



Normalizing necessity? Support networks and racial inequality in Namibia

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ABSTRACT

Community or interpersonal support is a critical source to sustain livelihoods in the Global South. At the same time, these practices can exhibit unequal dynamics such as disincentives, hierarchies, or adverse inclusion of individuals. However, an understanding of such 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 within a society. This paper explores how support practices might be shaped by or respond to structurally inherited inequalities in the Namibian context. More precisely, I estimate the probability of supporting others that are notably worse off by comparing support practices of black and white Namibians across various age groups, gender, and socioeconomic standing. By drawing on primary network data, I assess racial inequality as a social dynamic within the space of practising solidarity towards others and further evaluate whether providing worse off others corresponds to consequences of former discriminatory practices under the apartheid regime. My results suggest that racial inequality shapes support practices and meaning. For black Namibians, this can entail that support among family members is a necessary act to redress economic imbalances stemming from former discriminatory policies. For white Namibians, support to worse off others seems to be an act of choice that primarily involves socially distanced contacts. I propose that racial inequality has normalized a sense of support as a necessity for black but not white Namibians. This can lead to sharing one's merits with members of the extended family for black Namibians, rather than accumulating, saving, or re-investing its outcomes. 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.

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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., 2015; Jetten et al., 2017), social preferences and perceptions (Hauser and Norton, 2018), or solidarity towards others (Bilecen, 2012; Piff et al., 2010; Piff and Robinson, 2017). Hereby, 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; 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 and experiences of Namibians.

In this study, I applied Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital to focus on the relationships and experiences of social support in Namibia. Doing so assesses inequality as a social dynamic within the space of practising solidarity towards others, emphasizing a mutual constitution between social structure and behaviour. In Namibia, a local narrative emphasizes the aspect of racial, economic inequality in personal support practices. The colloquial term Black Tax describes support dynamics that 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.

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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 as a necessity to support in individuals' behaviour 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 that 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 mixed-method data on personal networks of adult Namibians of different ages, ethnic identity groups, gender, and socioeconomic status. The 205 respondents' networks amount to a total of 5732 support activities recorded in the dataset. Using individuals' educational and professional attainments as socioeconomic markers, I compute a measure that identifies 'providing downward' as the 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. At the same time, it accounts for a greater ability to provide of those who are economically better off. Using a sequential approach, I first analyse the data from a quantitative perspective. I use a multi-level mixed-effects logistic regression model to estimate the odds among whom 'providing downward' is more likely to occur using individual characteristics such as age, gender, household, and relationships. To discuss results further, I draw on qualitative data captured as causes and motivations to support from respondents' networks which describe why these support activities took place.

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, potentially linked to former mobility restrictions for black women and children. It further includes stronger support to notably worse off 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 of providing across notable socioeconomic differences than 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. 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 the 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

In this study, I adopt [Bourdieu's \(1986\)](#) conceptualization of social capital to discuss behaviour of economic support. In ways opposed to rational choice theory, Bourdieu's theory rests on the recognition that social exchanges are neither purely driven by self-interest nor can capital be understood in solely economic terms. It much rather is a means and an end, a form of accumulated labour as well as a pathway to further accumulation. Further, Bourdieu draws attention to structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources based on gender, class, and race, which facilitate such accumulation. 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, for instance, differential taxation or pension claims. It further restricted the mobility of black Namibians, particularly so for women and children, while other discriminatory measures concerned restrictions on access to education as well as educational achievements. 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](#)).

Another aspect of Bourdieu's theory is the mutual constitution between social structure and social capital. First, the latter is not uniformly available to members of society but rather to those who obtain power and status, which create benefits and advancements – constituting a process of class reproduction. In Namibia, positions of power were and continue to be inherently biased towards white Namibians. 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" ([Levine and Roberts, 2013: 185](#)).

In addition, the process of accumulating social capital comes by means of "more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" ([Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119](#)). Hence, social capital resides in individuals and their social connections, which can be mobilized for advancement. Bourdieu's theory is thus also a networked approach to understanding the formation of social capital. It differs from other approaches in that it sees social capital as inseparable from context being social, economic, and cultural structures. Hence, a macro-sociological process related to norms and culture cannot be viewed as being distinct from social capital. The colloquial term 'Black Tax' describes support practices among members of black families. It is neither an in-depth account of ethnic tradition nor one of Namibia's political economy alone, but a narrative that stresses a mutual constitution between them.

For instance, before the term Black Tax itself existed, economic support was seen as 'old African traditions' that entailed mutual caretaking of families, kinship and community. Economic support was a family duty, family responsibility, but also family upliftment ([Mhlongo, 2019](#)). It seems that the embedding of African family tradition in the post-apartheid context gave rise to the notion of tax. External challenges due to the economic recession in the last

2000s were more strongly felt by already marginalized black Namibians. Thus, when being faced with 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, this term, however, "unintentionally demonise(s) the idea of family upliftment" and falsely describes it as an "abusive cultural practice, (including) a burden on black people's progress" (Mhlongo 2019: 82). Yet, others explicitly refer to their own position and status being a determinant of whether or not they are expected to 'engage' in Black Tax. For instance, 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". Reaching for others 'further down' again acknowledges structural constraints on black Namibians whereby their ability to advance, if not sustain themselves, depends on those social relationships that enable Black Tax. Yet this also applies to those who were able to advance, having benefitted from support earlier on. It would be misleading to conclude that Black Tax is solely a dynamic of delayed reciprocity among family and kinship generations. This comes back to the key focus of this paper, which places social practices within social structure and thus also illustrates their response to structural inequalities. I argue that these exchanges might reflect a cultivation of necessity whereby social structures fed into and increased the need to obtain relationships that facilitate economic advancement, especially for black Namibians. It is also reflected in statements that emphasize both social traditions and social structures – for instance, in 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).

Though there are studies focusing on interpersonal dynamics of support – understood as interpersonal material and non-material transfers – in the Namibian context, there are none in a comparative manner across race within the country's modern urban context. 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 remittances 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 contexts; for instance, studies on reciprocity and sharing practices in North-western Namibia, including pastoralist communities (Schneegg, 2015; Schneegg and Linke, 2015; Schneegg and Bollig, 2016). These works provide important insights on community dynamics, collective action, 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 how such support networks are embedded in Namibia's wider societal context, particularly its racial inequalities. The only study similar to this one is a paper 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 in society at large.

From the studies mentioned above, it also becomes apparent that support can be seen as an overarching term for different

modes of transfers ranging from caretaking, sharing, gift-giving to financial remittances. Indeed, it has been argued that support cannot be viewed as a single commodity and largely depends on the type, for instance, instrumental or emotional support, and the underpinning relationships also referred to as the source of support (Veiel, 1985). As I shall detail in the following section, this study is less concerned about classifying interpersonal motivations, making one label more applicable than others. It rather focuses on whether certain transfers, largely economic in nature, take place between differently economically situated individuals and to what extent doing so responds to structural constraints: both in the patterns that emerge across race as well as individual's reasonings as to how these transfers fit into their lives.

Another perspective that is linked to this investigation are matters of redistribution and social welfare more broadly. Acknowledging structural constraint in support practices 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; 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. Primarily economic studies which focus on the internal workings of support 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). However, they have also detected certain 'unequal' dynamics, including certain disincentives and disadvantages for individuals involved in support practices. Wood and Gough describe support relationships depicting elements of hierarchy and asymmetry resulting in "problematic inclusion, or adverse incorporation, whereby poorer people trade some short-term security in return for longer-term vulnerability and dependence" (Wood and Gough, 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). 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). However, these 'unequal dynamics' are often discussed as within group dynamics in the context of poverty. These perspectives fail to acknowledge how internal group dynamics can be a response to patterns of social stratification.

In this study, I apply the embedded lens of Bourdieu's social capital conceptualization by focussing on the question among whom provided support across considerable economic differences is more likely to occur. I hereby place within-group dynamics within the context of racial inequalities in Namibia by primarily focussing on how social practices differ across lines of former discrimination and thus compare support across networks of white and 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 including black and white Namibians only. Therefore, the 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 stems from a research project on inequality, private redistribution, and social identity in Namibia. It included eleven months of fieldwork throughout which data on personal networks of support were collected. The process of data collection took place between September 2017 and August 2018 and obtained ethical clearance from the University of Sussex.

Personal network data represents both a concept and a method which allows centering on individuals and their immediate social environment (Perry et al., 2018). I further employed an integrated mixed-methods approach to personal network studies which collects social structure and personal meaning simultaneously (Domínguez and Hollstein, 2014). An integrated approach to data collection implies that quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously (Creswell and Clark, 2017). To do so, I utilized a two-stage survey document. During the first stage, respondents would map out their social contacts across concentric circles, also referred to as target method (Spencer and Pahl, 2006). Hereby, they elicit with whom they engage in a pre-defined set of support activities. Support activities are aligned with economic welfare and include specific 21 activities of support salient in Namibians' lives and socioeconomic contexts (for example, see Greiner, 2010; Kalomo et al., 2018; Melber, 2005; Schnegg, 2015; Tvedten and Nangulahu, 1999). They were classified under four thematic domains being cohabitation, unpaid labour and care, financial support, in-kind support as well as opportunity sharing¹. Respondents were generally equally likely to report support activities across those four domains (see Table 1).

A second step includes collecting particularities about the mentioned relationships as well as support activities, such as sociodemographic and economic characteristics of the mentioned contacts of the frequency of said support. Quantitative data thus refers to primarily categorical variables, which allows describing personal networks of support in quantitative terms, for instance, the number of relationships reported. Qualitative information, more related to the meaning of mentioned support relationships, stems from open questions about respondents' motivations and causes to support mentioned contacts. These questions would be asked for each support relationship and activity recorded.

Respondents were recruited using discretionary sampling. This is reflected in the purposeful selection of respondents whereby ethnic identity was used to construct sub-samples, within which age and gender would then be applied to generate a balanced sample across both criteria. Sampling criteria thus included gender, age groups between 18 years and above 65 years old, and six deliberately selected ethnic identity groups.² The sampling site was restricted to urban areas of Namibia and primarily includes participants residing in Windhoek (see Table 1). This stems from an inter-

est to explore networks of support in Namibia's largest urban conglomerate comprising a considerable and ethnically diverse share of its population. Interviews were conducted by the author of this study as well as ten research assistants. They were held in English as well as other Namibian languages spoken by the selected ethnic identity groups. The latter primarily concerned older study participants. Written information captured on the surveys was recorded in English and hence immediately translated by research assistants. Research assistants were also responsible for the recruitment of study participants in line with sampling criteria. At least two researchers would consecutively collect data on an ethnic identity sub-sample. I would first assess the type of socioeconomic profiles the first assistant generated before hiring the second assistant. As assistants would naturally have different access points to different individuals, I engaged independent researchers with differing socioeconomic profiles to create a diversified sample with minimal overlaps. For instance, I used neighbourhoods as a proxy for research assistants' socioeconomic profiles and their spatial sampling focus to minimize the chance of repetition, replications, and overlaps. In addition, sampling guidelines prevented assistants from selecting contacts mentioned by a previous respondent for future interviews, including persons closely related to previous respondents. The duration of interviews varied between one and up to five hours. A few interviews had to be interrupted and were completed over two or three sessions due to the respondent's availability.

In total, the data comprises 5735 support activities stemming from networks of 205 Namibians. Table 1 contains further sample statistics. On average, respondents are 44 years of age, with the youngest being 18 and the oldest respondent being 84 years old. The average age of mentioned contacts is slightly lower, suggesting that overall support is somewhat downward directed in terms of age, though this does not apply uniformly across individuals' networks. About half of the respondents and their mentioned contacts are female, representing an overall gender-balanced sample.

As stated earlier, a majority of respondents (83.9 per cent) reside in Windhoek. Hence, the findings of this study primarily apply to urban residents of Namibia's capital spanning roughly 27 neighbourhoods and locations from Katutura (informal and largely black Namibian settlement) to Klein Windhoek and Ludwigsdorf (primarily white neighbourhoods of higher socioeconomic status). For a broad overview, I classified respondents into those residing in informal, formal or semi-formal neighbourhoods using geographical data in the work of Weber and Mendelsohn (2017). Roughly the same number of respondents live in either formal or informal neighbourhoods, followed by those living in semi-formal neighbourhoods.

Networks provide rich information, including on average 37 support activities (degree) reported across roughly 20 individuals (unique size). They, however, vary in size, with the largest network comprising 105 and the smallest only seven support activities. On average, roughly half of stated support activities are provided by the respondent to their contacts. This demonstrates that overall, respondents were equally likely to report provided and received support. About a third of activities occur with members of the same household, primarily understood as persons who are constant members of one's household. A notable share of 42 per cent of activities occurs within the nuclear family, including parents and their children. About 26 per cent then include members of the extended family, for instance, aunts and uncles, cousins, or grandparents. These classifications are based on information provided by respondents and hence includes half- or classificatory siblings, cousins, or parents common in Namibia's context. Thus, in some cases, they reflect a social rather than biological nature of relationships (see Table 1).

Further, a little less than half of the respondents holds post-secondary or tertiary degrees (about 44. per cent), and roughly

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

² The ethnic identity groups include Ovambo, Herero, German Namibian, White Afrikaans, Caprivian and Nama/Damara. The selected groups are based on selection criteria that concern settlement and population share, cultural roots as well as socioeconomic marginalization. An overview table of the information considered is displayed in Appendix, Table 4.

Table 1
Sample description.

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 support¹					
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 network data collected 2017/18.

¹ Applies if respondent and contact are either from the same household, nuclear family, or extended family.

one third are higher grade professionals. This reflects comparatively higher education levels in urban than in rural areas of Namibia and thus might generally capture individuals of higher socioeconomic status. This is beneficial for the analysis of this study which aims to assess support from individuals who fare better economically than those who are worse off. This shall, however, be reflected in the interpretation of results.

To acknowledge the structural constraints of continued racial inequalities in understanding patterns of social relationships in support practices, I divide the sample by non-white and white ethnic identities. This does not represent a homogenization of ethnic identity groups. In fact, the selected six ethnic identity groups are not as distinct in that they comprise various sub-identities by local languages or regional affiliation. Rather than understanding 'black' and 'white' as identity groups themselves, they shall represent political labels that help distinguish between those ethnic identities, language, or regional groups who experienced discriminatory measures (non-white) and those who did not (white) under the apartheid regime. While there are inter-ethnic marriages and family formations, the extent to which this happens across former lines of discrimination remains limited. Applying this distinction results in 165 black and 40 white Namibian respondents, in part reflecting a greater pool of non-white ethnic identities.

Providing downward

Providing downward is aligned with the notion of assessing to what extent individuals support networks respond to greater economic disparities. In other words, it specifically focuses on the support provided from an economically better to a worse off individual. This captures the notion of 'sending the elevator back down' and assesses to what extent such behaviour can be linked to structural inequalities. 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" (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 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 . The associated score is not interpretable per se but creates a harmonized scale for the ranking of individuals. The data does not include information of their monthly income or their neighbourhood of residence, constituting alternative socioeconomic status indicators for mentioned alters. However, it is essential to have highly comparable information on socioeconomic markers for both egos and alters to establish a harmonized measure of differences between them. In addition, education and professions were found to be linked to (racialized) income differentials (The World Bank, 1991; United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1986) and thus provide relevant indicators for socioeconomic status. In addition, it has been suggested that education is generally seen as being indicative of a person's socioeconomic standing in that it can reflect and determine present and potential future earnings (Machin, 2011).

$$SES_i = \sum E_i, W_i$$

Education levels are based on a scale from zero to three, whereby zero represents no education, followed by primary, secondary, and tertiary (including post-secondary) education obtained. Professions are clustered and ranked using

Goldthorpe's class scheme (1987).³ The resulting scale ranges from zero to five, whereby zero represents not being in the labour force. One represents unemployment,⁴ 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.

SES positions differ across black and white Namibians represented in the sample. Fig. 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. On the contrary, the majority is situated at the top, namely 63.7 per cent. At the same time, this applies only to 19.8 per cent of black Namibians. Further, black Namibians cover the full range of socioeconomic positions with a cumulative share of 25.7 per cent on the bottom three positions and 38.4 per cent on positions four to six.

On the other hand, when looking at distributions of alteri mentioned by either black or white egos, they are spread across the entire scale of socioeconomic positions for both groups (see Fig. 2). It is important to mention that support primarily occurs among members of the same ethnic identity (63.9 per cent for white Namibians and a 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 Fig. 4). Among those that hold any of 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 Fig. 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).

To see which SES positions are linked via support activities, I computed the distance D_i between the individual who provided support and their contact 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 support to the alter and zero if the ego received support from the alter or the alter provided support to the ego.

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

The following graph (Fig. 5) provides an overview of absolute SES distances observed between egos and alteri across black and white ethnic identity groups. It appears that greater distances between egos and their alteri are generally observed less often. Zero 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.

This comparison still 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_i by expressing the observed SES distance D_i as a share of their position SES_i , so that:

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

Positive values below zero thus reflect 'providing downward' as the observed distance amounts to a share of the 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 the provider'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 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 fewer resources to provide support whereby 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, 2020). Support activities can but might be generally less substantive for higher positioned individuals, whereas having more resources can also reflect a greater ability to provide.

Thus, to identify considerable distances for 'providing downward', I impose a threshold. On the one hand, to reflect the 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 avoiding an overrepresentation of high positioned individuals whose activities are more likely to be classified as downward directed. The applied threshold 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:

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

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 that are provided downward across distances <50 per cent of the provider's SES position. This distinction further results in 31.1 per cent of activities categorized 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 general dynamic but might apply under certain circumstances being explored in this paper.

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

³ 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).

⁴ 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.

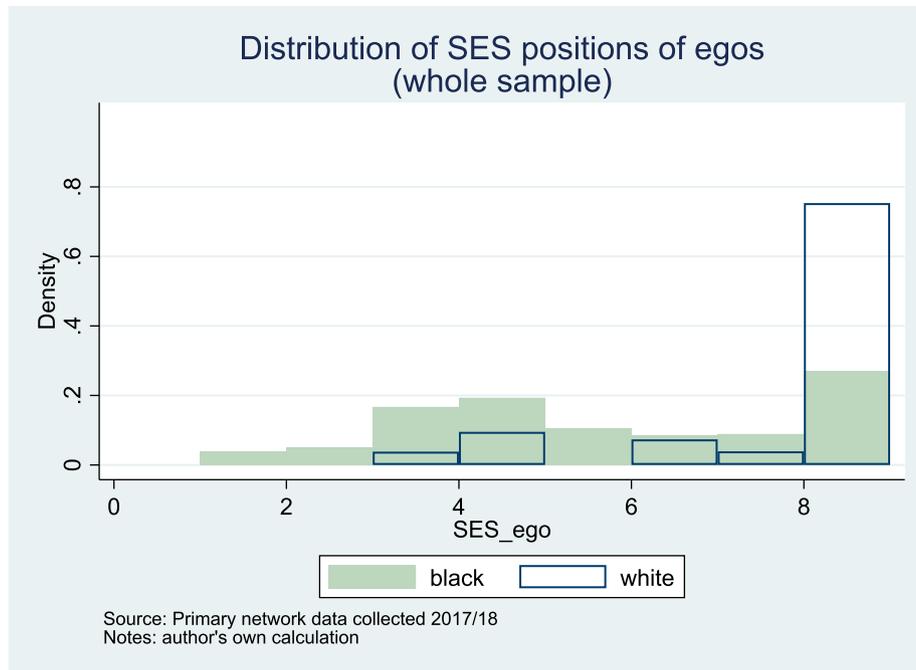


Fig. 1. Distribution of socioeconomic positions of egos (whole sample).

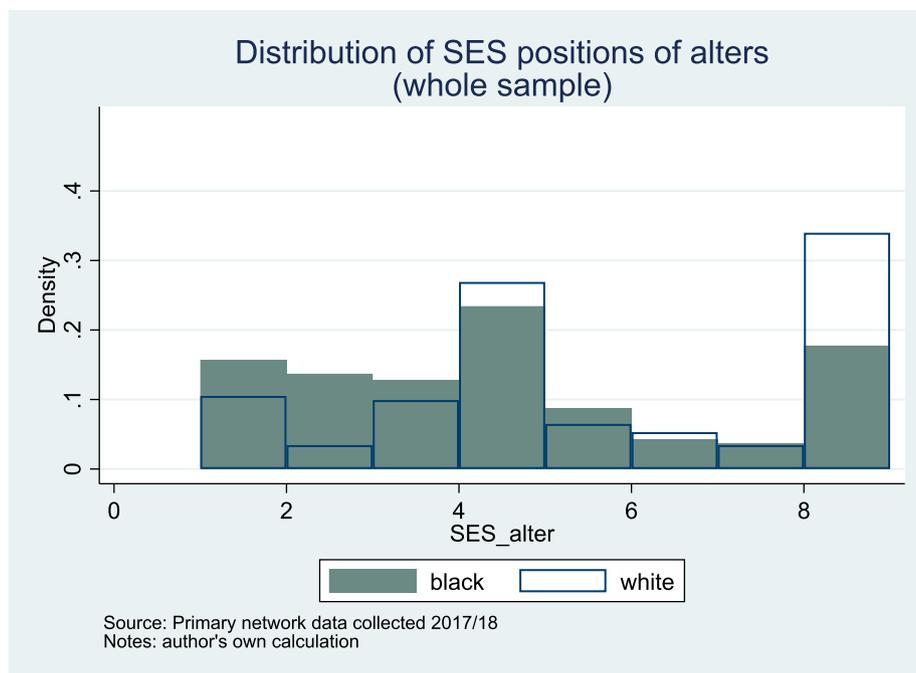


Fig. 2. Distribution of socioeconomic positions of alters (whole sample).

providing downward might occur to similar extents, it might be driven by different social characteristics.

3.2. Analytical approach

This study draws on mixed-method data engaging qualitative and quantitative data in an ‘intelligent dialogue that benefits both sides’ (Domínguez and Hollstein, 2014: 2). This particularly fits the purpose of this paper, which seeks to identify the likelihood of a given support pattern (quantitative aspect) as well as how such is reflected in the personal meaning of support (qualitative aspect).

I use a sequential analytical approach whereby I analyse the quantitative data first and utilize qualitative information to interpret identified patterns further (Clark, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2017).

3.2.1. Quantitative approach

I introduce a multilevel mixed-effect logistic regression (MLME) model to understand among whom ‘providing downward’ is more likely to occur. I test for a set of individual characteristics which represent characteristics of ‘among whom’: for instance, whether gender, age, relationships, household membership, or network size play a role in defining the odds of providing downward and

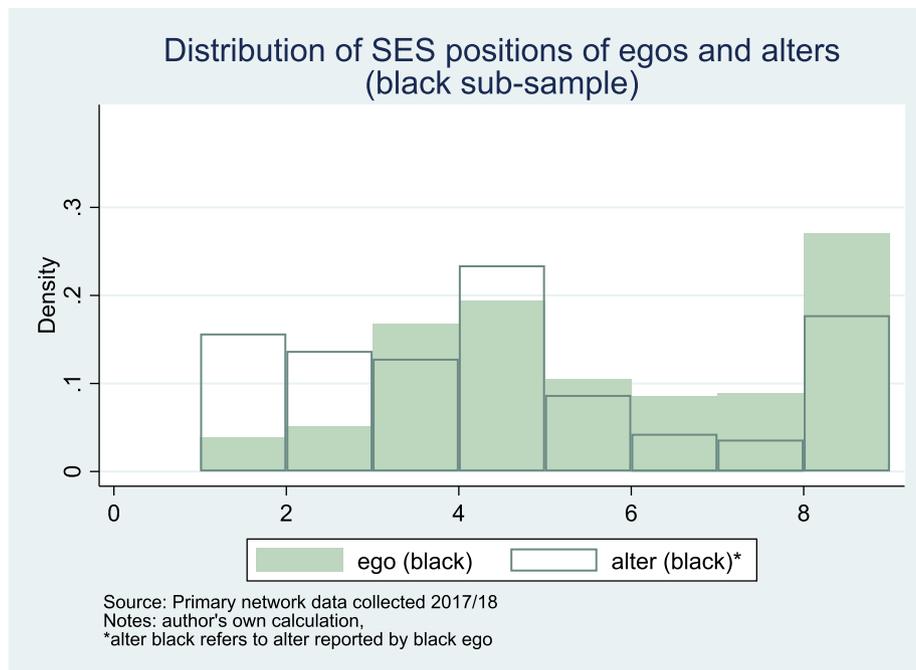


Fig. 3. Distribution of socioeconomic positions of egos and alters (black sub-sample).

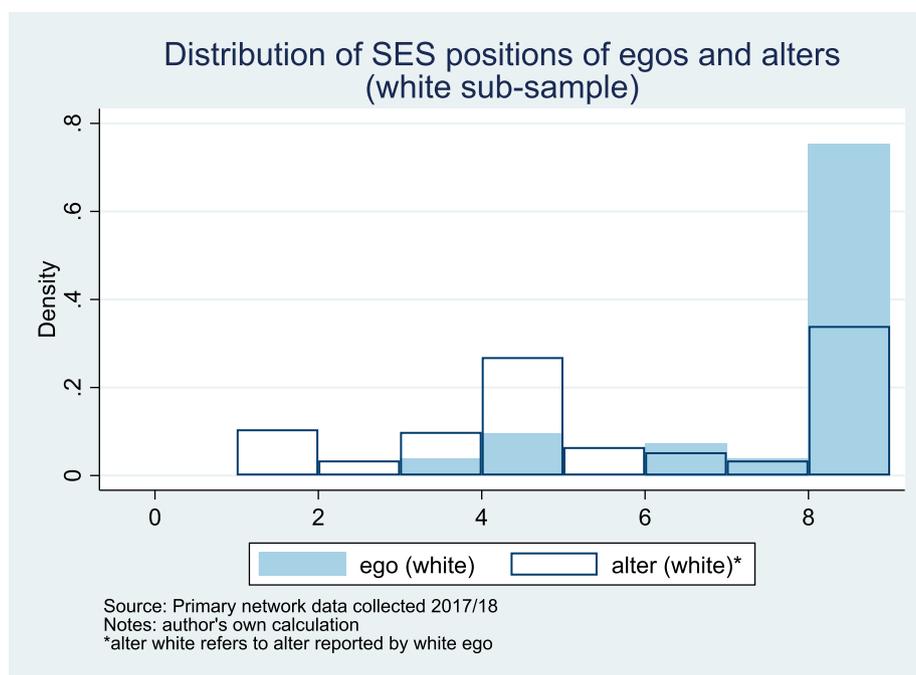


Fig. 4. Distribution of socioeconomic positions of egos and alters (white sub-sample).

whether such differs across black and white Namibians. Doing so places behavioural patterns within the social context whereby I use individual’s qualitative statements as well as Namibia’s former apartheid policies to interpret results.

MLME models account for the hierarchical structure of network data and simultaneously analyse individual and group levels, such as the ego and alter level. 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, presents the unit of analysis (level one). Characteristics of 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) and 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:

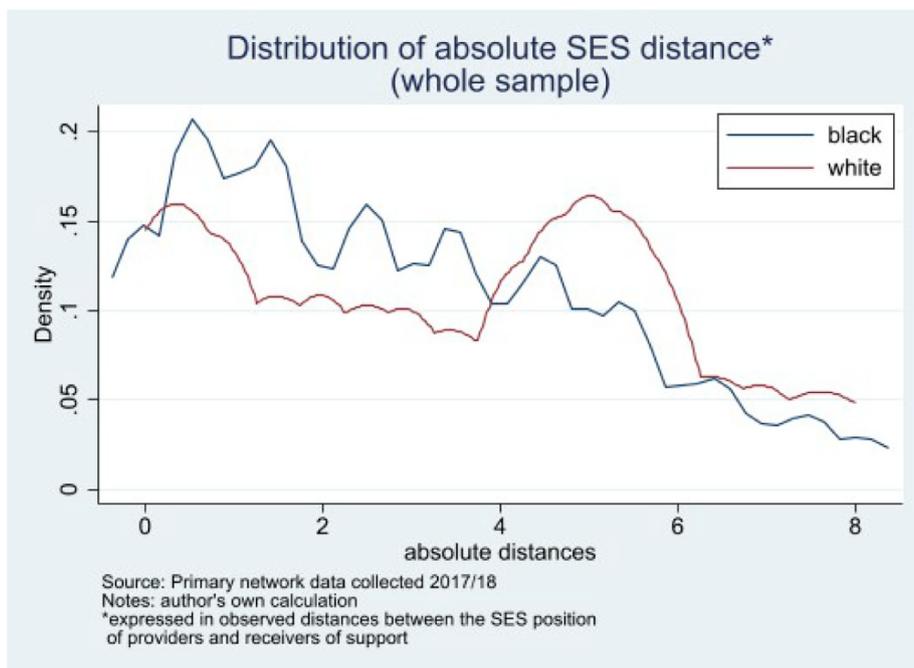


Fig. 5. Distribution of absolute socioeconomic distance (whole sample).

$$\text{logit}(\pi_{ij}) = \beta_{0j} + \sum_{h=1}^p \beta_h X_{hij} + \sum_{k=1}^q \beta_k Z_{kij} \tag{1}$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \beta_0 + u_{0j} u_{0j} N(0, \sigma_{u0}^2) \tag{2}$$

Hereby, σ_{u0}^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 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 and age, further considering ego's network measures such as the number of ties or contacts mentioned within an ego's network.

In the 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 8–105 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. I further included most explanatory variables 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 relationship. More precisely, 'being of the same gender' would consider the gender of the ego and alter at the same time. Table 2 provides an overview of included explanatory variables. I run the model specification on the whole sample first before applying the same specification to sub-samples, thus to white Namibians and black Namibians separately.

3.2.2. Qualitative approach

Network research places emphasis on 'the contextuality or "embeddedness" of social action (Domínguez and Hollstein, 2014: 7). While primarily drawing on the quantitative aspect of the network

data, I further utilize the qualitative statements described in Section 3.1. In network analysis, qualitative data are typically employed to obtain an 'understanding of meaning' beyond and within its frames of reference and social structures (Hollstein, 2014). To recall, in this study, qualitative statements include individuals' statements about the cause and their motivation to engage in support for each provided activity. Findings from the quantitative model allow me to identify statements that fulfil the identified criteria that describe downward providing. In other words, I utilize variables included in the modelling approach that turn out to be significant predictors as selection criteria for qualitative statements in the dataset.

Using these criteria, I revisit statements to provide further insights into life experiences associated with downward provided support practices. Hereby, causes and motivations serve as examples to contextualize support in urban Namibia and demonstrate how and in which way they can be embedded in individuals' lives. They provide an additional step to understand support practices beyond identified patterns by also shedding light on personal meaning. This, in turn, matters to explore whether and how economic marginalization and corresponding necessity resonates in personal meanings of support being of interest in this study.

4. Findings and discussion

I present results as odds ratios (OR) that express the likelihood of downward providing given social characteristics that define such support relationships. I thus identify certain patterns of group behaviour, which I then compare across white and black egocentric networks. The displayed OR thus address the aspect among whom downward providing is more likely to occur – given who is involved on both ends of such relationships. An overview of the model results is provided in Table 3.

When looking at patterns that emerge across all networks (entire sample) while controlling for the effect of former racial discrimination, providing downward is more likely to occur in networks of black Namibians. The effect of belonging to a formerly discriminated ethnic identity group increases the likelihood of

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	Pos 4-7	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	HH member	Level-1	Dummy
Network measures	Number of ego's activities	Degree	Level-2	Continuous
	Number of ego's contacts	Uniquesize	Level-2	Continuous

Source: Primary network data collected 2017/18, author's own calculation.

Notes: 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 >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.

downward providing by 80 per cent. Note that this is after controlling for the effect of network size which negates an argument that black support networks might be larger and therefore support worse off others is more likely to occur. It rather shows that there seems to be more notable socioeconomic heterogeneity within black support networks regardless of size. This speaks to earlier findings which showed that in the Southern African context, intra-racial rather than inter-racial inequality increased more notably (Seekings et al., 2004). Next, I focus on group patterns that emerge within black and white support networks separately to identify and interpret group differences. I use respondent's statements about causes and motivations linked to downward provided support to provide further insights into how such activities are placed in individuals' lives and how they might correspond to former practices of discrimination.

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 downward.⁵ This might also reflect a greater potential or ability to provide resources, given that a higher positioned individual has a higher educational degree (earnings potential) and higher professional attainment (higher incomes). The data shows 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 for black Namibians). Knowing that positions have a higher concentration at the very top for white egos (less so for their alteri), this difference can 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 negligible effect on the likelihood of providing

⁵ 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.

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 4–6	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

Source: Primary network data collected 2017/18, author's own calculation, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Notes: 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.

downward (3 per cent), whereas the number of recorded activities (Degree) has no effect at all. This also suggests that generally, respondents were not incentivized to think of additional 'worse off' individuals the more activities they recorded.

The effect of high SES positions captures the notion reflected in Black Tax of having studied and found a job comes with expectations to support others. It could further be seen as what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) described as institutionalized relationships that can be mobilized for advancement. The accumulation of capital, as expressed in socioeconomic status, might then also be a product of earlier support to others and thus a result of delayed reciprocity. Just looking at SES positions, the results suggest that this applies to black and white Namibians alike. Thus, it is interesting to compare characteristics of downward providing more closely across both groups.

4.2. Gender and household dynamics

Results suggest that downward providing is almost three 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. One possible explanation would be various former proclamations and acts such as the 1963 Alien control act, which restricted black women and children to live in co-residence with husbands and fathers in town (Hishongwa, 1991). It was found that consequences legally prohibited black Namibians from forming "neo-local, conjugal" families and led to a spatial and geographic separation for black Namibian families (Jauch et al., 2009). Jauch further argues that this remains visible until the present, reflected in split households across spatial boundaries. This is also evident in downward providing being overall less likely to occur with a household member for black Namibians (1.6) as compared to white Namibians (2.6). It suggests that households (defined as shared domestic facilities) constitute less of a social boundary to supporting worse off others for black Namibians.

In part, former spatial proximity might have fostered stronger support bonds towards worse off others among black women and their female contacts. However, it might also be explained by being socially close, as discussed in Pauli's work (2013). The author acknowledges the role of apartheid which 'forced people into specific territories and migration patterns' and stresses the continuance of sisterly bonds amidst 'ever-changing and spatially extended family networks and households' (Pauli, 2013: 30). A foundation of these relationships appears to be personal similarity and 'growing up together'. As shown in the following statements, this sense of similarity can also be reflected in acknowledging mutually shared social functions such as being a primary caregiver.

They take care of my child, and I help to take care of theirs. Because we usually share, if I have to go somewhere, they take care of my kid and vice versa. (Businesswomen, female, 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, female, 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, female, 36, providing a home for her sister's children).

However, it can also carry the recognition of shared economic hardship in statements that express empathy towards another women's difficulty to care for her family in the absence of employment and given the circumstances of poverty more broadly.

I know how it feels to be a mother and not being able to provide for your kids (Domestic worker, female, 43, support given to her at the time unemployed friend, 41, to help her find a job as a 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, female, 69, financial support given to her unemployed daughter, 37).

Another frequent category of support is household chores that feature among black female to female support. The following example shows 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, female, 28, talking about household assistance to her disabled aunt, 56).

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.

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. If downward providing might occur more frequently beyond 'households' for black Namibians, it might also suggest that a household might be less of a physical entity but rather a social constitution or network (work which compares such across the urban and rural space include for example Greiner, 2011, 2012).

4.3. Family and non-family relationships

Families and kinship are often described as creating systems that secure livelihoods, survival and help (Campbell and Lee, 2011). In 1992, UNICEF used the term of a 'typical family' referring to Western ideas which have been challenged, inter alia in the Namibian context. While families 'are socio-historical constructs that can change over time and socio-cultural contexts' (Jauch et al., 2009: 1), they can also have different social foundations ranging from genealogical, affinal or fictive relations that are culturally and historically grown. In the previous paragraph, I discussed how apartheid has interfered with such processes in the Namibian context. In this section, I compare the concept of family in downward providing across black and white support networks further.

While the results do not enable insights regarding which foundations underpin family relationships, say affinal or fictive ones, they show to what extent the 'labelling' of another as family member increases or decreases chances of downward providing. Across both groups, downward providing is slightly more likely (40 per cent) with a member of one's nuclear family (defined as parents and their children). This is primarily driven by the dynamics of black Namibians, for whom it is twice as likely to occur. A comparatively higher number of minors might also explain this in black Namibian families,⁶ and thus rather than being a support to worse off others, it could be seen as support to economic dependants. There

⁶ The percentage of support given to minors in black ego networks exceeds those of white ego networks by 12 percentage points on average (10.8 versus 22.3 percent). Minors would be primarily labelled as nuclear rather than extended family. Again, this can also reflect different family compositions and underpinning social foundations that constitute family relationships.

is no significant effect for white Namibians regarding the likelihood to provide downward to a nuclear family member or to someone who is not. The same pattern holds 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 a notion of 'not saying no to those who raised you' in support of practices of black families (Busani-Dube, 2019: 18), reflecting a sense of reciprocity within families. Indeed, when downward providing occurs, statements of black Namibians more often reflect an explicit notion of becoming a good member of the family understood as providing (reciprocal) support once one is able to do so compared to white Namibians. With downward providing being more likely to occur, there is also an indication of significant differences in socioeconomic heterogeneity within black Namibian families, less so in terms of the extent but the specific socioeconomic positions it spans across. This is reflected, e.g. in the mentioning of economic precarity more associated with low economic positions such as unemployment.

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. (Teacher, female, 55, talking about financial support to unemployed cousin and sister).

[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. (Government employee, male, 43, talking about financial support to niece, 21).

[I support them] so that they help me in future. I want them to finish school and help me and other family members. (Salesperson, female, 54 talking about financial support given to her children). 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. (CEO of private sector firm, male, 55, talking about housing support received from aunt).

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 who are considerably worse off are more likely to be non-family members. 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 who are 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, including gardeners, domestic workers, or car guards – whereby each of these professions is 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. (Small business owner, male, 50, talking about financial support to domestic worker, 48).

[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. (Lawyer, female, 50 talking about financial support to domestic worker, 45). 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... (Engineer, male, 30, talking about financial support to domestic worker, 62).

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. (Consultant, male, 38, talking about in-kind (food) support to gardener and domestic worker).

Generally, these scenarios acknowledge the difficulties of other's economic situations, such as paying one's bills or buying food for oneself and one's family. However, the preceding examples show a sense of discriminatory 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 or conflict, it can also be framed as an annoyance that illustrates a mindset of inequality in weighing one's own priorities against other's circumstances concerning basic needs.

4.4. The role of generations

Next, I focus on age distances in downward provided support. In general, these patterns can also reflect support patterns across generations. 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) and notably larger for white Namibians (7.6 times).

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, 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 shall not be misunderstood as elderly black Namibians providing less support per se; in fact, there is evidence that they are important providers within families (for example, see Kalomo et al., 2018). It rather shows a lower extent to which such occurs across notable socioeconomic distances. Older generations of black Namibians might be more likely to provide to others closer to them in socioeconomic terms due to former restrictions on their educational and professional advancement.

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 that emphasise school completion. 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 good condition. If you do not help people, they do not want to help others in the future. (Grandparent, male, 64, about financial support given to his 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, female, 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, female, 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 which occurs among black Namibians who can combine wage labour and educational opportunities (including covering their costs) in urban spaces with part-time pastoralism back home (Schneegg et al., 2013).

I gave them livestock so that they farm with it. They need to learn how to farm at an early age. (Grandparents, male and female, 86 and 84, about livestock provided to their grandchildren)

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

She gave us livestock every now when we have debts, she sells [the livestock] and pays our debts (Grandson, male, 34, livestock received from grandmother)

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. Support can also reflect socioeconomic inequality 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. (Pensioner, 64, male, financial support to children and grandchildren)

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 (Retired teacher, female, 58, financial support to children)

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: pat-

terns 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 explored a mutual constitution between social structure and social capital by examining patterns of economic support across former lines of ethnic differentiation under Namibia's apartheid regime. I apply Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital, particularly its emphasis on social capital residing in individuals and their social connections which can be mobilized for accumulation and advancement (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). I thereby address a paucity of studies in assessing a nexus between structural inequalities and interpersonal support practices.

I 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. 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 Namibians 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. It might also be explained by social norms among families or ethnic identity groups and reflect certain reciprocal patterns of family generations. Indeed, I found statements that reflect on such 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, male, 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 younger individuals to defer their own growth ambitions in comparison to their white peers. Providing to worse off individuals being more likely to occur among family members of black Namibians further suggests a different type of socioeconomic heterogeneity within such families. Indeed, studies in contexts with similar racial inequality confirmed such for African American families (Moore, 2005; Stewart, 2015), where black individuals show a higher likelihood of being linked to someone living in poverty. 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 or reaching further below. This is also often in return for earlier received support, as shown in the statement above: helping one's parents 'for their sacrifice'.

This also 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 traced back to former discrimination policies. 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, inability to meet basic needs, or fostering strong family bonds through 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, I propose 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. Indeed, such has been reflected in notions of ‘becoming a good family member’ and associated obligations to support. 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 can reduce necessary support to otherwise impoverished family members and impede individuals’ resource accumulation, which can contribute to greater inter-racial inequality. It can further uphold social stratification through an experience of ‘incompatibility’. There seems to be a greater divergence between a collective and the individualized space regarding economic progress and resource allocation for black and not white Namibians, an aspect worth further exploration.

By examining racial inequality and support practices in the Namibian context, I further contribute to the literature on redistribution more broadly. 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. In a way, my findings also show a potential for progressive redistribution within informal safety nets. While it remains debatable whether it should be a private or public responsibility, it shows that available resources are used for economic advancement, which in turn ensures the redistribution of merits towards those that have contributed or are in need.

My analytical approach does not come without limitations, including 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 that 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. It is further important to recall that the sample applies to Windhoek’s resident and not Namibia as a whole. An interesting comparison would be utilizing

the same research instruments across the urban and rural divide for further comparisons. 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. Lastly, social worlds and practices within are complex phenomena, and it would be misleading to attribute identified patterns to solely the aspects considered in this study. This exploration invites further examination, zooming in on some of the key findings proposed.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Annalena Opperl: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. **Colleagues at UNU WIDER:** Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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