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Working with religious leaders and faith communities to advance culturally informed strategies to address violence against women

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abstract

South Africa (SA), a country with a long history of colonialism and apartheid is faced with the enormous problem of gender-based violence against women in intimate relationships and public spaces because of the intricacies of white supremacy and patriarchy. Research indicates that South African women live in one of the most religious – yet most violent - societies in the world. Around 90% of its population ascribe to religious practice. Studies indicate that one in four women find themselves in abusive relationships. Research also points out that while many victims/ survivors use faith as a coping mechanism and that they often approach their religious leaders and faith communities for help, perpetrators use easily misinterpreted scriptures, religious teachings and cultural practices to support abusive behaviour. Feminist theologians and practitioners note that although the rights discourse is an essential democratic value (in a post-apartheid South Africa), it is not in itself an effective intervention strategy in contexts where religion (embedded in culture) is a social determinant of hierarchical gender power-relations. Skewed gender-power relations are justified by suggesting that hierarchical gender power-relations are ‘ordered’ by God. The idea that gender equality is incompatible with traditional family values is also promoted within some conservative faith communities. The South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI), a multi-faith non-profit organisation was established in 2008 to address the faith dimensions of violence against women (VAW) and to be a resource to religious leaders and faith communities in advancing culturally informed strategies and interventions that promote equal and more loving relationships between intimate partners. This article will reflect on SAFFI’s work in the hope that it contributes to the broader pool of new thinking and debate on women’s rights and gender equality as it relates to local faith communities in the Western Cape, South Africa.

keywords

gender-based violence against women, hierarchical gender power-relations, victims/ survivors, perpetrators, South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI)

Speaking in his capacity as Convener and Chairperson of the Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum at the launch of the South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI) in 2010, Anglican priest, Reverend John

Oliver acknowledged that:

“Religious communities and particularly those from the Abrahamic faiths, have a lot of work to do when it comes to

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women. We have been reminded once again today of the ancient and abiding ambivalence in monotheism towards everything feminine, an obsession with sexual transgression and misogyny in our churches and communities that has never ceased to denigrate, demean and disempower women. That tradition and theology have been constructed in such a way as to perpetuate a culture of male superiority and male privilege is a corporate failure to which we as religious leaders must strive to make amends.”

The context, multi-layered nature and extent of gender-based violence against women

The interconnectedness of gender-based violence (GBV) and oppression of women with colonial rule (in relation to religion) and cultural practices must be considered to more fully understand the complex dynamics involved in finding lasting solutions for this human tragedy in Africa; and more specifically in South Africa. South African women live in one of the most religious societies, with at least 90% of the population subscribing to religious practice (WIN/Gallup international, 2015), yet most violent societies in the world. Research estimates are that one in four women finds herself in an abusive relationship (Jewkes and Abrahams, 2002) and that every six hours a woman is killed by her intimate partner (Mathews *et al.* 2004).

Whilst feminism has recognised patriarchy as a central source of oppression and violation of women, Nompumelelo Motlafi (‘Why black women in South Africa don’t fully embrace the feminist discourse, *Mail and Guardian*, 7 August 2015:2), referring to African women on the continent and of the diaspora (in other parts of the globe) argues that the international human rights discourse originated in the context of ethnocentric European endeavours aimed at achieving consensus-based nation building. In this context, she writes that human rights were regarded as entitlements allocated to rational individual human agents – namely white European males. White women were regarded as imperfect humans lacking rationality, and “the basic humanity of all non-Europeans was totally rejected”. Motlafi further posits that:

The earliest protests of black South African women were as much about

women asserting their rights to make a living in the urban areas as they were about fighting to protect the integrity of the black family (Nompumelelo Motlafi, ‘Why black women in South Africa don’t fully embrace the feminist discourse, *Mail and Guardian*, 7 August 2015:2)¹.

The large majority of black and other women of colour in South Africa, continue to live in dire socio-economic deprivation which is deeply rooted in the colonial and apartheid legacies.

In as much as faith is a source of hope and affirmation, it compounds the personal and public human crisis of GBV because for centuries sacred texts and religious teachings have been used to justify the oppression and violation of women and black people. It is also maintained that the domination of, and violence toward women are ingrained in the tradition of family relationships in South Africa (Emmett, 2000).

Feminism recognises patriarchy as a system of oppressive power that through its institutionalisation masquerades as being beneficial to the oppressed. It is a system that has throughout the ages been posited as a God-ordained holy hierarchy – sanctified by certain bible passages (Pillay, 2013:64).

Religion must therefore receive particular attention in any dialogue about the role and impact of domestic violence in the lives of women (Bell and Mattis, 2000).

Whilst the aftermath of the institutionalised colonial and apartheid systems are often acknowledged as contributing factors towards the violent nature of the South African society, funding resources are usually geared to help women leave abusive relationships. Passing reference only is made to the deep complex root causes and exacerbating socio-economic conditions which keep women trapped and perpetrators unaccountable and outside of receiving help (Petersen, 2010). Despite some accomplishments in service provision (including counselling) for victims of intimate partner violence, public education and domestic violence legislation, the problem in South Africa appears to be escalating and deepening in brutality (Padayachee and Petersen, 2010). Shelter advocates for abused women complain

that the fragmented nature of services actually leave abused women at higher risk and more vulnerable to abuse. It is the lack of holistic and integrated approaches to interventions that often results in women who leave shelters returning to their abusive partners, and further ostracisation by hostile families and communities. I therefore concur with Motlafi who writes that in the current dispensation in South Africa, black women's negotiation of their human rights and dignity continues to be a balancing act between personal needs and broader family and community needs (Nompumlelo Motlafi, 'Why black women in South Africa don't fully embrace the feminist discourse', *Mail and Guardian*, 7 August 2015:2).

As a young social worker in Cape Town, South Africa in 1993 – a time of great expectation as South Africa was transitioning to democracy from colonialism and apartheid, I remember my own experience of marginalisation during deliberations on the crafting of what became the Family Violence Prevention Act and later the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998. The agenda being vigorously pursued was about the empowerment and liberation of women, but the voices of black and other women of colour – *especially* those who did not define themselves as feminists pitted against men and religion were treated with disdain. These legislative processes were predominantly led by white feminists who largely insisted on what became known as a one-size-fits-all approach to intimate partner abuse and GBV intervention. The aftermath of this progressive, yet in many ways ineffective legislative tool, is that for a large majority of women for whom leaving is not an option or a choice – access to safety remains out of reach. Also quite unsettling was that soon after liberation in 1994, many of the white feminist activists disappeared from the scene as black women took up leadership positions in the struggle to end GBV. A recognition of the interconnectedness of race, faith, cultural practice and patriarchy was a reality for most abused women; yet it remained a critical gap as far as intervention strategies are concerned.

In response to the #FeesMustFall (in South Africa) and the #BlackLivesMatter (in the United States of America) uprisings, I noted (Elizabeth Petersen, 'Initiatives inspiring the quest to dismantle oppression', *Cape Times*, 26 October 2015:9) that humanity (more especially leaders of institutions) is

called upon to become serious about dismantling what I refer to as 'the Siamese twins of oppression': namely, white supremacy and patriarchy. Black people and women continue to be at the receiving end of oppression; and many are co-opted and lured into sustaining these systems by being offered special privileges and a false sense of supremacy. These systems of white and male privilege continue to use institutions such as intimate relationships, families, religion, schools/ education, business, politics, law/ legislation to perpetuate dehumanising practices.

Theological struggles relating to gender roles within the family continue to be central for victims and survivors

In SAFFI's research, it has been found that countless women of faith who are victims in abusive intimate relationships are yearning for more comprehensive responses to their personal crises. These women, who locate their identity within their religious faith, often face the dilemma of having to leave their faith community if they walk out of an abusive situation. Theological struggles relating to gender roles within the family continue to be central for victims and survivors. In instances where women have decided to leave abusive relationships, they have found that their faith communities have difficulty in supporting them for different reasons. They are worried about the implications of reaching out to secular counsellors as this is frequently discouraged in faith communities. In many cases, interventions from their faith communities have not been helpful, as confirmed in various research studies (Rotunda *et al.* 2004; Bell and Mattis, 2000; Grady, 2000; Walker, 1979). These scholars confirm that most victims are likely to use religious coping strategies and are more likely to seek help from a minister than from any other helping professional. Yet a South African study with Christian clergy confirmed that they are not equipped to deal with issues of intimate partner violence/ abuse. The tendency is to encourage victims to extend themselves further by praying more and becoming more supportive of their male partners who have the God-given responsibility of being head of the home (Petersen, 2006).

Almost 40 years ago, Walker (1979:2) called it a “myth” that religious beliefs would prevent gender-based violence. The majority of women interviewed by Walker (1979) grew up in what she calls “religious” homes and she found that their beliefs and values primarily served to maintain the family unit. While most of the women in her study reported religious beliefs and some felt that their belief in a deity “helped them endure their suffering, offering comfort and solace” (Walker, 1979:2), others abandoned their faith because it created conflict with the abuser or because of being unsuccessful in seeking help from religious or spiritual leaders.

the assignation of disproportionate power within the relationship can lead to the abuse of that power

The construct of masculinity has long been studied in relation to intimate partner violence and religion. Studies often focus on the patriarchal cultural beliefs that create the conditions in which men expect to dominate their partners and control the family’s resources (eg Dobash and Dobash, 1979). Religious beliefs that exemplify this stance include those that place the husband as the head of the household with the primary decisional power and wives as the primary caretakers of children; that limit their vocational or economic prospects, or charge them with submission to their husbands (Nason-Clark, 2004; Fortune, 1983). Feminist theorists (eg Walker, 1979) have cited these teachings as contributing factors to domestic violence, believing that the assignation of disproportionate power within the relationship can lead to the abuse of that power. Many feminist domestic violence professionals (Hunt, 2014; Petersen, 2006) blame religion for aggravating the problem while many faith leaders and religious communities (Hunt, 2014; Petersen, 2006) believe that secular interventions alienate help-seekers from their faith. It can be said that both these critical sectors have been at odds with each other, lacking awareness of the resources that each potentially contributes to bringing hope, healing and transformation to individuals and families affected by the devastation of gender-based intimate partner abuse.

South African Faith and Family Institute’s vision for a restorative justice response

The establishment of SAFFI in 2008 and its official launch in 2010, was informed by the quest for expanding safety options for abused women and accountability for perpetrators through the creation of a coordinated, culturally informed restorative justice response to GBV. Here, religious leaders/ the faith sector would play a pivotal role in collaboration with government and the GBV sectors.

As one of the founders of SAFFI, I brought more than 20 years of experience in working with abused women, seven years of working with male perpetrators of intimate partner abuse and more than 15 years’ local and international research within the GBV field to the organisation. I have also drawn on my own experience as a woman of faith working with faith leaders within the Pentecostal Christian tradition and across different religions. Key staff within SAFFI bring experience within these broad contexts, as well as from various research traditions. Central to SAFFI’s work is the advancement of the common good and the critical contribution that all stakeholders bring to this restorative justice outcome. SAFFI embraced the following five key principles (as offered by Crosby and Bryson, 2005) in its unfolding work towards creating a coordinated response to gender-based violence against women. These are: knowing your authentic self; orienting your moral compass; understanding your motivations; building your support team and; staying grounded by integrating all aspects of your life.

The overall objectives of SAFFI’s approach to domestic/ intimate partner abuse intervention are drawn from international best practice and include: safety of the woman and her children first; accountability for the perpetrator; restoration of individuals; and if possible, restoration of the relationship or mourning the loss of the relationship.²

SAFFI’s vision is to see women, men and children live their full potential in a society free from gender-based violence where faith and justice are honoured. SAFFI’s mission is to advance a coordinated, multi-sectoral, culturally competent restorative

justice response to violence against women and children by:

- Being a resource to religious leaders, institutions and faith communities as they hold offenders accountable and ensure the safety and empowerment of victims/ survivors by offering them an opportunity for truth telling and the healing of individuals and families;
- Challenging, from a theological perspective, patriarchal traditions and other root causes of intimate partner abuse and violence which destroy the dignity of women, children and men; and
- Encouraging the promotion of scriptural and theological teachings that encourage intimate relationships which allow people to live their full potential in supportive unions.³

SAFFI targets religious leaders, faith communities and institutions (government and GBV service providers) who offer services and interventions to abused women, perpetrators and their families. Our programmes seek to deepen their understanding of the faith dimensions and root causes of GBV against women. In each encounter there is the promise of an opportunity for expanding insights on GBV, safety and empowerment services offered to women; as well as accountability and personal restorative justice for abusive men. SAFFI has an inter-faith as well as an intra-faith focus and engages religious leaders and faith communities within the African Traditional Religion, Baha'i, Christian, Hindu, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and the Brahma Kumaris faiths.

SAFFI also facilitates dialogues and 'sacred conversations' between the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community and faith sectors to reflect on challenges and opportunities for collaboration and partnership in the quest to eradicate sexual violence and same-sex discrimination. Rather than focusing on the diverse views and theological complexities pertaining to same-sex intimate relationships, SAFFI advocates for intimate relationships, which set people free to live their full potential in supportive unions, while refraining from offering directives.

We are concerned that the rape and killing of lesbians is often dealt with by LGBTI service providers exclusively. The SAFFI dialogues have expanded the consciousness of violence against lesbians as GBV against women.

Ubuntu and theoretical framework

SAFFI's work is located in a number of theoretical frameworks. For the purpose of this article, attention is drawn to the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* and Family Resilience and Ecology of Human Development theory. The *Ubuntu* philosophy makes a significant contribution to the application of the theory of Family Resilience and Ecology of Human Development. *Ubuntu* correctly proposes that we are truly human only in community with other persons (Lutz, 2009). Gender-based violence has a profound impact on the life of the individual as well as the family as a whole. Through cultivating the spirit of *Ubuntu* we are able to address the complex faith dimensions of GBV in intimate relationships and families. The Family Resilience and Ecology of Human Development theory provides a framework for SAFFI's interventions and informs its vision. Walsh (2012) explains that resilience can generally be defined as the ability to 'bounce back' to healthy functioning when faced with significant stressors and events. This is particularly true for families where GBV is present. The term family resilience is applied within this theory on the basis that the healthy family is a myth: conflict and change are therefore normal issues and expected. Aspects of family resilience that lead to successful adaptation and the ability to deal with a significant stressor or adversity include family cohesion, belief systems, coping strategies and communication. SAFFI also leans more towards Lederach's (2003) notion of conflict transformation that holds that relationships have visible as well as invisible dimensions, and that conflict provides opportunity to stop, reflect and change.

During the transition from a violent colonial apartheid to democracy, it was Archbishop Desmond Tutu who reminded South Africans (and the world) about the ancient African way of life and philosophy of *Ubuntu*. He describes *Ubuntu* as the essence of being human.

It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. *Ubuntu* speaks about wholeness; it speaks about compassion. Persons with *Ubuntu* know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of *Ubuntu* gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them.⁴

The unity that *Ubuntu* advocates is about support for the dignity of human life (Chuwana, 2014). The work of SAFFI is about cultivating *Ubuntu* as we invite religious leaders to dig deep for resources from within their own sacred texts and faith traditions in the quest of bringing lasting healing to victims/ survivors, perpetrators, affected children and families. SAFFI established the Theological Advisory Council on Gender-based Violence (TACGBV) to bring together theologians, scholars and religious leaders from diverse religions and denominations for the purpose of addressing easily misinterpreted scriptures; and for assistance in developing helpful resources which SAFFI incorporates into its training and support services to religious leaders and faith communities.

Navigating through patriarchy and SAFFI's leadership narrative

The complexity of addressing GBV in intimate relationships in the deeply troubled socio-political and socio-economic context of South Africa is enormous. South African activists from different race, class and ideological or theological positions have realised that a key challenge remains negotiating how and when contradictions are confronted. In a multicultural and multi-sectoral collaboration the possibilities are endless in terms of peace-building. Miranda Pillay, the Western Cape Chapter Convener of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, asserts that the historical nature of GBV confirms that:

it is entrenched in culture and religion and reinforced, powered and maintained by patriarchy. Patriarchy is referred to as

male rule, male headship and androcentrism (ie. a male-centred perspective on relationships and lived-reality) and entrenched in the structures of society and the church as well as in the inner consciousness of both women and men. This explains why many women remain in abusive and violent relationships and why some women and men defend patriarchy (Pillay, 2013:55-56).

Whilst some feminists see religion as irredeemably problematic, SAFFI leans towards the hopeful view of feminists who see religion as a:

life-giving and life-sustaining intention and authority of scripture for all creation in terms of God's dynamic, re-creative presence in ever-changing times and circumstances (Mouton 2011 in Pillay, 2013:60).

In its training and dialogues with religious leaders from diverse faiths, SAFFI invites participants to critically reflect on the 'Siamese twins of oppression' in the quest to address the faith dimensions and root causes of GBV against women in intimate relationships and society. SAFFI offers the *Ubuntu* philosophy (which is present in all faiths) as the safety net in confronting the white supremacy and patriarchy that are operative in the systematic and systemic destruction of women, men, children and families. Referring to the challenges faced by clergy in addressing domestic violence, Nason-Clark (2004) confirms that clergy often find themselves in the cross-fire between the ideology of the family that the churches hold dear, and the reality and persistence of male aggression and abuse. With the demand for counselling services on the increase, many pastors feel stretched beyond their limit to provide pastoral counsel to needy individuals and families on the basis of very poor training.

As faith leaders become more and more aware of their sacred responsibility in shaping people's beliefs, they tend to respond in one of two ways. They either feel too overwhelmed by the task at hand and disengage, or they become remorseful and almost immediately implement more informed sermons and pastoral care interventions with afflicted individuals and families in their congregations. Some

SAFFI trained faith leaders are actively involved in community initiatives to end GBV. Another unintended positive outflow of SAFFI's work is the intra-faith and inter-faith collaborations between faith leaders who would otherwise never have mixed. Drawing on an insight expressed by Archbishop Tutu, we furthermore invite religious leaders to consider what faith they might have been born into if they were born in a different community or part of the world; the intention being to affirm within religious leaders their own conflicting beliefs and traditions.

By offering a safe space for such acknowledgement, we hope to start them on a journey of critical reflection about their own theological positions and the implications for those they seek to serve. Following a Pan-African Muslim-Christian clergy week-long conference which was held in Cape Town in 2015 where SAFFI facilitated a workshop, this was a statement presented to us:

Thank you so much for the session we had with you together with other religious leaders from different parts of Africa. As the Kenyan crew we thought the model you use at SAFFI would perfectly add value to the work we do here (in Kenya) and even take it to the next level. We were very happy to know that you work with religious leaders and hold them in high esteem and respect them... we really connected with that (SAFFI Newsletter, Issue 1, July 2015).

Over time we have noticed how some religious leaders open up about their own suffering and shortcomings as they feel able to reach out for support for themselves. One such case was a pastor who came to the office to request professional support - he spoke about helping his congregants but the lack of support as he struggles with deep tensions within his own intimate relationship and family life. SAFFI finds Hands and Fehr's (1993) description of the healing process: uncovering, discovering and recovering very useful. We draw on these scholars' explanation of the healing process as we invite religious leaders who participate in SAFFI's training, to consider the importance of spending more time in the discovering phase - which allows us to delve deeper into understanding the

nature, dimensions and historical context of the 'violence against women wound'. We further acknowledge that most of us find it difficult to look at a wound but we know that if we rush through the discovering phase to recovering, chances are that the wound will fester and become worse. This particular illustration creates an opportunity for both training facilitators and participants to experience the discomfort of delving into the complex dynamics of the root causes of violence against women, namely patriarchy, white supremacy and religion.

As we make reference to the impact that all South Africans continue to suffer because of the unresolved festering 'apartheid wound', the value of lingering in the discovering phase become apparent. As we unpack some similar features of patriarchy and apartheid, religious leaders connect with their own personal experiences in relation to the 'Siamese twins of oppression'. It is from this place then that participants open themselves up for the much needed work of dismantling attitudes and beliefs which undergird these oppressive systems. SAFFI is mindful that the grooming of women and men, and black people and white people, to preserve the 'Siamese twins of oppression' have been happening over centuries; thus our work is not to blame and shame. SAFFI prefers to invite itself and participants into a journey of self-reflection and self-discovery which honours the human dignity of each person. We believe that each person, institution and sector holds part of the solution; and that it is only in the creation of respectful partnerships and collaborations that we will be able to interrupt the vicious cycle of oppression and abuse which impacts our common humanity.

The process described above draws from what Crosby and Bryson (2005:xxiii), call: "the new leadership for the common good which offers a comprehensive approach to leadership as a shared-power phenomenon that embraces many individuals, organizations, and institutions." Personal leadership is the work of understanding oneself and others and using this understanding to achieve beneficial change in a lifelong learning process. Crosby and Bryson assert that soul work helps leaders claim their power as co-creators of the universe and discern the unique gift they can offer the world.

They suggest that leaders who use reflection and retreats during times of transition have the opportunity to tap into their own and others' wisdom (Becker 1973 in Crosby and Bryson, 2005). Guided by these personal leadership principles, SAFFI engages in continuous evaluation and self-reflection as a learning organisation and attempts to adapt its approaches and methods to reach its vision and mission in a more humane and effective way. This way of being presents various challenges and requires that key stake-holders be willing to evolve with SAFFI in the quest to expand the safety options for women and accountability for the perpetrator. In a recent conversation about the evolution of SAFFI, one of the organisation's board members, Dr Amelia Jones, a veteran social worker, asserted that SAFFI is more than just an organisation trying to offer certain skills. She described SAFFI's work as an ideology which is being crafted together with its constituents and stakeholders. As such, she observed that one has to be patient with the process and be willing to learn and grow with the organisation and the people it seeks to serve.

Visionary leadership, is another intentionality that SAFFI brings to its work. According to Crosby and Bryson (2005) visionary leaders help diverse stakeholders develop a sense of what they have in common with each other and what they might do to address common problems and create a better future. In visionary leadership fundamental values and cultural tradition are honored, while previous mistakes and failures are recognised. Because of the complex nature of the social problem that SAFFI is addressing and in the light of the short-comings of current interventions, SAFFI draws from multiple sources in its quest to create a coordinated restorative justice response to domestic violence. Visionary leaders gather ideas from many sources for remedying the public problems that concern them. Such leaders offer a compelling vision of the future (Crosby and Bryson, 2005). In order to address interconnected public problems effectively, public leadership requires individuals to act as catalysts. As such, catalysts convene and join with a diverse group of individuals, forging sustainable agreements, setting into motion multiple strategies, and sustaining momentum over time. In SAFFI's unifying leadership imperative, it invites stakeholders to imagine what

our lives would be like if *Ubuntu* is a reality in our intimate relationships, partnerships (as stakeholders), families, communities and society. The fact that South Africa dismantled apartheid and is actively participating in the creation of democracy which respects the rights and dignity of its peoples is indicative of the enormous capacity inherent in us as a people to transcend patriarchy and cultivate *Ubuntu* in our intimate and public relationships.

Concluding remarks

SAFFI's commitment to come alongside religious leaders and faith communities as key stakeholders in the advancement of culturally informed strategies to address violence against women is located in the belief that they play a pivotal role in both the continuation and the eradication of the problem. The traditional, predominantly propagated, one-size-fits-all approach which essentially insists that women must leave abusive relationships if they want to be safe and sane, does not recognise the diverse needs and requests by women. It also runs the risk of leaning toward a patronising approach to African women's insights and ability to come up with their own solutions and the importance of faith and culture as a resource.

I conclude this article with the following two statements:

Throughout the historical shifts recorded from the nineteenth century onwards, one core belief of feminism is the idea of human equality. Based on the multi-dimensional nature of women's experiences regarding race, class, age, ability, sexuality, etc., the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians calls for recognition of the full humanity of women and men (Pillay, 2013:60).

Given the social and theological challenges presented by gender-based violence, the contributions of women and men with a critical feminist hermeneutic is a relevant resource for the renewal of community and for transformation in the church – lest feminist insights be regarded as yet another irritant to be dismissed as a fad that will fade in due time (Pillay, 2013:67).

Through SAFFI's work leaders and activists from across diverse societal sectors

(especially in the faith sector) and contexts are invited to consider our need for healing from the deep wounds of apartheid and 'the Siamese twins of oppression' – often operative in our leadership narratives and approaches. SAFFI's quest to advance more coordinated culturally informed restorative justice strategies to address violence against women is reliant on a catalytic leadership approach which encompasses personal and visionary aspects of leadership. Many of us involved in this work are women who are deeply connected to our families, faiths and cultures. At our core is the value of listening to and learning from the voices and requests from the women whom we ultimately seek to serve.

Notes

1. Available at: <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-08-07-why-black-women-in-south-africa-dont-fully-emb-race-the-feminist-discourse>, site accessed 29 September 2016.
2. see SAFFI: <http://www.saffi.org.za>.
3. see SAFFI: <http://www.saffi.org.za>.
4. As cited in SAFFI Annual Report (2013/2014).

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