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# Between Preservation and Memory: How Post-Independence Namibia Treats German Colonial Architecture from 1884 to 1915

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## **Abstract:**

This thesis examines how German colonial architecture in Namibia is perceived and negotiated in its contemporary society. While such buildings remain prominent features of the urban landscape, they are deeply entangled with histories of colonial violence, dispossession, and genocide. Moving beyond traditional architectural and historical analyses, this study addresses a gap in existing scholarship by focusing on present-day social experiences and interpretations of these structures.

Drawing on a mixed-method approach, including architectural analysis, literature review, interviews with Namibians of different backgrounds, and insights from social media, the research explores how different communities relate to buildings from the German colonial era. It investigates how practices such as preservation, repurposing, and reinterpretation are shaped by intersecting factors, including cultural identity, collective memory, socio-economic conditions, and power relations.

The findings reveal a wide spectrum of perceptions, ranging from pragmatic and depoliticised heritage management to critical perspectives that emphasise historical trauma and ongoing inequality. Through case studies of key buildings in Windhoek, the thesis demonstrates how colonial architecture functions as contested sites of memory, continuously reinterpreted within post-independence Namibia. Ultimately, it argues that more inclusive and context-sensitive approaches are necessary to address the complex legacy embedded in the built environment.

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## **Keywords:**

German Colonial Architecture; Namibia; Postcolonial Perception; Cultural Identity; Collective Memory

## I Introduction

On May 28, 2025, Namibians commemorated for the first time the genocide against the Herero and Nama people committed by German colonial forces. The date marks the 117th anniversary of the final closure of German concentration camps in the region. Government officials, diplomats and members of the public gathered at the Parliament Gardens between the Christuskirche and the Tintenpalast, two historically and symbolically very important sites in the political centre of Windhoek. The ceremony included a candlelight vigil, a moment of silence, prayers, and speeches honouring the victims. The event caused controversy among Namibian citizens, as members of the Ovaherero and Damara communities were not involved in the planning process, despite being the descendants of the honoured victims.<sup>1</sup> For 31 years, Namibia was under German colonial rule as part of the territory then known as German South West Africa. This period was marked by violence and displacement, eventually leading to a genocide against the Nama and Herero people. The first formal commemoration took place so late because Germany only recently officially recognised their ancestors' crimes as genocide in 2021.<sup>2</sup>

Until today, there have been heated discussions about reparation payments from Germany towards Namibia to rightfully acknowledge the injustice from that period. The German government refuses to pay legal reparations, stating that the crimes were committed before the establishment of international criminal law.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it agreed to pay approximately 1.1 billion euros over a period of 30 years to support development and reconstruction programmes. Amnesty International claims that these payments do not substitute legal reparations as they allow the former colonial power to set the terms and conditions of the support and therefore continue the colonial legacy and power hierarchy instead of legally acknowledging their unrightful doing.<sup>4</sup> This is just one dimension that shows the ongoing struggle with Namibia's colonial past and the burden that the contemporary Namibian society still must carry.

The colonial traces are also deeply embedded in Namibia's built environment, especially in hotspots of former German settlements like Lüderitz, Swakopmund or the capital of

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<sup>1</sup> Melissa Chemam, *Namibia Holds Controversial First Commemoration of German Colonial-Era Genocide*, May 28, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20250528-namibia-holds-controversial-first-commemoration-of-german-colonial-era-genocide>.

<sup>2</sup> The Guardian, *Namibia Pushes for German Reparations on First Genocide Remembrance Day*, May 28, 2026, [https://www.ictj.org/latest-news/namibia-pushes-german-reparations-first-genocide-remembrance-day?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.ictj.org/latest-news/namibia-pushes-german-reparations-first-genocide-remembrance-day?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>3</sup> "Bundesregierung lehnt Wiedergutmachung für ehemalige Kolonien ab," *Deutschlandfunk*, August 16, 2025, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/bundesregierung-lehnt-wiedergutmachung-fuer-ehemalige-kolonien-ab-106.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ester Mbathera, "Amnesty International urges Germany to deliver reparations for Namibia genocide", *The Namibian*, October 5, 2025, [https://www.namibian.com.na/amnesty-international-urges-germany-to-deliver-reparations-for-namibia-genocide/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.namibian.com.na/amnesty-international-urges-germany-to-deliver-reparations-for-namibia-genocide/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) Amnesty International urges Germany to deliver reparations for Namibia genocide - News - The Namibian.

Namibia, Windhoek. Numerous houses, churches, and other infrastructure characterized by distinctly German architectural features continue to shape and dominate the Namibian streetscape to this day. Besides the residential and commercial buildings of everyday life, there are a few striking examples of German colonial architecture in Namibia that are subject of this paper. The Christuskirche from 1910 has become an important landmark and tourist attraction of the city of Windhoek and is still actively used as a Lutheran church. The seat of the Namibian Parliament, named Tintenpalast was constructed in 1913, formerly housing the colonial administration of German South West Africa. A prominent example of Germany's martial presence is the Alte Feste which served as the main military stronghold in Windhoek and has later been transformed into a museum, documenting Namibia's colonial history. Regarding the conflict-ridden past of colonial-era structures, questions arise about their meaning and place within present-day Namibian society.

This thesis wants to explore the complexities of dealing with this historically burdened urban fabric in contemporary Namibia and, more precisely, how its diverse population perceives German colonial buildings today. It examines how different communities relate to the colonial-era architecture from 1884 to 1915, and how their personal experiences shape their attitude. How do practices of renaming streets, repurposing buildings, or adding new memorials create new layers of meaning, and how do power dynamics between the state and local communities influence the preservation debates?

While German colonial architecture in Namibia has been documented and analysed in terms of style, function, and symbolism, far less attention has been paid to how these buildings are perceived and experienced by people today. In her book "Kontaktarchitektur", Ariane Komeda started touching on the perceptions of colonial architecture, but the focus is still on the mix and development of German and Namibian architectural styles.<sup>5</sup> Walter Peters' *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884 – 1914* provides a survey of German colonial architecture in Namibia and remains a key reference in Namibian heritage research.<sup>6</sup> However, Peters does not go beyond the mere historical descriptions of the buildings, while this thesis aims to situate them within a broader contextual framework.

To include the perspectives of locals, part of the methodology is going to include interviews with selected representatives of Namibian communities, as well as documenting personal opinions expressed on social media. This shifts the focus from architecture itself towards the analysis of discourse about it. This approach moves beyond the theory of the built environment to emphasize its effects on those who inhabit it, reflecting the very essence of architecture.

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<sup>5</sup> Ariane Komeda, *Kontaktarchitektur. Kolonialarchitektur in Namibia Zwischen Norm Und Übersetzung*. (V&R unipress, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884-1914* (Vorstand der S.W.A. Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft, 1981).

This study is based on a mixed methodology, consisting of architectural analysis and literature review for the theoretical and historical base, as well as interviews with different locals to investigate the personal perception of Namibians. Another source of personal perceptions is social media, where locals share their thoughts on current developments in heritage architecture. This leads the thesis beyond a mere inventory of colonial heritage in Namibia but investigate the complex contemporary dynamics around these structures. As a focal point for the analysis serve three key buildings in Windhoek that are very well-known among the Namibian population: Christuskirche, Alte Feste and Tintenpalast. Archival sources, historical records and existing scholarly works provide additional context.

To investigate the research questions, the thesis starts with an overview of the German colonial period Namibia, as profound historical knowledge is crucial to better understand the local's perspectives on colonial-era architecture. This chapter is followed by research about post-independence heritage and memory politics, specifically focussing on perception of different local communities. These complexities are being discussed on the basis of three specific case studies before coming to final conclusions.

## **II German Colonialism in Namibia**

In 1884, the German Empire declared the territory of present-day Namibia a protectorate, naming it German South-West Africa. The large but sparsely populated territory was of special interest to Germany during the wider European “scramble for Africa”. After running into difficulties with his trades in the area, a tobacco merchant named Adolf Lüderitz got the German government involved. Unlike some other German colonies, the territory was intended as a settler colony. German migrants established farms and businesses, supported by railways and infrastructure built largely for their benefit. In order to expand, the colonial settlers expropriated land and cattle from indigenous peoples, particularly the Herero and Nama communities. These groups also faced increasing racial discrimination, forced labour and newly imposed laws that restricted their freedom of movement.<sup>7</sup> As the situation for Africans worsened over time, the Herero people, led by Samuel Maharero, began with armed resistance against the German oppressors in 1904, the Nama followed shortly after.

Germany, eager to control the locals to not lose their power, responded with an overwhelming military intervention under General Lothar von Trotha. This was only possible due to the construction of military bases and war infrastructure, making architecture a key player in the power structures of Namibia. After defeating Herero forces at the Battle of Waterberg, von Trotha issued an extermination order driving thousands into the Omaheke Desert, where many died of thirst and starvation. Those who survived

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<sup>7</sup> Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism : A Short History* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 38-42.

were forced to work in concentration camps like Shark Island and had to face severe abuse and diseases. Between 1904 and 1908, an estimated 65,000–80,000 Herero and around 10,000 Nama were killed. This campaign is widely regarded as the first genocide of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

German rule came to an end in 1915, when South Africa sided with Britain during World War I and invaded the colony. The period left a legacy of land dispossession, racial hierarchy, and demographic devastation that shaped Namibia's later history. After another period of foreign administration, this time from South Africa, Namibia finally achieved independence in 1990.<sup>9</sup>

Although the period of German rule in Namibia was relatively short, it had a strong and long-lasting impact on the built environment. Settlement patterns, land division, infrastructure as well as architectural styles were heavily influenced by the Germans. German settlements were mainly concentrated in the central and northern interior plateau, as well as some coastal regions, where many key Namibian cities emerged.<sup>10</sup> Windhoek, founded in 1890 as a military station, later developed into the colonial capital and still is the capital of the independent Republic of Namibia today. Swakopmund was founded as a German port in 1892 and then developed into a major German cultural centre. It retains one of the most complete ensembles of German colonial architecture outside of Windhoek, sometimes referred to as “little Germany”<sup>11</sup> due to stylistic similarity to early 20th-century German towns. Lüderitz was the main colonial entry point, named after Adolf Lüderitz, and is known for the close-by diamond mining areas.<sup>12</sup>

Many heritage buildings in Namibian cities today reflect stylistic characteristics of German architecture. Monumentality, symmetry, towers, gables, and ornamental façades were key elements of late 19th-century German historicism, including Neo-Romanesque, Neo-Gothic, and Neo-Baroque influences. The streetscapes are defined by German writings on façades, steep roofs and timber details, organized in rational, grid-based layouts. But despite the clear dominance of German stylistic elements, the buildings in Namibia differ from those in the homeland. Since Namibia has different climatic conditions and material resources, the imported architecture was adapted. As Komeda describes in her book “Kontaktarchitektur”, colonial buildings should not be understood merely as stylistic imports from Germany. Instead, she frames them as products of cultural “translation” that melt together with local circumstances. Architectural norms, construction knowledge, labour practices, and spatial concepts

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<sup>8</sup> Jan-Bart Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890-1923* (James Currey, 1999), 141-191.

<sup>9</sup> *Namibia Feiert Seine Unabhängigkeit*, March 20, 2020, <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/203118/namibia-feiert-seine-unabhaengigkeit/>.

<sup>10</sup> Guido G. Weigend, “German Settlement Patterns in Namibia,” *Geographical Review* 75, no. 2 (1985): 156–69, JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/214466>.

<sup>11</sup> Fredrik Söderbaum, *Afro-Regions. The Dynamics of Cross-Border Regionalism in Africa*. (2008), 55.

<sup>12</sup> Weigend, “German Settlement Patterns in Namibia.”

were negotiated between German planners, settlers, local craftsmen, and environmental conditions.<sup>13</sup> An example for this is the introduction of the “SWA Veranda Style”, which emerged in response to the Namibian climate. Verandas and arcades



*Figure 1: Hotel in Lüderitz, photographed by Edda Schoedder, Digital Namibian Archive.*



*Figure 2: Pharmacy in Lüderitz, photographed by Edda Schoedder, Digital Namibian Archive.*

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<sup>13</sup> Komeda, *Kontaktarchitektur. Kolonialarchitektur in Namibia Zwischen Norm Und Übersetzung.*

were key elements to protect walls from solar radiation and created cool, shaded living spaces. In terms of materiality, the German standard was modified by substituting masonry with sun-dried bricks or quarried stone, which were the only locally available structural materials.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the influence of the Namibian context, the buildings are still very clearly imports of the German empire. They did not just serve as dwellings or infrastructure, but as deliberate instruments of power and representation. The German colonial administration used architecture to literally materialize its political presence and control in stone. Administrative buildings, churches and military installations were placed in very prominent locations and designed in monumental styles. The Alte Feste, one of the most significant military structures in German South-West Africa, was strategically built on elevated ground, overlooking the central valley of Windhoek. This allowed a clear overview over the surrounding area, including the routes through which people entered the settlement. After imposing laws that restricted free movement for certain indigenous groups, this spatial control was a key element of the exercise power. This principle was also applied on a larger scale, looking beyond Windhoek. In 1896, the rinderpest broke out in the North of Namibia and started to spread rapidly. To protect farms in central and south Namibia from the epidemic, German authorities imposed a strict veterinary border, the so-called “Red Line”. It soon developed into a political and administrative boundary separating the settler-dominated south from the largely African northern regions. What once started as a health-protection measure was then abused to reinforce racial and economic segregation. After the introduction of the Red Line, movement of people, livestock and goods were only allowed through checkpoints and police posts, which also affected particularly African pastoralists, whose cattle trading routes were cut off.<sup>15</sup> Administrative buildings like the Tintenpalast visually embodied the bureaucratic authority of the German settlers. Another typology which also has a big symbolic component are Christian churches, often placed in the centre of Namibian cities. Besides the mere functionality for the Germans as a religious institute, the churches also represented the supposed moral and cultural mission of the colonial project.

Not only the buildings themselves, but also their documentation and publication reflected the German imperial narrative, presenting the colonies as a successful extension of German culture and modernity. Carefully selected and orchestrated photographs were widely circulated in newspapers or on postcards in the German homeland, conveying the image that the African colony was orderly and prosperous. This propaganda completely turned a blind eye on the violence and oppression that indigenous people had to face daily. At the same time, African presence was kept to a minimum in these images. Africans are mostly either absent in the photographs or placed

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<sup>14</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884-1914*.

<sup>15</sup> Giorgio Miescher, *Namibia's Red Line: The History of a Veterinary and Settlement Border*, ed. Giorgio Miescher (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2012), [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137118318\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137118318_1).

at the margins of the frame, while Germans usually occupy the central positions.<sup>16</sup> Through this visual framing, buildings were seen as evidence of colonial success and thus as a legitimization of imperialistic ambitions.

This narrative is paradox, considering that the people who were pushed out of the representation of colonial structures were the same people who were forced to build them. While the design followed European aesthetics, the realization relied heavily on African labour and craftsmanship. As the German settlers upon arrival did not know much about how to build in this foreign environment, the local population had long-standing knowledge of stone extraction, clay preparation and earth-based construction methods. Based on their experience with the local arid climate in central Namibia, they adapted the European templates to work more efficiently, which connects back to Komeda's concept of Kontaktarchitektur. Additionally, African workers were also crucial for craft production and construction logistics. They formed the majority of construction workforce in many projects, especially in Windhoek and Swakopmund, carrying out physically demanding tasks like stone cutting, assembling scaffolding or transporting materials. However, the working conditions were extremely unequal and poor. During the early colonial period, Africans were already oppressed by the power hierarchy and had to accept unfair wage labour contracts and gradual expropriation of property and land. Despite the strong racism and discrimination, they still had some ability to move between employers at this point in time. After the 1904-1908 uprising of the Herero and Nama people, the poor conditions and maltreatment of Africans became even more severe. Survivors of the genocide were imprisoned in concentration camps and systematically exploited. They were assigned to settlers or construction project, where their movements were tightly tracked to prevent workers from leaving. The constant abuse, malnutrition and the spreading of diseases caused a significant increase of mortality.<sup>17</sup>

Considering the broader context of colonial history and the harsh working and living conditions imposed on indigenous populations under this regime, it becomes evident that colonial-era architecture carries a dual historical meaning. While it represents a period of infrastructural and urban development, it is also inseparable from a history of violence, exploitation, and domination. As a result, these buildings constitute a deeply emotional and complex subject for subsequent generations. The legacy of colonial rule did not simply disappear with independence, but rather, its social and cultural consequences continue to shape Namibian society today. This enduring historical burden raises an important question of how to deal with the colonial-era remains.

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<sup>16</sup> Wolfram Hartmann et al., eds., *Colonising Camera: Photographs In Making Of Namibian History* (Ohio University Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890-1923*.



*Figure 3: Alte Feste, Windhoek, renovation work, original photographer and date unknown, National Archives of Namibia.*

### **III Heritage and Memory in Post-Colonial Namibia**

After gaining independence in 1990, Namibia experienced a strong rural to urban movement, with many Namibians relocating to cities like Windhoek to seek employment. This rapid population increase led to urban expansion and the development of informal settlements. To accommodate for the many new residents, the government had to prioritize housing and infrastructure development, often at cost of heritage structures that were not regarded as suitable anymore. Additionally, the independence also required construction of new representative and administrative buildings. This was achieved by either directly replacing colonial-era structures, or by reusing them and adding new layers of meaning.

Shifting the focus from individual buildings towards urban planning, Namibian cities are also deeply influenced by structures of the colonial era. Namibia inherited a racially segregated urban structure, introduced by the German rule, but also especially by apartheid South Africa. Historically, white settlers lived in the centre of Windhoek, while

black Namibians were mainly located in the township Katutura.<sup>18</sup> Although the political system has changed dramatically with the independence, spatial practices in current planning are partly still reproducing colonial patterns. Urban planning is still a top-down process with very limited community participation. During Apartheid, the urban fabric was heavily impacted by hygienic discourses based on race, whereas today there is still a strong segregation, but based on social classes and income. In contemporary Namibian cities, there is a large number of gated communities and so-called country estates that are often directly adjacent to slums.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these deeply embedded structures, post-independent Namibia made an effort to gradually reframe public spaces, reflect national identity and to remember the atrocities committed to the Namibian population. This has been partly initiated by the government, but also by organisations and individual members of the public. For instance, most streets that referenced German politicians have been renamed to current Namibian politician names or African statesmen. However, Karen Miller, an architect in Swakopmund who is currently serving on the built heritage committee at the heritage council of Namibia, stated that the Namibian heritage approach primarily focuses on documentation and preservation.<sup>20</sup> In December 2004, the government released the National Heritage Act of Namibia, to “provide for the protection and conservation of places and objects of heritage significance”.<sup>21</sup> According to Miller, there is no difference in treatment of colonial-era buildings and non-colonial structures. The evaluation is solely based on a grading system to determine the degree of cultural importance and preservation measures that should be applied. Additionally, members of the public are encouraged to propose additional structures that should be added to the heritage catalogue. Miller argues that most conflicts with heritage preservation do not stem from political or cultural concerns about colonial architecture, but rather from modern day developers that value financial gain over heritage protection and regularly tear down heritage structures illegally. In that sense, Namibia is facing an issue that is present globally and not necessarily connected to its colonial history. The Heritage Council expresses a rather neutral position towards colonial-era structures, emphasizing more the general value of the building, based on data like age or design features. In fact, the label of “colonial building” is far less common than the term “historical or heritage building”, once again expressing that this categorization is not present in the Councils work.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Wade C. Pendleton, *Katutura : A Place Where We Stay : Life in a Post-Apartheid Township in Namibia* (Athens : Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1996), <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/3134828>.

<sup>19</sup> Jens Wiedow, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage,” March 16, 2026, Written interview via e-mail.

<sup>20</sup> Karen Miller, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage,” November 3, 2026, Written interview via e-mail.

<sup>21</sup> “National Heritage Act, 2004, (Act No. 27 of 2004),” Government of Namibia, December 29, 2004, <https://archive.gazettes.africa/archive/na/2004/na-government-gazette-dated-2004-12-29-no-3361.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Karen Miller, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage.”

However, this attitude does not speak for all Namibian citizens. In the past, there have also been political debates specifically about the colonial background of certain structures. The Reiterdenkmal is one of the most prominent examples of a politically driven removal. It was erected in 1912 in Windhoek to commemorate German soldiers who died during the wars against the Herero and Nama people. After the independence, this monument became increasingly controversial, as people saw it as a symbol of colonial oppression. In 2009, the statue was replaced by the Independence Memorial Museum and instead moved near Alte Feste. After further objections, authorities decided to remove the monument from the public eye and stored it in the courtyard of the Alte Feste museum.<sup>23</sup>



*Figure 4: Reiterdenkmal with Christuskirche (left) and Tintenpalast (right), original photographer and date unknown, National Archives of Namibia.*

Another case was the removal of the statue of German colonial officer Curt von François on November 23, 2022. Hildegard Titus, a local artist and activist in Windhoek, started an online petition named “A Curt Farewell” in 2020 to take down the statue, arguing that it glorifies colonial violence and at the same time, erases Black history. Von François, former governor of German South-West Africa from 1891 to 1894, was falsely regarded as the founder of Windhoek, eclipsing the rightful founder named Jonker Afrikaner. The petition received a lot of support from the local communities until, eventually in 2022, the City Council announced to take down the statue. However, many German-speaking

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<sup>23</sup> Janne Lahti, *Südwester Reiter: Fear, Belonging, and Settler Colonial Violence in Namibia*, (Abingdon, Oxfordshire), ahead of print, May 22, 2022, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2078073>.

Namibians and descendants of von François were outraged about the decision and protested the removal. Ruprecht von François, his great-grandson, found this decision very unfair, stating that his great-grandfather did a lot for Namibia and its infrastructure. According to him, Namibians who are in favour of the removal have an “inferiority complex”.<sup>24</sup> As most building companies are owned by German-speaking Namibians, it was difficult to get a crane for the removal, as these owners didn’t want to be seen as traitors to their community.<sup>25</sup> In the end, there were only very few proposals from citizens for how to replace the statue. Instead of a permanent new monument, the empty pedestal in front of the City Council has since been used for temporary art installations.<sup>26</sup> This was the first time that a colonial monument was taken down due to civic activism in the country. This reveals that there is still tension and a discrepancy of perception between Namibian citizens of German descent and Namibians of indigenous communities. Naitsikile lizyenda, editor of the University of Namibia Press, also observed that Namibia recently has begun to engage more critically with its colonial past and to have more visible discussions about the matter. In her perception, the pragmatic approach of the Heritage Council was especially prevalent right after the independence, whereas now, people are starting to question more how these buildings should be interpreted.<sup>27</sup>



*Figure 5: Removal of the Curt von François statue, photographed by Sven-Eric Stender, 23.11.2023, Windhoek*

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<sup>24</sup> Shelleygan Petersen, *Great-Grandson Says Von François ‘Did a Lot for This Country,’* October 31, 2022, <https://www.namibian.com.na/great-grandson-says-von-francois-did-a-lot-for-this-country/>.

<sup>25</sup> Constanze Blum, *When Cultures of Remembrance Clash: Contesting Memorialization in Namibia’s Urban Spaces*, January 3, 2024, [https://www.boell.de/en/2024/02/29/when-cultures-remembrance-clash-contesting-memorialization-namibias-urban-spaces?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.boell.de/en/2024/02/29/when-cultures-remembrance-clash-contesting-memorialization-namibias-urban-spaces?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>26</sup> Eva-Rakel Johannes, *Celebrating Love and Peace*, June 12, 2024, [https://www.namibian.com.na/celebrating-love-and-peace/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.namibian.com.na/celebrating-love-and-peace/?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>27</sup> Naitsikile lizyenda, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage,” March 17, 2026, Written interview via e-mail.

According to Miller, there used to be some animosity of Namibians against German colonial architecture, but nowadays the focus is more on the economic benefits that it brings to the country. Towns like Lüderitz or Swakopmund still have very intact German-style city centre streetscapes that “appear almost frozen in time” which turned them into major tourist destinations. This creates a lot of jobs for locals and draws many people from rural areas into these cities.<sup>28</sup> Colonial-era buildings play a significant role in marketing, often being represented in guidebooks, tourism websites, or on social media. While lizyenda agrees with the importance of colonial architecture for the tourism sector, she perceives this with a more critical view. Usually, its historic or aesthetic value is emphasised, while the violent colonial background is being downplayed or ignored, creating a distinct heritage tourism narrative. She claims that some Namibians feel “uneasy” about the way some tourists engage with these spaces<sup>29</sup>, although there are reportedly also tour guides who do entice visitors to interact more critically with these buildings, especially at very problematic sites like Shark Island, location of the former concentration camp.<sup>30</sup>

Miller’s and lizyenda’s perspectives on colonial architecture differ significantly. While they agree on the significance for tourism and the legal framework to protect heritage buildings, it becomes clear that the representative of the Heritage Council has a much more pragmatic and depoliticised view on the matter, while lizyenda stresses historical trauma and contested meaning. She explains that communities such as the Ovaherero and Nama usually experience colonial architecture with a stronger sense of historical injustice due to its ties to a very painful colonial past. German-speaking Namibians on the other hand, tend to call for preservation and historical continuity. According to her, Namibians living in urban regions hold a more ambivalent view. Karen Miller instead focused less on perceptions of different communities, but more on the institutional and professional approach to heritage management. In her opinion, Namibia is doing a very good job with dealing with heritage infrastructure, especially since the legislature and structures have become increasingly organised and structured.<sup>31</sup> lizyenda criticizes that the Heritage Council focuses too much on preservation only, but there is still a lack of contextualization. She calls for more involvement of descendant communities in the processes, as well as adaptive reuse of structures in a way that serves the public rather than remaining static monuments of the past.<sup>32</sup>

Jens Widow, architect and member of the Namibian Heritage Council, Namibian Scientific Society and the Green Building Council of Namibia, adds the influence of socio-economic differences. He observed a greater indifference towards colonial architecture within lower-income groups. Younger generations tend to be more critical but often cannot formulate alternatives. Indifference can also stem from financial and

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<sup>28</sup> Karen Miller, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage.”

<sup>29</sup> Naitsikile lizyenda, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage.”

<sup>30</sup> Jens Wiedow, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage.”

<sup>31</sup> Karen Miller, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage.”

<sup>32</sup> Naitsikile lizyenda, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage.”

structural conditions rather than just lack of interest. Wiedow argues that in a “building scarce country”, preservation and reuse is also a practical necessity. However, many heritage buildings, especially in rural areas, silently disappear, as there is no money or desire to renovate them. In terms of contextualisation, Wiedow states that during early independence, there was an effort to replace colonial plaques with new ones, but this apparently has stopped, leaving many structures uncommented and many residents unaware of the history behind the buildings.<sup>33</sup>

This discussion with representatives of different Namibian groups highlights again the complexity of perspectives on colonial architecture in Namibia, where different layers of meaning coexist and are understood differently across social, professional, and cultural contexts.

Stephanie Roland, architect and researcher investigated a few more main perspectives among Windhoek’s population, using a mixed, qualitative methodology like mental map drawings, photo elicitation exercises and interviews. She found that in general, many residents do not see colonial-era monuments as central to their everyday perception of the city. However, participants highlighted several different angles, such as the historical value of such monument and the importance of preserving them as artifacts of the past. Others perceive them as confusing or difficult to interpret, often lacking knowledge about their historical meaning. Another group of people, especially prevalent among young residents are indifferent towards the monuments and did mostly not include them in their mental maps. This adds to the perspective of colonial-era monuments being symbols of past domination and contested historical memory. Roland concludes that colonial architecture in Windhoek holds fragmented meaning, which is hard to fully unravel, even for residents themselves, leaving the city with an uncanny effect.<sup>34</sup> Her group of participants included Oshiwambo speakers and members of the Nama community, but no German speakers. Rolands’s findings largely corroborate Karen Miller’s interview responses. Both state that colonial architecture often becomes depoliticised in everyday perception, and that residents relate more to functional spaces than to the symbolic meaning of monuments. Roland observed that some people justify preservation not with ideological reasons, but with benefits like tourism, which is also reinforced by Miller’s statement.

To further investigate the perception of German colonial architecture amongst the Namibian population, an interesting source can also be social media. According to

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<sup>33</sup> Jens Wiedow, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage.”

<sup>34</sup> Stephanie Roland, “Uncanny Windhoek: Mapping the Spatial Logic, Urban Imaginaries, and Hauntings of an African Capital City” (RMIT University, 2023), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368570623\\_The\\_Uncanny\\_Capital\\_Mapping\\_the\\_Historical\\_Spatial\\_Evolution\\_of\\_Windhoek](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368570623_The_Uncanny_Capital_Mapping_the_Historical_Spatial_Evolution_of_Windhoek).

Nermin El Sherif's work, social media platforms are modern archives of everyday life.<sup>35</sup> They can act as a "memoryscape", where users construct narratives and shared imaginaries. The social media evaluation does not aim to represent national attitudes in Namibia. Instead, it provides a qualitative snapshot of publicly available online discourse on the platforms Reddit, Facebook and Instagram. The sample is limited in size and shaped by platform algorithms, language use, and visibility biases.

The type of discourse and interaction depends on the platform, as they are structured differently and have different aims. Instagram is not really designed for in-depth discussions, but rather to show aesthetic vacation photos. When searching for multiple variations of hashtags connected to Namibian heritage architecture, particularly German colonial buildings in Namibia, the main narrative seems to be the popularity of these structures among tourists. Most of these posts focus on the aesthetic value of heritage buildings but mostly leave out contextualisation or a critical comment about the historic background.<sup>36</sup> The most popular subject for photographers is the Christuskirche, which aligns with the claim on its website, stating that the Christuskirche is one of the most photographed tourist attractions in Namibia.<sup>37</sup> On Facebook, one can also find tourism advertisement and aesthetic presentations of German colonial architecture.<sup>38</sup> However, the posting format on this platform allows for more flexibility on written dialogue. Newspaper articles about preservation debates sometimes spark discussions in the comment section. One example is a post about the recently proposed renovation of the Alte Post building in Swakopmund. Almost all the 73 commenters agree that the building should be preserved, although there are differences in the desired approach to do so. Many users understand the necessity of refurbishing the interior of the building, as the outdated infrastructure can be a safety hazard, while others consider this intervention too invasive and fear that only keeping the facade will diminish the authenticity of the building. The consensus among the users commenting under this post is that the Alte Post should be preserved in a way that also serves the local community in Swakopmund instead of just aesthetically appeal to tourists. However, it is noticeable that the majority of these users seems to be white, and the names sometimes suggest connection to

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<sup>35</sup> Nermin Elsherif, "Social Media, the Archives of Tomorrow," in *Digital Politics, Digital Histories, Digital Futures: New Approaches for Historicising, Politicising and Imagining the Digital*, ed. Adi Kuntsman and Liu Xin (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80382-201-320231003>.

<sup>36</sup> "See for Example, @sa.Travel, 'WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA...,' Instagram, August 18, 2025, [Instagramhttps://www.instagram.com/p/DNfFLM7Mtlj/?img\\_index=1am](https://www.instagram.com/p/DNfFLM7Mtlj/?img_index=1am); @cyberkax, 'Windhoek' Instagram, Oktober 24, 2025, [Instagramhttps://www.instagram.com/p/DQM2au1DPk1/?img\\_index=1am](https://www.instagram.com/p/DQM2au1DPk1/?img_index=1am); @goselfdrivetours, 'Our 14-Day Small Group Tour...,' Instagram, Oktober 28, 2025, [#windhoekhttps://www.instagram.com/p/DQW91ODPgdl/](https://www.instagram.com/p/DQW91ODPgdl/) • Instagram," n.d.

<sup>37</sup> Christuskirche, *The Soul of Windhoek*, Christuskirche Website, n.d., accessed January 4, 2026, <https://christuskirche.namib.site/>.

<sup>38</sup> "Namibia Budget Travellers. 2026. 'Swakopmund - German Colonial Architecture', January 27, 2026. [https://www.facebook.com/groups/1141213682749677/permalink/2933998423471185.](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1141213682749677/permalink/2933998423471185/)" n.d.

European ancestry.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, under a post about Alte Feste, most commentators calling for the restoration of this historically significant structure are white, while one of the only people of colour in this comment section wrote: “The fact that we go to a structure where our ancestors were watched and killed or left to die (...) it’s a shame”.<sup>40</sup> Interpreting this through El Sherif’s theory, these comment sections are micro archives of contemporary dynamics around the heritage discourse that capture the complexity and multiplicity of perspectives.

Reddit is a social media platform that is more designed for discussions and long-form comments in so-called threads. When searching for German colonial architecture in Namibia, very little is posted about specific buildings but rather more about the general Namibian society, urban design and land ownership among the different ethnic groups. Residents of Namibian cities like Swakopmund or Windhoek state that generally Namibians are not hostile towards German culture or architecture, though this might differ for certain native groups.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, it is a big concern that to this day the white German-speaking citizens only make up a few percent of the population, yet they own most of the land, which is also an inherited injustice that needs to be challenged.<sup>42</sup>

Although colonial architecture seems to be peripheral in the lives of many locals, these buildings still hold great value when analysed through the lens of heritage and memory study. According to Vanessa Ruhlrig, colonial architecture can be seen as material carriers of historical memory that help documenting Namibia’s past and shape the symbolic landscape and cultural identity of the country.<sup>43</sup> In most cases, they are not being actively perceived as such by locals, but they are in a sense silent witnesses of historic events. This lens is especially important for heritage institutions and professionals to help evaluate the worth of colonial-era structures. This perspective does not necessarily contest Roland’s observation of a limited importance to everyday citizens but rather adds

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<sup>39</sup> “Swakopmund – for the People. 2026. ‘The National Heritage Council of Namibia...’, March 10, 2026. [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0RPaQzqLitxAi2Mtm2P8sw8m1oWWLLSgTsZTo2RtYV7q7w2RkHwuHTD8mXvwj5xFbl&id=61559809585140.](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0RPaQzqLitxAi2Mtm2P8sw8m1oWWLLSgTsZTo2RtYV7q7w2RkHwuHTD8mXvwj5xFbl&id=61559809585140.),” n.d.

<sup>40</sup> “Comment by Caroline Ripuree Jenie Araes on Etosha Namibia, ‘Fort Namutoni: Where History Meets the Wild!’ Facebook, December 17, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/Etoshanamibiarevel/Posts/pfbid0zAbbUg1f2dTuy24TYKkAjrGfwCTksEcLirsV3tSemdQB5FPVg81cQkoTSJXVdgEwl.>,” n.d.

<sup>41</sup> “Comment by u/Redcomet29 on ‘How Do Namibians Feel about Germany?’, Reddit, 2022, [https://www.reddit.com/r/Namibia/comments/ye79kd/how\\_do\\_namibians\\_feel\\_about\\_germany/?solution=ef1f4b98b28b2d4def1f4b98b28b2d4d&js\\_challenge=1&token=bbbe4bf1c9a2b5160829c4be34da586149b8163324e0714604bea5a2e22cb222.](https://www.reddit.com/r/Namibia/comments/ye79kd/how_do_namibians_feel_about_germany/?solution=ef1f4b98b28b2d4def1f4b98b28b2d4d&js_challenge=1&token=bbbe4bf1c9a2b5160829c4be34da586149b8163324e0714604bea5a2e22cb222.),” n.d.

<sup>42</sup> “Comment by u/unitedstatesofLABIA on ‘How Do Namibians Feel about Germany?’, Reddit, 2022, [https://www.reddit.com/r/Namibia/comments/ye79kd/how\\_do\\_namibians\\_feel\\_about\\_germany/?solution=ef1f4b98b28b2d4def1f4b98b28b2d4d&js\\_challenge=1&token=bbbe4bf1c9a2b5160829c4be34da586149b8163324e0714604bea5a2e22cb222.](https://www.reddit.com/r/Namibia/comments/ye79kd/how_do_namibians_feel_about_germany/?solution=ef1f4b98b28b2d4def1f4b98b28b2d4d&js_challenge=1&token=bbbe4bf1c9a2b5160829c4be34da586149b8163324e0714604bea5a2e22cb222.),” n.d.

<sup>43</sup> Vanessa Ruhlrig, “Colonial Architecture as Heritage: German Colonial Architecture in Post-Colonial Windhoek” (University of Cape Town, 2018), <https://open.uct.ac.za/items/0469570b-934e-4fb5-a81d-c5e9f493131c>.

a new perspective to the meaning of colonial architecture for the contemporary Namibian society.

This complexity of different nuances of relevance for different people can be better understood through the concept of *lieux de memoire*, developed by the French historian Pierre Nora. He argues that societies create sites of memory after direct, lived memory of historical events begins to fade and must instead be preserved through symbolic places or monuments. These sites function as physical anchors of collective memory, where historical narratives are stored, interpreted, and sometimes contested.<sup>44</sup> German colonial buildings in Namibia can therefore be interpreted as a form of *lieux de memoire*, as they are latent memory sites where historical meaning can suddenly become politically activated. Even if locals don't necessarily actively think about this architecture every day, the buildings still function as repositories of collective memory.

#### **IV Well-Known Case Studies in Windhoek**

To better understand how these dynamics unfold in practice, this chapter focusses on three prominent colonial-era structures in Windhoek and analyses their historical development and the diverse perceptions they evoke among Namibians.

The Alte Feste is one of the oldest buildings in Windhoek and one of the most important remaining colonial-era structures in Namibia that has also been subject to many discussions about heritage preservation in the country. The fort was built in 1890 by German colonial forces as a military headquarters for the German army, the so-called *Schutztruppe*. Beyond the logistic function, it also represented colonial control and military dominance over the indigenous communities, which was very directly emphasized by the location on a hill, overlooking all of Windhoek. Thus, it is also deeply connected to the period of the Herero and Nama genocide and perceived by some as a central symbol for national trauma. During World War I, the complex was taken over by South African forces and repurposed for various administrative and military uses but still continued to represent colonial- and apartheid-era structures. After Namibia's independence in 1990, the site was re-evaluated in terms of function and meaning for the citizens. As this building is very prominent in the city, it was one of the few buildings that were not just kept uncommented but that was clearly contextualised. The Alte Feste was eventually transformed into a part of the National Museum of Namibia and serves today as an exhibition site and landmark of the city of Windhoek. Thematically, the exhibitions are deeply connected with the building itself. They include information about anti-colonial resistance, SWAPO liberation struggle, as well as recognition of historical Namibian figures. This conversion was initiated by the government as part of a wider

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<sup>44</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24, JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

reshaping of the symbolic landscape.<sup>45</sup> Since 2024, the complex has been undergoing renovations that are also partially funded by the German government<sup>46</sup>, turning it into Namibia's Genocide Museum and a cultural centre.<sup>47</sup> Since the independence, this site has been a very contested landmark in Windhoek. Critics argue that the processes around the Alte Feste have not been transparent and led top-down, without the involvement of the Herero and Nama people, risking a reproduction of colonial narratives. Additionally, the fact that the building is still very prominent within the city fabric, can be interpreted as persisting German domination.<sup>48</sup>



*Figure 6: Schutztruppe parading in front of Alte Feste, original photographer and date unknown, National Archives of Namibia.*

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<sup>45</sup> George Steinmetz and Julia Hell, *The Visual Archive of Colonialism: Germany and Namibia* (Duke University Press, 2006), 175–83, <https://public.websites.umich.edu/~geostein/docs/Steinmetz%20and%20Hell%20Public%20Culture%202005%20Visual%20Archive%20of%20colonialism.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Jens Wiedow, “Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage.”

<sup>47</sup> “<https://www.altefeste.com/>,” *The New Alte Feste*, 2025, <https://www.altefeste.com/>.

<sup>48</sup> Núrel Bahí Reitz and Sabine Mannitz, “Remembering Genocide in Namibia,” Paper, Hessische Stiftung Friedens- und Konfliktforschung, 2021, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-73450-7>.

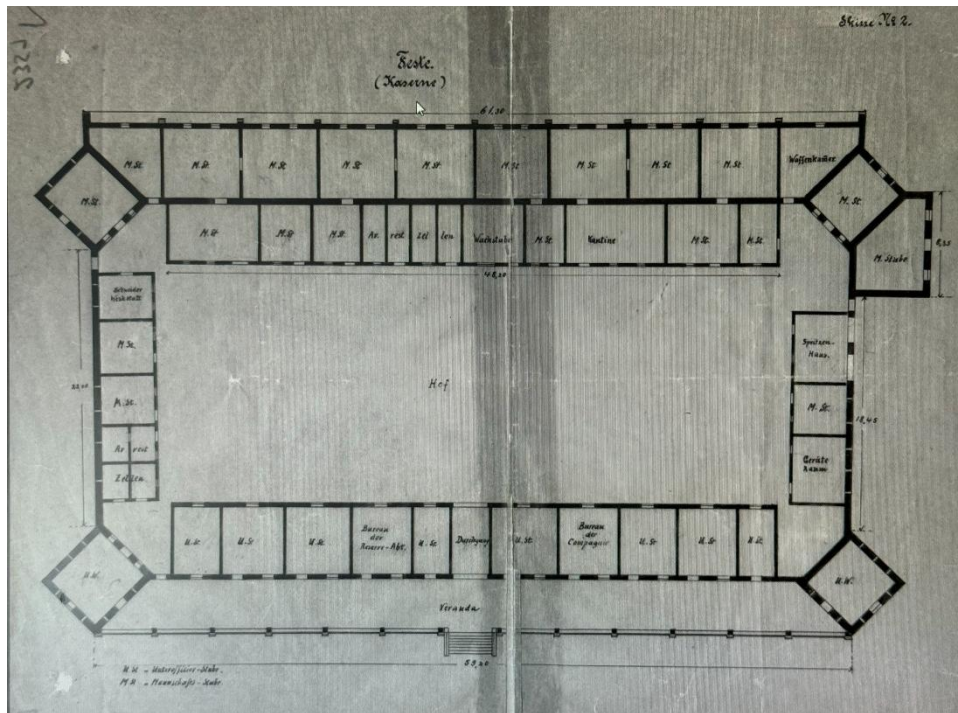


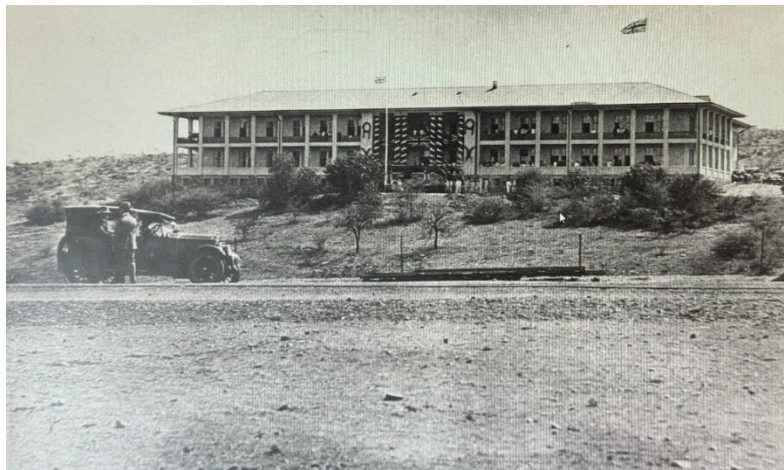
Figure 7: Floor Plan of Alte Feste, original photographer and date unknown, National Archives of Namibia.

Similarly to Alte Feste, Namibia's parliament building also went through a symbolically significant transition. The so-called Tintenpalast was built in 1912 to 1913 as the administrative headquarters of the German colonial rule, constructed, like many other buildings, through forced labour of indigenous people. This very monumental and centrally located structure was once again a tool to express authority and German superiority. The buildings symmetry and formal layout visually communicate state power and hierarchy, while reflecting key elements of imported Wilhelminian architecture.<sup>49</sup> Thus, for many Namibians on the other hand, the building became a symbol of oppression and exclusion. During the late colonial period, as Namibia moved towards independence, Tintenpalast was still seen as a centre of imposed authority. It manifested a system which Namibians perceived as illegitimate or externally controlled by South Africa, while trying to give the impression of self-governance.<sup>50</sup> This perception changed drastically after the independence in 1990 when the lower house of the Namibian Parliament, the National Assembly moved into the building. Suddenly it became a symbol of democracy and freedom, contrasting its original purpose. Not only the building itself was reinterpreted, but also the surroundings. Statues and monuments were added to honour Namibian anti-colonial leaders like Hosea Kutako, a traditional leader of the Ovaherero people. The gardens in front of the parliament building have been appropriated by citizens as a leisure

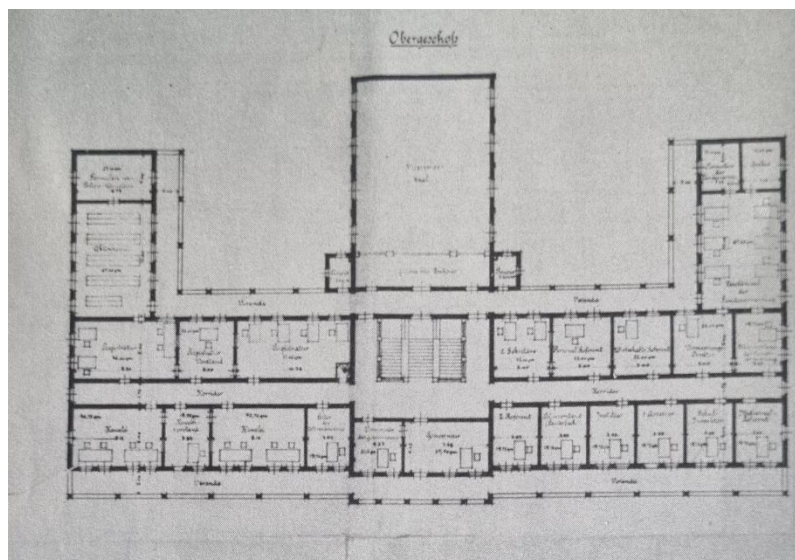
<sup>49</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884-1914*, 287-299.

<sup>50</sup> Louis Freedberg, "Inside Namibia; Stirrings in a Forgotten Land.," *The Nation*, 1986, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Inside+Namibia%3b+stirrings+in+a+forgotten+land.-a04502575>.

park and have been a popular meeting spot for locals until its closure in 2017. The gardens have been fenced off due to multiple reasons, some being environmental restoration and rehabilitation, security concerns and vandalism, as well as the Covid-19 restrictions. This took away a “therapeutic open space” of “utmost importance” to Windhoek’s citizens, leading to a petition demanding the reopening, which so far has not been successful.<sup>51</sup> The Tintenpalast is simultaneously an artifact of colonial domination and a symbol of democratic governance and sovereignty in contemporary Namibia. It is a key example for colonial-era structures that have evolved over time and now represent a layered and negotiated memory space.



*Figure 8: General Hertzog’s visit to Tintenpalast, photographed by Edda Schoedder, 1924, National Archives of Namibia.*



*Figure 9: Sketch of the 4. Design for the administrative building in Windhoek, First Floor, 1910, Walter Peters, Baukunst in Südwestafrika.*

<sup>51</sup> Tanja Bause, ‘Open Parliament Gardens to All,’ 2022, [https://www.we.com.na/local-news-we/open-parliament-gardens-to-all2022-11-09?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.we.com.na/local-news-we/open-parliament-gardens-to-all2022-11-09?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

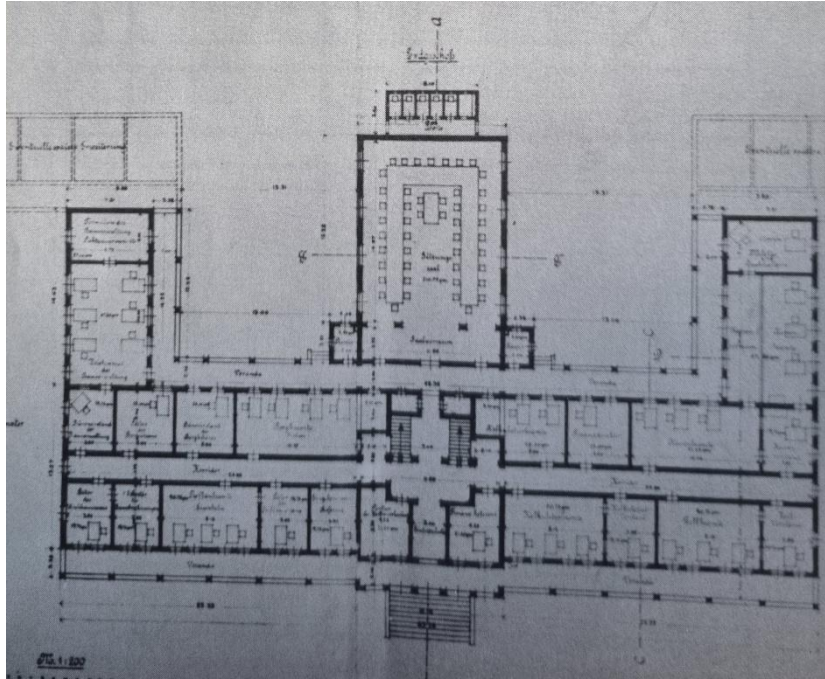


Figure 10: Sketch of the 4. Design for the administrative building in Windhoek, Ground Floor, 1910, Walter Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika*.

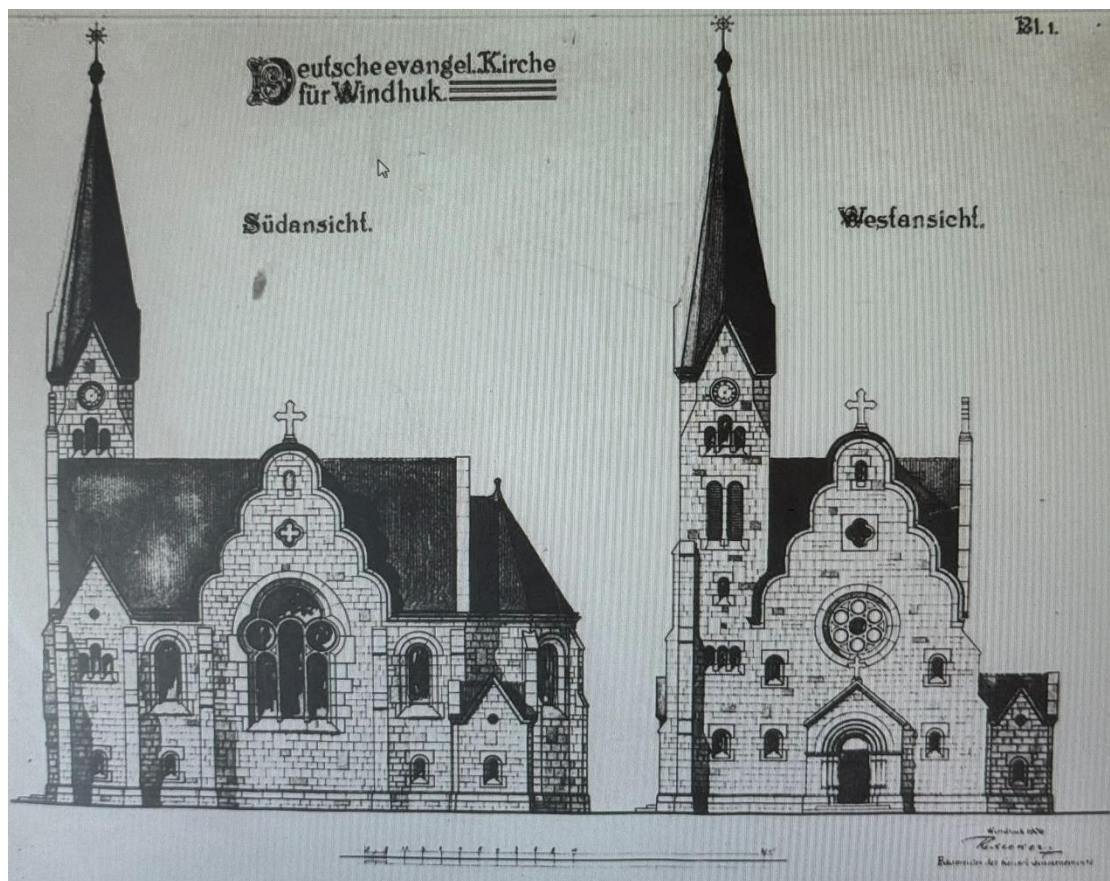
A third example for prominent colonial-era structures in Windhoek is the Christuskirche, built between 1907 and 1910, shortly after the suppression of the Herero and Nama uprisings. Therefore, the church was officially framed as a monument of peace, although peace did not stem from mutual reconciliation, but it was rather imposed after the violent suppression of indigenous people. Architecturally, the church also represents imported European styles, primarily Neo-Romanesque and Art Nouveau elements.<sup>52</sup> During the period of German colonial rule, the Christuskirche served as a religious centre for German settlers and as a symbol of their cultural and moral superiority. During South African rule, the church lost its explicitly German political function but remained active as a place of worship, mainly for the German-speaking Lutheran community. Now the significant difference in perception in comparison to the Alte Feste or the Tintenpalast happened after the independence. Unlike the other structures, the church was not politically targeted for removal, despite its similar prominence and central location in the city centre. It gradually became a less controversial structure, due to its religious function and lacking connection to military dominance.<sup>53</sup> The Christuskirche became a historic landmark and one of the most photographed buildings in Namibia with high popularity among tourists, while still serving as a religious institution. However, the church is still not uncontested, as some Namibians see it as an uncritical reminder of colonial power<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Peters, *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884-1914*.

<sup>53</sup> Vanessa Ruhlig, "Colonial Architecture as Heritage: German Colonial Architecture in Post-Colonial Windhoek."

<sup>54</sup> Naitsikile lizyenda, "Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage."

since little measures have been taken to contextualise the background and working conditions of labourers. According to Miller, the Christuskirche is an accepted National Monument and very popular among wide parts of the population. She states that churches in general are far more frequented in Namibia than in Europe and that many families go there as part of their Sunday routine, building a strong social structure at the same time.<sup>55</sup> The case of the Christuskirche shows clearly how perception shapes preservation. The function of an active church seems to favour public acceptance rather than a static monument. Additionally, in this case, the aesthetic appreciation can overshadow the historical context, leading to a widely positive image among Namibians and tourists. The Christuskirche is being presented in a very different heritage narrative than other colonial-era structures and faces less criticism but is still object of contemporary heritage discourse.



*Figure 11: Construction plans of Christuskirche, South and West elevation, photographed by Edda Schoedder, 1906, National Archives of Namibia.*

<sup>55</sup> Karen Miller, "Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage."



*Figure 12: Christuskirche soon after completion, photographed by Rolf Schneider, 1910, National Archives of Namibia.*

## **V Conclusion**

Gathering all the data, it becomes evident that the contemporary perception of German colonial architecture in Namibia is very broad and complex.

A key finding is that the institutional sphere, namely the Heritage Council, views heritage architecture rather pragmatically and in a depoliticised manner. Colonial structures are not evaluated as such but through other criteria such as age, architectural value and condition. In contemporary Namibia, economic considerations like land value and pressures through urban development play a very decisive role in the decision making around preservation or demolition.

Some Namibian citizens share this rather unpolitical view and a certain ambivalence towards these structures, especially those in lower income groups, or communities that have not been affected by the violence of German colonial forces. As found in other scholarly works, many Namibians don't attribute colonial structures great importance in their daily life, if they are not part of their frequently used spaces.<sup>56</sup> This, however, does not mean that these structures don't hold any meaning but rather that their significance sometimes operates on a more latent level.

In fact, in some cases and under specific circumstances, this architecture can become highly politicised and sparks public outrage and debates. As illustrated with examples like the Reiterdenkmal or the Curt von François statue, especially structures with direct association to military presence of the Germans and violence against the indigenous communities reveal tensions between different social groups. Referring to Pierre Nora's theory, these structures are the that retain the potential to become activated as symbols of historical injustice. In that sense, German colonial architecture in Namibia can be understood as a form of materialised collective memory. So even when it is not always actively acknowledged, it presents sites where historical narratives are embedded in physical environment. They silently carry traces of colonial power relations, forced labour and cultural imposition, while also being reinterpreted and altered in post-independence Namibia. This complexity is illustrated by the three case studies Alte Feste, Tintenpalast and Christuskirche, who all have undergone multiple steps of transformation but yet never fully detached from their colonial past.

This paper also highlights that, depending on ethnicity, socio-economic factors, language or cultural factors, different communities have different relations to this type of architecture. Specifically for the Ovaherero and Nama communities, colonial architecture is strongly tied to a legacy of trauma and dispossession. For others, especially the German-speaking community, it represents continuity, heritage and architectural value. Between these two positions lies a wide spectrum of ambivalence and lack of knowledge about the background of certain buildings, where mainly aesthetic or economic considerations are in the foreground. In general, it can be observed that in recent years, Namibia has begun to engage more critically with its colonial past and the discourse about heritage treatment has become more visible.<sup>57</sup>

Building on these insights, this thesis suggests that dealing with colonial heritage appropriately requires to move beyond purely preservationist approaches more towards inclusive and context-sensitive strategies. This includes especially a stronger involvement of descendant communities, critical contextualisation of historical narratives and adaptive reuse practices that serve contemporary societal needs. Without

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<sup>56</sup> Stephanie Roland, "Uncanny Windhoek: Mapping the Spatial Logic, Urban Imaginaries, and Hauntings of an African Capital City."

<sup>57</sup> Naitsikile Izyenda, "Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage."

such measures, there is the danger to unintentionally reproduce colonial-era patterns and power structures.

Finally, this paper also points to several limitations and suggestions for further studies. While this thesis includes interviews and qualitative insights of representatives, it cannot represent the full diversity of communities and opinions. In particular, more research is needed on the perspectives of communities directly affected by colonial violence as well as the role of African labour during the colonial period.<sup>58</sup> Due to spatial and time constraints of this paper, it was unfortunately not possible to work with broader participatory research methods with communities in Namibia. This would be an interesting approach for further research on this topic.

In conclusion, the perception of German colonial architecture in Namibia cannot be reduced to one single narrative. It is not just a narrative of heritage, oppression or identity, but all at once in different intensities and layers. This type of architecture is continuously negotiated, reflecting the ongoing process of confronting and redefining the colonial past within the present.

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<sup>58</sup> Naitzikile lizyenda, "Interview About Local Namibian Perceptions of German Colonial Heritage."

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