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**Ruptures and
continuities of struggle:
social movements and popular
struggles in urban Namibia, 1980s**

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Editorial Note

This working paper is based on a lecture that Prof Becker delivered at the university on February 2020. We would like to thank to two reviewers that kindly went through the draft submitted. One of them took the initiative to write a short text in response to the paper, which reflects how the paper is relevant in a wider discourse on urban and larger social struggles in Namibia. We have therefore decided to re-print it here along with Prof Becker's response toward the end.

Ruptures and continuities of struggle: social movements and popular struggles in urban Namibia, 1980s

INTRODUCTION

This working paper is based on a presentation I gave in February 2020 during a lunchtime seminar at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). I am grateful to Guillermo Delgado of NUST's Integrated Land Management Institute (ILMI) and the Department of Architecture and Spatial Planning for inviting me to share some of my research on Namibian urban social movements and popular struggles during the 1980s.

The seminar was an inspiring occasion to share thoughts with young Namibian urban activists and postgraduate students, as well as some older activists who had personal memories of the rising movements of the last decade before Namibian independence. The presentation was accompanied by a series of photographs by John Liebenberg (1958-2020), the eminent photographer who had documented the remarkable community struggles in Namibia in the 1980s. At the time of his unexpected death on 18 February 2020, just a week before my presentation at NUST, I had been in contact for some time with John regarding the possible curatorship of an exhibition of his photography of the 1980s community struggles for a conference on narrations of the nation, which had been planned to take place in Windhoek later in the year.¹

Rather than following standard practice and place acknowledgments in a footnote, I have chosen to open the working paper with pointing out the context of its presentation and discussion, which has been significant for pushing my thinking further. The student-activists in the audience had little knowledge about the history of earlier urban struggles in Namibia but they certainly knew much about and provided deed insights into today's popular politics around urban land, infrastructure and livelihoods. The audience drew fascinating connections, and showed a special interest in learning about the engagement of cultural workers in the movement. It was felt that the new generation of grassroots activists could learn much from activities of BRICKS, the leading media and culture project of the 1980s and early 1990s.

In the light of a new generation of Namibian activists who have been forcefully asking penetrating questions and engaging in collective action over the past few years, the history of the popular urban revolt of the 1980s has become particularly significant again.

I opened my presentation with a personal account of how I had encountered the urban activists in Windhoek at the time of Namibian independence in 1990, with special attention to music and social movements in the final decade of the Namibian struggle for liberation from apartheid colonialism. I

¹ The conference was cancelled/ postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions from March 2020.

used this window into the everyday life of young activists to address social and political developments in Windhoek, and to a lesser extent, other towns in central and southern Namibia in the 1980s.

From 1983 onward urban residents increasingly protested against poor living conditions and the oppression as the everyday experience of life under apartheid colonialism. I showed how the new social movements of the 1980s took up people's day-to-day concerns under the conditions of worsening poverty after the partial abolition of influx control laws, a series of devastating droughts and an economic recession hit the economy in the late 1970s. My central argument was that the popular movements together with the increasingly politicised stance of the mainstream churches filled a political vacuum left by the de-facto dissolution and largely inactivity of SWAPO inside Namibia. The activism of students, workers, women and township resident associations became momentous in the anti-apartheid struggle inside Namibia, however the rising grassroots social movement activity irritated SWAPO, which was suspicious of any activities beyond its control. Tensions grew between the organised political liberation movement and the grassroots activists (Becker, 1995, pp. 171-226).

I raised questions whether these tensions may be responsible for the deplorable fact that there is very little documentation available of the 'internal' struggle by professional historians and in Namibian public history. The 'external' nationalist struggle from exile continues to dominate the historiography of the Namibian struggle for independence.

Revisiting Namibia's little-known social movements of the 1980s invites alternative questions about the nationalist struggle. In addition to considering the significance of grassroots struggles and 'bread-and-butter' issues (as they referred to people's livelihoods), the experience of the 1980s suggests the need to re-think the connections between popular culture and social movements. The decade-and-a-half from the late 1970s through to the early 1990s also highlighted transnational entanglements of struggle within Southern Africa, and specifically the connections and mutual influence between Namibia and South Africa.

WINDHOEK 1990

Let me start with my story: I arrived in Namibia in the early southern winter of 1990, just over two months after the country's day of independence. Those were exhilarating times. Wherever I went, Namibians hummed with excitement – the young and the old, urbanites and rural dwellers, the poor and the comparatively affluent, those who had just returned from years of exile and those who had remained inside the country. Music was everywhere, especially on weekends. Whether I tagged along to *braais* (barbecues) in Windhoek's Katutura township, or joined my new Namibian friends for parties in the city's modest, increasingly racially mixed suburbs such as Windhoek North, similar tunes resounded from ghetto blasters and Hifi systems.

It was fun to start my research on gender and the Namibian liberation struggle during this exciting time of vibrant discussions about the envisaged pathways to the Namibian future, and equally vibrant social life. Quite troubling though for me as a passionate young researcher cum anti apartheid activist from West Germany was that most popular music I heard in Namibia came from South Africa. Most celebrated were the female pop music stars of the time, such as Yvonne Chaka Chaka and Brenda Fassie. Their songs were inevitably blasting away in 1990 at Windhoek township braais, and parties of the educated Namibian left of exile and especially those of internal struggle provenance.

My new friends were an energetic lot. A few weeks after my arrival, some of the younger women activists, with whom I had begun my research on the Namibian women's movement and nationalist politics (Becker, 1995), roped me into a range of activities and social events. Those were mostly confident, university-educated women in their late twenties and early thirties. We talked politics and love interests, and on weekends partied until the early hours.

These women formed part of the small Namibian intelligentsia, which mostly consisted of those who had driven the internal anti-apartheid struggle of the 1980s. This nationalist yet fiercely independent intelligentsia included Black, and a few white², Windhoek-based activists of the urban social movements of students, workers, women, and community activists. They were joined by a few of those who had just returned from exile in countries around the world.

I was flustered: Why would those activists who had fought energetically for independence from Namibia's powerful southern neighbour and former colonizer listen enthusiastically to South African music? In other words, how did it come about that the Namibian activists appeared heavily influenced by South African popular tastes in music?

FROM SOUTH AFRICA, WITH REVOLUTIONARY LOVE

Getting to know the activists of 1980s Namibian urban social movements, making friends, and eventually recording some of their life histories helped to unravel this apparent mystery. I learnt that many of this activist generation had close links with South Africa, where increasing numbers of Namibians had studied and often also become involved in South African anti-apartheid community struggle activism during the 1970s and 1980s. They had brought back ideas, tactics and styles from their participation in student and community activism 'down south', most often in Cape Town, which they put to use back home in Namibia.

A number of the leading activists and intellectuals in Windhoek had been students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) near Cape Town, where I now teach. This university had been established in 1960 as the apartheid higher education institution for 'coloureds', the South African racial category for people of mixed decent (and about everyone else who could not conveniently be classified otherwise, thus including also, among others, South African Chinese and descendants of the 'first people' Khoisan populations). In its early years UWC had been a dull conservative academic environment, dominated by second-rate white academics and geared towards training a mediocre middle class of professionals and bureaucrats for the 'coloured' apartheid administration. By the 1980s however the university had become a radicalized 'intellectual home of the left' and enrolled students irrespective of 'race' and ethnicity. Namibian UWC students and graduates particularly came to play a major role in in the movement of community-based organisations (CBOs, as the social movements were collectively referred to) as activists, human rights lawyers or social workers (cf. Brown and Leys, 2005, p. 52).

In South Africa young Namibians had read Fanon, Gramsci, Lenin, Latin American liberation theorists such as Paulo Freire, and significantly had become acquainted with the South African Black Consciousness (BC) movement, founded by Steve Biko and his comrades from 1968. Many Namibian students had been members and activists with the BC aligned South African Students Organisation (SASO). Some also had played an active role in community struggles on the Cape Flats, the vast area of townships and emerging shack settlements on the outskirts of Cape Town.

A key figure among those Namibian students was André Strauss, who had grown up in Walvis Bay. Strauss was a first year law student at UWC in 1976, the year South African students rose up in a mass revolt around the country. He had been among the sixty to seventy Namibian students at UWC who became involved at the time in their own Namibian student association Namso (Namibian students organisation). The Namibians also linked up with the South African revolt on campus and in the surrounding township communities. Of his time in Cape Town Strauss recalled reading revolutionary literature, fierce battles with police, but also his increasing involvement in cultural groups in fields such as drama. After his return to Windhoek in the 1980s he became a leading intellectual and activist in social movements politics. In an interview recorded in a publication by Colin Leys and Susan Brown

² I capitalize 'Black' to reference ideological and political discourse and a category based on joint historical and personal experience of racism and oppression, encompassing in southern African contexts those subjected to the apartheid categories 'black/African', 'coloured' and 'Asian' but use "white" in lowercase as a social-demographic rather than ideological reference.

(2005) he reflected on what he called the mutual influence of South African and Namibian anti-apartheid activism:

I think the predominant influence on the thinking of the youth, whether the Swapo Youth League, or NAMSU, or some of the church youth bodies, came from the university students coming from South Africa. ...

That was the story of our generation. But I think if you go back you will find all the generations of nationalist leaders, even Toivo, started in Cape Town. Konzonguizi was there, Apollus was there, the Abrahams were there, I think even President Nujoma was there at one stage, together with other workers. There was always a lot of mutual influence between the two countries (cited in Brown and Leys, 2005, p.90).

This influential activist of the 1980s thus drew a line to an earlier generation of Namibians, who had been significant in the nascent nationalism and urban struggles, associated with Windhoek's Old Location in the late 1950s. The 'Old Location' near central Windhoek was home to a socially highly diverse community. It is memorized in Namibian nationalist historiography for its December 1959 resistance against the forced removals to the new apartheid townships of Katutura and Khomasdal while little has been recorded of its social life, including patterns of consumption, cultural and leisure styles, and of course the music, which was played there (but see Jafta et al, 1999).

Similar to what happened in the 1980s, leading political militants in the Old Location came from an incipient Namibian intelligentsia, to name but two prominent activists, Zedekia Ngavirue and Emil Apollus who had studied in South Africa, where they had become involved with ANC politics. A most interesting project of that first urban activist generation was Namibia's first newspaper, which was edited and published by Africans. I have written elsewhere about the *South West News/Suidwes Nuus*, which started publishing in March 1960, a few months after the 10 December shootings of anti-forced removal protesters in the Old Location (Becker, 2015, pp. 27-29). The paper reported overtly political issues from a nationalist perspective; however, as Dag Henrichsen (1997, 23) points out, it was also concerned with the everyday life of Africans, thus speaking to, and about, the social and cultural worlds, in which the political activism was rooted. Popular cultural practices and performance, including new forms of language and humour, sports clubs, beauty contests, and significantly *jive* music were crucial to the urban modernity that emerged in Namibia and across the African continent in the aftermath of World War II. The post-war African modernity was marked by expectations of a bright future and embraced a distinctive cultural repertoire. The first urban generation jazzed and jived – band members of the Namibian *Original Jazz Masters*, as they are known today, were playing jazz in the 1950s Old Location already. Some of them had brought back the love for jazz from stints of migrant labour in South Africa from the 1940s onwards (Informanté, 28 November 2012).

Like the earlier activist generation of the 1950s, the Namibian militants of the 1980s who were at the forefront of urban political and social struggles had personal experience of social life and politics in South Africa and had brought back ideas and practices of anti-apartheid activism, along with South African tastes in popular music, and the alternative sartorial, artistic, and literary styles of South African oppositional politics. It was indeed a striking recognition during my early 1990s fieldwork with activists from the broad spectrum of civil society organisations that the internal, urban Namibian opposition to South African rule was as heavily influenced by South African political and cultural styles, as was the apartheid colonial dispensation itself. The transnational entanglements of southern African social movement politics and popular culture were significant. They complemented, and encouraged, the formation of networks among Namibians of different social and cultural backgrounds. These two transnational and national developments were instrumental in the creation of a cosmopolitan nationalism in urban settings, particularly in Windhoek. It thus comes as no surprise that opponents of Namibian apartheid colonialism appropriated the South African popular music of the time along with the styles and tactics of South African oppositional politics. Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Brenda Fassie and other popular musicians of the 1980s perfectly captured the activist spirit and

boundary-crossing desires of the young activists of the late apartheid era in Namibia as much as in South Africa.

The popularity of South African music in the final years of South African rule over Namibia was not simply a consequence of South African sub-imperialism important as the recognition of the uneven regional ties within southern Africa remains. To an extent at least, it was also a vibrant expression of the border-crossing, cosmopolitan nationalism of the social movements that made up a momentous part of the internal resistance in urban Namibia, like in South Africa's cities.

URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE 1980S

Silences of Namibian narratives of liberation

Although, for several reasons, Namibian civil society proved not to be very robust in the years following independence, the community activism of the late 1980s helped significantly to undermine South African rule over Namibia. Its absence in the historiography of Namibian decolonisation struggles is quite undeservedly a blindspot. It is not the only one. Postcolonial Namibian narratives of nationalism are peppered with silences. In the 21st century the narrative of Namibian anti-colonial struggle has begun to open up, if tentatively, to more inclusive perspectives (Kössler, 2007). Thus far, these have largely been restricted, however, to an increasing consideration of the early anti-colonial resistance in southern and central Namibia. This has recently gained momentum in the context of ongoing, contested negotiations about Germany's colonial genocide in Namibia (1904-1908), and thrust forward by the Namibian apology and reparations movements and their supporters in German decolonization movements.

Regarding the period of the nationalist struggle, between the 1960s and 1980s, however little has changed regarding the postcolonial narrative. Public memory narrations, the country's ritual political calendar and monumentalisation continue to celebrate the armed struggle from exile as the foundation of national liberation. I have in earlier work pointed out particularly the silence surrounding local people's agency in the former war zone, which is linked to the portrayal of local people as having suffered and being traumatised by historical events – an acknowledgment of victimhood rather than of agency, which appears to be a crucial dimension of the foundation myth of postcolonial Namibia (Becker, 2011). This goes along the line: The exile-based political and military nationalism of SWAPO won independence through the barrel of a gun; the part played by the civilian population during the liberation war has been, at best, contingent on the hegemonic discourse.

The silences surrounding the urban, community-based activism during the final decade before Namibian independence reach even deeper. To some extent this relates to what has become known as persistent tension between the 'external' and 'internal' wings of the organized nationalist movement, SWAPO. What is more, and more complicated, the erasure of Namibia's urban struggles of the 1980s is owed to the pronounced history of strained relations between SWAPO and the community organisations. This did not subside after independence. The postcolonial state, particularly during the Nujoma presidency (1990-2005) resisted presumed 'hidden agendas' of certain civil society initiatives (Becker, 2019).

Namibian social movements of the 1980s

In the 1980s, social and political developments in Windhoek and other towns of central and southern Namibia critically challenged the politics of the nationalist struggle. From 1983 onwards residents protested against the price of electricity and formed street committees in several towns; a popular revolt against poor living conditions and the oppression under apartheid colonialism was staged by residents' associations, and movements of workers, students and women, and significantly reflected in an emerging alternative press. A publication in 1987 listed 29 community-based organisations,

ranging from residents' associations to women's, church, education and health groups (Strauss 1987, pp. 184-195).

The social movements took up people's day-to-day concerns under the conditions of worsening poverty after the (partial) abolition of influx control laws led to accelerated urbanization, and an economic recession hit the economy towards the end of the 1970s (Wallace, 2011, pp. 301-2). The deterioration of living conditions of the impoverished urban majority was the first significant factor of the political economy that led to the (up)rise of popular protest. Poverty and urbanization aggravated following a series of devastation droughts in the early 1980s. In the words of one of the leading activists of the grassroots activism, these factors played together and the situation became explosive. André Strauss explained:

During this time, [...] the drought that we had reached its peak, and there was a very big economic crisis. The drought and economic decline intensified the suffering of the people. People just didn't have enough to eat [...]. In the south, people were dying and they came into Windhoek in their thousands, and it was just exploding (cited in: Leys & Brown 2005, p. 92).

The crisis hit urban Namibia at about the same time that the South African regime began to use its colony as a 'testing ground' for limited reform. In the later 1970s South Africa lifted some apartheid restrictions, which it did not yet dare do in the South African heartland. In a significant move, in 1979 the legal requirement for separate residential areas had ended with the promulgation of the Abolishment of Racial Discrimination (Urban Residential Areas and Public Amenities) Act 3 of 1979. The 'reforms' did not just impact on race relations. While the apartheid Bantustans – introduced in Namibia following the devastating Odendaal commission's report of 1963 – remained bent on ethnicity, coded as 'culture', in urban settings it was gradually de-emphasized. In Windhoek, for instance, the mid-1980s extension of Katutura township included the significantly named multi-ethnic Wanaheda section (Wa-mbo, Na-ma, He-rero, Da-mara). The political and legal reforms introduced from the late 1970s contributed the second significant factor that came to play in the rise of new movements and forms of protest.

Social occasions, which had been greatly restricted following the forced removal of Black Windhoekers to the apartheid townships, became gradually revitalized. From the 1970s onwards, night clubs and soccer tournaments provided increasing opportunities, especially for young urbanites, to meet across the fissions of ethnicity. The urban population which crossed ethnic boundaries remained small but became significant for an emerging new layer of activists who, in the mid-1980s, founded social movements and community-based organizations (CBOs).

A third, and particularly suggestive dynamic behind the rise of the new movements was the emergence and life experience of a still small but growing Namibian intelligentsia. Secondary schooling for Black Namibians had become much more widely available for the generation that came of age in the 1970s than it had been before. Growing numbers of young Namibians were keen on post-secondary studies in fields other than the limited opportunities that had been open for Blacks before, ie., teaching and nursing. An increasing number of bright young Namibian men and for the first time including substantial numbers of young women left for studies at South African universities at precisely the moment when that country erupted in vibrant protests of youth and particularly students. Already in 1974 when the conflicts between SASO and the apartheid state escalated at the University of the North (colloquially known as 'Turffloep'), Daniel Tjongarero, later a leading activist of the 'internal' SWAPO participated in the protests as a student and SASO activist when the campus was closed after the arrest of the student leader Abraham Tiro. During the uprisings of 1976 and again during the widespread popular revolt of the mid- and later 1980s students from the apartheid state's colony took part in campus protests and some became intensely involved in township protests, too.

The University of the Western Cape played a particularly significant role in this important process of politicization. In the mid-1970s UWC had developed into a hotbed of Black Consciousness politics

among 'coloured' youth, which influenced a number of young Namibians from the country's southern and central regions. In the mid-1970s about sixty to seventy Namibians were students at UWC, who formed the Western Cape branch of NAMSU, an organisation of Namibian students at South African colleges and universities. The Namibian students of NAMSU linked up with organisations on campus, such as SASO, the university's Student Representative Council, and a number of different groups involved in the uprisings. Namibians became an integral part of the radical politics on and off campus. Advocate Bience Gawanas was among those Namibian students of the 1970s. She was arrested and went into exile straight from 'Bush', as the university was affectionately known due to its geographical and social location. André Strauss listed a broad range of intellectual influences for the activists on the UWC campus and in the townships of the Cape Flats:

There were many influences on us. We laid our hands on everything we could get: Franz (sic! HB) Fanon's Wretched of the Earth, Salinsky, Lenin, Gramsci; I became a fan of Gramsci. Apart from my Christian background – and I was quite a devout Christian at that time – the people who influenced me enormously were Gramsci, Mao Tse Tung, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, and of course Lenin. Lenin played a big role, I wouldn't only say in my life but also in the lives of a large number of students. And then of course there was a big dose of Steve Biko; Henry Isaacs was one of the biggest proponents of the thinking of people like Steve Biko. We were very little influenced by Mandela or Mbeki, but Sisulu was quite popular. And then quite a lot of international writers: the Latin Americans – I can remember Illich and Paulo Freire – and on another level, people like Schumacher, and Amin from North Africa; it was quite a wide spectrum. I think the predominant influence on the thinking of the youth, whether the Swapo Youth League, or NAMSU, or some of the Church youth bodies, came from the university students coming from South Africa. But the real activists who were in charge of Swapo branches – they were light years ahead of most of the students concerning practical politics, because the socio-economic landscape in Namibia was quite different from Cape Town's. We needed to work with them in order to understand the villages, to understand the townships here (cited in Leys & Brown, 2005, p. 90).

Unlike Gawanas, most of the young Namibian activists from 'Bush' returned to and became politically active in Namibia. When Strauss came home for his first university holiday in mid-1976, he joined the SWAPO Youth League. The similarities, as well as the practical and theoretical connections between the liberation struggles in Namibia and South Africa were clear for him and for many among the number of young Namibians studying in South Africa:

These kinds of theoretical influence, as well as the kind of practical experience that we had got in South Africa, meant that students coming from Cape Town could link up easily with Swapo activists in Namibia; quite a lot of things were similar. One of the things about Swapo's constitution that inspired the youth of that time was that it stated quite categorically, we're going to create a classless society (ibid.)

The transnational entanglements of southern African social movement politics and popular culture were remarkable. The members of the nascent Namibian intelligentsia who had studied in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s returned to Namibia and brought back ideas and practices of student politics and the new forms of anti-apartheid activism that had arisen after the 1976 Soweto revolt, along with the 'alternative' styles of South African oppositional politics. The boundary-crossing desires of the young anti-apartheid activists significantly broke down the barriers that prevented people from creating networks among Namibians of different social and cultural backgrounds. This cosmopolitan nationalism remained confined to urban settings, particularly Windhoek; however it became an important driving force of the anti-apartheid decolonization struggle in urban Namibia; the leading activists of the new urban movements of the 1980s came from this background.

Unlike in earlier anti-colonial Namibian movements women played a leading role in the 1980s wave of community activism. Women's autonomous organizing around their practical and strategic gender interests will be discussed below. In addition to the role of the nascent intelligentsia who returned

after studying abroad, mostly in South Africa, in the middle of the decade the release of the (male) Namibian Robben Island prisoners provided a substantial boost for the activism (Wallace, 2011, p. 302).

Organising the community around 'bread-and-butter' issues

The popular movements together with the increasingly politicized stance of the mainstream churches filled the political vacuum left by the de-facto dissolution of SWAPO inside Namibia. While SWAPO, unlike the ANC in South Africa, was never a banned organisation, generations of the organisation's activists and leaders inside the country suffered harsh repression. In the late 1970s repression became particularly brutal and overt political activities became exceedingly difficult to pursue. There were no longer public mass protests, and it even became difficult to carry on with the everyday work of politicization, such as the writing, production and distribution of pamphlets with the aim of political education, as Paul Vleermuis, then SWAPO's coordinator in southern Namibia, recalled (Leys & Brown, 2005, p. 102). Vleermuis, another former UWC student, who soon fell out with SWAPO and was among the founding community activists of the 1980s, explained the lull of political activity:

So things became slow. People wanted to be office-holders in Swapo, but it was difficult to keep those positions, because of the risk of arrest, and the only way to keep those positions and avoid arrest was to bring the work of the organisation to a standstill, using the argument that it was impossible to operate in Namibia (cited in Leys & Brown, 2005, p. 107).

Yet, the harsh repression meted out by the South African occupation forces and their Namibian allies in the so-called 'interim government' was not the only factor for the failure of conventional nationalist forms of mobilisation at that time. Township residents in particular had mostly withdrawn from, and given up hope in, the customary forms of nationalist politics; the urban majority buckled under the entangled pressures of limited reforms of petty apartheid laws, harsh repression, and worsening poverty. The young activists, fresh from political as much as academic university in South Africa, realised that new political forms had to be tested. They developed new political forms, which started with the 'bread and butter' issues that affected the urban poor.

André Strauss gave a detailed account of the process:

There was a political resurgence: we started to organise people again, we were getting to the point where within two or three hours we could get between three and five thousand people to gather for a rally. ... The pressure was becoming too much for people in the townships; all over we had a lot of dissatisfaction, and we organised the people in various kinds of civic organisations. ... But we couldn't link things with our political rhetoric. We were just going around explaining to people what Resolution 435 means, what constitutions are, talking about concepts. But the people's attitude was, 'You can explain to us what scientific socialism is in relation to!' Swapo's constitution: nice, fine! We understand!' There were even people who could recite the constitution, or parts of it! 'But we are hungry!' And we saw people really going hungry, especially the poorest. So we started to look for solutions. We started to put pressure on the state, and some other bodies, and it helped. The municipality became very careful about just putting up prices any more. ... I could give you dozens of examples.

[...] so we were forced to come down from the rhetorical, sectarian level, into the community. The expression, 'bread and butter issues', entered our vocabulary. We decided that if we were going to have any meaningful change, any meaningful development, we must link up with the people (cited in Leys & Brown, 2005, p. 91-92).

It started towards the end of 1983 with mobilisation of urban resident associations, such as KARA, the Katutura Residents' Association. Their initial battles were with the Windhoek municipality around water and electricity tariffs, and the cost of rentals of the township housing stock. This movement

grew over the next few years to include both popular struggles with the administration, and increasingly grassroots and self-help structures.

Students rise up

High school and university students had played a significant part in the emerging Namibian nationalist politics ever since the early 1950s when a handful of young Namibians studied in South Africa since there were no post-secondary educational institutions in Namibia at the time. They were the first generation of Namibian students to pursue higher education and came mostly from Windhoek and the Otjiherero-speaking 'reserves' of central Namibia, where the first secondary schools for black students had been established in the 1930s and 1940s while as late as 1958 only 30 per cent of black Namibian children were in school (Wallace, 2011, p. 247).

The Namibian university students were strongly influenced by the new radical movements that had arisen in South Africa with the renewal of liberation politics from the 1940s instigated by the ANC's "young lions" around Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu. The South African political set-up provided a model for the Namibians' political aspirations. The ANC's Defiance Campaign of the early fifties particularly stirred them, when over 8,000 men and women courted imprisonment as a protest against 'unjust laws'.

The young Namibian intellectuals of the 1950s founded a succession of radically nationalist, anti-ethnic organisations, though these bodies remained small and lacked wider influence. They constituted an emerging intelligentsia, who developed links with nationalist ideologies and organisations, including the group of migrant workers in Cape Town around Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, with whom some of them had established personal links. Also important for shaping Namibian nationalism in the 1950s were nationalist movements in other parts of the African continent, especially the Ghanaian nationalism of Kwame Nkrumah (Emmett, 1990, p. 290). Among the most important of the young intellectuals was Jairetundu Fanuel Kozonguizi, the president of the South West Africa Student Body (SWASB) founded in 1952. Later in the decade this body was succeeded by the South West Africa Progressive Association (SWAPA) when the young intellectuals returned and settled, mostly in Windhoek.

The urban environment grew and provided a fertile space to transform responses to colonialism. In cooperation with the urban population the young graduates gave shape to new forms of resistance. They presented the most radical nationalist politics at the time; they challenged the colonial state and were highly critical of, even opposed to the indigenous leadership; yet exactly for that reason they lacked influence, this was due, partly, to their contentious relations with the traditionalists of the Herero Chiefs' Council, whom they accused of being 'backward' and pursuing 'tribalism' (Emmett, 1999, p. 291). Following the devastating repression of the protests against the removal of Windhoek's old location residents to the new townships of Katutura and Khomasdal though the radical urban politics were crushed.

In the 1970s however young intellectuals and high school students in particular had been a leading radical force in black Namibian politics again during the big contract workers strike and its aftermath in the early 1970s. In 1976 the great majority of black high school students in the southern and central regions – over 1,000 – had taken part in a boycott of the end-of-the-year examinations. The Namibian students declared their dual aims: they demanded an end to Bantu education in Namibia, they also made explicit that they wanted to express solidarity with the student protests in South Africa. Like their predecessors of the 1950s, the Namibian student organisations of the 1970s were small and loosely-knitted associations.

This changed during the mid-1980s due to social movement politics. When thousands of Namibian high school students throughout the country, joined later in the year by those attending the 'Academy of tertiary education' (the predecessor of the University of Namibia, UNAM) in Windhoek, came out for

a massive school boycott in May 1988 to demand the withdrawal of army bases near schools, they were organised already in a new, nationwide student organisation. The *Namibia National Students' Organisation* (NANSO) was formed in June 1984 and became a leading force. NANSO spearheaded many rallies and marches in the last few years of South African rule over Namibia. Several youth leaders were arrested and imprisoned for their activism.

The late John Liebenberg's amazing photographs of the vibrant protests against occupation in the late 1980s invariably point to the tremendous significance of the student struggles. Some times they were directly related to student issues, for instance, students challenged the Rector of the 'Academy' publicly regarding his academic credentials, asking: "Are you Koevoet or Academicus?" Students thus called an institution in question that was still largely in cahoots with the apartheid colonial dispensation. Other student activism was even more overtly connected to broader politics, including massive public rallies in Katutura on Cassinga Day and May Day 1988, which were led by NANSO activists.

Workers' activism

Of equal significance to the rise of the student movement in the years before independence were the revival of the labour movement and the formation of radical nationalist trade unions. The *National Union of Namibian Workers* (NUNW) had officially been launched in 1970, yet it had been dormant and existent mostly in official pronouncements of the exiled SWAPO leadership.

In the mid-1980s workers were not really organised in Namibia, although reportedly remnants of underground NUNW structures existed. In the mid-1980s two moves were made however that came together to give rise to a powerful – though eventually rather short-lived – labour movement in the dying days of apartheid colonialism. On the one hand there was the formation promoted by the 'Robben Islanders', the Namibian political prisoners who were released from the prison island and returned to Namibia in the mid-1980s. In cooperation with the SWAPO Youth League they set up a Workers' Steering Committee in early 1986 (Peltola, 1995, pp. 202-3).

A parallel effort was made by social movement activists who were already active in community organisations, including Lindi Kazombaue and Rosa Namises, and Vezera "Bob" Kandetu who was working with the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN). The CCN, and some of its member churches, played at the time a key role in the urban social movement politics. The following brief explorations of the workers' and women's movements demonstrate the close political and in many instances personal connections within the upsurge of community activism and popular protests. The final discussion of the media and culture activism centred on BRICKS rounds this up and will be closed with some notes on the final demise of the vibrant urban movement politics before Namibian independence.

In late 1984 and early 1985 social workers at the Social Welfare Unit of the Catholic Church, together with other community activists, founded the Workers' Action Committee (WAC). Rosa Namises and Lindi Kazombaue were social workers and community organisers with the Roman Catholic Church in Windhoek who had found themselves inundated by workers complaining about problems in the work place, including low wages, unfair dismissal, and no leave arrangements, as well as their broader living conditions, inadequate housing and transport. Together with Kandetu at the CCN they turned for consultation to church and trade union activists they knew in South Africa. Their first step was to invite a group of workers they knew to a workshop with a South African activist experienced in trade unionism, in order to discuss how best to address the workers' plight. This meeting, in early 1985, was attended by almost one hundred people, from there the WAC was founded (Bauer, 1998, pp. 75-76).

As one of the founding WAC members, Rosa Namises, put it, the original aim of the WAC was to collect information and educate workers about their rights. The activists at the time regarded this as a community programme rather than a classical trade union activity (BRICKS Vol. 6, No.3 July/ August

1990). These activities of organising labour within the context of community mobilisation were soon merged, if not overtaken by a more explicitly nationalist approach.

The first of the new trade unions, NAFAU (Namibian Food and Allied Workers Union) was established in September 1986 through the WAC. Two months after the formation of NAFAU, the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) was established, and in early April 1987 NUNW was reconstituted. The new Namibian workers movement had its first climax on May Day 1987, when about 10,000 workers turned out for a massive rally in Katutura. By that time, the nationalist politics of the 'Robben Islanders' had become central to the unions. Ben Ulenga, a released Robben Island prisoner and generally regarded as a key figure of the formation of the new unions, who played a significant role as secretary general of MUN emphasised the nationalist orientation of the new trade unions:

... the Namibian workers were born with colonialism and the resolution of their problems could come about with the resolution of the colonial problem. Though he conceded that the struggle by workers would go on beyond independence, he emphasised that it would never be achieved without independence (The Namibian, 22 May 1987)

An independent women's movement

Women played a leading role in the 1980s wave of community activism, which was partly built on preexisting support networks of women as those responsible for the survival of families and communities (Becker, 1995). Some of the leading women activists belonged to the still small but rising number of better educated people, including a few who had returned after having completed studies in South Africa, the United Kingdom, and North America.

The central organisation of women formed in 1985 during the heyday of community mobilisation was the Namibian Women's Voice (NWV). The NWV was founded on the analysis that the conventional politics of national liberation had little appeal to women because such politics did not address women's daily problems. The initiative to the formation had come from some of the women who were already prominently active in various forms of community organization, and often worked with the Christian churches, which were associated with the CCN. Among those women were Lindi Kazombaue and Rosa Namises, whose key role in the resurrection of labour organization I already discussed.

One of the NWV founders reflected soon after independence on the political process of mobilising women in the mid-1980s. Her analysis was similar to the one presented by Strauss regarding the movement of community organisations at large. She emphasised however the problems that affected poor black women particularly:

You can't tell people, now if you are hungry, you just have to fight for independence. [...] So you can't come with things that are not really affecting the women's lives. If you talk about Resolution 435 at the time, the women know that it has to be for independence. But they know, the power is not with them to change it. [...] But women could be organised around their own problems. And those they had enough! And get women who want to talk about their problems. And how politics affect their problems. That is how we tried to bring in politics: Why are we in this position? It's because of this and that (cited in Becker, 1995, p. 204).

The NWV, therefore, set out to address not only women's practical gender interests (such as earning an income or securing child-care), but also their strategic gender interests and the project of national liberation. They insisted that their main target group, "grass-roots women" in urban locations and rural areas, were oppressed because they were black, poor women in a situation marked by a web of racist-colonial domination, exploitation, and sexist subordination. The new women's organization soon attracted a large membership in Windhoek and the towns of southern and central Namibia as well as some members in the emerging northern centres such as Oshakati. The NWV had some branches in small towns and even villages but their focus of mobilisation was in urban Namibia, particularly in Windhoek.

The starting point of both their ideology and political practice was the everyday experience of impoverished Black Namibian women. This approach allowed for successful mobilisation of urban women in particular. It also got them into trouble. The NWV's independent and women-focused political orientation earned the wrath of both the colonial administration and the liberation movement. The administration persecuted women activists for women's equality and Namibian independence in similar ways to those involved in other forms of popular struggle. More damaging though, especially in the long run, was the opposition of the SWAPO Women's Council (SWC), which became active again inside Namibia in the second half of the 1980s. The SWC was particularly opposed to the independent women's organization, which they accused of dividing the nationalist liberation struggle through a "separatist feminist women's struggle" (The Namibian, 9 December 1988, cited in Becker 1995, p. 221). In the end, the NWV succumbed to the pressure exerted by SWAPO and dissolved itself in March 1989, when the process leading to independence was already under way.

The experience of the NWV suggests that an independent gender politics was seen as a threat by the male-dominated leadership of the nationalist movement. It was not enough for the NWV activists and other women involved in Namibian political and social struggles to claim to put the goal of the country's independence first. Although most of the leading women activists were members of SWAPO, they were accused of 'feminism' and were charged with giving gender issues undue priority while neglecting the nationalist struggle.

While the dominant liberation movement's opposing stance to the independent women's movement was clearly gendered, the entire drive of SWAPO-aligned yet independent community organisations, including students, workers, and those engaging livelihoods and urban living conditions raised suspicion among the SWAPO leadership and even the rank and file.

Cultural workers laying BRICKS

Another key project of the community organisations focused on democratic communication in print, art, theatre and video. This organisation was known as BRICKS and co-founded in 1984 by André Strauss and Paul Vleermuis, who were among the leading activists who had come back to Namibia after having been students at UWC and had cut their teeth in community mobilisation on the Cape Flats.

The culture and media initiative provided an innovative approach in community mobilisation and social movement politics. It facilitated creative expression and publics among the urban majority. In 1984 the culture and media activists began publishing a community newspaper they named BRICKS. BRICKS established a public forum for the township residents who could read and make contributions to the paper. It was not just a forum of a small group of political activists. Residents wrote about the everyday struggles of collective life in the townships. The paper also announced events in the community.

When BRICKS came out, publishing a community newspaper was a novelty; however, as I discussed above, there had been an earlier, by the 1980s largely forgotten, media initiative run by the intelligentsia activists of the 1950s. Now available as a facsimile reprint, the Southwest News / Suidwes Nuus (SWN), a short-lived alternative newspaper, was published in nine editions in Windhoek in 1960 (Henrichsen 1997). The SWN was the first Namibian newspaper that was published by Africans. The paper followed closely developments in the social and political life of black urbanites as well as the enquiry into the Old Location shootings of December 1959. Similar to BRICKS more than two decades later, the SWN reported on overtly political issues but also spoke to, and about, the social and cultural worlds in which the political activism was rooted.

The BRICKS collective did not stop with the publication of a community newspaper. Over the next two years, activities such as drama, poetry, oral history research and even vegetable growing as a sociocultural project broadened the scope of the Katutura-based organisation (Becker, 1995, p. 183). Eventually BRICKS comprised six different projects and platforms.

BRICKS became particularly significant as the lead actor in a nascent Namibian and particularly Windhoek community theatre movement. By 1986 the cultural activists had established a theatre wing called 'Platform 2000', which until independence in 1990 emphasised 'resistance theatre' in opposition to apartheid colonialism and its Namibian stooges. After independence the focus shifted to 'theatre in development' with plays on topics such as HIV/AIDS. In the later 1980s BRICKS, led by the energetic André Strauss, also connected with Southern African regional and international initiatives of similar orientation. Together with groups from countries such as Zimbabwe, the Philippines and Latin American countries the Namibian cultural activists developed coherent strategies around media and cultural activities in collaboration (Kerr & Chifunyise, 2004, pp. 204-05).

The publishing activity pursued by BRICKS was officially legal. The activists had discovered a loophole in the colonial media laws that allowed them to circumvent censorship; the law stipulated that a publication was not subject to state censorship if it was published less often than twelve times a year. However, as with the other activities of social movements and popular protest, the cultural resistance project clashed with the administration. André Strauss told of several times when he spent periods of imprisonment in solitary confinement because of his prominent involvement in community organisation. On several occasions, he and some of his comrades barely escaped being shot at by police. Community activists received death threats as late as 1989, and some took serious mental strain. During my research in the early 1990s, I heard countless stories of how the security police had deliberately intimidated the activists by breaking, and sometimes just forcefully walking into project offices, confiscating books and records while leaving money and personal valuables untouched. It is worthwhile listening closely to Strauss's recollection, which brilliantly expresses the innumerable pressures the young, university-educated activists experienced. Often they were caught between the harsh political climate and the expectations of their families:

The pressure that we worked under was enormous. We didn't have access to anything. We didn't have access to money for development purposes; we didn't have access to premises. Many times, guests that we had from abroad were escorted out of the country by the police, or were stopped at the airport. We were under constant pressure from the security police. We were what they called 'pimpernels'; in and out all the time, moving through different communities, organising the linking up of branches, working with different communities all over the place. As we were quite well known, especially to the security police, and the local police and municipal people and so on, I couldn't get a job. And we were under a lot of family pressure. If you go to university and get a degree, as I did, my own extended family expected me to start to provide – and I never did that! My wife was just keeping a roof over us, and we were moving from house to house all the time (cited in Leys & Brown, 2005, p. 94).

AUTHORITARIANISM AND NATIONAL LIBERATION

As the mobilisation of students, workers, women and township resident associations became crucial in the internal anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle in Namibia, activists were ever more frequently harassed by the security forces. Importantly, the regime used a double-barrelled approach in their response to popular protest and community organisation. Repression was complemented by soft tactics. The administration eruditely set up 'fake' community projects as part of their 'Winning-the-Hearts-and-Minds' (WHAM) strategy. Those were state-funded initiatives run by local proxies of the administration, whose activities, such as income-generating projects looked at a first glance suspiciously similar to those started from within the movement of anti-colonial community organisations. The colonial state's WHAM tactics thus contributed to the painful tensions between the community activists and SWAPO and jeopardized much of the activism in the later 1980s.

A deeper look reveals crucial differences though. Whereas the WHAM efforts were sponsored by the administration, the anti-apartheid community-based organisations in many cases received comparatively generous outside funding, for instance, from international church aid organisations.

Their politics differed sharply. Many, in fact: most, of the leading community activists were members of SWAPO; they clearly expressed their support of the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 435 of 1978, which called for a ceasefire and UN-supervised elections as the way forward towards Namibia independence.³

Nonetheless, they were accused of undermining the nationalist struggle. The SWAPO leadership in exile, and some though by no means all members of the organisation's rather dormant internal leadership, were particularly critical of community initiatives because those presumably promoted 'development'. SWAPO argued, any developmental efforts before independence would thwart the politics of national liberation and promote the efforts of the Namibian-based 'interim government' to win support and gain acceptance within the country as well as international recognition.

Open strategic debate was hardly possible due to the repressive situation in the country. However, the authoritarian power politics of the SWAPO hierarchies clearly contributed to the conflict. Rumour-mongering and suspicion became rife. Community activists were frequently denounced as 'puppets', thus equating them to those engaged in the South African-sponsored 'internal' government structures.

The tensions reached a critical point in late 1985 when a number of the leading urban activists in Windhoek were suspended from their SWAPO membership rights; they were no longer allowed for instance to attend meetings of their local SWAPO branches. Although they were readmitted to SWAPO six months later, the damage had been done.

When I interviewed activists soon after independence in 1990, the painful memories were still fresh. My interlocutors were convinced that their supposed 'development' activities were not the real reason behind SWAPO's hostile stance towards community activism. They pointed to the fact that the workers' and students' movements had been subjected to the same hostile stance although they were not involved in 'development' activities but focused on straight-forward campaigns and protest. The activists suggested that all independent progressive politics were perceived as threatening by the SWAPO leadership, which insisted on total control. They thus regarded it as a matter of dominance and power politics within the decolonisation movement (Becker 1995, pp. 217-19).

Their sceptical stance of the motives behind SWAPO's hostility to their efforts was plausible. It would be inaccurate to claim that the tensions between SWAPO and the social movements were owed primarily to the administration's crafty strategy. Rather, as my interlocutors pointed out, the social movement community activism was much to the irritation of SWAPO, which was suspicious of any efforts beyond its control.

The authoritarian politics of SWAPO, and the political subjectivities it instilled were deeply infused with social and ideological mistrust of the younger, well-educated, urban activists. To some extent this was owed to their transnational entanglement. Many of the social movement activists had deep roots in the rebellious Black Consciousness ideology of SASO, the South African student organisation that had been founded by Steve Biko and his comrades in 1968. Even if they were ideologically more inclined towards the ANC-aligned South African movements, such as those that had come together in the United Democratic Front (UDF), they had close political, cultural and biographical links with South African community movements, especially in the Western Cape. This added to the suspicion.

³ On grounds of space, this paper does not allow for a detailed discussion of additional strands of even more complex community development politics in 1980s Namibia. A small number of politically radical former SWAPO members, among them Otilie and Kenneth Abrahams, had returned to Namibia in 1978 after having been granted political amnesty at the beginning of the South African administration attempts at an 'internal settlement' for the 'South West Africa' territory. They joined the campaign for internal elections for a Constituent Assembly, which was a rather controversial move at the time when SWAPO called for a boycott of the internal elections. While being part of this process and forming a new political party inside Namibia, known as the Namibia Independence Party (NIP), later part of the Namibia National Front (NNF), they also founded critical initiatives in community development, and educational projects, such as the Jacob Marengo Tutorial College, whose principal Otilie Abrahams remained until her death in 2019 (Becker 2018).

The authoritarianism of the established liberation movement was particularly pronounced in the attempts of patriarchal control of the women's movement. This was exemplified in the experience of the women activists engaged in the Namibian Women's Voice. The insistently independent and women-focused approach of the NWV (affectionately referred to as the "Voice") earned it not only the colonial administration's, but also SWAPO's wrath. It wasn't simply a matter of a male-female conflict. As I pointed out above, SWAPO women had a deeply problematic part in this.

While the women's organisation bore the brunt of the conflict, the exiled SWAPO leadership, and some of the internal SWAPO felt threatened by the entire community-based movement due to the community activists' insistence on a non-sectarian 'grassroots' orientation towards the fight for political independence.

CONCLUSION

The community activism of the late 1980s had helped to undermine South African rule over Namibia. However, for several reasons, Namibian civil society was not very robust and largely faltered in the years after independence. On the one hand this was owed in part to the history of tensions between SWAPO and the community organizations. Co-optation further weakened civil society organisations when a number of leading activists were recruited into senior positions in the civil service after independence. In a number of instances, the activists-turned-civil servants achieved progressive developments. For instance, in the 1990s postcolonial Namibia could certainly be counted as a relative success story in terms of gender equality.

However, there were definite limitations to liberation. Particularly during the Nujoma presidency (1990–2005) the postcolonial state regularly resisted presumed 'hidden agendas' of certain civil society initiatives, which revealed authoritarianism and a deep-seated social and cultural conservatism. The Namibian Women's Manifesto, for instance, an attempt in 1999 to bring together a coalition to push for increased representation of women in the political sphere, was denounced as deflecting from gender equality because some of the manifesto's proponents were known for their advocacy against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation (Akawa, 2014, pp. 184; 192).

The local and global worlds of the 21st century have seen profound change, which is faced by Namibia's young social movements. There can be no doubt that over the past few years the post-independence lull of civil society activism has been replaced by a new vibrancy. The popular politics of young movements such as the Landless People's Movement (LPM) and Affirmative Repositioning (AR) are engaging Namibia at a new crossroads. Recently, a new generation of Namibian activists has given decidedly local expression to global movement politics such as the Global Climate Strike in 2019, and Black Lives Matter in 2020. One fascinating development is owed to an engaging vibrant scene of young artists in the performing as well as the visual arts, who take up pressing concerns in their works and come together in pulsating events such as the 2019 Owela Festival. Young activists and activist-researchers have also become active in long-standing grassroots politics such as the members of the Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG) and the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN). Some of those were participated and made brilliant interventions during the seminar at NUST where this paper was presented. Many of the young activists are urbanites and often thinking deeply about "writing" urban spaces (cf. Tjirera 2019). All these activist and artistic initiatives are part of the essential conversations about the Namibian past, present and future: How do the various strands of activism and the arts imagine Namibia as their 'project'? It is my sincere hope that this paper and the historical reflections on earlier chapters of Namibian urban social, political and cultural movement politics make a tiny contribution.

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- Newspapers:* Informante, The Namibian, BRICKS

REVIEW

I enjoyed reading this work. It fills a gap and invites further engagement around social movements and popular struggles in Namibia during apartheid and shortly after independence. It also triggers critical inquiry beyond this period. This gap in local scholarship is even evident in the post-apartheid context, for example, we lack critical inquiry into the various phases and practices of protest and resistance cultures in the last three decades. Therefore, this paper provides interesting insights into the intersecting anti-apartheid work, especially in the 80s.

Prof. Becker is right when she points out that we (contemporary youth activists) know very little about urban struggles during apartheid. She reflects on the recent rise of social movements in Namibia, noting the significance of looking back at our shared and trans-national histories of popular urban revolt. Hence reading this paper, one gets a sense about the complex dynamics in the activist work of young scholars, women, intellectuals, social and cultural workers, churches, media and political organizations. I got a sense of what it meant to organize under the repressive conditions of apartheid and the internal tension of doing feminist work under Swapo (both during apartheid and in the new dispensation).

The paper includes personal anecdotes of being a researcher arriving and working in the newly independent Namibia. It accounts and narrates the experiences of post-apartheid elation, a time which many Namibians were excited about the prospects of a new democracy. Becker also poses the following questions regarding popular South African music that was widely played during this time. She writes:

Why would those activists who had fought energetically for independence from Namibia's powerful southern neighbour and former colonizer listen enthusiastically to South African music? In other words, how did it come about that the Namibian activists appeared heavily influenced by South African popular tastes in music?

Let me attempt to answer parts of these questions. I argue for complexity when engaging with what we refer to as South African music (by Black artists) because it is more than just South African music. Although it is produced in South African contexts, its genealogies can be traced elsewhere on the African continent. Therefore, we resonate with this sonic. When I hear Brenda Fassie and Yvonne Chaka Chaka's music whom I grew up listening to in Katutura, I do not just hear South Africa, I hear pan-Africana imaginaries, solidarity and shared struggles. We can expand on this argument by referring to ANC struggle music in exile or Strike Vilakazi recording with Namibian musicians at SWABC studio in the 1970s). Sound circulated by its nature of borderlessness and universality, and this is how it was mutually influenced.

Hence, the paper misses the opportunity to refer to the range of local musical practices that played a big role in social movements and popular struggles during apartheid. Apart from the Original Jazz Masters which the paper refers to, there were many other musical ensembles that performed live music in many Namibian towns. This includes bands such as the *Ugly Creatures*, *#Kharixurob*, *Outjo Singers*, *The Rocking Kwela Boys*, *The Chiquitos*, to name a few. Most of this music remained underground, even after independence. I dwell on music here because a lot of local popular culture have suffered erasure and marginalization, even in Namibian historiography of the people's struggles and social movements.

The notion of mutual influence deserves more unpacking to show how ideas and concepts circulated through the work and mobilities of African intellectuals. This will help us unpack much of the complexities and tensions that the paper already points to. Reading about the tensions between Swapo and other internal anti-apartheid groups is interesting. This reminds me of the tensions between youth/student activists inside the country and those coming from South Africa e.g. the University of

Western Cape. Dr. Yvette Abrahams wrote about these tensions already in 1983 in her discussion of the emergence of a Namibian student movement.

As we speak back to the silences and erasure in the historiography of urban social movements, it is important to speak beyond the Windhoek experience when we write about Namibian urbanity. I found this paper rather limited to Windhoek when the geo-politics of social movements were entangled and trans-local, as much as they were trans-national. Again, popular cultures would have been ideal to draw from here.

Speaking of mutual influence, I recall one example that Prof. Becker shared with me when we once run into each other during our walks at the Liesbeek river in Cape Town. This is the story of how the 1971 contract labour strike also influenced workers in South Africa to organize against the contract labour system. This is a good example of mutual influences between the two countries. I would have love to read about this too.

What happened to BRICKS? What led to its dissolving in post-apartheid Namibia? What does this tell us about civil society and activism in the last three decades of Namibian democracy? What does this tell us about the intergenerational dynamics relating to the continuity of social movements and popular culture post-1990? These are the kinds of questions that this paper has unearthed for me. As a Namibian scholar of performance studies, it is significant to engage with these questions because arts, culture and heritage education has been depoliticized and demobilized in the last three decades. We must dare to respond to this as we re-encounter the decolonial turn. This paper is critically useful in the here and now. Thank you, Prof Becker.

Here is an extended reading list:

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RESPONSE

I have really enjoyed reading this engaging review of my paper. Thank you very much Mushaandja for close reading and tremendously insightful comments!

The reviewer accurately identifies some omissions and indeed gaps in my paper. These are, if I read his comments correctly, on the one hand related to a lack of in-depth engagement with the history of Namibian music and, on the other hand, aesthetic and performative dimensions of Pan-African culture.

The reviewer rightly points to some of the earlier popular musicians in pre-independence Namibia, who were however mostly forgotten around the time of independence. Certainly their music was not available in record stores, on the airwaves, or even in live performances. Recent projects such as the 'Stolen Moments – Namibian Music History Untold' archival research and exhibition of photographs and recordings are now importantly rectifying this blind spot.

I am intrigued by the reviewer's comments about the Pan-African sonic aesthetics that rendered certain South African musicians attractive to Namibians. This important comment points out the need to look deeper into transnational and Pan-African connections of the politics of decolonization and popular culture.

Finally, I am incredibly thankful that the review identifies some key challenges for further research. Mushaandja raises important questions regarding the trajectories and legacy of cultural resistance projects such as BRICKS. These questions featured also prominently during the seminar discussion where I presented the paper at NUST earlier this year. I feel that it would be wonderful if Namibian researchers could take this up in interdisciplinary research perspectives that combine social, historical, aesthetic and performative aspects.

It makes me happy that my little paper has raised questions and brought up suggestions – this is more important to me than providing answers...

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