

# Transnational Linkages and Learning between Populist Actors in Southern Africa

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## ABSTRACTS

While the study of populism has received increasing attention in the last years, existing policy and academic literature largely remains confined to the nation-state as the predominant conceptual framework. However, populist actors are in constant exchange with each other, both within and across geographical regions. They “learn” from each other. Ideas and rhetorical tools are transferred and adapted to various contexts. This article explores some of the transnational linkages and learning processes that take place between populist political actors in Southern Africa, which include ruling as well as opposition parties. Specifically, it looks at the former settler colonies South Africa and Namibia, which share a similar historical legacy of protracted anti-colonial struggles and apartheid that continues to affect regional socioeconomic and political realities in all three countries up until today. This legacy is manifested in highly racialized inequality and ongoing societal debates on how “real” (usually termed as “economic”) justice and freedom can be achieved. Populists from both the left- and right-wing spectrum make use of entrenched ethnic, racial, and intergenerational schisms and frequently refer to each other across the border. By empirically examining some of the diverse formal and informal linkages between populist actors in the region, this article aims to highlight the potential of this hitherto neglected field in populism research and to push forward the scholarly engagement with two essential questions: How are populist ideas and practices transferred across different contexts, and how do populist actors “learn” from each other?

Obwohl die Erforschung des Populismus in den letzten Jahren zunehmend an Bedeutung gewonnen hat, beschränkt sich die vorhandene wissenschaftliche und Policy-Literatur weitgehend auf den Nationalstaat als vorherrschenden konzeptionellen Rahmen. Populistische Akteure stehen jedoch in ständigem Austausch miteinander, sowohl innerhalb als auch über

geografische Regionen hinweg. Sie „lernen“ voneinander. Ideen und rhetorische Mittel werden übertragen und an verschiedene Kontexte angepasst. Dieser Artikel untersucht einige der transnationalen Verbindungen und Lernprozesse, die zwischen populistischen politischen Akteuren im südlichen Afrika stattfinden, zu denen sowohl Regierungs- als auch Oppositionsparteien gehören. Konkret geht es um die ehemaligen Siedlerkolonien Südafrika und Namibia, die ein ähnliches historisches Erbe aus langwierigen antikolonialen Kämpfen und der Apartheid teilen, das die regionalen sozioökonomischen und politischen Realitäten in allen drei Ländern bis heute beeinflusst. Dieses Erbe äußert sich in einer nach wie vor rassistisch geprägten sozioökonomischen Ungleichheit und anhaltenden gesellschaftlichen Debatten darüber, wie „echte“ (gewöhnlich bezeichnet als „wirtschaftliche“) Gerechtigkeit und Freiheit erreicht werden können. Populist:innen sowohl des linken als auch des rechten Spektrums bedienen sich der tief verwurzelten ethnischen, *racial* und generationenübergreifenden Schismen und beziehen sich häufig über staatliche Grenzen hinweg aufeinander. Durch die empirische Untersuchung der vielfältigen formellen und informellen Verbindungen zwischen populistischen Akteuren in der Region und die Verwendung des Konzepts des Kulturtransfers möchte dieser Artikel zur Beantwortung zweier wesentlicher Fragen beitragen, die in der Populismusforschung bisher vernachlässigt wurden: Wie werden populistische Ideen und Praktiken über verschiedene Kontexte hinweg transferiert, und wie „lernen“ populistische Akteure voneinander?

## 1. Introduction

While the (perceived) global rise of populism has received increasing academic attention in the last years, existing literature largely remains confined to the nation-state as the predominant conceptual framework for analysis. However, populist actors are in constant exchange with each other. Populist ideas, practices, and rhetorical tropes are transferred and adapted to various contexts, for example as with the xenophobic “Put South Africans First” campaign<sup>1</sup> that references Trump’s “America First”. This article examines some of the transnational linkages between populist actors in Southern Africa, a region that has so far not been studied much in the context of the proclaimed “global rise of populism”.<sup>2</sup> It presents empirical observations on how ideas, rhetoric, and practices are transferred and examines some of the ongoing learning processes between different populist actors in the region. Specifically, it looks at South Africa and Namibia, two countries that share a similar historical legacy of apartheid that continues to affect regional socioeconomic and political realities today. This legacy is manifested in highly racialized inequality and current societal debates on how “real” (usually termed as “economic”) justice, reconciliation, and freedom can be achieved.<sup>3</sup> The fact that inequality in the subregion still largely

1 See also Christi van der Westhuizen, this volume.

2 B. Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*, Redwood City 2016.

3 In South Africa, the term “economic freedom” became popular with the emergence of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) on the political scene in 2013. However, it has already been used in parliamentary and public debates before that. In Namibia, it also appears in parliamentary debates (see, e.g., Republic of Namibia, Hansards National Assembly, Hon. Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services, National Youth Council Bill, 1 October

appears along racial lines is reflected in household survey data<sup>4</sup> as well as in popular perceptions.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, youth unemployment rates are among the highest worldwide. Populists from both the left- and right-wing spectrum make use of these entrenched ethnic, racial, and intergenerational schisms.

This became, for example, evident in October 2020, where demonstrations following the killing of a white farm manager in a small town in Free State Province (South Africa) turned into a stage for various populist performances. Afrikaner nationalist organizations, such as AfriForum, used dog whistles, such as “farm murder”, to push the conspiracy theory of a “white genocide”. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), also at the scene, threatened a “race war”. Both sides emphasized ethnicization, defining “the people” they represented along ethnic lines. The pictures of some AfriForum protestors holding up “Boer Lives Matter” signs, a bizarre cultural backlash to the “Black Lives Matter” movement following the murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 unfolding in the US and elsewhere, circled the world.<sup>6</sup>

From this example, it is clear that populists take up globally known slogans and appropriate them to their own advantage across different continents, twisting their meaning in the process.<sup>7</sup> However, the borrowing of rhetorical tropes and the transfer of populist practices also take place *within* the region. So far, these intraregional linkages have been little investigated.

In this text, I look at the diverse formal and informal entanglements between the diverse populist political actors in the Southern African region. The ruling parties and former national liberation movements in power,<sup>8</sup> including the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO Party [before SWAPO of Namibia]) in Namibia, make increasingly use of populist rhetoric and performative elements as their approval rates dwindle.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, opposition parties, such as the EFF in South Africa, the Landless People’s Movement (LPM), and

2008, p. 156) and has been regularly referred to by the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement. See, e.g., D. S. Nauyoma et al., *Affirmative Repositioning: Awakening a Generation*, Windhoek 2016, p. 228.

4 For example, using the Gini coefficient as the measurement (World Bank, Gini index, [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?end=2021&name\\_desc=false&start=2014](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?end=2021&name_desc=false&start=2014) (accessed 31 July 2023)). In 2015, Namibia had a Gini coefficient of 59.1 and South Africa of 63 (in 2014). These are among the highest levels of inequality globally. Class remains racialized even decades after the end of white minority rule (see J. Patel, *Social cohesion hangs in the balance as South Africans feel economically insecure: Reflections from the South African Reconciliation Barometer, Reconciliation & Development Occasional Papers*, No. 7, Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2021, p. 7 for unemployment rates by race groups).

5 See South African Social Attitudes Survey (<https://hsrc.ac.za/special-projects/sasas/>) or Afrobarometer (<https://www.afrobarometer.org/>) (both accessed 31 July 2023).

6 See, e.g., P. Fihlani, *South Africa white farmers condemned for storming Senekal courthouse*, 7 October 2020, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54441374> (accessed 31 July 2023).

7 See, e.g., C. Blum, *Against Thy Neighbour: The Rise of Xenophobic Populism in South Africa*, in: *FGZ Hypotheses*, 12 December 2022, <https://fgzrisc.hypotheses.org/3033> (accessed 31 July 2023).

8 This term has been coined by R. Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power*, Cambridge 2013.

9 In South Africa’s local elections in November 2021, the ANC fell below the 50 per cent mark for the first time, receiving only 45 per cent of the votes. At the same time, voter turnout has steadily declined, highlighting growing disillusionment, especially among young South Africans (the “born-free” generation). Similar observations can be made for Namibia. See H. Melber, *Explorations into middle class urbanites, social movements and*

the self-styled social protest movement Affirmative Repositioning (AR) in Namibia have emerged, which focus on redistribution, in particular the land question, as well as the fight against (ruling party) corruption, often employing racialized (or ethnicized) as well as other forms of populist rhetoric.<sup>10</sup>

I make use of the cultural transfer concept, which takes into account the mutuality in the constitution and transfer of political concepts and ideas, from the field of transregional studies.<sup>11</sup> The cultural transfer approach considers active intermediaries, or brokers, as a necessary precondition for the transfer of ideas and knowledge.<sup>12</sup> It thus differs from diffusion, a prevalent concept in political science that conceptualizes the traveling of ideas as unidirectional, often without paying attention to agency.<sup>13</sup> This article is based on field research conducted in South Africa and Namibia in February, March, and November 2022 in the context of the research project “Political Populism in Southern Africa” at the Research Institute Social Cohesion (RISC), funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF, 2020–2024). This included interviews with scholars, civil society, and political representatives as well as an extensive document analysis, including a compilation of the South African and Namibian Hansards<sup>14</sup> collections and party manifestos.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, public government documents, newspaper articles, speeches, and social media posts have informed my analysis. The empirical research design impacts on how I approach terminology. As highlighted in the introduction of this special volume, “populist” is, of course, not a self-designation used by parties and movements discussed in this publication. I approach populism through a performance lens and look at the construction of closeness to an imagined (homogeneous) “people” in the post-apartheid context as the starting point for my analysis. Furthermore, legitimate grievances and a post-apartheid “desire to assert the leadership of a long-neglected underclass”<sup>16</sup> should

political dynamics: Impressions from Namibia’s capital, Windhoek, in: *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* (2023) 1, pp. 94–105.

10 Populism in the region extends beyond the political parties and movements discussed here, of course. This paper does not pretend to address all actors that have been or can potentially be regarded as “populist”, but highlights empirical observations with regard to the ties between some of them.

11 See M. Middell, *Kulturtransfer, Transfers culturels*, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte* 2016, available at <https://zeitgeschichte-digital.de/doks/frontdoor/index/index/docId/702> (accessed 31 July 2023); and M. Middell, *The Intercultural Transfer Paradigm in its Transnational and Transregional Setting*, in: T. Adam (ed.), *The Yearbook of Transnational History*, Vancouver 2018, pp. 46–60.

12 Middell, *Kulturtransfer*, para. 1.

13 On the concept of diffusion, see, e.g., F. Gilardi, *Who Learns from What in Policy Diffusion Processes?*, in: *American Journal of Political Science* 54 (2010) 3, pp. 650–666; T. A. Börzel and T. Risse, *From Europeanisation to Diffusion: Introduction*, in: *West European Politics* 35 (2012) 1, pp. 1–19 and T. A. Börzel and T. Risse (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford 2016.

14 These are *ad verbum* protocols of parliamentary debates.

15 Party and election manifestos constitute, however, an insufficient source. Especially in the Namibian case, they are difficult to access and often are not publicly available, which indicates that they are of little importance in electoral campaigns. Press statements and social media activities by the relevant parties are thus an essential complement.

16 S. Mbete, *Out with the old, in with the new? The ANC and EFF’s Battle to Represent the South African “People”*, in: P. Ostiguy, F. Panizza, and B. Moffitt (eds.), *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach*, New York 2021, pp. 240–254, here p. 242, referring to the EFF in South Africa.

not be dismissed as mere electoral bating or manipulation. As argued by several authors, the populism pendulum can swing either towards “more” or “less” democracy<sup>17</sup> and thus can also potentially be an emancipatory force.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. Southern Africa as a Region: The Long Shadow of Settler Colonialism

Southern Africa has hitherto been discussed in the study of populism only on a few occasions.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the regional dimension of populism has been barely acknowledged in general. However, historical peculiarities arguably make this region an interesting case. Southern Africa has been shaped by constant migration, starting from the Khoi San roaming the subregion in the Late Stone Age to migration movements such as those linked to the Mfecane in the early nineteenth century to the labour migration resulting from the economic system, which depended on cheap labour, especially in South African diamond and gold mines. Southern African *regionness* is a political construct and lived reality for its population at the same time.<sup>20</sup> Compared to other African countries, most of which became independent in the early 1960s, Southern African countries gained independence late. Mozambique and Angola became independent from Portugal in 1975, Zimbabwe in 1980, and Namibia from South Africa in 1990, with South Africa holding its first democratic elections in 1994.

Many countries in the region have gone through protracted and violent anti-colonial and liberation struggles and have been politically, socially, and economically shaped by the apartheid system. Specifically, in the three former settler colonies of South Africa, Namibia, but also Zimbabwe, which today still exhibit a high percentage of white population (often still referred to as European),<sup>21</sup> severe wealth disparities continue between the historically defined race groups and inequality rates are staggering. Such situations provide fertile ground for populist messaging. In all three countries, there are currently intense social (and partly government-led) debates taking place concerning more equitable and just redistribution policies.<sup>22</sup> These debates include the urgent question of land reform, particularly how to achieve “true” reconciliation and create unity after decades of apartheid and racial segregation, as well as who belongs (and who does not belong) to these young nations. The latter question is attempted to be answered according to differ-

17 C. R. Kaltwasser and C. Mudde, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2017, p. 87.

18 E. Laclau, *On populist reason*, London, New York 2015.

19 A notable exception is the work by Henning Melber. See, e.g., H. Melber, *Populism in Southern Africa under liberation movements as governments*, in: *Review of African Political Economy* 45 (2018) 158, pp. 678–686.

20 G. Bauer and S. D. Taylor, *Politics in Southern Africa: Transition and Transformation*, 2nd ed., Boulder, CO 2011, p. 5.

21 In Namibia, about 5 per cent of the approximately 2.5 million inhabitants are white. Of the estimated 60 million South Africans, 4.6 million are white, which is approximately 7 per cent of the total population.

22 See C. Blum, *Social Cohesion im südlichen Afrika: Diskurse, Institutionen und Praktiken*, in: M. Middell (ed.), *Variationen des Zusammenhalts: Historisch und transregional vergleichende Perspektiven*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2024 (forthcoming).

ent variations, for example with notions of citizenship, nativism, and migration (see van der Westhuizen in this volume).

### 3. National Liberation Movements in Power as Populists in their own Right

Since the end of white minority rule, the former national liberation movements (NLMs) in South Africa (ANC) and in Namibia (SWAPO) have transformed from military to political structures, winning all elections in the post-independence era. Due to their similar histories, they arguably share a distinct political culture.<sup>23</sup> Today, they operate de jure in multiparty systems but de facto in *dominant party systems*<sup>24</sup> and use a variety of discursive practices of self-legitimization, heroification, and self-celebration in order to cement their power.<sup>25</sup>

In the specific historical and sociopolitical setting of former settler colonialism, the question arises of how populism, which is often characterized by a juxtaposition of an “elite” and “the people”,<sup>26</sup> can be described and conceptualized for the Southern African context, where former liberation movements turned ruling parties continue to present themselves as the only legitimate representatives of “the people”. This supposed closeness to “the people” is discursively enshrined in a dominant narration of the liberation history.<sup>27</sup> To this end, the ANC and SWAPO use a wide variety of discursive practices of mystification and self-celebration. They claim ownership of history and society on the basis of their achievements as liberators, thereby legitimizing the party’s hold on power in democratic times: “We will continue to run this government forever and ever. Whether they [detractors] like it or not”.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, for example, the popular expression “SWAPO is

23 See H. Melber, *Limits to Liberation in Southern Africa*, Cape Town 2003; H. Melber, *Liberation Movements as Governments: Democratic Authoritarianism in Former Settler Colonies of Southern Africa*, Basel 2013. See also Melber, *Populism in Southern Africa*; Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power*. This also applies to other NLMs in the region, such as the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF). The post-independence bilateral relations between Namibia and South Africa and between the ANC and SWAPO are complex and often “ambivalent” (T. A. Hengari and C. Saunders, *Unequal but intertwined: Namibia’s bilateral relationship with South Africa*, in: A. Bösl, A. du Pisani, and D. U. Zaire [eds.], *Namibia’s Foreign Relations*, Windhoek 2014, pp. 169–180, here p. 170). This ambivalence is, amongst other things, grounded in apartheid-South Africa’s occupation of South West Africa (later Namibia) for 30 years up until its independence and South Africa’s economic, political, and demographic importance within the region (see also C. Saunders, *South Africa and Namibia: Aspects of a relationship, historical and contemporary*, in: *South African Journal of International Affairs* 23 (2016) 3, pp. 347–364).

24 M. Bogaards, *Counting parties and identifying dominant party systems in Africa*, in: *European Journal of Political Research* 43 (2004) 2, pp. 173–197; H. Giliomee and C. Simkins (eds.), *The Awkward Embrace. One Party-Domination and Democracy*, London 1999; R. Doorenspleet and L. Nijzink (eds.), *One-Party Dominance in African Democracies*, Boulder, CO 2013.

25 Melber, *Populism in Southern Africa*.

26 See, e.g., C. Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*, in: *Government and Opposition* 39 (2004) 4, pp. 541–563.

27 On Zimbabwe, see, e.g., T. Ranger, *Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe*, in: *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30 (2004) 2, pp. 215–234.

28 A comment made by Jacob Zuma in 2014 in the context of an electoral campaign. See S. Afp, *Zuma: The ANC will rule till Jesus comes back*, in: *Mail & Guardian*, 8 January 2014, <https://mg.co.za/article/2014-01-08-zuma-the-anc-will-rule-forever/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

the people and the people are SWAPO”<sup>29</sup> suggests an inextricable link between the party and the Namibian people. The glorification of the own role in the liberation struggle and the derived claim to embody the “will of the people”, also in the democratic era, are central discursive elements of the specific “variant” of populism by former liberation movements in power in Southern Africa.<sup>30</sup> Populists in power in the region therefore do not oppose the establishment but *are* the establishment.

In spite of their continued electoral dominance, popular support for NLMs has plummeted over time. In South Africa, support for the ANC has steadily decreased and reached an all-time low in the last local elections of 2021 (47.9 per cent). Similarly, SWAPO has lost significant popular support, solely obtaining 56 per cent in the 2020 municipal elections, which saw several municipalities going to opposition parties, including the capital of Windhoek. With approval rates decreasing, populist rhetoric in (sections of) the ruling parties have experienced a boost, notably under Jacob Zuma (2009–2018) and Hage Geingob (since 2015).<sup>31</sup>

### 3.1. Land and Reconciliation as Transnational Discourses

Discursively, NLMs often borrow from each other. The popular SWAPO slogan “One Namibia, One Nation”<sup>32</sup> is strikingly similar to Kenneth Kaunda’s “One Zambia, One Nation” motto, used to foster unity in the ethnically and culturally diverse Zambia upon the country’s independence in the 1960s. References to experiences made by neighbouring countries become particularly salient with regard to the question how to rectify the highly unequal land ownership patterns in the region, one of the long-term impacts of settler colonialism.<sup>33</sup> The negotiated transitions that ended the South African occupation of Namibia and South African apartheid in the early 1990s arguably did not bring about revolutionary change. Skewed land ownership patterns were not addressed in the respective negotiation outcome documents and thus continue to exist. For instance, in Zimbabwe, an explicit 10-year ban to tackle the land issue was effectively enshrined in the Lancaster House Constitution.<sup>34</sup>

29 Republic of Namibia, Minister of Justice, Statement by Sacky Shanghala on Social Cohesion for Nation Building, Windhoek, 10 July 2019, p. 8.

30 Melber, Populism in Southern Africa.

31 H. Melber, Namibia’s Regional and Local Authority Elections 2020: Democracy beyond SWAPO, in: *Journal of Namibian Studies* 29 (2021) 1, pp. 73–85, here p. 75 seq. Melber notes the rise in anti-white rhetoric just before the local elections for vote baiting. The populism of Jacob Zuma in South Africa has been subject of several academic analyses. See, e.g., J. Hyslop, Trumpism, Zumaism, and the fascist potential of authoritarian populism, in: *Safundi* 21 (2020) 4, pp. 464–472.

32 The term was later consecutively replaced by “Unity in Diversity”. See M. Akuupa and G. Kornes, From ‘One Namibia, One Nation’ towards ‘Unity in Diversity’? Shifting representations of culture and nationhood in Namibian Independence Day celebrations, 1990–2010, in: *Anthropology Southern Africa* 36 (2013) 1–2, pp. 34–46.

33 S. Moyo, The Land Question in Southern Africa: A Comparative Review, in: L. Ntsebeza and R. Hall (eds.), *The Land Question in South Africa. The Challenge of Transformation and Redistribution*, Cape Town 2007, pp. 60–84.

34 See H. Melber, Colonialism, Land, Ethnicity, and Class: Namibia after the Second National Land Conference, in: *Africa Spectrum* 54 (2019) 1, pp. 73–86, here p. 74.

The historically grown solidarities between former comrades that jointly fought apartheid and the deterrence of the Zimbabwean example, which turned from a beacon of hope in the 1980s to a cautionary tale in 1990s and 2000s, are two central cornerstones that shaped intraregional “learning”. Former South African president Thabo Mbeki claimed in a speech in 2019, following Robert Mugabe’s death, that Zimbabwe had not embarked on a land reform in 1990 out of consideration for its neighbour South Africa. Even though the 10-year ban to address a land reform had then expired, Mugabe – according to Mbeki – did not want to jeopardize the negotiations that had begun in South Africa in 1990 through a potential mass flight of the white population that the tackling of the land issue might have provoked. Mbeki framed this as an act of regional solidarity.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the fast-track land reform programme (FTLRP) in Zimbabwe, a both chaotic and violent process of expropriation without compensation of mainly white farmers in Zimbabwe that started in the late 1990s, became a point of reference for the entire region. Initially, high-ranking government officials in Namibia praised Zimbabwe’s land policy, especially under President Hifikepunye Pohamba.<sup>36</sup> In April 2004, Namibia even received a group of “land experts” from Zimbabwe.<sup>37</sup> Since the economic crisis and hyperinflation, beginning in 2007, positive references to Zimbabwean land reform have died down. Zimbabwe has progressively turned into a cautionary tale for Namibia and South Africa. Similarly, Zimbabwe has initially been praised as a regional role model when it came to reconciliation, having adopted a coherent discourse and practice in the early 1980s before turning its back on such actions later on.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, both the reconciliation and land policies subsequently designed in Namibia and South Africa looked rather different, indicating that no simple “copy/paste” was taking place. In Namibia, SWAPO was hesitant in addressing the land issue, despite having held two land conferences. A first land conference had taken place a year after independence, in 1991, and resulted in little change.<sup>39</sup> A second land conference was convened in November 2018. By then, 70 per cent of a total of 12,380 commercial farms were still owned by whites.<sup>40</sup> The second conference offered more new promises than solutions,<sup>41</sup> even though a “significant new addition [to the conference’s agenda] was the issue of urban land and informal settlements”,<sup>42</sup> which had been a central demand of the AR movement (see the contribution by Rui Tyitende to this volume). In South Africa,

35 The Herald, Zim delayed land reform for SA, 20 September 2020, <https://www.herald.co.zw/zim-delayed-land-reform-for-sa/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

36 Melber, Colonialism, Land, Ethnicity, and Class, p. 74.

37 Melber, In the Footsteps of Robert Gabriel Mugabe: Namibian Solidarity with Mugabe’s Populism – (Bogus) Anti-imperialism in Practice, in: S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Mugabeism? History, Politics, and Power in Zimbabwe, New York 2015, p. 115.

38 Blum, *Social Cohesion im südlichen Afrika* (forthcoming). Before turning his back on his initial approach to reconciliation, Mugabe had adopted both a discourse and practice in the early 1980 that secured the pensions of white civil servants, included white Zimbabweans in the new cabinet etc.

39 For a detailed analysis, see Melber, Colonialism, Land, Ethnicity, and Class, pp. 75–78.

40 Ibid., p. 76.

41 Ibid., p. 78.

42 Ibid.

the land question has been raised as a central concern by social movements that emerged in the early 2000s in protest against the ANC's increasingly neo-liberal economic policies.<sup>43</sup> The EFF's regular calls for expropriation without compensation have attracted significant media attention. The issue was eventually addressed by the National Assembly with the so-called Expropriation Bill. After long and intense debates, the bill was passed in September 2022.<sup>44</sup> Efforts driven largely by the EFF to amend Section 25 of the South African Constitution that deals with private property have so far been unsuccessful.<sup>45</sup> As traditional allies, NLMs in the region not only look at each other's rhetoric, practices, and policies, but also try to learn from their peer's failures (i.e. Zimbabwe).<sup>46</sup> On the one hand, channels for exchange are provided by the multiple, formalized bi- and multilateral fora, including the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as regular meetings of liberation movements.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, informal ties grown from historical solidarities and personal friendships between former comrades in the liberation struggle are arguably also essential in creating strong intraregional linkages.<sup>48</sup>

- 43 Notably by the Landless People's Movement (LPM) which was founded in 2001. For more details, see section 5.2. of this paper. Apart from rural land, urban land and affordable housing have also become key topics of social protest, voiced for example by Abahlali baseMjondolo, a movement in support of shack-dwellers founded in Durban in 2005, and the Reclaim the City (RTC) campaign which advocates for urban land and affordable housing in Cape Town's inner city since 2016.
- 44 M. Merten, Controversial Expropriation Bill is finally approved after navigating a 14-year rocky road, in: Daily Maverick, 29 September 2022, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-09-29-controversial-expropriation-bill-is-finally-approved-after-navigating-a-14-year-rocky-road/> (accessed 31 July 2023).
- 45 See, e.g., R. Pather, First step to land expropriation without compensation, in: Mail & Guardian, 27 February 2018, <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-02-27-historic-vote-land-expropriation-without-compensation-passed/> (accessed 31 July 2023).
- 46 In the literature on liberation movements in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe is referenced as a case from which South Africa and Namibia have learned on several occasions. This extends, for example, to the way "patriotic history" has been used by other NLMs (cf. C. Saunders, History and the armed struggle: from anti-colonial propaganda to 'patriotic history?', in H. Melber (ed.), *Transitions in Namibia – which changes for whom?* Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute 2007, pp. 13–28), the land question (see, e.g., Moyo 2007), and reconciliation discourses and practices (see, e.g., A. du Pisani, *Imagination, metapolitics and reconciliation: Vignettes from postcolonial Namibia and beyond – A Professoria Lecture*, Windhoek: University of Namibia n.d.; Blum, *Social cohesion im südlichen Afrika*, forthcoming). These manifold learnings were facilitated by the time gap between Zimbabwe's independence and Namibia's and South Africa's moment of freedom ten and 14 years later. Moreover, the experience of Namibia's peaceful transition and retaining of white minority rights made F. W. de Klerk's speech on 2 February 1990 possible in which he announced the unbanning of the ANC (C. Saunders, *From Apartheid to Democracy in Namibia and South Africa: Some Comparisons*, in: H. Melber and C. Saunders, *Transition in Southern Africa – Comparative Aspects*. Two Lectures. The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Discussion Paper 10 2001, pp. 6–17 here pp. 7–8). Furthermore: "By the time the South African negotiators began working on a new constitution, there was the Namibian example to follow" (ibid., p. 14).
- 47 See, for example, The Chronicle, *Liberation movements meet*, 5 May 2016, <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/liberation-movements-meet/> (accessed 5 July 2023) and The Herald, *Ex-liberation movements meeting roars to life*, 9 September 2019, <https://www.herald.co.zw/ex-liberation-movements-meeting-roars-to-life/> (accessed 5 July 2023). However, very little is known about what goes on in these meetings.
- 48 Regional solidarity is expressed on a regular basis to other "comrades" from the times of the joint fight against the racist minority regime in South Africa and Rhodesia. It remains one of the corner stones of the bilateral relations between ruling parties in the region until this day. SADC leaders mourned and lauded Mugabe after his death in 2019. See, e.g., Cyril Ramaphosa's speech following Robert Mugabe's death (C. Ramaphosa, Office of the Presidency, 6 September 2019, <https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-ramaphosa-mourns-passing-president-mugabe-6-sep-2019-0000>) as well as the condolences by the regional community (SADC, Condolences

Many friendships were built in exile – the so-called Frontline States (FLS) provided a safe haven for many liberation struggle fighters<sup>49</sup> – but also at universities and the few educational institutions available to black Africans during apartheid.<sup>50</sup> Given the significance of these historically grown connections for regional relations, the question arises how newly emerging parties in the region, lacking the same history and structural support, interact and learn from each other.

#### 4. Origins and Links between Emerging Populist Parties in South Africa and Namibia: Copycats or Vanguard in their Own Right?

The EFF have hitherto received the most academic attention among the young opposition parties in the region labelled as “populist”. Other opposition parties (or protest movements) that have emerged in the region around the same time, including the LPM and AR in Namibia, have so far been largely ignored in scholarly work and left to political commentators. The EFF were founded in 2013 by Julius S. Malema after he was ousted from the ANC Youth League (ANCYL). ANCYL president from 2008 until his removal, Malema had fallen out with the ANC leadership in 2012, including his former mentor and South African president Jacob Zuma (2009–2018). In the 2014 national elections, the EFF became the third-largest party in the National Assembly and has managed to retain a significant share of electoral support ever since. The EFF’s emergence on the South African political scene has been widely considered as a “turn towards a dangerous populism in South African politics” by both right- and left-wing commentators.<sup>51</sup> Individual analysts have highlighted the EFF’s potential to strengthen the democratic process.<sup>52</sup> Clad in domestic worker and miner uniforms when attending

on the passing of H.E. Robert Mugabe, 9 September 2019, accessible via: <https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/condolences-passing-he-robert-gabriel-mugabe-former-president-zimbabwe> (both accessed 31 July 2023).

49 Precursor of today’s SADC, one of eight regional economic communities (RECs) on the continent recognized by the African Union (AU). The Frontline States were a loose grouping of Southern African states that stood against the racist apartheid regime in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa (and, by extension, South-West Africa/Namibia).

50 Fort Hare University in South Africa was attended by many liberation struggle icons, including Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Ntsu Mokhehle of Lesotho, and Sir Seretse Khama of Botswana (see the university’s website: <https://www.uhf.ac.za/international/notable-alumni.html>, accessed 31 July 2023). The ANC moreover opened the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFSCO) in Tanzania for exiled “comrades”. The role of cadre schools, such as the ANC’s recently (re)launched OR Tambo School of Leadership, would also be interesting to look at in this regard.

Friendship, dislikes and rivalries seem to matter significantly for intraregional ties. Melber describes the relationship between Robert Mugabe, Sam Nujoma and Nelson Mandela post-1994. When Mandela was increasingly put on a pedestal by the international community, the friendship between Mugabe and Nujoma grew close, partially out of a joint feeling of comradeship and jealousy with regard to Mandela’s fame (Melber, *In the Footsteps of Robert Gabriel Mugabe*, p. 108).

51 S. Mbete, *The Economic Freedom Fighters: South Africa’s Turn Towards Populism?* in: *Journal of African Elections* 14 (2015) 1, pp. 35–59, here p. 35.

52 For example, the late Eusebius McKaiser, although McKaiser has remained highly critical of the EFF. See, e.g., E. McKaiser, *Reject the dichotomy of political horrors*, in: *Mail & Guardian*, 20 October 2020 (accessed 31 July 2023).

parliamentary sessions, the EFF's style insinuates closeness to the working class and has been analysed as a specific sociocultural performance.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Malema and other EFF members frequently wear red berets, portraying themselves as revolutionaries in line with Thomas Sankara or Che Guevara. The EFF claim ideological roots in Fanonism and Marxist-Leninism.<sup>54</sup> It positions itself as a leftist vanguard party and rallies for support around the issues of land and the fight against corruption of the ANC elite. Some scholars have characterized the party as neo-fascist, partially due to its emphasis on an all-encompassing state power over the economy and over the South African people.<sup>55</sup> Malema's discourse is highly racialized. He has battled several hate speech cases at the South African Equality Court, with different outcomes.<sup>56</sup> "The people", as Malema frames them in most of his speeches, are black poor South Africans, while "the other" are usually white South Africans and/or the corrupt ruling party elite.<sup>57</sup>

The EFF's political style has had a significant impact on South African politics and beyond. It has pushed the boundaries of "acceptable behaviour", but at the same time has anchored key topics, such as corruption within the ANC,<sup>58</sup> land and racialized inequality firmly on the political agenda.<sup>59</sup> Malema himself has enjoyed an "almost meteoric rise to the top".<sup>60</sup> He joined the ANC when he was just nine years old and was elected provincial chair of the ANC's student arm, the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), at only 16 years old. After becoming COSAS's national president, he became the provincial chair of the ANCYL in 2003 and, a couple of years later, its president. Until Mugabe's ousting in Zimbabwe in 2017, Malema held close ties with the ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF).<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Malema portrayed himself as being close to the former wife of Nelson Mandela and ANC Women's League

53 Z. Goldhammer, The Coded Clothes of South Africa's Economic Freedom Fighters, in: *The Atlantic*, 1 August 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/the-coded-clothes-of-south-africas-economic-freedom-fighters/375366/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

54 C. Bernardo, Democracy, fascism and the future of the EFF, in: *UCT News*, 29 January 2021, <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2021-01-29-democracy-fascism-and-the-future-of-the-eff> (accessed 31 July 2023). See also the Facebook presence of the EFF (accessible via: <https://de-de.facebook.com/economicfreedomstruggle/> (accessed 31 July 2023)).

55 V. Satgar, Black Neofascism? The Economic Freedom Fighters in South Africa, in: *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie* 56 (2019) 4, pp. 580–605. See also C. van der Westhuizen, Populism as African Fascism? Examining the Economic Freedom Fighters in Postapartheid South Africa, in: *Africa Today* 69 (2023) 3, pp. 3–25.

56 In 2011, Malema was found guilty of hate speech by the South African Equality Court for singing the anti-apartheid song *dubul' ibhunu*, which translates to "shoot the boer". See *Mail & Guardian*, 11 April 2011, <https://mg.co.za/article/2011-11-04-malema-loses-out-on-hate-speech-appeal-bid/>. In 2022, the court dismissed a similar complaint presented by *AfriForum*. See *Mail & Guardian*, 25 August 2022, <https://mg.co.za/top-six/2022-08-25-malema-economic-freedom-front-singing-kill-the-boer-ruled-not-hate-speech/> (both accessed 31 July 2023).

57 Mbete, *The ANC and EFF's Battle to Represent the South African "People"*, p. 243.

58 See, e.g., the social media campaigns #PayBackTheMoney 2015 directed against Jacob Zuma or #ZuptaMustGo in 2016, which were coined by the EFF. Mbete, *The ANC and EFF's Battle to Represent the South African "People"*, p. 247.

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 240–241.

60 Bernardo, *Democracy, fascism and the future of the EFF*, para. 5.

61 See, e.g., F. Forde, *An Inconvenient Youth: Julius Malema and the 'new' ANC*, Johannesburg 2011, p. 187. See also

icon, the late Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who fell out with some of the ANC leadership. The new EFF headquarters at Gandhi Square in downtown Johannesburg bear her name (photo 1 below). Shortly after the formation of the EFF, in 2015, Black First Land First (BLF) emerged as a splinter party. The BLF was founded by a couple of EFF members that had left the young party after a quarrel, among them John Andile Mngxitama, a former LPM activist. The BLF, which currently does not hold any seats in the National Assembly, has opted for a more radical stance concerning land and race issues.<sup>62</sup>

Figure 1: The new EFF headquarters at Gandhi Square, Johannesburg (photo taken by the author, October 2022)



J. Campbell, South Africa: Was Julius Malema in ZANU-PF's Pocket? in: Council on Foreign Relations, 18 November 2011, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/south-africa-was-julius-malema-zanu-pfs-pocket> (accessed 31 July 2023).

62 See the BLF website: <https://blf.org.za/quick-qa-on-black-first-land-first-blf/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

In the context of the exposure of the corrupt business connections between the Indian Gupta family and the Zuma administration by several South African investigative journalists,<sup>63</sup> it became known that the BLF had been financially supported by the Gupta family to spread interracial hatred.<sup>64</sup> The EFF, the BLF, plus a faction of the ANC linked to former president Jacob Zuma, rally support around the battle cries of “radical economic transformation” (RET) and “white monopoly capital” (WMC), two terms that have become important dog whistles and “divisive signifiers”.<sup>65</sup>

In Namibia, splinters from the ruling party SWAPO and its youth structure, the SWAPO Youth League (SPYL), have also acted as the basis for newly emerging populisms. One of the central political figures in this regard is former deputy land minister and (former) SWAPO member Bernadus Swartbooi. He was fired by President Geingob in 2016 after a public fight with land minister Utoni Nujoma, the son of Namibia’s first president Sam Nujoma.<sup>66</sup> Subsequently, Swartbooi was also ousted from the parliament and the ruling party. The former regional governor of the southern ǀKaras region then founded the LPM, a “political movement party”<sup>67</sup> of the exact same name as the aforementioned social movement that had emerged in South Africa in 2001, that registered as a political party in 2018 and first entered the parliament in the 2019 national elections.<sup>68</sup> The LPM focuses on the restitution of ancestral land, land reform, and the eradication of corruption.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, a couple of years earlier around the time of the presidential elections in 2014, the AR had emerged. Led by the three (then) SPYL members Job Shipululo Amupanda, Dimbulukeni Shipandeni Nauyoma, and George Hidipohamba Kambala, the AR started out as an activist group working on the behalf of landless, primarily urban youth, and later turned into a self-styled “popular movement” that received significant attention on the national scale.<sup>70</sup> The movement also drew attention to corrupt land distribution practices and favouritism by the ruling party, leading to the (temporary) expulsion of the three leaders from the party structures in 2015, including of SPYL spokesperson Amupanda, who had become the figurehead of the movement. Amupanda, Nauyoma,

63 See U. Engel, *State Capture in South Africa* (book review), in: *Comparativ* 31 (2021) 2, pp. 267–274.

64 See, e.g., D. Neille and R. Poplak, (Directors), *Influence*, 2020. This documentary by two investigative journalists uncovers the business connections between Mngxitama and the Guptas. For a forensic analysis of the white monopoly capital campaign, see A. Beresford et al., *Conceptualising the emancipatory potential of populism: A typology and analysis*, in: *Political Geography* 102 (April 2023), pp. 1–15.

65 A. Beresford et al., *Conceptualising the emancipatory potential of populism*, p. 2.

66 S. Immanuel, ‘You are an idiot’, in: *The Namibian*, 16 February 2017, <https://www.namibian.com.na/161373/archive-read/You-are-an-idiot> (accessed 9 March 2023).

67 See LPM, *The Constitution of the Landless People’s Movement Political Party*, 2019, para. 1.1., available at: <https://www.lpmparty.org/lpm-constitution/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

68 See [https://twitter.com/lpm\\_namibia](https://twitter.com/lpm_namibia). It has been registered with the Electoral Commission of Namibia on 8 February 2019 (<https://www.lpmparty.org/about-lpm/>; <https://www.namibian.com.na/184398/archive-read/LPM-political-party-launch-in-May>) (both accessed 31 July 2023).

69 LPM, *The Constitution of the Landless People’s Movement Political Party*, para. 1.6.

70 H. Becker, *Namibia’s Moment: Youth and Urban Land Activism*, in: *Review of African Political Economy* 18 January 2016, <https://roape.net/2016/01/18/namibias-moment-youth-and-urban-land-activism/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

and Kambala took the SWAPO leadership to court, won, and were “welcomed back” in 2016.<sup>71</sup> Today, the AR is registered as an association and Amupanda has become the mayor of the Namibian capital Windhoek in December 2020 at the age of 35, a position he held until December 2021. In early 2023, Amupanda announced his intention to run for president in the 2024 elections. The AR adopted a new constitution in late 2022 and several news outlets have reported that it is in the process of registering as a political party.<sup>72</sup>

The AR’s self-description was first presented in an article that appeared in one of the main country’s newspapers, *The Namibian*, on 12 December 2014. It has also been laid out in several of Amupanda’s writings.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Amupanda, Nauyoma, and Kambala have published an AR historiography.<sup>74</sup> It can be purchased in the “Radical Books – an afrocentric bookshop” in Windhoek, alongside a broader collection of literature and Amupanda’s other texts. On his time with the SPYL (2012–2014), Amupanda writes:

*In the SPYL, we advanced the youth development agenda, spoke truth and exposed lies. I stayed in SPYL from 2012 until 2014 when fate chose us to advance the radical agenda for the benefit of the masses of our people.*<sup>75</sup>

In 2016, he was appointed deputy dean of the University of Namibia’s (UNAM) Faculty of Economics and Management Science as the youngest Namibian in history. In his writings, he cites Frantz Fanon, Vladimir Lenin, Steve Biko, and Karl Marx as key sources of inspiration. He often appears with a Che Guevara–style beret and commonly refers to himself as an activist. The AR has been widely credited for putting the issue of urban land precarity on the political agenda.<sup>76</sup>

There are several similarities between these “populist” parties and movements in Namibia and in South Africa. Firstly, they put a strong focus on the youth. When I did archival work in the parliamentary library in Windhoek in the spring of 2022, I overheard a senior staff member commenting on the “new” practices in the parliament (i.e. interrupting speakers, see below) as well as the occupation of urban land by the AR to one of her younger colleagues in a half-mocking, half-accusatory tone: “now you [young people] do not like how things are being done anymore”.<sup>77</sup> “The youth” was a key topic of opposition parties in the region more generally. In Zimbabwe, “let the boy rule”<sup>78</sup> was

71 *The Namibian*, 24 May 2016, <https://namibian.com.na/swapo-welcomes-back-youth-leaders/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

72 See, e.g., S. Nashama, AR applies to register a political party, *Windhoek Observer*, 4 July 2023, <https://www.observer24.com.na/ar-applies-to-register-a-political-party/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

73 Cited in Nauyoma et al., *Affirmative Repositioning*, pp. 38–39. See also J. S. K. Amupanda, *Truth is truth: Selected works of an activist*, Windhoek: PPC Press, 2014.

74 Nauyoma et al., *Affirmative Repositioning*.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

76 H. Becker, *Namibia’s Moment: Youth and Urban Land Activism*.

77 Personal observations, parliamentary library, Windhoek, February 2022.

78 “Ngaapinde Hake Mukomana” (in Shona), which loosely translates to “let the young man in[to office]”, or “let the boy rule”. See, e.g., CCC Campaign event at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80Aj8aCr2y4>, (accessed 31 July 2023). Nelson Chamisa was born in 1978.

one of the electoral campaign slogans of Nelson Chamisa – presidential candidate for the Citizen’s Coalition for Change (CCC) and main opponent of 80-year-old incumbent ZANU–PF’s Emmerson Mnangagwa – in Zimbabwe’s August 2023 national elections. When Amupanda (b. 1987) announced that he would run for president earlier this year (see also Rui Tyitende in this volume), he did so with a clear targeting of the youth, highlighting the generational divide between the landless and jobless youth and what is perceived as the old and corrupt liberation struggle elite, which he frequently mocks on social media platforms.<sup>79</sup> The issue of generational (in-)justice resonates widely across the Southern African region and beyond.<sup>80</sup> Secondly, the leaders of these newly emerging parties and movements all have historical ties with the ruling elite and a history of falling out with the party leadership, a scenario that they usually explain by their actions of exposing lies and internal corruption, speaking “the truth”, and standing up for “the masses”.<sup>81</sup> Thirdly, political communication of these newly emerging parties centres around land and economic justice, which remain unresolved issues in the entire region. The intersection between youth and access to land figures clearly in the AR’s communication, not only in its political demands (free education, access to land, etc.) but also in its chosen practices (e.g. service boycotts and house and land occupation in urban centres [see below]). And finally, their leaders often have an ambiguous personal track record when it comes to corruption. Most notorious are the various scandals involving the EFF leadership. Floyd Shivambu, Malema’s deputy, was involved in a large-scale embezzlement scheme that became public in 2021 when investigative journalists at the *Daily Maverick* discovered that pension funds of the South African VBS Bank were looted by companies that were traced back to leading EFF members and their families.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, several cases of instigating racial hatred for personal economic gain by EFF and BLF members for financial profit have been documented. An especially sinister case was a senior EFF member managing a Twitter account of a fictitious white woman (“Tracy Zille”), sending out racist tweets against black South Africans, creating income for some of his own companies via clickbaiting.<sup>83</sup> Malema himself is known for a rather lavish lifestyle. In 2020, he was spotted in Ibiza at the wedding of the daughter of Adriano Mazzotti, a controversial business figure accused (among other things) of cigarette smuggling. Being confronted with his ties to the Mazzotti family and showcasing his glitzy lifestyle, he stated that he was “not fighting to live in Alexandra [a large and primarily poor township

79 See, e.g., “...not boring Exile Stories [sic]”, part of tweet by Job Amupanda (@Shipululo), Twitter, 13 March 2023 at 12:41 pm, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/Shipululo/status/1635244653686722560> (accessed 31 July 2023).

80 See, e.g., L. Melchiorre, The Generational Populism of Bobi Wine, in: Review of African Political Economy, 12 February 2021, <https://roape.net/2021/02/12/the-generational-populism-of-bobi-wine/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

81 Nauyoma et al, Affirmative Repositioning, p. 12.

82 P. van Wyk, VBS scandal: SARS demands R28.2m from Brian Shivambu, displays clear connection to Floyd, Daily Maverick, 15 August 2021, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-08-15-vbs-scandal-sars-demands-r28-2m-from-brian-shivambu-displays-clear-connection-to-floyd/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

83 See, e.g., N. Shange, EFF councillor in court over racist “Tracy Zille” tweets, Times Live, 27 July 2021, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2021-07-27-eff-councillor-in-court-over-racist-tracy-zille-tweets/> (accessed 31 July 2023) for more details on the case.

in Johannesburg]”.<sup>84</sup> In Namibia, Amupanda was alleged to have applied for subsidized housing when he was still part of the SPYL. Amupanda has denied these accusations; however, they have added to the controversy around his persona.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the EFF celebrates hypermasculinity.<sup>86</sup> Amupanda has been accused by political opponents of targeting female politicians through misogynist social media posts.<sup>87</sup> He prominently uses the term “testicular fortitude”<sup>88</sup> to emphasize political courage (or a lack thereof to disqualify opponents), a term based on patriarchal and heteronormative imaginations. In Amupanda’s writings, the world seems dichotomic, divided into good and evil: “[we] spoke the truth and exposed lies”.<sup>89</sup> The AR’s own actions are being portrayed as righteous and infallible. Although some similarities between these parties are striking in content and performance, this analysis is not meant to equate them, as there are significant differences. For example, the racial under- and overtone in the AR’s discourse is much less pronounced and rather ambiguous<sup>90</sup> when compared to the South African EFF.<sup>91</sup>

#### 4.1. Personal Ties as Mechanisms of Transnational Entanglements and Learning

As opposed to formal structures like the Southern African Partnership for Democratic Change (SAPDC),<sup>92</sup> a network of SADC-based opposition parties founded in 2016, there is currently no formalized meeting structure between emerging populist parties in

84 Q. Hunter, Malema defends trip to the Mazzottis’ Ibiza wedding: “I am not fighting to live in Alexandra”, News24, 27 August 2022, <https://www.news24.com/news24/politics/political-parties/malema-defends-trip-to-the-mazzottis-ibiza-wedding-i-am-not-fighting-to-live-in-alexandra-20220827>; M. van den Heever, ICYMI: Malema parties in Ibiza at ‘mafia’ Mazzotti family wedding, *The South African*, 14 July 2022, <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/lifestyle/celeb-news/julius-malema-ibiza-adriano-alexa-mazzotti-wedding-tobacco/> (both accessed 31 July 2023). Mazzotti was a celebrated guest at the gala dinner on the occasion of the EFF’s 10-year anniversary on 27 July 2023.

85 Namibiana, Job Amupanda, <https://www.namibiana.de/namibia-information/who-is-who/autoren/infos-zur-person/job-amupanda.html> (accessed 31 July 2023).

86 T. Maggott, *Contested Feminisms, Masculinism and Gender Relations in the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command: A view from the branch (Master’s Dissertation)*, Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg 2019, <http://hdl.handle.net/102000/0002>.

87 See, e.g., a tweet by the first lady of Namibia Monica Geingos [@KalondoMonica], 26 October 2021 at 6:15 pm, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/KalondoMonica/status/1453032646162923520> (accessed 5 August 2023): “Your Worship, Mayor of the City of Windhoek, Dr Job Shipululo Amupanda. One of the barriers faced by women in politics is the tendency for society to subject them to a barrage of gendered, misogynistic insults intended to humiliate and diminish. Your tweet is exhibit A.”

88 See, e.g., Nauyoma et al., *Affirmative Repositioning*, p. 29.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

90 See, e.g., Becker, *Namibia’s Moment: Youth and Urban Land Activism*.

91 See, e.g., the pejorative term “clever blacks” coined by Zuma to blemish black intellectuals that do not support the ANC (V. Mde, ‘Clever blacks’ least of ANC’s problems, in: *Mail & Guardian*, 5 June 2018 <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-06-05-clever-blacks-least-of-ancs-problems/>). See also a recent tweet by Malema from 13 January 2023 using the same term, [https://twitter.com/Julius\\_S\\_Malema/status/1613818341809864705](https://twitter.com/Julius_S_Malema/status/1613818341809864705) (both accessed 31 July 2023).

92 Members are the Democratic Alliance (DA) of South Africa, The All Basotho Convention (ABC) in Lesotho, Rally for Democracy and Progress in Namibia, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Zimbabwe, Civic United Front in Tanzania, Movement for Multi-Party Democracy in Zambia, *Convergência Ampla de Salvação de Angola-Coigação Eleitoral (CASA-CE)* in Angola, and the United Democratic Movement in Swaziland. Pre-Covid, the network held regular meetings.

the region. However, diverse personal ties exist between their leaders. Representatives of the AR consider the EFF and the BLF their friends.<sup>93</sup> The AR leadership is in personal contact with the executives of both South African parties.<sup>94</sup> Regional mobility linked to education is one channel through which bonds between politicians and activists are created. Amupanda, political scientist by training, first studied at UNAM in Windhoek and then attended Stellenbosch University in South Africa, where he became active in the South African Students Congress (SASCO). He states that when he returned to Namibia at the end of 2011, he was “completely converted to black consciousness and activism”.<sup>95</sup> At least three of Amupanda’s former students at UNAM are today members of the Namibian parliament, highlighting the potential of network analysis to ascertain how individual life curricula cocoon transnational linkages.<sup>96</sup>

The LPM also portrays itself as being close to the South African EFF. Henny Seibeb, member of parliament (MP) for the LPM, drew a direct parallel in a recent parliamentary debate:

*In Southern Africa, new progressive movements emerged such Reclaim The City in Cape Town, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the Landless People’s Movement in Namibia (LPM), all fighting against the neoliberal class forces and corrupt regimes. It is critical to state that the strategic formation of LPM was crucial as it provided strategic intellectual and programmatic history and agenda for the State to focus on rural and urban periphery, in the context of considering their voice.*<sup>97</sup>

One of the most striking examples of transnational linkages in the region are the regional offshoots of the EFF. After 2013, national EFF structures were founded all over Southern Africa, including in Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. The Namibian offshoot, the Namibian Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF), is currently represented with two seats in the National Assembly. The “sister” party in Namibia is led by former SWAPO member Epafras Mukwiilongo. It is often perceived as a “copycat” of the South African structure.<sup>98</sup> The NEFF mimics the same style as the South African EFF (e.g. red berets) and bears a nearly identical party logo. Just before announcing the party’s foundation in 2014, Mukwiilongo and some of his colleagues had visited South Africa, where they reportedly sat down with Malema himself.<sup>99</sup> Personal ties seem to be important here, too. Moreover, showcasing a close allegiance with Malema is perceived as useful. When I did research at the Namibian parliamentary library in February 2022,

93 Informal conversations and personal observations, February 2022, Windhoek.

94 Informal conversations and personal observations, February 2022, Windhoek.

95 Nauyoma et al., *Affirmative Repositioning*, p. 11.

96 Including Utaara Mootu (LPM), Inna Hengari (Popular Democratic Movement [PDM]), and Henny Seibeb (LPM).

97 Republic of Namibia, National Assembly Hansard, Contribution by Henny Hendly Seibeb, LPM, “Debate on how our democratic systems are impacting development in Namibia”, 28 October 2020, p. 2.

98 Personal impression and feedback from interviews in Windhoek and Johannesburg (February, March and November 2022).

99 Namibian Sun, 24 June 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140702012853/http://www.namibiansun.com/politics/local-party-apes-malemas-eff.67539> (accessed 31 July 2023).

I saw the car of the NEFF parked in the driveway in front of the parliament building. Among the faces of NEFF leaders printed on the car, the face of Malema was featured most prominently, next to classic electoral slogans (“Vote NEFF”, see photo 2). It is still not clear to what extent the NEFF receives support from the South African EFF. Still, it appears that the NEFF perceives Malema as a successful and effective politician and that a public association benefits the Namibian structure as well. While the Twitter account of the EFF Zimbabwe consists nearly exclusively of retweets of the South African EFF leadership, the NEFF also frequently publishes its own content.<sup>100</sup> For example, homophobic and anti-Chinese rhetoric is more blatant and dominates the NEFF’s external communication.<sup>101</sup>

Figure 2: NEFF car in front of the parliament building in Windhoek (photo taken by the author, February 2022)



## 5. Political Practices by Populist Opposition Parties

One lens through which these newly emerged parties in the region can be fruitfully analysed is their political practices. These are highly variegated. They include more conventional political practices, such as (e.g. in the case of the AR) engaging in meetings with the presidency about political demands (i.e. plots for young people and an impro-

100 See, e.g., the official Twitter account of the EFF Zimbabwe (<https://twitter.com/effzimbabwe>) and of the Namibian EFF, [https://twitter.com/eff\\_namibia?lang=de](https://twitter.com/eff_namibia?lang=de) (accessed 31 July 2023).

101 R. Davis, Homophobic Namibian fighters: What the EFF, Daily Maverick, 26 June 2014, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-06-26-homophobic-namibian-fighters-what-the-eff/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

ved housing policy).<sup>102</sup> For the parliamentary opposition, they also include practices such as tabling motions on the land issue in the parliament.<sup>103</sup> These more conventional practices are often combined with more “radical” strategies, such as land occupations<sup>104</sup> (e.g. before political talks), calling politicians out in social media posts (e.g. after unsuccessful talks), and public demonstrations.<sup>105</sup> In the following section, I will focus on two emerging practices that are observed in both South Africa and Namibia and that have received significant media attention: the disruption of parliamentary proceedings and land occupations.

### 5.1. Disruption of Parliamentary Proceedings

The EFF has made several headlines by disrupting South African parliamentary proceedings since it entered the parliament in 2014. Scenes of brawls, fist fights, and other forms of verbal and physical altercations involving EFF representatives have become common in the South African National Assembly, especially since the 2015 State of the Nation Address (SONA). Usually, concerted disruptions of parliamentary sessions start with an MP’s refusal to follow the rules of the house (i.e. the refusal to stop speaking or to retract a statement or insult, interjections, and heckling of speakers), which then escalates into chaotic scenes, at times physical altercations and the disruption of the session. This first became visible at the SONA held by Jacob Zuma in February 2015. The EFF refused to let Zuma speak after he had failed to address a corruption scandal around the luxury renovations of his home in Nkandla.<sup>106</sup> Eventually, the EFF parliamentary group was escorted out by security forces. This has turned into a common practice, frequently applied in the context of the annually held SONA in particular, which is the most televised parliamentary session.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, the number of people streaming “Parliament TV” has increased since the EFF entered the parliament, arguably making citizens more interested and aware about what was going on in the National Assembly.<sup>108</sup> The reaction by the South African speakers of the house to the EFF’s disruptive behaviour have been

102 Nauyoma et al., *Affirmative Repositioning*, pp. 131 seq.

103 For example, in the case of the EFF, see N. Goba, Enough is enough, our people must get land, says Malema, 27 February 2018, <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-02-27-enough-is-enough-our-people-must-get-the-land-says-malema/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

104 For example, as organized by the Affirmative Repositioning at Kleine Kuppe in November 2014 (see below).

105 The president of the NEFF and a high-ranking AR member have been arrested in 2022 following the staging of an anti-Chinese protests in Windhoek that aimed at shutting down Chinese-owned businesses. See O. Simasiku, Activists shut down China Town... NEFF president, 7 others to spend weekend in jail, in: *Windhoek Observer*, 14 May 2022, <https://www.observer24.com/na/activists-shutdown-china-town-neff-president-7-others-to-spend-weekend-in-jail/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

106 For 2015, see A. Calata, Parliamentary stage set for more chaos in 2015, *UCT News*, 19 January 2015 (accessed 31 July 2023); D. Pelz, Jacob Zuma under pressure, *Deutsche Welle*, 13 February 2015, <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-do-something-jacob-zuma/a-18257094> (accessed 31 July 2023).

107 For 2022, see eNCA, EFF MPs disrupt parliamentary proceedings, 10 June 2022, <https://www.enca.com/news/eff-mps-disrupt-parliamentary-proceedings> (accessed 31 July 2023).

108 B. Matshaba, Nothing as entertaining as parliament TV, *News24*, 23 April 2018, <https://www.news24.com/drum/celebs/nothing-as-entertaining-as-parliament-tv-20180423>. The livestream is available at <https://www.parliament.gov.za/parliament-tv> (both accessed 31 July 2023).

varied, ranging from the removal of EFF MPs from sessions to penalties, such as salaries being reduced.<sup>109</sup> The EFF's "political theatre",<sup>110</sup> "spectacle",<sup>111</sup> and "taboo-breaking" behaviour<sup>112</sup> (e.g. the EFF's deputy president Floyd Shivambu showing the middle finger to the speaker of the house)<sup>113</sup> forms part of a classic populist script in line with international patterns.<sup>114</sup> According to Sithembile Mbete, this performance of a "politics of the low" is what primarily makes the EFF successful.<sup>115</sup> This performance is clearly being perceived as "successful" elsewhere in the region, too, as indicated by the frequent referencing of the EFF in public interventions by the LPM, AR, and NEFF.

In Namibia, a similar practice has evolved after the LPM entered the parliament in the 2019 elections. The LPM managed to get four MPs into the National Assembly and was also rather successful in the 2020 local elections, where it took over the two most southern regions of the country (Hardap and ǀKaras). In 2020, Swartbooi interrupted President Geingob's SONA, who retorted that he was owed respect as "I'm older than your [Swartbooi's] mother".<sup>116</sup> A year later, in April 2021, the question-and-answer session following Geingob's SONA was again disrupted by several MPs, led by the LPM. Geingob refused to continue with the session until order was restored. LPM MPs Swartbooi and Henny Hendly Seibeb were subsequently forcibly removed from the parliament. Moreover, Swartbooi and Seibeb were banned "indefinitely" from the parliament by the speaker of the house, Peter Katjavivi (SWAPO).<sup>117</sup> This represented a much stronger disciplinary reaction to the SONA disruption, as compared to South Africa. However, Katjavivi became heavily criticized for this tough stance.<sup>118</sup> The LPM challenged Katjavivi's decision in the High Court<sup>119</sup> and even threatened to take him to the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>120</sup> Swartbooi and Seibeb won the case and were reinstalled a

109 L. Kiewit, EFF MPs to be investigated for disrupting parliamentary proceedings, Mail & Guardian, 15 September 2020, <https://mg.co.za/politics/2020-09-15-eff-mps-to-be-investigated-for-disrupting-parliamentary-proceedings/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

110 Calata, Parliamentary stage set for more chaos in 2015.

111 Pelz, Jacob Zuma under pressure.

112 ABC, South African Parliament brawls during protest of President Jacob Zuma, 10 February 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-10/south-african-mps-brawl-during-protest-of-president/8258722> (accessed 31 July 2023).

113 South African Communist Party (SACP), SACP statement on EFF's hooliganism in Parliament, 17 September 2014, <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/floyd-shivambus-flipping-of-middle-figure-to-speak> (accessed 31 July 2023).

114 Mbete, The ANC and EFF's Battle to Represent the South African "People", p. 250.

115 Ibid.

116 See, e.g., Eagle FM, 4 June 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/EagleFMNam/posts/geingob-told-swartbooi-older-than-your-mother-as-the-lpm-mp-kept-interrupting/2815931375295170> (accessed 31 July 2023).

117 M. Amakali, LPM leaders sue Katjavivi over parly ban, New Era, 23 April 2021, <https://neweralive.na/posts/lpm-leaders-sue-katjavivi-over-parly-ban> (accessed 31 July 2023).

118 A. Kathindi, LPM High Court judgement questioned, Windhoek Observer, 7 May 2021, <https://www.observer24.com.na/lpm-high-court-judgement-questioned> (accessed 31 July 2023).

119 M. Amakali, SONA fallout rumbles on ... as Katjavivi questions court's jurisdiction, New Era, 27 April 2021, <https://neweralive.na/posts/sona-fallout-rumbles-on-as-katjavivi-questions-courts-jurisdiction> (accessed 31 July 2023).

120 A. Kathindi, LPM drags Peter Katjavivi to ICC, Windhoek Observer, 27 May 2021, <https://www.observer24.com.na/lpm-drags-peter-katjavivi-to-icc> (accessed 31 July 2023).

couple of months later the same year.<sup>121</sup> Katjavivi was reprimanded by the court for having reacted too harshly by sending them out. The court further stated that Katjavivi had acted on no legal basis when he indefinitely banned them from the parliament.<sup>122</sup> Swartbooi had already engaged in rhetorical taboo-breaking in the parliament before the LPM's foundation, for example when calling his former boss, the minister of land, an "idiot" in February 2017.<sup>123</sup>

## 5.2. Land Occupations and the Decolonization of Public Spaces

According to its self-presentation, the AR's foundational moment was the occupation of vacant plots in Kleine Kuppe, a predominantly white and affluent suburb of Windhoek, by several protesters under the "Affirmative Repositioning" slogan on 9 November 2014.<sup>124</sup> The occupation was initiated by Amupanda and others as a protest movement against SWAPO's long-standing practice of favouritism, giving away plots for free or at reduced prices to celebrities and friendly politicians. Following the occupation, protesters submitted over 14,000 applications for land plots to the city of Windhoek, partly as a symbolic act and partly in expectation of receiving discounted or freely allocated land.<sup>125</sup> The sheer number of applications caused chaos in the responsible administration and created wide publicity for the AR's cause.<sup>126</sup> The occupation was condemned by SWAPO leaders as "illegal land grabbing" and interpreted as hostile act against the party.<sup>127</sup> In South Africa, the EFF has threatened to occupy unused or white-owned land on several occasions.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, it has encouraged members to occupy unused land with the promise to take over potential legal fees.<sup>129</sup> Of course, land occupations (and threats thereof) have a much longer history in the region. They have been a central

121 S. Petersen, Supreme Court returns Swartbooi and Seibeb to parliament, *The Namibian*, 2021, August 4, <https://www.namibian.com.na/213825/archive-read/Supreme-Court-returns-Swartbooi-and-Seibeb-to-parliament>; R. Routh, Top court rules in favour of LPM MPs, in: *New Era*, 5 August 2021, <https://neweralive.na/posts/top-court-rules-in-favour-of-lpm-mps> (both accessed 31 July 2023).

122 "This court finds that the decision to suspend the appellants indefinitely was not made in accordance with the Standing Rules or the Act and that the decision to suspend was not made by Parliament, but by the Speaker, as a consequence s 21 [sic] of the Act does not find application in this matter, given the absence of the necessary jurisdictional facts for its invocation to oust the court's jurisdiction. It is thus found that the decision to suspend the appellants was outside the Speaker's powers and it is thus unlawful, of no effect and is set aside." *Supreme Court of Namibia, Swartbooi and Another v Speaker of National Assembly (SA 38 of 2021) [2021] NASC 33 (4 August 2021)*. The full judgement can be found here: <https://namiblii.org/na/judgment/supreme-court/2021/33> (accessed 31 July 2023).

123 Immanuel, "You are an idiot".

124 Nauyoma et al., *Affirmative Repositioning*, pp. 26 seq.

125 Namibiana, Job Amupanda.

126 *Ibid.*

127 Becker, *Namibia's Moment: Youth and Urban Land Activism*, p. 1.

128 See, e.g., *Deutsche Welle*, S African opposition leader calls for land grab, 11 October 2016, <https://www.dw.com/en/south-african-opposition-leader-calls-on-blacks-to-occupy-white-owned-land/a-36299120> (accessed 31 July 2023).

129 T. Mathe, 'We want to occupy the land,' says EFF's Malema at Senekal farm murder protest, in: *Daily Maverick*, 16 October 2020, <https://mg.co.za/politics/2020-10-16-we-want-to-occupy-the-land-says-effs-malema-at-senekal-farm-murder-protest/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

practice of social movements in South Africa that have formed since the late 1990s/early 2000s in opposition to the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution Act (GEAR) and its negative effects on the poor and marginalized majority.<sup>130</sup> A central actor in this field was the LPM, which is today largely defunct.<sup>131</sup> Land discourses are tightly interwoven within the region.<sup>132</sup> Arguably, Zimbabwe's state intervention in the land question around the turn of the millennium in form of the FTLRP represented a "spark of hope" for many in South Africa and favored the emerging activism around land.<sup>133</sup> The genealogy, political economy and merits of social movements to the social advancement in the region deserve a much more detailed analysis, which would go beyond the scope of this article. What is important to highlight here are the discernable overlaps between social movements and populist parties, both in terms of thematic foci and their members. This is epitomized by Mngxitama, founding member of the LPM and now leader of the BLF. The Southern African region as the former epicentre of settler colonialism and white minority rule has played an important role in the context of the global decolonial movement.<sup>134</sup> It was in South Africa that the "Rhodes Must Fall"<sup>135</sup> movement started, specifically at the University of Cape Town (UCT), where a campaign to remove the Rhodes statue was successful. After a UCT Council decision on 9 April 2015, the statue was taken down, with images of the event making it around the world. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni contextualizes the 2015 and 2016 South African student protest around both movements – "Rhodes Must Fall" and the ensuing "Fees Must Fall" – as a specific phase of African protest movements and the "resurgent decolonial struggles of the twenty-first century".<sup>136</sup> As "protest capital of the world",<sup>137</sup> South Africa arguably takes on a role of inspiration for social protest movements in the entire region.

130 See, e.g., S. Greenberg, *The Landless People's Movement and the Failure of Post-apartheid Land Reform*, Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal 2004, p. 1. For a detailed overview on social movements in South Africa, see R. Ballard, A. Habib and I. Valodia, *Voices of protest: social movements in post-apartheid South Africa*, Scottsville 2006.

131 For a detailed analysis of the foundation of the LPM, see Greenberg, *The Landless People's Movement and the Failure of Post-apartheid Land Reform*.

132 Moyo, *The Land Question in Southern Africa*.

133 Greenberg, *The Landless People's Movement and the Failure of Post-apartheid Land Reform*, p. 7.

134 S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Rhodes Must Fall*, in: S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa. Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (pp. 221–242), London/New York 2018, p. 222.

135 The movement was named after British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes who aimed to colonize the entire African continent for Britain and remains one of the central symbols of white supremacy in the region. He continues to be honoured in the form of memorials, statues and institutions, e.g. the prestigious Rhodes scholarship, Rhodes University in Grahamstown, etc. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa*, p. 221). His grave lies in the sacred Matopos area in Southern Zimbabwe.

136 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa*, p. 222. An alternative reading of the decolonial movement at South African universities is provided by J. Jansen, *The problem with decolonisation: entanglements in the politics of knowledge*, in: *Journal of Modern African Studies* 61 (2023) 1, pp. 139–156. He argues that the conceptual distinction between apartheid and colonialism has not been engaged with sufficiently by activists and academics.

137 See, e.g., N. Bohler-Muller et al., *Minding the Protest: Attitudes towards different forms of protest action in contemporary South Africa*, in: *South African Crime Quarterly* 62 (2017), pp. 81–92.

In Windhoek, both German and South African colonial memorials have thus far remained largely untouched.<sup>138</sup> A significant move towards decolonizing public spaces in Namibia constituted the recent removal of the statue of the German colonial officer Curt von François in front of city's municipality. It was taken from its pedestal on 27 October 2022, following a favourable vote by the Windhoek City Council.<sup>139</sup> Von François, falsely venerated as the “founder of Windhoek”,<sup>140</sup> represented a colonial vision of the city's history. The statue's removal was the result of a successful campaign and online petition (“A Curt Farewell”) initiated by activist and artist Hildegard Titus and constituted “a remarkable movement of intersectional activism in urban Namibia”.<sup>141</sup>

Urban political activism at a smaller or larger scale, including “A Curt Farewell” and “Rhodes Must Fall”, often become infused with populist party politics. These movements can serve as a platform for self-presentation and politicking for political populists. Just moments after the Curt von François statue was taken down, Amupanda, who had been supportive of the statue's removal when he was the mayor of Windhoek (2020–2021), positioned himself on top the pedestal of the statue. This moment was captured in various social media posts. In South Africa, the EFF Student Command (EFFSC) became a dominant force in the “Fees Must Fall” movement that demanded the cancellation of student fees, a movement that “Rhodes Must Fall” “gave birth to”.<sup>142</sup> In her book on the ANC Youth League, Rebone Tau expresses frustrations with the fact that the EFFSC took on such a dominant role in the “Fees Must Fall” movement at many university campuses, a role that the ANCYL could have taken on.<sup>143</sup>

A central question in populism research, epitomized in the current debate on the AR in particular, remains the relationship, symbiosis, as well as potential delineation between social (protest) movements – by nature directed *against* the establishment – and those who potentially feed off them for own political gains. A potentially fruitful tool to further investigate connections and establish delineations between different “populist” actors by distinguishing between an emancipatory agenda and focusing on personal benefits within the context of an elite power struggle is the approach by Beresford et al.<sup>144</sup> However, it still remains to be seen to what extent the methodology that relies heavily on

138 H. Becker, ‘A Curt Farewell’: Decolonizing public space in Namibia, in: Review of African Political Economy 3 November 2022, <https://roape.net/2022/11/03/a-curt-farewell-decolonizing-public-space-in-namibia/> (accessed 31 July 2023).

139 H. Melber, Namibia pulls down German colonial statue after protests – who was Curt von François?, in: The Conversation, 25 November 2022, <https://theconversation.com/namibia-pulls-down-german-colonial-statue-after-protests-who-was-curt-von-francois-195334> (accessed 31 July 2023).

140 Ibid. Windhoek's real founder was arguably the Nama leader Jonker Afrikaner.

141 Becker, A Curt Farewell; H. Becker, ‘Youth speaking truth to power’: Intersectional decolonial activism in Namibia, in: Dialectical Anthropology, Forum Commentary, 2022.

142 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Epistemic Freedom in Africa, p. 235.

143 R. Tau, The Rise and Fall of the ANC Youth League, Cape Town 2020, p. 1.

144 See Beresford et al., Conceptualising the emancipatory potential of populism. The authors propose a methodology in order to distinguish between a populism that actually encourages popular reimaginations of politics and people's integration into politics (“devolutionary”) and a populism that is primarily a means in elite power struggles to the end of accessing and wielding power (“vanguardist”).

social media analysis can be applied to a context where social media coverage is less pronounced, such as in Namibia. In this context, it is also interesting to note that according to the 2017 Afrobarometer data on Namibia, the AR as a social movement is considered to be most effective in raising the urgent land issue (41 per cent), while only 12 per cent of the interviewed felt that the political party LPM was best situated to address this issue effectively.<sup>145</sup> It remains to be seen if these perceptions potentially change once the AR has morphed into a political party.

## 6. Conclusion

Only 54.6 per cent of Namibians today feel that democracy is their preferred political system.<sup>146</sup> This reflects a considerable drop in trust in institutions for Namibia, which has previously scored much higher. South Africa's support of democracy scored even lower in the last Afrobarometer survey round (40.4 per cent), highlighting a generally low level of trust in the current political system dominated by one party.<sup>147</sup> The emergence of "new" populist parties and their focus on economic freedom and inequality thus has to be analysed in this broader context of declining approval rates of former NLMs – populists in their own right.

In this article, I have argued that transnational linkages are a striking feature of emerging populisms in the region, not only between the former NLMs that maintain close formal and informal ties, but also between emerging opposition parties. The EFF offshoots in the region, notably in the form of the Namibian EFF, are among the most vivid examples. First empirical observations presented in this article suggest that it is often individuals that matter for establishing transnational linkages, for transferring ideas, and for learning processes when it comes to populist rhetoric and practices within the region. Individuals, such as Amupanda, are both vehicles and brokers that translate meaning between different (but in many ways still similar) national contexts in the region. Transnational exchange thus takes place not only via the historically grown personal and inter-institutional ties between NLMs, the "first-generation" party activists,<sup>148</sup> but also via new networks that are being formed. Southern Africa has always been a space for the circulation of ideas. However, what appears to be novel is the transfer of rhetoric and practices between emerging populist parties that rely on newly established and evolving networks,

145 T. Isbell, N. Alweendo, and M. Moosa, Namibians look to social movement to prompt government action on land reform, Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 289, IPPR & Afrobarometer, 29 March 2019, <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/namibians-look-social-movement-prompt-government-action-land-reform/> (accessed 31 July 2023), p. 2.

146 Afrobarometer & Survey Warehouse, Summary of results Afrobarometer Round 9 survey in Namibia (2021), Windhoek 2022, p. 27.

147 Afrobarometer & Plus 94 Research, Summary of results: Afrobarometer Round 8 survey in South Africa (2021), Cape Town 2021, p. 33.

148 H. Melber, D. Kromrey, and M. Welz, Changing of the guard? An anatomy of power within SWAPO of Namibia, in: African Affairs 116 (2017) 463, pp. 284–310, here p. 300.

with a strong penchant for (nearly exclusive) communication via social media<sup>149</sup> and personal ties between “second-generation activists” that are not based on liberation war solidarities but that are united in their disdain for the old guard. The different reactions by Namibian and South African state institutions to these emerging practices, for example parliamentary disruptions and demonstrations, highlight that there is no automatic “copy/paste” or equalizing dynamic taking place across the region. Instead, it is the variety of responses to them that is worthy of further investigation.

This article offered an empirical starting point for further research on the topic of populisms in Southern Africa, both in empirical and theoretical terms. First, a central question for future research will be to what extent these observations with regard to “new” populist parties will apply to other countries within the region as well, in particular Zimbabwe.<sup>150</sup> Second, a more detailed description of how ideas, policies, and practices are transferred and how learning processes take place between different actors can contribute to generating a “typology of transfers” in order to further conceptualize some of the reflections presented in this paper. Third, additional populist practices, such as the schizophrenic launch of attacks on democratic institutions (e.g. on the speaker of the parliament) and making use of them (e.g. the courts) at the same time as well as the role of social media in external communication of populist actors would be important fields to explore. And finally, the multidirectionality of transfer processes remains to be investigated further. Little empirical evidence could so far be found for a reciprocal learning process taking place between populist actors within the region. Instead, it seems that Namibia is commonly imagined as a “microcosm” of South Africa<sup>151</sup> where things happen in small and with a time delay. However, more empirical work is needed in order to add layers and depth to the analysis and to potentially challenge the widely held assumption of a unidirectional flow of concepts and ideas from the economically strong regional hegemon South Africa to its economically “weaker” neighbouring states.

149 As of July 2023, the AR has no official website. The social media accounts of the movement and its leaders, in particular on Facebook and Twitter (Ampuanda has approximately 160,000 followers by the time this paper went to print), are central means for external communication.

150 At first glance, similar tendencies can be observed for Zimbabwe as well (see, e.g. the EFF Zimbabwe). However, more in-depth research will be necessary to corroborate potential similarities and carve out differences.

151 This description was made by a Namibian journalist at an international workshop organized by RISC together with the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) held in Cape Town, 11–12 May 2022.