





Explorations into middle class urbanites, social movements and political dynamics: impressions from Namibia's capital, Windhoek

Henning Melber 🗅

Department of Political Sciences/University of Pretoria; Centre for Gender and Africa Studies/University of the Free State, Bloemfontein; Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala

ABSTRACT

Namibia's National Assembly and Presidential Elections in November 2019 documented for the first time a decline in the hegemonic status of the former liberation movement, SWAPO. This culminated since then in an unforeseen loss of support in the Regional and Local Authorities Elections of November 2020. Most municipalities and towns are now under the control of new political alliances. These include agencies with social movement elements. The urban middle class deserves in this context some special attention: Has it influenced voting patterns? Can an urban middle class be of sufficient political influence to play a significant role in changes of political governance? The dramatic political shifts in Windhoek are explored: if and to what extent might a focus on urban middle-class political behaviours help to analyse current political dynamics unfolding?

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 2 August 2021 Accepted 19 May 2022

KEYWORDS

Middle class; urbanites; Windhoek; Namibia; SWAPO;

1. Introduction

As already bemoaned by Winterfeldt (2010), Namibia remains in dire need of a proper class analysis. Three decades into independence, there are not yet any comprehensive, in-depth analytical efforts to investigate the shifts in social strata under the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO)¹ as former liberation movement in government since 1990. Fragmented research into aspects of socio-economic developments since independence have highlighted occasionally beneficiaries of the (re-)appropriation of economic gains based on the shift of political and administrative power and state control over and access to resources. Micro studies have also highlighted elite formation and thereby to some extent class-related aspects on a regional or local level, notably so with regard to the younger generation climbing the social ladder in Rundu as the centre of the Kavango region (Fumanti 2016), the country's second biggest town, and Fransfontein as the centre of Damaraland (Pauli 2019). But no serious analysis has so far been undertaken regarding demographic, social and class-related changes in the capital city of Windhoek. Given recent political trends, this remains an overdue challenge.

After 30 years of by and large uncontested political hegemonic rule, SWAPO for the first time faced meaningful setbacks in the National Assembly and Presidential Elections in November 2019 (Melber 2020). The trend culminated in the party's loss of dominance in many regions and even more municipalities and towns in the Regional and Local Elections of November 2020 (Melber 2021). The sobering results suggested that voters have started to abandon unconditional loyalty to the former liberation movement and its heroic narrative. While the party's dominance remained despite the bruises largely intact on the level of centralised state power, significant cracks became visible at regional and local levels. These suggest a gradual erosion of credibility and trust in the organisation, which for decades was associated with the slogan that 'SWAPO is the nation and the nation is SWAPO', coined during the days of the anticolonial liberation struggle.

In the absence of any pre- or post-election related surveys and exit polls, the following thoughts can only claim to be a preliminary exploration into some of the contributing factors. They are in search of likely reasons for the rather dramatic shift in voting for the Windhoek municipality, linking it not least to a re-orientation of urban middle-class political preferences and urban protest over an increased marginalisation of a social strata somewhere in between the top and the bottom of one of the world's most unequal societies. Those lost in the middle, as is suggested, have resumed an active political role hitherto less manifested, articulating dissent in a growing mobilisation. This includes social movement related forms of opposition to a former liberation movement, which has failed to adjust to changes in society. Interestingly, the observations presented in this article with regard to Windhoek, resonate to some extent also with assessments for younger generations' middle-class (re-)positioning in Luanda (Schubert 2016) and even more so Maputo (Sumich 2018; Nielsen and Jenkins 2021). Political trends among segments in the younger urban black middle class in South Africa as the 'born free' generation seem – as suggested by Oyedemi (2021) – to replicate similar shifts.

2. The new political realities

As the National Assembly and Presidential Election results of November 2019 suggested, the firm basis of SWAPO showed cracks and sands were shifting slowly (for details, see Melber 2020). With 65%, SWAPO lost its two-third majority (2014: 80%), which it had held since the 1994 elections. Even worse, the party's presidential candidate Hage Geingob was re-elected with a humiliating 56% (2014: 87%). Scoring almost 30% of votes, the 'independent' SWAPO candidate Panduleni Itula personified the dissatisfaction among party followers and the deep internal factional rifts. Expelled since then, he subsequently established the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC). The party's official registration was certified by the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) in late September 2020. Notably, Itula's background is markedly more in line with a post-independence middle-class orientation than that of his peers in SWAPO.²

Well ahead of the forthcoming Regional and Local Authorities Elections, the fielding of candidates provided a new map of alternatives. This included next to the IPC the Landless People's Movement (LPM). It was established in 2017 after a fall out of the deputy minister for Land Resettlement Bernadus Swartbooi (previously governor of the!Karas region) with his Minister over the selective redistribution policy and subsequently being ousted by the SWAPO leadership. Coming from the Nama communities in the South, Swartbooi³ and the

LPM appealed to those mainly concerned about the lack of land reform, restitution and redistribution to address some of the colonial legacies in terms of the unequal ownership in commercial land. In the National Assembly Elections 2019 the party came third and secured four seats, thereby illustrating its support.⁴

The registration of the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement as an organisation, whose candidates entered as contestants in the Walvis Bay and Swakopmund municipal elections, was also confirmed by the ECN. Its candidates had already been registered for the local authority election in Windhoek. Given this formation of new political entities campaigning for votes, going to the polls in late November 2020 had by far more alternative options than ever before. For the first time too, numerous independent candidates offered additional multiple choices.

Despite Covid-19 and only physical vote casting at polling stations, the always low voter turnout increased.⁵ It displayed a discrepancy between the Regional Council and Local Authority Elections, voted by two ballots in parallel. This suggests that voters were more interested in preferences for (proportionally elected) party candidates in the local authorities than supporting a candidate in the regional election constituencies following the first past the post principle.

Voter Turnout: Regional Council and Local Authorities Elections 2020						
	Registered votes	Votes cast	Percentage	2015		
Regional Council votes	1 375 640	526 337	38.26%	36.5%		
Local Authority votes	451 870	195 092	43.17%	39.8%		

2.1. Regional Council Elections

Total votes for SWAPO dropped proportionally from 83% in 2015 to 57%. The party was in sole control of the National Council before (composed of three seats from each region) and held 40 of 42 seats with an absolute majority in all 14 regions. It remained the biggest party in 10 of the 14 regions, but the dominance has now been reduced to 28 seats in the National Council. A further decline was stopped mainly because the strongholds in the North remained to a large extent loyal. The first-past-the-post election system for regional councillors also prevented worse. Since in many constituencies several opposition parties competed, SWAPO candidates were elected at times with a mere one-third of votes (in one Windhoek constituency by three votes only). If opposition parties had embarked on concerted action, SWAPO would have had even bigger losses: 'The combined opposition vote beat Swapo in at least 16 constituencies where the Swapo candidate was declared the winner' (Hopwood 2020).

Overall Regional Councils Election Results 2020						
SWAPO	IPC	PDM	LPM*	NUDO	Other**	
293,626	89,030	35,010	35,184	12,258	50,296	
56.66%	17.49%	6.95%	6.87%	2.35%	9.72%	

^{*}There is an inconsistency comparing the figures given with the official ranking and the percentage, compared with PDM. The overview is dated 01 April 2021 but seems to have not properly integrated the figures from the rerun elections for the Mariental Rural Constituency. The figures here are reproduced as given on the ECN web site.

Source: https://elections.na/RegionalCouncil.aspx.

^{**}Including nine parties and 90 independent candidates.



2.2. Local Authority Elections

In the Local Authority Elections, SWAPO garnered just 40% (2015: 73%) overall votes. It maintained full control over 20 of the previously held 52 (out of 57) municipalities and town councils. The party's Politburo decided to negotiate 12 possible governance alliances with two of the smaller regional-ethnic parties. Both rejected the offer. The official election results announced by the Electoral Commission for the local elections had the following aggregated scores for all 57 local authorities:

Overall Local Authorities Election Results 2020						
SWAPO	IPC	LPM	PDM	AR	Other*	
76,680	40,723	27,380	15,266	8,501	23,934	
39.84%	21.16%	14.22%	7.93%	4.42%	14.25%	

^{*}Including independent candidates. A total of 31 parties were campaigning in one or more of the local authority elections, including two separate AR branches for Walvis Bay and Swakopmund (votes counted separately and not included in the AR figure above).

Source: https://elections.na/LocalAssembly.aspx.

Differently from regional councils, local authorities are elected by proportional voting system. As a result, municipalities and towns were seized by other parties - either single-handedly or in planned coalitions, since IPC, LPM and AR garnered sufficient (combined) votes to replace the SWAPO dominated councils. A disaster was not only the loss of the capital Windhoek but the degree of defeat. With previously 12 of the 15 seats in the municipality, SWAPO now holds five seats. Eight seats were won by the new competitors IPC (4), LPM (2), and AR (2), while party candidates from the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) and the National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO) each gained one seat.

Windhoek Municipal Election Results 2020						
	SWAPO	IPC	AR	LPM	PDM	NUDO
Votes	20 250	14 028	8 501	7 365	5 411	1 455
Percentage	33.88%	23.47%	14.22%	12.32%	9.05%	2.43%

Source: https://www.elections.na/LocalAssembly.aspx#

Maybe the biggest symbolic humiliation as a result of the Local Authority Elections was the appointment of Job Amupanda from the AR as Windhoek's mayor for 2021.⁶ After all, he was the leading figure in a SWAPO-internal revolt, when he and others in leadership positions of the party's Youth League embarked on a social movement grassroots course: in November 2014 they symbolically and temporarily occupied municipal urban land under development for an upmarket further suburban expansion at Kleine Kuppe to highlight the lack of affordable access to urban plots and housing (Becker 2016). This was a spectacular part of an open challenge of the party's gerontocratic structures (Melber, Kromrey, and Welz 2017, 305-307). Since the end of 2015, the AR has not only also embarked on several legal initiatives to disclose and fight acts of corruption (Amupanda 2019, 201–203), but as well took initiatives to advocate and protect the interests of local shack-dwellers. This included the establishment of a social justice centre, as well as the creation and formal registration of a People's Litigation Centre. It thereby became



maybe the closest agency to those frustrated over the exclusion from access to upward mobility.

3. Windhoek's urban development constraints

Already since the mid-1970s, when 'petty apartheid' was gradually reduced, urban areas in parts accommodated the new black elite participating in the re-configuration of a postapartheid society. With independence, spatial segregation was officially abolished entirely, though this did not lift physically distinct living areas between the haves and the have nots, which continued largely to bear an affinity between race and class. As Friedman (2000, 1) maintains, 'racial segregation, though without legal basis, still exists'. She attributes this mainly to the continued spatial, monofunctional, fragmented urban environments. While slightly modified since then, urban planning remains influenced by the design and development of neighbourhoods and new suburbia based on class structures. This reproduced to some extent the previous racial divide now rooted mainly in differences of income. As observed by Chitekwe-Biti (2019, 390): In Windhoek, the rich, the poor, the upwardly mobile, new migrants, and particular social and/or ethnic groups all inhabit distinct special zones.'

Based on a 1995 estimate of 182,000 inhabitants, the growth of Windhoek was projected to reach between 623,000 (low projection) and 740,000 (high projection) inhabitants by 2020 (Windhoek Municipality 1996). In the absence of any registry as regards the residential place of living, figures vary considerably and are rather speculative. The National Population and Housing Census of 2011 numbered the Windhoek population at 325,858 residents (Namibia Statistics Agency 2011, 7). Weber and Mendelsohn (2017, 73) estimated the population at 413,000 in 2017. UN population data number residents in the metro area for 2021 at 446,000.7 It can be assumed that this excludes large numbers in the adjacent squatter areas euphemistically dubbed as 'informal settlements', which rapidly expanded into undeveloped neighbouring land mainly to the west and north of the township, Katutura (see Pendleton, Crush, and Nickanor 2014). 'While in 1991 only 3% of all houses in Windhoek where shacks they make up about one third (32%) of all houses by the time of the 2011 census' (Weber and Mendelsohn 2017, 73). Over 40% of Namibia's current population of some 2.5 million are living in 'informal settlements'. Translated into urban realities, this adds up to two thirds of residents in towns and cities squatting in such conditions (Lühl and Delgado 2018, 7). Given the rapid influx to the margins of Windhoek, it can be assumed that the number of people living under such conditions is even higher (for a more detailed description of their living conditions, see Weber and Mendelsohn 2017, 72-85).

The emergence of a growing number of middle-class oriented Namibians in Windhoek's urban setting and their aspirations collided with the socio-economic realities of a property market, which limited upward mobility in terms of decent housing. Initially, a new blend of residents developed in some of the established suburbs (such as Windhoek West, Windhoek Nord, Suiderhof and Pionierpark, where many of the stateowned houses for public servants were situated, and to some extent for private new residents, parts of Eros and Klein Windhoek). New expansions allowed for middle- and upperclass black Namibians to settle in Academia, Doradopark, Hochlandpark, Rocky Crest and, more recently, Prosperita and Cimbebasia. Old and new elites mingle in upmarket areas

such as Ludwigsdorf, Auasblick and the 'Luxushügel', as well as certain expansions into Kleine Kuppe, Erospark and Avis. The previous townships of Khomasdal (originally established for the coloured and Rehobother communities) and Katutura provided scope for upgraded housing for those who could afford it, while the growing influx of urban dwellers were documented in expansions at its northern and western fringes such as Otjomuise, Wanaheda, Okuryangava, Hakahana and Goreangab, where shacks are the order of the day.

The (implicitly racist) assumption was that the apartheid inherited segregation could be reduced if not eliminated by black Namibians integrating into previously exclusive white parts of the city (and simply keeping the large majority who could not afford any such mobility at the outskirts of the growing capital - without any whites moving there). Such anticipated mobility became increasingly limited and unrealistic by prices for plots and on the property market, spiralling out of any affordable dimensions. This was partly triggered by the booming oil economy in neighbouring Angola but also the growing number of foreigners (not least Chinese nationals) settling to benefit from the economic growth taking place until around 2015. Their investments in local properties turned Windhoek into one of the world's most expensive places to live. In 2011, Namibia recorded the fourth highest increase in housing prices worldwide with an annual increase of over 25%: 'access to housing is indeed a luxury for the majority of the households' (Nandago 2015, 29), since 'the prices of houses in Namibia have escalated astronomically in recent years to levels that are beyond what the majority of the population can afford' (Nandago 2015, 67). Housing has remained a festering wound (Remmert and Ndhlovu 2018), as well as the limited (if any) access to urban land (Lühl and Delgado 2018). The failures in addressing housing and land, triggered not only frustration but also politically motivated protest on different levels, as already mentioned with reference to the AR. Urban development was unable to accommodate the needs and desires of the growing younger middle-class oriented generation desperate to get access to decent housing they felt in line with their aspired lifestyle.

A survey interviewing a total of 106 teachers from eight public primary schools in Windhoek testified to the dire needs of those, who by status and income do qualify as urban middle class: 'While teachers enjoy a secure regular income, which is 66 percent higher than the national average and can be considered middle-income, they generally live in the poorer western neighbourhoods and some find themselves in marginalized living conditions' (Delgado and Lühl 2016, 17). A November 2017 Afrobarometer survey among 1200 Namibians revealed that 63% of respondents with post-secondary education considered the AR movement as being closest to their views on the land issue (Isbell, Alweendo, and Moosa 2019, 2). Based on the survey results, the Institute for Public Policy Research warned: 'If the government is to avoid a crisis, it must take the grievances of AR and its supporters seriously and implement policies to address the housing shortage in urban areas' (Isbell, Alweendo, and Moosa 2019, 9).

4. The new urbanite middle class of Windhoek

Several factors contributed to the formation of a growing middle class in mainly urban centres and in particular the capital Windhoek. The rapid expansion of a civil service must be considered an essential feature. Administered largely as a fifth province from

Pretoria until the late 1980s, the public service at Independence on 21 March 1990 counted some 42,500 filled posts. By the end of the century, it had expanded to over 78,000 funded posts (Melber 2000, 90). Its current size is hovering around 100,000 posts and personnel costs for the civil service absorb almost half the amount of the annual budgetary expenditure. Together with this expansion went the creation of a plethora of mostly subsidised (loss recording) state-owned enterprises mainly with headquarters in Windhoek (Marenga 2020), providing access to higher salaried positions (including generous fringe benefits) for a significant number of people. These included those rewarded for their 'struggle history' in exile, but also a number of locals who since the 1980s had made use of opportunities offered in a liberalised system softening the apartheid limitations and providing access to higher education.

The new era entered with independence was also reflected in the local transformation of institutions of higher learning, which prior to independence were mainly a combination of several regional teacher training colleges.⁸ An Academy for Tertiary Education established in 1980 was the midwife for the subsequent birth of the country's two universities with their main campuses in Windhoek. In 1992 the Academy was turned into the University of Namibia (UNAM) with a rapidly expanding campus at the city's southern outskirt. Student numbers exceeded 30,000 in 2021. As a separate entity under its auspices, a Technikon operated on the inner-city campus, and was awarded autonomy in the mid-1990s. It became the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) in 2015, with a total enrolment exceeding 11,000 in 2018. Both institutions facilitated over the years in growing numbers the formation of a local intelligentsia, increasingly confronted with problems to find suitable employment (if any) matching their qualifications. While their graduates by educational standards (and mindsets as well as lifestyle aspirations) fall in the main into a category which could be classified as middle class, they are often denied the income to finance their aspired status. Like other higher educated urbanites coming from other regions to the capital, they often remained closely connected to their home regions. As middle-class urbanites they embrace multiple identities, practice 'class switching' (Pauli 2020) and shift lifestyle and cultural practices adjusting to the localised context and environment (Nghiulikwa 2008).9

In parallel to a growing number of educated younger people, a vibrant media sector flourished under a democratic system, which respects media freedom and allows a plethora of different – often highly critical – opinions being published without major risks. Local print media provide space for scholar activists and public intellectuals (often employed at the institutions of higher learning) voicing their critical views on socio-political and -economic matters of the day. Higher civil servants and their offspring face since the economic crisis starting in 2015 hitherto unknown hurdles in upward mobility and stagnation. An ever-growing number of academically trained youth are confronted with unemployment and frustrated by the limited opportunities for employment. This is articulated in social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) which, in combination with a largely free media environment, has created a local urban environment fostering social movement activism.

Indications of this relatively liberal environment used for the expression of dissenting views and lifestyles can also be seen in the open campaigns of so far still officially not recognised LGBTI communities demanding civil rights and protesting against continued discrimination. Despite no legalised freedom of choice for same sex relations, public gay parades take place since some years without facing harassment and the LGBTI subculture remains largely tolerated, at least in the urban settings. Protest against gender-based violence and discrimination of non-mainstream sexual preferences and identities culminated in 2020 in demonstrations taking the frustration to the streets. #ShutltAllDown became a leitmotif Namibians, too (Ugwuede 2020). As one of the activists explained:

The idea of disruption, as a means of protesting, is about confronting docile and properly maintained systems of power. It's about asserting that abnormal situations require action that is, in itself, disruptive, drastic and abnormal. (Hambuda 2020)

In all these civil rights related activities a younger middle-class oriented generation plays a visible and significant role, testifying to a vibrant political culture emerging in the shadow of a largely gerontocratic political leadership in SWAPO, whose members are stuck in yesteryear's mindset. By promoting only those younger members who follow in their footsteps, they cultivate a meritocracy which excludes new ideas and transformations from a liberation movement gear into a party adjusting to the new realities (Melber, Kromrey, and Welz 2017).

5. Conclusion

Recent engagements with the notion of African middle classes have on the one hand criticised the absence of a proper class analysis giving the socio-economic material factors sufficient recognition (see some of the contributions to Melber 2016), and on the other hand stressed the need to include lifestyle, aspirations and socio-cultural milieus among other less material aspects to determine the individual aspirations, belonging and positioning in something 'in between' (for the latter, see especially Neubert and Stoll 2015, some of the contributions to Kroeker, O'Kane, and Scharrer 2018; Neubert 2019; while Spronk 2012 draws attention to complementing aspects of sexual life).

In their exploration of Maputo's urbanites, Nielsen and Jenkins (2021, 177) frame middle-classness as an aesthetic moral community, 'potentially exhausting itself as a social, economic and aesthetic utopian ideal ... founded on the vacuity of middle-classness'. As they argue, 'it is precisely because of the fractured relationship between the concept and its content that it becomes possible for urbanites ... to articulate a new form of urban insurgency' through engaging with land and housing (Nielsen and Jenkins 2021, 177). Middle-classness advances to an urban ideal, but unfulfilled aspirational desires in a process of rapid urbanisation contrast with political-economic weaknesses. Rather than based on income and consumption, middle-class is seen as 'a particular ideal of urban living', which faces limitations in the socio-economic realities.

Sumich (2018, 159) characterises his middle-class interlocuters in Maputo as an example of 'a complicated web of dependence, alienation, and ambivalence', with little love for Frelimo but at the same time afraid that a future without the party could be even worse. Oyedemi (2021) points out that the post-apartheid youths of South Africa, although 'born-free', have remained as post-colonial casualties in the shadow of coloniality, confronted with a difficult process of decolonisation. As the social realities of many among the younger middle-class urbanites in Windhoek suggests, this seems to be a similar challenge for Namibians making use of the opportunities opening with independence but denied reaping the benefits. Their behaviour suggests noteworthy trends in political mobilisation and re-positioning, turning a back on the liberation gospel of SWAPO as the former liberation movement, which in its governance since Independence has frustrated the expectations cultivated by the narratives of social progress and emancipation promoted. The civil liberties adopted in the constitutional framework and to a large extent so far respected and recognised in the 31 years of democracy, have turned into a tool practised by the growing numbers of voters turning a back on the organisation claiming to have liberated them. As documented in election results in Windhoek and other municipalities, middle-class urbanites seem to be among those at the forefront of political agencies (including social movements) mobilising for alternatives. To which extent these emerge as transformative instead of being more of the same remains to be seen.

The recent changes in the also institutionalised political culture in Namibia and in particular its capital can maybe best be illustrated by a Tweet of Job Amupanda, Windhoek's mayor for the year 2021. On 25 July 2021 he posted:

Youth Minister is 75, President is Turning 80 in few days. Vice President is turning 80 in few weeks. Speaker of Parliament already turned 80. Many CEOs are above 60 & Fighting to die in Office. In the Meantime (sic) Youth Unemployment is increasing to 50%. Youth, You are Under Attack!10

But political promises and sloganeering is one thing. It risks creating expectations, which cannot be delivered on, by occupying temporarily offices while an administration continues to run affairs as before. Since the changes in Windhoek's municipal council, little has changed for the residents. This has already caused strain on the newly elected councillors and the mayor, who are criticised for non-delivery. While calls for immediate fundamental transformation of the city's policy might be an unrealistic demand, they add to the pressure on those who promised to make a difference. This has triggered or exacerbated frictions and hiccups in the party alliance while still in the formative stages of local governance and resulted in the first critical observations (Ekandjo 2021; Namibian Sun 2021) questioning its degree of success. If and to which extent urbanite middle-class protest could by means of politics transform local realities remains at this stage to be seen. As regards the electorate, voters will have another say in 2025.

Notes

- 1. SWAPO and Swapo as well as Swapo Party are usual references. Except otherwise quoted, this article refers to SWAPO as the original acronym.
- 2. After initial years of political activism, he used exile in the UK since 1981 to qualify as a dentist and only returned to Namibia in 2013. While joining the party internal establishment, he emerged as an alternative to the current leadership with the backing of some Northern support base. He strongly appealed also to parts of the predominantly anti-SWAPO white Namibians. While their number has no decisive impact in election results generally, they participated in bigger numbers than before in the local authority elections and were a contributing factor to the IPC performance, especially in Windhoek and Swakopmund.
- 3. Like Itula, Swartbooi has not been a 'mainstream' SWAPO cadre. In his case, mainly in terms of his relatively young age (born 1977), his regional-ethnic background, as well as his educational status as a graduate from the University of Namibia (Bachelor of Law, 2001).
- 4. The other three Members of Parliament also have degrees from the University of Namibia.
- 5. Notably, voter turnout in Windhoek for the 2015 elections was the lowest with 32.7%. See for detailed 2015 data the Election Watch no. 8 2015 by the Institute for Public Policy Research: https://ippr.org.na/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Election_Watch_Bulletin_Results_8pdf.pdf.



- 6. Born in 1987, Job Shipululo Amupanda is a political scientist who studied at the University of Namibia (BA 2005), Stellenbosch University (BA Hons 2008, MA 2012). He also obtained a BA Hons in History from the University of South Africa and his PhD at the University of Namibia in 2020, where he is Deputy Dean in the Faculty of Economic and Management Science. He is the prototype of the middle-class political activist and public intellectual representing the social movement affinity of this new segment of Windhoek urbanites, while at the same time maintaining strong bonds to his origins in the northern region.
- 7. https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/21925/windhoek/population.
- 8. The white elite could afford to send their offspring to South African universities or even overseas for studies.
- 9. Bernadus Swartbooi and Job Amupanda are prominent examples for this adjustment of behavioural patterns when fluctuating between their regional home base and Windhoek. It would be wrong, however, to consider this as a contradiction.
- 10. https://twitter.com/Shipululo/status/1419358800528748548.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Henning Melber has been the Director of the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit (NEPRU) in Windhoek (1992-2000), Research Director of the Nordic Africa Institute (2000-2006) and Director of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (2006–2021), both in Uppsala/Sweden. He remains affiliated as Senior Research Associate and Director emeritus/Senior Advisor respectively to both institutions, is Extraordinary Professor at the Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria (since 2012) and the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, University of the Free State in Bloemfontein (since 2013), Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Commonwealth Studies, Centre for Advanced Study at the University of London (since 2015) and President of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) since 2017. He can be contacted at Henning. Melber@nai.uu.se.

ORCID iD

Henning Melber http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8439-8148

References

Amupanda, Job. 2019. "The Fight Against Corruption in Namibia: An Appraisal of Institutional Environment and a Consideration of a Model for Civil Society Participation." Namibia Law Journal 11 (1): 187-203.

Becker, Heike. 2016. Namibia's Moment: Youth and Urban Land Activism, ROAPE Blog, 18 January. https://roape.net/2016/01/18/namibias-moment-youth-and-urban-land-activism/.

Chitekwe-Biti, Beth. 2018. "Co-producing Windhoek: The Contribution of the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia." Environment and Urbanization 30 (2): 387-406.

City of Windhoek, 1996. The Windhoek Structure Plan. Windhoek Municipality, October 1996 (unpaginated). http://www.windhoekcc.org.na/documents/Windhoek%20Structure%20Plan% 20October%201996.pdf.

Delgado, Guillermo, and Phillip Lühl. 2016. The Case for Adequate Housing for Teachers in Windhoek. Windhoek: Integrated Land Management Institute/Namibia University of Science and Technology. https://ilmi.nust.na/sites/default/files/2016-WP5-The-case-for-adequate-housingfor-teachers-in-Namibia-FINAL-A4-web.pdf.



Ekandjo, Abednego Katuushii. 2021. "A Critical Perspective on the City's Mess." *New Era*, 30 July. https://neweralive.na/posts/opinion-a-critical-perspective-on-the-citys-mess.

Friedman, Fatima. 2000. *Deconstructing Windhoek: The Urban Morphology of a Post-Apartheid City*. London: Development Planning Unit/University College London. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/case-studies/2000/aug/111-deconstructing-windhoek-urban-morphology-post-apartheid-city.

Fumanti, Mattia. 2016. The Politics of Distinction: African Elites from Colonialism to Liberation in a Namibian Frontier Town. Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing.

Hambuda, Anne. 2020. #ShutltAllDown, *The Namibian*, 16 October https://www.namibian.com.na/95689/read/ShutltAllDown.

Hopwood, Graham. 2020. "The Changing Political Landscape." *IPPR Blog*, 13 December. https://ippr.org.na/blog/the-changing-political-landscape/.

Isbell, Thomas, Ndapwa Alweendo, and Mikhail Moosa. 2019. *Namibians Look to Social Movement to Prompt Government Action on Land Reform*. Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research. (Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 289).

Kroeker, Lena, David O'Kane, and Tabea Scharrer, eds. 2018. *Middle Classes in Africa. Changing Lives and Conceptual Challenges*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lühl, Phillip, and Guillermo Delgado. 2018. *Urban Land Reform in Namibia*. Windhoek: Integrated Land Management Institute/Namibia University of Science and Technology. http://dna.nust.na/landconference/submissions_2018/policy-paper-urban-land-reform-2018-final.pdf.

Marenga, Ralph. 2020. "Analysing the Performance of Public Enterprises in Namibia: A Challenge for the Practice of Public Administration?" *Journal of Governance and Regulation* 9 (3): 96–109.

Melber, Henning. 2000. "Public Sector and Fiscal Policy." In *Namibia – A Decade of Independence*, edited by Henning Melber, 87–108. Windhoek: Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit.

Melber, Henning, ed. 2016. The Rise of Africa's Middle Class: Myths, Realities and Critical Engagement. London: Zed.

Melber, Henning. 2020. "Geingob 2.0. Namibia's New Government." *Journal of Namibian Studies* 27: 101–121.

Melber, Henning. 2021. "Namibia's Regional and Local Authorities Elections 2020: Democracy Beyond SWAPO." *Journal of Namibian Studies* 29: 73–83.

Melber, Henning, Daniela Kromrey, and Martin Welz. 2017. "Changing of the Guard? An Anatomy of Power Within SWAPO of Namibia." *African Affairs* 116 (463): 284–310.

Namibia Statistics Agency. 2011. Namibia 2011. Population & Housing Census Main Report. Windhoek: Republic of Namibia. https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/p19dmn58guram30ttun89rdrp1.pdf.

Namibian Sun. 2021. "Editorial: Fix Windhoek's Leadership Mess." 30 July. https://www.namibiansun.com/news/editorial-fix-windhoeks-leadership-mess2021-07-30/.

Nandago, Hilya. 2015. "The Determinants of House Prices in Namibia and Their Implications on Housing Affordability." Research assignment for Master of Development Finance, Stellenbosch University. https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.945.4214&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

Neubert, Dieter. 2019. *Inequality, Socio-Cultural Differentiation and Social Structures in Africa. Beyond Class.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Neubert, Dieter, and Florian Stoll. 2015. Socio-cultural Diversity of the African Middle Class. The Case of Urban Kenya. Bayreuth: Institute of Africa Studies/University of Bayreuth.

Nghiulikwa, Romie Vonkie. 2008. "Re-situating and Shifting Cultural Identity in Contemporary Namibia: The Experience of Rural-Urban Migrants in Katutura (Windhoek)." MA Thesis, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of the Western Cape. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/58913569.pdf

Nielsen, Morten, and Paul Jenkins. 2021. "Insurgent Aspirations? Weak Middle-Class Utopias in Maputo, Mozambique." *Critical African Studies* 13 (2): 162–182.

Oyedemi, Toks Dele. 2021. "Postcolonial Casualties: 'Born-frees' and Decolonisation in South Africa." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 39 (2): 214–229.

Pauli, Julia. 2019. *The Decline of Marriage in Namibia: Kinship and Social Class in a Rural Community*. Bielefeld: Transcript.



- Pauli, Julia. 2020. "Class-Switching: Migrants' Multiple Class Identities in Rural and Urban Namibia." *Africa Today* 66 (3&4): 115–135.
- Pendleton, Wade, Jonathan Crush, and Ndeyapo Nickanor. 2014. "Migrant Windhoek: Rural-Urban Migration and Food Security in Namibia." *Urban Forum* 25 (2): 191–205.
- Remmert, Dietrich, and Pauline Ndhlovu. 2018. *Housing in Namibia: Rights, Challenges and Opportunities*. Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research. https://ippr.org.na/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IPPR_HousingBook_PRINT.pdf.
- Schubert, Jon. 2016. "Emerging Middle Class Political Subjectivities in Post-war Angola." In *The Rise of Africa's Middle Class. Myths, Realities and Critical Engagements*, edited by Henning Melber, 147–158. London: Zed.
- Spronk, Rachel. 2012. Ambiguous Pleasures. Sexuality & Middle Class Self-Perceptions in Nairobi. New York and Oxford: Berghahn.
- Sumich, Jason. 2018. The Middle Class in Mozambique. The State and the Politics of Transformation in Southern Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ugwuede, Kay. 2020. Why does Namibia want to #ShutltAllDown?, *techcabal*, 19 October. https://techcabal.com/2020/10/19/shutitalldown_namibia/.
- Weber, Beat, and John Mendelsohn (With the special assistance of Esleen Guriras and Alina Nambuli). 2017. *Informal Settlements in Namibia: Their Nature and Growth*. Windhoek: Development Workshop Namibia. https://www.raison.com.na/sites/default/files/Informal-Settlements-in-Namibia-Book-Web.pdf.
- Winterfeldt, Volker. 2010. "Postcolonial Dynamics of Social Structure in Namibia." In *The Long Aftermath of War Reconciliation ad Transition in Namibia*, edited by André du Pisani, Reinhart Kössler, and William A. Lindeke, 139–170. Freiburg: Arnold Bergstraesser Institut.