

ETHNOGRAPHY OF '*HERERO MALL*' (WINDHOEK) AS A POST-  
APARTHEID SOCIAL SPACE

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## Abstract

The post-apartheid city represents an important reflector of a society in transition. Urban space as a mixture of complex interrelations and social interactions provides a prism through which a society in transition is illuminated. This transition is captured in social spaces. Yet, there is a dearth of studies focusing on locating the meaning of social spaces in post-apartheid urban Namibia. Employing ethnography as a methodological choice, participant observation combined with in-depth interviews was used to locate the social meaning of the so-called '*Herero Mall*' in the heart of Katutura. Providing an important means of economic survival, '*Herero Mall*' is a solace to the urban *subaltern*, to invoke Gayatri Spivak's concept. Most traders if not all are unable to join formal employment because of their low level of education. '*Herero Mall*' exists against the backdrop of high unemployment in the city where enormous wealth rubs shoulders with abject poverty. Subjected to history and with reference to power symbols within its milieu, '*Herero Mall*' attracts symbolic capital in the Bourdieuvian sense. The latter is expressive of a social space embodying identity with an ethnic character. However, looking at '*Herero Mall*' solely using historical and power symbols' lens robs us of conceiving this social space as a fusion of the past and the present. This brings *hybridity* to the fore, a character ingrained in '*Herero Mall*' as a post-apartheid social space. The reproduction of class divides, especially along gender lines is expressed through the interaction of social actors. Invariably, social actors eke out a living within the purview of their social positions. '*Herero Mall*' is by and large organised around consumption, a distinctive feature of modern societies. It brings together people

from different walks of life and across ethnic and class divides. However, consumers are notably young people from various social spheres. As a mix of disparate informal market place, it is interwoven with the broader formal economy by acting as a transmitter of consumer goods sourced from formal businesses. The paper concludes with an assertion that from a sociological point of view, treating social spaces as mere 'containers' carries with it the risk of forfeiting to get a grasp of social transformation under way.

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## **Dedication**

*To the traders at 'Herero Mall' who toil incessantly to meet the demands of a city life.*



## Declarations

I, Ellison Tjirera, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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## Chapter one – Introduction

*“Interactions (...) mask the structures that are realized in them” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 16).*

### 1.1 Evidence and meaning

Things are not as they seem, and what you see barely represents the ‘truth’. Such is the nature of social reality and meaning. The challenge is to transcend mere observation. Therefore, the study seeks to unpack ‘*Herero Mall*’ beyond observation in an effort to locate its meaning as a social space in a post-apartheid setting.

The second half of the year 2011 saw a plethora of articles about ‘*Herero Mall*’ appearing in major newspapers in Namibia, largely for the wrong reasons. ‘*Herero Mall*’ is a controversial milieu: a place to be for some, a public nuisance to others. Simply put a space of contrasts. Assuming that social spaces meriting social enquiry are merely treated as ‘containers’, conceptually speaking, the analysis addresses the social meaning of the intriguing ‘*Herero Mall*’.

### 1.2 Background

#### Windhoek

By far the largest urban locality in Namibia, Windhoek is the political and administrative capital of Namibia. According to the National Planning Commission (NPC) (2003), the Population and Housing Census of 2001 puts the population of

Windhoek at 233 529 inhabitants, representing 13% of the total Namibian population. Due to rural-urban migration, the population of Windhoek has increased noticeably over the past 10 years. The preliminary results of the 2011 Population and Housing Census by the NPC places Windhoek's population at 322 500 amounting to 16. 2% of the total population of Namibia (NPC, 2012).

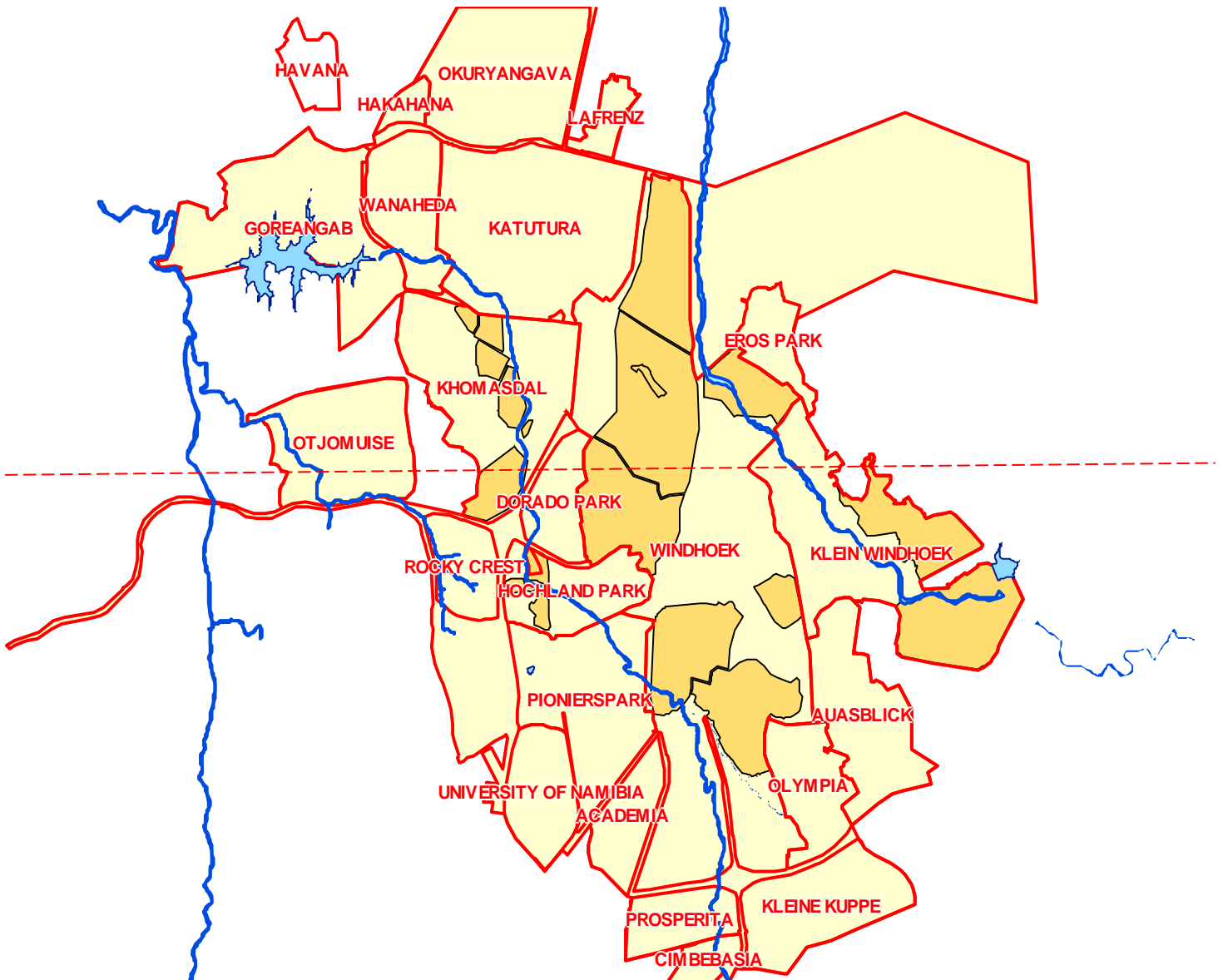
In its structure and land use, the Namibian capital epitomises stark footprints of segregationist apartheid laws. For affluent suburbs of opulence exist alongside impoverished erstwhile and new townships plagued by rubbish bin scavengers. As Fanon (2004<sup>1</sup>) would argue, the postcolonial state is typically characterised by a contrast that allows enormous wealth to rub shoulders with abject poverty. Peyroux (2001) avers that the urban fabric in Windhoek was shaped by the social and racial segregation policies of colonial authorities – especially by the policy of institutionalised apartheid as from 1948 by the South African Government.

“Until the end of the 1970s, Windhoek was a typical example of this tradition: a fragmented territory composed of white, black and coloured ‘townships’ separated by buffer zones; urban space characterised by the unequal distribution of services and infrastructure; a residential area segregated on the basis of ethnic groups in the black ‘township’ of Katutura, built in 1957, 6 km to the north of the city centre; and finally, a specific type of habitat for the black population – mirroring the colonial conception of the African in the apartheid system” (Peyroux, 2001, p. 288).

Twenty-two years after independence – Peyroux's portray of Windhoek holds true more than ever. Even though attempts have been made at improving infrastructure and access to services in former ‘townships’, a fundamental change of Windhoek's architecture remains a mirage. For the sprawling informal

settlements north and east of the city centre are synonymous with black shack dwellers and urban destitution entrenching and perpetuating the apartheid legacy. In this view, Friedman (2000, p. 3) rightly observes that “in Windhoek, and other towns, apartheid planning has left an enduring imprint on urban spatial organisation and form. This particular component of the colonial legacy is less easily transcended, as apartheid in urban form proves more resilient and less amenable to change than do former apartheid laws and policies”.

**Map 1:** Windhoek suburbs (Source: City of Windhoek)



Map 1 shows the City of Windhoek's residential areas. With the exception of Eros Park, the line demarcates Windhoek into the north and the south – this dichotomy translates into the impoverished and the affluent. The further north you go, the less infrastructural developments and services you will encounter.

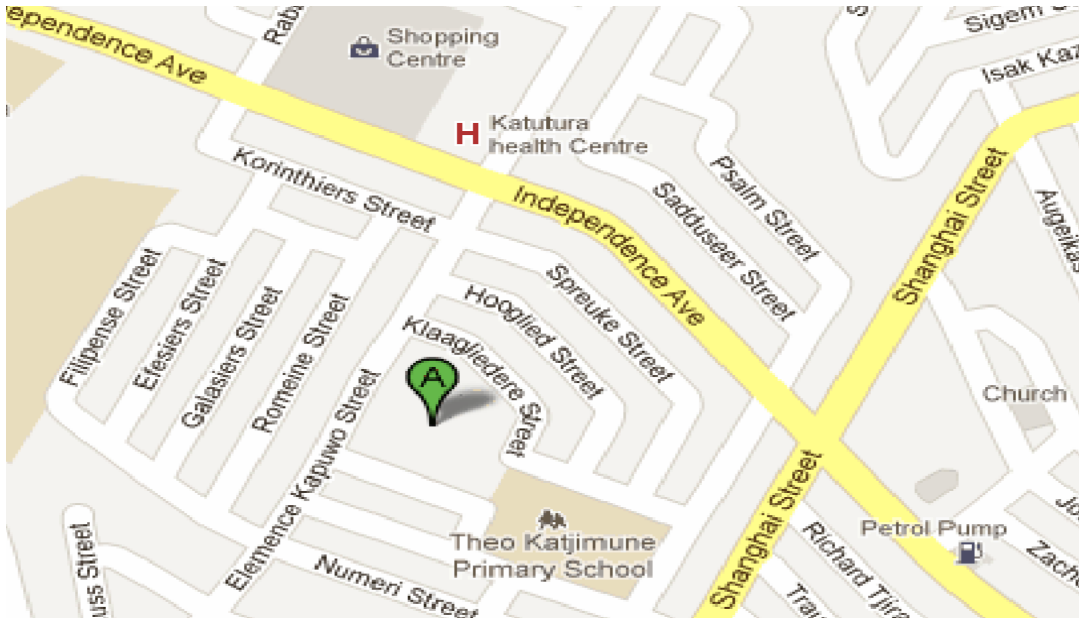
### **Katutura**

Established in 1957 in the north of the city centre, Katutura is home to more than half of Windhoek's population. The constituency of Katutura Central within which the study area of '*Herero Mall*' is located, had a population of 21 243 inhabitants in 2001 (CBS, 2001). This number has increased to 24 600 over the past 10 years, translating in a 14% increase (NPC, 2012), a figure considerably above the general population growth rate.

### ***'Herero Mall'***

The place called '*Herero Mall*' began to take shape in 2007 (Sibeene, 2011). What started off as a fractional number of isolated movable establishments on open space, primarily selling roasted beef, mushroomed into a great number of establishments over a period of four years. Commanding a sizable clientele, alcoholic drinks joined the range of consumables – and shebeens (alcohol outlets) proliferated. These establishments started to take on a permanent outlook in the form of shacks. The new physical immovable structures hosted car washes, barbershops, tyre-repair and general motor mechanic businesses.

**Map 2:** Locating *'Herero Mall'* in Katutura Central



*Note:* Located in Clemens Kapuuo Street (wrongly spelled as 'Elemence Kapuwo' Street on the map), *'Herero Mall'* is marked with letter A. Adapted from Google Maps, 2011.

*'Herero Mall'* is largely located in Clemens Kapuuo Street with some sections bordered by Klaagliedere Street. The name Clemens Kapuuo is of historical significance to the Ovaherero people in particular and Namibians in general, and perhaps the location of *'Herero Mall'* in Clemens Kapuuo Street should not be looked at as a mere coincidence. Clemens Kapuuo was a paramount chief of the Ovaherero and leader of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). He was assassinated in cold-blood on the Easter Monday of March 27, 1978 (Gewald, 2004). The southern part of *'Herero Mall'* is located behind the Ovaherero Commando No. 2, the erstwhile epicentre of Ovaherero political / traditional power, and still an important place for Ovaherero cultural life.

## **Social space**

Since its inception, *'Herero Mall'* has aroused debates questioning its existence and what it stands for. Some have called for its removal as it signifies moral decadence and a hotbed of crime (e.g. Hengari, 2007). The call has become even louder recently, as conflicts over opening hours of shebeens of *'Herero Mall'* have brought the police into the arena. *'Herero Mall'* is an illegal setting in the eyes of municipal laws of the City of Windhoek (Weidlich, 2007). Some defended it as a business hub contributing to livelihoods of many people in its milieu (e.g. Karuombe, 2007). More importantly, it has become a fashionable meeting point for entertainment and leisure time, and a cultural hot spot of consumerist young Africans of the capital city. The latter forms a point of departure of this study.

Writing in *The Namibian* newspaper, Hengari (2007) claimed that “*'Herero Mall'* would burden any critical Namibian with a sense of hopelessness because it epitomises what is sociologically wrong with the youth in this country”. Retorting to Hengari, Karuombe (2007) argues that *'Herero Mall'* serves as a platform for people from all walks of life, and those who converge at the Mall amongst others discuss matters touching the welfare of Ovaherero and Ovambanderu people as well as of Namibians in general. This controversy reflects but some of the contradictions and opposing views proffered by opinion makers and observers concerning *'Herero Mall'*. Without disputing or supporting either assertion, the study seeks to interrogate the sociological meaning of this place by the name of *'Herero Mall'*.

### 1.3 Defining concepts

The study is largely anchored on two concepts: *social space* and *social meaning*. Goodall (1987, p.483) contends that *social space* refers to “space as perceived and used by members of a particular social group, and within which that social group carries on its interrelations, the framework within which the subjective evaluations and motivations of members of the group can be related to overtly expressed behaviour and to the external characteristics of the environment”. Notwithstanding that the definition invoked by Goodall (1987) captures the context in which the concept(s) will be employed; definitional wrangles of social space do exist. Before attending to definitional issues, Giddens’ Structuration Theory is illustrative in contextualising social action with reference to time and space. Giddens (1984) posits that in analysing social relations we have to acknowledge their patterning in time and space in reproducing situated practices. Simply put, social action always takes place in a setting of time and space.

Simonsen (1996) took issue with an apparent lack of precision of the word ‘space’ as used in contemporary human geography and social theory. He raised three conceptions of space – space as social spatiality, space as material environment, and space as difference. For our purpose, definitional precedence would be accorded to the conceptions of space as social spatiality and space as difference. This perspective uses as its starting point social practices and/or social processes (Simonsen, 1996). “The basic idea is that the spatial forms an integrated part of social practices and/or social processes – and that such practices and processes are all situated in space (and time) and all inherently involve a spatial



dimension. This is so in all scales of social life – from micro phenomena, such as daily practices of work or consumption...” (op. cit., p. 503). Explaining space as difference, Simonsen (1996) points to the dissimilitude of places, regions or localities that influences social processes and social life.

## **Meaning**

Interactionism is premised on the Weberian assumption that action is meaningful to those involved. George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) who can largely be read through his students’ lecture notes as he did not publish any books during his lifetime, was an Interpretive Theorist of note. On social interaction, Blumer (1966, p. 537) contends that Mead ... “identified two forms or levels – non-symbolic interaction and symbolic interaction. In non-symbolic interaction, human beings respond directly to one another’s gestures or action; in symbolic interaction they interpret each other’s gestures and act on the basis of the meaning yielded by the interpretation”.

To illustrate the latter part of interaction: picture an unemployed Markus washing cars around Windhoek city centre at a fee – the meaning he attaches to his action is: trying to earn an honourable living. From the City Police perspective: Markus is washing cars in an area not designated for that purpose, therefore, he is breaking the law and should be incarcerated. Same action, different meanings – and importantly, meaning is defined by the respective actor within the purview of his/her position in relation to the action. In the Weberian Interpretive Sociology, meaning is what ‘makes’ “action” social. Weber (1981, p.159) speaks of social

action “wherever human action is subjectively related in meaning to the behaviour of others”.

The year 2011 saw a physical confrontation between law enforcement officials and traders as well as patrons at *Herero Mall*. The *Mall* came under attack over the years due to illegal trading, noise pollution, crime and unhygienic conditions. On Friday 15 July 2011, a large contingent of Namibian Police (NamPol) and Special Field Force members arrived and swept the square at *Herero Mall* – driving out revellers and shutting bar doors until the area was deserted (Isaacs, 2011). Residents questioned the methods used by the national security officials to move people from *Herero Mall* as some alleged that tear gas and pepper spray was used to force people to move (Immanuel, 2011).

#### **1.4 Orientation of the study**

Assuming that *Herero Mall* is a postcolonial social entity, which should be understood by taking cognisance of intricate social interactions that embody ethnic cultural identities against a backdrop of apartheid legacy, a systematic and focused social enquiry *into the representations of Herero Mall* is indeed called for. What does *Herero Mall* represent as far as identity construction and social closure in an urban space are concerned? The study will critically analyse this social space beyond legal positivism.

Pendleton (2006) argues that Windhoek has a dual structure reflecting its colonial and apartheid history, that is, a ‘first world’ existing along a ‘third world’.

Fascinated and at the same time intrigued by the social space called '*Herero Mall*', the researcher developed an interest in understanding this 'controversial' establishment. In his highly acclaimed work, *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills (2000<sup>ii</sup>) suggests that smaller-scale milieux should be selected and studied in the context of larger-scale historical structures. '*Herero Mall*' is a milieu reflecting a persisting apartheid legacy of ethnic division in post-apartheid and post-independence Namibian society, which befits Wright Mills' exposition. It has been a magnet of controversies for the most part since its inception. Fatal fights at '*Herero Mall*' have been a cause of concern, absence of ablution facilities a health risk and alcohol abuse among young people a worrisome phenomenon (Weidlich, 2007). There is another side of the coin – '*Herero Mall*' contributes to livelihoods, it is economic lifeblood to be reckoned with. Equally, it is an entertainment hub and a melting pot where people from different age groups interact (Karuuombe, 2007). This juxtaposition of the 'undesirable' existing alongside the 'desirable' represents a contradiction intriguing for sociological enquiry.

Shields (1997) provocatively asserts that apart from sociologists and geographers, it comes as no surprise to most people that the *where* and *when* of events are as significant as the *what* of those events. "This applies to the most important of social activities (including crimes), which may well be empty of meaning or may never take place except for their fortuitous siting and timing" (op.cit. p.187). This research, in its sociological orientation, would want to add the *who* to the above-mentioned *where*, *when*, and *what*.

Amin (2007, p.104) reminds us that “...the constant tension in urban life between fixity and flow, stasis and change, interaction and fragmentation, diversity and commonality, has to be acknowledged explicitly as an analytical and political challenge”. Acknowledging these contrasts forms another analytical angle unpacking social formations, together with the need to understand their historiography to give them context.

### **1.5 Relevance of the research**

A preliminary scrutiny into studies on social space in Namibia proved elusive. The body of knowledge of Namibian urban sociology is still under construction, thus providing the scope for this study. Equally, the analysis embeds the decoding of a bounded social formation in the comprehensive picture of the emerging contradictions of a post-independence Namibian society.

Often times, authorities introduce interventions that prove to be incongruent with inhabitants of places they seek to ‘uplift’. The resistance they face reflects a rift between those in power and the residents. In the case of Windhoek, such rift could point to both race and class factors, in addition to the persisting ethnic divides.

### **1.6 Research Question(s)**

In consonance with the problem statement, the study seeks to address the knowledge gap that exists in the exploration of social meaning of urban space, with a particular focus on *‘Herero Mall’*. Importantly, the study targets aspects of social

space that beyond mere observation, promise a deeper understanding of current processes of social transformation.

Therefore, the main question of this study is: What is the meaning of *'Herero Mall'* when contextualised in history (“when”), in Windhoek’s urban space and post-independent urban society (“where”) and with reference to its agents (“who”)? Getting to know what the place was used for before and the factors that precipitated the formation of *'Herero Mall'* are but some of the issues the study seeks to address. Moving beyond accidental siting, the “where” of *'Herero Mall'* will be interrogated to reflect on the meaning of power symbols in the proximity of this place. Cognisant of the fact that *'Herero Mall'* is not merely a place of doing business, the research needs to transcend economics to identify what meaning business owners attach to *'Herero Mall'*, apart from it being a source of income. The demographics of business owners – sex, age and ethnicity – will be complimented by the portrayal of the customers / visitors. Social interaction between the two groups of agents forms an important constituent of what makes *'Herero Mall'*. Identifying who the customers are and what this place means to them would be paramount. Finally, and with reference to Morin’s (2009) assertion that “...place names are laden with human stories, silences, and struggles...” – investigation of the meaning of the name *'Herero Mall'* will take centre stage.

## **1.7 Overview of the study**

**Chapter 1** of this study introduces the problem statement and concisely sketches the historical background of the place in which the study was conducted, i.e.

Katutura, Windhoek. Important concepts related to the research problem are also defined in Chapter 1. The review of literature is covered under **Chapter 2**, engaging with major theoretical and conceptual propositions. The scrutiny of relevant literature draws from studies dealing with issues of social space and post-apartheid scholarship from writers within the African continent. **Chapter 3** presents the research methodology used throughout the research. It includes a narrative of how the actual field study was manoeuvred and specifies the instruments used in the analysis of the empirical evidence generated through the field research. In **Chapter 4**, ethnographic evidence is interfaced with literature, and Municipal Resolutions of the City of Windhoek concerning *'Herero Mall'* are briefly analysed and contextualised to the existing practices at the 'Mall'. **Chapter 5** expounds the data from the field study. Amongst others, it covers the demographic profile of the respondents and identifies a variety of overlapping themes. Analytical discussion is also dealt with under Chapter 5 of the study. Data are discussed in conjunction with the literature. Finally, **Chapter 6** gives an account of major conclusions reached, and recommendations.

Henceforth, the term 'chapter' will be abbreviated with 'Ch.', if a reference is given in brackets.

## Chapter Two - Literature Review

### 2.1 Social space in a post-colonial and post-apartheid setting

Scholars writing on social space abound, Henry Lefebvre seems to be an influential force. A quick look at the literature reveals frequent reference to him. Lefebvre (1991, p. 73) argues that “social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their relationships in their co-existence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder”. Importantly, social space is an outcome of past actions, and it permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting others (op. cit.). Indeed, *Herero Mall* came about as a result of past actions – and identifying these actions, or reasons that led to the ‘production of this space’, is crucial if we are to understand its social architecture.

Castells (2010, p. 441) posits that “space is a material product, in relationship to other material products – including people – who engage in [historically] determined social relationships that provide space with a form, a function, and a social meaning”. When we venture into the definitional aspect(s) of space, one thing is apparent – history is a critical strand in studying social formations (cf. Lefebvre 1991; Castells 2010). This is where postcolonial studies become important as far as grasping the social meaning of postcolonial or post-apartheid social formations is concerned.

One of the few Namibian studies analysing specific social spaces of the post-apartheid formation is that of Romie Nghiulikwa (2008), an unpublished Master of

Arts thesis. Picturing Babilon youths and their cultural attitudes, Nghiulikwa explores the coping mechanisms of young migrants from Oshiwambo-speaking northern parts of Namibia (the erstwhile Ovamboland) in negotiating the demanding city life. In the main, it is a cultural anthropological study – but it also touches on issues of class as it engages those as research respondents who live on the periphery. Young people in Babilon informal settlement live on the periphery, in spatial and social terms, being remote from all what the city life has to offer. The latter sense resonates with the setup of *'Herero Mall'*, which exhibits the same marginalization. However, *'Herero Mall's'* marginality intriguingly occurs in the very midst of a formal residential area. This juxtaposition somewhat illuminates 'the reproduction of the rural in the urban', to borrow from Nghiulikwa (2008), or rather, the adaptation of the rural in the urban.

Theorizing about the character of postcolonial aspects of culture, Bhabha (1994) observes that the expression of social marginality forces us to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value. Could we argue that *'Herero Mall'* is an offshoot of apartheid South Africa's policies, unfolding as a post-apartheid social formation? Could it be a reflection of an incomplete project of identity construction as a result of social marginality? Invoking a postcolonial perspective, Bhabha (1994) argues that cultural and political identities are constructed through a process of alterity (otherness). Given the visibly entrenched footprints of apartheid, ethnic segregation is a tormenting ghost besetting Namibia's social fabric. To this end, social formations of an ethnic character should not be



looked at in isolation, for they are a reflection of entrenched ethnic segregation seeking to enhance the process of alterity.

Engaging Bhabha's concept of alterity demands some reference to the 'third space'. Arguably, the space of 'thirdness' opens up a platform where the newness of cultural practices and historical narratives are rendered conflicting in an unexpected juxtaposition. Bhabha (1994) further asserts that social difference – where difference is neither one nor other but something else besides, in-between, find their agency in a form of the future where the past is devoid of origin, where the present is not simply transitory. The historical difference of the present is articulated in the emergence of a third space of representation. This conception of a postcolonial subject represented in a 'third space' suggests an emergence of a 'new' subject resulting from the overlap between the past and the present, and Bhabha refers to this phenomenon as hybridity. A critical look at hybridity reveals an underestimation of the role played by the interplay of the past and present in a continuous, still ongoing creation of meaning, or social reproduction.

Subjecting '*Herero Mall*' to Bhabha's hybridity without over-emphasising 'newness' or the 'third space', a different conception could be that '*Herero Mall*' does not necessarily represent an emergence of a new space, but rather a constant reproduction of meaning through the fusion of the past and the present. Winterfeldt (2010, p. 138) rightly avers that "as much as Namibian postcolonial society has developed its own social structural dynamics since 1990, it cannot be conceived without the legacies of the past. In the literal sense of the composite term, Namibian *postcolonial* society transcends its colonial origin and yet bears its marks".

Relatedly, Massey (2005) offers some suggestions of looking at space – and among others, she pleads for a recognition that space is always under construction. “Precisely because space (...) is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded in material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made” (op. cit., p. 8).

Similarly, in problematising the assumed similarity of space, place and culture, Gupta & Ferguson (1992) point to the question of postcoloniality – to which places do hybrid cultures of postcoloniality belong? Interrogating this question could provide insights in understanding post-apartheid social formations on a larger scale. Writing about South Africa on a similar subject, Landman (2002) argues that “despite many attempts at reconstruction, cities still reflect the footprints of the past in their spatial and use patterns, which serve as constant reminders of a past of inequity and segregation” (cited in Donaldson & Marais, 2002, p.206) . Certainly, the same can be said for Namibia in general and Windhoek in particular as the remnants of South Africa’s apartheid regime are starkly visible in land use pattern. Castells (2010, p. 441) contends that “... the apparently simple acknowledgment of a meaningful relationship between society and space hides a fundamental complexity. This is because space is not a reflection of society, it is its expression”. One could use this latter assertion as a point of reference in an attempt to unearth the meaning expressed in *‘Herero Mall’*, taking into account the historicity of this social space. Moreover, Castells argues that from a social point of view, there is no space as a mere physical quantity, but a historically defined space-time, a space constructed, worked, and practised by social formations (cited in Kellerman, 1989). This

resonates with Giddens' rejection of time-space as mere environments, containers of categories of mind. Instead, Giddens viewed time-space as constitutive features of social systems, implicated as deeply in the most stable forms of social life as in those subject to the most extreme or radical modes of change (op. cit.).

### **Post-apartheid social formations**

Talking about post-apartheid social formations demands us to immerse ourselves into the post-colonial discourse. For apartheid was a specific form of colonialism. Taking as a basis Landman's (2002) allusion to the stark footprints of apartheid legacy in contemporary South Africa, the institutionalisation of apartheid policies in Namibia indeed left an ingrained mark on the Namibian social structure. As Simon (1996) contends, Namibian apartheid legislation was crafted on that of South Africa, although implemented principally by proclamation. Therefore, when reference is made to post-apartheid social formations, primacy is given to the effect of past policies on present day realities. This raises the issue of how apartheid laws of the yesteryear underlie the formation of '*Herero Mall*'. The latter is by no means a straightforward nexus, but could well be an undercurrent, which invisibly explains the formation of a social space like '*Herero Mall*'. I shall call this undercurrent an 'apartheid hangover'.

In dealing with the question of why we need to study a city as a point of entry into wider questions about a society, Chandoke (1991) postulates that it is within a city as a bounded socio-spatial entity that one can locate the social and spatial juxtaposition and the articulation of social processes. Indeed, it is within a city

where the distribution of social desirables, municipal services and infrastructures' unequal distribution is accentuated. In the case of Windhoek, this somewhat crystallises the legacy of apartheid. Relatedly, it is argued that "the city spatially and socially condenses the contradictions of a social formation" (op. cit., p. 2868).

## **2.2 The urban social in Windhoek**

Windhoek functions as a primate centre in political, economic and socio-cultural terms (Tvedten, 2004). Moreover, Namibia is the only country in Southern Africa with a large proportion of its population living in the capital (op. cit.), currently some 15% of the population. Relatedly, Frayne (2004, p. 492) insists that "Windhoek provides a destination for all sectors of the Namibian society". Not surprisingly, the urban poor is disproportionately high in Katutura. This should be understood in terms of rural-urban migration picking up exponentially with the abolition of formal apartheid after independence. Urban vulnerability in Windhoek is linked to rural-urban migration, for the urban poor comprise of migrants who moved from rural areas in search of better living standard in the capital. At times, the search for a better living standard in urban centres is elusive as it 'remains just a hope' as Nngiulikwa (2008) puts it. As Frayne (2004) demonstrates, urban-rural reciprocity of social relations and exchange of goods is not a one-way movement from rural to urban centres – but also a movement in the opposite direction.

### **2.3 Transcending mere observation**

Epistemologically speaking, observation invariably entails moving beyond what is observable in the field. Observation cannot be separated from interpretation – the quest for a value-free science proves elusive. It does so in spite of Max Weber’s classical ethical call for the academic’s unconditional objectivity, which he interprets as value neutrality (Weber, 1989). Certainly, we see things differently due to our social experiences and not least our embodied values. Arguably, if there is anything particular about participant-observation fieldwork as a research approach – it is that it is socially defined (Katz, 2004). As noted in Chapter 3 (Ch. 3.3), participant observation is one of the research instruments used in the data collection process. In this light and with reference to the Weberian enunciation, observation as an instrument of data collection should be treated with a caveat especially in the social sciences. Goddard (1973, p. 1) rightly points out that “no science is value-free, for all scientific activity (because it is an activity, a human activity) presupposes some framework of meanings or values in terms of which is judged meaningful, worthwhile, or useful”.

### **2.4 Social transformation in a post-apartheid setting**

According to the Human Development Report of 2011, Namibia is among the most unequal countries in the world in terms of social development (UNDP, 2011). Most writers attribute this state of affairs to remnants of pre-independence institutionalized apartheid and colonialism that refuse to dissipate (cf. Jauch, Edwards & Cupido, 2009; du Pisani, 2000; Bond, 2007). About a year after

Namibian independence in her aptly titled piece, *'The contradictions of independence: Namibia in transition'*, Freeman (1991) already spoke about a 'social structure of inequality'. At independence, Namibia had one of the most unequal distributions of income in the world (op. cit.). Admittedly, the situation has not changed that much and the country is highly fragmented years after independence. Jauch, Edwards & Cupido (2009) conclude that the redressing of enormous levels of socio-economic inequality in Namibia is contingent on systematic structural changes.

It follows that the wheels of social transformation move slowly in post-apartheid settings. Formations such as *'Herero Mall'* could be seen as representing a specific form of social organisation of a post-apartheid city. Such a social space could represent desperation in the midst of a widening gap between the haves and have not, as well as adaptation to it. It could represent a frustration against the backdrop of eviscerated hopes of independence beyond universal suffrage, as well as the ascendance of the few privileged. Socio-economic status has worsened for the majority in the post-apartheid era, betraying the fallacy of the liberal promise in reality (Bond, 2007). Arguably, "while the race of the rulers has changed, the basic structure has continued relatively undisturbed" (op. cit.: 36).

## **2.5 *'Herero Mall'* – What is in the name?**

*"From the house to the street to the nation to the globe, place names are laden with human stories, silences, and struggles that continually face off against bureaucratic and linguistic control"* (Karen M. Morin, 2009: In a book cover of Vuolteenaho & Berg, 2009).

The name '*Herero Mall*' somewhat defies nomenclature and semantics. Notwithstanding that it is located in an area predominantly inhabited by Otjiherero-speaking Namibians, '*Herero Mall*' represents nothing that is remotely akin to a 'Mall'. In common usage and in the context of a trading sphere, the word 'Mall' could refer to an assemblage of shops offering a variety of consumer goods and services.

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2012) defines shopping centre, shopping mall, or shopping plaza, as a... "20th-century adaptation of the historical marketplace, with accommodation made for automobiles. A shopping centre is a collection of independent retail stores, services, and a parking area conceived, constructed, and maintained by a management firm as a unit. Shopping centres may also contain restaurants, banks, theatres, professional offices, service stations, and other establishments". '*Herero Mall*' bears none of the characteristics proffered by the aforesaid definition.

Certainly, the naming of places is not an innocent exercise. For names of places can express an aspiration, frustration, anger, identification, and the sorts. Does the name '*Herero Mall*' signify an Ovaherero-only area? Or, does it express social closure? Probably not. Karuumombe (2007) observes that "what was initially a free-for-all open space started to become a commercial hub and mainly through the Otjiherero radio assumed the name '*Herero Mall*'". Karuumombe further points to the non-existence of any platform where the name '*Herero Mall*' was proposed and endorsed (op. cit.). Cohen and Kliot (1992, p. 655) remind us that, "[a]s signifiers of place, place names can evoke powerful emotions within individuals and groups, and

they thus conform to the most classic definitions of symbolism” (cited in Berg & Kearns 2009, p. 25). Not least, place names are paramount to the process by which people attach meaning to a place (op. cit.).

A popular Otjiherero radio disc jockey often refers to *'Herero Mall'* jokingly, as “the Mall without a roof”. Simply put, *'Herero Mall'* has gained currency in official circles and not least in the mainstream media. Reading and hearing Municipal and Government Officials talking about *'Herero Mall'* has become commonplace. However, it is not out of place to speculate that the name *'Herero Mall'* will be an anathema when a chance of formalising it comes into play. Renaming places could be an integral part of formalisation, and this is where the issue of power becomes apparent. Vuolteenaho & Berg (2009, p. 7) insightfully observe that, “when seen through theories that stress the pervasiveness of power in all socio-spatial relations, the mundane taken-for-grantedness of place names (until something “goes wrong with them”), and their politically charged meanings, are elements in the same conceptual tangle”. In the tradition of critical place-name studies, the emphasis is not necessarily on the name itself – but rather on the cultural politics of naming which entails how people seek to control, negotiate, and contest the naming process as they engage in wider struggles for legitimacy and visibility (Rose-Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu, 2010).

As Morin (2009) suggests, there are nuances expressed in names of places – and fundamental meanings are discernible upon closer examination. So, what is in the name *'Herero Mall'*? In Bhabha’s sense, it represents ‘hybridity’ of sorts, an interface between ‘Herero’ (old) and ‘Mall’ (new) to form a ‘third space’. Moreover,



the name carries pretentious undertones – that is, claiming to be something it is not. This could suggest an aspiration to be a posh place of consumption. It is not out of place to assert that the name ‘*Herero Mall*’ expresses a ‘consumerist space’ as its defining character.

## **2.6 Theoretical Framework – Bourdieu’s *Field***

The notion of *Field* is one of Bourdieu’s central concepts throughout his work (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1984; Thompson 1991). Bourdieu’s conception of *Field* provides a seemingly fitting telescope through which ‘*Herero Mall*’ can be theorised. The purpose, needless to repeat, is to lay the meaning of this social space bare. It must be pointed out from the outset that Bourdieu used the *Field* originally to expound preferences of artistic goods as a way of expressing taste and distinction or difference. Closer reading of Bourdieu’s *Field* reveals that the undercurrent defining preference is the issue of social class. Bourdieu (1984, p. 230) insists that “there is a fairly close homology between (...) fields of production in which products are developed and the fields of the social classes or the dominant class in which tastes are determined”. He further asserts that antagonistic relations between different classes over material or consumer goods are the source of the changing of tastes. The following can be used to illustrate relations of consumption at ‘*Herero Mall*’:

“[t]he correspondence which is (...) established between the classes of products and the classes of consumers is realised in acts of consumption only through the mediation of that sense of the homology

*between goods and groups which define tastes. Choosing according to one's tastes is a matter of identifying goods that are objectively attuned to one's position (...) because they are situated in roughly equivalent positions in the respective spaces (...)" (op. cit., p. 232).*

People who make 'Herero Mall' what it is assume positions in the *Fields* of production / supply and consumption / demand within the confines of social class. Traders occupy the social space called 'Herero Mall' because it is easy to join the *Field* of production or supply, exonerating them from the trouble of large sums of start-up capital and taxation. Of course there are those who enter the *Field* of supply at the 'Mall' because of wanting to get more by investing less. In a typical capitalist disposition, this group of traders could have the means to invest but would nonetheless be fixated on profit maximisation at the lowest possible production or supply cost. This represents a deviation from the general landscape of the *Field* of supply at the 'Mall', for a great number of traders are those without enough money to invest.

Patrons of consumer goods at 'Herero Mall' become part of the *Field* of consumption for a number of reasons. Admittedly, the majority of revellers reside in Katutura. To this end, the issue of reach becomes a factor in the equation of consumption. This in turn lowers consumption cost. But there are those who come all the way from posh suburbs with their expensive cars. Seeing a Mercedes Benz E-Class or a BMW X5 at the 'Mall' is no unique encounter. Presumably, this group of patrons have the financial means to frequent upmarket entertainment zones. But why do they come to 'Herero Mall'? It is romanticization of the informal which

temporarily exonerates one from the formal and professional etiquette typical of established service industries.

Photo No. 1



Cars parked at *'Herero Mall'*

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## Chapter three – Methodology

### 3. Methodology

The main thesis of this study anchors on two strands. Firstly, it is to bridge the gap between protagonists and antagonists' understanding of '*Herero Mall*' by locating its 'real' social meaning. In an attempt to achieve the latter, I 'immersed' myself in the social space called '*Herero Mall*' as an observing participant and not least as a participating observer. Secondly, it deflates conceptions of social space as mere 'containers'.

#### 3.1 Research Design

Since the study focused on understanding and situating the meaning of a social space (*Herero Mall*), it employed a qualitative research design. An ethnographic approach has been used in order to engage research participants in their natural setting. Therefore, an 'Ethnography of *Herero Mall*' was a methodological choice. Haralambos, Holborn & Heald (2000, p.1008) define ethnography "as the study of a way of life", and they observed that participant observation is the most dominant single method used in ethnographic studies. Herbert (2000) stresses that ethnography provides nonreplicable insight into the processes and meanings that sustain and motivate social groups. To grasp the social meaning of a space such as '*Herero Mall*', one cannot do without seeking to understand actors / agents' way of life to illuminate how they negotiate meaning, hence the appropriateness of an ethnographic approach.

## 3.2 Population

Research population largely include those who run businesses at *'Herero Mall'*. Key players who wield influence over the operations of *'Herero Mall'* formed part of the research population. This includes the Councillor of Katutura Central Constituency, *'Herero Mall'* Committee and residents in the immediate proximity of *'Herero Mall'*. Importantly, visitors / customers were an integral part of the research population.

### 3.2.1 Sample

A total of 25 respondents were interviewed for this study. The sample includes business owners and their employees at *'Herero Mall'*, customers, Councillor of Katutura Central Constituency and *'Herero Mall'* Committee Members. As the research population was known by the researcher, *purposive sampling* was employed. Thus, the sample of this study can be identified as *non-probability sample*. Participants were approached on the basis of the fact that they make *'Herero Mall'* what it is, i.e. they are traders at the 'Mall', customers or residents close to the 'Mall' and as such better positioned to define the meaning they attach to this space. Even though the *modus operandi* was approaching prospective respondents at the 'Mall' and ask whether or not they are willing to participate in the study after explaining the research purpose, I also incorporated *snow-ball sampling* to shape the sample population when the circumstances dictated so. Such circumstances invariably manifested after asking an Otjherero-speaking respondent

what the name '*Herero Mall*' meant. [*'People think that 'Herero Mall' is only for OvaHerero, go to that shebeen – there is Oshiwambo-speaking owner'.]*

### 3.3 Research Instruments

In line with the methodological principles of ethnographic approach, the following instruments of data collection were employed:

✚ Overt participant observation (the researcher had an established participant role in the scene studied), In-depth interviews (using unstructured interview guides) and Key Informant Interviews (KII). Initially, my presence was viewed with suspicion and some time (circa one month) needed to pass by before I could establish the necessary rapport. Seating at the 'Mall' taking notes and having a voice-recorder switched on did not sit well with revellers passing by and traders alike. Apart from the suspicion initially attached to the voice-recorder, the dictates of the field at times rendered the use of the voice-recorder illogical. This was usually the case when conducting an interview in the midst of loud music and sound from metals mechanics work with. In such instances, note-taking was the only way. After frequenting '*Herero Mall*' for more than a month, I became part of the 'Mall's' everyday life and interaction. The suspicion was buried and I got to know some traders and revellers in person and this led to a number of impromptu informal conversations that added important insights to the study. To pin down the history of the place where '*Herero Mall*' is located, that is, Windhoek / Katutura – desk research was used.

### **3.4 Procedure**

Armed with a voice-recorder, notebook and a digital camera, I would descend on '*Herero Mall*' any day of the week. Making appointments for interviews proved problematic an approach of going about meeting my research participants, for often times I would make appointments only to find my prospective interviewee attending to customers. I settled on the approach of 'chance', coming to '*Herero Mall*' as frequent as I could given the flexibility of my workplace in allowing me to 'sneak out' of office at my own volition. As far as participant observation is concerned, note-taking was the main procedure of ensuring a systematic record keeping of what was observed in the field. This was complemented by taking photos to foster a better understanding of the study through visualising some aspects of the research where necessary. For in-depth interviews, guiding questions were followed and the approach was open-ended to facilitate thick description. The same goes for KII's.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

As cited in Babbie & Mouton (2001), Tesch (1990) enumerated a number of research interests that by and large dictate the analysis of qualitative data. The study relied on two main strands during the process of data analysis: 1. "The discovery of (ir) regularities – a) as the identification of categories of elements and the establishment of their connections, and as identification of patterns; 2. The comprehension of meaning of action – a) through discovery of themes and through interpretation" (op. cit., p. 491). After conducting a number of interviews, a number

of themes related to the study stood out and in turn these dictated the structure of the data presentation and the analytical discussion chapter. In summation, content analysis was used in the process of data analysis. To analyse written texts in a form of newspapers' articles on '*Herero Mall*', the study relied on discourse analysis. The word *discourse* is to a greater extent associated with the work of Michel Foucault, at least in the social sciences. Foucault (1972, p. 80) refers to discourse "sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as regulated practice that account for a number of statements". Discourse analysis is concerned with applying the notion of structure above the level of the sentence, that is, "taking the analogy of grammatical relations such as subject-verb-object and applying it to the analysis of longer text" (Mills, 2004: 120). But why discourse analysis? In Sociology, discourse analysis plays an important role in accounting for structures of everyday interaction (van Dijk, 1993). As de Wet (2001, p. 100) puts it, "texts are examined for their effects rather than their accuracy; the question is 'What do texts do?', not 'What do texts say?'". In short, discourses aim to construct particular truths (op. cit.).

### **3.6 Research Ethics**

Richardson and McMullan (2007) insist that when researching 'the social', one is bound to come head-on with ethical issues. Reflecting on his field study of how Masvingo's female heads of households dealt with impoverishment in southern Zimbabwe, Muzvidziwa (2004) touched on a number of ethical considerations one



should honour in fieldwork settings. One such consideration is the avoidance of pretence and deceitful behaviour. During my field study, I incessantly got the impression that respondents harboured expectations that the research will ‘fix’ their plight at ‘*Herero Mall*’. An ethical dilemma emerged as a result – should respondents’ expectations not be met, the researcher will be a suspect of deceitful behaviour if not pretence. I followed the advice of Muzvidziwa (2004) of ‘never lying but be oneself’ during fieldwork settings to avoid pretence and deceitful behaviour. My assurance to the respondents was telling their story in the best truthful manner possible to the wider audience including academics and policy-makers but stopped short of promising them that the study was going to be a ‘fixer’. Moreover, participants’ consent was obtained before the study commenced, hence voluntary participation was the *modus operandi*. In ensuring confidentiality, identification codes were employed to avoid disclosing the identity of participants who did not wish to reveal their names. In keeping possible victimisation at bay that could result after publication of this study, names of respondents who disclosed their names are not revealed in the study but are kept confidential by the researcher. Instead, respondents are numbered chronologically in terms of the date on which interviews were conducted.

## Chapter four – Ethnographic Evidence

### 4.1 Conducting business in an informal setting –socio-legal aspects

Informal trading is a pervasive feature of the Namibian economy and not least of other African countries. There is no major town in Namibia spared from the apparent presence of informal business activities. Businesses in the informal sector are invariably unlicensed and illegal. As a mix of disparate informal trading enterprises, *'Herero Mall'* reverberates with what La Porta and Shleifer (2008) call 'unofficial economy' – unregistered entities hidden from taxation and operating outside official regulations. Informal trading in an urban setting by and large bespeaks coping mechanisms chosen by the urban poor within a demanding city life. The informal economy, or the 'unofficial economy' in the language of La Porta and Shleifer, should be understood in relation with the formal economy. As Webster (2005) suggests, formal paid employment (*as well as economy*) and informal-sector activities are *asymmetrically interdependent* (original italics). To illustrate this interdependence, at a risk of oversimplification: A mini-truck from Namibian Breweries is often seen offloading crates of beer at *'Herero Mall'*. This is expressive of the interface between the formal and informal economy.

### 4.2 Formalising the informal – genesis of a conflict

Between 2007 and 2011, a total of 3 deaths are reported to have occurred at *'Herero Mall'*. On October 09, 2009, it was reported that a 19 year-old youth was

stabbed at the 'Mall' and succumbed to his wounds in Katutura State Hospital (*The Namibian*, October 09, 2009). Another death and the most recent reported, occurred in 2011 July, the same month that the Police clashed with traders and customers while using force to 'close' the 'Mall'. A 23 year-old man was reportedly stabbed with a knife at the intersection of Clemens Kapuuo Street and Independence Avenue and apparently ended up at '*Herero Mall*' where he eventually died due to loss of blood from the stab wound (Nunuhe, 2011b; Isaacs, 2011). Tribal tensions were heightened in 2007 following the murder of a 35 year-old Damara-speaking Namibian – Rodney Nuwuseb in the vicinity of '*Herero Mall*' (Nunuhe, 2011b). Arguably, Rodney Nuwuseb was attacked by a group of Otjiherero-speaking Namibians and allegations that the attack was tribally motivated surfaced (op. cit.). A brief scrutiny of the Short Message Service (SMS) Section of *The Namibian* over the past 2 years or so points to residents' frustrations concerning '*Herero Mall*' and its operations. The SMS Section should be treated with a pinch of salt as one person can easily write a number of short texts using different cell phone numbers to sway public opinion in either direction. Box 1 shows some of the texts extracted from the SMS Section of *The Namibian* concerning '*Herero Mall*'.

### **Box 1: Gauging the pulse of the City**

***The Namibian. February 19, 2009. [SMS Section - General]***

“Please City of Windhoek do something about the so-called Herero Mall. The noise is unbearable throughout day and night.” – Concerned resident

***The Namibian. October 29, 2010. [SMS Section – City Fathers Please]***

“Why does Herero Mall operate till the morning hours every day without proper facilities like toilets and security? (A lack of hygiene). Is this fair to other businesses who sell the same products but they are licensed? Something must be done.” – Concerned citizen.

***The Namibian. May 05, 2010. [SMS Section]***

“The City of Windhoek’s CEO (Niilo) Taapopi calls the so-called Herero Mall ‘Sodom and Gomorrah’. What are Ombili, Havana, Sevende Laan, Babylon, Single Quarters, Hakahana and other similar places in the city called? They are not an iota better than the discredited Mall. Shut down all of them and give the residents of our so-called cleanest city in Africa better, humane conditions for living, commercial activities and entertainment.” Windhoek resident.

***The Namibian. March 16, 2011. [SMS Section – City Fathers Please]***

“Councillor Kandjii of Katutura Central please address the so-called Herero Mall. Remove alcohol from the ‘mall’ and our kids will lead happier lives and become productive citizens.”

***The Namibian. July 18, 2011. [SMS Section – City Fathers Please]***

“Herero Mall poses a serious health risk. Hundreds of shebeens are operating without licence but the City Pol are doing nothing about it. What is so special about it and why are the City Police only targeting certain shebeens? Is Herero Mall a holy cow that is untouchable?”

***The Namibian. July 21, 2011. [SMS Section – City Fathers Please]***

“Whoever decided on new trading hours at Herero Mall should without delay do the same to the shebeens in Eveline Street.”

***The Namibian. August 09, 2012. [SMS Section – Law and Order]***

“I am glad that Herero Mall has hours of operations, at least now people can rest. However, I have a problem with the fact that it is only Herero Mall that was targeted. How many crime reports of people being killed and raped do we have of other shebeens? Eveline Street is also a bad street at night. We all know that. Shouldn’t we shut those shebeens at 19h00 also?”

In light of the foregoing and at times full blown skirmishes and confrontations between the authorities and *'Herero Mallers'*, the first official attempt at formalising *'Herero Mall'* (at least on paper) came in a form of a council resolution. On 28 September 2011, the Municipal Council of the City of Windhoek through Council Resolution 278/09/2011 resolved on a number of issues concerning operations at the 'Mall'. Chief among them include a needs analysis for traders, training on crime prevention and law enforcement. The Resolution also entertained the identification of funds for the development of *'Herero Mall'*. By far attracting enormous resistance is the resolve by the Municipal Council to phase out light industries and shebeens after the formalisation process (for details, see the Resolution in *Appendix A*).

Photo No. 2



Demo base

The tent in photo No. 2 was erected at *'Herero Mall'* around June 20, 2012 as a base from where a follow-up demonstration was to be organised against shortened trading hours and alleged discrimination by the authorities. A group of about 50 traders marched down Independence Avenue to hand over a petition demanding longer trading hours from the Municipality of Windhoek. Traders gave the City of Windhoek a deadline of June 20, 2012 to reconsider their trading hours (Kangootui, 2012). Expressive of defeat, the tent was put down shortly afterwards and no follow-up demonstration took place. Even though the demo was not executed, symbolic protest and resistance was illuminated.

As noble as changes proposed in Resolution 278/09/2011 sound, it is apparent that they would be met with resistance. In fact, resistance took place at the 'Mall'. As evidenced by the fact that time and again the Police had to enforce restricted trading hours with its physical presence – resistance continues. Vendors who trade in alcohol would need to be relocated or find alternative market place if Council Resolution 278/09/2011 is implemented in its current form. Vendors involved in light industries would suffer the same fate. Whether or not their resistance is warranted is another question. But it does point to inadequate consultation before the Resolution was drafted and the corresponding divergence of views on how the 'Mall' should look like and where the power of definition lies? These are but some of the questions the authorities and traders alike are still grappling with.

On the question of resistance, Shields (1997, p.198) argues that “[t]he aim of ‘resistance’ is not revolution but the preservation of the potential for significant

social change at a time of confused praxis and rapid restructuring”. Similarly, Harvey (1989) insists that confusion may arise because command over money, space and time form independent but interlocking sources of social power whose repressive qualities spark movements of revulsion and resistance. *‘Herero Mall’* somewhat reflects confused praxis generated by a seemingly precarious future. It is apparent that traders at *‘Herero Mall’* are not privy to the foregoing Municipal Council Resolution, let alone understanding the contents contained therein.

Photo No. 3



Building in defiance?

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Photo No. 3 shows a contractor digging holes for poles that would pave way for the expansion of a shebeen at *‘Herero Mall’*.

The contractor charges N\$10 (approximately €1 at current exchange rates) per hole for his labour. What came to mind witnessing what the photo displays was a question: Why would a vendor trading in alcohol embark on expanding a business which would not be accommodated when the *'Mall'* is formalised? This could reflect building in defiance. The expansion did not take place by the time of writing as the poles were stolen shortly after they were installed into the holes. The latter notwithstanding, the intention does matter – it transcends the primary reason for business expansion, i.e. profit maximisation. The expression of 'ownership' in the midst of contestation over space comes into play. "Because of its proximity to Ovaherero Commando where most of 'traditional' activities take place, people assume that the land where the 'Mall' is belongs to Ovaherero" (Interviewee No. 25). Therefore, defying institutional orders bespeak cultural attachment giving impetus to a sense of ownership.

But there are some vendors who seemingly gave in – they either closed down or put down their businesses (see Photo No. 4). This 'giving up' attitude is also expressed by a number of traders who are still operating at *'Herero Mall'*. "Where am I going to earn a living? But what can we do?" (Interviewee No. 20).



Photo No. 4



Giving up

©Ellison Tjirera

Not far from where a contractor was digging holes for the expansion of an alcohol outlet, nails protrude from a wooden plank of another alcohol outlet being put down.

#### **4.2.1 Council Resolution 249/07/2012 – restriction of trading hours**

Even though the restriction of trading hours has been in place at *'Herero Mall'* since 2011, no formal resolution was in place until July 2012. The Police has been implementing a decision of confining trading activities at the 'Mall' to 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. since 2011 and the passing of Council Resolution 249/07/2012 was nothing more than a mere formality. The Municipal Council of the City of Windhoek resolved to formally restrict trading hours at *'Herero Mall'* through Resolution 249/07/2012. As a background to legitimise this decision, the Council cited “concerns of alcohol abuse, crime and safety, pollution and the impact thereof to the surrounding residents (...)” (Municipal Council Agenda: 2012-07-25). Consequently,

the same Resolution resolved that the request by the petitioners on the extension of operating hours at *'Herero Mall'* should not be supported.

#### **4.3 Consumerism – a defining feature of African youth?**

Even though *'Herero Mall'* is largely comprised of Ovaherero, it represents a social space constituted by interaction of mainly youths from different walks of life and ethnic provenance. This renders its meaning hybrid, that is, 'unifying' young people (new) in a setting reminiscent of ethnicity and tradition (old) through consumerism. Moreover, this points to the generational transformation of urban post-apartheid society in Namibia – the emergence of a consumerist youth culture as a distinct social category.

Photo No. 5



Cruising around the 'Mall'

Music sounds from different directions, cars and people criss-crossing around, glitter from welding works and intermittent sound of a hammer on some metal of sorts. Such is a character of everyday life at *'Herero Mall'*. At the centre of it all is youthful customers.

Photo No. 6



Converging at the 'Mall'

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An important thread at *'Herero Mall'* that signifies the – perhaps typical - hybridity of processes of social transformation in a post-apartheid social formation is consumption. It is the interaction of consumers and providers of consumer goods that constitutes the *Mall's* social meaning. Markedly, its consumers are young people from various social spheres – school-going youngsters<sup>iii</sup>, youthful school dropouts and working young adults are but some of the revellers of *'Herero Mall'*.

Though important, consumption is not the only *raison d'être* of *'Herero Mall'*. Some young people frequent the 'Mall' to mingle. In an uninvited protestation about the status of *'Herero Mall'*, an acquaintance from my high school expressed his displeasure about the 'closure' of the 'Mall'. "...Kandjii did terrible things; girls are nowhere to be found" (Field notes, 09-02-2012). The young man in question wanted to mingle but seemingly there was not enough company of females and he blamed this on the Councillor of Katutura Central Constituency, Ambrosius Kandjii, who is widely believed to have masterminded the 'closure' of *'Herero Mall'*.

The prevalence of young people at *'Herero Mall'* corresponds with Dobler's observations made in Oshikango. Dobler (2008, p. 410) infers that "consumption, and the quest for consumption, has become one of the major modes of integration of young Africans into a global society, and consumption choices have become an important means to express personal identity in relation to the wider world, with all its social and economic discrepancies".

What do young people at *'Herero Mall'* express through their consumption choice – given the fact that alcohol is *the* commodity of choice at the 'Mall'? Partly, it is leisure and mingling. Drawing on circulation of alarming statistics on violence, AIDS and unemployment involving Namibian youth – Fumanti (2007) holds that the foregoing reinforces the public perceptions of youth as potentially dangerous and immoral agents unwilling to participate in the post-independence project. However, Fumanti (2007, p. 154) does not stop short of recognising that "excluded from the productive sphere, the youth are in turn excluded from the consumer culture so pervasive in post-apartheid Namibia and Africa at large, and are left facing

disenchantment and more often despair and alienation”. The indulging of youth in alcohol as part of the consumer culture appears to be at variance with Fumanti’s assertion. For the latter could represent solace of the disenchanting and alienated youth, and their exclusion from the productive sphere does not necessarily exclude them from alcohol consumption. Alcohol sharing is a pervasive social practice at *‘Herero Mall’* and as such purchasing power is by no means the only determinant of consumption. Customers develop relations through their constant interaction in time and space. With almost perfect regularity, a group of customers frequent *‘Herero Mall’* and sit at the same spot. They would move to another spot after exhausting what they were consuming. This could be an intimation of constant search for new relations in order to augment consumption chances. Traders from specific alcohol outlets invariably have their lunch at the same food stands almost every day.

Mufune (2002, p. 187) observes that “alcohol and drug consumption may become an escape from the demands of preparing for responsible adult life among the young”. Without denigrating the generality of youth exclusion from consumer culture, alcohol is an exception. The term *consumer culture* is used interchangeably with *consumer society* to embody the claim that modern societies are distinctive in that they are increasingly organised around consumption (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 2006).

The coming together of young people through consumerism bespeaks transcending apartheid-type ethnic divisions. It bespeaks transcending social divides of status but at the same time stands for lack of opportunities post-apartheid youth faces in post-colonial Namibia. Fairweather (2006, p. 727) posits that “in the

shifting cultural environment of post-apartheid modernity, young people must be regarded not only as a social problem, but as independent actors capable of producing distinctive postcolonial subjectivities through their choices as consumers of global culture”.

#### **4.4 Reproduction of class divides**

Inasmuch as *Herero Mall* brings together youths from different walks of life, it reproduces class divides. Eclectically, people try to eke out a living but at different levels. There are business owners who run their own business; business owners who are formally employed but employ others to run their businesses. You also have traders who operate their own businesses with an assistant. At a meat and porridge’s stand christened *‘Onjungu yaTuvingo’* (‘Pot from Otuvingo<sup>iv</sup>’), a trader combines his efforts with a scrounger to assemble his business utilities every morning and pack them away at the end of the business day. Interestingly, the trader does not know the name of the scrounger though they have been working together for more than 3 months. They simply refer to each other as *‘lani’* (South African informal word for a white man, an employer or boss) whenever they are communicating. “We call each other *‘lani’*, it just started like that” (field notes, 14-09-2012). It could be safely inferred that it was the scrounger who started with using the word *‘lani’* in addressing his employer. The employed *‘lani’* is paid N\$ 10 per day – 5 Namibian dollars in the morning when opening the business and another 5 dollars at the end of the business day. Lunch is also provided to the scrounger as part of the payment for



service rendered. The trader and his assistant communicate in Afrikaans. They are Otjiherero-speaking and Damara-speaking respectively. It is apparent that their working relationship is crudely pragmatic to an extent that they do not need to know each other's name. The employing 'lani' needs a hand to run his business and the employed 'lani' needs to fend for himself – hence a symbiotic relationship at different levels. This is expressive of class divide and reproduction.

Photo No. 7



'Onjunga yaTuvingo'

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Picture another scenario below which exemplifies a specific disposition defined by a class position:

*On August 02, 2012 – I was at 'Herero Mall' for an interview appointment with a car mechanic that did not materialise as the interviewee was attending to his clients.*

*Instead, I decided to sit in a nearby shebeen and engage in some observation. While sitting in a shebeen, a noticeably drunk male presumably in his mid-thirties walked in with a second hand electrical-iron. I soon learnt that the iron was for sale – ‘Ek verkoop’ (‘I am selling’ in Afrikaans), and the price was a mere N\$10 (roughly €1 at current exchange rates). From what I could gather given my limited command of the Afrikaans language, this scrounger, for lack of a better word – appeared aggressively adamant that we (me and other patrons in the shebeen) buy his iron (Field notes, 02-08-2012). He was trying to eke out a living in his own way within the purview of his social position. At a basic level, this scenario presents class reproduction – of a lumpenproletariat.*

Bourdieu (1984, p. 246) maintains that “dispositions are adjusted not only to a class condition, presenting itself as a set of possibilities and impossibilities, but also to a relationally defined position, a rank in the class structure”. Relatedly, and with relevance to a post-apartheid city such as Windhoek – Seekings and Natrass (2005) hold that class has come to replace race as a driver of inequality following the end of formal apartheid (cited in Schensul and Heller, 2011:103). Analyzing post-apartheid Durban in South Africa, Schensul and Heller (2011, p. 103) conclude that “(...) class mechanisms are now reinforcing apartheid urban spatial structures”. Changes linked to class play a major role in reproducing the spatial hierarchy of the city (op. cit.). Indeed, post-apartheid Windhoek can be viewed within the foregoing prism and *‘Herero Mall’* is a classic example of this conception.



#### **4.5 ‘Herero Mall’ in the print media – newspaper documentation of conflict and crime**

The picture of ‘Herero Mall’ painted in the media reflects a particular discourse (see Ch. 3.5 on pp. 30 – 31 for a discussion on discourse analysis), aimed at constructing a particular truth. Written texts perpetuate certain world-views, advance certain perceptions, and give prominence to some voices while silencing others. ‘Herero Mall’ has been in the print media largely for the wrong reasons as the majority of headlines about it suggests.

Two of the three daily newspapers<sup>v</sup> largest in circulation were chosen for discourse analysis. Accessibility was a determining factor in opting for print media. The corpus of texts accessed for analysis includes newspaper articles from *The Namibian* and *New Era*’s internet archives for the period 01/01/2007 to 08/31/2012. ‘Herero Mall’ was a computer search phrase. The year 2007 marks the inception of ‘Herero Mall’ and allows for a starting point in grasping the trajectory of discourse up to the period closest to the analysis, September 2012. A computer search with the phrase ‘Herero Mall’ yielded a total of 44 newspaper articles. The content of these articles directly makes reference to, and are about ‘Herero Mall’. It is worth noting that the search produced more than 44 articles, but articles referring to ‘Herero Mall’ in passing were sieved out so as to avoid using articles that incidentally make reference to ‘Herero Mall’.

##### **(i) *Early skirmishes between protagonists and antagonists***

The dominant theme emerging out of articles about ‘Herero Mall’ in 2007 is the pitting of protagonists versus antagonists. There are a number of articles

holding '*Herero Mall*' in high regard. Equally, there are articles bemoaning the existence of '*Herero Mall*'. The issue of (im)morality and what '*Herero Mall*' stands for in the broader sense of informal trading come to the fore. Hengari (2007) suggests that '*Herero Mall*' is a display of the failure of Government and society at large in crafting a different (*better?*) future for Namibian youth. Therefore, '*Herero Mall*' could be viewed as a form of an alternative protest movement and not necessarily a 'Booze Mall' (op. cit.).

Though tensions were not yet heightened at '*Herero Mall*', first signs of cracks started to surface as early as 2007. Reportedly, a 35 years old man was murdered at the 'Mall' (*The Namibian*, 2007) and this led to inter-ethnic confrontations and fights – for the murdered was a Damara-speaking Namibian and the perpetrators were allegedly Otjiherero-speaking Namibians.

**(ii) *Crime, crime, crime and crime...***

The frequency of the word *crime* in newspaper articles about '*Herero Mall*' between 2007 and 2012 is overwhelming. It could be safely argued that the word *crime* has become an equivalent of '*Herero Mall*' in the print media. Of course media compile reports based on investigations put together from short interviews and observation, and as such reference to *crime* is not out of the blue. Whether or not *crime* has reached bewildering proportions at the 'Mall' compared to other areas in Windhoek is another question. But the pairing of *crime* with '*Herero Mall*' points to actual instances of *crime* as well as existing perception that this place is a hotbed of *crime* even in the absence hard of data to quantify the assertions made.

**(iii) Alcohol abuse**

By broad strokes, consumption at *'Herero Mall'* is organised around alcohol. Outlets trading in alcohol dominate the physical landscape of the 'Mall'. Unsurprisingly, the word *alcohol* is another near equivalent of *'Herero Mall'* in the print media. Alcohol is seen as a major problem at the 'Mall', the mother of all troubles. Again, whether or not this problem is confined to *'Herero Mall'* is another debate altogether. But the issue of alcohol abuse has certainly irked the authorities. In its proposal to formalise *'Herero Mall'*, the Municipality of Windhoek seeks to ban alcohol outlets at the 'Mall'. Selling alcohol to minors is also a subject of loathing, but this is a Windhoek if not a Namibian problem.

**(iv) Noise pollution**

Another dominant theme on *'Herero Mall'* coming out of the print media highlights noise pollution. Residents in the vicinity of the 'Mall' are the recipients of unbearable noise coming from jukeboxes.

**(v) And what else...**

Certainly, the print media do not only view *'Herero Mall'* in a bad light. Reference is also made to self-employment against the backdrop of rising unemployment. However, the dominant discourse seems to centre on issues of crime, alcohol abuse and noise pollution.

#### 4.6 Narratives of protest in ‘popular music’

*‘Herero Mall’* has featured prominently in ‘popular music’ since its inception. Artistes within the genre of ‘Oviritje’ (*type of music performed by OvaHerero entertainers, invariably characterized by a high tempo piano paired with a singer and dancers*) made reference to *‘Herero Mall’* since 2007. In the main, reference made involves the glorification of *‘Herero Mall’*. During 2007/2008 when *‘Herero Mall’s’* hype was at its climax, live ‘Oviritje’ performances were part of the weekend entertainment package the ‘Mall’ had to offer. Such was an inextricable nexus formed between *‘Herero Mall’* and ‘Oviritje’ music that up to today when a new ‘Oviritje’ album is released, *‘Herero Mall’* will be the first place where one would easily buy it.

There is a plethora of ‘Oviritje’ music albums making reference to *‘Herero Mall’*. I shall only pick excerpts of two songs from different artiste to demonstrate narratives of protest through music.

*“(...) nandarire po ‘Mall’ yetu indji yOvaHerero*

*Vapatisa o ‘Mall’ ngunda amatukondjo*

*Mwapatisa o ‘Mall’ ngunda amatukondjo”*

(Muundjua, 2011).

*“(...) also at the ‘Mall’ of OvaHerero*

*They closed the ‘Mall’ while we are struggling*

*You closed the 'Mall' while we are struggling"*

(Muundjua, 2011).

Above are excerpts of a song titled *'Hola' Business* by one Mutjangatjike Muundjua, a highly sought-after artiste of 'Oviritje' music. The song was released shortly after the Police and traders' altercation of 2011. Whether or not the artiste composed this song at the request of *'Herero Mall'* traders is a different kettle of fish, but the excerpts above protest the 'closure' of the 'Mall'. Mans (2002), the prominent Namibian musicologist, reminds us that music is a powerful form of social expression and can be used as a medium through which emotion, social class and expectations are expressed. In as much as protestation of *'Herero Mall's'* 'closure' through music would prove to be a boon to the traders – an instrument to amplify their protest – artistes also have a vested interest. For the erstwhile *'Mall's'* unregulated trading hours and by extension a jam-packed informal trading zone meant a surge in prospective buyers of 'Oviritje' music. It also provided a readily accessible place for marketing new music materials to entice the would-be-buyers. Thus, the 'Mall' is inextricably linked to 'Oviritje' music producers in economic terms.

Another artiste whose music also made reference to *'Herero Mall'* is Uatungua. Her debut album titled *'Uatungua Vol. I'* in 2007 was famous largely because of a song about the 'Mall'.

*"Mbatire mba, mbatire po 'Mall'*

*Opu mekondjere, nokuza kerero*

*Hiteratera, hiparakata”*

Uatungua (2007).

*“I am stuck here, stuck at the ‘Mall’*

*It is where I am venturing, since yesterday*

*I do not waver, I do not dilly-dally”*

Uatungua (2007).

Interpretations abound, this song could represent a protestation against whoever intends to ‘relocate or move’ those who use ‘*Herero Mall*’ to earn a living. This interpretation could be at variance with the atmosphere of the ‘Mall’ in 2007, for there were no altercations with the authorities by then. Could it be that the artiste saw it coming, since it was conventional wisdom that the place was occupied illegally? Perhaps it was a marketing gimmick on the part of the artiste who saw a niche for her music sales. Again, this speaks to the ‘Mall’ and music producers’ economic nexus.

#### **4.7 Social space as ethnic identity – space as ‘difference’**

The conception of space as difference holds that different places or localities are fundamentally different in the material and immaterial sense – this difference explains social processes and social life (Simonsen, 1996). In the immaterial sense, ‘*Herero Mall*’ is laced with ethnicity as a marker of difference. To a greater extent, this marker is an outcome of the literal reading of the name ‘*Herero Mall*’. But what purpose does this ‘marker’ serve? Drawing on the *Instrumentalist Approach* to

ethnicity, Kearney (2012, p. 40) argues that ethnic identity can be employed in space as a political tool ‘prefaced on collective and social memory that attests to (...) contemporary inequities’. If one engages in literal reading of the name *‘Herero Mall’*, two strands could emerge. Firstly, the ethnic character of the name could be understood as an instrument of social closure for economic gain. Secondly, in the pervasive atmosphere of ethnicity and tribalism in Africa south of the Sahara (cf. Welsh 1996; Thies 2007), ethnic identification would in this instance act as an instrument of protest against domination or an attempt at ‘visibility’.

#### **4.8 Power symbols in the vicinity of *‘Herero Mall’***

The immediate proximity of *‘Herero Mall’* is flanked by a number of power symbols – Ovaherero Commando No. 2, Oruano Protestant Church and the erstwhile Paramount Chief’s residence. NUDO’s head office is a stone’s throw from the ‘Mall’ across the street. DTA’s office is virtually part of the ‘Mall’, located within the same compound as Ovaherero Commando No. 2. Socio-cultural and political activities at any of these places indeed form part of *‘Herero Mall’s* social life. Through exposure because of close proximity, traders, customers and residents shape and are in turn shaped by activities at these power symbols. At times the co-existence between activities at the ‘Mall’ and at the Church is acrimonious. “The entrance to the Church was initially from the ‘Mall’s side – but this was rendered impossible with the mushrooming of makeshift structures erected by the entrance and blocking it in the process. Congregants had no choice but to start entering the Church

premises from the opposite direction” (Interviewee No. 10). The issue of alcohol consumption does not go well with the Church as well. ‘Alcohol is a major problem at *Herero Mall*’ and making the ‘Mall’ a ‘better’ place must involve getting rid of alcohol trading’ (Interviewee No. 10).

It could be argued that the following structures embody symbolic capital in the Bourdieuvian sense, and perhaps they could put contestations at *Herero Mall*’ in context.

**(a) *OvaHerero Commando*<sup>vi</sup> No. 2\***

OvaHerero Commando in Windhoek was initially stationed in Old Location (the present-day Hochland Park). In Old Location, OvaHerero Commando<sup>vii</sup> was a yellow structure built from corrugated iron sheets.

The year 1968 marked the complete relocation of OvaHerero from Old Location. In the early 70’s up to mid-70’s after settling in Katutura, the political ‘who’s-who’ among the OvaHerero community started brainstorming about the idea of having a place where to assemble from time to time and deliberate on community issues. Fundraising started after the decision to build a commando was made. It was only after 1978 following the assassination of the Herero leader Clemens Kapuuo that the process of putting plans into practice gained momentum – as the newly elected Paramount Chief did not have a house in Windhoek. In the early 1980’s, it was decided that a community building will be constructed and it will house the Paramount Chief’s residence, the Oruano Church and the Commando. Builders were contracted and the construction of a structure housing the abovementioned



sections was set in motion. Today, Ovaherero Commando No. 2 remains the centre and a host of various activities of Ovaherero.

Photo No. 8



Ovaherero Commando No. 2 in Windhoek

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*\*Note: The numbering of the Windhoek based Commando as '2' relates to the fact that Commando No. 1 is in Okahandja and it is where the Ovaherero Red Flag's day takes place annually on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August.*

### ***(b) Oruano Church***

*Oruano* is Otjiherero word for unity. For this reason, the Oruano Church is also christened Unity Church. This Church is of Protestant extraction and forms part of the triumvirate pillars within Ovaherero political, cultural and socio-religious life.

The Church was constructed in the 1980's and is located between the Ovaherero Commando No. 2 and the Paramount Chief's Residency.

Photo No. 9



Oruuano Church

© Ellison Tjirera

Power symbols within a social milieu relay the identity of a place through their history. They provide social actors with a sense of belonging and ownership. Indeed, the institutions in the milieu of *'Herero Mall'* provide a conduit to the historicity which colours this social space in an ethnic light. This historical reality is in turn blended with the necessity of economic survival of the present day – rendering the meaning of *'Herero Mall'* hybrid. For the existing socio-economic organisation cannot be entirely explained within the prism of ethnicity.

The historical antecedents of *'Herero Mall'* are partly communicated through the institutions in the vicinity of this social space. Moreover, social interactions and

consumption choices reflect historical and cultural aspects typical of Ovaherero rural life. Sitting under a tree indulging in meat and ‘omaere’ (*sour milk*) while conversing endlessly? Seemingly, the meat persisted – there are no less than three pots offering fire boiled beef at ‘*Herero Mall*’, not to mention numerous barbeque stands. ‘Omaere’ has been replaced with beer and other alcoholic beverages.

Bourdieu (1989) points to the conditions under which symbolic power assumes the power of constitution, i.e. power to make groups. “Symbolic power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital. The power to impose upon other minds a vision, old or new, of social divisions depends on the social authority acquired in previous struggles” (op. cit., p. 23). A physical structure such as Ovaherero Commando No. 2 represents an important organising power of various activities of Ovaherero community. In other words, this structure possesses symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1989, p. 23) refers to symbolic capital as “(...) power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition”. Ovaherero Commando No. 2 – is the administrative headquarter of the Caretaker for the Ovaherero Paramount Chieftaincy.

Massey (1995, p. 186) emphasizes the *fluidity* of spatial identity:

“The identity of a place (...) *should not* be seen as inevitably to be destroyed by new importations. (...) Identity is always, and always has been, in process of formation: it is in a sense forever unachieved. This, of course, does not mean that some things are not more 'absorbed' or incorporated into the place than others, nor conversely that some 'foreign' imports have not had more influence than others. Nor, more importantly from a political point of view, does it mean that no distinctions can be made, no judgments or

political stances taken, on what might be the interpretation of the past or the most preferred directions for the future”.

Both the present and the future of *'Herero Mall'* are a contested terrain, with authorities envisioning a different picture from what vendors would like to see. Arguably, it is within material spaces that people, institutions and social structures are rendered 'entangled' and produce relational power – some places become particular sites of contestation in the process (Few, 2002). *'Herero Mall'* is such one place, for political stances have been taken and judgments have been made on the backdrop of contestations. Prime Minister Nahas Angula was on record in 2011 saying that *'Herero Mall'* needs a political solution (Nunuhe, 2011a).

## Chapter five – Data presentation and analytical discussion

In this chapter, demographic characteristics of the respondents will be tabulated and the main themes crisscrossing their experiences will be identified. Notwithstanding that this study does not focus on narrating the experiences of traders, customers and residents *per se* – their experiences provide an appropriate telescope through which the meaning they attach to *'Herero Mall'* can be discerned.

### 5.1 Demographic profile of respondents

Name	Gender	Age	Education level	Trade / Status
Interviewee No. 1	Female	28	Grade 10	Food*
Interviewee No. 2	Male	43	-	Alcohol*
Interviewee No. 3	Male	28	-	Alcohol*
Interviewee No. 4	Male	27	Grade 10	Barber*
Interviewee No. 5	Female	22	Grade 10	Shopkeeper**
Interviewee No. 6***	Male	-	-	-
Interviewee No. 7	Male	37	Grade 9	Food*
Interviewee No. 8	Female	28	Grade 12	Food*
Interviewee No. 9***	Male	65	-	N/A
Interviewee No. 10***	Male	79	-	N/A
Interviewee No. 11	Female	30	-	Resident close to the 'Mall'
Interviewee No. 12	Male	24	Grade 8	Alcohol*
Interviewee No. 13a	Female	26	Grade 10	Hiring trailers, selling CDs and soft drinks**
Interviewee No. 13b	Female	37	Grade 12	Hiring trailers, selling CDs and soft drinks**
Interviewee No. 13c	Female	38	Grade 12	Hiring trailers, selling CDs and soft drinks**

Interviewee No. 14	Male	21	Grade 7	Alcohol*
Interviewee No. 15	Female	37	-	Resident close to the 'Mall'
Interviewee No. 16***	Male	60	-	N/A
Interviewee No. 17	Male	28	Grade 12	Barber
Interviewee No. 18	Male	30	Grade 6	Meat Slicing machine operator**
Interviewee No. 19	Female	26	Grade 10	Customer
Interviewee No. 20	Male	25	Grade 5/6	Alcohol*
Interviewee No. 21	Male	52	-	Mechanic
Interviewee No. 22	Male	29	University degree	Customer
Interviewee No. 23***	Male	40	Advanced diploma	N/A

$n = 25$

\*Respondent owns the business

\*\*Respondent employed, but does not own the business

\*\*\*Key Informant Interviewee

About half (50 %) of the respondents are between the ages of 21 – 29 and the majority hardly have a level of education beyond the 10<sup>th</sup> Grade. Their experiences on how they (traders) ended up at *'Herero Mall'* markedly differ though in the main they are all connected by trying to earn a living in a demanding environment of a city life.

## 5.2 The advent of *'Herero Mall'*

The year 2007 marks the birth of *'Herero Mall'*. This is generally accepted but not without some disagreements. Despite the fact that the name *'Herero Mall'*

gained currency in ca. 2007, trading activities were indeed taking place as far back as 1998 though limited and isolated (Interviewee No. 21).

### **5.3 The social meaning of ‘Herero Mall’**

As pointed out in Chapter 1 (Ch. 1.1), the thrust of this study is anchored on locating the social meaning of ‘Herero Mall’ by subjecting it to history, its physical positioning and to the social actors who define or shape its character. A glance at the physical structure of ‘Herero Mall’ from the vantage point of an outsider could elicit images of chaos that blemish an urban landscape. On the other hand, this social space also reflects the hope of urban poor pitted against the authorities. The power of defining urban planning and structure is a manifestation of unequal power relations *par excellence*.

#### **5.3.1 “When”?**

The year 2007 is generally accepted to have marked the inception of what is today called ‘Herero Mall’ as pointed out before. It is worth noting that the place where the ‘Mall’ is located was enclosed with a fence in the 1980’s as it was amongst others designated for the housing unit of the Oruuano Church Bishop (Interviewee No. 10). Thieves stole the fencing structure gradually until the place was laid bare. It was since then that this place became a ‘common property’ for all and sundry.

### 5.3.2 “Where”?

Shields (1997) aptly observes that the “*where*” of events (*and social practices*) is as important as the “*what*” of those events and practices (*own emphasis*). ‘*Herero Mall*’ is located in the heart of Katutura and is easily accessible with unhindered ‘entrances’ from all directions. Apart from its proximity to Ovaherero Commando and Oruano Protestant Church, its neighbourhood also hosts NUDO’s head office and DTA’s office. In a country like Namibia where political parties are largely organised along tribal lines, the location of ‘*Herero Mall*’ in the vicinity of political parties’ structures makes it a political sphere. It was not surprising that political parties joined the fray preceding Police intervention at the ‘Mall’ and its aftermath in 2011 (cf. Nunuhe, 2011a; Shipanga, 2011; Smit, 2011). Owing to its location – ‘*Herero Mall*’ is a politically contested terrain. Moreover, it possesses symbolic capital due to its proximity to the cultural and political power structures.

### 5.3.3 “Who”?

As the demographic profile of the respondents shows, most of the traders at ‘*Herero Mall*’ are young people between the ages of 21 – 29 who are unable to join the already saturated labour market due to their low level of education, most of them school dropouts. The recent past of ‘*Herero Mall*’ precedes the Namibia Labour Force Survey of 2008 (NLFS 2008). According the NLFS 2008, unemployment rate in Namibia stands at 51.2 % when the broad definition is applied and decrease to 37.6 % when the strict definition is applied.



Not surprisingly, the majority of the traders are Otjiherero-speaking Namibians. About 12.5 % of respondents were Oshiwambo-speaking Namibians. There were more Oshiwambo-speaking traders at '*Herero Mall*' but they moved out after the restriction of trading hours in 2011 (Interviewee No. 7). Working professionals also frequent the 'Mall' for getting their cars washed, for a hair-cut or a drink. Simply put, '*Herero Mall*' attracts people from different walks of life and age groups.

#### **5.4 Moving beyond economics**

*'Herero Mall'* does not solely serve as an economic means of survival for those involved in trading activities. It does not only serve as an entertainment hub for those who have nothing to do with their lives. Rural-urban linkages are maintained between traders and their relatives in rural areas. What appears as a simple movement of goods and money from Windhoek to rural areas where traders originate from provides a conduit through which rural-urban relations are kept alive. Moreover, businesses are inter-dependent at the 'Mall' and this shapes important social interactions and collective solidarity. A trader in alcohol and soft drinks would usually have lunch at one of the nearby food stands. And a trader in food would have a drink at a nearby shebeen. Informal talks under a tree would touch on a number of extant political and socio-economic issues within an informal setting beyond education and social standing barriers.

## 5.5 Narratives of discrimination

One of the dominant themes traversing the majority of the respondents' views is the allegation of discrimination. There is a general consensus among traders and customers alike that *'Herero Mall'* is discriminately targeted by the authorities through the Police. Arguably, the underlying reason named is ethnicity and/or tribalism. Eveline Street (located in Goreangab, an Ovambo majority area north-west of Windhoek) was coming up and again during most of my interactions with the interviewees as a place warranting the same treatment as *'Herero Mall'*. Most interviewees however alleged that the Police act high-handedly only when it comes to *'Herero Mall'*.

“A place like ‘Eveline Street’ is also a hotbed of crime, but no such conduct by the Police was reported. “Do the authorities hate Ovaherero? This tribalism must stop!” (Interviewee No. 4). ‘There is hardly any difference between the nature of activities at ‘Herero Mall’ and ‘Eveline Street’ and as such these places should not be treated differently’ (Interviewee No. 1).

But a theory that has been doing rounds is that residents of Goreangab probably do not complain about things such as noise and other inconveniences brought about by the shebeens. In as much as the Police can act on its own in pursuance of maintaining law and order, its actions are also demand-driven. ‘Residents around *'Herero Mall'* complained and wrote letters to register their displeasure to the authorities concerning the operations of the *'Mall'* (Interviewee No. 23). On March 15, 2012, a meeting on *'Herero Mall'* attended by the Minister of Safety and Security, the Namibian Police Inspector General, the Namibian Police Regional

Commander and the Head of City Police and Emergency Management resolved that the activities carried out at the ‘Mall’ are illegal and that the interventions were necessitated by public complaints (Municipal Council Agenda: 2012-07-25).

### **5.6 ‘Politics of economic sabotage’ – restriction of trading hours**

By far the most contentious, the restriction of trading hours is an issue that remains thorny up to now with traders alleging that they are being short-changed. The petition delivered to the Mayor of Windhoek and the preceding peaceful demonstration by ‘*Herero Mall*’ traders on June 13, 2012 mainly requested for the extension of trading hours. Weekdays from 07:00 to 22:00 and weekends from 07:00 to 24:00. A theory advanced by some consumers is that when it was operating optimally, ‘*Herero Mall*’ popularity was a concern for nearby businesses as it encroached on their profitability. It follows that the restriction of trading hours at the ‘Mall’ is a boon to businesses in its proximity. The restriction of trading hours was purportedly aimed at reining in on alcohol consumption, crime and pollution. Seemingly, this is far from being achieved – traders and consumers alike are adamant that the restriction of trading hours at the ‘Mall’ did not solve any problem.

“Shortening of operating hours did not solve the problem of alcohol abuse” (Interviewee No. 3). Instead, what happened is the shifting of a ‘problem’ from the ‘Mall’ to other places – or the moving of ‘profits’ away from the ‘Mall’ to put it

bluntly. Alcohol abuse, fights and under-age drinking continues – the only difference is that it is not at the ‘Mall’ anymore.

The Councillor of Katutura Central, Ambrosius Kandjii is fingered by all and sundry to have allegedly masterminded the restriction of trading hours at the ‘Mall’.

“I was personally told that I have a business and that I wanted ‘*Herero Mall*’ to close so that people can come to my business. This is false! “I was indeed part of the 07:00 to 19:00 trading hours. My conscious is very clean, in the long run I know I have done something in the best interests of our people”. People have threatened me; they said they will burn my house. I told myself: “let me die for a good cause rather than dying for nothing” (Ambrosius Kandjii – Interviewee No. 23).

There are deep-seated allegations and counter allegations based on business rivalry and economic sabotage.

### **5.7 Deconstructing the name ‘*Herero Mall*’**

It is apparent that the quagmire embroiling ‘*Herero Mall*’ is by no means restricted to its operations. The name ‘*Herero Mall*’ does not sit well with those who possess the power of definition and naming. In terms of Council Resolution 249/07/2012 1.1, it was resolved “that once the feasibility study (*for formalising ‘Herero Mall’*) has been completed, the name of the proposed market be considered

by the Street and Place Naming/Renaming Committee”. In other words, this name would be under the hammer as it is currently not ‘acceptable’.

Even though there was no formal naming and adoption, the name ‘*Herero Mall*’ was arguably proposed by a certain Malcom-X Maṭundu in circa 2007 (Interviewee No. 1; Interviewee No. 21). Two views on what the name ‘*Herero Mall*’ means emerged among traders, customers and residents. There are those who hold that ‘*Herero Mall*’ is ‘just’ a name and as such people should not read much into it. To others, the place is called ‘*Herero Mall*’ because it is located in Ovaherero majority area.

‘*Herero Mall*’ is a place of Ovaherero, the name could be because of the ‘Mall’s proximity to Ovaherero Commando No. 2’ (Interviewee No. 1).

“The name carries a connotation that it is place that belongs to Ovaherero – and that is the mind-set and attitude of our people. We should come up with a name that would be acceptable to everybody. Informally you can mention it, but formally we should not – we are trying to move away from the colonial hangover” (Interviewee No. 23).

Those who think that the ‘Mall’ is only for Hereros are mistaken. How about China Town<sup>viii</sup>? Is it only for Chinese? (Interviewee No. 21).

Indeed, place naming is not a politically (*and socially*) innocent exercise but rather a socio-political practice *par excellence* of ‘power over space’ (Pinchevski and Torgovnik, 2002). Vuolteenaho & Berg (2009) advocate for an understanding of place names as ‘social facts’ embedded in intricate cultural interrelations and tension-filled conception of space. Therefore, the practices of place naming are in

any given society caught up in the power and possibilities of ‘making places’ (op. cit.).

### **5. 8 Configuration of a formalised ‘Herero Mall’ – theatre of contestations**

Not surprisingly, all traders interviewed prefer an arrangement whereby all businesses currently operating at the ‘Mall’ are accommodated. Their primary concern is economic survival and as such they do not factor in issues of town planning. Conversely, the City of Windhoek’s proposal of a formalised ‘Herero Mall’ intends to exclude some trading activities such as liquor trading and light industries. This rendered the formalisation talks already a ‘theatre of contestations’. It is a fact that the majority of traders at ‘Herero Mall’ operate alcohol outlets and this in part explains the uproar concerning the exclusion of shebeens in the proposed formalised ‘Mall’. As per Resolution 278/09/2011, the Municipal Council resolved that “the selling of alcohol at the market to be developed not be accommodated in line with the Informal Trading Regulations 200 of 2007 and the concerned traders be encouraged to identify alternative business opportunities to be incorporated in the market design concept or relocate their businesses to suitable trading premises”. As for those who have to relocate their businesses, whether or not they will be able to get a clientele base that would allow them to run their businesses profitably remains to be seen.

‘When it was operating optimally, the configuration of ‘Herero Mall’ is something on which it thrived – a person would bring his/her car for washing

and while it is being washed he/she would have a beer or some meat. Soon he/she would remember that the car have got a problem to be fixed after seeing a mechanic while having his beer' (Interviewee No. 21).

The foregoing testimony could be construed as an attempt at defending one's continued business existence. Interviewee No. 21 is a mechanic at '*Herero Mall*' whose business risks being ordered to pack and go should Resolution 278/09/2011 is implemented in its current form. But the underlying message from the mechanic is that 'different activities assembled in one compound makes business sense'.

The rift on what shape '*Herero Mall*' has to take in the next 2 years or so is best accentuated by views expressed by the Councillor of Katutura Central Constituency. Albeit his views would not necessarily determine how a formalised '*Herero Mall*' would look like, they play themselves sharply in the 'theatre of contestations'. As a political head of Katutura Central, Councillor Kandjii wants to see a multi-million mall to assume the place where '*Herero Mall*' is located. The latter is conspicuously pendent from the views of the traders.

"I was asking myself why we should build a place like Soweto Market at the 'Mall'. Why should we duplicate? Why can't we set-up a multi-million Community Mall? Like any other Mall, with various sectors. Why do we want to think small? People ask me why I am not bringing toilets and the fence. To me, this is going back to square one. My dream for that place is to one day set-up a proper multi-million mall! We have enough people; we should just do a feasibility study and set up a proper mall. Build a cinema, where people can go and watch movies" (Ambrosius Kandjii – Interviewee No. 23).

Should Kandjii's idea see the light of the day, a number of questions come to mind: Who would benefit from a multi-million mall? Would any of the traders afford to run a business at such a mall? In summation, the situation exposes unequal power relations and brings the contested notion of what development is under the spotlight.



## Chapter six – Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter shall attempt to synthesise discussions of preceding chapters in such a manner that meaning and implications are discerned. After traversing a review of literature coupled with observing participation and talking to actors who make *'Herero Mall'* what it is, a picture of the urban poor within a post-apartheid city has been painted. Moreover, transitory patterns of post-apartheid Windhoek reveal unfulfilled promises of independence. *'Herero Mall'* is a theatre in which contradictions of a post-apartheid city play out. The urban poor faces some dilemmas – their low level of education condemn them to perpetual non-employability and they invariably lack start-up capital to embark on a formal business. Joining the informal economy presents the only viable prospect to meet the ever-increasing demands of a city life against the backdrop of an escalating unemployment rate. The informal economy epitomises illegality and carries with it the risk of insecurity and the looming wrath of the law in the name of maintaining order. Though *'Herero Mall'* is a social space bringing together people of different ethnic provenance, crude business interests is the organising principle. Therefore, genuine inter-ethnic harmony and cooperation remains a challenge and *'Herero Mall'* as an unintended attempt at forging such a harmony is at best a façade. The simmering discontent based on perceptions of inter-ethnic domination, discrimination and tribalism and all the paraphernalia of the post-apartheid city represent the illusive promises of independence. *'Herero Mall'* is a social space whose identity carries an ethnic character. This is because of the name and indeed the ethnic background of the majority of traders, customers and residents in the

immediate proximity of the 'Mall'. To this end, the alleged discrimination traders suffer at the hands of the police in part boils down to ethnic divides. With the majority of traders being Otjiherero-speaking and the Police predominantly manned by Oshiwambo-speaking Namibians – even a minimum force from the Police could easily be clouded by perception of ethnic discrimination. However, inconsistency in dealing with issues of the same magnitude by the authorities engenders perception of discrimination.

In line with the Namibian social structure, issues of inequality and class reproduction at *'Herero Mall'* display a gender dimension. Women are in most cases employed by men at alcohol outlets and if they (women) run their own businesses it is selling food. This bespeaks the intrusion of gender division of labour in the marketplace – 'women are socialised to nurse and feed the family'. The perpetuation of inequality is in part linked to remnants of apartheid legacy which is stubbornly ingrained in the social structure of independent Namibia. The divergent views on how a formalised *'Herero Mall'* should look like demonstrate a rift between traders and the authorities. Traders are poised on protecting their turf (livelihood) while the authorities want to develop the city along stringent planning principles. Finding a common ground is but an illusion.

It is apparent that consumerism especially among the youth is an organising principle of social life at *'Herero Mall'* and not least of Namibian youth in general. The coming together of young people from different ethnic provenance through consumption signifies transcending apartheid-era ethnic divisions and social divides – but at the same time stands for lack of opportunities post-apartheid youth face in

independent Namibia. In as much as youth's alcohol consumption brings to the fore the perception that they are immoral agents unwilling to participate in the post-independence development project, it also reveals disenchanted and hopeless youth. The latter is a ticking time bomb because it represents a surge of the *lumpenproletariat* which is a recipe for criminality and related social ills.

In light of the foregoing, the study offers a number of recommendations. It must be recognised that treating social spaces in urban areas as mere 'containers' carries with it the risk of forfeiting the essence; of the incessant progression of social transformation. Unequivocally, solutions to urban problems such as uncontrollable sprawling of informal markets lie in unearthing the underlying meaning and causes of such a sprawl. '*Herero Mall*' is a microcosm of a wider problem besetting the post-independence Namibia – desperation with diminishing opportunities. Therefore, if those who are entrusted with public resources are to make an impact on the lives of ordinary citizens, giving ultimatums is not the way to go. Forceful removals and closures should be the last resort after exhausting channels of communication in an effort to foster understanding in the development project. The police and others in positions of authority must act consistently in their quest for maintaining law and order without fear or favour. This will go a long way in dispelling perceptions of discrimination and enhance the legitimacy of the authorities. '*Herero Mall*' is at the cross-roads and in as much as it is a headache to the authorities and residents alike, it presents an opportunity of rethinking development in a post-apartheid setting. Dealing with the legacy of apartheid demands structural changes to reorganise the Namibian economy and bring about

redistributive justice. Investing in the informal economy, empathically listening to small scale traders and meeting those who are trying to help themselves halfway is a development approach urban planners should employ to get a 'buy in' from those they are purporting to uplift. Things are not as they seem and reading beyond the veneer enhances understanding necessary for solving societal problems.

**Appendix A: Municipal Council Resolution 278/09/2011**

On 28 September 2011, the Municipal Council of the City of Windhoek through Council Resolution 278/09/2011 resolved:

1. “That the development of a market on Erf\* R/6296\*\* Katutura be approved and that the Strategic Executive: Economic Development and Community Services undertake a needs analysis amongst the Herero Mall traders for the envisaged constructing of a formal market on Erf R/6292, Katutura.
2. That the Strategic Executive: Economic Development and Community Services group the different trading activities into retail and other services.
3. That light industrial activities not to be allowed within the market because of residential character in the area and that the Strategic Executive: Economic Development and Community Services, in consultation with the Strategic Executive: Planning, Urbanization and Environment, investigate alternative industrial sites where the light industries can be relocated.
4. That the Strategic Executive: Economic Development and Community Services, in conjunction with the Chief Executive Officer, inform ‘*Herero Mall*’ traders of the proposed market development on Erf R/6292, Katutura and the potential impact on business operations as not all traders will be accommodated once the market has been established, inclusive of application procedures that will apply.
5. That the Strategic Executive: Economic Development and Community Services verify the total number of traders registered by the Namibia Informal

Sector Organisation (NISO), whereas diversification of products and services be encouraged to ensure the sustainability of the market.

- 5.1 That the request of Namibia Informal Sector Organisation (NISO) to provide training through education sharing and community participation to the *'Herero Mall'* traders, with regard to crime prevention, law enforcement, social conduct and mutual respect, be noted and granted.
- 5.2 That Namibia Informal Sector Organisation and *'Herero Mall'* Committee be granted a period of four (4) months from the date of this Council Resolution, to conduct the proposed training and that the Strategic Executive: Economic Development and Community Services submit feedback/report to Management Committee/Council by February 2012.
6. That the selling of alcohol at the market to be developed, not be accommodated in line with the Informal Trading Regulations 200 of 2007 and the concerned traders be encouraged to identify alternative business opportunities to be incorporated in the market design concept or relocate their business to suitable trading premises.
7. That the Strategic Executives: Economic Development and Community Services and Finance, in conjunction with the Chief Executive Officer, identify funds during the 2011/2012 Financial Year for the development of Erf R/6292, Katutura and report back to Management Committee so that time limit for the upgrading of the market be determined.

8. That once savings are identified, the Strategic Officer: Economic Development and Community Services arrange for the appropriate fencing of Erf R/6292, Katutura.
9. That the Strategic Executive: Economic Development and Community Services inform the Khomas Regional Council and the line Ministry, in writing, of this Council Resolution” (Department of Economic Development and Community Services, 2011).

*\* South African concept of Dutch origin used to denote a small plot of land on which to build, usually in an urban area, (Encarta World English Dictionary 1998-2005).*

*\*\*Erf number where 'Herero Mall' is located.*

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> English translation (2004) by Richard Philcox. Originally published in French (1961) under the title *Les damnés de la terre*.

<sup>ii</sup> Originally published in 1959.

<sup>iii</sup> Between 13h00 and 14h00 during weekdays, school going children would pass through 'Herero Mall' with their school uniforms. They are regularly exposed to scenery of public drinking of alcohol and at times vulgar language. Since it (the 'Mall') is centrally located, pupils from schools in the vicinity of Katutura Central take a short cut back to their respective homes passing through 'Herero Mall'. Even though passing through the 'Mall' is necessitated by taking a short cut, school going youngsters do frequent the 'Mall' at their own choosing. A number of traders and customers alike argue that the problem of school going children having unfettered access to the 'Mall' would be solved by fencing off the whole place.

<sup>iv</sup> Otuvingo is a village not far from Okakarara. The trader hails from Otuvingo and he refers to his business as the 'Pot from Otuvingo'.

<sup>v</sup> According to the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA-Namibia, 2009) Namibian print media consists of four dailies: *The Namibian* (English with some Oshiwambo pages), *Republikein* (predominantly Afrikaans), *Allgemeine Zeitung* (German) and *New Era* (English and some indigenous languages). The dailies became five after *Namibian Sun* switched from being a weekly to a daily in late 2010. Until recently, there were five English weeklies: the free tabloid *Informanté*, *Windhoek Observer*, *Namibian Sun* (became a daily on 15 October 2010), *Namibian Economist* and SWAPO's mouthpiece *Namibia Today* (MISA-Namibia 2009; *Namibian Sun* 2010).

<sup>vi</sup> This extract is based on an interview with Alex Jarimbovandu Kaputu, a 'griot' of sorts well versed in Ovaherero culture and folklore (June 18, 2012).

<sup>vii</sup> *Commando* is a military term for 1. A specially trained soldier or military unit or 2. In the history of military, to the Boer fighting unit during the Boer war ("Encarta ® World English Dictionary © & (P)," 1998-2005)

<sup>viii</sup> China Town is located in the Northern Industrial area in Windhoek and mainly trades in clothes and electronic products.