



“Youth speaking truth to power”: intersectional decolonial activism in Namibia

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Abstract

This article portrays a recent movement towards intersectional activism in urban Namibia. Since 2020, young Namibian activists have come together in campaigns to decolonize public space through removing colonial monuments and renaming streets. These have been linked to enduring structural violence and issues of gender and sexuality, especially queer and women’s reproductive rights politics, which have been expressly framed as perpetuated by coloniality. I argue that the Namibian protests amount to new political forms of intersectional decoloniality that challenge the notion of decolonial activism as identity politics. The Namibian case demonstrates that decolonial movements may not only emphatically *not* be steeped in essentialist politics but also that activists may *oppose* an identity-based politics which postcolonial ruling elites have promoted. I show that, for the Namibian movements’ ideology and practice, a fully intersectional approach has become central. They consciously juxtapose colonial memory with a living vision for the future to confront and situate colonial and apartheid history. Young Namibian activists challenge the intersectional inequalities and injustices, which, they argue, postcolonial Namibia inherited from its colonial–apartheid past: class inequality, racism, sexism, homophobia, and gender-based violence.

Keywords Activism · Intersectional · Decolonial · Namibia · Windhoek

On the 16th of June 2020, a hundred mostly young Windhoekers engaged in a multi-sited protest action. Their handwritten placards expressed their allegiance to the global Black Lives Matter movement, which had arisen after the murder of George

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Floyd on 25 May 2020. They protested against racism, gender-based violence and Namibian police brutality.¹

They also rallied for the decolonisation of the public space calling for the removal of a statue of German colonial officer, Curt von François, in front of the Windhoek Municipality building. In 1890 the German colonial officer Curt von François had designed and laid the foundations of the first European building in Windhoek (still called, the *Alte Feste*—Old fortress).² In 1965, the (all-white) Windhoek City Council decided to honour him as the supposed town founder with a 2.4-m high bronze statue, which was modeled and cast by a South African sculptor, Hennie Potgieter.

The protesters gathered around the monument, some climbing onto its top. Their quest for a reception by city officials to deliver their demands was unsuccessful; they left, leaving behind their posters. Some among those read, “Rape culture must fall”, “Legalize Abortion”, “Police Brutality must end”, and “Black Lives Matter”.

Others addressed historical issues. Some recalled the 1893 German colonial attack on the Witbooi Nama settlement at Hornkranz, southwest of Windhoek. By remembering this brutal act of colonial violence, the demonstrators denounced “white supremacy—an insult to those who water our freedom”, as stated one eloquent poster, alluding to Namibia’s national anthem’s lyrics. Calling on the Hornkranz onslaught was directly connected to the protest’s key target since the same von François, the removal of whose statue they were demanding, was its leader.

Well-known activist and journalist, Keith Vries, reads out a petition in which the protesters voiced their grievances. It demanded a review of colonial legislation and public sector policies still promoting racist ideals. The protestors asked for accountability and action from both justice and policing systems in all cases of police and military brutality and for a broad and holistic public re-education on gender-based violence, rape culture and LGBTQ+ people’s rights. The petition also called for the removal country-wide of colonial monuments and the change of street names named for German colonial era despots. It concluded: “We understand all these issues to be intersectional and interconnected.”

A decolonial intersectional activism

The above vignette illustrates a recent movement towards intersectional activism in urban Namibia. Since 2020, young Namibian activists have come together in campaigns to decolonize public space through removing colonial monuments and renaming streets. These have been linked to enduring structural violence and issues of gender and sexuality, especially queer and women’s reproductive rights politics, which have been expressly framed as perpetuated by coloniality (Becker 2020).

¹ Police brutality was a major concern during Namibia’s brutally enforced first COVID-19 lockdown in Windhoek’s impoverished townships.

² The *Alte Feste* was the German colonial military force (*Schutztruppe*) headquarters. Together with the *Reiterdenkmal* (see below) and the *Christuskirche* (Christ Church) consecrated in 1910, it conveyed an encompassing message of an intertwined political–military and spiritual–cultural domination (Steinmetz & Hell 2006: 175).

I argue that such protests amount to new political forms of intersectional decoloniality that challenge the notion of decolonial activism as identity politics. Recently, some authors have claimed that decoloniality is inevitably caught up in identity politics (e.g., Táiwò 2022; Hull 2021).³ I argue that while the broad-based movements, which identify with decolonial aspirations have, in certain moments, espoused problematic essentialist tendencies, the politics of decolonial movements needs to be examined more cautiously.

Firstly, it appears problematic to construct a purportedly uniform theory of decoloniality, while drawing on the writings of only a few authors. Hull's verdict on decoloniality theory as essentialist and "metaphysical", for instance, is based only on his reading of works by Walter Dignolo and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni. He entirely ignores other influential authors, such as Nelson Maldonado Torres. Secondly, one must ask those that have argued that the turn to decoloniality has been a problematic turn to identity politics why they ignore an entirely different genealogy of decolonial theory from thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney, who have been widely received in the movements.

The most important questions however relate to practice. Regarding the South African Fallist movements, Kelly Gillespie and Leigh-Ann Naidoo (2019) have argued that, instead of issuing a verdict on students' turn to blackness as a problematic turn to identity politics, their invocations' substance should be considered carefully.

In this article, I present the case of Namibian movements that avowedly "lean(s) towards decoloniality" (Mushaandja 2021: 192; Fn 2). I contend that the Namibian case demonstrates even more clearly than the South African movements Gillespie and Naidoo (2019) discuss that decolonial movements may not only emphatically *not* be steeped in essentialist politics but, instead, that activists may *oppose* an identity-based politics which postcolonial ruling elites have promoted through memory politics and discourses of policultural nationalism and citizenship (see Becker 2015).⁴

I show that, for the Namibian movements' ideology and practice, a fully intersectional approach has become central.

Namibian activists consciously juxtapose colonial memory with a living vision for the future to confront and situate colonial and apartheid history. They imagine a postcolonial Namibia that takes up the challenges of full decolonization. They continuously challenge the intersectional inequalities and injustices, which, they argue, postcolonial Namibia inherited from its colonial-apartheid past: class inequality, racism, sexism, homophobia and gender-based violence.

Most recently, they have focused on two sets of apartheid era colonial laws that are still in force in Namibia, despite having been abolished in South Africa soon

³ Similar critiques have appeared regarding the US's Black Lives Matter movement (Haider 2018)

⁴ I adopt John and Jean Comaroff's (2005) term "policultural" to describe the foundations of postcolonial citizenship. Namibian official discourse has emphasized "unity in diversity" whilst governmental practice has promoted ethnic-based performances of "heritage" and "identity" in state-sponsored cultural festivals (Akuupa 2015)

after that country's transition to democracy.⁵ These are the extremely narrowly defined grounds allowing legal abortion and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. The latter is epitomized in Namibia's Sodomy Law and in administrative practices discriminating against partners in same sex marriages and children born into such families.⁶

Activists have redefined their struggles for legal reform in these arenas expressly as part of the efforts to decolonize public space. As self-defined queer and decolonial activist Omar van Reenen commented on Twitter (19 March 2022): "The Divorce Law, the Sodomy law, the Abortion & Sterilization Act: all laws inherited from apartheid South Africa, laws disproportionately affecting women and LGBTQ + persons. All laws not written—or voted on—by democratically elected representatives of the new Namibian people". Van Reenen thus exemplified the understanding that laws imposed by apartheid South Africa as Namibia's second colonial ruler until 1990, are a legacy of colonialism, as well as apartheid.

While activists conceptualise their struggle as decolonial, they equally emphasise its intersectionality. In an interview recorded by Nicola Brandt, artist and activist Hildegard Titus articulated thoughts about entanglements in space and time activists work with as they attempt to decolonize public space in the built-up environment, in living memory and in everyday democracy.

By protesting in public we are drawing attention not just to the single grievance, but to the wider structures and how they connect us as people. For example, although one of the demands was the removal of the Curt von François statue, we were protesting interrelated things. We were protesting gender-based violence (GBV), racial oppression—we were protesting police brutality. It is all of these intersections (Titus 2021: 178).

Leading activist Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja (2021: 196–197) who, on his Twitter account, describes himself as an "undisciplined cultural worker", embraced the poetics of the intersectional decolonial struggle:

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

⁵ South Africa's 1996 Constitution expressly prohibits discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. South Africa made provision for same sex marriages from 2006. Legal abortion has been widely available since 1997.

⁶ In a prominent case, which has been repeatedly before the courts in 2021 and 2022, Namibia's Ministry of Home Affairs has opposed residency and citizenship to the Mexican-born partner of Namibian Phillip Lühl and their three children. The couple were married in South Africa, and the children's South African birth certificates name both men as their parents.

Our Fathers of Nation
 Inherited and preserved these imperial systems
 ...
 Hence, here we are fighting the past with decolonial futures
 ...
 Contemporary Black youth speaking
 truth to power
 With iconographies of colonialists
 Towering over them

In these examples, two well-known Namibian activists pronounce what they see as the inextricable connections between ostensibly separate issues of contemporary Namibian society: persisting coloniality in public spaces through monuments and street names, state violence in the form of police and military brutality, and the postcolonial Namibian ruling elites' sexist, patriarchal and homophobic inclinations.

During public protest action, Windhoek's decolonial activists have repeatedly temporarily occupied colonial remnant spaces in the city. These performative actions are best described as embodying forms of political aesthetics, which were previously unknown in Namibia, where protestors consciously put their bodies on display—they sat and lay down to occupy spaces; in some instances the performative embraced what some of the activists referred to as "queering" public space, for instance with bold hip-hop moves. Even though those were rather short-lived *demonstrations*, the activists conceived them as *occupations* because of their public acts of taking up—occupying space with the aim of disrupting "business as usual".

Chronology of postcolonial performance and remembrance

When protesters climbed on top of the von François memorial in June 2020, it was the first time young Namibians had come out *in a public demonstration* for the eradication of colonial symbols. It was not the first-ever intervention against traces of colonialism in Windhoek; previous actions had however taken place in the dark of the night, surprising passers-by only the next morning.⁷

Earlier actions had, in fleeting moments of counter-monumental performance, targeted the city's (then) most notorious colonial edifice, the *Reiterdenkmal*, described by Steinmetz & Hell (2006: 177) as the "most aggressive colonial symbol in all of

⁷ Starting from c 2008, several noteworthy artistic works, films and performances also critically addressed the coloniality of the postcolonial Namibian society (see, eg., Brandt 2020; Lehmann 2021), a detailed discussion of those goes however beyond the present analysis's focus on decolonial social justice movements; only a brief discussion of the noted 2016 "The Mourning" will be provided in the following section.

Namibia.”⁸ Interventions subverted the monument’s colonial claims before the infamous monument was removed in 2009 from its prominent public position.

One subversive initiative, in July 2008, saw white wooden crosses planted around the statue, bearing place names and expressions in Otjiherero, the main language spoken by victims of the 1904–8 German colonial genocide. Three months later, passers-by were greeted by the Rider holding up a small flag in post-independence Namibia’s national colours (Kössler 2015: 156).

These were thought-provoking initiatives intended to subvert and decolonise public space. Every time protestors re-signified the Rider statue, controversial local media discussions flared up (Niezen 2018: 559). Though less militant than South Africa’s anticolonial RhodesMustFall activism, these Namibian initiatives came from within civil society. They were credited to activists connected to various OvaHerero and Nama victim-descendant pressure groups, which have demanded justice for the communities that suffered most during the colonial war and genocide.

Bidding ‘A Curt Farewell’

The 2020 protest against the von François memorial pointed out the significance of that monument (and others) as a painful site of remembrance and memorialisation in several ways that differed from earlier postcolonial Namibian memory politics. The contemporary activists regard their approach as decolonial and intersectional. This makes it distinct from the overnight actions of ethnic-identified genocide reparations activists *and* from the hegemonic state-centred commemorative practices which celebrate the master narrative of the Namibian postcolonial state: “SWAPO brought us liberation through the barrel of a gun” (Becker 2011, 2018).⁹

⁸ The *Reiterdenkmal* (literally Horse-rider Monument but usually referred to in English as the Windhoek Rider or the Equestrian Statue) was designed, sculpted and cast in bronze by Adolf Kürle in Berlin. Sitting on a 5-m high sandstone plinth, the double life size (4.5 m) statue of a mounted German colonial soldier with rifle had been used as the logo for Windhoek lager beer, and served in many other formats as the city’s iconic image. Inaugurated in 1912, its plaque commemorated German military and civilian casualties during the 1904–7 colonial war. Despite its location having previously been the site of a concentration camp incarcerating prisoners of that genocidal war, no mention was made of the about one hundred thousand OvaHerero and Nama who were murdered during the genocide (1904–8) by Germany’s colonial army. The statue forcefully illustrated a claim to perpetual colonial domination. The post-independence government stopped illuminating it at night, but otherwise little changed until the removal of the *Reiterdenkmal* in 2009.

⁹ Until 2020 public decolonisation of the Namibian public space remained an official project of the post-colonial state. When Namibia finally gained its much-delayed independence (March 1990), the city’s high street, formerly known as ‘Kaiserstrasse’ (‘Emperor’s Street’), was renamed ‘Independence Avenue’. A handful of other streets were renamed. Otherwise, little changed in the capital’s public space. Most streets retained their colonial eponyms. All Windhoek’s German and South African colonial monuments, with their histories of violence, remained. In the mid-2010s a scholar who has written extensively about the Namibian colonial past, observed that, “in a tangible way, the view over Windhoek presents testimony to the current state of public memory in Namibia. Monuments and representative buildings from the colonial era not only dominate the scenery, but attest to the compromise surrounding the transition to independence” (Kössler 2015: 26)

The post-independence SWAPO government’s policy was primarily geared at constructing new memorials, statues and monuments that added another layer of public space commemorative aesthetics and nar-

Firstly, it was the first *public* demonstration demanding eradication of colonial symbols in public spaces. Secondly, it was connected to a sustained campaign that built on new forms of online activism. Inspired by the global Black Lives Matter movement against racism, Windhoek activist and artist, Hildegard Titus, started an online petition entitled "A Curt Farewell", which garnered over 1,600 signatures by the day of the protest three weeks later. Considering that Windhoek's population is less than half a million, and that, in 2020, online activism was an entirely new endeavour in Namibian civil society politics; this was quite remarkable.

The petition, like the protest that followed, demanded removal of the statue celebrating the purported city founder and its replacement with a statue of Windhoek's Jonker Afrikaner, the Nama leader who first established a settlement in the area of today's Windhoek around 1840, and should thus be acknowledged as the city's real founder. It reads verbatim (excerpts):

Continuing to keep Curt von François on his pedestal at the intersection of Sam Nujoma Drive and Independence Avenue is a painful erasure of the city's history and that of its rightful founder, **Jonker Afrikaner**. This colonial monument continues to feed the incorrect narrative that "this land was empty" until he "discovered" it.

It is now time that [the city] ... ceases honouring colonial faces.

Curt von François was responsible for the building of the Alte Feste, a military fort meant to protect the interests of the German colonial regime, and that is where his statue belongs. He should be confined within the walls that he built, next to the other statue of a bygone and violent era—the Reiterdenkmal—to contemplate their violent colonial legacies until the end of time.

Windhoek Mayor Fransina Kahungu eventually accepted the petition in July 2020. However, she and the city council chose not to respond to it. Instead, she said, in September 2020, that the city council did not want to remove the statue although residents of Windhoek had indicated their desire to do so (The Namibian 24 September 2020). Later in 2020, however, a new mayor was elected. Job Amupanda, an academic and activist who had cut his teeth with youth protests a few years earlier, signalled support for the statue's removal. So did his successor, Sade Gawanas, who took over from Amupanda on 1 December 2021.

Unlike Windhoek's previous post-independence mayors, Amupanda and Gawanas are not members of Namibia's ruling party, Swapo,¹⁰ but belong to a new generation of politicians with roots in civil society activism.¹¹ In mid-2022, discussions

Footnote 9 (continued)

rative. Post-independence structures, such as the Namibian Heroes Acre and the Independence Memorial Museum, are distinct from the colonial monuments in terms of aesthetics and the historical narrative they prescribe. Yet they too are easily comprehended as affirmative glorification of victory (Becker 2011; 2018).

¹⁰ After independence in 1990, the former liberation organization South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) was officially renamed Swapo Party of Namibia.

¹¹ Amupanda was a founder of *Affirmative Repositioning*, a youth movement started in 2014 with a campaign for land redistribution (Becker 2016). Gawanas is a member of the Landless People's Movement (LPM), another movement of young activists since turned political party.

considered a new heritage policy for the city. On 27 October 2022 the Windhoek City Council finally voted to remove the statue, and four weeks later, on 23 November 2022, it was removed to the loud cheers of the assembled activists and their allies.¹²

Thirdly, the activism around the von François statue also reflects an exploration of ‘another’ postcolonial Namibian society, which can be best described with reference to Saidiya Hartman’s (2019: 228) idea of *waywardness* “as an ongoing exploration of what might be”. Through their temporary occupation of the memorial, the activists embarked on a transgressive act that challenged Namibian society, which, more than thirty years after achieving independence, has remained marked by deep social conservatism. “Full decolonisation”, as the activists have declared on many occasions, challenges conservative Christian perspectives on issues such as gender and sexuality. More about this in a moment.

Leading self-declared decolonial activists and artists have on several occasions also emphasised their explicit stance against the ethnicised identity politics which has characterised much of Namibian memory politics, on the one hand, implicitly, on the part of the SWAPO government, which has paid primary attention to the experience of the northern regions, and on the other hand, the Ovaherero and Nama genocide reparations movements (cf. Kössler 2015). Although most decolonial activists are not ethnically Ovaherero or Nama, they have campaigned for reparations by Germany for the colonial genocide of 1904–1908. As my interlocutors have repeatedly told me, justice for the genocide is not just an issue for those identified as descendants of the victims. Instead it should be seen as a Panafricanist and, ultimately, as a concern of global humanism.

Finally, activists have frequently emphasised the intersectionality of their decolonial practices. As I showed in my opening vignette, those demonstrating for the von François statue’s removal did not restrict their demands to decolonizing public space; they connected their protest about the coloniality of the public space with concerns about gender-based and state violence, particularly police brutality in the city’s impoverished former black townships. As a leading woman activist told me in August 2020, they considered the police brutality to be yet another expression of coloniality because it related to both race and class. She emphasised that the strict lockdown measures during the early weeks of the pandemic had been enforced brutally *only* in the townships whereas she had never been stopped while out jogging, together with her white boyfriend, in their affluent (still largely white) neighbourhood.

The published statements regarding the intersectionality of the decolonial struggle by leading activists Nashilongweshipe Mushaandja and Hildegard Titus, cited earlier, also demonstrate that they did not regard contemporary Namibian struggles as separate from each other. Instead, activists have pointed out that, in their view, their struggle for the “full decolonisation of Namibia”, as they have often phrased it, integrates various concerns, ranging from decolonisation of public space, through to matters of state violence, and particularly gender and sexuality.

¹² On 15 June 2022 the City Council convened a stakeholder workshop to develop a policy framework for the identification and management of heritage properties in the capital. In a remarkably transparent move, the workshop was accessible to all via zoom, and inclusive of critical historians and the non-governmental Museums Association of Namibia.

The intersectional conceptualisation of decolonial activism in urban Namibia is reminiscent of Maldonado-Torres's (2016: 10) elaboration of decolonial efforts. Maldonado-Torres presents a perspective on decolonial practice as transcending identity politics by "breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world." Maldonado-Torres (2016: 1) identifies the targets of contemporary decolonial movements as the "predominant racist, sexist, homo- and transphobic conservative, liberal and neoliberal politics of today".

In the remainder of this article, I show how Namibian activists have incorporated struggles against the sexist and homophobic politics of the postcolonial Namibian state into their campaigns for the decolonization of public space.

Decolonizing public space: performance and counter-memorials

Windhoek's intersectional decolonial activists have protested against colonial monuments; they have also begun to inscribe their politics into the built environment with counter-memorials. In December 2021, activists painted a "Rainbow Sidewalk" in front of the old Namibia Breweries building, which had over recent years housed a 'queer friendly' meeting place. Leading queer activist Omar van Reenen tweeted: "Today, we commemorated Namibia's first LGBTQ+ Historic Landmark. it is a statement of solidarity against discrimination". A plaque explains the rainbow flag and the struggles to end discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

The Rainbow Sidewalk celebrates recent activism. It also provides a penetrating critique of colonial monuments, indeed any monument as concept and idea that fixes memory.¹³ Instead, it seeks to "confront or disrupt established meanings and tropes" (Mayat and Hart 2021: 203). Even where they materialised in more permanent artistic form, these actions, such as the collective painting of the Rainbow Sidewalk, have been performative. The colours of the rainbow on a public road in central Windhoek demonstrate the presence of a queer community, and thus confront Namibian society where apartheid era sodomy laws remain in force.

As Annie Coombes (2004) has argued, monuments are animated and re-animated only through performance. Performance, especially site-specific artistic performance, entered the remembrance of colonialism and of the 1904–1908 genocide a few years earlier through the arts rather than political demonstrations. In 2016, a multimedia dance enactment, *The Mourning*, directed by choreographer and dance lecturer Trixie Munyama, was performed in the *Alte Feste* courtyard. The fortress was chosen as the production's site because of its proximity to the *Reiterdenkmal's* previous location on the site of a 1904–8 colonial genocide era concentration camp and now occupied by the Independence Memorial Museum.

¹³ Bayron van Wyk's forthcoming Masters thesis on Namibian genocide reparations and decolonial movements however analyses Windhoek's Rainbow Sidewalk initiative more explicitly as a critique of masculinist and homophobic attitudes, understood as an effort towards decoloniality.

The Mourning and its sequel, *The Mourning Citizen*, performed in 2019, were powerful interventions into memories of historical violence, performed at the site of what was once the epicentre of white, male coloniality. Nicola Brandt (2020) emphasised the site-specific-ness of these performances as significant. Being specific to the site of the concentration camp, the performances were profound gestures to honour and acknowledge the dead, to conjure up the site's traumatic legacies and to bring about healing.

Employment of performative activism is one of the decolonial activists' significant innovations. The following section shows how these have become salient in a succession of recent protests that focused on sexism and homophobia.

A new generation of youth activists

Despite the restrictions of recurrent COVID lockdowns, in mid-July 2020, protesters again took to Windhoek's streets. This time they demanded legalization of abortion. The action was organised by a newly formed alliance, Voices for Choices and Rights Coalition (VCRC). By then VCRC had collected 60,000 signatures (in a national population of only 2.5 million) calling for the right to safe abortion and abolition of Namibia's Abortion and Sterilisation Act of 1975, a legacy of South African colonial presence.

In October 2020, another movement galvanized an unprecedented number of young people to reclaim the streets, marching, dancing and unleashing incredible creative energy with their performances. Hundreds of activists, students, working youth, and artists took to Windhoek's and other towns' streets to protest against gender-based violence and femicide. The protests started after a young woman's body was found in the port city of Walvis Bay. Demonstrators blocked busy intersections in downtown Windhoek. As a leading activist in these protests pointed out, in a reflection on protest, performance, publicness and praxis, their unprecedentedly radical practice and strategy was "embodied through disruptive politics of public life" (Mushaandja 2021: 193).

The young protesters were quickly dubbed "Ama2000", the "people of the twenty-first century". Mostly in their early twenties or teens, they amazed even the movements' most seasoned trailblazers. Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, who is in his early thirties, commented during a recent conversation with the author that the new generation's energy and audacity in challenging the "old guard" of Namibian politicians was surprising, even for his generation who, while growing up, had acquiesced much more readily to incomplete decolonisation and authoritarian structures.

Triggered by the scourges of femicide and gender-based violence, women and young people made clear that they were tired of living in a violent society. Their rallying cry was #OnsIsMoeg (Afrikaans for "We are tired"), along with #ShutItAllDownNamibia (Becker 2020). The second hashtag expresses their aim to disrupt business-as-usual in a situation of crisis. Protesters marched on various ministries and demanded the resignation of Minister of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, Doreen Sioka. Some carried posters reading, '*Jou Poes Doreen*' (literally 'your cunt, Doreen'), which Mushaandja (2021: 13) described as a poetic "gesture of radical rudeness" rooted

in a feminist tradition. This transgressive directive confronted the Minister for her conservative, insensitive and ignorant views around sexual and reproductive health rights.

Inspired by Cardi B's recent hit single, "WAP", young protesters taunted the police force with radical hip-hop moves. During one march on Saturday, 10 October, protesters were forced to scatter in central Windhoek after security forces threw tear gas and shot rubber bullets at them. Twenty-six activists were detained, although charges against them were later dropped. Minister of Home Affairs, Frans Kapofi, eventually apologised for the police brutality during a meeting, on 23 October, with youth activists to discuss issues of gender-based violence (Becker 2020).

Following the unfolding 2020 Windhoek protests through social media and inter-personal engagements via Zoom and WhatsApp calls from Berlin, Germany, where I was then based, it became increasingly clear to me that this was no longer just a protest against gender-based violence. A new generation of young Namibians were challenging the vestiges of coloniality and raising pertinent questions regarding the politically and socially incomplete liberation of Namibia in 1990 (Becker 2020).

When, in March 2022, another protest took to the streets, again demanding the repeal of the prohibitive abortion legislation, one activist tweeted that the march targeted the "APARTHEID abortion act of 1975" (Twitter, 19/03/22, Callipygian; caps in the original). The same activist added that, "As Namibia celebrates Independence, we march for freedom from archaic laws!" This tweet exemplifies how pro-choice and anti-homophobic protestors explicitly regarded the sexism and patriarchy issues concerning them as enduring legacies of apartheid and colonialism.

Concurrently the activists turned their focus onto colonial apartheid laws still in force in Namibia. They include the South African Immorality Act of 1957, which prohibits "unlawful carnal intercourse" and the sexual act of sodomy between men. Whilst these laws have rarely been enforced in recent years,¹⁴ there have been repeated homophobic attacks, including those fuelled by former President Sam Nujoma in 1996 when he claimed, in an address to the SWAPO Women's Council Congress, that homosexuality was a negative foreign influence.¹⁵ At the time a document, formally issued by the President's office, claimed that "gays and lesbians" were "exploiting our democracy" (cited by Frank 1997: 6).

In 2021, the newly formed *Namibia Equal Rights Movement* (known as "Equal Namibia") campaigned for abolition of the sodomy law. In a vibrant social media campaign and through participation in Namibian television and radio shows, queer activists made clear that they regarded this legislation as integral to coloniality in Namibia.

Equal Namibia also mobilised public protests around court challenges regarding recognition of same-sex marriages and queer families with the slogan: "There is no freedom if there is no equality". Unlike during earlier waves of state-induced

¹⁴ The Namibian Law Reform and Development Commission noted that between 2003 and 2013 115 sodomy cases had been reported to the police and 64 arrests had been made (The Namibian, 18 May 2021).

¹⁵ While there is conclusive historical ethnographic evidence, and common knowledge of (male) homosexual practices in some regions of Namibia, as in many other African countries, state-driven homophobic campaigns have repeatedly emphasized alleged "foreign influence".

homophobic campaigns, queer Namibians and their allies were no longer silent. Hundreds came out in public protest against openly displayed homophobia by members of the country's political class. On 17 November 2021, a vibrant queer protest march swept down Windhoek's Independence Avenue, proudly waving rainbow flags and colourful banners in protest against homophobic utterances by veteran SWAPO politician Jerry Ekandjo.¹⁶

Two weeks later, the largest ever Namibia Pride Parade marched on the Ministry of Justice and about 300 participants held a vigil on the Independence Memorial Museum's steps, displaying their newly won confidence with banners such as "abolish sodomy law—#lovewins NA" (The Namibian, 7 December 2021).

Conclusion

Since 2020, young people have been engaged in an array of intersectional activist work, calling for social justice in Namibia. This they have done with reference to decoloniality, while explicitly rejecting identity politics.

They tackle issues of social justice and equality, which have not been addressed since independence. Those include matters of poverty and land restitution (Nghiteveleka 2020). Immediate attention has gone into campaigns against gender based violence, homophobia and for women's reproductive rights. Those, in turn, have been identified as intersecting with class and race struggles. The activists thus describe their conceptualisation of decolonial activism consciously as intersectional. In Mushaandja's (2021: 199–201) eloquent expression, "these recent protests demonstrate a consistent focus on the interconnectedness of these struggles and the need to create responsive interventions that take all these links into consideration".

Namibia's decolonial activists call for inclusivity in society. They demand that Namibian society should espouse full equality and undertake radical reconfigurations of institutions and citizenship. Thus, they contest the Namibian transition of 1990 as an "elite pact" (Melber 2014: 23) between the former colonial rulers and the new nationalist ruling class; and they challenge the country's society and politics' clearly visible "authoritarian features" (Melber 2014: 56).

Prominent among the intersectional activists are young women and people who identify as "queer", who are tired of living in a post-independence society where entangled histories of colonialism are reflected in the coloniality of unfinished progressive constitutionalism. While the Namibian constitution promised liberal freedoms once colonialism and apartheid had ended, and despite comparatively progressive gender politics having been implemented after 1990 (Becker 1995), the activists demonstrate that, in many ways, Namibian society and politics remained steeped in conservatism and authoritarian structures.

The Ama2000 are disillusioned with the Swapo government, in power since 1990. Namibia's decolonial activists claim that decolonisation has been abandoned

¹⁶ During a parliamentary debate Ekandjo had said that, "We cannot, comrade speaker, allow a male person to insert his penis into the anus of another man (Video posted by The Namibian on 17 November 2021).".

in the post-independence dispensation. This they see reflected in remnants of colonial apartheid legislation still in force. It is also tangible for observers of Windhoek's built environment, where the country's colonial heritage remains visible and overlaid with new constructions of Namibian nationalism and capitalism (Becker 2018).

Aiming for another possible world in the Namibian context, decolonial intersectional activists imagine a decolonised Namibia, which is ordered differently to the hierarchies which have been inherited and reproduced from colonial legacies: authoritarianism within the formally democratic dispensation, heteronormativity, and a lack of women's autonomy over their bodies.

The analysis of these issues as a perpetuation of coloniality has led Namibia's young activists to adopt an intersectional approach that disavows identity politics by integrating struggles for the decolonization of the public space through removing colonial monuments and renaming streets with those combatting structural violence, sexism, patriarchy and homophobia.

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