

**WestminsterResearch**

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch>

**Decolonising the Informal: Discourse, Everyday Life, and the  
Politics of Urbanisation in Windhoek, Namibia**

**Luehl, P.**

This is an electronic version of a PhD thesis awarded by the University of Westminster.

© Mr Phillip Luehl, 2020.

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.

# DECOLONISING THE INFORMAL

Discourse, Everyday Life, and the Politics of  
Urbanisation in Windhoek, Namibia

Phillip Lühl

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment for the requirements  
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Westminster  
August 2020

To my father Hans-Peter – who passed the baton seemingly too soon – with gratitude  
and to my son Yona – who picked it up in time – with love

## ABSTRACT

In contemporary post-colonial Namibia, the concept of *informality* is widely applied with reference to the ‘informal economy’ and ‘informal settlements’, which are rapidly overtaking formal urbanisation processes inherited from colonial times. All the while, conventional professional spatial practices remain structurally elitist and seem ineffectual in settings of ‘urban informality’, which largely overlap with the lived experience of the black urban poor. Urban theory continues to reinforce a binary conceptualisation in which ‘informality’ remains framed as the non-formal, emphasising what it is *not* rather than providing a conceptual framework for what it *is*. This study is threefold: firstly, I investigate understandings of ‘informality’ through in-depth interviews with professional spatial practitioners in the governmental, NGO and private sectors. Secondly, I reconceptualise ‘informality’ as everyday spatial practice based on participant observation at the “Herero Mall” ‘informal market’ in Windhoek. Thirdly, I give account of my involvement in a co-productive spatial intervention at the Herero Mall with local traders. Through these three approaches, I found that the temporal overlap between Namibia’s decolonisation (from the late 1970s until Independence in 1990) and the mainstreaming of the concept of ‘informality’ in urban theory provided the conditions of emergence for ‘informality’ to become a discursive practice. By discursively constructing the world of the ‘informal’ as the binary opposite of what is considered formal and legitimate, its actors and practices are delegitimised and thus continue to be structurally excluded. At the same time, I argue that the ‘informal’ everyday spatial and economic practices of the subaltern is a form of resistance to formal enclosure, weaving together fragments of colonial urbanisation into a decolonising urbanism. I argue that this form of alter-urbanisation provides a point of departure for an alternative professional spatial practice, the outlines of which I trace through reflecting on a co-productive spatial intervention at the Herero Mall.



## **CONTENT**

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xi
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	xii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xiii
DEFINITIONS	xv
ACRONYMS	xvi
CHAPTER 1    SITUATING THE THESIS	1
1.1    How did I get here?	3
1.2    Research objectives	4
1.3    Research questions	5
1.4    Theoretical framework	6
1.5    Methodological strategy	12
1.6    Research design	18
1.7    Methods of data collection	19
1.7.1    Participant observation	19
1.7.2    Semi-structured interviews and spatial mapping with traders	20
1.7.3    In-depth interviews with spatial practitioners	22
1.7.4    Co-production of a spatial intervention at the site	24
1.8    Methods of data analysis	25
1.9    Ethical Considerations	27
1.10    Structure of the dissertation	28
CHAPTER 2    LITERATURE REVIEW	31
2.1    The problematique of informality	31
2.1.1    Informal sector: a contentious label	31
2.1.2    Informalisation: from sector to process	34
2.1.3    Urban informality: from exclusion to inclusion and back	38

2.1.4	Informality: an ideological representation	44
2.1.5	Conclusion: a binary that isn't	47
2.2	<b>Positioning spatial co-production</b>	<b>48</b>
2.2.1	Architecture, participation and the false notion of consensus	48
2.2.2	Spatial practice: between normativity and negotiation of difference	52
2.2.3	Participation versus the proper political	58
2.2.4	Conclusion: exposing urban politics	61
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDY</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>THE PRODUCTION OF INEQUALITY</b>	<b>70</b>
4.1	Namibia – geographies of settler colonialism	71
4.2	Windhoek – a diagram of an apartheid city	76
4.3	Decolonisation and the re-production of inequality	85
4.4	Policy response to the emerging 'informal economy'	92
4.5	Characteristics of professional spatial practice	101
4.6	Conclusion: the conditions of emergence of the 'informal' discourse	105
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>'INFORMALITY' AS DISCURSIVE PRACTICE</b>	<b>108</b>
5.1	Locating the discourse of 'informality'	113
5.1.1	The formal as normative	113
5.1.2	'Informality' as non-conformity	119
5.1.3	The 'informal' as illegitimate	124
5.1.4	Conclusion: the 'informal' as mechanism of othering	130
5.2	<b>Spatial technologies of power</b>	<b>131</b>
5.2.1	Formalisation as 'development'	132
5.2.2	Planning as mirage	141
5.2.3	Stabilising inequality	148
5.2.4	Conclusion: perpetuating colonial spatial technologies of power	151
5.3	<b>'Informality' as resistance</b>	<b>152</b>
5.4	Conclusion: the production of informality as apparatus of exclusion	156
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<b>EVERYDAY LIFE AT THE HERERO MALL</b>	<b>159</b>
6.1	<b>Retro-fitting the Township</b>	<b>161</b>
6.1.2	Occupy, appropriate, defend	163
6.1.3	Build, transform, keep it light	173
6.1.4	Live, work, socialise	177

6.1.5	The agencies of cars	183
6.1.6	Withholding services	186
6.1.7	Conclusion: presence as act	195
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Popular urban economies</b>	<b>196</b>
6.2.1	The shebeen as the beginning of business	197
6.2.2	The car wash as anchor	207
6.2.3	Food as marker of difference	212
6.2.4	As long as the hair is done well...	217
6.2.5	The Herero Mall as one-stop shop	224
6.2.6	Conclusion: making the city work	229
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Reflections on being a white Namibian at the mall</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>6.4</b>	<b>Conclusion: the Herero Mall as alter-urbanisation</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	<b>REFLECTIONS ON SPATIAL CO-PRODUCTION</b>	<b>242</b>
7.1	A contested participatory process	243
7.2	The necessity and limitations of mediation	257
7.3	Building a meeting space for the traders' committee	261
7.4	Conclusion: building as method	272
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	<b>CONCLUSION: DECOLONISING INFORMALITY</b>	<b>275</b>
<b>8.1</b>	<b>Answers to research questions</b>	<b>276</b>
8.1.1	The new 'other': how to delegitimise the majority in the post-colony	276
8.1.2	Asserting the right to the city: learning from Herero Mall	278
8.1.3	Prospects of a critical spatial practice	280
<b>8.2</b>	<b>Reflection on theory and methods</b>	<b>281</b>
<b>8.3</b>	<b>Contribution of the thesis</b>	<b>282</b>
8.3.1	Exposing the discourse of 'informality' as mechanism of exclusion	282
8.3.2	Re-framing everyday urban practices as decolonising the apartheid city	283
8.3.3	Re-orienting urban imaginaries through practice-based research	284
8.3.4	Decolonising 'informality'	285
<b>8.4</b>	<b>Relevance and potential for generating impact</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>8.5</b>	<b>Limitations of the study</b>	<b>287</b>
<b>8.6</b>	<b>Opportunities for future research</b>	<b>289</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>		<b>290</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>		<b>301</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1:	Diagram of the methodological strategy of this research, which is also reflected in the structure of the four major chapters of the dissertation (Chapters 4-7). ....	17
Figure 2:	WIEGO model for informal employment. Redrawn by author after Chen (2012: 9) ....	36
Figure 3:	Map of the “tribal” division of Katutura by the apartheid administration, 1976, showing areas for Ovaherero residents in orange. The site, marked with a X, was allocated for the purposes of a “park” and “pre-primary school”. Source: National Archives of Namibia. ....	64
Figure 4:	The Herero Mall (A) along Clemence Kapuuu Street within the “Herero Location” neighbourhood in Katutura. Institutions neighbouring the mall: (B) Commando Hall, (C) Oruuano Church and (D) Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA) Headquarters. Notice the encampment in the OTA yard. Source: Google Earth.....	65
Figure 5:	Patrons at a shebeen at the Herero Mall on a Saturday afternoon. Photo by author. .	69
Figure 6:	Protest march along Clemence Kapuuu Street by Ovaherero groups demanding reparations from Germany for the 1904-07 genocide, February 2016. Photo by Guillermo Delgado. ....	72
Figure 7:	Map of 10 ethnic Homelands after implementation of the recommendations of the Odendaal Commission in the 1960s. Source: National Archives of Namibia. ....	75
Figure 8:	The Old Location in 1954 after its re-organisation into a grid. Clearly visible is the central cluster of public amenities including the social halls, as well as the link to the white part of the city in the top right corner. Source Surveyor General .....	77
Figure 9:	Dance event at the Sybil Bowker Hall at the Old Location, 1950s. Source: National Archives of Namibia .....	78
Figure 10:	View of central Windhoek with the Old Location in the background, ca. 1932. Source: National Archives of Namibia .....	81
Figure 11:	Commuters queuing for the bus in central Windhoek to take them back to Katutura after work, 1970s. Source: National Archives of Namibia .....	81
Figure 12:	Map of Windhoek in the 1970s, indicating the forced relocations of black and coloured inhabitants to the racially segregated townships of Katutura and Khomasdal respectively. The townships were separated from white residential areas by means of a large highway (dotted red), industrial areas (grey) and open buffer zones. Also note the names of white suburbs such as Academia, Olympia, and Pioneers Park. Source: drawn by author based on historical maps (Lühl, 2012a).....	82

Figure 13:	A family in front of their house in the Old Location preparing to be relocated to Katutura, 1960s. Source: National Archives of Namibia.....	84
Figure 14:	New municipal houses for black residents in Katutura, 1960s. Source: National Archives of Namibia .....	84
Figure 15:	Otjomuise informal settlement in Windhoek, 2012. Photo by Guillermo Delgado .....	88
Figure 16:	Map of Windhoek in 2010 showing informal expansion on the fringes of the former townships with the general structure of segregated development largely intact. Source: drawn by author based on recent cadastral maps (Lühl, 2012a) .....	89
Figure 17:	Sketch of architectural interventions along Eveline Street, Katutura. Source: (Charman et al., 2017, permission for reproduction granted by the authors). This visual also appears in the new publication Township economy: people, spaces and practices by Charman et al. (2020).....	100
Figure 18:	1970s South West Africa postage stamps presenting the image of a modern state. Top: J G Strijdom International Airport, Windhoek, 1977 (Pager, 1977); below left: Katutura State Hospital, 1976 (Pager, 1976b); below right: Augustineum College, 1976 (Pager, 1976a). Note that both the hospital and the college were reserved for 'natives' .....	110
Figure 19:	The mall seen from Clemence Kapuuu Street with the roofs of the OTA Headquarters, Oruuano Church and Commando Hall in the background. The image depicts a protest march by Ovaherero groups in the context of the genocide negotiations between the Namibian and the German governments, February 2016. Photo by Guillermo Delgado .....	164
Figure 20:	The site in 2001 before it was occupied with the light pole (A) and electricity substation (B) already in place. Image source: City of Windhoek.....	166
Figure 21:	The site in 2005 when it was first occupied. Amongst the first businesses were two car washes (A) and (B). Image source: City of Windhoek. ....	166
Figure 22:	The Herero Mall in 2011 with vehicle thoroughfares (A) and (B) indicated. Image source: City of Windhoek. ....	167
Figure 23:	The Herero Mall in 2019 indicating clusters of buildings. Map drawn by author (for more detail see A1 fold-out map in Appendices, p 287). ....	167
Figure 24:	The north-eastern edge of the site remains somewhat secluded since the fence (right) has been erected. Note the storm water ditch in the foreground, and the permanently closed vehicular gate to the right. ....	170
Figure 25:	Omutendereti Tree with wood carvers. ....	171
Figure 26:	Mukupua's shebeen. ....	174

Figure 27:	Kaumbe's shebeen. ....	175
Figure 28:	The Herero Mall seen from the top of the adjacent container tower: two recently installed prefabricated municipal toilets are visible in the foreground.....	177
Figure 29:	Food vendor Muarii cooking in front of Uzuva's shebeen, Tjikaa's blue veranda in the background. ....	178
Figure 30:	Different versions of the shebeen typology showing the permeability and flexibility of spaces that open up to several sides (RF = fridge, FR = freezer).....	179
Figure 31:	A typical enclosed bar with jukebox (left) and flexible social space (right) with large openings to the outside. ....	182
Figure 32:	3D visualisation of the proposed self-built toilets that was part of the proposal submitted to the municipality in 2016.....	189
Figure 33:	Installation of the toilets by the external contractor (left) and interior of newly installed cubicle with broken fittings (right). ....	190
Figure 34:	Two of the refabricated toilets after installation.....	190
Figure 35:	Sketch of the history of electricity distribution at the mall developed in collaboration with traders. Red indicates the current distribution network from five electricity meters that are numbered according to the year of installation (green). Blue indicates the need for new meters that was discussed with traders. ....	193
Figure 36:	Electricity meters and distribution boards inside the space that traders constructed in 2009.....	193
Figure 37:	Map of the various businesses at the mall that are mentioned in this section: (A) Uzuva's shebeen; (B) Harry's shebeen; (C) Sukona's shebeen; (D) Tjikaa's restaurant; (E) Nduezu Car Wash; (F) Muarii's food; (G) Muarii's shebeen; (H) Kovii's food cart / Uajenenisa's veranda; (I) temporary food vendors; (J) Kaumbe's shebeen; (K) Ndeshi's salon; (L) Ndapandula's salon. ....	200
Figure 38:	Socio-spatial diagram of car wash and shebeen.....	211
Figure 39:	Socio-spatial diagram of female hair salon .....	223
Figure 40:	Map of functions established through a participatory workshop with traders in 2015. Source: Lühl, Delgado and Kozonguizi, 2016, p6. ....	228
Figure 41:	Learning from Herero Mall: spatial diagram of popular economies and their relations to wider economic and spatial scales. ....	231
Figure 42:	Timeline of my professional engagement at the Herero Mall. ....	246

Figure 43:	Workshop 2, November 2015: defining the existing situation. Photo by Nangula Shilongo.....	248
Figure 44:	Workshop 2, November 2015: developing an in-situ concept model for the future market indicating the potential for densification of economic and social activities. Photo by Nangula Shilongo. ....	251
Figure 45:	Final model of concept design for new market. Source: Lühl, Delgado and Kozonguizi, 2016 (design and model by author). ....	251
Figure 46:	Final concept design: floor plans with uses indicated. Source: Lühl, Delgado and Kozonguizi, 2016 (drawing by Guillermo Delgado). ....	252
Figure 47:	Proposed organisational structure of the future market. Source: Lühl, Delgado, and Kozonguizi, 2016 (drawing by author). ....	254
Figure 48:	Sketch plan of the office and meeting hall used for discussions with the traders' committee. Office (A), committee meeting hall (B), forecourt (C), and billboard (D). ....	265
Figure 49:	Perspective sketch of the office and meeting space seen from the mall (left) and seen from Clemence Kapuuu Street (right). ....	265
Figure 50:	The electricity distribution box during the setting-out of works.....	267
Figure 51:	Prefabrication of the billboard steel frame on the concrete surface of the disused car wash (left). The concrete mix recipe written with chalk on the door of the neighbouring building (right). ....	268
Figure 52:	Prefabricated wall panels of the office during assembly with billboard frame already in place (left), and construction of the frame of the meeting hall (right). ....	268
Figure 53:	The frame of the meeting hall partly clad on the street facade.....	269
Figure 54:	The frame of the billboard seen from one of the entrances to the mall.....	269
Figure 55:	The interior of the meeting hall with an opening towards the street (left) and the door into the office (right). ....	270
Figure 56:	The concrete floor of the meeting hall being cast and finished. ....	270
Figure 57:	The HMTTC office and meeting hall with the yet to be clad billboard seen from Clemence Kapuuu Street.....	271
Figure 58:	Diagram of my involvement at the Herero Mall, negotiating the tension between current policy, governance and planning and actually existing urbanism.....	274

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	General matrix of spatialities, redrawn by author from Harvey (2006: 135).....	9
Table 2:	Formal employment as part of labour force in 1991. Compiled by author from (Central Statistics Office, 1994) and (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019).....	115
Table 3:	The Herero Mall conceptualised as everyday socio-spatial practice using Harvey's matrix of spatialities (2006: 135). ....	241



## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The seeds for this thesis were sown when I first met my supervisor, Prof. Lindsay Bremner, while curating an exhibition on socio-spatial legacies of colonial urbanisation in Namibia as part of the London Festival of Architecture 2012. The venue for the exhibition happened to be a gallery space in the basement of the University of Westminster Marylebone campus. The exhibition was an intuitive, raw visual collage dealing with many of the concerns that also underlie this thesis, and my sincere gratitude goes out to my supervisor for nudging me to embark on a PhD and guiding me through the process ever since. As a recent PhD graduate herself, my co-supervisor provided useful input and support although she could not accompany the project to the end. I have to thank the university for the generous fee waiver without which I would not have been able to embark on this journey, and for facilitating a mode of study that allowed me to continue with my life and work in Namibia whilst pursuing the PhD.

My employer, the Namibia University of Science and Technology, has been equally generous in supporting me with workload reduction, study and sabbatical leave that allowed me to find time to pursue my research while continuing to be a full-time lecturer. During the course of the study I received a grant from the University of Westminster 125 FUND that allowed me to finance a spatial intervention at my case study site. I am grateful for this rare opportunity, which is not common in research funding. I appreciate the colleagues at the University of Cape Town School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics who allowed me to utilise an office in their post-graduate space during my sabbatical leave in Cape Town.

My family in Namibia and Mexico has been a source of support throughout the process. First of all, I owe enormous gratitude to my partner Guillermo, with whom

I share everything, and who remains a sounding board for ideas as small or ambitious as they can be. This thesis owes a lot to our collaborative work and is but a mere strand of the carpet we are weaving. I thank my sister-in-law Valentina, who spent some months with us in Namibia to help us take care of our one-year old and enable me to pull through the final write-up. Galilei deserves thanks not only for assisting me with anonymising the names of my research participants but also for his general support during the last few weeks of writing. Helen Vale has kindly language-edited my dissertation.

Of course, all this work would be meaningless without the many people who contributed to this endeavour over the years. The influences on this thesis are as manifold as the city itself. My interviewees and research participants generously shared their thoughts and experiences, their everyday life and their concerns. In some cases, I had to persevere to gain their trust and acceptance and I am grateful for them having allowed me into their space. Students at my university provide an on-going inspiration to advance a transformative agenda.

As I write this, the world is in lock-down to mitigate a pandemic that will once again make the poorest suffer most. Those who have to make a living from one day to the next cannot afford isolation. It is contrary to the ways of the city. But although the impact of this global crisis is and will be extremely uneven, it forcefully reminds us that ultimately, we are all in this together. Hopefully this involuntary introspection will make us re-consider life on this planet in its entirety and raise our energies to work towards an alternative and better future for all.

## DEFINITIONS

Aawambo	The majority ethnic group in Namibia, comprising about half of the country's population.
Bantustan	Rural reserves demarcated by the South African apartheid administration for various ethnic groups.
Coloured	The official apartheid term for people of 'mixed-race' background. It remains widely used today.
Herero	Colloquial term for Ovaherero (see below).
Homeland	Another word for bantustan (see above).
Kapana	A popular street food of BBQed beef strips.
Labour compound	Male-only accommodation facilities for black contract labourers that municipalities were required to provide under apartheid legislation. Sometimes also called labour hostels.
Location	Term used for racially segregated residential areas for 'non-Europeans'.
Nama	One of the minority ethnic groups in Namibia, making up about 4.5 percent of the population, who traditionally live in the central and southern regions of the country, as well as parts of South Africa and Botswana.
Otjiherero	The language of the Ovaherero people (see below).
Ovaherero	One of the minority ethnic groups in Namibia, making up about 10 percent of the population who traditionally lived in the central regions of the country.
Shack	Colloquial term for auto-constructed shelter made of corrugated iron sheeting on a structural timber or steel frame.
Tombo	Home-brewed alcoholic drink made of grains fermented with water and sugar.
Township	In its everyday use the term has a similar meaning as location (see above), indicating black or coloured residential areas. However, until recently the term was used for any urban extension in town planning legislation.
Traders	Colloquial term for hawkers, street vendors, and informal business operators.

## **ACRONYMS**

AeT	Asiye eTafuleni
ANT	Actor-network-theory
CBD	Central Business District
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CLIP	Community Land Information Programme
CoW	City of Windhoek
DASP	Department of Architecture and Spatial Planning
DEDCS	Department of Economic Development and Community Service
GBP	British Pound Sterling
GNI	Gross National Income
HEL	Household Effective Level
HMTC	Herero Mall Traders' Committee
HSL	Household Subsistence Level
ILO	International Labour Organization
LaRRI	Labour Resource and Research Institute
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex
MITSMED	Ministry of Industrialisation, Trade and SME Development
NISO	Namibia Informal Sector Organisation
N\$	Namibia Dollar
NSA	Namibia Statistics Agency
NUST	Namibia University of Science and Technology
OTA	Ovaherero Traditional Authority
SDFN	Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SME	Small Medium Enterprise
SWA	South West Africa
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation

## CHAPTER 1 SITUATING THE THESIS

*The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.*

Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach (Engels, 2009 [1886])

This doctoral research emerged from my personal academic and professional engagements concerning issues of urbanisation in Namibia generally, and my home-base Windhoek in particular. Over the last 10 years my work has taken various forms: from academic exercises with undergraduate architecture students at the university where I teach; public art projects and debates on the state of the city; advocacy and support for community-based organisations; to architectural consulting work for local and central government authorities. The latter refers specifically to a feasibility study (Delgado and Lühl, 2014) commissioned by the City of Windhoek (CoW) in 2014, for the formalisation of the “Herero Mall”<sup>1</sup> informal market in central Katutura,<sup>2</sup> Windhoek’s apartheid-era black<sup>3</sup> township. This work exposed me to the inadequacy of the prevalent regulatory, planning and professional practice paradigm in engaging meaningfully within conditions of ‘informal’<sup>4</sup> urbanisation. Rooted in colonial and modernist approaches to urban planning and development, this paradigm is yet to be challenged in views of increasing ‘informalisation’ – both economically and spatially. These developments

---

<sup>1</sup> Herero is the colloquial term for Ovaherero, one of the minority ethnic groups in contemporary Namibia.

<sup>2</sup> Katutura is an Otjiherero word for “the place where we do not want to live”, reflecting inhabitants’ resistance to forced relocation to this black-only township in the 1960s.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis, racial terminology is used reflecting the historical context. Where such classifications appear discriminatory, they are not used in the affirmative, but to support the analysis of ongoing and long-standing patterns of oppression.

<sup>4</sup> Conceptualisations of informal urbanisation and informal economy largely revolve around being unregulated. For now, I am putting the words *informal* and *informality* in scare quotes, as they serve as placeholders until I will develop more suitable conceptualisations below.

happen on the foundations of the segregated and highly unequal apartheid geographies Namibia inherited at independence, which continue to marginalise a majority of urban dwellers. This, in turn, reveals the inherent political dimension of space and raises questions around the complicity of spatial practice in the reproduction of such *uneven geographical development* (Harvey, 2006). While deeply critical of this reality, I am acutely aware of my own privileged position within this setting: a white, male Namibian of German descent, having studied in Europe, living in a central, affluent (former white) suburb, being employed at a major public university, and registered as a professional architect (one of only about 140 in the country). In other words: inhabiting a different 'planet' than the vast majority of urban dwellers who live only a few kilometres away in the 'informal settlements' of Windhoek.

Through the feasibility study mentioned above I became immersed in this seemingly other world, and exposed first-hand to the field of socio-spatial power relations in which my own position was never neutral. Informal traders<sup>5</sup> contravene zoning and trading regulations, health and safety procedures, and other established regulatory provisions. By occupying municipal land, they effectively challenge the paradigm of property. Yet in the near-absence of credible alternatives of formal employment, it is clear that such livelihood strategies are socially legitimate and should be supported to thrive. Having had the opportunity of entering such a paradigmatic field, I decided to use the market as a case study for my doctoral research with the following threefold aim: (1) understanding better the lived experience of that world which is typically labelled as 'informal'; (2)

---

<sup>5</sup> The term 'informal traders' is widely used in everyday practice, including by the people who conduct various economic activities at the Herero Mall, and have named their representative association the Herero Mall Traders' Committee (HMTc). Throughout this thesis I will use the term 'traders' to indicate business operators and those who are informally employed at the mall.

developing insights into what could constitute meaningful intervention in this context; and (3) contrasting this knowledge with the prevailing discourse on 'informality' to critically review conceptualisations of our urban future. All three aims infer my personal participation and a first-person voice is the linking thread throughout this dissertation.

### **1.1 How did I get here?**

Responding to a call for a tender by the City of Windhoek to undertake a feasibility study for the re-development of the Herero Mall 'informal market' in 2013, I submitted a proposal together with my partner and fellow architect and urbanist Guillermo Delgado. He was working at the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI), an independent research institute affiliated with the National Union of Namibian Workers, Namibia's largest trade union federation. We were commissioned to undertake the study and were expected to conduct the work in two months, during March and April 2014. Without delving into the details of the process that ensued, which is elaborated in detail below, a brief overview is provided here for context.

We established a research team including my 4<sup>th</sup> year architecture students and local field researchers and an ambitious research plan was developed. The first hurdle we encountered was that the traders' committee would not engage us as they felt that the municipality had acted unilaterally in appointing us. It quickly transpired that relations between traders and the municipality were fraught and we found ourselves caught unawares in the midst of these dynamics, despite affirming our independence. The differences could not be resolved during the 2 months duration of the study and we had to rely on secondary sources regarding socio-economic realities at the mall. When we presented our draft study – which recommended that the development of the market be based on principles of



autonomous self-management by traders and supported by the local authority – to the traders’ committee, we were told that they did not endorse the study even though they were generally in agreement with our recommendations. At the same time, the proposed trader self-management and the fact that we recommended allowing both the sale of alcohol and light industrial activities on the site, which is contrary to municipal zoning and market regulations, did not sit well with city councillors and officials. We had entered the field of urban politics.

Our final report to the municipality was submitted in June 2014 and is still under consideration; meanwhile little has changed on site. The frustration amongst traders and the committee at this lack of progress is easily imaginable. This experience taught me that the conventional processes for the production of space are not conducive in the context of ‘urban informality’ and require re-thinking. My continued involvement at the Herero Mall provided an exemplary socio-spatial context to pursue more fundamental reflections through my doctoral research and led to my inquiry of ‘urban informality’ and – to a lesser extent – spatial co-production as the central themes of this study.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

The general research aims stated above range from the personal – i.e. developing a better understanding of a socio-spatial reality in which I find myself as an outsider; to practice – i.e. searching for meaningful methods of intervention as a spatial practitioner; to theory – i.e. aiming to challenge and shape conceptualisations of ‘informality’. Here, the objective is to re-conceptualise ‘urban informality’ as socio-spatial practice and – paraphrasing Brenner (2012) – as a site to excavate latent possibilities for more socially-just cities. Revealing discursive manipulations of the ‘informality’ label and how it is reproduced and subverted in everyday spatial practice will contribute, I argue, to re-politicising the production of space in

Namibia. To achieve this, my practical objective was to bridge the distance between myself as spatial practitioner and ‘informal’ traders and to immerse myself deeply into the reality of the site to gain knowledge, while simultaneously engaging traders in the co-production of spatial interventions. These two objectives interacted dialectically; in other words, the one allowed me to advance the other. In this way I aim to make both a contribution to critical urban theory that is empirically situated in the Global South (Kloß, 2017),<sup>6</sup> as well as to a critical spatial practice that is able to meaningfully engage with what I will continue to call ‘urban informality’ for now.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The research undertaken for this PhD was framed by the following questions:

*How is the discourse on ‘informality’ constructed through the language and practices of activists, professionals, state officials, the media and other actors in spatial production in Namibia?* This question was formulated to reveal ideological underpinnings of the continued use of the term ‘informal’ in urban discourse, the power relations that are at play in it and its implications for a post-colonial urban politics in Namibia.

*How do people inhabit the Herero Mall socially, spatially, and economically?* This question aimed to provide an account of everyday life at the site as a way of countering the formal – informal binary. It frames a way of accounting, in

---

<sup>6</sup> Following Kloß, my use of the term Global South does not delineate a merely geographic location but rather a condition of sub-alternisation within global networks of power.

ethnographic detail, the spatial characteristics, economic relationships and social dynamics at the case study site that cut across this ostensible dichotomy.

*What are the potentials and limitations of spatial co-production methods for design in the context of colonial socio-spatial legacies and the discourse of urban informality?* This question informed my direct intervention at the site in collaboration with traders and other stakeholders. It also allowed me to reflect on my involvement at the Herero Mall prior to this research and leads to the final question that will frame the conclusion of this thesis: *What are the implications of co-production for professional spatial practice in such contexts more generally?*

#### **1.4 Theoretical framework**

*Critical theory has no specific influence on its side, except concern for the abolition of social injustice.*

Max Horkheimer in  
Critical Theory: selected essays (Horkheimer, 2002, p242)

Following Brenner, in this thesis, I identify with a critical approach to urbanism that “emphasizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested and therefore malleable character of urban space - that is, continual (re)construction as a site, medium, and outcome of historically specific relations of social power” (Brenner, 2012, p11). Such framing should make sense to anyone who has experienced Southern African cities and the lasting legacies of colonial and apartheid policies and planning on contemporary social, economic and spatial dynamics. I aim to show that the Herero Mall is an exemplary case to study socio-spatial power relations in the case of Windhoek, how they were historically produced, and how they are continually re-produced and subverted. What Brenner calls critical urban theory, sets itself apart from mainstream urban theory that

accepts the status quo as “transhistorical” (2012, p13), i.e. aiming to stabilise existing relations of power. Critical urban theory, he contends, combines a “critique of ideology” and a “critique of power” (2012, p13). He holds that critical theory “emphasizes the disjuncture between what is actual and what is possible” and focuses the search for such potential towards the “emancipatory possibilities that are embedded within, yet simultaneously suppressed by” capitalism (2012, p17). Brenner conceptualises these possibilities as “alter-urbanization” or the “collective imagination and radically democratic appropriation of the ‘right to the city’” (Brenner, 2017, p16). It is essential to note that he does not propose this as the pursuit of “alternative models of spatial organization” but instead as “alternative *processes* for the common appropriation and transformation” of the urban (2017, p17–18, original emphasis).

He ascribes this epistemological angle to the “dialectical approach to radical socio-spatial transformation” developed in the 1970s by Lefebvre in his *Production of Space* (2009) and elaborated by Harvey in *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (2006), amongst others. Arguing that conceptualising the nature of space has been largely missing within the Marxian tradition, Harvey (2006, p141–142) constructs a matrix relating Lefebvre’s three spatialities – experienced, conceptualised and lived space – to his own tripartite categorisation of absolute, relative and relational space (see Table 1). Harvey argues that in both cases, space is not reducible to any of the three categories, but can become “one or all simultaneously”, the conceptualisation of which is “resolved through human practice” (2006, p125–126). This dialectical understanding of space is critical to my doctoral research as I aim to transcend the understanding of apartheid and colonial spatial legacies that are too often framed primarily in terms of the absolute or material space of the segregated city (in the case of Namibia see Friedman, 2000; Simon, 1996; Pendleton, 1974 amongst others).

Conceptualising critical theory together with Adorno in the 1930s, Horkheimer contrasts it to “traditional theory,” which continues to be driven by disciplinary autonomy rather than social relevance (Horkheimer, 2002, p197). He argues:

*If, however, the theoretician and his specific object are seen as forming a dynamic unity with the oppressed class, so that his presentation of societal contradictions is not merely an expression of the concrete historical situation but also a force within it to stimulate change, then his real function emerges (2002, p215).*

Horkheimer goes on to state that in critical theory “constructive thinking, then plays a more important role than empirical verification” (2002, p221). The sought-after change, it must be noted, is not to be confused with a positivist outlook where research is aimed at finding normative solutions to problems. Rather, central to a critical theory is a forceful criticism of the pursuit of “instrumental rationality” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, p305), which is considered to be at the core of positivist science and implicated in the stabilisation of the status quo. Brenner elaborates that “reflexive approaches emphasise their mutual constitution, practical interdependence and ongoing transformation through social relations, including in the contested realm of interpretation and ideology” (Brenner, 2017, p20).

	Material Space (experienced space)	Representations of Space (conceptualized space)	Spaces of Representation (lived space)
Absolute Space	walls, bridges, doors, stairways, floors, ceilings, streets, buildings, cities, mountains, continents, bodies of water, territorial markers, physical boundaries and barriers, gated communities...	cadastral and administrative maps; Euclidean geometry; landscape description; metaphors of confinement, open space, location, placement and positionality; (command and control relatively easy) – <i>Newton and Descartes</i>	feelings of contentment around the hearth; sense of security or incarceration from enclosure; sense of power from ownership, command and domination over space; fear of others “beyond the pale.”
Relative Space (Time)	circulation and flows of energy, water, air, commodities, peoples, information, money, capital; accelerations and diminutions in the frictions of distance...	thematic and topological maps (e.g. London tube system); non-Euclidean geometries and topology; perspectival drawings; metaphors of situated knowledges, of motion, mobility, displacement, acceleration, time-space compression and distanciation; (command and control difficult requiring sophisticated techniques) – <i>Einstein and Riemann</i>	anxiety of not getting to class on time; thrill of moving into the unknown; frustration in a traffic jam; tensions or exhilarations of time-space compression, of speed, of motion.
Relational Space (Time)	electromagnetic energy flows and fields; social relations; rental and economic potential surfaces; pollution concentrations; energy potentials; sounds, odours and sensations wafted on the breeze.	surrealism; existentialism; psychogeographies; cyberspace, metaphors of internalization of forces and powers; (command and control extremely difficult – chaos theory, dialectics, internal relations, quantum mathematics) – <i>Leibniz, Whitehead, Deleuze, Benjamin</i>	visions, fantasies, desires, frustrations, memories, dreams, phantasms, psychic states (e.g. agoraphobia, vertigo, claustrophobia)

Table 1: General matrix of spatialities, redrawn by author from Harvey (2006: 135)

Contesting ideology, while not new in the Marxian tradition, becomes ever more urgent as we understand, after Gramsci, that “dominant power in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not always exercised simply by physical force but also was expressed through social psychological attempts to win people’s consent to domination through cultural institutions such as the media, the schools, the family, and the church” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, p308). In his *One Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse develops the tenets of critical theory in the 1960s context of Western consumerist society (Marcuse, 2002 [1964]). He argues that both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the “two great classes” of the industrial period observed by Marx, have ceased to be “agents of historical transformation”, requiring critique to be taken to a “high level of abstraction” (2002 [1964], pxiii). In his introduction to the second edition of the book, Kellner argues that the continued relevance of this work is that “critical and dialectical social theory should analyse containment and stabilisation as well as contestation and struggle” (Kellner, 2002, pxxxiv). In other words, while power continuously reproduces itself it is unceasingly resisted by countless other forces, which equally need to be accounted for.

Yet social transformation is not inherently progressive and Frankfurt School theoreticians have been criticised for failing to escape an inherent eurocentrism, by Said amongst others, who accused them of a “motivated silence” on racism, colonialism and resistance within empire (Allen, 2016, p1). Allen argues that this is due to a belief in “historical progress” (2016), in other words, a successive progression towards a universal modernity emerging out of European enlightenment, which underlies much of contemporary Frankfurt School critical theory. To *decolonise* critical theory, she urges us to re-think the relationship between history and normativity (2016, p25), drawing on the work of the first-generation Frankfurt School thinkers such as Benjamin and Adorno, as well as Foucault, who rejected the idea of historical progress as a “metaphysical illusion”

(2016, p164). According to Allen these thinkers envision social transformation not only as the “fuller realization” of existing normative ideals, such as democracy, inclusion and egalitarianism, but also allow the possibility of those normative ideals to be radically transformed, without pre-judging the outcome of such transformation (2016, p188). She argues that this requires that one reveal one’s own “historically situated” point of view by showing how it has been contingently made up and how this in turn is entangled with relations of power (2016, p190). Scheurich and McKenzie similarly argue that Foucault’s method of archaeology “decentres the modernist subject” (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005, p848) by rejecting the idea that humans create history in a logical, rational and continuous manner, as the proponents of a history of progress argue.

Another critique of (critical) social theory is formulated by Latour, who argues that it had for too long firmly held onto a false society / nature dichotomy, the first assembling all humans and the second assembling all non-humans (Latour, 2005, p164), both conceived as autonomous spheres. In following the natural sciences, Latour contends, social theory concluded prematurely on the existence of “social ties” as the all-structuring forces behind human activity (2005, p64). Instead, he suggests a “sociology of associations” – also known as actor-network-theory (ANT) or assemblage theory – which maintains that:

*Power, like society, is the final result of a process and not a reservoir, a stock, or a capital that will automatically provide an explanation. Power and domination have to be produced, made up, composed (2005, p64).*

ANT then does not assume a pre-existing ‘society’ structuring all else, but rather understands it as the whole of all relations (or translations) between *things* and humans, to both of which it assigns the role of actors (2005, p70). Including objects into the realm of understanding the continuous (re)production power relations resonates with Harvey’s conceptualisation of space (see p7), which combines



physical and non-physical aspects of spatiality. It is especially the possible designation of space as an *agent* in this reproduction – not just in its physical form, but also in its representations and *as* representation – that interested me here. Those who are much better versed in the theoretical debates might frown at this eclectic fusion<sup>7</sup> of theoretical traditions that seem to be at each other's throats.<sup>8</sup> But for the purpose of my study, a political orientation provided by critical urban theory, combined with a Foucauldian understanding of discourse and methodological and analytical insights from actor-network-theory, is a useful mix as I will argue below.

## 1.5 Methodological strategy

*Men of good will want to draw conclusions for political action from the critical theory. Yet there is no fixed method for doing this; the only universal prescription is that one must have insight into one's own responsibility.*

Max Horkheimer in the introduction to  
Critical Theory: Selected Essays (Horkheimer, 2002 [1968], pv)

My research objectives and the theoretical framework imply that I aim not only to better understand existing urban socio-spatial dynamics that are often categorised under the catch-all label of urban 'informality', but also to co-produce some transformation of those dynamics. The research questions place my study squarely in the qualitative realm, and require a crafted methodological strategy that is critical, ethnographic, self-reflexive and in part participatory. While the aims of critical urban theory have been outlined above, its methods are less obvious. Though some authors choose to highlight the divides between Frankfurt School

---

<sup>7</sup> Fusion is meant here as it is used in *haute cuisine*, as the mixing up of distinct culinary traditions.

<sup>8</sup> According to Latour, ANT has been criticised to be "so indifferent to inequalities and power struggles that it offers no critical leverage" (Latour, 2005: 251), while throughout the book he claims repeatedly that critical social theory prioritises political relevance over scientific rigour.

critical theory and Foucault (Wandel, 2001, p368), I deem Foucault's archaeological and genealogical methods useful to pursue parts of the critical investigation that I envision here. For Foucault, archaeology, rather than a discipline, is a "domain of research" that distinguishes between knowledge as *savoir*, an "implicit knowledge" specific to a certain society that is enabled through philosophical ideas, institutions, commercial practice, police activity and everyday life, and *connaissance*, which are formal or disciplinary "bodies of learning" found in scientific, philosophical and religious publications (Foucault and Faubion, 1998, p261). *Savoir* provides the often seemingly messy and irrational "conditions of possibility" for the emergence of formal knowledge or *connaissance* (1998, p262).

A similar distinction could explain the tension between 'informality' and 'the formal', as different types of *knowledge*. As I set out to do, re-conceptualising urban 'informality' understood as *not formal* requires one to first understand what 'formal' means in relation to urban: for now, in the context of Namibia the premise is that it is closely related to colonialism. Following Foucault, I studied the *conditions of emergence* of colonial spatial development, which – here is another hypothesis – has become what he would call a "false self-evidence" (Foucault, 1991, p75). In other words, something has become so ordinary that it seems to be self-evident, and hence remains unquestioned. In drawing from ANT, I am deploying the various agencies that made a difference, produced transformation, left traces and entered into accounts (Latour, 2005, p53) of urbanisation in Namibia.

Foucault's second method, genealogy, aims to analyse "power relations and their technologies" (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005, p850), which is especially relevant to my inquiry as it is in space where inequalities are most explicitly produced and reproduced, as Brenner (2012) suggests. More importantly, in his seminal book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault reconceptualised power

not just as the dispensation of domination – its most obvious function – but also as having what he termed “positive effects” ([1975] 1995, p23). Here, positive is not to be construed as the binary opposite of negative, or good versus bad, but rather an understanding of power as a social function, a creative force that produces something outside of the oppression it administers. To elaborate this view Foucault explores the history of the penal system and argues that it did not only administer punishment to the convicted, but also produced “correct behaviour” in the wider society (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005, p854), which has much further-reaching and longer-lasting implications.

Having first established the historical conditions of emergence of the ‘formal’, I investigated further the notion of ‘informality’ as a discursive practice, its inherent power relations and technologies, as well as how these are enabled by the positive effects of the formal – in other words, its power to normalise behaviour. This part of the inquiry thus deals mainly with aspects of what Kellner (2002) calls containment and stabilisation (see p10) or the re-production of dominant power, its sites and agencies. I approached contestation and struggle, the second aspect of necessary inquiry according to Kellner (see p10) as everyday resistance to the incessant re-production of power and normativity, or what Brenner referred to as latent emancipatory possibilities (see p7). Returning to my aim of re-conceptualising ‘informality’, I undertook an ethnographic study of the Herero Mall which, as I have outlined above (see p3), is conventionally designated an ‘informal market’ within a ‘formal’ neighbourhood, and which embodies many of the socio-spatial legacies of Namibia’s colonial past. My own experience of being involved in a feasibility study for the formalisation of the mall has exposed me to the emptiness of the ‘informal’ designator, while being overwhelmed at the multiplicity of activities, relationships and spatial transformations occurring every day. As a mainstay of qualitative inquiry, ethnography provided me with suitable methods to better understand this

setting in its everyday life. In their introduction to the *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* Denzin and Lincoln (2005) offer the following definition of qualitative research, which I found instructive:

*Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. [...] At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2005, p3).*

This definition aligns with ANT in as far as it positions the researcher as an actor in the field (or network) – which was certainly true in my case – though Latour insists that the interpretation should be left to the actors, rather than the analyst (Latour, 2005, p30). This is particularly important as my professional and cultural background simultaneously and continuously exposed me as an ‘outsider’ in this particular context.<sup>9</sup> My presence at the Herero Mall was not too far removed from Denzin and Lincoln’s description of the traditional “lone ethnographer,” the white male researcher who studies the “native in a distant land” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p15). Yet, this land is only mentally distant: after all it is the city where I live and its inhabitants (including myself) that were at the centre of my interest. Furthermore, I had become an actor in the field long before this study commenced. The research thus has – by necessity – an autoethnographic subtext as I make sense of my own agency in this context and the power relations implicit in my interactions. Holman Jones contends that autoethnographic writing requires “demanding attention and participation. Implicating all involved. Refusing closure

---

<sup>9</sup> My particular background as Namibian citizen of German ancestry often stirred suspicions, unwarranted expectations or other sentiments that impact the interactions with traders and visitors of the market as will become clear from all that follows below. The lingering colonial history, especially the Genocide of Ovaherero and Nama by German colonial troops, which is currently at the centre of public debate in Namibia, affects inter-cultural dialogue.

or categorization” (Holman Jones, 2005, p767). This seems to overlap with Latour’s understanding of the researcher – through the act of writing – as *mediator* amongst other mediators (Latour, 2005, p39). But self-reflexivity was certainly never my foremost aim. Only through the process of engaging and reflecting on my involvement at the site did I become aware of this aspect of the work and began embracing its implications. Consequently, the ‘participatory’ aspect of the research, which was central to my original research proposal, transformed as I began to understand myself as an active agent in the setting. I was already participating. Yet, in order to overcome the strangeness of my presence at the site, to ‘pay’ for having access, and to fulfil my desire for producing transformation – this seems to be the innermost drive of an architect – I pursued a spatial intervention at the site in collaboration with the traders’ committee, or in other words *building* as method. This direct involvement allowed me to literally construct a – perhaps insignificant – assemblage, allowing a glimpse into what might constitute an emergent alter-urbanisation, and the potential for a critical spatial practice.

As mentioned at the end of the previous section, this study was methodologically eclectic. I combined critical urban theory with Foucauldian discourse analysis, features of actor-network-theory and architectural practice. Figure 1 below synthesises the overall strategy through which the various methodological aspects of archaeology, genealogy, (auto)ethnography and spatial practice are brought into relation with each other, the questions that each raises and possible overlaps between them. This was done without the explicit desire to reconcile these seemingly incongruent methodologies as it was not my aim to pursue theoretical feuds. Instead, as part of the conclusion of the thesis, I aim to offer a reflection on methodology and the limitations of this study.

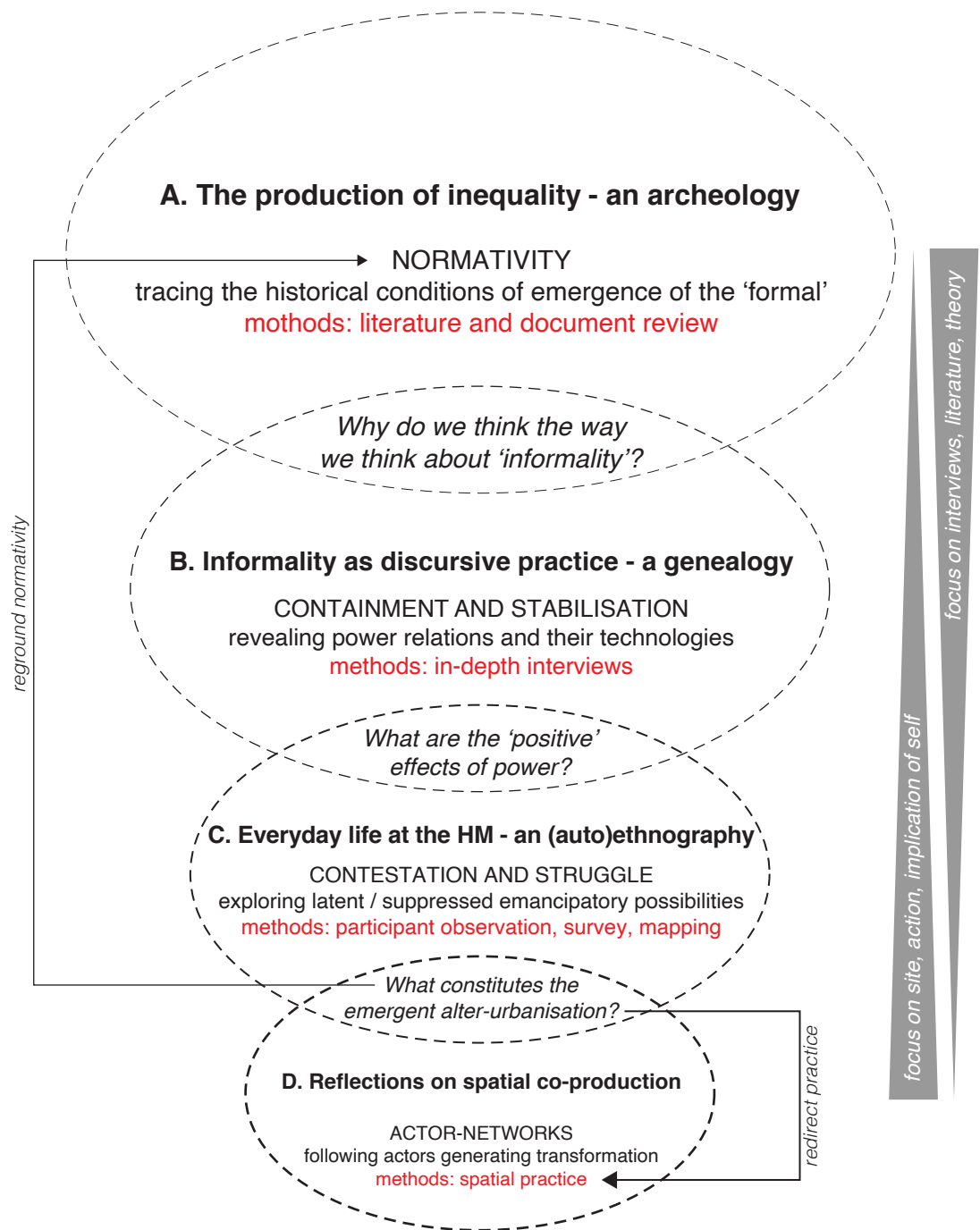


Figure 1: Diagram of the methodological strategy of this research, which is also reflected in the structure of the four major chapters of the dissertation (Chapters 4-7).

## 1.6 Research design

Informed by the theoretical framework and the methodological strategy, I approached the research project through a mix of qualitative methods in a single case study site that, as I have argued, embodies latent potential for different *processes* of urbanisation, and in which I was already embedded prior to this study. I conducted an extensive review of two major strands of literature to situate my study: firstly, debates on ‘informality’ from the definitions of the ‘informal sector’, to informalisation and ‘urban informality’; and secondly debates on spatial co-production and its implications for architectural and spatial practice more widely, as well as its political dimension. These debates provided a set of coordinates for my empirical work and allowed higher abstraction of what was experienced on the ground. In addition, pointers from these debates informed the literature review on theory, methodological considerations and qualitative research methods presented in the previous section. I further conducted literature review to explore the historical production of space and power in the case of the Herero Mall in relation to Namibia’s and Windhoek’s particular socio-spatial development. This aimed to crystallise the Foucauldian conditions of emergence of the contemporary discourse of ‘urban informality’.

In my empirical work I explored two spheres of inquiry that are investigated with different methods of data collection and analysis as laid out below: (1) the construction of discourse of ‘informality’ by professional spatial practitioners<sup>10</sup> in the private, non-governmental and government sectors which are concerned with urban development; (2) the socio-spatial lived experience of the case study site as

---

<sup>10</sup> Throughout this thesis I use ‘professional spatial practitioners’ as a collective term for those who are professionally involved in the production of space, to distinguish them from all those who through their everyday activities are equally involved in producing and transforming space.

an actor-network. These two spheres are woven together, in autoethnographic fashion, by my own experience of the co-production of a spatial intervention with traders at the site, as a direct actor within an assemblage. Throughout the research, the methods remained preliminary, as they continued to be adapted, subject to the contingencies of the ongoing research dynamic. Methods included participant observation including conversations with traders and visitors at the site; semi-structured interviews and spatial mapping with business operators at the site; in-depth interviews with professional spatial practitioners; and construction of an architectural intervention at the site. As researcher I thus took up a role of methodological negotiator as well as mediator of differences, both between myself and traders, between traders individually, as well as collectively vis-a-vis 'informal' and established institutions including the HMTC, NGOs, the Windhoek municipality, and funders amongst others. I do recognise, however, that owing to the parameters of the doctoral research programme, I am here presenting the work under my sole authorship, with all the implications regarding representativity that this entails.

## **1.7 Methods of data collection**

### **1.7.1 Participant observation**

Throughout the research I pursued extensive participant observation at the case study site. This allowed me to spend substantial time at the mall and interact with traders and visitors without always having a predefined agenda. I attempted as much as possible to cover different times of day, days of the week and months of the year. To deepen my understanding of the space, activities, as well as my own presence, I kept a detailed diary throughout the process. I do not speak



Otjiherero,<sup>11</sup> the local lingua franca, so I was unable to follow most conversations that I was not involved in. Instead, I relied on English as the official language in Namibia, Afrikaans, which remains widely spoken, and surprisingly enough, German, which happens to be my mother tongue. Where translation was provided from Otjiherero to English or Afrikaans it would often seem partial, judged by the discrepancy between the extent of the original conversation and the brevity of the translation. This allowed people to determine the depth of information shared with me, requiring me to follow the *traces* of associations (Latour, 2005, p5) that I could perceive with more intent. Usually my presence raised interest, especially amongst visitors who do not expect ‘foreigners’ to spend time at the mall. I often had to explain that I am Namibian, and that I am collaborating with the traders’ committee on the development of the mall. That usually served well as an introduction, elicited the acknowledgment that I am indeed “from here”, and allowed conversations to flow more easily from there. As I took notes of the conversations as thoroughly as possible in my diary I also noted down my own observations on aspects of the surrounding context, including spatial distributions, material assemblages, activities, weather, soundscape, time of day, amongst others. These aspects thus relate largely to absolute space in Harvey’s matrix (see Table 1).

### 1.7.2 Semi-structured interviews and spatial mapping with traders

Secondly, I investigated the case of the Herero Mall with specific emphasis on its economic circulations, social relations and spatial dimensions. The chosen method here was a semi-structured interview with business operators at the mall, which combined quantitative with qualitative aspects. More conversational exchanges with traders, in addition to the interviews, were captured through participant

---

<sup>11</sup> Otjiherero is one of the multiple indigenous languages in Namibia spoken by the Ovaherero people.

observation, outlined above. I formally approached the traders' committee to request its collaboration in the research and access to a sample of business operators at the mall. These included: food vendors; restaurants; shebeens;<sup>12</sup> hair salons; shops; a car wash; a shoemaker / repairs; meat cutting / butchery. I selected the sample of operators partly through connections I had built up over time, especially with members of the traders' committee, as well as snowball sampling based on suggestions by traders, or simply approaching a certain business with the request for it to participate in the research. The interview guide (see Appendices, p296) was largely informed by the literature on informal economies presented in the Literature Review below, as well as by conventional methods of architectural analysis including mapping and drawing of scaled, annotated, two-dimensional drawings. It was structured to cover aspects of demographics, economic activity, social relations, and spatial aspects of the business itself, as well as in relation to other businesses, the neighbourhood and other geographical sites and scales. Where applicable, I enquired how buildings were adapted over time. In addition to these questions, I asked permission to photograph the structure, which was not always granted. Finally, I asked respondents to draw up a timeline of their activities during the day to understand temporal rhythms.

It was often difficult to keep to agreed times for interviews as business operators are very mobile and have to change plans on the go. This required flexibility on my part, and times of waiting were useful to pursue participant observation. The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed me to generate somewhat comparable

---

<sup>12</sup> Shebeen is the popular name for (often unlicensed) bars. The word derives originally from the Irish language and is widely used in Southern Africa. Usually shebeens are to be found in former black townships, where they historically emerged as illicit alcohol outlets in residential houses to avoid colonial control of alcohol consumption.

data, though in practice the interview guide was not followed mechanically. Instead I allowed conversations to flow organically. The interviews generally took place at the business venue, and the interview guide allowed for interruptions as often operators had to attend to business activities. Research aims were explained to interviewees, emphasising the aspect of anonymity and protection of their data. Consent was sought verbally and noted on the interview guide. Conversations were conducted in English or Afrikaans, and often both, and were not recorded as that tended to raise some discomfort in this setting. Instead, I took notes on the spaces provided in the interview guide.

In addition to the survey and documentation of a sample of individual businesses I mapped the larger area of Herero Mall. The aspects I mapped included built structures; spatial distributions and linkages; circulation and barriers; construction methods; institutional, economic and social linkages; shared infrastructure; and informal governance; amongst others. In terms of Harvey's matrix, these mappings combine aspects of absolute space combined with aspects of relative space (see Table 1). I initially mapped these aspects in the form of two-dimensional sketches and in some instances involved traders at the field office to draw over and collectively improve the maps that I had developed, allowing us to refine the maps together.

### **1.7.3 In-depth interviews with spatial practitioners**

To investigate the prevailing discourse on 'urban informality' I undertook in-depth interviews with practitioners, including two town planners, an architect, a housing advocate, a labour expert, an informal sector organiser, a municipal officer, a former local constituency councillor, and the former Mayor of the City of Windhoek. I was able to identify interviewees purposively – given the relatively small spatial practice field – selecting those who had been involved in participatory

development processes or had been working within settings of 'informality' in general or at the Herero Mall in particular. The interview guide (see Appendices, p299) was developed in relation to the relevant research question. Interviewees were first requested to share their personal background to help appreciate their professional rationalities, ethics and value systems. The questions that followed were slightly differentiated between those for spatial practitioners such as architects, town planners and housing advocates, and those of labour experts, informal sector activists, government officials and public office bearers, depending on their practice.

Built environment practitioners were asked to describe their professional practice and the design process with a focus on projects for non-private clients, of a participatory nature or those involving sites of 'informality'. Interviewees were also requested to reflect on what would need to change in the Namibian architectural and urban practice to facilitate engagement with such sites. Government officials and public office bearers were prompted on definitions of 'informality' and its perception amongst authorities and decision makers. They were asked to share examples where informal workers were accommodated in development processes and were questioned on the major challenges faced in their own work. Labour experts and informal sector activists were asked additional questions on how informal workers could strengthen their position within the politics of urban space, and what forms of organisation would be required. The interviews, most of which took between one and two hours, were conducted in English and recorded, while I took notes for later cross-checking. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and sent them to interviewees for verification. A participant information sheet (see Appendices, p294) and a consent form (see Appendices, p295) were signed and filed for reference.

#### 1.7.4 Co-production of a spatial intervention at the site

The fourth method can be best described as an architectural practice<sup>13</sup> that aimed to co-produce a strategic spatial intervention with traders at the site. It was originally intended to develop self-built sanitation facilities at the mall, but in the meantime the municipality had installed a number of pre-cast concrete toilets, making this initiative redundant though enlightening, nonetheless. At the same time, to enable the practice of co-production, I aimed to have a permanent presence at the site by renting a vacant structure as my field office, where I had intended to spend much time working on the spatial intervention, as well as to use it as a meeting space and office for the traders' committee. In 2017 I had received a GBP 2,000 (N\$ 38,000)<sup>14</sup> grant from the University of Westminster 125 Fund, which I had applied for to buy furniture and equipment for the office, which would later be transferred to the traders' committee. As the structure was rented from one individual it became a bone of contention amongst traders, and the lease was cancelled. The proposal was changed to co-design and build an office and meeting space for the traders' committee, which I could also use as field office during my research. I thus proposed to use the 125 Fund grant for buying building materials, while traders would contribute their labour.

The practice of spatial co-production includes a broad spectrum of methods, including participatory mapping, meetings with committee members, two- and three-dimensional drawing, physical and virtual model building, on-site discussions on spatial design and construction methods, fund raising, mediation

---

<sup>13</sup> Architectural practice is here used in the sense that it has as a basic outlook the transformation of spatial and social realities.

<sup>14</sup> For comparative purposes I use the historical exchange rate of 1 GBP = 19 N\$ (as of 1 December 2019) throughout this dissertation. Source: XE.com, accessed 08.03.2020

with local and governmental authorities, and external stakeholders, arranging workshops with resource persons, acquiring building materials, assisting during construction work, ad-hoc problem solving, archival research, letter writing and minute taking at committee meetings, availing technical expertise, drawing on my professional networks, and mobilising university students, amongst others. In other words, these activities could be traced as an actor-network and included my own agency as mediator of all these instances of practice. The documentation of the traces and assemblies is based on notes and document review from my personal archive of the process.

### **1.8 Methods of data analysis**

As varied as my methods of data collection are the methods of analysis. Transcripts of in-depth interviews were processed using the HyperRESEARCH™ Qualitative Analysis Tool software in a process of open coding, grouping original quotes from the interviews arranged by their codes into two overall sections based on my research design: (A) understandings of ‘informality’; and (B) practices of co-production. I proceeded to analyse quotes in terms of the way interviewees framed their understanding, how they related their practice, the explanations they provided and the references they used. Through an iterative process of re-reading, re-writing, and cross-referencing with official statistics, media reports, policy frameworks and aspects of my literature review, I thus aimed to uncover conceptualisations of ‘informality’, inherent relations of power and their reproduction as discourse.

Mappings and notes from participant observation, traders’ committee meetings, and conversations with committee members were transcribed and digitally coded to organise the data. Data gathered through semi-structured interviews with

business operators were processed by crafting a series of visual diagrams and maps that reflect spatial and economic logics, temporality, social relations, and aesthetic codes of individual businesses in relation to the mall, and wider territorial scales. This allowed me to visually construct the associations I was aiming to trace. My personal archive of the Herero Mall project from its initial beginning as professional consultancy was mined for additional data, including specifically my correspondence with the municipality on behalf of the traders' committee, workshops with traders, and presentations to city officials and council members. Documentation of the design process and the construction of the traders' committee office and meeting space was based on diary entries, design sketches and drawings, project-related documents and photographic documentation. In addition, I drew from memory, media reports and relevant literature to complement the data.

Using this vast archive of traces, I used principles of actor-network-theory, and especially Latour's understanding of "textual accounts" (Latour, 2005, p124) to develop a "thick description" (Patton, 2002, p437–40) – as ethnographers would have it – of associations between sites, mediators, intermediaries, agencies and scales. Latour criticises the distinction between *description* and *explanation* as another deceptive binary and instead calls for accounts that fully deploy – through text – the "networks that make possible a state of affairs" (Latour, 2005: 137). These textual accounts of the networks of associations have been iteratively reworked to slowly develop an alternative reading of 'informality' through lived experience and spatial practice. In a final step, 'informality' as discourse and as lived experience have been put into critical dialogue with each other to reveal the political implications for a post-colonial (alter)urbanisation in Namibia.

## **1.9 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained by the University of Westminster Architecture and the Built Environment Research Ethics Committee in June 2016 and there have been no significant protocol changes during the project since then. The research was considered a Class 2 Application in terms of the University of Westminster Code of Practice Governing the Ethical Conduct of Research 2015-2016. By definition Class 2 research might cause harm to participants, who in this particular case involve groups who are considered “vulnerable due to their social and economic situations” (University of Westminster, 2015). This is so because the Herero Mall is strictly speaking an illegal occupation of municipal land. Exposing the underlying socio-spatial dynamics through this research, and thereby making them visible to authorities, amongst others, could jeopardise people’s livelihoods. At the same time, most traders are registered with the municipality and have a representative committee that is acknowledged by the city council, which essentially confirms the intention of the municipal authorities to acknowledge traders as official stakeholders.

My research participants included traders at the mall, represented by and contacted through HMTC, as well as other stakeholders identified during the feasibility study I had previously been involved in. They also included professional spatial practitioners in the private and public sector, many of whom I have professionally worked with in the past. In all cases informed consent was obtained through providing participants with a participant information sheet and a consent form. Consent was obtained either in writing by signing the form, or by providing verbal consent which was noted on the interview guides. Processing and storing of data were done mindful of the need to comply with the UK Data Protection Act of 1998. In writing this thesis I aimed to ensure strict anonymity to reduce the risk of negative impacts for individuals. To this end names have either been substituted



or interviewees are mentioned by their profession or role. In some cases, personal information about participants has been provided, but only where it was necessary to contextualise their social or professional background. Furthermore, care was taken not to disclose any information that could prove harmful or disadvantageous to participants in any way. Finally, as I made use of images and maps from the National Archives of Namibia, I am expected to make a copy of this thesis available to the Archives upon its publication.

### **1.10 Structure of the dissertation**

The dissertation is structured in eight chapters. In Chapter 1 I introduced the rationale and central aims and research questions of the thesis; I situated the research theoretically and laid out the methodological considerations that inform the methods of data collection and analysis. I argue that critical urban theory provides a useful framing for this particular qualitative and action-oriented inquiry and outline its implications for the empirical work that follows.

In Chapter 2 I present a reading of the literature on ‘urban informality’ and spatial co-production, which have emerged as the central themes of the study. I argue that while conceptualisations of ‘informality’ continue developing and gaining depth, they remain inadequate for understanding contexts such as the one I have been investigating. Similarly, I argue why spatial co-production, for all its democratic values, continues to conceal uneven power-relations in the urban realm and requires a political reading to become “emancipatory” (Allen, 2016).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> I follow here Allen’s conceptualisation of emancipation as “minimization of relations of domination” instead of “a social world without or beyond power relations” (Allen, 2016: xiv).

In Chapter 3 I introduce the Herero Mall. I argue why I consider the mall a paradigmatic case for understanding dynamics of contemporary urbanisation in Windhoek and Namibia more generally.

In Chapter 4 I outline the conditions of emergence of the 'informal' as discourse that is rooted in the unequal development of the colonial project, both spatially and socially. Departing from a territorial analysis I focus on Windhoek's urban development and the emergence of 'informal' urbanisation during the process of decolonisation, as well as the dominant policy response. I argue that inherited colonial spatial logic is re-produced and entrenched and position professional spatial practice within this process.

In Chapter 5 I investigate the 'informal' as discursive practice. Here I aim to expose how professional spatial practitioners construct discourse on 'informality' to lay bare its inherent power relations and technologies. I argue that in Namibia the discourse of 'informality' has taken on the particular function of delegitimising and marginalising the urban poor – the largely black majority of urban residents.

In Chapter 6 I return to the field to excavate notions of 'informality' as lived experience. A thick description of everyday life at the Herero Mall allows us to overcome binary conceptualisations of formality vs 'informality' that I have argued are not only imprecise as concepts, but also reproduce unequal power relations within the socio-spatial development of the city. I argue that the world of the 'informal' and its everyday practices can be understood as a form of resistance against the capitalist and neo-colonialist enclosure of all spheres of life.

In Chapter 7 I trace my own professional involvement in a process of co-production of a spatial intervention at the site over the past seven years. I reflect on my

changing role within the network of actors at the mall on the potential and limitations of a critical spatial practice in a context of uneven development.

In Chapter 8 I conclude on my contribution to critical urban theory and spatial practice in answering the research questions. I reflect on the relationship between the discourse of 'informality' and everyday practices of resistance in the context of post-colonial urbanisation in Namibia and consider the opportunities and constraints that this context offers to the practice of architecture. Finally, I outline the limitations of this study and opportunities for future research.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The problematique of informality<sup>16</sup>

#### 2.1.1 Informal sector: a contentious label

The concept of the “informal sector” emerged in the early 1970s (Chen, 2012; Skinner, 2008; AlSayyad, 2004; Meagher, 1995; Simon, 1984). According to Chen (2012) it was believed in the 1950s and 60s that the development of the economy would eventually absorb traditional low-income economies by generating sufficient formal jobs. Meagher contends that this “marginalist” view of the informal sector, both in neoliberal and Marxist writings, was based on three basic assumptions: that the informal sector would be transitory and that development would lead to a modern, capitalist economy; that it would provide only subsistence-level activities; and that it would be primarily a feature of peripheral economies. This view was challenged in the 1970s as firstly state-led development failed to generate a growing and efficient modern sector; and secondly as informal activities were on the increase throughout developing and developed countries, which suggested potential for economic dynamism in an environment of formal sector recession and disintegration (Meagher, 1995, p261). It appeared that instead of an increase in formal employment, what took place was a rise in unemployment and under-employment in developing countries.

In a seminal anthropological study on low-income activities in Accra, Ghana, Keith Hart coined the term “informal sector”. He made a distinction between the formal

---

<sup>16</sup> In the literature review chapter, I suspend the use of scare quotes for informal and informality as these terms are widely used in the literature that is presented here.

and informal sectors based on types of employment (i.e. wage-earning or self-employment respectively). He described how the urban poor often engaged in petty capitalism as a substitute for formal wage employment which was inaccessible (Hart, 1973). By 1972 the Kenya Employment Mission of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) had adopted the term and found the informal sector produced profitable and efficient economies (Chen, 2012, p5). This shift of focus to forms of production within informal settings popularised by the ILO gained widespread traction because it offered the possibility of “helping the poor without a major threat to the rich” (Bromley, 1979, p1036). This suited the context of global neo-liberal reform of the 1970 and 1980s and its promise of a de-politicised, inclusive development. Castells and Portes, rejecting marginalist notions, offered the following definition of the informal economy:

*[...] it is unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated [...] by which we understand the explicit, active intervention of the state in the process and outcome of income-generating activities, on the basis of a set of enforceable legal rules (Castells and Portes, 1989, p12–13).*

Chen (2012) formulates four main schools of thought with regard to informal economies: Firstly, the “dualist school”, which postulates that the informal sector is composed of marginal activities that are separated or weakly linked to the formal sector and providing income and a fall-back for the poor in times of hardship. This school proposes that governments create more jobs and lend business support to the informal sector. Secondly, the “structuralist school”, which argues that the informal sector is inherent to the late capitalist development in an overall process of precarisation of labour to reduce labour costs, benefitting large capitalist economic players. This proposes that governments address the uneven relationship between big businesses and smaller producers by regulating commercial and employment relationships. Thirdly, the “legalist school”, which puts forward the idea that small traders choose to engage in the informal sector to

avoid costs, time and formal registration. This view maintains that a streamlined/simplified bureaucratic system and granting of property rights would incorporate workers into the formal sector. Finally, the “voluntarist school” also holds that the decision to operate within the informal sector is indeed voluntary, but it does not attribute this to prohibitive registration procedures. It suggests that informal enterprises be formalised in order to increase the tax base and reduce competition to formal businesses (2012, p4–6). Chen further argues that although there is merit to all the above perspectives, the “informal economy as a whole is more heterogeneous and complex than the sum of these perspectives would suggest” (2012, p6). Skinner (2008) calls on us to understand how the different perspectives add to a better understanding of informality. According to her, while the structuralists remind us how those working in the informal sector are integrally linked to the overall economy, the legalists focus on how the mechanisms of the state impact on the sector (2008, p4).

While the structuralist analysis of informality sees the informal as part of the wider capitalist development, its crisis and reincarnations, it perpetuates a conceptual duality. Such a binary understanding remains problematic as it does not correspond with the lived experience in my own work at the Herero Mall. Boundaries between informal traders, owners of informal businesses, some of whom are employed in the formal economy, registered traders and formal enterprises supplying informal ones are blurry and cannot account sufficiently for what is going on. On first sight formal and informal seem to be easily distinguishable, especially on a visual level, but once one scratches the surface these distinctions melt into thin air.

### 2.1.2 Informalisation: from sector to process

Early on, scholars insisted that understanding informality as an independent sector is not very insightful. Meagher (1995) criticised the two neoliberal perspectives (legalist and dualist) of the 1970s: one treated the informal sector as victim of excessive state intervention, while the other, favoured by the ILO, stressed that besides prohibitive state intervention, the weaknesses within the sector itself, including low incomes, low productivity and limited skills and technology, narrowed its growth irrespective of deregulation. The ILO prescription thus called for “more rather than less state intervention” (1995, p262). According to Meagher both these views lack an understanding of the operation and impact of linkages with the formal sector as well as an analysis of class relations within the informal sector (1995, p263). She positions the structuralist “informalisation” perspective as a theoretical framework for better understanding the informal sector, instead of reducing it to a marginalised economic activity. This essentially amounts to a shift in focus from “informality as a sector to informalisation as a process” (1995, p260), which requires analysis in terms of its historical socio-economic and political aspects. She further contends that informality should not be analysed as a result of inadequate state policy, but rather in light of shifting possibilities for accumulation – and I would add dispossession – within a context of global economic crisis (1995, p261).

This notion of informality as a way to deal with a crisis of capitalist accumulation is echoed by others, like Hart (2015), who more recently revisited his earlier stance on the informal economy as the formal economy’s other, which had originally established the idea of a formal and informal duality. Forty years later he holds that the neoliberal revolution of the 1970s and 1980s saw the entire world economy becoming informal in the sense that there is no more political control over the money economy, as was the case in the period of what he calls “national capitalism” (2015, p39). He argues that deregulation caused the rapid expansion

of the informal economy, now embedded everywhere from informal street vending to multinational corporate tax evasion (2015, p39). Neoliberal deregulation had a large impact in Africa. Under the so-called Washington Consensus, emerging African states were required to undergo Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in return for accessing foreign debt. These prescribed the devaluation of currencies, privatisation of state entities, elimination of import controls and food subsidies, cost-recovery in health and education and radical shrinking of the public sector (Davis, 2007, p153). However, contrasting the predictions of increasing growth, SAPs increased poverty and inequality and thus the need for people to find alternative livelihoods. This liberalisation of African economies also led to increasing imports of consumer goods, many of which were sold through informal traders (Skinner, 2008, p6). This in part explains why, unlike in Latin America and more industrialised countries where subcontracting to informal enterprises occurred, informal economies in Africa were generally subsistence-level activities (Meagher, 1995, p266). Instead of depending largely on local raw materials, as was commonly believed, the informal sector often heavily relies on supplies from the formal sector and is thus subject to the global economy as a whole (1995, p276).

However, understanding the linkages between informal and formal are more complex than simply tracing supply chains. In the early 2000s the definition of the “informal sector” was expanded to include “informal employment” – non-regulated and non-socially protected labour relations – in addition to the (lack of) legal regulation of the enterprise. Two main categories of informal employment exist: informal self-employment and informal wage employment (Chen, 2012: 7–9). The Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) network defines six employment statuses: informal employers; informal employees; own account operators; casual wage workers; industrial outworkers / subcontracted



homeworkers; and unpaid family workers. This is visualised by distinguishing these categories according to average earnings, poverty risk and sex (Figure 2). On the basis of these considerations Chen offers the following definition of the informal economy:

*The informal sector refers to the production and employment that takes place in unincorporated small or unregistered enterprises; informal employment refers to employment without legal and social protection—both inside and outside of the informal sector; and informal economy refers to all units, activities, and workers so defined and the output from them (2012, p8).*

Such classifications help to avoid, as Meagher cautions, the misleading tendency to view the informal sector as an undifferentiated pool of entrepreneurs, rather than understanding the inherent social stratifications. Genuine entrepreneurs, she argues, only make up about 20 percent of African informal economies. Only those who have access to a minimum level of skills and capital hold the potential for accumulation. These social, physical and financial resources are usually available to the employed, thus further challenging the assumption that the informal sector provides a launch pad for the unemployed to prosper (Meagher, 1995, p268).

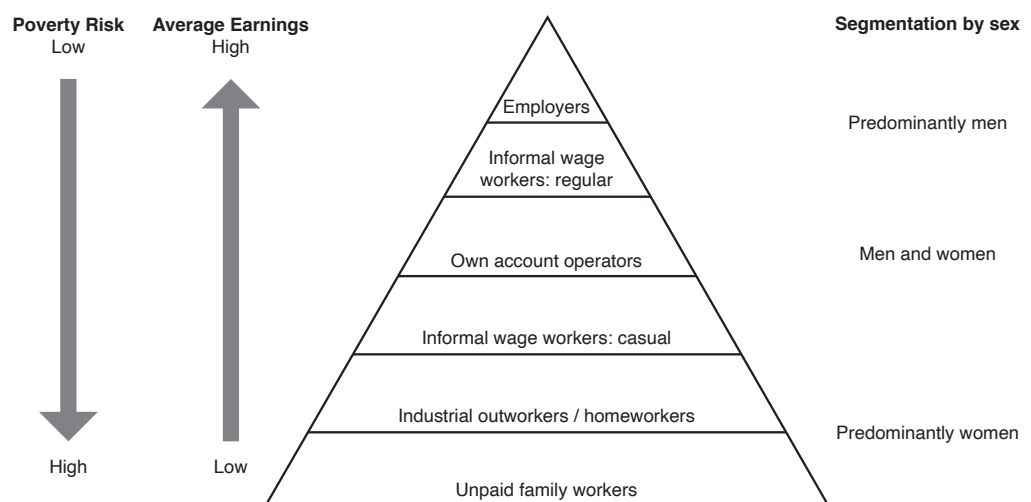


Figure 2: WIEGO model for informal employment. Redrawn by author after Chen (2012: 9).

Others argue that even these expanded classifications are limited by their implicit perpetuation of the formal as the universal yardstick of development. Ferguson and Li (2018) argue that the concept of “the proper job” has lost currency as the culmination of the grand development narrative, which is steeped in “transition thinking” that imagines everyone to ultimately transition into formal economic and social formations. Yet while transition narratives have been widely discredited in academic literature, and the likelihood of obtaining formal employment in many parts of the world is rapidly diminishing due to neoliberal restructuring, the globalisation of production and distribution processes, as well as mechanisation and automation, amongst other phenomena. They note that the broad term “precarity”, aiming to capture everything besides formal employment, all too often tends to rely on negative analytical categories focusing on what something is not: “*unemployment, informal economy, non-standard employment, instability, insecurity*” (2018, p1–2, original emphasis).

Instead, Ferguson and Li propose a list of questions for inquiry based on a political-economic analytical framework that “foregrounds unequal access to resources, and attends to how socially-situated subjects sustain, navigate and transform power-laden meanings and practices in diverse and dynamic ways” (2018, p19). These questions include transforming dynamics of work, uses of land, access to livelihood resources, forms of social membership and the politics that emerge out of all those. This thinking emerges from ethnographic work undertaken in Southern Africa, and it requires, according to Ferguson (2015), emphasising the role of “distribution” in addition to “production”, which most Marxist analyses continue to prioritise over all else. According to him, common sense linkages of production and spatial and social organisation are increasingly coming under strain. His central argument is that people that are no longer integrated into systems of production

are increasingly busy with advancing systems of distribution and making claims on the income of others (2015, p89).

With the effects of neoliberal global reforms, increasing deregulation and the retreat of the state becoming more visible in the 1980s and 90s, scepticism regarding the independence of the informal sector as a marginal economic activity grew. Evidence suggested that the informal economy was growing despite formal economic growth in more developed countries, while in many sub-Saharan African countries induced economic liberalisation and downsizing of the public sector led to the dramatic rise of the informal economy to fill the increasing income gap. These on-going dynamics, linkages to the formal economy, the role of the state and internal social stratifications amongst informal workers were studied increasingly as process rather than as a sector. Clearer distinctions in informal employment allowed the debunking of optimistic views that the informal economy would allow a surge of entrepreneurialism that would lift people out of poverty.

### **2.1.3 Urban informality: from exclusion to inclusion and back**

Only towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have the spatial dimensions of informality been more widely discussed. Al Sayyad (2004) defines urban informality at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as set of “practices” that have emerged in response to global economic liberalisation in various third world contexts (2004, p8). He argues that informality should be seen as a “mode of urbanism” which resembles patterns of urban behaviour and exchange of the middle ages, “made of segregated enclaves, [...] dominated by militarisation, religious ideologies, and the maintenance of political structures that govern through patronage, division, and economic oppression” (2004, p27). He states:

*Perhaps it is time, then, to come to terms with the idea that formality may be the ‘new’ mode — that it was introduced to organise urban society only in the*

*nineteenth century. In this regard, many features of the formal / informal dichotomy may owe their origin to unresolved issues in this historical process (2004, p25).*

Watson describes how modernist ideology, aiming to rationally design social order in ways that matched positivist natural science, developed with the emergence of early modern statecraft in western societies. This ideology was subsequently applied in colonial and postcolonial territories, where “development and modernisation came to mean the same thing” (Watson, 2003, p396). Ferguson and Li (2018) have argued how in this process “the proper job” has become a “widely shared social ideal and expectation” influencing everything from social structures, the organisation of time and space, formal education, values of respectability and virtue, as well as contribution to the nation (2018, p1).

Skinner elaborates that colonial urban planning approaches are often very persistent as they are deeply engrained in legislation, regulatory frameworks and everyday practice. Most African cities, she holds, inherited patterns of spatial segregation between the rich and the poor and many perceive informality as the representation of under-development. This fosters strong “anti-informality sentiments” at national and local government level, and the disappearance of informality is equated with progress (Skinner, 2008, p11). Similar to AlSayyad, Simone characterises modernisation of African cities as a “truncated process” which “has never fully consolidated apparatuses of definition capable of enforcing specific and consistent territorial organisations of the city” (Simone, 2004, p409). At times, national states have established punitive systems of control over informal trade. In apartheid South Africa, and by extension in Namibia, the state established a complex web of national and local laws effectively banning street trading and other informal activities (Skinner, 2008; Simon, 1984). Similarly, in socialist Tanzania a penal code was enacted in the 1980s “that branded all self-employed people as

unproductive, idle and disorderly” (Skinner, 2008, p9). But forced removals of informal traders are also a recurring aspect of most postcolonial African cities, ranging from large-scale evictions to perpetual harassment, and extraction of police bribes and other forms of corruption. The latter aspect highlights the systemic problem of often underpaid local officials in many African cities (2008, p10). Skinner reminds us that besides making a considerable economic contribution to local economies, it should be appreciated from a planning perspective that informal trade contributes to the functioning of cities that often lack appropriate services in the poorest areas (2008, p17).

Exactly how this contribution looks in its most extreme form becomes evident in Koolhaas et al.’s investigations on Lagos (2000). They attest that the city has a “near-complete absence of those infrastructures, systems, organizations, and amenities that define the word city in terms of Western planning methodology” (2000, p652). This void has been filled with alternative systems that defy the notion of order, yet in the words of the author produce “large-scale efficacy” and thus turn Lagos into the representation of “a city at the forefront of globalizing modernity” (2000, p653). They sketch how spatial boundaries remain constantly in flux and property lines are subject to continuous re-negotiation based on overlaps of “land laws, taxes, claims, and interests” (2000, p661). In this scenario, public space and decaying modernist urban infrastructure are appropriated in various ways for entrepreneurial and industrial activities. What modernist rationality would deem inefficient, such as the “go-slow” or perpetual traffic jam, and various infrastructural “bottlenecks”, is here presented as economic opportunity (2000, p685). Such rather journalistic accounts of urban informality, always on the search for the spectacular, stimulate a rethinking of the way we understand the city itself. They do not, however, add to the understanding of that which is deemed to be ‘new’.

Nevertheless, the notion of informality as emerging practice resonates with Simone's understanding of "people as infrastructure" (2004). He notes that infrastructure is usually understood in physical terms "as reticulated systems of highways, pipes, wires, or cables" (2004, p407). This is essentially a modernist view of how the city is efficiently structured, reproduced and its inhabitants, resources and spaces are partitioned, and accounted for. Based on ethnographic work in inner-city Johannesburg, he proposes extending the notion of infrastructure to include that which provides a platform for the reproduction of city life: "the ability of residents to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices" (2004, p407). He claims that an "experience of regularity capable of anchoring the livelihoods of residents and their transactions with one another is consolidated precisely because the outcomes of residents' reciprocal efforts are radically open, flexible, and provisional" (2004, p408). Again, Simone's reflections destabilise and offer a negative critique to the dominant discourse, but they remain largely silent on what this might mean for an urban politics.

Yet, expanding the boundaries of what is knowable has its own function within capitalist development. Roy (2015) observes the increasing global inclusion of the poor, or what she calls "the bottom billion", into modes of capitalist accumulation based on their entrepreneurialism. Financialisation, through ubiquitous micro-finance loans is one means through which the poor are integrated as new untapped markets. The second means is based on the legalist school of thought represented by de Soto who asserts that the poor already hold assets, which only need to be legalised in order for them to enable the poor's participation in property markets. This is most commonly achieved through land titling to secure residents' tenure rights in informal settlements, the efficacy of which remains contested (2015, p65). Roy further argues that for capitalism to expand in such ways requires poverty to be made visible and accessible first. This, according to her, is often achieved with

the help of urbanists and architects like Rem Koolhaas who see “great potential” in the experimental, creative and even emancipatory appropriations of the informal city and make this potential visible (2015, p65).

Given the tensions between mental conceptions of what is modern and backward, local authority approaches to urban informality vary widely, especially with regards to informal trade in streets and public spaces. Generally, authorities either attempt to rid cities of such informal activities through law enforcement, or they tolerate them implicitly (Bromley, 2000). Both stances expose informal workers to uncertainty, harassment and possible victimisation and only a few cities have coherent policies that safeguard the interests of informal workers (Chen, 2012, p14). Bromley also points to the fact that there is often a large discrepancy between high-level aims of administrators and politicians, and street-level implementation. The complexity of regulating and supporting street vendors is staggering, not least by the vast number of actors involved, while the function of undertaking these tasks is often delegated to the lowest ranks of officials. He further raises the issue of the complex sets of regulations that are neither fully known to vendors nor inspectors and police at street level, often leading to ad hoc enforcement (Bromley, 2000, p17–20). Skinner further points to the aspect of decentralisation and frequent personnel changes in local authorities: often a tough response to informality is a popular way to “impress the public” (Skinner, 2008, p9).

However, despite the high levels of informality in many cities in the Global South, urban development cannot be seen as simply beyond state control. Meagher stresses that ambiguous or incoherent policy mixed with partial or no enforcement is partly to blame for informalisation (Meagher, 1995, p277). Roy goes much further, and distinguishes between *lack* of order, and *suspension* of order, in that:

*[...] the planning and legal apparatus of the state has the power to determine when to enact this suspension [of order], to determine what is informal and what is not, and to determine which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear (Roy, 2005, p149).*

In Windhoek this observation holds true though it is not agricultural land that turns into informal settlements, but rather municipal land that was planned as reception areas or public open spaces, where informal settlement is tolerated whilst awaiting future upgrading. So, although the municipal authority in Windhoek has a wide-ranging regulatory framework, and stringent byelaws, it selectively suspends such apparatuses in capitulation before the huge task (and expense) of instituting order.

A typical policy response to street vending, which both aims to promote and regulate the sector, is to move traders into off-street dedicated markets (Bromley, 2000, p18). This is also the case in Namibia including in Windhoek where a number of municipal markets have been developed over the years, as well as in other localities such as Oshakati, Ondangwa, and Tsumeb. However, often land availed for markets is not situated where informal trade would naturally occur and neglects the importance of pedestrian traffic through the area, which is widely regarded as crucial for informal trade (Mati, 2012; Skinner, 2008; Bromley, 2000). When traders are moved into the new premises, other informal traders appropriate their original space in the city. More sensitive approaches deal with informality where it exists. Following Skinner, trader-supporting infrastructure as a minimum should provide shelter, storage space and ablution facilities. The right to operate, through licences, further secures traders' livelihoods and allows them to invest in their trading areas and is this a central requirement for improving the management of public spaces (Skinner, 2008, p12). Related to this B  nit-Gbaffou (2015) describes recent legislation in India which requires authorities to register all existing traders and adhere to the notion of "natural markets" i.e. to develop markets where there is already a concentration of traders (2015, p30).



Despite the various views provided above, urban informality continues to defy clear definition, classification and consensus. What Castells and Portes argued more than 30 years ago holds true: it is far more clear what informality is not (1989, p12). More clarity exists around the state response to informality, which swings between the outer poles of the exclusion-inclusion continuum. In a fractured field of enduring modernist and colonial idioms, partial state formation, conflicting policy landscapes, differentiated implementation and economic globalisation, urban residents are taking matters into their own hands, appropriating various forms of commons in the process. Often, well-meant responses of creating dedicated markets are counter-productive, and the notion of natural markets, pioneered in India, is one step to acknowledge residents' inherent agency in the making of cities.

#### 2.1.4 Informality: an ideological representation

*The ways in which societies compose and invent themselves in the present (the creativity of practice) is always ahead of knowledge produced about them*

Mbembe and Nuttall (2004, p349).

The above shows that it remains futile to define informality as a condition, and that for it to be re-conceptualised, as I aim to do using a critical urban theory lens, requires a critique of ideology (see Brenner, p7). This deserves a detour into the discussion of the city as concept. Wachsmuth (2014) revealed how the “city as self-contained system”, one among three tropes of the traditional concept of the city with provenance in northern theory, continues to exist as an “ideological representation” in urban studies and the everyday lives of citizens, long after it has lost its power as analytical framework (2014, p81). He expands on how the concept of the city benefits capitalist elites and thus reveals their political dimension. Critical geography, in his view, should aim at exposing how these concepts are used to exploit and marginalise the majority of urban citizens. In respect of workers, whom

he claims know why and how they are exploited in the factory, a similar clarity of dynamics of exploitation does not exist in popular understandings of the city. Wachsmuth here points to an important disjuncture between a “category of analysis” and “category of practice” (2014, p76). In other words, a disjuncture between *understanding* urbanisation, and its *lived experience*. In relation to the topic of this thesis this means that while informality is commonly *perceived* to be a condition, it does not follow from this that it can be *analysed only* as condition.

Negri (2008) maintains that indeed the metropolis, not the city – which he deems a rear-guard vision of a false identitarianism – has today become a “source of production: the organized, inhabited, and traversed territory, has become a productive element, just as worked land once was” (2008, p35–36). He argues that from this arises the possibility of a “common”, which is neither the “private” of capitalism, nor the “public” or monopolised state ownership of socialism, but which is about “communal management” of public goods (2008, p38). Negri asserts that the left, however, is entirely unable to engage positively with these emergent realities as they go beyond established tropes of working-class struggle rooted in industrial capitalism and wage labour. He argues that a metropolitan politics will increasingly be linked to common services, housing and other issues to do with social reproduction (2008, p219). The notion of a metropolitan or urban production requires us to question the role of ‘informality’ within this overall production.

According to Ferguson (2015), who is another voice calling for revisiting ossified theoretical conceptualisations in the light of contemporary urbanisation, Africa’s rapidly expanding cities are largely characterised by inhabitants “who lack both land and formal-sector jobs and who improvise complex and contingent livelihoods through a combination of petty trade, hustling, casual labor, smuggling, prostitution, begging, theft, seeking help from relatives or lovers, and so on” (2015,

p91). Much of these miscellaneous livelihood strategies are being captured under the label informal, while according to him their pervasiveness makes such a label increasingly redundant as it offers little insight into what is happening, rather than what is not happening. What emerges from ethnographic research across the Southern African region is that these livelihoods are generally very precarious and require constant “flexible improvisation” (2015, p93), and thus suit the understanding of survivalist strategies rather than entrepreneurial manoeuvres. However, he argues that more than about producing things for sale, such survival is often more about “securing distributive outcomes” (2015, p94). He shows how in Southern Africa anyone who receives an income in money will likely be faced with legitimate claims on that money from others, whether family or not. This explains, according to him, how so many people without any visible income are able to survive through what he calls “relations of dependence”. However, the ability to make such distributive claims requires “social labour” to build and sustain social relationships that provide the basis for the legitimacy of such claims: this he calls “distributive labour” (2015, p97). This definition does neither align with idealisations of teeming entrepreneurialism on the right nor with imaginations of a shared class consciousness on the left. He contends that just like production, distribution is not just about quantitative distribution of resources, but involves social processes, social relations and institutions. In Southern Africa incomes are distributed in such ways through vast geographical and social spaces through “petty reciprocities” (2015, p100–103). The question then arises why such practices are conventionally labelled as informal.

The hypothesis I would like to advance here, following Wachsmuth (2014), is that ‘informality’, widely perceived to be the modern (formal) city’s ‘other’, is a pseudo concept that endures as an ideological representation – i.e. the negation of the formal – while it has little purchase as an analytical framework. The concept

remains too invested in negative connotations about physical environments – in other words emphasising the *condition* of informality (Marx and Kelling, 2019) – drawing on Victorian definitions of slums, poverty and disease as many suggest (Varley, 2013; Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004). If, according to Brenner, critical urban theory aims to “excavate possibilities for alternative, radically emancipatory forms of urbanism that are latent, yet systematically suppressed” within contemporary cities (Brenner, 2012, p19), perhaps shifting the focus towards dynamics of distribution, as Ferguson (2015) is suggesting, will allow us to gain deeper understandings of what is at play.

#### **2.1.5 Conclusion: a binary that isn’t**

In this section I sketched the emergence of *informality* as a concept in urban theory and aimed to expose its inherent limitations. Most scholars continue to reinforce its opposition to the formal, with its positive connotations of order, modernity, and progress, however partial and uneven these have materialised in different parts of the world. The rise of the informal economy is often related to the evolution of late capitalism, feted by some as opening up new frontiers of economic growth. Others laud the ingenuity of people to survive in the face of poverty, underdevelopment and state repression. But the concept does not hold water in the face of the lived experience of cities in the Global South and North alike: it has not yet enabled theorisation beyond what it is *not*.

This raises the question of who benefits from the perpetuation of this muddle. The hypothesis I advance here is that the informal is a seemingly de-politicised category that is useful to perpetuate colonial legacies of inequality while promising its eventual disappearance once all developmental plans and visions have been successfully implemented. It allows inclusion and exclusion – in other words to govern – without upsetting capital accumulation to continue unabated. I will deal

with this aspect in CHAPTER 5 of this dissertation. The second question that arises is how the processes and conditions described as informal could be conceptualised differently, without setting them apart from that which is knowable, measurable and thus formal. This will be the focus of CHAPTER 6.

## **2.2 Positioning spatial co-production**

### **2.2.1 Architecture, participation and the false notion of consensus**

Cohen claims that the 20<sup>th</sup> century more generally saw the democratisation of architecture through the modernist project, though clearly this assessment is based on a global north experience. Certainly, the “field has expanded” (Cohen, 2012, p10) and architects have worked for wider social groups than ever before, especially through large-scale housing and public infrastructure developments of some parts of the industrialised and developing world. However, the explosion of architectural production during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in welfare state contexts, has also firmly established the distinction between the expert or professional, and the common inhabitant, whose influence in the shaping of their urban surroundings decreased by the increasing scale and pace of development. Blundell-Jones et al. argue that modernisation has meant “removing people from decisions” and lead to their alienation. Furthermore, the representation of architecture in mass media exacerbates the general public's engagement with architecture on the aesthetic dimension which renders them passive consumers rather than what the authors call “active doers and makers” (Blundell-Jones, Petrescu and Till, 2005, pxiii–xvii).

This divergence ultimately led to the widespread critique of modernism in the West. De Carlo ([1970] 2005) succinctly synthesised this in his seminal text *Architecture's Public*, pointing to the alignment of architects with the worldview of those in power

because of its dependence on money, land and authority to pursue their practice. This, he argues, permitted architects to solely deal with the “problems of how”, while leaving the “problems of why” unanswered ([1970] 2005, p5). According to him the Modernist Movement with all its formal commitment to the cause of the largest number did not overcome this inherent contradiction and propagated elite cultural and aesthetic codes. Modern architects were simply providing answers to pressing questions of capitalist development by developing ever more (cost)efficient solutions to urbanisation and housing ([1970] 2005, p6–8). More recently and in another context, Roy is of the view that planners tend to focus on utilitarian questions of where things belong, while disregarding the question of to whom things belong. She offers Lefebvre’s “right to the city” as a useful way to think about informality, emphasising use value over exchange value (Roy, 2005, p155).

Participation, a seeming tautology in a democratic system, has since made its inroads in local governance from municipal budgeting to urban development, largely in order to achieve legitimacy in developmental projects (Mayer, 2010). However, participation and democracy are not necessarily the same and the need to define progressive participatory development - working with rather than for the citizenry - is critical. According to Blundell-Jones et al. participation is often accepted uncritically, based on idealised notions of consensus. These authors denote the important difference between the demands of clients (those with money and power) and usually represented by architects and other professionals, and the desires of users that conventionally have little influence on the spatial surroundings they find themselves in (Blundell-Jones, Petrescu and Till, 2005, pxiv: xiv). Till argues that conventional architectural practice resigns itself to an idealised notion, best represented by the Vitruvian triad - commodity, firmness and delight - the purity of which is “threatened” by the disorderliness of user participation. According to him, participation brings forward the “moment of reality” into the

design process and thus threatens normative architectural culture (Till, 2005, p29–30). He proposes that architects “must project themselves into the spatial context, physical and social, of the user” (2005, p31–33) or become organic intellectuals in the way Gramsci defined it. Participation thus opens up a political space of negotiation of the individual with the collective – or the personal with the social – to collectively define a better vision.

The reluctance of architects to deal with the political dimension of space and the urban persists until today. Cruz and Forman propose that “at this moment, it is not buildings, but the fundamental reorganization of socio-economic relations that must ground the expansion of democratization and urbanization” (2015, p209). For architectural practice this means to redirect architectural culture and its inherent value systems that are biased against the messy reality of politics (Blundell-Jones, Petrescu and Till, 2005, p xv) and have their own, professionally coded language and representation which generally obscure the design process to outsiders (Till, 2005, p28). For de Carlo participation transforms architectural planning from an authoritarian act into a process that begins with the identification of users’ needs, through the formulation of organisational hypotheses and then the phase of use, which, unlike in conventional architectural practice, becomes part of a cyclical design process ([1970] 2005, p16–17). Discovery of the users’ real needs according to him means acknowledging their right to express themselves and question all preconceived value systems that were built on non-participation. Organisational hypotheses are then developed through the interaction between those real needs and “images of spatial configurations”. Each hypothesis enlarges the possibilities of previous hypotheses in a sequential manner. The planner’s role here is to expand this sequence of hypotheses and enlarge it beyond the margins set out by the client, to expose to the users the difference between what could be possible and what authoritarian planning offers them. He goes as far as arguing

that the planner's role is to “re-establish the terms of class struggle” ([1970] 2005, p20).

The Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée approaches participation as appropriation and transformation of temporarily available and underused spaces through urban actions. Petrescu (2005) describes her practice as a process of “assembling a collective economy of desire” and “creating space for liberated speech”, which will in turn liberate space. As such, she argues, “participation should be understood as a progressive and evolving process that constructs itself inferentially, by both integrating and adjusting its aims according to the newly created situations” (2005, p53). Knowledge and space are thus produced at the same time and use is no longer separated from the design process. The focus on the temporary appropriation and leftover spaces is because these are outside of the planned city and resist homogenous and stable appropriation. Instead of the object or place, the process becomes sustainable (2005, p58).

The above theories and practices of participation are necessary steps for the future, ranging from establishing some form of counterculture in the interstitial spaces of capitalist urbanisation to calling for outright class struggle as the basis of re-directing practice and socio-spatial relations. While the former could be seen as a form of liberal realpolitik, the latter calls for the spatial practitioner to take a stand and position herself politically before advancing. However, this political position can only form the basis of the process; the process itself has to be envisaged in ways that allow those that participate to engage in meaningful negotiations. The main questions then – who defines the parameters for those negotiations, and how much is to be negotiated – are of major relevance.



### 2.2.2 Spatial practice: between normativity and negotiation of difference

Recently urban scholars and architects have shown more interest in the social and spatial dimensions of urban informality as “places of social interaction, fostering cultures of different values and alternate relations” (Mörtenböck et al., 2015, p7). However, the shortcomings of conventional architectural practice have been alluded to, deriving largely from discipline-specific and wider class-based value systems that are untenable in the face of large-scale urban informality. But also planning theory continues to struggle with tensions between acknowledging the specific challenges of urban informality and the “desire to produce normative theoretical positions (relating to both procedure and product) which can be of generalized use to planners in practice” (Watson, 2003, p396). Yet, there are examples of approaches that are of relevance to informal markets, in that they suggest ways of co-production between the users, authorities and spatial practitioners, some of which I will present in this section.

Sissoko (2012) describes the lessons learnt from delegating market management to informal traders in Bamako. Mali has only introduced local government structures since the advent of full democracy in 1991, in a context where 94 percent of employment was informal. The need for new local governments to raise revenue led to the delegation of market management to increase tax collection and improve the working conditions of informal traders. This approach has been implemented in Commune I, one of the six municipalities that make up Bamako, since 2005. The delegation requires independent entities to be established, usually in the form of cooperatives, which sign a contract with the local authority with a clear list of objectives, outcomes, obligations and responsibilities of each party. The process of setting up cooperatives is supported through educational material and training sessions, both for traders and for municipal staff. To determine the market potential, a taxpayers’ census was undertaken in collaboration with traders. Finally, a

monitoring and evaluation system was implemented to assist learning and improvements of services (2012, p35–41). Sissoko concludes that consolidation of traders' cooperatives made them more effective partners of the municipality in the local development, improved tax collection by nearly 100 percent by ensuring that parts of the proceeds would be spent on improving the market, and encouraged traders to become directly involved in the operation and maintenance of sanitary facilities, waste collection and water provision (2012, p42).

Skinner (2008) shows how after years of confrontation, Dar es Salaam in Tanzania started licensing street traders in the 1990s. Design solutions that allowed better display of goods, especially food, improved health and safety as well as the cleaning of streets and public space. Similarly, the last years of white minority rule in South Africa were marked by a more tolerant approach to the informal economy. The 1991 Business Act specifically banned restrictions on street trading, allowing for dramatic increases of informal activities in South African towns and cities (2008, p10). She also draws attention to forms of organising amongst street traders in African cities. The research suggests that the level of traders organised in associations is relatively low and the role of traditional labour unions, where they have incorporated the concerns of informal traders into their programmes, is becoming more important. Self-help schemes such as community-based savings groups play an important role in the absence of other financial services. The role of women is further indicative of the level of inclusion. Leaders of trader organisations are often men, while women provide the majority of the membership. Low levels of participation and accountability, as well as undemocratic election of leadership are some of the concerns (2008, p14–16).

The municipality of eThekweni (Durban) became paradigmatic for its inclusion of the informal economy in its policy frameworks. In 1996 the Durban city council

embarked on an area-based urban renewal project for one of its more notorious inner-city areas: the Warwick triangle. On the edge of the CBD, this area comprises commuter train stations, markets, bus and taxi ranks, highway flyovers and a cemetery. In careful consultation with thousands of street traders over more than 20 years, relatively small-scale infrastructural improvements were developed, often on a sector-by sector basis. At the same time urban management was improved through a coalition of the area-based local authority staff, technical support by Non-Governmental Organisations and organised traders' associations (Dobson et al., 2009; Skinner, 2008; Lund and Skinner, 2004). In Warwick Junction participation was central to the project's success. Dobson et al. (2009) argue that consultation helped to dispel conflict, ensured that interventions were based on user needs and led to an increased sense of ownership by traders in the area. The latter had a positive impact on improved urban management. Skinner calls this "planning by negotiation and contract" (Skinner, 2008, p12).

Expanding beyond the dimension of Warwick's spatial transformation, Lund and Skinner (2004) describe the consultative policy development process to integrate the informal economy into urban planning and governance in Durban. They describe the context of post 1994 transformation and the growing acknowledgement that the informal economy would become a lasting aspect of the city, reaching a point in which this is seen as part of economic development rather than welfare. This refers specifically to the newly-established policy task force engaged with informal traders as "workers", rather than an abstract notion of "civil society". The consultative processes had to deal not only with external stakeholders, but also with municipal staff who had to be re-directed to work in interdepartmental ways towards the formulation of the policy. As external advisers, the authors were the link to research and international advocacy groups. One of the major challenges was the issue of representativity of traders during the process

and entrenched hierarchies within municipal staff, which made it difficult for lower level civil servants to engage fully (2004). While only producing a policy document, which in itself does not guarantee material transformation, they highlight an important shift in the mind-set of authorities to see informality as ordinary, not as the unknown other that requires taming or formalisation. The Durban policy mind-shift seems to have been a critical basis for the widely praised urban transformation of the Warwick Junction.

Another central aspect of the success of the Durban approach was due to the empowerment of informal workers through advocacy and technical support. Conley (2015) lays out how Asiye eTafuleni (AeT), the NGO that supports informal workers at Warwick Junction, established a practice of supporting informal workers who operate in public space. The organisation works in direct consultation with traders to develop innovative design interventions, and continuously engages the public and government to legitimise the informal economy and advocate for more inclusive urban development (2015, p3–4). AeT argues that one of the critical aspects in its work is the inclusion of practitioners with professional experience in design, architecture, urban planning, law enforcement, research, facilitation and law as “active and essential agents of change” (2015, p5). AeT operates from a space within the Warwick area, which ensures its easy accessibility for traders and can be used as meeting space for traders independently. Besides this direct interaction, AeT engages continuously to sensitise architecture, urban planning, and built-environment professionals to the realities and needs of informal workers in urban settings. It also represents informal workers at various public fora and supports them by providing technical arguments to assist traders “to engage with power structures” (2015, p6). However, AeT admitted that one shortcoming of its operations is the inability to organise traders effectively.

Castells and Portes (1989) warning that informalisation goes hand in hand with the demise of the ability of organised labour unions to represent the working class raises the question of representativity. Where classic labour organisation happened within the confines of the factory, easily enabling organisation, informal labour by its dispersed nature and complex relations of dependence often lacks collective bargaining power. Instead, the absence of organised collective formations is swept under the carpet by insisting on uncritical concepts of 'community'. The idea that planning decisions can be reached through processes that allow all stakeholders to participate in fair and equal ways, contains the underlying assumption that consensus is possible in the face of real political divisions and conflicting interests (Watson, 2003, p398).

Exemplifying such misguided notions, Bremner (1994) discusses the underlying aspects that caused a well-intentioned and ambitious programme of integrated development to falter in the context of pre-1994 violence in South Africa. She argues that its failure was caused by "inadequate conceptualization of development within the highly volatile political context" presupposing a "stable and cohesive community" (1994, p23). The prospect of introducing developmental resources into a context of extreme precariousness further increased existing tensions. While this is a case within a highly specific, volatile political context, it nevertheless points to one of the major misconceptions within much of the development discourse, the unquestioned existence of a community, usually implying progressive connotations.

Where such imaginary stable collectivity does not exist, the impulse is to create it through "community building" (Simone, 2004). Simone criticises that this is often perceived as peripheral and distracting from residents' actual needs to navigate ever-changing constellations of social collaboration. As such, community building

programmes aim to stabilise a broad range of political and economic relationships so that public safety is restored, and enterprise can thrive. However, according to Simone, such approaches are ineffective, as survival requires “not only opportunism but precisely the ability to hide one’s intentions and abilities within complex relationships of mutual dependence” (2004, p420). Simone elaborates that the drive to install normative behaviour in residents establishes an urban politics that does not allow for dialogue and mediation of difference, but rather measures residents against their ability to conform (2004, p420).

At the Herero Mall the assumptions about community and coherence were quickly dispelled as I will elaborate later. Yet, participatory procedures to define the future development of the market were expected to produce a general consensus on how to proceed. This consensus, once formulated and voted on by the community, or that part of the community that actually attended the meeting, then enters the realm of rhetoric, used to give legitimacy to the project going forward. The concept of community is often glossed over in developmental discourse. It is problematic exactly because it de-politicises development as inherently positive and in everybody's best interest. Spatial practice can no longer remain neutral in this context, even in its well-intentioned versions. Rather than seeking out the cracks in the system and spatially transforming those in more or less ephemeral ways (as many architectural and artistic practices, certainly in the global North, have done), spatial practice needs to identify the critical moments within processes of urbanisation that require to be altered to enable radical socio-spatial transformation. Those few instances of spatial practice that co-produce space together with users are often driven by activist practitioners who engage with users at the place of transformation. Such engagements usually require such users to be legitimised in the eyes of authorities, which in many contexts leads to unreflexive

and problematic concepts of community and consensus being imposed on sites of relative complexity, and thereby de-politicising the production of space.

### **2.2.3 Participation versus the proper political**

In *Every Form of Art has a Political Dimension*, Mouffe (2001) follows Schmitt to distinguish between “the political” (antagonism, friend/enemy distinction), able to arise out of any kind of relationship, and “politics”, an “ensemble of discourses and practices, institutional or even artistic practices, that contribute to and reproduce a certain order” (2001, p99). “Politics is always about the establishment, the reproduction, or the deconstruction of hegemony...” and because any form of artistic practice either contributes to the given common sense or its deconstruction, it is always political. According to her, politics, by defining a “demos” (populace), cannot do without a certain type of exclusion, defining who belongs and who does not. She contrasts this with liberalism that tries to replace political concepts with non-political ones such as “humanity” or “population” – and I would add – community. This tendency, according to her, defines the tension intrinsic to democratic liberalism (2001, p104), but also opens up a space within which pluralistic democracy emerges. She elaborates that while democracy tends towards the totalitarian, it is kept in check by liberalism's reference to humanity. While the liberal logic is one of assertion of rights, only through being a democratic citizen one can exercise rights (2001, p107). Mouffe thus argues for the establishment of a public sphere that allows for an “agonistic pluralism” which allows for people to negotiate their interests with those of others through democratic means. In that sense they would not seek consensus but rather agonistic confrontation that still contains a common allegiance to liberal democracy and liberty and equality for all (Miessen, 2010a).

Reminding of Harvey's *Spaces of Hope*, Swyngedouw (2016) critiques utopias of form - the arena of modernist architectural fictions - as either foreclosing "agonistic encounter" (the political) and pretending to "consensual but illusionary inclusion of all in liberal participatory governance of the givens" or generating the distinction between friends and enemies, i.e. "insiders and outsiders" (2016, p6), which ultimately leads to antagonistic conflict. He contrasts this with utopias of time that live by the promise of an inclusive future, but "disavow the perversities of the actually existing present". Swyngedouw again draws on Harvey, who proposes a dialectical spatio-temporal utopianism as a way out, "nurturing radical openness while recognizing the inevitability of temporary spatial closure" (2016, p7). This raises the question of whether architecture, or rather the co-production of space, would be able to perform a similar role.

In his critique of participation Miessen (2006) defines cities as "social and spatial conflict zones, re-negotiating their limits through constant transformation". Rejecting notions of harmony and solidarity that are often implied in understandings of community or marginalised groups, he suggests that future spatial practitioners could enter such zones as outsiders, and instead of aiming to create and sustain consensus, start catalysing conflict between separate fields of knowledge (Miessen, 2010b). Such understanding of creative conflict opens up ways of thinking about the political dimension of space. Yet it does not point to the ways in which that conflict is turned into socio-spatial transformation that goes beyond the performative moment of an ephemeral intervention.

Swyngedouw (2016) explores the possibilities of an "emancipatory politics" and the role of "insurgent architects" within it. He holds that architecture cannot be emancipatory in itself, but architects as practitioners can "co-animate political events and inscribe themselves in emancipatory political sequences". Tellingly, he



positions “politics” as architectural practice as it aims at “intervention” or the re-ordering of the given (2016, p3). Emancipatory politics, according to him, thus has to be “a practice, a set of affective and sequential acts”, similar to the definition of communism in Marx and Engels’s German Ideology, revolving “around the notions of equality, freedom, solidarity, and the ega-libertarian management of the socio-ecological commons of life” (2016, p4). This position puts it in direct conflict with those who embrace capitalist enclosure of the commons in all its forms. He further spells out how emancipatory architects can go beyond their disciplinary limitations by engaging “with the political moments that already brew in the interstices of actually existing urban practices” (2016, p8). He suggests that the inability of critical theory to engage with insurgent architects of the various global urban occupations of the past years left the door open to nationalist, identitarian and antidemocratic politics to gain purchase. The mostly socio-spatial analyses of critical theory of the past decades failed to engage on the ground, continuing to situate the intellectual at the helm of radical urban politics (2016, p14). Emancipatory politicisation thus requires re-framing the political by articulating “dissent and rupture” (2016, p17). According to him, work needs to be done to spatialise and universalise the insurrectional moments of urban struggle, which re-kindled a sensibility for “the polis as a democratic and potentially democratizing space” (2016, p19). At the same time, he argues that the violence inscribed in any spatial intervention that necessarily closes down certain possibilities – “the autocratic moment, or temporary suspension of the democratic” – must be fully endorsed including the possibility to “fail again” (2016, p21).

The political dimension of space will undoubtedly delineate a progressive spatial practice from other forms of practice. Much of the developmental discourse in Namibia lives by elusive promises of ‘development’ (whatever that means) while shying away from asking fundamental questions about the distribution of resources

and opportunities in such a highly unequal context. Because the production of space is by definition political in that it both provides the arena for political encounter and a process of negotiating the distribution of resources, it is critical for the progressive spatial practitioner to align herself with those that are ordinarily not in a position of power.

#### **2.2.4 Conclusion: exposing urban politics**

In this section I reviewed literature that in various ways positioned spatial co-production as a key sphere of *urban politics* as Mouffe (2001) understands it. I elaborated on the role of architecture and planning within this field. Historically these professions have been at the service of power and have contributed to the production and reproduction of hegemony, especially in the colonial setting as I will expand on in CHAPTER 4 below. But there are and always have been spatial practices that seek, sometimes ostensibly, to undermine dominant power. These often take the form of co-productive practices that range from conciliatory and de-politicising interventions to legitimise the status quo, to radical disruptions of the established order.

A progressive spatial practice needs to be conceptualised not merely as practice that alters space and therefore will alter the distribution of resources, but as a practice that needs to engage on multiple levels, and most critically negotiating the political dimensions of that which it seeks to change. It needs to question conventional notions of community, consensus, participation and of de-politicised, positivist visions of 'development' that dominate not only developmental discourse but also popular imaginaries. As Wachsmuth (2014) suggests, besides exposing the citizenry to the dynamics of their exploitation within the capitalist urban order, critical theory needs to be embedded within spatial practice to enable bridging the gap between theory and lived experience. It needs to be an agile practice that can

operate on various playing fields, navigate political spaces and dialectically weave such engagements into an on-going process of catalysing transformation. In this research project I aimed to explore how such a practice could take shape in the context of post-colonial Namibia. This will be the subject of the remainder of this thesis but let me first introduce the case study site in the next chapter.

### CHAPTER 3 INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDY

*Herero Mall* is the popular name for an ‘informal’ market in central Katutura. It is situated on two adjacent plots of land at the heart of a residential area: a ca. 7132m<sup>2</sup> municipal plot (Erf R/6296) and a 1300m<sup>2</sup> plot owned by the Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA). The previously vacant plots, reserved for future institutional use,<sup>17</sup> had originally been appropriated around 2005 by ‘informal’ traders, and today features food outlets, shebeens, a car wash, auto mechanics and welding services, hair salons, meat cutting services and small convenience shops amongst others. These businesses are housed in self-built steel and corrugated iron structures, re-used shipping containers or discarded car bodies loosely arranged along two main vehicle thoroughfares traversing the site. Until late 2017 there was no sanitary provision at the site, electricity remains distributed through precarious networks, and storm water management is near to absent.

Over the years the number of businesses has fluctuated, and it is difficult if not futile to determine. Many visitors frequent the place regularly, sometimes on a daily basis and weekends are considerably busier. Patrons from within the neighbourhood come for entertainment, some for traditional food, a chat and a drink; farmers from hundreds of kilometres away buy cattle feed-troughs from local welders; others rent a trailer to transport cattle over the weekend; while others need to get their car repaired or washed while they wait and socialise. Some come from wealthier neighbourhoods across the city to get meat cut to size and others just want to play some pool accompanied by local music.

---

<sup>17</sup> On a municipal map dated 30.05.1980, Erf R/6296 is indicated as “Old Age Home” and neighbouring Erf 6300 is indicated as “Parsonage”. Source: Office of the Surveyor General.

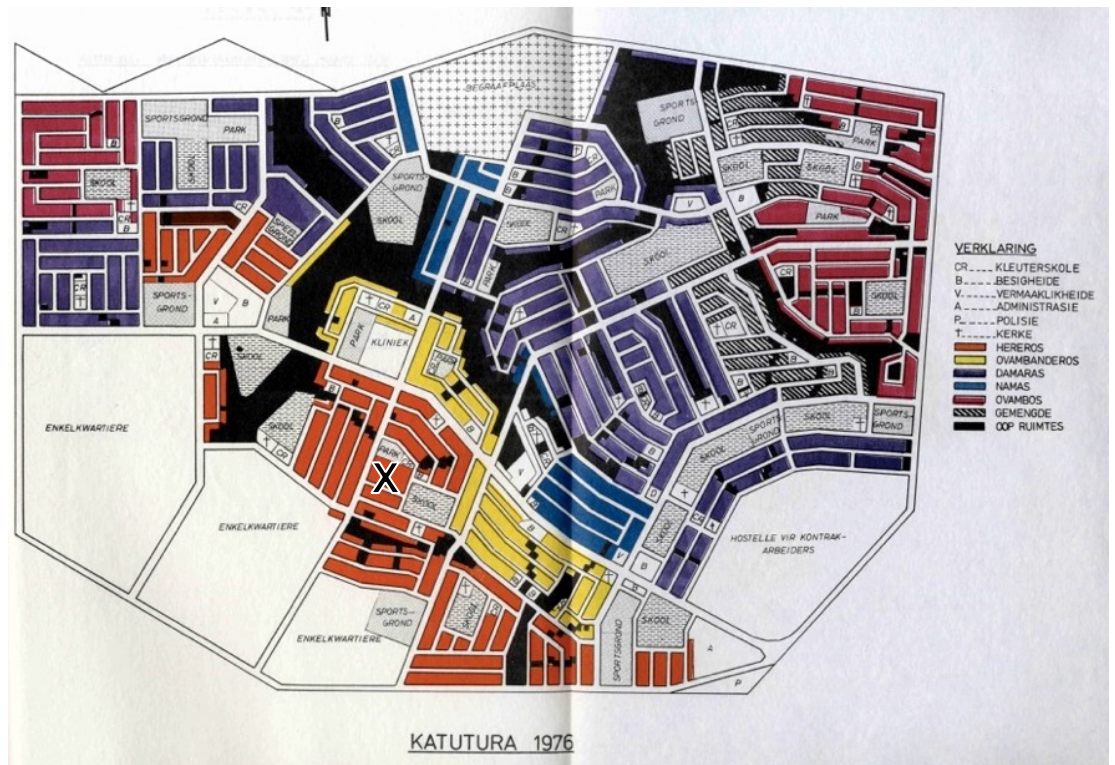


Figure 3: Map of the “tribal” division of Katutura by the apartheid administration, 1976, showing areas for Ovaherero residents in orange. The site, marked with a X, was allocated for the purposes of a “park” and “pre-primary school”. Source: National Archives of Namibia.

The neighbourhood had originally been designated “Herero Location” by apartheid urban planners in the 1960s (see Figure 3). Subsequent sale of municipal houses to tenants in the 1980s and 90s, which was meant to empower residents to become homeowners, fixed this ethnic segregation in space, leading to an enduring dominance of Ovaherero culture in the area today. Three major institutions border the market (see Figure 4): (B) the “Commando No 2” multi-purpose community hall that falls under the auspices of the Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA); (C) the Oruuano church;<sup>18</sup> and (D) the headquarters of the OTA and official residence of the Paramount Chief of the Ovaherero. Furthermore, a number of small political

<sup>18</sup> The Oruuano church was founded in 1955 as a Herero-dominated break-away church from the Rheinisch Mission Society (RMS) that had its origin in Germany and remained under white leadership. Together with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, which had seceded from the RMS in 1946, the Oruuano was amongst the first independent black churches in the country (Tjibeba, 2003).

opposition party headquarters, some of which are considered to be largely composed of Ovaherero groups, are either situated at or in close vicinity of Herero Mall. The site has thus gained major significance not only in the everyday life of the neighbourhood but specifically in the cultural, political and religious life of the Ovaherero (see Figure 6) both in Windhoek and extending into far-away villages and farms, as well as in the diaspora, as I will elaborate below.



*Figure 4: The Herero Mall (A) along Clemence Kapuu Street within the “Herero Location” neighbourhood in Katutura. Institutions neighbouring the mall: (B) Commando Hall, (C) Oruuano Church and (D) Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA) Headquarters. Notice the encampment in the OTA yard. Source: Google Earth.*

Despite the civic potential of the site, and the fact that municipal service infrastructure such as water, electricity and sewer mains are available, the market remained without any sanitary provisions or other public amenities until late 2017. This resulted in traders and patrons using open spaces between structures for their sanitary needs. This critical sanitary challenge has been compounded by the fact that since 2016 the backyard of the OTA headquarters (see Figure 4) has transformed into a dense encampment of hundreds Ovahimba petitioners from the rural, far north-western Kunene Region. The chairperson of the traders’ committee told me that they had assisted the South African army to fight SWAPO ‘terrorists’. After Independence, the South African army gave money to the new Namibian

government for compensation of these veterans who are now petitioning to receive that money. According to him they would not return to their rural homes until they get an answer from government.<sup>19</sup> In order to suppress the stench of urine, old motor oil was spilled onto the ground, creating yet another environmental hazard as the site forms the beginning of a seasonal river system which drains stormwater to the nearby Goreangab dam. The site thus performs a major public function within the neighbourhood and wider afield, yet it lacks the most basic infrastructure to do so.

The current situation has divided public opinion. For some, the Herero Mall is an eye sore and the representation of underdevelopment and social decay. In a popular English daily, a well-known political analyst described it as “a symptom of our failure 17 years after Independence, notably our half-hearted attempts at nation-building and innovative city planning” and called for the City of Windhoek to tear down the market and replace it with something that would offer a proper place of entertainment, especially for the youth (Hengari, 2007). His somewhat misguided comparison of the Herero Mall with a famous entertainment area in Tokyo, Japan, exposed his elite vantage point and sparked a fierce public debate in the print media over the meaning and identity of the Herero Mall: while some stressed its role as an enabler of livelihoods and a hub of cultural identity and social interaction (Tjirera, 2013), others saw it as a direct challenge to law and order (The Namibian, 2011). Nevertheless, most commentators called for its development rather than its closure. I undertook a detailed media review of the period from 2007-2014 as part

---

<sup>19</sup> The encampment has been demolished a week before submission of this thesis under the state of emergency declared in response to Covid-19, while the residents were temporarily accommodated in tented camps elsewhere to prevent the spread of the pandemic (Mutanga, 2020).

of the feasibility study (Delgado and Lühl, 2014) which I include here for reference (see Appendices, p292).

Since the initial controversy in 2007, the city council has been undecided on what to do with this particular plot of land occupied by about 300 informal traders at the time. One considered option was to offer it for sale to the OTA, which would have probably prevented the development of an open market and thus put livelihoods in jeopardy. In the wake of increasing complaints by surrounding residents about deteriorating conditions including crime, alcohol abuse, and noise pollution in and around the Mall, in July 2011 the city council resolved to restrict trading hours to 07:00-19:00 instead of the conventional 07:00-22:00 applicable to trading sites and municipal markets elsewhere in the city. A subsequent dispute between the local constituency councillor and a shebeen operator in August 2011 led to the Namibian Police and City Police moving in on the Mall to enforce the operating hours, facing stiff opposition from traders and visitors. On two occasions police used teargas to disperse the crowd, and in the event not only affected traders and visitors, but also surrounding residents including children, who had to flee their homes to avoid being affected (Allgemeine Zeitung, 2011; Die Republikein, 2011). This unprecedented harsh public policing response drew wide public criticism and accusations of racial discrimination of Ovaherero by the authorities that are alleged to be Aawambo-dominated.<sup>20</sup> The various Aawambo ethnic groups represent about half of Namibia's population, while the Ovaherero account for about seven percent.<sup>21</sup> Other entertainment hot-spots in Windhoek with similar characteristics

---

<sup>20</sup> The Aawambo are the majority ethnic group in Namibia, comprising about half of the country's population.

<sup>21</sup> Some argue that current resentment amongst the Ovaherero relies not only on the original trauma inflicted by the German colonial regime during the 1904-07 genocide and its socio-economic legacies, but also in the fact that the genocide greatly diminished the Ovaherero's political weight in post-colonial Namibia. From personal conversation with a Herero Mall visitor on 27.1.2019.



that are Aawambo-dominated were not subject to restrictions and police violence, seemingly confirming allegations of tribalism.

Allegations of unfair treatment of the Herero Mall traders by the municipality and City Police continued through 2012, and it was claimed that over 40 businesses had to close down owing to restrictive trading hours (Kangootui, 2012). Reacting to the confrontations, Windhoek's CEO had already announced the development of the Mall into a formal municipal market (Kisting, 2011). However, the city council resolved that in future the sale of alcohol and light industrial activities would not be allowed, in line with municipal regulations for public markets. As a direct consequence of these measures, a large majority of traders would have had to relocate or change their business to conform with regulations. In April 2013 the Namibia Informal Sector Organisation (NISO) launched a feasibility study for the development of Herero Mall, sponsored by a German development foundation. Amongst the study's major recommendations was the re-zoning of the land to "business" in line with the CoW's policy for business corridors,<sup>22</sup> and to sell the land to NISO for further development as a mixed-use market. The city council rejected the study, claiming it had been undertaken without council's input in defining its terms of reference. These developments ultimately led City of Windhoek to commission an independent feasibility study for the re-development of the Herero Mall into a formalised municipal market in 2014, which I will elaborate in CHAPTER 7 below. I was part of the team responsible for the study and this doctoral research emerged out of my frustration with that process and my interest to continue to engage professionally within this context.

---

<sup>22</sup> The CoW business corridor policy was established in 2008 to incentivise the re-zoning of residential properties along selected "high streets", including Clemence Kapuuo Street adjacent to the mall (Figure 4). For further discussion of this policy and its effects see (Charman et al., 2017) below.

I argue in this dissertation that the Herero Mall embodies the full complexity of Namibia's post-colonial urban landscape. On the one hand it presents a rupture with inherited spatial patterns of the apartheid city, on the other it is a space where many social legacies of colonialism are re-produced. As an 'informal' market within a formal neighbourhood it is technically illegal yet practically tolerated by municipal authorities, though not enough to provide basic services to affirm its existence, suspending traders in ambiguity for years. It is a unique local space of difference, imbued with meaning far beyond the scale of the neighbourhood and the city, which split public opinion about the nature of post-colonial urban development. From my own perspective it laid bare the failure of professional spatial practice to engage within such a context. But to read the many layers of significance that the Herero Mall embodies requires us to first trace the country's socio-spatial context and its historical development.



*Figure 5: Patrons at a shebeen at the Herero Mall on a Saturday afternoon. Photo by author.*

## CHAPTER 4 THE PRODUCTION OF INEQUALITY

I have shown in the literature review that conceptualisations of ‘informality’ rely to a large extent on binary oppositions to that which is formal, regulated, legitimate and measurable. As suggested by AlSayyad (2004), from a historical perspective it is not the ‘informal’ but the formal that is the new phenomenon – worldwide – and its specific development in particular local contexts is contingent. This is true especially in countries that were colonised, where foreign ways of organising relations of production were forcefully imposed on existing social, cultural, economic and political structures. In the previous chapter I outlined why for Namibia the Herero Mall provides an instructive case to study the “truncated process” of modernisation as Simone (2004) calls it. Following Foucault, in this chapter I will aim to establish the conditions of emergence for the ‘informal’ discourse in Namibia as I outlined in the Methodological strategy (see p13).

The major question I aim to answer here is how the formal / informal binary could come to be seen as self-evident in everyday practice, even though most literature on ‘informality’ casts this binary as limiting a better understanding of what is at stake. To achieve this, I will construct an archaeology, inspired by Foucault’s method (see p13), which traces the historical production of inequality through the colonial project as the setting that allowed such binary understandings to emerge. I start from an investigation of territorial socio-spatial dynamics under colonialism, followed by a closer look at Windhoek’s historical development, and the shifts and continuities experienced during the process of nominal decolonisation.<sup>23</sup> I then turn

---

<sup>23</sup> I use the adjective nominal here because much of the argument of this thesis is that while Namibia was officially decolonised, i.e. became independent of South Africa in 1990, many of the colonial legacies persist and are re-produced. Wherever I suggest the need to decolonise in this thesis, this does not refer to the formal notion of decolonisation mentioned above, but rather to undo colonial legacies.

to the emergence of the ‘informal economy’ and the dominant policy response before highlighting the position of professional spatial practice within this context. The chapter is primarily based on a literature review, but I also draw on in-depth interviews, public statutes and media reports amongst others.

#### **4.1 Namibia – geographies of settler colonialism**

The existence of contemporary ‘urban informality’ in Namibia cannot be understood in isolation from the country’s colonial past. In Namibia, a major apparatus to establish settler control over the colonial territory was the introduction of private property that had hitherto not existed. Backed-up by a powerful colonial army after the official establishment of the German protectorate South West Africa (SWA) in 1884, major land dispossession of indigenous populations in the central and southern parts of the territory was accomplished in a relatively short period. The major rupture in this process was the Ovaherero and Nama<sup>24</sup> uprising against the German occupation of 1904-07, culminating in the first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the war with the “Schutztruppe” (German colonial army), thousands of Ovaherero and Nama were killed, following Lieutenant-General Lothar von Trotha’s infamous “Vernichtungsbefehl” (extermination order). Prisoners of war were interned in concentration camps in Windhoek, Swakopmund and Lüderitz, where captives were subjected to forced labour, and thousands succumbed to the inhumane conditions. The ensuing collective trauma, and the loss of ancestral land and livestock mainly affected Ovaherero and Nama communities who inhabited the central and southern regions and lingers as an unresolved and highly charged

---

<sup>24</sup> The Nama are one of the minority ethnic groups in Namibia, making up 4.5 percent of the population, who traditionally live in the central and southern regions of the country, as well as parts of South Africa and Botswana.

political issue in contemporary Namibia.<sup>25</sup> By 1921, free-hold tenured settler farms occupied most of the central and southern parts of the territory (Surveyor General, 1921). In the same year South Africa was mandated to administer the territory for the League of Nations after Germany's defeat in the First World War (Wallace and Kinahan, 2011).



*Figure 6: Protest march along Clemence Kapuuo Street by Ovaherero groups demanding reparations from Germany for the 1904-07 genocide, February 2016. Photo by Guillermo Delgado.*

This enclosure of a *de facto* commons by external force rendered former pastoralists landless and forced many to seek employment in the nascent colonial industries and settler farms. Similar to other Southern African countries, the mining sector and its demand for cheap labour significantly encouraged this

---

<sup>25</sup> At the time of writing this dissertation formal negotiations between the Namibian and German governments about possible reparations for the genocide are in progress.

transformation (Ferguson, 2015). This was institutionalised in the notorious contract labour system that started in the mid-1920s. Through this system the colonial administration recruited young black males from the northern territories – later to become native homelands under apartheid – to work on two-year labour contracts in the urban industries, mines or farms of central and southern Namibia – in the so-called Police Zone – including as far as the gold mines of Johannesburg and other industrial centres in South Africa. According to Ferguson, keeping labour in a state of migration helped avoid the rise of political demands on behalf of workers, while at the same time the costs of social reproduction were off-loaded onto the impoverished rural areas (2015, p10).

In the 1950s and 60s South Africa consolidated apartheid policies across the entire SWA territory, especially through the implementation of the so-called *Odendaal Plan* of 1964,<sup>26</sup> building on foundations laid by the earlier German colonial occupation. Municipalities and corporations were held liable to provide housing for their urban labour force and a system of urban influx control policed through infamous pass laws kept unemployed blacks away from urban centres. This ensured the outward appearance of well-planned, civic and modern cities (Wallace, 1997). As migrant labourers were solely valued in terms of their labour power they were efficiently housed in ‘labour compounds’ away from the city proper (Gordon, 1977; Beyerly, 2012, p34–35).<sup>27</sup> The flipside of this deceptive urban order, formally planned along modernist principles though racially perverted (Frayne, 2000; Friedman, 2000), was the *underdevelopment* (Rodney, 1981) of the rural

---

<sup>26</sup> The Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs, or Odendaal Commission, named after the lead Commissioner, was established by the South African government to promote the closer integration of the territory into the political and economic structure of apartheid South Africa.

<sup>27</sup> “Labour compounds” were migrant worker hostels established for male contract workers, which came to represent the oppressive nature of the contract labour system.

native reserves called homelands or bantustans (see Figure 7).<sup>28</sup> The majority black population was relegated to ten such homelands comprising just 40 percent of the land area, often with the poorest conditions for agriculture and livestock rearing, while the best 43 percent were reserved for white farmers (Frayne, 2000, p53). Homelands were essentially reserves of surplus black labour, where pre-colonial and pre-capitalist modes of life co-existed with attempts at synthesising tribal administrations that further extended the apartheid administration's influence over those areas.

Rodney defined development at the level of social groups as “an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships” (Rodney, 1981, p3). He posits underdevelopment firstly as a comparative measure of economic conditions – in other words not in terms of mental, physical or moral aspects – between historical periods in one country or between countries at a given point in time. Underdevelopment in his conceptualisation can be observed most readily in terms of quantitative indicators such as statistics on consumption, levels of nutrition, access to social services, life expectancy, child mortality and literacy and education levels amongst others (1981, p13–17). More importantly for his own analysis and for my thesis, is his contention that underdevelopment is in essence a “relationship of exploitation” between countries, with specific reference to countries in Africa and certain developed countries predominantly in Western Europe and the United States (1981, p21). The latter countries were able to dominate relationships with the former countries to such an extent that their own

---

<sup>28</sup> Bantustans were “pseudo-national homelands” demarcated by the South African apartheid administration for various constructed ethnic and linguistic groups (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). The Odendaal Plan expanded this principle to SWA.



development would be to large extent premised on the exploitation and consequently the underdevelopment of the former.

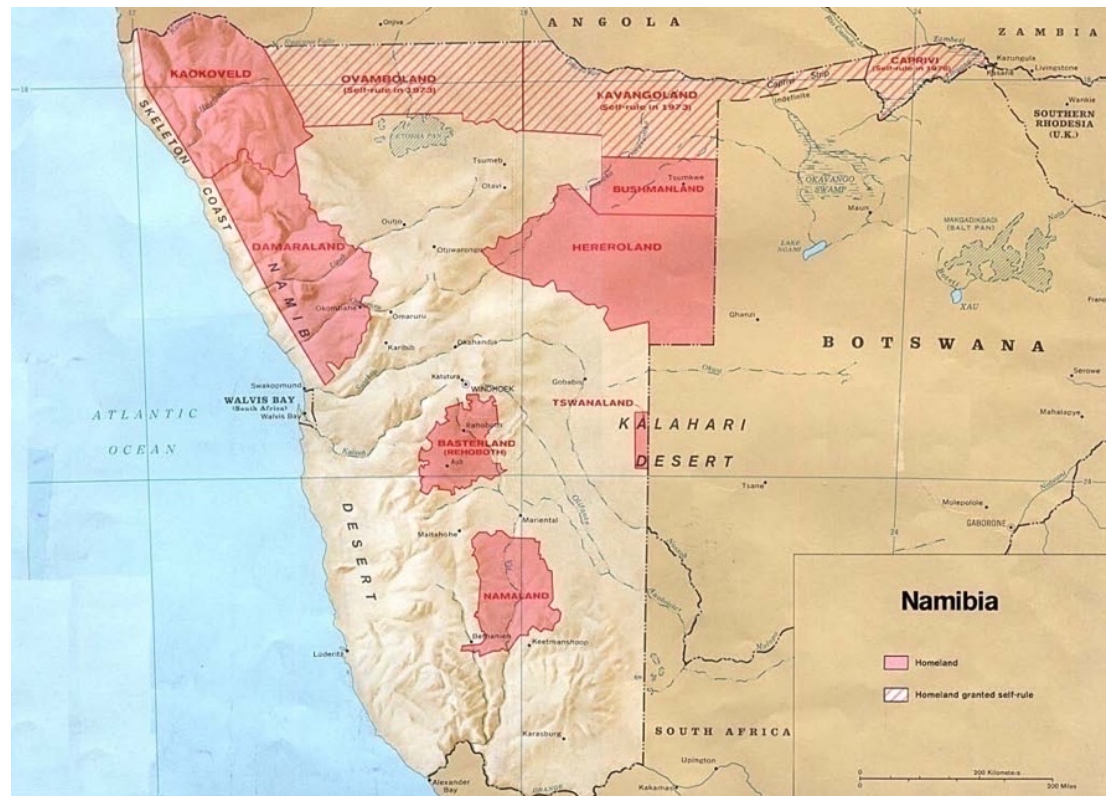


Figure 7: Map of 10 ethnic Homelands after implementation of the recommendations of the Odendaal Commission in the 1960s. Source: National Archives of Namibia.

In the case of the settler colony of SWA relationships of exploitation were established not only in relation to Germany and later South Africa, but also within the territory, creating unequal development between industrialising and modernising urban areas as well as commercial landholdings for settlers and the underdevelopment of the native homelands. The resulting asymmetries had to be reconciled and made palatable within the same space. Spatial planning and architecture played a central role in establishing geographies of inequality and deprivation both on a territorial scale as well as within urban areas, which I will elaborate in the next section. The deeply asymmetric patterns of (dis)empowerment, loss of land, ethnic delimitations – real and imposed – and



social development continue to haunt contemporary politics. Ongoing bilateral negotiations between the Namibian and German governments for reparations to compensate for the losses inflicted during the genocide, and the recent rise of both urban- and rural-based social movements calling for land restitution, amongst others, are part of those dynamics.

#### **4.2 Windhoek – a diagram of an apartheid city**

Urban apartheid geographies have been well documented as has the instrumental relationship between colonial and apartheid urban planning and modernist planning ideology, propagating scientific rationalism through which a system of total order and control could be established, often disguised as ‘development’ (Heynen, 2005; Friedman, 2000; Wallace, 1997; Pendleton, 1974). Windhoek’s ‘Old Location’ has a special place in history in this respect. It was established as the ‘Main Location’ under German rule in 1912 to the immediate west of the town (Wallace, 1997, p66) and was soon subjected to the Natives’ (Urban Areas) Proclamation of 1924, an extension of the notorious South African Natives’ (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. This proclamation notably facilitated residential segregation in urban areas, established pass laws for black males, and compelled local authorities to improve conditions in the native locations. It also led to the establishment of a location police force and an Advisory Board of nominated and elected residents who reported to the location superintendent (1997, p99–100).



*Figure 8: The Old Location in 1954 after its re-organisation into a grid. Clearly visible is the central cluster of public amenities including the social halls, as well as the link to the white part of the city in the top right corner. Source Surveyor General*

Residents had to pay ‘hut tax’ to the local authority for occupying a plot of land, while the largely self-constructed houses remained their private property. The location was rigorously re-organised into a regular grid pattern of streets from 1932 onwards (see Figure 8) largely based on public health concerns (1997, p319–330) that became increasingly central in urban planning. Houses were relocated to suit the new urban plan, and a municipal Beer Hall and a “Bantu Welfare Hall” were established in 1936-37. Some markets, communal bathhouses and street lighting followed, though they remained utterly inadequate. Residence in the location was controlled through the issuing of permits (or passes) to employed, non-contract

workers and their dependent family members, as well as to some recognised self-employed traders or shop owners (Melber, 2016, p7–8).



*Figure 9: Dance event at the Sybil Bowker Hall at the Old Location, 1950s. Source: National Archives of Namibia*

Like Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town – and despite the gross deprivation in terms of service provision and institutionalised inequality – the Old Location nurtured an emerging urban culture, transcending the increasingly separate ethnic identities of the native homelands. Social life revolved around dancing (see Figure 9), beauty contests and cinema screenings at the Sybil Bowker Hall, as the Bantu Welfare Hall had been renamed after the location superintendent's wife. Sports, including football, tennis and horse racing, as well as a variety of churches provided further opportunity for social interaction, though especially team sports enabled tribal identification (2016, p15).

In the 1950s plans to re-locate black and coloured residents of the Old Location to new townships<sup>29</sup> farther to the north-west of Windhoek took shape in line with apartheid planning practices in South Africa. While the removal was primarily argued on the basis of unsanitary conditions and substandard housing in the Old Location, the pressure of opening up land for expansion of white suburbs that had grown close to the Old Location was a major underlying consideration (Pendleton, 1974, p27–28). In 1959, the year of the beginning of forced relocations to the newly established townships of Katutura and Khomasdal, Windhoek was estimated to have 20,000 white, 18,000 African and 1,500 so-called Coloured or Baster residents. This marked a turning point from whites outnumbering other groups in the town. At the time only 108 black and coloured Windhoek residents held trade and business licences for their own economic activities (Melber, 2016, p9–10). With the administration advancing to relocate residents voluntarily, resistance grew. Residents refused to relocate for a number of reasons including prohibition of ownership of housing in the new townships, high rental costs for municipal houses, and bus fares required for commuting to town. Boycotts and protests followed, culminating in the “Old Location Massacre” on 10 December 1959, when eleven people were killed and many wounded as the municipal police force tried to contain a women-led protest against forced relocations.<sup>30</sup> Some claim that this event provided a turning point “in the consolidation of political organizations, and especially the formation of the South-West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO)” (2016, p4), which later advanced to form the country’s first democratically elected government after independence and remains the ruling party to this day. However,

---

<sup>29</sup> “Township” is the terminology used for urban extensions in planning legislation until the recent enactment of the Urban and Regional Planning Act of 2018. However, as a colloquial term it usually refers to the black residential areas under apartheid racial segregation laws.

<sup>30</sup> In Namibia 10 December is annually celebrated as Women’s Day, in remembrance of the predominant role of women during this historic event.

authorities continued to coerce residents to relocate over a period of nine years and by 1968 the Old Location was finally closed down, erased from the face of the earth to be re-developed as the white suburb of Hochland Park. Simon summed up the consolidation of urban apartheid as follows:

*Namibian apartheid legislation was modelled closely on that of South Africa, although implemented principally by proclamation. [...] the notorious Group Areas Act was never applied to colonial South West Africa, although other legislation, particularly the 1951 Natives (Urban Areas) Proclamation coupled with municipal bylaws, town planning practices and social custom achieved extremely high levels of residential segregation (aside from domestic workers on employers' premises). By 1968 Windhoek and other Namibian towns complied with the requirements of the apartheid city model (Simon, 1996, p52).*

The reorganisation of Windhoek to fit the apartheid city model is visualised in Figure 12. White neighbourhoods to the east and south of the city were shielded from the black and coloured townships through various means: a north-south axis of industrial areas and the central business district (CBD), the Western Bypass highway, and large open greenbelts that acted as buffer zones. The urban design of the townships was informed by military strategies with single access roads controlled by police amongst other measures. The Old Location, an integral and diverse part of the city despite being spatially segregated, had been replaced with the ethnically segregated dormitory townships at the periphery of the city.



*Figure 10: View of central Windhoek with the Old Location in the background, ca. 1932. Source: National Archives of Namibia*



*Figure 11: Commuters queuing for the bus in central Windhoek to take them back to Katutura after work, 1970s. Source: National Archives of Namibia*



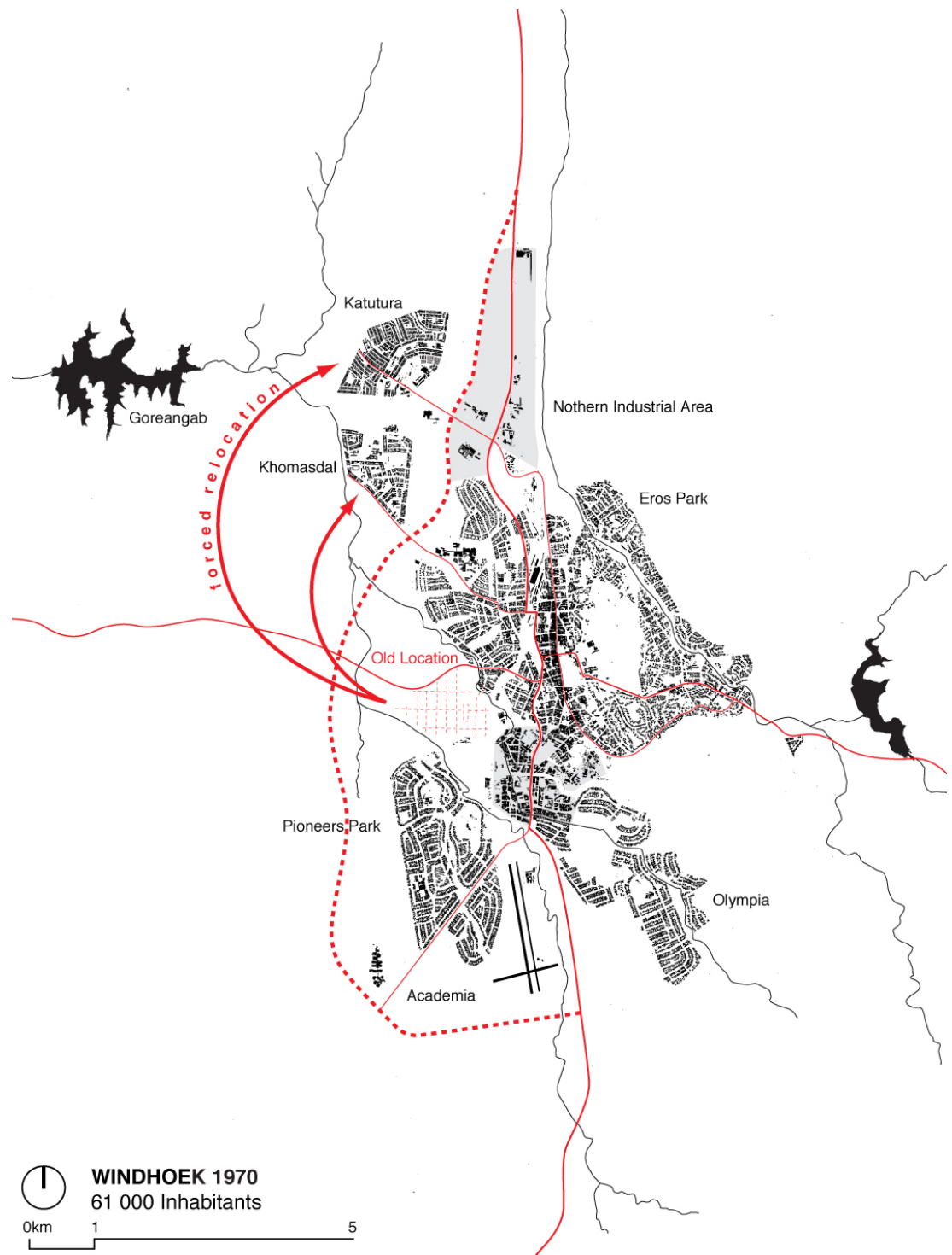


Figure 12: Map of Windhoek in the 1970s, indicating the forced relocations of black and coloured inhabitants to the racially segregated townships of Katutura and Khomasdal respectively. The townships were separated from white residential areas by means of a large highway (dotted red), industrial areas (grey) and open buffer zones. Also note the names of white suburbs such as Academia, Olympia, and Pioneers Park. Source: drawn by author based on historical maps (Lühl, 2012a)

In a crude diagrammatic representation of apartheid racial hierarchies in which coloured residents were often employed in lower administrative positions while black residents were employed as labourers, the coloured township was infrastructurally linked to the commercial heart of the city in the CBD, while the black township was directly linked to the major industrial area. More importantly though for this thesis, the coercion and subjugation of black and coloured residents based on ostensible improvement of living conditions and 'development' is critical. Wallace argues that already the 1932 re-organisation of the Old Location – at the time considered a more cost-effective solution than its relocation – exposed the fault lines between “poorer Africans, fearful of losing their housing and grazing rights, and the elite of the Advisory Board, anxious to promote hygiene and modernity” (1997, p340). Similarly, the 1959 relocations pitted those who complied against those who resisted the apartheid administration's moves. Yet, the new townships created the image of a modern and clean town, and the municipal rental housing that was provided (see Figure 14) was held up as representation of orderliness and progress. On the whole, the erasure of physical structures and representations of underdevelopment in urban areas enabled the new formal townships and housing solutions to become considered as the new normal, the impact of which I will turn to later (see 5.1.1).





*Figure 13: A family in front of their house in the Old Location preparing to be relocated to Katutura, 1960s. Source: National Archives of Namibia*



*Figure 14: New municipal houses for black residents in Katutura, 1960s. Source: National Archives of Namibia*

### 4.3 Decolonisation and the re-production of inequality

The 1970s saw increasing international pressure on South Africa to grant Namibia independence as per the United Nations resolution 435 of 1978. Under Namibia's transitional government from 1977-83 much of the racially discriminatory legislation was repealed in an effort to portray change during international negotiations on the future of an independent Namibia. Chief amongst those laws repealed was the South African Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, which was proclaimed in South West Africa in 1924, and had hitherto enabled the influx control of rural migrants. According to Simon, all "racial restrictions on urban residence, property ownership and use of public amenities" had been removed from the statutes by 1983 (1996, p52). However, reporting on 'informal sector' activities in Windhoek in 1984, Simon notes that "only limited blurring of the racial geography has occurred to date [... and that] little structural economic change has occurred in Namibia since 1977, and a high degree of continuity with the pre-transitional colonial era can thus be imputed" (Simon, 1984, p552). In 1981 national unemployment stood at 18 percent, up from 10 percent in 1977/8. The increasingly high cost of living in Windhoek could be attributed partly to consumer goods and food being largely imported from South Africa.<sup>31</sup> Given the small population in the country, only small quantities were imported which were furthermore distributed through quasi monopoly outlets. Simon reports a "widespread wage discrimination, both by race and by sex", with an average wage ratio between whites and coloureds of 2.2:1, between coloureds and blacks of 1.8:1 and between whites and blacks of 4:1 (1984, p553–558).<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> 43 percent of black households fell below the official Household Subsistence Level (HSL) for Windhoek and 69 percent below Household Effective Level (HEL), while 19 percent of coloured households fell below HSL and 37 percent below HEL. The HSL and HEL were official indices calculating required incomes to sustain a household of 5 people (for coloureds) and 6 people (for blacks) on an annual basis for different cities in South Africa, as well as for Windhoek (Simon, 1984).

<sup>32</sup> The latter ratio, however, reflected a few high black wages rather than average earnings. Women earned significantly less on average and migrant labourers' average wages were up to 50 percent lower than permanent urban residents.

Ferguson notes that the gradual equalisation of political rights happened simultaneously with the transformation of Southern Africa's labour-scarce economies in the 1970s to a state of vast labour surplus after decolonisation and to this day (2015, p4).

The increased freedom to move to urban areas amid stagnating formal employment provided the thrust for the emergence of what later would be called the 'informal' economy. The effects of the increasingly dire situation for urban black and coloured residents were documented in historical accounts: "during working hours many hundred unemployed men and women of all ages are evident in Katutura, often patronizing illegal shebeens" (Simon, 1984, p559). However, in comparison with other African cities where the informal sector represented 25-50 percent of urban employment, Katutura at the time fell within the profile of South African townships where it only counted for 10-20 percent (1984, p559–561). This further underlines the high levels of control of 'informal' activities under apartheid rule.

Attempts to ensure externalisation of costs of social reproduction of coloured and black residents while continuing to extract their surplus value took the form of proposals to administer the coloured and black townships as separate municipalities. However, the fact that Katutura and Khomasdal were both originally designed as dormitory townships and lacked any significant economic and social infrastructure that would enable them to function as stand-alone entities, demonstrates that this was a thinly veiled attempt at cementing the racially segregated status quo. These plans never materialised as they were overtaken by historical events: The National Assembly was abolished and the South African-appointed Administrator General held executive powers again from 1983 onwards (Simon, 1985, p520). Nevertheless, the spatial barriers persisted even after free movement was allowed.

It took until 1990 and Namibia's eventual Independence from South Africa, for efforts to overhaul local government in non-discriminatory ways to take root. Again, it was Simon (1996) who traced the development of this transition. The urban local authority system Namibia inherited at Independence, comprised three elements: municipalities established in the commercial areas (formerly for whites only), a large number of small towns and villages scattered across the commercial central and southern areas that were centrally administered, and the peri-urban areas in the so-called communal lands or former homelands, which had no local authorities. Former personnel of ethnic representative authorities were absorbed into the new three-tier government structures: a bicameral parliament, regional councils and local authorities (1996).<sup>33</sup> The new Local Authorities and Regional Councils Acts were drafted and finally promulgated in 1992. Inherited urban governance structures were however only slightly modified, which allowed the spatial geography of inequality to continue unabated.<sup>34</sup>

Repeal of influx controls resulted in 'informal' urban growth at the periphery of the black townships from the 1980s onwards.<sup>35</sup> As a result of extremely low incomes the vast majority of the urban population country-wide lives today in 'informal

---

<sup>33</sup> According to Simon (1996) the first Delimitation Commission, established in 1990 to determine regional and local boundaries did not concern itself too much with the restructuring of existing municipalities, as it deemed their rather extensive territorial boundaries adequate to accommodate future growth. It premised its expectations on inclusive future urban development to rely largely on the establishment of a free land and property market, which had previously been restricted. Simon's prediction that this approach "could, in the absence of any checks and regulations on resale [...] give rise to intense speculative pressures on land prices, to the detriment of the majority of local residents" (1996, p54–56) certainly materialised. Urban land and housing have since become increasingly inaccessible to the majority of urban residents, particularly in the capital (Delgado and Lühl, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Under the Local Authorities Act three kinds of local authorities are defined: municipalities, town councils and village councils. While municipalities are required to be financially self-sufficient, town and village councils may receive financial and administrative support from central government (Simon, 1996, p58).

<sup>35</sup> According to the 10-yearly national census data Windhoek's population grew from 147,022 in 1991 (Central Statistics Office, 1994, p15) to 232,743 in 2001 (Central Statistics Office, 2011, p10) to 325,033 in 2011 (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2011, p7) and is currently estimated at about 400,000 (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017a, p45). This number is projected to double by 2040 (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2014, p18).

settlements' unable to access adequate housing and most basic services, including adequate sanitation (Figure 15). The percentage of households living in such impoverished housing conditions in Windhoek is estimated at about 42 percent according to official statistics (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017a, p101).<sup>36</sup> This growth continues along the underlying apartheid city patterns (see Figure 16). The former white eastern and southern residential areas are associated with higher incomes and standards of living, whereas the north-west continues to bear the stigma of poverty and marginalisation (Friedman, 2000; Lühl and Delgado, 2013).



*Figure 15: Otjomuise informal settlement in Windhoek, 2012. Photo by Guillermo Delgado*

---

<sup>36</sup> Informal settlement counts by the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN) through their Community Land Information Programme (CLIP) put the number of households living in shacks in informal settlements considerably higher at about 63 percent of all households. This is based on an unpublished CLIP informal settlement profiling report from 2018 that was shared with me by the Namibia Housing Action Group. It must be noted that CLIP excludes backyard structures and other forms of informal inhabitation within formal areas.



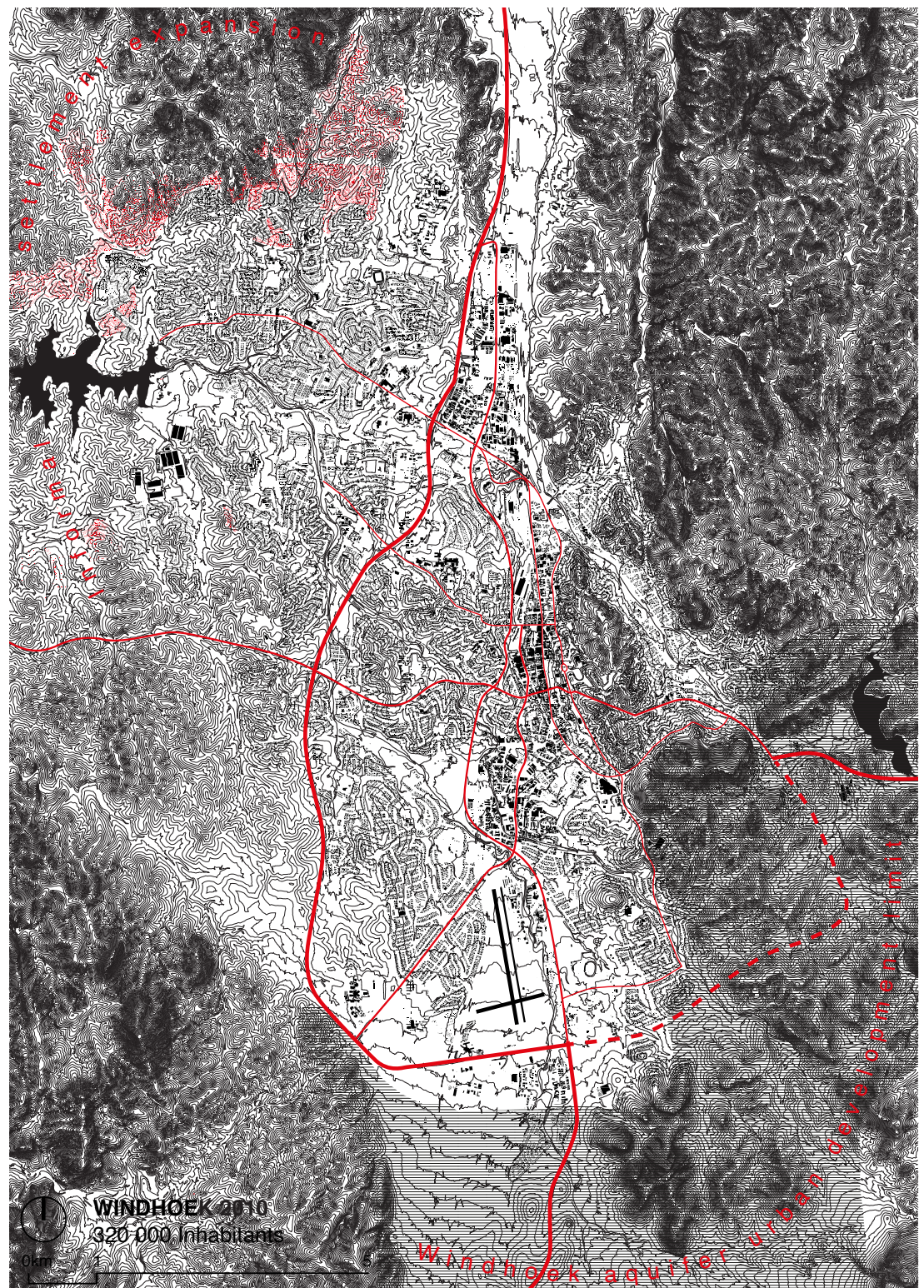


Figure 16: Map of Windhoek in 2010 showing informal expansion on the fringes of the former townships with the general structure of segregated development largely intact. Source: drawn by author based on recent cadastral maps (Lühl, 2012a)



Today, 30 years after gaining Independence from South Africa, Namibia retains a highly unequal economy that creates standards of living comparable to Scandinavia for a small minority who are seamlessly integrated – economically, socially and spatially - into a global economy. This is a ‘first world’ reality, with the latest luxury cars, large suburban mansions and shopping malls, world-class private healthcare and education, high-speed internet and other advanced infrastructure. For the great majority this realm remains out of reach, yet always agonisingly present in its material representations. Today, domestic workers especially, many of whom are informally employed, have to cross the line between these separate and highly unequal worlds daily.<sup>37</sup> As Melber highlights, in colonial times domestic servants were “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” (Melber, 2016, p7). This has arguably not changed much since.

In 2008 Namibia was reclassified by the World Bank as an upper middle-income country based on the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita.<sup>38</sup> While in 2015 the Namibia’s GNI per capita stood at U\$5,190 (The World Bank, 2017), the country continues to rank as the second most unequal society worldwide, measured by its GINI coefficient of 60.97,<sup>39</sup> just after South Africa and other neighbouring countries (The World Bank, no date).<sup>40</sup> Of those who have work in Windhoek, 55.6 percent

---

<sup>37</sup> One of the common euphemisms for apartheid racial segregation was ‘separate but equal’ development for the different ethnic groups.

<sup>38</sup> Upper middle-income economies are those with a Gross National Income per capita between U\$4,036 – 12,475 (GBP 3,105 – 9,596) (The World Bank, 2017).

<sup>39</sup> There are different methods of estimating GINI, and data from different countries is not always comparable and from the same period. However, this does not diminish the extent of inequality that exists in Namibia today.

<sup>40</sup> To put this in perspective, the Namibian Labour Force Survey of 2014 reports that only four percent of households have a monthly income above N\$ 10,000 (GBP 526), seven percent have an income between N\$ 5,000 and N\$10,000 (GBP 263 – 526) and a staggering 89 percent of households have an

are informally employed and 12.4 percent are in vulnerable employment, including own-account workers, unpaid family workers and subsistence farmers (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017b, p51–52). These together make up the ‘informal economy’, which is characterised by its low and irregular income and uncertain labour conditions, amongst other features.<sup>41</sup>

Efforts to overcome the socio-spatial inequalities represented by these statistics face a number of impediments. Tellingly, the pervasive spatial legacies of racial and ethnic segregation were not directly addressed in the Namibian Constitution even though colonialism, racism and apartheid were singled out as the major challenges to overcome (Republic of Namibia, 1990, p5). Private property received constitutional protection while ancestral land claims were not entertained (Werner, 2015, p10), though attitudes towards the latter seem to be slowly shifting after the 2018 National Land Conference where Guillermo Delgado and I presented on the necessity of an urban land reform (Lühl and Delgado, 2018). Article 23 of the Namibian Constitution makes reference only to social, economic and educational aspects of historical inequality (Republic of Namibia, 1990, p15). Not unsurprisingly, during the first 20 odd years since independence, space and its significance for a post-colonial future, has not been the subject of much public debate, with government focusing more on a “quantitative than a qualitative approach” towards undoing socio-economic discrepancies (Tjitjo quoted in Lühl, 2012b). Only more recently has the issue of housing and access to urban land gained prominence in the public debate (Delgado, 2018).

---

income below N\$ 5,000 (GBP 263) (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2015). Unemployment stands at 34 percent of the economically active population (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017b, p56), while underemployment remains a major concern.

<sup>41</sup> Even some of those employed in the relatively large public sector, who themselves account for about 25 percent of the formally employed, are unable to access adequate housing as urban land and housing have become a major speculative playing field (Delgado and Lühl, 2016).



Namibia's post-colonial transition is on-going: previous legal discrimination has been abolished, yet social and spatial legacies of earlier dispensations have proven hard to dispel. Income inequalities and underdevelopment of the former townships remain entrenched and mixed-income neighbourhoods are rare, even though local government was extensively reformed to become more inclusive, democratic and accountable. Rapid urbanisation and the lack of serviced land and infrastructure development have spurred 'informal settlement' growth. But this emerging 'urban informality' is only tolerated at the fringes of the former townships, and not near middle- and higher-income areas, perpetuating the segregation that was envisioned by the apartheid administration and enabling the entrenchment of the formal / informal binary.

#### **4.4 Policy response to the emerging 'informal economy'**

Namibia's 'informal economy' has generally been under-researched. While a number of studies exist, the understanding of the 'informal economy' as an inherent part of the economy is yet to be clearly outlined. One of the earliest studies about the local informal sector is Simon's *Urban Poverty, Informal Sector Activity and Inter-sectoral linkages: Evidence from Windhoek, Namibia*, published in 1984.<sup>42</sup> Simon's survey, conducted through 25 structured interviews under sometimes difficult circumstances,<sup>43</sup> proved the notion that "informal urban economic activity largely represents a response to poverty, un- or underemployment or lack of job security" (Simon, 1984, p551). The survey found that about 52 percent of informal activities counted for production and retail, 36 percent for retail and distribution

---

<sup>42</sup> Again, as in the literature review above I suspend the use of quotation marks for informal and informality where these words are used in the reviewed literature.

<sup>43</sup> At the time Namibia was still under South African occupation and many of the activities surveyed were essentially illegal.

only and 4 percent for production and service activities. Hawking was found to be dominant,<sup>44</sup> especially in 'squatter' areas because of the absence of formal retail outlets.<sup>45</sup> Hawking was observed to intensify along popular pedestrian routes or at major public nodes but was fairly scattered within the township (1984, p562). Equally ubiquitous were shebeens, selling liquor bought from formal bottle stores or home-brewed mahangu (sorghum) beer or both. In some areas up to one out of two or three houses would operate a shebeen for the immediate neighbourhood. Shebeens were never advertised, to avoid drawing the authorities' attention to this illegal activity. Services offered included backyard motor mechanics, upholsterers, baby-sitters, barbers and hairdressers, shoe repairs, construction and related activities, especially since the introduction of home extension and housing self-help schemes became more generalised. More marginalised activities such as scavenging on refuse dumps, collecting firewood as well as illegal activities such as drug-peddling, recycling of stolen goods as well as prostitution were also considered part of the informal sector (1984, p571).

Simon's study aimed to ascertain whether inter-sectoral linkages between the formal and informal sector – widely agreed to exist – are exploitative and whether informal enterprises are capable of growth and diversification if adequately promoted. Purchases from formal wholesale outlets were found to be the major supply, and some exploitative relations were uncovered, especially regarding the sale of alcohol. Informal enterprises were for the most part one-man operations (68 percent) and only 4 percent employed more than three people. Women formed 57

---

<sup>44</sup> This included retail hawkers and vendors selling a variety of goods, e.g. fruit, vetkoeks (fried batter cakes), bread, cool drinks, meat, firewood, baskets, wood carvings, leather goods, and jewellery (Simon, 1984, p571).

<sup>45</sup> Squatter areas or camps is a term that was widely used to describe what today are called informal settlements.

percent of the overall participants and predominated in the operation of shebeens, basket weaving, doll-making, and hawking food products, while men were responsible for all construction-related activities, car repairs and equipment maintenance, newspaper vending, woodcarving, operation of private taxis, and most fruit hawking (1984, p564–566). Simon found that most informal enterprises in Windhoek were subsistence oriented and had little potential for growth. He thus concluded that the case of Windhoek lends support to the premise that informal sector growth is mainly owing to survival mechanisms in circumstances of rising unemployment and diminishing real incomes for unskilled labour (1984, p568–569).

These predictions have been largely confirmed. The *Informal Economy Survey of 2001*, undertaken by the Ministry of Labour reported an unemployment rate of 20.2 percent and estimated that 132,602 people were employed in the informal economy (Ministry of Labour, 2004). If compared with *2000 Labour Force Survey* statistics, which indicated 541,447 people as the total labour force (Ministry of Labour, 2002), this constituted roughly 25 percent of the economically active population. The survey further found that 53 percent of urban households were solely dependent on income from informal enterprise activities. Twenty five percent of the informal economy operators were found to be also engaged in other activities. In urban areas 45 percent of these had a job in the private sector, 30 percent had a government job, and 16 percent a job at a parastatal enterprise (Ministry of Labour, 2004).

More recent labour statistics indicate that 67 percent of employment in Namibia (57 percent in urban areas) is informal (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017b), showing a stark increase compared to 2001. An informal economy survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation together with the Social Security Commission in 2016 indicates that the Namibian

informal economy remains predominantly made up of own-account workers (77 percent) with low degree of collective organisation, suggesting a more survivalist character of activities. 58 percent of informal workers operate from their residential premises, 12 percent from dedicated market spaces and 11 percent within the public space of the street (Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation and Social Security Commission, 2017). This is indicative of generally stricter regulations and their enforcement in public space, and a lack of public infrastructure in support of informal economies.

'Informal' trade is regulated by the Local Authorities Amendment Act (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2000). On this basis the CoW developed *Informal Trading Regulations* (City of Windhoek, 2007). An informal trader can register in four categories: a "market informal trader" (those who conduct their businesses from a stall in a municipal market), a "fixed informal trader" (those who conduct their business from a stationary stand or marked site), a "roaming informal trader" (those trading in a mobile way but within a defined area specified by the trader and subject to approval by the CoW CEO) or a "temporary informal trader" (not exceeding 90 days, and not issued for more than two consecutive periods; traders must wait at least 30 days before being able to re-apply). Applicants as assistants of informal traders must follow similar procedures. The regulations furthermore distinguish between "a stall", or a structure that is permanent "with roof and walls", erected by the council at a municipal market, capable of being locked-up, and let to a trader, and "a stand", which might not have walls, and although being erected by council, it does not necessarily need to be at a municipal market. Traders hire stalls or stands through a lease agreement with the council, and may only sell goods indicated in their permit, and only in the stipulated area (City of Windhoek, 2007). It is clear from these regulations that their drafters sought to bring all economic activity under the purview of the local authority. Failure to comply

amounts to a criminal offence, which may lead to the impounding of goods and equipment. The irony is that traders are labelled 'informal' even after being subjected to a protocol of registration and control.

The regulations further stipulate that an informal trader may not sell intoxicating liquor, stay overnight at the premises, erect any structure, create a nuisance, make a fire that could harm any person or damage property, and may not conduct business in a garden or park (unless marked by the council), on a sidewalk, near public buildings, churches, national monuments, in an area within 500m from a municipal market, or other places where trading creates an "obstruction". As mentioned in CHAPTER 3 above, and as I will elaborate in CHAPTER 6 below, traders at the Herero Mall contravene all of the above regulations. The fact that they are tolerated by municipal authorities clearly highlights the disjuncture between such regulatory fervour and everyday realities of rapidly urbanising spaces. At the same time, harassment of vendors and hawkers continues and is frequently reported in the media. Existing regulations thus paint a concerning vision for 'informal' trade, being on the border of legality and often beyond it.

Similarly instructive is the controversy that erupted around the introduction of the Liquor Act of 1998. The new Act that replaced various colonial legislations around alcohol use and though adopted by Parliament in 1998, it was only gazetted in 2002. According to Dobler (2010) the act combined contradictory objectives of increasing control and state revenue through licensing of alcohol outlets, especially shebeens, at the same time as addressing moral and public health concerns around alcohol abuse (2010, p181–182). Particularly contentious were the requirements for licensing of shebeens in the Schedule IV of the act, which included that shebeens needed to comply with existing zoning regulations within the area; that approval by a health officer had to be obtained before starting

operations; that separate male and female toilets had to be provided on the premises; that the flooring of the shebeen had to have a smooth finish [read: a concrete floor]; and that spaces within the shebeen were not be used as a habitable space (Isaacs, 2006).

Opposition to the impending enforcement of these regulations was led by the Namibia Shebeen Association with wide support by political and civil society organisations, who argued that shebeens presented one of the scarce opportunities for economic participation by the most disadvantaged citizens, and that the new regulations would be prohibitive for the vast majority of shebeen owners, and thus unfair (Dobler, 2010, p184). This led to coordinated protests by hundreds of shebeen operators who, after unsuccessfully petitioning the President, camped at Parliament until the Government agreed to review the requirements, but without scrapping the requirement for licensing altogether (Isaacs, 2006). According to Dobler (2010) the shebeen protests saw one of the few moments of mass popular protest and debate about regulatory reform as the regulation of alcohol use reached many in their immediate everyday lives. I would argue that this also signifies the contention over 'informal' economic activities as a central locus of everyday urban politics that requires further analysis, which I will attempt in CHAPTER 5 below.

However, not all regulations are to the detriment of the informal economy. A recent study investigated the 'high street' or 'business corridor' policy applied in Windhoek since 2008 through investigating the "leisure economy" of Eveline Street in Katutura

(Charman et al., 2017).<sup>46</sup> This case study was of interest to the South African research team as in South Africa the usual policy response is to restrict where, when and how alcohol-serving businesses may operate (2017, p3). The authors testify to an on-going “moral panic” around the consumption of alcohol in townships, leading to restrictive apartheid-era liquor policies to continue to be implemented. The study found that a significant proportion of shebeens in Windhoek’s settlements are positioned along important transport routes or “high streets” (2017, p13). Comparing 2008 baseline data collected by the City of Windhoek with their own 2016 survey, it was found that the high street economy of Eveline Street has undergone profound densification and diversification of enterprise activities. The number of businesses had doubled from 133 to 270 and the economy had diversified from a predominance of bars and car washes in 2008 to a much wider range of enterprises. While the total number of bars increased from 61 to 80, as a proportion of overall enterprises bars decreased from 45 percent in 2008 to 29 percent in 2016. The number of car washes remained constant, reducing their proportion from 29 percent to 14 percent. The growing economic diversity comprises both what the authors call “survivalist activities”, such as street braais, street trade, green grocers, etc. and businesses operating from dedicated business premises, such as hair salons, house shops, print shops, food takeaway businesses, and vehicle services such as car mechanics, panel beaters and spare-part suppliers (2017, p15–17). It became clear that car washes, hair salons, and takeaways are related to bars “through the dynamic of the leisure economy”, with each offering services that sustain their interconnectedness (2017, p35).

---

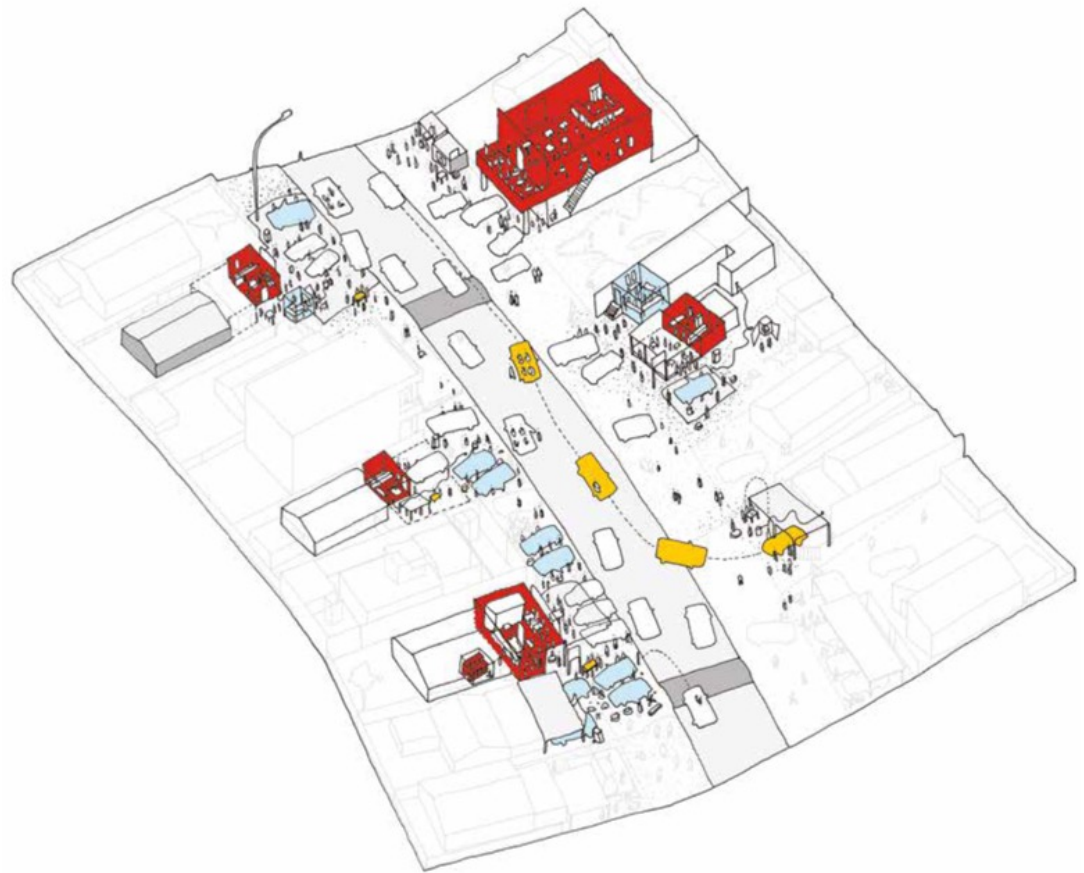
<sup>46</sup> The authors’ definition of the ‘leisure economy’ includes bars, restaurants, street food establishments, entertainers and musicians, and businesses providing services such as car guards, car washes, hair salons, etc. (Charman et al., 2017, p3)

The new dimension the study introduced was a spatial analysis of the street (see Figure 17), which indicated that diversified land use has been supported by a number of factors: varying plot sizes along the high street; a wide and symmetrical road reserve, allowing both sides of the street an equal opportunity to develop and concentrate activities within the public space; and the initial placing of residential dwellings set back from the boundary line, enabling property owners to develop the land both in front and behind the dwelling. Generally, businesses are situated along the street edge whilst existing backyards allowed for densification with additional rental dwellings. According to the authors there is a contrast between the transience of the infrastructure set up on public land and the monetary investment in solid construction where private property rights exist. Charman et al. describe the architecture as follows:

*The architecture of social and business space is people-centred. Buildings, structures and objects come alive through the manner of their usage. As a result, the architecture is preoccupied with attracting people to various spaces. [...] Since the sidewalk is accessible to spatial transitions, it is easily appropriated with use rights marked through surface treatments and the use of objects (2017, p23–27).*

The authors conclude that despite political support for the high street concept having relied on the assumption that shebeens would be compelled to relocate from within residential neighbourhoods, this proposition was not supported by the evidence (2017, p39). Nevertheless, the spatial and social dynamics and qualities created through the business corridor policy are notable for creating unique spatial and social qualities in former townships.





*Figure 17: Sketch of architectural interventions along Eveline Street, Katutura. Source: (Charman et al., 2017, permission for reproduction granted by the authors). This visual also appears in the new publication Township economy: people, spaces and practices by Charman et al. (2020).*

Windhoek's 'informal' economy can be traced back to the early 1980s as a survivalist response to rising unemployment following increased influx of rural migrants. Early on observers accounted for linkages with the formal, white-owned business sector, especially in the realm of retail that continues to dominate 'informal' economic activities. Similarly, in many cases 'informal' income complements a formal salary within a household. Spatially, most of the activities happen in residents' homes, while activities in the public space are subject to increased control, underpinned by regulatory frameworks at the national and local levels that criminalise 'informal' economic activity. However, in everyday practice coherent enforcement of regulations is hardly achievable, which creates ambiguity and insecurity for residents. At other times regulations are prohibitive for residents

to comply with, which in the case of restrictive liquor licensing has led to protests and confrontation with lawmakers. Despite clear evidence – including that contained in government surveys – that the ‘informal economy’ is becoming mainstream and about to overtake the formal sector in terms of its relevance for livelihoods, regulation and control of those activities seems to be the dominant policy imperative.

#### **4.5 Characteristics of professional spatial practice**

*Our whole setup is a patron-based, capitalist system of architectural procurement, and I can't see that changing. There is no support system for practice-based research or knowledge co-production.*

Local architect

After exploring the social and spatial development of Windhoek and the wider territory and tracing historical vectors of development above, in the final section of this chapter I will focus on situating the built environment professions, particularly architecture and spatial planning within this historical narrative. Frayne has argued that regional and urban planning practice in Namibia, long dominated by the white professional class, relied heavily on a positivist-functionalist planning ideology, in other words maintaining that the universal rational and scientific planning principles that exist are purportedly non-political (2000, p54–59). While the implication of the planning profession in the realisation of apartheid geographies created a sense of uneasiness amongst planners post-independence, they provided no radical or more equitable alternative planning visions (2000, p56). According to Frayne, planners’ reluctance to lower “extravagant” engineering standards (which had been devised to satisfy the requirements of the white settler minority) in order to reach the broader population, exemplify their mental distance from the lived reality of the poorer sectors of society. More generally in Africa, Watson argues that the

optimistic notion that informal settlements are areas waiting to be substituted by orderly or “proper development” (2003, p395) persists. She posits “conflicting rationalities” between the formal institutions for spatial production and the realities in contemporary urban Africa as a major challenge:

*[...] attempts by functionaries of government to extend the grid of formalized and regulated development over what is often termed the ‘informal’ or sometimes ‘unruly’ (or unrule-able?) [...] part of the city. [...] A vast gap exists between the notion of ‘proper’ communities held by most planners and administrators (grounded in the rationality of Western modernity and development), and the rationality which informs the strategies and tactics of those who are attempting to survive, materially and politically, in the harsh environment of Africa’s cities (2003, p401).*

The question of how planners and spatial professionals in general situate themselves ethically within a context of such different value systems becomes pertinent and has not, according to Watson, received adequate attention in planning theory. I argue that the conventional approach by the architectural and spatial planning disciplines, government officials and planning authorities is to avoid the socio-economic and political questions inherent in their practice.

Similar to most other built environment professions, I have shown elsewhere that the Namibian architectural profession remains profoundly stratified in terms of race and gender. Of the 131 registered architects in Namibia 75 percent are white<sup>47</sup> and only about 22 percent are female. Amongst the 60 percent of all registered architects that are Namibian nationals, numbers are even starker: 85 percent are white (Lühl, 2018). This demographic distribution has historical reasons, not least because of the absence of a school of architecture in Namibia before 2010, when

---

<sup>47</sup> “Whites” only make up about 7 percent of the population.

the Namibia University of Science and Technology established the Department of Architecture, where I am working as a lecturer since 2011. The opportunity to study architecture outside Namibia had been accessible only to a small and mostly white minority of Namibians. Given the historical inequalities related to race, a profession largely made up of middle or upper-class white males embodies a specific worldview regarding challenges and solutions within the socio-spatial field.<sup>48</sup> A major gap exists between architects who generally form part of the upper income strata of society, and the majority of ordinary citizens, for whom architecture with a capital 'A' has little meaning. This is most clearly exemplified in the extreme discrepancy (by a factor of 100) between government-prescribed minimum fees for professional architects, standing at N\$ 1,734.95 (GBP 91) per hour (Ministry of Works and Transport, 2017), versus the minimum wage of a construction worker, currently at N\$ 16.94 (GBP 0.89) per hour (The Namibian, 2018a). In addition, this gap is spatially articulated in the apartheid geography of residential suburbs described above, allowing parallel social worlds to exist and seldom to be transcended.

But such disjuncture is not only of a social and spatial nature. Public procurement processes in Namibia have historically not considered the involvement of end users. The architect I interviewed<sup>49</sup> explained the procurement protocols for

---

<sup>48</sup> In a public debate on the topic of inclusive cities I organised in 2013, one architect presented Venice as an ideal example of a city that creates integrated communities. While the merit of this assertion is not to be discussed here, the mere fact that this extremely unique, central European example was considered to have relevance in the face of Namibia's 21st century urbanisation challenges is telling.

<sup>49</sup> The architect studied at the University of Cape Town during the political upheaval of the final years of apartheid under Roelof Uytienbogaardt, Ivor Prinsloo, and Julian Cooke, amongst others who were very interested in social issues. She remembered that when in 1986 influx controls were lifted students could see from their studio how the Cape Flats changed from being mostly bush to being one vast informal settlement. She attributed her environmental inclination and consciousness to growing up in a small town in South Africa close to the beach with family life revolving a lot around the outdoors. She has since established herself as the foremost environmentally conscious architect in Namibia and has won due recognition locally and internationally. The interview took place at the architect's office on 27.06.2017.

government capital projects through the Ministry of Works and Transport. Until the recent implementation of a new Public Procurement Act, professional consultants were appointed based on a rotating system, with little transparency regarding selection criteria and processes. Besides the client ministry, consultants would only deal with the relevant government agencies, such as the regional councils, local authorities etc., but not with end users. According to her, “the planning and design system is conventionally top-down, it’s not designed for involvement. The involvement is often an afterthought”. Design competitions for public buildings were extremely rare, as are opportunities for process-based and participatory design. Where user-participation is a requirement, as in the case of the Herero Mall feasibility study, this is often not well understood and not provided adequate time for meaningful processes to take shape as I will elaborate later (see 7.1).

The town planner I interviewed<sup>50</sup> speculated that professionals might fear public participation because they deem it to “undermine” their legitimacy as “the professional” to safeguard the basis to charge fees. The architect acknowledged that the post-independence government-led construction boom allowed the historically restricted number of professionals to be consumed by getting work done without much reflection. Even though the architectural fraternity has an obligation to represent “the community” according to its code of conduct, being appointed by the state and not the communities, results in consultants following the orders of “the people that pay you”. According to her only the ongoing economic downturn since 2016, specifically in the building industry, necessitated

---

<sup>50</sup> The town planner was born in South Africa, where he studied at the University of the Free State. In the mid-1990s he worked at Namibia’s Ministry of Regional and Local Government providing town planning support to the Regions, including for the proclamation of towns. Subsequently he worked at a private town planning consultant firm, before joining the new Habitat Research & Development Centre as its first director and later the university as a town planning lecturer. The interview took place at the town planner’s office on 26.06.2017.

professionals to be more reflective with regards to their practice. In addition, she perceived the establishment of the architecture and spatial planning department at NUST as an opportunity to “start a new era of a more socially-conscious, research-based, appropriate architecture and urban design”.

Professional spatial practice in Namibia, historically fashioned as an exclusive domain for whites, re-produces structural elitism. Class-based differentiation continues to be enshrined in law and in space and derivative worldviews do not easily align with processes and practices of ‘informal’ urbanisation on the ground. Public procurement processes enforce expert-led development that, as Blundell-Jones et al. (2005) reminded us, removes people from decisions about their spatial environment. In the case of Namibia, with its historical legacies of structural inequality I have shown above, professional spatial practice remains structured as an exclusive practice based on colonial-inherited legislation. The fact that no radical visions for an alternative, more equitable urban development have been developed after decolonisation is indicative of a general resistance by professionals to question the very foundation on which their privilege rests.

#### **4.6 Conclusion: the conditions of emergence of the ‘informal’ discourse**

In this chapter I constructed an archaeology of the former colonial production and post-colonial reproduction of social, spatial and economic inequality in Namibia more generally and in Windhoek in particular. This is not only useful to contextualise my case study for the unfamiliar reader but also serves as the departure point of my analysis. I have shown how relationships of exploitation were created between the territory and the colonial ‘motherland’ as well as within the territory between colonial settlers and indigenous people. This was achieved through racial segregation at the territorial scale as well as within urban areas. Rural homelands were designed as reserves for the reproduction of unskilled labour for the emerging

colonial industries and as such became spaces of underdevelopment. Native locations or townships in urban areas in contrast were designed and equipped to be effective dormitory suburbs at the service of urban industry, sustained by the formal economy. I have shown how this was spatially articulated in the case of Windhoek and how the reorganisation of the city along apartheid planning doctrine was nevertheless cloaked in developmental disguise. The latter allowed apartheid 'native' housing and urban planning models to be established as representations of orderliness, modernity and progress, though always far inferior to white urban areas. At the same time, social reproduction and the most apparent symptoms of underdevelopment were outsourced to the homelands and thus remained largely out of sight.

I have subsequently demonstrated how the removal of urban influx controls from the late 1970s onwards, which had underpinned apartheid segregation, lead to the rise of 'informal' urbanisation. This form of urbanisation, which I will turn to in CHAPTER 6, defied the earlier modernist urban logic and was initially only tolerated to emerge on the periphery of the townships, ensuring that former white-only areas remained well-planned and regulated and thus further entrenched the binary between well-developed parts of town and the former townships that were in the process of becoming increasingly 'informal'. The process included the rise of the 'informal' economy, with activities such as hawking and home-based businesses that black residents had to rely on to make a living amid growing unemployment. I further showed that many of those activities remain criminalised even after decolonisation and exemplified how control and regulation continue to frame the primary policy (and police) response, even where it is to the detriment of those who were supposedly to benefit from decolonisation the most.

In the last section of the chapter I analysed how professional spatial practice remains framed by racialised relations of production. I showed that top-down capital project procurement is the dominant mode of state intervention in infrastructure development. This in turn inscribes expert-led practices, guided by colonial-inherited modernist planning ideology, into the production of space. These practices are not only distant from the increasingly mainstream realities of 'informal urbanisation', and thus incapable to meaningfully intervene, but they re-produce structural inequality. Piecing together this archaeology was necessary to show why the formal / informal binary can persist in this setting. How this binary is constructed will be the argument of the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 5 'INFORMALITY' AS DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

*... the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor, is the mind of the oppressed.*

Steve Biko (Biko and Stubbs, [1978] 2012, p75)

When I embarked on this doctoral research, I would inform people that I was working on an informal market in a former township of Windhoek. I have since realised that I was using 'informal' to represent some degree of underdevelopment, that 'market' was a misnomer with misleading connotations about the spatial character of the place, and that 'in the township' was a proxy for social engagement on my part. I would continue to say that I was looking at how to better integrate inhabitants into the spatial planning processes that shaped such places. This inferred that the inhabitants had little agency in forming their spaces – which is far from the truth – and that spatial planning still reigned supreme, shaping urban spaces through legislation and spatial interventions directed by an all-powerful state.

I have since realised that almost everything in these descriptions was superficial, partial or inconsistent with everyday practice. I realised that I was dealing with a whole set of what Foucault would call false self-evident truths (see p13), in other words an established common sense that was seldom questioned, and that hid unequal relations of power between myself, inhabitants, institutions, spaces and knowledges. I had set out to reconceptualise 'informality' as the locus of an alter-urbanisation in the sense Brenner (2017) imagines it (see p7). This is because in my everyday spatial practice, which includes the university where I teach on topics of housing and urbanisation the term is widely used without reflection. Foucault urged that the task of writing effective history is to reveal "what thought ... silently

thinks” (cited in Allen, 2016, p194) to unmask historically situated points of view for what they are: points of view. This made it necessary for me to ask how I (and others) had come to think the way I and they thought about the term ‘informality’ within the Namibian socio-spatial context.

In the urban discourse in Namibia, ‘informal’ is used largely in relation to the two spheres of economic activity and urban areas: the ‘informal economy’ and ‘informal settlements’. In the previous chapter I traced the production of inequality under colonial rule and showed how both these spheres were the exclusive domain of colonial settlers – with few exceptions – enforced through racialised spatial planning and governance. In that chapter I argued that central to the colonial project was the control of the labour and movement of black bodies, particularly in those white domains governed by the paradigm of private property, i.e. in urban areas, on commercial farmland and in mines. ‘Natives’ whose labour power was not exploited for the purpose of colonial industry through the male-only contract labour system and urban influx control, were largely restricted to various rural bantustans according to their assigned racial origin. The social reproduction of black labour that was required for industrialisation and urbanisation by the white minority was externalised to the rural hinterland and could be accessed by the colonial power on demand. In this spatial duality, underdevelopment (see p74) was effectively relegated to ethnically-restricted rural areas. At the same time the towns and urban centres of apartheid assumed a ‘modern’ and orderly spatial expression and a civic self-image (see 4.1 above and Figure 18). This was realised through the development of modernist residential suburbs with a high standard of living, spatial abundance and well-developed service infrastructure. In other words, towns took on the spatial and social organisation of a modern, production-oriented, industrialising nation – though exclusively for the white minority – while “natives in urban areas” (Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs and Odendaal,

1964)<sup>51</sup> were consigned to homogenous dormitory townships that were attached to the city in such a way as to maximise efficiency in the supply of required labour (see 4.1 and 4.2).



Figure 18: 1970s South West Africa postage stamps presenting the image of a modern state. Top: J G Strijdom International Airport, Windhoek, 1977 (Pager, 1977); below left: Katutura State Hospital, 1976 (Pager, 1976b); below right: Augustineum College, 1976 (Pager, 1976a). Note that both the hospital and the college were reserved for 'natives'.

The following inquiry departs from the observation that today it is overwhelmingly – if not exclusively – black citizens who are discursively constructed to embody urban and economic ‘informality’. This argument I will unpack in what follows. According to community-led ‘shack’ counts,<sup>52</sup> about 80 percent of the urban population live in ‘shacks’ in ‘informal’ settlements<sup>53</sup> and the NSA reports that 57

<sup>51</sup> This refers to the title of a chapter of the Odendaal Commission Report.

<sup>52</sup> “Shack” is a widely used colloquial term for a corrugated iron house.

<sup>53</sup> Also see footnote 36. This is based on an unpublished CLIP informal settlement profiling report from 2018 that was shared with me by the Namibia Housing Action Group. While CLIP includes settlements

percent of employment in urban areas is ‘informal’ (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017b). These numbers include a vast majority of citizens for whom the end of colonial rule held the promise for a better and more equitable future. How could it be that in 2018, Namibian President Hage Geingob, who was amongst the leading anti-apartheid activists, could publicly contemplate the need for influx control into urban areas, in order to regain control over what is referred to as ‘informal’ urbanisation (New Era, 2018a)? How could it be that in the face of undignified living conditions and public health epidemics in poor urban settlements, he assigns blame to those who merely seek better opportunities in cities, while freedom of movement was a central demand of the liberation struggle? How could a young mayor <sup>54</sup> of the City of Windhoek, raised in Katutura not far from the Herero Mall, in the midst of a public health crisis largely because of the lack of municipal water and sanitation provision, single out vendors as being dirty and by implication being responsible for the crisis (New Era, 2018c)?

While it could be argued that these views are here removed from the context in which they were uttered, the fact that they can be expressed by high-level politicians today – both stalwarts of the liberation struggle and younger politicians – is significant for the purpose of this study. At the beginning of my research I had imagined that there was more to understand about ‘informality’ – this assumed concept – in order to better plan *for* and *with* it. But in the light of such utterings, Foucault’s conceptualisation of discourse as the analysis of power relations and

---

that are not proclaimed as urban areas it excludes backyard structures and other forms of informal inhabitation within formal areas.

<sup>54</sup> The mayor (at the time of interview) grew up in Katutura, Windhoek, next to Katjimuine Primary School close to the Herero Mall. He holds a Diploma in Youth Development, a Certificate in Local Government and one in Management of Local Social and Economic Development. In 2010 he was a first-time councillor through the Namibia National Students Organisation (NANSO), was elected as Deputy Mayor in 2013 and as Mayor 2015. In late 2019 he was succeeded as Mayor by a fellow councillor. The interview took place at the mayor’s office on 30.01.2019.

their technologies (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005) led me to question if 'informality,' rather than an analytical category as much of the literature would have it (see 2.1), could be understood as a discursive practice.

This led to the formulation of the first research question (see 1.3), which this chapter will address: *How is the discourse of 'informality' constructed through the language and practices of activists, professionals, state officials, the media and other actors in spatial production in Namibia?* This requires engaging with the philosophical ideas, institutions, practices, everyday life and formal knowledges (disciplines) that constitute and re-produce this discourse, and in so doing expose its technologies of power. The aim is to expose the urban politics that this discourse enables and its practical implications, to reveal assumptions, presuppositions, and 'self-evident' beliefs that are held by a range of spatial practitioners in Namibia about the 'informal' and how these form part of the discourse of 'informality'.

To answer these questions, I undertook in-depth interviews with a range of spatial practitioners about their understanding of and engagement with the 'informal'. All the practitioners I interviewed were selected because they were or had been involved in projects and practices involving organised groups of people in the context of spatial or economic 'informality'. I relied on triangulation with policy documents, media reports and secondary sources where this was necessary. In the following section I present a critical analysis of the interviews inspired by Foucault's genealogical method that I outlined in the Methodological strategy (see p13), from which a number of central concepts emerge.

## 5.1 Locating the discourse of ‘informality’

*That's the thinking in Namibia, that the informal sector does not belong in the mainstream economy. It does not belong in the main street in the CBD, they are dirty, they must be out, we must clean them...*

Informal Sector Organiser

### 5.1.1 The formal as normative

In the Namibian context the use of the term “informal” in relation to urbanisation can be traced to academic publications in the 1980s and 1990s (Hansohm, 1996; Van der Linden, 1994; Simon, 1984), coinciding with its emergence in development debates globally (see 2.1.1 and 0). This temporal intersection with Namibia’s decolonisation process, during which the previously excluded black majority gradually obtained legal equality, obliterating previous racist definitions of the other – the non-white, non-urban, non-modern – is of significance and needs to be elaborated in more detail. Labour unrest in the migrant labour compounds in the 1970s and 80s had galvanised the emergence of the labour movement that fought to improve labour conditions for black workers. Both the informal sector organiser<sup>55</sup> and the labour expert<sup>56</sup> I interviewed started their careers in the student and labour movements emerging in the mid-1980s and remained involved in the trade union

---

<sup>55</sup> I derived the title ‘informal sector organiser’ for this particular interviewee from the title of the Namibia Informal Sector Organisation he currently directs. He was a student organiser at Augustineum Training College in Khomasdal during the 1976 student uprisings. He first joined the workforce as a general worker in Windhoek and later as a teacher in Opuwo. In the early 1980s he became actively involved in the labour union movement. He recalled how his upbringing in the Old Location, where his mother was a hawker, made him aware of the challenges of earning a livelihood, and led him to establish various organisations in support of the informal sector. He posits that his class consciousness was based on a simple question: why are we poor? The interview took place at an informal market on 06.11.2017.

<sup>56</sup> The labour expert is a teacher by training with a main focus on political studies, languages, history, and economics. He emigrated from Germany to Namibia in 1988 to become a teacher at Jacob Marengo Tutorial College in Katutura where he supported student boycotts and became a founder member of the National Democratic Teachers Union. He has since supported the labour movement in various ways, notably during his directorship of the Labour Resource and Research Institute of the National Union of Namibian Workers, the largest labour union federation in Namibia. The interview took place at my office on 26.06.2017.

and the 'informal sector' movements ever since. Many current political and business leaders have their roots in the labour and student movements which subsequently became affiliated with the ruling SWAPO party. The resultant gains for organised labour and formal employees after independence were significant and are evident in the Constitution of 1990 and the Labour Act of 1992 and its amendments. For instance, workers in Namibia have the right to 24 consecutive days of paid leave per annum as part of their basic conditions of employment, amongst other wide-ranging labour rights (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2007). However, the rate of urbanisation stood at only 28 percent in 1991 (Central Statistics Office, 1994), and the number of the formally employed who benefitted from these new legal provisions stood at only 45 percent of the labour force (or the total economically active population) (see

Table 2). What was a necessary adjustment to improve labour conditions was already at that time unable to reach a broad majority, and the percentage of those in formal employment according to official statistics has since decreased further to 37 percent.

	1991			2018		
	Total number	% of Labour Force	% of Total Population	Total number	% of Labour Force	% of Total Population
Total Population	1 409 920		100	2 413 643		100
Labour Force	479 779	100	34	1 090 153	100	45
Employees (formal)	218 077	<b>45</b>	15	401 970	<b>37</b>	17
Unemployed Persons	91 765	19	7	364 411	33	15

*Table 2: Formal employment as part of labour force in 1991. Compiled by author from (Central Statistics Office, 1994) and (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019).*

While labour conditions for formal employees improved significantly after independence, it did not do so in the 'informal sector'. For instance, the informal sector organiser shared his experience of the lengthy and difficult "struggle" to register a welfare organisation to support hawkers, predominantly women, in the early 1990s and the resistance by the Windhoek municipality to make land available to his organisation:<sup>57</sup> "[the] municipality was totally ignoring us". Yet, the Okatumbatumba Hawkers Association<sup>58</sup> he headed grew rapidly, with about 5000-6000 members in the late 1990s. The initial driving force behind organising these hawkers was a programme to buy in bulk from the Namibian Breweries and large wholesale retailers for distribution amongst hawkers. This allowed collective price negotiations and more efficient transport to disparate areas in the townships that were under-serviced by formal retail outlets. The informal sector organiser recalled that these companies "were very careful about us [hawkers] not to boycott their products". While formal businesses were eager to penetrate this emerging petty retail sector and its associated market, government continued to prioritise formal sector employment and economic growth. The informal sector organiser summarised his frustration:

*They talk about a new constitution, but that constitution does not work for us. There are new laws, but there is no law that protects the informal sector. That became the problem and we said there must be a law to protect the informal sector, it must be recognised as the beginning of business first, before we go any further, instead of demonising us. [...] They fooled us with the term SME [Small Medium Enterprise], but [...] the SME policy does not even work for us.*

---

<sup>57</sup> Simon also reminded us that hawking and home-based business, often including the sale of self-brewed alcohol, was strictly illegal in the colonial setting, and subject to harsh penalties (Simon, 1984).

<sup>58</sup> The association was established by hawkers in 1988. Okatumbatumba means "we are trying to come up step by step" in Otjiherero.



*[...] After 14 years they bring a new term SMME [Small Medium and Micro Enterprise], and we asked where is the informal sector? Why is it not included? So we are still fighting. It's close to 30 years now after independence and there is no policy for the informal sector.*

The informal sector organiser here clearly utilised a binary conception of the 'informal' as a 'sector' apart from the formal. He further identified with the informal sector, which he saw as being demonised by the government which enabled the formal economy and the historically white-dominated retail sector to thrive. Yet, the fight according to him was for extension of legislation and protection to the informal sector in the same way as the formal sector was legislated and protected. He seemed to assert that the 'informal sector' had been deliberately overlooked.

However, the informal sector organiser, the labour expert and the economic development officer<sup>59</sup> I interviewed all emphasised that this sphere of economic activity allows large numbers of people without financial means and prior knowledge of regulatory requirements to pursue economic activity for survival. Yet, a bias by governmental authorities against such independent, petty and survivalist economic activity was perceived by all of them. According to the labour expert this could partly be explained to have its roots in the contract labour system, which was at the heart of the colonial project, and through which a large portion of the current political leadership was socialised:

*Through the migrant labour system in our case, the young men had to apply in Ondangwa with SWANLA [South West Africa Native Labour Association] for a contract with one of those [large formal businesses]. Then, you will find that with people from those areas, they were regarded as the outstanding ones, as*

---

<sup>59</sup> The economic development officer was born and raised in Windhoek and studied business administration with specialisation in commerce and entrepreneurship. He worked at a commercial bank before joining the City of Windhoek, where he has been working for more than 20 years focusing on SME development, and specifically providing infrastructure to accommodate "micro-entrepreneurs" in the city. The interview took place at the economic development officer's office on 07.07.2017.

*the achievers, they came back with some cash, with nice shoes and with a leather jacket, making them immediately visible as those on Okaholo, the contract system. That set in motion a system, where to work for TCL [Tsumeb Corporation Ltd] as a migrant worker was already a step above being a subsistence farmer in Okwaluudhi [Traditional Aawambo kingdom in northern Namibia].*

He argued that the heightened social status of wage labour was partly due to colonial contract labourers being the harbingers of the money economy and its related aesthetic of modernity in rural areas. In this setting, having access to cash with its associated flexibility to command social relations across space and time, allowed the perception of the supremacy of formal labour to take root. The strict separation between 'native' and white, rural and urban areas, meant that the realities of the well-documented oppressive contract labour conditions remained spatially removed from the rural areas where the remittances were consumed. As the recruitment of contract labourers happened in the rural areas, only those who qualified for a labour contract would move to urban areas and would become intimately aware of the injustice inherent in the system. For those who did not have that first-hand experience but observed some of its seemingly positive impacts, perceptions of urban wealth and opportunities took hold. Still, in urban centres an emerging black working class became established. The labour expert argued that formal jobs and their generally higher wages, predictable payment cycles, regular working hours, associated benefits, paid holidays and opportunities for promotion earned higher social prestige than working independently in the 'informal' economy. He cited the study undertaken while he was the director of LaRRI, which showed that on the whole the income and living standards associated with formal jobs were generally higher than in the 'informal' economy (Mwilima, 2006). According to that study 'informal' workers considered formal work as superior to their current livelihood strategies, which the labour expert considered "rational", given the economic insecurities that went along with 'informal' employment.

It is thus no coincidence that in the run-up to independence, the political activity of workers was focused on improving labour conditions within the contract labour system, drawing on the power of the withdrawal of labour to destabilise the colonial economy through strikes. These struggles within and against an overtly oppressive colonial economy, dominated by male contract labourers, would later inform the drafting of the constitution and post-independence law reform around labour rights. At the same time hawking and home-based businesses, dominated by women, started emerging in the townships (also see Simon, 1984 above). This was confirmed in my interviews with the informal sector organiser and the economic development officer from their personal experience. However self-organisation amongst hawkers was in its infancy and without much influence on policy formulation.

The informal sector organiser added another dimension to the discourse of post-colonial development in Namibia: the schism between the liberation fighters who were exiled in the Socialist / Communist countries and in the West – the so-called exiles – versus those who stayed in the country throughout the liberation struggle:

*We saw that those who came from abroad [the exiles], they were kind of championing development, while seeing those that were in the country as backwards. At the same time, they came from different countries with different systems, and these things were not synchronised in such a way that one learns from different systems to form one system, which is the local system. They were not prepared to learn from the locals [...] on what they do and how to change the environment.*

Development was here construed as yet another import from industrialised and developed countries, disregarding local realities. Both capitalist and socialist or communist systems were production-oriented and as such aligned closely with a colonial economy based on wage-labour. While strategies might have differed, the emphasis on labour as the sole strategy for social progression was a common

denominator. Furthermore, the dominant labour model was deeply framed in gendered understandings of work, as historically colonial wage labour was male dominated while female labour was associated largely with domestic work and emergent petty trade and hawking. Within this setting, even those who were critical of the dominant development model, the labour expert and the informal sector organiser amongst others, called for expanding its reach to include those deemed to be excluded. This suggests that formal wage labour with its associated benefits and statutory protections has been established as the normative model against which all work and economic activity is measured. This model provides the lens through which reality is understood and development is conceptualised in a production-oriented, neo-colonial capitalist economy.

### 5.1.2 'Informality' as non-conformity

In the previous chapter I outlined the gradual removal of urban influx controls for black Namibians since the late 1970s. The perception of urban areas as territories of opportunity – contrasting with the underdevelopment experienced in rural areas – could increasingly be acted upon by moving to towns without the prerequisite of having a job, as had been the case during the apartheid period. Although this established the freedom of movement for the black majority, formal employment, housing and infrastructure development were not expanding at the same rate, necessitating rural-urban migrants to find their own shelter and means of livelihood. The housing advocate<sup>60</sup> I interviewed remembered:

---

<sup>60</sup> The housing advocate grew up in Namibia and studied architecture in Port Elizabeth. She worked at the Department of Works (pre-independence) for two years before embarking on a master degree and later a PhD in housing studies in the UK. She became involved with Saamstaan, the first community organisation working with the poor around improved housing conditions, which over the years led to the establishment of the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN) and the Namibia Housing Action Group, the NGO supporting the SDFN, which she currently directs. The interview took place at the housing advocate's office on 26.06.2017.

*In the late 1980s there were nearly no informal settlements in Windhoek but there was lots of overcrowding, families living in one room. Or they were hiding in a shack behind houses that looked like it is for chickens, or in an old car, because the municipality removed any informal structures.*

Here ‘informal’ structures are those that are not the detached brick-and-mortar municipal rental houses that were originally constructed by the apartheid government. Avoiding municipal and police scrutiny required making structures look un-inhabitable for humans, thus amplifying the differentiation between the ‘proper house’ and what came to be known as the backyard shack.

Formal housing production continued at a slow rate after Independence, and catered for those with formal jobs, regular incomes and the ability to re-pay mortgages over a longer period (Delgado and Lühl, 2013, p58). Yet increasing rural-urban migration coupled with internal population growth and the overcrowding crisis lead to the growth of what in policy documents of the time was termed “spontaneous settlements” (Namibia National Housing Policy, 1991: 2) or “squatter areas” (1991, p23) on the peripheries of established urban townships. The policy called for their facilitation through declaring “reception areas with sites and services” for new residents to put up temporary self-built structures, while the local authority would incrementally provide services (1991, p23). However, in practice, the Windhoek municipality did not provide the sites and services at an adequate scale, but instead provided un-serviced reception areas with the proclaimed aim of servicing land elsewhere and then relocating residents to those areas. Without the alternative formalised land development materialising, many of the unplanned reception areas became permanent settlements lacking in basic services and without security of tenure. The living conditions in these areas remain deeply problematic for residents, to the extent that the President declared the situation a “humanitarian crisis” (Geingob, 2018), and have led to, amongst others, the current public health crisis alluded to in the introduction to this chapter.

Yet, in a similar fashion as with formal labour regulations, at the political level, statutory, formal urban land development processes are upheld as the only way to achieve what is considered dignified housing. According to Namibia's Local Authority Act (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 1992), land has to be fully serviced before ownership can be transferred by the local authority.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the 1991 Namibia Housing Policy established a minimum plot size of 300m<sup>2</sup> (Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development, 1991), as the minimum space required for a house.<sup>62</sup> Existing densities in 'informal settlements' have since increased to often two or more households living on what would become a minimum plot. This means in theory that inhabitants of existing settlements would have to be relocated en masse to conform to the legislation, while alternative serviced land for such relocations is not provided. Upholding unachievable developmental standards while providing too little public investment in urban land and housing (Delgado and Lühl, 2013, p58), essentially accelerated the production of 'informal settlements' while at the same time it delegitimised them – and more importantly their inhabitants – as not meeting the developmental goals of the political elites in the postcolonial state.

The revised Namibia National Housing Policy of 2009 referred to these settlements as "informal settlements" (Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development, 2009) and called for their upgrading to improve services and tenure rights. However, this process was bypassed in favour of the formal, credit-linked, contractor-based "Namibia Mass Housing Development" scheme launched in 2013, but already suspended in 2015 owing to gross irregularities and corruption

---

<sup>61</sup> Full servicing refers to availability of water, electricity, sewage and road infrastructure in newly developed residential areas.

<sup>62</sup> The most common housing model in Namibia is that of the detached house, usually centred on the plot to allow for side-ways additions.

in the tendering process (Integrated Land Management Institute, 2017). Because of increased advocacy to recognise bottom-up initiatives in the upgrading of informal settlements, the upgrading process has gathered momentum only very recently, especially since the President declared the living conditions in “informal settlements” a “humanitarian crisis” during the 2018 2<sup>nd</sup> National Land Conference (Geingob, 2018). The language in key policy documents on the issue of housing and urban development has changed over the years in insightful ways: ‘squatting’ clearly refers to unlawful occupation while ‘spontaneous settlement’ seems to indicate that this process was unforeseen and deemed beyond control. The shift to ‘informal settlements’ acknowledges their permanency yet emphasises their status of non-conformity vis-à-vis set formal standards that largely remain unachievable by the majority of urban residents. In other words, while ‘informal settlements’ are a *symptom* of underdevelopment, they become framed as the *problem*, which delegitimises such settings and their inhabitants in the eyes of government authorities. This shift is essential and linked to a larger transition. While free movement of citizens meant that underdevelopment became increasingly urbanised in the guise of ‘informal settlements’, the process of *urbanisation* came to be considered as negative, rather than the underdevelopment stemming from a lack of investment in urban development and service provision.

The housing advocate provided a nuanced interpretation of formal processes:

*The formal process is regulated. [...] In the housing process everything has a legal framework for how you get to the product. This is related to land rights and the market, financing, and to make sure [...] what we need to share commonly, the roads, the safety aspects etc, [...]. So, the informal would be outside of that framework, but it's not necessarily illegal. It's just not in the way that fits within the legal framework [that] prescribes what can be financed in a certain way. And if you are too poor you cannot participate in it.*

Here the tension between the 'informal' and the illegal is addressed. While both remain outside the formal legal framework, she distinguishes the 'informal' as not fitting within the legal framework, rather than contravening it. She thereby attributes the non-conformity of the 'informal' not to the realities that are born out of necessity but to the inadequacy of the formal legal framework. That the poor cannot participate in the formal realm portrays them as excluded. A similarly nuanced analysis was also offered by the informal sector organiser who observed that:

*...it might be that 90 percent of our cabinet ministers and councillors are in the informal sector. I am saying that because they occupy the land in rural areas,<sup>63</sup> informally, without them noticing that they are informal. [...] If I am a lawmaker, and I don't like informality, I think everything has to go according to law. But then I own an illegal shebeen or a land in the rural areas... What is that law which I am making against the informal sector, if myself as a lawmaker I am informal. Those are the type of contradictions we have in our society. But when a poor person stands up and does something then he is illegal.*

This highlighted the fact that the 'informal' label is assigned selectively to the poor, and not to those of wealth and political power who might be involved in what would essentially constitute non-formalised business activities or landownership. He raised the point that on communal land, governed through traditional authorities, unlike the formal urban and commercial farming areas based on private property, 'informality' is not well articulated and thus does not carry a similar stigma as in urban areas.

In the above I have traced how underdevelopment became urbanised because formal employment in urban areas did not keep pace with the influx of rural migrants enabled by newly found freedom of movement. I argued that in turn, the

---

<sup>63</sup> The former minister of Minister of Industrialisation, Trade and SME Development Tjikero Tweya was embroiled in a controversy over unlawfully fencing off communal land in 2012 amongst other cases (The Namibian, 2012).



process of urbanisation became stigmatised as it was equated with the growth of 'informal settlements'. Decolonisation meant that the term 'illegal' was used less frequently with reference to those who reside in poor urban settlements without access to basic services and security of tenure and those engaged in hawking or home-based economic activities. However, replacing it with the term 'informal' reinforces the binary that constructs those who do not or cannot afford to conform to what is considered formal and proper as illegitimate. Unlike references to 'poverty' or 'slums',<sup>64</sup> which solicit moralistic obligations for charitable intervention, the fact that the subaltern are discursively construed as at fault, reduces the responsibility of the state to take corrective action.

### 5.1.3 The 'informal' as illegitimate

Having established the formal as the dominant normative reference that does not capture the full reality of lived experience requires us to understand how that which falls short of this norm is being treated discursively. Many policy documents such as the 2018 report on the Status of the Namibian Economy by the National Planning Commission (2018) for example, do not mention the 'informal' economy once, but rather revel in official data of formal economic activities. Yet, at local authority level in the City of Windhoek there seems to be growing acknowledgement that the 'informal' economy is a lasting reality that provides livelihoods for many and is not a developmental stage. This was evidenced in my interviews with the mayor of the City of Windhoek and the city's economic development officer who both acknowledged that the 'informal' economy is a lasting reality and that its contribution to the national economy needs to be recognised. Still, most policy debates argue for its inclusion, even if partial, in formal regulatory frameworks. This

---

<sup>64</sup> In Namibia the term "slum" is hardly used in the policy documents I reviewed for this thesis, unlike in other countries where its use is common.

impetus to formalise that which is 'informal' also became evident in the interviews with the two city officials. Both stressed the need for regulatory control over activities in the 'informal' economy. They insisted on the duality of the formal and the 'informal' economy, acknowledging linkages between the formal retail sector to the 'informal sector' only in terms of supply chains. The mayor provided the following definition:

*Informal work refers to work or jobs created in the informal sector. We refer to the sector as informal because most of the operators or their businesses are not registered with relevant authorities such the municipality, Government such as Ministry of Industrialisation, Trade and SME Development, Ministry of Finance for tax and the Social Security Commission etc. as required. The informal sector, informal economy, or grey economy is not taxed or monitored by any form of government. Unlike the formal economy, activities of the informal economy are also not included in a country's gross national product (GNP) or gross domestic product (GDP). [...] In an informal work situation, the person doing the work generally has very little or no job security, doesn't have a contract and might not even have the same employer for more than a few weeks or months.*

The 'informal' is here identified by all that it is not: not regulated, not compliant, not taxed, not monitored, not job-secure and not measurable as contribution to GDP. Especially the aspect of measurability in terms of contribution to GDP is insightful: instead of the failure to measure the economic contribution of this economic realm owing to methodological shortcomings, the implication is that the problem lies with the 'informal' economy itself. Dismissing the 'informal' economy as not contributing to tax collection is biased: while individual income tax is lawfully exempted for annual incomes below N\$ 50,000 (GBP 2,632) (Inland Revenue Department, Ministry of Finance, Republic of Namibia, 2018), a category into which the vast majority of the population falls (see p90), value-added tax is payable on all goods, which because of the dependence of 'informal' trade on the formal retail sector, applies even in the so-called 'informal' economy. This negative framing thus delegitimises livelihood strategies that are largely born out of necessity as not

contributing towards national development. The labour expert elaborated the view that GDP is essentially an unsuitable concept in a context of what he called an “enclave economy”, comparing the formal sector which is “preferred and idealised and frequently mentioned” to an island surrounded by ‘informality’. He explained:

*[...] we measure the economy through GDP, a classical western economic concept, but we maintain it till now. One of the shortcomings of that concept is that it only measures the contribution of the formal economy. So, in our case that means that two thirds of the population wouldn't be measured by GDP.<sup>65</sup> [...] It would [require] a complete re-definition of statistics and require different measurements. GDP is a very unsuitable instrument to measure livelihoods and social progress. You can have massive GDP growth and absolute disastrous living conditions in a country, through high levels of pollution, etc. which would not affect GDP.*

He discerns the formal sector as idealised which is facilitated by the economic tools used for measuring the economy in terms of GDP. Exposing GDP as an inadequate economic methodology to capture the complexities of the real economy and measure social progression (Fioramonti, 2013), highlights the irrationality of this idealisation. He ascribed this to the stubborn notion that Namibia and South Africa are predominantly formal economies different from other African countries, what others have referred to as South African exceptionalism (Hull and James, 2012). However, in terms of survival strategies, incomes, and coping mechanisms of citizens, the formal economy is no longer the dominant one as I have also shown above (see 4.4). The predominance of such views can only be upheld owing to conventional economic indicators that effectively hide the extreme inequality that exists in these countries. According to him the stigma on the policy level is further reinforced by global institutions such as the International Monetary

---

<sup>65</sup> This refers to recently released labour statistics that 67 percent of employment in Namibia is informal (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017b)

Fund, the World Bank and later the ILO, which largely represent formal sector employers, trade unions and the state, which all considered the 'informal' economy to be a sign of a problem (International Labour Organization, 2015) rather than something to be harnessed, leading to a global policy drive to formalise the 'informal' economy, on which I will elaborate below.

The stigmatisation of the 'informal' is thus driven not only locally but also at a global scale, with local consequences. In southern African cities, this has spurred the rapid expansion of large formal retailers with strong capital backing (both domestic and South African franchises) into the former dormitory black and coloured townships, resulting in a situation today where Namibia has among the highest supermarket penetration rate in Africa (Nickanor et al., 2017, p20). The informal sector organiser recounted:

*[...] you remember the apartheid times, there were bad things and there were good things. What was bad maybe was that we were not equal in terms of payment, but what was good was that blacks were allowed to sell in their own townships, and whites could sell this side. Now after independence, all these big companies went there [to the townships]. They were killing all those shops which were there. We said our money is not even ending up in Windhoek, our money now ends up in Cape Town. We buy everything from them, what is that which they buy from us? [...] We thought we are still at the receiving end while the other white groups are building their companies.*

At first glance this might be a surprising argument: the spatial segregation meant that independent black shops and small-scale economies were somewhat protected in the townships and desegregation meant a sudden, unmitigated competition with large-scale capitalist retail companies. At the same time, the independent shops were black-owned while the big companies were white-owned, such that desegregation in fact enabled white capital to expand and capture much of the black majority as its market at the expense of black independent business. Different types of binaries are constructed here, not an imagined economic binary

of two separate sectors, but antagonistic relationships between us and them, black and white,<sup>66</sup> small and large, local and foreign, disenfranchised and empowered.

Amid this process of formal sector infiltration into poor townships the informal sector organiser narrated the struggle of Namibia Shebeen Association (NASA) opposing a Government proposal contained in the 2006 Liquor Bill to issue wholesale liquor licences to formal retailers and gas stations. This was considered unfair competition to shebeens that were dominating the market in the townships and led to the shebeen protests mentioned above (see p96). The provision was ultimately included in favour of the large-scale formal businesses. Conceptualising 'development' as access to formal retail and opportunity for consumption remains a strong tendency to this day, and is at times paradoxically presented as a way of redressing inequities of the apartheid city.<sup>67</sup> The labour expert argued that politicians, who are predominantly black, are "too embedded in the formal economy and elite structures of society". This, according to him has led to shacks and the 'informal' economy being seen as an embarrassment that needs to be eradicated,<sup>68</sup> instead of seeing them as a base from which to improve the lives of those involved. The architect I interviewed also believed that 'informality' was anti-aspirational: "people reject the informal if they have come from it themselves", a rationality that according to her also has an aesthetic dimension.<sup>69</sup> Such aesthetic rejection can also be linked to the aspect of inter-city competition and global city aspirations that are cultivated at the political level. Windhoek was purportedly

---

<sup>66</sup> The informal sector organiser here referred to the historic transition in the 1980s and 1990s where formal companies were still largely white-owned, which has changed somewhat since.

<sup>67</sup> For example, the Affirmative Repositioning leader Job Amupanda has called for "mega shopping malls" to be established in all neighbourhoods of Windhoek, not only in high income areas (Amupanda, 2019).

<sup>68</sup> For example, see Shacks offend Geingob... wants them gone in 5 years (The Namibian, 2019).

<sup>69</sup> In her own practice the architect has often encountered perception that her environmentally conscious design approach was likened to building with "mud and sticks", versus "conventional materials" (i.e. plastered cement bricks and corrugated iron).

declared the cleanest city in Africa in the early 2000s.<sup>70</sup> This has become a recurring mantra in political speeches and policy documents, more so since the status has been lost to Kigali, Rwanda in 2011 (The Namibian, 2016). The preoccupation of politicians with the 'cleanest city' status, amid outbreaks of cholera, hepatitis, and other public health crises related to poor service infrastructure (Ngutjinazo, 2019), exposes it as detached from the challenges faced by people on the ground.

The 'informal', as the word suggests, remains largely conceptualised as the binary opposite of the formal, which I have shown above, is associated with predictability, regularity, compliance, cleanliness and stability and has been widely established as the normative ideal. The dissonance between construing the 'informal' economy as non-compliant with regulatory frameworks and the call for its inclusion within these frameworks, in other words its *formalisation*, remains unresolved at policy level. It continues to be discursively fashioned as economically immeasurable, void of contribution to national development and thus lacking legitimacy. The correlation of black-owned small-scale independent shops, home-based businesses, shebeens, hawking and survivalist livelihood strategies with filth and illegality, versus regulated – and by implication virtuous – capitalist and historically white-owned formal business exacerbates colonial inequalities and reinforces lopsided power relations.

---

<sup>70</sup> I was unable to trace the source of this declaration, even though it was widely reported in the local media and has been a talking point in popular and political debates for years.

#### 5.1.4 Conclusion: the 'informal' as mechanism of othering

The emergence of the discourse of 'informality' in Namibia assumed a particular function in the country's process of decolonisation. The repeal of urban influx controls removed legal barriers for free movement of the black majority from the general underdevelopment of rural areas into urban centres that had come to hold the promise of modernity and social mobility. Where previously social reproduction of the colonial economy had been externalised to the rural hinterland, it now became embedded and visible in towns and cities with all its symptoms of underdevelopment. I have argued that the capitalist-colonial system introduced and established the formal as the norm, guiding all developmental aspirations, analyses, and interventions. In the context of the gradual de-racialisation of the colonial governance apparatus from the 1970s onwards, the emerging discourse on 'informality' provided a mechanism for othering a burgeoning black urban population that was not able to conform to the established formal development model rooted in colonial spatial and economic logics, which were most acutely present in urban areas. In this process, where the main symptom was the growth of 'informal settlements', urbanisation itself became associated with underdevelopment, demonstrated by the oft-repeated mantra that 'those people' should rather stay in their rural homes than come to the city to make it ungovernable, most starkly represented by the President's musings about influx control that I mentioned in the introduction to this section.

The 'informal' is discursively constructed as urban, black, female, non-conforming, illegitimate, and economically immeasurable and thus not contributing to national development. It is conceived as the binary opposite of the formal, the regular and regulated, the predictable, the stable, the secure, the legal; and implicitly blames the poor black majority that increasingly falls short of realising such normative behaviour. Understanding something by what it is not, relinquishes it to a state of

non-being, of not having value in and of itself. These mechanisms of othering and delegitimisation elaborated here must thus be understood as technologies of power, which can be politically mobilised. This follows Foucault's understanding of the *positive effects* of power, where power is understood not merely in terms of administering direct subjugation, but as a creative force that establishes normative behaviour outside of the immediate domain of oppression, against which all behaviour is measured (see p14). This means that besides direct oppression, colonialism created a *mindset* in its subjects, who came to embody 'coloniality' (Memmi, 2003 [1957]; Fanon, 2008 [1952]; Memmi and Bonnono, 2014). I argue that this *common sense* continues to live forth in postcolonial subjects. Such normativity, and its consequences, according to Foucault, can be more oppressive and wider reaching than overt oppression, and ultimately sustain the base of power itself. Although seemingly more neutral than previous racialised categories of the other, the 'informal' as discourse thus facilitates the perpetuation of colonial inequalities in a different guise.

## **5.2 Spatial technologies of power**

In the previous section I outlined how the 'informal' became a mechanism of othering that allowed for colonial inequalities to be perpetuated amid the process of decolonisation. As AlSayyad reminds us, historically, the formal is the new mode of organising society (see 2.1.3), and this is nowhere more evident than in previously colonised countries like Namibia where the rule of law was introduced through colonial conquest. The introduction of European systems of law, administration and governance, key amongst which was the institution of private landownership (see 4.1), gave rise to what we today know as the formal sector. Private property rendered control over *space* to become a central means to include and to exclude. This was taken to its utmost extreme with the redistribution of space – both urban and rural – along racial lines during the apartheid administration of



then South West Africa (see 4.1 and 4.2). I elaborated above how this resulted in the formal becoming the norm, rendering everything outside of it illegitimate and other, with the exception of rural areas under traditional authority jurisdiction where Western systems of governance had never fully taken hold. Having thus established the formal as the normative ideal, I will focus in this section specifically on the *spatial technologies of power* which enable the perpetuation of unequal power relations rooted in the colonial project. I argue that ‘development’ is being equated with *formalisation*;<sup>71</sup> that planning practice is complicit in the exclusion of the majority from socio-economic advancement; and that the ‘informal’ economy stabilises elite economic interests.

#### 5.2.1 Formalisation as ‘development’

*We don't have enough policies to protect them [informal traders]*

Mayor, City of Windhoek

While the term ‘informal’ has become widely used in the public sphere in recent years, the realities so labelled (un-proclaimed settlements and un-regulated economic activities) are hardly acknowledged, let alone strategically considered in national policy and developmental plans. In various national development policy documents, the word ‘informal’ is mentioned only in reference to very narrowly defined formalisation initiatives, while the conditions for those living in un-proclaimed settlements and those pursuing un-regulated economic activities are hardly recognised. For instance, *Namibia Vision 2030*, the country’s overarching developmental policy guide launched in 2004, mentions the term ‘informal’ only

---

<sup>71</sup> Formalisation here means bringing activities within the purview of the state through registration and taxation, and legal regulation.

three times in relation to economic activities: acknowledging its “absorptive potential” (Office of the President, 2004, p28); and proposing the need to “develop small enterprises” as the “key to employment and economic empowerment” (2004, p71); and four times in terms of “informal settlements”, without further elaboration or related strategic vision. In other words, an ‘informal’ sphere outside the world of regulated development is superficially recognised to exist, but the often explicit and otherwise implicit strategy is that this sphere has to be formalised in order to improve conditions. At the same time, its “absorptive potential”, in other words its ability to provide for livelihoods resources to a large majority that the formal sector has failed to provide for, is simply taken for granted without problematising inherent inequities.

The language of the current National Development Plan 5 (2017/18 – 2021/22), released in 2017, is even less cognisant of these realities and focuses on business and enterprise development, increased access to finance, research and development, industrialisation, production and adherence to regulations amongst others.<sup>72</sup> This is particularly striking as it is far removed from the realities of home and street economies that are witnessed throughout urbanising spaces, that account for 67 percent of employment according to recent national labour statistics (see page 94). The municipal officials I interviewed recognised this shortcoming and suggested that the national legal frameworks and policies need to be adapted to become relevant to the ‘informal sector’. There is thus a substantial disjuncture between local governance, the everyday realities of an ever-increasing majority of

---

<sup>72</sup> Throughout the five-year National Development Plans (NDPs) that Namibia has been developing since 1995 the word “informal” is hardly used. NDP 3 (2007/08 - 2011/12, 42 pages long) mentions it one time in the same breath as SME development (National Planning Commission, 2008, p9); NDP 4 (2012/13 to 2016/17, 152 pages) mentions the word two times in the context of education and training (National Planning Commission, 2012, p49; 52); and NDP 5 (2017/18 – 2021/22, 134 pages) mentions the word twice in relation to gender equality, seeking to “mainstream informal businesses led by women” to be “integrated into the formal economy” (National Planning Commission, 2017, p66).

urban and rural residents living in 'informal settlements', and to a large extent pursuing 'informal' livelihood strategies, and primary policy frameworks that seek integration of all activities into the formal economy without substantial analysis of current realities. The formal here becomes a goal that everything needs to be turned into. Without offering concrete strategies how such formalisation is to be achieved, it enters the ideological realm.

The continuity of municipal byelaws, some dating back to pre-independence times, as well as post-independence legislation embodying paradigms derived from colonial laws allow for the continued criminalisation and/or marginalisation of 'informal' trade.<sup>73</sup> However, abiding by all relevant formal requirements is not only bureaucratically and logistically challenging, but also expensive and thus not easily achievable by a large majority as the informal sector organiser exemplified in a number of ways during his interview. The required capital to conform to existing regulations and standards is often not available even where technical skills are. The housing advocate and town planners exemplified the drive towards formalisation based on unrealistic standards in the field of land and housing provision, with the prime example being the minimum size for residential plots of 300m<sup>2</sup>. However, given existing residential densities across most unregulated settlements, upholding this 'standard' would require extensive relocations of urban inhabitants, while in reality very few new plots are being developed. The housing advocate noted that "if you tell four households that only one can get a plot and you have not created space for the other three, then it's going nowhere."<sup>74</sup> In both

---

<sup>73</sup> In 2018 a group of female street vendors petitioned the Ministry of Gender and Child Welfare to intervene with the City Police harassing street vendors and confiscating their goods or fining them and jailing those who do not pay the fines on time (The Namibian, 2018b)

<sup>74</sup> This refers specifically to the common situation in informal settlements in Windhoek, where up to four households share a potential 300m<sup>2</sup> plot, requiring the relocation of more than half of the households when the settlement is upgraded to conform to the 300m<sup>2</sup> policy.

economic and urban development in Namibia there is ample evidence that for many, the formal remains an unobtainable yardstick of legitimacy. Still, most major developmental policies only focus on a formalisation agenda, instead of envisioning forms of re-distributive justice that many had expected to be the result of independence and decolonisation.

The leaning towards formalisation was echoed in my interviews with the mayor and the municipal economic development officer who determined 'informal' economic activity as either the lack of contractual agreements of employment and/or the lack of business registration and related non-compliance with municipal health and hygiene standards. Both interviewees highlighted the difficulty in accessing what the Labour Act defines as basic "conditions of employment", including minimum wages, regulated working hours, and leave amongst others (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2007), where such registrations are not in place. The mayor argued that this undermines job security, creates an unstable work situation and opens up opportunities for exploitation. The labour expert also noted that in the 'informal sector', where businesses have employees, often these are based on family relations that can hide exploitative practices, as minimum wages and social protection mechanisms do not apply like those enjoyed by the unionised sectors.

As outlined in the literature review, class distinctions amongst 'informal' workers can differ widely (see 0), which was also highlighted by the informal sector organiser: "Those that started the business are poor, but those working for them are poorer". However, from my own empirical work at the Herero Mall it became clear that having a registered business does not necessarily impact the level of vulnerability that 'informal' workers are exposed to as I will elaborate in the next chapter. Business registration is only one of many instances within the network of associations between traders and the state. Here, formalisation through

compliance with regulatory frameworks is discursively projected as the only way for various activities to be recognised as a legitimate contribution to national development and to protect those involved. The assumption that extending formal rights to everyone will provide the impetus for inclusive development reveals a state-centred, rights-based developmental approach that I will argue has limited impact on the status quo.

But the formalisation agenda is also driven by global institutions that Namibia is signatory to, including by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) that calls for the formalisation of the 'informal'. The Namibia Informal Sector Organisation (NISO) (directed by the informal sector organiser I interviewed) was at the time of the interview investigating how to improve salaries and protections for workers in the 'informal' economy, a project funded by the ILO and guided by its Decent Work Agenda. He noted the need to observe provisions of the Labour Act and the constitution – which “must be respected” – also in the 'informal sector'. He claimed that “ignorance” of legal provisions by 'informal' workers and business owners was the main factor in the lack of their implementation, and that there was a need to raise awareness through training. Again, formal legislative frameworks are positioned as paramount, which highlights the level of assimilation of local NGO's such as NISO into state-centred development.<sup>75</sup> This also shines a light on the relationships between NGOs and international institutions and the extent to which these are able to influence local advocacy agendas.

The mayor elaborated that 'informal' work includes “business activities conducted at various street corners and within road reserves” including the sale of fruits and

---

<sup>75</sup> Namibia has an established tripartite alliance of government, employers' organisations and organised labour unions that deals with labour-related conflicts.

vegetables, cooked food, fresh meat and services such as car washes, salons, and tyre repairs. The economic development officer mentioned with some frustration that “we still have informal traders operating from street corners, pavements, which can bring conflict with other users within the city, be it motorists or pedestrians, passing along those pavements”. Both officials thus directly addressed the aspect of space, more specifically the fact that such activities often occur on public land which was designated for other land uses. Firstly, this means that besides the often-mentioned aspects of business registration and employment, access to *land* plays a central role. They also seem to implicitly suggest that the assigned uses, in this case pedestrian and vehicle traffic, have priority in such spaces over largely survivalist economic activity. What is presented here discursively as antagonistic conflict between users, hides the fact that traders would not be in those locations if some of the pedestrians and motorists would not require their goods or services. In other words, it hides a transactional logic.

In addition, hawking is often presented as competition for formal businesses. The economic development officer mentioned that “it might be that informal traders operate next to formal setups like big supermarkets, which is often perceived to be direct competition”. The labour expert stated that “many formal sector operators [...] see the informal competitors as a threat, especially in the retail sector”. However, he argued that the odds are stacked against ‘informal’ trade: “if informal traders sell their goods in front of a formal retailer, the formal retailer tends to call the police and they will be able to chase people away on the basis of lacking licences etc., or fine them or even arrest them”.<sup>76</sup> But he highlighted that “supermarkets also use the informal networks to their own advantage. Some sell

---

<sup>76</sup> See footnote 73

their own goods through informal traders in other areas on a commission basis at a different price on the street". The relationship between formal retailers and hawkers varies between protectionist interventions on the one hand and collaborating in the economic interest of large retail on the other.

According to the labour expert the dominant thinking regarding economic development is thus to move traders to "a nice place elsewhere" where basic infrastructure is provided, but usually accessibility and thus potential for economic success is reduced, often leading to tensions between traders and authorities.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, over the years a number of formalised markets have been built in Windhoek and other towns in areas where open land was available, similar to strategies followed elsewhere (see p43). But where these were located off the main pedestrian and traffic arteries such markets have never succeeded in taking off, even where they were subsidised by the local authority.<sup>78</sup> In addition, under the CoW's regulations, in municipal markets fixed rents are levied and business activities are restricted. Specifically, the sale of alcohol is forbidden and "light industries" are not allowed as these are deemed to be incompatible with other market functions for health and safety reasons. The economic development officer admitted that "we have some challenges from [...] the way we used to plan for the markets. [...] In the past people allocated whatever land was available, that could not be used for other uses". He thus acknowledged that allocating space for trading used to be low on the priority list of the local authority. This also makes clear

---

<sup>77</sup> This strategy is repeatedly reported in daily newspapers from local authorities all over the country. I supervised an independent student-led project to investigate the informal economy in Opuwo, a small rural town in the far north-west of Namibia. The town council had requested students to design a formal market at an inaccessible site, even though the research clearly showed the importance of proximity of vendors to mobility routes and formal retail outlets amongst others (Namupala et.al, forthcoming).

<sup>78</sup> In one case in Windhoek a market has since been remodelled into a pre-primary school as it proved not to be viable for trade.

the misguided approach to develop 'markets' that do not engage with the spatial logics of the economic activities themselves, but rather propose projects that can be politically mobilised as 'development' as the informal sector organiser maintained.

Skinner (2008) argues that providing formalised markets for street traders is a widespread approach in Sub-Saharan Africa, often with negative consequences for traders, and contrasts this with the notion of "natural markets" that has been the result of bottom-up struggle for the recognition of street vending rights in India (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2015). But relocation of traders was supported by the informal sector organiser, who recalled that:

*We reached some agreement that where there is a market built, traders must go into the market. They were refusing at one point, because they see the areas where they sell for free for many, many years. You see, when you are changing the culture of your people you must be also tough.*

In Namibia the tendency to relocate traders away from public land to formalised spaces reserved for markets still prevails, though some shifting in the thinking of the Windhoek municipality seems underway, as I will show in the next section. What underlies this is the view, derived from modernist concerns about land use, that assigning a use to a space will make it viable as such, often disregarding existing socio-spatial and economic patterns. The informal sector organiser framed formalisation in terms of transforming culture, implying that such development is generally progressive. At the same time, he highlights the fact that selling in the public space is usually for free, making it a form of commons, whereas markets that are owned and operated by the local authority are regulated spaces that are part of the state, and thus do not allow the freedom of appropriation.



In the above I aimed to show that formalisation or inclusion within the formal economy of all economic activity is an unquestioned assumption throughout government and non-governmental sectors.<sup>79</sup> Given the stark income inequality (see p90), and inadequate public spending priorities based on policy frameworks that I have already shown do not adequately address the economic and urban development challenges of the 'informal' (see 5.2.1), this rights-based developmental drive towards formalisation effectively excludes a large majority of citizens. On a spatial level, 'informal' trade in public space is discursively construed as generating 'conflict' between different users of space, which underlies the thrust to relocate traders from the public space to dedicated market areas. However, street trade evidently requires a symbiotic relationship with those other 'users' who provide the customer base. Views of street trade being unruly thus seems to hide deeper, class-based differentiations between those who (have to) buy from street traders and those for whom streets are merely mobility networks aimed at getting from point A to B with maximum efficiency.

At the same time the generally restricted nature of formal municipal markets sharply contrasts with traders' conceptualisations of economic diversity as a key factor for viable economic development that I will elaborate on in the next chapter. Formalisation thus often negatively affects traders as it remains steeped in modernist paradigms of state control, separation of functions, and orderliness. Ultimately, common spaces of relative freedom within the city where 'informal' economies thrive are increasingly being enclosed through regulatory control. In the

---

<sup>79</sup> In a workshop we organised at my university with Prof James Ferguson in August 2019 on conceptualising livelihoods beyond formal employment it was striking how participants from across the academic, governmental, non-governmental and private sector insisted on the need for more and better policies, while at the same time arguing that policy was ineffective and difficult to implement (Delgado, 2019).

extremely unequal context of post-colonial Namibia, I argue that formalisation without concomitant redistribution of resources must be understood as a state-centred, exclusionary technology of power, aimed at the preservation of elite interests. As Roy (2005) reminds us, from a governance perspective the benefit of the 'informal' is that it can be tolerated where opportune or criminalised where necessary for power to be asserted. At times of political expediency however, the developmental promise of formalisation can always be mobilised even though in practice it often does not mean 'progress' on the ground.

### 5.2.2 Planning as mirage

*No person shall use or cause or allow to be used any land or portion thereof for a use other than provided for in this Scheme.*

Clause 11(3) of the Windhoek Town Planning Scheme  
(City of Windhoek, no date a)

In the previous section I outlined the imperative for formalisation of 'informal' economic activities, and how this becomes a technology of power that – under the guise of progress – excludes those who cannot conform to its imperatives. In the following section I will elaborate on how contemporary planning practice perpetuates these dynamics and with which methods. This highlights how the *discourse* on 'informality' becomes a *discursive practice* and what role spatial planning and design play within this dynamic. Indicative for the planning paradigm are the visions that guide local development. When I asked the mayor about what a well-functioning city must achieve in his view, he had the following to say:

*As a city we need to ensure improved public transport linkages and alternatives, mixed land uses and high-quality services which can have long-term positive effects on the economy due to technological innovation, including more efficient public transport that responds to economic needs and better connects labour with employment thus increasing firm's productivity. Here we are looking at new approaches to urban service provision, such as that of smart*

*cities, where through harnessing technology, including ICT, efficient service delivery is offered.*

This statement again echoes the developmental vision of an industrialising country based on formal employment, increased productivity and technological solutions to improve communication and service delivery. Especially the smart city concept can be seen to permeate this thinking, which is further elaborated in the city's Transformational Strategic Plan.<sup>80</sup> Given the extremely poor conditions in 'informal' settlements in the city and the challenges to provide livelihoods such visions seem far removed from everyday realities of the majority of residents. The economic development officer elaborated on the relationship between planning and the 'informal' economy:

*For a long time, the informal sector was considered a nuisance [...]. In most of the spatial planning within the city the accommodation of the informal economy was one of the least priorities [...]. It has become an afterthought that was not integrated. Now most operators are actually illegal, because they are operating in areas that have not been approved for them to be [...]. There is not sufficient accommodation for informal economic activities which also hinders them in applying to be registered. Because in strategic areas where more income can be earned, we might not be able to accommodate them because of requirements, such as town planning schemes and safety requirements for operators and residents etc.*

Regarding planning practice he clearly spells out a conundrum: whatever activities do not conform to the planning scheme are illegal by default, while the lack of spatial provision for activities that fall outside the statutory ones, such as street vending for example, prevents them from meeting the requirements for

---

<sup>80</sup> The vision outlined in the current City of Windhoek Transformational Strategic Plan 2017-2022 is to be a SMART and caring City by 2022 and features a bullet train on its cover (City of Windhoek, 2017, p 15).

formalisation (an example of this will be elaborated in the next chapter). This disjuncture has been highlighted during the 2006 shebeen protests for example. The denial of unregulated economic activity in urban and developmental policy and lack of spatial provision in planning practice thus dialectically reinforce each other, continuously marginalising those engaging in such activities.

This was confirmed by the town planner I interviewed, who acknowledged that in current planning practice, whatever “does not conform to the town planning scheme”<sup>81</sup> is considered ‘informal’. He explained that all planning processes and regulatory frameworks are “regulating and controlling” (also see Frayne, 2000 above) coupled with a lack of capacity at all levels to administer and enforce them effectively.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, high spatial planning and engineering standards are derived from past planning practice. The town planner argued that “especially the middle and upper classes are spoilt with the professional input and development that took place in the past”. He referred to the suburban development of former white suburbs where in the 1970s the minimum size for single residential parcels was still 900m<sup>2</sup>, roads were tarred, sewage, storm water management, water, electricity and street lighting was provided from the outset. However, suburbs with such high spatial standards were solely implemented for the white

---

<sup>81</sup> A town planning scheme is required for municipalities as per the Local Authorities Act of 1992. The Windhoek Town Planning Scheme provides for use zoning, divided into (1) primary use, (2) consent use and (3) prohibited use as well as for density zoning. Land uses include single residential (generally one primary dwelling per plot), general residential (several dwellings per plot, depending on density zoning), business, industrial, institutional, municipal and street. Land can be re-zoned although with considerable financial and bureaucratic implications. Density zoning for residential uses is generally determined as number of primary dwelling units per m<sup>2</sup> of plot, with ratios between 1:100 to 1:900. Notwithstanding some exceptions, residential buildings are to be set back 5 m from any street boundary and 3 m from any lateral and rear boundary of the plot. Business and industrial buildings are not required to be set back from the street boundary, but 3 m side and back setbacks generally apply. In addition, without consent of council, no building on residential land may be higher than 2 storeys (City of Windhoek, no date a).

<sup>82</sup> Administrative under-performance has caused professional town planners to bypass the municipality and request approval directly from the ministry concerned with final approvals of town planning issues (Namibian Sun, 2017).

minority, and while they are the spatial outcome of an exclusionary regime, as standards they remain as yet another utopian mirage. These frameworks render everything outside such official plans and policies – which are still largely based on assumptions of full employment (see page 39) – illegal, while the state does not possess the capacity to enable its citizens to realise what it considers formal and appropriate.

Where ‘informal’ business has been successfully promoted, such as is the case of Eveline Street, it required wholesale re-zoning of residential plots along the entire street that has been transformed into an ‘informal’ business corridor (see 4.4). However, lessons from such retro-active interventions have not filtered through into forward planning practices. The second town planner I interviewed<sup>83</sup> recalled that during her tenure as a planning official at the CoW in the early 2000s, where she was responsible for ‘informal settlement’ upgrading, the question of neighbourhood economies was simply neglected. Entire neighbourhoods for up to 2000 households were formalised with solely residential plots and no provision for formal business zoning or consideration for home or street economies. On the one hand, this shows that the concern about the acute shortage of dignified shelter overshadows other pertinent aspects of urban development. On the other hand, it is an indication that the premise of employment elsewhere in the city as the basis of residents’ livelihoods was still firmly rooted in the thinking about the city’s future. The first town planner explained that in most ‘informal settlements’ there are no parks or playgrounds, for example, “because local government does not develop

---

<sup>83</sup> The second town planner was born in Lüderitz and raised on a small farm south of Rehoboth. She first moved to Windhoek to study urban geography and sociology. She started working at the City of Windhoek before moving to Cape Town to pursue a master’s degree in town planning. Subsequently she worked as a town planner at the city and later joined NUST as a lecturer. Her interest in ‘informality’ derived from surveys she had done as a sociology student on migration, aiming to understand people’s lives after moving to the city. The interview took place at the university on 29.01.2019.

those kinds of facilities”.<sup>84</sup> He clarified that for planning practice – and especially during ‘informal settlement’ upgrading processes – this means that planners “usually only reserve the areas [for future public use] and explain to people that there is a necessity to have a certain hierarchy of play parks, schools, institutional facilities etc.” Such reserved land parcels can remain empty for years or decades, as was the case at Herero Mall, before they are developed. Given resource scarcity public facilities are considered a luxury, to be provided at a later stage. While cloaking itself in the language of civic-ness, without the adequate allocation of resources to develop the envisaged public facilities such promises ring hollow, especially if such land could be more meaningful for people to access livelihood strategies.

The informal sector organiser also regretted that space for vending is hardly ever considered when public works such as hospitals, government offices or other public facilities are constructed. Such facilities usually attract vendors selling food and snacks at the entrances to serve the public in the absence of alternative outlets. As such they compensate for a lack of facilities and add to the functioning of public amenities, yet they are denied a dignified presence, and often these vendors are harassed by police or private security guards employed by the various facilities.<sup>85</sup> He asked:

*Why do the town planners or government planners, if you do plan things like Government Park [a cluster of Ministerial office buildings at the edge of the*

---

<sup>84</sup> I recently supervised a student-led project for a public space intervention in a formalised informal settlement in Gobabis in the east of the country. The plot of land reserved as public open space was merely that: open space without any infrastructure provided. Students co-produced a multi-functional spatial intervention with local residents, funded by the German Development Cooperation, to highlight the importance of providing functional infrastructure to residents at the earliest stages of urban consolidation.

<sup>85</sup> At the university where I work a similar situation exists: although there is a lack of provision of food outlets, street vendors who sell in front of the entrance gates regularly get chased away by security guards.

*Windhoek CBD] for example, why don't you plan us in, and provide a market nearby so that we can participate in the mainstream of our economy?*

He suggested that provision for vending should be made as an integral part of capital projects for public facilities, leveraging the potential of such facilities to generate conditions of density for hawking to become viable. Supporting vending directly through provision of public infrastructure for vendors would be one way of re-distributing resources towards those who cannot afford to participate in the formal sector and in turn dignify their working situation. The economic development officer acknowledged that because of a large demand for markets the city would not be able to provide for all needs and that the municipality is moving towards a model where it becomes responsible for markets jointly with traders. In such cases, the city would provide the infrastructure, and traders would take responsibility for some of the services and the management of the market. However, this is a recent shift in policy and only one market of this kind has thus far been established, which was largely funded by the private developer of the adjacent shopping mall.

The question of livelihoods continues to be an afterthought in planning. The mayor and the economic development officer both acknowledged the need to strategically integrate the 'informal economy' in future planning to provide space for 'informal' trade. The economic development officer proposed that:

*In the existing parts of the city we need to revisit some of the structural setups, if it ever possible, to see if there are ways to accommodate informal trade. If there is sufficient space and it does not negatively affect any other operators in the neighbourhood then we can see how to re-integrate informal trade in those areas. That can also help us to legalise informal operators that we currently refer to as illegal operators, who can then be licensed and registered and then they can also contribute to the revenue of the city in terms of rent for the spaces.*

Given the fact that in many parts of the city 'informal' activities take place, either in houses, in road reserves and on sidewalks or on public or private land,

“accommodating” or “re-integrating” them seems to suggest that they are not considered legitimate. But registering these activities opens up the possibility for the city to gain revenue, even though most of the activities need to be considered survivalist in nature, and thus not in a position to generate much income. Yet the economic development officer went further to suggest that besides a form of taxation, the city could also try to “re-coup whatever investment is made, from the operators [...] even over a period of ten years, so that operators are able to fully pay back what has been invested”. This statement exposes the expectation that traders would be able to re-pay the infrastructure, which is in stark contrast to other infrastructural investments that are not considered on the basis of direct cost-recovery and are simply budgeted for under regular capital budgets.<sup>86</sup> The thinking that some ‘users’ of space have to repay the cost of the infrastructure they make use of while others do not, and more importantly where the expectation to repay falls on the shoulders of some of the most marginalised in society, reaffirms the argument that such formalisation remains a tool to exclude and disempower.

In this section I aimed to highlight some of the methods through which contemporary planning practice perpetuates the exclusion of those who do not conform to the premise that all human activity be rationally pre-determined (through planning) and subject to control. One such spatial technology is exemplified by the town planning scheme that describes what is considered adequate and permissible in terms of land use within the local authority jurisdiction and renders all else illegal. However, Watson argues that planning practice describes what is considered “proper” development based on western and modernist planning ideology (see p102) which disregards realities of African cities on the ground. I

---

<sup>86</sup> Public investment in road infrastructure for example is not based on the principle of cost recovery.



have shown already how in developmental policy the lack of recognition of unregulated economic activities continues to reinforce their marginalisation and furthers their delegitimisation. Here I aimed to show how this dialectically impacts on planning practice, which disregards what is not provided for in policy, and which in turn influences policy development in ways that are informed by its own epistemological underpinnings – the by now near-utopian assumption of full employment being chief amongst them. While contemporary planning standards largely derive from those that were reserved for the white minority at the expense of the black majority under colonial rule, it becomes increasingly clear that the state does not possess the capacities to realise such standards for everyone. Where ‘informal’ settlements are formalised, only the barest of the formal attributes are realised in the form of basic service provision, while necessary public amenities are disregarded, and land is merely reserved for their future development. The insistence on qualitatively high planning standards however then exposes this as not merely a blind spot in policy development, but rather a way to preserve elite privilege while rhetorically offering the promise of development for all. Here, planning becomes a promise of a utopian future – a mirage – that is not guaranteed to materialise. On the other hand, where support to the ‘informal’ economy is being re-thought, such as in the case of Windhoek which I shall expand on in the last chapter, neoliberal premises of cost-recovery for infrastructure development are applied to those who largely follow survivalist livelihood strategies, re-emphasising the continuous marginalisation of the urban poor.

### **5.2.3 Stabilising inequality**

As indicated in earlier studies, and confirmed during my interviews, in Namibia the ‘informal sector’ has a high degree of dependence on the formal, heavily import-reliant economy. The economic development officer of the City of Windhoek observed that “especially in Windhoek most of the informal activities that are taking

place are in the area of retail and a bit of service industry: tailors, shoe repairs and [hair] salons.” He described the dependency on formal suppliers as follows: “the obvious linkage is that the informal depends on the formal, because especially in areas of retail, whatever products are offered are purchased wholesale from the formal sector.” This dependency has historical roots as business and trade in black townships was severely restricted under apartheid which I elaborated before (see 4.4). He considered urbanisation and migration from smaller towns and villages to cities as the major factor driving the ‘informal’ economy:

*There are expectations that there are many job opportunities in the city. But that is not the case and when people get into the city, they get stranded and cannot find a job due to unemployment. They turn to the informal economy or SMEs, earning a bit of income for them to sustain themselves.*

The argument that urbanisation is largely driven by the promise for jobs in the city has become a mantra in Namibia where urbanisation is conventionally understood as a linear movement from rural to urban areas, fuelling the growth of such urban areas. The related stigmatisation of the urban, based on the symptoms of underdevelopment that accompany this process have been elaborated above (see p122). However, the economic development officer characterises the ‘informal’ economy as a secondary realm that new urbanites chose to turn to in the absence of formal sector jobs. However, the labour expert recalled that during his tenure at LaRRI the institution carried out a survey on the ‘informal’ economy which showed that if “they had a choice people would much rather prefer working [...] in a formal sector job, as an employee” (Mwilima, 2006). However, the recent labour statistics showing that the majority of the workforce is employed in the ‘informal’ economy is an indication that the possibilities to get such a formal sector job are extremely limited. The labour expert positioned “survival” at one end of the spectrum of the ‘informal’ economy, where “someone who lost the job [...] out of desperation starts

selling vetkoeks<sup>87</sup> on the street corner to earn an immediate income” without any form of registration. The informal sector organiser similarly explained that “informal business is anybody who is operating a business within his own means, without consideration for any law or regulation at the beginning. [...] It’s a person who is operating business just for survival”. Again, the ‘informal’ economy is construed as an alternative to the world of formal employment, a sort of ‘second choice’ for those who cannot find the highly prized formal job.

Ferguson conceptualised this as the sphere of “distributive livelihoods” (2015), where people who are no longer integrated into systems of production are increasingly busy with advancing systems of distribution and making claims on the income of others. The labour expert and the informal sector organiser both highlighted that partial compliance, registration or observation of legal provisions is part of this reality. Depending on the situation, certain licences might be applied for or regulations adhered to whenever this is needed to access a certain other service or benefit, without otherwise operating as a formal business. This was confirmed by my own experience at the Herero Mall as I will elaborate in the following chapter. The labour expert accounted for practices in the construction industry where “operators that are registered as SMEs, and thus not really informal, don’t pay minimum wages”. This essentially bridges what is too often presented discursively as a binary between formal and ‘informal’ employment. In both categories one can find exploitative labour practices where power relations between employer and employee are often extremely skewed, curtailing the effectiveness of labour legislation as a mitigation measure. At the same time, the conceptualisation of the ‘informal’ as opportunistic versus foregrounding its state

---

<sup>87</sup> See footnote 44, p93.

of non-compliance opens up the understanding of its function within long-standing economic and social dynamics. The labour expert provided this explanation:

*The informal economy is what was described as the reserve army of labour. So, the formal sector which enjoys all the attention, government subsidies etc., draws a certain number of people from the informal sector and formalises them. But the informal is a constant given when you refer to unemployment [...], and it serves in economic terms as an enormous pressure group to either arrest or even place downward pressure on wages and working conditions. The other side is the social one [...]. Usually you have one main income earner with a formal sector job, but because of the low wages paid in many sectors, that salary cannot cover all household expenses, so the others need to contribute in very fluid and changing ways towards household survival.*

The so-called informal economy is here conceptualised as a force that stabilises the formal capitalist economy in that on the one hand it absorbs surplus labour power but on the other hand it diminishes organised labour's ability to demand better wages since the oversupply of labour would easily neutralise such claims. As functional surplus labour reserve the 'informal' economy is a sphere of survivalist livelihood strategies that mitigate the negative impact of a low-wage economy (see p90). The emerging void between jobless growth and rapid urbanisation is thus filled by the so-called informal economy, which stabilises capitalist development in a profoundly unequal society.

#### **5.2.4 Conclusion: perpetuating colonial spatial technologies of power**

Having set out in the previous section how the formal has been established as the norm, and the 'informal' is discursively being used to delegitimise the poor, in this section I argued how such discourse enters the realm of developmental and planning practice. In a context of deep-seated, long-standing socio-economic inequality, an unquestioned formalisation agenda that is not underpinned by adequate public spending to achieve its objectives, must be exposed as an exclusionary mechanism, despite its developmental and inclusionary rhetoric.

'Informal' trade in public space in particular continues to be discursively construed as *conflicting* with implicitly more legitimate and formally sanctioned use(r)s of space. The typical response is to isolate such activities in dedicated, formal markets that often are not economically viable. Formalisation thus becomes a technology of power that aims to centralise and consolidate state control and enclose existing commons in the sense that Negri and Scelsi argue (see page 45). The unceasing enclosure of such commons requires spatial technologies that allow the differentiation of the permissible from the illegitimate, which is achieved through planning regulatory frameworks. These frameworks, I have argued, continue to disregard the that reality which is captured as 'informal', and rather perpetuate an exclusionary planning paradigm invented during colonial times. This paradigm, which upholds the promise of high developmental standards even though the state lacks the capacity to realise these, establishes a utopia as it is commonly understood – the perfect place that is impossible to reach. Combined with the delegitimisation and even criminalisation of those who do not – or are not able to – conform to such standards, it establishes an apparatus of exclusion of the majority of citizens. Simultaneously, the 'informal' economy provides a seemingly unlimited labour reserve that sustains a low-wage economy for the preservation of elite interests.

### **5.3 'Informality' as resistance**

If above I traced the rise of the discourse on 'informality' and its mechanics as discursive practice furthering and consolidating the interests of power, in the last section of this chapter I aim to put the discourse back into the field of *the political* as Mouffe (2001) conceptualised it. Delegitimising substantial parts of the population, as I have argued above, does not go unchallenged, and in the following I will focus on realms of contestation and struggle against this marginalisation. This will allow us to understand the opportunities and constraints for political agency of

those who are presumably excluded and understand their agency in shaping their own reality before we enter into the lived experience of the 'informal' at the Herero Mall in the next chapter.

The labour expert cautioned that while Namibia has a few organisations representing 'informal' economy operators, there is no organisation that represents the interests of the generally more marginalised 'informal' employees. This lack of self-organisation has as a consequence the underrepresentation of 'informal' workers during public consultation processes where an array of formal sector organisations like the Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Namibia Employers Federation, and various trade unions amongst others are conventionally represented.<sup>88</sup> However, he acknowledged the difficulties for self-organisation in this particular context:

*The hardships and deprivation within the informal economy create a condition where you can hardly think beyond tomorrow. You're so embroiled in the day-to-day struggles for survival, that you have very little time and energy to think [...] what could be a transformative agenda for ourselves.*

Survival is here understood as both acute deprivation but also as a factor that largely immobilises transformative political activism at the grass roots. At the same time voices of 'informal' workers are not heard in those spaces and institutions of society where political influence can be leveraged. However, instances of outright protests are relatively rare in Namibia, where a veneer of participatory politics is generally upheld, notably through the so-called tripartite relation between organised labour, employers and the state. The labour expert suggested that to

---

<sup>88</sup> He contended that the Shack Dwellers' Federation of Namibia was one of the only examples of self-organisation around undignified living conditions, but that similar forms of organising do not exist around wages and working conditions in the 'informal' sector.

increase the recognition of the 'informal' economy "would require self-organisation" from within, in similar ways that migrant workers fought against the exploitative colonial migrant labour system. He recalled:

*We have seen one outcry many years ago when the Okatumbatumba Hawker's Association organised that camp near Parliament and slaughtered cattle there, demanding that the law must be changed that required shebeens to have two toilets for licensing purposes. The lawmakers back-pedalled, to get those people off their lawn (also see p96).*

The labour expert thus establishes an antagonistic political relationship between 'informal' workers and the state, where direct and concerted opposition to the institutions of the state bears fruit. While political mobilisation has proven successful in influencing policy formulation in few instances, varying interests within the 'informal' economy present the potential for disjuncture unlike in more clearly stratified formal labour relations and their corresponding organisational forms. The informal sector organiser expressed his view that a certain dependency of 'informal' traders on politicians is consciously maintained by the latter. He provided an example of municipal markets:

*The municipality is not in favour of those markets being run by anybody else than themselves. Partly because it is their campaigning ticket, politically. It is built by us for the traders, so they have to vote for us. Because it's a visible development for them, something you can show. It's not about development, but about who did it, what can I get out of it.*

He establishes here a power dynamic of dependence between the local authority and 'informal' traders who often depend on public space for their livelihood, which is exploited to administer political patronage. He also highlights the conceptualisation of physical infrastructure as the only tangible form of development. Such mechanisms of patronage require a level of dependence to be re-produced for which the historical criminalisation of 'informal' trade and its contemporary delegitimisation are useful underpinnings. The informal sector

organiser further related how in the 1990s he did not receive much support from the municipality for market stall development. He described the strategy “to educate the hawkers and the informal sector on how to have negotiation skills, to plan for advocacy and action, and the need to lobby their leaders”. He shared his experience of the growing ‘informal sector’ movement in the 1990s and 2000s:

*They [the government] did not understand if it is a political movement, is it really a hawker's association, what is it all about? It was confusing, because other groups joined like the panel beaters, the small builders [...], and the shebeen association [...]. So, they were more confused. We were having a big training programme, providing business planning, finance, hygiene, human rights, because we noticed that our people have to understand their constitution to fight over their rights, because we feel more oppressed.*

He proposed a different form of politics which engages the state through advocacy and negotiation. This strategy builds on NGO-led civic education as the basis of strengthening the hawker's agency and to increase citizens' independence from a paternalistic government. He envisioned the potential of a social movement that could challenge hegemonic party politics that have seen the dominance of SWAPO since independence.<sup>89</sup> This political threat was also noted by the architect:

*Within the Government and authorities and the middle class there is a strong perceptual bias against the 'informal' which is a big problem. These prejudices are aesthetic, things look messy, and disorganised and poor. It's also power-based, because it is complex to manage, and it has the potential for independence and political disruption. So, the aesthetic rejection is also a kind of a sub-conscious concern about where the power rests.*

She here establishes a link between the aesthetic realm, which, following Harvey acts as *space of representation* (see p7) of the realm of lived experience, and the

---

<sup>89</sup> While SWAPO received 57 percent of votes in the first democratic elections in 1989, its share of votes since rose to 73 percent in 1994, 76 percent in 1999 and 2004, 74 percent in 2009, 80 percent in 2014, and 65 percent in 2019 (Electoral Commission of Namibia, no date).



threat of political disruption due to the perceived ambiguity of the 'informal'. She thus positions class interests at the heart of these differences.

The world of the 'informal', often considered to be outside the purview of the state and thus seemingly separate, has many points of contact with institutions of the state and as such holds multiple possibilities for contestation. However, such contestation is rarely antagonistic, or outright class-based, and more often conciliatory. On the other hand, its 'illegibility' provides the potential to see the 'informal' as realm of resistance as a whole, which opens up a different sort of politics through direct everyday action. It is this realm that I will explore in depth in the next chapter.

#### **5.4 Conclusion: the production of informality as apparatus of exclusion**

In this chapter I have explored the question of how I and others had come to think the way we think about the 'informal' in order to expose the historical situatedness of such discourse and its inherent power relations. This was guided by the precepts of critical urban theory, which following Brenner (2012) requires a critique of ideology and a critique of power. My initial concern was that 'informality' does not seem to be a useful category of analysis, but rather acts as an ambiguous label that conceals a lot of what is happening. In addition, the notion that in Namibia 'informality' is largely relegated to the black urban experience raised questions regarding how this sphere is entangled with the historical development of urbanisation on the one hand and decolonisation on the other. As laid out in the theoretical framework I attempted to achieve such critical reflection through constructing a genealogy of the 'informal' by tracing discursive practices and their technologies of power.

I have argued above how increasingly free movement for the black majority during the transition to independence together with job-less growth shattered the pretence of modernist development based on full employment and a related city image of efficiency, orderliness, and civicness that previously had been upheld by means of modernist planning principles and protected through urban influx control. Underdevelopment which had previously largely been relegated to rural areas now became increasingly visible in towns and cities in the form of unplanned and unregulated settlements as formal development did not keep pace with the influx. At the same time an 'informal' economy began taking hold, driven by a lack of formal employment opportunities and low wages amongst others. This led to urbanisation – a historically recent phenomenon in Namibia – to become associated with underdevelopment. The concept of 'informality' that was simultaneously emerging in urban theory allowed for the escalating urban population that did not and could not conform to elite visions and standards of urban development to be othered as non-conforming and illegitimate. This could only be achieved because the formal – essentially the ways of organising society that were introduced by the coloniser – had been firmly established as the norm guiding all aspirational developmental goals before and after independence.

This, after Foucault, is the more lasting legacy of colonialism: a deeply entrenched normativity which delegitimises everything that falls short of the formal, Eurocentric paradigm and thus consolidates elite power. Discursively the 'informal' is constructed as everything the formal is not, further implying its inadequacy and relegating it to a state of non-being, which is mirrored in policy documents that fail to acknowledge the complexity of the world that is labelled 'informal'. This then explains why the focus of post-independence developmental policy was on preconceived formalisation of the activities and spaces of the 'informal', without much engagement with the realities within that sphere. Yet this focus and drive to

formalise everything in policy was not supported through concomitant redistribution of resources, which in the context of historically produced and deep-seated inequality exposes such formalisation agenda as an exclusionary technology of power disguised in a rhetoric of inclusive development. Within this setting, planning functions as a technology that not only derives from colonial practices, and perpetuates much of their original underpinnings, but more importantly produces the 'informal' through insisting on unachievable formal requirements and standards far beyond the reach of the state or the majority of the population, who in turn are discursively rendered illegitimate.

Yet, unlike the binary conceptualisations suggested by concepts of 'informality' versus formality, I have argued that the sphere for the 'informal', in other words its lived reality, has multiple overlaps and points of contact with formal institutions, processes and actors, allowing opportunity for political contestation, even though this rarely takes the form of outright confrontation with the state and its institutions. I will argue in the next chapter that contestation itself might need to be rethought as everyday socio-spatial practice, through which not only the formal paradigm is challenged, but an alternative form of urbanism is being created.

## CHAPTER 6 EVERYDAY LIFE AT THE HERERO MALL

*Our life is just here...*

Harry, Herero Mall Trader<sup>90</sup>

In the previous chapter I investigated how ‘urban informality’ operates as discursive practice, as an apparatus of *othering* on the one hand, and of *stabilisation* of capitalist development on the other. Both these mechanisms allow colonial inequalities and spatial paradigms to be entrenched and perpetuated far into the future. This, I argued is one of the *positive effects* of colonial power in the Foucauldian sense. If the discourse of ‘informality’ serves to entrench unequal power relations by delegitimising those it oppresses, critical urban theory as proposed by Brenner (2012) demands of us to explore the *latent, yet suppressed emancipatory possibilities* within that setting or in the words of Kellner (2002), to explore *contestation* and *struggle* that pushes back against such manifestations of power. This means we must enter the realm of everyday lived reality that is labelled ‘informal’ and establish its relationships with such discourse. I have argued above that the Herero Mall provides a uniquely relevant case for such inquiry (see CHAPTER 3).

To reconceptualise the ‘informal’ in terms of the emancipatory possibilities such settings embody, I carried out an ethnographic study of the Herero Mall to explore ways of knowing ‘urban informality’ as lived experience by engaging with and listening carefully to those who produce this space. To convey this lived reality for

---

<sup>90</sup> Harry was one of the traders I interviewed for this thesis. He will be introduced further below. All names in this section have been substituted to ensure interviewees’ anonymity.

what it *is*, instead of what it *is not* – such as the prevailing discourse would have it – I aim to immerse you as the reader in the everyday life of the Herero Mall through text and image. This narrative is based on my observations during the seven years that I have been engaging with the mall. It is based on participant observation and notes of meetings with the traders' committee, memories, spatial mapping and semi-structured interviews with business operators as well as casual conversations with traders and visitors at the mall. The overarching research question I attempt to answer in this chapter is: *How do people inhabit the Herero Mall spatially, economically, and socially?* This classification, derived from Harvey's triad of absolute, relative and relational space (see p7), is not meant to isolate these evidently interdependent instances of spatiality, but rather to allow me to structure the inquiry to develop an understanding of a contemporary form of alter-urbanisation defined by what it is: a socio-spatial practice.

I, therefore, wrote the following chapter in a narrative tone and largely in the present tense to reflect my personal experience of this space and allow the reader to enter as closely as possible into this reality. I aimed to describe the space and the practices as I experienced them as well as the way they were accounted for by those I interacted with. I aimed to avoid framing these accounts and practices in terms of the prevailing discourse established earlier, but rather acknowledged that they remain in constant tension with that discourse as it acts directly on the setting. Scattered throughout the narrative are vignettes that highlight specific moments of experience or conversation that are significant for establishing the relationships between social, spatial and economic 'spheres'. In addition to describing the spaces and practices in detail, I translated the information into socio-spatial diagrams that visualise the relationships between people, institutions, space and economic flows. Throughout this narrative that transverses scales and sites, people and things, practices and theory, I aimed to draw conceptualisations of an alter-

urbanisation that form an analytical strand throughout the text and that are consolidated in the conclusion of the chapter.

## 6.1 Retro-fitting the Township

### *Vignette: lunch at the mall*

*It is 1:30 pm. I order pap<sup>91</sup> with meat and gravy from Muarii who operates next to Uzuva's shebeen. Before I know what's going on, she has organised me a table with a tablecloth and chairs at Uajenenisa's place on the other side of the thoroughfare for cars. Her other customers sit on beer crates and self-made furniture in the shaded area of Uzuva's shebeen and they hold their plates in their hands or on their knees. I realise that I only carry a 200 Namibian dollar note on me, which is quite a lot of money around here. But this is not a problem. Uzuva's sister, who also makes food nearby, takes some change from her bra but soon realises that it is not enough and disappears to get change elsewhere. She and Muarii must be working together somehow? There is clearly no shortage of cash here, and soon the problem of change is resolved, at least for me. Uajenenisa's place, where I sit, has stackable steel and plastic chairs. It is essentially a roofed and paved veranda alongside a 20-foot container in which the fridges and freezers and other equipment are stored. Containers are more difficult to break into than corrugated iron shacks that are the general standard around here, but they are also more expensive to obtain. Next to it is a food cart that permanently rests on stacked bricks. The sun is burning, and everyone gathers in the few shaded areas that are provided. Sitting all by myself, I feel awkward at the special treatment I receive, but it is not entirely unexpected. I am as usual the only white person around, which tends to create this kind of situation. But it allows me to calmly observe the scene. At Tjikaa's place opposite, which is also a veranda, customers make space on the benches for some seemingly high-status individuals who joined to eat. As usual, Tjikaa's seems the most popular*

---

<sup>91</sup> Pap is made of white maize meal and either prepared as a thick porridge or into a firmer polenta-like consistency. It is the local staple food.

*place to be at the mall during the day. Next to me on the veranda two women peel potatoes in large quantities. Kovii, who runs the food cart next to Uajenenisa looks energetic today. I arrange an interview with her for later in the afternoon. Two hawkers selling plastic flip-flops and car keyholders pass through. Children, on their way back from school, walk through the mall and along Klaagliedere [Afrikaans for lamentations] Street at the back. Music blasts from different shebeens, indistinctive. Parked cars fill up the open spaces between buildings. The roof of a nearby house is being repaired, which becomes part of the soundscape. Utaara<sup>92</sup> arrives to have lunch at Tjikaa's and brings along his own plate. He greets me in passing. More school children cross. A woman passes through, selling meatballs which she carries in a large Tupperware container for five dollars. I ask and she tells me she cooks them at home. She offers me some, but I decline because I just finished my big lunch. A man and a woman return to Uajenenisa's, carrying a 25-litre water container that they refilled at one of the neighbouring houses. The water will surely be used for cooking those many potatoes. An old man with a hat, a beard and a beautiful, thin knobkierie,<sup>93</sup> made from acacia branches with the root ball carved as the handle, passes by. He swings the kierie elegantly as he walks...*

The Herero Mall is a so-called informal market. This is a designation which, as I argued in the previous chapter, is discursively structured as lack, deficiency, and non-conformity (see 5.1.2). It characterises the place as a place of non-being, something that is neither measurable in conventional economic terms nor compliant with statutory regulations and is therefore deemed to lack legitimacy. But once one becomes more familiar with the setting and the people, even spending just one lunch hour there – observing the space and the dynamics for what they are – is enlightening. It revealed the interdependency and mutual assistance

---

<sup>92</sup> Utaara was the first trader to occupy the site in 2005. He operates a car mechanic and welding business and has been the chairperson of the Herero Mall Trader's Committee since its inception.

<sup>93</sup> Kieries are common to many Southern African cultures and come in many shapes and materials. While often used as weapons, the Ovaherero kieres are primarily used as walking sticks.

between traders who, superficially, seem to be direct competitors; that cash is required to lubricate these transactions; that this economy forms part of wider local and global networks of distribution; that minimal infrastructure, providing only basic shelter from the elements, is sufficient to make this space habitable and conducive for business and socialising; that the space is perpetually under construction to suit evolving needs; that activities here partly depend on the surrounding formal infrastructure and governance regimes as part of a system of distribution of goods and provision of services; and that this place allows class differentiation and cultural affiliation to overlap in a multi-layered system of social membership. This experience also exposed me as isolated in this space, feeling alienated, and receiving special treatment. This needs to be kept in mind as I narrate about this place, aiming to develop and deepen our understanding of 'informality' as socio-spatial practice.

### 6.1.1 Occupy, appropriate, defend

*When they [municipality] break here [Herero Mall], then we build another one, where there are those open lands.*

Sukona, Herero Mall trader<sup>94</sup>

As outlined in the introduction to the case study site (see CHAPTER 3), the mall is located on what used to be a vacant piece of municipal land dedicated and zoned for future institutional use.<sup>95</sup> Within conventional town planning practice, land reserved for such future uses becomes a 'placeholder', a promise for future development that can remain empty for decades. Beyond its southern boundary, slightly higher than the mall, are three major institutions of relevance for the

---

<sup>94</sup> Sukona will be introduced further below.

<sup>95</sup> Also see footnote 17, p63.



OvaHerero: The OvaHerero Traditional Authority (OTA) Headquarters, the Oruuano Church, and the Commando Hall No 2 (see Figure 4 and Figure 19). The OTA Headquarters and the church have solid boundary walls bordering the mall, creating a hard, impermeable edge. Their entrances, and that of the Commando hall face south, away from the mall.<sup>96</sup> Towards the north the land slopes downward and has been eroded in places by storm water flowing downhill towards the northern edge of the plot, where an open storm water drainage ditch takes the water westwards, into the seasonal river network feeding the nearby Goreangab Dam.



*Figure 19: The mall seen from Clemence Kapuu Street with the roofs of the OTA Headquarters, Oruuano Church and Commando Hall in the background. The image depicts a protest march by OvaHerero groups in the context of the genocide negotiations between the Namibian and the German governments, February 2016. Photo by Guillermo Delgado.*

<sup>96</sup> The entrance of the church used to be from the mall through a large gate, but it has since been moved towards the street in the south, away from the mall allegedly because of the incompatibility with the activities taking place at the mall.

The distribution of buildings on the land has developed over the years, guided by a certain spatial logic (see Figure 20; Figure 21; Figure 22): to the south a row of attached buildings (cluster A, see Figure 23) run along the boundary wall of the adjoining OTA and Oruano Church properties. The high boundary walls of approximately two metres act as back walls of the various buildings. Existing physical infrastructure is thus utilised to minimise required materials. Consequently, all the spaces in cluster A open up only to one side towards the first thoroughfare, which runs fairly straight in a north-east to south-west direction. Opposite this row, at the centre of the plot, are clusters B, C and D, comprising various abutting spaces that again reveal efficient use of materials. The spaces in these clusters open up on various sides and have a number of indentations which form courtyards. A number of spaces in these clusters have several entrances, allowing a high degree of permeability between spaces.



Figure 20: The site in 2001 before it was occupied with the light pole (A) and electricity substation (B) already in place. Image source: City of Windhoek.



Figure 21: The site in 2005 when it was first occupied. Amongst the first businesses were two car washes (A) and (B). Image source: City of Windhoek.





Figure 22: The Herero Mall in 2011 with vehicle thoroughfares (A) and (B) indicated. Image source: City of Windhoek.



Figure 23: The Herero Mall in 2019 indicating clusters of buildings. Map drawn by author (for more detail see A1 fold-out map in Appendices, p 290).

The central clusters are encircled on the northern and western side by the second thoroughfare, the existence of which can be traced back to the footpaths cutting across the open land before it was settled (see Figure 20). This pathway connects the neighbourhood to the nearby business node surrounding Soweto market to the north-west of the mall as part of the larger open space network of Katutura (see Figure 3). The retaining of this pre-existing pathway throughout the site's development is inherent to the process of its incremental development as emerging economies tend to establish themselves in direct relation to pedestrians, or, in this case, increasingly to vehicular traffic. To the north-east of the second thoroughfare is another tight cluster of buildings (cluster E) that is less permeable and has a somewhat inaccessible edge with a number of spaces facing the storm water ditch to the north. Towards the north-west is cluster F which turns it back towards the stormwater ditch entirely while along Clemence Kapuuo street are a number of detached buildings (cluster G) that by and large open up towards the thoroughfare instead of the street that borders them. This indicates that these businesses are more dependent on traffic crossing the site than passing along the street.

This inward-looking character of the mall has been accentuated since a boundary fence has been erected by the municipality in early 2018 at the request of the traders' committee. The idea of the fence can be traced back to around 2012 when it was first mentioned in the media as a way to curb crime at the mall (Die Republikein, 2012) which had been widely reported in previous years and created a harsh police response (see CHAPTER 3, and Appendices, p292). The committee had also argued that besides reducing crime, a fence would enable them to control access for underage children who pass through the mall on their way home from the nearby primary school. This 'exposure' of youth to drinking in public and other "immoral behaviour" was often used as argument by residents and authorities for

the banning of alcohol from the mall, and thus threatening the traders' livelihood.<sup>97</sup> The fence became a strategic device for traders. On the one hand, they could deflect moralistic opposition to their activities, on the other, a fence built by the municipality to improve the security could be seen as a de-facto acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the mall.<sup>98</sup>

The fence is made of razor diamond mesh and has a number of pedestrian and car entrances (see Figure 23), which changed the spatial dynamic by reducing pedestrian access to the previously open site.<sup>99</sup> I was not the only who had reservations about the fencing of the site<sup>100</sup> and the issue was the subject of various discussions during my visits. In one particular discussions over lunch at Tjikaa's place, a customer told me that he thought the fence was not a good idea because it would feel too enclosed and stated that "if you create a fence you create colonisation". He lived in Klein Windhoek (where I also live), a central, predominantly white high-income neighbourhood, where "you don't even see your neighbour". He justified his view by saying that "we are all Hereros here, so there will be little crime". He thus clearly distinguished the white / colonial city from the mall and surroundings and marked out ethnic affiliation as the factor that would unite, rather than spatial enclosure.

---

<sup>97</sup> On several occasions that I presented the feasibility study to the City Council the sale of alcohol was debated. During interviews with surrounding residents that formed part of the feasibility study the issue was raised, e.g. during an interview with the chairperson of the Residents Committee on 23 February 2014.

<sup>98</sup> One trader told me that during a visit to the mall by the CoW CEO she had shown him the shoddy workmanship of the fence and requested him to get it rectified, which was done. This is indicative of the position of legitimacy that traders have acquired to make direct demands on senior municipal officials.

<sup>99</sup> While numerous pedestrian entrance gates have been provided, not all are unlocked during the day. Vehicular access gates were located to maintain original thoroughfares.

<sup>100</sup> My objection to the fencing of the site was mainly based on the expectation of reduced economic activity due to restricted access.

While it is difficult to establish if security has improved – as access through the various gates is not being controlled as originally proposed – committee members maintain that it has. They argue that there is generally reduced business activity since about 2017 which is caused by the economic recession and not related to the increased enclosure of the mall.<sup>101</sup> Most of the venues on the north-eastern edge along the storm water ditch (see Figure 24) stand vacant as this area is now relatively isolated as the gate provided in the fence is kept permanently closed. The new fence also highlights the fact that the land comprising the mall is made up of two plots, only the larger one of which belongs to the municipality, while the smaller one has been sold to the OTA after years of negotiations.<sup>102</sup> While the mall historically occupied both plots, the fence now practically separates the land in a way that suggests a future spatial development that may yet sever the original thoroughfare. But physical enclosure also delineates inside from outside, who belongs and who does not. In this way, the fence could be considered as a physical acknowledgement of the presence of traders on its land by the municipality and thus provide traders with a sense of tenure security.



*Figure 24: The north-eastern edge of the site remains somewhat secluded since the fence (right) has been erected. Note the storm water ditch in the foreground, and the permanently closed vehicular gate to the right.*

---

<sup>101</sup> The temporal overlap of these two developments made it difficult to verify this argument.

<sup>102</sup> The application to buy the land from the municipality goes back to the early 2000s and had only been implemented in 2010.



Another dominant feature is the various Shepherd Trees (Omutendereti in Otjiherero) dotted around the mall, which are the only remaining trees of the original savannah landscape. They provide valuable shade and their fruits can be fermented to make beer as Utaara told me. In many cases the trees are an integral part of the spatial arrangement. Some trees show traces of red spray-painted numbers, which was done to demarcate the various businesses at the mall when traders were first registered by the municipality. Trees can, therefore, be considered venues in and of themselves, dissolving the distinction between nature and infrastructure. A large tree on the northern edge of the site is regularly used by a male wood carver who sits on the ground making traditional artefacts for sale (see Figure 25). Another large tree close to the road used to be the established site of a woman cooking meals for lunch. Since the site has been fenced off her location became separated from the road and is now secluded within the spatial setting of the mall. I have not seen her since.



*Figure 25: Omutendereti Tree with wood carvers.*



As per conventional planning procedure, the parcel was reserved for future development of civic amenities which have not materialised since the 1970s. But in a township context, where hardly any provision was made for business activities to take place, and in an economy with an increasing labour surplus, for residents the *open land* had a different meaning: free and unrestricted space ready to be occupied to establish independent livelihood activities. Here a parallel with Foucault's notion of the *conditions of emergence* comes to mind (see p13). Once appropriated, the spatial logic underlying the incremental development of the site over the last 15 years has been guided by numerous factors. The presence of adjacent culturally significant institutions had established an *a priori* centrality with a reach beyond the neighbourhood and the city, far into the rural areas. At the neighbourhood-scale, pedestrian mobility networks linking other centralities, and passing through the site, encouraged vendors to unlock latent economic opportunities.<sup>103</sup> Pre-existing infrastructure, topography and the existence of trees, in addition to the pathways, informed where structures would be set up. The need for efficient use of building materials dictated the way buildings are constructed, which I will expand on in the next section.

The ongoing process of formalisation of the mall by the municipality, manifested in the form of the new boundary fence, affirms a logic of property, of static boundaries and pre-conceived land use, which I argue are hostile to the on-going mode of urbanisation witnessed at the mall. One customer called these logics of enclosure *colonisation*. All the same, to the traders' committee, the fence represents the first official affirmation of their legitimacy after years of engaging, at times

---

<sup>103</sup> Up to this day most businesses at the mall face pedestrian and car traffic crossing the site, rather than outwards towards the street as conventional urban planning theory would have it.

antagonistically, with municipal authorities and the police.<sup>104</sup> It delineates their *presence*,<sup>105</sup> which has become one of the main strategies for legitimisation. It has also been a tool which traders used strategically to counter moralistic arguments by surrounding residents and authorities which threaten their existence: the fact that the mall used to be open for schoolchildren to pass through and witness ‘immoral’ behaviour. Arguing that a fence would allow the control of access and thus keep young children out – even though this did not happen in practice – allowed traders to pursue the sale and consumption of alcohol in a *de facto* public space, which is otherwise forbidden. Strategies of defending their presence at the mall thus ranged from direct confrontation with the police to tactics of engagement and negotiation with authorities.

### 6.1.2 Build, transform, keep it light

Despite the slope most buildings are built directly onto the land, without prior levelling of the ground.<sup>106</sup> This makes many buildings prone to flooding during the short but intense downpours that are common in Windhoek’s climate. The vast majority of structures are steel – or in fewer cases – timber frames, with corrugated iron sheeting as walls and roofs. Roof sheets are often held down by placing bricks or rocks on top, in addition to a few roofing nails. Besides the dominant galvanised corrugated sheets, a deep blue version is one of the few pre-painted options for corrugated sheets available in Namibia, providing a means of differentiation between buildings as only few structures are painted (see Figure 26 and Figure

---

<sup>104</sup> The fence as recognition is analogous to the demands for new policies as a way to recognise the ‘informal’ during the workshop we organised with James Ferguson (also see footnote 79, p140)

<sup>105</sup> Here I have to acknowledge James Ferguson’s notion of presence, which he has partly developed in his book *Give a Man a Fish* (Ferguson, 2015). In a public lecture he presented while visiting our university in August 2019 he developed the idea further. However, the above represents my own interpretation of this notion.

<sup>106</sup> Building on sloping land without any terracing is also a hallmark of the majority of so-called shacks in settlements for the urban poor that sprawl along the periphery of larger Katutura.

27).<sup>107</sup> Undeniably these construction methods and materials testify to the precarious nature of the situation. At the same time such materials are the most affordable, lightweight and easy to transport. They lend themselves to self-construction and can be transformed easily when changing uses or circumstances so require. As steel prices are calculated by weight, the more lightweight a structure, the less expensive it is.



*Figure 26: Mukupua's shebeen.*

Where internal floors are made of concrete, as most are, they are only casually levelled and, in some cases, have steps to make up for the slope which attests to their incremental construction. The frequently corroded lower edges of the corrugated sheets are a result of the sheets being directly buried in the ground without any detailing of the transition between ground and building, indicating the

---

<sup>107</sup> One structure that is bordering the street was painted with the colours and logos of a popular beer brand, providing free advertising for the owner at little cost to the advertiser.

prioritisation of immediate design solutions over long-term sustainability. Here and there old shipping containers form part of the spatial arrangement. While these provide improved security and longevity, they are expensive to purchase and require heavy duty transport. This suggests that the use of containers depends largely on opportunity, and is not necessarily a generalisable solution, as is often suggested.<sup>108</sup> Altogether, the majority of buildings at the Herero Mall are made primarily of steel in its various forms (see Figure 28).



*Figure 27: Kaumbe's shebeen.*

The predominant welded steel-frame construction permits easy, rapid and comparatively inexpensive transformations of space, which is further enabled by the four welding businesses located at the mall. Over the years I have witnessed the on-going transformation of a number of buildings, especially those that are

---

<sup>108</sup> For example, the economic development officer suggested in the interview that containers would provide a good solution for markets without making them too fixed.

operated by the owners themselves, whose interest is in setting their place apart from others and opening up additional possibilities for business activity. However, the necessity of generating livelihoods demands that such transformation does not impede existing business activities. At times new structures are built over the existing ones in order to allow activities to continue during construction. A floor can be paved early in the morning, so that at lunch time customers are not disturbed. A major limitation for spatial transformation is the availability of space surrounding the structure, and only few structures are still able to grow sideways. Despite this increasing lack of space, no double storey structures have yet been erected, as these would require much sturdier, and thus more expensive structures. The only tall building in the vicinity of the mall is a tower, three stacked containers high, on the adjoining premises of the Commando Hall and belongs to a prominent businessman. It features a trailer and a billboard atop, advertising the trailer welding and rental business at the premises below. The ground floor container houses a music shop selling Oviritje<sup>109</sup> CDs that are popular for jukeboxes found in shebeens. The upper containers are reachable by a steel staircase and are used as an office on the first floor and storage space on the second floor. The second landmark is a ca. 15m high steel light pole – a substitute for street lighting and hallmark of apartheid township infrastructure design – that is centrally located on the plot.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Oviritje is a contemporary Namibian music genre that is primarily sung in Otjiherero.

<sup>110</sup> The traders told me that at one point the municipality wanted to remove the light pole and use it for a stadium elsewhere. Only after protests from the committee did the municipality review its proposal and left the light pole where it was.



*Figure 28: The Herero Mall seen from the top of the adjacent container tower: two recently installed prefabricated municipal toilets are visible in the foreground.*

The architecture at the Herero Mall is an architecture of immediacy, of steel, of minimised means and weight, which is perpetually being made and re-made by its inhabitants to suit their needs. The prevailing construction methods and materials lend themselves to the dynamism that the precarious nature of the context demands: affordable to buy, easy to transport, quick to erect, and conducive for transformation. Here, incremental building is the given, and construction methods prioritise adaptability and efficiency of means in the current moment over solutions which might be more long-lived, but usually come at higher cost and provide less flexibility. The dominant aesthetic of temporality, of lightweight corrugated metal, of self-construction and perpetual transformation reflects this architecture to be one of *process* rather than *product*.

### **6.1.3 Live, work, socialise**

As mentioned in the introductory vignette, at the Herero Mall shade is of primary concern for daytime activities. The most elemental structure, the veranda, only provides a roof on poles without further enclosure, which, if high enough to avoid direct radiant heat emanating from roof sheets, is enough to create a comfortable space. In many cases existing trees have been integrated as shading elements. Often, only selected sides of verandas, especially those facing the harsh western afternoon sun, are partially closed off. Some of the most popular daytime spaces



are essentially enabled by such elemental structures, highlighting the fact that very little physical infrastructure is required to enable social interaction.



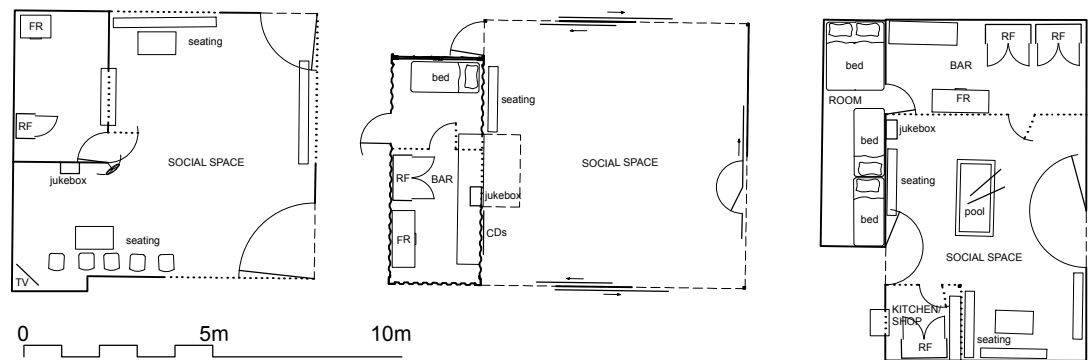
*Figure 29: Food vendor Muarii cooking in front of Uzuva's shebeen, Tjikka's blue veranda in the background.*

The few permanent food vendors are located directly adjacent to a shebeen (see Figure 29), the one providing food while the other provides drinks in a mutually beneficial relationship that I will expand on further below (see pages 197 and 211). Generally, in these settings no music is played, unlike in most of the other shebeens: these are places of conversation. People sit on beer crates, plastic chairs in various states of disrepair, and on elongated welded steel benches where they are provided. There are generally few tables, allowing seating arrangements and constellations of social interaction to change continually.<sup>111</sup> Those structures that are more enclosed usually feature large sliding or hinged doors that open up

---

<sup>111</sup> One restaurant comprises only one large table where the social dynamic changes owing to the rotation of customers.

large parts of the façade and thus allow sight of activities inside. Free-standing structures often have such openings facing multiple sides (see Figure 26, Figure 27 and see Figure 30), which allows them to be closed selectively for climate and dust control or for increased privacy.<sup>112</sup> These large and glass-less openings also make possible the continuity between interior and exterior spaces (see Figure 31). Openness and enclosure of spaces is made to be flexible, allowing for a wide array of spatial arrangements and continuous adaptation to the requirements of social dynamics.



*Figure 30: Different versions of the shebeen typology showing the permeability and flexibility of spaces that open up to several sides (RF = fridge, FR = freezer).*

The most common architectural typology at the mall is the shebeen (see Figure 30) which is sometimes re-purposed as a shop or a restaurant. The largest space is usually the social space of the shebeen, which opens up to the outside as described above. Where adequate cross-ventilation is enabled, the interior spaces are comfortable throughout the day. In some cases, attempts at improving insulation have been made, either by cladding the inside with plasterboard off-cuts, or by fixing recycled freight truck canvas covers or other fabrics to the inside of the

<sup>112</sup> Window openings are usually covered with expanded metal mesh or steel reinforcement mesh, which acts simultaneously as burglar proofing and allows for permanent ventilation. Glass is rarely used.



structure.<sup>113</sup> There is usually a separate room inside or adjacent to the social space. This space functions as the bar and most commonly takes the form of a cage made of expanded metal mesh or iron burglar bars with a counter and a little opening to pass through drinks, while protecting the bartender on the inside.<sup>114</sup> The bar usually houses a variety of fridges and freezers for keeping drinks cool, as well as other valuable equipment and is generally the most secure space in the shebeen. Sometimes the jukebox, a standard feature in most shebeens, is fitted in such a way that it is secured inside the bar, but accessible from the social space for customers to operate. In other cases, jukeboxes are secured with their own lockable metal cage. Security of bar tenders and equipment is ensured through providing a protected space at the centre surrounded by a more permeable social space which blurs the distinction between the interior and the exterior (see Figure 31).

The third space, sometimes an additional room, sometimes just a niche inside the bar, is used as storage and often for bartenders to sleep, evidenced by rolled up and stowed-away mattresses.<sup>115</sup> Over the years I have witnessed the transformation of one shebeen in particular: it started from the typical typology of a bar 'cage' in one corner of a square corrugated structure and subsequently a second, larger bar was added as an extension of the original structure, allowing the original bar to be used as a kitchen. Two years later, a second addition was built towards the road, which the owner explained was planned as a future butchery. However, at the time of our conversation she was staying there

---

<sup>113</sup> There seem to be trade-offs between improving interior aesthetics to distinguish the shebeen from the competition, the availability of large amounts of material, and its thermal insulation capacity.

<sup>114</sup> These spaces often have lockable, low doors that require one to bend down when entering.

<sup>115</sup> I was told by several business owners that this arrangement is mostly to ensure the security of the business, equipment and stock during the night as structures are easy to break into.

temporarily with her partner and their two children since the rent for her backyard shack across Clemence Kapuuo Street had become unaffordable.<sup>116</sup> Shebeens thus often perform a residential function in addition to their commercial purpose and thus provide a very direct means of integrating living and working, and in the process improve security of the space. Where sleeping quarters are separate, they can be quite spacious and provide privacy and a level of comfort. Sleeping niches within the secure space of the bar are often quite small and separated only with a curtain.<sup>117</sup> I am not aiming to belittle the ultimate inadequacy of corrugated iron structures as habitable dwellings, nor to dismiss the concern for the exploitation of family labour, for which such dual spatial arrangements provide an effective solution. But under the prevailing circumstances the typology is fit for purpose and challenges the prevalent single-use zoning, which the municipality, through the process of formalisation, wishes to re-affirm.

The experience of continuous space is not merely reliant on the blurring of physical barriers. The open and permeable structures and the spatial distribution of buildings at the mall allow people to communicate up to 15-20m across to other places. At the same time, music – the pulse of the mall – emanates in various volumes from countless jukeboxes, as well as from passing and parked cars, aurally enhancing the perception of spatial continuity. Jukeboxes and CDs for on-demand music can be found in nearly all of the shebeens, with the occasional exception of a laptop or smartphone for digital streaming. This allows customers to choose their own music according to taste and thus personalise their experience at the mall. It is no surprise that local Oviritje music predominates, interspersed

---

<sup>116</sup> The trader confirmed that although some people at the mall sleep in shebeens to avoid paying rent, it is usually done for security reasons.

<sup>117</sup> In one case I witnessed I was told that up to 3 people would share the single bed.

with the latest international pop megahits like “Despacito”, or “Shape of you”.<sup>118</sup> The lightweight metal structures meanwhile do little to prevent sound from travelling and one way to ensure drowning out noise from neighbouring establishments is to turn up the volume.<sup>119</sup> The resulting cacophony is punctuated by construction noise, most likely steel grinders and hammering where structures are being built, repaired or transformed.



*Figure 31: A typical enclosed bar with jukebox (left) and flexible social space (right) with large openings to the outside.*

The mall is a spatial continuum where activities, sounds, economies and jurisdictions blur. Its physical infrastructure is concentrated in the minimum required for comfort and enabling social life to thrive in ever changing constellations, bringing to mind conceptualisations of architecture as *social condenser*.<sup>120</sup> Typologies allow freedom of movement for customers, and flexibility of use and adaptation through large, variable openings, while ensuring safety of staff and security of stock and equipment at the heart of the space. Often primarily

---

<sup>118</sup> This refers to 2018 when these songs were popular.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Noise pollution’ has been another major concern for surrounding residents that has been repeatedly raised in our engagements during the feasibility study, both with neighbours and municipal authorities.

<sup>120</sup> Architecture as ‘social condenser’ was a key concept of the constructivists in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union the 1920s.

recreational spaces also include residential functions, challenging established principles of land use separation. The architecture thus blurs delimitations of interiority and exteriority, enclosure and openness, economic competition and mutual assistance, personalised and shared space, working, socialising and living. Visual continuity and a soundscape of conversation, music, construction and vehicular movement stretches this spatial continuity beyond the immediate boundaries of the mall and embeds it in the lived reality of the neighbourhood, which initially had been conceived as a residential-only suburb. Here, citizens give shape to the right to the city that Brenner (2012) and Roy (2005) invoke: much more than the right to access, this is the right to transform the city in their image.

#### **6.1.4 The agencies of cars**

The mall seems to be as intrinsically linked to the automobile as any commercial shopping mall would be, though in a different way. Unlike the swathes of static, parked cars surrounding suburban shopping malls, here the automobile, moving or stationary, forms part of the space and is difficult to disassociate from the on-going dynamics. A rhythmic trickle of cars passes through the two main thoroughfares. Especially the northern thoroughfare has increasingly sharper bends as buildings are expanded limiting the space of the automobile.<sup>121</sup> Traces of cars which rammed into buildings, even though at low speed, are visible everywhere, but buildings are easy to put back into shape. Pickups and small lorries deliver goods, including from wholesale retailers that deliver beverages to some of the shebeens, exemplifying the direct economic link between formal retail and the mall which will be explored below (see 6.2.1). Drivers often stop temporarily to exchange some words with visitors or business owners without the need to step

---

<sup>121</sup> Steel bollards, positioned at strategic corners of the accessway to discourage cars bumping into structures, were much too weak to perform their intended function.

out of their car, or they park in close proximity to the business they are frequenting. In the latter case customers often play their own music from their car, as long as it is acceptable to other customers.<sup>122</sup> Such personalisation of space through music does thus not only apply to shebeens but also to the shared space of the mall.

Then there are cars parked at the carwash: those waiting their turn and those that are drying, their polished tyres glistening in the sun. In this setting the car itself becomes part of the economy: the owners usually sit at the shebeen towards the back of the car wash, engaging in conversation over a drink, while waiting for their car to be cleaned as I will expand on in more detail below (see p207).<sup>123</sup> There are also those cars with former lives, that have since become part of the immovable property. Next to Uzuva's shebeen stands an old Volkswagen minibus that, until the recent installation of municipal toilets, had functioned as a discreet enclosure for women to relieve themselves in a bucket that could then be emptied into the storm water drainage ditch behind it. Other stationary, large cars, or parts of them, such as the body of a delivery van, are used for storage, providing functional space. In some cases, rusting car bodies, stripped of all useful parts, are simply too demanding to dispose of and serve no further purpose.

Cars come in all forms and sizes. The bakkie (pickup) is ubiquitous. It is evident from the existence and form of the loading bay tralies<sup>124</sup> if pickups are used for farming, and the number of farm bakkies that frequent the mall reveals that many patrons have farming interests, on which I will expand below (see p217). This

---

<sup>122</sup> Even with the doors open the music must be on full volume as noise competition from the surrounding shebeens is not easily outdone.

<sup>123</sup> Other car-related economies include car and tyre repair services that are scattered throughout the mall.

<sup>124</sup> Tralies are purpose-made steel loading bars for pick-up trucks that range from ornamental to functional additions to the car.

reveals the relationship between the mall and the larger territory of which it is part.<sup>125</sup> The foremost urban transport option in Windhoek, the sedan taxi, is equally omnipresent. While it is the regular transport mode of choice for the majority,<sup>126</sup> it is also used widely to transport goods such as crates of beer, meat, groceries or firewood needed for the various businesses, to and from the mall.<sup>127</sup>

At the same time, it is not uncommon to see very expensive cars, such as the latest Range Rover, glide past with the owner exchanging greetings through lowered windows.<sup>128</sup> Yet the fact that the owners, who assumedly live in higher income parts of town relatively far away, frequent the mall sheds some light on the complex overlap of cultural affiliation with an emerging class formation. Sporadically, an open-roofed beige Land-Rover shuttles tourists past the mall on a “township tour”, conjuring up images of Safari and wild Africa. The official website of the Namibia Tourism Board advertises township tours as a way to learn about the “real Namibia” in a “safe and educational way” (Namibia Tourism Board, no date) and informs tourists about the charitable projects supported by such ventures.<sup>129</sup> Here, the moving car provides a shield, establishing distance and thus preventing social interaction. This strange display of orientalism is telling of the continuous othering of ordinary people in the ‘township’.

---

<sup>125</sup> The large-scale trailer-hire business on an adjacent property is further evidence of this distinctive link with farming, and the strategic position which the mall holds in this respect.

<sup>126</sup> Taxis are the major public transport option in Windhoek and account for about 35 percent of all trips made (City of Windhoek, 2013, p17).

<sup>127</sup> In Windhoek taxis have do not have predefined routes, but rather go in certain general directions. For this reason, they provide a very flexible transport option.

<sup>128</sup> Range Rover is the car of choice for the new elite and easily worth two million N\$ (GBP 105,263).

<sup>129</sup> The tourists only leave the car at a few pre-determined spots which do not include the mall, and instead point their cameras at the scenery as they pass by as if immediate danger lurks.

In modernist planning the automobile was primarily conceptualised as a mode of transport and infrastructure for cars still provides the overwhelming majority of transport investment in Namibia.<sup>130</sup> Many critiques of modernist planning have singled out the prioritisation of cars as a major obstacle to social interaction in public spaces (Gehl, 1980; Jacobs, 1961). However, in the context of the Herero Mall, the automobile transcends a functionalist, transport-oriented framing and takes on multiple uses and meanings that are closely intertwined with the space itself: while it still serves as a mode of transport, it enables larger distributive economic networks, can act as extension of personal space, becomes the subject of local economies, serves as utilitarian space, carries meaning of status and social mobility, but can also provide a shield for social interaction. It is not spatially separated from the core spaces and activities, and thus becomes part of a shared space of circulation. The car is thus intrinsically a link to and enabler of the economy at the mall.

#### **6.1.5 Withholding services**

Cars passing on the coarse gravel ground churn up lots of dust. This worsens in the months of August and September when the bare ground itself is swirled up by seasonal winds. The storm water ditch is littered with refuse that is collected elsewhere at the Mall and dumped there. Customers of adjacent food places casually throw their bones over their shoulders into the ditch. Flies abound. The municipality outsourced the responsibility to maintain the drainage ditch to the Roads Contractor Company in 2017.<sup>131</sup> It has not been cleared for long periods

---

<sup>130</sup> The CoW's public spending for non-motorized transport represented only 2 percent of the budget for road repair and maintenance in 2012 (City of Windhoek, 2013, p37).

<sup>131</sup> The Roads Contractor Company is a Namibian Public Enterprise established by Act of Parliament "to undertake the construction and maintenance of roads and other construction works". Source: Roads Contractor Company Act 14 of 1999.

since, which could cause a blockage of the storm water drain under Clemence Kapuuo Street. Now and then, through his networks the chairperson of the traders' committee manages to arrange a municipal bulldozer to clean the ditch, which requires money to be collected from traders for this purpose, while supposedly the municipality pays for this service. Two municipal refuse skips are located on the sidewalk outside the mall, next to major entrances (see Figure 23). They seem not to be emptied often enough as they spill over, and garbage is blown into the surrounding streets. Some of the food vendors who cook on open fires discard their hot coals directly into the skip as it is the only place where they do not produce a safety hazard, making the garbage smoulder – at times for hours – with noxious smoke everywhere. The municipal system of refuse removal is evidently not adequate, yet blame for the place being dirty is apportioned to traders as the mayor of the city did (see p111).

But refuse removal does not provide the most urgent service delivery concern. Instead, the smell of urine lingers. Despite six toilets having been installed by the municipality in late 2017, not everyone seems to use them. Especially for men it is easier and seemingly acceptable to urinate against the side or back walls of buildings rather than to ask for a key to the toilets that are relatively far away (see Figure 23). It is also not uncommon to see men urinating in the drainage ditch out in the open, just a few metres from where people are sitting.<sup>132</sup> The most notorious places, usually somewhat sheltered corners, have been fenced off with NATO razor wire to discourage open urination, and in some of these areas old motor oil is spilled onto the ground to cover up the stench. The sanitary challenges are more difficult for women and I have mentioned innovative ways of dealing with the problem of

---

<sup>132</sup> This might be because of habit or the distance between some of the shebeens and the toilets, or even because of reduced inhibitions of people when in a state of drunkenness.



lack of toilets above (see p184). Two young women who regularly visit the mall told me that whenever they needed to urinate, they had to find a sheltered spot and go with someone to protect them, highlighting the gendered impact of the lack of toilets.

It is not my aim here to explore in much depth the issues related to sanitation, but rather pursue the question of how it could take so long for the municipality to provide public toilets in a fully serviced area, while concerns over poor sanitation had been raised in the media and by the municipal authorities since the early beginnings of the mall (see CHAPTER 3), let alone by the traders themselves. In October / November 2017 three sets of two adjacent toilets were installed by a building contractor commissioned by the municipality. The municipal officer I used to deal with Herero Mall-related issues explained to me that the municipality had a pre-defined list of contractors established through open public tender, from which it would pick contractors depending on the project. The outsourcing of the construction to an 'external' contractor had been met with much disappointment by the traders who claimed that they could have done the job themselves, generating some income at the mall. This happened more than a year after the traders' committee had applied, with my assistance, for the municipality to provide them with building materials to construct their own temporary toilets until the longer-term development plans for the mall were being finalised (see Figure 32). I had designed the toilets using local construction materials and methods as they have been described above (see p173), so that local welders could build the structures themselves. They were planned to connect to the mains sewer line which passes through the plot since the neighbourhood was first linked to the municipal sewer

system, long before the land was occupied.<sup>133</sup> The only missing aspect was a water connection which was requested from the municipality. Statutory, ‘transparent’ public procurement in this case became a structural impediment to a locally embedded process.



*Figure 32: 3D visualisation of the proposed self-built toilets that was part of the proposal submitted to the municipality in 2016.*

A calls for the immediate installation of temporary sanitation facilities was also included in our 2014 feasibility study for the development of the mall, which I will expand on in the next chapter. Instead, the municipality opted for standardised, prefabricated concrete toilet cubicles that are used in informal settlements. The pre-installed WC suites are inexpensive, domestic-grade fittings.<sup>134</sup> The steel doors of the toilets open directly to the outside, as the inside of the concrete cubicle measures only 800 x 900mm. Sukona, who controls access to the two toilets closest to her shebeen, told me they are “too small for tall or fat people”.<sup>135</sup> One woman, she told me, had to enter the toilets backwards as she is not able to turn around

---

<sup>133</sup> The availability of sewer mains makes the fact of the delayed sanitation more remarkable as this is usually by far the most difficult infrastructural aspect to provide.

<sup>134</sup> I witnessed two of the six toilets breaking when the contractor carelessly hauled the heavy cubicles onto the concrete base that had been cast earlier.

<sup>135</sup> Among the Ovaherero in particular there are many tall and heavy-built people.

inside.<sup>136</sup> The prefabricated toilets, though answering a basic sanitation issue, provide no privacy and little dignity to people, especially in a public setting like the mall.



*Figure 33: Installation of the toilets by the external contractor (left) and interior of newly installed cubicle with broken fittings (right).*



*Figure 34: Two of the refabricated toilets after installation*

---

<sup>136</sup> This is particularly undignified as the toilets have no privacy screens and stand in plain view for all to see.

While water for the toilets is provided by the municipality free of charge, the design is such that it is only available for flushing and no hand wash basins are provided. Apart from a lack of space to install a basin inside the cubicle, it appears that the fear of people using 'free' water for other purposes is the main concern. Besides the car wash, which has its individual water connection and meter, the toilets are the only water source at the mall, with nothing provided for washing hands, pots, cooking utensils and cutlery or for human consumption. In some cases, the lids of cisterns have been removed to enable people to wash their hands.<sup>137</sup> The toilets also have no light at night, putting into question stated municipal priorities for hygiene and safety. Minor maintenance, the committee was told, has to be carried out by the traders themselves while the municipality would only be responsible for large-scale maintenance. The original copper plumbing was cast in the concrete to avoid tampering and most of it was damaged or leaking within a year after installation. To repair the broken plumbing, traders replaced the cast-in pipes with more affordable, surface-mounted plastic ones. In repairing the piping, traders added a tap with a hose inside one of the cubicles, which allowed them to fetch water for consumption. This particular cubicle would be kept locked under the watch of one trader, to ensure that it was not discovered by the municipality. Contradictions in the provision of sanitation solutions, such as providing 'tamper-free' plumbing while requiring traders to undertake their maintenance, seem problematic. At the same time, such inconsistency provides opportunities to appropriate service provision in ways that are more equitable and fairer.<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> The pre-paid communal water-point the traders' committee applied for in 2016 has not yet been installed.

<sup>138</sup> For water pricing also see footnote 188, p215.

The provision of electricity at the mall has been less controversial but equally complex. A map developed with traders' committee members (see Figure 35) revealed the intricacies of the electricity distribution at the mall in relation to its incremental growth. Currently four electricity meters are shared by the various businesses, which were installed in 2006, 2008 and 2012 respectively,<sup>139</sup> while one butchery gets its electricity directly from a neighbouring building<sup>140</sup> and the car wash has its individual meter. In all other cases, traders share the expenses per meter, and given the diverging uses, especially between welders and other businesses that use much less electricity, this arrangement provides for some friction. The first electricity box from 2006 still supplies businesses at the far end of the mall, even though new meters have been installed closer by, revealing the chronology of the development. The meters are controlled by members of the traders committee, who thus yield some power over traders as they can disconnect individuals who are deemed to contravene any rules or are in arrears. Control over the electricity supply thus allows the committee to assert a level of governance.<sup>141</sup>

While the meters were installed by professional electricians who were paid for their services with money collected from traders, the connections to the various businesses have been installed by traders themselves in often precarious ways (see Figure 36). Yet, the chairperson of the traders' committee told me that normally, if traders need any assistance regarding the electricity supply up to the meters, they call the municipal officer who then arranges someone to assist.

---

<sup>139</sup> This explains why some businesses on the western side of the mall are connected to the electricity distribution box on the far eastern side of the site.

<sup>140</sup> The butchery received electricity from the neighbouring head office of the Popular Democratic Movement, Namibia's largest opposition party, which does not allow shebeens to be connected to their electricity.

<sup>141</sup> Traders' committee members conceded that control over electricity supply is the only way the committee can assert power, as it is not officially recognised through a management agreement with CoW.





Figure 35: Sketch of the history of electricity distribution at the mall developed in collaboration with traders. Red indicates the current distribution network from five electricity meters that are numbered according to the year of installation (green). Blue indicates the need for new meters that was discussed with traders.



Figure 36: Electricity meters and distribution boards inside the space that traders constructed in 2009.

However, traders argue that this assistance is only happening because the municipality is recovering its costs by selling electricity. In 2017 electricity tariffs were increased from N\$100 for 50 units to \$100 for 29 units, nearly double, because the mall was considered to be a business area by the municipality. The attitude of the municipality towards service provision is thus at best vague, if not opportunistic: generating revenue from certain services while withholding others.

The chequered history of service provision at the mall is telling about the attitude towards providing municipal services to the poor as well as of the conceptualisation of legitimate economic activity. On the one hand, the monopoly of provision of services is upheld as the only legitimate system by the municipality, even where such provision is insufficient and inadequate, as in the case of refuse removal. Still, blame for litter and dirt is levelled at the traders. Where such services are outsourced, their reliability is further diminished, prompting traders to arrange and pay for alternative services, which is not acknowledged by the municipality. On the other hand, while sewerage bulk infrastructure was available on site throughout the existence of the mall, for more than 10 years water was provided only to individual car wash businesses but not for public sanitary uses, with major negative and gendered implications for traders and customers of the mall. At the same time, in the absence of municipal provision for water and sanitation, proposals for self-help approaches to creating temporary sanitation facilities and generating income for local traders were disregarded in favour of formal procurement of generic and inadequate solutions through established formal processes and providers. Concerns of cost recovery seem to outweigh those of public health, safety and dignity as evidenced by the provision of toilets without facilities for washing hands and equipment used for food production, without light at night and without privacy. At the same time, owing of the ambiguity in the municipal approach traders were able to exploit the situation and create their own free water supply. Electricity, on

the other hand, has long been provided on a cost recovery basis, and business tariffs and municipal assistance with maintenance suggest the acknowledgement of the mall as a place of business. Yet, the evident precarious nature of electrical connections between municipal supply and end-user businesses and the related safety hazards seems to be ignored. Again, traders know how to exploit this ambiguity to their own advantage by making electricity supply the central lever of their self-governance.

#### 6.1.6 Conclusion: presence as act

The Herero Mall was never planned this way. Reserved by town planners for future civic development within an otherwise dormitory township for black urban waged labour, the open land took on a different meaning of potential: making an independent living in a city that could no longer uphold the myth of employment for all. As I have shown above this myth of full urban employment was artificially constructed through urban influx controls, amongst other measures (see 4.1 and 4.2). In this setting, space for economic activity has to be appropriated: either by turning private residences into mixed-use businesses, as in the case of Eveline Street (see p97); by trading in the public space of streets; or by occupying public land as is the case at the mall. Key to the latter operation is to establish legitimacy, as such occupations are resisted by the municipality not necessarily through outright eviction, but in more subtle ways, as I have shown in the case of the Herero Mall, through withholding provision of municipal services.

In the post-independence context of Namibia, legitimacy is primarily achieved through presence. However, presence is not a *condition* but an *act*: in other words, it requires to be *enacted* continuously to be sustained. In the above sections I demonstrated how such enactment occurred in the case of the Herero Mall. Historically presence has been established through occupation, building, and



everyday practice, spatially guided by an adjacent institutional centrality, pre-existing neighbourhood-scale mobility patterns, pre-existing public infrastructure and trees. Once established the presence was strategically defended through confrontation, engagement and negotiation with the local authority and other stakeholders. Only through the enactment of presence did traders ultimately negotiate access to municipal services that had been available on site long before traders occupied the land. Architecturally, this presence has been materialised as lightweight, incremental, affordable, adaptable, and flexible buildings that continue to be transformed. Interiority and exteriority blur and use patterns and opportunities are perpetually changing. The architecture challenges conventional modernist separation of functions, spaces and infrastructure and fuses these into a unitary spatio-temporality of *being urban*.

## **6.2 Popular urban economies**

If the spatiality of the urban is changing as I have attempted to show above, so is the economy that produces – and is produced by – this setting. In the following section I aim to explore how these economies operate, that are, again, conventionally labelled ‘informal’. This exploration is based primarily on semi-structured interviews with business operators at the mall and casual conversations with traders and visitors throughout the research. I approached a number of traders as I outlined in my data collection methods (see 1.7) to develop an understanding of the social, spatial and economic aspects of their operations. As in the previous section, narrative description is used to develop qualitative insights into what I will call the *popular economy* and interspersed with discussion and analysis throughout. I derived the idea of popular economies from the Spanish concept of

“artes populares”, or popular art, as opposed to high art.<sup>142</sup> The socio-spatial diagrams of some of the businesses that I developed from the gathered data (see Figure 38; Figure 39) allowed me to visualise – if only in a crude way – the complexity and scale of these popular economies as a network of relationships and economic transactions between people, institutions, spaces and sites. While I had originally thought of these diagrams as tools for co-producing knowledge on ‘informal economies’ with traders, they quickly became too elaborate to function as didactic instruments. Rather, the diagrams took on a role of analytical tool, through which I constructed, or in the words of Latour (2005), *deployed* various actors as networks that cut across sites and scales. While my original research question and interview guide distinguished spatial, social and economic aspects, the diagrams reveal that, in terms of lived experience, these spheres are impossible to separate. Theoretically, such separation would be incongruous. Instead, they allow us to see these instances of spatiality to be the site, medium and outcome of a process of urbanisation that is distinctly different – I will argue – from an urbanisation paralleled by industrialisation, which had historically been the basis for modernist urbanism to develop, which in turn had been influential in the development of colonial urbanisation in Namibia (see 4.1).

### 6.2.1 The shebeen as the beginning of business

The history of the shebeen has already been elaborated above (see 4.2) as has its generic spatial typology (see 6.1.3). As I mentioned in the introduction to the Herero Mall, the sale of alcohol at the site has been one of the major contestations throughout its existence (see CHAPTER 3). The historical stance of the municipality that sale of alcohol should not be permitted in any future development scenario,

---

<sup>142</sup> Hull and James have also used the term popular economies in the case of South Africa (Hull and James, 2012).

which is in line with Municipal market regulations (see 4.4) and to which extent a stand-alone council resolution exists,<sup>143</sup> has created much unease amongst traders. One shebeen owner asked me repeatedly over the years if shebeens would be allowed by the municipality, which I was in no good position to respond to as the thinking on this issue within the municipal structures seems to be shifting. In my interview with the now former mayor, he acknowledged that while alcohol abuse is a problem, sale of alcohol enables the mix of businesses: “If you don’t have the alcohol component it would not work”.<sup>144</sup> Yet, there are no official pronouncements by the municipality on the matter and the feasibility study that I was involved in, which recommended the sale of alcohol to be maintained at the site as part of the economic mix (Delgado and Lühl, 2014, p140–142; Lühl, Delgado and Kozonguizi, 2016, p9), has not yet been approved by the city council.

The three shebeen owner-operators that I interviewed for what follows are all members of the traders’ committee and have all been at the mall since the early years of its existence.<sup>145</sup> Rather than elaborating on their individual businesses, I will explore what we can learn about popular economies by looking closely at the shebeen as type, the agencies involved in its production and its role within the popular economy of the Herero Mall. While their shebeens largely follow the generic spatial typology explained above, they are variations on the theme. Uzuva’s shebeen<sup>146</sup> only comprises an enclosed bar, with a veranda that is open towards

---

<sup>143</sup> The resolution reads that “no spray painting / mechanical activities and alcohol sale be allowed at the market”. Council Resolution 271/09/2013.

<sup>144</sup> In an interview which I conducted for the feasibility study in 2014 while he was deputy mayor, he was still opposed to the idea of allowing the sale of alcohol at the Herero Mall. The interview was held on 10 May 2014.

<sup>145</sup> Sukona and Harry confirmed that the owner-operators that have been at the mall the longest still remain in control of the traders’ committee.

<sup>146</sup> Uzuva is in his 40s and although he was born in Windhoek, he grew up and went to school in Grootfontein, some 500km to the north of Windhoek, before returning to the capital. At the time of the

the vehicular thoroughfare (see (A) Figure 37). Harry's shebeen<sup>147</sup> has two enclosed social spaces for customers separated by metal mesh screens, which are evidently a result of a gradual enlargement of the structure (see (B) Figure 37). Sukona's shebeen<sup>148</sup> has also undergone major transformations since I have known it, which have been described earlier (see p180). Its social space is large enough to accommodate a pool table, as one of the few shebeens at the mall (see (C) Figure 37). In two of the cases the owners constructed their structures themselves, sometimes with the assistance of friends in return for monetary compensation. Permission to set up a business was usually sought directly from the chairperson of the traders' committee, who would also propose the respective location for setting up a structure. As alluded to earlier, structures are continuously transformed and adapted to suit the owner's needs, improve customers' comfort, and to differentiate them from others both spatially and in terms of goods and services offered.

---

interview he rented a room in Greenwell Matongo, on the outskirts of Windhoek, for N\$1,500 (GBP 79) per month.

<sup>147</sup> Harry is in his early 30s and had his shebeen at the mall since 2008. He lives close to Soweto market, some 5 minutes away from the mall but originates from the far north-west Kunene Region. His income supports 8 dependents, including his parents who live in Ruacana on the Namibia-Angola border, a sister who studies at UNAM, four brothers and a child. He derives his main income from the shebeen, which fluctuates a lot depending on the months and the general state of the economy.

<sup>148</sup> Sukona is in her 30s and had her shebeen since around 2005. At the time of the interview she lived with her family in an appendage of her shebeen. One of her major expenses is the education of her 10-year-old son who goes to primary School in Hochland Park, the middle-class neighbourhood that replaced the Old Location.



Figure 37: Map of the various businesses at the mall that are mentioned in this section: (A) Uzuva's shebeen; (B) Harry's shebeen; (C) Sukona's shebeen; (D) Tjikaa's restaurant; (E) Nduezu Car Wash; (F) Muarii's food; (G) Muarii's shebeen; (H) Kovii's food cart / Uajenenisa's veranda; (I) temporary food vendors; (J) Kaumbe's shebeen; (K) Ndeshi's salon; (L) Ndapandula's salon.

However, investments in spatial transformation are calculated carefully. Uzuva, for example, told me that he wanted to build a small retaining wall around the front of his veranda, to avoid storm water from flooding his space. According to him, fixing the roof and improving the floor of the veranda would improve his business. On the other hand, he did not want to waste money as he was not sure when the municipality would build the new market. He showed me a meat cutting machine he had received from the Ministry of Industrialisation, Trade and SME Development (MITSMED) when he registered his business.<sup>149</sup> But there were already too many meat cutting businesses along Clemence Kapuu Street, and some at the mall, which made starting a meat cutting business too competitive.<sup>150</sup> At the time of the interview he told me that he was thinking of rather settling and investing in his farm near Grootfontein.<sup>151</sup> He showed me photos of his cattle on his phone as well as his bank savings of N\$55,000 (GBP 2,895). While he had plans for improving the business, some machinery and capital to invest, he would rather invest it in his farm as ownership there was secure. Insecurity of tenure clearly undermined his willingness to invest further in his business at the mall.

But not all traders have such secure possibilities elsewhere. For Sukona, who started the shebeen as a young woman after school, accessing capital to realise her future plans was one of her primary concerns, and something she asked me about often. For the butchery she had planned in one of the extensions to her shebeen, she would need a cool room, a meat cutter, a sausage machine and

---

<sup>149</sup> The MITSMED ran an Equipment Aid Scheme that supported SMEs with equipment and technology according to their requirements in order to grow businesses and create employment (Financial Literacy Initiative, no date).

<sup>150</sup> The meat cutting machine was stored at the shebeen as he had no use for it. Instead, he thought it would be better to start a meat cutting business near his home in Greenwell Matongo, on the outskirts of Katutura, though he had not yet adequately investigated this option.

<sup>151</sup> Since 2019 he was mostly at the farm and had employed someone to run his shebeen.

fridges. But to get a loan to finance the equipment she told me she needed a professional “business plan”, which can cost between N\$ 3,000 – 6,000 (GBP 158 – 316), which in addition to the repayment of the loan with interest, made it entirely unaffordable to her. In the case of Harry, although he had a company registered with the MITSMED, it remained difficult to get a liquor licence for his shebeen because he did not own the land. In his view this prevented him from having a “professional business”. In addition to the sale of alcohol and cool drinks he would like to sell fresh meat, but the fact that he did not have a stable electricity supply proved too much of a risk to begin such a business.

In addition to alcohol and cool drinks, Uzuva sells charcoal and firewood from the farm, vetkoeks, ice cubes, loose cigarettes and Oros <sup>152</sup> water. Although his sister and another relative cook food independently in front of his shebeen, they help out when needed.<sup>153</sup> Harry also wanted to sell prepared food, macaroni, russians,<sup>154</sup> and braai meat in addition to drinks to set himself apart from the other, more traditional Herero food offered nearby. But he told me he will start slowly and test the impact with customers before taking a step to employ someone for the purpose of preparing and selling food. Although he had strong dedicated customers,<sup>155</sup> now and then when business was stagnant, he offered free meat, cooked outside his shebeen, to customers who buy a drink. He would announce such “sales” by SMS to his regular customers. Usually, he collaborated with Tjikaa's Restaurant where customers could buy food (see (D) Figure 37), and if he ran out of drinks, he could

---

<sup>152</sup> Oros is a popular South African orange concentrate that is mixed with water to make juice.

<sup>153</sup> Before his sister started to prepare food on her own, Uzuva used to make food and run the shebeen. He has since handed over his cooking equipment to his sister. Besides the food vendors surrounding his shebeen he also collaborates with Kaumbe and Ernest, owners of two neighbouring shebeens.

<sup>154</sup> Russians are meat sausages that are locally produced. The name has become a synonym for sausages in general.

<sup>155</sup> Harry told me that some of his best customers live in Pioneerspark, a former white, middle class neighbourhood in the south of Windhoek, and they come specifically to the mall to frequent his shebeen.

get some from other bars. In addition to direct sales, he rented a jukebox from someone for a 35 percent share of its earnings. Harry saved the remaining money in a bank account specifically to buy his own jukebox to avoid such high deductions.<sup>156</sup>

Most shebeens are open daily and require long working hours. All owners reported that they are open Sundays to Thursdays from 10:00-22:00 and Fridays and Saturdays from 10:00-24:00. These times are regulated by the 1998 Liquor Act (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 1998) and detailed in the regulations. The busiest time is after 17:30 when people return from work and spend time at the mall to socialise. For owner-operators that usually means between 12 and 14 hours of work per day. However, at the time of the interview, all three interviewees had employed people to serve at the bar, after initially having started out on their own.<sup>157</sup> The competition amongst shebeens, especially in a depressed economy, requires continuously comparing their prices with those of other bars. Many shebeen operators, including Uzuva and Harry, buy supplies monthly from a wholesale retailer in the Northern Industrial Area some four kilometres away, paying about N\$300 for transport. They asserted that direct deliveries from Namibia Breweries were too expensive.<sup>158</sup> However, Sukona claimed that according to her, many traders do not adequately calculate the cost of transport in the pricing of their goods although it reduces their profit. She told me she had spent the previous holidays calculating her income and expenditure to better understand where her challenges lie. The mall could thus be considered a place of learning about

---

<sup>156</sup> According to Harry the jukebox is an essential ingredient for a successful shebeen as people want to choose their own music.

<sup>157</sup> Harry employed a relative and only Uzuva disclosed the salary of his employee to be N\$ 1,400 (GBP 74) per month.

<sup>158</sup> Sukona told me that "the Owambos know how to make business". They buy crates of beer from Metro (large wholesale retailer) and re-sell them to shebeens, including the cost of the taxi money and profit.



business principles, and Sukona was eager to teach her children about trading and money.<sup>159</sup> Sukona explained to me the logic of her pricing: the Namibian Breweries deliver beer at the mall from Monday to Saturday at 7am for N\$180 per crate (12 x 750ml bottles @ N\$15). She sells a bottle for N\$20 and thus earns N\$60 per crate of which she has to deduct another N\$12 for empties (N\$1 per bottle),<sup>160</sup> making her a profit of N\$48 per crate. Uzuva told me that he would sell about 130 crates of beer (12x 750ml bottles) in 3 weeks, which, using similar profit margins as Sukona, equates to a profit of about N\$ 6,500 (GBP 342) per month.<sup>161</sup>

I learned that most of the owners who started businesses at the mall have since left and rented out their places or have employed someone – often relatives – to operate it on their behalf. According to Sukona there were only about ten owner-operators at the mall, out of the ca. 67 businesses. She told me with some frustration that “they don’t come here to check or participate anymore. As long as the rent is paid, they don’t have a problem”.<sup>162</sup> In the flux of self-governance people can easily become rent-seekers once they have secured a space, extracting value from the open land they had initially occupied. But this also relies on the mall being an entry point for rural-urban migrants. According to Sukona about 80 percent of

---

<sup>159</sup> Once I ordered a cooldrink from Sukona at her bar and she involved her pre-school daughter in the transaction. She told me she needs to learn how to count and how to sell, so that she will develop a “sense for business”.

<sup>160</sup> Because customers at the mall often carry their bottles around from one place to another, shebeens do not require them to return their empty bottles. Instead, the “zula boys” (young Aawambo boys) collect empties and usually get paid 50c per bottle if they sell them back to shebeens at the mall, and N\$1 if they sell them at the nearby Single Quarters Market. Metal cans and plastic bottles are, however, picked up by the Damara boys, indicating some sense of territoriality and ethnically constructed distribution of labour in the waste collection and recycling system. However, tracing these networks of distribution was beyond the scope of this research.

<sup>161</sup> An average about 130 crates of beer per month, and an average gross profit of N\$50 per crate equals N\$ 6,500 (GBP 342) per month. This figure does thus not include earnings from all other sales of cooldrinks etc., but these were considerably less than beer sales according to him. From this he had to deduct about N\$1500 for electricity and N\$1400 for the salary of his employee.

<sup>162</sup> Sukona provided the example of Kaumbe who now owns a hardware store in Gam, a rural village which he supplies from Windhoek, about 535km away. Because of this he was rarely at the mall anymore. She also used the example of Uzuva, who did not want to lose his cattle to the drought, so he went to the farm and rented out his shebeen.

traders at the mall are Ovazemba and Nkhumbi <sup>163</sup> and most of them rent their premises from the business owners who in the majority are Ovaherero.<sup>164</sup> Often these rural migrants would initially work at Ovaherero-owned farms before arriving at the mall via those connections and being employed by owner-operators or renting a business from the owners.<sup>165</sup> Sukona elaborated that because of these migration dynamics most people at the mall either did not have identity cards or had false identity cards. For her the dominance of tenant-operators at the mall made self-governance more difficult: “how do you give loans to people who rent? How will you find these people? If they are Hereros you will be able to find them from their surname, which is linked to a village”. The diverging interests between owner-operators, owner-rentiers and tenant-operators at the mall poses a fundamental dilemma which the informal sector organiser had highlighted (see page 135).

Shebeens are the most controversial amongst the popular economies where moral values clash with pragmatic considerations. Charman et al. (2017) argue that in the case of Eveline Street the predominance of shebeens has statistically declined over the course of 8 years, which they interpret as an indication that shebeens as drivers of the “leisure economy” play a role in the diversification of business activities (2017, p45–46). In the case of my study it is difficult to propose such views quantitatively, but from interactions with shebeen owners it became clear that starting a shebeen indeed provides a possible “beginning of business” as the informal sector organiser coined it (see p115). As shown above, all shebeen

---

<sup>163</sup> Ovazemba are a tribe from north-western Namibia, who like the Ovahimba, are related to the Ovaherero and share the language. Nkhumbi are a tribe from southern Angola who are difficult to distinguish from the Ovazemba.

<sup>164</sup> According to Sukona only three Omuzemba and four Aawambo own businesses at the mall.

<sup>165</sup> The fact that many young men I encountered working in shebeens could neither speak English or Afrikaans supports these accounts.

owners I interviewed either already pursued additional economic activities or were aiming for business diversification and in some cases wished to 'professionalise' their business. While the normative discourse would have it that insecurity of tenure, inaccessibility of capital, inadequacy of service infrastructure, and lack of identification are *inherent* to 'informal' economies, understanding economic activities at the mall shows that people negotiate these constraints continuously but selectively by engaging the municipality or other relevant authorities where required and distancing themselves where opportune.

Most shebeen operators relied on a collaborative stance towards 'competitors' as customers were largely reported to be loyal to certain shebeens and their owners or operators. Beyond the often disproportionately emphasised alcohol consumption, other leisure activities are offered in bars that include listening to music, gambling, watching television, playing pool amongst others. Remaining competitive requires comparing pricing and seeking reduction in transport costs that are the main differentiating factors while retail prices for drinks generally vary little. Only a few had alternative livelihood strategies external to the mall, which usually led them to renting out their 'properties' or employing someone to run their business. However, in many cases this emerging landlordism provides an entry point into the city for rural migrants who only speak indigenous languages and often have no identification documents, and thus little chance of success in seeking formal employment. As their employment is often combined with shelter, the mall effectively functions as a conduit for them becoming urban and has developed into a setting where this transition is not too disruptive as food, social dynamics and cultural aspects provide a familiar setting.

### 6.2.2 The car wash as anchor

Amongst the first businesses at the site were two car washes (see Figure 21). The car washes were established at the two outer edges of the mall and have been instrumental anchor points in its spatial development. Of the one near Clemence Kapuu Street only a concrete platform remains after it closed down a couple of years ago. The remaining one, Nduezu Car Wash,<sup>166</sup> is seemingly the largest business at the mall (see (E) Figure 37). The car wash is located on the portion of land that today belongs to the OTA (Erf 6300) and the owner pays the organisation a monthly rent based on an oral agreement. He told me that he initially got permission to start the car wash at the site from the late Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako, even though he was not the legal owner of the land at the time, revealing the power wielded by the chief over early decisions about the site.<sup>167</sup> Besides this agreement, his current tenure relies on a letter provided by the OTA consenting to the use of the site, which is required by the CoW to issue a Certificate of Fitness,<sup>168</sup> which indicates municipal approval of his business based on meeting certain minimum requirements.<sup>169</sup> The certificate of fitness in turn is a requirement by the municipality to provide the business with a separate water meter, and it is still the only entity at the mall that has piped water. This all happened despite a 2010

---

<sup>166</sup> Nduezu is about 40 years old and was one of the first people to start a business at the site around 2005. He told me he started washing cars because his grade 12 results did not allow him to enter university. As he used to wash his neighbour's car as a child, he took it on as a business, using the open land as a resource. Together with his wife who worked for a government ministry, the business allowed him to support about 15 people including his family and parents. He also had a farm near Okakarara that he visited once a month which suggests a further income for the family, and – given the chronic unpredictability of farming in Namibia – possibly an additional expense.

<sup>167</sup> At the time the OTA application to purchase the land was in process, but legally the chief had no jurisdiction over the property. A 2006 Council Resolution (Resolution 196/08/2006) mandated the sale of both erven to the OTA but this was later rescinded in 2010 with a new resolution (RESOLUTION 113/05/2010) that mandated the sale of the smaller Erf 6300 to the OTA. This sale has since been implemented.

<sup>168</sup> The CoW issues Certificates of Fitness after municipal inspection of business premises to be fit for purpose (City of Windhoek, no date b).

<sup>169</sup> In this instance Nduezu was required to install a 3-chamber grease trap before connecting to the sewer mains to reduce contamination with cleaning chemicals.

Council Resolution that mandated the sale of the plot to the OTA for “institutional use” under the condition that “trade [is] to be stopped” and “illegal occupants” are to be “removed” from the site.<sup>170</sup> Although this stipulation has not been effected, the threat of eviction remains imminent. While the recent fencing of the larger municipal plot (see p168) has provided some form of legitimacy for traders situated on that land, for Nduezu and those outside of this parcel it only highlighted the insecurity of their tenure.<sup>171</sup> What used to be *open land* ready for appropriation, is increasingly becoming enclosed.

The venue of the car wash is made up of roofed and paved wash bays for three cars, and two containers, a metal mesh store room for the workers’ clothes and equipment, and a semi-open shop and a toilet cubicle,<sup>172</sup> all aligned along the OTA boundary wall (see Figure 38). The second aspect – but not secondary – of the business is a shebeen.<sup>173</sup> In between the container that functions as the bar, and the wash bays is a paved veranda with fixed seating in rows, which acts as the social space where customers interact while waiting for their cars to be cleaned. The seating is aligned perpendicular to the bar for ease of access and movement and allows customers to face each other as they wait. A concrete curb acts as a barrier to protect customers from moving vehicles. This setting is a prime example of the limited infrastructure required to procure social interaction (see 6.1.3). The electricity meter and water tap are installed inside the bar container as it is the most

---

<sup>170</sup> Council Resolution 113/05/2010.

<sup>171</sup> Nduezu told me that his ongoing insecurity prevents him “to buy a car or a house or to get an overdraft”.

<sup>172</sup> Nduezu installed the toilet a year prior to the interview to improve the customer experience (municipal toilets had not yet been installed). This was possible as the car wash had its own municipal water and sewer connection. Non-customers were required to pay N\$3 for the use of the toilets.

<sup>173</sup> The symbiosis of shebeens and car washes can be widely observed in Windhoek and has been described by Charman et al. (2017). This will be elaborated on in the next section.

secure place.<sup>174</sup> He told me that he continues to advance his business and had plans to rent out the vacant shop as a barbershop and to improve the food products that are on sale.<sup>175</sup> Nduezu confirmed that all the structures were made to be removable because of the insecurity of tenure, and that they could easily be re-positioned elsewhere.<sup>176</sup> In addition to the reasons stated above, the insecurity of tenure provides further reasons why temporary, removable and flexible spatial solutions are sought by operators at the mall.

Nevertheless, he told me that business was good. Having a car washed here is cheaper than “in town”<sup>177</sup> and some customers come all the way to the mall for this purpose as it is a familiar place.<sup>178</sup> Nduezu employs 13 workers in two shifts,<sup>179</sup> some of whom have families and several jobs. Though the business is open seven days a week, Sundays and Mondays are the busiest days because people return from the farm, or from weddings and need their cars to be cleaned for the week ahead. Saturdays he usually took off. Rough calculations of turnover based on the figures provided by Nduezu reveal that on average 31 cars were washed per day at N\$65 per car, which translates into a daily turnover of about N\$ 2,000 (GBP 105) and an average monthly turnover of N\$ 60,000 (GBP 3,158). This income directly touches the lives of about 30 people though this number is much higher if dependents of employees are included.

---

<sup>174</sup> Nduezu showed me his CCTV installation with which he could observe and record customers' and workers' movements, and which he checked every evening.

<sup>175</sup> At the time of interview customers were allowed to bring their own food as according to Nduezu the offerings were not sufficient. He also considered installing Wi-Fi for customers' convenience.

<sup>176</sup> He told me he continued searching for an open area in the vicinity of the mall to lease from the city, but his applications to the municipality had so far been declined without any reasons given.

<sup>177</sup> Nduezu's rates ranged between N\$ 55 – 75 (GBP 2.90 – 3.90) depending on the type of car. These figures can easily be more than double in car washes in the wealthier parts of Windhoek.

<sup>178</sup> Nduezu told me that even the former mayor of Windhoek, who grew up in the neighbourhood, is a regular customer.

<sup>179</sup> The employees washing the cars are men, while two women are employed to attend to the shop and the bar.

Car washes have become a mainstay within Windhoek's popular economies and in the case of the Herero Mall the two car washes have been instrumental as two anchor points in its spatial and economic development. As I have suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the example of the car wash clearly renders any formal/informal dichotomy baseless and misleading: it cannot be considered a survivalist strategy, but rather a complex entrepreneurial activity that is opportunistically compliant with municipal regulations yet perpetually insecure in terms of tenure and operations. While the language of council resolutions remains delegitimising of "informal trade", municipal actions including provision of water and electricity and enforcing selective regulatory control over certain activities at the site speak of a more pragmatic approach towards popular economies, as long as these are situated on private land and cost-recovery of services provided is ensured.<sup>180</sup> From a governance perspective, such ambiguity allows the municipality to affirm a supportive stance towards emerging economies while keeping options open for withdrawing such tolerance when it becomes politically opportune to do so. This requires business owners to continuously negotiate which aspects of formal regulatory requirements to comply with and which ones to consider irrelevant for their operations to continue. At the same time, traders innovate in making infrastructure removable to mitigate the ever-present threat of eviction as previously open land is increasingly being enclosed.

---

<sup>180</sup> Nduezu paid about N\$ 6,000 (GBP 316) for electricity per month.

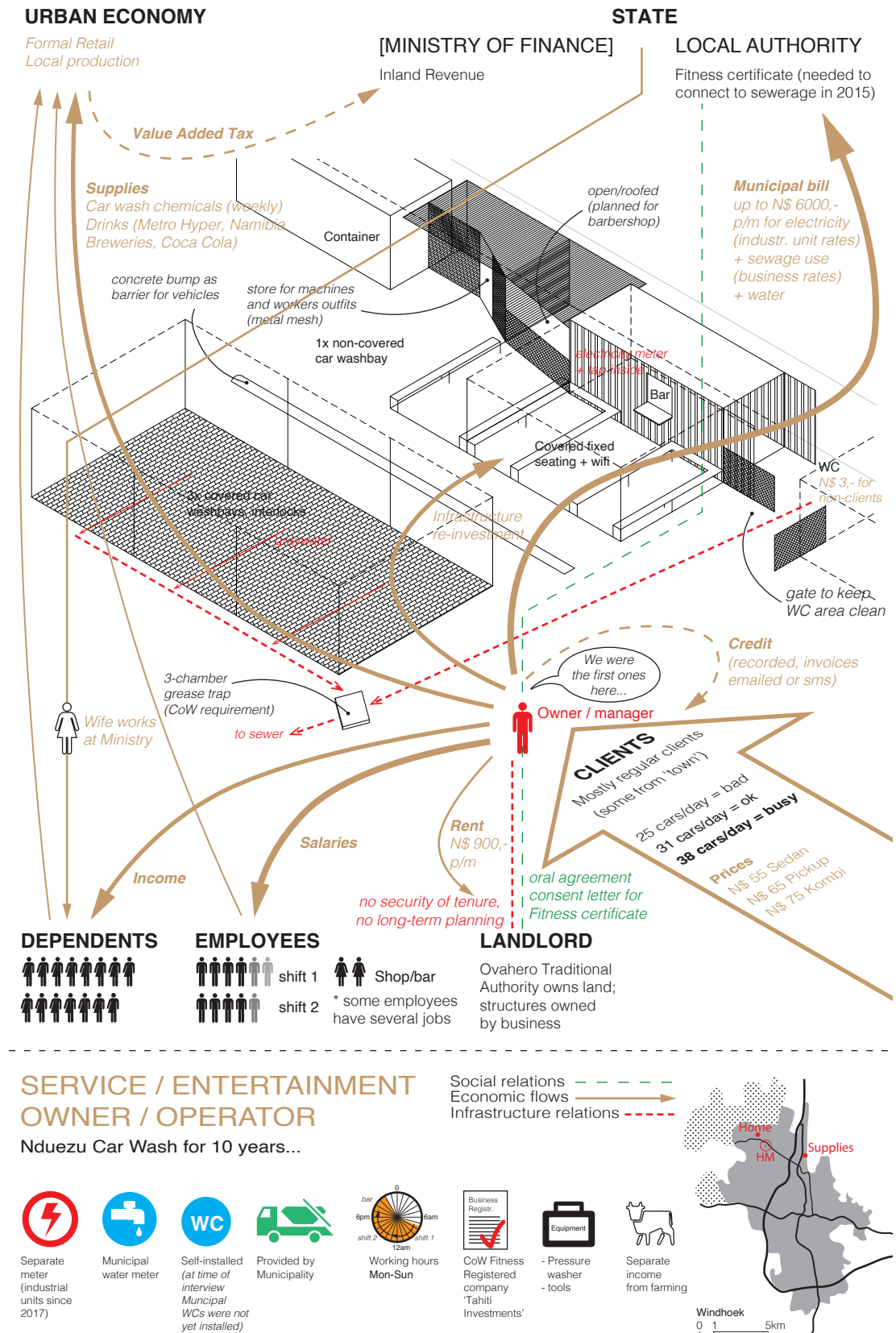


Figure 38: Socio-spatial diagram of car wash and shebeen.



### 6.2.3 Food as marker of difference

I previously mentioned the symbiosis of shebeens and food vendors (see 6.1.3). In some cases, it is not obvious that food vendors and shebeens are separate businesses. Of the three food vendors I interviewed, Tjikaa <sup>181</sup> and Kovii <sup>182</sup> had premises of their own, while Muarii <sup>183</sup> cooked on an open fire next to Uzuva's shebeen (see (F) Figure 37). According to her it was a better location than next to her own shebeen (see (G) Figure 37). It is certainly more exposed to people and cars passing by. Her customers would usually sit on the veranda that is part of Uzuva's shebeen. Kovii rented a stationary food cart from Uajenenisa and shared a veranda with him (see (H) Figure 37). Tjikaa's place only features a veranda with a paved floor and fixed steel benches, a tree, and a car chassis as storage. It is especially well suited for conversation. Women patrons were usually in the minority. Muarii conceded while there is a lot of competition between the three food vendors that are in close proximity, she also collaborated with Tjikaa and their customers sometimes shared spaces to sit. In all cases, drinks were available from adjacent shebeens and food vendors often made use of their electricity. In addition to the permanent food vendors, a number of women regularly cook in the open near the former car wash, usually on weekends, with no further infrastructure and protection from the sun (see (I) Figure 37). As temporary vendors they pay a daily fee to the

---

<sup>181</sup> Tjikaa is in his 40s and was born and went to school in Okakarara, some 300 kilometres from Windhoek. He rents a house far from HM and has been at the mall for 10-11 years. He co-owns the business, informally known as Tjikaa's business, with his wife and it is their core business.

<sup>182</sup> Kovii is 24 years old and lived in Clemence Kapuu Street near the mall with her son. She was born in Opuwo and came to Windhoek after high school. At the time of the interview she had been at the mall for two months and rented a food cart with electricity from Uajenenisa whom she knew. This was her first business and it was her main income, although her husband had another income. Her business was not yet registered, but she had planned to register if the business took off.

<sup>183</sup> Muarii is 37 years old and lived in Clemence Kapuu Street, nearby. She supported her boyfriend, her mother and 3 children with the income from food vending, a home business selling take-away chips and sweets, and a shebeen at the mall. She employed two males in shifts at the shebeen for 5 years (who were not family), and one female at her home shop who also looked after the children. She had been at the mall for 10 years and had both businesses registered with MITSMED.

traders' committee and store their equipment in neighbouring shebeens when they are not there. Cooking mostly happens outside on an open fire on the bare ground and firewood is sold at the mall every morning directly from farms. The only infrastructure required is a roof for the customers. That space, however, is flexible and often shared by several businesses, allowing spatial boundaries to blur.

Lunch was one of the best reasons for me to spend time at the mall when I was not working with the committee and I often had meals at Muarii's or at Tjikaa's. They serve similar food, which is specific to Herero culture: pap<sup>184</sup> with meat and grav. A big portion costs N\$40. Muarii served 40 meals on a good day and 10 on a bad one and Tjikaa served between 30-70 people per day. The meat is cut in big chunks, with fat and bones, and cooked in large steel pots that are manufactured by local welders out of recycled gas cylinders. The fat that separates in the pot is scooped off the top and stored in plastic containers to be sold separately. It is used by people cooking at home to add flavour to pap. Kovii sold fries, russians, and macaroni salad for N\$39.<sup>185</sup> She served 20-25 meals on a good day and 7-10 on a bad day.<sup>186</sup> Which foods are eaten by which ethnic groups is one of the more subtle ways of differentiating cultural identity at the mall.<sup>187</sup> While language and traditional dress can be obvious signifiers of Ovaherero identity, food opens up the cultural experience to non-Ovaherero.

---

<sup>184</sup> See footnote 91, p162.

<sup>185</sup> To prepare this food she required a potato fries' cutter and an electric frying pan, which she had bought from a large catering supplier in town.

<sup>186</sup> According to Kovii she did not have much competition as she had made sure her products are unique and competitive.

<sup>187</sup> Sukona told me that one can distinguish tribes by the food they prepare. According to her, people selling kapana are Aawambo; if they have large pots, they are likely Ovaherero; the Damara know how to cook well; and the Baster make good roosterbrood [bread rolls] and salads, like Macaroni salad. Tjikaa maintained that the different vendors' food is distinct, which makes each have their own loyal customers.

Next to the large pots, a smaller pot contains boiling water for cleaning plates and cutlery with a cloth. Only recently the municipal Health Services Division distributed devices that have a water container and a bucket for washing hands, but vendors still have to buy water from surrounding houses for N\$10 for a 25-litre canister. This is about 14 times the municipal tariff for pre-paid communal water and 11 times the municipal tariff for domestic water as delivered to neighbouring houses.<sup>188</sup> Given the fact that the mall is situated within a fully serviced urban area, traders could manage to mitigate the lack of provision of water by buying water from neighbours. But this comes at an extreme premium that factors into the pricing of goods and services at the mall and creates dependencies between traders and residents who are able to exploit this to their own benefit.

The food vendors cook once in the morning for the entire day, as their pots are large enough to hold sizable quantities. They are busiest around lunch hour and after work, and none of the interviewees had employees. They got their non-meat supplies from nearby supermarkets or wholesale retailers and butcheries, highlighting the vendors' dependency on formal retailers. Meat was usually sourced from the Single Quarters market nearby.<sup>189</sup> Cattle are slaughtered at Brakwater, a peri-urban area with smallholdings about 10km to the north of Katutura. Tjikaa bought meat at the market every day at 06:00, had it cut at the mall by 06:30 and started cooking by 07:00. He bought N\$500-1,300 worth of meat per day.<sup>190</sup> Muarii also sourced her meat from the market, but had it delivered and paid in cash daily. I asked Sukona why Ovaherero farmers – many of whom frequent the

---

<sup>188</sup> This equals N\$400 per kilolitre compared to the current CoW domestic water rate of N\$35 per kilolitre and communal-tap water rates of N\$28 per kilolitre (likela, 2019b).

<sup>189</sup> Even the meat cutting business next to Sukona's relies on people bringing their own meat that they bought from Single Quarters, as the owner does not sell meat.

<sup>190</sup> For 30-70 people this translates into ca. N\$20 per meal for the meat alone, of the overall price of N\$40.

mall – are not trading cattle there. She told me that the permits required to move cattle through the country and the police controls were not conducive. She explained that the “Owambos”, who sell meat at Single Quarters had smallholdings at Brakwater which allowed them to buy a small number of cattle for a month, keep them there and slaughter them one by one for sale at the Single Quarters. Though the mall has a central position amongst Ovaherero farmers as has been described above (see 6.1.4), and meat is the main staple at the mall, this does not translate into direct economic chains of production and distribution. Rather, supply chains are more intricate owing to factors of regulatory control, which further dispels the notion of a formal / informal duality, or the idea that the ‘informal’ lies outside the reach of the state. Mobile food vending, as alluded to in the introductory vignette, further transcends rigid logics of land-use zoning as food is prepared at home and sold elsewhere at the mall and in the street.

Whenever I inquired with customers about how they decide where to eat I was told that loyalty prescribes where to go. Usually that meant going to familiar business owners, the people you are “comfortable with”. Tjikaa confirmed this view, telling me that he did not advertise actively and had no signage for his business. Both he and Muarii mostly had regular customers who spread the message by word of mouth.<sup>191</sup> As Kovii was only in business for a few months at the time of the interview, she only just started to have regular customers.<sup>192</sup> Regularity, usually associated with formal economic dynamics as I showed above, is here construed by vendors in terms of their customer base and evidenced by their readiness to give credit based on trust.

---

<sup>191</sup> Both provided credit to selected customers and kept books of names and cell phone numbers for end-of-month payments.

<sup>192</sup> While Kovii did provide credit, it was payable after 1-2 days to reduce the risk of non-payments.

Now and then I observed people collecting plates with food leftovers, including fat and bones, indicating a food chain, both literally and figuratively, in the neighbourhood.<sup>193</sup> In the evenings, I was told, street kids help with washing the pots in exchange for 10-15 N\$ and food leftovers. While food vendors did not employ others to assist them with their work, they did produce spin-offs that allowed wider benefits to emerge from their activities. Muarii told me that she started to work at the mall because she “likes business”. She had asked permission from Utaara, the current chairperson of the traders’ committee, as the committee had not been established at the time. Kovii had not heard about the traders’ committee, as she was renting from one of the owners. This re-emphasises the differentiation between owner-operators and tenant-operators in terms of governance that I discussed above (see p205).

Food vending plays a central role in the economic network of the mall, and usually occurs in symbiosis with shebeens. Largely prepared out in the open and consumed in the shade of multiple verandas that are often shared by customers of more than one vendor, food vending effectively operates within a shared space on the interstices between exterior and interior. While food vending lacks overt physical markers such as dedicated premises or visual advertising which other businesses at the mall have, as an activity it has a permanent presence during daytime and success depends on being exposed to customers and customers being exposed to each other. This explains why the open veranda is the ideal space for this activity, as it facilitates public display of its popularity. If above I have alluded to the notion of architecture as social condenser (see p182), it is more precisely the activity of eating and drinking that allows the space to become a

---

<sup>193</sup> I observed that sometimes vendors would call someone on the phone to come pick up leftovers, suggesting an established relationship between the vendors and person.

social condenser. Mobile food vending, as alluded to in the introductory vignette, further transcends logics of land-use zoning where food is prepared at home and sold at the mall and in the street.

But food transcends more than just social and spatial confines. Specifically, the economy of meat forms circuits of distribution between rural and urban areas that are neither formal nor informal, but rather partially institutionalised (Hull and James, 2012). Supply chains for non-meat products are more directly dependent on the dominant formal retail sector. Smaller economies are created around food preparation such as provision of firewood, locally produced cooking equipment, and syphoned-off fat used for home cooking. But also, non-monetary chains of distribution were established with reference to food leftovers that are bartered in return for washing dishes. Social and economic co-dependencies circulate as much as commodities and money. As result of the lack of water provision at the mall, a market for water provided by surrounding formal residences was created, leaving vendors in the vulnerable position of paying between 11 and 14 times the municipal water tariff. If understood as a signifier of cultural identity, *food culture* allows urban residents to articulate difference in a non-exclusionary way and helps to bridge the gap between established rural traditions and an emerging urban culture.

#### **6.2.4 As long as the hair is done well...**

Hair salons and barber shops abound at the mall. These are usually gendered spaces. I conducted semi-structured interviews with two female-run hair salons, both located close to Clemence Kapuuo Street, which the operators claimed is a good location because of increased pedestrian movement along that street. One

salon is run by Ndeshi <sup>194</sup> who had started it at the mall four years earlier, after renting a space elsewhere in the city. She rented the space from Kaumbe, and it is in the same cluster as his shebeen (see (J) Figure 37) and an independent male hair salon which borders it.<sup>195</sup> Ndeshi's salon (see (K) Figure 37) is an enclosed space with only a door and a window to the neighbouring male salon for ventilation (see Figure 39).<sup>196</sup> The concrete floor is tiled with recycled broken tiles and furniture is kept to a bare minimum with a counter for hair products, and two chairs and mirrors on the walls. One wall is layered with corrugated metal sheets on the outside and reinforced steel mesh on the inside, which is used for hanging hair extensions, tools, and other required items.

The second salon is a few shops up the street, and is run by Ndapandula,<sup>197</sup> who at the time of the interview had been at the mall for two years (see (L) Figure 37). It also borders an independent barber shop. She had set out renting a chair for N\$600 per month for the first six months from a friend's in-law who had a salon at the mall.<sup>198</sup> But then she stopped renting and rather paid for the land,<sup>199</sup> bought her own corrugated sheets and timber poles and set up her own structure with the help of two male friends. Regarding an ensuing dispute with the neighbouring shebeen

---

<sup>194</sup> Ndeshi is Aawambo and in her mid 20's. She lived in Havana, a peripheral informal settlement and supported six dependents. Her business partner, also an Aawambo female in her mid 20's, had joined Ndeshi in the year of the interview and only supported her mother.

<sup>195</sup> When I interviewed Ndeshi a customer who was waiting for her turn indicated she was waiting around the corner at the shebeen.

<sup>196</sup> At the time of the interview the baby of one owner was sleeping in one corner, while a little schoolgirl sat on a crate following the conversation.

<sup>197</sup> Ndapandula is also Aawambo and in her mid 20's. She lived in Goreangab, which was a 40-minute commute by taxi to the mall. She had two children: the little one was with her mother and the older one was in a kindergarten close by. The salon provided her only income and besides general expenses she also paid a funeral cover and a study policy.

<sup>198</sup> The owner of one of the barber shops told me that he rented out three barber chairs at N\$30 per chair plus N\$75 for electricity per day. This translates to a gross income of about N\$ 315 per day or N\$ 9,450 (GBP 497) per month.

<sup>199</sup> Ndapandula did not want to disclose whom she paid or how much.

owner, who requested a lease amount for the land, Ndapandula responded: “this land is illegal, so when Mukupua kicks me out I would report her! She is also here for free”. She thus highlighted the fact that the open land was free, and that the mere fact of first occupation had no relevance in this setting. It also exposed the emerging petty landlordism that had taken hold at the mall. Her structure faced the street as one of the few at the mall and had the name and phone number written on the door. The wide sidewalk facilitated her business as customers could easily park right in front of the shop.<sup>200</sup> Both salons were not registered in any way, though Ndapandula told me she would like to register “in town”, revealing a mental conception of the difference between “the town”, where registration was effected, and “the township”. Although Ndapandula owned her structure, she did not have a relationship with the traders’ committee. Yet, she was aware of meetings that were announced by megaphone now and then. This revealed that the committee’s governance was not broadly accepted or even known to all at the mall.

Both Ndeshi and Ndapandula worked up to 10 hours a day, every day, starting between 08:00 and 09:00am. Generally, afternoons and towards the end of the month was the busiest time for them.<sup>201</sup> Ndapandula used to have an employee, but she had gotten a job at a large South African grocery retailer three months earlier and had left. Mid-month, she told me, she did not come to her salon some days, but since her number was on the door customers could always call her. At the time of the interview she only did braiding for ladies but could not cut hair due to the unaffordability of electricity.<sup>202</sup> She had bought a blow dryer and a

---

<sup>200</sup> Ndapandula had experienced a break-in before, where her chairs, hair extensions, and mirrors were stolen. She thought a fence and security guards would improve security, as long as it was a wire fence that would allow visibility of her shop for potential customers to be able to see if it is open.

<sup>201</sup> In Namibia salaries are paid monthly, usually at the end of the month.

<sup>202</sup> Kaumbe asked N\$700 per month irrespective of use.



straightener but because of the lack of electricity she could not use them. She also wanted to do nails but needed electricity for that too. She decided rather not to incur electricity costs as the irregularity of her income made such a decision risky. Ndeshi bought equipment and supplies in different shops once a month.<sup>203</sup> Most hair supplies she told me are found in the CBD, about 7 kilometres away, but some products can be bought from the nearby supermarket. Ndapandula bought hair at China Town in the Northern Industrial Area and cosmetics at Pelican, a wholesale retailer for hair products in the CBD. Similar to the food vendors, both had to either bring water from home or buy water from surrounding houses. The economy of salons thus exists throughout the city and depends fully on formal retail for supplies. Unlike the food vendors, barbers and salons are dependent on electricity for most of their operations.

Both interviewees asserted that the key to competing in the hair business was that customers were treated well and that the hairdo was proper. Once customer loyalty had been established based on positive experiences, competition became less of an issue as customers would return regularly and would receive credit until the end of the month if required.<sup>204</sup> Though sometimes repayment was problematic, giving credit was considered a necessary competitive advantage. Ndapandula reported that she catered for between two and six people per day and considered four as enough to make ends meet. Depending on the respective hairstyle, her prices ranged between N\$50 for braiding own hair (30 minutes), to N\$300 for long Rasta style (3 ½ hours).<sup>205</sup> Ndeshi mentioned that, without the need for active advertising,

---

<sup>203</sup> Ndeshi usually used a hair straightener, a blow dryer, needles, and hair products to conduct her business.

<sup>204</sup> But passers-by also contributed to the customer base, and usually they would ask for recommendations from previous customers.

<sup>205</sup> Ndapandula's prices ranged according to the style and time needed: Dena: own hair N\$50 (30 mins); Benevrag: own hair + braids N\$70 (40mins); Fishtail: Braids N\$100 (1h); Rasta: (own + add) short

she and her partner usually had between two and eight customers per day and considered four customers to be enough to have an income. Their prices for a hairdo ranged between N\$120 (1-2 hours) to N\$140 (up to 3 hours) for labour plus the price of the weaves, which were around N\$15 per pack and quantities would differ per hairstyle. Four customers, at prices between N\$120-140 equals a gross income between N\$480-560 per day for the salon, which translates to a gross income of N\$240-280 per person per day or N\$ 6,720 – 7,840 (GBP 354 – 413) per month. If compared to the statutory monthly minimum wage for domestic workers of N\$ 1,564.39 (GBP 82.33) <sup>206</sup> it becomes clear that such independent activity becomes a viable alternative to formal employment. Ndapandula told me that as an Aawambo woman she had not experienced any tribal issues with her customers, as long as the hair was done well. But she had experienced verbal assault when she complained about some men urinating against her wall who told her to “go back where you came from”. Ndeshi, however, reported that she had never experienced any problems as a non-Ovaherero at the mall. But she added that she believed that the “Herero Mall should be called something else” to avoid referring to tribal identities.

Within the mix of businesses at the mall, hair salons and barber shops provide an opportunity to start a business without the need for major infrastructure, equipment, or formally acquired skills. As independent economic activity they often create significantly higher incomes than domestic work, which ranks amongst the lowest paid yet regulated formal employment. However, this comes at the cost of long

---

N\$170 (2h30), medium N\$200 (3h), long N\$300 (3h30); Weave: Jodia N\$120 (1h), Brazilian N\$140 (1h), soft dread N\$140 (1h40); Soft Dread Rasta: N\$180 (2h30)

<sup>206</sup> This was the minimum wage for domestic workers as of October 2018 which was around the time of the interview (New Era, 2018).

working hours as the processes, especially braiding hair, tend to be lengthy. Workspace is accessed by renting a chair from an established salon, or by renting a complete space, exposing the landlordism that has emerged since the original occupation of the land. Only a few salon operators own their building if they had been able to secure a portion of the land. Being generally more introverted spaces, salons rely on outward visibility of the services they offer. They often face the street or pedestrian corridors, and display services rendered and contact details on their building. As a highly personal service, established hair salons and barber shops generate a regularity of returning customers – as long as the hair is done well – which benefits the mall as a whole as customers often frequent shebeens or food vendors before or after their visit. Generally, salons are largely dependent on formal retail for products and are part of city-wide networks of distribution that cut across scales of formality. The interviews with hair salon operators further revealed that the legitimacy of the traders' committee' is not equally accepted by all, and certainly is of little consequence to those who rent.

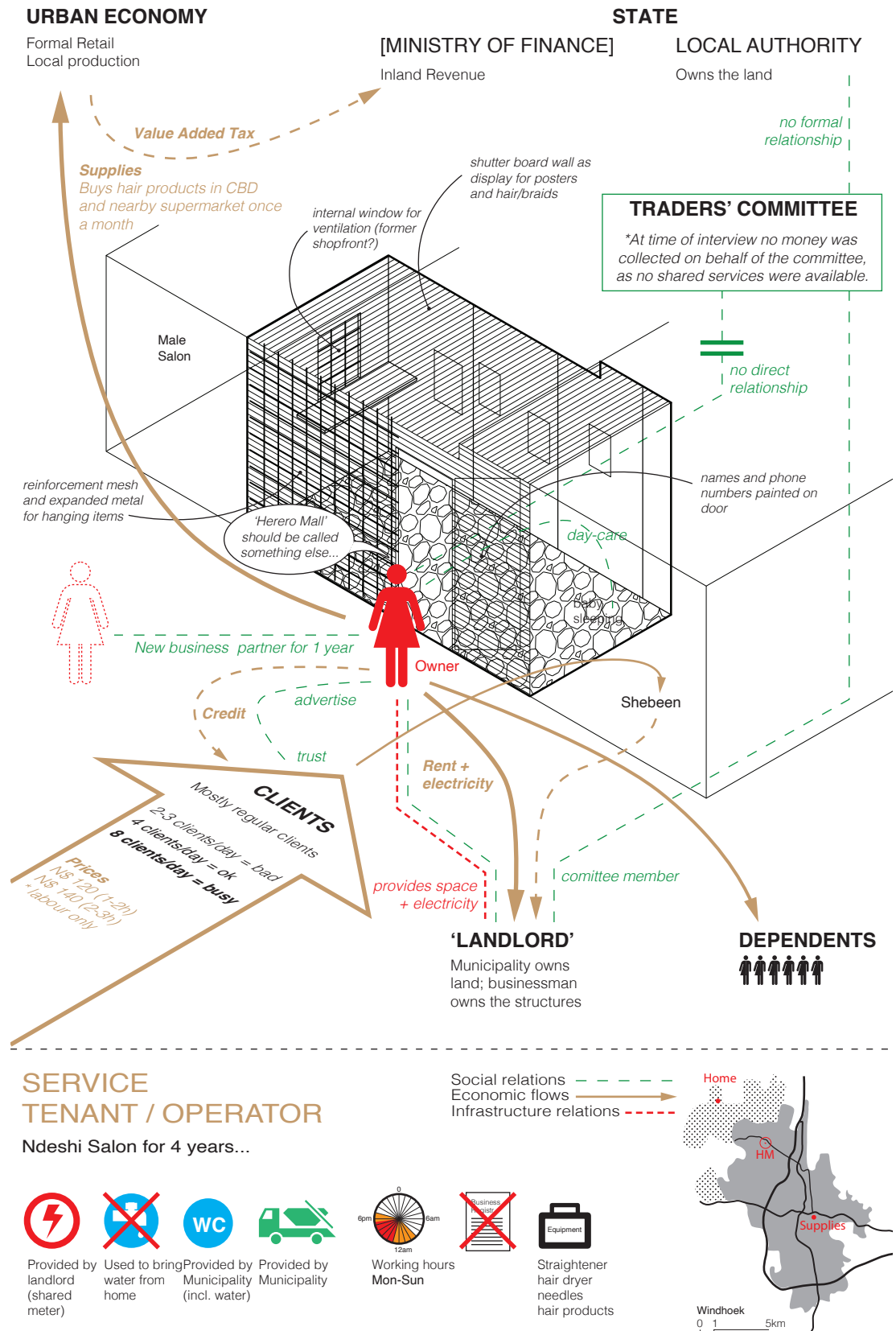


Figure 39: Socio-spatial diagram of female hair salon.

## 6.2.5 The Herero Mall as one-stop shop

### *Vignette: the mall and the world*

*While looking for Utaara at his car repair and welding workshop, an elderly man introduced himself to me in German, assuming that I was from Germany.<sup>207</sup> After introducing myself to him and explaining my research he tells me that he owns a bar at the mall. His Nissan Double Cab (pickup) was in for repair. Utaara is his friend and repairs his three cars. He does not come to the mall to drink, he tells me: just to visit. He also buys lekkebaks (cattle feed troughs), gets his tyres repaired, and sometimes he buys meat and Herero food. “All hierdie mense is mij kinders” (all these people are my children) he tells me in Afrikaans. He also goes to the Commando, and the Red and Green Flag.<sup>208</sup> He now farms with “bokkies” (goats), sheep and cattle near Okahandja,<sup>209</sup> but lives in Ovitoto.<sup>210</sup> He says it’s better to live at Ovitoto, as he does not need to pay anything there and people can help him if he gets older. He is also a counsellor at Ovitoto. We establish that he knows a good friend of mine whose family “owns very large [commercial] farms” bordering Ovitoto. He sometimes buys meat there. When I told him that I work at the Namibia University of Science and Technology he mentions that his father was related to the Tjivikuas.<sup>211</sup> His wife of 36 years is from Aminuis<sup>212</sup> and his family lives in Windhoek where they have a house in Soweto, not far from the mall, and in Hochland*

---

<sup>207</sup> He told me his life story: He was born in Omatjete in 1946 and moved to Windhoek’s Old Location in 1957. “We needed a pass to go to town, and [we] could not drink wine”. He says only lighter skinned people got a permit for wine, so he sold self-made “tombo”, which was banned by the authorities. In 1963/4 he moved to Katutura when he started to work as a wholesale representative for a local company, which he did for the following 35 years.

<sup>208</sup> Different Ovaherero Royal Houses are identified by different flags including the red flag (Maharero Royal House), and the green flag (Ovambanderu Royal House).

<sup>209</sup> Okahandja is a small town about 80 kilometres north of Windhoek where the Paramount chief Maharero and other central Ovaherero figures are buried. An annual commemoration, the Red Flag Day, takes place at Okahandja.

<sup>210</sup> Ovitoto is a small communal reserve about 45 km north of Windhoek that was first established as a Native Reserve by the South African Administration in 1923.

<sup>211</sup> Professor Tjama Tjivikua was the founding Vice Chancellor of the Namibia University of Science and Technology, the former Polytechnic of Namibia, from 1996 until 2019. He is one of 11 surviving siblings, many of whom have high ranking positions in Government, Public Enterprises and the Military (Us Namibia Magazine, 2017, p6–7).

<sup>212</sup> Aminuis is a town within the communal area of the same name and former Herero reserve in the east of the country, bordering Botswana.

*Park.<sup>213</sup> His sister lives in Washington DC and his daughter lives in London, “kissing white guys like you”. If they send a little money home, he says, it is a lot here because of the exchange rates. Utaara asks him N\$100 to fix his bumper which is loose from driving on the gravel road to Ovitoto.*

As mentioned before, the conception of the Herero Mall as an informal *market* is misleading, and the idea of a *mall* appears conceptually more fitting. As the interaction with the elderly farmer suggests, the mall is an important central place for Ovaherero people far beyond the neighbourhood and the city. As a business owner at the mall he receives income from there, he gets supplies for his farm, has his cars repaired and eats and socialises with his community, or attends cultural and traditional events. This speaks to the principle that popular economies thrive on spatial, social and economic interrelationships. Nduezu, the owner of the car wash, defined it most clearly:

*There are shebeens, welding, kapana, hairdressers: we call it a one-stop shop. Without each other the businesses will suffer. We need each other, otherwise there is not a chain, connected in delivering to the customer. Us Hereros love cattle, so the welders make cattle brands, troughs for lick, tyre repairs. People feel safe, at home, together: there is no tribalism troubles. We are family. The difference with this car wash and the ones in town, where you book your car and come back: here it takes 40 minutes to 1½ hours to wash. So, to release after hard day's work [you] grab a beer, a piece of meat... it's one concept. You should feel at ease.*

It is a trope that I have heard often at Herero Mall: “After going to a [hair] salon, people want to eat” as I was told by Uzuva. The availability of alcohol in particular is often thought to play a significant part in the popularity of the mall, opposed to

---

<sup>213</sup> See footnote 148, p200.

formal municipal markets where sale of alcohol is not allowed: Kaumbe, who owned a number of shebeens around the city,<sup>214</sup> including the mall, put it this way:

*Compare the mall to Soweto [market], especially on Saturdays, when there is very little movement at Soweto. Oshetu [official name for Single Quarters market] is only busy because of the meat. Or look at Khomasdal market, where not much is happening. If you put Kapana here [at the mall] alone, [it] is like Khomasdal. [This] is a car wash, hair salon, people want to eat and drink.*

As elaborated above interdependencies between shebeens and food vendors are amongst the most discernible symbiotic relationships, both spatially and economically. But these are not the only ones by far: often the jukeboxes and gambling machines inside shebeens are rented out by owners to be operated by someone else, which can be a profitable business as Sukona and Harry explained to me. Meat cutters cut meat for food vendors. And people waiting for their turn at the hair salon would spend such time at a nearby shebeen having a drink and a chat. In the same vein the local welders work for business owners that want to repair or transform their structures or manufacture equipment for food vendors. Beer wholesalers supply the shebeens that are not able to organise their own transport. Bottles and cans are collected by boys who sell them elsewhere for recycling. Figure 40 shows a map of different businesses which was developed through a participatory workshop that will be elaborated in the next chapter below, revealing the diversity of adjacent businesses.

But the concept of a one-stop shop, understood as entry point, makes sense at another level: as an economic central hub, the Herero Mall provides a model of

---

<sup>214</sup> Kaumbe told me he owned shebeens in Okuriangava, 8<sup>ste</sup> Laan, Wanaheda, and he also had a hardware store at Gam. Also see footnote 162, p205.

development that is not alienating to the residents who still often have rural backgrounds as Nduezu explained:

*You need to bring development to the people, not like Maerua Mall.<sup>215</sup> People are used to this life, they are happy, they will be afraid of high-end developments [...] All the politicians come here because they were born here, and their families are here. Some people come here because the place is like the village.*

Here he clearly distinguishes the Herero Mall from formal commercial developments that might alienate people whose references and mental conceptions are more thoroughly embedded in memories of rural life. This point was also made in conversation with a customer who also suggested that to empower informal businesses formalisation needed to happen gradually over time: “it can’t be once off”. As such the Herero Mall provides a transition space, historically and personally, for people who have their roots in rural areas and are first time urbanites.

As a space of transition, the mall also holds more controversial social struggles. One afternoon at Tjikaa’s, a slightly drunk young man approached me to tell me that there is a need for safe spaces for LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) people, especially amongst the Ovaherero.<sup>216</sup> He said gay people did not feel comfortable at the mall “because acting straight all the time is exhausting”. According to him homosexuality was taboo in Ovaherero culture, but people were becoming more accepting, partly owing to social workers. He was accompanied by a number of friends and seemed to be well-known. In a joyful discussion – seemingly without much stigmatisation – they elaborated the meaning of the LGBTI

---

<sup>215</sup> Maerua Mall is a shopping mall in the central high-income areas of Windhoek.

<sup>216</sup> He was a clerk working for the Ministry of Health and Social Services.



acronym and clarified the meaning of the various labels. He clarified to the group that he is a gay man. His younger sister told me that their parents did not accept him, and another man told me that “people want to kill gays, like the founding [president]”<sup>217</sup> because to them it is not masculine enough. I was surprised by the open and uninhibited tone of the debate amidst other customers and visitors at the mall. It revealed the possibility of a future where sexual orientation could be freely lived even in spaces that seem to be socially conservative. On several other occasions I observed outwardly queer people frequenting the mall without apparent victimisation.

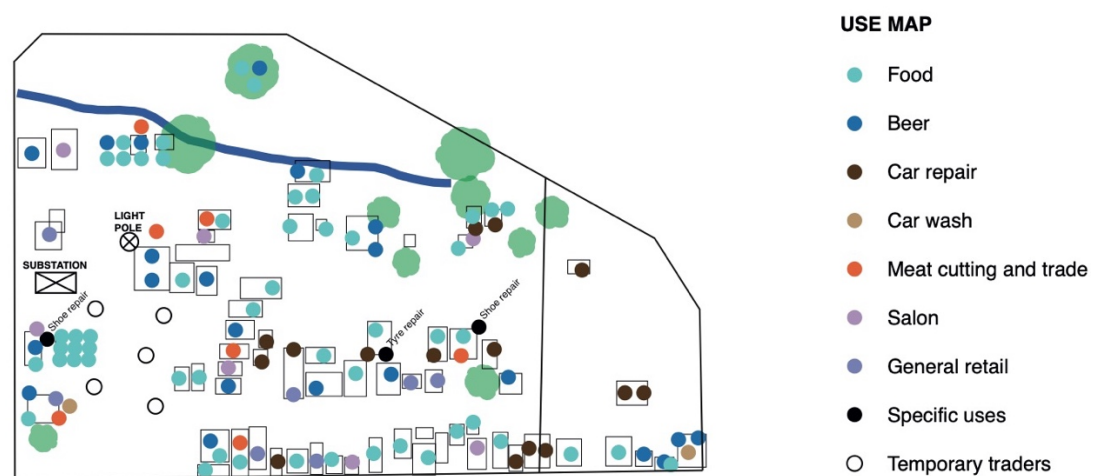


Figure 40: Map of functions established through a participatory workshop with traders in 2015. Source: Lühl, Delgado and Kozonguizi, 2016, p6.

Traders clearly articulate the interdependency of the Herero Mall economy, while the concept of the *mall*, instead of the *market*, has firmly taken root in the popular imagination of the place. They also assert that its gradual process of transformation creates a sense of familiarity instead of the alienation caused by ‘development’ that

<sup>217</sup> Founding President Sam Nujoma made homophobic public remarks in the early 2000s that were widely reported and echoed by some government ministers.

is associated with 'town', in other words with the European-derived urban construct. In combination with the ongoing transformation of surrounding residences that increasingly house shops, restaurants, businesses, churches, and rental accommodation in addition to their supposedly primary function of residential dwellings, the mall thus provides a diversified urban economy that the neighbourhood was denied in its original colonial design. The mall also allows room for non-conformity in terms of gender and sexuality to exist side-by-side with more traditional ways of life and thus provides a space of *difference* that characterises urban life. As such this process of urban and social transformation can be argued as a process of decolonising the township from the ground up, within the cracks of the established order.

#### **6.2.6 Conclusion: making the city work**

In the first section of this chapter I aimed to show how traders established, materialised and defended their presence at the mall. In this section I aimed to shed light on the ways that traders pursued an array of livelihood strategies which literally make the city – particularly this former dormitory township – work for those who do not have access to a formal job. Through its occupation the land has been re-configured as a communal resource for economic activities that span the spectrum from survivalist to entrepreneurial strategies (the both extremes of which I have illustrated in Figure 39 and Figure 38 respectively), including the opportunism of extracting rent from public space. Ambiguous governance by the municipality overlaid with the influence of traditional authorities and partial self-organisation of traders has created varying degrees of vulnerability amongst traders. The hierarchy in descending order of vulnerability includes owner-operators with employees, owner-operators without employees, tenant-operators, informal employees, temporary vendors, hawkers and zula boys. The higher up one goes within this hierarchy, the more traders are visible to the local authority and

thus need to negotiate formal requirements and observe regulatory compliance in order to not jeopardise their livelihood.<sup>218</sup> But such challenges also lead to spatial innovation, with particular reference to making infrastructure removable to mitigate the lack of secure tenure. Popular economies further thrive on the principle of shared spaces which act as social condensers for an array of recreational activities that weave together an interdependent and diversified urban economy. This economy provides necessary amenities, work opportunity, specialised commodities, generates rural-urban and city-wide circuits of distribution with substantive dependency on formal retail but also enables non-monetary forms of distribution at the neighbourhood scale (see Figure 41). Following Cruz's concept of density of social relations (2015), popular economies establish a density of social and economic relations which render the spaces they inhabit essentially urban.

Popular economies also provide entry points and spaces of transition for rural migrants into the city. Familiarity is created through the articulation of cultural difference, which provides for a gradual transformation – a process of becoming urban – that is not otherwise accommodated in statutory urban development protocols. Here, social transformation extends to questions of cultural heritage and tradition, sexuality and gender, as well as local and world politics, all of which are mediated in this space. This type of urbanism thus contains a nascent and globally networked metropolitanism. Given the original colonial conceptualisation of what the township was ought to become, these urbanising processes observed at the mall could be considered decolonising the township from within.

---

<sup>218</sup> This could also explain that I mainly had access to the owner-operators who are members of the traders' committee, which became a limitation of this study.

## The World

*H.M. is related to the rest of the world*

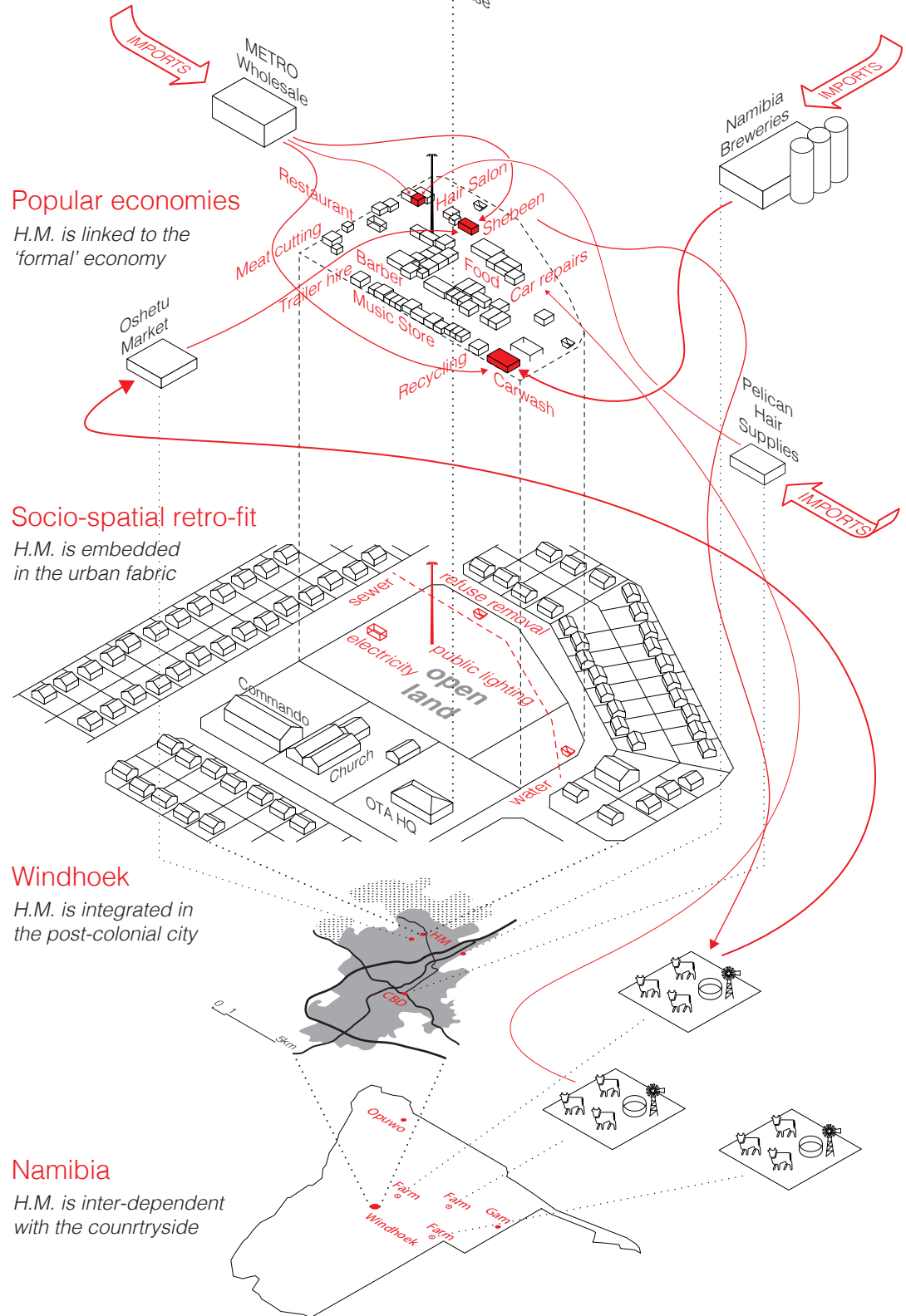


Figure 41: Learning from Herero Mall: spatial diagram of popular economies and their relations to wider economic and spatial scales.

### 6.3 Reflections on being a white Namibian at the mall

*Vignette: the past, the present and the future*

*Edison<sup>219</sup> calls me over when passing by Uajenenisa's place where he is sitting with a friend. It's a Sunday afternoon. He wants to know why I am here? Did I get a tender?<sup>220</sup> What would be my interest? I tell him my story. Once he understands I am a German-speaking Namibian he wants to know if I am interested in the "German / Herero dispute". I explain that my research is focused on the Herero Mall economy but that the politics of the ongoing genocide reparation negotiations are part of the whole. He tells me that the Ovaherero were supposed to be a big group, "a large family", but because of the genocide they are now a minority in independent Namibia. They thought the Aawambo were on "their side" as black people, but they are "making us skelm" [they are deceiving us]. According to him the disunity amongst the Ovaherero is because of tribal lineages, where people become chief due to their lineage, not because of their capacity. He says German Namibians do not get involved in politics because they got "the better deal".<sup>221</sup> But, he assures me, "we are not going to do to you like in Zimbabwe".<sup>222</sup> He asks if in my family it would be ok to marry a black person? While I answered affirmative, I added that it is likely not the case for the majority of white families. He tells me that Ovaherero are not keen on intermarriage of their children. He says it's complicated, because it is about money and cattle, but in the end, it is the child's choice. He has a son and four daughters.*

---

<sup>219</sup> Edison told me he is Tjikaa's "peer". The "Omakura" is a Herero tradition describing the group of men (peers) that were circumcised around the same period of up to 3 years. Boys are circumcised between the age of 6 months and a year. Each Omakura is named after the most important historical happening during that time. The Omakura meet at the beginning and at the end of the year to open and close the year respectively. They cannot fight or insult each other, he told me, otherwise they are punished and have to slaughter a cow as a sign of reconciliation.

<sup>220</sup> It is interesting to note that my first venture to the Herero Mall had indeed been because of receiving a tender to conduct a feasibility study on the development of the mall.

<sup>221</sup> Edison was referring to the fact that after Independence no structural transformation of economic and landownership was pursued, leaving colonial inequalities intact.

<sup>222</sup> He referred to Zimbabwe's fast track land reform of the early 2000s when war veterans occupied large-scale commercial farms and expelled their white landowners, which was later sanctioned by the Government as land reform.

My representation of the Herero Mall will necessarily be coloured by the fact that as a white Namibian of German ancestry who lives on the other side of the enduring apartheid city divide, my presence at the Herero Mall was an anomaly that impacted on social dynamics. My social and cultural formation, and the lack of Otjiherero language skills might have led to partial – if not outright wrong – perceptions about what is unfolding in this particular space. But this is not to say that my encounters were less authentic. Instead, they are part of the larger, more complex reality of post-independence Namibian urban life. In some ways these interactions opened up lines of conversation that would have otherwise not easily emerged, as can be seen in the vignette above. They exposed deeper layers of connection between me and the mall, the Ovaherero people and post-independence realities. Indeed, I come from German settler families that have large cattle farms, some of which are in parts of the country that used to be known as Hereroland. The generational wealth my family was able to accumulate has as its flipside the generational poverty and trauma of the genocide and the entire colonial history of this country. In some of my encounters this issue was directly addressed: after jokingly asking me to marry her, a woman enquired “when will you pay reparations [for the genocide]?” Two other women asked me if I was German and when would I pay them “[their] money.” There are few spaces in the city where I would be confronted about my personal implication within relations of inequality in such a frank manner. The usual spaces of encounter which I frequent, such as the university, professional practice or public debates, or in general those areas of town that whites conventionally access, are modelled on the image of European modernity and never fundamentally question ‘whiteness’ (Fanon, 2008 [1952]; Memmi, 2003 [1957]). For the first time, I had entered a space in the city where my personal armour of privilege could be easily breached. This is not to say that my privilege dissipated, as I retained my freedom and ability to remove myself from this setting at any time. Unlike more academic settings, where theoretical

arguments can easily be removed from personal implication, here I could not escape that direct scrutiny, and the adage that the personal is political made more sense than ever.

I often got asked where I was from. Some thought I was British, some American, but usually it was assumed I was from Germany.<sup>223</sup> A young woman, who had imagined I must be American, apologised for having “judged” me. It seemed improbable to most people I met at the mall that I would be from Namibia and despite knowing the place well, I could never rid myself of a feeling of not belonging. Some people would ask me in passing, and then move on. Others would call me over to enquire what I was doing at the mall, like Edison had done. To ‘justify’ my presence at the mall I often explained that I was working with the traders’ committee on the development of the mall, and that I was doing research. Only such pragmatic explanations seemed to provide ‘legitimate’ reasons for me to be there. Another woman inquired why she saw me so often around the mall. After giving my usual explanation she told me that she had not seen white people “getting involved”, but that they would usually just pass through, looking at the place “like tourists”. My experience of not fitting in and the conceptualisation of white people as tourists in this space is indicative of the depth of the colonial project of spatial segregation, reserving certain parts of the city for certain people. This might partly explain the tenacity of the formal / informal binary in Namibia: the formal former white city versus the informal former township.

My presence in this space did seem to raise varying expectations. I often got asked to buy someone a beer, so much so that I thought I should budget research money

---

<sup>223</sup> Tjikaa once explained to one of his customers that I am German, but that I was born in Namibia: “Then you are Namibian!” was the response.

for buying beers. It seemed more appropriate with people I had come to know: one beer for the other person and one for me. Beer is consumed in 750ml “quarts” here, so it was usually an investment in a longer conversation. Now and then I got invited as well, so it was not a one-way street. Besides the committee members, with whom I had long established an essentially transactional relationship, buying drinks facilitated access where it was otherwise difficult to achieve. But beyond aiming for a free drink I was approached by various people with requests for assisting them in some way or the other. One adolescent, Alejandro, approached me at a shebeen and told me that he is in his second year of a fitter and turner course at a vocational training college. He said he needed to get involved in doing something “for the community”, but also to earn money, and therefore wanted to be “associated” with me. Another man, a teacher by profession, brought me his CV and a number of reference letters so I could help him find a job. Once I was asked by a middle-aged man which plots of land he could register for. He must have assumed me to be an official listing people’s names for land redistribution purposes. A woman asked me when I would come and visit Otjomuise 8<sup>ste</sup> Laan,<sup>224</sup> the neighbourhood where she lives, as they “also have a Herero Mall there”, implying that I should also assist her neighbourhood to be developed further. On another occasion, while walking through the south thoroughfare where the car mechanics are, I witnessed a man having what must have been an epileptic seizure, bleeding from the mouth and making groaning sounds. Bystanders mentioned that he was one of the mechanics and that this had happened before, and that he probably drank too much.<sup>225</sup> One bystander immediately approached me and told me to put a first aid station on “[my] list”, seemingly assuming that I was there for some kind of imminent

---

<sup>224</sup> Otjomuise is the original Otjiherero name for Windhoek. Now it is the name of a post-independence middle-class suburb to the west of the city.

<sup>225</sup> Someone had turned him onto his side and stuck a spoon into his mouth to avoid him biting his tongue. An ambulance that someone else had called was there within 10 minutes.



development. Perhaps it was the notebook I carried that gave me away? Beyond these random encounters, in my regular interactions with traders I was often asked to assist them with accessing loans, finding donors or lending money. There was thus a general perception – not unfounded – that I should have access to opportunities beyond those available to most people at the mall. Ferguson (2015) argued at length why seeking out such seemingly counter-intuitive “relations of dependence” are rather common in Southern Africa. He argues that in a post-job society, dependence can provide the basis for making successful claims on someone else’s resources.

At the same time, reactions to my presence at the mall revealed its cosmopolitanism. The relationship to Germany, and the world, went beyond merely historical traces and seemed to run deep in ways that I had not anticipated. On several occasions visitors at the mall would converse with me in German. In a number of cases this was because they had lived in Germany either for studies or because of marriage. A nephew of Utaara, whom I met at the mall, had been a professional soccer player for Werder Bremen in northern Germany, where he had lived since he was 14 years old, after which he had played a few seasons in Turkey. In one case the surname of a visitor who spoke to me in Bavarian dialect suggested a partially German ancestry.<sup>226</sup> Often these were seemingly middle-class people living in other parts of the city who frequented the mall because they were Ovaherero and enjoyed the familiarity of the place. Unlike in my experience, their social mobility did not preclude spatial mobility in the city in ways I could not easily access.

---

<sup>226</sup> Many Ovaherero have German ancestry that dates back to sexual assault of Ovaherero women by German soldiers and settlers during the German colonial period.

However, rather than foregrounding all these episodes as purely personal experiences, I am interested in this aspect as it relates to the possibility of a de-colonial urban future: a space where whiteness is the anomaly, where white privilege is fundamentally challenged, and where as a white person I feel alienated perhaps embodies the seedlings of a de-colonial urban modernity that does not take as its reference an imagined Eurocentric universalism. That might explain in parts why many cannot see beyond the deprivation and underdevelopment of 'informal urbanisation' because they cannot access this space beyond 'solving problems' based on their pre-conceived notions of development.

#### **6.4 Conclusion: the Herero Mall as alter-urbanisation**

The name Herero Mall suggests that it is popularly conceptualised as a mall rather than an 'informal' *market*, as it is generally designated by the local authority. Authors like Charman et al. have used descriptors like *leisure economy* (2017) or *township economy* (2020) for describing their insights about similar settings. Although the Herero Mall could very well be described by either of these two terms, they seem too restrictive in their framing of the range of economic activities as *leisure* and their setting as the *township*. By essentially relegating such descriptions to niche activities or spaces, they fail to capture the latent potential – not restricted to a positive sense of the word – of these economies and the mode of urbanisation that they embody.

The Herero Mall is a relevant case of urban development that was “not planned that way” but turned out the way it did “because of planning” (Bhan, 2012). Leaving vast open spaces in between a generally very low-density suburban fabric, apartheid planning unwittingly provided room for radical future transformation of the colonial city from within. The mall is a specific instance of that transformation where such open land was appropriated and transformed by ordinary citizens into

a space – in all its spatio-temporal dimensions – that I argue provides a rupture with colonial urban logic and holds the potential for a de-colonial urbanisation in Namibia. In Table 3 below I mapped my methods and related findings about the Herero Mall adapting Harvey’s matrix of spatialities (see Table 1, p9). This mapping should not be understood as an attempt at categorisation, but rather as a device to support my re-conceptualisation of what is usually labelled ‘informal’ as a unitary spatial practice. I have shown above how traders have enacted their presence within this space of rupture, to the extent that they have gained legitimacy in the eyes of hesitant authorities that are now pressed to find more inclusive solutions to the development of the place. In the process traders have successfully exploited the ambiguity of policy-implementation gaps to safeguard their livelihood strategies, especially in the light of moral objections against the sale of alcohol, but also in terms of securing provision of basic services.

In filling the gap that conventional planning had left in the spatial and economic sense, traders developed bottom-up popular economies that range from survivalist to entrepreneurial strategies with dense and multi-scale circuits of distribution and varying levels of interdependency. It is this interdependency that traders identify as the central aspect of the mall’s success. While hierarchies of vulnerability exist and continue to be reproduced, local forms of social support are maintained. In this setting statutory labour rights are difficult to implement, which lends urgency to calls for more suitable forms of state-support.<sup>227</sup> Visualised through socio-spatial diagrams, I argue that the denser the networks of interdependency are, the more

---

<sup>227</sup> As I am reviewing this text before final submission, an Emergency Income Grant for informal traders and workers is being implemented as part of the Covid-19 economic relief measures taken by the Namibian Government. This is in my view the first time that the informal sector is fully acknowledged in a wide-reaching state-led economic intervention. In addition, this approach is more in line with the notion of presence, instead of requiring various forms of pre-determined means testing to qualify for support.

stable the economy, reminiscent of Latour's argument that stability derives from the extent of established connections (2005). This is an economy thriving on a transactional logic as opposed to a fixed, pre-conceived land use planning-driven paradigm.

In this setting traders have also accomplished spatial innovation to support such a process-driven urbanisation with an architecture of material austerity, shared space and mix of functions as its defining characteristics. Such process-based spatial development does not only allow for independent, incremental economic development, but also provides room for the transition of rural migrants to gain a foothold in the city and become urban. This transformation happens amid the wider transformation from labour-scarcity to labour-surplus in Southern Africa and the general decline of a job-based political economy that Ferguson and Li have observed (2018). That larger transformation requires us to reconsider what urbanisation means in order to re-direct planning practice to support such processes instead of hampering or erasing them. For this we need to see the present and value it for its contribution amid failing or partial capitalist development, instead of imagining and planning for a future based on inherited and often inadequate principles of the spatial and social organisation of industrial, productive and growth-based economies. In this hybrid field, regulatory formalisation can only be one amongst many strategies for development.

Learning from the Herero Mall, I argue, is to rethink the idea of being urban away from a place-based, material definition of urbanity towards one that includes the former but emphasises the density of relationships, both social and economic. In this view the urban-rural distinction is not a binary one, but one that is perpetually re-assembled, with changing degrees of connections to other networks and scales. This also means that instead of seeing urbanisation as the growth of that place that

has been designated urban, which then requires planning for extending that space according to set principles, this new form of urbanisation includes the process of people becoming urban in space and through the process of making and inhabiting space as I have attempted to show in this chapter. Once this is better understood and accepted it could become the basis for a different form of spatial practice, glimpses of which I will elaborate on in the following chapter.

	Material Space (experienced space)	Representations of Space (conceptualized space)	Spaces of Representation (lived space)
Absolute Space	<p>Physical space</p> <p><u>Method</u>: participant observation</p> <p><u>Findings</u>: lightweight steel architecture; self-construction methods; fluid interior-exterior relations; shared spaces</p>	<p>Visualisations of the physical space</p> <p><u>Method</u>: spatial mapping</p> <p><u>Findings</u>: organic morphology, flexible typologies; aesthetics; complex infrastructure and service provision</p>	<p>Feelings related to the physical space</p> <p><u>Method</u>: descriptive writing</p> <p><u>Findings</u>: panoptic view of surroundings; continuity of urban space; physical comfort; soundscape</p>
Relative Space (Time)	<p>Economic activity</p> <p><u>Method</u>: business surveys</p> <p><u>Findings</u>: interconnected economies; strong rural-urban linkages; daily rhythms; continuous spatial transformation</p>	<p>Analytic representations of space / time</p> <p><u>Method</u>: socio-spatial diagrams</p> <p><u>Findings</u>: relationships between businesses; multi-scalar economic linkages; economic mobility;</p>	<p>Feelings related to space / time</p> <p><u>Method</u>: (auto)ethnography</p> <p><u>Findings</u>: alienation as 'white' person; familiarity of community / food / language (visitors); personalisation of experience</p>
Relational Space (Time)	<p>Social relations</p> <p><u>Method</u>: conversations</p> <p><u>Findings</u>: 'one-stop shop'; global / metropolitan relationships; cultural identity; LGBTI identity; becoming urban</p>	<p>Dialectical relations</p> <p><u>Method</u>: assembling an actor network</p> <p><u>Findings</u>: enacting presence; transactional logic; popular economies</p>	<p>Fantasies and desires</p> <p><u>Method</u>: critical urban theory</p> <p><u>Findings</u>: decolonial alter-urbanisation</p>

Table 3: *The Herero Mall conceptualised as everyday socio-spatial practice using Harvey's matrix of spatialities (2006: 135).*

## CHAPTER 7 REFLECTIONS ON SPATIAL CO-PRODUCTION

I have argued in the previous chapters that ‘informality’ has been historically produced and is discursively reproduced to reinforce heavily skewed power relations in a post-colonial setting, thereby stabilising capitalist development. I highlighted the contribution of planning as technology of power, and by extension the entanglement of planning professionals, including architects in perpetuating socio-spatial inequality. I also argued that the spatial practices that animate the so-called informal realm can be read as resistance to capitalist enclosure through formalisation, and that they should be considered as a form of alter-urbanisation that points to an alternative urban future than typically envisioned by planners and the political class who are firmly situated in the formal paradigm.

In this final chapter I will expand on my ongoing professional involvement with the traders’ committee at the mall over the past seven years and how my role evolved during that time. I will use this case to reflect on the urban politics of post-colonial Namibia, as a space where the discourse of ‘informality’ and everyday practices of enacting presence are negotiated. On this basis I will reflect on the potentials and limitations of spatial co-production and the implications for professional spatial practice that arise. As outlined in the research objectives (see 1.2), here my practical objective was to bridge the distance between myself as a spatial practitioner and traders at the Herero Mall to allow for not only the production of new knowledge about that realm but also to co-produce spatial interventions that could point to an alternative spatial practice that might be better understood and traceable as an actor network.

In the first two sections of this chapter I trace the evolution of my own work at the Herero Mall from professional consultancy for the municipality to professional

support on behalf of the traders. In many ways this doctoral research grew out of my personal frustration with this process. While reflecting on this transition I aim to relate it to the arguments of earlier chapters, showing that conventional professional spatial practice has fundamental limitations in engaging within such urban politics. In the third section I trace the co-production of a spatial intervention at the mall, which formed part of this doctoral research. This required a broad array of activities as outlined in the methods of data collection section (see 1.7.4). For this chapter I draw primarily from my personal archive of the Herero Mall project (including the period prior to embarking on my doctoral research), notes of meetings held with the HMTC and the municipality as well as publicly available information.

## **7.1 A contested participatory process**

At the beginning of this thesis I briefly outlined how I first got involved at the Herero Mall (see 1.1). I was part of a consultant team, led by LaRRI in collaboration with the then NUST that was commissioned by the CoW to conduct a feasibility study for the development of the mall. The timeframe of two months that the CoW prescribed for the feasibility study<sup>228</sup> was in stark contrast to its ambitious terms of reference that included, amongst others, a participatory survey of stakeholders, an architectural design and cost estimate, and an implementation plan. The timeline diagram below (see

Figure 42) exposes the disjuncture between the minimal time allocated for engaging the traders and residents in order to fulfil the scope of the study versus the time taken for municipal processes of procurement and decision-making. We

---

<sup>228</sup> The timeframe seemed to have been dictated by the CoW's financial year end in June, by when budgetary provisions have to be spent.



were also made aware of the municipal council resolution prohibiting light industrial activities and sale of alcohol in the future market in line with standing municipal market regulations.<sup>229</sup> However, as I have shown previously, such activities provided about 73 percent of economic activities at the mall (see CHAPTER 3 and 6.2.1). A fundamental decision about the future development with an immediate adverse impact on the majority of the existing traders had already been taken at council level. This clearly limited the scope of developmental potential that the participatory process was supposed to unearth. The participatory aspect of the study was thus meant to legitimate those decisions in similar ways that Mayer (2010) has argued with regards to urban social movements (see p49). The attempt at prohibiting ongoing activities at the site would not only render those activities illegal but also delegitimise residents' earnest efforts to create a livelihood in the context of scarce alternatives. This correlates to my argument that the 'informal' is delegitimised and othered (see 5.1.3). Through my interactions with traders over the years I can certainly account for the anxiety that this resolution caused about their future at the mall.<sup>230</sup>

Our original proposal for the feasibility study had included the creation of a permanent presence in close proximity to the site throughout the study thus allowing the team to interact closely and on an everyday basis with traders and visitors at the mall.<sup>231</sup> We had approached the traders' committee regarding a rentable space at the mall and were shown a small room where the central electricity meters are located. The structure was made of shutter board and

---

<sup>229</sup> See also footnote 143.

<sup>230</sup> In one case the trader decided to rather invest money on his farm as he was ensured of his ownership and thus the security of his investment. See footnote 151, p214.

<sup>231</sup> "The Market Place: A study on the feasibility of developing an informal market on Erf R/6296 and 6300 in Katutura ('Herero Mall')". Feasibility study proposal by Guillermo Delgado and author, dated February 2013.

required some renovation for it to become usable as a field office. We proposed paying for the renovations in return for using the space for the duration of the study. Afterwards the committee would have been able to use the space for meetings. Although this had been included in the original proposal to the CoW, expenditure for the renovation was not permissible under the municipal spending regulations for feasibility studies and we could not proceed as planned. This episode emphasised the narrow definition of participation as *consultation* by the municipality, and the influence of public procurement regulations on more experimental participatory processes. The importance of spatial proximity of consultants and stakeholders to enable the co-production of “spaces of liberated speech”, as Petrescu (2005) calls it, was not considered a priority by the municipality.

The inability to fulfil our promise only increased the mistrust the team was facing on behalf of the traders’ committee. It turned out that the municipality had not officially informed the committee about the feasibility study. An independent study had been undertaken a year before by a town planning consultant, who had been commissioned by the traders committee through NISO and funded by a German development organisation. The municipality, however, did not acknowledge the recommendations of that study, as the CoW had allegedly not been engaged in the drafting of its terms of reference. Instead, the municipality publicly advertised a tender for a new feasibility study and commissioned our team. This did not sit well with the traders’ committee and NISO who felt that their pro-active initiative had been disregarded. We were informed by the committee that the traders would not engage with our team directly.

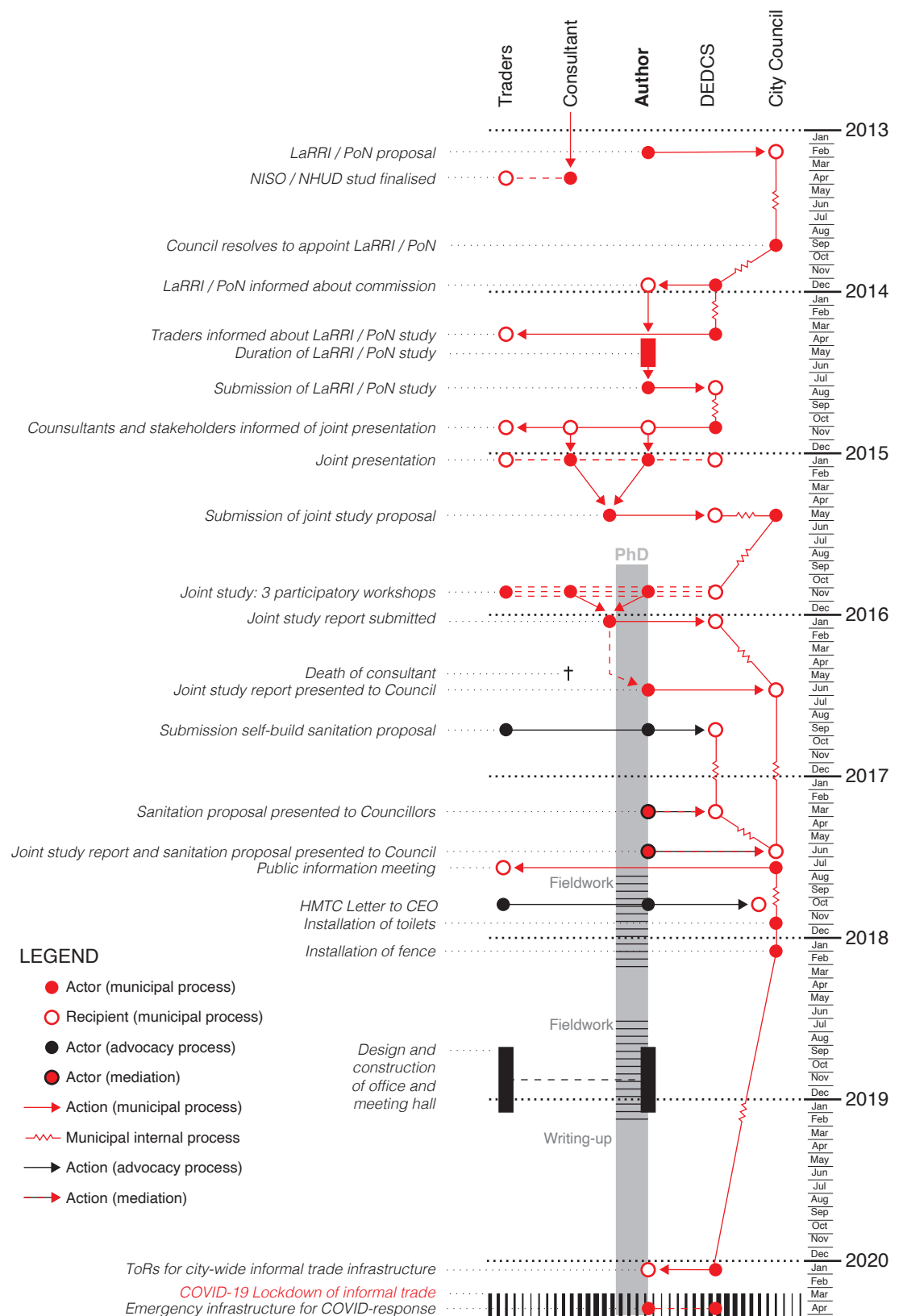


Figure 42: Timeline of my professional engagement at the Herero Mall.

Given the time pressure, this meant that we could rely only on secondary sources with regards to economic activities at the mall, notably the NISO study (Kozonguizi, 2013), while engaging other relevant, yet secondary, stakeholders directly. Despite reiterating our institutional independence of the municipality and our opposition to the standing council resolution to prohibit shebeens and light industrial activities we were perceived by traders as an extension of the municipality with which they had a troubled history that I outlined above (see CHAPTER 3). This culminated in the committee chairperson stating at our closing presentation that although traders largely agreed with our proposals, they would not officially endorse the study.<sup>232</sup> Traders thus effectively denied the legitimisation of the municipal process and thereby created a space for negotiation with the municipality. Following their having established a physical presence as I showed in CHAPTER 6 this was an affirmation of their political presence.

Under pressure from the traders' committee the municipality called a meeting in January 2015 for the two consultant teams to present their respective studies to the traders and to staff from the CoW Department of Economic Development and Community Services (DEDCS) (also see Figure 42).<sup>233</sup> The presentations showed that the recommendations of the two studies were largely comparable in their aim to strengthen existing economic activities of traders at the site, even where they contradicted the standing council resolution.<sup>234</sup> It was agreed at the meeting to combine the two studies into one report for submission to council and in May 2015 the municipality requested the

---

<sup>232</sup> "Minutes of first meeting with Herero Mall Traders' Committee HMTTC", dated 18 June 2014

<sup>233</sup> "Consolidation of the two independent feasibility studies for the development of a market on Erf R/6296, Katutura". Letter from CoW DEDCS, dated 11 June 2015.

<sup>234</sup> See footnote 143, p199.

two consultant teams to submit a joint concept proposal to this effect. After further delays related to procurement processes the joint team undertook three participatory workshops with traders in October and November 2015 to: 1) review the combined recommendations and agree on a proposed governance structure for the mall; 2) co-design the spatial intervention using a large-scale model; and 3) review the final design concept and report.<sup>235</sup> Because of the long delays since the studies were first undertaken, and once approved by the council, the participatory exercise was done – again – under immense time pressure with only two weeks between workshops, which was reminiscent of the predicament of our first study.



*Figure 43: Workshop 2, November 2015: defining the existing situation. Photo by Nangula Shilongo.*

The second workshop to co-design alternative spatial arrangements was particularly insightful. Our team had installed a 1:20 model of the mall in the community hall where the workshop was taking place. Traders assembled around

---

<sup>235</sup> "Herero Mall market roadmap towards Windhoek City Council (WCC) joint submission". Letter to CoW DEDCS, dated 16 June 2015.

the model and in a first step we collectively defined the current spatial arrangement (see Figure 43) and requested traders to indicate existing functions. This exercise proved to be useful to orient participants and for our team to exemplify possibilities for densification and spatial re-arrangement. This exercise also allowed us to map the various businesses by asking traders to indicate the nature of their business on the model with coloured stickers, resulting in the map presented above (see Figure 40).

On the other hand, it was not useful, given the lack of time, to meaningfully co-design a future market. The conceptual spaces we had developed in the large-scale model (see Figure 44) did not correspond close enough with the final concept design (see Figure 45 and Figure 46). We had aimed to embrace the full potential of the Herero Mall as a civic centre at the neighbourhood scale, opening up to and including the neighbouring institutions, both spatially and in its envisaged governance structure that included surrounding institutional and residential stakeholders, as well as the local authority (see Figure 47). The design included a public park, a large square for temporary traders and cultural manifestations covered with solar panels to generate electricity, spaces for formal retail anchor stores, entertainment spaces restaurants, industrial workshops, cold storage for meat distribution, public educational spaces and some housing units. It was designed to be built in phases so that traders could be temporarily relocated on the site during the construction process.

However, traders were visibly unhappy when I presented the final concept design at the third workshop. As most of the discussion was in Otjiherero, and the concerns were not translated in English, I could only sense the disappointment from the atmosphere in the room and the heated discussions. Our team had used its own design sensitivity to make design decisions that had altered the spatial concept to

such an extent that it was not recognisable for participants of the previous workshop, and no time for additional iterations was available. Yet, at the end of the meeting participants approved the proposal for the sake of progress,<sup>236</sup> which underscored the coercive nature of the participatory process as it was framed then.

In addition, the required capital investment which the quantity surveyor had estimated based on the concept design amounted to N\$ 33 million (GBP 1,736,842),<sup>237</sup> which was about 10 times as much as the investment in a recent municipal market under a highway overpass in the CBD.<sup>238</sup> We had recommended alternative financing measures, including raising external funding, as well as phasing the project implementation over a period of 10 years. Nevertheless, the size of the required investment meant that the design had entered the realm of utopias of form (see Swyngedouw, p59). Here, participation framed as open consultation, combined with the municipality's reluctance to set clear budgetary parameters for the project beforehand, resulted in an ambitious spatial representation of a long wish-list of facilities and amenities that the neighbourhood clearly lacked. The cost-recovery stance of the municipality (see p147) and the fact that an investment in public infrastructure of this magnitude could evidently not be recovered from trading activities had not been reconciled.

---

<sup>236</sup> "Minutes of Workshop 3 on the redevelopment of market on Erf R/6296 ('Herero Mall')", dated 2 September 2015

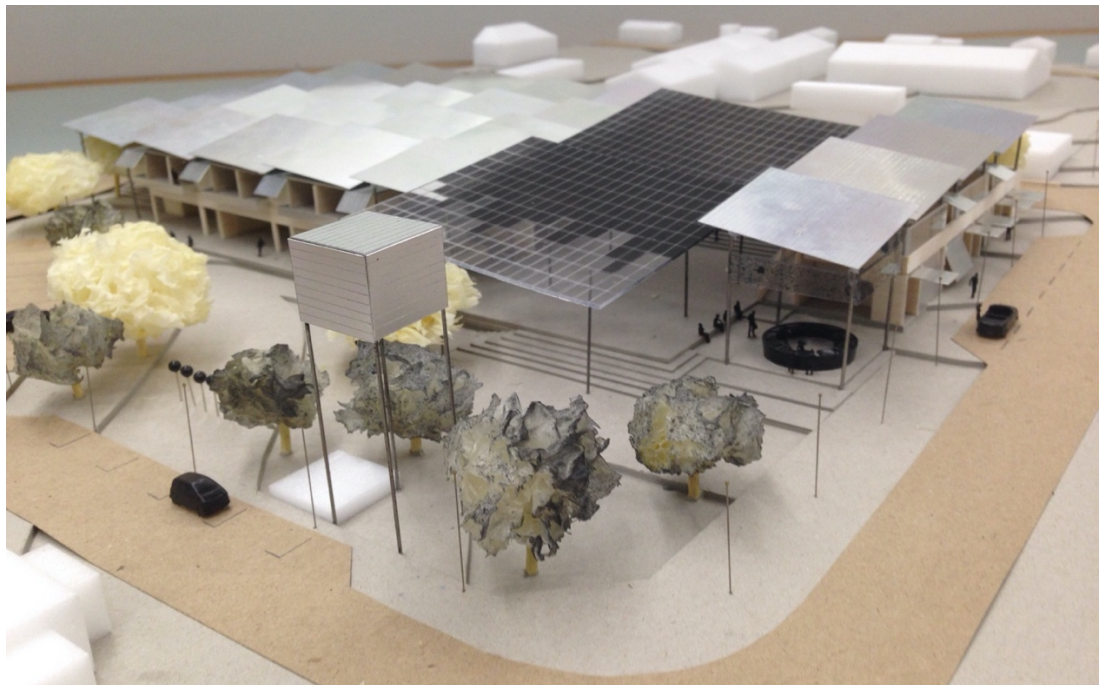
<sup>237</sup> "Preliminary project estimate – new market on Erf R/6296, Katutura". Cost estimate by Hendrik Herselman Quantity Surveyors, dated 21 September 2015.

<sup>238</sup> Also see footnote 241.





*Figure 44: Workshop 2, November 2015: developing an in-situ concept model for the future market indicating the potential for densification of economic and social activities. Photo by Nangula Shilongo.*



*Figure 45: Final model of concept design for new market. Source: Lühl, Delgado and Kozonguizi, 2016 (design and model by author).*





Figure 46: Final concept design: floor plans with uses indicated. Source: Lühl, Delgado and Kozonguizi, 2016 (drawing by Guillermo Delgado).

The resultant report (Lühl, Delgado and Kozonguizi, 2016) was submitted to the municipality in January 2016. It included general recommendations, a proposed governance structure (see Figure 47), the concept design (see Figure 45 and Figure 46), a cost estimate and a phased implementation plan. Subsequently, I held a presentation for the city council in June 2016, shortly after the town planning consultant had tragically died in a car accident. The proposed self-management of the public infrastructure by a traders' cooperative (see Figure 47), as well as the proposal to permit sale of alcohol as well as light industrial activities, dominated the debate amongst councillors, who were more familiar with the conventional municipal market model.<sup>239</sup> Nonetheless, the minutes of this council meeting indicated a slight shift in the stance of the council on these matters:<sup>240</sup>

- *[...] the option of setting up an ordinary market like the Soweto Market might not be viable due the mixed activities taking place at the site (Erf RE/ 6296 Katutura), which mainly consist of alcohol 43%, food 30% and light industry 27%.*
- *Traders should be encouraged to identify alternative products to sell at the new market; the main focus should not just be on alcohol [my emphasis].*
- *The City of Windhoek should consider the option of managing the market for a period of five (5) years after completion and while the traders are being capacitated to take over the management of the market.*
- *That the development of markets be considered as a social responsibility project and that cost recovery not be expected within short term.*

The meeting also resolved that the DEDCS should arrange a familiarisation visit to the Horseshoe market, a community-run market originally developed with donor funding, not far from the Herero Mall. We had presented this market this as a local precedent of trader self-management. The visit seems to have further convinced

---

<sup>239</sup> Conventional municipal markets are administered by market managers and cleaning staff employed by the city and the infrastructure is maintained by the municipality. Permitted activities are restricted and traders pay a fixed subsidised rent to the municipality.

<sup>240</sup> "Minutes of meeting held with the councillors to discuss the feasibility study for the development of the 'Herero Mall Market'", dated 25 July 2016.

the DEDCS of introducing a “self-management concept at the municipal markets”.<sup>241</sup>

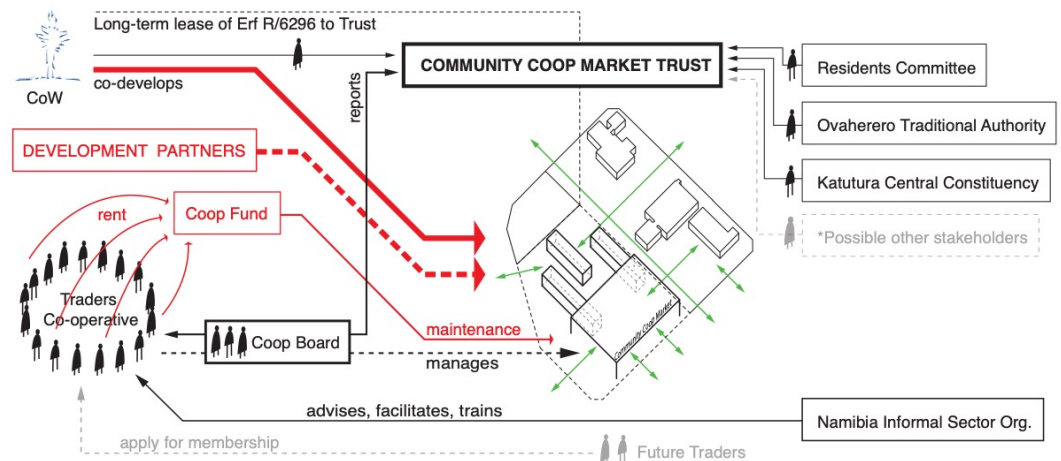


Figure 47: Proposed organisational structure of the future market. Source: Lühl, Delgado, and Kozonguizi, 2016 (drawing by author).

A year later I held a second presentation to council without there having been any obvious progress made at the municipality. The Herero Mall proposal has been under consideration by the council ever since July 2016 and to date no clear instruction regarding the way forward has been provided. In early 2020 I received the draft Terms of Reference for *Basic Informal Market Design Models for the integration of the Informal Economy within [the] Spatial Development Framework [of] the City of Windhoek* from the DEDCS for consideration. The document included the Herero Mall amongst the sites to be considered for such 'market

241 “Minutes of meeting with Horse Shoe Market Committee”, dated 3 August 2016. The economic development officer had confirmed in my interview that the municipality’s approach was changing from being responsible for the management of municipal markets to traders being “fully involved in managing the market facilities”. He noted that in a recent market development in the Windhoek CBD, funded by the municipality together with a private developer of the adjacent shopping mall, operators would be taking full responsibility for managing the market, while the CoW would only retain the responsibility for maintenance of the infrastructure, towards which the traders will contribute with “monthly small fees”.

design models', which indicates that the earlier proposal is being re-thought in favour of a more generic city-wide approach.

The process of the feasibility study revealed that the local authority, legally backed up by its ownership of the land on behalf of the 'public', considered itself to have overriding power to decide on behalf of traders and residents in its jurisdiction and that any decision making power lay solely with the city council.<sup>242</sup> Such a stance was able to emerge in a setting where, in the eyes of the local authority, the ongoing 'informal' activities were deemed illegitimate; the municipality as the formal land owner had full discretionary powers; participation was conceived merely as consultation; and any official engagement with traders was considered charitable. In that setting, as consultants we were expected to proceed based on existing policy, not to challenge it. We were deemed to be answerable to the client – the municipality – instead of the everyday users – the traders and their customers. We had imagined the future mall in terms of Negri's proposition of a "common" under communal management, instead of the dominant state-centred notion of public ownership *on behalf* of citizens (see p45).

This process laid bare the *politics* in the sense that Mouffe defined it (see p58): on the one hand a local authority, legitimised through representational democratic processes, seeking to transform an 'informal' place into an orderly and regulated space using a top-down planning logic. On the other hand, a loosely organised group of residents, self-legitimised through their presence (see 6.1), which resisted this kind of formalisation as it would disrupt their opportunities to earn a living. By

---

<sup>242</sup> A "top-down" procurement process for public commissions had also been identified by the architect I interviewed as one of the major obstacles to a participatory spatial practice that would engage end-users effectively in the design of public buildings.

denying the validity of the municipal-driven consultative process traders essentially turned their daily enacted physical presence into a political one, challenging the re-production of colonial-inherited spatial hegemony. In this setting, as professional spatial practitioners we found ourselves to be mediators of the differing positions.

However, the traders' political leverage did not fundamentally alter the participatory process itself. Despite our efforts to expand the possibilities of a participatory process, it remained framed in a conception of 'participation' as consultation and was thus restricted in its potential. Project timelines were related to budgetary constraints instead of being guided by methodological considerations. To speak in the words of de Carlo (see p49), as architects we were expected to resolve *how* to formalise the market, while leaving the question of *why* to formalise the market unanswered. In other words, we were not expected to rearrange socio-economic relations, as Cruz and Forman have argued is required (see p50). The municipality considered traders as beneficiaries of a product instead of participants in the process. Without a well-defined formulation of the financial parameters and scope of the participatory process, it was clear neither to municipal staff, nor to us as consultants, let alone to the traders, what we could expect as an outcome. While we had managed to expand what de Carlo (see p50) calls the organisational hypothesis and spatial configurations beyond what the local authority had anticipated, in terms of the physical project these were shattered as unrealistic expectations. At the same time, I argue that the process generated a change in attitudes, both at the local authority level and amongst traders, that I will turn to in the next section.

## 7.2 The necessity and limitations of mediation

What seemed a breakdown of the feasibility study process transformed my role and approach to the project. The untimely death of the town planning consultant practically left the traders with me as the only ‘consultant’ with the support of NISO to advocate for their case and changed my relationship with the committee. In the meantime I had embarked on this doctoral research in September 2015, using the Herero Mall as my case study, which allowed me to continue working with the traders’ committee independently of the municipality.<sup>243</sup> Following my presentation to council in June 2016 I met the committee to brief them about the discussion.<sup>244</sup> The fact that they had been waiting for so long – more than one and a half years since the decision was taken to combine the two studies – led to heated discussions.<sup>245</sup> Councillors change too often, one trader remarked, and suggested that perhaps this was a strategy to prolong the process.<sup>246</sup> The option of a protest march to increase pressure on the municipality was raised, with Kaumbe attempting to mediate: he argued for the processes to take their course, in order not to jeopardise progress made, and convinced the other members to instead send a letter to DEDCS to request official feedback.<sup>247</sup> The discussion soon turned to more urgent matters: the lack of toilets. “Can’t we provide them ourselves?” was the central question. As a mains sewer line extended across the mall, enabling adequate sewage disposal, the major remaining challenge was to access water,

---

<sup>243</sup> “Request for Meeting with HMTc to present Herero Mall Research Proposal”. Letter by author addressed to HMTc chairperson, dated 12.10.2016.

<sup>244</sup> Personal notes of meeting with HMTc at Mukupua’s place on 15.06.2016.

<sup>245</sup> Sukona remarked that she even “had a baby” in the meantime.

<sup>246</sup> The informal sector activist had also narrated his forty years involvement in the informal sector in contrast to political office bearers, who often do not understand the environment because they are elected every five years. This can cause major frustrations and setbacks, “because as an activist you work so hard, but then an elected policy maker comes and says: who are you?”.

<sup>247</sup> “Request for Meeting with City of Windhoek Economic Development and Environment Division regarding development of Herero Mall”. Letter drafted by author for HMTc, dated 20.06.2016.

which currently was only provided to the car wash (see 6.2.2). One trader offered to weld the enclosures. This engagement with the committee revealed the disjuncture of the ongoing everyday struggles of traders at the mall where the lack of water and sanitation provision required all kinds of self-help measures mentioned earlier (see 6.1.5), and the slow and fragmented process of decision making regarding the overall project. This all-or-nothing approach to formalisation prevented even the most urgent temporary infrastructure measures to be taken.

The debate shifted towards arguing that it might be better not to wait for the city council, but to self-initiate projects that would bring relief to the most pressing issues such as lack of sanitation and the proposed security fence to improve the situation incrementally. The committee requested me to write a letter to the municipality, proposing that they would install temporary sanitation facilities and a security fence themselves if the municipality would grant approval.<sup>248</sup> After some months without receiving feedback I met the committee again in March 2017 to discuss the design and select suitable sites for the temporary toilets and the fence. It was proposed that the construction be of steel and corrugated iron such that local labour could be used to build the structures (see Figure 32). We agreed that I should present a proposal on behalf of the traders' committee, and that the municipality would contribute the required materials while traders contribute their labour. The lack of progress of the municipal-driven process induced a gradual shift within the HMTc away from an emphasis on state-dependency towards a position of negotiation with the state represented by the local authority. Within this process my own role as consultant for the municipality shifted towards a focus on professional support for traders. While I did not undertake this work formally as

---

<sup>248</sup> "Proposal to develop temporary security fence and sanitation facilities at Herero Mall". Letter drafted by author for HMTc, dated 08.09.2016.

university lecturer, my employment at a well-known public university enabled this shift as I was not considered to be furthering any private interests.

In July 2017 I was invited to yet another full council meeting in which I presented the temporary sanitation proposal including a quotation for the required materials which amounted to N\$ 66,000 (GBP 3,474), which the municipality was requested to contribute.<sup>249</sup> I also proposed a way forward for the overall project that would rely on incremental development and spatial co-production with traders and the municipality instead of the original concept design for a formalised market. Instead of a once-off capital investment this would require an annual development budget over a number of years which would allow an ongoing process of co-production at the site. I presented experiences from Durban, where an area-based management approach was introduced within the municipality to support informal traders in the inner city (also see p53), as a best practice that could inform the further development of the Herero Mall. Given that the prohibitive capital investment required for the original design proposal seemingly prevented any progress, including for temporary measures, the suggestion to move towards an incremental process of co-production seemed necessary.

In July 2017 a public meeting was held at Katutura Community Hall where it was announced that council had approved the traders' request for temporary sanitation facilities, the fence and a pre-paid water point at a cost of N\$245,350 (GBP 12,913).<sup>250</sup> The city also announced at the meeting as well as in newspaper adverts

---

<sup>249</sup> "Temporary Sanitation and Security Solution for Herero Mall". Proposal developed by author in collaboration with HMTc for CoW Council, dated 15.03.2017.

<sup>250</sup> Notes of public meeting at Katutura Community Hall drafted by Martin Namupala, dated 22 July 2017. Notice the discrepancy between the amount budgeted by the municipality and the originally proposed N\$66,000.00 in our proposal.



that an overall capital budget of N\$ 2 million (GBP 105,263) had been allocated for the development of the mall for the financial year and that it would be spent in phases. As no details were provided to this effect, the committee requested me to draft a letter to the DEDCS requesting detailed feedback regarding the project status and way forward.<sup>251</sup> Without a response having been received from the city, an external contractor commenced to cast concrete foundations for toilets without the knowledge of the traders (the installation of the toilets has been dealt with on pages 189-191). The committee requested me to draft a second letter, this time addressed to the CEO of the municipality. They requested an audience with him to discuss traders' concerns regarding their lack of inclusion in the municipality's plans for the development. Specifically, a concern was raised that "construction tenders were not offered for local construction companies but to 'outsiders', [and] no local labour was used".<sup>252</sup> Despite these concerns over the execution of the project, the eventual installation of the toilets and security fence at the mall was a result of my sustained mediation between traders and the local authority. Still, the experience highlighted the limitation of such advocacy to alter the design and procurement processes and thus reduced influence over the spatial outcome.

This phase of the project is best defined by mediation and brought to light some limitations of mediation as strategy. As a reaction by traders to slow progress, linking up with strategic professional allies to further a more autonomous agenda, was a reasonable step to take. The fact that I did this work under the guise of the community service mandate of the university, opened doors and allowed me to mediate between various stakeholders in spatial production. However, the

---

<sup>251</sup> "Proposal to develop temporary security fence and sanitation facilities at Herero Mall HMTC". Letter to the acting Head of DEDCS, drafted by author for HMTC, dated 22.07.2017.

<sup>252</sup> "Request for official meeting". Letter to CoW CEO, drafted by author for HMTC, dated 27.10.2017.

experience showed that mediation might be useful in asserting pressure on the local authority to take action, but it did not alter the process of the production of space in fundamental ways. Mediation seems inevitable within a context of resistance against formalisation coupled with the aspiration of development, but for it to lead to alternative socio-spatial realities it must be part of an overall strategy for transformation. This episode emphasised the need to re-think methods for the spatial intervention that I had planned as part of this thesis.

### **7.3 Building a meeting space for the traders' committee**

*Vignette: the show must go on*

*I am sitting at Sukona's shebeen, waiting for Utaara to discuss the next steps for the construction of the new office and meeting hall. The main structure is well advanced, and he is still busy with the electrician to re-position the electricity distribution board, fixing it to the wall of the new office. As I am discussing the payment for the electrician with Sukona, I notice a few men crossing over from the barber shop to the new office carrying a chair and a large mirror. Without giving it more attention, I continue my chat with Sukona until Utaara arrives for our meeting. He had to assist the electrician who is now finishing up and re-connecting the distribution board for the electricity to be switched on again. We finish our discussion and I accompany Utaara to check the progress. As we enter the office it all becomes clear to me what had happened: inside the office the men had set up a full barber station, mirror and all. There are about five people, including the client and the barber going about his work, and it seems from the conversation that they are in good spirits. They had arranged with the electrician to connect an extension lead directly to the main electricity supply, enabling them to use their electrical clippers during the hour that the electricity had to be temporarily switched off for the part of the mall that includes their barber shop.*

I will now turn to the final part of the thesis to elaborate on the spatial intervention I co-produced with the traders' committee at the Herero Mall. In February 2017 had

received GBP2,000.00 (N\$38,000.00) from the University of Westminster 125 FUND which I had applied for to procure furniture and equipment for a field office for my research and meeting space for the traders' committee.<sup>253</sup> The committee had granted me the right to use one of the vacant spaces at the mall to convert into a field office in June 2017 as my fieldwork had been scheduled for the second half of 2017.<sup>254</sup> I had purchased a table and chairs which were donated to the committee for their independent meetings. Already towards the end of 2017 the owner of the structure requested an increased rent which made the office unsustainable for its purpose. The rent was discontinued, and it was agreed with the committee to look for an alternative solution. Because of the slow progress of the municipal approval process the committee had held a meeting with traders on June 2016 to initiate a monthly individual contribution of N\$200.00 (GBP10.50) that would be used to hire security guards and for the cleaning of the proposed toilets.<sup>255</sup> In addition, the formation of a neighbourhood watch was initiated in liaison with the City Police as part of the policy of promoting self-policing. Traders were thus actively taking steps towards improving their self-administration.

Because the committee did not have an independent space to gather and keep its administration it was dependent on using individual member's spaces and entrusting individuals with handling of documents and money, which had already caused controversy. The committee member who had initially collected the N\$200

---

<sup>253</sup> The 125 Fund Award 2016/17 Terms of Agreement, dated 12.02.2017

<sup>254</sup> In July 2017 I used the field office as the base for a week-long vertical studio workshop on Informal Economies and the Future City, with NUST Bachelor of Architecture students. Students explored the Herero Mall and surroundings to uncover the ways in which people establish and sustain popular economies in the city, interacted with the various traders and drew up the spatial settings that were created to cater for the specific activities.

<sup>255</sup> I was not part of this process but was briefed by a committee member about the initiative. This also required the opening of a bank account and the committee proposed that in addition to two signatories from the committee, one independent trader should have signing rights for oversight.

contribution by traders for safekeeping in the absence of a collective bank account had spent some of it on personal items. This led to heated discussions amongst members about how to approach the person to retrieve the money.<sup>256</sup> I was requested to draft a letter for the committee chairperson to request the member to return the money to the committee or else risk having his businesses' electricity cut and being suspended from the committee.<sup>257</sup> A concern was how to regain the traders' trust in the committee, if the money of the first monthly contribution remained partly unaccounted for. More generally, members bemoaned the fact that committee members were not committed enough to be punctual for meetings, that they had individual business activities to attend to and would leave meetings without apology. The general agreement was that better administration was required if the committee was to convince the municipality of its ability to self-administer the market.

As the largest part of the 125 Fund budget for additional equipment had not yet been spent, I proposed to the committee to use the remaining funds to build an office and meeting space for the committee. The committee welcomed the idea of the office as members felt it could facilitate the process of consolidating the self-administration of the mall by providing an independent space that would not be subject to the daily contingencies of individual businesses of the committee members and other undue external interference. At the same time the process would allow me to realise the spatial intervention that I had planned as part of this research. During a meeting with committee members we agreed to design the structure with materials and methods in mind that could be locally constructed

---

<sup>256</sup> Sukona expressed some sympathy, saying others should not judge too harshly as they do not know how they would act with the temptation of handling such an amount of money.

<sup>257</sup> "Money collected from traders for improvements of Herero Mall". Letter drafted by author for HMTTC chairperson, dated 02.11.2018.

without the need of a contractor, similar to the original proposal for the toilets. I proposed to use the 125 Fund budget to buy materials for the structure, while the traders would contribute their labour either in kind or through contributions. On a walkabout of the mall the committee made it clear that the site for the office had to be where the main municipal electricity distribution box was located. Enclosing the electricity box, which had been unprotected, would provide the committee with an effective governance tool (see p192) to exercise control over the provision of electricity to businesses that did not adhere to established closing times of the mall or were in arrears with their payments.

Based on the spatial constraints of the chosen site I sketched a design concept that was discussed with the traders' committee in a follow-up meeting. The design was based on four spatial elements (see Figure 48 and Figure 49): an office (A) as the most secure space enclosing the electricity distribution board; the committee meeting hall (B) with a large sliding door which would allow the space to open up to a forecourt (C) for meetings with traders; and a billboard (D) that would increase visibility from within the mall and from the main street while also shielding the electricity substation from view. The spatial arrangement was inspired by the generic shebeen typology that I described earlier (see p179), including a secure core space with a an adjacent social space with large openings to the outside for increased flexibility of use. Although separated from the street by the new and supposedly temporary security fence, an opening was made that could become a door towards the street if the need or opportunity should arise.

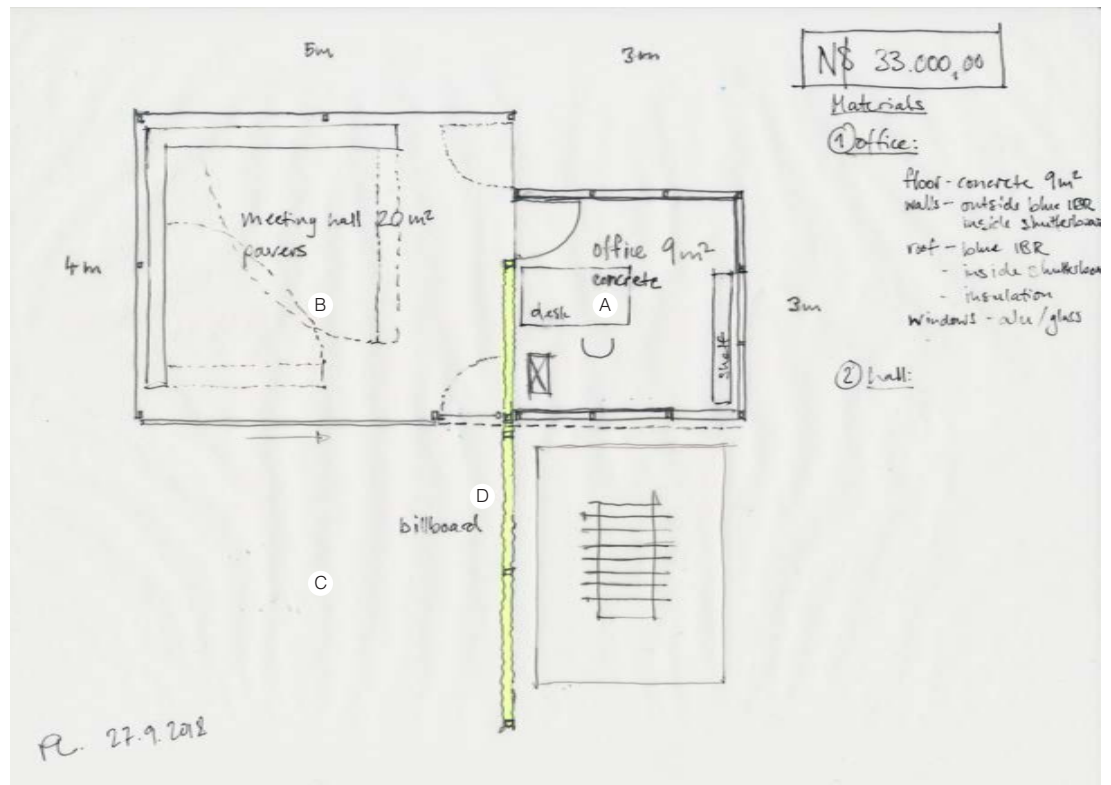


Figure 48: Sketch plan of the office and meeting hall used for discussions with the traders' committee. Office (A), committee meeting hall (B), forecourt (C), and billboard (D).

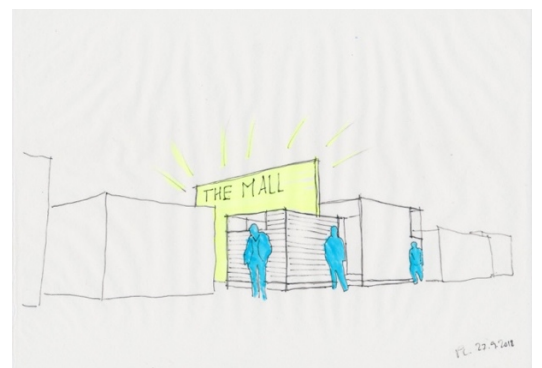


Figure 49: Perspective sketch of the office and meeting space seen from the mall (left) and seen from Clemence Kapuuu Street (right).

The construction methods for the three built elements were based on the current construction methods at the mall that I described above (see 6.1.2). The office was designed comprising panels with a steel hollow section frame onto which 1.6 mm mild steel sheets were welded.<sup>258</sup> The panels were designed so that they could be thermally insulated from the inside for improved comfort at a later stage and if additional funding became available. The window is made of a top-hinged steel sheet panel that opens up to the outside and can be locked from the inside when closed. The larger and higher meeting hall was designed as a much lighter construction. It has an in-situ welded steel frame that is clad with corrugated iron sheeting for the walls and the roof and expanded metal mesh for ventilation and daylight openings. The billboard was designed as a spatial marker with a sturdier steel hollow section frame and was planned to be clad with polycarbonate sheeting with LED lights inside to provide lighting and presence also at night.<sup>259</sup>

As the committee chairperson Utaara was the only welder amongst its members, the committee proposed that he would do the construction work for which a week had been originally set aside and which was to be paid from the earlier collected contributions from traders. He proposed engaging two unemployed youth from the neighbourhood as assistants. It quickly became clear that the timeframe had been too ambitious as he needed to keep his car repair business afloat in the meantime, and the project eventually took four weeks until completion. We bought most construction materials directly at a large construction steel supplier where Utaara had an account and the rest at the local hardware store. Materials were delivered to the site and Utaara stored them in his 40ft shipping container that was awaiting

---

<sup>258</sup> This construction provides increased security compared to the corrugated iron sheeting that is easily bent.

<sup>259</sup> The cladding and lighting of the billboard as well as the paving of the forecourt remain outstanding owing to lack of funding.

to be turned into rentable shops. In the following pages I will present an annotated visual and chronological documentation of the construction process (see Figure 50 – Figure 57) before concluding on the implications of spatial co-production as method.



*Figure 50: The electricity distribution box during the setting-out of works.*





Figure 51: Prefabrication of the billboard steel frame on the concrete surface of the disused car wash (left). The concrete mix recipe written with chalk on the door of the neighbouring building (right).



Figure 52: Prefabricated wall panels of the office during assembly with billboard frame already in place (left), and construction of the frame of the meeting hall (right).





*Figure 53: The frame of the meeting hall partly clad on the street facade.*



*Figure 54: The frame of the billboard seen from one of the entrances to the mall.*





*Figure 55: The interior of the meeting hall with an opening towards the street (left) and the door into the office (right).*



*Figure 56: The concrete floor of the meeting hall being cast and finished.*



*Figure 57: The HMTC office and meeting hall with the yet to be clad billboard seen from Clemence Kapuuu Street.*

The HMTC office and meeting hall emerged out of the efforts by the traders' committee to advance its independence and prove to the local authority that it was capable of self-administration of the mall. The siting of the building was strategic to enclose the electricity distribution box and thereby assert the committee's power over the mall's governance. At the same time the building with its 5m high billboard created a physical presence to those using the main street passing the mall (see Figure 57). The design and construction methods were entirely derived from the locally prevailing way of producing space, drawing on local typologies, construction methods and design detailing. Where possible, the aim was to improve these construction practices if even minimally. For example, to ensure that the load-bearing structure and the internal floors were level required my presence and direct intervention during the critical stages of the construction. In some cases, what I had imagined to be a self-explanatory was interpreted differently, leading to

material wastage or superfluous construction elements. In this way, the process of building taught me about the potential of the architecture of Herero Mall to inform a future spatial development that could be more in tune with the socio-spatial dynamics that I have described throughout this thesis.

However, the process also galvanised discussions around the governance of mall and the traders' committee. By requiring concrete decisions to be taken and actions to be followed through, it exposed separate interest groups within the committee. The leadership of Utaara (the first trader to occupy the site), was challenged and the discrepancies between the interests of active owner-operators and rent-seeking business owners as well as those of tenants were foregrounded. My attempts at introducing clearer administrative processes and guidelines in the form of a constitution for the traders' association was supported by younger committee members while others resisted it in favour of the more open-ended method of talking things out in lengthy meetings. How the availability of the office and meeting hall is affecting the traders' committee dynamics in the longer term and the further development of the mall generally remains speculation at this stage.

#### **7.4 Conclusion: building as method**

In this chapter I reviewed my practical involvement at the Herero Mall over the past seven years and contextualised it in the arguments of the earlier chapters of this thesis. I showed that the municipality of Windhoek retained a heavily top-down administrative structure that is slow to react to changing urban conditions and continues to treat residents – specifically the urban poor – in paternalistic terms. In such a setting, professional consultants are meant to assist the local authority to advance the project of formalisation to bring all activities under the control of the state. However, as I have demonstrated in CHAPTER 6, residents resist this formal enclosure and instead enact alternative urban forms and practices that answer



their immediate needs, rather than policy-prescribed, prohibitive standards and requirements of the formal city.

In the case of the Herero Mall, I have demonstrated how the traders successfully asserted their political leverage in the municipality-driven re-development process. However, I also showed that this did not fundamentally alter the process of the production of space itself, which remained framed in an expert-driven consultancy process. I further explored how my role changed towards a position of mediating between the traders and the local authority, which, though partially successful in achieving some sanitary improvements, did not produce a different spatial outcome. Nevertheless, I also argue that sustained advocacy for alternative approaches to 'informal' economy development seems to be slowly showing results within the municipal hallways and must thus be considered a supporting activity for any critical spatial practice.

In the final section of the chapter I demonstrated how in collaboration with traders committee I adopted the prevailing practice of appropriating and building to co-produce an office and meeting hall, through which its presence was spatially and administratively asserted. The lessons learnt from this process complemented my insights into the architecture of popular economies that I had previously described only through observation. It clarified for me the real potential that lies in this form of construction for the purpose of accommodating popular economies within the urban fabric, as well as the pitfalls that need to be avoided. In Figure 58 I diagrammatically show how these different aspects of spatial practice interrelate with the spatio-temporality of the Herero Mall.

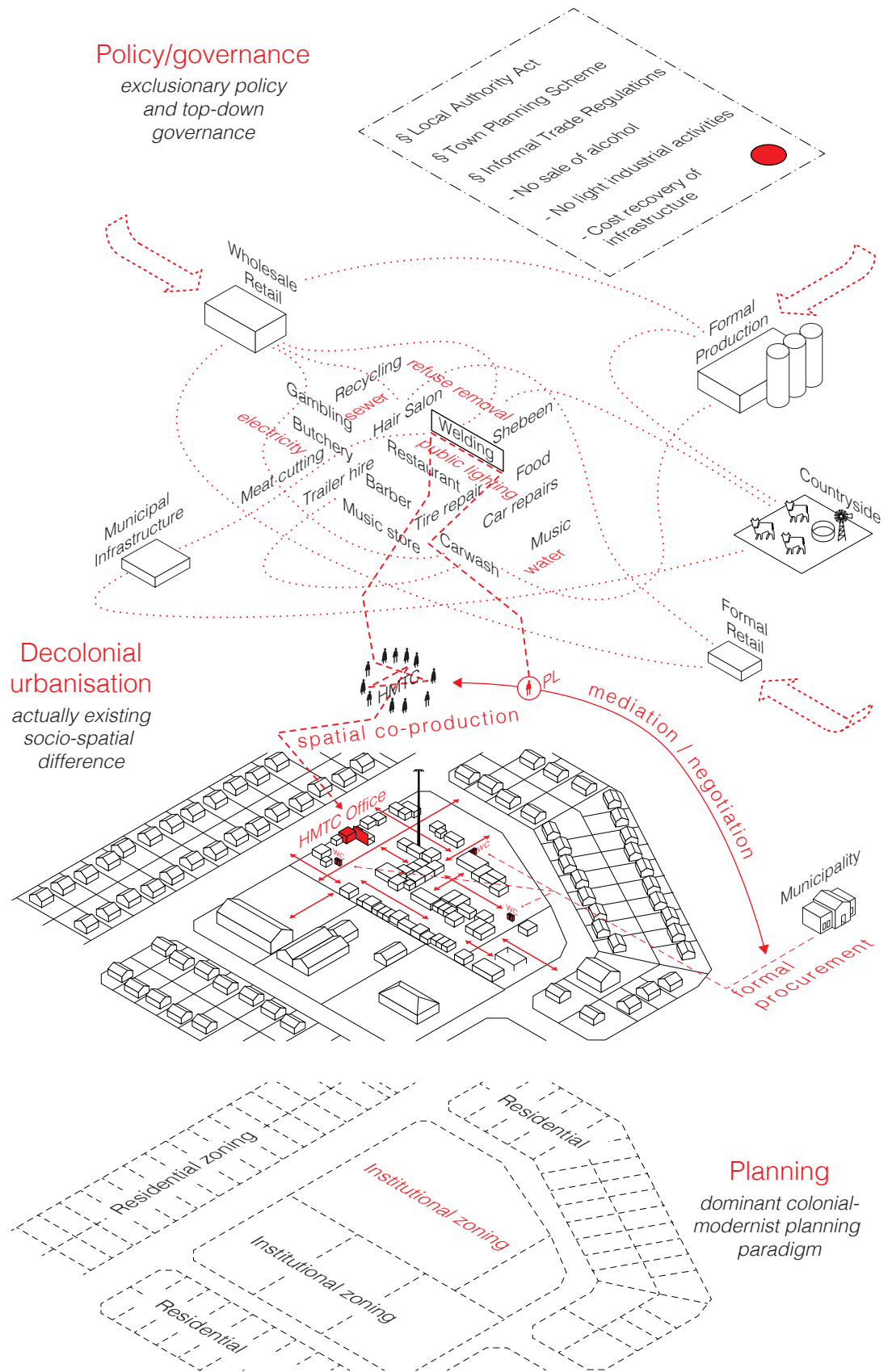


Figure 58: Diagram of my involvement at the Herero Mall, negotiating the tension between current policy, governance and planning and actually existing urbanism.

## **CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION: DECOLONISING INFORMALITY**

I now turn to conclude my thesis beginning with reviewing the objectives that guided this study. My realisation was that the socio-spatial realities of a majority of citizens in Namibia – the black urban poor – remain largely unaffected by professional architectural practice and are hardly explored in the education of future professionals. Instead, these realities are relegated to the conceptual black hole called ‘informality’. At the same time, my personal lived experience of generational white privilege in a post-colonial context of extreme inequality and enduring spatial segregation allowed me to live in a parallel reality that is deeply rooted in a Eurocentric colonial modernity. To explore progressive professional engagement with the world of the ‘informal’ meant that I needed to understand these socio-spatial conditions better in order to challenge their pre-dominant conceptualisations in urban theory. My hypothesis was that in these forms of everyday socio-spatial practice lies an alternative and potentially more socially just urbanism, rather than in the formal urban development patterns and practices that have been instrumental in shaping not only the capitalist-colonial past but that continue to shape imaginaries of an urban future. This required to challenge these urban imaginaries by offering an alternative that departs from asserting the legitimacy and viability of situated everyday practices irrespective of their position on the formal – informal spectrum.

In practice, my on-going involvement in the redevelopment process of the Herero Mall provided me with an entry point into such an ‘informal’ reality, while this doctoral study offered a frame for theoretical reflection. Methodologically, engaging with traders at the mall in the co-production of a spatial intervention allowed me to gain knowledge of their everyday practices while actively contributing to the transformation of their spatial conditions. In parallel, my linkages



to professional spatial practitioners in the private, non-governmental and government sectors enabled me to explore the ways in which the discourse about 'informality' is constructed locally. While I presented these three aspects of the study separately above, I will now seek to relate them to each other in this concluding chapter. I will first address the research questions that have been discussed throughout chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, and offer a reflection on theory and methods. This will be followed by my contribution to knowledge, the pathways for generating impact, the limitations of the study, and finally by outlining the potential for further research.

## **8.1 Answers to research questions**

### **8.1.1 The new 'other': how to delegitimise the majority in the post-colony**

In this section I respond to the research question of how the discourse of informality is constructed through the language and practices of activists, professionals, state officials, the media and other actors in spatial production in Namibia. The question was aimed at revealing the political dimension of this discourse by situating it historically, exploring its ideological underpinnings and reflecting on its implications for contemporary urbanisation in Namibia.

I have established in CHAPTER 4 that urban areas were the locus of an exclusionary colonial modernity, while the majority of Africans was restricted to underdeveloped rural reserves. Gradual decolonisation, beginning from the late 1970s, and the relaxing of movement restrictions for Africans allowed rural-urban migration in search of upward social mobility to gather momentum despite an increasing lack of formal urban employment. This led to symptoms of underdevelopment becoming increasingly apparent in urban areas from the 1980s onwards, including slum-formation, rising unemployment, and increasing

survivalist economic activities. In the process, urbanisation became correlated with underdevelopment and a strong anti-urban bias persists at the political level today. I further showed how professional spatial practice remained expert-led and steeped in colonial-modernist planning ideology, thereby re-producing inherited structural inequality. Together, I argued, these provided the conditions for a formal/informal binary to take root.

In CHAPTER 5 I have demonstrated how the formal, Eurocentric way of organising society, space and the economy were established as the norm for development during the colonial period and entrenched in its legal foundations. This formal developmental paradigm continues to be construed as progressive, aspirational, regular, regulated, predictable, measurable, legal and democratic. Yet, this realm remains inaccessible for a large and growing majority of citizens. At the same time the concept of 'informality' emerging in urban theory from the 1970s onwards was constructed as the photographic negative of the formal urban imaginary. I argued that the discourse of informality provided an outwardly depoliticised mechanism for othering those who were unable to conform to the dominant normativity – mainly the black urban poor – just as they were nominally unchained from colonial oppression. By delegitimising the majority of citizens' aspirations and everyday actions towards improving their livelihoods and their real contribution to post-colonial national development, dominant capitalist and Eurocentric modes of development and the elite interests they serve are entrenched.

By continuously construing 'informality' as *not* formal, conventional developmental discourse and planning practice offer formalisation as the only way to legitimise development, upholding the imaginary of a modern and orderly city. However, this happens in the absence of matching public resources allocated to enable such often costly formalisation and thus effectively generates the conditions of

'informality'. In the context of an extreme, historically produced social inequality that would require radical redistributive state intervention to redress, this must be considered an apparatus of exclusion.

### **8.1.2 Asserting the right to the city: learning from Herero Mall**

In this section I respond to the research question how people inhabit the Herero Mall socially, spatially, and economically. I aimed to account in ethnographic detail for the everyday life and spatial practices at the mall in order to deconstruct binary conceptualisations of the world of the 'informal' and rather create a positive image – again in the photographic sense – of the case study site. This, I hold, is required if we want to re-orient imaginaries of the urban in the Global South.

In CHAPTER 5 I have demonstrated how the discourse of informality delegitimises the urban subaltern. However, such delegitimation does not go unchallenged. In CHAPTER 6 I sketched how traders at the Herero Mall have established legitimacy through enacting their *presence* spatially and economically and how they defended it politically. I described this process as retrofitting the apartheid city through inserting *popular economies* into the gaps that modernist economic and spatial planning had created. These gaps include literally open spaces in the urban fabric but also gaps in economic planning that continues to be framed by formal employment as the sole basis of livelihoods. Through appropriating common resources such as open land and municipal services traders effectively accomplished their collective self-legitimation and a degree of spatial redistribution from the ground up. Following Roy (see p49), I argue that by elevating the use value of the land over its exchange value as property, traders asserted their right to the city.

The popular economy at the Herero Mall spans a spectrum from survivalist to entrepreneurial activities that are networked at various scales including with formal enterprise and operate within wider circuits of distribution that reach far into the rural hinterland. These networks also provide the conduits for rural migrants to enter the city and nurture a process of *becoming urban* through spatial practice. While certainly creating differing degrees of vulnerability and social stratification, what is common to these activities is a transactional logic of economic interdependence, expressed through spatial proximity and an inherent mix of uses. Hence the popular conceptualisation of Herero Mall as *mall* or in the words of Nduezu as “one-stop shop”. The density of social and economic interrelations determines the success and stability of the business and thus fundamentally subverts the foundational premise of rationalist zoning and land-use planning that remains at the core of planning practice in Namibia.

The architecture of popular economies is borne out of a process-driven mode of urbanisation. It is inherently improvised, incremental, lightweight, flexible, and permeable, and offers people the possibility of personalising their experience unlike in more formalised settings. The distinction between interior and exterior spaces are blurred, creating a spatial continuum that challenges Eurocentric modernist conceptualisations of rational separation of functions, spaces and ownership. The socio-spatial setting of the Herero Mall also mediates the articulation and transformation of cultural difference and value systems which effectively resist the delegitimisation that the discourse of informality implies. The architecture and economy of Herero Mall, I argue, represent a process of decolonising the township from within, and point, in the words of Brenner (see p7), to an alter-urbanisation that holds critical lessons for Namibia’s urban future. Acknowledging these processes as pointing towards a radically different urban

future requires re-directing architectural practice to engage with this reality, as I will discuss next.

### **8.1.3 Prospects of a critical spatial practice**

In this section I respond to the research question on what the potentials and limitations of spatial co-production methods are for design in the context of colonial socio-spatial legacies and the discourse of urban informality. This question allowed me to analyse my personal involvement at the mall over the years which provided the basis for the more general question of what the implications of co-production for professional spatial practice are in such contexts more generally.

In CHAPTER 7 I highlighted the limitations of spatial co-production with traders while being commissioned and answerable to a local authority that has not yet embraced the socio-spatial transformations that it is undergoing and that retains a paternalistic approach towards the urban poor. With a public client with entrenched, pre-conceived normative ideas, processes and solutions, our expansive, co-productive methodology led to alienating traders on the one hand, and on the other hand our frustration of (initially) not being able to convince the local authority of the need to re-think its approach towards 'informality'. A specific constraint for co-productive processes are public procurement protocols that are prescriptive and not accommodating of practice-based research. I showed that to deconstruct such resistance to co-production requires mediation between stakeholders in spatial production and that the university is perceived as a neutral platform to pursue such mediation. I have shown in Chapter 6 that in postcolonial Windhoek many residents do not derive legitimacy from ownership of land, but rather from commanding presence over publicly owned land. Here, tactical mediation by spatial practitioners can contribute to legitimising such practices and

revealing them as alternative pathways towards a more inclusive urban development. I demonstrated that while in physical terms the project for the development of the Herero Mall remains unfulfilled, exposing the local authority officials and traders to the potential of communal management of common resources through a co-productive process can counter preconceptions and change attitudes, effectively altering what Petrescu calls the “resistance of the real”.<sup>260</sup>

I have further shown how engaging co-productive methods of mapping and design through large-scale models amongst others can contribute to developing a shared understanding of space between professionals and traders. Finally, I showed that the collaborative method of *building*, embedded in close observation of existing socio-spatial dynamics, can contribute to bridging the gap between theory and practice by materialising hypotheses and testing them in one and the same process. Collaborative practice-based research in this way facilitates the imagination and appreciation of the potential for a new architecture and city to emerge.

## **8.2 Reflection on theory and methods**

Early on I referred to the theoretical framework and the derivative methodological considerations for this study as eclectic. However, as my aim was always to effect transformation in theory *and* in practice, drawing from an array of seemingly incompatible theoretical positions was pertinent. Critical urban theory was fundamental in framing my overall outlook on the urban question and my

---

<sup>260</sup> My external examiner Prof Doina Petrescu used this term during my viva on 18 June 2020. It resonated a lot with my experience throughout this project.

positionality as a spatial practitioner long before I commenced this doctoral study. It essentially directed me where to look and influenced the choice of the case study and my engagement with traders. Yet I found that it did not provide me with the methods to undertake my actual research. In order to theorise the discourse of informality I was required to look elsewhere, and Foucault's methodologies of genealogy and archeology provided clearer tools for analysis and interpretation of my interview-based data. At the same time, I found this lens to paint an incomplete picture with regards to understanding the complexity of the spaces I was engaging in. My re-conceptualisation of informality as everyday spatial practice was supported by Harvey's understanding of spatio-temporality as well as Latour's actor-network-theory which assigns agency to human subjects and to material objects alike. Again, I was not interested in a pure exploration of ANT but rather its applicability towards the socio-spatial setting that I was observing and entangled in. While ANT facilitated my own understanding and the visualisations of socio-spatial complexity, it limited their usefulness for the originally envisioned co-production of urban knowledge with traders. Finally, the methods and tools of the architect to envision, visualise and construct alternative futures were useful to weave together the various aspects of the study.

### **8.3 Contribution of the thesis**

As outlined in the research objectives (see 1.2), through this study I aimed to make a contribution to critical urban theory from a Global South perspective as well as to a situated critical spatial practice that is framed in the former. I consider the following aspects as the main contributions I was able to make.

#### **8.3.1 Exposing the discourse of 'informality' as mechanism of exclusion**

The socio-economic and spatial legacies of colonialism in Namibia and Southern Africa are well researched and understood. However, this study contributes to the

understanding of *how* those colonial legacies are re-produced in the interest of contemporary elites in Namibia, in other words presenting a critique of power (see p7). I argue that 'informality' is akin to a false self-evident truth after Foucault (see p13) that was able to emerge during the process of decolonisation. It is conventionally understood as a 'not-yet' developmental stage that perpetually keeps alive an elusive promise of formal, Eurocentric development for all. This imaginary had firmly been established during colonial times. I further argue that the discursive practice of producing and re-producing 'informality' through policy, media discourse, planning regulations, professional spatial practice and governance amounts to an apparatus of exclusion of the urban poor. While the Namibian elite can no longer be construed as solely white, the urban subalterns are certainly still overwhelmingly black, and othering 'informal' traders or 'informal' settlers can thus be construed as an inherently racist practice. This mechanism has progressively replaced earlier forms of overt race-based exclusion under apartheid. In this way, the discursive construct of 'informality' represents one of the more lasting exclusionary legacies of colonialism in Namibia and remains a powerful technology to divide and rule.

### **8.3.2 Re-framing everyday urban practices as decolonising the apartheid city**

Decolonising 'informality' then requires the re-grounding of our normativity (see p10) to see the potential for more socially just urban futures. Brenner (2012) reminds us that the urban is the site, medium and outcome of historically situated power relations (see p7) that are continually socially contested. While the discourse of informality outlined above is a powerful mechanism, the everyday spatial and economic practices of the subaltern resist such exclusion. Instead of framing these practices as the binary opposite of the formal, and therefore rendering them illegitimate, as most of the literature on informality continues to do, this study contributes to understanding these practices for what they *are*. I contend that these



are re-distributive practices of self-legitimation, asserting the right to the city through the spatial, economic and social *enactment of presence* in the cracks of the decomposing colonial urban spatial order. In other words, what we witness is the ongoing process and spatial manifestation of decolonising the apartheid city from below. The emerging spatio-economic order is propelled by popular economies that have an inherently transactional logic and thrive on the density of social and economic relationships, spatial continuity, mix of uses, flexibility and that are in perpetual transformation. In the process, normative modernist principles and imaginaries such as an industrial production-based urban economy, property rights, land use-based planning, and state-centred provision of services are subverted and de-centred, opening up the potential for alternative pathways towards a decolonial urban development.

### **8.3.3 Re-orienting urban imaginaries through practice-based research**

In the charged field of contemporary urban politics in Namibia that I have outlined above, professional spatial practitioners can position themselves on a spectrum from being enforcers of the formal, disciplinary paradigm to becoming allies to the subaltern who through their everyday practices remind us that the post-colonial city remains an exclusionary realm. Herein lie the core politics of a critical practice. In choosing the latter position, it is not enough to transform physical space through conceptualising alternative spatial distributions that fill the history books of architecture, and which remains the primary skill being taught at architecture schools the world over. Nor is it enough to expose to the citizenry the extent of their exploitation within the capitalist urban order (see p61). A critical spatial practice, I argue, has to shape urban imaginaries by thinking and engaging across spatio-temporalities that are diagrammatically represented in Harvey's matrix of spatialities (see Table 1, p9). I have attempted to achieve this throughout my research as I have shown in Table 3 (see p241). Professionally engaging with those

who are discursively construed to fall short of the norm, requires the practitioner to see and fully appreciate their everyday spatial practices as a legitimate departure point for a different production of space. This requires expanding the methodological repertoire of architects beyond their technical skills to include qualitative research methods, strategies and methods for co-production, critical engagement with policy and institutions of power, but also with everyday dynamics of complex social formations and their inherent politics. A co-productive, practice-based research framed by a critical stance provides the opportunity to shape not only spatial outcomes, but also processes of knowledge production, modes of representation and discourse itself. I have shown that drawing from diverse theoretical positions and mediating them through a co-productive spatial practice promises to transform collective imaginaries of a *radically* different urban future.

#### **8.3.4 Decolonising ‘informality’**

I consider the first two aspects as my contribution to a situated critical urban theory and as the main contribution of this thesis: on the one hand exposing the discourse of ‘informality’ as an *exclusionary practice* of power in post-apartheid Namibia, while on the other hand re-conceptualising the conditions of ‘urban informality’ as everyday practices of *socio-spatial decolonisation*. The third aspect of my contribution is the re-orientation of the dominant planning and developmental imaginaries by weaving together the previous two aspects through co-productive practice-based research.

### **8.4 Relevance and potential for generating impact**

Having outlined above my contributions, I will now elaborate their relevance for different contexts, the potential impact they might have for different audiences and via which pathways such impact might be realised. The first contribution on informality as exclusionary practice has relevance for re-thinking the discourse of

urban informality elsewhere in the Global South where colonial, Eurocentric modernity and its spatial manifestations have always been only partially realised yet continue to shape political and developmental aspirations. It will be mostly of interest to academic audiences who engage with urban theory more generally and the Global South in particular. But it might also be of use to practitioners and activists and those involved in challenging hegemonic notions. Chapter 4 and 5 will provide the core material for international academic publications that will position the lessons from the Namibian case within wider urban and planning theory. In addition, these insights will find their way into postgraduate programmes in architecture and planning as well as into the evolving research agenda of an emergent trans-disciplinary research centre focusing on 'land, livelihoods and housing' at my university.

The second contribution on the emerging decolonial architecture and urban popular economies at the Herero Mall might seem at first sight to be of relevance only for Namibia. However, the urgency for spatial practitioners to see the urban future that already exists before their eyes, rather than looking elsewhere – and more often than not towards the Global North – for developmental models and theory is equally pressing if the right to the city is to be realised in other Global South contexts. The approach to practice that I have outlined in this thesis may thus be of relevance much further afield. The different methods I explored, largely contained in Chapter 6, will form the basis for international academic publications in the architectural and planning fields. To achieve local impact the insights will be processed into educational modules for a planned cross-disciplinary postgraduate curriculum centred around the issue of informal settlement upgrading. This programme aims to reach beyond academia to include community activists, private and non-governmental spatial practitioners and local and central government

officials, building on the expanded notion of spatial practitioners I advanced in this study.

The aspect of re-orienting urban development imaginaries is an ongoing process in Namibia and elsewhere. By engaging local and central government, as well as organised trader groups an impact on the ongoing process of informal economy policy reform is expected. Again, the university is seen as a useful platform to advance this aim through various forms of public engagement. Certainly, the relationship with the Herero Mall Traders Committee will be a useful avenue to further this goal. The potential for an alternative professional spatial practice that flows from the various insights above I have only been able to scratch at the surface during this study. In the true meaning of the word, this potential will have to continue to be realised in and through *practice*.

## **8.5 Limitations of the study**

At the end of an endeavour as long and complex as a doctoral research project, and certainly through the act of writing, its limitations are foregrounded. For an ethnography of this sort certainly my major limitation was the language barrier. Not able to speak Otjiherero created a filter even when I was deeply involved and present at the mall. I fully accept this as a legitimate check on my privileges and access as a researcher and understand it as an inherent aspect of the post-colonial urban politics that I was studying.

Secondly, basing my participatory engagement at the site on my relationship with the traders' committee allowed it to function, at times intentionally, as a gatekeeper. For example, throughout the study I did not manage to engage employees of the business owners, which certainly reflects in the outcomes of the study. The fact that the committee itself is not universally accepted as the rightful representative of

all traders also meant that my presence continued to be regarded with some suspicion. Again, I accept this limitation as a consequence of deriving a doctoral study from an on-going practice that is already compromised before the start of the project.

Thirdly, it is also in the nature of practice-based research that it does not progress in tune with the academic cycles and rhythms of university life. While I highly appreciated the structured nature of my doctoral programme with its annual progress reviews, this often meant that during the periods leading up to a review my attention was primarily focused on writing. This often translated into prolonged periods of absence from the site with an impact on the potentials of the participatory project.

Fourthly, although the University of Westminster External Research Degree Study Scheme allowed me to be based in Namibia for the full duration of my studies and thereby made this project possible in the first place, a limitation was that I could not benefit from the university's comprehensive Doctoral Researcher Development Programme over the years. This study would have profited from receiving feedback on work-in-progress through academic exchanges, seminars and conferences.

Besides these practical limitations, a more theoretical limitation was that my overall objective to re-conceptualise the vast and multifarious theme of 'informality' perhaps remained too broadly formulated. It is my conviction that it takes a generalist to engage with topics of contemporary urbanisation in their full complexity, which requires deciding which aspects of the research to include and which to leave out. From this flows the need for future research that I will elaborate on in the next and final section.

## **8.6 Opportunities for future research**

This study is part of a larger and on-going practice and further research on a number of aspects is required to lend depth to the picture that I have begun to trace in this thesis. These would include elaborating on the self-governance mechanisms of the traders' committee including their relationship with the organs of state and other stakeholders; expanding on the social stratification amongst traders; tracing the internal processes within the local authority and other relevant state institutions that deal with developmental aspects; exploring the transition from traditional rural ways of life to 'becoming urban' and the ways in which places like the mall facilitate this process; examining the impact of the Herero Mall on its immediate neighborhood; investigating popular economic networks and their linkages at the scale of the city and wider territories which I could only hint at here; and finally exploring the economic measurability of popular economies. More importantly, beyond my own conceptualisation of popular economies presented here, it would be worthwhile exploring ways of reviewing and crafting these conceptualisations together with traders and others who have been involved in this study.

The aspect of re-thinking architectural and planning practice leaves much room for further elaboration. On the one hand this can be done through studying other international and local co-productive spatial practices and their methods more widely. But given the implications for professional spatial practice of re-considering 'informal' urbanisation as an ongoing decolonial process, the most fruitful avenue for pursuing an alternative spatial practice is through practice itself. This is the pathway that I am looking forward to.

## **APPENDICES**

*A1 fold-out plan of Herero Mall in 2019, indicating the office and meeting hall that was co-produced with the Herero Mall Traders' Committee. Drawn by author.*





*A0 fold-out media review timeline 2007-2014. The media review was undertaken by the author as part of the feasibility study (Delgado and Lühl, 2014), and visualised by Guillermo Delgado.*







## Participant Information Sheet

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

#### RETHINKING ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE AS AN ACTIVE AGENT OF DECOLONIZATION IN NAMIBIA

**Researcher:** Phillip Lühl (E: w1562465@my.westminster.ac.uk, T: +264 (0)81 679 8394)  
**Supervisor:** Dr Lindsay Bremner

You are invited to take part in a research study, which focuses on the development of "Herero Mall" informal market in Windhoek as a case study for understanding how traders and residents, as well as other stakeholders can be integrated in the development and design process in meaningful ways so that they become co-producers of their own living and working environment.

This research is being undertaken as part of the researcher's studies for PhD programme at the University of Westminster, London, UK.

The study might involve you in:

1. Unstructured, in-depth interviews
2. Spatial mapping of the case study area
3. Participant observation by the researcher
4. Photographic survey of the case study area
5. Spatial interventions in the case study area

#### Please note:

- **Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.**
- **You have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.**
- Wherever practicable, withdrawal from the research will not affect any treatment and/or services that you receive.
- You have the right to ask for your data to be withdrawn as long as this is practical, and for personal information to be destroyed.
- You do not have to answer particular questions either on questionnaires or in interviews if you do not wish to do so.
- Your responses will normally be made anonymous, unless indicated above to the contrary, and will be kept confidential unless you provide explicit consent to do otherwise, for example, the use of your image from photographs and/or video recordings.
- *[NOTE: it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality in certain circumstances, e.g. where issues of child safety have been identified. You should seek clarification from the researcher and/or their supervisor if you are concerned about this].*
- No individuals should be identifiable from any collated data, written report of the research, or any publications arising from it.
- All computer data files will be encrypted and password protected. The researcher will keep files in a secure place and will comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.
- All hard copy documents, e.g. consent forms, completed questionnaires, etc. will be kept securely and in a locked cupboard, wherever possible on University premises. Documents may be scanned and stored electronically. This may be done to enable secure transmission of data to the university's secure computer systems.
- Please notify the researcher immediately if any adverse symptoms arise during or after the research.
- If you wish you, can receive information on the results of the research. Please indicate on the consent form if you would like to receive this information.
- The researcher can be contacted during and after participation by email
- If you have a complaint about this research project you can contact the project supervisor, Lindsay Bremner by e-mail L.Bremner@westminster.ac.uk or by telephone +44 (0)20 7911 5000 ext 66848

## Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

#### RETHINKING ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE AS AN ACTIVE AGENT OF DECOLONIZATION IN NAMIBIA

**Lead researcher:** Phillip Lühl (E: w1562465@my.westminster.ac.uk, T: +264 (0)81 679 8394)

I have been given the Participation Information Sheet and/or had its contents explained to me. Yes ☐ No ☐

I have had an opportunity to ask any questions and I am satisfied with the answers given. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand I have a right to withdraw from the research at any time and I do not have to provide a reason. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that if I withdraw from the research any data included in the results will be removed if that is practicable (I understand that once anonymised data has been collated into other datasets it may not be possible to remove that data). Yes ☐ No ☐

I would like to receive information relating to the results from this study. Yes ☐ No ☐

I wish to receive a copy of this Consent Form. Yes ☐ No ☐

I confirm I am willing to be a participant in the above research study. Yes ☐ No ☐

I note the data collected may be retained in an archive and I am happy for my data to be reused as part of future research activities. I note my data will be fully anonymised (if applicable). Yes ☐ No ☐

**Participant's Name:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

This consent form will be stored separately from any data you provide so that your responses remain anonymous.

I confirm I have provided a copy of the Participant Information Sheet approved by the Research Ethics Committee to the participant and fully explained its contents. I have given the participant an opportunity to ask questions, which have been answered.

**Researcher's Name:** Phillip Lühl

**Signature:**

**Date:**

## Business survey guide

PhD Phillip Lühl: Informal Economy Survey Guide

Date/time:

### 1. General Info

1.1.	<i>Name</i>	
1.2.	<i>Age</i>	
1.3.	<i>Gender</i>	
1.4.	<i>Place of birth</i>	
1.5.	<i>Place of residence</i>	
1.6.	<i>No of dependents</i>	
1.7.	<i>At HM since when?</i>	

### 2. Economic Activity

2.1.	<i>Business name</i>	
2.2.	<i>Business type</i>	
2.3.	<i>Labor status</i>	
2.4.	<i>Working hours</i>	
2.5.	<i>How long does the business exist</i>	
2.6.	<i>Land occupied</i>	
2.7.	<i>Business registered and/or licensed</i>	
2.8.	<i>Levels and regularity of income</i>	
2.9.	<i>Trading fees, levies etc.</i>	
2.10.	<i>Production and/or supply chains</i>	
2.11.	<i>Formal-informal economy linkages</i>	
2.12.	<i>Competition and/or collaboration with other businesses</i>	
2.13.	<i>Symbiotic relationship with adjacent properties</i>	
2.14.	<i>Service provision</i>	
2.15.	<i>Customer base and dependency</i>	
2.16.	<i>Credit facilities</i>	

Map the extent of one product

**3. Social Structure**

3.1.	<i>Customer relationships</i>	
3.2.	<i>Landlord relationships</i>	
3.3.	<i>Business owner-employee relationships</i>	
3.4.	<i>Business-competition relationship</i>	
3.5.	<i>Business-formal business relationships</i>	
3.6.	<i>Business-authorities relationships</i>	
3.7.	<i>Cultural specificity of trade</i>	
3.8.	<i>Time spent economic activity vs organizing</i>	
3.9.	<i>How do traders get recruited?</i>	
3.10.	<i>Why / how arrived at HM? How did they find out? Through which social structures?</i>	
3.11.	<i>Who decided where structures can be set up? How is space allocated?</i>	

Notes:

- Xxx
- Xxx

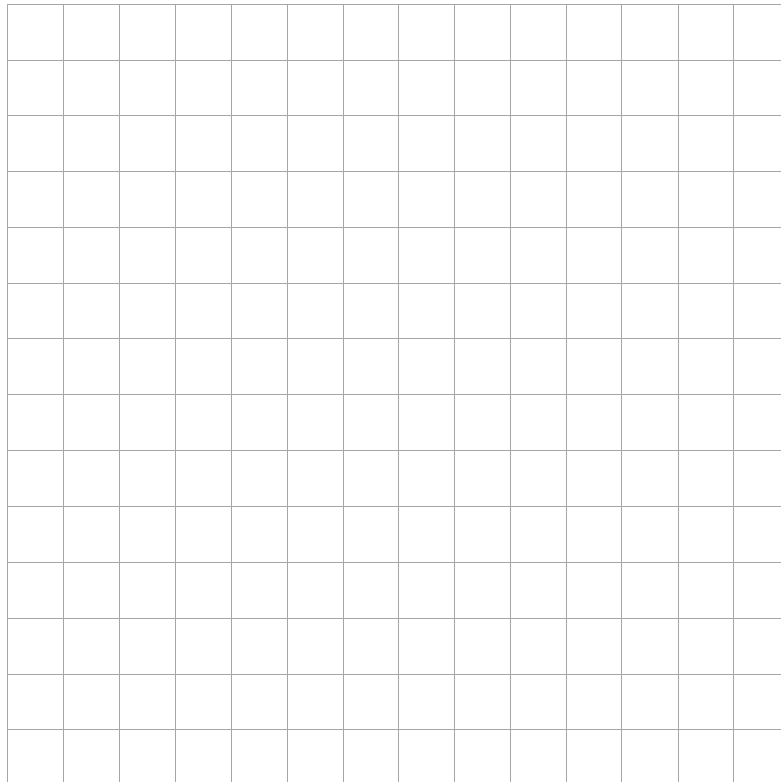
**4. Spatial Relationships**

4.1.	<i>Space or structure occupied</i>	
4.2.	<i>Display mechanisms and/or specialized equipment</i>	
4.3.	<i>Supporting spatial and/or infrastructural factors</i>	
4.4.	<i>Relationship to surrounding neighborhood</i>	
4.5.	<i>Security arrangements</i>	
4.6.	<i>Relationship to customer movement: pedestrians, cars, mobile</i>	
4.7.	<i>Maintenance: who is responsible, how does it impact on trade?</i>	
4.8.	<i>How does electricity, water gets distributed?</i>	

**PhD Phillip Lühl: Informal Economy Survey Guide**

**Date/time:**

*Ask permission to take photos of structures inside & out  
Map/sketch the structure to scale 1 unit = 1m*



**5. Timeline of Daily Activities**

<i>When</i>	<i>What</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>With whom</i>
05:00			
05:30			
06:00			
06:30			
07:00			
07:30			
08:00			
08:30			
09:00			
09:30			
10:00			
10:30			
11:00			
11:30			
12:00			
12:30			
13:00			
13:30			
14:00			
14:30			
15:00			
15:30			
16:00			
16:30			
17:00			
17:30			
18:00			
18:30			
19:00			
19:30			
20:00			
20:30			
21:00			
21:30			
22:00			
22:30			
23:00			
23:30			
24:00			
00:30			
01:00			
01:30			



## *Interview guide for spatial professionals*

### **PhD Phillip Lühl: Interview Guide Professionals**

1. Describe your background: where did you grow up, study, practice?
2. Where do you currently live and how would you describe your neighbourhood?
3. Where do you work?
4. How would you describe your professional practice? What kind of work do you do, would you like to do?
5. What kind of commissions have you worked on? (Focus on non-private clients)
6. Describe your design process of a project.
7. What are the important aspects that a well-performing city has to achieve in your view?
8. How would you explain urban informality to non-architects/urbanists?
9. Have you worked on issues to do with urban informality? Describe the projects?
10. Do you distinguish between users and clients?
11. Is there relevance of user's inclusion in design processes? How can they be engaged?
12. How do you see the role of authorities (municipality, government agencies etc.)?
13. What would need to change in Namibian architectural/urban practice to facilitate the engagement with urban informality?
14. What would you change in your own practice if you could? Do you have any reference of participatory work that you think is interesting/relevant?

## REFERENCES

- Allen, A. (2016). *The end of progress*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Allgemeine Zeitung. (2011). Durch Tränengas vertrieben. *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8 August. Available from <https://www.az.com.na/nachrichten/durch-trnengas-vertrieben> [Accessed 29 April 2019].
- AlSayyad, N. (2004). Urban informality as a new way of life. In: AlSayyad, N., and Roy, A., (eds.). *Urban informality: transnational perspectives from the middle east, latin america, and south asia*. Berkeley: Lexington Books, 7–30.
- Amupanda, J. (2019). AR to contest elections. *The Namibian*, 17 September. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/193146/archive-read/The-Radical-Future-of-Windhoek> [Accessed 22 March 2020].
- Bénit-Gbaffou, C. (2015). *In quest for sustainable models of street trading management: lessons for Johannesburg after operation clean sweep*. Johannesburg: Centre for Urbanism and Built Environment Studies, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Beyerly, A. (2012). Compound space: a study of the architecture of labour control in the case of Walfish Bay. *Digest of Namibian Architecture*, 10, 34–37.
- Bhan, G. (2012). In the public's interest: evictions, citizenship and inequality in contemporary Delhi. PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley. Available from <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/0nd455cm>.
- Bhan, G. (2019). Notes on a southern urban practice. *Environment and Urbanization*, 31 (2), 639–654.
- Biko, S. and Stubbs, A. (2012). *I write what I like*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa.
- Blundell-Jones, P., Petrescu, D. and Till, J. (eds.). (2005). *Architecture and participation*. London; New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Bremner, L. (1994). Development and resistance: the lessons for the planners of Phola Park. *Urban Forum*, 5 (1), 23–44.
- Brenner, N. (2012). What is critical urban theory? In: Brenner, N., Marcuse, P., and Mayer, M., (eds.). *Cities for people, not for profit: critical urban theory and the right to the city*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Brenner, N. (2017). *Critique of urbanization: selected essays*. Gütersloh; Berlin: Bauverlag.
- Brenner, N., Marcuse, P. and Mayer, M. (2012). *Cities for people, not for profit: critical urban theory and the right to the city*. London; New York: Routledge.

Bromley, R. (1979). *The urban informal sector: critical perspectives on employment and housing policies*. Oxford; New York: Pergamon Press.

Bromley, R. (2000). Street vending and public policy: a global review. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 20 (1), 1–28.

Castells, M. and Portes, A. (1989). World underneath: the origins, dynamics, and effects of the informal economy. In: Portes, A., Castells, M., and Benton, L.A., (eds.). *The informal economy: studies in advanced and less developed countries*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 11–37.

Central Statistics Office. (1994). *Namibia 1991: population and housing census main report*. Windhoek: National Planning Commission. Available from [https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/1991\\_Population\\_and\\_Housing\\_Census\\_Basic\\_Analysis\\_with\\_Highlights.pdf](https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/1991_Population_and_Housing_Census_Basic_Analysis_with_Highlights.pdf) [Accessed 26 April 2020].

Central Statistics Office. (2011). *Namibia 2001: population and housing census main report*. Windhoek: National Planning Commission. Available from <https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/p19dmlgjjk1ojjdsd1ddd17is16jf1.pdf> [Accessed 26 April 2020].

Charman, A. et al. (2017). *Transformative leisure economies: Eveline Street, Katutura, Windhoek*. Cape Town: Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation.

Charman, A., Petersen, L. and Govender, T. (2020). *Township economy: people, spaces and practices*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Chen, M. (2012). The informal economy: definitions, theories and policies. *WIEGO Working Paper No 1*. 2012. Cambridge, MA; Manchester: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing. Available from [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Chen\\_WIEGO\\_WP1.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Chen_WIEGO_WP1.pdf) [Accessed 7 January 2016].

City of Windhoek. (2007). *Informal Trading Regulations*. Windhoek: City of Windhoek.

City of Windhoek. (2013). *Sustainable urban transport master plan*. Windhoek: City of Windhoek and Ministry of Works and Transport. Available from [http://www.windhoekcc.org.na/documents/SUTMP\\_Final%20Main%20Report%202013%20v1.pdf](http://www.windhoekcc.org.na/documents/SUTMP_Final%20Main%20Report%202013%20v1.pdf) [Accessed 15 February 2020].

City of Windhoek. (2017). *Transformational strategic plan (2017-2022)*. Windhoek: City of Windhoek. Available from [http://www.windhoekcc.org.na/documents/066\\_strategic\\_plan\\_final.pdf](http://www.windhoekcc.org.na/documents/066_strategic_plan_final.pdf) [Accessed 31 March 2020].

City of Windhoek. (no date a). *Windhoek town planning scheme*. Windhoek: City of Windhoek. Available from <http://www.windhoekcc.org.na/documents/Whk%20TPS%20Document%20Official.pdf> [Accessed 31 March 2020].

City of Windhoek. (no date b). *Health Services Division*. Available from [http://www.windhoekcc.org.na/depa\\_economic\\_development\\_division3.php](http://www.windhoekcc.org.na/depa_economic_development_division3.php) [Accessed 23 December 2019].

Cohen, J.-L. (2012). *The future of architecture, since 1889*. London; New York: Phaidon.

Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs and Odendaal, F.H. (1964). *Report of the commission of enquiry into South West Africa affairs, 1962-1963*. Pretoria: Republic of South Africa.

Conley, P. (2015). *Empowering market traders in Warwick Junction, Durban, South Africa*. Durban: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing and Asiye eTafuleni. Available from <http://www.inclusivocities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/IC-Durban-Case-Study.pdf> [Accessed 13 April 2016].

Cruz, T. and Forman, F. (2015). Changing practices: engaging informal public demands. In: Mörténböck, P., et al., (eds.). *Informal market worlds: the architecture of economic pressure*. Rotterdam: Nai010 Publishers.

Davis, M. (2007). *Planet of slums*. London; New York: Verso.

De Carlo, G. (2005). Architecture's public. In: Blundell-Jones, P., Petrescu, D., and Till, J., (eds.). *Architecture and participation*. London; New York: Taylor & Francis.

Delgado, G. (2018). A short socio-spatial history of Namibia. *ILMI Working Paper No 9*. 2018. Windhoek: Integrated Land Management Institute, Namibia University of Science and Technology. Available from <http://ilmi.nust.na/sites/default/files/WP9-DELGADO-A-short-history-of-Namibia-WEB.pdf> [Accessed 15 October 2019].

Delgado, G. and Lühl, P. (2014). *The market place: a study on the feasibility of developing a market on erf R/6296 and 6300 in Katutura, Windhoek*. Windhoek: Labour Resource and Research Institute and Polytechnic of Namibia. [unpublished].

Delgado, G. and Lühl, P. (2013). Financialisation and the production of inequality in Namibia: a socio-spatial perspective. *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik*, 29 (4), 46–66.

Delgado, G. and Lühl, P. (2016). The case for adequate housing for teachers in Windhoek. *ILMI Working Paper No 5*. Windhoek: Integrated Land Management Institute, Namibia University of Science and Technology. Available from <http://ilmi.nust.na/sites/default/files/2016-WP5-The-case-for-adequate-housing-for-teachers-in-Namibia-FINAL-A4-web.pdf>.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (2005). *Handbook of qualitative research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, California; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Die Republikein. (2011). Mall-geweld skud stad wakker. *Die Republikein*, 8 September. Available from <https://www.republikein.com.na/nuus/mall-geweld-skud-stad-wakker> [Accessed 29 April 2019].

Die Republikein. (2012). Herero Mall: nuwe klagte oor brutale polisie. *Die Republikein*, 18 April. Available from <https://www.republikein.com.na/nuus/herero-mall-nuwe-klagte-oor-brutale-polisie> [Accessed 22 April 2015].

Dobler, G. (2010). License to drink. Between liberation and inebriation in northern Namibia. In: Van Wolputte, S., and Fumanti, M., (eds.). *Beer in Africa: drinking spaces, states and selves*. Zürich: LIT Verlag.

Dobson, R. et al. (2009). *Working in Warwick: including street traders in urban plans*. Durban: School of Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Electoral Commission of Namibia. (no date). Available from [www.ecn.na](http://www.ecn.na) [Accessed 31 March 2020].

Engels, F. (2009). Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of classical German philosophy. Union Books.

Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks*. New York: Grove Press.

Ferguson, J. (2015). Give a man a fish: reflections on the new politics of distribution. Durham; London: Duke University Press.

Ferguson, J. and Li, T.M. (2018). Beyond the 'proper job': political-economic analysis after the century of labouring man. *PLAAS Working Paper No 51*. Cape Town: Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape. Available from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324507232\\_Beyond\\_the\\_Proper\\_Job\\_Political-economic\\_Analysis\\_after\\_the\\_Century\\_of\\_Labouring\\_Man\\_Institute\\_for\\_Poverty\\_Land\\_And\\_Agrarian\\_Studies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324507232_Beyond_the_Proper_Job_Political-economic_Analysis_after_the_Century_of_Labouring_Man_Institute_for_Poverty_Land_And_Agrarian_Studies) [Accessed 11 January 2019].

Financial Literacy Initiative. (no date). MITSMED: equipment aid scheme. Available from <http://www.fli-namibia.org/product/mitsmed-equipmentaidscheme/> [Accessed 23 December 2019].

Fioramonti, L. (2013). Gross domestic problem: the politics behind the world's most powerful number. London: Zed Books.

Foucault, M. (1991). Questions of method. In: Burchell, G., Gordon, C., and Miller, P., (eds.). *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Vintage.

Foucault, M. and Faubion, J.D. (1998). *Aesthetics, method, and epistemology*. New York: The New Press.

Frayne, B. (2000). Political ideology, social change, and planning practice in Namibia. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 20 (1), 52–65.

Friedman, F. (2000). Deconstructing Windhoek: the urban morphology of a post-apartheid city. *DPU Working Paper No 111*. London: Development Planning Unit, University College London. Available from [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/sites/bartlett/files/migrated-files/wp111\\_0.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/sites/bartlett/files/migrated-files/wp111_0.pdf) [Accessed 10 March 2015].

- Gehl, J. (1980). *Life between buildings: using public space*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Geingob, H.G. (2018). Statement by his excellency Dr. Hage G. Geingob, president of the Republic of Namibia, at the closing of the second national land conference.
- Gordon, R.J. (1977). *Mines, masters and migrants: life in a Namibian mine compound*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Government of the Republic of Namibia. (1992). Local Authorities Act, 1992.
- Government of the Republic of Namibia. (1998). Liquor Act, 1998.
- Government of the Republic of Namibia. (1999). Roads Contractor Company Act, 1999.
- Government of the Republic of Namibia. (2000). Local Authorities Amendment Act, 2000.
- Government of the Republic of Namibia. (2007). Labour Act, 2007.
- Hansohm, D. (1996). The state of the informal sector in Namibia: role, characteristics, and prospects. *NEPRU Working Paper No 49*. Windhoek: Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit.
- Hart, K. (1973). Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 11 (1), 61–89.
- Hart, K. (2015). How the informal economy took over the world. In: Mörttenböck, P., et al., (eds.). *Informal market worlds: the architecture of economic pressure*. Rotterdam: Nai010 Publishers.
- Harvey, D. (2006). *Spaces of global capitalism*. London; New York: Verso.
- Hengari, A.T. (2007). Let us tear down the 'Herero Mall'. *The Namibian*, 31 August. Available from <http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=29990&page=archive-read> [Accessed 3 November 2015].
- Heynen, H. (2005). The intertwinement of modernism and colonialism, a theoretical perspective. *Proceedings: Conference on modern architecture in East Africa around independence*. Dar es Salaam: ArchiAfrika.
- Holman Jones, S. (2005). Autoethnography: making the personal political. In: Denzin, N., and Lincoln, Y., (eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, California; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Horkheimer, M. (2002). *Critical theory: selected essays*. New York: Continuum.
- Hull, E. and James, D. (2012). Introduction: popular economies in South Africa. *Africa*, 82 (1), 1–19.

likela, S. (2019a). Kahungu promises hands-on approach. *The Namibian*, 16 December. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/196392/archive-read/Kahungu-promises-hands-on-approach> [Accessed 23 December 2019].

likela, S. (2019b). Windhoek corrects water tariffs. *The Namibian*, 30 September. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/193659/archive-read/Windhoek-corrects---water-tariffs> [Accessed 11 October 2019].

Inland Revenue Department, Ministry of Finance, Republic of Namibia. (2018). *Integrated Tax Administration System (ITAS) Portal*. Available from <https://www.itas.mof.na/index.html> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

Integrated Land Management Institute. (2017). *Mass housing development programme MHDP-2 blueprint*. Windhoek: Integrated Land Management Institute, Namibia University of Science and Technology. [unpublished].

International Labour Organization. (2015). Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, No. 204. Available from [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:R204](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R204) [Accessed 22 March 2020].

Isaacs, D. (2006). Liquor Act amended following protests. *The Namibian*, 21 July. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=23486&page=archive-read> [Accessed 3 January 2020].

Jacobs, J. (1961). *The death and life of great American cities*. New York: Vintage Books.

Kangootui, H. (2012). Herero mall traders want trading hours extended. *The Namibian*, 13 April. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=94016&page=archive-read> [Accessed 29 April 2019].

Kellner, D. (2002). Introduction to the second edition. In: Marcuse, H. *One-dimensional man: studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Routledge.

Kincheloe, J.L. and McLaren, P. (2005). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In: Denzin, N., and Lincoln, Y., (eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, California; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Kisting, D. (2011). 'Immoral' Herero Mall in Katutura regulated. *The Namibian*, 21 July. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=82902&page=archive-read> [Accessed 29 April 2019].

Kloß, S.T. (2017). The global south as subversive practice: challenges and potentials of a heuristic concept. *The Global South*, 11 (2), 1–17.

Koolhaas, R. et al. (2000). *Mutations*. Barcelona: Actar.

- Kozonguizi, G.K. (2013). *Socio-economic needs analysis*. Windhoek: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Namibian Informal Sector Organisation, and Namibia Housing and Urban Development.
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lefebvre, H. (2009). *The production of space*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lühl, P. (2012a). The production of inequality: from colonial planning to neoliberal urbanization in Windhoek. *Digest of Namibian Architecture*, 10, 26–31.
- Lühl, P. (2012b). Visions for the future revisited: an interview with Marley Tjitjo. *Digest of Namibian Architecture*, 10, 50–51.
- Lühl, P. (2018). Towards a new architecture school: positioning Namibia's first school of architecture theoretically within its post-colonial context. *Supplement to the Journal of the South African Institute of Architects*, 90, 33–41.
- Lühl, P. and Delgado, G. (2013). Mass housing in Namibia: a chance to transcend the socio-spatial geography of apartheid? *Digest of Namibian Architecture*, 11, 16–19.
- Lühl, P. and Delgado, G. (2018). Urban land reform in Namibia: getting ready for Namibia's urban future. Windhoek: Integrated Land Management Institute, Namibia University of Science and Technology. Available from <http://ilmi.nust.na/sites/default/files/LUHL-DELGADO-Urban-land-reform-in-Namibia-PP-1-2018-WEB.pdf> [Accessed 10 October 2019].
- Lühl, P., Delgado, G. and Kozonguizi, G.K. (2016). *New market on erf R/6296: joint feasibility study report*. Windhoek: Department of Architecture and Spatial Planning, Polytechnic of Namibia and Namibia Housing and Urban Development. [unpublished].
- Lund, F. and Skinner, C. (2004). Integrating the informal economy in urban planning and governance: a case study of the process of policy development in Durban, South Africa. *International Development Planning Review*, 26 (4), 432–456.
- Marcuse, H. (2002). *One-dimensional man: studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Routledge.
- Marx, C. and Kelling, E. (2019). Knowing urban informalities. *Urban Studies*, 56 (3), 494–509.
- Mati, F. (2012). *The case of Muthurwa Market, Nairobi*. South African Local Economic Development Network and Local Economic Development Network of Africa. Available from [http://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/managing\\_informality\\_local\\_governments\\_practices\\_towards\\_the\\_informal\\_economy.pdf](http://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/managing_informality_local_governments_practices_towards_the_informal_economy.pdf) [Accessed 21 April 2017].
- Mayer, M. (2010). *Social movements in the (post-) neoliberal city*. London: Bedford Press.



Mbembe, J.-A. and Nuttall, S. (2004). Writing the world from an African metropolis. *Public Culture*, 16 (3).

Meagher, K. (1995). Crisis, informalization and the urban informal sector in sub-Saharan Africa. *Development and Change*, 26 (2), 259–284.

Melber, H. (2016). Revisiting the Windhoek Old Location. *BAB Working Paper No 3*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien.

Memmi, A. (2003). *The colonizer and the colonized*. London: Earthscan.

Memmi, A. (2006). *Decolonization and the decolonized*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.

Miessen, M. (2010a). Articulated power relations: Markus Miessen in conversation with Chantal Mouffe. Available from [https://www.westminster.ac.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/6457/csd\\_mouffe\\_interview\\_with\\_miessen\\_ArticulatedPowerRelations.pdf](https://www.westminster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/6457/csd_mouffe_interview_with_miessen_ArticulatedPowerRelations.pdf) [Accessed 14 January 2016].

Miessen, M. (2010b). *The nightmare of participation: crossbench praxis as a mode of criticality*. New York: Sternberg Press.

Miessen, M. and Basar, S. (eds.). (2006). *Did someone say participate? An atlas of spatial practice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Ministry of Labour. (2002). *The Namibia labour force survey 2000: final report of analysis*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia.

Ministry of Labour. (2004). *Namibia informal employment survey*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia.

Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation and Social Security Commission. (2017). *Namibia informal economy: case study report*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia.

Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development. (1991). *Namibia national housing policy*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia.

Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development. (2009). *Namibia national housing policy*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia. Available from [https://www.npc.gov.na/downloads/Policies%20\(By%20institutions%20or%20sector\)/Urban%20and%20Rural%20Development/National%20Housing%20Policy,%201991.pdf](https://www.npc.gov.na/downloads/Policies%20(By%20institutions%20or%20sector)/Urban%20and%20Rural%20Development/National%20Housing%20Policy,%201991.pdf) [Accessed 3 May 2018].

Ministry of Works and Transport. (2017). Minimum fees chargeable by architects and quantity surveyors: Architects and Quantity Surveyor Act 1979.

Mörtenböck, P. et al. (eds.). (2015). *Informal market worlds: the architecture of economic pressure*. Rotterdam: Nai010 Publishers.

Mouffe, C. (2001). Every form of art has a political dimension. *Grey Room*, 1 (2), 89–125.

Mutanga, M. (2020). OTA removes squatter shacks. *Informanté*, 23 April. Available from <https://informante.web.na/ota-removes-squatter-shacks> [Accessed 25 April 2020].

Mwilima, N. (2006). *Namibia's informal economy: possibilities for trade union intervention*. Windhoek: Labour Resource and Research Institute.

Namibia Statistics Agency. (2014). *Namibia population projections 2011-2041*. Windhoek: Namibia Statistics Agency. Available from <https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/p19dn4fhgp14t5ns24g4p6r1c401.pdf> [Accessed 3 December 2019].

Namibia Statistics Agency. (2015). *Namibia labour force survey 2014*. Windhoek: Namibia Statistics Agency. Available from <https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/9b8e77842e3dec459407c2a76b9d79ab.pdf> [Accessed 3 October 2019].

Namibia Statistics Agency. (2017a). *Namibia inter-censal demographic survey 2016 report*. Windhoek: Namibia Statistics Agency. Available from [https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/NIDS\\_2016.pdf](https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/NIDS_2016.pdf) [Accessed 3 May 2019].

Namibia Statistics Agency. (2017b). *Namibia labour force survey 2016*. Windhoek: Namibia Statistics Agency. Available from [https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/Labour\\_Force\\_Survey\\_-\\_20161.pdf](https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/Labour_Force_Survey_-_20161.pdf) [Accessed 3 December 2019].

Namibia Statistics Agency. (2019). *Namibia labour force survey 2018*. Windhoek: Namibia Statistics Agency. Available from [https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/Labour\\_Force\\_Survey\\_final\\_-\\_2018.pdf](https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/Labour_Force_Survey_final_-_2018.pdf) [Accessed 13 November 2019].

Namibia Tourism Board. (no date). Five reasons to book a township tour in Namibia. *Welcome to Namibia: the official website of the Namibia Tourism Board*. Available from <http://www.namibiatourism.com.na/blog/Five-Reasons-to-Book-a-Township-Tour-in-Namibia> [Accessed 17 October 2019].

Namibian Sun. (2017). Town planners criticise govt. *Namibian Sun*, 21 October. Available from <https://www.namibiansun.com/news/town-planners-criticise-govt> [Accessed 31 March 2020].

Namupala, M., Ganes, S. and Uautua, U. (forthcoming). *Upgrading the Epupa market and the integration of informality into central Opuwo*. Windhoek: Integrated Land Management Institute, Namibia University of Science and Technology.

National Planning Commission. (2008). *Third national development plan (2007/08-2011/12)*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia.

National Planning Commission. (2012). *Namibia's fourth national development plan (2012/13-2016/17)*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia. Available from [https://www.npc.gov.na/national-plans-ndp-4/?wpfb\\_dl=37](https://www.npc.gov.na/national-plans-ndp-4/?wpfb_dl=37) [Accessed 4 March 2019].

National Planning Commission. (2017). *Namibia's 5<sup>th</sup> national development plan (2017/18-2021/22)*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia. Available from [http://www.npc.gov.na/?wpfb\\_dl=293](http://www.npc.gov.na/?wpfb_dl=293) [Accessed 13 March 2019].

National Planning Commission. (2018). *Status of the Namibian economy*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia. Available from [https://www.npc.gov.na/?wpfb\\_dl=315](https://www.npc.gov.na/?wpfb_dl=315) [Accessed 3 December 2019].

Negri, A. and Scelsi, R.V. (2008). *Goodbye Mr. Socialism*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

New Era. (2018a). Geingob wants rural-urban influx control. *New Era*, 5 February. Available from <https://neweralive.na/posts/geingob-wants-rural-urban-influx-control> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

New Era. (2018b). Minimum wage for domestic workers up by 4.15%. *New Era*, 11 February. Available from <https://neweralive.na/posts/minimum-wage-for-domestic-workers-up-by-415> [Accessed 23 December 2019].

New Era. (2018c). Windhoek mayor blames street vendors for city's health risks. *New Era*, 19 February. Available from <https://neweralive.na/posts/windhoek-mayor-blames-street-vendors-for-citys-health-risks> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

Ngutjinazo, O. (2019). 155 new hepatitis E cases reported. *The Namibian*, 30 July. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/191337/archive-read/155-new-hepatitis-E-cases-reported> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

Nickanor, N.M. et al. (2017). *The supermarket revolution and food security in Namibia*. Cape Town: African Food Security Urban Network and Hungry Cities Partnership.

Office of the President. (2004). *Namibia vision 2030: policy framework for long-term national development*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia.

Pager, H. (1976a). Augustineum, Windhoek [image]. Available from [https://colnect.com/de/stamps/stamp/434944-Augustineum\\_Training\\_Institute-Südwestafrika](https://colnect.com/de/stamps/stamp/434944-Augustineum_Training_Institute-Südwestafrika) [Accessed 26 April 2020].

Pager, H. (1976b). Katutura, Windhoek [image]. Available from [https://colnect.com/de/stamps/stamp/434945-Katutura\\_State\\_Hospital\\_Windhoek-Südwestafrika](https://colnect.com/de/stamps/stamp/434945-Katutura_State_Hospital_Windhoek-Südwestafrika) [Accessed 26 April 2020].

Pager, H. (1977). J G Strijdom, Windhoek [image]. Available from [https://colnect.com/de/stamps/stamp/434956-J\\_G\\_Strijdom\\_Airport-Südwestafrika](https://colnect.com/de/stamps/stamp/434956-J_G_Strijdom_Airport-Südwestafrika) [Accessed 26 April 2020].

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, California; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Pendleton, W.C. (1974). Katutura, a place where we do not stay: the social structure and social relationships of people in an African township in South West Africa. San Diego: San Diego State University Press.

Petrescu, D. (2005). Losing control, keeping desire. In: Blundell-Jones, P., Petrescu, D., and Till, J., (eds.). *Architecture and participation*. London; New York: Taylor & Francis.

Republic of Namibia. (1990). The constitution of the Republic of Namibia.

Rodney, W. (1981). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. Washington: Howard University Press.

Roy, A. (2005). Urban informality: toward an epistemology of planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71 (2), 147–158.

Roy, A. (2015). Bottom billion capitalism: how informality became a global market. In: Mörténböck, P., et al., (eds.). *Informal market worlds: the architecture of economic pressure*. Rotterdam: Nai010 Publishers.

Scheurich, J.J. and McKenzie, K.B. (2005). Foucault's methodologies: archaeology and genealogy. In: Denzin, N.K., and Lincoln, Y.S., (eds.). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, California; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Simon, D. (1984). Urban poverty, informal sector activity and inter-sectoral linkages: evidence from Windhoek, Namibia. *Development and Change*, 15 (4), 551–576.

Simon, D. (1996). Restructuring the local state in post-apartheid cities: Namibian experience, and lessons for South Africa. *African Affairs*, 95 (378), 51–84.

Simon, David. (1985). Decolonisation and local government in Namibia: the neo-apartheid plan, 1977-83. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 23 (3), 507–526.

Simone, A.M. (2004). People as infrastructure: intersecting fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, 16 (3), 407–429.

Sissoko, S. (2012). *Delegating the management of markets to informal traders: the case of Bamako, Mali*. South African Local Economic Development Network and Local Economic Development Network of Africa. Available from [http://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/managing\\_informality\\_local\\_governments\\_practices\\_towards\\_the\\_informal\\_economy.pdf](http://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/managing_informality_local_governments_practices_towards_the_informal_economy.pdf) [Accessed 21 April 2017].

Skinner, C. (2008). Street trade in Africa: a review. *WIEGO Working Paper No 5*. Cambridge, MA; Manchester: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing. Available from [http://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Skinner\\_WIEGO\\_WP5.pdf](http://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Skinner_WIEGO_WP5.pdf) [accessed 23 June 2016].

Surveyor General. (1921). Farm area South West Africa [map].

Swyngedouw, E. (2016). On the impossibility of an emancipatory architecture: the deadlock of critical theory, insurgent architects, and the beginning of politics. In: Lahiji, N.Z., (ed.). *Can architecture be an emancipatory project? Dialogues on architecture and the left*. London: Zed Books, 48–69.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2019). Bantustan. Available from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bantustan> [Accessed 26 April 2020].

The Namibian. (2011). Police tackle Herero Mall problems. *The Namibian*, 17 August. Available from <http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=84142&page=archive-read> [Accessed 15 January 2015].

The Namibian. (2012). Kavango governor disturbed by land grabbing by wealthy. *The Namibian*, 27 March. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/93369/archive-read/Kavango-Governor-disturbed-by-land-grabbing-by-wealthy> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

The Namibian. (2016). Keeping Windhoek clean comes at a price. *The Namibian*, 15 June. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/151995/archive-read/Keeping-Windhoek-clean-comes-at-a-price> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

The Namibian. (2018a). Construction workers get 5,6% wage increase. *The Namibian*, 13 April. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/176402/archive-read/Construction-workers-get-56pct-wage-increase> [Accessed 23 February 2020].

The Namibian. (2018b). Street vendors protest high fines. *The Namibian*, 22 October. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/182467/archive-read/Street-vendors-protest-high-fines> [Accessed 23 February 2020].

The Namibian. (2019). Shacks 'offend' Geingob... wants them gone in 5 years. *The Namibian*, 30 January. Available from <https://www.namibian.com.na/185139/archive-read/Shacks-offend-Geingob-wants-them-gone-in-5-years> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

The World Bank. (2017). Namibia. Available from <http://data.worldbank.org/country/namibia> [Accessed 23 April 2017].

The World Bank. (no date). GINI index (World Bank estimate): country ranking. Available from <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/SI.POV.GINI/rankings> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

Till, J. (2005). The negotiation of hope. In: Blundell-Jones, P., Petrescu, D., and Till, J., (eds.). *Architecture and participation*. London; New York: Taylor & Francis.

Tjibeba, H.R. (2003). The history of the Rhenish Mission Society in Namibia with particular reference to the African Methodist Episcopal Church schism (1946- 1990). PhD thesis, University of Durban-Westville, Durban. Available from [https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10413/7578/Tjibeba\\_Hendrik\\_Rudolf\\_2003.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10413/7578/Tjibeba_Hendrik_Rudolf_2003.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) [Accessed 15 January 2020].

- Tjirera, E. (2013). Ethnography of 'Herero Mall' (Windhoek) as a post-apartheid social space. Master thesis, University of Namibia, Windhoek. Available from <http://repository.unam.edu.na/bitstream/handle/11070/912/tjirera2013.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [Accessed 23 March 2015].
- University of Westminster. (2015). University of Westminster code of practice governing the ethical conduct of research 2015-2016.
- Us Namibia Magazine. (2017). Ouma Tjivikua: Namibia's most fruitful grandma turns 85. *Us Namibia Magazine*, October.
- Van der Linden, E. (1994). The role of the informal sector. *NEPRU Working Paper No 33*. Windhoek: Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit.
- Varley, A. (2013). Postcolonialising informality? *Environment and Planning: Society and Space*, 31 (1), 4–22.
- Wachsmuth, D. (2014). City as ideology: reconciling the explosion of the city form with the tenacity of the city concept. *Environment and Planning: Society and Space*, 32 (1), 75–90.
- Wallace, M. (1997). Health and society in Windhoek, Namibia, 1915-1945. PhD thesis, University of London, London.
- Wallace, M. and Kinahan, J. (2011). *A history of Namibia: from the beginning to 1990*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wandel, T. (2001). The power of discourse: Michel Foucault and critical theory. *Cultural Values*, 5 (3), 368–382.
- Watson, V. (2003). Conflicting rationalities: implications for planning theory and ethics. *Planning Theory and Practice*, 4 (4), 395–407.
- Werner, W. (2015). 25 Years of land reform. *ILMI Working Paper No 1*. 2015. Windhoek: Integrated Land Management Institute, Namibia University of Science and Technology. Available from <http://ilmi.nust.na/sites/default/files/2015-WERNER-25-Years-of-land-reform-in-Namibia-A4.pdf> [Accessed 26 April 2017].