

# FOR YOUR OWN GOOD: PATERNALISM AND PATRIARCHY IN URBAN NAMIBIA

*JOHN ALEXANDER PYSKLYWEC*

## **ABSTRACT**

Using the case of the informal settlement of Havana 6, Namibia, I argue that apartheid in Namibia created a highly paternalistic and patriarchal state that racially divided the urban landscape. This state structure continues to operate through the marginalization of racialized lower classes. This is achieved through the state rhetoric policies coupled with a public discourse that constructs certain groups of people as dirty and incapable of comprehending what is 'best for them'. I demonstrate how apartheid policies have entrenched systematic discrimination against poor, non-white citizens and how the language and actions of municipal authorities is used to place thousands of people in a state of contested precarious existence.

## **Introduction**

Apartheid left an indelible mark upon the social landscape of Namibia. More than a decade has passed since the official policy of segregation based on race ended, yet it continues to play an unofficial role in race and class relations. These relations are most notably expressed spatially in urban Namibia, in places such as the capital city of Windhoek. The paternalistic apartheid policies racialized the urban form. Non-whites were required to live in sequestered quadrants where access to the broader city was tightly regulated through environment and national legislation. Since the official end of apartheid and the independence of Namibia from South Africa,

urban centres across the country are witnessing an unprecedented rate of growth as more and more people migrate to the city from rural areas in search of work and better opportunities (Friedman 2000:12). Many migrants are coming from situations of extreme systemic poverty as a result of (former) apartheid policies, and have little to no money to start their new lives in the city. This, coupled with the lack of appropriate infrastructure to facilitate migrants, has given rise to multiple informal settlements at the fringes of the urban landscape (Freidman 2000:13-14).

In this paper I explore urbanization in post-apartheid Namibia. I argue that apartheid fostered a highly paternalistic and patriarchal state that racially divided the urban landscape. Furthermore, I posit that this patriarchal structure continues to operate by marginalizing racialized poorer classes. I argue that this is achieved through the state and public discourse that constructs poor people as dirty and incapable of comprehending what is 'best for them'. I demonstrate this through the case study of an informal settlement on the outskirts of Windhoek called Havana 6 that the local government has slated for removal for the reasons of illegal occupation and poor sanitation. I will begin by tracing the historical rootedness of patriarchy in Namibia by examining some of the social dimensions of apartheid, and how this shaped the development of Windhoek. Next, I will discuss how the end of apartheid and the shift away from race-based national policy has not heralded the inclusion of the non-white population as was originally hoped. Rather, racial divisions now operate within a structure of class divisions and paternalistic classist-based discourse. I will then focus more specifically on Havana 6. I demonstrate how the racialized policies of apartheid have entrenched a systematic discrimination against poor, non-white citizens in which paternalistic language and actions of municipal authorities continue to place thousands of people in a state of contested precarious existence.

Before I continue, I would like to take a moment to situate myself epistemologically and discuss some of the choices I have made for this paper. I approach the subject matter as a self-identified white,

middle-class, queer, male settler in what is now known as Canada. I have not personally been to Namibia, nor have I spoken with any residents of Windhoek or Havana 6. The evidence that I use to support my argument has been gathered from various scholarly articles and my personal analyses of Namibian newspaper articles.

In an attempt to give voice to the people of Havana 6 and other actors in Namibia, I have drawn quotes from the newspaper articles used for the research presented here. All of these statements have been quoted directly from these articles. The names that I use here are those that appeared in the newspaper. I have chosen to do this in light of the fact that the statements and identities of the people who made them have already been entered into the public record. It must be noted that utilizing quotes from newspapers to represent the voices of Havana 6 residents and municipal authorities can be seen as problematic because the quotes could have been selected by the news reporter for any number of reasons, some of which may be politically motivated. Also, it could be the case that these statements were never even made. I admit that this is a shortcoming of my approach. Yet, I must trust in the ethical conduct of the newspaper reporters that I draw from. Furthermore, I believe that it is the only way that I could bring the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the affected peoples into this conversation. By making use of these quotes I hope to provide a glimpse into the lives of people I have never met. Any misrepresentation of people or places is my responsibility, albeit unintended.

I would also like to outline and unpack a few central terms and concepts used in this paper. I will begin with the term patriarchy. The *Dictionary of Human Geography* states that patriarchy is a “system of social structures and practices through which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Pratt 2009:522). I expand on this definition in that I apply it to describe the relationship between a masculinized state, and a feminized subordinated/marginalized “Other.”

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED 2011) defines paternalism as “[t]he policy or practice of *restricting the freedoms* and responsibilities of *subordinates* or dependants in what is considered or claimed to be their best interests” (emphasis added). I use the term to describe the relationship between whites and blacks, rich and poor within Namibia.

Also, for the purposes of the discussion in this paper I will be using the terms white(s), non-white(s), and/or black(s) to describe the various ethnic groups, as well as rich and poor to describe social classes within Namibia. This is not intended to over-simplify the richly diverse cultural make-up of the country, nor is it to say that there is no middle class, or mobility between classes in Namibia. However, within the context of apartheid and post-apartheid Namibia, I feel that such dualistic language is appropriate as it reflects what I perceive as visible divisions in society.

Finally, I use the term *informal settlement* to describe “an unplanned and unregulated urban settlement erected on land not officially proclaimed as a residential area” (OED 2011). I stress that this is neither a neutral, nor uncontested term. The term ‘informal’ can have the effect of delegitimizing the plight of millions of people around the world who struggle to survive and make ends meet in urban contexts. These processes of de-legitimization naturalize or erase the racialized and/or classist structures of power that are perpetuated through the state’s claims of legal authority to determine what is formal and informal. The concept informal can also insinuate that life in these settlements is unorganized and chaotic. While this may be the case in some informal settlements, this cannot be taken as a universal truth. I assert that my use of the word informal here does not mean illegitimate, chaotic, or unorganized. Rather, I would like to focus the term on the actions (or lack of) of the state by highlighting that these settlements emerge from the failure of the state to plan and prepare for the needs of their citizens, as well as formally recognize and act upon issues of poverty. I will now turn my attention to the exploration of the rise, fall, and impacts of apartheid policies in Namibia.

## **The Rise, Fall, and Impacts of Apartheid in Namibia**

The South African occupation of present-day Namibia began in 1915 during the First World War (WWI) with the invasion of South African troops into what was then known as German Southwest Africa (United Nations 2011). At the end of WWI the continued South African occupation was legitimized by the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations which conferred the administration of the territory to the Union of South Africa (United Nations 2011). The rise of the National Party and the implementation of the apartheid system in South Africa in 1948 were subsequently reflected in Namibian territory (Friedman 2000:3).

Apartheid formalized the colonial-era race-based hierarchical structure of the Namibian cultural landscape as the country's population was officially divided along racial lines between whites and blacks. The incorporation of apartheid laws ensured that “[a]ll political and economic power was assembled in the hands of the white minority” (Friedman 2000:3). Although whites ‘benefited’ from apartheid policies, they were rooted in Afrikaner nationalist sentiment in which “[d]eeply encoded patterns of paternalism and prejudice [were] an essential part of the Afrikaner nationalist tradition ... [and that notions] of superiority, exclusivity and hierarchy [had] long existed as more or less conscious ‘habits of mind’” (Dubox 1992:210). Therefore, within this paradigm, the moral justification for racial separation was based on the nationalistic belief of Afrikaner (and other white) racial superiority and the idea that whites needed to ‘care’ and ‘assist’ in the development of the ‘inferior’ blacks. This created a dualist and patriarchal society in which the white elites lived in Western-style industrialized urban centres and farming operations, while the black population were relocated and/or restricted to rural ‘black areas’ or ‘homelands’ (Friedman 2000:3).

Afrikaner Nationalist belief was that ‘black tribes’ had historically lived as bounded entities in a rural setting, hence the creation of these homelands (Friedman 2000:3). By allotting people

to these areas it would allow for a 'natural' development scheme. This rationale denied the fluid nature of cultural practices and subsistence strategies, forcing people to change and adapt to a more rigid and restrictive colonial system that effectively erased the capacity to conduct any semblance of their pre-apartheid life. Many different groups of people were lumped together into geographic spaces that did not contain sufficient resources to support their populations. Ultimately, this created conditions of extreme hardship in the homelands while providing a steady supply of tightly controlled cheap labour for the industrialized white elites on farms or in urban areas (Friedman 2000:3).

In addition to the paternalistic control of settlement and subsistence patterns of the black populations in rural settings, the apartheid government also asserted a high degree of control within urban centres. This meant that in order to reside within the 'white cities', blacks were required to live in designated areas. In the nation's capital, Windhoek (home to roughly 10% of the total Namibian population), black residents were initially confined to a small settlement at the periphery of the city centre, at the time called the Main Location (now referred to as the Old Location) (Friedman 2000:4,7; Penndleton 1996:26). However, beginning in the 1960s, residents of the Main Location were forcefully removed and relocated to the present-day settlement of Katutura, situated farther afield in the Northwest corner of the city (Friedman 2000:6; Pendleton 1996:29).

Municipal authorities believed that the expansion of white residential areas, the squalid condition of the Main Location, and the desire to maintain a physical separation of white and black populations as sufficient reasoning to close down the settlement (Pendleton 1996: 29). The construction of Katutura was a successful attempt to further segregate and control the black population through their confinement to a relatively isolated suburban-like location that was surrounded by industrial areas and highways with limited entrance/exit points and access to transportation (Friedman 2000:5-6). Furthermore, Katutura residents were required to carry

identification cards that proved they were registered, and had the 'right' to live in the city.

The 1970s ushered in an era of relaxed settlement regulation for black residents; however, the cycle of poverty that had been created through apartheid policies restricted the movement of marginalized populations into the more affluent areas of the city. Additionally, despite the freedom to move throughout the urban landscape, black children were still required to attend school in the 'formerly' black neighbourhoods, which further disincentivized any voluntary relocation (Friedman 2000:7). With the exception of some neighbourhoods that immediately lay next to Katutura, the racial division of Windhoek stayed (and continues to stay) intact (Friedman 2000:7).

With the independence of Namibia from South Africa in 1990 came the end of apartheid, which resulted in the supposed freedom of spatial movement for all citizens within the country. Black citizens were no longer confined to homelands. Subsequently, there has been a sharp increase in migration to urban centres throughout the country. Migrants who had been economically marginalized by former state policies throughout the apartheid-era, experienced a number of barriers with living in the city. For example, migrants who arrive with little to no means of support are often unable to afford formal housing rent in the city (Mitlin and Muller 2004:170-174). Thus, in the capital, many informal settlements sprung up in and around Katutura, following much the same urban development model originally instigated during apartheid (Friedman 2000:13). However, the spatial organization of the city has now shifted from being exclusively along racial lines, to more explicitly one of both race and class.

Formerly, the economic and social marginalization of non-whites was a by-product of apartheid policies. As Friedman (2000:12) notes: "[i]n the Namibian context, racial segregation is inextricably interwoven with socio-economic segregation. Windhoek's black population was, and still is, largely congruent with the city's low-

income group.” She continues to note that, in light of the recent past, an avoidance of racialized language has given rise to the deployment of class-based terminology to describe marginalized populations (Friedman 2000:13). Although this has the effect of erasing the racialized nature of poverty in the public eye, it does not change it. Therefore, I assert that a continuing settlement pattern within the city of Windhoek based along racial, and now class, lines has been firmly entrenched after years of segregation policies in Namibia. I will now demonstrate how these race- and class-based divisions of the urban landscape are punctuated by the continuance of paternalistic and patriarchal attitudes or policies enacted by municipal authorities.

## **Post-Apartheid Paternalism and Patriarchy**

To the north of Katutura, near a dump site, is an informal settlement of approximately 2000 people called Havana 6 (Nonkes 2008; Sibeene 2008). People began to construct unauthorised housing in this area in early 2008 (Issac 2009a). According to city officials there is no running water, sewage system, electricity, or roads to the site (Isaac 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Nonkes, 2008; Shejavali 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c), and residents assert that the entire population is serviced by only two toilets (Sibeene 2008). People began to occupy this area, which is owned by the City of Windhoek, in response to the lack of residential land, and the high cost of housing (Isaac 2009a, 2009c; Nonkes 2008; Shejavali 2008a). The lack of services and land to build on within the Havana 6 settlement is not unique to Windhoek or Namibia as a whole. Although statistical accuracy is impossible in most cases, local news sources state that approximately 20-25% of Windhoek’s population of 300,000 presently live in informal settlements (Nonkes 2008; Sibeene 2008), and local government institutions are ill-equipped to handle the massive influx of migrants to the city.

These facts and figures paint a bleak picture of Havana 6, and in many cases, life in such circumstances are due to complex processes

occurring in Namibia. That is to say, life in an informal settlement is not a product of one person's behaviour, but rather the behaviour of the society within which the individual finds themselves making particular decisions. The decision to move into such tenuous and uncertain conditions is not an easy one to make, and there are multiple factors that must be considered, such as rent costs and personal space. Petrus Shaanika, a Havana 6 resident, describes the effects of some of these factors:

... [D]ue to the escalating costs of paying rent and the fact that it became uncomfortable and intolerable to reside with another big family, my family of eight people and I immediately moved to Havana 6 when we learned that other people have moved there and started to construct their shacks. (Isaacs 2009b)

What is not made clear in this statement is how people like Petrus are found at the nexus of a racialized class structure that is created, reinforced, and further advanced by public policy and uneven economic development. This, however, is not lost on other residents of Havana 6. Ruben Kamutuezu, for example, states how: "Our people don't have anything to eat, and many are just crying the whole day because our brothers are being arrested. The Government only seems to be good for rich people, and we are not rich" (Shejvali 2009d). He carries on to say that "[f]rom my birth until now, I haven't felt free. I only see the rich people enjoying Namibia's freedom, but the poor are meaningless. No one can see us" (Shejvali 2009d). This is a sentiment echoed by Rudolph Kahuure, who argues: "They have no concern for suffering people. They should respect us the way we respect the municipality" (Shejvali 2008b).

In late 2008 the Windhoek government demonstrated its lack of respect for Havana 6 residents when it enacted certain policies that are born of inequality and continue to reinforce the exclusion of people living in Havana 6. Residents began to be evicted by municipal authorities who claimed that the eviction was part of a larger city-wide 'crack-down' on informal settlements (Isaac 2009a,

2009b, 2009c; Nonkes 2008; Shejvali 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Sibeene 2008). The City of Windhoek, in a letter that had been addressed to the “illegal land invaders” (Shejvali 2008a, 2009b) of Havana 6, advised residents that “[t]his site has serious potential health risks and therefore it is not suitable for human habitation. The site is close to the refuse dumping site and it is not serviced in terms of water and sanitation” (Shejvali 2008a). In another statement to *The Namibian*, the Chief Executive Officer of the City of Windhoek, Niilo Taapopi, reiterated the city’s position as to why it needed to clear the settlement, yet he also revealed his concern about the image and reputation of his city and its government:

We understand that there are great numbers of people in need of places to stay, but the area where they have settled has not been demarcated as an area for settlement. There are no water, electricity, or sanitation services there, and if we let them to continue to settle, this same municipality will be accused of not providing adequate services. (Shejvali, 2008b)

What can be extrapolated from this statement is that, within the context of post-apartheid Namibia, the displacement of residents and the erasure of their settlement will allow the state to continue to not provide essential services to those most in need. Meanwhile, the state continues to legitimize their authority to police these same bodies under the guise of paternalist care and knowing what is in the best interests of their citizens. The question is: whose interests are really being advanced?

This notion of displacement and erasure can be further challenged when it is juxtaposed with the willingness of residents to pay for these services (Shejvali 2008a, 2008b). One Havana 6 resident commented that “[a]s a community, we will organize to pay for water, sanitation, and even electricity” (Shejvali 2008a). Comments such as this contest paternalistic and patriarchal constructions of the state and challenge its legitimacy. Not surprisingly, then, despite

the publicly stated intention of Havana 6 residents wishing to improve the conditions of their settlement, the city began to conduct 'evictions' by way of demolition. The municipal authorities were able to move forward with the removal of homes and other structures without the need for a court order through the invocation of the *Squatters Declaration of 1985* (Isaac 2009a, 2009b; Nonkes 2009).

This apartheid-era law states that any landowner can destroy any structures that have been erected on their property without consent, as well as evict any persons without notification and/or the need for a court order (Isaac 2009b, Nonkes 2008). The lack of prior notice effectively removed any opportunity for the impacted individuals to fight their eviction before it took place. Additionally, any person being evicted under the *Squatters Declaration* was then legally prevented from challenging their eviction once the proclamation was issued (Isaac 2009b, 2009c; Nonkes 2009). The city employed the use of the police force to tear down the homes of residents or spray paint targeted homes with the words "ILLEGAL. REMOVE" (Nonkes 2008, Shejvali 2008a, 2008b, 2009a).

Regardless of the legal manoeuvring to gag, erase, and remove the residents of Havana 6, this process did not go uncontested. In the words of an unnamed community member: "We are staying here because we need a place. We are not against the law, we just need a place to live" (Shejvali 2008a). Yet the actions of Havana 6 residents went far beyond words. Some people joined together to form a 'concern group' and organized a petition for the city to stop the evictions (Shejvali 2009c, 2009d; Sibeene 2008). The city attempted to undermine their efforts by rejecting the petition on the grounds that it did not constitute a 'real' petition. They cited how it lacked certain legal components, such as a person to whom it was addressed and/or the signature of a formal group leader (Shejvali 2009c). However, this did not halt the community's actions. They enlisted the aid of the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), a non-governmental organization that strives to "[p]rotect the human rights of all Namibians" (LAC 2012) and took the city to court (Isaac 2009b; Nonkes 2009).

With the assistance of LAC, the community argued that the squatter proclamation was unconstitutional since no court order is needed to carry out the evictions; and that the evicted person(s) are barred from pursuing their case in court (Isaac 2009b, 2009c; Nonkes 2009). Originally, this argument was upheld by the law, and the actions of city officials were deemed illegal and in violation of the Namibian constitution (Isaac 2009c; Nonkes 2009). Despite this, evictions continued with the creation of a “buffer zone” around the dump site, requiring all structures within the zone to be removed (Shejavali 2009b). The impact of the evictions on the people of Havana 6 was deep and indelible. Norman Tjombe, Director of the Legal Assistance Centre, captures some of the pain and anguish faced by displaced members of the community:

Imagine children who are evicted from their homes and have to sleep under a bridge. Their right to education is likely affected; their dignity is affected. ... For families, their right to privacy and to security of person is violated. Their right to the peaceful enjoyment of possessions is violated as many of the forced evictions occurred without warning, forcing people to abandon their homes, lands, and worldly possessions (Nonkes 2008).

Less than a year later the initial decision of the court was overruled by another judge. The appeal judge stated that the people of Havana 6 had “approached the court ‘with dirty hands,’” and that their illegal occupation of the land meant that they were not entitled to the court’s aid. Justice Johan Swanepoel stated that: “[the court’s aid] is denied in order to maintain respect for law; in order to promote confidence in the administration of justice; in order to preserve the judicial process from contamination” (Menges 2010).

The Havana 6 case is striking as it exemplifies an apartheid-era law used to displace people from their homes. This case reveals the discourse(s) constructed by the state, local news media, and community members regarding Havana 6 residents’ sanitation,

criminality, and the ability to provide for themselves or improve their living conditions. The state's paternalistic discourse surrounding the Havana 6 site, perceived the land to be 'unfit for human habitation' and unable to provide the necessary services to improve the quality of the environment for the 'illegal land invaders' with 'unclean hands'. The state thus constructs the image that the land and the people upon it are dirty, unworthy, and criminal.

By categorizing people into subordinated positions of uncleanness and lawlessness, the state and news media delegitimize, marginalize, and feminize the residents of Havana 6, thus reinforcing the state system of naturalized patriarchy. By constructing residents in this manner, they are made to appear incapable of taking care of themselves and are therefore in 'need' of cleaning and reform. This discourse covertly sanitizes the violence that is being perpetrated against the Havana 6 community in that they are considered to be dirty and uneducated. This, in turn, then renders natural the entire structure of class inequality that is deeply rooted in race and racialized policies, remnants of the apartheid-era that perpetuate a paternalistic and patriarchal state actor.

Under the guise of concern for the residents of Havana 6, the government has positioned itself as a benevolent, well meaning, and law-abiding entity that is acting in the interest of the citizens of Namibia. However, if this were truly the case, the government would be housing these people they are evicting. Not simply pushing them away.

In reality, the people of Havana 6 are ready to help themselves improve their own living conditions. For at least the past two years, the people who inhabit Havana 6 are making a life for themselves in a place and time rigidly controlled by the state. They are constructing and defending their own homes, asserting the legal rights that they feel they ought to possess, and in the process have rewritten the laws of Namibia. Ruben Kamutuezu, a resident of Havana 6 and member of the Havana 6 Concern Group, highlights the industrious and tenacious will of the people very clearly when he states: "If we have

land, we can sustain ourselves and create jobs for ourselves through various projects” (Shejavali 2009d).

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have argued that apartheid cultivated a highly paternalistic and patriarchal state in Namibia that racially divided cities, and that the same patriarchal structure continues to operate by marginalizing racialized poorer classes within society. I have used the case of the informal settlement of Havana 6 to demonstrate how this is accomplished through discursive practices that construct poor people as unclean and unable to properly care for themselves. State-directed evictions are thus seemingly justified by health and sanitation concerns. These justifications for eviction echo those used during the apartheid-era to evict black settlers in Windhoek, and exemplify the current paternalistic and patriarchal nature of Namibian government and society. Yet, these processes do not go uncontested. As the residents of Havana 6 demonstrate through their legal challenge that questioned the constitutionality of the laws that repress them, the poorer classes of Namibia are fighting for their rights and independence. They are challenging the dominant minority to recognize and respect them and their presence in Namibian urban landscapes.

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