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Affordability and relationality

The reproduction and transformation of the segregated city in Windhoek

Lalli Metsola

Abstract: Despite the professed break from apartheid, a dual logic continues to reproduce the segregated city structure in Windhoek, Namibia's capital. On the one hand, the formal regulation of access to urban land, housing, and basic services privileges property ownership and ratepaying. On the other hand, for the informal residents, access is provisional and incremental, and depends on cultivating relations with peers and authorities. However, the latter logic of access also contributes to a moral imagination that challenges entitlement based on market participation. The article argues that everyday urban governance and urban citizenship in Windhoek arise out of the coexistence, clashes, and collusions between these logics in policies and planning, the residents' claims of entitlement, and the communication between residents and authorities. The article is based on fieldwork conducted in 2016 and 2019.

Keywords: access, housing, land tenure, Namibia, service provision, urban citizenship, urban governance

As one approaches northwestern Windhoek after hours along one of the few main arteries from the city, traffic proceeds at snail's pace. There is plenty of time to reflect on the startling contrasts between the barrage of movement, smell, and noise of the congested northwestern fringes of the city, the quietness of the lush, spacious suburbs, and the city center that turns into an empty ghost town over weekends. Such differences have a long history, rooted in southern African settler colonialism. But why are they still so prominent, more than 30 years after independence and the abolition of statutory discrimination. What are the forces that reproduce

them, and how do urban Namibians experience them? What kinds of urban citizenship do they entail?

The rapid growth of the city has placed a huge burden on the financial and administrative capacities of the municipality. Additionally, a number of planning and implementation failures have been faulted for the growth of informal residence. However, I will argue that beneath the professed transition from apartheid to democracy and majority rule, strong forces reproduce the segregated city structure and its unequal provision and access—in the sense of “ability to derive benefits from things” (Ribot



and Peluso 2003)—to land, housing and basic services, resulting in the growth of informality and associated problems of access. Obviously, Windhoek is no longer a city officially divided into white, colored, and black residential areas.¹ Yet, transition to independence did not mean the end of segregation but rather changed its statutory basis from explicitly racial into one that stresses property rights and economic responsibilities. A relatively durable regime of contradictory, but also largely compartmentalized dual logics of urban governance has emerged that continues to pattern access to land, housing, infrastructure and service provision in ways that result in practically segregated urban spaces. At the same time, I will demonstrate that the everyday governance of the urban fringes and their precarious conditions might also contain seeds of transformation.

The first logic, propertied citizenship (Hammar 2017; Heer 2018; Roy 2003), depends on the ability to pay and is usually indexed with the term “affordability,” commonly used in Namibian policy discourse, research literature, and public debates. The second logic, less visible in these literatures and debates, is that of conditional, relational access that depends on the ability to cultivate relations—to politicians, administrators, neighbors, and relatives. The formal city structure, planning, and administration is organized according to the former logic, and beyond the reach of a large part of the city’s poorer inhabitants. Yet they persistently seek to establish themselves and advance their lot in the city. Access to land, housing, and basic services, such as water, sanitation, electricity, and transport routes tends to get bundled in these two logics. For the propertied classes, ownership of land and housing grants access to the services as well. For the urban “informals,” by contrast, access to infrastructures and services becomes a central part of their daily navigations, struggles and relations. The paper follows these two logics, as they appear in the institutionalization of the dual city structure in apartheid and post-independence policies, planning and administration, in justifications of entitlement by

municipal operatives and different segments of the city’s populace, and in the prolonged claim and response dynamics between residents and authorities.

This duality is a structural legacy that is codified in the continuing economic inequality and ensuing material forms in the city. However, it is also a contested terrain of contemporary urban politics of space and services that presents itself to the social actors involved as a definitional struggle concerning how urban residential land, housing and associated basic services are to be understood and regulated; as private property or as a fundamental socioeconomic right that should be available to all for the purposes of residence and basic needs. This struggle is waged both in the form of public argumentation and in the form of incremental tactics of occupation and use, through which residents of the urban fringes seek to establish and extend their access, thus containing elements of both commoning and publicizing practices (Trémon, in this issue). While such incremental processes and tactics have been underexplored in the Namibian context, they have been noted as significant aspects of how urbanization occurs in southern cities through interactive processes between residents, public authorities and private capital, in a way that constantly redefines formality and informality (Caldeira 2017; Metsola 2018).

Access to such necessities is always regulated and contested, but particularly intensely so in contemporary urban conditions. Here, it is important to distinguish between national citizenship and urban citizenship in the sense of inclusion and access in the urban space (Holston 2019: 122–123; Nyamnjoh 2007). The legal provision of national citizenship often does not translate into tangible socioeconomic rights without active effort and contestation (Chatterjee 2004; Das 2011; Das and Randeria 2015; Englund 2006). Such struggles increasingly occur in the context of cities, over access to the basics of decent living. Furthermore, meaningful participation in urban communities may or may not overlap with national citizenship. For example, poor immigrants often occupy the most

precarious positions in the ladder of rights, opportunities and access, while well-off foreign investors might conversely enjoy stronger rights, opportunities and access than poor nationals.

In line with the Introduction to this issue, I prefer to look at processes of commoning and publicizing as contested and changing fields of action, instead of sweeping generalizations based on the supposedly inherent characteristics of particular goods and forms of social organization. In Windhoek's fringe urban spaces, already propertied under state or private ownership for a long time, counterarguments and tactics do not merely seek to defend a pre-existing commons but rather carve space for alternative arrangements of access. At the same time, this is not merely a "post-capitalist" reaction to the logics of private ownership and profit (Dalakoglou 2016), as such bottom-up, networked provision was never completely overrun by state or commercial ones in the Namibian context but instead remained a crucial part of survival and social reproduction for the majority. Indeed, as has been argued by classic texts in the Namibian context (Moorsom 1977) and elsewhere (Wolpe 1972), these colonial economies depended on the subsidization of the reproduction of black labor by inputs from relational, non-commodified livelihoods.

Likewise, the role of the state and political power can be more ambiguous than some critiques suggest. Some scholars see the state as an agent of domination in collusion with capital, against which popular efforts antagonistically rise in the form of resistance (Davis 2006; Harvey 2008). Others portray the state as a cynical project of abandonment that caters to the elites while leaving the poor to fend for themselves; their projects of betterment then express their autonomous agency and generate new institutions of urban citizenship (Bayat 2010; Holston 2008). Both of these perspectives identify significant aspects of contemporary urban realities but need to be complemented by also noting moments of collusion, negotiation and co-production. I will demonstrate that in the case of Namibian precarious urbanites, their tactics and

arguments of advancement do not simply stand against or beyond the state but rather happen in constant interaction with state agencies and their regulatory efforts, forming an arena of publicizing practices (Trémon, in this issue).

In the following, based on observations, discussions, interviews, and documents accumulated during two fieldwork periods in 2016 and 2019, I will first discuss the colonial origins of Windhoek and then examine the ways policies and governance reimagined the city and its residents after independence. Further, I will explore how the dual logic of access plays out in the everyday governance of informal settlements. Finally, I will discuss some of the broader implications of these segregationist legacies for the Namibian state and its citizens.

Windhoek as a post-apartheid city

The institutionalization of racial hierarchies and ethnic categories was at the core of colonial rule—as well as establishing settler states such as the United States—and hence an integral part of processes of accumulation and the development of capitalism as a historical system. This was an underside of liberal statehood that demonstrated that modern biopolitics does not merely consist of improving forms of life and enhancing their capacities but also of techniques of violent exclusion (Blaut 1989; Hansen and Stepputat 2005). Along these lines, colonial administrations in Africa transplanted the ideal of modern, networked infrastructure and service provision from metropolitan contexts into emerging colonial urban environments, but in a distinct manner that led to highly differentiated cities. Hygiene and order were used as justifications for dual, segregated cities with separate European and "native" parts (Njoh 2008). While such plans rarely reached full implementation (Beckmans 2013; Fourchard 2011), there was a clear tendency for the European quarters to receive considerable investment in infrastructure and service networks, while solutions for the African city ranged from modest networks

(as in Windhoek) to existing entirely beyond the grid, with varied, fragmented, and localized provision regimes (Monstadt and Schramm 2017).

While the association of race and class was a key part of colonial capitalism, Southern African former settler colonies—South Africa, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and South West Africa (now Namibia)—were perhaps the paradigmatic examples of this combination. In comparison with other African postcolonial states, they were characterized by the relative strength of their institutions of governance, which led to particularly systematic, pervasive, and efficiently policed segregative models that were in place up to the late twentieth century (Freund 2001; Legassick and Hemson 1976; Lodge 1998).² As Parnell put it, “as a caricature of the social divisions that now plague cities across the ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ worlds, the apartheid city experience served as a worst-case scenario of persistent social and economic inequality” (Parnell 1997: 891; see also Bénéit-Gbaffou et al. 2012).

While the northern dual city literature has focused primarily on “post-industrial” cities, those in Southern Africa, including Namibia, are perhaps better characterized as “post-segregationist.” Their recent evolution has been partly driven by global trends familiar from the northern literature, such as increasingly capital-intensive economies, financialization and associated speculation in land and housing. However, unlike northern cities, Namibian ones originally developed as centers of administration and trade in colonial settler economies that actively sought to restrict the migration of “natives” into the cities, apart from who were needed as a labor force. Gradually this led to segregated housing arrangements, with a number of permanently urbanized Africans designated to live in separate townships with modest housing and service standards and yet more as temporary contract laborers in labor compounds or quarters provided by their employers (Emmett 1987: 528–533; Republic of South Africa 1964: 115–119; Wagner n.d.: 87–96). Their character and conduct were a cause of constant worry for the

authorities, who sought to implement various measures of control (Emmett 1987; Wagner n.d.: 70, 90, 191–194). The township housing of the South African era became further associated with surveillance and overcrowding (Emmett 1987: 533; Mitlin and Muller 2004: 169; Republic of Namibia 1990: 2). Such negative aspects of pre-independence housing generated resentment that fueled ideas of national liberation and basic freedoms. Knowing this history, I found it puzzling to realize that many of my Namibian interlocutors were speaking nostalgically about the basic housing provision of the previous regime in black townships. I shall complete this puzzle later in the article, after collecting its pieces.

Racial discrimination was legally abolished with Namibia’s independence. In principle, people could now move and settle freely. In practice, this did not end segregation. In some respects, it has become more extreme than before for two reasons. First, rapid urbanization and growth of informal settlements occurred as people from rural areas started to look for opportunities in urban centers, and those from overcrowded locations simultaneously sought vacant land to establish homes. Windhoek grew from 147,000 inhabitants in 1991 to 326,000 in 2011 (Namibia Statistics Agency n.d.: 39; Republic of Namibia 1994: appendix C) and has continued to grow rapidly since then. As jobs are scarce and generally low-paid,³ many end up relying on odd jobs and small-scale entrepreneurship and cannot afford market prices of land, housing, and individual services (Remmert and Ndhlovu 2018: 28–29; Republic of Namibia 2009: 7; Weber and Mendelsohn 2017). In the absence of well-functioning social housing, increasing numbers of people stay with relatives or friends or settle in the informal areas. By 2016, 39.7 percent of urban households in Namibia and 42.3 percent in the Khomas region, where Windhoek is located, were living in shacks (Namibia Statistics Agency 2017: 101).

Second, the legacy of class differences buttressed by policies of racial labeling and division has converged with neoliberal policies in a way

that has enabled the transformation of the legal basis of socioeconomic inequality from statutory racism into the sanctity of private property. This has resulted in the reinterpretation of colonial dispossession as legitimate assets, in inherited patterns of residence, and in the generalization of the ideals of homeownership and ratepaying. Through these forces, the mechanisms that reproduce the segregated city are converted from explicit racial categorizations to designations of “formal” and “informal,” closely associated with the ability to participate in the housing market. Additionally, the global tide of the financialization of urban land and housing has increasingly resulted in a shift from the long-standing ideal of homeownership into treating land and housing as an investment. In the context of high demand and low supply, this has driven the prices of real estate and rentals further beyond the reach of the majority (Delgado 2018; Jauch 2015; Lennon 2018). Additionally, political positions and connections are commonly alleged to have been used to lubricate land deals and inflated tenders in construction and servicing (see e.g., Immanuel 2014). My interlocutors often resorted to such explanations of the perceived lack of political will to solve the housing issue, and equated the owning of multiple properties and accumulating wealth from land and rentals with corruption (see also Metsola 2021). In combination, these forces have guaranteed the continued economically privileged position of the white minority while simultaneously opening the doors for the emergence of a black politico-economic elite (Melber 2007). At the other end of the spectrum, the poor majority continues to experience various forms of structural marginalization.

New residential areas for the better-off residents in Windhoek are usually gated communities (Delgado 2018: 22; Morange et al. 2012). Additionally, “lifestyle estates,” suburban spaces detached from the city itself, offer islands of affluence and tranquility for the upper and middle classes. Such residential developments perpetuate the isolation of the wealthy, thus contributing to the reproduction of the segregated society

that restricts contacts, empathy, and identification between the haves and have-nots. Ironically, some of these new housing developments are marketed as solutions to the affordable housing problem. For example, Ongos Valley, a self-sufficient housing development to be constructed by private investors with government support about 20 kilometers northwest of Windhoek, is marketed as “a response to the critical need for affordable housing in Namibia.”⁴ With the project value listed at 25 billion Namibian dollars for a project meant to produce 28,000 dwellings, its “affordability” seems far removed from the realities of most Windhoekers.

At the other end of the wealth and income scale, the informal settlements are characterized by a state of relatively permanent temporariness or in-betweenness. Here, even modest advances in accessing land, housing, and basic services depend on cultivating and maintaining relations with other residents (Metsola 2022), as well as with City of Windhoek officials and local politicians. While occupying municipal land is illegal in principle, the residents do not usually face a threat of removal. Council policies combine in situ upgrading of existing settlements with establishing relocation areas for those who would have to move from congested areas to be upgraded. The upgrading policy outlines incremental development levels based on such criteria as resident income, tenure arrangements, block layout, service levels, and payments (City of Windhoek 1999, 2019). The residents lack formal titles but—apart from the newest settlements—are not completely unrecognized. The upgrading policy offers degrees of tenure security in the form of certificates of occupation and leaseholds. Such arrangements have been recently codified in the model of flexible tenure that offers legal and hence secure intermediate definitions of group-based tenure (Republic of Namibia 2016: 4). The residents are not permitted to erect permanent structures before plots are demarcated and serviced. In any case, investing in immovable property would be potentially risky as long as tenure remains uncertain. Access to basic services is similarly partial.

Informal settlements differ in terms of congestion and service provision, largely depending on their age, but generally their residents have access to municipal communal services, such as a rudimentary road network, communal water taps and toilets, and high mast lights, combined with self-organized, networked arrangements of procuring various necessities, such as water and electricity, shelter, and security. City of Windhoek does not provide individual service connections until plots are demarcated. So far, the only way to bypass this requirement has been to obtain a piece of land collectively, as saving groups do, and subdivide this “block erf” between participating households who build the houses and install individual connections. The municipality treats the group as a single owner or lessee and provides single connections to the block.

I will now discuss the policy landscape that has contributed to the perpetuation of segregated urban spaces in Windhoek, before moving on to examine the ways the everyday governance of informal residence unfolds in practice.

Imagining the city and the urban resident: Policies of housing and upgrading since independence

In this section, I discuss how the dual logic of access appears in national and local policies related to housing and informal settlement upgrading. I will look specifically at the ways such policies have imagined the individual and collective agency of precarious urbanites.

Apart from the above forces of rapid urbanization and financialization, a number of policy-related factors have been noted to contribute to the housing question. The rapid growth of the city has placed an enormous strain on the financial and administrative capacities of the local authority. The municipal operatives and politicians that I communicated with referred to the lack of resources and indicated the need for central government intervention (see also City

of Windhoek n.d. a: 31; Republic of Namibia 2009: 21). Additionally, there are obstacles related to planning, land delivery, and building regulations (De Vries and Lewis 2009; Remmert and Ndhlovu 2018; Republic of Namibia 2009: 15; Weber and Mendelsohn 2017: 40–48).

Over the years, there have been government-led housing initiatives to improve affordability. These include the Mass Housing Programme for lower middle-income groups, the Build Together Programme for low-income households, and most recently, the Mass Urban Land Servicing Project. Additionally, saving groups, in which people pool resources and skills, have facilitated access to housing among poor urban residents (Chitekwe-Biti 2018; Delgado et al. 2020; Mitlin and Muller 2004; Sweeney-Bindels n.d.: 24). However, the coverage of these programs has been modest. In 2020, Namibia’s Deputy Minister of Urban and Rural Development assessed that there is a housing backlog of 300,000 units countrywide, and the various housing programs have produced a total of close to 35,000 houses over the years (Erastus 2020). Key issues behind the shortage, the Minister said, were the “lack of financial means to acquire decent shelter” and inadequate budgetary allocations. These should be addressed through “targeted employment” and smart partnerships with the private sector (Erastus 2020).

Such statements hint at how solving the housing issue is not a neutral technical exercise, but involves policy imaginations of “public” and “private” and the responsibilities of different actors. The current situation results from not only policy failures but also such imaginations and their impact on the distribution of resources and access. The issues that appear in the Minister’s statement—the affordability of individual households, budgetary allocations, employment, and public-private partnerships—can all be seen as a continuation from Namibia’s first housing policy, issued in 1990. It marked a clear break from the paternalist and authoritarian housing policies of the previous regime that had institutionalized highly divergent housing standards for different “racial” groups, but also sub-

sidized housing in the black and colored areas (Simon 1983: 187). As government involvement and subsidized housing were thought to generate market distortions and accelerate urbanization, the 1990 policy reconstrued the role of the state from “a direct provider and administrator” into that of a “facilitator” of market-driven solutions, only allowing for limited direct state involvement in the name of poverty alleviation (Peyroux 2001: 292; Republic of Namibia 1990: 10, 17, 18, 21–22; see also Republic of Namibia 1996: 24). As the counterpart of private providers, the policy reimaged black urban residents as homeowners and earners (Republic of Namibia 1990: 6–8, 10, 14, 17). It stressed that “the Government does not wish to develop a syndrome of paternalism or dependence on state assistance. The primary responsibility for providing family housing rests clearly with the head of each household” (Republic of Namibia 1990: 17). The only exception were people defined as “welfare cases,” but this explicitly excluded able-bodied people of working age (Republic of Namibia 1990: 26–27). Although housing subsidies for low-income people have been reintroduced in the updated housing policy (Republic of Namibia 2009: 22) and Namibia’s overall welfare net has gradually expanded, this general expectation of people supporting themselves through their own labor has remained firm.

The visions of market access, self-help, and homeownership have proven to be a lasting legacy. Furthermore, not only has housing been persistently associated with homeownership but usually further conflated with land ownership (Remmert and Ndhlovu 2018; Republic of Namibia 1990: 11, 2009: 20–21; Weber and Mendelsohn 2017; see also Metsola 2021). Commonly, land and housing are seen as not just fulfilling basic needs but also as property and an asset. In this view, aligned with influential, globally circulated perspectives (De Soto 2000), property ownership will free up the resources of the poor and contribute to development (Mendelsohn et al. 2012; Remmert and Ndhlovu 2018; Republic of Namibia 2009: 8, 20–21; Weber and Mendelsohn 2017).⁵

These perceptions manifested also in official approaches to informal residence. In the early 1990s, three “reception areas” were established, in which the residents were allowed to stay under lease agreements and provided with rudimentary communal services (City of Windhoek n.d. b). Such residence was supposed to be temporary “pending [the residents’] eventual entry into home ownership schemes” (Republic of Namibia 1990: 20). The reception areas reflected the housing policy’s desire to control migration and curtail squatting (Republic of Namibia 1990: 10, 23).

In a few years, the policy ideals and the reality on the ground increasingly diverged. It became clear that market solutions had not managed to turn the poor into homeowners. What had occurred instead was the mushrooming and normalization of informal residence. The municipality city outlined new guidelines and policies for dealing with informal settlements (City of Windhoek n.d. b, 1999, 2000). In them, the tone started to change into one that advocates tolerance toward informal residents and recognizes their positive potential. Instead of moving people to designated reception areas, existing settlements were to be formalized. Citing examples from Mexico and Botswana, as well as settlement upgrading and sites-and-services policies promoted by the World Bank and international donors, the guidelines “proposed to positively accommodate and manage informal settlements . . . Traditional views (confine people to a specific area to exercise control over them) . . . have to be discarded” (City of Windhoek n.d. b).

Despite the stated commitment toward upgrading, municipal resources remained limited. The principle of cost recovery, introduced in the national housing policy, was reiterated (City of Windhoek n.d. b). Encountered with this dilemma of growing informality and limited resources, harnessing people’s own participation and collective energies seemed to offer a promising outlet. Participation had been part of the proposed solutions already in the 1990 housing policy that stressed “self-help” by the

“popular sector” and argued that “community participation . . . draws on untapped resources, ingenuities and skills” as well as “builds self-reliance and a cooperative spirit” (Republic of Namibia 1990: 22, 24). Now, participation was adopted more systematically as part of upgrading efforts. Citing John Turner’s notion of the “freedom to build” (Turner and Fichter 1972), the guidelines advocated seeing informal residents as active agents seeking to improve their lives, as well as to approach housing as a process instead of a product (City of Windhoek n.d. b; see also Mitlin and Muller 2004: 173). Nationally, the committee that convened in preparation for the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements advocated a “people’s process of housing,” in which the “people who are in need of housing initiate action, take decisions at the local level and implement the programme . . . Government, instead of trying to compete with the private sector and the people’s sector, can contribute more effectively . . . by recognising and supporting the people’s sector” (Republic of Namibia 1996: 17). The visions of national and local government, those of international actors and those of NGOs, such as the Shack Dwellers Federation meet in this notion (City of Windhoek n.d. b; NHAG and SDFN n.d.; UN-Habitat 2014: 47–49). It has informed low-income housing provision in Namibia across the board, from the Build Together Programme to the saving group model and the ways upgrading policies envision group-based tenure and administration.

The ideals of homeownership and self-help are retained in this vision, but its ideal subject is different. Instead of imagining a self-sufficient household head, the informal residents are here envisioned as inherently communal beings who can mobilize their resources, creativity and energy collectively. Such relational, networked forms of pooling and provisioning have been important among Namibian urban dwellers, and elsewhere in Africa, both informally and through recognized organizations (Guyer 2015; Metsola 2022; Spiegel 2018). However, this conceptualization also has a potential downside

that it shares with the first national housing policy, namely that of shifting the responsibility for provision from public authorities onto the residents themselves. Surely, communal, co-productive and participatory housing is thought to involve public authorities as facilitators but the anticipated responsibilities of the state remain rather thin. The focus on more efficient use of existing resources, rather than rethinking the redistributive functions of the state, merely alleviates the problems of affordability rather than unravels the dual logic of entitlement.

One City of Windhoek planner remarked to me in 2016 that “people in the informal settlements generally want everything but the problem is they cannot afford it all.” In a way, this is merely a factual statement. The doctrine of resident responsibility and cost recuperation has remained strong. As phrased by the development and upgrading policy: “The concepts of full cost recovery and ‘user pay’ should be the underlying principles of any low and ultra-low-income land development project or programme” (City of Windhoek 2019: 6). As long as this principle is adhered to, most informal residents are not able to proceed beyond the lowest levels of upgrading. However, the centrality of affordability depends on the existing institutional regime that takes the combination of socioeconomic inequality combined with propertied citizenship for granted. After independence, the ideals of homeownership and formerly “white” standards have been extended to the previously excluded populations, but so has the expectation of paying for services. Treating land and housing as property and as an investment encourages those with the means to accumulate these. On the other side of the coin, residents of informal settlements have to rely on relational, networked provision, and a local authority that acts as a buffer without the resources to fundamentally alter the situation. This regime allows “informals” modest degrees of recognition, tenure security, shelter, and services but simultaneously limits their scope. Informal settlements with their partial, graded rights to tenure and services are secondary and

thought of as temporary, even though they have become the most common and long-term arrangement for poorer residents.

Enacting affordability and reciprocity: The everyday governance of expectations and entitlements

The two logics outlined above, property rights and paid contributions versus relational access, reappear in the everyday governance of the city and the associated relations between residents and authorities. The participation envisioned as part of governing informal settlements has largely remained an add-on to the conventional top-down decision-making processes and not extended deeply into planning and budgeting.⁶ In practice, participation has mainly taken two forms. The first consists of regular meetings between officials, councillors and residents in all constituencies. These meetings are not a forum for making decisions but rather for disseminating information on decisions taken by the Council and listening to the residents' concerns. Second, there is a system of community leaders who act as transmitters between residents and higher political and administrative offices in the informal settlements (City of Windhoek 2011).

I observed a series of public meetings in September 2019. There were startling differences between meetings held in the informal settlements and those in established townships, let alone the affluent, formerly white areas. In the latter, residents were treated as equal partners and respected citizens. They were allocated ample time to express their concerns and the municipal representatives were prepared to engage in conversational interaction with them. In the informal settlements, by contrast, communication was largely unidirectional and the residents were treated as subordinate, despite the professed principle of participation. They had to wait until the end of the meeting before getting the chance to speak, and they had to queue in front in order to get the floor. In some cases, the residents were required to show gratitude for

actual or promised improvements by clapping hands.

The arguments of the residents in different parts of the city were also strikingly different from each other. In a meeting in a constituency that consists entirely of formerly white suburbs and newer affluent ones, the discussion revolved around questions of crime, security, and order, for example, break-ins, policing, street kids, hawkers, illegal taxis, and cleanliness of the neighborhoods. This reflects the way in which those who have made it to the upper classes wish to cling to the high standards of living and service provision that they are accustomed to and seem wary of sharing the same urban spaces with the poor whom they perceive as a nuisance, a source of disorder, and even as a threat (see also Morange et al. 2012).

This lack of a sense of belonging in the same social world likely plays a part in why the extreme inequalities of the Namibian urban spaces are tolerated. But there is another recurrent justification that normalizes such inequalities and makes them legitimate in the eyes of the propertied suburban residents, namely ratepaying as a basis of entitlement.⁷ Demands made of the city officials were repeatedly justified by contributions toward municipal revenue.⁸ In the words of one attendee who was complaining about illegal traders:

You [said] that these people actually go to the service station. Forget it, they go into the river and they urinate there and they do their things there . . . I don't mind supporting people who start businesses . . . but this is illegal . . . I pay tax and I contribute . . . and if I look at that playground, people from businesses . . . come there to have their lunch there, lying . . . there, I feel all the filth here, and it is stinking, everything gets broken . . . This whole place deteriorates . . . and I pay tax.

Further, the accountability of municipal employees and councillors was directly linked with the contributions of the residents: "When a per-

son who gets a salary in the City of Windhoek cannot come to the meeting with an applaudable answer then I hope the Council represents me. If the Council can't represent me, then who is accountable? . . . Because at the end of the day, if I stop paying rates and taxes, what will happen then?"

In contrast, people in the informal settlements were sometimes reminded that since they do not pay, they are not in a position to demand. According to this notion, not everyone is entitled to the same standards, even when it comes to basic necessities. Hence it runs powerfully counter to the idea of "access to basic services and shelter . . . as the inherent right of human beings in Namibia" (Republic of Namibia 2009: 21). In one meeting, a local councillor argued:

What is the contribution of the people in the informal settlements to the City of Windhoek? . . . The law says . . . to demolish all the informal settlements . . . but we put that policy on hold to say these are our people . . . let them be there, let's give them services . . . But . . . we are forgetting . . . Hakahana, Ombili, Wanaheda,⁹ it's a formal location where people are paying their water bill, electricity bill and rates and taxes but they have gravel streets. And those people came there 1980-something . . . And their rates and taxes money was supposed to cater for those developments. Now, you have someone who is not contributing anything . . . and then he's not thankful . . . and he's still demanding for more.

A key way of reconciling the expectation of entitlement through payments with the idea of equal basic rights is to normalize informality by imagining it as a temporary, fleeting state. Policy papers, as well as statements by politicians and public servants, repeatedly set target time frames for solving the housing problem. These time frames produce a sense of moving forward amid a reality that is marred by complexity and tardiness. However, apart from the imag-

ined end point, the sense of moving forward also requires that something actually happens. Here the incremental steps of improvement, characteristic of both resident expectations and upgrading policies become important. Such changes do not happen automatically but depend on the communication between City of Windhoek and the residents, through recurrent pleading and gradual responses. Even modest advances become a matter of considerable effort and negotiation.

Overall, the residents of informal settlements are surprisingly patient in their piecemeal struggle to improve their conditions. Their moving from one goal to another seems to give them some sense of purpose, as well as hope. However, people's hopes tend to outpace actual delivery, leading to frustration and tensions, which the regular communication on the part of municipal representatives attempts to manage. For example, in 2016, for some residents of one settlement dating back to the early 1990s, hopes of advancement had largely evaporated and given way to critical skepticism toward the authorities. In 2019, optimism had been revitalized by recent plot demarcation and service connections. In a contrary example, the community leaders of another early informal area were also enthusiastically anticipating plot demarcation and upgrading in 2016. By 2019, things had not moved forward and they walked out of a scheduled public meeting after declaring "no development, no meeting."

Such frustration was a recurring feature in the meetings that I observed. For example, in a public meeting in Tobias Hainyeko constituency, one resident argued:

When the election is close you come here to lie to us. My people, if you are working in the government offices please do the work for the nation, you are the leaders because we voted you in power . . . Locations . . . came a long time [ago] in 1990 to 1992 but there is still no development . . . because you are busy fighting each other . . . I pray now for God to come in your

hearts so that you get united and you give us the development . . . Go and work like the people were fighting for the country,¹⁰ be united so that you bring development to us, electricity please, electricity.

In the expressions of frustration that I heard, pieces of the puzzle of occasional nostalgia toward colonial housing arrangements that I referred to above started to fall into place. It dawned on me that what these people were remembering, and felt nostalgia for, were other aspects of such housing than the control and overcrowding stressed in conventional narratives. They recalled the security and welfare, even if modest, that such housing provided (Peyroux 2001). It stood in stark contrast with the expansion of informal settlements and the doctrines of free market access, affordability and personal responsibility that were adopted after independence. The residents perceived these changes as indications of the abandonment of the urban precariat by the current regime, especially as the market doctrine and associated policies have glaringly failed to turn precarious residents into homeowners. Instead of the logic of privatized market access, they were arguing in favor of a responsive public authority that takes care of the people it governs.¹¹

I will now discuss what the aspirations of the precarious urbanites and their prolonged negotiation with the authorities contribute to comparative debates of urban politics and urban citizenship.

Urban politics and urban citizenship in Windhoek

Literature on “the politics of the urban poor” (Bayat 2010, 2015; Caldeira 2015; Chatterjee 2004; Das and Randeria 2015; see also Holston 2008, 2019) is valuable for recognizing the transformative potential of precarious agency beyond the lenses of oppression and resistance. Some approaches in this vein, such as the concepts of insurgent citizenship (Holston 2008)

and quiet encroachment (Bayat 2010, 2015), stress the ways gradual efforts toward practical improvement by precarious urbanites carve space for increased autonomy and realization of rights vis-à-vis restrictive authorities. Others, such as the notion of “political society” (Chatterjee 2004) stress group-based identities and claims, and responses that follow a clientelistic logic (see also Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield 2014). Yet others emphasize the ways such processes not only articulate distinct political or economic interests and contradictions but also play a role in producing a political common ground where mutual recognition and deliberation (Das and Randeria 2015: S6; Forment 2015; Stacey and Lund 2016) or a sense of mutual obligations (Englund 2015; Ferguson 2015) become possible between the denizens and the authorities. How does the situation in Windhoek measure up to these approaches?

Since the early 1990s, informal residence has usually started with occupying municipal land, either in a piecemeal fashion and often clandestinely (as my interlocutors in the field told me), or at times, collectively and openly, as an act of demonstration. These occupations index discontent with the prevailing arrangements and challenge existing regulations and administrative practices that limit people’s access to land, housing and basic services. After the occupants have managed to establish themselves on a site, they work toward improving their conditions through their own means and by appealing for better services and tenure security from the municipality. These activities—land occupation, autoconstruction and campaigning for improvements, recognition, and acceptance—can be partly interpreted through the prisms of quiet encroachment (Bayat 2010), insurgent citizenship (Holston 2008, 2019), and “right to the city” (Harvey 2008). However, I think that proper understanding of the agency of the precarious residents must go beyond the emphasis on the residents’ autonomy, their demands of rights, and antagonistic relations with authorities characteristic of these approaches. While these qualities are a part of the agency of the

precarious residents of Windhoek, so is the way in which the everyday governance of their conditions proceeds through a continuous, intensive process of claims and responses, as I have described in this article. The residents' incremental work toward increased tenure security and better services is entangled in multiple ways with those authorities—city officials, local politicians and community leaders—who control access. The residents—even when protesting—repeatedly identify City of Windhoek or “the government” in general as the agent they expect to act and improve the situation. This is in stark contrast, for example, with the approach of the well-known Abahlali baseMjondolo movement in neighboring South Africa (Huchzermeyer 2014). The authorities likewise manifest multiple tendencies toward “illegal” occupation. While there are efforts to prevent people from occupying new land, many residents told me that such control tends to relax prior to elections. Also, after someone has managed to build a shelter and demonstrably started living there, their presence is usually tolerated, and they enter the long process toward formalization.

One key aspect of such relational provision and the associated long-term communication between authorities and residents is how they work as nodes in a system of clientelist dependency. The residents depend on the authorities for keeping and improving degrees of tenure security as well as access to basic services, while the authorities depend on the residents for political support and their legitimacy as officials. The residents tended to think that improvements are connected to electoral cycles and that the potential of withholding political allegiance can be used as a tool for making claims.

However, I would like to highlight another aspect of the co-productive characteristics of governing the urban fringes, so far less prominent in the literature on southern urbanities than those above. Beyond clientelist bartering between piecemeal improvements and political support, the arguments of the residents (such as the one quoted above; see Metsola 2021 for more) and their interaction with authorities also

construct a more general moral politics of obligation. In it, citizens and authorities are imagined as mutually obligated counterparts rather than separate parties with inalienable rights and competing interests (Englund 2006, 2015; Ferguson 2013, 2015; Friedman 2011).

Such imaginations hark back to long histories of understanding economic and governmental relations in terms of mutual dependencies, including precolonial forms of political organization that emphasized accumulating dependents (Ferguson 2013), and personalized, long-term relations between “bosses” and workers in the colonial economy (Ferguson 2013; Wagner n.d.: 72). With capital-intensive production and high levels of unemployment, the previous economies of dependency have perhaps given way to continued expectancies of such (Ferguson 2015; Ferguson and Li 2018). This translates into regular demands for work, but also visions of a more just regime of generalized redistribution of national wealth, in which access to land, housing and basic services are rightfully deserved by all. These expectations are buttressed further by the gradual extension of welfare payments and service provision after independence, itself driven by the imperative to universalize the standards of living and welfare allotted to the white minority under the previous regime. Such expectations differ from the clientelist bartering between piecemeal improvements and political support in seeking to scale up the obligations of mutual dependency from personal relationships and exchanges with particular politicians into a general principle of authority and citizenship.

Additionally, perceptions of the significance of land and ways of regulating its use are complex in the Namibian context. While the prevalent logics of access have been commodified, the tactics and claims of relational access harness multiple alternative histories of relating to land. The modes of holding, distributing and using land that existed in Namibia before its colonization did not correspond to commercial freehold tenure. Colonial dispossessions were often violent, which made land a symbolically charged issue that was central in visions of na-

tional liberation, and imparted a continuing desire to “have” land among the black majority. At the same time, the modes of access to land that the German and South African regimes allowed in the black homelands, operated on a communal basis, and this land tenure regime is still in place. Overall, access to land and housing for the black majority has historically tended to depend on authorization—not in the abstract sense conveyed by legally codified property rights but in the more direct sense of a concrete authority, whether traditional authority, an employer—or the municipality—granting the right to stay. All these forces diverge from the principle that grounds entitlement in affordability and ratepaying and by so doing justifies the isolation of those able to pay from those unable to do so. They are likely to contribute to complex views of what it means to have land and how one should access it, including continued expectations of relational access.

However, at the same time as the residents invest considerable energies in these relational forms of governance and access, the eventual ideal that most residents that I communicated with—including those who reside on saving group block erven—was to get their own plots and service connections. They tend to expect “the government” to not only provide the elementary services and infrastructure necessary for survival, but also assist people to fulfill their dream of becoming property owners. Many propose that the government should “meet them halfway,” as it is often phrased, with free or cheap land allocations that they could then develop gradually as resources permit (see also Remmert and Ndhlovu 2018: 60–62).

Such dreams serve as a reminder that we should not essentialize relational forms of access. The people who are involved in them also appreciate independence for various reasons. For one, in the current institutional constellation, property ownership by individual households represents the default mode and the safest and least complicated form of tenure and access to services—as long as one is able to pay.

Intimately tied to such practical considerations is the role that property ownership plays as an ingredient of valued, proper urban citizenship. Historically, racial and class distinctions have tended to blend in the Namibian context. While this association is no longer sanctioned by the state, the overall distribution of wealth has not changed dramatically. Hence, visible markers of success—including property ownership—become important to aspiring black Namibians as a way to break out of the historical association of blackness with poverty and dependency and reach toward the status of a respectable citizen.

Taken together, these forces combine into a complex terrain of urban politics and urban citizenship. In Windhoek, as in many southern cities, the “private” concerns of advancing security of access and livelihoods are inescapably blended with the “public” concerns of claim-making, politics, and citizenship (Caldeira 2017; Metsola 2018). From a long-term perspective, criticism of existing injustices and calls for realization of citizenship rights is part of the precarious urban politics in Windhoek. However, in contrast with antagonistic readings of the relations between residents and authorities, the process through which the informal areas are governed, services provided, and tenure security improved is often a site for the formation and reproduction of collusive, co-dependent political relations and visions. Additionally, there is a dual, partly temporal character to the claims and efforts of informal residents. They invest in governmental relations that can better ensure access, inclusion, and more secure existence in the city, and articulate desires of a responsible and responsive public authority. At the same time, they tend to harbor dreams of eventually reaching the status of property owners and exiting the logic of relational, dependent access (see also McGregor and Chatiza 2020: 19–20). Thus, the agency of the residents refuses to be reduced into the policy imaginations and simplistic analytic notions concerning them, challenging the caricatures of individual responsibility, communal provision, participation, or resistance.

Conclusion: Two logics of access—two kinds of urban citizenship

In Windhoek, access to private and public goods is often intimately connected. Varieties of goods get bundled so that where people have private, paid access to goods such as land and housing, they also tend to have better access to public infrastructures. This is because of the ratepaying and cost recuperation logic of such provision. Namibia inherited a highly skewed, unequal distribution of wealth and incomes from the previous regime. Housing policies since independence have tended merely to extend the ideals of homeownership and ratepaying, as well as the expected standards of the formerly white town to the dwellers of townships and informal settlements, without addressing the deeper roots of unequal access. This has created a persistent problem of affordability.

In this institutional regime, property ownership—and paying taxes or rates—is key to realizing full citizenship as a proper, respectable member of the political community. As the City of Windhoek depends heavily on service charges for most of its revenue generation, it is continually susceptible to prioritize provision to those areas that generate payments, which then, in turn, reproduces the segregated city, with its dual logics of access and provision. In other words, those who have reached the status of propertied citizens, experience far fewer challenges related to access than those living in informal settlements. The latter, in turn, are faced with constant uncertainties over access to land, housing, infrastructure, and services, as well as inclusion in planning and decision-making. They counter these uncertainties by engaging in relationships through which they seek to generate loyalties and obligations that improve their access and inclusion. Despite the supposed transitionality of informal residence, this duality has become an established, prolonged situation, leading to a relatively durable regime of everyday governance at the fringes of the city.

Instead of this situation resulting from distinct failures by the City of Windhoek or from

corruption, which is a favored popular explanation (also among my respondents; see Metsola 2021), I see it as arising from the profound structural legacies of segregation foundational to the Namibian state. These are reproduced in contemporary patterns of access. Namibia may have set itself apart from minority rule, state-sanctioned racism, and formalized segregation, and it continues to dream of socioeconomic “liberation” on top of political democracy. Also, planners’ and officials’ perspectives transmit global concepts, such as “inclusive,” “sustainable,” and “compact” cities onto the Namibian scene. However, these ideals are tempered by the pervasive idea of propertied citizenship. Likewise, the racially segregated privileges of the previous regime have fueled expectations and norms of what are proper, decent standards of life. This has multiple consequences. As a legacy of apartheid, there is institutional tolerance for deep inequalities, as well as expectations on the part of the previously privileged and new elites to continue enjoying high standards of provision, justified by their ratepaying. However, the existence of such standards, combined with perceived state capacity, has also set a precedent, feeding both expectations of a government that provides for all and dreams of reaching the bourgeois status of propertied citizens among those who live in precarious circumstances.

Southern African states have taken impressive steps in basic service delivery and mostly cash transfer-based welfare extension.¹² While these are of utmost importance, they do not redefine the grounds for access to goods and services beyond the logic of treating them as commodities. Rather, it is taken for granted that society is divided into propertied citizens and those who have to rely on forging and maintaining relations of dependence, whether with immediate family, local patrons, foreign donors, or the national state. This represents ameliorative welfare that alleviates poverty in conditions where propertied citizenship remains the norm, instead of transformative welfare that restructures patterns of entitlement. At the same time, the long-standing ideas of mutual dependency

and obligation that motivate such ameliorative welfare also feed counterarguments to those favoring private accumulation and market solutions. There is constant local moral argumentation over the justifiability of the existing arrangements, and this constitutes a form of collective pressure despite not taking the form of explicit, militant resistance. Residents of informal settlements advocate a notion of reciprocity that suggests far more pervasive forms of redistribution than those that currently exist, including land allocations and everyone's right to basic service provision. Whether this reflects deeply held convictions of the relations between public authority and the citizens or is rather a matter of tactically resorting to a well-understood local register remains an open question.

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Notes

1. In the Namibian context, the categories of “white,” “colored,” and “black” have a long history of administrative and lay use. Their use in this article stems from this background and does not refer to any supposed essence behind such labels.
2. Apart from these South African arguments, the connection between race and class has become the subject of much broader discussions. Cedric Robinson's 1983 (2000) book is a classic text that argued that the tendency to differentiate and essentialize group identities was integral to capitalism, and there is a lively debate on this matter that I do not have the space to enter here; see, e.g., Olende 2021.
3. The overall unemployment rate was 33.4 percent in 2018, while youth unemployment 46.1 percent (Namibia Statistics Agency 2019: 13). Only 14 percent of the workforce earn more than a domestic worker's minimum wage (Republic of Namibia 2017: 52).
4. Ongos Valley housing development project website: “Ongos Valley: Your Own Home Starts Here.” <https://www.ongosvalley.com.na/> (accessed 2 July 2020).
5. Critical observers have stressed the potential of increasing inequality associated with privatization and land accumulation, arguing instead for the primacy of secure tenure and for housing as a basic right (Lennon 2018; Jauch 2015; Delgado 2018).
6. See Delgado et al. 2020 for a Namibian case that went further toward these objectives.
7. See Dorman 2016 for an instructive comparative case on Zimbabwe.
8. And they are indeed crucial, as out of the City of Windhoek's total revenue of 3,897 million Namibian dollars in 2017–2018, the lion's share of 3,045 million Namibian dollars consisted of service charges (City of Windhoek 2018: 127).
9. These are low-income suburbs in the north-western parts of the city.

10. This is a reference to the liberation struggle.
11. See Metsola 2021 for further discussion of this.
12. Ferguson 2015; Levine et al. 2009; note also Seekings's (2017) more critical take on Botswana.

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