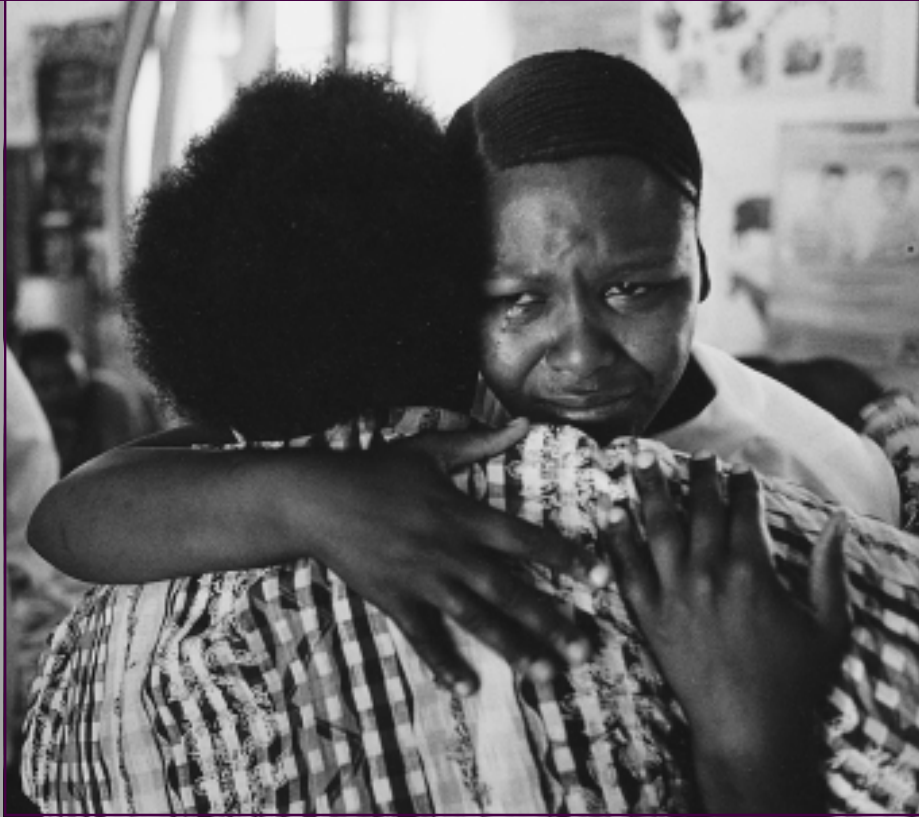


# Norwegian Church Aid



Life without violence  
Women and men together

Policy and Reports

Life without violence – Women end men together

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## Foreword

Of all the important issues on the agenda of Norwegian Church Aid and partners in Southern Africa, HIV/AIDS was the most obvious choice as a theme for the regional consultation in March 2001. Southern Africa has some of the worst HIV/AIDS statistics world wide, and most of us are struggling to understand the issue and to deal efficiently with it. Besides that we also saw it as important to bring the gender perspective into our discussion about the issue. We see more and more clearly that women and men are affected differently by HIV/AIDS. This fact has to influence on how we strategize.

At last but not least we experience that violence is increasing in most societies and that the homes and families are not at all the safe havens it should be to children and women, who are most frequently the victims of domestic violence. The threat of HIV/AIDS has in different ways made domestic violence even more serious than it used to be. In their attempt to find safe sex men abuse family members and there are even believed that sex with a virgin can cure an infected person. To the psychological and physical suffering caused by sexual abuse, the possibility of death by AIDS is now added for the victim of domestic violence.

Facing this dramatic situation Norwegian Church Aid invited partners in Southern Africa under the theme Life Without Violence – Men and Women Together. We wanted to be challenged by partners, to challenge partners and partners to challenge each other. I think we all agreed with one of the voices in the consultation exclaiming, **This can not continue!**

But it will continue unless we do something about it. The intention of calling for this consultation was that we together should do something. We hope the participants went back to their respective organisations with new ideas on how to address these issues and that this report put together by Yvette Esprey will help them and other readers to move forward.

Rolf Strand



Regional Representative for  
Southern Africa  
Norwegian Church Aid

# Proactive responses to domestic violence and HIV/AIDS

In March 2001, the NCA hosted a consultation in Gaborone which had as its primary focus, the pressing issue of domestic violence (violence primarily directed at women and children in the context of relationships), which is recognised as being particularly pertinent in the Southern African context. An objective of the consultation was to look at domestic violence issues in relation to HIV/AIDS, and within a gender-sensitive framework. This initiative was in line with the World Council of Church's Decade to Overcome Violence, and the increased focus in NCA on HIV/AIDS regionally and worldwide.

## **NCA mobilising for moral action...**

In its policy document outlining its mobilisation for moral action, the NCA commits itself to addressing the abuse of power, and has, as one of its priorities, the addressing of violence in the family and the church. In its document, the NCA recognises that violence is overtaking infectious disease as the primary cause of injury and death worldwide. Most vulnerable to this violence are women and children, and interpersonal violence stands as an obstacle to the empowerment of women, and to the realisation of gender equality. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) stipulates that gender-based violence is a human rights violation, and there is the recognition that those contexts which should be "sanctuaries of support", namely the home and the church, in fact provide the context for abuse.

During the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988 – 1998), power abuse in the church was exposed, and it was seen that patriarchal structures support, rather than condemn, violence against women. The NCA, in response, has prioritised violence against women on its agenda, and is committed to increasing awareness, and stimulating discussion around issues related to gender-based and domestic violence. There is the recognition that churches in fact have the power to be active agents for positive change, and an important objective of the NCA's advocacy is to challenge oppressive church structures and to begin to use the spiritual forum as a vehicle for the eradication of violence.

The Gaborone consultation was a manifestation of the NCA's objectives.

## **The gender, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence triangle...**

The key, and very current issues of gender, domestic violence, and HIV/AIDS are inter-related, and the triangle formed by these three issues provided the framework for discussing the problems that NCA partners face in their work. The triangle also provided a foundation for the generation of possible solutions and recommendations, focussing specifically on spirituality, healing, human rights, working with youth/children, tradition/culture, and educational programmes.

An important aim of the consultation was to provide a forum for an interactive meeting between people working in NGOs, churches, and community projects, with the objective of informing and influencing policy and practice at a grass roots level. With this in mind, whilst formal input around the current status of domestic violence, HIV/AIDS and other related issues was given, the consultation was structured in such a way as to facilitate maximum participation and contribution from all participants. This aim was realised, and overwhelmingly participants felt that they had used the consultation as an opportunity to talk about issues and difficulties being experienced in their particular context, and to brainstorm around possible ways of confronting the challenges faced.

### **Women and men, together....**

An important outcome of the consultation was the realisation for many participants that their community's problems are shared by others, and the sense of alienation and isolation so often felt when working in domestic violence, HIV/AIDS and development contexts was alleviated, perhaps only for a time, but there was the hope that we can share our burdens through talking. Participants also had the opportunity to confront some of their own demons, particularly when looking honestly at issues around gender. Possibly one of the most valuable products of the consultation was the very real dialogue that began to emerge between men and women. Often during the week there was a shared sense that this is something which we rarely do, but that it is essential if we are serious about breaking down the barriers created by gendering and stereotype, recognising that men and women, together, can be an active and formidable force for constructive change in Africa.

### **Objectives of the report...**

This report is not a summary of the input given at the consultation, rather it is an attempt to pull together the key issues that were confronted and to present a coherent understanding of the problems being faced in the Southern African context of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. The context for the problems being faced is set by looking at the issue of gender, and how it predicts our response to the world, to ourselves, and to one another. This is followed by a closer look at domestic violence, focussing on how the interplay of gendering, culture, development and poverty collude to provide a fertile ground for the abuse of women and children. The relationship between HIV/AIDS and domestic violence is investigated, looking at the dilemma posed by the imperative to "break the silence".

The report looks also at solutions, specifically highlighting potential vehicles for change which include healing, spirituality and human rights frameworks. What was recognised at the consultation is the vital role which caregivers of all kinds have to play in confronting domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. With this in mind the report turns to highlight the need to tend to ourselves as a prerequisite for doing good work in community contexts. It became strikingly obvious during the consultation that the concept of the wounded healer was pertinent to all people participating – we gain insight into the work that we do by reflecting on our own wounds and pain, which are inevitable concomitants of being Africans, living in Africa. In so doing we are able to tend to the wounds of others. This report is a liturgy of sorts, a way of recognising shared pain, and of remembering and honouring those, including ourselves, who are victims and survivors of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS.

What cannot be captured here is the spirit which was pervasive throughout the consultation. It was one of sharing and generosity, of humility, pride and love, and of a real sense of UBUNTU – of a shared reality and understanding, and a recognition of the tenacity of the human spirit and of the human potential to effect positive change. A gift.

# Introduction

**By Atle Sommerfeldt**  
**General Secretary, Norwegian Church Aid**

*Violence against another human person is a violence against God, because we are all created in God's image*

The NCA's guiding slogan, "Together for a just world", encapsulates the organisation's vision to stimulate and participate in the struggle for basic human rights and basic human responsibility for all peoples, around the world. It emphasises the need for community-based, holistic and comprehensive approaches to the challenges facing humanity, including the problems of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. In order to succeed in this struggle, in order to be survivors rather than victims, we need to identify the signs of crisis and the signs of hope, as expressed in daily lives and struggles of ordinary people. The work of NCA and its partners then, is to agree on strategies and programmes that will strengthen the signs of hope, and to mobilise to overcome the crises in homes, communities and nations.

Part of the foundation which supports such mobilised action, is based on the co-operative interaction between men and women within a culture of gender recognition and respect. The focus on men and women working together has been with us for some time. It has brought us from an unconscious male-dominant understanding, through a necessary focus on the decisive role of women, to an understanding of the interrelatedness of men and women. There are two aspects of this process that I would like to highlight.

Firstly, the coming home of social action and reflection to the basic realities we in a sense all know. Gender awareness has brought us into the daily lives of ordinary people. As much as systems and structures need to change to achieve justice, likewise it is absolutely necessary to change the basic pattern of personal and individual behaviour. A bottom-up approach to social change is not possible without lifelong personal and individual patterns of behaviour and action with social programmes for improvement and liberation. If we are going to stimulate change in daily life, it is not possible to do that without addressing how men and women in their different roles can be subjects and agents in their own lives. That is the centre of all human life.

Looking into the reality in households as the key formation determining people's lives, it has been discouraging to be aware of the level of violence and oppression that takes place. In a way the insight has of course been there all the time: of the reality of domestic violence, sexual abuse and power abuse. But we have not been able to a sufficient degree to make the linkage between violence in the homestead and the violence in society. This linkage should be clear to us: improvement in people's daily lives requires systemic changes and political intervention. There are, however, always windows of opportunity to start the march towards liberation from poverty and suffering. This demands maximum utilisation of human resources. If human resources are bound by anxiety and fear of violence, if energy is spent on civil war in the homestead, liberation is sapped of energy and resources.

*If human resources are bound by anxiety and fear of violence, if energy is spent on civil war in the homestead, liberation is sapped of energy and resources.*

Attempts to address economic development without addressing the issue of violence in the home are going to fail. At the centre of this, is the relationship between men and women.

The reality of the abuse of power as the root cause of poverty is well-known. For NCA it has been of extreme importance to link the abuse of power to the need to focus on individual responsibility. Structural and systemic changes are absolutely necessary, and programmes relating to that should play a more prominent role in NCA's activities. Structural change without personal commitment to change patterns of power abuse in daily life will not achieve NCA's goal. It is our firm belief that we have to stimulate each other to address ethical and moral issues which are obstructing the struggle for liberation and justice. The inspiration for this has come through careful listening to our partners in Southern Africa, East Africa and Central America. And when we have focussed on it, the stories of relevance multiply.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has passed the threshold of a health problem in Southern Africa. The epidemic is a major factor depriving people and nations of the opportunities for a better life. It is a focus point for collaboration, as it stands in the midst of many of the crises being faced: poverty, uprootedness, and global trade. It is also in the midst of the new relationship between men and women. The HIV epidemic has shown us the dramatic results of power abuse and violence in the home. It has revealed that home is not a safe ground, rather a major threat to people's lives. Violence is not only women and children, being physically beaten. It is as much the use of power to secure one's own lifestyle and needs. When children are forced into sexual actions with parents or older brothers or uncles, or even grandfather, it is abuse of power and violence even if the act itself is not violent. When women are forced to have sex without condoms, are excluded by the husband when they are HIV positive, the mentality of power abuse is there.

*Attempts to address economic development without addressing the issue of violence in the home are going to fail. At the centre of this, is the relationship between men and women.*

The struggle with HIV/AIDS is the struggle to break a silence. What we have seen is that such silence is not only caused by the difficulties we all have to speak about sexuality and death. It is caused too by the fact that the epidemic is uncovering practices in families and churches and schools and local communities which have been embarrassing to talk about. To break the HIV/AIDS silence is also to break the silence of power abuse, to question age-old patterns of misuse of authority and to focus on those who give legitimacy to such abuse of authority.

All of these issues are global, but the concrete reality is contextual, and can only be addressed by people and organisations with legitimacy in their own communities. NCA can facilitate and stimulate networking, provide financial resources and facilitate the sharing of insights, however we need to be guided by the reality-based knowledge of our partners who work and interact daily with the issues we need so pressingly to address.

### A case from Namibia: The reality of gender-based violence across communities

By Elfriede Gaeses

Once in our small town of Outjo in the North Western part of Namibia, there was a domestic violence case with a member of the Haillom-speaking San community. She was a woman of 29 years who had a boyfriend with whom she shared a baby girl. This woman worked in the community in the craft shop for no pay, and she did not have an income. Her boyfriend was staying in Otjiwarongo with another girlfriend. Whenever he came to see her, he would be jealous and would beat her. This happened for almost 4 years. Whenever he was in love with another woman, he had to beat this woman from Haillom, and do whatever he wanted with her. Last year she was beaten so badly that she was very sick. She even had a leg broken at the ankle. She was admitted to the Katutura Hospital in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. She was there for almost two weeks. As Haillom women we encouraged her to launch a case against the man, which she did. But the problem was that there was no one to be her witness, because all the San women are afraid to be in court. But finally we talked one of her sisters into witnessing, however she was afraid. The man had two witnesses in court. She had only one. The case was postponed several times, but finally the man was found not guilty. According to her he has promised to kill the children if she takes him to maintenance court. She does not have any more courage to go and report any of the violence cases to the police because she is afraid, and says she will lose in court. Social workers say that it is best to 'refuse' to be abused the first time it happens. How can San women gain the courage to do so?

#### Commentary

This case study reinforces the experience of so many abused and violated women in Africa who find that reporting domestic violence is seldom useful to the individual survivor. Evidence shows that very few reports culminate in any legal action. Furthermore, reporting and testifying can potentially exacerbate the woman's vulnerability, particularly if she returns to a culture which in fact supports gender-based violence within a strongly patriarchal system. Often too, the attitude of policemen is not conducive to reporting, and women feel shamed and humiliated. The issue of alleged abuse at the hands of police officers, can also not be ignored, and it is clear that women who do choose to report their experiences have little expectation of being heard or taken seriously.

## From problems....

### Setting the stage: Gender as a context for understanding domestic violence and HIV/AIDS

#### Jane Bennett introduces the concept of gendering....

*“Boys don’t cry”; “don’t sit like that, it’s not lady-like”; “you can’t play with that, you’re a girl!”; boys don’t play with dolls”; “stay at home and help your mother in the kitchen”; “I am the man and therefore head of the household”.*

The sayings that we hear as boys and girls growing up, teach us very early on that there are differences between boy-children and girl-children that are defined by whether we are born as male or as female. In the behaviours that we are taught, and in the things that we are told, it is implicit that who we are in the world is predicted to a large degree by our gender. Even in the womb we are gendered, and the first question asked of a mother when she gives birth is: “is it a boy or girl?”. Being gendered is a fundamental part of the identity that is stamped on us for life.

Understandings of gender are very deeply rooted within our cultures. They become part and parcel of the ways we think about each other, the world, and ourselves early on – they become “automatic”, or “common sense”. They become part of the way we predict behaviour, and how we expect ourselves and others to behave.

“Gender” is an odd word. In no other language but English do we separate the word used to describe something physical about the body (“sex”), from the

word that means “what the body means in the world (“gender”). Other languages with which we are familiar in Southern Africa do not make the same distinction. In N.seSotho – “bong”; in Ndebele – “ubulili; in isiXhosa – “isini”; in Afrikaans – “geslag”, one concept covers both a physical description and the implications of being born one of two ways – “male” or “female”.

If we analyse this concept we see three main things:

If we analyse this concept we see three main things:

- 1 Although human bodies share so much (if we are healthy, we all have four limbs, one heart, one brain, two eyes, and so on), there is one set of differences: the “sex” differences
- 2 These differences matter **hugely** in all the cultures we know about. The implications of being identified – through the body – as a “boy/man” or as a “girl/woman” are extremely powerful. This is what one can call “becoming gendered”, a process that affects everyone. Because it is so primary a process, it becomes woven into all the other processes that influence our identity, and our approach to the world: our culture, our access to resources (class), our relation to racialization, and our introduction to religious faith/practice.

3 There are four main areas in which “becoming gendered” has an influence on our lives:

- The area of labour (who should take responsibility for which work)
- The area of authority (who should have authority/power in which places and institutions)
- The area of performance (who should occupy which space; how people should walk, dress, speak; how people should perceive themselves and others; who may eat what, where, and when)
- The area of sexuality (who may express sexual desire for whom, where, and how)

In most cultures and communities with which we are familiar, the process of “becoming gendered” offers men-people more importance and power than women-people, and more especially so in Africa. Although everyone is subjected to the gender-meanings within their culture, those meanings almost always suggest that being a “man” is the most highly valued form of humanity. This does not mean that men-people are always, everywhere, more powerful than women-people. Four centuries of colonialism have embedded race and class inequalities amongst us, so that “men” are not a unified group of people, and neither are “women.” It is the connections between being gendered, being racialized, having access to resources, and the politics of the land we live in that ultimately give us our place

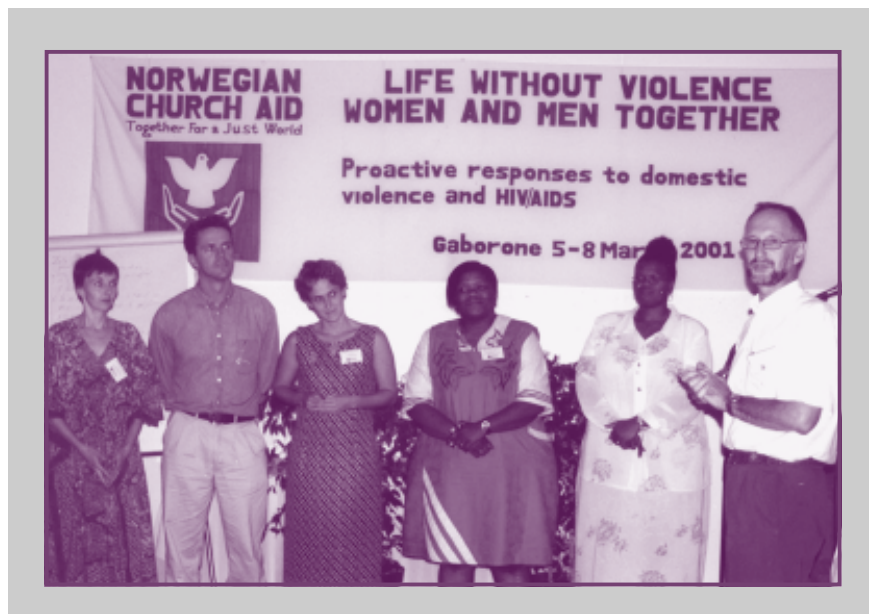
in the world, and access to self-definition and power. What we can say about gender is that as a form of division amongst us, it currently operates as one of the forces which cause cruelty, injustice, and – at best – miscommunication.

In our own lives, what are the things that make us realise we have gender?

In a way, being gendered is an experience which unites us, even if we are from different countries, cultures, or speak different languages. We have all had experiences that make us realise that we have a gender, that we are either “man” or “woman”.

*“When I was pregnant and became a mother, then I knew I was a woman. No man can ever do that.”; “When I started menstruating”; “when I was told I couldn’t play ‘boys’ games”; “I am a single parent, and I am reminded that I am a man whenever someone asks me, ‘where is this child’s mother?’”; “when I started playing all-boy sports at school”; “when my wife fell pregnant”.*

It is interesting to consider what it means to us to be seen as either “man” or “woman”, or to think about what it



From NCR regional consultation in Botswana 5 - 8 March 2001

Photo: Jon M. Lund

would feel like to be identified as “sir”, when you are a woman, or “ma’am” when you are a man. At times we might wish we belonged to a different gender.

*“To be thought of as a woman is an insult; it means I am weaker and effeminate”; “women are considered to be attractive, so that could be a compliment, but it would also take away my power as a man”; “to be seen as a man is to be seen*

*as strong and capable, which is good”; “I enjoy being a woman; I would not want to be seen as a man”; “I would want to be a woman because they have the ability to create and nurture life”; “being a woman would mean not being expected to be strong, and not to always have to make the decisions”; “to be a man would mean authority and power, but also the burden of expectancy”.*

## Gender as a context for domestic violence

### With thoughts from Sizakele Zuma

Gender related violence refers to any violence that is perpetrated against women, and this includes violence in the home, structural and political violence, female circumcision, and other cultural practices that condone the assertion of power of men over women. In the context of this report, gender related violence is seen as the backdrop against which domestic violence is played out. It should be noted then that the term ‘gender related violence’ pertains to a broader context of abuse, and ‘domestic violence’ relates to violence and abuse which emerges specifically from the domestic or home environment, and which manifests in familial relations.

The operation of gender occurs everywhere, but most powerfully within the home. Addressing what happens between men-people and women-people in the home is the first step towards transforming broader pictures of gender imbalances. Heterosexual relations are most clearly defined in the context of domestic life, and it is these domestic-based relationships which so often become sites of gender-based violence. Here it is important to look not only at the vulnerability of women which arises from being gendered, but to look also at what being cast in a particular gender role means for men. Both men and women are vulnerable to the dominant norms of gender relations. It is evident that in Africa, men are likely to become assailants of women (and men), and women (and children) are likely to be-

come victims of sexual abuse, domestic violence, economic abuse and incest. Of course individuals who assault others carry the responsibility for their actions. But the challenge within our context is to untangle both “victim” and “perpetrator” from their macabre dance of violence, and to understand and thereby attempt to alter, how our conceptions of gender predict the roles we assume in relation to one another.

*“Gender-based violence is an integral aspect of modern African life, an invidious social ill that forestalls development, nullifying all the talk about women’s rights and human rights, and shooting democracy in the foot.” Amina Mama.*

Whilst not all domestic violence implies man-on-woman abuse, in the majority of cases violence in the home is gender-based.

Gender-based violence has been defined by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as: “any act...that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in private or public life...”

The World Health Organisation (WHO) asserts that gender-based violence represents a substantial health burden for women in terms of morbidity and mortality rates, and makes a significant negative impact on their physi-

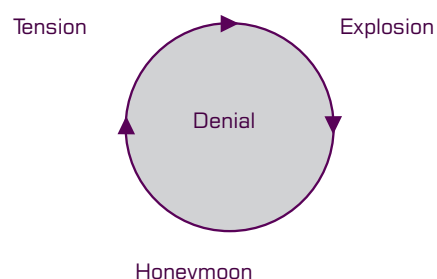
cal and mental health. According to the WHO, violence against girls or women throughout the world causes more death and disability in the 15-44 age group than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or war. Between 16 – 52% of women have been physically assaulted by an intimate partner at least once in their lives.

*Domestic violence affects every group in society. It takes place across race and class lines*

Domestic violence has replaced illness or disease as the principle cause of death or injury worldwide. It is defined as a pattern of coercive behaviour which can include physical, sexual, economic, emotional and/or psychological abuse exerted by an intimate relation over another, with the goal of establishing and maintaining power and control. Although the vast majority of reported survivors of domestic violence are female, domestic violence occurs in all communities, and can be found in all types of relationships.

### The cycle of violence:

There is a cycle of violence that is frequently seen in domestic abuse relationships.



Understanding the cycle of violence can give direction in helping those who are victims of abusive relationships. In the TENSION phase, the perpetrator becomes abusive in small ways, either verbally or emotionally with insults, accusations, put-down. The women tries to calm the situation, keep the peace by trying to fulfil his wishes. The small abuses become more extreme, and the tension mounts. In response the woman, feeling responsible, becomes more passive, and the abuse becomes more oppressive.

Inevitably there is an EXPLOSION that breaks the tension, and there is an eruption of violence. This explosion is usually prompted by some external event, and not by the woman's behaviour, yet she becomes the target. Severe abuse occurs in the form of beating, sexual assault and/or other injury.

Some abusers, following the explosion, become very contrite, asking for forgiveness, promising that it will not happen again. He may tell her he loves her, give her gifts, make promises. Some perpetrators do not go through the

HONEYMOON stage, and never feel sorry for what they do.

Over time the cycle becomes tighter, and periods of calm become shorter, and the abuse more extreme. Denial helps to sustain the cycle. The abuser does not see the abuse as his fault, and blames other things such as work, drink, his temper, the children, the woman's attitude. The woman often tries to believe that the abuse is not that bad, or that it won't happen again. She is often kept in her position by economic dependency.

Women need to understand what is happening to them, to stop denying and to find the support which will help to break the cycle of violence.

*"For years my husband beat me before I finally got the courage to file for divorce. During this time I had a restraining order placed on him so we were living apart, but one evening he forced his way in and brutally raped me. I dropped the divorce proceedings because I did not think I could go through that again"; "Yeah, she is bruised. Yeah, she bruises easily any-*

*way. If I just squeeze her like that, you know the next day she'll l get a mark"; "I never beat my wife, I responded physically her."*

Family violence can be understood in the context of stereotyped gender roles. Men are taught and expected to be powerful, strong, aggressive, provider and protector. Traditionally, and particularly in the African context, women are taught to be passive, weak and helpless, particularly in relation to men. This gendering makes it difficult for women and men to relate equally. When there is difficulty in a family, or when a man is experiencing feelings of inadequacy, he uses his role in the home to reaffirm his sense of power by overcoming the women and children. Here it is evident how other issues that are pervasive in African society, such as poverty and unemployment, also contribute to the cycle of domestic abuse. Feeling disempowered and out of control in the world, the abuser finds his power base in his home, and the easy targets are the women and children.

### Effects of violence on women

Fear:	Women are often immobilised by their terror. In order to deal with fear they deny the horror of the violence and minimise their need for safety
Addiction:	Some women use drugs or alcohol to help numb the pain of their ordeal
Minimising:	Most abused women, in their contact with caregivers, tend to minimise the severity of the abuse
Isolation:	The woman's fears for the safety of herself and her children, her shame and embarrassment, sustain her silence
Helplessness:	Abused women are often in a state of learned helplessness where they have a sense of powerlessness, and they hold the belief that there is nothing they can do
Internalisation of blame:	Women often believe that they are to blame, and that they have provoked violence, and spend much energy in trying to please the abuser
Ambivalence:	The woman often holds the hope that the abuser will change, often because she has no independent income, she is unemployed, and she fears for the future of her children.
Internalisation of oppression:	The abused woman sees herself as inferior, and each assault confirms that there is something wrong with her. Women who are unable to challenge the traditional female role are most vulnerable to remaining
Self-esteem:	A woman who is being abused typically loses her sense of self-worth and her belief in her own abilities diminishes. This reinforces helplessness and dependency

*A fieldworker from a development organisation in Cape Town, South Africa, describes the contaminating and insidious effects of domestic violence: "It's one of our funding criteria that the committees set up to manage the project include women; that was our goal, you know, to promote women. But when we went out there, I found that the women didn't want to come to the committee meetings, and I said, but why, this is your project. And first they said to me, no it's the time of the meetings, or I don't really understand what everyone is saying, so I'd rather not go. But then some other women spoke to me, and told me, no, it's not the time so much, it's what happens when we go home, the husband is mad, and the kids are upset, and then there can be all this hitting and fighting in the house. So that's when it clicked – it's domestic abuse that's happening. That's why the committee won't function the way we thought it could".*

### Modernisation clashes with tradition....

Traditionally, women stay at home and take care of children, work in the fields, prepare things for the husband to be ready for work. The kind of work they are doing is not paid for. She is economically dependent on the husband who is the main provider. The mother and children are his own properties. The father tends to deny them their individual or civil rights. Prescribing what to eat, what a woman should wear, who to socialise with. However, due to the demands of industrialisation and economic change, women have had to seek paid employment. The male role as the only provider is threatened. It is a psychological threat to a husband that claims to be superior to and more powerful than their wives and children. The husband is no longer clear of his role in the family. While women may

be prepared for their new role as employee through training, activism of feminism and their housekeeping are roles taken over by the school, educare centres – many men fail to adjust to the situation of having their wives engage in formal employment and remain trapped in the old mindset of gender roles.

Typically, African women strive to do their housekeeping responsibilities even when they are employed. Their husbands demand their service as before employment. One finds professional women playing double roles (being an assertive career woman at work and a submissive housekeeper at home) because they have accepted their partner's behaviour (an acceptance predicted by culture). Should she fail to do her house duties the husband complains that she wants to become a man. Those men that lack self-esteem go to the extreme of claiming control through violence.

Returning to the earlier discussion of being gendered, it is evident how this early process perpetuates (although is not the only cause of) domestic violence, particularly in Africa where, in spite of democratisation and post-colonial liberation, women and men remain shackled by tradition, stereotype and societal expectation.

### Outcomes of domestic violence

- Physical injury or death
- Complications of pregnancy and childbirth
- Gynaecologic problems
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- HIV
- Chronic somatic disorder
- Exacerbation of chronic medical conditions
- Non-adherence with medical treatment
- Depression, anxiety disorders and suicide
- Eating disorders
- Alcoholism
- Substance abuse
- Social isolation



Photo: Kay Berg

### Why do men abuse?

The reasons for why men abuse are varied and complex, but there are three main explanations used to make sense of this behaviour.

- The first takes a social learning perspective, which suggests that violence is learnt behaviour. Growing up in a culture of violence, and where violence is witnessed as being a solution to difficulties, predicts violent behaviour as an adult. Certainly this criterion is met in Africa where political, structural, civil and domestic violence are part of the history of Africa.
- The second explanation sees violence against women as being inherent in a system of patriarchy, where men are brought up to believe that women are property, and women learn that they should be subservient and take on secondary roles to men in society. This relates back to the earlier discussion around gendering, and how important that is in influencing our behaviour. Once again, this is pertinent as patriarchy is the dominant culture in African society.
- The third explanation describes a particular psychological profile that predicts the ability to be abusive.

Typically men who abuse tend to deny the fact that they have a problem, they have low impulse control and use aggression and anger as an expression of a range of emotions,

they are socially isolated and have low self-esteem, and they buy strongly into the traditional male role model. For them, power which cannot be felt outside of the home, is experienced by controlling their partners.

Certainly none of these explanations can be taken in isolation. There are many men who have low self-esteem who do not abuse. There are many African men who have grown up in a patriarchal system, and who have been subject to gendering, who cannot understand or enact abusive behaviour. There are any men who have childhood histories of violence and abuse who do not abuse. It is important, therefore, not to make generalisations, and to try to understand perpetrators of violence within a framework which incorporates all of these explanations. It is also important to position abuse within the social and political climate. It has been found that levels of domestic violence are correlated with the incidence of unemployment and poverty. Men unable to find work feel disempowered and their sense of control can often only be found in dominating the home in what is often an abusive and violent way.

Working towards solutions to the problem of domestic violence must, by necessity, include working with men. It cannot only be about empowering women to change their position, or to leave situations of abuse. Treatment models need to attack all antecedents of abuse. Violence as a form of control and as a solution to problems needs to be

unequivocally condemned, and strategies of anger management and problem solving need to be taught to adults. The inequality of gendering needs to be confronted developmentally, with children being taught from an early age about the equality of the sexes, and both boys and girls need to learn about non-discrimination and tolerance. Men who have specific abusive behaviour patterns would benefit from individual interventions aimed at helping them to shift their way of behaving. Most importantly, however, the eradication of domestic violence in Africa can only happen if coupled with economic and social development. As long as poverty and unemployment are rife, the soil for violence will remain fertile, and changes need to occur at a macro-level in order

## The relationship virus: The silent workings of HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and gender

### With input from Stephen van Houten

*“We were born at the wrong end of the century. We are the AIDS generation. AIDS hit us where it hurts most. AIDS came to us and said ‘Now you can’t eat sadza and mabhonzho and covo\*. Now you can’t eat!’ And we said, ‘But how can we live without eating?’ AIDS said, ‘You think this is drop or syphilis? All right. Glut yourselves and see what happens...We are the condom generation...For some it is no use. For some it is too late. We are dying like flies. But we live on, clinging to the frayed edges of our lives with our pathetic claws. We live on, hiding our despair behind tired smiles...”*

*(\*Pap with bones and covo, a type of spinach common in Zimbabwe)*

Violence against women is one of the most overlooked factors driving the HIV epidemic, and the link between violence and HIV has remained unemphasised in the world’s response to the illness. In 2000, at the XIII International AIDS conference, the link between HIV/AIDS, sexual violence and coercion was, for the first time, placed on the agenda. Director-General of the WHO, Dr Gro Harlem Buntland, noted that “we will not achieve progress against HIV until women gain control of their sexuality”.

Gender-based violence is recognised as being both a cause, and a consequence of the spread of HIV. The prevalence

of gender-based violence, and mostly sexual violence, is an important contributor to the spread of HIV. Violence against women and children is an acceptable, and in many ways, condoned feature of the traditional, patriarchal and male dominated African culture. In a survey conducted in South Africa, 42% of men admitted to having physically abused their partners, and 15% admitted sexual abuse. Results of a Zimbabwean study revealed that more than three quarters of HIV-infected women had been forced to have sex with their partner. Research among youth in an Eastern cape township found that young men had an explicit need to be in control of their relationship, which they expressed by exerting physical control over their female partners. As described earlier, the climate of unemployment and poverty exacerbates a sense of inefficacy and powerlessness, and, for men, the home becomes a source of a (false) sense of empowerment, through the abuse of women and children.

Women’s vulnerability has social roots. For millions of women and girls, their subordinate position in their culture makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to protect themselves from HIV. They often cannot insist on fidelity, demand condom use, or refuse sex to their partners, even when they suspect or know that he is infected. Quite often such women lack the economic power to remove themselves from relation-

ships that carry major risks of HIV infection.

### Domestic violence puts victims at risk of HIV...

- Victims of domestic violence are often unable to negotiate safer sex practices with coercive partners.
- Abusers may rape or sexually assault their victims as part of their pattern of control, making it unlikely that a condom will be used.
- Abusive partners who engage in extra-marital/partnership sexual activity potentially expose victims to STDs including HIV.
- Victims often suffer a wide range of health-related problems caused or exacerbated by abuse. This may compromise their immune system in ways that increase risk of HIV contraction.

### An HIV+ status can perpetuate abuse...

- An abuser may threaten to reveal the victim’s HIV+ status to family, employer etc.
- The abuser may threaten to use the HIV+ result as grounds for paternal custody if the woman leaves
- Abusers frequently humiliate or degrade the victim for being HIV+
- The abuser may isolate the victim on the basis that she poses a threat to others
- The abuser may refuse to assist the victim when she falls ill
- The abuser may use the HIV+ status as an excuse for violence

Nearly 14 million women are infected with HIV. Of those whose infection status is known to others, many have suffered direct violence at the hands of their partners, and of the community. The story of Gugu Dlamini highlighted this – in December 1998 she revealed her HIV+ status on World AIDS Day, and as a consequence was brutally murdered by her neighbours.

*Fear + ignorance = brutality*

### **Disclosure of HIV status, partner notification, confidentiality:**

Non-disclosure and Disclosure:

This is a complex issue, which has, unfortunately, been oversimplified by the well-intentioned message of “break the silence”. Partner notification is not common in Southern Africa because of the social stigma of HIV/AIDS, denial of his/her HIV+ status, and fear of retaliation from partners. This last reason is important because we are becoming increasingly aware of how many persons, especially women, are being abused by their sexual partners. This abuse takes the form of physical and sexual abuse, severing of emotional and economic ties, and, in extreme cases, death. We are much more cautious at present when prescribing partner notification because of the devastating effects on the patient. In fact, now we have changed the message to: *Break the silence, only if it is safe to*. The health care worker, in discussing partner notification, needs to have an understanding of the partner, his/her history of violence/abuse, alcohol abuse history, etc. Only then can it be decided whether or not partner notification is to be encouraged.



Photo: Kay Berg

*Break the silence, only if it is safe to*

Non-disclosure often results in infecting the partner. The potential results of this vary. The first may be an accusation of infidelity. There may be denial of HIV status, accompanied by emotional/physical abuse, or economic abandonment. Disclosure may result in the partner not being infected. The consequences of notification may include lowered trust, emotional/physical abuse, or abandonment. If, despite disclosure, the partner is infected, the consequences may be the same as non-disclosure.

The decision on the part of the caregiver, and the consequent advice

given to the HIV+ person to disclose or not, is a complex one. And, once again, a multitude of factors need to be borne in mind before that decision is taken.

### **Transmission of HIV**

The table below shows the different degrees of risk of transmission for men and women, and, as is obvious, women face a far greater likelihood of infection than do men. It is important to remember that women are at least 4 times more at risk than men based on physiological differences. In the case of sexual assaults, women are at a much higher risk, especially if they already carry an STD.

### Risk of HIV infection associated with penetrative sexual intercourse with an infected partner

Mode of sexual intercourse	Risk of HIV infection
Unprotected intercourse: infected female to uninfected male	1 in 1000
Unprotected intercourse: infected male to uninfected female	1 in 100
Unprotected intercourse: infected female to uninfected male with STD	1 in 250
Unprotected intercourse: infected male to uninfected female with STD	1 in 25

#### Control over sexual relationships and safer sex

Safer sex in the African context is all too often not practiced. The reasons for this are multiple. For men, they often don't want to wear condoms, or they wear condoms inconsistently, or they choose to practice dry sex which prohibits the use of a condom. For women, frequently they do not have control over safer sex practices. Young women don't want to wear condoms. In other cases women don't insist on condoms as they face the threat of physical abuse or abandonment. Women are also unable to take control by using female condoms as these are often not accessible to them.

#### Implications of an HIV+ result: focussing on loss

HIV brings many losses, for example through illness and physical symptoms. It typically predicts emotional problems, as well as difficulties at work, in the family, and socially. There are also legal implications, and often the intimate partner relationship comes under strain. These factors are all considerably confounded by adding gender and domestic violence issues.

We all know the silence of domestic violence, and how this is exacerbated by issues around gender. HIV/AIDS is another silent topic. Not only is it killing

people, but it is destroying relationships in the process. Intimate relationships, families and friendships are being torn apart by the sinister "workings of HIV, domestic violence and gender. The time to speak in long passed.

### A case from Zambia: The devastating spiral emerging from the gender-HIV/AIDS/domestic violence triangle

By Josephine Musamba

The polygamous community of Wachitangachi is found among the Tumbuka people from the Eastern province of Zambia. A meeting on gender and development was held with group members of this community in January 2001. The discussion was focussed on gender and HIV/AIDS and we learnt that men of this community were allowed to marry as many women as they wished. Hence most of the men in this community had an average of 5 wives each. We also learnt that women, once married, in this community had no right to own property. They also had no freedom of expression. They were expected to submit to their husbands all the time. They were not allowed to participate in decisions made by the husband on issues such as the use of a condom when having sex, the type of income generating activities in which to be involved, the distribution of wealth in the family, the number of children to have, the type of family planning method to use. A woman who behaved contrary to these traditional norms by expressing her opinions on decisions made by her husband was scorned by society, ill-treated by the husband's relatives, and battered by the husband. The women were saying most of them were vulnerable to contracting HIV/AIDS because of the freedom given to their husband to marry as many wives as they chose. Especially with the ratio of 1 in 4 people being HIV positive. Hence if a man had 5 wives, chances were that one might be HIV positive and infect the rest. Since the husband had many wives, he could not afford to financially support his wives and children. The wives who culturally were not allowed to own property would end up having extra-marital affairs to earn income, hence becoming vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Since the man was unable to satisfy the women sexually, they involved in sex with other men, hence exposing themselves to HIV/AIDS. The women found it difficult to educate their children because of lack of financial support from the husbands. The children therefore started earning their living from prostitution for girls, and drug abuse for boys. The women said they had lost many family members dying of AIDS and having several widows and children. The effects of AIDS which was partly as a result of domestic violence in this community, were confirmed by the fact that 50% of the group members present were widows while most families had an average of 6 orphans. When asked how the situation could be effectively addressed, the women suggested intensive gender awareness and information dissemination targeted at both men and women.

#### **Commentary:**

This case study raises a number of important human rights issues. Particularly pertinent in this context is Article 14 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), which states that "the right to property shall be guaranteed. It may only be encroached upon in the interest of public need or in the general interest of the community and in accordance with the provisions of appropriate laws." Raised too is the fact of community acceptance of, and support for the abusive and denigrating behaviour of men in this context. The issue of how gendered roles are accepted unquestioningly by society, and how these roles reinforce patterns of inequality and patriarchal dominance is evident here.

## .....To solutions...

### Healing in the African context

#### With reflections from Nomfundo Walaza

*A thumb working on its own is useless. It has to work collectively with the other fingers in order to get the strength to achieve anything.*

'Healing' in an African context is polymorphous, taking on numerous guises, and manifesting in a diversity of ways. The challenge in Africa is to move beyond a Western understanding of healing of psychological or emotional wounds as referring to counselling or psychotherapy. We need to begin to explore the potential for customised healing practices that are relevant to a particular context. The root of the word 'healing', means /making whole'. This, perhaps, is especially pertinent to the African context of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS, where there is such an urgent need to address the wounds, and to integrate the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social/relational in a wholistic way. Healing in this context means not only addressing individual hurts, but refers also to the need to mend the ruptures in the social fabric, and to rediscover the true spirit of UBUNTU. Without the strength of community support, the insidious impact of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS will continue to spread pervasively through Africa.

*UBUNTU refers to the importance of group cohesion and solidarity in the survival of African communities, stressing the importance of brotherly group care over individual selfinvolvement, and is based on fundamental belief "a man can only be a man through others".*

*Nelson Mandela, in his autobiography, reminds us that "In African culture, the sons and daughters of one's aunts and uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins. We do not make the same distinctions among relations practised by Whites. My mother's sister is my mother; my uncle's son is my brother; my brother's child is my son, my daughter".*

The essential question posed to those working in communities, whether in an NGO or a church-based setting, is whether or not they see themselves as healers. All too often the potential to heal, to minister to the wounds and scars of others, is attributed to 'experts' or specialists, be they psychologists, doctors or priests. What needs to happen in the contexts in which we work is for individuals to recognise their own healing potential, more so in Africa, where as a consequence of our history we are all wounded healers. We all carry the scars of a painful history. The myth of the centaur, Chiron, suggests that it is through our own pain that we are able to have insight into the pain of others.

Rather than waiting for experts to apply their methods to our home-grown ills, we need to recognise our own innate potential to offer respite and healing to our communities, and to ourselves.

*The myth of the Wounded Healer refers psychologically to the capacity to be at home in the darkness of suffering, and there to find germs of light and recovery with which to bring forth the healer.*

The crucial instrument in any healing practice is listening. Through listening it is possible to hear the needs of the other, and to respond to those needs. Access to another person's psyche can happen in so many ways, be it through cultural rituals, traditional healing structures, spirituality, and it is through listening that we are able to hear the best way to reach another person. The analogy of drumming is appropriate here. Imagine that we all carry with us an African drum on which we play our own beat and rhythm. When we come together with another person, if we remain in our own rhythm, we will be out of beat with the other's drum. The challenge as a healer is to listen to the other's rhythm, and to modify our own to beat in time until there is synchronicity. Only then, when we can hear the other rhythm and respond to it, can we truly tend to another person's context and needs.

Working in Africa means bearing in mind the context and the person. Factors such as language, tradition, age, gender, all influence an individual's drumbeat. It is essential to healing that these elements are recognised, and healing practices modified to accommodate them.

Returning to the central issue of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS, it is important to consider that it is not only women and children who are 'victims', and who need empowerment. It is crucial to concentrate too on empowering men with the same vigour as that with which we need to empower women who suffer as a result of male domination and patriarchal tendencies. It is useful too, to see the scourge of HIV/AIDS and domestic violence as symptoms of deeper societal dysfunction, and to recognise that the target of healing practices should not be aimed solely at victims/survivors of HIV/AIDS, but also at correcting imbalances created by gendering.

### Healing for the caregivers

There is a cost to caring. Anyone working in a context where human trauma and tragedy is the focus of attention, risks developing what has become known as 'compassion fatigue'; they experience a change in their interaction with the world, themselves, and their family. Or they may experience burnout which brings with it emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation (where they feel emotionally hardened and distanced from others) and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Along with this comes feelings of depression and anxiety.

In order to effectively work in the context of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS in Africa, as people working at a grassroots level, we need to take care of ourselves. This means recognising our limits, knowing when to say "No", recognising when we need to take a break, and most importantly, continuously prioritising our well being. One way of doing this is to consciously challenge ourselves with the following question: How do I take care of myself:

- Emotionally
- Spiritually
- Physically
- Socially

The challenge is not only on a personal level, but also organisationally. The onus is on each of us to take care of, not only ourselves, but also of one another. Africa's primary resource in the face of crisis lies in the people. In strengthening ourselves, we nurture the strength to help others.

## Spirituality as a vehicle for healing

### Guided by Beverley Haddad

#### Defining spirituality...

One avenue to healing is through spirituality; a concept which takes on so many meanings for different people, and which should not be ignored in responding to the enormous crises of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. It is a resource for survival. Spirituality is a material and concrete part of our daily reality; it is the human search for direction and meaning in life. It is linked to a belief in a greater reality outside of ourselves, and it is a reality which beckons and calls us. Our spiritual quest helps us to understand what it means to be fully human.

#### Spirituality for life...

Spirituality sustains us in choosing life, and it affirms and increases trust in life as it takes us beyond the realm of human reality to a context that is greater than ourselves, and that connects us to the whole human race. Through spirituality we are able to acknowledge women not as victims, but as active agents in recreating the world.

#### Spirituality as a force for survival...

In the HIV and domestic violence context, where literal survival is a key issue, faith in an essence more powerful than ourselves offers hope, strength and courage. Spiritual belief enables survival to become a strategy of resistance against the evil of HIV and domestic violence which results from gender injustice. In Africa we see the strength of

hidden networks of women who are fostered by the spirituality of life.

*Faith is evidence of things unseen*

#### Spirituality as a power for change...

The spirituality of life has the potential and power to transform unequal gendered social structures and to offer resistance against domestic violence. It can provide a framework for the reconstruction of communities that embrace the full humanity of men and women. Acceptance of spirituality helps us to make sense of our struggles, and thus to find solutions. Organised religion enables groups of people to speak out and to help change social structures. Evidence shows us that as women draw

on their spiritual resources, they are empowered to refuse to be marginalized. In drawing on their resources, women need to share their own stories and thus begin to create an alternative to the patriarchal spiritual tradition.

African people have historically been characterised as storytellers, and it is through the spoken narrative that culture and tradition is translated from one generation to the next. This gift of storytelling needs to be drawn on by the women of Africa in their quest to break the silence that surrounds HIV/AIDS. They need to begin to create a new African narrative that espouses gender equality and transparency as the precursors to the eradication of HIV/AIDS, and domestic violence.

Photo: Kay Berg



### Using worship as a channel to renewed thought.....

Phumzile Zondi offers the following devotion, and shows how this kind of communication can be used to stimulate thought around creating a life without violence.

- If half of humanity is not liberated then humanity cannot be liberated.
- It is important for the churches and organizations to continually strive for equality and recognition of both sexes.
- Life without violence can only be a reality if we look and review relationships especially between women and men.

I would like us to look at stories of creation and how our interpretation and distortion of these have led to gender inequality and discrimination. The hierarchy of power leads to a violation of rights.

In the Zulu traditional story of creation God is known as Mvelinqangi which means the one who appeared first. In the Xhosa tradition God is known as Qamata whilst in the Basotho tradition God is known as Modimo. In all these cases God is a Superior Being who is beyond sex and gender. Our languages also refer to God as such, a person without specifying a gender. Interpretations to English and other languages reduced God to a "he". Language is a powerful tool for oppression and can control the process of imaging and making sense of our relationships.

In Islam, Allah is also beyond sex and gender. Asghar Ali Engineer, Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies in Bombay says the following about the creation of humanity. "The Quran considers both the sexes as having originated from one living being and hence they should enjoy the same status. It says, "O! mankind be conscious of your sustainer, who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women." The word used in the Quran is "nafs" which means living entity.

The Bible has two creation stories, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. The second story is the most commonly used to justify gender inequality.

Human beings are created in God's image. The image that we subscribe to, determines how we treat one another. Denise Ackerman in her article called Being Woman, Being Human says:

The Biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination over thousands of years. The symbol of the Father God spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting.

We must begin by challenging the images of God that we believe in. If God is male, the male is god. Sexist and classist images of God lead to division of humanity.

Let us reclaim the story of creation and affirm, remind and empower more than half of humanity namely women. We are all created in the image of a God who is beyond sex and gender.

Let us challenge and review the androcentric interpretations of sacred texts.

Let us openly talk about our differences and equality as a way of combating violence in our churches and communities.

May God bless us all as we together seek God's face and talk about practical ways of combating violence in our organizations.

### Using the bible as a channel for empowerment and growth

Through devotional reading and bible studies, biblical texts have the potential to provoke constructive thinking around the issue of domestic violence and gender inequality. Pamela Cooper-White, a woman priest, offers the following thoughts on a reading of the story of Tamar, in 2 Samuel 13:1-21, which is seldom heard in Christian churches. It is rarely read on a Sunday in lectionary-based traditions and not for any other saint day or public occasion. Yet this story needs to be heard, and this hearing needs to be in a critical and questioning frame of mind or we will be misled, both by the ways we have traditionally been taught to hear a biblical text (that is, uncritically, as the word of God) and by the narrator's own viewpoint (that is, uncritically, as the true and only telling).

### Amnon and Tamar

13 Some time passed. David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar; and David's son Amnon fell in love with her. 2Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. 3But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah; and Jonadab was a very crafty man. 4He said to him, "O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." 5Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, so that I may see it and eat it from her hand.' " 6So Amnon lay down, and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand." 7 Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, "Go to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him." 8So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house, where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. 9Then she took the pan and set them out before him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, "Send out everyone from me." So everyone went out from him. 10Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand." So Tamar took the cakes she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. 11But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her,

“Come, lie with me, my sister.” 12She answered him, “No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! 13As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you.” 4But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her. 15 Then Amnon was seized with a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her. Amnon said to her, “Get out!” 16But she said to him, “No, my brother; for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me.” But he would not listen to her. 17He called the young man who served him and said, “Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her.” 18(Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times.c) So his servant put her out, and bolted the door after her. 19But Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went. 20 Her brother Absalom said to her, “Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart.” So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom’s house. 21When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn.

Having sex with a woman - whether or not by force - was a time-honoured means of declaring an engagement in Hebrew and other ancient cultures and probably would have been accepted as a betrothal by the king if the perpetrator had properly assumed his ownership and responsibility over the victim.

Often readers of the Bible are conditioned to look for a moral to the story - and are then led to infer the moral intended by the particular narrator. If it is biblical, many assume that it establishes normative behaviour. So, for example, if a crime is framed as a violation of property rather than of person, readers are likely to accept that framing as correct. Is everything that is in the bible named holy to be accepted without re-

flection? Is the narrator’s frame of reference, namely, that women are property rather than persons, above scrutiny? It is not enough to say that this was simply the cultural and historical reality of the times. It is not enough to recognize this cultural and historical bias while continuing to read the text from the perpetrator’s point of view, and, therefore, in tacit sympathy with him. As long as we ignore the victim’s pain, or fail to ask about it, we have not located the text’s truth.

Two elements are crucial in stopping violence and abuse of women and other oppressed groups. The first is to hear the stories from their own viewpoint insofar as this is possible. This is true whether the story is about the rape of a

girl three thousand years ago in Jerusalem or of a next-door neighbour tomorrow. The second element in stopping abuse is questioning and opening for revision all forms of authority and power that are misused to perpetrate, incite, or collude with abuse - consciously and directly, as with Amnon and Jondab, or unconsciously, as with King David. Such power and authority needs to be critiqued even when it appears in the Bible - or in the church.

Power-within seems like a natural opposite to power-over and clearly has greater potential for mutuality and intimacy. In rejecting the dominator model, one sows seeds for non-violence.

*How can a biblical text, such as the story of Tamar, be used in a bible study focussing on gender and domestic violence issues?*

Initially it is important to read through the text quietly and meditatively, trying to gain some insight into the processes and people who feature in the text. Either working alone or in a group, the following questions provide a useful framework for discussion:

The first set of questions relate directly to the story being read:

- 1 What is the theme of this text?
- 2 Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
- 3 What is the role of men in this text?
- 4 How does Tamar respond throughout this ordeal?

The second set of questions grounds the story in the contemporary context, and shows how stories thousands of years old, are relevant to the situations which we face in our own communities:

- 5 Do you know of women in your church or community who went through similar experiences? How did the church or your community help them deal with their pain?
- 6 What resources are available in your community for survivors of rape?
- 7 In the light of this Bible Study, what new steps will you take as a community to help survivors of rape?

## Human rights as a backbone in the fight against HIV/AIDS and domestic violence

Alice Mogwe, lawyer, and director of DITSHWANELO – The Botswana Centre for Human Rights – contextualises domestic violence and HIV/AIDS within a human rights framework.

The question of gender, domestic violence and HIV/AIDS as an interlinked triangle of issues cannot be divorced from human rights and human responsibilities.

### What are human rights?

To some it means giving certain people more privileges than others; to others it means ‘letting people get away with murder through deliberately infecting those who are HIV negative and not being subject to capital punishment etc’. Generally human rights are understood to be linked to ideas such as ‘natural’ rights which are not earned, bought or inherited; moral codes which go beyond any differences such as race, class, sex, ethnicity and apply to everyone at all times.

Human rights are contained in constitutions, laws, international treaties and conventions. When governments sign international treaties they are promising to implement the rights contained therein. The same intention applies to constitutions.

### Human rights and gender...

The process of gendering is embedded in the predictions about work, performance, relation to authority and sexuality. This has clear implications for who

have which kind of rights, and how they exercise them. Culture too plays an important role in determining the gendering process and consequently the nature and apportionment of rights and responsibilities. The legal system, as a product of societies, tends, itself to be a reflection of predicted socialisations. All too often we see this in operation when women take alleged abusers to court, and the case is either dismissed or the sentence imposed so lenient that it trivialises the severity of the act of abuse, and further disempowers the woman.

An important question to ask when looking at gender inequality from a spiritual or religious perspective is, how does the church deal with ethical issues which pit the predictions imposed by gendering, against the unorthodox? For example, the ordination of women, acceptance of gay priests, empowerment of women. These are human rights issues that touch people’s daily lives and need to be dealt with directly. What is the responsibility of the church in matters such as these?

### Human rights and domestic violence...

What is clear, is that transmission of HIV is exacerbated in situations where rights are violated. Within a violent relationship, women are less able to negotiate for safer sex practices to be applied. In most violent relationships, rape within marriage or the relationship is a norm. Rape is itself a violent act and cannot be interpreted as a sexual act. Marital rape is not an offence in Botswana. This

is consequence of societal acceptance of male conjugal rights which are not negotiable! They just are. This leaves the woman with few legal and social options.

The role of other people in the protection of rights is crucial. The police need to take the concerns of the woman seriously before they decide to act – to treat it like an assault and not like a domestic squabble which can be resolved with a few apologies. The Church needs to realise that it is not enough, as was said in a study conducted a few years ago, “pray my child”. The family needs to be supportive and not focus on the fact that ‘bogadi’ or ‘lobola’ has been paid and that ‘the cattle have already been eaten’ as was the case with some women in Zimbabwe some years ago. Women as mothers also need to stop telling their battered daughters that ‘violence is part of marriage my child – we have survived it!’.

The predictions of gender often prevent women leaving a violent relationship – ‘a failed marriage is the fault of the woman’; ‘my husband is only behaving strangely because he has been bewitched – dare I say it...by another woman’; ‘he is the head of the household and I am his child – he loves me’; ‘he hit me because I made him do it’.

Questions relevant to domestic violence are also relevant in the context of religion: what is the responsibility of the church in the transformation of the gendered predictions? How can we encourage all of us to become critical, self-examining and brave enough to discard

what we recognise as holding back the human rights struggle and preventing the recognition that all people ought to be treated with dignity and respect? How do we break the cultural silence about domestic violence?

A fundamental aspect to be borne in mind is that both men and women have a right NOT to be violated.

### Human rights and HIV/AIDS....

When considering HIV/AIDS, a rights-based approach recognises that disempowered people are vulnerable to transmission. Where discrimination exists, economic independence is curtailed. Where economic, social and cultural rights are not respected, the chances of engaging in high-risk behaviour increases. Where freedom of speech and association is not respected, it becomes impossible for certain groups which are engaged in ‘illegal’ activities to organise and empower themselves through knowledge about safer sex practices, for example gays, lesbians, sex workers.

The main human rights which we need to bear in mind are the following:

- Non-discrimination and equality before the law
- Access to health services – access to means of prevention, treatment and cure
- Privacy – the confidentiality of HIV test results, prohibition of mandatory testing

The question of shared confidentiality is of pertinence here. This is a concept which is law in Botswana, and in terms

thereof, “...a person taking care of, living with or otherwise coming into regular close contact with the patient shall be informed about such patient’s medical condition where the said patient is suffering from a communicable disease or has an infection which may be passed to such a person if appropriate precautions are not taken”

Whilst this particular legislation only governs medical doctors and dentists, and not nurses or midwives, it is this type of legislation in Africa that potentially compromises the traditional concept of confidentiality. The regulation runs counter to certain fundamental human rights principles, such as right to privacy. The potentially negative consequences for women and other vulnerable groups are of serious concern.

The International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights do encourage voluntary partner notification. They focus on health workers being authorised but not required to inform partners of people living with HIV/AIDS of the status of their partner. In light of an earlier discussion about the risks of disclosure, it would be most constructive to consider each case for its own merits.

Conclusions around the issue of human rights in the context of the domestic violence, HIV/AIDS and gender triangle indicate that the promotion and protection and monitoring of human rights and responsibilities should be the collaborative effort of government, the private sector and civil society. Culture is not static, and tradition should not be used to prevent responsible responses

to domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. We all need to be self-critical, to consciously think about how we deal with others on a daily basis in our work – are we consciously aware that the fundamentals of human rights ought to apply equally to the other person – be they woman, child, gay, or a person living with HIV/AIDS. A final note: all rights are important, but a crucial point is that vulnerability to violations of human rights within our Southern African context is exacerbated by poverty.

“...the very right to be human is every day denied to hundreds of millions of people as a result of poverty....The unavailability of food, jobs, water and shelter, education, health care and a healthy environment...is not a preordained result of the forces of nature or the product of a curse of the deities...it is a consequence of decisions which men and women take or refuse to take, all of whom will not hesitate to pledge their devoted support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” Nelson Mandela (1998)

### Relevant articles from the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted June 27, 1981.

#### Article 2

Every individual shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognised and guaranteed in the present Charter without distinction of any kind such as race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion...

#### Article 3

Every individual shall be equal before the law; every individual shall be entitled to equal protection of the law

#### Article 4

**Human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right**

#### Article 18

**....the state shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of the woman and the child....**

#### Article 19

**All peoples shall be equal; they shall enjoy the same respect and shall have the same rights. Nothing shall justify the domination of a people by another.**

#### Article 22

All peoples shall have the right to their economic, social and cultural development with due regard to their freedom and identity, and in the equal enjoyment of the common heritage of mankind

#### Article 28

**Every individual shall have the duty to respect and consider his fellow beings without discrimination, and to maintain relations aimed at promoting, safeguarding and reinforcing mutual respect and tolerance**

### Commentary:

The articles in bold highlight the Charter's condemnation of any form of human abuse, specifically of violence against women and children.

## Some thoughts on where to go from here

### From the editor's desk

#### Forging links and sharing information...

An overwhelming message being heard from NCA partners in Southern Africa, communicates the need for increased collaboration and sharing between organisations in the region. Working in isolation engenders a sense of helplessness in the face of what seem like overwhelming odds. There is the recognition that many small, under-resourced organisations are sharing the same struggles and facing the same difficulties in working in the area of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. What is needed is a pooling of resources, as well as increased inter-organisational support. What is also apparent, is that community- and church-based bodies are initiating extremely effective and innovative strategies in combating the HIV/AIDS and domestic violence scourge. A sharing of the success of these projects is important. NCA, as a co-ordinating umbrella body, could help in facilitating the following:

- Increased co-operation between organisations working in the same geographical area
- Publicising the activities of the different partner organisations
- Organising regular dialogue between organisations, possibly in the form of mini-regional consultations such as the one held in Gaborone
- A regular review of the progress being made by partners
- The creation of a network for information dissemination

- The creation of a website catering to partners in Southern Africa
- Advertisement of projects that have worked well

Partners voiced the need for regular contact with NCA.

#### A thirst for knowledge....

There is an urgent need for more information about HIV/AIDS. Whilst there is basic knowledge, many organisations feel ill-equipped to respond to the problems and questions presented by their communities. As education is seen as a primary vehicle in changing high-risk behaviour, information about transmission, progression and treatment is desperately needed. Once again, the use of a website would be invaluable here as a way of linking organisations to current knowledge. It would also provide a forum for discussion around presenting issues.

#### "I am a healer": empowering ourselves...

Whilst there is a legitimate need for external assistance from donor bodies such as NCA, local organisations are also recognising the need to empower themselves. As long as the power of knowledge is located externally, organisations will remain disempowered, and unable to respond with efficacy to their contextual difficulties. Partners need to recognise that expertise resides in the communities, and that the tools for change are possessed by the change agents themselves, in each community-based organisation. NCA can be an

essential partner in helping organisations to realise their own potential:

- By funding local initiatives and projects
- By facilitating local research
- By helping organisations to produce contextually relevant material
- By creating a data base of local resources
- By facilitating local needs analyses

There are not generic solutions to the threat of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. Rather we need to move toward an understanding of the idiosyncratic manifestations of these issues in particular contexts. We need to use local resources to address the problems at a grassroots level.

#### Recognising the link...

Issues such as domestic violence and HIV/AIDS are not discrete, rather they are intertwined not only with one another, but also with broader societal issues such as poverty and economic development factors. There is an urgent need in Sub-Saharan Africa to locate HIV and domestic violence within a broader context, and to target intervention strategies more broadly. To attempt to address HIV and domestic violence as independent issues would be to fail: if the broader context does not shift, changes cannot be sustained.



Photo: Kay Berg

Possible ways of doing this would be:

- To work towards transforming social values relating to male behaviour
- To develop projects aimed at empowering women, and addressing gender imbalances
- To begin educating young children about gender equality
- To develop socio-economic development projects aimed specifically at women
- To publicise the links between domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, gender and the wider political and socio-economic context
- To advocate for government intervention and support in the fight to save Africa

Some projects, notably in South Africa, have located gender-based violence issues as development issues. What needs to happen is for projects involved in

domestic violence to ally with those involved with violence reduction and those working on poverty alleviation. “The challenges involved with these conceptual and practical ‘border-crossings’ are political and complex. But the possibility of ‘new’ African men (people to whom the perpetration of gender-based-violence is unthinkable), and of ‘new’ African women (people who know only what is written in books, or told in horrible ‘once-upon-a-time’ stories, of the vulnerability of their bodies) depends upon embracing these challenges” Jane Bennett (Gender-based violence in South Africa, in AGI Newsletter, Vol 6, May 2000).

### **Bringing government into the fight....**

NGO’s and church and community-based organisations are pioneering the fight against HIV/AIDS and domestic violence in Africa. Most of the work being done occurs in these contexts, and

there is a notable lack of government involvement or intervention at a macro-level. Even when this does happen, policies are seldom translated into action. An example of this is seen in South Africa’s Domestic Violence Act (2000) where access to police services and courts has been considerably increased for victims of domestic violence. In spite of this, however, the criminal justice system has failed to implement the act – court interdicts are ineffectual, and perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions. Police intervention also fails to convert policy into practice, and women are repeatedly let down by the police and by the justice system. The constitutional and legislative fabric is in place, however it is not being translated into actual practice.

As long as government remains detached from the fight, little headway can be made. Typically, in Africa, overseas organisations such as NCA, fund and manage much-needed projects, and there is a culture of paternalism which is bought into by African governments. It is high time that African countries begin to take responsibility for their own affairs and start to act internally, without the elbow-nudging from foreign donor bodies. There needs to be an acknowledgement that this is an African problem, to be confronted domestically.

A key task for those organisations who are rooted in the struggle against domestic violence and HIV/AIDS, is to increase advocacy at a macro-level, and to continuously challenge and pressurise their governments to become part of the fight.

### **Breaking the silence...**

The stigma and taboo surrounding both HIV/AIDS and domestic violence colludes with the conspiracy of silence which prevents full knowledge of these issues. Organisations need to work actively to expose and publicise the epidemiology of HIV and domestic violence, in order to communicate the insidious impact of these scourges and to concretise people about treatment and prophylaxis. Up to date statistics as well as hard core facts need to be filtered to the public. A false sense of safety emerges from ignorance – this is a luxury that cannot be afforded in Africa.

### **Changing its ways: the church as an instrument...**

Acknowledging that the church is, in many ways, a collaborator in the scourge of violence against women, is an extremely painful and difficult thing to do. It is tantamount to realising that our parents, whom we hold in such high esteem, are imperfect and subject to human weakness and frailty. There is huge investment, from both congregations and clergy, in keeping the church separate from the ills that permeate society. In this way the church remains a sanctuary, and a stronghold for faith. Unfortunately, however, with the breaking of the silence that has typically protected the church, religious structures and their leaders have been shown to be colluders in the abuse and disempowerment of women.

This collaboration occurs covertly, in the scriptures that are taught – the story of Tamar, for example, is one bible pas-

sage that is seldom quoted by clergy; in the condonement and encouragement of a patriarchal, gender-specific societal structure where the man is the head of the home, where wives are taught to submit to their husbands, where the man's word is final. Within the churches themselves, the historical exclusion of women from the clergy has further perpetuated a covert subversion of women's rights, and has encouraged a championing of the men's power over women. Collaboration with the abuse and disempowerment of women has also occurred more overtly and blatantly, where members of the clergy have been implicated in actual physical and sexual abuse of women and children.

The church holds enormous power: there is an urgent need that this power be used in constructive rather than destructive ways.

Many women have had extremely positive experiences with clergy and with the church, whilst others have been imprisoned by the theology and teaching of their churches, and have had their trust in the clergy betrayed. It is time that the church becomes answerable to its actions and teachings, and there needs to be an unequivocal recognition of the role it has played in maintaining, and in fact exacerbating, the subverted position of women in society. Faith and belief, in Africa, are fundamental to survival, and the church can be a powerful and effective instrument in fighting against domestic violence, and against the accompanying scourge of HIV/AIDS.

In acknowledging that church structures have, historically, colluded in the disempowerment of women, and in the entrenchment of a dominant patriarchal culture, representatives of the church are also freed to change this *modus operandi*. The challenge is for churches to recognise the role they have played, and to commit themselves to empowering women, and to addressing without discrimination or prejudgement, the epidemic of HIV/AIDS and domestic violence in their communities. One of the most effective ways of doing this is to begin to speak about it in church, to prioritise the church as a loudspeaker and a sanctuary for women suffering abuse, for people living with HIV/AIDS, and in so doing lift the veil of secrecy. The church has the potential to be a forceful adversary of fear and stigma, and a powerful agent for constructive change. Community-based organisations and NGOs need to challenge local church structures to join the fight against domestic violence, and HIV/AIDS.

Overwhelmingly partners at the consultation communicated a sense of renewed hope which overcame a sense of despair that so many of us face when working in impoverished communities ravaged by domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. This sense of hope comes from a recognition that they are not alone in their struggles, and once again the need to rediscover a true UBUNTU is highlighted. HIV/AIDS is, without question, the severest challenge faced by Southern Africa. Current estimates predict that, with time, the death rate will

exceed the birth rate of Africa's population. In some areas this is already happening. The inevitable consequence of this galloping statistic is clear. Rescuing cannot come from outside Africa. It cannot be handed down in tablet or syringe form. It has to come from within a sub-continent intent on saving itself. We need to access the wounded healers within ourselves but, more than anything, we need to recognise the strength of collaboration and solidarity against an enemy that unites us all.

### **Remembering to remember....**

Africa is a continent whose face is lined by a history of trauma. She has experienced and survived tribal warfare, the brutality of colonialism, genocide, ethnic cleansing, racial intolerance, coups, dictatorships, drought, floods, famine. Trauma has manifested itself physically, structurally, politically, emotionally and psychologically. It is impossible to look at Africa without positioning her historically, and placing her in a context of trauma. Theory and experience tell us that the only way to deal with trauma is to confront it – rather than burying it and trying to move on. Rehabilitation can only really happen through remembering what is past, trying to understand it, before it can be filed away as memory.

A message that emerged from the Gaborone consultation was that, in the face of the trauma that Africa now faces, in the pain and suffering caused by domestic violence and HIV/AIDS, we need to remind ourselves to remember what is past. We need to remember victims and survivors of HIV and domes-

tic violence in order to connect ourselves to our history, to one another, and to move on.

Possibly the session that will be most remembered by participants at the consultation is the liturgy that was conducted one evening. We were invited to bring to the forum a symbol, a reminder of people, possibly of ourselves, who have struggled with domestic violence or HIV/AIDS. The high-ceilinged, impersonal consultation hall was transformed for a time into a spiritual centre, and we shared in a most profound experience of honesty and emotion. Individuals brought to the alter song, words, physical gestures and symbols to communicate their personal connection to the tragedy that we all share. Through this we remembered ... we remembered pain and suffering, courage, humility, love, hope, and in that process we were transformed from a collection of individuals, to a collective. The strength of Africa lies in unity; it lies in community, and it lies in acknowledging and addressing our history so that we can move forward...it is in remembering to remember.

*Yvette Esprey*

## About the

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