Silence is not an option

'I see a light but no fire
is this what
my life is to be like
better to head for the grave'

Tagore

The Republic of South Africa (are we ever going to change this name?) is one great country. In 1994, 160 years after the abolition of slavery in the Cape Colony³, the indigenous people of the land cast their vote for the very first time. A decade after that magical moment, the country had repealed and reversed some of the negative effects of brutal and draconian laws, as well as a history coloured by racial oppression. However, like a neophyte emerging from the mother's womb faced with the challenge of adapting to the real world, the country is faced with the challenge of balancing political and economic stability with a strong moral ethic as an integral part of national identity.

One good thing about the charade surrounding Jacob Zuma's trials is that it gives us an opportunity to stop and reflect as a nation. The trials present us with a crisis that enables us to look
beyond the surface and ask searching questions about the meaning
of justice, democracy and power. At stake, in this instance, is the
question of political power. This power can be fickle and fragil
Here today, gone tomorrow. Because it is driven by a win or lose
mentality, those who lose simply have to wait for a moment to
avenge their loss, while those who win have a limited period of
time during which they can display their popularity on public
platforms. Conflict resolution is emotionally driven; many in
Zuma’s camp may be driven by their hate for President Mbeki’s
leadership style rather than their unwavering belief in Zuma’s
fitness to govern.

Asking deep fundamental questions about the way we govern
cannot only be based on popular support. Neither can it only
depend on the power of the intellect. It must also be founded on
our ability to feel. This means we cannot only rely on the logic
of the mind but also must rely on higher logic that brings the heart
to the question of leadership. Bringing the heart to governance
implies governing in a way that generates the greatest good for
the greatest number of people. According to Lorraine Canoe,
a Mohawk Indian leader, a powerful leader is one who has the
ability to put politics in one hand, the spirit in the other, and
then bring them together.2 Such politics, according to Canoe,
is transformational because it embodies personal and social
change.

For South Africa, the pursuit of transformational politics
demands a conscious regeneration and reintegration of our moral
values into our policies. However, regeneration of our morality in
a capitalist society driven by a ‘what do I stand to gain?’ mentality
as opposed to ‘what’s at stake for the country?’ is a constant battle
of harmonising the spirit with the heart and head.

When he delivered the J. D. Buxwa Memorial Lecture at the
University of Cape Town in 2006, rector of the University of
South Africa, Prof. Barney Pityana, referred to the remarks
about the growing consumerist and materialist nature of our
society made by President Mbeki in his Nelson Mandela Lecture
at Wits University on 29 July 2006. In his lecture, Prof. Pityana
outlined the emerging world of South Africa’s nouveau riches
who are engrossed in the dog-eat-dog, cut-throat world of black
economic empowerment (BEE) deals. Such a world, he argued,
makes no room for quality of life or family life. The ultimate
outcome, he argued, is a breakdown of moral values fuelled by
greed, corruption and criminal activity.1

For a nation emerging from a protracted war that required
mobilising the soul and hardening of the heart to achieve
democratic liberation, an awakening of the spirit embedded in the
ancient African philosophy of phela ke phela (live and let live)
is one of the greatest challenges for leaders and the nation as a
whole. Indeed, one of the most important questions facing us is:
can the revival and reintegration of this principle into our lives
solve the current state of moral decay? If the answer is yes, how
can this be done?

In his monograph Current Perspectives on African Philosophy,
Dr Kgaloshi Koka tells a story about an American Catholic
bishop, the Rev. Fulton Sheen, who visited Europe in 1957 and
stopped in Johannesburg on his way home, conducting a Holy
Mass at St. Pius Church in Mofolo Village, Soweto. In his sermon,
Rev. Sheen remarked that at the time when the East and West
were at each other’s threats during the Cold War, Africa would
save these countries from mutual destruction through its revival
and application of a philosophy of humanness or ubuntu.3

The application of ubuntu is, however, not limited to religion
and should therefore not only be housed in religious institutions.
Rather, it should be explored within the deeper realms of
spirituality inherent in all people. In his essay ‘I Am Because We
Are’, esteemed African son of the soil Es'kia Mphahlele relates
a story told by a Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore, of a song
from a beggar who belonged to a Bengali sect called the Baul.1
In the song, Tagore described an intense yearning of the heart
for that which is divine in man and not in the temple, scriptures or symbols. According to Mphahlele, African humanism, like traditional Indian thought, emphasises the longing to be, rather than to have.

“The traditional African has shrines but not churches or temples, and his faith in the Supreme Being finds expression in social relationships, in music, in his art and craftwork, in the cultivation of the soil, and so on. To meet the eternal spirit in all objects and all humans is to be emancipated. Our ancestral spirits teach us through proverb, folklore, and song the wisdom on how to conduct ourselves in order to realize the Supreme Being as a Vital Force in all our relationships with things and beings.”

Ubuntu is an ancient philosophy founded on the notion of communalism, mosho mo mosho ka lela (I am because we are), driven by attributes such as truth, justice and compassion. This philosophy does not discriminate on the grounds of race, economic status, social status or gender. It is a flow of life that is the same for every member of the human race. Ubuntu is not only tied to human life. It also concerns itself with respect for animals and the environment. The adoption of such a philosophy therefore seeks to create a balance between the self and others, as well as between the internal and external.

Ubuntu is a philosophy that could assist in rebuilding unity within and amongst different communities. However, healing can only occur when the wounds of the past are reopened and understood. People who undertake this journey are sometimes accused of being stuck in the past.

In my book Hearing Visions Seeing Voices, I alluded to the fact that forgiveness should not be used to force black people to forget the past. This means that for black people, proving that they have healed and that they practise ubuntu does not mean they should agree with external prescptions on who and how to forgive, or why and when, without coming to terms with the extent of their suffering in their own way, in their own time. At the same time, black people should avoid being stuck in pain and rage, a place that has the potential to make them serve time in a prison that has no walls. This will obliterate efforts to kill the enemy within by liberating their hearts from the heavy burden of hatred and a quest for revenge.

Fighting the enemy within our hearts and minds is a personal liberation required for the fundamental racial, economic and moral transformation of society. Because transformation is personal work, a regeneration of moral values that fosters ubuntu or botho neither is a movement of the Presidency, nor does it belong to the masses. It is about the individual. An individual contribution to it includes confronting our sense of entitlement to a position or a contract because of our political affiliation, struggle credentials, educational qualifications, class privilege, race or gender. My contribution involves taking a stand against buying stolen goods and against all forms of discrimination and oppression, greed and corruption. A revolution based on truth and justice starts with me.

Zuma, moral regeneration and sexual violence
No-one seemed to understand the depth and breadth of the challenges of moral leadership other than Jacob Zuma himself. In opening the first Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM) conference in Midrand in November 2004, Zuma challenged people to focus on building a caring, humane and ethical society.

'"The MRM was founded on the principles that South Africans are highly moral beings, know the difference between right and wrong, and are appalled by the
symptoms of moral decay which sometimes occur in our country. These include blatant disregard for the sanctity of human life, the abuse of women and children, crime, substance abuse, lack of respect for the next person and their property and so forth."

In his address, the then deputy president went on to outline that the issues raised above were critical elements in the government's five-year plan. He also reiterated the MRN's commitment to the fight against Aids, 'especially with regard to promoting a change in behaviour, which would greatly assist the campaign to reduce new infections'.

Four years later, we know very little about the achievements of the Moral Regeneration Movement. What we know for sure is that a champion and driver of the movement was charged with rape after having sex without a condom with a woman living with HIV. During his trial, Zuma maintained that he was HIV negative. This means that making a conscious decision to have unprotected sex with a woman openly living with the virus was not in line with the campaign to reduce new infections.

In yet another address on the occasion of World Aids Day at Athlone Stadium in Cape Town on 1 December 2004, Zuma emphasised the need to focus on women's empowerment as a foundation for achieving equality in gender relations in the public and private spheres. According to him, women were still vulnerable to men's greater economic and social power, which affects their ability to negotiate safer sex. As a result, many women are left with little or no control over their exposure to the virus. In his concluding comments, Zuma urged everyone to take the message of HIV prevention seriously.

"The action of each person counts in this war against Aids. If everybody takes the messages of abstinence, faithfulness or condom use [ABC] seriously and acts

Silence is not an option

on it, we can achieve our goal of drastically reducing the rate of infections."

If one thing is clear from Zuma's utterances in court, it is that HIV/AIDS prevention is not as easy as the concept of ABC. In one sense, ABC is largely focused on individual risk without considering how broader contextual factors affect an individual's access to information, his interpretation of the information in relation to his own world view, his motivation to act, as well as his ability or inability to act within existing cultural, economic and other external norms that govern his behaviour.

Clearly, in Zuma's situation, abstinence (A) is totally out of question for a married polygamist who has publicly admitted to having sex with a woman who is not his regular partner. As far as B and C are concerned, he chose to be neither faithful (B), nor to use a condom (C). When he responded to a question regarding his reasons for not using a condom, he was reported to have said it was because he knew that, as a man, he has a low risk of contracting the virus. In this way, he conveniently chose to forget one of the greatest cornerstones of African life: a person is a person through others, meaning what you do has direct impact on others. This fact is reinforced by an African-American psychiatrist, Dr Frances Cress Welsing, who argues in her book, The Isis Papers that 'behavior is not simply an individual affair, for when multiplied by thousands, it has profound effects on the life, future existence and well-being of a total people'.

If one was to multiply Zuma's utterances in court about women, sex and HIV with his multitudes of supporters converging on the courts in Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg and the supporters at the public rallies he addressed, the overall impact on the psyche of a nation will be catastrophic not only to the living but to the unborn. If all his male supporters choose to have sex without a condom because 'they know that they have a slim chance of contracting the virus' the outcome will be dire.
Minister of Social Development Dr Zola Skweyiya’s efforts in supporting Aids orphans would be tantamount to pouring money into a bottomless pit.

As a married man, Zuma chose not to care about the effect of his actions on his sexual partners irrespective of whether they were regular or not. It is such thinking that is behind many men’s attitudes to sex with women. Once aroused, some men prefer instant release at the expense of long-term health and longevity. In many such instances, a sexually aroused man will persuade, cajole, or even force himself on a woman irrespective of whether a condom is available or not. Often, if and when a condom is negotiated, it is the man who will ultimately agree to use it and keep it on during the entire act of intercourse. This makes the male condom an unreliable way of preventing the spread of HIV and Aids. We know from women’s experiences that many who contracted HIV did so in monogamous relationships.

Ukhlahleni Zuma is not a young man. His decision to engage in ‘consensual sex’ with a woman other than his regular partners was not the uninformed and risky behaviour of a boy who is still experimenting with sex. It was definitely not the decision of a young man who finally has a ‘stadium’ and a chance to ‘grab some hasty pussy’ and who later returns to the street corner to brag about his conquest to his peers. This was the action of an elder and a father of children who are the same age as his one-night stand.

As a respected elder in his community and an astute politician who once chaired the South African National Aids Council, he was well aware of the consequences of a decision to have sex with a woman young enough to be his daughter who is not only HIV positive but who, because of historical and cultural reasons, holds him in awe. He was aware of the power he held over her; he knew that in spite of Judge Van der Merwe’s failure to grasp an expansive notion of family that goes beyond blood lineage, he was a father-figure to her and had a moral obligation to exercise control over his sexual urges, especially if and when sex was initiated by her. As someone who has a keen eye and ear for tradition, he is aware of the principle of ‘my child is your child, your child is mine’ which, in African societies, encourages biological and non-biological parents to take communal responsibility for the material, psychological and moral well-being of every child in their community.

Because of his strong belief in ancestors, Zuma must have known that the wrath of the spirit of his conrade who died in exile leaving behind a distraught ten-year-old daughter might come back to haunt him. As a former head of intelligence in the ANC, he must have been trained to be highly suspicious of any woman’s sexual attention, especially at the time when he was allegedly facing a political conspiracy to oust him from the presidential succession race. Despite all this, his training and experience in political intelligence, being an elder, husband, father and a leader purporting to uphold traditional values, Zuma chose to have unprotected sex with the complainant. Political conspiracy or not, his choice to engage in sex was in his hands alone.

It was his hands that lowered the kanga and massaged her with baby oil; it had nothing to do with the invisible hand of a third force. It was his hands that turned her body around and his fingers that were inserted into her vagina; it had nothing to do with political camps. It was his arms that held her as he penetrated her; it had nothing to do with the arms deal. It was his hand that he raised in court swearing to tell nothing but the truth. It is indeed his hand that he may use to sign the document in 2009 after being sworn in as leader of one of the most powerfully evolving nations in the southern hemisphere. The choice between 10 minutes of instant gratification and 10 years in the highest office of the land was his and his alone. After all, there is no greater power than the power of choice.

However, what Zuma did cannot be condemned in isolation. It is a reflection of the prevailing thoughts, attitudes and
perceptions in broader society. Not many men and women can claim to have been completely faithful to their partners. Similarly, not all people who are faced with the risk of HIV use condoms all the time. Likewise, Zuma is not the only leader whose hands are contaminated by accepting bribes. We know from various media reports that fraud and corruption are cancer spreading in our government, business and the country at large.

Corruption in South Africa is not a new phenomenon. We know from history that the apartheid regime used state money for political and personal purposes. It is a well-known fact that good and ethical governance is not a phrase that could be used to describe the previous racist regime. Similarly, we know from various scandals in governments across the world that fraud and corruption are not only confined to Africa or black governments. It is my view that black governments would need to stoop very low (ethically speaking) to match imperialist and racist regimes in the world.

We cannot condone these actions because ‘everyone else is doing it’. It is important to search for solutions that will ensure that common virtues do not become common virtues. As we engage in self-examination through campaigns such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Moral Regeneration Movement and the Batho Pele campaign, to name a few, are we ready for honest and full examination or are we bent on condemning others while we know full well that their actions mirror our own hidden thoughts and beliefs? Considering the extent of moral decay and gross expressions of inhumanity that exist in contrast to the celebrated economic boom, perhaps it’s time to reflect on what the Chinese sage Confucius once said: ‘When we see men of a contrary character, we should turn inwards and examine ourselves.’

The response to Zuma’s rape charges as demonstrated by his supporters is a reflection of moral double standards that are applied differently to women and men. Let’s assume that Jacob Zuma was a woman for a moment, let’s call her Jacobeth.

Silence is not an option.

Jacobeth is a rural woman of 54, married with children. She is one of the valiant women in South Africa who, left the country in her youth to play a meaningful role in the activities of the African National Congress. She was also one of the first women who returned to the country to pave the way for negotiations and peace in a country riddled by violence and war. As one of the key women in the country, she is well respected by all.

She is a warrior against any form of injustice; she works tirelessly and speaks out openly against poverty, especially in rural areas. Because of her commitment to a better life for all, she has established a bursary scheme to combat lack of access to education for young people in her village and beyond. She is a selfless Mother of the Nation. It is an open secret that she is tipped to become the next president.

Because of her dedication and the demands of her work, she is forced to spend time away from her husband and children. On one of her nights away from home, she was visited by a young man well known in the family, a son whose mother was Jacobeth’s close friend and comrade in exile. The young man, aged 31, held her in awe and loved her as a mother. On that night, the two had sex.

If the young man reported a case of rape, how would we respond to the allegations? Who would we accuse of being at fault? What names would we use to describe Jacobeth? How would her husband react to the news? What would people say about her husband’s reaction? Would there be any chanting of ‘shoot the motherfucker’ to express outrage towards a presumptuous ‘son of a bitch’ for seducing the mother of the nation? If any underwear was burnt outside the court, would it be a man’s underwear or would we be burning the panties of an old bitch
and cradle-snatcher who exposed herself shamelessly to a man old enough to be her son? If she accepted her wrongdoing and apologised to the nation for her act, would she be forgiven? If not, why not?

It was on waking up to the headline ‘Burn the bitches’ at Jacob Zuma’s rape trial on International Women’s Day, 8 March 2016, twelve years into South Africa’s new democracy, ten years after the implementation of the new Constitution and fifty years after women marched to the Union Buildings to demand their rights, that the pervasive disrespect for women and women’s rights was brought home.

For me personally, Jacob Zuma’s rape trial was both a form of victimisation and a moment of reawakening. Seeing him arrive in court and being ushered in with ceremonial pomp surrounded by an army of bodyguards in dark suits leaping out of a motorcade of luxury automobiles and running towards the court building, I wondered if Thomas Jefferson was correct when he said “A people get a government they deserve.”

I know from talking to other people that the South African political landscape will never be the same again. I also know from reading what many women and men wrote about the trial, including its outcome, that the experience had a shocking impact on the nation. Like the complainant, many of us were deeply affected by the experience.

Painful and confusing as it was, a handful of courageous women and men spoke out and seized the moment as an opportunity to revisit ways in which women’s freedoms can be repressed in democratic societies. For those of us who have been part of a painful and vibrant movement that ensured that women’s equality is enshrined in the Constitution, silence is not an option. We know from the experiences of women in post-colonial nations that even when they have fought alongside their men, after liberation, they are expected to return to the kitchen and bedroom. We know from women’s experience all over the world that violence, including rape, is a weapon used to ‘put women in their place’.

Faced with an ever-increasing prevalence of rape and other forms of violence against women in South Africa, we are challenged like never before to revisit deeply rooted stereotypes that inform our views of women in relation to men (e.g. a woman can never lead, she is inferior or evil) in the same way we confront our hidden view of blacks in relation to whites (sethlhare iwa mosotho ke tšogane – black people are inferior, violent and stupid). Just as racism increases the potential of violence against black people, sexism has a similar effect on women.

Unlike racism, however, sexist practices are perpetuated not only by strangers but also by those with whom women live intimately. The fact that the home is one of the institutions in society that reinforce deeply entrenched sexist beliefs presents a major challenge to efforts aimed at rooting out sexism. It is in the home that some of the most brutal forms of violence and torture are perpetrated against those perceived to be weak, i.e. women and children. It is no wonder that a greater proportion of women who are raped are violated not by strangers but by someone they know and trust in the ‘safety’ of their own homes. Contrary to popular belief, the home is not necessarily a safe place for women and children.

Societal responses to rape in South Africa

The escalating rate of sexual violence in South Africa is alarming. The increasing occurrence of rape is not only worrying, the fact that the assaults are also accompanied by vicious sadism and gross mutilation of women’s bodies is of deep concern. The use of knives and guns during rape is commonplace as are the harrowing accounts of women being penetrated by foreign objects such as bottles.

Many women’s organisations reveal that most incidents of sexual violence go unreported. We know from the recent 1 in 9
campaign that for every woman who reports rape, nine others are silenced by fear, shame and guilt. The one woman who has the courage to report a rape has to recount her experience in graphic detail to secure a conviction. This person who has suffered the trauma of one of the most horrendous crimes imaginable has to present her ordeal in a rational and logical manner. Furthermore, she also has to show that she is not of loose moral character otherwise her case will be disavantaged by past sexual experiences, which may have no bearing on her current claim. In many ways, the accuser is cast as the accused.

“She should have screamed if this was really rape. Even with a gun, you have to come out of that without being raped. Even if he slaps you — you run away, you scream, you do whatever you can do to stop him.”

This is the voice of a woman interviewed outside the Johannesburg High Court during Jacob Zuma’s rape trial. It is founded on the belief that a woman who fails to show visible injuries as a sign of having resisted rape may have engaged in sex willingly. How and how much should she resist? Very often, those who do resist end up being beaten mercilessly and raped repeatedly. To secure a conviction, does a woman have to present evidence of a breast slashed with a knife or a vagina stuffed with sand? What about a woman raped by a man who whispers sweet nothings in her ear as he thrusts violently, working himself to a state of temporary insanity?

The supporter quoted above was of the opinion that the complainant ruined her hero’s political career and therefore deserved to be condemned in the strongest possible manner. As a woman, she is expected to have prevented her attack by fighting him off. If we compare this to a hijacking, we find that potential victims are advised not to fight back but to hand over their car keys to the hijacker without any struggle, to avoid injury. This is irrespective of whether the hijacker and the victim are both strong men. Similarly, whilst laying a charge of robbery at a police station, a business owner is never quizzed to find out whether he fought back or if he quietly submitted to the ordeal. Evidence of fighting the robber by shouting, screaming or getting physical is not required as a precondition for laying a charge or the payment of an insurance claim.

A woman who is immobilised by fear may not be physically strong enough to fend off her rapist. In addition to being physically injured, or even murdered, a woman who is raped is presumed to be guilty by society if she does not fight back. Furthermore, she is also blamed for being born female. This means that she not only has to contend with the trauma of sexual violence, she also faces a deep, negative social stigma that surrounds womanhood, sex and sexual violence.

Narrations of the impact of the stigma of rape are found in many works of fiction and non-fiction. In her novel And They Didn’t Die, Lauretta Ngebo outlines the shame felt by Jeziile, a woman from Umzimkhulu who was raped by her employer. Of concern to her was not only that she was raped but the reality that she would be accused of bringing the name of Siyabo, her husband, as well as his family into disrepute.

Panic and horror seized her. He had her arm twisted and he rolled her onto the bed and pinned her down... He had his way with her... He did not leave the room when he had finished with her... He sat up next to her trying to calm her down and to comfort her.

“If it wasn’t for the law, I would love you openly; I would even marry you.” Finally he left the room after midnight. She felt dirty and steeped in evil. The feel and the smell of his slimy emission filled her with much revulsion... But as dawn broke, the thought of telling her community back in Sigageni about her
bitter experience filled her with shame. She was no longer sure of their sympathy and understanding. Something in her could not face it. Rape is a burden to its own victim. It was as though she had wished it on herself. She could predict all the hard gossip... And what would Szyalo think when he came back and heard these stories? Would he believe her against all those rumours? 12

A woman I met during my work in Alexandra Township was raped by two young men and had to face the wrath of her husband, who accused her of asking for it.

"My husband did not come home that night. Very early the next day, at about 6am, I left the house to go and look for him. I had to go because if he gets injured I will have to answer to my in-laws. They might accuse me of not being a good wife. As I walked past the women's hostel, two young men approached me and dragged me to some part of the hostel threatening me with a knife on my neck. I tried to fight; they assaulted me with a fist and later raped me. After they had left, I went back home to wait for my husband. On arrival, I told him what happened. He was very angry with me, accusing me of following him around. He shouted at me saying that I asked for it because I was supposed to have stayed at home like a good wife until he comes back." 13

Women's experiences of the trauma of rape begin early in their lives. Given the prevalence of the sexual abuse of children, many women have guilt-ridden childhood memories of hearing the brunt of misogynistic violence directed to those who are born female. Similarly, there are very few women who have not experienced a lover forcing himself on them. There aren't many who do not have a memory of coerced sexual intercourse, which is reactivated by forceful sexual acts with regular partners. If this is a disease, then thousands, millions, of women are ill. If the complainant in Zuma's rape trial is ill, her disease does not exist in a vacuum but in a society where men do not think twice about descending on a woman's body like a pack of vultures feasting on a dead carcass. Indeed, if she is pronounced ill, Zuma must also be ill. Just like the complainant who might, according to Judge Van der Merwe, 'perceive any sexual encounter as rape,' Zuma might perceive all acts of patriarchal sex as consensual.

Women were not born ill. Their socialisation as girls in a society structured by patriarchal attitudes is the root cause of the disease. Through an organised tyranny of religion, tradition, political, legal and economic systems, women's minds have been constrained and their bodies violated without consent. Confronted by the conspiracy of silence, women had to learn to accept that there must be something wrong in their drawers 14 and that they would suffer for being born female. Against all odds, those in positions of power (including marital and blood male relatives) hoped that women would keep silent and never find a voice to question these repressive systems.

"I have never been free from the fear of rape. From a very early age, I, like most women, have thought of rape as part of my natural environment - something to be feared and prayed against like fire or lightning."

"At the age of eight my grandmother took me to the back of the house where men wouldn't hear, and told me that strange men wanted to harm little girls. I learned not to walk on dark streets, not to talk to strangers, or get into strange cars, to lock doors, and to be modest. She never explained why a man would want to harm a little girl, and I never asked." 15
Rape goes far beyond a man penetrating a woman’s vagina with his penis. It is, according to Kalumu ya Salaam, an act of denying women the autonomy of self-determination in the same way that the imperialists usurped the sovereignty of colonised nations.8 Depending on who the victim is and who the rapist is, Ya Salaam argues that rape becomes an expression of the ideologies of racism, capitalism and sexism. Therefore, rape cannot be divorced from the objectification of women in the media, commercials, music videos, billboards and the pages of glossy magazines.

Running through the commercialised and misogynist depiction of women is the message that they are men’s property. As a result, sex becomes a commodity that men consume rather than something that women and men share together. This explains the common notion of re ja bana or re ja khekh, which runs as a thread through men’s conversations about women and sex. This notion of chasing the waves exists despite the man being the one who surrenders to the ‘little death’, losing his essence to a woman while she retains her essence (and his) within her body.

Ending sexual violence against women goes far beyond legislation. It requires a change in societal attitudes through comprehensive community education campaigns on gender violence and its impact on women, families and communities. Early in 1995 I was appointed as a gender consultant in the Presidency and tasked with overseeing the process of formulating women’s empowerment policies in the new democracy. My team focused its energies on establishing the National Gender Machinery and protective legislation such as the Domestic Violence Act. More than a decade later, appropriate gender institutions are in place, policies have been formulated and legislation has been passed, but thousands of women remain prisoners of war in their own homes and country.

Silence is not an option

Clearly, as far as the substance of the law is concerned, there are limitations to what it can do. It gives women certain rights and prescribes appropriate forms of punishment if these rights are violated. The laws may change but unless the attitudes of judges, lawyers, the police and other members of society change, the impact of new legislation will be limited. Urgent calls to pass the Sexual Offences Bill should also be accompanied by calls for the widespread legal education of women. Such an education should include a comprehensive public awareness campaign that eliminates the socio-cultural myths that perpetuate rape in our society.

Educating the public about their legal rights cannot be limited to the written word in a language that not everyone understands. Given that about three million adults in South Africa are completely illiterate, between five and eight million are functionally illiterate and ten million are illiterate, such an educational campaign should occur within a context that is culturally relevant for the target population.9 Otherwise, lengthy public lectures such as the one that Judge Van der Merwe gave when he allowed the complainant’s sexual history to be taken into consideration in the Zuma case will not only be meaningless but could also prove to be dangerous since their misinterpretation could fuel the raging fire of sexual violence in South Africa. Some men might read women’s humiliation during cross-examination about their sexual history as tacit approval for men to dominate women sexually – it gives men permission to blame women for rape.

The politics of rape

Undoubtedly, the greatest weapon in this battle is organising and recruiting women, men and entire communities to be part of a struggle that exposes the links between sexism and racism. A need to heal relationships between black women and men is
of critical importance. Focusing on black men is, however, not meant to reinforce the common myth of black men being violent by nature. It is meant, rather, to bring attention to the abuse they suffered for centuries.

One of the most calculated and premeditated forms of rape in Africa occurred in the 19th century when King Leopold II and other European monarchs rationalised their immoral acts of rape and plunder of Africa's human and natural resources as bringing civilization to parts of the globe whose darkness has not yet been penetrated by the white man's enlightenment. The legacy of such enlightenment is well recorded in history – the brutality of the Germans in Namibia, the Belgians in the Congo, the English and the Dutch in South Africa, the Portuguese in Mozambique, and the Italians in Somalia – the list goes on. European countries small enough to fit into a geographical space equivalent to Gauteng have perfected the art of exploiting vast continents such as Africa, Asia and Latin America. Indigenous peoples across the world are still suffering the trauma of foreign invasion.

Similarly, focusing on black men is also not meant to reinforce the myth of the black man as a rapist. It is not intended to turn a blind eye to the rape of black women by white men. We know from history that while slave owners had unrestricted access to slave women's bodies, they viewed black men as sexual predators who possessed an insatiable appetite for white women. For this reason, they felt a need to exert tight patriarchal control over white women's bodies as a way of protecting them from black rapists. In its 1872 congressional report, the Ku Klux Klan required its initiates to take an oath to protect white women from black rapists. This protection was used as justification for the lynching of black people in America's southern states.

The same was true of the Cape Colony where rape served as a rite of passage for young settler men. In writing about the life of Sarah Baartman, Yvette Abrahams reports that institutionalised rape was so embedded in the settler culture to the point where a white man’s death sentence for raping a woman was reversed when evidence revealed that the victim was not white but Khoe. Similarly, in her book Women, Race and Class, Angela Davis argues that rape laws were originally framed to protect upper-class men. What happened to working-class black women was of no concern to the courts. As a result, the rape charge was indiscriminately aimed at black men. Of the 455 men executed on the basis of rape convictions between 1930 and 1967 in the United States, 405 of them were black.

The image of the black man as rapist is, according to Angela Davis, inseparable from the notion of black women as chronically promiscuous. If it is accepted that black men are rapists of white women, black women must reciprocate the sexual attention of white men.

Furthermore, the notion of black men as rapists is based on a racist view of black men as sex maricas derived from biological and sociological stereotypes coined by a range of theorists and scientists. By 'peeping' into the lives of black men in the ghetto, observing their behaviour like a scientist studying a group of chimpanzees in a cage, some of these scientists reduced their subjective observations to biological make-up and/or environmental effects. These theories assume that black men can't help raping women because they are born that way, or because they are raised to behave in this way. In contrast, however, the stories of victims of other atrocities such as the Holocaust are narrated not as stories of learned helplessness but as tales of triumph demonstrating the power of the human condition to transcend genetic and/or environmental limitations.

As a people, we have internalised these stereotypical notions of black men's sexuality.

Although they shocked us, it came as no surprise to hear Jacob Zuma's remarks about Zulu culture and rape. For many of us it was a reminder of ways in which the white man's misinterpretation
of African custom was assisted by and contributed to black men’s manipulation of tradition to perpetuate male domination. Traditional customs that pertain to women’s sexual behaviour are often presented as rigid constructs of our past that cannot be changed or challenged.

The tendency for people to exploit tradition for a particular purpose is commonplace in modern society. Its success rests on an appeal to ‘go back to our roots’, which for men who were dehumanised by oppressive regimes seems to be the only way to resist further dehumanisation by feminism, which they believe has foreign origins.

The growth of feminist scholarship, including its attack on nationalist agendas that uphold leadership principles espoused by elite men, has invoked counterattacks that see African feminists as vehicles for cultural contamination. In this instance, Desiree Lewis argues, culture is used to silence women and to keep them in an inferior position.

“Fictions of undirected African culture have been weapons for enforcing women’s obedience, with the charge of ‘Westernisation’ being used against many women in public realms dominated by men. Women so castigated are pressured to modify their “untraditional” behaviour or relinquish an identity that appears to be at odds with a communal identity. Yet the selective lawing of certain institutions, customs or values lays bare the spuriousness of discourses that claim to speak in the name of culture.”

When I saw Zulu men in court on judgment day proudly displaying their African identity in a society that tried to crush the spirits of their ancestors for years, listening to them sing in their mother tongue as their hero received judgment in a foreign language from a system founded on the colonial ideology...
and linguistic abilities, women are prone to abusing others verbally and emotionally. Verbal abuse can be as devastating as physical abuse; harsh words can be as deadly as a bullet.

While women focus on confronting widespread male violence, it is equally important that they stay alert to the subtle ways they may collude with patriarchy. For instance, how many times do women refer to one another as ‘bitch’, especially when fighting over a man? Women might rebel against men who refer to them as bitches and whores, yet refer to another woman in the same way. In a rural gender and HIV/AIDS programme that I was a part of in Burgersfort, Limpopo Province, women constantly referred to other women as kwababane (whore). The greatest challenge for us was to show the women how internalised oppression (racism and sexism) controls their oppressed sense of self and identity.

For instance, a common belief that a woman cannot lead a country explains why other women obstruct gender equality by refusing to vote for or support the efforts of a capable woman leader. I was fascinated by a photograph of a woman wearing ANC colours outside the court buildings carrying a placard bearing a bold message: NO WOMAN PRESIDENT. This self-discrimination and negative self-image is not a ‘woman thing’. It is a human phenomenon. Often the oppressed internalise and come to believe the oppressor’s negative view of themselves explaining it as ‘this is how black people are’ or ‘this is how women are’.

In many ways, some of the actions of women supporters outside the court buildings during Jacob Zuma’s trial illustrate this fact. How else do you explain an image of a self-respecting elderly African woman burning impepho (cleansing herbs) in one hand and holding a G-string in the other, calling for the ancestors’ intervention whilst cursing in words that, according to Don Makatole, make ‘bitch’ seem like a tame Sunday school word? How else do you explain such vile expressions of self-hate from older African women in the presence of young men who look to them for moral education? Was there no way of showing support for Mashololi without vilifying women’s bodies?

Actions of support outside the court buildings not only reinforced the belief of women as temptresses, they also went further to reinforce the view of male revolutionaries as sexual symbols. The same applies to cultural icons. From Che Guevara to Steve Biko, Bill Clinton to Bin Laden, Fela Kuti to Miles Davis, Bob Marley to Tupac, George Burns to Hugh Hefner, industry (sex, politics, religion, show business, media, etc.) market their power as an aphrodisiac, which makes women hover around these men like moths around a flame. Essentially, any man with power - money, muscle, fame, political popularity or intellectual wit - seems to be allowed to juggle as many women as he can.

In such instances, women play a stereotypical role of ‘hot sex on a platter’. Even ANC Chief Whip Mduduzi Manana is reported to have used his position of power to try to get a parliamentary assistant to have sex with him. When the woman refused, Manana was allegedly reported to have said: “I thought you were a real Xhosa girl. How can you say ‘no’ to your chief whip as if I am an ordinary man?”

Combining a view of men’s power as an aphrodisiac with women’s negative sense of self, some women openly accused the complainant of being ungrateful for an opportunity to have had sex with Mashololi. MaMkhize, an ardent supporter from Umzimkhulu who achieved celebrity status during the trial, stated that if she had been raped by Zuma she would not have bathed her bosom (where he’d have lain) for days.

Dismantling patriarchal thinking and practice therefore goes beyond a female empowerment strategy that only focuses on putting women in powerful positions. It involves confronting the culture of patriarchal thinking that can be found in men as easily as it can be found in women. In a country where most...
families are headed by women, to what degree do single mothers force their sons to conform to patriarchal standards in their relationships with their girlfriends and wives?

For men, self-examination includes asking key questions: Is it possible for men to live life-affirming, fulfilling and meaningful lives without dominating women? If you take away a man's ability to have sex with a woman, provide for the family and dominate social institutions, is he still a man? What makes a man a man? How is the identity and role of men in contemporary society affected by modern pressures? How does pressure to perform in a boardroom translate into pressure to perform in a bedroom? Does the existing widespread feeling of men's impotence (sexual and social) signify failure of the male machine gun?

According to Kalamu ya Salaam, it is not women's quest for independence that should become the central problem. Rather, ya Salaam argues, men of African descent must examine their own impotence in contemporary culture.

If we didn't have women to beat on, to pimp off, to massage our egos to treat us like the kings we desire to be but aren't, to stand behind us when no-one else in the world would even think of us, what would we have to do? 28

As far as parenting is concerned, do men have a greater and more significant role in child development other than providing for their material needs? In their absence, who is helping boys to deepen images of misogynist violence acted out in contemporary popular culture? Where are the fathers and father figures when boys act out in response to their unmasked and unanswered questions through drugs and violence?

In most countries, men's average incomes are higher than women's and they control the tools of violence in the form of weapons and armed forces. Within the corporate sector, men have greater control of wealth. In South Africa, however, we cannot talk about male privilege without addressing the legacy of racial discrimination reflected in the high levels of poverty and unemployment amongst black men. Until such time that black men triumph over the social conditions that force them to participate in their own massacre, we cannot claim to be free.

Political freedom without economic empowerment is a hollow victory. However, economic empowerment without spiritual emancipation is not only hollow but deadly.

Currently, many black men's bodies are rotting in jail (as they did during apartheid) and their minds are slowly decomposing from exposure to the never-ending psychological warfare and terrorism of a corrupt life behind bars. To eliminate crime, we cannot only rely on punishment as a deterrent. Otherwise, we may as well convert every school building and art centre into a prison. Or even better, we may as well allocate another R32 billion to buy more arms.

Conclusion
As you travel the journey in this book, it might seem as if you are reading a litany of horrors committed against women. This is because this book is meant to examine Zuma's rape trial beyond the narrow confines of South Africa and within the context of a global war against women.

One limitation of the book, however, is its exclusive focus on heterosexual masculine culture as if it is the norm and everything else is an aberration of nature. The focus on heterosexual masculinity is not intended to exclude other ways in which men may choose to express their sexuality and masculinity. Rather, it is meant to confront some of the negative heterosexual expressions of masculinity that arose out of the Zuma rape trial.

Closely related is the exclusive emphasis on women as rape victims. This does not in any way ignore the grim reality of boys and men who are expected to 'take it like a man' and suffer the
trauma of rape and sexual assault in silence. We know, from the
reported Roman Catholic sex abuse cases, the sex scandal in the
Ghardaïa prison in Algeria, horrific gang rapes in our own prisons as
well as other unreported accounts of male rape, that men and
boys have suffered deep psychological trauma. More research
and documentation is needed to bring men’s sexual wounds out
in the open to heal.

Notwithstanding the above, the focus on women as victims
in this book is intentional and inspired by the courage and
tenacity of a remarkable young woman who, in spite of her
fear, took a principled decision to fight a war knowing that she
might not win. While experiencing anguish, pain, isolation, fear,
self-doubt and many other emotions that we will never know
or understand, she was strong enough to speak out against one
of the most popular political leaders in South Africa. Like a
child from a broken family, she was caught in the crossfire of
the succession debate. Like a warrior, she refused to be silenced
and amplified the muffled screams of many other women who
have been raped by those who still parade their power (or lack of
it) in the corridors of government, business and traditional and
religious institutions.

It is clear from Jacob Zuma’s rape trial that in the 21st
century a woman who decides to lay a charge of rape still has to face
impermeable challenges. If she takes a shower, she is told she
destroyed essential evidence. If she doesn’t, she is not a typical
victim and may be accused of lying. If she is raped by a soccer
star, a business tycoon, a politician or religious leader, she should
not bathe, hoping and praying that by some divine miracle male
power will be sexually transmitted.

It is also clear from the reportage on the trial that a female
rape victim who doesn’t fight back is perceived as a willing
participant. If she fights back, however, she runs the risk of injury
or death. If she chooses not to speak out, she will die inside. If
she speaks out, she is a devil and deserves to burn in hell. Either
way there is a possibility of death. Therefore, it is better to speak
out and, like Biko, die for an ideal that will live on.

It is for this reason that I dedicate this book to a daughter of
the soil born to a man who dedicated his life to fighting for the
return of Azania to its children. Many lives later, including his
own, his child is forced to return to exile. What, then, is the
meaning of freedom?