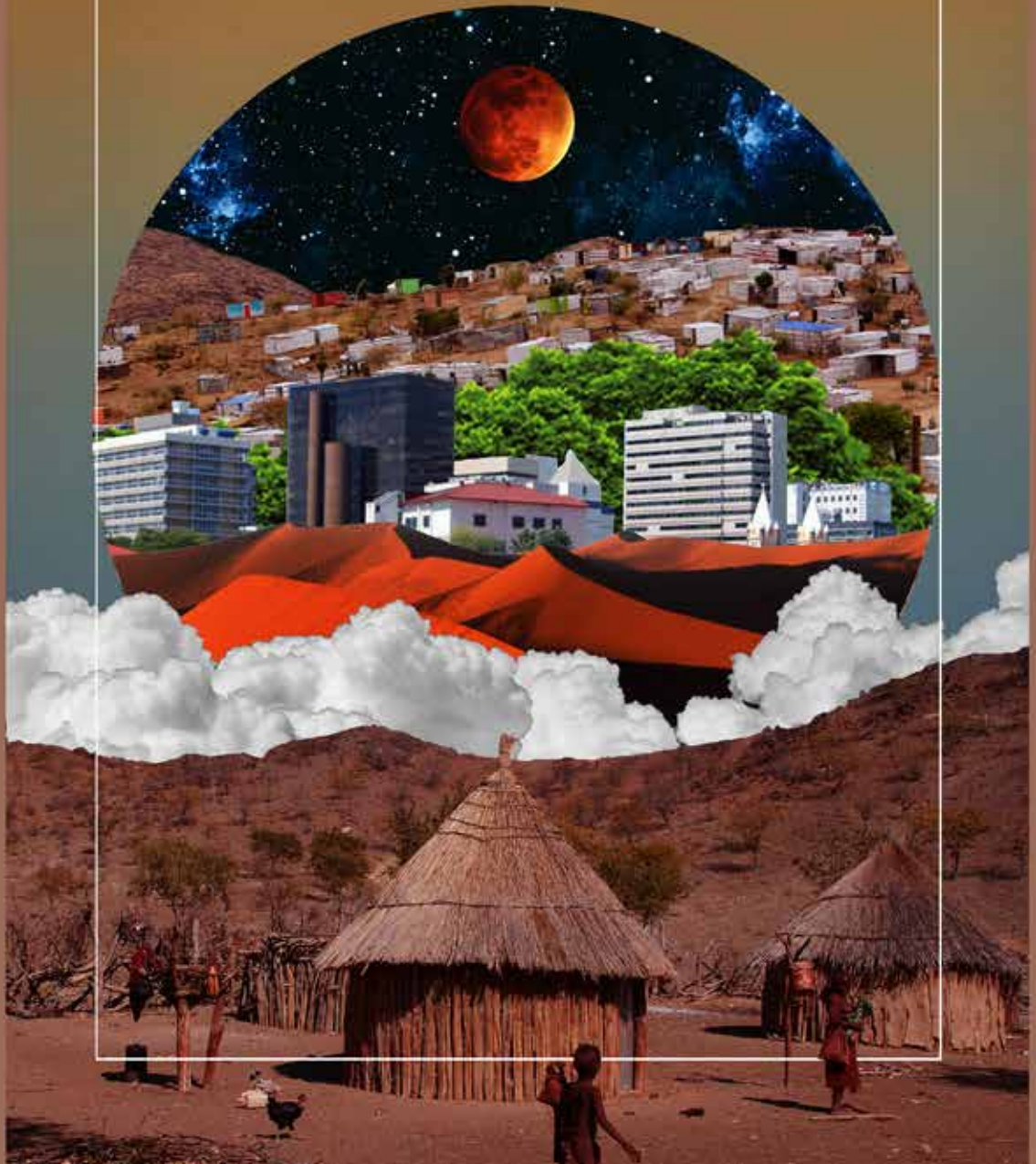




Namibian
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of Social
Justice

Namibia's Housing Crisis in Perspective



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Critical Visualities & Spatialities: Protest, Performance, Publicness and Praxis

Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja

This incomplete and process-based photo essay is an exhibition of selected photographs representing recent protest performances in Windhoek and Luderitz. I make use of Performative Writing as a method of embodying the work that these protests do, which is to mobilise dialogic action¹ and movement formation². The performativity of these photographs points towards alternative notions of Publicness, critical visualities and spatial processes, particularly in Namibian urban centres. This essay posits that this protest action and their photographic remnants mobilise Praxis³ that is required for decolonial futures.



Photo: Nghidimondjila Hashikutuva

#ShutItAllDown (2020) protesters in front of the office of the Minister of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare.

-
- 1 “The object of a dialogical-libertarian action is not to ‘dislodge’ the oppressed from a mythological reality to ‘bind’ them to another reality. On the contrary, the object of dialogical action is to make it possible for the oppressed, by perceiving their attachment to opt to transform an unjust reality.” “In order for the oppressed to unite they must first cut the umbilical cord of magic and myth which binds them to the world of oppression; the unity which links them to each other must be of a different nature.” Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
 - 2 Movement as in social movements that leans towards decoloniality as well as radical learning and culture.
 - 3 Praxis as in “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed.” (Freire, 1972). This also includes theory as an embodied practice, beyond sustained reading and writing.



Photo: Vivian INou-/Gawaseb

#ShutItAllDown protesters (2020) in Windhoek Central Business District.

Our Praxis as protesters at *#ShutItAllDownNamibia* was embodied through disruptive politics of public life. In the photo on the next page, we are occupying the CBD intersection of John Meinert Street and Independence Avenue. This radical practice of occupying and interrupting intersections in the CBD and several other significant sites in the city such as Parliament, Ministry of Justice, Central Police Station has been central to the movement's strategy. As portrayed in the photographs, the *#ShutItAllDown* series of protests were organised by predominantly young women who

have overtly expressed the collective fear, anxiety, and exhaustion of living in an unsafe country. One of the protest posters in the photographs reads “*Ons Is Fokken Moeg*” (*#OnsIsMoeg*)⁴ is a signature slogan in the *#ShutItAllDown* movement which we often chant during our protest performances. Another poster addresses the normalisation of trauma in post-apartheid Namibia, highlighting the unfinished business of collective healing of the nation.

The poster reads, “*Jou Poes Doreen*” is a gesture of radical rudeness directed at the Minister of Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare Doreen Sioka for her insensitive and ignorant views around Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR). We first saw this poster during the *#LegalizeAbortion* protests that took place in Windhoek in July 2020. This poster calling out Sioka's anti-abortion and conservative politics must also be read as a poetic gesture for us to grasp its nuances. While it is literal, it is also loaded with all kinds of metaphoric and symbolic meaning as it is part of a contested politics of the female body. It is a radical queer feminist gesture that disrupts the politics of politeness as a way of amplifying feminist voices against femicide and the Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) in Namibia. This form of radical rudeness is an ancient tradition which many feminists often turn to in the fight

4 Afrikaans for We are Tired.

the crisis of gendered and sexualised violence⁵.

The photograph on the previous page depicts a mobile #ShutItAllDown protest action that happened surrounding Independence Avenue, one of the longest streets in the city, named after Namibia's political independence, gained in March 1990. The building structures are standing tall and dominant, resembling the bureaucratised violence and delayed justice. These buildings include the Independence Memorial Museum, Christuskirche, High Court of Namibia, Magistrate Court, First National Bank, Ministry of Gender, Ministry of Justice, Parliament, Central Police Station, to name a few. Most of these buildings are part of the city's colonial heritage and some of them are new constructions of Namibian nationalism and capitalism. Hence, the constructions and preservation of these buildings can be problematised on the basis that they are protected and valued more than the female, queer and youth lives. Another significant symbol to observe in the photograph above is the Kudu Statue, a bronze sculpture unveiled in 1960 by the apartheid city of Windhoek. It commemorates a time when the Namibian kudu population was struck by a disease that almost made them extinct. This colonial monument

is one of the many landmarks that continue to define the landscape of Windhoek. Again, we could read this colonial landmark as representing the historic value placed on wildlife while rendering black and female bodies as disposable. These are the urban spatial contradictions that mark contemporary Namibian politics of the public sphere.

The following selection of photographs curates a visuality of recent protest action in Windhoek and Lüderitz representing a wide range of activist work by women and young people calling for social justice in the Namibian context. Both Windhoek and



Photo: Martha Mukaiwa.

#ShutItAllDown protesters at the Namibian Parliament.

5 Tamale, S. 2015. Nudity, Protest and the Law in Uganda. Accessed on 20th July 2020 from http://www.agi.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/429/feminist_africa_journals/archive/22/fa22_inaugural_lecture.pdf



Photo: Vivian !Nou-/Gawaseb

#ShutItAllDown protesters (2020) At the Ministry of Gender entrance.

Lüderitz are historically colonial urban centres, whose heritage continues to be visibly present in their respective landscapes. This connection between place, history and violence is essential in unpacking Namibia's crisis of femicide and Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).

'Vuli'gate Doreen Vuli'gate'

Open the gate Doreen, Open the gate
We chanted and danced at the gates of
the gender building
We demanded to see the Minister of
Gender Affairs
To face and address us
To hand her resignation letter
Under the scorching Namibian sun
In this city with deficit of trees and
shadows

We burnt from the sun while demanding for justice

Behind us is a blank billboard facing the gender building
Why isn't it being used for any anti-femicide work?
Why are there more billboards advertising alcohol and political parties in this city?

June 16th

During a global Covid-19 pandemic
We took to the streets to stand in solidarity
Against police brutality, violence, racism and Afrophobia in Namibia
We remember those who lost their lives



Photo: James Jamu, The Namibian Newspaper

Activists from the Young Feminists Movement of Namibia Activists en route to the #SilentProtest.

#JusticeforFriedaNdatipo
#JusticeforBenisiusKalola
#JusticeforDavidTuhafeni
#JusticeforJohnnyDoeseb
#JusticeforOdilioMotanane
#JusticeforFambauoneTalentBlack
#JusticeforHlalisaniZhou

The #**SilentProtest** highlighted the intersectional struggle

People who witnessed the protest often asked,
'Why are you guys focusing on so many issues?'

Keywords: Intersectional Struggle and Solidarity

Our struggles do not exist in isolation
Colonial events such as the Hornkranz

Massacre of 1893...

Have everything to do with Namibian military brutality

Colonial and the apartheid projects were also deeply gendered

And here we are...

Fighting ghosts of our past as our Fathers of Nation

Inherited and preserved these imperial systems

To continue upholding white supremacy in the new dispensation

Hence, here we are fighting the past with decolonial futures

Singing, #**BlackLivesMatter** in the here and now

Proudly demanding spatial, gender, economic and epistemic justice in our lifetime

Check the levels, check the power!
Contemporary Black youth speaking
truth to power
With iconographies of colonialists
towering over them
Calling out all colonial remnants in
the public space
Calling in decolonial love
Calling in Fallist traditions
From #GallowsMustFall in Hen-
ties Bay to 'No Justice, No Peace' in
Lüderitz

The photos by Ndeenda Shivute and Robin Tyson portray the continued #ShutItAllDown solidarity and protest action in urban centres such Lüderitz and Swakopmund. This contemporary photography constitutes a visual expression of how ideas and consciousness is circulated across various places. In the case of the social movements exhibited and discussed in this essay, the role of social media such as Twitter was significant in the mobilisation of protest action. For



Photo: Martin Amushendje

Activists reading the petition at the June 16th #SilentProtest in front of the Curt von Francois statue at the City of Windhoek premises.

example, the “Ons is Moeg slogan is continuously used in many of these visuals. It is a notable #ShutItAllDown text that is often heard and seen



Photo: Ndeenda Shivute

#ShutItAllDown protesters in Lüderitz, October 2020.

in protests and their audio-visual presentation. It is used as a chant, a social media hashtag and text on signage. It is this performative power that makes it a borderless idea to speak back to the crisis of SGBV and femicide. I think the exhaustion expressed in “Ons Is Moeg” should be unpacked along the lines of historic trauma and Namibia’s legacies of violence.

Edwards-Jauch (2016) provides a structural analysis of systemic violence and hegemonic hypermasculinity in Namibia. She identifies a major gap in local knowledge production on SGBV which has everything to do with the heritage of violence in the Namibian society.

“The relationship between male physical violence and structural

violence is largely ignored and most of the research on gender-based violence in Namibia is descriptive and lacks historicity. Just the same, Namibia’s violent history of colonialism has left its mark on society. The colonial history and traditional forms of African patriarchy converge to justify women’s subordination, gender inequality and different dimensions of violence against women.” (Edwards-Jauch, 2016: 56).

It is these legacies of violence that the new youth protests are responding to. The collective and shared fatigue expressed in “Ons Is Moeg” is a result of the intergenerational trauma normalised in cultural violence. On the other hand, spatial violence is part



Photo: Robin Tyson

#ShutItAllDown protest action in Swakopmund, October 2020.



Photo: Robin Tyson

#ShutItAllDown protest action in Swakopmund, October 2020.

and parcel of this larger cultural and structural violence. The three urban centres in which these protests were performed have sustained their geo-historic traditions of spatial violence which serve to displace, dispossess, and segregate. This connection between place and violence is another gap that is hardly studied when we try to understand SGBV in the Namibian society. The photographs in this collection visualise radical imaginaries of these urban spaces as a response to this complex heritage of violence.

Swakopmund, Lüderitz and Windhoek are three urban centres that have historically administered colonial violence and land dispossession. This historic violence is embedded in the spatial, embodied and institutional archives of the post-colony and

hence the cultural crisis of SGBV and femicide. These new protest visuals of these urban centres represent a critical reflexive turn in the discourses of gender, race, sexuality and spatiality. The Pro-choice and Reproductive Justice March that took place in Windhoek during July 2020 is one of these protest actions that is heightening in current dispensation. The photographs below portray predominantly young black women leading this protest, calling for the decriminalisation and legalisation of abortion. Although this protest highlighted the rights related to bodily autonomy and freedom of choice for women, the visuals below show how these issues intersect with class and race struggles. These recent protests demonstrate a consistent focus on the interconnectedness of these struggles and the need to create responsive



Photos: Merja Ilekka

Pro-choice and Reproductive Justice March, July 2020.

interventions that take all these links into consideration.

All of these recent protests highlight the politics of bodies

Bodies on the margins

Oppressed bodies in relation to space and time

These protest performances mobilize movement formation

They theorize transgression and radical public education

As embodied in a protest theatre and public performance artwork by JuliArt in her performance *I AM HUMAN* at *Operation Odalate Naiteke* (2020).

Performed at corner of John Meinert and Robert Mugabe Avenues

At a corner between the National

Theatre of Namibia and National Art

Gallery of Namibia

Confronting these post-apartheid institutions of culture...

... Their histories of systemic violence

Their objectification and exploitation of the black artist body

Their restrictions imposed by their imperial architectures

JuliArt's queer feminist artistic practice is often excluded from these black boxes and white cubes

Hence, *I AM HUMAN*, like all protests exhibited in this essay must be read as engaged praxis that invites us to think critically about the how the body, place and time mobilise critical inquiry that is grounded social justice for all people of the world.



Photo: Vilho Nuumbala

JuliArt performing a protest performance work, I AM HUMAN, January 2020.