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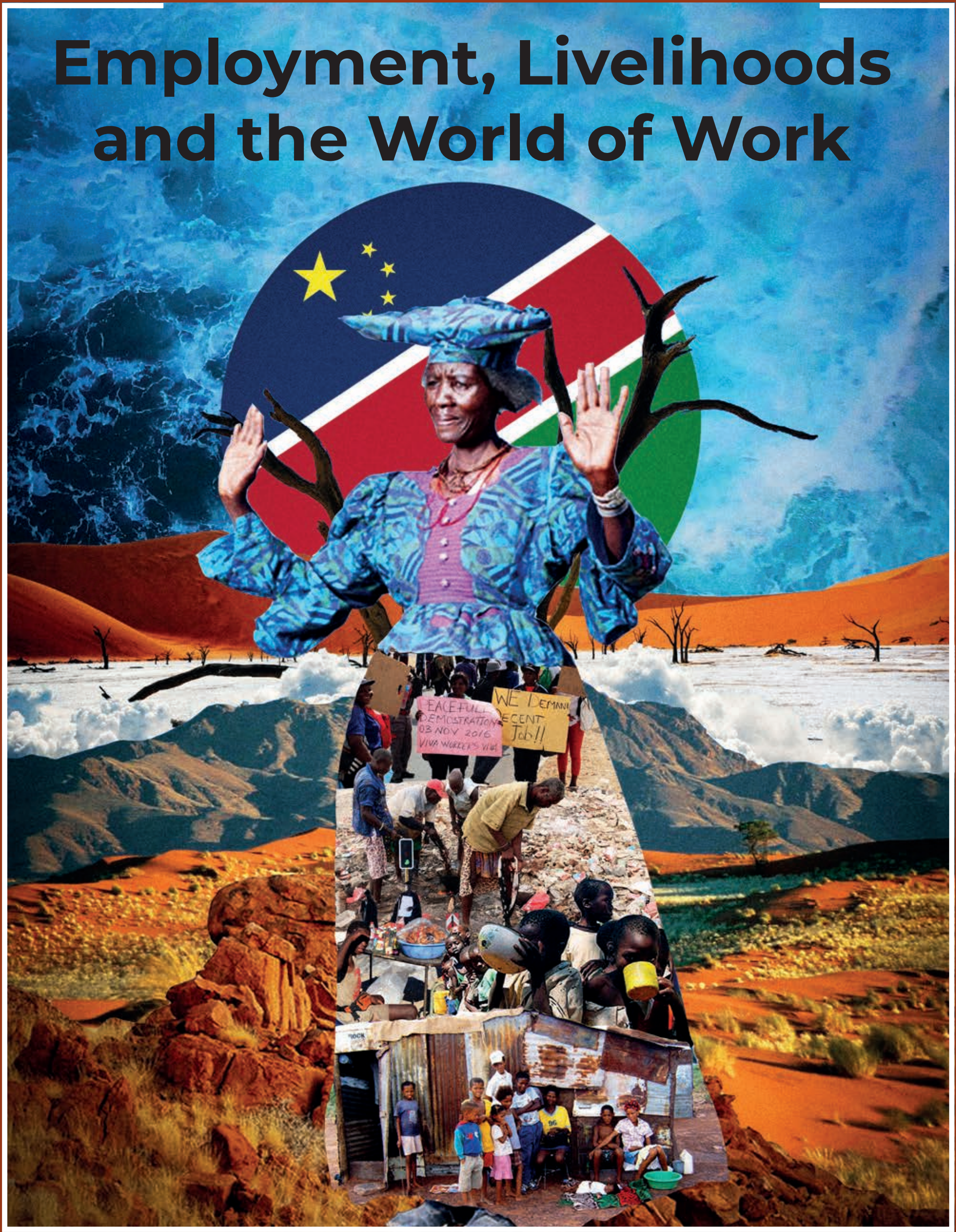
Employment, Livelihoods and the World of Work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Employment, Livelihoods and the World of Work

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Namibian
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Everyday Decolonisation: The Popular Urban Economy of Herero Mall

Phillip Lühl

Abstract:

In Namibia, informality is widely used with reference to informal economies and informal settlements, which are fast overtaking formal urbanisation processes. Informal actors and practices are continually marginalised. As a result, few attempts are made to understand their everyday socio-spatial practices for what they are. Instead, the lack of compliance with the dominant colonial-modernist urban development paradigm is foregrounded. This paper is based on ethnographic research undertaken for my PhD thesis on the case study of Herero Mall, an informal market in central Katutura (Lühl, 2020). The research was framed by the question of how traders inhabit Herero Mall socially, spatially and economically, with the latter aspect forming the focus of this paper. I construct a notion of a popular economy that thrives on diversity, co-dependence and spatial innovation and thereby quilts inherited modernist urban fragments into a decolonising urbanism that works for the majority.

Key terms: informality; everyday life; popular economy; post-colonial city; decolonisation; ethnography

Introduction

In urban development discourse in Namibia, the term ‘informal’ is used largely in relation to two spheres, namely referring to the ‘informal economy’ and ‘informal settlements’. Community-led enumerations indicate that ca. 60–70% of the urban population live in ‘shacks’ in informal settlements, and the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA) reports that 57% of employment in urban areas is ‘informal’ (NSA, 2017). Analysis of the demographics of these two spheres makes it clear that the urban poor, consisting largely of the black majority, is discursively constructed to embody ‘informality’. This begs the question of how this term relates to decolonisation and the postcolonial Namibian city.

> *That’s the thinking in Namibia, that the informal sector does not belong in the mainstream economy. It does not belong in the main street in the CBD, they are dirty, they must be out, we must clean them … (Informal sector organiser)*

Apartheid ‘native’ housing and urban planning models of the 1960s and 1970s established representations of orderliness, modernity and progress which continue to shape contemporary imaginaries of urban development. The gradual removal of influx controls from the late 1970s until independence in 1990 allowed free movement to urban areas (Simon, 1996, p. 52), which was paralleled by the larger transition from labour scarcity to labour surplus in southern Africa (Ferguson & Li, 2018). Post-independence policy, steeped in the urban development paradigm assuming economic growth, formal employment and industrialisation, focused on formalisation without concomitant redistribution of public resources. This led to the emergence of unregulated urbanisation in the 1980s and 1990s. I argue that in the Namibian developmental discourse, the 'informal' is discursively constructed as urban, black, female, non-conforming, illegitimate, and economically immeasurable, and therefore not considered to contribute to national development (Lühl, 2020). It is conceived as the binary opposite of the formal, the regular and regulated, the predictable, the stable, the secure, and the legal. This discursive construct implicitly blames the poor black majority for falling short of inherited normative development imaginaries that are quintessentially colonial. In this paper I aim to provide a different lens through which we can reimagine the potential that 'urban informality' holds for the future of our cities.

Objectives and Methods

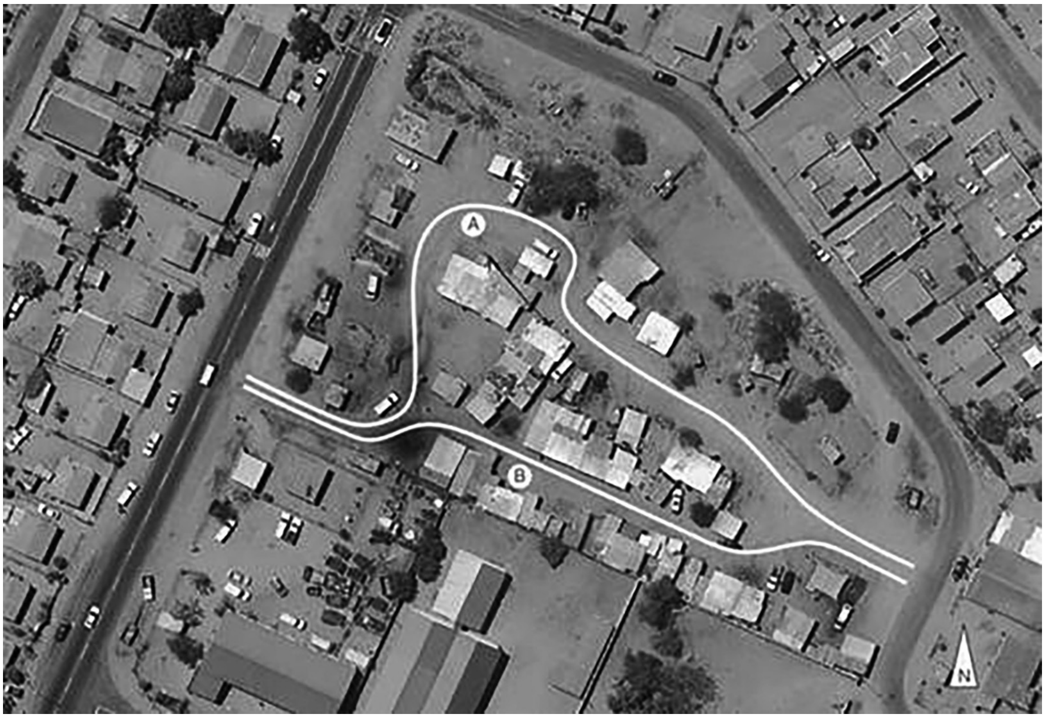
The overarching objective was to re-conceptualise 'urban informality' as socio-spatial practice and as a site to excavate latent possibilities for more socially-just cities (Brenner, 2012). I pursued this through an ethnographic study of Herero Mall, a popular 'informal market' in Katutura, the apartheid-era black township of Windhoek. I engaged with and listened carefully to those who produce this space, including food vendors; owners of restaurants, shebeens and car washes; hair specialists and barbers; butchers; and a cobbler, amongst others. The guiding research question was how people inhabit Herero Mall spatially, economically, and socially, and the focus of this paper is on the economy that produces – and is produced through – these everyday practices. This exploration is based on a range of qualitative methods. Participant observation allowed me to spend substantial time at the mall and interact with traders and visitors without a predefined agenda. Semi-structured interviews with business operators at the mall covered aspects of demographics, economic activity, social relations, and spatial aspects of the business and its relation to other businesses, the neighbourhood and other geographical sites and scales, temporal rhythms, and how buildings had been adapted over time. I also mapped the larger area of the mall, including built structures; spatial distributions and linkages; circulation and barriers; construction methods; institutional, economic and social linkages; shared infrastructure; and informal governance, to spatialise the economic dynamics that were observed.

Data gathered through semi-structured interviews was processed by crafting a series of diagrams (see Figure 4) that reflect spatial and economic logics, temporality, social relations, and aesthetic codes of individual businesses in relation to the mall, and wider territorial scales. These socio-spatial diagrams, together with narrative descriptions, took on the role of an analytical tool, through which I constructed, or in the words of Latour (2005), deployed, various actors as networks that cut across sites and scales. While my original research question and interview guide distinguished spatial, social and economic aspects, the diagrams reveal that, in terms of lived experience, these spheres are impossible to separate. Theoretically, such separation would be incongruous. Instead, they allow us to see these instances of spatiality to be the "site, medium and outcome" (Brenner, 2012, p. 11) of a process of urbanisation underpinned by popular economy that is distinctly different – I argue – from an urbanisation propelled by industrialisation and formal economic growth.

Background on the Case Study

Herero Mall is the popular name for an 'informal' market in central Katutura. It is situated on two adjacent plots of land at the heart of a residential area: a large municipal plot and a smaller plot owned by the Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA). The land, originally reserved for future institutional use, was appropriated around 2005 by 'informal' traders, and today features food outlets, numerous shebeens, a car wash, auto mechanical and welding services, hair salons, meat cutting services, and small convenience shops, amongst others. These businesses are housed in self-built steel and corrugated iron structures, re-used shipping containers or discarded car bodies loosely arranged along two main vehicle thoroughfares traversing the site (see Figure 1). Until late 2017 there was no sanitary provision at the site; electricity remains distributed through precarious networks, and storm water management is near to absent. Over the years, the number of businesses has fluctuated, and it is difficult if not futile to attempt to determine that number. Many visitors regularly frequent the mall, sometimes on a daily basis, and weekends are considerably busier. Patrons from within the neighbourhood come for entertainment, some for traditional food, a chat and a drink; farmers from hundreds of kilometres away buy cattle feed-troughs from local welders; others rent a trailer to transport cattle over the weekend; while others get their cars repaired or washed while they wait and socialise. Some come from wealthier neighbourhoods across the city to get meat cut to size, and others just want to play some pool accompanied by local music.

Figure 1 *Herero Mall in 2011, with vehicle thoroughfares (A) and (B) indicated*



Source: City of Windhoek, adapted by author

The mall "has divided public opinion. For some, Herero Mall is an eye sore [sic] and the representation of underdevelopment and social decay. … [Political analyst Alfredo Hengari] described it as 'a symptom of our failure 17 years after Independence, notably our half-hearted attempts at nation-building and innovative city planning' and called for the City of Windhoek to tear down the market and replace it with something that would offer a proper place of entertainment, especially for the youth" (Lühl, 2020, p.

66). This sparked a fierce public debate in the print media over the meaning and identity of the mall: while some stressed its role as an enabler of livelihoods and a hub of cultural identity and social interaction (Tjirera, 2013), others saw it as a direct challenge to law and order (The Namibian, 2011).

Particularly controversial in this regard is the public discourse on the regulation of shebeens, the popular name for (often unlicensed) bars, usually to be found in former townships, where they historically emerged as illicit alcohol outlets in residential houses to avoid colonial control of alcohol consumption. According to Dobler (2010, pp. 181–182) the Liquor Act (6 of 1998) combined the contradictory objectives of increasing control and state revenue through licensing of alcohol outlets, especially shebeens, while at the same time addressing moral and public health concerns around alcohol abuse. Particularly contentious were the requirements for licensing of shebeens, which included, amongst others: compliance with existing zoning regulations and approval by a health officer before starting operations; separate male and female toilets on the premises; smooth floor finish read: concrete floor; and that shebeens were not be used as a habitable space (Isaacs, 2006). The prohibitive regulations drew wide opposition led by the Namibia Shebeen Association with support from political and civil society organisations, who argued that shebeens presented one of the scarce opportunities for economic participation by the most disadvantaged citizens (Dobler, 2010, p. 184). This included coordinated protests at Parliament by hundreds of shebeen operators, forcing the government to review the requirements (Isaacs, 2006). Dobler (2010) holds that, post-independence, this was one of the few moments of mass popular protest and debate about regulatory reform, as the regulation of alcohol use impacted many in their everyday lives. I argue that this also signifies the contention over ‘informal’ economic activities as a central locus of everyday urban politics.

Popular Urban Economies

Herero Mall is a so-called informal market. This is a designation which is discursively structured as lacking, deficient, and non-conformist. It characterises the market as a place of non-being, something that is neither measurable in conventional economic terms nor fully compliant with statutory regulations, and is therefore deemed to lack legitimacy. But once one becomes more familiar with the setting and the people, even spending just one lunch hour there – observing the space and the dynamics for what they are – is enlightening:

> *It is 1:30 pm. I order pap with meat and gravy from Muarii who operates next to Uzuva’s shebeen. Before I know what’s*

going on, she has organised me a table with a tablecloth and chairs at Uajenenisa's place on the other side of the thoroughfare for cars. Her other customers sit on beer crates and self-made furniture in the shaded area of Uzuva's shebeen and they hold their plates in their hands or on their knees. I realise that I only carry a 200 Namibian dollar note on me, which is quite a lot of money around here. But this is not a problem. Uzuva's sister, who also makes food nearby, takes some change from her bra but soon realises that it is not enough and disappears to get change elsewhere. She and Muarii must be working together somehow? There is clearly no shortage of cash here, and soon the problem of change is resolved, at least for me. Uajenenisa's place, where I sit, has stackable steel and plastic chairs. It is essentially a roofed and paved veranda alongside a 20-foot container in which the fridges and freezers and other equipment are stored. Containers are more difficult to break into than corrugated iron shacks that are the general standard around here, but they are also more expensive. Next to it is a food cart that permanently rests on stacked bricks. The sun is burning, and everyone gathers in the few shaded areas that are provided. Sitting all by myself, I feel awkward at the special treatment I receive, but it is not entirely unexpected. I am, as usual, the only white person around, which tends to create this kind of situation. But it allows me to calmly observe the scene. At Tjikaa's place opposite, which is also a veranda, customers make space on the benches for some seemingly high-status individuals who joined to eat. As usual, Tjikaa's seems the most popular place to be at the mall during the day. Next to me on the veranda two women peel potatoes in large quantities. Kovii, who runs the food cart next to Uajenenisa looks energetic today. I arrange an interview with her for later in the afternoon. Two hawkers selling plastic flip-flops and car keyholders pass through. Children, on their way back from school, walk through the mall and along Klaagliedere [Lamentations] Street at the back. Music blasts from different shebeens, indistinct. Parked cars fill up the open spaces between buildings. The roof of a nearby house is being repaired, which becomes part of the soundscape. Utaara arrives to have lunch at Tjikaa's and brings his own plate. He greets me in passing. More school children cross. A woman passes through, selling meatballs which she carries in a large Tupperware container for five dollars. I ask and she tells me she cooks them at home. She offers me some, but I decline because I just finished my big lunch. A man and a woman return to Uajenenisa's carrying a 25-litre water container that they refilled at one of the neighbouring houses. The water will surely be used for cooking those

> *many potatoes. An old man with a hat, a beard and a beautiful, thin knobkierie [wooden club], made from acacia branches with the root ball carved as the handle, passes by. He swings the kierie elegantly as he walks…*
>
> Author's notes

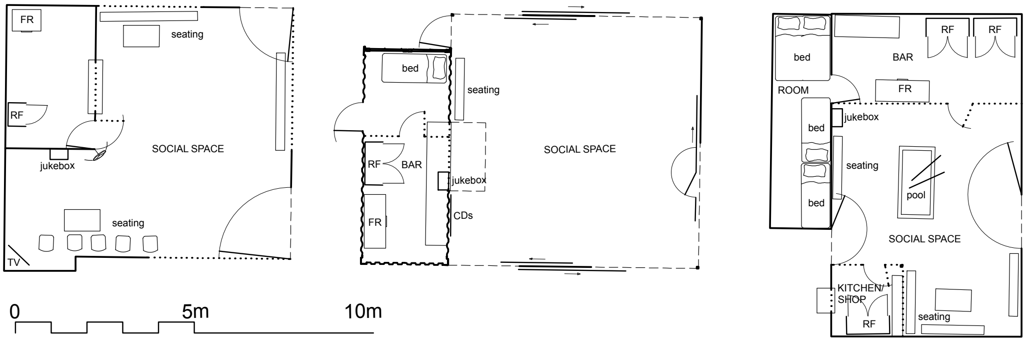
The above reveals the interdependency and mutual assistance between traders who on the surface are direct competitors; that cash is required to lubricate these transactions; that this economy forms part of wider local and global networks of distribution; that minimal infrastructure, providing only basic shelter from the elements, is sufficient to make this space habitable and conducive for business and socialising; that the space is perpetually under construction to suit evolving needs; that activities here partly depend on the surrounding formal infrastructure and governance regimes as part of a system of distribution of goods and provision of services; and that this place allows class differentiation and cultural affiliation to overlap in a multi-layered system of social membership. In the following sections, I will elaborate on some of the key business types at the mall.

The shebeen as the beginning of business

The shebeen is the most common architectural typology at the mall (see Figure 2) which is sometimes repurposed as a shop or a restaurant. The largest space is usually the social space of the shebeen, which opens up to the outdoors, often on multiple sides and with large openings. There is usually a separate room inside or adjacent to the social space. This space functions as the bar and most commonly takes the form of a cage made of expanded metal mesh or iron burglar bars with a counter and a little opening to pass through drinks, while protecting the bartender on the inside. The bar usually houses a variety of fridges and freezers for keeping drinks cool, as well as other valuable equipment, and is generally the most secure space in the shebeen. The third space, sometimes an additional room, sometimes just a niche inside the bar, is used for storage and often for bartenders to sleep, as evidenced by rolled up and stowed-away mattresses. This arrangement is mostly to ensure the security of the business, equipment and stock during the night, as structures are easy to break into. While concern about the inadequacy of corrugated iron structures as habitable dwellings remains, as do questions about the exploitation of family labour, such spatial arrangements provide an effective solution under the prevailing circumstances.

Most shebeen operators relied on a collaborative stance towards 'competitors', as customers were largely

Figure 2 *Different versions of the shebeen typology showing the permeability and flexibility of spaces that open up to several sides (RF = fridge, FR = freezer)*



Source: Author's drawing

reported to be loyal to certain shebeens and their owners and/or operators. Beyond alcohol consumption, other leisure activities available in bars include listening to music, gambling, watching television, and playing pool, amongst others. Remaining competitive requires comparing pricing with competitors and seeking reductions in transport costs, the main differentiating factor, while retail prices for drinks generally vary little. Only a few had alternative livelihood strategies outside of the mall, which usually led them to rent out their 'properties' or employ someone to run their business. In many cases this emerging landlordism provides a foothold in the city for rural migrants who only speak indigenous languages and often have no identification documents, and thus have little chance of success in seeking formal employment. As their employment is often combined with shelter inside the shebeen (see Figure 2), the mall effectively functions as a conduit for rural migrants to becoming urban dwellers, providing a setting where this transition is facilitated through the familiarity of language, food and other customs.

Charman et al. (2017) argue that in the case of Eveline Street, the predominance of shebeens has statistically declined during the period 2008–2016, an indication that shebeens as drivers of the "leisure economy" play a role in the diversification of business activities (2017, pp. 45–46). My study was not designed to prove such an assertion quantitatively, but interactions with shebeen owners supported the claim that starting a shebeen provides a "beginning of business", as the informal sector organiser I interviewed coined it. All shebeen owners I engaged with either already pursued additional economic activities or were aiming for business diversification, and in some cases wished to "professionalise" their businesses. While the normative discourse I studied in my thesis would have it that insecurity of tenure, inaccessibility of capital, inadequacy of service infrastructure, and a lack of identification are *inherent* to 'informal' economies, economic activities at the mall show that people negotiate these constraints continually but selectively by engaging the municipality or other relevant authorities, where required, and distancing themselves, where it is opportune.

The car wash as anchor

Amongst the first businesses at the site were two car washes which had been established at the two outer edges of the mall, one of which closed down some years ago. The remaining one is seemingly the largest business at the mall. The car wash is located on the portion of land that belongs to the OTA, and the owner pays the organisation a monthly rental based on an oral agreement. Besides this agreement, his current tenure relies on a letter provided by the OTA consenting to the use of the site, which is required by the City of Windhoek (CoW) for the issuing of a Certificate of Fitness, which indicates municipal approval of the business based on its meeting certain minimum requirements. The Certificate of Fitness in turn is required by the municipality to provide the business with a separate water meter, and it is still the only entity at the mall that has piped water. This all happened despite a 2010 Council Resolution that mandated the sale of the plot to the OTA for "institutional use" under the condition that "trade [is] to be stopped" and "illegal occupants" are to be "removed" from the site. Although this stipulation has not been effected, the threat of eviction remains imminent.

Car washes have become a mainstay within Windhoek's popular economies, and in the case of Herero Mall, the two car washes have been instrumental as two anchor points in its spatial and economic development. The car wash clearly renders any formal/informal dichotomy baseless and misleading: it cannot be considered a survivalist strategy, but rather a complex entrepreneurial activity that is opportunistically compliant with municipal regulations yet perpetually insecure in terms of tenure and operations. While the language of council resolutions remains delegitimising of "informal trade", municipal actions, including the provision of water and electricity and selective enforcement of regulatory control with regards to the car wash at the mall, speak of a more pragmatic approach towards popular economies, as long as these are situated on private land and cost-recovery for services provided is ensured. From a governance perspective, such ambiguity allows the municipality to affirm a supportive stance towards emerging economies while keeping options open for withdrawing such tolerance when it becomes politically opportune to do so. This requires business owners to continuously negotiate which aspects of formal regulatory requirements to comply with and which ones to consider irrelevant for their operations to continue. At the same time, traders innovate in making infrastructure removable to mitigate the ever-present threat of eviction, as previously open land is increasingly enclosed.

Food as marker of cultural difference

Food vendors usually exist in some form of symbiosis with shebeens, and in some cases it is not obvious that they are separate businesses. Of the three permanent food vendors I interviewed, one cooked on an open fire next to a shebeen with a veranda where her customers would usually sit (see Figure 3), while two had premises of their own. Of the latter, one rented a stationary food cart and shared a veranda with the lessor, while the second had a stand-alone veranda with a paved floor and fixed steel benches, a tree, and a car chassis as storage. In all cases, drinks were available from adjacent shebeens and food vendors often made use of their electricity. In addition to the permanent food vendors, a number of women regularly cook in the open near the former car wash, usually on weekends, with no infrastructure and protection from the sun. As temporary vendors, they pay a daily fee to the traders' committee and store their equipment in neighbouring shebeens when they are not there. Cooking mostly happens outside on an open fire on the bare ground, and firewood is sold at the mall every morning directly from farms. The food vendors cook once in the morning for the entire day, as their pots are large enough to hold sizable quantities. They are busiest around lunch hour and after work, and none of the interviewees had employees. They acquired their non-meat supplies from nearby supermarkets or wholesale retailers and butcheries, highlighting their dependency on formal retailers. Meat was usually sourced from the Single Quarters market nearby. Cattle are slaughtered at Brakwater, a peri-urban area with smallholdings about 10km to the north of Katutura.

Food vending plays a central role in the economic network of the mall, and usually occurs in symbiosis with shebeens. Food is largely prepared out in the open and consumed in the shade of multiple verandas that are often shared by customers of more than

Figure 3 *Food vendors cooking in front of a shebeen with a veranda*

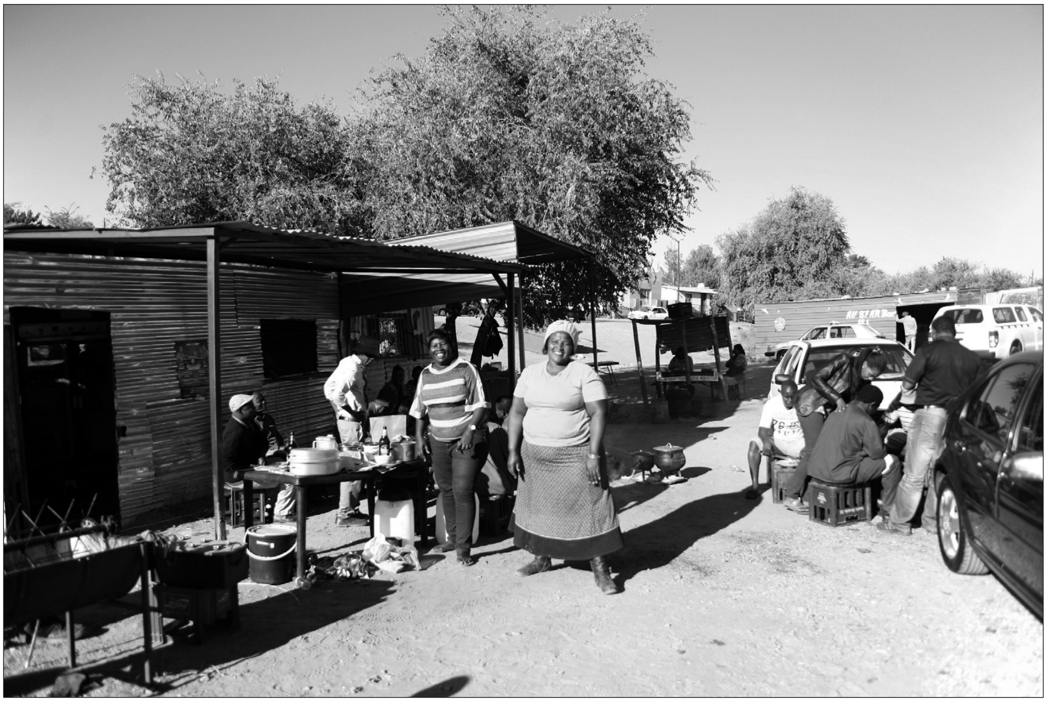


Photo: Phillip Lühl

one vendor. Food vending effectively operates within a shared space on the interstices between the interior and the exterior. While it lacks overt physical markers such as dedicated premises or visual advertising, which other businesses at the mall have, as an activity it has a permanent presence during the daytime, and its success depends on exposure to customers, and customers being exposed to each other. This explains why the open veranda is the ideal spatial typology for this activity, as it facilitates the public display of its essential popularity. Mobile food vending further transcends the logic of land use zoning, in terms of which food is prepared at home and sold at the mall and in surrounding streets.

But food transcends more than just social and spatial confines. Specifically, the economy of meat forms circuits of distribution between rural and urban areas that are neither formal nor informal, but rather partially institutionalised (Hull & James, 2012). Supply chains for non-meat products are more directly dependent on the dominant formal retail sector. Smaller economies are created around food preparation such as the provision of firewood, locally produced cooking equipment, and syphoned-off fat sold for flavouring pap. In addition, non-monetary chains of distribution have been established with reference to food leftovers that are bartered in return for washing dishes. As result of the lack of water provision at the mall, a market for water provided by surrounding residences has been created, leaving vendors in the vulnerable position of paying between 11 and 14 times the municipal water tariff. If understood as a signifier of cultural identity, *food culture* allows urban residents to articulate cultural difference in a non-exclusionary way and helps to bridge the gap between established rural traditions and an emerging urban culture.

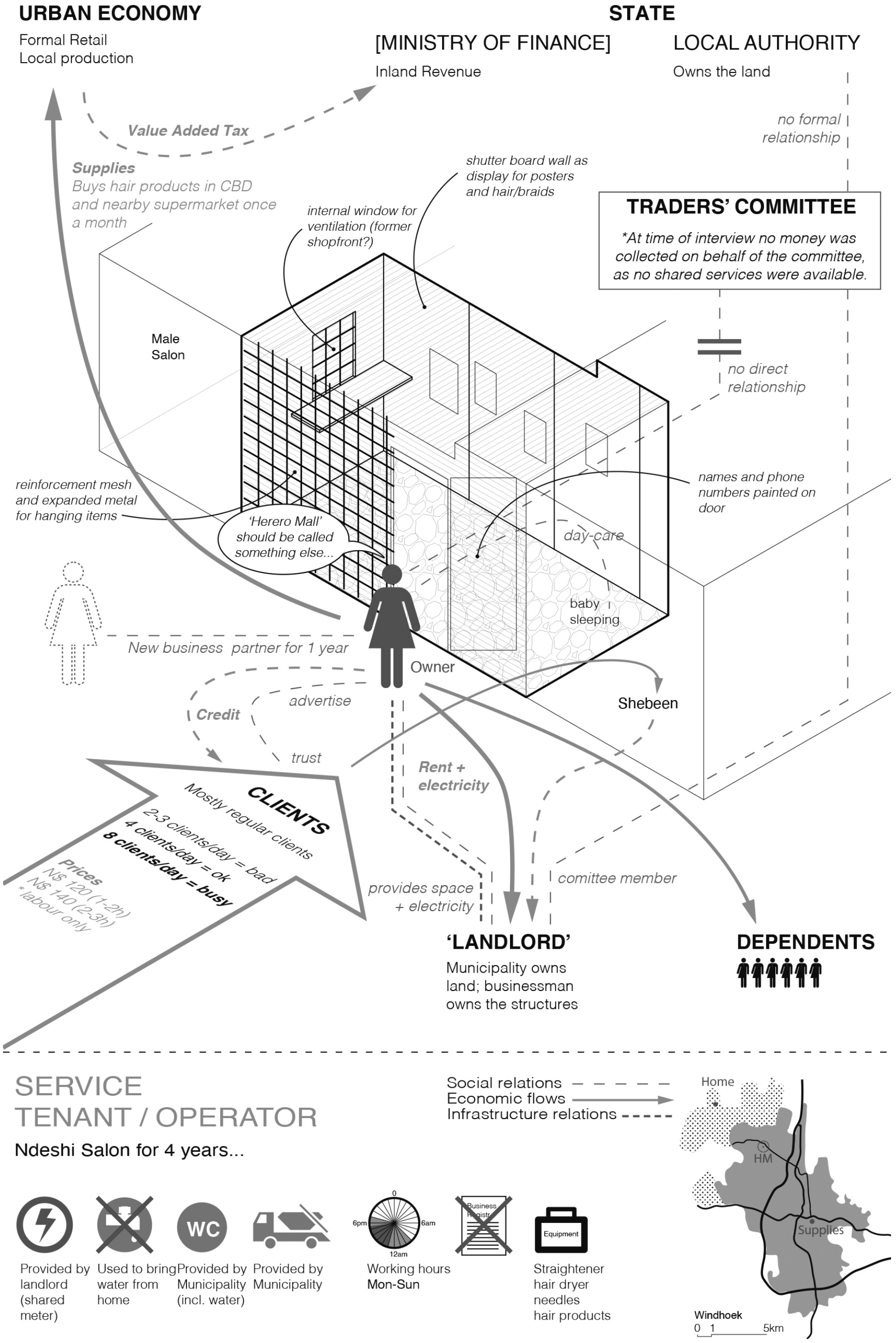
As long as the hair is done well …

Hair salons and barber shops abound at the mall and are usually gendered spaces. Within the mix of businesses at the mall, hair salons and barber shops provide an opportunity to start a business without the need for major infrastructure, equipment, or formally acquired skills. As independent economic activity they often create significantly higher incomes than domestic work, which ranks amongst the lowest paid regulated formal employment. However, this comes at the cost of long working hours as the processes, especially braiding hair, tend to be lengthy. Workspace is accessed by renting a chair from an established salon, or by renting a complete space, revealing the landlordism that has emerged since the original occupation of the land. Only a few salon operators own their building if they had been able to secure a portion of the land. Being generally more introverted spaces, salons rely on outward visibility of the services they offer. They often face the street or pedestrian corridors, and display services rendered and contact details on their outer walls. As a highly personal service, established hair salons and barber shops generate a regularity of returning customers – as long as the hair is done well – which benefits the mall as a whole as customers often frequent shebeens or food vendors before or after their visit. Generally, salons are largely dependent on formal retail for products and are part of city-wide networks of distribution that cut across scales of formality. Fig. 4 exemplifies the socio-spatial diagrams I constructed from the interviews and observations for the various businesses.

Herero Mall as one-stop shop

The conception of Herero Mall as an informal *market* is misleading, and the idea of a *mall* appears conceptually more fitting. The mall is an important central place for Ovaherero people far beyond the neighbourhood and the city, as one elderly farmer recounted to me. As a business owner at the mall,

Figure 4 *Socio-spatial diagram of female hair salon*


URBAN ECONOMY
Formal Retail
Local production
STATE
[MINISTRY OF FINANCE]
Inland Revenue
LOCAL AUTHORITY
Owns the land
Value Added Tax
no formal relationship
Supplies
Buys hair products in CBD and nearby supermarket once a month
shutter board wall as display for posters and hair/braids
internal window for ventilation (former shopfront?)
TRADERS' COMMITTEE
*At time of interview no money was collected on behalf of the committee, as no shared services were available.
Male Salon
no direct relationship
reinforcement mesh and expanded metal for hanging items
'Herero Mall' should be called something else...
names and phone numbers painted on door
day-care
baby sleeping
New business partner for 1 year
Owner
Shebeen
Credit
advertise
trust
Rent + electricity
CLIENTS
Mostly regular clients
2-3 clients/day = bad
4 clients/day = ok
8 clients/day = busy
Prices
N$ 120 (1-2h)
N$ 140 (2-3h)
* labour only
provides space + electricity
comittee member
'LANDLORD'
Municipality owns land; businessman owns the structures
DEPENDENTS
SERVICE
TENANT / OPERATOR
Ndeshi Salon for 4 years...
Social relations
Economic flows
Infrastructure relations
Home
HM
Supplies
Windhoek
0 1 5km
Provided by landlord (shared meter)
Used to bring water from home
WC
Provided by Municipality (incl. water)
Provided by Municipality
0
6pm
6am
12am
Working hours Mon-Sun
Business Registr
Equipment
Straightener
hair dryer
needles
hair products

Source: Author

he receives income from there, he gets supplies for his farm, has his cars repaired, and eats and socialises with his community, or attends cultural and traditional events. This speaks to the principle that popular economies thrive on intricate spatial, social and economic interrelationships. The owner of the car wash, defined it most clearly:

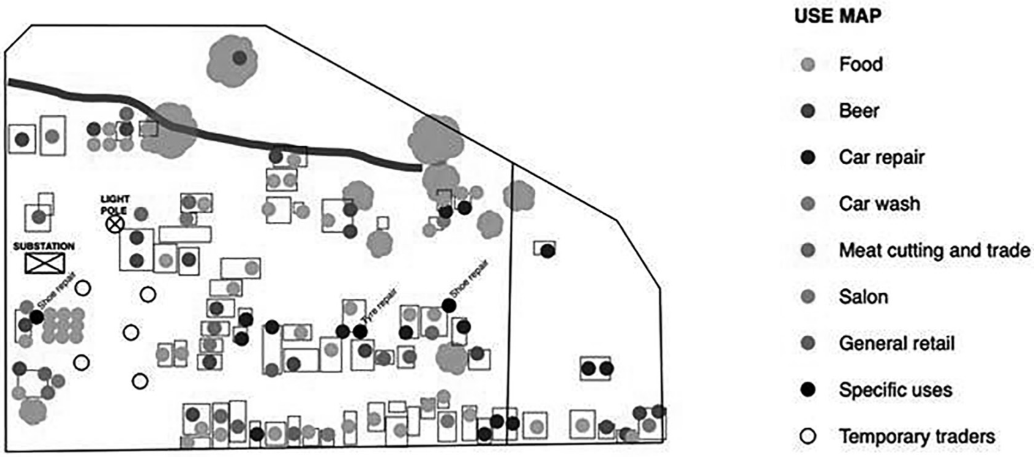
> *There are shebeens, welding, kapana, hairdressers: we call it a one-stop shop. Without each other the businesses will suffer. We need each other, otherwise there is not a chain, connected in delivering to the customer. [We] Hereros love cattle, so the welders make cattle brands, troughs for lick, tyre repairs. People feel safe, at home, together: there is no tribalism troubles. We are family. The difference with this car wash and the ones in town, where you book your car and come back: here it takes 40 minutes to 1½ hours to wash. So, to release after hard day's work [you] grab a beer, a piece of meat… it's one concept. You should feel at ease.*
>
> *Car wash owner*

It is an image that I have heard often at Herero Mall: "After going to a [hair] salon, people want to eat" as I was told by a trader. The availability of alcohol, in particular, is often thought to play a significant part in the popularity of the mall, as opposed to formal municipal markets where the sale of alcohol is prohibited. An owner of a number of shebeens around the city, including in the mall, put it this way:

> *Compare the mall to Soweto [market], especially on Saturdays, when there is very little movement at Soweto. Oshetu [official name for Single Quarters market] is only busy because of the meat. Or look at Khomasdal market, where not much is happening. [This] is a car wash, hair salon, people want to eat and drink.*
>
> *Shebeen owner*

As elaborated above, interdependencies between shebeens and food vendors are amongst the most discernible interdependent relationships, both spatially and economically. But these are by far not the only ones: often the jukeboxes and gambling machines inside shebeens are rented out by owners to be operated by someone else, which can be a profitable business. Meat cutters cut meat for food vendors. And people waiting for their turn at the hair salon would spend the time at a nearby shebeen having a drink and a chat. In the same vein, the local welders work for business owners that want to repair or transform their structures or manufacture equipment for food vendors. Beer wholesalers supply the shebeens that are not able to organise their own transport. Bottles and cans are collected by boys who sell them elsewhere for recycling.

Figure 5 *Map of functions established through a participatory workshop with traders in 2015*


USE MAP
Food
Beer
Car repair
Car wash
Meat cutting and trade
Salon
General retail
Specific uses
Temporary traders
LIGHT POLE
SUBSTATION
Shoe repair
Tyre repair
Shoe repair

Source: Lühl et al., 2016, p. 6

But the concept of a one-stop shop makes sense at another level: as an economic central hub, the mall provides a model of development that is not alienating to the residents who still often have rural backgrounds, as the owner of the car wash explained:

> *You need to bring development to the people, not like Maerua Mall. People are used to this life, they are happy, they will be afraid of high-end developments […] All the politicians come here because they were born here, and their families are here. Some people come here because the place is like the village…*
>
> *Car wash owner*

Here he clearly distinguishes the mall from formal commercial developments in formerly white areas of the city that might alienate people whose references and mental conceptions are more thoroughly embedded in memories of rural life. This point was also made in conversation with a customer who suggested that to empower informal businesses, formalisation needed to happen gradually, over time: "It can't be once off." As such, Herero Mall provides a transitional space, historically and personally, for people who have their roots in rural areas.

Discussion

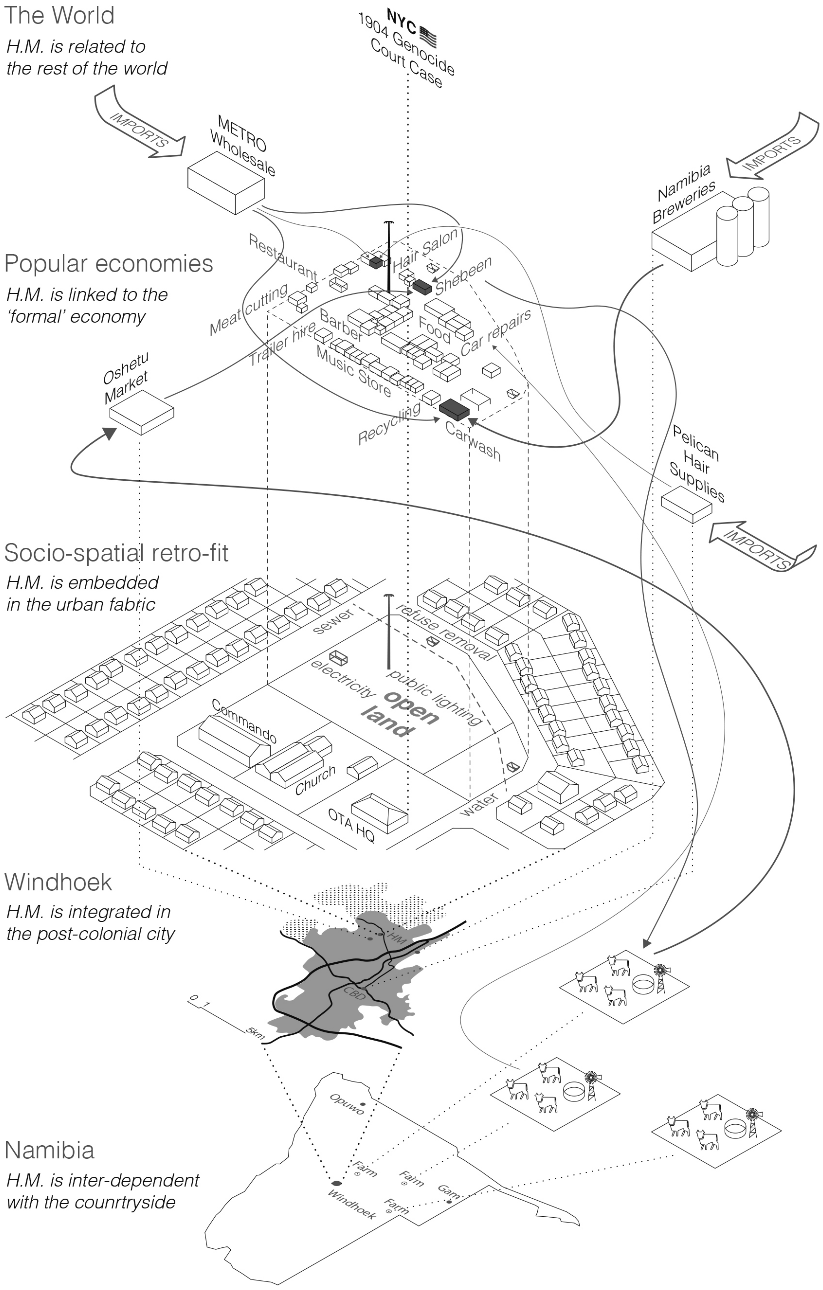
Herero Mall embodies the full complexity of Namibia's post-colonial urban landscape. On the one hand it presents a rupture with inherited spatial patterns of the apartheid city, but on the other it is a space where many social legacies of colonialism are reproduced.

As an ‘informal’ market within a formal neighbourhood it is technically illegal yet practically tolerated by municipal authorities, though not enough to provide basic services to affirm its existence, suspending traders in ambiguity for years. It is a unique local space of difference, imbued with meaning far beyond the scale of the neighbourhood and the city, which split public opinion about the nature of post-colonial urban development.

In this paper I aimed to shed light on the ways that traders pursued an array of livelihood strategies which literally make the city – particularly this former dormitory township – work for those who do not have access to a formal job. Through occupation – an inherently decolonising act – the land has been re-configured as a resource for economic activities that span the spectrum from survivalist strategies to entrepreneurial opportunism, which includes extracting rent from public land. These economies are networked at various scales, including with formal enterprise, and operate within circuits of distribution that reach far into rural areas. Traders clearly articulate the interdependency of Herero Mall economy, while the concept of the *mall*, instead of the *market*, has firmly taken root in the popular imagination of the place. They also assert that its gradual process of transformation creates a sense of familiarity instead of the alienation caused by ‘development’ that is associated with ‘town’ – in other words, with the European-derived colonial urban construct. In combination with the ongoing transformation of surrounding residences that increasingly house shops, restaurants, businesses, churches, and rental accommodation in addition to their initially primary function of residential dwellings, the mall thus provides a diversified urban economy that the neighbourhood was denied in its original design. Elsewhere in my thesis I observed that the mall also allows room for non-conformity in terms of gender and sexuality to exist side-by-side with more traditional ways of life and thus provides a space of difference that characterises urban life. This process of urban and social transformation can be argued as a process of decolonising the township from within. Figure 6 visualises this conceptualisation of Herero Mall as a popular economy that is spatially, socially and economically enmeshed with the post-colonial city and the world, and larger territorial scales and circuits of distribution.

Ambiguous governance by the municipality overlaid with the influence of the OTA and partial self-organisation of traders has created varying degrees of vulnerability amongst traders. The

Figure 6 *Spatial diagram of popular economies and their relations to wider economic and spatial scales*


The World
H.M. is related to the rest of the world
NYC
1904 Genocide Court Case
IMPORTS
METRO Wholesale
IMPORTS
Namibia Breweries
Popular economies
H.M. is linked to the 'formal' economy
Restaurant
Hair Salon
Shebeen
Meat cutting
Barber
Food
Trailer hire
Car repairs
Music Store
Oshetu Market
Recycling
Carwash
Pelican Hair Supplies
IMPORTS
Socio-spatial retro-fit
H.M. is embedded in the urban fabric
sewer
refuse removal
electricity
public lighting
open land
Commando
Church
OTA HQ
water
Windhoek
H.M. is integrated in the post-colonial city
HM
CBD
0
1
5km
Namibia
H.M. is inter-dependent with the counrtryside
Opuwo
Farm
Farm
Gam
Windhoek
Farm

Source: Author

hierarchy in descending order of vulnerability includes owner-operators with employees, owner-operators without employees, tenant-operators, informal employees, temporary vendors, and hawkers. The higher up one goes within this hierarchy, the more traders are visible to the local authority and thus need to negotiate formal requirements and observe regulatory compliance in order to not jeopardise their livelihoods. But such challenges also lead to spatial innovation, with particular reference to making infrastructure removable to mitigate the lack of secure tenure.

Popular economies further thrive on the principle of shared spaces which act as social condensers for an array of recreational activities that weave together an interdependent and diversified urban economy. This economy provides necessary amenities, work opportunities, specialised commodities, generates rural – urban and city-wide circuits of distribution with substantive dependency on formal retail but also enabling non-monetary forms of distribution at the neighbourhood scale. Following Cruz and Forman's concept of density of social relations (2015), popular economies establish a density of economic relations which render the spaces they inhabit essentially urban. These activities are underpinned by a transactional logic of economic interdependence, expressed through spatial proximity and an inherent mix of uses. The density of social and economic interrelations thus fundamentally subverts foundational premises of rationalist zoning and land-use planning that remain at the core of planning practice in Namibia.

Conclusion

If the apartheid city was designed primarily to facilitate an efficient and stable pool of (cheap) black wage labour in service of colonial industry and white domestic space, using strict land-use planning and police control to foster the segregation of races and urban functions, then the mall subverts such economic, spatial, and social logic in nearly all aspects. The original urban fabric of Herero Location, comprising single-family, residential, rental houses with a near-total absence of public amenities, and connected to industrial areas by dedicated public transport, exemplifies the apartheid conception of urban life for blacks. However, this socio-spatial reality has been fundamentally transformed from within this formerly peripheral setting, creating both an identity and an economy of its own that does not foreground colonial spatial and economic constructs. Charman et al. have used descriptors like *leisure economy* (2017) or *township economy* (2020) for describing their insights about similar settings. However, by relegating such insights to niche activities or spaces, they fail to capture the latent potential of such economies and the mode of urbanisation that they embody. I described this process as retrofitting the apartheid city through inserting popular economies into the gaps that modernist economic and spatial planning left blank. Through appropriating common resources such as public land and municipal services, traders effectively accomplished a degree of spatial re-distribution from the ground up. Following Roy (2005), I argue that by elevating the use value of the land over its exchange value as property, traders effectively subvert a key aspect of coloniality – property – and thereby assert their right to the city. While the discourse of 'informality' is a powerful mechanism of exclusion, the everyday spatial and economic practices of the subaltern resist exclusion. Instead of framing these practices as the binary opposite of the formal, and therefore rendering them illegitimate, as most of the literature on informality continues to do, this study contributes to understanding these practices for what they *are.* I contend that what we witness is the ongoing process and spatial manifestation of decolonising the apartheid city from below. In the process, normative modernist principles and imaginaries such as an industrial production-based urban economy, property rights, land use-based planning, and state-centred provision of services are subverted and de-centred, creating potential for alternative pathways towards a decolonial urban development.

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