

World Lead

Bridging cultures. Transformi



by Joseph P. van der Westhuizen • photographs Contributed

A BROTHER'S APPEAL

PATRIARCHY IS DEADLY

I'm a social entrepreneur, youth activist/leader, entrepreneurship development consultant, author, education-
alist and preacher. I was born on farm Duwisib, South-West of Maltahöhe in the Hardap Region.

I studied theology at the University of Namibia & the Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary. Have certificates in Social Entrepreneurship and Community Development.

We all have a role to play in addressing gender inequalities and gender based violence.

The church has long played a role in how we relate to issues in our community and in that the church has failed in addressing the issues of gender based violence.

Every day, countless numbers of women and children are sexually, emotionally and physically abused at the hands of men. This situation has one root cause, namely men's understanding of being the man.

The word 'patriarchy' originates from the Greek word patriarkhēs which means as much as ruling father. In this dominant ideology it is understood that men hold the

power, if not relative to their position to other men in their communities, then definitely in relation to their positions over women and children – to the extent that they may kill their women and children. This power is exercised through the physical sexual abuse such as rape, harassment, forced prostitution, emotional abuse, breaking the spirit and character of those over whom they assert power. Not uncommonly, this understanding of men's power leads to the killing of women and children at the hands of the patriarch, the ruling father.

I within my own family

circle, have lost two women as a result of this understanding of 'manhood.' My aunt was hacked to death in front of her children. My very own sister, pregnant at the time, was stabbed to death by her intimate partner. I refuse to be quiet after all this, I refuse to see abuse on women and be quiet, I refuse to see the oppression of women in society, workplace, church or politics and be quiet.

Not all men actually commit the above stated violence against women and girls. However, our silence when we see such acts in our

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friends and family circle, in our churches, in parliament in school, means that we consent to a world view that can only be described as heinous.

In our country, the large majority of the population subscribes to the Christian faith. It is therefore the responsibility of the faithful and the church to address the evils of gender-based violence. We must recognize it as a sickness that affects us all.

Not only the church and other public institutions must act against the sickness of gender-based violence. It is my appeal to every male person in this nation to act like a man and commit himself to be responsible and accountable to each other thus uniting us in decent humanity, deserving of the care and love that our faith hold dear.

ACT NOW to end the abuse against our daughters, mothers, wives and lovers. ♀

THE ISSUE IS...

by Laura Sasman

IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER, TWO SHOCKING EVENTS OCCURRED, BOTH INVOLVING CHILDREN OR MINORS. IN ONE CASE A YOUNG GIRL WAS FOUND DEAD AND DISMEMBERED IN THE OTHER, A MINOR RAPED, KILLED AND DISMEMBERED A FEMALE RELATIVE. WHAT THIS SHOWS IS THAT CHILDREN ARE NOT ONLY VICTIMS, THEY ALSO ARE PERPETRATORS. IN THE CASE OF THE LATTER, THE QUESTION THAT NEED BE ASKED IS HOW AND WHY CHILDREN RESORT TO THE TYPE OF VIOLENCE BEHAVIOUR THAT IS CONSIDERED 'TYPICAL' OF GROWN MEN. IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THIS ONE HAS TO ASK WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PSYCHE AND SOCIETY FROM WHICH CHILD PERPETRATORS COME.

Alice Miller is a well-known psychologist who sought the root causes of violence, especially in children. She argues that all children are born to grow, to live and love and to articulate their needs and feelings in a non-violent, non-threatening environment. This is necessary for the self-preservation of all children. In order for a child to develop to become a creative, productive and decent human being, that child needs respect and love to help it find a moral compass by which to navigate through life.

The opposite of a loving, caring context in which the child is taken seriously, is a situation in which the child is subject to abuse, exploitation, punishment where he or she is beaten, manipulated or neglected. This, Miller argues leads to anger, pain and trauma that the child cannot or is not allowed to express. They are forced to suppress their hurt and their feelings and repress their memory of their own abuse. They learn to bear their pain alone since there is no-one in their social context to whom they can turn, either as witnesses or as a protector/ally.

Children who are abused and subjected to violence are likely to turn their feelings of anger, despair, helplessness, anxiety and loneliness into aggression and destructive behaviour against others or against themselves. A child who is subjected to cruelty and abuse will become cruel and abusive him/herself. This is how a vicious cycle is perpetuated in families and throughout society.

How then does one break out of these vicious cycles? Miller is of the opinion that if mistreated children are not to become criminals or mentally ill, it is essential that they, at least once in their lives, come in contact with a person who knows unequivocally, that it is the environment or society, not the battered and helpless child who is at fault. Ignorance or acknowledgement of abuse in society can either save or destroy the life of a battered and abused child. We in Namibia, too often look away from the abuse and the abusive adult is protected. By the same token, the abused child blames himself or herself for the cruelty that the parents commit under the pretext of disciplining the child.

It is by breaking out of violent cycles by raising persons whose integrity has not been damaged in childhood, who were protected, respected, and treated with honesty by their parents, that we will be – both in our youth and in adulthood – intelligent, responsive, empathic, and sensitive people. We will take pleasure in life and will not feel any need to kill or even hurt others or ourselves. We will use our power to defend ourselves, not to attack others.

We will not be able to do otherwise than to respect and protect those weaker than themselves, including our children, because this is what we will have learned from our own experience, and because it is this knowledge (and not the experience of cruelty) that has been stored up inside us from the beginning.

The issue is, in Namibia, we are socialised to look away from abuse. We only wake up and intervene on behalf of the abused, when it is too late. Our very liberation is built on a dogma of violence, in the sense that we believe that freedom came through the barrel of the gun.

When we consider the amount and extent of violence in our country, we have to reconsider our own attitudes and beliefs first and then to bring about change for a violence-free society and then, maybe, one day, we will have a Namibia where children do not become killers.