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## **Male Violence against Women in Botswana: A Discussion of Gendered Uncertainties in a Rapidly Changing Environment**

**Abstract:** Male violence against women has become commonplace in contemporary Botswana. Analyses of gender-based violence in Botswana indicate that men are acting out their dominance through acts of violence. This dominance is created and reinforced by patriarchal beliefs and practices. The discussions are characterised by notions of female victimhood and universal male dominance. This paper contextualises male violence against women by examining the role played by economic and social change in the shaping of gender identities and relations. I show that while contemporary forms of male dominance have resulted from their privileged access over time to resources such as wages and property, men also face uncertainties of unemployment and reduced social status. I also show that rather than assuming the role of passive victims, women have developed, and continue to develop, contradictory survival strategies such as cohabitation and sexual relations that not only reinforce notions of male dominance but sometimes also challenge power relations and render some men victims.

### **Introduction**

Botswana is best known internationally as a shining example of economic growth, sound fiscal management and democracy in contemporary Africa. Botswana was classified as one of the poorest nations at the time of independence from Britain in 1966. The rapid economic growth was largely due to the discovery of two diamond pipes in 1971. The classification of Botswana as a middle-income country is directly linked to the sale of diamonds, which have provided the basis for the development of infrastructure, as well as social welfare provisions, such as health and educational facilities.

There are problems that breed uncertainty in the lives of ordinary Botswana. The last detailed analysis of household income survey data by the Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (BIDPA 1997a; 1997b) indicated that up to 46 percent of all households are either very poor or poor. The lives of those living in poverty are further complicated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which poses a major strain on financial and human resources. The 2003 HIV/AIDS Surveillance of Botswana indicated that about 283,765 adults between the ages of 15 and 49 are living with HIV/AIDS. A breakdown of this age group by gender reveals that 63 percent were females compared to 37 percent males. Just over 40 percent of the infected women are between 20 and 29 years old (National Aids Coordinating Agency 2003:30-31).

Gender inequalities continue to result from women's inferior access to resources resulting from their lower participation in wage employment and their limited access to the necessary capital for engagement in income-generating activities. Culturally-based social and economic disparities have been linked with escalating rates of gender-based violence, particularly male violence against women (Mogwe 1988; Botswana Police Service 1999; Women's Affairs Department 1999; Metlhaetsile Women's Information Centre n.d.). Acts of male violence against women have come to be commonplace in contemporary Botswana society. Research conducted in Botswana (Botswana Police Service 1999; Women's Affairs Department 1999) has suggested that much of this violence is meted out by men against their female partners, wives, cohabiting

partners, and girlfriends, leading to the conclusion that most violence against women occurs within domestic settings. These findings of 'domesticated' violence against women are not unique to Botswana, but illustrate a global trend (see Watts et al. 1995; Green 1999; Summers and Hoffman 2002).

This paper examines the dynamics of domestic violence against women in Botswana. I argue that the escalations in these particular forms of violence result from negotiations and re-negotiations of gender identities (by women and men) within a society that is undergoing rapid change. As Botswana continues to be affected by social and economic influences from outside and within the country, they are faced with many uncertainties that arise from negotiating the new values that accompany modernisation on the one hand, and traditional beliefs and practices on the other. Women and men are constantly reflecting and acting upon their positions with respect to each other, particularly regarding power and control.

This paper begins with a brief review of the dominant discourses on gender inequality and patriarchy that form the basis of analyses of male violence against women in Botswana. This is followed by a discussion of the effects of rapid change on social organisation and gender roles as illustrated by decline in marriages and an increase in the number of cohabitating couples. The next section provides an overview on violence against women in Botswana. It begins with a discussion of some of the research findings of a national study on the causes and implications of violence against women. The findings from my doctoral research illustrate how cultural ideals of men as breadwinners and heads of households come into question as more women maintain their families financially, and assume responsibility for their welfare on a daily basis. These gender roles often place women and men in conflicts that are manifested in acts of violence. The following section highlights some issues emerging from the male crisis debate that seeks to situate men in gender discourses. The concluding section presents suggestions for more holistic analyses of gender inequality and violence that focus on ongoing negotiations of structure and agency by women and men in a rapidly changing society.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

Most theoretical frameworks for discussing violence against women illustrate how violence stems from unequal power relations between women and men (Vieritis and Williams 2002). The dominant discourses on gender violence in Botswana, as elsewhere in Africa, continue to be women-based and women-centred. Most discussions and studies of gender violence in Botswana have occurred in a policy environment (Botswana Police Service 1999; Women's Affairs Department 1999); some have been spearheaded by women's organisations (Emang Basadi-NGO Network on Women's Rights and Women in Law and Development in Africa, 1995); others have been conducted by feminist scholars who are also change agents linked with civil society organisations (Mogwe 1988).

The policy studies are situated in the Gender and Development (GAD) framework as the modus operandi for addressing social, economic and political disparities between women and men in Botswana. The GAD approach was touted as a move from the women-centred Women in Development (WID) perspectives towards more holistic analyses of gender that included *women* and *men*. In reality, however, the focus continues to be almost exclusively on women as victims and men as evil perpetrators of injustices against them.

Treatments of gender-based violence by women's organisations and by feminist scholars have centred on illustrating the workings of patriarchy as the gender system that perpetuates all forms

of women's subordination. The broad conceptualisation of culturally-based patriarchy continues to dominate discussions of women's subordinate socio-economic, legal and political status (Mannathoko 1992; Alexander 2001; Maundeni 2001).

My concern is that the conceptualisations of patriarchy within discourses on violence against women and gender relations have not been adequately criticised. This is despite the reservations held by scholars such as Walby (1986) about the limitations of notions of 'universal male agency' and associated images of women as passive victims. It could be argued, as Nyamnjoh (2001) does, that without critical discussion and review, such conceptualisations represent 'strategic essentialism' which is an inevitable facet of political mobilisation by feminists.

The problem with both the GAD perspective and patriarchal analyses, however, is that they tend to isolate women further, and to exclude men from an active part in gender discourses (Greig, Kimmel, and Lang 2000). Detailed critiques of these dominant discourses fall outside the scope of this paper.<sup>1</sup> My discussion of male violence against women does, however, raise pertinent issues with respect to negotiations of culture and sexuality against the background of change and uncertainty in contemporary Botswana society.

## **Introducing the Tswana**

Historical accounts indicate that the original inhabitants of the area covering present-day Botswana were the Khoisan (also referred to as the Hottentots, Bushmen or *Basarwa*) who subsisted on hunting and gathering (Tlou and Campbell 1984; Schapera and Comaroff 1991).

The area was later occupied by Tswana agro-pastoralists.

The Tswana who settled in present-day Botswana are comprised of eight principal sub-groups. Seven of the groups, BaKgatlwa, BaKwena, BaNgwaketse, BaNgwato, BaTawana, BaTlokwa and BaRolong, are direct descendants of the original Sotho migrants. The eighth group, BaLete, are descendants of the non-Tswana Ndebele who have assimilated Tswana customs and languages (Colcough and McCarthy 1980). While there are variations in dialects among the groups and localised components of culture, the Tswana have been described as culturally homogeneous in terms of their base beliefs and customs (Alverson 1978; Schapera and Comaroff 1991; Gulbrandsen 1996).

Early Tswana (seventeenth to nineteenth century) societies were politically and economically stratified along class and gender lines. The Tswana were politically stratified into two broad layers: the leadership, and the subjects or commoners. Each Tswana principal sub-group (*morafe*) was politically independent, managing its own affairs under the centralised leadership of a chief (*kgosi*). The chieftainship was male-centred, with succession being passed down to male descendants within the leadership lineage of each sub-group. The social significance of cattle was associated with trade, ploughing, and the payment of bridewealth (*bogadi*).<sup>2</sup>

Ownership of cattle was a marker of wealth and prestige.

Men were the recognised heads of family-households. Membership in family groups was passed down through males, with the most senior male in the lineage ward being regarded as the elder and primary decision-maker (Schapera 1933; Schapera and Comaroff 1991; Gulbrandsen 1996). Succession in traditional Tswana society was male-based, with the eldest son (*mojaboswa*) succeeding his father as the head of the family. Besides inheriting the role of decision-maker, the eldest son also inherited most of his father's property such as his cattle and agricultural implements. Where there were no sons, or if the sons were still minors, the dead man's estate would fall under the control of the most senior male relative - usually the younger brother - who

would assume the role of household head. Women did not inherit cattle and fixed assets following the deaths of their fathers, but were entitled to clothing and domestic implements after the deaths of their mothers and female relatives (Driel 1994).

The rapid transition from subsistence agriculture to a modern cash economy during much of the twentieth century has been accompanied by changes in social fabrics and individual lifestyles. In addition, other opportunities for social mobility, particularly education, have caused many Batswana to abandon subsistence activities in rural areas to seek greener pastures in urbanised villages, towns and cities.

The migration of young men to work in the mines in South Africa during much of the twentieth century loosened the grip of elders and relatives over them, particularly with respect to marriage and family formation. Their participation in wage work has also resulted in the development of the male breadwinner, which came to be embedded in traditional marriage practices of bridewealth (*bogadi* and *lobola*). This male-breadwinner ideology, coupled with men's relatively higher access to resources - particularly cash - forms the basis of male violence against women in contemporary Botswana.

It must be noted that women in Botswana had access to 'new' opportunities for wage employment that have grown since the 1970s (Driel 1994). Accounts of female migrants in urban areas suggest that education and increasing employment opportunities have opened up prospects for female autonomy (see Larsson 1989; Bhebe and Mosha 1997). While some women may have the chance to escape dependence on men, others are faced with lives of uncertainty due to their limited choices and opportunities for economic empowerment. Many negotiate their precarious situations by engaging in survival strategies that expose them to perils such as violence from partners and husbands.

### **Changing Gender Relations and Marital Strategies**

Botswana society has undergone, and continues to undergo, rapid change, which has significant implications for family formation. Anthropological accounts alluded to the decline in the significance of marriage as the basis for reproduction and family formation, and the rise in the incidence of extra-marital pregnancy and mothering during the 1930s (Comaroff and Roberts 1977; Schapera 1933, 1966; Schapera and Comaroff 1991).

Extra-marital pregnancy has been attributed to changing cultural norms relating to family formation and altered personal outlooks that come with modernisation - particularly access to western education and increased mobility on the part of women and men.<sup>3</sup> Analyses of household organisation and family forms show that the mother-child family form features prominently in contemporary Botswana (Syson 1972; Molenaar 1980; Ingstad and Saugestad 1987; Molokomme 1991; Driel 1994; Motts 1994). The 2001 Census shows that 54 percent of all households in Botswana were headed by men, and 46 percent were headed by women (Mookodi 2003a:3).

The results of censuses conducted since 1971 point to continued declines in the rate of marriage as well as the growing significance of cohabitation. While 40 percent of all household heads were married in 1991, the figure had declined to 31 percent according to the 2001 census (Mookodi 2003a:8). Data from the 1981, 1991 and 2001 censuses show that the proportion of married persons over the age of 15 years has declined by up to 20 percent (Mookodi 2003b:1). While marriage is declining, the proportion of cohabiting persons has increased from 12 percent in 1991 to 16.6 percent according to the 2001 census.<sup>4</sup>

How do we account for declining marriage rates in Botswana? Gulbrandsen's examination of marital strategies among the Ngwaketse<sup>5</sup> in post-colonial Botswana focused on the relative delays in marriage among women and men, as well as increased incidences of non-marriage and childbearing out of wedlock (1986). While his study concurred with Schapera's earlier observations (Schapera 1933) relating lengthy male absences to the increase in the 'surplus of marriageable women', he posited that gendered marital strategies were embedded in customary practices of lengthy marriage processes, the payment of *bogadi* (bridewealth) and the relative weighing of the advantages and disadvantages of marriage by women and men.

In his discussion of men's marital strategies, Gulbrandsen (1986) pointed to the relative autonomy that they gained from wage labour, which in turn reduced their reliance on relatives for the payment of *bogadi*.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, he pointed out that, in a changing economy, men would rather use their earnings on cattle than establish farming homesteads. This relates to the arguments raised by Driel (1994) and *Women and Law in Southern Africa WLSA* (1997; 1999) regarding the significance of *bogadi* as a means of consolidating male power and control; a means of acquiring labour of women and children for agricultural production. An interesting point that Gulbrandsen (1986) and Townsend (1997) took up is that during a great part of their twenties and thirties, men's affinities to their natal families ensured them security and the domestic services that they would otherwise require from women. It may also be suggested that men take advantage of alternatives to marriage such as serial relationships and cohabitation. Gulbrandsen concluded that delays in marriage extended men's youth, allowing them to remain longer on the marriage market. In addition, the availability of females was relatively guaranteed as illustrated by the rate of pre- and extra-marital pregnancies.

Gulbrandsen (1986), Driel (1994), *Women and Law in Southern Africa* (1994) point to women's increasing ambivalence towards marriage. This, they argue, is due to the general view that marriage limits women's autonomy. Instead, they engage in livelihood strategies that involve direct forms of male economic support while falling outside the rubric of formalised marriage commitments.

Women's survival strategies that are based on male economic support include serial sexual relationships that result in pre- and extra-marital pregnancy. They may culminate in cohabitation or marriage. An examination of the cohabitation figures from the 2001 census shows that most of the persons who were cohabiting were of the prime child-bearing ages between 15 and 29. Within this category, women constitute 65.9 percent of all cohabiting partners (Mookodi 2003b:8).

The proportion of cohabiting males increases with age, suggesting that younger women are cohabiting with relatively older men. Within that context cohabitation can either be regarded as a stage in the marriage cycle, or be utilised as a survival strategy by many women in Botswana. The strength of the latter argument is supported by women's relatively lower economic activity and higher levels of female unemployment or economic 'inactivity'. The 2001 census shows the overall unemployment rate in Botswana is 19.5 percent (Siphambe 2003:7). The unemployment rate among women is 23.6 percent, compared to 16.24 percent among men (ibid). Women form the majority of those who are classified as 'economically inactive' homemakers - many of whom rely on men for economic support.

The foregoing discussion has pointed to the contradictory conditions that change has often presented in Botswana. While modernisation may have increased women's and men's chances for economic empowerment, women still lag behind and patterns of male economic power continue to prevail. The following section examines the tenuous relationships between men's

economic power and women's 'male-based' economic survival strategies as possible causes of violence in Botswana.

### **Male Violence Against Women**

At the beginning of 2003 Botswana was rocked by a series of violent acts, which have come to be described within the community as 'passion murders'. The *Botswana Daily News* (2003:2) wrote the following report:

Gasekgale's body was found with multiple stab wounds in a hostel.... Petrus's body was found hanging from a tree... Although the Gaborone Central Police Superintendent said it was too early to determine what could have led to the deaths of the students, unconfirmed reports suggested that they were lovers. Their deaths bring to three the number of deaths resulting from what appear to be crimes of passion within a month in Gaborone alone.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after this report, there was another murder in a tertiary institution in northern Botswana. These murders sparked a series of debates that explored the possible causes, as well as measures to address the problem. Some of the discussions were initiated by students at the University of Botswana.<sup>8</sup> The discussions provided an opportunity for university students to debate the possible causes of violence against women. Much of the discussions centred on female and male attitudes towards the changing status of women.

Many of the young men, and some women lamented what they regarded as the abuse of men by women, which results from multiple relationships. They argued that young women establish relationships with their age-mates, and cheat or abandon them for *sugar daddies* who, as the term indicates, provided them with cash, financed their cell phones, and transported them in cars. The materialistic tendencies of women in their pursuit of 'the three C's', Cash, Cell phones and Cars were regarded as cheating and exploitative, and triggered violent reactions from men. It was also evident that men felt a sense of alienation and confusion that stemmed from women's seeming independence on the one hand, and their expectations of support from them. The concerns about the changing status of women and challenges to male authority and power have been found to be the main cause of violence against women in Botswana.

The increased participation of women in wage work places a degree of uncertainty on men's roles as breadwinners and principle decision-makers. Women's earning power is regarded as fostering more independence and autonomy, thereby reducing their dependence on men. Socialisation imparts cultural norms that are also seen as contributing to gender inequality by teaching females to be submissive, and men to be aggressive. These cultural norms are practised among unmarried couples, but are particularly predominant among married couples between whom the payment of bridewealth can be construed as justification for husbands' control over their wives (Women's Affairs Department 1999; Maundeni 2001).

### ***On Violence against Women***

A national study in Botswana on the socio-economic implications of violence against women (Women's Affairs Department 1999) examined the incidences and causes of violence against women. It also examined the social and economic impact of violence against women as individuals, in communities and institutions, and made recommendations for action. The research assessed the perceptions and experiences of violence of 735 women from the age of 12

in rural, semi-urban and urban locations. The ten types of violence that were defined included physical slaps, severe beatings, sexual harassment, rape and sexual assaults, incest, verbal and emotional abuse and murder.

The study concluded that violence against women is a substantial problem, and that three out of five women in the study had been victims of violence. The majority of cases of violence are perpetrated by partners or acquaintances of victims, making violence against women a primarily domestic phenomenon. The most commonly perceived causes of violence were identified as unequal power relations between women and men. Married men or temporary male partners resort to the use of force to keep women and children under their control:

When a woman gets married, she is told she is the junior partner or child in the relationship and her duty is to listen to the man. This is the start of violence, since it makes her a willing accomplice in it (Women's Affairs Department: 1999:76).

Based on the accounts of female respondents, the study indicated that men felt insecure about wives' and partners' earning power, which was regarded as reducing their (men's) power in the household:

In one abusive family the woman was the breadwinner. The husband was insecure, jealous, and always beating her. He even followed her to work to demand money from her. A month ago he broke her fingers so she could no longer work. She is now registered as a destitute (Women's Affairs Department 1999:76).

The study pointed to the dilemmas presented by socialisation and culture on women's perception of themselves and of men:

When a man does not provide for the family's basic needs, as he is deemed the sole provider, or if he has many girlfriends, the woman should not say a word. She should be careful at all times not to register her displeasure. If she does, it's the beginning of violence! (Women's Affairs Department 1999:76).

Respondents also pointed to the crisis of masculinity, which they saw as resulting from unemployment and poverty:

Poverty is the biggest cause of violence. Families are struggling to survive and men's pride in looking after the family is bruised and as a result men are hitting out at all those around them. Women get hurt! (Women's Affairs Department 1999:78).

The study concluded that violence against women has significant personal and institutional costs. Personal costs to women and their dependants include loss of income, medical expenses, and the costs of legal proceedings. Violence was also associated with loss of productivity due to absenteeism. The study pointed out that there were significant costs for providing social welfare services, prosecuting cases as well as the imprisonment of suspects and convicted perpetrators (Women's Affairs Department 1999).

The study on violence against women pointed to the magnitude of the problem, as well as the uncertainties associated with the juxtaposition of cultural and modern ideals and lifestyles. The discussions on the 'passion killings' reflected how the demands of modern life lead some women to have economically motivated relationships and multiple partners. These relationships were regarded as challenging male authority, betraying men's trust, and provoking some to commit murder. The following section discusses how women negotiate marriage and family life and their relationships with men - including violent situations. The accounts are based on my

doctoral study among low-income households, as well as compilations of women's stories by women's organisations.

### **Negotiating Gender Roles in a Changing Environment**

'A man, like a bull, cannot be confined to a kraal.'  
(*Monna ke poo ga a agelwe lesaka.*)

'Seize the breast of a widow, that of a divorced women is unstable.'  
(*Letsele go tshwarwa la moswelwa, la motlhadiwa ke mogofe.*)

'Don't grab my wife, I have bought her with cattle.'  
(*Se nkgapele mosadi, ke mo rekile ka dikgomo.*)

'Not all men are fools, some are single.'  
(Bumper sticker on cars in Gaborone.)

'Girls just want to have funds.'  
(Bumper sticker on cars in Gaborone.)

(Hermans and Nteta 1992:1; Maundeni 2001:41)

These proverbs and slogans reflect the contradictory values for male and female sexual behaviour in contemporary Botswana. While cultural beliefs and practices of male dominance continue to prevail, women and men are struggling to cope in a rapidly modernising and cash-driven environment.

As indicated earlier, women in Botswana are making inroads into previously male-dominated areas. While many assume relatively autonomous positions within their families, others continue to negotiate their gender identities against the background of internalised cultural values. In my doctoral study I examined the gender dynamics of poverty by looking at household organisation and the survival strategies of household members (1999). I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with women and men in 40 households in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, and Manyana, a small village in the southeastern part of Botswana. While the study was originally informed by patriarchal discourses of culturally-based male dominance, initial interviews pointed to the need to deconstruct the concept of 'household headship' in order to explore the social construction of gender and power relations between women and men. The results of the interviews showed the significance of culture in the shaping of gender identities on the one hand, and how the nature of gender roles has altered over time and space, on the other hand.

I asked women and men to define the term head of household (*tlhogo ya lolwapa*) and to describe the responsibilities that were associated with this role. The responses from women and men illustrated the cultural ideal. Most of the respondents indicated that *tlhogo ya lolwapa* had specific gender connotations - and was synonymous with 'man or maleness' within the context of cultural beliefs and practices. These perceptions were expressed by women and men both in Gaborone and Manyana.

There was a direct link between household headship and resource provision - with men being

associated with economic provision. However, respondents pointed to realities of resource-provision by women in households that are primarily supported by females, as well as within male-headed households.

Kgalalelo, a widowed single mother in Manyana who lived in her younger brother's compound identified him as the head of the household.<sup>9</sup> She alluded to the role that her non-resident elder brother played as head of the family (*lolwapa*), showing the importance of gender and age-based hierarchies in the determination of household headship. She mentioned that when important traditional events such as wedding negotiations and funerals take place in her family and community, her non-resident elder brother would represent her household as the most senior male member of the family:

The head of this household is my older brother who lives on the other side of the village. He is the one who is consulted as the elder in the household. He often arbitrates in issues that are relegated to the uncles [*bo malome*]. He is older than both of us [herself and her younger brother]. When someone from the *kgotla* [the public kraal] brings an important message, they will want to consult a man, even if he is younger than me, to give him the message from the elders. He is my chief [*kgosi*]. I cannot supersede him in authority. If he is absent, I can receive the information as a woman only if he doesn't have a wife. If he is married, the message will be delivered to his wife, who in turn will deliver it to my brother.

Kgalalelo points to the subordinate status of women in culture-based gender and age hierarchies. During her marriage, she had been under the authority and guidance of her husband. When her husband died, she was unable to support herself and her children, and ultimately returned to her natal compound that had been bequeathed to her younger brother following the death of their parents. She effectively fell under the immediate guidance and authority of her younger brother. Her younger brother was in turn superseded in authority by her elder brother as a result of his age and by virtue of his having completed the passage into adulthood through marriage.

Another woman in Manyana who resided in her natal home initially identified her mother as the head of the household. During the discussion she indicated that her elder brother who lived and worked in Gaborone was the head of the household [*tlhogo ya lolwapa*] because he was chief [*kgosi*], even though he made virtually no input in maintaining the household financially.

Some respondents alluded to their dependence on the head of household for guidance, and saw that position as being associated with the handling and resolution of disputes within the homestead, as well as dealing with problems that faced household members from outside. These roles were largely associated with men. Moatlhodi, a self-identified male household head in Gaborone voiced this view:

The main thing that I am responsible for in the household as head [*tlhogo*] is to ensure that the male responsibilities are taken care of. Care of the children and their mother. I am the one responsible for maintaining discipline in this home.

Women's accounts of their experiences illustrated that the male breadwinner-cum-decision maker was more of a cultural ideal than actual practice (Mookodi 1999).

In the discussions on marriage, some women alluded to cultural ideals of partnership and economic security, while others regarded marriage as a survival strategy, a marriage for maize meal (*nyalo ya paleche*). Marriage for maize meal was described as having a relationship with a man for the purpose of getting financial support for food and other basic needs. One single

mother in Gaborone further explained, 'Marriage is useful because it enables people to make financial contributions to the welfare of their families'. Another single mother had the same view, stating that the life of a married person is different from that of a single one. She indicated that a mother who is single is at an economic disadvantage compared to one who is married, as she alone has the burden of raising children. Motlatsi, another single mother in Manyana, felt the same way, stating that she could obtain assistance for raising her children if she married. Masego, a widowed grandmother in her late seventies, felt that the success and failure of marriage hinged on the extent of financial support that a woman received from her husband. She held the view that husbands should be the main breadwinners.

Many respondents in Gaborone referred to the increase in incidence of economically motivated cohabitation. A study conducted by Bhebhe and Mosha in Gaborone (1997) indicated that help from male partners came in the form of groceries, payments towards rent, utilities and food. In my study, Meisie, a 43-year-old single mother of two children, had been deserted by her long-term partner. When asked about the value and significance of consensual relationships, she had very strong views that reflected her expectations of economic support from the man she cohabited with: 'The man I told you about is the only one that I cohabited with. I thought that he was a person with integrity who would assist me financially...' These expectations of economic support from male partners were echoed by other women such as Betty, a 48-year-old who had also been deserted by her partner of fifteen years: 'The life of a married person is different from that of a single person. The life of a married person is better. You know where you can get support and comfort'.

Some of the widows in Manyana believed that through marriage, women would be protected and provided for by men. They believed that the main reason for failures in relationships was due to the fact that young women were too independent, and disobeyed their husbands. A 71-year-old widow in Manyana said: 'When you agree to get married to a man, he will shield you from all danger. When he tells you something, you must obey. That will save you from getting into problems'. The older women who had adult children were perturbed by the increasing rate of casual sexual relationships which they regarded as a loss of morals. They were worried that young people were not formalising their relationships through marriage.

While many women's survival strategies involve male economic support, an increasing number of women are establishing and maintaining 'independent' lives. This view was reflected by some self-identified female heads of households in Gaborone. Meisie, a 43-year-old woman gave the following reasons for identifying herself as the head of her household:

When you are alone with nobody to help you, like I am, then all responsibilities fall on your shoulders. If there is a problem in this yard, and the police are called, I am the one that will have to answer for it. Only me. The police will not ask for my children, or my siblings. They will ask for me. They will ask *me* what happened.

She indicated that she had little contact with relatives in the rural areas. While she may not be recognised as the head of her household due to her gender, many of the roles that she performs in her urban household incorporate those traditionally relegated to men. The 'new' autonomy among single women is related to the economic independence that has been partly obtained through wage employment and property-ownership. Meisie's views illustrate what Larsson (1989), Driel (1994), Bhebe and Mosha (1997) refer to as the social freedom and autonomy gained by many women in urban areas from reduced reliance on extended family economic support and influence.

It can be argued that a growing proportion of single women who spend the majority of their adult lives and establish homesteads in the urban areas are less affected by kinship influences than those single mothers whose lives remain embedded in their natal families out of economic need. The degree of autonomy that women exercise over their lives and the lives of their dependants is highly contingent on the degree of economic power that they possess. For many women, however, the continuous juggling of cultural expectations and changing realities often results in violent reactions from male partners.

As indicated earlier, much of the research on violence against women in Botswana has been conducted by women's organisations such as Emang Basadi, Women and Law in Southern Africa, The Women's Shelter Project and Lentswe La Basadi. One important aspect of this research is that of providing the opportunity for abused women to voice their experiences of abuse. Many women's experiences of violence revolve around perceived challenges to male authority. Lentswe La Basadi relates one young married woman's story of exploitation and abuse:

Ever since I finished school, I have been working at the National Food Laboratory. I have done some short courses to develop my career at the University of Pretoria, and with the City and Guilds of London. My husband is illiterate and has always been self-employed. His business has been quite successful, and at first he supported me quite well financially ... Our problems started when my husband stopped supporting me and the children financially. Fortunately I continued working, but my salary wasn't very much and I really struggled to make ends meet... During all this time my husband beat me several times . . . The climax to our problems started in August 1998 when I applied for a Financial Assistance Policy (FAP) loan [with the intention of] rearing and selling goats in Mochudi [a small town immediately north of Gaborone]. Since I was working full time I thought it would be difficult for me to administer the project so I allowed my husband to buy the goats and the stock feeds. Later I left for my course in Pretoria [the capital of South Africa]. When I came back, I found that my husband had bought a mini-bus (*combi*) and he told me that he had bought goats as well. At Mochudi I found him with his girlfriend and a certain man. I got very angry. How could he be playing around and having fun with a woman when he was supposed to be supervising the project for which I was suffering so much in repaying the loan? When I asked him that question, he got furious and the beating started. He forced me into the combi and said: 'I am going to teach you a lesson when we get home. I will teach you how a man can make a woman respect him'. He tried to strangle me and beat me with his fist (Lentswe La Basadi 2001:13).

The legal situation of married women in Botswana continues to be that of minors. Married women cannot obtain bank loans without the written consent of their husbands. This educated woman found herself in a situation where she had to defer to her husband due to marriage, but found herself bearing the financial, emotional and physical cost of challenging her husband's authority. The subordination of married women to the legal guardianship and authority of their husbands may have the effect of deterring young women from getting married. Unmarried women can apply for bank loans and land independently. The opportunities that are available to unmarried women with education and economic means provide the chance to live independently or reduce their reliance on male relatives and sexual partners.

Attempts to understand men's violent behaviour have resulted in a discourse suggesting that men throughout the world are *in crisis*. These crises stem from dwindling economic opportunities, as

well as actual and perceived threats to their authority over women (see e.g. Cornwall and White 2000; Morrell 2001).

### **Men in Crisis?**

The literature on men in crisis/crises of masculinity attempts to contend with men's lived realities, including attempting to find reasons and causes for what are regarded as negative and harmful aspects of men's behaviour: violence, crime and unsafe sexual practices. The key argument here is that men find themselves in a predicament with regard to a loss of power and control (Cornwall and White 2000; Whitehead 2002 ).

In many African societies the breadwinner ideology was largely based on the insertion of men into wage labour during the colonial era. The breadwinner/head of household ideology is now an entrenched aspect of cultural organisation in many of our countries. In Botswana, the earning power of young male migrants increased their autonomy with respect to their family. Prior to labour migration, young men had relied on family elders to arrange their marriages and pay bridewealth. Their absence effectively delayed marriage processes, and their wages provided them with the opportunity to pay for the bridewealth themselves (Schapera 1933). The new cash-earning power shaped gender relations of male economic provision and dominance, and female dependence and subordination. While the position of breadwinner/head of household may provide men with much power and authority over women, it exerts pressure on men to live up to expectations of resource provision and authority. This pressure is generated within societies and is transferred to individuals through socialisation throughout the course of life.

According to this line of argument, men are facing challenges to their authority as increasing numbers of women enter the workforce and earn incomes. At the same time, men are not guaranteed incomes, due to limited employment opportunities, and retrenchments throughout the world. Men in Botswana are increasingly relying on cash incomes to survive, asserting their authority among family members, as well as illustrating their social mobility among peers and within their communities. This is becoming increasingly difficult against the background of limited employment prospects as illustrated by the high rate of unemployment.

In the context of South Africa, Ratele (2001) points to effects of the changing political and economic environment on male identities. He posits that, while black populations were affected by the misery that was part and parcel of apartheid policies, many hitherto unemployed black males in townships ameliorated this situation by heroic participation in the struggle for independence. The period following independence was the effective end of this 'honeymoon' period, as many men were forced to return to the realities of unemployment and the squalor of township life. Entrenched gender inequalities were manifested in heightened gender violence. The male crisis discourse is useful for providing insight into the changing social and economic contexts that African men *and* women are forced to contend with. This type of analysis can be employed to understand the dynamics of uncertainty with respect to male violence against women, as well as the spread of HIV/AIDS. Male violence against women has been attributed to male assertion of power over women. The literature on violence against women, and HIV/AIDS in Botswana does not provide much insight into the uncertainties and challenges faced by men, and the possible links between the crises in men's lives and their behaviour.

Pattman (2001) examined the social construction of gender identity among students at the University of Botswana. The findings of the study allude to the male respondents' references to self-identified cultural markers of masculinity such as excessive drinking and womanising,

which they interpreted as virility and youthful defiance. Rather than being imprisoned by these cultural markers, however, young men were constantly negotiating dominant cultural images of masculinity. This is illustrated in the emergence of men's groups such as the Society for Men against AIDS in Botswana (SMMABO), and the Men against Violence group in Botswana. The very emergence of these groups suggests that some men are negotiating and renegotiating notions of male identity and behaviour.

Debates on 'males in crisis' in Botswana are being taken up in academic circles and public discussions as illustrated by Log Raditlhokwa's open letter to President Mogae on what he referred to as the 'The Plight of the Distressed Man'.<sup>10</sup> Raditlhokwa was responding to an appeal by the President to members of the gender movement to find solutions to the escalating rates of male violence against women. Raditlhokwa referred to the phenomenon of the 'distressed man' as being a new development in the country. His sympathy for this 'distressed man' largely emanates from what he believed to be failures of the state and society:

... 'problems of living' and the crisis of self-esteem overwhelm men, they become a danger to themselves, women, girls and children. It is a universal patriarchal tendency. It should also be accepted that in order to improve the status of women, we must eliminate environmental conditions that generate disaffection and destructive tendencies afflicting men and boys (Raditlhokwa 2003:13).

Raditlhokwa's intervention is clearly a plea for political commitment on the part of the state in order to address socio-economic disparities. His notion of the 'distressed male' with problems of living is clearly faced with a myriad of uncertainties marked by disillusionment caused by limited survival prospects and related losses in status within the society. He makes reference to patriarchy as, presumably, the system that fuels male crisis. While one would have expected him to elaborate this further, it was beyond his agenda. What we can glean from this article is a need to further examine what constitutes 'gender', 'patriarchy', as well as the role of the state in addressing or not, whichever the case may be, male violence against women.

### **Concluding Remarks**

My paper situates issues of uncertainty, and gender-based violence in contemporary Botswana by examining how processes of modernisation and change have shaped women's and men's life experiences. I have illustrated how rural social organisation changed due to the migrant labour system, as well as the infusion of western education and Christianity. These influences altered value systems at societal and individual levels. The changing life experiences of women and men have led them to review their priorities. These changed priorities resulted in a dramatic reduction in marriages. Such change was made possible by the increased individual choice and the loss of authority among family elders. The emergence of the male breadwinner during this period created a new dimension of male dominance.

The discovery of diamonds has accelerated the rate of modernisation. While much of the benefits trickle down through social services, they have not reached all. Unemployment and limited economic prospects among women and men lead to the type of despair that breeds tension and violence. The findings of studies on violence and women's lived experiences illustrate how pursuing survival needs can bring them into conflict with men, particularly in situations where men regard their authority as being threatened.

The realities of violence and gender inequality have the consequence of weakening the ability of

Africans to address contemporary problems such as the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. I posit that while gender discourses on patriarchy have done much to situate the problem of violence against women, these benefits have the tendency of being reductionist by over-simplifying men's positions as being of dominance, while relegating women to victimhood status. This also assumes many certainties about power relations, particularly men's privileged status. The discussion on male crises has further illustrated the importance of understanding the processes that shape individual behaviour. This paper has presented the challenge of acknowledging the existence of uncertainties in their many varied forms within our societies. It is important to name them, and determine how African women and men relate to them in their everyday lives.

## Notes

1. A more detailed critique of the dominant discourses is contained in Mookodi and Fuh (2004; in press).
2. The transfer of cattle from the family of the male spouse to that of the female spouse.
3. The manifestations of modernisation such as education and economic change and their effects on family forms are discussed by Molokomme (1991); Driel (1994) and the Women and Law in Southern Africa Project (1997).
4. The first time the category 'living together' was included in the national census.
5. A large ethnic group in south-east Botswana.
6. In this respect, Gulbrandsen's findings concur with Schapera's research in the 1930s.
7. The body of a murdered woman had been discovered in the grounds near the University in the same month.
8. Two of the discussions were facilitated by the Department of Educational Foundations, and Emang Basadi Women's Organisation (University of Botswana Branch).
9. All informants have been assigned fictional names.
10. A lecturer at the Social Work Department, University of Botswana, and a prominent gender activist in Botswana.

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