

Research paper

Feminist Solidarity Against Sexual Violence: A Political Biography of the One in Nine Campaign

Simamkele Dlakavu * 

University of South Africa (UNISA), SOUTH AFRICA

*Corresponding Author: Simamkele.dlakavu@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines feminist resistance against sexual violence in South Africa, tracing the political biography of the One in Nine Campaign, a boldly feminist social movement organisation formed in 2006 in solidarity with Fezekile "Khwezi" Kuzwayo, who accused then-Deputy President Jacob Zuma of rape. Through the lens of African feminist theory and social movement theories, the paper explores the genealogy of African feminist activism against sexual violence in democratic South Africa, attending to the political opportunities, strategies, and solidarities that gave rise to and sustained this movement. Grounded in feminist qualitative methodologies and thirteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with current and former members of the One in Nine Campaign, the paper foregrounds the voices and lived experiences of those who built and sustained this movement. It argues that the solidarity enacted by the One in Nine Campaign is distinctly intersectional in character: active, tangible, and public, it confronts the interlocking systems of patriarchal, racialised, and classed power that silence survivors and reproduce sexual violence. In doing so, the paper contributes to African feminist scholarship by demonstrating how solidarity, rooted in collective care, rage, and political imagination, transforms both movements and the activists who build them. Ultimately, the One in Nine Campaign offers a vital and enduring template for feminist resistance, one that insists solidarity is not passive sentiment but a deliberate call to action. In remembering Khwezi, the paper recovers an erased feminist history while reaffirming the political possibility of a future free from gender-based violence.

Keywords: South Africa, sexual violence, social movements, one in nine campaign, African feminist theory

South Africa's democratic project carries the deep and unresolved scars of gender-based violence (GBV), particularly, sexual violence is embedded in the nation's democratic fabric. This violence sits in stark tension with the Constitutionally embedded promises of freedom, dignity and gender equality. Both the One in Nine Campaign, and later, the symbolic #RememberKhwezi silent protest, illuminate an enduring struggle for justice, accountability, and feminist solidarity against sexual violence. This paper invites us to reflect on these political moments, tracing the genealogy of African feminist resistance through movements that confront the persistent pandemic of sexual violence. At the heart of these movements lies the commitment to *tangible and active solidarity*, solidarity that is not only expressed in words but enacted through deliberate, continuous, public, and often contentious political acts and activism.

In centring the narratives of Fezekile “Khwezi” Kuzwayo and the feminist and queer activists who stood with her, this paper foregrounds narratives often excluded from dominant political histories. Kuzwayo’s bold and courageous decision to speak out against then deputy president of South Africa and the African National Congress, Jacob Zuma, and lay a rape charge against him in 2006 was a watershed moment, not just in South African politics but for African feminist praxis. It catalysed the formation of the One in Nine Campaign, a movement that resisted the erasure of survivors’ voices and asserted a bold collective feminist political identity. This paper seeks to archive these acts of resistance as a political biography of feminist solidarity, tracing how movements emerge, grow, and confront intersecting systems of patriarchal, racialised, and classed power. Through the lens of social movement and African Feminist theory, this study engages with the opportunities and threats that gave rise to this feminist movement against sexual violence.

Above all this paper serves as a call to recover erased histories of feminist activism, particularly the intersectional and queer feminist solidarities that shaped South Africa’s response to sexual violence. As we confront a present still marked by pervasive gendered injustice, remembering the #RememberKhwezi protest and the One in Nine Campaign offers critical lessons on how solidarity can disrupt power and transform society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is theoretically grounded in African feminist theory, which provides a contextually rooted framework for analysing sexual violence, feminist activism and movement building, and political resistance in South Africa. African feminist theory emerges from the concrete historical and political realities experienced by African women and is attentive to the interconnected nature of forms of oppression produced through race, class, gender, sexuality, colonialism, and apartheid (Mama, 2005; Lewis, 1993). Central to this theoretical framework is a demand as well as an insistence on being aware of difference, to the politics of location and particular historical conditions/contexts, rejecting single-axis explanations of oppression and domination, in favour of an analysis of interlocking structures of power. African feminist theory is in an active and generative conversation with Black Feminist theory and the conceptual framework of *intersectionality*, coined by Crenshaw (1989). Intersectionality exposes the constraints of viewing oppression and discrimination in a single-axis framework or lens (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989, p. 139) observes that in antidiscrimination law that “a problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis”. Crenshaw (1989) focuses on Black women and asserts that because of their multifaceted identity, shaped both by their race and gender, a single-axis analysis or lens on the ways in which they are discriminated against distortion and inaccurate account of their lived experience. However, African and Black Feminists from South Africa such as Lewis and Baderoon (2021, p. 4) warn us that we should remain critical of the tendency to collapse Black Feminism into an exclusively African American framework. African Feminist theory and scholarship have further illustrated the limits of liberal feminism in tackling the sexual violence epidemic both in South Africa and worldwide. Arguing that despite progressive laws and a Constitution in South Africa, that patriarchal and racist legal institutions and lawmakers continue to fail Black women and other marginalised survivors (Ludwig, 2007). As such, African Feminism foregrounds feminist movement-building, protest and collective action as central strategies in confronting sexual violence, challenging the depoliticisation of the sexual violence crisis, and asserting African women’s political agency beyond the confines of the law.

METHODOLOGY

This study draws on feminist qualitative methods, emphasising and foregrounding lived experience, activism, and archival research to reconstruct a political biography of the One in Nine Campaign. Guided by African feminist methodologies, the research listens deeply to the voices of feminist activists, survivors, and allies, voices often marginalised by dominant historical narratives. Hesse-Biber (2014, p. 46) demonstrates that “research is considered ‘feminist’ when it is grounded in the set of theoretical traditions that privilege women’s issues, voices, and lived experiences”. Rather than seeking to extract or “capture” participant experiences, the study is grounded in practices of deep listening, reflexivity, and collaborative knowledge production, recognising participants as co-producers of African feminist knowledge.

The imperial foundation of this study consisted of thirteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews and conversations conducted with current and past members of the Campaign, including co-founders, member activists, and board members involved at different moments in the movement’s history. The interviews provided space for participants to reflect on the Campaign’s emergence, internal dynamics, political strategies, and evolving understandings of feminist solidarity. African Feminist interviewing methods were employed to prioritise ethical accountability, foregrounding and recognising the considerable emotional labour and care that participants undertake when they revisit and recount their experiences of sexual violence, feminist political struggles and resistance. The study further attends to the emotional landscapes of solidarity, rage, grief, joy, and captures how

collective action transforms individuals and movements like the One in Nine Campaign. As this research is concerned with tracing the political biography of the One in Nine Campaign, interviews function as a form of oral history, enabling the documentation of lived experience, emotions, and reflections that are often absent from official archives (Della Porta and Diani, 2006; Della Porta, 2014). In this context, interviews were essential to rendering visible the feminist labour, political consciousness, and collective practices that shaped the Campaign's long-term and sustained mobilisation in fighting the sexual violence pandemic in South Africa.

In addition to interviews, the research involved primary archival analysis, drawing on internal Campaign documents, organisational reports, media coverage, and public statements to trace how the One in Nine Campaign's feminist political activism emerged, took shape, deepened, expanded, and responded to South Africa's shifting and often hostile socio-political conditions (Dlakavu, 2024). This archival approach aligns with African feminist theory, which values oral histories and embodied knowledge, countering the erasure of marginalised voices from mainstream historical records (Zezeza, 2005; Mama, 2011)

Taken together, this methodology reflects a commitment to collaborative knowledge production, recognising the intersectional challenges that shape feminist movements. It offers a nuanced account of the One in Nine Campaign's work, tracing the ways in which intimate personal narratives and testimonies intertwine with collective political action to produce sustained African feminist resistance to sexual violence in South Africa over time (Dlakavu, 2024).

The emergence of the One in Nine Campaign

Towards the end of 2005, Fezekile "Khwezi" Kuzwayo took the decisive step of filling an official rape case against Jacob Zuma, the then former deputy president of the country as well as the ANC. Her decision catalysed a convergence of friends, fellow survivors and feminist activists who came together to establish the social movement organisation that would become the One in Nine Campaign, conceived explicitly to provide tangible solidarity and strategic support in the legal struggle she was about to face against Zuma (Dlakavu, 2024). They articulated a shared political message, often expressed through protest chants such as: "*phantsi ngo Zuma, phantsi*" [down with Zuma, down], "*phambili ngomzabalazo wabo mama phambili*" [forward with women's struggles, forward]" (Mail & Guardian, 2010). Those feminist activists who came together to establish this social movement organisation brought with them substantial activist experience, professional skills in survivor counselling and the law, as well as firsthand knowledge of navigating the legal system that constantly failed rape complainants, with many having accompanied survivors through that process themselves (Dlakavu, 2024).

These seasoned feminist activists and comrades of Kuzwayo titled their organisation the One in Nine Campaign. The organisation's name was directly drawn from a 2005 South African Medical Research Council (MRC) study on sexual violence, whose findings revealed a stark and troubling reality: only one out of every nine rape survivors and victims, report the assault to the police, it is indeed that statistic and figure that prompted the name: 'One in Nine' (One in Nine Campaign, 2015). Within the same study, it revealed "that of the cases that do reach the courts, less than 5 % of the rapists are convicted" (One in Nine Campaign, 2006). As observed by Mbandazayo (2018), the women who established this organisation and movement in support of Kuzwayo "were the first to say, unreservedly, 'I believe her,' when it was the hardest time to do so". A swell of support which provided a counter-political discourse in South Africa, that was distinctively feminist, during and after the rape trial (Dlakavu, 2024)

It was from the moment that Kuzwayo decided to report the assault, that 2006 would become a year of acute political and personal difficulty, not only for Kuzwayo, but for other victims and survivors of sexual violence in South Africa too. It was additionally a particularly difficult period for the feminist and gender justice activists who had waged a parallel struggle, a struggle which insisted that the democratic project that they had fought to build would be a democratic society that took the violation of women's bodies seriously as a political and constitutional matter. The Zuma rape trial reverberated worldwide, as the world took note beyond the immediate courtroom walls, and was subject to contested interpretation and reinterpretation. It was Hunter (2010, p. 1) who observed that "the trial—in the words of one newspaper headline, '23 Days That Shook Our World'—appeared to crystallize fundamental gulfs in South Africa's young democracy". It is widely acknowledged that for rape survivors and feminist activists who bore witness to the proceedings on television and radio, the trial and its outcomes constituted a particularly dark period, personally and politically. Moffett (2008) documents the ways in which millions of women in South Africa followed the trial as it was broadcast live on radio and television. She articulated how many of these women tuning into the trial were survivors themselves, for whom the scenes out of the courtroom provoked acute re-traumatisation and triggers. Additionally, Moffett (2008, p. 175) tells the story of how "rape hotlines reported that they were inundated with calls from survivors re-traumatised by the case – and terribly afraid that, should they be raped again (unfortunately by no means an uncommon occurrence), this would be held against them in a court of law". While Motsei (2007, p. 18) posits that "the pervasive disrespect for women and women's

rights was bought home” when she was awoken to a newspaper headline during the rape trial titled: “Burn the Bitch”. Feminist scholars in the country argued compellingly that the Zuma rape trial laid bare the deeply hyper-patriarchal assumptions and victim shaming embedded within South Africa’s judicial system, particularly as it relates to its treatment of consent and its systematic delegitimisation of sexual violence complainants. Feminist scholars such as Bennett (2009, p. 5) observed that this verdict and trial “split the nation around the meaning of rape”, while Gouws (2021, p. 6) demonstrated that “the outcome of this case strengthened the impression that men are entitled to rape with impunity”. Robins (2008, p. 153) similarly draws attention to the structural depth of patriarchy within South African society, and the categorical failure of the country’s political leaderships to take meaningful action to fight against sexual violence. Notably, Burnett et al. (2007, p. 161) observed that African women’s activist groups “were outraged by his eventual acquittal, not so much over the not guilty verdict, but rather because of the attitudes and views on women which emerged during the trial and judgement”. At the end of the trial, outcomes favoured Zuma legally as he was acquitted by the Johannesburg High Court in 2006 and the trial did not diminish his political ascent either as he would assume the country’s highest office, becoming South Africa’s President in 2009.

The ordeal confronted by Kuzwayo, sexual violence survivors and victims in the country, as well as feminist activists during this period, was not only the single political narrative of this historic Zuma rape trial (Dlakavu). In keeping with feminist traditions of responsiveness to gendered injustices, the Zuma rape trial was the terrain upon which a qualitatively new era in South African feminist history was forged. This particular political moment catalysed a distinctly renewed modes of direct, contentious feminist activism explicitly directed at the state. Feminist scholars such as Hassim (2009, 2023) have placed particular attention to the One in Nine Campaign’s impact and work, instead of solely placing emphasis on the dire effects that the trial had on the lives of women in South Africa. This paper too is invested in the question of how African feminists respond to contentious political moments, and specifically, in positioning the Zuma rape trial can be understood as a paradigm shift and rupture between feminist activism and the South African state. The analysis pursued here centres the ways in which the trial operated as a political catalyst, one that moved feminist-leaning activists and survivors of sexual violence to reframe their political claims and demands, in doing so creating the conditions and the openings for the emergence of a more confrontational and contentious feminist politics in democratic South Africa to crystallise (Dlakavu, 2024). It is this African Feminist political response, its textures, its strategies and its ongoing significance, that this paper sets out to recover and theorise.

An African feminist story of political and intersectional solidarity

The emergence of the One in Nine Campaign in February 2006 is, at its foundation, a story about tangible and active feminist solidarity, meaning it is a form of solidarity that is sustained, embodied, and made legible in public. As One in Nine Campaign member Mthathi (2023) acknowledged “how movements evolved is never like a neat thing”. Yet what is indisputable is that the Campaign was born from a collective determination to demonstrate solidarity with the woman who had opened the rape case against Jacob Zuma, Fezikile Kuzwayo, known publicly by her pseudonym “Khwezi”. The political ethos of this solidarity was captured in one of the One in Nine Campaign posters outside the Johannesburg High Court which asserted that the “rape of one woman is rape of us ALL” (One in Nine Campaign, 2006).

When the rape case was opened by Kuzwayo, feminist activist Dawn Cavanagh (2023), was among the very first people she contacted. Their connection was rooted in a shared history of involvement in South Africa’s right to health movement, specifically through the Gender AIDS Forum (GAF) in Durban. Cavanagh (2023) recognised from that initial conversation that their community of activists would need to be “geared up ... we were going to need to give support” due to the fact that they were aware the case would be an extremely public matter. In the course of our interview, she provided additional clarification that:

because we were in Durban and the case was going to be in Johannesburg, we contacted POWA [People Opposing Women Abuse], which was the obvious organisation to contact. We contacted them and said this has happened and we are going to be traveling to Johannesburg and are they willing to do a kind of partnership? So that was how it started. Then GAF and POWA kind of led the process of creating a coalition of organisations... so that on the first day of the case and we were able to be outside court supporting (Cavanagh, 2023).

A critical dimension of this story is that Kuzwayo was not a political outsider, she was already deeply embedded in feminist and right to health networks and movements, as an activist in her own right, living openly with HIV. As Cavanagh (2023) reflected “we were already activists and many of the people that stood with Fez [Fezekile] were people that were involved in the right to health movement and then out of that right to health movement, we had all gone from the kind of broader right to health and access to primary healthcare into the HIV crisis in the country, as well as violence against women.” Consequently, for Cavanagh (2023) the impulse to stand with Kuzwayo born out of “both our experience as girls, as young women, as women and our experiences as activists... that just really mobilised the rage and the anger and just the sense of this is our experience and one of

us is now under an unparalleled level of attack with this added layer of the privilege and power of the perpetrator.” Cavanagh’s (2023) account of what drove them to demonstrate solidarity and tangible support to Kuzwayo as being rooted in their own lived experiences as women in South Africa who were survivors themselves of various forms of injustice such as sexual violence, as well as their activist identities, speaks to social movement theories’ understanding of solidarity (Dlakavu, 2024). Within the social movement theories field, it is widely affirmed that solidarity is tied with questions of belonging to and identifying with particular groups. Hunt and Benford (2004, p. 439) indeed theorise that “solidarity is an identification with a collectivity such that an individual feels as if a common cause and fate are shared.”

African feminist scholars have underscored the extraordinary nature of Kuzwayo’s decision and will to exercise her agency and publicly name her violation. This act of courage transformed her into a mobilising force, particularly for women who themselves had survived sexual violence and faced retaliation for speaking out against patriarchal privilege and power (Lewis & McFadden, 2007, p. 14). As articulated by Tallis (2012, p. 148):

rape in itself is an act of male power over women, and to report rape represents an act of resistance and empowerment. This case presents us with an example of extreme resistance – not only did Khwezi challenge male power over women exercised through violence against women, she chose to challenge a man who had extensive political power.

Motivated by solidarity, Cavanagh (2023) and a group of activists made their journey from Durban. In the course of my interview with her, she recalled that they were “scrounging around trying to find money to get to Johannesburg and to find somewhere cheap to stay”. As Cavanagh (2023), stated “we were standing right outside the court. We are like 30 people, 50 at the most in the course of their day” which the photographs below demonstrate. Even though they were vastly outnumbered by thousands of crowds of Zuma supporters, they held their ground in their resolute feminist presence and stood firm in solidarity with Kuzwayo in a hostile political environment (Dlakavu, 2024).

Feminist scholarship has long positioned and theorised as an indispensable tool and method to achieve political aims and actions. It is widely acknowledged that without solidarity, that the work of feminist movements cannot endure and survive. Within a feminist framework, solidarity has been theorised as a form of “political togetherness” and Della Porta (2021) adds that, within social movement research, political solidarity involves “emotions of apprehending others’ suffering”. Crucially, however, this apprehension is distinct from pity or passive sympathising, which risks depoliticising the response. Political solidarity, by contrast, channels urgency, rage and empathy into forms of political action that politicise activists. This is precisely what characterised the solidarity expressed by the feminist activists in the One in Nine Campaign, it moved beyond emotions and sentiment, and resulted in engaged political action and tangible solidarity as evidenced in the demonstrations held outside the Johannesburg High Court that we see in the photographs below during the Zuma rape trial as shown in [Figure 1](#) (Dlakavu, 2024).

Figure 1

One in Nine Campaign demonstration outside the Zuma rape trial at the Johannesburg High Court



Note. Photograph by Zanele Muholi (2006). One in Nine Campaign archives.

In my interviews and conversations with One in Nine Campaign members and co-founders, I set out to understand and reconstruct how the strategic organising around Kuzwayo’s case took shape. Importantly, Carrie Shelver was the first person at People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) that Cavanagh engaged with whom had been embedded within the organisation’s in survivor support programmes. Shelver then became a key contact. In our interview, Shelver (2023) described receiving a call from Cavanagh, and being alerted to the rape case opened against Zuma at the Sandton police station in Johannesburg, information that had reached them through personal networks before it entered the public domain. Cavanagh informed Shelver that she was the one who had a personal relationship with the survivor, Kuzwayo. The feminist activists, Shelver and Cavanagh then discussed “what would it look like to give some kind of support to the survivor during the court case”. As one of the founding members of the One in Nine Campaign and the current coordinator articulated, standing in solidarity and believing Kuzwayo’s account was a deliberate act of counter-political resistance and opportunity affirm women “seeing how

quickly everyone believes men over women” (Mathabela, 2023). It was from that point that they began reaching out to multiple feminist organisations and activists in South Africa in order to form a coalition of support for Kuzwayo. They did so and their efforts were successful and resulted in a strategic gathering at the POWA offices in Johannesburg strictly aimed at planning purposes. During the interview she recalled that “in the beginning, when we were organising, it was really under different organisations’ names. There was no campaign to speak of” (Shelver, 2023). Shelver (2023) noted that “we were sort of just meeting informally as people from different organisations to think about how to get people to the court”. It was when the case formally began, that they recognised the full magnitude of that political moment, and it was apparent that there should be more a structured and formalised response from their side, understanding and that this particular political moment exceeded the boundaries of any individual rape case (Dlakavu, 2024).

Multiple founding members recalled in their interviews that the mobilising call they received came from Shelver who acknowledged the institutional advantage her position within POWA afforded her. Shelver (2023) stated in our interview that “my luck was that also I was able to work within POWA and kind of really draw on the resource base of POWA and the capacity of POWA to make the calls and so on”. POWA itself brought a long history to this work, having already been organising outside courts and engaged in survivor support work in the country since its founding in 1979 (POWA, 2023). The interviews consistently revealed that POWA’s contribution to the One in Nine Campaign’s formation extended well beyond their individual staff members’ participation. As Mathabela (2023) explained that “because it is the work that they do, the funding or the money to call the meetings and whatnot, were coming from POWA”. POWA’s institutional depth, as the first organisation in South Africa to provide shelters for women who were victims of abuse in 1981, provided the institutional infrastructure upon which the One in Nine Campaign was built (POWA, 2023).

As Shelver (2023) additionally elaborated during our interview, it was the national significance of the trial that prompted activists to conceptualise what they called “national days of solidarity”. These “national days of solidarity” was an expansion that required contacting feminist activists across the country who had the capacity to organise and mobilise broader public support. The diversity of those who rallied around Kuzwayo is best understood as a form of *intersectional solidarity*, a form of group consciousness and political praxis that is alert to the interconnected and overlapping nature of oppression across gender, race, class, and sexuality (Crowder, 2020, p. 36). Kuzwayo’s position as a Black lesbian working-class woman living with HIV, demanded precisely this kind of *intersectional solidarity*, one capable of recognising difference and the interconnected systems of oppression that she was up against (Dlakavu, 2024). *Intersectional solidarity* thus addressed for the overlapping and multiple layers of oppression encountered by sexual violence survivors such as Kuzwayo in ways that earlier feminist mobilisations could not. In contrast to both the gendered solidarity seen in earlier women’s movements in contexts such as the United States of America, which often centred gender alone in displays of solidarity, and the nationalist anti-colonial movements that preached forms of racial solidarity without much attention to the experiences of patriarchal oppression which would impact Black women’s lives. *Intersectional solidarity*, then, enables a fuller and more honest understanding of what solidarity actually requires. Indeed, hooks (1989:25) remind us, that it is when we are:

Working collectively to confront difference, to expand our awareness of sex, race, and class as interlocking systems of domination, of the ways we reinforce and perpetuate these structures, is the context in which we learn the true meaning of solidarity. It is this work that must be the foundation of feminist movement.

Larissa Donald (2023), a Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) activist who worked at Rhodes University in Grahamstown (later renamed Makhanda), was among those Shelver reached out to in order to host solidarity actions or the “national days of solidarity” beyond Johannesburg. Their pre-existing relationship was itself significant, they both had a long-standing friendship which is testament to feminist scholarship’s insistence that solidarity in social movements is built not only through political alignment, but through the cultivation of genuine relational and emotional bonds over time among people (Rawluszko, 2022, p.385). As Donald (2023) recalled during our conversation together, “Carrie and I went to university together. So, we have known each other for a long time, and we had worked together at the Equality Project. We were friends.” Donald’s account illuminates to the long history of feminist organisations’ capacity to harness and activate their personal relationships and trust-based networks to build political movements. Following Shelver’s call, Donald turned to the intimate activist ecosystem in the small university town, drawing in student activists such as Ishtar Lakhani (2023) who articulated that:

I did not know a lot about the kind of formalised feminist organising at the time. I mean, I was in my late teens. Probably I was maybe 19 at the time... I was young and impressionable and wanted to do what people I admired were doing.

Feminist theorists are clear that political solidarity is centred on active political engagement and is not a passive affair, as it seeks to proactively and directly confront power, and generate a counter-political discourse that renders injustice visible (Einwohner *et al.* 2021, p. 6). The One in Nine Campaign embodied this principle through their various national days of solidarity held across the course of the trial, with feminist activists delivering messages of solidarity to Kuzwayo outside the High Courts in Johannesburg, Durban, East London, Cape Town and

Grahamstown on the days she appeared in court. The stakes of these solidarity actions became fully apparent when one views the conditions of the trial in which Kuzwayo was subjected. As Gouws (2021, p. 6) documents, the Jacob Zuma rape trial subjected Kuzwayo to the most severe form of secondary victimisation of a rape survivor ever publicly witnessed, where she was even stoned on her way inside and outside the court, forced to conceal her face and body, and required security escorts, constituting an unprecedented level of public violation of a rape survivor.

Beyond their symbolic function, the national days of solidarity were also mobilised as platforms for the dissemination of information around the sexual violence crisis in the country. Internal organisational records from the One in Nine Campaign in 2016 document gatherings of between fifty to one hundred people in different parts of South Africa as demonstrations of solidarity. For participants such as Nonceba (2023), a student activist at Rhodes University, she said during our interview that the pull to the national days of solidarity was visceral and immediate because she “was just drawn to the injustice of it.” Through its visible demonstrations of solidarity, the One in Nine Campaign’s directly challenged prevailing perception and narrative that Zuma held widespread support in the country, it highlighted that there existed a strong African feminist counter-political force built through the One in Nine Campaign (Dlakavu, 2024). As Shelver (2023) explained, the coalition-building strategy was explicitly inter-sectoral, as their plan and strategies were linked to “drawing on all our networks, personal networks also trying to mobilise all the sectors, because it was in the HIV sector, the violence against women sector, as it was then, somewhat the LGBT sector.” Shelver (2023) further elaborated that “most of us who were centrally involved in kind of holding and building the campaign, I think most of us had worked in gender- based violence for some time. Many of us were survivors ourselves”.

Subsequent to engaging with and inviting numerous organisations across different activist sectors, an initial meeting was convened at POWA’s offices in Johannesburg. During our interview, Mathabela (2023) recalled that “it was a handful... more than ten” people that honoured that initial meeting invitation. What emerged clearly from the meeting was the recognition of the need to mobilise greater support to join in with their efforts and mobilisations. As Mathabela (2023) affirmed, as feminist activists, they were aware that this “is a big case, so we need more bodies, we need more voices. We need expertise of different kinds... we needed to have our ducks in a row and get more organisations.” Mathabela came from Behind the Mask, an LGBTI regional media organisation, that documented stories of the LGBTI community on the African continent, and they were one of the organisations invited to a meeting at POWA where the Campaign was introduced. Behind the Mask became one of the initial organisations to pledge support and show tangible solidarity towards the case. Mathabela (2023) further recalled that, “our founder was very familiar with Fezeka, also with Fezeka identifying as a lesbian woman was another thing. That made sense for Behind the Mask to be involved in it because she is a lesbian woman”. Kuzwayo’s identity as a lesbian-identifying woman was thus politically relevant and significant, influencing how LGBTI organisations understood their obligation to openly support her during the rape trial. As emphasised by Tallis (2012, p. 150) “specific lesbian issues are not on the agenda of African feminism or women’s movements... there is often a deafening silence when the time comes to stand up against the oppression and abuse of lesbian women”. What dominated Mathabela’s (2023) mind during the early solidarity meetings was not only mobilisation strategies, she said during our interview, that it was importantly “really just worry, thinking about her safety, thinking about our safety...wondering how we are going to do all of this”. Mathabela (2023) was in her early 20s during the trial and she described that being an organiser during the Zuma rape trial was “very difficult” and “scary”. Mathabela later joined the One in Nine Campaign as a full staff-member in 2011.

Once Kuzwayo opened the case, and the One in Nine Campaign started to mobilise, and feminist political momentum in the country slowly began to build. As Sipho Mthathi (2023) emphasised during our interview, “she [Kuzwayo] reached out to those people who then reached out to other feminists, and before you know it, feminists were gathering.” Mthathi was, at the time was serving as the General Secretary of the TAC in Cape Town. TAC is a historic HIV/AIDS activist movement in South Africa founded in 1998 that had successfully secured a landmark Constitutional Court victory, compelling the state to provide HIV/AIDS treatment to its citizens. During my conversation with Mthathi (2023) she articulated that “the feminists within the TAC, who were part of Positive Women's Network that Prudence had founded, then started reaching out. [Saying] have you heard this, and this is what women are planning”. As Shelver and Cavanagh commenced organising and engaging with activist movements and organisations such as the TAC, Mthathi (2023) felt that in her capacity as a General Secretary of the TAC and as a feminist that:

for us the TAC has to take a stand... As women in the TAC, regardless of whether they TAC will join, we are going to take a stand in solidarity with women, and before you know it, women in the branches were organising. We were having these difficult discussions with the TAC National Executive Committee. And it was causing these splits. I remember that week this first came out and how difficult it was to be a General Secretary of a patriarchal movement where you had all these kinds of threats that began to kind of reveal themselves, the patriarchal threats, the tribal threats (Mthathi, 2023).

The internal fractures, or “splits” that Mthathi (2023) describes above were rooted in a fundamental fault line within the TAC. Within the movement, a significant constituency of men neither subscribed to feminist politics

and ideologies nor believed and accepted Kuzwayo's account of what Zuma had done to her. While the TAC was not an explicitly self-defined feminist organisation, Mthathi (2023) noted that, akin to several grassroots social movements in South Africa, deliberate efforts were already underway to push the TAC towards a gendered and feminist political consciousness in relation to its work and activism. Mthathi (2023) further recalled that "we had already been doing work with some of the feminists who then gathered under the One in Nine banner... Doing feminist political education within the TAC, connecting the women in the TAC to other social movements, particularly the women in the other social movements. And so there was already momentum and so when this came, it became obvious for us" to join the Campaign. Through sustained internal organising, feminist activists within the organisation, succeeded in pushing the TAC to publicly support Kuzwayo's during the rape trial and the subsequent work of the One in Nine Campaign. As Hassim (2009, p. 60) noted, most of South Africa's new social movements, who were dissatisfied with the economic policies pursued in the Thabo Mbeki presidential era, had aligned behind Jacob Zuma. Hassim (2009, p. 60) argues that even within the ANC political alliance, Zuma had garnered substantial support, including the workers union, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Young Communist League. Both alliance partners supported Zuma's candidacy for the presidency of the ANC and given that the ANC was the governing party, that meant by extension that they endorsed him for the presidency of the country. In both these political groupings, Kuzwayo and the Zuma rape trial were seen "as no more than a political conspiracy, thus denying any credibility or agency to 'Khwezi'" (Hassim, 2009, p. 60).

It is important to understand that the One in Nine Campaign did not begin as a membership organisation in the formal sense, it was, as Mthathi (2023) articulated, a gathering of "a group of feminist activists and women who want[ed] to stand together in solidarity with a survivor". In its early form, the One in Nine Campaign was coordinated across ten member organisations such as: People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA), OUT LGBT Well-Being, Positive Women's Network (PWN), Gender AIDS Forum (GAF), Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), Men as Partners/Engender Health, Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), AIDS Consortium, Rhodes University Treatment Action Campaign and the Masimanyane Women's Support Centre (One in Nine Campaign, 2006). During our interview, anti-apartheid activist, artist and member of the One in Nine Campaign Judy Seidman (2023), articulated that the One in Nine Campaign introduced purple t-shirts during the rape trial as a way of "identity and a sense of working together". They additionally created various posters to declare their messages of solidarity. Mathabela (2023) recalled and articulated their strategic logic for visibility clearly, she stated that in and outside the court, "there should not be a single day where she is taken into court, she does not see our faces. She does not see those shirts." Through their sustained organising outside courts in solidarity, the active feminist media narratives and influencing, and days of solidarity across the country and in places such as Grahamstown, their efforts started to show in the number of crowds pulled in solidarity. In our interview Donald (2023) noted that "it was important to show that there was more going on than what was happening outside the court and that the base of support was much larger than the 20 or 30 women that were standing against the 5000 outside the court in Johannesburg... You know, because then you could paint it like a niche, small movement, or she did not really have support when in fact that was not the case. And that first march or protest, we probably had about 600 or 700 people at, from across the community". Donald (2023) further recalled "we were getting information directly from Johannesburg and sharing it and people were hungry for the information, like people wanted a way to show solidarity". Below in [Figure 2](#) are the photographs from the initial day of solidarity in Grahamstown where hundreds of people, including students, activists, the faith community, and community members attended and demonstrated their support with Kuzwayo (Dlakavu, 2024).

Figure 2

One in Nine Campaign day of solidarity in Grahamstown



Note. One in Nine Campaign (2006). One in Nine Campaign archives.

In the wake of the rape trial and Zuma's acquittal, a judgment outcome that was legally, personally and politically devastating for the One in Nine Campaign, the coalition did not dissolve. Instead, the member organisations convened a multi-day conference and strategic planning session to collectively outline the vision of continuing the work of the campaign. As well as creating a formalised structure, establishing their institutional capacity and beginning to register a legal structure in order to raise funds for future work. As the One in Nine Members articulated during our interviews, although they began this work because of Kuzwayo, they wanted to continue to show the same kinds of tangible solidarity for other rape survivors and victims of sexual violence in South Africa.

Members of the One in Nine Campaign described the political opportunities generated by this moment as layered and multifaceted. Chief among them was the recognition that feminist solidarity became a political opportunity and strategy for feminist activists in the One in Nine Campaign (Dlakavu, 2024). As social movement scholars such as Della Porta and Diani (2006, p. 179) emphasises, "movement strategists are fully aware that at least some of their tactics must widen the pool of activists and develop 'solidarities,' rather than 'merely' having an impact on politicians". As Donald (2023) recalled during our interview, through their work in creating solidarity actions across the country, "it felt good to find a concrete way to show solidarity with Fezeka and you know, to be able to say to her you are not alone. People across the country are with you, even if you cannot see them outside the court."

As Mthathi (2023) explained, the One in Nine Campaign activists created the slogan *solidarity with women with who speak out* in part because of the "recognition of the effect that speaking out against patriarchy and against powerful men comes at a huge cost. And that the kind of backlash that survivors often face prohibits people from actually speaking out. And so, the solidarity was needed to embolden survivors who want to speak out... At the time right there had been this seminal MRC study that was showing how one-in-nine women survivors, only one-in-nine survivors get to speak out [report]... And linked to that, was to push back on the patriarchal silence thing that happens with survivors."

Solidarity, both as a principle and lived practice became a key theme in my discussions with One in Nine Campaign activists. As recalled by Donald (2023) "myself and the other people that were organising in Grahamstown and in other parts of the country... we knew we could not be outside the court, but we also were not prepared to let the folks that were outside the court stand alone, that solidarity was really important." It is crucial to further add to Donald's (2023) perspective, the activists "were organising outside the court because they needed to find a way to let Khwezi know, to let Fezeka know that she was not on her own when she walked in there... [That] not all the voices shoutings were in opposition to her and were voices of hate. There were also voices of love and support, and in the same way that those purple people¹ outside the court held Fezeka, we held them.... And that was not just about being angry or being frustrated or being oppressed, it was very much about care and solidarity as well.

During our interview, Motene (2023) highlighted, that the political opportunity that was available at the time of the Zuma rape trial was to demonstrate visibility of the support towards survivors, to highlight what rape culture was, as well as the cost that one bears when speaking out. Motene (2023) noted that for the Campaign, it was crucial to comprehend "what solidarity is and what it looked like." Motene (2023) further elaborated that "because you are going up against this huge political figure. We need to show her that we believe her... We cannot all be at court every day, but if it means showing that symbol and wearing the T-shirt... that is just saying to survivors and to other victims and also to the families of those victims is that we still believe you". Solidarity also contributes to individual survivors and victim's healing journeys, as Motene (2023) emphasised in our interview, that even when people do not win their rape cases, knowing that there was "at least one person that stood with them that is a really a good start to the healing journey."

CONCLUSION

The story of the One in Nine Campaign is a story of resistance, grief, and courage, as well as an example of how feminist solidarity can confront systemic injustice in the most public, political and personal of ways. It is a reminder that solidarity, particularly among African feminists, is an ongoing process of care, confrontation, and imagination. Through the tangible acts of defiance captured in these moments, we see how feminists in South Africa redefined political mobilisation, creating spaces where survivors could be believed and heard, even when the formal legal system failed them.

This paper does more than document a historical event in the form of the Zuma rape trial; it positions the One in Nine Campaign within the broader political landscape, where activism and resistance continue to be necessary

¹ Purple people refer to One in Nine Campaign protestors who wrote purple t-shirts outside the court during the rape trial. Purple as a colour is often associated with the feminist movement.

for the ongoing struggle against sexual violence. Khwezi's story is not an isolated one, it echoes in the lives of countless survivors across the country, many of whom are silenced by fear and shame. By disrupting patriarchal narratives and naming state complicity, the One in Nine Campaign provided a template for feminist solidarity that remains relevant today. In a political context where powerful men often evade accountability, these acts of resistance challenge the societal norms that uphold rape culture.

Ultimately, the work of the One in Nine Campaign teaches us that "solidarity is not passive", it should be intersectional, it demands action, confrontation, and an unwavering commitment to justice. It calls us to remember that movements are built by people who dare to stand against power, even when it costs them personal and tangible ways. The task now, as feminists and scholars, is to continue building on these legacies, fostering solidarity that not only names injustice but transforms the structures that sustain it. In remembering Fezekile "Khwezi" Kuzwayo, we not only honour her strength and courage to name her violation and demand justice, but we further reaffirm the possibilities of a future free from gender-based violence. A future shaped by feminist imagination, resistance, and collective action.

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The research received ethical clearance from Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

Competing interests

There are no competing interests for this research.

Author contributions

This research was solely conducted and prepared by Dr Simamkele Dlakavu.

Data availability

The qualitative interview data that supports the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical and confidential commitments made to the research participants. The primary archival documents drawn upon in this study are held in the One in Nine Campaign archives, which were accessed via the research participants.

AI disclosure

The author confirms that no generative AI or AI-assisted tools were used in the writing, analysis, and preparation of this manuscript.

Biographical sketch

Simamkele Dlakavu is an African Feminist scholar-activist and adjunct academic at the Political Science Department at the University of South Africa. She holds a PhD in Political Science from Stellenbosch University.

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