The Life History Approach as a Decolonial Feminist Method? Contextualising Intimate Partner Violence in South Africa

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Contents

The Geopolitics of Pro-Feminist Studies on Mxn, Masculinities and IPV.................... 45
The Life History Approach as a Decolonial Feminist Method in Community Psychology..... 46
The Study: Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis.. 47
Precarious Positions and the Lives of Black Mxn: Readings at the Intersection of 'Race', Class and Gender... 48
Implications and Final Considerations.. 54
References.. 56

> I think my story needs to be heard – it is something that I kept almost all my life to myself. I was raised in a happy family; my mother and my father were always there, but things turned out differently after they got divorced. He started drinking a lot and hitting my mother so stuff did change a lot for us – for me, my sister and my brother. (Scott)

A key problem area we engage with in this chapter involves the question of how to humanise research participants (cf. Paris and Winn 2014) whose lives have been fundamentally shaped by the epistemic and material violences of colonialism, slavery and apartheid but who have simultaneously benefitted from patriarchal domination and have perpetrated violence against womxn[1] partners during the course of their lives. We work with an understanding of colonial patriarchy that recognises the long shadow that colonialism casts and how it continues to shape the lives and experiences of the formerly colonised and their descendants, through structural violence and ongoing political, social and economic exclusions and marginalisations (Irwin and Umemoto 2016). In building on a body of work that takes an intersectional

[1]We use the terms 'womxn' and 'mxn' to unsettle the essentialisation of normative notions of gender and sex. Through these terms, we aim to centre the experiences of black womxn and mxn located in the global South, as well as those who identify as transgender, intersex, queer and all womxn and mxn who have found themselves erased from dominant norms of femininity and masculinity

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perspective on mxn's lives, especially mxn located in the global South, and that acknowledges the ways in which colonialism involved the assertion of not only racist domination but also heterosexist and gendered domination (Boonzaier and van Niekerk 2018; Moolman 2013; Ratele 2013a; Salo 2007) we talk about the violence mxn perpetrate against the womxn in their lives and about their own precarities as mxn located within a colonial hypercapitalist patriarchal context.

In our previous work involving interviews with mxn in domestic violence intervention programmes, we find that mxn bring the contexts of their lives, experiences and histories into view through talking about their participation in the programmes (Boonzaier and van Niekerk 2018). Mxn's understandings of themselves, their violence and their potential for changing consciousness around violence against womxn appear to be shaped by their intersecting identifications with race, class, gender, history and location. We have found that the complex entanglement of their family histories, community norms and social and cultural norms of violence and gender and how this shaped their processes of 'transformation' are centred in their narratives (van Niekerk and Boonzaier 2016). In this chapter we work with the life history approach to foreground the realities of black mxn's lives within a racist patriarchal context, such as South Africa, to illustrate how it brings to view the complex intricacies of privilege and disadvantage that shape their lives. We explore the potential of the life history methodology to exemplify the principles of a decolonial feminist community psychology through mxn's narratives of intimate partner violence (IPV) against womxn. We reflect on the application of this approach with two black mxn participants – Michael (age 46) and Scott (age 33) – recruited, in Cape Town, South Africa from a programme intended to end mxn's violence against intimate partners. Importantly, we explore the utility of the life history approach for working with marginalised mxn given that research has predominantly explained the high levels of violence against womxn in South Africa as a symptom of particular identities and statuses of mxn (i.e. black, poor, low education). In a country so fundamentally marked by racialised inequality, any reading about violence that links it to poverty, low education and unemployment, will uncritically mark black mxn as inherently violent, isolating their very racialised and classed identities as 'risk factors' for violence (Boonzaier 2018). In the South African context, importantly, it is the entanglement of black mxn's histories of racial oppressions and their complicity within hetero-patriarchy that require attention through methodologies, such as, the life history.

In this chapter, we present mxn's narrations of their violence within the broader contexts of their histories and lives, and have placed a focus on the emancipatory and transformative potential of the life history approach and the benefit it might hold for understanding this larger context of marginalised mxn's histories and their lives. We conclude by providing commentary on the potential opportunities offered through a life history approach and what that might mean for a decolonial feminist community psychology as well as its capacity for challenging normalised ways of *doing* and for consciousness-raising.

The Geopolitics of Pro-Feminist Studies on Mxn, Masculinities and IPV

It has been suggested in work by Shefer et al. (2015) as well as our recent work (Boonzaier and van Niekerk 2018) that global understandings of mxn's violence against womxn have been dominated by western and radical feminist discourse. In broad terms, westernised forms of radical feminism position all mxn as equal beneficiaries of the patriarchal gender order, casting all womxn as equally oppressed (Boonzaier and van Niekerk 2018). These patterns similarly carry through into criminal justice work and intervention programmes in South Africa designed for violent mxn which tend to take a reductionist approach to 'treating' mxn through their identities as 'perpetrators' while the complexities of their lives are not foregrounded. For example, we illustrate how this one-dimensional focus on mxn – who racially identify as black – fails to acknowledge how they may have been victims of other forms of violence, such as structural violences and histories of family violence (see Boonzaier and van Niekerk 2018). Research in South Africa also suggests that black mxn who are marginalised in terms of their race and class experience masculinity in a particular way as a result of structural and racial oppressions, ways that western mainstream feminist theories fail to capture (Ratele 2013b). These problematics around the hegemonic production of knowledge from the West speak to the one-directional flow of knowledge that tends to globalise and normalise Euro-American knowledges, "silencing their positionality and location" (Kessi and Boonzaier 2018, p. 304).

Although western feminist perspectives have been central to shaping gender justice discourse globally, these have also been critiqued – for example through black feminist theorising (e.g., Crenshaw 1994, Mohanty 1988) that argues that there is a limited focus on gender or patriarchy, and that western feminist discourses fail to acknowledge how multiple identities, such as race, social class, sexuality, amongst others, intersect (Boonzaier and van Niekerk 2018). It is important to interrogate mxn's violence against partners in the context of gendered power relations, but it is also crucial that attention be paid to how this violence is shaped by intricate systems of domination and histories of ongoing oppression unique to the location under investigation – issues which are central to intersectional feminist as well as decolonial feminist perspectives (Kessi and Boonzaier 2018). The lens of decolonial feminism is useful for the recognition of continuities in the decimation, destruction and dispossession wrought by colonialism and for challenging the ways it manifests in the present through knowledge production, representation, and everyday life in global southern contexts. In avoiding the "'danger' of reproducing Northern authority" (Shefer et al. 2015, p. 169), we turn our attention to the variety of feminist theorisations (e.g., Gqola 2007; Ratele 2013b, 2018) developed in South Africa and on the continent, where we see how the complexities of mxn and womxn's lives in the global South are attended to. It is through this work that complex questions of power, violence and difference can be contextualised and engaged with. Central to

these investigations is the utilisation of methods of knowledge production that allow for the acknowledgement of these complexities. One such method, we argue, is the life history approach.

The Life History Approach as a Decolonial Feminist Method in Community Psychology

Together with scholars such as Kessi and Boonzaier (2018), we imagine a central aspect of the decolonial feminist project for community psychology to engage with the complexities of historical traumas in relation to South Africa's past of colonialism, slavery and apartheid, and how these traumas manifest in the present to shape those previously subjugated. In order to fully grapple with the persistence and high levels of mxn's violence in the context of intimate heterosexual relationships, a focus on transgenerational traumas and the epistemic violences enacted on people is required (ibid.). These relationships can be interrogated through life history methodologies on the lives of black mxn who are descendants of historical oppressions, and who currently find themselves positioned as perpetrators of IPV.

Scholars, such as, Sonn et al. (2013) have noted the potential of storytelling methodologies to encompass a decolonial agenda and to disrupt power relations, particularly in the fields of community and liberation psychology. However, as noted in the introduction to this volume, although there may be a strong commitment amongst some forms of decolonial community psychology to achieve liberation and conscientisation, methodologies that exemplify these visions for social transformation – along the axes of gender *and* race – are less visible (Montero 2009). This has particularly been the case for mainstream forms of community psychology taken up in the South African context where, in spite of its intended alignment with principles of critical psychology, it has tended to depart from its liberatory and critical aims (Seedat et al. 2004). In this chapter we argue that the life history approach offers an opportunity and the potential to take up principles of a decolonial feminist community psychology that aims to interrogate complex systems of power and histories through the lens of gender, race, class and location. Through its holistic approach, this methodology places a focus on personal narratives within their wider socio-cultural, historical and material contexts, and places emphasis on the social dynamics of power, oppression and resistance relayed in these narratives (Atkinson 2012). The act of telling a life story additionally provides the tools for those who have been historically oppressed to offer personal narratives that work to bring 'everyday' forms of racial and structural oppressions to the surface, as illustrated through Chaudhry's (2016) study that employs an intersectional life history methodology to gain insights into the structural violences encountered in the lives and histories of Pakistani Christians. In this way, storytelling might be conceived of as a socially transformative praxis in its potential to disrupt power relations and 'unsilence' those historically and currently subjugated (Chaudhry 2016; Sonn et al.

2013). We ask how life histories might elicit transformative praxes, in this chapter, specifically amongst mxn who are in the process of ending their violence against womxn, and who may continue to be marginalised through their racial and class identities but in powerful positions relative to their subjectivities as heterosexual mxn. We additionally show how stories of historical traumas and structural violences emerge through mxn's life history narratives (see Chaudhry 2016), allowing those who have been silenced to represent their lives and experiences on their own terms, which aligns with ideas around decolonising the research endeavour.

It is in the context of Michael and Scott's life histories that we argue for the potential of a life history approach to espouse the principles of a decolonial feminist community psychology, especially in its potential to exemplify transformative praxes, to make historical traumas and violences visible, and to conscientise mxn who aim to end their violence. The mxn provide a wide angle reading of their lives and histories, bringing them (and us) to the current moment in which they are positioned as perpetrator in an intimate partner violence intervention programme.

The Study: Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis

The life history data we use in this chapter emerges from a larger, ongoing study which aims to examine the social and collective features of IPV amongst a range of actors, including partner violent mxn. In addition to being positioned as a study of community norms of gendered violence, this larger study explores how these resources allow individuals to construct meanings around such violence and employs critical qualitative methods and feminist methodologies in the interest of privileging participants' voices.

Here, we draw on life history interviews conducted with two mxn who had been participants in a programme[2] for perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Life history interviews were conducted over two interview sessions. The first interview focused on their lives from childhood to adulthood in a relatively unstructured manner, inviting them to free associate and speak generally about their past and current lives. The second interview focused more firmly on their perpetration of violence against their partner and the specific incident of abuse that resulted in them having been mandated into the programme. As the questions were broadly framed, the mxn had the opportunity to speak about their intimate relationships and perpetration of violence in both interviews, if the moment presented itself. Consistent with narrative approaches to interviewing, we follow the meaning frames of participants as they lead us through their stories. The two interview sessions were scheduled three weeks apart to allow participants time for reflection, but also enough time to reflect on the teachings from their participation in the programme sessions.

[2] The programme adopts a psycho-educational, Duluth-CBT-type intervention model and takes place over a period of 20 sessions. Both voluntary and largely court-mandated mxn received education about domestic violence through this programme.

Aligned with the life history method's positioning within the field of narrative studies (Atkinson 2012), we employed a thematic narrative analysis. We were guided by Riessman's (2008) outline of the method with a focus on 'what' is said by participants, rather than 'how' narratives are relayed, while also placing emphasis on language, power, subjectivity and the co-construction of meaning. We additionally acknowledge that our own reading of the data represents one of many interpretations and is shaped by our own histories, identity markers and institutional affiliations. As black cisgender womxn conducting and engaging with the interview data, we were able to identify with the mxn based on our shared racial identities and upbringings in various Cape Town communities but also through our working-class backgrounds. In decolonising the way we 'do' research, we prioritise mxn's life histories by attempting to keep them intact – as far as that is possible in an academic paper – to ensure that their voices are privileged above ours. Doing so was important especially as the academy continues the epistemic violences of colonisation in the ways in which it retells and packages the stories of the colonised and their descendants (Tuck and Wayne Yang 2014). We present each of the mxn's life stories separately, extracting significant themes that relate to their intersecting identities.

We attempt to understand the complexities behind mxn's narrations about historical traumas of violence, oppressions and the normalisation of violence experienced in their lives, and the functions these narratives may serve. For example, in spaces such as the interview and the intervention programme, these narratives may function to justify their perpetration of partner violence. However, our intention for this chapter is to move beyond the study of how mxn's accounts of their violence minimise and justify their acts towards situating these narratives within the broader historical and social contexts of their lives. As noted here, and in previous work by Boonzaier and van Niekerk (2018), mxn's reflections on their perpetration of violence cannot be imagined outside the historical conditions that fostered various oppressions and structural violences, and the normalisation of violence that oftentimes represent a form of 'protection' and conflict resolution in mxn's homes, families and communities. The life history methodology allowed for a perspective on the complexities behind mxn's perpetration of violence in the context of their home environments, histories and social and cultural contexts.

Precarious Positions and the Lives of Black Mxn: Readings at the Intersection of 'Race', Class and Gender

Michael's Story

Michael is a 47-year-old mxn, living in an area on the northern outskirts of the Cape Town metropole, and married with a daughter of 19 years of age. He holds a bachelor's degree in computer science and is employed in a full-time capacity. As the eldest of three siblings, he grew up in Soweto, Johannesburg in a household run by his mother. He describes his father as absent, having left when he was a young boy.

Although he explains that he is unable to remember much about his parents and their relationship during this time, there appears to be some recollection of their frequent arguments and fights. Michael's childhood was shaped by the responsibilities he was expected to carry out as the eldest son in a household with no father.

> **Michael:** As a child, look I mean being the eldest and I have three siblings, I felt responsible for them most of the time, I mean I could…I could understand that my parents were having issues and at the same time, I had these three innocent people that looked up to me and wanted to play with me. That is all they wanted, just wanted to play with me […] it did not affect me, it is just that it made me more responsible, I think, early on in life, before most people were responsible. So, I already had that knowledge of looking after kids, making sure that they have eaten, making sure that when my mother comes back from work, everything is sorted, I need to go pick them up from crèche. You know, sometimes I would walk with my brother to school when he started school, we were in the same school, and my sister at the same time, so for me it was just taking care of business, that is all it was, nothing else.
> **Taryn:** You were an adult figure in the eyes of your siblings …
> **Michael:** That is all I was basically, I was like my mother's husband in a sense – I mean that is pretty much how I looked at myself. I mean, my father was not there so I thought, you know what, I am the mxn, so pretty much that is how it was.

Michael narrates about his younger years as a time where he was propelled into the responsibilities of an adult to ensure the care of his younger siblings and to provide the necessary support to his mother as the single-parent and breadwinner. The responsibility and parenting identity taken on by Michael is what some psychologists have called 'parentification' or the 'parentified child' (see Jurkovic 1997), identified by the blurring of boundaries of the parent-child relationship, with the potential in some cases to impact negatively on the child's self-esteem and to compromise their sense of security. Rather than positioning himself as ill-equipped to take on the parentified role, Michael describes this transition from boy-to-mxn as a necessity and in terms of 'responsibility' and 'business' (i.e., "*it is just that it made me more responsible, I think, early on in life, before most people were responsible*" and "*so for me it was just taking care of business*"). He adds that "*I was like my mother's husband in a sense*", having taken on the position of responsibility and paternal care. Although Michael's narrative of responsibility and duty could be read through the lens of 'parentification' as a sign of his maturity at a young age, it could also be read within the context of structural violences enacted on black families and communities. Michael's story about transitioning from the position of 'child' to 'adult' at an early age in apartheid South Africa is part of a larger narrative that characterises the experiences of black working-class people forced to the margins, living lives imposed on them by various structural violences, and forging ways to survive these daily violences. These include scarce employment, poverty, a lack of social support and challenges around providing for families – issues that pervade the lives of those who continue to be marginalised in contemporary South Africa. As Bell (2016) so eloquently put: "[a focus on structural violence] holds the potential of broadening our definition of injury, widening the aperture through which we can examine the effects of colonially produced trauma on individual and community life" (p. 116).

Michael's childhood was additionally shaped by the political and social climate of the time. He vividly described everyday experiences of living through the Soweto Uprising in the 1970s, which is regarded as an important turning point in South African history and which brought about a series of protests through the country's transition from apartheid rule to a democratic one.

> We lived in pretty much a military zone, I mean there were times when the army was just all around us, all the time and you get out and you go to school, "oh there is the army", it is like you know, it was just regular so that is what people do not realise, that we…Soweto, or rather most of Johannesburg, in those troubled places, was actually a military area. The presence of the army was there the whole time […] There is always the presence of the military or some type of force, that is what it was like, you get up, you get out of the house, the army is there, patrolling […] they are checking everything, that was normal, you know, that was. Now you realise, if you think about that, I mean that went on for more than 10 years […] Imagine the type of violent minds that came out of that. You see that is why our country is where we are right now in terms of the level of violence, that is pretty much it. I mean, gangsters were… were grown out of a situation like that, I mean as kids we knew how to cock a gun, a rifle, we knew exactly what type of rifle he was carrying, you know what I am saying? We were like 12, we already knew all of that, the *Kasper* [military vehicle], we knew *Nyala* [military vehicle], we knew a *Apache* helicopter, whatever it was […] Most white conscripts would be placed in Soweto as part of their military training, and a lot of the people we work with now can tell you that they were placed in Soweto and this is how they learned leadership skills. And I am thinking: "but hang on a second, I learned survival skills in the same place".

The picture that Michael attempts to paint in narrating his story above is of the precarity of growing up, as a black boy, in a context of racialised military repression and violence – a context that so fundamentally shaped every aspect of his existence. Drawing on narratives of violence, survival and various forms of oppression, he speaks about growing up in this historical context where there was much violence and oppressive policing of black people. Rather than feeling protected by the police, black people in an apartheid state were mistrusting and fearful of the police. At the same time, Michael provides a commentary on different types of masculinity and racialised interpretations of violence. As Tengan (2002, cited in Irwin and Umemoto 2016) argues, racially privileged mxn are quick to point to the violence and hypermasculine practices of mxn on the racialised and classed margins in order for them to position themselves as superior. What Michael is pointing to here are the ways in which mxn like himself had to learn to survive in that context (fostering perhaps a particular kind of masculinity) while the white mxn's violence gave them a skill that was described as something more respectable: "leadership skills". Michael's narrative here hints at how violence is racialised and interpreted differently depending on whether one is black or white.

Narrative continuities that foreground his racial identity emerged from his childhood stories of living in Soweto to his experiences of attending a predominantly white South African university for his tertiary education.

> It was not the best of places, I mean it was still white back then, I mean you struggled as a black person. That was the bottom line, you just struggled. And, not because people are racist, because things had just changed so quickly for all of us. I mean Mandela had just been released, and suddenly we were forced to now be together and not a lot of people understood and traditionally Rhodes University was a white university. That is the bottom

> line and at that time it was still white, so I …you know, you struggle…we struggled a lot to just get by and that…that also makes you grow up quickly, so yes, it was a difficult time.

It was in the context of the historically white university that Michael speaks about the experience of feeling his racial identity and blackness marked, in a similar way in which black South African students continue to feel today (Kessi and Cornell 2015). Michael makes it clear that he wanted to get as far away as possible from the violent and oppressive militarised area he grew up in, when he says earlier in his interview: *"so that is why the first thing I wanted to do when I got out of Soweto is some place free, some place where there is no sign of you know military, whatever, just some place where it is quiet"*. While trying to escape one form of oppression, he found himself trapped in another, being forced to live in a space *for* white people, as he expresses above, "*suddenly we were forced to now be together*". Michael uses the word "struggle" four times in the above extract, stressing the continued structural oppressions, and the daily battles and challenges he experienced as a black working-class mxn attempting to obtain a higher education.

In Michael's reflections on his current location – as a participant in the programme for partner violent mxn – he notes his own perpetration of violence against his partner as part of a larger idea around the normalisation of violence.

> **Michael**: I'm actually quite positive and hopeful about this programme and I actually intend to put it to good use. I'm actually thinking of even starting a blog to actually mention this so that other people can realise that there are ways out there. I mean I grew up in an environment where violence became an acceptable act and before you know it, it's violence all over the place, and this is where we are as a country; we are in this violent situation where people are killing each other, striking each other, doing all sorts of things regularly. But when you look at the cost of the, the source of the problem, it could have been handled differently, and we don't need to wait for, we don't need [Organisation] after the act; it should be something that happens even before people become violent.

From Michael's life story above, it is clear that the meanings he makes of himself currently, as a mxn who had perpetrated violence against his intimate partner, cannot be divorced from the larger story of his life having been shaped by colonial and apartheid patriarchy. In the South African context, importantly, and from Michael's story, it is the entanglement of black mxn's histories of racial oppressions, structural violences and their complicity within hetero-patriarchy that require attention.

Scott's Story

We began this chapter with an extract from Scott's life story and his narration of his history. At the time of our interviews, Scott was 33 years-of-age living in a neighbouring community to Michael's. Having attained an engineering diploma, Scott is employed in a part-time capacity to do manual labour on oil ships. He is married with two young daughters, aged three and four years.

Scott narrated about the early stages of his childhood with fond memories of receiving good care and love from his parents. However, things took a tragic turn in his family, which Scott describes as being brought on by his father's alcoholism and

physical abuse against his mother. The disintegration of Scott's family played itself out in the divorce and relocation of both his parents, leaving his older sister to be the primary caregiver for Scott and his brother – in a similar way to which Michael had to take care of his siblings.

> Basically, we were on our own, my sister was still always taking caring of us. They divorced and my father, he got married to another womxn, and my mother went overseas and got a job as a nurse in London. So basically, she was there for 10 years, but she came to visit us once, twice a year and my sister was taking care of us then. We did not have that structure of mother and father. This all started when I was eight years old and we were depending on our sister and she had to provide for us […] When my mother came back, she started drinking a lot and that is when things went wrong. Most days, I did not sleep at home, I slept by friends and that.

Like Michael, the western, colonial, patriarchal assumption (Oyewumi 2002) of children growing up in a two-parent nuclear family home did not apply to Scott. Although Scott did not articulate the reason for his mother's rapid relocation to London, his narratives express the sense of abandonment of having both parents leave to take on separate lives and the process of dealing with the major financial implications of his parents' alcohol addictions.

> He [Scott's father] got fired from his job because of drinking. He was under the influence of alcohol when he was at work, he got fired, he took all his money. He did not give my mother a cent. He moved out, he married a younger womxn and has two kids now. My mother moved to England and came back. I do not know what happened, she also started drinking and drinking. She lost her job because of drinking.

Scott's childhood hardships appear to form part of a larger narrative about child-headed households where, through financial need, parents or family members are forced to migrate to cities and financial hubs to earn salaries for their families, leaving children under the care of guardians or older siblings, as in the case of Scott's older sister. Beyond the rights of the affected children being compromised in child-headed households, the responsible child would need to attend to domestic chores and earn an income to cover food, clothes and other basics, meaning that oftentimes, they would be unable to attend school, compromising their own educational development to care for their siblings (Mogotlane et al. 2010). Scott's mother returned home when he was 16 years old. She continued to struggle with alcohol abuse which made Scott seek refuge in other people's homes.

> I was sleeping by my friends and I saw violence all the time. They lived like in the ghetto. They did not have what we had: cars, nice house, not a noisy neighbourhood and that kind of stuff.

Scott narrates how his constant attempts to have a sense of belonging and place of safety put him at further risk, in terms of placing him in violent contexts and being exposed to normalised violence during his younger years, which resonates in some ways with Michael's early encounters. Central to his narrative was his attempt to keep track of "*where it went wrong*" for his family. He frequently expressed anger and disbelief at how his family – once described as financially stable, religious, educated and 'respectable' – became a 'broken' family.

> I am angry but I think my whole situation goes around my father and my mother because we were a happy family once and everything we asked for, we got. I do not know where it went wrong because we were also on Sundays, as a family, in church. We got the best school education – my sister is a social worker, my brother finished now – he is an accountant, I got to study fabrication engineering. There was no fighting in our house and drinking and smoking because we knew that it is harmful to our bodies and stuff. My mother is a nurse and she told us the effects that that stuff has on you, but then my father started drinking […] I heard my father was dead, because of all the drinking. I was not even at his funeral because my mother did not let us go to his funeral. So, I decided to live with my grandmother after that, she paid for my studies after school.

After the death of his grandmother with whom he had a close connection, Scott explains that his addiction to alcohol began ("*A few years back, four years ago, my grandmother died, we were close. It is then that I start drinking*"). Narratives around the intergenerational transmission of trauma and family history of substance abuse as a means of problem-solving were central to Scott's life history. Similar to Scott's experience of having an absent father, he too considered himself an absent father especially in the context of his employment which involved working on ships for lengthy periods. Although this form of employment allows him to financially provide for his family, it also supports a culture of drinking, making it even more challenging for Scott to maintain his sobriety which he describes as a constant challenge.

> It's only when I go back to sea that it is difficult, because for that four, five, six months we are on standby that's when they drink a lot on the ships […] You can get everything for free on that ship […] everyone on that ship is drinking […] I don't want to test myself and be on that ship and be around all guys who are drinking because I know I'm going to fail by testing myself. That's why I asked one of my bosses last night whether he can transfer me onto that one Meridian ship because most of the guys don't drink because there are older mxn on that ship. Basically, the guys on that ship that I am currently on are 20, 26, 30, and most of the guys are single.

Scott believes that his alcohol addiction, violence perpetration and employment that keeps him from his family for months impacted negatively on his family, especially on his eldest daughter, who he paraphrases as saying, "*daddy is never at home, he is always with friends, friends, friends and when he goes to work, we only see him after a long time*". Scott's life story followed a cyclical pattern in how narratives of alcoholism, violence, and broken families recurrently featured, in childhood and the contemporary. He expressed much internal conflict with having witnessed his father's abuse against his mother and having started abusing his wife too, while also reflecting on his eldest daughter who is now similarly exposed to Scott's abuse towards his wife.

> Sometimes I cry at night because why, my father he did it to my mother and it does not give me excuse to do it to my own partner, I must know better because I am educated and I know what is right from wrong.
>
> Only thing is now, playing with my kids, spending time with them, try to convince them to see me in another way because they see me now as that monster that was hitting their mother and the older one is the clever one. She sits in front of me, and she will look at me like I am a monster. I know she is a stress freak because every time anyone speaks, or screams in the house, then she starts crying and that psychiatrist, she blames me for all that stuff and I know I am to blame for it. […] That older one always comes bragging at home,

> that this one child in her classroom always talks about her dad as her hero and all this. What has she got to say in the classroom? Her dad is a womxn beater and I do not feel like living like that anymore. I want to make changes in my life.

As noted by Ratele (2018) “a great feat of economically, racially and sexually violent structures is precisely in predisposing its victims to hurt each other. Ironically, the violence of the (formerly) oppressed against each other may sometimes follow the same lines as the violence of the (former) oppressor: the formerly colonised become neo-colonialists, those who were abused become abusers” (p. 96). There are a number of recurring narratives to highlight in Scott’s life story; that of the oppressed becoming the oppressor, the abused becoming the abuser. More so, themes of the intergenerational abuse of alcohol and violence as well as his ideas around respectability were central to his story. Scott’s disbelief about how his family life took a tragic and unfortunate turn may relate to his understandings around ‘class’ and the broader ideology of respectability. In describing his home environment as a space unlikely to cultivate violence and alcohol abuse, he says above and in an earlier extract that his family practiced good values, built a financially stable home, and experienced the privileges of advancing him and his siblings’ education beyond high school. In contrast, he narrates about violence and other high-risk behaviours as more likely to occur in his friends’ communities, which he calls the “ghetto”. In South Africa we see the reproduction of stigmatising discourses that represent working-class black masculinities as embodying the “streetwise gangster”, as violent, criminal and as dangerous (Haupt 2012, p. 153). Scott appears to have internalised these discourses and relays a sense of disbelief at his current circumstances and how his life did not follow the trajectory of a boy having grown up in a respectable, educated household.

Families who have experienced the upheaval of their lives being disrupted by colonial and apartheid structural violences are often the very ones who, through public and media narratives, end up carrying the stigma of that disruption. These families become marked as ‘chaotic’, ‘alcoholic’ and ‘violent’ – lacking respectability. They carry the shame and stigma of what had been perpetrated against them. Scott is grappling with feelings of shame as he attempts to reflect on what went wrong in his childhood family as well as in his current one. As with Michael’ story, Scott’s life narrative carries much complexity and shows how the meanings he makes of himself and his family – as a mxn who had perpetrated IPV against his partner – cannot be decontextualised from the larger story of his life, one that has been shaped by colonial and apartheid patriarchy, and structural violence.

Implications and Final Considerations

We have foregrounded mxn’s narratives contextualised within their histories and at the intersection of their race, class and gendered identities to better understand how their ‘selves’ un-folded over time and how multiple identities rather than a singular

subjectivity as perpetrator was foregrounded. Our focus in this chapter counters and problematises scholarship that explain the high levels of gender-based violence in South Africa as a symptom of particular identities and statuses, that is, of black, poor mxn with low education in decontextualised ways. Exploring men's lives in detail, it allows us to challenge and disrupt ideas that stereotypically position black masculinities as inherently violent and shows the various pathways mxn have taken to arrive at their current situations.

In this chapter, we have asked mxn to narrate about their violence within the broader contexts of their histories and lives, and have placed a focus on the emancipatory and transformative potential of the life story interview to exemplify decolonial feminist community psychology praxes. In its potential to espouse decolonial feminist principles, the life story approach provided a space for the mxn's narratives about their vulnerabilities in their younger years to surface, showing how their lives and histories have been shaped by structural violences of colonial racialised and patriarchal arrangements and by apartheid. Their narratives show how racial marginalisation and male privilege are the key organising principles of everyday life in colonial patriarchy (Irwin and Umemoto 2016). As articulated by Irwin and Umemoto (2016), in relation to the position of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander youth: "males are tasked with being protectors and providers while their families were relegated to some of the most precarious positions in the economy and political system" (p. 151). This sentiment is shared through the chapter's findings, which suggests that while colonial patriarchy considers mxn to be in positions of agency, the system sets them up for economic, social and political precarity (ibid.).

In foregrounding mxn's life histories, articulated in their own words, we have also attempted to resist the ways in which academic discourse re-packages and re-colonises the voice of the oppressed to reproduce stories of pain and oppression (Tuck and Wayne Yang 2014). We have attempted to work against having mxn's narratives of pain circulate as "common tropes of dysfunction, abuse and neglect" (ibid, p. 229) marking the oppressed in ways that continue the stigmatisation invented by colonisation. Importantly, we also point to how mxn's narratives about their lives and histories have the potential to establish a renewed consciousness about patriarchy and violence; the mxn's interpretations of past events were brought to the fore to allow taken-for-granted narratives of the past to be disrupted. Mxn's narratives show the potential to bring about conscientisation which illustrate how the life history methodology may serve a practical, transformative function for partner violent mxn. We argue that the life history approach has the potential to mobilise mxn towards greater self-knowledge by building consciousness about how their histories shaped their beliefs and perpetration of violence against partners, and thus, holds the potential to exemplify principles of a decolonial feminist community psychology.

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