

“Anything about us, without us, is against us”: An ethnography of
the genocide reparations and decolonial movements in Namibia

Bayron Van Wyk

Student number: 3985010

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Award of Masters of Arts in Anthropology at the University of the
Western Cape

Supervisor: Professor Heike Becker



Table of Contents

DECLARATION	v
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
CHAPTER ONE	10
INTRODUCTION	10
1.1. Protesting the agreement between the Namibian and German governments for reparations for the colonial genocide (1904-1908)	10
1.2. Ethnicity and the struggle for genocide reparations	20
1.3. The Big Question	20
1.4. An emergent decolonial (memory) struggle	22
1.5. Contextualising the struggle for reparations by the Ovaherero and Nama	23
1.5.1. Commemorations	23
1.5.2. Namibia’s memory politics	25
1.6. An overview of decolonial memory activists and queer activists calling for the decolonization of Namibia	26
1.7. Thesis Structure	27
CHAPTER TWO	30
AN EXPLORATION OF THE PAST: MEMORY, ETHNICITY AND COLONIALITY	30
2.1. Introduction	30
2.2. Dealing with the colonial past	30
2.3. Memory	32
2.3.1. The relations between memory and social activism	32
2.3.2. Multidirectional memory	33
2.3.3. Situating the theory on “multidirectional memory” in Namibia	35
2.4. On ethnicity	36
2.5. The decolonial turn	37
2.5.1. Coloniality	38
2.5.2. Decoloniality	40
2.6. Conclusion	41

CHAPTER THREE	42
SETTING THE SCENE	42
3.1. Introduction	42
3.2. Entangled decolonial struggles against different forms of coloniality	42
3.2.1. The emergence of the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement	43
3.2.2. The ‘SlutShameWalk’ movement	45
3.3. Research Methodology	47
3.3.1. Pre-fieldwork	48
3.3.2. Encounters with COVID-19: personal and family struggles	51
3.3.3. Becoming Friends	52
3.3.4. An activist ethnography	53
3.3.5. My positionality	55
3.3.6. Fieldwork processes	59
3.4. Conclusion	63
CHAPTER FOUR	64
RESISTING COLONIAL SPATIALITY IN WINDHOEK’S URBAN LANDSCAPES	64
4.1. Introduction	64
4.2. The coloniality of public spaces	66
4.2.1. The making of a colonial city	70
4.3. The Curt von François statue	72
4.3.1. Visiting the statue	72
4.3.2. A history of the erection of the statue	76
4.4. Decolonial memory activism against the Curt von François statue	78
4.4.1. Who is Hildegard Titus?	78
4.4.2. The #ACurtFarewell petition	81
4.4.3. Responses to the petition	83
4.4.4. The Council meeting	85
4.4.5. Visit to the City of Windhoek Museum	88
4.5. The #BlackLivesMatter protests	91
4.6. Conclusion	95
CHAPTER FIVE	97
DECOLONIZING THE SKULLS	97
5.1. Introduction	97
5.2. On the skulls	99

5.3. The first commemoration of the return of skulls from Germany in 2011	102
5.4. The Namibia Genocide Association	105
5.4.1. Who is Laidlaw Peringanda?	107
5.5. Decolonizing the skulls	109
5.5.1. Swakopmund cemetery “cleanings”	109
5.5.2. Attempts at getting the Municipality of Swakopmund have the graves recognized	115
5.6. Rapping about the skulls	117
5.6.1. ‘Hamakari’	119
5.7. Conclusion	124
CHAPTER SIX	126
DECOLONIAL CALLS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS	126
6.1. Introduction	126
6.2. State-sanctioned homophobia	129
6.2.1. The early years	129
6.2.2. The emergence of homophobia	131
6.3. Namibia’s Equal Rights Movement	132
6.3.1. Life histories	133
6.3.2. The legacy of queer activism in Namibia	136
6.4. Court cases	137
6.4.1. Engagements with Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl	137
6.4.2. On the sodomy law	140
6.5. Windhoek’s first decolonial monument: Rainbow sidewalk	141
6.6. ‘Kapana’: Namibia’s first gay movie	146
6.6.1. International Pride Month	146
6.6.2. A synopsis of the film	148
6.6.3. Namibia’s film industry	150
6.6.4. ‘Kapana’: exploring masculinities and their impact on same-sex relations	151
6.7. Conclusion	154
CHAPTER SEVEN	156
CONCLUSION	156
7.1. Possible avenues for future research	163
BIBLIOGRAPHY	165

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that *“Anything about us, without us, is against us”*: *An ethnography of the genocide reparations and decolonial movements in Namibia* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

3

Bayron van Wyk

12 December 2022



ABSTRACT

This thesis explores decolonial memory activism and queer activism in Namibia. It demonstrates how activists have mobilized in intersectional struggles (Becker 2020; 2022) against the structural remnants of colonialism. The activists have pointed to how racist-, patriarchal- and heteronormative hierarchies that were imposed through German and South African colonialisms have remained and are taken even further in the postcolony. In this sense, activists have targeted colonial monuments, colonial laws and the colonization of human remains in their decolonial campaigns. I specifically focus on the *#ACurtFarewell* petition against the Curt von François statue, the formation of the Namibia Equal Rights Movement calling for the recognition of same-sex relationships, and the campaigns by the Namibia Genocide Association (NGA) and other activists for the recognition of the graves of Prisoner-of-War graves to show respect to those who died during Germany's colonial genocide (1904-1908) in Namibia.

I situate their calls within the context of broader activism aimed at dealing with the colonial injustices from the German and South African colonial periods. I particularly reference the struggle by the Ovaherero and Nama for reparations against the German government. I show however that through their campaigns for reparations the two groups have emphasized their ethnic identities. This I argue relates with the ethnicization of postcolonial Namibia, that is the Namibian government has used ethnic identities with origins in South African colonialism (Becker 2015; Akuupa 2015) in (postcolonial) nation-building efforts. This is happening while the Namibian government has introduced a postcolonial master narrative that draws mainly from the experiences of the ruling elite during the liberation struggle (1966-1989) in exile – and overlooking other experiences of other groups, particularly those of the Ovaherero and Nama (Kössler 2015) and the civilian population of northern Namibia (Becker 2011).

In this thesis I reveal how activists have resisted against rigid notions of ethnicity and are working to overcome the limitations posed by it. Their aim is to address colonial injustices that emanate from the German and South African colonial periods.

Keywords: Namibia, reparations, ethnicity, memory, decolonial, queer, activism, Hildegard Titus, Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe, Omar van Reenen, Laidlaw Peringanda, Boli Mootseng

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Poster by political parties announcing the protest event

Figure 2: Myself with some of the young members of PDM and LPM political parties

Figure 3: Flag of the NUDO party with the crowd of protestors in the background

Figure 4: A road sign pointing to the Von François statue in central Windhoek

Figure 5: Hildegard performing *Without Question*

Figure 6: A day after the silent protests I visited the Von François statue and came across placards situated at the its bottom

Figure 7: A poster announcing the commemoration event at the Independence Memorial Museum

Figure 8: A photo of the group of participants for the cleanings in front of the Swakopmund Genocide Memorial Stone.

Figure 9: A photo of some of the participants at the graves engaging in the cleaning.

Figure 10: Sidewalk at Brewers Market with the Rainbow flag.

Figure 11: Placards placed at the Rainbow flag at the Brewers Market.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis is owed to the support of many people that I encountered since enrolling at the Department of Anthropology at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in 2019. I am grateful to my supervisor, Heike Becker for the guidance she provided on writing. She eased my fears about undertaking my first ethnography since completing my first degree in History. She encouraged me to read other ethnographies, making me realize the joys of ethnographic writing. Throughout my studies she remained a source of constant inspiration and support. My thesis journey was profoundly impacted by the devastating COVID-19 pandemic that swept across the globe. During this time, she became a friend, and helped me overcome some of the personal struggles that I was faced with. When I was on the brink of cancelling my studies over these struggles, she encouraged me to continue irrespective of what I was faced with at the time.

I am also grateful to the Carl Schlettwein Foundation for the generous financial support I received from them. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit they were kind enough to extend my funding for an extra year. I really appreciate it.

At UWC I found a home with a group of supportive and inspirational academics and fellow students. Some of them (much like Heike!) went over and beyond their professional duties to support me in completing my studies. I am grateful to Melissa Louw, the Departmental Administrator, who helped me through all the bureaucratic tussles at UWC. Kelly Gillespie and William Ellis were both inspirational and thoughtful in guiding me through my work as Tutor and Graduate Lecturing Assistant (GLA) in the Department. Hameedah Parker offered support with my study visa. Zuko Sikhafungana, who I worked with together as GLA, kept me sane over WhatsApp with our chats over some of the demands of the GLA position.

The writing of a thesis is a demanding endeavour that comes with a lot of personal sacrifices. To my friends and family, thanks for putting up with the moments of absence and silence while I was away in Cape Town writing my thesis. It also came with lots of stress and mood swings. Thanks for having patience with me. My mother, Magdalena van Wyk and two friends, Bernard Moore, Cathrine Coetzee – were there when I needed support from loved-ones the most.

Lastly, (and most importantly) I would like to thank my interlocutors who opened their lives to a nosy anthropologist, who may have had too many personal questions to ask. Thanks for trusting me with your stories of personal struggles and for telling me about

the inspiring work you involved in. I hope that by writing about your inspirational stories we can start with building a better world for ourselves and our children.

Hildegard Titus, Omar van Reenen, Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe, Guillermo Delgado, Phillip Lühl, Phillipe Talavera, Laidlaw Peringanda and Boli Mootseng – I owe you all a great thanks for contributing to my study.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Protesting the agreement between the Namibian and German governments for reparations for the colonial genocide (1904-1908)

On 21 September 2021 I attended a protest in central Windhoek. The event was organized by a group comprising of various opposition political parties and movements in Namibia. These political parties and movements come from different backgrounds and represent different constituencies; these range from the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM), which grew out of the former Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), which was formed by politicians who advocated in a South African-controlled independence process, through to the more radical Landless People's Movement (LPM), which was formed by former Swapo Youth League leader Bernardus Swartbooi, and the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement that was formed by another former Swapo Youth League Leader, Job Amupanda. There was also the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) established in 2007 by the former Swapo party member Hidipo Hamutenya, ethnic Ovaherero-based National Unity for Democracy Organisation (NUDO) and Rehoboth Baster-based United People's Movement (UPM) and Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) that was newly established in 2019 by Dr Panduleni Itula. About a hundred protesters had assembled. Most of them were members of the political parties and movements – like my friend, Brian¹ who is a member of the LPM's Youth Wing - Student and Youth Command Element. The opposition political parties and movements had called for the protest but there were also non-party politically affiliated activists who were calling for a just agreement for genocide reparations, including myself. Slightly more than half of the protesters were women, and they belonged to different age groups, between 20 and 70 years of age. The group carried banners, which read “STOP THE VOTE”, “THE MAJORITY VOTING ON IT ARE NOT DESCENDANTS OF THE VICTIMS” “WE REJECT THE ATRICIOUS SWAPO GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT” and “PROPER REPARATIONS NOW!!!”

¹ This is his real name.



Figure 1: Poster by the political parties announcing protests



Figure 2: Myself with some of the young members of the PDM and LPM political parties. Photo taken by one of the protestors who was also present.

On that day the Namibian government was presenting the agreement on genocide reparations with the German government to the National Assembly, Namibia's Parliament for its members to vote on it. Through this protest the members of the opposition political parties and movements were showing their dissatisfaction with the agreement between the Namibian and the German governments for genocide reparations, which had been announced by the German Foreign Ministry on 25 May of

2021. After more than five years, the negotiations about genocide reparations between the two governments were concluded, and it was communicated to the media and publics in both countries that an agreement had been reached between the two delegations. This document agreed to an apology from the German government and the payment of of 1.1. Billion over thirty years for the colonial genocide. The funds will be paid in the form of development projects in several southern and central regions of Namibia. The Khomas, Otjozondjupa, Kunene, Omaheke, Erongo, Hardap and /Karas regions have been historically occupied by the Ovaherero and Nama, as well as other groups such as Damara and San. Furthermore, the funds will be administered jointly by the Namibian and German governments (Van Wyk 2021a).²

Immediately after the agreement was announced, there had been protest in Namibia, especially by organisations of the descendants of the Ovaherero and Nama communities, who had been the primary victims of the genocide that was committed by the German colonial army in 1904-1908. For some time, the protests had died down, largely due to the terrible third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit Namibia between June and August 2021 (Becker 2021a). Now, in September, the protesters were back on the streets.

The organizers of the September protest first held a gathering at the Miami Service Station in Nama Location, Katutura – Windhoek's historically black-designate township³– before marching along the main boulevard of Independence Avenue to the Parliament precincts on Robert Mugabe Avenue in central Windhoek, colloquially known as town, *odorpa* or *dorp* [in English: “town”].⁴ I met the group halfway on their march to Parliament. In town I strolled along Mburumba Kerina Avenue (formerly known as *Bahnhofstrasse*) close to the Windhoek Railway Station and the Owambo Campaign Memorial – a monument that was erected in 1917 in honour of the South African campaign against Chief Mandume ya Ndemufayo of the Kwanyama of northern Namibia⁵- to the Windhoek Central Police Station building, where I sat for a short while, waiting for the crowd marching from Katutura. I then phoned Brian to find out if the march had kicked off. While I was on the line with him, I heard the loud cheers of

² While the document carefully avoids to refer to “reparations”, the Namibian government, in their press release upon the publication of the agreement, used the term “reparations”, presumably to acquiesce critics.

³ This township was further divided into separate “locations” for each ethnic group: “Nama”, “Damara”, “Herero” etc.

⁴ *Odorpa* is used both in Otjherero and Oshivambo which was adopted from the Afrikaans *dorp* (see Tjirera 2019).

⁵ The memorial has been reappropriated by some who stress that the head of Mandume ya Ndemufayo was buried there (Shiweda & Likuwa 2020).

the crowd and whistles being blown in the background. Brian was at the gathering. The marchers, however, were still at the Miami Service Station in Katutura's Nama location and did not want to leave until more protestors had joined.

After a short while I went down along Independence Avenue to the corner of John Meinert Street, named after a former Mayor of Windhoek (1929-1938) during the South African colonial period. Across the street was the First National Bank (FNB)'s "John Meinert" Branch, while on the opposite of the road the newly renovated buildings of the High Court of Namibia stood in the background of the Kudu monument. While I was waiting for the marchers to arrive, I was pondering the colonial connotations of the more than life-size sculpture of the large antelope in cast-metal monument. It was designed and produced in Germany by Fritz Behn⁶, who was famous for his many works of African animal sculptures; he was also a strong supporter of German colonialism and the Nazi party. I kept wondering why in 1960 the then Windhoek City Council had erected it as a 'spirit of hope' statue.⁷

Seated next to me on the square's side curb were a few newspaper sellers, selling the day's paper to passer-byers. I called Brian again for an update on the march and he told me that they had passed the Katutura Intermediate Hospital - Windhoek's apartheid-era "blacks only" hospital. Soon thereafter I noticed a police car stopping at the robots (as traffic lights are generally known in Southern Africa) and I instantly knew that the crowd was approaching. My phone then started to ring. It was Brian calling. *Bayron, waar is jy?* ("Bayron, where are you?") he asked while I was frantically trying to answer the phone. *Ons is hier by die poliesstasie* ("We are at the police station") Brian continued. *Ek is hier by...* ("I am here at...") as I stuttered looking at my surroundings trying to find the name of the nearest "known" place. *By John Meinert* ("At John Meinert") I answered.

By this time now, the loud chants of the crowd were becoming more clearer as I walked over to the sidewalk and noticed McHenri Venaani, the leader of the PDM, who was leading the crowd in the front with a police escort. The leader of the political opposition in Namibia's Parliament was formally clad in a dark blue suit and green tie. I slowly waited on the side before flowing into the crowd as we passed the robots. There were protestors dressed in T-shirts with the colours of the various political parties, including LPM, PDM and NUDO, while others were in what is known as

⁶ See <https://www.travelnewsnamibia.com/news/heritage-hour-city/>

⁷ See <https://www.bing.com/search?q=kudu+monument+windhoek&go=Search&q=ds&form=QBRE>

Ovaherero/Ovambanderu⁸ and Nama traditional attire. Walking next to me, was an Omumbanderu woman dressed in her characteristic green traditional attire of a full-length dress with multiple petticoats. There were also Nama women in their colourful, patchwork *Namarok* and *veldskoene*⁹, which much like the Ovaherero dress the style by Nama women was modelled after the dress of missionary women during German colonialism. There were flags of the various political parties that were being flown high up in the sky. There were loud chants of the crowd with the *ombimbi* of the Ovaherero, a traditional war cry of the Ovaherero. Brian called me again, but because of the loud chants of the crowd, we were unable to talk to each other over the phone. So I looked around to see if I could find him, which I did.



Figure 3: Flag of the NUDO party with the crowd of protesors behind. Photo taken by one of the protestors present at the event.

⁸ These are the two main Otjiherero-speaking groups in Namibia. The Ovaherero have historically occupied central Namibia as Okahandja as the main location, while the Ovambanderu historically occupied the eastern parts of Namiba (present-day Omaheke region). They have since adopted different coloured dress to show their different tribal allegiance – red for the Ovaherero and green for the Ovambanderu. Interestingly the style, which is today known as traditional Herero dress, was adapted from the dresses worn the German missionary wives, which the various Ovaherero factions have adopted as ‘traditional’ (Hendrickson 1994).

⁹ Shoes made from leather that have traditionally worn by the Nama.

At the turnoff at Independence Avenue to Fidel Castro Street at Zoo Park, a recreational park that was established during German colonial period in 1894, there was a road sign pointing to the Owela Museum, *Alte Feste*, *Reiterdenkmal*, Parliament Building and Windhoek Tourism Information Office. This struck me as odd since the *Reiterdenkmal* (as the Equestrian statue monument has been referred to in German), for a long time Windhoek's "most aggressive" and controversial colonial monument (Steinmetz & Hell 2006:117) had already been removed from public view in 2013 and placed in the courtyard of the *Alte Feste*, the German colonial-era old fort. The *Reiterdenkmal* had made way for the construction of the postcolonial monumental landscape comprising the Independence Memorial Museum (known as the Independence Museum), Sam Nujoma Statue and adjacent Genocide Memorial (Becker 2018a). The Windhoek Tourism Information Office, which was located at the city's former main parking area, has also since been replaced with the skyscrapers of the First National Bank (FNB) and NEDBANK buildings, Freedom Plaza apartment block and the Hilton Hotel.

As we proceeded up on the small hill on Fidel Castro an elderly man¹⁰ turned to me and asked in Afrikaans *Hoekom will hulle nie hê ons moet staan nie?* ("Why do they not want us to stand here?") referring to the police escort in front of the crowd. *Is dit oor die Duitsers?* ("Does it have to do with the Germans?") he continued. *Ja, hulle will nie hê ons moet by die Duitsers staan nie!* ("Yes, they don't want to us to stand at the Germans!") I replied as I confirmed his suspicions. The man's question referred to the offices of the German Embassy located in the Sanlam Centre, directly opposite Zoo Park. The crowd started jogging up on the hill, but with Brian's limping leg, we preferred to walk up slowly. As we marched, we passed JP Karuaihe Street (formerly *Lüderitzstraße*), the Goethe Centre¹¹ which is housed in the Estorff Building, and the *Christuskirche* (Christ Church), both architectural relicts from the German colonial era. We then arrived at the gates of the National Assembly, also still housed in the *Tintenpalast* (ink palace), once the administrator's seat during the era of German and South African colonial rule over Namibia. There I noticed the newly constructed fence around the boundary wall of parliament which has recently been the subject of much debate in Namibia.¹²

¹⁰ He was not dressed in traditional attire or colours of the political parties, therefore I could not easily make out which groups at the protest he belonged to.

¹¹ A (international) German cultural institution that offers various cultural and language learning programmes. In Namibia it offers German, Oshivambo and Afrikaans language courses. It also holds cultural events focused on music (Night Under The Stars), dance and plays (Otjomuise Live Arts Festival). See <https://www.goethe.de/ins/na/en/index.html>

¹² See <https://fb.watch/ffpYklpczG/>

At the gates, the crowd came together. More protestors came with cars and parked at *Christuskirche* before joining the rest of the crowd in front of the gates of the National Assembly. Police officers were stationed at the gates in order to prevent the crowd from entering the parliament grounds, by locking the gates. Some protestors picked dry palm leaves from the sidewalk and held them up in the air. Ovaherero women were ululating, while moving in slow sequential dance moves, back and forth. There were also sounds of whistles being blown. I turned to Brian to find out what it was about. He told me that this was also a war cry by Ovaherero women, which they would normally make when men returned from the battlegrounds, during war. Behind the now stationary crowd, I could see the Independence Museum¹³ towering high-above the *Christuskirche*. In front of the Museum, was the statue of Sam Nujoma, holding up the Namibian Constitution.

Then, Bernardus Swartbooi the leader of LPM, started to climb over the gates, he was followed by some protestors. Those who crossed over started running towards the steps in front of the Parliament buildings, while Brian and I, with other protestors, preferred to wait under a tree until the police eventually opened up the gates and we also walked to the steps of Parliament. In front of Parliament buildings, were more postcolonial monuments, including that of *Ombara Tjitambi* Hosea Kutako, Reverend Theofilus Hamutumbangela and *Gaob* Hendrik Samuel Witbooi who all played an important role in Namibia's anti-apartheid struggle.¹⁴ There were more police officers, while parliament staffers were looking down from the building's balconies at protestors, taking photographs and videos. Some of the opposition leaders, including McHenri Venaani were engaging supervisors of the police staff, trying to find out why the gates were closed off to protestors. I started then talking with some of the protestors about what had unfolded at the Parliament gates. My interlocutors thought that this was part of a strategy of crowd control by the police, who apparently wanted the crowd to observe social distancing as part of COVID-19 health regulations, before entering parliament grounds.

¹³ The museum was opened in 2014 and constructed by the North Korean company, which has in the past couple of decades built characteristic monuments across Africa (Becker 2018a).

¹⁴ They were involved in Namibia's anti-apartheid struggle. On the National Heritage Council (NHC) website Kutako is credited for petitioning the United Nations (UN) and for being the spokesperson of the Ovaherero, Hamutumbangela is credited for resisting against the South African colonial regime's treatment of contract workers at Namutoni. On the website, Witbooi is incorrectly listed as "„first African leader to take up arms against German imperialists and foreign occupants", which describes Hendrik Witbooi who resisted against the German colonial regime (<https://www.nhc-nam.org/nahris/node/524>). Hendrik Samuel Witbooi is rather the grandson of Hendrik Witbooi (Kössler 2015).

While political leaders still engaged police officers, some members of the crowd started various artistic performances. Nama women were singing traditional Christian hymns, while moving sequentially in a small circle and later then performed a traditional *langarm*¹⁵ dance. There were also Ovaherero men, known as *Oturupa* in their militaristic German colonial army-style traditional attire, performing their characteristic war march. The leaders of the various opposition parties present addressed the crowd before handing over a petition¹⁶ to the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Loide Kasingo.

During their short speeches the political leaders, Swartbooi, Ester Muinjangu (President of NUDO and Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services) and Mike Kavetokora (President of RDP) emphasized the colonial genocide particularly against the Ovaherero and Nama and in that way suggested that these two groups were solely entitled to genocide reparations from the German government. The leaders were thus showing their dissatisfaction with the agreement concluded between the Namibian and German government that envisages development projects in the regions historically occupied by the Ovaherero and Nama. They instead called for direct compensation to be paid to the two groups. Swartbooi called for new negotiations to determine: “who must get the money?” “who must get the benefits?” and “who must get the recognition, restitution and apology?” Through this Swartbooi was effectively making a case for genocide reparations to be paid only to the Ovaherero and Nama and not to the Namibian government. This was a view that was similarly taken by Muinjangu who read from the UN Convention on Genocide (1948). She emphasised: “Genocide is Genocide. It cannot be defined differently. The United Nations Convention on Genocide defined it. We are not trying to be tribalistic, because the definition is clear. In order for it to be a genocide it should be an ‘ethnic group’, ‘race’, ‘nation’ or ‘religious group’”. Kavetokora ostracized the Namibian government for its half-hearted response to the claims of the Ovaherero and Nama because, as he puts it: “the government does not have an emotional attachment to the issues and simply do not care about it!”

In a break from these essentialized views on ethnicity, as they have been tied to issues related to calls for restorative justice for the colonial genocide (1904-1908) the 35-year-old leader of the AR and political science academic, Job Amupanda dressed in a

¹⁵ A dance that is widely performed at social gatherings in southern Namibia by Nama, Rehoboth Basters (members of mixed-race origins) and Afrikaners.

¹⁶ In the petition the political parties rejected the agreement between the German and Namibian governments. They also called for new negotiations (<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://www>)

University of Namibia (UNAM) shirt, stepped on the podium and called on Namibians from all ethnic backgrounds to jointly work together in addressing issues of the colonial past. He also emphasized that the Ovaherero and Nama in southern and central Namibia and Ovambo in northern Namibia have similar historical experiences especially as it relates to colonialism. In that way, Amupanda emphasized that they were faced with the (same) present struggles. Through this he tied the issue of genocide reparations to broader concerns of the legacies of German and South African colonialism in Namibia. Amupanda specifically referenced colonial agricultural practices¹⁷ as an example. He linked the confiscation of cattle from the Ovaherero during the German colonial period to the erection of the Red Line in 1896, a veterinary corridor that was established to curb the spread of the Rinderpest cattle disease which effectively resulted in the division of the country into two zones of colonial administration: the areas beyond the Red Line (without much white settlement) and those within in the Police Zone (with large white settlement).¹⁸

By using this example Amupanda evoked a sense of sameness based on interlinked historical experiences between the Ovaherero, Nama and Ovambo groups, which supersede ethnic affiliation. Amupanda's statements contrasted the views perpetuated by the opposition party leaders, who explained the colonial past in varied experiences. They thus emphasized ethnic differences as a strategy to claim genocide reparations only for the Ovaherero and Nama. Amupanda on the other hand illuminated the linkages of historical experiences of the Ovaherero, Nama and Ovambo groups, so as not accentuate social difference.

Amupanda's views however did not resonate with everyone at the protest. At one point while he was speaking on the podium a woman turned to me and said, "On that I do not agree with him". Being the curious anthropologist that I am, I asked her about what she said. I continued with a series of two questions: "The Red Line?" "You don't want it removed?" The woman replied in a stern voice "No" and a short conversation followed between us:

¹⁷ He most probably used this example because the groups have historically been mostly engaged in agriculture. The Ovaherero have mostly been cattle-breeders while the Ovambo have produced crops and bred some cattle.

¹⁸ The former was kept as communal spaces while the latter was used for commercial purposes (with some communal production primarily by the Ovaherero and Nama) This was introduced with German colonial rule and continued with South African colonialism and seemingly has continued to exist in postcolonial Namibia even more than three decades of independence from South Africa in 1990 (Miescher 2013).

Bayron: Why not?

Utaara¹⁹: Because of the communal farms in the north. Those animals there have diseases. Once they come in, then we cannot export meat.

Bayron: But do you think that they can compete with farmers on this side?

Utaara: I do not think so, because they are not farmers. (as I looked at her quite shocked) Yes, they do not know how to farm. The only people who know how to farm, are the Ovaherero's down here.

The woman clearly dismissed the Ovambo, which were allegedly not capable farmers and that the “animals there have diseases.” That this woman was holding such views about ethnicity (even after independence) points to the condition of coloniality – that will be the focus of this study.

This opening vignette opens my discussion on decolonial memory activism and queer activism in Namibia. It points out some of the struggles for restitution and reparations, but also indicates issues of ethnicity in contemporary Namibia. Leaders of opposition political parties were pointing to varied historical experiences in emphasizing ethnic difference so that entitlements such as genocide reparations be only provided to some groups – in this case the Ovaherero and Nama. This suggests then an entanglement between issues of the colonial past and ethnicity.²⁰ This is a legacy of German and South African colonialism that Namibia is still confronted with today. While there exists many like the woman that I encountered at the protest event that hold on and perpetuate rigid views of ethnicity, as I will show in this thesis, some, like the academic and activist Amupanda have opposed such assertions and are actively working to cross over such rigid ethnic boundaries. My thesis will focus on the latter and show some remarkable efforts by, mostly younger activists who have embarked on decolonial memory activism and queer activism across the limitations of ethnic boundaries.

¹⁹ This is not her real name.

²⁰ Such efforts are highly problematic since I earlier alluded to ethnicity is a contentious issue in Namibia. Ethnic categorization became the mainstay of colonial society. It was used by German and South African colonialists to separate groups from each other so as to further their own colonial ambitions in Namibia (Akuupa 2015; Becker 2015).

1.2. Ethnicity and the struggle for genocide reparations

Most Ovaherero and Nama activists have represented the struggle for genocide reparations through ethnic lines. This suggests a unified struggle for genocide reparations by members of the Ovaherero and Nama communities. However, as Kössler (2015) shows, the trajectory to the Ovaherero-Nama alliance was complex and the Ovaherero and Nama have not always been collaborating. Kössler (2015) points out that the earlier campaigns, in the late 1990s, for genocide reparations were mostly driven by Ovaherero. This, he argues later changed, when the centennial commemorations in 2004 by Ovaherero, were used to forge a unified struggle with leaders of Nama communities and Nama joined the struggle for genocide reparations. Based on rather short-term fieldwork in Namibia by one of the authors, Ellen Hamrick and Haley Duschniski (2018) on different Ovaherero political groups, mention that several committees for genocide reparations have been established, including the Ovaherero Genocide Committee (OGC) (which was recently rebranded as the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation – OGF), and the Ovaherero Genocide Council for Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide (OCD-1904). They show that each of the groups have political affiliations to different Ovaherero Royal Houses and political parties in Namibia²¹ – pointing to a fragmented struggle for genocide reparations that comprises of sectoral groups even within the respective ethnic groups. Hamrick and Duschniski (2018) also mention the existence of the Nama Genocide Technical Committee.

Certainly, these groups have been instrumental in propelling the struggle for reparations against the German government. They are however not the sole actors involved in illuminating the varied experiences of Namibia’s colonial past. Pedsizai Maedza (2018) emphasizes some of these initiatives. He specifically focuses on various embodied performances in Namibia, Germany and South Africa.

1.3. The Big Question

In this study I will explore the ways through which decolonial memory activists and queer activists are overcoming the limitations posed by the ethnicization of the struggle for genocide reparations, while negotiating nationalist constructions of “cultural diversity” and “multiculturalism.” Here, it is significant to mention that these ethnic representations of the struggle for reparations are occurring within a broader context of postcolonial nation-building by the Namibian government. Heike Becker (2015) and Michael Akuupa (2015) demonstrate that ethnic categories, which were de-emphasized

²¹ The OGC have been historically linked to the Maharero Royal House and NUDO political party, while the OCD-1904 have been affiliated to the Swapo party (Hamrick and Duschniski 2018).

during the liberation struggle, in favour of an anti-racial, anti-tribal and anti-ethnic nationalist discourse, re-emerged shortly after independence. Becker (2015) and Akuupa (2015) then specifically ask, why would a tool that caused so much social harm – perpetuated through colonial and apartheid injustices- be used by the Namibian government in re-imagining the post-colonial nation-state? Akuupa (2015:4) explains: “Namibia' leadership may well have realized the ending of colonial culture and recommitted to the same format of celebration to address the issues of post-colonial nation-building.” Here, he notes that the re-introduction of cultural festivals, with roots in the apartheid system, were critical in cultivating such a national consciousness. In essence then, Namibia has been re-ethnicized, with ethnic categories crystallized within the fabric of postcolonial society, albeit in somewhat of a different format. Similarly, John and Jean Comaroff (2009) illuminate how rigid notions of ethnicity have been taken up by others interested in the economical benefits of ethnicity, including using it in evocations of cultural heritage, making sure to cement its powerful agency.

The ethnicization and emphasis on ethnic heritage is occurring, while the Namibian government institutionalizes an official memory discourse that accentuates the war experiences of the ruling elite, during the country's liberation struggle (Becker 2011; 2015). The Swapo party, former liberation movement and ruling party since Namibian Independence in 1990, is regarded as the sole actor in what can be described as a protracted process of anti-colonial resistance and liberation of Namibia. This is primarily how nation-building has been viewed by the ruling Swapo party. What does has done, is that other group experiences have been overlooked. Becker (2011) shows this largely includes the experiences of the local population of northern Namibia, known as “the north”, whereas Kössler (2015) focuses on those of the Ovaherero and Nama communities in central and southern Namibia. This reflects the history of Namibia that resulted in varied colonial experiences; what Kössler (2007:361) conceptualizes as a ‘fragmented past’. In central and southern Namibia, German and South African colonial rule was strongly present, while in the northern parts, there was indirect colonial rule.

1.4. An emergent decolonial (memory) struggle

In this thesis my central argument however is that even though the struggle for reparations is ethnicized, there has been a group of younger decolonial memory activists and queer activists that have not been deterred by this. They have openly resisted such notions of ethnic boundaries and are actively working to overcome the limitations posed by it, through their attempts at creating broader awareness on colonial injustices. I argue that they have thus challenged how we view issues of the colonial past and ethnicity. Most of this younger generation of decolonial memory activists and queer activists are not Ovaherero or Nama but hail from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

They comprise of a group of younger artists, social justice and queer activists, and scholars (like myself!). As argued in two articles by my supervisor, Heike Becker (2020; 2022), they are increasingly mobilizing in intersectional struggles against the structural remnants of colonialism and apartheid, including racist-, patriarchal- and heteronormative hierarchies. In this thesis, I expand on Becker's (2020; 2022) argument and elaborate multiple directions of their activism. They are not only concerned with genocide reparations, as put forward by the Ovaherero and Nama in their campaign against the German and Namibian governments, but want a reckoning with all past colonial injustices, from the German and South African colonial periods, and which is seemingly propelled by systematic forces in the postcolony.

They are challenging all forms of coloniality, including colonial monuments, repressive legislation, such as laws on same-sex relationships, which stem from the South African colonial time and the colonization of human remains. In this way the activists are fighting against colonial excesses such as racism, sexual violence and police brutality. At the same time, they are constructing new visions of the future through memory practices, which encourage reconciliation and healing.

I will show how these activists and artists have largely worked without much support from this group comprising traditional leaders and activists – that is the older generation. This does not necessarily mean that they have out rightly challenged the Ovaherero and Nama activists in the ways that the latter has been doing with the German and Namibian governments. Instead, I argue that they have situated their claims in conjunction and next to that of the Ovaherero and Nama activists. Therefore, I do not view it as distinct from the struggle for reparations, but rather that is one major constituent part of it.

What I discovered during my fieldwork was that decolonial activists and queer activists, were involved in novel approaches, including online petitions, cemetery “cleanings”, organizing protests, erecting new monuments, producing films and songs in bringing attention to the varied experiences of colonialism and apartheid. This stands in contrast with the Ovaherero and Nama activists who in the last few years, have been involved in an international court case against the German government for their inclusion in the negotiations for genocide reparations.

1.5. Contextualising the struggle for reparations by the Ovaherero and Nama

1.5.1. Commemorations

Reinhart Kössler’s (2015) seminal study of negotiating Namibian-German relations during colonialism and in the postcolonial era shows that the commemorations by the Ovaherero and Nama in central and southern Namibia emerged in the years following the colonial genocide (1904-1908). Drawing on in-depth ethnographic and historical research, he argues that these commemorations were aimed at rebuilding themselves from the devastating effects of the colonial genocide (1904-1908). Kössler (2015) notes though that these commemorations were undertaken while Ovaherero and Nama continued to be restricted under South African colonialism (1915-1990), when many of the German colonial policies continued or were further exacerbated by the South African colonial regime. Nonetheless, various commemorative (memory) practices were introduced by the Ovaherero and Nama.

According to Kössler (2015:180) this speaks to the “energy and creativity that were inherent in African communities.” Some of the earlier commemorations were undertaken by the /Khowese at Gibeon in southern Namibia and the Ovaherero at Okahandja in central Namibia. Biwa’s (2012) study of the recollections of the war and colonial genocide in southern Namibia traces the former commemoration to 1906, while Kössler (2015) indicates that the Okahandja event was held in 1923. Since then other groups have also introduced commemorations as part of their performative (cultural) repertoire, including the Kai//khaun, !Gami#nun, Vaalgras people and Rehoboth Basters. Such efforts have continued to the present with the !Aman (Bethanie) group having since 2007 started with holding a commemoration in honour of Goab Cornelius Fredericks at Lüderitz (Kössler 2015).

Biwa (2012) foregrounds these commemorations, especially by the Nama. She shows that these commemorations have been critical in memory-making by the Nama (and I can add by extension the Ovaherero). She however notes that scholars have refrained from including these practices in their studies on the colonial genocide in Namibia. Biwa (2012:7) argues that this produces “silences in the retelling of these histories.” She therefore suggests that it requires deliberate efforts to confront these silences, otherwise it may result in “ongoing cycles of silence in historical production” (ibid:11).

Biwa (2012:1) further continues to theorise the commemorations as “a prolonged wake.” She writes that: “at the wake, the death event is historicised through the polyphonic narrative range of a reading of the deceased’s personal history in biographical form, prayers and all night hymns before the burial.” This suggests then that the “wakes” to the victims of the colonial genocide allow the Ovaherero and Nama to re-create their pasts in an effort to reflect on present struggles and re-imagine their societies. As Biwa (2012:ibid) puts it: “the past and future are made present, and interpreted through the ‘wake.’” This indicates a spiritual nexus to these commemorations. Kössler (2015) shows these commemorations are intrinsically linked to religion and spirituality.

Here it is important to note that the graves of the victims of the colonial genocide have been centrally inscribed in the commemorations in central and southern Namibia. Biwa (2012), Kössler (2015) and Maedza (2018) have all provided extensive ethnographic overviews of the commemorations by the Ovaherero and Nama demonstrating that central to the commemorations are the walking parades and church services. These performances take place at traditional towns where these communities have historically inhabited, important graves and battle sites. As a case in point, every year on the 26th of August the Ovaherero visit the graves of chiefs at the cemetery in Okahandja in honour of Samuel Maharero.

These commemorations have also been used in mobilizing Ovaherero and Nama for genocide reparations from the German government. This is where their histories are enforced to illuminate the experiences of the Ovaherero and Nama during the colonial period. The commemorations inform calls for genocide reparations from the German government and emphasize their role in anti-colonial struggle against colonialism in Namibia (Kössler 2015). Biwa (2012) and Kössler (2015) show that this is mostly done through public speeches by traditional leaders. Kössler (2015) therefore finds these commemorations significant in challenging the dominant views on colonialism in

Namibia, situating the Ovaherero and Nama in a complex entanglement of memory politics.

1.5.2. Namibia's memory politics

Henning Melber (2003) explores Namibia's (postcolonial) memory culture. He shows that experience of war is powerfully evoked through national memory-making. In this sense, the Namibian government – vis-à-vis the Swapo party - has drawn on its experiences as a liberation movement to emphasize memories of war against the South African colonial regime. As Becker (2011) shows in her study of commemorations and memorials related to the nationalist liberation war (1966-1989) it is especially the memories of the liberation elite that was in exile during South African rule that have been referenced. This master narrative, as Becker (2011) has coined this representation, presents an image of heroic struggle by the Swapo party and those who left for exile during the liberation war. This as explained earlier is the pretext through which national remembrance and commemorations have been undertaken – effectively silencing other group memories (Kössler, 2015; Becker 2011). It is particularly the experiences of the Ovaherero and Nama during the German colonial period (1884-1915) that have been removed from national memory practices.

Kössler (2015) suggests that the memories of war and liberation resistance have mainly been informed by the experiences of the Ovambo in northern Namibia. In her study which is based on brief visits to Namibia, Elke Zuern (2012) finds it important that the Nama and Ovaherero are challenging Namibia's master narrative, on account that these groups represent a minority. She stresses that they have challenged the master narrative mainly through the erection of monuments to the colonial genocide, including the Genocide Memorial Stone in Swakopmund and Gaob Cornelius Frederick's memorial in Lüderitz. Zuern (2012) stresses the initiatives by the Nama and Ovaherero communities to push the Namibian government to recognize the contribution of the communities towards anti-colonial resistance. Becker & Lentz (2013) have further argued in the introduction to a volume on national independence celebrations in southern Africa that apart from promoting support for national governments these ceremonies have become important spaces for small groups to articulate their concerns and this introduction to the volume also discusses in detail connection between performance, embodiment and, both hegemonic and subversive memory.

Furthermore, Hamrick & Duschniski (2018) situate the Nama and Ovaherero in a struggle for genocide reparations from the German government. In this way, they have ensured that the memories of the colonial genocide are situated centrally in Namibia's memory culture. Their study focuses on the politics specifically by the Ovaherero groups. Hamrick & Duschniski (2018) argue that memory is critical for the Ovaherero and Nama in their struggle for genocide reparations.

However, Becker (2011) argues that contestations of memory-making in Namibia are not always based on ethnicity. She demonstrates that the role of the civilian population during the liberation struggle in northern Namibia have similarly been downplayed by the ruling elite. Significantly also, Kössler (2007) and Becker (2011) point out that there have been some shifts in the master narrative of Namibia. Becker (2011) refers to the Namibian National Heroes Acre near Windhoek as the master narrative cast in stone and, in contradistinction, to the Eenhana Memorial Shrine in northern Namibia, where counter narratives of the liberation struggle have been included. Similarly Kössler (2015) discusses the 2008 !Gami#nun commemoration that have taken on more national significance.

1.6. An overview of decolonial memory activists and queer activists calling for the decolonization of Namibia

In this ethnography I reveal my encounters with the following decolonial memory activists and queer activists:

The 30-year-old performer, artist and activist, Hildegard Titus who has been engaged in a decolonial struggle against the colonality of public spaces. She has focused her efforts on Windhoek where various colonial monuments exist. In 2020 she was involved in initiatives aimed at removing the Curt Von François statue in central Windhoek. As I will show in chapter four, she was instrumental in calls for the removal of the statue. The concerns over colonial monuments were also broadened to target postcolonial monuments and street names. In this way, the decolonial memory activists point to a situation of colonality in Windhoek and beyond.

In Swakopmund there is the 48-year-old Laidlaw Peringanda who has been mobilizing against colonality in that town. He established the Namibia Genocide Association for this purpose. This organization has focused on removing colonial monuments in Swakopmund and on the unmarked graves of the Prisoners-of-War of the colonial genocide. On the latter the Namibia Genocide Association has engaged in regular "cleanings" on the graves to restore them, which is a decolonizing process of the skulls

aimed at showing respect to Ovaherero and Nama victims of the German colonial period. Similarly. The 53-year-old Boli Mootseng has also called for respect for the skulls through his song on the colonial genocide in Namibia.

These calls against coloniality have been taken further by the two queer activists, namely the 25-year-olds Omar Van Reenen and Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe. As I will show in chapter five, they have called for the recognition of same-sex relationships in Namibia. In this way, they have mobilized against a colonial law – the sodomy law – that bans relations between men. Since establishing Namibia Equal Rights Movement, a queer rights organization, the activists have also rallied behind several same-sex couples who are presently involved in court cases against the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration to have their relationships recognized. Specifically, the organization has mobilized in support of Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl who are an openly gay couple living in Namibia. This couple has sued the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration and Safety for the residency and citizenship rights of Guillermo (who is Mexican) and Yona, Paula and Maya – their three children born through a surrogacy procedure in South Africa. The queer activists in chapter six have also engaged in further decolonizing process, including the painting of a Rainbow sidewalk to illuminate how women and queer persons have been overlooked in the postcolonial monumental landscape. Similarly, Namibia’s first gay film “Kapana” was produced which is aimed at exploring same-sex love between men to challenge dominant views on masculinity – specifically that two men cannot engage in a sexual or romantic relationship. These are the decolonial memory activists that I encountered while conducting fieldwork in Namibia.

1.7. Thesis Structure

In chapter one I started with an account of my ethnographic observations at a protest held in response to the agreement between the Namibian and German government for genocide reparations. They were protesting against the agreement for not prominently situating the Ovaherero and Nama in the payment of genocide reparations. That is these political parties called for genocide reparations exclusively for the Ovaherero and Nama. As I demonstrated, this points to issues over ethnicity which have taken on a salient role in postcolonial Namibia. However, as I argued these rigid notions of ethnicity have been vehemently resisted. I pointed out that my main question in this thesis is to explore how decolonial memory activists are overcoming the limitations posed by these ethnic frameworks of the struggle for reparations.

In chapter two I emphasize memory practices in Namibia and Germany as it relates to the colonial past. I specifically trace the shifts in how issues of the past have been conceived in the present by different groups in Namibia and Germany. I then relate this to the salient role of memory in society. This I situate within relevant conceptual frameworks, including memory activism and multidirectional memory that centrally locate various social actors, in exploring the changing dimensions in memory practices. These changing dimensions call for further theorising. Here I refer to the decolonial turn and the concepts coloniality and decoloniality.

In chapter three I start with historicising the decolonial struggle in Namibia. I show that contemporary decolonial memory activism has roots in earlier decolonial struggles, particularly against postcolonial land policies and patriarchal views on women's sexuality. This sets the scene for the decolonial struggles that I explore in chapter four, five and six. I also further look at the research process of this study. I show the conditions that the study was undertaken, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused major changes to the research approach. In this sense, ethnographic research was conducted online and offline using various modes, including visits to colonial and postcolonial sites, virtual events (such as commemorations, film screenings and songs), archival research (virtual and physical archives) and interviews (virtual and physical interviews).

In chapter four I explore calls for the removal of the Curt von François statue in central Windhoek. I situate these calls within decolonizing concerns over colonial public spaces. In this sense, decolonial memory activists have been preoccupied with the coloniality of these spaces through colonial monuments. I show that the activists have called for the removal these monuments, such as the Curt von François. I also discuss how these calls have been broadened to include postcolonial monuments and street names, which they have argued continue with colonial practices – pointing to a situation of coloniality. The decolonial memory activists have since called for a “truly” decolonial cityscape, in which more statues to be erected and streets to be named in honour of women and queer persons. They have argued how these statues epitomize colonial racism which is perpetuated in the postcolony through contemporary state violence against black people, such as police brutality.

In chapter five I explore calls for the decolonization of skulls. I specifically reference the Namibia Genocide Association and its memory activism in Swakopmund to have the unmarked graves of the Prisoners-of-War of the colonial genocide recognized. The

organization has conducted regular “clean-ups” at the Swakopmund cemetery. This as I show is critical in decolonizing the skulls, i.e. showing respect to the Ovaherero and Nam victims that perished during the colonial genocide. This has been further taken up through a song that sings about the skulls as another gesture of respect. This is happening in the context of broader decolonial memory activism against colonial monuments in Swakopmund. Such efforts have also been undertaken by the Namibia Genocide Association.

In chapter six I illuminate decolonial and queer struggles for the recognition of same-sex relationships. In Namibia these relationships are not recognized. There is also a sodomy law that bans relations between men. I show that decolonial calls for the recognition of same-sex relationship have mostly revolved around the court cases of same-sex couples in Namibia. These court cases I show are critical in fighting for more equal rights for queer persons in Namibia, while challenging dominant heteronormative views on human relationships that considers same-sex relationships as improper. I then draw discussion between visual aesthetic, including the painting of a Rainbow flag and the ‘Kapana’ gay film that aims to challenge these heteronormative views. These heteronormative views have since been taken up the Namibian government that can be said is homophobic. I show then that these productions are critical in opposing the state’s homophobic campaigns against queer persons.

In this chapter I elaborated on the key research question of this thesis, namely how decolonial memory activists are resisting rigid notions of ethnicity and have broadened the notion of decoloniality to include anti-patriarchal and anti-heteronormative struggles. In the next chapter shall now contextualise this within the relevant theoretical and historical debates.

CHAPTER TWO

AN EXPLORATION OF THE PAST: MEMORY, ETHNICITY AND COLONIALITY

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter my theorising draws much on what has been described as the “decolonial turn” in disciplines such as Anthropology and History. The discussion of concepts such as memory activism, multidirectional memory, coloniality and decoloniality is inextricable intertwined with debates surrounding relevant political and social practice in different contexts. In this chapter I will develop how those connect with the shifting place occupied by the memory of the German colonial genocide (1904-1908) in Namibia and Germany.

2.2. Dealing with the colonial past

Kössler (2015:6) in his comprehensive analysis of the past and present of Namibian-German relations refers to the memories of the genocide. He observed a “constellation of actors” in Namibia and Germany that have responded to the colonial genocide in different ways. Following the German colonial period in Namibia, the colonial genocide has been a central reference point in the memory culture of the Ovaherero, Nama and Germans in Namibia, while in Germany references to the colonial genocide have been characterized first by forms of “colonial revisionism” which were practiced by some groups in the 1920s and 1930s, and which later evolved into “postcolonial amnesia” with the end of Nazi rule.

Kössler (2015) emphasizes historical inequalities, that were crystallized through the colonial genocide and that persists in the present, as informing the response (tactics) of the various actors. Significantly then, the Ovaherero and Nama were restricted in pursuing restorative justice and ensuring that their memories of the colonial genocide were (widely) represented. This is owed in the first place to Namibia’s unique history of two colonialisms. When South Africa took over from Germany after WW1, it soon implemented a similarly harsh system of colonial rule. During the ensuing decades until Namibian independence in 1990, understandably the struggle for liberation from South African apartheid colonial rule took precedence. This is not to say that the Ovaherero

and Nama were prevented from representing their memories of the colonial genocide. In their studies Kössler (2015) and Biwa (2012) show that they have engaged in various initiatives in commemorating the events. In the case of the Nama, Biwa (2012) shows that these memories were constantly memorialized over the years from 1906, and existed in the cultural repertoire of communities, through performance, song, dance and poetry. Similarly, Kössler (2015) told the detailed histories of community commemorations of both the Ovaherero and Nama, which go back to the first half of the 20th century.

Kössler (2015) argues that in Germany colonial claims persisted even after the end of German colonial rule after WWI. This was influenced by the earlier colonial campaigns of the 19th century after the establishment of the German Empire in 1871 which focused on establishing German colonies for migration and economic benefit. Kössler (2015:62) explains how such colonial ambitions crystallized after WW1 when Germany lost its colonies into “an attitude of colonialism without colonies”, that is “colonial revisionism.” This took the form of continued colonial land purchases in Namibia, promoting colonial products, erecting colonial monuments, and naming of streets that celebrated Germany’s colonial history.

Kössler (2015) however shows that Germany’s colonial tradition persisted with Nazi rule – it can even be said to have been reignited, albeit in a somewhat different register. Here the colonial focus shifted to other places like Eastern Europe. Kössler (2015: 63) explains that “the onset of World War II and Nazi Germany’s initial victories fired hopes for a new colonial empire, but the main thrust of colonial endeavour was directed towards the conquest in Eastern Europe. Many of the former agents of colonialism, as well as institutions serving it and also economic enterprises involved in colonial ventures, turned to this new colonial sphere in the vast occupied regions, particularly in Poland and the Soviet Union.”

These events as Kössler (2015) explains pushed memories of Germany’s colonial past away from German public consciousness creating a situation of “postcolonial amnesia” that characterized the post-WWII period. This suggests that there were limited efforts at a possible reckoning with Germany’s colonial past, including also the horrors of the recent Nazi period.

In terms of Germany’s colonial past, particularly the colonial genocide in Namibia (1904-1908) Kössler (2015) argues have remained at the periphery of German national memory. He mentions that this has somehow changed from the 1980s. Here colonial

monuments and naming of streets were critical in bringing to the fore more prominently Germany's colonial past. Kössler (2015) uses the example of the Bremen Colonial Memorial where a memorial was placed there in 1992 and the changing of street names in Munich that drew explicit references to Germany's colonial presence in Namibia.

Kössler (2015) shows that this was soon cut in the bud with emerging political circumstances both in Namibia and Germany that complicated the process of dealing with Germany's colonial past. Here he points to the liberation process in Namibia and re-unification process of Germany as well as in terms of memory, healing and reconciliation, dealing with the horrors of the Nazi past.

From 2004, which marked the centenary of the colonial genocide, more steps have been taken in both Germany and Namibia, which are aimed at engaging with the colonial past. That this happened now points to an increasing interest in how the past relates to conceiving the present. This can be seen in the growing number of studies, which have memory activism as their central focus, such as those by Jenny Wüstenberg (2010) and Michael Rothberg (2009). In the following sub-sections I will be drawing from their studies in presenting a conceptualization of memory. I will focus on the work of Wüstenberg (2010) who stresses civil society in memory-making, and Rothberg (2009) who explores the relations of such groups. I will emphasize how different groups in the present relate to issues of the past.

2.3. Memory

2.3.1. The relation between memory and social activism

In her study of the German History Movement of the 1980s and 1990s, Jenny Wüstenberg (2010) illuminates the role of social activism in memory-making. She argues that the History Movement, a left-wing German social movement, was critical in ensuring broader public consciousness of memories of the Holocaust in post-war Germany. A key component of this movement were the so-called "history workshops" around which the movement coalesced. These workshops emerged in response to a failure on the parts of the West and East German governments to openly deal with the horrors of Nazi rule. Holocaust memory was not a priority for the two governments that was rather more focused on garnering support for their respective regimes following the end of Nazi rule. Wüstenberg (2010) therefore explains that civil society action or "memory activism" was critical in the cases of the West and East German governments, which were at loggerheads on issues of history, and only at a later stage conceded to the claims of Holocaust victims and acknowledge their historical experiences.

Indeed, social activism was essential in memory-making in Germany, leaving an enduring impact on the memory landscape. This can be seen in the monumental landscape of Germany with various monuments and memorial erected in honour of the victims of the Holocaust. The influence of the History Movement has also been significantly felt at the state-level, with the German government having since adopted many of the principles of the movement. This suggests that memory exists within a web of exchanges between various memory agents, in this case “civil society” and the “state”, carrying out commemorative and remembrance acts in reference with each other.

Wüstenberg (2010) argues against a memory project of the “elite” that privileges certain views, particularly those of the political establishment. The scholars Olick et al (2011) reminds us that memory was previously inscribed in nationalistic projects that sought to ensure popular support for political regimes. This suggests that memory is the preserve of the state. Wüstenberg (2010) however points to more subaltern ways of remembrance and commemoration outside the state-centred institutions, which are often less recognized. She contends that such initiatives have often been overlooked by scholars of memory.

The primary concern therefore for Wüstenberg (2010) is the role of civil society in memory-making. This is critical in understanding how memories of the past are constituted in the present. In this regard she has illuminated various initiatives by various groups in Germany in bringing to the fore memories of the Holocaust. I will take up her conceptual work, which she developed in the context of the German History Movement of the 1980s and 1990s, in my research on memory activism in postcolonial Namibia. Michael Rothberg (2009), as we will see below takes up similar concerns. In his study of multidirectional memory: Holocaust remembrance in the postcolonial era, Rothberg (2009) locates civil society actors centrally and attempts to carefully understand the relations between different actors.

2.3.2. Multidirectional memory

Rothberg (2009) argues that a common perception holds that memory actors are vying each other for controlling influence over the memoryscape, especially groups, against who historical injustices were committed. In the opening vignette of his seminal publication Rothberg (2009:3) refers to some scholars like Walter Ben Michaels, who suggest there to be “a zero-sum struggle for pre-eminence” between memory actors. He particularly shows that histories of Jewish victims of the Holocaust and the Africans of

the Atlantic slave trade are often presented as contenders for American official commemoration and remembrance. According to Rothberg (2009) this suggests that memory actors are involved in a struggle to have each of their histories (widely) recognized in the public sphere. He, however, argues against such views.

Rothberg (2009) speaks of a racialization (we can even say ethnicization) of memories that seek to break human connection. Rothberg (2009) is concerned that presenting memories in such crude racial or ethnic terms may pit collective pasts against each other and result in the essentialization of memory; furthering to accentuate social difference. The theory on “multidirectional memory” is relevant for exploring the ways through which memory struggles have been taken up by different actors in Namibia, which I further elaborate on in the next sub-section.

Rothberg (2009) argues that a particular memory cannot be said to only belong to one group. That is because groups do not exist in isolation from each other. There is always contact with others through communication that results in the cross-pollination of ideas, emotions and visions about the past. In this sense, it can be said that memories exist in conversation with each other. It is especially this form of connection that Rothberg (2009:50) emphasises in “multidirectional memory.” He writes that:

Memories are not owned by groups – nor are groups “owned” by memories. Rather, the borders of memory and identity are jagged; what looks at first like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant. Memory’s anachronistic quality – its bringing together of now and then, here and there – is actually the source of its powerful creativity, its ability to build new worlds out of the materials of older ones.

He therefore proposes to view the relations between memory actors as “multidirectional” rather than as “competitive.” Rothberg (2009:3) therefore suggests that memory actors are involved in a generative process that is “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing and borrowing; as productive and intercultural.” In this way, he points to exchanges occurring between actors, what he calls “dynamic transfers” that ensure collective commemoration and remembrance take place (*ibid*: 11). For Rothberg (2009) thinking of memory along racial (and ethnic) lines limits such exchanges.

In his use of case studies drawing on the memories of Holocaust and European colonial violence, Rothberg (2009) situates the “multidirectional” character of memory as a central reference point with references to the work of scholars such as, Hannah Arendt,

Aime Cesaire, and WEB Du Bois and their “multidirectional” focus on the Holocaust and decolonization process of European colonies, which they already noted in the 1950s and 1960s.

However, in emphasizing the “multidirectional” character of the Holocaust and decolonization process, particularly of Africa, Rothberg (2009) argues that there were other subaltern (and often side-lined) ways of memory-making that adopted a more critical view of these histories. In that way, he explains that these actors meant to underscore the relatedness of these histories. Rothberg (2009) explores some of these initiatives that aimed at illuminating the “multidirectional” relatedness of the Holocaust and European colonial violence in Africa. He uses a variety of cultural productions, including film productions, memoirs and novels in locating “multidirectional” thinking in the early 1960s.²²

Rothberg (2009) shows that “multidirectional memory” embodies a form of relatedness that challenges essentialized views of histories. Histories cannot be said to be different from each other in respect to group identities. They are intractably intertwined. Rothberg’s (2009) study situates the theory of “multidirectional memory” more prominently in the realm of studies on memory.

2.3.3. Situating the theory on “multidirectional memory” in Namibia

In his study Kössler (2007) observes that there exists a “fragmented past” in Namibia based on the varied experiences of German and South African colonialism. Anti-colonial struggles against German colonialism were primarily taken up by groups in central and southern Namibia, which also suffered the succeeding colonial genocide. This strikingly differs with northern Namibia where German colonial rule was less present and took the form of labour exploitation through the contract labour system. Here the liberation struggle against South African colonialism takes precedence.

These different experiences have been evoked in two narratives of the colonial wars and genocide (1904-1908) and the liberation struggle (1966 – 1989). It has been primarily through performances that Kössler (2007:363) suggests these histories have been situated in “a competitive framework, within which they are represented and valued

²² Specifically, he uses the French film, *Chronique d’un été* (Chronicle of a Summer) by the social scientists, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin as a case study. This film was released in 1961. In this film the wider implications of genocidal violence of the Holocaust was contemplated and connected to similar historical experiences such as the colonial violence in Africa. In this way, as Rothberg (2009) shows the film situates these histories in closeness with each other. There was also a memoir that Rothberg (2009) finds significant in his search for “multidirectional” thought in post-war France. He specifically refers to Charlotte Delbos’ *Les belles lettres*.

differently.” Since Namibia has been ruled since 1990 by the Swapo party, the former liberation movement-turned-ruling party, which emerged during the nationalist liberation struggle, the liberation war narrative has been endorsed as national history while the colonial genocide has been relegated to the margins of national memory-making. Significantly, these memory struggles also relate to the issues over ethnicity: that of the Ovaherero, Nama (southern Namibia) posited against the Ovambo (northern Namibia).

In situating the theory on “multidirectional memory” centrally in this study, I ask whether such thinking might help to evade ethnicised frameworks that seek to essentialize and separate. Ethnographically, I try to speak to Rothberg’s (2009) theorisation by exploring the experiences of a new emergent group of decolonial memory activists and queer activists to challenge different forms of coloniality in Namibia. These decolonial struggles have emerged in the context of a struggle for reparations by the Ovaherero and Nama to have their historical experiences of colonial genocide more widely recognized. This is happening while the Namibian government enforces a master narrative that, as I previously mentioned, draws on the experiences of the liberation struggle.

In adopting a “multidirectional” focus in this study I attempt to provide new analysis in how memory is shaped by various actors in Namibia. It then is critical to mention here that central in decolonial struggles have been several historical experiences that relates both to German and South African colonialism. The decolonial memory activists and queer activists in this study have precisely focused their present struggles on colonial structures that have been imposed through colonialism that relates to race, sexuality and gender and bodies.

2.4. On ethnicity

Notably, ethnicity takes up a prominent role in contemporary memory struggles in Namibia. The Ovaherero and Nama activists have used their ethnicity in legitimising their claims for reparations. This speaks to the vernacularisation of ethnicity that Jean and John Comaroff (2009) refer to. In their study, the Comaroffs (2009) argue that when ethnicity was formerly used by the state in inscribing rigid forms of social identity – particularly in the way that the apartheid regime in Namibia and South Africa did – it has now become entangled with the free market, driven by agents interested in mostly reaping the economical benefits that comes with it. They stress that this has resulted in a deeper cultural search for what is ethnic – for the real, the exclusive and the distinctive

– emphasizing ideals of uniqueness and separateness. In this way, the Comaroffs (2009) argue that this is taking us into “ethno-futures”, in which ethnicity still plays an integral part of social life, by having both ethnicity and the market enmeshed together in order to create a “identity economy.”

Here I argue that it is the same “identity economy” that the Ovaherero and Nama activists operate within. Their calls can be seen in almost exclusive terms, as many activists in the movement are seeking reparations for only the Ovaherero and Nama, leaving out other groups such as the Damara and San who were equally affected by the colonial genocide. This is understandable to an extent since these suffered immeasurable losses including loss of lives, land and economic livelihood at the hands of German colonialists and are certainly entitled to material recourse. However, in emphasizing their ethnic identities I argue that this may lead to further entrenching social difference created by European colonialists, by keeping certain groups and individuals out from seeking similar moral or political recourse for historical injustices – whatever they may be – through this bounded view of ethnicity.

In Namibia therefore there is a need to resist rigid forms of social identification, especially that of ethnic categorization. But how can the decolonial memory activists and queer activists, who are actively working to cross rigid ethnic lines overcome these essentialized views of history based on ethnic frameworks in Namibia? In attempting to answer this question, I will now move on to theorising coloniality and decoloniality. Here I find these concepts as relevant in further exploring the connections between memory and ethnicity.

2.5. The decolonial turn

In recent years scholars, activists and artists have insisted that certain systematic forces present during colonialism persist and are perpetuated in postcolonial societies. With this there has been increasing emphasis on what has been described as an incomplete decolonization project. Therefore, Ramón Grosfoguel (2007) contends that the removal of colonial regimes was not simultaneous with decolonization. Colonialism has permeated and manifested itself anew in the form of coloniality. Significantly scholars have started theorising these links. This theorisation specifically originated in Latin America, led by scholars such as Grosfoguel and Walter Mignolo and has since been adopted and adapted by African scholars, for instance the Zimbabwean scholar Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni.

2.5.1. Coloniality

In the recent decolonial theory scholarship, two concepts have become salient. These are coloniality and decoloniality. So what do these mean? In short, coloniality refers to the hierarchical structures that were imposed through European colonialism that prevails even after the end of colonialism, while decoloniality refers to the dismantling of these structures to ensure an encompassing liberation.

Ramón Grosfoguel (2007) shows that colonialism steered human relations into particular hierarchical systems of power that produced what Frantz Fanon popularly described as zones of being and zones of non-being. Grosfoguel (2007:217) argues that these are constituent of 'multiple and heterogeneous global hierarchies.' In fact, he speaks of 'heterarchies' to describe the construction of colonialism and its enduring influence over society. For Grosfoguel (2007:216) colonialism and by extension coloniality (understood as the enduring legacy of colonialism in societies after the formal end of colonialism) has infiltrated all spheres of social life; that is coloniality exists over 'labour, political and military systems, gender, sex, spirituality, knowledge production, language'. He summarizes that:

a European/capitalist/military/christian/patriarchal/white/heterosexual/male arrives in the Americas and established simultaneously in time and space several entangled global hierarchies..." (Grosfoguel 2007:216).

In this sense, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016) in his "Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality" speaks of a 'metaphysical catastrophe', in which everything of the Other, of the colonized became a target for destruction. The world is supposed to be rid of this perceived evil – the African, the black. Maldonado-Torres (2016) likens this to a war. The colonialist seeks to get rid of the physical existence of the othered, though genocidal wars and other heinous ways.

Maldonado-Torres (2016) has been the Latin American decolonial scholar who has paid the closest attention to African situations. He shows that the condition of coloniality is also taken up by Africans themselves. It is implanted in their soul so much so that it leads to feelings of self-loathing. These feelings are internalized to the extent, that they seek to rid ourselves of their African-ness, their black-ness. There is little fulfilment in being African or black. Therefore, nobody wants to be associated with it. This is what the colonialist wants the colonized to believe.

As Maldonado-Torres (2016: 4) says:

For a black person, this means that one is always trying to kill the black in oneself. The war therefore is within and without... blackness must disappear or at least be covered-over by whiteness. Blackness must not anything substantially, neither land or much time to live, nor goods and resources and not even the possibility to generate self-esteem. Value, for Blacks, is supposed to be elsewhere and forever postponed.

He suggests that African-ness should be forever hidden under a cloak of whiteness. This self-loathing creates insecurity in the colonized, and further doubt is inscribed in their consciousness. They, therefore, remain uncertain about their capabilities. Maldonado-Torres (2016) concludes that by so doing, the colonizer can continue to carve out the world it desires for themselves, with little concern for the colonized.

“Writing On the Postcolony”, Achille Mbembe (2000), drawing deeply on examples, particularly from the history of his native Cameroon, shows that Africa is regarded as having a dearth of possibilities, of culture, of knowledge - of capable beings. Mbembe (2000) continues to say that the West has never really come to terms with how to deal with Otherness.

He points to the resistance on the part of the West against viewing others as equals, as humans. This othering as Maldonado-Torres (2016) explains results in a situation where Africans experiences a hell on earth – with their humanity constantly denied. They are, therefore, constantly trying to escape from such a “hellish existence”. Coloniality is then said to conjure up feelings of “breathlessness”. Africans cannot breathe, because they feel smothered by the anti-blackness exhumed in public spaces.

Coloniality relates to this thesis in the sense that although political liberalization has ushered in a new era with increased freedoms, and accompanying opportunities, they are still challenged by various forms of coloniality that is preventing the full enjoyment of such freedoms. Their social reality remains informed by colonialism – physical and non-physical remnants alike – that are impacting negatively on their sense of self and self-worth.

In this sense, decolonial memory activists and queer activists point to their constant feelings of insecurity, being choked, suffocated and left “breathless” by coloniality. Their being still threatened by modern and global system (read: coloniality), created to inscribe a Western mode of being, while overriding that of Africanness and blackness. Increasingly, the activists are mobilizing against forms of coloniality, whether its protesting against colonial statues and monuments, calling for the scraping of colonial-

era laws or calling for the respect of human remains, to in a sense (re-) claim their Africanness, their blackness, which was stripped away from them. It is about (re-) building the world, to allow for pluralistic modes of being, including that of being African and many others as well as to finding new ways of being with each other.

2.5.2. Decoloniality

If coloniality is the production of several ‘heterachies’, then decoloniality is a purposeful act meant to resist these modes of being comprehensively.

Maldonado-Torres (2016) writes in the Ten theses that real decolonization means an encompassing liberation (of people, nature, etc – getting rid of capitalism, extractivism, homophobia, sexism, and – of course – racism!). Furthermore, Maldonado-Torres (2016) observes that the decolonial struggle has mostly been put forward by the youth. He argues that since young people are at the forefront of making calls for the decolonization of postcolonial society, they often become the targets of state forces, who wants to prevent at all costs, uncontrolled changes to society proposed, that may pose a threat to their grip on state power.

At the centre of this struggle has been the university, because this is where a significant number of young people congregate. According to Maldonado-Torres (2016) it is from here that they mobilize for their struggle against the generational inheritances of racism, sexism and homophobia. In this sense he was evoking the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements that emerged in South Africa. In 2015 South Africa was rocked by protests by students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) calling for the removal of the Cecil John Rhodes statue on its scenic Table Mountain “Upper” campus (Becker 2016a).

It, however, becomes extremely problematic when the “colonized” becomes the “questioner” (Maldonado-Torres, 2016:8) and as alluded to earlier, feelings of insecurity emerge amongst them. That is why he stresses that the colonizer will not hesitate to cut in this in the bud at an early stage, to prevent it from spreading. As he puts it: “...security forces are brought in, and violence ensues. Bodies bleed. Youth are no longer treated as youth, as criminals.”

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I provided an overview of memory-making by the Ovaherero, Nama and Germans in Namibia, as well as by other actors in Germany. I demonstrated that these actors have responded to the experiences of colonial genocide in varied ways. This was informed by structural inequalities as imposed through German and South African colonialisms. In this way, I argued the Ovaherero and Nama were limited at representing their historical experiences more widely. However, as I pointed out, they have engaged in various performance acts, which have ensured that memories of the colonial genocide remain in their communities. In Germany, on the other hand, colonial claims were perpetuated even after WWI when Germany lost its colonies. The situation, as I demonstrated, only changed after WWII. However, memories of the German colonial period receded from public knowledge and new issues related to Germany's recent past were taken up. In this sense, memories of the Holocaust became more significant. However, engagement with Germany's colonial past remained, and certain issues related to the colonial past were later taken up again in the 1980s.

I further referred to relevant concepts in understanding how memory claims have been taken up by these groups in Namibia and Germany. I specifically situated these claims within debates around the role of non-state actors in memory work. I emphasized how civil society actors are critical in illuminating past (colonial) injustices. In this sense, I explained that significant civil society actions were required to ensure that memories of the Holocaust were prominently situated within Germany's public sphere (Wüstenberg 2010).

I further elaborated in the relations between these actors. I suggested there to be a complex rendering of relations between memory actors (Rothberg 2009). I argued that this is relevant in understanding how memory struggles have been taken up by various actors in Namibia. Through my discussion on how memories are related I emphasized that such thinking is critical in reflecting on memory process in Namibia. This relates to the varied experiences of German and South African colonialisms. This is important since younger activists have taken up memory struggles that challenge essentialized views of history. I argued that in exploring their struggles further theorisation is necessary, and therefore I found the concepts 'coloniality' and 'decoloniality' relevant.

CHAPTER THREE

SETTING THE SCENE

3.1. Introduction

While this study foregrounds contemporary struggles against coloniality in Namibia, I will also provide a contemporary history context of the study. I will begin by exploring the histories of the early decolonial and civil rights struggles in Namibia. My focus will be on the emergence of two intertwined movements, that is the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) and ‘SlutShameWalk’ movements. The formation of these movements was significant in the trajectory of contemporary decolonial struggles in Namibia because they mobilized against the Swapo party’s²³ postcolonial policies. AR rallied for equitable land distribution, while the SlutShameWalk against patriarchal views on sexuality and gender. These movements influenced the latest struggles over decoloniality, which are at the heart of this thesis.

I will then discuss the research process of this study. I start with a discussion on my pre-fieldwork process in Windhoek at the Riruako Centre for Genocide and Memory Studies, a local non-governmental organization working on issues related on the colonial genocide. During this period, as I will show, I encountered several problems over my ethnicity, which coupled with an impending COVID-19 pandemic, saw me re-thinking the research process. Then I continue with my discussion with a focus on the fieldwork process.

3.2. Entangled decolonial struggles against different forms of coloniality

Before I will reflect on the process of field work, I will trace the trajectories of decolonial struggles in Namibia. I will historicise struggles before my fieldwork between 2020 and 2022 to show the entanglements between previous and contemporary decolonial struggles. In many ways, the decolonial memory activists and queer activists I encountered between 2020 and 2022 were influenced by activists, such as Job Amupanda and Nzosi Mwazi. Since these preceding struggles happened within the last decade (post 2010), many of the former activists were still active in Namibia’s decolonial struggles during the period of my fieldwork.

²³ Since independence the party has used “Swapo party” rather than “SWAPO” in its self-references. The latter was used between 1960-1990.

I will focus on two decolonial and civil rights struggles, primarily against postcolonial land policies and patriarchal (colonial) views on sexuality and gender. For this purpose, I emphasize the formation of Affirmative Repositioning (AR), a political movement that challenges the Swapo party's land policies and the emergence of the SlutShameWalk movement, which mobilized against sexual- and gender-based violence.

3.2.1. The emergence of the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement

On 9 November 2014 social media was set a buzz with reports of three young activists closely linked to the ruling Swapo party who controversially took possession of a piece of land, dubbed as *Erf 2014* in Windhoek's upper class neighbourhood of Kleine Kuppe on the southern outskirts of the city. Amongst them were the former SWAPO Youth League (SPYL) Secretary for Information and Publicity, Job Amupanda, and fellow former SPYL activists Dimbulukeni Nauyoma and George Kambala. They argued that their move was part of their "affirmative repositioning" radical strategy to challenge the Swapo party's postcolonial land policies which have been characterized by escalating urban land prices, particularly in Windhoek, making it unaffordable to the bulk of the city's poor and working-class residents. They also highlighted unfair practices by Swapo party leaders in distributing land, such as corruption and nepotism. These two factors they said were making it nearly impossible for the city's residents to cheaply acquire property in Windhoek. Amupanda, 25-years-old at the time, claimed that he previously "...applied for land two years ago. My application was ignored. I am still waiting" (*The Namibian* 10 November 2014). This while the Windhoek City Council was cheaply selling land to Swapo party politicians and well-connected property developers, at the expense of the city's residents who were expected to pay exorbitant prices for the same pieces of land (*The Namibian* 19 December 2014).

Determined in their opposition against Swapo party leaders, the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) activists then started organizing the city's mostly youthful residents to hand-in mass land applications to the Windhoek City Council, resulting in a staggering 14,000 such applications (*The Namibian* 24 November 2014). In the meantime, Amupanda resigned from his position in the SPYL²⁴, citing a personal conviction for pursuing a social justice agenda, rather than a political career in the party, as the main reasons for such a move. In his resignation letter to the party, Amupanda stressed frustrations over the party's conformist political culture. He specifically argued against views by the party's leadership that youth leaders should be accepting of the

²⁴ Amupanda, Nauyoma and Kambala were later removed from the party.

party's policies, without question, like "tea boys clapping hands", "singing songs" and being "obedient zombies" (*The Namibian* 12 November 2014).

In responding to the AR protests over land, President Hage Geingob, a Swapo party presidential candidate for the 2014 elections at the time, acknowledged that Namibia was finding it hard to solve its enduring land question. He was, however, quick to brush off the youth's radicalism around the issue, presenting the Swapo party, and in effect himself, as capable of handling it, mostly through the party's existing policies. At a political rally in Mariental, the capital of the southern region of Hardap, Geingob said that "you need leadership to solve it in an amicable way where all Namibians can live together" and that "We are in a capitalist system. We have the political power. Let us reconcile it with the economic power and address the land reform through the willing-seller and willing-buyer concept"²⁵ (*The Namibian* 18 November 2014). Undeterred by Geingob's comments, the AR activists, continued with their land activism in the ensuing months of 2015, resulting in more land applications.



²⁵ A postcolonial land policy that was introduced in 1991 at the first land conference emphasizing neo-liberal free market principles in addressing Namibia's historical inequalities in land ownership, particularly agricultural land. A second land conference was controversially held in 2018 to introduce new land policies. Pressing concerns, such as claims over ancestral lands and urban land featured prominently at the latter (Delgado 2020).

In her analysis, Heike Becker (2016b) describes the AR movement, as prominently bringing to the fore decolonial concerns for the first time in postcolonial Namibia. This was in the form of concerns over land distribution. Becker (2016b) summarizes it as Namibia's "Fanonian moment", that is "a new generation has entered the country's social and political scene and has forcefully asked penetrating new questions" which Becker (2016b) describes as constituting "the biggest mass actions since Namibia's independence in 1990." Indeed, the formation of the AR movement has been significant in calls for the decolonization of postcolonial Namibia. The AR is decolonial in the sense that it has expressed ideological affiliations to thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Thomas Sankara. It has further called for "self-help" programmes for securing more social justice in Namibia, especially as it relates to land ownership. They specifically aim for youth to be involved in such processes. Since then, Namibia's decolonial struggle has expanded with more decolonial activists organizing against different forms of coloniality. Significantly more recently, decolonial activists in Namibia have been preoccupied with the coloniality of sexuality and gender.

3.2.2. The 'SlutShameWalk' movement

Over the last few years civil rights activists have mobilized against sexual- and gender-based violence against women – something that they attributed to misogynistic and patriarchal attitudes prevailing against women. (*The Namibian* 2 April 2019; *The Observer* 10 April 2021) – with the biggest related protest #ShutItAllDown held in October 2020 (see Becker 2020). On 6 April 2019 the first-ever 'SlutShameWalk' was held in Windhoek by a group of younger feminist activists (*The Namibian* 2 April 2019). The main reason for the protest – was to address the narrative that women were "sluts" "asking for it" by dressing in specific ways – i.e., that women were responsible by dressing in sexually "provocative" ways. The use of "slut" as an affirmative self-reference took this up in a powerful way – like I show in chapter five when people started to use the term "queer" in self-naming. The protestors illuminated that such views are highly problematic since women are of course disproportionately affected by incidents of sexual- and gender-based violence. In Namibia there is a high prevalence rate of sexual- and gender-based violence. These protests I argue emerged within a broader context of activism for sexual- and gender-based violence against women that started in the early 1990s (Becker 1995). Clothing, in this case the miniskirt, then became a powerful tool for mobilization and resistance against sexual- and gender-based violence perpetuated against women. One of the leading activists, Nzosi Mwazi

was also referring to views that women were to be blamed for sexual- and gender-based violence targeted against them.

The ‘SlutShameWalk’ was attended by two hundred women, men and children marching from Ausspannplatz, located a few metres away from the Central Business District (CBD), an area of downtown Windhoek known for its small gambling houses, along the city’s main arterial Independence Avenue (*The Namibian* 12 April 2019). The protestors were dressed in provocative clothing of short skirts, colloquially known as “miniskirts” to challenge patriarchal views on sexuality and gender, that they argued were imposing on their sexuality. The protestors were particularly outspoken against views on how women should behave and what they should wear when in public. According to them it pointed to the control of women’s sexuality by men.

The protests therefore became a platform for women to openly discuss issues related to sexual- and gender-based violence. As Mwazi puts in an interview with *The Namibian*: “Late last year, I started thinking of ways to bring Namibian women together to express themselves fully, share experiences and have their voices heard by embracing womanhood through sisterhood” (*The Namibian* 2 April 2019). In this way, it was meant for women, especially those affected by sexual- and gender-based violence, encouraging women to come out with their stories of sexual- and gender-based violence and support each other.

The decolonial struggles that I explore in this study have roots in earlier decolonial and civil rights calls, such as I demonstrated above, with calls for a change in postcolonial land policies and violence perpetuated against women. These calls I argue were critical in the trajectory of the contemporary decolonial struggle that is the focus of this study. The years 2020, 2021 and 2022 have been significant in this regard. This can be seen in the vociferous online and offline campaigns by decolonial activists in Windhoek and Lüderitz.

I undertook fieldwork amongst these decolonial memory activists and queer activists, with a special focus on selected activists, whom I already introduced in the introductory chapter. In the following section I will provide a discussion of my ethnographic research with focus on experiences in, encounters in, and processes of fieldwork.

3.3. Research Methodology

This ethnographic research was conducted through extended fieldwork over two years in Namibia. In the initial phase of my research, when I took up my studies at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) I started with pre-fieldwork to get a better sense of the field site; that is to identify key sites and interlocutors for conducting this study. This took me to the Riruako Centre for Genocide and Memory Studies (hereafter the Riruako Centre) in Windhoek. I worked there for three months between March and May 2019 as an intern, assisting with research and fundraising activities for the organization. When I left for Cape Town, South Africa to resume my studies at UWC I was caught off-guard by the changing conditions of my field site. As I show in the following subsection, my plans of returning to the Riruako Centre for more extensive ethnographic fieldwork following my time spend there was placed in jeopardy with the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in Wuhan, China in late 2019. The COVID-19 outbreak was accompanied by constantly changing social conditions in response to curbing its spread. This seriously impeded on conducting conventional ethnographic research and I had to change my focus to “virtual” ethnographic research and when the times allowed for it. I conducted “physical” ethnographic research. Due to the unpredictability of the COVID-19 virus I therefore had to conduct my ethnographic work in several periods in the first period in 2020, second period 2021 and third period in 2022.²⁶

Following that I then stopped with “physical” fieldwork to conduct further reflections on my research in Cape Town, South Africa. During this time, I also undertook some fieldwork virtually and attended a virtual film screening of the ‘Kapana’ movie – Namibia’s first gay flick that I will discuss in chapter six. When I returned in January 2022 to Namibia I started with more interviews, specifically with Omar van Reenen, Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe and Phillippe Talavera, the Director of the OYO which produced the ‘Kapana’ film. Some of these interviews were also conducted virtually because interlocutors were not in Namibia. Omar was in Pretoria, South Africa while Ndiilokelwa was in Belgium. I held a physical interview with Phillippe at their offices in the Windhoek suburb of Prosperita and we spoke about the film. I then paused for further interim reflections between February and May 2022. Finally, I resumed with further interviews in June and July 2022, with Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl, an openly same-sex couple living in Namibia and Boli Mootseng, a musician who has been producing songs on the colonial genocide in Namibia.

²⁶ My research proposal and ethics clearance had just been approved when the pandemic hit and made the research as planned impossible.

3.3.1. Pre-fieldwork

On 4 March 2019 I started with an internship at the Riruako Centre. I was there for over two months, conducting preliminary research for my research proposal on the Ovaherero and Nama activists fighting for the recognition of Germany's colonial genocide (1904 – 1908) in Namibia. During that time, I was staying in Rehoboth some 90 km south of Windhoek and was commuting daily to the centre, located close to Marua Mall, a shopping mall on the southern edge of the Central Business District (CBD). The Riruako Centre was established in late 2018 by the Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA) and Nama Traditional Leaders Association (NTLA) as an educational and research centre of the colonial genocide (*New Era* 11 December 2018). The new Riruako Centre held regular public meetings, public lectures and conferences. It was also planning to introduce university courses in Genocide Studies, which have thus far not been offered.²⁷ The Riruako Centre was a place where Ovaherero and Nama, who felt haunted by the experiences of colonial violence were able to openly discuss these issues. It became a space for mourning, healing and reconciliation.

I was motivated to contribute through an internship placement and to establish contact and built rapport for the research I intended to do for my Masters. I planned to conduct life history interviews with some of the Ovaherero and Nama women activists, such as Nokokure Vei, Esther Utjiua Muinjangu, Ida Hoffmann and Sima Luipert of the struggle for genocide reparations. The Riruako Centre, as I will show below, was a key site since this was where most of the women reparation activists working at in one or other capacity.²⁸

During my time at the Riruako Centre I had several engagements with these women activists in which I learned more about their role in the struggle for reparations. Esther Muinjangu, Ida Hoffmann and Sima Luipert were mostly involved in activism in illuminating the experiences of women during the colonial genocide. I had planned then to conduct life histories of the various Ovaherero and Nama women activists.

²⁷ In Namibia there are no such courses offered.

²⁸ The director, Nokokure Vei was previously the Secretary of the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation (OGF), which was formed during the 2004 Ohamakari centennial commemorations (Duschniski and Hamrick, 2018). During that time, Vei was also newly elected as the Treasurer-General of the NUDO party. This came after the former Chairperson of the OGF, Esther Utjiua Muinjangu was elected as its first female president. Muinjangu was also on the Board of the Directors of the Riruako Centre together with leading Nama women activists, including Ida Hoffmann, the former Chairperson of the Nama Genocide Technical Committee (hereafter the Nama Committee) and Sima Luipert, Chairperson of the Nama Committee.

However, my initial intention to focus on the reparation movement and specifically the Riruako Centre became ever more questionable around issues over ethnic and national backgrounds. For instance, one morning a young woman came for a meeting with Nokokure Vei. When she arrived at the Riruako Centre, the woman started speaking in Otjiherero to Hlumelo Lunga, known as Lulu, who was a 29-year-old Zimbabwean worker at the Riruako Centre and myself.²⁹ When she found out that Lulu and I were both not conversant in the language, she was vividly irritated and insisted on being assisted in Otjiherero, because as she put it “It is the Riruako Centre.” This despite her being young and would most probably be conversant in English – Namibia’s official language. The woman’s persistence to use Otjiherero showed that she held a belief that the Riruako Centre was a space exclusively for Ovaherero people, excluding others, like Lulu and myself, who might also be equally interested in issues over genocide.

At some of the events organized by the Riruako Centre, Lulu and I encountered similar issues. Most of these events were mostly attended by Ovaherero, while Nama were mostly absent. For instance, at one of the press conferences held at the UN Plaza in Katutura, there was only one Nama delegate, *Gaob* Eduard Afrikaner, who was leader of the Afrikaner Traditional Authority. The event was held in response to the dismissal of the Ovaherero and Nama court case in New York, USA.³⁰ The event was mostly attended by Ovaherero traditional leaders and activists, including *Ombara Tjitambi* Vekuii Rukoro³¹, Spokesperson of the OTA, Bob Kandetu. There was a crowd with their traditional Ovaherero and Ovahimba attires of German military-style uniforms and leather skin clothing consisting of headgear and short dress for men still common amongst the latter were seated in the complex.

While I was somewhat frustrated with issues over ethnicity and nationality at the Riruako Centre, I still wanted to continue with my participant observation there during my fieldwork. However, new challenges I encountered at and beyond the Riruako Centre, forced me to re-think my planned field work. In his ethnography of elites in the north-eastern town of Rundu in the Kavango East region, Mattia Fumanti (2016) speaks

²⁹ Since there are also members of the Ovaherero community who have mixed-race origins of German and Ovaherero backgrounds, I am also often mistaken for being Ovaherero, especially when in spaces like the Riruako Centre.

³⁰ Since 2017 the Ovaherero and Nama have been involved in an international court case against the German government for their inclusion in negotiations over genocide reparations. The case was launched in New York, USA. See the Class Action Complaint at <http://genocide-namibia.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Class-Action-Complaint.pdf>

³¹ Both Afrikaner (*The Namibian* 18 June 2021a) and Rukoro (*The Namibian* 18 June 2021b) sadly passed away due to COVID-19 health related complications during Namibia’s deadly third wave of COVID infections.

of a dynamic field site that is constantly evolving, often taking anthropologists into unexpected encounters, opening new pathways for social research. In pretty much as Fumanti (2016) suggests above the field site that I encountered in 2020 largely determined how this study would unfold. The circumstances of the field site, and particularly the COVID-19 pandemic that would endure for more than two years profoundly shaped the trajectory of this study.³²

Certainly, the ban on social gatherings and movement, which was later amended to include limits on social gatherings – initially a maximum of fifty people (and which changed constantly according to the unfolding situation) posed a major difficulty to my proposed study. This was accompanied by strict observation of health protocols, such as hand sanitizing, the wearing of facemasks and social distancing. I was muddled about my research practice: “How should I go about doing this research?”. Social events were now banned and viewed as a serious public health threat. The operations of the Riruako Centre, was therefore, limited. Significantly also the war commemorations and cultural festivals of the Ovaherero and Nama communities were now cancelled, events that were supposed to be key sites for my proposed study.

I slowly learnt that fieldwork is an intricate process constituting of many evolving elements, requiring anthropologists to transverse these. As Fumanti (2016) argues, this brings questions over the researcher’s agency. During fieldwork anthropologists are often taken into unexpected turns and introduced to new twists through our encounters with our interlocutors. I came to understand that such ongoing changes should not be seen as a disruption of the fieldwork, but rather as a deeply rewarding and enriching process for both the researcher and their interlocutors.

In many respects, I was also shaped by the field site. This can be seen in the deeply personal impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on me and my family. For several months I was in a panic mood not knowing what to do about my research. In the meantime, the COVID-19 pandemic kept unfolding. It felt like everything was turned upside down. Even worse, at this very early stage of the pandemic the COVID-19 virus impacted on

³² The Namibian government responded to the pandemic with strict lockdown measures, imposing a series of restrictions on social gatherings and movement. The central Erongo and Khomas regions (including Windhoek and the commuter towns of Okahandja and Rehoboth), where COVID-19 cases were concentrated, were placed under lockdown (*The Namibian* 30 March 2020). In an unprecedented move, President Hage Geingob cancelled the highly anticipated 30th year independence anniversary celebrations (*The Namibian* 16 March 2020) and introduced a six-month-long State of Emergency, one of only four declared before in Namibia. Previously there was a State of Emergency in 1999 in response to the Caprivi succession attempts. A second one existed in 2016 with the drought and in 2019 again for another drought in the country.

me severely negatively. Towards the end of March, I received a big scare when I started experiencing a cough, one of the symptoms of COVID-19. I started showing these symptoms after an encounter with friends from The Netherlands and South Africa. That required that I start rethinking my proposed study, and more importantly I had to put aside my urges at controlling the trajectory of the study and in a way just had to go with the social relations and trajectories of the fieldsite; the field site was speaking to me and I had to respond to it.

3.3.2. Encounters with COVID-19: personal and family struggles

While the economic and health-related consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were deeply noted across the globe, less obvious were its impact on mental health. After more than two years of the COVID-19 virus ravaging across the globe, scholars are now only recognizing its psychological impact (eg., Halder, Tiwana and Tahir 2020; Pretorius and Padmanabhanmi 2021).

Undoubtedly COVID-19 resulted in severe mental health consequences causing feelings of “anxiety”, “loneliness”, “depression”, and leading to “substance use” as a coping mechanism and feelings of hopelessness leading to “suicide risk” (Pretorius and Padmanabhanmi 2021:257). In mid-2021 during Namibia’s deadly third wave of COVID-19 infections I was equally confronted with these feelings when my sister and elderly mother became sick with the virus. After receiving news about their infection, I immediately travelled back to Rehoboth to take care of them. During this time social media was swamped with reports of the staggering COVID-19 related infections and death rates. Namibia at the time was reporting an average of 1,000 COVID-19 cases daily (Becker 2021a). *The Namibian* newspaper (22 June 2021) carried a on its frontpage a collage of headshots of well-known personalities in Namibia who succumbed to the COVID-19 virus, including the Swapo party parliamentarian, Mandela Kapere. In Rehoboth the energetic Mayor, Rudi “Snypes” van Wyk had also died. If so many influential people with more resources were dying in such high numbers, what about my family, who were less well-off, I thought. I developed feelings of hopelessness and anxiety, constantly fearing that my relatives may die. Fortunately, they recovered fully after several weeks of sickness. However, a few days after I went back to Windhoek with plans to resume my study in early July 2021.

I also contracted COVID-19 and fell seriously ill, being forced to stay in bed for several weeks. I was stuck in my small garden flat for over a month before leaving for

Rehoboth again and taking a further month to fully recover. During these months I was put under immense emotional strain trying to take care of my relatives and then myself.

Nevertheless, I started again with my fieldwork in August and September 2021 attending events, like the protest I described in the thesis's opening vignette, and commemorations such as the tenth-year commemoration of the first return of human remains ("skulls") from Germany. I also started conducting one-on-one interviews with some intercolutors. While I was healthy enough to resume the work, I did not fully comprehend the mental strain that I experienced during Namibia's third wave of COVID-19 infections. This resulted in a serious mental breakdown in late October 2021, leading to feelings of hopelessness that was starting to border on depression. This was, without saying, a difficult time for me.

3.3.3. Becoming Friends

Hildegard Titus came to my rescue on one night after my feelings became so overwhelming that I threatened to commit suicide. She thus demonstrated that she was no longer only a intercolutor but became a friend. Late at night she came rushing to my place in the suburb of Windhoek North after Omar (who uses the "they" pronoun), who had also become a friend asked her to visit me. Earlier the night I posted on my Facebook wall about my feelings and that I no longer wanted to continue living. In part, it was about my experiences of COVID-19, but was also much deeper. It was also about insecurities over my sexuality, which I elaborate more in a discussion on my reflections of my experiences during fieldwork.

After my Facebook post Omar tried calling me, but the call was cut while we were talking with each other. They then sent a text message encouraging me not to give up and to stay strong in the face of so much adversary.

That night both Hildegard and Omar became my friends. They gave me their support to help me through that difficult time. Hildegard then came with Matt³³ and we went to her place, spending the rest of the evening watching some adult cartoons, before later on talking to her about my feelings. We had a lengthy conversation and she suggested that I visit her therapist to talk more about my issues. That night I slept at her place. The next morning, she prepared a scrumptious breakfast of toast, bacon and eggs before she invited me to do some yoga exercises together. We then later visited the therapist.

³³ This is not his real name.

3.3.4 An activist ethnography

Koni Benson and Faeza Meyer (2015) explore alternative ways of knowledge production. They specifically focus on the relations of co-production between researchers and their interlocutors. Benson and Meyer (2015) integrated their professional and activism skills to look at the struggles over housing and homelessness in Cape Town. They engaged in a joint writing project that focuses on some of these issues. Methodologically, this collaborative research process, took the form of journaling by the interlocutor (Faeza Meyer) on her personal engagements with social activism in Cape Town, and weaving this into broader perspectives by the researcher (Koni Benson).

Their research opens new pathways for creating shared research spaces. In this way Koni and Meyer (2015) challenge power relations that exists between researchers and interlocutors, by moving away from a narrow focus on the researcher. Instead, they focused on weaving together the perspective of both the researcher and interlocutor. According to Koni Benson and Richa Nagar (2006) such approaches pushes us to consider decolonial forms of knowledge production that opposes hierarchical structures present in our research settings. They argue that this is a reflexive process, that can build solidarities and lead to new ways of knowledge production.

This thesis builds on such a collaborative research approach to explore contemporary decolonial struggles in Namibia. My attempts at engaging with the interlocutors extended beyond the conventional research setting, where the researcher purely collects information from their interlocutors, without further processes of engagement. Instead, this thesis, emphasized a shared process of knowledge production, where the decolonial, memory and queer struggles of the interlocutors informed the research process and vice versa. In this sense, I worked together with some of the activists on some of their initiatives. I was motivated to engage in such process, since I had a commitment towards social justice (as I will discuss later on) and therefore was interested in creating a more linear relationship between the interlocutors and myself.

My friendship with Hildegard gew and we became close resulting in me also taking up the decolonial struggle with her. I worked jointly with Hildegard on her activism. For instance, we worked together on a film project for Decolonize Berlin³⁴ on the decolonization of public spaces which was part of their Amo Festival “Amofest, which was held in honour of the 19th century Ghaian-born scientist, Anton Wilhelm Amo who

³⁴ <https://decolonize-berlin.de/en/bundnis-verein/>.

lived and worked in Berlin, Germany”³⁵ This gave us a chance to jointly reflect on the struggles against the coloniality of public spaces that Hildegard has been preoccupied with. I specifically drew from my experiences as someone with Rehoboth Baster origins - a group of racially mixed people with origins of European men and Khoisan women³⁶ - and what I felt like when visiting these sites. In the video I came out strongly against the coloniality of public spaces (see chapter four).

We also worked together on some of the interviews for this thesis. In late 2021 I visited the Windhoek City Museum with Hildegard in central Windhoek. We spoke to Aron Nambadi, the Curator of the museum who told us that the City Council of Windhoek had agreed to the calls of the petition (see chapter four).

In a sense I was motivated to participate in the activism with Hildegard since I previously was engaged in student struggles at the University of Namibia (UNAM). At UNAM I developed a strong commitment towards social justice and this undoubtedly influenced my willingness to engage in activism with Hildegard. In 2016 I led a protest with fellow students and student leaders against the decision of the University of Namibia (UNAM) to refuse students who owed the university to write exams. We held our protest in front of the administrative buildings on UNAM Main Campus. The protests escalated after the university required printed exam timetables for the examinations. Students who were not issued with exam timetables (especially those who still owed the university) were refused entry to write exams. We called on the university to allow students to be permitted to write exam, whether they owed the university or not. (*Republikein* 19 October 2016; *Allgemeine Zeitung* 19 October 2016). I was further motivated to share my research with the decolonial memory activists, queer activists, and various other communities in Namibia who might be interested in these issues. I published several online articles dealing with memory politics (Van Wyk 2020) and the struggle for reparations (Van Wyk 2021a). In 2021 I published an article on “Hornkrantz and Social Justice” in *The Namibian* that explored the calls for the removal of the Curt von François statue in relation with broader concerns over social inequalities in Namibia (Van Wyk 2021b). I further looked at decolonial struggles

³⁵ Decolonize Berlin has been involved in efforts at changing the street name Mohrenstraße to Anton Wilhel Amostraße. The ‘Amofest’ was the first event held to celebrate the successful renaming of the street in 2021 (<https://decolonize-berlin.de/en/veranstaltung/amofest/>)

³⁶ Rehoboth is where they established themselves in the 1880s following a series of migrations from the Cape Colony. During the 1950s and 1960s the apartheid colonial regime established an ethnic homeland for them there (Britz, Lang and Limpricht 1999).

against Windhoek's colonial public spaces (Van Wyk 2023) and the experiences of queer persons in Namibia (Van Wyk 2022).

3.3.5 My positionality

In this thesis, I adopt Heike Becker, Emile Boonzaaier and Joy Owen's (2005:124) conceptualization of the 'citizen anthropologist', which were helpful, in exploring the relations between the research interlocutors and myself. They note that there exists a view of the 'native anthropologist' – who hails from the societies in which they conduct their research – as fully embedded in their specific fieldsites, and therefore less likely to deal with issues over racial, cultural or linguistic difference, as is often the case with anthropologists who come from societies different from their own.

Becker, Boonzaaier and Owen (2005:124) opposes such views, instead arguing that the 'native anthropologist' or in their words 'citizen anthropologist' deals with these issues, just as much as other anthropologists, who might be separated from their fieldsites more permanently. Their views were informed by their own encounters as anthropologists who worked in fieldsites in which they had extended personal and social ties with, but at the same time had encountered issues that was still unfamiliar to them.

This was similarly the case for me. I hail from a different cultural and linguistic background as the decolonial memory activists and queer activists that I encountered during fieldwork. I am from Rehoboth, a small town located roughly 90 km south from Windhoek, that was created as a homeland for Rehoboth Basters. This is how I mostly introduced myself to my interlocutors. This then, for all intent and purposes, suggested to them that I was a Rehoboth Baster.³⁷ There were also factors that may have informed my interlocutors of my Rehoboth Baster origins, including that I am a native Afrikaans speaker, and my surname is Van Wyk, which a large percentage of people from Rehoboth carry. In June 2020 when I visited Hornkrantz, 120 km south-west from Windhoek with Hildegard, she asked me to tell her about the history of the Rehoboth Basters. Later when I met with Omar and told them that I was from Rehoboth they loudly exclaimed with *Oh, jy is 'n Rehoboth Baster!* (Oh, you are a Rehoboth Baster!). In my interview with Laidlaw Peringanda, he spoke to me in Afrikaans. This suggests then that they were aware of my Rehoboth Baster cultural origins.

³⁷ This even though since independence, a common reference to the postcolonial situation of Namibia, the town has become more multicultural with the return of Damara and Nama who were forcefully removed by apartheid agents in the 1920s and newer migrants from the north, a common reference to northern Namibia, including Ovambo, Kavango, Caprivians and Zimbabweans who have established themselves in the town.

In some cases, it meant that I could not evade certain perceptions of Rehoboth Basters that relates to their complicit and complex position during the German and South African colonial periods. For instance, while I participated in the cemetery “cleaning” on 10 December 2020 in Swakopmund, I was confronted with some of these issues. During my conversations with some of the participants, my cultural origins came up. I informed them that I was from Rehoboth and had Rehoboth Baster cultural origins. Some of the participants then referenced how privileged the Rehoboth Basters were during South African colonial period and described them as a “land-owning class”. This of course related with colonial origins of the people, the early South African colonial era suppression of the “Rehoboth Rebellion” (Emmet 1999) but also the complicity of (at least the leadership of) the “Basters” with the late apartheid dispensation. The then Kaptein Hans Diergaardt’s politics, from the Turnhalle negotiations (Britz, Lang and Limpricht 1999) through to the early Independence period could be understood as anti-black.

However, these differences were overcome by our similar experiences living in a postcolonial society with deep traces of German and South African colonialism. Specifically, I related with the critical views of the decolonial memory activists and queer activists on bounded notions of ethnic identity. In this sense, I preferred not to use any ethnic origins in my own self-references with them. Many of the activists also shared this preference with me. In cases, where issues of ethnicity emerged, it was used to stimulate exchanges between us, such as in the case of their biographical life histories, (to share our experiences with each other) and never used to impose boundaries and separate us. However, the activists and my preference of not using ethnic origins in our own self-references should then be regarded as particular to the situation in postcolonial Namibia where ethnic identities have been maintained in postcolonial national self-images (see chapter one).

In addition to my critical analysis of the Namibian colonial and postcolonial politics of nationalism and ethnicity my critical stance on my Rehoboth Baster origins was informed by my early childhood experiences. While I was born in Rehoboth, I moved to Windhoek at a young age to live with my mother, sister and start with school. In 2003 I was enrolled in Eros Primary School, a formerly whites-only school in the upper-class Eros suburb (which was also previously reserved for whites-only). My mother was a domestic worker and lived with her employers at their residences in Eros, colloquially referred to as *in slaapwerk* [loosely translated as “stay-in-work”]. She had struck a deal

with some of them to allow my sister and me to live with them. In Eros we kept mostly to ourselves, rarely visiting Rehoboth or family members in Khomasdal – Windhoek’s formerly coloured-designate neighbourhood. This meant then that we had effectively adopted a white suburban lifestyle – of course without many of the luxuries that goes with that- and in that way separated from our Rehoboth Baster cultural origins.

Ethnicity and Namibian coloniality

This was certainly helpful in building relationships and rapport with the intercolutors. Having been born in Namibia I had similar experiences as some of the intercolutors, even though this may be varied as we will see below. However, I still had intimate knowledge, like the activists, on the impact of German and South African colonialism. Indeed, the intercolutors perceived me as part of the fabric of Namibian society. Some of the issues that the activists were opposing, I also encountered during my childhood years growing up in Windhoek. In terms of coloniality in Windhoek’s public spaces, my family – that is my mother, sister and I – lived in Eros. I therefore lived in a place where I had limited encounters with my Rehoboth Baster cultural heritage.

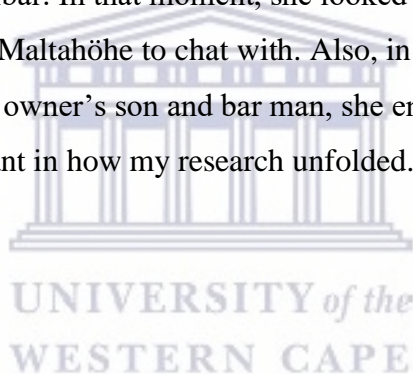
This related with our inability to develop friendships with the white residents living there, which was informed by limitations posed by colonial racist and classist structures. We failed to overcome these racial and class boundaries, which was heavily guarded by my mother’s employers. For instance, I was not allowed to play with their children. I was faced with similar challenges at Eros Primary School (also a formerly whites only school). Here I was also unable to develop friendships with the white pupils, some of whom also lived in Eros. This related with views from their parents that reinforced racist and classist stereotypes. For instance, I can clearly recall an incident when I was involved in a physical fight with one of my white classmates - Stefan. He teased me regularly and when I got frustrated to the point where I punched him in the face, his parents confronted my mother about the incident at the school. There they took Stefan’s side and lamented to him in Afrikaans: *Ons het jou geswaarskuu, bly weg van hom af. Nou kan jy sien hoekom ons so gesê het. Dit is hoe hierdie mense is* [in English: “We warned you to stay away from him. Now you can see why you told you to do so. This is how these people are”].

Sexuality and Namibian coloniality

I also have the same sexual orientation as many of the queer activists in this study, and therefore faced with similar issues related to sexuality in Namibia. While in high school I mostly had friends who were girls and avoided activities, in which boys mostly took part in, such as playing soccer (see chapter six). I was often targeted by my classmates

(mostly boys) for not conforming to expected gender roles. They would regularly tease me, and call me names such as “moffie” (a derogatory term used in Afrikaans to refer to gay men).

I was therefore personally affected by some of the issues that the queer activists referenced in their struggles. So when I changed my focus to work with younger decolonial memory activists and queer activists, several also self-identified as gay or lesbian like Omar van Reenen, Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe, and later the slightly older couple Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl there was a commitment from me to openly disclose my sexual orientation to them. This facilitated conversation with them around queer issues. I was regarded as someone who faced similar struggles, and, in that way, we could relate with each other. It was however initially to Hildegard however that I disclosed my sexual orientation. This happened incidentally in the Maltahöhe guesthouse while we were having drinks at the bar. I took out my cellphone to show her something, when a notification from Grindr, a popular dating app for gay singles, appeared on my phone’s toolbar. In that moment, she looked at me intuitively and asked whether I found someone in Maltahöhe to chat with. Also, in Lüderitz at a hotel bar, after I showed interest in the owner’s son and bar man, she encouraged me to talk to him. This was quite significant in how my research unfolded.



3.3.6. Fieldwork processes

Visiting public sites with their colonial and postcolonial monuments

During my fieldwork I visited several sites that relates to the colonial genocide. The sites that I visited are significant for the memory practices of the Ovaherero and Nama communities and that date from the German colonial period in Namibia. Most of these sites were located in central and southern Namibia. In central Windhoek I visited the Curt von François statue, Rainbow sidewalk, while in the coastal town of Swakopmund I visited the Swakopmund cemetery.

At these sites I paid attention to the aesthetics and design of the sites and learned about the histories of these sites. I particularly observed the monuments that were erected at the sites. I looked at the plaques and placards at the monuments that provided biographical information on them.

On some of my visits to these sites I was accompanied by activists and learned about their decolonial concerns over colonial and postcolonial monuments. When I visited Hornkrantz with Hildegard Titus and her partner, Matt. Hildegard was photographing some of the graves of the Nama victims who died there during the German General, Curt von François' crippling attack on the /Khowese Nama chief Goab Hendrik Witbooi and his followers in 1892. Later in December 2020 I visited the Swakopmund cemetery to attend the annual "cleaning" of the graves of the Prisoners-of-War of the colonial genocide (1904-1908) that is organized by Laidlaw Peringanda who is the founder of the Namibia Genocide Association.

This brought about significant contact between the interlocutors and I. At these sites I had conversations with the activists about their contemporary struggles against the coloniality of public spaces. During our conversations the activists referenced the initiatives that they presently involved in to have colonial monuments removed and to build a more encompassing postcolonial memory landscape – memoryscape – that reflects on other histories – particularly those of women and queer persons³⁸ – and not only men (as has been predominantly the case). At Hornkrantz, Hildegard told me that she had started with activist work and that she had been involved in efforts at decolonizing Windhoek's public spaces. Hildegard told me that she submitted a petition to the City of Windhoek to have the Von François in central Windhoek removed (see chapter four of this thesis). Similarly, at the Swakopmund cemetery Laidlaw told me that he and his fellow activists from the Namibia Genocide Association engaged in

³⁸ My online article '#ACurtFarewell and Inclusive Namibian Memory Landscapes' (2023) explores calls by women and queer persons for a inclusive memoryscape that reflects on their experiences.

activism to start with regular “cleaning” events to restore the graves and pay homage (and show respect) to those who perished at the hands of their German colonial masters (see chapter five).

I further learned about the personal histories of the activists. I asked Hildegard about her life history, including where she grew up, where she studied and what work she does. Through our conversations I learned that she was an artist and photojournalist. Soon after this first conversation, I travelled further with Hildegard through central and southern Namibia, to visit historical sites that date from the German and South African colonial periods. During these joint trips I continued learning about her life history and her current preoccupations with decolonial activism.

Attending protests, commemorations, film screenings and council meetings

It was at various events organized by activists and political leaders that I learned that decolonial concerns extended far and beyond the coloniality of public spaces (with their colonial and postcolonial monuments). During these events I paid attention to what the participants wore, the various dance and musical performances they engaged in, listened to speeches of political leaders and the aesthetics and design of buildings where these events were held.

At the protests held on 21 September 2021 against the agreement for reparations between the Namibian and German governments (see chapter one) that I attended I specifically learned that coloniality related to issues over ethnicity. I focused on perceptions of the participants. I specifically wanted to understand their views of Namibia’s colonial history. I learned that ethnicity (which as I explained in chapter one is a colonial inheritance) was still centrally situated in the views of history of both the protestors and political leaders. Further, I attended a commemoration event at the Independence Museum in Windhoek (see chapter six). The event was held to commemorate the first return of human remains, commonly referred to as “skulls” from Germany in 2011. I focused on the claims of the Namibian government to the skulls. I learned that the Namibian government placed emphasis on their ownership of the skulls (which as I will explain in chapter five relates to how the skulls were colonized during the German colonial period).

These events illuminated some of the decolonial struggles of the activists that I explore in this thesis and how Namibia’s political elite have responded to these claims. I attended the film screening of the ‘Kapana’ gay film. I focused on the representation of same-sex relationships in the film. I learned that same-sex relationships were frowned

upon because of views on masculinity. This film, as I will explain in chapter five, is critical in challenging these views.

One-on-One interviews

I continued to learn about the personal histories and contemporary decolonial struggles of the activists through interviews. In July 2020 I started with another life history interview with Hildegard. I then also held an interview with Laidlaw learning about his personal life and memory activism in Swakopmund. We conducted this interview over the phone since he was in Swakopmund, and I was unable to travel. In exploring decolonial concerns around sexuality and gender I started having interviews with the queer activists and founders of Namibia Equal Rights Movement, Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe and Omar van Reenen who have been engaged in an anti-homophobic campaign. Since they were constantly travelling, Ndiilokelwa was in Belgium and Omar in South Africa, we held these interviews through virtual platforms such as WhatsApp video call and Google Meetings.³⁹ I further held an interview with the gay couple Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl in Windhoek. During fieldwork I came across the 'Kapana' gay film and spoke with its director, Phillip Talavera from the Ombetja Yehinga Organization (OYO)⁴⁰ I further spoke with Boli Mootseng, who produced the song 'Hamakari' in honour of the victims of the colonial genocide.

In most of the interviews I meticulously took notes of my conversations with interlocutors, while I asked them to simultaneously make a recording with my cell phone. Most of the interlocutors agreed and were comfortable with being recorded. The recordings were helpful in that I was able to listen to them long after the interview was concluded as much as I wanted to. There were, however, circumstances where I was not able to take notes nor make a recording of the interview. This happened with my interview with Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl, a gay couple living in Namibia. We held the interview at their house in the upper market neighbourhood of Klein Windhoek, where Guillermo and Phillip introduced me to their three children: Yona, Paula and Maya. Guillermo's mother, Irma, was also present. They invited me for dinner, and we talked about their court cases against the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration and Safety over the recognition of their relationship. Since we held this conversation in the company of the whole family, including the children and Irma, I felt it was not appropriate to take out a notebook to write notes of our conversation or

³⁹ It was also because we were not certain about how the situation would unfold at that time relating to COVID-19 infections and we did not want to take our chances with possible transmission of the virus, so in that case virtual interviews were far more better.

⁴⁰ A non-governmental organization that uses art in creating awareness on social issues in Namibia.

request that I record. I therefore listened attentively and immersed myself fully in the situation. I often had to help both Guillermo and Phillip with the fidgeting children around the dining table. When I later left their house, I went home, and the following morning started to write down notes of my encounters with the family the night before.

Archival work

When the National Archives of Namibia (NAN) was closed first for renovations and then due to the national COVID-19 restrictions, I was frantically searching for alternative archives to collect some historical information for this study. This search took me to the Namibia Scientific Society (NSS) on the corner of John Meinert and Robert Mugabe Avenues in central Windhoek. In the small library of the NSS, on my many visits there, I came across several newspaper clippings in Afrikaans, English and German that reported widely on the erection of the Von François statue. I went through these files to explore the history of the statue. I learned about the plans of the then city council to erect a statue in Von François' honour and its significance in constructing a colonial narrative that Von François was the “founder” of Windhoek (see chapter four).

Furthermore, I also looked at online archives, including *The Namibian* newspaper archive. The Namibian established an online archive with a catalogue of newspapers that have been printed since its establishment in 1985. This archive is part of their website and has a search database where I entered the time periods in which I wanted to explore a certain topic. I systematically went through these newspapers to explore earlier decolonial struggles in Namibia, including the AR and ‘SlutShameWalk.’ In this case, I often used the keyword on a topic like “Affirmative Repositioning” that I was interested in finding more information about and then several newspaper articles dating from its establishment since 2014 would pop up. This was helpful in locating easily historical information that I needed for this study. *The Namibian* newspaper was also helpful to contemplate my present ethnography, I also extensively used The Namibian archive, especially in investigating cases of police brutality in Namibia.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I provided a history of contemporary decolonial struggles in Namibia. I showed that present decolonial struggles related to previous decolonial and civil rights calls for a change in Namibia's postcolonial land policies and patriarchal views of women's sexuality that was imposing on their behaviour, particularly on what they choose to wear. These decolonial and civil rights calls as I demonstrated were taken up by the AR and 'SlutShameWalk' movement. I further suggested that these earlier struggles have informed contemporary decolonial struggles that I will explore in the following chapters.

In this chapter I provided an overview on my experiences during fieldwork in Namibia.

I showed that the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted on the trajectory of this study. In this regard, I had to conduct online and offline ethnography in intermittent periods between 2020 and 2022. This also resulted in several personal struggles, including that my family and I were infected with COVID-19 causing serious personal strain. In this chapter I reflected on how this personally impacted on me. I particularly referred to how my relationship with some of the interlocutors developed and we became friends and even taking up some of the activism together.

However, I could not evade issues related to ethnicity. Even though I tried not to refer to my ethnic origins, many of the interlocutors already held perceptions about it. They specifically viewed me as a Rehoboth Baster. This posed its own set of challenges including that I could not evade some of the stereotypes that are associated with this ethnic identity. However, as I revealed these limitations were overcome by my my sexual orientation— a trait that I shared with many of the decolonial memory activists and queer activists in this study – which meant that I was aware and often impacted by the same struggles of many of the activists, especially as it relates to coloniality.

CHAPTER FOUR

Resisting colonial spatiality in Windhoek's urban landscapes

4.1. Introduction

On Namibia's Youth Day⁴¹ on 16 June 2020 about one hundred mostly young Windhoek residents followed the calls for a "silent protest." They marched on several locations in central Windhoek, including the war memorial in Zoo Park, which commemorates fallen colonial German soldiers, and the Ministry of Justice buildings. Their main target was the statue of Curt von François in front of the Windhoek Municipality offices. The protestors were gathered at the foot of the statue, calling for its removal from public view. The protests were held a week after a petition, dubbed *#ACurtFarewell*, had been launched by the Windhoek-based artist and activist Hildegard Titus, which called for the removal of the statue.

The Von François statue is nestled on the corner of Sam Nujoma Drive (formerly *Curt von Françoisstraße*) and Independence Avenue in front of the City of Windhoek headquarters. The statue stands tall in an upright position on a plinth 2m high. The statue itself is another 2m high. There are three plaques with inscriptions in Afrikaans, German and English. The English inscription read: "Curt von François (1852 - 1931) Founder of Windhoek in the year 1890." The statue is adorned with military attire. The left side of its jacket full of military medals, while its left hand firmly gripping on a walking stick with a shash on its top. Its right hand is on its hip. The statue looks out at the city in somewhat of a boastful way. As the *Windhoek Advertiser's* (18 October 1965) title of a photograph of the Curt statue goes by: "the statue is an impressive likeness of a man who can look with pride across the city he helped found."

This statue was erected in 1965 by the then city council of Windhoek in honour of the Governor of German South-West Africa (1891-1894) Curt von François⁴² who led a brutal attack on the Nama *Gaob* Hendrik Witbooi (!Nanseb Gabemab) and his followers in 1893 at Hornkrantz, 120 km south-west from Windhoek. The statue was erected to emphasize the role of Von François in the development of Windhoek. In 1890 he started

⁴¹ The day is commemorated both in Namibia and South Africa. It marks the 1976 student uprisings in Soweto.

against apartheid authorities for wanting to introduce a Afrikaans-only curriculum in schools.

⁴² In relation to Windhoek, Von François previously established himself there in 1890, making it the centre of the German colonial administration. It was from here where Von François operated from for the last few years of his tenure as Governor of German South-West Africa and where he started with the construction of the *Alte Feste* colonial fort in central Windhoek. The fort was completed in 1892. For this it was claimed that Von Francois was the "founder" of Windhoek. In 1893 Von François attacked the Nama Goab Hendrik Witbooi and his followers at Hornkrantz, close to Windhoek (Van Wyk 2021b).

with the construction of the *Alte Feste* colonial fort. According to the inscription on the statue, as well as colonial and apartheid-era sources (*The Windhoek Advertiser* 18 October 1965), he is considered the founder of Windhoek.

At the statue protestors, some wearing face masks due to COVID-19 health regulations, were shouting “Whose Lives Matter?”, “Black Lives Matter!” and “No Justice! No Peace!” while others were holding up signs with the title: “End Police Brutality” and “Who Killed Frieda?” – the latter was in reference to the shooting of 28-year-old Frieda Ndatipo six years earlier in 2014 in front of the Swapo party headquarters by Namibian police during a protest for jobs (<https://fb.watch/hn1xXJVm7A/>). In this way, the protestors connected their calls for the removal of the Von François statue to the global #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) protests that swept through the world at the time in response to the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in the United States of America (USA) at the hands of two white police officers. Globally protests called for the end of colonial racism, which the #BLM activists argued was perpetuated through state violence in the form of police and military brutality targeting black people.

The protests made me think about the coloniality of public spaces, which globally have become a particular concern for decolonial memory activists in their campaign against the excesses of colonialism (and coloniality). In this chapter I show how activists in Windhoek have been preoccupied with the coloniality of public spaces, specifically colonial monuments. These monuments are regarded as representing the racist and sexist structures that was imposed through colonialism and that is now taken further in the postcolony, pointing to a situation of coloniality. These monuments therefore are powerful symbols of colonial racism and sexism.

I relate the coloniality of Windhoek’s public spaces through a discussion of several texts on Windhoek’s coloniality with focus on monuments and the experiences of informal traders (Tjirera 2019), attempts at challenging this coloniality through official efforts, which in essence have persisted with colonial practices (Kössler 2015). This is connected to how space was conceptualized by colonial agents (Delgado 2018; Becker 2018b). I show how coloniality was introduced in Windhoek through a history of the erection of the Von François statue. I connect these further to contemporary struggles over colonial spaces, drawing specifically from the case of the #BLM protests, which have resisted coloniality present in public spaces.

I will trace the intricacies of decolonial memory activism against the coloniality of spaces. This form of coloniality relates to the exclusion of the city's black and coloured⁴³ population in the memory landscape - memoryscape. That is the experiences of black and coloured population are not represented, while the experiences of the white population have been widely represented. I will specifically focus on decolonial memory activism against colonial monuments in understanding the coloniality of public spaces. I will show that in illuminating the issues surrounding colonial monuments the activists have simultaneously focused on postcolonial monuments, such as the Independence Museum which they have argued continue with colonial practices. Thus, their focus is on coloniality that persists in the postcolony. In summing up their concerns over coloniality as it relates to colonial and postcolonial monuments it is necessary that I provide some clarity along the following lines: colonial monuments were erected to promote a narrative of racial superiority and domination, while now the postcolonial monuments promote a narrative of heroic (male-centred) struggle by the Swapo party against apartheid colonialism. For the decolonial memory activists these narratives impose certain hierarchies between whites and blacks (the colonial narrative) and now between a ruling black elite and poor black masses (the postcolonial narrative).

4.2. The coloniality of public spaces

Walking down central Windhoek along its main boulevard of Independence Avenue is like walking down memory lane. The main street used to be named Kaiserstraße in honour of the German Kaiser, the 19th century ruler of the German colonial regime. While it has since been renamed to Independence Avenue and extended far beyond central Windhoek⁴⁴ there still exists several small fire hydrants along the street (which mostly goes unnoticed by passers-byers) in the city centre with the erstwhile colonial name of the street.

I still have very fond memories of family outings in my childhood years in Windhoek on weekends to the city centre, colloquially known as *dorp* or *odorpa* [in English: “town”]⁴⁵, where we would often have afternoon picnics in the lush green urban garden of Zoo Park, a colonial recreational park that was established in 1897 on the corner of

⁴³ These were racial constructs imposed by the South African apartheid regime. Black referred to people of Bantu-speaking origins, while coloured to those with mixed-race origins, that of white and black. These terms still remain commonly used even after the end of apartheid rule.

⁴⁴ It is now one of the longest thorough-ways in the city, stretching across the city centre, Northern Industrial Area and Katutura – Windhoek's formerly black-designate township and home to the city's mostly poor residents.

⁴⁵ See chapter one.

what are now Independence Avenue and Fidel Castro Street (formerly Peter Mueller Street in honour of a previous Windhoek mayor). While in the park as young children, my friends and I, used to run along the small waterways, played on the swings, seesaws and ran around the Witbooi war memorial in the centre of the park, a monument that was erected in 1897 in honour of German colonial soldiers during the Hornkrantz attack against the Nama. A few hundred metres down the road was the Von François statue in front of the City of Windhoek headquarters. Just across from the road of the statue was a large open parking area, where we used to enjoy the displays of fireworks as part of the city's annual New Year celebrations.

While for the most part still blissfully unaware of Namibia's colonial past, I remember distinctly the feelings of exhilaration for Namibia's independence amongst many people at the time. The country was then newly emerging from more than a century of colonial violence and subjugation, first by the German colonial empire (1884-1915) and later by apartheid South African colonial regime (1915-1990). Surprisingly though, these feelings of exhilaration remained intact for some time after independence. I was born in 1996 and when I started school in the early 2000s, there was still a great sense of excitement, yet also accompanied with feelings of uncertainty and to some degree naivety in response to the emerging postcolonial situation.

In 2003 I had just enrolled in the formerly whites-only Eros Primary School in the upper-class neighbourhood of Eros, itself also previously reserved for whites-only. My family and I were also staying there. While on surface level we may have seemed like another black or coloured family, part of the emerging postcolonial elite (most probably with some close ties with the ruling Swapo party) having newly moved into this former white suburban oasis, this could not have been further from the truth.

This exposed me early on to coloniality in Windhoek. In these colonial public spaces that I encountered as a child, the experiences of the white population were overrepresented, while that of the black and coloured populations underrepresented. The activists and I find an issue with how colonial public spaces are not representative of the multiple histories that exists in Namibia's cities. It is that the histories of some groups (in this case the whites) have found more representation than others (blacks and coloureds). It was the policies of segregation that ensured that the colonialists were able to inscribe their colonial views in the landscape.

In his exploration on the interconnectedness of coloniality in Namibia's public spaces, racial and sexual violence, Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja (2021a:194) points to colonial policies that resulted in the exclusion of "...female, queer and youth" bodies from the memoryscape. However now that there has been a process of de-segregation, new questions have emerged over the use of spaces that remain characteristically colonial since the black and coloured populations are now freely using these spaces. It becomes pertinent to know what does that mean for Windhoek's black and coloured population? Myself, like the activists with whom I have been working, have been asking: How do they feel when presented with colonial objects, such as statues that remain in these spaces? In a recent film project with Hildegard, myself and Decolonize Berlin (a German NGO that focuses on decolonizing public spaces in Berlin)⁴⁶ I recounted how blacks and coloureds simply do not feel comfortable using these spaces. I said the following:

It is important to reclaim colonial spaces because they were designed to exclude one group of people – blacks. Part of this reclaiming process is also reclaiming your space as an individual. Because a lot of the message that went into excluding was to dehumanize you. To say you don't deserve something better. You know if you look at the Von François statue it was part of the apartheid's regime to remove the broader black population from the centre of the city. To say that you are dirty, you don't belong with us; you don't belong in the centre (the core of the city). You understand. So part of that is reclaiming your space as an African -saying that but I belong here. I belong here!

Here I referred to the impact of the coloniality of public spaces. When moving in such spaces black and coloured bodies do not feel comfortable, because they are reminded of their supposed inferiority as perpetuated through colonialism and coloniality. This colonial process meant to "dehumanize" blacks. They were regarded as "dirty" in comparison with their white counterparts. In practice this meant that the city's black and coloured population were forcefully removed to the far outskirts of the city far from the white population and would only engage whites as servants rather than as equals (Jafta et al 1999). In the colonial or "white" spaces, buildings, monuments, statues were erected to celebrate colonial history (and visually present the narrative of racial superiority and domination). The colonizer therefore made sure to carve its identity in stone, pointing to a belief that notions of racial supremacy will steadfastly remain intact. It can be argued that not even a change in governing systems could successfully expunge these ideas of racial supremacy from postcolonial society. That is why a young

⁴⁶ <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=W1Y180rNhBI>

group of decolonial memory activists (who are also using these spaces) have started challenging the existing coloniality of public spaces.

Heike Becker (2018b) in her study on the commemorations of the Marikana incident in South Africa explores how activists have challenged the coloniality of Cape Town's public spaces. She is particularly interested in how these initiatives subvert "the dominant politics of space..." in that country (Becker 2018b:2). Becker (2018b) argues that through such effort's activists are asking penetrating questions over what it means to exist in the postcolonial city. She links this to contemporary struggles over "rights to the city" by Cape Town's black and coloured populations.

This relates to how blacks were historically stripped of their rights to the city by colonial forces. She writes that: "black Africans were regarded as non-inhabitants of the urban and were controlled through the infamous pass laws, as "visitors" who were issued only temporary visiting rights to the city for the purpose of providing labour" (Becker, 2018b:5). This process of racial segregation was accompanied by the forced removals of blacks and coloureds, aimed to segregate the city into different spaces for different races. This also occurred in Windhoek, the central location of the South African colonial administration in Namibia. Spaces in the centre of Windhoek were meant to be used only by whites, while blacks and coloureds were moved in the 1960s from the city centre to segregated black and coloured townships (Katutura and Khomasdal respectively). They were only meant to make use of these spaces on a temporarily basis, in cases such as to provide labour.⁴⁷

I now turn to some historical reflections in exploring some of the colonial histories of Windhoek. I will specifically discuss the "making" of colonial of Windhoek looking at processes that resulted in the coloniality of the city and its public spaces. Here the forced removals in Windhoek and beyond, erection of colonial monuments are significant.

⁴⁷ These removals were vehemently resisted by the Old Location residents, which resulted in the police killing of eleven protestors and wounding fifty more. Amongst those killed was Anna Kakurukaze Mungunda who has since been renamed a national heroine by the Namibian government and visually inscribed in the memoryscape through a ceremonious grave at Heroes Acre and street name in her honour in Katutura (Jaftha et al (1999).

4.2.1. The making of a colonial city

Guillermo Delgado (2018) explains that the making of colonial Windhoek was a process set in motion by the South African colonial regime as they were establishing their colonial control over Namibia after 1915. Significantly, several South African colonial laws were introduced in Namibia, such as the Native (Urban Areas) Proclamation No.34 of 1924, which aimed to restrict blacks from residing in so-called white areas. While most South African colonial laws applied to Namibia, Delgado (2018) shows that the Group Areas Act was not introduced in Namibia. He argues that this is because the local white population felt secure by the law of 1924. However, there was a tightening of this law through the Native (Urban Areas) Proclamation of 1951 that sought to fast-track “residential segregation” along racial and ethnic lines in Namibia’s urban spaces. This resulted in the increased forced removals of blacks and coloureds.⁴⁸

In returning to the coloniality in the city, in his pioneering study on Windhoek and city-making Ellison Tjirera (2019) shows that monuments have been indispensable in fostering coloniality in Windhoek and its public spaces. This colonial history has been influential in how the city is viewed (and experienced). Tjirera (2019) argues that while the city has held different meaning throughout time, colonialism has specifically influenced narratives about the city. Through an ethnography of informal traders Tjirera (2019) shows that coloniality persists in Windhoek. He writes, this is evident in the differences in economic wealth of the city’s residents, something that he argues is a colonial inheritance. Tjirera (2019:9) therefore speaks of a “noticeably unequal city” that makes Windhoek “a somewhat unusual place.” He observes that although many narratives of the city exist, “it presents uncomfortable permutations of pre-independence power structures and relations that reek of a segregated city that refuses to change. Or to put it differently, a city that is refused and denied change” (Tjirera 2019:10).

In one chapter of his dissertation, Tjirera (2019) writes about colonial and postcolonial monuments that were erected in the German and South African colonial periods as well as after independence to show the persistence of coloniality in the city. On the latter he argues that the erection of (new) postcolonial monuments by the Namibian government has further perpetuated coloniality in the city. He observes that “...the construction of Mansudae⁴⁹-designed buildings and monuments asserts a decisive break with

⁴⁸ See section 4.2.

⁴⁹ A North Korean company known for constructing several Stalinist-style monuments in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana (Becker 2018a).

architecture and memorials associated with colonial regimes, and in so doing foreground the authority and modernity of the postcolonial government” (Tjirera 2019:11). In this sense, Tjirera (2019) speaks of the peculiarity of the style of the monuments after independence, which were erected after Independence by the North Korean company Mansudae Overseas Projects.

Other than bringing a significant shift to the memoryscape of the inner city, Becker (2018a) observes that it has created a situation where these new postcolonial monuments exist alongside two other colonial monuments: *Alte Feste* and *Christuskirche*, which were with the *Reiterdenkmal* statue, also known as the Windhoek Rider, a prominent German colonial statue that was erected in 1912, meant to enforce the old colonial narrative of racial superiority and domination. The former two have, however, remained in their old positions and continue to be potent symbols of German colonialism in Namibia. In that way, Becker (2018a:4) argues that rather than completely expunging this old colonial narrative from the memoryscape, the new inscription of the postcolonial narrative has created what she conceptualizes as “a multi-layered environment and memory narrative.”

In their campaigns against the coloniality of public spaces decolonial memory activists refer to the process of removing colonial monuments and erecting (new) postcolonial monuments by the Namibian government in challenging the dominant colonial imagery (Mushaandja 2021a). This process of changing Windhoek’s colonial memory landscape started after independence in 1990 with the renaming of some of the colonial street names in Windhoek. Efforts culminated in the removal of the Rider. In 2009 the statue was moved from its pedestal to closer to the *Alte Feste* colonial fort for the construction of the Independence Museum with its Sam Nujoma statue and Genocide Memorial (in honour of the victims of the colonial genocide 1904-1908).⁵⁰ Later in 2013 the Rider was removed all together from public view and stored in the *Alte Feste*.

Kössler (2015) however argues that the construction of the museum has not effectively challenged Windhoek’s colonial memoryscape. This relates to the views of decolonial memory activists who argue that coloniality lives on in the city even after Namibian independence. Kössler (2015) explains that the Rider has left an enduring influence on the city. He writes that the “shift of the Rider from its original position to the front of

⁵⁰ Initially the Genocide Memorial did not explicitly address the colonial genocide. Former Minister Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, Jerry Ekandjo (2012-2018) refused to place a plaque in honour of the victims of the colonial genocide (Kössler 2015). This however, later changed in 2020 when a plaque was placed there that explicitly drew references to the victims of the colonial genocide (see Van Wyk 2020).

the *Alte Feste* had little effect on its meaning and importance within the memory landscape of the Namibian capital” (Kössler 2015:148). This means that the Rider occupied an unrivalled position in the memoryscape as it relates to colonial imagery. The two other colonial monuments, namely the *Alte Feste* and *Christuskirche* colonial church held a far less prominent position.

This coloniality is also as Tjirera (2019) suggested earlier perpetuated by the Namibian government. It points to a complex situation where the Independence Museum with its characteristic North Korean socialist realist imagery perpetuates coloniality through a (new) postcolonial narrative (Tjirera 2019) while not entirely moving away from the previous colonial imagery. As I previously mentioned, the colonial monuments, such as the *Christuskirche* and *Alte Feste* still remain in their old positions, thus maintaining the colonial narrative. In this sense, Windhoek’s decolonial memory activists have been preoccupied with both colonial and postcolonial monuments. That is while they have focused their calls on the removal of colonial monuments, they are also concerned with the erection of new postcolonial monuments, which they have argued further perpetuate coloniality (Mushaandja 2021a).

4.3. The Curt von François statue

4.3.1. Visiting the statue

29 September 2021 was a scorching hot day in Windhoek. I was on my way to the National Assembly (Parliament) buildings on Robert Mugabe Avenue in central Windhoek to visit their library for my research. While walking towards Parliament I was instantly reminded of the protests on the 21st of September 2021 against the agreement for genocide reparations between the Namibian and German governments (which I described in the opening vignette of the thesis). There was still a poster from the protest, lying torn on the ground, reminding me of that day’s events. I looked around at the Parliament gardens and colonial “Tintenpalast” (ink palace) building, which houses the National Assembly. This made me think about the coloniality of spaces, so I decided to go to the Von François statue.

When I finished my work at the National Assembly, I proceeded to walk down Robert Mugabe Avenue and then to the Von François statue. I passed the Independence Museum, *Alte Feste* and Windhoek High School (WHS).⁵¹ There was something going in front of the *Alte Feste*, which was rather unusual. Since the closing of the *Alte Feste* Museum before the inauguration of the Independence Museum in 2014 not much has

⁵¹ A formerly Afrikaans-speakers whites-only high school.

been going on there. The building, where the Rider statue was placed in its courtyard in 2013, has been standing empty. Now I observed that there were men busy with renovations on the old fort. Further down the road, in front of WHS an electrician was working on underground cables. A few metres further on were a tourist sign pointing to the Von François statue.



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

Figure 4: Road sign pointing to the Von François statue in central Windhoek. Photo taken by Bayron van Wyk.

Following the sign, I went down the hill on what is today known as Sam Nujoma Drive, passing the Bank of Namibia buildings. The recently completed white-coloured modern city administration building, next to the old municipality buildings, was adorned with a large blue billboard encouraging Windhoek's residents to use water sparingly. The billboard was a reminder of the devastating national drought that had hit the country and city in 2019. This drought has been described by Rosemary Shikangalah (2020) as the worst drought recorded in Namibia since the 1930s. On the opposite side of the road, I could see the Hilton Hotel and Freedom Plaza buildings. Descending slowly down the hill, the site felt aesthetically clean and sanitary. I started thinking how this related with the analysis by Tjirera (2020) who stresses how the emphasis on Windhoek's "cleanliness" by the city's authorities is informed by German and South African colonialisms. He shows that the City of Windhoek has mostly been against informal trading in central Windhoek. Tjirera (2020) argues that this continues with colonial policies that regarded blacks as not belonging in central Windhoek.

It was not long before I came across the Von François statue. Dressed in a German style uniform to me he looked like an American cowboy with his big hat and boots. When I started walking around the statue, I came across two institutional workers of the City of Windhoek at the foot of it. I also noticed people seated on the small green lawn next to the statue, who were having their lunch.

When I approached the two workers, they were busy painting the plinth of the statue. From my conversation with them I learnt that this was part of larger renovation works on the front façade of the city's headquarters. I asked the two workers what they thought about the statue. It turned out that the middle-aged looking man and woman did not know at all who the man was. Was this because of their strong Oshivambo accents, I wondered, which made it more unlikely for people from the northern parts of Namibia to know about Windhoek's colonial history? Or was it simply an indication that statues may sometimes be overlooked and their meanings often not that obvious to the public (Brandt 2021). However, Nicola Brandt (2021) reminds us that even though this may be the case, the histories of the statues are still felt at a structural level.⁵²

⁵² On the Physical Energy statue in London, Brandt (2021:21) writes that: "The painful realities represented by this statue have yet to penetrate a wider public consciousness. Even if the deeper symbolism of this work is mostly unknown, its representation of physical power is palpable. The reverberations of the imperialist values that this statue represents are still with us today in the form of rampant capitalism that runs with its own "machine-like indifference."

Following my conversation with the workers I decided then to give them a short history lesson of Von François.⁵³ I was drawing from literature, specifically history books that I previously read. I then asked them again about their thoughts about the statue. They both strikingly responded with: “He must go!” echoing the sentiments of the #ACurtFarewell petition calling for the removal of the statue, which as I will show in a moment, had been launched by Hildegard Titus in June 2020. Joking, I asked them: “Will you be removing it?” The woman sternly denied that “No, that is not our job!”

I could not help wondering why the city’s authorities would still have renovation works done on the statue, especially since there were now growing calls for its removal.

Moreover, at the Windhoek #BLM protests (that I will discuss in a later section) on 16 June 2020 in a *One Africa* Television interview the city spokesperson, Haroldt Akwenye had offered the city’s support to the calls by the decolonial memory activists to remove the statue. When he was asked about his views on the Akwenye said that he “won’t mind it coming here” referring to the #BLM protests in Windhoek and that the city was willing to work with decolonial memory activists to “change the look and feel of the city.” Still looking at the statue, I was wondering if the city was backtracking on these promises. Was it taking the activists’ calls seriously? Were they not planning on removing the statue at all?

In relation to the Rider, *Alte Feste* and *Christuskirche* colonial monuments, the Von François statue occupied a far less conspicuous position in Windhoek’s memory landscape. The statue only briefly featured in the Namibian filmmaker, Tim Hübschle’s “Rider Without a Horse” (2009) film about the intricacies of the Rider.⁵⁴ Six years later, as Tjirera (2019) shows, in 2015 the statue became the subject of an intervention. In the National Assembly, the leader of the Swanu party, Usuaitje Maamberua called for the removal of the statue. Maamberua addressed the former Minister of Basic Education, Arts and Culture, Katrina Hanse-Himarwa, asking her why such monuments should still exist in Namibia and that these statues were a painful reminder of the colonial past where blacks were subjected to the status of a subservient class; a situation he argued persists even after independence. He specifically challenged the colonial narrative

⁵³ See section 4.1.

⁵⁴ In the film a German colonial soldier – the Rider – can be seen waking up confused in a changed postcolonial Windhoek. There was an interracial couple kissing at its foot, the *Alte Feste* draped in the colours of the Namibian flag for independence celebrations and two drag queens flirting with the Rider. While strutting down to the Von François statue from his pedestal, the Rider made a salute at the statue, before taking out his rifle in response to a marching group of *Oturupa* men, a group of Ovaherero men dressed in German-style military attire known for their performative war marches at commemorations and cultural festivals. The statue then suddenly woke-up and winked at the Rider, who then joined the marching Ovaherero men.

constructed by the South African colonial regime that Von François was the founder of Windhoek by emphasizing the role of Jonker Afrikaner in Windhoek's history. He thus pointed out that the erection of the Von François statue was critical in furthering this colonial narrative that Von François was the founder of Windhoek (Tjirera 2019).

Through these efforts decolonial memory activists challenged the colonality of public spaces in Windhoek. As I showed in the opening to this chapter, in June 2020 with the launch of the #ACurtFarewell petition calling for the removal of the statue, and the following 'silent protest' on 16 June 2020, their focus was on the Von François statue, which they argued epitomizes colonality in Windhoek's public spaces. This colonality as I will show below was enforced by the South African colonial regime through the erection of the Von François statue.

4.3.2. A history of the erection of the statue

In 1965 the City of Windhoek held several festival activities to commemorate the supposed 75th anniversary of the city. This was to commemorate the apparent "founding" of the city by Von François in 1890.⁵⁵

The main event of these festivities took place on 18 October 1965 with the inauguration of the Von François statue. It started with a procession walk by school children and a salute by the mayor, Sam Davis on the then Kaiserstraße. In the early afternoon a formal ceremony was held on the small lawn in front of the municipal offices, where the Administrator, Wentzel du Plessis inaugurated the statue (*Allgemeine Zeitung* 18 October 1965). It was reported by the press that there was a crowd of between 1,500 and 2,000 members gathered to witness the unveiling of the statue.

The event was attended by high-ranking officials, like the South African Vice-Minister, J.G.H van der Wath, as well as the South African sculptor, Hennie Potgieter, who was enlisted to design the statue. Davis gave a short speech, followed by Du Plessis who gave the inaugural address in German. In his speech, he called on the audience to remember the role of the German colonial troops in the establishment of colonial rule in Namibia (*Allgemeine Zeitung* 18 October 1965). Similarly, in an earlier mayoral

⁵⁵ There was also an agricultural show, performances by the Voortrekker Movement and May carnival. At the old *Alte Feste* a historical exhibition was held to mark the establishment of a historical museum there. While in the colonial Zoo Park, formerly known as the *Truppen Garten* there was a ceremony to hand-over diplomas to old German colonial officers and seniors. Furthermore, important capital projects were undertaken by the city, such as the construction of an Olympic-size swimming pool in the formerly whites-only suburb of Olympia (*The Windhoek Advertiser* 18 October 1965), as well as new buildings for the municipal headquarters.

message to the residents of Windhoek, Davis underscored the role of Von François and German colonial soldiers in the development of the city.⁵⁶

Von François and the colonial soldiers were regarded as the avant-garde “founders” of the city as part of a civilizing mission to Namibia, a colonial justification for the subjugation of black people. As Davis puts it in his message the blacks were living in a situation of “chaos” where “rape” and “thuggery” which was considered as normal practice and it required whites to save them from this situation. This of course was the common thread of colonialist narratives in Namibia and elsewhere. While Davis acknowledged the city’s black population in his message, he however, gave them a marginal role in the city’s history, mentioning them as low-level “labourers.”⁵⁷

It becomes clear that the erection of the Von François statue was part of a process to assert colonial control over the city, and in that way claim prime spaces for the city’s white population. This was meant to whiten-up the city by claiming that a white male, Von François was the founder of the city and thereby effectively diminishing the role of the black population in the city’s development. While Windhoek’s white residents were treated to various festive events, the black and coloured people were marginalised. It thus becomes clear that the city was being racialized and gendered in significant ways, which process had already started earlier with the forced removals of the city’s black and coloured population from the city centre to locations on the far outskirts of the city. –This has left an enduring impact on the city and its people.

⁵⁶ These efforts should be regarded as attempts by the South African apartheid government (comprising of mostly white Afrikaner representatives) to build alliances with the local German-speaking population of Namibia.

⁵⁷ Birgitte Lau (1982:3) in her pioneering study of early 19th century migrations into Namibia, reminds us that this was of course the dominant “view of history” at the time, in which whites were regarded “as last-minute saviours, the initiators of the colonial pax.”

4.4. Decolonial memory activism against the Curt von François statue

4.4.1. Who is Hildegard Titus?

When I first met the 31-year-old performer, artist and activist Hildegard Titus at Grove Mall on the southern outskirts of Windhoek, she told me about a visual production that she previously curated. In *Without Question* (2019) she performed as a domestic worker. Titus dressed in the characteristic apron, dress and *doek*⁵⁸ (this is a common look for domestic workers in southern Africa) going around cleaning colonial and postcolonial monuments in Windhoek and Swakopmund.⁵⁹ She had staged a cleaning at the Von François statue and Genocide Memorial situated next to the Independence Museum in Windhoek and Marine Denkmal in Swakopmund.⁶⁰



Figure 5: Hildegard performing *Without Question*. Photo taken from *The Namibian* website (14 June 2019).

⁵⁸ Afrikaans for “headgear” that is commonly worn by women.

⁵⁹ Swakopmund is located on the Namibian coastline known for its German-style architecture (see chapter six).

⁶⁰ It honours German colonial soldiers who died during the colonial genocide (1904-1908).

Hildegard told me that through this performative act she wanted to illuminate the experiences of black servitude, through colonial and postcolonial monuments. The character of a cleaner or domestic worker was critical in showing the hierarchies that have persisted between white and black. She told me that with the production she challenged hierarchies that were (and still are being) imposed. Hildegard explained that nobody found it strange for a black woman to suddenly clean the monuments, except for some passing tourists who were taking photographs. She suggested that this points to an acceptance of the colonial view that black people should be in a subservient and inferior (even sub-human) position –such as cleaners performing menial work for white people. Thus, black people were to remain in positions below their white fellows.

Several months later I met with Hildegard at her apartment in central Windhoek. After waiting for a short while, she came walking to me with a blue dress and Rainbow-coloured bag full of her personal stuff. We started greeting each other and she immediately told me that she was performing at a Drag Night event (which was recently introduced by drag performers) at *Café Prestige* the next evening. She encouraged me to buy a ticket, which I did. After buying the ticket, we went for lunch at *Sicilia's*, an Italian-style restaurant on the corner of Independence Avenue and *Gartenstrasse*. We both ordered pizza and I asked Hildegard to tell me about herself.

She started by telling me about her childhood years. She was born on 27 February 1991 in the north-central town of Otjiwarongo. While growing up as a child her father was employed at the Namibian Embassy in Cuba as a clerk, which meant that for most part of her younger years she lived in Cuba. During this time, they barely travelled back home, and she can only remember being in Namibia once. It was only at a later stage when Hildegard was a teen that they moved back to Namibia. They were however not there for long and moved again to the USA where her father took up another position as clerk at the Namibian Embassy. She told me that this has exposed her to different cultures and experiences.

Having lived abroad for such long periods of time, Hildegard has not learnt to properly speak Oshivambo; the language of her parents. She said because of this people tended to feel that she was arrogant when she preferred to speak English rather than Oshivambo. For this reason, she was often called an *ombwiti* (a – derogatory - reference to someone who has left their rural home in the north (former Ovamboland) and moved to an urban place and in that way became disconnected to their cultural roots back home).⁶¹

⁶¹ See Nghiulikwa (2008).

Hildegard lamented that since she grew up abroad there was an impression that she would “not know her culture.” She really dislikes this and made a point saying, “just because I don’t speak the language, doesn’t mean I don’t know the culture.” She claimed that the times that she did travel back to Namibia during her childhood offered her an opportunity to reconnect with her cultural traditions. She said that she would often spend time in the country’s north in a village set-up where she would regularly pound *mahangu* (pearl millet) and fetch water from the well. Somewhat annoyed by those who called her *ombwiti*, Hildegard said that some of those people calling her by this derogatory term had not even performed the regular traditional chores that she did in the village.

Hildegard told me that she was previously not much aware of Namibia’s colonial history. She was only exposed to the history of Namibia’s liberation struggle (1960-1990) through her parents. They were both in exile. However, Hildegard told me that when they spoke about their experiences in exile, they would do so without providing many details. In our conversation she further explained that at the time “I was ignorant”, referring to her knowledge on Namibian history. She was attending school in the USA and was taught very little about colonial history. In some cases, she explained that the teachers who taught history refrained from explicitly mentioning colonial crimes that were committed against blacks. Hildegard, however, recalls having read the book *King Leopold’s Ghost* (1998)⁶² during this time, which she received as a gift from her mother, which provided her with some encounter with colonial history.

Later, while she was studying photojournalism at the London College of Communication in the United Kingdom, Hildegard was able to explore colonial history (especially African colonial history) more when she was required to read Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*⁶³. Hildegard explained that this was when she really started to get the “first real understanding of things.” This prompted her to start a debating club at the London College of Communication. She was also involved in other activities, like the publishing of a magazine. It was also during this time that she started working holiday jobs at nursery homes in London where her mother was working as a nurse. In our conversation she explained how this exposed her further to coloniality as a “black servant” she felt completely invisible to the many visiting relatives of the (white)

⁶² The book focuses on 19th century Belgian monarch, King Leopold II and the colonization of Congo.

⁶³ The book discusses how blacks have historically been situated in a sub-human class through European colonization.

elderly people she was caring for. She felt compelled to explore this theme more in her art. Therefore, she curated *Without Question* (see above).

Hildegard is an activist and has been engaged in initiatives at lobbying for social issues, such as sexual- and reproductive rights for women and girls. Since leaving the UK in 2012 after her studies she has been based in Namibia. In 2015 Hildegard co-founded the ‘Power Pad Girls’ project to distribute sanitary pads to schoolgirls from low-income families. It includes Hildegard having discussion with girls on menstrual, sexual and reproductive health.

These experiences in the USA and Namibia have significantly informed her to engage in efforts at mobilizing against the coloniality of Windhoek’s public spaces. This we can see through the *#ACurtFarewell* which she started.

4.4.2. The *#ACurtFarewell* petition

The *#ACurtFarewell* petition was launched in June 2020.⁶⁴ At the heart of it, the petitioners challenge the colonial narrative of racial superiority, namely that a white European man, Curt von François was the “founder” of Windhoek. They further argue that this narrative does not consider the contribution of the Windhoek’s black population in the city’s development. Through the petition, Hildegard and her fellow decolonial memory activists meant to illuminate the experiences of the city’s black population before German colonization of Namibia and during the German and South African colonial periods. The petition thus refers to the pre-colonial Otjiherero and Nama names of Windhoek, the colonial genocide against the Ovaherero and Nama, and the Old Location removals of Windhoek’s black population. In this way, the petition draws a connecting line between these colonial histories of different historical periods, from early German colonial conquest through to the South African colonial-apartheid era. In this way, the petition points to the multidirectional constellation of these histories, that is these histories are linked and have influenced each other.

The petition shows the multiple histories of Windhoek. It points out two contesting historical narratives: that of the colonizer and that of the colonized:

Continuing to keep Curt von Francois on his pedestal at the intersection of Sam Nujoma Drive and Independence Avenue is a painful erasure of the city’s history and that of its rightful founder, Jonker Afrikaner. The colonial monument continues to feed the incorrect narrative that “this land was empty” until he “discovered” it.

⁶⁴ See <https://www.change.org/farewellcurt>

That is while it was claimed by the South African colonial regime that Von François was the “founder” of the city, historical evidence shows that Jonker Afrikaner, a 19th century Orlam Nama leader lived with his followers in the Windhoek region since the 1820s before German colonization of Namibia. In 2020, during National Heritage Week⁶⁵ the National Archives of Namibia (NAN) showcased a letter by Afrikaner from 1844. In this letter, Afrikaner gave permission to the missionary, Joseph Tindal to establish a mission station in Windhoek. This provides evidence for the fact that Jonker Afrikaner rather than Curt von François should be celebrated as the founder of Windhoek. Therefore, the petition calls for the erection of a statue of Jonker Afrikaner in the place of the Von François statue. As Nicola Brandt (2021) pointed out, while producing certain narratives, statues can also lead to silences. Brandt (2021: 22) explains that a “monument becomes a symbol of historical erasure: wiping out a past – and present – of unrestrained economic and territorial expansion.” In this case, Brandt’s (2021) comments refer to the contribution of the black population, particularly that of the Nama Orlam in Windhoek’s history, which has been forgotten in favour of a colonial narrative that promotes white supremacy.

Through the petition the decolonial memory activists also brought into context the process of decolonization the city has gone through since independence to better reflect the experiences of the black population; that is through the renaming of colonial street names:

While the city has rightly renamed old colonial streets – like the former Kaiser Street to current Independence Avenue and Curt von Francois Avenue to Sam Nujoma Drive – it is now time that it publicly corrects the image of the city’s founder, and ceases honouring colonial faces.

However, the petition is critical of the process of the renaming of these street names. Street names have mostly been renamed in honour of male figures (especially those who feature prominently in the postcolonial narrative of Swapo heroism and who are the ruling elite and international figures, such as Fidel Castro, Robert Mugabe). In the petition the decolonial memory activists also pointed to the existence of several colonial street names in Windhoek that have not been changed since independence. In an update on the petition nearly a year after it was submitted to the City of Windhoek, Hildegard explained that the demands of the petition were now broadened to include the calls for the renaming of the Von Trotha and Lindequist Streets in Windhoek.

⁶⁵ A national event organized by the Museums Association of Namibia (a local NGO that works at promoting museums) to celebrate Namibia’s diverse cultural heritage.

The petition calls for a truly decolonial Windhoek, one in which more of the city's multiple histories are reflected in its public spaces – not only of whites or now the black elite. This can be seen in the calls for the erection of a statue in honour of Afrikaner, who is dubbed as “Windhoek’s true founder” by the petition. Importantly also, the petition calls for the involvement of “Namibian artists and sculptors” in changing this colonial space:

1. *We, citizens of Windhoek, ask that this statue be removed as soon as possible and be replaced by a sculpture of Windhoek’s true founder: Jonker Afrikaner*
2. *The new sculpture should be commissioned by the City via an open call to Namibian artists and sculptors, and be erected on 18 October 2020: roughly 180 years after Windhoek’s actual founding*

This is important, pointing to a decolonizing process that decolonial memory activists are after; that is that more persons are involved in ensuring more historical experiences are represented in Windhoek’s memoryscape.

4.4.3. Responses to the petition

In response to Hildegard’s petition, there were several comments on *change.org*. I reproduce some of them here as they were written verbatim on the website:

It is lamentable that the statue of a colonialist still stands after 30 years of neo-colonialism. It not only shows the disregard for black lives in Namibia by the political elite, but also their dishonesty about the history of the country. It is time to put up statues of our anti-colonial heroes, Jonker Afrikaner and Jakob Marengo – Shaun Whittaker

Black lives matter!! They should have mattered when people were forcibly removed from the city...but obviously their lives (needs and wants) did not matter then. It’s long overdue that our lives mattered, not because we are the majority, but because this action is the RIGHT thing to do... FINALLY! – Pamela February

A man that was responsible for the Hornkrantz Massacre and initiated unabated violent atrocities against Herero and Nama people is staring over us. Making sure we remain submissive, watching over our every move, and arrogantly tormenting us. Symbols, monuments, statues, influence how we experience our city. Curt must fall! The city must be reclaimed – Katrine Vigne

These comments by activists like Shaun Whittaker (from the Marxist Society⁶⁶) and young international scholars like Katrine Vigne above points to frustration at how slowly structural reforms have taken place in postcolonial Namibia. Their comments particularly illuminate the situation of colonial racism that remains in the postcolony through the existence of colonial monuments like the Von François statue. This statue promotes the colonial narrative that a white European male was the founder of Windhoek. The decolonial memory activists and I, therefore, view these monuments as potent symbols of racism and that they should thus be removed.

The petition for the removal of the Von François statue was further supported by the Marxist Society of Namibia and the Affirmative Repositioning (AR). However, while supporting the removal of the statue, the Marxist society and AR called for statues of other people other than Jonker Afrikaner. The former wanted a statue to be placed there in honour of Johannes Nangutuwala, who led the 1971 general strike in Namibia (*The Namibian* 10 July 2020). Their main reasons for calls for a statue of Nangutuwala was that they argued that the histories of the workers' struggle and industrial action in Namibia were marginalized by the postcolonial master narrative (*The Namibian* 10 July 2020).⁶⁷ AR, on the other hand, called for a statue to be erected in honour of Anna Mungunda, who led the protests in 1959 against the forced removals of blacks and coloureds from the Old Location. The AR leadership explained that this was part of their 'radical transformation' plan for Windhoek aimed at challenging colonial spatiality and introducing "Afro-centric building designs and initiatives." On the removal of the Von François statue the AR leaders called for a statue of "Namibian Heroes who have made a significant contribution to the restoration of Human dignity" (*The Future of Windhoek* 2019:40) – they as I explained earlier identified Mungunda as one such heroine.

However, there was also further opposition, particularly against the removal of the Von François statue. The opposition came mainly from some of the family members of Von François, and some members of the local German-speaking community. The main critic of the #ACurtFarewell petition was Ruprecht von François, the great-grandson of Von François.⁶⁸ In his response to the petition, Von François emphasized the

⁶⁶ A group of leftist writers in Namibia, comprising of the leader of the Worker's Revolutionary Party (WRP) (formerly the Communist Party), Harry Boesak and the prominent clinical psychologist, Shaun Whittaker.

⁶⁷ See chapter one.

⁶⁸ During his time in Namibia, Von François married a Damara woman Amalia Gareses, and had a family with her (<https://gondwanatravel.wordpress.com/2012/01/16/curt-von-francois-leaves-noteworthy-legacy-to-namibia/>).

contribution of his great-grandfather to Namibia's development, while downplaying his role in furthering colonial violence in Namibia. He said that his great-grandfather: "...was a land surveyor, not a killer, as some people claim he was." Von François further described claims on his great-grandfather's involvement in the Hornkrantz as "historical lies" (The Namibian 24 September 2020). In fact, when the City of Windhoek finally removed the statue in November 2022 (see the following sections) Von François went as far as exonerating his great-grandfather from the killings of the Hornkrantz massacre in 1893 (<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=r-1z2x0k3po>). He was joined by a prominent German Namibian lawyer, Andreas Vaatz who further described the move by the city council as "removing history" and "emotional" (<https://fb.watch/jn1nFfXHLX/>).

Here Von François and Vaatz clearly hold colonial views. It shows just how such views have remained intact. When I met with Hildegard at the Von François statue in October 2022 on the day of the City of Windhoek's announcement that the statue would be removed, she pointed to how these views have resulted in the exclusion of the experiences of Windhoek's black and coloured populations from the memoryscape. She therefore emphasized that it was necessary to mobilize against these views to decolonize Namibian history.

4.4.4. The Council meeting

Despite the support that the *#ACurtFarewell* petition received from members of the public it was initially rejected by the City of Windhoek for not satisfying some bureaucratic requirements of the city. I will provide further details on this below.

On a chilly September morning in 2020 I had breakfast with Hildegard at the upmarket Krisjan's Bistro, owned by a gay couple, at the corner of Julius Nyerere Road (formerly *Lazarettraße*) and Robert Mugabe Avenue in central Windhoek. I was having blueberry pancakes, while Hildegard enjoyed an English breakfast with eggs, *boerewors* (farmers sausage) and toast. Sitting on the wooden patio outside we had views of the Freemasons Hall. Next to the Bistro was the Leutwein Cemetery with graves of German colonial soldiers who died during the colonial genocide (1904-1908). We thus were engulfed by spaces with telling colonial references.

Hildegard then told me that the councillors were mistrustful of the process of the petition. They were sceptical that the petition was virtually signed and wanted her to submit the municipal bills of each person that signed the petition to prove that they were

indeed Windhoek residents. During our interview I found this to be rather ridiculous considering that many of the signatories to the petition were not from the city:

Bayron: That's crazy! I mean the process of removing the statue does not only affect Windhoek residents. It is a national issue.

Hildegard: Exactly! And we even had people from abroad that signed the petition.

Hildegard's comment indicates a contestation between the bureaucratic expectations of the city government on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the ability of virtual platforms to reach larger audiences, and in that way build global solidarities. In the case of the *#ACurtFarewell* petition people from across the globe, were given an opportunity to give voice to their concerns, even though they were not physically present in Windhoek. It also gave them a chance to connect similar issues and claims from across the globe. In that way, the online activism, which was then very new in Namibia, strengthened the activists' demands. Significantly, Windhoek's decolonial memory activists linked their lobbying efforts for the removal of the statue to broader global calls for racial justice. At the time, local activists used the global *#BlackLivesMatter* protests to promote their own calls for social justice in Namibia. As Hildegard puts it in our interview: "When I saw the Bristol statue being taken down⁶⁹, I knew we had to do something."

On 30 July 2020 the council meeting was held online on Facebook Live Streaming events. Kahungu in a blue suit with the golden mayoral chain over her shoulders gave her mayoral speech in which she noted that it was the first virtual meeting held. She explained that the council was motivated to take the meeting online since the COVID-19 pandemic was impeding on social gatherings. Along with others, I participated in this event online. Discussions revolved around governance issues of the city. During the discussions significant contestation erupted when the mayor, Fransina Kahungu stopped councillors from debating on the *#ACurtFarewell* petition that was submitted by Hildegard. She cited that Hildegard did not follow bureaucratic procedures when she first submitted the petition.⁷⁰ Kahungu noted that "it is not registered here but will be at the next council meeting." She was however opposed by her fellow Deputy Mayor, Ian Subasubani who requested her to provide a clarification on the procedures of the

⁶⁹ She was referring to the Edward Colston statue in the British coastal city of Bristol where BlackLivesMatter protestors took down the statue, dragged it and threw it over the harbour in the ocean (Funke 2021).

⁷⁰ During my interview with Hildegard at *Sicilia's* she told me that she had submitted the petition to Kahungu at her offices in Babylon, an informal settlement located on the northern outskirts of Windhoek.

submission of petitions to the City of Windhoek

(<https://www.facebook.com/cowmunicipality/videos/326818838502809>).

Robert Kahimise, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the city responded to Subasubani by explaining that petitions may only be submitted to the Management Committee (which comprises of the CEO as its head) who then presents at it a council meeting for discussions. Kahimise followed with the reassurance that “the city has dealt with petitions before.” Subasubani subsequently did not further oppose and stated that he simply “wants the public to be assured that their petitions receive the attention of council” and continued to read from the city’s by-laws in support of Kahimise: “The public may submit to the CEO a petition. It must be properly written and may not be read out to the council. Instead, it must be referred to Management”

(<https://www.facebook.com/cowmunicipality/videos/326818838502809>).

When I asked Hildegard about the process of submitting the petition, she could not help but show her obvious frustration with the city’s rigid bureaucratic processes.

Bayron: Can you please explain the process of submitting the petition? What was it like?

Hildegard: No my dear, I am so frustrated (sighs and then takes a deep breath) I actually went to the extent of submitting a folder with the petition and historical information on Von François to each councillor. I did this only for them to tell me that I have to submit it again (casually she then says) I’m so pissed.

Hildegard who strongly believes in the non-violent removal of the statue says in frustration: “Maybe we should just topple it by ourselves!”

I then laugh.

This bureaucratic tussle significantly slowed down the process of having the statue removed, which was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The city’s CEO, Kahimise was diagnosed with COVID-19 and went into self-isolation (*The Namibian* 14 August 2020). As a result, Hildegard’s attempts at meeting with him to properly hand-over the petition were futile. When he came back from self-isolation, Kahimise resigned from the city to head the regional electric utility, CENORED (*The Namibian* 7 August 2020). There was also opposition from some city councillors who condemned Kahungu of wanting to purposely remove the statue without involving other actors in the process. Three representatives, Brunhilde Cornelius⁷¹, Ignatius Semba and Prieska Kahure from

⁷¹ Notably Cornelius who is the great-granddaughter of Von François was also opposed to Maamberua’s earlier attempts at calling for the removal of the statue (*Namibian Sun*, 10 April 2015).

the RDP, PDM and NUDO opposition political parties, strongly condemned Kahungu.⁷² They also maintained that the issue of colonial monuments was not that relevant to attend to. For them there were more important issues that needed to be attended to by the city, like poor water, sanitation and land-delivery services (*The Namibian* 2 October 2020).

In this sense, the councillors constructed the issues over social inequality and the decolonization of public spaces as binaries. However, some scholars (like myself!) have pointed to the interconnectedness of these issues (Van Wyk 2021b). For instance, in the first issue of the *Namibia Journal of Social Justice* several articles were featured that emphasized concerns over social inequality and decolonization. These articles focused on Namibia's housing crisis and combined this with articles on the *#ShutItAllDown* protests, which were held against high incidences of sexual- and gender-based violence against women (I will discuss it further in the next sub-section) by Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja (2021a) and Heike Becker (2021b).

4.4.5. Visit to the City of Windhoek Museum

Fast-forward to 2021. I had now become very much involved in the activist campaign to have the statue removed. One year after the petition was submitted, Hildegard and I started having conversations with Aron Nambadi who is the Curator of the Windhoek City Museum to find out how the process of the petition was going.⁷³ This was a chance encounter. In mid-2021 I visited the museum. The museum was opened with the aim to reflect on the histories of the city, particularly that of the forced removals in the late 1950s with the movements of the city's black and coloured populations from the Old Location in the city centre to the townships of Katutura and Khomasdal. The museum holds several exhibitions, including on "Precolonial Windhoek", the city's bird life, and places much emphasis on life of the city's black population in the Old Location.⁷⁴

⁷² NUDO has also opposed the negotiations between the Namibian and German governments for reparations for not involving other actors (particularly the Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA) and Nama Traditional Authority (NTLA) – who can be regarded as the main traditional groups) in the process. Some of Ovaherero and Nama leaders from smaller traditional groups have however backed the Namibian government (Van Wyk 2021a).

⁷³ It is owned by the City of Windhoek and was unveiled in December 2020.

⁷⁴ For further information on the exhibits of the museum see my forthcoming article in *Museum Matters* by the Museums Association of Namibia. In this article I provide a discussion on my visit to the museum while since starting with an internship at the organization. The lives of the Old Location residents were also further depicted through photographs on churches, schools and leisure activities like sports, beer drinking and music. There was also a list of the victims who were wounded and died during the Old Location shootings.

When I visited the museum, I met with Linda, the receptionist and museum guide. She took me on a tour through the museum. While she was showing me around, I asked her about progress on the petition. Linda explained that the process was gaining ground. She said that the councillors had approved the removal of the Von François statue. To find out more, she suggested that I speak to Nambadi. He was, however, not available at that time. So, I continued looking at the exhibitions at the museum before leaving to meet Matt for a sundowner, that is a drink in the late afternoon.

I was impatient to tell Hildegard about the news that I found out on the removal of the Von François statue. So, when I saw her coincidentally passing the Avani Hotel, while I was there with Matt, I called her over to share the news. She was ecstatically surprised by it and said that she was now planning on visiting the museum the next day. I offered to go with her as well. The next day after we met at my place in Windhoek North for a heavy lunch of *Marathon/Wambo* chicken (free range chicken that have been traditionally eaten by communities from northern Namibia) and *pap* (maize porridge) prepared by my Angolan-born landlady we went to the museum to meet Nambadi.

When we arrived in Nambadi's office we found a slightly short middle-aged man dressed formally in a shirt and pants. He began by explaining that the removal of the statue had indeed been approved a few days before. The councillors were only to make it public on that day. Their announcement was supposed to be made at the council meeting on the same afternoon that we spoke to Nambadi. Nambadi further acknowledged that the petition brought about significant changes in the city's memory culture. He explained that there was now a heritage committee established to deal specifically with the city's colonial heritage. Such a committee did not exist before. There was only a street committee, which dealt with the renaming of streets. Nambadi said that while the heritage committee will still focus on street names, it will now widen the scope of its activities to also to look at colonial monuments, graves, buildings etc. Since its establishment the heritage committee has specifically been focusing on the Von François statue and recommended that the statue be moved to the Windhoek City Museum. Nambadi explained that the statue will be kept in storage at the museum and that it will eventually be exhibited in the museum.

After receiving the news, Hildegard and I went to Vinyls Café at Zoo Park to celebrate. While there we coincidentally ran into another decolonial memory activist and queer activist, Omar van Reenen (who uses the "they" pronoun) who we told about the news. Omar too was happy about the removal of the Von François statue.

After this Hildegard and I went to the council meeting where we expected more news, as promised by Nambadi. However, after being there for some time and going through a thick agenda book we left when we realised that issues relating to the statue were not going to be discussed. So, we left and partied the night away with friends.

The development of the plans for the removal of the Curt von

François statue

Two-years after the launch of the petition in June 2020, the plans for the removal of the Curt von François statue had reached an advanced stage. On 29 October 2022, in a council meeting, the councillors of the City of Windhoek voted on the removal of the statue. Nine councillors were in favour, while five were against the removal of the statue. The next day, I met with Hildegard Titus at the Von François statue where she explained her feelings about the decision of the city council. She said the following: “I am very excited today the statue is finally being taken down. Von François was a symbol of colonial oppression, so I am very happy that he will be gone now.”

Fast-forward to the 23rd of November 2022 on the day of the removal of the statue. On the small lawn of the Von François statue in front of the City of Windhoek buildings, I was joined by a crowd of about hundred people, comprising of artists, activists, scholars and journalists to witness the removal of the statue. On the plinth of the statue, right at the foot of the Von François statue were two performance artists, Muningandu Hoveka and Gift Uzera, who were both performing a “silent ritual.” Hoveka wore a green Ovaherero dress and *Otjikaiva* headgear, while Uzera a light blue skirt and dark blue top. When I spoke to Hoveka she explained that she was performing the *Otjina*, which Ovaherero woman traditionally perform at weddings and other celebrations. Hoveka said that: “It is a dance that takes place in a cow pan – *kraal* – where a woman normally has a plank situated under her feet and makes several hand gestures to represent the cow.” These performances, as explained by Hoveka and Uzera were a critical intervention in claiming space for minority cultural groups, women and queer persons who have been historically excluded from the memoryscape. In this way, they pointed to how the memoryscape has been imbued with European (colonial) masculinity through the erection of the Von François (Van Wyk 2023).

4.5. The #BlackLivesMatter protests

As shown above, on 16 June 2020, a group of about hundred young protestors gathered at the foot of the Von François statue, at the Witbooi war memorial in Zoo Park and outside the Ministry of Justice buildings in central Windhoek. The protestors dressed in their characteristic COVID-19 masks were shouting “Whose Lives Matter?” “Black Lives Matter!” and “No Justice! No Peace!” at the foot of the statue calling for its removal from public view (<https://fb.watch/hn1xXJVm7A/>). When I spoke to Hildegard at *Sicilia's* restaurant on 29 September 2020 about the protests, she told me that those who had organised the protest, had agreed on a “multi-sited” protest because of the COVID-19 regulations, which at the time restricted social gatherings to maximum of fifty persons.

In a black leather jacket and a white shawl with a playful mix of brown and yellow stripes on his head Keith Vries read out another petition on behalf of the protestors at the Von François statue. Vries was surrounded by a group of protestors holding up signs with the text: “END POLICE BRUTALITY”, “BLM”, “WHO KILLED FRIEDA?” and “STAND TOGETHER” (<https://fb.watch/hn1LGk3DhP/>). This petition was also read out at the Ministry of Justice buildings by Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja (<https://fb.watch/hn1xXJVm7A/>). Through this petition, the decolonial memory activists pointed to the intersectionality of issues related to racial, sexual- and gender-based violence (Becker 2020; 2022).

The activists were inspired by the global #BLM protests against the brutal killing of George Floyd by police officers in the American city of Minneapolis. Globally protests erupted against colonial racism present in the form of police brutality. In her seminal on the #BLM protests in Germany Hejo Funke (2021) describes Floyd’s murder as fuelling the largest transatlantic anti-racism movement since the 1900s. As Funke shows, in the former colonizing states of Britain, France, Belgium and Germany the #BLM activists started holding protests calling for the removal of colonial monuments. For them, these monuments represented the colonial system of racism.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ In Germany activists called for the removal of the Otto von Bismarck statue in the northern port city of Hamburg, while in Belgium the Royal Family offered a public apology to the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for the colonial crimes of the monarch King Leopold II, who was responsible for carrying out mass genocidal killings there (Funke 2021). Significantly also a group of BLM protestors in the British city of Bristol toppled a statue of the slave owner, Edward Colston, pulling it to the ground and dragging it to the Bristol harbour, before tossing it over in the ocean.

At Windhoek's #BLM protest the activists argued that police brutality was not uniquely an American phenomenon, but that Namibia was equally plagued by the same issue. In so doing, the activists meant to connect the histories of colonial racism to contemporary state violence against young black people in the form of police and military brutality. Through the #BLM protest the decolonial memory activists then highlighted the brutal killings of several young black Namibians at the hands of state security forces, namely the Namibian Police (NAMPOL), Windhoek City Police and Namibia Defence Forces (NDF). The activists specifically referenced the extrajudicial killing of Frieda Ndatipo, Johnny Doëseb, Benesius Kalola and Tambouna "Talent" Black.

An overview of incidents related to police brutality in Namibia

In 2014 Ndatipo a 28-year-old woman was tragically gunned down by the Namibian police in front of the Swapo party headquarters in Windhoek. The incident occurred in 2014 when the self-styled "children of the liberation struggle" group that she was part of were protesting for jobs (*The Namibian* 10 July 2015). Following this incident in 2019, the 18-year-old Doëseb was shot in the Dolam neighbourhood of Katutura (*The Namibian* 4 December 2019). While Kalola was gunned down at the popular eatery Oshetu Market, commonly known as Single Quarters in Katutura (*The Namibian* 9 September 2019) and Black who was a Zimbabwean migrant was shot in the head by an NDF officer when he turned his taxi away from a police roadblock in Greenwell Msatongo, Katutura (*The Namibian* 24 June 2019). Both Kalola and Black were killed during a joint operation by the Namibian police and armed forces, named "Operation Kalahari" in 2019, which succeeded the more controversial "Operation Hornkrantz". This relates to the name Operation Hornkrantz that bears reference to the Hornkrantz attack on Hendrik Witbooi and his followers in 1893. Operation Hornkrantz was launched during Namibia's festive season in December 2018 and January 2019 (*The Namibian* 21 December 2018). There were also many reports of police harassment allegations against police officers during this period. Later on it was replaced by the similar contentious Operation Kalahari which, as earlier alluded to, resulted in the killings of several young black people (*The Namibian* 8 May 2019)

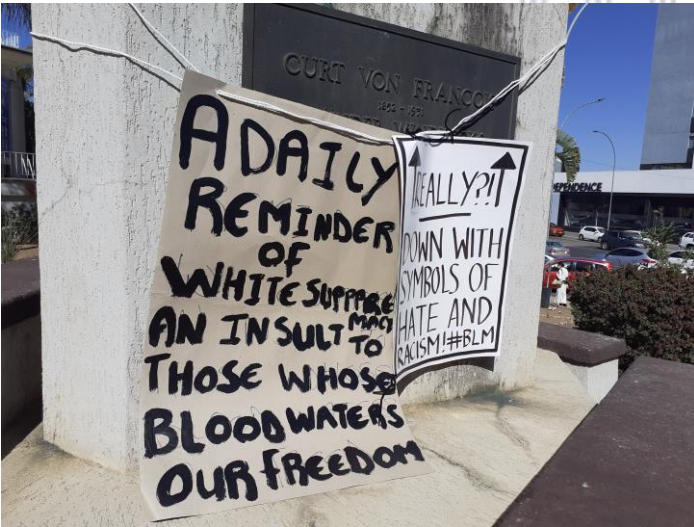


Figure 6: A day after the #BLM protests I visited the Von François statue and came across placards situated at its bottom. Photos taken by Bayron van Wyk.

Similarly, to the *#ACurtFarewell* petition the decolonial memory activists who gathered on 16 June 2020 called for the removal of the Von François statue. However, the *#BLM* protestors also took up other concerns. They specifically called for the removal of “The Gallows” in the small coastal town of Henties Bay. There was also previously an online petition, *#TheGallowsMustFall* which called for the removal of the monument.⁷⁶ The monument was erected in the 1970s as a warning to the town’s residents that went something like this: if you litter then you will be hanged. Many of the decolonial memory activists however were not humoured by this and instead reappropriated the statue as a reminder of the history of colonial hangings during the colonial genocide (1904-1908). They therefore set the monument on fire.

Through this petition the activists supported the calls of the *#ACurtFarewell* and *#TheGallowsMustFall* petitions. They also significantly broadened the concerns of these petitions. Specifically, the activists connected the calls for the removal of the Von François and Gallows monuments as symbols of colonial racism to contemporary state violence against black people, particularly women and queer persons. This has allowed the *#ACurtFarewell* and *#TheGallowsMustFall* petition to reach an even larger audience, thereby strengthening their calls.

It also points to how activists have been working with each other. Later in 2020 many of the decolonial memory activists that were involved in the organizing the *#BLM* protests in Windhoek held several other protests in response to incidents of sexual- and gender-based violence in Namibia. In October 2020 amid the devastating COVID-19 pandemic there was a resurgence of protests which were held in the aftermath of the tragic murder of the 22-year-old Shannon Wasserfal whose remains were found buried in the Namib Desert at Walvis Bay on the Namibian coastline. She went missing several months before this. Disgruntled by the events young Namibians mobilized in several cities and towns, such as Windhoek and Lüderitz under the social media hashtag *#ShutItAllDown#OnsIsMoeg* calling for an end to sexual- and gender-based violence (Becker 2020).⁷⁷

⁷⁶ See <https://www.change.org/p/petition-for-the-removal-of-the-gallows-lynching-pole-in-henties-bay-namibia>

⁷⁷ In Windhoek, protests were held at key government buildings, including the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare as well as the National Assembly, Namibia’s national parliament. There the protestors started calling for another State of Emergency (that was introduced earlier on in the year to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus) and resignation of the Minister of Gender, Doreen Sioka to address the alarming rates of sexual- and gender-based violence in Namibia (Becker 2020).

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I explored decolonial memory activism against the coloniality of public spaces. This relates to how public spaces were designed by colonial agents. These spaces were designed along exclusionary lines that meant to accentuate racial difference between whites and blacks. In this sense public spaces were where the experiences of whites were emphasized while the experiences of blacks were side-lined. This was achieved through the erection of colonial monuments. That is why decolonial memory activists have since started calling for the removal of these colonial monuments. They point to the racial connotations of these monuments meant to dehumanize blacks in the form of colonial racism and sexism, which they have argued is continued in the postcolony through contemporary state violence targeting mostly blacks. In this way, the activists are pointing to the situation of coloniality. They have also mobilized against an emerging postcolonial monumental landscape that aims to imbue the built environment with the experiences of the new black elite – which they have argued is also a form of coloniality. This suggests then that colonial and postcolonial monuments have been central in concerns over coloniality in public spaces.

This ethnography on colonial spaces in Windhoek reveals the concerns over coloniality in public spaces. Through my encounters with the decolonial memory activist Hildegard Titus who has been at the fore of changing the situation of Windhoek's public spaces, particularly through an online petition - *#ACurtFarewell* petition, I demonstrated the various practices of decolonial memory activism in Namibia as it relates to public spaces, particularly targeting the Von François statue.

I demonstrated through a virtual ethnography on one of the Council meetings the City of Windhoek has not been that forthcoming to the calls by the decolonial memory activists. The *#ACurtFarewell* petition was rejected over procedural concerns. However, this has changed since the establishment of the City of Windhoek Museum which has been identified as a possible place to house the Von François statue when it is removed. Following the petition, a heritage committee was also established to deal with issues over heritage in the city. These were some of the positive outcomes of the petition that I demonstrated in this chapter.

There was further support mobilized for the petition through the *#BlackLivesMatter* protests, following the killing of George Floyd by white police officers in the United States. Similar to the global outcry against contemporary violence targeting mostly

black people, decolonial memory activists used the protest to illuminate Namibia's situation of police brutality. Here as I demonstrated in the chapter the activists linked their concerns to other similar campaigns against racism in Namibia, including the *#TheGallowsMustFall* petition. They went further to take up concerns around sexual- and gender-based violence. Some of these I will present in depth in subsequent chapters. Now after presenting these decolonial struggles against the colonial and postcolonial memoryscape, in the following chapter I will further explore decolonial calls, specifically those related to the colonality of human remains.



CHAPTER FIVE

DECOLONIZING THE SKULLS

5.1. Introduction

In April and March 2022 marches were held by the Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA) for the Annual Reparations Walk.⁷⁸ These marches have been held since 2007 in Swakopmund to call on the German government for reparations to the Ovaherero and Nama. After it was cancelled in 2021 due to the COVID-19 health regulations that limited social gatherings and movement, the commemorative event took place again in 2022.

On 26 March 2022, during one of the Reparation Walk events under the theme “Not anymore” to illuminate the Ovaherero and Nama opposition to the agreement for reparations that was concluded between the Namibian and German governments, marchers visited the cemetery in Swakopmund in the upper-class neighbourhood of Kramersdorf.⁷⁹ In addition to graves of white Christians and Jews and the black residents of Swakopmund’s Old Location who were forcefully removed during the South African colonial period, located in this cemetery are several unmarked graves of the Prisoners-of-War, who were kept in the Swakopmund concentration camp during the colonial genocide, 1904-1908. Many of the graves are unmarked without tombstones, making it difficult to identify to whom the grave belonged.

During the march women were neatly lined up in their red Victorian-style Ovaherero dress; they were leading a procession with Ovaherero men dressed in their characteristic German-style military attire. Other women in the procession sported green- and white-style Victorian dresses.⁸⁰ There were also young Ovaherero cadets performing a drilling march in the cemetery while horsemen were following behind them

(https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=).

⁷⁸ Two separate marches were held. This was informed by the current Ovaherero leadership struggle over who should succeed the former Ombara Tjitambi Vekui Rukoro who passed away in mid-2022. The two contenders for the position, Chief Vipuire Kapuu and Professor Mutjinde Katjua have been involved in a court battle over the recognition as Ovaherero leader. This informed their supporters to organize different marches (*New Era* 7 April 2022).

⁷⁹ The second event was held in April 2022 with a structure and line-up similar to the first event that took place in March.

⁸⁰ These different colours of Ovaherero dress signify allegiance to the main Ovaherero groups: the Maharero and Kambazembi Royal Houses (red), Zereua Royal House (white) and Ovambanderu (green).

In the small riverbed close to the cemetery Ovaherero priests and leaders held a spiritual ceremony – announcing their presence to the ancestral spirits - before starting the official ceremony (https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=).

Through this spiritual ritual the Ovaherero were communing with their ancestors that were buried at in the cemetery at Kramersdorf.

These graves, as I will show in this chapter, have been the focus of memory activists in Swakopmund, Namibia's resort town on the Atlantic coast. Particularly, the Namibia Genocide Association, an organization that was established by the artist and activist, Laidlaw Peringanda have engaged in regular cleanings at the Prisoners-of-War graves at the cemetery in Swakopmund, which are unmarked, shallow and generally in a bad condition. Their neglected condition is telling of the Swakopmund Municipality's lack of recognition of the graves. Through the cleanings at the cemetery, the Namibia Genocide Association has campaigned for the recognition of the graves so that renovation works can be undertaken on them. I argue that these efforts are critical for the activists' endeavours to restore the dignity of those who died during the colonial genocide.

As Laidlaw who has been instrumental in the memory activism in Swakopmund, explained to me, many of the Ovaherero and Nama victims of the colonial genocide were buried without burial ceremonies. He elaborated that there were also no markers with the person's name or other biographical information erected on the graves. In some cases, he said, graves were desecrated, and the remains of the dead were stolen and taken to Germany. Laidlaw considers this an indication of how the skulls have been colonized. Laidlaw and fellow his memory activists aim at decolonizing the skulls. They have thus specifically engaged in regular cleanings of the graves to show respect to those who died.

The Namibia Genocide Association has been significant regarding efforts of decolonizing these skulls. I start with a discussion on the colonization of the skulls, that is how they were collected and taken to Germany for scientific purposes (Kössler 2015), since their return from Germany in 2011 new contestations have emerged around the skulls (Biwa 2010). I then explore the history of the organization emphasizing the role of Laidlaw Peringanda in its establishment. I then provide an account of my ethnographic observations at the cleanings of the cemetery. In the second part of the chapter, I link the calls for decolonizing the skulls to initiatives that make use of other

media forms. This is focused on a music production by the musician Boli Mootseng, who sings about the skulls of those who died during the genocide.

5.2. On the skulls

The skulls that were returned from Germany to Namibia have gained a prominent presence in Namibian public culture following their internment in the Independence Museum since the first return of human remains in 2011.⁸¹ The skulls were collected and taken to Germany during the colonial period for scientific purposes were European scientists to carried out research on them (Kössler 2015).

Kössler (2015) elaborates on how in Germany human remains were used as scientific material for various laboratory experiments in 19th century Europe. He argues that this was part of a “race science” at the time that was focused on “assigning categories to a huge range of objects, including plants, animals and humans” (Kössler 2015:274).

These ‘scientists’ placed humans into several racial groups with each viewed as possessing certain traits. Human groups were viewed as possessing either superior (whites) or inferior (blacks) traits. According to Kössler (2015:274) this was:

“...tantamount to objectifying humans, and classification of ‘races’ also fed into assigning to these categories greater or lesser value or worth...” That such experiments took place as Kössler (2015) argues does not suggest that such practices were wholly acceptable in Europe. In fact, he shows that it went against both local and European practices on how the dead should be treated. The scientists however ignored these protocols. Some of them were also publicly displayed in European museums.

Kössler (2015) shows the extent to which European ‘scientists’ were willing to go to prove their ‘scientific’ theories on race and humanness. He points out that they went ahead with their experiments without concern for the moral implications of such actions. Kössler (2015) therefore argues that there existed a self-serving ‘science’ in which “race science” was critical that was more concerned with imposing a colonizing and hierarchical structure between blacks and whites.

Activists regard this as an indication of how the skulls were colonized. They were transformed into physical items, as “things” and the possession of European scientists. The scientists viewed these skulls as ‘items’ without lived experiences thereby assisting the process of taking possession of them.

⁸¹ It is important to mention that there has also been other repatriations that took place, including the return of the Bible and whip that belonged to Gaob Hendrik Witbooi that was stolen during the Hornkrantz attack in 1893. These cultural objects were returned in early 2019 (Kössler 2019).

Kössler (2015) further observes that interests in studying human remains slowly declined after World War I as scientists started to take up other ‘scientific’ concerns, such as genetic studies. Human remains were therefore no longer used for ‘scientific’ studies. The skulls were also no longer displayed at German museums and were rather kept in storage out of public view. This then effectively resulted in the skulls receding from public knowledge. In this way, Kössler (2015) therefore observes that the skulls underwent a forgetting process. However, recent calls that have emerged by the Ovaherero and Nama for the repatriation of these human remains have ensured that the skulls remain central in their pursuit for restorative justice.

Over several years since 2006 the Ovaherero and Nama traditional leaders have lobbied for the Namibian government to engage the German government in returning the skulls. Such calls can be said to have started when human remains were unexpectedly found at Lüderitz in 2006 (Biwa 2012; Kössler 2015). Biwa (2012) and Kössler (2015) shows that these skulls were believed to be the remains of Ovaherero and Nama who died at the Shark Island concentration camp. Then in 2007 at a commemoration in honour of *Gaob* Cornelius Fredericks at Shark Island calls were made for the return of Fredericks’ remains that was shipped to Germany during the colonial genocide. In 2008 there was a feature on *Koloniales Erbe* on the the German FAKT TV skulls (Kössler 2015). These events as Biwa (2012) and Kössler (2015) explains were key in intensifying the calls by the Ovaherero and Nama which were later taken up by the Namibian government.

However, as Kössler (2015) shows there were several issues that complicated the process of repatriating the remains. The first relates to the naming practices of the remains in Germany. Many of the skulls were only recorded with an ethnic marker “Ovaherero” or “Nama”, rather than their personal names. This would make it impossible to trace these skulls to families and have them “mourned and buried at home” (Kössler 2015:281).

Therefore, they can longer be claimed by specific families, resulting in contestation of ownership that have since emerged, specifically by the Namibian government, Ovaherero and Nama. In this sense claims by the Namibian government have been heavily contested by the Ovaherero and Nama traditional leaders. This can be seen in these groups challenging the Namibian government on its plans to have the remains buried at the Heroes Acre.⁸²

In contrast, the Ovaherero and Nama traditional leaders wanted the skulls to be buried according to customary rites of the respective groups. Biwa (2012:245) explains that: “This was an intervention by community leaders to claim specific human bodies and incorporate them in their funerary rites as part of their burial practices.” Biwa (2012) therefore argues that this intervention should be regarded as significant in efforts aimed at the “repossession” of the skulls as “bodies” rather than as “objects”, as they have previously been handled during the German colonial period. They also called for some the skulls to be housed in the Independence Museum where the public could view them. Biwa (2012) situates the concerns of the skulls in context of broader claims of genocide reparations. She refers to how the Ovaherero and Nama have used these skulls as evidence for the colonial genocide in Namibia. This is significant since, as I explained in chapter two, these communities have historically been restricted at widely representing their experiences during German colonialism.

However, as I explained in the opening of this sub-section, since their return in 2011, the skulls have been kept in the Independence Museum. It is in storage where the public are unable to view them. No burials of the skulls have also taken place. In this way, I argue that the skulls have (again) been effectively rendered as property – in this case as property of the Namibian government. This I suggest continues with colonial practices that treated the skulls as physical things. The Namibian government has however allowed for some public engagement with the skulls. In 2011 an official ceremony was held at Parliament Gardens (National Assembly). Ten-years later, as I will provide a discussion on below, an anniversary was held at the Independence Museum in honour of the skulls. I wil show that rather than have these ceremonies as a means to have public discussions around what to do with the skulls, the Namibian government used the events to emphasize its ownership of the skulls.

⁸² The Heroes Acre is where many of the leaders of Namibia’s liberation struggle (1966-1989) were buried. There also exists many ceremonial graves of the previous leaders who fought against German colonialism in Namibia (Becker 2011).

5.3. The first commemoration of the return of skulls from Germany in 2011

On the 7th of October 2021 there was a tenth-year commemoration of the repatriation of the skulls, which was organized by the Namibian government. This was the first such event held and it took place at the Independence Museum.

I came across a poster announcing the event a day before on Facebook on the Eraka page, a virtual Ovaherero cultural magazine.

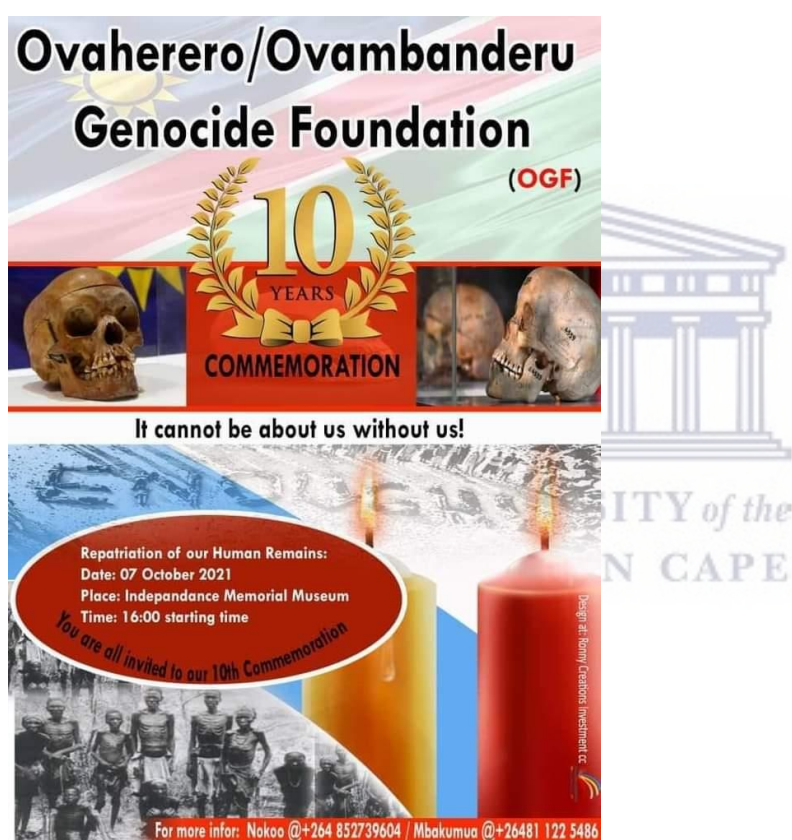


Figure 7: A poster announcing the commemoration event. Photo taken from the Eraka Facebook page.

When I arrived at the Museum with my friend, Cathrine⁸³, I noted a small placard next to the elevator of the Museum that read: “There are no skulls or human remains exhibited here.” On that day, however, we were allowed to view some of the skulls as part of the commemorations.

⁸³ This is her real name.

When we arrived at the parking area of the museum, we first saw the statue of Sam Nujoma, Namibia's first president, holding up the Namibian Constitution. The museum was with some slick tile works. We entered the elevator with its glossy glass work with a golden interior. While moving up with the elevator we had views of the panorama of the colonial Windhoek landscape: the German colonial church, 'Christuskirche', and some of the purple jacaranda trees blossom in Parliament Gardens, the park in front of the National Assembly 'Tintenpalast' building, which was constructed during the German colonial period in Namibia. On the second floor, while walking to the room where the ceremony was going to take place, was a large military tank behind a glass box, which was the main centrepiece of the room. Painted on the walls was a mural of two hands breaking free from chains. There was a script that read: "The strength of our convictions breaks the chain."

In the room we stood at the back, because most of the seats were already occupied. The room was semi-lit. I looked around the room and noticed that there were between fifty and sixty people present. On a table close to the podium were several traditional leaders. I however only recognized the Ovambanderu *Ombara Tjitambi* Aletta Nguvauva, who has been closely linked to government efforts in negotiation for genocide reparations from Germany. In the audience in one row of seats I noticed a group of women dressed in their green-coloured Victorian style Ovambanderu dress. There were also a few school children in their uniforms standing at the back. Behind the podium where the former Minister of Education, Arts and Culture, Katrina Hanse-Himarwa was speaking was a mural painting of images of historical figures like Hendrik Witbooi, Samuel Maharero, Ipumbu ya Shilongo – from south, central and northern Namibia, officially recognized as heroes of Namibia's anti-colonial struggle. There was also a painting of a war scene with some men throwing spears and another a group of men with military weapons behind a military garrison. There was a male soldier on a horse with a rifle, drawing striking resemblance to the *Reiterdenkmal*, the German colonial equestrian monument that was removed in 2013 from its location at the *Alte Feste*. It was clear that this was meant to depict the anti-colonial wars by Africans against their German colonial masters. In front there was a podium where Hanse-Himarwa was giving a lengthy speech on the role of the former Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, Kazenambo Kazenambo "KK", who sadly succumbed to COVID-19 during Namibia's third wave of infections (*The Namibian* 19 August 2021) in the repatriation of skulls.

She specifically said the following:

I believe that the process has coincidentally been falling in the right hands at every time and moment. The first repatriation fell in the lap of KK, who had a vested interest, because of his blood and bone. The third on mine as another descendant. And for those of you that don't know me, I am a descendant of both the Ovaherero and Nama communities. Therefore, the interest for me is even double.

Hanse-Himarwa further spoke on the intricacies of repatriation. In the speech she specifically stressed her and Kazenambo's role – and in that way also the Namibian government's role in the repatriation of skulls and cultural objects from Germany. She said that:

When you have a vested interest in something, like what was the case with KK and myself, you stand firm. You stand solid. And you stand in the conviction of what you want and how you want it. When you want it. And you stand uncompromising. That's what we have done. Thanks also to the government of the day who accorded us that honour. If it was not the government that supported us the honour to be appointed in these Ministeries we would have never had that significant, historic and very important honour to repatriate the remains of our ancestors in the fashion and way we insisted to happen, and which successfully happened.

Through this Hanse-Himarwa had effectively excluded the Ovaherero and Nama traditional leaders from the process of repatriations of the skulls. This the activists and myself argue was clearly aimed to claim ownership of the skulls solely for the Namibian government – that as Kössler (2015) argues are still viewed as physical items rather than as bodies to be mourned. This, the activists and myself argue continues with colonial practices. In this case, the skulls are still handled as “objects” rather as humans with lived experiences. This as I showed above in my discussion of the commemoration event was a view that was endorsed by national leaders.

Following Hanse-Himarwa's speech, however, the presenter then announced that on the first floor there was an exhibition of some of the skulls that came from Germany. We walked to the first floor down a flight of stairs to the “Chambers of Horror” room – with its exhibit on the colonial genocide, where the skulls were on display. We were looking at some of the exhibits in the rooms, while waiting to enter the ‘Chambers of Horror’ room. With the crowd we moved sequentially through the following exhibits: “Pre-colonial Society. Peaceful Coexistence”, with its cultural objects, including beadwork in glass display boards on the wall, tall palm trees and canoe boats characteristic of north and north-western Namibia and “Early Resistance Against Colonialism”, with its

images of the Shark Island and Windhoek concentration camps. There was an image of the Nama *Goab* Cornelius Fredericks, who was imprisoned on Shark Island and of some of the skulls that were collected by German colonialists.

The entrance of the ‘Chambers of Horror’ room was draped with a brown curtain. Inside were two museum officials, a woman and man. I recognized the woman, Ms Nzila Mubusisi, who is a Senior Curator at the National Museum of Namibia. They were dressed in white lab coats and were standing behind the two skulls in a glass box. The male museum official explained to us that the government retrieved about hundred skulls from Germany and they were stored in safe rooms at the museum. The two skulls in the glass box were that of a Ovaherero between 20 and 35 years old and a young Nama child of between 2 and 5 years. Both came from the Shark Island concentration camp. He went on to emphasize how the German colonial genocide targeted all kinds of people, regardless of even their age. Despite the biographical information they had on the two skulls, they did not know how exactly the two victims died. I thought that the man’s comment: “I hope that they didn’t kill them” was rather naïve.

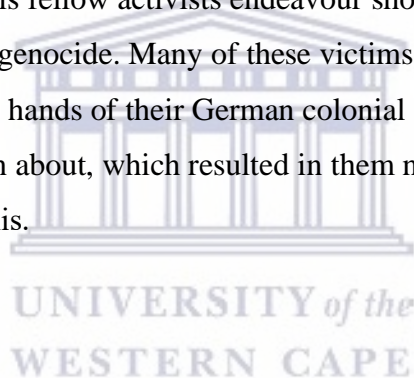
This commemoration event reveals the coloniality of skulls that memory activists have referenced in their struggles. It shows how the Namibian government stresses its ownership over the skulls, which points to the coloniality of the skulls. Memory activists, as I explained in the opening vignette, have started resisting against this. In Swakopmund they have particularly focused on graves of the victims of the colonial genocide. Now I will move over to a discussion on memory activism in Swakopmund. I specifically refer to the Namibia Genocide Association who has engaged in activism for the recognition of the Prisoner-of-War graves in Swakopmund.

5.4. The Namibia Genocide Association

In 2018 the 48-year-old artist and activist, Laidlaw Peringanda established the Namibian Genocide Association in Swakopmund, a quaint town on the Namibian coastline known for its colonial German-style architecture and German-speaking population. The organization is located in the Matutura, a mostly black township of Swakopmund. The Association’s motto in Otjiherero is *Katuna Okuzemba Ko* (“We will not forget”). The organization aims to illuminate the experiences of German colonialism, particularly as it relates to Swakopmund.

The Namibia Genocide Association has an official Facebook page with 1,417 friends and 1,499 followers where Laidlaw shares the memory work that the organization has engaged in. This, includes organizing the cleanings at the cemetery in Kramersdorf, writing letters to officials to have the unmarked graves there recognized, and more recently new initiatives such as establishing the Swakopmund Genocide Museum, the first museum in Swakopmund that reflects on the experiences of the Ovaherero and Nama during the colonial genocide in Namibia.

Through this organization Laidlaw and other members have challenged coloniality in Swakopmund. They have particularly focused their memory struggles targeting the “human remains”, commonly referred to as “skulls” of the Prisoners-of-War that are buried in the cemetery. A centrepiece of their activities have been cleanings of the graves, which the Namibia Genocide Association has engaged in since 2018. They have also focused on mobilizing against colonial monuments, such as the Marine Denkmal⁸⁴ and calling for their removal from public view.⁸⁵ With their core activism directed on the cleanings, Laidlaw and his fellow activists endeavour showing respect to those who perished during the colonial genocide. Many of these victims did not have proper burials when they died at the hands of their German colonial masters. Their graves have also somehow been forgotten about, which resulted in them not being taken care of. The “cleanings” aim to change this.



⁸⁴ The statue was erected on 26 July 1908 following the colonial genocide. It was designed by a German sculptor, Albert Moritz Wolff and is a national monument in Namibia. This status was proclaimed a national monument by former Namibia Monuments Council in 1969 and has since not been removed by the National Heritage Council (that replaced the Namibia Monuments Council).

⁸⁵ Laidlaw previously covered the Marine Denkmal in a black plastic bag after the skull of a cow at one of the monuments in the Swakopmund cemetery was removed by some of the residents next to the cemetery, who claimed that it was smelly. Later there were also protests held at the Marine Denkmal on 26 July 2015. At the protest activists threw red paint on the statue calling for its removal. They also wanted the statute to be taken back to Germany – called “Operation Back to Germany” (*New Era* 17 July 2015).

5.4.1. Who is Laidlaw Peringanda?

I started to get to know Laidlaw through my Honours research project on initiatives by the Ovaherero and Nama to construct memorials to the colonial genocide in Namibia. My study particularly focused on the Genocide Memorial Stone in the Swakopmund Cemetery as a case study.

When I first spoke to Laidlaw in relation to my present project in August 2020, he told me that he was born on 3 November 1974 in Otjimbingwe, central-western Namibia. He hails from an Ovaherero background. Laidlaw explained that he is a spiritual man. On his Facebook wall Laidlaw lists Rastafarianism amongst his religious views. He attributed his spirituality to growing up in a household where religion was central. The family practiced Christianity. His grandfather was even a church pastor. Laidlaw was thus exposed early on to a deep sense of spirituality that has influenced his present views on many social issues, such as racism, poverty, and corruption. These childhood experiences also motivated Laidlaw to engage in memory activism against the excesses of German and South African colonialism in Namibia. He said that *ek soek net die waarhied* (“I am just looking for the truth”) and that *ek is op die aarde gesit vir ‘n mission* (“I am on this earth for a mission”).⁸⁶ I thought to myself: here then is a man who is committed to social justice.

Laidlaw described himself as being “radical” and that *ons gee hulle vuur* (“we are putting pressure on them”) in reference to the Namibia Genocide Association’s memory activism in Swakopmund. Laidlaw explained that his “radical” attitude was rooted in his childhood experiences. As a youngster before independence in 1990 growing up in Arandis, a small mining town located 60 km from Swakopmund he was among the school’s learners who tore up exam papers in protest against the apartheid policies of the school. Since then, he has actively pursued his interest in activism. However, he explained that his work has not always been welcomed, especially not by some Germans in Swakopmund. Laidlaw recounted how he has even been viewed as a threat by some who dislike the (memory) work that he is engaged in. I was inspired by Laidlaw’s resolve to continue with his (memory) work despite the opposition against such initiatives.

⁸⁶ That Laidlaw spoke in Afrikaans with me points to his perceptions of my Rehoboth Baster origins (see chapter three). Also, apart from Omar (who is a native speaker of Afrikaans) Laidlaw was the only other activist who spoke to me in Afrikaans. It relates to Afrikaans having been the *lingua franca* in pre-independence southern and central Namibia, so that for Laidlaw’s generation Afrikaans would be quite natural –younger people would hardly use it but speak in English.

Laidlaw is an artist who has won many prizes for his work, including at the National Ceramics Biennale where he won third prize. He was a student at the John Muafangejo Art Centre that was established in 1994 and named after the Namibian artist John Muafangejo. Laidlaw also spend time in the Reunion Islands on a scholarship and exhibited some of his earlier works in Italy (Gebhard, n.d.). Laidlaw has, much like Hildegard, combined interests in social justice and art, and has used his artworks as a form of activism. In 2002, Laidlaw who was 27-years-old at the time, held an exhibition at the National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAN) entitled “Namibia: The Good And Bad”, which was meant to reflect on the conditions of postcolonial Namibia. In an interview, published in *The Namibian* newspaper, Laidlaw illuminated corruption by some of Namibian government leaders. He said the following:

I decided to speak about corruption and I made a mixed media artwork using newspaper clippings, some drawings and clay. You are asked the question: why don't Namibians have money and I say its because a few people want to keep the wealth for themselves and they steal the wealth for themselves and misuse it at the expense of the common people.... an artist is there to express the sentiments of a people or a particular era that is why I felt the need to speak out. If I don't do it, who will? (*The Namibian* 26 April 2002).

Already then Laidlaw demonstrated a deep awareness of social issues in postcolonial Namibia and commented on postcolonial corruption. Laidlaw stressed his dissatisfaction with this, motivating him “to speak out.” His artworks gave him the confidence to openly resist social inequality still present in Namibia.

Laidlaw has since been at the forefront at memory struggles in Swakopmund. He is the founder of the Namibia Genocide Association that has called on the Swakopmund Municipality to recognize the graves of the victims of the colonial genocide in the cemetery in Kramersdorf. The organization has also undertaken regular cleanings at the cemetery with the aim of restoring the dignity of those who were buried there. In the following sub-section I will provide a discussion on the cleanings in Swakopmund that I participated in.

5.5. Decolonizing the skulls

5.5.1. Swakopmund cemetery “cleaning”

On 10 December 2020, a public holiday – International Human Rights Day and Namibia’s Women Day⁸⁷, I participated in a cleaning of the cemetery in Kramersdorf in Swakopmund. This was the first time I was travelling to Swakopmund after more than ten years. The last time I was here was when I was in Grade 7 for a school camping trip. When I entered the city with the private hike that I got at B1 service station in Katutura, Windhoek I was surprised to see how big the town had grown. What has not changed however was Swakopmund’s characteristically German colonial architecture. The town has several German colonial-style buildings that have remained even with the end of German colonialism in Namibia. Prominent buildings include the Railway Station building, Woermann House and the Swakopmund Prison (Massman 1983). When I arrived at the cemetery in Kramersdorf early in the morning, I saw a group of people standing in front of the cemetery. I joined them. We first started with introductions. Each person introduced themselves by giving their names, where they were from, and why they were interested in the “cleaning” of the cemetery. There were ten participants from different age groups (but mostly younger people), racial and ethnic groups. Amongst the various ethnic groups present were: Ovaherero, Ovambo-, Damara and German and Baster. The group comprised of the following persons: in addition to members of the Namibia Genocide Association, Laidlaw Peringanda and Lourens Ndura⁸⁸, Peringanda’s partner, Olivia, and his friends John and Eva⁸⁹, there were four members from the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) party (Peter, Selma, Petrus and David⁹⁰), who explained why they were motivated to participate in the event for the first time. They said their aim was to promote “social justice.” We were two research students, Frowin who told us that he was studying plant and animal conservation, but his interest in the cleanings was more due to the fact that he was German who had grown up in Swakopmund and wanted to learn more about his history and myself. I explained that I was a Masters student conducting research on the colonial genocide and that I was interested in using the cleaning event in my study.

⁸⁷ See chapter four.

⁸⁸ This is his real name.

⁸⁹ This is not their real names.

⁹⁰ This is not their real names.

At the entrance of the cemetery, I looked around and saw that there was an orange-coloured wall encircling the entire cemetery with panoramic views of the Namib Desert. There were mansions neatly lined up along the cemetery. There were also horse stables nearby. Further beyond the cemetery walls I noticed that there were a few people taking camel rides in the far background.⁹¹ There were also a few people driving quad bikes in the dunes beyond the cemetery. Laidlaw then told us that previously people would drive their quad bikes across the cemetery without the concern of the many unmarked graves of the Prisoners-of-War. He explained that this happened because there was no wall built around the cemetery, which allowed the quad bikers to drive their bikes there without concern for the many graves of the victims of the colonial genocide. Now since there has been a wall erected the bikers have been prevented from driving their bikes over the graves.

We then entered the cemetery grounds. As Laidlaw was taking us through the cemetery, he explained that it was previously separated into two main parts: for Swakopmund's white and black residents. Since independence in 1990 this has been discontinued and the cemetery is now no longer separated. We first moved through the former section for whites which was obviously in a much better condition when compared to the other graves for blacks that we later encountered. On the side for whites there were tall palm trees and tombstones for each grave. It was further divided into the "Christian" and "Jewish" sections. There were also new graves of victims of the COVID-19 pandemic – which included black and white victims of the virus. On the other hand, the section for blacks was in a poor condition. Many of the graves were unmarked and shallow. It was further divided into the unmarked graves of the Prisoners-of-War of the colonial genocide and also graves of the Old Location. Some of these graves had tombstones, wooden crosses. Other graves here were also unmarked graves. That these graves were there shows that Swakopmund also had its own Old Location from which black people were removed.⁹² Ursula Massmann (1983) shows that the forced removals of Swakopmund's black and coloured populations took place in the 1960s with the creation of Mondesa (black township) and Tamariskia (coloured township).

⁹¹ This is a sought after activity by international and local tourists to Swakopmund.

⁹² During fieldwork I encountered several of histories of forced removals in Namibia – pointing to the multidirectional relatedness of these histories.

After we passed through the first part of the cemetery we approached the newly erected Nama and Ovaherero Genocide Monument (1904-1908). On 20 March 2020 a stone was placed there to mark the unmarked graves of the Prisoners-of-War of the colonial genocide (1904-1908). It was a large black marble stone that looked like a scribe. There was some long white text inscribed on the monument. The text on the inscription read:

Nama & Ovaherero Genocide Monument

1904-1908

In honour & loving memory of thousands of Ovaherero and Nama men, women and children who perished at this sacred site. They died in concentration camps of hunger, slave labour, sexual abuse, disease, fatigue & adverse weather conditions at the hands of German soldiers.

Their remains were buried in shallow graves by fellow inmates. Our ancestral lands & restorative justice remain the inspiration for our struggle today, tomorrow and forever

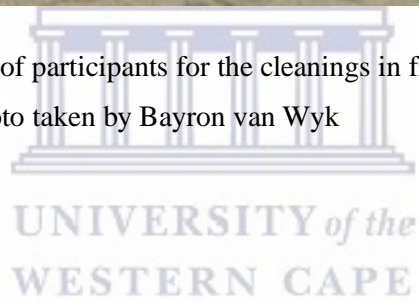
The new monument replaced the first stone that had been placed here in 2007.⁹³

After taking a group photo at the monument we proceeded to the graves. They were lying outstretched far in the cemetery. From the Genocide Memorial Stone, they looked like heaped of sands. I realized that an unsuspecting visitor may easily overlook these graves. This is because many of the graves were quite flattened. The only signs that these were indeed graves were the many small rocks that were placed at the graves by Laidlaw and members of the Namibia Genocide Association as a substitute for tombstones. Since sandstorms usually blow here many of the topsoil of the graves have been blown away which results in the graves being flattened to varying degrees. Some graves were not flattened that much. Other graves however were completely flattened and as a result had wholly disappeared.

⁹³ In 2007 the former Ovaherero Paramount Chief Kuiamo Riruako and Chief Christian Zeraua of the Zeraua Royal House inaugurated the stone at the Swakopmund cemetery. This monument was erected through a collaborative effort between Ovahereros and Germans in Swakopmund. According to Elke Zuern (2012) this effort was dubbed a “reconciliation project” by the two German spear headers of the project, Ericka Rusch and Eckart Muller. It aimed to integrate the black side with its unmarked graves of the Prisoners-of-War with the adjacent Christian and Jewish graves of the white side. Controversially, the organizers of the initiative refrained from using the term genocide in the wording of the stone (Zuern 2012).



Figure 8: A photo of the group of participants for the cleanings in front of the Swakopmund Genocide Memorial Stone. Photo taken by Bayron van Wyk



Indeed, the initiative by the Namibia Genocide Association has been instrumental in restoring the graves. In realizing that without proper care the situation of graves may further deteriorate, the organization has held regular cleanings of the cemetery. These events had one central purpose: that is to restore the unmarked graves of the Prisoners-of-War. This entailed that the participants in the cleanings were engaged to remould the graves, which is done through raking sand together on the graves. We used our rakes, spades and brooms for this purpose. In cases where there were no graves and only the small rocks we had to make “new” graves all-together. Two people were normally stationed at a grave. This was partly to make the work easier. It also provided a chance for the participants to talk with each other. While we were remoulding some of the graves we had conversations on the history of the colonial genocide, concentration camps and forced removals in Swakopmund.





Figure 9: A photo of some of the participants at the graves engaging in the cleanings. Photo taken by Bayron van Wyk.

At one time during the day, I stood at a grave with Frowin, and we started talking other about the significance of the cleanings. While I expressed my doubts that “these events will solve anything, but at least it allows us to reflect on the past”, Frowin gave me a detailed explanation as to why he was interested in the cleanings.

They certainly helped adjust my perception of Swakop and it's community. It's a far more honest presentation. Most incredibly sobering. I've appreciated being exposed to what draws different participants to this particular site. They've definitely encouraged me to study my own family's and community's history in this country. That in turn continues to inform my ideology. So, the impact has been quite substantial.

While we were over there, we saw car tracks over one of the graves. It was clear that someone drove through cemetery and destroyed some of the graves there. We then started to make a new grave with a pile of rocks to prevent another car driving over it again.

5.5.2. Attempts at getting the Municipality of Swakopmund have the graves recognized

While some residents and visitors act in such inconsiderate ways, the main concern for the Swakopmund memory activists has been that the graves are generally in a bad condition as they are not being taken care of by the Swakopmund Municipality. Lourens Ndura explained the situation as follows:

These graves have never been given attention. The municipal workers there only take care of the graves of the whites, while forgetting about the graves of our ancestors. That is not fair. They should also be taken care of like the other graves.

In 2018 Laidlaw wrote to the former Minister of Urban and Rural Development, Dr Peya Mushelenga concerning the situation of the graves at the cemetery. Laidlaw wanted the Minister to intervene to ensure that the Swakopmund Municipality recognize these graves and start with renovation works on them. In response to Laidlaw's claims the Minister wrote to the Municipality concerning the issue. In his letter the Minister asked the former Mayor of Swakopmund, PND Nashilundo for further information on the situation. In a reply to the Minister, PND Nashilundo recognized the "trauma among the African communities, in particular, among the OvaHerero, Namas and San Namibians" because of the colonial genocide. She also made specific reference to the establishment of concentration camps to keep Prisoners-of-War during the colonial genocide, especially at Swakopmund. She however pointed out that many of the graves of these Prisoners-of-War cannot be located.

That is precisely why the Namibia Genocide Association has called for recognition of the Prisoners-of-War graves. The association has engaged with the Swakopmund Municipality through writing letters and holding meetings to recognize these graves and start with renovation works on them. Practically, the organization has effectively started with a process of showing respect to the victims of the colonial genocide.

Ndura explained their motivations for starting with the cleanings:

We do it to keep it as evidence. Otherwise the wind will blow the graves away. They will disappear. We can't let that happen. Our ancestors are buried in those graves.

For Ndura the cleanings of the cemetery is important because it is about “our ancestors”, who are being shown respect in this way. This is significant since many of the victims of the colonial genocide (1904-1908) did not receive a dignified burial when they died at the hands of their German colonial masters. Even worse, some of the skulls of the victims were shipped to Germany for scientific studies. In some cases, these graves were desecrated by German scientists who took the skulls from them (Kössler 2015).

When I participated in a later clean-up event in May 2021, I noticed that the graves were in a much better condition than what I first had encountered in December 2020. Before I could hardly make out that these were indeed graves. On this occasion, however, the graves could be clearly noticed (*ErongoNews* 2 June 2021). This suggests then that the efforts by the Namibia Genocide Association have been paying off. It is significant in having the graves recognized and ensuring that the dignity of those buried in the cemetery be returned, which was lost through German colonialism.

Furthermore, at the cemetery Laidlaw told me that he was planning to map some of these graves through Google Maps “to measure the graves.” He wants this to serve as “scientific evidence that there were mass graves.” Laidlaw told me that he created an inventory of the graves which he obtained from the records of the Municipality of Swakopmund. In referring to the work of Namibia Genocide Association on the cemetery Laidlaw said that the site was “no longer a Memorial Park (in reference to the Memorial Stone) but a crime scene.” That is why Laidlaw has plans to have forensic anthropologists start with the documenting of the unmarked graves.

Laidlaw has also been working tirelessly to have the cemetery declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, as explained by friend Buhle Ndlovu who attended the event with me in 2021⁹⁴, UNESCO's authority is limited in Namibia and that they are required to follow national policies on heritage. Therefore, UNESCO will not be able to formally recognize the cemetery as a World Heritage Site if it was not first given that status a national heritage site by a national body, such as the National Heritage Council (NHC).

The AR and Laidlaw previously spoke about collaborating with each other on activism around the cemetery. One of the members of the AR in Swakopmund, Passat even offered to write a letter with Laidlaw to the Swakopmund Municipality to extend its municipal services to the unmarked graves. Laidlaw had welcomed the suggestion. When I asked him why he agreed without hesitation, Laidlaw explained that it is important to jointly work with other activists as it can assist in strengthening their campaigns. This I thought was a wonderful gesture by the AR in Swakopmund can help in Laidlaw's memory struggles. Concerns over the skulls have similarly been taken up by other artists such as by the musician Boli Mootseng, who produced a song on the skulls.

5.6. Rapping about the skulls

The skulls of the colonial genocide (1904-1908) have recently also become the subject of music, when a Namibian musician, Boli Mootseng, started singing about them. I met up with Mootseng on the cold winter's morning of 29 July 2022 at the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) radio studios in Windhoek North for a conversation about himself and his music. I found a middle-aged man who had shoulder-length dreadlocks and was wearing a beanie [Southern African English "woolen cap"] with the colours of the Rastafarian flag, a warm jacket, denim jeans and black sneakers. We went to his small recording studio where we started talking about his music. I started by asking: how would you describe yourself? Boli said that he was a "storyteller." He told me that his interest in storytelling started while growing up and that it was his family members, especially the older generation that evoked such an interest in him.

⁹⁴ At the time she was also working for UNESCO.

Boli previously sang commercially in Namibia. He however never released an album. While we were chatting he pointed to a dissatisfaction with the commercial music industry that motivated him to start singing about political concerns. Boli said the following:

I was worried. Jesus, am I only going to make music to keep everybody's hands-up in the air for the rest of my life? Am I going to reduce myself to that? That is why I looked at telling stories. I applied it to music. So I started singing about stories I am interested in.

Boli expressed an urge that he wanted more out of his passion for music than only earning a living with it. He wanted it to be more anchored in his own identity and sense of self-worth. Boli told me that he also has an interest in social justice. That is why since leaving the commercial music industry he has been producing songs that speak more to this part of him. Moreover, he uses music in trying to fight for more social justice in Namibia.

Boli was born in 1970 in Windhoek. He works for NBC producing TV shows. In the early 1990s he was involved in various development programmes by civil society organizations that was aimed at young people. While reflecting on this time Boli said that “we were kept of the streets by them. So along those lines we improvised. Because we were empowered at the time. We were told that you can be what you want to be.” This is where Boli started making music. “They gave us instruments. Obviously if you have friends around we rub off on each other. Then one thing leads to another; when one guy can play a guitar, another a drum or sing. We then recorded a song. It started there” Boli explained. Following this he then started presenting on radio.

Writing about a 28-year-old Boli at the time, who was starting out with a music career, *The Namibian* reporter, Erick Shirumbu provided the following description of the musician:

Something of a drifter, Boli moves through life as if driven by a breeze of his own making, “Chillin” here and there as he dabbles with this and that in his creative playground. There certainly is a child at the heart of Boli “baby-face” Mootseng. He loves to sing, he loves to write poetry, he loves to act, he loves to make videos, and he loves to play music and talk to people on his weekly NBC radio show. But he has yet to follow any one-line particularly seriously (*The Namibian*, 14 August 1998).

Boli presently lives in Groot Aub, a small village located 40 km south from Windhoek, where he has since become further aware of some of the pressing social problems in Namibia. He explained that this relates to the socio-economic conditions present in Groot Aub that Boli has encountered while living there.

There are children there. To make a photocopy they need a N\$100 to go to Windhoek and some more money for the copy. Even the elderly people have to travel to Windhoek to get their social grants. That is what the area is like. What do you say when you look at it? These people are full of shit? I am enjoying my life on the farm. Fuck them?! No, you don't do that. So I suppose that it what I would love to do now.

5.6.1. 'Hamakari'

In a song called 'Hamakari' which was recorded in 2020, Boli is preoccupied with the skulls or in his words "bones" particularly those found at Shark Island, a former concentration camp known for its exceptionally high death rates of Ovaherero and Nama. For Boli these "bones" are important in memory (claims) making by the Ovaherero and Nama as they have left a trail of evidence of the colonial genocide.

Like the Namibia Genocide Association that we previously learned about the song 'Hamakari' is aimed bringing honour to the victims of the colonial genocide.

On Facebook the music video of the song opens with a scene in a cinema. There was a large audience watching the BBC produced documentary *Namibia: Genocide and the Second Reich* (2005).⁹⁵ The aesthetics of the documentary is used in creating a certain mood and feel, that of sadness and despair by drawing on the experiences of colonial genocide in Namibia. In a sense it is a historical tool aimed at evoking the memories of the colonial genocide. Several scenes from the documentary are therefore reproduced in Boli's music video. These scenes draw from historical material, such as popular oral recounts of some the events in the colonial genocide, historical images, landscapes.

⁹⁵ See <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Rbon6HqzjEI>

At the beginning there was a German flag and street scenes from what looked like a German city. It quickly then moved over to a church building in Namibia where black churchgoers were entering as a service was about to start. There were more graphics that appeared on the screen. The black and white image of Boli with a beanie, some big sunglasses and a puffer jacket with a T-shirt covers many of the scenes in the video. That Boli was in black and white can be regarded as pointing to the temporality of the experiences of colonial genocide, connecting the past with the present – emphasizing the multidirectional relatedness of historical experiences from German, South African colonial periods that lives on in the postcolony. Moreover, in these scenes Boli is portrayed as a figure shaped by the historical experiences of colonial genocide. These traumatic experiences have impacted his present realities. In this way, he hints at his own genealogical and cultural links to the colonial genocide.

However, what I found concerning while watching the music video was that many of the members of the audience in the documentary were eating popcorn during the screening of the documentary. This suggests that they were more entertained than grieved by the images and sounds that they were exposed to while there. In a way, this misses the point of trying to connect people to the memories of the colonial genocide. How will viewers at home watching this music video connect to the emotionally disengaged audience in the cinema? Several scenes in the video then appeared of soldiers with rifles shooting at the screen. This was accompanied with sounds of gunshots going off and squirts of blood that appeared on the cinema screen.

Boli sings about important places and figures in the trajectory of the colonial genocide in Namibia. This lyrics is meant to connect the listeners to the events as they unfolded more than a century ago. Many of the places he mentions are located in central and southern Namibia. They are the names of places and persons that are historically significant for the Ovaherero, Nama and Germans in Namibia. Boli does not only mention these names, but also provides context to them as well. As the lyrics in stanza one suggests there was a brutal attack on black churchgoers whilst in a Sunday service in Otjimbingwe:

Ohamakari

In Otjimbingwe like any Sunday morning

People in the church singing, praying and reading up on the word

Our father, who art in heaven

And the gunshots go off

Gunshots go off

More gunshots go off and off⁹⁶

The Ovaherero still remember what happened there and will not forget this anytime soon. Larissa Förster (2010) shows that Hamakari and by extension Waterberg, which Boli refers to stanza five, six and seven, is a significant place in the trajectory of the Herero-German war (1904). This is where the Ovaherero fled to after the war broke out with the German colonial troops in Okahandja, located 60 km north of Windhoek.⁹⁷

All these bones

Rebelling in Okahandja

Fires start to burn on at Okahandja

Germans start to die in Okahandja

Make problem in Okahandja

Six weeks later

Von Trotha marched up with the deadliest

Waterberg was burning

People were running and people hanging from trees

⁹⁶ This is part of oral history of the Ovaherero. It was retold by Esther Utjua Muinjangu in the 1h7min *Skulls of My People* (2016) documentary by Vincent Moloji.

⁹⁷ Jan-Bart Gewald (1999) in his exploration of the histories of 19th century Ovaherero political figures explains that the German colonial troops continued to attack the Ovaherero at Hamakari, resulting in a genocidal campaign against them. The Ovaherero were then forced by the German colonial troops to further flee to the Omaheke Desert, where many died of hunger and thirst. Some of the survivors travelled further to Botswana, which was a British colony, while the rest were collected and shipped to concentration camps as Prisoners-of-War.

Hamakari

Life is never lost it keeps coming back bulletproof

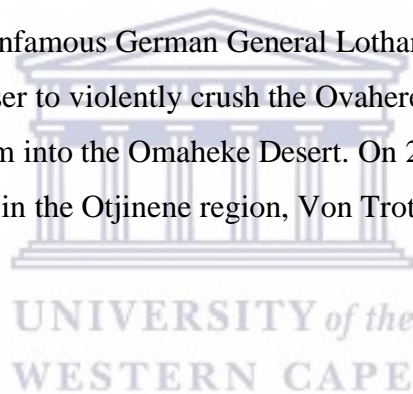
In a real lifetime

Memories never fade

Lies

Förster's (2010) study of landscape and memory points out that Hamakari and Waterberg are regarded as the main sites for the colonial war by both the Ovahereros and Germans. It, therefore, takes up a central place in the cultural repertoire of the two groups. For the Ovaherero specifically, Hamakari has been the subject of performances, song and dance. In the Ovaherero tradition the grave of the first person who died at a place becomes a historical site and receives a praise song. 'Ohamakari ya Kakongo yotjinyo', a praise song, refers to Kakongo, who was regarded as the first person who died at Hamakari, or who received a grave at the site (Förtser 2010).

Hamakari is also where the infamous German General Lothar von Trotha, who was roped in by the German Kaiser to violently crush the Ovaherero during their resistance and subsequently forced them into the Omaheke Desert. On 2 October 1904 at a small hilltop *Ozombu zOvindimba* in the Otjinene region, Von Trotha issued the extermination order.



Then there was the further carnage at the Shark Island concentration camp where the Prisoners-of-War were kept under harsh conditions. Many of them died there. The remains of the dead were also shipped out to Germany and other places. The remains that have recently been recovered in places like Germany, therefore, are physical evidence of the colonial genocide, serving as another reminder of the traumatic experiences (stanza 4).

All these bones in the Shark Island

A friendly ghost in the belly of the beast

In this lifetime

Memories never fade

When I met with Boli at the NBC recording studios, I asked him about why he did sing about the colonial genocide? He explained why he was interested in producing a song on 'Hamakari' since he had a personal connection with it. Boli explained that when he was growing he was exposed to some of these conversations on the colonial genocide. Boli said the following:

It is an emotional story. It was the first round of negotiations (between Germany and Namibia) that was being delayed. I could tell from people and the Facebook posts that it was a story. And I was thinking that I know this conversation since my teens. This conversation has been going nowhere. There are really implications. There are wrong and right people there. What amazes me is that they don't get to a point. It just amazes me! But you know in Namibia politics are so fucked up my bru. In the sense that there are too many conspiracies of local politicians that deals with Germans within the SWAPO circles. There are delays, they are business partners. All this bullshit. Then there is also an insinuation of people playing on the tribal fear. If these people get this money, aren't they just going to be themselves. It's a big story bro!

Recently, after he had released the 'Hamakari' song, Boli sang about the present struggles of the Ovaherero and Nama for reparations from the German government. He particularly sang about the agreement for reparations that was concluded between the Namibian and German governments without the involvement of the Ovaherero and Nama.

Boli's sensibilities allow him to produce songs on pertinent political issues. He releases songs almost on a weekly basis, using contemporary political events as an inspiration. In a recent interview, Boli attributed his productivity in terms of making music to his ability to "synchronizing and sensitizing (himself to his) immediate environment."

Through the songs that Boli produces he wants to illuminate present political struggles in Namibia and beyond. According to the description of *#BoliGoesToParliament*⁹⁸, Boli's official Facebook page on which he regularly releases his songs: "Boli Goes To Parliament is the least expected but most logical way of removing complications out of politics and bringing issues to the playground #omake." That is Boli specifically targets "everybody around the parliament that is interested in governance issues and laws." Through this statement Boli points to the ability of music in mobilizing people against social issues.

⁹⁸ The Facebook page has 5,441 likes and 6,526 follows.

His statement speaks to how song has been used as a resisting tool and a powerful creative intervention in reorientating society. Moreover, it is intractably part of the human experience. Marie Jorritsma (2011) writing on the sonic practices of rural coloureds in Graff-Reinert in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa points to the use of music and sound in constituting social identity – demonstrating the connectedness of song in constructing human experiences. She argues that the collective singing of songs by coloureds in Graaf-Reinert has allowed them to stay connected to the traumatic histories of settler colonialism. Jorritsma shows that their music constitutes of varying musical influences, drawn from “European missionaries, British settlers, Dutch/Afrikaans settlers, Xhosa people, slaves and Khoisan survivors” (2011:11). In this way, Jorritsma (2011) alerts us to the enmeshing of these sounds, which was constituted, as well as followed by globalizing process that imposed a hierarchical colonial system and which inflicted serious spiritual harm on the black and coloured populations.

5.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I explored decolonial calls against the coloniality of human remains. Memory activists have been concerned with these remains. They therefore mobilized for the recognition of the graves of the Prisoners-of-War of the colonial genocide in Kramersdorf in Swakopmund. These graves are unmarked, shallow and in a bad condition. They also not recognized by the Municipality of Swakopmund. Furthermore, the victims of the colonial genocide who were buried in these graves did not have proper burials. Their graves were sometimes desecrated and their remains stolen and taken to Germany for racial experiments. The activists have argued that this points to a situation of coloniality of the remains.

This I argued related to the colonization of the skulls during German colonialism in Namibia. The skulls were stolen and taken to Germany for racial experiments. In this way, I argued that the remains were viewed as “items” and “objects” by European scientists. What I found interesting was how these skulls were erased from public memory after European scientists took up other concerns. However, the Ovaherero and Nama who have referenced these skulls in their struggle for reparations have ensured that their not forgotten.

Through this ethnography I learned about the formation of the Namibia Genocide Association, that aims to fight for the recognition of the graves of the Prisoners-of-War. The organization was founded by Laidlaw Peringdanda.

I further elaborated on the cemetery cleanings that have been organized by the Namibia Genocide Association. I argued that these events were critical in ensuring that the Municipality of Swakopmund recognize the graves and start with renovation works on them. Lastly, I further learned that similar concerns over the coloniality of the skulls have been taken up by other activists. I specifically referred to the musician, Boli Mootseng, who sings about the skulls. These songs are aimed at bringing honour to the victims of the colonial genocide.



CHAPTER SIX

DECOLONIAL CALLS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

6.1. Introduction

Towards the end of the year in 2021 an impressive alliance of organizations: Namibia Equal Rights Movement, Voices for Choices and Rights Coalition (VCRC), #ShutItAllDown, Transgender, Intersex and Androgynous Movement of Namibia, Sister Namibia, PowerPad Girls, Efano Efano Gallery, Pride Pop-Up and *Café Prestige* working on sexual and gender rights held Windhoek's first-ever Gay Pride Week. Previously, there was only a one-day event, called "Pride Day" (*The Namibian* 26 November 2021). While in the past there had been only a march now a range of events were held over several days. This was meant to strengthen the claims of queer persons for equal rights. Several events were held, including a screening of Namibia's first gay film - *Kapana*, the #LoveIsLove# exhibition by queer artist, Bewise Tjonga, the annual pride parade, and the painting of a Rainbow sidewalk (*The Namibian* 26 November 2021).

The Pride Parade was held on 4 December 2021 by a group of a hundred queer⁹⁹ persons, queer activists and supporters for equal rights who marched through the Jan Jonker Street, Robert Mugabe and Independence Avenues in central Windhoek and Ausspannplatz – located on the southern edge of the Central Business District (CBD) known for its many small gambling houses. The crowd was led by several female traditional dancers in front with their short *Ondelela* dresses, red and pink wear that was introduced into northern Namibia by 19th century Finnish missionaries and now considered traditional. The erstwhile 2021 national and international Mr Gay pageant winners, Jason-Lee McKay (Mr Gay Namibia) and Louw Breytenbach (Mr Gay World) from South Africa were holding up a large banner with other activists with the following title: "Abolish SodomyLaw #WeBelong #LoveWinsNA." There was also a float with an open-air *lorrie* [in southern African English: "truck"] which was decorated with different medium-size cloths and balloons on its sides. The cloths and balloons each had a colour from the Rainbow flag. On the *lorrie* was a bunch of youngsters on it flying many smaller Rainbow flags high-up in the sky. Some youngsters were also

⁹⁹ In this chapter I adopt the term "queer" as it has recently been widely adopted in Namibia by persons with deviant sexual preferences. I however use other terms such as "gay" and "lesbian" at certain points as this term was more acceptable in the years following Namibian independence in 1990.

holding posters. One poster that was held up by a young woman was titled: “HATE HAS NO HOME HERE” (<https://m.facebook.com/106451938204927/>).

At Ausspannplatz, recently refurbished and now including the small Agostinho Neto Park, with its small bust of the poet and former Angolan President who prominently led the struggle for Angola’s independence, the 25-year-old activist Ndiilokelwa Nithengwe started shouting over the microphone “Tell me what Democracy looks like?” The crowd loudly responded with “This is what Democracy looks like.” Ndiilokelwa continued: “Tell me what Equality looks like.” The crowd responded again: “This is what Equality looks like.” The crowd continued all along Jonker Afrikaner Avenue before making their way through *Gartenstraße* to Robert Mugabe Avenue. On Robert Mugabe Avenue the crowd then gathered on the steps of the Sam Nujoma Statue in front of the Independence Museum waving their Rainbow flags, before stopping and ending their march at the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration and Safety on Independence Avenue (<https://m.facebook.com/106451938204927/>).

Six days later there was a painting event. On 10 December 2021 International Human Rights Day, which in Namibia is also commemorated as Namibia’s Women’s Day¹⁰⁰ another group of about hundred activists gathered at the Brewers Market (formerly Warehouse Theater) on Tal Street in central Windhoek for the painting of a sidewalk in front of the nightclub with the colours of the Rainbow flag. On that day they were joined by the family of Philip Lühl and Guillermo Delgado, an openly gay couple living in Windhoek. Phillip and his son, Yona, were present at the event (<https://fb.watch/hlQsHEkmnj/>). The family has been involved in court battles with the Ministry of Home Affairs over the recognition of their relationship, including the rights of their children: Yona, Paula and Maya, who were born through surrogacy. Phillip and Guillermo were married, and their children were born in South Africa. In Namibia, however, there exists no legal recognition for same-sex couples and their children. Hence, the family has been fighting a legal struggle over the residency and citizenship rights of Guillermo, a Mexican citizen, and their three children.

¹⁰⁰ See chapter four.

Through these events queer activists were illuminating the plight of queer persons in Namibia. Presently, same-sex relationships are not recognized. This relates to the sodomy law, included in the South African Immorality Act of 1957, that criminalizes homosexual relations between men. Queer activists have been arguing that this law stems from apartheid colonialism when it was introduced by the South African colonial regime. It has since been viewed by the activists as draconian and imposing on human sexuality. The postcolonial Namibian government has however refrained from getting rid of this colonial law. However, no law has been introduced following Namibian Independence in 1990 to recognize same-sex relationships. The colonial laws still in force in the postcolony are imposing on the rights of queer persons, thus pointing to a situation of coloniality.

In this chapter we will get another glimpse of how young activists have been challenging coloniality in Namibia. The activists that I will focus on in this chapter are mostly concerned with colonial laws regarding sexuality and reproductive rights that are still in existence. The Namibian government's decision to keep many of the colonial laws that were enforced during apartheid South African rule¹⁰¹ has created discontent amongst some of the activists, who believe that these laws contradict the new path that Namibia has put itself on - that of democratic rule and human rights for all. They are, therefore calling for the scrapping of these laws.¹⁰² Activists are particularly concerned with how these laws perpetuate colonial views on sexuality and gender. They have, therefore, launched a decolonial struggle against the non-recognition of same-sex romantic love and are calling for equal rights for queer persons.

My focus in this chapter will be on how visual productions present coloniality on sexuality and gender in order to challenge colonial laws and the dominant and colonial views on human relationships, which are still prevalent in Namibian society. I begin by providing a discussion on the homophobic attitudes of the Namibian government which emerged in the 1990s after independence from South African apartheid rule (Lorway 2014; Currier 2010). I then look at how queer activists have mobilized against homophobic views of the Namibian government and explore activism for the recognition of same-sex relationships, starting from the ongoing court cases launched by Guillermo and Phillip. I situate this within a "Queer Liberation Struggle", as queer

¹⁰¹ In the Namibian Constitution Chapter 7, Article 66 states that: " (1)Both the customary law and common law of Namibia in force on the date of Independence shall remain valid to the extent to which such customary or common law does not conflict with this Constitution or any other statutory law."

¹⁰² A related law that activists have rallied against is the Abortion and Sterilisation Act 1975 that criminalizes abortion (see Becker 2022).

activists have referenced their struggle that aims to fight more equal rights for queer persons in Namibia. This can be seen in the formation of Namibia Equal Rights Movement, a queer rights organization that was established by the queer activists Omar Van Reenen and Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe, which I present and relate it to previous activism in the early 1990s for the rights of queer persons.

6.2. State-sanctioned homophobia

6.2.1. The early years

The Namibian government holds negative view of same-sex relations that emanates from the German and South African colonial periods and persists in the postcolony. There exists a (colonial) heteronormative view that romantic love can only be expressed through heterosexual (and monogamous) relationships. The Namibian government seems to have adopted such views. It can even be said to be homophobic. To understand why this was the case, I will explore the views of scholars like Robert Lorway (2014) and Ashley Currier (2010), who ask critical questions over the government's adoption of homophobic attitudes against gays and lesbians after independence.

In his study on The Rainbow Project, a Namibian gay rights organization that was formed shortly after independence, Lorway (2014) explains that the signs of a newly emerging "gay life" shortly after independence, where many people were now openly expressing their sexual identities, were soon cut in the bud with the homophobic campaigns – dubbed "hate speeches" of senior Swapo party members and government officials in 1995. This was vividly expressed in the figure of the first president, Sam Nujoma – officially declared Namibia's founding father by the National Assembly. In the mid-1990s, Nujoma and senior members of his cabinet, significantly the Minister of Home Affairs, Jerry Ekandjo launched scathing attacks on gays and lesbians. During this time, Nujoma and Ekandjo gave public speeches in which they condemned same-sex practices. Several other leading members of the party also publicly started chastising particularly gay men for their same-sex desires (Lorway 2014; Currier 2010).

According to Ashley Currier (2010) this was part of broader anti-Western sentiments by the Swapo party aimed to expunge Western imperialism from Namibia, including its many cultural manifestations. However, this did not coalesce in broader attempts at genuinely decolonizing Namibia in the way that Maldonado-Torres (2016) speak of (see chapter three). Instead, as Currier (2010) shows, this was used to target members of opposition political parties, sexual and gender minorities. In so doing, homosexual practices became the main target of this cultural agenda. It was viewed as a Western

practice; as un-African. In this way, Currier (2010) points to the multifarious nature of homophobia.

In attempting to find out why the Swapo party with its struggle credentials adopted homophobic attitudes, some scholars (Melber 2003; Lorway 2014) suggest that this was part of a growing culture of authoritarianism in which the Swapo party aimed to assert its political authority over the country.¹⁰³

In her exploration of homophobic attitudes among Namibian government officials, Currier (2010) takes this a step further. She argues that it was not so much about an emerging culture of authoritarianism, but rather suggests that it was on a whole a “gendered political strategy” that “allowed Namibian state leaders to target LGBT activists specifically and political opponents more generally” (Currier, 2010:110-111). In this way, Currier (2010:112) explains that while homophobia was evoked against gays and lesbians, it was simultaneously used as a potent political weapon by Swapo party leaders to challenge popular support for political rivals. She argues:

Thus, homophobia is an ideology and strategy individuals and groups use to police gender and sexuality. As a political strategy, SWAPO leaders employed political homophobia for more than regulating gender and sexuality. They used political homophobia to bolster their masculinist control over the state apparatus by silencing opponents.

For Currier (2010) then, homophobia is used as a tool in furthering the ambitions of some politicians, particularly that of the ruling elite. In this way, Currier (2010) shows that it was not only sexual and gender minorities who suffered from the Swapo party’s harrowing homophobic attacks. Members of opposition political parties were similarly targeted. Questioning the party was regarded as the ultimate betrayal to the nation – one can even speak of it being tantamount to high treason. Politicians who opposed the party were therefore regarded as being disloyal to the project of nationhood, and as having fallen victim to Western influence (read: homosexuality). As Currier (2010:119)

¹⁰³ Despite having one of the most liberal constitutions in the world, emphasizing democratic rule and human rights, Melber (2003) shows that the ruling Swapo party still clearly held an authoritarian disposition.

There were also several other reasons for this. The party did not win a landslide victory in the first democratic elections in 1989. It, therefore, saw the growing political opposition as a threat to its authority and legitimacy to rule (Currier 2010). Then there was also the mediation process, which left the party vulnerable to external critic, as many political opponents chastised the party for making too many concessions with the former colonizer. While lingering questions over the party’s own human rights abuses during the liberation struggle challenged its own take on history (Lorway 2014). Furthermore, there were calls by some members of the Rehoboth community and in the former Caprivi Strip for succession from Namibia, which undermined nation-building efforts (Akuupa 2015). The party responded to this by entrenching its rule over Namibian society.

explains, they were regarded as “puppets of western governments”, and accused of engaging in unacceptable sexual activities, such as homosexual sex, which was considered a Western practice Homosexuality therefore became something that was foreign; as non-traditional and resulting from the colonization of Africans (Currier 2010).

6.2.2. The resurgence of homophobia

Since then, members of the party have rarely made homophobic statements, suggesting that the party may have changed its views on the issue. This was especially the case during the presidencies of Hifikepunye Pohamba (2004 – 2014) (Lorway 2014; Currier 2010) and Hage Geingob (2014 – present), who were said to have more liberal views than their predecessor, Nujoma (Lorway 2014).

However, there has recently been a resurgence of homophobia by some members of the Swapo party, and interestingly also by opposition political parties. In mid-2021 in the National Assembly during a debate on the national budget, the veteran Minister of Home Affairs and now Member of Parliament (MP), Jerry Ekandjo unprovokedly engaged in homophobic behaviour, and started to bash gay men for engaging in same-sex practices, demonstrating that his homophobic views on the issue have since not changed – pointing to Ekandjo’s earlier homophobic references in the 1990s.¹⁰⁴ In parliament Ekandjo was derailing from discussions on the proposed national budget to chastise some activists who were calling for the recognition of same-sex relationships.¹⁰⁵

Homophobic attitudes have not only been internalized by members of the Swapo party but also by some members of opposition political parties, such as by the leader of the Landless People’s Movement (LPM) and former Deputy Minister of Lands and Resettlement, Bernardus Swartbooi. In mid-2021 Swartbooi and his deputy, Henny Seibeb were expelled from the National Assembly for their unruly behaviour during a session in which President Geingob gave his State of the Nation (SONA) speech. In response to this, Swartbooi claimed that they were unfairly treated and suggested that

¹⁰⁴ At one point then, he even suggested that the Namibian government was going to introduce even stricter anti-homosexual legislation (*EagleFm* 17 November 2021).

¹⁰⁵ He was specifically referring to the same-sex couple, Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl who sued the Ministry of Home Affairs over the recognition of their same-sex relationship. Ekandjo was also calling out those who were fighting for the legalization of smoking dagga [in southern African English: “cannabis”/ “marijuana”], and abortion. Ekandjo stressed that when parliament is presented with these issues, that they will “throw it out.” On same-sex relations Ekandjo said that: “Why should we allow gays here in Namibia? We cannot allow a male person to insert his penis into the anus of another man”” (*The Namibian* 17 November 2021).

this was part of a political plot by the Swapo party to have him jailed and even raped. Speaking to the press, Swartbooi said that it was meant “to take possession of my body and let at least 10 men to have (forced) anal sex with me to psychology destroy me.” (*The Namibian* 7 May 2021). Then when a parliamentary enquiry into the issue was initiated, Swartbooi wanted MPs suspected of engaging in sodomy to also be investigated (*The Namibian* 20 September 2021).

This illustrates Currier’s (2010) earlier point that homophobia is used as a tool to further the political agenda of some politicians. Specifically, it is used to discredit political opponents. However, when considering the homophobic statements by Swartbooi, it is evident that it is not only used by the ruling elite, but that it can similarly be re-appropriated by opposition political parties in their own campaigns against the government. Here, Swartbooi’s allegations that the Swapo party wanted to have him raped should be seen in this light. Considering that this was the first time that Swartbooi spoke on issues relating to same-sex relations – that I am aware of - by referring to homosexual in such crude terms, as rape and sodomy, in an environment where gay men are already stigmatized for their sexual preferences it is especially concerning to consider what impact such statements may have on them.

6.3. Namibia Equal Rights Movement

On 21 March 2021 – Namibia’s Independence Day - a group of young queer activists formed Namibia Equal Rights Movement that aims to fight for the rights of queer persons. The organization has specifically called for the recognition of same-sex relationships in Namibia. On its Facebook page, the organization describes itself as follows:

Equal Namibia is a youth grassroots led, and community activist fed, movement fighting for the emancipation and protection of LBTQ+ Namibians and their Constitutional rights. We are supported by a coalition of 18+ CSOs and human rights organizations.¹⁰⁶

Namibia Equal Rights Movement started out running its campaigns on popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Since it was established, it garnered a large following on these platforms, especially from young people with 2,652 Instagram, 949 Twitter followers and 1,387 Facebook friends. They have also been involved in grassroots mobilization, for example organizing street protests in support of same-sex couples in their fight for the recognition of their relationships. In October 2021 it rallied behind Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl after their two newly born

¹⁰⁶ See <https://m.facebook.com/106451938204927/>

twin daughters, Paula and Maya were refused to enter Namibia after their surrogacy birth in South Africa. The two co-founders were Omar van Reenen and Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe, who both use the “they” pronoun.

Ndiilokelwa explained that Namibia Equal Rights Movement grew out of the court cases by same-sex couples against the Ministry of Home Affairs for the recognition of their relationships. They said that Namibia Equal Rights Movement started with “the tracking of court cases” in order to “built momentum and keep visibility” for the struggle for the recognition of same-sex relationships. For Omar this was critical because as they put it earlier “queer people were erased from history.”

To get a better sense of their activism, I explore Omar’s and Ndiilokelwa’s life histories below.

6.3.1. Life histories

Omar van Reenen

“When I grew up I knew that I was gay. I knew that I loved differently.” This is what the 25-year-old Omar van Reenen told me in our first conversation over WhatsApp video call. At that time, Omar just started with their Masters degree studies in Human Rights at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. They recounted some of the difficulties they encountered while growing up in Namibia, relating to their sexuality. Omar is a self-identifying cis gender person and gay. They told me that they faced several personal struggles over their sexuality, which related to the lack of recognition of same-sex relationships crystallized through a sodomy law that criminalizes homosexual relations. Omar told me that when they were a young adolescent child, queer persons “weren’t visible” and that “growing up as queer you think that you are the only one. LGBT issues were not talked about.” This points to an erasure of queer persons that Omar is referring to.

I asked Omar about their feelings at the time. What went through their mind at that young age? I asked. Omar explained that they experienced a lot of imposter syndrome as a young self-identifying gay person involved in politics. At that early age, they were already politically active. In 2015 Omar was the Head Boy at Duneside High School and later elected as Junior Mayor of Walvis (2014-2015). They also had several academic achievements, especially in science, and attended various science fairs abroad. Omar attributed their success during this time to a resolve to always wanting to achieve

the best, and as a result they pushed themselves hard, because “as gay people you kind of have to prove yourself.”

Having faced my own struggles over my sexuality, I related with what Omar was talking about. The experiences of queer persons in Namibia, especially as young children in schools, is something I could easily relate to. The educational scholar, Rauna Haitembu (2021:1) conducted a pioneering study with a focus on responses to “gender nonconforming” children in Namibian schools in the Erongo region. Gender nonconforming is the term that she uses to refer to children with same-sex desires. Haitembu (2021) situates the fight for the recognition of same-sex relationships within an educational context where histories of exclusion persists, especially in relation to sexual minorities. These forms of exclusion were introduced during colonialism.

This points to coloniality in the education system. Haitembu (2021:1) contends that “learners from minority groups such as gender non-conforming learners do experience harassment and bullying as well as face discrimination on a daily basis in schools.” This is, according to Haitembu (2021), something that the Namibian government is trying to solve through adopting new policies to create a more inclusive education system. However, she points out that there remain pervasive “silence in regard to marginalised identities within the Namibian education system” (Haitembu 2021:263) that is issues related to same-sex relationships are not openly discussed in Namibian schools.

The situation of queer youngsters in schools is something that I am intimately aware of. While not being open about my sexuality at that time, I experienced mockery from my fellow learners, who often poked fun at me for not behaving like the other “regular” schoolboys. It was not so much that I was effeminate, but rather that I preferred to mostly hang-out with girls and never played sports like soccer or rugby with the other boys. At school, I regularly *bunked* [southern African English: “skipped”] Physical Education (PE) classes to avoid having to play soccer or rugby.

Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe

In August 2021 at the launch of Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe’s book *Chronicles of a Non-Binary Black Namibian Lesbian...in love* (2021) I had a conversation with them. They told me that they grew up in what they call “a melting pot of different nationalities.” Their mother was Namibian and their father a Malawian. Ndiilokelwa’s father was employed as a journalist at the United Nations, and therefore travelled around a lot. Their parents were also separated at the time. That is why they were not around their father much. They lived with their mother and stepfather, who was Cuban. Ndiilokelwa

attended schools at Orban Primary School and Windhoek High School, two formerly whites-only schools. On their childhood experiences Ndiilokelwa said the following:

I had so many experiences that I wasn't aware of my sexual orientation. I knew that I was unconventional. It was only later that I realized that this was because of my sexual orientation.

Ndiilokelwa only later came out as lesbian. They explained “that when I was in high school it became more defining. I was more conscious, especially around my sexual orientation.” When I asked them how their coming out as lesbian was related to a multicultural background Ndiilokelwa said the following:

It influenced my religious concept. My mother was Christian and my stepfather a non-Christian. This influenced my ideas on religion. It also dovetailed with my sexual and gender identity.

In high school Ndiilokelwa studied acting and dance at the National Theatre of Namibia (NTN). They said that it was here that their love for activism started in earnest. They mentioned that the veteran actor, Dr David Ndjavera, who died during Namibia's deadly third-wave of COVID (*The Namibian* 14 July 2021), was amongst one of their mentors, that has left a lasting impression on them. Ndiilokelwa remembers a class assignment with Ndjavera. They were tasked to write a short play based on one of his musicals. Ndiilokelwa's script focused on why same-sex marriage should be legalized in Namibia. During our conversation when they started reflecting back on this Ndiilokelwa said that they were “already holding this bold concept” at that age. It was also in that experience at NTN that they were able to find acceptance of their sexual identity.

In 2019 Ndiilokelwa started working at OutRight Namibia, a queer rights organization. They remember being somehow thrown into the deep end first with their colleagues expecting them to start planning a programme for queer persons living with disabilities and the commemoration of “16 days activism”, which is held annually against sexual and gender-based violence (*The Namibian* 23 November 2018). They explained that this was where their “activism energy was harnessed.” In March 2021, however, they left the organization to focus on activism, because they indicated that OutRight Namibia was not radical enough in pursuing a campaign for the recognition of same-sex relationships. Around that time Ndiilokelwa became involved with the formation of Namibia Equal Rights Movement and started having meetings with same-sex couples “on how to shape their advocacy and communications” around their legal battles in Namibian courts to have their relationships recognized.

In exploring queer activism of Namibia Equal Right Movement, I will link contemporary decolonial concerns over same-sex relationships to activism that emerged in the 1990s after Namibian independence. In the following lines I will provide a discussion on two organizations, that is SISTER Namibia and The Rainbow Project, that mobilized against the Namibian government for its homophobic attitudes.

6.3.2. The legacy of queer activism in Namibia

SISTER Namibia was founded in 1989 by a few women as a women's rights organization. The organization had established itself as a feminist media and culture organisation (Becker 1995). On its website a description of the organization is provided as follows: "Sister Namibia has been amplifying women's voices since 1989. From a focus on inclusion in a democratic post-colonial society back then, to a focus on responding to our realities on the ground now, we know without any doubt that empowered women are not only the most urgent need of our country, but the most effective means of change for all us all." (<https://sisternamibia.org/2020/10/16/hello-world/>)

However, after independence in response to the growing homophobic attitudes by Namibian government officials towards lesbian women and gay men, it started supporting lesbian rights (Currier 2012). SISTER Namibia got involved in "gay rights" advocacy in 1997, when two of their leading members – Elizabeth Khaxas and Liz Frank were the first same-sex couple challenging the courts which denied Frank, a German, permanent residence. The case was also behind the state-induced homophobic campaigns at the time. This as Currier (2012) explains resulted in the organization being regarded as a gay rights organization, which compromised its women rights activism – particularly SISTER Namibia's stance on lesbian rights risked its relationship with the Namibian government, which started withdrawing support from the organization.

Another organization, The Rainbow Project then also emerged on the scene fighting for gay and lesbian rights. It was founded in 1996 by a group of gay men. It aimed to support gays and lesbians through awareness campaigns and providing psycho-social support to its members. The Rainbow Project was established in the wake of growing homophobia from the Namibian government. It specifically called for the repeal of the sodomy law (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Namibia%27s_Rainbow_Project).

Lorway (2014) who explores the trajectory of the organization from the late-2000s situates the struggles by gays and lesbians at the time within broader socio-economic challenges that have been persisting since even after independence, which he argues

impeded seriously on efforts at securing more equal rights for gays and lesbians. In this regard Lorway (2014) points to the youthful members of the Rainbow Project – The “Rainbow Youth” – who were calling on the organization to improve their socio-economic conditions. Many of the members came from the poorer sections of Windhoek’s population in Katutura and Khomasdal.

Since the formation of SISTER Namibia and The Rainbow Project queer activism has expanded. This can be seen in the formation of the Namibia Equal Rights Movement and, as I will discuss below, recent court cases for the recognition of same-sex relationships.¹⁰⁷

6.4. The court cases

6.4.1. Engagements with Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl

On the 9th of June 2022 I met with Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl, who are in a same-sex union. The couple invited me to their family home in the upper-class neighbourhood of Klein Windhoek (which was previously reserved for whites-only). After doing some archival research at the National Archive of Namibia (NAN) on Robert Mugabe Avenue, I walked to their home. On my way to the couple’s house in Klein Windhoek I passed through a small riverbed over to Nelson Mandela Avenue, named after the anti-apartheid leader and first black South African president. At the house Phillip welcomed me at the front gate. He was playing with Yona, his 3-year-old son, outside in the small garden, while Guillermo was waiting for us in the house.

Phillip told me that he and Guillermo got married in 2014 in South Africa, where same-sex marriage became legal from 2006. In Namibia however the couple have been involved in ongoing legal battles for the recognition of their relationship. They have specifically been fighting cases in the courts for the residency rights of Guillermo in Namibia. When we entered the house, Guillermo told me that he was born in Mexico and moved to Namibia in 2011 when he first started dating Phillip, a German Namibian. They had met in The Netherlands, where they were both studying. They have also been

¹⁰⁷ There are currently nine (9) court cases in Namibian courts dealing with the recognition of same-sex relationships, trans and children’s rights. One of the court cases that the Namibia Equal Rights Movement has strongly rallied behind is that of , Phillip Lühl and Guillermo Delgado. There are also the cases of Johan Potgieter and Daniel Digashu, along with their child, T L Digashu and that of Anita Seiler-Lilles who is married to Anette Seiler. Then a transwoman, Mercedes von Cloete has also been involved in a court battle over police brutality that she experienced from Namibian police officers (Van Wyk 2022).

fighting for the citizenship statuses of their three children: Yona, Paula and Maya, who were all born through surrogacy procedures in South Africa.¹⁰⁸

Guillermo further told me that he has lived in Namibia on several other residency permits, such as a work permit – since he has been employed at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). He however cannot apply for permanent residency in Namibia, through his marriage with Phillip, because the Namibian law does not provide for that. Guillermo explained that in 2020 he was forced to leave the country.¹⁰⁹ After being stuck in Johannesburg for some days, he organized a tourist visa to travel back to Namibia. He then tried to challenge this in the High Court of Namibia, by requesting that the Ministry of Home Affairs issue him with a residency permit. Guillermo told me that when this was turned down by the court, and he continued to appeal the judgement in the Supreme Court. On 7 March 2022, three Supreme Court Judges, Peter Shivute, David Smuts, and Petrus Damaseb, gave their verdict on the appeal. The judges acknowledged that “the appellant (that is Guillermo) was effectively expelled at the border when he was in the country still waiting for the outcome of his application” and that “it is an inhumane and degrading treatment that has no places in a society based on the rule of law and other values of inherent dignity as well as justice for all espoused in the Namibian Constitution.” (*Castaneda vs Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration* 2021). The expulsion of Guillermo from Namibia was thus considered by the judges as reminiscent of the South African colonial period where political dissidents were forced to leave their country to flee political persecution.¹¹⁰ The wording of the judgment seemed to concur with what the queer activists had been resisting: the Namibian government’s adoption of colonial practices in their views on homosexual relationships in the postcolony.

¹⁰⁸ Namibia also does not have a law that deals with issues related to surrogacy procedures for hetero- and homosexual couples alike.

¹⁰⁹ He told me about the ordeal with the Namibian immigration official at the Ngoma border post in the Zambezi region. He was travelling with his sister, Camila (not her real name) who had come for a visit from Mexico. They wanted to visit Victoria Falls, but the immigration officer prevented them from travelling further across the border. The immigration official went through Guillermo’s travel documents and found that his residency permit in Namibia, was expired. Guillermo had already applied to the Ministry of Home Affairs for an extension. The official told Guillermo, that his application was rejected. His requests for a confirmation in writing from the Ministry was ignored and he was forced to leave the country at that very moment.

¹¹⁰ On the history of exiles in Namibia during the liberation struggle see Williams (2009).

However, the citizenship status of their twins, Paula and Maya, born in Durban, South Africa in 2021 are still not clear. Initially the Ministry refused to even allow the twins to enter Namibia—effectively rendering them as stateless. There was significant protest against this by the Namibia Equal Rights Movement, and the Ministry later responded by providing the twins with temporary residency papers. In the meantime, Phillip and Guillermo explained that they have applied for Mexican citizenship for the children. However, since then they have secured some victories in their court challenges.

Before the court ruling on Yona's citizenship status Omar told me that they were hopeful that the court cases of Guillermo and Phillip and others would strengthen Article 10 of the Namibian Constitution that deals with equality rights. As they explained: "Namibia is a young democracy, and we are trying to become more equal and just." Article 10 of the Namibian Constitution does not explicitly ban discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.¹¹¹ Recently, their fight for the citizenship of Yona was won, with the High Court instructing the Ministry to issue citizenship papers to Yona. However, this has been appealed by the Ministry in the Supreme Court.¹¹²

The (non)recognition of relationships such as Guillermo's and Phillip's is based in the sodomy law that informs dominant and colonial views on same-sex relationships. Furthermore, it is impacted upon by what is officially considered as constituting a family in the Namibian context. Unlike in South Africa, where the post-apartheid Constitution of 1996 explicitly bans discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, this is not the fact in Namibia. Only heterosexual relationships are presently recognized by the Namibian Constitution as constituting a family.¹¹³ No constitutional protections are given to same-sex couples. Instead, the situation of families such as that of Guillermo and Phillip remains impacted upon by laws, which were introduced during colonial times.

¹¹¹ Article 10 of the Namibian constitution states the following:

(2) No persons may be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status

¹¹² In this ruling, Musuku instructed the Ministry to give Yona, Lühl and Delgado's child Namibian citizenship status. It initially refused to do so because Yona was born through surrogacy in South Africa – a process that is still not recognized in Namibia. The Ministry, therefore, wanted the couple to prove through a DNA test 'a genetic link' between Yona and Phillip – the Namibian father. In this case, citizenship would only be given if his parentage was proven in this way. Musuku found this to be erroneous and as unfair. In his judgement, he states that if the tables were turned, and it was a heterosexual couple there would have not been an issue, and citizenship to the affected child would have been granted. The fact that this is expected of a homosexual couple, was according to Musuku discriminatory.

¹¹³ In the Namibian Constitution, Article 14 states the following:

(1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, creed or social or economic status shall have the right to marry and to found a family. They shall be entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

According to queer activists, such as Omar and Ndiilokelwa, this means that they are engaged in a decolonizing process to challenge colonial views on human relationships. In this regard Omar, Ndiilokelwa and other queer activists from Namibia Equal Rights Movement have pointed to other forms of human relationships, specifically between men as a form of human love.

6.4.2. On the sodomy law

In Namibia, a piece of colonial legislation continues to exist legally as part of the Roman-Dutch common law that bans sexual relations between men. This law stems from apartheid South African colonial rule when it was introduced with Dutch colonialism. There are also several statutes relating to sodomy in Namibia, that was introduced during apartheid, including the Criminal Procedures Act, 1977 (Act No. 51 of 1977).¹¹⁴ Interestingly also after independence similar laws that refer to sodomy have been introduced, for example the Immigration Control Act, 1993 (Act No.7 of 1993) that I will refer to below. That these laws still exist, and that even now similar laws have been introduced, I argue shows the continuity of colonialism (now in the form of coloniality).

In 2021 the Law Reform and Development Commission (LRDC) a government agency that works at developing and reforming Namibia's legal system presented the *Report on the abolishment of the Common Law offence of Sodomy and Unnatural Sexual Offences* (2021) to the Minister of Justice, Yvonne Dausab (*The Namibian* 18 May 2021) The report called for the repeal of the sodomy law, as it presently prohibits sexual acts between men (but not between women). It refers to some of the statutory laws relating to sodomy. Furthermore, the commission's report pointed out that the Immigration Control Act (1993) does not provide protection to immigrants to Namibia who may identify as queer. Even worse, the law states that someone who is found guilty of sodomy may lose their immigration status in Namibia (*Report on the abolishment of the Common Law offence of Sodomy and Unnatural Sexual Offences* 2021).

¹¹⁴ According to the Criminal Procedures Act sodomy is a Schedule 1 offence, which means that police officers can "arrest a person without a warrant" and "use deadly force against such a person in the process of effecting an arrest" (Report on the abolishment of the Common Law offence of Sodomy and Unnatural Sexual Offences 2021:10).

Since independence this law has been opposed by different organizations, including now the commission, which has called for the scrapping of the sodomy law, which the commission referenced as redundant, rarely used by law enforcement agencies, and resulting in the stigmatization of queer persons. The commission's steps in this regard are significant in ensuring that Namibia's lawmakers can start with changing some of these laws. Activists have continued to push for related change. In June 2022, Friedel Dausab, a 48-year-old Namibian activist filed a case before the High Court challenging the constitutionality of the sodomy law (*Namibian Sun* 8 July 2022).

6.5. Windhoek's first decolonial monument: The Rainbow sidewalk

Activists are not only challenging Namibian state-induced homophobia in the courts of law. On 10 December 2021 on International Human Rights Day and Namibia's Women's Day roughly a hundred Windhoek residents from different racial, sexual and gender backgrounds gathered at the Warehouse Theater (now known as the Brewer's Market) on Tal Street in central Windhoek to paint Namibia's first Rainbow flag sidewalk. The Warehouse Theatre was a popular nightclub and cultural centre in Windhoek before its closing due to financial constraints in mid-2019.¹¹⁵ It formed a significant part of the cultural scene of the city for some thirty years, after opening its doors in 1989.¹¹⁶

The spot for the Rainbow Flag was purposefully chosen since the former Warehouse Theatre was also a popular spot for the city's queer persons. As one of the cardboard placards at the rainbow sidewalk reads:

This site, formerly known as the Warehouse Theatre, has been a safe-space for LGBTQIA+ persons to freely love, celebrate and express their sexuality and identity. The Rainbow Sidewalk is a symbol of solidarity for the community, a statement against discrimination and hate, in the collective pursuit of building and Equal Namibia

¹¹⁵ There were usually several performances held at Warehouse Theatre. Amongst the many events hosted there were Spoken Word, Free Your Mind (comedy) and Song Night. Popular local artists who performed there were Ras Sheehama, Lize Ehlers, Big Ben, Slick and Elmotho. There were also international performances (*The Namibian* 11 October 2019). It was located next to the Crafts Centre, where local Namibian artists sold woodwork and other art pieces, mostly to international tourists. The Centre along with the Warehouse Theatre were at the precincts of what used to be an old brewery during the German and South African colonial periods.

¹¹⁶ The Warehouse Theatre closed due to financial constraints. To help keep it open a GoFundMe crowdfunding campaign: Keep Warehouse Theatre Windhoek Open was started (*Namibian Economist* 14 May 2019). There was even an online petition started to assist with this initiative, demonstrating the cultural significance of the place to Windhoek's residents.



Figure 10: Sidewalk at Brewers Market with the Rainbow flag. Photos taken from the Namibia Equal Rights Movement Facebook page.





Figure 11: Placards placed at the Rainbow flag at the Brewers Market. Photos taken from the Namibia Equal Rights Movement Facebook page.

While the Warehouse Theater was regarded as a “safe-space” for queer persons in Windhoek, the site has also been connected to sexual abuse controversies and homophobic outbursts, especially after the poet and activist, Keith Vries (who is queer himself) was attacked at Chopsi’s Bar, which was located on the same premises as The Warehouse Theatre (*The Namibian* 9 May 2018).¹¹⁷

In terms of the memoryscape, the Rainbow sidewalk can be regarded as part of recent shifts in Windhoek’s memoryscape that was observed by scholars such as Reinhart Kössler (2015), Helvi Elago (2015), and Heike Becker (2018a). While I already discussed the coloniality of the public space in Chapter 4, it may be added here that efforts by authorities, whether they were by national government or city officials, have tended to privilege the dominant (colonial) narrative of masculinity, as evident in the North Korean-built new monuments. Becker (2011) gives an in-depth discussion of the masculinist narrative and aesthetics with reference to the National Heroes Acre, which was built just south of the city and inaugurated in 2002.

The new postcolonial monuments, meant to bring about a change in the public space, have been met with critical comments because of the gender bias (Becker 2011) and also with resistance, particularly by Ovaherero and Namibia activists and opposition party leaders (Becker 2018a). Their protests were particularly directed against the new Independence Museum because the site holds historical significance for them. After the Hornkrantz massacre (1893) many Nama prisoners-of-war were kept there, while during the genocidal campaign (1904 – 1908) it was a concentration camp for the Ovaherero and Nama. Decolonial memory activists have similarly resisted against the postcolonial monumental landscape (see, eg., Mushaandja 2021a).

During a chance encounter with Omar at Vinyl’s Café in Zoo Park in late October 2021 they told Hildegard and me about the initiative to have a Rainbow flag painted on a Windhoek sidewalk. Dressed in a pair of denim shorts, and with a string of white pearls around their neck, as well as brightly coloured nails, Omar had just returned from a trip in Cape Town. They were inspired by the sight of Cape Town’s Rainbow sidewalk, which was painted at the Raptor Room restaurant along Roeland Street in the CBD by 75 residents of the city in 2020 (*IOL* 28 October 2020) to start with a Rainbow flag

¹¹⁷ In a widely circulated video, Vries was seen in a heated argument with another man at the crowded bar. The man kicked Vries to the ground, before punching and further kicking him, while down on the ground. In an interview to *The Namibian* newspaper, Vries said that he was confronting the man for sexually harassing his female friend. After it came to light that the assault might have also been because of Vries’ sexuality, an online petition was started to “Boycott Chopsis” for not responding to the incident, as well as other similar cases of sexual abuse at the club.

sidewalk painting in Windhoek.¹¹⁸ Cape Town's painted rainbow walk was the first-ever such landmark on the African continent. The Windhoek Rainbow sidewalk is the second such initiative.

Windhoek's Rainbow sidewalk is Namibia's first queer monument. It was a civic initiative, being driven mostly by members of Namibia Equal Rights Movement such as Omar. The Rainbow sidewalk is a significant move away from the dominant (and colonial) masculinities that have been imprinted on the city's memoryscape, first with German and South African colonialism and now by the postcolonial Namibian government. Colonial statues that were erected commemorated mostly white male heroes: The Rider a fallen German male soldier, Curt von François a German colonial officer and the Witbooi Memorial in Zoo Park, to commemorate fallen German colonial soldiers. The postcolonial government seemingly took its cue from this and continued to perpetuate a similar narrative, albeit somewhat different, that "it was a bunch of black men who fought for independence" as Omar puts it. As pointed out in earlier research (Becker 2011), the Heroes' Acre at the Leopardville's NDF military base on the B1 road from Windhoek to the south strongly epitomizes this.

Unfortunately, I had missed the painting of the sidewalk in late 2021 due to a writing stint in Cape Town. When I came back to Windhoek, I walked through Tal Street on the Rainbow flag, which had been painted there. I reached the two Rainbow flags painted right at the entrance of the new Brewers Market. Windhoek's Rainbow sidewalk comprises of two flags that have been used to represent queer persons, specifically those who identify as gay, lesbian and transgender. The artist-activists meshed the two together, using the format of the Namibian flag, with a triangular shape (colours for transgender persons) and several lines with different colours for gays and lesbians.

¹¹⁸ During a previous visit to Cape Town in 2021, I encountered the Rainbow sidewalk as I was walking on Roeland Street to the Western Cape Archive. The store on the sidewalk looked empty and closed-off, which I suspected was a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit small businesses especially hard.

6.6. 'Kapana': Namibia's first gay movie

6.6.1. International Pride Month

In July 2022 the International Pride Month was held in Windhoek with several activities, including the repainting of the Rainbow sidewalk, movie screenings, poetry nights, visual arts exhibits, a Pride Pop-Up expo and picnic on the lawns of Zoo Park in central Windhoek. On one of the nights of Pride Month I met a friend Helao¹¹⁹ at Vinyls Café at Zoo Park for a drink and left afterwards to The Village on Robert Mugabe Avenue close to Eros, where a film screening of 'Kapana', Namibia's first gay film, was held. This was the second screening of the film in Windhoek. Previously, a film screening had been held in December 2021 as part of the European Film Festival, which I unfortunately missed. This time around I made sure to attend the film screening.

When we arrived, a large crowd of Windhoekers was already gathered at the entrance of the building with white mugs of *Glühwein* (German hot spicedwine enjoyed mostly in winter) to ward off the mid-winter cold. We started to talk with some of them. Many of the attendees complained of celebrating a Pride Month during winter, just because it was held in Western countries at that time (which is summer in the northern hemisphere). When we took our seats with Helao and another friend of his, I noticed Hildegard Titus in the front with a laptop and projector. I then stood up and approached her. We shared a greeting with each other, and she told me that she was assisting with the organization of the event, as Omar was in the USA.

Namibia's first gay film was produced by the civil society organization, Ombetja Yehinga Organization (OYO)¹²⁰ and was released in 2020. The director is French-born Philippe Talavera, with Senga Brockenhoff and Mikiros Garoes (who also stars in the film) as writers, the award-winning actor Adriano Visagie and veteran actress Felicity Celento.

¹¹⁹ This is not his real name.

¹²⁰ Since 2006 the organization has been producing short films on social issues in Namibia. The organization was established in 2002 in the Kunene region, northwestern Namibia, using artistic productions, such as films, dance performances, photography and literature, in illuminating some of the social issues affecting postcolonial Namibia. It also holds various dance performances at Namibian schools. Some of the dance performances that have been staged so far includes: *Should I know?*, *Choices, To take or not to take and what is love* (HIV/AIDS), *Teacher Ania* and *The Dark Medea* (Teenage pregnancy), *Betrayal*, *He loved me* and *The Moirai* (GBV).

The first red carpet release of the film was held in August 2020 in Windhoek at the commercial Ster-Kinekor Cinemas in Windhoek. Another screening of the film was held in Kilimanjaro, an informal settlement in Windhoek. Then due to COVID-19 health regulations the film was then only screened online. It has been screened at virtual film festival from across the world.¹²¹ The film has won several awards on the African continent and beyond.¹²²

Since the COVID-19 health regulations were eased from time to time, intermittently, physical screenings were also held in Windhoek, Walvis Bay and Eenhana, and now again as part of International Pride Month in 2022. At all Namibian screenings the film was followed by discussions with the actors and members of the audience.

Through this discussion I learned that the film was received well by the Namibian public – especially queer persons. It had even received positive media reviews from *The Namibian* newspaper, which described it as “groundbreaking LGBTQI+ love story, ‘Kapana’ focuses on the relationship between a young profession and an urban kapana seller as they navigate their union in a society still greatly discriminatory towards LGBTIQ+ people and intolerant of same sex relationships” (*The Namibian* 17 January 2022). The state-controlled *New Era* newspaper however was not very forthcoming to the film. It refrained from explicitly stating that it was a gay film and only gave the following description of the film: “The film aims to enlighten locals and film lovers across the world that love does exist and can be found most unexpected places” and that “...the film is a representation of inclusivity, incorporating one of the kapana vendors Simon Hanga as one of its characters (Simeon)” without mentioning that Simeon is involved in a same-sex relationship with George (*New Era* 22 May 2022).

¹²¹ It was specifically screened at the Kashish Mumbai International Queer Film Festival (India), Pride Pictures – Queer Film Festival – Karlsruhe (Germany), San Francisco Social and Economic Justice Film Festival and Gilbert Baker Film Festival (USA).

¹²² This included the Best Feature Film at African Diaspora Cinema Festival (Italy), Best Feature Film at Black Star International Film Festival (Ghana) and Best Feature Film at DC Black Film Festival (USA) amongst others. In Kenya the film won Best Film on Human Rights Issue at the CIDFF-Film Festival. However there the film could not be screened due to censorship on queer content. Some of the cast members of the film were also awarded for their performances and work, including Best Actors Awards for Adriano Visagie and Simeon Hanga at the Independentan Festival (France) and Best Director at the North East International Film Festival (UK).

In a recent interview with Phillip at the OYO Windhoek office and studio in Prosperita, one of Windhoek's four main industrial districts¹²³ he told me that they had initially faced some resistance from people who were against the film depicting same-sex relationships. As the upbeat pop music was loudly blasting in the large open space next to his office Phillip specifically cited that there were several messages on social media from people that criticized him for working on the production of 'Kapana.' Similarly, the requests that the producers sent to some Namibian actors to feature in the film were turned down because they were concerned about what it would mean for their professional and personal reputations to be in a gay film. Surprisingly though, Namibian politicians have not openly come out against the film and have not responded to the film like other African countries such as Nigeria and Kenya that have banned productions that depict same-sex relationships.

6.6.2. A synopsis of the film

This film tells a story of the personal struggles faced by men involved in same-sex relationships in Namibia. As a result of their official and societal non-recognition same-sex relationships between men in Namibia are viewed suspiciously, as a threat and with disgust. George and Simeon are the main characters of the film, which explores the complicated love that evolves between the two men. George is openly gay. He lives with his mother, brother, and aunt. His family and friends (who are also his co-workers) have all accepted his sexual identity. On the other hand, Simeon's family and friends do not know about his sexual preferences. Although he does not identify as gay, Simeon regularly has sex with men. George and Simeon's lives intersected when they met at a bar. George was alone while Simeon was out with friends. Their eyes caught each other and the two ended up hooking up. The next day when George and his friends, Tangeni and Ndeshi went to Single Quarters for a treat of *kapana* meat they encountered Simeon.

Simeon and George hail from two different economic backgrounds. Simeon is a *kapana* seller, and economically less well off than George, who works in insurance. At an upmarket restaurant where they had met, Simeon seemed uncomfortable, while George tried to calm him down: "don't look so nervous. You look good tonight", referring to Simeon's brightly coloured shirt. Simeon replied with "of course you like it, you bought it." He then continued "So if this is what you like ... brim ... proper... then what are you doing with a *kapana* seller like me?" George replied in a sweet tone: "well, he's

¹²³ The other three industrial districts are: Lafrenz, Northern and Southern Industry.

kapana is really nice and he's sexy". Simeon then interrupts him and checks to see that nobody heard them.

The film was shot in Windhoek. Throughout the film there were scenes of an upmarket bar, the Single Quarters (renamed Oshetu Market) informal market in Katutura, a mix of brick houses in some of the city's affluent neighborhoods and on the flip side houses made of corrugated iron sheets, colloquially known as *kambashu's*, *ghetto's*, *khaya's* and *sinkhuise*, in Windhoek's sprawling townships and informal settlements. Other scenes are set in modern office buildings where George works.

The film was named after the Namibian delicacy: *kapana*¹²⁴, a hot spice that is commonly served with grilled beef meat. I asked Phillippe why they chose to name the film after *kapana*. He explained that they wanted the film to reflect the social realities of Namibian society. They gave the main character a job, Simeon that is somewhat common in Namibia – that of a *kapana* seller¹²⁵ whereas the other, George works in insurance. The key scenes of the production are set in the Single Quarters Market where many Windhoekers, tourists and others hang out to have some *kapana* meat. This Phillippe explained is meant to connect the viewers of the film with the storyline. In this way, he suggests homosexual relations between men (which is regarded as un-African and as not existing in so-called "African" culture) as an integral part of African society.

'Kapana' is a multilingual film. The characters speak two main indigenous languages: Afrikaans and Oshivambo.¹²⁶ They also use English, Namibia's official language. In the film, most of the characters codeswitch between English, Afrikaans and Oshivambo, which is common practice in Namibia. The film mostly makes use of Namibian slang, commonly referred to as Namlish¹²⁷, short for Namibian English.

¹²⁴ The meat is cut into small strips and prepared on a braai; a grill. Thereafter it is dunked in *kapana* spice and eaten. Beef liver is sometimes mixed with the beef strips or can be substituted all together for the beef. There also commonly side dishes eaten with the meat, including salsa (diced tomatoes and onions), *vetkoek* (oil fried doughnut) and *pap* (mielie- or mahangupap).

¹²⁵ In Namibia the informal economy contributes 12% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and has 150,000 people employed (*Namibian Economist* 23 November 2022).

¹²⁶ The former was one of Namibia's erstwhile official languages during German and South African colonial periods, along with English and German. It is now recognized as a regional language, along with 13 other indigenous languages. Afrikaans, however, is still mostly used as a lingua franca in south and central Namibia. On the other hand, Oshivambo is spoken by half of the Namibian population. It is one of Namibia's regional languages. There is currently a high number of speakers in urban centres and also in the mostly rural northern regions, known colloquially as the four 'O-regions': Oshana, Oshikoto, Ohangwena and Omusati.

¹²⁷ Some Namlish phrases includes: hoezit? (How are you?), my bru/bra (my friend), hakahana (hurry up), nxa (it is good/well).

6.6.3. Namibia's film industry

Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja (2021b:101) focuses on subversive film productions in Namibia. He observes that there exists a chauvinistic film culture that “is largely heteronormative” and “leans towards sexist and patriarchal representation.” On two well-known Namibian film productions: *Katutura* and *Rider Without A Horse*¹²⁸ Mushaandja (2021b:101) remarks that “women and queers are extensions of the heteropatriarchal narratives.” That is while these films have women and queer characters, Mushaandja says that they “lack remarking on the criticality of the subject matter they touch on” (Mushaandja 2021b:101), that is issues relating to sexual and gender minorities are not adequately explored in these productions. I argue in this chapter that ‘Kapana’ can be regarded as a move away from this, in that it is part of a growing visual counterculture that has emerged in Namibia.

The OYO organization

OYO produced the film. Phillippe told me that the organization started working on the issue of queer rights after supporting safe sexual practices in Namibia's prisons. Because of the sodomy law, that bans anal sex between men, condoms are not distributed in Namibian prisons (*The Windhoek Observer* 6 March 2021). The production team therefore decided to tread carefully with the production of the film since as Phillippe said “we did not want to walk on other's people's territory” referring to other organizations that have worked in queer activism. He further explained that since OYO was not a queer rights organization, they “had to find a way of approaching it.” He then told me that they found inspiration from queer productions from different African countries, such as “Moffie” (South Africa), “Rafiki” (Kenya) and “Ifi” (Nigeria). However, the producers also found some of the themes in these films to be problematic. Their primary concerns were that these films may give the wrong impression of queer persons. They were worried that it can even lead towards the enforcement of existing stereotypes on queer persons. Phillippe emphasized that these African queer films ‘were all very dramatic’ and they were ‘wondering is it what we want young people to see?’ While he acknowledged that these films explored pressing concerns such as family rejection, homophobia and police harassment, which “is the reality on the ground”, Phillippe argued that it can lead to further feelings of isolation and rejection by queer persons, “because if you are a teenage boy somewhere in the village, sort of struggling with your sexuality looking for content online, do we want him to see

¹²⁸ Refer to chapter five.

a storyline that your life will be miserable, you will be discriminated against, thrown out of your house?”

6.6.4. ‘Kapana’: exploring masculinities and their impact on same-sex relations

Sakhumzi Mfecane (2016) who theorizes masculinity through African perceptions of what it means to be a man – “indoda” – particularly by the Xhosa in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, shows us that conventional views on masculinity have been crystallized by Western epistemological traditions. This demonstrates the coloniality of such views. According to Mfecane (2016), these epistemologies sought to impose certain (colonial) hierarchies over sexuality and gender that privileges the white Western heterosexual man. He explains that this hegemonic conceptualization of masculinity has been widely adopted in society, despite there being varied forms of manhood. In fact, Mfecane (2016), and other masculinity scholars such as Connell (2005), or Reid and Walker (2005) refer to different concepts of manhood that are specific to each society. Mfecane (2016) particularly foreshadows the circumcision practices of the Xhosa, which is how masculinity is prescribed by them. Furthermore, he shows that while all societies have their own perceptions of manhood, there are certain hierarchies, which may differ from one society to the next.

Connell’s (2005) seminal monograph, ‘Masculinities’, argues that masculinity is imbued with social meaning that is influenced by factors such as biological traits and the social environment. Connell (2005) who studies masculinity from a mostly Western perspective argues that some scholars have privileged one above the other. He also shows that some scholars have argued for a consideration of both biology and social environment in understanding sexuality and gender (especially the colonial hierarchical structures). However, Connell (2005) argues that there is need to take this a step further in investigating sexuality and gender. He is therefore calling for a “rethinking” of these concepts. Connell (2005:52) refers to the haptics of skin and body movements, including in sex: “Bodily experience is often central in memories our own lives and thus in our understanding of who and what we are.”

In the film 'Kapana' masculinity takes on these biological and social forms. This is represented in the "bodily experiences" that Connell (2005) refers to above. The film reflects on these conventional (dominant) forms of masculinity and how it tends to deal with issues such as same-sex relationships, particularly between two males, which have been viewed as a threat to masculinity. The biology of sexuality and gender is represented in the bodily structures of some of the characters. The physical structure of Simeon (one of two main characters) and his two friends, Joshua and Elifas and George fit the stereotypical chauvinistic male look: they are all physically fit, well-built and buff, with ripped muscles and tattoos. Both the biological and social forms of sexuality and gender also relates to hand gestures shared by the (dominant) male figures in the film. In greeting the men share a hand gesture, commonly performed between two men in Namibia. They greet each other by placing their hands together, sliding it away and ending it with a bump of the thumbs. This form of greeting commonly shared amongst men has strong masculinist undertones. Socially, public expressions of non-heteronormative behaviours are frowned upon in Namibia, and effeminacy amongst men is viewed suspiciously. Public displays of effeminate behaviour are sometimes even viewed with disgust. This can be seen in the way Simeon, Joshua and Elifas react to an openly transwoman entering a bar where they were having drinks. When a transwoman strutted into a bar with her butt-legged denim shorts, blouse and long hair, Simeon and his friends were clearly disappointment by this. While looking at the woman, Simeon comments "Tah, these moffies are taking over the nation" and shakes his head. Elifas responds "Imagine leaving the house dressed like that. Even posing." When I first watched the film and learned about Simeon's homophobic behaviour I wondered why the producers of the film would have an openly homophobic and masculinist main character. I asked Phillippe about it, and he explained that many men in Namibia who engage in same-sex relations do not necessarily identify as gay – especially those that would take on the more active role during sex. He attributed this to how same-sex relations particularly between men are understood in Namibia. Phillippe pointed out that feminine men are often viewed as gay, while more straight-acting men as not gay.

In terms of speech in 'Kapana' the characters speech is also littered with gender bias. The conversations between Simeon, Joshua and Elifas mostly comprise of rants on what it means to be a man. Here, soccer takes up a significant part of their conversations. This is because soccer is viewed as a sport for men, as it requires high physical endurance - something women are not expected to have. It is the ultimate test of strength. In this way, the soccer pitch is where manliness is commonly asserted.

Simeon and George cannot freely and openly love each other because of society's perceptions on sexuality and gender. After hooking up with Simeon at a bar, George accidentally ran into him, while going for *kapana* with his work colleagues and friends to cure their *babelaas* [in southern African English: "hangover"] from partying the night before. They arrived at the Single Quarters market where several male *kapana* sellers were busy cutting meat on the grill and placing it in loose newspaper pages¹²⁹ to give it to one of the customers standing and waiting for their meal. George then took a piece of meat from one of the vendors and shook his head, not satisfied with the taste of the meat, and then moved over to the next vendor.¹³⁰ He noticed Simeon behind the meat stand and exclaimed "Oh hey!" Frieda, a colleague and friend of George, then nosily asked if they know each other, to which George replied "mmmh yes" while Simeon denied that he knows George. The scene turned to the night before where George and Simeon were hooking up in the toilets of the bar where they had met. Simeon locked the door behind them.



When they met again at the Single Quarters, George looked disappointed. He asked Simeon: "so its like that now?" Simeon irritably responded with "like what?" The scene then turned back to George and Simeon in the toilet. Things started getting heated between the two men as they shared an intimate moment. George pushed Simeon against a wall. Simeon then turned George around, after which the latter pulled out a condom and the two men had sex. Back at Single Quarters George said: "*kama* today, you don't know me." Simeon replied with: "what do you want? *Los daai goed* ("Don't do that") don't make trouble for me here."

¹²⁹ This is how *kapana* was previously served at Single Quarters.

¹³⁰ This is how one customarily buys *kapana*: by first tasting the vendor's meat before ordering it.

Simeon knows that in public spaces like Single Quarters, where sexual and gender behaviour are monitored, he cannot show that he is attracted to men. Moreover, he is in a gendered space where masculinity is potently inscribed and has taken on a highly performative nature. Very specific gender roles are expected of men and women at the market – particularly by the vendors and less so by the customers.

In our many Sunday trips to Single Quarters ostensibly also to cure our *babelaas*, my friends and I became accustomed to these gender roles at the market. All *kapana* sellers are men. They are very loud, often shouting to customers loudly to come and buy meat at their stand. Their voices, are therefore, the dominant sound at Single Quarters (apart from the honking cars of course). Occasionally while moving from one vendor to the next tasting the meat, as is customary, a soft-spoken young man will approach the customer asking if they may require some salsa or *vetkoek* with their order. These men can be regarded as occupying the role of “boy”, as conceptualized by Mfecane (2016) earlier. Their positions are mostly subdued. Their voices are hardly heard out loudly in a very expressive way like the male *kapana* sellers. Their position seems to resemble that of women. Women sell the salsa, *vetkoek* or *pap*. They also have other merchandise, including traditional food, such as beans, spinach and lemons. Women do not handle the meat at Single Quarters as that is the prerogative of men.

6.7. Conclusion

The ethnography in this chapter pointed out decolonial calls for the recognition of same-sex relationships in Namibia. Currently no law in the country recognizes same-sex relationships. On the contrary sexual relations between men are banned. As I argued, this relates to the sodomy law, introduced during the South African apartheid colonial rule, which crystallized colonial views on sexuality and gender. In this chapter I presented the dissatisfaction of queer activists with the continued existence of this (colonial) law in postcolonial Namibia which they stressed is imposing on the rights of queer persons. In this regard, I demonstrated that the activists have been calling for more equal rights for queer persons.

In situating their queer activism for the recognition of same-sex relationships centrally in this chapter, I presented how activists have been challenging colonial views on sexuality and gender. In specific I referred to Namibia Equal Rights Movement, a queer rights organization, that was recently established by the queer activists Omar Van Reenen and Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe.

Through the ethnography presented in this chapter I learned about various visual productions curated by queer activists to show their dissatisfaction with the non-recognition of same-sex relationships. In 2021 activists painted a sidewalk in Windhoek with the colours of the Rainbow and Transgender flags. In this chapter, I demonstrated how this initiative was critical in challenging the dominant and colonial masculinities that have been imprinted in the memoryscape that was introduced through German and South African colonialisms and taken further in the postcolony.

Through my discussion on the 'Kapana' film I demonstrated that, much like the Rainbow sidewalk the film has opposed dominant and colonial masculinities. The film particularly reflects on same-sex relationships between men. It tells the story of George and Simeon who engage in a complicated love affair. They are forced to hide their relationship. This I argued relates to heteronormative views that frowns upon same-sex relationships.



Chapter Seven

Conclusion

In this thesis I explored issues related to ethnicity, memory and activism in Namibia. I demonstrated that ethnicity has been used by the Ovaherero and Nama in their struggles for reparations from the German government. I emphasized (postcolonial) nation-building efforts by the Namibian government. It is apparent that it is not only the Ovaherero and Nama who have used ethnicity in legitimising their claims. There has similarly been a re-ethnicization of Namibia, and ethnic identities with origins from South African apartheid colonialism, have been re-introduced in postcolonial society (Becker 2015; Akuupa 2015). Such efforts have been undertaken by the Namibian government in promoting a national (postcolonial) identity. This I argued relates with a postcolonial master narrative that was introduced by the Namibian government that draws mostly from the experiences of the ruling elite from northern Namibia, while sidelining the experiences of other groups – particularly those of the Ovaherero and Nama in central and southern Namibia.

Through my discussion on how decolonial memory activists and queer activists have resisted these rigid notions of ethnicity, I revealed that they have mobilized in intersectional struggles against the vestiges of colonialism and apartheid, particularly against racist-, patriarchal- and heteronormative hierarchies (Becker 2020; 2022). I therefore emphasized decolonial and queer struggles against colonial monuments, repressive (colonial) laws and the colonization of human remains.

I explored how decolonial memory activism and queer activism is linked with broader activism, particularly by the Ovaherero and Nama who have engaged in a struggle for reparations from the German government. I drew from literature on the commemorations of the Ovaherero and Nama to show how these events were introduced by the two groups directly following the colonial genocide. I demonstrated how these commemorations have been critical in memory-making by the Ovaherero and Nama. In this sense, the commemorations have been used by the two groups in mobilizing against the German government for reparations. Further discussion of the literature demonstrated that the struggle for reparations by the Ovaherero and Nama have ensured that their memories of colonial genocide are situated centrally in Namibia's (postcolonial) memory culture. This is significant, as I explained, the

postcolonial master narrative has privileged the experiences of Namibia's ruling elite during the liberation struggle.

In this thesis I revealed how memories of German and South African colonialisms have been referenced by decolonial and queer activists in their struggles against coloniality in Namibia. Theoretically, I argued that their claims related to concepts of memory activism (Wüstenberg 2010), multidirectional memory (Rothberg 2009), coloniality (Grosfoguel 2007) and decoloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2016).

I further discussed the historical roots of present decolonial and queer struggles against coloniality in Namibia. I emphasized the trajectory of decolonial and civil rights activism by the AR movement and 'SlutShameWalk' movement, which rallied against postcolonial land policies and colonial views that cause sexual- and gender-based violence.

In exploring the struggles by decolonial and queer activists I conducted an ethnography. My encounters with the activists were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic that set the trajectory of this study. This resulted in the adoption of online research approaches, including attending virtual commemorations, political meetings, festivals, watching online music videos, and using online archives. However, when the situation allowed there was also offline research conducted, including visiting colonial and postcolonial sites, conducting interviews. Through my discussion on how the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted on me, I emphasized some of the personal struggles I had to straddle while conducting fieldwork. I demonstrated how my encounters with Hildegard Titus and Omar van Reenen developed into a friendship, which resulted in them helping me to overcome some of the personal issues I was faced with.

In this thesis I explored decolonial memory activism against the coloniality of public spaces. The activists that I have encountered point to how the erection of these monuments by European (white) colonizers resulted in the exclusion of blacks and coloureds from the memoryscape. They therefore argued that these colonial monuments are powerful symbols of colonial racism and sexism. In their campaigns against these monuments, activists similarly referred to postcolonial monuments, which they argued continues with colonial practices. These postcolonial monuments have mostly referenced the experiences of the ruling elite during Namibia's liberation struggle. This I demonstrated points to a hierarchical representation of historical experiences that activists are mobilizing against.

In illuminating the issues surrounding the exclusion certain groups from the memoryscape, I referred to the use of public spaces by blacks and coloureds. I emphasized how these two groups feel uncomfortable when confronted with coloniality in public spaces. In these spaces these two groups regularly encounter relicts of colonialism, such as colonial monuments, statues and buildings that sought to inscribe the landscape with racist and sexist views.

Following my discussion on earlier struggles against the Von François specifically by Maamberua in the National Assembly I provided a discussion on how the coloniality of Windhoek relates to historical processes of German and South African colonialisms. In my discussion I focused on colonial regimes and referred to the colonial policies of segregation and forced removals that ensured that colonial views were inscribed in the memoryscape. This resulted in the removal the historical experiences of blacks and coloureds from public spaces. I further illuminated the efforts by postcolonial Namibian government at changing colonial public spaces.

Through my discussion on (new) decolonial memory activism against the Von François statue I drew from the life history of Hildegard Titus to show how her recent activism against the statue has roots in her childhood experiences, earlier artworks that she curated and related civil rights activism for the reproductive rights of women and girls. I then zoomed in on the *#ACurtFarewell* petition and discuss how activists drew from the historical experiences of blacks during pre-colonial, German and South African colonial periods in Namibia to challenge the colonial narrative that Von François was the founder of Windhoek. The activists specifically emphasized the histories of the Afrikaner, a group of Nama Orlam, who inhabited Windhoek and its surroundings since the early 1800s, before German colonialization of Namibia.

In illuminating these histories of Windhoek's black population, the activists have simultaneously pointed to the process of decolonization the city has underwent with the renaming of colonial street names. However, the activists remained critical of this process, pointing out that some colonial street names still remain while the renaming of street names have taken place mostly to honour men – which they argued is continuing of colonial practices. In this sense, the activists have particularly called for an encompassing decolonization of Windhoek's public spaces, that involves more actors in representing the city's multiple histories. Such calls by activist have since been well-received by some members of the public, who have openly supported the calls of the petition.

I then followed with a discussion on the trajectory of the process of the petition since it was submitted to the City of Windhoek. Through this discussion I referred to the city council's response to the petition. I demonstrated that the council has not been that forthcoming to the claims of activists. In their opposition to the petition, the councillors referred to the organization of the petition. They were critical of the virtual approach of the petition and with how it was submitted by Hildegard.

I further demonstrated that there were positive outcomes of the petition with the establishment of the heritage committee that seeks to address issues related to the city's heritage. The city council also agreed to remove the Von François statue.

In my discussion on the *#BLM* protests I further related the calls for the removal of the Von François to broader concerns over racial and sexual violence. This points to the intersectionality of some of these issues, that activists and scholars (Becker 2020;2022) have recently taken up.

I further explored decolonial calls related to human remains. I demonstrated that activists have targeted the skulls in their campaigns against coloniality. The activists were particularly concerned with the graves of the Prisoners-of-War of the colonial genocide 1904-1908 at the cemetery in Kramersdorf in Swakopmund. These graves are unmarked, shallow and generally in a bad condition. They have also not been properly cared for by the Municipality of Swakopmund. Activists have therefore opposed this situation and have argued that this points to the coloniality of the remains.

Through my discussion on the colonization of the remains, I referred to how they were collected and shipped to Germany for racial experiments by European scientists (Kössler 2015). This was part of a "race science" (Kössler 2015:274). I further elaborated on how this resulted in a colonization process of the remains, that is they were treated as "items", "things" and not as bodies to be mourned. This as I demonstrated related to a self-serving science that was concerned with imposing racial hierarchies. However, it appears that interests in studying human remains slowly declined after WWI, as European scientists started to take up other concerns. In this way, I explained the skills receded from public knowledge. I further revealed how the Ovaherero and Nama have centrally included the skulls in their calls for reparations from the German government.

Through my discussion on the Namibia Genocide Association that was established to fight for the recognition of the graves of the Prisoners-of-War, I explored the life history of Laidlaw Peringanda who is the founder of the organization. I emphasized Laidlaw's background in activism and art to illuminate his motivations for taking up present decolonial concerns. I further elaborated on the work by the Namibia Genocide Association to have the graves recognized by the Municipality of Swakopmund. They have organized cemetery cleanings for this aim. This I argued is how the organization aims to show respect to the victims of the colonial genocide. I demonstrated that issues related to the remains of the victims have also been taken up by other activists, including the musician Boli Mootseng who sings about the experiences of the colonial genocide.

This thesis revealed how decolonial memory activism relates with queer activism. It presented struggles by queer activists against the non-recognition of same-sex relationships. Colonial laws that were imposed through South African colonialism perpetuated a negative view of same-sex relationships. It was specifically the sodomy law that ensured that sexual and relations between men were banned. In postcolonial Namibia this sodomy law has remained unchanged and is largely still in force. In their campaigns activists refer to how the continued existence of this law in Namibia points to a situation of coloniality, especially as it relates to sexuality and gender. They have therefore resisted against it.

I further elaborated on this coloniality in Namibia through my discussion on state-sanctioned homophobia. I demonstrated how the Namibian government has openly engaged in homophobic behaviours targeting queer persons. This was taken up by Founding President, Sam Nujoma who chastised men for engaging in same-sex practices. What I found interesting was that the while the Namibian government's homophobic attitudes targeted mostly gay men, it was simultaneously directed at members of the political opposition. This related with an apparent cultural decolonization project, which I demonstrated fell short of an encompassing decolonization of postcolonial Namibia. This I argued further related to an emerging authoritarian dispensation by the Swapo party (Melber 2003; Lorway 2014) which translated into a political strategy against political opposition (Currier 2010). Therefore, it appears that homophobia is a powerful political tool used by the political elite in supporting their control over the state (Currier 2010). I further noted that the homophobic attitudes of Swapo party politicians have significantly declined since then. However, as I revealed in my discussion on the re-emergence of homophobia, some

(veteran) Swapo party politicians have again publicly come out against same-sex relations. Interestingly leaders of the political opposition have also since taken up similar views of these relations. This I argued points to how homophobia is used as a political tool. In this sense, the political opposition have also now used it in their own campaigns against the ruling elite.

In this thesis I explored how activists have challenged homophobic attitudes of the Namibian government. In my discussion on the formation of the Namibia Equal Rights Movement that aims to fight for more equal rights for queer persons I referred to how activists have specifically mobilized in support of same-sex couples. These couples are presently involved in court cases against the Namibian government for the recognition of their relationships. I further emphasized the life histories of two queer activists, namely Omar van Reenen and Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe to explore their struggles growing up as gay and lesbian, their involvement in student politics while being openly gay (Omar) and work at NGOs that focus on issues related to queer persons (Ndiilokelwa). I related their activism with previous work by two organizations that fought for the rights of gays and lesbians, namely SISTER Namibia and The Rainbow Project. I argued that present activism for the rights of queer persons has roots in earlier struggles in the 1990s.

Through my discussion on court cases that some same-sex couples are presently involved in, I learned about how the sodomy law has impacted on their relationships. I presented their struggles against the non-recognition of their relationships. I specifically referenced the court cases that Guillermo Delgado and Phillip Lühl are presently involved in. I presented their struggles against the Ministry of Home Affairs to have their relationship recognized. The couple got married in South Africa where such relationships have been recognized since 2006. I demonstrated that their court cases have revolved around the citizenship status of Guillermo (who is Mexican) and their three children: Yona, Paula and Maya – who were all born through surrogacy in South Africa. While Guillermo is married to Phillip (who is a Namibian), he however cannot receive Namibian citizenship or permanent residency through his marriage with Phillip, because of the non-recognition of same-sex relationships. Similarly, the Ministry of Home Affairs have refused to issue citizenship to their children.

Through my further discussion on the sodomy law, I revealed how it was introduced through South African colonialism in Namibia. What I found interesting was how the Namibian government has continued with the same colonial practices, by introducing similar laws after independence. I then elaborated on efforts by the Law Reform and Development Commission (LRDC) to have the sodomy law changed. This I demonstrated is part of their broader work aimed at changing (old) colonial laws and introducing (new) postcolonial laws in Namibia.

In this thesis I revealed how queer activists have moved beyond court cases to fight for the recognition of same-sex relationships. I demonstrated how activists have engaged in producing visual aesthetics aimed at challenging colonial views on human relationships, particularly as it relates to the non-recognition of same-sex relationships. I focused on initiatives targeting the memoryscape, which activists have referenced as imbued with masculinity. They have therefore engaged in producing counter-memorials, such as the painting of a prominent Windhoek sidewalk in the colours of the Rainbow and Transgender flags, which is aimed at challenging heteronormative views present in the memoryscape.

What I further revealed was that activists have producing films in exploring colonial views of same-sex relationships. In 2020 the Ombetja Yehinga Organisation (OYO) a NGO working on issues related to sexuality and gender, produced the ‘Kapana’ film. The film is Namibia’s first gay movie and explores same-sex relationships in the country. It presents the struggles of particularly men are involved in same-sex relationships. Through my discussion on the storyline of the film, I demonstrated the complicated love affair that emerged between the two main characters, George and Simeon. Since same-sex relationships are viewed negatively in Namibia, George and Simeon, are forced to hide their relationship. I further demonstrated that the film is significant in that it breaks from Namibia’s (conventional) film industry, that has been described as “sexist” and “patriarchal” (Mushaandja 2021b:101).

7.1. Possible avenues for future research

During the write-up of this thesis, while my thinking developed around the themes that I presented in this thesis, I also started thinking far and beyond these themes. However, due to time constraints and the requirements of thesis writing, particularly that of presenting concise arguments I had to exclude some of these themes from my thesis. I am however tempted to explore these themes further at a later stage.

While in chapter four I emphasized the coloniality of urban spaces (particularly in Windhoek) I also thought of how these themes extended to other cities and towns in Namibia. In relation of colonial street names, I thought of the Von Trotha street that was in Otjiwarongo, a small town located on the B1 national road, before it was renamed in 2021. In 2017 the Otjiwarongo Municipality through its street renaming committee started with the process of renaming the street. Through my trip with Hildegard and Matt to southern Namibia, I further learned about how colonial street names still remain unchanged in towns. In Lüderitz, on Namibia's Skeleton Coast, we encountered many colonial street names. While driving through central Lüderitz we specifically came across the following street names: *Bismarck-*, *Nachtigal-*, *Woermann-*, *Göringstraße*. While there we met with the mayor of Lüderitz, Brigitte Fredericks, who told us about the colonial history of the town. She told us that about recent initiatives to have a street named in honour of *Gaob* Cornelius Fredericks, the Nama leader whose remains were stolen and taken to Germany. The issues related to colonial street names in other places such as in Otjiwarongo and Lüderitz can possibly be taken up further in future research. I further learned about how the coloniality of space extended beyond urban spaces, and was similarly imprinted in rural landscapes. Through my trip with Hildegard and Matt to Hornkrantz, a farm on the south-western outskirts of Windhoek, I encountered coloniality in rural spaces. At Hornkrantz, I observed that coloniality was present through the mostly white-owned commercial farms that surrounded it, colonial monuments that were erected there, graves and in the embodied racist experiences that Hildegard and I encountered¹³¹. This, much like the issues surrounding colonial street names, can also be taken up further in future research.

¹³¹ On one of the farms where we stopped, before reaching Hornkrantz, Titus and I could not get enough of a German-speaking farmer completely ignoring to look at us. He was mostly in conversation with Matt, a white American man. They spoke with each other in English. The attempts by Titus to get a response to some of her questions to the man on his rural spa at the farm went mostly unanswered. We had our suspicions that the farmer responded to us in this way because Titus and I were people of colour.

In chapter five I explored memory activism in Swakopmund. What I found interesting was that the activists in their decolonial campaigns targeted both the graves of the Prisoners-of-War of the colonial genocide and colonial monuments that still remain in the town. However, I was unable to include the issues of colonial monuments in Swakopmund more prominently in my thesis. During our previous conversation over the phone Peringanda and I talked to each other about his previous activism. He told me about the decolonial memory activism of the Namibia Genocide Association against the Marine Denkmal in central Swakopmund. Peringanda told me that he previously covered the Marine Denkmal in a black plastic bag after the skull of a cow at one of the monuments in the Swakopmund cemetery was removed by some of the residents next to the cemetery, who claimed that it was smelly. Peringanda also illuminated the existence of the Bismarck Medical Centre that was named after the erstwhile (colonial) German chancellor Otto von Bismarck. The Bismarck Medical Centre is in central Swakopmund on Sam Nujoma Avenue and Bismarck Street (the latter's street name has also not been changed since independence). On its official logo the centre still displays an image of von Bismarck in fully-style German imperial dress. Furthermore, there has been major controversy around the erection of the Reiterdenkmal at the *Altstadt* restaurant. Amongst those who called for the removal of the monument from the *Altstadt*, was Peringanda. In 2019 Peringanda opened a police case against the owner of the restaurant for displaying racist and colonial symbols. Peringanda specifically referred to the Racial Discrimination Prohibition Act 26 of 1991 that bans racism. These cases are important and deserve to be explored in further research. Overall, as these examples have shown, much further research on remembering the toxic masculinity prevalent in the colonial and postcolonial landscapes of Namibia is needed.

Bibliography

- Akuupa, M. (2015). *National Culture in Post Apartheid Namibia*. Basler Afrika Bibliographien.
- Becker, H. (2022). "Youth Speaking Truth to Power: Intersectional decolonial activism in Namibia." *Dialectical Anthropology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-022-09678-1>.
- Becker, H. (2021a). "A Deadly Third Wave: Scenes from Namibia's devastating COVID crisis." Rosa Luxembourg Foundation website, <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/44720>. Accessed on December 12, 2022
- Becker, H. (2021b). "#ShutItAllDownNamibia: Young Namibians are Hitting the Streets Against Gender-Based Violence and Colonial Legacies." *Namibia Journal of Social Justice*, 1: 184-191
- Becker, H. (2020). "#ShutItAllDown Namibia: Young Namibians are hitting the streets against Gender-Based Violence and Colonial Legacies." Rosa Luxembourg Foundation website, <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/43225/shutitalldownnamibia>. Accessed on 12 December 2022
- Becker, H. (2018a). "Changing Urbanscapes: Colonial and Postcolonial Monuments in Windhoek." *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 27 (1): 1-21
- Becker, H. (2018b). "Remembering Marikana: public art intervention and the right to the city in Cape Town." *Social Dynamics*, 1-17
- Becker, H. (2016a). "South Africa's May 1968: Decolonising Institutions and Minds." Review of African Political Economy website, <http://roape.net/2016/02/17/south-africas-may-1968-decolonising-institutions-and-minds/>. Accessed 25 November 2022
- Becker, H. (2016b). Namibia's moment: youth and urban land activism. Review of African Political Economy website, <http://roape.net/2016/01/18/namibias-moment-youth-and-urban-land-activism/>. Accessed 13 December 2022.
- Becker, H. (2015). "From 'to die a tribe and be born a nation' towards 'culture, the foundation of a nation': the shifting politics and aesthetics of Namibian nationalism." *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 18 (2015): 21 – 35.
- Becker, H. & Lentz, C. (2013). "The politics and aesthetics of commemoration: national days in southern Africa." *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 36 (1&2): 1-8.

- Becker, H. (2011). "Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana: Memory, Culture and Nationalism in Namibia, 1990-2010." *Africa*, 81(4): 519-43.
- Becker, H., Boonzaaier, E., Owen, J. (2005). "Fieldwork in shared spaces: positionality, power and ethics of citizen anthropologists in southern Africa.", *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 28(3&4), 123-132.
- Becker, H. (1995). *Namibia's Women's Movement: From Anti-colonial Resistance to Reconstruction, 1980 to 1992*. IKO – Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation.
- Benson, K. and Meyer, F. (2015). "Writing my history is keeping me alive": Politics and Practices of Collaborative History Writing" in *A Reflexive Inquiry into Gender and Gender-Based Violence: Toward a New Paradigm of Knowledge Production Across Multiple Divides*, edited by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizella and Samantha van Schalkwyk. Cambridge Publishers.
- Benson, K. and Nagar, K. (2006). "Collaboration as Resistance? Reconsidering the processes, products, and possibilities of feminist oral history and ethnography." *Gender, Place and Culture*, 13(5): 581-592.
- Biwa, M. (2012). "Weaving the Past with Threads of Memory: Narratives and Commemorations of the colonial war in southern Namibia." PhD thesis. University of the Western Cape (UWC).
- Brandt, N. & Whorral-Campbell, F. (eds) (2021). *Conversations Across Place: Reckoning with an Entangled World*. The Greenbox
- Britz, R., Lang, H., Limpricht, C. (1999). *Beknopte Geskiedenis van die Rehoboth Basters tot 1990*. Klaus Hess Publishers.
- Comaroff, J. & Comaroff, J. (2009). *Etnicity Inc*. University of Chicago Press.
- Connel, R. (2005). *Masculinities*. University of California Press.
- Currier, A. (2010). "Political homophobia in postcolonial Namibia." *Gender & Society*, 24 (1): 110-129
- Currier, A. (2012). *Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Elago, H. (2015). "Colonial Monuments in a Post-Colonial Era: A Case Study of the Equestrian Monument." In Jeremy Silvester (ed.), *Reviewing Resistance in Namibian History*. University of Namibia Press.

- Delgado, G. (2020). "The Second Crossroads in Namibia's Land Question: Land must be re-thought if the promises of independence are to be fulfilled." Rosa Luxembourg Foundation website, <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/42884/the-second-crossroads-in-namibias-land>. Accessed 13 December 2022.
- Delgado, G. (2018). "A short socio-spatial history of Namibia." *Working Paper, 9*. Integrated Land Management Institute: Namibia University of Science and Technology.
- Emmet, A. (1999). *Popular Resistance and the roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966*. P.Schlettwein Publishing.
- Förster, L. (2010). *Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaften in Namibia: Wie Deutsche und Herero des Kriegs von 1904 gedenken*. Frankfurt am Man & New York Publishers.
- Fumanti, M. (2016). *The Politics of Distiction: African elites from colonialism to liberation in a Namibian frontier town*. University of Namibia Press.
- Funke, H. (2021). *Black Lives Matter in Deutschland: George Floyd und die Diffamierung von Achille Mbembe als Antisemit – eine Streitschrift über (post-)koloniale Konflikte*. VSA Verlag.
- Gewald, JB. (1999). *Herero Heroes*. James Curry & Ohio University Press.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2007). "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn." *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3): 211-223.
- Haitembu, R. (2021). "Exploring the Namibian Inclusive Education Policy's Responses to Gender Non-conforming Learners: A Case of Erongo Region." PhD thesis. University of the Western Cape.
- Halder, I., Tiwana, F. & Tahir, S.M. (2020). "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Adult Mental Health." *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 36: 90-94.
- Hamrick, E. & Duschniski, H. (2018). "Enduring injustice: Memory politics and Namibia's genocide reparations movement." *Memory Studies*, 11(4): 437-454.
- Hendrickson, H. (1994). "The 'Long' Dress and the Construction of Herero identities in southern Africa." *African Studies*, 53 (2): 25-54
- Hübschle, T. (2009). *Rider without a horse*. Short film, 12 minutes. *Collective Productions* website, <http://www.collective.com.na/rider-without-a-horse---short-film-2010.html>. Accessed 13 December 2022

- Jafta, M. Kautja, M., Oliphant and Shipingana, K. (1991). *An investigation of the shootings at the Old Location on 10 December 1959*. Namibian History Trust.
- Jorritsma, M. (2011). *Sonic Spaces of the Karoo: The Sacred Music of a South African Coloured Community*. Temple University Press.
- Kössler, R. (2019). “The Bible and Whip: Entanglements around the Restitution of Robbed Heirlooms.” *ABI Working Paper*, 12. Arnold Bergstraesser Institut.
- Kössler, R. (2015). *Namibia and Germany: Negotiating the Past*. University of Namibia Press.
- Kössler, R. (2007) “Facing a Fragmented past: Memory, Culture and Politics in Namibia.” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33 (2): 361–82.
- Lau, B. (1982). “Namibia in Jonker Afrikaner’s Time.” *Namibia Digital Repository* website, <https://www.namibiadigitalrepository.com/items/show/207>. Accessed 12 December 2022
- Lorway, R. (2014). *“Namibia’s Rainbow Project: Gay Rights in an African Nation.”* Indiana University Press.
- Maedza, P. (2018). “Chains of Memory in the Postcolony: Performing and Remembering the Namibian Genocide.” PhD thesis. University of Cape Town.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2016). “”Outline of the ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality. Frantz Fanon Foundation. <https://foundation-frantzfanon.com/outline-of-ten-theses-on-coloniality-and-decoloniality/>. Accessed 12 December 2022
- Maasmann, U. (1983). *Swakopmund: A Chronicle of the Town’s People, Places and Progress*. Society for Scientific Development and Museum.
- Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press.
- Melber, H. (2003). “Namibia, land of the brave’: selective memories of the war and violence within nation building”, in Abbink, J., de Bruijn, M.E., van Walraven, K., *Rethinking resistance: Revolt and violence in African history*. London: Brill.
- Mfecane, S. (2016). “Ndiyindoda”[I am a man]: theorising Xhosa masculinity.” *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 39 (3): 204-214.
- Miescher, G. (2013). *Die Rote Linie: Die Geschichte der Veterenär- und Siedlungsgrenze in Namibia (1890er – 1960er Jahre)*. Basler Afrika Bibliographien.

- Moloi, V. (2016). *Skulls of My People*. Short film, 1 hour 17 minutes.
- Mushaandja, N. (2021a). "Critical Visualities & Spatialities: Protest, Performance, Publicness and Praxis." *Namibian Journal of Social Justice*, 1: 192-201
- Mushaandja, N. (2021b). "Embodiments of love on the margins of Windhoek's cinematic landscape." *Social Dynamics*, 47 (1): 100-117.
- Namibia: Genocide and the Second Reich*. (2005). BBC documentary, 1 hour.
- Nghiulikwa, R. (2008). "Re-situating and shifting cultural identity in contemporary Namibia: The experience of rural-urban migrants in Katutura (Windhoek)." MA thesis. University of the Western Cape.
- Nthengwe, N. (2021). *Chronicles of a Non-Binary Black Namibian Lesbian...in love*. John Meinert Printing.
- Olick, J., Vinitzky-Seroussi, V., Levy, D. (2011). *The Collective Memory Reader*. Oxford University Press.
- Pretorius, T. & Padmanabhanunni, A. (2021). "A looming mental health pandemic in the time of COVID_19? Fortitude in the interrelationship between loneliness, anxiety, and life satisfaction among young adults." *South African Journal of Psychology*, 51 (2): 256-268.
- Reid, G. & Walker, L. eds. (2015). *Men Behaving Differently: South African Men since 1994*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rothberg, M. (2009). *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford University Press.
- Shikangalah, R. (2020). "The 2019 drought in Namibia: An overview." *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 27: 37-58.
- Shiweda, N. & Likuwa, K. (2020). "The Owambo Campaign Memorial in context: Who is being remembered?." *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 27: 59-80.
- Steinmetz, G. & Hell, J. (2006). "The visual archive of colonialism: Germany and Namibia". *Public Culture*, 18 (1): 147-83.
- Tjirera, E. (2020). "The Cleanest City in Africa: Revisiting the Obsession with Cleanliness in Windhoek's Colonial History." Rosa Luxembourg Foundation website, <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/41790>. Accessed 12 December 2022.

Tjirera, E. (2019). "Writing Windhoek: Multiple Representations of the City." PhD thesis. University of the Witwatersrand.

Van Wyk, B. (2023) "The #ACurtFarewell petition and calls for more an inclusive memory landscape in Namibia." *Rosa Luxembourg* Foundation website.

<https://www.rosalux.co.za/our-work/acurtfarewell-inclusive-namibian-memory-landscapes>. Accessed 18 March 2023.

Van Wyk, B. (2022). "Namibia's efforts at curbing sexual and gender based violence remain ineffective without the inclusion of LGBT persons." *Minority Africa* website.

<https://minorityafrica.org/namibias-efforts-at-curbing-sexual-and-gender-based-violence>. Accessed 12 December 2022.

Van Wyk, B (2021a). "Apology and Reparations? Reflections on the genocide reparations agreement between Germany and Namibia." Rosa Luxembourg Foundation website. <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/45028>. Accessed 11 December 2022.

Van Wyk, B. (2021b). "Hornkranz and Social Justice." *The Namibian* website.

<https://www.namibian.com.na/211780/archive-read/Hornkranz-and-Social-Justice>. Accessed 11 December 2022.

Van Wyk, B. (2020). "Memory Politics and Justice: The legacy of colonialism and a call for postcolonial justice." Rosa Luxembourg Foundation website.

<https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/41789/memory-politics-and-justice>. Accessed 18 March 2023.

Williams, C. (2009). "Exile History: An Ethnography of SWAPO Camps and the Namibian Nation." PhD thesis. University of Michigan.

Wüstenberg, J. (2010). "The Geschichtsbewegung and Civil Society Activism in German Memory Politics." PhD thesis. University of Maryland.

Zuern, E. (2012). "Memorial politics: challenging the dominant party's narrative in Namibia." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 50 (3): 493-518.