# Gender-based violence and masculinity in Namibia: A structuralist framing of the debate

Lucy Edwards-Jauch*
University of Namibia

**Abstract**

*Gender-based violence in Namibia is pervasive and solutions to it remain elusive. How we address the problem depends on how we frame it. Gender-based is directly linked to unequal relationships of power and do not stand in isolation of structural and cultural violence in our society. There is a long history of gender inequality and gender-based violence that is deeply imbedded in Namibia's history. Colonialism was violent and its effects still structures representations of masculinity. It has shaped violent hegemonic and subaltern masculinities. There is also a history of gender-based violence embedded in traditional African patriarchy that is often denied. Gender-based violence should not be sought in the biological or psychological essences of individual perpetrators but, instead, in the nature of our society, our histories and ethnographies of violence. This article locates gender-based violence in a social-historical context and seeks to illuminate some of the intersections between violent masculinities, gender, race and class.*

## Introduction

Gender-based violence is not just about women, but about relations of power between men and women that stem from relations of power in our society. In our discussions of gender-based violence we generally express outrage about the high levels of direct violence against women. Violence against women remains a pervasive problem in Namibia. It is an outcome of violence in society that predates colonial times. At the centre of gender-based violence is the unequal distributions of power. These unequal distributions of power impact on gender relations and representations of masculinity.

The legal and policy frameworks developed to respond to gender-based violence have so far not stemmed the tide. How we seek to solve the problem depends on how we frame the problem. Often the answers are sought in the biology and psychology of men. Men are not born violent and neither are they inherently so.

The magnitude of gender-based violence indicates that it is far from being a question of the occasional individual deviant who commits anti-social acts of aggression against an individual female. Gender-based violence affects large numbers of people. Therefore our explanations of gender-based violence should not be sought in the biological or psychological essences of individual perpetrators but, instead, in the nature of our society, our histories and ethnographies of violence. Our discussion on gender-based violence and masculinity should also illuminate the intersections between gender, race, class, ethnicity and sexuality to enable us to see how these intersections work. They bring about similarities and differences in the exercise of patriarchal power and the different representations and performance of masculinity.

For these reasons, this article calls for a broader definition of violence in general and gender-based violence in particular to incorporate the structural, cultural and direct dimensions of violence. Together, this triad of factors creates a culture of violence and it is this culture that should be the focus of the debate.

*__Dr Lucy Edwards-Jauch__ lectures in the Department of Sociology at the University of Namibia.
E-mail: ledwards@unam.na

 *Journal for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*
*Volume 5, Number 1, 2016 - ISSN 2026-7215*

## The magnitude of the problem

Common definitions of gender-based violence are limited to physical and psychological violence in the interpersonal sphere for example assault, rape, sexual harassment, abuse by authority figures, trafficking for prostitution, child marriages, dowry-related violence, honour killings and sexual assault. But this direct form of interpersonal violence takes place in a broader societal context of structural violence. The 2013 Namibian Demographic and Health Survey results show a relatively high level of social acceptance of violence against women, particularly among poor rural men with low levels of education and men who fall in the lowest wealth quintile (Republic of Namibia, 2014).

In Namibia the most recent reports indicate that 50 000 crimes related to gender-based violence were reported to police stations around the country between 2012-1215. This averages out to about 45 gender-based violence cases per day. Many crimes go unreported and it is mainly assaults, rapes and murders that are reported, therefore it is likely to underestimate the actual number of incidents (Hartman, 2016). From the numbers reported Khomas, Kunene and Otjozondjupa regions have the highest number of rape cases (Ileka, 2016). One in three, or 32% of women experience some form of physical violence. Married women and those with less education are likelier victims of violence than single women (Republic of Namibia, 2014). The high levels of violence against women by men make it too easy to equate men with violence. Such an essentialist view – and there are other essentialist views – obscures the historical-, economic-, political-, social- and cultural context of violence and how the social structure is at the epicentre of gender-based violence.

To look at men's superior physical strength leads to biological essentialism and the conclusion that men are inherently violent and aggressive. But there are many men who do not rape, kill or beat up women. The fact that men have a greater propensity for violence is an outcome of historical, social and cultural processes (Connell, 2000).

Corporeal feminists argue similarly that the bodily performance of masculinity and femininity are outcomes of social processes and particularly relationships of social power (Harcourt, 2002). Some societies legitimise, normalise and idealise male physical prowess and will accept without question men and boys expressing or performing these societal norms and values through their bodies (Messerschmidt, 2000). Judith Butler (1990) points to the performative nature of gender and sexuality and ascribes bodily experiences and enactments of gender norms as the outcome of social processes. The performance of the body is often shaped by social norms. The biological essentialist argument, then, naturalises and normalises violent masculinities. Expressions like "men will be men'" discourage further exploration of a society that breeds and normalises violence (Messerschmidt, 2000; Connell, 2000).

The individualised essentialism attributes violence to the psychological essence of men and ignores social structural factors (Connell, 2000). Psychological factors may play a role in gender-based violence but cannot explain the magnitude and universality of the problem. Individuals have agency and the ability to make choices. However, agency is shaped and constrained within a social-historical context. The social system, social institutions and the State should be held accountable for the preventable structural violence (Greig, 2011). There is a social, cultural and historical context to violence that has its foundations in our society, its unequal distributions of power and unequal access to resources (Connell, 2002).

What is required then is a structural approach to gender-based violence that sees it holistically and locates it in a society where violence is normalised (Ho, 2007).

## Intersections between different dimensions of violence

John Galtung (1969, 1971 & 1990) defines violence as that which is avoidable and decreases the realisation of potential. To him violence is the cause of difference between the potential and the actual and the factor that causes an increased distance between the two. To Galtung (1969 & 1971) violence is built into the social structure of unequal power, unequal life chances and unequal resource distributions. Poverty and inequality are, therefore, forms of violence because they are firstly avoidable and, secondly, they prevent the realisation of potential.

Galtung (1969 & 1971) also identified the different dimensions of violence. He distinguishes between direct violence that directly destroys the realisation of potential and indirect violence where that potential is withheld. He also distinguishes structural, cultural and direct violence. Galtung (1969, 1971 & 1990) argues the existence of an unbroken connection between structural violence, direct violence and cultural violence. All these dimensions of violence are found in gender-based violence, although the intersections are not always visible.

Structural violence (Galtung, 1969 & 1971) is the precursor to other forms of violence and prevents the realisation of potential for some while it priviledges some genders, some social classes, some nationalities, some ethnicities and people with a certain skin colour to the detriment of others. Structural violence is a systemic process in which violence breeds violence (Galtung, 1990), that appears natural (Galtung, 1969), and where the perpetrators are difficult to identify (Galtung, 1969).

Cultural violence includes the cultural and ideological resources employed to justify and legitimise structural violence and to make it seem so natural. It includes attitudes, ideas, religion, language and the epistemic priviledge to certain forms of knowledge (Hathaway, 2013; Galtung, 1990; Quijano, 2000). Religious and political ideologies and belief systems that justify male domination are all forms of cultural violence aimed at manufacturing the consent from the oppressed for their own oppresssion. It is therefore not an accident that women often become the defenders of patriarchal priviledge.

Direct violence could be physical or psychological and includes war, murder, rape, assault and verbal attacks (Hathaway, 2013). The discussions on gender-based violence are by and large limited to acts of direct physical violence that are mainly performed on the body and perpetrated by identifiable actors (Ho, 2007). It is clear, however, that omitting social and cultural violence reduces the capacity of these discussions to expose violence and its original source.

Xenophobic violence in South Africa is an example of how different dimensions of violence intersect, as well as how certain constructions of masculinity intersect with social class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and nationality. Those who were targeted were black men from other African countries, whose nationality was often gleaned from linguistic markers. South Africans accused them of stealing South African jobs, undercutting wages, exploiting them with high prices and, of course, stealing "their" women. Often the perpetrators of this violence were men who themselves were the victims of structural violence. The root cause of the xenophobic violence was structure-level violence that has its roots in a long history of colonial and apartheid economic violence, direct violent repression, unemployment, inequality and poverty. Those who carried out the xenophobic violence misplaced blame for their own violent repression and poverty on already marginalised immigrants. In the 2015 outbreak of xenophobic violence ethnicity was mobilised by the Zulu king to ferment xenophobic violence (Haffejee, 2015; Manyisa, 2015; The Week, 2015).

## Men and masculinity

"Masculinity" refers to the position of men in gender relations and in the gendered social order (Connell, 1993). Masculinity encompasses norms, values, practices, institutional arrangements, ideologies and power relations ascribed to manliness in a given society. It is socially constructed and can change over time. It is constantly reproduced, but can also be challenged and reconstructed (Donaldson, 1993). It is socially constructed, rather than biologically determined (Dowd, 2008). A social constructivist view of masculinity starts from the premise that men are not born violent but are raised to become so.

Patterns of behaviour and practices ascribed to maleness are embedded in the social structure of society (Connell, 1993, 2000, 2001 & 2003; Donaldson 1993; Messerschmidt, 2000 & Greig, 2011). The different constructions of masculinity are bound to particular socio-historical contexts (Connell, 1993). Historical and social contexts differ across time and cultures and are mediated by sexuality, which is an important site for the affirmation of certain hegemonic constructions of masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2000).

Connell (2000) and Dowd (2008) refer to "masculinities" to point the historicity and socially constructivist nature of being a man. This insight leaves room for diverse constructions of masculinity. However, Greig (2011) argues that the pluralistic characterisation of masculinity does not sufficiently highlight hierarchical differences amongst men and their differential social locations (positionalities) within power hierarchies. Men do not form a homogeneous social category and the dividends of patriarchy are unequally distributed amongst men of different social locations. To Greig (2011) different identities and practices are constituted by differential access to social, economic and political power. There is, therefore, an intersection between patriarchal priviledge and oppression in the form of racism and classism that creates commonality and shared interests between certain groups of men and women. The struggle for gender equality should, therefore, not be perceived as anti-male but rather part of a struggle to end all systems' oppression and inequality

Certain forms of masculinity are priviledged over others (Connell, 2000). To link masculinity to the matrices of power in society Connell (1993) invokes the Gramscian concept of hegemony and describes hegemonic masculinity as the culturally idealised form of masculinity derived from the relative positions of power in society.

In an era of globalised capitalist neoliberalism the culturally exalted constructions of masculinity cohere with the core values of transnational capital (Connell, 2000). These values include competetiveness, entrepreneurship, concentration of wealth and economic assets and conspicuous consumption. The mass media exalts the minority experience of western hemisphere global elites. In Namibia the majority of men experience unemployment, job insecurity, insufficient access to basic services, such as education, housing, sanitation, transport and healthcare. These men are socially and economically marginalised and excluded (Greig, 2011).

Greig (2011) argues that anxiety around masculinity is exacerbated by neoliberalism that has brought unprecedented numbers of women into the labour force in the context of stagnant or even declining rates of male labour force participation. We can't call neoliberalism genuine liberation, as female labour is often casualised and flexible. It also hides social injustice of lower-wage levels, greater job insecurity, falling standards of living, increased working hours and an increased burden of unpaid labour.

Direct violence is one response to masculine anxiety and insecurity caused by structural violence in the social system (Greig, 2011; Messerschmidt, 2000). Another response seen in Namibia is masculine political conservatism and the re-masculinisation of the rhetoric around African culture and the desired return to the patriarchal order of African tradition.

The dominant constructions of what it means to be a man depend on the local social cultural context but these localised constructions of masculinities are infused with globalised ones through the influences of the mass media. In Namibia local hegemonic constructions of the cattle- and land-owning hetero-sexual male have been infused with the values of global capitalist consumerism. The ideal man (at least discursively) should have lots of money, access to tenders, possess a number of luxury goods and be in control. These constructions of masculinity are oppressive to the majority of men who live in the structural violence of poverty and inequality.

Hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relations of domination and subjugation. It is firstly constructed in relation to femininity. Therefore the biggest insult to masculinity is to feminise men by referring to them as "sissies", "henpecked" or other forms of feminisation (Donaldson, 1993; Connell, 2002; Messerschmidt, 2000). Hegemonic masculinity is also constructed in relation to other masculinities that have been inferiorised and subordinated; for example, homosexuality and male primary caregivers or homemakers.

In most of Europe, America as well as racist apartheid South Africa and Namibia, black men are inferiorised and their masculinity constantly denigrated. Black men often face higher levels of structural violence in the form of unemployment, discrimination, marginalisation and direct violence in the form of shootings, assaults and incarceration. Central to dominant constructions of masculinity are men as breadwinners and providers. These dominant constructions threaten the sense of masculinity of large sections of working-class men who are unemployed or live with the constant threat of low wages and unemployment (Donald, 1993).

## Violent masculinities in a socio-historical context

The relationship between male physical violence and structural violence is largely ignored and most of the research on gender-based violence in Namibia is descriptive and lacks historicity. Just the same, Namibia's violent history of colonialism has left its mark on society. The colonial history and traditional forms of African patriarchy converge to justify women's subordination, gender inequality and different dimensions of violence against women.

## Colonialism and masculinity

The acts of direct violence during political and military occupation, both in the German and South African colonial period, included the 1904-7 genocide, which led to the extermination of between 75%-80% Hereroes and 35%-50% of Nama people (Katjavivi, 1988). Conquered groups were subjected to slave labour, incarceration in concentration camps where they faced starvation, hypothermia, rapes and kidnappings (Mbuende, 1986; Katjivivi, 1988; Moleah, 1983). Direct violence also characterised the South African colonial period, with killings, kidnapping, rapes, torture, incarceration, restrictions on movement and other gross human rights violations (Smith, 1986; Leys & Saul, 1995).

Galtung (1969) argues that structural economic violence included the expropriation and dispossession of key productive assets, land and cattle, the extraction of raw materials, the subjugation and the exploitation of indigenous labour through slave and contract labour. In Namibia all this was exacted and reinforced through direct physical violence (Katjavivi, 1988; Mbuende, 1986; Moleah, 1983). Colonial dispossession laid the foundations for decades of inequality and wealth concentration primarily in white hands.

The racist nature of capitalism in the German and South African colonial periods saw a racial pact between white settlers of all classes. A racist division of labour ensured white privilege, even when whites owned no property and did manual labour. Direct violence itself was perpetrated on black bodies, primarily by white men. Both for the oppressed and the oppressors, violence was central to the lived experience of masculinity.

The cultural violence legitimised racism and structural violence. Indigenous knowledge and cultural systems were inferiorised and disrupted (Katjavivi, 1988; Moleah 1983). Cultural violence desocialised the colonised from their own culture and re-socialised them into the culture of the coloniser or oppressor. Consent for structural violence obviated the need to reproduce systems of inequality and physical violence because they had already been normalised. It is essentially the process of "the implanting of the top dog inside the underdog" and eventually the violent culture is internalised (Galtung, 1990, pp. 294-302).

Colonialism brought with it dualistic constructions of humanness. Through the racist colonial social structure and epistemologies humanity was divided into hierarchies of superiority and inferiority based on the division of labour, property ownership patterns as well as biological, cultural, religious and linguistic markers (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2007; Grossvogel, Oso & Christou, 2014). Grossvogel, Oso and Christou (2014) invoke Fanon's concept of zones of being (as in Dasein) to explain the dualism. The 'zone of being' was constructed as superior and 'the zone of non-being' as inferior. The 'zone of being' denotes whiteness and white priviledge and the zone of non-being black oppression. In the colonial matrix of power, class and gender oppressions were always structured by racism. Although we have seen the end of formal colonial occupation, the effects of its racist exploitation are still felt daily and still influence subaltern masculinities.

Maldonado-Torres (2007) uses the term "coloniality of being" to express the continued effects of colonialism on the mind and on lived experience. The colonial power matrix was both racist and sexist. The conquered bodies were racialised and sexualised; black men were portrayed as hyper-sexualised, aggressive and potentially subversive with desires to rape white women (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). The black male's supposed sexuality was used to create fear and paranoia that helped to forge a racial pact between white elites and poor whites (Greig, 2011).

The racism in Namibia around black male sexuality still finds currency in the discourses and literature on gender-based violence. Racism can lead to the assumption that the perpetrators of gender-based violence are primarily, if not exclusively, black. Colonialism made violence an integral part of the lives of the dominant and subjugated groups. Current white male gender-based violence in Namibia is under-researched. There is, however, enough historical evidence that points to widespread white male violence against women. Andre Brink (2002), in his well-researched novel, *The other side of silence*, also draws attention to the violent experiences of white settler women. Colonial male violence was also focused on nature, which also became normalised.

### Sexual violence, repression and resistance: Intersections between structural, cultural and direct violence

Where there is oppression there is also resistance. The anti-colonial resistance in Namibia can be divided into two phases: the periods of Primary Resistance and National Liberation. Both were steeped in violence. During the period of Primary Resistance tribal groups resisted colonial dispossession of land, grazing and water rights, as well as their cattle. There was a number of uprisings, which included the Mbanderu/Khaua revolts (1896), the Swartbooi revolt (1897-98), the Bondelswarts revolt (1903), and the 1904-7 war that led to the Herero genocide and extermination of a large portion of Nama people (Mbuende, 1986; Katjavivi, 1988). During the war, farms and German garrisons were attacked and railway and telegraphic links were destroyed. Samuel Maharero gave instructions that no women, children, unarmed and non-German settlers should be attacked. After the war large-scale expropriation of land and cattle occurred; there was a ban on cattle raising and traditional forms of organisation, executions of chiefs and deportations. After the German occupation, Chief Mandume of the Ukwanyama fought a two-pronged battle to retain autonomy against the Portuguese in the north and South African forces in the south. This resulted in tremendous loss of life and the eventual killing of Mandume in 1917 (Katjavivi, 1988).

Colonial dispossession resulted in competition for grazing and water rights that led to inter-ethnic conflicts. To escape Boere commandos the Orlam traversed the Orange River from the Cape. They imported the commando tactics to raid other groups and to expropriate cattle and other possessions. There was also armed conflict between the Orlam and the Nama groups they annexed and the Hereroes over land, cattle and water rights (Katjavivi, 1988).

Sexual violence was part of the colonisation process of subjugation and during the German colonial period indigenous women were raped, abducted, forcibly removed to other areas of the territory, and murdered (Moshenberg, 2012). The rape of indigenous women was known by the racist term *Verkafferung* (going native) or *Schmutzwirtschaft* (dirty economy) (Madley, 2004). It was done with impunity and in the rare case, such as with the rape and murder of Louisa Kamana, the daughter-in-law of a Herero chief, the perpetrator was initially acquitted and sentenced to only three years upon appeal. Herero and Nama women were deported to concentration camps in Windhoek and Swakopmund as sex slaves for both German civilians and soldiers. A section of the Windhoek prisoner-of-war camp was exclusively reserved for this purpose. There is evidence that Hereroes fled areas close to German settlements in order to protect women from sexual violence on the part of German men (Hartman, 2007).

The second period of anti-colonial resistance, the National Liberation Struggle, was influenced by African nationalism and independence struggles that were taking place all over Africa. The struggle for independence initially started off with petitions. It later escalated into non-violent civil disobedience, mass mobilisation and then armed struggle in the face of brutal repression (Mbuende, 1986; Katjavivi, 1988; Moleah, 1983). Forms of civil disobedience or passive resistance, such as the 1958-9 resistance to forced removals and deportations were met with arrests, shootings and killings. Similarly, the great labour strike of 1971-2 against the excesses of the contract labour system was brutally repressed with intimidation, arrests and killings (Katjavivi, 1988).

In response to the mass mobilisation and armed struggle, Namibia became increasingly militarised. The armed struggle that started in 1966 used hit-and-run tactics. Small groups, armed primarily with light weapons, ambushed police stations, military patrols and installations (Katjavivi, 1988). Headmen who collaborated with the occupying force were assassinated. Guerrillas also abducted white construction workers who were involved in road building and performed acts of sabotage resulting in loss of life (Leys & Saul, 1995).

In response, the South African security forces used the twin strategy of repression and co-option. The notorious counter insurgency unit, Koevoet, committed many atrocities against the civilian population and many were accused of aiding guerrillas. They also targeted political activists involved in mass mobilisation. Some of the atrocities included; assaults, torture, routine whipping of women and children, electrical shock treatment, water boarding, being buried alive, burnings and rapes. A dust to dawn curfew was imposed and anyone who violated the curfew was shot on sight. The Catholic Bishops Conference reported widespread human rights abuses and violence, including sexual violence. White soldiers moved into villages and raped young girls in the veld while black soldiers kept watch. While committing these atrocities, the South African security apparatus tried to win to the "hearts and minds" of the oppressed population by deploying soldiers to run schools, hospitals and public services (Katjavivi, 1988).

The violent repression and resistance exacted a heavy toll on the liberation movement itself. In exile SWAPO was the organisation primarily responsible for the wellbeing and deployment of refugees who escaped the brutality of South African occupation. A period

of heightened resistance was followed by retribution and brutal repression during which different waves of Namibians fled into exile (Katjavivi, 1988; Leys & Saul, 1995; Williams, 2015). The South African Defence Force made incursions into neighbouring states to attack refugee camps; the most well-known of these was Operation Reindeer, which resulted in the Cassinga Massacre in southern Angola in May 1978 and in which mainly women, children and un-armed refugees were killed (Leys & Saul, 1995).

In addition to the provision of education, training, health and general welfare services, the refugee camps run by SWAPO were also sites for extreme forms of direct violence. Abuses of power and human rights violations were perpetrated by members of the liberation movement. This was mainly in response to differences, dissent and conflicts around strategy, distribution of humanitarian aid, corruption and food shortages. Justified fear that South African spies may have infiltrated the movement unleashed a general paranoia that turned innocent people into suspects. The abuses included arrests by the governments that hosted the refugees on SWAPO's behest, torture to gain confessions and incarceration in dungeons. There are exiles who went missing and whose disappearance has still not been accounted for (Leys & Saul, 1995; Williams, 2015).

The camps were also sites for sexual violence. Although SWAPO had a policy of gender equality, patriarchal norms still governed sexuality and informed a lot of the practices. Akawa (2015) argued that journeys into exile placed young women at risk as they relied on male guides and that this created unequal gendered power relationships in which the women were sexually exploited. These unequal relationships of power were also exploited by male camp commanders who sexually imposed themselves on new arrivals, who were referred to as "still fresh". Owing to supply shortages and relative positions of power of men to access resources, women were at times forced into transactional sex where sex was exchanged for ondjolo (goodies) such as meat. These transactional relationships became part of the survival strategies to access other benefits like scholarships abroad. Women who refused male sexual advances were at times falsely accused of being South African spies. In the climate of spy paranoia some rather far-fetched rumours circulated that some female spies (omatuma) had razor blades inserted into their vaginas with instructions to have sex with top leaders in order to assassinate them by cutting their sexual organs. The command structure was abused to exact sexual favours because women could not refuse an order to have sex with senior commanders. Some women fell pregnant after being raped. The priviledged sexual access male commanders had to women in the camps caused resentment amongst ordinary male soldiers (Williams, 2015). Often rape was not taken seriously or acknowledged as a violent crime and normalised as "part of life". Female sexuality was controlled and Namibian women who lived in the camps were strongly discouraged from sexual relations with foreign nationals (Akawa, 2015).

## Pre-colonial patriarchy and gender-based violence

### Patriarchy denialism

The desire to recast African identity away from colonial oppression and denigration and the reclamation of indigenous African culture and an African knowledge system are part of the decolonisation process. Unfortunately this process has led to uncritical acceptance or denial of African patriarchy. Capitalist colonialism, however, did not construct its exploitative project on a blank canvas. Although it often destroyed, distorted and denigrated African cultures and knowledge systems, it also used pre-colonial African gender political-economy for super-exploitation. Becker (1995 & 2007), however, doubts the existence of pre-capitalist patriarchy. This she justifies with women's access to property. She argues that because in a minority of cases women were leaders and rulers no firm conclusions about pre-colonial gender power relations can be drawn. However, the political-economy

of gender relations was not based on access only, but more importantly ownership and control over productive resources, division of labour, customary inheritance patterns. This influenced decision-making power, sexual and reproductive autonomy and gender norms.

**The political economy of African patriarchy**

In pre-colonial Namibia as in many southern African societies decision-making, access, control and ownership over key productive assets like land and cattle were primarily in male hands. The political economy of pre-colonial societies was patriarchal. Ideological and cultural systems normalised and naturalised patriarchal priviledge. Despite the communal ownership of land, men controlled land use through gendered land tenure and inheritance systems (Gordon, 1996). Adult males and females who received land from chiefs were the custodians of communally owned land. As wives, women were granted access or usufruct as they provided and still provide most of the unpaid family labour in the familial subsistence economy. Male control over the means of production was the basis for male control over surpluses (Guy, 1990; Koopman, 1995). It was rare for young unmarried women to be allocated land in their own right (Lebert, 2005). Polygyny provided men with further opportunities for wealth accumulation. Bridewealth/lobolo was an exchange relationship between a woman's male kin and her husband for control over her labour and fertility (Guy, 1990).

In many of Namibian matrilineal societies descent and inheritance rights were mainly traced matrilineally. Key forms of property (e.g. cattle) and land rights were inherited by men on the matrilineal side of the deceased. This ensured an intergenerational transfer of wealth to men. Inheritance was a major factor in the promotion of gender inequality (Gordon, 2005). Upon the death of the husband women were often stripped of assets. In some groups they had to return to their maternal kin and in others they could, like property, be inherited by the primary male heir of the deceased husband's estate (Lebert, 2005; Kavari, 2005; Le Beau, 2005; Bollig, 2005). Many of these customary inheritance practices are still present in Namibia.

Capitalism in southern Africa did not dissolve all pre-existing social forms. An articulation of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production resulted in female labour providing the basis for super exploitation (Guy, 1990). There was thus a convergence of different forms of patriarchy (Bozzoli, 1993). For most of the time, the migrant labour system took men away and forced women to take over tasks that were traditionally performed by men. The colonial imposition of taxes, monetisation and commodification of services (education and health) made women dependent on male migrant remittances. This deepened inequalities (Jauch, Edwards, & Cupido, 2009). Female labour in the non-capitalist subsistence economy subsidised cheap male labour in the capitalist economy and enabled the super exploitation of male labour. It provided the basis for surplus accumulation during the early stages of the colonial capitalist economy (Wolpe, 1978, as cited in Jauch, Edwards & Cupido, 2009).

There are still customary practices that promote structural and direct violence against women. Customary marriages had no age requirements and thus girls in puberty could enter marriage (Republic of Namibia, 2012). Namibia is still faced with the problem of early and forced marriages that continue to negatively impact on the girl-child. Disproportionally, high school drop-out rates amongst girls are mainly as a result of early marriages, teenage pregnancies, hunger and poverty (Kangootui, 2016). Customary polygamous marriage allows for polygyny but not polyandry, which is discriminatory towards women. It also provides less security for women. The division of marital property upon divorce or death in customary marriages is highly discriminatory towards women. Owing to the matrilineal inheritance systems, women were dispossessed of key wealth-producing forms of

property like land rights and cattle. Some customary laws also permitted levirate (widow inheritance) and sororate unions, which could violate Article 14 of the Namibian Constitution as it could be seen as forced marriage (Republic of Namibia, 2012).

Certain traditional practices still subject women to forms of direct violence and humiliation. The payment of lobola/bridewealth is central to patriarchal control over women's sexuality. Iipinge and Le Beau (2005), and McFadden and !Khaxas (2007) argue that lobola represents an exchange relationship that enslaves and entraps women, because in some cultures women have to double the amount of lobola (either in cattle or in cash) initially paid for them by the groom's family in order to get a divorce. What this suggests, is that lobola represents a further impediment to women's autonomy and strengthens patriarchal control. It reasserts notions of male ownership and control over females and often becomes the justification for sororate marriage and the inducement for child marriages (Edwards-Jauch, 2009; Wadesango, Rembe, & Chabaya, 2011). Widow inheritance, virginity and sexual testing, beatings and degrading treatment during female initiation ceremonies all reinforce gender inequality and gender-based violence (McFadden & !Khaxas, 2007; Wadesango, Rembe, & Chabaya, 2011 ).

**Inequality and violence**

Inequality is a form of structural violence and a hindrance to peace and non-violence (Galtung, 1969; Godenzi, 2000). Based on cross-country comparisons, Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza (2002) concluded that there is a robust positive correlation between the incidence of violent crimes such as murder and robbery, and the extent of income inequality.

Direct and interpersonal violence and, particularly, gender-based violence cannot be viewed in isolation of the structural and cultural violence in the society. It is argued that often interpersonal violence is an expression of the powerlessness certain oppressed groups of men experience in society. When hegemonic versions of masculinity call into question and threaten the masculinity of subordinate men in society, physical violence might be the only resource available through which masculinity can be asserted (Messerschmidt, 2000).

The key to understanding structural and direct gender-based violence is the relative economic inequality of women in relation to men and the unequal distribution of economic power. Despite rising educational levels and growing labour-force participation rates, economic power imbalances still exist (Godenzi, 2000).

Gender equality is a crucial part of violence prevention and evidence indicates that inequalities increase the risks of violence on women by men. Inequalities also inhibit the ability of those affected to seek protection (World Health Organization, 2009).Violence is linked to power and thus the person in the family who makes the decisions is also the one who perpetrates the violence (Sandness, 2012). Controlling income and possessions – i.e., economic power – is a key factor in determining gender power relations. A key factor in women's economic position is the fact that a large part of their labour is not recognised, enumerated or remunerated, and takes the form of unpaid family labour (Godenzi, 2000).

In Namibia male labour force participation rates are higher than female labour force participation rates. Men also have higher employment absorption rates due to relatively higher levels of education and skills training. Of the own account workers in the subsistence farming sector, males more than females, are likely to be paid employees. Women are more likely to do unpaid family workers and social reproductive labour. Female unpaid family workers are concentrated in the subsistence economy, in the agricultural-fishing sector and in private households (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2015). The question is therefore not only whether women are employed or not, but also what the quality of that employment

is. Women are also more likely to be in precarious work (Ibid.). Recent statistics cited by the Prime Minister indicate that women are increasingly employed in economic decision-making positions but a gap between men and women remains (Haidula, 2016). Women who are employed in the wage and salary sector generally earn less than men. In some instances, such as in the mining and quarrying, electricity and related industries, the gap is more than double. It is still not clear how male income in extraterritorial organisations and bodies dropped from N$ 37, 000 to N$ 1000 in one year (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2014 & 2015). Such a drop in male income significantly reduced the average gap between male and female wages (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Average monthly wage (in Namibia Dollars) by industry and sex 2014**

| Industry | Female | Male |
|---|---|---|
| Agriculture forestry & fishing | 2, 265 | 2 ,072 |
| Mining | 9, 247 | 24, 424 |
| Manufacturing | 5, 007 | 7, 130 |
| Elect Electricity & related industries | 7, 427 | 22, 484 |
| Water & related industries | 6, 805 | 8, 813 |
| Construction | 4, 686 | 4,093 |
| Wholesale and retail trade | 3, 734 | 5, 539 |
| Transport & storage | 6, 270 | 7,345 |
| Accommodation, food & service activities | 3,126 | 3,543 |
| Information and communication | 16,289 | 12, 772 |
| Financial and insurance activities | 13,038 | 17, 000 |
| Real estate activities | 6,472 | 15,219 |
| Professional, scientific & technical activities | 10,227 | 14,057 |
| Administration & support service activities | 4,299 | 4,900 |
| Public administration, defence, social security | 10,319 | 8,719 |
| Education | 9 494 | 15 235 |
| Human health & social work activities | 14,910 | 27,020 |
| Art, entertainment & recreation | 1,803 | 6,040 |
| Other service activities | 4,495 | 4,840 |
| Private households | 1,304 | 902 |
| Extra territorial organisations & bodies | 4,117 | 1, 000 |
| **Total** | **6, 164** | **6,965** |

**Source:** Namibia Labour Force Survey 2014 (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2015)

## Conclusions

Men are not born violent, nor are they inherently violent. The social structure produces violent masculinities. To resolve issues of gender-based violence one would have to confront structural violence in Namibia. Gender inequalities have their origins in the political economies of both pre-capitalist societies and colonialism. Although Namibia has achieved political independence, it has not sufficiently dealt with the economic structures of colonialism that continue to reproduce inequalities. The conversations about gender-based violence should not only focus on physical violence, but also on the structural violence that is the precursor to physical violence.

Legislative changes are not enough to change the social structure and societal norms that constantly re-affirm gender inequality. The construction of violent masculinities has particular histories and ethnographies. The need exists to engage those histories to understand current high levels of violence towards women, and to reconstruct alternative masculinities from patriarchal domination and violence.

The decolonisation process should be a project of liberation and should therefore deconstruct the society that normalises gender inequality and violence towards women at structural, institutional and personal levels. Although part of the decolonisation process is to re-assert African cultural and knowledge systems, our democratic dispensation of gender-equality should compel us to deconstruct African culture as well and to critically engage with its patriarchal tendencies. There is a need to critically engage with traditional practices that promote gender inequality and violence against women. The challenge is not to reject African culture but to engender it.

**References**

Akawa, M. (2015). The gendered politics of the SWAPO camps during the Namibian liberation struggle. In J. Silvester (Ed.), *Re-viewing resistance in Namibian history*. Windhoek: Archives of the anti-colonial resistance and the liberation struggle (AACRLS).

Becker, H. (1995). *Namibian women's movement 1980-1992*. Frankfurt: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation.

Becker, H. (2007). Gender, making tradition: A historical perspective on gender in Namibia. In S. Lafont, & D. Hubbard (Eds.), *Unravelling taboos: Gender and sexuality in Namibia* (pp. 99-128). Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre.

Bollig, M. (2005). Inheritance and maintenance among the Himba of the Kunene. In R. Gordon (Ed.), *Meanings of inheritance: Perspectives on Namibian inheritance practices* (pp. 45-62). Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre.

Bozzoli, B. (1993). Marxism, feminism and South African studies. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9(2).

Brink, A. (2002). *The other side of silence*. Florida, USA: Harcourt Books.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble*. New York: Routledge.

Connell, R. (1993). Masculinities in recent world history. *Theory and Society, 22,* 597-623.

Connell, R. (undated) *Masculinities*. Retrieved on February 20, 2015 from www.raewynconnell.net/p/masculinities_20.html

Connell, R. (2001) *Gender, men and masculinities*. Retrieved on February 4, 2016 from http://www.eolss.net/sample-chapters/c11/e1-17-02-01.pdf

Connell, R. (2000). Arms and the man: Using the new research on masculinity to understand violence and promote peace in the contemporary world. In I. Breines, R. Connell & I. Eide (Eds.), *Male roles, masculinities and violence: A culture of peace perspective*. Paris: UNESCO.

Connell, R. (2002). On hegemonic masculinity and violence: Response to Jefferson and Hall. *Theory Criminology*, 1, 89-99.

Donaldson, M. (1993). What is hegemonic masculinity? *Theory and Society* (Special Issue). *Masculinities*, 22(5), 643-657.

Dowd, N. (2008). Masculinities and feminist legal theory. *Gender and Society*, 23(2), 201-248.

Edwards-Jauch, L. (2010). *The effects of HIV/AIDS related mortality on family structures in Namibia: Selected case studies from Namibian AIDS service organisations*. Windhoek: University of Namibia. Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy Thesis.

Fanon, F. (1986). *Black skin white masks*. London: Pluto Press.

Fajnzylber, P., Lederman, D., & Loayza, N. (2002). Inequality and violent crime. *Journal of Law and Economics*, XL. V.

Galtung, J. (1971). A structural theory of imperialism. *Journal of Peace Research*, *8*(20), 81-117.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, *6*(3), 167-191.

Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, *27*(3), 291-305.

Gordon, A. (1996). *Transforming capitalist patriarchy*. London: Lynne Reinner Publishers.

Gordon, R. 2005. *Meanings of inheritance: Perspectives on Namibian inheritance practices*. Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre.

Greig, A. (2011). *Anxious states of masculinity*. Retrieved on March 11, 2016 from http://www.alangreig.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Anxious-States-of-Masculinity.pdf.

Godenzi, A. (2000). Determinants of culture: Men and economic power. In I. Breines, R. Connell, & I. Eide (Eds.), *Male roles, masculinities and violence: A culture of peace perspective*. Paris: UNESCO.

Grossvogel. R., Oso, L., & Christou, A. (2014). "*Racism*". *Intersectionality and migration studies: Framing some theoretical reflections. Identities: Global studies in culture and power*. Retrieved on May 18, 2015 from http://dx.doi.org/10. 1080/1070289x2014.950974.

Guy, J. 1990. Gender oppression in Southern Africa's pre-capitalist societies. In C. Walker (Ed.), *Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945*. Cape Town: David Philip.

Haffejee, I. (May 3, 2015). *Xenophobia in South Africa: Strained by a high unemployment rate, relations between locals and foreigners have deteriorated into deadly violence*. Retrieved on March 15, 2016 from http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2015/05/xenophobia-south-africa-150501090636029.html

Haidula, T. (2016). 42% women in top jobs. *The Namibian*, 8 March, p. 1.

Harcourt, W. (2002). Body politics: Revisiting the population question. In K. Saunders (Ed.), *Feminist post-development thought: Rethinking modernity, post-colonialism and representation*. London: Zed Books.

Hartman, A. 2016). 50 000 gender crimes reported in three years. *The Namibian*, 15 March, p.1.

Hartman, W. (2007). Urges in the colony: Men and women in colonial Windhoek, 1890-1905. *Journal of Namibian Studies*, *1*, 39-71.

Hathaway, W. (2013). *Varieties of violence: Structural, cultural and direct*. Retrieved on March 8, 2016 from http://www.transcend.org/tms/2013/10varieties-of-violence-structurasl-cultural-and-direct/.

Ho, K. (2007). Structural violence as a human rights violation. *Essex Human Rights Review, 4*(2).

Ileka, S. (2016). 10 000 GBV cases reported in three years. *New Era*, 15 February, p. 3.

Iipinge, E., & Le Beau, D. (2005). *Beyond inequalities: Women in Namibia*. Windhoek: UNAM/SARDC.

Jauch, H., Edwards, L., & Cupido, B. (2009). A rich country with poor people: *Inequality in Namibia*. Windhoek: Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI).

Kangootui, N. (3 March, 2016). Staggering school drop-out figures. *The Namibian*, p. 1-2.

Katjavivi, P. (1988). *A history of resistance in Namibia*. London: James Currey.

Kavari, J. (2005). Estates and systems of inheritance among Ovahimba and Ovaherero in Kaokoland. In R. Gordon (Ed.), *Meanings of inheritance: Perspectives on Namibian inheritance practice* (pp. 63-70). Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre.

Koopman, J. (1995). Women in the rural economy: Past, present and future. In M. Hayman, & S. Stichter (Eds.), *African women south of the Sahara*. London: Longman.

Lebert, J. (2005). Inheritance practices and property rights in Ohangwena region. In R. Gordon (Ed.), *Meanings of inheritance: Perspectives on Namibian inheritance practices* (pp. 71-92). Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre.

Le Beau, D. (2005). In small things stolen: The archaeology of inheritance versus property grabbing in Katutura. In R. Gordon (Ed.), *Meanings of inheritance: Perspectives on Namibian inheritance practices*. Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre.

Leys, C., & Saul, J. (1995). *Namibia's liberation struggle: The two-edged sword*. London: James Currey.

Madley, B. (2004). Patterns of frontier genocide 1803-1910: The Aboriginal Tasmanians, the Yuki of California and the Herero of Namibia. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 6(2), 167-192.

Maldonado-Torres (2007). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(2-3), 240-270.

Manyisa, A. (April 16, 2015). *The real cause of xenophobia attacks*. Retrieved on March 15, 2016 from http://www.news24.com/MyNews24/The-real-cause-of-Xenophobia-Attacks-20150416.

Mbuende, K. (1986). *Namibia, the broken shield: Anatomy of imperialism and revolution*. Malmo: Liber Foerlag.

McFadden, P., & !Khaxas, E. (2007). *Research report on patriarchal repression and resistance in the Caprivi region in Namibia*. Windhoek: Women's Leadership Centre.

Messerschmidt, J. (2000). *Adolescent masculinity challenges and sexual violence. Men and Masculinities, 2*(3), **286-307.** Retrieved on February 4, 2016 from http://jmm.sagepub.com/content/2/3/286.abstract.

Mignolo, W. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 155-167.

Moleah, A. (1983). *Namibia: The struggle for liberation*. Delaware: Disa Press, Inc.

Moshenberg, D. (2012). *Namibia: Herero women challenge German amnesia*. Retrieved on March 17, 2016 from http://www/theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/23/namibia-herero-german-land.

Namibia Statistics Agency (2014). *The Namibian Labour Force Survey 2013*. Windhoek: Namibia Statistics Agency.

Namibia Statistics Agency (2015). *The Namibian Labour Force Survey 2014*. Windhoek: Namibia Statistics Agency.

Republic of Namibia (2012). *Working paper on issues related to family law in Namibia: Swakopmund family law workshop*. Law Reform and Development Commission. Working Paper.

Republic of Namibia (2014). *Namibia Demographic Health Survey 2013*. Windhoek: Ministry of Health and Social Services & Namibia Statistics Agency.

Sandness, H. (2012). *Gender equality reduces violence*. Retrieved on March 1, 2016 from http://sciencenordic.com/gender-equality-reduces-violence.

Smit, S. (1986). *Namibia: A violation of trust*. Oxford: Oxfam.

The Week (18 May 2015). *South African Xenophobia: Why is there so much hatred of foreigners*. Retrieved on March 15, 2016 from http://www.theweek.co.uk/63378/south-african-xenophobia-why-is-there-so-much-hatred-of-foreigners

Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from the South*, *1*(3), 534- 580.

Wagesango, N., Remba, S., & Chabaya, O. (2011). Violation of women's rights by harmful traditional practices. *Anthropologist*, *13*(2), 121-129.

Williams, C. (2015). *National liberation in postcolonial Namibia: A historical ethnography of SWAPO's exile camps*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

World Health Organization (2009). *Violence prevention, the evidence: Promoting gender equality to prevent violence*. Retrieved on March 15, 2015 from http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/gender.pdf.

(**Note:** Missing information in some references can be obtained directly from the author.)