

# Perspectives on KwaZulu-Natal

Volume Two - Number One - February 2002

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## Brutal crimes perpetrated in our society

The rapes of several babies have made headline news in recent months. Those who work in the counselling field have had experience of similar incidents over a number of years. **Colin Collett van Rooyen** contemplates the brutal behaviour.

Two-month-old babies. Five-month-old babies. Raped and abused in the severest forms by men. The men next door, the men upstairs, the men we work with. The men we sometimes know.

Nelson Mandela speaks out against the myth that sex with a virgin, child or baby can cure HIV. The national department of health follows suit. And 'activists' call for President Mbeki to "speak out" and "take action".

The general public, by and large (whoever and/or whatever that is) sits in silent shock. We are slapped in the face by the imagery conjured up in our imaginations, or by the graphic and often sordid details described in the media. They tell us of blood stained babies clothes, used condoms, dirty foam mattresses on the floor... you know the images - we all own those images and once with us they tend to stick.

So we ask, why? At times even, how? We work hard in our self-discourse and in our debates with others to develop rational responses to these questions. A waste of time. None of our answers satisfy all the criteria required for a good argument and we become despondent, think of moving to some far off place away from this brutality and even become card carrying man haters (even if fleetingly for some). You see, we base our arguments on issues 'rational'. We believe that people have clearly defined psycho-social-sexual processes that they engage in as part of their own decision making before an 'act' such as infant rape. Actually 'baby rape' makes it sound more bizarre but more true, so let us call it that - baby rape.

But perhaps they don't. Perhaps we have an evolving (Wait - 'flag' this word for a moment. It may come back to haunt me.) sector of our society so devoid of those things that we call essentially human that they can no longer act as such. What are the essentials of humanity? Maybe love, nurturance, rationality and creativity simultaneously, a sense of belonging and contributing, respect, dignity and honour are but a few. An important few though. Perhaps we have reverted to earlier phases of the evolutionary process (there it is - haunting me; leading me into a minefield too!), taking us 'back' to instinctive animal behaviour. Perhaps (oh yes, there are many 'perhapses' here) we are at a place in the social history of our country where some of our fellow citizens have been so depleted of what is their essential humanity that all they have left is base instinct. The instinct that leads them to 'mark their territory', attack the fragile, assert their 'alpha

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maleness' and follow an automatic path of destruction of the most vulnerable.

I am not sure that psychology, criminology and sociology (or any of the other 'ologies') have given us the tools to understand and respond to what we are experiencing. I'm not sure that Mandela's call for a halt to the violent act of virgin rape is a solution to this particular 'wave' of social nausea. I am sure that there is no response Mbeki or any other leader can make that will solve this challenge. I'm not sure that any of us know the real answers to 'why'.

I am sure that it is bigger than we perceive it to be - both in scope and solution. And I am sure that we have to think in as many ways as possible about solutions - to save our babies; to save ourselves. I am sure that we want to reclaim our humanity before we lose it totally.

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