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Exploring economic support networks amidst racial inequality in Namibia

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WIDER Working Paper 2021/102

Exploring economic support networks amidst racial inequality in Namibia

Annalena Opperl*

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Abstract: Community or interpersonal support as a critical source of livelihood sustenance in the Global South can exhibit unequal dynamics. An understanding of these practices is primarily tied to the conceptual space of poverty or small communities. Less is known about how social support systems might respond to structural inequalities. I address this by exploring how support practices might be shaped by inequalities in the Namibian context. I draw on primary network data to assess inequality as a social dynamic within the space of support and evaluate whether providing worse-off others corresponds to former discriminatory practices under the apartheid regime. My results suggest that inequality has normalized a sense of support as necessity for black but not white Namibians. More broadly, by recognizing differences in group practices, I evidence that exploring support practices across structural inequalities can enhance insights on the social replication of inter- and intragroup-based inequalities.

Key words: inequality, race, economic support, personal networks, Africa, Namibia

JEL classification: C30, D10, D31, D63

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Note: As the research is part of the author's PhD thesis, they will hold copyright.

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1 Introduction

Economic inequality, though prominently expressed as the Gini coefficient, is not just an outcome evaluated by welfarist measures. It can also be observed as a social dynamic, shaped by and shaping aspects of social belonging (Abbink and Harris 2019; Harris et al. 2014; Jetten et al. 2017: 1–5), social preferences and perceptions (Hauser and Norton 2018), or solidarity towards others (Bilecen 2012; Piff et al. 2010; Piff and Robinson 2017). Thereby, inequality is seen as a driver that can be attributed or contribute to social division. In that, social identities and thus answers to ‘who one is to whom’ (Hogg 2016: 3–17; Parkin 1974; Turner 1987) can become increasingly valued in unequal and hierarchical ways. This particularly applies to the Namibian context, where ethnic identities have been instrumentalized for policies of political, economic, and social discrimination. Until the present day, economic inequality prevails along former lines of racialized discrimination (Levine and Roberts 2013; Seekings 2007) shaping outcomes but also lived experiences of Namibians.

In this study, I focus on the lived experiences of social support in Namibia. Doing so assesses inequality as a social dynamic within the space of practicing solidarity towards others. Namibia is particularly interesting as a local narrative emphasizes the aspect of racial economic inequality in personal support practices. The colloquial term Black Tax describes support dynamics which seem to be anchored at a black individual’s socioeconomic position in relation to others in their social orbit or extended family. For instance, it describes expectations to support worse off family members once one ‘studied and found a job’ (Mtolo 2018). Social class, or upward-shifting identities across class, then seem to play a role in mobilizing support among family members for black Namibians. Furthermore, Black Tax speaks to inequalities between black and white Namibians. For instance, support practices of black but not white Namibians seem to respond to causes of continued economic marginalization and material deprivation. To explore to what extent racial inequality has manifested itself in support practices across and within ethnic identity groups, I pose the following question: among whom are provided support activities across considerable socioeconomic distances more likely to occur?

To answer this question, I develop a novel approach which measures socioeconomic differences and provided support across such within the space of social relationships. I draw on a unique dataset stemming from fieldwork in Namibia, primarily Windhoek. The dataset comprises personal networks of adult Namibians of different age, ethnic identity groups, gender, and socioeconomic status. The 205 respondents’ networks amount to a total of 5,732 support activities recorded in the dataset. Using educational and professional attainments as socioeconomic position of individuals, I compute a measure which identifies ‘providing downward’ as support given to someone who is notably worse off in relation to oneself. ‘Notably worse off’ is understood as the socioeconomic distance between two individuals which amounts to at least 50 per cent of the provider’s socioeconomic position. This approach thus reflects that transfers for lower positioned individuals can be more substantive while reflecting a greater ability to provide of higher positioned individuals. I then employ a multi-level mixed effects logistic regression model to estimate the odds among whom ‘providing downward’ is more likely to occur using individual’s characteristics such as age, gender, household, and relationships. To discuss results further, I employ support narratives from respondents’ networks which describe why support activities took place with whom.

My results evidence that former apartheid policies can be associated with present day support patterns of black Namibians, making their likelihood to support worse off individuals distinct from those of white Namibians. This includes gender dynamics, particularly female to female support which can be linked to former restrictions in mobility for black women and children. It further

includes stronger support to notably worse of family versus non-family members, including the nuclear and extended family for black Namibians. Lastly, older generations of black Namibians show a much lower probability to provide across notable socioeconomic differences compared to white Namibians. This might be explained by older black Namibians having experienced an imposed restriction on their educational attainment and thus overall socioeconomic position; a reason why they might also emphasize the role of and create expectations towards achieving better education for their younger ones.

I do not set out to argue that racial inequality is the sole driver or explanation of between-group differences in support practices as culture and traditions might play a role as well. Much rather, I show how the latter might have become instrumentalized for meeting the precariousness and marginalization of racial inequality for black Namibians, further discussing my results considering the Black Tax narrative. In doing so, I contribute to literature on support practices often described as informal safety nets by demonstrating the importance of between-group inequality in examining the role of support practices in society at large.

In the following, I discuss relevant literature in section 2, before detailing my analytical approach in section 3. I present findings in section 4 and conclude by revisiting the broader debate and contributions to literature in section 5.

2 Racial inequality and economic support in Namibia

Racial identity is a widely acknowledged dimension of between-group inequality. This particularly applies to the Namibian post-apartheid context. Apartheid was a political system that institutionalized and reinforced racial and ethnic segregation in South Africa and Namibia. It is a prominently discussed case of human rights violations and structural violence, conflict and power imbalances, as well as social stratification and economic inequalities (Fosse 1997; Friedman 2011; Leibbrandt et al. 2012; Matlosa 1998; Seekings 2003).

The South African colonial government enforced ethnic identity-based segregation by implementing various discriminatory policies towards black Namibians, e.g. differential taxation or pension claims. It further restricted the mobility of black Namibians, which was manifested in a multitude of government policies such as the 1963 Aliens Control Act or the Native Urban Areas Proclamation of 1951, particularly so for women and children by not allowing them to join the residence of their husbands and fathers living in urban areas (Jauch et al. 2009). Such policies led to a divide between rural subsistence farming and urban industrial workers along gendered lines for many black African families in Namibia. Other discriminatory measures concerned educational outcomes. Following the Bantu Education Act in 1953, in 1958 non-white education entailed four years of primary schooling whereby only 20 per cent were to proceed to higher levels. Furthermore, while white education was tax-financed, black Namibians had to pay in the form of fees constraining access through affordability (O’Callaghan 1977). Furthermore, the United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN) demonstrated that observed income differentials across white and black Namibians surpassed any variations that could have been explained by differing skill levels, thereby reflecting ethnic discrimination based on payment levels (United Nations Institute for Namibia 1986). At the same time, on average, the white population held permanent jobs across the public and private sectors, and had access to subsidised housing, healthcare and high-quality schools, as captured in ‘the expenditure of health care resources for the white population differed from that reserved for the black population at a scale of about 10:1’ (Jauch et al. 2009: 14).

Though apartheid policies were revoked when Namibia gained independence in 1990, Levine and Roberts find ‘a substantial amount of ‘unfinished business’ ... in terms of reducing the country’s extreme inequality... related to ethnicity, race, and geography’ (2013: 185). On an aggregated level,

income inequality measured by the Gini coefficient showed levels of 0.70, 0.60 and 0.59 in 1994, 2004 and 2010 respectively, ranking among the ten most unequal countries (World Bank 2019). Only a minority of people depict the living standards expected in an upper-middle-income country (Namibia Statistics Agency and World Bank 2017). Scholarly debates on inequality further often depict a comparative lens that primarily focuses on group differences framed as poor and non-poor. The recognition of ethnic differentiation then finds the root cause in former unequal education systems and varying labour skills, leading to high rates of unemployment among black Namibians and income inequality overall (Aron et al. 2009; Seekings 2007; Seekings et al. 2004).

The salience of such racialized inequality in interpersonal support practices is then evidenced by the public discourse and discussions around Black Tax. Black Tax is a fairly recent term in Namibia and South Africa. Before the term itself existed, it used to revolve around ‘old African traditions’ that entailed mutual caretaking of families, kinship and community. It was seen as family duty, family responsibility, but also family upliftment (Mhlongo 2019). While the term ‘Black Tax’ does not necessarily seem to be known or used by older generations (Busani-Dube 2019), some attribute its origin to recent economic recessions and its socioeconomic implications with more precarious effects for black individuals.

A traditional way of life — or communal life as African way of life — seems to depict a somewhat negative connotation for younger generations. Material caretaking used to be a ‘neutral’ practice across the lifecycle. External challenges due to economic recessions and resulting unemployment in the late 2000s increased economic pressure for those who are typically referred to as black middle-class. In light of decreasing resources to cater for one’s own and other’s needs, the sharing of resources became referred to as ‘tax’ (Mhlongo 2019). For some, Black Tax ‘unintentionally demonise(s) the idea of family upliftment by calling it some kind of Black Tax’ or an ‘abusive cultural practice, (including) a burden on black people’s progress’ (Mhlongo 2019: 82). Further, the author describes that some black individuals felt the pressure to retreat from a traditional way of life.

In her master’s dissertation, Magubane (2017) generally describes two schools of thought when referring to Black Tax. In one, it seems to be attributed to the discrimination of the apartheid system and the continued between-group inequality by race as a result of such. The other primarily focuses on the black middle-class and their financial support to extended family members considering within-group by race inequalities resulting from apartheid. While both do not differ in identifying the cause, namely historical inequality, the latter points to the fact that shifting up in terms of socioeconomic class bears consequences for black individuals. In fact, Busani-Dube (2019: 17) states that ‘success comes with expectations; it comes with the responsibility to send the elevator back down to fetch the others’.

Framed as a normative, social script that individuals interpret and follow differently within the compounds of family, why and between whom Black Tax is mobilized seems to be associated with changing socioeconomic statuses among family members. For instance, such can be found in statements which describe it as ‘(a practice which) ... many young black working professionals have to endure as part of their career successes in the modern world’ (Mushaandja 2015: 1) as well as a ‘cultural and moral obligation that people feel towards their families ... (which) feeds an expectation that a person may be liable to carry a burden if they studied and found a job’ (Mtolo 2018: 1).

Similarly, a recent article suggests that Black Tax is an ‘affective term that is associated with shifting social identities’ (Mangoma and Wilson-Prangley 2019: 444) whereby this shift is then understood as becoming or being ‘better off’, causing individuals to support ‘... their economically disadvantaged family’ (Mangoma and Wilson-Prangley 2019: 447). Therefore, the authors point to

a certain social trade-off as ‘balancing one’s own personal growth ambitions against cultural and social pressures can create internal conflict’ for those who provide support (Mangoma and Wilson-Prangley 2019: 456). More broadly, it has further been argued that ‘Black Tax does the real work of income redistribution in the country’, which deals with ‘apartheid(s)... socially engineered black poverty... and makes the need for Black Tax a reality’ (Ndinga-Kanga 2019: 1).

Acknowledging these dynamics is particularly important in the Global South, where informal or interpersonal practices of economic support were found to constitute vital parts of the ‘welfare package’ (Bevan 2004: 88–120; Wood 2004). For many individuals, relying on their social relationships for economic support, is a part of their livelihood if not a necessary mode of survival. Studies which focus on the internal workings of these support networks, have explored some of the social trade-offs mentioned in the Black Tax narrative. While these studies paid attention to aspects of efficiency, e.g. testing whether such support networks can cope with various shocks (Heemskerk et al. 2004) or function as mutual insurance (McDonald et al. 1999), they have also detected certain ‘unequal’ dynamics. This includes certain disincentives and disadvantages for individuals involved in support practices. Wood and Gough describe support relationships depicting elements of hierarchy and asymmetry as resulting in ‘problematic inclusion, or adverse incorporation, whereby poorer people trade some short-term security in return for longer-term vulnerability and dependence’ (2006: 1696). A study situated in rural Ethiopia found that kinship networks impose moral obligations of redistribution on its members, which lead to a discouragement of wealthy members to increase their income, whereas relatively poor network members appeared to be discouraged to improve their income situation owing to the comfort provided by the safety net of their family (Werger 2009). Furthermore, in South Africa, individuals attempted to evade traditional sharing norms by ‘accumulating durables that are non-shareable at the expense of durables that may be shareable and reducing savings in liquid assets’, which ultimately resulted in more extensive kinship networks with lower incomes (Di Falco and Bulte 2011: 1128). In sum, while personal practices of support seem to benefit some, they might constitute burdens or disincentives for others. A critical stance describes such kin systems as a ‘poverty trap’ as well as the ‘collective force of conservatism’ that can maintain its members at the expense of the individual (Hoff and Sen 2005). This general stance speaks to the notion of Black Tax described as the balancing of one’s own ambitions against the social pressures and obligations to support others that are in need or have contributed to one’s success. However, Black Tax emphasizes that this might apply to black and not white Namibians.

Though there are studies focussing on the interpersonal dynamics of support in the Namibian context, as of today there are none which do so in a comparative manner across white and black ethnic identities and corresponding socioeconomic positions. For instance, studies often focus on support within the context of poverty and gender (Plattner and Gonzo 2010), youth-headed households (Ruiz-Casares 2010) or urban–rural remittance flows, further accounting for associated migration patterns (Frayne 2001, 2004; Greiner 2010, 2011). Furthermore, some of these studies are confined to specific geographical locations and context, which also includes studies on reciprocity in North-western Namibia including pastoralist communities (Schneegg 2015; Schneegg and Linke 2015). These studies provide important insights on household compositions and interactions among them, as well as gendered dynamics of support or aspects of food security and methods to sustain livelihoods. Thereby, and possibly due to the nature of economic marginalization in Namibia, they primarily focus on non-white social spaces and dynamics. Considerably less is known about the nexus between individuals’ support practices and racial inequality, particularly how such plays out in the largest urban conglomerate of the country, Windhoek. The only study similar to this one is by Mangoma and Wilson-Prangley (2019) who explore financial transfers among families of the black South African middle-class as mentioned above. Whilst being a first empirical exploration of Black Tax in a similar context, the authors do

not compare support practices of white and black South Africans. Doing so might miss out on understanding, how support practices respond to social stratification that exists in a society at large.

In this paper, I focus on the question among whom are provided support across considerable economic differences more likely to occur. I pose this question to support practices in general, as well as to those of white and black Namibians separately. This comparison in turn allows me to detect differences regarding inter- and intra-racial inequality. Thereby, provided support to notably worse off individuals in one's social orbit is discussed considering former and inherited structures of racial inequality. I do not claim that racial inequality is the sole driver or explanation of between-group differences in support practices, as culture and traditions might play a role as well. I rather explore ways in which the latter might have become instrumentalized through a normalization of necessity and associated dependency on support owing to the economic marginalization experienced by black Namibians.

3 Analytical approach

In my analytical approach, I focus on the question among whom provided support activities across considerable economic distances are more likely to occur. I explore this question using the whole sample as well as sub-samples only including black and white Namibians. Therefore, a first step is to define what 'considerable economic distances' mean in the following approach. To define such, I begin with a description of the type and content of data informing this study.

3.1 Data and definitions

The data informing this study stems from fieldwork, which collected primary data on Personal Networks of Support. It was conducted in 2017/18 and comprises a total of 5735 support activities stemming from personal networks of adult Namibians (n= 205) and informs this analysis. Personal network data represents an in-depth collection of information about the immediate social environment of an individual. They differ from social networks in that they do not comprise the social structure of a population of interest at large.¹ The mentioned study focuses on relations between the respondent and their immediate contacts but not among contacts. The method employed to elicit respondents' contacts, is aligned with the resource generator of Van der Gaag and Snijders (2005). Thereby, respondents would be asked with whom they engage in certain activities, recording their contacts by activity. With each support activity, respondents would further elaborate on characteristics of their contacts, the activity itself, as well as state their personal motivations and considerations attached to the activity. Support practices are defined using economic welfare as a framework and comprises activities such as in-kind and financial transfers, co-habitation, unpaid labour, and care as well as economic opportunity sharing.²

The data was purposefully sampled to comprise various income strata, age groups between 18 years and above 65 years old, six ethnic identity groups and gender (see Table 1 for further

¹ Social networks generally capture sociometric data which contains all relevant links within a population of interest. Personal networks, also called ego-centric networks can be viewed as zooms into the larger structure as they focus on the social relations of individuals (for further discussion see for example Crossley et al. 2015).

² More precisely, support practices in this study include: 1. financial transfers of N\$100 (Namibian dollars), up to N\$5000. 2. Non-durable asset transfers such as food and clothing. 3. Durable asset transfers such as livestock and land. 4. Co-habitation arrangements and household assistance. 5. Childcare and elderly care. 6. Opportunity sharing including assistance with applications, job referral, hiring through contacts, or mentorship.

particulars). First, it is important to mention that the subsequently employed categories ‘black’ and ‘white’ are then defined as comprising black and white ethnic identities.³

Table 1: Sample summary statistics

Summary statistics	Percentage	Min	Mean	Max	Std. Dev.
Sociodemographic criteria					
Respondents age		18	44.902	84	16.19
Contact age		1	37.429	111	20.63
Respondent female	0.47				
Contact female	0.49				
Location					
Informal WHK	0.31				
Formal WHK	0.32				
Inf/Formal WHK	0.20				
Village	0.05				
Town	0.09				
Farm	0.01				
Network measures					
Degree		7	37.075	105	21.89
Unique size		3	19.678	47	9.376
Provided activity	0.54				
Household and family support⁴					
Same household	0.31				
Nuclear family	0.42				
Extended family	0.26				
Support activities by domain					
Co-habitation, unpaid labour, care	0.23				
Financial support	0.27				
In-kind support	0.23				
Opportunity sharing	0.25				
Socioeconomic status					
Tertiary and post-secondary education	0.44				
Higher-grade professionals	0.29				

Source: primary data, collected 2017/18.

This aggregation of ethnic sub-groups does not represent a homogenization of ethnic identity groups in terms of their cultural practices and social dynamics. What gives meaning to a dualistic lens, is the focus on historically grown inequalities. Whether historical systems discriminated against some ethnic identities and not others can present a binary answer: yes, systematic discrimination applied to black ethnic identities and no, this systematic discrimination did not apply to white ethnic identities. In fact, discrimination against black Namibians were designed in a way to favour white Namibians. I thus account for ethnic identities owing to their former instrumentalization in generating differentiated access, rights, and opportunities. The sample thus comprises 165 black and 40 white respondents whereby the larger number of black ethnic identities is primarily owing to the sampling by language groups and greater ethnic sub-diversity within the non-white space. Overall, the data is not nationally representative and broader interpretations

³ Ethnic identity groups include: Ovambo, Herero, Caprivian, Nama/Damara, German Namibia, White Afrikaans.

⁴ Applies if respondent and contact are either from the same household, nuclear family, or extended family.

beyond the scope of the sample are limited. In the subsequent analysis, I draw on quantitative aspects of my data which I shall define below. In addition, I include network narratives being statements regarding causes and motivations of respondents to discuss results further.

Providing downward

Providing downward is aligned with the notion of shifting social identities as mentioned in the Black Tax narrative. In other words, the support provided from an economically better to a worse off individual. This also speaks to previously assessed dynamics in related studies. In particular, transfer patterns between relatively poor and more wealthy members of support systems which has been associated with economic disincentives for those that receive and economic disadvantages for those that provide (Di Falco and Bulte 2011; Werger 2009; Wood and Gough 2006). To capture this notion in the subsequent analysis, I first defined individuals' socioeconomic position. In personal network data individuals can be distinguished into egos, being the respondents who reported their personal network, and their contacts as alteri, being the contacts recorded within their specific network. When referring to egos and alteri jointly, I use the subscript (i) for individuals, otherwise (e) for egos and (a) for alteri.

As noted by Brown-Iannuzzi et al., socioeconomic status can be constituted by 'objective material resources ... commonly assessed by indicators of wealth, education, and occupational prestige' (2015: 15). I follow this rationale to generate a continuous scale for socioeconomic positions based on data availability using individuals' education levels E_i as well as their profession W_i to generate their socioeconomic status position SES_i .

$$SES_i = \sum E_i, W_i$$

Education levels are based on a scale from zero to three, whereby zero represents no education, followed by primary, secondary, and tertiary education obtained. Professions are clustered and ranked using Goldthorpe's class scheme (1987).⁵ The resulting scale ranges from zero to five whereby zero represent not in labour force, one represents unemployment,⁶ followed by manual labour, service workers, lower-grade professionals, and higher-grade professionals. As positions are used as denominator later, I rescale SES_i by adding one so that it ranges from one to nine, instead of zero to eight. This step is uniformly applied to all positions and hence does not affect the original scale.

When looking at the distributions of SES positions across black and white Namibians included in my sample, a different socioeconomic standing of racial identity groups becomes apparent. Figure 1 shows that the sample does not include any white Namibians situated at positions as low as one or two whereby only a minority then occupies positions in the medium range. The largest share however is situated at the top, namely 63.7 per cent. On the contrary, this applies only to 19.8 per cent of black Namibians. Further, black Namibians cover the full range of socioeconomic

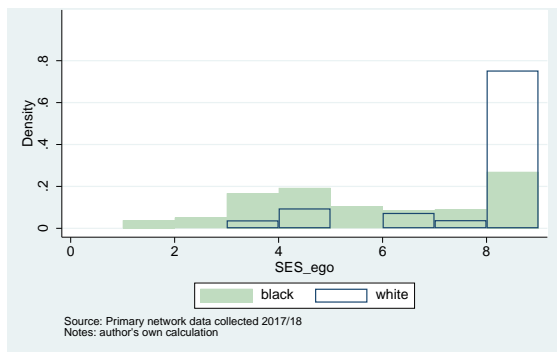
⁵ Goldthorpe's class scheme is the dominant schema in international sociology literature. It generally facilitates the computation of comparable categories related to socioeconomic class; in the case of this research, professions obtained. Since professions were captured using an open question, clustering was necessary for the proposed analysis. In this study, I apply the five categories, these being: (1) unemployed; (2) manual labour, food service workers and household staff; (3) service workers and office staff; (4) lower grade professionals; and (5) higher grade professionals (Goldthorpe 1987).

⁶ I scale unemployed individuals at one instead of zero as some individuals who are currently recorded some source of (informal), or additional income as compared to those who were not in the labour force.

positions with a cumulative share of 25.7 per cent on the bottom three positions, and 38.4 per cent positions four to six.

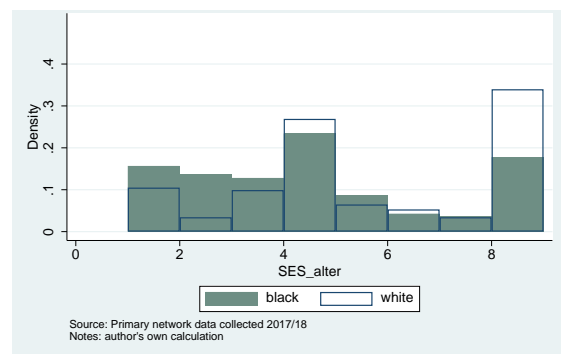
On the other hand, when looking at distributions of alteri mentioned by either black or white egos, they tend to be spread across the entire scale of socioeconomic positions for both groups (see Figure 2). It is important to mention that support occurs among members of the same ethnic identity (63.9 per cent for white Namibians and a considerable share of 87.5 per cent for black Namibians). Hence, while I did not observe white egos on the lowest position, alteri mentioned by them can rank as low as one, two, or three (see Figure 4). Among those that rank on the bottom three positions, about half of them are black alteri. For black egos, there are considerable shares of mentioned alteri on the lower positions (see Figure 3), amounting to a cumulative share of 42.2 per cent for the bottom three positions (as opposed to 23.8 per cent for alteri of white egos).

Figure 1: Distribution of SES positions of egos (whole sample)



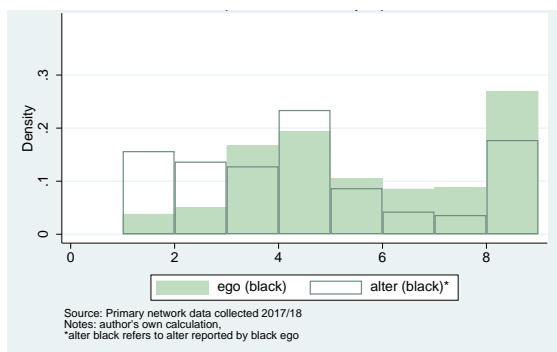
Source: author's illustration.

Figure 2: Distribution of SES positions of alters (whole sample)



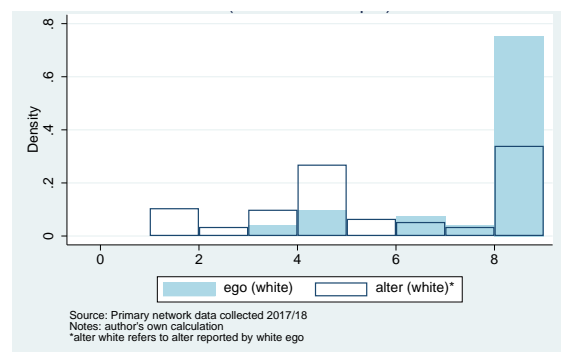
Source: author's illustration.

Figure 3: Distribution of SES positions of egos and alters (black sub-sample)



Source: author's illustration.

Figure 4: Distribution of SES positions of egos and alters (white sub-sample)



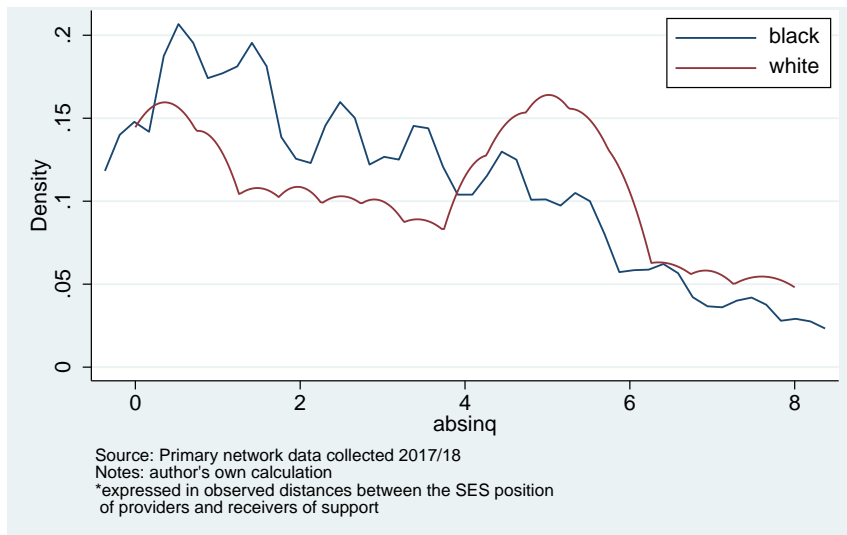
Source: author's illustration.

To see which *SES* positions are linked via support activities, I computed the distance D_i between the one who provided support and the one who received it. In order to reflect the direction of support, I subtract the position of the receiver from the one of the provider so that positive values indicate a ‘downward orientation’ of support (provider’s position greater than receiver’s position) and negative values an ‘upward orientation’ (provider’s position smaller than receiver’s position). The dummy variable *provide* amounts to one if the ego provided to the alter, and zero if the ego received from the alter or in other words the alter provided to the ego.

$$D_i = (SES_e - SES_a \mid provide = 1), (SES_a - SES_e \mid provide = 0)$$

The following graph (Figure 5) provides an overview of absolute *SES* distances observed between egos and alteri across black and white ethnic identity groups. There seems to be a general decline with rising *SES* distances between egos and alteri across both identity groups. Zero generally represents peer to peer support. While in part peaks in the absolute distances of white egos can be explained by the pattern of their observed *SES* position, there seems to be an accumulation of *SES* distances spanning four to six units.

Figure 5: Distribution of absolute SES distance* (whole sample)



Source: author's illustration.

However, in general this comparison does not reveal which *SES* positions are linked to which *SES* distances. In other words, across which *SES* distances an individual of a given *SES* position provides support. To account for such, I calculated individuals’ relative distances *RD* by expressing the observed *SES* distance D as a share of their position SES_i , so that:

$$RD_i = \left(\frac{D_i}{SES_e} \mid provide = 1 \right), \left(\frac{D_i}{SES_a} \mid provide = 0 \right)$$

Positive values below zero thus reflect ‘providing downward’ as the observed distance amounts to a share of the support provider’s position, hence the receiver of support holds a lower position. Negative values in turn indicate ‘providing upward’ as a receiver of support is positioned higher than the provider, hence the observed and relative distance is negative. Values of zero indicate peer support whereby values equal or greater than ± 1 then indicate distances that cover 100 per cent or multiples of one’s position.

Relative distances thus increase with an individual's *SES* position. For example, 0.5 per cent amount to four units for individuals positioned at eight and to just two units of an individuals positioned at four. In that, relative distances can also reflect a notion of 'substantiveness' of support. This applies particularly to individuals positioned at the bottom ranks. Hereby, one might generally have less resources to provide support but also received support might be essential for sustaining livelihoods. Indeed, in my sample I found that for low positioned egos, support activities evolved more around basic needs or responded to external challenges such as unemployment or material deprivation as compared to higher positioned individuals (Oppel, *forthcoming*). For higher positioned individuals, support activities can but might be generally less substantive whereas having more resources also reflects a greater ability to provide.

Thus, to identify *considerable* distances for 'providing downward', I impose a threshold. One the on hand, to reflect an idea of 'substantiveness' as discussed above. On the other hand, to not discriminate against lower positioned individuals who, given a finite scale, have fewer opportunities to provide to lower positions. Hence, imposing a threshold balances 'providing downwards' by also avoiding an overrepresentation of high positioned individuals whose activities are more likely to classify as downward directed. The threshold applied classifies 'providing downward' P_i if the covered distance between two individuals amounts to at least 50 per cent of the provider's *SES* position, so that:

$$P_i = (1 \mid RD_i \geq 0.5, 0)$$

By using a finite scale there is a certain assumption that an individual positioned on the bottom cannot provide downwards and vice versa for an individual positioned at the top. Thus, generally dynamics can only be interpreted within the observed range while further unobserved downward or upward providing can occur. Overall, 26.5 per cent (1521 support activities) classify as 'downward provided'. That excludes 19.1 per cent of activities which are provided downward across distances less than 50 per cent of provider's *SES* position. This distinction further results in 31.1 per cent activities as 'providing upwards' (*SES* position of provider smaller than *SES* position of receiver) and 23.3 per cent as 'peer support' (same *SES* position for provider and receiver). As downward providing applies to one fourth of the data only, it can be assumed that it is not a commonly observed dynamic. Further, downward providing is almost evenly distributed across white and black ethnic identity groups: 27.1 per cent among white Namibians and 26.4 per cent among black Namibians. This makes an interesting case for studying among whom such support is more likely to occur across black and white Namibians. While providing downward might occur to similar extents, it might be driven by different social characteristics.

3.2 Modelling approach

To understand *among whom* 'providing downward' as defined above is more likely to occur, I introduce a multilevel mixed effect logistic regression model. These models account for the hierarchical structure of network data and simultaneously analyse the individual and group levels. The data informing this study consists of non-overlapping personal networks. This means that alteri mentioned in one ego network do not occur in another ego network or if, only at random. The ties, being support activities, or a property thereof, like in the case of this analysis being downward providing, presents the unit of analysis (level one). The egos are on level two in which alteri are nested.

To recall downward providing P_i is equal to one if the ties between the i -th alter and the j -th ego covers a *SES* distance of at least 50 per cent of the providers position (SES_e or SES_a depending on direction of support), zero otherwise. The probability $\pi_{ij} = P(P_i=1)$ is then defined. Being presented with a dichotomous response variable, I use a multilevel random intercept logistic model

with p explanatory variables z_{kj} , $k = 1, \dots, q$ measured at level-1 and level-2, adopted from Lumino et al. (2017) as follows:

$$\text{logit}(\pi_{ij}) = \beta_{0j} + \sum_{h=1}^p \beta_h x_{hij} + \sum_{k=1}^q \beta_k z_{kj} \quad (1)$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \beta_0 + u_{0j} u_{0j} \sim N(0, \sigma_{u_0}^2) \quad (2)$$

Hereby, $\sigma_{u_0}^2$ represents the ego variance (thus at level two). $\text{logit}(\pi_{ij})$ is a logit transformation as $\log(\pi_{ij}/(1 - \pi_{ij}))$. Further, β_{0j} is the random intercept with β_h and β_k coefficients representing the fixed effects of level-1 and level-2 accordingly. Thereby, fixed effects do not vary across egos and thus present general effects for the whole sample of individuals. With respect to the model selection, I followed steps as proposed by Lumino et al. (2017) and Van Duijn et al (1999). This included adding first, available fixed level-1 (alter) explanatory variables, such as their age, gender, or being a household or family member. In a second step, I added fixed level-2 ego characteristics, such as the ego's racial identity, age, further considering ego's network measures such as the number of ties or number of contacts mentioned within an ego's network.

Table 2: Explanatory variables included in model specification

Theme	Variable description	Variable name	Level	Type
Race	Racial identifier for regression on whole sample	race	Level-2	Dummy
Position	SES >4 & <7	Pos4-7	Level-1, level-2	Dummy
	SES >=7	Pos>7	Level-1, level-2	Dummy
Gender	Female to Female	FemFem	Level-1	Dummy
	Male to Male	MaleMale	Level-1	Dummy
Generation	Distance <= 20 years	Age_20	Level-1	Dummy
	Distance > 40 years	Age_40	Level-1	Dummy
Family	Nuclear family member	NucFam	Level-1	Dummy
	Ext. family member	ExtFam	Level-1	Dummy
Non-family	Friend	Friend	Level-1	Dummy
	Acquaintance	Acquaintance	Level-1	Dummy
Household	Household member	HHmember	Level-1	Dummy
Network measures	Number of ego's activities	Degree	Level-2	Continuous
	Number of ego's contacts	Uniquesize	Level-2	Continuous

Note: explanatory variables have been computed as relational or relative characteristics to capture the aspect of 'among whom' central to this study's research. This involved, e.g. taking an ego's gender and comparing it to the alter's gender to compute, e.g. female to female support as a dummy variable. Other variables were already relational due to their character, say 'being of the same household' or 'being a family member'. Generations were clustered into up to 20 years and more than 40 years to reflect different support structures across, e.g. parents and grandparents. Network measures (degree versus unique size) differ as respondents could mention same individuals across multiple support activities. Hence unique size captures the total number of individuals mentioned, while degree captured the total number of activities mentioned.

Source: Primary Network Data collected 2017/18; author's calculation.

In a last step, non-significant explanatory variables were removed except for network measures. This is since reported networks vary considerably in size (from as low as 8 to 105 activities recorded). As, i.e. *SES* positions vary on level-2 (ego), controlling for network size can correct for some of the overrepresentation of ego characteristics due to network size. This involved including most explanatory as relational measures given that the analysis is centred on the question ‘among whom’. In other words, explanatory variables were computed in a way to reflect both ends of a support activity. In other words, ‘being of the same gender’ would consider the gender of the ego and alter at the same time. Table 2 provides an overview of the included explanatory variables.

I run the model specification on the whole sample first before applying the same specification to sub-samples by racial identity group, thus to white Namibians and black Namibians separately. Comparing effects can provide insights on different dynamics within groups whereby I use support narratives to further the discussion of results.

4 Findings and discussion

In the following, results are expressed as odds ratios (OR) as a measure of association between attributes of individuals and the outcome of providing downward. Thus, OR show the odds that providing downward will occur given a specific event, i.e. certain (shared) characteristics of individuals, compared to the odds that providing downward occurs despite the specific event. For example, they express the probability of, say female to female downward support compared to the probability of downward providing in general, i.e. for all other combinations (male to male, or across gender). The displayed ORs thus address the aspect *among whom* downward providing is more likely — further comparing such across ethnic identity groups. At first, providing downward is slightly more likely for black Namibians (the effect of being black increases the likelihood by 80 per cent overall). This might simply be caused by a larger amount of observations for black ethnic identities as compared to white. It might also reflect the fact that while inter-racial inequality appeared to decline, intra-racial inequality increased (Seekings et al. 2004). Within group measures and a comparison thereof can provide further insights. An overview of model results is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Model results: the odds of downward providing

	Whole sample	Only Black Egos	Only White Egos
Race (black=1)	1.881** (0.453)		
SES position 4 to 6	0.330*** (0.0441)	0.426*** (0.0614)	0.0619*** (0.0278)
SES position above 7	2.961*** (0.348)	3.053*** (0.375)	2.843** (1.123)
Female to Female	2.068** (0.573)	2.731** (0.996)	1.065 (0.494)
Male to Male	0.800* (0.0801)	0.814 (0.0891)	0.798 (0.213)
Age distance <=20 years	0.484*** (0.0452)	0.454*** (0.0455)	0.604 (0.168)
Age distance >= 40 years	2.403*** (0.276)	1.737*** (0.219)	7.689*** (2.494)

Nuclear family member	1.383* (0.222)	2.001*** (0.378)	0.562 (0.221)
Extend. Family member	1.533** (0.250)	2.023*** (0.388)	2.195 (0.888)
Friend	0.639* (0.132)	0.869 (0.209)	0.341* (0.153)
Acquaintance	1.548* (0.284)	1.372 (0.321)	2.167* (0.765)
Household member	1.691*** (0.154)	1.698*** (0.166)	2.614*** (0.727)
No. of unique contacts	1.031* (0.0158)	1.026 (0.0165)	1.001 (0.0440)
Degree	0.986 (0.00757)	0.989 (0.00810)	0.989 (0.0200)
Constant	0.102*** (0.0342)	0.139*** (0.0452)	0.156** (0.0963)
Random effects, Ego: identity	1.155 (0.0861)	1.172 (0.0978)	0.715 (0.165)
chi2	509.6	391.9	176.9
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	5731	4713	1018

Note: coefficients expressed as odds ratios, standard errors in parentheses. Likelihood ratio tests were used to test whether controlling for random effects outperforms a model which does not. Random effects allow intercepts and slopes to vary by sub-groups, i.e. nested levels, e.g. the 205 (whole sample), 165 (black sub-sample) or 40 (white sub-sample) personal networks of egos. Tests results suggest controlling for random effects outperforms a model specification without. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Source: author's calculation.

4.1 Socioeconomic position and network measures

SES positions were included to control for the fact, that economic distances between individuals are measured on a finite scale. Mathematically, a better situated individual's activities are more likely to qualify as providing downward⁷. This in turn might however also reflect a greater potential or ability to provide resources given that a higher positioned individual has a higher educational degree (earnings potential) and a higher professional attainment (higher incomes). The data indicates such by showing that downward providing seems less likely for individuals positioned at four and up to seven (67 per cent less likely) which is more pronounced for white Namibians (94 per cent as opposed to 57 per cent less likely). However, knowing that positions have a higher concentration at the very top for white egos (less so for their alteri), this difference might in part be explained by such. Individuals positioned at seven and eight are then more likely to provide downwards for both groups: about three times as likely for black Namibians (3.1) and 2.8 times as likely for white Namibians. The number of individuals reported in one's network (No. of unique contacts) has only a marginal effect on the likelihood of providing downward (3 per cent) whereas

⁷ Say an individual positioned at 4 reaches the threshold if she provides to individuals at position 2. This only leaves individuals at position 1 as other opportunities for downward providing. In turn, an individual positioned at 8 reaches the threshold at a distance of 4 units, leaving individuals positioned at 4, 3, 2, and 1 for downward providing.

the number of recorded activities (Degree) has no effect at all. This suggests that generally respondents were not incentivized to think of additional 'worse off' individuals the more activities they recorded. The effect of having a high *SES* position might in part capture the notion of Black Tax as having studied and found a job comes with expectations to support worse off individuals. Just looking at *SES* positions, the results suggests that this applies to black and white Namibians alike: who is generally considered when supporting notably worse off individuals, is thus interesting to compare. Indeed, the results suggests that there are differences across both groups.

4.2 Gender and household dynamics

This concerns gender and household dynamics. Interestingly, the Black Tax narrative does not seem to address gender aspects specifically, for example different roles within families depending on one's gender. However, results suggest that downward providing is almost 3 times more likely to occur (2.7) among black female egos and their female alteri. That does not hold true for white egos. Conversely providing downward is slightly less likely to occur overall (-20 per cent) among men whereby this effect is not significant within groups. This might link to discriminatory policies namely the 1963 Aliens Control Act or the Native Urban Areas Proclamation of 1951. Through formerly restricting the mobility of black women and children, they might have initiated support among women while being physically distanced from their male family members. While this may have fostered or further pronounced women's roles as primary care givers, the following examples also illustrate that associated support among women can be shaped by and respond to economic challenges. This can be in the form of shared childcare arrangements among neighbours or family members to enable participation in paid labour but also assuming care duties for children of deceased family members.

They take care of my child and I help to take care of theirs. Because we usually share if I have to go to somewhere, they take care of my kid and vice versa. (businesswomen, 27, talking about shared childcare duties with her unemployed neighbour (28)).

She is my sister. As the eldest I have to take care of her. So that she can help me in the house with my children and take care of them when I am away at work. (salesperson, 36, providing accommodation to her unemployed sister, 32).

They are my older sister's kids and she passed away. It is my duty to care for them. (teacher, 36, providing a home for her sister's children).

A more explicit reference to economic challenges can be seen in expressing empathy through support which recognizes another women's difficulty to care for her family in the absence of employment or given the circumstances of poverty more broadly. There can then also be a sense of mutual dependency in support relationships.

I know how it feels to be a mother and not being able to provide for your kids (domestic worker, 43, support given to her at the time unemployed friend to help her find a job as domestic worker as well).

Due to poverty that she lives in. To help and for her... to get energy for her to help me too. (farmer, 69, financial support given to her unemployed daughter).

Another frequent category of support are household chores that feature among black female to female support. What the following example shows is that doing so can also be triggered by the absence of other family members to provide such or due to physical conditions of the receiver of support such as old age or disabilities.

Cook for her, clean for her, wash dishes and clothes. This used to happen every time I go to Katima (North of Namibia) because I used to go and stay in her house for some time. It is very important because my auntie is on a wheelchair and there is no one to help her, some of her kids are in South Africa and others in Zambia, they do not want to help their mother. (nurse, 28, talking about household assistance to her disabled aunt).

In these scenarios, certain types of support can be linked to downward providing among women. In part they respond to gendered roles in the household – however they also recognize if a woman faces a difficulty to ‘fulfil’ such given social and economic circumstances.

In addition, downward providing is less likely to occur with a household member for black Namibians (1.6 more likely) as compared to white Namibians (2.6 more likely). Earlier studies suggested that in the Namibian context households might have a multilocal character; particularly demonstrating such by the flow of rural–urban and urban–rural transfers (Greiner 2011, 2012). This again can be traced back to former mobility restrictions, evident in the study of Tvedten and Nangulah (1999). The authors show that urban male-headed households ‘with employment and income ... are in the best position to maintain relations with their extended family and rural areas of origin ... [yet being] most susceptible to claims from the extended family’ thereby providing an example of how support transcends household boundaries for black Namibians (Tvedten and Nangulah 1999: 32). Linked to gender dynamics, they further argue that ‘[women’s] ties with the extended family are to a large extent based on children as extended family property’ whereby children sent to the mother’s matrilineal family then create expectations for rural-urban support (Tvedten and Nangulah 1999: 33). Hence, in part discussed female-to-female support regarding childcare obligations might be interlinked with support transcending household boundaries for black and less so for white Namibians; the latter which did not experience a gendered, institutional divide of household members across the urban-rural sphere. If downward providing might occur more frequently across ‘households’ for black Namibians, it might also suggest that households might be seen less as a physical entity but rather a social constitution or family network.

4.3 Family and non-family relationships

Across both groups, downward providing is slightly more likely (40 per cent) with a member of one’s nuclear family. This is primarily driven by dynamics of black Namibians for whom it is twice as likely (2.0) to occur. For white Namibians there is no significant effect regarding the likelihood to provide downward to a nuclear family member or to someone who is not. The same pattern holds true for members of one’s extended family: it is twice as likely for black Namibians and not significantly more likely for white Namibians. These results speak to Black Tax which emphasizes ‘family’ and ‘family membership’ when providing support to worse of individuals as well as ‘not saying no to those who raised you’ (Busani-Dube 2019: 18).

Indeed, when downward providing occurs, statements of black Namibians often reflect a notion of family obligation or a sense of ‘becoming a good member of the family’. The latter can be understood as achieving some form of economic attainment or security which then enables one to share such with their family. In some ways, statements also show how support becomes an essential part of family life, for example building a strong bond. They also how support comes with strong expectations towards future generations, however.

They are my family members, and we take care of our own. When one is broke, we help each other. She [sister] lives in the village and needs support. She has no access to labour, and she has a lot of family to support. They are family. You cannot live a happy life while others of your family suffer. You have to help. (financial support to unemployed cousin and sister, teacher, 55)

[I paid her] tuition fees from my salary bonus that I got as a lump sum. If I do not provide, she is gone. [I expect her] to complete her studies and not mess up. So that she becomes a supporter to her father who is in prison, and so that she is better off. I want to see her succeed and become a supporter to the family. (financial support to niece, government employee, 43)

[I support them] so that they help me in future. I want them to finish school and help me and other family members. (financial support given to her children, salesperson, 54)

I have nowhere to stay and because I am studying here in Windhoek. Because rent is expensive, and I cannot afford everything myself. It is nice and we need to help each other as family members. It also creates a strong bond which is a good thing. (housing support received from aunt, 55, CEO of private sector firm).

At the same time, downward providing is not associated with extended family members for white Namibians. This can suggest that there might be less socioeconomic heterogeneity within white versus black Namibian families. It can further suggest that individuals which are considerable worse off in comparison to white Namibians are more likely to be a non-family member. This might be reflected in downward providing being about twice as likely with acquaintances for white Namibians and less likely (about -66 per cent) with individuals they consider as being friends. Thus, while friends tend to be closer to them in socioeconomic terms, acquaintances are not. Examples of downward providing with acquaintances can be found when dissecting the category of acquaintances further which then include gardeners, domestic workers, or car guards — whereby each of these professions are almost exclusively held by black Namibians. Downward providing with acquaintances of white Namibians then follows a slightly different narrative. It is less about creating a bond, a mutual obligation, nor are there future expectations to being able to provide support in return.

We do not have much, but she has less. She might need it for emergencies. She would ask [for it] or we would give to say thanks. (financial support to domestic worker, small business owner, 50)

[It is] additional support. Sometimes she would run behind on electricity. She looks after my oldest daughter's baby. We would talk, she does not come to me to ask for a loan. I want her to be worry free, have a piece of mind. She has a sick child at home and comes to my house to take care of my children. (financial support to domestic worker, lawyer, 50)

She runs out of money... she needs to feed herself. [It is] for food. You share an existence with these people... I treat [the support] as an annoyance. I am bothered when she asks me about 300 bucks now and then and I worry about my trip to Europe at the same time... [I want] that her [*curse*] children start supporting her... (financial support to domestic worker, engineer, 30).

When I clean out my cupboard or you have some leftover food when you go on a trip, also as a bonus at the end of the year. [I expect] that they are thankful. [It is] mostly just getting rid of stuff I do not really need, to not to see it go to waste... see that it gets used. (In-kind (food) support to gardener and domestic worker, consultant, 38)

Generally, these scenarios of downward provided support acknowledge the difficulties of other's economic situations such as being able to pay one's bills or buying food for oneself and one's family. The preceding examples however show that there is a sense of 'othering', expressed as 'these people' if not an explicit sense of 'looking down upon others' that comes with downward

providing. While support can be related to a sense of guilt of conflict, for example she takes care of my own children while having a sick child at home, it can also be framed as an ‘annoyance’ that illustrates a mindset of inequality in weighing one’s own priorities and other’s circumstances in meeting their basic needs.

4.4 The role of generations

Lastly, I discuss the effects of age, particularly age differences between individuals. Overall, downward providing is significantly less likely (-50 per cent) to occur among individuals of the same generation, defined as within an age distance of up to 20 years. This seems to be primarily driven by black Namibians for whom this effect amounts to -65 per cent, though the effect is not very strong. However, when looking across generations, namely an age distance of at least 40 years and above, the overall effect suggests that downward providing is more than twice as likely overall (2.4). Interestingly, this effect is comparatively smaller for black Namibians (1.7 times more likely) and notably larger for white Namibians (7.6 times more likely).

It is important to note that older generations of black Namibians included in this study were raised during the *apartheid* regime. One of its discriminatory measures entailed a cap on educational attainment for black Namibians. As stated earlier on, in 1958 black education entailed four years of primary schooling whereby only 20 per cent were to proceed to higher levels. In addition, while white education was tax-financed, black Namibians had to pay fees (O’Callaghan 1977). This might explain the moderate extent of downward providing across generations: older generations of black Namibians might not have obtained higher socioeconomic positions, limiting their ability to provide to those being worse off. It might also explain why older black Namibians came to value education as a means of economic bettering for their younger ones as shown in statements which emphasize the completion of school, shown below. Furthermore, when looking at the role of black versus white grandparents, different narratives evolve. Like dynamics discussed earlier on, an expectation of supporting the family in future can be present in statements of black but is barely found in those of white grandparents when supporting their grandchildren. This also includes a sense of support being a gesture to be passed on to others. Furthermore, black grandparents were found to fulfil the role of material caretaking in case their grandchildren’s parents are unable to take care of them.

To eat and to be healthy, to have strength for school and to prevent malnutrition. To be in a good condition. If you do not help people, they do not want to help others in the future. (grandparent (64) about financial support given to her grandchildren)

To get a job in the future and to study smart but she later dropped out. [I want her] to fight for her future and maybe help me later. (grandparent, 69, support to her granddaughter, 20, who works as a housekeeper)

They are spread to me ... their parents are not employed so I have to help them. They are very special to me as they are the ones who will take care of me when I am old. I do not want to see them in the streets. (grandparent, 54, support to her grandchildren)

Another practice observed is the passing on of livestock as a source of future investment and economic security from older black generations to their younger ones, often during events of childbirth, but also first communions, graduations, or weddings. There is sometimes a sense of continuing a tradition but also a source of liquidation to pay unexpected or larger expenses.

I gave them livestock so that they farm with it. They need to learn how to farm at an early age. (grandparent, 84, about livestock provided to their grandchildren)

For her to farm with when she gets old enough. Their wealth will be a lot (livestock provided to niece, businessman, 63)

She gave us livestock every now when we have debts, she sells [the livestock] and pays our debts (livestock received from grandmother, 69)

On the other hand, white grandparents equally show a sense of securing the economic well-being of their adult children or grandchildren. However, their practices differ in their means to do so and they are hardly linked to poverty-related issues such as ‘ending up in the streets’ or ‘malnutrition’. In that, support can reflect socioeconomic inequality also through the absence of a ‘need to support’ or by experiencing support as an individual choice.

There is always something the kids want or need but are too responsible to get. There is no need for it, but I deposit [money] into a trust fund to them. (financial support to children and grandchildren, pensioner, 64)

Once we built her a house and upgraded ours, we gave her all our old furniture [I want her] to be well. Wanting what is best for your children. If you can still help your children at almost being 60, it is a great feeling (financial support to children, retired teacher, 58)

Differences regarding likelihoods to provide to others being notably worse off differ for black and white Namibians. It is important to note that not all such differences can be entirely attributed to socioeconomic inequality due to former racial discrimination. In part, they might also be explained by established social norms, cultures, and tradition. Black Tax is however a narrative that demonstrates how ‘seemingly neutral’ practices and associated norms have gotten ‘instrumentalized’ to meet challenges associated with racial inequality. The results presented in this paper evidence such: patterns of providing to notably worse off individuals can be associated with measures of former discrimination and continued differences in socioeconomic standing of black and white Namibians.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I address a paucity of studies in assessing a nexus between structural inequalities and interpersonal support practices. I thereby focus on the question among whom support practices across considerable socioeconomic distances are more likely to occur and compare such across black and white ethnic identity groups in Namibia. Ethnic identities are significant markers of structural inequality in the Namibian context. I am able to draw upon a unique set of data, where I develop a novel approach to defining and measuring ‘downward providing’: an expression which captures support given across considerable socioeconomic distances, or in other words, to notably worse off individuals. I further assess its relative probabilities of occurrence among black versus white Namibian to understand how support to worse off individuals might correspond to sources and continued patterns of racial inequality. I find that the answer to among whom providing downward is more likely to occur, is a different one for black versus white Namibians. I do not argue that these differences can be entirely attributed to former racial discrimination and continued economic inequality. A fair share might be explained by social norms among families, or ethnic identity groups. Indeed, I found statements which reflect on ‘cultural practices’, ‘tradition’ or ‘societal expectations’ as shown in the example below:

Community, this is how we were raised. It is culture, this is how we have always functioned; you help, they must help you back. It is a son’s duty, as a child, by tradition, it is a must that we help our parents. For their sacrifice. They helped me finish school. Society expects

us to take care of our parents after studies. But I also do it with love. (private sector employee, 35, about support to his parents and family more broadly)

Yet, it seems that these traditions or practices have become somewhat instrumentalized to help smoothen economic imbalances in the racialized Namibian context. This is evidenced, e.g. by the strong obligations of family support for black Namibians which might cause individuals to defer their own growth ambitions. Providing to worse off individuals being more likely to occur among family members of black Namibians, further suggests greater socioeconomic heterogeneity within such families. Indeed, studies in contexts with similar racial inequality confirmed such for African American families (Moore 2005; Stewart 2015). This is also in line with empirical studies showing that, more broadly, inter-racial inequality declined while intra-racial inequality increased in South Africa and Namibia (Seekings et al. 2004). These patterns can then be linked to what has been described as ‘shifting social identities’ by Mangoma and Wilson-Prangley (2019) where once one becomes better off, there are growing expectations to support worse off family members – across greater socioeconomic distances.

This seems to be a core argument of Black Tax. However, rather than being a narrative that calls out differences across the black and white divide, I propose that it is also a narrative that demonstrates a certain ‘normalization of necessity’ in support practices. On the one hand, this is shown by the relative probabilities of downward providing of black Namibians which can be linked to former policies of discrimination. On the other hand, it also resonates in individuals’ statements and meaning making of support. While for white Namibians, support rarely corresponds to poverty-related issues, for black Namibians there are notable recognitions of other’s economic precariousness, their inability to meet basic needs, or a fostering of strong family bonds through means of support. Thus, what might have been a way of life or collective care, may have been magnified by the economic challenges and consequences associated with racialized economic inequality for black Namibians.

More broadly if ‘sharing’ has been a fundamental part of one’s culture, then it would also value individual merit as an ability to share and give back — rather than an act of accumulation. Racial inequality can work on both ends of the socioeconomic scale: it can pose hurdles to economically ‘catch up’ or ‘get ahead’ for black Namibians on the upper end, while causing struggles to ‘sustain oneself’ for those on the lower end. For black Namibians which ‘travel upwards’ or across the socioeconomic spectrum, intra-racial inequality might thus ask for, if not demand, the social mobilization of their merit. This in turn can lead individuals to weigh off personal accumulation and social sharing against one another, also described as internal conflict (Mangoma and Wilson-Prangley 2019). These conflicts in turn have a potential to reduce necessary support to otherwise impoverished family members but also to impede individuals’ resource accumulation which can contribute to greater inter-racial inequality. It can further uphold social stratification through an experience of ‘incompatibility’. For black Namibians, there seems to be a greater divergence between a collective and the individualized space regarding economic progress and resource allocation, an aspect worth further exploration.

By examining racial inequality and support practices in the Namibian context, I further contribute to literature on ‘informal safety nets’ in the following way. Associated literature evidences the importance of personal support in the developing context but also points to unequal dynamics within support systems (Di Falco and Bulte 2011; Hoff and Sen 2005; Werger 2009; Wood 2004). While these studies provide important insights on disincentives, hierarchies, or problematic inclusion, my findings illustrate the importance of examining support practices beyond a conceptual space of poverty and across social identities associated with economic inequality more broadly. I show how in-group dynamics illustrate a responsiveness to as well as potential replication of economic inequalities between groups.

My analytical approach does not come without limitations, one of which includes the measurement of socioeconomic position and providing support across such. First, socioeconomic positions, being educational and professional attainments are sensitive to an individual's age. Hence, in part observed dynamics are explained by age differences — a reason why I control for such using two variables which measure age distances among individuals. Thus, differences in the odds of providing across socioeconomic distances might be more conclusive when looking at differences across groups, namely white and black Namibians. In addition, future studies could expand by exploring support patterns more closely, for example by accounting for transfer types, values, or frequencies to further understand the substantiveness and importance of support in individuals' lives across racial identities and socioeconomic positions.

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