Violence

SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES

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GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: A COUNTRY BENT OVER IN GRIEF

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INTRODUCTION

There is no blanket approach to fighting violence against women. What works in one country may not lead to desired results in another. Each nation must devise its own strategy. But there is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable. (Ban Ki-moon 2013)¹

These words of Ban Ki-moon still hold true today. South Africa is bleeding, because of the violence that communities are experiencing on a daily basis. The rampant violence against our womxn² and children have made us to live in fear and uncertainty. We are a society suffering trauma on a very deep level. The femicide rate and the rate of sexual violence in our country is of the highest in the world. South Africa is blessed with a strong legislative environment, government programmes, and many active civil society organisations. Unfortunately, our country remains burdened with extremely high rates of violence.³ This not only oppresses womxn, but it also shines a spotlight on the many ills within our society. Suffice to say that attempts to address this evil in our society needs a holistic approach. Solutions to structural and social challenges should form part of this holistic approach. Thandi van Heyningen (2020:n.p.), Senior Research Consultant, Justice and Violence Prevention at the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria, alluded to the role that the private sector can play in stopping gender-based violence (or GBV).

- 1 Ban Ki-moon was the 8th Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) and held office from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2016.
- 2 This alternative spelling is used to "avoid the suggestion of sexism perceived in the sequences m-a-n and m-e-n, and to be inclusive of trans and nonbinary women". <http://www.dictionary.com>.
- 3 A study that was done by a Western Cape Government and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) team during South Africa's Covid-19 lockdown in selected areas across the Western Cape. The period that they focused on was from April to August 2020. It showed that, despite restrictions on movement and the banning on alcohol sales, violence in South African societies cannot be stopped. See the report written by Faull and Kelly (2020:n.p.).

Apart from the psychological and physical trauma that victims go through, violence also has an economic impact on the individual as well as the country. In 2014 alone, the cost of violence to South Africa's economy was estimated between R28.4 billion and R42.4 billion.

The United Nations (UN) defines violence against women as “[a]ny act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women”. These acts include spousal battery, sexual harassment, as well as violations of the rights of women in situations of armed conflict, including systematic rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy.⁴

The moral fibre in our country has been so badly fractured, and sadly it is the most vulnerable in our society that is exposed to the violence. Although this chapter focuses on gender-based violence, it is important to highlight that gender-based violence also has to do with the violation and denial of human dignity. Those who have experienced these violations have to live with the shame. Others are unable to live with the shame and decide to end their lives.

According to Ackermann (2003:69), “our wounds are our memories”. She continued to explain that the stories of victims can be seen as their “embodied memories” (ibid:69). Sharing painful memories is never easy.⁵ Womxn who have been battered and bruised normally keep quiet for many years for a variety of reasons. It takes immense courage to break years of silence about sexual abuse. Ecclesiastical spaces should offer safe spaces for violated womxn to break their silence. Although, in many instances, these ecclesiastical spaces are led by men, they remain spaces of safety, trust, and comfort, and can serve as a catalyst for the healing of pain (Oduyoye 2001:78-89). Oduyoye also alluded to the fact that the church that womxn experience is “different from the Church that can be the body of Christ” (ibid:82). More than anything else, it can be argued that gender-based violence violates and wounds the image of God and our God-given dignity.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE DURING LOCKDOWN IN SOUTH AFRICA

Year after year, South Africans are reeling from the shock of hearing of another violent death in our communities. 2021 was no different. On 25 November 2020, our country once again embarked on what is known as ‘16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children’. This is an international campaign that starts on the International Day of the Elimination of Violence against Women. In 1999, a resolution was brought before the UN General Assembly that 25 November should be known

4 See Ki-moon (2013).

5 See Keshgegian (2000) for an in-depth discussion on redemptive memory. She explains the meaning of suffering as transformed by hope. She also reminds her readers that the witness of the church includes being a catalyst for transformation; to remember transformation.

as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. This day was remembered in Latin America for the bravery of the Mirabal sisters. They spent many years highlighting the corruption and injustice of the Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo. Their husbands were incarcerated, and their defiance cost them their lives (Storkey 2018:1-2). Focused attention is given on gender-based violence during these 16 days, and yet the situation for many womxn remains unchanged. I am also reminded of August, which is womxn's month in SA, which is filled with empty gestures, conveniently putting GBV aside for that month.

While South Africa, and the world, are fighting for survival from the Covid-19 pandemic, South Africa must also deal with what President Cyril Ramaphosa called the "second pandemic" (Ellis 2020:n.p.), namely gender-based violence. A state of emergency was declared in South Africa that took effect on Friday, 27 March 2020, and all citizens were mandated to stay home and be safe. But how can you be safe when you share this space with your perpetrator? For many South African womxn this was their reality. During Level 1 Lockdown in South Africa, data from the South African Police Services show that there was a substantial reduction in crimes.

However, according to the report from the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), not many gender-based violent crimes are reported to the police (Burger 2020:n.p.). This could have been the case during lockdown, as well as that it would be difficult for victims to report the perpetrator, especially if they are sharing a living space with the person. Many victims also do not have anywhere else to go and are forced by their socio-economic circumstances to stay with the perpetrator. Another factor for the decrease in gender-based violence crimes could be a reduced consumption of alcohol and community or family intervention in crimes being committed. It would seem that alcohol abuse contributes greatly to the high numbers of gender-based violence in South Africa, as well as to general crime and accidents.

In 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa reacted sharply against the scourge of womxn at the start of the campaign for '16 Days of Activism' against gender-based violence. He reiterated that the violence against womxn is our nation's shame (Mabuzza 2019:n.p.). It is still our nation's shame. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation deteriorated for our womxn. The Minister of the South African Police Services (SAPS), Bheki Cele, said in a briefing to the media on 5 April 2020 that the (SAPS) received 2320 complaints of gender-based violence during the first week of our national lockdown alone (Newham & Du Plessis 2020:n.p.). He acknowledged that this was in fact 37% higher than the weekly average for domestic violence cases recorded in 2019. In conjunction to this, the National Gender-Based Violence Command Centre issued a report indicating an increase in their usual number of calls.⁶ Clearly the different

6 See Western Cape Government (2020).

lockdown levels implemented by the national government made it very difficult for womxn to access the support services they so desperately needed.⁷

It is quite difficult to obtain accurate statistics of rape as the victims are reluctant to report rape to the police, as well as the government legal and social services. Their hesitancy stems from a variety of reasons ranging from negative experiences with the police to fear of retaliation. Victims are also struggling with feelings of shame, as well as fear of social stigma. Even though these statistics might not be accurate, it is clear that gender-based violence is rampant in our country. This should be a huge concern to all citizens of our country. Violence against womxn and children is predominantly at the hands of men. When these acts have played themselves out, these victims become part of statistics in our country. Yet, each one of these cases have a name. In his address to the nation on 17 June 2020, Ramaphosa named the womxn and children that were raped and murdered over a period of only two weeks. Ramaphosa said: “Over the past few weeks, no fewer than 21 women and children have been murdered. Their killers thought they could silence them. But we will not forget them and we will speak for them where they cannot” (Ellis 2020:n.p.).

The annual crime statistics 2019/2020 was released on 31 July 2020 by the Minister of Police, Bheki Cele. Sexual offenses decreased from 4.6% in 2018/2019 to 1.7% in 2019/2020 period. Rape went down from 3.9% in 2018/2019 to 1.7% in 2019/2020. Cele (2020:n.p.) stated that sexual offenses have been terrorising “most households and communities as most of these crimes happen behind closed doors”. This reduction in percentages might look very positive, but the reality in our country looks far different. What was even more alarming though was the statistics that Cele released for the fourth quarter (ibid:n.p.). Rape increased by 1.5% from the beginning of October 2019 to the end of December 2019. This calculates to 12218 rapes over this short period. Cele conceded that the statistics clearly shows policing gaps that needed to be addressed quite urgently. These statistics shows a very grim picture in our country. A possible reason for the increase of numbers in rape and violence against womxn and children could be the lifting of the ban on alcohol sales. This becomes clearer when looking at earlier statistics of the hard lockdown. It would seem that the violence against womxn and children is perpetuated by alcohol abuse (Govender 2021:n.p.).

SPEAKING OUT

South Africa is blessed with a strong civil society that is actively involved in speaking up against the violence in our country. These organisations serve as a watchdog for the many evils in our communities. They speak out against the injustices in the different communities in our country. Apart from this, they also keep a hawk’s eye

⁷ See the article of Chandré Gould on 11 May 2020 for the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in which she raises possible reasons for the reduced numbers of reported domestic violence cases during South Africa’s Covid-19 lockdown.

on the work of the government, specifically with regards to fighting gender-based violence in our country.

South Africa also has a strong judicial and policy-enabling environment, that in conjunction with the affiliation to international conventions, seek to protect and promote the rights of womxn. During Ramaphosa's Women's Day speech in 2020, he informed the nation that South Africa has joined Generation Equality – a global campaign to achieve gender equality by 2030 (Ramaphosa 2020a:n.p.). He acknowledged that the womxn of South Africa still live in conditions of poverty and unemployment. Womxn continue to face discrimination and violence. And as such, this partnership with Generation Equality hopes to achieve real change in the lives of many womxn.

As the frustration with the high levels of gender-based violence grow in our country, so the call for the return of the death penalty are frequently heard now in South Africa. In response to this request, Ramaphosa replied that "it is not the state's place to take life. Our constitution has enshrined the right to life. This means that the state should not be the one to terminate a life. The surge in criminality should be addressed in other ways rather than ending people's lives" (Businesstech 2019:n.p.). Despite this, activists are encouraging government to give heavier sentences for criminals, as well as reviewing the release on parole for those who had been convicted and sentenced for rape.

One of "the other ways" to address the surge in criminality is a global movement, 'Thursdays in Black: Towards a world without rape and violence.' This movement is a form of peaceful protest against rape and violence. It started in the 1980s by the World Council of Churches (WCC), focusing on ways through which individuals may challenge attitudes that cause rape and violence. In October 2013, the WCC worked towards a revival of the campaign. During the WCC 10th Assembly in Busan, in the Republic of Korea, the WCC re-invigorated their involvement with this campaign. Churches, commercial organisations, and NGOs followed suit and embraced the campaign in different countries. Participants at the WCC 10th Assembly in Busan were encouraged to wear black. This gesture allowed participants to be part of a global movement urging an end to violence against womxn. In a news article in 2013, Dr Fulata Mbano-Moyo, the WCC programme executive for Women in Church and Society reiterated that

through this campaign we want to accompany our sisters, who bear the scars of violence, invisible and visible, in Syria, Palestine and Israel, Egypt, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan and the whole world, where women's bodies remain a battlefield, whether in armed conflict or so-called 'peaceful' situations ... Through this campaign we are demanding a world free of rape and violence!
(World Council of Churches 2013:n.p.)

The WCC made it clear that, even though the colour black has often been used with negative racial connotations, black signifies resistance and resilience in this campaign.

In South Africa, the ‘Thursdays in Black’ campaign is also used to raise awareness and also to encourage men and womxn to work towards a world without rape and violence. This is a simple act of wearing black on a Thursday, but it serves as a catalyst in our communities. People are tired of the continued violence in communities. People are yearning for a place where everybody can walk safely in the streets, without fear of violence. Wearing black on Thursdays shines a spotlight on the high levels of abuse against the womxn and children of our country. It also provides an outward sign of mourning for the many lives that we have lost in our country, and the world, to this second pandemic. Thursdays in Black provides a platform where people can express their desire for a different world.

In an article in the *Daily Maverick* on 20 March 2019, Prof. Juliana Claassens⁸ ponders on the success of this particular campaign. She is of the opinion that it gives individuals who normally do not see themselves as activists a voice. It is an outward sign to clearly say that the status quo cannot be observed. There needs to be a visible change in our communities. Wearing black also give those who have been silenced an opportunity to “speak”. Claassens continues by sharing personal stories of colleagues and their reasons for being part of this campaign (Claassens 2019:n.p.). Sadly, the prevalence of violence in so many of our communities are so intense that some people have made the conscious decision to wear black every day of the week, as they stand in solidarity with those who are experiencing abuse in their lives. Gender-based violence knows no boundaries and it is present in most communities in SA, regardless of the socio-economic circumstances.

THE RITUAL OF LAMENT FOR A COUNTRY BENT OVER IN GRIEF

Violence against womxn is not unique to South Africa. It is a global pandemic.⁹ The violence in our country is on such a scale that we are compelled to question the assumptions of the value of womxn, and the justification of the use of power that is so deep seated in our society. We need to become part of the solution. Our country is bent over in grief for the brutal way her womxn and children are killed. Each year during the campaign for ‘16 Days of Activism’, the South African nation holds its breath. It is during this time when the spotlight is shined on this second pandemic in our country, that it seems that the violence spirals out of control.

This begs us to ask the question – who is killing our womxn? This loaded question was answered by activist Siyabulela Jentile when he categorically stated at a march held in Pretoria that “[i]t is us men who are killing and abusing women” (Mahlangu 2018:n.p.). Jentile is part of a civil rights movement, #NotInMyName, that was formed after the death of Karabo Mokoena in 2017.

8 Prof. Juliana Claassens is Chair of the Department of Old and New Testament and Head of the Gender Unit in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University.

9 See Gould (2020) for the UK statistics.

Ramaphosa, in his briefing to the nation on our response to the Covid-19 pandemic, said the following:

At a time when the pandemic has left us all feeling vulnerable and uncertain, violence is being unleashed on women and children with a brutality that defies comprehension. These rapists and killers walk among us. They are in our communities. They are our fathers, our brothers, our sons and our friends; violent men with utterly no regard for the sanctity of human life.

(Ramaphosa 2020b:n.p.)

South Africa is a deeply religious nation. Suffice to say that religion therefore plays a significant role in the formation of our nation's values. If we look at the most recent survey of the South African population that was conducted by Statistics South Africa in 2013, it shows that 84.2% of South African citizens identify themselves as Christians (Schoeman 2017:3). Are some of the perpetrators sitting in our pews? Are the abused womxn and children seeking refuge in the faith community? (Oduyoye 2001:82). And if so, what role does the religious community have in curbing the scourge of violence in our country? Can the faith community be part of a response to the violence in our country? Unfortunately, it is sad to say that ecclesiastical spaces are not always a safe space for womxn and children.

Nigerian pastor, Timothy Omotoso, is in jail and stands accused of human trafficking and rape. He was the senior pastor at the Jesus Dominion International that is based in Durban, South Africa. Omotoso is alleged to have groomed his victims and began molesting them from the age of 14. In another case, the KwaSizabantu Christian Mission in KwaZulu-Natal also faces allegations of rape, child abuse and human rights violations. Public hearings were held by the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL). These hearings started in October 2020, after there was an investigation into allegations of fraud, rape, assault, and money laundering being levelled at the church (Singh 2020:n.p.).

According to Ackermann, “violence is a theological problem, for it calls into question the very nature of humanity and it raises doubts about God’s presence in and care for the world” (Ackermann 1996:145). However, she continues to say that this theological problem is not limited to the act of rape itself. We also need to take cognisance of the influence that Christian theories and Christian praxis are playing in contributing to the problem of rape in our communities.¹⁰ Given the dire situation our country is in, our nation is in desperate need of healing. This is not only for those who have suffered abuse and violence at the hands of perpetrators, but healing for our nation. We need healing on every level of our lives.

10 Ackermann (1996:150-151) provides a discussion on Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's four key traditional theological discourses, namely socio-cultural politics of subordination, the patriarchal teachings of submission, scriptural texts that links to suffering and victimisation, as well as the Christian values of love and forgiveness.

The Director of UNAIDS (The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS), Catherine Sozi, in an address to national church leaders in 2013 was adamant that “we need more than a prayer” in our response to the wave of sexual violence in our country. Sozi was deeply concerned about “our actions”. She proposed then that

the church is systematically weak/absent in responding to the reality of sexual violence, both in a preventative sense and in after-care. And as such congregations are actively creating a context in which sexual violence survivors are stigmatised and discriminated against, and in which sexually violent practices are condoned. (Sozi 2013:1-8)

To illustrate the reason for her proposition, Sozi shared an experience she had at a traditional ceremony in the Eastern Cape. During the ceremony a teenage girl revealed that she was being repeatedly raped by her uncle. The girl and her mother turned to their church for support, but they felt that they were being blamed for the incident. They had the same experience with the police and in court. It is against this background that Sozi strongly believes that “it takes more than a prayer to heal and empower girls and women who have endured sexual violence – to transform them from victims to survivors. It takes compassionate leadership that reaches beyond scripture and traditional rites and teachings”.¹¹

It is therefore very evident that the faith community cannot be lethargic about gender-based violence in our country (Le Roux 2012:49-60). Le Roux argues that sexual violence is a worldwide phenomenon, and that, in the area that she was doing research (DRC, Rwanda, and Liberia), the church was absent, for the most part, in responding to incidents of sexual violence. She continues to say that, even though the research was done in countries involved in armed conflict, sexual violence is not only experienced in these countries. South Africa does not have a recent history of armed conflict and yet the Medical Research Foundation of South Africa did a study in 2010 and reported that “one in three men interviewed in Gauteng Province admitted to having raped a woman, while a similar study in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape reported one in every four men admitting to at least one rape” (ibid:51). The situation is therefore far too dire, and it asks of all stakeholders to be actively involved in fighting this evil in our communities.

One of the ways in which the church can play a part in this healing process is to break the silence surrounding this issue. When South Africa marked Women’s Day on 9 August 2020, protestors hung underwear on the gates of Bishops Court, the residence of Archbishop Thabo Makgoba. This was in support of Anglican Church Reverend June Dolley-Major who has requested the church to have an independent investigation into the allegation of rape she had laid against a priest from the church (August 2020:n.p.). The stories of violence need to be told so that victims can lay

¹¹ See Sozi (2013).

down their burden but also so that they can be ministered to. The church can provide a platform where rape is talked about in our sermons, in our teaching, but also during our liturgical actions. Our liturgy provides an opportunity where the violence against our womxn and children can be lamented. This ritual of lament could contribute to the healing of painful experiences and loss within our community of faith (Ackermann 1996:145-155).¹² This ritual of lament can take place in intimate spaces where victims of rape can feel safe to share their stories of violence. This platform does not necessarily need to be in ecclesiastical spaces only.

By assisting victims of violence to find words for their horrific experiences, a process of healing and hope can be initiated. An example of this is told by Anderson and Foley (1998) when they shared the story of the effects the massacre in Rwanda had on the women who lived in the refugee camps.

These women were unable to sleep because of the traumatic events they witnessed. However, they were instructed by camp officials not to speak of the atrocities in the camp. Even though they obeyed this instruction, they were haunted by the images of what happened. A psychologist, who visited the camp, decided to set up a "story tree" where these women could go and share their story. This was a physical tree that was on the edge of the camp and the psychologist waited every morning. Eventually the women came, told their stories and then left. Within a few days many women visited this "story tree" to share the pain and hurt they have experienced. They were given a platform to vocalise their pain and suffering. The psychologist knew that the approach was working because she received word that finally the women in the refugee camp were able to sleep.

(Anderson & Foley 1998:3-4)

Another way in which the church can play a role in the healing process is to nurture theologies which are more inclusive. The notion that womxn are inferior to men should be boldly addressed by our church practises. A theology of dignity should be part of the transformation process in our ecclesiastical spaces. For an example of the slow transformation that can exist in ecclesiastical spaces, see Flaendorp (2014:53-63). Even though a large percentage of South African citizens identify as Christians, it is not only the Christian tradition that relies on lament to express sorrow and suffering. Nancy Lee provides insight into a wide variety of cultures that make use of two genres within lament, namely dirges (funeral songs) or lament prayers (Lee 2010). These dirges and lament prayers take on different forms depending on the language and culture in which they are used. Some examples are poems, prayers, songs, and sacred texts. Lee recognises and refers to Israel's lament to the God of Israel. Their lament is one of displacement and exile.

However, Lee also speaks of the laments by the people of Sudan, India, and New Orleans. She refers to the people of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. She tries to give

12 Ackermann provides an in-depth examination on violence against womxn. She uses rape as a manifestation of violence to address this widespread evil in our country.

insight into the lament of these rich and diverse traditions and cultures. Lee's journeys between the Bible and other ancient sacred literature not only show how lament was incorporated, but she also comfortably shows us how we could rediscover lament as an important expression of our faith today – amidst the challenges that we are experiencing in our country.

How would we understand lament? Lee has an interesting and bold understanding of lament. She is of the opinion that lament is a tool for us to

express all aspects of suffering and to help maintain the value and dignity of one's humanity under hardship, if possible. Lament is, and not secondarily, a call to bring attention to injustice, an anguished plea for respite and consolation, an appeal for intervention not only to one's deity but to one's community, and to the world community. (Lee 2010:27)

Lament is therefore not just for 'the ears of God alone', but our lament is also for our fellow human beings. Intervention in our suffering does not only come from God alone, but it could – and should – also come from our fellow brothers and sisters. This could be people from our faith communities, our social communities, and even from the world community. When we suffer in our communities due to injustices or violence, we should lament together. We should protest in the form of vocal or silent embodiment to show that we do not agree with the status quo in our communities. Our circumstances will not change overnight, but we could experience an emotional transformation through our communal lament that will energise and strengthen us not to give up. Lee reiterates that our plea for justice is not just to God alone, but to our fellow human beings as well. And the hope therefore is that those who learn of the injustices "are asked to respond with compassionate justice" (ibid:99).

Great caution needs to be practised when a safe space for lament has been afforded. Lamenting could trigger the need for retribution by the lamenter, as well as the faith community. This liturgical way in which victims can process their feelings of suffering and sorrow can be quite intense. Therefore, the space and structure of the liturgy should allow for the sensitive reading of Scripture that might be taken out of context or even be exploited. Given the high rates of gender-based violence in our country, people are hungry for justice, and it can so easily turn into a case of 'vengeance will be mine'. We need to be aware of the consequences of our moments of lament and be cautious that it does not cause more harm, but that it should assist us to have a better quality of life.¹³

CONCLUSION

Being violated can never be justified. The gender-based violence pandemic is so widespread in our country that it makes sense for everyone to play a role in the healing and

13 See Hilukiluah (2013:197-214) for an example of a healing liturgy.

survival of those who have been scarred for life. Our womxn who have been battered and bruised need to know that this suffering can never be justifiable. Sadly, it is too late for those who have lost their lives in this battle.

We remember **Anene Booysen**, a 17-year-old Bredasdorp teenager, who was brutally gang raped and disembowelled in 2003.¹⁴ On Valentine's Day 2013, **Reeva Steenkamp** was shot and killed by Oscar Pistorius through a closed bathroom door after an alleged argument (Sodha 2020:n.p.). In May 2017, **Karabo Mokoena** was killed – her body burnt beyond recognition – by her ex-boyfriend who has since been sentenced to 35 years imprisonment (BBC News 2018:n.p.). Karabo's death sparked the hashtag #MenAreTrash on social media. In 2018, **Khensani Maseko**, a law student and anti-rape activist, took her own life after posting a message on Instagram saying "[n]o-one deserves to be raped" (John 2018:n.p.). **Uyinene 'Nene' Mrwetyana**, a student at the University of Cape Town, was raped and murdered in the suburb of Claremont in Cape Town (Cruywagen 2019:n.p.). **Leighandre 'Baby Lee' Jegels**, a boxing champion, was killed on Friday, 30 August 2019. Jegels and her mother were on their way to a boxing gym when they were confronted by her ex-boyfriend. Jegels was shot and killed in the incident and her mother was wounded (Dayimani, Zifo & Fuzile 2019:n.p.). **Zodwa Tyoloda** died in September 2019 in Qumbu in the Eastern Cape (Bhengu 2019:n.p.). Also, in 2019, **Jesse Hess**, an 18-year-old theology student was killed in Parow (Knight 2019:n.p.). These are just a few names mentioned to paint the bleak picture of violence in our country.

When we also look back in history and read of gruesome rapes and killings on defenceless womxn, it reminds me of the article that Heidi Swart, a reporter for the *Mail & Guardian* wrote about the gruesome rape of **Anene Booysen**, as well as **Jyoti Singh Pandey**, a 23-year-old student who was studying physiotherapy in New Delhi. Pandey was attacked by six men on 16 December 2012 (Swart 2013:n.p.). "She was gang-raped and beaten with an iron rod and left for dead on the side of the road after the attack." She died of her injuries on 29 December 2012. Swart had the following to say about the way the Indian and the South African nations reacted to these vicious crimes: "There were some similarities in the public reaction to the two attacks. But in India, the public outcry became a high-pitched wail that spread across the region" (ibid:n.p.).

The people of India came together as one to protest this monstrous crime. They made use of songs and music as well as posters to bring the message across that something drastically needed to change in India. The protesters even went as far as clashing with the police to make their voices heard. Cities and towns were lamenting loudly about this sad state of affairs. In comparison, the turnout in support for Booysen was different. The attack was widely condemned by government, the African National Congress Women's league and many other civil society organisations. However, the protests that took place in South Africa were on a much smaller scale than those in India. (ibid:n.p.)

14 See the article by the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation (2013).

After **Uyinene ‘Nene’ Mrwetyana’s** death in 2019, this “high-pitched wail” that Swart talked about in her article on **Anene Booysen** and **Jyoti Singh Pandey** swept over our nation. South Africans have had enough of the killings. We have been confronted for too long with daily news reports on the killing of loved ones. **Uyinene** and **Jegels** were killed within a few days of each other. Tuesday, 3 September 2019, a man in Wyebank in KwaZulu-Natal was charged with hanging his three children and stepdaughter after he was presented with divorce papers by their mother. The children were aged four, six, ten and 16. On that very same day, the body of **Zodwa Tyoloda** was found buried in a pit toilet near her home in Qumbu in the Eastern Cape. And just the previous Friday, the body of **Jesse Hess**, together with her grandfather, was found in their family’s flat in Parow.

Our country was shocked to its core with all these deaths in such a short space of time. As fear swept over our nation, so protests were also rampant as South Africans were demanding action to be taken so that the rate of femicide can decrease in the country. Protestors, under the banner #EnoughisEnough even demanded that more female judges should be assigned to gender-based violence cases. South Africans have had enough.

The hope that our country will ever recover from the scourge of violence against our womxn and children is ever so fragile. Ackermann wrote in 2003 that a “war is being waged on the bodies of women and children” (Ackermann 2003:65). Sadly, 18 years later it is still our reality. We are living in hope that one day we will be able to sing each other’s song (Lee 2010:208). This is so profound. When we sing each other’s song, we are aware of one’s suffering, pain, and joy. We learn of each other’s dreams, hopes, and fears. When we can do this, it is an expression of our hopefulness for the future – a future that includes peace, hope, and justice for all.

As South Africans, we might be forced to reimagine hope anew. Keshgegian guides us in this by saying that hope is fundamentally something that needs to be practised (2000:182-183). It is a process and should become part of our habits. It would seem that the miracle of hope lies in the practising of it. Can we practise hope? Is this possible? Is hope not something that we yearn for? Something that is different to our current circumstances? Keshgegian shares the philosophy of the German political theologian, Dorothee Soelle, who explained the idea of hope as a baby that started to walk. A baby learns to walk by getting up and taking the steps. “Similarly with hope, we will learn to hope anew as we practise hope ... we will gain confidence in hope as we enter more deeply into the practices of hope” (Keshgegian 2000:188).

May South Africa be blessed to one day experience this hopeful future that includes peace and justice for all.

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