AUTHOR:
Robyn Murning[1]
Robbert-Jan Adriaansen[2]

AFFILIATION:
[1] PhD candidate and Lecturer, History Department, Erasmus University Rotterdam
[2] Associate Professor, History Department, Erasmus University Rotterdam

ORCID:
[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1364-4572
[2] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3611-6502

EMAIL:
[1] murning@eshcc.eur.nl
[2] adriaansen@eshcc.eur.nl

DOI: https://doi.org/10.38140/sjch.v48i2.7062

ISSN 2415-0509 (Online)
Southern Journal for Contemporary History
2023 48(2):113-139

PUBLISHED:
29 December 2023

PARADOXICAL LEGACIES AND UNATTAINABLE FUTURES: SOUTH AFRICA'S NATIONAL SELF-NARRATIVE AND THE HAUNTING OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE POST-TRANSITIONAL ERA

ABSTRACT

This article examines how, over the past two decades, South Africa's post-apartheid narrative shaped the public's perception of gender-based violence (GBV) by focusing on three significant events: the Jacob Zuma rape trial, the murder of Anene Booysen, and the murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana. It is argued that South Africa's post-apartheid narrative, which was grounded in the hopeful discourses generated during the transition, played a significant role in shaping post-apartheid national identities but simultaneously sidelined the problem of gender-based violence. Despite its hypervisibility in society, violence against women was suppressed and, in some cases, denied due to its incompatibility with the nation's hopeful visions for the future. The rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana eventually revealed the limitations of these hopeful discourses and the fragility of South Africa's democracy. The national response to Mrwetyana's death pointed to a subversion of South Africa's contradictory narrative of hope. It revealed the social paradox embedded within South Africa's democratic nationhood, as embodied by the oversight and denial of gender-based violence at a national level. This article examines how South Africa's transitional narrative of hope overshadowed the ubiquitous problem of GBV and distorted public perceptions of the problem. It highlights the need for an inclusive and accountable narrative that addresses the root problem of gender-based violence.

Keywords: *South Africa, gender, violence, national identity, public discourse, national self-narrative*

South Africa's transitional era witnessed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) attempt to grapple with the uncomfortable legacies created by the apartheid regime and its colonial precursors. While the Commission succeeded in addressing various forms of violence that had been hidden from public view during the apartheid era, its primary focus was on political reconciliation. As an effect, forms of violence that were not directly linked to political reconciliation were marginalised and not adequately addressed. Only towards the end of its hearings, and largely due to the rallying of feminist organisations, did the Commission include Special Hearings in July 1997 that shed light on gender-based violence (GBV).[1] Despite this late focus, the TRC's overall historical ethos constituted a spirit of "moving on" politically towards a brighter South African future grounded in notions of healing and forgiveness.[2]

The effects that these sentiments had on post-transitional South Africa constituted the formation of dominant democratic discourses that established a hopeful national self-narrative while simultaneously informing new constitutional values. The idea of a "new South Africa" – free of the violent injustices of the past – set a precedent for post-apartheid national identity, symbolising possibility, liberation, and beginnings. Democratisation constructed nationhood largely through celebratory multi-ethnic metaphors, with the so-called "Rainbow Nation" becoming synonymous with South Africa. The contradictory elements inherent to this nationhood have been extensively problematised since its inception, especially with regard to how "rainbowism" has served to erase lingering power-differentials in the post-apartheid era.[3] Indeed, although these transitional ideals aided in developing "one of the most inclusive constitutions in the world"[4], South African society has continued to struggle with an array of challenges, including state corruption, persistent economic inequality, and violent crime. One of these major challenges has been persistently high rates of what the United Nations has defined as gender-based violence (GBV): "any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women".[5] The alarming

1 R Murning, Haunting memories: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's women's hearings and South Africa's discourse on gender-based violence (MA, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2022), p. 32.

2 B Bevernage, "Writing the past out of the present: History and the politics of time in transitional justice", *History Writing Workshop Journal* 69, 2010, p. 110.

3 PD Gqola, "Defining people: Analysing power, language and representation in metaphors of the new South Africa", *Transformation* 47, 2007, p. 98.

4 Statistics South Africa, "Gender statistics", <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=737&id=6=6>, accessed 8 March 2024.

5 United Nations, "Platform for action". In: United Nations, *Beijing declaration and platform for action* (New York: United Nations, 1995), p. 112.

statistics of violence affecting women and children and references to South Africa as the "world's rape capital" underline the gravity of the situation.[6]

The prevalence of GBV has been an object of inquiry for many scholars over the past few decades, with feminist scholars emphasising its ties to historical and sociocultural forces.[7] The roles of "violent masculinities", patriarchal militarism, and structural inequality have been considered at length, not only academically but also in popular media.[8] Contemporary issues related to GBV are well-researched in South Africa in a variety of scholarly domains, with a general focus on violence against women

6 "South Africa, once called the 'the world's rape capital', is running out of rape kits", *Washington Post*, 1 December 2010, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/03/05/south-africa-once-called-the-worlds-rape-capital-is-running-out-of-rape-kits/>, accessed 25 September 2023.

7 See, BB Brown, "Facing the 'black peril': The politics of population control in South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 13 (2), 1987, pp. 256-273; P Scully, "Rape, race and colonial culture: The sexual politics of identity in the nineteenth-century Cape Colony, South Africa", *The American Historical Review* 100 (2), 1995, pp. 335-359; N Etherington, "Natal's black rape scare of the 1870s", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15 (1), 1988, pp. 36-53; A Coetzee and L du Toit, "Facing the sexual demon of colonial power: Decolonising sexual violence in South Africa", *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25 (2), 2018, pp. 214-227; E Bridger, "Apartheid's 'rape crisis': Understanding and addressing sexual violence in South Africa, 1970s-1990s", *Women's History Review* 33 (2), 2023, pp. 1-20; E Thornberry, *Colonizing consent: Rape and governance in South Africa's Eastern Cape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); PD Gqola, "How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender-based violence in contemporary South Africa", *African Identities* 5 (1), 2007, pp. 111-124; X Thusi and VH Mlambo, "South Africa's gender-based violence: An exploration of a single sided account", *EUREKA: Social and Humanities* 3, 2023, pp. 73-80; JE Mason, "Fit for freedom": The slaves, slavery and emancipation in the Cape Colony, South Africa, 1806 to 1842 (PhD, Yale University, 1992); A Reef, "Representations of rape in apartheid and post-apartheid South African literature." In: A Fahraeus and A Jonsson (eds.), *Textual ethos studies, or: Locating ethics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 245-261; LV Graham, *State of peril: Race and rape in South African literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); C Crais and P Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A ghost story and a biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); D Posel, "The scandal of manhood: 'Baby rape' and the politicization of sexual violence in post-apartheid South Africa", *Culture, Health and Sexuality* 7 (3), 2005, pp. 239-252; H Moffet, "'These women, they force us to rape them': Rape as narrative of social control in post-apartheid South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32 (1), 2006, pp. 129-144; H Moffet, "Sexual violence, civil society, and the new constitution." In: H. Britton, J. Fish and S. Meintjes (eds.), *Women's activism in South Africa: Working across divides* (Scottsville: University of Kwazulu Natal Press, 2009), 155-184; S Doan-Minh, "Corrective rape: An extreme manifestation of discrimination and the state's complicity in sexual violence", *Hastings Women's Law Journal* 30 (1), 2019, pp. 167-197; N Ndawonde, "Gender-based violence in South Africa: The second pandemic?" In: AO Akinola (ed.), *Contemporary issues on governance, conflict and security in Africa* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2023), pp. 287-307.

8 Gqola, "How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender-based violence", pp. 111-124.

and children.[9] Historical research on GBV is, however, relatively scarce, particularly concerning the colonial and apartheid eras. Nonetheless, historians have examined various aspects and forms of GBV, such as sexual exploitation and violence perpetrated by white settlers in the context of slavery,[10] the racially informed stereotypes that determined both the colonial perception of black sexuality and the inadequate and discriminatory legal responses to GBV under colonisation and apartheid.[11] The representation of GBV, especially rape, in literature since colonial times has also been of particular interest to scholars. Attention has been paid to a variety of literary works published across the colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid eras.[12] Literary studies corroborate that while most cases of rape were, in fact, not interracial, narratives of interracial rape dominated national discourse, fuelled racial tensions, perpetuated harmful stereotypes, and fostered a climate of fear and mistrust. The disproportionate focus on interracial rape served as a tool for perpetuating racial hierarchies and furthering the divisive agendas of the colonial and apartheid regimes.[13]

The scale of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and gender-based violence in post-apartheid South Africa means that the body of scholarship on this period is significantly larger, and increased domestic violence as an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic – dubbed as a "second pandemic" by Cyril Ramaphosa[14] – urged scholars to pay renewed attention to GBV. Post-apartheid GBV underscores the persistent challenges hampering women's development, particularly within the low-income demographics of South Africa's black townships. While scholars disagree on whether this can best be explained by class disparities or sociocultural factors, the link between economic vulnerability and GBV is undisputed. The activities of women's empowerment organisations and, most recently, the state's *Gender-based Violence and Femicide National Strategic Plan* (GBVF-NSP) underscore the persistent urgency of GBV as a major social problem.[15]

9 Thusi and Mlambo, "South Africa's gender-based violence", pp. 73-80.
10 Mason, "Fit for freedom".
11 Brown, "Facing the 'black peril', pp. 256-273; Scully, "Rape, race and colonial culture", pp. 335-359; Etherington, "Natal's black rape scare of the 1870s", pp. 36-53; Coetzee and du Toit, "Facing the sexual demon of colonial power", pp. 214-227; Bridger, "Apartheid's 'rape crisis'", pp. 1-20; Thornberry, *Colonizing consent*.
12 See, S Plaatje, *The mote and the beam: An epic on sex-relationship 'twixt white and black in British South Africa* (New York: Young's Book Exchange, 1921); A Maimane, *Victims* (London: Allison and Busby, 1976), JM Coetzee, *Disgrace* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1999); Z Wicomb, *David's story* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2000); A Dangor, *Bitter fruit* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001).
13 Graham, *State of peril;* Reef, "Representations of rape in apartheid and post-apartheid South African literature", pp. 245-261.
14 Ndawonde, "Gender-based violence in South Africa: The second pandemic", pp. 287-307.
15 Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, "Overview of National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide roll-out: Year 1. 1 May 2020 - 30 April 2021",

While the scholarly focus has predominantly been on the manifestations and causes of GBV, there is a growing recognition of deep-seated historical legacies and their ongoing impact on gender roles and violence in South Africa that requires further inquiry. What these sentiments reflect is an idea of a certain haunting historical "legacy" of gender roles borne of colonial or apartheid ideals, cultures of violence borne of a militaristic apartheid state, and the social inequalities that linger in the wake of a violently unequal and racist system. Despite the efforts made during South Africa's transition by the TRC, there is a sense that South Africa has not dealt fully with its past and, moreover, that the past is somehow a preventative obstacle to true social change or to attaining South Africa's ideal future. This is an essentially temporal perception – that everything is fundamentally tied to South Africa's history and that the country is still haunted by violence today. This stands in juxtaposition to the vision of South Africa constructed by the dominant discourses of the transition, and it is this conflict that has led to significantly paradoxical engagements with GBV in the post-apartheid era. South Africa has, in this way, grappled with the historicism of GBV as a legacy of apartheid. At the same time, it is simultaneously something inextricably and hauntingly present in the post-apartheid era. How has South Africa's national self-narrative influenced the public perception of gender-based violence in the post-apartheid era over the past two decades? In order to answer this question, we analyse public discourses surrounding three of the most prominent cases of GBV over the past 20 years: the Zuma rape trial (2006), the rape and murder of high-schooler Anene Booysen (2013), and the rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana (2019).

1. SPECTRES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa has a long and complex history that is intertwined with the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. During the colonial period, violence against indigenous women was pervasive under racially stratified slave societies in the Cape. Dutch and British settlers frequently raped enslaved and Khoikhoi women as a means of exerting patriarchal control and domination while also intentionally or unintentionally growing the slave population.[16] However, such acts went largely unpunished, as the colonial legal system offered little protection to indigenous and enslaved women. Rape laws were applied differentially along racial lines, with the rape of white women by black men seen as a severe transgression.

<https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202108/nsp-gbv-year-1-rollout-report-2020-2021-final-version-web.pdf>, accessed 8 March 2024.

16 Mason, "Fit for freedom", pp. 202–225.

In contrast, the rape of a black woman by any man was not constructed as a major legal or moral violation.[17] This racialised conceptualisation of rape had roots in European colonial discourses that stereotyped the sexuality of indigenous peoples. Khoikhoi women, in particular, were exoticised and hypersexualised, such as the case of Sarah "Saartjie" Baartman, the so-called "Hottentot Venus".[18] Similarly, black masculinity was hypersexualised, leading to "Black Peril" panics over real or imagined rapes of white women by black men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which fuelled fears of miscegenation, and invoked population control measures.[19]

During apartheid (1948-1994), due to the racist stereotypes about inherent black male aggression and female promiscuity, state institutions showed little concern about high rates of sexual violence within black communities.[20] The apartheid legal system also defined rape extremely narrowly, excluding marital rape and same-sex rape. This reinforcement of rape as an issue only warranting attention when perpetrated by a stranger against a virtuous woman meant that most acts of sexual violence were rendered invisible, and survivors denied recourse.[21] For the apartheid government, acknowledging the extent of sexual violence was seen as reflecting poorly on the efficacy of apartheid rule.[22] Yet, the apartheid system created conditions of poverty, inequality, displacement, militarisation, and violence that exacerbated GBV in both rural and urban areas. At the community level, the 1980s saw the rise of widespread practices like "jackrolling" and youth gangs known as "*iintsara*" in urban townships that terrorised women.[23] It was only with the growth of the anti-apartheid movement in the 1970s and 1980s, the unbanning of liberation organisations in 1990, and the gradual loosening of press censorship that alternative, critical narratives about endemic violence against black women began emerging.[24]

The transition to democracy in 1994 brought about significant changes in the legal framework and the political commitment to combat GBV in South Africa. The TRC made visible the degree to which violence permeated apartheid South Africa. Yet, its dedication to political reconciliation and its institutional approach made that, although GBV was addressed in dedicated "women's hearings", the TRC could not effectively address GBV and how

17 Thornberry, *Colonizing consent,* pp. 193-247.
18 C Crais and P Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*.
19 Brown, "Facing the 'black peril'", p. 262.
20 Posel, "The scandal of manhood", pp. 239-252.
21 Moffet, "'These women, they force us to rape them", pp. 129-144.
22 Posel, "The scandal of manhood", pp. 239-252.
23 Gqola, "How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender-based violence", p. 120.
24 Posel, "The scandal of manhood", p. 243.

it intersects with inequalities along racial and socio-economic lines.[25] While the political transformation of South Africa was not accompanied by a transformation of the socioeconomic structures, mentalities, and inequalities that nurture GBV, legally, the situation improved. The new constitution recognised the rights to equality, dignity, bodily integrity, privacy, and health for all people regardless of sex or gender. The new government enacted progressive laws and policies to prevent and respond to GBV, such as the Domestic Violence Act (1998), the Sexual Offences Act (2007), and the National Strategic Plan on GBV (2020-2030). However, despite these advances, GBV remained a serious and pervasive problem in post-apartheid South Africa. The high rates of rape created a "staggering contradiction between the hard-won gender rights enshrined and even showcased in the public arena and women's everyday experiences of private violation" while simultaneously fuelling the HIV/AIDS pandemic that further destabilised the country.[26] Patriarchal ideas about gender roles persist alongside new forms of violence like "corrective rape" against lesbians.[27] The transition to democracy had thus not transformed heteropatriarchal norms and violent masculinities within South African society. Yet, at the same time, new national narratives instilled a sense of progress and equality.

2. THE DISCONTENTS OF THE AGE OF HOPE: THE FEZEKILE KUZWAYO CASE

In the 30 years since the abolishment of apartheid, social attitudes in South Africa have fluctuated along with the rapidly changing socio-political environment of the era. This fluctuation in social thought is not only indicative of the role that the self-narrative of the post-apartheid state has played in the (re)formation of national identity but also of the malleability and inconstancy of these identity constructs. GBV, although a seemingly constant presence in post-transitional South Africa, has been portrayed and contextualised by these dominant social attitudes, often in accordance with political sentiments.

The early 2000s were defined by a "prevailing mood of optimism", with the South African Social Attitudes Surveys (SASAS) of the period indicating an "overwhelming sense of general national pride" and loyalty to the nation across all demographic groups.[28] In 2006, then-president Thabo Mbeki declared that South Africa had undoubtedly entered its "Age of Hope",

25 Murning, "Haunting memories", 97.
26 Moffet, "Sexual violence, civil society, and the new constitution", p. 157.
27 Doan-Minh, "Corrective rape", pp. 167-197.
28 B Roberts *et al.*, *South African Social Attitudes 2nd report: Reflections on the age of hope* (Cape Town: HSRV Press, 2010), p. 2.

> Our people are firmly convinced that our country has entered its Age of Hope. They are convinced that we have created the conditions to achieve more rapid progress towards the realisation of our dreams. They are certain that we are indeed a winning nation.[29]

This discourse of hopefulness was no doubt influenced by popular media, with a variety of effective marketing campaigns that sought to redefine South African identity, including *Proudly South African* (2001-present), *South Africa: The Good News* (2002-present), and *Alive with Possibility* (2006-2012). Public perception was further influenced by ideals borne of the transition, including a notion of an African "Renaissance" and, most famously, the aforementioned idea of a "rainbow nation".[30] Furthermore, despite high unemployment rates, there was also a marked pursuit of economic growth during this period, which cemented a mood of hope for the nation's future economic success.[31] A consequence of this "hopeful" national identity was a notably fierce loyalty to the ruling "liberating" party, the African National Congress (ANC), particularly in the "belief in municipalities to work better and provide in the future", despite a lack of present-day service delivery.[32] These social attitudes were arguably representative of the future-oriented democratic dreams of the "new" South African state in breaking with its sordid history, no doubt an extension of the transitional ideals of "moving on": the nation may not yet be at its peak, but the conditions for progress have been laid out in earnest.

Yet, at the pinnacle of this "Age of Hope", one of the greatest socio-political crises in recent South African history took place in the form of the now-infamous "Zuma rape trial", in which Fezekile Kuzwayo alleged that then-deputy president, Jacob Zuma, raped her in his Johannesburg home in November 2005. Zuma was acquitted of the rape in May 2006, with the judge decrying the victim as a liar, setting in stone the precedent of disbelief and suspicion that she had faced from not only Zuma's many supporters but also the South African media during the trial.[33] One only needs to look as far as Mbeki's 2006 sentiments about the "hopeful" state of South African society to see why this trial has been perceived as a "crisis" because it brought into question pre-established identity constructions of post-apartheid society.

Kuzwayo had revealed a flaw in the image of the "new nation". She brought to the fore an element of society that seemed more connected to

29 Roberts *et al*., p. 1.
30 Roberts *et al*., p. 2.
31 Roberts *et al*., p. 4.
32 Roberts *et al*., p. 6.
33 R Thlabi, *Khwezi: The remarkable story of Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2017), p. 79.

South Africa's past rather than its hopeful and dream-like present, standing in stark contrast to the prevailing sentiments of the "Age of Hope". This revelation can be seen as a form of haunting in Avery Gordon's terms – a persistent, unsettling echo from the past that actively disrupted the dominant mood of the period and caused discomfort nationwide.[34] Gordon suggests that hauntings are not merely remnants of the past; they actively interfere with and shape the present and the future, revealing that what has been concealed continues to exert influence and challenge dominant narratives and structures. The way the nation reacted to this rape case is particularly telling in this regard. Kuzwayo became burdened with the hopes of a nation because the narrative she told - of a prominent and iconic politician and ANC liberator raping her – simply did not "fit" within the dominant socio-political discourse of the period. Indeed, the representations of this rape case were undoubtedly generated in relation to the visions of a hopeful South Africa that dominated the social attitudes of the time. In this sense, the case serves as a haunting reminder of the unresolved issues and uncomfortable truths that continued to shape South Africa's socio-political landscape, even in an "age" characterised by hope and aspiration.

This is particularly evident in the reactions of political and social organisations that were directly involved in the maintenance and perpetuation of widely accepted socio-political perspectives at the time. A frequently represented sentiment was the notion that Zuma was a "good man" and politician, indicating the hope and loyalty ascribed to the ANC as national representatives. One of the key factors contributing to this loyalty was Zuma's relatability; he was widely viewed as a "people's person", making it easier for many to feel a personal connection with him.[35] Polls conducted with members of workers' unions in 2006 indicated an overwhelming loyalty to Zuma. His "goodness" and the way he "addresses" people were noted, with some even going so far as to emphasise that he would have had support "whether guilty or innocent".[36] These sentiments were matched by the rallying of his adherents during the trial, with a fervent "carnival atmosphere" prevailing outside the courtroom amongst droves of Zuma supporters.[37] To many, Zuma embodied the freedom struggle, with strong sentiments and beliefs that he would be capable of leading South Africa into its future, an extension of the dominant,

34 AF Gordon, *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination* (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 2008), p. 17.

35 "Mandela memorial: From 'rainbow nation' to 'rain boo nation'", *BBC News*, 11 December 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25335797, accessed 8 March 2024.

36 "As Zuma rape trial opens, judge stands down over potential bias", *The Irish Times*, 14 February 2006, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/as-zuma-rape-trial-opens-judge-stands-down-over-potential-bias-1.1015032>, accessed 8 March 2024.

37 *The Irish Times,* 14 February 2006.

future-oriented discourse of the Age of Hope.[38] However, the fact that he was willing to deny a rape charge, despite the weight of evidence against him, showed that there was a widespread acceptance of GBV in South Africa, even though – according to dominant post-apartheid discourses - the country was supposed to be "free" from such violence. This denialism was a sign of the continued presence of GBV, even though it was not acknowledged or seen.

Similarly, in November 2005, shortly after the initial rape allegation came to light, *News24* reported that the Young Communist League of South Africa (YCLSA) "stands by Zuma",

> Former deputy president Jacob Zuma's right to a fair trial has been "consistently abused and undermined", the Young Communist League of SA (YCLSA) said on Friday. In a statement issued after a meeting in Johannesburg, the national committee of the YCLSA said it reaffirmed its political support for Zuma. "We stand firmly for the rule of law: comrade Jacob Zuma must have a fair trial. However, this right to a fair trial has been consistently abused and undermined by the conduct of the national prosecuting authority, the misuse of state institutions for political ends, and through a trial and campaign against comrade Zuma by the media. These violations reinforce our view that there is a political conspiracy against comrade Jacob Zuma personally.[39]

Zuma was framed as a victim of a "trial by media", "unfairness" and a "political conspiracy". Embedded within this denialism is the side-lining of the gendered nature of the crime Zuma was accused of, instead relating the rape allegation to the recent corruption allegations levied against him earlier in 2005.[40] The rape is found to be incompatible with paragon-like Zuma. It is thus framed as a "conspiracy," a word that suggests some secret plan intended to undermine Zuma and – more broadly – the South African political landscape. There was an affirmation of the dominant social attitudes of the time – hopefulness and loyalty – within which Kuzwayo's story of GBV was wholly incompatible. This is paradoxical – the idea of a "political conspiracy" should be out of place in a fair and equal South Africa. Yet, it was drawn upon to explain the cracks that Kuzwayo revealed: it *cannot* be rape, but it *can be* a conspiracy.

In Kuzwayo's accounts of the trial in Redi Thlabi's 2017 biography of her life, there is further evidence of a code of silence imposed upon her for disrupting the post-apartheid ideal. According to Kuzwayo, she was approached by members of her community, who implored her to drop the

38 "JZ still the worker's darling?", *Mail and Guardian*, 31 March 2005.
39 "YCLSA stands by Zuma", *News24*, 25 November 2005, <https://www.news24.com/news24/yclsa-stands-by-zuma-20051125>, accessed 8 March 2024.
40 *The Irish Times,* 14 February 2006.

charges in fear of the widespread impact they might have on South Africa's socio-political environment. One individual allegedly told her that "there [was] a bigger picture" and "how dare [she] disrupt that".[41] She also received an offer of compensation from "a senior member of the ANC and trusted Zuma confidante", Dr Zweli Mkhize, if she dropped the charges initiated against Zuma.[42]

During the trial itself, Kuzwayo faced a significant degree of victim-blaming. For example, the clothing that she was wearing on the night of the rape – a kanga, which is a type of sarong – was frequently brought up as an outfit that indicated to Zuma that "she was inviting sex".[43] Furthermore, her prior experiences of rape were used to discredit her, with Zuma's advocate going so far as to cast doubt on her prior experiences of GBV, including the rape she experienced at the age of 13.[44] Her behaviour during the rape was also called into question, perpetuating harmful stereotypes about how rape victims are expected to behave.[45] It was also suggested that her "regular contact" with Zuma in the months leading up to the rape was indicative of a degree of consent, as she had sent him "54 SMS messages" that had an affectionate tone[46], even though Kuzwayo was generally a very affectionate person with all of her friends.[47] All these statements indicate that a victim is only a victim insofar as their behaviour reflects that of a victim.

While these examples indicate an overwhelming sense of denialism, ignoration, and rejection, feminist organisations were unsurprisingly the first to highlight the undeniable, unavoidable presence of GBV in post-apartheid South Africa. Carrie Shelver, writing on behalf of a South African women's rights organisation, People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA), in 2006, highlighted the dichotomy between the treatment of the victim and the perpetrator as a sign of a lack of meaningful change for women since the abolishment of apartheid,

> The complainant in the case had entered the court, head bowed and covered. The accused had entered through another entrance. He emerged after the day's proceedings to loudly take centre stage, sing the contentious *Awulethe Mshini*

41 Thlabi, *Khwezi*, p. 78.
42 Thlabi, *Khwezi*, p. 80.
43 S Hassim, "Democracy's shadows: Sexual rights and gender politics in the rape trial of Jacob Zuma", *African Studies* 68 (1), 2009, pp. 57–77.
44 Thlabi, *Khwezi*, p. 101.
45 Thlabi, *Khwezi*, p. 101.
46 South African Legal Information Institute, "Final Judgement: State v. Jacob Zuma", 8 May 2006, <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAGPHC/2006/45.pdf>, accessed 8 March 2024.
47 Thlabi, *Khwezi*, p. 66.

> *Wam* (already interpreted by some as a phallic symbol representing male virility and power), and dance with the crowd – all with the attitude of someone not raped [*sic*], not someone who has been accused with rape, nor someone who even takes the matter of violence against women seriously. [48]

These opposing, contradictory perspectives reveal how the post-transitional "Age of Hope" South Africa was haunted by the continued presence of violence as a remnant or continuation of a violent patriarchy that allowed for the abuse of women on both sides of the apartheid struggle. This "Age of Hope" could thus be seen as a masculinist vision of hope that not only failed to prioritise the rights of women but also obscured the ongoing GBV behind the ideals of the new South Africa. The rejection of Kuzwayo's story was deeply related to her supposed defamation of an anti-apartheid figure, a man pedestaled by the self-narrative of the nation, one free from the injustices of the past towards a better, safer future. This fierce loyalty to such figures also signals a tacit endorsement of the existing patriarchy. Within this, we can observe some of the potential negative effects of the major transitional discourses that greatly informed the self-narrative of the post-transition. Women like Kuzwayo were forced to contend with a new South Africa that neglected gendered issues in its pursuit of discourses of equality and hope, in which GBV would ideally remain a matter of the past rather than the present or future. The normative nature of rape in South Africa, supported by the fact that – according to a 2010 review – one in three South African men admit to having committed rape, casts a dark shadow over the nation's aspirations for gender equality and calls into question the very notion of progress.[49]

3. A PERSISTENT PROBLEM IN THE AGE OF DESPAIR: THE ANENE BOOYSEN CASE

The "Age of Hope" would inevitably end as South Africa's socio-political climate changed, and with its end came new ways of positioning and engaging with GBV in the context of post-transitional discourses. In 2007, Zuma became South Africa's president with an election campaign that, "presented a shift from leading by aspirational ideals to pursuing specific, tangible ends".[50]

48 "Zuma trial reflects South Africa's response to rape", *Gender Links*, 2 February 2006, <https://genderlinks.org.za/programme-web-menu/zuma-trial-reflects-south-africas-response-to-rape-2006-02-22/>, accessed 8 March 2024.

49 "One in three South African men admit to rape, survey finds", *The Guardian*, 25 November 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/25/south-african-rape-survey>, accessed 8 March 2024.

50 K Kotze, "Cyril Ramaphosa's strategic presidency", *Defensive Strategic Communications* 7, 2019, p. 22.

Despite these promises, the 2010s were a particularly tumultuous decade for South Africa. The decade commenced with the success of the 2010 Soccer World Cup on South African shores, which acted as a moment of clarity in the symbolic national identity constructs of South Africa, putting on display the "rainbow nation" on an international stage. However, 2012 saw the violence of the Marikana massacre in which the police slaughtered 34 miners during a series of strikes – an event that has been likened to a haunting reminder of the brutality of the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre.[51] Zuma's presidency was also marked by a significant rise in state corruption and subjugation, with Zuma himself accruing corruption charges and evading political consequences or prosecution for years.[52] Beginning in 2013, the "decorum-busting" of the new and youthful Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party in parliament, "signalled an end to the politics of hope and patience".[53]

Indeed, public opinion about the government, patience for its betterment of society, and particularly its service provision, plummeted significantly, with annual service delivery protests doubling between 2009 and 2018.[54] For example, since 2007, South Africa has been embroiled in an energy crisis, with its population experiencing frequent and widespread electricity blackouts due to supply falling behind demand.[55] Moreover, the mid-2010s witnessed the student protests of the born-free generation, with #RhodesMustFall calling for the decolonisation of higher education and #FeesMustFall calling attention to unaffordable rises in university fees. Frustration and anger abound; Mbeki's "Age of Hope" had devolved into an "Age of Despair".

These mounting social frustrations and resulting pressures placed upon the state invariably impacted how GBV was confronted in South African society. The Anene Booysen case, which gained sensational media attention and government responses at the highest level in 2013, is one of the clearest examples of how narratives of GBV "shifted" in relation to the degradation of social attitudes and the "Age of Hope". On 2 February 2013, in the small Western Cape town of Bredasdorp, a security guard on a construction site came across the body of a severely injured girl surrounded by blood. She was partially disembowelled because of brutal injuries to her vagina. While she

51 "Marikana massacre no different to Sharpeville massacre", *News24*, 16 August 2016, <https://www.news24.com/news24/marikana-massacre-no-different-to-sharpeville-massacre-amcu-20170816>, accessed 8 March 2024.

52 DN Mlambo, "Governance and service delivery in the public sector: The case of South Africa under Jacob Zuma (2009-2018)", *African Renaissance* 16 (3), 2019, p. 215.

53 SR Pillay, "Silence is violence: (Critical) psychology in an era of Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall", *South African Journal of Psychology* 46 (2), 2016, p. 156.

54 Mlambo, "Governance and service delivery in the public sector", p. 215.

55 "How the ANC government broke Eskom - 2008 vs 2018", *My Broadband*, 5 December 2018, <https://mybroadband.co.za/news/energy/288412-how-the-anc-government-broke-eskom-2008-versus-2018.html>, accessed 8 March 2024.

was still alive when the ambulance arrived, she managed to name one of her perpetrators and indicate that multiple individuals had been involved before ultimately succumbing to her injuries at the hospital. Only one man, Johannes Kana, was convicted in November 2013.

The case served as a focal point for public outrage, effectively shaping the national conversation and illuminating the deep-seated issues that continue to haunt post-apartheid South Africa. This phenomenon is intrinsically linked to the national self-narrative developed during the transition and the "Age of Hope". It enabled declarations of that which "should not belong" in post-apartheid South Africa, with the bitterness of the period indicative not of frustrations with the stagnation of society since apartheid, but that the promised South African dream is incongruent with the present situation. Anger and outrage signalled an incapability to deny not only the continued presence of GBV but other persistent socio-economic problems. The government's response to Booysen's case is particularly interesting because, in many ways, it reflects how the national self-narrative of post-apartheid South Africa was still partially maintained despite shifts in social attitudes. Shortly following the news of the crime, President Zuma firmly declared the "outrage" of the nation,

> The whole nation is outraged at this extreme violation and destruction of a young human life. This act is shocking, cruel, and most inhumane. It has no place in our country. We must never allow ourselves to get used to these acts of base criminality to our women and children.[56]

This statement is fundamentally declarative in the sense that it does not acknowledge the causes or wider prevalence of violence in South Africa. Instead, Zuma emphasised that we must not tolerate or "get used to" crimes such as these. By employing the national spotlight to vehemently denounce the violent assault on Booysen, Zuma achieves a dual purpose: he distances himself from prior rape allegations while subtly defining what constitutes intolerable violence. This framing, unfortunately, allows for the perpetuation of everyday occurrences of gender-based violence, which are not labelled as intolerable and thus remain part of the societal norm. In his State of the Nation address later that month, Zuma stated further,

> The brutal gang rape and murder of Anene Booysen and other women and girls in recent times has brought into sharp focus the need for unity in action to eradicate this scourge. [57]

56 "Zuma shocked at Western Cape gang rape", *News24*, 7 February 2013, <https://www.news24.com/News24/zuma-shocked-at-western-cape-gang-rape-20130207>, accessed 8 March 2024.

57 "President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation address, 14 February 2013", Video, 14 February 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilPm_iYUiVI>, accessed 8 March 2024.

Although he called for "unity in action" as a response to violence, he nevertheless conveyed GBV – as embodied by Booysen's rape and murder – as a "recent" phenomenon without acknowledging its widespread prevalence in post-apartheid society. Perpetrators are also absent from this statement, subsumed beneath a narrative of necessary collective outrage. Furthermore, GBV is attributed to "scourges" and "criminals", comfortably positioned outside of the simultaneously conveyed "unity" of the nation, no doubt an extension upon the dominant discourses of the "new South Africa". Notwithstanding the irony of Zuma making statements about the "scourge" of GBV, we see an attempt to consolidate the intolerable presence of GBV within South Africa's national consciousness at a presidential level. This notion of intolerability is, in many regards, just another way of consolidating GBV within the national self-narrative of post-apartheid South Africa. Unlike Kuzwayo's case, where GBV was purposefully denied, in this case, it was wholly undeniable, and so contextualising it in democratic South Africa leads to a firm declaration that it is highly intolerable within this particular self-perception. This notion of intolerability is essential in understanding how GBV haunts: declarative outrage indicates intolerance of the all-too-depressing ever-presence of GBV, that although it is an "old story of the past… we are in this story, even now, even if we do not want to be".[58] To be made aware of that which should not belong in the present evokes haunting, and it is this haunting that evokes the declaration of its intolerability and incompatibility within the discourses that underly South Africa's national self-narrative.[59]

Evidence of this is also found in how Bredasdorp was scapegoated as having a greater tolerance of violent crime than the rest of South Africa, with outrage directed locally as opposed to nationally. *The City Press* claimed that "such horrific violence is commonplace in [Bredasdorp]" and that Anene's rape and murder was not "the first" for the town.[60] *News24* emphasised that "sex crimes in Bredasdorp, where a teenage girl was gang-raped and mutilated, have drastically increased over a two-year period".[61] These examples indicate that the violence inflicted upon Anene Booysen was frequently abstracted as an "outbreak" isolated to a "problem" town, despite its widespread prevalence in South Africa. This relates strongly to the "intolerability" of GBV, as it allows for one's identity to be comfortably positioned "outside" of the intolerable structures that are perceived to enable GBV in post-apartheid South Africa. The example also highlights the intersectional nature of GBV, as it shows

58 Gordon, *Ghostly matters*, p. 190.
59 Gordon, *Ghostly matters*, p. 190.
60 "Anene's gang rape not Bredasdorp's first", *The City Press*, 10 February 2013, <https://www.news24.com/news24/Archives/City-Press/Anenes-gang-rape-not-Bredasdorps-first-20150429>, accessed 8 March 2024.
61 "Alarming rise in Bredasdorp sex crimes", *News24*, 7 February 2013, <https://www.news24.com/news24/alarming-rise-in-bredasdorp-sex-crimes-20130207>, accessed 8 March 2024.

how class and gender are discursively intertwined in the narrative that constructs Bredasdorp as an exceptional case. By portraying Bredasdorp as a "backward" place where such violence is commonplace, the media and public discourse effectively relegate the issue of GBV to the margins of South African society. Not only does this narrative neglect the systematic presence of GBV, but the scapegoating of Bredasdorp also perpetuates another layer of violence upon a community that is already socially and economically disadvantaged. Blaming a poor and marginalised town for the prevalence of GBV further entrenches the social conditions that make such violence possible in the first place. It creates a cycle where poverty and marginalisation become justifications for violence rather than conditions that need to be addressed for violence to be eradicated.

The narrative generated is that GBV only happens to people of certain classes who live in certain places with certain lifestyles. This othering is indicative of a different kind of declarative outrage than that portrayed by Zuma, in this case indicating a *cause* that comfortably supports the dominant national self-narrative while still acknowledging the discomfort of GBV. The classist undertones of these repudiations are undeniable and no doubt signal the remnants of a deeply unequal society that defines its people by their socio-ethnic background. In this, a contradiction can be observed: acknowledgement of the presence of GBV is matched by attempts to consolidate its "unbelonging" in society; it is not *here* in South Africa but *there* in Bredasdorp.

This trend towards declarative outrage, in this case, is essentially related to the social attitudes of the period. As mentioned, the "Age of Hope" was marked by the denialism of GBV, whereas in the 2010s, we see an acknowledgement that GBV is still a problem. However, GBV contradicts the vision of a democratic South Africa that was promised during the transition. This disconnect fuels public frustration, as the real social change that was pledged by the country's national self-narrative has not materialised. That being said, the Anene Booysen case would also bring to the fore a growing cynicism and breaking down of this self-narrative, particularly through the debates in solution-seeking that arose as a result.

4. CHANGING TIDES AND LOST FUTURES: GROWING FRUSTRATIONS, SOLUTION-SEEKING, AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Although there were indeed attempts to position and abstract Anene Booysen's death within the dominant discourses of the "new South Africa" through declarative outrage, the "Age of Despair" also brought forth cynicism, dejection, and a cold acceptance that South Africa is *not going to change*. The "loss" of the "new South Africa" is a different kind of haunting, with GBV not only signalling a continuation of the violence of the past but also a reminder that its promised future never came to be. Booysen's case revealed some of these perspectives, particularly through solution-seeking that placed emphasis on what victims can do to protect themselves, as opposed to reforming the social structures that enable the continued prevalence of GBV. Take, for example, two opinion columns written by journalist Ferial Haffajee at the time of Booysen's case. Haffajee quite rightfully observed the lack of impact made by the usual dialogues of declarative outrage,

> None of the dozens of solemn editorials I've written over decades declaring patriarchy a bitch and insisting "Stop rape" or "Never Again" have made an iota of difference. It doesn't stop; it happens again and again. We need a new narrative, new ideas.[62]

However, she also emphasised that solutions lie within a) the victim's upbringing and b) in her protecting and safeguarding herself against danger. In terms of the former, Haffajee stated the following,

> Her life was hard. Orphaned, she quit school early to help out at the impoverished foster home she was taken into. That home looks threadbare, with its trust in Jesus as saviour the only marks of decoration: a cross, icons of Christ. I guess when life is so buggered up, you have to put your hope in the afterlife. Would Anene's destiny have been different with the firm guiding hands of loving, doting, focused parents?[63]

She noted quite pointedly that although women should "be able to walk home from sports clubs at any time of the night" in post-apartheid South Africa, they cannot. Further, she highlighted that blaming the legacies of the past that facilitated this state of affairs – the patriarchy, apartheid, colonialism, or misogyny - has never provided adequate solutions. Instead, she suggested

62 "#WTF was she thinking?", *News24*, 11 February 2013, <https://www.news24.com/news24/columnists/ferial-haffajee/WTF-was-she-thinking-20130211>, accessed 8 March 2024.

63 "Words fail us", *News24*, 10 February 2013, <https://www.news24.com/news24/editors-note-words-fail-us-20150429>, accessed 8 March 2024.

that women and girls have the agency to safeguard themselves against a violent world, supported by their behaviour, their upbringing, or even their world perspective. She called into question the notion of "victim blaming" and instead chose to frame it as "solution thinking", as the inevitable next step in a society for which "nirvana is a while away".[64] What was suggested here is that in the absence of solutions that deconstruct or confront the patriarchy in an effective way – solutions that were never generated by the discourses of the post-apartheid state - the only "solution" is to turn to potential victims and warn them, instil fear, or give them "tools" to protect themselves.

On the surface, this cynicism was undoubtedly related to the general disillusionment regarding the South African government's failures. However, it is the sentiment of a yet-to-reach "nirvana", utopia, or "perfect world" that is the most telling metaphor used. This indicates a sense of pessimism at the vision of democracy produced by South Africa's national self-narrative that never came to be. There is a certain realisation that this incorporeal, regenerative "nirvana" makes its home as something otherworldly and unobtainable within the present moment. Embedded within this is a sense of loss of a "path not taken".[65] This has led to a cynical mood that *nothing will change* so long as the promised future is out of reach. The hopeful futurism of South Africa's post-transitional self-narrative is directly responsible for these expectations, and the prevailing negative social attitudes of the 2010s were no doubt influenced by the unfulfillment of promises, as idealistic or unrealistic as they may have been in the first place. In this way, South Africa is not only haunted by its traumatic past but by a future that never was, with the ever-presence of gendered violence not only acting as a legacy of the past but also a signal of this lost future. GBV gives notice to this for what it represents: something that continually reminds us of and disrupts South Africa's unfulfilled democracy. In this case, there is nevertheless a sense of clinging to the hope that although nirvana may be "a while away", it may still come in the end.

This brings up a new question: what are the limits of hope, and how has South African identity been reshaped by feelings that "enough is enough?". In recent media reflections, South Africa has been described as locked in a "crisis in faith", with many of its citizens today feeling as if there is "no hope" for their country, with poor governance continuing into the post-Zuma era.[66] President Cyril Ramaphosa came into power in 2018, and early on in his presidency, he appeared to problematise GBV as a significant challenge to

64 *News24*, 11 February 2013.

65 Gordon, *Ghostly matters*, p. 64.

66 "A crisis of faith in South Africa: 'People have given up on the state'", *The Guardian*, 4 January 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/04/a-crisis-of-faith-in-south-africa-people-have-given-up-on-the-state>, accessed 8 March 2024.

South Africa's democracy. His approach has, in many ways, differed greatly from that of his predecessor. Although he faces an immensely "complex challenge" due to the need to "balance state and party interests", he has approached his governance by "maintaining order" while attempting to avoid "factional volatility" within the ANC.[67] This is not to say that there have not been frustrations with Ramaphosa, as some believe that he is still complacent with known corrupt individuals remaining in positions of power within the ANC.[68]

Ramaphosa is a constitutionalist who "pursues a vision of a capable South Africa as depicted in the country's aspirational constitution".[69] It is a familiar sentiment that falls in line with the discourses of South Africa's transition – with Ramaphosa himself as one of the architects of the constitution. However, his emphasis on human rights marks a shift from not only the unrealistic idealism of Mbeki's Age of Hope but also Zuma's state subjugation. During his first State of the Nation address in 2018, he emphasised a sense of civic responsibility "to adopt and exhibit Constitutional values".[70] He also indicated in 2019 that the decade under Zuma's rule was a "lost decade" for South Africa economically, a term borrowed from Japan's infamous "lost decade" of economic stagnation during the 1990s.[71] This indicates a perception that the ideals of the constitution have not been adopted or maintained in South Africa, and many of his early actions as president have emphasised an active drive towards changing this.[72]

His approach to GBV, in particular, is novel for the South African government. Unlike his predecessors, Ramaphosa has appeared to take some steps towards confronting GBV. In November 2018, South Africa's first Presidential Summit Against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide took place.[73] In April 2019, an Interim Steering Committee produced the *Gender-based Violence and Femicide National Strategic Plan* (GBVF-NSP) in order

67 Kotze, "Cyril Ramaphosa's strategic presidency", p. 24.

68 "SONA Debate response: Ramaphosa ignores corruption elephants in the room", *News24*, 19 February 2021, <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/sona-debate-response-ramaphosa-ignores-corruption-elephants-in-the-room-20210219>, accessed 8 March 2024.

69 Kotze, "Cyril Ramaphosa's strategic presidency", p. 25.

70 Kotze, "Cyril Ramaphosa's strategic presidency", p. 27.

71 "South Africa's lost decade: Politics or reality?", *City Press*, 31 January 2019, <https://www.news24.com/citypress/voices/south-africas-lost-decade-politics-or-reality-20190131>, accessed 8 March 2024.

72 Kotze, "Cyril Ramaphosa's strategic presidency", p. 27.

73 South African Government, "Declaration of the presidential summit against gender-based violence and femicide", 2 November 2018, <https://www.gov.za/speeches/declaration-presidential-summit-against-gender-based-violence-and-femicide-2-nov-2018-0000>, accessed 8 March 2024.

to implement the outcomes of the 2018 summit.[74] This plan was actively rolled out on the 30th of April 2020, with its official year 1 report indicating that although there were some achievements, including the "prioritisation of GBVF" on a national level that allowed for "multisectoral" responses, "only a few government departments have successfully embedded the NSP on GBVF within their operations", pointing to a "lack of the sense of urgency with the government in general".[75] Thus, the state-sponsored response to GBV has been rather contradictory. On the one hand, there seems to be an active acknowledgement of and attempt to counter GBV, on the other, there is a lack of urgency.

5. A "WATERSHED MOMENT": THE UYINENE MRWETYANA CASE

Arguably, it is "too little too late", especially from the perspective of the South African public with a national identity fractured by prolonged social unrest. The dramatic events of September 2019, which saw a slew of protests against the continued prevalence of GBV, are a testament to this. The dominoes had fallen in response to the rape and murder of 19-year-old University of Cape Town (UCT) student Uyinene Mrwetyana in a post office in the suburb of Claremont, Cape Town. On the 24th of August 2019, Luyanda Botha lured Mrwetyana to the post office after closing time by indicating that her package was not ready for collection when she had attempted to collect it earlier in the day. When she returned, she was raped and bludgeoned to death. There was something visceral about the ordinary, everyday location of her murder: a post office, a place that many women would not regard as inherently dangerous. As ENCA news anchor Michelle Craig described shortly after the first appearance of Botha in court,

> Uyinene Mrwetyana. Her name became a hashtag that was trending on Twitter around the world, and before long it morphed into the hashtag #AmINext, and then #EnoughIsEnough. Soon after her alleged murderer's appearance in court and the confirmation that the body found in Khayelitsha was indeed hers, it was as if each of us had suffered a personal loss. And I realise that selfishly, part of this collective heartache as a country is ***fear*** – because, it could have been me, it could have been

74 SAMRC, "National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence & Femicide", *South African Medical Research Council*, 11 May 2020, <https://www.samrc.ac.za/reports/national-strategic-plan-gender-based-violence-femicide>, accessed 8 March 2024.

75 Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, "Overview of National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide roll-out".

> you; my daughter, or your daughter; my sister, or your sister; my mother, or your mother. Because where are women safe in South Africa? In hospital? At a police station? At school or university? At work perhaps? At home, in the arms of her intimate partner? Or at the post office?[76]

The murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana sparked a different kind of reaction than the murder of Anene Booysen six years prior. In Anene's case, there was a sense that her murder was an isolated incident in the "problem" town of Bredasdorp or that her victim profile made her a target. In contrast, Uyinene was attacked during the day in a public service establishment in middle-class suburban Cape Town. This has led to a feeling among many that "it could have been me" and that this kind of thing could happen to any woman. Moreover, the attack took place during South Africa's "Women's Month", celebrated annually in August. The ninth of August is celebrated as "Women's Day" in commemoration of the 1956 Women's March that saw 20 000 women march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest pass laws.[77] Much like other national identity campaigns, Women's Month is loaded with affective marketing that supports South Africa's national self-narrative. In 2019, the theme was "Generation Equality – Realising Women's Rights for an Equal Future", with a campaign that sought to "get a diversity of voices to express their vision of an equal society, and one that does not discriminate on the basis of gender", to bring to light "inspirational women who are making a difference every day in their communities" and in a typical idealistic, future-looking fashion, to achieve "gender equality by 2030".[78] Much of the outrage generated by Uyinene's case was temporally contextualised in relation to its occurrence during Women's Month,

> The end of Women's month is marked by multiple tragedies involving gender-based violence. We are not safe. South African women are all wondering: Am I next?[79]

76 "State of emergency on femicide", Video, 3 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcTI0x--x7I>, accessed 8 March 2024.

77 South African History Archive, "You strike the women, you strike the rock!", 2013, <https://www.saha.org.za/women/national_womens_day.html>, accessed 8 March 2024.

78 Statistics South Africa, "Realizing women's rights for an equal future on women's day", 9 August 2021, <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=14559>, accessed 8 March 2024; "Presidency kick-starts Women's Month with gender equality campaign", *The South African*, 1 August 2019, <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/minister-establishes-womens-month-2019/>, accessed 8 March 2024.

79 "Take note of these practical tips to stay safe as a woman in South Africa", *Cosmopolitan*, 4 September 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190909044921/ https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/politics/practical-tips-stay-safe-women-south-africa/>, accessed 8 March 2024.

> The fact that her disappearance happened during the Women's Month of August, when the country commemorates the anti-apartheid march to the Union Building by more than 20 000 women, added salt to the wound.[80]

This subversion of a quintessential commemorative holiday in post-apartheid society effectively called attention to the harmful effects of the dominant post-apartheid discourses that tend to establish violence as inherently incompatible with post-apartheid society and the haunting of South Africa's lost, unattainable future.

There is a recognition that although the threats that women face may have changed in shape since 1956, women still find themselves threatened within post-apartheid society and that the promises of the national self-narrative embodied by Women's Month have not, and seemingly cannot, come to fruition. This casts a shadow over the optimistic post-apartheid discourses that promised a brighter, safer future for all. Despite the absence of legal racial and class restrictions on their movement in post-apartheid South Africa, women are now restricted by the threat of GBV. Such a situation prompts a re-evaluation of the national self-narrative, particularly as it is idealised during Women's Month, making us question how much of that promise has been fulfilled for the nation's women. The observance of Women's Month, therefore, serves as an unsettling temporal marker, reminding society that despite the passage of time, women in South Africa are *still* not safe. Most significantly, these sentiments demonstrate the deliberate and explicit rejection of dominant identity discourses, especially patriarchal identity narratives curtailing the role of women, as emphasised by the campaigns of Women's Month. It is also an indignant rejection of South Africa's idealistic futurism, reflecting the prevailing tragedy of hopelessness of the period. Once again, GBV is a representation of this tragedy, with such a subversion of the tropes of the South African self-narrative giving notice to this. Interestingly, this subversion was also matched in President Ramaphosa's responses to the tragedy and its resulting protests. On 3 September 2019, he addressed the nation, stating:

> This is a very dark period for us as a country. The assaults, rapes, and murders of South African women are a stain on our national conscience. We have just commemorated Women's Month. Sixty-three years after the women of 1956 marched for the right to live in freedom, women in this country live in fear - not of the apartheid police but of their brothers, sons, fathers, and uncles. We should all hang our heads in shame.[81]

80 "Uyinene Mrwetyana's death shows South Africa's femicide crisis", *Global Citizen*, September 2, 2019, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/uyinene-mrwetyana-gender-violence-south-africa/>, accessed 8 March 2024.

81 South African Government, "President Cyril Ramaphosa welcomes arrest of Uyinene Mrwetyana and Leighandre Jegels' murderers", 3 September 2019, <https://www.gov.za/

It's crucial to recognise that such declarations often gain prominence only during nationally observed periods like Women's Month or following high-profile cases of GBV. This sporadic attention inadvertently diverts focus from the constant, everyday risk that women in South Africa face, framing it as a temporal crisis rather than a persistent issue.

In contrast to the previous two case studies, we see in this statement not denialism or a declaration of intolerability in post-apartheid society but an acknowledgement that post-apartheid South Africa is presently within a "dark period." Ramaphosa used affective language to emphasise that GBV is a "stain" on South Africa's "national conscience", indicating a recognition that discourses of post-apartheid national identity are directly impacted by the continuous and prolonged trauma of gender injustice. Unlike the outright rejection observed in public and the media responses, Ramaphosa still emphasised the importance of South African national identity. That said, by drawing on the juxtaposition between the commemoration of the 1956 women's march and the present-day severity of GBV, he revealed the paradox of haunting embedded within South African national consciousness - that the ideals of South African national identity are wholly incompatible with the state of affairs in the present moment. Furthermore, in a statement directed towards Mrwetyana's family made on 6 September 2019, Ramaphosa stated that South Africa had reached a "watershed moment",

> The death of your daughter and a number of other women who have been killed quite brutally across our nation, especially here in the Eastern Cape, is something that has gotten us to look at gender-based violence in a way that we must say we've reached a watershed moment.[82]

The contextualisation and juxtaposition of this temporal positioning - a "watershed moment" and "dark period" – within the sociohistorical significance of the Women's Month indicates an explicit engagement with the uncomfortable, haunted presence of GBV and the impact that this haunting has on national identity. The 2019 response to the crimes committed against Mrwetyana and other women indicates not only a disruption of South Africa's national self-narrative - as was also evident in the cases of Kuzwayo and Booysen - but also an explicit acknowledgement that this framework is paradoxical and cannot fully represent the experiences of women in South African society today. Such sentiments are perhaps unsurprising, as

speeches/president-ramaphosa-welcomes-arrest-uyinene-mrwetyana-and-leighandre-jegels%E2%80%99-murderers-3>, accessed 8 March 2024.

82 "Ramaphosa describes Mrwetyana's Death as a watershed moment", *Eyewitness News*, 6 September 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220424191745/ https://ewn.co.za/2019/09/06/ramaphosa-describes-mrwetyana-s-death-as-a-watershed-moment>, accessed 8 March 2024.

Ramaphosa has noted that South Africa has not achieved the ideals outlined in its constitution.

These deconstructions and subversions of major national identity discourses were also narrativised impactfully through protest action over the course of the month of September 2019. The ideal "rainbow nation" was frequently deconstructed by protestors, with signs at various protests in South Africa and abroad including references to the metaphor. Notable examples include, "We're a country with no rainbow, only rain and that rain is red and warm and bruised between her thighs",[83] and, "Our rainbow nation is bleeding women's blood".[84] Other identity deconstructions were also brought to the fore in relation to Heritage Day, which is celebrated annually on 24 September. Heritage Day is a holiday intended to highlight and celebrate the "cultural wealth" of South Africa, in line with the ideas of rainbowism and cultural diversity emphasised by South Africa's national self-narrative. Signs displayed during the visit of members of the British Royal Family to Cape Town on Heritage Day in 2019 read, "Heritage Day […] Instead of celebrating my culture I'm fighting rape culture".[85]

These examples include a linguistic deconstruction of the word "rainbow" into "rain", stripping away the positive connotations associated with rainbows. There is also a held belief that rainbows follow rainfall, and thus, this deconstruction also holds a temporal meaning, highlighting the present-day perception that South Africa's promised future is unattainable. The rainbow nation is further personified as a bleeding entity, implying injury or slow death. We also see a similar use of juxtaposition in the deconstruction of Heritage Day, where the positive connotations of "culture" are reshaped into the negative connotations of "rape culture". Fundamentally, these representations not only indicate frustrations and feelings of hopelessness but also demonstrate how national self-narratives have been utterly subverted in recent times, often to demonstrate how these narratives have been harmful in erasing or ignoring continuing issues in South Africa today and have served as distractions to important social issues such as GBV.

83 "In Pictures: Women protest against gender-based violence", *New Frame*, 6 September 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230328015335/https://www.newframe.com/in-pictures-women-protest-against-gender-based-violence/>, accessed 8 March 2024.

84 "Uyinene Mrwetyana: 5 fast facts you need to know", *Heavy*, 5 September 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20211020075912/https://heavy.com/news/2019/09/uyinene-mrwetyana/>, accessed 8 March 2024.

85 @vauldicarelse, "Young people, who turned out to welcome the Duke and Duchess of Sussex to Bo Kaap", Tweet, *Twitter* (X), 24 September 2019, <https://twitter.com/vauldicarelse/status/1176473387096530945>, accessed 8 March 2024.

Perhaps the current tragedy of South Africa's "lost future" lies in the realisation that it is indeed lost. The ongoing prevalence of gender-based violence serves as haunting proof of this loss, highlighting the unattainability of the ideals that form the foundation of South Africa's national narrative. This was no better encapsulated than in the emotional response of protestors when President Ramaphosa appeared outside Parliament on the 5 September 2019 to directly address and reassure them that this time, the government would act.[86] As he states that he will be travelling to the Eastern Cape to visit Mrwetyana's family, cries in the crowd of "it's too late, it's too late!" can be heard.[87] He responds by stating, "that is fine, but it is important that we continue as a nation to show our solidarity".[88] Someone in the crowd exclaims, "then show solidarity". He continues, stating that it is important, "to show our care and compassion".[89] Again, we hear someone quite pointedly respond with, "do you even have any [compassion]?".[90] All these responses indicate overwhelming moods of anger and hopelessness directed at a state that has taken far too long to respond in any meaningful way.

What these sentiments reflect is, in part, the cynical belief that people and the government would soon forget, would soon move on with their lives as they so often did, and that GBV cases in the future would not receive the same attention. On that matter, it is difficult to reach a definitive answer. The Uyinene Mrwetyana Foundation (UMF) continues its work in awareness campaigns, consent talks, and dignity drives to this day. The smaller, community-led organisation, "Keep the Energy", continues to share the stories of women who have become the victims of GBV on social media, with the campaign amassing over 100 000 followers on Instagram as of September 2023. As already highlighted, the government's GBVF-NSP did roll out in 2020, to varying degrees of success and failure.[91] Further, President Ramaphosa signed three Bills on GBV into law on 28 January 2022, focusing on implementing a compulsory national sex-offenders register, generating ease of access for victims in applying for protection orders online instead of at court, as well as expanding the definition of domestic violence to, "include victims of assault in those engaged to be married, those who are dating, those in customary relationships, and those in actual or perceived

86 "President Ramaphosa addresses protestors outside parliament", Video, 3 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzotx4Qsq4c&t=184s>, accessed 8 March 2024.
87 "President Ramaphosa addresses protestors outside parliament", Video, 3 September 2019.
88 "President Ramaphosa addresses protestors outside parliament", Video, 3 September 2019.
89 "President Ramaphosa addresses protestors outside parliament", Video, 3 September 2019.
90 "President Ramaphosa addresses protestors outside parliament", Video, 3 September 2019.
91 Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, "Overview of National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide roll-out".

romantic, intimate, or sexual relationships of any duration".[92] These changes in legislation were supposedly directly influenced by the, "public outcry for the government to take GBV cases seriously, particularly after the rape and murder of UCT student, Uyinene Mrwetyana in August 2019".[93] It is still too early to tell what kind of long-term impact the events of September 2019 will have on the lives of South African women. This is something that deserves more academic attention in the future.

6. CONCLUSION

South Africa's post-transitional era has been deeply impacted by a national self-narrative that had its grounds in the hopeful discourses generated during the transition. This narrative played a significant role in the creation of post-apartheid national identities, birthing an "Age of Hope" that actively sought to deny intolerable structures and remnants of the past in society. These optimistic visions were often framed in terms of transgressing racial divisions, neglecting gender issues and perpetuating historical prejudices that painted black men as sexually deviant – factors that contributed to the side-lining of gender-based violence in this new era.

The discourses surrounding the Zuma rape trial revealed quite starkly a deeply embedded paradox within the national discourses of post-apartheid South Africa, i.e., that violence against women was so incompatible with the hopeful visions of the new nation that it was denied despite its hypervisibility in society. As the 2010s unfolded, social attitudes shifted from denial to outrage and from passive acceptance to active rejection of gender-based violence. The case of Anene Booysen demonstrated the abstraction of GBV as something determined by communities rather than systems, an identification that enabled South Africans to be comfortably positioned outside of this intolerable structure in the maintenance of the last semblance of the dominant national self-narrative.

Simultaneously, such intolerability was equally matched by a sense of losing a South African future that never was, with GBV, as intolerable as it might be, a signal of this. Consequently, solutions proposed in the wake of Booysen's case turned inward, rather than upward, towards victims themselves rather than greater societal structures. Victim-blaming turned into solution-seeking, for in the lack of any social change, girls needed to learn to

92 "South Africa just adopted new laws on gender-based violence. Here's what to know", *Global Citizen*, 1 February 2022, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/south-africa-adopts-three-new-gbv-laws/>, accessed 8 March 2024.

93 *Global Citizen*, 1 February 2022.

protect themselves from the unavoidable presence of violence, despite how intolerable it may have felt. It was thus, paradoxically, tolerated - for although we may dream of it, GBV is the haunting proof that South Africa's nirvana remains out of reach.

The case of Uyinene Mrwetyana revealed that such tolerance has its limitations and that eventually the national self-narrative that maintained South Africa's façade of equality for two decades was fractured because of its own failure to encapsulate post-apartheid reality. The widespread social - and consequently government - response of September 2019 pointed to an explicit subversion of South Africa's contradictory self-narrative.

Fundamentally, all these developments in South Africa's engagement with GBV reveal an arguably harmful legacy left behind by the reconciliatory discourses of the transition, generating a fundamental social paradox. In striving for perfection, for the ideal, for the new nation, South Africa's national framework confounded GBV as something both intolerable and ignored, highly visible and simultaneously invisible, and most damagingly, something left unchecked to fester for three decades, irreparably damaging national identity and contributing to a growing sense of hopelessness.