

On pointless objections to Anti-GBV: a response

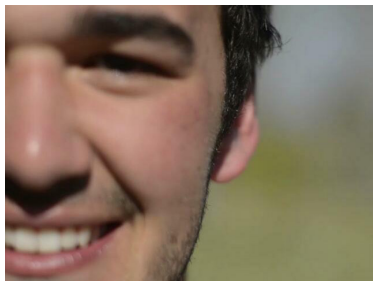
MICHAL VISSER

Since late August, South African campus communities have engaged in protests and discussions regarding a national crisis of Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

The rape and murder of varsity women in particular, has served to galvanise a movement that is long overdue. For many years, South Africa has had among the highest rates of GBV in the world. The severity and brutality of GBV in South Africa deserves assertive opposition. Fortunately, activists have started to engage in resistance against GBV.

In response to growing anti-GBV activism, Die Matie opinion columnist, Tian Alberts, asserts that we need to “get real about the Anti-GBV” [emphasis my own]. This column is a response to Alberts’s opinion piece. This column is neither a defence of every manifestation of Anti-GBV activism, nor is it a defence of the particular demands of the three-page memorandum that was handed to men’s and mixed residences.

It is not aimed at Alberts in particular, but he has provided a convenient summary of poor arguments lodged against Anti-GBV activism. As a testament to the impersonal nature of my response, I



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will henceforth refer to Alberts’s piece as LGR (short for “Let’s get real...”) and avoid invoking his name any further. I suggest that readers first read his opinion piece to see whether this response misrepresents any of the arguments in LGR (available in the 25 September edition of Die Matie and online).

Firstly, I agree that any movement may be critiqued. However, the critiques should be valid and (preferably) constructive. LGR does not satisfy these rudimentary criteria and thus deserves a critical response.

Secondly, LGR constructs a theatrical narrative of oppressed dissidents fighting against an overbearing social movement. I contend that this narrative is self-imposed by those who feel victimised by the Anti-GBV movement – an actual “victim mentality”. If people demand that you take certain actions, you can disagree. If people call you

names, you can disagree. Importantly, you can disagree without having a martyr complex.

Thirdly, LGR vaguely suggests that the Anti-GBV movement aims to “prescribe acceptable culture” and to “impose” this by using University structures. For this strong claim, the author provides no specific examples of prescriptions. This is a critical deception because the reader is left to imagine any degree of draconian regulation without being able to judge the merits of the author’s argument. In fact, it is hard to discern exactly where the author disagrees with particular prescriptions made by the movement that he implies we should rebuke. I hypothesise that many of the pitfalls of LGR are due to fundamental misconceptions about the Anti-GBV movement. Despite the impression given by LGR, Anti-GBV activism is not monolithic. The movement does not have a “leader”. It is simply a broad-based and diverse civil society movement that is united in one cause: opposition to Gender-Based Violence. Sure, some bad actors may use the movement as a means to consolidate power, but this is not a sufficient reason to broadly lambast a whole movement.

Furthermore, the author asserts that the Anti-GBV movement demands adherence to “every ideological disposition”. This demand

is, of course, an extrapolation of the author’s own nightmares. If certain demands are unreasonable, you can oppose them specifically without eschewing an entire movement. In the latter half of his article, the author reveals a fundamental grievance he has against the movement: he doesn’t like it that Anti-GBV activists are telling men’s residences what to do. He doesn’t like the language they use. He doesn’t like criticism from the outsiders. Altogether, LGR’s opposition to the Anti-GBV movement seems rather petulant.

I imagine that, in the author’s utopia, the outsiders would desist from saying mean things about men’s residences and stop telling them what they should do. The author has chosen to experience critiques of his “constructive criticism” as a public persecution enacted by “the mob and social media hunting packs”. It appears that dissidence is only courageous when it is voiced by the author.

LGR is based on the premise that the act of making suggestions to men’s residences is necessarily undermining the autonomy of men’s residences. For example, the author contends that “if men’s residences were really adamant to effect (sic) these changes in the first place, they would have done so on their own terms in the absence of the social coercion that they now

face”. However, it is not at all obvious that men’s residences will propose and enforce solutions to GBV independently. It could be that they are either complicit or indifferent to GBV issues.

Clearly, a superior method would be for men’s residences to receive the suggestions formulated by Anti-GBV activists (from the outside) and discern which suggestions are beneficial and which are unreasonable. Learning from outsiders is astute. It is not “caving”. How would constructive criticism of a movement look like? Firstly, dissidents need to make valid arguments against specific points of contention. My stylistic preference is that authors should avoid painting themselves as martyrs when they are criticised for their critiques. When the discussion stays centred on the arguments it is much less likely to devolve into wasteful melodrama.

Secondly, authors should avoid conflating the actions of some bad actors as being representative of an entire movement. Rather, state explicitly which denomination or individuals are committing the specific transgressions. Constructive criticism needs to suggest better alternatives. Let’s get real avoids suggesting any tangible policies in response to GBV, and thus does not contribute whatsoever to addressing the crisis.

Faith vs Reason, or Faith vs Faith?

SEBASTIAN UYS

YES, this is another article about the existence of a deity. I say another because I write this as the “sequel” to the article written by Christopher Joubert, who I attend class with, called “Faith, religion and reason at SU.”

Chris wrote about the disparity in belief in Stellenbosch, and I agree, but I would propose that there is a general agreement around the ‘essential’ fundamental difference between theists (those who believe in God) and atheists (those who don’t).

As Chris mentioned, the fundamental difference comes from how either side makes their argument, and this is a view that is commonly held upon most 21st century campuses across the world.

However, through this article, I would like to question the ‘fundamental difference’ that has been proposed between the two sides – namely the assertion that atheists use empirical evidence to “reasonably” justify their unbelief in God and that theists disregard these reasons, but instead remain fully committed to the existence of God in a way that the modern world deems unreasonable.

Dallas Willard, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California who held theistic views, said that “We live in a culture that has, for centuries now, cultivated the idea that the sceptical person is always smarter than one who believes.” Even though we doubt for sport, we can all agree that a “fact” is either a) something that is self-evident to everyone (E.g. There’s a rock in the road) or b) something that is not self-evident to the senses but can be proved scientifically.

Any other position held that can’t be demonstrated in any of these two ways is one that includes some degree of faith.

To demonstrate this, and to expand on Willard’s quote, I propose that our culture fails to see the latent faith within the arguments made by atheists using reason.

For example, if someone would “reasonably” doubt that Jesus Christ is the truth because “there can’t be just one true religion, due to all the various religious beliefs today”, we fail to recognise that this statement is itself an act of faith.

This is not a self-evident universal truth, and even though this statement has the appearance of reason, can it be scientifically proven? I wonder what a mathematics professor at any university would think if a student shouts out, “There can’t be one right answer to the question because all of us got different answers!”

Additionally, another example can be drawn from Atheist Alliance International, which is a worldwide organisation that envisions a world based upon ‘sound reasoning’.

In an article proclaiming the ‘reasons’ Christianity is false, AAI claims that “Christian theology is incoherent to the point of absurdity.

God killing his son so he can forgive our future sin is like me breaking my son’s legs so, I can forgive my neighbour in case she ever parks her car on my drive. It is quite ridiculous.” I hope it is clear, by now, that this is a clear statement of “faith”.

This is not self-evident or empirically grounded. This supposedly “ridiculous” nature of the sacrifice of Christ does not reasonably



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disprove his existence, it actually just points to the superior nature of God’s love, as willing to sacrifice what was most precious to him for the undeserved benefit of others.

Therefore, this is not a difference between faith and reason, it is a difference between alternate systems of beliefs.

There is no fundamental difference in how either side makes their arguments.

In conclusion, this article was written to problematize the distinction between faith and reason and I hope that it helps to show that it is in fact faith vs faith. I, therefore, urge those with “unexamined faith” as the base of their reasonable scepticism to wrestle with their beliefs, and for believers to wrestle with their personal and cultural objections to their faith.

At the end of this process, I propose, we will all hold our positions with greater clarity and humility, and ultimately respect one another’s views in a way we didn’t before.

ARE YOU BLACK OR COLOURED?

PERCIVAL QUINA

I watched the premier episode of a TV-series called Mixed-ish. As race is the central issue that this series deals with, this episode left me immediately reflecting on my own identity. I cannot account the amount of times I have been asked: “So, what exactly are you?”. Nor the amount of times I was left unable to honestly answer that question. For quite some time I thought of discovering my identity as a destination. Something that I will eventually reach and be truly sure of. I am only realising now that discovering your identity is a journey. I am 22 years old and the fact that I still cannot answer what seems to be a simple question to some, means that I honestly do not know who I am.

Since forming part of the Stellenbosch environment in January 2016 as a first year, and throughout my years in this environment, I was fighting an identity war. Not just internally, coming to terms with my sexuality and dealing with my race, but also externally, explaining to people something that I myself do not even know and am not truly sure of. Many people look at me and assume, based on my dark complexion that I can speak an African language. The truth is, my home language is Afrikaans (and yes, to some this might be a surprise). Every single time when I tell this to people I am left feeling like I disappointed and denied some part of myself. See, my grandmother was a coloured woman and my grandfather a black, Xhosa man. Their reality was totally different from my reality. I cannot imagine how difficult it must have been raising children of colour in the Apartheid years.

Even worse, raising children of colour in what was then a predom-



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inantly Afrikaans forestry town called Knysna. They decided to teach their children to speak Afrikaans instead of Xhosa hoping that this will allow their kids to have an easier life in a predominantly Afrikaans town (however, this was not the case). Today, here I am. Not sure how to answer a simple question. Too dark to be considered coloured and too Afrikaans to be considered black. I am left not knowing which box to tick at the Home Affairs office. Either way it feels like I am betraying a part of me. I acknowledge that being in this situation offered me some privileges that few have. I grew up being exposed to a rich and complex culture unlike any other in the world. I was also able to access certain “Afrikaans spaces” that most people who look like me are blocked out of.

This identity war is still raging. To you this question might be extremely straightforward but to me it is a complex one. One that leaves me with sweaty palms and a racing heart because what if I choose the wrong identity?...Why do I have to choose in the first place? I hope that one day I will fully embody James Baldwin’s words when he said: “It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I’d been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here.” Up until now this label and identity obsessed world is not allowing me to win this war.