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Working Paper No. 9

**A short
socio-spatial history
of Namibia**

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The following document was produced as part of my doctoral research at the University of Cape Town (UCT), in South Africa. The scope of the thesis shifted up to a point in which it wasn't necessary to include a trajectory of Namibia's socio-spatial development for the reader to engage with my work. The term 'socio-spatial' is to stress the spatial dimension within social processes. To have simply left the term 'spatial' would have missed the point of spatial production as a social process. In other words, space *per se* is not what is at stake here, but rather the dialectic relationship of how space is produced and at the same time it transforms those who inhabit it. Therefore, what I would like to encompass is not merely town planning schemes, houses, or public spaces, but also spatial social relations, policy documents, jurisdictions, and to a certain extent the production of nature. However, this review may be useful for other researchers and interested parties to have an overview of the trajectory of Namibia's socio-spatial development. I'd like to thank Werner Hillebrecht, Phillip Lühl, Anna Muller, Nashilongweshipe Mushaandja, and Wolfgang Werner for their comments on this rather preliminary document. A thorough 'history of socio-spatial development in Namibia' still remains an outstanding task.

I have produced all the visuals unless otherwise noted.

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1. Introduction

This paper is largely based on a review of the literature written on Namibia mainly in the 1980s and 90s, as well as some contemporary literature. Particularly the pre-independence section relies considerably on a spatial reading of Wallace's 'A History of Namibia', as well as from other historical sources. While doing a review of urban research in Southern Africa in 1990s, Swilling noted that in Namibia during the period of 1983 and 1991, only 21 publications were dedicated on the topic and most of it focused on Windhoek. He attributed this to the limited research base and "expatriate academics and the pre-independence government dominating the research field" (1994:309). This situation has somewhat changed, but I include it to account for the kind of references that I've used. This paper tries to capture key events for socio-spatial production, and therefore neglects events that may be of historical importance for Namibia as a nation. While the longest section of this paper addresses the recent developments, it is in fact only to a limited extent. One can consider this paper as 'an index' of themes. This paper wasn't conceived to put forward a particular thesis. However, the reader will find that an argument inductively emerges, one that suggest the development and consolidation of inequality through socio-spatial production.

The timing of the release of this paper may also be timely, as currently the issue of 'land' is at a height in views of the looming Second Land Conference, which was recently announced by the president (Republic of Namibia, 2018) and that is set to take place in October this year. As the reader will find in the following pages, the First Land Conference took place in a context where less than one fourth of the population was living in urban areas; today, more than half of the population lives in urban areas, and current estimates expect this to increase up to a point in which the situation in 2050 becomes precisely the opposite as that in 1990 (UNDESA, 2018). At this point, Namibia will have about 3 million people living in urban areas; and while this number may provide a quantitative reference, the implications of Namibia's urban future is arguably far from being understood. Furthermore, while informal settlements around 1990 were few, today most of those living in urban areas live in an informal settlement ¹. In other words, the socio-spatial transformation of Namibia in less than three decades has been astonishing.



Figure 1 Namibia view from space. Source: Google Earth.

¹ The numbers of inhabitants in informal settlements gathered through the self-enumeration efforts of the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN, 2009) represent 60% of the population in urban areas reported in the 2011 census (NSA, 2011).

At the same time, this kind of rapid and profound transformation has taken place in many other contexts, the question is in fact *the way* in which this development has taken place. Therefore, what may be actually astonishing is that this transformation has taken in a deeply unequal manner. Namibia, together with South Africa, tops the list of inequality measured by GINI coefficient (World Bank, 2017); the country's national geography and urban areas are, in many ways, both a result and an engine for this condition. Namibia's socio-spatial development may well be a paradigmatic case of uneven geographical development (Harvey, 2006); or perhaps, as others have diagnosed in the case of South Africa, both uneven *and* combined development (Bond, Desai, & Ngwane, 2011). However, defending any of these theses is beyond the scope of this piece. This paper suffers from a structural omission that presents the gradual process of appropriation of spatial production for profit-driven purposes as uncontested. This is not so: the history of resistance to the German colonial regime is a main theme in key sources (Gewald, 1999); Garveyst movements in the coastal towns emerged as a way to resist oppression in terms of working conditions and racial discrimination (Kotze, 1990); and workers, students and women struggles have also played a role in many respects (Katjavivi, 1988). However, in the documentation I've used for this paper, resistance is mentioned only scantily. To highlight these struggles would've required archival work or expanding this bibliography to other fields, which was beyond the scope of the process from which this paper stems.

What this paper highlights is not only a progression of uneven development, but perhaps also a number of opportunities. An common idea that was generally shared by the various international speakers at last year's Urban Forum (NUST, 2017), was that Namibia can still harness the dynamics taking place in its favour. Africa is the continent with the fastest growth in urban areas, and only one in three countries have what can be called a 'national urban strategy' or plan (Turok, 2015); Namibia is not yet one of them. The extensive efforts and thorough planning that the Apartheid administration put into restructuring Namibia's territory through the Odendaal Commission have not been matched by a comprehensive and unitary document countering this and chartering the way for a new spatial reality for the country. Therefore, expanding and deepening on the present document remains an important task to make decisions gaining from historical experience, and hopefully deliberately aiming at transforming the trends that have progressively turned Namibia's production of space into an engine of reproduction of inequality.



Figure 2 A moment at an informal market. Photo: Phillip Lühl

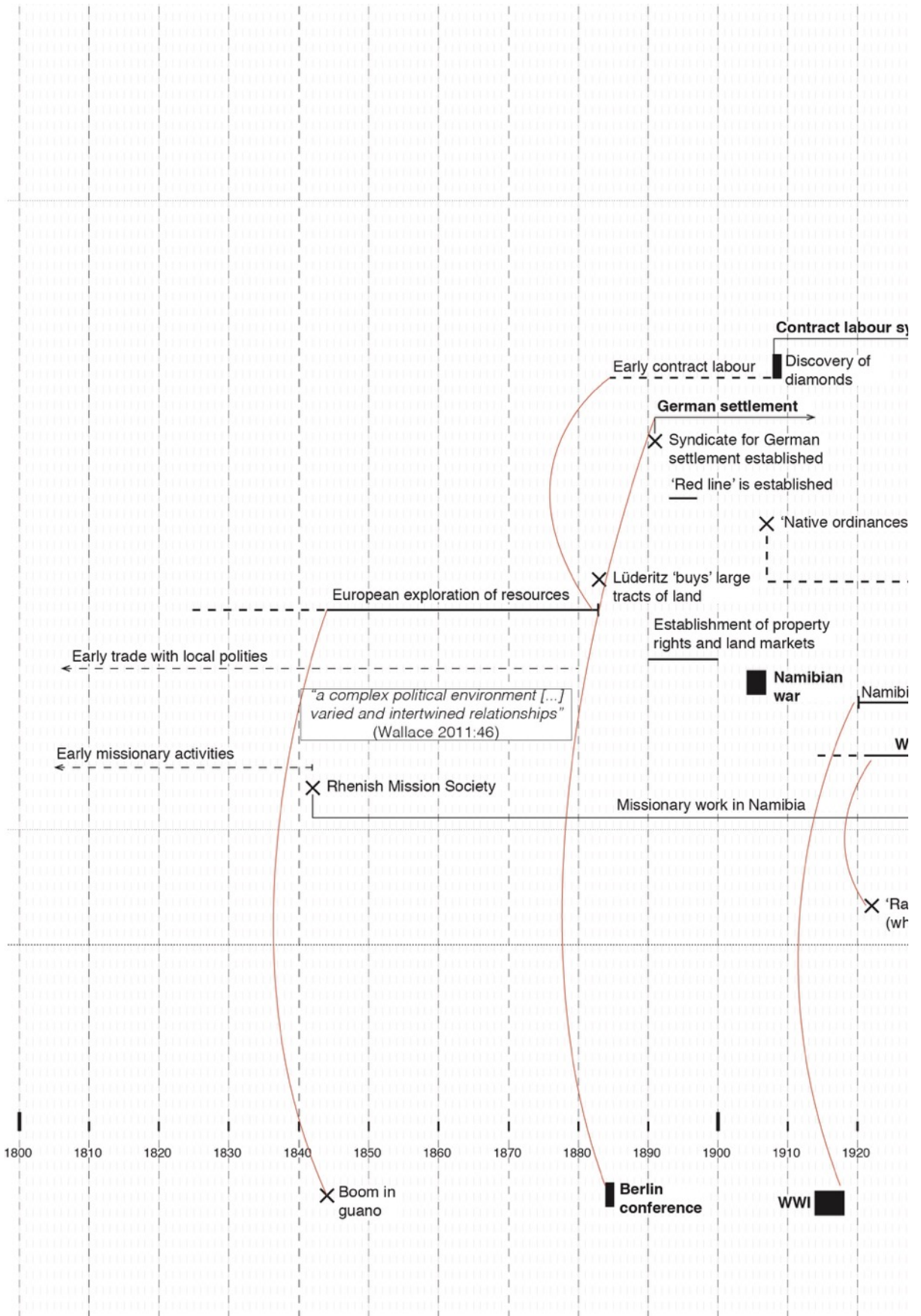
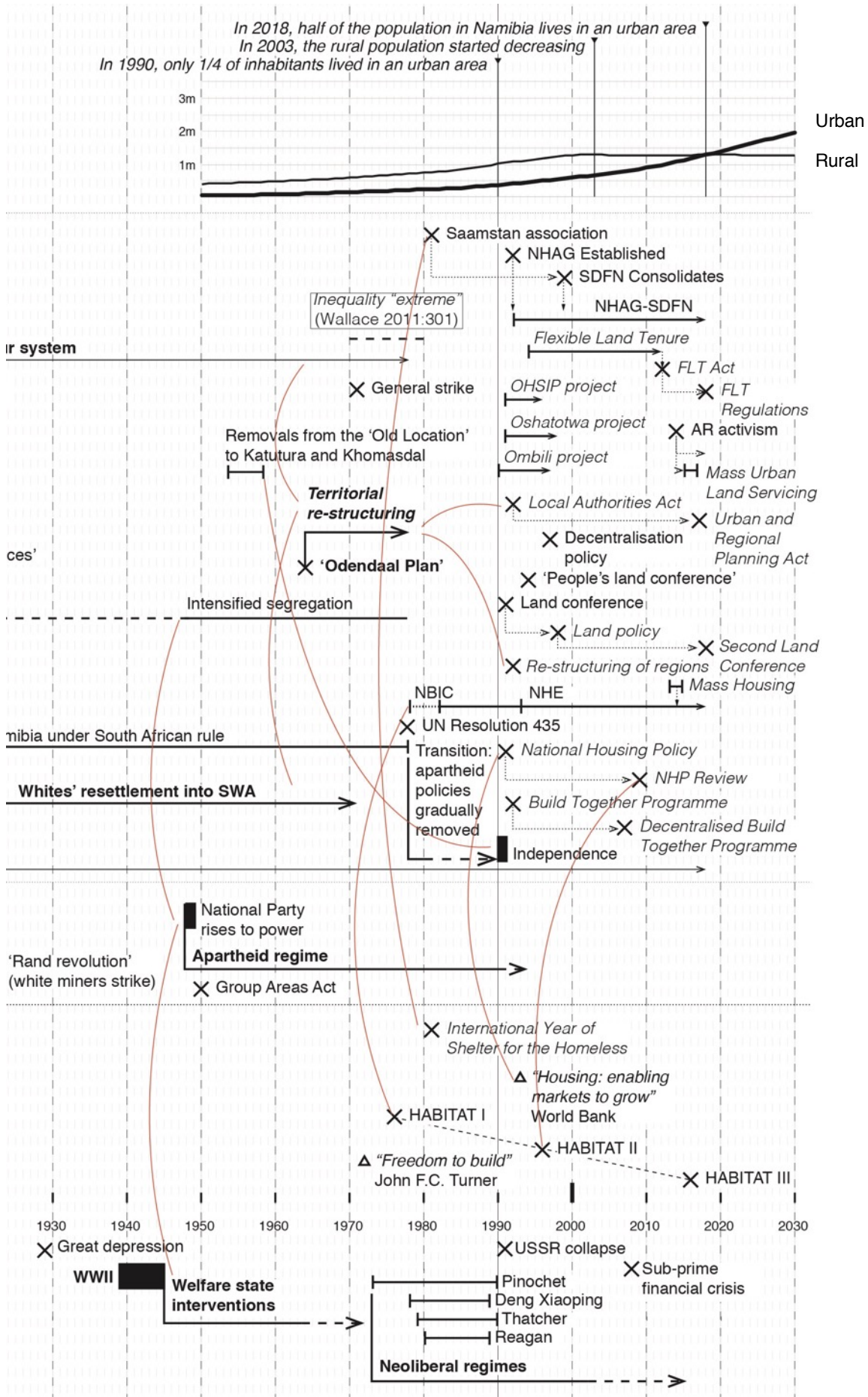


Figure 3 Timeline of events in Namibia, key events in South Africa and internationally.



2. The early socio-spatial dynamics

The socio-spatial transformation of Namibia's landscape started way before colonial times. One of the first clarifications Wallace makes when introducing her history of Namibia is that "[b]y the time Namibia became a colony in formal terms, it had already been considerably transformed" (Wallace 2011:1). Already in 1870, she describes the central and southern areas of Namibia as "a complex political environment, in which groups of people speaking Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab, Cape Dutch and San languages maintained varied and intertwined relationships, and where claims to rights to land, water and grazing sometimes flared into conflict" (2011:46). The first archaeological evidence of human inhabitation in what is today known as Namibia dates from "about 10,000 years ago" (2011:20). From then until the 18th and 19th Century, Namibia was inhabited by pastoralists and traders passing through routes negotiated with more sedentary polities. The decline of pastoralism was determined not only by gradual land dispossession from colonising forces, but also due to diseases; Kinahan writes how a rinderpest outbreak in 1897 led to the "effective collapse of pastoralism" in Namibia (Kinahan, 2011:40). Up to this point, groups didn't seek control over land *per se*, but over rights to access its resources: "wells, pasture [...] ants' nests and beehives" (2011:47). Furthermore, groups themselves were not aggregated as the solid groups that the colonial and then the apartheid administration gradually imposed.

A key dynamic that facilitated the transition between precolonial and colonial times was the expanse of missionary activities. Initially, the missionaries were seen by local leaders as threats to their power, but eventually "greatly expanded" (Wallace, 2011:62) after the 1842 arrival of the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS). Missionary activities are important to highlight for the proto-modernist order that they started to establish:

"missionaries promoted a salvation that lay not only in faith, a rigid sexual morality and the abandonment of what they saw as 'heathen' practices, but also in the adoption of the features of an idealised, orderly, European peasant society: Western clothes, literacy, *square houses*, a Christian education, a rigid assignment of male and female roles confining women to the domestic space, and the use of the plough" (Wallace, 2011:64, my emphasis)

This framework placed space within a package of idealised European virtuosity promoted by the church. The production of colonial space was not isolated but came within a bundle of other 'virtues' and modernisation. Religion is also here brought to the fore for its primary role in the introduction of the colonial regime and the idea of 'the state'. During the early colonial times, the "state and settler power has come to be understood as frequently fractured, partial, and limited by circumstances and resources, rather than an all-powerful machinery" (Wallace, 2011:5). The missionary church would at times fill some of these 'fractures' of the colonial state; and in some cases, mediate between it and its congregation.

3. The colonial moment

European colonial powers gained attention to Namibia with the increase in interest in natural resources, as well as the own political-economic events taking place in Europe at that time. The earliest Europeans to settle in Namibia were the British in the early 1800s. It was also them who started exploring commercial opportunities, and it was due to their activities that the Germans became eventually interested in it (Frayne, 2000). Early trade between local groups and Europeans was encouraged by a boom in guano as commodity in 1844; and it was also around this time that the first rights to mining were granted to traders by local groups (Wallace, 2011:66). The watershed moment for Namibia and Africa in their colonial history was the 1884-5 Berlin Conference, where the continent was subdivided and apportioned between European colonial powers. Although it is documented that Bismarck himself wasn't keen on the idea of colonisation, he eventually changed his view in 1884, but with the specific position that "colonies should be administered by private German companies"

(2011:116). The gradual process of German colonisation of Namibia took such pathway itself: Adolf Lüderitz, a German trader, 'bought' large tracts of land from local inhabitants in 1883, paid for in goods and weapons. As Wallace notes, the "land purchases in the south gave Bismarck a basis on which to begin the process of installing German authority in Namibia" (2011:117). As Lüderitz failed to make profits, he sold his land holdings to the newly-established German South West Africa Company (DKGSWA, standing for *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft für Südwestafrika* in German). The company is documented to have had rights to prospect and mine not only those areas owned by Lüderitz, but the entire territory; a situation that most likely had little legitimacy. For strategic reasons, the Germans came up with 'protection agreements' that they signed with local groups, which were then used to hinder the dominance of the more powerful groups such as those loyal to powerful local leaders such as Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witbooi. The land dispossession during German colonial rule was gradual, and despite the skewed power situation between the coloniser and the colonised, many of the documented expansions of land holdings were 'purchases'. Some leaders would use the sale of land as a way to settle debts; even if such land was not under their jurisdiction. Crucial in this process was the control that Germans attained over the land registration, which was a powerful tool that allowed them to gain influence in the politics of succession in local polities by conditioning land sales (2011:150). Land tenure was here employed to exercise significant power over political decisions and colonial expansion.



Figure 4 Diagram outlining the colonial project as represented by the Germans. Although this visual expresses the resource extraction colonies, the settler colonial project also implied a flow of people. Text translation: (top) Germany, (bottom) German colonies, (text in between, left to right) German capital in the colonies, colonial products to the motherland, industrial products to the colonies, increased capital flow. Source: Kunze (1938).

The early structures of colonisation for the extraction of resources were followed by the setting up of living space for settlers. Germany considered that Namibia was, from all their colonies, “the one that could provide the healthiest conditions to settlers” and, due to the armed conflicts that erupted, furthermore saw it as a territory “bought with the blood of German soldiers” (Wallace 2011:194). In 1891, the Settlement Syndicate for South West Africa (SWA), as Namibia was known then, was founded with the purpose of encouraging Germans to relocate; Klein Windhoek was identified for the use of settlement and a small influx occurred then (2011:127). It was however only until 1896 that “the conditions for colonial development were created” (2011:131): German settlers arrived, and there was support to develop transport and other infrastructure. In 1896 there were only 2,000 ‘whites’ including the armed forces, but by 1903 the number had more than doubled (2011:149). Already here can one find the first town plans developed for Windhoek (Frayne, 2000). The development of infrastructure “presaged the construction of a new form of capitalist economy, with much greater industrialisation and increased access to technological resources” (Wallace, 2011:151). Also it was in these early stages that the ‘Red Line’ was established, which was initially a geographical delimitation to control cattle in the drier Southern areas from being affected by the diseases from the Northern areas. This line would eventually acquire other socio-political and economic dynamics, creating a clear social divide that arguably continues until today (Miescher, 2012). Already in the 1890s a system of property rights and a capitalist land market had been established (Simon, 1991), which ingrained a Western capitalist logic in the ‘DNA’ of spatial production in Namibia. At this point, the resource extraction paradigm had already transitioned into settler colonialism rapidly gaining roots; and the foundations for a capitalist spatial production and political economy had been laid.

The 1904-8 war between the German colonisers and the Herero and Nama groups was crucial for the socio-spatial development of Namibia. The fragile ecology between these two groups broke in 1904, and consolidated a single rule over the territory and confirmed the idea of the German colonial state (Wallace, 2011:147). Maps available at the National Archives reveal a varying understanding of the spatial distribution of the various polities at that time, but in all it is possible to recognise the diversity among groups. However, the effect of the war was the most dramatic in the Herero and Nama. Wallace attributes the victory of the German colonial rule not only in its might, but also to “the level of penetration of merchant capital into SWA” (2011:148) which put pressure on leaders to settle debts through sale of land. The significance of the war, Wallace notes, was that it was “crucial in creating the structure of unequal, and racially determined, land ownership” (2011:155) in Namibia. The racial segregation of towns was also enhanced by the situation created after the war, and the emergence of concentration camps:

“In some towns, racially based spatial segregation was beginning to emerge, based on the ad hoc construction of separate areas for Africans, including detention camps, accommodation for those serving the army, and in some cases an older and often complex form of segregation that had grown up around the mission stations” (2011:154)

Furthermore, at a larger scale, the idea of ‘reserves’ had been already discussed in the early 1900s, mainly as a debate between missionaries and the German colonial rule on how to deal with settlements. In the years after the war, an apartheid-like system was imposed by the passing of the Native Ordinance (*Eingeborenenverordnungen* in German) of 1907. Wallace argues that the aim was to “transform the Africans into a landless proletariat, destroy their political organisation and culture, and force them to work in a disciplined and orderly manner for white employers” (2011:184). This was achieved by controlling movement, penalising Africans breaking employment contracts, and instituting vagrancy laws, among other measures.

A key moment that further attracted powerful economic interests to Namibia was the 1908 discovery of diamonds near Lüderitz. At that moment, a system for contract labour for bringing workers from the populous northern areas of the country into the less populated southern areas was already taking place at a small scale in the 1890s. However, the diamond industry and the flourishing copper industry in Tsumeb intensified this and eventually turned the contract labour system into the forceful

restructuring factor that it was. At the turn of the century there were “as many as 1,700” (Wallace, 2011:152) contract labourers working on railroads, farms, and for missionaries; by 1911, “there were estimated to be 15,000 more jobs than workers within the colony” (2011:187). However, this ‘boom’ didn’t reflect on improvements of living conditions for workers. Hishongwa documented the precarious conditions in the labour compounds (1992), demonstrating that economic activity was undertaken with high disregard for the labour that made it possible. The post-war period also saw rapid growth in the black and white population of Namibia’s towns, which was a matter of concern to authorities as they viewed the “new urban black population” as posing the “danger of ‘indiscipline’ and potential unrest” (Wallace, 2011:192). This was also a time when ‘urban governance’ started to include ‘Africans’; Wallace explains how “new forms of authority began to develop among urban Africans, especially when the state began to appoint black headmen in the towns” (2011:192). This can be regarded as a moment where segregated governance structures started to be established in the city. Wallace quotes Bley (1996) to note employers’ “everyday struggle for ‘distance’” (2011:196) to describe the efforts of authorities to keep a segregated social ecology around the concentrations of people that the new economies required. The pace of the influx of ‘blacks’ into urban areas that the economic imperatives demanded was therefore much quicker than what was tolerable from the social point of view of those in charge; and segregation was the solution.



Figure 5 Photograph showing German colonial buildings and apartment buildings built during South African colonial rule in Windhoek today.

4. South African colonial rule

With the defeat of Germany in the WWI, Namibia came to be administered by South Africa under a UN (then League of Nations) mandate. The mandate of South Africa over Namibia was intended to be only temporary in nature, but in practice it became a form of colonisation that resulted in a strengthening of the on-going and systematic land dispossession. The land in Namibia was of strategic importance for the local situation in South Africa, particularly with the white working class disaffection vis-à-vis the hardened employment situation:

“SWA opened up the prospect of jobs and land for the growing numbers of impoverished whites in South Africa itself, where landlessness, disaffection and the threat of social unrest were rising, and were to culminate in the white miners’ strike (‘Rand revolution’) of 1922. The authorities in SWA responded with a mass land settlement programme for poor whites” (Wallace, 2011:216-217)

Wallace quotes Wellington (1967) to affirm that “the Native question is synonymous with the labour question” (2011:218). She then repurposes this statement to argue that “[i]f the ‘native question’ was the ‘labour question’ it was also, in the Administrator’s eyes, ‘the land question’” (Wallace, 2011:218). Land was largely allocated to South African applicants, but also to some Germans; no applications were received from ‘Natives’, who were under the impression that the land would be restored to them after the WWI (Goldblatt, 1971:226). Goldblatt quotes a Union Government document saying that “[t]he greatest difficulty was experienced in explaining to them [Natives] that this [restoring the land] was utterly impossible” (Goldblatt 1971:226). In 1920 a Native Labour Commission was set up to investigate the labour situation, and it also laid the ground work guiding the South African administration to implement the establishment of ‘native’ reserves.

The rural areas underwent major restructuring, and urban areas grew considerably under the new colonial dispensation; both of these developments took place in a starkly uneven manner. More than mining, which was the largest contributor to the economy of S.W.A., Wallace notes how “[t]he most important economic shift [during the South African administration] was the increasing success of white-owned agriculture” (2011:235), particularly in the karakul² sector. The relevance of the agricultural sector for employment remains high until today, as it continues to be the largest employer in the country (NSA, 2015). During the 1940s-50s, the number of white-owned farms expanded and a report on social security, the Lardner-Burke Commission of 1945-47, recommended to shift the Red Line further north to create more land for white settlement. Between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s, the number of white-occupied farms increased by 80%, and the white population doubled (Wallace, 2011:251). At the same time, by 1946, about one seventh of the population was already living in urban areas. The Natives (Urban Areas) Proclamation, No. 34 of 1924, instituted residential segregation by outlawing acquisition of land by ‘Africans’ in ‘white’ areas, and vice versa. The infamous South African Group Areas Act was not instituted in Namibia partly because the existing legislation provided sufficiently for residential segregation, so that “whites did not feel threatened” (Pickard-Cambridge, 1988:22). Some of these include title deeds restrictions and other kinds of discrimination; most fundamentally in public education and health facilities. The towns in the north were purposefully-developed instruments for the South African colonial project to expand. As Dubresson & Graefe note, they were created “out of nothing” (2001:70) for policing, recruitment of contract labourers, and administrative purposes; as well as for the creation of markets. The military occupation in the north also “generated a bizarre consumer economy of supermarkets and bottlestores” (Leys & Saul, 1995:10). A possible unexpected outcome of the growth in urban population, at least for the Administration, was that urban areas became “a significant arena of unrest”, with organised groups setting up tax boycotts and other forms of protest as early as the 1920s (Wallace, 2011:225). Unionism, particularly in the coastal towns, also added to the social effervescence at that time (Peltola, 1995).

The moment where the implementation of segregationist practices gained its strongest traction was when the National Party in South Africa rose to power in 1948. Wallace quotes Ngavirue (1967) to clarify that in Namibia the implementation of apartheid was nevertheless “slower and less elaborate [...] than in South Africa” (2011:251). The Natives (Urban Areas) Proclamation of 1951 was passed to regulate African mobility, and together with subsequent town planning ordinances, it established “new means of enforcing spatial apartheid in the towns, using the title deeds of individual properties to prevent land in ‘white’ and ‘Coloured’ areas being sold to Africans” (2011:252). During this time, the implementation of apartheid entailed only “a limited number of forced removals” (2011:253), particularly in the 1950s, however others argue that displacement was a significant force that shaped the way we understand urban areas in Namibia today (Lühl, 2013). It nevertheless took one such event to trigger the liberation struggle in earnest. From 1954 to 1959, the closure of the ‘Old Location’ in Windhoek and relocation of residents to a new ‘township’ in the northeast of Windhoek, sparked protests that were violently crushed by authorities, killing at least 11 of those who demonstrated. Irrespective of such violence, First notes how this relocation was unacceptable for inhabitants:

² Karakul is a sheep race original from Kazakhstan whose pelts are highly valued in international markets for luxury clothing.

"Offers of money for development are rejected because the Africans fear that the money is conditional on their acceptance of apartheid. Africans refuse to move from the tin-can slum of Windhoek to the new Katutura township; the new housing is better, but it is apartheid housing" (1963:16).

Some note that these removals were a key determinant that intensified the liberation struggle in Namibia (Melber, 2016); with many of the leaders going in exile to coordinate efforts with the help of allies elsewhere in the continent and beyond.



Figure 6 A house in Katutura, Windhoek, today; with extensions



Figure 7 Remains of life in the Old Location in today's Hochland Park.

5. Odendaal Commission

Although the conditions for separate development were being gradually and consistently established since the German and later through South African occupation, it had its summit with the appointment of the Odendaal Commission in 1964. Among the proposals of the Commission report, known as 'the Odendaal Plan', was to create Homelands that would eventually become politically independent. The extent to which the Odendaal Plan was implemented is not well documented, but that which is known reveals significant consequences; particularly with regards to movement of people south of the Red Line, which was also known as the Police Zone. One of the key contradictions in this plan, Wallace notes, was that there were no homelands for 'whites'; "the entire Police Zone, apart from the reserves, was considered to be the 'white area'" (2011:263). Key in this plan was the division of the territory into geographical and administrative regions "based on racial and ethnic criteria", which created a situation in which "ten black regions received 40 percent of the total land area of the country, and [what can be considered] the one white region received 43 percent" (Frayne 2000:54). Wallace notes that a full-on implementation of the plan would've required displacing a third of the African population (2011:264). The Odendaal Plan relied on three pieces of proposed legislation: the Development of Self-Government for Native Nations in South West Africa Act (1968), which entailed a degree of self-government for the Homelands in terms of education, water, and revenue-raising, and which created positions for representatives from seven traditional authorities throughout the territory; the South West Africa Constitution Act (1968), which governed the 'white areas'; and the Mines, Works and Minerals Regulations of 1968, which laid out employment terms based on race. In this way, Namibia was re-organised into three unevenly developed geographical units "with the blacks occupying the poorer and generally less productive areas of the country; the whites, the richer areas; and the [white, South African] government controlling the richest, mineral zones" (Frayne, 2000). A condition that structured the country in a way that still has currency today.

During its administration, the South African government performed a welfare state role with a consistent bias towards 'whites'. Wallace notes how, particularly during the economic crisis of 1929, "[w]hite farmers and workers received state help"; in the capital, an example of this was how "Avis Dam [in Windhoek] was built by white workers as a relief project" (2011:227). Apart from the segregationist consequences, the Odendaal Plan also "triggered increased government spending" (2011:266). This had significant impact in the urbanisation of the territory: investment in infrastructure, supply of water and electricity (e.g. Kunene hydroelectric scheme in Ruacana, construction of dams and canals, drilling of boreholes); roads, air transport, postal and telephone communications, radio, agricultural improvement in the reserves, industrial development; as well as increase in education, health, old-age pensions, and "welfare for Africans" (Wallace, 2011:267) even if

such investment “was always to lag far behind the amounts spent on whites” (2011:267). Irrespective of the racial and uneven implications of this plan, Wallace notes that it also aimed at increasing state control (2011:266).

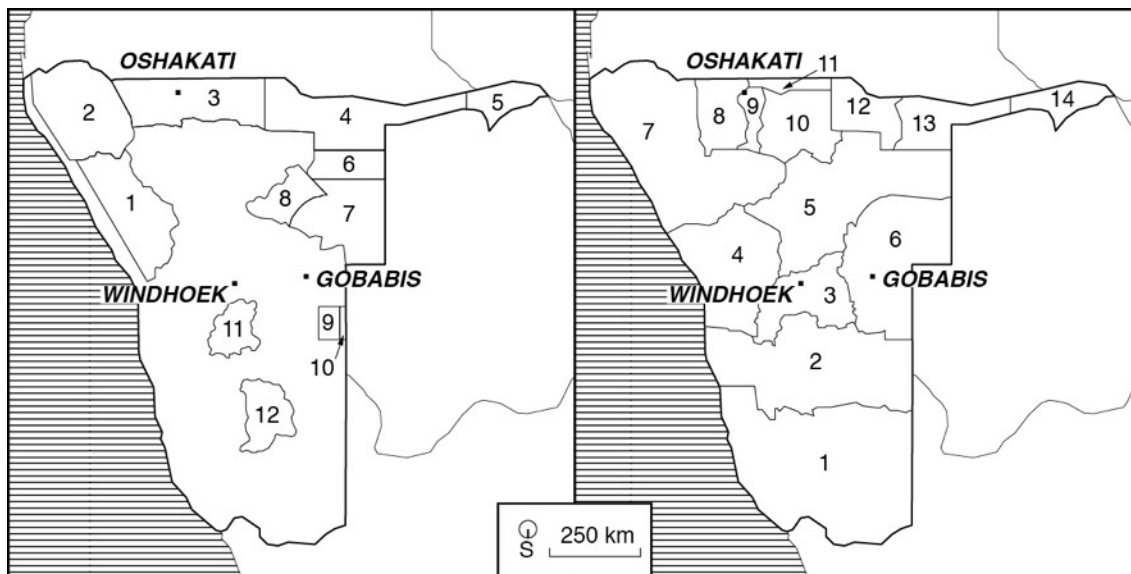


Figure 8 (Left) Odendaal plan: 1. Damaraland, 2. Kaokoland, 3. Ovambo, 4. Kavango, 5. East Caprivi, 6. Bushmanland, 7. East Hereroland 1, 8. West Hereroland, 9. East Hereroland 2, 10. East Hereroland 3, 11. Rehoboth, 12. Namaland. (Right) Today: 1. //Karas, 2. Hardap, 3. Khomas, 4. Erongo, 5. Otjozondjupa, 6. Omaheke, 7. Kunene, 8. Omusati, 9. Oshana, 10. Oshikoto, 11. Ohangwena, 12. Kavango West, 13. Kavango East, 14. Zambezi.

6. Towards independence

While the economy of SWA was booming, the social contract, albeit distorted and lacking legitimacy, was deteriorating. This was furthermore enhanced by the increasing international pressure against the South African occupation of Namibia. In the 1940s and 50s, the economy of Namibia “increased phenomenally” (Wallace, 2011:257) due to expansion of mining, fishing, and manufacturing; all of which was supported by the system of contract labour system. Around the time of independence, Namibia was in ‘the leading’ group in Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of economic development; with a per capita GDP of US\$1,610 in 1992, Namibia was “just behind Gabon, Botswana, Mauritius and South Africa” (Diener & Graefe, 2001a:25). However, despite such economic boom, the general living conditions were not improving and “levels of discontent among workers were high” (Wallace, 2011:258); the frequent strikes were evidence of this (Dempers, 2010). The key event was the 1971 general strike, which gave a considerable blow to the Administration and economy of SWA, and “led to the mass deportation of workers to the north, and the shutdown of most mines and large industrial enterprises” (Wallace, 2011:273) but also became a defining moment for the labour movement in Namibia (Jauch, 2018). Already in the 1970s, Namibia’s inequality was “extreme” (Wallace 2011:301); Wallace explains how “in the mid-1970s the top 10 per cent of the population received 52.8 per cent of the total income, while the bottom 40 per cent had to make do with 5.9 per cent” (2011:301). She furthermore notes how, in 1978, official unemployment stood at about 25% while in reality it was closer to 50% “if those under-employed in the subsistence agriculture sector are included” (2011:301). These conditions of unemployment would also slowly reflect in the situation in urban areas, which eventually started to see informal settlements grow within and beyond their boundaries.

In 1966 the UN General Assembly ended South Africa’s mandate over SWA; which was approved by the Security Council in 1969 in its Resolution 264. In 1977 an Administrator-General was appointed and “charged with preparing the territory for independence” (Pickard-Cambridge, 1988:23). This

Administrator ended many aspects regulating the movement of Africans in the territory, “abolishing passes, permits to stay in residential areas and the forced removal of unemployed Africans from the towns” (Wallace, 2011:287). At this point, an exodus from rural to urban areas started, creating the first conditions of informal settlements. In recognition of this, and to promote homeownership among ‘black populations’, the Namibia Building Investment Corporation (NBIC) was created. Up to this point, there was no general housing policy, as homeownership in urban areas was reserved for whites. NBIC attempted to create low-cost solutions for ‘blacks’ in urban areas, and while the institutions was competent, it faced resistance from local authorities who didn’t want ‘low income’ housing developments in their constituency (NBIC, 1990), as well as from beneficiaries, who perceived their products as inferior and expensive. In 1978, the UN Security Council took Resolution 435, which was agreed by South Africa and which paved the way for Namibia’s independence. The United Nations was tasked with supervising the transition to independence. The liberation movement who led the struggle towards independence, the South West Africa Political Organisation (SWAPO) would eventually agree on principles “which determined that the constitution of independent Namibia would be a liberal democracy –an indication that it was less committed to socialism than many of its statements suggested” (Wallace 2011:292). This would eventually reflect in the socio-spatial policies that would be implemented after independence, which were less redistributive and communal in nature, and more anchored in the paradigm of individual private property and preserving privileges. In 1988, negotiations for independence started, which culminated with Namibia attaining independence in 1990.

7. Namibia’s first decades

*“liberation struggle is a revolution that [...] does not finish at the moment when the national flag is raised and the national anthem played”
(Cabral, 1966)*

At the moment of independence, some observe that the “whole Namibian socio-spatial system functioned like an outpost (the ‘fifth province’) of South African capitalism” (Dubresson and Graefe 2001:53). One of the key changes was the geographical reorganisation of the territory into regions that had a socioeconomic logic, moving away from the racial logic of the past (Töttemeyer, 1992). The restructuring of local government was also a significant step in the reconfiguration of urban governance, as most functions were hitherto concentrated in central government (Simon, 1996). Decentralisation policy was only established in 1997; and the achievements of such efforts are after a decade are still not conclusive (Republic of Namibia, 2008). Another key event was the ‘Land Conference’ that was convened in 1991 to address the rural land question and, to a very limited extent, matters pertaining to urban land. This moment seemed to exemplify the limited transformation that independence brought in the socio-spatial realm; something that has been discussed by various writers in different fields (Jauch, Edwards, & Cupido, 2009; Melber, 2003, 2007). The documentation of the event reveals a more moderate and technocratic approach to the land question (NEPRU, 1992). At this junction, the historical land dispossession was not challenged, and a market-based policy of ‘willing buyer, willing seller’ was instituted. The limitations of this first Land Conference can be exemplified by the organisation of a People’s Land Conference which took place only two years later, in which both the original shortcomings of the 1991 conference and the lack of progress were highlighted from a bottom-up perspective (NGO-WCLR, 1994). Today, the land reform programme is largely considered a failure; and while considerable resources have been allocated to it, the outcome has not only been a limited amount of land redistribution (Werner, 2015). However, a key factor tarnishing the land reform programme is that the redistribution is often redistributed to already wealthy members of the new political and economic elite of the country (Sibeene, 2011; The Namibian, 2016, 2018), which can be considered a form of “elite land grabbing” (Odendaal, 2011).

Also, just after independence, a National Housing Seminar was convened by the then Minister of Local Government and Housing. Already then, frictions between inhabitants, local authorities, and NBIC were revealed (Andima, 1992). This may be attributed to collection of payments but also to the social alienation between inhabitants and the kind of housing provided and the processes and institutions that produced them. Regarding this latter point, and observing the kind of housing produced by NBIC, Muller argues that “[h]ouse types were designed for the socio-economic needs of a nuclear family living an euro-american lifestyle” (Muller 1993:213). This took place despite the reality on the ground, where there was “not a nuclear or elementary family for which modern houses are usually designed” (Muller 1993:226). At that time, the need for a housing policy to guide efforts of the various stakeholders was highlighted. Already in 1992, some observed that “[a]ccess to adequate housing is perhaps one of the most controversial and emotional urban issues in Windhoek today” (Frayne, 1992:126). Reading through reports on both land and housing events, one can note the hopes that after independence that the inequities and inefficiencies of the past would be overcome. The patience that these ‘controversial’ and ‘emotional’ issues awaken may have been quelled in these first decades through these hopes.



Figure 9 Commercial farmland in central Namibia

The Land Conference and housing workshops were followed by the development of national policies that were intended to guide socio-spatial development in the country. The National Land Policy that was developed in 1998 is considerably biased towards freehold title. With respects to urban land, it states that such tenure form is “the only form of secure, registerable title available in urban areas which affords the holder ownership that is transferable, inheritable and provides collateral against a loan” (Republic of Namibia, 1998:7). While disregarding other forms of secure tenure as well as those that can be transferable or inheritable, this enhances the overt focus on private property introduced by the colonial German regime a hundred years back. The policy is at times progressive by prescribing that informal housing structures should be “upgraded rather than removed” (Republic of Namibia, 1998:9), providing for ‘community participation’ in land development, and providing for expropriation for under-utilised or abandoned urban land.

On the housing front, a National Housing Policy was developed by a committee led by NBIC and approved by Cabinet in 1991 (Republic of Namibia 1996). The policy embodied a neoliberal spirit that proposed the role of government as “a facilitator rather than a direct provider and administrator of housing” (Republic of Namibia 1990:17). Without referring to it, the policy was in line with the tenets that were synthesised in the World Bank report ‘Housing: Enabling Markets to Grow’ (1993) and the First United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I). It substantiated this approach based on the intention to avoid developing “a syndrome of paternalism or dependence on state assistance”; it also made clear that the “primary responsibility for providing family housing rests clearly with the head of each household” (Republic of Namibia 1990:17). Although it recognised the informal sector and the grassroots in the housing process it entailed, it was considerably concerned with the impact that housing had on the economy and made clear that the Namibian government would favour homeownership as the main objective of supporting housing. It did, however, aim to put housing as a matter of national importance. At that time, NBIC changed leadership and it adopted the name National Housing Enterprise (NHE); the housing policy refers to NHE as the “executing agent of the central government” (Republic of Namibia 1990:38) with regards to state-supported housing. At this point, local authorities (LAs) were tasked mainly with the provision of serviced land, while low-income households were basically relegated to the task of saving money towards housing.

The policy was reviewed in 2009, but the underlying approach didn’t change; if any it was made more explicit: “Housing: An Agent for Namibia’s Economic Growth”, reads the introductory section of Chapter 5 (Republic of Namibia, 2009). At the same time, it was recognised that about 70% of the population was unable to access a commercial home loan (Republic of Namibia 2009:4); a figure that today stands at about 92%, if one considers recent figures from the Namibia Labour Force Survey (Chiripanhura, 2018). This is arguably a more challenging situation than that which was diagnosed in the first housing policy, where 60% of the urban population couldn’t “afford to pay ANYTHING towards housing” (Republic of Namibia 1990:2, capitals in the original). The same document estimated that about 4,7% of the ‘Gross National Product’ was spent on housing in 1988, which was in line with the recommendations of multi-lateral organisations at that time (i.e. 5%) (1990:5). Furthermore, private investment in housing was mainly focused on Windhoek; a 1994 estimate calculated that about 70% of investments in housing at that time had happened in the capital, mainly due to the lack of serviced land elsewhere (Namoya-Jacobs and Hokans 1994:7). The revised housing policy did make a significant departure from previous documents by recognising the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN), which had emerged in the late 1980s, and the Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG) among the ‘role players’ in the housing strategy, as well as the inclusion of ‘people’s housing processes’ among the methods of delivery.

During the 1990s, there were also several housing interventions supported by foreign donors in Namibia. In the north, the Oshakati Human Settlements Programme (OHSIP) aimed at improving living conditions through participatory processes that were thought to instil democracy at the local level. The project was supported by the Danish and although it had some success, the project developed frictions with the local authority due to perception of competing authority created by the self-organised groups formed by the project (MRLGH & Ibis, 1996) and today a lot of the infrastructure that was produced is in ruins. In Windhoek, the Germans supported a comprehensive housing programme known as ‘Oshatotwa’, which had different sub-components targeting different gradients of the lower income groups (SUM-McNamara Consultants, 1993). The project was implemented through NHE with two partner consultants, one local and one from Germany. The programme developed several housing units, but it also faced some difficulties in managing social situations emerging during allocation and with repayments for the houses. The French also supported a housing intervention in Windhoek, as well as research on the then-new phenomenon of informal settlements (Peyroux & Graefe, 1995). Hopes were also that Namibia would develop cooperatives, particularly to tackle the housing question. While foreign specialists came to explore this possibility (Namoya & Hokans, 1994), the concept had only limited success; mostly outside the realm of housing. These interventions eventually ceased, and a review of their success in terms of the built environment produced as well as the social impact is outstanding.



Figure 10 Infrastructure built through OHSIP in Oshakati: as illustrated in report (MRLGH & Ibis, 1996) (left), and today (right).

The growth and consolidation of the SDFN membership and activities and the emergence of the government-led Build Together programme can be considered some of the major changes in post-independence socio-spatial production. This is not only related to access to land, but also in terms of enumerations, exchanges, and partnership building (SDFN & NHAG 2014:2). The Community Land Information Programme (CLIP) was the first nation-wide enumeration effort of informal settlements in Namibia and, according to Mabakeng (2015), also from all the country affiliates of the Shack Dwellers International (SDI)³, an international coalition of groups of inhabitants of informal settlements. While this process is on-going, currently SDFN and NHAG have signed MoUs with local government and also with universities to expand their activities through wider co-production (ILMI, 2017). In recent years, ‘planning studios’ have challenged top-down planning, where “[p]ower is placed in the hands of the local authority” which “side-lines community inputs” (SDFN & NHAG 2014:26).

³ These member countries include Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ghana, India, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (SDI, 2015).



Figure 11 Tsumeb. Meeting with inhabitants of informal settlements, the municipality, NHAG, SDFN members, NUST lecturers and students. Photograph: Martin Namupala.

On the other hand, the Build Together programme was developed around the time of independence with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The programme is a kind of state-led micro-finance system supporting home building and improvements. Theoretically, the programme has nine components: leasing a plot of land, adding services to a plot of land, support to savings groups, collective obtaining of a partly-serviced plot of land through Community Land Trusts, acquisition of a plot of land, obtaining a serviced plot of land, building materials, acquire completed houses, and building of collective facilities (Ministry of Urban and Rural Development, 2007). However, only loans for a few of these objectives have been made available to beneficiaries. The programme was administered by central government, but was later ‘decentralised’ to LAs in 2007. This, however, has been observed to yield many irregularities due to the limited administrative capacities in LAs at the time of decentralisation (Simion, 2007). Through my work in other projects, some stakeholders have mentioned that the programme was ‘decentralised’ without provision for flanking support for LAs to deal with this additional bundle of administrative tasks. However, perhaps a more systemic shortcoming, is the threshold for eligibility and the need to demonstrate some capacity of repayment. While the programme aims to benefit those earning a monthly salary up to N\$3,000, already in the 1990s, a report by the Urban Trust of Namibia (UTN, n.d.) quoted in Peyroux observed that the programme was “not reaching the lowest-income residents”, mainly benefiting those with formal employment (Peyroux 2001:197). However, it is this programme, sometimes in combination with the efforts of SDFN/NHAG, that has the widest reach still today.

Namibia participated in the Habitat II conference in 1996 and the report that the Ministry prepared for that occasion is a portrait of the state of the country’s urban and housing development in the 1990s (Republic of Namibia, 1996). Subsequently, Habitat meetings were convened where local government, professionals, grassroots organisations and government would come to discuss their progress in their practice. While most of those who have participated have spoken to me highly of these meetings, eventually they stopped taking place. In 2004, the Habitat Research and Development Centre was established to promote increased exploration on ‘habitat’-related matters; however, some observe that

the aim to mainstream sustainability in the built environment has not been realised (Sweeney-Bindels 2011:27). With support from UN-Habitat and efforts of local and foreign planners, a plan towards Namibia's 'urbanisation strategy' was drafted (Ottolenghi & Watson, 2011); however, it is also unclear what the impact of this document was, as currently no concrete steps are being taken to draft an official national urban policy or plan. Matters of urbanisation do not only deal with urban land and housing, but also of infrastructure; Namibia's main roads are part of a series of networks: the Trans-Caprivi Highway, connecting with Botswana, Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe; and Trans-Kalahari Highway, which connects Namibia through Botswana to South Africa. However, from the dams, mines, and large real estate developments, the recent construction of the Husab uranium mine project in Erongo stands as the single largest investment in Namibia (IJG Research, 2013). Its impact is not only in economic terms, but also in the restructuring that such large-scale developments have in terms of labour and, consequently, in terms of living environments. Information and communications technologies deserve also a considerable mention, as today it can be said that every inhabitant of Namibia has some form of cellular phone subscription (CTO, n.d.). And although still only 13% of the population is identified as 'internet user', the current minister has made his personal goal for to make Namibia fully covered with internet access (MICT, 2017). In this respect, documents such as the National Development Plans or the Regional Land Use Plans being currently undertaken speak more broadly to a wider definition of urbanisation beyond the limits of the boundaries of proclaimed 'urban areas'.

There are arguably more continuities than breaks with the past in the way that spatial production in Namibia unfolds since independence. One of the key colonial legacies of Namibia is an economy of extractive nature, one that "essentially produces what it does not use and consumes what it does not produce" (Rogerson, 1990:31). Another more practical matter is noted by Wallace, who observes that "[t]he new government took over the existing civil service, adding posts for its own people rather than dismissing those already employed", something that "helped to create Namibia's current disproportionately large bureaucracy" (2011:309-310). In the 2016/17 national budget, about 30% of national expenditure was used to cover government's personnel costs, which raised concerns among economic analysts (Brown, 2017). Legislation has not fundamentally changed, and although it is now widely recognised, even in mainstream fora, that a 'free market' logic does not lead to 'good cities'⁴, the lack of government funds is currently pushing socio-spatial development to the realm of the private sector. Even after recently passed public-private partnership (PPP) legislation⁵ outlines clearly the specific cases in which such partnerships are recommended (i.e. those where there's a deficit between supply and *effective* demand), the 'PPP' phrase is currently a buzzword when discussing public projects, particularly in the realm of land and housing delivery. The changes outlined in this section, appear more as reactive than as conscious strategies for future socio-spatial development.

⁴ An example of this can be when the former executive director of UN-Habitat stated that "the market doesn't produce good cities" (UN-Habitat, 2014)

⁵ Public Private Partnership Act 4 of 2017



Figure 12 Windhoek. Informal settlements in the foreground and the city centre in the background.

Segregation continues to be a significant legacy from apartheid times. At the time of independence, Windhoek's valuation roll revealed that houses in the upmarket and formerly white areas of Eros or Olympia were worth three times that those in Katutura (Asiama 1993:15). In the early 1980s, about 36% of the houses in Windhoek were owned by the state (Pickard-Cambridge 1988:24), which is something that suggests a the potential opportunity that public institutions had in easing or enhancing urban segregation at these early stages; however, most of these houses were sold and are now 'traded' in the private market. Residential differentiation had clear racial connotations; a multidisciplinary team in the 1980s observed that: "[t]ypes of houses vary from a high standard (especially among whites and other high-income earners), to average (especially among the Coloureds and Basters), to uniform mass schemes (especially among the Black people)" (Stals 1987:16). Around the time of independence, desegregation in Windhoek, in terms of 'blacks' moving into areas reserved for 'whites', was scantily described as "slight but noticeable" (Pickard-Cambridge 1988:1). This preserved inequality is documented not only in terms of figures, but also described through lived experience. Some describe Windhoek as having "a First World character" and at the same time note that the development taking place "does not yet take into account the needs of the majority of inhabitants of the larger urban complex" (Stals 1987:26-27). Others observe that the circumstances at independence created some moments of "spontaneous de-segregation" which, through state-supported programmes, real estate dynamics, and legislation, "was followed by an organized re-segregation [...] on a larger scale than before" (Peyroux 2001:205). As it was mentioned at the beginning, Namibia, along with South Africa, tops the list in the inequality index measured through the GINI coefficient and as this brief history has laid out, this condition has been an on-going and long-standing process in the making; and one that has very much been unfolding in and through the socio-spatial milieu.

8. Recent developments

Namibia can be said to be in an urban land and housing crisis. On the one hand, property prices in Namibia have increased dramatically; just between 2012 and 2016, housing prices have more than doubled (FNB Namibia, 2016). Considering that such price increases have not been met with a concomitant growth in employment or wages, the alarms of a possible 'housing bubble' were raised, which attracted multi-national organisations to assess the matter in question (IMF, 2015). This confirmed that house prices were 'over valued' (IMF, 2016), and partly due to a recent government slowdown in spending, the sharp rise in house prices has eased. Partly to address the housing dilemma, former President Hifikepunye Pohamba, just in his final years of mandate in 2013, announced the Mass Housing Development Programme (MHDP). In scale, it was conceived as the single largest development intervention in independent Namibia, aiming to build 180,000 housing units by 2030 at an estimated cost of N\$45bn (Republic of Namibia, 2013). To put this in perspective, this would've required building about 14,000 housing units per year, while the state-owned housing parastatal (NHE), who was implementing the project, developed an historical average of about 400 units every year (NHE, 2014). The envisioned amount was also far beyond any budgeted projects nationally at the time that the project was announced. While the project encompassed various kind of housing-related interventions, including support for 'people's housing processes', only credit-linked houses were developed in the first phase. However, after a number of difficulties, the project was suspended in 2013. Two years later, the review of the project was commissioned to NUST, a project in which I have taken part and that continues to be under discussion.



Figure 13 Photo of an uninhabited house developed through the MHDP in Walvis Bay

Despite these efforts, housing remains unattainable for most, and it is in this context that in 2014, a number of SWAPO Youth League members symbolically occupied a plot of land in the wealthy area of Kleine Kuppe in Windhoek. This unprecedented move, along with the threat of urban land invasions nationwide, placed the young leaders in a politically powerful position. The President invited the young activists for a dialogue, and it was shortly after such meeting in 2015 that the Mass Urban Land Servicing Programme was announced. This programme aims to service 200,000 plots of land nationwide, and a steering and technical committee were appointed including the young activists. However, they subsequently pulled out of these committees, and the most recent development regarding this programme is not clear. The movement, which became known as Affirmative Repositioning, continues to rally for similar matters in the socio-spatial field, such as a new rent legislation as well as supporting those affected by evictions. Another mobilisation led by an ousted Deputy Minister, the Landless People's Movement, has also emerged giving voice to inhabitants mainly from the southern regions of the country on land-related matters. These two social movements, along with the historical efforts of the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia, can be considered the bottom-up component among the stakeholders in the contemporary production of space.

Communal areas are also being shaped by the rapid changes in urbanisation and could be considered themselves be included within it. The growth of northern towns is also taking place at a rapid pace, and active informal land markets in communal areas have also been documented in these regions (Mendelsohn & Nghitevelekwa, 2017). Considering that still most of the population lives in the northern regions, this remains a crucial space where spatial development can be expected to continue at a fast pace. Illegal fencing of communal area, largely by elite groups with income from urban areas, is by now widespread (Werner, 2011). Experiments on community-based resource management have been implemented in Namibia, and although success has been documented, there are several obstacles that require attention, particularly the uneven beneficiation through these schemes (Wang, Humavindu, Bandyopadhyay, & Shyamsundar, 2004). Recently, there have been increasing discussion on matters pertaining 'ancestral land', partly triggered by the announcement that the Second Land Conference will address the issue and potentially resolve on the stance that government will take on this matter (Republic of Namibia, 2018). Matters pertaining all the previous may also in principle be steered in a different direction after this event.



Figure 14 Traditional households in the Oshana region developing through new ways of building.

Although Namibia's defining characteristic of its urban areas has been historically that of segregation, today it can be said that it is the reality of informal settlements for most of its inhabitants. There has been some innovation in this respect at the local government level; Otjiwarongo has developed a way to guide the development of informal settlements and Rehoboth has also tested the idea of 'planned layouts' (Esterhuizen, 2016). A recently-established non-governmental organisation, Development Workshop, is testing ways to develop serviced land that is ready for later upgrading at a cost affordable to a large portion of the population (Weber & Mendelsohn, 2017). A typology that is also reproducing quickly and becoming another defining characteristic of Namibia's socio-spatial development are gated communities and 'lifestyle estates'. While the former refer to secured housing estates subdivided through sectional title schemes, the latter refer to large-scale residential neighbourhoods developed often in the outskirts of urban areas promising security and a kind of 'affordable luxury' (Morange, Folio, Peyroux, & Vivet, 2012). The expansion and consolidation of urban areas into metropolitan regions may be also a new way of understanding Namibia's urban areas in the coming decades.



Figure 15 Gated communities in Kleine Kuppe, Windhoek

Finally, Namibia took part in the Habitat III conference in 2016, and committed to the ‘New Urban Agenda’. However, the action plan to undertake this in Namibia hasn’t been planned yet. The document prepared for this event is also a contemporary portrait of a situation of the country today in terms of socio-spatial matters (Republic of Namibia, 2015). Housing and land issues also have a prominent role in the national programmes developed by the Geingob administration, notably the Harambee Prosperity Plan as well as the Fifth National Development Plan. Recently, the Urban and Regional Planning Bill legislation was passed towards the end of 2017, aiming to streamline the statutory process of ‘land delivery’ (Genis, 2015); it also entails a ‘spatial development framework’ that should provide direction on national spatial planning. Similarly, the Flexible Land Tenure Act was passed in 2012, which aims to create more accessible forms of land tenure; the regulations for this were gazetted during the time of writing this paper, which will enable the rolling out of pilots in Windhoek, Gobabis and Oshakati. Furthermore, the jurisdiction of this field remains fragmented between government offices, ministries and agencies, which further complicates coordination. However, the pressure from the newly emerged social movements, the increased recognition of the efforts of organised inhabitants around housing matters, and an increasing consciousness of the importance of the right to urban life, will continue to keep socio-spatial issues as a crucial field in Namibia’s agenda.

9. Conclusion

The paper I’ve drafted outlines a sequence of events in Namibia’s socio-spatial production. I have suggested in the introduction that this trajectory can be said to have progressively (and consistently) turned Namibia’s socio-spatial production into an engine of reproduction of inequality. From the early historical dispossession during colonial times, until the more contemporary displacement of low-income inhabitants to peripheries in urban areas. Today, the actual crisis seems not necessarily to rely on the existence of informal settlements but on how the situation is being dealt with and where state support is placed. Attempts to benefit formal planning and land delivery mechanisms to the needs of the lowest incomes have proved insufficient and the impasse created by the actual socioeconomic reality of the many vis-à-vis the nature of public interventions result in the kind of deeply unequal and segregated urban experience. The plan that is yet to break or counter the overall progression of events outlined in this paper remains a pressing and outstanding task.

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