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## Eviction of families from Nkarapamwe black township houses in Rundu, north-east Namibia, 1970

Kletus Likuwa\* and Shampapi Shiremo\*\*

### *Abstract*

*Through the perusal of archival police testimonies, blended with oral and written sources, this paper centres around the 1970 eviction of 400 families of Nkarapamwe Black township in Rundu. While detailing factors behind eviction, it asserts that a colonial official, who was concerned with accommodation shortages, used his office powers inconsiderately to evict unemployed families with no concern to their plights. A discussion on eviction process explains the colonial officials' strategies of cancelling previous double housing allocations. The paper further explains Nkarapamwe residents' liaison with Church and the Police and their concerns of the exclusion of traditional authorities in decisions relating to Africans' urban residency rights, which was a strategy to buy support against eviction. Lastly, we discuss the social, political and economic impacts of eviction. Nkarapamwe residents' held view that the eventual dismissal and removal from the Kavango of the responsible colonial official emanated from their collective efforts, presents a tale of morality and a psychological reward to victims of evictions. Arguably, in the face of eminent colonial evictions, it seems plausible that evicted residents' collective efforts, although unable to stop evictions, still presented psychological rewards for evicted families to come to terms with effects of evictions.*

### Introduction

An interest in a history of colonial eviction of families from Nkarapamwe Black Township houses of Rundu in north-east Namibia, along the Kavango River boundary with Angola in 1970, was inspired by the need to contribute to histories of colonial evictions in Namibia and Southern Africa generally. This paper is originally based on a chapter in a Master's

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thesis by Likuwa in 2005 detailing Rundu removals.<sup>1</sup> *Inter alia*, as an urban space in north eastern Namibia, Rundu has relatively a recent history. Although the first assistant native commissioner Mr. René Dickman (aka Kayuru or Shongola) was posted to Kavango at Nkurenkuru in 1922, it was only on 16 September 1936 that an Assistant Natives Affairs Commissioner Harold Eedes (aka Nakare) opened office doors at Rundu where he operated until 1946 after which he was replaced by Mr. Morris (1946-1954). It was however during the tenure of Mr. Dave Maree (1958-January 1970) as a Bantu Affairs Commissioner that Kavango people in Rundu were first relocated from the riverside villages into Nkarapamwe Bantu Township by 1968.<sup>2</sup> By 1970, at the times of the Nkarapamwe evictions, Mr. Van Niekerk served as the Bantu Affairs Commissioner for barely a year (February-December 1970).

The history of Rundu as an administrative town is thus situated in colonial development and security schemes, such as contract labour supply, Odendaal Commission Plan and the so-called counter-terrorism or surveillance concerns necessitated the removal or evictions of people in Rundu.<sup>3</sup> Colonial evictions were extensive during the Apartheid period in both South Africa and Namibia and, in the case of South Africa, such history is widely documented.<sup>4</sup> Uma Mesthrie, for example, focused on the experiences of forced removals by Coloured and Indian residents from Sea-point and she placed the eviction in the broader context of evolving policy, legislation and institutional structures for implementing forced resettlement of communities in the name of the Apartheid ideology.<sup>5</sup> In South Africa, as in Namibia, the eviction of 'squatters' from land during apartheid both involved the use of legal procedures and institutions to protect property interests, however, in the period following the abolition of apartheid, this logic was not abandoned and seemingly, liberty was acquired at the price of economic subjugation.<sup>6</sup> Racial discriminatory laws such as the Groups Areas Act of 1950 and other laws such the Squatters Act were identified as the reasons for the various evictions in the urban areas of South Africa and Namibia during the colonial and apartheid period.<sup>7</sup> However, these reasons were most often a time disguised by the colonial authorities who instead justified the evictions of the local African residents.

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<sup>1</sup> Kletus Likuwa, "Nkarapamwe, new beginning and endings", in: idem, *Rundu, Kavango: a case study of forced relocations in Namibia, 1954 to 1972*, unpubl. MA thesis, Cape Town, UWC, 2005: 52-72.

<sup>2</sup> Kletus Muhena Likuwa, "Colonial relocations in Northern Namibia: from the Riverside village to Nkarapamwe Black Township in Rundu", *European Scientific Journal*, Special edition, 2014: 605-615.

<sup>3</sup> Shampapi Shiremo, *Vamama's History and Heritage: 'Forgotten' History of Namibia*, Windhoek, Meinert, 2020: 1-34.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Baldwin, "Mass removals and separate development", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1 (2), 1975: 215-227.

<sup>5</sup> Uma Duphelia Mesthrie, "The tramway road removals, 1959-61", *Kronos*, 15 (21), 1994: 61-78.

<sup>6</sup> Andries Jacobus Van Der Walt, "Rendition/eviction, a post-apartheid reflection" *Law and Critique*, 15 (3), 2004: 321-344.

<sup>7</sup> Cosmos Desmond, *The Discarded People: An Account of African Resettlement in South Africa*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971

Seeing through the pretext of these colonial laws and how evictions were carried out, the non-white urban residents most often responded in various ways ranging from peaceful protest to violent means. A well-known case in Namibia's colonial history is the Windhoek Old Location Removals which resulted in a massacre of Africans.<sup>8</sup> However, the then Windhoek municipal authorities provided 'good' reasons for moving people to Katutura. Against this background, it has been established that colonial evictions too centrally related to the transfer of high-value land from low-income groups to those in the middle or upper-income bracket, or the freeing up of land to build houses, commercial development, roads and other forms of infrastructure which primarily benefited those who were wealthy.<sup>9</sup> In discussing the causes of evictions, various studies highlighted how colonial authorities made use of benevolent excuses of natural disasters to compel people to move permanently to new areas but subsequently as pretext to fulfil the colonial administration's political agenda of security and control over the population.<sup>10</sup>

Other factors for evictions aimed to reduce over-crowding judged by those in power to be eyesores or centres of crime.<sup>11</sup> While past research focused on the causes and effects of eviction in political economy, state power, and cultural difference, emerging work has emphasized the subjective experience and sustaining practices of eviction process as it happens. An observation of the process of colonial eviction has shown that families received mainly verbal notices but that evictions were dominantly forceful and brutal.<sup>12</sup> Most colonial evictions were also carried out without court orders and by police officers who attacked and destroyed properties and used trucks to relocate people and properties to unknown destinations.<sup>13</sup> In some cases, during eviction process, no alternative accommodation was provided and there was no legal support against eviction or after eviction. Resistance to eviction was an option in some communities and these included acts of activism as protests to evictions.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See M. Jafta et al., *Investigation of the Shooting at the Old Location on 10 December 1959*, Windhoek, MSORP Publication, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Lynette Ochola, "Eviction and homelessness: The impact on African children", *Development in Practice*, 6 (4), 1996: 340-347.

<sup>10</sup> Kletus Muhena Likuwa, "Flooding and its impacts on Nkondo community in Rundu, Kavango east region of Namibia, 1950s", *Jambá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*, 8 (2), 2016: 1-5.

<sup>11</sup> Katherine Brickell, Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia, and Alex Vasudevan, (eds.), *Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Mbithi Kimeu and Benjamin Waswa Maina, "Forceful evictions: an intersection between corruptions, land and human rights: Case study of the Kenyan perspective", *African Journal of Land Policy and Geospatial Sciences*, Special Issue, 2018: 102-106.

<sup>13</sup> Mathews Desmond, "Eviction and the reproduction of urban poverty", in: David B. Grusky and Jasmine Hill, (eds), *Inequality in the 21st Century*, New York, Routledge, 2018: 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Brickell et al., *Geographies*: 1-24.

Eviction and housing displacement was viewed as particularly threatening to individual and public health especially during a pandemic.<sup>15</sup> In poor black neighbourhoods, eviction was to women what incarceration was to men: a typical but severely consequential occurrence that contributed to the reproduction of urban poverty.<sup>16</sup> While forced displacement affected both men and women, it seems that women experienced displacement and relocation in a particularly gendered way.<sup>17</sup> Forced eviction was more traumatic on women and children, since they make the most intensive use of shelter and related facilities.<sup>18</sup>

There have been some negative impacts of eviction on individuals, particularly the resulting financial insecurity, health challenges, and increased likelihood of homelessness.<sup>19</sup> It is noted that while in some cases, evictees received psychological counselling afterwards, this was not always the case everywhere. Evictees experienced a lack of sanitation facilities in relocated areas; a lack of electricity power supply, a lack of proper road infrastructures, limited or lack of water supplies; poor or lack of educational facilities.<sup>20</sup> Further, physical, economic and mental (affective) impacts of eviction on evicted people have been highlighted with an overwhelming sadness, compulsive worry, difficulty in sleeping and concentrating and with an emotional outbursts (such as wails of despair and trauma).<sup>21</sup> This paper on the eviction of Nkarapamwe township families is necessary as a means to contribute to the Histories of colonial evictions in Namibia. We begin by discussing the factors behind eviction of Nkarapamwe residents, the process or forms of evicting and residents' responses, with a specific focus on the roles of individuals or agents involved in the eviction process. A final discussion centres on the differentiated impacts of eviction on families.

## Factors behind the eviction of Nkarapamwe families

A central factor that led to the eviction of Nkarapamwe residents by 1970 was centrally, although not solely, the inconsiderate colonial official's economic reasoning to accommodate new workers. Following on Van Niekerk's assertion, it was an increase in a number of black workers seeking work with no alternative accommodation which led Van Niekerk,

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<sup>15</sup> Emily A. Benfer, David Vlahov, Marissa Y. Long, Evan Walker-Wells, J. L. Pottenger Jr., Gregg Gonsalves and Danya E. Keene, "Eviction, health inequity, and the spread of COVID-19: housing policy as a primary pandemic mitigation strategy", *Journal of Urban Health*, 98 (1), 2021: 1-12.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Desmond, "Eviction and the reproduction of urban poverty", *American Journal of Sociology*, 118 (1), 2012: 88-133.

<sup>17</sup> Vandana Asthana, "Forced displacement: A gendered analysis of the Tehri Dam Project", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47 (47-48), 2012: 96-102.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Damian Collins, Esther de Vos, Joshua Evans, Meryn Severson Mason, Jalene Anderson-Baron, Victoria Cruickshank and Kenna McDowell, "*When We Do Evict Them, It's a Last Resort*": *Eviction Prevention in Social and Affordable Housing*, *Housing Policy Debate*, 2021; 197, DOI: 10.1080/10511482.2021.1900890.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Joseph van Holm and Jake Monaghann, "Eviction and the dissolution of neighborhoods", *Housing Policy Debate*, 31 (2), 2021: 197-213.

<sup>21</sup> Benfer et al., "Eviction".

a top colonial official in the so-called Kavango Homeland, to do a reassessment of housing occupation and to eventually cancel house occupancy rights and evict unemployed families.<sup>22</sup> The demand for accommodation for black workers came about due to some developing work opportunities in Rundu. By 1970, some of the following work opportunities were available to Africans such as: working for the Bantu Affairs Commissioner as labour agents or African police. Africans were also recruited at the post office, at a hospital construction site, at an iron type two bedroomed hospitals led by Dr Kuschke, at a Butchery for meats meant to feed leprosy patients, for domestic and garden work at houses of white government officials, as attendants at the SWANLA shop; for teaching in Bantu schools, at Mr. Black (Kandorohwa) construction camp; at a SWANLA compound, etc. There was thus a lack of accommodation for new potential African workers in Rundu by 1970.

It was against this background that the new Commissioner Van Niekerk evicted families out of the houses under the pretext to provide more accommodation to potential government workers in the black township of Nkarapamwe. Other clarity for 1970s eviction is explained as arising from the way in which a colonial official in 1968 allocated houses to satisfy the local conception on housing for extended family occupation and as such, double housing was provided to a few government employees which eventually became the basis for eviction later by 1970. Paulus Munango argues that large families have moved to Nkarapamwe in 1968 only after the Commissioner agreed to give them more than one house.<sup>23</sup>

Oral interviews, however, suggest that only those who had connections with the Commissioner got more than one house. Government employees who had great influence in community affairs and who played a crucial role to convince their fellow community members to vacate their homesteads near Rundu and to move into the township in 1968 were granted two to three houses per person by the Commissioner.<sup>24</sup> Paulus Munango who got more than one house in the township, and was among those families facing eviction by 1970, has been in the civil service for more than thirty-nine years and was now an old man facing retirement.<sup>25</sup> Others like Pineas Kandunda was by then an old man who had worked as a messenger (Police boy) and, received more than one house too.<sup>26</sup> These two men got more than one house because they were rewarded for their long service and loyalty to the Administration. It is also known that other native messengers who worked with Native Affairs Commissioners, had large families as they abused their status of working for the Commissioner to marry too many women as was for example shown in a report of 1940 where a 50 years old Looper Shikwaya (popularly known as

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<sup>22</sup> See National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek (NAN), NAR 9, 1/1/55, Vol. 13, letter titled, "Behuising: Bantodorp Nkarapamwe: Kavango gebied, U geheime aansbrief nr.T.60/2/1482/1 van 12de Oktober 1970", 5 November 1970.

<sup>23</sup> NAN, NAR 9, 1/1/55, Vol. 13, police testimony by Paulus Munango, 18 July 1970.

<sup>24</sup> Interview Berthold Shiyuka Lucian and Alfonsine Namvhura Lucian, Rundu, Safari location, 19 June 2005.

<sup>25</sup> NAN, NAR 9, 1/1/55, Vol. 13, police testimony by Paulus Munango, 18 July 1970.

<sup>26</sup> NAN, NAR 9, 1/1/55, a police testimony by Pinias Kandunda, 17 July 1970.

Makaranga) had 8 wives.<sup>27</sup> Apart from working for the Commissioner, their polygamous families justified the two or more houses they were given at the time when the housing demand was low such as was the case in 1968. While there were around ninety-four (94) houses in Nkarapamwe by 1970, there was thus less than ninety-four owners as some influential community members possessed more than one house while extra homes were occupied by their dependents many of whom were unemployed.

At the time of the evictions in 1970 there were 1089 residents in Nkarapamwe Township, 676 males and 413 females.<sup>28</sup> It can be deduced that approximately about twelve residents each lived in a house although there could have been some variation. Considering that Nkarapamwe houses consisted of two bed rooms, the houses were also overcrowded with no room for visitors. Lack of space for large family accommodation in Nkarapamwe thus left the township overcrowded. These incomplete houses, without electricity and a plumbing system became costly for residents who had to find alternative ways to urgent power (paraffin stoves or cooking in the open fire). Residents erected additional shacks within the yards due to lack of living rooms, limited bed and kitchen spaces within the houses, as was required for the local cultural practices and this additional backyard shacks soon became an eyesore to the colonial officials and was eventually a ground for eviction.<sup>29</sup> Social disintegration due to an increase in alcohol consumption in Nkarapamwe among occupants also became a concern and a basis for eviction.<sup>30</sup> Despite the lack of services, all occupants were expected to pay a minimum of one rand per month as a guarantee or holder of the plot in Nkarapamwe.<sup>31</sup> The tenure system was permission to occupy, well-known as P.T.O. and there was no title deeds. It was this lack of affordability to pay for incomplete houses, for rent and water consumption, which was another factor for eviction. For the majority, eviction followed a protracted failure to meet their financial obligations or to keep their property in good condition. There was a lack of unsatisfactory maintenance of the incomplete houses by occupants. A tribal police force that was employed to keep order in Nkarapamwe location could report such irresponsible occupants to the colonial officials for potential eviction.<sup>32</sup>

Oral interviews carried out in 2004 and 2005 shed light on some of the Commissioner's other motives for eviction. Interviewees strongly disagreed that they were evicted because they were unemployed or because they had homesteads in walking proximity to their place of work. They argued instead that some of the employed people who had no homesteads near Rundu were also evicted from the township mainly for political reasons. Although

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<sup>27</sup> NAN, SWAA 0456, A50/88. A letter of communication by Harold Eedes, Rundu to the Attorney-General, Windhoek. 29/11/1940.

<sup>28</sup> NAN, NAR 7, Population census, South West Africa geographical distribution of the population (Report No, 02-05-26, 1970), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Interview Siteketa Wilbard and Joseph Kandjimi, Nkarapamwe location, 20 May 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> NAN, NAR 7, 1/1/55, N13/1/2, Government Gazette, No R293, 1962, attached to a letter from the office of the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner in Windhoek to Rundu, February 1970.

<sup>32</sup> Interview Rebekka Kambundu, Rundu, Safari location, 20 December 2004.



there were some political developments affecting Rundu by the 1970s such as the insecurity situation alongside the Kavango River, the infiltration of SWAPO fighting forces and influx of refugees from the Angola liberation war, it remains unclear how these developments influenced on the colonial evictions of Nkarapamwe by 1970. Some interviewees nonetheless were still insistent that the evictions from Nkarapamwe had a political tone as Shikerete explains:

Van Niekerk came in, yes, when he arrived he introduced his own rules. He came to put in place his own rules but we were used to those of Maree. Maree could speak with people and would understand them and would also ask about all the problems that the people may have. Van Niekerk was not a type of a white person who could listen. At this time, I also went out of town to settle at Mupapama village where I had my other homestead. When I returned from there, I found that they have put a law in place. His whole intention was based on his suspicion of establishing as to who was working for the government and who was not working for the government that was his whole intention. That was when he started to make people fill in new forms to evict those who were not cooperating with him; I was also one of those people who were evicted from the house.<sup>33</sup>

Despite authorities' benign reasons for evicting families, some people who were especially employed hardly found them convincing and discerned their own reasons for being evicted as being politically motivated.

## The process of evicting and residents' responses

The new Bantu Affairs Commissioner made an inspection of the files of his predecessor and discovered that some of the residents who were previously given houses were in the meanwhile discharged from their work. They were now unemployed but still occupying houses. He decided to act on this 'problem' after he established a long list of applicants needing accommodation. He explains,

During April 1970, I established that there was a waiting list of almost 100 applicants from the assistant inspector of Bantu education and Bantu information assistant. It was very clear to me that there was an accommodation need in Nkarapamwe that needed to be addressed. I therefore went through the Bantu files and established that some of the houses were assigned to the natives while they were for example working for the local hospital, the army, etc and that the above mentioned people have been discharged along time but still live unemployed in the houses.<sup>34</sup>

Van Niekerk argued that some individuals had two to three houses and should therefore surrender these and retain one only. He began by requiring all residents to fill in new application forms for occupation of houses in Nkarapamwe Black Township. With this information, he then acted to cancel all the extra houses of individuals. A total of 300-400

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<sup>33</sup> Interview Gosbert Lyambayi Shikerete, Rundu, Safari location, 20 December 2004.

<sup>34</sup> NAN, NAR 9, 1/1/55, Vol. 13, letter titled, "Behuising: Bantodorp Nkarapamwe: Kavango gebied, U geheime aansbrief nr.T.60/2/1482/1 van 12de Oktober 1970," 5 November 1970.

people were affected.<sup>35</sup> The Commissioner Van Niekerk in his letter explains that he informed the township committee about cancelling the ownership of houses of some residents of Nkarapamwe:

After the forms were completed, I called the town committee together and explained the problem to them. I indicated to them that I felt that those natives who still had their homesteads in Sauyemwa and Sarusungu needed to give up their houses since their homesteads were just in walking distance to the white township, Rundu, where their employment is situated. The township committee accepted these arrangements openly.<sup>36</sup>

While the Commissioner suggests that the township committee agreed with his decision, this is not an accurate representation of the committee's position. Evidence indicates that the committee wrote a letter to him to oppose the eviction.<sup>37</sup> They opposed the eviction because they felt that Van Niekerk's decision to evict people from Nkarapamwe Township did not hold water because he had not consulted with Hompa Maria Mwendere of the VaSambyu and Hompa Elisabeth Nepemba of VaMbunza ethnic groups in whose 'tribal' lands the township was situated. The township committee asked:

How did you come about to decide alone to chase people out of the Bantu township without coming into agreement with the chiefs? If we have to ask Pretoria that the new Commissioner who has been sent to us decides on his own without unity with the tribe shall it be good? Shall you find comfort in that? But we do not want to approach Pretoria in a case where you listen to us.<sup>38</sup>

By referring to their traditional leaders and the threat to write directly to Pretoria, residents clearly hoped they could force the Commissioner to reconsider his decision. Residents were opposed to evictions because they believed it was insincere of one colonial official to having invited Africans to live in town in 1968 only to have them evicted by his successor by 1970, within a space of two years. Residents argued that it was the same government that forced them to leave their homesteads alongside the river in 1968 and invited them to come and live in Nkarapamwe Township, why again should they be forced to move out?<sup>39</sup> In some eviction cases generally, the collaboration of evicted people with the local political elites or Churches for example, helped to either stop eviction or to provide support to victims during and after eviction.<sup>40</sup> Similarly in the case of Nkarapamwe eviction, the residents relied on the support of some local church leaders to stop the eviction. Although church support did not eventually stop the eviction it still remained the most powerful voice for Nkarapamwe evicted families. The argument against eviction was

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<sup>35</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol.13, letter by Dr. Romanus Kampungu to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Rundu, Kavango, to enquiry about the eviction issue, 29 June 1970.

<sup>36</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, Behuising: Bantoedorp Nkarapamwe: Kavango gebied.

<sup>37</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, letter by Nkarapamwe committee to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Rundu, Kavango, titled "Die Bantoessakekommissaris. Geagte Heer," 17 June 1970.

<sup>38</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, letter titled "Die Bantoessakekommissaris, Rundu, Geagte Heer," 17 June 1970.

<sup>39</sup> See Likuwa, "Colonial relocations".

<sup>40</sup> Braimah R. Farouk and Mensah Owusu, "'If in doubt, count': the role of community-driven enumerations in blocking eviction in Old Fadama, Accra", *Environment & Urbanization*, 24 (1), 2012: 47-57.

summed up well by a then local born and first Black Catholic Priest in Namibia, Reverend Dr. Romanus Kampungu in his letter to Bantu Affairs Commissioner Van Niekerk, in which he argued:

It would be bad policy on the part of the government to have called and invited these people to come and live here only to have them sent away afterwards. It is immaterial whether the former Bantu Affairs Commissioner had committed a blunder in allowing them to live here. The fact for the people is that he had acted as an official.<sup>41</sup>

Dr. Romanus Kampungu hoped to convince Van Niekerk to reconsider his decision to evict residents. He thought that these people having learned in the past two years how to live in the township would be a good example to the others gradually coming in. He also saw that such an expulsion was already creating and was going to continue to create a bad impression in the Kavango that the government deals unfairly with the people of Kavango and eventually this will fill them with doubts for the future, especially for the 1964 Odendaal recommendations for Kavango to be declared as an independent Bantustan area later in the same year 1970.<sup>42</sup> Dr. Kampungu thought that to replace old town inhabitants with new ones would mean starting over again to teach them how to behave in order to live peacefully in the township and this would be an unnecessary time wasted by the Catholic Church at Rundu because it had already spent time framing and moulding the behaviour of these people in the township.<sup>43</sup> Residents subsequently went to the police and gave testimonies about the evictions, with the hope that this was another option to garner support against eviction. The police first forwarded these testimonies to the head office of the Bantu Commissioner in Windhoek and then approached the Bantu Affairs Commissioner at Rundu for clarity. These attempts angered Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Van Niekerk who felt he should have been contacted first. Van Niekerk, in a response letter to the head office painted a glowing view of the planning prospects for Rundu. He indicated that all those residents whose occupation rights of houses in the township was cancelled would have to build their homesteads further away from Rundu and not in their former areas of Sarusungu or Sauyemwa as these two areas has been set aside as agriculture areas.

Since the beginning of the Rundu office in 1936, most native messengers (black police men) who worked for the Native Commissioner settled at Sarusungu village from which they walked some kilometers to Rundu for work. Sarusungu, which was sparsely populated by 1936, consisted mainly of the homesteads of these native messengers (policemen). It was only after 1954 that some of the victims of flood from the Nkondo area came in numbers to settle here.<sup>44</sup> Residents who faced evictions in 1970 included those who had come as early as 1936 from Nkurenkuru settlement to Rundu. After Nkarapamwe evictions of 1970, the evicted residents soon faced eventual forced removal from Sarusungu to

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<sup>41</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, a letter by Dr. Romanus Kampungu, Rundu, Kavango, 29 June 1970.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Likuwa. "Flooding".

Kaisosi by 1971.<sup>45</sup> Since residents were aware of the betterment plans and another eminent eviction from the planned relocated areas, they opposed the eviction.<sup>46</sup> The residents of Nkarapamwe held a meeting under the leadership of their township committee and explained in writing to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner as to why they were opposed to his eviction orders.<sup>47</sup> In a letter, the residents of Nkarapamwe argued that they no longer had any other homesteads on the outskirts of Rundu, therefore, to return there would mean they would have to re-erect new homesteads at their own cost and they did not think that this was fair because they were never compensated for the destruction of their previous homesteads along the riverside when they were forced in 1968 to come and live in Nkarapamwe township.<sup>48</sup> Residents also argued that life was no longer going to be the same again at their previous settlements since they had lost touch. They further felt that they are also sojourners who came from far and therefore if Nkarapamwe Township was meant for people who came from far, as the Commissioner argued, then they were those people. People compared their situation to some known experiences of African residency in other parts of the country and beyond. Based on their comparisons, residents rejected the idea that the township of Nkarapamwe was only built for people who came from far and not for those ones who lived nearby. The township committee further explained this to the Commissioner Van Niekerk:

What we know is that Oshakati is occupied by people who live nearby as well as those who live from far like any other towns in the world. Where do you find such an idea that a town must be occupied only by people who come from far? Is Windhoek, Johannesburg built only for people who come from far, must we than ask Pretoria?<sup>49</sup>

The residents argued that most of the children of the people who faced eviction were already progressing to higher grades at both primary and secondary level, and the eviction of their parents would also mean their children would be forced to stop schooling. Schooling was seen as an important part of the anticipated self-rule which was forthcoming later in the year 1970 and they argued that the areas of Sauyemwa and Sarusungu to which the evicted people were told to move had no classes going above standard three to four. The people also reasoned that they had already paid a lot of money as rent for all the two years that they had come to reside in the township and to be evicted now would be an act of having wasted their money on the houses. If one takes into consideration the regulations of black townships in South West Africa/ Namibia, which were also applicable to Nkarapamwe, residents were expected to pay rent of one rand per month. This may sound very little rent today, but it was of some value at that time especially when you consider that you could buy a few blankets with one rand. It was argued that ownership

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<sup>45</sup> Kletus Muhena Likuwa and Mandhavela Khasera, "A brief history of forced relocations from Sarusungu and Magarandangja in Rundu, 1971-1972", in: Marius Kudumo and Jeremy Silvester, (eds), *Resistance on the Banks of the Kavango River*, Windhoek, Museums Association of Namibia, 2016: 126-148.

<sup>46</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, "Behuising: Bantoeorp Nkarapamwe: Kavango gebied," 5 November 1970.

<sup>47</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, "Die Bantoesakekommissaris, Rundu, Geagte Heer," 17 June 1970.

<sup>48</sup> Likuwa, "Colonial relocations".

<sup>49</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, "Die Bantoesakekommissaris, Rundu, Geagte Heer", 17 June 1970.

of two to three houses should not be used as a basis to remove them out of the township. That matter was well understood and accepted by the former Commissioner as basis on which most Nkarapamwe household heads with large families were only willing to move from the river side and come to live in the township by 1968. The township committee explained:

These houses of Nkarapamwe are suited for people who just got married, but not for people with big families. We know that the government have built such houses in South Africa and South-West-Africa but this does not mean that they have enough living space. What is understandable is that two houses in Nkarapamwe are not easily affordable but not to say that they are big enough. The previous Commissioner, mister Mare understood the case very well, which was why he provided people with big families two houses.<sup>50</sup>

So, there was a clear fear to being evicted from the township and forced to relocate to the said areas, only to be forced to relocate again to new planned camps by 1971 and 1972 in the name of betterment scheme projects. While residents did their best to prevent eviction, it eventually occurred. The residents of Nkarapamwe were given one month to vacate the houses. All evicted residents soon shifted to Sarusungu and Mangarangandja in the east from which they again faced another forced removal to Kehemu and Kaisosi respectively by 1971 to 1972.<sup>51</sup>

## Picking up the pieces: impacts of eviction

### Social

Language usage have been an important tool to make meaning of people's interpretations of housing and evictions and the utilization of metaphors in everyday language seems to have influenced how people structure their relationships.<sup>52</sup> In the case of Nkarapamwe eviction, it seems language usage to refer to a residential area that was once called Nkarapamwe at the time of occupation in 1968 to Katutura by 1970 speaks volume to residents' changing views about declining assurance on their residency in Nkarapamwe. In 1970, two years after they had come to settle into the township, people of Nkarapamwe began to refer to their township as Katutura, which is a borrowed Herero term for a black township in Windhoek to which blacks had been forced to settle in 1959. Katutura means 'a place where we do not stay'.<sup>53</sup> This name began to be used as a replacement for what was once Nkarapamwe when many residents no longer felt settled when they faced eviction as a result of the orders from Van Niekerk. This eviction had direct consequences for the unemployed and for those government workers who had houses in the township but also retained homesteads in the areas of Sarusungu and Mangarangandja in the east

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<sup>50</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, a letter titled "Die Bantoesakekommissaris, Rundu, Geagte Heer". 17 June 1970.

<sup>51</sup> Likuwa and Khasera, "Brief history".

<sup>52</sup> Kavita Ramakrishnan, "Disrupted futures: Unpacking metaphors of marginalization in eviction and resettlement narratives", *Antipode*, 46 (3), 2014: 754-772.

<sup>53</sup> Wade C. Pendleton, *Katutura: A Place Where We Do Not Stay*, San Diego, San Diego State University Press, 1974.

and Sauyemwa in the west of Rundu. Those people who owned more than one house lost some and were left with only one. In some cases, there was a relief. For example, where a father owned two houses, one of the houses was taken away and registered in the name of his working son. As the Commissioner explains, this was so in the case of Paulus Munango: "Concerning Paulus, whose homestead is +2 miles East of Rundu, two houses were cancelled and one was later given in its whole to his son after an appeal through the committee."<sup>54</sup> A central worry for the evicted families was the new long distance they will now have to travel from the new villages to work in Rundu town. People who were surely still government workers would then have to walk very long distances to work and this was a big concern as Paulus Munango explains:

I am again already an old age man and do not see a chance to walk by foot every day. There is in each case no public transport in Kavango area and there is only one way and that is to go on foot to your work.<sup>55</sup>

Some people were used to living in houses with small family and without much regard for cultural and social practices or taboos to which they had to now readjust as they return to the traditional homesteads near Rundu thus resulting in some cultural shock. The problem of water shortages in the new area of both Sarusungu and later Kaisosi had great effects on the people. For example, women, would line up for water behind the water point and soon began to argue with each other and would go as far as labelling each other's as witches.<sup>56</sup> This contributed to a breakdown of good neighbourliness and cooperation. Some scholars have noted that in most evictions, children are the hardest hit but that there is less consideration of the extent of the impacts of eviction on children.<sup>57</sup> In the case of Nkarapamwe eviction, it meant increased distance to school for many children who had to foot from the relocated areas of Sarusungu to Rundu for school. Established neighbourhood relations of evicted families were broken as many drifted apart. Positively, evicted unemployed residents were relieved from continued payment of township services and of the Nkarapamwe houses which they did not own. This position is well articulated by an interviewee in a group discussion:

It is good that we are living now in our own homes, we will now look for our own food. It is not the same as living in those Nkarapamwe houses where one has double worries: one is where to buy food, paying for the children school fees, their clothing, pay for water, pay for the house, pay for electricity, and is that what you call development? Town is for the educated people, those who are educated and are receiving a good salary, they will see town life as good. Those of us who are not educated, we see town life as very useless because we have to buy food and water and electricity. Those of us living here [outside town] are better off. Now, we can eat our mutete (traditional spinach) from our fields. When

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<sup>54</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, Behuising: Bantoedorp Nkarapamwe, Kavango gebied.

<sup>55</sup> NAN, NAR 9, 1/1/55, Vol. 13, police testimony by Paulus Munango, 18 July 1970.

<sup>56</sup> Interview Nyamonde Kanunga, Rundu, Safari location, 29 December 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Ochola, "Eviction".

it rains, we grow Mahangu (traditional meal crop), we collect water freely from the River and drink, and this is not the same when compared to living in town.<sup>58</sup>

Eviction caused fear amongst the traditional leaders who also feared of similar reappraisals if they moved and lived in the newly build traditional office spaces and houses around the same time in 1970. Hompa Maria Mwengere waMukosho, in whose land the town was situated, flatly refused to move to the new residential quarters of the tribal offices which were specially erected for her occupation in 1970 in fear that she too may eventually face eviction.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, no other Kavango chief moved to live in the tribal houses.

### Economic

The evicted families were aggrieved that they thus had to spend money erecting temporary shelters. Those families who could not erect their own homes found temporary accommodation with friends. Although they were disappointed to be evicted, some residents easily relocated to their existing homesteads in the nearby villages of Sarusungu, Sauyemwa, Kansukwa etc, but this was not the same for all evicted residents whose homesteads were non-existent in nearby villages. In July 1970, Pineas Kandunda indicated of the plight of the evicted families in terms of the cost for erecting new homesteads for new residency in his declaration under oath to the police:

At this moment, I am aware of five families who have already moved out of the Bantu township. The people who have already moved out have erected temporary shelters for themselves where they now live. There are still other people who are planning to move out, but then, there are others who are refusing to move out.<sup>60</sup>

Eventually eviction resulted in, what Katherine Brickell et al. saw in a similar context as, the breakdown of neighbourhood trust and conviviality.<sup>61</sup> Affective impacts such as overwhelming sadness, compulsive worry, difficulty in sleeping, difficulty in concentrating and emotional outbursts, wails of despair, trauma has been common among evicted families in general and some of these affective outcomes was equally evident amongst the victims of Nkarapamwe eviction.

### Political

Politically, eviction of people from the township of Nkarapamwe filled the residents of Kavango with doubts for the political future. The people of Nkarapamwe began to doubt the policies of the Bantu Affairs Commissioner who had previously always told them that the authorities were there to protect them against enemies (SWAPO freedom fighters) who were craving to take away their land and all that they owned. This doubt is expressed

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<sup>58</sup> Group discussion, Sauyemwa, December 2004.

<sup>59</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, "Die Bantoesakekommissaris, Rundu, Geagte Heer".

<sup>60</sup> NAN, NAR 9, 1/1/55, police testimony by Pineas Kandunda, 17 July 1970.

<sup>61</sup> Brickell et al., *Geographies*.

in the letter of the township committee of Nkarapamwe to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner on the Kavango in 1970:

N.B: In Windhoek, the blacks had to be forced to go and live in Katutura. It took years. In Nkarapamwe, the blacks have to be prevented from living in a black township. What will our enemies say?<sup>62</sup>

This indicates that the people were becoming doubtful of the future plans of the government and indeed of what their so-called enemies, as was told to them, would say to such a move of eviction. They were beginning to doubt that the colonial authorities were their partners in opposing the communist enemies whom as the colonial authorities informed them, wanted nothing more than to take away their land and properties. It also indicates, however, that the people of Nkarapamwe Township were not living in isolation. They were aware of what went on in the whole country and beyond the border. Their resistance and other responses to eviction were shaped by their understanding and knowledge from the experience of forced removals of other black people from as far as Windhoek. The people of Nkarapamwe were aware of the experiences of other black communities in Windhoek who were shot and killed by the white colonial authorities for refusing to move from their old location to the scheduled residential area of Katutura. Among the thirteen people who got killed in the 1959 shootings in Windhoek, was a man from Shامbyu. They therefore feared too that they would be shot and killed if they refused to move to the resettlement camps. This fear of being killed was clearly spelt out by the township committee of Nkarapamwe. In their letter of complaint to the Commissioner Van Niekerk in the middle of the year 1970 they said:

The people have great uneasiness that they would be shot if they will not be willing to move into the planned camps but to stay where they are.<sup>63</sup>

SWAPO used the opportunity of eviction to campaign for the armed liberation struggle against colonial rule. In a secret anonymous S.W.A.P.O letter which was discovered by the police, S.W.A.P.O encouraged people to oppose the eviction, to continue to support its guerrilla fighters who were infiltrating into their areas, and finally to cross over in large numbers into Angola and join the other Kavango people and other ethnic groups who were already in the liberation war.<sup>64</sup> The eviction order brought discontent among the residents of Nkarapamwe who regarded such evictions as unfair. Some residents were of the opinion that their resistance to eviction exposed the ill intentions of the colonial official which put the colonial government into disrepute with the local people. Some of our interviewees believed that it was the people's opposition to the evictions that eventually resulted in the exposure of the ill-intentions of the Bantu Affairs Commissioner Van Niekerk, and subsequently in the termination of his services and eventual removal from the Kavango area. Shikerete explains:

Van Niekerk, was like this, he actually did not serve long and he was removed from his job because of his bad behaviours and bad relations with black people.

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<sup>62</sup> NAN, NAR 9, Vol. 13, "Die Bantoesakekommissaris, Rundu, Geagte Heer".

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> See NAN, NAR 9, 1/1/55, Vol. 13, a Swapo letter, 1970.



His fellow Boers (colonial administration) saw too that Van Niekerk will destroy the land (Kavango). He was ill and short tempered. Remember, Commissioners also doubled work as magistrates. Yes, so when Van Niekerk left, then he was replaced by Jacobus. Yes, but why should he (Van Niekerk) evict people? What did they do wrong considering that they do pay dues for the houses? It was after all these that he was dismissed. Yes, even his fellow whites realized that he will destroy the country (Kavango).<sup>65</sup>

Another interviewee, Simon Kandere argues that the Commissioner was made to feel ashamed of his wrong doings by Nkarapamwe residents and 'abdicated' his office.<sup>66</sup> This perception derives from the fact that Van Niekerk was in office for barely a year and was replaced by December 1970 by D.E Jacobus. This interpretation is important to those who were victims of eviction. Whether it was really the case or not is immaterial. It gives them, however, some satisfaction that their struggle or resistance against the actions of the colonial official had not been totally in vain, it conclusively conveys a tale of morality.

## Conclusion

A history of eviction of Nkarapamwe residents in 1970 shows that the central cause of the eviction was economical and beneficial to the colonial economy, to pave way for economically active Africans to occupy the houses so that they work for the colonial economy in Rundu. The colonial official acted without consultation with the evicted residents or their traditional leaders before or after eviction. The lack of consultation caused conflict and resulted in some form of opposition towards the eviction by the residents. The evicted residents sought support against eviction from the Township committee, from the local church and Priest, and from the Police but all these only angered the colonial official (the evictor) more, then preventing the eviction from occurring. The use of official data and documents on previous housing allocation was a useful tool by the colonial official as a basis for eviction. The evicted families did not receive support during or after the eviction process and had to bear all the cost of the eviction. The eviction had differentiated social, economic and political impacts on different individuals and their families. As has been a similar experience elsewhere, women and children remained amongst the badly affected by eviction process. Some evicted families bore the cost of building new homestead in the villages near Rundu, Children's schooling was negatively affected in terms of long distance etc. Although eviction occurred, residents found relief in the sense that their efforts were rewarded in the sense that the colonial official responsible for eviction was made to feel ashamed, forced to resign or to abdicate office and leave the Kavango, which for evictees presents a tale of morality.

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<sup>65</sup> Interview Gosbert Lyambayi Shikerete, Rundu, Safari location, 20 December 2004.

<sup>66</sup> Interview Simon Kandere, Rundu, Nkarapamwe location, 20 December 2004.

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