Mary Clare Kidenda, Lize Kriel, Ernst Wagner (Eds.)

VISUAL CULTURES OF AFRICA

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Preface

The Technical University of Kenya is part of the *Exploring Visual Cultures* project.[1] There, the School of Creative Arts and Media, together with the Kenya National Museum, Kenyatta University and the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich were scheduled to host a joint conference on Visual Culture in Nairobi in April 2020. The conference subthemes were: Visual culture in 'traditional' arts and crafts; visual culture and the archaeological record; visual culture in music and the performing arts; visual culture in the 'fine' arts; visual culture in journalism and popular media; visual culture in interactive and other digital media.

Because of the COVID pandemic, we could not have a face-to-face conference. Thus, we decided to write a book instead. This book *Visual Cultures of Africa* tells stories of the past, present, and future and how intricately linked cultures and identities are. The book explores the complex histories and discusses how people have used images, objects, and artefacts to describe what is going on in society and give expressions of their fears, hopes, and resolutions for centuries.

Visual Cultures of Africa is a book of many voices. Many people helped bring this book to fruition, and we are grateful to them. Once this book started, there were many people involved who deserve acknowledgement. Their ideas and suggestions helped us get to a manuscript that made us say, "Yes, it finally is a book!"

Our first debt is to members of the *Exploring Visual Cultures* panel of experts chaired by Avitha Sooful, University of Pretoria, South Africa who

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1 *Exploring Visual Cultures* (EVC) focuses on the concepts of *Shared Heritage*, *Education for Sustainable Development*, and *Global Citizenship Education* (as defined by UNESCO). The project addresses traditional academic subjects like art and history. It looks at images and image practices through a broad inter- and transdisciplinary lens, asking questions about culture, heritage, and our shared globalized future.

Exploring Visual Cultures project focuses on the conscious selection of images in different countries or regions, their respective interpretations, and their use in education. The different interpretations of an image or object often tell us about people's culture, self-concepts and being. Throughout the use of art, visual images and artefacts, people can interpret, think through and give meaning to the object, image or piece of art.

Exploring Visual Cultures provides a platform online and through face-to-face discussions where all participating teams give different interpretations. It also looks for answers in transnational dialogues between artists, (art) educators, (art) historians, (cultural) anthropologists and students. It is collaborative and multi-perspectival, and it aims at mutual exchange about imageries and their meanings. *Exploring Visual Cultures* shares results with a worldwide community of researchers and educators through conferences, publications, and websites.

responded generously to the call to write and review the chapters. We would like to acknowledge the outstanding debt we owe to the writers who wrote chapters for this book in the last two years. Special appreciation goes to the peer reviewers. They made the thoughts, ideas, and words sing. They were all so critical to this book's success. Each chapter was blind peer reviewed by two critical readers and changes and corrections required for the approved chapters were overseen by the editors.

George Washington Karani, our secretary, did a tremendous job writing the minutes and keeping us updated and up to speed during all the meetings. We want to let him know how incredible he is.

We also thank the publisher Waxmann for the always helpful support and patience with this complex project.

We thank the Federal Foreign Office of Germany for the financial support as well as the South African National Institute for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (NIHSS) (Catalytic Project CRP20/1032) in the School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria: "African au-o-ral art in image-text objects: Cultural translations of precolonial objects and remains" for supporting the publication of this book.

Mary Clare Kidenda, Lize Kriel, and Ernst Wagner

Introduction

Lize Kriel

Visual cultures of Africa

The voices in this book offer a multi-perspectival approach to visual culture – hence, our use of the plural, visual cultures, in the title. Culture, being practised, is a hard thing to describe in the singular, or to capture in a fixed series of images, whether graphic, mental, metaphoric, or otherwise. This becomes even more apparent when applied to the complex 'Africa' – a continent, a place, a space, a history, an idea, an experience, a view on the world, a vision. Thus, there are numerous 'conversations' between the chapters in this book, with various aspects featuring in several of them, and with authors inadvertently complementing, commenting on and contradicting one another. Yet there are recurrent themes that draw the chapters towards one another. Following both the coherences and centrifugal motifs, the contributions to this book are presented in four sections, with the chapters on the margins of each heralding the transitions between them.

Skills and knowledge in Africa: The preservation and transfer of visual cultures as praxis

The first section is presented from positions within Africa, focusing on making. The authors of the chapters in Section One are all concerned with the skills and the knowledge underpinning the visual cultural expressions they investigate, along with their transfer and preservation as praxis. *Ebenezer Kwabena Acquah and Isaac Opoku-Mensah* take the reader to Ghana for the opening scene, providing a glimpse into the ways Akan symbolism is reproduced in objects like cloth and chiefly regalia, illustrating how many age-old symbols continue to be adapted to the social and religious needs of contemporary society.

In the second chapter *Jane Otieno* moves the spotlight to Kisumu, Kenya and the role of traditional pottery production in the social sustainability of a Jonyuol Nyalo women group. Otieno emphasises that, along with the appearance and utility of the pottery, the production process itself expresses the belief system of this community of women in the Seme region.

Staying in Kisumu, *Mary Clare Kidenda*'s chapter introduces the work of women artisans in Karachuonyo and the Obunga slum. These women harvest and process water hyacinth for furniture production. Similar to Otieno, Kidenda emphasises the cyclical process of observation and imitation through which the skills are being transferred, but she also stresses the elements of self-reflection

and self-evaluation under the tutelage of master artisans and how these practices enhance the sustainability and profitability of the women's endeavours.

In chapter four *Rashida Resario* takes the reader back to Ghana where she continues with the theme of skill transfer. Her topic, dance, brings to the surface embodiment and performativity, underlying aspects in all the chapters in this section. The capability of performers, through mimetic empathy, to mediate the invisible values intrinsic in cultural-specific dance repertoires which are not their own, shows powerful capacity for authentic representation, cultural translation, the transfer of tradition, and heritage conservation.

In their chapter *Melisa Achoko Allela and Odoch Pido* move on from dance to another deeply ingrained dimension of a specific kind of knowledge transfer in Africa: orature. They find their answer for safeguarding the continuation of embodied visual cultures in the digital, by suggesting a virtual alternative for the enactment of oral performative practices. They report on the creation of an expressive animated Embodied Conversational Agent, or digital prototype, of *Lawino*, the woman storyteller in Okot p'Bitek's East African literary classic. Significantly, by digitising the narrator, the authors of this chapter highlight the extent to which the viability of embodied visual culture hinges simultaneously on the skill transfer from performer to performer, as well as on the transfer of knowledge and experience from the performer to the audience.

Finally, *Alexis Malefakis*'s chapter on skill research in an ethnographic museum consolidates the themes in the first section and bridges over to the second cluster of chapters in the book, featuring objects in collections, museums and other practices of conservation and display. By applying the notions of thinking-through-making and social learning, Malefakis contextually 'returns' a collection of wire models in the Ethnographic Museum, University of Zürich, to their community of production in Bujumbura, Burundi. This heralds a new broad theme in the book: visual cultures *of* Africa: the wire models of well-known Western car manufacturers crafted in Bujumbura are African-designed, -engineered and -crafted. These items of African ingenuity, based on the observation of imported goods, have been exported as high-end commodities.

Visual Cultures of Africa in collections, museums, and exhibitions: From conservation to conversation

While the visual cultures featured in the first section emphasise longevity through experiential and observational transfer within African communities of practice, the second cluster of chapters focuses on visual cultures contained in receptacles for display, often to communities of spectators that exceed the audiences these objects and their use had initially been intended for. In all the cases featured in this section there is an element of dislodgment, decontextualiza-

tion and severance which enables conservation but necessitates conversation towards reconnection and an approximation of the mimetic empathy which Resario had advocated for in her chapter in the previous section.

In his chapter *Stefan Eisenhofer* discusses *minkisi*, also referred to as "fetish figures", from the ancient central African kingdom of the Kongo which had found their way into collections in Germany. Eisenhofer explains them as evidence of visual interactions between Africa and Europe since the seventeenth century. These objects, crafted by central African artisans, were for Christian worship and as such incorporated Catholic forms, and yet they retained indigenous central African characteristics linking them to the ancestral realm as well as the royal power of the Manikongo.

While the *minkisi* present a case of African artistic incorporation of European symbolism, *Mark Evans* writes about European collectors, critics and artists drawing inspiration from Africa. In his chapter, he explains how African art, as introduced to England by twentieth-century émigrés from central Europe, contributed to, as he refers to it, "the Western discovery of the 'artness' of African art".

The conversation between the German and Kenyan curators *Njeri Gachihi, Frauke Gathof, Clara Himmelheber, Lydia Nafula, Leonie Neumann, Philemon Nyamanga, and Juma Ondeng* addresses the point of accountability. It drives to the fore the questions of provenance, ownership, and custodianship of the material remainders of African visual cultures as conserved in museums, both in Africa itself and in overseas institutions. The conversation format of this chapter resembles the reciprocal nature of the ameliorating interaction between the participating curators of Kenyan collections 'at home' and 'abroad'.

The last two chapters in this section build upon the necessity and the complexity of a conversation between custodians of African cultural heritage. High on the agenda, is the measure of control either Africans or descendants of former colonisers wield over the location and the representation of the sites or collections at stake. *Bea Lundt* writes about the castles, or fortified trading-posts, built as from the fifteenth century by European traders along what is today Ghana's coast. Soon their "merchandise" also included human labourers, who were held in "slave dungeons" within the castles before being shipped across the Atlantic. Lundt investigates how the dubious inheritance of these castles is managed by an independent African state and perceived globally as world heritage, although in more tormenting ways by descendants of the former slavers and enslaved. Lundt's investigation into the legacy of the fixed stone citadels along the west coast of Africa aptly invites juxtapositioning to *Benjamin Merten*'s essay on CONCRETE LIMBO, a three-week exhibition which brought West Africa's spatial environs to Berlin in October 2020. Merten's chapter explores the role of art and architecture in sub-Saharan city life. He emphasises the possibilities and opportunities for engagement also by Africans

in the Diaspora, especially when configuring spaces as public, private, institutional as well as digital.

Visual expressions in Africa appropriated from encounters with the West

The contributors to this section, with their focus on conserved and/or displayed objects and sites, affirm the adage that African history is world history. Through transcontinental dialogue the intricate entanglement of African visual cultures in legacies of long-distance trade, migration and colonialism come to the surface. Sections Three and Four build on this argument. With Malefakis' critique of a reductive stereotyping of African ingenuity as 'recycle culture' still resonating from the first section, Merten concludes Section Two with suggestions about the potential of digital platforms for conversation. The focus of this section must therefore be on the materials and media of African visual expression – as appropriated through encounters with the rest of the globe. The authors contributing to it successively hinge their arguments on the following: beads, shoes, books, film, and cellular phones.

Poetically calling it a "movement on its own", *Esther Kute and Odoch Pido* illustrate how footwear came to play a specific role in Africa during the twentieth century. Whether by making, decorating or wearing them, shoes have become a marker of 'indivisuality' (the authors' term): of individual tastes and preferences by the personalisation of global trends. Painted canvas shoes, bead- and fabric-adorned Akala and funky Velskoene from Africa, are also setting trends in the global market. Kute and Pido add an important dimension to their chapter by probing into the changing role of footwear as individual expression for successive generations in Africa by including the nostalgic reflections of Africans on this via social media in the twenty-first century.

Lize Kriel pulls back to pre-digital print media in her chapter on the continued significance of the book as object, specifically with its cover art, to make truth-claims about identity and belonging in South Africa.

In their chapter *Lydia Muthuma* and *Fred Mbogo* probe further into the (counter-)factual shaping of common imaginaries and how they delineate identity. They take a philosophical approach to imagination as both content and process: drawing on content (the stockpile of mental images a community has access to), members of the community do the intellectual work of arranging (and rearranging insight from the available content. The medium they focus on to investigate this process is the motion picture documentary. They offer a sensitive reading of the metonymic approach in the film *Softie*, featuring the Nairobian social media activist Boniface Mwangi. Their argument is that the documentary deliberately offers only a portion of the 'brand' Boniface Mwangi,

presupposing viewers are already familiar with it, having encountered it on Facebook, Twitter, television, in the newspaper, in his book (an autobiography titled *Unbounded*) and at the physical base for his operations, Pawa 254, State House Crescent Road, Nairobi. Because the documentary 'slice' of the brand refers to the other 'slices', or sites the audience is already familiar with, the intertextual discourse in the documentary is at liberty to add images to the audience's imagination without scaffolding them with contextualising facts that can enhance further insight.

Amanda du Preez's chapter stays with visual activism, and the discourse between presences on-site and online, by illustrating how selfie-takers asserted their right to be seen in the 2015–2016 #FeesMustFall and 2020 #endSARS protests in South Africa and Nigeria respectively. She explains the selfie as expanding the genre of the self-portrait (as it evolves from its long history). Her approach links up with that of Muthuma and Mbogo in that it reminds the reader that the selfie operates as a slice, or a portion, of the multi-medial branding of an activist movement.

Contemporary Art in Africa: Praxis as conversation with the past and with the world

Section Four is dedicated to contemporary art and African praxis as conversation with its past and with the world. It is confirmed in the opening voice of *Douglas Sokari Camp*, Nigerian-born-London-based artist, interviewed by *Ernst Wagner*. Camp's "memory of visual culture [as] dance, dress, masquerade, performances," resonates with the research contributed to the previous sections of this book. In her interview Camp also reiterates the specific conundrum tackled by the authors in Section Two. She describes the de-contextual conservation and display of objects as stories 'edited' on a "Western level". What contemporary African artists do, according to Camp, is to reintroduce these stories in their creative work. Besides reflecting on her own art, Camp also refers to the work of Alexis Peskine, Osi Audu, Romuald Hazoumè, and El Anatsui. She also mentions Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Moholi to make the point that "South African artists bring their historical struggle of race and inequality to the conversation".

The next two chapters of this Section feature more such South African Artists. *Runette Kruger's* chapter features the work of Titus Matiyane and Candice Breitz and their strategies to battle for social equality. *Avitha Sooful* demonstrates how black African female artists Muelwa Noria Mabasa and Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi's artmaking has been defying the masculine conventions of a European aesthetic.

When *Paul-Henri Souvenir Assako Assako* then reflects upon the 'conflict of representation' in the art of urban Cameroon, he lays his finger on the chal-

lenge to contemporary African art everywhere: how to be both commemorative and reinventive, endogenous and global. This is the question which this book invites the readers – both as scholars and practitioners – to continue grappling with. *Angelika Boeck* discusses two examples, of West African artists sculpting European sitters as decolonial practice inversing the Western gaze. Boeck's examples are mesmerising also for another reason: she reminds readers that artistic action is intuitive. Therefore, artworks continue to invite "new impressions on repeated viewing" – in quick succession and over longer periods of time. *Ronnie Watt* echoes this in his nuanced overview of South African ceramic art as a conversation between African and European forms and techniques of meaning making and aesthetic expression, and the resultant blending of traditions and materials. In the process, this final chapter in the book bends the narrative back to its beginning, into a circle of praxis.

How are African visual cultures both 'in' and 'of'; identifying and confrontational; post- and decolonial; preserved and practised; old and new; borrowed and authentic; becoming and complete; rooted and soaring? The success of the explorations in this book will lie in the furthering of conversation and praxis in an emporium of disciplines such as visual culture studies, media studies, performance studies, orature, literature, art, design – as well as their histories.

Visual cultures in Africa: Skills, knowledge, preservation and transfer as praxis

Stimulating visual cultural literacy

Akan symbolic forms in perspective

Ebenezer Kwabena Acquah and Isaac Opoku-Mensah

Abstract

Ghana has captivating philosophical symbols that define aspects of the country's visual culture in "traditional" arts that need further recognition. The advent of globalisation has contributed to an apparent decline in recognising these symbolic treasures of Ghana. This chapter attempts to identify specific Akan visual images in Ghana and analyse what they represent to revisit and sustain the legacy of Akan sculptural works and stimulate visual cultural literacy. The chapter adopts a narrative analytic approach by navigating through symbolic Akan images focusing on geometric figures, colour symbolism, and symbolism of court art.

Keywords

Ghana, Akan images, geometric figures, colour symbolism, court art

Understanding the term *symbol*

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines a symbol as 'a mark or character used as a conventional representation of an object, function or process' (oed.com 2014, para 1). Following the OED's definition, this chapter approaches a symbol as a sign, mark, or object which, through the use of an artistic invention, expresses ideas, emotions, and abstractions in a sensory way, in the place of realism. Symbols are therefore both tangible and intangible. Akan symbols can make a lengthy statement simple. However, symbols become a secret language unless one is part of the cultural set up or exposed to it. According to Sarpong (1994: 74), 'the African way of thinking about the world they live [in] … is often based on symbolic rather than scientific terms'. This chapter contextualises symbols to reflect the ideas and cultural values of the Akan people in Ghana. Historical documents reveal that people's cultural values are linked to symbols and handed down from generation to generation. In Ghana, these cultural values include, but are not limited to: respect for authority, community and sharing, self-reliance, and projection of traditional symbols and colour

(Amenuke 1995; Hagan 2007; Isiguzo 2011). Amenuke, Dogbe, Asare, Ayiku, and Baffoe (1991: 150) comment on some of the Ghanaian cultural values as:

> … attitudes, behaviours, habits and beliefs, how we deal with neighbours, the part we play in society and ways in which we dress, talk and address people. Our ideas about religions and the rites of passage (birth, puberty, marriage, and death).

This description indicates that values are closely linked to the fundamental social practices of Ghanaians. The meanings of symbols are derived from their relationship with life. Symbols express the general beliefs and ideas of the people in philosophical, psychological, and spiritual forms. Ghanaians and the Akan in particular, perceive symbols in terms of their peculiar meanings and usage.

Symbolism and symbols among the Akan of Ghana

Symbolism and symbols are closely related. One can suppose that, when seeing a symbol, members of a community will recognise it to denote something specific. Symbolism is the meaning, interpretation, expression, and information carried by the symbols. According to Boaduo (2011), every ethnic group has its own mythological stories, and Ghanaians are no exception. Such stories are an integral part of people's existence, making them unique in their way of life (Boaduo 2010; Isiguzo 2011; Kquofi, Olowonirejuaro and Asante 2013). The myths can be cosmological, sociological, pedagogical, or mystical (Campbell, 1988; Coutlander 1996; Gatti 1994; Boaduo 2011). Cosmological myths imply modes of life that one cannot explain, as in realms beyond death. Sociologically, the Akan use myths to authenticate rules in society, such as moral principles and values. Pedagogical myths must teach the youth how to live a worthwhile life, and myth in the mystical sense helps the Akan 'realise the mystery of the universe concerning creation' (Boaduo 2011: 78). The mythological stories aligned to the symbolic interpretation of art forms are at the core of the identity and existence of the Akan of Ghana. The illustrated symbols in this chapter are visual, but what they represent needs to be explained. For example: If a person receives a carved *Sankofa,* its significance can only be explained through symbolism. The bird is the symbol. The fact that it looks backward signifies the need to revisit the essential things of the past. The *Sankofa* stresses the importance of learning from the past: taking the good and applying it to present situations (Glover 1971). *Sankofa* may appear in stools or *Adinkra* symbols.

Adinkra is a *Twi* (a Ghanaian language) word derived from one of the famous national cloths of Ghana called *Adinkra,* which means 'to say goodbye'. It is a traditional mourning cloth worn in many communities in Ghana at funerals and memorial services to commiserate with the bereaved family

and send forth the dead person to the land of ancestors. According to Arthur (2001: 33), *Adinkra* symbols are artistically 'based on various observations of and associations between humans and objects they use, flora and fauna scenes, the human body and its parts, and elements of nature, [geometric] and abstract ideas'. These symbols reveal pictorial designs of birds (like the *Sankofa*), body parts, plants, and chains. The symbols' representations go beyond the individual images and 'are understood within the context of Asante culture' (Danzy 2009: 4).

In the Ghanaian macro culture,[1] symbols appear in geometric, human, and animal figures, while colours convey particular messages. The following section highlights geometric figures and their symbolic implications among the Akan.

Geometric figures and their symbolic implications

Among the Akan, triangular figures appear on the chiefs' headgear and sandals. Such figures depict the charm and attraction of friendship. The triangle is also the symbol of the pride of the state. The triangle is a female symbol, the focal point for all eyes at state assemblies, and the chief's or queen mother's pectoral is usually triangular. Traditionally, a special stick a young man gives to his wife-to-be on the occasion of her initiation into womanhood is triangular. It symbolises how a young man tells the girl that they (the couple) should wish for endless and faithful love, a love for which either of them should be prepared to die – *Odo-ye-wu* (Sarpong 1994: 101).

A broken circle is the symbol of fertility (Sarpong 1974) and is used to warn dead people who failed to father children not to return to the world infertile. The oval represents beauty, bears a cleansing power, and represents the ideal shape of a female figure. Traditionally, a Ghanaian female figure should fall into an oval or egg shape in all her effective forms to be considered beautiful. An undulating line represents the stream of life, which is characterised by ups and downs.

Squares and rectangles are signs of sanctity in the male (of both God and man). They also represent territorial power and the extent of a male ruler's sovereignty. A square appears in the *kente* cloth (woven in Ghana for centuries, but now also available as print fabric) more often than any other symbol. On many regal ceremonial chairs among the Akan, especially the *Asipin* chair (Figure 1), one sees a combination of square and circular figures known as *Nyame Ntaakyire,* which means 'God's spiritual support and protection'. Therefore, the Akan chief who sits in state on the chair continually solicits the help of God.

1 The broader shared core culture is the *macro culture* and the smaller sub-cultures that form part of the core culture are the *micro cultures* (Banks & Banks 2010).

Figure 1. Akan *Asipim* Chair. Photograph: Tim Hamill.

Colour symbolism in Akan context

In the Ghanaian context, colour is used to express feelings about a subject rather than depict its natural colouring. It strongly influences people's lives and designs as they tend to accept colour and recognise how each Ghanaian ethnic group perceives colour. According to Amenuke et al. (1991, 183), 'indigenous meanings assigned to colour are not based on modern scientific theories but philosophical, psychological and spiritual meanings related to life'. Diverse tangible material culture, such as clothing, the chiefs' regalia, sub-group flags, such as those used by *Asafo*[2] companies, and rituals, is a manifestation.

Gold or yellow represents royalty, continuous life, warmth, glory, maturity, prime of life, and the presence of God. White represents purity, virtue, virginity, joy, and victory. Green represents newness, fertility, vitality, and prime in growth. Black represents vice, deep feelings of melancholy, the devil, death, and the power over life and old age.

In some countries, blue may represent peace and serenity. Among the Akan in Ghana, blue represents love, and female tenderness is likened to the appearance of the crescent moon in the sky. Sarpong (1994, 103) observes that Akan people often use blue to 'signify the rule of queen mothers. Green combined with white represents a bountiful harvest. Red or yellow stands for life and its power over sickness'. Silver stands for second in position, next to the

2 An *Asafo* company is an indigenous socio-political group in Ghana that defends the traditional states and actively participates in social festivities.

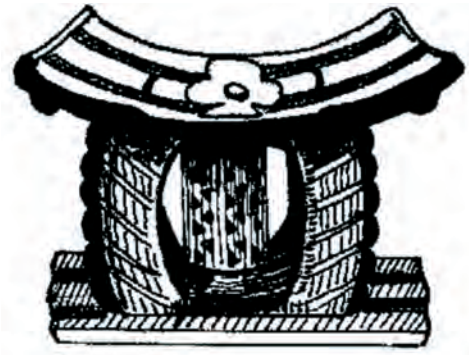

Figure 2 *Kontonkuoronwi* is a stool with a circular design. It is commonly used to represent the moon's orbit. Kyerematen (1964: 24) emphasised that it 'symbolises the saying *eda emansan nyinaa kon mu,* meaning that there is no part of the earth or any nation that does not behold the orbit of the moon when it shines'. The stool represents the power of a fighting ruler whose enemies could all feel his strength (Sarpong 1971).

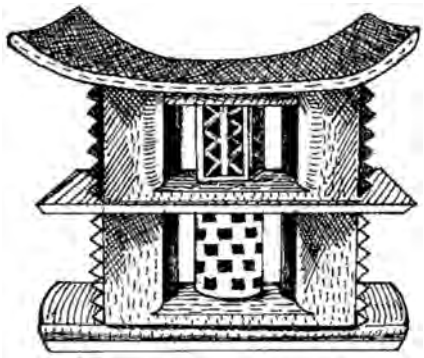

Figure 3. The double-decked *Obi-te-obi-so* stool shows a female stool surmounted by a male stool. The symbolic meaning is two-fold. First, it is a symbol of male supremacy over the female. A critique of this extended structure is that it fosters male chauvinism or misogyny. Secondly, it symbolises order of seniority among citizens and even among chiefs, priests, elders, and others in any society. In short, it implies that an order of precedence should be observed for the good running of a community.

leader, female royalty, and feminine qualities. The following section outlines the symbolism of Akan court art.

The symbolism of Akan court art

Kings and royal courts wear clothes with royal reference motifs stamped on them (Mato 1986). Sometimes, the king wears *Adinkra*-designed fabric that describes the dead relatives' characteristics and how he ruled. A voyage through court art among the Akan reveals the symbolic representation of proverbs and philosophical thoughts through the lens of their visual cultural images. A few such sayings, as illustrated through chairs and stools, as well as umbrella tops, are discussed below (all images in Figure 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 are from Ankrah (1982)).

Chiefs in all parts of Ghana use state umbrellas as canopies and as symbols of office. A carved figure plated in silver or gold leaf is usually placed on top of the umbrella. These communicate proverbs, wise sayings, or messages to the people.

Figure 4. An umbrella top with *an eagle killing a cobra.* This symbol explains this proverb: The eagle's power is demonstrated in the air and on land. Its symbolic meaning is that a courageous chief must be all-conquering and have the versatility of power and strength.

Figure 5. An umbrella top featuring *a lion trampling a hunter.* It explains the proverb, 'the hunter's gun becomes useless if he is overpowered'. Without the gun, the hunter is helpless. This is a symbol of power.

Figure 6. *An antelope standing on an elephant's back* as umbrella top. It illustrates the proverb 'someone is sitting on another'. This is a symbol showing that the top is reached not by size or might but by wisdom. It symbolises wisdom.

Conclusion

Ghana is blessed with rich cultural symbolism. With time, the relevance of many old symbols is waning as new ones are created. The symbols and their meanings that have transcended time, have adapted to the social, cultural, and religious developments that characterise contemporary Ghanaian society. For instance, the *Adinkra* symbol of a chain link associated with the slave trade now represents law and justice, the judgment for committing a crime being imprisonment (Adinkra Index Geek Corps 2007). Thus, it now represents the uncompromising nature of the law.

Another example is the symbol *Gye Nyame*, literally meaning 'except for God'. In the past, it mirrored Akan belief in the supremacy of God. In contemporary times, it also stands for the sovereignty of the Christian God (Arthur 2001).

In sum, symbols reflect who people are and where they live by providing visual expression to their identity. From schools' colours to municipal crests, provincial, territorial, or district flags, and national coats of arms, symbols establish people's identity within themselves, their communities, and their country. They provide bonds that bring people together and that reinforce their sense of community.

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Socio-cultural aspects of traditional pottery production among Jonyuol Nyalo women group, Kisumu, Kenya

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Abstract

Pottery is amongst the most ancient of Kenya's traditional crafts and occupies an important position in the country's cultural heritage. Pottery has the potential to offer employment to women, hence contributing to poverty eradication. However, pottery is underrepresented in historical literature compared to its importance as an expressive culture in Kenya. The purpose of the investigation featured in this chapter was to provide a socio-cultural review of traditional pottery production among women in Seme, Kisumu, to discover the role of pottery in their social sustainability. The study employed interviews, observation, and contextualising literature to examine pottery production processes from the potters' socio-cultural perspective. This chapter discusses clay processing and the production, function, and distribution of the pottery.

Keywords

Expressive culture, pottery, production, social sustainability, traditional craft

The research project

The chapter provides a socio-cultural review of traditional pottery production among a Jonyuol Nyalo women group in Seme, Kisumu County, Kenya, to understand the role of traditional pottery in the women's social sustainability from the participants' perspective. Seme is the third-largest city in Kenya, situated in the western region of Kenya, lying on the north-eastern shores of Lake Victoria (Republic of Kenya 2013). I selected this study site based on the prevalence of widespread pottery works in the region. The qualitative research method was observational; oral interviews and fieldwork were carried out, including the visual recording of the participants at work. The focus was on the traditional techniques used by women in pottery production, from obtaining the raw material to the processing, forming, shaping and surface treatment, and the firing and finishing of pots. Attention was also paid to the process of pottery making as encapsulated in the belief system of the women potters.

Traditional methods in pottery production

Paste preparation

The women obtain their clay from Nyalaji Hills in Seme. They consider this excellent quality clay because it contains natural particles of the proper type and quantity used without further additions. When the women go out, they source enough clay to last them some weeks or months.

Once they bring it to the compound where potting occurs, the women cover the mined clay with green leaves for three days to ferment. They believe the leaves keep the clay moist, protect it from dirty substances and facilitate fermentation. According to the women, fermentation helps to distribute clay particles uniformly. Fermentation also increases the workability of the clay and limits the risk of cracking during drying and firing. When processing the clay (Figure 1), the women first remove natural inclusions such as leaves and rootlets from the mined clay. In conversation with the researcher, the women emphasised that no temper like grog and sand is added to the clay since it is fine enough and the vessels produced are usually strong enough.

Forming methods

At the designated home, every woman builds her pots according to the accepted size, shape, and decoration, usually under the shade of a tree used as a standard workshop. Coiling and moulding techniques are the main forming methods employed by the potters. The coils are formed by hand, squeezing and rolling the clay into ropes. Initially, the women model the pot by winding a long coil of clay along the base of the rim, which is then attached to the base by pressing it down. Additional coils are laid over and pressed together one at a time and pulled to build a spherical shape until the bottom is completely sealed.

In a simultaneous movement, the potter gently pushes out the inner surface to bring out the spherical shape of the pot (Figure 2). They remove the junctures and seams created between successive coils by smoothing the surface using *ombasa* (outer covering of a nut from a local plant).

From observing the creation process (see Figures 3 and 4), the necessary size to give the potter access to the inside dictates the size of the neck's opening. The potters explained that they make the walls of steaming pots thicker, so they are less likely to break when used for cooking. Thicker walled pots are preferred for tuber cooking because of their gradual heat-transferring properties, allowing proper cooking and creating a pleasant smell. Christensen (2011) explained that when clay interacts with acidity in the food, it neutralises the pH balance. Something naturally acidic, like a tomato sauce, will become naturally sweet when cooked in a clay pot, clearly showing that pottery offers some health benefits not found in aluminium containers.

Figure 1: Kneading clay. (Photograph by the author).

Figure 2: Spherical shaping of the pot. (Photograph by the author).

Figure 3: Shaping of Ohigla pot. (Photograph by the author).

Figure 4: Moulding a slab for a Jiko clay. (Photograph by the author).

Drying vessels

The women potters strictly follow all necessary steps in drying vessels up to the leather-hard stage (Figure 5). It is important to follow the steps because failure to do so risks the pots' 'survival'. According to the respondents, people are not allowed to visit potteries where pots are made without prior notice because they believe some strangers are malicious and have powerful eyes that can cause harm to wet pots. They must protect all the pot-making stages

from passers-by before firing because it is believed that their eyes will break vessels as they are being moulded and fired. In this context, a 'stranger' refers to anyone not a member of the Jonyuol Nyalo potters' families.

Pre-firing and firing

The potters determine the pit size based on the number of pots they must fire in one batch. As much as possible, the women try to prepare the pit to be efficient in firewood consumption relative to the number of pots to be fired. Besides the thermodynamic effectiveness of pit firing, the women reported that pit firing shields the vessels from the eyes of strangers. The time for firing depends on the weather conditions and the stage of the dryness of the vessels. Potters reported that it takes about thirty minutes to fire well-dried pots. With experience, potters can determine the amount of firewood needed to fire vessels based on size and levels of dryness.

The selection of the firing area is scientific; the women potters are always conscious of the direction of the wind at that period of the day. The women have learnt through years of experience that during pottery season, the wind blows from a specific direction. The firing of pots with such knowledge ensures control of the fire. The fuel used in firing usually consists of small branches of dry wood, maize chaff, and grass. Once the women have arranged the pots, one of them sets the fire at several spots. No strangers are allowed close to the firing area to ensure their pots' safety. These findings coincide with Gosselain (2011), who noted that the study of living pottery traditions is an extraordinary tool for social investigations. Any technical behaviour can be considered a social product. It involves materials and techniques, but it is also a medium for social expression and an essential element in the endless game of social constructions. In other words, it is not merely a static expression of social affiliations, but it may play an active part in the building and maintenance of social representations.

Functions of pots

The women make various products ranging from cooking and storage pots to decorative pots in different shapes and sizes that serve the people's cultural functions. There are cooking pots, water coolers, storage pots for the whole family until the next harvesting period, water or eating bowls, and pots for the fermentation of locally brewed beer. Water pots (Figure 5) are usually marked with single lines on the rim and two lines on the neck, respectively. A pot meant for the cooking of food is called *aguch tedo*. Every woman is free to produce any pot according to the accepted size, shape and depending on preference and demand. According to the respondents, the pot meant for cooking fish food is

Figure 5: Burnished, dried water pots ready for firing. (Photograph by the author).

Figure 6: Ohigla pot used for cooking. (Photograph by the author).

called *ohigla* (Figures 3 and 6). The large storage pot, which is usually high, is used by housewives to store grains stuff and is called *dak*.

The findings corroborate Mteti's (2016) observation that most pots are made for cooking, storing and drinking. The vessel's morphology determines its implied function by the maker and the user. In this case, cooking pots have wide apertures, while those intended for fetching water have restricted openings. Arifin (2015) has observed that in the past, the demand for traditional pottery was always high because it was used daily. Users are decreasing because modern amenities like refrigerators and rice cookers have taken over. The other related issue is the aesthetic value of traditional pottery. As the public's appreciation deteriorates, the demand becomes less and indeterminate. Another factor is the inability of the traditional industry to attract interest and accommodate the needs of buyers, which necessitated a change to modern production methods. Therefore, it is evident that competition from large scale modern pottery production units and poor sales of products are some of the hindrances to the sustainability of traditional pottery.

Pottery distribution processes

Women potters occupy a strategic position in maintaining the continuity of pottery production and preserving pottery as a collective habit of society. All the women potters were above 45 years and were all widows. The group reported that they were not keen on including younger women because, according to them, young women lack the commitment and patience required for clay making. Most of the women joined the group to improve their economic status. The women could construct or repair their houses with money accrued from pottery, and some of them had benefitted from pottery sales.

Potters are the primary market sellers of their wares, but some traders purchase their pots and re-sell them either in local markets or other regions. The traders are always women. In Seme, women usually visit weekly markets, and dominate the buying and selling activities partly because women are the ones who are responsible for purchasing domestic items. The women revealed that the price of a pot depends on its type and size. The chairperson mentioned that the costs of pots range from 100 Kenyan Shillings (KSh) to 350KSh. 'We sell a cooking pot between 150KSh and 250KSh'. The women put aside Tuesday and Friday mornings before it gets hot for pottery making, giving them enough time to do other family chores and planning appropriately. Since they do not engage in pottery making every day, they are flexible to produce pots as and when the need arises in a relaxed atmosphere. The women learnt pottery making from their mothers-in-law and others from their co-wives. One respondent remarked that 'I learnt pottery from my mother-in-law. That made it easier for me to join the group after losing my husband'. The findings align with Griffiths's (2015) observation that pottery making has been noted as one of the economic strategies to meet household needs in contemporary society. Kayamba (2012) also pointed out that families have employed informal rudimentary technology, from clay prospecting, forming and decorating methods, and firing, which has resulted in low-quality products, low sales and thus low incomes. The findings show that traditional pottery faces numerous challenges due to the increasing interest in imported products because of their aesthetical appeal, functional value, and quality.

Discussion and conclusion

From the analyses and data, pottery production in the Seme area is mainly a woman's craft, as is usual in many indigenous cultures. The level of creativity and innovation was low in terms of form, finishing and function of pottery. The potters have incorporated a bit of the style of contemporary wares. The traditional values in pottery have not provided the space for innovation and creativity to develop pottery products to be more artistic. External intervention, perhaps from the local government of Kisumu, is needed for various reasons. For the overall economic stability of potters and their families, better education on innovative ways to improve pottery for greater gain in traditional pottery is necessary. Improved pottery products will be more competitive and add value. The pottery trade provides an opportunity for the people of Seme to project their culture, raise the standard of living (for the women in particular), and transmit their cultural beliefs onto the next generation.

It is necessary to record all the pottery processes from a cultural perspective to map out pottery-making activities in the Seme region. It would help understand the dynamics of the art and document traditional pottery's tangi-

ble and intangible aspects for posterity. Should these suggestions be accepted, Jonyuol Nyalo women potters will work towards enhanced productivity and quality products. Improved sustainability will go a long way to enhance their and their families' living conditions.

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How *Ber Neno* creations in the Jua Kali sector use reflective practice for apprenticeship in product design

Mary Clare Kidenda

Abstract

The multi-sectorial Kenyan informal sector is also referred to as the Jua Kali sector (JKS), 'jua kali' being the Kiswahili term for the hot sun in which the artisans preponderantly operate. The JKS is significant to the Kenyan economy because it is a source of employment and livelihood for many Kenyans. It is under-rewarded owing to, amongst other factors, limited business and technical skills and tools. This sector can become a seedbed of design innovation, on-the-job training, and entrepreneurship, contributing to the long-term growth of the Kenyan economy. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Ber Neno Creations (BNC), as a community of practice (CoP) in the JKS, uses reflective practice for apprenticeship in product design. The BNC sought to commercialise the water hyacinth in Lake Victoria by creating employment amongst women and tackling the lake's hyacinth menace. They used reflective practice to provide training for women artisans in Karachuonyo and the Obunga slum in Kisumu through a continuous cycle of observation, imitation, and self-evaluation under the guidance of master artisans. In this study, I used mixed-method and action research to take stock and identify the artisan's concerns. Findings show that most artisans cannot access relevant skills, tools, materials, and technologies to make good products in minimal time, which leads to the expensive and time-consuming outsourcing of work. The unstructured processes make them unable to articulate their craft process in their working environment. Upon reflection, some possible ways forward were identified for developing a competency-based design training framework that would be affordable, accessible, and address their literacy and education constraints anytime and anywhere.

Keywords

Jua Kali sector, community of practice, reflective practice, traditional apprenticeship, water hyacinth

Introduction: Hyacinth – from menace to material

The multi-sectorial Kenyan informal sector is also referred to as the *Jua Kali sector* (JKS), '*jua kali*' being the Kiswahili term for the hot sun in which the

Figure 1: Tables and chairs made from hyacinth by Jua Kali artisans from Ber Neno Creations, Kisumu County, Kenya (Kidenda 2017).

artisans preponderantly operate. It is a community of practice that comprises artisans running micro and small enterprises not fully integrated into the mainstream formal economy. It is a self-organising community or economic unit based on the ideology of hard work, self-reliance, and a self-driven economy. These enterprises produce various products and services using skills acquired mainly through traditional apprenticeships from master artisans. The majority have not mastered the multi-dimensional pedantic skillset that involves using multiple support materials and various teaching forms to gain knowledge, expertise, and experience in design practice and planning. This sector can become a seedbed of design innovation, on-the-job training, and entrepreneurship, contributing to the Kenyan economy's long-term growth. Their market is constrained by their inability consistently to ensure their products' expected quality, accessibility, affordability, and sustainability.

Jua Kali artisans form associations called Jua Kali Associations (JKA). JKA consists of clusters with the characteristics of communities of practice (CoP) and communities of learners. Their foundation consists of informal yet solid social relations or networks with multiple identities, collective action, and conversational social protection forms. The social network helps the new entrants regularise their membership and familiarise themselves with activities. As a CoP, they have some common visions, goals, and interests to engage in collective learning, create employment and generate income. They also collaborate to share ideas and solve problems in their knowledge domains (Wenger et al 2013) in specific craft areas like handicrafts, pottery, woodwork, and metalwork. In the process, they hold similar beliefs and share a value system in the quest to develop better practices (Barnett et al. 2016; Osmond and Tovey 2015).

The study's concern is that if the artisans advanced their knowledge in design practice and planning, it would enhance their design, innovation, and planning capabilities to ensure the adequate supply of well-trained JK artisans for the job market. Therefore, this chapter explores the possibility of using the principle of a design-training framework (DTF) to educate the artisans by

providing them with rudiments of design processes to improve their design practice and planning skills. This chapter looks at one of the groups in the JKA called Ber Neno Creations (BNC) that makes crafts products using water hyacinth from Lake Victoria.

Lake Victoria is the largest freshwater lake in the world. The water hyacinth menace in Lake Victoria had existed since the early 1990s when the weed began encroaching the water body (Odhiambo 2018). The weed has negatively affected business and disrupted livelihoods around the lake region. For instance, the hyacinth had carpeted sections of the lake that prevented fishing and tourist activities and significantly reduced the existence of aquatic species that support fish's lives (Ojina 2019). Ber Neno Creations (BNC) sought to turn these negatives into positives by designing and making products using hyacinth to create products.

Background: A Community of Practice

Ber Neno Creations began as an empowerment project that was the brainchild of the Women in the Fishing Industry Project (WIFIP). '*Ber Neno*', in Luo, means 'beautiful to look at'. BNC started up in 2008 to help tackle the menace of hyacinth in Lake Victoria and reduce unemployment amongst women from the Obunga slum in Kisumu City and Karachuonyo Bay in Homa Bay County. BNC is a community of practice that uses reflective practice for traditional apprenticeship in design practice and planning. They teach women in Karachuonyo how to harvest and preserve hyacinth, which they eventually use to make twines. BNC then buys the strings from the women and uses them for weaving.

BNC exemplifies the three characteristics that are a hallmark of any community of practiceCoP): domain, community, and training. BNC's vision is to create employment for underprivileged women to generate income by engaging them in collective learning in their shared environments. They learn new skills through traditional apprenticeship (TA). The domains create some common ground and a sense of shared identity in craftsmanship at BNC. Craftsmanship is a central concept in apprenticeship, and a desirable outcome focused on acquiring the skill 'right' rather than 'fast' (Lucas and Spencer 2014). Even though the TA learning process is mainly unstructured, with minimal theoretical explanations, the women are encouraged to contribute and participate, give meaning to their actions as they observe and imitate their master craftsmen.

BNC is a community of craftspeople who collaborate in sharing ideas and solving problems. The community creates the social fabric for learning, which as Salminen-Karlsson (2014) notes, fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust. BNC has also espoused the concept of practice which is another critical element of CoPs. The practice is the specific expertise, including knowledge and skills that the community members require (Baker

and Beames 2016). Through TA, every group of artisans at BNC acquire tacit skills as the bits of information and knowledge that are not easily expressed as formal knowledge but are essential for doing work correctly and efficiently for product development. Design by doing is the most appropriate method for acquiring tacit skills.

Reflective practice

Reflective practice is critical in learning design skills that the artisans at the BNC use to create their craft products. Reflective practice develops a learner's capacity to engage with their action in the process of continuous learning. It is, therefore, a mental process through which some particular purpose is achieved (Iqbal 2017). Budworth and Al Hashemi (2015) note that reflective practice provides the autonomy to develop and determine unique skills needs, teaching learners to reflect as they learn. In the process, it engages them in continuous cycles of self-observation to understand their actions and reactions and refine practice on an ongoing basis (Madden et al. 2015). During the BNC artisanal training, the master craftsman (MC) plays an integral role in the reflective process by guiding the apprentices and providing different resources and perspectives, including sharing crafts skills (Habib 2017).

Activity accompanies reflection, which involves using or translating prior knowledge into action. It includes: creative ideation, recalling and considering past experiences, observing things in the current environment, and developing and improving products and services (Heyler 2015; Plattner et al. 2012). The development of reflective skills in BNC can help the artisans accept their centrality to their learning. These would make the apprentices, especially the women, reflect and create ideas instead of being passive learners entirely dependent on the MC's knowledge.

Reflective practice also facilitates collaboration between the apprentice and the MC and other learners, enabling the sharing of ideas and new ways of operating (Iqbal 2017). It is a reflective activity by which the apprentice takes the work as the object of reflection and in which doing and thinking are complementary. Each will feed into the other to enable the MC to mentor, display artistry, and set boundaries to avoid vulnerability when the apprentices expose their findings and thoughts about craft (Heyler 2015). The recruitment of the apprentices through social networks plays a critical role in developing their capacity for reflection on their intuition of knowing-in-action. Knowing-in-action is essential because the apprentice-artisans are trained to get involved in the production and managing of the design process, strategy, and design implementation to add value to the business.

Methodology

My study of BNC involved a mixed-method research approach alongside an Action Research Design (ARD). The ARD steps involved the collection and analysis of combined qualitative and quantitative data. I adopted a mixed-method approach to yield comprehensive analyses and findings of data in the study. As Coghlan and Brannick (2014) observe, ARD was adopted for design aiming towards a collaborative problem-solving approach between researchers and the participants. It aims to solve a problem and generate new knowledge. It is an interactive process that goes through successive phases, with each building on the previous one. This study adopted only the observation and reflection stages to understand the design craft skills challenges of the BNC artisans. The observation stage employed a situational analysis to identify BNC artisans' existing design skills and skill gaps. I conducted semi-structured interviews, and made use of non-participant observation to collect data.

The findings informed the reflection stage of the situational analysis. It involved thinking through the possible ways to develop a Design Training Framework (DTF) to enhance BNC artisans' design knowledge and skills and grant them ownership and control of their design process. The competency-based DTF will use reflective practice to teach the artisans as a CoL to focus on informed, evidence-based judgments about design practice. Artisans will acquire skills and knowledge as responsible, open-minded, dedicated, and enthusiastic learners who dialogue with other colleagues with an active desire to listen. Through dialogue, mediation, and collaboration with colleagues, the reflective learners will learn to make things and generate new products and systems in response to numerous market conditions and opportunities.

Ber Neno Creations design process

The key material used by BNC to create products is the water hyacinth. Design is a function, resource, and way of thinking (Kramoliš et al. 2020). Within BNC, that can be achieved in developing and implementing hyacinth in the design process. BNC starts the design process through market research by identifying its target market's needs, wants, or wishes. Subsequently, BNC creates a brief to address the target market's desires, enabling them to meet market needs through generating ideas. Understanding the context in which design operates helps BNC identify opportunities for new creative projects within the lake region. The design process is quite helpful in adding value to a product beyond the manufacturing process because it will affect the gross margin, performance, and profitability (Mozota and Wolff 2019). Reflective practice has been selected for discussion in this chapter because artisans learn the crafting process by making.

Observation stage of the action research circle

Production

The creation of craft products at BNC is heavily reliant on the craft skills of the artisans. Kramoliš et al (2020) note that the management of essential skills is foundational to the design process, mainly aiming at designing affordable, manufacturable, and high-quality products. The training of the artisans starts with harvesting hyacinth at the shores of Lake Victoria. Karachuonyo women artisans are trained to harvest the raw hyacinth from the lake (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Karachuonyo women harvest the raw hyacinth from the lake (Kidenda 2017).

The design process involves managing certain specialised activities needed during production (Mozota and Wolff 2019). Harvesting hyacinth requires physical cutting and removal. The harvesters trim off roots and leaves, then rinse the stems free of dirt, which is a time-consuming exercise. The women artisans harvest the hyacinth without any protective gear, which could be a health hazard. Apart from causing an itchy body, walking barefoot in water exposes their feet to bacterial and fungal organisms that can infect the skin and nails. These organisms can lead to infections such as athlete's foot or fungus that change the foot's appearance and odour and cause discomfort. A solution could be the use of an affordable eco-friendly machine to harvest the hyacinth effortlessly.

Once harvested and trimmed, the women carry the stems to an identified homestead (see Figure 3). They split the stalks into pieces and dry them in the direct sun for two days. They carefully rotate them every two to four hours to ensure they dry evenly. Properly prepared hyacinth should be golden brown without green patches, mould, or cracking, which would cause discolouration or structural problems during production. Proper drying is essential as the moisture content affects fibre quality. Ideally, the drying process should be performed at various temperatures to obtain the optimum drying condition depending on the composition of the water hyacinth. If the women could dry the water hyacinth fibre bundles at regulated temperatures, it would ensure twines of consistent quality to BNC. During my research visit, sunshine dictated the process, causing delays during the rainy season.

Figure 3: Karachuonyo women trim off the leaves, retrieve the stems, and carry them to an identified homestead where they are split, dried, and treated (Kidenda 2017).

The women receive gloves and treatment powder for processing the split stems. They then treat the dried hyacinth stems by dipping them in water mixed with sodium bisulphate tablets, enhancing their durability, and preventing insect infestations such as bedbugs. They again dry the treated branches before twisting them into strings.

Twining and rope making

Woven hyacinth products require thoroughly dried stems. The women artisans use dried split hyacinth stem lengths and twist them by hand to form tight 'ropes'. To create longer rope sections, the women expertly weave pieces together. The twines are treated and dried again (see Figure 4).

The twines are transported to BNC in Kisumu City, 76 kilometres away, using a Tuktuk (see Figure 5). BNC workers grade the strings based on their thickness. Grade A is the thinnest, the most expensive, and the most difficult to use. Grade B is slightly thicker than Grade A, whereas Grade C is the thickest. Grade B and C are marginally cheaper. The average length of the twines is ten metres each. BNC buys the strings from the women to make their products (see Figure 5).

Ber Neno Creations faces the challenge of expanding the weavers' training by the lakeside to reduce the unprofessional handling of twines. The training is essential because the quality control of products begins with hyacinth handling by the trained women artisans. Thirdly, there is an inadequate supply of twines for use during production by BNC.

The BNC market research findings define their market. The design brief then serves to create ideas that meet their target market's needs. They explore ideas and develop potential solutions. The manager sketches the ideas to record and document the brief and graphically demonstrate the end product (see Figure 6). They create the design brief to make products that are affordable and

Figure 4: The dried split stems are dipped into water mixed with the treatment powder to prevent rotting. Put to dry in the sun. Split stems are used to make ropes (Kidenda 2017).

Figure 5: The twines are transported from Karachuonyo to Ber Neno Creations in Kisumu City. They are graded on arrival (Kidenda 2017).

aesthetically pleasing. They must function well, be environmentally friendly, and meet the needs of their target market.

Design aims to achieve a particular purpose (Kramoliš et al 2020). It also involves the choice and configuration of materials, components, and elements that bestow specific attributes such as the method of manufacture, appearance,

Figure 6: Sketches are developed to visualise potential solutions (Kidenda 2017).

Figure 7: Timber is sourced from Kibuye Market. It is partially sawed and planed (Kidenda 2017).

Figure 8: Sawing and joinery of wooden frames. Varnished frames are dried in the sun (Kidenda 2017).

performance, and ease of use, which considers the manufacturing, communication, and functional requirements (Carneiro et al. 2021). Therefore, the process involves creative efforts and entails strategic, technical, and market aspects (Mozota and Wolff 2019).

Based on the product needs, BNC develops both metal and wooden frames for their products. They source timber from a timber yard at Kibuye Market, five kilometres away. Dried wood planks are purchased, then sawed and planed by machines according to BNC specifications. The powered saws rip large pieces of lumber or panels. Though expensive, their production process is more manageable, efficient, faster, and safer than hand saws. The wood panels are transported to the BNC workshop (see Figure 7).

Most of the machinery used at BNC is outsourced from other artisans, making it both expensive and time-consuming. BNC lacks adequate space at their workshop for storage and to accommodate all the required machinery. The

Figure 9: Weaving twines on the frames. Drying the completed hyacinth product in the sun (Kidenda 2017).

lack of machinery restricts the capacity of BNC to engage in mass production. The wood is further undertaken at the workshop through a sawing and joinery process to realise the frame for the furniture (see Figure 8). The wooden frames are painted or varnished and then put in the sun to dry. The BNC workshop also produces metal frames based on the product's specifications (see Figure 9). Most of these casual workers come from the nearby Obunga slum and are trained to weave using hyacinth twines. Training includes how the frame loom warps and how weft yarns are woven over and under warp yarns, and where the weft yarns loop back to form an edge that does not fray, which is

Figure 10: Finished products (Kidenda 2017).

called the selvedge. The twines are soaked in water before being woven onto the frames in neat patterns (see Figure 9). The sourced hyacinth twines are threaded on the frames. The completed hyacinth product is then left in the sun to dry (see Figure 9). The finished products are stored in a display room (see Figure 10).

The master craftsman uses a lampshade to train weavers in the various methods of weaving. So far, Ber Neno Creations has trained about fifty women from the Obunga slum who come on a need basis. While working as casual labourers at Ber Neno, a fabricator supervises these women. However, these women do not receive certificates; their training focuses on perfecting their weaving skills. Their working conditions seem to affect their products' quality. During my research visit, the working environment seemed oblivious to health and safety regulations. Most workers did not have the proper tools and equipment for quality outputs. The production process is also dependent on the weather. The artisans work out in the open air and rely on sunshine to dry the products.

Product marketing

Product marketing is essential for BNC to persuade their customers and satisfy their needs (Carneiro et al. 2021). It is a prerequisite for BNC to determine how to influence the demands for their products to improve their sales using the marketing mix of packaging and branding. They must have a thorough knowledge of their company and their competitors, determining their input for the innovative process (Mozota and Wolff 2019). BNC makes a wide range

of products, such as hotel kits, furniture, jewellery, and accessories, and has retail and wholesale customers, including high-end customers, especially hotels. They market their products using brochures and catalogues, but mainly by word of mouth. Ber Neno aims to reach a fifty percent market share in western Kenya, but still lacks the structure to produce large-scale orders.

Business management

Design management involves the managerial and organisational activities and skills critical for optimising the design process (Song and Li 2018). It is about how the BNC can adopt a creative approach when seeking business solutions because design and business are intrinsically linked. Both can add value through marketing, communication, research and development, human resource management, finance, and communication (Carneiro et al. 2021).

The BNC production manager holds a diploma in mechanical engineering and is competent in a broad scope of technical work. At the time of my research visit, the manager was the marketer, human resource manager, and supervisor of the artisans. BNC employed four permanent staff and sourced extra workers on a casual basis, based on the volumes of products they needed to produce. The informal workers are predominantly the women fabricators from the Obunga slum. There is a need for capacity building to enable the artisans to realise their full potential in design management.

Discussion

BNC has quite effectively deployed resources to help curb the spread of hyacinth in Lake Victoria. Through my research, it has become apparent that there is a growing awareness that design is a valuable means to understand how a creative enterprise should operate. BNC could accomplish this if they know the design tools, planning, and implementation to optimise their business to contribute value and realise their design process.

According to Kramoliš et al. (2020), this is a critical design process, which, according to Carneiro et al. (2021), benefits the craft business and improves the quality of life. It is vital for making the design process fulfil functions, as Mozota and Wolff (2019) propose. It adds economic value through differentiation and aesthetics, product value through quality, process value through coordination and problem solving, and human value through cultural value transformation. Good design is not accidental (Kramoliš et al. 2020). As the BNC processes established, good design is a product of managed processes right from ideation to selling the product. The practices are what constitute design management.

Conclusion

It has become evident that skill acquisition in BNC is outside the formal sector. It is labour intensive and conducted under challenging conditions. Consequently, the apprentice artisans may not have time to focus on career development while improving their skills, developing their understanding, and increasing their knowledge. The study's AR reflection process identified the need for developing a competency-based design training framework that is accessible and affordable to the artisans to help them address their design practice and planning skills challenges. The developed framework needs to consider artisan's literacy levels and their need to access training anytime and anywhere. The framework will outline key design areas' strengths and weaknesses, including design concepts, production development, marketing, and enterprise management. As I illustrated in this chapter, the interrelatedness of these areas is integral to the success of BNC and JKS enterprises at large.

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The visible and the invisible in the visual culture of the Ghana Dance Ensemble

Towards mimetic empathy

Rashida Resario

Abstract

Established in 1962, the Ghana Dance Ensemble (GDE) has represented the nation through a repertoire of "national dances" drawn from various ethnic groups. The company earns its permission to perform ethnic dances through "authentic" representation of the dances, and by extension, the people. As the professional dancer's body becomes a vehicle for cultural expression, it renders her both visible and invisible. In this chapter, I examine the visuality of the GDE as intercultural, in embodied, visible, and invisible terms. The visual manifestation of the GDE's cultural practice and representation is analysed as visual rhetoric. I argue that while the dances, costume, make-up, and musical instruments visually represent their respective cultures of origin, their representation is contingent on the invisible, the negotiation of values, and underlying assumptions of the performer. Mimetic empathy mediates this negotiation, guided by the dancer's respect for cultures other than her own. The dancer's body, as an intercultural site is analysed to determine how it visually persuades a specific audience in a particular situation of her authentic representation. My unit of analysis includes interviews with dancers and the artistic director of the company, and photographs of dancers and musical instruments.

Keywords

Ghana Dance Ensemble (GDE), ethnic dances, visual rhetoric, mimetic empathy, authentic representation

Introduction

Visibility has become essential today as a result of digital and emergent technologies, the internet, and social media, which seem to make available the world to everyone with access. It is changing our mode of communication (Gries 2020). However, what we see with our eyes is only the tip of the cultural iceberg (Parker 1998; Uyan Dur 2015). The layered nature of culture, which

Figure 1: Representative image of the GDE's visual inter-culturalism. Photographs R. Resario.

includes visible artefacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions, carries meaning tied to its origins (Schein 2004). Therefore it requires a more profound investigation beyond the visible (Kuşcu et al. 2015; Schein 2004). Visual representation is political and contingent on purpose and interpretations (Gomaa 2012). That 'scopic regimes' determine what we see, how and why we see 'suggests that the ways we view the world are never neutral, but can be examined according to the ideologies that underpin the specific place and time from which we look' (Johnson 2012: 10). A discussion of the GDE's visuality will be incomplete if I do not discuss the nation-building agenda that led to its establishment. The project, spearheaded by Kwame Nkrumah after political independence in 1957, was driven by a cultural emancipation agenda (Adinku 2000; Botwe-Asamoah 2005; Schauert 2014). Nkrumah saw Ghanaian cultural traditions as a weapon in the fight against colonial oppression and cultural emasculation after colonisation.

However, with over seventy linguistic and ethnic cultures, the nation's diversity posed a challenge to the nation-building project. National representation, therefore, became a defining factor in the life of the young country. To avoid any form of conflict, Nkrumah adopted a cultural policy firmly rooted in the distinct cultural traditions of the various ethnic groups and promoted through institutions such as the Institute of African Studies and the GDE

(Botwe-Asamoah 2005). In October 1962, the National Dance Company (now GDE) was established as the first dance group in Anglophone West Africa (Adinku 2000). One can only appreciate the choice of traditional dance as a repository and representation of the people's culture in the face of linguistic and ethnic diversity within the context of a multi-ethnic/multilingual nation. Herzfeld further supports the efficacy of folk or popular art in the nation-building project (1997: 27) by stating that; 'visual and musical iconicities have been especially effective in rallying entire populations … .'

According to Schramm (2000, 342), the primary aim for setting up the GDE was '… to establish a program of "national dances" that would represent the cultural wealth of all the diverse ethnic groups in Ghana.' The founders, Nketia and Opoku, were guided by the need to 'preserve aspects of "dying" traditional dances while at the same time using them as models for creative development' (Adinku 2000: 131). Therefore, the GDE's preservation and creative development plan, forms the "authentic" and hybrid framework guiding the company's representational practices. Their claim to "authentic" representation, shared by various state dance ensembles (Shay 1999; Wilcox 2018), is backed by extensive fieldwork carried out by the founders in the 1960s.

However, the authenticity of the GDE's representation is challenged because the company engages in what Shay describes as '… highly stylized, carefully choreographed, and staged genre of dance that differs from the dances found among nonprofessional populations of villagers and tribes [sic.] people …' (1999: 29). Shay (1999) compares dance in the field with staged dance, and views the two as 'Parallel Traditions'. The relationship is exhibited in the use of "authentic" elements found in the choreographed expressions of the state dance companies and the degree of "theatricalization" present in "traditional" social performances. Authenticity, therefore, can be viewed from two perspectives, depending on faithfulness to materials from the field and varies from company to company. According to Shay (1999: 30), some companies produce 'invented traditions' or character dance, where steps and movements have no direct connection with tradition in the field. Other companies are 'devoted to authentic elements of traditional life such as the use of musical instruments and vocal styles, costumes, and dance steps, movements, and the portrayal of customs and ritual' as practiced in the villages. As early folklorist critics have pointed out, the search for the primordial and unmitigated authentic culture is 'a one-sided focus on the past, neglecting a tradition's embeddedness in the present, [and] will eventually exclude all history' (Roodenburg 2004: 216). In Pierre Bourdieu's fieldwork among the Kabyle (1958), his focus on the past in his quest for authenticity brought him under heavy criticism from anthropologists because it contradicts his analyses of the 'processes of embodiment, of all the inculcating or rather incorporating practices that define our being in the world' (in Roodenburg 2004: 216). One can describe the GDE's authentic representative practice as dynamic in line with Iacono and Brown's description

of dance cultures as 'living cultural heritage' (2016: 100). They argue that dance is linked to the people who created it, and continue to shape and be shaped by it 'in an open-ended fluid dialogue' (2016: 216). This understanding regulates the relationship between the company and the "field" and its dynamic and creative use of cultural heritage.

The visuality of the GDE is intercultural. They bring together diverse traditional elements of dance, costume, musical instruments, props, songs, and rituals, and dancers belonging to distinct ethnic groups in Ghana for theatrical performance. Despite the problem of "authentic" representation, the GDE continues to claim such representation because of the reception they receive from the field when they perform ethnic dances among the people to whom the dances belong.

In what follows, I present a visual rhetoric analysis of the GDE's practice as intercultural. I argue that through its activities, the professional dancer's body becomes a persuasive instrument that uses dance movement, costume, and gesture to convince a particular audience of the company's authentic representation visually and emotionally. I further argue that even though the dancer takes centre stage and is most visible, she is invisible. Her "authentic" representation of another culture makes her own cultural dance identity invisible at the moment of performance, which is the aim of the professional GDE dancer who communicates through dance to move and persuade (Aczél 2016) her audience to believe in her cultural representation.

This study relies on interviews with GDE dancers and the artistic director, photos of performing dancers, and of instruments to argue that the GDE engages in visual rhetoric towards "authentic" representation. I selected and analysed the pictures to illustrate the visuality of the GDE as an intercultural dance company. The GDE dancer is engaging in mimetic empathy in her persuasive representational practice.

The rhetorical rituation: Authentic representation of diversity

The repertoire of the GDE comprises dances that Mawere Opoku, a co-founder, choreographed between 1962 and 1967. He called the traditional dances Neo-Traditional dances because he choreographed them for theatrical presentation (Mawere-Opoku 2014). According to the technical, artistic director, 'Neo-Traditional dances are purely traditional dances that have been redesigned for the stage.' Even though the GDE performs creative dances and dance dramas, the Neo-Traditional dances are the key selling point for the company.

To dramatise a people's culture and turn them into an audience is not an easy enterprise. They are the immediate critics who can quickly point out misrepresentations and weaknesses in the performance. In the 1960s, much research went into learning the appropriate way of performing the dances

Figure 2: Fontomfrom drum set: Ashanti region. Photograph R. Resario.

and their accompanying musical traditions to represent the dance traditions of the various ethnic groups. The importance of research to the GDE's practice is linked to their claim to authenticity. To remain close to traditions in the field, they incorporate material aspects of these cultures into their practices. The visual culture of the company is more palpable in the musical instruments, the costumes, the vocal style and songs, the dance cultures, and the ethnically diverse dancers.

Figure 2 shows an ensemble of drums used for performing the Akan ethnic group's *Fontomfrom* dance. The two big drums are the Fontomfrom drums, also called *Bomaa* or *Frum*. The drum is about 1,5 m tall. They often use it along with the two talking drums (*Atumpan*) standing in the middle, the two drums on the left (*Adugrogya* and *Apemtema*), the bell (*Deruo*), and stick. They use this set of instruments for the Asante royal Fontomfrom dance. The crossed sword symbol (*Akofena*) on the *Bomaa* and talking drums symbolises war, representing the courage and heroic exploits of the Akan people. The famous Akan symbol, the Sankofa, is visible on the Apemtema and Adugrogya, implying that they take wisdom from the past to benefit the future. In its performance of the Fontomfrom royal dance, the GDE stays true to using the above set, as found among the Asantes.

As with the musical instruments and vocal styles, the GDE performs their Neo-Traditional dances dressed in the original costumes from the ethnic areas of the dances. The GDE tries to maintain its claim to authenticity by ensuring that these costumes are frequently updated to keep up with the changing trends in the field. As one dancer pointed out: 'the costume represents the kind of

Figure 3: GDE dancer performing the Bamaya dance in a newly acquired costume from the field. Photograph R. Resario.

dance that goes with it. So as someone sees you, they know that this costume is for this dance which belongs to this particular group of people.' To further the cause of authentic and proper representation within the GDE, the dancer responsible for the GDE's costume revealed that 'we recently bought northern costumes from the Northern Region.' One of the original Northern costumes can be seen in Figure 3.

Authenticity in costume is vital in the company's performance, as the outfit visually communicates a cultural identity even without movement. Bamaya is a male dance of the Dagomba ethnic group in the Northern Region. Its costume comprises a female blouse and skirt with anklets that buzz to create a rhythm as the dancer moves the body. The dancer also wears headgear with cowries that extend downwards to look like earrings. A waistband is added to the costume to exaggerate the twisting of the waist during a performance. The fan and towel are accessories that complete the drag. This costume in the picture is used in the Northern Region for the Bamaya dance. The GDE has purchased it and other outfits to authenticate their representation and foster a continual engagement with the living cultural heritage.

Professional GDE dancers and musicians must be knowledgeable about the origin of the dances and musical traditions of the people. Knowledge of the socio-cultural and historical background of the dances is considered key to a suc-

cessful practice. This knowledge is supposed to ensure that the professionals, who are intercultural communicators, adequately represent the people through the dances and costumes, accessories, and gestures, to further the authentic representation agenda of the company. It is within this rhetorical ecology that the GDE dancer operates as an intercultural agent.

Mimetic empathy as persuasion

In traditional society, dance functions as a social and artistic medium of communication. "Dance" expresses thoughts and emotions through movement, posture, gesture, and facial expression (Abloso 2013). Communication at its best is persuasion, as it functions by moving people on various levels, even beyond the cognitive and affective (Aczél 2016). The role of dance as a visual form of communication is evident in its ability to hold and transmit a people's ideologies and religious or philosophical beliefs through symbolic gestures and specific movement and rhythm (Abloso 2013; Nketia 2014). The field research conducted by the founders of the GDE, which led to the creation of the GDE's authentic Neo-Traditional dances, has given the company an important position as a cultural ambassador, even within the nation. The positive responses their performances have attracted for decades, foreground the intercultural communication competence the GDE dancers have developed over the years. These dancers, 'trained to access and express emotions' experience in performance what Warburton describes as mimetic empathy – 'the ability to put oneself imaginatively in the place of another, reproducing in one's own imagination and physicality the emotional tenor and movement form of another' (Warburton 2011: 72, 74).

When dancers are successful in their interpretation of the choreographed movements and representation of expressive intention of the dance, 'the viewers not only see the movement, but they also feel its expressive intent. Simply put, dancers and viewers move into empathy together' (Warburton 2011: 74). In Figure. 4, the dancer takes on the role of a traditional priestess, as one would find among the Akan. During the dance, she aims to become a medium ready to be possessed by a spirit by combining her emotional and social understanding of the dance. What enables the dancer to perform believably is mimetic empathy, which puts her in synch with the nature of the dance she intends to portray. Mimetic empathy provides the framework to understand the 'other centeredness' of the GDE dancer's performance and its credibility (Wigham and Boehm 2017).

The Akan believe that deities and ancestors rule the human and spiritual worlds on behalf of God. They, therefore, invoke these deities to determine whether they are acting following the mandate given to them by God (Ephirim-Donkor 2008; Nketia 2014). When invoked, these deities possess and speak

Figure 4: GDE dancer performing the Akom possession dance of priests and priestesses among the Akan. Photograph R. Resario.

through mediums in dance movement and drum rhythm. The 'mediumistic state is what the Akan refer to as Akom, a unique extrinsic phenomenon whereby an invisible agent acts unilaterally on a human being in order to bring the subject under its dictate' (Ephirim-Donkor 200: 55). Akom puts the dancer in a trance as she responds to rhythmic music associated with distinct deities. In the GDE's bid to appear authentic, they appropriate and present the visual and performative aspects of a ritualistic practice as a theatrical show. However, applying the Akom ritual among the Akan clergy to enter the socio-religious and spiritual realm it embodies requires years of professional training (Nketia 2014).

The GDE dancer, a professional, aims to achieve mimetic empathy in representing the dance steps. She therefore relies on her years of training in the dance to put forth an "authentic" performance. She bases her authenticity on knowledge from the field, which informed the choreography, her understanding of its socio-religious and spiritual relevance to the Akan people, and her performative skills that all come together to convince her audience she is an Akom priestess. In the moment of performance, the dancer, who neither belongs to the Akan ethnic group nor believes in the socio-religious and spiritual worldview of the people, becomes momentarily invisible (as far as her own cultural identity is concerned), even though she is at the centre stage of the

performance. She becomes an Akan priestess through mimetic empathy, persuading her viewers to believe in her performance. The dancer views her ability to represent the dance well as a way of showing respect for the culture of the people. According to the GDE dancers,

> for you to do the dance properly means that you are giving the people respect, it is not only because it is our job. Because if you take something from somebody and you don't treat it well, it means you don't regard what the person has. But for you to do it well means you are giving the person a bigger respect.[1]

This mimetic empathy, driven by respect for other cultures, has authenticated the GDE's practice because of accounts of actual possession during their performances of such possession dances. In discussing the actual possession of an audience member during a possession dance performance by the GDE, Schauert (2006: 176) notes that, 'the dances retain their spiritual power despite their transplantation to a theatrical context, who can argue with the metaphysical that these dances are not the "real thing"?' (2006: 176).

The visual aspect of the performance goes beyond what is immediately discernible by a particular audience: costume and make-up; raffia skirt; red cloth; white powder, amulets; waist charms; headband; white patches on the face, and the actual dance movement all come together to project the dancer's mimetic empathy. It allows the viewers and the dancer to move together empathically (Warburton 2011). Her ability to persuade depends on her becoming someone else at the moment of performance. The visuality of the dancer in performance is, therefore, visible and invisible, which reinforces the ability of the visual to strategically transmit a meaningful experience to an audience (Finchum-Sung 2012). However, her momentary invisibility does not render her passive, as she is an active agent who engages in mimetic empathy to persuade her, often critical, audience (those to whom the dance belongs) that she represents them well. As an agent of cultural representation, the dancer is constantly aware of the watchful eyes policing her efforts. According to a member of the GDE company,… Sometimes they [her people in the village] watch me on TV and call to ask me 'what were you people doing, so you were there and they were singing these songs for our dances'.[2]

Each dancer within the company serves as an authenticator for the representation of her ethnic dances. It is essential to note that it takes more than belonging to a particular ethnic group to become an authenticator of one's cultural traditions. Dancers who maintain constant interaction with their people in the villages are trusted as authenticators more than those who do not.

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1 These views were expressed during an Interview with GDE dancers conducted on May 20, 2017.

2 These views were expressed during an Interview with GDE dancers conducted on May 20, 2017.

The immediate (authenticator) and extended critics carefully watch the dancer during her authentic representation of the Akom dance. Ultimately, mimetic empathy drives the dancer's exact representation of the dance, which stems from her respect for the culture she is representing within the professional environment of the GDE.

Conclusion

Visuality 'implies an engagement with the politics of representation…' (Mirzoeff 2006: 76). Therefore, there is no doubt that such political negotiations featured, and continue to feature prominently in the selection of "representative" ethnic dances and aesthetic elements of the company's repertoire, and the frequency with which some dances are performed over others, in the company's practice. The visual culture of the Ghana Dance Ensemble is embroiled in the cultural representational processes that brought it into existence over fifty years ago. The company brings together a diversity of dancers and musicians competent in their own ethnic dances. As they learn and perform various dances from the different ethnic groups, they engage in intercultural practice. Therefore, the visuality of the GDE's representational practices is intercultural in terms of the dance movements, accompanying costumes, musical instruments, and rhythm. In this chapter, however, I have only focused on how and why the dancer, operating within the rhetorical ecology of the GDE, uses resources available to her; costume, dance movement, make-up, and other cultural elements to convince the audience that she is an Akom priestess.

As discussed, the dancer, embodying the company's cultural diversity, becomes an intercultural agent. She engages in the art of persuasion to convince audiences of her authentic representation. In doing so, she also convinces those to whom the traditions belong that they are well represented. Even though the dancer is at the heart of the company's representational practices, she is both visible and invisible in the spirit of professionalism. Through mimetic empathy, driven by her respect for the culture she represents, she expresses the intention of the dance to move viewers to empathise together. At that moment, the dancer as a person becomes invisible as she seeks to become the other. As argued, her momentary invisibility does not render her passive in the performance. Instead, she becomes an active agent who engages in mimetic empathy to persuade her audience to believe in her performance and be moved by it.

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Digitising Lawino

Creating an expressive embodied conversational agent based on Okot p'Biteks' *Song of Lawino*

Melisa Achoko Allela and Odoch Pido

Abstract

This chapter presents the findings of a practice-based study on the digitisation of African orature works. The practise-based research resulted in a digital prototype that employed an expressive animated Embodied Conversational Agent (ECA) in a virtual reality environment to recreate a section from a literary research example. The selected literary text, Song of Lawino, by Okot p'Bitek, has been heralded as an example of East African literary aesthetics and draws heavily from oral storytelling traditions. As a result, this orally conscious feature was the primary basis for considering a research example for digitisation using ECAs.

Keywords

African orature, Human-Computer Interaction Embodied Conversational Agent (ECA), virtual reality, digitisation, Song of Lawino

Traditional African oral storytelling: Interactive and digital

ECAs are of growing interest in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) to further the application of the human-human interaction metaphor by endowing virtual actors with human-like social behaviour. At a technical level, they are computer-generated characters that emulate the social interaction behaviour of face-to-face human interaction. They exist across a broad spectrum, from highly intelligent AI-driven ECAs with a hyper-realistic avatar to simple text-based chatbots. Furthermore, they provide a means for digitally recreating works of African orature recorded as written texts. Because an oral storytelling performance is highly expressive, the design of an ECA should reproduce multimodal behaviours that model the elements of an oral storyteller. In such a scenario, the ECA as a storyteller would utilise verbal and vocal resources to narrate the story and use expressive gestures to engage the audience.

This chapter thus positions that the verbal and non-verbal characteristics of performance and participation present in traditional African oral storytelling

can be recreated in interactive digital storytelling experiences using new and emerging technologies. It would serve as a strategy to mitigate the limitations of legacy media in recreating African oral storytelling experiences.

Background information

The *Encyclopaedia of African literature* (Gikandi 2003: 580) defines orature as 'something passed on through the spoken word, and because it is based on the spoken language, it comes to life only in a living community. Where community life fades away, orality loses its function and dies. It needs people in a living social setting: it needs life itself'. Ugandan linguist and literary enthusiast Pio Zirimu coined the term 'Orature'. It is about oral texts that constitute utterance as an aesthetic means of expression, created to be verbally and communally performed.

Orature is fundamental 'word of mouth', which means that the appeal lies in what the performers are saying and how they say it (Okpewho 1992). It includes the quality of voice and skill in manipulating the tones of the words used to evoke different emotional responses. The teller brings verbal resources of narrations or songs and accompanies this with the appropriate facial and body movement to describe emotions or mimic characters in the tale. Musical accompaniment, when used, supports the oral text and enhances the overall performance (creates spectacle). Also, the delivery of the verbal text may depend on the tempo and rhythm of the musical accompaniment.

African oral storytelling is also a communal participatory experience, which implies a collective event where an audience congregates to listen, participate and share ideas (Okpewho 1992; Ramazani 2001; Thiong'o 2007). Traditional African oral storytelling takes place in an environment where the storyteller and audience interact to shape the story's form. The audience participates by asking questions, exclaiming, laughing, making comments, and responding to challenges posed by the narrator.

The storyteller may make a solo performance to the audience and relay the narrative as part of a group activity. Other group members contribute music and other resources to help highlight the dramatic moments and episodes (Okpewho 1992; Thiong'o 2007). In other cases, a storyteller works together with an accompanist. In addition to playing musical instruments, the accompanist may prompt an audience to respond to the storyteller at particular moments. The accompanist may also pay attention to the audience to discern their interest or comprehension of the story and thus prompt the storyteller to adjust accordingly, most importantly, correct lapses in the storyteller's memory. Storytellers may also adorn themselves with a costume connected to how the story is being told or meant to make them appear more spectacular.

Storytelling sessions take place within specific contexts (Finnegan 2011; Odaga 1980; p'Bitek 1962). Traditionally, performance could take the form of games played during relaxation, such as telling riddles and proverbs, or when a family gathers in the compound after an evening meal. Other contexts might include songs and chants during ritual divinations and dynastic chants where the performance is more rigid, and responses from the audience are not particularly encouraged. This study is only limited to storytelling performances.

While not a critical defining feature, African orature may be characterised by episodic storytelling devices (Jennings 1996). It pertains to narratives that do not have a discernible beginning, middle, and end and include iteration (repetition and narrative rhyme) instead of a single resolution of the plot, unlike written works based on Western traditions of storytelling

Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*

The orature identified for this study was *Song of Lawino*, a narrative poem by Ugandan writer Okot p'Bitek. This poem was initially written in Acholi Lwo as *Wer Pa Lawino*, and was translated and published in English in 1966. Narrated in the first person, it tells the story of a wife's complaints about the resentful way her husband treats her upon his return from studies in a foreign country in the West. He denigrates all aspects of the Acholi traditional way of life.

Narrative poetry tells stories through the voices of a narrator and characters. However, *Song of Lawino* is unique because it is a work of orature, existing between the realm of the written and the spoken word. Oral personal narratives are a folklorist sub-genre that refers to stories in which interlocutors speak about significant events associated with their own experiences or the history of their own families or villages. Although not the author's memoir, the study considered the role of the main character Lawino, as the author's spokesperson through whom he criticises Western ideals and influence on African culture. Lawino, on the other hand, is an offended first wife and a defender of Acholi value systems. In this regard, it would be counterproductive to dismiss the writer's position solely based on the author's gender and the presumed gender of his spokesperson. That Okot p'Bitek expresses his thoughts through Lawino, who is coincidentally female, should not diminish his position, especially since the content of the lament is not innately gender-focused. The entire text is an allegory for the conflict, which Westernisation has brought to African societies. Further, it is similar to longstanding traditions in Western philosophical texts. The male author's beliefs are discussed and debated with or through an explicitly feminine personification of abstract ideas such as liberty (Delogu 2015).

Digitising Lawino

There are two main steps in developing an ECA system. These include: implementing a narrative approach that allows the audience to interact with the virtual storyteller and, in so doing, make decisions that may influence the outcome of the narrative experience; and the visual design of the character (storyteller). The first, including its relation to the visual design, is beyond the scope of this chapter.

A mood board (Figure 1) was developed to present a range of visual approaches and to develop the visual appearance of the virtual storyteller (Lawino), two methods on which to base the character's appearance, were considered. The first was to base the character's visual appearance on an Acholi woman dressed in traditional attire. The other option was to dress her in contemporary Acholi attire but depicting the blue, red, and yellow Nilotic colour combination. The final decision was to create an avatar body, which was then animated using a set of motion-capture recordings played at specific programmed moments within the Unity game engine. Animation relied heavily on motion capture technologies and animation approaches from gaming that attempt to create hyper-realistic digital characters. Other decisions considered in developing an animated 3-D character that could be manipulated in real-time in a game engine include:

- **Facial rendering** – creating a realistic face that can lip-sync through text to speech or using pre-recorded audio, blink, and express different dynamic states. (Fan et al. 2012) outlines the main parts that people pay attention to that enable them to distinguish between an actual human and a CGI character. These include: eyes (36%), skin (22%), illumination (17%), expressions (11%), and colour (2%). Other studies have also included facial proportions to this criterion. The virtual storyteller was modelled in 3-D modelling software (Figure 2), and attention was paid to avoiding the uncanny valley effect. Mori et al. (2012) first used this term to explain how almost human objects create more of a sense of eeriness than those that are decidedly not human.
- **Body modelling** – consisted of a skeleton, skin mesh, and a set of motion capture recordings that drive its movement and non-verbal body gestures and could be implemented during runtime.
- **Clothes modelling** – to create the storyteller's garment, three different technical approaches were implemented. The first resulted in creating the geometry and weight mapping the clothing to the character's skeleton. The advantage here was that transitioning between different body animations could easily be achieved using the animation blend system from the state machine in the game engine. While this approach offered the optimum route (performance-wise), its main impediment was that the clothing did not deform (folds, wrinkles, and flows) in realistic ways but instead followed the

Figure 1: Moodboard (Melisa Allela)

Figure 2: A 3-D Model of Lawino's head (Melisa Allela)

distortions of the body. The second method involved using the game engine's cloth simulation component to emulate the cloth's dynamics and collision systems, thereby deforming in more realistic ways. The third approach was to use cloth simulation software often used in the fashion industry. The Marvellous Designer software was used to create the garment and simulate the animations and realistic garment deformations to yield more realistic clothing simulations. The resulting garment was saved as an alembic file and imported into Unity to combine it with the character's animation state machine. While this resulted in the most realistic character design, alembic files are quite large.

Implementation

The technical implementation of the ECA prototype entailed the design of the character and execution within a game engine. It was essential to work within a character animation system that supports the development of a believable character: runtime motion capture retargeting to drive non-verbal behaviour; animation blending to make seamless transitions to different animations driven by the motion capture recordings; basic locomotion; lip synchronisation using pre-recorded audio or text-to-speech systems; facial blend shapes (also called morph targets or shape keys) to express emotional and facial expressions; the ability to follow targets with their eyes as well as the implementation of believable eye saccades.

As part of the iterative design process, early prototype versions were presented at different forums to focus group discussion participants and attendees at the 2019 African Crossroads event. The following account details the participants' experience emphasising how the resultant animation product serves as a practical design for African oral storytelling, and the researcher's experience during the development stage.

Orality was achieved using the pre-recorded dialogue of the first chapter of SoL. This dialogue was cut into smaller segments to create room for pauses, audience reaction, and other performance elements implied in different sections of the poem and implemented in the Behaviour Markup Language Realiser. Early design iteration ruled out the use of text-to-speech services since this resulted in very synthetic non-African accented computer voices that marred the sense of realism of the character. The participants generally commented that the dialogue and accompanying non-verbal behaviour seemed natural and supported the delivery of the story.

Early versions of the prototype had used generic motion capture recordings obtained from online motion capture databases. In the early prototypes, the character movement and gestures, such as stance and body posture, appeared to lack coherence with the perceived personality and ethnicity of Law-

Figure 3: Khanga texture for a 3-D garment (Melisa Allela)

Figure 4: Application of texture on a 3-D garment (Melisa Allela)

ino. Some public domain gestures were indeed universal and conveyed states of unease, restlessness, and irritation. The gestures, body stance, and facial expressions were thus deemed necessary to entrench a sense of character credibility. As a result, later versions used custom-made motion capture recordings.

The generalisability of the gestures was a fundamental limitation. The gestures used were not precisely the gestures of the Acholi people. Instead, they reflected the observations of live-storytelling sessions by storytellers from different East African communities. Implementing a fully interactive virtual human or embodied conversational agent was also difficult.

Further to this, the earlier prototypes did not use skin shaders on the character's body and thus resulted in a greyish-brown skin tone. However, this problem was remedied using a skin shader that provided better illumination. While the character initially wore a contemporary dress, a *khanga* (*leso*) later replaced this garment, which has been typical across East Africa from as early as the late nineteenth century. It is not time or culture-specific (Figures 3, 4). Other subtle visual changes pertained to the details on the texture used for her face. The earlier texture image had well-defined (tweezed) eyebrows and specific lip colour. The purpose of this research project was not to recreate a particular event from the past but rather to investigate how a narrator and narrative framework could be constructed with African Orature as their guiding principles. The character's appearance, both bodily and in dress, was designed in such a way as to avoid overt cultural discrepancies while not hindering their ability to perform any potential story of the genre.

Regarding character design, her realistic design, the use of pre-recorded dialogue, and ambience sound in the environment, enhanced realism, credibility, and immersion. The virtual storyteller did not appear 'creepy' or 'uncanny',

which sometimes limits hyper-realistic characters. Furthermore, the interaction with the viewer was presumed to be pretty realistic.

The technical challenges included simulating natural African hair and loose draping garments in the game engine for real-time animation. A fully interactive system would accommodate an extensive repertoire of responses that can be used to control the flow of the story when the user attempts to deviate or when the responses from a user are inappropriate. Improved TTS services and a more believable synthetic East African sounding voice could resolve this within a sophisticated BML system. It was also apparent that not all participants understood the metaphors within the story because they first needed to understand the context of the references. It can be achieved using new dialogue and additional exposition or prior knowledge of the text.

Overall, the prototype demonstrated the ability to relay the performance elements of orature using Embodied Conversational Agents with a VR environment. Across the board, participants stated that the experience was exciting and maintained their engagement even after it concluded and desired to 'watch' the second chapter. They could recall elements from the story more clearly and vividly than they would have, had they read the book.

Conclusion

It petrifies when an orally conscious telling of a story is written down or recorded using legacy media. The storyteller lacks access to a live audience and can neither access listener cues nor react and adjust the story accordingly based on audiences' feedback. In a live storytelling session, the interaction wafts a relationship between storyteller and audience and, as evidenced in this study, gives the necessary framing for digital mediation. Interaction with an audience includes songs and chants that they can engage in, banter which manifests as the occasional dialogue between the teller and audience, and co-active participation in the form of gasps or repeating short statements by the teller and gestures and dramatisations. The storyteller also interacts with the environment and context in which the story is told. It is similar to immersive theatre. The immersion and presence of the audience in the unfolding story are essential. As explained in this chapter, such an interaction can be replicated using Embodied Conversational Agents in a virtual environment, as shown in this demonstration: https://bit.ly/LawinoV. In addition, the resulting system can be applied to other oral storytelling scenarios that draw their narrative content from other sources. This work is not in conflict with different modes of recording oral storytelling performances for posterity. Instead, it seeks to evidence the opportunities presented by an oral aesthetic system to digital interactive storytelling. It is situated within a larger body of elements of oral storytelling performance such as architectural space, time frame, an oral equivalent to mise-en-scène,

and the audience-performer relationship as espoused by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1998), which are integral to computational narratives. While archived in non-interactive formats such as video, such features become inaccessible to new audiences who were not present during the recorded live-telling. Creating a fully interactive, autonomous virtual human or embodied conversational agent for oral storytelling has attendant challenges. Except for specialised expertise in different fields (animation, human computer interaction), one also requires expensive equipment (motion capture suits, virtual reality equipment for immersive experiences, and computers). Also, there are few (Geigel et al. 2020; Ladeira and Blake 2004) contextually relevant examples on which to predicate such work.

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From “recycling art” to “reverse engineering”

Skill research in the Ethnographic Museum

Alexis Malefakis

Abstract

This chapter outlines a research approach practiced at the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zürich, Switzerland, that takes a new look at ethnographic collections. Regarding a research and exhibition project on wire models from Burundi, I introduce skill research to reformulate knowledge production in ethnographic museums.

Keywords

Ethnographic museum, Switzerland, Burundi, cultural artefacts, skill research, knowledge production

Skill research at the Ethnographic Museum

In a move to decolonise museum practices, many ethnographic museums have turned their gaze inwards in recent decades to reflect on the processes of knowledge production that the objects in their collections have undergone over time (Macdonald 2011; Shelton 2011; Bouquet 2012; von Oswald 2020). At the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zürich (EMZ), we thematise the objects in the collection as repositories of the knowledge and skills developed and deployed in their original creation and use (Flitsch 2019). The concept of skill encompasses the acquired ensemble of capabilities that actors develop in their engagement with their material environment, for example, making artefacts (Ingold 2007; Ingold 2011: Flitsch 2019; Flitsch, Isler et al. 2020). Skills emerge from the interplay of body and material and result in the embodiment of knowledge (Csordas 1990) and cognition (Marchand 2010), for example of materials and their textures, colours, and scents. People typically develop skills throughout a lifetime, share this knowledge socially and conceptually, and transmit it through different media and mnemonic strategies. Skills do not always entail explicable forms of knowledge but may remain tacit and involve situated learning in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 2002).

This chapter describes a research project at the EMZ on wire models from Burundi, which focused on the builders’ analytical and technical skills. It re-

quired transdisciplinary research between anthropology and industrial design and the collaboration with members of the communities who made these objects. The outcome of the research project resulted in the exhibition and book publication *Auto didactica. Wire models from Burundi* in 2017 (Malefakis 2017).

A new look at wire models from Africa

In 2015, the EMZ acquired 240 wire models that the Swiss architect Edmond Remondino had collected in the Burundian capital Bujumbura in the 1970s and early 1980s. The models depict a wide range of motorised vehicles such as cars, trucks, motorbikes, and other vehicles. They consist of re-used wire, rubber strips from car tyres, parts of discarded plastic sandals and similar residues, such as metal bottle caps or the plastic barrels of ballpoint pens. A noticeable number identifiably depicts specific car models, such a Volkswagen Beetle or a Citroën DS.

Western observers have often described similar objects from Africa as 'wire toys', 'recycling toys' or 'recycling art' (Kratz 1995; Nicholson 2002; Froidevaux 2004). However, the remarkable accuracy with which the makers had analysed the original vehicles and the attention to detail that their products reveal led us to the working hypothesis that they are models rather than toys or statements on overconsumption, as the term 'recycling' might imply. These wire models have little in common with the consumer-oriented model-making

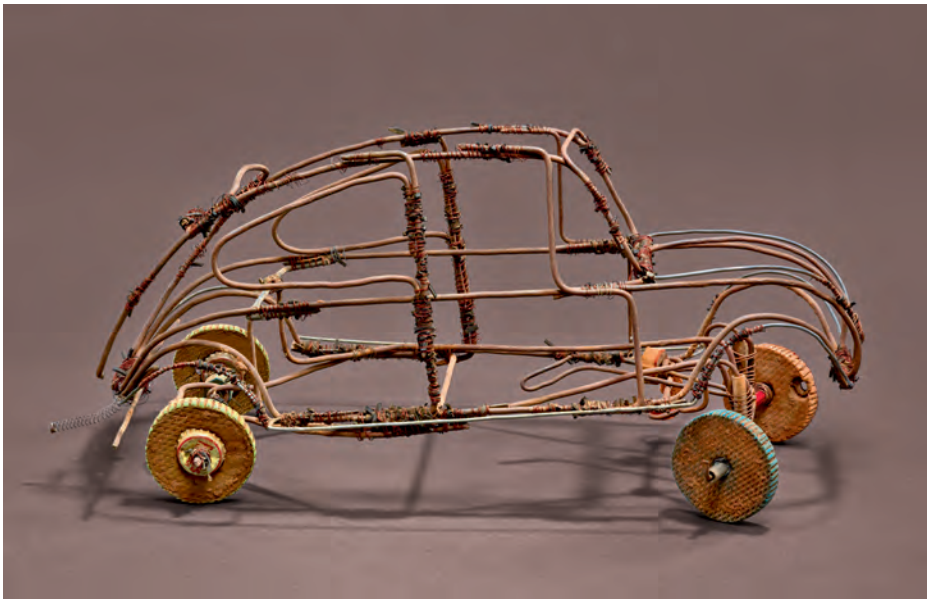

Figure 1: A wire model from Burundi. Inv. Nr. 31381. Photo: Kathrin Leuenberger/ Ethnographic Museum, University of Zürich, 2016.

sets sold in toy shops worldwide. They do not consist of industrially made parts that one should assemble following a prescriptive plan. Instead, the makers of the wire models were the creators of both the elements and the assembly plans for miniatures resembling original vehicles.

This initial insight led us to formulate a research project that would trace back model making’s analytical and technical processes and the social contexts in which the creators refined and shared their skills with their peers. The former aspect of the project was conducted in the Ethnographic Museum and comprised interdisciplinary research on the connection between anthropology and industrial design (Malefakis and Togni 2017). The latter part of the project involved a short field trip to Burundi to understand the context in which the models had been created (Laely 2017) and discuss our theses with some of the original model builders.

Reverse engineering

Reto Togni, an industrial designer, and I, an ethnologist, applied a project-based methodology to study the structure and technical canon informing the production of the models. To approach the models from the angle of their construction process, we initially recreated two in wire and plastic. The ethnological method of participative observation enables researchers to grasp non-verbal and implicit forms of knowledge which cannot be understood by means of mere observation or by asking questions in interviews (Hirschauer 2006; Dewalt 2011). In design, the *thinking through making*-approach aims to reveal the knowledge inherent in artisanal praxis and use it to design new objects (Schon 1991; Cross 2001; Pallismaa 2009). Therefore, a subsequent step was the digital reproduction of selected models using 3D computer-aided design (CAD) software (Porten 2008). This method, known in design and engineering terms as *reverse engineering* (Messler 2014), aims to reconstruct a current object, and is used in industry, for instance, to analyse competitors’ products. Digital 3D modelling of three objects enabled us to dissect them virtually and visualise the information thus gained.

Analytical explosion

A key feature of all the models in the collection is a visibly additive approach to design. Their aesthetic diversity, complexity, and functionality result from the interplay of many, often minimally-designed, individual pieces. That an additive approach was used is particularly remarkable given the fact that many of the vehicles depicted in the models exemplify integrated design, which combines different three-dimensional forms into one coherent surface. In the wire

models individual lines in space must suggest these three-dimensional surfaces. The translation of such forms into numerous individual elements is a fundamental design principle informing the models.

Moreover, their components have a flat organisational hierarchy, often lacking primary structures such as the chassis of a car that prefigure the finished object and incorporate secondary parts, such as the wheels. The complex form of the model results from the assemblage of individual, simple components. Therefore, an analytical explosion of the object to be modelled into individual form elements is essential to the design process of the wire models. Rather than being the result of spontaneous hit-or-miss and ad hoc decisions, the building process was preceded by precise analysis and planning.

Aspects of standardisation

Individual parts also entailed specific standardised solutions for recurrent technical problems, such as linking parts or functional features like steering mechanisms and wheel axles. For example, a ballpoint pen barrel in multiple models serves as a bearing that renders the wheels movable. Steering mechanisms occur on many of these wire models, notably bicycles, motorcycles, and cars. A striking feature of some vehicles is that they have Ackermann steering, which functions as do the linkages in the steering of an actual vehicle. Each front wheel turns separately on its axle while linked via a steering rod (see Figure 2). Rather than coming up with a new solution in every case, the creators could draw on a pool of successful solutions that a group of peers had probably shared.

Figure 2: Digital modelling allowed us to reverse engineer the models to reveal their technical details. Image Reto Togni/ Ethnographic Museum,University of Zürich, 2016.

The social context of model construction

During the subsequent period of field research, my colleague and I, the long-time Burundi researcher Thomas Laely, browsed through Bujumbura’s artisan districts and markets. Our objective of getting in touch with some of the original creators of models in the collection was unsurprisingly tricky, given how much time had passed and considering Burundi’s turbulent history. However, by chance, we met the artisan Gustave Poko Mulunga, at the Marché Congolais in Bujumbura, where Congolese artisans make and sell wood carvings and other souvenirs. According to Mulunga, many mainly European clients had continued to buy wire models and carvings made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from him since the early 1980s. Remondino had been one of his oldest and best clients, who over the years had bought 139 wire objects from him, which were identified by Mulunga when he surveyed the museum’s collection. We shared the preliminary results of our design research with Mulunga. The discussion of his models confirmed our initial assumption that they are not toys but workpieces that attest to young engineers’ specialised analytical and technical skills.

Born in Bujumbura in 1966 to Congolese immigrant parents, Mulunga had learned about cars and their inner workings early on when he visited his fa-

Figure 3: Gustave Poko Mulunga creates and sells wire models in his shop in Bujumbura. Photo: Alexis Malefakis/Ethnographic Museum, University of Zürich, 2016.

ther's workplace, a garage, where he would occasionally help out. He studied the parts of disassembled cars close up to make wire models of them, which explained the striking accuracy with which steering mechanisms, for example, had been replicated in many of the models. Furthermore, Mulunga described the process of wire model making as a popular social event that entailed a division of labour. The older and more experienced model makers instructed the younger children to procure materials or prepare components, such as rubber strips cut from bicycle inner tubes. This collaborative organisation was of fundamental importance for developing and transmitting skills and knowledge and accounted for standardisation in the design of the models described above.

A social learning process

We had the opportunity to witness the social dimension of wire model making with a group of young artisans who allowed us to document their work on video. About ten younger children supported six adolescents between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. They were responsible for cutting and straightening pieces of wire, making thin strips of rubber out of a bicycle inner tube for linking the individual parts or making wheels and axles from flip-flops and ballpoint pen barrels. By observing, the younger children could learn how to make components, measure out and bend wire into shape, estimate the proportions of parts, and create symmetrical forms. The crafts skills they practised included thinking in abstract terms and understanding geometry, such as the right angle, parallelism, proportionality, and symmetry (cf. Mogari 2004). For the makers, the gradually emerging models thus also became teaching and practice pieces. As participants gained experience and became sufficiently confident to build models of their own, they would slowly grow into the role of experienced makers able to assign subordinate tasks to younger children in turn. In this informal learning setting, the transmission of knowledge was associated with movement through the social hierarchy (Lave and Wenger 2002).

The social organisation associated with model making has expanded our understanding of the wire models as training pieces generating and transmitting knowledge and skills. This important dimension should not be overlooked. In constructing models, the young makers produced and shared technical and design principles and artisanal skills. They also practised collaborative work in a self-organised social sphere while learning to solve problems through a division of labour. Thus, the wire models, as Auto Didactica, set a social learning process in action.

Conclusion

European and American collectors have collected African wire models since the 1970s. The models were mainly presented as "wire toys" "recycling toys" or "recycling art". Since the mid-1970s, the notes and accounts of travellers have increasingly expressed a fascination with children's toys made from 'rubbish of the modern world' (Mandel and Brenier-Estrine 1977, translation by the author) – wire, tin, rubber and plastic – in various regions of Africa. When viewed from a European perspective, these objects look like trivial children's playthings fashioned from the leftovers of a modernity in which African children were not considered to participate (Peffer 2009). Such a conceptual framework implicitly consigns their creators backwards in time and to an inferior economic and cultural model, as exemplified by 'bricolage' practices (Peffer 2009: 124). Conceptualising the artefacts as models, on the other hand, allowed us to overcome this derogatory perspective and acknowledge their makers' contemporaneity and analytical and technical skills. These emerged from a self-organised learning process in peer groups outside of Western-style formal education, but provably effective and relevant, nonetheless.

Research in ethnographic museums on the skills of objects' creators opens up new perspectives on objects that often have been collected under different assumptions that today are rightly criticised as being derogatory or simply wrong. Putting a spotlight on the skills and knowledge of the creators of the objects in ethnographic museums reminds audiences in Europe that Western knowledge represents but one variety of human intelligence.

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Visual cultures of Africa: Collections, museums and exhibitions from conservation to conversation

"Fetish figures" (*minkisi*) from Central Africa and Catholic holy figures from Europe

Stefan Eisenhofer

Abstract

So-called "Fetish figures" from Central Africa are admired in numerous exhibitions and publications on African Arts. As such, they became general symbols of African Arts and representations of ancient African visual traditions. The fact that these figures are closely linked to adaptation processes concerning Catholic figures and liturgical equipment in Central Africa, is not common knowledge. Indeed, the "Fetish figures" witnessed visual interactions between Africa and Europe since the sixteenth century.

Keywords

Crucifixes, Kongo kingdom, minkisi ("Fetish figures"), Portuguese empire, Saint Anthony

The Kongo kingdom's encounter with Portuguese Catholicism as from the fifteenth century

When the Portuguese Diogo Cao arrived in the Kongo kingdom in 1482, he found a well-organised state with a stratified political system. The empire possessed a stately sphere of power in large areas of the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Congo, Angola, and Gabon. The capital, Mbanza Kongo (San Salvador), with a powerful urban elite, functioned as the centre of the empire. From there, trade routes stretched thousands of kilometres and provided mutual influence over vast regions (Palme 1977; Bastian 1859; Thornton 1984).

A lively exchange of envoys and gifts quickly developed with the Portuguese. In the course of these relations between the Portuguese King Emanuel I and the African ruler Nzinga Nkuwu, three Portuguese ships arrived in the Congo region as early as 1491 with priests and a large number of Catholic ritual objects such as crosses, church utensils, pictures, monstrances, incense burners, rosaries and, above all, statues of saints and reliquaries. Carpenters and masons, who brought their tools to construct churches and schools, accompanied the priests. They were solemnly received together with the clergy in the capital of

Figure 1: Power figure *nkisi* with idealised naturalistic face, Anonymous (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yombe region), second half of the nineteenth century, height, 340 mm, Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich; Image rights: MFK, S. Autrum-Mulzer

the Kongo empire. One month later, at the request of Manikongo, the empire's ruler, the Catholic missionaries accompanied the Kongo troops on a campaign against so-called rebels. After this victorious military operation, several high-ranking Congolese were baptised – including the royal family, who in the process received the Christian names of their Portuguese counterparts: King Joao, Queen Eleonore, and Prince Afonso (Northrup 2002: 19f., 33f.; Kohl 2003: 14, 2008: 18ff.).

The appeal of Catholicism

We still do not know why the Kongo elites were so quick to convert to Catholicism: Were they influenced by the idea that Europeans, as a result of their lighter skin colour and origins from across the sea, were initially seen as embodiments of the ancestral world? Could the successful campaign against the "rebels" in the northern provinces, in which the Portuguese marched under a banner with an embroidered Christian cross and their frightening, deadly boisterous firearms, have played a crucial role? It seems possible that the military success under the Christian flag increased the willingness to convert (Northrup 2002: 33f.).

However, despite all the differences between Christian-Catholic and Congolese world views, there seems to have been sufficient points of contact. The so-called contrast between "rational Christian Europe" and "irrational spiritual Africa"[1] misjudges European "popular Catholicism" and "European religiosity" with its strong belief in supernatural helpers and the extraordinary power and efficacy of relics. For many fundamental views of Catholicism and those of the Congo region were by no means incompatible, and the worlds of experience of the European missionaries were in some respects probably not so utterly different from those of the Central African ritual specialists. There was, for instance, a fundamental agreement that an invisible world exists, which could exert its influence on the visible world. The Congolese army was equipped with war amulets and other sacred, protecting items during campaigns. They also performed rites before military operations to ensure success through divine assistance, which corresponds to the practice of the Catholic missionaries of holding a solemn mass at the beginning of the campaign and subsequently marching under a religious banner. This was apparently able to tie in successfully with Congo custom. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the Europeans' superior weaponry was associated with the greater effectiveness of their sacred rituals and objects (Kohl 2003: 14; Balandier 1968: 260; Eisenhofer 2019: 283f.).

1 Cf. Sweet 2003.

Manikongo Afonso (1506–1543) became a great admirer of European culture, science, and statesmanship. He travelled to Portugal in 1514 and established Christianity as the official religion of the Congo. He encouraged church building and launched a European-style education programme for children of the elites. One of his sons, named Henrique, became the first Catholic bishop in sub-Saharan Africa in 1520. After Henrique's return from Lisbon in 1521, where he had undergone training with the Order of St. John, father and son subsequently took several steps to Africanise Catholicism while attempting to centralise rule. They implemented a dual strategy. Certain ritual specialists were assigned to the court and Catholicism, for example, by designating the traditional earth priest, Mani Vunda, as the official holy water bearer (Pechuel-Loesche 1877: 10ff., 1907). At the same time missionaries and Congolese royalty took mass action against certain local nganga ritual specialists whose practices and the associated ritual objects *minkisi* (singular: *nkisi*), were regarded as significant oppositional social and political forces. Vast quantities of "idols" and "fetishes" – often together with the ritual specialists acting with them – were incinerated during that period (Northrup 2002: 34). Catholics redefined the divine powers attributed to these sacred objects as demonic and witchcraft powers. The destruction of the "fetishes" went hand in hand with the efforts of missionaries and royalty to provide and distribute Catholic ritual images as a replacement for the destroyed sacred objects. The goal of these actions was apparently to centralise and secure spiritual, political, and economic power. It is unclear in this context to what extent the introduction of Christianity initially represented a questioning of the existing Congo worldview and social order, as well as of the old power structures and their representatives. Nevertheless, Catholicism quickly became a source of spiritual authority under the exclusive control of the king, and thus beneficial to the royal house (Eisenhofer 2019: 287f.).

The popularisation of Catholic symbols

The popularisation of Catholic symbols supported the conversion process as the KiKongo-speaking population was particularly impressed by the wealth of images and the material embodiments, ceremonies, and rituals associated with the sacred character of Catholic Christianity. The missionaries, therefore, immediately sought to provide a substitute for the destroyed "idols" in the form of representations of saints and crucifixes. In addition, bronze figures of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Anthony of Padua, who came from Portugal, were created by Congo brass casters based on Portuguese models. The considerable success of Catholic missionary work in the Congo region, which is by no means self-evident, can be ascribed to the magnificent ecclesiastical objects of worship interpreted by the local population against the background of their worldview.

Figure 2: The newly converted Mani Kongo (Kongo king) Ferdinand I, is encouraged by his Catholic Portuguese allies to destroy local Kongo relics (engraving by Theodor de Bry (Lopes et al. 1609: 105)).

Crucifixes, in particular, became essential goods in the trade agreements between the Portuguese and Congo kings (Tribe 1996: 241; Palme 1977; Kohl 2003: 14f).

The royal family did not persecute certain native ritual specialists who differed fundamentally from Catholicism. However, the reinterpretation of certain "traditional" rituals and objects was problematic. Accordingly, Catholic missionaries and priests, like native ritual experts, were called *banganga*. Crucifixes and other Catholic paraphernalia such as reliquaries, holy figures, rosaries, and liturgical garments were referred to as *minkisi*, like indigenous sacred paraphernalia. The Congolese incorporated Catholic priests and objects into existing local systems and patterns of their reality by avoiding special designations, categories, and standard Catholic terminology. In this process, crucifixes, in particular, became critical sacred objects in the Congo region (Eisenhofer 2019: 288).

The cross in Central Africa

It is challenging to establish whether the cross had been a powerful religious symbol in Central Africa before the arrival of Europeans. If so, it might have facilitated conversion because the Catholic missionaries could identify with a familiar symbol. The Portuguese also erected stone and wooden crosses on the coast at the beginning of the 1480s. The crosses served as markers and claims of European ownership (Kalthammer 1983). Catholic crucifixes in the Congo region had different and additional significance and indigenous ideas. The Christian cross became an essential spiritual sign and a symbolic analogy of people's relationship with their world. The horizontal axis represented the boundary between this world and the hereafter. In contrast, the vertical axis represented the relations between people and the divine world of God and the ancestors, between the living and the dead. The crucifix served as a diagram for the course of life, with the left crossbar symbolising the East and birth, the top representing life as an adult and full member of a community, the right bar a dignified death in old age, and finally the base of the cross signifying the emptiness of the human world and the fullness of the other world and existence as a respected ancestor. In Central Africa an overlapping of concepts and utopian meanings culminate in the object of the crucifix. In Catholic belief, the crucifix represents the new and eternal life through Jesus Christ as Son of God; in the world views of the Central African region it stands for the fulfilled cycle of the ancestor and the new beginning in the life of the descendants. In both belief systems, death does not mean the end, but rather, with the appropriate conduct in this life, comes the promise of eternal life in a world beyond, either as a human being or an ancestor (Tribe 1996: 241).

The decoration of the crucifixes also reflect the merging of spiritual contents. Small praying figures are often depicted at the crucified's feet or on the top crossbeam of the cross. These ornaments often symbolise the Virgin Mary, who, in her role as mediator between humanity and the heavenly glory, matches Central African worldviews, where certain prominent people could mediate between the living and the divine (Tribe 1996: 241; Eisenhofer 2019: 289).

The figure of Christ on the cross is often executed according to indigenous representational patterns, especially in the face and body. These formal adaptations reflect shifts in the meaning of Kongo crosses, in which orthodox Catholic content increasingly receded into the background in favour of indigenous ideas and beliefs. Thus, crucifixes on ancestral altars, and as a means of protection against harmful spells, played an essential role in the ritual life of the Christian kingdom of Kongo and beyond for centuries (MacGaffey 1986: 43ff.; Tribe 1996: 241).

Saint Anthony

Statues of Saint Anthony often display corresponding processes of adaptation and reinterpretation. On prominent examples, Anthony, who is portrayed as European, is carrying the Christ child in his arms. The child is depicted as African, following the "traditional" human depiction conventions of that region. The little Jesus is depicted as a Kongo king: He is seated on a square throne as a traditional symbol of kingship and power. He also carries a flywhisk as a sign of authority. In addition, his left-hand touches his right shoulder. In the Congo region, the so-called medicine bundles were often carried as a source of power. Finally, the figure is rubbed with palm oil according to regional customs (Ivanov 2005: 58) (see Figure 5).

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Kimpa Vita, a member of the Kongo elite, and Dona Beatriz founded a powerful movement focusing on Saint Anthony as a patron saint for the reformation of the local church and for political and religious renewal of the empire, which slave trade had massively disrupted. Therefore, representations of Saint Anthony became more widespread as he was widely incorporated into sacred objects and personal protective, apotropaic items and amulets. His figure, to whom extraordinary healing powers were attributed, remained enshrined in local cults under Toni

Figure 3: Crucifix, Anonymous (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bakongo region), height 380 mm, Maritta von Miller Collection.

Figure 4: Crucifix, Anonymous (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bakongo region), height 480 mm, Maritta von Miller Collection.

Figure 5: Toni Malau Figure, Ethnologisches Museum/Staatl. Museen zu Berlin/Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Malau ("Anthony of Good Fortune") until the nineteenth century (Eisenhofer 2019: 289f.; Ivanow 2005: 58).

The Toni Malau figures, too, show the reconquest of foreign pictorial and formal worlds and "feedback effects" through which European aesthetic conventions such as realism merge with Central African pictorial traditions and complement each other.

In other object groups in the Congo region, the references to Catholic pictorial traditions are not as apparent as in the Toni Malau figures. An example is the *minkisi*, (the figures charged with extraordinarily effective powers), which the Western World referred to as "fetishes". The energies inherent in these sacred objects could be activated and directed by knowledgeable *nganga* or ritual experts for the benefit and protection of the community and in legal rulings (Eisenhofer 2019: 290).

Power figures

For long periods in the history of the European collection of African objects, power figures in particular were regarded as very "primitive", "original," and as "completely different" from the European visual world (Figure 6). But Walter Hirschberg and Josef Franz Thiel already expressed doubts about the existence of anthropomorphic or zoomorphic power figures in pre-European times as we find them in museums and African arts collections (Hirschberg 1971: 41ff.;

Figure 6: Power figure in the form of a double-headed dog, Anonymous (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Vili-region), second half of the nineteenth century, length 740 mm Museum Fünf Kontinente Munich, Image rights, MFK, S. Autrum-Mulzer.

Thiel 1986). It is only recently that Karl-Heinz Kohl postulated that the Catholic saint figures and reliquaries caused such a stir among the natives and gained acceptance because they resembled their ancestral statues and sacred objects. Verification of this thesis, however, is not easy. Since 1491, many images, which must have been depictions and statues of saints, were introduced into the Kongo kingdom and publicly displayed in churches and Catholic ceremonies. However, we do not know what "fetishes" and "idols" looked like in the Congo

Figure 7: The Virgin Mary, Anonymous, Congo region, nineteenth century, Maritta von Miller Collection.

region during the first phase of contact. Thus, it is not yet possible to establish unequivocally whether or not the *minkisi* were anthropomorphic before contact with the Catholics, as no figurines or documented sources from before the mid-nineteenth century have survived. However, the idealised naturalism of many power figures stands in contrast to most visual traditions of that region. Therefore, it is highly probable that formal elements of Catholic saintly figures were adapted to form the naturalistic *minkisi* (see Figure 7). Statues of Saint Francis, Saint Anthony and the Virgin Mary were especially abundant (Thiel 1986; Kohl 2003: 14; Palme 1977).

Conclusion: Merging and negotiation

The visual traditions of the Congo region also strengthen the view that the developments in the history of religion were not a "collapse of Christianity" or a continuous "path of resistance" against Catholicism, as some authors proclaim, but rather a gradual incorporation and transfer of Catholic ideas and forms into Central African world views and belief systems. In the process, what was initially foreign was absorbed without abandoning what was indigenous (Thornton 1984: 147ff.; Sweet 2003: 83, 88; Eisenhofer 2019: 293f.). Therefore, the indigenous elements in Central African Catholicism are by no means a sign of local religions rebelling against Christianity, but rather the result of the merging of, and negotiation between two religious systems. A high degree of flexibility in the adoption and integration of foreign elements in Central African religions led to a very characteristic form of Central African Catholicism and exceptional ritual figures and objects.

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Émigrés and African art in England

Mark Evans

Abstract

An anthropologist aptly observed that any work of art requires three participants: an artist, a client or public and, as an intermediary between them, a critic or connoisseur (MacGaffey 1998: 220). This tripartite interaction is common to Yoruba and European aesthetic conventions (Yai 1999: 35). During the era of modernism, art collecting offered a means to critique institutional culture, while recognition of the "artness" of African art provided an alternative formal repertory (Braddock 2012: 1–28; Gikandi 2005: 31–50). This essay considers the contribution of émigrés, mainly from Central Europe, to that cultural epiphany in England.

Keywords

Yoruba, Europe, aesthetic conventions, modernism, art collecting, alternative formal repertory, émigrés

Central European perspectives

GWF Hegel played a fundamental role in the Western philosophy of history and aesthetics. Rejecting imitation of nature as the aim of art, he maintained that the coincidence of form and content in classical art made it 'the true manifestation of art' (Knox 1980; Mitias 1980). The less mimetic styles of Ancient Egypt and Assyria, India and Mesoamerica were accorded subordinate places in the conceptual 'chain of art' (Jenkins 1992: 56–74). Beyond the pale of civilisation was sub-Saharan Africa, called by Hegel 'the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night' (Kuykendall 1993).

As if to fill this lacuna, between 1862 and 1879, ethnographic museums were established across Germany to interpret the cultures of *Naturvölker* ('peoples of nature') without a documented past (Penny 2002: 17–49). In particular, the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde was far better resourced than its rivals in Paris and London (Kelly 2007: 110; Mack 1990: 28). In 1875, the Baltic German explorer Georg Schweinfurth urged the study of the 'industrial arts of Central African tribes' before they succumbed to cheap European imports (Schweinfurth 1875: vii-x). Before the First World War, Leo Frobenius, and the Hungar-

ian Emil Torday, assiduously collected African artefacts for German museums, and for the British Museum (Fabian 1998).

The Berlin curator, Felix von Luschan, likened the bronzes looted by the British from Benin in 1897 to 'the highest heights of European casting' by the Renaissance virtuoso Benvenuto Cellini (Gunsch 2013: 23–24, 26–30.) In 1910, at Ifé near Benin, Frobenius encountered portrait heads whose astonishing realism led him to postulate fanciful links between the Yoruba and ancient Greece (Sylvain 1996). However, most African sculpture was dismissed as too technically rudimentary and stylistically barbarous to register in the Hegelian 'progress of civilisation'.

The doyen of the Vienna school of art history, Alois Riegl, understood in 1893 that 'today's natural science' proved that 'contemporary primitive cultures are the rudimentary survivals of the human race from earlier cultural periods' (Riegl 1993: 16). He felt that the representational art of his own day, like that of late Antiquity, had become alienated from society. To assuage this 'inner emptiness', Riegl foresaw a 'crystalline' art that would follow the laws of nature to wrest 'conceptually meaningful work from dead matter' (Rampley 2013: 155–156).

Such values were soon recognised in African sculpture. Around 1909–10, the Hungarian Joseph Brummer arrived in Paris, where he studied with Matisse and became a leading dealer in Asian and African art (Biro 2019: 61–172). Brummer lent African carvings to the Austrian Otto Feldmann, who showed them beside new paintings by Picasso in the exhibition *Picasso – Negerplastik* held in 1913–14 at Berlin and Dresden (Biro 2019: 87–90). In 1922, the Philadelphia Maecenas Albert C Barnes bought from Brummer's protégé, Paul Guillaume, a group of 47 African masks and figures specifically to complement the pictures by Picasso and Matisse he so energetically collected (Clarke 2015: 28–35).

An acquaintance of Brummer was the Latvian painter Voldemars Matvejs, known as Vladimir Markov. He was fascinated by 'primal' or 'primitive' traditions untouched by Renaissance culture, such as Byzantine and folk art and those of Oceania, and Africa (Biro 2019: 159–163, 166–167). In 1913 Markov began his book *Iskusstvo Negrov* (1919), which recognised that 'Africa's old art is essentially about thinking and playing with mass' and reckoned it 'a valuable contribution to the treasure-house of world beauty' (Howard, Bužinska and Strother 2015: 243, 249).

Brummer also provided the critic, Carl Einstein, with many illustrations for his *Negerplastik* (1915), the first analysis of the aesthetics of African sculpture (Biro 2019: 89–90, 94,108-113). This essay goes so far as to reject the entire European sculptural tradition, from Donatello to Rodin, as a pictorial surrogate, and identifies the 'cubic intuition of space' in African sculpture as uniquely able to express 'pure form' (Einstein 2019: 32–59).

Anglo-Saxon attitudes

Einstein probably prompted his acquaintance, Roger Fry, to propose 'logical comprehension of the plastic form' as an essential characteristic of African art in his exhibition review *Negro Sculpture at the Chelsea Book Club*, published in 1920 (Flam and Deutch 2003: 147).[1] By 1925–26, the sculptor, Henry Moore, was also familiar with Einstein's book when he wrote that Africans 'undoubtedly possessed high sculptural genius. Their carvings show them to have had a wonderfully fertile invention of abstract forms' (Ades 2015).

Fry's friend, Clive Bell, argued in 1922 that Africa's 'most perfect achievements' were textiles and basket-work, while its sculpture showed 'delicacy … of relief and modelling' (Bell 2004: XI). He thought this 'savage gift' reflected 'the instinctive taste of primitive people'. Bell believed Africans lacked intelligence, self-consciousness, critical sense, and creative imagination and that their fine art had become moribund.

A similarly mixed message appears in 'The Aesthetic of Ashanti' (1927) by the artist, writer and long-distance cyclist Vernon Blake. Despite conceding the 'seeming paradox of calling a savage a better artist, a purer artist, than Pheidias', he accepted Lucien Lévy Bruhl's contentious theory that Africans had a 'primitive mentality' with a 'prelogical' outlook (Blake 1927: 344–347, 359).[2] This led Blake to suppose African art evoked 'the infancy of our own thought'; the widespread belief Riegl had thought scientific in 1893. It was overturned in 1927 when the anthropologist, Franz Boas, demonstrated 'the fundamental sameness of mental processes in all races and all cultural forms' (Boas 1927: 1).

Sir Michael Sadler, the leading educationalist and keen collector of modernist art, still thought Blake's essay to be 'the most penetrating and profound study of primitive art we have found in any language'. In *Arts of West Africa* (1935), he and the painter Richard Carline celebrated the 'significance and vitality' of the region's cultural heritage and proposed means to preserve it (Sadler 1935: 1–12, 100–101).

A New Yorker of Polish-Russian parentage, Jacob Epstein settled in London in 1905. He began to collect African sculpture because 'it was the only sculpture that I could afford', and in 1912 he met Paul Guillaume in Paris (Haskell 1931: 88; Epstein 1955: 188). Professional success enabled Epstein to acquire two hundred, mainly African, statues, masks, and ivories by 1930 (Haskell 1931: 87). He eventually packed his house at Hyde Park Gate with over a thousand African sculptures, other "tribal" artefacts and antiquities: perhaps the most significant private collection of its kind ever formed (Bassani and McLeod 1989). Epstein

1 That Fry was personally acquainted with Einstein is evident from their visit to Duncan Grant in April 1925 (Letter from Grant to Vanessa Bell; Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 8010/5/1354).

2 For Lévy-Bruhl's theory of a 'primitive mentality' see: Mousalimas (1990: 33–46).

Figure 1: Geoffrey Ireland. Fang, Dogon and Sakalava sculptures with other works in the collection of Jacob Epstein at 18 Hyde Park Gate, Kensington, the late 1950s.

kept the best in his bedroom and only showed them to close friends (Figure 1). His collection was exhibited posthumously in 1960 before its sale at auction.

Epstein recognised that Africa's 'highly individualised artists' were 'governed by the same considerations that govern all sculpture', and listed the characteristics of their work as 'simplification and directness, the union of naturalism and design, and its striking architectural qualities' (Haskell 1931: 89–90). He thought African carvers employed 'directness and simplification' to achieve a feeling of awe and fear'.

Epstein insisted his style remained in the European tradition, but its apparent primitivism exacerbated the racism then endemic in Anglophone 'polite society'. An American critic asserted in 1934 that his 'Negroid exaggerations' showed how 'the primitive in Negro sculpture answers the primitive in Epstein'.[3] In 1935, art historian and Russian spy, Anthony Blunt, declared that Epstein's 'technical interest in savage art', empowered him to vivify his subjects 'by an infusion of dark blood, itself not pure, but drawn from the African, the Aztec and many other races' (cited in Epstein 1955: 149–50).

Encouraged by Epstein, the glamorous heiress Nancy Cunard began to acquire African artefacts in 1919 and formed a vast collection of ivory bracelets

3 Dorothy Grafly, cited in Barker, in Silber and Friedman (1989: 44).

(Greenshields 2016: 20–22). She tirelessly opposed racial injustice in the USA and colonial brutality in Africa. Cunard's principal achievement was editing *Negro: An anthology*, a massive tome with over a hundred and fifty contributions, some translated by Samuel Beckett (Cunard 1934). These included a vigorous attack by Cunard's lover on Lévy Bruhl's theory of 'primitive mentality' (Michelet in Cunard 1934: 739–761). Its section on 'Negro sculpture and ethnology' also included essays by the Hungarian painter and dealer Ladislas Szecsi and the Danish poet and collector Carl Kjersmeier.

Leon Underwood was an influential artist and art teacher who began collecting 'tribal art' in 1919 to 'pursue the study of the imagery of belief in the spirit-world' (Jeffrey 2000: 22). He caused an uproar in 1935 by carving a hardwood *African Madonna* in the image of a Bantu woman (Neve 1974: 155–157). In 1945, Underwood undertook a lecture tour of West Africa organised by the British Council. He collected over five hundred and fifty works, including Ghanaian ceramics and Yoruba carvings, and after his return wrote a trio of illustrated books on West African sculpture.[4] Underwood gradually sold off his collection, and works from it are now in the British Museum and American museums (Jeffrey 2000: 29–36) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Male figure. Probably Bamileke; Cameroon, nineteenth or early twentieth century
Wood, 390 mm high, Leon Underwood; purchased for £100 by Mrs Margaret Plass; Given to the British Museum, 1954. The British Museum (Af1954,12.2)

4 Jeffrey (2000: 29–36); Neve (1974: 181–189); Underwood (1947, 1948, 1949).

Underwood admired the 'abstract treatment of form in African art', which seemed to reflect the same 'simple and universal faith' as Romanesque and Byzantine art (Underwood 1947: xi). He persisted in the view that Africans had a 'pre-logical' outlook and warned that growing 'art consciousness' threatened what he perceived as their 'primitive' art (Underwood 1948: 15–18). Nigerian modernist Ben Enwonwu, who had trained as a carver in the indigenous Igbo tradition before studying at the Slade School of Art in London, promptly corrected this perception in a review (Enwonwu 1948: 123).

Émigrés and African art

Britain's cultural horizons were enlarged during the 1930s by an influx of émigrés from Nazism. These included the luminaries of the 'Second Vienna School' of art history, Otto Pächt and EH Gombrich, and enterprising dealers like Arthur Kauffmann and Paul Wengraf, founder of the Arcade Gallery (Hönes 2019: 102–103; Aronowitz and Isaac 2019: 130). Some traded in modernist and 'tribal' art, like the proprietor of the Berkeley Gallery, William Ohly, an Englishman trained as a sculptor in Frankfurt (Waterfield and King 2009: 104–109). The South African, Herbert Rieser, who had studied at the Bauhaus, also traded in African art (Waterfield and King 2009: 134–141).

Manfred [Fred] Uhlman was a lawyer and social democrat who fled Stuttgart for Paris and became a painter of naïve landscapes. In 1936, he married an English debutante and settled in London (Müller-Härlin 2019: 186–193). Uhlman purchased African carvings from the leading Parisian dealer Pierre Verité, and his friend, Richard Carline, published several from his collection in 1940.[5] He sold the British Museum 23 of these between 1949 and 1956, including a distinctive Bambara antelope mask that appears to the right of his *Still life with African figures*[6] (Figure 3). The remainder was later toured by the Arts Council and given by Uhlman and his wife to the progressive art school at the University of Newcastle (Fagg 1967; Milner 1976), whose head was their friend Kenneth Rowntree.

The son of a cobbler from the Warsaw ghetto, Josef Herman fled to Britain in 1940. He gained a reputation with realist paintings in a 'stark, sombre, and luminous' style and was later elected a Royal Academician (Berger 1955; Bohm-Duchen 2009). Herman became friendly with Underwood and Epstein, who introduced him to William Ohly, from whom he bought a Songye pendant and a Mende figure in 1945 (Waterfield 2000: 7–8, 24–25, 66) (Figure 4).

5 Carline (1940: 114–116, 118–120, 123 [pls. IB, C; II, E]). The Uhlmans bought Carline's family home in Hampstead in 1938 (Bohm-Duchen 2019: 157, 160.)

6 The British Museum; Af1949, 23.1, 40.1-2; Af1950, 11.1-5; Af1950,31.2-4; Af1953,04.1.a-3.a, 6–9; 11.1-5; Af1956,03.1.

Figure 3: *Still life with African figures.* Fred Uhlman (1901–85), ca. 1952. Oil on canvas, 610 mm × 910 mm. Acquired from the artist, 1984. Hatton Gallery, Newcastle on Tyne (NEWNG: PCF.007)

Figure 4: Female figure. Mende; Sierra Leone, twentieth century. Wood, 240 mm high
William Ohly, Berkeley Gallery, London; Purchased for £15 by Josef Herman in 1945. Sold at Christie's Amsterdam 12 December 2000.

Figure 5: Unknown photographer. Josef Herman in his studio with his collection of African sculptures, West London, ca. 1995.

He formed an impressive collection of mainly miniature West African figures, which occupied the studio and living room of his West London home (Fagg 1970) (Figure 5). The collection was dispersed at auction after his death in 2000.

Herman considered that 'Primitivity in art' was 'a quality of the imagination … which produces vividness' and 'is recognisable as the spontaneous, the strong and simple' (Herman 1976: 31–33). He believed this 'absolute element' was found 'in men of genius' and especially in 'the tribal art of Africa' and that it had the power to vitalise images, 'whether they be classic, expressionistic or abstract'.

Before the Second World War, the grocery magnate Robert Sainsbury and his Dutch wife Lisa, began to collect works by Epstein, Moore, Picasso,

Figure 6: Sam Lambert. Bambara, Yoruba and Baule sculptures with other works in the collection of Robert and Lisa Sainsbury at 5 Smith Square, Westminster, in 1971.

Modigliani, and later Giacometti and Francis Bacon (Hooper 1997). Initially guided by their friend Moore, they also enthusiastically acquired antiquities and 'tribal' art, including about hundred African works (Hooper, Carey and Fagg 1997). They elegantly arranged these works in their fashionable London house (Figure 6). In 1963, the pre-eminent scholar of primitivism, Robert Goldwater, curated an exhibition of their collection in New York.

The Philadelphians Webster and Margret Plass settled in London in 1945 and formed an exceptional collection of a hundred and fifty carvings from the Congo and West Africa. They lent works to the ground-breaking exhibition *40,000 Years of Modern Art* at the Institute of Contemporary Art (1949), founded in 1947 to pursue a self-consciously modernist agenda. Margret Plass later gave their collection to the British Museum (Fagg 1952: 1953).

The relationship of such artefacts to modernism is suggested by the modest collection of the graphic designer Hans Schleger. He had studied at the Berlin Kunstgewerbeschule in 1919–22, at the high point of the radical Dada movement, which celebrated African art (Burmeister, Oberhofer and Francini 2016). Schleger emigrated to London in 1932 and developed an influential style influenced by the Bauhaus. Between 1963 and 1971, he acquired antiquities and

'tribal' objects as modernist décor.[7] These included Ashanti gold weights that informed his thinking on trademarks.[8]

Legacies: African art in the service of modernism

Figures of Jewish heritage played a significant role in the Western discovery of the 'artness' of African art. They include the field collector Torday, the critic Einstein, the dealer Brummer, the anthropologist Boas, and the sculptor and art collector Epstein. This achievement was consolidated in England by dealers such as Wengraf and Rieser, painters like Uhlman and Herman, the designer Schleger and other collectors, notably Lisa Sainsbury. It forms part of the considerable contribution of Jewish émigrés to modernism in Britain.

Its apotheosis was the Sainsburys' gift in 1973 of over four hundred artworks to the University of East Anglia. Peter Lasko, its professor of fine arts, facilitated the donation. He was a refugee from Berlin and an expert on Expressionism as well as early medieval art. Housed at the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, a futuristic building designed by Norman Foster, this donation established a school of World Art Studies, the first of its kind in Britain (Figure 7).

The British Museum curator William Fagg, who collaborated with the Institute of Contemporary Art (Newby 2017: 16–17, 22–45), catalogued the most significant private collections of African sculpture in post-War England. Revering Underwood as 'the seer', he thought him 'one of the most penetrating

Figure 7: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. Designed by Norman Foster 1974–76 University of East Anglia, Norwich.

7 Schleger's collection was sold at Rosebery's auction house, London on 7 September 2016, lots 1001–1128; https://auctions.roseberys.co.uk/m/view-auctions/catalog/id/159?page=9

8 The 22 Ashanti gold weights Schleger had purchased at Sothebys on 25 November 1963 (lot 81) were lot 1086 in his sale. Ten of these bear the motif of a swastika; a subject he discussed in 'The functions and limitations of the trade mark', published in June 1962 (Schleger 2001: 76–77).

interpreters of African art' and sought 'the truths of art as in a glass darkly, in humble imitation of my artist friends' (Fagg 1970: 9).

Ben Enwonwu's objection to Underwood's Neo-Hegelian view of West African sculpture as the *primitive* product of *pre-logical* carvers innocently devoid of *art-consciousness,* was sustained by the philosopher Olabiyi Yai. Yai has shown that Yoruba culture prizes artistic innovation and individuality (Yai 1999: 32–35). The lively critical response to the exhibition *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art*, held in New York in 1984 (Rubin 1984; McEvilley 1984), highlighted this fundamental dichotomy in the representation of African art.

Since then, the major auction houses have sought to entice affluent collectors of contemporary art to African and Oceanic artworks by stressing their historical association with iconic leaders of the avant-garde such as Matisse and Picasso (Schild 2019). Academics and curators have simultaneously disowned this very same modernist construct and increasingly seek instead to 'decolonise' the interpretation of non-Western art (Vogel 1991). We cannot foresee how this divergence in approach will affect the universalist legacy of the artists and collectors considered here.

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Visualizing the Kenyan collections in Western museums

An intercontinental dialogue

Njeri Gachihi, Frauke Gathof, Clara Himmelheber, Lydia Nafula, Leonie Neumann, Philemon Nyamanga, and Juma Ondeng'

Abstract

The International Inventories Programme (IIP, 2018–2022) is an international research and database project investigating a corpus of Kenyan objects held in cultural institutions across the globe. The project brings together the National Museums of Kenya in Nairobi (NMK), the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne (RJM), and the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt am Main (WKM), as well as the two artists' collectives, The Nest and SHIFT. In this framework, the three museums worked together. They collectively contributed to the exhibitions showcased in Nairobi, Cologne, and Frankfurt in 2021 under the theme: 'Invisible Inventories – Questioning Kenyan collections in Western museums.'[1]

The museums decided on different forms of visualising one of the critical questions of the project: the discussion about the significance of the artefacts being in Germany and not in Kenya. Therefore, the discussion that follows reflects on the IIP partners' different perspectives, ways of access, positioning within the debate on restitution and provenance research, and the effects of various visual representations of imbalance.

The IIP was created to contribute actively to the discussion on museums' role in restitution. Since artists initiated the program, two of them partnered with three museums in this project. Together, they developed strategies to present the topic to the public and reflect on it critically. Research on objects in the two German museum collections formed part of the project. Researchers from the three participating museums discussed their collaboration and elaborated on key points in their joint research and the significance of the exhibitions. The following questions formed part of the research interview.

Keywords

Kenya, museum, restitution, provenance research

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1 The three exhibitions were at the National Museums of Kenya in Nairobi from 18 March 2021 to 30 May 2021, at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne from 28 May 2021 to 29 August 2021, and at the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt am Main from 6 October 2021 to 9 January 2022.

What was your interest in joining IIP?

Juma Ondeng' – National Museums of Kenya (JO) I got fascinated with the whole idea of creating a database of Kenyan collections in the global North[2] … bringing museums and institutions together, which would typically not collaborate; I have never worked with art collectives before. That joint work is very inspiring. It is the same with German museums. In the past, NMK's focus has always been on English-speaking countries, mainly the UK, because of historical reasons. So, IIP has expanded our reach and interactions. Additionally, I was also interested in exhibitions, which would reach out to the public thus bringing out the voices of local communities to be part of the conversation.

Clara Himmelheber – Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum (CH) Is it different working with German museums than with British museums?

JO Yes. In the past, we were recipients of knowledge as we only received instructions on doing things from the experts in the global North. However, this is a different model because now we are co-creators of knowledge and our opinions and ideas are an integral part of this partnership. So it used to be interesting to see people from UK museums, for example, teaching us how to handle a pot made in Africa!

Frauke Gathof – Weltkulturen Museum (FG) This is a fascinating point of our project. We make connections between Kenya, which has historical ties with Great Britain and Germany, visible through the movement of objects. Furthermore, the project was of interest to me, as in the Frankfurt museum, the Kenyan collection has been little researched under the aspect of provenance or restitution so far.

CH Like Juma said about the NMK working with the UK because of their colonial history, the RJM usually works with museums from former German colonies: Namibia, Tanzania, Togo, and Cameroon. So for me, it was also fruitful to work with Kenyan collections and the National Museums of Kenya because this is a collection where you do not see any traces of colonial violence at first glance; many objects were bought after independence by tourists. However, they have interesting stories to tell.

Njeri Gachihi – National Museums of Kenya (NG) Initially, I was not part of IIP. I became a member of the team about a year after the project began. I

2 A fundamental part of IIP was the collection of data on Kenyan objects in Western museums. So far, a database of over 32,500 objects from thirty institutions has been collected. Currently, work is in progress to make this information available to the public online. As of 22 September 2021, 4,874 datasets have been published on the project's website: https://www.inventoriesprogramme.org/explore

learned about the project through my colleague Juma and became very interested. I am interested in stories about and the status of Kenyan objects abroad – especially those connected with rituals.

In the last few years, provenance research and the debates about restitution and repatriation have become critical issues for museums around the globe, including in Kenya and Germany. How does IIP contribute to these debates?

Leonie Neumann – Weltkulturen Museum (LN) Firstly, IIP started a conversation with artists and museum professionals, both Kenyans and Germans, about this topic. We also provide an exhibition and a public space where discussions take place.

Lydia Nafula – National Museums of Kenya (LYN) For me, one crucial component is the database. It is essential to get an idea of all the collections in different countries. Another important critical component is the Object Movement Dialogues [OMDs] – a series of public discussions that IIP organises. These contribute to the debates on restitution. The intellectual discussions on provenance and restitution mainly take place in Kenya, Nairobi. Through the discussions, we get the views of various panellists and the public that are aware of all this.

FG Another critical part is the 'voices' of people from different communities that NMK interviewed. Restitution is not a subject we are used to seeing in an exhibition, but something which goes beyond that and can raise awareness of this whole discussion about objects, their stories, and restitution.

LN Through the OMDs and the community voices, this project presents us with different and new perspectives that were not listened to in the past.

Philemon Nyamanga – National Museums of Kenya (PN) Yes, the combination of a database, artwork, and community voices will hopefully inspire others.

NG Let me say that through IIP, the repatriation and restitution discourse has come alive in Kenya. Unlike before, NMK now has a new platform that enables communities and individuals to follow up on objects that they may have experienced only through pictures and folklores. As the project draws to a close, we hope IIP will have made an immense contribution to filling the gaps relating to historical and cultural collections. Personally, since becoming a member of IIP, I have made new and valuable networks and discovered the possibility of working with colleagues in the global North as co-curators and researchers.

The exhibition, 'Invisible inventories – questioning Kenyan collections in Western museums' was displayed three times as part of IIP in 2021 – Nairobi, Cologne, and Frankfurt. Each of them presented the outcomes of this international multi-perspective project in different ways. How and why?

NG At first, it was unclear how we would represent the whole issue in an exhibition. Over time and through the research and interaction with the communities, two keywords emerged: Absence and Loss. It all took shape once other IIP members became involved in the discussion about these two concepts. So finally, we decided to show empty showcases instead of presenting objects.

CH I remember, in the beginning, we did not plan to have empty showcases in Nairobi. We were thinking of shipping at least some of the objects from Frankfurt and Cologne to Kenya, but then it turned out to be too expensive. Then you [Kenyan colleagues] came up with something good from this financial restriction. Now I think it is much more powerful that the objects are absent than it would have been if they had been present.

PN Yes, to us in Kenya, it was more interesting to consider issues of absence. What is the significance of absence to us, and how do we look at this artistically? We seek to creatively showcase the lack of Kenyan collections through empty cases and using the expertise of young artists like the Tuzi artist group. They created artistic images of the absent objects to amplify the empty showcases.

JO Right, we were faced with the challenge of how to exhibit absent objects. One of the solutions we thought would be appropriate was to recreate them by using the Tuzi's creative talent and providing what they called artworks with experiential effects. This effect helped the audience understand the context of the objects' origin and use. Rare artefacts like *ndoome* (wooden Kikuyu objects formerly used during initiation) remain an essential part of the Kikuyu's cultural history. Currently there are groups that are attempting cultural revivals, and they use images of Kenyan artefacts from museum collections in the global North to recreate objects like *ndoome*.

FG It was an excellent decision to create these empty showcases because these objects are no longer in Kenya. Since the objects are no longer in their communities, it creates a cultural and physical empty space. The showcases made this absence visible. However, these open spaces are not in Germany, where museums have to be transparent about the objects we are discussing that are here in our collections. So it is our duty not only to show them to the public but also to make visible this imbalance through these different ways of presenting.

CH For the exhibition in Cologne, my idea was to experiment with the title 'Invisible inventories'. As our collection is relatively small, we could exhibit all of the roughly eighty objects – to make the invisible inventories visible. The idea is to make them visible in the way you [Kenyan colleagues] saw them when you came to our storerooms: not like in an exhibition but in a working environment, spread out on tables.

LN In Frankfurt, we cannot display the more than five hundred objects we have because that is too much for the exhibition space. Therefore, we highlight some of them, especially the ones on which we have done collaborative research. It lays the foundation to exhibit more artefacts from our Kenyan collection, and maybe to continue with provenance research on other objects in future cooperative projects.

We talked about the differences between the presentations in Nairobi, Cologne, and Frankfurt. What do these three exhibitions have in common?

LYN A lot! The basic concept is the same in all three exhibitions as IIP discusses the effects of the presence of Kenyan objects in Germany and their corresponding absence in Kenya. Moreover, the museums were conducting joint research and came up with the idea of object biographies. They combined these with the community voices, documentaries, and the work of various artist collectives.

CH Yes, we selected ten objects from the RJM and WKM and looked at their biographies before and after they were collected. It is a small corpus of in-depth research. We also have a vast corpus on the database, which comprises over 32,000 objects so far. To visualise this mass of information, The Nest Collective printed a seemingly endless series of object labels. A small part of the database contains the – at first glance – rather unspectacular objects from RJM and WKM, but the database also includes significant objects of national interest. The latter were the subject of artworks specially created for the exhibitions by The Nest and SHIFT. Finally, the community voices somehow connect the different works: they show how the communities are affected by the absence of all these objects. All three exhibitions contained these elements.

The museums focused their joint research on ten objects from the collections in Frankfurt and Cologne.[3]
What was unique about this co-operation that we did together as a research team? And what do you think was your most important research outcome?

JO There are two aspects to every object we picked. One was the German aspect, the stories of the collection, documented in the German language and consequently difficult for non-German speakers to access. The other is the Kenyan aspect, which provided local knowledge to fill gaps and correct misconceptions in this documentation. It shows positive outcomes from co-operation on a project such as IIP. By working together, we can create a complete story for each of these objects.

CH I am deeply impressed by the knowledge of my Kenyan colleagues, and how a small object such as a pipe can open up extensive discussions on women smokers and emancipation, for example. Or how a small beaded object like the *adwel* can initiate conversations about different Kenyan communities, national identity, Pan-Africanism, and political problems. Working together made this possible.

FG Yes, take the *ndoome*, where, without the community, we would not have understood that the word 'shield' is a wrong translation. One uses the term

3 These 10 objects were:
1. *Elongo* (Masai shield, nineteenth/twentieth century, in the Weltkulturen Museum collection since 1955).
2. *Hirizi* (Swahili necklace, twentieth century, in the Weltkulturen Museums collection since 1974).
3. *Hirizi ya fedha* (Swahili amulet, twentieth century, in the Weltkulturen Museum collection since 1974).
4. *Ndoome* (Kikuyu 'dance shield', nineteenth/twentieth century, in the Weltkulturen Museum collection since 1911).
5. *Kanga* (wrap, produced 1971 by Tasini, in the Weltkulturen Museum collection since 1974).
6. *Ngakoromua* (Turkana necklace made of coins, twentieth century, in the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum collection since 1987).
7. *Adwel* (Turkana apron, twentieth century, in the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum collection since 2006).
8. *Ndoyo* (Kamba tobacco pipe, nineteenth/twentieth century, in the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum collection since 1905).
9. *Kondo* (Luo headgear, nineteenth/twentieth century, in the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum collection since 1910).
10. *Kichanuo* (Swahili comb, twentieth century, in the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum collection since 1987).

'shield' only in connection with war and combat. A *ndoome,* on the other hand, is used for initiations that only take place during peacetime.

JO The object biographies in the exhibition explore how collections were created. In the current debate, provenance research in Africa tends to criminalise all Western collections of African origin as products of colonial theft. However, when you look at them in-depth, you realise that many curators visited Africa and collected objects from open markets through normal commercial exchanges. It is important to me, as it shows collections have multiple stories to tell.

PN We have worked well over the project period. We focused on and defined the gaps in information on the collections and learned from one another. Feedback suggests we can now engage better with our collections. One of the issues that interested us was the collectors and dealers and the circumstances under which they acquired and deposited the artefacts with the respective museums.

NG Co-operation allowed us to learn more about our museums and collections, make connections, and forge friendships. It opened my eyes to objects and thematic areas I would previously have passed casually in an exhibition. Today my interaction with objects and databases has become more intimate and purposeful. For instance, *kichanuo*, a wooden comb, may represent more than the usual exhibition questions of 'what, who, how, when', to deeper meaning such as identity, fashion, and Africanism that significantly enriches the restitution debate.

IIP will end in 2022 when the exhibition in Frankfurt closes. What would further co-operation between Kenya and Germany entail?

PN The future of the project depends on the successful completion of the present phase. Now we might determine potential activity areas for future partnership and move forward with it based, of course, on the availability of funds.

LN In the future, we should connect more widely, exchange our research results, and collect information about Kenyan collections in other museums, also for the database. A wider pool of colleagues would permit a broader exchange and dialogue about different collections and perspectives towards a global network.

CH Continuing to grow the database will show the mass of objects outside Kenya, which I think is important but has restrictions. Through in-depth research, one can discover different forms of absence, both factual and emotional.

One can hardly show the latter in a database, which is why we also need community-based research. That will be part of a subsequent project.

NG We should target further collaboration and research and start thinking about restitution. The return of some objects must be our long-term goal.

JO Yes, hopefully, in the future, Kenyan objects stored in institutions in the global North will be exhibited in Nairobi. It would be an excellent outcome of this partnership when the absence becomes presence.

FG Overall, this project made it very clear that collaboration between institutions, but especially between people, is essential for the research on object histories and especially for the appropriate discussion of how to deal with objects that were taken from communities. We have identified multiple contexts of collecting. But regardless of the stories of how the objects came into the museums, working with the communities made us realise how important these objects still are, even though they are no longer with them, and how their loss affects the communities and their cultural practices. It was time to take the voices of these communities seriously, as their contributions have greatly enriched our project and resulted in the creation of the online database. It primarily provides the communities with access to the objects and information about their whereabouts. Only in this way can demands for restitution be made possible.

IIP is meant to be an initiation spark for further research and co-operation, especially for a more profound understanding of what objects can mean and how much damage their removal from the community may have caused.

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What about the "Castles" in Ghana?

Material relics of colonialism and the slave trade: a disturbing and challenging visual legacy of three continents

Bea Lundt

Abstract

This chapter outlines the history of Ghana's coastal castles, which were built by Europeans starting in the fifteenth century. It attempts to follow the difficult path to approaching the challenges posed after independence by Ghana's colonial visual heritage. This is not only an important task for the nation state Ghana, but these monumental edifices depict a visually conspicuous and spectacular, incriminatory material witness to a problematic centuries-long relationship between three continents. UNESCO has included the fortifications and castles in its list of World Heritage sites and, in the process, conferred global awareness and responsibility upon them.

Keywords

Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, coastal castles, transatlantic slave trade, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, remembrance, repurpose

A short review of the history of the forts and castles in Ghana

Currently, Ghana has about eighty fortified trading posts along a five hundred kilometre stretch of its coastal territory, between Beyin in the west and Keta in the east (Lawrence 1963; van Dantzig 1999; Anquandah 1999). On a map dated "around 1700" (see Figure 2), their names appear beside one another, within a short distance; they were the most important sites of European possession and orientation. In Ghana, all of them are called "castles" rather than "forts" or "trading posts", which is not exactly historically correct. As massive relics and testaments to the ambivalent history of relations between Africa and Europe, they place their visual stamp on the whole coastal area of the country. No other African country has a similar phenomenon.

The castles' history began when the Portuguese reached the west coast of Africa with their ships. Fascinated by the region's wealth, they sought to strengthen their trade with a solid location, a storage house for commodities,

Figure 1: Daily life around the castles: A fisherman and a boy seem unimpressed by the material heritage of colonial exploitation and the slave trade. A poster on the wall informs people about current events (Photo: Nina Paarmann).

Figure 2: Gold Coast colony with its forts and castles along the coast, historical map from around 1700 (free access).

and a garrison for protection from rival European nations. They erected the first fortification in a rectangle with towers at its edges and a water-filled moat in 1482 with stone materials brought from Europe. The company representatives also used it as a residence and built living spaces, churches, infirmaries, and cemeteries within its walls. In 1529, the first school for locals, particularly children born of unions between European men and indigenous women, was founded. Surrounding the castle, the city of Elmina, named for the nearby gold mine (Portuguese: *el mina* = the mine), developed into an urban centre (see Figure 3). Soon, the English, Swedes, Dutch, Danes, and Brandenburg-Prussians followed and erected similar structures. In the space of five centuries, the buildings experienced diverse transformations: time and again, they were renovated and expanded by the European powers, and received new names corresponding to the languages and traditions of origin of their owners who purchased or conquered them. More and more Europeans, for instance, missionaries, penetrated the interior via the castles.

The Europeans quickly expanded the cooperative trade in goods to include the "merchandise" of human labour. The slave trade, in which traditional Africa had also shared (Perbi 2004), developed in new ways under the cooperation between Europeans and native chiefs using several castles as way stations. From

Figure 3: Construction area opposite Elmina Castle. The breath-taking skyline of the castle can be seen from a distance and encourages people to erect buildings just opposite. (Photo Nina Paarmann).

Figure 4: The carefully restored main entrance of Christiansborg Castle (Osu Castle) shows the representative function of the building as government architecture (in 2019). (Photo: Nina Paarmann).

the northern part of the region, slave hunters drove people together and off to the coast, where they crammed them into "slave dungeons" built for this purpose within the castles. When ships arrived from Europe, they drove the captives onto them through a small exit, the "Door of No Return", that would forever separate them from their continent of origin and their loved ones. The transport across the Atlantic Ocean held innumerable dangers; many lost their lives. The survivors were taken to the West Indies, where they were forced to work on the plantations. The commodities they produced, for example, molasses, a substance extracted from sugar cane and used as the basis for rum production, were then loaded onto ships and taken to Europe. Cities in Denmark and the northern part of present-day Germany became wealthy through the trade of this product. The transatlantic slave trade represents a giant transfer of labour and formed the beginning of a diaspora in the Americas. It slowed after the official abolition of the slave trade in the nineteenth century, but did not stop.

During the colonial period, England asserted itself against other European countries as a colonial power over the region. The British colonial empire named their colony the "Gold Coast" after this pivotal and valued precious metal desired by the Europeans. After 1877, the British governor resided in

Accra in Christiansborg Castle, which was purchased from the Danes and renamed "Osu Castle" after the neighbourhood where it is located (see Figure 4).

Breaking the curse: The castles' use since Ghana's independence

The Gold Coast colony achieved its independence in 1957 as the first Sub Saharan African country to do so and took the name of "Ghana" after a medieval kingdom in West Africa. The new government handed the castles over to the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, "the legal custodian of Ghana's material cultural heritage" (Ghana Museums 2021). How were these buildings redefined and used in an independent African nation state? It is a question of meeting the challenges of reappropriating these buildings and introducing novel ways of changing their function and the active life in and around them.

A frequent topic of discussion is whether the stone reality of the castles makes them intimidating spaces of dread and horror that cultivate a myth of European might and superiority over other continents. Does their preservation prevent our forgetting and, therefore the surmounting of a history of imperialistic human rights violations, an act necessary to meet future challenges? And how can the people who experienced injustice within these structures be memorialised?

After the transfer of power to the fledgling nation, the local people were confronted with the castles and their contents, revealing the bones, blood, and excrement of human beings living under inhuman conditions in dungeons without sanitary facilities. A problematic discussion arose as to whether to leave the castles as a testament to the enormity of colonial injustice, or give them a new purpose? Although the slave trade is a national traumatic experience and, to this day, a sensitive and often-suppressed topic, several measures have been taken to break the silence (Lundt 2019). The government chose the castle in Accra as its seat of power. After 2012 they moved to the newly-built Golden Jubilee House, whose architecture symbolically represents the "Stool", the traditional seat of Asante chiefs (UEW-Team and Lundt). This move undermined the immense conventional significance of the coastal area for Ghanaian culture and politics.

Museums and memorials documenting the history of the buildings and the region were established in the well-preserved buildings in Elmina and Cape Coast. Guided tours are given during the day (see Figure 5) and are indispensable for taking in the expansive rooms of the building. The castles accommodate concerts, religious events, workshops, and exhibits. Museum shops (ghanamuseums.org) sell books as well as artworks, clothing, and souvenirs. A particular infrastructure for visitors, with hotels and restaurants, has developed in the vicinity of the castles. Various websites of the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board and other official bodies in and outside Ghana provide overviews of

Figure 5: Entrance to the male slave dungeon with participants of an international conference during a guided tour at Cape Coast Castle (Photo: Nina Paarmann).

all the forts and castles along with visitor information and summaries of the castles' history. Photos of the largest among them, Elmina Castle, Cape Coast Castle, and Osu Castle, are used in advertising Ghana as a tourist destination.

In 2018, the archaeologist Wazi Apoh, professor at the University of Ghana in Legon near Accra and president of the West African Archaeological Association (WAAA), together with two colleagues, conducted interviews with visitors to Cape Coast Castle, the most spectacular of the edifices. Apoh's research showed that tourists admire the castles as picturesque places; they wish the walls to be painted and picnic areas built. Instead, Apoh and his colleagues insist that the message of "Shit, Blood, Artifacts, and Tears", as they titled an article they wrote on the subject, be presented as a focal point for the visitors. Apoh and his cohorts reflected on the problem of transmitting the "deeper" narrative and meaning to people with different backgrounds and knowledge (Apoh et al. 2018). Creative, memory-cultural interferences in the previous arrangement of the architecture are needed to help reinvent the historically fraught castles in the present.

One group whose familial tradition and fate connects them specifically and personally to the castles is African Americans whose ancestors were deported from Ghana as slaves. Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972), the first president of the independent country, was the first to invite them to "Come back and stay" in order to develop a Pan-African understanding of their identity as part of a family separated by fate. The "Door of No Return" in the castles were renamed to "Door of Return" to ease their difficult return (see Figure 6). A new, inviting entrance was created on the ocean-facing side. Symbolic, collective acts like

Figure 6: Door of No Return/Door of Return, Cape Coast Castle, an example of how a history of dread and horror has been given new shape through a symbolic act (Photo: Nina Paarmann).

carrying urns with the remains of slaves through these entrances from the outside were intended to break the curse of irreversible banishment.

The rigid and impregnable impression of the building is dissolved in the process. The castle is shown in its "vulnerability" and understood as something that can be altered. In this way, one might see it as an exciting place with its own aesthetic, which can be reshaped and revitalized in many different ways (Osei-Tutu and Smith 2018: 16; Osei-Tutu 2019).

But can history be reversed? The possibility of the slaves' descendants overcoming the trauma of the slave trade through their return is judged ambivalently. In 2008, Katharina Schramm researched state activities for promoting the diasporan pilgrimage as part of the "Joseph Project". She sharply criticises the hegemonic repatriation discourse in Ghana for its banalisation and construction of a "unified African family". She calls it a myth that glosses over antagonisms between Africans and members of the diaspora (Schramm 2008; Schramm 2016). In 2019, Ghana commemorated the first slaves shipped to the American colonies four hundred years earlier by launching several activities and events showing how the affiliation between Africans and members of the diaspora had developed. In various documentaries, members of the diaspora who followed the call for repatriation described their experiences in Ghana

mainly as happy ones, and expressed gladness at having escaped everyday racism in America.

How outsiders see the castles in light of their long history

The information brochures sold in the castles emphasise the slave trade and present displaced people as helpless victims. Books written by African-born intellectuals who love their hometowns offer a more nuanced picture. Torn by contradictory, often painful, impressions, they struggle to create a balanced imagining that does justice to African activities during contact between the continents. They open up the castles, integrating them into their surroundings to showcase the agency of the indigenous people, who utilised these outside influences in their own ways. Joseph K Adjaye, a professor of history and a member of the Africana Studies Department at the University of Pittsburgh, calls his hometown Elmina "The Little Europe" in his 2018 book of the same name. He shows the tremendous change this place underwent over five centuries of contact with Europeans. For the population, the arrival of the Europeans brought not only suffering but also opportunities, especially in the field of education. In the process, the castle became more than a menacing foreign presence, something fluid and open for the region's inhabitants. The latter, over many generations, mixed with the newcomers and accepted, altered, or successfully rejected their cultural offerings. Some local religious and political rites survived, and some were transformed (Adjaye 2018). With great care, Adjaye explains the resilience of the older traditions in the face of colonial infiltration.

Another Ghanaian scholar, Henry Nii-Adziri Wellington, professor of architecture at the University of Ghana in Legon in Greater Accra, wrote a brilliant book on the language of the building's stones. He does not consult European sources (although he knows them quite well), but allows an old fisherman to tell the complex narratives he had heard about the castle and its function in the surrounding neighbourhood. In the author's understanding, the area around the castle became a "unique cosmopolitan community spiced by the presence of people of divergent origins and family histories" (Wellington 2011, XIV). He reconstructs the stories of four families with Swedish or Danish ancestors from after 1690, showing the blending of nationalities and the integration of foreign people into the vicinity of the capital.

Reinventing the castles as points of contact between three continents

The castles also stand for the historically fraught contact between three continents. As a European scholar who teaches in Africa, I hold excursions with colleagues and teacher trainees from Germany and the African countries of Togo and Ghana. It has proved necessary to enhance the sightseeing tours with prepared and discussed active verbal and symbolic acts. As one example, we held a moment of silence in the slave dungeons, where we laid down wreaths (see Figure 7).

We also symbolically brought "back" stalks of sugar cane, the crop for whose sake the slaves were deported to the Americas. We gave cane stalks to the guide who, by way of "libation", entered into dialogue with the ancestors and entrusted them with an offering of dismay and dismissal as a response to the injustice and pain. German Studies students from Togo rehearsed a play about overcoming the trauma of the slave trade, which they performed (see Figure 8) at the historical site in front of the Brandenburg-Prussian fortress of Großfriedrichsburg (Van der Heyden 2001). In an ensuing workshop with actors from the Pilkentafel theatre in Flensburg, Germany, we found that the African students sought the proximity of the castles to own them and fill them with new life. At the same time, the Germans shuddered and turned away.

Figure 7: The author laying down a wreath in the slave dungeon (Photo: Nina Paarmann).

Figure 8: Performance by Togolese students in front of Großfriedrichsburg Castle (Photo: Nina Paarmann).

UNESCO World Heritage objects in Africa

Transcending the limited, regional significance of the castles, their recognition, care, and preservation have been entrusted to the global public. UNESCO pursues several goals through its World Cultural Heritage Project (unesco.org), launched in 1972, that further global appreciation and preservation of cultural and natural diversity. In the process, artefacts that are "of outstanding universal value" are chosen and entered into a list. In 1979, UNESCO designated ten of Ghana's forts and castles as World Cultural Heritage sites based on Criterion IV of its criteria catalogue as "outstanding example[s] … which [illustrate] a significant stage in human history" (UNESCO list 34). UNESCO also emphasises the castles' manifold functions and shift in meanings after the precolonial and colonial periods.

> They can be seen as a unique "collective historical monument'": a monument not only to the evils of the slave trade, but also to nearly four centuries of precolonial Afro-European commerce on the basis of equality rather than on that of the colonial basis of inequality. They represent, significantly and emotively, the continuing history of European – African encounter over five centuries and the starting point of the African Diaspora (UNESCO list 34).

As is understood here, the demonstrative character of these structures' material presence also poses emotional challenges to the collective memory. Their authenticity qualifies them as places of remembrance and learning.

UNESCO included other heritage sites on the African continent in the programme. Excavated ancient cultural sites, rock art, tombs, traditional buildings from different ethnicities, and ancient urban centres such as Timbuktu can be found among them. Comparative statistics and overview maps of UNESCO show that, as of the beginning of 2021, the African continent is represented with 96 sites (8.56%) in 35 countries, while Europe and North America make up 47.19% (UNESCO stat). An action plan for Africa represents an attempt to alleviate this discrepancy (UNESCO Africa).

In discussions on fair and balanced global representations of cultural diversity, UNESCO follows its "Global Strategy", a broad conception of its legacy: "This new vision … strives to recognize and protect sites that are outstanding demonstrations of human coexistence with the land as well as human interactions, cultural coexistence, spirituality, and creative expression" (UNESCO criteria). They base the selection on a spectrum of ten primary factors and numerous further differentiating criteria. In addition to material objects, the requirements also include nonmaterial phenomena such as dances and rites.

Conclusion

UNESCO has entrusted the castles in Ghana to a responsible global perception as a World Heritage Site. They represent a historical era that impacts the world order to this day and presents a particular challenge to the three continents that are directly affected. The Ghanaian castles prove that their complex historical meaning and cultural legacy can be reconsidered and reshaped into something new.

Translated into English by Kelly Thompson, Flensburg.

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Concrete Limbo

A trans-continental dialogue on space and responsibility

Benjamin Merten

Abstract

This essay summarises research, observations, and conclusions derived from a three-week exhibition in Berlin from 2 to 25 October 2020. CONRETE LIMBO – a trans-continental dialogue on space – drew attention to West Africa's spatial environs. It created a platform to showcase and discuss visual arts as a driver of modernisation and change. Curated in collaboration with the spatial art platform Limbo Accra, the exhibition centred on the following question: How do contemporary African art and architecture configure sensibilities of urbanism and city life in emerging sub-Saharan cities? A presentation on artists living and working in West Africa showed how black cultural spaces, forms, and practices could be transformed into sites of imagination, identification, and re-generation. At the same time, I also investigated the roles and responsibilities of Diaspora artists living in Germany. This discussion point emphasises the importance of African Art in public, private, institutional and digital spaces.

Keywords

Berlin, CONCRETE LIMBO, diaspora, Limbo Accra, urbanism, West African art and architecture

Spaces for art, culture and social affairs

Curating an exhibition with art from West Africa in Berlin evokes questions around the people involved. 'What is it with white men entangled with African culture in general?' was one of the reactions I received on my Instagram account soon after the opening. And this, indeed justified comment, leads me to wonder: How can Visual Cultures of Africa be performed, formulated, and perceived in different diasporic contexts and still convey the myriad stories about the continent? Who are the players leading a conversation that has moved into the digital realm as soon as it happens? And isn't it a shared responsibility for everybody to participate in such dialogue between the continents to tackle some of the most urgent global problems such as climate change, urban development, economic and social injustice? These are the questions I want

Figure 1: CONCRETE LIMBO poster. Photograph: Sierra Nallo.

to discuss when summarising research, observations, and conclusions derived from a three-week exhibition from 2 to 25 October 2020 at Haus der Statistik, Berlin (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 2: Exhibition CONCRETE LIMBO during the opening event. Photograph: Johanna Ghebray.

Where spaces for art, culture and social affairs are created for Berlin

CONCRETE LIMBO – a trans-continental dialogue on space and responsibility – drew attention to West Africa's spatial environs. It created a platform to showcase and discuss visual arts as a driver of modernisation and change. Curated in collaboration with the design studio Limbo Accra, the show centred on the following question: How can contemporary art configure sensibilities of urbanism and city life in emerging sub-Saharan metropolises? The identities of cities experiencing high rates of modernisation are changing. Luxury shopping malls and apartment blocks are replacing older, more traditional neighbourhoods. An influx of new developments leaves such urban spaces caught in a state of limbo. They are awaiting modern futures among fossilised fragments of the past.

The team from Limbo Accra, led by Dominique Petit-Frere and Emil Grip, intervenes in uncompleted constructions in Ghana by realising site-specific, socially engaged art projects. While properties are transitioning from traditional community land settlements into real estate objects, they are putting forward a new, ambitious model for responding to the commercial land practices:

> Exhibiting artworks in LIMBO demonstrates our collective interest in taking artistic work outside the gallery and outside of the designated geographic limits

> of a city's affluence and into a space where our artistic interaction with the city and one another is accessible to all (Grip and Petit-Frère 2020).

Bringing their curatorial concept to Berlin, I wanted to observe the transcontinental parallels in the use of public space on the one hand and create a framework to present artists living or working in West Africa at the same time. Where should such an exhibition that intrinsically neglects space as a predefining context rather than re-thinks our geographic patterns be displayed? Happily, with 'Haus der Statistik', we found a location that allowed these ideas to be discussed openly in an unbiased – yet politically engaged – atmosphere.

The former headquarters of the State Central Administration for Statistics of the GDR (German Democratic Republic), now an abandoned 45 000 m^2 building overseeing Alexanderplatz, represents a new city model being developed as a place to work and live. The ground level is used for pioneering methods to engage with cultural, community, educational, and social affairs. The busy atmosphere in this gigantic concrete skeleton is probably what Johnny Pitts (2020) describes as the beauty of Berlin: 'when its people are forming cooperatives and community initiatives'. This project was realised bottom-up. In 2015, a group of activists led by now program director Harry Sachs, affixed a banner to the building, claiming: 'This is where spaces for art, culture and social affairs are created for Berlin'. The Fake News poster successfully turned into reality. The initiative triggered a massive participatory avalanche, which led to 'Haus der Statistik' in its current use.

Figure 3: Director of programs, Harry Sachs, discussing 'tactical urbanism' with Dominique Petit-Frere, Kuukuwa Manful (on screen), and Anthony Badu. Photograph: Johanna Ghebray.

This same mindset also motivated the curators of Limbo Accra, suggesting a playful inversion of spaces that notions of urban design otherwise separate. In an opening panel around space and responsibility, Petit-Frere and Sachs agreed on this shared ambition. Anthony Badu[1] moderated the panel, and Kuukuwa Manful[2] added insights on the architectural developments in Ghana. The pan-

1 As a writer, photographer, and filmmaker working in Accra and London, Anthony Badu has followed the projects realised by the spatial design studio Limbo Accra closely.

2 Kuukuwa Manful is an architect from Ghana with interests in African architectural history and social architecture.

ellists discussed how emergent forms of 'tactical urbanism' could respond to alterations like public space, housing, mobility, spatial justice, and other significant issues of near-future city life. Despite the prominent varying historical backgrounds and existing power structures, the conversation showed a shared understanding of the challenges. The same capitalist principles are rooted in tendencies towards gentrification, a speculative real estate market, mobility, and a social economy. Furthermore, the speakers agreed on a similar, if not identical, curatorial toolkit as they intervene in the public space with art installations that evoke ideas of inclusive and sustainable ways of living.

Going back to the question, if and how we can present and discuss Visual Cultures elsewhere than 'on the ground,'[3] I want to emphasise the social character of space in a curatorial context. A young international community and cultural players were invited to perform dance and theatrical choreographies, poetry, and music. As a platform for encounters and discussions, the group show allowed a spontaneous and improvisatorial character. Visual stimuli and emotional experiences that (re)created individual and collective memories fuelled an open conversation. What I had in mind was a curatorial execution similar to Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung's (2017: 276) understanding of Edward Soja's (1996) 'thirdspace':

> the social relations between the people and the artworks, the political discourse that emerges in such contexts, the way hierarchies can be turned upside down, and most importantly, how these frameworks can subvert power structures.

Steering a shared experience towards a collective understanding

But how and why would art installations come to life and become a catalyst for dialogues around responsibility – once you have found the right location? In line with Paul Goodwin (2020), I certainly did not want to place African (diaspora) art within the frame of a fixed narrative around 'black art' or 'diversity'. Instead, I wanted these creative positions to speak for themselves and create an emotional response to 'rearticulate the diaspora experience as part of the global, contemporary moment in which we all live' (Goodwin 2020).

A few examples:

Working from a community hub in Accra, Ghana, Serge Attukwei Clottey produces large-scale installations made of former water gallons.[4] In Berlin, four

3 Writing about 'African art', you should 'start on the ground', suggests Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o; the 'knowledge-making has been controlled and steered by the West', adds Ruth Simbao to the discussion around 'colonised cognitive processes' (2020: 135, 137).

4 Yellow plastic gallons – in Ghana also known as 'Kufuor gallons', named after former President John Agyekum Kufuor – were used to distribute water during a serious drought in the early 2000s. See Meyerding (2020).

Figure 4: Exhibition venue with installation 'Expand consciousness' by Serge Attukwei Clottey, 2019. Photograph: Daniele Ansidei.

tapestries transformed the former voluminous canisters into flat yet stunning visual landscapes. They suggest a form of 'expanded consciousness' of global resources and shared values (see Figure 4).

Working along those lines, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, another artist participating in the show, manipulates and reconstructs recycled sandals into artworks that become an educational community tool.[5] The plastic in his work was once produced in Asia before being worn and ending up as a challenge to local waste management. The repurposing of such waste material doesn't just create awareness around (local) environmental phenomena and socio-economic responsibility. It also adds a 'global'[6] perspective – thus becoming relevant to visitors of all backgrounds.

Another contribution that retraced the global supply chain of industrial goods was a multimedia installation by Nana Osei Kwadwao, which was exhibited on a screen monitor inside a 'Tro-Tro' mock-up. The Korean mini-van

5 Patrick Turkson's process of working with found flip-flops and other found plastics and turning them into artworks (sculptures, installations, and performances), not only addresses the question of identity, memory, and waste but more importantly, 'Turkson's process and work show us the role that an artist and art itself can play within a community' (Middelmann 2017).

6 Sunanda K Sanyal (2014) critiques the way the unevenness of global exchanges can be ignored by adding the notion of 'global'.

Figure 5: A film by Nana Osei Kwadwao was screened inside a 'Tro-Tro' parked outside of the exhibition venue and next to a food stand with Ghanaian delicacies. Photograph: ArtCineMove.

was discarded in Poland and found in a junkyard outside of Berlin. Before being shipped to West Africa via Hamburg, we used the car for an installation. We wanted to give the audience an immersive experience of riding with one of Ghana's most beloved forms of transport. We also added a sound installation – recorded at a bus stop in Tema and repeating the destinations of departing buses – and a Ghanaian food stand. This consistent installation allowed an emotional connection to the necessities and opportunities of urban mobility. Standing or sitting next to a 'Tro-Tro', enjoying Jollof rice, and hearing background noises in Twi over some Afrobeat Music by internationally renowned DJs, highlights the complexity of transdisciplinary visual and sonic[7] elements that embody (Visual) Cultures of Africa. A multi-layered co-existence of aesthetic elements helped steer this shared experience towards a collective understanding without applying a fixed narrative. In the words of WJT Mitchell (1992): 'an aesthetic construction of the social'.

The twin brothers Jalan and Jibril Durimel added yet another interesting element to precisely that point. The work of this photography duo sheds light on life's unseen, romantic, and graceful moments as demonstrated by shooting a magazine for the musician Sampha in Sierra Leone (2017). This series pauses

7 'Some of the most obvious spaces of cultural manifestations and expressions on the African continent are spaces of the sonic', underlines Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (2020).

the rapid modernisation process in West Africa, which is becoming an ever-busier shooting location for international artists and commercial brands. It argues for the hype around such productions in contemporary youth culture and for constructing a collective Visual Culture as a profitable item by the fashion and music industry.

So given that the stories articulated in the exhibition were relevant to the guests and allowed emotional access to re-call individual memories (of African cultures). Supposedly, they also created a new collective understanding. But who are the players that take on responsibility for such reading within this Diasporic context? In a panel discussion towards the end of the exhibition, I posed that particular question to cultural players living in Germany. Conceptual artist Philip Kojo Metz, photographer David Uzochukwu and curator Dr Mahret Ifeoma Kupka engaged in a conversation around the (re)construction of identity and representation of BIPOC artists in the fields of visual arts and cultural practices.

Metz is currently exhibiting at the Humboldt Forum[8] presenting his invisible sculpture SORRYFORNOTHING – a sculptural intervention setting up four large wooden crates revealing: nothing. Referring to invisibility, the artist invites viewers to engage with German history to redefine it for themselves and create a new collective memory,[9] as he states in an interview with Franziska Schönberner (2020).

Presenting this and other works by German artists of African descent in cultural institutions will help decolonising the respective landscapes. However, it feels more sustainable to assign a representative[10] number of cultural players in the executive boards of museums that can identify with narratives of migration and integration. Dr Kupka is a 'curator for fashion, body and the performative' at Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt and thus able to add her perspective to the program. In her latest exhibition, 'Life doesn't frighten me, Michelle Elie wears Comme des Garçons' (2020), she decodes fashion as one of the most prominent attributes of visual culture.

The digital landscape offers cultural producers a vast range of opportunities apart from the public and institutional art scene. The photographer, Uzochukwu,

8 Responding to the polemics around the economic and symbolic dimension of this museum dedicated to colonial expeditions and hosted in a newly constructed castle in Berlin, the director Hartmut Dorgerloh (2020) felt the urge to publish a statement on their website: 'As representatives of public cultural and research institutions in Germany, we share a mandate from the state to promote arts and culture, historical research and democratic education and to make these accessible to the general public.'

9 This change of perspective is essential in communication as European history can be read as 'a monologue – told by the winners' voices and neglecting the existence of everybody considered different' (Kazeem-Kaminski 2017: 43).

10 We have to keep in mind that the idea of becoming a representative of a 'group' refers to a 'selected, reductive and limited' entity (Bayer and Terkessidis 2017: 53–70).

Figure 6: Panel invite with an artwork by David Uzochukwu. An outtake of the panel can be seen online on https://www.thxagain.com/concrete-limbo-past

has a big following on Instagram as he invites his community to take part in constructing his artistic persona. Through intimate self-portraits, he defines the body as the first and most important 'safe space for black and brown bodies', as he states in the panel discussion. He is, however, pushing the boundaries of the human body by digitally altering his photography. With these 'hybrid bodies, I want to interpret the danger or monstrosity that confronts me regularly', he explained. Going back to Mitchell (1992), Uzochukwu sets another example of 'the visual construction of the social'. Born to a father from Nigeria, his portraits do not just express the hesitations of a young adult, but at the same time, become a canvas for projections from the Austrian society (in which he grew up). Sharing this reality through his and various other social channels underlines the importance of digital networks for constructing (collective) identities.

Also, working in the digital field, we see the arrival of new curators defining art in the context of Africa. Independent content creators (so-called 'influencers') or community platforms open new ways to create and establish a shared vision for Africa and Europe. For example, the music label 'African Acid is the Future', is based in Berlin yet part of an international community network.[11] They allow their listeners to interpret the different cues of African music and (re)construct an identity within a dedicated community space by

11 The label 'African Acid is the Future' is part of the music network Worldwide FM which presents music, culture and people from marginalised societies and oppressed communities to a global community (https://worldwidefm.net/about-worldwide-fm/).

presenting their music in clubs and online. For this reason, we invited them and other musicians to frame the evenings acoustically throughout the exhibition period.

Finally, a friend of mine transformed the exhibition venue into a 'safe space' for the black community after the opening hours, summarising the idea of a 'third space' as a phenomenon of social relations in response to curatorial practices. As a host, Michael Mitu Turner assembled a group of people sharing different views and traumas confronting BIPOC men. He invited participants to 'let go of toxic masculinity … and understand and connect' (2020). And even though they did not invite me to that evening for obvious reasons, I have learned that the exhibition provided a framework to experience visual cultures emotionally and create a collective understanding of our shared responsibility.

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African visual expression in materials and media appropriated from encounters with the West

The shoes on my feet

A visual culture of footwear in Africa

Esther Kute and Odoch Pido

Abstract

In yesterday's Africa, people considered shoes a preserve of elites or those who had tasted Arab, Asian, and westernised civilisations; most people went about their business barefoot or in made-to-function sandals. By the 1940s to the 1960s, many Africans considered footwear to be something for office, church, and school. In recent times footwear has become an indicator of status, a declaration of individual style, a movement on its own, and a big part of the visual culture in Africa. Social media further embed footwear in African visual culture as individuals continue posting photographs and videos of their footwear for posterity and publicity reasons. This chapter attempts to present and discuss customisation of shoes as an emerging visual culture in Africa, while looking at painted canvas shoes and the Akala – car tyre shoes. We explore perceptions and the evolution of footwear in Africa and other parts of the world. Our discussion is the result of extensive reading, participant observation, and reflection.

Keywords

Visual culture, footwear in Africa, social media, customisation, shoes, Ngoma, Akaka

A social-cultural background

Protection remains the primary reason for the development of footwear in Africa and other parts of the world. The first footwear is traced as far back as fifty thousand years ago (DeMello 2009). Flat soled strappy sandals were made from plants and hides in hot and dry areas, while leather moccasins were wrapped around feet to keep them warm in areas with snow. People made shoes from various materials, including plants, leather, rawhide, wood, and metal (Shoes History Facts 2020).

Customisation of footwear in early African cultures was mainly for ceremonial purposes and to indicate status. In 2000-1000 BCE Ancient Egyptian elites often wore extravagantly adorned solid gold sandals (Figure 1). Archaeologists unearthed evidence that the Egyptians made shoes for the right and

Figure 1: Gold sandals found in the Tomb of Thutmose III's queens in the middle of Dynasty 18. Image: The Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Figure 2: Men's toe knob sandals. Image: Pinterest.

left foot, unlike early Europeans who wore shoes on either foot without differentiation (Kimani 2017).

The Luba of Zaire (currently the Democratic Republic of the Congo) hand carve wooden toe-knob sandals (Figure 2), made for status and ceremony (Eccentricyoruba 2012), while the Akan of Ghana and Ivory Coast made sandals for their chiefs with strips of gold and silver ornaments on the upper (Kimani 2017).

The Hausa of Niger and Nigeria made thigh-length boots (Figure 3). They incorporated woven leather as decoration from the early twentieth century (Kimani 2017). To complement their royal cloaks and gowns, the Hausa emirs in northern Nigeria would line the insets of their footwear with ostrich feathers. Their leatherwork is considered legendary throughout West Africa; they dye it with natural pigments like henna to create a striking appearance. Yoruba elites are known for elaborate beadwork on their boots, as are the Cameroonians for metal cast shoes (Eccentricyoruba 2012).

Bata, synonymous with footwear in Africa

One of the main contributors to the footwear legacy in Africa is Bata (Figure 4), a global shoe retail and manufacturing company that started operations in Africa in the early 1900s. Legend has it that in an expansion drive Thomas Bata Jr., heir to the company, sent two salesmen to Africa to scout the markets. One salesman went back and reported, 'No one is wearing any shoes in Africa, everyone is barefoot, it is a terrible market!' The second salesman reported, 'No one is wearing any shoes in Africa, everyone is barefoot, it is a fantastic market!' And that is how the company set up manufacturing plants and retail shops across all countries in Africa. In fact, in the West African language Yoruba, the word for shoe is *bata*.

Figure 3: Hausa riding boots from the early twentieth century. Image: American Museum of Natural History, New York.

Based on oral history passed down by parents in the 1970s to the1990s, most walked barefoot until they joined secondary schools, when it became mandatory to wear shoes in order to attend school. It was a common refrain to hear the words 'Do you know I went to school barefoot and was still the best student in my class?!' in many homes in this period. The intention of making such a statement is not entirely clear. It speaks of the social contradictions of feet with or without shoes. The statement gives the impression that bare feet signal poverty, hopelessness, and a dark future while feet adorned in shoes signify the opposite: financial wellbeing, hopefulness, and a bright future. However, not having shoes is no permanent condemning indication of a ruined future.

When we were children, footwear was limited to school shoes. We also called them our Sunday Bests because we wore them on Sundays to go to church. The school shoes also doubled as outfits for special functions. The limited variety of available footwear types means that most African countries

Figure 4: Screenshot of a Twitter thread discussing how many people grew up on Bata shoes and thought it was an African brand belonging to their country. Image: Twitter.

Figure 5: Screenshot of a tweet showing a Bata Shoe Company poster advertising Cortina school shoes in Nigeria. Image: Twitter.

have stories and experiences of similar footwear. Shoes made by Bata dominate stories of before the 2000s (Figure 5), with Bata being a household name and their footwear brands like Safari Boots, Toughees, Prefect, Cortina, Ngoma, PataPata, Bullets, and Sandak fondly remembered on social media posts.

Visuality in the eyes of the child

In the not-so-distant past, parents purchased functional and durable shoes for their children without seeking their opinions. In most cases, children went barefoot to extend the lifespan of shoes. The child continued to wear the same pair of shoes until they were utterly worn out; only then might the parents buy a new pair (Figure 6). If parents said there was no money to buy new shoes, they would have to make do, and be creative with their current shoes. One can imagine the excitement of getting a new pair of shoes, even if they were oversized (Figure 7). Parents bought oversized shoes as the best solution for taking care of fast-growing children and reducing the frequency of buying new shoes.

One of the most recurring memories is receiving a new pair of shoes and the exhilaration many of us experienced (Figure 8). We have fond memories of being taken to a Bata store after an unpleasant visit to the doctor, getting new

Figures 6 and 7: Screenshot of social media users making fun of African parents' decisions about buying shoes. Image: Twitter.

Figure 8: Screenshot of a tweet visualising memories of the feelings buying new shoes elicited as a child. Image: Twitter.

shoes brightened the rest of the day. Some of our peers narrate stories of how they would sleep in bed wearing their new school shoes and keep them in tip-top condition with a bright shine using Kiwi polish.

The introduction of Toughees school shoes with a chunky sole in the early 2000s became a defining factor on who was cool and who wasn't cool in the schoolyard. Made for high school-goers, those who owned chunky Toughees school shoes were assumed to come from wealthy families and occupied the

highest seats in the social ladders in high schools across East and southern Africa. Those without were left to pray and beg their parents fervently each school term until they convinced them to buy a pair. Cortina school shoes elicited similar status in western Africa, especially in Nigeria.

Indivisuality

Coined by the authors from the terms individuality and visual, indivisuality is the rise in visual customisation of footwear through painting to reflect an individual's taste and preference. Over time, available footwear in Africa increased because of the influx of second-hand imports, *mitumba*, and new markets in the 1980s. *Mitumba* shoes were cheaper and offered access to international brands and seasonal fashion trends. Availability of footwear options increased levels of individual style and customisation even further. Footwear from Bata was now considered boring, mainly for school shoes and flip-flops. Rubber-soled canvas shoes, Ngoma, once considered 'shady' and only worn by poor countryfolk, have now made a comeback as a hot, staple fashion trend, especially in the colour white. The trend of painting one's canvas shoes, made popular by the Ngoma Challenge during the Bata Designers Apprentice Competition 2017–2018 in Kenya, has seen the trend for shoe customisation going strongly up to today.

The Ngoma Challenge tasked the four designers participating in the Bata Designers Apprentice competition 2017–2018 with developing personalised concepts and painting them, in a live timed exercise, on white Bata Ngoma canvas shoes, which are the fashion blogger Sharon Mwangi's favourite (see Figures 9 and 10). This challenge was to determine how the designers could add value to basic canvas shoes through customisation, making them sell at a higher price, increasing the company's turnover. Other creatives were asked to paint their favourite Bata shoes and share their creations online on social media platforms with the Bata team, who chose winners.

The Ngoma Challenge in 2017 led to an increase in the popularity of Bata Ngoma shoes, increasing sales and increasing individuals' customisation of footwear long after the competition was over. Many creatives turned footwear customisation into businesses and shared their famous cultural artworks on social media. Motifs included cartoons from Disney and Marvel, celebrities, and nature to attract customers. Others took on personal projects to paint their own, or their children's shoes, as a fun way to bond with their families (Figure 11).

Painted canvas shoes are a global trend, with prints from African cultures inspiring international trends. For example, in 2016 renowned South African artist Esther Mahlangu collaborated with Swedish sneaker designer Max Schiller to develop a collection of painted sneakers for Eytys that sold internationally (Figure 12). Mahlangu's works pay homage to the graphic, colourful, traditional beadwork motifs of the Ndebele of South Africa.

Figure 9: Painted canvas for Ngoma Challenge designed by Ian Abraham, contestant for Bata Designers Apprentice Competition 2017–2018. Image: Bata Kenya.

Figure 10: Ngoma Challenge winning design by Moraa Nyabame, chosen by Sharon Mwangi, depicting her love for nature. Image: Bata Kenya.

Figure 11: Screenshot of mutual social media user sharing with one of the authors outcomes of painting Bata Ngoma canvas shoes for his children. Image Twitter.

Figure 12: Painted sneakers from the Eytys x Mahlangu collaboration. Image Eytys.

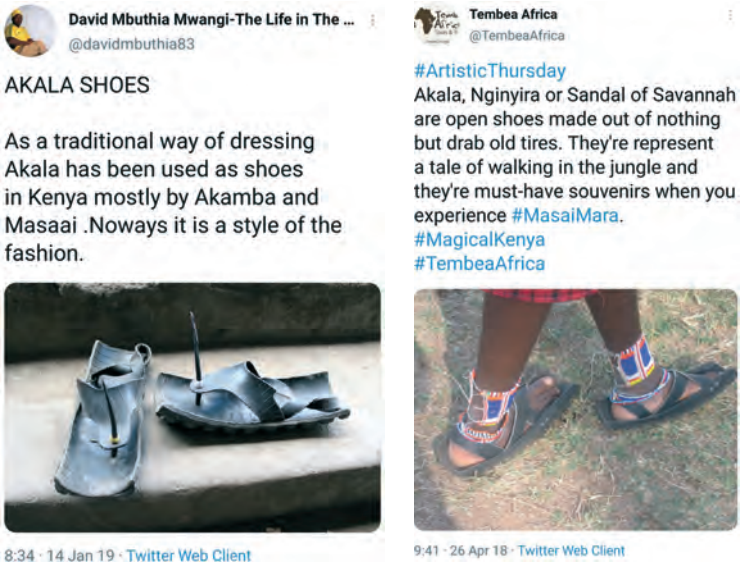
Shoes as the image of a nation

Certain footwear styles have become national symbols in their countries of origin, for example, Puma from Germany, Nike from America, and Akala shoes in Kenya (Figure 13). Once the imagery of poverty, Akala shoes became synonymous with the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania (Figures 14 and 15), who wore them in harsh terrain while herding cattle. Today they are a fashion statement, the imagery of 'cool' culture through customisation. Traditionally Akala shoes were plain rubber sandals made from recycled car tyres cut into strips and attached to soles with nails and glue. Nowadays, Akala shoes are adorned with beads and fabric to make them fashionable. They are even exported to other countries.

The Khoisan of southern Africa have always made footwear to survive the arid land and high grass (Wilderness Blogger 2015). When Europeans arrived and settled in the area, they took the shoe's construction and combined it with their simple design to create 'Veldskoens'[1]. The shoe consists of tanned leather or a soft rawhide upper attached to a leather footbed and a rubber sole with-

1 From Dutch/Afrikaans: veld = nature/the outdoors; vel = leather/hide; skoen = shoe. In 2021 the South African team participated in the opening parade of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games wearing Vellies manufactured by the brand *Veldskoen* (Oberholzer 2021).

Figure 13: Screenshot of social media users discussing imagery of footwear from their countries of origin. Image: Twitter



Figures 14 and 15: Screenshots of social media posts discussing imagery of Akala shoes compared to Kenya and the Maasai. Image: Twitter.

out tacks or nails (Veldskoen 2021). Today the soles are also made from car tyres. Veldskoens have been nicknamed Vellies today and are still a part of southern African culture in Namibia (Figure 16), South Africa, and Zimbabwe (Kimani 2017). Although all classes and professions wear them, they are especially popular with farmers, park rangers, and safari guides. In most African countries, especially in eastern Africa, Veldskoens are known as Safari Boots,

Figure 16: Screenshot of Veldskoen shoes, Vellies, being discussed as an image of Namibia by social media users. Image: Twitter.

made famous by Bata as the 'the boots that say you know Africa' (and very popular among tourists).

Summary of discussion

Conversations that follow after images and videos of footwear appear on social media contain valuable information in curating and recording the recent visual history of footwear in Africa. We have selected information from childhood memories, intrigues, and experiences with footwear, parental involvement, and developing individual styles. Childhood experiences with footwear in Africa are very similar across different countries, with Bata playing a considerable role in these memories of the post-independence period starting in the late 1950s. There is a proud, nostalgic way in which four generations remember Bata shoes, as they were prominent in most events or even gave rise to specific circumstances. The fact that the company established itself in individual countries employing locals and adapting to their cultures, while governments restricted importation of products by international markets, is another reason why Bata is so ingrained in the history of footwear in Africa. Availability of

international footwear brands is more noticeable towards the early 2000s with heavy influence from global trends on what Africans wear.

Adornment is a big part of African visual culture (Blauer 1999). Africans customised themselves and their property using body and object adornment; there is hardly an African community that did not engage in painted or beaded adornment. To add a cultural sense of beauty and individuality, we painted our houses and similarly adorned our cattle to identify them. Customisation of footwear in Africa is an extension of personalisation from our cultures influenced by global trends. The availability of footwear options has increased the proliferation of individual style and customisation even further, along with the intense cross-fertilisation of design brought on by the internet.

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Book cover design and the visual culture of land and ancestors

The case of Botlale Tema's Welgeval, Pilanesberg, South Africa[1]

Lize Kriel

Abstract

In 2005, Struik published Botlhale Tema's book about her family's journey out of slavery as The people of Welgeval. The second printing in 2006 donned a new cover page, and the descriptor, A novel, was added. In 2019, a second edition appeared, again with a new cover design, and under a different title: Land of my ancestors. The 2019 edition includes a new prologue and epilogue, providing more historical context and relaying the events after 2004 that culminated in the Moloto clan obtaining co-ownership of the Pilanesberg National Park, which absorbed their farm Welgeval years before. The interplay between text and image in the three successive cover designs call for attention. The retail reasoning is not surprising: to keep enhancing the book's appeal for a growing readership in a changing political landscape. Having refocused the 2019 edition on the theme of ancestral land, the new publisher tapped into a current South African debate on land restitution. The book's creative engagement with historical meaning-making through Tema's imaginative interweaving of family memories and archival remains, has immense emotional appeal. The changing book covers reveal the designers' challenges in expressing these complexities.

Keywords

Book covers, Bothlale Tema, fiction, history, Welgeval

A 'good' book cover

According to celebrated designer Peter Mendelsund (2014), a "good" book cover grapples with the mystery of what we "see" when we read and should, there-

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Figure 1: The three successive covers for Botlhale Tema's story about her family: 2005, 2006, and 2019. Photograph by the author.

fore, be 'true' and 'arresting' (Petit 2015). With Botlhale Tema's book *The people of Welgeval*, this ideal posed a strange dilemma to the publisher and the designer because 'true' and 'arresting' were two descriptors that spoke to the content of this book in ways somewhat more contradictory than usual. Historian Fred Morton (2010) explains as follows:

> Reception of the first printing revealed … that *The People of Welgeval* (2005) was often read as history, not historical fiction. When asked why the title of the second printing (2006) was changed to *The People of Welgeval: A Novel,* the publisher [from Zebra Struik] answered that 'we had feedback from the trade that many people mistook it for a work of non-fiction'.

As part of their editorial resolve to remain 'truthful' about an 'arresting' story selling well, the publisher also commissioned a new cover for the 2006 second printing. With the book now safely categorised as a novel, designer Michiel Botha was at liberty to include more references to the ample historical evidence that was indeed underpinning Tema's story: he shrank the family photograph on the initial cover to thumbnail size. He also added another picture of a man in a suit, hat, and bow tie, legs genteelly crossed, with a cup-and-saucer on his lap. These two photographs appear as tiles on the full-page photo of an African farm landscape that dominates the cover. Hand-written and typed documents, one bearing the coat of arms of the Union of South Africa and a heading confirming the purchase of the farm Welgeval, are inscribed in the clouds above the landscape. By implication, the paper evidence – photographs and text – floating above the horizon affirm the people of Welgeval's claim to the land featured on this cover page.

The people of Welgeval

Botlhale Tema had been truthful about her intentions. In the 2005/6 novel's afterword, she explained that the farm Welgeval, in the North-West Province of the Republic of South Africa, was the home of her paternal grandparents where she often visited as a child. As an adult, she worked for the South African National Commission of UNESCO, promoting their Slave Route Project, and South Africa's part in it. In the second half of the seventeenth century, some West African captives destined for the Americas ended up in slavery on the southern tip of Africa, at the time under VOC (Dutch East India Company) rule. The VOC also relocated enslaved captives from occupied areas in Asia to the Cape of Good Hope.

Tema initially assumed that the only South African link to the Slave Route Project was through the descendants of the VOC-enslaved communities with roots in the Cape. Then she learned about Morton's (1992; 1994) research on a somewhat different history of inland enslavement during the nineteenth century. By then, some descendants of the Dutch-speaking VOC employees who made Africa their home had migrated further into the interior.

In this frontier zone, Boer (European settler farmers) raiders sometimes captured children and women – 'black ivory' (Boeyens 1994) – from African villages and made them serve as workers on their farms and in their households. They called the captives *inboekselinge* because, according to the letter of Boer law, they were 'booked in' with the white farmer until young adulthood, upon which the farmer was supposed to allow them to go free (Delius and Trapido 1983). Tema discovered that the farm Welgeval, was a Dutch Reformed Church missionary refuge for such formerly-enslaved Africans (Morton 1994) and that she was one of their descendants.

Owing to the abrupt and early severance from their African heritage and their integration into Boer culture through servitude, *inboekselinge* became Dutch-Afrikaans in their language and practices. They obtained the name *Oorlamse* (from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial Cape Dutch, meaning skilful or "civilised" persons who had acquired the mannerisms and speech of masters of European descent) (Willemse 2021: 43). With a Dutch Reformed Church Missionary (Mbenga and Morton 1997), the black Christian community on Welgeval pooled together to purchase the farm. During the twentieth century, in racially segregated South Africa, Tema's generation, the grandchildren of anomalous Afrikaans-speaking black Africans, integrated into the culture of the surrounding Tswana-speaking African communities, going to school with them and urbanising with them into the same townships. The Welgeval community lost their farm in 1980 when it became part of a new nature reserve called Pilanesberg (Manson and Mbenga 2009).

Tema's elders had probably been too immersed in their traits to see a need for explaining either their Afrikaner attributes or their legacy of enslavement

to their descendants (Morton 2010). With their new awareness, Tema and a relative then 'set out to piece the puzzle together' by interviewing elderly relatives and tracking archival records, resulting in her 'narrative of my people': a truly arresting Alex-Hayley-*Roots*-like story with literary merit (Bystrom 2013). The opening chapter immediately begins with complex character building and pulls the reader into the terror, pain, and shame experienced by Lesiba, Maja, and the other captured youths with vivid and heart-wrenching verbal imagery that makes it difficult to put the book down.

But the design of the book cover does not unveil this much. A certain degree of suggestiveness works well on a good book cover (Loots 2016). The cover of the first print of the first edition features only the single black-and-white family photograph, of a kind typical for African Christian households in the early twentieth century. Understated as it seems, the combination of this photograph and the title of the book would have been an arresting image-text (Mitchell 1994) in 2005: Welgeval (meaning *pleasing, agreeable*) is a very Afrikaans name, and in South African book shops in the first decade after the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990, the mere fact that the people in the family photo associated with this place name are black Africans, would have sparked curiosity and enticed the browser to 'pick up the book and turn it over to read the information provided on the back cover or start reading the first pages and ultimately buy the book' – precisely what an "effective" book cover should accomplish, according to Marco Sonzogni (2011).

Land and ancestors

After a significantly diminished family photograph appeared on the cover of the 2006 *Novel*-edition, Ryan Africa prominently reinstated it in his new cover design for the 2019 edition. This photograph's successive yet changing use is at the heart of the genre confusion that made the book's reception welcoming yet problematic. The "truth" appeal as a visual image is vital: it is, after all, an authentic historical record. As we have seen above from Morton's inquiry, the honest intentions of the author-and-publishing team, at least for the 2005 and 2006 print runs with Michiel Botha's cover pages, seem beyond reproach. But the propensity for readers to be mesmerised by what they read, and our trusting human inclination to take at face value and believe what is presented to us, is also mesmerising (Steinmetz 2018; Herbert 2011).

By 2019, Penguin Random House had bought over the initial publishing house, and the post-apartheid South African political landscape had matured another decade. The new visual identity designed for the latest edition seems to embrace (as much as it proclaims) a shift in discourse. The family photograph is again dominantly displayed on the cover but no longer against the 2005 faded brown voids. The portrait appears in the sky above a landscape, the same one

featured on the 2006 cover, with hills and thorn trees typical of the north-western parts of South Africa. A new title for the book, *Land of my ancestors*, works convincingly with these visual images: the ancestors in the portrait are connected to the land above which they hover. The farm name Welgeval has been removed, I presume, because of the likelihood that this Afrikaans name could compromise potential book buyers' expectations of a story about a "truly" African family. In the third decade after the reconciliatory Mandela years and Bishop Desmond Tutu's dream of a rainbow nation, South African popular culture has seen some relapses into myths of racial differentiation, cultural authenticity, and ethnic purity. It seems as if the publishers had thought that it would be best to encapsulate Tema's intricate tale in an arresting politically current title for efficient marketing. It was sealed with an appealing sub-title that would affirm why readers should take it seriously*: an epic South African story based on actual events*. However, the 2019 text remained the same as in 2005/6 – to the letter; even the page layouts are the same. Only a new foreword and epilogue reporting on more recent developments replaced the postscript and afterword of the 2005/6 edition, such as the Welgevallers' successful land claim in the Pilanesberg in 2008.

With its new title, Tema's book would stand a better chance of being noticed and holding its own in the 2020s, amidst an increasingly heated debate on land restitution in South Africa, fuelled by populist movements like *Black land first* on the one hand, and scholarly literature contemplating land from legal, historical, social, and agricultural perspectives on the other. To mention some of these non-fiction book titles on land: *The land question in South Africa* (Ntsebeza and Hall 2007); *Our land, our life, our future* (Feinberg 2015); *Land divided, land restored* (Cousins and Walker 2015); *The land is ours* (Ngcukaitobi 2018), *The land wars* (Laband 2020), and *The lie of 1652: A decolonised history of land* (Mellet 2020).

History and historical fiction

On the 2021 website of *Exclusive Books*, a well-known South African bookstore, *Land of my ancestors* appears under the rubric 'social and cultural history of South Africa'. After all, there is nothing in the title to suggest anything different. The cover text at the back of the book does nothing to contest this categorisation either. On the contrary, whereas it was stated in 2006 that '*The People of Welgeval* is a superbly crafted and dramatic historical novel', the 2019 version claims: 'this is a fascinating and insightful retelling of history.' The 2019 cover text further asserts the book's historical authenticity by dating the family photograph on the front and identifying each person in it. None of this was mentioned on the 2005/6 covers.

And yet, as Fred Morton (2010: 336) had established with his close reading of the text in 2010, historical integrity is not the most vital point of Tema's story:

> Having plumbed The People of Welgeval for its historical value, I should caution anyone reading this fascinating account, not to assume that it has been built on extensive historical research. … The People of Welgeval charts the history of a family pretty much in a historical vacuum.

How important is it to differentiate between historical fiction and historical writing? To what extent should we distinguish between them – and the ''promotion'' of the one over the other – be problematised? Already in the 1970s, historical theorist Hayden White punctured the modernist myth of history as purely factual. Following Foucault, he emphasised the importance of the imagination in narrating history by explaining the 'historical text as a literary artefact', with contents as much invented as found (White 1985: 82). And yet, the tacit agreement remains that what passes as history must be embedded in accountable evidence.

In contrast, producers of historical fiction are at liberty to interweave accountable historical information and interpretations thereof with imaginary fabrications. In the process, they can achieve remarkably enthralling and entertaining authenticity. Still, they have no obligation or responsibility to alert the audience of where they transition between history and fiction. Audiences are at liberty to suspend their belief/disbelief and indulge. Yet, fiction (however fabricated or unbelievable), has a long and proven track record of having conveyed substantial truths about society and human behaviour in ways often more compelling than cold factual reports.

We, therefore, return to the question: does it matter whether we are being served history or historical fiction? My answer is yes. As a species, we are more inclined to believe what is presented to us, than not. Because we have this tendency, the realisation that we have misjudged a situation or been misguided or misled is not pleasant; this is clear from the global disarray caused by fake news (Steinmetz 2018).

In an email to Fred Morton in 2001, Tema wrote:

> I have never written a story before … I am determined to try. I already daydream about settings and so on.

Quoting further correspondence with Tema in 2008, Morton (2010: 327) continued:

> In looking back on her published work, Tema recalled that she chose to write it as a novel, an [sic] historical novel, 'as opposed to a true story, because I extrapolated on the facts to create dialogue and scenes that I didn't have evidence for. The overall framework of the book is true but to make it real (for my children mainly) I created scenes that were not recorded in reference books …'

Publishers and readers

If we agree with Sonzogni (2011), a successful book cover must mark the genre of the book and offer a visual translation of the content (in varying nuances of inclusiveness, persuasiveness, and suggestiveness). As such, Tema's correspondence with Morton casts doubt on the success of the 2019 cover of her book. But the cover designer works for a client and is not solely responsible for a book's appearance. Publishing is, after all, a business, and books are commodities. Book covers are packaging, with advertising a primary objective (Loots 2017). In the case of the 2019 Tema book, it seems as if the publisher has been banking on reader-consumers' credulity on at least two accounts. Readers had already been lapping up the story as non-fiction the last time it was published. The heightened interest and emotion around ancestral connections to land in the current political climate also assured a renewed interest in the topic.

It would be pleasant to think that publishers would somehow know better, that we could somehow hold them accountable as gatekeepers of authenticity or as guardians against deception. If not, then, at least if we could think of them as organisers that present some semblance of trustworthiness concerning the knowledge they package and disseminate – offering some affirmation that a book is indeed what it presents itself to be. But publishers have every right to be opportunistic. Our resentment at having been enticed in a somewhat disingenuous way may just as well be our embarrassment about our susceptibility to truth-claiming accoutrements and our lack of skills to identify them.

The cover of the 2019 edition of Tema's book is a cover-up, hiding from memory a significant portion of the publishing and the reception history of the first edition. It is, therefore, somewhat ironic because, in her story, Tema employed fictional and historical elements to work towards a narrative on the importance of memory and the need to recognise its malleability. Everything considered, the 2019 book cover of *Land of our ancestors* is somewhat arresting for its lack of truth.

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The film *Softie* and the Kenyan imaginary

Lydia Muthuma and Fred Mbogo

Abstract

Kenya's varied visual culture includes motion picture documentaries. The Kenyan documentary feature film Softie (2020) documents the life and work of a Kenyan activist. This chapter investigates its contribution to the content and process of a viewer's imagination because forming a common imaginary helps distinguish and delineate identity. In philosophy of mind, imagination holds the double role of providing content for this faculty while also indicating the process or working of this same internal faculty, which is examined in Softie. In this chapter, imagination is considered more from philosophy of mind and less from aesthetics (Kind 2017). Entrenched in philosophy of mind, imagination denotes the capacity to retain, recall and rearrange images to segue into intellectual insights. Softie suggests using imagination in a way that allows counterfactual reasoning. This chapter points out the documentary's incoherent storytelling but highlights the most dramatic scene and applauds its action. As discussed, these scenes concentrate on the film's metonymic approach; its raison d'être is to give only a portion of the more prominent brand, leading to the conclusion that Softie's contribution to philosophical imagination is more incremental than qualitative. For while it adds to the conversation on cultural content, its gaps in camera work fail to complement the process of the imagination.

Keywords

Softie, Boniface Mwangi, activist, documentary film, Nairobi, Kenya

Softie the film

Softie is a 2020 Kenyan documentary feature film that runs for 96 minutes. Sam Soko scripted, directed, and subsequently produced it together with Toni Kamau. The film won a special jury award for editing (by Mila Aung-Thwin, Sam Soko, and Chris Rhys Howarth) at the Sundance Film Festival.

Softie does several things. It presents an ordinary Kenyan, Boniface Mwangi, living in Nairobi. His home is thrown open for the viewer to interact with his wife and their three children. Mwangi, as a husband, father, and provider, works in the streets of Nairobi. His occupation is to protest against parliamentarians; he is a political activist.

Figure 1: A still from the film *Softie*. Boniface Mwangi and his wife Njeri. The policeman is dragging Mwangi away as the latter attempts to bring bloodied pigs into parliament. (Roger Ebert 2020).

Visual culture and the imaginary

This chapter investigates the use of the imagination – from the philosophical perspective – in the documentary *Softie*. According to Cuddeback (2019), imagination is understood as the capacity to retain, recall and collectively arrange (or rearrange) images to provide material for intellectual insight. Our minds use the material drawn up by the imagination for the ultimate intellectual endeavour. We need to imagine culture if we are going to think it up; concepts come from the prior work of the imagination. What 'fodder' does *Softie* provide for intellectual reasoning?

Imagination is double-sided: acting like content, or a stockpile of mental images, and also as process, or the skill to bring to the mind's eye an image that was previously not present. Imagination, as both content and process, is a universal tool to learners and educators alike. Both aesthetics and philosophy of mind revived interest in the imagination in the latter part of the twentieth century. Kind (2017) and O'Sullivan et al. (1994) assert that visual culture relies heavily on imagination or the imaginary since images are inherently part of the process and content of imagining; the 'what' and the 'how'.

Often, the formation of a common imaginary distinguishes a community by delineating its identity. Thus, visual culture is inseparable from collective identity (Anderson 1983). *Softie*, as visual culture, impacts Kenya in one way or another. It is not an indifferent phenomenon given that the colour and nuance of a people's thought depends on the richness of that people's imaginary. Softie offers the 'what' alluded to above, stifling the 'how' by impeding the natural segue into the intellectual realm.

Corruption in Kenya

The film *Softie* singles out a problem in Kenyan society – corrupt politicians who are steeped in nepotism and who do not serve their constituents but rather their self-interests. In the documentary *Softie,* these politicians are held responsible for the 2007 post-election violence.

Boniface Mwangi makes a dramatic entry into the film: a confrontation with police, bloodied pigs, shouting crowds, tear gas, lorries, blaring police cars in an almost carnival mood. The mood continues throughout the movie and succeeds in presenting a Mwangi who is fearless, courageous, and therefore heroic in the face of corrupt leaders who flaunt their impunity to the detriment of the hoi polloi. This image speaks in an inter-textual fashion to other images from social media. The question of this chapter is whether the image of Mwangi presented in the film is credible within the context of Kenya's political and cultural milieu.

Rounding up pigs

In presenting Mwangi's *dramatis personae,* the film has him herding pigs together, splashing them with blood, before attempting to take them to the nation's parliament. But in a chaotic interchange, he is stopped by riot policemen.

Mwangi has started as a photojournalist. In a different scene we see him armed with macabre photographs of the carnage following the 2007 post-election violence. The film uses this image as a possible explanation for Mwangi's career switch. He has given up photojournalism to become a political activist.

In the scene mentioned above, Mwangi is preparing to storm parliament with the pigs smeared in blood. It is a pointer to the most colourful moment in his chosen career. We enter into this scene without the details of Mwangi's prior planning and, therefore, might fail to appreciate the necessary preparation for this dangerous task. It results in making Mwangi seem like a lone ranger in his activism. He is portrayed as a lone star in a supposed field of many that must remain unnamed. Although the cameras zoom into the action of the squealing pigs, the brutal policemen, and other people, they come to rest and focus on Mwangi, making him the lone, fearless activist.

The dramatic police charge and relentless activist are later replayed in the almost tragic scene where they shoot Mwangi in the chest. The oozing blood, surgery, and removing of the bullet coalesce to vivify the uncompromising activist's depiction.

By skimming over Mwangi's associates, the film makes him not only a lone operator but a mysterious one as well. We see neither his peers nor his offices or base of operations. The film's sole interest, at this juncture, is to dramatise the conflict between the activist and the police, leaving the audience with

more questions than answers: Why pigs? Why blood? Why must the police be stopped? Despite its heightened drama, the action in this scene fails to tell a coherent story. It is unclear, to the audience, why parliamentarians must be accosted by Mwangi – to what purpose?

The episode reduces the activist's narrative to an activist's simplistic recount versus the powers that be, despite its colour and drama. The audience does not easily comprehend the problem between them, nor the solution sought by the activist. Further, the episode fails to impact the powers that be, the ones precisely, who ought to be on the receiving end of this action. Because of this lack of clarity, the drama of the blooded pigs presents no real arguments. It does not state clear objectives and therefore creates no room for reasonable negotiations. Yet the camera has plenty of room to zoom in and capture a war-zone-like spectacle! The consequent confusion harms, rather than encourages, present and future activism.

Running for office

In a different scene, Mwangi attempts yet another solution to corruption by running a 'clean' campaign to, paradoxically, join the same political class that he is fighting. In the elections, he is pitted against 'Jaguar' (Charles Njagua Kanyi), the eventual winner of this contest.

Mwangi's campaign style, unlike Jaguar's, is contrary to the norm. It is long-suffering: Mwangi hawks his message from door to door; he 'funds' his campaign through phone calls made by volunteers; he doesn't dish out T-shirts to potential voters. Instead, the camera, perhaps unwittingly, captures the brewing tension within his underfunded campaign team. Viewers get a snippet of his campaign manager, cursing potential voters who pursue her relentlessly, asking for T-shirts.

Not surprisingly, Mwangi does not win; Jaguar does. Mwangi is not elected as a member of parliament for his constituency. And it is not clear what conclusion the film director expects the audience to draw.

The metonymic approach of *Softie*

To make sense of the preceding inconclusive scenes, one may argue that the film aims at giving only a slice of the Boniface Mwangi that we (supposedly) already know from other sources: Twitter, Facebook, television interviews, newspaper columns (*The Nairobian*), photography, his autobiography and his office, *Pawa 254.*

Softie presents alternate ways of viewing a documentary or a motion picture biography. 'Boniface Mwangi' is presented as a brand that viewers are

familiar with, given the many sites where they engage with his person. Yet, *Softie* the film deliberately skips mention of, or reference to, any of these sites. It does not give as much as a glimpse of the 'Mwangi' contained within the pages of *Unbounded*, his biography published in 2016, which echoes Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed* (2006), perhaps to pay tribute to the inspirational role that the late Nobel laureate's memoir plays in Mwangi's activism.

While playing with the idea of 'Softie' as Mwangi's nickname, the film forgets to give the viewer a clue of who bestowed it on him. Not a single interview, or someone who grew up with Mwangi, is captured at the time of his christening. Even when we visit Nyeri, the ancestral land of Mwangi's people, the film still displays some tentativeness: the camera avoids capturing peoples' faces. Mwangi's kin, especially his brothers, sisters, or cousins, are not shown to us. We do not enter their house, or houses, within the Nyeri compound. No one is seemingly available to speak of Mwangi's childhood – in this his ancestral home!

In Nyeri, the only people on camera are Mwangi, his wife, and their children, the same crew, captured in the Nairobi scenes. How to account for this lonesomeness amidst Mwangi's closest community?

Perhaps there is fear, given Mwangi's status as an activist, that people related to him may also appear on the police's radar. The police force in Kenya is more feared than befriended. Ordinary Kenyans keep well away from the police and their activities, which is probably why Mwangi's larger family, friends, and associates avoid the camera. It creates a skittish element in *Softie* that is discomfiting. Once again, the questions outnumber the answers: why are there no witnesses to Mwangi's life? Is he a pariah because of his political engagements?

Perhaps *Softie's* raison d'être, then, is to supply a portion of his brand, and act as one more facet of the 'Boniface Mwangi Brand'. After all, he has a Twitter following of 1.6 million.

This approach presupposes that people coming into the film's story do not need the hard facts of strategies or plans for Mwangi's activism. The film speaks in a metonymic fashion to them, something akin to what Fiske (2004) discusses in *Reading television*. It becomes a mere piece speaking to the other versions of Boniface Mwangi on Twitter, in newspapers, on television, or at *Pawa 254*. *Softie's* intertextual discourse doesn't need hard facts. It enjoys the freedom to focus on family life, showing the intimacy between Mwangi and his wife, Njeri, without going deep enough to reveal her background. For example, we do not know where Njeri went to school, her career training, and how this plays out within Mwangi's life.

Choice of audience

The other way of viewing *Softie* is from the perspective of its intended audience. Perhaps, by rehashing the idea of 'African politics', the film director addresses the international audience. To the global mind, especially the Euro-American one, the violence, bribery, poverty, literal dirt, and crammed spaces that the film captures is the expected purview from any corner of the African continent.

Unfortunately, the international media continues constantly to broadcast these fixed ideas. The media's stock of African images does not require its audience to see the African players as humans equipped with agency. These characters are despondent in dirty market spaces, bribed, and expect nothing short of a miracle to get through the simple business of living life. An illustrative scene captures Mwangi having a meal while seated on a street bench, wearing a hoodie. His meal is interrupted by a street child (*chokoraa*) who is passing by. Mwangi offers his unfinished meal to this *chokoraa*. There is no communication between them. Child needs; Mwangi gives as he stands up and joins other evening strollers. And, the exceptions to lack of agency in African characters are explained away as corrupt, like Jaguar, Boniface Mwangi's competitor. *Softie* portrays Jaguar as a buffoon without marital fidelity and possessed of many more personal and social ills.

Love for country versus love for family

The film has a subtext; Mwangi loves his country. He also loves his family. Pursuing political activism out of love for country interferes with the peace and harmony of family life. His wife, Njeri, asks him to review his priorities.

Njeri prefers that Mwangi be a husband and father before getting involved in activism. But, the film asks, is Mwangi equipped with a capacity to judge and reason out issues? The painful answer is no. At no time does *Softie* portray Mwangi as engaged in self-reflection. On the contrary, it supplies a simplistic description of him by concentrating on his external activity. *Softie* tells us what Mwangi does, not who he is – he **is** essentially 'political activism'. We are thrown into his dramatic activism without the benefit of making an acquaintance with his interiority. And herein lies the dilemma. Love for country may be expressed through external activity; love for family is best articulated through a person's interior acts. The first is addressed to a faceless crowd, while the latter deals intimately with specific persons.

Conclusion: *Softie's* contribution to the imagination

Softie is about politics and agitation. The spectacle in the film is quite moving; there are glimpses of Starehe's dirty streets, of movement to and fro during campaigns, of crammed retail shops, of the hustle and bustle of busy streets and marketplaces. Nothing shines. There is no generosity, no ultra-modern malls, except when Mwangi's children are interrupted to join him in a campaign concert. This chaotic environment is the image of Nairobi, which remains with the viewer. It is not representative of the city because it is inaccurate; to see the entire Nairobi as dirty streets and busy markets does not reflect the reality.

Amidst this chaos is the staid home of Mwangi. And in Mwangi, the film picks a plausible *type* to represent today's Nairobi dweller. It is refreshing to be invited into the heart of an urban family. Many Kenyans identify with Mwangi's home; its setup, furnishings, and daily rhythm bespeak a typical middle-class family home in Nairobi. However, this family lives in dirty streets and busy markets selectively depicted in *Softie*.

Although the film has picked Mwangi as a plausible *type* to represent a modern Nairobi dweller, it (miss) places his home in unconvincing imagery of Nairobi. Mwangi's middle-class family living in the kind of neighbourhood-cum-streets depicted in the movie is not factual. And this is why *Softie* adds to the content of images about contemporary Kenya while simultaneously denying the Kenyan viewer opportunity to synthesize these discordant images. A Nairobi dweller may easily forget the documentary film *Softie,* especially after the excitement of seeing an ordinary Nairobian on screen has died down. By disallowing the 'process' of imagination to segue into the intellect, *Softie*, the documentary, runs the risk of becoming an occasional entertainment.

This chapter has considered how *Softie* speaks to its audience, its 'documentariness' which is also its 'visualness'. The film director expects viewers to come to *Softie* with prior knowledge of Boniface Mwangi, the social media activist. Only a facet of the activist's brand is offered since the assumption is that the viewer already knows some things about Mwangi, about politics in Kenya, or Africa, for that matter. This documentary, unfolding Mwangi-the-brand, has intentional gaps feeding on the discussed intertextual discourse broached in our argument on the metonymic approach.

Whichever way one interprets *Softie*, this chapter examines its contribution to Kenya's collective imaginary. The term is used here not so much as conjuring up possible current or future happenings but as a signifier of mental visual material that allows for thinking through phenomena to come up with significant insights.

Has *Softie* contributed to the collective imaginary? Yes and no; it adds to the content of images about life in contemporary Kenya while giving little room to exercise the process of imagining.

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The right to be seen and to look

Selfies #FeesMustFall and #endSARS

Amanda du Preez

Abstract

The selfie is notorious for inserting the human subject into the ubiquitous digital sphere and social media platforms. More than any other mediating technology, the front-facing smartphone has enabled the human subject to create and capture images of the self as never before. The selected pictures of selfies formed part of the #FeesMustFall and #endSARS protest in South Africa and Nigeria. I argue that the chosen selfies make power hegemony visible as the subjects negotiate their status apropos the powerful and ideological hegemony. There is an awareness in the selected hashtag movements' images of selfies that witness the anarchic event and position the self in a particular participatory and supportive place towards what is happening. It is an act of uncovering how power works by making it visible and showing solidarity with the demonstrations by inserting the face of the selfie-taker as a montage, a mise-en-scène, onto the events in the background.
As images, these selfies can be interpreted as decolonising images as they disrupt what can be considered to be colonising powers and assert themselves as agents of what Mirzoeff (2011) terms 'the right to look' and claiming 'the right to be seen'. These images refuse to look the other way by pretending nothing is happening. Instead, they inject themselves into the event and confront us as viewers with their visual presence.

Keywords

selfie as image, selfie as enactment, interpellation, #FeesMustFall, #endSARS, de-colonising images, the right to look/be seen, witness to witnessing

More than ever, we need confirmation that we exist and that our lives do indeed matter, even though an oversupply of screens and digital images that continuously stream, reflect and circulate our virtual presences immerse us. Yet, we still need to affirm that we are real by extending materiality into digital networks. We may interpret selfies as one such endeavour – a visual confirmation that once I too was here. Once my life also mattered. This confirmation is by no means a new impulse or drive. When we search through the history of images, the wish to evidence agency and presence resounds in self-portraits, portraits, photographs, documentaries, and cinema, to name but a few examples.

The drive towards visual self-documentation is discussed through selected selfies from two African hashtag movements. The first is the #FeesMustFall student campaign in South Africa that raged between mid-October 2015 and flared up again in 2016. The second is the recent #endSARS youth resistance to police brutality in Nigeria, which erupted in October 2020 after a video spread on Twitter about a young man shot and then robbed afterward from his luxury car by Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) members. The subsequent events and killings of protesters (such as the police shooting live rounds of ammunition at unarmed protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate) sparked the hashtag #endSARS to draw the world's attention to the plight of the youth in Nigeria.

It is perhaps helpful to distinguish between the differing nature of the images of selfies explored in my discussion. The first image (Figure 1) is an actual selfie – meaning the image-maker (object) and taker (subject) are the same people. The other two images (Figures 2 and 3) are selfie-takers' images where the image-makers differ. According to Roopika Risam (2018), the distinction is helpful because mainstream media tend to publish images of selfie-takers rather than good selfies. Risam discusses how the global North press treats 'migrant-related selfies', and 'refugee selfies'. The latter remain mostly unseen by the broader public as they are only shared on private social networks. The images of selfie-takers mostly tend to dehumanise and racialise, Risam notes. At the same time, selfies proper can 'instantiate[e] a new politics of representation that produces both agency and community' (Risam 2018: 66).

I treat all three images as enactments of selfies, in other words acknowledging that they may differ in vantage point but not in gestural witnessing. By showing an awareness of the difference in agency and positioning of these selfie images, the predicament of making some images visible while others remain invisible can be circumvented. Also, by including both types of selfies images, the author hopes to become a 'witness to witnessing' (Derrida 2000: 184). In other words, not only are selfies treated as witnesses to political upheaval, but it is proposed that the images of selfie-takers are positioned in this chapter to witness the witnessing taking place via the selfie-taker taking a selfie. It is also adamantly a refusal to look away, in the sense that Mirzoeff explores the 'right to be seen' (2011). So as the selfie-takers position themselves as witnesses, the images of taking selfies extend their 'right to be seen' into the viewer's 'right to look' (cf. Mirzoeff 2011).

#FeesMustFall and #endSARS

The first selected selfie (Figure 1) was taken in 2015 by reporter Yuzriq Meyer of Bushradio, 'Africa's oldest community radio station project based in Cape Town' (Bushradio Blog). Meyer took the selfie with students congregating in the background, and one can sense rising apprehension and tension. The sign-

Figure 1: Yuzriq Meyer, 2015, selfie, n/a, South Africa, © With kind permission of the photographer Yuzriq Meyer.

boards towards the Cape Town University of Technology (CPUT CT) campus and the Damelin building (private tertiary training institution) in the background are clear indicators of its location. The #RhodesMustFall campaign, which kicked off earlier in 2015 at the University of Cape Town as a decolonising student movement by attacking and dismantling a statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the campus, sparked the #FeesMustFall campaign. Rhodes embodied the symbol of colonialism that had to be removed physically and needed to be challenged metaphorically (cf. Garuba 2015; Thomas 2018). However, the main point of contestation was about raising student university fees by six percent. One may debate the concrete results of the youth uprising, but the main benefits probably signify more symbolism. As Saleem Badat (2016: 17) notes, 'the student protest movement may not only be a challenge to dominant cultural codes but also a possible laboratory of cultural innovation'.

Meyer, selfie-taker, and maker, *also known as* Bushradio's unofficial 'selfie-king', is visible in the righthand side of the image, forming a montage by merging his image with that of the students in the background. Interestingly, Meyer's selfie can be identified as part of a new selfie genre, termed 'selfie journalism' (cf. Maniou & Veglis 2016; Maniou et al. 2019). Selfies have become journalistic tools because they enable reporters to share and upload personalised stories directly, and in the process, become a form of live media witnessing (Maniou et al. 2019: 2). The journalist is inserted in the events, and the selfie leads the story because 'the news does not derive from the photograph but it rather is itself the photograph, while the journalistic analysis and interpretation follows and does not precede the story' (Maniou et al. 2019: 2–3). Meyer's selfie thus is the story; it bears witness to the event.

The second hashtag movement examples come from the more recent #endSARS protest in Nigeria. The youth, targeted and victimised by the corrupt and brutal police force (SARS), protested in the main urban centra, especially Lagos.

Figure 2: A woman takes a selfie with a banner showing the names of victims of police brutality in Lagos, Nigeria, Monday Oct. 19, 2020. (AP Photo/Sunday Alamba).

An estimated 70 per cent of the Nigerian population is under the age of 30, and at least 62 per cent is under 25 (Fayehun & Isiugo-Abanihe 2020). Add to this that this section of the population is the worst hit by unemployment, bad governance, corruption, and police brutality, and the revolt becomes self-evident. SARS brutally and violently attacked the youth, who used social media and new technologies. Branded as the iPhone and Twitter generation, President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria has described them 'as being lazy cohorts who are looking for free things' (Tade 2020). Hence, we see posters with statements like '#To be Modern is Not a Crime', 'IPhone, Laptops, Styled Hair and Living Fresh is not a Crime!', 'We cannot be the future of the nation if we are dead' and 'Stop Killing Our Dreamers', raised by protesters. The strong messages are often intertwined with #BlackLivesMatter sentiments and either accompanied by the Nigerian flag or with comments such as 'Nigerian Lives Matter' and 'Black Lives do not matter because of African Leaders'.

Protesters took the selected images amidst and aligned with the #endSARS resistance. A female protester took the first selfie (Figure 2) in front of a banner with the names of her fallen comrades. The following image (Figure 3) shows protesters holding smartphones and documenting the events by taking selfies. The first selfie-taker is holding a Nigerian flag in her left hand and donning a mask as is befitting during the Covid-19 epidemic. She is showing solidarity by inserting her image into the background of the protest banner. We, as viewers, are also affirming her 'right to be seen' by exerting our 'right to look'. The following image is taken amidst the revolt with banners and arms flying in the air while the smartphones are ready (or armed?) to document and take selfies. Like

Figure 3: Demonstrators at the ENDSARS protest in Lagos, Nigeria on Oct. 13, 2020. (Kaizenify, https://tinyurl.com/y5brpkam; CC BY-SA 4.0, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en).

the upheld fist, the smartphone becomes a powerful weapon that can record and document injustices against the youth of Nigeria and, by implication, the future of democracy in the country. The image of the raised fist and the upheld smartphone merge to become an icon of resistance.

The #FeesMustFall and #endSARS movements are generational rebellions and revolutions of those armed with modern technologies such as the iPhone, against those who most fear the invasion and revelation mediated by new technologies. These selfies represent the growing 'young urban global network' (Mirzoeff 2016: 30). The #endSARS protesters were able to summon global support on digital social networks and financial support from the Nigerian diaspora and celebrities that empathise with their cause. William Shoki (2020) correctly inquires: 'Does this express a new-found global consciousness around issues of police violence on the heels of #BlackLivesMatter international, or does their susceptibility to celebrity and corporate attention also make them easy to co-opt?'

The images selected here attempt to engage with the growing selfie scholarship in visual culture and image studies. The selfie has predecessors in the rich tradition of artists painting portraits and self-portraits and then being democratised further with the invention of photography as a means of self-expression to include a broader audience and artistry. Finally, in the contemporary moment, anyone with a smartphone can create a self-portrait or, instead,

take a selfie. The images sampled here showcase the expressive and participatory possibilities of selfies as voicing dissent against the powers that be on the one hand, and the other hand, showing solidarity with those uprising – to participate in the 'right to be seen', and claiming the 'right to look'. They form part of new visual activism and create 'selfie citizenship' (cf. Kuntsman 2017) via online participation and images.

Selfie witness

The selfie is notorious for its insertion of the human subject into the digital sphere that appears ubiquitously on social media platforms. More than any other mediating technology, the front-facing smartphone has enabled the human subject to create and capture images of the self as never seen before (cf. Peraica 2017; Tildenberg 2018). The immediacy with which selfies circulate is quite extraordinary.

Depictions of the self are not new within the history of images; in the past, any reflective surface has sufficed as a tool for creating self-images. Most notably, the mirror shares an intimate relationship and history with self-portraiture and self-representation. The selfie's progenitor can probably be found in Andy Warhol's self-portraits taken in photo booths (circa 1964–1965). It has become a substantial category on its own since 2012 and has elevated self-expression to a new level. The selfies assert: look at me and look over my shoulder at the world behind me even more importantly. I am bearing witness to these events, and by sharing this image with you, you are also becoming complicit and bearing witness to the event. It is a calling forth of a visible co-agency.

The artists' attempt to show their witnessing of an event – being there – is also not a new endeavour in the history of images. We think of Jan van Eyck's (1390–1441) signature and presence left in the small mirror in *The Arnolfini portrait* (1434), and later Diego Velázquez's (1599–1660) mocking presence in the company of royalty in *Las Meninas* (1656). In all these instances, the artists insert or interject themselves into the picture plane. In the case of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's (1880–1938) *Self-portrait as soldier* (1915), we see the artist inserting himself into the horrors of war, with an arm lost (although only imaginary), trying to work through the aftermaths of terror. Granted, it is not the same interjection we see as in the case of selfies. Still, one may argue that something of the tradition of witnessing, thus making present and visible, announcing an event is already born in these earlier examples from Western art history.

Interpellated, enacted, and embodied

As part of the recent African hashtag movements, the selfies selected here testify to a historical event and are being interpellated into the activities. As used by the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1971), interpellation shows the individual's status as always already being a subject subjugated in power and ideology. The selfie makes that power hegemony visible as the subjects negotiate their status apropos the powerful and ideological hegemony. There is an awareness in the #FeesMustFall selfie and the #endSARS selfie-taking woman who witnesses the riotous event and positions the self in a particular participatory and supportive position towards what is happening. Yuzriq Meyer euphorically states about his participatory #FeesMustFall selfie: 'I may not have been around in the apartheid era in [the] freedom struggle as an active participator, but from my experience of today, I may have a better understanding of what it was like to be in the atmosphere of passionate comrades and the feeling of camaraderie in the air' (Meyer 2015). It is both an act of uncovering how power works by making it visible and showing solidarity with the riots by inserting the selfie-taker's face as a montage onto the events in the background.

These selfies can also be interpreted as decolonising images. They disrupt what can be considered colonising powers and assert themselves as agents of what Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) terms 'the right to look' and proclaims 'the right to be seen'. These images refuse to look the other way by pretending nothing is happening. Instead, they interject themselves into the events and confront us as viewers with their visual messages. Selfies allow for an expansion to the gamut of the traditional self-portrait. The selfie's democratic evolution is eminent in the history of self-portraiture, in at least three categories: the skills required, immediacy, and considering the selfie as an entangled enactment and embodiment of agency that expand the self-portrait genre.

One can argue that creating a self-portrait, whether through painting, sculpture, etching, or photography, requires some talent or particular skill. The artists had to master some basic techniques and skills to complete a self-portrait, which is not the case for producing a selfie. One merely requires a front-facing smartphone and the willingness to create and share a selfie. In this respect, the selfie can be interpreted as a democratising tool.

Similarly, whereas creating a traditional self-portrait mostly implied time (duration) and space for the artwork to be executed and exhibited, the selfie can be immediately uploaded online and shared. The selfie also potentially has a far broader reach than the traditional self-portrait as it can be viewed by hundreds (conservatively estimated) of viewers immediately after being shared. The selfie thus further democratises the image of the self by becoming available everywhere instantly. The selfie is not bounded by time or place and space, as is the traditional self-portrait – it crafts telepresence (cf. Du Preez 2013).

Suppose we take the logic of telepresence a step further. In that case, Katie Warfield (2016: 1) interprets selfies as 'networked material-discursive entanglements', which means the image of the selfie is mutually constituted at the moment of creation, implying the body, camera, self, space, and image do not exist separately before taking the selfie. They are mutually created during the act of selfie-taking. For Warfield, selfies are 'identity work' that assists with forming corporeality and gender (and race, we may add) '*in* the production of the image' (2016: 5, original emphasis). The selfie is thus an enactment of the body, self, and photo. Any attempt to dislodge these entities into separateness is flawed, for they are 'always and already intra-acting material-discursive entanglements' (Warfield 2016: 7). Mirzoeff argues: 'Our bodies are now in the network and the world at the same time' (2016: 13) while stressing the performative and conversational tone of selfies.

Similarly, Paul Frosh (2015) reads the selfie as a gestural act that participates in phatic communion; it causes an affective response that becomes a kinaesthetic image. He states: 'The selfie is a preeminent conductor of embodied social energy because it is a kinaesthetic image: it is a product of kinetic bodily movement; it gives aesthetic, visible form to that movement in images; and it is inscribed in the circulation of kinetic and responsive social energy among users of movement-based digital technologies' (Frosh 2015: 1608). Quite literally, the selfie is an image that captures movement, and it is an undertaking that can stir or move us. The selected selfies aim to stir, and motivate.

Although the selfie is a complex and multi-layered occurrence like most images, not all selfies produced are democratising and destabilising agents. What is, however, accurate for most selfies is that they expand the genre of self-portraiture in significant ways, and the examples under discussion are conceivably commendable for this achievement.

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Contemporary Art:
African praxis as conversation with its past and with the world

In-Between

A conversation between Sokari Douglas Camp and Ernst Wagner

Ernst Wagner and Sokari Douglas Camp

Visual Cultures of Africa can be *Visual Cultures in Africa*, historical or contemporary, how it is explored in many chapters of this book. The book's title can also refer to the reflection of Africa's rich heritage in collections around the globe. But, it also refers to the richness that artists from Africa living in the diaspora today contribute to contemporary art 'between continents'.

In a book on *Visual Cultures of Africa*, these voices cannot be missing. Through the kind mediation of Mark Evans, contact was made with Sokari Douglas Camp, an outstanding artist whose artistic work starts at the interface between cultures and whose work also exemplifies that all art starts at such interfaces. Sokari Douglas Camp (born 1958 in Nigeria) is a London-based artist who has had exhibitions worldwide. She studied art in the USA and England. The conversation partner is Ernst Wagner (born 1952 in Germany) a Munich-based art educator who coordinates the project *Exploring Visual Cultures* at the Art Academy in Munich. He studied art and art history in Germany.

Ernst Wagner This book is called *Visual Cultures of Africa*. What do you think about this title?

Sokari Douglas Camp I do find it to be very western – broad brush. Visual cultures are so complex. My memory of visual culture is dance, dress, masquerade, performances. In museums, selected elements of this visual culture are presented, carvings and constructions that are used for rituals are shown out of context and appreciated on another level; dare I say a Western level. It is hard to dismiss showing a mask without the person to wear it and the costume to accompany it. But many contemporary African artists are reintroducing these edited stories in their work. The future of visual culture from Africa is very exciting. There is a tsunami of (cultural) ideas to be expressed.

Ernst Wagner You were born in Nigeria in 1958 and raised in England. You once said: 'I had an interest in art because of my guardian who was English, and I was introduced to western culture by a westerner in Nigeria.' Could you explain a bit more about your biography as an artist?

Sokari Douglas Camp The biography of my life is my base, that is Kalabari. We are located in the eastern Niger Delta region, and my working life is Eu-

ropean. But I am an African. Maybe this is why I believe in egalitarianism. I was introduced to 'art' because my guardian, my brother-in-law, was English and came from a family of artists. In the University of Ibadan[1], where we lived, icons such as Wole Soyinka[2] put on plays. There were travelling theatres and conversations. In the house, philosophers, photographers, choreographers, anthropologists, and artists visited to discuss ideas. I was in the same room as these people, even though I was just a child.

These adults gave importance to Nigerian culture after independence because they wanted to write books, put on plays with an African narrative for the West or now, as we like to say, the globe. They wanted to put Nigerian culture on the stage. I was familiar with theatre in the round. An appreciation of theatre on a stage was a new and exciting concept. 'Art' introduced new tools and platforms to present cultural conversations we were already having in Nigeria.

Ernst Wagner In the beginning, you mentioned that we can await a tsunami of ideas from Africa. That makes me very curious. Which ideas? Could you give an example?

Sokari Douglas Camp I always think that language is inspirational to artists; conversations, descriptions, stories explain so much. There are fifty-five countries on the continent of Africa, each of them speaking different languages. There are, for example, two hundred and fifty languages in Nigeria, not counting the dialects. So, how many languages are there on the African continent?

With language come ideas. People in these countries see their cultures and philosophies to be very distinct. When Kalabari people say the word 'loneliness', their word when translated is 'the inside of a person is quiet'. The description of this state of being brings up pictures that the English word does not. But this might be a subjective view.

Ernst Wagner This means that we can expect a huge diversity of ideas and concepts, as already the languages and through these perceptions of the world and ourselves, are more manifold, diverse, rich?

Sokari Douglas Camp Yes, this does mean that there will be more diverse ideas because of the perceptions of these different cultures. The hope is that

1 The University of Ibadan was founded in 1948. It is the oldest degree-awarding institution in Nigeria and has contributed to the political, industrial, economic, and cultural development of Nigeria. The history and influence of the University of Ibadan have made it one of the most prestigious universities in Africa.

2 Wole Soyinka (*1934) is a Nigerian playwright, poet and essayist. He actively participated in Nigeria's political history, where he repeatedly raised his critical voice. In 1986 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

established cultures are open to those different ideas. But let me focus on one concrete example. Yoruba culture in Nigeria believes that the head is the primary part of the human body, which is connected to the soul and maybe God. The brain inside the head is a primary point in our bodies. It is needed for all our functions.

Traditional artisans who made Gelede masks (heads[3]) focused on simply creating heads with almost docile faces, evenly spaced features, unsmiling. These carvings also echoed women's head ties and society's ideas at the time. The docile faces carry decorations that depict children, houses, trees, bicycles, illustrating thoughts expressed from the head.

Ernst Wagner Is your work an example of transferring such a local tradition from Africa into the global context of contemporary art?

Sokari Douglas Camp In my work, those Gelede masks played an important role in the 1990s, as you can see in these examples (Figure 2).

The theme of the Gelede sculptures I made then was to echo my life in London: council houses, wedding cakes, and my children. These works were shown in contemporary galleries. '*Gelede from top to toe*' was presented in the British Museum (Museum of Mankind). The idea then was to show that these headdresses did not come on their own. The costume of the masquerader who wears this sculpture is an art in itself. My work on this occasion was indeed transferring a local African tradition into the global context of Contemporary Art.

Let me give another example. Osi's[4] work is a continuation of a conversation going on globally using very simple colours and materials. His simple shapes are sculptural, teasing three dimensions on paper, creating calligraphic symbols. I am mentioning Osi's work because it is conceptual on the one hand but recognisable as coming from a specific source: an interest in Yoruba philosophy and the head/brain issue.

But countless more artists are using their cultural legacies to illustrate life in the twenty-first century. Alexis Peskine's portraiture work which resembles pop art, has been tied to African nail fetish sculptures from the Congo. He and Osi are very contemporary and are influenced by more than the examples I have given. Their French and English colonial backgrounds also play a part in how they think.

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3 A Gelede "mask" is more accurately a headdress, since it rests on top of the head and the wearer's face is covered by a cloth veil. The headdress takes the form of a human head, on top of which are motifs that are intended to entertain onlookers but, in addition, usually address social concerns that may also be expressed in songs that are part of the masquerade (see Siegmann *et al.* 2009.)

4 Osi Audu is a contemporary Yoruba artist who works with the theme of the head (http://www.osiaudu.com/). He lives and works in New York.

a. Gelede Mask Costume. Population Nago-Yorouba, Bénin, 2013. Musée Vodou (Strasbourg). Creative Commons

b. Mask/headdress composed of male face with beard and pierced eyes, topped by headwear which includes sculpted drum resting on framework, held in place by sculpted fabric tie. Birmingham Museum of Art. Wikimedia Commons

c. Gelede mask, Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo. Creative Commons

Figure 1: Gelede masks.

a. Coloured Family Tree Gelede

b. Council House Gelede.

c. Gelede from top to toe.

d. Gelede wedding cake.

Figure 2: Sokari Douglas Camp, various works presented by the artist at the discussion. Courtesy of the artist.

Ernst Wagner Can you elaborate on that a little bit more?

Sokari Douglas Camp Our colonial history plays a part in what we choose to focus on because of education and perceptions from the colonial masters. There are so many layers to being an African. We have our own cultures, and the adopted European culture. Frantz Fanon[5] highlighted the difficulties in finding a path through these influences as a black person. A French person and an English person are different (but similar), which would also be true of Africans who these two different nations have colonised.

Romuald Hazoumè[6] is an artist with a French colonial heritage. His work uses familiar domestic objects, containers for petrol, and palm oil. Like Marcel Duchamp, he is working with an ordinary object. But he is also working in West Africa, where it is difficult to access plaster for modelling. Using discarded materials is a resourceful approach to creating work. But it has echoes of the techniques introduced by modern western art. Some French Africans do believe they are French. Does Hazoume's work show that he is French? I do not think so, but he is a West African with French sensibilities because of his education.

Ernst Wagner This is an interesting construction, indeed. Would you say that you are a West African as well, but with British sensibilities?

Sokari Douglas Camp Yes, I would say that I am a West African with London sensibilities rather than British ones – such details are important but time-consuming.

Ernst Wagner How would you then talk about an artist like El Anatsui, who was educated in Ghana and Nigeria?

Sokari Douglas Camp El Anatsui is a fantastic example of an independent artist, originally from Ghana and adopted by the community of Nsukka (Enugu State, Nigeria) and beyond. He is well travelled; he has done residencies globally and went to art school. El has led a carefully-considered career. Being an African does not mean that you are in a cocoon. But, I took notice that he did not want to be defined by the continent.

Of course, artists use all sorts of influences for their work. El Anatsui is very experienced in using recycled materials. This might be seen as an 'African' construct, but people globally have been using discarded materials.

On the other hand, South African artists bring their historical struggle of race and inequality to the conversation. There is also a strong voice for the LGBTQ community, e.g., Nicholas Hlobo or Zanele Moholi.

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5 Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), psychiatrist and political philosopher from Martinique, became influential in the fields of post-colonial studies, critical theory and Marxism.

6 Romuald Hazoumè (*1962 in the Republic of Bénin) only uses recycled materials to create his works. He is well-known for his mask series.

Figure 3: William Blake, Europe supported by Africa and America, 1796. Engraving, 194 mm × 141 mm.

Figure 4: Sokari Douglas Camp. Europe supported by Africa and America, 2015, steel abalone, gold and copper leaf and petrol nozzles. Courtesy of the artist.

The recent introduction of art fairs and auctions that concentrate on Africa and African artists is a chance for more diverse dialogues to be added to the global conversation from an African perspective. We also have ephemeral art – but this does not fit into the commercial construct of the fairs or the auctions, but it may be introduced to film.

Ernst Wagner I understand that it makes no sense to reduce an artist to a specific origin, but that it does make sense to name influences to recognise the specific mixture. Could you demonstrate this – at the end of our conversation – with an example of one of your works? Which work would you choose?

Sokari Douglas Camp 'Europe supported by Africa and America' from 2014 is the work I would choose at this moment in my life; this piece encompasses my love of art.

This sculpture is inspired by an engraving of 1796 by the radical English artist and poet William Blake titled 'Europe supported by Africa and America'.[7] The figure in the middle representing Europe is rather exhausted, which is why she is being held up. Blake's figures are naked.

I choose this work to illustrate an African point of view. I "Africanise" Blake's work by clothing the figures. In my version they are dressed as contem-

7 https://collectionSokari Douglas Campvam.ac.uk/item/O127397/europe-supported-by-africa-and-print-william-blake/

porary Africans with all the influences that we carry. The colours and patterned fabric on my figures are taken from a wedding photograph of family members dressed traditionally for that event. Some of the materials were made in Nigeria; the pattern worn by the African figure is *Akwete*.

The Mondrian-like pattern is worn by the sculptural figure representing Europe, in the middle. The paisley patterned fabric represents America, as represented by Blake's original drawing. Blake's third figure is an American Indian. I know paisley has nothing to do with native Americans, but this fabric suited the composition.

But, I also wanted to talk about power in this piece, and who supports whom? The wreath held by the figures ends in petrol nozzles. Thus it is also a conversation about wealth, slavery, and crude oil, that is, power.

This conversation was conducted via email in (northern hemisphere) spring 2021.

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Strategies of co-liberation and belonging in the work of South African artists Titus Matiyane and Candice Breitz

Runette Kruger

Abstract

The term othering describes a dynamic whereby one person or group of people, whom one could refer to as 'the same', dehumanises, oppresses, or obliterates another person or group of people (the so-called 'Other'). Othering happens across various vectors of inequality around race, gender, nationality, class, and sexuality.[1] *The leverage wielded by the same over the Other stems from the exteriority of the Other to systemic resources and socio-political validation. Othering leads to inequality and can be deadly. Whilst othering is a widely acknowledged, undesirable social phenomenon I wish to focus on counterstrategies which can lead to belonging and co-liberation, as narrated by equity practitioner, artist, and activist Sonali Sangeeta Balajee in her text An evolutionary roadmap for belonging and co-liberation. In this text, Balajee clarifies five valuable counterstrategies to othering namely beloved, be still, behold, believe, and become, which together form a set of psychological and political strategies to build community, level inequality, and address the effects of being othered. Lastly, I trace the various counterstrategies in the work of South African artists Titus Matiyane and Candice Breitz, showing how visual art can embody these strategies in the battle for social equality and a new world.*

Keywords

Belonging, Co-liberation, Othering, Sonali Sangeeta Balajee, Titus Matiyane, Candice Breitz

Othering

The dynamic of othering involves diminishing another socio-politically, economically, or physically through acts of deprivation, humiliation, or violence. It occurs on account of race, gender, nationality, class, sexuality, or any other categorisation that relegates the Other as exploitable or inferior in some way to the person who is practising the othering.

1 The term Other is purposefully capitalised in order to decentralise the same.

In the sense used here, as diminishing the rights of the sociopolitically marginalised, the term othering was first articulated by postcolonial feminist Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak (Thomas-Olalde and Velho 2011: 29). In this context, othering moves beyond an individual act of consolidating and centring the self through projecting abject aspects of the self onto an Other. It is applied to an analysis of broader social and institutional dynamics (while remaining pertinent for understanding interpersonal interaction). This framing of the term denotes specifically the effects of power imbalances. The system that enables othering as a function of power is named the *dispositif* by French philosopher Michel Foucault. He describes it as a 'heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral or philanthropical propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid … [a] system of relations … [that] has, above all else, a strategic function' (in Thomas-Olalde and Velho 2011: 38). The machinations of the *dispositif* (which also informs personal conduct), transforms a human being into an object (Frost 2019: 152).

Concrete examples of othering include gender-based violence, sexism, racism, homophobia, ageism, classism, and xenophobia. Because othering emerges from the social fabric (the *dispositif*) within which the antagonist and the Other find themselves, it is frequently regarded as 'normal' behaviour. It is socially sanctioned as such, depriving the Other of recourse against violence or abuse. Such abuse is, accordingly, often accompanied by a sense of entitlement. For example, in a society where a woman is expected to defer to and appease men, failure to do so is seen as a provocation of the subsequent violence she is met with. In a patriarchal society, the expectation that heteronormative males should attract women, engenders a sense of entitlement to a woman's body. Challenging this expectation can result in hate crimes and death. Similarly, racism and hate crimes against black people and people of colour or foreign nationals are justified in the minds of the perpetrators based on the latter's entitlement and the scapegoating and demonisation of the Other to the extent that the perpetrators of othering and abuse frame themselves as the true victims.

The problem of the Other

The use of the term Other is, however, problematic. It is half of the binary (Other / self) created to centre the self. As such, the Other is ontologically overdetermined, inescapably predicated on the same. Spivak (1993: 104) summarises this problem when she concludes her essay *Can the subaltern speak*? with the pronouncement that 'The subaltern cannot speak'.

A second problem is a habit of attempting to speak on behalf of the Other or avoiding confrontation with complicity as the same. Spivak takes exception to Foucault's failure to identify his positionality vis-à-vis the Other and for believ-

ing himself capable of vacating the stage upon which the dynamic of othering plays out, thereby 'creating a space' for the Other to speak (Spivak 1993: 84). As a settler descendent, I am mindful of the temptation to speak 'about' or 'for' an Other, or of 'creating space' for the Other to speak. These seemingly benevolent actions (the bedrock of liberal ideology) are patronising and re-centres the same in the name of equality. Worse, it soothes the same without denting the status quo of actual political inequality. A phrase attributed to the Queensland Aboriginal Activist Group provides a helpful reminder to refrain from attempting to save the Other. It reads, 'If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together' (Eddo-Lodge 2018).[2] This focus on co-liberation as mutually beneficial political work is taken up by artist and activist Sonali Sangeeta Balajee, and clarified in the following section.

Co-liberation and belonging

Neither attempting to represent the Other nor super-inscribing her *as* the Other, Balajee focuses on the agentic strategies devised by the Other to navigate and determine the conditions of her othering, counter its effects, and work towards nullifying the inequality that enables and normalises othering. Balajee (2018) investigates five strategies of belonging and co-liberation, namely *beloved*, *be still*, *behold*, *believe*, and *become*, and she defines belonging as 'a state of enacting and being wholeness' (Balajee 2018: 55). This wholeness is not the chimerical wholeness achieved through expunging unwelcome aspects of the self and using the fragments to construct an Other, but the strategic defragmentation of the traumatised self of the Other by the Other. Significantly, wholeness and *liberation* are intertwined and Balajee (2018: 56), like Spivak, emphasises the importance of power analysis, that is, observing and understanding how power works to mandate othering within broader societal frameworks.

Elaborating on the five strategies, Balajee (2018: 57) positions *beloved* as a battle against inequality founded on a deep love of society. Praxis based on *beloved* does not invoke a sentimental rainbow 'togetherness', but involves disrupting and dismantling the structures perpetuating inequality (Balajee 2018: 57). Imbricated in this love is an ability to see the damaging dynamics of a skewed society for what they are, namely powerful but contestable. This in/sight is based on the capacity to *be still*, that is, an ability to step back and

2 I first became aware of this phrase from the podcast *About race with Reni Eddo-Lodge*. It is mentioned specifically in the episode *The big question*, which refers to the frequent query 'As a white person, what can i do to help race relations?' (Eddo-Lodge 2018). Use of the lowercase I here constitutes purposeful decentring praxis.

assess the problem at hand (Balajee 2018: 58). The temporary withdrawal of *be still,* affords serenity and builds reserves to engage with toxic othering in order to dismantle it when deemed tactical. Engaging in self-nurturing and grounding practices impacts positively on the nervous system and our ability to sustain our efforts at transformation.

Being still generates the third strategy, namely the ability to *behold,* see and understand the nature of the problems we encounter clearly (Balajee 2018: 60). In doing so, we need to challenge our conditioned thinking around issues and interrogate multiple perspectives (Balajee 2018: 60). However, accommodating numerous views does not imply a neutral validation of all perspectives. Othering is deeply implicated in so-called neutrality. For instance, countering Black Lives Matter's message with the slogan, All Lives Matter, indicates a deep-seated inability/unwillingness to witness patently racial inequality across societies globally – a wilful, defensive blindness. Instead, accommodating multiple perspectives challenges the same to look beyond self-justifying reflexes to see bigotry for what it is more clearly.

With the fourth strategy, *believe*, Balajee (2018: 61) addresses ingrained beliefs that inequality is normal and even healthy, as well as the debilitating beliefs we harbour about ourselves. This strategy thus firstly addresses the need to dismantle entrenched prejudice, a process which can commence when we 'engage people most affected by inequities to tell us what they see' (Balajee 2018: 62). (Such receptiveness aligns the fourth strategy with the third, namely the ability to *behold*). Secondly, *believe* touches on how the Other internalises the ingrained prejudice of the same and aligns herself with the dominant culture, which has negative consequences on a personal and community level.

The last strategy, *become*, is the apotheosis of the roadmap that illuminates the possibility of a more just and equal society. Praxis oriented toward becoming is arduous because it maps emergent landscapes, deconstructs as it builds, and is threatening. The same resists change and wages war on it. Furthermore, *becoming* requires stamina, vision, and faith (hence the need for the preceding strategies) as it 'doesn't have results yet. It is sparse' (Paden in Balajee 2018: 64).

The different aspects of Balajee's roadmap work in tandem and have a complex layering of application: both the same and the Other are encouraged to approach each of the strategies from their positionality.[3] For instance, *behold* is a call to the liberal same to see the racist wood for the diversity trees. To the minoritised Other, it is a call to develop an empowering analysis of chimerical oppression when it presents itself as liberation. *Believe* addresses the need to confront prejudices that inhere in us as the Other or as the fawning same (not

3 It can be added that one's positionality as the same or the Other varies depending on the context of one's interactions, and that othering along one vector, such as gender, does not nullify one's privilege as the same along a different vector, such as race.

to mention as found in naked bigotry). In the following section, the ways in which artists address or respond to social inequality and oppression through their work, are briefly discussed with reference to the strategies outlined here.

Co/liberation and belonging in the work of Titus Matiyane and Candice Breitz

The works of South African artists Titus Matiyane and Candice Breitz discussed here encompass a range of strategies outlined by Balajee in visionary, whimsical, and disturbing ways. Both artists foreground the tactics and agency of the Other in their work.

Titus Matiyane started producing art in the 1980s, a starkly dehumanising decade in South African history. In the early 1990s, he commenced with the works he is best known for, namely panoramic drawings of local cities, metropolitan districts, and entire provinces, and, later, of international cities such as Amsterdam, New York, and Rio in telescopic scenery up to 45 meters in length. Sidogi (2018: 129) describes Matiyane's panoramic re-envisionings of global cities and their surroundings as 'a kind of leveller, where individual identity is free to be imagined and performed without fear of persecution'. Matiyane remakes the cities he depicts, brick by brick, lovingly inserting details into scenery he is now at liberty to visit without a passbook, and without even having to travel physically. Matiyane combines a deep love for – *beloved* – and longing to traverse the cities of Africa and the world with a messianic visionary ability – *behold* – to transform the brutal given which *becomes* welcoming: he is a global traveller; his cities are cosmopolitan dreamscapes of belonging. Lastly, there is a quiet serenity – *be still* – in his work, where both the artist and the viewer are afforded an experience of tranquil, imperturbable flight.

The work *Love story* (2016) by South African, Berlin-based artist Candice Breitz, similarly addresses the ability to travel (safely), but from the perspective of the growing global crisis of migration and displacement: violence induced movement, as opposed to flights of fantasy engendered by the immobilising apparatuses of apartheid and poverty. *Love story* comprises an installation on seven screens displayed in two adjacent spaces: in the second space, six migrants relate their stories of displacement and attempts to secure safety and asylum. Only three of the six had successfully obtained asylum at the time of the interviews (2015): former Angolan child soldier José Maria João who settled in South Africa, Syrian war refugee Sarah Ezzat Mardini who was granted asylum in Germany, and Luis Ernesto Nava Molero who fled Venezuela to settle in the USA (Love Story Interviewees 2016). Mamy Maloba Langa, a political fugitive from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was less fortunate. She arrived in South Africa in 2006, and for nine years (up to 2015), had been unsuccessful

in gaining official refugee status, always on the brink of becoming an illegal alien. She had to flee the 2008 xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg as well, and one wonders how much othering a body can bear and survive. By contrast, a year before Breitz created *Love story*, the then Minister of Home Affairs, Malusi Gigaba, illegally secured South African citizenship for members of the Gupta family, currently (2021) under investigation by the Zondo Commission on State Capture established in 2018 (Merrington 2019).

This disparity between the lived experiences of the Other and those of the same, is spatially and discursively recreated in *Love story*. To reach the second space in which refugees relate details of their personal peril and hardships (both before and after their displacement), the viewer must pass through the first room in which American celebrities Julianne Moore and Alec Baldwin, re-enact the stories of the refugees. This rhetorical strategy keenly highlights how the viewer effortlessly empathises with western icons but feels alienated from and threatened by vulnerable members of society negotiating survival in their communities (Love Story Interviewees 2016; see also http://www.candicebreitz.net/). In their vision of an alternative life – *behold*, courage to access it – *believe*, and struggles to gain recognition – *become* – the refugees in *Love story* represent depths of personal resilience that the othering, projecting same could only hope to attain.

Becoming

In this essay, I have attempted to highlight some of the mechanisms that enable Othering in order to counter it. Subsequently, Balajee's counterstrategies *beloved*, *be still*, *behold*, *believe*, and *become*, which provide tactical guidelines for the Other in a sustained struggle for equality, were applied to a brief interpretation of examples of the work of South African artists Titus Matiyane and Candice Breitz.

In conjuring his meticulous landscapes, Matiyane crafts a diffuse and inclusive ecumene for himself, as *beloved* by and loving of him as the 'real' world is othering, alienating and grim. His panoramas afford him the pleasure of unperturbed travel and movement. The contrast between the dreamscapes of his vision and the excluding apparatus that is his embodied life world impresses upon us the disaster that is othering, and the psycho-political expedience of (in this case, a self-created sense of) belonging.

By contrast, Breitz's work embodies the strategies of co-liberation, highlighted by Balajee and Eddo-Lodge as actions (her choices as an artist of means) in concert with those of an Other, to effect change. *Love story* makes us see our easy identification with the hardships of the same versus our deft disengagement from the harrowing experiences of the Other. It exposes a deficit of empathy toward her and the lethal consequences of such a failure of feeling.

These artworks enunciate the fanciful, and fierce praxis needed to challenge and change what is through calling forth a becoming world and thereby bringing it closer to existence.

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Breaking traditional rules

Artmaking practices of Muelwa Noria Mabasa and Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi

Avitha Sooful

Abstract

Artmaking has remained a male-dominated practice globally. In their artmaking, female artists Muelwa Noria Mabasa and Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi defy this masculine dominance and the conventions of a European aesthetic. Mabasa works predominantly in the mediums of clay and wood that capture African mythology. Sebidi, on the other hand, works in various mediums – print, painting, pastel, charcoal, and clay – representing experiences in rural environments. Their artmaking styles are personal, with intuitive responses to transcribe form.
Both artists' works retain storytelling captured in visual images archiving periods in time and indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, Mabasa and Sebidi's introduction of a new aesthetic extends the boundaries of South African art history.

Keywords

Muelwa Noria Mabasa, Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, storytelling, indigenous knowledge, female South African artists

Historical background

An apartheid ideology affected the lives of all South Africans. The effect of this ideology was a social construction of hierarchy and segregation between its black and white citizens, with white citizens assuming the position of superiority (Posel 2010; Block and Hunt 2015). The apartheid government enforced a system of migrant labour, compelling black men to a world of labour predominantly in the mines, which had a devastating effect on black families. Women had little choice but to seek employment, often in cities, as domestic workers, further fragmenting black families that were already fragile (Baden, Hassim and Meintjies 1998; Seidman 1999; Kuumba 2002). Additionally, a common humiliating practice by the apartheid government was to forcibly remove[1] entire

1 In the 1950s, forced removals were part of the apartheid project to order the population into racially and ethnically homogenous 'group areas' by eradicating racially mixed residential

communities of black families from their homes to places with no infrastructure further away from their workplaces with no available transportation. Most adversely affected within this dispensation were black women and their families who had no means of immediate contact with absent husbands to inform them of their forced relocation (Patel 1987; Hassim 1991; Melville 2004). It is against these socio-political challenges that the author discusses Muelwa Noria Mabasa and Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi.

The current condition of South African art history is a direct result of apartheid as vital areas of cultural representation and expression remain, to some extent, porous or unwritten. South African art had been documented as predominantly that by white artists and remained male-dominated. This white dominance is not peculiar to South Africa as it remains a globally constructed defect in society. Against this historical context where specifically black female artists were neglected, South African art history is extended.

South African artmaking and history applied a European response as best practice in aesthetic appreciation. This approach acknowledges attention to specific styles, content depiction, and signatures that identify the artwork as the artist's intellectual property. Contrary to the European canon, many African artists retained an intuitive drive in their artmaking as central to image construction while appreciating the availability of different mediums, surfaces, and coloured pigments incorporated in their artmaking. Unfortunately, black female artists and Venda sculptors specifically were documented as crafters (Marschall 2001). In her critique of a VhaVenda artists group exhibition in Grahamstown (1987), Kathy Berman summarises the "cancel culture"[2] approach adopted during apartheid. 'One is struck with a strange ambivalence, an ethical and ideological dilemma. For there all the works stood, neatly arranged in glass display cabinets, devoid of any history, stripped of any tales, simply a collection of memorable artefacts' (Berman 1987: 8).

However, within the complexities of the apartheid race and class struggle, two black women contested the perceived masculine space of artmaking. I refer specifically to Muelwa Noria Mabasa and Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, whose creative practices introduced personal African interpretations in their artmaking to an unassuming European-trained audience. Interestingly, both artists concede to the ancestral voice as vital in their intuitive responses to image creation.

The intervention of the ancestral voice in these artists' works recognises a distinct separation in approach between African and European artmaking. The ancestral voice becomes the central catalyst to the artmaking process as the

areas and informal squatter areas. Urban black South African labourers were assigned to 'coloured, Indian or African' townships, and 'surplus' Africans were to 'return' to rural 'homelands' / Bantustans. By the end of the 1960s, about 3 500 000 people had been forcibly moved (Posel 2012: 360).

2 A practice that expresses disapproval and exerts social pressure.

artist responds to specific directives. By implication, the visual interpretation by the artist makes the artist the primary author of the work. That is why the artist's process and revealing of images in the artwork becomes imperative 'to uncover the forms, contexts, meanings, and intentions' (Kreamer 2013: 147) in knowledge generation.

Muelwa Noria Mabasa

Noria Mabasa was born in 1938 in the village of Xigalo (pronounced Shigalo) in Limpopo, which was later assigned to dominant Tsonga-Shangaan-speaking residents by the apartheid government.[3] Venda-speakers, like Mabasa, were forcibly relocated in 1968 to the Tshino village near Vuwani, Thohoyandou (Nolte 2005; Luonde Vhavenda history 2015). A domestic worker until the 1970s, Mabasa's career as an artist began in 1974 after experiencing a recurring dream of an older woman who encouraged her to work in clay. Mabasa began making traditional Venda pots and later ventured into clay vessels shaped into female forms. She made these distinctive figurative clay vessels using a conventional coil technique, fired them in an open pit, and painted them with commercial paint to add finer details. Mabasa's departure from traditional vessel creation and her experimentation with figurative sculptural forms in clay was both in 'subject and surface' (Becker 2006: 294), transitioning her into the realm of a sculptor (a practice reserved for men), a first in Venda history.

The apartheid struggle reached its zenith during the 1980s, and black townships crawled with police officers and army personnel. Figure 1 *White policeman* is a recognisable image of this period. When asked about her sculpture, Mabasa responded, 'They are the protectors of the white people' (Younge 1988: 39) – a clear indication that Mabasa was very aware of the political temperature of that time.

Younge (1988: 39) described this distinctive sculpture, *White policeman,* as 'enigmatic', and an audience accustomed to a European aesthetic would experience it as curious. Mabasa dispels the expectation of 1:7½ heads-to-body ratio in favour of an African aesthetic that divides the body into three parts. Frank Willet corroborates this balanced characteristic: 'the body proportion in a traditional African sculpture, is deliberately divided into the head, body, and legs with the head being disproportionately large' (1971: 161). In keeping with this African aesthetic, there is a combination of abstraction and realism in the work not to represent a particular individual. The surface is smooth, the

3 As part of the apartheid project to forge separate African polities ('Bantustans') along ethnic lines, black African communities were divided into specific dialect-dominant villages. Non-Tsonga-Shangaan speaking residents required a permit to reside in this specific village (Nolte: 2005). This served the divide-and- rule policy under apartheid.

Figure 1: Noria Mabasa, *White policeman*, (n.d.) bisque-fired clay and paint, 540 mm
Photograph: Proud 2006: 295.

figure is symmetrical, and it stands upright in a frontal position that suggests dignity (Mangiri 2014). *White policeman* is an example of Mabasa's negation of the European aesthetic favouring a typical African sculpture-making practice.

Unlike other rural sculptors, Mabasa sets herself apart in her use of materials and artworks that she creates and, in her ability, to transition between African mythology and real-life experiences. Her wood carvings show the im-

Figure 2: Noria Mabasa, *Crocodile eating a goat*, (2006) wood, 210 mm × 1000 mm × 350 mm
Collection: University of Pretoria, South Africa.
Photograph: University of Pretoria Museums.

portance of her Venda cultural heritage and the ancestral voice in dictating content, as seen in *Crocodile eating a goat* (2006). In her wooden sculptures, she harvests the natural shape, knots, scars, and discolouration as features in her work (Jacobs 2006). More importantly, Mabasa transgressed the standard division of labour among the Venda men and women (Nettleton 2000).

Traditional sculpture was a way of preserving history, visually documenting an oral tradition to capture a person's relationship to the world (Mangiri 2014). Like a European reading, one must understand the background of artwork to appreciate the visual representation in the way that 'traditional Africans believe in Nature Spirits which, according to them, inhabit trees, rocks, mountains and hills, forests and bushes, rivers and river courses' (Mangiri 2014: 132). It is within this spiritual pronouncement that one has to understand Mabasa's *Crocodile eating a goat.*

The animals, specifically the crocodile, carved by Mabasa are metaphors in her storytelling and frequently occur with other objects such as drums or people. Drums in her work represent Venda culture, and a crocodile represents the river or watery world: it is a spiritual being. A river also indicates agriculture, farming, and the animals' domesticity, a dominant part of the Venda lifestyle (Nolte 2005; Nettleton 2000). Like *White policeman,* there is attention to detail, such as the shape of the wood and textured coat of the crocodile that creates a rhythmic movement in the crocodile and implied river. The crocodile is not eating the goat captured in its jaw as the work's title proclaims, but offers it as a gift. A goat is valued in Venda culture as it provides milk and meat. More importantly, Vendas sacrifice goats to "mediate" with the spiritual world. Given this, the goat represents an integral role. In understanding the Venda

cultural background, the sculpture is revitalised and becomes a visual resource for indigenous knowledge preservation.

Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi

> My works are not political; they are social. The social is in the community. … We did not know our grandfathers; we were all women. We looked after the children, or they were sent to us … my works are about 'getting back humanity' (Sebidi in interview with Sooful 2019).

Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi was born in 1943 in Marapyane, in the province of Mpumalanga, and schooled until Grade 8. Financial difficulties forced her to seek work as a domestic worker and dressmaker in Johannesburg in the 1960s (Leeb-du Toit 2009). During the 1970s, inspired by her grandmother's teachings about community building and the history of her people, she began her artistic career at the White Studio (Johannesburg), founded by Koenakeefe Mohl (Sosibo 2016).

As an artist, Sebidi works in various mediums: charcoal, pastel, ceramic, printmaking, painting, and sculpture. In Sebidi's opinion, 'My works are a reflection of who I am, where I come from and where I am going. They are a statement about my culture' (*True Love* 1987: 75). Like Mabasa, Sebidi relies on the ancestral voice to inspire her as she works in isolation, locked away from people: 'no one is allowed. The spirit must be there – do not disturb' (Sooful 2019).

Sebidi received the prestigious Standard Bank Young Artist Award in 1989, followed by numerous other awards and scholarships. She became the first black female artist to receive national recognition. The reading of cultural content in her works provides valuable insight into women's experiences in African townships during and after apartheid. Sebidi's works constantly portray women as a central theme 'I have always been concerned about women's fate, the incredible amount of work they have to do and the little rewards. But, I have also always admired the strength and the beauty that they possess. My work is a celebration of all I see in African women' (*True Love* 1987: 75).

Sebidi uses collage as an initial process to fragment and rearrange a multitude of forms drawn within a confined space, then working over them to reinterpret the image on her canvas (Leeb-du Toit 2009). Her artmaking reflects her personal experiences in the township and questions the future of black South Africans placed in these environments.

Sedibi created *Untitled* (2019), whilst on an artist in residence programme at the University of Pretoria, in response to young black students she met at the Tshwane University of Technology. She realised that these students were "lost" as they lived away from their rural homes and township dwellings. Sebidi perceives township and rural living as two separate lifestyles created by apartheid.

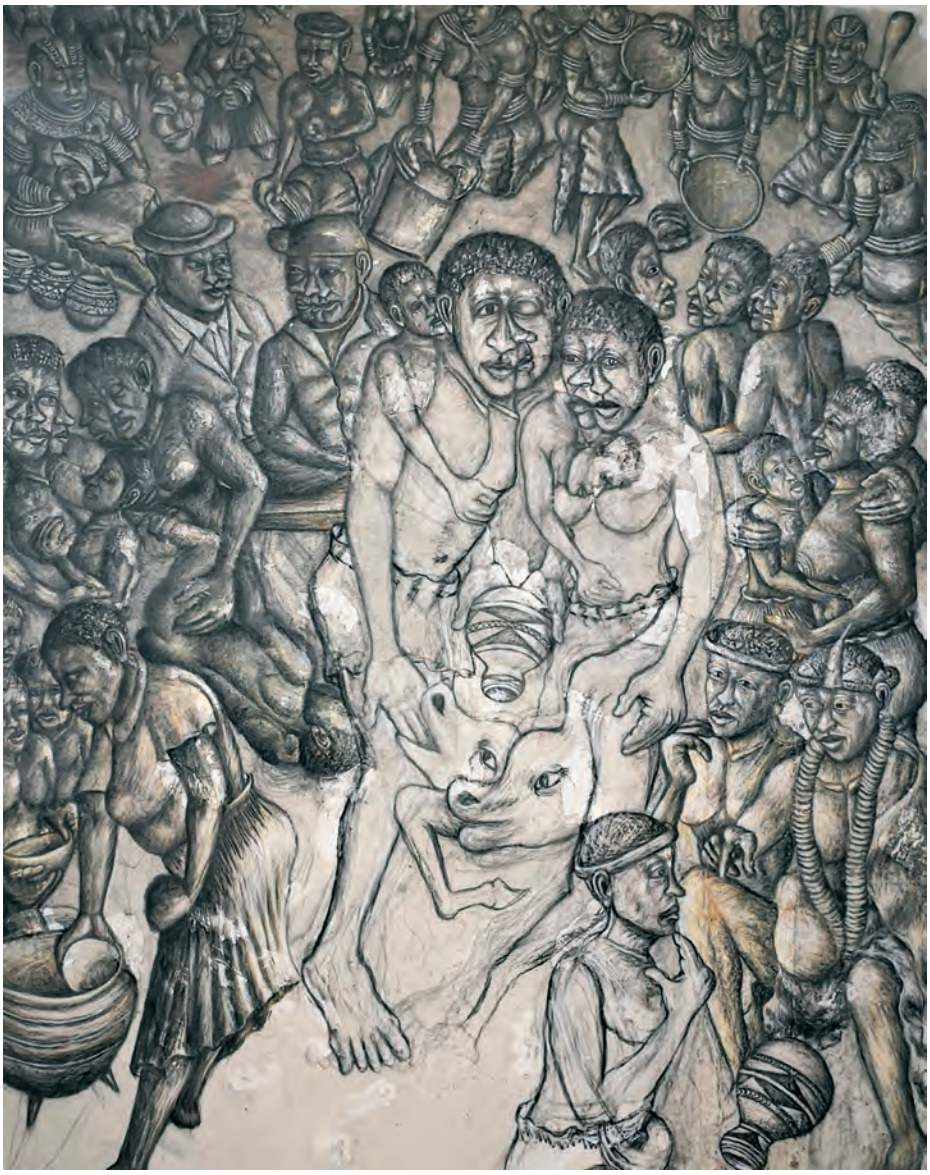

Figure 3: Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, *Untitled,* (2019), Charcoal and pastel on canvas, 2500 mm × 3750 cm
Collection: The artist.
Photograph: University of Pretoria Museums.

She believed that these students, not knowing their parents, experienced anxiety and were not aware of traditional family values. The lack of traditional knowledge taught in the rural communities rendered these urbanised students 'empty' and unable to cope with the pressure exerted by society. The artwork *Untitled* represents the breakdown in traditional family values in homes and the anguish faced by contemporary black families that lived in semi-urban developments.

In this work, Sebidi continues with the central theme of women in her artwork. The disproportionate head to the body, lack of space, and the 'stacking' of figures is a recognisable signature in Sebidi's work. The many chores women perform in rural communities are represented: making clay pots, collecting water, sifting and stamping corn, and feeding children. The work describes the erosion in traditional family values (a burden carried by women) featured in the distressed central couple. Her art speaks of the human horror experienced by black people and the need to embrace the freedom of rural living. At first, the work is unsettling in the employed technique of saturated distortions, forms with multiple faces, images within images, and claustrophobic space. Yet, she captures intense sadness in the couple who dominate the work. This distinctive signature of Sebidi disposes of a European aesthetic employed in two-dimensional artworks.

Sebidi's work seduces the viewer into a rural stage with people dressed in traditional attire, except for two men. One is wearing a formal suit and hat and the other a shirt and baseball cap, a symbol of the erosion (by a colonised lifestyle) of African values that have taken root in the rural community, a commentary by the artist on what she perceives as the dangers associated with urban environments. Sebidi includes in her work specific symbols that remind us of traditional values and modern living. A calabash is an essential and versatile object in African culture. In ritual or domestic practices, it serves as a spoon or storage vessel, or it can be turned into a musical instrument when dried. More importantly, it is a symbol of sharing (community) and a metaphor for knowledge and wisdom and, therefore, occupies a central place in Sebidi's work. The calves indicate the community's relationships with their animals. A cow is an integral part of rural life, similar to the goat in Mabasa's sculpture.

It is evident that both Mabasa and Sebidi as artists occupied a masculine domain, and in their approach to their artmaking prioritised specific content that highlighted their distinctive African styles. One may argue that each visual narrative realised by these artists can be equated to a written text revealing a distinct difference between the continents of Africa and Europe in how we continuously generate, define, and archive knowledge. There is no doubt that both artist's intuitive methods of representation, use of metaphors, and combination of realism and abstraction favour an African aesthetic in their response to artmaking. Unfortunately, white South African artists and art historians negated an African aesthetic during apartheid, which prompted Sabine Marschall (1999)

to propose a re-defined canon of South African art so that lost histories could be constructed in post-apartheid South Africa.

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Visual culture and conflicts of representation in contemporary art in Cameroon

Paul-Henri Souvenir Assako Assako

Abstract

The urban context presents a tremendous artistic diversity in Cameroon. The great variety of representations and forms of expression produced by social practice characterises this diversity. The conditions of creation and creative experience benefit from new environments, new codes of artistic representation. These conditions also favour the construction of a visual culture with essential elements of socio-cultural criticism. From a visual cultural point of view and the experience it calls forth, we observe that the influence of artistic imagery and traditional lifestyles in contemporary art feeds a form of 'conflict of representation'. This conflict is mainly defined in the artists' concern to preserve a solid socio-cultural bond rooted in an endogenous heritage, which offers survival references in a globalised world. Thus, traditional artistic imagery can be said to face a double requirement. It must preserve a symbolic and commemorative mark of identification. But it must also subscribe to and (through creation, criticism and inter- and transcultural dialogue) face up to the reality of a contemporary society subject to reinvention.

Keywords

Cameroon, urban context, representation, conflict, visual culture, artistic experience, transcultural dialogue

Contemporary Cameroonian artists and the problem of representation

The urban context presents a tremendous artistic diversity in Cameroon. The large variety of representations and forms of expression produced by social practice is characteristic of this diversity. An eclecticism of forms and styles intermingle and testify to an artistic landscape of great creative emulation. The conditions of creation and the artistic experience benefit from new environments, new codes of representation. This promotes the construction of a visual culture with essential elements of socio-cultural criticism. In a changing landscape made up of multiple mixtures, the question of representation assumes particular importance. It puts the nature of socio-cultural changes and their

elements of relevance in contemporary society into perspective. We focus on how contemporary Cameroonian artists approach the problem of representation in their work and the aspects of conflict that emerge in their appropriation of the iconography of art and imagery of "traditional" society in their practices.

Among the general characteristics of the visual arts in Cameroon, we note the great interest that artists have in artistic and traditional social imagery in contemporary creation. The importance of this traditional imagery in art is highly significant. Authors like Jean-Paul Notué present it as a recurring feature despite process of transformation we observe in the visual arts throughout the twentieth century, and especially in its second half. The forms resulting from this imagery in Cameroon's contemporary art stem from a strong idea of belonging to an identity somehow assumed by artists. This is the legacy of a village past that, resuscitated in the modern urban landscape, appears in artistic practice as a form of resilience in the face of the strong influence of a modern, Western-inspired environment.

Indeed, traditional iconography in contemporary art is the means through which artists safeguard endogenous socio-cultural landmarks capable of guaranteeing a remarkable presence in a global community. In this context of globalisation and unprecedented intermingling, the idea of representation is fundamental. It translates this will to exist, the importance of which the visual artist, Joseph Francis Sumegne, recalls in the following terms: 'to participate in the collectivity [sic] without disappearing in the number'[1]. It is in this vein of survival in the face of a global culture, that artists adapt their belonging to a form of identity through the language of visual forms.

The devastating memory of the colonial era had, as any other consequence in the second half of the twentieth century, sprung a desire to regenerate and rediscover traditional cultural features. The artists needed to be inspired by the classic iconographic background through an approach of reappropriation of forms and patterns by which they would try to free themselves from Western influence to build singular, identifying styles.

In this perspective of the multiplicity of reinterpreted forms of the traditional iconographic repertoire, artistic practice in Cameroon gathers and preserves signs of identification contrary to the idea of a generalised radical reform, with which we have often associated the transformation of twentieth-century art labelled as contemporary art. The fact that the artistic landscape presents stylistic expression at several speeds reflects a lot more of the conflicts of representation that question the idea of a kind of alienation of the creative consciousness. Ruth Colette Afane Belinga (2009) wrote the following concerning Cameroonian painting:

1 Interview with the artist for a video we made for the exhibition 'Collective memory, national memory' organised at the LABA in Douala, November 2020. The video can be watched on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3bSIKqKfiQ. The specific phrase quoted: 4:28/6:25

> It is a real burial of the Cameroonian identity. The style is almost entirely Western, with the representation of religious scenes (under the model prescribed by the colonizers who supervised the artistic activities of the time), the representation of the portraits of the colonizers (the portrait of General De Gaulle for example by the painter Djeng Rigobert) and other scenes of colonization as well as landscapes corresponding to their taste, etc. The compositions are of naturalistic types where the artist seeks to get as close as possible to reality. The characters are admirably observed and described in great detail. A study of texture presents a smooth and somewhat later pointillist painting.

The trajectory taken by the artists comprises an attempt to reconstruct a universe of visual memory without which art in Cameroon would be doomed to a kind of cultural drying up with endogenous references. Paul Gebauer (1979) already noticed this commitment among artists to reconnect with ancient forms in the micro-contexts of traditional chiefdoms in Northwest Cameroon. The author pointed out that a new generation of artisans was participating in the revival of local sculptures, particularly figures and poles, and succeeded in reconstructing the appearance that these chiefdoms had presented several decades before. The forms inspired by the traditional iconographic heritage and their varied style are, first of all, patterns of pre-twentieth-century memory that art tends to revive. It is only in a second moment that this reference to the past justifies the felt need underlined by SL Kasfir (2000: 166) that there is a need for several African countries to reshape their cultural identities after independence.

Symbolic and realistic representations of the traditional: Gaspar Gomán and Martin Abossolo

In a conglomerate of figurative, realistic, and even abstract forms of a rich variety, two levels of resilient representations shine through in the visual arts of artists in Cameroon: symbolic representation and realistic representation. The first is expressed through symbolic forms and subjects in a double dimension: that which involves the sometimes-reinterpreted copy of the symbolic forms and motifs of the iconographic heritage of ancient art, and that which illustrates the lifestyles that specifically characterise a village context – in what may be typifying of it.

In the case of the reappropriation of symbolic patterns and forms, for example, artists have not been able to detach themselves from the mask's shape. In contemporary art, the mask inspires structural and compositional solutions that characterise a style. The mask's shape is generally remarkable and geometrically expressive, which helps define an aesthetic form for artists. The work of Gaspar Gomán (1928–2016), for example, allows us to observe how the motif of the mask is reinterpreted (Figure 1).

Figure 1a: Gaspar Gomán, *Mask*, 1999. Oil on paper 500 mm × 315 mm. Private collection.

Figure 1b: Gaspar Gomán, *Mask*, 1999. Oil on canvas 480 mm × 380 mm. Private collection.

Gomán was one of the first Cameroonian artists to have studied art in Europe at the Barcelona School of Fine Arts from 1954 to 1960, during the Franco era, when the mere mention of Picasso's name prompted dismissal. However, returning through Equatorial Guinea in 1960, Gaspar arrogated a pictorial expression of great freedom. It relativises codes learned at the School of Fine Arts, preserves certain principles of technical language specific to the academy, and draws its inspiration from African art and lifestyles to shape a style. His painting is a synthesis of Western painting from the first half of the twentieth century (Gauguin, Matisse, and Picasso) and ethnographic iconography. The works on masks and those grouped under 'ethnographic gaze', assume an extraordinary stylistic personality. Moreover, the artist associates with the nature of the subjects, represented sufficiently by explicit themes that contribute towards not shying away from the endogenous references which inspire him – and, probably, which he introspects: the masks, the hunters (Figure 2), the princesses (Figure 3), the musicians of the chiefs (Figure 4), and exodus.

In terms of aspects specific to traditional lifestyles, the *Dancer of Ozila* (Figure 5) by artist Martin Abossolo (1935-) translates, on both a formal and philosophical level, the commemorative relationship that artists maintain with the pre-colonial living environment. Beyond the delicacy of the pictorial gesture which shows remarkable craftsmanship and gives the work a proud modern allure, Martin Abossolo extends the memory of the Fang initiation dance.

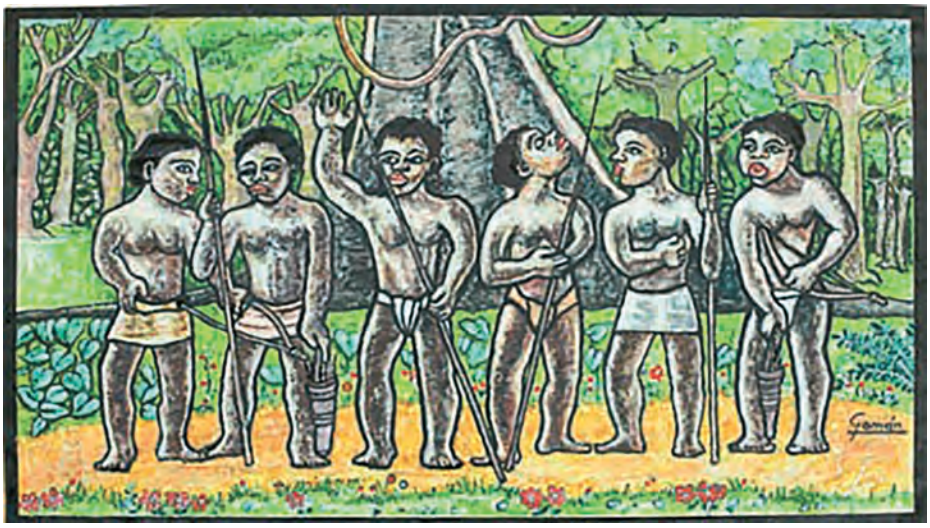

Figure 2: Gaspar Gomán, *The hunters*, 1991. Oil on paper 500 mm × 835mm. Private collection.

Figure 3: Gaspar Gomán, *The princesses*, 2000. Oil on paper 420 mm × 320 mm. Private collection.

Figure 4: Gaspar Gomán, *The musicians*, 1988. Oil on paper 750 mm × 500 mm. Private collection.

Figure 5: Martin Abossolo, *Dancer of Ozila*, 2003. Acrylic on paper 420 X 299 mm. Private collection.

He harmoniously combines its beauty and mystery through a technical feat that has drawn the fleeting figure of a serene young dancer immersed in a mysterious and vibrant universe. The artist succeeds in turning performance into a mystic treatment of the form. Typical elements of the Ozila dance outfit are a tuft of feathers on the head, a skirt of raffia fibres, and animal skins attached to the belt and on the chest. The atmosphere of fear surrounding this dance probably explains the public's hesitation, as J Binet (1972) points out. The author reports that the themes associated with the dance are medicine, fear, and fatigue, as a woman in a trance usually performs it. These everyday-life themes are generally part of a relatively subjective process in which artists attempt to set essential benchmarks by starting from the exploration of traditional cultural models.

Realistic representation beyond a tribal perception of art: Hervé Youmbi and Joseph Francis Sumegne

The second representation, which we have called realistic, brings together the illustration of subjects that mark the phenomena of the modern transformation in society. In their works, the artists go beyond a relatively tribal perception of art and adopt the codes of representation of a contextualised modernity. This realism in this art is also marked by the new materials, the modalities of their use in the production of works, the themes, the mediums of artistic interventions captured in the specificity of the characters to the context, and

Figure 6: Hervé Youmbi, 2009–2011, *La pirogue céleste*, installation, base of the canoe: length 5 m, height 80 cm, total height 3.2 m (http://doualart.org/portfolio/la-pirogue-celeste/).

Cameroonian history. The 'social processes', understood as these artistic interventions, built over time on the relationships and discussions woven between artists and members of society, define this specificity. The example of Hervé Youmbi's[2] artistic project illustrates the principles of a renewal of the artistic language that knows how to update the heritage of a tradition and give it a connotative charge linked to the dynamics of contemporary society:

> Hervé Youmbi's project, a monumental sculpture of a boat equipped with a carved figurehead [tangué] [Figure 6], had to be installed in the public space. By choosing such a culturally connoted object, he echoed how this neighbourhood, sometimes considered a Sawa, as a "place" village, [from the Sawa coastal peoples – ed.]. Nevertheless, it was by no means an attempt to reify the identity of the neighbourhood as a Sawa "place". On the contrary, the boat was not to be reduced to its Sawa connotations: the Tangué had to express universal urban realities (Burzynski 2017: 62).

On the other hand, these artists navigate and shape their representation mainly through technical vocabulary and the Western definition of art. For instance, Joseph Francis Sumegne's (1951-) creative work is stylistically unique, thanks to his great grandmother. She taught him the skills of weaving, woodcarving, basket making, and upholstering. However, the works he produces must reveal

2 Recipient of the Cultures France scholarship 'Visa pour la création 2009' and the 'Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship 2012'.

Figure 7: Joseph Francis Sumegne, *Nouvelle tradition de l'Equirfa*,1992, mixed media (plastic, wood, rubber and copper), 770 mm × 600 mm / ep: 16 cm, JF Sumegne collection.

the identity of their author (who did it?). They are subject to the test of sensitive appreciation (is it beautiful?). Finally, they must arouse a market/acquisition interest (how much does it cost?) without failing to pass the admission test in the category of 'contemporary art' (marked by the strength and durability of the plastic to withstand artistic manipulation). In this specific case, the artist reflects contemporaneity in his art in assembling industrial waste that gives substance to his works and in the mediums of art display (Figure 7): public spaces/installations and exhibition halls. The themes of his works also define contemporaneity, which is the poetry of the artist's time: the new freedom; the notable ones; the pharaohs, *Equirfra*, and the orphan's bread.

Classical/traditional artistic imagery in contemporary Cameroonian artists' work presents a critical analysis of Cameroon's art history and its aesthetic appreciation by Western museums. One of these aspects is deconstructing the clichés that appreciate art in Cameroon and Africa from the aesthetic dialogue between the local and the global. Cameroonian artist Hervé Youmbi, in one of his artistic projects, 'visage de masques', makes it the subject of a remarkable creation project. He sets out to reverse the appreciative route that has led from the mask as a ritual object to the work of art exhibited in Western museums. The artworks in Youmbi's project comprises masks sculpted in varied forms inspired by an association between the traditional masks of the chiefdoms of West Cameroon and (more or less) popular masks of Western culture. This approach highlights the reciprocal influence between the West and Africa. It immerses the overall contemporary aesthetics at the

Figure 8a: Hervé Youmbi: Scream mask (China – USA). Archive of the artist Hervé Youmbi, 9 July 2015.

Figure 8b: Masque éléphant classique (detail) and hybrid elephant mask of Hervé Youmbi (detail), 2011. Archive of the artist Hervé Youmbi, 9 July 2015.

heart of the cosmogony of the chiefdoms of West Cameroon and their practices (Figure 8). We can see in this approach a desire to deconstruct the standing order of aesthetic appreciation between artistic expressions, especially from one period to another and from one context to another. According to the artist:

> 'visage de masques' project would not like to take the usual route followed by these famous [traditional African] masks. Unlike them, the masks produced as part of this project will initially be the subject of a travelling exhibition before leading a life of ritual or cult objects. They are meant to be hybrid masks from an increasingly globalised world, in the service of an African culture [rather] than benefit the secular.

Conclusion

The issues of representations in art are further analysed on the subjects of the works and their styles. In the artistic work of Cameroonian artists, formal references linked to the past are very characteristic. From the point of view of visual culture and the experience it brings to mind, we observe that the influence of artistic imagery and traditional lifestyles in contemporary art feeds a form of 'conflict of representation'. This conflict is mainly defined in the artists' concern to preserve a solid socio-cultural bond rooted in an endogenous heritage that offers references to survival in a globalised world. Thus, traditional artistic imagery can be said to face a double requirement: preserving a symbolic and commemorative mark of identification, and also subscribing to and (through creation, criticism and inter- and transcultural dialogue) facing up to the reality of a contemporary society subject to reinvention.

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Africanisation of the European – vulnerability and de-colonisation

Angelika Boeck

Abstract

Drawing on my art practice-based research, I present two works on the subject of portraiture that have one thing in common: the "Africanisation" of the European sitter. I describe two experiments, one artistically and the other scientifically motivated, which were created within 28 years in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the first official portrait of a European monarch made by an African artist (Mohamud 2019). My project, StillePost (1999), corresponds with an experiment conducted by the German anthropologist Hans Himmelheber (1908–2003). Instead of adopting the historical perspective, with white Europeans depicting African subjects, this gaze is reversed in both works. Here, the Europeans are either the representational subject of African artists (Himmelheber), or both subject and object of representation (Boeck) contributing to the endeavour of reverse anthropology. The dominant direction of the gaze is similarly challenged in an earlier work, the portrait of Queen Elizabeth II commissioned by the colonial government from the Nigerian artist Odinigwe Benedict Chukwukadibia Enwonwu (1917–1994) to commemorate the monarch's visit in 1956 to Nigeria, which was then preparing for independence in 1960. This event coincides with the beginning of decolonisation theories, as Bea Gassmann de Sousa (2018) notes. Although created with different intentions and under other conditions, both works question the traditional positions of artists/researchers/interpreters concerning intercultural confrontation, inspiring decolonising endeavours. By highlighting the commonalities between these works in my subsequent discussion, I show differently evidenced and viable possibilities from the artist's perspective. I argue that our interpretation always depends on the time and perspective from which we view work.

Keywords

Portraiture, Africanisastion, StillePost (1999), Hans Himmelheber (1908–2003), Odinigwe Benedict Chukwukadibia Enwonwu (1917–1994), intercultural confrontation, vulnerability, de-colonisation, Western gaze, reverse anthropology

Angelika Boeck: *StillePost*

In 1999, I initiated a contributive art practice-based research project titled *StillePost*, a project which contributes to the tradition of reverse anthropology[1]. I use the term "contributive" to indicate that the contribution of project participants is crucial to this work. Collaborative projects are conceived and realised by several artists or by artists and non-artists. In contrast, participatory projects react to a specific context or situation, are often socially engaged, and usually involve non-artists. In *StillePost*[2] I was solely responsible for initiating and developing the artistic concept and bringing together the material resulting from interaction with project participants into an artwork. The same applies to all the other projects I have used my *StillePos*t-based method, *Portrait as dialogue*, which I summarise under the same name. It would go beyond the scope of this contribution to go into detail about these projects. I have described some of them as part of my thesis, *Decolonising the Western gaze: The portrait as a multi-sensory cultural practice* (2019a). However, it is essential to note that, contrary to my later *Portrait as dialogue* projects, which are concerned with cultural techniques and resulting forms of aesthetic representation that are not limited to people's perception through the sense of sight, my first cross-cultural experiment focuses on vision. As previously mentioned (Boeck 2013; 2019a), the starting point and research hypothesis of *StillePost* was that our facial features determine the way we perceive and represent others, as Oscar Wilde asserts in his work *The portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890):

> Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion.

Since I based my concept on an ongoing copying process, I approached African colleagues from a living woodcarving tradition. On the one hand, I was fascinated by the fundamentally different understanding of "copy" in the contexts of European and African art: copy as forgery and copy to preserve meaning.[3] On the other hand, I had chosen the bust format, one of the basic European

1 The tradition of reverse or inverse anthropology concerns 'the reversal of perspective that makes the observer and ethnographer the object of observation of the ethnographed' (Behrend quoted in Profalla, 2021). According to Heike Behrend, an anthropologist working in this tradition, it 'is already found in Herder, it is also found to a limited extent in Franz Boas; and it is taken up in different ways by Julius Lips and Hans Himmelheber up to Michael Harbsmeier and Fritz Kramer', as well as 'in France in Montesquieu, Michel Leiris and Jean Rouch' (ibid.).

2 *StillePost* (Chinese whispers in English) is a game in which one person whispers a word or message to another, and this is passed on through a number of people until the last player announces a result, which is usually amusingly different from what the first player had said.

3 To a Western audience, "copy" was often a synonym for "forgery", since the modern perception of an artwork as a genuine product created by an inspired individual (a concept outdated by conceptual art) developed in European art from the Enlightenment onwards. In traditional African art, however, "copying" should not be understood as a form of "forgery",

forms of sculptural representation, which hardly occurs in traditional African art.

In Boundiali, I commissioned the sculptor Dramane Kolo-Zié Coulibaly to make a portrait bust of me. Following the principle of "Chinese whispers", a game often used as a metaphor for cumulative errors, I asked four other sculptors – one after the other and in different places – to copy the life-size wooden bust, carved in the Senoufo tradition.

Dramane's bust served as a model for the second sculpture by Amadou Coulibaly, also a Senoufo artist from Mandine. His copy, in turn, served as a model for the third and fourth sculptures made by Dosso N'Gouamué in Biankouma and Gboungué Louna Pascal in Kabakouma, both committed to the Yoruba tradition. Much earlier than I had expected, the series was completed – with the final bust created in Abidjan by Bidjie Goure, a Gouro artist.

The artwork *StillePost* juxtaposes my portrait photographs of the sculptors and their busts of me. In this way, both the metamorphosis of my portrait and the reflection of the African sculptors in them can be traced. In my opinion, the installation confirms Wilde's claim since the artists, presumably unconsciously, incorporated their facial features into their copies.

Anthropologist and philosopher Thiemo Breyer recently wrote, in his essay *Multimodale Repräsentation und Identität* (Multimodal representation and identity) (2020), that *StillePost* demonstrates impressively how notions of exact reproduction vary. The mimetic standard for the portrait established in the European tradition is only one of many culturally and historically determined ways of understanding art. Before I come to the second experiment, (see the section on Hans Himmelheber's Mask portraits below), here are a few words on the different functions and ways of understanding individual representation in European and African art.

In pre-modern times, mimesis, based on the similarity of facial features, determined European conventions of portraiture. This tradition goes back to individual Roman representations of the deceased. In these representations, likeness, recognition of persons, and association with known lineages were of enormous importance (Walker and Bierbrier 1997), as is apparent in emperors' visually legitimising their authority through fictionalised resemblance to their predeces-

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as Ben-Amos argues (1980). It was customary in a sub-Saharan context that sculptors were asked to replace an old sculpture, the new artefact taking charge of the old object's ritual significance. Among the Dan of Côte d'Ivoire, however, the cultural anthropologist Vandenhoute noticed in 1938/39 that existing masks that inspire new ones may only be observed by the sculptor during their performance. He found no evidence of models of masks being used (Vangheluwe 2001), as is the case in the production of tradition-inspired African artefacts for the international tourist market. The reuse of existing artistic elements (for example, in the form of a copy of existing works) to create a new work, which Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) defines as a recent movement in contemporary art, thus is nothing new when viewed in a traditional African context.

Figure 1: A Boeck, *StillePost* (1999). Busts (from right to left) by Dramane Kolo-Zié Coulibaly (Senoufo), Amadou Coulibaly (Senoufo), Dosso N'Gouamué (Yoruba), Gboungué Louna Pascal (Yoruba) and Bidije Goure (Guoro). Photo: Wilfried Petzi.

Figure 2: *StillePost* (1999). Photo portraits (from left to right) of Dramane Kolo-Zié Coulibaly, Amadou Coulibaly, Dosso N'Gouamué, Gboungué Louna Pascal and Bidije Goure. Photo: Wilfried Petzi.

sors. Tiberius (r. 14–37 AD), for example, took the portrait of Augustus (r. 27 BC-14 AD) as the model for his public portrait, and Caligula (r. 37–41 AD) had the facial features of his portrait adapted to those of Tiberius to underpin his position as successor (Trentinella 2003). The significance of resemblance can be seen particularly well in the context of the funeral service of King Edward II of England in 1327, when an effigy, a doll-like double made of wood and/or wax, dressed in the clothes of the deceased, was used for the first time. The life-sized puppet, representing the three bodies of the king – natural, political, and sacred (Marek 2009) – lay on the coffin during the funeral and was then placed next to or on the grave. The effigy symbolically represented royal power until the new king was crowned (Giesey 1960). Similarly, criminals sentenced to death in absentia could be officially executed symbolically 'in effigia' (London Encyclopaedia 1829).

Since its invention, the photographic technique, the daguerreotype (sometimes called the mirror with memory), set visual art free from representational responsibility. The portrait was no longer about the representation of mere physical likeness. Contemporary artists have expanded the genre in distinctive ways: a portrait may consist of documentation of a woman's clothes, a listing of names and dates relating to private, political, social, and cultural events that have influenced the sitter, or a series of psychological assessments.[4]

Such portraits have something in common with representative African artworks. In African art, the literal naturalism of many Euro-American portraits is only one option among many, and other options are used much more frequently (Wendl 2004). Using traditional Benin art as an example, Sweet Ufumwen Ebeigbe (2013) argues that African artists value the representation of an idealised beauty more than the representation of physiognomic resemblance. Moreover, in line with cultural ideas, social rather than personal identity is often emphasised. The generalised subject is individually defined through other identifying elements such as the use of emblems, insignia, and symbols, or names, costumes, poses, hairstyles, or cultural traits, and emphasis on the environment. Another way is to evoke social exchanges between individually identified ancestors (masquerades) and their living companions (the titled elders) (Borgatti 1990). A generalised anthropomorphic sculpture on a family altar may evoke the sitter's profession, social position, achievements, prestige, and success (Ebeigbe 2013). According to Ebeigbe, the goal of depicting and remembering people is as crucial an impetus for the emergence of portraiture in Africa as it has been worldwide.

4 For example, Cuban artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1956–1996) symbolically depicted his late partner Ross Laycock with a 175-pound (Ross's ideal body weight) pile of candy in his work *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991). German artist Hans-Peter Feldmann inventoried all the dresses of a woman in his work *Alle Kleider einer Frau* (1974). French artist Sophie Calle asked her mother to hire a detective to secretly report on her daily activities in order, as she remarked, to 'provide photographic evidence of my existence' (Calle 2003).

Hans Himmelheber: Mask portraits – a self-experiment

In the early 1970s, Hans Himmelheber (1908–2003), an expert on African art, tried to prove, through an experiment, that portraiture is a part of African art. His view contradicted the opinion of the majority of African art experts at the time, as can be seen by claims such as those made by Douglas Fraser in his work *Die Kunst der Naturvölker (The art of primitive peoples*) (1962):

> However, some researchers continue to insist that sculptors of primitive tribes could create naturalistic portraits if they only wanted to. One could just as well insist that elephants can fly and that the only reason they don't is because they don't want to (Fraser, as quoted in Himmelheber 1972: 305).

For his self-experiment, Himmelheber commissioned four artists from various carving traditions (Senoufo, Baule and Dan) in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire; each was to carve a mask of Himmelheber, a sculptural format he chose for two reasons: The stylised form of the mask made the portrait less likely to be apparent, while on the other hand, the artists were able to concentrate on the most critical bearer of likeness (seen from a European perspective), the face (Himmelheber 1972; 2004). The result was four very different masks in which the African viewers, in contrast to the European viewers, had no difficulty recognising the anthropologist.

Himmelheber described his experiment in his essay, Das *Porträt in der Negerkunst – Bericht über eine Versuchsreihe* (The Portrait in Negro Art – Report on a Series of Experiments) (Himmelheber 1972). I only got to know about it after *StillePost* was made, and it was first publicly displayed at the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde (since 2014 Museum Fünf Kontinente) in Munich

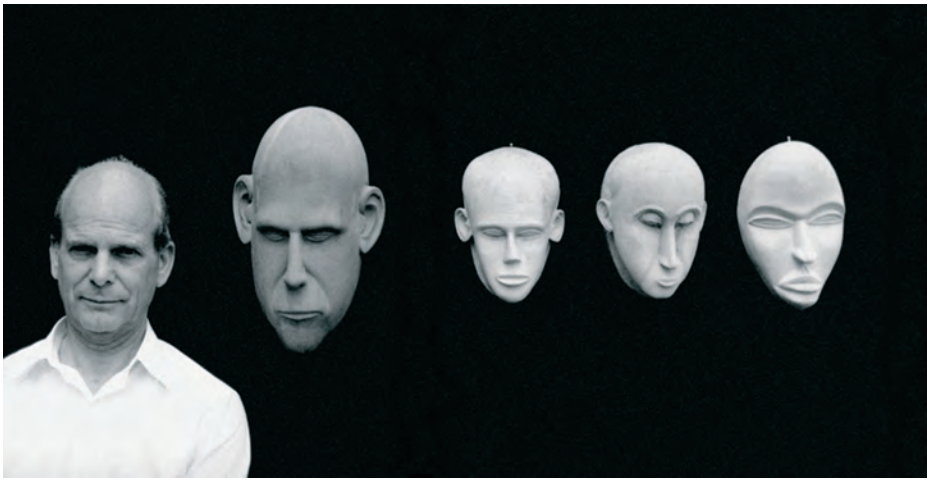

Figure 3: Hans Himmelheber next to the four masks depicting him, made by (from left to right) Dje Abou Coulibaly (Senoufo), Ase Kouakou (Baule-Atutu), Tano Ndri (Baule Sa), and Jean Don Gba (Dan). Photo: Eberhard Fischer.

in 2004 in combination with *StillePost*, after being initially shown in a joint exhibition at Iwalewahaus in Bayreuth (2004).

Odinigwe Benedict Chukwukadibia Enwonwu: Portrait of Queen Elizabeth II

In 1956, the Onitsha-Igbo Nigerian artist Odinigwe Benedict Chukwukadibia Enwonwu (1917–1994), often called Ben Enwonwu, was commissioned to create the official portrait of Queen Elizabeth II[5]. It included a bust and a seated full-body sculpture (referencing both European and African forms of portraiture), for which she sat at Buckingham Palace and the Maida Vale Studio of Sir William Reid-Dick. At this point in his career, Enwonwu had attained international repute while Nigeria was still a colony of the British Empire.[6] Awarded an MBE (Member of the British Empire) for his contribution to the arts, he was, as the colonial government's Art Supervisor, the 'nation's official artist and ambassador' (Nzegwu 1998: 48). The commission signified 'a shift in power relations between the British Empire and its Nigerian colony' (Ogbechie 2008: 132). The idea for the commission came from Enwonwu, who saw it as 'a means of attaining historical recognition as a modern artist' (Ogbechie 2008: 132) and as a 'rite of liberation' (Nzegwu 1998: 53). The artist suggested the idea to Alan Lennox-Boyd, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, as a way 'to commemorate her [Majesty's] visit to Nigeria in January and February 1956' (Ogbechie 2008: 132). Enwonwu's clay model was cast in bronze by Giulio Galicie from a plaster cast made by Mark Mancini (Nzegwu 1998). A copy was made in painted epoxy, and a bronze bust was cast for the Queen's private collection (Ogbechie 2008). The artworks were shown at the annual Royal Society of British Artists' exhibition and the Tate Gallery in 1957 before being shipped to the House of Representatives in Lagos. As part of the 1960 Nigerian independence preparations, they installed the seated full-figure in the

5 An image of the sculpture can be viewed on the website of The Ben Enwonwu Foundation (BEF) in the section 'Works in Public'. https://benenwonwufoundation.org/ben-enwonwus-works-in-public/

6 Ben Enwonwu (1917–1994) began his studies at Umuahia, Port Harcourt and Government College, Ibadan under Kenneth C Murray (1903–1972), continuing at the Slade School of Art and obtaining a Master of Arts degree in Social Anthropology at University College, London. Among other important honours (the Enwonwu crater on the planet Mercury is named after him), he was elected Fellow of the Royal Anthropology Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (FRAI) and appointed cultural advisor to the Federal Government of Nigeria (Ben Enwonwu Foundation 2020). As well as working as an international artist he was a visiting Professor in African Studies at Howard University, Washington DC and Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Figure 4: 1974 – Ben Enwonwu at work on his figure of the Queen, in Sir William Reid Dick's studio. The statue is one-hand-a-half times life size. © Keystone Pictures USA/ZUMAPRESS.com/Alamy Live News

courtyard and the bust in the House. The statue now stands at the entrance to the Parliament Buildings in Lagos.

Enwonwu received high praise and fierce attacks for his portrait of the monarch. This was because the artist described the Queen as a 'shy yet charming woman' and infused her features 'with the serene expression of his work *Head of Yoruba Girl* (1950)' (Ogbechie 2008: 133).

The media accused him of 'imposing African features on the queen and thus producing a sculpture that undermined the dignity of British royalty' (Ogbechie 2008: 138).[7] The Queen was unimpressed by this criticism and commissioned the artist to create a portrait of Prince Charles. Subsequently, the Royal Society of British Artists awarded Enwonwu the Bennet Prize. The following year the Royal Institute of Art, Commerce and Agriculture presented him with a Commonwealth certificate for his contribution to the arts. He became a senior member of the Royal Society of British Artists.

However, art historian and philosopher Nkiru Nzegwu argues in her work *The Africanised Queen: Metonymic site of transformation* (1998) that Enwonwu was pursuing anti-colonial objectives of cultural freedom through visual representation. She wrote:

> In modelling the features of the young Queen, Enwonwu had taken liberties with the royal lips. Widening them, he gave them a fuller, sensuous, more becoming pout. In so doing, he boldly inscribed an African aesthetic ideal of womanhood on the Queen's visage, the fountainhead of British imperial rule … what many then, and now, have failed to grasp in responding to this portrait of the Queen is the subversive metaphysical message which Enwonwu expressed … this was merely a physical protest against aesthetic imperialism (Nzegwu 1998: 52).

Serving and subverting the Western gaze

Apart from the apparent commonality of the Africanisation of European sitters, the reversal of the dominant axis of representation and the reference to a larger historical and/or political context interests me.[8] Critically following historical anthropometric studies, that is, systematic cross-cultural measurement, photographic mapping, or moulding of human bodies, in *StillePost* I fixed the external appearance of the project participants through photographic portraits; they presented their observations of me in the form of a bust and its copies, both adopting a vulnerable research position. By combining the material resulting from the intersubjective encounters – their sculptures and my photographs – in my contributive artwork, I simultaneously subverted and reinforced the Western gaze. On the other hand, the presentation and mediation of my work in contested sites

7 'Africanisation of the Queen', 'the Queen in African eyes', 'Africanised Queen' were reactions to Enwonwu's portrait of the Queen in the West and were expressed in the *Daily Telegraph* (London) and the *Otago Daily Times* (New Zealand) (Akpang 2016: 199).

8 The topicality of the issue discussed here is well demonstrated by the "colourblind casting" practice for the Netflix series *Bridgerton* (2020). In contrast to Hans Burgkmair's painting *Exotic tribe* (1508), which depicts "blackened whites", i.e. Africans modelled after whites (Mudimbe 1988), in *Bridgerton* non-white actors embody English aristocrats in the early nineteenth century (Hildebrand 2021).

of representation – especially the anthropological museum – make an essential contribution to the mental decolonisation called for by theorists and curators such as Kebede (2004) and Hansen and Nielsen (2011). *StillePost* and subsequent *Portrait as dialogue* projects show 'a white, European female, not typically represented in European anthropological collections. Moreover, one not viewed from a non-Western perspective' (Boeck 2019a: 115), thereby 'mediating to a Western audience what it feels like to be evaluated and represented according to different cultural modalities and criteria' (Boeck 2019b: 270).

Himmelheber was questioning canonisation and exploring the interdependence of seeing and images, of worlds of seeing and images by employing a vulnerable position to challenge the dominance of the Western gaze. According to Wendl (2004), Himmelheber, with his reflection on portraits, anticipated a series of insights that Jean Borgatti later systematically elaborated in her treatises *African portraits* (1990).

In Enwonwu's portrait, the Queen uses her vulnerability to mark a gesture of equality between the two nations she and Enwonwo represent in an action that emphasises the power of her position. The artist, however, succeeded remarkably in supporting this gesture of reconciliation while subtly undermining it on a highly charged political terrain. Through 'the reverse-imposition of modern Africanised art language on Western subjects' (Akpang 2016: 200), Enwonwu negotiated his unique position as an artist 'in relation to the Western claim that the African culture was inferior' (Gassmann de Sousa 2018). He committed himself, by allowing for Western influences, to the African understanding of art – just as modern European artists did in reverse as a matter of course.[9] This is expressed in his writing (1956):

> The epochs of high artistic achievements of any country have been those of comparative political stability, and of great national pride. It is in such a period in the life of a country that art assumes its role of great national importance. Then the artist is able to devote his energy freely, to the creation of national art, to the glory of his country. The political function of art can therefore be determined by the subject matter of art … every true artist is bound to express the political aspirations of his time. And for expressions to be true, they must be an embodiment of the struggle of self-preservation and expression … (Enwonwu 1956: 29, quoted in Akpang 2016: 202).

In the eyes of Enwonwu, the English word "art" lacked a precise conceptual focus as it was applied to a whole range of unrelated and inartistic activities. In Igbo cosmology, on the other hand, Nka (the Igbo word for art, creativity, and creative expression), assigns a "practical purpose" to art, namely to 'chan-

9 Malefakis (2009) explains that the African sculptures and masks that served the painters of the early twentieth century as sources of inspiration, catalysts or templates became the symbol and index of "real" African art, which, so he argues, must therefore be understood, to a great degree, as a European projection.

nel its spiritual force into an aesthetically satisfying physical form' (Akpang 2016: 181). In this concept, 'art, as a visual symbolisation and localisation of the spiritual world, is strongly connected to and channels it for the benefit of society' (ibid.). Therefore, as Nzegwu (1998) argues, from the artist's point of view, the portrait of Queen Elizabeth II should not be understood as a mere physical commentary. In her eyes, the work carries a subversive, metaphysical message. However, this was deliberately not revealed by Enwonwu: a 'first stage in the rite of transubstantiation that alters the imperial objective by transforming the face/spirit of the British Empire' (Nzegwu 1998: 52). If one argues that the Queen's portrait has a performative role and a symbiotic relationship with ritual, it should, in my opinion, be associated with the artist's portrait of Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904–1996)[10]. He was the first Nigerian president and one of the most influential figures in West Africa during the transitional period from colonialism to independence. Commissioned by Azikime, the statue was created in 1962 and installed in the Azikime Circle in Onitsha, Enwonwu's birthplace.

With this contribution, I have tried to point out that the interpretation of a work that seems evident in retrospect does not always emerge clearly. In my practice, it is sometimes only later, when I look at a work retrospectively, that I recognise its references and contexts of meaning. For example, it was not until I was writing my thesis (2019a), twenty years after completing *StillePost* (1999), that I realised that my research method, *Portrait as Dialogue*, both reinforces and subverts the Western gaze, as does Himmelheber in his experiment; thus validating Patti Lather's argument that practices that attempt to give voice to the voiceless are often 'entangled in layers of returns and reversals and cannot be considered as innocent counter-practice' (Lather 2015: 7).

The historical shifts and divergent evaluations I address here are particularly evident in Himmelheber's choice of title for an essay about his experiment, *Das Porträt in der Negerkunst – Bericht über eine Versuchsreihe* (The Portrait in Negro Art – Report on a Series of Experiments) (1972), which seems inappropriate from today's perspective and was irritating even at the time of publication; not, however, because of the use of the term "Negro", but because it implied that Africans made "art".[11] And, although I am more than happy to follow Nzegwu's reasoning, it is also conceivable that in 1956, when Enwonwu put his idea of portraying Queen Elizabeth II into practice, his effort to equate the significance of the modernist movement in African art (and thus his achievements) with European art, was more important than the conceptual connection to a liberating

10 An image of the sculpture can be viewed on the website of The Ben Enwonwu Foundation (BEF) in the section 'Works in Public'. https://benenwonwufoundation.org/ben-enwonwus-works-in-public/

11 Clara Himmelheber drew attention to this fact at the Africa Conference 'Hans and Ulrike Himmelheber' at the Munich State Museum of Ethnology (30 May – 1 June 2008).

ritual that a postcolonial perspective recognises more easily that I have expanded. Following Ebeigbe's elaborations on the portrait in African art (2013), one could even argue that he sought to emphasise the beauty of the Queen for a predominantly African audience. Artistic action is not always consciously thought through in every aspect but is often highly intuitive, which is, in my opinion, one of its strengths. Being 'definitely provisional' (Boeck 2005: 185), the consequent relative vagueness fosters alternative and changing approaches. Just as different viewers (including the artist) come to varying interpretations of a work, the same viewer can receive new impressions on repeated viewing – our memory recomposes itself through our experiences, allowing for further evaluations. For me, it is becoming more and more important to look not only at the results, but also at the way they were achieved and to pay attention to alternative readings and one's own subsequent personal, culturally and historically conditioned, changes. For me, it is precisely art's ability to oscillate between layers of meaning that is the special contribution it can make as a research practice and to gaining knowledge. I firmly believe that this process can be especially fruitful for such a complex topic as intercultural confrontation.

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Reading South African ceramics as narratives of entanglement and constructed alterity

Ronnie Watt

Abstract

A sense of "African-eity" has progressively emerged in South African ceramic art. On the part of some ceramists, this has regrettably been to satisfy the West's appeal for the "exotic". Others, however, are recognised for their innovative blending of Western and African ceramic traditions, techniques, and materials. The works of the latter group invite the contextual reading of the South African and African ethos as it relates to place, tradition, culture, history, circumstance, relationship, and identity. From the production of ceramic works that were either Western or traditionally African, the transition towards works that liberally borrow from one another to present re-visioned identities, echoes the African Modernism that arose in postcolonial countries to challenge Western binaries regarding art, craft, and identity. White ceramists' earlier expressions of hybridity speak of a tentative grappling with identity issues during socio-political distress. Contemporaneously, South African traditional potters exercised a creative agency to adapt the forms associated with indigenous cultures to meet changing consumer and collector demands. In comparison, contemporary ceramics produced by both white and black ceramicists reveal the practice of cultural referencing as a conscious engagement with issues of identities, values, and meanings, expressed as complex symbolism and metaphor in the visual vocabulary. Referencing works in the oeuvres of a selection of South African ceramists, particularly those by Andile Dyalvane, illustrates the entanglement problem.

Keywords

"ceramic art", tradition, hybridity, identity, meaning, Samuel Makoanyane, Hezekiel Ntuli, Elizabeth Mbatha, Maggie Mikula, Kim Sacks, Michelle Legg, S'bonelo Tau Luthuli, Andile Dyalvane

Introduction: Entanglement with place, time, influence, and circumstance

One may read a purposeful challenge of Western aesthetics in twentieth- and twenty-first century South African ceramics. From the early 1970s onwards, radical translations of indigenous traditional and Western aesthetics often revealed this to the point where those visual references become cryptic and tangential to the subject. The choice of materials, processes, references, forms, decorations, and meanings are read together as narratives of entanglement with place, time, influence, and circumstance. The outcomes challenge Western preconceptions of African ceramic traditions, conventions, and aesthetics regarding ceramicists and their ceramics as staid and of insular origin, nature, and identity. It is also a confirmation that ceramicists have the agency to reinterpret and even invent forms with added or new meanings, whether for consumption within their own culture or outsiders.

Western "studio potter" and black African "traditional forms", c. 1930–1970

Studio pottery and (semi-industrial) production pottery dominated South African ceramic production in the two decades after World War II. The studios and production potteries of that time were owned and managed by white citizenry who drew on Western aesthetics and some Scandinavian and Oriental influences to produce utilitarian and ornamental wares (Cruise 1991; Watt 2017; Watt 2020). In the shadow of that stood the traditional forms of pottery made by indigenous black Africans, which were, at best, deemed as collectable ethnographic material culture. The favouring, at that time, of Western-style ceramics was reflective of the character of the minority white South African society that enjoyed political, economic, social, and cultural domination under the apartheid policy of the Nationalist government. Whereas the white citizenry had educational and economic privileges for those who sought to pursue ceramic enterprises, black citizens were consigned to serve as labourers in ceramic factories and studios or, in the role of crafters, to produce their wares for consumption in their local communities or the tourist market.

There was a stark contrast from the 1930s onwards in the manner and modes by which white and black South Africans negotiated identities via ceramics. One example was the breaking of the indigenous tradition that assigned the production of ceramic works to women. Those works are predominantly practical, including vessels for storage, serving, brewing, and ceremonial and totemic figurines in some cultures. The precedent to producing ornamental works that would specifically appeal to white collectors was

Figure 1: Samuel Makoanyane, (left) *Figurine of female carrying a vessel in her hand* and (right) *Figurine of female carrying a vessel on her head* (1930s), hand-modelled and fired clay, 145 mm and 180 mm, William Fehr collection, ©Iziko Museums of South Africa.

Samuel Makoanyane (c.1909–1944) and Hezekiel Ntuli (1912–1973). Although Makoanyane was a citizen of Lesotho, a neighbouring country, he predominantly sold his works in South Africa. Ntuli lived and worked in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal Province. Both were autodidacts but had access to European reference material, and both drew on those resources to produce highly realistic figurative works. Makoanyane specialised in creating small-scale models of the Basotho people and added details fashioned from wood, metal, leather, and cloth to the models (Figure 1). Ntuli produced figurines of wildlife and cattle and busts of men and women (Figure 2). Their not-so-subtle white intermediaries influenced them to create works that would satisfy Western concepts of art and meet Western considerations of what constitutes African culture (Nettleton 2020; Perrill 2014).

The second example is the production potteries that tapped into the demand for products that reflected the indigenous culture and social life. The de-

Figure 2: Hezekiel Ntuli, *Bust of a Zulu man*, hand-modelled and fired clay, 151 mm × 117 mm, Collection William Humphreys Art Gallery, ©William Humphreys Art Gallery, South Africa.

Figure 3: Kalahari Ware Studio, plate, stoneware, hand-illustrated, 367 mm, William Raats Collection, ©Christo Giles, South Africa.

signers showed a distinct lack of discretion in developing forms and decorations to reflect "Africa" and South Africa's indigenous cultures. Their romanticised or distorted imagery of "native" life, states Wendy Gers (1998), reflects 'a preference for unspoiled tribal images, exotic, beautiful, naked or semi-naked black women and crass sketches of African and pseudo-African culture' (Figure 3).

Imitation, innovation, c. 1970s and 1980s

The ceramic works that referenced African material culture and made their appearance in the regional and national competitions of the Association of Potters of Southern Africa (APSA) in the 1970s were challenged by Garth Clark and Lynn Wagner (1974). They were dismissive of the influence of '[t]ribal African pottery … on any of the White potters, as the culture is alien and the work aesthetically and technically limited'. Initially, white potters who made liberal use of hybridity to reflect African material culture showed superficial copying or referencing to the extent of their work being 'pseudo-primitive artefacts' (Cruise 1981).

At the same time, the Evangelical Lutheran Church's Art and Crafts studios at Rorke's Drift in KwaZulu-Natal Province recruited a group of black women who were skilled in the hand-making of traditional Zulu and Sotho

Figure 4: Elizabeth Mbatha (Rorke's Drift), double-handled and triple-necked bird-form vessel (1982), stoneware, coiled and altered, decorative detail and painted glazes, 235 mm × 180 mm. ©Ronnie Watt.

vessels. Guided by Swedish instructors, the women used Western technology and materials to appeal to a Western market. The wares straddled the forms of familiar Western-style studio pottery and the presumed-to-be traditional pottery of Zulu culture (Figure 4), which Freddie Motsamayi (2012) considered as 'examples of "invented traditions"'. One could best describe the pottery studio's output as a continuation of indigenous material culture practice with evidence of interpreted and revisioned Western influences purposefully created for outsider reception. The works quickly attracted the attention of collectors both within and outside of South Africa. The earliest recognition by the art world came with the Durban Art Gallery's acquisition of several works in 1968 for its permanent collection. Doing so made them the first ceramic works by black South African artists to be acquired for inclusion in a public collection during the apartheid era. The fact that the ceramists signed their names on the wares, akin to Western conventions, distinguished their works from those at best described as associated with a cultural group or place of origin with the name of the individual maker not known.

There are parallels in African Modernism for how South African ceramists sought to convey "indigeneity", if not an "African-eity". The African Modernism that emerged in the 1960s, contested the Western perception and positioning of African art by claiming and expressing postcolonial identities (Araeen 2005; Hassan 2010; Mixinge 2009; Okeke-Agulu 2006, 2015; Vogel 1991). They abandoned or altered convention, referencing other cultures and utilising materials and processes associated with non-African art or, in short, to resort to hybridity in which the artists filtered and communicated relevance., The African Modernists challenged binaries, interrogated colonial and

postcolonial histories, and delivered socio-political commentaries. Recognition of their artworks did not hinge on them being African or from narrating the "other" and the "exotic" of Africa.

Hybridity, towards 1994 and beyond

Marvan Kraidy (2002) argues that hybridity is more than a 'descriptive device'. It is a communicative practice and space that continuously negotiates interactions of differential power. Applied to South African ceramists in the years leading up to and after the country achieved full democracy in 1994, this is particularly apt. In the new open society, constitutionally stripped of discriminatory privilege and prejudice, ceramists had a stronger incentive to accommodate, mediate, or even reject cultural prescripts to communicate their position in the space of collective heritage and identity.

In South African ceramics, this was facilitated via the pursuit of the vessel as opposed to the pot. The vessel is not bound to any traditions or conventions, whether in form, decoration, or purpose associated with the pot. It serves as a metaphor for the pot and assumes the function of being a container for concepts. In that sense, it permitted South African ceramists to explore and express alterity to a distinctive Western identity.

Maggie Mikula

The oeuvre of the white ceramist, Maggie Mikula (1941–1989), who hailed from a family steeped in association with Zulu culture, is a good example. Mikula, a primarily self-taught ceramist, travelled extensively in and outside Africa to familiarise herself with traditional material culture and collect crafts. In the early 1980s, Mikula's vessels started to bear evidence of cross-cultural referencing in which she recalled and interpreted traditional iconography and cultural materials. Material included African drums, the Yoruba weaving of Nigeria and the Fulani weaving of Western Africa, neck rings of various African cultures, and Zulu earplugs, headrests, and pottery. Mikula broke with ceramic tradition and convention when incorporating non-ceramic materials, such as threads, metal, and shells, in her vessels (Figure 5). She further decorated them with sgraffito, inlaid, and painted slips and oxides to achieve her desired form and design of pattern, colour and texture. According to Andrew Verster (2004: 8), Mikula's works bear evidence that the ceramist 'got under the skin of Africa and understood its thoughts from the inside.' Vanessa Bauer (2004) does not doubt that Mikula created a visual language that 'engaged with solving the question of "being" in South Africa'.

Figure 5: Maggie Mikula, vessel, ceramic materials, rope, found objects,sawdust-fired, burnished, 540 mm × 488 mm, Corobrik Collection, © Ceramics Southern Africa, and the Corobrik Collection, South Africa.

Kim Sacks

Like Mikula, the ceramist Kim Sacks, who trained in South Africa and Denmark, travelled extensively to explore the different ceramic practices and folk art of the Middle East, North and South America, and Africa. Her oeuvre synthesises elements of Danish and African ceramic traditions to express a layered identity. Her vessels recall the textures of Africa (Figure 6), but also cradle Africa's ethos. According to Sacks, this reflects her as 'being of the place' and 'in tune with a drum beating in Africa'.

Figure 6: Kim Sacks, vessel, ceramic materials, wire, 250 mm × 97 mm,
Corobrik Collection, © Ceramics Southern Africa, and the Corobrik Collection, South Africa.

Michelle Legg

A far more explicit allusion to Zulu culture is present in the oeuvre of the ceramist Michelle Legg. In her *Woman warrior* vessels, Legg examined the character and roles assigned to women, such as fragility, caregiver, and provider of sustenance, and opted to reference traditional Zulu vessels for her forms. Traditional Zulu vessels are sometimes decorated with raised conical nodules, known as *amasumpa*, which are arranged in low-relief geometric patterns. The forms are then dramatically enhanced with aggressive and even menacing spike-like *amasumpa* (Figure 7) to guard and protect that essence of womanhood.

Figure 7: Michelle Legg, vessel, earthenware, coiled, impressed lace design, black and white underglaze with bronze lustre glaze interior, 340 mm × 500 mm. © Eugene Hön.

S'bonelo Tau Luthuli

In 2015, four years after he graduated from the Durban University of Technology, S'bonelo Tau Luthuli presented his first solo exhibition, '*Ihubu Lengabadi* / Song of the soil'. With this, he raised the bar for revising "traditional" ceramic forms and their engagement with the metaphysical, the ideological, and the material. In her review of the exhibition, Lynette Morris-Hale (2015) states that his works display a 'ceramic disobedience to cultural traditions'. While drawing on African material culture, Luthuli boldly challenges and subverts associated convention. On the one hand, the vessels reflect how Luthuli defines himself as belonging to South Africa's Nguni culture and, on the other hand, how he situates himself in the broader South African society. Luthuli reimagines "traditional" forms and alters the shape and size to make them meaningless as utilitarian vessels. The surface decoration can be a play on traditional geometric patterns or, in a clear break with tradition, can introduce drawings, writings, and marks of a personal iconography (Figure 8). In another deviation from tradition and to serve as social commentary, the vessels are given provocative titles such as *Mis-education*, *Blacked out through white wash,* and *Stolen legacy*.

Figure 8: S'bonelo Tau Luthuli, *My father's book*/*Incwadi-kababa* (2014), ceramic materials, 200 mm × 260 mm, William Fehr Collection, ©Iziko Museums of South Africa, South Africa.

Andile Dyalvane

Andile Dyalvane found a visual vocabulary in ceramics for the narratives of his Xhosa ancestry and heritage and for making statements about his own identity and how and where he situates his oeuvre in the art world. Born in a rural community in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa but with a studio based in metropolitan Cape Town, his works encapsulate and express an urban persona in the context of a past and present indigenous cultural history. His works translate African tradition, belief, practice, and material culture into design concepts that appeal to an international audience, evidenced by his successful exhibitions in the United States, Germany, Dubai, the Republic of China, and South Africa.

Dyalvane paid particular attention to traditional indigenous material culture: wooden stools, storage vessels (such as milk pails and beer pots), Nguni baskets, meat platters, and headrests during his studies at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, where he obtained a National Diploma in Ceramic Design. He translated those into new ceramic forms using contemporary materials and processes. His acclaimed solo exhibition in 2003 at the prestigious Irma Stern Museum in Cape Town propelled him to the forefront of contemporary South African ceramics.

As practiced in Xhosa culture, ritual body scarification (*ukuqatshulwa*), is repeatedly recalled in Dyalvane's surface decorations. Gary Cotterell (2016) explains scarification as the 'channeling [*izihlwele*] of ancestral guides to protect individuals against manifestations of negative entities/energies', identifying with a clan and indicating status within a lineage. Dyalvane references scarification with one or many linear or curved lines that cut deep into the clay body. The lines which, at times, are accented with a blood-red glaze might join up with patterned motifs or with impressions made with found objects. Perrill (2018) has also noted Dyalvane's use of a pellet of clay inserted into the cut to reference the traditional Xhosa application of healing substances to scarring.

Kerstin Pinther (2019) hailed Dyalvane for his 'conceptual approach to design, one based on Xhosa culture and aiming to create new forms by a kind of "metabolic process" or material morphosis'. He is not merely referring to Dyalvane's revisioning of African material culture. He recognises that Dyalvane works in an urban design idiom in which he balances tradition with contemporary expectations of aesthetics. Dyalvane describes his practice as 'meditation, mediation, translation, and communion', which can be explained by examining his vessel titled *uTyityilizi* (Figure 9) that forms part of his *iindonga* collection. The Xhosa word *iindonga* refers to an area of soil erosion, which South Africans know as a "donga". *Uku-tyibilika* means to slide, and *tyityilizi* indicates a place to slide. It evokes Dyalvane's childhood memory of sliding down the slopes of dongas to collect clay while tending to his father's cattle. Therefore, the vessel resembles a slippery slope with the neck also recalling a cattle hoof print

Figure 9: Andile Dyalvane, *uTyityilizi* (2018), stoneware, coiled, altered, bisqued, smoke-fired, and polished with beeswax, 250 mm × 400 mm × 340 mm. ©Sandisile Poswa, Imiso Ceramics.

impressed in mud. The upper part of the vessel is decorated with faint lines to evoke scarification and many letters that do not spell out any word. He created the letters using the keys of a vintage typewriter found at a flea market in an urban setting. The vessel recalls an African legacy (dark, textured earth and scarification) merging with the modern and the "other" (Western technology and Roman lettering). It also positions Dyalvane to negotiate a firm foothold between the past (tradition) and the present (innovation).

Conclusion: Cultural divides negotiated

These examples of South African ceramics of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries illustrate how the ceramists have negotiated cultural divides from which new ceramic expressions arose that challenge convention and expectation. Those works by white and black ceramists bear evidence of an agency to reference a cultural heritage, while borrowing from Western forms and design elements and using non-traditional materials and processes to convey new meanings. Crude hybridity was, early on, a means of convenience to engage with one's "other". However, the ceramists have become more judicious in what and how they sample. They take note of forms and decorations and of associated meanings which they transpose to their context. Their works should not be measured against any evidence of hybridity. Instead, we should read it as narratives of entanglement with multiple societies, histories, and cultural legacies and how they filtered and revisioned it for relevance.

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Mary Clare Kidenda, Dr., is a senior lecturer and the Academic Team Leader in the Department of Design and Creative Media at The Technical University of Kenya with 36+ years of teaching. She holds a Doctorate in Design and Visual Arts from Coventry University, UK. A Bachelor's degree in Education and Fine Art (Kenyatta University) and Master of Arts (University of Nairobi). Her research interest is in design practice and planning in the informal sector in Kenya and in Visual Arts Therapy. She is a member of the Design Association of Kenya and Arts Council of the African Studies. She is an associate member of UNESCO's UNITWIN and a Member of *Exploring Visual Cultures'* Panel of Experts. She is a member of The College of Arms, Attorney General's office in the Republic of Kenya.

Lize Kriel is chair of the Visual Arts programmes in the School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria. For the past twenty-five years she has been teaching courses in African and European Cultural History, recently with an increasing focus on visual material. Her research interest is in translations between oral, print and visual cultural remainders of Christian missionary encounters with African societies. Her current project on African co-production of historical knowledge in the northern parts of South Africa is financially supported by the National Institute of the Humanities and the Social Sciences.

Prof Runette Kruger is the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Design at the Durban University of Technology. Her research focuses on the underlying dynamics shaping our societies and the various ways in which visual artists have responded to these dynamics. More specifically, she focuses on notions of the Other, time/space philosophy, Afrofuturism, agency, and dissent, and utopias in which these are foregrounded. For her PhD she created a utopia (named distopia) predicated on difference and dissent.

Esther Kute is an award-winning fashion, textile, footwear, accessories and industrial design professional changing the world one step at a time through Design, Manufacturing, Education and Mentorship. She was the first female, Kenyan, Black and youngest ever Designer to be appointed Product Development Manager overseeing Design at Bata Kenya; the largest footwear manufacturer and retailer in East Africa. She is a teaching assistant at the Technical Uni-

versity of Kenya, founder of Bata Designers Apprentice competition 2017–2018 and mentor in Bata Young Designers Challenge 2019. Her designs have featured in New York Fashion Week, Vogue Magazine amongst others and change lives. Esther is currently a doctoral researcher focusing on transdisciplinary design for her PhD.

Bea Lundt, Dr. phil., Professor em. for History and History Didactics at the Europe University Flensburg (Germany), guest professor (DAAD) at the University of Education Winneba (Ghana). She studied Social Sciences, German Literature and Language, and History in Cologne and Bochum. Dissertation and Habilitation (in Basel) about gender structures in popular narrations in Europe and Asia from the 12th to 16th centuries. Cooperation with Universities in (West)-African Countries. Her field in teaching and research is gender history in Africa and Europe, visual history, narrative history of premodern societies, and postcolonial studies.

Alexis Malefakis is Africa curator of the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich, where he also works as an academic researcher. He previously lectured at the University of Konstanz, Germany. His research interests include research on the informal economy in Tanzania (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). Exhibitions he curated include *Making a Living from Old Shoes: Tanzanian Street Vendors as Urban Experts* (Benteli, 2016) and *Auto Didaktika: Wire Models from Burundi* (Arnoldsche, 2017).

Fredrick Mbogo teaches in the Department of Music and Performing Arts at The Technical University of Kenya. His research areas include the meeting points of live theatre and screen acting in Kenya. He has recently co-edited a book titled *Theatre Arts Education: Approaches in Kenya*. He has contributed a number of academic papers and book chapters in the areas of live and screen performance. His is also a playwright and stage director whose works have been staged in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa. He holds a Master of Arts Degree in Dramatic Arts from the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa and a PhD from Moi University, in Kenya.

Benjamin Merten: With an educational background in journalism, Merten has been working in cultural marketing and communication for more than 15 years. In 2019 he graduated in "Curatorial Studies" at Universität der Künste, Berlin. Through his curatorial platform thxagain.com he invites artists, co-curators and theorists to work on research and exhibition projects and build long-lasting relationships.

Lydia Muthuma is a senior lecturer in Visual Arts at the Technical University of Kenya. She is also the current chair of UNESCO's National Committee for the Memory of the World. An alumna of Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III, Dr. Muthuma's research interests focus on the meeting point between culture and visual art, especially Eastern Africa's contemporary production.

In 2020 she was a guest speaker for Barnard College, Columbia University, tackling *Monumental Landscapes* while in 2021 she collaborated with CSSD, Barnard, in Insurgent Domesticities to produce a tool for graduate teaching.

Lydia Nafula has a background in anthropology and development studies. She works for the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) in the Cultural Heritage department as a research scientist. She has been involved in developing several exhibitions including *Kanga Stories: The Cloth That Reveals* (2011). As part of the Science and Ethics arm of the NMK, she oversees biannual science expos and conferences for the institution.

Leonie Neumann studied sociology and cultural anthropology at Göttingen University, where she specialised in East Africa with an emphasis on Zanzibar. She has worked at the Weltkulturen Museum Frankfurt am Main since 2018. As deputy head of the visual anthropology department, she participated in two of the museum's major exhibitions and in 2020 she curated the special exhibition *SW5Y – Five Years of Civil Sea Rescue* in conjunction with the sea-rescue organisation Sea-Watch e. V.. She has been deputy of the Africa department since May 2020.

Philemon Nyamanga is trained in anthropology, heritage conservation and risk management. He is a research scientist working with the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) in the Cultural Heritage department. He has been involved in developing several exhibitions including *Kanga Stories*, Jomo Kenyatta International Airport Exhibition, Omieri Exhibition, Central Bank of Kenya Exhibition, Biennial NMK Science Expos and the Nelson Mandela Centenary Celebration Exhibition. He is a member of the Nairobi National Museum Exhibition Committee.

Juma Ondeng studied cultural heritage and international development at the University of East Anglia UK. He has been involved in museum training programmes in the east African region with emphasis on collections care, exhibitions, museum education and community outreach. He is currently based in western Kenya regional museum in Kitale as the principal curator. He was involved in the curation of *Nelson Mandela: centenary celebration* exhibition (2018) and *Jijirama: 50 years of religion and culture change in Marsabit* exhibition (2008) at Nairobi National Museum.

Isaac Opoku-Mensah holds an MFA in African Art from the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi – Ghana. He has taught African Art, African Art History, and Sculpture for over twenty years.

Jane Awuor Otieno is an assistant lecturer at Department of Design and Creative Media, Technical University of Kenya, with over 9 years' experience of university teaching. She holds a B.Ed. in Fine Art, and MA in Fine Art – Ceramics from Kenyatta University, and a PhD in Philosophy in Art and Design from Maseno University. Her teaching areas include Fine Art and Design. Her

research interests include art and design education, cultural trends and psychology of art in relation to other disciplines. Jane is a practising ceramist. She is passionate about ceramic art, that represent ceramic, sculpture and pottery. Jane continues to carry out studies in art and culture from socio-economic and cultural dimensions.

Odoch Pido is a design educator and professional. He is an Associate Professor at the Department of Design and Creative Media, the Technical University of Kenya. He has served in numerous administrative positions, boards and committees; setting curricula and judging Kenyan art and design projects and competitions. He has been a strong force in the preparation and development of over five generations of Kenyan designers. His many professional credits include exhibition designs, graphic design, product development and many publications analyzing culture in relation to design, emerging trends in cultural expression, health and development. Odoch's photography of abstract forms in nature is his way of expressing his sensitive vision by focusing on small scale natural beauty that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Amanda du Preez is Professor in the School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria, where she lectures Visual Culture Studies since 2001 and Digital Culture and Media since 2019. Her book publications include *South African Visual Culture* (2005), *Taking a Hard Look: Gender and Visual Culture* (2009), *Gendered Bodies and New Technologies* (2009), *Voices from the South. Digital Arts and Humanities* (2018) and *Art, the Sublime and Movement: Spaced Out* (2022). She serves on the Advisory Board of the international journal *Persona Studies*, the Governing Board of the International Association for Visual Culture. She is also the Chair of the Arts Commission for the South African Academy for Science and Art.

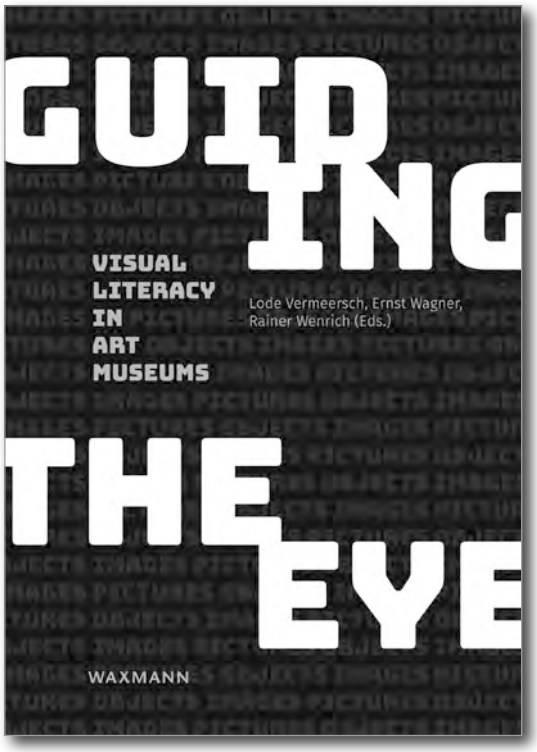
Rashida Resario is a lecturer of Drama and Theatre Studies at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana. She has a research interest in the interaction of cultures through performance, dramaturgy of playwrights, creative industries, mediated performance, and gender in performance. She had her PhD from Stellenbosch University in 2018, with a research focus on the intercultural performance practices of the Ghana Dance Ensemble. She recently completed a research project on the topic 'Fat-shaming and/or Claiming in Contemporary Ghana,' which was funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation. She is currently a co-principal investigator in a collaborative research project: Advancing Creative Industries for Development in Ghana.

Dr Avi Sooful began her academic career in Kwazulu Natal, as an educator before relocating to Gauteng. Her area of interest remains a feminist position within the visual arts. As a practicing artist, she has participated in numerous exhibitions both nationally and internationally and the notion of landscape has occupied her work as both socio-political and feminist images. Her academic

career spans twenty years and her interest is the documenting of art history embedded in apartheid experiences. She currently holds the position of senior lecturer, Fine Art at the University of Pretoria.

Dr. Ernst Wagner is lecturer and researcher at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Germany, where he coordinates the German section of the project *Exploring Visual Cultures* (www.explore-vc.org). His further research is focusing on, amongst other topics, competence models in arts education, international cooperation in the context of decolonizing education, and education for sustainable development. Ernst studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Munich and exhibited his art works in Germany and the USA. He graduated from the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich with a PhD in Art History.

Dr. Ronnie Watt is a collector and researcher of South African studio pottery. He is a postgraduate of the University of South Africa. He wrote his Master's dissertation on South African studio pottery and its Anglo-Oriental epithet. The focus of his Ph.D was a contextual history of South African ceramics in which he positioned cultural and socio-political influences in the development of oeuvres and genres. He has published numerous articles on South African studio pottery. After retiring from his career as journalist and producer of television programmes, he emigrated from South Africa to Canada in 2015.



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Guiding the Eye

Visual Literacy in
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This book addresses the link between visual literacy – people's ability to interpret and skillfully use images – and art museums. Art museums invite you to look at objects in different ways. They stimulate your visual curiosity, give you visual satisfaction, and allow the visual to merge with other sensory experiences. All of this makes art museums potentially the ideal learning environments for acquiring visual literacy skills.

But how should an art museum stimulate visual literacy in practice? How can it actually become such an ideal learning place? How can it spark visitors' visual literacy and increase their knowledge about it? In this book a wide range of authors from different parts of the world offer their answers. As researchers, curators and educators they provide crucial theoretical insights and reflect on real-life examples.

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