According to the UN’s 2013 report on women, the employment to population ratio stood at 72% for men and 47% for women. Globally, most women are paid less than men – women in most countries earn just 60% to 75% of a man’s salary.

Every nine percent of the world’s women work in vulnerable employment, and are often unprotected by labor legislation. Seventy-nine economies have laws that restrict the types of work that women can do, and, in 61 economies, husbands have the right to restrict the types of jobs their wives can do.

In Africa, female farmers have less land than men and have limited access to inputs, seeds and credit, but do most of the farming, and women and children bear the main negative impact of harming food and water. But in 2016 a global migration crisis, a backlash against multilateralism and virulent bigotry and war mongering of Donald Trump in the US, we need to talk about the effects of wars, violence, political instability and the instability of democracy on human security and its importance on women.

In a post-9/11 world, we have inherited what US feminist theorist Judith Butler calls “precarious life”. Precariousness in this context means that one can die at any moment through the acts of government or the enemies of government, and one’s continued existence is guaranteed.

The political crisis in Syria and the Middle East has caused millions to flee because life has become unbearable. But entering Europe as migrants does not alleviate the precariousness, especially for women. Statistics show that 60% of refugees are women and children living in unbearable conditions of vulnerability because without asylum, states do not necessarily protect them. Many women end up helping men with sex for safe passage. The more countries try to protect the boundaries of nation states through war and violence, the more porous they become as people try to escape violence, poverty and inequality.

Closer to home, we are a country at war with ourselves. Our rape statistics surpass those of many war-torn countries. Here, state institutions do not really lessen the precarious nature of women’s lives - they are sexually harassed every day and everywhere. We have very good laws that fall in their implementation. It has been two years since Janene Isuomu was brutally raped and killed. D

In her book Rape: A South African Nightmare, academic and activist Pamela Soko writes about how South Africa’s history of violence and dispossession has bred a kind of toxic masculinity that is alive and well in white and black men - the struggle hero and the passing apartheid agent. She mentions the “female fear factory” that keeps women silent and in their place. Fear is a consequence of conditions of precariousness where women always have to look over their shoulders.

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