

Boston University**OpenBU****<http://open.bu.edu>**

College of Communication

BU Open Access Articles

2020-02-19

Gender violence, poverty, migration, identity, xenophobia

*This work was made openly accessible by BU Faculty. Please [share](#) how this access benefits you.
Your story matters.*

Version	Published version
Citation (published version):	Greg Marinovich. "Gender violence, poverty, migration, identity, xenophobia." Our World, February 19, 2020.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/40714>*Boston University*



#OURWORLDXMOMENTS : Justice (left) looks on as relatives load a coffin bearing the body of his wife Xoliswa N. onto a minibus taxi's trailer in Doornfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa, March 22, 2019. Xoliswa was beaten by three men and a woman when she went out to communal pit toilets in the night near her home in Zandspruit informal settlement outside Johannesburg. The men then raped her and left her for dead. There are many elements to this story, Xoliswa is a South African from the Eastern Cape who migrated to Johannesburg in search of work and a better life; she hardly found this and became an alcoholic, living in a shack in a lawless shantytown. She had a child with her common-law husband Justice, who is also a migrant, but from neighboring Zimbabwe. He has HIV as well as suffering from epilepsy brought on by being attacked by a mob of South Africans during xenophobic violence some years previously. (Photo Greg Marinovich © 2019)

Gender Violence, Migration, Poverty, Identity, Xenophobia.

By **Greg Marinovich** - February 19, 2020

Xoliswa had returned earlier from the nearby shebeen drunk, which was not unusual for her. Now, she needed to go to the toilet, which was a communal arrangement for hundreds of people from the neighbouring shacks. She had left her husband Justice and daughter P. asleep. It was several hours later that Justice was called to the toilets – Xoliswa was unconscious and bleeding profusely from head wounds likely inflicted with the gory rocks discarded alongside her. It was clear she had also been raped.

The police and an ambulance were called, but in the hours-long wait, Xoliswa died. The ambulance crew refused to venture into the Zandspruit settlement and the policemen who came refused to treat her death as a murder until the pathologists had thus determined. In the meantime, the community had begun their own investigation and several witnesses directed them to a group of three men and a woman who had been drinking with Xoliswa earlier that night.

The vigilantes soon found two of the three men who quickly confessed.

It would take Justice and Xoliswa's relatives weeks to get a (private) pathologist to determine she had been raped and murdered, but even then the police seemed reluctant to open a case.

Xoliswa had migrated from the Xhosa-speaking parts of the Eastern Cape in the hope of finding a job and a better life. It had not worked out as she had imagined and she was by all accounts an alcoholic. On the positive side, she had met Justice, a Zimbabwean migrant who had followed his mother south. They had a daughter, P., who was a bright and cheerful child.

On the run-down eastern periphery of downtown Johannesburg, in one of the city's oldest suburbs established when this was a mining settlement, a small group of black people sat on rudimentary wood benches on the sidewalk, out of the hot sun. Newly-widowed Justice sat in a depressed, shocked stupor. He was painfully thin, his eyes supernaturally large and glistening above stark cheekbones. There, in Doornfontein, a historic and living example of the power of migration and human ambition, family had gathered to send Xoliswa's body back to the rolling hills of her ancestral home.

A little girl took turns playing with the grandmother on the Zimbabwean side and her Eastern Cape aunts who lived in Soweto – all part of the massive influx of rural people into the cities, of a pan African dream. P. seemed unaware of the permanence of the absence of her mother.

The single-story building, which had worn varied retail garbs over a century, was now an undertaker catering primarily for Zimbabweans and others north of South Africa's borders. The warehouse-like interior with bright gold synthetic materials covering plastic chairs and decorating the walls. Xoliswa's coffin was on trestles and a pastor who seemed to know the deceased not at all spoke briefly and the dozen people prayed before the coffin was loaded onto a trailer hitched to Toyota minibus for an overnight trip south and east towards the Indian Ocean.

In one of the several spasms of xenophobic violence that on occasion wrack the country, Justice was attacked and beaten with an iron rod some years earlier.

When he recovered, he discovered that the savage beating his head had taken had made him susceptible to epileptic fits. In the months that followed, Justice continued to fare poorly while his daughter went to live with her grandmother.

Justice had Aids, and he did not respond well to the medication. His compromised immune system could not fight off tuberculosis and a range of other opportunistic disease.

Greg Marinovich

Master Lecturer, Journalism, Boston University. South African photojournalist, filmmaker, photo editor, and member of the Bang-Bang Club. He has received multiple awards, including a Pulitzer prize and United Nations Award of Recognition for Services to Humanity
