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Encountering post-colonial realities in Namibia

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Abstract

This article offers an overview of the research undertaken in Namibia in 2019 by a group of emerging academics studying at Hamburg Germany to shape the core of this volume. We aim to tackle the challenging question of the speaker position within a field of discourse around post-colonialism from which our group can legitimately speak, and sketch the necessities for and challenges facing a decolonization of language, action and research. It is impossible with a small – though sensitive and ambitious – group of upcoming anthropologists to do more than scratch the surface of a problem that is so big and multidimensional. So, in this volume we present partial glimpses of our encounter with post-colonial realities in Namibia, and do not claim to be able to paint more than a rough picture. Here we have chosen to present our projects within a broader description of the current Namibian condition including aspects of history, sociality, politics, economics and ecology, religion, gender, identity and art. Such a contextualized depiction, we hope, will offer the reader a more comprehensive picture with which to understand our contributions.

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Introduction: From where do we speak? Challenges for research

In spring 2019 when we were preparing for a fieldwork excursion to Namibia, as part of the University of Hamburg Institute of Anthropology's seminar cycle on colonialism, we visited the exhibition titled "Ovizire somgu"¹ held at the Museum am Rothenbaum (MARKK) and at the Art-Space M-Bassy in Hamburg.² Three Namibian artists³ had been invited to Hamburg as artists-in-residence for a year to access the colonial image archive of the museum and formulate artistic positions/reactions. The artists came up with the subtitle "From where do we speak?". This subtitle, which we took as profound inspiration for our preparatory discussions, aptly pinpoints the enormous challenge, if not the impossibility, of finding a speaking position or perspective regarding the ongoing and pervasive system of post-colonialism. It also sketches the challenge of decolonization, as this process incorporates not only the transformation of language and positionality but additionally – in Currier's words – "the dismantling, removal, and/or transformation of laws, practices, ideologies, and institutions associated with foreign occupation and domination" (2011: 18).

As emerging anthropologists of Colombian, German, and US-American descent we asked ourselves how and from what perspective we could do "research" on some facets of the highly dynamic and highly diverse Namibian society – a society that gained independence only 30 years ago after suffering from more than a hundred years of colonial oppression. How, as academics coming from outside of Namibia though involved in troubling residues of historical events in a very unclear yet sensitive manner, would we approach a system that we found ourselves deeply part of? How would we begin taking

1 Meaning "Shadow".

2 Organized by the Forschungsstelle "Hamburgs (post-)koloniales Erbe / Hamburg und die frühe Globalisierung" see <https://www.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/arbeitsbereiche/globalgeschichte/forschung/forschungsstelle-hamburgs-postkoloniales-erbe.html> [accessed 02 October 2020].

3 Namely Nicola Brandt, Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja and Vitjitua Ndjiharine.

steps to decolonize our own language, our perception and our way of doing research, while pursuing the normal and meaningful practice of ethnography, the trade of a discipline that itself was and is involved with colonial practice? This volume is an attempt to find a partial answer to this question. The result are six research reports on self-chosen current issues like post-colonial memory politics, tourism and craft, tradition and modernity in Pentecostal congregations, current day gender relations, coloniality and identity, and artistic interventions (each of which will be further outlined below and in the articles of this volume).

Attempting to investigate the traces and residues of colonialism in Namibia in a decolonized manner first and foremost requires us to take into account the wealth of insight that has been produced by *post-colonial studies* and *theory* (Asad 1973; Bhabha 1994; Chakrabarty 2000; Chibber 2013; Cooper and Stoler 1997; Dirlik 1994; Fanon 1952; Gandhi 1998; Goldberg and Quayson 2002; Hall 2017; Huggan 2013; Kalu and Falola 2018; Mbembe 2001; Mongia 1996; Said 1978; Spivak 2006; Stoler and Cooper 1997; Young 2001) as well as research on decolonization (Bhambra 2014; Dhawan 2014; Grosfoguel 2007, 2008; Mignolo 2011, 2012; Mignolo and Walsh 2018)⁴. To inform our research we needed to critically think about key terms like the term *post-colonial*, which we are using in this volume in full awareness that the meaning is blurred, and a field of debate (Huggan 2013). We agree that *post-colonialism* cannot be simply thought as something that occurred or happened *after* colonialism. It also stands for the *anti* of resistance against the colonial powers and their consequences (Comaroff 2005; do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan 2005). Besides, it implies a continuation of toxic colonial patterns of thought, perception, speaking etc. as well as ongoing hegemonic structures that also constitute the subject matter of decolonization, and which we wanted to better understand through our research.

The emergence of post-colonial theory engages, broadly speaking, in two moments: the history of decolonization and the connected problematic discourses around “race”,⁵ language, culture and class, as well as the restructuring of “western” intellectual traditions, which challenge concepts of power, subjectivity and resistance (do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan 2005; Smith 1999). Post-colonial theory thus has as its theme the unfinished process of decolonization and criticizes actual Eurocentrism in science and everyday ideas (do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan 2005) and asks for a sensitization

4 See also: http://democracyinafrica.org/decolonizing_the_academy/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=decolonizing_the_academy [accessed 21 September 2020].

5 In this article we italicize the noun *race* referring to its ideological constructedness. “*Races*” by no means depict biological realities but continuously affect their presence at a social, economic, political and psychological level as a concept.

of the context.⁶ As Huggan puts it, post-colonial theory is to “play its utopian part in making colonialism and the imperialist ideologies that drive it a thing of the past” (2013: 22). Hence, instead of looking at history as a linear process, post-colonial theory turns towards the complexities and contradictions of historical processes. Pre-colonial structures had an effect on colonial ones. Telling the history of “western” countries would not be possible without the colonization of other lands, which is why Shalini Randeria talks about “entangled histories” (Randeria 2002: 284). Post-colonial theory takes the challenges of this transnational writing of history seriously.

What post-colonial theory aims to show is essentially that colonialism does not belong to the past, that there are continuities of neo-colonial power relations and that specific forms of oppression are still present (do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan 2005). It aims to expose forms of representation of the colonized in literature as well as in all other social contexts through a simultaneous analysis of history, politics, social sciences, and other disciplines. Post-colonial theory thus not only considers the remains or effects of colonialism but also focuses on recent neo-colonial cultural formations, which emerged from migration to the metropolises, as one remainder of colonial times.

So how to tackle these challenges in our research on Namibia? Investigating the traces and residues of colonialism in others as well as inside of us, we learned, requires listening, a sensuous approach, and something that one might call dialogic ethnography. It is about researching and writing and depicting *with* rather than *about* people.

Decolonized co-operation at eye-level in a system loaded with hurt, pain and vulnerabilities resulting from colonial violence in the areas of gender, class, physical appearance etc. requires us to attempt to clearly answer the question “from where do we come?”. It requires a self-placement and a reflection of the potentially privileged and relatively unhurt position/ history one comes from. We have been doing research as a heterogeneous group of people. Heterogeneity means that our group is internally differentiated in terms of gender, sexuality, age, “race”, class, nationality, education and wealth. We will reflect upon these factors, which potentially influence our individual approaches to a post-colonial research subject, in our respective articles of this volume and below. However, here we also speak with one voice and therefore

6 Said, Spivak and Bhabha have been important for post-colonial theory, because they enable a radical reconceptualization of the relations between nation, culture and ethnicity, which is of far reaching cultural and political importance (do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan 2005). The fight for decolonialization has brought up different strategies and ran through different phases, and it also shed light on intern and unresolvable controversies. They continue to revolve around the question of representation, material relations of dominance and the connection between theory and political activism (do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan 2005).

would like to reflect upon a common position. We are a group currently living and studying/ working in an academic environment in Hamburg, Germany. Hence our position can be described as privileged since the research trip was only affordable with a certain income/ financial background, and was in addition partially supported by the University. Academic studies also require a certain “higher-level” educational background that privileges us, and likewise the outcome of our research will mean academic capital. In the research reports that this volume contains we have attempted to incorporate the above presented reflections to influence our research practice and methodology.

The presence of the past

Additionally, we have learned that any meaningful research on present conditions has to take a look at the past, and that we are involved with both. Collective research on contemporary residues of colonialism automatically takes into account the fact that the peculiar history of an area, a nation or a country impacts upon the present (Förster et al. 2004; Kössler 2015a & 2015b; Melber 2015). We are aware that this whole nexus is a system that we – especially as Germans – are inescapably part of and that this system is in constant processual change and not coming to any end. So, to understand this impact for us it became necessary to look back into the history of Namibia and the history of colonialism to understand ongoing debates about identity, politics and society. The peculiar Namibian history is thus another key issue framing subjects of our interest – a certain lens through which we look at all the rest. The writing of history is not a neutral process. Rather, historical events are being interpreted and read in different ways to legitimate specific politics or can be used to cover up a given party’s guilt. For the Namibian context it is important to recognize that many of the data were produced by the colonial powers to justify their occupation and their aggression against local people. Several aspects which are salient when it comes to influencing the present can be sketched here. Therefore, it is necessary to look back in the past to understand that lot of current inequality in Namibian society, like the unequal distribution of land and wealth, can be traced back to colonialism and the oppression of the population by Germany and South Africa (Bollig 2004; Förster 2010; Gewalt 2003; Häussler 2018; Hayes et al. 1998; Miescher 2012; Steinmetz 2007; Zimmerer and Zeller 2003).

The representatives of the German government started the formal colonialism in Namibia when they declared themselves as *Schutzmacht* in 1884 (Speitkamp 2017: 65). The interference of the German state had the purpose of stabilizing their power as a new imperial power and protecting German economic interests. Restricted laws and taxes, based on racism, forced the local population into contract labour and to give their fertile land to German settlers (ibid. 76-77). The war against the Herero and later against the Nama in 1904 was a consequence of the ongoing oppression by the Germans and

their expansion. Through the *Schießbefehl*,⁷ which was signed on the 2nd October 1904 by the German general Lothar von Trotha, and its inherent extermination order, the war is referred to as the first genocide of the 20th century. By the end, 80% of an estimated total of around 80,000 Herero and 50% of an estimated total of around 20,000 Nama had been killed (ibid. 86). The German colonial period ended with their defeat in the First World War, and South Africa become the declared mandate power of Namibia (Wallace 2011: 205).

The hopes of the Namibian people that an African Government would stop the racial discrimination soon vanished when they were faced with the South African apartheid regime (ibid. 343). Racial segregation was legally enforced by the South African state which was dominated by white people who took over the fertile land (ibid. 319). The plan of South Africa was to establish Namibia as one of the South African provinces, against the will of the United Nations (ibid. 387). The ongoing oppression resulted in several liberation Movements and a guerilla war against South Africa. Independence from the apartheid regime was formally declared on 21st March 1990. Namibia was the last country in the African continent to declare a formal independence from a colonial state.

The German genocides of the Herero and Nama at the beginning of the 20th century are today a matter of negotiations between the German and the Namibian state. The Namibian side wants a formal apology, a restitution of all colonial artifacts and a reparation payment, but Germany is delaying the negotiations and emphasizing the development aid that is already being paid. Representatives of the Herero and Nama people are not part of these negotiations, so they are trying to bring Germany to court to get justice.

When it comes to the remembrance of the colonial times it is necessary to take a look at the political development after independence in 1990. There was no Namibian state before the colonial time and for that reason the post-independent government needed to make clear what it means to be Namibian at all. For this, a nation-building program has been created to define a Namibian identity. Beside socioeconomic improvements this nation-building also focused on cultural aspects of the Namibian identity, which are expressed through memory politics – an issue which will be further discussed by Tilman Gorenflo (see Gorenflo, this volume). In an examination of the Independence Memorial Museum different characteristics of the Namibian memory culture, like militarization, resistance, and hero worship will be analyzed and the way in which these are related to the nation-building discourse will be shown. With its location on the most prominent hills in Windhoek the newly built Independence Museum disrupts the German colonial landscape in Windhoek and establishes a post-colonial Namibian identity. This forming of an identity goes along with the appropriation of history, which is one

7 Meaning “The order to shoot”.

crucial aspect of the exhibition. Specific histories, like the resistance of the Herero and Nama against the German colonial power, become nationalized and established as the ideological forebears of the SWAPO. This construction of history causes tensions between the Namibian state and those communities that emphasize their own history, and raises questions about heritage, property and identity in the post-colonial setting. Gorenflo takes two recent examples – the restitution of the Witbooi Bible, and the case of the Bismarckstreet – to illustrate these tensions and discuss how they are connected with memory politics and nation-building in Namibia.

The present: Outline of salient core dimensions of a post-colonial condition in Namibia

Against the background outlined above we have chosen to look into several “segments” of contemporary society with individually chosen research projects. It is impossible with a small group of upcoming anthropologists to do more than scratch the surface of a problem that is so big and multidimensional. So, in this volume we present partial glimpses of our encounter and do not claim to be able to paint more than a rough picture. However, in the following paragraphs we jointly undertook the exercise of sketching an overview of certain broad dimensions of Namibian society that *we found* consensually. This description serves to offer the reader (and us) some background and map some reference points for our following ethnographic descriptions/articles, which will portray certain phenomena in more detail.

Recent societal and political developments

Distributed across an area of 824,292 km², Namibia’s population amounts to no more than about 2.5 million, resulting in the second-lowest population density in the world. The pyramidal societal structure⁸ shows colonial residues in structural socio-economic conditions, in which a once enslaved majority performs the most elementary work to maintain a newly founded capitalist state. The social and economic distribution of wealth must be contextualized in the aftermath of decolonization. Part of a colonial-historic

8 Namibia shows a pyramidal societal age structure with a share of 57 % of the population being aged 24 or less, while only 4 % have achieved an age of 54 or higher. While the younger people dominate the cities, the middle-aged population is overrepresented in rural areas (Greiner 2011: 620). Over the last 10 years, the increase of population has been at a rate of a mere 1.4 % due, to a significant extent, to the impact of the devastating HIV/Aids infection rate of 15 %. Connected to this massive challenge is a health system which aggravates social stratification by benefiting an elite private health sector at the expense of a chronically underfinanced public health care system lacking qualified personnel. Furthermore, Namibia struggles to provide a health infrastructure that covers the vast rural areas.

and economic nexus is the current situation of land possession in Namibia (Melber 2019, Werner and Odendaal 2010). During both colonial periods, the fertile land was taken away from the local communities and appropriated by white settlers. Many of those colonial land tenures are still active today, which means that descendants of colonial settlers still have access to the best and most fertile land. Land reforms have been promised since independence but there is not much progress yet. More and more the debate about land becomes a debate between white and black, showing how it is deeply rooted in colonial times (Bollig 2004). Ownership structures that stem from a racially-weighted distribution of land which was a core part of the colonial exploitation of Namibia persist (Werner 1993, Werner and Kruger 2007). The per-capita income of Namibia is estimated about US\$ 11,200 (CIA World Factbook 2020). This number appears far less promising considering that Namibia used to be the country with the worldwide highest income inequality for many years.⁹ As a post-colonial reality, the top economic players in farming, tourism, gastronomy, and retail industry are disproportionately of German descent, while 26.9 % (estimation of 2010) of the population live in highly impoverished economic conditions (Blueprint on wealth redistribution and poverty eradication 2016). Most craft and souvenir shops for tourists are managed and controlled by middle(wo-)men of German descent (see Alexiou, this volume). An unemployment rate of 23.1%, spiking to a rate of 44.4 % in people aged 15 to 24 (UN Human Development Report 2020) challenges the standard of living, and is worse for the young black population. While large proportions of the population still derive their income and subsistence from farming, a significant move towards the urban areas is noticeable. The reasons for resettlement to urban areas are not least due to the climatic conditions of the country. Namibia has been suffering from drought for several years. Due to the low rainfall, less than one-tenth of the total land area is suitable for agriculture without irrigation. During periods of drought, farmers must cope with water shortages, rampant animal pests or similar impairments (Melber 2015: 121). Up to 25 % of Namibia's population are now located in the five biggest cities, which struggle to keep up with the infrastructural demands of their inhabitants (Final draft blueprint on mass housing development in Namibia 2013). As a result, informal settlements rapidly expand on their outskirts, where up to a third of all inhabitants live in precarious conditions. Windhoek's informal settlements are growing at a rate of 8% every year, twice as fast as the city itself (ibid.).

Deficits can also be diagnosed in the education system. Namibia managed to create a qualitative tertiary education sector, led by the University

9 The Gini-Index has mildly decreased, from a stark 0.7 in 2011 to 0.57 in 2017, still ranking Namibia at the top in the world in terms of unequally divided wealth in its population despite its growing middle class. The UN Human Development Report of 2019 ranks Namibia's Inequality Index at a 0.422.

of Namibia (UNAM) and the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). The abolition of segregation laws formally granted access to Academia for everyone. In reality, a tertiary education still depends on unequally distributed economic capacities. Public institutions of primary and secondary education lack the funding and qualified personnel necessary to reach an educational standard similar to that of the highly acclaimed private schools. As a result, several higher-grade students encounter structural difficulties in attaining the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC), which is required to enter university (Iipinge and Likando 2012).

Concerning the formation of a working class in Namibia it is necessary to consider that during South African occupation, the country experienced a high flow of translocation of people from northern rural areas to the capital city and surrounding smaller cities and towns, establishing the basis for a large oppressed lower working class. At the same time, other ethnic ascriptions were equally dragged into working-class lifestyles, additionally limited, and oppressed by apartheid segregation laws. Today, rural-urban migrant networks and remittances are common income-diversification strategies. They reduce the risk of deprivation in the face of internal and external stressors for their members and the households involved (Greiner 2011: 606). At the same time, they can reinforce socio-economic stratification and exclusionary practices by sending the few money-earners of poorer households into a downward spiral, unable to save or invest money for themselves, while a rural middle-income class successfully diversify their income strategies through the dynamics of translocality (ibid. 616f.). In the cities, a large exploited working class carries out three types of jobs: (1) all vital jobs within the service sector, for instance taxi drivers, nurses, cooks, or primary school teachers; (2) informal jobs that cover the necessities of “lower” social classes: egg sellers, meat cutters, taxi drivers, street vendors, etc.; (3) anglers, copper and diamond miners, and other jobs within the industrial labour force (Likuwa and Shiweda 2017: 33, 41). The qualification of a working class created new businesses and economic possibilities as well as new exploitation fields of work. The legal decay of apartheid led to an open socialization of capital. The freedom of enterprises and capital flow from imperialist consortiums strengthened a middle and upper-middle class. Independence struggles finally forced Namibia along with other African countries into a world economic system in which they had to accommodate enormous extractive economic projects, and now also deal with and justify the painful social and economic inequality caused by colonial administrations in the first place (Winterfeldt 2010).

Ongoing political grievances and the election in 2019

The period of our research stays coincided with the time of the pre-election period for the Presidential and National Assembly elections scheduled for

27th November 2019. As voter registration had already started, daily conversations often turned to election-related subjects, for instance the generally still-present questions of land and its use/distribution, the current economic crisis, the fight against state elite's corruption and mismanagement, or conflicts over social distribution. Patterns of undemocratic practices are widely believed as if proven. The former liberation movements still shape the dominant public discourse to a considerable extent (see also Gorenflo, this volume) which they regulate according to rather strict concepts of inclusion and exclusion, which also come into play in our individual research contexts.

Trying to understand the political landscape nowadays demands that we engage critically with the processes of the Liberation Struggle, the subsequent consolidation of the SWAPO Party after independence, and an analysis of the inherent, often contrary decolonization and democratization processes. This is because these implied a socioeconomic and political regulatory framework unifying basically antagonistic social forces (Melber 2003: 16) under the pattern of a sovereign, formally and internationally legitimated Namibian state. The new political system, built by former armed PLAN liberation fighters – now democratically elected policymakers and representatives of the Namibian population – shows characteristics of a one-party state under autocratic rule. This is not just reflected in great election successes since independence, with the ruling party taking generally over 80 per cent of the votes while the estranged political opposition usually remains under 5 per cent, but also in the creation of a national narrative of a unified, patriotic and forward-facing Namibia. The construction of a national identity – while at the same time excluding something marked as “anti-national” or “unpatriotic” – hence “serves the purpose of justifying all kinds of authoritarian practices so that ‘anti-national’ or ‘unpatriotic’ can be defined basically as any group that resists the power of the ruling elite of the day” (Melber 2003: 11).

During our research we observed a growing number of critical voices, especially among younger people well aware of the briefly shown political deficits but also affected by an ongoing financial crisis which broke out in 2016.

Nonetheless on Saturday 30th of November the southern African nation's electoral commission officially announced the re-election of Hage Geingob for a second five-year term.¹⁰ The sharp decrease also affected the National Assembly's election as well as his ruling SWAPO party, winning only 63 of the seats in parliament, down from 77, which means they were losing the requisite two-thirds majority that for example empowered them to make constitutional amendments. The opposition leading party, the PDM, now holds 16

10 The expected voting losses manifested as Geingob only won 56.3 percent of the votes, compared with his winning 87 percent in 2014. The independent candidate Panduleni Itula came second with 29.4 percent of the total votes, followed by the leader of the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM), McHenry Venaani, with only 5.3 percent.

seats in parliament (The Guardian 2019). The reasons for the loss of votes are seen in the widespread corruption,¹¹ the high unemployment rate, and also the biggest corruption scandal in the history of Namibia. Furthermore, the long-lasting drought, which has hurt the economy and ravaged agricultural export crops, fed into the voters' frustration. The election was marred by technical failures and a slow vote-collation and verification process but was described as mostly free and fair by The Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN). The official announcement was boycotted by most of the opposition candidates, who argued that there were a lot of anomalies during the election (Iikela 2019).

Economy and tourism

Namibia has long had a reputation for being a relatively resource-rich country whose economy consists of the main sectors of agriculture, fishing, mining, and tourism (Melber 2014; Levine 2007). However, at the time of our research Namibia was suffering from an economic and ecological crisis. Since 2016 Namibia has experienced an economic decline, driving more and more people into unemployment. *The Namibian* attributed this development to "weak consumer demand for goods and services, as well as the impact of the drought exerting further pressure on the disposable income of households" (Erastus 2019: 2). Most heavily affected were the construction, wholesale, and retail sectors. In 2019, 2,641 people were registered as job-seeking. Through the economic crisis, many of those sectors that the nation relies on are unstable. The fishing industry has suffered due to the severe decline in fish stocks. The mining industry is also afflicted with the persistently low prices of minerals, especially uranium, which Namibia depends on (ibid).¹²

Commercial tourism, along with mining and fishing, is one of the country's most important economic sectors and is growing steadily (Christiansen 2014). Although the growing number of tourists led to the creation of new jobs in the tourism business, it also resulted in the neglect of the relevant infrastructure to the detriment of the local population. Once local attrac-

11 In November 2019 the involvement of some SWAPO ministers in doling out fishing rights to an Icelandic fishing firm in return for kickbacks was reported. As a result, two ministers were forced to leave office (Guardian 2019).

12 The main employment sectors in Namibia (fishing, mining, tourism) are strongly globalized by ownership and investment patterns of companies and by links to international market and policy fluctuations (Melber 2014: 132-133). The discovery of diamonds in the Namibian coastal desert near Lüderitz Bay in 1908 led to rapid economic growth. The country's mineral wealth (including copper, gold, zinc, platinum and other precious metals and stones, as well as uranium oxide) has since made investment attractive to foreign companies, who continue to control a large part of Namibia's resources (Sherbourne 2013: 129).

tions and excursion destinations were transformed into upmarket facilities for the privileged. The recovery of locals is sacrificed to the expectations and consumption habits of foreign, wealthier guests, so that there are only a few affordable recreational opportunities for the majority of the local population (Melber 2015; Beckert 2014; Jänis 2014).

The tourism representations of African countries are often about fantasies and an ambivalent nostalgia. Tourists often travel to experience aspects of past traditions. Therefore, the notions of people and places cannot only be seen as commercial representations but are historically determined and encompass political values and ideologies of society. Ideas of the “other” have mostly been constructed over centuries and shaped through intercultural contacts (Salazar 2012). Tourism advertising often appeals specifically to historical and cultural affinities. Black Forest cake, knuckle of pork, apple strudel or German beer consumed in the ambience of the remaining colonial architecture of Windhoek, Swakopmund or Lüderitz Bay still sell as a common cliché with nostalgic appeal. Namibia’s colonial history does not only leave traces inside the country to the present day, but also has special attraction as a tourist destination. The charm of the past paired with familiar elements of everyday culture make the country attractive for many travelers (Melber 2015; Christiansen 2014). Namibia is a striking example of the still-predominant imagination of Africa (Koot 2013). Travel businesses focus on nature motifs, common landscapes, and popular destinations such as Sossusvlei, Fishriver Canyon, and the Namib Desert. The national parks are advertised with the diverse wildlife – the “big five”: lion, elephant, buffalo, leopard, and rhino. Namibia’s most famous and largest nature reserve is the Etosha Park, which covers more than 22,000 km². The wild animals also represent the majority of the motifs, which decorate numerous objects on craft markets or in souvenir shops. A more detailed look into the production and consumption of Namibian crafts and their narratives has been provided by Paula Alexiou (see Alexiou, this volume).

Christianity in post-colonial Namibia

Christianity in Namibia had its beginnings before and during German colonial times. The *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft* built protestant churches, which today remain some of the most important social institutions and gathering places. Sunday services act as platforms to demonstrate one’s status and moral values in public and within the community. Relations of distinction are shown and performed there as well (Pauli 2012: 414). After independence, supported by the SWAPO government, an attempt at a reappraisal of the past began. Questions about precolonial belief systems were made the subject of discussion. Under the new constitution, every religion should be equal. The Namibian constitution enshrined the clear separation of state and

church. But still the opinions and remarks of church authorities on issues of morality, for example the approach to homosexuality, are considered important, even though they have no direct influence on political decision-making or legislation (Vogel 2015: 193). Pauli shows that religious practices play an important role in social stratification and daily life, as well as their interplay with other social institutions (2012). For example, Sunday services and marriages are considered as occasions on which to “show off” one’s social status and distinction. People used to dress up in their best clothes and the services could last up to three hours. It can be said that the local protestant church, in this case in Fransfontein, is so successful, because it can connect and attract people of all different classes, genders, ethnicities and generations (ibid. 415).

According to Vogel (2015: 193), 76% of the population announced that religion plays an important part in their lives. Namibia is one of the most Christianised nations of the African Continent. Even if the Namibian constitution enshrines laicism, Christian Churches do get political privileges. President Nujoma declared that the churches (Lutheran, Anglican, Catholic and AME churches) that were active in the Liberation Struggle would get political rewards and influence. The contribution of Hannah Siegert (see Siegert, this volume) will offer a more detailed insight into the religious and political practices of Pentecostal churches in Windhoek.

Gender and sexual politics

The process of establishing colonial control is deeply sexualized and gendered, as e.g. the construction of racial boundaries as a sexual process strengthens heteronormative patriarchy and misogyny. In the Namibian colonial context for example sexualized and racialized myths about poisonous powers informed the genocide of the Herero and Nama populations in the Namibian wars 1904-1907 (Wieringa 2006). Also, legal discrimination against homosexuals stemming from the colonial rule and adopted after independence still exists in the Namibian legal framework. Colonial discourses of *deviant* and *peculiar* African sexualities continue to have an impact on current gender and sexuality discourses in the country (Becker 2007).

In a broader context in much of the Eurocentric literature the African continent is assumed as homophobic per se and poor in activism for sexual and gender minority rights (Epprecht 2013). The imaginations of post-colonial Namibian sexualities and gender roles are dominated by various, sometimes interlinking narratives labeling queer gender expressions and sexualities as un-African, Eastern or un-Christian (Ekine 2013). These claims are based on religious and cultural fundamentalism, which are gendered themselves, and are selectively approved by the former liberationists and post-colonial party politicians to acknowledge their own power as well as a masculinist, heteronormative and national imagination (Altman 2001; Currier 2011). Be-

sides, different actors, both state-sided and non-state-sided, intricately link the question of sexuality and gender to the topic of decolonization as well as to legal equality (Currier 2012). Both state leaders and political activists, with opposing opinions, claim the prerogative of the interpretation of the concept of decolonization for themselves, making the field of gender and sexuality a highly contested one (ibid.).

Still, there is a continuously increasing diversification of human rights and gender activism in the country which contests the long-established heteronormative power relations. Moritz Gemmeke (see Gemmeke, this volume) provides a detailed look at the manifold struggles and strategies of the LGBTI* communities in contemporary Namibia. The contribution reveals the broader social, cultural, and political tensions concerning gender relations and sexuality as well as it asks about the effects and relics of colonial and post-colonial discourses and politics on the communities and their allies.

Feminist movements have been on the rise over the past 30 years. Several feminist organizations sponsor debate and activism in Namibia on the subjects of gender equality, rape culture, and sexual and reproductive health, among others (Khaxas 2009). Masculine organization on the other hand is also on the rise. Various organizations are dynamic stakeholders, but share common foci: awareness, empowerment and fighting violence, especially gender-based violence (see Angola, this volume). In spite of the social and political guarantees listed in the national constitution, a common critical approach appeals to the State for factual support, justice and prevention (Khaxas 2008: 3, 5). Men have also been engaging in dismantling the attitudes that affect them personally and systematically as well as women, members of the LGBTI* communities, and children. Male organization thematizes the engagement of men by questioning societal structures and bringing other men into an exchange and encouraging emotional reflections. The aim is to question how to deal constructively with masculinity/the male experience and acknowledge the impacts of colonially imposed views of corporeality, sexuality and resulting socio-economic role-embodiment (Oyěwùmí 1997: 32, 121). In the end, understanding the current situation of unbalanced social dynamics from anti- and decolonial viewpoints leads to a practice that includes a thorough analysis of colonial concepts of hierarchy introduced amongst the peoples of southern Africa in order to erect and maintain an order of dominance and exploitation (Seroto 2018: 7) and a re-alignment with ancestral structure. After taking a brief look at the current and historical needs and limitations of the Namibian people with respect to the relations between different sub-groups in this society, Camilo Angola in this volume tackles the systematics of patriarchy and the role of male Namibian organization and offers a critical assessment of global colonial and imperialist dynamics (see Angola, this volume; see as well Lemelle 2010).

Art

Windhoek's urban landscape is marked by murals that inform passers-by with the protest, anger and demands of young artists; critical exhibitions and performances can be found all over town. While the relevance of art as a breadwinning profession appears to lack valuation, or rather demand, in rural areas, a professional, connected art scene is slowly emerging within Namibia's bigger cities, where crucial networks are being established. Self-taught entrepreneurs, students and graduates from different Arts institutions alike emerge as a self-conscious, urban generation that appropriates stages and galleries as catalysts for their articulate analysis of society's struggles. Their visual and performative art voices marginalized narratives, challenges stereotypes and creates awareness of the conflicts that determine the artists' realities. As such, the (de-)construction of gender, queerness, neo-colonial structures, violence towards children and women, child marriage and the plurality of identities appear as poignant themes. Such contemporary artwork incorporates features of global cultural exchange, yet it is often the reappropriation and revitalization of traditional artistic elements that lends them the power to move and challenge audiences.

For this volume Michael Pröpper has engaged in dialogues with the contemporary Namibian visual artists Reginaldo Antunes, Masiyaleti Mbewe, Vitjitua Ndjiharine, Urte Remmert and Erik Schnack (see Pröpper et al., this volume). Jointly they co-author and thematize exemplary perspectives on and interventions into post-colonial realities. Dialogues about selected art pieces and additional subjects like the healing of past wounds, visions of decolonization and the potential of art to reveal social complexities expose visibly how artists intervene very differently in the process of undoing colonialism. What becomes evident through looking at the images of the art pieces and the conversations about them is artists' suggestions for a different future, namely one that opens up a cultural space on earth for Black people's belonging; a post-racial world which is not subverted, devalued and discriminated against, and a space for the celebration of the uniqueness and innovation of Black or/and African culture.

Recently the promise of such local narratives in art has coincided with a discourse on contemporary Africa around the term Afrotopia. Its empowerment lies in a rhetoric of optimism that works as a counterpart to stereotypical neo-colonial narratives about the African continent that depict it as intrinsically defined by "failure, deficit, and defect" (Sarr 2019: 9-10). Contemporary Namibian art, it seems, is at least based on this partial glimpse, and holds the potential to offer nuanced ideas of a reorientation towards the imaginary constitution of a decolonized society.

Summary

What we have experienced is an encounter with a society where the colonial condition has not ended at all. The individual contributions in this volume are based on thematically different research approaches, yet the results and reflections reveal far more similarities than just the local setting. While our research endeavour has to be perceived as rather partial, we nevertheless encountered an omnipresence of questions/traces that are deeply rooted in colonialism. Whether in art, the culture of remembrance in museums, tourism, Pentecostal churches, the LGBTQ* community or concepts of body type and masculinity, the colonial heritage, as well as the entanglement of the colonial past with the post-colonial present of Namibia have become visible in all these fields.

One could attempt to organize these findings according to some core notions – however, this may simply serve as an initial suggestion for further debate.

Reclaiming seems to be something that is of key importance to many actors, whether in the context of land/wealth, identity, sexuality, language, energies, dignity, respect, history or heritage, as outlined most prominently in the debates, tensions and negotiations around heritage and memory culture. This process certainly includes the reclaiming of identity connected with the restitution of colonial artefacts. But it can also be seen in a negotiation around the (tourist) imaginations of crafts, and in the reclaiming of sexual orientations, spirit/body relations and alternative lifestyles, as well as in new ways of practising religion, or in multiple artistic expressions, thirty years after independence.

Closely related if not prior to this process is the act of *uprooting*. Uprooting of pain, vulnerability, conflict, discrimination etc. as prominently outlined in the voices and art pieces on gender discrimination, patriarchy and the wounds of a racialized past.

All this leads to a new self-awareness and self-esteem, especially in the younger generation, causing them to *challenge* the status quo that is being perceived as unsatisfactory (e.g. the established power structures with massive unemployment and corruption, heteronormativity, neo-colonial relations, the position of e.g. German elites in Namibia, etc.). Many of our interlocutors seek action, empowerment and ways to *intervene* and to redefine an alternative post-colonial Namibian future.

Lastly what remains open for further debate is the ways in which such societal discourses about restitution, solution of conflict, *healing of wounds* and redefinition of a future can be held and brought further. This is not only up to us but, primarily, up to the involved Namibians. With this volume we have gathered some impressions, to offer the reader a picture of contemporary post-colonial traces and residues and a glimpse of the complexity of decolonization in which the formerly colonized, the discipline of post-colonial

studies, and we, the researchers all are deeply immersed. It becomes apparent that the examinations and controversies have to an extent only just begun, or are just about to emerge as we all make our way forward.

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