



Editorial

Critical reflections on contemporary responses to gender violence within public, political, health and research contexts

*Tamara Shefer*¹

Department of Women's and Gender Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Western Cape

The first few months of 2013 were testimony to the pervasiveness of gender-based violence (GBV) internationally. A number of high profile cases of rape and femicide in Southern Africa and elsewhere were devastating reminders that brutal violence against women persists across the globe. Many of the papers in this special edition indeed make reference to these cases of sexual violence. In India, the gang rape and killing of Jyoti Singh Pandey in New Delhi at the end of 2012 was followed by a wave of political action against GBV in India in early 2013 with international ripple effects. In South Africa, the violent rape and murder of a young woman, Anene Booysen, followed shortly afterwards by a high profile femicide (the murder of Reeve Steenkamp by international sportsman Oscar Pistorius) in early 2013, similarly gave rise to a widespread politicised focus on violence against women and children in this country. In these two countries, and globally, an accelerated public call to mobilise against GBV and address the conditions that facilitate it were evident for much of the year. While such a focus is of course welcomed by long-term campaigners against violence against women and by researchers who have taken forward the project of understanding and responding to the complex contexts of such violence, especially in many post-colonial countries historically ravaged by both structural violence and violent conflict, there are also growing concerns about how popular representation and discourse may hold further challenges for the fight against GBV. To ensure that our responses to violence do not perpetuate or legitimise the very conditions that make such violence possible, we need to be critically reflective of the subtle messages implicit in the multiple social responses to GBV, from prevention efforts to mass action in the media and public campaigns and to supporting victims. This special issue addresses responses to GBV across diverse sectors, focusing on response at multiple levels and in the broadest definition of response to

¹ Please direct all correspondence to: Prof Tamara Shefer, Women's and Gender Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Western Cape, Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535; Email: tshefer@uwc.ac.za



include social science research on community perceptions, health service and educational institutions, and to larger forms of response including public discourse in the media, legal cases and literature.

Gender-based violence, ranging from the sexualised violence of rape as well as physical, emotional and economic violence in interpersonal relationships, has long been shown to be widespread internationally and powerfully enmeshed with gender and other social inequalities. Most of the papers in this edition provide valuable data indicating the pervasiveness of GBV in international contexts and in the local context. In post-colonial countries on the continent and elsewhere, the heritage of massive and continued social inequalities manifesting as structural violence, together with the persisting impact of colonial violence, both psychological and political, is also strongly implicated in continued high rates of violence. How this violence is responded to at political and public levels, however, is also important in shaping national and international imperatives, policy and practices in this respect. Thus an emerging concern with how violence against women is currently dealt with and responded to as reflected in these recent international cases of violence is that it may serve to facilitate an “othering” and therefore erasure of everyday and commonplace violence, so endemic in our societies. This may contribute to silences around the larger social context of violence including normative gender roles, hegemonic masculinities and femininities, and their enmeshment with material contexts of inequality and structural violence. The focus on “extreme” forms of violence and extremely “brutal” violence may have been mobilised in ways that inadvertently (if not strategically) deflect attention away from the normative nature of GBV, and the everyday violence that creates and maintains the conditions which make more brutal manifestations possible. In doing so, these everyday violations may be obfuscated and ignored with a focus on a pathologised and “othered” forms of violence. As a consequence, efforts at prevention may fail to address the complexities of GBV effectively. In thinking about responses to GBV at national and international levels it becomes increasingly important to critically reflect on the impact of our responses at multiple levels, not only the extent to which they are successful and/or appropriate, but also what messages are inherent in such responses. Thus we need to acknowledge the nuances of social response, both in publicising GBV and events related to GBV such as court cases, but also in the more practical and programmatic responses that include prevention, mitigation and support of victims. This call to caution means constant and critical interrogation of how we as a society, whether researchers or practitioners or citizens, respond to sexual and other gender violence. It thus becomes evident that many of our current responses to GBV may themselves be highly problematic. Thus generating effective and appropriate social responses to GBV, whether aimed at prevention or care, requires far greater work in unpacking intentions and effects than is assumed by many researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. As argued by Bennett in relation to research on sexuality and gender, but equally transferable to research on GBV and also to practice and intervention:

[t]here is an ongoing necessity to be vigilant about the ways in which notions of research ... can become deployed in the rehearsal of brutal and demeaning legacies (Bennett & Pereira, 2013, pp. 8–9).

To ensure that our responses to the brutal and demeaning legacy of sexual and other gender violences are not deployed in reproducing the very brutalities they seek to challenge, we need to unpack and interrogate carefully the things we say and do. This special issue is directed towards this task, hoping to make a contribution to this ongoing interrogation of the multilayered responses to GBV in African contexts. This also speaks to the international goals of challenging GBV as a normative and pervasive challenge to freedom and equality.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON PUBLIC RESPONSES TO GBV

Towards making the argument for the significance of interrogating responses to GBV and how they may be embedded in problematic discourses, public responses to the two highly publicised violent rapes and murders that took place in quick succession in early 2013 in South Africa are interrogated here by way of example. While the public expressed outrage, commentary was made by government and many agencies, and mass national campaigns initiated, it would seem that this was a nation genuinely concerned and moved to challenge GBV.

Yet, it became increasingly clear to critical and feminist thinkers that the public fascination with brutal and extreme forms of violence against women and the way in which meaning was made of these murders of these two young women served many functions other than signifying simply outrage and a desire to do good. Notwithstanding some well-meaning intentions, a closer look at how events unfolded and how these women and their deaths were represented reveals a lot to be concerned about. Feminist author and Gender Commissioner Amanda Gouws (2013, para. 1), for example, articulates concern about what the public response means for the larger goal of gender justice:

For the past three weeks we have been treated to a feeding frenzy around the deaths of two women due to violence in South Africa by the media, by politicians and by commentators (myself included). But I am wondering if we are not losing sight of what is really at stake here.

Similarly, it was disturbing to attend a mass meeting against GBV held on one of our local university campuses in which a group of participants marched around with handwritten and barely legible messages but on the back of very legible election posters. Ironically, on one poster were the words “Kill the abuser”, clearly reiterating Gouw’s concern about losing

sight of what is at stake here, and flagging the way in which all responses to events are themselves political, reflecting existing dominant discourses and often reproducing the very problematic systems of belief and practice that we hope to be challenging.

Another aspect of concern with how violence against women is dealt with and responded to which was starkly reflected in those few weeks in South Africa following the two brutal femicides is that, notwithstanding our well-meaning intentions and the value of mass mobilisation, such responses serve to facilitate an “othering” and therefore erasure of everyday and commonplace violence. By reproducing an image of extreme and violent brutality of women as reflected in these two events, the public is inadvertently contributing to the silences around normative violence shown to be bound up with everyday gender inequalities and prescribed gender roles, hegemonic masculinities and femininities, and their enmeshment with material contexts of inequality and structural violence. The focus on “extreme” forms of violence and extremely “brutal” violence is arguably being mobilised in ways that deflect attention away from the normalisation of gender violence, and the everyday violence that creates and maintains the conditions which make more brutal manifestations possible. In doing so, these everyday violations, which are with us in multiple manifestations, are obscured from sight. As Judge (2013, para. 10) suggests:

[t]he shock and awe response that often follows reports of violence against women exposes a kind of “performance of surprise” – an incredulity which acts to conceal just how very “normal”, how every day, violence is. It is the everyday conditions that make violence possible and probable. As a social practice, violence is made permissible through normalised, everyday discriminations, such as misogynist and homophobic practices that are institutionalised. These discourses of prejudice – often legitimised through cultural and religious narratives – make material acts of violence imaginable and explicable.

Indeed, the very different stories told about the perpetrators and the victims in these two cases also tell us a lot about the way in which violence against women is racialised and classed and serves as another area of my concern in the responses to these in South Africa. One would have thought that these two events across class and “race” happening so close together and both so clearly foregrounding patriarchal control/ownership over women’s bodies and male violence against women *could* serve to strategically destabilise the kind of *outsourcing of patriarchy*, that Inderpal Grewal (2013) has written about, which happens globally, and which in South Africa amounts to a racist, classist discourse of poor black men as perpetrators of violence. It seems, on the contrary, that the public responses both reflect and have served to reinforce and rationalise racist and gendered discourses. As Sisonke Msimang points out (2013, para. 1), “[m]edia coverage ... has reflected deeply racialised

and gendered attitudes to sexual violence”. This happens at multiple levels through the different foci in the stories, the intricacies of what is told and not told, and so on. There are multiple examples, importantly the image of “normative” violence in black/poor communities and assumptions of abnormal violence in white middle class communities where “complex” factors are brought to bear to explain this “anomaly” and notions of public disillusionment at being let down by a role model further serve to reinforce the notion that it is “such a disaster”, not because a woman is dead, but because it is so “unexpected” that such a murder should happen in such a community of high profile sports stars and models. The idea, for example, that Oscar’s killing of Reeva reveals his “darker side” (a term used in a number of news reports on the case) does infer that, under a particular set of conditions that involve a threat to his property, masculinity is “naturally” violent. Similarly, “lover’s quarrel” also suggests this normative operation of heterosexual love ... whereby men are violently possessive and in other instances act as proprietors of women (for example, that Oscar was acting to protect Reeva from an intruder). Thus in this moment of public response we see not only the reproduction of normative gender and gender power relations, but also racist discourse, as Msimang points out (2013, para. 2):

Part of our national narrative is that when white people murder and rape one another, there is usually a complex human story to explain their behaviour.

This is nowhere more evident in the stark differences between the stories of Oscar versus the stories of Anene’s rapists and murderers. There has been little media coverage of their stories even though one of the accused was found guilty and sentenced towards the end of 2013. Yet the global media provided a detailed day-to-day account of what Oscar was doing and even feeling in the first few months after his arrest.

Similarly, with regard to how the bodies of Reeva and Anene are represented in the public eye, gendered and raced lenses shape media representation. Because white, male bodies appear to really “matter”, more so than black and female ones, one sees how Reeva’s killing is strongly represented through the male subject’s experience. It appears that Reeva matters in a different way to Anene, not only because of her model celebrity status, but also because she represents a privileged idealised lifestyle and white upper-middle class femininity. So there is more public knowledge about Reeva’s life, especially aspects related to her career and her strength in challenging male power – she is nobly presented as someone who intended to make a contribution to women’s struggles and indeed her death was even rationalised through this trope, so that she may not have died in vain. Anene’s life, on the other hand, as black and poor and young, has been almost entirely invisible in the media.

This links to another political effect of the comparative stories of these two brutalities. While one would have thought that the resonances between the two stories would have acted to challenge assumptions of the impact of class on violent practices, the distinction between responses to the private versus public deaths of Reeva and Anene, respectively, is also not insignificant. It is widely assumed that even while GBV occurs across class, material resources may act against a susceptibility to violence such that middle class women are protected by their urban buildings and security systems while working class women are exposed by contexts of poverty. Yet both women are dead, one raped and murdered in a public outside space, and the other shot three times in a private upmarket bathroom. One would have thought that the two events, happening so close together in such different contexts, would underscore the classless nature of femicide and GBV. Yet, responses to the two cases do indeed illustrate the lived experience of class inequalities, both in the representation and actual treatment of the victims and perpetrators as well as in their material circumstances and outcomes. To cite just one example, the men arrested for Anene Booysen's murder were in jail with no bail for some months, while Pistorious was out on bail after less than a week and no doubt the prison circumstances were very different. Both the discursive and material bases of class inequalities in South Africa were arguably more powerfully restated through these events and their narrative representations.

A further embedded concern with the effect of the public representation of such crimes, as highlighted by these two cases, is that in the naming of such rapes and murders of women as violence against women, clearly an important moment strategically, there is ironically an erasure of men; what is actually in evidence is male violence, but all the public sees are women victims and male perpetrators. Arguably, in that moment we reproduce a problematic blind spot – while male violence is highly problematic for women, it is as problematic for men themselves. As Kopano Ratele (2013), a critical feminist and masculinities scholar, has tirelessly pointed out, young black poor men in South Africa are by far the greatest group at risk of male violence. During the mass response to these events, there was a marginal voice in the proliferation of media and public response that constituted some call to scrutinise masculinity and its link with power, control, violence, militarism and indeed guns. When masculinity was visible, mainstream notions of essentialised masculinity proliferate, evidenced in one example of Oscar's friend who, in an interview on *Third Degree* (a South African issue-based television talk show), narrated the story of how Oscar mistakenly shot a bullet in a public space (an offence now added to his charges). The interviewee explained this as “men have to be men”, poignantly drawing on notions of essentialised masculinity that include a deterministic association with violence. Ironically, many of the mass action events that followed these two high profile cases of GBV were led by men, usually calling for harsher, indeed violent, measures against men who are violent. This was disturbingly articulated in a banner at one university that proclaimed “kill the perpetrator”, drawing on the

very discourse that bolsters violence against women. Probably most ironic in this respect is the synchronicity of the Nike advert that was about to be released, of course withdrawn before the public release following the murder of Steenkamp, along the lines of “I am the bullet in the chamber” – referring to Oscar’s speed, stealth and power as a sports person. To cite Judge (personal communication, February 25, 2013):

Of course this so clearly indicates how the masculinity he has come to represent is deeply implicated in normative discourses of male power as an invincible force, a “killing machine” if you like. So in a symbolic sense he really stuck to the story line.

OVERVIEW

Articles in this special issue critically assess some of the current responses in different contexts to GBV which foreground a range of problematic discourses and practices. Included are inadequate political, health sector and public responses to GBV that arguably undermine more constructive and appropriate responses and inadvertently serve the purpose of erasing the focus on those aspects that reproduce GBV.

INAPPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND STATE RESPONSES TO GBV

Crudely evident from the banner described above, one of the problematic social responses highlighted by authors is the way in which popular responses are directed by an imperative for a more punitive response, hence frequently missing the importance of a focus on prevention and challenging the inequalities of gender and intersecting inequalities that shape GBV. In their short communication, reflecting on public and political responses to GBV in the South African context, Anik Gevers, Nwabisa Jama-Shai and Yandisa Sikweyiya argue:

The public and political discourse condemned these violent acts and overwhelmingly called for increases in penalties and convictions and the re-establishment of specialised sexual offences courts with very little discussion or engagement on how South Africans can prevent such violence from occurring in the first place (p. 15).

These authors go on to argue for an “evidence-based, multi-level strategy that addresses primary prevention at all levels of society”.

Johannes John-Langba, Vivian Nasaka John-Langba and Nyella Maya Rogers, researching in the context of post-conflict Sierra Leone, similarly point to inadequacies in the legal system and the way in which a silencing of sexual violence due to gender normative practices

mitigates adequate responses to GBV. They argue that while sexual violence during the conflict in Sierra Leone has been well researched, there is little known about such violence during the country's post-conflict transition. This paper presents narratives from a group of men and women in different communities in Sierra Leone as well as key informants such as community leaders and service providers that speak to current gender normative practices within heterosexual relationships. Sexual violence is reportedly widespread and it appears that changes following the conflict may have not adequately addressed educational, social and economic gender inequalities that continue to disempower women and girls in respect of reproductive rights. These authors argue for the importance of addressing normative gender roles and inequalities in any responses to sexual violence. A key finding in this study is that although there are legal measures in place and commitments to international and African protocols on GBV, they are not effective as sexual violence is not taken seriously by authorities and the community. The authors argue that sexual violence "generally exists within a culture of silence and impunity ... due to the inability of the justice system to adequately redress sexual violence crimes" (p. 71). Community participants argued that the main perpetrators of sexual violence are men in power such as elderly wealthy men, teachers and lecturers, which further appears to mitigate against such abuses being taken seriously as a crime. The paper flags how political and constitutional commitments, such as signing protocols and making laws, do not ensure the eradication of sexual violence; rather it argues that:

[a]dequately addressing the problem of sexual violence in Post-conflict Sierra Leone would require addressing continued inequalities between men and women bolstered by gender norms and practices through sensitization, awareness-raising and education as well as sustained efforts to improve the social, political and legal domains related to women's current disempowerment in Sierra Leone (p. 74).

Focusing on a particular sector of health workers, Navindhra Naidoo, Stephen Knight and Lorna Martin's paper illustrates inadequacies in health professional responses to GBV. This paper focuses on the response of a group of medical personnel, that is emergency support workers, to GBV. The authors point out that while there has been considerable research focusing on the responses of the police, courts and social workers to victims of abuse, none of the empirical literature includes first responders as interventionists. Emphasising their location of emergency medical services as often the first-on-the-ground service for injury, these authors argue for the potential value that such professionals may have in both identifying and supporting appropriate services for victims of GBV. Investigating a large group of participants' understandings of and reported practices in relation to identifying and treating victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), the study highlights a range of deficiencies in current emergency care providers' responsiveness to IPV. Participants lack

a basic understanding of GBV, including a definition of and familiarity with the legalities related to GBV. Some of the problematic assumptions that participants reported, such as the strong and widespread belief that alcohol causes domestic violence and the class-based determination of GBV, as well as their reported lack of capacity to assess the possibility of such violence, clearly undermine their effective capacity to act and illustrate a lack of adequate training for such care workers.

Kate Joyner's short communication focuses on the role of policy in shaping our responses at the primary health care level to IPV. She interrogates the very recently published World Health Organization's first ever clinical and policy guidelines for responding to IPV. While welcoming this vital intervention globally, the author reflects on the challenges to achieving these policy recommendations in the material context of South Africa as one example. Resonating with other articles such as those by Gevers et al. and Naidoo et al., the piece points to a range of inadequacies regarding the knowledge and capacity of health care practitioners. As emerges in this commentary, these international policy recommendations may assist different countries in focusing on the gaps in their current responses to gender violence, especially at the primary health care level. Joyner argues that "the time is ripe for all sectors to mobilise and work together by improving IPV services in South Africa" (p. 26) and of course in all global contexts.

PUBLIC DISCOURSES ON GBV AND THEIR IMPACT

Louise Vincent and Samantha Naidu focus on literature as a public terrain, interrogating its possibilities and constraints in representing and challenging GBV. The paper takes as "its starting point that crime fiction is a public and political response to gender-based violence" (p. 48) and focuses specifically on the novels of Margie Orford, a well-known crime author located in South Africa and specifically attempting to raise consciousness about GBV in her novels. The authors deconstruct the representations of violence against women in Orford's Clare Hart series which features a female investigator of horrific crimes directed against women and girls. In a complex unpacking of representations of GBV in these novels and the female lead, the authors foreground the stark contrasts between fictionalised GBV and material contexts of GBV. They show how novels, despite their good intentions, do not adequately represent the lived reality of violence against women and its aftermath. The neatness of the crime novel resolution of violent crime is starkly contrasted with the recent South African story of Anene Booysen, referred to in this editorial and a number of other papers:

In crime fiction, the violent act, as well the victim's body, are dissected so that a satisfactory resolution may be presented to the reader. But in Anene's story there



is no such denouement, the story is tragic but without resolution or intrigue hence the apathetic shrug of a bewildered public (p. 55).

The authors go on to unpack the feminist strategy of the assertive, independent female criminal investigator, Clare Hart, highlighting how she is masculinised and questioning whether she serves to reproduce a masculinist construction of police and public protectors rather than subverting it. While this paper represents a literary criticism that is unusual in this journal, it draws attention to the role of other frameworks of response, such as literature. This criticism may, however, serve to reproduce problematic responses to GBV, such as the “othering” of GBV as extreme and brutal violence, which in turn pathologises GBV as non-normative rather than acknowledging the pervasive nature of violence within current gender power inequalities and normative gender practices. On the other hand, the paper also draws attention to the value of feminist and activist attempts to raise consciousness about GBV and to popularise alternative performances of gender such as that of the female lead in this novel, who embodies both stereotypical masculinity and femininity in her investigatory practices and interpersonal relationships.

Lucy Graham echoes the perspectives of many of the contributions in this edition through a focus on the public representation of rape trials, in this case aspects of the high profile rape trial that took place some years ago, of the current South African President, Jacob Zuma. She argues that sexual violence:

is not a “women’s issue”, nor a sudden “epidemic”, and it should not be a platform for political point scoring. Rather, it is a longstanding, chronic expression of disease in the body politic that draws attention to serious fault lines that need to be confronted within our society today (p. 29).

Graham suggests that key to addressing the high levels of sexual violence in South Africa is the acknowledgement by the state and the public of the ways in which “a colonial, white supremacist and patriarchal past has shaped responses to sexual violence”. As many of the other papers also do, this commentary further argues the need to “redress problems of social and economic inequality that exist in South Africa as hangovers from this country’s colonial and apartheid-era past” (p. 28). One of the more troubling reflections made in this paper is the possible impact of the Zuma rape trial on the reporting of rape. This calls attention to the power of public responses to sexual violence and how they may impact on victims of sexual violence in particular. Graham shows how reports of rape dropped noticeably in the year following the trial and wonders if this drop “may be read as disturbing empirical evidence of how the public revictimisation and ostracisation of a complainant may serve to silence victims of sexual violence”.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO GBV

Arguably, educational institutions offer one such productive space for preventive measures in challenging the conditions that make GBV possible. Yet ... “[p]reventing and reducing gender violence in schools is missing in research, interventions and debates involving children” (p. 39) argues Deevia Bhana, who goes on to flag the imperative that:

[i]t is time to act, time to get to zero and time to put boots on the ground and address the scourge that limits children’s freedoms, health and well-being in South Africa (p. 45).

Also in an educational setting, but this time at a tertiary education level, Sarah Gordon and Anthony Collins explore how a group of women at a South African university construct GBV and how they position themselves within such discourses when discussing the fear and threat of this violence. The study elaborates on three different discourses which they identified in their participants’ narratives on GBV, which they suggest “act to normalise, legitimise and excuse gender-based violence on campus” (p. 104). These include a culture of fear in which women on campus report a constant sense of fear of GBV, a discourse of women’s responsibility which places women as responsible for avoiding GBV through a set of regulatory practices, “rules” that they must abide by or be blamed for sexual violence if they transgress, and a powerful silence surrounding GBV. All of these serve to undermine their safety on campus and in the larger social world. The last discourse speaks to the central issue of silence and speaking, which is such a strong focus in the paper by Fleming and Kruger. Gordon and Collins refer to “the ingrained silence surrounding GBV”, illustrating how their participants “spoke about the silence surrounding gender-based violence and how it is not acceptable to speak about such violence”. Reiterating the argument raised by Graham about the way in which public responses to sexual violence crimes reproduce the silence (and lack of reporting) of sexual violence, this paper argues that social invalidation of sexual violence disclosure facilitates further silencing:

The tension between this woman’s desire to articulate her traumatic experience and the social invalidation she feels when she does, is indicative of a culture which systematically normalises and tolerates gender-based violence. The social invalidation that women receive when they disclose their experiences of gender-based violence creates a cycle of underreporting and sends the message that women’s experiences and identities are not valued (p. 102).

These authors stress the importance of moving beyond holding those at risk of GBV as responsible, and rather shift the focus to challenging the social relationships and inequalities of power that allow such violence to exist in South African society.



SHAME AND SILENCE IN COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO GBV

Resonating powerfully with the theme of silence that is salient in the article by Gordon and Collins and John-Langba et al., Karen Fleming and Lou-Marié Kruger forge an important argument about the powerful role of shame in the reproduction of such silences. The paper presents one in-depth case study of a woman presenting with depression living in a low-income community in South Africa who is a survivor of sexual violence, yet did not share this for over 40 years. The article explores the way that feelings of shame contribute to continued silences around sexual violence by highlighting possibilities for disclosure and therefore support. The authors argue that the “shame of women in this particular community is linked to very particular gender discourses that also impact on the participant’s sense of agency” (p. 109). In a reflexive and complex account the paper unpacks the larger social discourses that shape the responses of women who are victims of sexual violence. The authors identify a “communal complicity of silence” around sexual violence and illustrate the “powerful gender discourses” that they argue “determine that women should be the silent and passive carriers of shame, while men can be active in the world and do not have to carry shame” (p. 112). The silence around sexual violence is also then shown to be linked to the imperative on women to protect their men and their community.

Importantly, the authors suggest that the political rhetoric that asks women to speak out about GBV and take legal action, for example, is questionable, since such simplistic resolutions do not appreciate the deep entrenchment of normative practices and cultures that support and rationalise sexual violence and the lack of support and safety for women to speak out. The authors argue, similarly to Gordon and Collins, that the silences and shame around sexual violence ultimately serve to further entrench dominant discourses. They call for an acknowledgement of the complexities surrounding women’s silence on sexual violence and argue that:

to hear the stifled voices of traumatized women, more focused interventions are indicated that take the above factors into account. Interventions considered should not only focus on women as passive victims of sexual abuse or as powerless pawns in a society where hegemonic discourses render traumatized women (p. 121).

Rather, they suggest women’s agency has to be drawn on if dominant discourses are to be subverted.

In conclusion, there are many threads of commonality woven through these different papers that speak to the complex, nuanced and multilayered framework of responses to GBV, their meaning and effects. These include the continued silences surrounding GBV

and women victims; inadequate and problematic knowledge, attitudes and practices of key stakeholders and providers in society, in communities and primary institutions like school and higher education in general; and the power of the media and other public and popular representations of GBV. One of the key points emerging from the insights provided about GBV on the continent and globally in these contributions is the call to focus on ensuring adequate support, care and safety. This means an emphasis on including such knowledge in all forms of training for health, legal and other civil society practitioners and agents. However, contributions also foreground an emphasis on prevention and this means addressing larger structural violences such as continued poverty and gender normative practices and the inequalities in many African and global contexts. Linked to this, emerging from papers such as by John-Langba and colleagues and many of the South African papers which link GBV with post-colonial costs and histories of violence is the imperative to recognise “the ways in which gender inequality has been forged by a violent history” (Graham, in this edition, p. 36).

Importantly, many of the papers emphasise how addressing GBV needs to be multipronged and to operate at multiple levels, and should also target key sites for change such as universities and schools. To echo Deevia Bhana's poignant call, “it is time to act, time to get to zero” in our efforts towards making gender-based violence, indeed any form of violence, *unimaginable* in our societies.

REFERENCES

Bennett, J. & Pereira, C. (2013). Introduction: Sexualities and gender – research methodologies and the questions which compel us. In Bennett, J. & Pereira, C. (Eds.), *Jacketed women: Qualitative research methodologies on sexualities and gender in Africa* (pp. 1–19). Cape Town: UCT Press.

Gouws, A. (2013, February 25). Anene, Reeva media frenzy reveals a nation's shallowness. *Mail & Guardian Online*. Retrieved December 4, 2013, from <http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/amandagouws/2013/02/25/anene-reeva-frenzy-reveals-a-nations-shallowness/>

Grewal, I. (2013). Outsourcing patriarchy: Feminist encounters, transnational mediations and the crime of 'honour killings'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 15(1), 1–19.

Judge, M. (2013, April, 3). Behind the shock and awe, the violence is 'normal'. *Mail & Guardian Online*. Retrieved December 4, 2013, from <http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/melaniejudge/2013/04/03/behind-the-shock-and-awe-the-violence-is-normal/>

Msimang, S. (2013, February 24). Crime knows no race. *City Press Online*. Retrieved December 4, 2013, from <http://www.citypress.co.za/columnists/crime-knows-no-race/>

Ratele, K. (2013). Subordinate Black South African without fear. *Cahieres d'Etudes africaines*, LIII (1–2) 209–210, 247–268.