

# Killing women in the name of passion?



**MARKING THE END** of yet another year, Sister Namibia staff once again are caught up in making plans for activities around the 16-Days-of-Activism-against-Violence-against Women. This means, we take time to reflect on the situation of women in Namibia over the past year.

Media headlines throughout the year-once again- were punctuated by killing of women which in the same media is portrayed as “passion” killings. Somehow I get the sense that people are genuinely trying to come to terms with the continued and seemingly unabated tendencies towards the killing of women in this land where our ostensible freedom was watered by blood. The question is only how are people trying to come to terms with.

I, for one, believe that people erroneously are referring to the cold-blooded and premeditated killing of women as “passion” killing. Living in lawful society, we recognise that the law demands that the intentional killing of a fellow human being is dealt with proportionally and “justly.” The law therefore holds the offender blameworthy and assigns the highest degree of culpability when the intent to kill is premeditated and deliberate. The killing of another person is partially assuaged when there are external reasons (self defence, accidents, provocations) for the killing. Killing another person under these circumstances now becomes manslaughter, as opposed to murder before the law.

The word passion assumes that the perpetrator was adequately provoked into a spontaneous, unplanned and impulsive lashing out – and if a woman (or anyone) is killed as a result, then this killing can be

seen to be “accidental.” The perpetrator acted out of human weakness, and while the act of killing is still unfortunate – even reprehensible – it is nevertheless still “understandable.”

We find mitigation for the act – for the dead women surely deserved what was coming! This tendency – to blame the woman and absolve the perpetrator-became abundantly clear to all when in October readers were asked by a local paper – Namibian Sun – to share their reflections on the issue.

Of the 14 persons (5 women and 9 men) whose opinions were published in this piece, 8 stated (paraphrased) that women/girls are “abusing” the men for money only. This view was shared by 4 of the 5 women asked. One woman, Ester, went as far to say : “men are spending their money on girls out of love. He is supporting her, so the girl should stay faithful. It is hard for a guy to see the girl with another man when he knows how much he invested in her.” Louise was of the opinion that “Girls are “chopping” guys’ money. They need to stand up on their own, be independent and stop depending on guys. They should not aim for high things if they cannot afford it, but be satisfied with what they have. Stop dating sugar daddies, but date (people) your own age.” Through this slight of hand, the killings were now mitigated since they now are blamed on women’s cheating, unreliability and “manipulation.

Investigating the issue in respect of killings happening “in the heat of passion” ie., as the result of a compulsive, unplanned reaction to an adequate provocation, one needs to understand the circumstance under which some women were disposed of during the year.

In the case of Elizabeth Ekandjo, who was killed in June, the killer - the son of a local businessman – entered her flat through the bedroom window in the middle of the night, taking with him two bottles of petrol. How was this individual provoked into acting “in the heat of passion” by a sleeping woman? Can there be any doubt in the mind of anybody that this was a premeditated and planned murder?

Patricia Hango’s killer went to her work place with a gun in his hand after apparently leaving a suicide note. How does making a plan to get a firearm, going to another person’s place of work and killing that person constitute “acting in the heat of passion?” Perhaps even more shocking than the killing itself, are the comments made by apparently “normal” Namibians in response to the “publishing” of a supposed suicide note on Facebook

One person was of the opinion “ Yaah gud dey, chop our money we chop dey life, passop.” Another person thought “ she deserve to be killed wan! to hell is whre thy belong and may their soul BURN in hell.”

Yet another so-called passion killing: This time in October, a pregnant teenager, Sara Van der Westhuisen, was called out of her house before being stabbed to death in front of neighbours who apparently did not intervene in spite of the fact that the victim tried to hide behind them. Also here the killer wrote a supposed suicide note before going to, hunting down and killing the young girl – ostensibly because she had an interfering mother!

I am shuddering at my own irresponsibility for having brought a daughter into this misogynistic – women hating - society where our sons are encouraged to kill a woman – I suppose because they love them so “passionately” they could kill them! This is not love, this is passionate HATE.

All those people talking about love will know that love in the biblical sense is supposed to be patient, generous, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud. In Namibia, it seems we are confused about what love is. We equate love with financial transactions: Does that mean that you may also kill your children if they disappoint you after you have invested a lifetime of money, energy, worry and love in them?

Calling the cold blooded and premeditated killing of a woman “passion killing” to me seems opportunistic and cynical. The killings of women in Namibia are no different from the so-called honour killings of women in Islamist countries. It is about male egos, it is about their sense of honour and losing face and it is time that we in Namibia wake up to this reality and call it what it is. Only by so doing will be able to challenge the blatant masculinity stereotypes that make such behaviour and attitudes pervasive and acceptable.

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