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Shadow Work in Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?

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INHALT

Shadow Work in *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?*

Vitjitua Ndjiharine and Nashilongweshipwe Sakaria

Introduction

In this chapter, we reflect on *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?,* an applied arts and transhistorical exhibition curated and facilitated in Germany and Namibia between 2018 and 2020. This archival endeavour culminated from a project titled *Visual History of the Colonial Genocide*, which initially began with a residency hosted by the Center for Hamburg's (post-)colonial Legacy based at the University of Hamburg, under the leadership of Professor Jürgen Zimmerer. We were among the participating artists-in-residence, along with Namibian artist Nicola Brandt as well as German historian Ulrike Peters. Our historical research and artistic practices responded to a colonial-photography collection archived at the Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK), previously known as Hamburg's Museum of Ethnology.

Alexander von Hirschfeldt's photography is part of MARKK's larger inventory of captured images. Johanna Wild – who, along with Bisrat Negasi, co-curated the exhibition – says of von Hirschfeldt's photography:

> Consisting of roughly 1000 images, it includes glass plates, prints, dia-positives, negatives, and postcards that depict landscapes, colonial cities and infrastructures; portraits and ethnographic photographs of colonized individuals and groups, as well as private snapshots of white colonial agents at leisure. The latter are starkly contrasted by images of forced labor and the genocide of the Herero, Nama, San and Damara people during the German-Namibian War of 1904 to 1908.[1]

The 12-month residency programme resulted in a December 2018 exhibition at MARKK and M. Bassy.[2] *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?* also included work by another Namibian artist, Isabel Katjavivi. The exhibition was made up of collages, paintings,

1 Johanna Wild, 'Collaboration is an opportunity to fail in the most splendid way', in: *Ovizire-Somgu, From Where do We Speak?* (Exhibition Brochure, MARKK: Hamburg, 2018), p. 8.

2 The latter is a Hamburg-based 'non-profit organization pursuing the goal to promote contemporary artistic positions and discourses from Africa and the Diaspora in the areas'.

music, sound, photography, poetry, installation, video and found objects. It addressed key questions and methodological concerns which we had debated during the residency process. What, though, are the ethics of doing creative work in a colonial archive? What methods and tools can we use to reimagine/restore/heal/reconcile African bodies and lives which have endured colonial erasure, as reflected in this photographic collection visualizing genocide? In making 'histories of the future', which positionalities will we speak from?

We would pose these questions in the project team, attentive to the history of colonial photography and its role in the production of difference in German South West Africa. Scholar on Namibian historiography Lorena Rizzo writes, 'Landscape photography naturalised the spatial structure of the territory and visually inscribed the reserve as an absent presence, enabling colonial rule without undermining African "virgin" nature and culture'.[3] It was a tool for producing images of the 'ideal conquest', as Silvester, Hayes and Hartmann have discussed in their book *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*.[4] Like in other colonies in Africa, photography was part of the colonial gaze producing difference and 'the other'.[5] Von Hirschfeldt's collection reflected this colonial gaze in its representation of both colonizing and colonized subjects in the countries currently known as Namibia, South Africa, Togo and Zimbabwe.

It is because of this burden of colonial photography that we made the choice to compare this collection with other archives and histories which are not necessarily colonial. As a team, we became invested in the work of shifting the colonial gaze, and de-centring the dominant narratives marked in MARKK's photography collection, by focusing on themes and topics related to finding love in the archive, queering the latter, remembrance of our ancestors as well as self-reflexivity in our respective bodies of work produced for the exhibition. Another approach we took was to use indigenous Namibian languages in naming our exhibition, allowing us to unpack specific localized forms of knowledge embedded therein.

3 Lorena Rizzo, 'A Glance into the Camera: Gendered Visions of Historical Photographs in Kaoko (North-Western Namibia)', *Gender and History*, 17/3 (2005), pp. 682–713, here p. 686.

4 Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester and Patricia Hayes (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999).

5 Brent Harris, 'Photography in Colonial Discourse: the making of the other in Southern Africa, c. 1850–1950', in Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester and Patricia Hayes (eds), *The Colonising Camera. Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), pp. 20–25.

The title of the exhibition draws on two concepts, namely 'Ovizire' and 'Somgu'; these translate as 'shadow'[6] in Otjiherero and Khoekhoegowab, respectively. In terms of curation, the exhibition would explore the conceptual usefulness of these cultural notions. For example, shadows provide shade but they also follow us everywhere we go. They appear and they disappear, reminding us of their inevitable presence and absence. Shadows are like ghosts, in the sense that they are haunting. In the different Namibian villages where we come from, there are trees which provide shade for family and community gatherings. We juxtaposed these ideas in relation to the materiality of photographs in which light is transfixed to a photosensitive surface to create an image. In a literal sense, variations of light create observable information; an absence of light creates shadows, meanwhile. We metaphorically applied this marking of absence and presence to the colonial-photography archive, a space with empirical contradictions and refracted forms of knowledge. It eventually became evident that we were working with different kinds of shadows, and for varying reasons. In the context of our project, however, we were imagining shadows as sources of erased, hidden, distorted and displaced knowledge inside and outside both the colonial archive and a postcolonial museum. The shadows are the dark spots which have remained unattended to in Namibia–Germany relations. And it is in paying attention to these shadows that we can recover hidden truths.

Our various translations of the shadows discovered in a particular colonial archive brought us to questions of positionality and multivocality. This is how the exhibition's subtitle *From Where Do We Speak?* emerged. As the project progressed, colonial photography was interfaced with Namibian orature and contemporary literature to explore possible transhistorical and artistic approaches. This process was extended to talks, workshops, exhibitions and a series of online interventions. *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?* became an applied arts project relying on cultural knowledge and artistic processes to oversee educational and community engagement. Our approach allowed us to take alternative pathways to reconciling with and healing the wounds of the colonial past. It is on this basis that we conceptualize this process as 'shadow work'[7] in this chapter.

6 In other contexts, these terms are also translated as 'shade'.

7 Jeremiah Abrams and Connie Zweig, 'Introduction: The Shadow Side of Everyday Life', in: Jeremiah Abrams and Connie Zweig (eds) *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature* (New Consciousness Reader Series, New York, NY: Tarcher/Putnam, 1991), pp. XVI–XXV.

Shadow Work as an Archival Methodology

In reflecting on the project's journey, we adopt and put forward this notion as a creative and affective form of labour regarding working in and with the archive. 'Shadow work' is a term largely used in Psychology to refer to individual processes of working through the conscious and unconscious selves, as a way of discovering those parts of ourselves which have been suppressed and hidden. It includes introspection, critical self-reflexive praxis and processing and healing traumatic histories. The notion comes from Carl Jung's conceptualization of the 'shadow self'.[8] Aspects of one's shadow develop in the unconscious mind from a young age based on individual life experiences. These experiences may be influenced by family structures or societal beliefs shaping one's values, behaviours and overall sense of identity. Personality traits or values considered taboo are contained in the shadow, as are also other aspects of the self-deemed negative or too difficult to manage – for example, emotions such as jealousy, lust and rage. The shadow therefore becomes a container of repressed ideals which are defined as unacceptable or undesirable. Authors Jeremiah Abrams and Connie Zweig give us an overview of how to understand the shadow in the conceptualization of the self in their introduction to a collection of texts by Jungian scholars, *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*:

> The shadow acts like a psychic immune system, defining what is self and what is not-self. For different people, in different families and cultures, what falls into ego and what falls into shadow can vary. For instance, some permit anger or aggression to be expressed; most do not. Some permit sexuality, vulnerability, or strong emotions; many do not. Some permit financial ambition, or artistic expression, or intellectual development, while some do not.[9]

This understanding refers to the personal shadow which is shaped and defined through family values, social structures and collective social imagination. As such, the personal shadow contains all that which has been rejected by a society's conscious awareness: namely, those feelings and actions seen as dissonant with its self-image and self-understanding. The collective shadow holds negative projections embedded within shared

8 JUNG, C. G. (1969). Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 9 (Part 1): Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (G. ADLER & R. F. C. HULL, Eds.). Princeton University Press, p. 20–21.

9 Zweig and Abrams, *Meeting the Shadow* (above, n. 7), p. XVII.

memory, for example in the othering of entire groups of people deemed to be different. Throughout history the shadow has taken the form of racism, scapegoating, religious wars and other acts of violence linked to negative emotions such as fear, resentment and anger.

Other iterations the collective shadow can take are the folktales, myths, legends and collective orature exposing the dark side of humanity. Through shadow work, these aspects can be flushed out in order to gain a truer sense of our collective fears and heal ourselves through more honest self-reflection. Our delving into the shadow brings these notions to the (post)colonial space. When thinking about previously colonized bodies and societies, what aspects of the collective subconscious do they hold, and how do these play out on the individual level? Moreover, what are the undeveloped or unexpressed traits needing to be brought into the light so as to collectively create a new framework for a liberated future?

Shadow work holds a space for using creative imagination through writing, drawing, performance and more to own our disowned selves, as a way to recognize colonial projections which have been internalized and therewith come to a more authentic understanding of who we are both as individuals and as a society. It has always been crucial to adopt this study of the colonial archive in relation to ourselves as artists, scholars and activists as a means of paying attention to the affective and the imagination. This was an important consideration in *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?* because, from the Namibian perspective, we observe how the space for artistic and therapeutic imaginaries in Namibian nationalism has been shrinking and controlled. Hence, shadow work as a methodological approach to the colonial archive means fading, shading, reconciling, speculating, breathing, restoring, haunting, loving, healing and resting. It implies remaining with the dark history of Namibia–Germany relations, bringing these long shadows into the light in order to heal them ultimately.

If we think of this expansive notion of shadow work in the context of the nation, for example, what this represents is the unfinished business of decolonization in Namibia and Germany alike. We have already established that coloniality is deeply present in the afterlives of imperialism, which we recognize in the lived experience of shared intergenerational trauma – as necessitating calls for collective healing and restorative justice. The Namibian genocide in itself is a shadow continuing to haunt both countries.

We identify four features to our chosen methodological approach, and given that shadow work is not a linear process they occur simultaneously: 1) digging (also referred to as 'mining the archive'); 2) critiquing; 3) smuggling; and 4) curating. These characteristics are not exhaustive in framing and designing what we mean by shadow work in this context. We foresee that other artist-academic-activists who are interested in archives

of any kind will have to expand on this. The four features are meant to remind us of the complexity of our decolonial responsibilities, inviting us to think beyond popular frameworks relying exclusively on critique. This complexity is reflected in Irit Rogoff's (2006) thought-provoking questions.

> But what comes after the critical analysis of culture? What goes beyond the endless cataloguing of the hidden structures, the invisible powers and the numerous offences we have been preoccupied with for so long? Beyond the processes of marking and making visible those who have been included and those who have been excluded? Beyond being able to point our finger at the master narratives and at the dominant cartographies of the inherited cultural order? Beyond the celebration of emergent minority group identities, or the emphatic acknowledgement of someone else's suffering, as an achievement in and of itself?[10]

Rogoff's lines of inquiry are significant in framing our own methodology because they remind us that this historical and creative work is more than a practice of mere critique. The latter is certainly one of the many things we do; however, critique of gaps and silences in the archive alone does not factor in aspects like love or empathy. How else are we to relate to the transformation of entire groups of people who were stripped of their possessions and identities, catalogued, labelled and presented as tools for labour and economic activity as well as knowledge production? Firstly, by identifying the archive as something which relates to people and their (hi)stories, and not just as a space of objects from a time and place far removed from us. Secondly, by approaching people from a position of love and empathy. Our framing of shadow work in the archive is a mediation on intimacy and relationship with the colonized bodies and objects held within its confines. Here, we do not take a stance of critical distance.

> For alternatives to imperialism to exist, unlearning what is assumed to be a structural distance between actors – in time, space, and the body politic – is a distance in relation to which we are enticed, encouraged, impelled, and interpellated to introduce ourselves; it

10 Irit Rogoff, *Smuggling: An Embodied Crticality* (2006), available online at: https://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff_smuggling.pdf (last accessed 27.7.2024).

> is a distance that transforms others from political actors into subjects or objects of alternative histories and deprives them and us of the common ground of a shared tradition.[11]

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay positions the archive as an entity which pertains to people, and thus it relates to all people There are those who are present within the folds of its documents and translations, transformed by imperial objectives and those conspiring together with the archive itself to arrange, organize and store memories. The process of archiving is one which entails deliberate intervention through the creation, erasure and preservation of particular information, acts carried out by human beings no less. Azoulay's sentiments on relating the archive to people and their things are similarly echoed by Molemo Moiloa in the context of museums in the postcolonial era (more hereon in due course).

By relating to people, we smuggle warmth, passion, playfulness, care, affection and, most importantly, love into the archive. In *All About Love*, bell hooks muses on the meaning of love. hooks notes that 'affection is only one ingredient of love. To truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients – care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication'.[12] hooks associates love with being more than just a feeling: it is, rather, a set of expansive actions and challenges which cultivate growth both on the personal and spiritual level. Love assumes accountability, responsibility, respect and, most importantly, healthy boundaries.

Love is a practice nurtured and taught from one generation to the next, for example a child learns how to love by observing the practices of their parents. In mainstream culture, love is understood as something that starts with the self, as in self-love. How, then, might we account for love in the bodies of the colonized when they were stripped of the ability to love themselves, when their boundaries were violated time and time again? Might the absence of love they experienced during the imperial age play out as particular symptoms of intergenerational trauma? These questions can be asked not only for the colonized but for the colonizer as well. Might the concept of White guilt be considered a symptom of intergenerational trauma, and if so what are the possibilities for healing here? Attending to the dark spots in our entangled histories in the context of healing practices and actions rooted in love comes a step closer herewith. Smuggling the

11 Ariella Aisha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London, New York City: Verso, 2019), p. 200.

12 bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018).

ingredients for love into the archive via shadow work helps us, then, learn and uncover new imaginings of ourselves beyond the colonized/colonizer binary.

According to Jacques Derrida, the archive lies at the intersection of law and privilege. It is a political space which not only governs memory but also claims the beginning of memory. The latter is systematized and enacted in a synchronous manner.[13] These processes of systemization (storing and cataloguing) and enactment (authorized and put into practice) are referred to by Julietta Singh as the 'archive's archive'[14] – namely, the process of institutionalization where knowledge is structured in private but for public interests. This, too, is a realm for interventions of digging, critiquing, smuggling and curation. In the next section, we explore our respective bodies of work which were displayed for the 2018 exhibition at MARKK and M. Bassy. Our collaging, painting, performing, deep listening and curating resulted in various methods of institutional critique which inform the above-mentioned features of carrying out shadow work in the archive.

Imagination and the Politics of Display in *We Shall Not Be Moved* and *Ondaanisa yo pOmudhime*

The exhibition *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?* was a meeting of artistic and historical imaginations. It was hosted at MARKK and M. Bassy in Hamburg from December 2018 to March 2019, at the National Art Gallery of Namibia in July 2019 as well as at the Frans Nambinga Art Training Centre (both Windhoek) in November 2020. Our practices of exhibition-making were accompanied by a series of public talks and workshops as a way of facilitating the and envisioning of both histories and futures. *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?* eventually transformed into a project perpetually shifting between an exhibition and workshop format.

Let us unpack the idea of the exhibition and explore the process around it, as well as what it ultimately achieved. The objects on display in this mobile exhibition included paintings, videos, drawings, sound recordings, poetry, installations, collages, colonial photographs as well as other found objects. The approach taken to exhibition-making was a dialogic process playing out between the curators, artists and historians involved.

13 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Religion and Postmodernism; Reprint Edition, Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2017).

14 Julietta Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You* (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018).

The 2018 Hamburg exhibition at MARKK and M. Bassy featured the work of Ndjiharine, Brandt, Katjavivi and Peters. It represented an institutional critique of MARKK, as reflected in the curatorial choice of the alternative venue, M. Bassy. The latter is a space promoting contemporary artworks and discourses from Africa and the Diaspora. Dialogues moving back and forth between these two venues were facilitated by the chosen format. For example, Ndjiharine's notable collage work was made up of figures of African bodies which she cut out from colonial photographs and pasted on canvases, layering them with paintings as well as images of cultural objects like spears, plants and colonial architecture. The two images below are from the collage *We Shall Not Be Moved* which was hung on M. Bassy's wall. This title reflects the artist's intention of bringing the bodies into relationship with space, land and material culture hereby. This is critical spatial commentary, reminding us that genocide was directed at erasing the Black body as much as it was about spatial dispossession, and hence displacement. This artistic position, which can also be read as a political statement, showcases refusal and resistance – which the artist continues to uphold, as the descendent of genocide survivors.

Julia Rensing explains that 'cutting, altering and manipulating "colonial" photography is a way for Ndjiharine to reinterpret and subvert the image. The blank spaces gesture to the voids in the colonial archive, to the unknown that remains untraceable.'[15] This speaks to Ndjiharine's described use of multidisciplinary practice, which includes developing strategies of deconstructing and re-contextualizing the pedagogical function of the texts and images found within colonial archives. This labour in transforming the pedagogical intention of colonial knowledge was central to our dialogues occurring as part of the residency process.

Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak? helped shed light on MARKK as a site of colonial knowledge, emphasizing therewith the need to decolonize the museum. At the same time, we were also aware that one exhibition addressing solely a colonial-photography archive held at the museum was not going to single-handedly fulfil that ambition. During our residency process, however, we were interested in exploring and experimenting with making an exhibition space which was critical, dialogic and democratizing of knowledge. We hence drew on Richard Watermeyer's (2012) conceptualization of the 'post-museum', existing as a pedagogical space. As Watermeyer writes:

15 Julia Rensing, 'Ovizire · Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?': Artistic Interventions in the Namibian Colonial Archive (2018–2020)', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 48/1 (2022), p. 6.

Fig. 1: Vitjitua Ndjiharine, *We Shall Not Be Moved* (2018), mixed media on canvas. Photo: Nils Schliehe.

Fig. 2: Vitjitua Ndjiharine, *We Shall Not Be Moved* (2018), mixed media on canvas. Photo: Nils Schliehe.

> Transformed from isolated and passive to collective and participatory, the post-museum experience is primed not only to enlarge the critical consciousness and sharpen the critical lens but extend the diversity of its patrons. The post-museum is for and belongs to educators, museum specialists, scientists, students, artists, parents, the general populace.[16]

This ethos of critical consciousness Watermeyer writes about derives from the educational philosophy of 'critical pedagogy', as theorized by those such as Paulo Freire and hooks. One way in which the exhibition forged such critical consciousness was through the ritual performance of Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, *Ondaanisa yo pOmudhime* (*Dance of the Rubber Tree*). This site-related work responded to erasure by assembling found objects, which were treated as items to be used in relation to those the colonial archive itself offered up. This application of objects such as fire and salt was made possible by drawing on embodiment and spatiality as archival containers. In *Ondaanisa yo pOmudhime*, Mushaandja performed a cleansing of the museum (using fire, salt, spears and marula stones), speaking back to the erasure which is inherent in the colonial archive. This spiritual labour of love was activated as part of mobilizing decolonial praxis, on a site burdened by its colonial histories. Another way in which the performance achieved this was through its poetic and musical utterances displayed at M. Bassy, which called for *odalate nayi teke* ('the fence/wire must break'), burning the museum and the archive, as well as disrupting white-monopoly capital. All of these suggestions were meant to be both symbolic and literal, in the process of working towards restorative justice for historically colonized communities.

These examples of our (Ndjiharine's and Mushaandja's) artistic endeavours were part of the larger collection of artworks, photographs and other objects put on display in the course of the initial exhibition. All these offerings were appreciated as much as they were contested and challenged, both within the organizing team and among the exhibition's audiences. For example, there was reluctance on the part of one team member about embracing fire and the suggestion of burning the museum. This issue became a bone of contention which allowed us to unpack the cultural meanings embedded in this artistic suggestion, particularly in this work of ritual-making. In other instances, some German audiences felt that the exhibition, particularly at MARKK, was not making a significant

16 Richard Watermeyer, 'A Conceptualisation of the Post-Museum as Pedagogical Space', *JCOM*, 11/1 (2012), p. 3.

Fig. 3: Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, *Ondaanisa yo pOmudhime* (*Dance of the Rubber Tree*), performance at MARKK in 2018. Photo: Nils Schliehe.

intervention vis-à-vis critiquing the museum and its colonial heritage. And yet, many who visited it in Germany argued that the exhibition was bringing an unknown history into the public discourse.

The exhibition at the National Art Gallery of Namibia was expanded in terms of the objects put on display. It also included documentation from the first exhibition. We maintained the initial principle of refusing to show the colonial violence, as reflected in visualities of the archive we had begun with. It came as a surprise to us, then, that local audiences wanted to see depictions of such colonial violence in an exhibition about the long-forgotten Namibian genocide. This was interesting for the organizing team because it allowed us to reflect on the relationship Namibians and Namibian history have with violence, while simultaneously pointing once again to the exhibition's central question of *From Where Do We Speak?* It reminded us of the difficult conversations and questions which shadow work will always unearth. In reflecting on the relational ethics of doing the latter, we realized that the exhibition and project at large had achieved its objective: namely, to hold space for transhistorical work. In this case, in museum, gallery and university settings.

Moiloa, who mobilizes the approach of moving from object-centred museums to humanizing African museums, reminds us of working beyond the burden of colonial heritage. 'We are looking for skills that enable the provisional and the incomplete, that makes space for multiple voices, for anger and for pain, but also for healing and explo-

ration'.[17] Our pursuit of shadow work in the archive speaks to this ethos of humanizing and of being attentive to the affective labour this requires. Moiloa draws our attention to IsiNtu linguistics ('nto' and 'ntu'), which that are useful in mobilizing a relational infrastructure here. Nto refers to a thing, while ntu refers to a human being. Moiloa uses these two terms to remind us that museum-making practices and cultural work on the African continent at large have defined relatedness through ntu, which in essence situates the human as regards other humans, their community and their ecology.

> A social and relational infrastructure, then, is a possible way to think away from the physical, the accumulated, and the left behind by our colonial ancestors. People as museum infrastructure potentially becomes a move away from the grand building and the stuff inside it; and towards the infrastructure of relationship, economy and social value. Museums perhaps function not as houses of civilization, but rather as central nodes from which a network of social knowledge frameworks, meaning making, and collective education might emerge.[18]

These insights point us to the potentialities existing for museums in the decolonial age, but they also remind us that, like galleries, the latter will always ultimately constitute limited and restricted spaces. We are also told herewith that, if we adopt this idea of 'people as museum infrastructure', we might encounter other public spaces allowing us to do shadow work beyond display, exhibition-making and the burden of representation. In the following section, we will discuss, then, how *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?* slides into other spaces which are not galleries, museums or universities.

Another critique which can be extended to our own endeavour as well as to contemporary exhibition-making practices more broadly is the flawed idea of even holding group exhibitions. Writing on South Africa's fixation with making women-based group exhibitions, The Two Talking Yonis (Nontobeko Ntombela and Reshma Chhiba) point us to the limits facing contemporary museums when it comes to this tradition. Ntombela and Chhiba argue that the issues with women's group exhibitions lie in this very curatorial gesture of grouping, often along gender lines, as well as in the use of racial terms. 'While group shows continue to have a valid function in demonstrating how different groupings

17 Molemo Moiloa, 'nto>ntu: Reimagining Relational Infrastructures of Museums in Africa', in Leonhard Emmerling, Latika Gupta Lagalo and Luiza Proença (eds), *Museum Futures* (Wien, Berlin: Turia + Kant, 2021), pp.393–404, here p. 393.

18 Ibid. p. 360.

of works offer different narratives, those narratives can and should move beyond historical trappings if they are to engender new imaginative and political possibilities'.[19]

One could argue that *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?* as a group exhibition was confronted by this very problem in predominantly displaying the work of African artists and their affective labour in the confronting of these traumatic histories. This is not to undermine the endeavours of the German historians and curators involved in the project. Rather, it is to show how the wealth of colonial racial capitalism is used to fund residencies and exhibitions for African artists in exchange for their affective labour. Despite the critical considerations directed at *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?*, however, the project was also seen as an innovative intervention in Namibia–Germany histories. As local arts journalist Martha Mukaiwa wrote: '"Ovizire – Somgu" is articulate, illuminating and interrogative, held high by diverse young voices speaking from places of solidarity, resistance and healing'.[20]

After Universities and Museums

In 2020, the project evolved to now include art and history workshops across three locations in Namibia: namely, in the ǁKharas, Omaheke and Otjozondjupa Regions. These workshops strove to work with Namibian youth in order to (re-)imagine anti-colonial histories and decolonized futures. They were also aimed at enhancing community dialogues and expressions regarding imperial legacies, colonial photographic archives, memory culture, restorative justice and intergenerational trauma. We collaborated with various Namibian artists, cultural workers and curators[21] to create generative workshops which produced posters, illustrations, maps, collages, poetry, performances, paintings and so much more. The artworks arising from the workshop processes were later displayed in an exhibition at the Frans Nambinga Arts Training Centre,[22] as co-curated with StArt Art Gallery.

19 Nontobeko Ntombela and Reshma Chhiba (eds), *The Yoni Book* (Johannesburg, South Africa, 2019), pp. 197–211. This book is an extension of the work produced from the artist's exhibition *The Two Talking Yonis*, Johannesburg, 2013.

20 Martha Mukaiwa, *'Ovizire – Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?'* (2019). Available online at: https://www.namibian.com.na/ovizire-somgu-from-where-do-we-speak/ (last accessed 27.7.2024).

21 Collaborators and contributing artists: Isabel Katjavivi, Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, Kambezunda Ngavee, Nicola Brandt, Shomwatala Shivute, Prince Kamaazengi Marenga I, Fellipus Negodhi, Silke Behrens, Nguundja Kandjii, Nelago Shilongoh, Keith Vries, Esmeralda Cloete, Hildegard Titus, and Vitjitua Ndjiharine.

22 The Frans Nambinga Arts Training Centre is a non-traditional exhibition space located in Havana, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Windhoek. It operates as an arts training school and youth centre with

Prior to these regional workshops, the project organized a facilitator-training one which brought together cultural workers to explore artistic as well as popular education tools and methods vis-à-vis doing historical work. This initial workshop was rooted in critical pedagogy praxis, which we highlight throughout this section as the orientation which artists used to facilitate learning and culture in the above-mentioned regions. The respective workshops were held at the Keetmanshoop Museum, Omaheke Regional Library in Gobabis and The Okakarara Trade Fair Centre. Participants mainly included young learners and out-of-school youth.

In the development of the workshops themselves, our main point of focus was to consider the arts as a critical tool for a liberatory pedagogical praxis which can empower youth. We used artistic practices like drawing, collaging, writing and performance to reflect on imperial history. We believed that using the arts would enable us to work through the colonial-photography archive in question as well as its gaps and shadows beyond the confines of a traditional academic approach, thereby exploring the utility of this repository outside of the museum space. Furthermore, we were interested in utilizing traditional methods like 'applied art'[23] – with the end product being a robust history lesson which can be administered in any learning environment, such as a classroom or youth centre for example. Thus, making the artistic process – the both cognitive and physical activities via which art is realized – a function of teaching history. Here we will examine a few theoretical frameworks we used in the process. In addition to using traditional arts methods in the workshops, we turned also to 'applied theatre'[24] methodologies to facilitate active participation and an embodied process of (un)learning.

To unpack the concept of 'embodied (un)learning' further, let us consider Augusto Boal's proposed methods in *Theatre of the Oppressed*: 'We can begin by stating that the first word of the theatrical vocabulary is the human body, the main source of sound

after-school programmes for underprivileged kids. Havana is part of Katutura, a township historically tied to the legacy of apartheid in Namibia – as the place where Black residents were forcefully removed to from the centre of town. This legacy was an important consideration in displaying the project there. We consider Mushaandja's meditation on the township as a concentration camp here, as featuring in his poem *Dance of the Rubber Tree* (2018).

23 This term refers to the application of artistic design to objects in everyday use. Whereas works of fine art only provide aesthetic or intellectual value, works of applied art are usually end products created with both aesthetics and utility in mind. We expand this definition of applied arts by thinking of such items as not always end products but rather processes and interventions in industrial, educational, community and health contexts.

24 A way of doing applied arts which refers to the practice of using theatre-based techniques – such as acting, storytelling, role-playing and similar – as tools to explore issues of concern to a community and to actively rehearse solutions which facilitate the development of new perspectives in a safe and structured space.

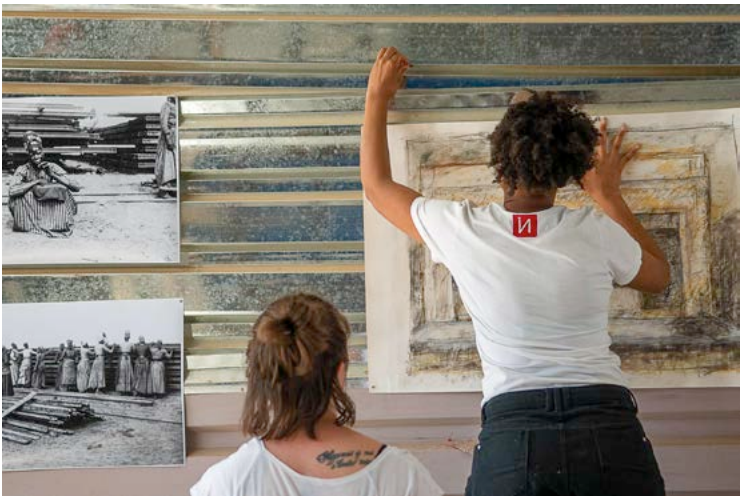

Fig. 5: Installation process of the 2020 exhibition at the Frans Nambinga Arts Training Centre. Photo: Gina Figueira, StArt Art Gallery.

Fig. 4: The project team during the workshop planning process in Windhoek, July 2020. Photo: Hildegard Titus.

and movement'.[25] Our workshops were not theatrical productions; however, Boal's body space as a source for reflection and transformation in the teaching and learning process was a jumping off point in our quest to create workshops addressing the idea of 'embodiment'. We teach through the body, we learn through the body and it is through the body that we are on an equal footing with one another as workshop facilitators and participants. Moreover, it was important for us to factor in lived experience in the different localities in the creation of our workshop activities. We understood each participant as having their own set of information based on the bodies they occupy; as such, they too had knowledge to impart during our time together.

The workshop activities included reading and writing, dialoguing, storytelling, role-playing, process-mapping, energizer and warm-up activities, as well as creative and expressive exercises generating sources of reflection. This creative process would not have been possible if the transformation of the body into an expressive space had not been encouraged. One of the potential barriers for a project such as this – namely, in bringing topics heavily steeped in academic discourse to a fairly young audience – is in finding the appropriate language for expression. Taking into account the limited knowledge of the workshop participants about the archive and all its complications, expressing certain concepts through performance or role-playing was more feasible.

One of the activities taking place during the workshop in Omaheke Region was the creation of short scenes which the participants performed based on their recollection of historical narratives told to them by their own family members or others in their communities. The purpose here was to recall oral histories still present in the region, as a sort of memory held in this specific part of Namibia. One of the (hi)stories emerging was of people fleeing through the Kalahari Desert to Botswana. It recounts how these refugees survived by digging down in the sand for water and lighting big fires at night which would scare off the desert lions and other predators pursuing them. Another (hi)story told of the use of cannons to execute people in Omaruru, and how people fled from there to the Omaheke area to avoid persecution. Those who perished had their remains cleaned and packed up in crates for shipping to Europe. After these performances, participants reflected on their feelings so as to elucidate own thoughts and perceptions about colonialism in Namibia, as well to better understand history as a series of narratives which relate to and influence the lived experiences of individuals.

In recalling and performing some of these narratives of violence, workshop participants were able to situate their own lived experiences in the context of this very history.

25 Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), p. 102.

Our approach to embodied learning emphasized performance as a language in its own right, where expression and dialogue became tools for understanding history as multidimensional and non-linear. The short scenes performed showcased a transcription of the past, demonstrating it to be something still alive in the present. This helped participants to engage with history beyond just the pages of a textbook. In the Otjozondjupa Region workshop, for example, one of the participants reflected on the connection between the displacement of people from their land and the existence of a major South African retailer in the area monopolizing the grocery-food market and limiting the abilities of local retailers or vendors to sell their goods. Another participant made a connection between their family members being domestic workers and the central character in Elder Katjivena's *Mama Penee*.[26] In the novel, the eponymous figure survives the ordeals of war and genocide in colonial Namibia and subsequently continues to endure by working as a domestic worker for a German farmer. Therefore, a link was hereby made between colonial legacies and the domestic labour of Black and Indigenous people by the workshop participant.

Another framework which informed our dialogues and explorations in the workshop process was Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1950). We took into consideration his meditation on the 'banking' concept in our workshop planning process, a critique of the teacher/student paradigm in the traditional model of education. Per the latter, knowledge-sharing is but a one way stream in which only the teacher imparts it to the student, with the latter methodically memorizing and repeating this bestowed information. In our consideration of the lived experiences of workshop participants, however, our envisioned format centred on the integration of knowledge-sharing, emotional reflection, empathy and holding space alike. We believe these aspects to be crucially important in the teaching and learning process. In our (re)telling of our (hi)stories, it was not only necessary to be critical but to create a space in which youth could see themselves in Namibian history. Our approach guided participants to first identify with the photographic subjects in the archive, then to question and scrutinize the latter, and finally to reflect on their emotions and drive their own thought processes around certain images or historical narratives. This threefold method of identifying, questioning and reflection is a means of generating awareness (via both action and reflection): participants contemplate and confront oppression by examining the relationship between victim and perpetrator here.[27]

26 Kapombo, U. E, *Mama Penee: Transcending the Genocide*. Windhoek: UNAM Press (2020).

27 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. With an Introduction by Donaldo Macedo (50th anniversary Edition, New York, NY, USA: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

The ethics and worldview of the oppressor, which inform those of the oppressed, need to be reflected on and untangled in order to pursue a liberatory pedagogical praxis. The nature of this relationship is predicated on a notion which Freire refers to as 'prescription': namely, the understanding that the consciousness of the oppressed is connected to that of the oppressor.[28] The image of the oppressor is internalized by the oppressed, it is held as an aspirational ideal, whereby the oppressed long to become the oppressor in their quest for freedom. According to Freire, however, true freedom is a pursuit which should be reflected upon consistently and with a great sense of responsibility if the oppressed are to reach a lived experience authentic in nature.[29] 'The "fear of freedom" which afflicts the oppressed, a fear which may equally well lead them to desire the role of oppressor or bind them to the role of oppressed, should be examined'.[30] This pursuit of freedom should be taken up by the oppressed through education, which can be an instrument of critical discovery. Our workshops allowed for a process-based experience of critical thinking – therewith giving rise to reflection and creativity (as expressed in the latter case through art or performance).

The workshop process generated a series of visual artworks, a collection of poetry as well as song and performance. Many of the artworks carry an array of messages ranging from pan-Africanist and resistance ones, to depictions of the ubiquity of violence in postcolonial Namibia to forms of self-affirmation. The visual artworks are depicted in an elementary style which is easy to digest for everyone involved. Some of these are simple stick figures; illustrations of landscapes which emphasize ideas more than artistic forms also feature. In these artworks we see meditations on identity against the backdrop of apartheid and colonial history, the loss of land and natural resources, and accompanying problems in the community such as hunger, a lack of education and alcoholism. We also see critical reflections on borders and nationalism, as well as activism and solidarity. Lastly, we witness connections made to the land and the importance of the latter as a resource. This would be depicted in many of the artworks emerging from the Otjozondjupa Region workshops, where the poisoning of waterholes in the Waterberg area is an important collective memory. In many of these artworks there is an emphasis on the land, natural resources, cruelty, violence, resistance and identity. This can be seen in the images below (all photos courtesy of Gina Figueira, StArt Art Gallery):

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p. 46.

Fig. 7: Asmara Kaffer and Conzetta Swartbooi, *Roots before branches*, Crayon on paper, ǁKharas Region. Photo: Gina Figueira, StArt Art Gallery.

Fig. 8: W. K. Sithole, *Speak Up Namibia*, Paint, glitter and oil pastel on calico, Omaheke Region. Photo: Gina Figueira, StArt Art Gallery.

Fig. 6: Immanuel Tjipanga, *Untitled*, Paint and oil pastel on calico, Omaheke Region. Photo: Gina Figueira, StArt Art Gallery.

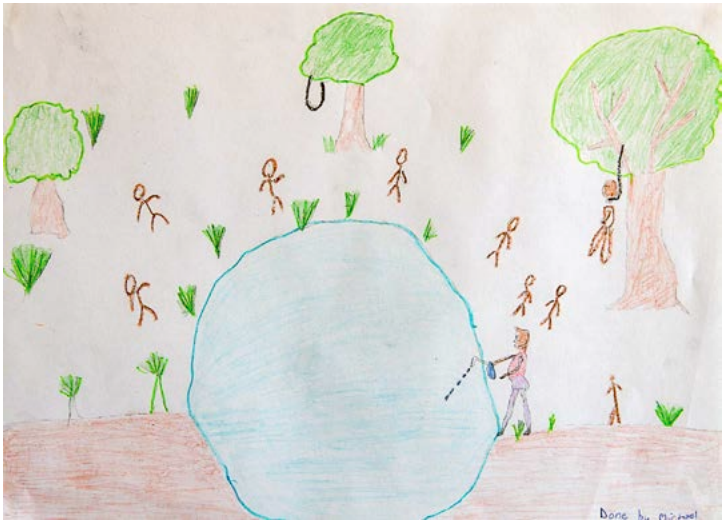

Fig. 9: Michael Kapukare, *Untitled*, Wax crayon and pencil on paper, Otjozondjupa Region. Photo: Gina Figueira, StArt Art Gallery.

Fig. 10: Mukuauti Kavendji, *Poison water at Hamakari*, Watercolour, wax crayon and glitter on paper, Otjozondjupa Region. Photo: Gina Figueira, StArt Art Gallery.

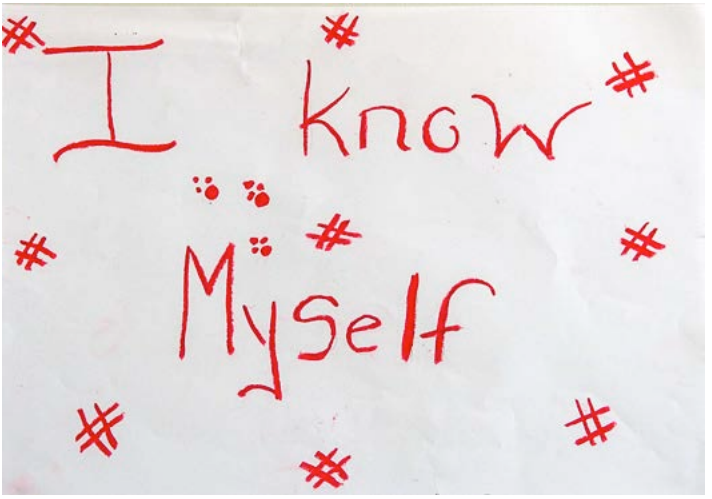

Fig. 11: Hanna Koffer, *I know Myself*, Oil pastel on paper, ǁKharas Region. Photo: Gina Figueira, StArt Art Gallery.

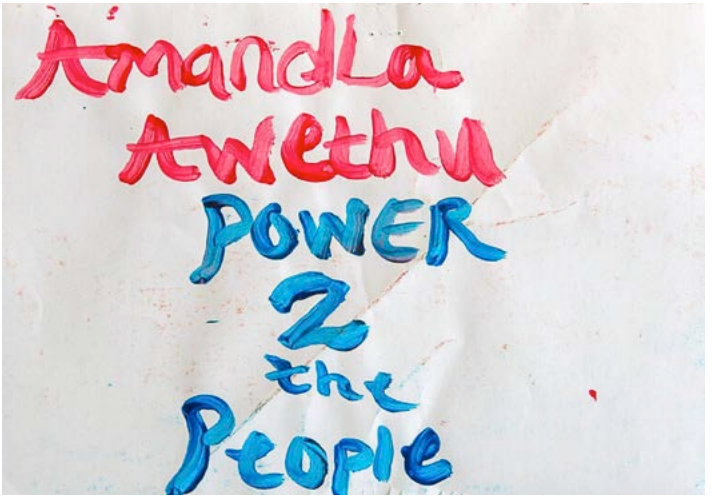

Fig. 12: Timothy Isaacks, *Amandla Awethu POWER 2 the People*, Powder paint on paper, ǁKharas Region. Photo: Gina Figueira, StArt Art Gallery.

When examining some of the methodologies we used in the workshop process, we are able to further relate our concept of shadow work not only to the archive but also beyond: namely, among the various localities and communities in Namibia. The affective labour of attending to the dark spots of history and doing the work of critical reflection and healing formed the basis of our workshop activities. The chosen methodologies for the latter similarly involved digging, critiquing, smuggling and curating. Here, we break each of these down accordingly and in the context of the workshop process: 1) digging – not only digging or mining in the archive, but digging in our communities as well: looking at our oral histories, our own memories and lived experiences for perspective; 2) critiquing – the learning process taking place in the workshops encouraged, as noted earlier, critical thinking, allowing participants to process their own thoughts and feelings along the way; 3) smuggling – smuggling love, play, creative expression, speculation, performance, emotional connection and empathy into the learning process; and 4) curating – overseeing healing, co-learning, co-creating and co-curating liberatory narratives together.

Conclusion: From Entangled Histories to Processes of Disentangling Histories

This chapter has unpacked several processes relating to the transnational and transhistorical project *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?* held in Germany and Namibia from 2018 to 2020. We have offered detailed descriptions of the kinds of artistic processes and interventions made as well as of accompanying discourses. Throughout, we relied on the notion of 'shadow work' to think about how these interventions evoked an affective labour which required intense critical reflection on both the individual and collective levels. As a result, the chapter has demonstrated the key usefulness of cultural endeavours in historical studies and how applied arts particularly can be used to work through traumatic and difficult histories. We also posit that such reflection has opened up further space for the notion of 'disentangling histories'. The latter involves thinking deeply about the limits of 'entangled' or 'shared histories', and paying attention to the particular and productive ways in which artistic work inherently helps disentangle those very histories – meaning that culture creates space for unpacking the legacies of the past and for forging multivocality. This act of disentangling histories is visualized in Kambezunda Ngavee's sculpture below, which he produced for the *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?* exhibition held in Havana, Windhoek.

Fig. 13: Sculptural installation by Kambezunda Ngavee in the Frans Nambinga Arts Training Centre yard, exhibited as part of *Ovizire-Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?*
Photo: Gina Figueira, StArt Art Gallery.

This sculptural installation is a depiction of prisoners of war during the genocide in Namibia. It reminds us that this part of the country's history remains largely scattered and forgotten even though it might be thought of as entangled both with Germany and with other colonial histories. Ngavee's response to this enduring legacy is attentive to the necessary work of assembling and gathering its scattered fragments, which fundamentally requires disentangling the different parts in order to make sense of the whole. We do not in any way wish to suggest, however, that applied art is the ideal means of disentangling histories and doing shadow work; we are simply speaking to what it can help generate while simultaneously remaining aware of the limits to our chosen approach. As Mushaandja reminds us, 'applied theatre is no rehearsal for the revolution' – meaning that even artistic interventions find themselves continuously challenged and prone to their shortcomings.[31]

31 Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, 'When Applied Theatre is no Rehearsal for the Revolution', in: Helen Vale and Sarala Krishnamurthy (eds), *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition* (Baltimore, Md.: Project Muse, 2018), pp. 183–203.