

WHAT IF? WHAT NEXT?

SPECULATIONS ON HISTORY'S FUTURES

SESSION 2A

ROUTES TO THE PAST

Critical, Cultural or Commercial: Intersections Between Architectural History and Heritage

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SEGREGATION AND MEMORY: WINDHOEK'S SPATIAL EVOLUTION AS THE CAPITAL OF NAMIBIA

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> The present-day urban landscape of Namibia's capital, Windhoek, displays a discernible periodisation of public architecture coincident with successive occupations' displays of political power. To date, little research has been devoted to understanding the spatial effects of these ideologies which geographically embedded institutionalised discrimination defined by racially-segregated urban planning. This paper examines Windhoek's history by drawing original maps of its development in five spatially, architecturally, and socio-politically distinct epochs.

> Namibia, dubbed 'Africa's last colony', gained independence in 1990. Known as South- West Africa prior to independence, the territory was occupied in 1884 by Germany, captured by South Africa in 1915, briefly administered by British forces, and then ruled by South Africa from 1921 as a Mandated Territory of the League of Nations, and from 1946 effectively as part of South Africa proper. Previous studies have attributed segregation within the city to the implementation of modernist apartheid planning, but a more nuanced historical analysis shows it has persisted and evolved over successive occupations. Challenging prevalent functionalist studies of the city favouring inquiries along trajectories of institutional governance, service provision and politics, this paper describes the city as a site of cohabitation of various people and the meanings and memories they ascribe to architecture and places. Recognising the site's prehistoric origins, the settlement's historical roots are shown to be embedded in pre-colonial regional power struggles and outside occupations. These socio-political relations have manufactured the legacies of displacement, forced removals and segregation still underpinning and determining Windhoek's uncanny mnemonic landscape today.

Introduction

Colonialism was merely a brief interlude in the long span of human activity in Namibia, where forces of merchant capitalism and Christianity had already considerably transformed the country before its formal colonisation.¹ Evidence from archaeological excavations in the 1960s in Windhoek's present-day Zoo Park found stone tools and remains of a prehistoric elephant kill dating back to 5200 BC. The settlement would have been a bountiful spot for hunter-gatherers due to its hot springs, providing a rare source of water in an arid climate. The first known names of the site, in Nama language /Ae//Gams, and in Otjiherero Otjomuise, mean 'place of hot water' and 'place of steam'. In the early 1700s, central and southern Namibia, known as Damaraland and Great Namaqualand, formed a complex, dynamic and intertwined socio-political environment of groups speaking Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab, Cape Dutch and San languages, with occasional conflicts over land, water and grazing rights.² Although no physical structures and few written records pre-date German colonial occupation, this paper discusses the regional socio-political conditions of the pre-colonial settlement as the inception of a genealogy of successive outside occupations, leading to the present-day conditions of outsourcing the production of the capital's civic structures to an authoritarian regime in North Korea.

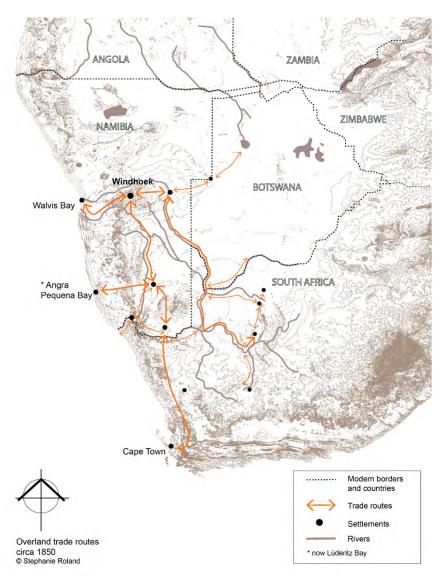


Figure 1. Overland trade routes in Southern Africa circa 1850. Source: author. Adapted from Jan-Bart Gewald, 'Untapped Sources, Slave Exports from Southern and Central Namibia up to c1850', in Mfecane Aftermath, 1995, 417–36.

Ae//Gams, Otjomuise and Windhoek

Diogo Cão and Bartolomeu Dias touched on the South-West African coast in 1486 and 1488, but it was only from the 1700s that Cape Dutch and British settlers, together with German missionaries, Norwegian whalers, and explorers and traders of various nationalities patronised the territory, introducing firearms. A local population, the *Oorlam*, developed as "the cultural products of the frontier", from "incorporation, cultural shifts and interracial sexual relationships" between indigenous groups and fugitives from the Cape Colony, including fleeing slaves and servants, escaped criminals, and migrating groups of livestock herders.³ The Oorlam could speak Cape Dutch, had wagons, horses and firearms, embraced Christianity, and depended on cattleraiding by *commando*, a violent practice adopted from the Dutch mounted citizen militias.⁴

In 1842, an Oorlam group led by Jonker Afrikaner established the town of *Windhoek*⁵ in central Namibia. The choice of site was strategic; sheltered between the *Khomas Hochland*, *Auas* and *Eros* mountain ranges, with ample water supply. Windhoek was positioned along the only passage through mountainous central South-West Africa, connecting westwards to the coastal port Walvis Bay and southwards with the Cape (Fig. 1). Crucial in the regional cattle trade and trafficking ivory and whale products, the settlement grew to a bustling town of 5000 people. The southern and central parts of South-West Africa increasingly became integrated with the Cape trade network, incorporating indigenous societies in the system of merchant capital and increasing the presence and influence of both missionary and secular white traders.⁶ Jonker Afrikaner, himself of Christian faith, built a sizeable stone church in Windhoek and actively courted missionaries, a strategy to legitimise his ascendancy by employing Europeans as political assets to negotiate peace treaties with chief Maharero of the nearby Herero.⁷ The peace did not last, and in 1880, after seven years of conflict, Windhoek was destroyed, and the Oorlam were banished and dispersed.⁸

The Oorlam are considered the vanguard of European expansion into the territory,⁹ an assumption supported by the proximity of the residence of Jan Jonker (Jonker Afrikaner's son) to the Mission, mission gardens, and presumably the stone church (Fig. 2).¹⁰ The natural springs around the former mission gardens supported orchards and wineries still evident in the 1950s, and in recent times one of these sites has been converted into the high-end 'Am Weinberg Estate', which incorporates the 1901 German colonial 'Heritage House' and is situated on present-day Jan Jonker Road. While no physical buildings remain, the history of the Oorlam settlement remains inscribed. The Oorlam irrevocably incorporated the territory into the colonial trade system and the trans-Atlantic slave trading system creeping across Africa.¹¹ Missionaries promoted ideas of urban space infused with notions of European virtue, orderliness, Western clothes, literacy and Christian education, square houses, and a rigid assignment of male and female roles.¹²

The Schutztruppe

The 1884-5 Berlin Conference gave Germany's chancellor Otto von Bismarck a project to politically unify his country. ¹³ Spurred on by Britain's annexure of the centrally located coastal port of Walvis Bay in 1878, Angra Pequena Bay¹⁴, a port on the southern coast of South-West Africa, was declared under German protection in 1884, with additional gunboats sent along for Germany to gain effective possession of the South-West African coast.

In 1890, a meagre contingent of 42 German troops claimed the abandoned site of Windhoek as their headquarters for the *German Protectorate of South-West Africa*. This was a pragmatic decision, hastened by escalating tensions with the Nama chief Hendrik Witbooi. Curt von Francois, the officer in charge, immediately set about drafting plans for the settlement, which was divided into three distinct parts (Fig. 3). The orderly street grid of *Groot Windhoek*, located on relatively flat land along the former North-South trade axis, accommodated administrative buildings. The agricultural smallholdings of *Klein Windhoek* centred on the former Mission gardens. They were separated by a hill upon which the military buildings had been arrayed to maximise visual surveillance of the surrounds. The stone fort, built in the manner of a typical Roman Military Camp, ¹⁵ remains at the symbolic centre of Windhoek. The abodes of white

farmers and merchants mainly stood opposite *Groot Windhoek* along the North-South trade route, with only a few scattered across agricultural plots within *Klein Windhoek*. Huts housing indigenous inhabitants were dispersed along the military ridge, likely for convenient proximity of workforce and to allow surveillance over it.

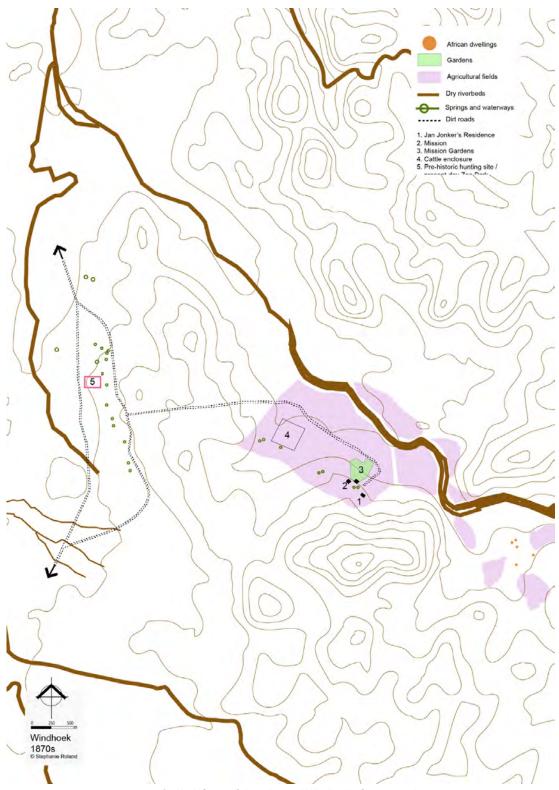


Figure 2. /Ae//Gams, Otjomuise and Windhoek. Source: author.

A spatial reading of Figure 3 supports Zollmann's argument that the colonial state in South-West Africa was relatively weak, the spaces of colonial control only representing islands of authority within the territory. 16 German colonial control only extended as far as a demarcated police zone that excluded the populous northern regions of South-West Africa. Beyond the police zone, the colonisers relied on negotiation with local leader to acquire protection and influence 'on paper', lacking any real ability or ambition to fully enforce their own laws.¹⁷ Within Windhoek's islands of authority, some areas were controlled and 'Europeanised' more than others, specifically the orderly greened landscape of Groot Windhoek, conspicuous in relation to the scattered private structures and gardens of both settlers and indigenous inhabitants.

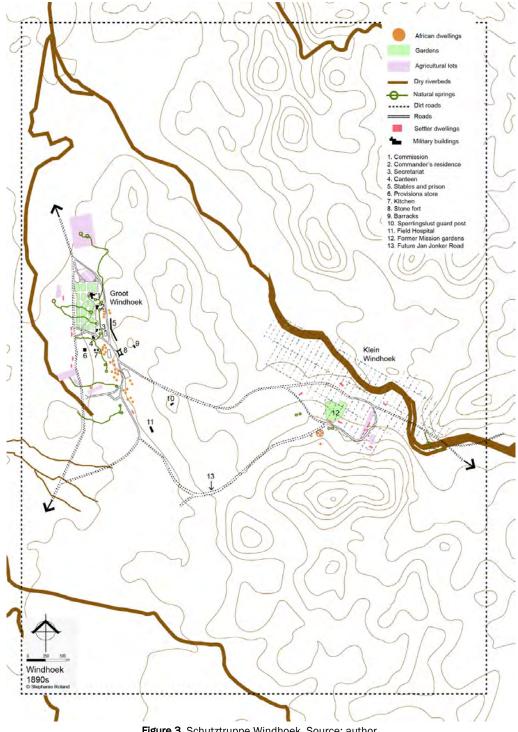


Figure 3. Schutztruppe Windhoek. Source: author.

Colonialism introduced property rights, illustrated in the punctiliously outlined land parcels of *Klein Windhoek*. African societies were characterised by a far less individualised and static land ownership system than Europeans'. ¹⁸ Von Francois' map both claimed possession of the territory and positioned the settlement's future development by making land a trading stock. Private property rights based on individual freehold and leasehold tenure ¹⁹ were made available only to Europeans, immediately systematising racial and ethnic segregation. ²⁰ The indigenous huts, indicated with an 'x' on Von Francois' map, were probably temporary structures, either worker accommodation or on land rented from the local authority. ²¹ By 1903, Windhoek was the principal urban settlement in Namibia, boasting a white civilian population of around 500 and 2000 African residents, many of whom "had arrived...under coercion". ²²

The German Colony

The outbreak of the 1897 cattle plague devastated African pastoralists, accelerating African indebtedness and land transfer to settlers amidst increasing tensions, leading to the 1904-1908 Herero Wars.²³ The colonisers' strategy up to this point had been coercion by diplomatic and military means, leaving leaders like Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witbooi a measure of autonomy, often exploiting pre-existing divisions among local polities.²⁴ By 1908 German forces had committed genocide against the Herero and Nama, and the administration began issuing ordinances intended to subjugate Africans into a landless proletariat and workforce for white employers.²⁵

In Windhoek, the war and genocide spatially begat the concept of the *location* (township), a local expression denoting the African residential counterpart to the now exclusively white residential suburb. The central *Location* (now known as the *Old Location*), west of the town centre, was bordered by dry riverbeds and deliberately distant from the white residential suburbs of *Klein Windhoek* (Fig. 4). The Old Location would become emblematic of the colonial 'other' and the dominant racial group's practice of perceiving Africans as backward and primitive. The creation of geographically separated residential areas increasingly determined Windhoek's urban landscape. The Old Location would later become synonymous with African unity opposing apartheid.²⁶ The railway connecting Windhoek with Swakopmund on the coast, completed in 1902, became a north-south spatial barrier between white suburbs and the Location, reinforced by buffer zones of industrial uses. Spurred by the 1908 discovery of diamonds in southern South-West Africa, Windhoek's settled white population grew from 457 in 1903 to 1,700 in 1915. The black population doubled to 4,000, due to the dissolution of the prisoner-of-war camps in Windhoek and migration from rural areas.²⁷ Despite the disparity in numbers, the white residential suburbs occupied a far larger area than the black Locations.

The German colonisers spatially and aesthetically shaped the urban realm to reflect their ambitions as absolute rulers and to develop their societal self-image. A trio of centrally-located administrative, religious and military buildings characterised the ideal German colonial city.²⁸ Figure 4 shows Windhoek's 'colonial crown', which expanded from the 1892 Fort to include the 1910 neo-Romanesque Christuskirche, the 1913 administrative building dubbed Tintenpalast 29 with its accompanying formal gardens. These buildings, adapting Wilhelminian architecture into a local vernacular, SWA Veranda Style, 30 reminded European residents and visitors of a typical provincial German Beamtenstadt.31 To the non-European population, these structures were alien in material, construction method and form. There were "abundant gardens in European residential quarters" along with "central areas interspersed with public parks and/or tree lined squares". 32 By comparison, archival photographs show little greening in the central Location, save for a line of trees creating a boundary to the town centre. Memorials to German sacrifice and military victory were erected, many of which remain today. The 1912 equestrian statue³³, erected next to the Fort on the site of the former prisoner-of-war camps, would in time become simultaneously a symbol of settler culture and the genocide, metonymic as the Herero name for Windhoek, and iconic of tourism highlighting Namibia's unique (German) cultural dimensions.³⁴

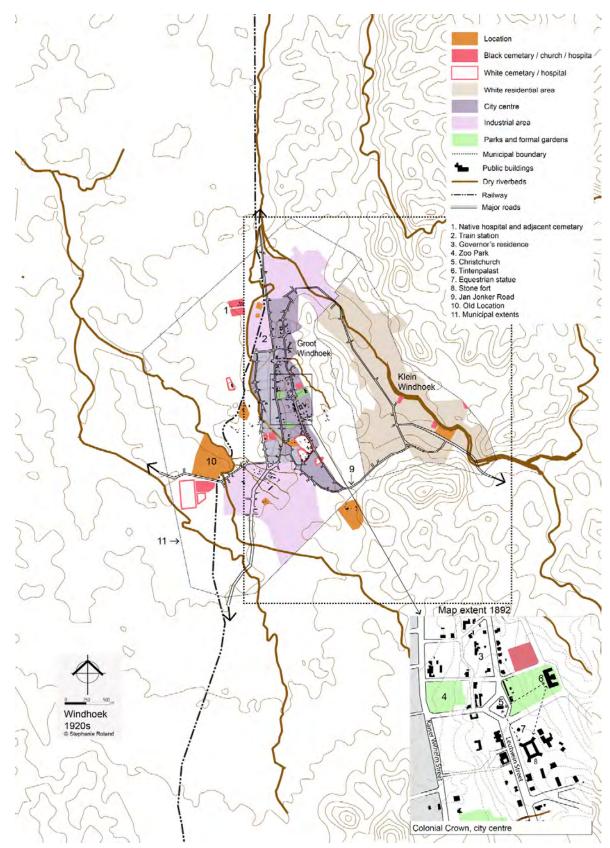


Figure 4. Windhoek as the German colonial capital. Source: author.

The city's expanding administrative apparatus, influenced by international town planning trends,³⁵ extended to building regulations, which excluded the African population due to the restricted accessibility and affordability of stipulated building materials.³⁶ African homes were constructed differently to settler homes and arranged in a much higher density, aesthetically reinforcing the spatial difference between suburbs and locations. Despite this, Windhoek was not intended as an example of German empire building, in contrast to other German colonial cities such as Qingdao.³⁷ Social segregation, although evident, was not strictly imposed, and indigenous contestation and administrative exemptions characterised the ad-hoc construction of Windhoek as the colonial capital.³⁸ This is illustrated by the presence of African Locations, churches and cemeteries in *Klein Windhoek*, and near the railway station (Fig. 4).

Apartheid Windhoek

South-West Africa's German administration was overthrown by South Africa in 1915. The country was briefly administered by British forces and ruled by South Africa from 1921 as a *Mandated Territory* of the League of Nations. The advent of World War II saw the Nationalist South African administration progressively enact its territorial ambitions on South-West Africa, despite international protests, effectively governing the country as a fifth province of South Africa.

Town planning in Windhoek became intertwined with South Africa's ideology of legalised apartheid, under the idiom of 'separate development' legalising racial and ethnic separation. The principle of separate rural bantustans, or homelands, was applied in South-West Africa,³⁹ and these rural regions became both geographically peripheral and excluded from most industrial and urban development, despite their high population densities relative to white farming regions.⁴⁰ Legislation limited black people's stays in urban areas without a job, mandated registration of urban dwellers and enforced repatriation of superfluous labour to the bantustans, as well as establishing spatially bounded locations within cities, including curfews and compulsory ethnic segregation.41 Modernist town planning principles, under a neutral scientific guise, were employed to shape the capital into two separate territories: one reserved for white people, comprising the central business district and the surrounding well-appointed suburbs; and another for those classified 'non-white'.⁴² The two territories were separated, ostensibly for hygienic reasons, by buffer zones of highways, green belts and industry. Each Location was designed for optimal policing and control, with a single access road, tarred perimeter road, flood-lighting, and no cul-de-sac streets.43 In this system, being black precluded being urban, and the black population was prevented from developing and spatialising an urban identity.⁴⁴ Based on model American cities, Windhoek was designed from the 1960s onwards for a mobile, car-owning population, despite most non-white residents not having access to private motorcars.

The Old Location had long been a source of consternation to the white administration. Accounts of a vibrant culture and social life,⁴⁵ and ethnic groups living together in relative harmony,⁴⁶ undermined apartheid ideology. The Old Location also hindered the westerly expansion of the urban territory allocated to whites. In 1959, the decision by the South African administration to forcibly relocate black inhabitants to new, ethnically segregated townships 7km north-east of the city led to protests, resulting in the Windhoek massacre that killed at least 13, pre-dating similar events in Sharpeville, South Africa. Figure 5 shows the two new townships Katutura (for black people) and Khomasdal (for coloured people), characterised by uniform matchbox dwellings arranged in strict right-angled plans. Katutura means "the place where we do not stay" in Otjiherero. Its inhabitants were quasi-permanent residents who were nonetheless not treated as urbanites and denied political rights and private land ownership.⁴⁷

The Western Bypass highway constructed in the 1980s acted as a new barrier between the expanding white suburbs and black locations. Due to idiosyncrasies in apartheid planning legislation, existing places of worship and cemeteries such as the Old Location cemetery were not allowed to be destroyed, even while pass laws denied former residents access to visit and tend these spaces.⁴⁸ With Namibian independence imminent in 1988, the municipal council established a new suburb, Hochland Park, on the site of the Old Location, re-orienting the street grid to obliterate all traces of the former township.⁴⁹

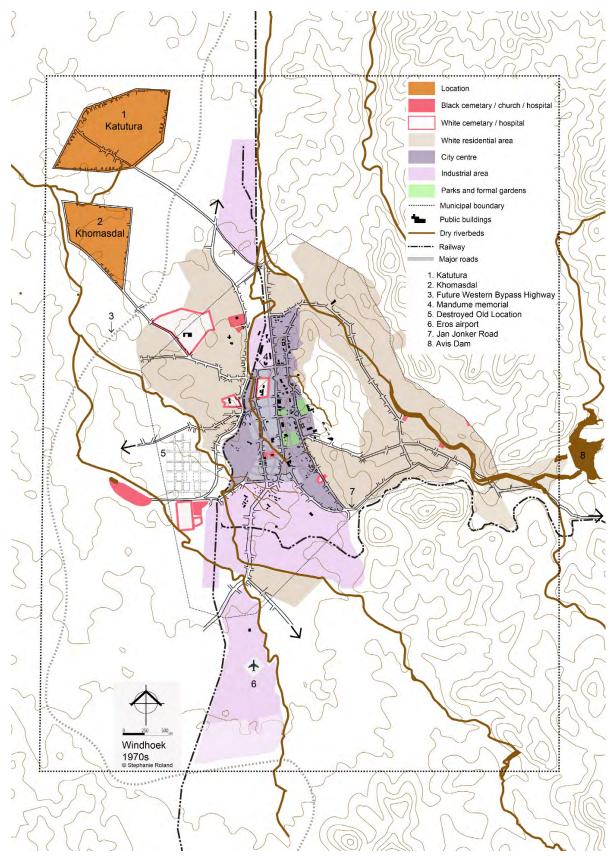


Figure 5. Apartheid Windhoek. Source: author

The memorials erected by the South African administration were less prominent and politically obdurate than their German antecedents. The 1919 obelisk commemorating South Africa's 1917 military campaign to subdue northern Namibia became fabled as the burial place of the Kwanyama King Mandume yaNdemufayo's severed head. This memorial was later reinterpreted by his people to honour the very figure whose defeat it was designed to celebrate. A 1965 memorial erected outside Windhoek's central municipal building celebrating Curt von Francois as the city's founder also remains in place, despite recent contestations.

Modernist aesthetics characterised the civic buildings erected by the South African administration, including the 1964 addition to the *Tintenpalast*, titled the *Building Complex of the Legislative Assembly of the Whites of South West Africa*, and many of the schools, post-offices, hospitals, police stations and local administrative buildings still in use today. These tall, functionalist concrete structures continue to operate as neutral civic architecture,⁵² with minor refurbishments to remove the once-ubiquitous 'whites only' entrances. They show "how... a politically oppressive urban model can be regarded as normative and neutral in the post-apartheid era, as well as relevant to a re-fashioning of the contemporary urban environment".⁵³

Independent Namibia

Namibian independence was declared on 21 March 1990, amidst euphoric celebrations that spontaneously renamed Windhoek's main thoroughfare from Kaiser Street to Independence Avenue. Despite fears of violence and land depreciation among Windhoek's white minority, there was relatively little social friction, and some suburban property prices rose.54 Windhoek had a massive population influx from 1977 onwards, when some of the most conspicuous apartheid legislation was repealed. Independence did not change the structural inequalities underpinning Windhoek's existing urban landscape. Katutura and Khomasdal still house at least 50% of the city's population on just 25% of the urban area, with densities approximately four times higher than elsewhere.⁵⁵ Windhoek's planning scheme, preoccupied with zoning, remained essentially unchanged from 1976 until 1996,56 organising the city "along colonial and apartheid lines, segregating and isolating people from each other and from the potential benefits of a more integrated and dense urban fabric". 57 Revised policies and schemes have not fundamentally challenged the colonially-imposed high standards and costly legal processes for urban development,58 to the detriment of poor residents, handicapping Windhoek's expansion and densification. Vehicle ownership to the west of the Western Bypass remains markedly lower per dwelling, coupled with the lowest household incomes in the city.⁵⁹ Despite the lifting of restrictions on property ownership, the capitalist housing market has inhibited residential racial integration, 60 demonstrating the limits of legislative desegregation without true political will. 61 An ongoing ruralurban influx of low-income residents has ensured rapid expansion of the townships and informal settlements to the north and west (Fig. 6).

In contrast to other African countries, the Namibian government generally did not dismantle the country's old monuments and landmarks, to avoid alienating the economically important white population. Gewald argues that the ruling Swapo party, dominated by people from northern Namibia who cannot trace their history to the events leading to the genocide, is less invested in adjudicating the urban heritage of that era. Windhoek's city centre retains many examples of German colonial architecture. This inherited symbolic landscape has been augmented by a new layer of memorials, a spatial superimposition that has been referred to as "breaking the [colonial] crown", a bold assertion of nationalistic self and explicit breaking with the past, a "obliteration of history", and "accentuating a multi-layered built environment and memory narrative". The removal in 2015 of the equestrian statue made way for the Independence Memorial Museum, Sam Nujoma statue and the Genocide Memorial, all designed and constructed between 2002-09 by North Korean firm Mansudae Overseas Projects.

Although these new memorial sites provide a constant visual reminder of national liberation in the city,69 their 'distinctly post-colonial form',70 in an aesthetic dubbed 'North Korean Stalinist Realism',71 is both architecturally and spatially uncanny. Obert asserts that they signal a country

estranged from itself, willing to outsource control over its built environment to an authoritarian regime in Pyongyang rather than recognize its own citizens as producers of cultural meaning. More importantly, these new memorials fit within a resistant urban form shaped by colonial and apartheid planning a form that remains spatially deterministic in the absence of any substantial structural change. The superimposition of these new landmarks and monuments on the city's 'colonial crown' deliberately reflects and consolidates the interests and power of the present government by grounding them on past regimes. In doing so, the independent government has repeated the colonial logic of importing an architectural form and monumental aesthetic to impress an ideological standpoint onto the local populace.

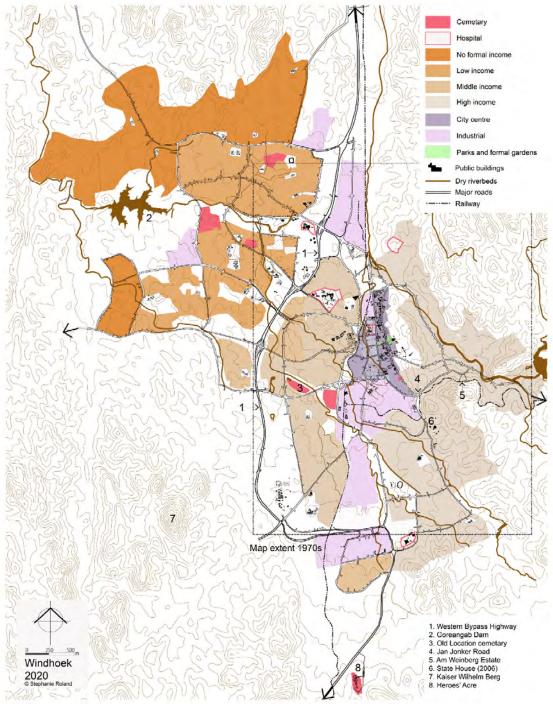


Figure 6. Windhoek in 2020. Source: author. Income by areas according to the City of Windhoek's 2013 Sustainable Urban Transport Master Plan.

Remembrance as a phenomenological process has again been separated from the urban landscape in independent Namibia, most notably with the construction of Heroes' Acre, the 700-acre war memorial and burial ground honouring liberation fighters. Built 13km south-east of the city on an empty site, accessible only by private motorcar, and modelled on Robert Mugabe's Heroes' Acre in Zimbabwe, this monument is a spatial manifestation of Namibia's dogmatic 'combat literature', 74 legitimizing the Swapo liberation narrative rather than providing an inclusive place of remembrance and reflection for the nation. Many of the forcibly-abandoned places of worship and graveyards in *Klein Windhoek*, once protected by apartheid legislation, were destroyed by development of high-end suburban homes after Namibia's independence. 75 In 1995 the Old Location cemetery was officially re-opened, allowing those whose relatives lay there to also be buried there.

Conclusion

Through the creation of a series of original maps, representative of five socio-political epochs, this paper has attempted to uncover Windhoek's urban history, which has suffered from a lack of interest by the current government of Namibia's political elite. 76 This paper has attempted to spatially analyse the practice of creating racially defined, geographically separate residential areas, which remain deterministic in shaping Windhoek's urban landscape. Successive regimes have imprinted their politics in the locations and aesthetics of its buildings and in the process of city making. Namibia's independence has not substantially changed its systems of governance and urban space, which remain foreign and often inaccessible to the local populace. It is clear from the map of Windhoek in 2020 that the extreme contrast of wealth and poverty, corresponding closely to racial divides,⁷⁷ is an enduring legacy of the colonially planned city. The dislocation of non-white residents from places of memory and sites that foster a sense of belonging has remained characteristic of Windhoek throughout its history. This logic still guides spatial memory and memorialisation in Windhoek today. The city's landscape has a distinct uncanny quality, with successive administrations inscribed in its architecture and memorials fostering a memory landscape that is "at once postcolonial and neo-colonial". 78 The spatial logics of colonialism, and later apartheid - both practices rooted in totalitarian aspirations - have been appropriated by the ruling Swapo party, and continue to reproduce the urban landscape of Windhoek. These spatial logics reinforce ethnic and cultural divisions produced by decades of social engineering and institutionalised discrimination.

Endnotes

- ¹ Marion Wallace and John Kinahan, *A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1
- ² Wallace and Kinahan, A History of Namibia, 46.
- ³ Wallace and Kinahan, A History of Namibia, 51.
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- ⁵ Windhoek is a Dutch name, meaning either 'windy corner', or a reference to the Winterhoek mountains at Tulbagh, South Africa, from where Jonker's ancestors hailed
- $^{\rm 6}$ Wallace and Kinahan, A History of Namibia.
- ⁷ Pierre Tim Böhm, Residential Segregation as Part of Imperial Policies. A Transnational Analysis for the Case of Windhoek (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2018).
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- ¹² Wallace and Kinahan, *A History of Namibia*; Guillermo Delgado, 'A Short Socio-Spatial History of Namibia', *Land, Livelihoods and Housing; Programme 2015-2018* Working Pa, no. 9 (2018): 22.
- 13 Wallace and Kinahan, A History of Namibia, 116.
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- ¹⁷ Böhm, Residential Segregation, 208.
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- ²¹ Simon, 'Windhoek: Desegregation and Change', 176.
- ²² Wallace and Kinahan, A History of Namibia, 154.
- ²³ Although small-scale armed resistance was not uncommon prior to this.
- ²⁴ Wallace and Kinahan, A History of Namibia, 147.
- ²⁵ Wallace and Kinahan, A History of Namibia, 184.
- 26 Henning Melber, 'Revisiting the Windhoek Old Location', in 3rd Namibia Research Day 30 September 2016 (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2016), 1–23.
- ²⁷ Wallace and Kinahan, A History of Namibia, 191.
- ²⁸ Winfried Speitkamp, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008), 118.
- 29 'Ink Palace'
- ³⁰ Walter Peters, 'Wilheminian Historicism and Objectivity'; *Baukunst in Südwestafrika, 1884-1914: Die Rezeption Deutscher Architektur in Der Zeit von 1884 Bis 1914 in Ehemaligen Deutsch-Südwestafrika (Namibia)* (Windhoek: Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft, 1981); Itohan I. Osayimwese, 'Colonialism at the Center: German Colonial Architecture and the Design Reform Movement, 1828-1914' (University of Michigan, 2008).
- 31 City of Bureaucrats.
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- 33 Nicknamed Reiterdenkmal.
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- 54 David Simon, 'City Profile Windhoek', Cities 12, no. 3 (1995): 139-47.
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- ⁵⁸ Peyroux, 'Urban Growth and Housing Policies in Windhoek', 293.
- ⁵⁹ according to the 2013 <u>Sustainable Urban Transport Master Plan</u> by the City of Windhoek.
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