

# ADDRESSING THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Collective Memory of Colonialism in the Urban  
Landscape of Windhoek and Bremen



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## **Abstract**

This research explores the relationship between the decolonisation of memoryscapes and the design of urban space. How can design contribute to an urban representation of pluriversal narratives? To find an answer to this question, I conducted a qualitative case study of Bremen and Windhoek, two cities that are connected by their shared colonial history and that I thus investigated in relation to one another. Through semi-structured interviews with actors who work in decolonisation and participant observations, I analysed the current state of collective memory of colonialism in Bremen and Windhoek. I found that although actors work on the decolonisation of public memory, a collective amnesia of colonial histories persists in both cities. In the second part of the research, I explored what visions the actors have about the future of the collective memory of colonialism. I discovered that conversations about colonial histories are key to a decolonial memoryscape. From these visions, I developed a set of urban design guidelines for Bremen and Windhoek that I then applied in a pilot proposal project. Overall, this research shows how crucial a relational lens on cities and their colonial memory is to achieve a true decolonialisation. To understand what constitutes a place, it has to be analysed in relation to other spaces in the world.

**Keywords:** Decolonialisation, Collective Memory, Urban Space, Pluriverse, Windhoek, Namibia, Design

Very close to the central train station of Bremen, there is a monument that towers above the Nelson Mandela Park. And while it is so present in size and location, I only got to learn about it a few years ago. My mother, who grew up in Bremen, used to walk past it as a child and kept asking the grown-ups what it meant, but no one knew the story behind it. The monument I am talking about is called “der Elefant” (the elephant). It is a 10 m high statue of an elephant made from red bricks that have weathered to grey over the years. The elephant tells a story of colonial occupation, of nazi imperialism, and of an attempt to decolonise the past.

On the other side of the world, a civil servant walks up the stairs of the City of Windhoek building. To her left, there is a red, abstract heart sculpture that does not quite match the old pedestal it is installed upon. Until a few years ago, a statue of a man in military attire who looked over Independence Avenue used to be at the place where the heart is today. Attached to the pedestal was a plate that described the man as the founder of Windhoek. I too have passed by this statue many times, but I never properly noticed it.

It represents a story of colonial occupation, of collective amnesia, and of a civil movement challenging the narratives of Windhoek.



Elephant Statue



Curt von Francois Statue (taken by Hildegard Titus)



Removal Curt von Francois Statue (taken by Hildegard Titus)

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# 1 | Introduction

This research investigates the current collective memory of colonialism in urban spaces. Through a qualitative case study in Bremen and Windhoek, two cities at the opposite ends of the German colonial enterprise, I aim to understand these landscapes in relation to one another and to develop design strategies to foster their decolonialisation. Arturo Escobar's theory of Designs for the Pluriverse, characterised by its idea of a pluriversal and deeply relational world, is at the centre of my research.



# Background

## Contextual Urgency

To better understand the urgency of the topic, I first want to establish Germany's colonial past and an understanding of the relationship between Namibia and Germany more generally. In the 1880s and within the framework of a late German arrival to the European imperialism movement, a merchant from Bremen laid eyes on the coast of Southern Africa (De Rivera, 2024). Adolf Lüderitz's goal: to develop a trade centre with a harbour. So, at the beginning of 1883, Lüderitz sent the Bremen-born merchant Heinrich Vogelsang, who was based in South Africa, to a natural harbour that was situated right at the border of the Namib desert. At that time, the region was predominantly home to two indigenous tribes: the Nama and the Herero. Back then, these tribes, who would later be subject to the horrors of the German genocide, were competing over land and livestock. Vogelsang reached out to the Nama chief Joseph Fredericks II. with a land purchase agreement of what Fredericks II. thought was 25 English square miles. What he did not know is that Lüderitz had planned to trick him, by drafting an agreement that was based on German miles. So instead of selling about 65 km<sup>2</sup> of land, Fredericks II., who could not read the German agreement, ended up selling 1376 km<sup>2</sup> to Lüderitz (De Rievera, 2024).

A bit later that year, Lüderitz sent Vogelsang to the area again, this time he wanted to use the conflict between the Herero and Nama to his benefit. He offered Fredericks II. gold and 60 guns in return for the political sovereignty of 10 000 German miles of land. The greatest part of that area was not owned by Fredericks II.. Instead, other indigenous tribes lived on that land without any concept of landownership

(De Rivera, 2024). Within one year, Lüderitz gained control over a big coastal area with a harbour at its centre, a harbour that to this day is called Lüderitz.

A year later, on the other side of the world, Bismarck initiated the Berlin Conference, a conference where Africa was divided between the European powers (Mair, 2005). As part of this conference, Bismarck legitimized the land grabbing done by Lüderitz and officially declared what was then referred to German South West Africa (today Namibia) a German protectorate (De Rivera, 2024; Nebe, 2021). What followed was 31 years of brutal colonial rule by Germany and the first genocide of the 20th century, a history that I discuss in greater detail in the context chapter. However, what is crucial to know right now, is that the tribes most affected by the German operation were the Herero and Nama, who both revolted against the Germans. During the entire German occupation, an estimate of 65 000 Herero and 10 000 Nama were killed (Wende, 2022). To put this into relation, 80% of the Herero and 50% of the Nama people died at the hands of German soldiers (Wende, 2022).

With the German defeat in the First World War, the League of Nations assigned the mandate over the German protectorate of South West Africa to South Africa (MEFT Namibia, 2025). This mandate was renewed by the UN, which replaced the League of Nations. While South Africa had the mandate to rule over the independent territory of South West Africa, it had no support for the annexation of the region. Nevertheless, South Africa annexed South West Africa and later implemented the South African

apartheid structure. In the 1960s, the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), today Namibia's leading party, began its armed liberation struggles against the South African regime, resulting in the official independence of Namibia on 21 March 1990 (MEFT Namibia, 2025).

While German colonialism and apartheid officially ended that day, 70% of Namibian farmland is still owned by white Namibians and approximately 250 farms by descendants of the German colonisers (Al Jazeera, 2018). Namibia is ranked the second most unequal country in the world when it comes to wealth distribution, and reparation talks between Namibia and Germany are still ongoing (Tendane, 2023; Al Jazeera, 2025). Germany officially acknowledged the genocide in 2021 and declared its investment of 1 billion euros in development aid over the next 30 years (Al Jazeera, 2025). It is important to note, that the government intentionally refers to this payment as development aid and reconciliation instead of reparations. Besides, the acknowledgement and reconciliation only encompass the genocide and not broader colonial injustices (Al Jazeera, 2025). This brings two considerations. Firstly, Germany does not trust Namibia with handling justice on its own terms. Secondly, Germany is hesitating to acknowledge broader colonial injustices, because that might spark more reparation claims in other parts of the world. Descendants from both the Nama and Herero have expressed frustration about being excluded from the conversation around reparations, a frustration that they have voiced again during the newly introduced Namibian Genocide Remembrance Day (Al Jazeera, 2025).

## Spatial and Social Context

With the arrival of the Bremen merchant Lüderitz in Namibia, the histories of Germany but also the city of Bremen and Namibia became inherently intertwined, histories that the elephant statue at the Nelson Mandela Park commemorates. The statue was initially built during the German Nazi era (Baum et al., 2024). In particular, trade cities such as Bremen felt the loss of the German colonies after the First World War, and merchants demanded that Germany reclaimed the former colonies (Baum et al., 2024). The elephant statue mentioned at the beginning of this text was built as a symbol to commemorate these colonies and an attempt by Bremen to become the "city of the colonies" (Stadt der Kolonien) (Baum et al., 2024). After the fall of the Nazi regime, all Nazi monuments had to be dismantled. So, all inscriptions were removed from the elephant, and it became a decontextualised animal statue (Baum et al., 2024). Until then, three plates were embedded in the statue. The first stated "our colonies", the second listed the name of all former German colonies, and the last showed a portrait of Adolf Lüderitz and General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck (Baum et al., 2024, p. 163).

It is thus no wonder that when my mother walked past the statue as a child, no one could tell her what the statue was about. However, this was about to change with the founding of the Namibia Project in the 1970s (Baum et al., 2024). This was a group of people that supported the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), which at that time was still in the midst of its independence fight against South Africa. Together with the anti-apartheid movement, the Namibia Project introduced the idea of the elephant as a decolonial monument. While Namibia was celebrating its indepen-

dence in 1990, Bremen organized a Namibian independence celebration that was centred around the rewriting of the elephant into a decolonial monument (Baum et al., 2024).

The relationship between Bremen and Namibia, which started with the collaboration of the Namibia Project and the SWAPO, further took off with Namibian independence (City of Bremen, 2025). As part of this national relationship, a partnership between Bremen and Windhoek evolved that was formalized into a sister city partnership in 2024 (City of Bremen, 2025).

Bremen, as a former colonial port city, always had strong ties to Namibia. These ties took on a new shape with the support of SWAPO, thanks to the Namibia Project. Growing up in the surroundings of Bremen, I knew very little about these ties. Still today, I notice that although Bremen is home to one of the few decolonial monuments in Germany, most people do not know about the history of Namibia or Windhoek and their ties with the city. This is in sharp contrast to the experience I had when I lived in Windhoek, where German colonialism is visible at every corner of the city. It puzzled me: How could colonialism be so visible in Windhoek, and not visible in Bremen?

This has led me to this thesis. I set out to uncover the reasons behind the asymmetrical memory and visibility of colonial histories between Bremen and Windhoek. Why is it that in Windhoek, the colonial past remains so physically and discursively present, while in Bremen, traces are fragmented, silenced, or transformed? My aim is to investigate how colonial memory is spatialised, remembered, and contested in both cities, and to understand the role urban artefacts, such as monuments, parks, and street names, play in shaping public

consciousness and historical accountability. Through a comparative and multi-sited approach, this thesis explores the entangled legacies of colonialism in Bremen and Windhoek. It examines how postcolonial actors, institutions, and citizens engage with these histories in everyday urban life. And it explores how urban design can contribute to a multifaceted memory of colonialism.

## Academic Context

In the current academic discussion on Namibia's colonial past, there are two focus areas. The first emphasizes the colonial history in the space of the colonised and the second in the space of the coloniser. In the following section, I first explore the space of Namibia/Windhoek and then move on to Germany/Bremen as illustrations of this dichotomy.

In her book “The Making and Unmaking of Colonial Cities”, Julia C. Oberts situates colonial memories within the urban space of Windhoek. Her chapter on Windhoek, is titled as “Ghost spaces: The Colonial and Neocolonial Faces of Windhoek, Namibia”. With the concept of the ghost space, Oberts refers to the idea that Windhoek is an “uncanny neocolonial revenant of the colonial city”, a place where the cityscape evokes the feeling of living in two worlds (Oberts, 2023, p. 14). This feeling is the result of both German colonialism and the occupation by South Africa and the implementation of segregation under the apartheid system (Oberts, 2023). The result of this segregation was the displacement of black people from what was known as “The Old Location”, a settlement designated for black residents, to Katutura. Katutura lays at the outskirts of the city and its name translates into we have no permanent places of our own (Oberts, 2023). The Old Location was turned into Hochland, a pilot white neighbourhood, and Khomas-

dal was functioning as a buffer zone between the township and the rest of the city (Oberts, 2023). Both Ellison Tjirera and Henning Melber address this displacement in their research. According to them, the spatial segregation under the German regime laid the foundation for the segregation under the apartheid system (Tjirera, 2021; Melber, 2020). The Old Location had already functioned as a non-white neighbourhood (Tjirera, 2021). However, with the displacement, people were moved to the outskirts of the city, which further intensified spatial segregation (Tjirera, 2021). Today, this socio-spatial segregation remains prevalent in Windhoek (Oberts, 2023).

In his article “Namibia’s Past in the Present”, Henning Melber reflects on the dominant commemorative narratives of Namibia’s colonial past (Melber, 2005). He argues that the history of liberation struggles against South Africa dominates the current memory landscape (Melber, 2005). According to Melber, memory functions as a base to legitimize the Namibian government, leaving no room for the society to process its colonial traumas (Melber, 2005). Instead of creating a space where the memories of multiple groups can co-exist, the Namibian government tends to frame memory on German colonialism and apartheid on a national basis, always in relation to the liberation struggles (Melber, 2005).

So, while memory is very much subject to politics in Namibia, the country’s history is very much present in the urban structures of Windhoek.

In this context, Oberts argues that “colonialism is often looked at on a national level” (2023). However, the everyday life of the colonial city holds considerable value and thus warrants more attention (Oberts, 2023). She states that

official top-down maps of cities must be re-imagined to counter “the anti-black currents in urban studies” (Oberts, 2023, p.19). Besides, she argues that due to its smaller size and closeness to Johannesburg, Windhoek is almost entirely absent from the academic agenda and but deserves greater attention (Oberts, 2023).

In the context of Germany, Henning Melber and Reinhart Kößler argue that Germany is faced with a public amnesia of the country’s colonial past (Melber & Kößler, 2023). And while decolonial projects are increasing, “an intimate engagement with the implications of the German colonial empire on both the people in the colonies as well as the mindsets of Germans so far remains to a large extent at the margins of a dominant culture” (Melber & Kößler, 2023, p.90). To be able to overcome this amnesia, Melber and Kößler argue that our society needs to revise its “perspectives, mindsets and behaviour” (Melber & Kößler, 2023, p.90). This would then “translate into everyday practices and a common culture based on shared historical awareness, impregnating daily life as much as politics” (Melber & Kößler, 2023, p.90).

In 2024, Norman Aselmeyer and Virginie Kamche published the book “City of the colonies” (Stadt der Kolonien). It is a collection of essays written by scientists, activists, and museum experts on the colonial memory of Bremen. It is thereby one of the first books that sheds light on the traces of colonialism that can be found throughout the entire city and the city’s influence on German colonialism, not just in Namibia, but in the entire world. In the preface of the book, Aselmeyer and Kamche write the following: “whoever wants to understand the past, has to understand colonial history. The consequences of German colonial rule – the exploitation of people and resources, the genocidal wars, the missionaries and the destruction of indigenous communities – have outlasted

in forms of racism and global inequality. [...] Although the German colonial history is gaining more public attention, the knowledge has not increased with that attention.” (translated from German) (Aselmeyer & Kamche, 2024, p. 9-10). Aselmeyer and Kamche further state that Bremen, as a trade city, was a driving force of German colonialism and profited from it (Aselmeyer & Kamche, 2024, p. 9-10).

Their argument is in line with the observations that Melber and Kößler made on the colonial amnesia of the German society.

The reviewed literature demonstrated that in Windhoek German and South African colonial occupation is still visible today. However, the memory of colonialism that is inscribed in spaces mainly frames colonialism in the context of the SWAPO liberation struggle. In Germany, scholars observed a public amnesia of colonial histories. While Bremen is shedding more light on its colonial ties through publications such as the book by Aselmeyer and Kamche, public knowledge on colonialism is still lacking.

What all current discourses have in common is that when looking at colonialism, they focus on one place separate from the other: either Germany or Namibia; Bremen or Windhoek.

Through my research, I aim to expand Obert’s argument of looking at colonialism on a city level. By looking at both places and their intertwined memories, this research aims to fill that gap and deepen our understanding of memory on colonialism and its spatial segregation. Using urban space as a base for this exploration allows me to show how crucial space is in the decolonialization of our memories.

## Problem Statement

So far, I have established the broad ties between Germany and Namibia; Bremen and Windhoek. I have also argued that these relationships need to be examined at the local level and in relation to one another, a reasoning that I further explore in the theory section.

For the remainder of this research, I explore the relationship between Bremen and Windhoek within the context of the collective memory of colonialism. Here, Aselmeyers and Kamches argument that our knowledge of the colonial past has not increased with the attention it receives orients my exploration. By focusing on two specific cities, I can generate deeper knowledge and thus contribute to a decolonisation of our minds. This idea of a decolonialisation of our minds was first coined by Faranak Miraftab (2018).

In both Bremen and Windhoek, memorial spaces and places form the centre of my research. I argue that the spaces we inhabit have a significant impact on how we perceive and interrelate with the world and one another. Therefore, space plays a crucial role in the decolonialisation of society. At the beginning of my research, I focused on the collective memory that tourists experience in the city. However, when I began to speak to actors in Windhoek, I realised that the data I collected was not only targeting tourists. So, I broadened my target group to visitors, which I understand as people intentionally or incidentally visiting a memorial site. That allowed me to include both the perspective of foreigners visiting a city and residents. Since the narratives that the two types of visitors’ encounter are potentially different, it can nuance the understanding of the memorial sites.

## Research Aim & Question

Through my research, I aim to understand how the design of urban space can facilitate decolonialisation processes. By using the theory of designs for the pluriverse, that Arturo Escobar developed, I explore ways in which a plurality of relational, coexisting memories of colonialism can be facilitated in the memorial landscape of a city. Through a pluriversal memory, I aspire to bring forth interpretations of the past that acknowledge silenced or marginalised voices. My main research question for this project is as follows:

**How can the (re)design of urban landscapes contribute to the creation of decolonial memoryscapes that critically engage visitors with colonial histories?**

To explore this question and to acknowledge the spatial relationality of colonialism, I make use of a case study of two cities: Bremen and Windhoek. I begin by analysing how narratives of colonialism are currently presented in urban space, and then I move into how they could be decolonised through urban design. This is guided by three sub-research questions:

1. What spatial narratives of the collective memory of colonialism are currently inscribed in the urban landscape of Bremen and Windhoek?
2. How do actors interact and contest the existing narratives of colonialism in the urban space of Windhoek and Bremen?
3. What design strategies and spatial interventions have been or could be employed to support decolonial approaches to memory, and what role can these play in fostering critical reflection among visitors?

## 2| Theory Chapter

In this chapter, I begin by exploring theories that relate to collective memory of colonialism in urban spaces. Then the conceptual framework relates these theories to one another and sets a frame for my research implementation.

# Theoretical Framework

In the following pages, I introduce the different theories that form the foundation for this research. Relationality is one of the main red threads of this project, to be able to understand the urban, we also need to understand the global. To be able to grasp the present, we have to dive into the past. To form a shared understanding of what is at hand, this chapter thus introduces perspectives on design, world-making, coloniality, responsibility, racism and memory. All in the context of urban spaces.

## Designs for the Pluriverse

The overarching approach that I am using throughout this project is Arturo Escobar's idea of designs for the pluriverse. Central to his argument is the interconnection of design and society: "design-led objects, tools, and even services bring about particular ways of being, knowing, and doing" (Escobar, 2018, p. x). Thus, design impacts who we are, what we know and how we (inter-)act. Before getting deeper into the design part of Escobar's theory, it is crucial to understand his idea of the pluriverse, which he places at the centre of design.

The pluriverse can be best described as a condition of plural world-making that stands in direct opposition to the current hegemonic, universal world-making of capitalism and modernity (Escobar, 2018). According to Escobar, the world as we know is facing "inter-related crises of climate, food, energy, poverty and meaning" (Escobar, 2018, p. x). He refers to these crises as "civilizational conjuncture" (Escobar, 2018). Escobar argues that to be able to resolve this conjuncture, our entire way of living and world-making needs to change. We must transition from a dominant one-world world-making to the pluriverse, which encom-

passes the plurality of relational, coexisting worlds (Escobar, 2018). In Escobar's reasoning, design is both a source and a potential response to the civilizational crisis.

Design is a source in the sense that it is fully integrated into capitalist, one-world structures (Escobar, 2018). Escobar argues that with the advent of modernity, community-based social norms were replaced by expert-driven processes (Escobar, 2018). Design work accelerated, and modern lives became "thoroughly designed lives" (Escobar, 2018, p. 2). He poses a question: If we assume that "the contemporary world can be considered a massive design failure, certainly the result of particular design decisions, is it a matter of designing our way out?" (Escobar, 2018, p. 33).

This leads me to Escobar's understanding of design as a potential response to this civilizational conjunction and as a way to move towards the pluriverse. According to him, design is inherently interlinked with "decisions about the lives we live and the world in which we live them" (Escobar, 2018, p. 33). If design is about shaping ways of being, then we should also be able to reshape these ways of being through design. According to Escobar, this requires a "reorientation of design from the functionalistic, rationalistic, and industrial traditions [...] toward a type of rationality and set of practices attuned to the relational dimension of life" (Escobar, 2018, p. x).

Transitioning towards the pluriverse requires us to acknowledge the political character of design and to situate it "squarely in relation to inequality, racism, sexism, and colonialism" (Escobar, 2018, p. 47). Besides, it demands us to move beyond Western social theory and to explore new ways of thinking (Escobar, 2018, p. 68). To conclude, we need to critically assess



our design processes.

Escobar's idea of design as something relational and deeply political, something that shapes our world in the same way that it shapes us, is crucial to this research. His understanding of pluriversal worlds that are relational, together with his decolonial approach and criticism of the current design practices, form the basis of this project.

## Coloniality of Power

Now that I have explored Escobar's pluriversal world-making, I want to dive deeper into the current mechanisms of world-making. In his article "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America", the sociologist Aníbal Quijano explores the making of the world as we know it today through the theory of coloniality of power. While he uses the example of Latin America, his theory encompasses the whole world. Quijano defines globalization as the current hegemonic world model of power. He connects it to both colonialism and race (Quijano, 2000). This is a model that is historically unique in its totality, spatially as well as societally (Quijano, 2000). This idea of a hegemonic world model is in line with Escobar's one-world world-making. According to Quijano, globalization has its historical foundation in what he refers to as the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentred capitalism (Quijano, 2000). He ascribes two main processes to the coming into being of globalization as the new model of power (Quijano, 2000). Firstly, concerning the colonization of the Americas differences between conquerors and conquered were justified on the basis of racial superiority (Quijano, 2000). Race, which was then codified through skin colour, emerged as a global tool used by the Europeans for the social classification of the world's inhabitants (Quijano, 2000). It became the foundation for the distribution of

the global population into "ranks, places, and roles" (Quijano, 2000, p. 535). Secondly, a new system of control of labour, resources and products was developed during the process of colonization (Quijano, 2000). This model evolved around capitalism as well as the global market and translated existing forms of labour, such as slavery or waged labour, into a new, global system (Quijano, 2000). For the first time in history, there was a global model to control work, and in this model, race was connected to social roles and geohistorical places (Quijano, 2000). Consequently, a global system with a division of labour based on race was established (Quijano, 2000). According to Quijano, race also became the foundation of the global hegemonic knowledge system (Quijano, 2000). To Europe, a monopoly on rationality and modernity was ascribed, and simultaneously myths and irrationality were attributed to non-European societies (Quijano, 2000). This mechanism is the essence of what Quijano refers to as Eurocentrism (Quijano, 2000).

Race as the base of social classification, division of labour, and knowledge production is what constitutes Quijano's theory on coloniality of power. While colonialism as an imperial ruling system has (mostly) ended, the structures that it created are the foundational structures we are living in now. Before trying to understand the collective memory of colonialism in Bremen and Windhoek, it is crucial to understand the system that we were socialized in. The system that Quijano talks about is the system we all grew up in, it describes the abstract global power relations as much as it describes our daily lives. While the coloniality of power does not directly inform the design of a decolonial urban space, it helps to understand how that space came into being in the first place. It thereby is an indispensable foundation for this research project.

## Afrocentricity

Building on these insights from Quijano, I want to introduce a theory that challenges the coloniality of our world. Afrocentricity is a theoretical framework developed by Molefi Kete Asante as a response to the model of power outlined by Quijano, particularly the hegemony of Eurocentrism in knowledge production. It represents a mode of thinking rooted outside Western epistemologies and, as Escobar suggests, may enable alternative approaches to design.

Asante defines Afrocentricity as “the agency and the centrality of African interests, ideas, and perspectives in social, historical, behavioural, and economic narratives” (Asante, 2020, p. 48). He argues that instead of making use of the own narrative, African discourse is still a reflection of the theories that the West produces (Asante, 2020). According to him, it is not enough to place African narratives in the margins of what he refers to as the “white narrative” (Asante, 2020). Instead, he advocates to “write the African in the center of the narrative” (Asante, 2020, p. 48). Asante wrote these lines 20 years after Quijano published his article on the coloniality of power. By referring to the dominant narrative as a white narrative, he shows that race persists as a base of social classification and knowledge production.

Asante introduces three approaches for transformation rooted in Afrocentricity. Firstly, language must be captured, meaning that there should be a consciousness on how we speak (Asante, 2020). In the context of education, he argues that it means “a willingness to question everything from the statues on campus to the menu in the cafeteria” (Asante, 2020, p. 52). Secondly, knowledge production must be critically reflected on (Asante, 2020). Not only current and future knowledge production,

but also the knowledge production of the past (Asante, 2020). Thirdly, in close alignment with Quijano’s argument, the European hegemony over reason must be dismantled (Asante, 2020). Currently, philosophy and reason are ascribed to Europe and myths, legends, and stories to Non-Western populations (Asante, 2020).

Asante further explores the role of history in Afrocentricity and argues that the goal of Afrocentricity is to regain agency of the “own historical experience” (Asante, 2020, p. 54). African theory is faced with an ongoing struggle against the wiping out of African historical memory, which makes African institutions unstable (Asante, 2020).

Afrocentricity is a theory that challenges Eurocentric historical knowledge production and argues in favour of an Afrocentric knowledge production. Its idea of questioning everything, from the past to the future is a crucial approach for my project. As Escobar had put it, if we truly want to decolonise knowledge production on for example the city, we must explore lenses different to the Western way of thinking and viewing the world. Only then are we able to think new thoughts.

## On the Identity of Place, Radical History & Geographies of Responsibility

While Coloniality of Power and Afrocentricity are both critiques of and alternatives to the global system of European epistemic domination, Doreen Massey's work interweaves the global and the local system grounded in a spatial context. To better understand her work, it is first crucial to get a grasp of Massey's understanding of the identity of place.

According to her, place is something hybrid and in constant evolution (Massey, 1995). The identity of space is inherently relational, meaning that "we make space through interactions at all levels, from the (so-called) local to the (so-called) global" (Massey, 2004, p. 5). It is important to notice here that Massey uses the terms place and space interchangeably. She criticises that in the current academic debate, place is often ascribed more meaning than space (Massey, 2004). However, if the identity of a space is relational, it always holds meaning (Massey, 2004).

The relationality of space consists of three components.

Firstly, how we read a place always depends on our own identity (Massey, 1995). This personal identity is relational too (Massey, 2004). It consists of engagements and practices of interaction (Massey, 2004).

Secondly, space is always a "product in part of global forces" meaning that the relations beyond the place also make up its identity (Massey, 1995, p. 183). Simultaneously, places also constitute the global, they are "agents in globalisation" (Massey, 2004, p. 11).

Thirdly, the identity of space is by nature linked to its past (Massey, 1995). In this context, Massey states that "the identity of places is very much bound up with the histories which one told of them, how those histories are told, and which history turns out to be the dominant" (Massey, 1995, p. 186). More concretely, the past is present materially, in resonance, and in the unembodied memories of people (Massey, 1995). Thereby, Massey also acknowledges spaces as a composition of power dynamics (Massey, 1995). The present constitutes the past as much as the past constitutes the present, which then in turn determines the future (Massey, 1995).

In the context of the historical dimension of space, Massey introduces the idea of radical history, whose characteristics resemble Escobar's pluriverse. She argues that "the description, definition and identification of a place is [...] always inevitably an intervention not only into geography but also, at least implicitly, into the (re)telling of the historical constitution of the present" (Massey, 1995, p. 190). Installing an own version of these stories and historical relations is the base of writing a radical history that challenges these narratives (Massey, 1995). Instead, radical history recognizes "that what has come together, in this place, now, is a conjunction of many histories and many spaces" (Massey, 1995, p. 191).

Massey's theory of geographies of responsibility is rooted in this understanding of place as a conjunction of many histories and spaces. She poses the question: "What is in light of the relational construction of identity, the geography of our social and political responsibility?" (Massey, 2004, p. 6). Massey argues that in Western societies, care and responsibility resembles a Russian doll (Massey, 2004). First comes the home, then the local, the nation and so on

(Massey, 2004). Thus, the feeling of responsibility is very much territorial and moves from the near to the far (Massey, 2004). She criticises this way of thinking and argues that there is not just a responsibility for the immediate or the local (Massey, 2004). Thereby, she extends responsibility based on space to responsibility based on the historical making of the identity of space. Massey states: “we are responsible to areas beyond the bounds of place not because of what we have done, but because of who we are” (Massey, 2004, p. 16). If history constitutes our own identity and the identity of place, then responsibility becomes a question of relational identity rather than guilt.

In her papers, Massey does not directly refer to colonialism and its consequences. Nevertheless, it is very much applicable to the conversation around reparations and general responsibility. Based on her work, the West carries a responsibility toward its former colonies not only because of what it did in the past, but because of what that past made it become. The Bremen I know, for instance, has a responsibility toward Windhoek, not merely for the harm it inflicted historically, but because Bremen’s very identity has been shaped in relation to it. This echoes Quijano’s notion of the coloniality of power: the idea that the modern world system rests on colonialism as its historical foundation. As Massey argues, this entanglement produces what she calls “geographies of responsibility,” where places and identities remain bound to one another by the legacies of colonial histories.

## Aesthetics of Superfluity

Now, that I have established the relationality of cities, I am now turning to the implications that specifically colonial relations have on a city. By engaging with Mbembe’s theorisation of superfluity and the racial city, this section demonstrates how urban space embodies the enduring effects of coloniality, and suggests that this lens can help illuminate the spatial and psychic dimensions of postcolonial urbanism in Windhoek. In his paper on “The Aesthetics of Superfluity”, Achille Mbembe introduces the case of Johannesburg to reflect on the identity of the African city as a place. He uses the concept of superfluity to show the consequences of global capitalism, today’s model of power. Mbembe defines superfluity as “the dialectics of indispensability and expandability of both labor and life, people and things” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 374). He argues in the case of South Africa, that “through the movement of bodies, superfluity came to be based on [...] the obfuscation of any use value black labor might have had” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 379). This obfuscation is an inherent part of the capitalist rationality, that is not only based on class, but also on race (Mbembe, 2004). Mbembe’s reflection is similar to the argument of Quijano, where capitalism introduced race as a fundamental part of social classification. What Mbembe is referring to, is that in the global capitalist system, the labour migration of black workers into cities such as Johannesburg came with the systematic devaluing of that labour. Mbembe relates this mechanism to racism and argues that its “function was to institute a contradictory relation between the instrumentality of black life in the market sphere [...], and the constant depreciation of its value and its quality by forces of commercialisation and bigotry” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 380). This dynamic is what is at the core of Mbembe’s idea of superfluity. Mbembe then interweaves

the concept of superfluity with his idea of the racial city. He argues that in the production of the city of Johannesburg, race is both a force and a relation of production (Mbembe, 2004). He states that “race directly gave rise to the space Johannesburg would become, its peculiarities, contours, and form” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 380). Through the mechanisms of superfluity, racism became a “constitutive mechanism of the city’s modernity” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 382). This is what Mbembe defines as the racial city, a space where everything, from the spatial form to the life of people is organised based on race (Mbembe, 2004). Architecture of hysteria is a symptom of these mechanisms of the racial city. According to Mbembe, today commercial architecture is not commemorating the city’s past in any way (Mbembe, 2004). Instead, “this architecture asks the spectator to forget that it is itself a sign of forgetting” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 402). It thereby is an “empty placeholder for meanings that have been eroded over time” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 402). Although with the end of apartheid the racial city has officially collapsed, today’s architecture fails to adapt to that change. Mbembe states: “architecture of hysteria is a constitutive but unconscious aspect of the psychic life of the racial city that resists change and challenges time itself by producing a set of fantasies” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 403). He concludes that Johannesburg has become a fragmented space. Here I would like to quote a longer passage from his paper:

“Despite all appearances to the contrary, the fabric of the racial city is in the process of being destroyed. Only its vestiges and debris remain. Blacks and whites have become wanderers among its ruins. But the play of intervals enables everyone to construct his or her own story of Johannesburg and form memories of place. This is an experience of fragmentation and of permutations that may never achieve coherence. The rupture between the racist past and the

metropolitan present, between here and there and between memories of things and events, renders possible the production of new figural forms and calls into play a chain of substitutions. Johannesburg becomes the city of deconstructed images.” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 404)

To conclude, Mbembe shows how Quijano’s coloniality of power plays out in Johannesburg. The racial city is a result of the global capitalist system of power, which operates based on race and through which Johannesburg became a city of deconstructed images.

While Johannesburg is a South African city, its dynamics resemble Windhoek. When I walked through Windhoek, it very much felt like a city of deconstructed images too. Apartheid and spatial segregation based on race are both part of the history of Johannesburg and Windhoek. I believe that through Mbembe’s lens, we can learn about the urban spaces of Windhoek.

## Memorial Landscapes

Having explored the case of Johannesburg, I am now diving into the memorial landscape specifically. The scholars Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman explore the interplay of memory and landscape from an analytical point of view. They pose the question of how we can make sense of the academically established “potent yet ambiguous intermixture” of landscape and memory (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008, p. 165). The scholars argue that memory is not neutral but is instead socially constructed (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Memorials, which can be defined as “material sites of memory”, are a part of this social construction of the past (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Dwyer and Alderman state that they are important symbolic channels for two reasons: they express

a version of history and at the same time they legitimize that version of the past (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). They argue that memorials “give the past a tangibility and familiarity – making the history they commemorate appear to be part of the natural and taken for granted order of things” (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008, p. 165). Since memorials are about selecting a version of the past, they are simultaneously about forgetting other versions of history (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). In that sense, memorials are material sites of power relations (*ibid.*). Besides, memorials function both as spaces of everyday life and as tourist destinations (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008).

If the meaning of memorials is socially constructed, memorials are not sites of static commemoration but instead are subject to a “constant process of becoming” (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008, p. 168). This constant rewriting of the memorials meaning is often done by the ones in power but can also be undertaken or challenged by ordinary people (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008).

With this understanding of memorial sites, Dwyer and Alderman introduce three conceptual lenses that are used by researchers to analyze memorial landscapes. With each lens, they developed a set of questions (can be found in appendix).

Text is the first lens that they refer to. It can be understood as “a critical reading of histories and ideologies in the content and form of memorial as well as the dynamic nature of (re) inscribing memory into space” (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008, p. 166). It thus aims at understanding the connection between the memorial as a space and the stories it represents. Questions that can be posed here are for example: “Who is cast in the memorial’s leading role?”

or “what surrounds the memorial?” (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008, p. 170).

Arena is the second conceptual lens. Here “the capacity of memorials to serve as sites of social groups to actively debate the meaning of history and compete for control over commemorative process as part of the larger struggle of identity” can be explored (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008, p. 166). This lens thus investigates the politics that the memorial both embodies and facilitates (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Questions that could lead the analysis could for example be: “Whose experiences does this memorial reflect?” or “To what extent does a memorial silence certain accounts of the past while giving voice to others?” (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008, p. 173).

Performance is the last lens that Dwyer and Alderman introduce. This lens is about “the important role that bodily enactments, commemorative rituals, and cultural displays occupy in constituting and bringing meaning to memorials” (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008, p. 166). It is about the performing of memory through for example historical tours for tourists or protests, and thus bodies become sites of memory too (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Questions to ask through this lens are for instance: “How are visitors supposed to behave at this place?” or “how do people treat this site?” (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008, p. 174-175).

Dwyer and Alderman’s understanding of memorial landscapes helps to grasp the memory that is embodied in these spaces. Their focus on text, arena and performance allow for a thorough analysis of memorials in relation to society.

## Conclusion

The different perspectives that I presented in this chapter form the theoretical foundation to understand collective memory, especially of colonialism, in urban space. Escobar's idea of designs for the pluriverse is the lens through which I view both the current state of collective memory and the possible future narratives. Quijano's theory of coloniality of power helps to understand the coming into being of the global power dynamics that are immanent in every aspect of life and that we cannot separate from colonialism. Asante's theory of Afrocentricity then narrows the coloniality of power down to the African context. It illustrates how neglected African narratives are in the global knowledge production and thus validates the importance of understanding collective memory. The work of Massey introduces urban places as a key aspect to this conversation. Her idea of geographies of responsibility, based on identity, is crucial to comprehend the relevance of collective memory in relation to other places. Mbembe's theory of superfluity places the more abstract perspectives in the context of the post-apartheid city and shows the consequences of the city's past for the present. Finally, Dwyer and Alderman's framework for analysing memorial landscapes forms a base to understand the memorial landscapes of colonialism in both Bremen and Windhoek.

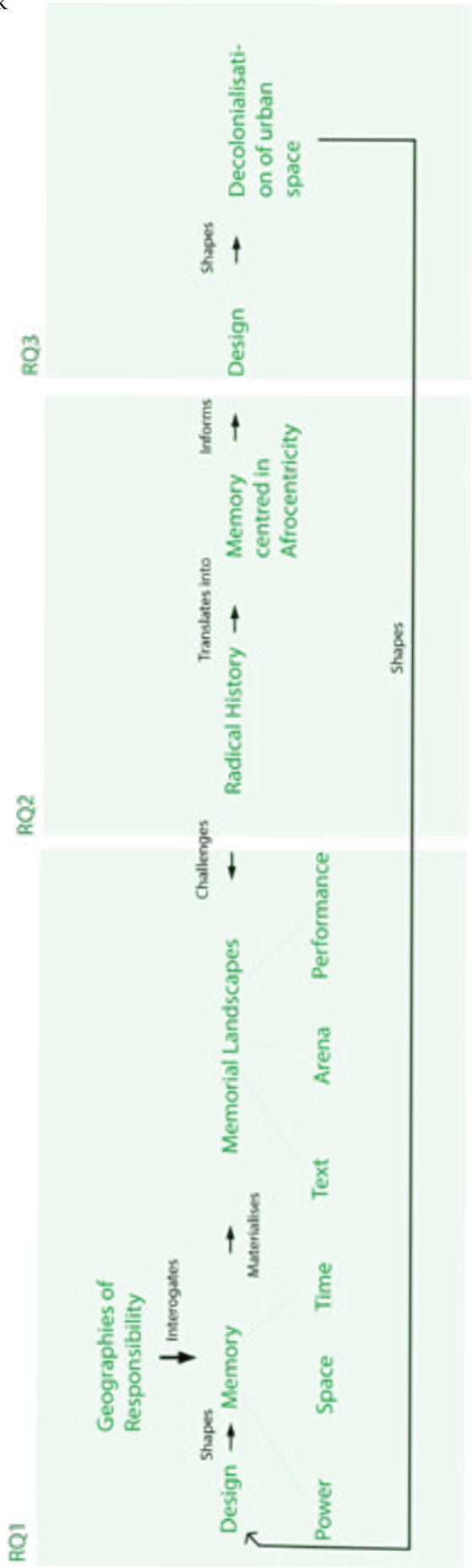
## Conceptual Framework

In the following sections, I showcase how the concepts that I derived from the theories guide and shape my research. It is divided into three sections, based on the sub-research questions that frame this project:

1. What spatial narratives of the collective memory of colonialism are currently inscribed in the urban landscape of Bremen and Windhoek?
2. What do actors envision as a pluriversal narrative of colonialism in urban space in Windhoek and Bremen?
3. What design strategies and spatial interventions have been or could be employed to support decolonial approaches to memory, and what role can these play in fostering critical reflection among visitors?

The illustration on the following page shows how the different concepts relate to each other considering these three questions. As established in the theoretical framework, relationality is at the core of this research.

Conceptual Framework





## RQ1: The Current State of Collective Memory

The first part of my research captures a snapshot of the collective memory of colonialism in urban space today. Building on Escobar's definition of design, I understand design and memory as co-constitutive. To recap the definition, Escobar argues that by designing, we also design "particular ways of being, knowing, and doing" (Escobar, 2018, p. x). I thus focus not only on the design of the built environment. Instead, I also emphasize the design of society, which materializes in urban spaces. How we design the city shapes our society's memory and what we memorize in turn shapes how we design the city. This research aims to contribute a small first step towards redesigning society.

Dwyer and Alderman conceptualize memory as socially constructed (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Memory is thus a way to make sense of the world through history, but it is also a way to make sense of ourselves. It is thus closely connected to our identity.

I argue that memory consists of three conceptual dimensions – space, time and power. Firstly, what is being memorialized is always situated in space. However, based on the reasoning of Massey's theory of place, it is not only situated in one space but rather connects to places outside its local site. To answer the first research question, I should always situate the memory that emerges from observations and interviews in both the Windhoek and Bremen context. Secondly, memory is something dynamic and changes over time (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Therefore, it also has a time dimension, and thus the memory resulting from the data collection should not only be observed in one moment of time but rather be a collection of different times.

Lastly, memory is contested and thus becomes a stage for political power dynamics (Massey, 1995). Who decides what should be memorized and what should not? In the case of Windhoek and Bremen, this thus means to always critically reflect on the origin of narratives.

In the first part of this research, I critically investigate the three dimensions of memory of colonialism in Bremen and Windhoek based on Massey's understanding of geographies of responsibility. I argue that these two places need to be analysed in conjunction, because their identities are intertwined. What happened in Windhoek cannot be separated from the identity of Bremen, and thus a responsibility to memorise and address the shared history persists.

Memorial spaces are an example of space where memory materialises in. These spaces are at the centre of my analysis. I explore these landscapes through the three conceptual lenses introduced by Dwyer and Alderman: text, arena and performance (2008). As presented earlier, the questions that they pose in their article form the foundation of the interview guide used to explore the current state of collective memory. Through the lens of text, I explore the current narratives that are present and absent in the urban space of Bremen and Windhoek. How do they materialize and are they being reinscribed with meaning? How are they told in both city tours and museums?

Through the performance lens, I explore who is interacting with memorial sites in Windhoek and Bremen. Who uses them, are there certain events taking place there and has the use changed over time? What did the interviewees observe here and how do tours interact with the sites?

With the arena lens, I investigate how people use the memorial sites in Windhoek and Bremen. Is there activism around them and who has an impact on the places? I explore this through the interviews conducted in both places.

## RQ2: Afrocentric Narratives on Colonialism

The second part of my research focuses on what narratives could be brought forward to decolonize the urban spaces of both Windhoek and Bremen. This centres around the idea of radical history introduced by Massey. To recap, Massey defines radical history as a (re)telling of history that recognizes “that what has come together, in this place, now, is a conjunction of many histories and many spaces” (Massey, 1995, p. 191). It thus challenges any memorial landscapes that facilitate a one-sided memory, spatially, temporally as well as politically. I then translate the idea of radical history into memory that is centred in Afrocentricity. By beginning my research in Windhoek and interviewing a variety of experts in both places, I aim to explore a radical history of colonialism that places agency in the hands of the Namibian population. I will further explore this in the methodology section.

## RQ3: Afrocentric Narratives in the Urban Space of Bremen

For the last part of my research, I explore what narratives can be brought forward in the urban space of Bremen through developing a set of design guidelines. I derive these guidelines from the interview material that I gathered for RQ2. This is rooted in the idea that memory centred in Afrocentricity should inform the design process of urban spaces. In doing so, design can contribute to the decolonisation of the urban space in Bremen and Windho-

ek. I understand decolonisation as defined by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni: “Coloniality is the core source of most modern problems and of the present historical interregnum. As a way forward, decolonial theorists present the ‘decolonial turn,’ predicated on the recognition of ecologies of knowledges, as essential for pluriversality (a world in which many worlds exist un-hierarchized). To realise this utopic imaginary called pluriversality, decoloniality lays out a multipronged attack on coloniality: in the domains of knowledge, power, and subjectivity” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019, p. 21). The decolonisation of urban space can thus be understood as a path towards the pluriverse. It is thereby essential in creating a just and diverse world.

# 3| Methodology Chapter

In this chapter, I describe the methodological structure of this research. I begin by presenting my methodological choices, then I dive into the subject of analysis. Additionally, I reflect on my positionality and the methodological limitations of my research. Lastly, I introduce the people I spoke to in Bremen and Windhoek.

## Methodological Choices

This qualitative research project centres the question “How can the (re)design of urban landscapes contribute to the creation of decolonial memoryscapes that critically engage visitors with colonial histories?” at its heart. It aims to find an answer to this question through a comparative case study of two places: Bremen and Windhoek.

As the literature review has established, there is a gap in the understanding of the interrelation between two places, especially on a city level. A case study of these two cities can thus contribute to fill this academic gap.

My research consists of an analysis and a design part. It can be divided into four steps, where the first focuses on the analysis and the other three the translation into design. The first step aims to (i) identify the current dynamics of absence and presence of the collective memory both in Bremen and Windhoek. The second part of the research then (ii) explores what narratives could be brought forward in the urban spaces of Bremen and Windhoek to decolonize them. Lastly, I (iii) dive into how the narratives both in Windhoek and Bremen can be translated into urban design in Bremen, which I then apply in a (iv) pilot project proposal.

For all four components, I conducted semi-structured interviews with actors working around the topic of urban colonial memory in Bremen and Windhoek. In both places, I sampled interviewees through snowball sampling. Next to the interviews, I conducted participant observations in both cities. These data collection methods allowed me to explore more pluriversal and afrocentric narratives of colonial memory. I analysed the interview transcripts, notes from the participant observa-

tions through open coding using atlas.ti. I then grouped all codes into the following themes: context, pre-colonial memory & folklore, post-apartheid city, the clean city, Katutura, city identity of Bremen, city partnership, memorial practices, current memorial landscape, the role of street names, reparation and restitution, black trauma, public awareness, memory and power, political activism, decolonial memory work. I did the same grouping for the vision chapter and derived the following themes: who own's history, let's talk, educating the youth, let's reimagine spaces. These themes form the foundation of the context chapter, the current state chapter, the vision chapter, and are then translated into design guidelines in the strategy chapter. A selection of these design guidelines then in turn form the base of the pilot intervention.

# Subject of Analysis

**SRQ 1: What spatial narratives of the collective memory of colonialism are currently inscribed in the urban landscape of Bremen and Windhoek?**

## Method

- Semi-structured interviews with experts in Windhoek and Bremen
- Participant observations in the following locations: Leutwein Cemetery (W), the Old Location Cemetery (W), Independence Museum (W), Übersee Museum (B), Elephant Statue (B)
- Participant observations during the following tours: Decolonial Tour on day of Hornkranz Massacre 3h (W), Walking Tour 2h (W), Walking Tour 2h (B)
- Participant validation: received feedback on a full draft of the analysis to Jephtha Nguherimo & Sheya Timo Gotlieb

## Justification

- allows for a pluriversal and more Afrocentric analysis of urban narratives
- Complements interviews and enhances researchers understanding of the environment
- Complements interviews and enhances researchers understanding of the environment
- Ensures that the research output reflects Afrcentric ideas and increases credibility

**SRQ 2: What do actors envision as a pluriversal narrative of colonialism in urban space in Windhoek and Bremen? in the urban landscape of Bremen and Windhoek?**

## Method

- Semi-structured interviews with experts in Windhoek and Bremen

## Justification

- allows for a pluriversal and Afrocentric ideation of future memoryscapes

SRQ 3: What design strategies and spatial interventions have been or could be employed to support decolonial approaches to memory, and what role can these play in fostering critical reflection among visitors?

#### Method

- Data-driven design synthesis
- participant validation: presented first draft of guidelines to Jephtha Nguherimo for feedback

#### Justification

- direct connection to the input of interview participants
- ensures that research output reflects Afro-centric ideas and increases credibility

## Data Collection Process

For the first and second part of the research project, I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders both in Windhoek and Bremen. 10 of these interviews took place in Windhoek, 1 in Swakopmund and 6 in Bremen. They ranged from 40 min to 60 min and were held both in English and German. In Windhoek, I found interviewees through my own social network. From there, I made use of snowball sampling to reach out to further interviewees. In Bremen, I got in contact with my first interviewees through an informal conversation with a Bremen-based NGO. They brought me in contact with more stakeholders and from there I made use of snowball sampling again. For two of the Bremen interviewees, I received the contact through a German living in Windhoek. The interview guide I used was based on the framework by Dwyer and Alderman. It can be found in the appendix (will add later). At the end of each interview, I also posed a few questions about the narratives that should be more present both in Bremen and Windhoek. The answers guide the second and third part of my research.

## Methodological Reflection

When I began this research, I was in doubt whether I was the right person to carry out a study on colonialism. Why should a white, German woman write about an Afrocentric perspective on the collective memory of colonialism, especially in the context of Namibia? Is that not a paradox? However, when I went to Windhoek and spoke to people doing work around the topic, I noticed that many of them were frustrated by the German absence in the engagement with collective memory of colonia-

lism. According to them, the critical review of the past is not a one-sided process. Both Germany and Namibia have to reflect the colonial history, and in that process the agency must remain with the Namibians. So, I hope that this research can contribute to such a critical reassessment. Besides, I would also like to highlight, that this research is conducted and written in English. While many German studies on colonialism are written in German, my research thus remains accessible to Namibians.

Nevertheless, I would like to reflect more on my own positionality within this research process. I grew up close to Bremen and know the city well. After finishing high school, I moved for a year to Windhoek and thus know this city too. I truly believe that having a connection to both places allowed me to conduct in-depth research. For example, it enabled me to do the sampling through my own network, which helped to create a feeling of trust and familiarity. However, the fact that I already knew both places made me go into the field with a certain view on them. Taking notes after each interview helped me to reflect on these views and to ensure that they do not impact my research too heavily. Through this research I got to gain a whole new perspective on both cities, something that I had to ensure that I was open to. Going back to Windhoek for a month helped me to immerse myself back into the culture of Namibia, which gave the interviews a whole new depth.

There are also a few more technical limitations. Firstly, I was unable to schedule an interview with any urban planners or civil servants working on the partnership with Bremen. Secondly, during my field research I spend more time in Windhoek than in Bremen and lastly, due to the time constraints, the pilot intervention ends with a proposal.

## The Interviewees

**Martha Akawa** is a historian with a specialisation in heritage. She is a senior lecturer and the Head of the Department of Geography, History and Environmental Studies at the University of Namibia. In 2014, she published a book on the gender politics of the Namibian liberation struggle.

**Ellison Tjirera** was born in Okondjatu in the North of Namibia. He is now working as a senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Namibia. He teaches a course on urban sociology and advanced sociology of Namibian society. Tjirera is also part of the editorial collective of the Namibian Journal for Social Justice.

**Ndapewa Nakanyete** was born in exile, in a Zambian refugee camp. She is a senior lecturer in human geography at the University of Namibia. Next to her education in Windhoek, Nakanyete followed a master's in culture and environment in Africa at the University of Cologne, which gave her a different perspective on the relations between Germany and African countries. She has travelled to about 25 African countries.

**Lilli Hasche** moved for her bachelor's in political science to Bremen. As part of her studies, she developed a decolonial walking tour for the Überseestadt that she is still doing to this day. In 2019, she also joined the group decolonise Walle, a collective that works on making the colonial history of Walle more visible. Their engagement evolves a lot around renaming streets.

**Hanno Balz** is a German historian. He is currently commissioned by Bremen's Senator for Culture to research and develop texts around colonial street names in Bremen.

**Tuli Mekondjo** is a Namibian visual artist. She describes her work as follows: „[I am] always asking, what is it that we remember as Namibians like what we remember from the soil, from the land. What trauma do we remember and how do we deal with that?“ For that, she often makes use of archival material. One of her recent works can be seen at the exhibition of the German Bundestag to mark the 75th anniversary of the Basic Law. She reflected on article 1.

**Jephta U. Nguherimo** is a reparation activist and the founder of the „OvaHerero People's Memorial and Reconstruction Foundation „. He grew up in the village of Ombuyovakuru and participated in the Namibian liberation struggle during South African occupation. Nguherimo spent several years as a political refugee in Botswana and Kenya. For his studies, he moved to the US, where he worked as a union representative until his retirement. Today, he lives both in the US and in Namibia and focuses on his transnational activism around reparations to the Herero people.

**Laidlaw Peringanda** grew up in Swakopmund. He is Otjiherero and describes himself as a postcolonial activist. His grandmother was a survivor of the concentration camps that the Germans established during colonial occupation. He decided to keep her memory alive and founded the Swakopmund Genocide Museum in 2015. Since then he is educating people from all over the world on the genocide.

**Hage Mukwendje** was born and raised in Omusati region in the Northern part of Namibia. After high school, he moved to Windhoek to study fine arts and graphic design. Now, Mukwendje works as a fulltime artist. He describes himself as a storyteller and an urban poet. His work mostly centres around people and their memories as well as emotions.



**Hildegard Titus** grew up in Windhoek. She describes herself as a decolonial activist, filmmaker and artist. In 2020, she started a petition to the municipality of Windhoek, requesting the removal of the colonial Curt von Francois statue. This petition developed into the ‚A Curt Farewell‘ movement, which led to the removal of the statue in 2022. Next to that, Titus also organises decolonial walking tours in Windhoek.

**Vitjitua Ndjiharine** is a visual artist based in Windhoek. Her work deals with knowledge production, Namibian identity and Namibian history. For this, Ndjiharine makes use of oral histories, culture and traditions. Besides, Ndjiharine lived for a year in Hamburg to research the post-colonial legacy of the city together with the University of Hamburg.

**Sheya Timo Gotlieb** was born in the Northern part of Namibia. He has a background in Geography, Environmental Science, Sociology, Cultures and African Environment. For the past five years he has worked in inclusive sustainable development in Namibia’s urban informal settlements, implementing projects to improve people’s socio-economic status. He has also taught classes on social geography at the University of Namibia.

In the midst of the South African occupation, **Dorothea Litzba** and her sister decided to move for a year to Windhoek where Litzba worked at a newspaper. The experiences of living under the apartheid regime have had a lasting impact on the two sisters. Back in Bremen, Litzba attended a speech by Ben Amathila that inspired her to join Bremen’s anti-apartheid movement. She also got involved in the Namibia project where she worked closely together with Manfred Hinz. She organised projects such as „Action Lüderitz Street“.

**Manfred Hinz** has a background in law and sociology. When he started working at the University of Bremen in 1971, he became interested in colonialism in Namibia. After attending the speech by Ben Amathila, Hinz founded the Namibia project together with other important actors in Bremen. Hinz was also involved in the repurposing of the elephant statue. After independence, Hinz moved to Windhoek, where he helped setting up the law department of the University of Namibia. He ended up staying in Windhoek for 20 years, before moving back to Bremen.

**Tobias Peters** works at the State Agency for Civic Education of Bremen for 8 years now. He is responsible for culture, history and publications. Next to the Holocaust remembrance, the department also increasingly works with the colonial past of Bremen. Part of this work is the organizing of the Namibian genocide commemoration that the agency hosts every year at the elephant statue in Bremen.

**Werner Hillebrecht** lived in Göttingen when he started to create a bibliography on Namibia. It was the 70s, and at the same time a group of people in Bremen began to support Namibia’s independence. Without much hesitation, Hillebrecht decided to move to Bremen and to join the Namibia Project. He began to digitalize the bibliography that he had compiled. With Namibia’s independence and still as a part of the Namibia project, Hillebrecht moved to Windhoek. He began to work for the Namibian national archive and until 2015, he was the chief of the archive.

**Silke Goethe** works for the Department for International Relations and Development Cooperation at the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen. She is responsible for the city partnership with Windhoek and the partnership with Namibia.

## 4| Context Chapter

In this chapter, I outline several events that occur in the chapter on the current state of collective memory. I move from German colonialism to apartheid and the liberation struggle. I end with a summary of how these two periods played out in Windhoek.

# German Colonialism

In the introduction of this research, I have addressed the beginnings of the colonial occupation of Namibia by Germany. Following the Berlin Conference in 1884, Namibia came under formal German rule. In the aftermath, German settlers tightened their grip on the local population, leading to the forced removal from their ancestral lands and other atrocities (Wende, 2022). In the following two sections, I would like to draw attention to two episodes of the German colonial occupation: the Hornkranz Massacre and the Nama and Herero Genocide.

## Hornkranz Massacre

On 12 April 1893, the commander Curt von Francois led the German colonial troops to Hornkranz, a settlement of the Witbooi Nama tribe (IKhowesin). Their plan was to erase the Witbooi tribe after their chief Hendrik Witbooi resisted signing a protection treaty. These treaties were a method of the German administration to oppress sovereign tribes. (Forensic Architecture 2024). Hendrik Witbooi, who remained relatively independent under colonial occupation, posed a danger to the German administration. To demonstrate their power and punish the Witbooi tribe, Curt von Francois thus declared the extermination of the Witboois. During the Hornkranz Massacre, the German troops killed nearly eighty women and children. An additional hundred people were taken prisoner and the remains of the settlement burnt to the ground (Forensic Architecture, 2024). Today, the area that used to be the Witbooi settlement is private farmland and only accessible with permission from its owners. Descendants of the Nama tribe define the massacre as the true first atrocity of the Herero and Nama genocide (Forensic Architecture, 2024).

## The Nama and Herero Genocide

In 1904, led by chief Samuel Maharero, the Herero rebelled against German occupation (Wende, 2022). The Waterberg (Otjozondjupa) in the Northern part of Namibia was their refuge, where about thirty thousand Ovaherero people had joined the settlements of the Kambazembi clan (Forensic Architecture 2022). The beginning of the Herero's military action was successful. However, when Lothar von Trotha took over the command of Theodor Leutwein, the armed conflict reached a turning point (Nebe, 2024). In December 1904, von Trotha gave an extermination order stating that "every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at" (Forensic Architecture, 2022).

To trap the Hereros, German troops formed a wall. So, instead of fleeing to the West, the Hereros were forced into the Omaheke desert (Forensic Architecture, 2022). According to Forensic Architecture, the German troops weaponised the environmental conditions of the area (Forensic Architecture, 2022). They turned the Omaheke into an instrument of genocide. The troops poisoned a majority of the water holes. Some Ovaherero were able to cross the border to Botswana. Others survived in the Omaheke, using their knowledge of the land, until the end of the extermination order in December 1905. However, most people died in the desert. At the end of the genocide, the Herero population diminished from 80,000 to 15,000 (Forensic Architecture, 2022).

After the Herero were pushed into the desert, the Nama tribes began their guerilla war against the German colonial troops primarily led by chief Hendrik Witbooi and chief Jacob Morenga (Wende, 2022). After the death of

Hendrik Witbooi in a battle in 1905, the Nama alliance collapsed. An estimate of ten thousand Nama died during German colonial rule (Wende, 2022).

The survivors of the Herero and Nama wars were brought to concentration camps that were widespread under colonial occupation (Forensic Architecture, 2022). Prisoners of these camps were used for slave labour to build colonial infrastructures (Forensic Architecture, 2022).

## Apartheid and the Liberation Struggle

As I explained in the introduction of this research, Namibia came under South African administration in 1920 (Melber, 2025). Consequently, the apartheid laws that South Africa implemented in 1948 also became the official legislation of Namibia (Lawal, 2024). These laws instituted a system that classified people based on race, where the white minority occupied the highest class of society (Lawla, 2024).

In 1959, Sam Nujoma, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo and a few other labour activists founded the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) as a resistance to South African rule (Melber, 2025). It was an expansion of the Owamboland People's Congress (OPC) that was founded by labourers and students in Cape Town two years earlier (Diescho, 2023). In 1960, the OPO then became the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) with Sam Nujoma as its first president (Melber, 2025). The first years of SWAPO were peaceful. In 1967, the peaceful resistance shifted to an armed resistance against South Africa (Melber, 2025). The goal of this armed resistance was an internationally recognised independence of Namibia (Melber, 2007). This recognition was first given in 1976, when the United Nations General Assembly declared

SWAPO as "the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people" (UN, 2022). However, it took fourteen more years until Namibia reached its official independence, and Sam Nujoma became the first president of the country (UN, 2022).

The histories of Bremen and Namibia intersected again, when Ben Amathila was invited to Bremen to give a speech in the Stephanie Church in 1975 (D. Litzba, personal communication, May 08, 2025). Amathila represented SWAPO from Stockholm and was responsible for Western Europe. His speech moved the audience, so that later Manfred Hinz, the director of the Übersee Museum, the director of the archives and other important actors got together to discuss how Bremen could support the SWAPO in its liberation struggle (D. Litzba, personal communication, May 8, 2025; M. Hinz, personal communication, May 16, 2025). From these conversations, the Namibia Project and a partnership that exists to this day emerged, which I discuss in greater detail in the following chapters.

## Windhoek under German and South African Occupation

The capital city of Namibia has many names: Damara people call it hot springs ([Ai]Gams), Ovaherero people speak about the city of smoke (Otjomuise) and in Afrikaans it is referred to as the windy corner (Windhoek). While the city has a rich pre-colonial history, this section limits its focus to the German and South African occupation.

During German occupation, Windhoek became the military headquarters of the German administration (Tjirera, 2020). In 1905, the administration implemented a racial segregation structure. According to Tjirera, this segregation

prohibited mixed marriage, separated health and education infrastructures and created residential divisions (Tjirera, 2020). With the South African rule, these structures of segregation were further institutionalised through the apartheid system (Tjirera, 2020). In 1964, the Bantustan apartheid policy was introduced in Windhoek, officially segregating the city into black, coloured and a white area (Tjirera, 2020). It implemented a total segregation of life between the different groups of Windhoek. The following chapters discuss this spatial segregation in greater detail.

# 5| Collective Memory Today

In this chapter, I explore the first sub-question of my research: What spatial narratives of the collective memory of colonialism are currently inscribed in the urban landscape of Bremen and Windhoek? I do this in three sections, that I grouped to structure the analysis of this chapter. The first deals with the different narratives of the city, both in Bremen and Windhoek. The second investigates the memorial landscape of the two places and the last focuses on the memory work that is done as well as lacking in Bremen and Windhoek. Throughout this analysis, the apartheid system that I introduced in the context chapter, is a reoccurring theme. Firstly, we should acknowledge German colonialism and genocidal wars laid the foundation for the South African apartheid regime in Namibia. Segregation was already a part of the German colonial system and got further institutionalised by the South Africans. Secondly, Namibia was a settler colony, meaning that a lot of Germans stayed long after colonialism had officially ended. So, while the apartheid system was not done by Germany, it was still done by Germans.

# City Narratives

To understand the current state of collective memory of colonialism, I begin by exploring the different narratives that exist on the two cities.

## Post-Apartheid City

In this section, I explore the different narratives that are present in Windhoek today.

### Racism and Class

Under the apartheid system, Windhoek was structured to segregate people on the basis of race and tribes (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025; T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). My conversations with the people in Windhoek have shown that this segregation persists and is being reinforced in the city's spaces (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025). However, what has changed since independence, and what I would highlight through a quote by the reparation activist Jephta U. Nguherimo, is that today this segregation also has an element of class:

“The landscape continues to reinforce the old colonial patterns, because those spaces were created intentionally as separate places and separate economics, people with different incomes, based on racism. So now what you see is this tall building, this huge building that the black elites are occupying, formerly occupied by white people. So, what do they represent? They represent wealth and segregation. So, in essence, apartheid it's still alive and well.” (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025)

During our conversation, Nguherimo related today's segregation back to the failure of SWAPO after independence (J. U. Nguherimo,

personal communication, April 15, 2025).

He told me that there was no attempt by the government to deconstruct society to make it equal through for example policies. According to him, the economic field is still not levelled.

Instead, the people I spoke to in Windhoek observe that the city's spatial dynamics are still reflecting the apartheid system. When more black people start moving into a predominantly white neighbourhood, the white residents move away and form a new neighbourhood (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). An example for this dynamic is the new enclaves, which were developed around Windhoek: Omeya in the South, Finkenstein in the east and Elisenheim in the north (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025).

However, there is not only a segregation based on social class and race, especially in Katutura, segregation between the tribes is still visible (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025). While the different locations for each tribe are less rigid, they do still exist in the minds of the people:

“Segregation in the sense of the apartheid that still remains in the residence thinking. So today's people still talk about the Herero location or Wambo location, Damara location. I'm sure you must have come across those things. But those places don't exist anymore, but they are still there. They are part of Windhoek narratives.” (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025)

The urban dynamics that I have described in this section very much resemble Mbembe's understanding of the racial city. Windhoek is an inherently racial city, where even though social class has emerged as a new base for segregation, the mechanisms of segregation have remained

the same. Instead of diverging from the apartheid system, the apartheid structure is developing with Windhoek. This dynamic is at the heart of the following sections.

## Roads and Transportation

In the conversations I had during my research in Windhoek, the city's road- and transportation system was a reoccurring theme. The people I spoke with especially stressed that the system is part of the classical apartheid urban development structure. Therefore, it is a system of segregation. This segregation has two dimensions. Firstly, there is a segregation on the road. Here, the sociologist Ellison Tjirera criticised that Windhoek is built around the car:

“One thing that struck me is that the road network in Windhoek is so car centric, so pedestrian unfriendly. And you see within that design there is already an issue of class: who has the private car, for example? Who then takes precedence over those who do not have cars or always walk?” (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025)

I would like to combine this argument with a conversation that I had with the visual artist Vitjitua Ndjiharine around Windhoek's bus system (V. Ndjiharine, personal communication, April 18, 2025). To this day, the city has no public transportation system that caters the needs of the whole city. Instead, the existing bus system still operates with the same terms as under apartheid: to bring domestic workers from Katutura to the wealthier neighbourhoods (V. Ndjiharine, personal communication, April 18, 2025).

The second dimension that I want to highlight is the one of segregation through the roads themselves. In Windhoek, they function as buffers between neighbourhoods of different

class and race (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). Katutura, for example, is cut off from the rest of the city through a highway and other big roads (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). In contrast, the streets that go into Katutura are narrow, leading to congestion during rush hour. Since independence, car ownership has increased in Katutura, but the roads were not adapted to this new need. So, while Katutura residents are stuck in traffic for an hour after work, the middle and upper class is not faced with the same heavy traffic (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025).

Windhoek's roads and transportation system is a notable example of how the racial city plays out in the daily lives of the city's residents.

## Malls and City Centre

The decay of Windhoek's city centre, which began with the development of new malls in the suburbs, has been mentioned throughout several of my conversations.

When I spoke to the visual artist Tuli Mekondjo, she told me that she hardly sees any white Namibians in the city centre, which used to be the city's hub for business. The only white people that spend time in the centre are tourists (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). Instead, the white Namibians spend their leisure time at Grove Mall, a mall that was built in the suburb Kleine Kuppe. With the white people, businesses also began to move to Grove Mall, leading to the decay of the centre. Tjirera explained the general dynamics of the Windhoek malls to me (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025). Wernhil, located in the city centre, is a predominantly black shopping mall. Maerua Mall, situated in Klein Windhoek, is a mix of people. And then lastly, Grove Mall is located in Kleine Kuppe and used by white people as well as the black





Independence Avenue



Pedestrian in Windhoek

Windhoek Cab



elite. So, although two of these malls have been built after independence, they are still inherently segregated places.

Because of the departure of businesses from the city centre is increasingly suffering from empty spaces (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). With high rents, the buildings stay empty and become inactive spaces. During our conversation, the visual artist Hage Mujwendje told me that the city in general has a lot of inactive spaces (H. Mujwendje, personal communication, April 17, 2025). At the same time, Windhoek is lacking creative spaces such as studios for artists (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025; H. Mujwendje, personal communication, April 17, 2025). However, the city seems to be unable or unwilling to activate more spaces and turn them into creative hubs.

To conclude, one can argue that the segregation of Windhoek as a racial city is worsening. With the development of malls for different social classes, the lives of people become increasingly segregated.

## The Clean City

In this section, I would like to highlight a narrative that was first brought to my attention by the human geographer Ndapewa Nakanyete. The theme of the clean city showcases how an apartheid structure and Western ideals can develop into a narrative that shapes Windhoek's urban space.

Nakanyete, who visited many African countries, told me how much she enjoys visiting the street markets in different places (N. Nakanyete, personal communication, April 09, 2025). She grew up in the North of Namibia and explained that in the villages of her childhood, trading and markets were an inherent part of the place's culture (N. Nakanyete, personal communication, April 09, 2025). This is in sharp contrast to the centre of Windhoek, where there is only a small souvenir market run by the Himba people next to the Hilton Hotel and a food market, hidden at the parking lot of the Wernhil Mall (N. Nakanyete, personal communication, April 09, 2025). While these spaces are partly designated to create a feeling of safety for tourists, there is another underlying mecha-



Wernhil Mall



Food Market at Wernhil

nism (Nguherimo, personal communication, September 02.2025). Until about 10 years ago, Windhoek held the title of the cleanest city in Africa (Tjirera 2020). Both Nakanyete and Tjirera argued that to the city and the police, street vendors tarnish this clean image that Windhoek gives off to tourists (N. Nakanyete, personal communication, April 09, 2025; E. Tjijera, personal communication, April 09, 2025). The human geographer Sheya T. Gotlieb described this dynamic as follows:

“If you land today in Windhoek at the airport, get a shuttle into a very nice hotel like Hilton. It’s very clean. It’s organised: clean roads, traffic lights. Like this sense of structure and cleanliness. Yes, in terms of facilities that are available, solid waste is being managed in the city centre. But the city centre doesn’t reflect the entire city.” (S. T. Gotlieb, personal communication, April 22, 2025)

What Gotlieb refers to is that this idea of cleanliness only exists in places that tourists and the upper class move in. This ambiguity of cleanliness can be traced back to the apartheid system, where it functioned as a tool for segregation. Already during German colonialism, black bodies were associated with uncleanness and diseases (M. Akawa, personal communication, April 08, 2025). The Old Location removal was reasoned with this idea of moving the people to a cleaner place, while the real intent was to move the black people away from the whites (E. Tjijera, personal communication, April 09, 2025). According to Tjijera, the same dynamics are at play today:

“Dirt, as in untidy stuff, is somewhat allowed to continue in particular spaces of the city. For example, if you go to Katutura, it’s not your squeaky clean city centre that you see. You start to see a totally different part of Windho-



Single Quarters Market

ek. [...] You would notice the difference, and perhaps the further you go into the informal settlements, you would realise how dirtier it becomes. Right, so you get the sense that particular spaces are associated with unhygienic conditions, and that is fine because they belong to black, poor bodies. So again, it goes back to that colonial history.” (E. Tjijera, personal communication, April 09, 2025)

So, this marketing strategy and progressive image that Windhoek invests in is inherently colonial and rests on apartheid structures. It is thereby in direct contrast to the idea of Afro-centric urban narratives. Besides, instead of focusing on providing services for the sake of its residents, Windhoek focuses on visitors.





Informal Settlements of Katutura

## Narratives of Katutura

So far, I have not discussed Katutura in greater detail. However, as Gotlieb explained to me, the narrative of Katutura is different to the rest of the city.

Katutura is situated in the North-west of Windhoek. The name means “we don’t have a permanent place to live”, which can be considered a protest (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025). When we drove past the Old Location Cemetery, situated between Hochland Park and Pionierspark, Nguherimo explained the history behind Katutura:

“So you can see the graveyard is near where the people used to live and it has been the intention of the South African apartheid regime to remove the people, they removed them by force. People died and at the end of the day people were moved to Katutura. There’s many narratives why they wanted to move them, but they also wanted them to stay away because this area is more attractive to whites because of maybe the hills and all.” (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025)

The Old Location was an area for black people, that was developed under the German colonial rule. The segregation of Windhoek was continued and intensified by the South African regime, ultimately leading to the Old Location Massacre and the development of Katutura (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

In the previous section on the clean city, I have highlighted that compared to the city centre, Katutura is less organised in a Western sense. Since no tourists move in that space, there is no need to convey an image of cleanliness and order. I argue that as a consequence, more

Afrocentric, alternative city narratives can be found in Katutura. Here I would like to highlight a quote by Gotlieb:

“But people have lived in Katutura for quite a while now. Different tribes have lived together for a while, so they have developed a vibrant culture. They have taken ownership of the space. [...] The homes are very tiny, and they didn’t reflect the native family dynamics. So, as people started improving their socioeconomic status they also started improving their homes. Others that could not own homes in Katutura and elsewhere in the city have started forming the informal settlements or grabbing land and then setting up their structures. So that’s claiming space. If you look at streets like Evelyn Street, they are dominated by informal businesses: doing your hair, your nails or tyres, carpentry, car wash.” (S. T. Gotlieb, personal communication, April 22, 2025)

While I do not want to romanticise the township and informal settlement, it is also crucial to acknowledge how much informal collective memory and alternative narratives they hold. Nguherimo referred to it as a city within a city.



Katutura

## Conclusion

Together, these narratives demonstrate that Windhoek's urban landscape cannot be understood purely through its material form. The city is also made of intangible memories, contested meanings, and inherited structures of segregation. Whether through erased pre-colonial memory, the lingering logics of apartheid in roads and malls, or the vibrant but marginalised narratives of Katutura, Windhoek's story reveals how power determines which histories are remembered, celebrated, or silenced.

## Pre-Colonial Memory & Folklore

The idea of local memory being overshadowed by narratives catering Western tourism came up in several conversations that I had in Windhoek. This observation can be dissected into four components.

Firstly, Windhoek reflects an erasure of pre-colonial city narratives, where people have little knowledge on Windhoek's history beyond the colonial occupation:

*“People don't recognize that Windhoek, before all the buildings that we see now was also just another landscape.” (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025)*

Here, I would like to highlight two examples that arose from my exchanges with Mekondjo and Titus. Mekondjo explained that there is a cemetery in Ludwigsdorf, where ancestors were buried before colonial occupation, because historically it was an area where a lot of Ovaherero, Nama, Damara and Wambo lived (Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). However, today the people performing domestic labour in the houses of the upper class walk past this cemetery without knowing that their ancestors are buried there (Mekond-

jo, personal communication, April 13, 2025).

The decolonial activist Titus brought a similar example to my attention. A Damara chief is buried in the botanical garden of Windhoek (Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025). However, local and foreign people visiting the botanical garden do not know about that.

Secondly, Windhoek reflects an erasure of folklore as collective expressions in urban space narratives. A few days after our first conversation, Nguherimo explained that folklore is a big part of Ovaherero urban narratives (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 21, 2025). However, these narratives are overshadowed by Western-centric narratives targeting tourists (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 21, 2025).

An example illustrating the status that folklore holds in Namibian culture and society is when in the North of Namibia children would gather around the fire to listen to stories by their aunties, uncles or grandmothers (H. Mukwendje, personal communication, April 17, 2025). While these stories are a way to put the children to bed, they also function as a tool to organise society. For instance, in the North of Namibia people say that you should not pull the clay pot over the ground, otherwise you will see snakes in your house (H. Mukwendje, personal communication, April 17, 2025). Here Mukwendje argued that the whole reason for that story is to stop people from breaking clay pots. This is relevant, because it showcases that folklore is an important part of Namibian culture and society and if folklore is being pushed away by tourism narratives, it means that Namibian culture is being pushed away as well.

Thirdly, even though folklore narratives are not an active part of Windhoek's memorial landscape, they are inherently connected. I would



like to illustrate this with an example from my conversation with Tjijera. He explained that in their praise poetry, the Ovaherero people refer to Windhoek as ongolo nombuntu, which means the horse and the man. This is a reference to the Reiterdenkmal statue that used to tower over the city, and which used to feature a man riding his horse (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025). He argued that this folklore narrative shows how Windhoek's memorial landscape directly shapes the way in which people understand the city:

“So sometimes monuments disappear, but their afterlives remain.” (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025)

Lastly, Windhoek runs the risk of a superficial decolonialisation if these intangible narratives continue to be overshadowed by Western tourism narratives in the public discourse:

“Otherwise we will fall into the same space of saying the Reiterdenkmal is no longer there, the Court von Francois is no longer there, maybe the memory of Germany is no longer present in Windhoek.” (M. Akawa, personal communication, April 08, 2025)

To conclude, the pre-colonial history of Windhoek is absent in the urban memoryscape. While folklore is being pushed away by tourism narratives, colonial urban memory also becomes ingrained into folklore narratives. Relating this back to the theory of Afrocentricity, in Windhoek's memorial landscape Afrocentric narratives are pushed away by Western centric narratives. Besides, there is currently no reflection on how this memorial landscape has influenced the way in which people speak about the city.

## City Identity of Bremen

Now, I would like to dive into the case of Bremen. When it comes to the identity of the city, especially in the context of colonialism, I would like to highlight two frictions between narratives that are at play and that reoccurred during my conversations in Bremen.

The first friction is between the mainstream narrative of Bremen as a harbour city and Bremen as colonial city (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025). When I spoke with the political scientist and decolonial activist Hasche, she explained this mainstream narrative as follows:

„There is this narrative of how much influence the trade relations had on the city, that the harbour was really important, that the merchants played a crucial role. But also, that the goods that came to Bremen were of great importance, so [this idea of] Bremen as a coffee city and Bremen as a cotton city.” (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025)

When I followed the walking tour in Bremen, the guide also emphasised this narrative of Bremen as a trade city. The story of Bremen as a colonial city was not shared.

Hasche argued that there are places and institutions such as the Bremen Cotton Exchange that still find this narrative of a trade city important. She told me that changing the narrative to the colonial city also entails that the current economic system is challenged (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025). According to Hasche, the harbour industry and merchants today still profit from colonial continuities in international trade. Therefore, they have no interest in critically examining Bremen's role in colonialism (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

Even though there are actors in Bremen that do not want to recognise the colonial ties of the city, they are visible all over the city. To illustrate this, I would like to give the example of two districts: Schwachhausen and the Überseestadt. In the context of Schwachhausen, Hasche told me that most of the mansions in that area are old merchant houses, meaning that the houses Schwachhausen is known for are built from colonial money (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025). The Überseestadt is another example of these colonial ties. As Litzba told me during our conversation, the old harbour that is at the centre of the Überseestadt is part of the city's colonial trade structures (D. Litzba, personal communication, May 08, 2025).

While trade has a strong influential position in Bremen, the city is also known for its special political landscape that is characterised by a left-liberal orientation. In this context, the sociologist and co-founder of the Namibia Project Manfred Hinz reflected on his experiences during the Namibia Project:

“But Bremen, I mean you probably also know this from living in this environment, has always been a politically special province and still is today. So, we always had governmental support in our work.“ (M. Hinz, personal communication, May 16, 2025)

Here, Tobias Peters, who works at the State Agency for Civic Education of Bremen, explained that Bremen generally has a politically active civil society that according to Hasche is also increasingly interested in the narrative of the colonial city (T. Peters, personal communication, May 19, 2025; L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025). This attention can be observed in the interest on the newly published book on Bremen as a city of the colonies that

I introduced earlier (W. Hillebrecht, personal communication, April 19, 2025).

Nevertheless, I would argue that there is a friction between the civic engagement of the past and the present. With the Namibia Project, and the repurposing of the elephant statue, Bremen was a forerunner in decolonisation in the 80s and 90s (H. Balz, personal communication, May 02, 2025). The elephant monument was the first decolonial memorial in Germany, and the Überseemuseum already decolonised its exhibition in the 70s (H. Balz, personal communication, May 02, 2025). Besides, there were protests organised around the Lüderitz Street by the Namibia Project (D. Litzba, personal communication, May 08, 2025). However, while the other city states are renaming their colonial streets, the Lüderitz Street still exists to this day (H. Balz, personal communication, May 02, 2025). When I went to visit the Übersee Museum, it still exhibited a collection of Herero clothes. So, even though the general interest in colonialism is increasing, the ties to Namibia are still to be critically examined.

To relate this back to theory, it is undeniable that geographies of responsibility exist between Bremen and Namibia. The identity of Bremen as a colonial city is inherently interlinked with Namibia and Windhoek. Besides, the narrative of Bremen as a trade city shows how the colonality of power, as defined by Quijano, still plays out today and how colonial continuities hamper decolonisation.





Centre of Bremen



Weser in Centre of Bremen

## City Partnership

In this section, I am exploring the identities of Bremen and Windhoek together. As I have already explained in the context chapter, the relationship between Bremen and Namibia did not end with colonialism. With the formation of the Namibia Project, the relationship between these two places transitioned into a new partnership. This evolving partnership is crucial to the understanding of the geographies of responsibility of both Bremen and Windhoek.

Commissioned by the SWAPO and located at the University of Bremen, the Namibia Project developed school material for the people in the SWAPO refugee camps that were set up in Zambia and Angola during the liberation struggle (M. Hinz, personal communication, May 16, 2025). The aim was to create a counter-narrative to the South African school material. As part of their two-way decolonialisation approach, the project also developed school material for students in Bremen (M. Hinz, personal communication, May 16, 2025). Later, the Namibia Project added a legal component to its work for Namibia. When independence was imminent, the project realised that research was necessary on the legal basis of the system that South Africa had implemented in Windhoek. During our conversation, Hinz told me that this research then turned into legislative proposals and support during the drafting of the Namibian constitution (M. Hinz, personal communication, May 16, 2025). Besides, as I pointed out earlier the project was also involved in the repurposing of the elephant statue.

In general, the project regularly hosted Namibian SWAPO members in Bremen and worked closely together with the SWAPO (M. Hinz, personal communication, May 16, 2025). Since there was limited money, SWAPO members often had to stay at the homes of the Namibia

Project members (D. Litzba, personal communication, May 08, 2025). Here, the political activist Dorothea Litzba told me a story of how a few years ago she coincidentally met a SWAPO representative that she got to know in the 70s as a student and that was now a Namibian politician (D. Litzba, personal communication, May 08, 2025). She described the encounter as very warm and personal, which highlights how personal the relationship was between the people from the Namibia Project and SWAPO (D. Litzba, personal communication, May 08, 2025). Silke Goethe explained that it is this early and personal partnership that is still highly regarded by the Namibians that Schneider is working together with (S. Goethe, personal communication, May 06, 2025).

So, since the 70s there is a governmental co-operation between the City of Bremen (federal state) and Namibia through the Namibia Project (S. Goethe, personal communication, May 06, 2025). Since 2000, this cooperation extended to a partnership with Windhoek that was formally reaffirmed in 2024. This partnership includes a climate partnership, cultural projects, such as an artist exchange, school partnerships, for example with the Augustineum Secondary school, and the cooperation with the GIZ (funded by BMZ) within their projects in Namibia (S. Goethe, personal communication, May 06, 2025). What is special to notice here is that Bremen has a partnership with Namibia as a country and Windhoek as a city. For a city state, this is quite an unusual dynamic (H. Balz, personal communication, May 02, 2025).

What I wanted to highlight with this section, is how deeply intertwined the identities of Windhoek and Bremen are beyond their colonial ties. The visit of Ben Amathila and the commissioning by SWAPO marked a turning point in the public engagement for Namibian independence in Bremen. Besides, with the educational

and legal support of SWAPO, it is also undeniable that Bremen had an impact on Namibia and Windhoek. Geographies of responsibility between Bremen and Windhoek thus encompass not only the colonial occupation, but also the partnership between the two cities.

## Conclusion

The previous sections have shown how intertwined the identities of Bremen and Windhoek are with their colonial histories. The spatial structure of Windhoek has developed from a racial to a neo-racial city. In Bremen, the mainstream narrative of Bremen as a trade city prevails. The partnership between Bremen and Windhoek showcases how the connection between the Bremen and Windhoek has evolved over time. In the following chapter, I explore how these identities materialise in the memorial landscape of the two cities.

# Memorial Landscapes

In this section, I address a selection of memorial sites in Bremen and Windhoek. All of these sites came up during the conversations I had with actors in Bremen and Windhoek. Besides, I explore the issues that relate to these memorial landscapes.

I would like to begin with a quote from my conversation with Tjijera. When we spoke about the dominant narratives of the city, he said the following:

“I think the first kind of point to start, it would for example be through monuments. Because I mean to me monuments in a way colonized space. You know, maybe in a literal sense, but also socially.” (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025)

## Current Memorial Landscape

In the following pages, I reflect on the current state of the memorial landscape in Bremen and Windhoek.



Nama War Memorial

## Memorial Sites and Museums in Windhoek

Windhoek has two types of memorial sites.

Firstly, there are officially recognised memorials such as the German church, that I visited with both walking tours.

Secondly, there are memorial sites that are not part of the public memorial landscape such as the Freedom Square. The history of this place is fully erased from the memoryscape (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

When I went to visit the Independence Museum, I noticed that it represents a one-sided narrative of history, something that I address in further detail in the memory and power section.

In the following section, I present the memorial sites and museums that Windhoek actors address during my conversations.

### Memorial Sites in Windhoek

Curt von Francois was a German general that led the Hornkranz massacre. His statue was removed in 2022. Today there is a heart installed on top (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025).

The Reiterdenkmal was a colonial statue that towered over the city of Windhoek, right where the Independence Museum is today. The statue was removed in 2009 and is now put into the courtyard of the Alte Feste (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025).

The victims of the Old Location Massacre and residents of the Old Location are buried on the Old Location Cemetery.

The Freedom Square is located in Katutura and was mentioned to me by Nguherimo and Gotlieb. During South African occupation,

SWAPO used to hold illegal meetings here (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

During the walking tour in Windhoek, the guide explained that this church has a memorial inside that commemorates the German soldiers who died during the war. Today, there are German services held in the church.

Situated in Zoo Park, the Nama War Memorial commemorates German soldiers who died during the war. When we visited the memorial during the decolonial tour, participants were very critical of the memorial's name. Today, there is a graffiti on top of it, which states "Fuck Germany, rest in hell".

Augustineum used to be a protest school during South African occupation. Many SWAPO leaders went to school there (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

Okomboni Compound: Okomboni Compound used to be a contract labour camp during apartheid, where workers had to stay under inhumane conditions (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

### Museums in Windhoek

Independence Museum: The Independence Museum showcases the Namibian history and struggle for independence.

Windhoek City Museum: The Windhoek City Museum exhibits the history of Windhoek and includes decolonial perspectives (W. Hillebrecht, personal communication, April 16, 2025).



Heart Statue in Windhoek





Old Location Cemetery





Independence Museum and Chirstus CHurch

## Memorial Sites and Museums in Bremen

In Bremen, there is a strong contrast between two memorial narratives. On the one side, there is the decolonial elephant statue together with the genocide memorial. These monuments shape a decolonial memoryscape. However, on the other side, there is the trade narrative where buildings such as the Bremen Chamber of Commerce remain uncontextualised (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

In the following section, I present the memorial sites and museums that Bremen actors address during my conversations.

### Memorial Sites in Bremen

**Elephant statue:** The elephant statue is a decolonial monument. Next to it is a memorial that commemorates the victims of the Herero and Nama Genocide

**Bismarck statue:** Situated next to the Dom, the statue commemorates Bismarck.

**Überseestadt Harbour:** The harbour in the district of the Überseestadt is directly linked to the colonial history of the city (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025)

**Bremen Cotton Exchange:** The Bremen Cotton Exchange played a crucial role in the colonial trade with cotton (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

**Bremen Chamber of Commerce.** The Bremen Chamber of Commerce is an example of the colonial buildings that are present all over Bremen.

## Museums in Bremen

The Übersee Museum is an ethnological and natural history museum.



Herero and Nama Genocide Memorial



Bismarck Statue



Überseemuseum



## Curt von Francois and the Elephant

In this section, I would like to dive deeper into two examples of memorial landscapes in Bremen and Windhoek. Both statues have been changed as an attempt to decolonise the urban structure of the city. My aim is thus to understand these two interventions and their effectiveness. I first explain the background of both statues separately and then investigate them together.

I have introduced the elephant statue in Bremen at the very beginning of this research. It is a statue that is very present in size, but also in location. With it being right behind the train station, numerous people pass it every day. However, with that location, it is not situated in a place where people would like to spend time (T. Peters, personal communication, May 19, 2025). The Nelson Mandela Park is not designed for leisure, but rather to pass by. However,

as Peters explained the sheer size of the statue makes it a dominant statue in the landscape of Bremen. Therefore, it does draw the attention of people walking past and makes them wonder what it represents (T. Peters, personal communication, May 19, 2025). Let me dive a bit more into the history of the statue. It was initially set up by the Nazi regime as a colonial memorial and as an attempt of Bremen during that time to become the city of the colonies (S. Goethe, personal communication, May 06, 2025). After the second world war, that the monument was uncontextualised for a long time. Until civil society and political actors, such as Hinz, decided that this had to change. Hinz wrote an article called “What to do with the elephant that’s standing in the middle of the city and cries?,” because the rain had washed away some of the cement which made it look like the statue was crying (M. Hinz, personal communication, May 16, 2025). Demolishing it was too costly, so they convinced the city parliament to repur-



Elephant Statue in Bremen

pose the statue into a decolonial monument in 1989 (M. Hinz, personal communication, May 16, 2025). The Namibia Project with all its connections to Namibia was involved into this process too. Later, another monument was erected near the elephant statue, built with stones from the Waterberg to commemorate the victims of the genocide in Namibia (J. Schneider, personal communication, May 06, 2025).

Up until 2022, the Curt von Francois statue was standing right in front of the municipality building of Windhoek. At the foot of the statue was a plaque referring to von Francois as the “founder of Windhoek”. For decades, people would walk past this statue on their way to work or to the centre of independence avenue (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025). However, a few years ago, a citizen-led protest against the statue began. In 2020, Titus set up a petition demanding the removal of the statue (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025). In this petition she stated the following:

**“WHAT WE WANT:**

1. We, citizens of Windhoek, ask that this statue be removed as soon as possible and be replaced by a sculpture of Windhoek’s true founder: Jonker Afrikaner.

2. The new sculpture should be commissioned by the City via an open call to Namibian artists and sculptors, and be erected on 18 October 2020: roughly 180 years after Windhoek’s actual founding.

While we cannot change our city’s dark and violent history, we can change what we commemorate from that history. We owe it to Jonker Afrikaner, Samuel Maherero, Hendrik Witbooi, and the thousands of Nama and Herero people who were subjected to genocide by the murder-

ous German Colonial Regime. We owe it to our current and future generations that the true history of our beautiful, yet complex city is not forgotten.

We bid him a „Curt“ farewell.” (Titus, 2020)



A Curt Farewell Protest (taken by Hildegard Titus)

On change.org this petition received 1.726 signatures (Titus 2020). However, it took two more years until the City of Windhoek officially removed the statue. Right now, there is a red heart statue temporarily installed on the old pedestal.

So, both statues were changed as an attempt to decolonise the city. While the elephant was repurposed, the Curt von Francois statue was demolished. What is interesting here is that both changes were initiated by citizens.

During the conversation I had, people voiced criticism towards both forms of decolonisation. When I spoke to Nguherimo about the elephant statue, he was quite critical about it repurposing:

“because the construction and the intent and the placement of the space was to show the German might.” (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025)

During the decolonial walking tour in Windhoek, participants also spoke about this afterlife of a colonial monument. Even after its removal, the space has a certain atmosphere that is inherently linked to the memory of the monument. So, in both cases the memory of the colonial monument remains even after it has been demolished or repurposed.

I spoke to Peters about this intent and atmosphere of a memorial even after its repurposing. He told me that it is indeed not always unproblematic to repurpose a memorial. However, with the elephant it was simply too costly to demolish it. Besides, the second memorial that was added later and therefore does not hold the same trauma as the elephant (T. Peters, personal communication, May 19, 2025). However, what I am wondering is why the second monument was not placed in a different location in the city. With the park not being ideal for a monument, a different location might have been more suitable. Besides, commemoration does not need to be centred in one space.

When Titus explained the history of the Curt von Francois statue during the tour, she mentioned that it would have been enough to contextualise the statue instead of removing it if Namibia was not suffering anymore from that history. So according to her, what we do with a statue is very much interlinked with how we dealt with our history more generally.

To conclude, both in Bremen and Windhoek, memorial spaces were successfully challenged by civil society.

## Memorial Practices

Memorial practices, especially in the form of commemoration events, were a reoccurring theme during the conversations I had both in Bremen and Windhoek. Therefore, I would like to highlight one commemoration event for each city. I argue that these events are an important part of collective memory.

Once a year, on the 11th of August, people gather at the decolonial monument in Bremen to commemorate the victims of the genocide in Namibia. Peters is one of the organizers of this commemoration event. During our conversation, we discussed the event in great detail. When I asked him about the atmosphere, he explained the following:

“So there is the part that is very respectful, because the victims are commemorated. And that is the most important part, where there is also a minute of silence and flowers are put down for the victims of the genocide. But that is only one part, because it is also about this exchange, and this exchange can also be music, that there is a band that animates people to join and because of that there is a very different atmosphere. But that is also what we want to create. There are also people that view this critically [...], but there we say that this is a contribution of the Afrika Network. And if this network has the wish that the commemoration looks like that, then us as a Western institution cannot say, no we have to commemorate this way” (T. Peters, personal communication, May 19, 2025).

I then asked Peters about the demography of people joining the commemoration. He told me that the main issue they have is that the 11th of August is almost always during school holidays. Because of that, it is difficult for them to attract young people, since they cannot

invite school classes. Besides, the close cooperation with the Afrika Network has made the event more present in the African community of Bremen. According to Peters, around 100 to 120 people join the commemoration every year. Since the event is located in such a busy space, it also attracts the attention of people passing by.

Every year, Namibia celebrates the Heroes day to commemorate the heroes of the liberation struggle. During our conversation, Ndjiharine reflected on this day:

“And to be honest, I don’t really watch the public broadcasts on Heroes Day because they usually have like. A live broadcast of all the like commemoration practises. Yeah, sometimes I think they’re in Okahandja, sometimes in Windhoek, I think they try to have them in different locations, but it’s generally more of like this idea of celebration, but at the same time. Because I think there’s also this flatlining of history, that it’s like, OK, but what are we actually celebrating and who are we celebrating. So, we’re celebrating heroes. But like, which heroes? [...] But I think there isn’t that kind of like this is actually what are we doing and this like I think maybe it’s one of those things that you know because it’s always been done or [...] which heroes and rule and for one reason are we celebrating? But it is still like a public holiday here.” (V. Ndjiharine, personal communication, April 18, 2025)

One of the main things that Ndjiharine pointed out here, is that even though people celebrate this day, they are not aware of the detailed background of this celebration. Besides, she is also critical of who is considered a Namibian hero. Is it only the people that fought in the liberation struggle?

To conclude, memorial practices are part of the memorial landscape in Bremen and Windhoek. However, especially in the case of Windhoek, there is little reflection on the background of the commemoration. In Bremen, in contrast, the commemoration event is contributing to a more critical civil society.

## The Role of Street Names

Street names are an important remnant of history and thus part of the colonial collective memory. Who and what do we decide to commemorate with the names of our streets? I argue that through street names colonial history is embedded without contextualisation in Bremen and Windhoek.

To this day, Bremen has colonial street names without any contextualization. Examples here are: Leutweinstraße, Windhoekstraße, Südweststraße and Waterbergstraße. While one might think that these names originated from colonial times, they are actually a remnant of the Nazi regime. Here Hasche told me the following:

„There is the so-called African district, where streets were named after places in the German colonies. And they were named in the 20s, when German colonies did not exist anymore. There was a call by the German Association of Towns and Municipalities together with the Colonial Societies. They asked municipalities to name streets and squares after places that were ‚in danger of losing their German identity.‘” (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025)

However, things are slowly changing. After pressure from civil organisations, the municipality of Bremen has hired Hanno Balz as a historian to research and situate Bremen’s street names (H. Balz, personal communication, May



Street Sign in Windhoek



02, 2025). The idea behind this project is to create a sticker with a QR code that people can scan at the street sign to read a short text on the narrative behind the street name (H. Balz, personal communication, May 02, 2025). Balz himself was quite critical of this project output, questioning whether a QR code is enough or whether the project was actually just for the municipality to be able to say that they have done something. He also realised how difficult it is to rename streets. If a street is renamed, the residents have to change their address on all their documents, which is work and costs money (H. Balz, personal communication, May 02, 2025). Consequently, residents of colonial streets are often opposed to renaming the street. However, as Hasche argued the unwillingness of residents is also a result of their own unawareness of colonialism. She told me that if people would know what happened at the Waterberg for example, they would not want their street to hold that name (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

Balz also told me that legally street names should always be an honouring and not a warning (H. Balz, personal communication, May 02, 2025). This creates a friction between honour and warning, because technically the colonial street names should not exist, even if they are contextualised.

Similar to Bremen, Windhoek is dealing with the issue of colonial street names. To this day, the city is full of German street signs. However, Nakanyete told me that the city is currently busy with renaming streets (N. Nakanyete, personal communication, April 09, 2025). She noticed that this renaming happens at different speeds depending on where you find yourself in the city. Currently, it is mostly middle-income neighbourhoods such as Windhoek West where names are changed to black leaders. Areas with pre-dominantly white populations remain the

same. During my conversation with Hinz, he told me that he was always amazed by the calmness with which Namibians treated the Lüderitz Street that was only renamed recently (M. Hinz, personal communication, May 16, 2025).

To conclude, while governmental bodies in Bremen and Windhoek are aware of the colonial connection of their street names, change only happens slowly. Especially in Bremen, residents are often unaware of the street name's implications. The project around contextualising street names is a good beginning, but not enough. To truly decolonise the city, these names need to change.

## Reparations and Restitutions

The reparation and restitution talks between Namibia and Germany are still ongoing (N. Nakanyete, personal communication, April 09, 2025). When I spoke to the archivist Werner Hillebrecht about this topic, he told me that one of the first restitutions done by Germany came from Bremen (W. Hillebrecht, personal communication, April 16, 2025). The city had two manuscripts by Hendrik Witbooi that were officially given back to Sam Nujoma in the city hall of Bremen in 1996. He argued that during that time, Bremen was a pioneer in returning stolen archival material. However, as I described earlier, to this day the Übersee Museum has both skulls and a herero collection stored and exhibited. Hillebrecht told me that he was not aware of any negotiations on officially returning these materials and human remains from Bremen (W. Hillebrecht, personal communication, April 16, 2025). He said that in general there are few return negotiations in Germany, which is also caused by the fact that the Namibian National Museum, which should be involved in this, is heavily understaffed (W. Hillebrecht, personal communication, April 16, 2025). The restitution that came from Berlin, for example,

was co-ordinated by an NGO called Museums Association of Namibia (W. Hillebrecht, personal communication, April 16, 2025). After the successful negotiations with Berlin, however, the vacant National Museum position of curator of ethnology was filled with a member of the working group on the Berlin restitution (W. Hillebrecht, email communication, September 10, 2025). When I spoke to the postcolonial activist Laidlaw Peringanda, he explained to me that during his research he found more than 200 Namibian skulls all over the world (L. Peringanda, personal communication, April 19, 2025). He wrote to the Namibian government, but they are not responding. Peringanda also told me how the restitution should best be organised to minimize the traumatic impact on Namibians:

“I’m pretty much sure that there’s a lot of skulls that are still in Germany, those things need to come back because every second year they’re always bringing skulls and it’s retraumatised us. They have to collect all of them and just come at the same time and then we will have closures. Every time it’s like you’re having a wound. It’s healing. And every time when you scratch it. So that, you know, emotional and psychological pain that we are injuring.” (L. Peringanda, personal communication, April 19, 2025)

During my conversation with Mukwendje, he spoke about a project that he did in Basel with archival material from the Basel Africa Library:

“This is the family from Germany, Missionaries that were funded or they got a scholarship, something like that through a church. And then you are sent to a country which is living under the apartheid regime. During the segregation, the way white people in most area were entitled to do whatever they want to do. And now they collected all this information and then they

brought it out. In this subject I also questions the language we use when we are talking about like colonial topics and so on. Cause they are saying that the German family donated those material to the BAB [...] And they say it was donated. These are moments that were stolen and they you use the term donated.” (H. Mukwendje, personal communication, April 17, 2025)

What struck me was his phrasing of stolen moments. I had never thought about the fact that the documentation with pictures and sounds during colonial times is part of colonial exploitation. Restitutions are therefore not only about stolen objects, they are also about stolen moments as well as the remains of Namibian ancestors.

To conclude, restitutions by Germany and Bremen specifically are slow. This has to do with two things: firstly, awareness for the impact of restitutions is lacking. Secondly, Namibia is missing a structure to organise these restitutions. However, based on the reasoning of geographies of responsibility by Massey, Bremen has a responsibility towards Namibia to initiate and support restitutions.

## Conclusion

Most memorial spaces in Windhoek and Bremen do not contribute to a pluriversal narrative of the urban history. Instead, the cities colonial ties. Nevertheless, there are examples such as the elephant statue or the Curt von Francois statue where citizen-led activism challenges and reframes memorial landscapes.



Herero Exhibits at Überseemuseum

# Memory Work

In this last section of the chapter, I explore the processes through which Bremen and Windhoek memorise colonial history.

## Black Trauma

When I spoke to Hasche about the German occupation of Namibia, she told me that you can only recognise someone as equal if you also recognise that person's trauma (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025). This understanding of trauma in relation to colonialism is at the core of this section. During my conversations in Windhoek, I observed two strains of argument when it comes to the Namibian trauma. Firstly, there is a need to understand both collective and individual trauma. Secondly, not everyone's trauma receives the same attention. In the following I explore these two arguments.

Throughout our conversation, Mekondjo mentioned that the colonial trauma is in the land and the soil of Namibia and Windhoek (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). And while that makes it very much visible, Namibians are unable to see it. This idea of trauma not only being in the people, but in the very soil of the country shows how ingrained and reinflicting the trauma is in the Namibian society and spaces. If it is in the soil of the country and the city, everything growing from that soil is carrying this trauma. Mekondjo then connected collective trauma to individual trauma:

„And perhaps once we have this understanding of our individual traumas as a people, as individuals, individual tribes, perhaps then we get a better understanding of what, what the collective trauma is all about, because you can't

just say you understand the genocide without actually understanding what did the people actually went through? What are their traumas? How were they treated during apartheid time, by the Germans, by the church?" (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025)

So, according to Mekondjo, a collective understanding of individual trauma is necessary to understand the trauma of Windhoek as a city and Namibia as a nation. To Peringanda, telling visitors his personal story is part of his healing process from his individual trauma:

“For me, it's actually like a healing process. Every time when I retell the story it is giving some relief, you know? And because even my grandmother, she was even saying that I must always step out and tell the world what happened to her and her family. So, I feel like I'm dedicated to do that.” (L. Peringanda, personal conversation, April 19, 2025)

Mekondjo further linked the lacking collective awareness of the individual trauma to the issue of tribalism. She pointed out two things: an understanding of individual colonial trauma is currently lacking in Namibia and that in turn is feeding into the social segregation between the different Namibian tribes (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). During my conversation with Nguherimo, he mentioned something similar about the lack of understanding of the past:

“After independence, there was a strong movement of a spirit of reconciliation and moving on. [...] I think there was a strong push like people should forget what they were. About this apartheid and German colonialism and create a new society. And the creation of new society maybe to those in power meant that we should forget about some of these aspect of German

and apartheid colonial atrocities or spaces.” (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025)

To the people in power, building an independent Namibia meant to forget about what caused people’s trauma. However, as Mekondjo pointed out, even though these colonial identities have vanished from the public discourse, their trauma has stayed in the soil of the country. And although they are not part of the public discourse, according to Ndjiharine, the Namibian society is still stuck in the past (V. Ndjiharine, personal communication, April 18, 2025). Namibians have adhered to their pre-independence identities (V. Ndjiharine, personal communication, April 18, 2025). Together, this creates a paradox, where the past determines the identity and segregation of the Namibian society, while that same society ignores the past and claims to move towards a unified Namibia.

However, this trauma is not only connected to the Namibian society, it is also very much interlinked with the German society. In this context, Mekondjo posed a question:

“But why is it when it comes to black bodies and black trauma and black pain - Why is it undermined? Why is it treated like it’s not so, it got no urgency [...]. Even a simple acknowledgement that yes, OK, we did that and we’re extremely sorry about this.” (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025)

Here, Mekondjo drew a comparison to the holocaust, which compared to German colonialism is very present on the public agenda of Germany. According to her, there is a difference in how present trauma is in public discourse based on the victim’s race (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). The holocaust, which was trauma inflicted on white

bodies is treated with more urgency than the trauma inflicted on black bodies through the German colonialism. However, according to Mekondjo, the systematic extermination of tribes during the German colonial time through concentration camps, mass killings and starvation can be seen as a foundation of the holocaust (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). This is in line with a statement that the political scientist Achille Mbembe made in 2020, where he argued that the holocaust and colonialism can be put in the same global context (Bajohr & O’Sullivan 2022). This argument caused a lot of controversy. For example, during my conversation with Balz, he argued that by viewing the German colonialism as a foundation for the holocaust, we take away the right of the Namibian genocide to be an atrocity on its own (H. Balz, personal conversation, May 02, 2025). Black trauma should not only be recognised as the foundation for white trauma. However, I argue that if we recognise the individual and collective trauma of German colonialism, it can be put in direct relation to the holocaust without taking away the right of the Namibian genocide to be an atrocity on its own.

The presented above understanding of trauma is closely related to the theory of both radical history and the pluriverse. Currently, trauma is treated from a homogeneous perspective. However, to be able to reach a radical history that represents everyone, the plurality of trauma needs to be recognized.

## Public Awareness

When it comes to the public awareness of the colonial ties between Bremen and Windhoek, the two cities are faced with similar issues. I argue that there are two levels of unawareness present in both places: an unawareness of history and an unawareness of spaces related to that history.

Mekondjo told me that she observed that many Germans do not know that Namibia was a German colony and that the first genocide of the 20th century happened there (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). Hasche extended this observation, she explained that two things have to be done in Bremen: firstly, people have to become more aware of the connection between Bremen and Namibia, and secondly, people need to understand the pain and suffering that this colonialism causes to this day (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025). Ndjiharine told me that Namibia is faced with a similar unawareness of Namibians of the country's colonial history (V. Ndjiharine, personal communication, April 18, 2025). There are people who do work around it, then there are people that do not know about it, and lastly there are people that do not care about it (V. Ndjiharine, personal communication, April 18, 2025).

Both in Bremen and Windhoek this unawareness can be related to education. Here I would like to highlight a quote from Tjirera:

*“It's as if the history of Namibia started in 1966. So, if you don't do a very conscious decision to say I want to know more about this place, perhaps what you will be fed is the dominant narratives of history that are, of course, always meant to legitimise those who are in power anyway.” (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025)*

Mekondjo made a very similar statement, saying that it does not only lead to a lack of information but also to a misreading of history (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). She argued that this is not only because the history is not in Namibia's school books, but also because Namibian students do not leave their classroom, they do not go on field trips to explore that history. When I spoke to Peters, he told me that he made a very similar observation in Bremen. Students do not learn about the city's colonial history (T. Peters, personal communication, May 19, 2025).

In addition to education, Windhoek's residents socio-economic status has an impact on their awareness of the city's history. According to Nakanyete the spaces where discussions on the city's memorial landscape take place, are inaccessible to a majority of the population. During our conversation, she gave me a personal example. UNAM, where she is working, was organizing an event around colonialism, but because it was past working hours and she is fostering a child, she was unable to attend (N. Nakanyete, personal communication, April 09, 2025).

The second level that I addressed in the beginning of this section relates to the unawareness of places related to the colonial history. Here Hasche explained to me that Bremen has a lot of visible places that relate to colonialism if people have the basic knowledge about it. However, if they do not know about colonialism, they will just walk past it (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025). Nguherimo made a similar observation in Windhoek. He told about the Okomboni compound in Katutura, which was a camp for contract labour where workers had to live under severe living conditions:

*“So that is one of the sites of apartheid colonial*



oppression. [...] There's not even a plaque to say what that place used to be, it's just forgot. It's a youth centre now. Is the youth aware of what it used to be? I don't think so, because there's no memorialisation of that space." (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025)

So, both in Windhoek and Bremen there is a lack of contextualization of public space through for example information plaques. In both places, space is not being memorialized, at least not in the context of colonialism.

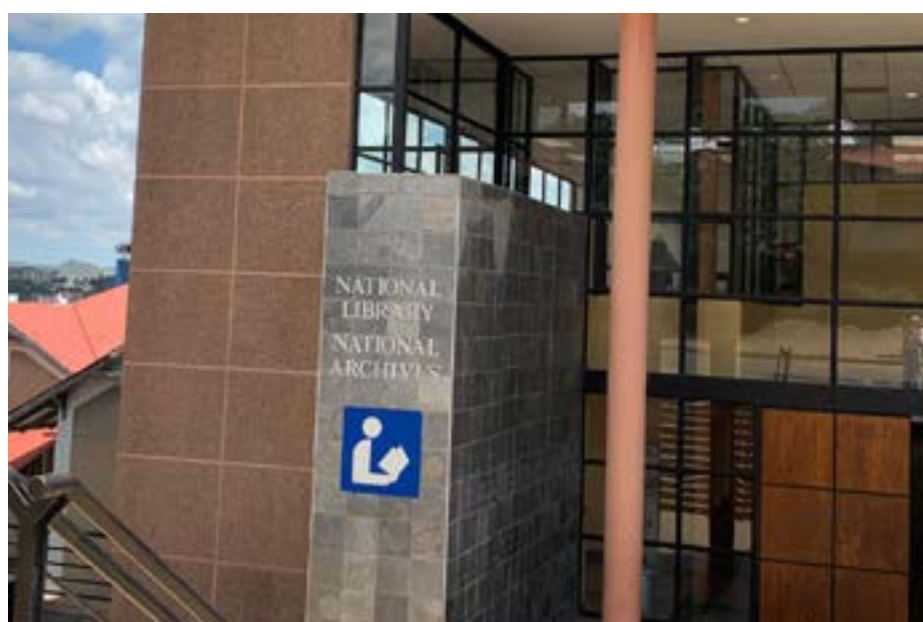
For the rest of this section, I would like to take a deeper look at the awareness of tourists specifically. I argue that although they get to see the city and its memorial landscape for the first time, they are often unable to understand its deeper colonial ties. In this context Tjirera stated the following:

"I think that distance from a place allows you to see things that others take for granted. [...] Because they have that luxury of first like [you] came here because [you] want to see Windhoek, so [you will] be looking at different things. But I have been here, I live in Windhoek and

I'm concerned about how I'm getting home because I'm in a place where the public transport system doesn't function properly. I'm thinking about what my child is gonna eat tomorrow. So precisely because of that, people simply don't have the time nor the interest in interaction with memorials." (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025)

So according to Tjirera, tourists are in the luxury position of having the time and curiosity to interact with the space. When I spoke to Nguherimo, he had a different view on the issue. He told me that it is difficult for tourists anywhere in the world to get access to the erased memory of a landscape. So, tourists will only see what they are able to see (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

In general, most tourists spend little time in Windhoek, they visit Namibia for the wildlife and the scenic places and thus have less of an interest in the history of Windhoek (S. T. Gotlieb, personal communication, April 22, 2025). This also explains why most German tourists do not know about the genocide and Namibia's history when they visit Peringanda's



National Archives of Namibia

genocide museum (L. Peringanda, personal communication, April 19, 2025). Most tourists arrive in Windhoek and then go on a tour that also passes Swakopmund. So, if tourists would learn about the colonial history of Namibia in Windhoek, they would already have that knowledge when they visit Peringanda. Since they do not have that, the only conclusion can be that tourists do not learn about it during their stay in Windhoek.

To conclude, tourists in Windhoek have little exposure to the city's memorial landscape unless they actively choose to. While they might treat this landscape with more curiosity it is difficult for them to understand its contested memories. Residents of both Windhoek and Bremen are lacking awareness of colonial histories in urban space. This lack of awareness can be explained through Quijano's theory of coloniality of power. In a world structured around Western-centric understandings of place, people have to actively choose to challenge that system.

## Memory and Power

When I told the historian Martha Akawa about my research and its design part, the first question she asked me was whether I thought that it was geopolitically possible (M. Akawa, personal communication, April 08, 2025). This question reveals how deeply power is rooted in memory. Consequently, power was also a reoccurring theme in the conversations I had.

Before diving into the power dynamics of memory in Windhoek and Bremen, I would like to look at memory on a more conceptual level. Experiences of people differ and therefore the memories of people differ too (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025). Akawa argued that memories that memory is thus contested (M. Akawa, personal communication,

April 08, 2025). According to her, memories get recognised, rejected and institutionalised. So, what happens to a memory is decided by those in power (M. Akawa, personal communication, April 08, 2025).

In the case of Windhoek, the narrative of the city is dominated by victors (J. U. Nguherimo, personal communication, April 15, 2025). However, there are two types of victors dominating the city narrative: the victors of colonialism and the victors of the liberation struggle. In the following, I elaborate on both victors.

When it comes to colonialism, power dynamics play out in the presence of monuments, the absence of contextualization and the denial of colonial atrocities. During my conversation with Tjirera, he gave me the example of the Curt von Francois statue to illustrate how the colonial remnants dominate the narrative of Windhoek. As I explained earlier, the statue had a plate declaring von Francois the founder of Windhoek. Tjirera argued that through this plate the residents of Windhoek had this wrong fact forced upon them: that a man who led the German troops to commit the Hornkranz Massacre was the founder of Windhoek (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025). With its location right next to the building of the municipality of Windhoek, overlooking Independence Avenue, the monument functioned as a key site where colonial power dynamics materialised.

Next to colonial monuments, there are also places in the city that are sites of colonial atrocities but have no contextualisation. An example is the area around the Independence Museum, which during colonial times was the site of a concentration camp (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). Today, there is no plate or information at the museum that



contextualises the past of this place (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). Mekondjo told me, that people claim to not be sure of where the concentration camp was exactly located. However, she argued that there is archival evidence of these camps as well as burial sites close to them. So, she has the feeling that a lot is being hidden from the public (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025).

For the last form of colonial power around memory, I would like to highlight a story that Peringanda when I went to visit him in Swakopmund. While this story took place there, it represents dynamics that are at play all over Namibia. He told me, that he had received death threats from Namib-Germans that want to stop his work at the genocide museum (L. Peringanda, personal communication, April 19, 2025). According to him, these people are denying the genocide (L. Peringanda, personal conversation, April 19, 2025). When I spoke to Tjirera about the removal of the Reiterdenkmal and Curt von Francois statue, he told me that it was also old Namib-Germans that were against it (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025). To conclude, within the white community and especially among Namib-Germans the denial of colonial atrocities prevails.

However, it is not only Namib-Germans that deny the atrocities of the German colonialism. Last year, Sven Tritschler, a politician of the German right-wing AFD, went to visit Namibia as part of a German delegation. The group put down flowers for the victims of the genocide in Windhoek and Swakopmund (Eberle & Weiland 2024). They also went to visit the genocide museum of Peringanda (L. Peringanda, personal communication, April 19, 2025). During that visit in Swakopmund, Tritschler went to a cemetery for the German Schutztruppe, put down flowers and posted it on his Instagram

account (Eberle & Weiland 2024). This provoked strong public reactions both on the Namibian and the German side. During an interview with the Deutsche Welle, Ellison Tjirera stated that “this act is a tribute to murderers, for people that killed Nama and Herero people” (Rust 2024). It also shows how much power and influence Germany still holds when it comes to colonial memory.

While this might seem unusual at first, I argue that the second victor dominating the narrative of Windhoek is SWAPO. Here I would like to highlight a quote from my conversation with Ndjiharine:

“They (SWAPO) definitely still hold the sort of dominant narrative of Namibian history, particularly after independence and that whole kind of narrative of, OK, we’re a free and independent nation. We are like a rainbow nation. [...]. And I feel like that’s all in effort to just sort of flatten and it’s like, ‘we’re equal now and everything is fine’. And honestly growing up, I believe that. Because of course, I want to believe that. And of course, it’s a nice narrative to believe in. And it’s true, everyone is born equal, but of course there are policies and histories and things that need to be dealt with, right?” (V. Ndjiharine, personal communication, April 18, 2025)

When I went to the independence museum, I noticed how the sections on the pre-colonial, colonial and apartheid times were relatively small. In contrast, the sections on the liberation war of SWAPO filled up most of the museum. The exhibition ended with an image of the Namibian rainbow nation, an image that reminded me of this conversation I had with Ndjiharine. This is in line with the argument by Melber on a SWAPO-dominated narrative, that I presented in the literature review.

As I have pointed out earlier, there are other memorial sites, aside from the Independence Museum, that are spread around the city and commemorate the liberation struggle. Examples here are Heroes Acre and the Sam Nujoma statue in front of Independence Museum. Next to that, there are commemoration days such as Heroes Day and Independence Day that centre around SWAPO's liberation struggle. I argue that these spatial and performative practices have two functions. Firstly, they serve as an instrument to unite the country. The struggle for independence is something that a lot of Namibians can identify with, and thus it can be seen as an instrument to unify those that have been separated for so long. Secondly, these practices also operate as a tool to justify SWAPO's political authority (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025). Based on the narrative of the liberation struggle, SWAPO cannot be separated from the memory and the national identity of the country.

In the section on the identity of Bremen, I have already mentioned how influential the harbour and trade companies are in the city to this day. When looking at the website of the Bremen Chamber of Commerce, for example, the chamber does not reflect on its colonial ties. On its page about the chamber's history, it instead states the following: "The successful trade in goods stimulated shipbuilding, and enterprising merchants founded their own overseas branches. The 'Golden Age' of Bremen's trade had begun" (Bremen Chamber of Commerce 2025). This narrative was also presented to me, when I followed the walking tour through the centre of Bremen. So, the narrative of the city is still very much dominated by the trade industry.

## Political Activism

In this section, I dive into different forms of political activism on memory: protests and artist performances.

### Youth & Protest

In my conversations with people in Windhoek, protests arose as an instrument of the youth to contest dominant narratives of the city. An example of such a protest is the A Curt Farewell Movement. Here, Akawa told me that this protest relates to a broader movement of reclaiming space, of which the Rhodes Must Fall Movement in South Africa is a part too (M. Akawa, personal communication, April 08, 2025). The Rhodes Must Fall movement started in 2015 with the removal of the colonial Cecil Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town and turned into a wider movement against white supremacy and racism in South Africa (Thomas-Johnson 2020).

Ndjiharine also compared the Windhoek protests to the Rhodes Must Fall movement. She remembered watching the statue removal on Titus's Instagram live while being abroad for a project. She told me that while watching it, she had a feeling of disbelief. It felt like a significant movement of decolonising public space (V. Ndjiharine, personal communication, April 18, 2025).

What I want to highlight with this example is the relationship between the Namibian youth and memorial landscapes. It is the youth that challenges these spaces in Windhoek, and they should therefore be seen as important actors in memory work. Besides, it is also noteworthy how media is utilised by the youth as a tool of a more global memory work. Tjirera explained this well in the following quote:

*"But young people, there are ideas, of course,*



A Curt Farewell Protest (taken by Hildegard Titus)

they travel around the world. And I think the Curt von Francois statue for example, happened within this context of decolonising space. So, there are these trendy ideas that now circulate all over the world and all over the continent. And of course, young people as people who are always engaging online, who watch news about what's going on, I think are most keen, for example, to engage in this kind of stuff" (E. Tjirena, personal communication, April 09, 2025)

When I spoke to Schneider, she described a different dynamic in Bremen. According to her, while the youth remain politically active, their engagement with political issues has shifted because they now have instant access to news from around the world. They are less focused on a single issue, such as Bremen's colonial history, and instead political activism has become more widespread.

To conclude, both in Bremen and Windhoek the youth is a driving force in memory work and the contestation of memorial landscapes. However, the globalisation of our world has had different impacts in the two places. In Windhoek, it has helped the youth to connect with the work of other movements all over the world. In Bremen, the multiplicity of global issues has led to a protest culture that is less centred on single issues.

## Performances as Political Activism

Performances are another way of challenging dominant narratives of the city. When I spoke to actors in Windhoek, they recurred as tools to disrupt residents' daily lives and raise awareness of contested narratives. To illustrate this, I would like to highlight two performances that took place in Windhoek. The first was by Mekondjo on Independence Avenue, one of Windhoek's main roads. Menondjo told me she

began this tea performance embodying a maid and holding a tray with a tea set (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). She invited a white woman to join the performance, and once Mekondjo blew her whistle, the woman had to wear her dress and was instructed by Mekondjo to wash the dishes. She then told her to hang the cloth on a washing line. Eventually, the two women sat together on the podium to have tea:

"So what does that mean now when we are sitting together on the podium and we're having tea? [...] Are we now equals or is it still like this: maid and white lady. Referring to the archives, referring to the city, this process of commuting from Katutura. Our mothers and grandmothers commuting from Katutura to Ludwigsdorf to work as maids." (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025)

Titus did a performance that, similar to the tea performance, evolved around domestic labour. She told me that it was a counter to a performance that a white friend of hers did, where she put on a blue overall and started to clean Independence Avenue. Titus told me that because her friend was white, people were confused about her cleaning the street. A white woman is not supposed to clean, and thus people immediately offered her help (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025). Titus decided that she wanted to do the same, so she cleaned different colonial monuments in Windhoek to show the connection between colonialism and black domestic labour. She told me that because she is a black woman, people expect her to clean. According to Titus, this history of black domestic workers can be traced back to the time after the genocide, when survivors were taken to the farms to do domestic work (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025). With her performance, she wanted to shed light on these dynamics.

As these two examples have shown, performances are an easy way to contest existing narratives. That they can also be very effective shows the following quote by Mekondjo:

“I immediately loved how the people stopped walking. And they just made this circle around because they wanted to see what was happening [...] And after the performance, everybody just dissolved, everything just became a street again, or people just going on with life. But there was a moment to stop, of quietness, to stop, to observe, to look” (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025)

## Decolonial Memory Work

Bremen and Windhoek both have institutional and informal work that engage with decolonial memory. While I was unable to speak to people involved in the institutional memory work in Windhoek, I had the opportunity to learn about the governmental engagement in Bremen. Besides, I spoke to two people who are organizing decolonial city tours: Titus in Windhoek and Hasche in Bremen. I was also able to join one of Titus' decolonial walking tours. To get a better understanding of how these different forms of decolonial memory work operate, I dive deeper into them in the following section.

Hasche informed me that she has been leading decolonial tours in the Überseestadt, the redeveloped harbour district of Bremen, since 2015 (L. Hasche, personal communication, 15 April 2025). Since then, she has refined the content of these tours and manages to organise 10-15 walks annually. The tours have become part of the school programme at the harbour museum, which has increased requests from school groups. Additionally, mainly university groups and research conferences participate in her tours. Moreover, 2 to 4 tours per year are open

to the public. However, tourists rarely take part in these tours. Hasche told me that because participants actively choose to join the decolonial walk, she has never encountered resistance to the topic from them. Instead, she observed the following:

“People are mostly blown away by how much it surrounds us, of how ordinary these places are. You just walk past them without being aware of their context.” (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025)

I also got the opportunity to follow Titus's tour in Windhoek. During my conversation with her a couple of days later, she explained her motivation behind the tours to me:

“So yeah, I basically started doing the tours because I wanted to share what I've learned so far and also have discussions with other people. Because we live here and we can't just let it be a place that we live in and aren't participating in its history. Because in all the other cities where they have that, it's because the people who live there decided to create that narrative around that space. Allowing for visitors to create the narrative around that space because we were catering Windhoek's story based off our visit versus catering Windhoek's story based off the people who live here.” (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025)

Similar to Hasche's tour, mostly people with an interest in decolonialisation join the tour in Windhoek. Titus told me that it is mostly people doing an exchange or gap year, people working for NGO's or people from Windhoek that are joining her tours (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025). So far, Titus has done around 5 public tours and a few private ones. The tour I joined was a special one, because it took place on the day of the



Hornkranz massacre, so the tour also evolved around that event.

The other two tours I took were not labelled as decolonial. In Windhoek, I participated in a walking tour organised by a hostel that critically engaged with sites such as the Independence Museum and the statues in front of the Tintenpalast. However, I also wondered if part of that critical engagement was influenced by the questions asked by the other two participants. The walking tour I took in Bremen was organised by the City of Bremen and did not mention colonialism at all. Instead, the guide discussed the thriving trade city that was a hub for coffee, cotton, and cacao imports.

Apart from the decolonial tour by Hasche, the city of Bremen has also taken steps to institutionalise decolonial work. It started with a conference called “colonialism and its consequences” in 2016 where all sorts of actors were invited (T. Peters, personal communication, 22 May 2025). This then led to the development of cultural policy guidelines on how to address colonial heritage in 2019 (T. Peters, personal communication, 22 May 2025). Part of these guidelines included organising the commemoration event on 11 August, which was organised by the “Landeszentrale für politische Bildung” in the same year.



Decolonial Walking Tour WIndhoek

## Conclusion

The public awareness on colonial histories is lacking in Windhoek and Bremen. The trauma that was inflicted on the Namibian population is part of the public amnesia. Nevertheless, there are civil actors in both cities that challenge this collective amnesia. In Windhoek, this happens through protests and artistic interventions, In Bremen, activism centres more around decolonial initiatives.

## Overall Conclusion

In the introduction of the analysis, I stated the following: “This has led me to this thesis. I set out to uncover the reasons behind the asymmetrical memory and visibility of colonial histories between Bremen and Windhoek. Why is it that in Windhoek, the colonial past remains so physically and discursively present, while in Bremen, traces are fragmented, silenced, or transformed?”

This analysis has shown that what seemed very asymmetrical in the beginning actually resembles each other. There is a difference between what is present in urban space and what is present to people in urban space. Although German colonialism is visible on the surface of the cityscape, its depth is invisible to most. Consequently, I argue that the traces of the colonial past are fragmented and silenced in Bremen and Windhoek. In the following discussion chapter, I dive deeper into these observations.

## 6| Discussion Chapter

The previous chapter explored the current state of collective memory in Bremen and Windhoek through three overarching categories: city narratives, memorial landscapes, and memory work. To ensure that results are presented from a more Afrocentric perspective, I decided to let the people speak for themselves to the greatest extent possible. Consequently, the analysis became rather comprehensive. To adopt a broader perspective, this discussion chapter synthesises the main findings of the thesis, relates them to the theory and literature, and finally answers the sub-research question: What spatial narratives of the collective memory of colonialism are currently inscribed in the urban landscape of Bremen and Windhoek?



## City Narratives

The analysis has shown that Windhoek is still very much a post-apartheid city. Segregation persists both in the urban landscape and in the minds of the people. This aligns with what Mbembe (2004) identified in the case of Johannesburg. Johannesburg and Windhoek are both cities where racial segregation operates as a constitutive mechanism that shapes the city's spaces and identities (Mbembe 2004). Consequently, Windhoek can be defined as a racial city. However, I argue that in Windhoek, segregation goes beyond what Mbembe defined as the racial city. Firstly, Windhoek still experiences a spatial and societal segregation of tribes. Secondly, segregation in Windhoek has acquired an element of class. This element goes beyond an intersection of identities. With the growth of the black middle- and upper class after independence, they began to occupy the same spaces as the white minority. However, Windhoek remained a racial city, meaning that the hierarchies of society persisted. Only the people occupying the top of these hierarchies changed. Windhoek developed into what I am referring to as a neo-racial city.

Next to the development of a neo-racial city, the people I spoke with have observed a decay of the city centre of Windhoek. This corresponds with Mbembe's (2004) idea of architecture of hysteria, where Johannesburg's architecture does not commemorate the city's colonial history and rather initiates a process of forgetting. Architecture in Johannesburg becomes an empty placeholder (Mbembe 2004). In the case of Windhoek, malls built in the sub-urbs of the city, such as Grove Mall and Maerua Mall, represent this form of forgetting. They do not commemorate the city's history. Instead, they drive the residents of the city away from the centre, which, with its German and Afrikaaner architecture, holds colonial memory. So, in the

case of Windhoek, the architecture of hysteria especially affects residents from the middle and upper class.

In contrast, tourists continued to be present in the city centre of Windhoek. They stay at hotels near the centre or visit the different memorial sites. To cater them, Windhoek primarily presents Western narratives in its urban spaces, such as the concept of the clean city. This contrasts with Katutura, which is not required to portray this Western image to tourists. Consequently, it is a place that produces more Afrocentric narratives than the rest of the city. Although Katutura developed as a tool of apartheid segregation, its residents have taken ownership of it. For example, Katutura is the only space in Windhoek where street markets such as the Single Quarters Market are allowed to exist openly.

So, next to the post-apartheid segregation, Windhoek thus also represents a duality of Westernized and Afrocentric narratives.

In the case of Bremen, the analysis has brought forward that the city experiences a constant friction between two groups and two narratives. While being a left-liberal, progressive city, Bremen is also home to a very powerful trade industry. So, the city experiences a friction between the progressive civil society and the trade industry that to this day profits from colonial continuities, such as the exploitation of workers in other parts of the world. The second friction is between the narratives of the urban space. With its ties to colonies such as Namibia, Bremen is an inherently colonial city. While this narrative is visible all over the city, it contrasts with the mainstream narrative of Bremen as a powerful trade city. So, the ties to

other places that, according to Massey's theory of geographies of responsibility, make up Bremen's identity are not part of the dominant city narrative.

However, as the section on the city partnership has shown, the identities of the two cities are not only interlinked because of colonial history, they have evolved with the post-colonial partnership that developed afterwards.

## Memorial Landscapes

Both Bremen and Windhoek have experienced interventions in the memorial landscape of colonialism. The example of the elephant statue and the Curt von Francois statue has illustrated how civil society can challenge a memory and initiate the removal or repurposing of memorial spaces. While in Windhoek, the removal of the statue was motivated by the attempt to achieve an Afrocentric memorial space, I argue that Bremen has failed to do the same. By only repurposing the elephant statue and adding another monument to the same space, Bremen was unable to reach a truly Afrocentric narrative of colonialism. Although the space has a decolonial narrative ascribed to it today, the history of its former meaning remains.

In contrast, the event of the 11th of August that commemorates the victims of the genocide reflects an important step towards a decolonial city. Based on Massey's (1995) theory of geographies of responsibility, it creates a space for participants to reflect on the identity of Bremen and how it is tied to the history of Namibia. In Windhoek, however, it seems that the city's commemoration events, such as heroes' day, still reflect the narrative of the SWAPO's liberation fight and thus of those in power. This is a very hegemonic narrative that fails to include the struggles of all Namibians.

In the context of street names, both Bremen and Windhoek are on a path towards decolonisation. While Windhoek has already begun to rename its colonial streets, Bremen has only started to investigate the history of colonial streets, aiming to develop QR codes to contextualise the names. It is thus questionable whether this research is a true attempt to decolonise or rather a performative decolonisation. Besides, the resistance of residents in Bremen towards changing colonial street names shows how unaware people are of the individual trauma and suffering that is connected to these street names. The same holds for the repatriation of human remains by Germany and cities such as Bremen. There is an unawareness of the meaning of these human remains, as well as a lack of structures between Germany and Namibia to facilitate restitutions.

## Memory Work

While I am writing these words, a new report has been published on the suicide rates of African countries. According to this report, Namibia has the highest suicide rate in Africa (Ndeyanale 2025). President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah referred to these developments as a national crisis (Ndeyanale 2025). What I want to illustrate with this is how deeply rooted the trauma of the country is in society. German colonialism and apartheid have created a system of segregation, they have disrupted and violated communities, and these violations have consequences to this day. Colonialism has shaped a plural society into a homogenised and hierarchical society. My analysis has also established that black trauma is treated differently to white trauma, where the trauma of white people is treated with more urgency. However, there is not only a lack of urgency, public awareness of colonial histories in general is lacking. My conversations with people have shown that in Bremen and Windhoek most residents are un-

aware of the histories of spaces around them. These two observations align with the theory of coloniality of powers by Quijano (2000). He argued that the social classification, division of labour, and knowledge production of our world system are structured on the basis of race (Quijano 2000). Therefore, the observation that black trauma is treated with less urgency than white trauma can be explained through the social classification of the world. White people occupy the top of this hierarchy, and thus their trauma is treated differently. The unawareness of colonial histories can also be related to this hierarchy of the world system. If knowledge production centres around the West, colonial atrocities will not be part of this knowledge production.

Besides, my research has established that both in Bremen and Windhoek, collective memory is still shaped by those in power. In Windhoek, these are two actors: the white minority and SWAPO. In Bremen, this is mostly the trade industry. These power dynamics of memory go against the idea of the pluriverse, where narratives should be able to co-exist and shaped by all members of society.

Nevertheless, these dominant narratives are being challenged by civil actors. The Curt von Francois protest is one example for this. The decolonial tours of Hasche and Titus are another example. They show how civil society can contribute to a plural memorial landscape.

## Synthesis

So, what spatial narratives of the collective memory of colonialism are currently inscribed in the urban landscape of Bremen and Windhoek?

Designs for the pluriverse is the overarching theory of this research, and as the analysis showed, the current design of the memorial landscape of Bremen and Windhoek does not reflect a plural-world making. Although monuments such as the elephant or decolonial tours like the one I followed in Windhoek exist, the memories of those affected by colonial occupation are largely erased from the memoryscape of Bremen and Windhoek. Consequently, the colonial memory that the memorial landscape holds is invisible to both residents and visitors. Instead of showing pluriversal narratives, urban spaces in both cities mainly represent one-sided memories.

## Limitations

One limitation that I would like to highlight in this section is that the professional background of the people I spoke with in Bremen and Windhoek is very different. While I spoke to a lot of creative professionals that do work around colonialism in Windhoek, the people I spoke to in Bremen did more institutionalised work around colonialism. This can have two reasons. In Windhoek I sampled most actors I ended up speaking to through my social network, which is more creative. So, the sampling outcome could simply be because of how I sampled. Another option could be that the community of people working on colonialism is more creative and informal in Windhoek.

Another limitation that I would like to highlight is that a lot of the actors I spoke to in Bremen are not specialised in the colonial history of Bremen in Namibia. So, although they are

doing important and very valuable work on the city's colonial history, their knowledge on the ties to Windhoek was limited. Consequently, my observations in Bremen are more general. However, this also tells something about the situation in Bremen. While colonialism is gaining more space on the public agenda, that does not necessarily mean that colonialism in Namibia does so too.



Cityscape of Windhoek



# Achieving a True Collective Memory

When I spoke to people in Windhoek and Bremen about how they envision a true collective memory, most emphasised that the two cities need to form a collective. This has two dimensions. Firstly, according to Titus, a collective memory is a memory that provides substantial room for all individual experiences and memories to coexist. Closely aligned with Escobar's theory of the pluriverse, she argued that because we live in a multifaceted world, memory should be multifaceted too (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025). To be able to achieve this multifaceted memory, people in Windhoek have to understand each other's individual traumas (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). When I spoke to Ndjiharine, she argued that this understanding is not one-sided:

“Healing goes both ways. For example, identity is constructed, right? So, me as a black woman, there are certain things that I have learned about myself that I need to unlearn. And then you, as a white woman, there are certain things that you have learned that you need to unlearn as well. I feel like if we could all unpack this, the world would be a better place. And it's not just one-sided, you know?” (V. Ndjiharine, personal communication, April 18, 2025)

To conclude, Windhoek itself should form a collective through understanding individual trauma and creating space for individual memories to co-exist. However, the understanding cannot be one-sided, which brings forward the second dimension of collective memory.

This revolves around forming a collective between Bremen and Windhoek. According to the people I spoke to, the exchange between

Bremen and Windhoek should increase. Currently, the partnership between the two cities is predominantly by city administration and politics (S. Goethe, personal communication, May 06, 2025). To achieve a collective memory between Bremen and Windhoek, this partnership should shift more towards civil society (S. Goethe, personal communication, May 06, 2025). For example, sports and exchange programs can foster a feeling of “togetherness” as Mukwendje explained to me (H. Mukwendkje, personal communication, April 17, 2025).

The two dimensions of an ideal collective memory translate into four needs:

1. The need to make room for individual memory and experiences within collective memory
2. The need to understand each others individual trauma
3. The need to unpack the own individual identity
4. The need for a civil partnership between Bremen and Windhoek

## Who Own's History?

A recurring question in the conversation I had was who must take ownership of the colonial history that connects Bremen and Windhoek? This question revolves around two axes: city and governance.

First, I would like to zoom in on the city axis. The people I spoke with all emphasised that this ownership is not a one-way road. Both places, Bremen and Windhoek, should take ownership. However, the kind of ownership differs per space. In Bremen, it is a question of responsibility. In contrast, in Windhoek it is more about self-determination. I would like to highlight two quotes here:

“Once we established that there are these important historical accounts that are absent, we bring them to the fore. And then once we, the people of Windhoek or Namibia, appreciate that, we can then tell the world, we can then tell Bremen, we can then tell Germany. Like you probably need to know this” (E. Tjirera, personal communication, April 09, 2025)

“It is not only the job of the victims. I can't be always travelling to Germany and talk about these colonial histories, what happened to my people in Namibia. And keep telling this to the German communities because apparently they don't know. It's also not my job. It's like piling trauma on top of the trauma that I'm already experiencing [...]. So, whose job is it actually to educate? I think the new generation in Germany they are quite curious, and they want to know what happened. And yes, the young people keep saying, but it's not my generation that inflicted this pain. But then you start to question, it might not be your generation, but this is what happened. This is your history.” (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025)

What these two quotes illustrate is the constant friction that the ownership of history is in. On the one side, it is not the victim's responsibility to retell that history, but on the other side, the victim also has to learn a new version of its history that it can then share with the world. Consequently, I argue that the ownership of colonial history is something fluid, something dynamic. It should be present in both places, but it also evolves with time.

The second axis adds a governance dimension to the ownership of colonial history. Is it something that the government should implement? Or is ownership citizen-led? Here, the answers of the people I spoke with were clear: we cannot and should not wait for the government to take ownership. Hasche gave me the example of the Holocaust commemoration. She argued that this history is only present in Germany because civil society fought for it. To her, bringing colonial history to the foreground is a societal fight. It is a fight that, while long overdue, will always be faced with public resistance. However, Hasche told me that it is this public resistance that the fight is for (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

I would like to end this section with a quote from my conversation with Titus:

“Because we forget that the government works for us. And every now and then, we have to remind ourselves and them that we are the government, like unofficially. If we don't complain about something, they are not going to change anything. Everyone has a role to play, and no one is gonna save you, unfortunately. [...] You have to start, and then it will be easier for people to join once you've started something. Because everything, any revolution, any change in history always started with someone telling someone else, and then together it just develo-



ped.” (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025)

To answer the question of who owns history: it is you and me.

The different visions of ownership that I presented above then translate into three needs:

1. The need to take ownership of colonial history
2. The need to revisit history
3. The need for citizens to take ownership of history

## Let's Talk

Another central thought of people in Bremen and Windhoek was that more conversations between communities should take place. These conversations have two different types of drivers. The first is driven by the need for different communities to critically talk about their shared colonial history. Here, Mekondjo stated the following:

“And this is why I keep, I keep saying it's important for us to come to the table, the perpetrators and the victims, we have to sit. You see how we have this table here? We all have to sit at this table and we have to talk about this, this issue, this genocide.” (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025).

Mukwendje argued that such exchanges between people can contribute to the decolonialisation of their minds. In the case of Bremen, Peters suggested the expansion of community-driven programs around events such as the genocide commemoration (T. Peters, personal communication, May 19, 2025). This engagement could foster conversations on colonial history between different communities and raise awareness.

The second driver that I would like to highlight revolves around accountability. Exchanges between people have to take place to hold each other accountable. I would like to share a quote by Titus:

“Not all of us are going to be activists. Not all of us are going to go to every protest, but protests are sometimes small, and they start in your house, and they start in your neighbourhood, and they start at your dinner table when you're talking to a racist auntie or uncle, you know what I mean? People see, oh, I want to go march outside, like, OK, that's nice, but did you march in your house? You know, because that's where it starts. Because if each young person is able to influence someone in their house, then that person won't go in the street talking shit because there's someone at home keeping them in check.” (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025)

What she highlighted is how important it is for people to talk. Activism starts in daily life with the people who surround us. Everyone has to hold the people around them accountable for what they say and do. Besides, daily, critical conversations about Bremen and Windhoek colonial history can change the perspective of the people surrounding us.

The section above has revealed the following needs:

1. The need for everyone involved in this history to talk
2. The need for more events and exhibitions around the colonial history
3. The need for small protests and conversations in daily life

## Educating the Youth

To increase people's awareness of colonial memory in Bremen and Windhoek, education arose as a crucial tool in several conversations. Here, Peters told me that he would wish for the topic to be more present in the classrooms of Bremen (T. Peters, personal communication, May 19, 2025). Mekondjo observed a similar lack of education in Windhoek. She argued that students do not leave the classroom to explore colonial memory in the urban spaces of Windhoek. During our conversation, she illustrated how school education could look like instead:

“Wouldn't that be so amazing to take a group of high school students to the National Archives? Take out this map. Take out everything, all the images that you can find about the Old Location and then compare. Take them that side. Let them walk around because now they have an understanding that there was a place called the Old Location. There's some evidence in the archives there is images, let them do a project around that. And then to understand why the people were moved from the Old Location to Katutura because the images are there. Yeah, there's a lot of evidence, so I wish our education was focusing a lot on our own history, so that we have a better understanding of what the Ovaherero people experience, what the Nama people experience, what the Wambo people experience, what the San people experience, what the Damara people experienced.” (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025)

So, students in both cities should interact with the space around them to understand the past of these places. This idea can be related to the theory of geographies of responsibilities. By interacting with the space around them, students can also learn about spaces historically tied to them. Then, as a second step, students from

both places could interact with the colonial history together. Here, Peringanda told me about a project that he is working on. German students work together with Nama and Herero students on the history of the genocide. He described this project as an opportunity to transform trauma and to reconcile (L. Peringanda, personal communication, April 19, 2025).

The theme of Educating the Youth has revealed three different needs:

1. The need for colonial history to be more present in schools
2. The need for students to interact more with the urban space around them
3. The need for students from both cities to work together on colonial history

## Let's Reimagine Space

One of the main conclusions from the conversations I had was that Bremen and Windhoek should reimagine their spaces. This reimagination can be divided into three approaches.

Firstly, spaces can be contextualised. An example that came up multiple times is the stumbling stones that commemorate victims of Nazi persecution. These stones are embedded in the pavement in front of houses. Hasche told me that something similar could be done for sites with colonial memory (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025). This urban intervention would showcase how ingrained colonialism is in our urban spaces. Peringanda suggested the same for Namibian cities to keep the memories of the victims of the genocide present (L. Peringanda, personal communication, April 19, 2025). In general, Hasche argued that wherever there are spaces with colonial memory, counter-narratives have to be presented in those spaces (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

Secondly, spaces should be changed. Here, I would like to highlight two examples. Nakanyete told me about the village of Oshakati where they have renamed a lot of streets after traditional food or native people from the region (N. Nakanyete, personal communication, April 09, 2025). What this illustrates is that street names are an accessible entrance to reimagine spaces, they can change the narrative of a place and a city (L. Hasche, personal communication, April 15, 2025). For the second example, I would like to highlight a quote from Mekondjo:

“Make use of that [colonial] building, use it and integrate it in the city. They can become shops, they can become artist studio spaces, for us artists in this city, we suffer from spaces where we can’t find the space to work from and I feel like if we are dealing with this colonial histories, how amazing it is to actually create work that is talking about the colonial histories and the past and the trauma and the memories inside a German colonial building. That would be brilliant. You can’t get rid of everything. You still have to preserve some of this.” (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025)

What Mekondjo argued is that instead of falling back into this pattern of architecture of hysteria, where colonial buildings are being demolished, Windhoek should take ownership of colonial buildings and repurpose them. So that these buildings can become Namibian in their own way.

The last form of reimagining that I would like to highlight is related to how we interact with these colonial spaces. During my conversation with Mekondjo, she told me that she would wish for Windhoek residents to interact more with the city through performances (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025). While it is very common in other parts

of Africa to do street performances, Mekondjo felt that they are lacking in Windhoek. During her performance work in Germany, she made a similar observation that I again would like to illustrate with a quote:

“What I also find very problematic is that I don’t want to be the only person that is stepping into this role because I’m always questioning what are the German artists doing? Why are they not doing work around Shark Island? And let’s say even performative work where they maybe collaborate with a Namibian artist. I really feel like it is always the artists from the former colonies that have to come that side [...]. What are the German artists doing about the colonial histories, these colonial entanglements? It’s not only my burden to carry.” (T. Mekondjo, personal communication, April 13, 2025)

So, there is a need for more German artists to step into these colonial spaces together with Namibian artists and to contribute to their re-imagination. Together with three other needs it forms the essence of this theme:

1. The need for memorial landscapes to be contextualised
2. The need to change street names
3. The need to take ownership of colonial buildings
4. The need for more artists to deal with colonial histories

# Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I presented visions for both Bremen and Windhoek that arose during the conversations I had. The aim was to find an answer to the question: What do actors envision as a pluriversal narrative of colonialism in the urban space of Bremen and Windhoek? Five visions emerged from the exchanges I had:

- A pluriversal memory is dynamic. It can encompass the individual memory and trauma of the people who relate to the history. In a society with pluriversal memory, people try to understand each other's individual experiences and are in exchange with people from other places that are historically tied to their space.
- A pluriversal narrative of colonialism is owned by both civil society and the government in Windhoek and Bremen. While the former coloniser takes responsibility for its colonial history, the colonised regains agency over that history.
- In a society with pluriversal narratives on colonialism, people engage in conversations about that history. This includes both the coloniser and the colonised. Besides, people challenge and hold each other accountable for the ways in which history is being told.
- Pluriversal memories of colonialism are part of the education system, both in Bremen and Windhoek. Students engage with these memories in the classroom and in the urban space itself. Besides, students from both places are in exchange on these pluriversal memories. By working on them together, they impact these narratives.

- To achieve a pluriversal narratives, urban spaces that hold colonial memory have to be contextualised, they have to be changed, and reimagined.

Together with the needs that derived from the above presented visions, these pluriversal narratives form the foundation of the following strategy chapter. Here, the visions and needs are translated into concrete design strategies and urban interventions.



Landscape in the Surroundings of Windhoek

## 8 | Strategy

In the previous two chapters, I have presented the different visions and the resulting needs that people explained to me during our conversations. In this chapter, I want to explore how these needs can be facilitated in urban spaces. The aim is to find an answer to the third sub-question: What design strategies and spatial interventions have been or could be employed to support decolonial approaches to memory, and what role can these play in fostering critical reflection among visitors?

# Urban Design Guidelines

To develop these design guidelines and spatial interventions, I synthesised the identified needs with the insights that emerged from the analysis of the current state of collective memory of colonialism. My aim was to ensure that the proposed guidelines reflect the conversations I had with people both in Bremen and Windhoek.

Initially, I had planned to develop design guidelines only for the urban spaces of Bremen. However, after analysing the data and conducting an ideation session, I realised that the design guidelines of Bremen and Windhoek are inherently intertwined. Consequently, I decided to include both cities in the design process. After a first brainstorm, I developed a table with guidelines, translations, and example interventions for each need and city. In this research, a translation functions as an application of a guideline. The example intervention then suggests a concrete action that derives from the translation. In the second step of the ideation,

I presented the preliminary guidelines to one of the Namibian actors that I had interviewed for the research. Finally, I implemented the feedback and merged guidelines that resembled each other and kept the individual translations and example interventions.

The following pages show the final guidelines, translations, and example interventions.



Centre of Bremen

## Guideline 1: Urban space and memorial landscapes should represent a plural collective memory

### **Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

### **Actors involved:**

Municipality, Non-Governmental Actors

### **Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Urban planning process must include research beyond the site itself, including its historical, social and cultural ties

Add counter narratives to spaces that hold colonial memory

### **Intervention Bremen:**

Conduct interviews with actors in Windhoek to form a better understanding of Bremen's landscape

Develop sth similar to the stumbling stones to showcase which places in the city hold colonial memory

### **Intervention Windhoek:**

Organizing a co-creation session with actors from diverse backgrounds

Develop sth similar to the stumbling stones to showcase which places in the city hold colonial memory

## Guideline 2: Deepen understanding of trauma inflicted on people in the former colonies

### **Applicable City:**

Bremen

### **Actors involved:**

Municipality, Non-Governmental Actors, Governmental Institution, Civil Society

### **Translation:**

Ensure that sites of colonial memory also showcase trauma and suffering on an individual level

### **Intervention:**

Add personal stories of descendents of the victims of the genocide in Namibia to the monument next to the elephant statue



### Guideline 3: Form a shared understanding of individual traumas

**Applicable City:**

Windhoek

**Actors involved:**

Municipality, Non-Governmental Actors, Governmental Institution, Civil Society

**Translation:**

Conduct research on how different communities experienced colonial occupation and its consequences to this day

**Intervention:**

Create a program that through art, poetry, talks and so forth addresses these individual traumas

### Guideline 4: Projects between civil society of both places should be fostered

**Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

**Actors involved:**

Municipality, Non-Governmental Actors, Governmental Institution, Civil Society

**Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Create exchange programs between the two cities

**Intervention Bremen & Windhoek:**

Begin a partnership between sports clubs in both cities

### Guideline 5: Form an understanding of what the city's and its residents identity consists of

**Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

**Actors involved:**

Civil Organisations, Civil Society

**Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Create a program around the identity of citizens

**Intervention Bremen & Windhoek:**

Organise workshops and discussions around the topic of identity especially in relation to colonialism

### Guideline 6: Actively take responsibility for the city's history

**Applicable City:**

Bremen

**Actors involved:**

Everyone

**Translation:**

Governmental and non-governmental projects dealing with the city's colonial history should be fostered

**Intervention:**

Create a space in the city that can facilitate workshops, exhibitions and so forth dealing with colonialism

## Guideline 7: Enable marginalised communities to gain agency over the city's colonial history

**Applicable City:**

Windhoek

**Actors involved:**

Municipality, Non-Governmental Actors, Governmental Institution, Civil Society

**Translation:**

Facilitate spaces where marginalised groups can revisit and present their history

**Intervention:**

Create a program that through art, poetry, talks and so forth addresses these individual traumas

## Guideline 8: Critically revisit and engage with the city's colonial history

**Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

**Actors involved:**

Everyone

**Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Create a governmental and civil knowledge exchange program about the city's colonial ties

**Intervention Bremen & Windhoek:**

Have an annual online conference between Bremen and Windhoek where the two cities can exchange their knowledge on their colonial ties

## Guideline 9: Enable and support civic activism to create and contest urban memory

**Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

**Actors involved:**

Civil Society

**Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Organise initiatives that contest dominant narratives in urban spaces

**Intervention Bremen:**

Organise a protest around colonial street names

**Intervention Windhoek:**

Organise a petition to the government to build an information plate about the concentration camp at the Independence Museum.

## Guideline 10: Support a critical civil society that challenges colonial memory in their daily life

**Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

**Actors involved:**

Civil Society

**Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Challenge the narratives that people in the surrounding environment reproduce.

**Intervention Bremen & Windhoek:**

Go into dialogue with family members on colonial history and memory

## Guideline 11: Create spaces for conversations about colonial urban memory

### **Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

### **Actors involved:**

Everyone

### **Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Enable settings that foster dialogue and a shared understanding of colonial history.

### **Intervention Bremen:**

Create a week in cooperation with the city of Windhoek around the genocide commemoration that facilitates dialogues on Bremen's colonial history

### **Intervention Windhoek:**

Create a series of events with dialogues between all communities of Windhoek

## Guideline 12: Integrate colonial urban memory into school education

### **Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

### **Actors involved:**

Governmental Organisations

### **Translation Bremen:**

Create school material that addresses the colonial history of the city

### **Translation Windhoek:**

Create school material that addresses the plural history of the city

### **Intervention Bremen:**

Produce school material in collaboration with historians from Windhoek on the historical ties between the two cities

### **Intervention Windhoek:**

Bring together a group of people from diverse communities to produce school material dealing with the plural pre-colonial and colonial history of Windhoek

## Guideline 13: Create opportunities for students to critically interact with urban space

### **Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

### **Actors involved:**

Schools, Non-Governmental Actors

### **Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Organise excursions to spaces in the city that hold colonial memory

### **Intervention Bremen:**

Organise a school project around the harbour of Bremen where students have to combine archival research with field research and interviews

### **Intervention Windhoek:**

Organise a school project around the Old Location where students have to combine archival research with field research and interviews

## Guideline 14: Facilitate cross-city collaborations between students to engage with colonial histories

### **Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

### **Actors involved:**

Everyone

### **Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Organise an exchange project about the history of the two cities

### **Intervention Bremen & Windhoek:**

Create a thesis exchange program where students from both cities write their thesis on the topic

## Guideline 15: Ensure that street names with a colonial history are renamed

### **Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

### **Actors involved:**

Municipality, Non-Governmental Actors

### **Translation Bremen:**

Educate residents on the historical meaning of these street names

### **Translation Windhoek:**

Develop a concept for new, decolonial street names

### **Intervention Bremen:**

Create film on the history of colonial streets that can be broadcasted on the local TV channel

### **Intervention Windhoek:**

Research on other city's and how they have dealt with colonial street names

## Guideline 16: Reprogram colonial buildings so that they foreground colonial histories

### **Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

### **Actors involved:**

Municipality, Non-Governmental Actors, Civil Society

### **Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Use colonial buildings as spaces for dialogues and exhibitions on colonial history

### **Intervention Bremen:**

Use one of the old buildings in the Übersee-stadt as a flexible space for talks, exhibitions and other projects related to the city's colonial history

### **Intervention Windhoek:**

Repurpose old colonial buildings into art studios and galleries

## Guideline 17: Support and encourage artists to engage with the city's colonial history

### **Applicable City:**

Windhoek, Bremen

### **Actors involved:**

Municipality, Non-Governmental Actors, Civil Society

### **Translation Bremen & Windhoek:**

Foster exchanges between artists from both places to deal with their colonial history

### **Intervention Bremen & Windhoek:**

Start an exchange program with an exhibition in both cities

# Conclusion

The guidelines that I outlined in the previous sections provided actional approaches to address the needs that I have derived in the vision chapter. They thereby answer the sub-question: What design strategies and spatial interventions have been or could be employed to support decolonial approaches to memory, and what role can these play in fostering critical reflection among visitors? In the next chapter, I present a pilot intervention that translates a selection of the guidelines into a real-world project.



Impressions of Katutura

## 9| Pilot Project

# Introduction

The pilot project operationalises a selection of the design guidelines introduced in the previous chapter. In this cross-national project, I collaborate with the Windhoek-based visual artist Hage Mukwendje. The objective is to critically engage with collective memory of colonialism in Bremen and Windhoek. This thesis research functions as a basis for this critical engagement. With our Bremen and Windhoek backgrounds, we aim to create an exchange where we host each other in our home cities and immerse ourselves in their urban environments. By conducting archival research, interviews, and field observations, we aim to produce site-specific responses that raise awareness for pluriversal narratives of colonialism in the two cities and that foster cross-city conversations.

## Concept

**Core Idea:** artist-research exchange to explore collective memory of colonialism in Bremen and Windhoek

**Key Activities:** archival research, interviews, field observations, workshops, exhibitions, discussions

**Target Audience:** residents of Bremen and Windhoek, local stakeholders

**Outputs:** exhibition in Bremen, exhibition in Windhoek, talks

**Roles:** researcher coordinates data collection and written output; artist translates findings into visual outputs

# Connection to Design Principles

This project operationalises several design guidelines that I presented in the strategy chapter:

- Guideline 17 - support and encourage artists to engage with the city's colonial history: In the strategy chapter, I had translated this guideline into fostering exchanges between artists from both places to deal with the colonial history. The artist-researcher exchange project is thus a direct response to the guideline and its translation. By immersing ourselves in each other's urban environment, we aim to achieve a cross-city understanding and awareness of colonial histories.
- Guideline 11 - create spaces for conversations about urban memory: Alongside an exhibition in Bremen and Windhoek, we aim to facilitate conversations about colonial histories by hosting talks and discussions.
- Guideline 5 - form an understanding of what the city's and its residents identity consists of: The city identity and resident identity in relation to colonialism will play a crucial role in the site-specific art responses and conversations around them. How did colonialism contribute to who we are as a city and humans?
- Guideline 10 - support a critical civil society that challenges colonial memory in their daily life: The goal of the artist-research exchange is to foster a critical engagement with urban colonial memory among visitors of the exhibitions and conversations. This first critical engagement is crucial in encouraging a critical civil society.



# Status and Next Steps

## Steps already taken:

- Conceptual development of the artist-research exchange
- Presentation to two stakeholders in Bremen and Windhoek
- Application for an art residence program in Bremen that evolves around the city partnership

## Next Steps

- Further explore funding opportunities
- Find partners in both cities
- Develop a detailed time planning



Exhibition by Hage Mukwendje in Basel (picture by Mukwendje)

# 10| Conclusion

This research centres around the question  
How can the (re)design of urban landscapes contribute to the creation of decolonial memoryscapes that critically engage visitors with colonial histories?

I began this study in Windhoek, where I immersed myself in the city's memoryscape for a month. I spoke to a variety of actors involved with the topic of urban narratives, went to visit different sites in the city, and followed two walking tours. After that experience, I began to speak to actors in Bremen, visited memorial sites in the city, and followed a walking tour. The empirical material that I gathered from these interactions with spaces and people revealed the following trends:

- Windhoek is a neo-racial city, where the remnants of apartheid developed into a system of spatial and societal segregation on the basis of social class, race, and tribes. Although colonialism is present in the urban landscape of the city and there is a group of young people challenging the landscape, its history remains uncontextualized and is thus invisible to a majority of the population.
- Bremen experiences a friction between the mainstream narrative of Bremen as a powerful trade and Hanse city, and Bremen as a deeply colonial city. Colonialism is present in many parts of the city but remains uncontextualized. Although initiatives and monuments such as the stones by the elephant statue exist, most of civil society does not know about the city's ties to Namibia.
- As a consequence, both cities represent a one-sided collective memory of colonialism, where the memories of those affected by colonialism are largely erased.

Building on these insights and the material from the conversations with actors, I established five visions for a pluriversal memoryscape of Bremen and Windhoek: achieving a true collective memory, who own's history, let's talk, educating the youth, and let's reimagine space.

The material revealed the following five key insights:

- A pluriversal memory of colonialism in Bremen and Windhoek is dynamic.
- Pluriversal narratives of colonialism should be owned by the civil society and government of Bremen and Windhoek.
- People from Bremen and Windhoek should engage in conversation about their shared histories with each other.
- Education should include pluriversal memories of colonialism in Bremen and Windhoek
- A pluriversal memory can only be achieved when spaces in Bremen and Windhoek are contextualised, changed, and reimagined.

For each vision, I used the insights from the people I spoke with to create needs. These needs represent what has to be done for the cities to represent a pluriversal, decolonial memory. Together with the insights, these needs then guided the development of the design strategy.

For the design strategy, I developed guidelines that I translated into actions and showcased with an example intervention. The guidelines include both Bremen and Windhoek and highlight which actors should be involved in the guidelines. The goal of the strategy is to achieve an urban memoryscape that represents pluriversal and decolonial narratives.

The pilot project then applied a selection of the guidelines to illustrate how they can be translated into real-world projects and thus directly informing the main research question.

Overall, this research provided insights into how the (re)design of urban landscapes can contribute to the creation of decolonial memoryscapes that critically engage visitors with

colonial histories. As Escobar (2018) argued in his theory of Designs for the pluriverse, life happens in space. My analysis has shown that both people in Bremen and Windhoek are unaware of the cities colonial ties. It is thus crucial that the design of space reflects the society that we want to build. Therefore, design of urban landscapes plays an inevitable role in reshaping public awareness.

Looking at Windhoek and Bremen together has allowed me to realise that this reshaping of space and awareness cannot happen alone. A true decolonisation of Windhoek is impossible if it does not go hand in hand with the decolonisation of urban places such as Bremen and vice versa. The design guidelines illustrate how intertwined the design of Bremen and Windhoek is. In line with the theories of the pluriverse and geographies of responsibility, I argue that cities are inherently relational (Escobar, 2018; Massey, 2004). Their identity consists of a plurality of invisible threads that touch other places. The (re)design of urban landscape can contribute to the creation of decolonial memoryscapes by uncovering the threads that weave together the identity of place. This uncovering has to be in collaboration with other places. In the case of Bremen and Windhoek, it means that the cities should revisit their colonial histories together.

To be able to critically engage visitors with colonial histories, the threads to other places should be present and contextualised in all spaces where daily life is lived. In doing so, a one-sided memoryscape can shift to a pluriversal engagement with colonial histories.

Building on these insights, my study suggests further research into three domains. Firstly, there is a need to increase our understanding of spaces in relation to each other, especially

in the context of colonial histories. Therefore, further case studies of cities with colonial ties should be carried out. Secondly, this research addressed colonial memory of the entire city. It would be interesting to, for example, focus on a specific area in Bremen and Windhoek and to explore their historical ties. Lastly, the pilot project introduced in this research is only a proposal. Further research should be carried out on similar projects, from ideation up until their implementation.

“Not all of us are going to be activists. Not all of us are going to go to every protest, but protests are sometimes small, and they start in your house, and they start in your neighbourhood, and they start at your dinner table when you’re talking to a racist auntie or uncle, you know what I mean? People see, oh, I want to go march outside, like, OK, that’s nice, but did you march in your house? You know, because that’s where it starts. Because if each young person is able to influence someone in their house, then that person won’t go in the street talking shit because there’s someone at home keeping them in check.” (H. Titus, personal communication, April 14, 2025)

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# Appendix

# Interview Guide

## General

- Background
- How does your background relate to this project?
- What does collective memory mean to you?

## Text

- What are narratives that are currently present in the urban space of Windhoek?
- How do these narratives materialize?
- Are there present narratives that are being misread?
- What narratives are absent in the urban spaces of Windhoek?
- Why are they absent?
- How are memorials/places reinscribed with new meaning/narratives?
- Are the spaces accessible to you and others?

## Performance

- For who are these places?
- Are there events organized around memorials?
- How are they used during these events?
- Who is involved in organizing these events?
- Did the use change over time?
- Is there a relation to Germany? Are there organizations that shape these events?
- Do these places facilitate discussions more generally?

## Arena

- How are people supposed to behave in these places?
- Who uses the spaces?
- How do they use them?
- Is there any activism around this site?
- How did that impact the site?

# Future Narratives

- What narratives should be told in German urban spaces?
- What can Germany learn from Namibia?
- What narratives should be told in German urban spaces?
- What can Germany learn from Namibia?

