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Revisiting the Windhoek Old Location

Henning Melber¹

Abstract

The Windhoek Old Location refers to what had been the South West African capital's Main Location for the majority of black and so-called Colored people from the early 20th century until 1960. Their forced removal to the newly established township Katutura, initiated during the late 1950s, provoked resistance, popular demonstrations and escalated into violent clashes between the residents and the police. These resulted in the killing and wounding of many people on 10 December 1959. The Old Location since became a synonym for African unity in the face of the divisions imposed by apartheid.

Based on hitherto unpublished archival documents, this article contributes to a not yet existing social history of the Old Location during the 1950s. It reconstructs aspects of the daily life among the residents in at that time the biggest urban settlement among the colonized majority in South West Africa. It revisits and portrays a community, which among former residents evokes positive memories compared with the imposed new life in Katutura and thereby also contributed to a post-colonial heroic narrative, which integrates the resistance in the Old Location into the patriotic history of the anti-colonial liberation movement in government since Independence.

*O Lord, help us who roam about.
Help us who have been placed in Africa
and have no dwelling place of our own.
Give us back a dwelling place.²*

The Old Location was the Main Location for most of the so-called non-white residents of Windhoek from the early 20th century until 1960, while a much smaller location also existed until 1961 in Klein Windhoek. Being adjacent to the white centre of town, urban planning replaced the Old Location by the newly established township Katutura at the Northern outskirts of Windhoek in the late 1950s, but many residents refused to be re-located. Protest resulted in boycotts

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2 Prayer by Chief Hosea Kutako, delivered on occasion of the annual Herero ceremony at the ancestral graves in Okahandja, as recorded by Scott (1958: 223).

and demonstrations, which ended in a massacre on 10 December 1959. As from 1960, forced removals were intensified. But residents in defiance continued to refuse being moved. The Old Location officially closed only in 1968.³

This paper recapitulates aspects of the social dynamics unfolding in the shadow of apartheid prior to the forced removal until 1960. It is an initial effort to contribute to the partial reconstruction of a place in a specific context of space and time, through the official documents and observations on record.⁴ Among these, the by far most instructive source is the undated detailed report of the German ethnologist Günther Wagner compiled mainly during 1951, copies of which are in the Windhoek and Basel archives.⁵ During the later 1950s and early 1960s, the local photographer Otilie Nitzsche-Reiter and her staff were among the few taking pictures, thereby documenting visually the township life. Many of their photos are now in the possession of the Namibian National Archives. In a rare exhibition, a selection of these was displayed in late 2011. They illustrated street scenes, portraits, dance events, funerals and beauty competitions. They gave the Old Location and its residents a face.⁶

Missing History

More than half a century later it is difficult to fully reconstruct the story of the place, its people, their exchanges and engagements with each other and with the authorities. Based on the accessible memories of those growing up there, the forms of social life were far more positively remembered than the realities in the newly constructed, in terms of internal ethnical sub-division much stricter segregated township, which was called Katutura (“a place where we do not stay”). The Anglican bishop Colin O’Brien Winter (1977: 46–51) has maybe best captured the ambivalence of the Old Location, where the poor material conditions contrasted with the social spirit

3 This paper maintains the terminology used in the context of the times, though many of the terms were/are derogatory and offending. The language reflects and documents the views of those claiming (and executing) the power of definition at the given time. This does of course not mean that such language is reproduced in the affirmative. Reference is made in today’s perspective to what has been the Main Location until 1960 as the Old Location or Location.

4 Documents were accessed during visits of the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek (August 2013), the Basler Afrika Bibliographien in Basel (September/October 2013) and the archive of the United Evangelical Lutheran Mission (Aktenbestand Archiv- und Museumsstiftung der Vereinigten Evangelischen Mission/VEM, Bestand Rheinische Mission/RMG, hereafter RMG) in Wuppertal in March 2014 and February 2015. A visit to the site of the Old Location took place in May 2015.

5 Wagner (1908–1952) was employed from 1950 onward as an “Assistant Government Anthropologist for South West Africa” by the South African government. For one of the rare recognitions of his work, applauded as a ‘monument’, see Gewalt (2002). Part of his chapter’s title (‘A Teutonic Ethnologist in the Windhoek District’) is inspired by the telling fact that Wagner, who arrived with his family by ship from Germany to Cape Town at the end of January 1950, entered the form for an entry permit under applicant’s race with ‘Teutonic’ (*ibid.*: 24).

6 “Social Life in the Old Location in the 1950s” is a collection of 57 photos, many dated from 21 May 1961. They were first at display in an exhibition at the National Archives between 14 September and 6 October 2011 and are electronically accessible at: <http://dna.polytechnic.edu.na/location/>. For a recent effort to reconstruct by means of photos a visualized history of another “old location” for the 1920s to 1960s see Grendon et al. (2015); for a complementing analysis of the process see Miescher (2015).

and interaction in the daily life. He frequently visited both the last remnants of the Old Location in the mid-1960s and the still relatively new Katutura during his seven years of service in Namibia before being deported in 1972. His account remains as ambiguous as the Old Location seems to have been.

While a prominent feature and reference point in modern Namibian history, the Old Location has to a large extent remained unexplored beyond the memories of those who lived there.⁷ Reverend Michael Scott, a British clergyman with the Anglican Church in South Africa who was nicknamed ‘the troublemaker’, was the only known outsider who became a nuisance for the authorities in the history of the Old Location (cf. Troup 1950; Hare and Blumberg 1980; Yates and Chester 2006). Scott assisted the Herero leadership, in particular Chief Hosea Kutako, to petition the United Nations, drawing attention to the plight of the Namibians.⁸ In 1948 he camped for two months in the dry riverbed of the Gammams River bordering to the Location (Saunders 2007a). Those classified as Europeans required a permit to enter the Location. As a priest, Rev. Scott was – like all church people from various denominations – exempted from this rule. But he refused to accept this privilege and hence stayed outside of the settlement area. Scott interviewed members of the Location’s Advisory Board and was also shooting footage for one of the first protest films made in Southern Africa (Gordon 2005). Despite this remarkable engagement, his interaction with the residents of the Location during these days receives surprisingly little attention in his memoirs, limited to two paragraphs (Scott 1958: 243).

The administration kept a close control and did not welcome any outsiders, considered to be intruders. At a meeting of the Location’s Advisory Board on 15 July 1953, chairman De Wet pointed out ‘that Europeans visit the Location after hours or during week-ends. ... if unauthorised Europeans are noticed, they should immediately be reported’.⁹ According to the advocate Israel Goldblatt (2010: 78–88), who was in close contact with some of the Herero leaders resident at the Location, somewhat less ‘informal’ visits by whites were rare occasions. Reverend Karuaera (1920–2013), a widely respected spiritual leader also politically active, was quoted as ‘no other whites ever came’ (*ibid.*: 83).

There was however a regular presence of white clergy people. In particular the missionaries of the Rhenish Mission Society and two mission sisters from Germany, who took care of health and education matters were permanently interacting with the residents of the Location.¹⁰ The Bishop of the Anglican Church and his co-workers also had a presence in the Old Location,

7 A noteworthy, hardly acknowledged exception is the unpublished thesis by Hoffmann, who in her chapter on the Old Location (2005: 82–123) uses a Herero praise poem to uncover a neglected aspect of dealing with the place.

8 For a general account of the local (mainly Herero) responses resisting incorporation into the Union of South Africa as a fifth province between the mid-1940s and the early 1950s see Silvester (2015).

9 National Archives of Namibia (hereafter NAN), Municipality of Windhoek (hereafter MWI), 1919–1961, Native Affairs/Native Advisory Board, File no. 65/3, Volume I. No further specific reference could however be traced, if this was aimed at certain individuals.

10 See for this particular interaction Melber (2015).

especially since the early 1960s, as they held church services and were teaching classes at the St Barnabas School.¹¹ White shop owners also visited the Location occasionally, if only to make sure that customers paid their bills.¹²

Nothing is – for obvious reasons – on record for the intimate inter-racial contacts, which presumably chairman de Wet as quoted above mainly referred to. But it is known that children were regularly interacting across the colour bar:

A German informant who lived on the town side of the Gammams River, in the immediate neighbourhood of the Old Location whose borderline with “white” Windhoek was somewhat fluid, said that as a child he had played every day with the black children who came running across the footbridge to play in the river bed. (Jafta et al. 1991: 27)¹³

Selective History

In marked contrast to the lack of accessible social history documenting the daily life, the Location’s residents play a prominent role as a reference point in the patriotic history presenting the formation of Namibia’s modern anti-colonial resistance leading to an armed liberation struggle. The refusal to be voluntarily relocated to the new township of Katutura, the protest organized and the escalation into the massacre of 10 December 1959 were turning points in the consolidation of political organizations, and especially the formation of the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO).

In contrast to the prominence given to the 10 December massacre in the ‘struggle history’ of Namibia, little has been hitherto published and made accessible for a wider audience on the organization and forms of daily life in the Old Location. It is noteworthy that the first critical reports of visitors to South West Africa, bringing the plight of the Namibian people to the attention of the outside world during the early 1960s (cf. Saunders 2008), made little to no reference to the Old Location at all (Lowenstein 1962; First 1963). The significant experience and its consequences are mentioned in the hitherto by far most authoritative history of Namibia only on one page (Wallace 2011: 254). The published personal memories of Namibians engaged in the early anti-colonial struggle of the time (Ndadi 1974; Ya-Otto 1982; Shityuwete 1990; Nujoma 2001) hardly refer to the daily life and interactions in Windhoek’s old township beyond generalized statements. A reason for this might be that the (auto-)biographical narratives were from activists not physically resident in the Location. With the exception of Ya-Otto (1982: 34ff.),

11 According to Mrs Gestwicki, who was part of the Anglican diocese then, she and her late husband were as US-American volunteers between 1964 and 1968 in charge of these activities and often interacted also beyond these functions with residents in the Location (information provided by Dag Henrichsen, who managed to trace Mrs Gestwicki during 2013 in the USA).

12 Information provided to Dag Henrichsen by Franz Irlich (Swakopmund), whose father had such a “native store”.

13 Christo Lombard confirmed this daily interaction in a personal communication with the author. He grew up in this part of Windhoek West during the 1950s and remembers playing regularly with children of his age group from the adjacent Location.

who summarizes his experiences as a young teacher in the Location as from 1959, these were mainly contract workers from the Northern part of the country known as Ovamboland.¹⁴

Contract workers were since 1947 accommodated at the Pokkiesdraai compound separately erected at the Northern margins of the city.¹⁵ They often were also living as domestic staff in separate rooms at the white employer's house or were on contract in other towns or on farms. Hence most of those coming from the Northern parts of the country had little to no access to the Main Location. The impact of the violent clash of 10 December 1959 as the midwife for the formation of the militant anti-colonial resistance has therefore been the main focus of their histories on record. Both Ya-Otto (1982) and Nujoma (2001) highlight the fatal events in their autobiographies. Nujoma's book is a classical example how the history is appropriated into a self-serving reference point to promote what shortly afterwards became SWAPO. The selective narrative sidelines other political organizations and activists such as the Herero Chiefs Council and the South West African National Union (SWANU), who both were more involved in organizing the popular protest in the Old Location than the Ovamboland People's Organization (OPO), which as a movement mainly among contract workers preceded during the 1950s the formation of SWAPO.¹⁶ The combat literature 'did not, of course, make such writing good history. It was not "history" in any real meaning of that word, in that it did not attempt to present a rounded picture or explore the complexities and ambiguities of the struggle.' (Saunders 2007b: 18)

Rather, the forced removal, the protest and the killing of demonstrators turned the location into 'a source of potent symbolism for the emerging nationalist movement, as well as a focus for nostalgia' (Wallace 2002: 55). As Hoffmann (2005: 87) suggests, 'the strongly party-politically informed institutionalization of memory decided to cultivate ... a seductive inversion: creating heroes and a heroic resistance where some Namibians still remember a brutal killing of unarmed victims'. Human Rights Day, celebrated internationally on 10 December, is in Namibia as Women's Day a public holiday. It commemorates the massacre and pays tribute to the women who were leading the boycott and protest. One of them is honored with a grave at the Heroes' Acre opened in 2000. Anna ("Kakurukaze") Mungunda was shot and killed while trying to set fire to the car of the location's superintendent. Sam Nujoma, co-founder of SWAPO and its first president from 1960 to 2007, portrays her in his memoirs in the language of the heroic genre:

14 Another exception is the autobiography of Namibia's so far most prominent singer Jackson Kaujeua (1953–2010). From a different perspective (being born a few years later than the first generation of struggle activists in the Southern part of the country with a cultural background in the Herero/Damara community, and never in any higher ranks of the anticolonial movement but rather at the margins) he recalls his childhood and teenage memories of the Old Location in a much more intimate way (Kaujeua 1994).

15 Byerley (2015) documents with regard to Walvis Bay the emergence of the compound system for contract workers between the years 1915 to 1960.

16 For critical reviews of the constructed patriotic history in Nujoma's memoirs see Saunders (2003) and Du Pisani (2007).

I was very moved to see her body. I knew her of course. She seemed to be shining even in her death. We knew when we saw those bodies of innocent people that we had to find a way of fighting against those Boers. It was what really inspired me and others to leave the country, to prepare ourselves for a protracted armed liberation struggle. (Nujoma 2001: 76–7)

His description of the corpse as ‘shining’, almost as if surrounded by a halo, is symptomatic for the glorifying rhetoric. In marked contrast, an independent local newspaper offered recently a scathing counter narrative when stating:

Kakurukaze Mungunda is often idolised as the Old Location’s hero who aroused fervor around apartheid’s forced removal of people to Katutura. Little is said about her being a wayward, out of control (some even say a drunk), stone-thrower, who was not part of the protest movement, but someone who became an accidental hero while leaders, including Sam Nujoma, were dodging and hiding from the apartheid police.¹⁷

Despite the selective glorification of the resistance erupting in the violent clash, however, no serious efforts have so far been made by the Namibian state to restore memory. What is ‘troubling’,

is the patent lack of interest displayed by the current government of Namibia’s political elite towards Windhoek’s urban history. This is all the more startling when one considers that the current government of Namibia prides itself on a history of struggle, the ‘heroes’ of which it urges one and all to revere and honour. (Gewald 2011: 258)

Many of those in higher government and civil service ranks now living in the new middle class suburb of Hochland Park are hardly aware that their homes were built on the grounds of the Old Location. Nothing but a small steel bridge, erected for the residents to cross the Gammams river also during the rainy season on foot to get to work, a few adjacent buildings which were earlier on “native stores”, some abandoned grave stones and a small, hardly known or visible memorial site reminds of its former existence. The current remembrance of the Old Location in the public domain is at best selective and narrow:

Even though the people killed in the event of the Windhoek shooting are heroes now, this official memory does not include life in the Old Location, the memory of an era of communal experience in a place where apartheid did not completely determine people’s way of living together and where the unaccepted boundaries of racial segregation were crossed. Distinguishing what deserves to be remembered and how, and appropriating the site and event of history, the institutionalised act of commemoration obscures conflicting versions of history as well as other forms and functions of memory. (Hoffmann 2005: 87)

Space and People

The Old Location was the product of social engineering, which had spatial components complementing racial policies of institutionalized discrimination ever since the colonization of the territory known today as Namibia. The organization of daily life took forms of physically separate entities confined to specific parts of the population. The locations established for the African

¹⁷ Editorial, *The Namibian*, 17 July 2015 – Established in the mid-1980s, the newspaper has been a strong supporter of the liberation struggle, often at great personal risks for its journalists. Its originally predominantly white staff has since some time been almost completely replaced by black journalists.

people were in as much as the white residential areas a separate own world. The difference was, that the black domestic servants, nannies, gardeners and other manual laborers were to some degree – often rather intimately – exposed to the world of the masters, while these in their overwhelming majority had no idea about the living conditions of their servants.

Administering segregation

Segregated living spaces were originally institutionalized under German colonialism and by no means an invention of South African apartheid.¹⁸ The Old Location was established at the beginning of the 20th century, while a (smaller) location in Klein Windhoek also emerged before the end of the German colonial period. A small monthly fee had to be paid to the municipal administration for occupying a plot – misleadingly referred to as “hut tax”. The buildings erected were however the private property of the residents. This enforced a strong feeling of ownership among the people, who had constructed their homes.

The administration considered the physical relocation already in the 1920s. But the effects of the global economic crisis in the early 1930s shelved the plans; instead further infrastructure was established at the existing places of residence.¹⁹ What is remembered as the Old Location was officially declared the Windhoek Main Location under the Natives’ (Urban Areas) Act (34/1924). It had an area of around 140 hectares. Its boundaries were demarcated and proclaimed by Government Notice no. 132 of 1937. Situated in relatively close vicinity to the Windhoek main cemetery at the Gammams and Arebbush (seasonal) rivers in what is today Hochland Park and at the borders to the old “white” residential area of Windhoek West, its distance from the city centre was some two to three kilometres.

As of 1932, the Main Location became the object of more systematic urban planning: it was divided into square blocks with roads intersecting at right angles. Houses (huts) were relocated according to the new plot structure. A Municipal Beer Hall and a “Bantu Welfare Hall”²⁰ were erected in 1936 and 1937. Other infrastructure (markets, basic sanitary installations and other amenities for collective use, street lighting, private stores etc.) followed. In his comprehensive study, Wagner (undated: 104) summarized the established structure as follows:

The various sections are marked off from one another by lanes or alleys. With the exception of the two Ambo and the two Union sections, each of which is situated in different corners of the Location, the sections occupied by the same ethnic group adjoin one another. Theoretically, people may live only in the section (or sections) set aside for members of their own ethnic group. In practice, the residential segregation according to ethnic groups is not too strictly enforced. Thus, a number of Ambo have recently sold their houses, chiefly to Coloureds. In all cases where these houses were too dilapidated to be removed to the buyers’ section, the latter were tacitly allowed to move to the Ambo section. Similarly, a number of Nama, mostly young men, live in the Bergdama sections. The vast majority of Natives, however, live, and prefer to live, among their own people. As among the rural population, kinship counts for more than friendship.

18 See on the history until 1960 especially Pendleton (1974: 24–8) and Simon 1983a: 114–44).

19 For developments during the inter-war period see especially Wallace (2002) and Simon (1983b: 91–3).

20 Named after the wife of the Location Superintendent Captain Bowker the “Sybil Bowker Hall”. Sybil Bowker played an active role as a welfare worker in the location (Wallace 1998: 88–90).

Residence permit in the location was granted to (non-contract) workers employed in Windhoek or recognised as self-employed (traders, shop owners) and their dependent family members (women, children). Bona fide visitors were allowed to stay one month (in exceptional cases up to two months). Wagner (*ibid.*: 95) observed that ‘comparatively few Natives reside in the Location for any length of time without being properly registered’, judged by the low number of persons convicted for this offence despite regular raids between 1945 and 1950 (with 19 convictions as the lowest in 1949 and 55 convictions as the highest in 1950).

Generally the officials of the Windhoek municipality and those in charge over “native affairs” seemed to follow official directives in implementing South Africa’s policy of segregation and apartheid. But the case of the Rhenish Mission school for Nama children offers an example that not every civil servant in the “white” administration was an obedient implementer of apartheid. The school operated in the vicinity of the mission church, which was frequented on Sundays by the location residents for sermons. It was situated opposite of the “Höhere Privatschule” (HPS – the German higher private school) in the “white” part of town (Church Street). Because of this “irregularity” the Magistrate enquired on 22 August 1953 with the Town Clerk about the nature of the school. He was particularly interested in knowing if native children had to walk through the white town and if this caused disturbances. It required a reminder from the Magistrate’s Office before the Town Clerk sent an enquiry to the Town Engineer, who on 21 September elaborated that the Rhenish Mission had rented the building from the Administration ‘since many years’. But he maintained: ‘The Native school, which is only separated by the width of the street from the Hoehere Privatschule, is very disturbing to the latter. Throwing of stones and cursing between the natives and the white scholars are and will always be inevitable.’ Despite this information, the Town Clerk P.J. Conradie reported on 22 September 1953 to the Magistrate’s Office that scholars did walk through the white area to get to the school, but that so far no complaints had been received.²¹

Infrastructure and demography

The census of 1950 registered 2,246 huts and houses in the main location with an average of about 3.5 occupants. From the early 1940s there were renewed discussions as to whether the location should be removed to another site and residents were discouraged to make improvements to their shelter (*ibid.*: 199). Regulations issued by the Municipal Council in 1927, setting minimum standards for the erected shelters, were relaxed as a consequence of the effects of war in lacking affordable construction materials. As a result, only a few constructions complied with the 1927 regulations, and ramshackle tin hovels mushroomed (classified as “category A”),

21 NAN/MWI, 1919–1961. Native Affairs/Native Advisory Board, File no. 65/1, volume no. I (storage unit 2/1/281, file no. 6/5/3). It can be assumed that Mister Conradie thereby prevented the closure of the school, which was operational until the Old Location was closed down.

‘measuring often no more than 6 x 4 x 6 feet of which several hundred may be seen in the Location, some of them without any roof at all’ (*ibid.*: 202). In contrast, the average type of construction (“category B”)

is a plain, rectangular structure with a ridged roof. Its framework is erected of second-hand timber, and the walls and roof consist of tin plates ... nailed on to the wooden frame. The floor is usually of hard-beaten earth, with a large stone slab forming the threshold. Doors are made of wooden floor-boards nailed together. Often there are two rooms, separated by a dividing wall which, likewise, consists of tins. Occasionally one sees a ceiling of reed grass or cloth. (*ibid.*)

Better than average houses (“category C”), were mainly occupied by Herero. The best type of dwelling (“category D”) existed almost exclusively in the Coloured section, with one brick house resembling features of European housing standards ‘of a thrifty European artisan or minor official ... Like the houses themselves, furniture and household utensils range from practically nothing to a lower middle-class European standard’ (*ibid.*: 203). Generally, there were hardly any noticeable differences in the levels of accommodation between the sections. Between 85 and 90 per cent of dwellings had no inside kitchen and plots were hardly fenced in or improved, ‘but there are a good many houses which show that their owners take a certain pride in them’ (*ibid.*: 204). In 1950, the main location had a total of 15 sections sub-divided between seven groups: five for Damara, three for Herero, two for Ovambo, two for residents from South Africa and one each for Mbanderu, Nama and Basters/Coloureds (*ibid.*: 103).

According to the data provided in an (undated) form based on the “Naturelle (Stadsgebiede) Konsolidasiewet, No 25 van 1945”, issued by the Union of South Africa’s Department for Native Affairs, the “natives” living in the Windhoek location around 1956–57 amounted to 9,764, of whom 2,667 were under 18. Coloureds were numbered at 1,073, of whom 569 were under 18. “Natives” in the town area outside of the locations (but including the Ovambo compound) officially totaled 2,750, of whom 50 were under 18. The total white population was estimated at ± 15,000.²² The Rhenish missionary Diehl presented the following census data for the African population in 1954 and 1956²³:

Group	September 1954	December 1956
Herero	2,749	2,875
Ovambo	856	1,702
Bergdama	3,383	4,034
Nama	367	425

In 1959 the population of Windhoek was estimated at some 20,000 whites, 18,000 Africans and 1,500 so-called Coloureds or Basters. Registered male workers included 1,424 Herero,

²² NAN/MWI, File no. 48/2 (4 volumes), storage unit 2/1/379, vol. 1.

²³ Jahresbericht 1956 über die Arbeit in der Herero-Ovambogemeinde in Windhoek, Stationsmissionar H. K. Diehl im März 1957, 5. RMG 2.533 d C/h 50 d Band 4, 1946–1967, Bl. 0092.

1,634 Damara, 247 Nama, 1,445 Africans from the Union, 32 from Bechuanaland and 8 from Nyasaland. Ovambo contract workers were numbered at 4,130, of which about 2,800 were accommodated in Pokkiesdraai. Some 1,300 contract workers were living in domestic quarters with their employers in town, and 719 older “non-contract Ovambo” in the location (Mossolow 1959: 436).²⁴ A total of 108 “natives” resident in Windhoek held trade and business licenses for legally registered own economic activities. More than a hundred cars in operational conditions were registered in African ownership (Mossolow 1959: 439). Other figures, based on census data, suggest the following composition of Windhoek’s population (Pendleton 1974: 31):²⁵

Year	Whites	Coloureds	Africans*	Totals
1946	6,985	1,353	6,591	14,929
1951	10,310	1,208	9,080	20,598
1960	19,378	2,738	13,935	36,051

* Including contract workers

All data available suggest that Windhoek throughout the 1950s until the mid-1960s had a white population amounting to roughly half of the total population on record.

According to a 1950 survey, 14,501 of 16,857 (or 86 per cent) of the “non-European” population residing in the Windhoek district (without any distinction between the urban and rural area) were registered church members. These were subdivided into the following denominations (Wagner undated: 239):

Anglican Church Mission	40
Rhenish Herero Mission	3,613
Rhenish Nama Mission	9,327
Roman Catholic Mission	1,471
Wesleyan Methodist Mission	45
<i>Total</i>	<i>14,501</i>

All five congregations had a church in the main location. The only “native” church in Windhoek was the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), claiming to have 145 members (*ibid.*:

²⁴ Statistical data were most likely to a certain extent flawed, as the fluctuating numbers within short periods of time suggest. In the absence of a proper registration system for residents these were guestimates or census-based figures (for an overview on Windhoek for 1921 to 1975 see Simon 1983a: 121). It can however be assumed that the overall proportions roughly reflected the demographic situation, though there was certainly an unknown number of “non-whites” unregistered. These included in particular former contract workers who had abandoned their work place, living without permit in the urban area. See for this numerically unaccounted group the personal story of Ndadi (1974: 34–43). Given the police state like control, the numbers of undiscovered deserted contract workers could however not have been very high.

²⁵ Note the markedly lower figure given for Africans in 1960.

245).²⁶ Wagner noted a strong sense of loyalty within the congregations towards their own churches, but with friendly relations to members of other churches (*ibid.*: 241).

The Native Advisory Board

Under the South African administration a municipal Superintendent of Locations was appointed. In 1925 the Municipality issued detailed “Location Regulations” and in 1927 it set up a Native Advisory Board, composed of the Superintendent of the Location as *ex officio* chairman and 12 members representing the various ethnic groups for a three-year term in office. Residents elected six councillors, while the municipality appointed the other six. Every resident above the age of 21 and in fulfilment of the tax obligations was entitled to vote (*ibid.*: 106–8).²⁷ Board members complained that while they were regarded as interlocutors to the people in their section, these normally did not consider them as authorities with a recognised status, unless it was based on their status within the traditional order, only applicable to councillor Aaron Mungunda as a member of the Herero clans (*ibid.*: 115).

Reproducing the ethnic affinities of the location’s residents, the Advisory Board had a combined majority of Damara and Herero councillors, while the municipality often appointed representatives from the minority groups among the six non-elected members. The Board’s composition in 1951 revealed that all except one of the members were classified as literate, in line with the declared intentions of the board, ‘to establish a closer contact between the European authorities responsible for the administration and welfare of the non-European community and the more intelligent and public-spirited members of that community, the avowed aim being to teach the non-Europeans the spirit and technique of local government in a democracy.’ (*ibid.*: 110)

While open to the public, the meetings and deliberations of the Board seemed to attract little interest. Members were frequently re-elected due to a limited number of candidates. Aaron Mungunda²⁸ and Clemens Kapuu²⁹, served on the Board either as elected or as appointed members since 1927. Board members were tasked to report back any decisions to the residents of the sections they represented, but they complained that hardly anybody would attend such meetings (*ibid.*: 114). This might have not been a sign of disinterest by the residents in their affairs. Rather more so an indication of mistrust concerning the role of the Advisory Board,

26 On the history of the AMEC see Schlosser (1958: 71–124). For a more detailed account of the church life during the 1950s and the role of the Rhenish missionaries see Melber (2015).

27 Minutes of the monthly meetings were until August 1952 taken only in Afrikaans, as from then upon a decision by the Town Council of Windhoek also in English. Councilors from the Klein Windhoek location were also in attendance.

28 By profession a chief clerk, born around 1894.

29 Born around 1893 and a general dealer, whose son with the same name later succeeded Hosea Kutako as paramount leader of the Herero and became a co-founder of NUDO, actively co-organising the resistance to the relocation.

since its members were suspected to be willing collaborators with the administration. When an official previously in charge of location affairs relocated to the Union of South Africa, he made a farewell speech at an Advisory Board meeting on 19 December 1951. With reference to the initiatives to petition at the United Nations he noted with approval that many of the councillors were not collaborating with such elements.³⁰

The administrative responsibilities for locations and their residents formally changed with the institutionalization of apartheid policy in South Africa from the mid-1950s, when the ministries in Pretoria took over “native policy” in the administered territory of South West Africa (SWA) too. That the dominant mind set was not free from unwanted irony bordering to humiliating sarcasm documents the following episode: At the meeting of the Native Advisory Board on 20 July 1955 the Assistant Native Commissioner Warner read a (undated) message from the South African Minister of Native Affairs. In this the minister explains that from 1 April 1955 the administration of native affairs in the territory had been transferred to his ministry. He stressed that the one ‘who always was your father, i.e. the administrator in Windhoek’ will remain acting in his name. But SWA would in the future benefit from the tested plan approved for the natives in the Union, who he claimed were pleased. He concluded with the statement: ‘May the road between you and the government remain always white’.³¹

In the absence of other documents or observations, the recorded minutes of the Native Advisory Board meetings offer some selective insights into the issues of concern among the residents of the main location. While the board had hardly any real powers, which remained vested in the white officials and the city’s municipality, it discussed some of the matters considered of concern in the organisation of daily life.

The functions of the Board are thus still essentially limited to the airing, under European guidance, of current issues relating to the welfare of the residents of the Location by a selected body of non-Europeans. The Advisory Board has no say in the financial administration of the Location and is not informed in any detail on income and expenditure. Having no funds at its disposal, the Board does not draw up a budget or vote money. (*ibid.*: 110)

During 1947–48 the Board discussed in total 59 issues on its agenda, relating to matters of health and sanitation (15), the board’s working procedures (10), labour conditions (8), housing and the new township (6), education (4), transport (4), stock (3), law and mitigation (3) and 6 classified as miscellaneous. Wagner (*ibid.*) concluded that, ‘despite its limited powers, the Advisory Board performs an indispensable function in that it offers a regular opportunity for an exchange of views and ideas between the European authorities and a representative body of non-Europeans’.

30 NAN/MWI, 1919–1961, Native Affairs/Native Advisory Board, File no. 65/1, Volume no. I (storage unit 2/1/281, file no. 6/5/3).

31 ‘Mag die pad tussen julle en die regering altyd wit bly.’ NAN/MWI, 1919–1961 Native Affairs/Native Advisory Board, File no. 65/3, Volume I. ‘Wit’ could be interpreted as ‘white’ and as ‘clean’ – satire at times simply cannot match reality!

Order and Security

Deliberations by the Advisory Board also documented tensions and security concerns. On 14 May 1952 C. Kapuuo demanded stricter control as well as the arrest and deportation of those living in or around the location without legal residence status to get rid of the *rondlopers* (those straying) in the *veld* (bush). A.S. Shipena supported him and suggested that more *boswagters* (bush guards) should be employed. H. Kondombolo complained that at the social gatherings of adults in the dance hall mainly children from the Bergdamara were a disturbance.³² A.S. Shipena complained on 15 April 1953 that Ovambo contract workers were living in the location and entered relations with married women, as a result of which many *onegte* (fake or not genuine) children were born. Herero from the reserves were accused of the same behavior. A.S. Mungunda also complained about the influx of *naturelle* (natives) from the Union, who often came as workers for contractors. They were accused of not respecting elders and behaving like *Tsotsis*, thereby influencing the local people negatively. He criticized his own people who did military service for South Africa on the side of the allied forces for the same behavior upon return.³³ C. Kapuuo complained at the meeting on 10 February 1954 that the streetlights were not properly working and also were switched off late at night, thereby allowing *kwaaijongens* (wild youngsters) to continue their shady businesses. He urged that the lights be kept fully functional and switched on until sunrise.³⁴ At the meeting on 17 March 1954 Boardman J. Kamberipa complained that two constables from the Municipal Police on duty controlling the Location were not enough, especially not at night times.³⁵

In 1947–48 arbitration committees were established to seek out of court settlements. Seven of these existed in 1951, each consisting of an Advisory Board member and at least four responsible members of the community in the respective section (or sections) elected by the residents and approved of by the Superintendent. Cases were dealt with either under traditional customary law or under common law, without any witness or court fees. Most of the cases that were heard in 1950 related to matrimonial disputes and offences under the liquor law, followed by violation of pass laws (387), arrears in the payment of the hut tax (185), residence in the location without permit (55), as well as some cases of ‘fighting’ (92) and ‘causing a disturbance’ (10). Theft was rarely a case (11) ‘and there is an almost complete absence of serious crime’, with nine cases of assault and 59 other unspecified offences (*ibid.*: 246–51).

32 NAN/MWI, 1919–1961, Native Affairs/Native Advisory Board, File no. 65/1, Volume I (storage unit 2/1/281, file no. 6/5/3).

33 *Ibid.*

34 NAN/MWI, 1919–1961, Native Affairs/Native Advisory Board, File no. 65/3, Volume I.

35 *Ibid.*, Minutes of the monthly meeting of the Non-European Advisory Board. Held in the Office of the Superintendent of Locations on Wednesday 17/3/54, 3.

The local police unit, comprised of community members and known as the Bowker police because their station was next to the Bowker Hall, was seemingly not taken very seriously and was ‘easy to fool because they were unable to read or write’.³⁶ But despite some petty offences recorded (mainly illegally brewing beer and violations of the pass laws), all in all, empirical evidence suggests ‘a socially highly stable and safe environment’ (Jafta et al. 1991: 17–8). Those who grew up during this period confirmed the relative absence of serious physical violence or molestations. An informant sharing memories of women and girls using a communal bathhouse maintained: ‘We were never afraid to bathe there as it was safe. I cannot recall anybody ever being molested there.’³⁷

Social Life

According to Wagner (undated: 111–12) ‘deep-rooted tribal antagonisms appear ... to be very rare’. But his interviews with residents also indicated that ‘antagonisms between the different ethnic groups, though not violent, are still distinctly there’. According to a survey among the Coloureds, more than 90 per cent opted for re-location to a separate residential area (*ibid.*: 131–2). He however maintains that, ‘these prejudices, jealousies, and antagonisms are more in the nature of undercurrents than an open hostility between the various sections. ... On the occasion of dances, sports events, &c., members of the different sections either mingle or amuse themselves on their own, without any group antagonisms making themselves felt.’ (*ibid.*: 136) Attending a dance hall event, he characterised the atmosphere as ‘“live and let live” which seems to be the key note in the everyday relations between the various groups’ (*ibid.*: 137). He concludes, ‘the conditions of town life tend to level down tribal differences’ (*ibid.*: 141). He also observes that class differences seemed to be stronger than ethnic affiliations by ‘a tendency for “better class people” to move together’ (*ibid.*: 147).

Wagner noticed a high degree of reciprocal subsidiarity and support systems displaying exceptional generosity when assisting those in need. A notion of belonging and solidarity seemed to dominate daily life. In 1950 only five paupers received food rations from the state because they had no near relatives to look after them. A system of *gooi mekaar* (throw together) was practised in communal social networks, where helping each other and thereby entering reciprocal social contracts seemed an established practice as ‘mutual, though staggered, lending of money’ (*ibid.*: 214).

Social activities had a prominent arena in the Municipal Beer Hall. It offered seating accommodation for several hundred men on a semi-open terrace resembling features of a beer garden and a taproom for some hundred women seated along long tables and benches. The conduct of those frequenting the facilities had ‘on the whole, been so orderly that the police supervision

36 Information by Mrs Anna Bailey, as quoted in Jafta et al. (1991: 18).

37 Interview with Mrs Anna Campbell, quoted in Jafta et al. (1991: 17).

has become a mere routine duty' (*ibid.*: 267). Public dancing took place on almost a daily basis in the Sybil Bowker Hall, organised privately by people renting the venue, hiring a local band and charging admission to cover expenses: 'In January, 1951, the Hall had already been booked until the end of the year' (*ibid.*: 275). Private dance halls, which had operated earlier on, were closed down since they were scenes of brawls and fights. Brass bands and dance bands were a common feature, and music was a dominant form of entertainment, as much as community singing. Cinema performances were fortnightly entertaining an audience in the Sybil Bowker Hall, featuring mainly "cowboy" movies.

A Senior Sports League was founded in 1936 under the auspices of the location's Superintendent, and a Junior Sports Union for juveniles was set up in 1944 sponsored by the welfare officer. Football was the most popular sport in the location, with 13 clubs organised in the Senior League in 1950, representing the ethnic sections (only the Nama had joined one of the Damara clubs). Matches were played on a football field with a covered "grandstand" adjacent to the location, and competitions took place for five different cups (*ibid.*: 272–3). Around 20 football clubs existed in 1960 (Henrichsen 1997: 28).³⁸ The teams remained ethnically exclusive and seemed to have instilled discriminatory emotions during the matches among their supporters, as a letter concerning the 'shameful picture' of 'tribalism in sports' bemoaned in the *South West News*:

Although no restrictions on the grounds of tribe is made by any team when enrolling its members, in practice it seldom happens that a team is multi-tribal. ... As a logical sequence, matches between these teams are conceived by the public in the spirit of inter-tribal competition, victory being hailed as triumph over the inferior, a sign of tribal complex. Threats which often result in violence are made. These sometimes reach an extent where it becomes impossible to continue a match. Vulgar and disgusting words capable of provoking tribal hatred are frequently uttered. (...)

In our everyday life we proclaim to fight tribalism and racialism in every form they appear, yet in this particular case we remain unconcerned. Is this a shameless surrender? Let those who care for the interests and welfare of their people heed this: An ideal cannot be attained by a mere declaration of lofty principles but by the practical application of such principles in all spheres of life. (Mamugwe 1960: 4)

Tensions also affected tennis. A "Bantu Welfare Tennis Club" was founded in 1937 but collapsed after the embezzlement of funds. In 1951 the "Excelsior Tennis Club" had 16 members from the "Cape Coloured" community and two "Union Natives" as members; six of the total members were female. The club tournaments were riddled by animosities: Blacks boycotted the club after Rehobother Bastards refused to play against black or mixed teams without the tournament being called off (Wagner undated: 273). Another popular sport was horse racing, staged at the "Hakahana Turf Club" founded in 1947. Until 1950 a total of 25 race meetings with six events each were held where only "native-owned horses" and black jockeys were admitted (*ibid.*).

38 All subsequent quotes from articles in the *South West News* are based on their reproduction in this volume edited by Henrichsen (1997).

Various churches and other associations provided additional forms of local social organisation. These included the Red Band organisation (*Truppenspieler*), the Bunga Private Club and the African Improvement Society as burial and mutual aid societies among the Herero. The Coloured Teachers Association and its subsidiary Coloured Parent Teacher Association, the Native Teacher Association, and the Non-European Railway Staff Association were the active vocational and trade union associations. Inter-ethnic tensions were reported in the Rhenish Mission School in 1957 and 1958. The Coloured principal at the Herero-Ovambo school, who had been in service for 15 years, returned to Cape Town in 1957 after the black residents had blamed him for not objecting to a decision taken by the Coloured Teachers Association to deny admittance of their children to their schools.³⁹ For 1958, conflicts among the 339 enrolled pupils were reported. Parents of Ovambo children complained that the newly appointed Herero principal made their children feel insecure. They felt disadvantaged and missed the former Coloured principal, whom they had considered as a trusted and neutral arbitrator.⁴⁰

As of January 1959, the Municipality of Windhoek employed Zedekia Ngavirue (later commonly known as “Doctor Zed”) as the first black social worker. On 4 July 1960 (not long before his dismissal due to his political engagement) he addressed the 12th Annual African Teachers Conference with an appeal for a “Clean up Campaign”:

Our living conditions are deplorable. You have only to look through the window to see what I mean – there you will see dirty and untidy homesteads, heaps of rubbish and carcasses of dogs and cats next to our water tanks; neglected cemeteries, ever dirty communal lavatories and so forth. These conditions are not conducive to progress. The gospel of cultural development that we as teachers, ministers and social workers preach will not be of any effect to the people who receive it unless a better environment is created for them. (...) I propose that we as teachers, ministers and social workers come together and form a united front against dirt. Let us organise a campaign against this deadly evil. Let’s not blame external factors only but take a critical attitude towards ourselves. I know that other societies have under oppression proved to be enterprising and progressive. (...) Why can’t we, honourable as we are, do the things that other people have done? Is it really due to oppression that we cannot build a lavatory for ourselves? Why don’t we get up and constructively criticize ourselves for these weaknesses lest others think we do not see them? Why should we sit down only to wait for some one to come and build a bad lavatory for us and then criticize him. ... Let this be our contribution as teachers, ministers and social workers, towards the creation of a new Africa. (Ngavirue 1960: 4)

The End of an Era

This vision of a “new Africa” had at the time of Ngavirue’s speech already been exposed to the full force of the apartheid system. Beyond the structural violence executed through what by then was euphemistically called “separate development”, the refusal of the location’s residents to move to Katutura had escalated. Passive resistance against the relocation had taken organ-

39 Jahresbericht 1957 über die Arbeit in der Herero-Ovambogemeinde Windhoek, Stationsmissionar H. K. Diehl, Ende Februar 1958, 5, RMG 2.533 d C/h 50 d Band 4, 1946–1967, Bl. 0082.

40 Stationsmissionar H. K. Diehl, Windhoek, 5. Mai 1959, Jahresbericht 1958 ueber die Arbeit in der Herero-Ovambogemeinde Windhoek, p. 5. RMG 2.533 d C/h 50 d Band 4, 1946–1967, Bl. 0063.

ised forms since September 1959. It culminated in a widespread boycott of services initiated by women in early December 1959. On 10 December 1959 a meeting with representatives of the Municipality ended in mayhem. The police was brought in and shot dead eleven Africans, more than 40 were treated in hospital for mainly bullet wounds. Since that day, the life in the location was never the same again.

Several factors motivated the continued refusal to resettle among many even after the violent clash. Higher rental costs for the houses built in Katutura, bus fares and new regulations were all reasons to resist the relocation, which was – more fundamentally – from a political perspective considered an apartheid initiative by an illegal authority without legitimacy. The prohibition of owning the houses occupied was maybe the biggest stumbling block. As a former resident recalled: ‘Houses in the Old Location were our own, and therefore better than in Katutura. It depended on you, whether you made your house nice. I would prefer Katutura to be like the Old Location.’ (Friedman 2000: 6) Confronted with the refusal to relocate, authorities threatened to deport those unwilling to move to the rural reserves. ‘To Move Or Not To Move’ was the title of an article in the *South West News* of 20 August 1960, which concluded that, ‘the situation is such that the African has neither the right to improve his or her environment nor the right to have a permanent dwelling in the urban area’.

Fear and resilience, despair and civil courage were all contributing factors supporting the mobilization for organized resistance in various forms of political associations. In this sense, the Old Location, in combination with the contract worker system and the pass laws, was an important element in the formation of the anticolonial resistance movements in the struggle for Independence. – To that extent, “patriotic history” indeed is diagnosing the resistance against forced removal and the massacre of 10 December 1959 as a relevant marker. As Emmett (1999: 285) suggested:

The authorities’ attempts to move residents of the old location to a new township and the resistance they met represent a significant point in the political history of Namibia. Not only did resistance to the removal provide the first major issue taken up by the newly formed nationalist organizations shortly after their launching in 1959, but it also represented a transition in the style of political mobilization in that it transcended parochial issues and united a broad cross-section of groups and classes in a confrontation with the colonial state.

At the same time, the urban arena provided the environment for the formation of an educated vanguard, which entered new forms of exchange and mobilization distinct from previous indigenous traditions and practices and the dominance of the traditional (ethnic) leaders, thereby inducing social diversity over and above ethnically restricted loyalties and forms of organization. *South West News*, the first African newspaper founded in 1960 and published in nine issues documents these fascinating dynamics unfolding, which emancipated not only from the white settler dominance but also the earlier dependencies on tribe and tradition.

Reminiscences of a Past

Sifting through the documents, a nuanced picture of the location's life in the 1950s can hardly be restored. What emerges even from the fragmented evidence is that there was a sense of ownership and belonging. The weekends saw a variety of bands playing, folks dancing, enjoying the odd sports competition, fashion shows and beauty contests. The location vibrated with social activities and leisure time in midst of poverty and destitution. It was an ordinary common ground for people of different histories and identities, united in being oppressed. They had more in common than what separated them. In the eyes and minds of many of those living there it was better than the alternative forced upon them.

With the removal to Katutura these people were robbed of their homes as their personal belonging. The houses they lived in – even if bordering to shacks – were theirs. It was property, which was taken from them. The limited material compensation offered by the municipal authorities did not make up for the much deeper loss, resulting in feelings of homelessness. Residents were removed to the outskirts of the city and could no longer walk through the streets of Windhoek to their work places. They were not any longer an integral albeit segregated part of the city, but were moved like cattle on trucks to the margins.

Going through the archival material it feels easy to identify with the nostalgic tendencies some of the present-day narratives by former residents display. What became the Old Location was a home, which Katutura was unable to create with its sub-divided, pre-fabricated quarters epitomizing the apartheid mind of “separate development”. Similar to Sophiatown, Alexandra or District Six in South Africa's urban centers, the Old Location emerged as a reminder how people were seeking to organize and survive in the shadow of apartheid. There seemed to be a sense of togetherness, which was stronger than the policy of divide and rule executed by the colonial system. The Old Location was the urban conglomerate, which transcended the separate identities of the “native reserves” and allowed a common ground for the people of Namibia.

Recalling the atmosphere in the Old Location, many seem to resort to selective memories of the daily life bordering to romanticising. In what was qualified as a ‘nostalgic journey to the beginning of days’ several former residents remembered their upbringing there almost half a century later. According to Daniel Humavindu, ‘the Old Location created a great family in which residents looked out for one another’, where they were dancing in the Bowker Hall and “Glorious” in the Ovambo Section with ‘only jazz and live bands and no other music’. Hesron von Francois added: ‘we were divided into sections but the people were close. ... I had a good life there at home. There was always food, love and peace’. For Katy Farao ‘childhood was really childhood. ... Those were good times when we would play in the streets’ (all quotes in Graig 2012). And Petrina Rina Tira Biwa remembers: ‘The segregation we experienced when

we moved to Katutura was not there. ... we stayed very nicely in the Old Location. Communication with other people was very good. We used to stay as family'.⁴¹

These might well be memories coloured by feelings of loss. But they offer some evidence for 'the sense of community despite differences' (Graig 2012), which was existing. It seems not by accident that the term "family" is frequently used to characterise the general feeling of communal belonging and sharing. At least by intuition, even the missionaries of the time seemed somehow able to capture this. In his annual report for the Nama congregation in Windhoek for 1959, the Rhenish missionary Lübke resorts to a highly unorthodox blend of characterisations for the features of the Location, when he qualifies the place as a brood nest for insecurity, dirt and risks for diseases, after listing as the first word – *cosiness*.⁴² Being a 'brood nest for *cosiness*' is certainly at best an unusual, but maybe most appropriate effort to describe what seemed to be a contradiction, but maybe close to social reality as experienced at least in retrospective.

In 1961, the residents of the Klein Windhoek Location were all moved to Katutura. In 1963 the Pokkiesdraai compound in the vicinity of Katutura was closed and the contract workers were moved into a new compound inside Katutura. Coloureds and Rehoboth Basters moved to the new residential area Khomasdal situated between the Old Location and Katutura. With the official closing of the former Main Location on 31 August 1968 'an era in township life came to an end' (Pendleton 1974: 30). The former social worker Zedekia Ngavirue, who was a co-founder of SWANU, left soon after his dismissal for studies in Sweden. After Independence appointed as the first Director-General of the National Planning Commission, he might have captured the spirit of these days best when based on his insights he contemplated after retirement: 'It was, indeed, when we owned little that we were prepared to make the greatest sacrifices' (Ngavirue 1997: 11).

41 M. Biwa, Translation of oral interview, Petrina Biwa. National Archives, Private Accessions, SMPA.0022, Old Location oral history (undated). Quoted with kind permission of Memory Biwa.

42 In his words, the "Werft" was a "*Brutnest von Behaglichkeit, Unsicherheit, Schmutz und Krankheitsgefahr*". Lübke, Jahresbericht 1959 für die Nama sprechende Gemeinde Windhoek / undated, 4. RMG 2.533 d C/h 50 d, Windhoek Band 4, Bl. 0053 (my emphasis).

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