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Reason requires impartiality

In building a non-racial rainbow nation, South Africans need to tolerate each other, even when protesting against one thing or another

Analysis JO-MANGALISO MDHLELA

THE good attribute about the study of philosophy is that it opens the blind eyes of men and women, clearing their mental cobwebs to the complexities of the world, helping society avoid ad hominem arguments that are nothing but sledgehammers meant to destroy characters rather than clarify issues.

We make assumptions that, in general, humans are rational. They ought to use their mental capacities to distil between right and wrong and that this process has evolved over many centuries. Modern man and woman ought to know, as clear as day, that they ought to act in a rational way, using facts and only facts to arrive at certain important decisions and conclusions.

If we take a hypothetical case of an enraged man who wants to shoot and kill another person, he ought to have facts to justify his killing of another person, if at all.

He would, for example, have said: "I will kill so-and-so because he is a threat to my own survival and so before he kills me, I will have to kill him first."

But even if it is factually true that your life may have been be in danger of extinction, what will a rational person do to avoid killing another person? He will surely have to consider a number of facts which, among other things, include considering that to kill is not only immoral, it is also criminal and that anyone found guilty of murder by any competent court of law might be sentenced to a jail term.

In some countries, a murderer is sentenced to death, which can include death by stoning or torture, such as being hanged. In South Africa and in many democracies, a constitution protects even murderers from being killed by the state.

To hang another person as a form of penal punishment was outlawed in South Africa because it was found to be unconstitutional, infringing on the Bill of Rights enshrined in the Constitution. In six words, the Bill of Rights says "Everyone has the right to life", which by implication also refers to a murderer found guilty by a competent court of law.

At the onset of our democracy, many people, including religious people of all ilk, including Christians, were upset when the death penalty was abolished and declared unconstitutional in our constitutional democracy.

The proponents of the death penalty strenuously argued that it was the law of God that permitted punishment by ending a person's life when that person had killed another person, screaming to high heaven that the ancient scriptures demanded "an eye for an eye" and "a life for a rule" be exacted as a punishment.

Where am I going with this argument? The rainbow nation wheels, as propounded by both former president Nelson Mandela and archbishop Desmond Tutu, may be coming off. There is too much acrimony among members of society.

On April 27, 1994, when for the first time in history all the rainbow people of this country went to the polls with blacks for the first time, claiming their right to exercise their vote, the new nation that unshackled the chains of oppression was born.

Mandela would become a popularly elected leader of the new South Africa, heralding a new order in which oppression gave way to a long reign of injustice and oppression, with the ANC styling itself as the leader of society.

Today, 23 years after democracy, the divisions are sharp and pronounced among comrades. It has become easy for stalwarts

the struggle to hurl insults and barbs at each other.

The beautiful art of formulating good and sound arguments, and thrashing out differences, not by engaging in a debate and failure to construct sound arguments to clarify standpoints, has become an art that is slowly dissipating.

It is easy to castigate others who do not belong to the same "camp" as belonging to "the enemy camp." Indeed, name calling has replaced "robust debates". Good comrades of the struggle use strange and foreign language inconsistent with the heritage bestowed as a heritage by the patriarchs and matriarchs of the ANC.

There are those who are described as "captured by the state" and some labelled as being driven by the agenda of "white monopoly capital,"whatever that might means. Some are described as patrons of some obscure shebeens in some leafy suburbs, without much

detail being given as to what this might mean. It is said that reason gives rise to ethical discourse and healthy debate and engagement and if this is true, the question must be asked:

Have we lost all reason that we can resort to insults, that we fail to engage one another in a constructive and thoughtful way, even as we differ ideologically and politically?

It is said that "reason requires impartiality" and this statement has serious implications for truthfulness and reason.

EFF leader Julius Malema at one of the recent protest marches, described President Jacob Zuma as Makhandakhanda, which means the one with a big head. The president himself described the marches as racist, which is factually incorrect.

Both statements are problematic and are based on the lack of clarity of mind and so resides in the realm of argumentum ad hominem, a ploy meant to appeal more to feelings. and prejudices rather than intellect or logic. We are building a new non-racial South Africa.

We need to tolerate one another, even as we take to streets to protest against one thing or the other. The Bill of Rights demands of us to take to heart that: "Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected."

If I disagree or do not like the president, that does not entitle me to hurl insults at him, for to do so would be tantamount to disrespecting his inherent dignity, whatever I may think of him.

This is the road we all have to walk, respecting the dignity of our sworn enemies and not in any way seeking to disparage them even as we disagree with them.

If we do that, we shall be on our way to building ethical communities. Jo-Mangaliso Mdhlela is a commentator and heads The New Age/ANN7 journalism academy

COMMON CAUSE: Opposition parties and South Africans across the rainbow nation marched to the Union Buildings united in will demanding the president resign. MOURE HERERIMANNER

For women, getting home is like running the gauntlet

Analysis

MATOKGO MAKUTOANE

IT IS late in the evening and retail workers are just beginning to close up their stores for the day.

Call centre staff are unplugging. Office staff are putting away their files. For many of these people, what happens next is the most risky part of the day - going home.

In the early hours of the morning and late at night when most of us are secure in our homes, late night workers - many of them women – are negotiating the risky task of getting home to their families.

They often do so in streets with poor lighting, overgrown and unsafe areas or taxi ranks filled with men.

It can be a journey filled with the risk of robbery, rape and even murder. These women risk this on a daily basis in order to put food on their tables, educate their children and plan for their future.

Often they are reliant on public transport while some even pay men in their community to escort them from home to the taxi and back. These additional security costs come on top of their transportation fares.

Yet many employers appear blissfully unaware of the challenges their workers face. Few have overtime policies that recognise the safety of their employees is also an issue when they stay beyond normal office hours.

I recently had to let my niece stay at my place and only go to her home on weekends because of safety concerns. She works at a call centre in Randburg and often finishes work at 7pm. At 9pm she's still at the Bree Street taxi rank waiting to board a taxi to Soweto. She gets home after 10pm.

We had to make the decision for her to stay with me as both her mother and I were unable to sleep at night until we knew she was safely at home.

She is not the only one, her colleagues and many other women who work in call centres, retail, hospitals and food and entertainment industries. They are all at risk.

What then can employers do and what policies should we have in place?

How do employees deal with gender-based

RISKY BEHAVIOUR: A woman walks home at night, prey for those lurking in the shadows seeking an easy target. Gender-based violence is rampant in SA, particularly for those who finish work in the dark and must take public transport.

violence or do they simply turn a blind eye if it does not happen on their premises?

The reality is that we live in a violent society and cannot ignore what happens when staff go home.

This is one of the many issues we need to consider when we begin to tackle safer public transport. While we push for a national safe taxi charter, the reality is that many women face danger even before they board their public transport.

We must recognise that a #safetaxisnow campaign is only of value if women are able to get to the taxi rank safely.

Taxi safety is not just about the ride home it's about ensuring that if women are accosted and violated in any way, the justice system is able to work effectively to support them.

Women should not feel that they risk further assault or abuse if they try to report

the assault at their local police station. They should not - as was recently reported to us be sent from pillar to post by police arguing about in whose jurisdiction the crime took place.

Last year, KPMG released a report that showed gender-based violence (GBV) cost South Africa between R28.4bn and R42.4bn a year. The report, Too Costly To Ignore, looked at the economic impact on South Africa. KPMG said that beyond its conservative cost estimates, individuals and families continue to bear the greatest proportion of costs due to GBV.

South Africa pays a high financial and human cost for gender-based violence.

Many employers are already taking precautions – whether they offer safer forms of transport for employees working late or even self-protection lessons for women in the workplace.

However, the reality is that this is often the exception rather than the rule.

The impact of GBV/sexual assault runs deep in our society. If businesses want to contribute to fighting it then they can start by recognising the impact on their own staff.

South Africa has among the highest rates of GBV in the world, which require groundbreaking and proactive responses with participation from all stakeholders.

We should break down silos of intervention to ensure we partner to increase success of those initiatives which work.

One such initiative is the Thuthuzela Care Centres, led by the Sexual Offences and Community Affairs unit of the National Prosecuting Authority, which are one-stop facilities introduced as a critical part of South Africa's anti-rape strategy, aiming to reduce second-

ary victimisation and to build a case ready for successful prosecution.

Since 2006, 51 centres have been established. Employers should ensure that their staff know where these are situated and what help can be sought. Safe public transport is more than just ensuring women are safe within the transport vehicle.

It means they are safe walking to and from public transport stops without verbal or physical harassment and are able to claim their right to freedom of movement without fear and access economic opportunities without the fear of violence.

We can only do this if business joins civil society and the government in the struggle to ensure women can work late without concern. Matokgo Makutoane is advocacy manager at Soul City Institute of Social Justice. Follow her on Twitter @ndumakutoane

