Namibia's Housing Crisis in Perspective

Namibian
Journal
of Social
Justice
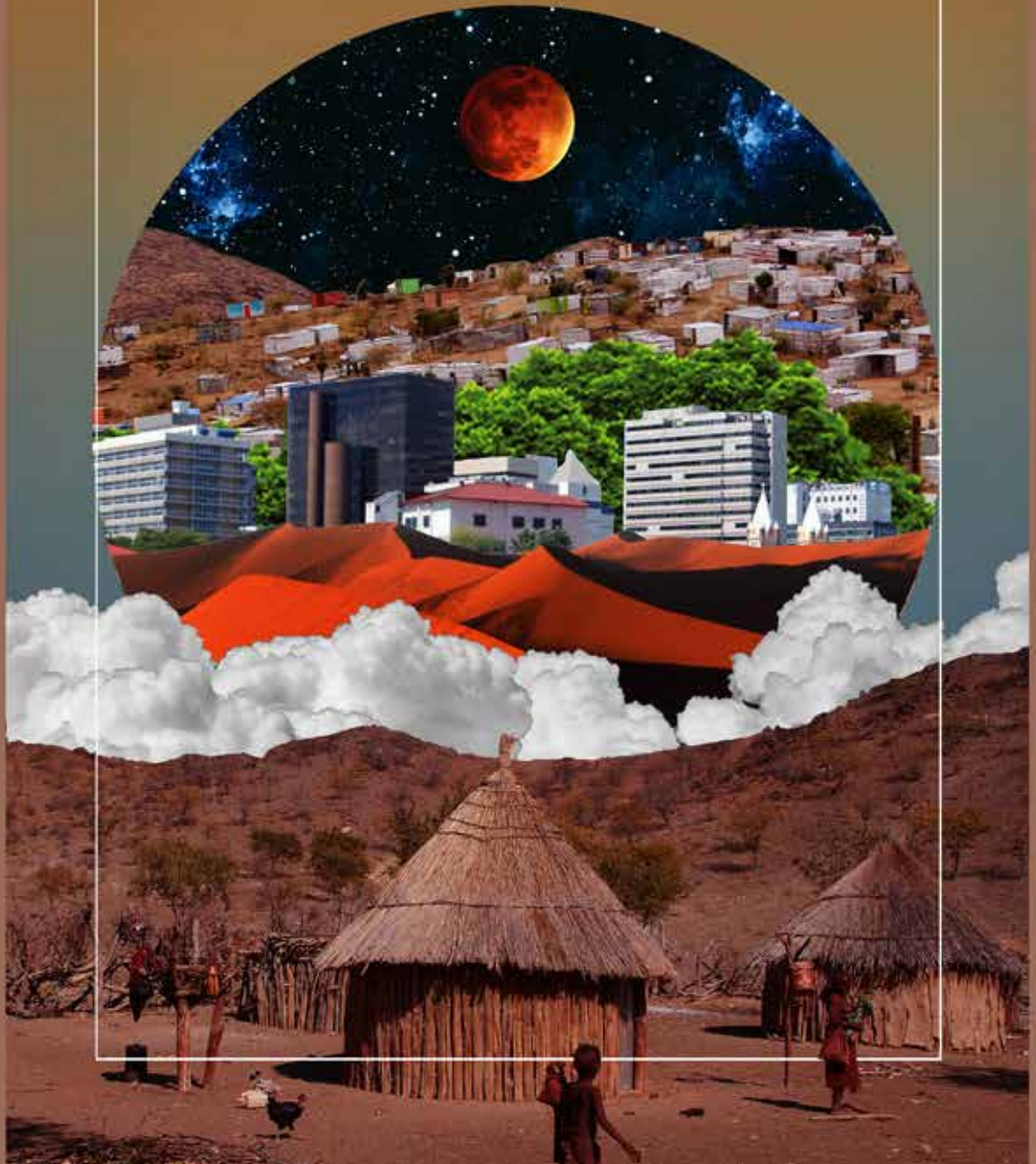
Namibia's Housing Crisis in Perspective

Volume 1,

July 2021

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Claiming Land and Housing – Imagining a Just Society: Precarity and Urban Citizenship in Windhoek

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Abstract

This article describes the forms and conditions of access to land, housing and municipal basic service infrastructures among the residents of the precarious urban fringes of Windhoek. It pays particular attention to the ways in which they understand the situation and how they justify their demands of improved access. The article discusses how the issue of urban land, housing and basic services can be interpreted beyond its practical, concrete aspects as simultaneously indexing broader issues such as urban and national citizenship, principles of access and redistribution, and ideals of a good society. Formal mechanisms of access to land and housing, as well as concomitant basic services such as water, electricity, and sanitation, depend on one's ability to participate in the housing market as a buyer. In contrast, for those who live in informal settlements or

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otherwise informal conditions in the urban fringes, access to these necessities is partial, incremental and dependent on relations with relevant authorities, mainly those representing the City of Windhoek. The residents criticise the authorities for failing to provide improvements and justify their pleas in terms of need, fairness, or their rights as Namibians instead of the market-based access that dominates the formal sphere of provision and planning. Their visions of a better future are twofold – they often entail dreams of ascending to the propertied classes but also ideas of a caring, responsive public authority that honours the perceived mutual obligations between the citizens and authorities. The article is based on interviews, recorded meetings and observational material from fieldwork carried out in 2016 and 2019.

Keywords: housing, informal settlements, urban citizenship, everyday governance

Introduction

This article deals with the arguments that residents of the precarious urban fringes of Windhoek make to justify their claims for access to land, housing and municipal basic services commonly associated with decent housing, for example safe water, electricity and sanitation. It further seeks to situate these arguments and their implications in the context of Namibian history and socio-economic structures. Urban land,

housing and basic service provision have emerged as a widely recognised problem in Namibia. People talk about it constantly; it appears repeatedly in media stories and social media discussions. It has become prominent in political mobilisation (as the 2020 regional and local elections clearly attested), and, most importantly, it is a question that a considerable number of Namibians deal with as part of their everyday lives.

Not surprisingly, this issue has also received increasing attention in recent scholarly literature. The existing literature tends to be focused on potential practical solutions or policies through which the problem could be targeted (Jauch, 2015; Weber & Mendelsohn, 2017; Chiripanhura, 2018; Delgado, 2018; Delgado et al., 2020). While I acknowledge the importance of such literature, my objective here is different. I suggest that precisely because of its perceived importance and visibility in the Namibian public sphere, the issue of urban land, housing and basic services can also serve as a social scientific window into the existing structures and emergent themes of Namibian society. While housing and basic services are a central condition for decent living, the arguments and claims made about these simultaneously reveal facts and views concerning social justice, principles of access and redistribution, urban citizenship and attendant relations between citizens and authorities. I refer

to these here not as given conditions but as something that is actively made through social action. For example, urban citizenship or the day-to-day governance of urban areas does not simply follow automatically from the legal and administrative provisions in place but rather results from the ways in which the various social actors involved use, challenge, modify or bypass such regulations (Blundo & Le Meur, 2008; Cornea, Véron & Zimmer, 2017). In practice, rights and access are realised in various degrees resulting from overlapping social, political and economic factors and their contestation in multiple and sometimes ambivalent forms of struggles and negotiations between residents, governmental agencies, social organisations and movements, and political authorities (Das, 2011; Holston, 2008; Bayat, 2010; Metsola, 2018; Lemanski, 2020; Watt, 2020; Anand, 2017; Fredericks, 2018). Such agency of the marginal urbanites often defies simple categorisations such as 'resistance' (Ortner, 1995).

The article finds that the people living in the informal settlements or otherwise precariously on the urban fringes mainly – but not exclusively – advocate access to land, housing and basic services based on need, fairness, or their rights as Namibians instead of the market-based access that dominates the formal sphere of provision and planning. In practice, improvements in tenure security and access to

housing and basic services for informal residents depend on forging relations with relevant authorities, mainly those representing the City of Windhoek. The attitude of the residents on these relations is ambivalent. On the one hand, they realise that they depend on these relations for improvements, but on the other hand, the authorities are widely criticised for failing to provide improvements because of 'corruption' or 'forgetting' the people. Visions of a better future are twofold – they often entail dreams of ascending to the propertied classes but also ideas of a caring, responsive public authority that honours the perceived mutual obligations between the citizens and authorities.

The article is based on material collected during fieldwork periods in 2016 and 2019. The main body of material consists of 59 recorded semi-structured interviews with residents and 21 with officials, politicians, and local experts, 16 recorded public meetings between residents and the City of Windhoek, together with three other meetings, as well as extensive notes from my interactions and observations in the field. I have analysed these through close reading focusing on the central themes and discursive structures in the materials. Complementary materials include official documents, a survey of the media, secondary literature, as well as materials accumulated during earlier

fieldwork periods from the 1990s onwards.

Overview of the Housing Situation in Windhoek

In principle, "access to basic services and shelter…as the inherent right of human beings in Namibia" (Republic of Namibia, 2009, p. 21) has been officially recognised and informal housing declared a crisis (Nakale, 2019). Yet, the urban housing and service provision situation has not improved over time. Namibia's independence brought about freedom of movement, leading to a rapid increase in rural-urban migration driven by rural poverty as well as by a perception of better opportunities and the promise of modernity in urban areas. Windhoek grew from 147,000 inhabitants in 1991 to 326,000 in 2011 (Namibia Statistics Agency, n.d. b, p. 39; Republic of Namibia, 1994, appendix C) and its rapid growth has continued. However, jobs are scarce and generally low-paid in the contemporary Namibian economy, leaving many of the migrants relying on odd jobs and small-scale entrepreneurship. Coupled with lack of efficient systems of subsidised public housing, this has led to expansion in informal houses. By 2016, 39.7 % of urban households were living in shacks and in Khomas, where Windhoek is located, the figure stood at 42.3 % (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017, p. 101).

As I have argued in more detail elsewhere (Metsola, 2020), a dual logic continues to define access to land, housing, infrastructure and service provision, resulting in practically segregated urban spaces till now 31 years after the end of segregation based on apartheid policies. While segregation has taken on an economic basis, in some ways it has become more, not less, extreme than before. On the one hand, while formal apartheid is long gone, in its stead a range of practically discriminatory housing arrangements have become prominent, based on who can afford them. Most new residential areas that have appeared especially at the southern edge of town, are gated communities. Additionally, there is the more recent phenomenon of "lifestyle estates", new suburban spaces detached from the city itself, offering islands of affluence and tranquility for the upper and middle classes. On the other hand, at the other end of the wealth and income scale, the rapid growth of the city together with shortage of affordable land and housing has made staying with relatives or friends or settling in the informal areas the only options for an increasing number of people. The first of the above situations, propertied citizenship (Roy, 2003; Hammar, 2017; Heer, 2018), depends on one's ability to pay while the second is one of conditional, relational access that depends on the ability to cultivate relations – to politicians, administrators, neighbours and relatives (Metsola,

2020; Metsola, 2021). The formal city structure, planning and administration is organised according to the former logic, to which a large part of the city's inhabitants do not have access; it is not "affordable" to them, as the phrase goes (see also Fjeldstad et al., 2005). Yet they persistently seek to establish themselves and advance their lot in the city. In the lives of urban "informals", access to infrastructures and services are a central part of their daily struggles and social relations. Meanwhile, for the propertied classes, access tends to follow much more unproblematically from property ownership.

Obviously, the sheer volume of the growth of the city's population over the past three decades has placed an enormous strain on the capacity of the local authority to deal with the demand for land, housing, and basic services. Indeed, lack of resources was something that many of my City of Windhoek interlocutors referred to, pointing out the need for the central government to step in. Yet, this is not all there is to the matter. Several human-made factors also seem to contribute to the land and housing shortage. First, while there have been several social housing initiatives, their scope has been modest. These include the Build Together Programme, meant to provide housing loans for low-income households, the Mass Housing Programme that has sought to provide subsidised housing units for middle-income recipients,

and most recently, the Mass Urban Land Servicing Project that started in 2016. Second, there are various obstacles related to planning, policies and building regulations. The technical regulations concerning residential land delivery make the process complicated, slow and costly (De Vries & Lewis, 2009; Weber & Mendelsohn, 2017, pp. 40-48). Another issue that was repeatedly raised as problematic by my respondents was the official requirement set out in the National Housing Policy that no residential plots under the size of 300 m² should be formalised (Republic of Namibia 2009, p. 21). Despite the problems this raises for informal settlement upgrading, influential politicians have maintained that the requirement is essential for the realisation of decent standards of living. In practice, it has been possible to cut down on plot size up to 150 m², but only with ministerial permission. The new Development and Upgrading Policy of the City does not allow relaxation of plot sizes below 200 m² (City of Windhoek 2019, p. 27). The City of Windhoek may also encourage two households sharing one plot to ease upgrading processes. This had just taken place in a part of the Havana settlement, Havana Proper, dating back to the early 1990s, at the time of my fieldwork in 2019.

Third, apart from such technical impediments, several observers have pointed to the effects of increasing privatisation and financialisation of

land (Jauch, 2015; Delgado, 2018; Chiripanhura, 2018; Lennon, 2018; Melber, 2018). The violent colonial appropriation of land in Namibia is a well-known part of the country's history. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the alienation and privatisation of land is a thing of the past. Despite efforts towards land reform, there are persistent, strong trends to the opposite direction. One of these is the grabbing and fencing of communal lands by the powerful, which contributes to rural poverty (Odendaal, 2011; Mendelsohn and Nghitevelekwa, 2017) and rural-urban migration. Another is the marketisation and financialisation of urban land, which, in the context of high demand and low supply, has driven the prices of land and rentals upwards (Jauch, 2015; Delgado, 2018; Chiripanhura, 2018; Lennon, 2018; Melber, 2018). Notably, this is not necessarily a matter of private versus public as such, but rather of one kind of private ownership, namely speculative investment, crowding out another, namely the ideal of private homeownership in conditions of extreme economic inequalities. An additional factor related to land speculation is the way in which political position is often allegedly utilised to strike lucrative land deals or to get tenders in construction and servicing (see e.g. Immanuel, 2014).

There are efforts to bypass such structural and institutional obstacles and practically fill the gap between complete informality and fully formal housing that is inaccessible to an increasing number of residents. Important among these has been the saving group approach, whether under the Shack Dwellers Federation umbrella or independently, in which people form groups to pool resources and skills for obtaining land, building houses and installing service connections (Chitekwe-Biti, 2018; Delgado et al., 2020). Apart from this, the City of Windhoek's upgrading system offers certificates of occupation and leasehold agreements that provide degrees of tenure security in informal settlements. Such arrangements have recently received legal backing from the Flexible Tenure Act, which created two new forms of group-based urban land tenure, the starter title and the landhold title that offer individual rights within a block of land ('block erf') (Republic of Namibia, 2016, p. 4). However, while such developments may have potential for improving the quality of life for many, for example by facilitating incremental construction, they do not automatically offer a way out of the affordability impasse. The idea that provision is based on cost-recovery remains firm. As stated by the Development and Upgrading Policy: 'The concepts of full cost recovery and "user pay" should be the underlying principles of any low and ultra-low-income land development project or programme' (City of Windhoek, 2019,

p. 4) and "the level of service provided must coincide with the affordability levels of households" (City of Windhoek, 2019, p. 6). In this way, the existing institutional regime makes it possible for "informals" to attain modest degrees of shelter, services, and tenure security but, at the same time, places limits on these. According to the income analysis presented in the 1999 development and upgrading strategy, only 4 % of informal residents would be able to afford individual service connections (City of Windhoek, 1999, p. 15). Hence, so long as the cost-recovery principle is adhered to, most informal residents are not able to proceed beyond the lowest levels of upgrading.

Access to Land, Housing, and Basic Services in Informal Areas

Much of public attention around the issue of access to land, housing and services focuses on antagonistic situations, such as conflicts over land occupation. However, from the perspective of the residents, such occurrences are fleeting moments in the flow of an everyday life that is far less dramatic and newsworthy, yet immensely consequential. This "everyday" is characterised by what Asef Bayat (2010) has called the quiet encroachment of the ordinary, the incremental efforts towards better conditions and more secure access to land, housing, and basic services.

This quiet encroachment takes place mostly on municipal land, and therefore the residents of informal settlements constantly have to adopt different kinds of relations and tactics towards municipal actors. They do not usually face an immediate threat of removal but are stuck in a state of relatively permanent temporariness or in-betweenness. In terms of land tenure, even though informal residents lack titles to the land they occupy, City officials have largely tolerated their presence since the 1990s and the City's registration and upgrading system offers intermediate degrees of tenure security. Access to housing is similarly partial. Building of permanent structures is not permitted before plot demarcation, servicing, and titling, and in any case, tenure uncertainties inhibit the residents from investing in immovable property. Despite this, it would be a mistake to consider the informal settlements a uniform mass of shacks. They are socially differentiated. Some residents are relatively long-established in their neighbourhoods and may have gradually extended their shacks into multi-roomed houses and made various improvements such as inside pit latrines, illegal electricity connections, solar power systems, or tiled floors. Others are newcomers who are yet to enter the City's registration systems. Some rent shacks that others own or back rooms in other people's yards.

For their access to formal infrastructure and services, including roads, sanitation, waste collection, electricity, water, and transport, the residents of the informal settlements are at the mercy of the considerations of the City, just as with land and housing. According to regulations, the municipality does not provide individual services until land tenure is formalised and plots demarcated (see also Karuaihe & Wandschneider, 2018). So far, the only way to bypass this requirement has been to obtain a piece of land collectively, as saving groups do, and then subdivide this 'block erf' into individual plots for participating households which install individual connections on their own. The City treats the group as a single owner or lessee and provides single infrastructural connections to the block. Apart from such group properties, the reality in informal settlements is mostly that of a rudimentary street network, shared pre-paid water, illegal tapping of electricity, DIY sanitation, insufficient waste collection, few police stations, and no fire brigades. In this context, people depend on a combination of modest advances in public provision and what I have elsewhere called social infrastructuring (Metsola, 2021), by which I mean informal, organic systems of personal networks, knowledge, pooling and sharing, for example in procuring water and electricity, shelter, or security.

In principle, the City of Windhoek reacted to the phenomenon of informal settlements quite rapidly. In the early 1990s, three 'reception areas' were established where new residents were given a lease-based right of occupancy with rudimentary services. As the informal areas spread further, the City outlined a housing policy and a development and upgrading strategy in the late 1990s (City of Windhoek, 2000, 1999). These documents advocated the notion of informal residents as deserving citizens and active agents seeking to improve their conditions instead of being mere problematic lawbreakers. The development and upgrading strategy combines an in-situ upgrading of existing settlements with establishing new residential areas under a sites-and-services model. The original version outlined seven development levels that differed in terms of resident income, tenure arrangements, block layout, service levels and payments. The current strategy, issued in 2019 and renamed 'Development and Upgrading Policy', has been simplified into four levels but the idea of incremental upgrading in tenure security and services remains (City of Windhoek, 2019). The City surveys and registers residents for the purposes of upgrading, recording for instance the duration of their residence and their income levels. The areas to be upgraded tend to be heavily congested, which means that for plot demarcation and servicing to happen, some residents would have to

move. This has become a bottleneck, as suitable relocation sites are in short supply.

Evidently what matters most is not the policy as such but how efficiently it is implemented. Overall, advances in in-situ upgrading have been modest, with the city growing mostly through the divergent trajectories of planning and establishment of new neighbourhoods from scratch (greenfield development) and spontaneous informal settlement growth. For the informal settlements, the situation of partial informality and partial formality has become a relatively lasting state, with most informal settlements advancing only to the stage of basic communal services, such as shared water points, communal toilets, main roads and mast lights, and advances to the first degree of tenure security (certificates of occupation and leasehold agreements). Some of them have remained in relatively the same condition since the early 1990s (which was a matter of major frustration to those participants of my research who lived in such areas). This might be partly a matter of prioritisation. According to the Development and Upgrading Policy, the Council prioritises bringing basic communal services to 'planning areas', that is, informal settlements previously without any formal provision (City of Windhoek, 2019, p. 6). As such areas are constantly growing and as funds for upgrading are limited, such basic

provision might overtake further advances in other settlements.

This situation is often characterised as the residents of informal areas being invisible or forgotten, and this was the way in which the residents themselves often depicted their situation. Such a portrayal correctly identifies the insufficiency of the solutions tried so far and indexes the moral outrage on society that has continued to permit the coexistence of extremes of affluence and poverty side-by-side. However, what it simultaneously overlooks is the existence of the precarious urban residents in the Namibian context not as an invisible and inconsequential category but as a recognised problem – whether understood as a humanitarian one of undignified life, as a security one of potential crime, an economic one of underutilised resources, or a political one of a significant constituency. Certainly, this problem-centred perception obscures much of their agency, including the variety of their situations, the ingenuity of their solutions on livelihoods and infrastructure (Metsola, 2021), their social realities, and overall, their lives in totality and not just an example of one or another problem. However, the problem-centred perceptions of different kinds of authorities and the general public also encourage other forms of agency that the informal residents direct towards these counterparts. These include the gradual

efforts to establish themselves on a site and gain degrees of recognition and access to tenure and services. They also include the pressure that the informal residents place on City operatives and politicians as an undeniable and large presence in the city. This pressure takes multiple forms – expressions of need in the conventional and social media, in public meetings, in occasional acts of protest and, in the 2020 elections, also voting decisions. As the tactics of gradual advancement are the focus of another article in progress, I will here concentrate on the latter – the arguments the residents make to justify their claims to land, housing and services, and what these justifications reveal about their visions of a just society.

Residents' Perspectives

In September 2019 I sat at the roadside with a group of residents in one of Windhoek's informal settlements. The neighbourhood had been there for about ten years and had become quite congested. As in many other such neighbourhoods, the residents had access to prepaid water taps, some communal toilets but no formal electricity. After our discussion on their lives and conditions and about my research, one of them who was a local leader in the area wanted to show me a shack that burned down the previous night. Looking at the charred remains of what had been someone's home the previous day

brought the strong realisation of the way in which inequalities are embodied in infrastructural conditions (see also Latour, 1990; Larkin, 2013; Chance, 2015). For people who live in shacks, security from fire remains a luxury as they do not have access to safe buildings, fire brigades cannot easily access their homes and they rely on such methods as candles or gas and paraffin stoves for their lighting and cooking. Fires are often publicised in the media, as they are so extreme, eradicating people's possessions and at worst, their lives. A particularly devastating fire occurred in Twaloloka settlement in the coastal town of Walvis Bay in July 2020, razing some 150 homes and sparking bitter reactions from residents and commentators (Ngutjinazo, 2020). A member of the Twaloloka Committee argued: 'We have been asking council to move us and to give us each an erf. Look what happened now. Parents have lost a child; people have lost everything. They only have the clothes on their back. Something needs to be done to assist our people and it needs to be done now' ("Fire leaves", 2020). At the site of the fire in Windhoek, my companions expressed similar sentiments, putting the blame on the City for not permitting them to build proper houses.

Indeed, the conditions in informal settlements should not be interpreted as simply resulting from poverty – and in fact, the socio-economic status of their residents varies considerably

– but also, and significantly, from what the regulations and policies concerning informal residence permit. While the residents rely on informal networks of exchange and support for their daily survival (Metsola, 2021), the basic parameters of housing and service provision depend on the City of Windhoek. Hence, the City features prominently in their explanations of what they need – or "the government", as often the different levels of government are not separated in their parlance.

Residents in different informal areas have different emphases on what they most need. Depending on what services their areas have already received, the residents speak of needing water, electricity, and sanitation, but also such issues as high mast lights, better roads, taxi ranks, and fire brigades. However, the eventual objective is to get plots. Let me try to unpack this desire in a bit more detail, as it takes different forms, with multiple justifications.

Overall, the desire to "have" land should be understood against the background of the people of informal settlements living in a context where having land is the key to a decent existence. Furthermore, such recognised tenure rights are a precondition to individual service connections, which adds to their significance. Additionally, Namibians face the collective trauma of the dispossession and displacement of many communities by colonial land

grabs, or if not this, prevention from moving, settling, and acquiring land freely, which imparts a heightened symbolic significance to the land issue. Connected to this history, many 'previously disadvantaged', that is, the current black elite, have become landowners since independence, which also plays a part in setting an example. The obvious injustices and inequities of the histories and existing arrangements of land tenure certainly come strongly to the fore in my respondents' accounts.

Residents of the informal areas are familiar with different land tenure systems that allocate access in different forms. Market-based freehold ownership is obviously the one most prominent in Windhoek, and the norm in official planning and allocation practices. However, many Namibians also have experience of communal land tenure arrangements. This is where land is allocated for a small fee while the ownership of that land remains vested in the community, administered by the traditional authority and recognised by the land boards. Apart from these, as I argued above, the real, everyday nature of landholding in the informal settlements follows a model of intermediate, semi-formal tenure arrangements that acknowledge such factors as degrees of need or length of presence and may be codified in the City of Windhoek's registers or certificates of occupation. The latter is well illustrated by the following story of one of my

respondents of how an absentee shack owner tried to evict her and her sister from an informal dwelling that they were renting:

> *The owner of the place decided that [my sister] must leave the place. She went to the committee. So, the committees knew her, and the councillors. She...told that 'the owner of the place just wants me to move out of the blue'...and the committees decided, 'no, we know you, who is the owner of the place then?' 'No, the owner of the place stays in Swakop' 'And you have been taking care of the place. In this case we can't let you go.' The committees decided that 'you are going to just stay next door, you are going to make your shack just at the next...open [space].'*

Against this background of multiple land tenure regimes (see also Mooya & Cloete, 2012), it is perhaps not surprising that in the residents' words, 'having' land may refer to freehold but also to leasehold or any form of secure, formally approved tenure. Furthermore, such different registers for talking about the forms of having land can be mobilized in different ways in different situations. When resources are meagre, the view of land as a form of commons to which everybody should have equal access can be mobilised in efforts to achieve more secure tenure while in situations where one has sufficient resources the idea of permanent individual land ownership might be dominant.

When it comes to how one might reach the goal of having land and associated services, there are different visions. Very few can afford the market prices for land. Hence, it is perhaps not surprising that the views of the informal residents run counter to the official norm of affordability. They tend to advocate the view that everyone should have access to land, housing and basic services. Some speak of being prepared to "meet the government halfway", meaning making contributions below market prices for access to stable tenure. For example, one local leader of an informal neighbourhood spoke in a public meeting between City representatives and residents in September 2019:

> I want to hear what exactly is holding these locations [from] develop[ing] since we come here in 1990s?

> City official: We don't have money.

> Crowd: Aye…

> Leader: I just want to know what is keeping these three locations from being developed since they came first and other new places are being developed… I have gone to different municipality offices, making requests...but we don't receive any answer.

He then proceeded to hand a letter to the City officials. It turned out to be a plea for development, addressed to Sam Nujoma when he was still the President of the Republic. He continued:

All these years we have been fighting for these locations to be developed but nothing is happening... Maybe it's because we are poor, we don't have money, let us raise an amount... because we want electricity and also for the ervens to be developed. We can meet the government or the municipality halfway if money is the problem.

Electricity was also in focus in one of the public meetings I attended at a relatively old informal settlement in September 2019. One of the residents, a woman, argued:

We are voting but we are not happy… This is our land but we are not getting anything… I am a PLAN fighter, I joined the liberation struggle in 1977, but where are the fruits of this country? This is my retirement year, but I don't even want to talk about electricity.

Some speak in favour of free access. For example, one young woman explained:

Now they bring their NHE, whatever housing and they build those houses there, sell the houses; it's not like they are giving people houses like 'you guys can stay

here', they just... sell the houses... to people who can afford it... It's just so bad because we're also humans, we also vote for them... and we need land as well.

The above arguments are motivated by strong moral convictions. They refer to need, fairness, compassion, and shared humanity – in other words, to various reasons why one should be recognised. They also seek to generate relations of mutual obligation with authorities, whether through monetary contributions, political support, or other indications of fealty.

The residents recognise their dependence on the decisions of the municipality – and invest in administrative and political channels, such as the local leaders and public meetings, through which they can push their claims. However, this also entails criticism of the misuse of such relationships and the slow pace of development. One form of explaining the misconduct of the authorities argues that improvements are tied to electoral cycles – 'they only need us when it's election time', as some of my respondents said. This is a variant of a more general argument that the authorities do not care enough about the residents of informal areas.

The most common explanation for perceived mismanagement and development deficits is 'corruption'.

Whether documented or alleged, it is a recurring theme in my data as well as the media and social media. However, in the words of the residents, its meanings are multiple. On the one hand, it refers to acts conventionally associated with corruption such as bribery, misuse of funds or use of connections for financial gain. On the other hand, it also refers to phenomena that are not actually illegal but that the residents find immoral, such as profit-seeking from renting or ownership of multiple plots when others have nothing.

My respondents generally disapproved of complexes of flats for rent and labelled their existence as 'corruption'. This contrasts quite strikingly with housing systems in established urban areas elsewhere in the world. For example, in London, half of households lived in rented homes in 2019 (Cosh and Gleeson, 2020, p. 27). Vienna and Berlin both have well-developed social housing systems that offer subsidised rental housing relatively successfully (Marquardt and Glaser, 2020). In these settings, renting is not considered problematic but rather as one option in the overall palette of providing decent housing. In the context of Windhoek, however, these complexes appear as islands of affluence and means of profit-seeking amidst poverty and lack of access. Apart from disapproving of rental housing, my respondents often criticised the owning of multiple properties or using land for business purposes rather than residence. Both were perceived as ways of hoarding land and crowding others out. Such practices were seen to diminish political will for effective solutions to the land and housing issue, as those with decision-making power have stakes in land and housing speculation. In such argumentation, land is not considered as a commodity that one can freely buy and sell but as something to be regulated and used in moderation so that everyone can access it.

The Broader Significance of Claims for Land, Housing and Service Provision

Apart from the fact that the issue of urban land, housing and basic services is broadly accepted as a burning one in Namibia, beneath the surface, this issue touches people in various different situations and with various means and aspirations. There is not one agenda but many, depending on the situation, interests and needs of the various segments of society. Therefore, it is also unlikely that there is any simple solution to the issues. Rather, it is a dynamic field of political contestation.

The market logic of access dominates formal ways of access to land and housing, and access to quality services tend to be related. In principle, it is not impossible to combine this access principle with mechanisms that cater for those without sufficient financial

means. Indeed, that is the modus operandi of the welfare state. Market-based solutions to the Namibian land and housing problems would still treat land as a commodity but try to ensure that everybody has reasonable access to one or another form of tenure. Such solutions would boost 'affordability' through measures that increase what people can spend in accessing land and housing, such as soft loans, employment generation or welfare payments. They might also seek to bring the cost of land and housing down via more flexible regulations, enhanced land delivery mechanisms, leaseholds, rental subsidies, conditions set on developers regarding types of housing or collaborative, co-productive modalities of producing housing infrastructure. Several of these ideas have been tried or proposed since independence through the NHE, the Mass Urban Land Servicing Programme, the Shack Dwellers Federation, the City of Windhoek's upgrading strategy, or various political movements and parties.

However, it is questionable whether the political will exists in Namibia to avail sufficient resources towards such reforms. The logic of unequal access and selective citizenship is deeply ingrained in Namibian state formation. It used to be determined mainly by 'racial' categorisations of people, having now been replaced by 'affordability' as the main criterion of

access. What has remained intact is the institutionalisation and tolerance of high degrees of inequality. The current status quo combines treating land as a financial asset with a lenient property and capital gains taxation regime. This does not augur well in terms of availability of land or funds for making it more easily available but rather contributes to desires for land accumulation by those with the means.

The residents who shared their stories with me by-and-large questioned the status quo, indicating a wish that the question of access to land, housing and basic services be treated as a matter of social justice and equitable (re)distribution of resources. In my view, this demonstrates that although collective political agency in Namibia is unlikely to be extensively based in shared experiences as a working class in the classical sense, due to the country's relative lack of industrial labourers, such agency can still form around shared experiences as a precariat in relation to the essentials of survival. But what particular characteristics does this agency and vision entail?

The daily modalities of survival and provision among the residents of Windhoek's urban margins operate according to a different logic from market-based access. As I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (Metsola, 2021), the relational logics of sharing and reciprocity between kin, friends and neighbours are

prevalent. Notably, relationships with authorities are also largely understood and organised along relational terms, although not equal ones between peers but rather hierarchical, asymmetrical ones. As a component of the existing everyday governance of informal areas, this relationship operates through constant pleas and responses over developments that take place in public meetings between City officials, councillors and residents as well as a system of community leaders who act as transmitters between residents and higher political and administrative offices. Such communications demand the patience and cooperation of the residents and often tie improvements with expressions of loyalty and gratitude (as I could observe in the public meetings that I attended in 2019). In this sense, the pleas of the residents and administrative responses to them are a form of political and bureaucratic capture.

However, the potential implications of this relational logic of dependencies reach beyond their immediate appearance of clientelist exchange. Apart from being about concrete infrastructural improvements, the pleas of the residents also articulate a claim to be recognised as deserving and worthy members of the urban and national community. Access to secure tenure, housing and basic services is seen as an index of these. The references of the residents to the authorities

forgetting them serve as a 'weapon of the weak' (Scott, 1985) that seeks to entangle the powerful in a moral universe where they are obligated to care for those who depend on them. This moral imagination carries a more fundamental criticism of the status quo than arguments that focus on the hindrances of affordability. According to this, the ability to enjoy the fruits of the land does not need to be deserved by payments, but already belongs to everybody by virtue of their membership in the political community. The roots of such convictions can be traced to histories of political consolidation in the southern African region (Ferguson, 2013, 2015). Historically, territory or land as such was not a scarce resource in Africa to the same extent as human labour. This led to such modes of political organisation that place emphasis on accumulating dependants. In some ways, the colonial economy reproduced such dependencies in the form of personalised, long-term relations between 'bosses' and workers. Even though the southern African region has in recent decades moved from labour shortage to its surplus because of changes in production, the political logic seems to have persisted, with various hierarchical relationships of dependence – and expectancies of such – continuing to organise political and economic relations (Ferguson & Li, 2018; Friedman, 2011; Seekings, 2017). An additional aspect stems from the specific status allotted to the

white minority during South African rule. They had access to high standards of infrastructure, service provision and welfare systems, and for many, decision-makers and laypersons alike, these served as a precedent for what independent Namibia should look like. The imperative to universalise such conditions and benefits has fed a demonstrable, if slow, drive towards the extension of services and welfare payments since independence.

Such perspectives are compatible with solutions that advocate forms of subsidised access but also with non-market-based solutions that adopt a commons perspective to land, housing, and basic services, advocating free access. This is in principle the case in communal lands in Namibia, or for example what are called tribal lands in neighbouring Botswana, even right next to the capital Gaborone. However, such arrangements are not necessarily a silver bullet solution in the context of rapid urbanisation and financialising of market economies. In the case of Botswana, in view of my fieldwork there in 2018, the availability of tribal lands has definitely mobilised people's efforts in land development and generated a class of small-scale landlords who contribute to the rental housing market. At the same time, the system is plagued by huge demand and waiting lists near growing urban centres, as well as informal marketisation, appropriation, and enclosure. Thus, such solutions

might contribute to improved general well-being but not necessarily to a more egalitarian city or society, unless the broader patterns of wealth formation and distribution are addressed.

Conclusion

This article has explored the ways in which residents who live in informal settlements in Windhoek experience and explain their situation, what kinds of improvements in terms of land, housing and basic services they desire, and how they justify their claims for improvement. For these residents, access to these fundamentals is precarious in many ways. It is often partial, with incremental improvements, and dependent on forging and maintaining bureaucratic relations with City officials and local politicians. Yet these residents are not simply forgotten and untouched by formal spheres of governance. On the contrary, their plight is widely perceived as a considerable problem, even crisis, which keeps them in the spotlight and adds leverage to their claims even in the absence of more conventional forms of power. Hence, the residents argue that the authorities have failed to provide improvements for them, contrast their situation with those living in affluence, and refer to need, fairness, or their rights as Namibians in justifying their demands of betterment. This is in sharp contrast with the market-based logic of access that dominates formal urban planning and provision mechanisms.

The article discussed the ways in which these residents' arguments also open perspectives into broader questions of social justice and urban citizenship. While they are speaking about problems and possible solutions related to the concrete issues of land, housing, and basic service provision, they are, at the same time, constantly imparting their visions of social justice. In various ways, these articulate the idea that access to the fundamentals of decent life should not depend on the ability to pay, and the ideal of a caring, responsive public authority that honours the perceived mutual obligations between the citizens and authorities. Such perceptions feed further claims of recognition and socio-economic betterment and are a potent arena for political mobilisation in contemporary Namibia.

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