

Find Justice for Women in Small Places
Jennifer Lee, August 2011

When you walk through the doors of the Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust (RCCTT) you feel like you have come home. Situated on a narrow residential street in Observatory, the RCCTT operates out of a vibrantly painted house that seems to embody what the organization provides: warmth, support, choice, life. Clients – survivors of rape and their families and friends – are quietly welcomed into the reception area where shelves of books and delicately worn couches – remnants of a former living room – bring comfort. The home’s other rooms have been converted into administrative offices, boardrooms, and spaces for counseling. Since its inception, the RCCTT in Observatory, along with the other two centers in Manenberg and Khayelitsha, have been a safe haven for women and men affected by sexual violence.

I sit in one of two counseling rooms with Mansura Africa, a RCCTT counselor. I am hoping to collect inspirational stories to write a moving article about women who painstakingly dedicate their free time to make the world, or at least Cape Town, a better place. However, Mansura is going on about how frustrating her work can be. I sink further into the plush armchair and feel my own frustration level rising – she has now moved on to the hopelessness she sometimes feels. Deciding to put niceties aside, I shift upright and ask, “Then why don’t you just quit?” Mansura’s eyes light up and shoot directly to meet mine. “*I can’t.*” “Why can’t you?” A smile breaks across Mansura’s face – she is full of confidence and peace. “Because I believe every human is here for a purpose. My personal purpose is to empower other women. Also, I can’t quit because I care about myself and my family. My children benefit from the environment I create.

Society – we need each other. When we help others we help ourselves.” Mansura’s surety washes over me and I cannot help but smile back.

“Rocking” Volunteerism

What strikes me about Mansura, beyond the incredible work she does with survivors of rape, is that she does it on a voluntary basis. Originally from Tanzania and having spent time in Syria and Iran to study Islam, Mansura, a Muslim woman “by choice and not chance,” began volunteering as a rape counselor with RCCTT 4 years ago. Despite the difficulty of the work, there is also the joy and satisfaction that comes from watching clients grow, and growing herself. “I feel happy when a client finds her own path, and I feel like I learn new information all the time. I am forced to change my own perceptions and judgments.” Mansura also raves about the amazing supervision and support she receives from the RCCTT staff. “We are like a family. The leaders lead, but don’t rule over us like dictators. I can take a rest, and help is always there when I need it.” When Mansura is not volunteering, she can be found hosting her own radio show on Radio 786, running The Light of Women, an organization she created to teach Muslim women about their rights, or running after one of her three children, two biological and one adopted from Ons Plek, a shelter for female street children in Cape Town. Recently, she and the women from her Islamic rights class drove to Philippi in a 30-car caravan to distribute *daal*. With each act of service, Mansura lives out her belief that “you can change society if you change the position of women.”

The RCCTT is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that envisions a South Africa where survivors of rape suffer no secondary trauma, and are supported throughout their interaction with the criminal justice system. In addition to counselling, RCCTT also

provides training, community development, and advocacy. All of these programs promote an end to violence against women, and support women in accessing their constitutional and human right to freedom and security through the reduction of trauma, the reporting of rape, and the conviction of rapists. RCCTT's services are high quality, comprehensive, and client-centered. However, what I found most astonishing is that volunteers provide a majority of these services. Shiralee McDonald, a Counseling Coordinator with the RCCTT, estimates that at least 80% of the organization is run by volunteers, and that at least 90% of these are women rigorously recruited from the community, just like Mansura. It is not surprising, then, to hear that Anne Mayne, the founder of RCCTT, volunteered 12 years of her own time to grow the organization after being gang-raped by 3 men in 1973. Her efforts bring life to the freedom song sung during the women's anti-pass march on 9 August 1956 that has come to commemorate Women's Day in South Africa: "*Wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo*" – "When you strike a woman, you strike a rock."

Morgan Mitchell is another "rock" at the RCCTT. At first glance, with her small frame leaned back against the neutral-toned futon, she appears quiet, reserved. Her hands are folded on her lap, and her feet, clad in heavy boots, wedge together. But when Morgan speaks, her thoughtful zeal is evident. A self-proclaimed feminist activist and a professional counselor and writer by day, Morgan became involved with RCCTT because she was interested in the "undeniably gendered basis of rape and the profound effect it has on people's lives." After completing the intensive volunteer training program (inclusive of 6 weeks of coursework, a month-long orientation, and 5 months of practical instruction) that was both "scary and wonderful," Morgan began counseling rape

survivors. That was 10 years ago, and now she also trains and supervises new volunteers, and facilitates workshops for police officers, doctors, and other interested groups on the signs and symptoms of rape, counselling techniques, and the Sexual Offences Act.

When Morgan first began volunteering, she was nervous – “You don’t want to make a mistake.” Still, she never felt alone or confused due to the consistent and ample help offered by the RCCTT staff. Morgan is now a RCCTT veteran, but the work remains challenging for reasons new and old. Recently, Morgan has been counseling an increasing number of refugees. Refugees have the legal protection of the South African government; “refugee status” was created to help those whose lives are threatened in their own countriesⁱ. However, many of these women who flee to safer places are instead met with further violence. The trauma incurred from political instability and war, inclusive of “conflict rapes” and witnessing the death and/or murder of loved ones, is compounded with the trauma of being raped here in South Africa. Add to this the ongoing lack of safety, language barriers, adjustment to a new country, scarcity of resources, poverty, and limited access to services, and it is a wonder how these women recover. But they do. “Without somewhere and someone to work through it, people can stay in the most horrific internal landscape for years and it doesn’t have to be that way.” Some of Morgan’s greatest moments with the RCCTT have been watching these survivors heal, regain their sense of self, and interact more functionally in society.

I am cognizant that the 30 minutes I have been allotted to interview Morgan is coming to an end. When I tell her I have one last question, she breathes a sigh of relief and says, “I feel like I’ve been talking forever!” Her unease with this quasi role reversal makes me think of the client’s experience, how demanding it must be to talk and answer

questions after experiencing such a violation of self. RCCTT makes every effort, however, to make the recovery process as safe as possible. Based on a feminist, strengths-based approach, the counseling is client-centered and client-led: survivors are active participants in their own healing. I ask Morgan, “Overall, how would you say your experience volunteering with RCCTT has been?” Morgan smiles for the first time and emphatically says, “I love it.” Tucking back the one side of her brown-blond hair that purposely hangs longer than the other, she continues, “You hear such terrible stories. But then you watch people get better and share what they have learned with others. It makes you realize that you really can save the world one person at a time.”

The Unacknowledged War

Currently, South Africa has arguably some of the highest rates of violence against women of any country in the world that is “at peace” – the levels are often likened to those experienced during times of war. Estimates show that one in four South African women will be involved in domestic violence², and that one woman is killed every six hours by an intimate partner – the highest recorded rate of female homicide, or “femicide,” in the world³. Although underreporting makes it difficult to know the exact prevalence of sexual violence, the Medical Research Council calculates that the actual number of rapes is likely nine times that of reported figures⁴. Between 2008-2009, the South African Police Service was inundated with 71,500 sexual offence cases. If we apply what we know from the Medical Research Council, a more approximate number would be 643,500 for that year alone – the equivalent of someone experiencing some form of sexual assault every minute. Specific to women, the closest findings report that at least one in three South African women can expect to be raped in her lifetime⁵. A

separate study conducted by the Medical Research Council in 2009 found that one in four South African men have admitted to having “had sex with a woman when she didn’t consent,” and that 46% of these men said they had done so more than once⁶. While it may be easy to shake our heads at the horrific acts of violence against women currently ongoing in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the oppressive environment for women in countries like Somalia and Afghanistan, South Africa – a country that has enjoyed freedom, peace, and democracy for nearly 20 years – is not doing much better. Helen Moffett, a former Senior Research Associate with the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town (UCT), suggests that South Africa is in an “unacknowledged gender civil war⁷.”

Across town, the issue of gender-based violence, and in particular sexual gender-based violence, is one that sits uncomfortably close to home for Ndumie Funda, the founder and director of Luleki Sizwe, an organization that supports survivors of “corrective rape,” a heinous and ridiculous practice where men rape women to “cure” them of their lesbianism. In many ways the issue actually *is* home for Ndumie: she runs the organization out of her one room house in Gugulethu, a historically black township. As I walk through the front door, Ndumie half-jokingly welcomes me into her home, office, Luleki Sizwe headquarters, shelter, and living room. She offers me one of two seats, and then proceeds to check her phone which doubles as the Luleki Sizwe hotline. When Ndumie tells me that at least 10 lesbians are raped or gang-raped per week in Cape Town alone, I cannot help but wonder how sustainable her work will be without greater resources.

Over the past few months the news has been littered with stories of openly gay women being raped, attacked, and killed. In June, while walking home with her partner, Noxolo Nkosana was approached by two men from her community. They yelled, “You fucking lesbian, you fucking tomboy – we’ll show you,” and then stabbed her four times⁸. A month prior, a *Guardian* headline read, “Teenage lesbian is latest victim of ‘corrective rape’ in South Africa⁹.” This “teenage lesbian” was a 13 year old girl from Atteridgeville, Pretoria who was openly gay. The list continues with Noxolo Nogwaza¹⁰, a gay rights activist who was gang-raped by eight men and then stoned to death in KwaThema in April, and the rape and murder of Nokuthula Radebe¹¹ – her body was found in Soweto in March. Currently, Ndumie is working with a survivor who was raped by a police officer in her community. Unable to press charges out of fear of retaliation, she sees her attacker every day. When they meet eyes, he usually laughs.

As awareness of “corrective” rape has grown, so have the services provided by Luleki Sizwe. When Ndumie first started the organization in 2008, her primary goal was to feed, house, and care for survivors. Now, Luleki Sizwe also runs prevention programs and advocates for the rights of lesbian, bi-sexual, and transsexual women in South Africa. Ndumie has arguably become South Africa’s poster child for “corrective rape” – numerous news and other organizations continuously seek her out for more information about the issue and her work. However, she admits that she too, like so many others, once turned a blind eye. “It was always happening in the community, but no one really did anything about it. Even me – it didn’t really hit me. And even though I worked with different gay rights groups, the priority always seemed to be gay men.” Then, two women close to her were “correctively” raped, and both eventually died from HIV and

other diseases contracted from the incident. After watching them suffer in silence, Ndumie was convicted to do something about it.

The project Ndumie began with two friends in her wendy house now reaches 10 townships. And recently, due to Ndumie and other activists' efforts, the Department of Justice appointed an interim task team to address homophobic and gender-based hate crimes. Perhaps the most telling evidence of Ndumie's efforts, however, is how her neighbors receive her. Gugulethu is a community that has always been hostile to homosexuality. Ndumie would know – she grew up there. And the little that I knew was enough to cause me anxiety prior to meeting with her (enough so that I dragged my colleague with me to the interview). However, Ndumie is fearless – the numerous gay pride stickers that clutter her front window, refrigerator, and car attest to this – and her neighbors are now her fiercest protectors. “They watch for me. They know who I am and what I do, and they protect me. Now they even bring their children to me for advice.” Ndumie attributes this to her outreach efforts and the relationships she has formed with them. “Now, when they see a man hitting on my partner, they even say, ‘Hey, you go get another girl! That girl is taken!’”

The Policy-Practice Conundrum

Everyone agrees that South Africa has a phenomenal constitution. The Preamble to the Constitution recognizes past injustices and commits to establishing a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights¹². Every citizen is granted equal protection and the opportunity to reach their full potential. With an emphasis on equality, human dignity, life, freedom, and security, the Bill of Rights encapsulates all of these principles into law and forbids unfair treatment and harm of

anyone based on their race, marital status, pregnancy, ethnic or social origin, color, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, birth, sex, sexual orientation, and gender. Everyone has: inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected; the right to life; the right to be free from all forms of violence; the right to not be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way; and the right to bodily and psychological integrity. The Constitution even mandates that 30% of the national legislature must be comprised of women.

In addition to the Constitution, a number of Acts have been passed since 1996 for the protection and justice of women, and all survivors of violence. In 1998, the Domestic Violence Act was passed to uphold the commitment to end violence against women and children¹³. Two years later, the passing of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act mandated “all persons, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and traditional institutions” to “promote equality in their relationships with other bodies and in their public activities¹⁴.” The Sexual Offences Act of 2007 acknowledges the particular vulnerability of women and children to sexual offences, and the responsibility to combat and eradicate abuse and violence against women and children; it appropriately expanded the definition of rape, and amended legal proceedings to better protect all victims regardless of sex or age¹⁵.

On an international scale, South Africa is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) – essentially the international bill of rights for women – adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1979¹⁶. Each of the Acts listed above acknowledge South Africa’s responsibility to adhere to CEDAW’s provisions, which attempt to eliminate all forms of

discrimination against women, and promote equality between women and men so that women can enjoy all of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. And very recently, South Africa heroically went before the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to advocate for the equal rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, a contentious subject that the UN has purposefully avoided in the past. South Africa's declaration led to the passing of the UN's first "gay rights resolution," which calls for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to research and report on the challenges faced by the LGBT community globally¹⁷.

However, as with many aspects of life, theory and law differ from practice. Manusra, Morgan, and Ndumie's experiences demonstrate this sad truth. Helen Moffett believes that a devil's bargain has been where women are accepted as having equal political status as long as they maintain their traditionally subordinate gender role at home. Violence against women and rape in particular, effectively monitors this delicate line¹⁸. Dee Smythe, Director of the Law, Race and Gender Research Unit at UCT agrees – "Rape is always about gender." This includes women who are raped "correctively." Melanie Judge, a lesbian activist wrote in the *Mail & Guardian*, "Lesbians are raped because they choose not to assume the prescribed feminine stereotype."¹⁹ Accounts of survivors reveal male perpetrators using rhetoric focused on teaching gender-based lessons such as, "how to be a real women and what a real man tasted like²⁰." Romi Sigsworth, Editor of the African Security Review for the Institute for Security Studies and former Senior Researcher with the Gender-based Violence Program of the Centre for Study of Violence and Reconciliation, suggests that while motivations and contexts for

the infliction of violence against women may vary, the result is always the same: the subordination of women.

The New Other

The roots of violence against women in South Africa are multifaceted and complex. “Patriarchy” seems to be the golden word and the easiest scapegoat. Colonialism coupled with apartheid runs a close second. And while this, for the most part, is a fair assessment, it is also overly simplistic. South Africa undeniably has a tradition and culture rooted in patriarchy, a social construct where men hold most if not all of the power (social, political, and economic) and women and children fall dependent²¹. A quick review of the culture and history of the indigenous Bantu, Khoikhoi, San, Xhosa, and Zulu peoples, and the Dutch and English colonizers speaks to this. The patriarchal system was complicated by colonization and apartheid, systems that not only privileged certain races, but also commended specific types of masculinity (men as breadwinners and protectors) and femininity (women as mothers belonging in the domestic sphere)²², and punished anything or anyone perceived as “other.” The dismantling of apartheid and the construction of the “new” South Africa then threw established gender roles into flux through the creation of economic, social, and political changes. The result? Both men and women began to seek alternate means for establishing a sense of self and identity. For women, this meant pursuing newly opened doors for education and employment. It seems that for men, this meant closing those doors through violence. Again, Helen Moffett:

For over 50 years, South African society operated on the explicit principle that the Other was unstable, potentially extremely powerful and therefore dangerous, and needed to be kept in its place by regular and excessive shows of force. Women – the current subclass – are also seen as having

significant agency and therefore they pose a potential threat to the uncertain status quo. Today, as under apartheid, there is considerable social anxiety about a powerful, unstable subclass that *must be kept in its place*²³.

Many South Africans may remember the interview, televised over a decade ago, of the taxi driver who described how he and his friends drove around looking for women to “gangbang” on the weekends. When the interviewer informed the driver that his actions constituted rape, he was genuinely taken aback, exclaiming, “But these women, they force us to rape them!” His defense was that he and his friends only chose women who “asked for it” – “the cheeky ones... that walk around like they own the place, and look you in the eye.” These “cheeky” women constitute South Africa’s current “other.” Since racial oppression has become illegal and socially taboo, energies now concentrate on a more widely accepted brand of systematic oppression: gender. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire says in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or sub oppressors. The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradiction of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them to be men is to be oppressors.”

“I do not believe in democracy at home.”

Women’s issues and women’s rights continuously take a backseat in South Africa. A couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to observe a peer education program for youth. The subject was Women’s Day, and the students were brainstorming on how to observe the upcoming holiday. After a few ideas had been thrown out – writing poems, singing a song, creating a dance – a couple of boys raised their hands to say, “Why do we have to participate? This is Women’s Day and we are not women.”

Some of the other boys laughed, others nodded their heads in agreement. I cringed.

Unfortunately, their sentiments are nothing new. Anastasia Maw, a Lecturer with the UCT Department of Psychology who has done extensive research on gender-based violence, spoke to me of how feminism, seen as a Western import, was rejected by the anti-apartheid movement. “An emphasis was placed on unity in the struggle against apartheid; therefore, the women’s movement was seen as divisive to the movement. Leaders did not want men and women fighting against one another.” Even during the anti-pass law demonstrations, men were very resistant to women getting involved because their participation was seen as a threat to the normative family structure. “The women’s movement had no place in the anti-apartheid movement. There was never a real political commitment to addressing gender, and we’ve never recovered from that. We’re suffering the consequences of that now.”

In the post-apartheid era, opportunities to advocate for women’s rights continued to be sidelined. There is a growing body of literature suggesting that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission failed to adequately address gender-based violence during apartheid, and that their actions during the public hearings contributed to continuing violence against women and men²⁴. And, who can forget the embroiled debate between Charlene Smith and former president Thabo Mbeki in 2004²⁵? After Smith, a survivor of rape, published a groundbreaking article revealing the astonishingly high rates of rape in South Africa, Mbeki’s first response was to publicly criticize her for reinforcing the stereotype of black men as “barbaric savages.” He completely ignored the issue of violence against women, and made it about race. Mbeki’s response was representative of what so many survivors of rape experience when they courageously step forward to seek

justice: suspicion and questioning of clear evidence – essentially, further victimization. We can add to the list President Jacob Zuma’s all-too-easy acquittal of rape charges in 2005 (his defense was that his lesbian, HIV accuser insisted on having sex, and that his Zulu culture necessitated he satisfy her), and Julius Malema’s boorish comment on the situation: “When a woman didn’t enjoy it, she leaves early in the morning. Those who had a nice time will wait until the sun comes out, request breakfast and ask for taxi money²⁶.” Although Malema, the president of the African National Congress Youth League, recently issued a public apology to “all women,” the zeitgeist nonetheless continues to be, “Democracy stops at my front door.” Gender equality is formally embraced in the public arena, but all efforts to dismantle inequality lay stagnant in the private domain.

Finding a Better Way

The point, however, in attempting to better understand the prevalence of violence against women in South Africa is not to criticize or shift blame. It is to make change. Fury over injustice is meaningless without a constructive response. I was reminded of this after speaking with Easy Nofemela, the Sports Facilitator of the Amy Biehl Foundation Trust (ABFT). For those unfamiliar with the story of Amy Biehl, it is worth looking up. In short, Amy, a white American woman in South Africa on a Fulbright scholarship to help register black voters in the country’s first free election, was killed by a black mob in 1993, the height of the anti-apartheid struggle. Her parents, Linda and Peter Biehl, set up ABFT, an organization that aims to prevent violence through youth development programs, in 1994 to honor her life and death. Beyond establishing an organization that now provides services to over 1800 children in and around Cape Town

per week, Linda and Peter are perhaps best known for supporting the pardon of the four youths convicted of murdering Amy, and then hiring two of them to work for ABFT.

Easy is a man who looks like he has been through some rough times. When you meet him, you are not quite sure if he is nice or if he likes you. But after you spend some time with him and especially if you see him interact with kids, you cannot help but feel warmly towards him. I found myself in a car with Easy back to Cape Town after spending the afternoon visiting ABFT's programs in the townships. Curious about how he got started with ABFT, I asked him about it. He shared that he had pretty much been with the organization since his release from prison in 1998 – Linda and Peter Biehl had approached him and asked him to help them with one of ABFT's initiatives. I asked why he had been in jail; Easy laughed and said, "You ask a lot of questions!" And then continued, "But it is good you ask. I was in jail because I was one of the men involved in Amy's death." I was taken aback. I recognized Ntobeko Peni, the other man convicted of killing Amy, in the ABFT office from the various news programs, but failed to put the pieces together with Easy.

Since I was on a roll with the questions and Easy seemed to welcome them, I asked one more – "What were you thinking when Linda and Peter approached you that first time?" Easy answered this question with a story.

"You know, one time when Linda came to visit, I was in an elevator with her. Another woman came in and asked me, 'Hey you, are you selling the newspapers on the street?' Linda got so mad at the lady and said, 'No! He is my guest! Why didn't you ask me if I am selling newspapers on the street?' I told Linda it was okay and to be calm, but she said, 'No, it is not okay.' That is when I knew she was different. She is white lady from America, but she understands things better than most white people in South Africa. She talks to us, and when she is here, she always wants to be with the kids in the townships."

Explaining that he had been raised to never trust a white person, Easy shared that he was initially very suspicious of Linda and Peter, even with their forgiveness. However, he was eventually won over by their efforts to understand the struggle of the youth living in the townships. This helped him to accept their kindness and recognize that white people are human beings too.

Linda and Peter were no doubt devastated by their daughter's death. And Easy was justified in his distrust. Everyone was angry. However, they all wanted better. So Linda and Peter booked themselves a ticket to Cape Town to try and understand the circumstances surrounding their loss, resulting in the founding of ABFT. And following their release from prison, Easy and Ntobeko started a youth club in Gugulethu. Their lives intersected once more, in the place where Amy had been killed, when Linda and Peter went to visit the youth club and asked Easy and Ntobeko to join ABFT. Easy now lovingly calls Linda "makhulu," the Xhosa word for "grandmother" or "wise woman," and the late Peter as "tatomakhulu," or "grandfather." Their choices to understand have not only caused profound reconciliation and change within themselves, but have also provided better opportunities for thousands of children.

A United Front

The question that has plagued me since I delved into the issue of violence against women is: *So what can be done about it?* The problem seems insurmountable without a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach on both a governmental and grassroots level that will simultaneously address employment, education, health, mental health, social-cultural issues, crime, and poverty. And even this wide-scale approach, or at least renditions of it, seems to have already been attempted in one form or another. Romi

Sigsworth suggests that perhaps the solution does not lie in some grand master plan or an untapped source, but in revisiting what we already know and meticulously continuing to work at and improve upon it.

One of the most promising strategies I have encountered is the One Man Can (OMC) campaign run by the Sonke Gender Justice Network (Sonke). Sonke was created in 2006 to address the social aspects of the HIV epidemic with a particular focus on gender issues. OMC was created out of recognition that more men need to be on the frontlines of the fight for gender equality. The campaign promotes the idea that each individual has a role to play in creating a more equitable and just world, and specifically supports men and boys to take action to end violence against women, and promote healthy, equitable relationships. OMC workers and volunteers reach out to fathers, sons, teachers, coaches, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and literally any other man that will listen, and facilitate workshops to prevent the continuing epidemic of HIV, AIDS, and violence against women.

I had the opportunity to sit down with Jean-Marie Nkurunziza, an OMC trainer for the Refugee Health and Rights division of Sonke. Feeling the void of the male voice and thinking it was all too representative of the women's movement in general, I was particularly excited to speak with him. Jean-Marie's story is a compelling. He grew up in Burundi in the midst of the civil war between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes. During the short periods of time his father, a soldier, was home, he would get drunk and beat his wife. "As a kid I didn't know what was happening. But I could never understand how a husband could beat his wife to correct her, and how a wife was not allowed to divorce her husband even if he was beating her." Jean-Marie also joined the war for a short while,

recruited as a soldier in high school, but then escaped to a refugee camp after deciding he did not want to be like his father. Moving from camp to camp, Jean-Marie first made his way out of Burundi to Tanzania, then Malawi, and finally arrived in South Africa. Despite the fact that he had nothing, he jumped right in to volunteering at a women's shelter in Johannesburg. Since then, he has tirelessly been working with various grassroots organizations on both a volunteer and professional basis on HIV/AIDS prevention, refugee rights, and gender-based violence. Recently, Jean-Marie's efforts won him a nod in the *Mail & Guardian's* 200 Young South Africans list, and the opportunity to assist in a study on violence against women in conflict and post-conflict countries being conducted by the UN.

Jean-Marie's ultimate goal is to end violence against women. The OMC campaign is especially effective in meeting this goal because it recruits men into a struggle that has been fought predominantly by women. The reality is that true gender justice cannot be accomplished without the aid of men, and men listen to other men. Jean-Marie says the process of working with men can be long and arduous, but it works. "You sit and talk, and sit and talk until you understand one another. Most of the men I work with believe it is the woman's job to take care of the children and house. They can't fathom any other way until you begin asking them why or challenging them to think outside of the box. And even then, many of them still refuse to change. But slowly you start to see some of them thinking differently." That is what Jean-Marie enjoys most about his work with OMC – watching men realize that they do not have to prescribe to certain behaviors just because they are men, seeing them change, and then having them join OMC in reaching other men. "Change is not something you can do in 24 hours – it

is a process. But everyone can change. Men need to know that women are human beings, and that you cannot have human rights without gender equality. And women need to know that there are men who talking about women's issues. We need to have the courage to fight because the struggle continues.”

Beginning with the Small Places

As my time in South Africa comes to an end, I find more and more people asking me how my stay has been. If I am completely honest, I have been absolutely stunned by the statistics of domestic violence, rape, and intimate femicide. And, I have been disturbed by personal experiences of being groped, in broad daylight, by a young man, and catcalled – “Hey baby!” – by two primary school-aged boys. These are in addition to the numerous sexual and sexist remarks and gestures from men I encounter on a daily basis. I am always on guard, and have the privilege of feeling, for the first time, what it is like to have my freedoms restricted. However, I have also been incredibly amazed, humbled, and encouraged by the efforts of various community workers, advocates, researchers, professors, activists, clinicians, leaders, volunteers, and friends to do something about it. Each of the individuals and organizations mentioned, and the countless ones that I have not, are small armies in the gender civil war. And they have been busy waging a mighty counter-attack, choosing to meet violence and injustice with the more sustainable and effective weapons of education, research, advocacy, communication, outreach, support, and kindness.

I still struggle to know, personally, how I can do my part in the war. I often find myself looking for that “Ah hah!” solution despite knowing that there are no easy answers to such a complex issue. However, as I reflect on the people I have met and

what I have learned, one simple theme does come through: to stop “othering” people. When Mansura first began volunteering with RCCTT, she remembers wondering if she would fit in with the other staff members. She was Muslim, they were not; she was from Tanzania, they were not. And, she was, well, different. How could they relate to one another? Over time, however, she realized that they shared the same goals: to empower women. And when I asked Morgan what she felt was necessary to prevent gender-based violence, she said, “To interact more with people who are different. It is hard to other people when you interact with them.”

Undoubtedly, we need to continue to advocate for systemic change through policy reform, program development, improvements in service delivery, grassroots efforts with community members – the list goes on – so that women are able to access their basic human rights. However, I believe the answer is also found in the choices we make every day. The “othering” of another begins with an individual choice to dissociate, detach, distance, disengage – ultimately divorce oneself from someone who is deemed as “too different.” Eleanor Roosevelt, the former First Lady of the United States and an avid civil and women’s rights advocate, famously said:

“Where after all do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person: the neighborhood he lives in; the school or university he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”

There are immense challenges in finding justice for women, and there will continue to be. But the decisions we make – to communicate, ignore, defend, pardon, ridicule, stereotype, harass, empathize, befriend – will determine the kind of world we live in.

A friend I met in South Africa heralds the phrase, “Be the change you want to see.” Her mantra requires thoughtfulness in everyday actions and interactions, and hinges on the suggestion that as we makes those changes in our daily lives, society itself will change. If you think about it, it makes a lot of sense. *Where, after all, do we begin?* The challenge then is to take time to think about the home that was created for you, and the home – and dare I say world – that you want to create for yourself and others. And then, to act. For Mansura, Morgan, Ndumie, Easy, Linda, Peter, and Jean-Marie it all began with a desire planted in the smallest place – themselves – and then a choice.

¹ Moffett, H. (2006). ‘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).

² Moffett, 2006.

³ Matthews, S., Abrahams, N., Martin, L.J., Vetten, L., van der Merwe, L., & Jewkes, J. (2004). Every Six Hours a Woman is Killed by Her Intimate Partner: A National Study of Female Homicide in South Africa. *Medical Research Council*, 5.

⁴ Jewkes, R. & Abrahms, N. (2002). The Epidemiology of Rape and Sexual Coercion in South Africa: An Overview. *Social Science & Medicine*, 55(7).

⁵ Moffett, 2006.

⁶ Jewkes, R., Sikweyiya, Y., Morrell, R., & Dunkle, K. (2009). Understanding Men’s Health and Use of Violence: Interface of Rape and HIV in South Africa. *Medical Research Council*.

⁷ Moffett, 2006.

⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/world-africa-13908662>

⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/09/lesbian-corrective-rape-south-africa>

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13265300>

¹¹ <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Local-Elections-2011/NYDA-Take-action-on-corrective-rape-20110511>

¹² <http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/>

¹³ www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=70651

¹⁴ www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=71215

¹⁵ www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=77866

¹⁶ www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/

¹⁷ http://articles.cnn.com/2011-06-17/world/un.lgbt.rights_1_gay-rights-human-rights-gay-pride-event?_s=PM:WORLD

¹⁸ Moffet, 2006.

¹⁹ <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-06-12-changing-the-language-of-prejudice>

²⁰ Martin, A., Kelly, A., Turquet, L., & Ross, S. (2009). Hate Crimes: The Rise of Corrective Rape in South Africa. *ActionAid*.

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- ²¹ Sigsworth, R. (2009). Anyone Can Be a Rapist: An Overview of Sexual Violence in South Africa. *Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation*.
- ²² Britton, H. (2006). Organising Against Gender Violence in South Africa. *Journal of South African Studies*, 32 (1).
- ²³ Moffett, 2006.
- ²⁴ Britton, 2006.
- ²⁵ Britton, 2006; Moffett, 2006; Sigsworth, 2009.
- ²⁶ Britton, 2006; Moffett, 2006; Sigsworth, 2009.