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# History, gender and ‘new practices of self’: re-interpreting Namibia’s Independence war through the work of Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe

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## Re-interpreting Namibia's Independence War through the work of Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe



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# History, Gender and 'New Practices of Self': Re-interpreting Namibia's Independence War through the work of Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe

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**April 2021**

**This research report is submitted to the School of Arts, Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History of Art by Coursework and Research Report (ACA00). It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.**

**University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg**
**School of Arts**

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## History, Gender and 'New Practices of Self':

## Re-interpreting Namibia's Independence War through the work of Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe

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## Abstract

The biographies of artists Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe have been fundamentally shaped by Namibia's Independence War (1966 - 1990), during which their respective families were 'on opposite sides'. The history of this transnational war has been primarily told by political parties, historians and white male military autobiographers. Far less so has it been told by photographers and visual artists, but again this has mostly been by white men. Mekondjo and Uambembe stand out in this context as pioneers. Both artists draw on the photographic archive to create mixed media work, employ gendered modalities such as embroidery and sewing, and have a performance practice. As such, they appear to form part of a growing group of *avant garde* artists across southern African whose practices have been posited by Brandt (2020) as "new practices of self", creating new historical, feminist, decolonial and spiritual vantage points on the War whilst resisting state-driven "patriotic histories". The artists' work goes beyond a simple insertion of black women's voices into dominant or contested narratives about the past: they operate as parallel revisionists themselves, shaping new types of history-telling in dialectic relationships with historical scholarship and, in the case of Mekondjo, through spiritual practices. Drawing on recent revisionist socio-military histories, this research interrogates layers of absence in artistic, gendered and transnational perspectives on Namibia's Independence War. It also asks how engaging with the work of Mekondjo and Uambembe might help us address historiographic and theoretical absences about Namibia's marginalised place in the South African imagination, and in art history in particular.

### Keywords:

History, historiography, empire, patriotic histories, archive, war, military, exile, transnationalism, gender, memory, contemporary art, artistic practice, performance, Namibia's Independence War, Namibia, Angola, South Africa, 32 Battalion

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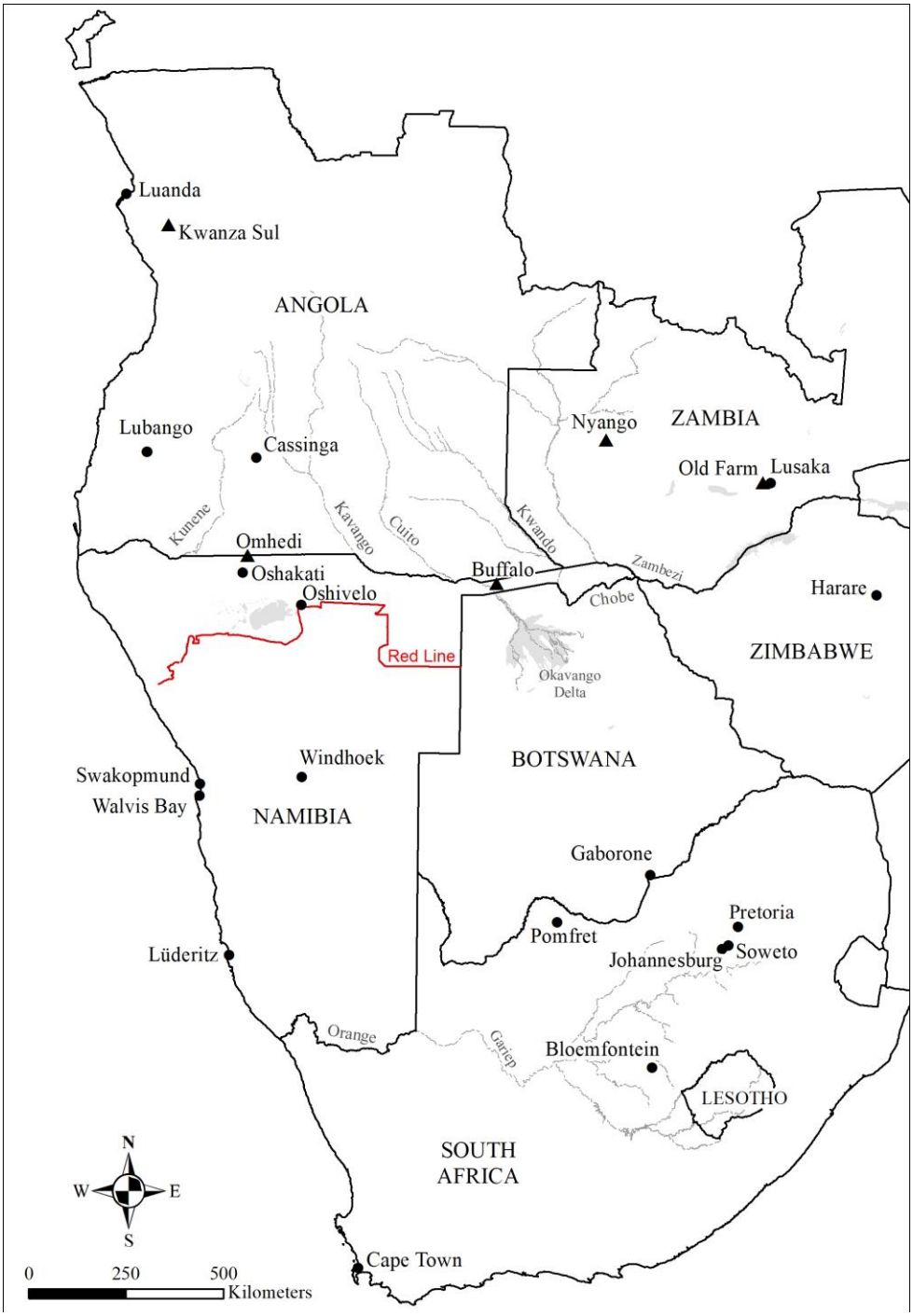



***Figure 1.*** *Map of Southern Africa showing Namibia, Angola, Zambia and South Africa, and places referenced in this text. Copyright Katharina Dierkes, Maproom.*

# Introduction, Methodology and Positionality

## Introduction and Overview

Angolan-born Namibian artist Tuli Mekondjo recounts that meeting South African-born artist of Angolan descent Helena Uambembe was "like meeting myself". The two black women artists' life biographies are, to a degree, inversely mirrored, and have been fundamentally shaped by Namibia's Independence War (1966 - 1990), also known in South Africa as the Border War, during which their respective families were 'on opposite sides'.

The history of this complicated transnational war - which South Africa waged to maintain control of Namibia, and which intersected with Angola's civil war and mapped onto the late stages of the global Cold War - has been primarily told by political parties, historians and white male military autobiographers. Far less so has it been told by photographers and visual artists, but again this has mostly been by white men such as John Liebenberg, Christo Doherty and David Brits (Liebenberg and Patricia Hayes 2011, Mary Corrigall 2012), although white women such as Jo Ratcliffe and Silke Berens have also entered this arena (Nicola Brandt 2020). In keeping with the lack of black autobiographical and research voices that revisionist political historians now seek to make visible, so too have very few black artists engaged with this past. Mekondjo and Uambembe thus stand out in this context as unusual and significant - indeed, they appear to be the pioneers.[1]

Historian Lennart Bolliger complicates the simplistic characterisation of two opposing factions in this War, showing how many black soldiers' choices, on both 'sides' of the conflict, were often fraught with dilemmas and impossibly difficult decisions.[2] Drawing on such historical analysis, we begin to see themes which underscore more *similarity* than difference between the two artists. Both Mekondjo and Uambembe grew up in displaced refugee communities. Both of them pose questions about their own 'belonging'. Their modes of artistic practice connect

[1] There are, of course, also obvious parallels and echoes viz the minority of black women artists practicing in southern Africa more broadly, the still-slim scholarly work on black women artists in the region (especially *outside of* South Africa), and the still-slim use of black feminist frameworks in South African art history (Portia Malatjie 2011), of which this study is cognisant.

[2] I am grateful to Bolliger for underscoring this point in his lecture presentation in April 2020 (see Appendix 4d), as it has become an important guiding trail in my own research.

them and are also ‘mirrored’. Both artists draw on archival photographs to create mixed media work, both employ gendered modalities such as embroidery and sewing, and both have a performance practice. As such, they appear to form part of a growing group of *avant garde* artists across the southern African region whose practices have been posited by Brandt (2020) as “new practices of self”. Most significantly, both Mekondjo and Uambembe provocatively manifest in their work the experiences of women and children whose stories have often been overlooked in prevailing masculinist and party-based patriotic histories of the War.

This research project poses several interrelated questions:

- In considering layers of absence in terms of artistic, gendered and transnational perspectives on Namibia's Independence War, how might we also address historiographic and theoretical absences about Namibia’s marginalised place in the South African imagination, and in art history in particular?
- How and in what ways do the practices of Mekondjo and Uambembe align with Brandt’s (2020) recent theorisation of post-apartheid “practices of self”, in order to create new historical,feminist, decolonial and spiritual vantage points on Namibia’s Independence War?
- What is the role of ‘history’, historiography and modes of historical enquiry in the artists’ practice; how does history mobilise them and how they do mobilise history?

In asking these questions, this project closely follows revisionist historical research that is breaking new ground in analysing the War, in order to better understand the experiences and practice of Mekondjo and Uambembe - who themselves not only also engage with some of the same research but operate as parallel revisionists themselves.

## Chapter Overview

The remainder of this Introduction outlines the origins of this study, my research methodology and my complicated positionality as both an art gallerist and researcher, in the sensitive, racialised context of contemporary South Africa.

**Chapter 1** lays out a number of theoretical anchors for the study, outlining why the concepts of empire, coloniality, the transnational and "patriotic history" (Terence Ranger 2004) are so important for (re)conceptualising Namibia and its liberation war in the context of South African history, historiography and imagination. It goes on to ask art historical questions about the dialectic, multidirectional relationships between history, the archive and art-making. This lays the ground for examining the relationships between artistic practice, gendered positions and historical engagement, which goes beyond a simple 'insertion' of black women's voices into dominant narratives about the past. I introduce Brandt's (2020) theorisation of "new practices of self", based on her analysis of hybrid artistic practices - often multimedia, performance-based and/or site-specific - emerging across southern Africa in recent years. I return to Brandt's analysis throughout this dissertation: many aspects of the artists' practices are illustrations of Brandt's argument.

Having set out this broader framing, which explains the ways in which the historical impacts the personal, I turn to detailed explorations of the work of both artists. **Chapter 2** traces the biography and practice of artist Tuli Mekondjo, examining the ways in which she mobilises photographic archives and the mediums of *mahangu* (millet) grain and embroidery to engage with, reflect on and gender contested histories of colonialism, war and exile. Sometimes responding directly to "patriotic histories", Mekondjo brings archival photographs into "new discursive fields" (Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa 2019), and harnesses spirituality-based performances to counteract the damage wrought by colonialism and gesture towards healing. In these ways she articulates her own personal stories at the same time as gesturing to collective reimaginings of the past (and future) as well.

Turning to the biography and practice of artist Helena Uambembe, **Chapter 3** considers place, identity and materiality in her work, which presents a transnational, gendered, domestic view on life in, and legacies of, the South African Defence Force (SADF) 32 Battalion during and after the War. Like the revisionist historians which this research closely follows, and with which the artist has a dialectic relationship, Uambembe identifies and counters critical absences in narratives about the Battalion and its civilian community, and about South Africa's relationship with Angola, through her use of photographic archives, textiles and performance. The chapter also considers sensory memory practices (Biwa 2012) and performance as gendered expressions for processing and re-telling traumatic, politicised histories.

## Research Origins and Positionality

This project lies at the confluence of multiple streams. Firstly, in my longstanding interest in southern African and Namibian history, and in particular the socio-political histories of its northern border, where I spent many months conducting my MPhil and DPhil social science research and fieldwork between 2003 and 2006 (eg. Taylor, 2007, 2008, 2012). Secondly, in my role as a gallerist and curator at Guns & Rain, a gallery that I founded in 2014 to support emerging artists from southern Africa, and particularly from 'under-represented' countries such as Namibia and Botswana.[3] Third, wearing that same hat, I initiated and curated an exhibition titled *The Borders of Memory*, hosted online by Guns & Rain in April 2020, presenting the work of artists Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe. Lastly, despite growing up across 5 different southern African countries between 1980 and1994 - Zimbabwe, Angola, Zambia, Namibia and South Africa - the artists and I share a generational inheritance, growing up in the shadow of difficult colonial histories, and with our parents' generation often choosing to stay silent about the past. This places me in a complex set of intersecting relationships with the artists, with whom I share a passion for engaging with this history.

In the sections that follow, I attempt to engage critically with my various positions in this research, in the context of art history, art commerce and race in South Africa. Reflexive and situated approaches to this kind of research necessarily highlight the partial, intersubjective nature of any knowledge that we produce, and makes us sensitive to the social dynamics of power (cf. Steven High 2009). Furthermore, as Sharlene Khan and Fouad Asfour (2018: 202) write, "the tasks of enunciation and representing—for all players in the visual arts feld—are full of responsibilities to both oneself, larger communities, and previous histories". Indeed, it is difficult to overstate the urgency and sensitivity of this in a deeply divided and fraught contemporary South Africa. Before exploring those themes in more depth, I briefly explain my research methods, which have largely been enabled through my role as director and curator at Guns & Rain gallery.

[3] The gallery has worked with artists from South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, eSwatini and Nigeria.

## Artist Relationships, *The Borders of Memory* exhibition and Research Methods

This research has been premised on a close working relationship with Mekondjo and Uambembe, developed over a period of two years. The cultivation of collaboration and trust with the artists has been important, in both my role as gallerist and researcher; this falls in line with dialogic and participatory approaches to knowledge building, at the same time as acknowledging the limitations of aspirations towards 'shared authority' (cf. High 2009, Michael Frisch 1990, 2003). Whilst this study draws on a variety of research methods, which I outline below, dialogic approaches are central to both my practical method of inquiry and theoretical approach.

My primary sources include dozens of informal communications and meetings with the artists; a small number of semi-structured interviews (oral and written) with the artists; studio visits with the artists, both in person and online; a fieldtrip with Uambembe and Bolliger to the SADF memorials at the Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria; two online panel discussions hosted by Guns & Rain gallery; informal and formal consultations with historians Bolliger, Professor Jocelyn Alexander and Dr Christian Williams; and informal consultations with researchers in the field including Dr. Nicola Brandt, Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja and Julia Rensing.

I first met Mekondjo in February 2019[4], having been aware of her work for some time beforehand through artist Jo Rogge at the NJE Collective. Rogge introduced Mekondjo to Uambembe the same weekend[5], with their mutual war histories in mind. I invited Mekondjo to start exhibiting with Guns & Rain soon afterwards. Preparation and execution of multiple exhibitions and art fairs in the period 2019 - 2021[6] has allowed me to develop a close relationship with Mekondjo in particular, more so than Uambembe. I met Uambembe in October 2019 and concurrently I connected her with Bolliger, who had recently finished his

[4] I helped facilitate sponsorship by an art collector for Mekondjo's performance at the Investec Cape Town Art Fair 2019.

[5] Tuli Mekdonjo, pers.comm, 19 March 2021.

[6] These included *Suffrage*, Women's Group Show, Johannesburg, 2019; 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London, October 2019; Investec Cape Town Art Fair, February 2020; ARCO Lisboa, Portugal, Online, May 2020; *The Borders of Memory* Windhoek edition in collaboration with The Project Room, Namibia, June 2020; and 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London, October 2020, as well as other 3rd party collaborations such as with museum Frac Nouvelle Aquitaine, MÉCA, Bordeaux, France, February 2021.

doctorate on the 32 Battalion[7] and was already aware of Uambembe's earlier work. In a strange but perhaps unsurprising twist, I learned that Bolliger's research assistant Dino Estevao - who grew up in the 32 Battalion community - was Uambembe's brother-in-law.

Not long afterwards in December 2019, I broached with the artists the idea of a two-woman exhibition focused on the legacies of Namibia's Independence War. It seemed obvious to collaborate with Bolliger for the exhibition as well, given his ongoing research in the field. In January 2020 I spent several days with Mekondjo in Windhoek, and attended her performance at the College of the Arts. In March 2020 I visited Uambembe's studio for the first time, at Arts on Main in Johannesburg.

My conceptual and practical curatorial preparations for *The Borders of Memory* necessitated frequent (often daily) verbal and written communications with the artists over several months.[8] To give a sense of these communications, Mekondjo regularly shared - and continues to share - new information that comes to light about her family history, including visits to old friends, discoveries of new photographs, her archival visits, news article links and so on. In turn, on occasion I helped her navigate access to archival information, for example, at the Mayibuye Archives in South Africa.[9] I also introduced her to other researchers such as Williams, and shared relevant historical material with her such as academic journal articles and references, as I did with Uambembe. Last but not least, in the case of Mekondjo, I also gave her feedback on her artwork, which in some cases changed its final manifestation.

The April 2020 opening date for *The Borders of Memory* coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and South Africa's hard lockdown, meaning that I had to immediately re-imagine and adapt the exhibition and related programming, taking it entirely online. Indeed COVID-19 presented new opportunities to innovate around non-traditional forms of exhibition-making and knowledge-sharing and -building. I stand in line with public historian Michael Frisch's (1990) assertion that, such engagement "should be not only a distribution of knowledge from those who have it to those who do not, but a more profound sharing of knowledges, an implicit and sometimes explicit dialogue from very different vantages about

[7] Bolliger and I shared the same doctoral supervisor, Africanist historian Professor Jocelyn Alexander, who first alerted Bolliger and I to our mutual interests.

[8] This communication has been ongoing, albeit with less intensity, since the exhibition.

[9] See Appendix 1c.

the shape, meaning and implications of history". To this extent, I would argue that an online exhibition and programming actually fostered a more meaningful public engagement with the history central to the artists' practice.

My revised exhibition programme included not only a Zoom video 'opening' together with the artists[10], but also Instagram Live video visits to each of their home-studios[11], and a history lecture on Zoom by Bolliger followed by a panel discussion between him and the artists.[12] Whilst these events were conceived under the umbrella of Guns & Rain, they doubled up as research opportunities for additional information gathering, deeper engagement with the artists and, importantly, ways in which the artists could speak directly to their own work, rather than it being spoken *about* or *over* by a curator. In addition, taking the exhibition programming online allowed us to engage with enthusiastic international audiences, both academic and from the art world, which fostered ongoing discussions and exchanges about the artists' work.[13]

Not long after the *The Borders of Memory* opened, we decided to present a physical iteration of the exhibition in Windhoek as well; Mekondjo's artwork was still physically in Namibia due to COVID restrictions and, together with some other Namibians, she and I felt it critical to engage with Namibian audiences given the nature of the work and the history it dwells on. We thus collaborated with Windhoek gallery The Project Room to facilitate this exhibition[14] and an accompanying panel discussion[15]. Following the second iteration, I embarked to expand and improve the exhibition catalogue, by including Bolliger's lecture transcript and its translations into Portguese and Oshiwambo.[16]

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[10] 15th April 2020.

[11] 18th April and 25th April 2020 respectively.

[12] 21st April 2020. See the full programme as it was communicated via Guns & Rain here: https://bit.ly/3cyL8W5 [accessed 28 March 2021].

[13] For example, for the Zoom panel discussion on 21st April 2020, we received over 90 RSVPs from South Africa, Namibia, Angola, Switzerland, Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States, and multiple cities therein.

[14] The Windhoek iteration of *The Borders of Memory* took place at The Project Room, 9-13 June 2020. Mekondjo's close relationship with gallerist Frieda Luhl made this an easy progression.

[15] The panel discussion "*borders, memory & belonging*" took place at The Project Room, 13 June 2020, with discussants Tuli Mekondjo, Martin Namupala and Ndapwa Alweendo (see Appendix 3d).

[16] These translations were intended to make the catalogue more accessible to audiences for whom the history is particularly pertinent, although whether this goal has been achieved is questionable, given my limited capacity to distribute the catalogue thus far. See the translations in Appendix 4i and 4j.

Since the conclusion of the two exhibitions and related programming circa July 2020, I continued to stay in regular contact with both the artists and with Bolliger, in my capacities as both gallerist and researcher, but notably moving on to the more formal requirements of this research, such as semi-structured interviews.

## Race, Art History and Art Commerce in South Africa

In the vast majority of popular discourses in contemporary South Africa, race is the overriding lens through which engagement, analyses of and debates around socio-economic power takes place. Whilst discussions around race are open and uncensored, they are also frequently sensitive, often inflammatory, and can have implications for physical protest and violence. This extends into the commercial art world and into the art academy, further precipitated and underscored by the 'fallist' movements that began in 2015[17] and their accompanying calls for decolonisation. As Brandt has written, "The post-apartheid era of euphoria has shifted dramatically to voices that are now 'of fury, not suffering'"(2020: 191).

I have conducted this research with my eyes wide open to the fact that I am a white (albeit Zimbabwean) woman writing about black artists, in a context where such practice has been substantially critiqued (eg. Khan 2006, Dabi Nkuleleko 1987, Portia Malatjie 2011) and where there are concerns about the extension and reproduction of white power in terms of knowledge-making, exhibition-making and money-making, amongst others (Athi Joja 2020, 2019; Thembinkosi Goniwe 2018). I briefly discuss some of these race dynamics whilst stressing that we must not lose sight of other positionalities and the ways in which race intersects with generation, gender, class and so on.

To provide a few examples of relevant analyses, and to start with a 'macro' view, Thulile Gamedze's (2018) research on the apartheid-era Medu Artist Ensemble argues that, in an ironic twist, neoliberalism in South Africa has been a destructive force to the radical cultural work of black artists which comprised, amongst other things, a mode to "unlearn black inferiority" (2018: 39). Gamedze argues that cultural work for the most part has been neutered, thanks to the African National Congress (ANC)'s version of nation-building, "using symbolism and imagery to portray the new democracy as a paradise of forgiveness, equality, diversity, and

[17] See Paul Maylam (2020) for a review of relevant texts.

'rainbow-ism'. In effect, this was a strategy to silence a nation of [black] people who had experienced worlds of pain, and to deny that this was largely a reality that still existed" (2018: 112) as part of the country's "underbelly of reproduced coloniality" (2018: 55).

Zooming in to critical arts writing in this post-apartheid context, Khan and Asfour have usefully theorised how "South African Whiteness frames appreciation, evaluation, historicization, and education about "non-White" cultural productions through art criticism texts (2018: 189). They proffer the term "Whitespeak" as nomenclature for how white writing "frames black artists/arts in particular ways…[resulting] in a hyper-visibility of the racial-gendered-ethnic body of artists of color, even while the body of the White writer-critic is invisible in its making of discourse (2018: 192). Through various practices of Whitespeak, "bodies of color are always known and are *always spoken for and about*. White art criticism texts, then, perform *both the role of ventriloquist and judge* (2018: 199, my emphasis). Within this, black artists' biographies are interpreted and deployed in particular ways, often to the detriment of thorough analysis of the artwork itself, as Khwezi Gule (2013) and Nomvuyo Horwitz (2017) have argued.

Furthermore, race, art history and commerce intersect in significant but under researched ways in South Africa. In general, there is a dearth of reliable research on the commercial art industry. One explanation is that it is a small scene, where "everyone knows everyone", where galleries frequently compete for new artistic talent, and where existing hierarchies and "food chains" structure the extent of a gallery's influence and possibly even profitability. Rigorous industry research would be hard to anonymise, and would inevitably prompt discomfort and/or conflict of some kind. As in other parts of the world, galleries and dealers are notoriously secretive about how they operate, and about pricing and sales. That said, as the art market increasingly moves online, transparency may be at its highest levels ever, and is helping to level and democratize the playing field (see McAndrew et al 2016).

When it comes to commerce, art critic Sean O'Toole (2018) has commented on the disproportionate and problematic influence of market forces on art education and production in South Africa, in the face of "frail, faltering" public institutions and lack of government support for the visual arts. He writes, for example, that "the much-feted graduate exhibition at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town...has increasingly come to resemble a job application forum…". Curator Kabelo Malatsie's (2018) research similarly highlights that a

shortage of self-organised art institutions drives young artists to immediately seek commercial representation, in the absence of alternative forms of support, meaning that the gallery system disproportionately affects artists' practices (including, for example, their choice of mediums) and dissemination of their work.

Taking market factors together with race, artist and art historian Goniwe (2018) has railed against the "the sad reality behind the mirage of a democratic art scene" in the context of "the unrelenting afterlife of colonial apartheid". He provides long lists of feted and successful black artists and curators, but argues that they are hamstrung by apartheid's legacies, continually "wrestling with white scrutiny", "tamed if not pacified through filters of an art market that renders them sexy, trendy and palatable". Goniwe propones that black artists are ultimately subservient to white interests and dominance of the commercial art scene in South Africa and elsewhere, and that these artists have no other choice but to find their success "within the playground of whiteness".

Whilst Goniwe makes multiple valid points, his analysis is lacking in too easily lumping together entities such as 'black artists' and 'white gallerists' and making them appear monolithic. In reality there are substantial and multifaceted differences *among* art galleries, for example, in terms of financial capital, organisational capacity, business and intellectual networks, and social influence, to name but a few factors.[18] In his overattribution of agency to structures rather than individual actors, Goniwe's analysis falls short for some of the same reasons as does writer Joja in his recent sparring with artist Judy Seidman (Joja 2019, 2020): an over-reliance on a high-level, structural macro-analysis, where conceptual entities such as "totality", "hegemony" and "dominant system" become reified, whilst individual human actors become "the mere carriers of a structural logic" (James Duncan and David Ley 1982:30). In turn this presents challenges for empirical study and analysis.

It is still clear, nonetheless, that the commercial sector, both gallery and auction house, is dominated by whites at senior levels. In addition, whilst I cannot provide statistics (another indicator of a dearth of research), the fields of art history and curatorship often seem to be

[18] It is almost impossible to directly compare, for example, Everard Read Gallery (a large commercial 100-year-old enterprise with a large staff of 54 spanning 4 locations) and Stevenson Gallery (spanning 3 cities with a staff of some 30 people) with Guns & Rain, which is 7 years old, has 1 full-time employee (myself) and 2 part-time employees and has never had any investors.

dominated by white women, although this may be starting to change. There are clearly ongoing racial structural inequalities at play here, and especially to the extent that race intersects with class. My own hypothesis is as follows: for new gallerists and art dealers, financial risk combined with the very lengthy gestation required to accrue credibility with both artists and collectors is so challenging that this precludes many who do not have other sources of finance, or who have had not had a previous professional career, related experience and savings (as was my case).[19] In this context, social capital becomes a key factor. As such, structural white privilege serves to bolster white resilience and longevity in a very tough industry. Simultaneously, whilst the media highlights new black-artist-led initiatives and spaces (eg. Corrigall 2021), which sometimes appear to correlate with the democratising effects of the web and new technologies, questions remain about why black-owned and black-led spaces often lack longevity. In turn, their appearance (repeatedly noted as 'new') and their un-analysed disappearance leads to new forms of erasure.[20]

Thus whilst it is beyond the scope of this research, we distinctly need less reductive, more nuanced analyses of how race, art history and commerce intersect in South Africa - and within this mix, a closer empirically-based examination of how art galleries operate, the multiple 'spaces' that they occupy which go beyond the simply commercial, and what these actors *effect*.

## The Gallerist-Researcher Nexus and Dialectic Approaches

My position in this research, informed by modes of working in parallel, is complex. On the one hand, and most problematically in the South African context, I am the black artists' white representing gallerist and agent, including in a commercial sense. On the other hand, the artists are the 'subjects' of my research as a Masters student. Commerce and researcher-subject relationships are the main two themes that I address in the following sections, in tandem with dialectics. There have been multiple other frameworks and positions to navigate, of course, which I do not address in any detail here: age, gender, language, class amongst others, and which are widely discussed in the methodology literature (eg. Linda McDowell 1992; Beverley Mullings 1999).

[19] Anecdotally, and again this is a personal hypothesis, the few black African and South African dealers, gallerists and fair owners who have found a foothold tend to be ex-corporate or come from wealthy and/or royal families.

[20] I am grateful to Nontobeko Ntombela for her insights on this point.

One's attempts at self-reflexivity inevitably fall short. Macro-structures and micro-agencies, and their causes and effects in relation to one's own positionality, are difficult to disentangle. Standing in the shadow of colonialism and apartheid, as many have noted, the politics of representation are fraught, and I have been wary throughout of claiming to represent the artists (beyond in my partial role as their commercial agent). As Brandt (2020: 19) has written, "The question at the heart of this is, 'what right have *I* to represent you?', or, as increasingly and more relevantly demanded in the current volatile discourse, 'What right have *you* to represent me?". Scholars such as George Mahashe go further, claiming that reflexivity is ultimately a 'Western' problem, an excuse to talk one's own coloniality "at the expense of [actually] *being in conversation* with those they have invented as counterpoints" (2019: 122, my emphasis).

I have been responsible for promoting and selling the artists' work in the international art market, including at commercial art fairs, and placing their art in multiple international private collections, as well as securing Mekondjo's first museum acquisition. I have also been the curator of several exhibitions for Mekondjo, and have secured collaborations on her behalf with exhibiting partners in other countries. I have also supported another gallery and curator in selling the work of Uambembe[21]. My interests are commercial to the extent of covering the costs of running a gallery[22], paying my own and part-time assistants' salaries, ensuring that the artists have a regular income, meeting artists' urgent welfare needs, and continuing to build the long-term local and international profile of the gallery. This research may also boost my credibility as a gallerist in terms of being able to speak with more depth to the artists' work.

Simultaneously, I have non-commercial interests. As a southern African interested in social justice and as a researcher with a publication record demonstrating long-term engagement with identity politics in the region, I have interests in raising the international profile of African voices and histories in a postcolonial context, including in terms of international and African art history. As a feminist, I have an interest in promoting women and their voices in particular.

[21] Most recently, I facilitated a number of sales of Uambembe's recent print monotypes on behalf of David Krut Galleries in March 2021, as well as work presented by independent curator Luamba Muinga at FNB Art Joburg, November 2020.

[22] Costs are often surprisingly high for such a small organisation.To provide a data point example, the cost of hiring the smallest available booth for the 4-day international 1-54 Art Fair in London is 150,000 rand, *before* any travel, shipping, framing, accommodation or other expenses. In addition, participation at a fair does not guarantee any sales.

I have a personal interest in expanding my own knowledge - and as someone who already has academic qualifications, this MA degree might be seen as yet another manifestation of white luxury and privilege.

What of the artists Mekondjo and Uambembe and their interests? Our interests intersect in that the artists benefit from the operations of the gallery: they earn an income; their profiles are raised locally and internationally through exhibitions and related marketing and publicity; and they gain access to new networks[23] and other opportunities.[24] Importantly, they also receive feedback on their work from multiple sources, which in turn influences their knowledge and practice. With much of this feedback being positive, it may also boost the artists' confidence and sense of self-worth. This said, the artists' interests differ in multiple ways: they each have multiple *other* projects and/or employment underway at any one time, unrelated to the gallery.[25] Furthermore, they may sometimes feel constrained by the gallery's expectations and/or operating frameworks.

In terms of my research methods, I have been interested in dialogic perspectives and practices, and whether and how I could position the artists more as "co-authors" rather than "subjects". There has been much written on dialogic approaches, shared authority, and sharing authority (eg. High 2009, Frisch 1990, 2003a, 2003b, amongst others). These explorations are correlated with the rise in participatory approaches to knowledge building, especially in community-based projects in multiple geographies since the 1980s. Some of this writing highlights the notion of moving away from the academic research 'product' (which has been the traditional focus of the academy) and focusing on 'process', an idea which has also taken shape in a more formal way in arts institutions (eg. Kentridge's *Centre for the Less Good Idea*) and in art theory (eg. Ambrozic and Vettese 2013).

Referencing Greenspan, High (2009: 16) writes that "self-reflexivity and subjectivity...combined with [a] commitment to sharing authority throughout the research process, represents a fundamental shift in perspective from "knowing about" to "knowing with". Given my close relationships with both Mekondjo and Uambembe, this research has

[23] Artists, curators, scholars, collectors, gallerists, dealers etc.

[24] Museum exhibitions, commissions, lecture and workshop invitations etc.

[25] For example, Mekondjo is also a primary school teacher; Uambembe is interested in building her profile in Angola, for which my capacity is extremely limited due to language barriers.

provided an opportunity to pursue an approach of "knowing with". I have purposely incorporated direct quotations from the artists on a regular basis; so too are a selection of discussions and interviews documented in the appendices, as part of an attempt to ensure the presence of their voices and authority. There have, however, naturally been limitations on the artists' time, availability and degree of interest which have shaped any attempts at co-authorship. Simultaneously, there is the ongoing problem of the privileged status of the written word inherent to co-authorship efforts. Is there a less 'word-centric' way to convey a production, collaboration or relationship between artist and academic, and how can hierarchies between the written and the visual be navigated and resisted?[26] In my experience, this remains a real challenge which is not overcome in this research.

Last and significantly, I have played a key role in bringing the two artists into engagement with each other and with third parties such as Bolliger. As Pamila Gupta asked, "what has that meeting done to three people now in an art practice relationship, and each artist's reading of the other artist?"[27] Gupta pre-empted my interest in knowledge-creation and art-making in this context - as a multi-directional dialectic process with multi-trajectoral outcomes and effects (cf. Jacob 2013), which I speak to and problematise in Chapter 1.

## Conclusion

This chapter has introduced my research project, which intends to shed light on the pioneering work of two black women artists re-telling Namibia's Independence War, the events and histories of which have dramatically shaped their biographies, even whilst in no way fully defining or limiting them and their identities. The study addresses multiple layers of absence concerning historiography, race and gender in the context of South Africa's imperial relationship with Namibia, proposing that Mekondjo and Uambembe's practices not only helps fill those gaps, but exert an agency that mobilises history in new ways, including back on itself and back onto revisionist historians.

[26] This question was posed to me by historian Joel Cabrita (pers.comm 12th May 2020) in relation to her collaboration with artist Sabelo Mlangeni for *Umlindelo wamaKholwa,* an exhibition that took place at Wits Art Museum, 27 June - 28 October 2018.

[27] I am grateful to Gupta for this point in her report on my research proposal, 12 June 2020.

In addition, this chapter has explained the origins of this research and my methodological approaches. It has considered the particularities of my position and interests as both white commercial gallerist and researcher in relationship to the two black artists, in the sensitive, highly racialised context of *fallist* South Africa - bearing in mind that this latter lens in turn may obscure the nuances inflected by our respective Namibian, Angolan and Zimbabwean heritages. I have also briefly introduced Mekondjo's and Uambembe's exhibition *The Borders of Memory* (2020), which was critical to developing this research. Last but not least, this chapter has introduced my interest in dialectic approaches and co-authorship, whilst acknowledging significant limitations to these intentions.

# Chapter 1: Historiography and Art-Making

## Namibia Imagined: Empire, Historiographical Absences and Transnationalism

This research considers layers of absence: not simply the broader absence of artistic, gendered and transnational perspectives on Namibia's Independence War, and how artists Tuli Mekdondjo and Helena Uambembe are addressing these *in and through* their work, but also historiographic[1] and theoretical absences in the ways in which South African art histories are being (re)written. In the context of the latter, I posit, we have overlooked *South Africa itself* as empire, instead privileging Europe and associated epistemologies and systems as empire.

Furthermore, I am concerned with taking a more regional, transnational view, taking seriously the idea that the marginalisation of Namibian history in South African popular discourse and historiography is "an expression of the reproduction ...of codes and conventions of a continuing imperial repertoire of South Africa itself" (Dag Henrichsen et al., 2015, cf. Gordon 2021). This approach necessitates thinking about the theoretical utility and limitations of both 'empire' and 'nation' in regional context. In turn, recent historical work which favours transnational perspectives on liberation wars not only better situates the biographies and narratives of the two artists, but becomes more theoretically useful as well.

Last but not least, I must acknowledge that at the same time as addressing multiple absences, this research of course contains its own absences, the most notable concerning my very limited attention to Angola (as compared to South Africa and Namibia) within the transnational histories that I address.

## South Africa and Namibia: Empire, Coloniality and Art History

In the face of historiographic neglect, Henrichsen et al (2015) have made convincing arguments for understanding South Africa *as* empire, given both its 20th Century regional domination and its 75-year rule of Namibia, formerly South West Africa. Building directly on this assertion, anthropologist Robert Gordon's new study (2021) demonstrates how Namibia was used as a

[1] Historiography is defined here as the study of the writing of history.

testing ground for apartheid, and how a host of Afrikaner ethnologists - particularly the Broederbond member Johannes Bruwer - played a critical role in this. Namibia was the site where native homelands were first trialled, and "the social technology for internal pacification was...then transferred back to South Africa as part of its strategy for suppressing internal dissent" (2021:1).[2]

Henrichsen et al also remind us that "new scholarship on empires...and post-colonial critique have unsettled the simplistic notion of a centre-periphery dichotomy in relations between Europe and the wider world, and have moved the debate towards transnational, entangled or shared histories of all sorts" (2015: 432). I stand with the authors in their view that "empire is, above all, a way of knowing and an enduring system of knowledge that persists long after the demise of colonialism" (2015: 433). Since 2015, of course, enduring colonialities have become the subject of many more studies and popular discourse, including in fine art and art history (eg. George Mahashe 2019). Last but not least Henrichsen et al. highlight the marginalisation of Namibian scholarship, which "seems to be struggling with the persistent intellectual legacies of the South African empire, as well as with a strong, state-driven, anti-colonial and patriotic history narrative" (2015: 434).[3]

What might this mean for art history as a discipline? If revisionist art historians such as Khan and Asfour see the bulk of South African art history as an 'outpost' of 'the West' - primarily extending practices of coloniality - where does this leave Namibia, as a former outpost of South Africa? Does this then comprise a sort of double-layered coloniality? As Namibian artist-activist Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja (2021: 5) has written, for example, "Visual culture discourse in Namibia has focused heavily on the colonial period, primarily colonial photography and posters. Even pre-colonial visualities like rock art have been read through colonial and western academic lenses. This is problematic because it often does not account for the diverse and intertwining indigenous visualities". Moreover, as we work to rewrite, delink and decolonise South African art history, what does it mean to extend that approach to Namibia? Can we indeed assume to *continue* to view Namibian art history and its new

[2] Gordon's study finds a parallel with Olusoga and Erichsen's (2011) study which closely implicates the experiences of German colonialism in Namibia in the rise of Nazism.

[3] Cf. Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, pers comm, 8th May 2020, where he commented on the lack of decolonial approaches in Namibian education and scholarship.

postcolonial art practices through a 'big brother' South African lens, or is this characterisation too simplistic?[4]

With these questions in mind I have worked to integrate recent Namibian scholarship into this research, in particular that of artist-scholar Nicola Brandt (2020), whose theory I discuss later in this chapter in detail, as well as historians Memory Biwa (2012) and Napandulwe Shiweda (2011, 2019), and Mushaandja (2020, 2021).

## Nation, Transnationalism and Patriotic Histories

Histories of nationalism and liberation in southern Africa are currently being reworked, challenging the centrality of 'the nation' in favour of transnational dynamics and "the negotiated and multi-directional exchanges between global, regional and local actors" (Alexander et al 2020: 822). Here this is important because there is little *art* historical work that attempts to engage the region's snarled, transnational histories.[5] This project constitutes a very modest contribution to such absence and perhaps points the way to new areas for research.

Commenting on very recent historical literature in this field, Alexander et al (2020) note "a new focus on entanglements, fractures and encounters that bring into view identities and motivations that do not easily fit a nationalist mould or indeed a story of liberation". It is precisely this kind of historical analysis that is much needed if we are to better comprehend the biographies and art practice of Uambembe and Mekondjo. Furthemore, as I soon show, particularly in Chapters 2 and 3, the transnational research of historians Williams and Bolliger provide critical context and theory in this regard, and in turn may be shaped by the narratives of the artists.

Whilst 'the nation' as a concept may have lost academic popularity, it was and remains a critical tool in practice for authority-making by the apartheid, post-apartheid South African and post-independence Namibian governments. This is relevant as we engage with Mekondjo's and Uambembe's work precisely because the artists frequently describe running up against

[4] Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, pers comm, 8th May 2020.

[5] Nicola Brandt, pers comm, 12th May 2020. John Peffer's (2009) work on the Medu Ensemble in Botswana may constitute one example of exception, although it is still very much focused on South African art history.

monocular post-independent "patriotic histories". "Patriotic history" is a term coined by influential historian Ranger (2004) and has since been redeployed in multiple analyses. To give an example as applied to the case of Zimbabwe, historian Blessing-Miles Tendi (2008) describes how patriotic history bolsters certain dominant narratives to the exclusion of others, usually along political party lines, which in turn influences popular understandings about the past.

This can be seen playing out in both South Africa and Namibia (eg. Gamedze 2018; Finex Ndhlovu 2019; Alexandra Stonehouse 2018). In the case of Namibia, the leading party South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) has, for example, often swept under the carpet contestations about the past, particularly regards human rights abuses in exile (eg. Oiva Angula 2018). This has understandably created all sorts of silences and questions for Mekondjo's generation. In South Africa, the ANC has also cultivated patriotic histories, attempting to build 'unified' postapartheid nationhood through its heritage practices and commemorations, (eg. Samuel Longford 2020), which certainly do not cater for the experiences of inconvenient groups such as the South African-based Angolan community of which Uambembe is a part.

Last and importantly, state-driven patriotic histories, alongside the apartheid propaganda that preceded them, have frequently overlooked the wartime experiences of women and children which are at the heart of the artists' view. Having laid out these historiographic and theoretical concerns, it is to the work of the artists and theories of art-making that I now turn.

## Is the Artist an Historian? History-Making, Art-Making and the Archive

One of the guiding motivations for this work has been to address the dearth of black women's perspectives in re-telling Namibia's Independence War[6], and more specifically to ask how we might understand this history differently through the lenses of two black women artists, Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe. In turn this begs a more nuanced set of theoretical questions relating to artistic practice, gendered positions and historical engagement, which goes beyond a simple 'insertion' of black women's voices into dominant narratives about the past.

[6] Notable exceptions include Martha Akawa's (2014), Libertina Amathila (2012) and Ellen Ndeshi Namhila's (2013), as well as current research by University of Namibia sociologist Ndeshi Namupula (pers. comm, Lennart Bolliger, 15 February 2021, Dag Henrichsen, 27 September 2020, Ndeshi Namupula, 6 April 2021).

Put differently, are these artists historians of some kind? What are they doing with history, memory and archival materials? How do we conceptualise 'history' and particular historical references (including documentary images) within artistic practises? Rather than being a 'truth' that exists out there to be excavated and revealed, how might we see history as a tool mobilised by artists to articulate their own stories and cultivate meaning at both a personal and collective level? To this extent, we find parallels with what the historical literature has long shown us about how groups and individuals mobilise discourses around history to address a wide range contemporary agendas and concerns. With regards to the historiography of liberation struggles in southern Africa, Alexander et al (2020: 827) remind us of "the uses to which these histories are put in the present and the ways in which the present shapes how the past is known, encountered and performed" (cf. Wolukau-Wanambwa 2019).

## Making and Gaining Knowledge through Art

Questions concerning the relationships between artistic practice and history-making reference a host of broader ongoing debates about theories of knowledge and "thinking through the visual" (Sarat Maharaj 2009). These discussions reflect on how and in what ways the visual arts and artistic enquiry should be considered a field of knowledge and knowledge production, and how *process* is central to this (Ambrozic and Vettese 2013; Maharaj 2009). In the section below, I briefly touch on ideas about dialectics and multidirectionality in knowledge-building, and the questions of whether and how an artwork can be 'legible'.

Mary Jane Jacob's (2013) definition is useful: "knowledge creation is a dialectic process. It moves between doing and reflecting, making and thinking. Quite simply, [as philosopher John] Dewey said, "We do something to the thing and then the thing does something to us in return" (Jacob 2013: 103). Further referencing Dewey, she goes on to argue that "works of art are not fixed things, but are both the "outcomes of inquires" and the "means of attaining knowledge of something else" by way of reflection. In this process, "in both production and enjoyed perception of works of art, knowledge is transformed; it becomes something more than knowledge because it is merged with non-intellectual elements to form an experience worthwhile as an experience" (Jacob 2013: 103). Jacob points at the multidirectionality of flows of information and knowledge. Indeed, knowledge-building is not just 'for' the artist but for and involving others in relation to them. I return to this shortly, regarding artist relationships with both the academy and the archive.

In terms of thinking about the legibility of artworks, Maharaj argues for moving *away* from "approaches to the visual that treat it predominantly as an 'image-lingo' - basing it on a linguistic model ostensibly with codes of grammar, syntax and related regularities" whose "impact is to restrict the visual to verbal-discursive legibility" (2009: 4), and which in turn may lead us to talking over and above the artwork. Verbal-discursive legibility is also interlaced with race and gender dynamics, creating segways for a long history of white writers and curators talking over and above the work and biographies of black artists, as described in the introduction to this research.

Maharaj's position also segues into a set of paradigmatic concerns which Irit Rogoff (2003, 2006) has clearly articulated. Existing theoretical frameworks such as structuralism and poststructuralism assume that "meaning is immanent, that it is always already there and precedes its uncovering" (2006: 1). Instead Rogoff argues that "as we have moved to engage increasingly with the performative nature of culture, with meaning that takes place as events unfold, we need to also move away from notions of immanent meanings that can be investigated, exposed and made obvious" (ibid). Rogoff''s work appears to offer a fundamentally postmodern approach: meaning cannot be uncovered or excavated and is not fixed, *cannot* be fixed in the artwork. No one has the final word in determining its meaning (Rogoff 2003: 104). Meaning is thus inherently unstable, and we cannot decipher it 'on behalf of' the artist.

Instead of attempting to uncover and make legible its hidden meanings, rather we must ask: what does the artwork do? What does it produce? What effects does it have in the world, for whom and in which moment? (cf. Rogoff 2003: 103). That is, and as I will argue in relation to the work of Mekondjo and Uambembe, "meaning takes place in the present", and is produced in ways which are contingent on the immediate audience and their subjectivities, as well as the temporal moment. If this is accurate, it concurrently unsettles how we think about the 'truths' of history, not only the "patriotic histories" of the state but perhaps also evidential visual genres such as documentary photography, upon which both the artists draw (cf. Okwui Enwezor 2008, Enwezor and Rory Bester 2013).

## Making Art With History, and Interdisciplinarity

There is a parallel, perhaps, between art historical tendencies to 'uncover', make legible and fix meaning within an artwork, and progressive historians' drive to unearth marginalised histories - black histories, gendered histories, transnational histories among others. In common is the assumption that, with the 'right' type of research, methodologies and analysis, one can successfully revise received wisdom about the past; one can really find a 'more truthful' truth.

On the question of interdisciplinary relationships between art and history, Maharaj's often dense writing emphasises that in their unpredictability, visual art methodologies contrast markedly from the "methodological steel tracks" (2009: 3) of other disciplines. However, "[t]his is not to say that visual art practices do not interact with established discursive-academic circuits and think-know components (Maharaj 2009: 3)". In this regard, we find interesting examples in how Mekondjo and Uambembe are engaging with, and being engaged by, European and American academics and their students. For example, Uambembe was invited by historian Bolliger to be a guest lecturer to his students in their courses on 'War & Conflict' and 'Regional Studies' in Berlin and Potsdam.[7] Uambembe also presented on her performance practice at University of California at Berkeley to students at the Performing Arts Department.[8] Meanwhile Mekondjo was invited by historian and cultural studies lecturer Julia Rensing to present to African Studies students at the University of Basel.[9]

In turn, exchanges and discussions with historians and scholars are informing the artists' making. As Uambembe explains:

> A lot of [Lennart Bolliger's] writing [has] influenced my thinking around the community and [my] making of the works, especially [his] paper on *'Gendering..*' influenced me when I made *How to make a Mud Cake*[10]. I'm still thinking about it as I'm creating new work….So that's important, it just makes sense having the visual representation and the written [historical] work [in relation to each other]. What I like about Lennart and what's different about him is how he positions himself...how he takes

[7] Interview with Lennart Bolliger, 19 February 2021.

[8] Helena Uambembe, pers. comm, 27 March 2021.

[9] Julia Rensing, pers.comm, 15 February 2021. See also Appendix 2l regards the lecturers' motivations.

[10] Uambembe's *How to Make a Mud Cake* series was exhibited as part of a group exhibition titled *Cubicle,* Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, 11-23 January 2021.

> on this position of learning, not just engaging and disappearing...he constantly engages with it.[11]

In turn, Bolliger believes that Uambembe provides his students with a unique perspective that is rare to find in the military history literature; he also acknowledges that other disciplines are 'valid' ways of engaging with this history:

> What [the key texts on gender and militarisation] all emphasise is that militarisation goes way beyond barracks, and it does so in multifaceted ways, and in ways that has little to do with armed forces more narrowly defined and understood. In colonial armies, you see they spend a lot of time regulating romantic... and family relationships. This is a really important aspect that doesn't come through in a lot of the literature. It is difficult to get at [and] difficult to ask about and write about. In Helena [Uambembe]'s work and lectures, it becomes very clear that her work and her own life is deeply militarized. Her performance *Therapy for the Black man (In honour of....)*[12] - where she brewed traditional beer - was inspired by the alcoholism... in [army] communities…It was also one of the ways for women to supplement income.[13]

These engagements are pertinent in terms of interdisciplinary pedagogy, North-South relationships and a range of power dynamics too. For the purposes of this research I want to highlight the multidirectionality of knowledge-production and history-making in these interactions. These dynamics move beyond the conventions of making art legible through verbal-discursive readings of and over the artwork, rather allowing for it to have a more malleable, animated, mutually constituted presence. At the same time, whilst these dynamics suggest the disruption of structural hierarchies in terms of colonial/postcolonial relationships and in terms of race and gender, I am cognisant that they hold the potential for reinscription of those structures, where the black artist and the black body (in various manifestations - from archival residue to contemporary performance presence) may once again becomes a site for Eurocentric viewing, reading and consumption (cf. Baderoon 2011).[14] Furthermore, my role as gallerist inviting figures such as Bolliger to collaborate in the exhibition could be read as being complicit in these dynamics.

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[11] Interview with Helena Uambembe, 8 February 2021.

[12] *Therapy for the Black man (In honour of….)*, performance by Helena Uambembe, FNB Art Joburg, September 13-15, 2019. See Figure 31.

[13] Interview with Lennart Bolliger, 19 February 2021.

[14] I am grateful to Nontobeko Ntombela for her insights on these points.

This research thus embodies and reflects on a number of efforts which operate either in parallel or perhaps even as mirrors. I closely follow and engage with revisionist historical research that is breaking new ground in analysing Namibia's Independence War, in order to better understand the biographies and practice of Mekondjo and Uambembe. At the very same time, the artists are engaging in the multidirectional production of new knowledges about that history, sometimes with myself and sometimes together with some of the historians, Bolliger in particular. This research thus attempts a nuanced dance between that history-revising itself, how revised historical discourses are being constructed in contemporary art, and how art may in turn shape scholarly research. This all the time whilst in part responding to dominant narratives and "patriotic histories", and in the context of a range of positions structured by race, gender and coloniality, as well as individual agency.

## Mobilising the Archive in Flux

Carolyn Hamilton's extensive work and theorisation about the archive in South Africa is well known and requires minimal introduction here. Her co-authored (2002) volume not only challenged received wisdom about how archives are continuously produced and shaped to found knowledge in the present, but posited that "a refigured archive might escape the boundaries [that institutions] enforce, and find expression in new sites and in new forms" (Hamilton et al. 2002: 17). This links neatly to Enwezor's wide-reaching and incisive analysis in his (2008) essay *Archive Fever*, where he writes that the artist serves as "the historic agent of memory" and that it is "within the archive that acts of remembering and regeneration occur…" (2008: 46).

Hamilton's most recent work in *Babel Unbound* (Cowling and Hamilton 2020) invites us to once again consider the definition of an 'archive' in a contemporary context where archives are increasingly contested in public life, "being actively inaugurated, burnt down and much more between those poles" (2020: 126). Inevitably this contestation is grounded in ideas and positions about what constitutes the "truth" of the past. In addition, the very protocols and disciplines surrounding the archive - including the in-vogue academic requirement for researchers to be self-reflexive in its use - are a site of contestation to the extent that they still embody and extend coloniality, as Mahashe (2019) argues.

Hamilton acknowledges a wide variance in what the term "archive" means, when and to whom - which in turn shapes what comes into view. She acknowledges, for example, that "cultural theory, subaltern inquiries and certain kinds of community projects have widened the scope of the term dramatically to include many forms [of archives] that are not in [physical] repositories" (2020: 126), meaning that an archive could be comprised of graves, graffiti or oral histories. This would stand in line with Namibian historian Memory Biwa's (2012) broader conceptualisation of the archive in terms of Nama memory practices, for example, and which I discuss in Chapter 3. Yet Hamilton maintains a narrower definition, which privileges evidentiary-oriented practices and whereby archival materials must be "accorded a preservatory apparatus that involves some form of 'freezing' and sequestration, or protective recording as in digital preservation" (2020: 126).

*Contrary or perhaps simultaneously* to this notion of 'frozen' preservation, however, Hamilton convincingly argues that archives are dynamic and in continuous flux. Indeed, there are multiple recent examples of archives, especially colonial archives, being recontextualised and thereby allowing new readings of the past and present.[15] There are also examples of obscure, particularly marginal archives being brought into "new discursive fields", such as the research of artist-historian Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa to reinstate pan-Africanist Amy Ashwood Garvey into the 'mainstream' history of anticolonial black activism. Wolukau-Wanambwa (2019) reflects on the "possibilities and constraints" of such work and the responsibility that comes with it - the possibility that those [archival] materials can and will be put to use within political life beyond the realm of contemporary art (cf. Wolukau-Wanambwa and Sherwood 2018). In line with Hamilton, the archive here is once again always in flux thanks to the individual actors who activate and shape it; it has effects beyond itself.

In this understanding of the archive we find clear parallels with what happens with art-making, directly resonating with the assertions of Jacob, Dewey and Rogoff:

[15] See for example, the exhibition *Ovizire * Somgu: From Where Do We Speak* at the Museum of Ethnology, Hamburg, 2018, where an exhibition by Namibian artists Vitjitua Ndjiharine, Mushaandja, Brandt and historian Ulrike Peters proposed a critical reading of the archive centred around a photographic inventory housed at the museum, created during the German colonial period in Namibia 1884 -1920 (Museum am Rothenbaum 2018; cf. Rensing forthcoming).

> Archival collections are reframed and refashioned over time, both affected by and resistant to the ebb and flow of reinterpretation, and in turn affecting interpretation. Thus it is that the archival object charts a course over time, lived in a continuous relationship with an ongoing, changing context, *sometimes exerting a form of agency and sometimes itself being acted upon* (Hamilton 2020: 139, my emphasis).

Returning to questions of historical 'truth', Hamilton's sharp conclusion is that "evidence is not a factual nugget mined from the archive, but a piece of evidence considered in relation to its own biography" (2020: 140). This returns us to Rogoff's notion that an artwork cannot be analysed and critiqued to uncover its meaning, but instead that there is always some degree of instability and flux in the process of engaging with the artwork. I would conceive similarly of the artists and their making process, especially as it is continuously shaped, multidirectionally, by their interactions and knowledge exchanges with multiple other parties, including academic researchers and publics, and also, of course, with the archive.

## "New Practices of Self" in Southern African Contemporary Art

Having presented the broader theoretical contours of art history and the archive which shape this research, I complete this chapter by turning towards contemporary art practices in southern Africa. I use scholar-artist Brandt's (2020) analysis as a key framework to which I return throughout this dissertation. Brandt situates her new research on landscape and photography firmly in the postcolonial moment, in the context of the movements Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall, Fees Must Fall, and resistance against western and Eurocentric scholarship. Within this context, she convincingly analyses the rise of new hybrid artistic practices across southern Africa in recent years - often multimedia, performance-based and/or site-specific. Her lens is that of landscape (cf. Baderoon 2011): "In landscapes marked by trauma, inequality and deprivation, and at the same time constantly in flux...photographers and artists, across a range of media and strategies, are seeking to restore a closer and more intimate connection to place and to their own bodies and histories" (Brandt 2020: 78)

Brandt examines "how [contemporary] progressive practices have been influenced by the rich legacies of earlier documentary idioms and sociopolitical critique" (2020: xviii). She conducts detailed analysis of the work of Santu Mofokeng, Margaret Courtney Clarke, John Liebenberg, Andrew Tshabangu, Jo Ratcliffe, Sabelo Mlangeni and David Goldblatt, all the while closely reflecting on colonial and apartheid policies around land and space, and extending this to the

context of Namibia's liberation struggle. Mofokeng's oeuvre is the cornerstone of her analysis, in whose practice "the idea of landscape...represented a transition from a state of captivity under apartheid to a more conscious mode of *claiming his right to the land* and his stake in the landscape"(Brandt 2020: 75, my emphasis).

Acknowledging the spectre of colonial hegemony as well as Independent state power, Brandt argues that "[t]he younger generation wants to move progressively away from the dictates of western hegemonic imports and instead draws on personal stories, oral histories and the imagination located in intimate narrative identities often expressed through performance" (2020: 172). The heart of her thesis is that

> Artists and photographers are now drawing on highly imaginative and cross disciplinary approaches and media in order to investigate deeper truths and are oriented towards new practices of self, including the interrogation of concepts of space/place and representations of landscape in varying ways. Motivations diverge, but are often also interconnected, from the desire to explore questions of personal identity, belonging and the production of new forms of knowledge, but also as a deliberate means to reclaim space (and land) and a sense of self-determination, especially in relation to the body. Some of these critical strategies and aesthetic modes include aftermath, appropriation, counter-narratives, opacity, collectivity and performativity (2020: 4).

Brandt's work echoes other recent analyses: for example, writing on the practice of South African 'Indian' woman artist Reshma Chhiba, Khan (2019: 52) writes about how "[t]he process of Self-determination is a crucial one for black-African-postcolonial feminists and race scholars...Self-definition, the ability and the process of naming ourselves, is part of recuperative projects for post-colonial Subjects".

Brandt also makes an important contribution in terms of documenting very new emerging practices in Namibia, particularly performance-based, which thus far appear to be mostly unwritten, for example the work of Trixie Munyama and the Da-mai Dance Ensemble. Brandt's work is augmented by Mushaandja's (2021) new research, which analyses alternative, radical cinematic and performance practices in Windhoek. In addition, Brandt also refers closely to Ratcliffe's post-war 'aftermath' work, showing how artists have used documentary images for subversion, and how such images open up questions about narrative and memory.

Employing Brandt's theorising, this research thus asks how and in what ways does the practice of the two artists Mekondjo and Uambembe align - or differ from - Brandt's theorisation of post-apartheid "new practices of self", in order to create revisionist, decolonial, feminist vantage points on Namibia's Independence War. At the same time, I ask if Brandt's framework, despite certainly shedding light on new practices in Namibia, perhaps reproduces South Africa's imperial 'big brother' relationship with Namibia, especially by centering so many South African artists in her work. Can we indeed assume continuity between the two countries and their respective 'art landscapes' and art histories, or does this extend a double-layer of coloniality? In addition, whilst I do not investigate this in any detail, there is the question of Brandt's role as a western-trained white scholar (like myself) writing on the work of many (though not exclusively) black artists.

Lastly, Brandt gestures towards the importance of spirituality within these "new practices" several times, for example, highlighting the predecessor interests of Mofokeng, Tshabangu and Mlangeni in the relationships between spirit and landscape (2020: 79). However she does not investigate this aspect in any depth, understandably, given her other key foci. Spirituality is an important avenue for exploration, considering Christianity's growth across Africa as part of colonialism's legacy (cf. Siundu and Wegesa 1998, and Andindilile 2017 on Kenyan writer Ngugi waThiong'o), and African spiritual practices as significant modes of decoloniality. As I show in Chapter 3, spirituality is particularly important in Mekondjo's performance practice, and makes it distinct from Uambembe's practice, despite many other commonalities.

## Conclusion

By way of setting the scene for engaging with Namibian history, which necessarily involves that of South Africa and Angola, I have highlighted the centrality of theoretical perspectives concerning 'empire', 'nation' and the transnational, the latter of which is crucial for contextualising the biographies and perspectives of the two artists, Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe. I have also flagged some art historiographic blindspots that hinge on South Africa's imperial relationship with Namibia. Within this transnational view, I have identified "patriotic history"-building as a common practice of independent states, and one to which both artists respond.

Next, I have pointed to theoretical questions that arise in relation to artistic practice and historical engagement, simultaneously conceiving of the archive as contested and in flux. I have posited theories concerning multidirectionality and dialecticism in knowledge-building, and cautioned that these dynamics may at times have a more sinister structural underbelly. In considering how to analyse artists' work, I move beyond simply identifying their insertion of 'new' gendered perspectives into dominant narratives, and I move away from trying to 'uncover' meanings in the work. Rather, I view the art as processual and dynamic, something which does something to us, and to which we (the viewer, the curator, the scholar) do something in return.

Meaning is made in the present, as artworks with their archival residues are brought into "new discursive fields". In acting as historians of sorts, Mekondjo and Uambembe mobilise the archive, history and its discourses. They 'do' historical work, 'making history' not only of their own accord, but also in relationship to other scholars - engaging with historians and students studying the same history - and in relationship to broader publics and communal collectives. This subsequently feeds back into their own production.

In the chapters that follow, I now turn to examining the work of each artist in depth and explore the nature of their "new practices of self", especially their invocations of land, place and the gendered body.

# Chapter 2: War, Land, Gender and Spirit: Counter-Rupture in the Practice of Tuli Mekondjo

## Introduction

Elizabeth Tuli-Mekondjo[1] Mbumba, commonly known as Tuli Mekondjo, was born in 1983 in Angola to Namibian parents who joined Namibia's SWAPO liberation movement in exile. Mekondjo spent her early childhood in exile camps in Angola and Zambia, returning to Namibia only at Independence in 1990, not long after which she lost both her mother and her step-father. In this chapter I trace Mekondjo's biography and its historical context as I offer an overview and interpretation of her practice. Importantly, whilst I centre the war's legacies in my reading of Mekondjo's work, I do not assume that that her biography and identity is only shaped by the war, nor that it should be considered 'fixed' in this light.

I examine the mixed media work that she has been creating since 2018, which employs the mediums of photographic transfer, paint, embroidery, resin and *mahangu* millet grain - a Namibian food staple. The majority of this work incorporates photographs which originate from both public and personal archives. I concentrate primarily on Mekondjo's series for *The Borders of Memory* (2020) exhibition, given its focus on the Independence War. Last but certainly not least, I examine how Mekondjo extends her practice into performance, highlighting its significant spiritual components.

Alongside liberation struggle historiography, particularly that of Christian Williams, Brandt's (2020) art historical framework provides an insightful lens for contextualising Mekondjo's work. As outlined in Chapter 1, Brandt documents the rise of new hybrid artistic practices which reflect a "desire to explore questions of personal identity, belonging and the production of new forms of knowledge, but [are] also as a deliberate means to reclaim space (and land) and a sense of self-determination, especially in relation to the body". Mekondjo's practice certainly falls in line with what Brandt theorises, but I build on this to incorporate spirituality as a critical element and mode of decoloniality in her work.

[1] Tuli Mekondjo in Oshiwambo translates as "We are in the struggle".

Mekondjo mobilises the archive and reflects on historical discourses - including "patriotic histories" - to articulate her own stories and mobilise meaning at a very personal level. In this way, the artist's expression of the individual self becomes a way to better understand her own past, but is also an avenue to knowing the collective self. Throughout, this process feeds back on itself as the artist gains self-awareness through new engagements with history and in relation to others such as researchers and traditional healers. This is a multidirectional processual mode of knowledge-building and history-making, in line with Jacob and Rogoff; interpreting it necessitates that we move beyond the verbal-discursive, per Maharaj, and that we conceive of the archive as dynamic and in flux, mobilised but also acted upon and outwards, per Hamilton.

In exploring Mekondjo's practice, I evoke the themes of disrupture and rupture. These are useful as a way to think about Mekondjo's personal life story - particularly her experience of wartime exile - as well as a broader motif for the colonial past, its profound reshaping of land, livelihoods and religion, and the Independence War that apartheid (a double layering of empire in Namibia) necessarily provoked. The idea of rupture also gestures to time and temporality - "before and after" - and the ambivalences within. I refer to Mekondjo's actions as counter-rupture: modes of practice that resist and counter dominant Eurocentric and/or "patriotic history" discourses, and that also proffer new ways of knowing about the past and being in the present.

## Disrupture: War, Exile and The Archive, Exile

### "For How Long Must We Wait?"[2]: Accessing and Mobilising the Archive

South African research has reflected extensively on the themes of omission and writing-out in the archive, unsurprisingly flagging race and gender dynamics in particular. In the face of a scarcity of a black archive (that is, where black experience is subject not object), the ongoing precarity of its existence in material form, and limited definitions of what constitutes repositories for black experience, Bekhizizwe Peterson called as early as 2002 for "more creative encounters between archival material and different sites and communities", incorporating those who have not historically used archives. This kind of approach acknowledges the implicit potential dynamism and generative capacity of the archive (cf.

[2] Interview with Tuli Mekondjo, 12 February 2021.

Cowling and Hamilton 2020), and indirectly begs engagement from contemporary artists as well (cf. Wolukau-Wanambwa 2019). In tandem, the story of the "colonising camera" has now been much-told[3], and I do not repeat this here but rather focus on the generative capacity of this 'camera'. We see multiple artists - alongside Mekondjo - taking up this mantle, appropriating and repurposing archival photographs, including the likes of Zanele Muholi (cf. Brandt 2020, Farber 2017).

Since 2018 Mekondjo has frequently used copies of colonial and war-time archival photographs in her work, as well as photographs from ethnographic books, her own personal collection and those of family friends. Explaining her fascination, she says:

> There is something about old photographs, they tell a story about a time capsule that is long gone, photographs capture the essence of the souls forever frozen in their poses, gestures and pains, regrets and joys. What were their profound memories of the pasts that they knew? *Could any of our very own ancestors be captured in one of these archival images*, without us knowing of them? For some people, they're simply photographs of people long gone, but *for me there's a connection, it is almost like a remembrance for me, [of] what if I was there before, before this lifetime* [my emphasis].

Regards Namibia's Independence War and its associated archives, it cannot be over-stated how tightly the apartheid state censored the war, nor how much documentation was discarded or destroyed by the apartheid state at its conclusion (Verne Harris 2000, Jacob Dlamini 2020).[4] Accessing government records from this period remains highly challenging, even in post-apartheid South Africa. Evert Kleynhans and Will Gordon (2020), for example, write about the huge legislative, practical and methodological challenges of accessing classified Department of Defence archives,[5] suggesting that apartheid secrets are being preserved ad infinitum. Yet the authors do not claim conspiracy nor gatekeeping, rather arguing that poor accessibility is grounded in limited institutional capacity and understaffing.

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[3] Examples include Landau and Kaspin (2002), Farber (2017), Hayes and Minkley (2019), Godby (2010), Rizzo (2019), Morton and Newbury (2015).

[4] Cf. Lennart Bolliger, pers. comm, and the late documentary photographer John Liebenberg, pers.comm, 5 October 2015.

[5] This Pretoria archive contains "extremely valuable primary sources, numbering some 3038 archival groups and comprising nearly 38 linear kilometres of archival material" (2020: 2) but access to the majority of these archival holdings remains very restricted. The authors claim that only 11 percent of this vast collection of archival material is accessible, albeit acknowledging that such numbers are contested. As a result, "the methodology of post-1970 historical research differs significantly from commonly accepted historical practices" (2020: 2). Kleynhans and Gordon conclude that the practical application of the Promotion of Access to Information Act at the DOD Archive inhibits access to information rather than promote it.

Whilst Mekondjo has not attempted to access any classified records thus far, public archival access has sometimes been challenging, for similar reasons to the aforementioned, albeit at the National Archives of Namibia (NAN). She has been sometimes frustrated by the difficulties of accessing and securing permission to use archival materials[6], which she views as her heritage and her right, particularly ethnographic photographs from the colonial period:

> *[W]hat is the point of locking up archival images in institutions, and have all kinds of restrictions on who is worthy of having access to these images, if the very people [wanting to view] their [own] ancestors who are captured in these images, have no access to look at themselves, then who are these images for? For how long must we wait?* So, the photographers from Colonial times made money from photographing natives, without asking for consent, they captured their poverty, hardship and grouped them according to [racialized categories of] Intelligence etc and yet today, *we are limited to look at ourselves*, to start asking questions, to be able to have access [my emphasis].[7]

Scholars such as Mahashe (2019) report similar yet more intractable problems in terms of accessing archives in Germany, making a strong argument for how archival practices extend coloniality.

When it comes to colonial ethnographic photographs, Mekondjo's explication is suggestive of wanting to rewind time to better invoke and understand the history of her people, but also constitutes a yearning to somehow locate herself, to belong, in that temporality. She is also concerned with the loss of Aawambo Kwanyama[8] oral histories and cultural practices, including bodily adornment practices such as hairstyles. In her 2019 body of work titled *Ohani*/*New Moon*, Mekondjo describes how, in uncovering rich Aawambo folklore and ritual only as an adult, she was both surprised and full of grief:

[6] Cf. correspondence in Appendix 1c.

[7] Interview, Tuli Mekondjo, 12 February 2021.

[8] The Kwanyama are one of the nine clans of the Aawambo ethnic group of Namibia, who comprise approximately 1.3 million people, and thus around half of the Namibian population (total 2.5 million). Regards terminology, Aawambo refers to the collective grouping, which is sometimes also spelled 'Owambo' today, and was predominantly spelled 'Ovambo' during the colonial period (Mushaandja, pers.comm, 20 April 2021). Some Namibian writers still use Ovambo, eg. Shiweda 2011.

> "It breaks my heart when I discovered the 'worshiping of the moon' tale *in a book*. It was never told to me around the fire when I was growing up in the '90s. I'm so sad that the moon rituals have been abandoned. I keep asking myself: What happened? [my emphasis][9]

There appears to be a deep concern here with reconstructing, claiming and honouring the past. How much of this is about her own biographical story of displacement, loss and disrupture, and how much of this is part of the broader cry of her southern African generation for decoloniality, as pointed to by Brandt and Mushaandja?

Through the archive, the ancestors become accessible in the present; the artist perceives that she is, in some ways, looking at herself. As such, the role and function of the photographic archive, including the colonial ethnographic archive, becomes particularly significant for Mekondjo's conception and re-imagining of the past. In mobilising archival photographs and bringing them into "new discursive fields", she articulates her own personal stories and invites viewers to consider their own pasts as well. I explore this in more detail later in this chapter. The photographs become part of a dialectic process where they are delinked from their original purpose; as Brandt (2020: xix) writes about "new practices of self", artists are using strategies that "dismantle [earlier] scopic regimes" which constituted the colonial gaze. At the same time, photographs are *not the only way* to access the past, and I discuss later in this chapter how Mekondjo's performance practice, in conversation with spirituality, provides another modality for doing this.

## SWAPO in Exile: Gender, Children and Authority-Making

Growing up in wartime exile was a fundamentally formative experience for Mekondjo, and for her series in *The Borders of Memory* (2020) she uses archival images (eg. Figures 26 and 27) to revisit - and learn about afresh - the context of her early childhood in the camps of Kwanza-Sul, Angola and Nyango, Zambia[10].

> "It's very much my story, trying to understand what it was like. I was a kid, very young. A lot of times, [as a child] you don't really know what is going on...It has been quite

[9] *Tuli Mekondjo: Investec Cape Town Art Fair 2020*. Catalogue by Guns & Rain (2020).

[10] See Figure 1 for geographic locations. Nyango camp was near Kaoma in Western province, Zambia, and was inhabited by several thousand people in the late 1970s and 80s (Williams 2020).

> heavy to deal with, going back to that time. Really understanding what was really happening in the war and in the camp, how people's lives were impacted by war."[11]

In particular, she has been interested in the life of women and children, and in the subsequent circumstances and psychology of "exile kids"[12] in contemporary Namibia. As a result, a number of Mekondjo's images point to lesser known histories within exile historiography: those of armed women combatants in the camps; foster-mothers who cared for children whose biological parents had gone away for short or long-term training abroad or at other camps (Mekondjo's own mother included[13]); and how children were schooled in these contexts. In this way Mekondjo makes a contribution to addressing absences in popular discourses about the history of the war, and indeed to building nuanced exile histories in the way that Williams has done over the last decade.

Williams' writing (2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2020) provides excellent broader context for Mekondjo's biography. He is interested in a *transnational* view and in demonstrating how many experiences of exile do not fit neatly within the main frameworks of liberation history scholarship (especially note Williams 2020).[14] In this regard his approach is much like Bolliger's, whose work I discuss in detail in Chapter 3. Pursuing a revisionist take on dominant narratives about Namibia's liberation struggle, Williams shows how political communities in exile - full of internal political, ethnic and gendered contestations - played a critical role in shaping the emerging Namibian nation and its social relations, both before and after Independence.

Throughout her *Borders of Memor*y series, Mekondjo leaves the photographs relatively bare, unlike in some of her earlier work where photographic transfers are more densely covered with layers of paint and grain. The artist seems to steer away from 'interfering' with the photograph as a "witness" (cf. Brandt 2020; Enwezor and Rory Bester 2013). In some instances Mekondjo

[11] Tuli Mekondjo, pers.comm, 30th March 2020.

[12] This is a colloquial term used in Namibia that refers to people who were born and grew up in exile in multiple other African and/or European countries before later returning to Namibia. See frequent reference to 'struggle kids' in the panel discussion that took place 21 April 2020 in Appendix 4e.

[13] See Mekondjo's moving description of this event in her statement about the artwork 'Kaleipo Nawa...' in Appendix 2e.

[14] Writing on a small group of Namibian "dissident refugees" in Zambia, Williams states that "Most scholarship on refugees in Africa is similarly silent on other struggle-era southern African refugees who lived outside liberation movements' direct control" (Williams 2020: 865).

uses images that tell a predominantly personal story, for example, *Ohango Ya Meme, Ko Mbada (My Mother's Wedding In Exile)*(Figure 2), a time of celebration and community at Nyango, Zambia. In other cases, she refers to "patriotic histories" at the same time as pointing to the gaps in those dominant narratives. For example, in *Ounona vo miita (Children of war)* (Figure 3) she re-interprets a well-known and internationally published image of President-in-waiting Sam Nujoma holding a child survivor of South Africa's attack on Cassinga, Angola. Photographic images like this have functioned as key tools in the Namibian state's nation-building and 'truth telling', often in the face of much contested interpretations of wartime events. It is to discursive contestations around the exile camps and Cassinga in particular to which I now turn, by way of a key example of 'history' and 'truth' in flux.



**Figure 2.** Tuli Mekondjo, *Ohango Ya Meme, Ko Mbada (My Mother's Wedding in Exile),* Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain, resin and embroidery on canvas), 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.



**Figure 3.** Tuli Mekondjo, *Ounona vo miita (Children of war),* Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain, resin and embroidery on canvas), 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.

## Burning Aftermath: Memory and Contestations for Cassinga

*"Death came to them in the bluest of hues, for their eyes saw the last glimpse of a blue sky. I saw myself in their faces: their determination, fighting spirits and sternness stared back from their archival faces".* - Tuli Mekondjo [15]

Commenting on the influential work of photographers Liebenberg and Ratcliffe in documenting the war and its legacy in Namibia and Angola, Brandt describes "aftermath" as "that which remains; of the effects of violence and destruction; of the often barely visible traces that are left when the action has ended and the actors have left the scene" (2020: 102). The war left devastating repercussions for many Namibians, much of which has remained shrouded in silence[16]. As Brandt (2020: 113) explains regards Liebenberg's co-authored photographic volume with historian Patricia Hayes (Liebenberg and Hayes 2011),

> One of the primary reasons for embarking on the book project *Bush of Ghosts* was to address the fact that so few people, and especially the younger generation, know much about the war...Liebenberg and Hayes' effort to re-activate the memories of this period will remain inadequate, yet as purveyors of 'reality' they clearly felt a responsibility to reopen the archive.

Like Liebenberg and Hayes, Mekondjo courageously decided to access the archive of wartime atrocities beyond Namibia's borders and engage with the gruesome visual legacy of some of these events. Specifically she sought photographs of Cassinga, the best known exile camp, perhaps precisely because of the extreme contestation over its memory. Whilst Cassinga was destroyed before Mekondjo's birth, her concern with its history is partly driven by her experience of a degree of amnesia in public life: "we celebrate Cassinga Day [as a public holiday] but we never learned about it, we didn't know all this"[17]. She is also painfully aware that the fate of Cassinga's children could have been her own fate ("I saw myself in their faces"[18]); she just happened to be at a different camp at a different time.

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[15] Tuli Mekondjo, Artist Statement, 1 April 2020, for *The Borders of Memory* exhibition, reflecting specifically on photographs of open mass graves at Cassinga. See Appendix 2b.

[16] To give an example of how such silences still operate, in the run-up to the Windhoek exhibition of *The Borders of Memory*, and a related panel discussion, gallerist Frieda Luhl reported the perceived discomfort of some potential panellists with discussing the war in public. See Appendix 2h.

[17] Tuli Mekondjo, pers.comm, March 2020.

[18] Tuli Mekondjo, Artist Statement, 1 April 2020, for *The Borders of Memory* exhibition, reflecting specifically on photographs of open mass graves at Cassinga. See Appendix 2b.

In her *Borders of Memory* series Mekondjo for the first time burned holes *through* each of her canvases (Figure 5). It is an aggressive act - to destroy one's own canvas, even if partially - and to this extent echoes the violence that the war manifested. Usually numbering four, the holes represent four major exile camps beyond the Namibia's borders[19], each of them containing their own contested histories that are often at odds with official narratives. There is an interesting visual metaphor here for both presence and absence: the burned holes underscore the etching of camp histories into people's lives and memory, yet to the degree that the holes contain 'nothing', they also comment on the ways in which strategic erasure and amnesia has been the flipside of state-building in Independent Namibia. In other words, Mekondjo's burned canvases well-capture Brandt's conception of 'aftermath'.

The subject of extensive debate, the event popularly known simply as "Cassinga" was a controversial South African attack on a Namibian SWAPO base in southern Angola on 4th May 1978[20], killing 624 people and injuring 611, including combatants and civilians, women and children. This tragic outcome and related documentary imagery of open mass graves immediately became a keystone in the propaganda war and in SWAPO's anti-apartheid rhetoric[21]. Cassinga is commemorated annually as a public holiday in Namibia, accompanied by ceremonies and media programmes in which survivors play a significant role. The event thus sits centre-stage in the nation-state's patriotic histories; as Mekondjo described, "SWAPO wants people to have [only] one narrative...with no questioning around it."[22]

One of the main rationales behind the detailed analysis of historians such as Williams (2010) and Gary Baines (2007, 2009, 2014) is that Cassinga has been at the heart of competing historical narratives, usually driven by SWAPO or the apartheid government respectively, particularly about whether it was a 'refugee camp' or 'military base'. As Williams (2010: 213) writes, "the dominant story of the 'refugee camp' does not begin to describe the collection of

[19] For Mekondjo, these are Kwanza-Sul and Cassinga (Angola), and Nyango and Old Farm (Zambia). Williams describes how over its three decades in exile, SWAPO was responsible for the welfare of roughly 60,000 Namibians, about 4% of the total Namibian population at independence, most of whom lived in camps.

[20] The camp as a SWAPO 'base' dates to 1976. Williams (2010: 221) writes that "With the exception of its earliest days, Cassinga was not exclusively or primarily inhabited by soldiers. It was not long before Namibians fleeing into exile began to enter Cassinga. Most of these newcomers were Oshiwambo speakers…".

[21] As Baines (2007:10) writes of photographs of Cassinga's mass graves, the identities (gender, age, etc) of the bodies was actually irrelevant to the extent that it was perception that mattered most, and this was "shaped not by the referential but the symbolic value of the mass graves imagery". Mekondjo used grave photographs in two of her works for The Borders of Memory.

[22] Interview with Tuli Mekondjo, 12 February 2021.

people, offices and practices that formed in and around Cassinga". This is complicated by the fact that South Africa was not officially at war with SWAPO.[23]

On the question of how the camps should be termed, Mekondjo emphasises that definition was always in flux and fundamentally linked to the position from which one spoke:

> My step-father and father would definitely refer to them as "military bases'' because of their combatant fighting on the frontline [and] training. Mothers with children would refer to them as "refugee camps'', a place of temporary safety for their children. Young people would call them "exile camps" because of the education opportunities that they were promised, once they have joined SWAPO. Perhaps it's pointless to try and have a single description, because these camps were not only in different locations...they served different purposes. In my case, because I was still a child, I would refer to my experience as a "refugee camp'' with a hospital and a school; we would watch kino on the soccer field, I had a three-wheeler bike and every mother in the camp was my other mother, they always fed all the children... *One day Nyango almost became a "military base'"* when we were told to pack up and to go and set up new makeshift homes in the bush, due to fears that the SADF was planning to attack the camp in Zambia. I stayed in the bush with our mothers for a week. It is relevant for my work because *I cannot only focus on my own experiences but on the experiences of everyone else, the truth is that, even though we were in exile, in camps etc, our experiences are not the same, we each got a unique story to tell (*my emphasis).[24]

In stark opposition to narrow "patriotic history" narratives, Mekondjo's view is nuanced and appears to embody a feminist critique: gender, age and occupation were all critical factors in defining what positionality one inhabited.

Exile was a fundamentally formative experience for Mekondjo. Engaging with photographic archives of life (and death) in SWAPO's exile camps is a way for her to interrogate her own knowledge about the history of the War, and to consider the contestations, erasures and ruptures therein. In this, as Brandt (2020: 202) has stressed regards the pluralism of emerging visual art practices, "the single photographic image that distils a range of meanings and temporalities into one view, or records a transitory moment with lasting effect" remains critical. Mobilising archival images, Mekondjo both acknowledges and resists patriotic histories which tell a one-sided version of events like Cassinga. The artist then offers the findings back to her viewers, all whilst highlighting the positions of women and children. Her art is the outcome of inquiries;

[23] South Africa's continued occupation of Namibia, *de facto* since 1915, had long been deemed illegal, and was formally declared so by United Nations Security Council Resolution 269, adopted in 1969.

[24] Interview with Tuli Mekondjo, 12 February 2021.

in proffering it she not only provides a different (gendered, life-staged) perspective but allows us to engage with this history differently, moving between the individual and the collective, past and present. To reference Dewey again, we do something to the thing and it does something to us in return.

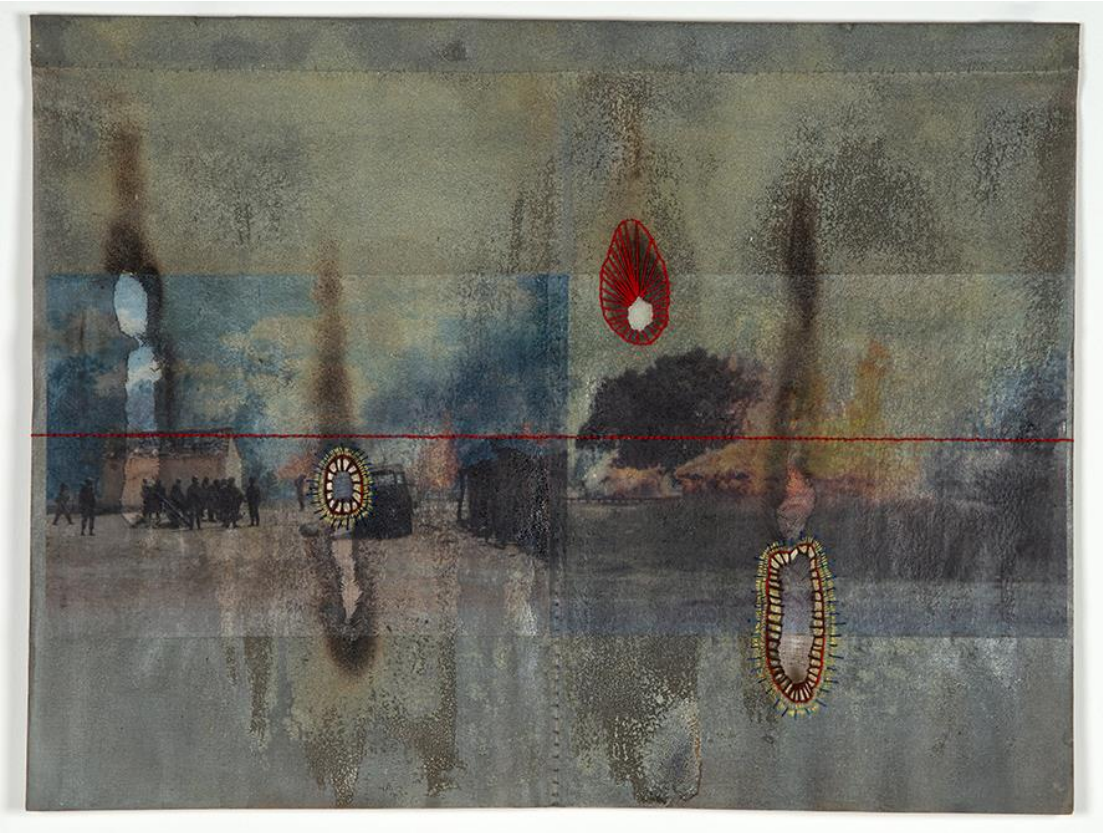


**Figure 4.** Tuli Mekondjo, *Om'dilo Mo Cassinga (Fire At Cassinga),* Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain, resin and embroidery on canvas), 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.



**Figure 5.** Detail from Tuli Mekondjo, *Ohango Ya Meme, Ko Mbada (My Mother's Wedding in Exile),* Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain, resin and embroidery on canvas), 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.

## Counter-Rupture

## Stitching Namibia's 'Red Line': Colonialism, Land & Space

Each of Mekondjo's works from *The Borders of Memory* is starkly partitioned by a bright red line, stitched with embroidery thread that seems to leap off the canvas (Figure 6). This horizontal line extends to the far edges of each artwork, pushing both east and west as if it intends to continue - and indeed it does continue across the entire series of 14 works (Figure 7 and 8). Mekondjo's red stitching is the common denominator of the series, speaking to Namibia's history of land and to colonialism writ large, in turn creating a broader historical backdrop against which the Independence War can be understood. In addition, it is a modality for speaking beyond Mekondjo's personal experience to a collective history. In her analysis of emerging "new practices", Brandt writes that work by artists Kiluanji Kia Henda and Sthembile Msezane "underscores how the body, and therefore *one's identity, is profoundly connected to space and landscape* and cannot be separated from it. These relations are never fixed or static, but are always dynamic and linked to diverse temporalities and power structures" (Brandt 2020: 197, my emphasis). Mekondjo's work appears to be another illustration of what Brandt describes.

The creation, definition and maintenance of boundaries was central to colonial enterprise as a whole, and this has been explored in multiple comprehensive histories of colonialism and mapping which I do not detail here. Examined in detail by Giorgio Miescher (2012), Namibia's transverse 'Red Line' (see Figure 1) is an internal boundary dating to 1896 when German colonial authorities tried to limit the damage of the Rinderpest cattle disease outbreak (cf. Michael Bollig 1998, Meredith McKittrick 2013). Stretching several hundred kilometres across northern Namibia, it ultimately protected white-owned livestock and the white settler economy to the south, limiting competition from knowledgeable and successful black pastoralists (Jeremy Silvester 2015).[25] The Red Line is thus a key symbol of colonial incursions into the cattle socio-economy, the cornerstone of black livelihoods in northern Namibia and southern Angola (cf. Kreike 2009). Assuming a host of policy, legislative and physical manifestations through the 20th century, the Red Line has continued to shape economics, movement and

[25] In the 1920s, for example, poor white farmers in southern Namibia were kept in business thanks only to state subsidies (Silvester 1997, Bollig 1998a).

migrant labour for over a hundred years (cf. Bollig 1998a, Dieckmann 2007). In some cases, this boundary was also gendered: Bollig's archival research on Kaokoland shows that in the 1910s, women were not allowed south of the Red Line.

During the Independence War, the Red Line also became a marker beyond which Namibia's liberation movement was drawn into global Cold War politics. This more recent history, as well as labour history, is Mekondjo's initial entry point and through which she reimagines the past:

> I'm fascinated by the idea of [how people] start[ed] this war journey from the Oshivelo 'red-line' point into Angola, to the [exile] Camps. From the same point, how the migrant workers crossed this 'red-line' travelling to work into the rest of Namibia. Psychologically, what did this line mean to these men? Was it like stepping onto "foreign land" while still being in the same exact land/ country? ...the 'red-line' is quite deep...it's like the middle line, where one can look up north and south and you will be *face to face with a country's history*, so bare, waiting to be exposed....
> I crossed the 'red-line' the very first time as a child, from Windhoek in 1990, traveling to Oshakati with my mother and baby sister at that time, as returnees…" [my emphasis][26]

> I really thought about [this stitching of the Red Line]. I didn't want to just use pen or paint, I really wanted it to be visible….The embroidery, the colour of the thread, the red, it doesn't matter if you are near or far, it still catches your eye that there is something red going through the work...You can see the bumpiness of the stitch, it creates texture on the canvas itself".[27]

Inscribing the Red Line on her canvases with thread, Mekondjo not only interrupts and divides each work, but also provides connection and continuity through the series. Importantly, the red embroidery evokes the rupture of space and temporality that colonialism and apartheid engendered, in different ways at different times. I suggest here that we might read it as a repetitive reference to land, and how imperial control of territory and movement had immeasurable consequences for black livelihoods.

In addition, Mekondjo's use of stitching has cultural and familial roots:

[26] Tuli Mekondjo, pers.comm, email 30th March 2020. The locations of these places can be seen in the map in Figure 1.
[27] Interview with Tuli Mekondjo, 12 February 2021.

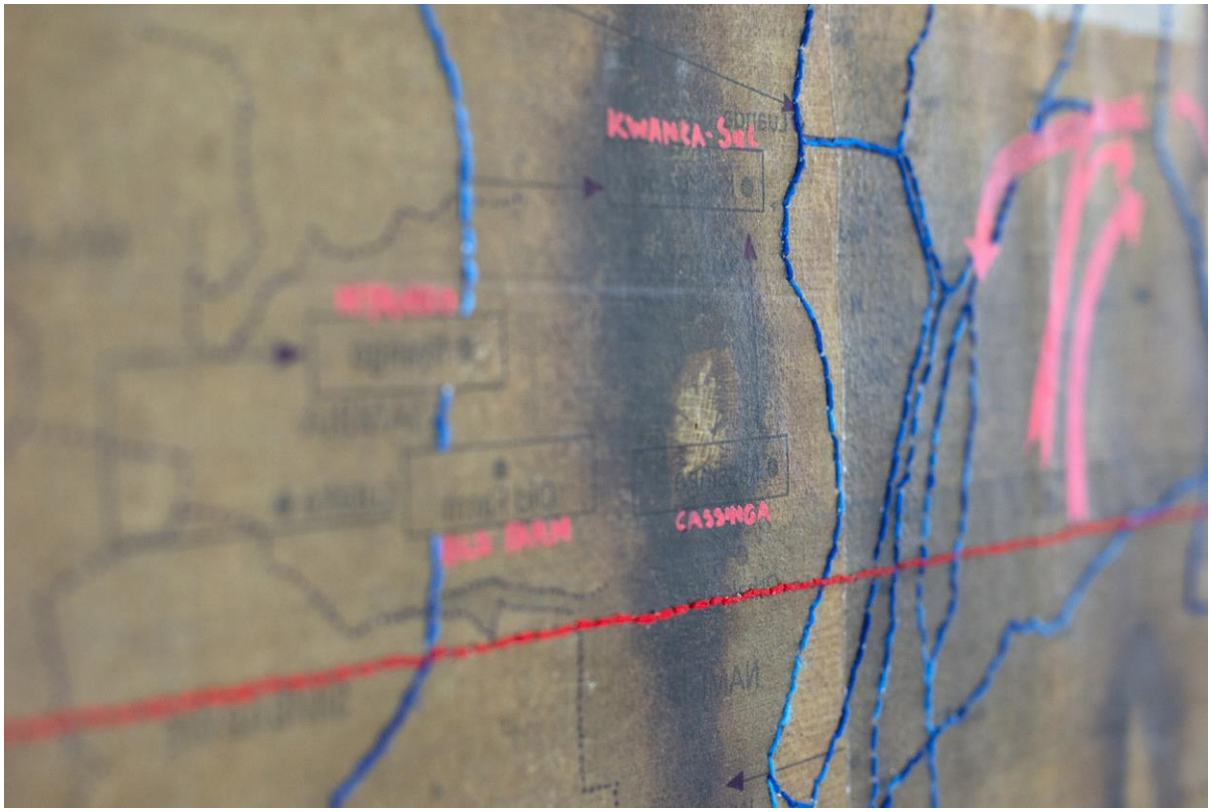



**Figure 6.** Detail from Tuli Mekondjo, *Ovanhu Vo Ma Casperi (People of The Casspirs)*, Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain, resin and embroidery on canvas), 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.

> My history with sewing is rooted within the basketry weaving of my grandmother…My grandmother would show me how to fold the Makalani palm leaves to create the base of the basket, that is mostly done by the women and in the end you would weave either oshimbale to carry or store mahangu or elilo to serve mahangu porridge. This education in basket-weaving set up my passion for sewing in general and to work with materials such as leather. The stitching in the artworks represents *the mending of the lost connection to my ancestors* and as a reference to *the 'backbone' of the women in our society*, of the many labours they have to keep working in order to feed their children and households (Mekondjo and van Huuysten 2021, my emphasis).

In some instances, the artist's embroidery hangs off the canvas in soft grass-like bunches (Figure 11): here we find a reference to *ovakwanaidi,* Mekondjo's maternal sorghum totem and another favoured material in her performances (Mushaandja 2021: 13). Plant materials and basketry are clearly linked to land and the nourishment it provides, as well as gender, labour and social reproduction. Whilst her grandmother's baskets were functional - to store grain, for example - Mekondjo's stitching plays a symbolic function which references all these aforementioned realms, and beckons healing for a ruptured past.

Last but certainly not least, Mekondjo's most unusual medium, *mahangu* (millet grain) flour, finds an important place in this matrix. She sprinkles the flour into resin applied onto her canvases and then, bringing together elements of earth and fire, seals it with a blowtorch (Figure 5).

> For centuries, the women in the northern part of Namibia toiled the soil and planted the mahangu seed and they would ask the ancestors for a good harvest. What a wonderful way to pay homage to these hard-working women, by incorporating mahangu in my work as a symbol of their strengths, how they nourished us with this mahangu and how they taught us, the meaning of work through the whole process of working the land, sowing the seed, tending to the mahangu sprouts, harvesting, pounding the mahangu into a fine meal at the end of the whole process. Every Ovambo person, who grew up in the northern part of Namibia, knows the importance of this mahangu field education… (Mekondjo and van Huuysteen 2021).

This medium in Mekondjo's work seems pertinent to decoloniality and to "new practices of self": it is once again a direct reference to land, and to gendered relationships to space and the ancestors. Through mahangu, she claims history, ancestry and belonging; the land is placed in her art, and vice versa, she places herself in it.





**Figures 7 and 8.** Tuli Mekondjo's Work. Installation images from *The Borders of Memory* exhibition at The Project Room, Windhoek, 2020. Courtesy of Frieda Lühl.

## "Photographs always escape their boundaries"[28]: Looking at *Meme Nekaya/Spiritual Embodiment of Meme Nekaya* (2020)

Having provided some broader context for Mekondjo's practice and related histories - specifically her use of of archival photographs, her experiences of exile and her references to land and space, I now turn to examine one artwork in greater depth, considering in more detail the lenses it provides on colonial history, gender and temporality.

In *Meme Nekaya/Spiritual Embodiment of Meme Nekaya* (Figure 9), two figures - captured in photographs - are turned towards each other, almost as if they are contemporaries in casual conversation. Yet there are multiple axes of ambivalence in the image. Are these persons contemporaries? Could they be in the same place at the same time, despite their very different attire? Under what circumstances would they be interacting? One of them is clothed in military fatigues with an AK47 slung over a shoulder; does the military attire suggest that this is therefore a man? The other figure seems to be in 'traditional' attire with an elaborate hairstyle extending all the way down the back of her body; breasts seem to confirm her femalehood. The legs of the figures give way into hair-like or grass-like threads. Keeping these ambivalences in mind, I very briefly return to the question of photographs as documentary witness and as historical 'truth'.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, documentary photography played an important part in shaping authoritative narratives about Namibia's Independence War, whether those were driven by SWAPO or the SADF. Cassinga's visual photographic record is noteworthy in this regard, and in Williams' examination of Cassinga's combatant versus civilian residents, he complicates some of the assumptions that viewers might make about documentary images. For example, commenting on photographs of teenage men in uniform, Williams (2010: 224) writes that "the uniforms which these boys are wearing were probably once worn by Cuban soldiers. The uniforms were often given by the Cubans to SWAPO officials in exchange for other commodities or as gifts. In turn, officials distributed them to Namibian youth entering the camps, many of whom wanted to dress up as soldiers. Youth, especially boys, often wore their

[28] Shiweda (2011: 67).

uniforms accompanied by pieces of wood which they carved to resemble guns." Immediately we 'see' that SADF interpretations of alleged numbers of SWAPO combatants may be problematic, had these unarmed boys been (mis)taken for trained soldiers. Williams' example is useful in demonstrating the ongoing ambivalence of documentary and archival images in how history and memory is contested and shaped.

I consider each of the figures in turn, but it is the 'traditional' figure on the right which opens up the richest seam of interpretation. According to the caption provided by Scherz et al. (1992) the woman is an Mbalantu Ovambo [Omuwambo] girl "shortly after the Ohango [initiation] ceremony with *eembuvi* plaits/hairstyle". The photograph was taken by Major C.H.L Hahn, Native Commissioner of then-Ovamboland from the early 1920s to the late 1940s. Namibian historian Napandulwe Shiweda (2011, 2019), whose research on photography in Namibia is now widely cited in the literature on the 'ethnographic gaze' (eg. Brandt 2020: 16), writes that "a huge mass of photographs of Ovambo customs and ethnography were produced [in the 1930s]...by Hahn and Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin who...photographed the [Aawambo] Ovakwanyama people at Omhedi". In line with other work on colonial photography, referenced briefly earlier, Shiweda convincingly argues that Hahn's photography, alongside his extensive research on the traditions of the Aawambo, "was integral to South African efforts to construct a colonial state in northern Namibia" (2011: 45). Indeed, as Peterson (2002: 29) has pointed out, "where robust forms of local knowledge could not be ignored or denied, colonial authorities sought to reshape and appropriate such 'archives' into the service of colonialism".

With close attention to gender throughout her thesis, Shiweda points out that "Photographs highlight...the empirical contrast between the invisibility of Aawambo women in most colonial documentation and their consistent visibility in colonial photographs of the period" (2011: 70). She argues that Aawambo women were constructed as bearers of "timeless tradition" (2011: 56) and "culture in staged ethnographic activities" (2011:4), in opposition to the march of urban change under colonial 'development'.

Archival images may circulate beyond their original intended spheres, finding expression in new forms (Hamilton et al. 2002), and perhaps with new or ambivalent readings and effects thereafter. Shiweda describes how she shared many of Hahn's colonial photographs with her research informants in northern Namibia: "[T]aking the photographs from the archives to the field allowed them to speak back from the past in a non-objectified or non-colonial way" (2011:

17). Shiweda thus argues that “photographs always escape their boundaries” (2011: 67), and I would argue that Mekondjo’s work enables this effect.



**Figure 9.** Tuli Mekondjo, *Meme Nekaya (Spiritual Embodiment of Meme Nekaya)*, Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain, resin and embroidery on canvas), 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.

I now turn to the soldier's image in *Meme Nekaya* (Figure 10). Mekondjo describes how she purposely sought out images of women in the archives:

> My focus with this body of work is obviously...on the roles of women...during the war time. They were on the front line fighting in a war in the trenches and at the same time raising children, [being] mothers and keeping things going in a domestic setting... they have to protect their children and had to raise the children during this very intense period... in a refugee camp…. a lot of times the voices of women soldiers [are] usually not heard because….people like to focus on the voices of the men that fought...
>
> I put together these two images of Meme Nekaya and one of the ladies from the Aawambo tribe. And the reason for that is just...to tell a history from how we as Aawambo evolved from wearing these traditional clothes... to the…[19]60s we have to wear, you know, a soldier's uniform and carrying a rifle and to fight a war (Mekondjo 2020).

A transfer of a photograph[29] reportedly taken in Angola in 1978 (the same year as Cassinga), the figure on the left of the artwork is a People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) soldier named Nekaya[30]. The source of the image is unknown, according to both the NAN and Mayibuye Archives[31]: a so-called "orphaned" image[32] which appears to confirm women's military participation in the war, and provides partial identification for the soldier. Upon closer scrutiny of the original archival photograph, Nekaya is a young slim black woman in uniform and appears to be in a rural environment. Her uniform is likely to have come from the Soviet Union, Cuba, Angola, Bulgaria, or East Germany[33], given that Namibia's liberation struggle was also ensconced in global Cold War alliances. The uniform gives her a sense of authority and discipline, yet with her hands in her pockets she also has a relaxed, casual stance. We do not know whether she was posing, or whether she was caught unawares. Wearing both earrings

[29] Source: National Archives of Namibia, reference number 15821, courtesy of Tuli Mekondjo.

[30] This name would have been a *nom du guerre* or pseudonym to protect the soldier's identity (Tuli Mekondjo, pers.comm, 23 February 2021).

[31] Its full name is the University of the Western Cape (UWC) Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archive, situated at UWC.

[32] The term "orphaned" was used by a Mayibuye archivist, and subsequently by Mekondjo as well in referring to some of the photographs she has used in her work. See email correspondence in Appendix 2c.

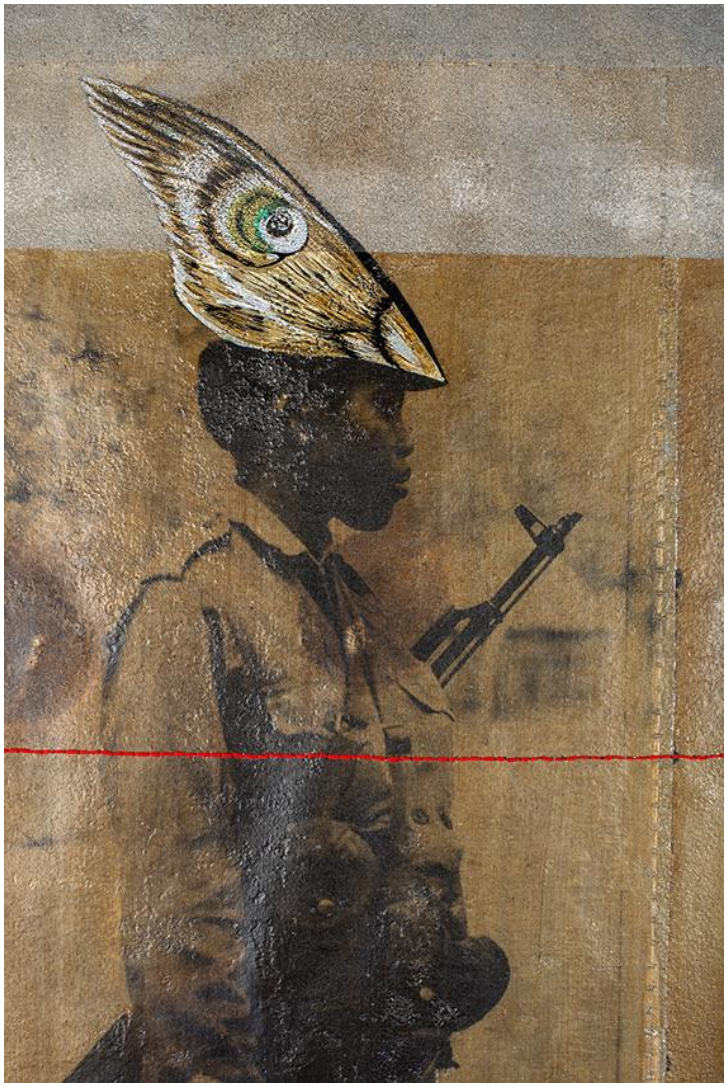
[33] Camopedia entry for 'South West Africa', URL https://www.camopedia.org/index.php?title=South_West_Africa (accessed 1.23.21). A Reuters photograph of a young Fidel Castro in an almost identical uniform suggests Nekaya's may be Cuban. URL: https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/live-fidel-castro-dead-90-9338198 (accessed 17 April 2021).

and trousers (still avoided by older women in rural Namibia today)[34], she brings together elements of masculine and feminine in her attire. There is a sense of the inevitable about her.

Mekondjo first brings the images of the two women - Nekaya the 'revolutionary woman' and her (pre)colonial 'twin' - into dialogue. In part, she sets up this dialogue as a 'then and now, before and after'. On one hand, the artist's twinning of the images could read as an overly simplistic dichotomy that romanticises the precolonial past, perhaps even *echoing* the colonial enterprise and its selective interests in inventing tradition. On the other hand, as Ross Truscott (2020: 296) has written in a review of a new collection of essays by young African scholars on photography, we should consider "the way images of resistance, or resistant images, recall the very objectifications they oppose" and read Mekondjo's work in this light. This reading is consistent with Brandt's argument about how colonial images are repurposed in new emerging cross-disciplinary practices that "create counter-narratives as a means of processing and healing. At the same time, they represent a spirit of resistance and radical determination to make previously silenced voices heard" (2020: 202).

To summarise, in mobilising the photographic archives, Mekondjo both speaks to *herself* about the past of her own people, as well as to collective memory and scholarship through the publics, local and global, that she engages with. *Meme Nekaya* and her precolonial *spiritual embodiment*, a sort of ancestral mirror, come from different eras and likely had fundamentally different lives, yet the Red Line transects both of them. Mekondjo brings them together, uniting them with her maternal totem of grass, and crowns of moth wings which represent the spirit or soul[35]. The artist becomes an agent for discursive multidirectionality and allows the archive to speak in different ways by bringing it into "new discursive fields" (Wolukau-Wanambwa 2019), countering some of the ruptures of history.

[34] Tuli Mekondjo, pers.comm, 19 March 2021.
[35] Tuli Mekondjo, pers.comm, 16 March 2020.





**Figures 10 and 11.** Detail from Tuli Mekondjo, *Meme Nekaya (Spiritual Embodiment of Meme Nekaya),* Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain, resin and embroidery on canvas), 2020.
Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.

## Possession: Spirituality, Gender and Counter-Rupture in Performance

Specialist in Zimbabwean English literature Anias Mutekwa (2010) has written about spirit possession not only as a key feature of Bantu cosmology and religion but also as an important trope in the writing of prominent Zimbabwean writers such as Charles Mungoshi, Stanley Nyamfukudza, Chenjerai Hove and Alexander Kanengoni. Mutekwa explores how the 'avenging spirit' is used in multiple works of fiction to "deconstruct phallocentric nationalist narratives" (2010: 166) and recover female voices, subjectivities and justice in the aftermath of war and unfulfilled promises of Independence. In Hove's *Ancestors*, for example, through an avenging spirit "the [woman] subaltern is able to speak and be heard" (2019: 167), and this capacity is extended to evoke other marginalized discourses such as indigenous knowledge systems about agriculture. Furthermore, "War and conflict are by their very nature sites for the commission and omission of crimes and iniquities that often go unpunished" writes Mutekwa (2010: 169), [such that] "the avenging spirit readily comes in handy as a traditional form of justice to expose and seek retribution".

Twenty years later, reading Mutekwa's text through a *fallist* lens allows additional interpretations: these writings seem to clearly position knowledge fostered through spirit possession as a form of decoloniality, and suggest that in some fundamental sense this *has to be* a gendered process. This is echoed in the substantial list of southern African women artists compiled by Brandt (2020), all engaging in 'new practices of self', many of which activate traumatic histories/memory in site-specific ways. Brandt (2020: 138) writes that

> [Namibian historian Memory] Biwa points out how the 'layers of suppression' of colonialism and South African occupation and apartheid in Namibia made it impossible to create formal spaces and institutions of remembrance. 'The kinds of institutions we did establish are things such as commemorations...the traditional authority held memory. They were the "record keepers" of histories such as genocide'.

Commenting on transient, often undocumented audio-visual and performative artistic practices such as the work of Trixie Munyama and the Da-mai Dance Ensemble, Brandt explains why these modalities *necessarily "*go beyond the prescriptive limits of the image and its unremitting associations with colonial violence and white supremacy" and why they are "instrument[s] of cultural and political activism" (2020: 139). In a similar vein to Brandt, Mushaandja's (2021:

16) new work on emerging, alternative cinematic forms by artists and activists in Windhoek[36] argues that "their forms and processes are not just alternative and undisciplined, they also challenge the mainstream cinematic praxis to engage in radical politics and decoloniality". We are also reminded here of Rogoff's (2006) view on the performative nature of culture, where "meaning takes place in the present", contingent on the immediate audience and their subjectivities

At the same time as reading spiritual practices as fertile for decoloniality, it is important not to romanticise this liberatory potential. We should not overlook that spiritual practices can, in other instances, be used used to drive "patriotic histories" *at the same time as* decolonial practices, as shown by archaeologist Njabulo Chipangura's (2020) highly original and macabre account of the exhumation and reburial of the war dead in Zimbabwe during a 2013 political elections cycle. In this case, the use of spirit mediums by ruling-party-aligned groups to 'identify' and disinter long-dead resulted in highly politicised public spectacles to decry colonialism, bolster ZANU(PF)'s legitimacy and undermine the opposition party MDC.

In turning towards Mekondjo's performance practice, we are aided by bringing together the analyses of Mutekwa, Biwa, Rogoff and Brandt. Mekondjo is open about the influence of the spiritual in her work, explaining that she feels her ancestors' presence and that "they are very vocal, I'm just a channel".[37] Speaking about her choice to carry out two recent performances in collaboration with a traditional healer,[38] Mekondjo's rationale stands clearly for what I term here "counter-rupture", a way of not only trying to access and acknowledge a precolonial past but to counter its degradation and destruction:

> [I]n Africa we have been 'stripped naked', deep from within, our Pagan Gods have been demonized and replaced with a Western God, we were made to fear the traditional spiritual part of us, and unfortunately, the traditional healer, was demonized too, as a soul that casts evil spells...

[36] Mushaanjda (2021) references video documentation work by artists and activists Tuli Mekondjo, JuliArt, Neige Moongo, Tangeni Kauzuu and the Decolonising Space Group, most of which is available online.

[37] Interview with Tuli Mekondjo, 2 February 2021.

[38] Tuli Mekondjo & Hafeni Muzanima, performance at Mekondjo's solo exhibition *Limbadungila*, The Project Room, Windhoek, October 2019; Tuli Mekondjo & Hafeni Muzanima, performance as part of *Operation Odalate Naiteke*, curated by Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, Katutura, Windhoek, 18 January 2020. Cf. https://www.namibian.com.na/197278/archive-read/Operation-Odalate-Naiteke-Returns-to-Katutura (accessed 22 February 2021).

> How can we be alive and not be spiritual and not remember our ancestors, we have lost so much, the time is now to re-root.[39]

Speaking about her perceptions of her collaborating traditional healer's motivations and involvement:

> He's very much about helping people reconnect with their ancestors and accepting that we need to get back to that, and [to] acknowledge that our ancestors are with us...Christianity gets rid [of] important ancestors...We need to acknowledge our ancestry… you think you are alone but they are actually with you… He did a couple of collaborations with Namibian artists, at a Goethe exhibition. I thought that was interesting.
>
> Then I told him my idea of my performance[40] and why I wanted him to be there...for it to be interactive, facing each other, not just opening the exhibition with a ritual, but I wanted the two of us to have that connection and work together that way. He was immediately up for it. We met beforehand, he wanted to check my energy...There was no rehearsal. We didn't have a script. I just gave him a guideline ...and [ask] what are his cues to switch things off if it gets too intense [when he goes into trance]. Everything in between was just natural. I really love that. Because you cannot script a performance like that! He will go away [into himself]...We just went with the flow of the piece.[41]

These same themes and characteristics came through clearly in Mekondjo's and Muzanima's powerful and boundary-pushing performance in January 2020 (Figure 12) as part of a programme titled *Operation Odalate Naiteke*, curated by Mushaandja. The performance resonates with Mushaandja's (2020, 2021) writing about '*Oudano'* as an African concept of performance through which we can read and study visual culture, and which does not rely on rehearsal but rather improvisation, desire and transgression (2021: 12).[42]

[39] Interview with Tuli Mekondjo, 2 February 2021.

[40] Tuli Mekondjo & Hafeni Muzanima, performance at Mekondjo's solo exhibition *Limbadungila,* The Project Room, Windhoek, October 2019.

[41] Interview with Tuli Mekondjo, 12 February 2021.

[42] See also Mushaanjda's analysis of Mekondjo's performance, *Ovakwanaidi*, filmed and edited by Vilho Nuumbala (2018), as part of the Live Museum of Afrotekismo public art project in Windhoek (2021: 13-15). Cf. Mushaandja, pers.comm, 7 May 2020.



**Figure 12.** Tuli Mekondjo & Hafeni Muzanima, performance as part of Operation Odalate Naiteke, curated by Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, Katutura, Windhoek, 18 January 2020. Courtesy of Julie Taylor.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have reflected on Tuli Mekondjo's practice and primarily her work for *The Borders of Memory* exhibition, of which the mixed media piece *Meme Nekaya* comprises an excellent example of the themes invoked therein. In exploring Mekondjo's work - in close dialogue with her biography and related transnational historiography of Namibia's Independence War - the terms rupture and disrupture become useful metaphors for thinking about imperialism (including South Africa *as* empire), coloniality and its effects writ large. These effects are referenced in Mekondjo's evocation of space, land and temporality.

I have resisted the urge to pin down and make legible Mekondjo's art, rather acknowledging how its meaning may be made dynamically, circumstantially and multidirectionally in the present. In *The Borders of Memory*, the artist mobilises photographic archival images which speak to her experience of wartime exile, and to comment more broadly on the experience of women and children whose voices have often been absent in "patriotic histories" about the past. This sometimes involves invoking those *very same* patriotic histories as a way to both point to and resist their absences through filling those gaps. She brings these archives into the "new discursive fields" of contemporary art practice and uses them to re-interpret her own past as well as make new histories.

Mekondjo also draws on the colonial ethnographic archive as a way to invoke, access, re-imagine and honour black subjectivities in the past and, in terms of her spiritual performance practice, perhaps re-imagine a different decolonial future as well. As Brandt (2020: 172) has written,

> The younger generation wants to move progressively away from the dictates of western hegemonic imports and instead draws on personal stories, oral histories and the imagination located in intimate narrative identities often expressed through performance...[African] symbols, metaphors and languages are deliberately recovered and valorized, in order to celebrate different knowledge systems connected to ways of being, and the creation of meaning, which through long histories of western domination have been marginalized.

In turn, Mekondjo's "new practices of self" might be theorised as 'counter-rupture': ways of not only accessing and acknowledging a re-valued precolonial past but countering its degradation, and resisting both Eurocentric and patriotic narratives about history. She does this at the same time as bringing the self and the collective into dialogue.

# Chapter 3: Dis-Placement: The Military, Gender and the Transnational in the work of Helena Uambembe

## Introduction

Helena Uambembe was born in 1994 to Angolan parents in Pomfret, Northern Cape, South Africa, and continues to live and work in South Africa, where she speaks Portuguese at home. The dominant themes in her practice are her Angolan heritage and the South African Defence Force (SADF) 32 Battalion, of which her father was a member. In this chapter I trace Helena Uambembe's biography and its historical context, as I offer an overview and interpretation of her art. As for the case of Mekondjo, whilst the legacy of Namibia's Independence War appears central for reading Uambembe's work, it should not however overdetermine or fix our understanding of her identity.

Uambembe's practice ranges from printmaking work - which appropriates archival military photographs - to textiles and performance, both of which also mobilise military themes and symbols. Uambembe interrogates dominant narratives and absences surrounding histories of the 32 Battalion that have been relayed most often by white male soldiers (eg. Jan Breytenbach 1990, 1998, Piet Nortje 2014), questioning their gaps whilst simultaneously telling her own story and constructing her own history. Historical research about the gendering of military communities in Africa broadly, and in the SADF in particular, is nascent (Bolliger 2019, 2021, Bolliger and Gordon 2020, Bolliger and Estevao 2021). In acting as an historian of sorts, drawing on political and military photographic archives - and in conversation with historians such as Bolliger - Uambembe both contributes to and draws on this new gendered field. Like Mekondjo, her practice embodies a dialectic, multidirectional process which mobilises archives, public and personal, to speak in new ways.

Place, space and self-determination appear as key themes in Uambembe's work, echoing Brandt's (2020) identification of these common themes emerging in "new practices of self" across the region. Whilst land and landscape do not appear to be a direct catalyst, I argue that thinking about *place*, home and what I term 'dis-placement' is particularly pertinent for Uambembe. Her broad evocation of and commentary on dis-placement is made through

opening up a gendered lens on life at Buffalo (the former 32 Battalion headquarters in northern Namibia) and on Pomfret (where many of the community were relocated thereafter), considering the lives of women, children and family in this space/place. As such she references domesticity and violence in equal measure.

Uambembe's work is also significant for its persistent reference to the transnational (evoking both space and time), in turn speaking to Bolliger's research, linking the histories of Angola, Namibia and South Africa and acknowledging the countries' fundamental entanglement. At the same time, of course, this transnational view urges us to think once again about South Africa *as* empire. Even whilst acknowledged to some degree in the historiographic literature, this idea is little recognised in the mainstream popular discourses about apartheid in South Africa with which Uambebe engages, and to which she responds. In turn this may problematise the way we conceive of the workings of coloniality.

Are practices such as Uambembe's and Mekondjo's are really 'new', as Brandt (2020) has posited, in what ways, and how do we theorise these modes of artistic practice in relation to the archive? Namibian historian Memory Biwa's work is most helpful in this regard. Her examination of memory among Namibian Nama communities makes a strong case for taking sensorial memory practices seriously as historical "evidence", reading and commemoration; she argues that "these practices depart from a conventional way in which to view an archive and history" (Biwa 2012: 2; cf. Brandt 2020: 139). This of course points to broader epistemological and methodological questions: how do we value, assess, prioritize and privilege different types of knowledge and sources - for example texts versus oral histories versus performance - and what does this reflect about the deep-seated Western ethnocentrism within much of the academy? Are practices to activate the archive in new ways inherently decolonial then (cf. Mahashe 2019)? But also, has this already happened for a long time - as in the case of Biwa's Nama communities - and we just did not notice, or, is that we did not have the necessary frameworks available in order to take such practices seriously?

Textiles are an important part of Uambembe's practice, in particular for *The Borders of Memory* exhibition, and in this regard Biwa's work again becomes useful for how we might understand gendered materialities: the "extra-linguistic sensory perceptions of material experience display a double enactment where material objects were sensed and sensed with" (Biwa 2012: 98, cf. Maharaj 2009). Bringing Biwa's analysis into conversation with

Uambembe's practice in turn opens up a new line of questions: namely, can we increasingly recognise and apply African concepts of performance and memory in art history (cf. Enwezor 1999, Mahashe 2019, Mushaandja 2021)?

## Nation, Race and Gender in the SADF 32 Battalion

### Transnational Identities and "Taking Sides"

Whilst being aware of concerns around the reductive capacity of biography as a lens through which to understand an artist's practice (cf. Gule 2013, Horwitz 2017), it seems clear that the transnational apartheid and post-apartheid experiences and circumstances of Uambembe's family is fundamentally important to understanding her work. As such, this somewhat complicated history requires substantial simplification for the reader. In 1975 Uambembe's father was recruited into the SADF 32 Battalion, which was led by white South African officers but was primarily made up of black former guerrillas from Angola. Many of the Battalion's members joined the unit after fleeing Angola's burgeoning civil war (1975-2002). Having occupied Namibia *de jure* since 1969 and *de facto* since 1915, the SADF's military operations into Angola were conducted to prevent the new Angolan government from supporting Namibia's growing liberation movement, and publicly positioned as part of a broader campaign against the rise of Soviet-backed communism. The 32 Battalion base camp was strategically situated in then-Caprivi, on Namibia's remote northern border with Angola. After Namibian Independence in 1990, the Battalion's predominantly Angolan military community was relocated from Namibia to Pomfret, where Uambembe was born in 1994.

Historian Bolliger's research is especially important for this chapter because of his revisionism which, like Williams', addresses absences in the military historical literature about Namibia's Independence War. His work is situated within a broader body of writing on African soldiers who fought in settler and colonial armies, and in understanding their motivations and agency beyond blanket terms like 'sell-outs', 'traitors' or 'collaborators' (cf. Dlamini 2020). Drawing on oral histories and archival research, Bolliger examines the history of black Namibian and Angolan soldiers who served in apartheid South Africa's security forces, focusing on the 32

Battalion.[1] He differentiates between the military cultures of different units, examining race, gender and militarized masculinities which were founded in 'civilizing' and paternalistic apartheid policies and psychologies.

Bolliger's (2021: 2) central argument is that

> these soldiers' trajectories and experiences profoundly challenge the dominant framing of southern Africa's wars of decolonization as struggles of 'national liberation' fought by and for Africans against colonial state forces and their 'collaborators'. In fact, the case of these soldiers provides new insight into the divisions and fractures of national liberation and the transnational dynamics that shaped the wars…

In addition, Bolliger poses a second central question, which "seeks to address the impact of the soldiers' military involvement on the post-liberation trajectories of Namibia and South Africa, in particular with regard to their political engagement and to questions of *citizenship and belonging*" [my emphasis] (2021: 4). This too I believe is highly pertinent to Uambembe's experience of post-apartheid South Africa.

## War, Displacement and Legitimacy in History-Telling

Like Mekondjo, Uambembe grew up in a displaced refugee community[2] , even though this community did not bear the characteristics that we might ordinarily associate with refugees. As Bolliger (2020: 5) reports,

> Within 15 years, the soldiers of 32 Battalion and their families had been displaced twice: first from Angola to Namibia and then again from Namibia to South Africa. While most soldiers and their partners were originally from Angola, many of their children were born in Namibia and later South Africa. As a result, many soldiers and their families feel like they have, in a sense, become "strangers everywhere". In our interview, one man related a typical conversation with people in South Africa, who would ask him and his friends: "'Where are you guys from?' 'We are from Pomfret.' 'No, where are you originally from?' So you have to explain yourself and it's a long story".

[1] Will Gordon's (2019) PhD study also looks at 32 Battalion, but in contrast to Bolliger seems to sometimes inadvertently endorse - or at least not sufficiently interrogate - the paternalism of the SADF.

[2] Bolliger made this point in his online lecture presentation, 21 April 2020. See Appendix 4d.

Uambembe continues to pose questions about her belonging, asking "Am I Angolan enough, am I South African enough?"[3] She acknowledges that she is "neither here nor there", that it is a case of constantly changing performance, and that she is repeatedly reminded of her outsiderness.[4]

Her unusual set of intersecting identities means that Uambembe is perhaps even more closely aware than her peers about questions of who has the authority to speak about the past. Whilst in the case of Mekondjo, the memory of SWAPO exile camps (such as Cassinga) have been highly contested in public discourse, the history of 32 Battalion is not so much contested as bearing substantial gaps and omissions, which both Uambembe and Bolliger seek to address. This (lack of) telling of history is both gendered and racialized: for example, key autobiographical texts about the 32 Battalion written by white soldiers exclude the experiences of black soldiers, women and children.[5]

In addition, growing up in democratic South Africa, Uambembe describes her frustration and anger about the fact that her black South African contemporaries often do not seem to understand that apartheid did not only affect those *within* South Africa[6]. Her view, experience and practice is fundamentally transnational, a perspective which, in parallel to Bolliger's work, complicates received wisdom about 'the Border War':

> There is disbelief amongst other South Africans [whom I speak to], where the shared history [between South Africa and Angola] is not discussed at all. It's like it didn't happen. The narrative [is that] apartheid only happened in SA and that was it.... that's what a lot of people believe.[7]

To this extent, there appears to be an echo between blindsports in popular discourses and historiographic absences regarding South Africa's colonial relationship(s) with Namibia - and by extension with Angola too. As such, Uambembe is driven by a desire to fill in gaps, to offer alternative histories and counter-narratives, and to present her own experiences, memories and

[3] Interview with Helena Uambembe about her exhibition "I Am/Am I", Longstreet Art Lovers 1932, Pretoria, 2016 (Uambembe 2016).

[4] Interview with Helena Uambembe, 8 February 2021.

[5] Examples include Nortje's (2014) *The Terrible Ones* and Jan Breytenbach's (1998) *Buffalo Soldiers* and (1990) *They Live by the Sword.* Cf. Lennart Bolliger, pers. comm, 15 February 2021.

[6] Helena Uambembe, in discussion with Bolliger, Mekondjo and Uambembe, 2 April 2020.

[7] Helena Uambembe, in discussion with Bolliger, Mekondjo and Uambembe, 2 April 2020. Cf. Uambembe's contribution to the online panel discussion on 21 April 2020 (see transcript in Appendix 3).

inheritances, making and claiming her place in this dis-placed history. I return to these themes throughout this chapter. Concurrently, Uambembe is aware of the *limitations* of her own practice when it comes to invoking and reshaping history:

> I'm filling in those gaps [in historical knowledge] talking about Namibia as best I can. Even if it's just telling the story of 32 [Battalion] that may bring to light what had happened. But then again, who engages with art without just seeing pretty pictures?...I'm trying to educate...through the small number of people who engage with art. Not everyone engages with history. We choose what we engage with. A lot of people don't really engage with African history, even Africans themselves.[8]

More broadly, both Uambembe and Mekondjo expressed a consciousness about people of colour speaking (or not) about the past.

> Uambembe: Who does history belong to?
> Mekondjo: Do you think we make it difficult because we don't believe people of colour ourselves when they tell stories? We are conditioned to believe and respond in certain ways? Why is it so difficult for us...to trust...to believe…?[9]

There is a thread here that takes us back to dominant narratives (both the white male military autobiographies and the ANC's and SWAPO's patriotic histories) as well as the issue of 'conventional' history-writing, and its privileging of texts and oral histories over other types of mediums (cf. Biwa 2012) *despite* our allegedly sophisticated comprehensions of 'the archive' (Hamilton et al 2002, 2020). In the sections that follow, I hope to show how Uambembe, like Mekondjo, seeks not only to tell different stories - referencing her own black, gendered, child-informed, (dis)placed experiences - but to tell them differently through her own "new practices of self" through particular mediums, materials and performance.

## Gender, Place, Memory and Materiality in *Lembrança de casa (Memories from Home)* (2020)

*Lembrança de casa (Memories of Home)* (Figure 13) is a large multi-colour textile work made from two layers of cotton and canvas respectively. It is notably titled in Portuguese rather than English, whereby Uambembe acknowledges the immediate circumstances of her production

[8] Interview with Helena Uambembe, 8 February 2021.

[9] Discussion with Bolliger, Mekondjo and Uambembe, 2 April 2020.

(such as listening to Angolan Portuguese music whilst in the studio)[10] but also seems to deliberately harness language as a mechanism for pointing to difference (cf. Gule 2013). The artwork features what appears to be an abstract design with curvaceous interconnected lines, almost reminiscent of cursive handwriting.

In the sections that follow, I suggest some interpretations of this work which are grounded in the themes of gender, place and dis-placement, in light of Uambembe's biography and revisionist historical literature. As Bolliger has explained (2019), one of the 32 Battalion's most unusual features was that hundreds of women and children were affiliated with the unit. The topics of civilian communities and gender in this context have only recently become the subjects of analysis and, as Bolliger and Estevao (2021: 3) write, "understanding militarism requires examining gender relations and the production of militarised versions of both femininity and masculinity."

## Gendering the Buffalo: The War always at Home and the Unspoken Tent

On closer examination the top layer of *Lembrança de casa* is made from army-green waterproof canvas, which bears evidence of pencil tracing lines along which the artist has hand-cut her design into the fabric (see detail in Figure 14 and 15). This cutting is careful and delicate; in some places the canvas only maintains its connection to itself via sections that are two millimetres wide. There is no stitching on the work besides at the outer edges, where the cotton and canvas layers have been joined with machine stitching.

Contrary to first impressions of an abstract pattern, Uambembe's cut-out design in her canvas is very particular: it is based on the shape of a buffalo's head. This buffalo symbol was part of the 32 Battalion's military dress insignia (Figure 28), as well as the name of the Battalion's base camp during the war.[11] Uambembe's reference, however, does not simply evoke this geographical place but the characteristics of the animal. The buffalo, she says, is a large, stubborn, resilient creature capable of fighting off lions. In her practice, she uses the buffalo as a symbol of white Afrikaner masculinity[12] - and thus perhaps indirectly as a symbol for

[10] Interview with Helena Uambembe, 8 February 2021.

[11] Former 32 Battalion member Nortje explains that the name Buffalo referenced the herds of buffalo that roamed the adjacent Kavango River floodplain (Nortje 2014: 181).

[12] Helena Uambembe, pers.comm, studio visit, Arts on Main, 6 March 2020; pers.comm, 2 April 2020.

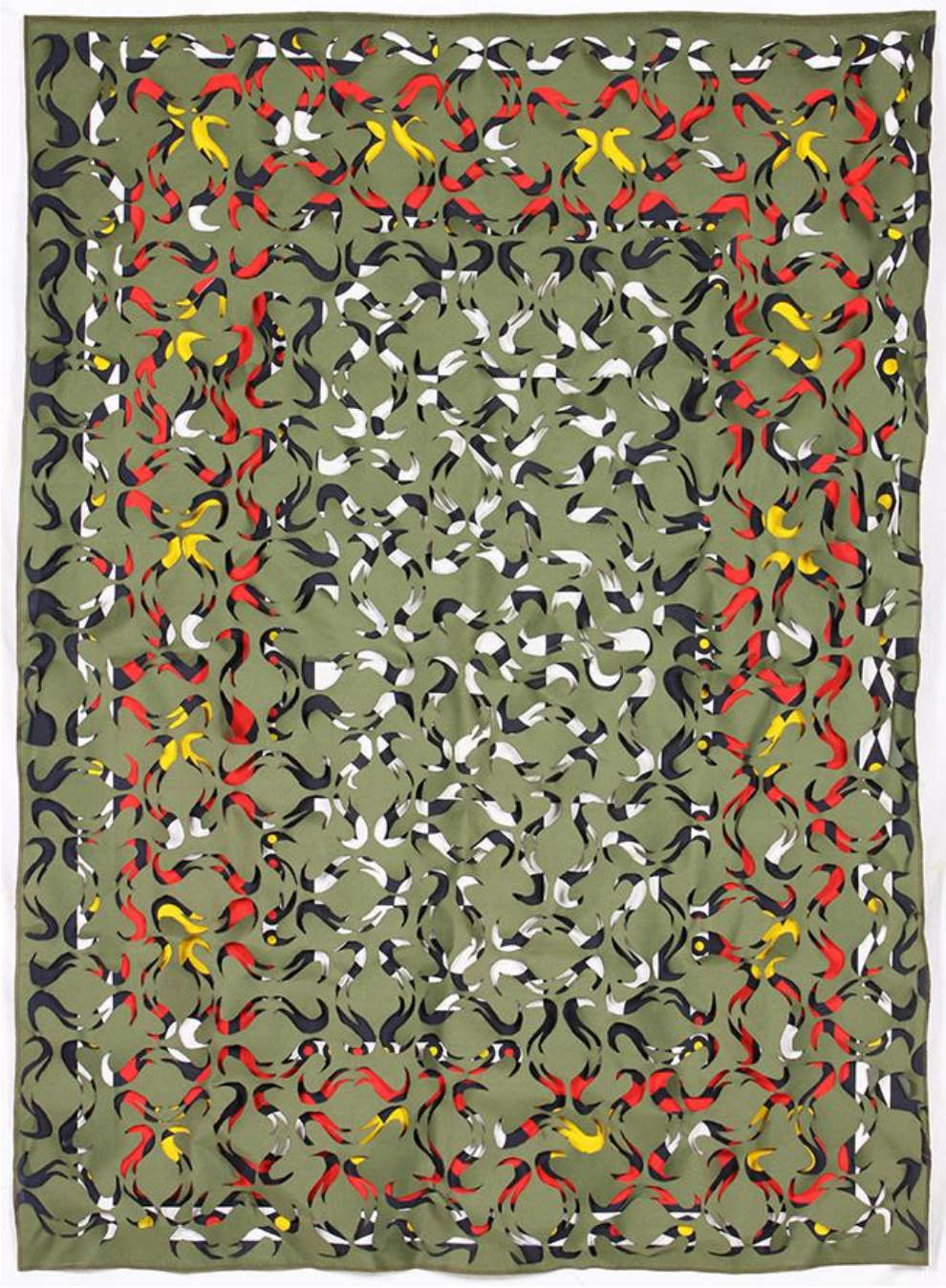
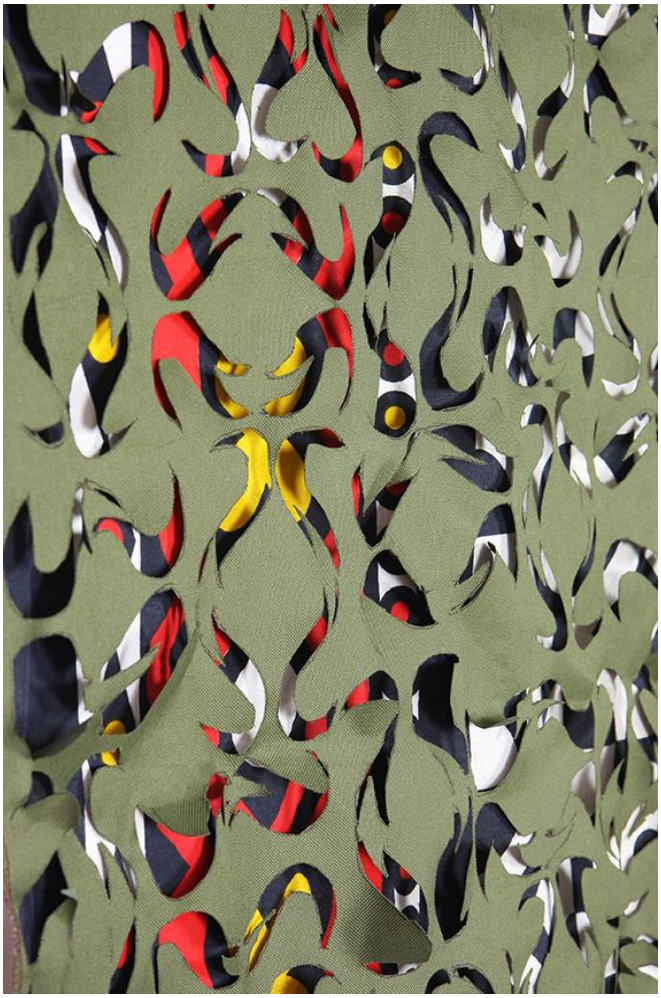


**Figure 13.** Helena Uambembe, *Lembrança de casa (Memories of Home)*, Waterproof canvas and cotton (‘traditional’ Angolan samacaca fabric), (hand cut), 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.





**Figures 14 and 15.** Detail from Helena Uambembe, *Lembrança de casa (Memories of Home)*, Waterproof canvas and cotton (‘traditional’ Angolan samacaca fabric), (hand cut), 2020.
Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.

apartheid more broadly. Whilst the buffalo is not the first or only animal motif she has used in her work[13] - because she finds animal motifs useful in their capacity to take on complexity and layers of meaning[14] - the buffalo finds a recurring and prominent place in her work starting from 2018, both in performance[15] and print-making.[16]

For example, in her series *Ghost of my Parents Past/ A luta Continua a te Quando* (2018), Uambembe superimposes her own buffalo-masquerade silhouette on black and white military and political photographs. These range from posed 'institutional' shots of uniformed soldiers of the 32 Battalion (such as in the work *Os Buffalos*, Figure 17) to documentary photographs[17] of political leaders Agostinho Neto[18] and Jonas Savimbi[19] (for example, the work *Chipenda, Savimbi, Holden and I*, Figure 16). In the variety of photographs she chooses, she points to the complex political dynamics of southern Africa's transnational war(s), including South Africa's role in undermining liberation struggles across the region. In some of the images Uambembe carries or wears the head of the recurring buffalo; in others she wears a beret in a nod to militarism. Her skirt is sometimes jarring in these clearly male-dominated contexts. Her silhouetted gestures, in which she often reaches out to touch the faces and hands of the political protagonists, suggest not only a desire to engage with this past and seek answers from it, but to travel through time and claim a place within it.

Uambembe's use of the silhouette finds reference in a much broader global art history, including art that speaks to gendered and racialized positions and historical engagement. In this regard, African American artist Kara Walker's cut-paper silhouettes and animations are particularly well-known and, together with her monumental sculptures (Bidisha 2019, Blake Gopnik 2014, Kayra Uguz 2020) comment on white supremacy and the degradations of black

[13] See artworks in her exhibition "I am/am I", Art Lovers 1932, Pretoria 24th-31st March 2016, which employed a number of animal motifs, explained in a short interview (Uambembe 2016).

[14] Interview with Helena Uambembe, 8 February 2021.

[15] She used a buffalo mask in the performance *Shinganji* by Kutala Chopeto (Helena Uambembe and Teresa Firmino), 2018, The Point of Order, Johannesburg.

[16] Other bodies of work where the buffalo features prominently include *Ghost of my Parents Past/ A luta Continua a te Quando (2018)* and *Commander Nel's Archive* (2021), produced with David Krut Projects.

[17] The photographs came from multiple published sources including printed books and the internet. Helena Uambembe, pers.comm, 27 March 2021.

[18] Neto Angola's first president and leader of the MPLA.

[19] Savimbi was leader of UNITA which fought the MPLA during Angola's civil war. Uambembe reported that her work's exhibition in Luanda in 2019 was the first time that Savimbi's image had been shown in an Angolan museum (Interview, 8 February 2021).

suffering in the context of slavery and colonisation. Leesa Rittelman's (2008) work is useful for understanding that the silhouette already had a long and racialized history in both the United States and Europe. She makes a strong argument for silhouette's substantial impact and versatile function in modern and contemporary Black American art (2008: 287), positioning the silhouette as one of the most identifiable and enduring aesthetic legacies of this genre/movement, engaging rigorously as it does with questions of race and racial struggles (2008: 291), and examining how "the Black American body has been literally and metaphorically reduced to a mere shadow of its physical and historical referent" (2008: 289).

In this light we might consider Uambembe's own silhouette not only as claiming her own place as a black Angolan-descended woman in the fraught and entangled history of South Africa, Angola and Namibia, but also calling for an acknowledgement and more nuanced treatment of Angolan positions and experiences in this transnational mix (cf. Brandt 2020: 109-110). Evoking her individual experience of a complicated history, her art in turn begs broader questions. What is the role of 'nation' in 'empire', one might ask; what is the place of 'nation' in the postcolony; and what is the place of a nation where one *imagines* one belongs, in either the past or the future, or both?

In Uambembe's textile works made for *The Borders of Memory*, she repeats and embeds the buffalo almost obsessively; it is an ever-present spectre. To this extent the buffalo may become a motif for the War at large, and its legacies at both collective and personal level. Yet at the same time, the modes via which Uambembe evokes the buffalo symbol in her artworks are subversive. Firstly, she extracts and appropriates the symbol from its military and wartime context - popularly understood through dominant narratives as a spatial and discursive domain of men. Uambembe then takes this further, harnessing the symbol to comment on women's and children's experiences, women's work and the domestic sphere at Buffalo base camp and later its trajectories in Pomfret.

In *Lembrança de casa*, Uambembe transfers the buffalo into a fabric explicitly associated with the military: waterproof canvas in olive green. Her choice to use this material is specific and intentional:

> I was really attracted to waterproof canvas used for tents. Because in Buffalo and Pomfret the first homes [of the soldiers and their families] were made from tents.



**Figure 16.** Helena Uambembe, *Chipenda, Savimbi, Holden and I*, 2018, Photographic Print. Courtesy of the artist.



**Figure 17.** Helena Uambembe, *Os Buffalos*, 2018, Photographic Print on Fine Art Rag. Courtesy of the artist.

> Tents are also used at funerals in Angolan custom, and for my mum's funeral, it was a green huge military tent that was rented. That's the type of fabric that I found.[20]

Once one has an understanding of the military inspirations for Uambembe's practice as a whole, Uambembe's layered fabrics may at first sight give the appearance of military 'camo netting', therein suggesting an element of disguise, of hiding or blending in - reminiscent of the buffalo masquerade. Yet whilst the canvas and its colour has clear military resonances, the physical structure for which it functions - that of the tent - starts to loom large. Is a tent a home, for whom and for how long? Thus the canvas (and its unspoken tent) also perhaps becomes a metaphor for transience and displacement, for arrivals and departures yet, on its flip side, for home and belonging.

In other artworks in the same series (eg. *Untitled (buffalo heads)* (Figure 19)) the artist transforms the symbol into 'softer', more decorative, 'feminine' motifs, using fabrics that she associates with interior home decor of her childhood. Furthermore, the modalities via which she manifests the buffalo - through cutting, stitching and embroidering - are themselves gendered and performative activities. As Uambembe described during the process of creating her body of work for *The Borders of Memory* (2020) exhibition:

> I'm going into embroidery as well...The one I'm currently sewing is buffalo heads.…[it's related to] the idea of this beautiful perfect home and having this green olive fabric with buffalo silhouettes and military cut-outs imposing on that home… I'm also thinking about the home I grew up in in Pomfret, how it was decorated, the fabrics that were used. And also about things that took place in the home - events, happy moments, sad moments - and how it *always* had to do with the military even if [the military] wasn't mentioned.[21]

In such commentary, we find that the war is always 'at' home, even when it is over; Uambembe's gendered performance of cutting and embroidering textiles acknowledges these strata of experience and memory. In some cases, the buffalo symbol is explicit - in others it is somehow disguised in its transposition. What is seen and what is unseen? And, things are not always as they seem. Writing about the "homeplace" as a site of resistance, bell hooks (cited in Hamilton et al 2020: 24) asserts that

[20] Helena Uambembe, pers.comm, 2 April 2020. See Figure 18 for a photograph of tents at Buffalo.

[21] Helena Uambembe, in discussion with Bolliger, Mekondjo and Uambembe, 2 April 2020.

> Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist … black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not abject objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts … where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world.

In Uambembe's "new practices of self", the home becomes a critical space-place, a crucible where the war and its histories becomes legible, but also where women and children can be made subjects in a context of dis-placement, violence and erasure from historical narratives.

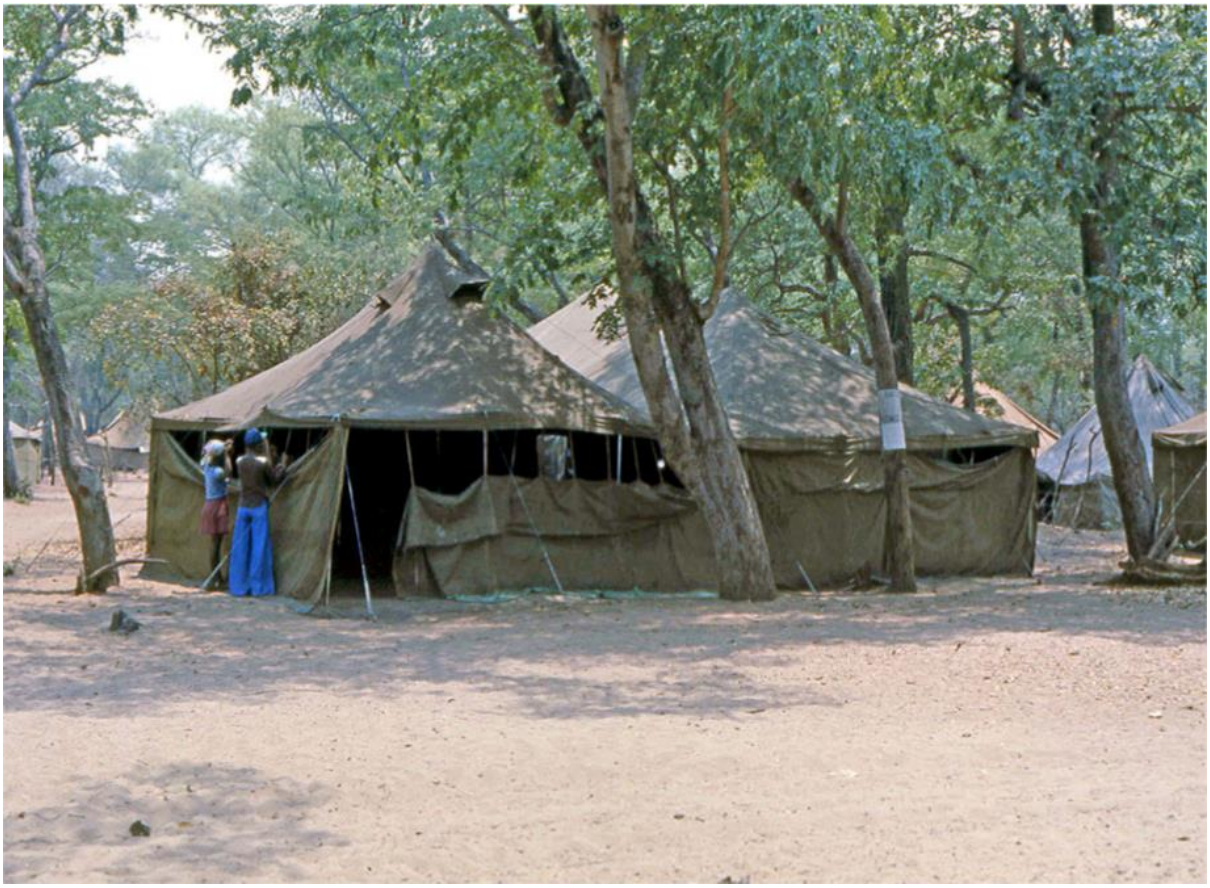


**Figure 18.** South African Defence Force (SADF) 32 Battalion base camp in northern Namibia during the Independence War, date unknown but circa 1977-1978, Personal Archive of Colonel Gert Nel. Courtesy Helena Uambembe.



**Figure 19**. Helena Uambembe, *Untitled (Buffalo Heads)*, Waterproof canvas and organza (hand cut and stitched), 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.



**Figure 20**. Detail from Helena Uambembe, *Untitled (Buffalo Heads)*, Waterproof canvas and organza (hand cut and stitched), 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Guns & Rain.

## *Samakaka* and 'Flagging' Angolan-ness

In *Lembrança de casa*, the cut-out canvas is layered against a length of bright, boldly-patterned *samakaka* fabric that Uambembe describes as popular in Angola and in the Pomfret community. Employing the red, black yellow and white colours of Angola's national flag, which is based on the flag of the ruling Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) party, *samakaka* is a commercial 'African' print fabric, the type that is designed, printed and sold in a standardised two-metre length, commonly worn by women as a wraparound skirt.

Uambembe references *samakaka* in her earlier printmaking work (for example, in *Like Father* (2019) (Figure 21)), even though this is monochromatic, and also used *samakaka* in at least two performances in 2019 (Figure 22 and 31)[22]. Angolan curator Paula Nascimento reports that the *samakaka* fabric, "has become a sort of representation of national identity [in Angola]"[23] whilst gallerist Dominick Maia-Tanner said that "it is widely associated [with] something a bit touristy and what outsiders view (often wrongly) as a trademark or symbol of Angolan nationalism or identity".[24] Uambembe's usage of the textile seems to concur with this somewhat fixed nationalistic reading of *samakaka*, although she is nonetheless cognisant of the state's attempts at harnessing material culture for nation-building: "You would know someone as an Angolan if they're wearing it...It represents a national identity that was constructed post-war, *the government's attempt to get people to move on* from what had happened [my emphasis]".[25]

My efforts to uncover additional information about *samakaka* were somewhat futile, and this was confirmed by Maia-Tanner and Nascimento, who pointed to the dearth of information about the textile and to a more precarious interpretation of its capacity as an identity-marker:

> [T]here are very few references... basically this is a fabric that is used not only by the Herero people in the south of Angola but...spreads through various countries in the south, contrary to the narrative that this fabric is native from Angola. Also, the fabric itself is not manufactured here in Angola - now most of it is manufactured in China,

[22] Helena Uambembe, *My load I shall carry (Prayer to Mother Njiga)*, 2019, Performance at The Melrose Gallery, Johannesburg, as part of their Women's Month Programme.
[23] Paula Nascimento, pers comm, 9th April 2020
[24] Dominick Maia-Tanner, pers.comm, 4 April 2020.
[25] Helena Uambembe, pers.comm, 22 April 2020.

> but before the China phenomenon in Africa I have no clue as to where it was manufactured.[26]
>
> It is the name of a former King of Huambo who fought the Portuguese [in the] early XX [20th] Century, also the name of a village and I believe also a district in Angola. It is unknown when, how and who created or developed the Samakaka cloth - most probably a post-colonial effort.[27]

Uambembe confirms that it is easily found in downtown Johannesburg, and that one salesman told her that it came from Vietnam.[28]

Despite the ambiguities surrounding the origin and ongoing construction of *samakaka*, it is clear that Uambembe mobilises the fabric to refer to Angolan identity, and that Angolans in South Africa may use it to 'flag' who they are. Indirectly Uambembe thus also talks to ideas about place and national identities. She does this in view of the transnational history of which she is a part, but perhaps also in light of the xenophobia that has repeatedly become a violent and divisive part of South Africa's social landscape since 2008. Whilst seeking to 'make visible' and often purge the local economy of foreigners, this xenophobia ironically simultaneously erases histories of anti-apartheid support and refuge provided by South Africa's neighbours in years gone by. Given Uambembe's experience of transnational dis-placement, using *samakaka* in her practice appears at once to be both a signal of difference and a claim to belong.

[26] Paula Nascimento, pers.comm, 1 February 2021.

[27] Dominick Maia-Tanner, pers.comm, 4 April 2020.

[28] Helena Uambembe, pers.comm, 10 April 2020.



**Figure 21.** Helena Uambembe, *Like Father,* Paper Lithography and watercolour on Fabriano paper, 2019. Courtesy of the artist.



**Figure 22.** Helena Uambembe, *My load I shall Carry (Prayer to Mother Njiga),* Performance at The Melrose Gallery, Johannesburg, 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

## Gender, Domesticity and Violence at Buffalo

Under the SADF at Buffalo, black women "were introduced to a military culture that was not only 'paternalistic, authoritarian and autocratic' but also deeply violent... and their lives came to be regulated by a mixture of official military policies and informal and often ambiguous rules instituted by individual officers" (Bolliger and Estevao 2021:9). The SADF intervened upon and closely managed domestic and sexual relations in multiple ways. These were clearly prescribed in the use of space and access to resources, but also in an institutional sense. Discipline was violently enforced through the use of the *sjambok* (leather whip). As the authors (2021: 12) describe,

> authorities aimed to use 'access to women' as a means to control and discipline black troops. Black soldiers who wanted to 'find a woman' [to bring back to the base as a partner], as many interviewees put it, had to pay a deposit of R40-50[29] before being given a week of leave. The deposit was most likely intended to prevent desertion. If troops returned to Buffalo alone, they not only lost their deposit but were whipped with the sjambok.

One of the most bizarre and visible ways in which domesticity was intervened upon was through a mass marriage ceremony of over 350 couples in 1978, presided over by SADF Commander Colonel Gert Nel (Bolliger and Estevao 2021: 11)[30]. In tandem, adultery was punished with the *sjambok*, with both men and women being beaten.

Whilst a minority of women were teachers, nurses and tailors, the majority were expected to provide domestic services. As Uambembe describes it, women's work in the military was enacted towards the sustenance of men[31]: their daily activities would have included washing, ironing, cleaning, sewing clothes and curtains, and cooking amongst others. Whilst women's roles may appear predominantly 'subservient', Bolliger and Estevao point out that women were not simply passive subjects of military discipline. For example, they sometimes broke rules that prohibited beer-brewing, despite the serious consequences of being caught. Furthermore, as Uambembe repeatedly points out, women at Buffalo and later at Pomfret took the initiative

[29] In today's money, this would be an amount of approximately 750-1000 rand, if the interviewees were referring to the period 1980-1985. See www.inflationtool.com.

[30] Cf. Helena Uambembe, pers.comm, studio visit, Arts on Main, 6 March 2020.

[31] Helena Uambembe, pers.comm, studio visit, Arts on Main, 6 March 2020.

and care to make their homes attractive. They thus exercised their agency in various ways, in the face of the SADF's substantial incursions into domestic relations and day-to-day life.

Uambembe's lived experience of growing up at Pomfret in an ex-military family, and her own research - for example, interviewing former Battalion Commander Colonel Gert Nel at his home in Pretoria - brings a richer, more intimate gendered dimension to this history that Bolliger's does not achieve[32]. Yet simultaneously engaging with both the historian and the artist is highly complementary, bringing gender, violence and domesticity into sharper perspective. They have very different methods, so, how is Uambembe making history differently, and in turn what does this effect?

## Memory, Materiality and Performance

At this juncture I turn to Memory Biwa's (2012) work as we further assess Uambembe's practice. Paying close attention to Nama women's roles in history-keeping and -making, Biwa (2012: 98) points to how women's 'traditional' garments, artefacts and the specific materials they employ form part of a landscape of sensory memory evoked and experienced during particular community rituals that recall the genocide of 1904-1908:

> "[M]aterial artefacts such as quilts, shawls and dresses were mnemonic features through which historical, cultural, gender identification and narratives were re-enacted"...[they] represented the content of the historical narratives of past sensory experience, they also presented new meanings to the women and to the perceiver at the moment of re-enactment. This was the moment of performance where the artefacts were recalled and activated as a representation of a particular narrative".

Biwa stresses that materiality and tactility goes beyond language and text, with material objects being both "sensed and sensed with". Specific materials and artefacts are "recalled and activated" in relation to particular historical narratives, opening up a different kind of 'archive'. Most significantly, Biwa makes a strong argument that "sensory memory, both as conscious and unconscious embodied histories alert us that there were *other knowledge regimes* by which historical narratives became known and represented that were not necessarily recorded in official histories" (Biwa 2012: 99, my emphasis).

[32] Bolliger acknowledged that this is one of the reasons he invited her to speak to his students in Potsdam and Berlin (pers.comm, 15 February 2021).

Biwa's approach gives us useful tools for thinking about *not* fixing the meaning of an artwork, at the same time as for thinking unconventionally about 'the archive'. Returning to Uambembe's textiles that reference domestic life in 32 Battalion and its aftermath, Uambembe says that "Making this work was performative: the idea of stitching and embroidery being feminine work is a performance, the performance of preparing to make one's house beautiful or presentable".[33] Her use of masculine army-green canvas and the buffalo symbol is disrupted when she turns to soft, slightly shiny, kitsch fabrics (Figure 19 and 20) that are reminiscent of decor from her childhood home: "It was well decorated in '90s kitsch style, and neat. We had religious boards up, family photos, doilies and house plants. Although Pomfret was a military town, the military aspect was not hyper visible. People tried to build homes and raise families."[34]

In line with Biwa's conception of 'other knowledge regimes', one could also make an argument that these regimes are not only "Nama" or "African", but that sensory memory and sensory histories are inherently *gendered* because of the ways in which gendered structures shape and constrain men's and women's expressions and re-telling. As Uambembe replied in answer to a question about men's and women's differentiated history-telling,

> There is a vast difference: the men speak openly of their experience. Because of the trauma they faced, and the constant silencing, women are more reluctant to speak. If they do speak, they speak less of their pain and more of what their partners or other people went through.[35]

We should be wary of extrapolating the practises of one ethnic grouping, the Nama - in a particular time and place and in response to a particular genocidal history - to other groups and/or to individual practices. But there does seem to be something relevant here, and it opens up avenues to bring Biwa into conversation with Brandt too. Biwa's research suggests that perhaps Brandt's "new practices of self" are not so new after all - but rather that we are seeing them being practised in new spheres, that of international contemporary art. Yet the two authors find similarity in that Nama memorial practices "were less concerned with how to fill gaps and [rather] re-enacted practices that reframed colonial aesthetics, criss-crossed territories, plotted

[33] Helena Uambembe, pers.comm, 10 April 2020.

[34] Helena Uambembe, pers.comm, 10 April 2020.

[35] Helena Uambembe, pers.comm, 10 April 2020.

and reinvented new historical pathways through storytelling and commemoration" (Biwa 2012: 291). There is something here that points to the transnational and trans-historic, and deserves further exploration (cf. Mushaandja 2021).

Last but certainly not least, Biwa's work points to how community ritual participants are "invited to make meaning at the moment of re-enactment thereby contributing to an interpretation of the past that reinvigorates these themes in the present." (2012: 295; cf. Rogoff 2006). Again, this creates an opportunity for thinking about history-making as performative and multi-directional, not something that already exists in an archive, waiting to be excavated, and its gaps therein filled.

## Performance, Gender and Trauma

In Uambembe's performance *The Crocodile Lover (2017)* (Figure 23)[36], modelled as a fairytale, the Crocodile wants to fall in love. The only way he can do this is when the Moon grants him a wish that lasts only until midnight. The Crocodile thus has to find a woman who is, in Uambembe's words, "so desensitized" that she does not notice he is a crocodile, only to later realise "she was dreaming it while living in that reality"[37]. The fairytale is, of course, a parable for the enforced, bizarre and often traumatic 'marriages' that took place at Buffalo.

Uambembe has a different set of reasons from Mekondjo for choosing performance, but they are also concerned with legacies of colonial, racial and gendered violence, begging the question of whether performance is a modality better equipped to hold the dynamics of both gender and trauma (cf. Mushaandja 2021). Commenting on her choice of performance as a medium, Uambembe explains:

> [H]ow do you retell a lot of these stories that are very traumatic and also hard to process as a listener but also for the person [telling it], how do you approach it with sensitivity? So performance came about as a perfect way that allowed for storytelling. One of the performances that I enjoyed was *The Crocodile Lover* that I did with our collective [Kutala Chopeto], looking at marriages [at Buffalo] and how violent they were...in the sense that the soldiers were forced to get married, and women getting into those

[36] *The Crocodile Lover* by Kutala Chopeto (Helena Uambembe and Teresa Firmino) was part of the performance programme for the group exhibition *the silences between,* Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, 13 September 2017. URL: https://www.goodman-gallery.com/exhibitions/789 (accessed 10 April 2021).

[37] Interview with Helena Uambembe, 8 April 2021.

> marriages because it was a survival technique. How do you tell that [story, that] your father or grandfather might have got [*sjambok*] lashes to go and marry his wife? A loveless way of living - because of survival.
>
> Performance allowed for that, to make these stories 'fairytale' because they are almost unreal. Who does that?! And [so] why not make it even *more* unreal? And [we] also [used that format] to avoid naming people; Teresa [Firmino] and I got warned that 'you don't want to talk about 32 Battalion because there are political implications'. Now I'm curious, how far can I push it? Maybe I'm jumping now [to different topics] but the photographic work allowed me to push it...I showed it in Luanda[38] with Paula [Nascimento] and it was actually the first time that Jonas Savimbi was shown in a museum in Angola! The very first time that any imagery of him was shown in a public space like that. It brought up a lot for a lot of people.[39]

In this commentary, Uambembe is once again very conscious of who has the authority and legitimacy to talk about history and in what way(s), as well as about the political dynamics therein, presumably both personal and collective, even though the war ended 30 years ago. She intentionally depoliticises the story of forced marriages at Buffalo whilst simultaneously tapping into rich African traditions and practices of storytelling and performance, extending her use of animal characters and symbols.

The dynamics of Uambembe's concerns and her performance decisions dovetail with what Brandt has written in her chapter on practices relating to "memorial landscapes" (2020: 135, my emphasis):

> Ongoing tensions exist between public, popular and personal memories, as different spheres of power and influence capture the reader and the viewer's attention….*artists face complex ethical questions around what it means to engage with traumatic histories, and how to recall them, especially when working at sites of memory, trauma or the sacred*. How artists engage with these locations and incorporate the archive are important but treacherous undertakings, especially as a force field of conflicting identities and memory-politics can be activated.

As it carves space for personal, gendered storytelling that also taps into communal experience, Uambembe's work presents similar questions about trauma and, indirectly, healing. Her interview commentary evokes Mushaanjda's writing on "undisciplined" cinematic forms in Windhoek as practices of resistance, self-determination and healing. Citing Cvetkovich (2003),

[38] *Texidermia do Futuro,* Museu National de Historia Natural, Luanda, Angola, 2019.

[39] Interview with Helena Uambembe, 8 February 2021.

Mushaandja (2021: 8) theorises these new film and video practices as socio-cultural modes for processing intergenerational and collective experiences of violence and ephemeral trauma.[40]

[40] Whilst I cannot address it in any detail here, Mushaandja (2021: 3) also raises the important questions of whether "In thinking of our decolonial responsibilities...are we placing a heavy burden on African artists? Do artists have to continuously confront legacies of colonialism?". Uambembe also reported on the "expectation [placed on black artists] to talk about colonialism and trauma"; whilst she acknowledges the necessity of coming to terms with these legacies, she also expressed a desire to see "work that is easy to look at and joyful and easy, and makes people of colour smile" and to "be a carefree black girl" (8 February 2021). These topics and their complexities certainly require more exploration.



**Figure 23.** *The Crocodile Lover*, Kutala Chopeto (Helena Uambembe and Teresa Firmino), performance programme for group exhibition *the silences between*, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, 13 September 2017. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery and Helena Uambembe.

## Conclusion

This chapter has briefly mapped out a revisionist history of the SADF 32 Battalion, drawing primarily on Bolliger and Estevao's research to complicate assumptions about the unit's racial and national membership, the rationales of its soldiers, and the 'two sides' of Namibia's Independence War. In particular I have drawn attention to transnational identities, displacement and gender, asking how the practice of artist Helena Uambembe, daughter of an Angolan 32 Battalion soldier, might help us understand this history differently, and in ways which parallel, complement and dialectically engage with analyses such as Bolliger's.

Uambembe's art-making addresses absences, specifically around transnational, gendered and domestic experiences and perspectives. In doing so, she employs particular symbols (the buffalo), mediums and materials (photography, canvas, organza, *samakaka*) and processes (sewing, performance). Addressing these absences necessarily invokes earlier dominant narratives. Yet her practice does not simply provide counter-narratives or alternative histories.

As described in Chapter 1, and perhaps spurred on by joint collaboration around *The Borders of Memory* exhibition, Uambembe and Bolliger have engaged repeatedly with each other over an extended period of time, and acknowledge each other's influence on their work. Together they shape new modes of multidirectional knowledge production around Namibia's Independence War. Historical and historiographic discourse shapes art-making, but the art shapes historical discourse in return.

Uambembe's work is thus suggestive of a different way of opening up and performing history, activating and reflecting memory in unconventional ways. In this regard, and to the extent that Uambembe employs gendered tactile materials and performative modalities in her practice, the work of Biwa proves highly useful for thinking about sensory memory and re-enactment. Together with Mushaandja's (2020, 2021) research, Biwa also helps us to think about African rather than Eurocentric conceptions of the archive, history-telling and performance, thus also prompting questions about the 'newness' of Brandt's contemporary "practices of self".

## Conclusion and Research Outlook

Comprising an in-depth exploration of the work of two pioneering contemporary black women artists, Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe, this study has examined the relationships between artistic practice, gendered positions and history-making. Weaving between revisionist historical scholarship and theories of art-making and the archive, it has shown that these artists are doing much more than simply 'inserting' black women's voices into dominant simplistic narratives about the messy, entangled past of Namibia's liberation struggle.

One of the driving forces behind this research has been the nagging question of why Namibia - and the long war against its illegal occupier South Africa (1966-1990) - is so absent in the contemporary South African imagination, and indeed in art history. I have viewed South Africa as empire itself, arguing for a more nuanced approach to thinking about coloniality and its double-layered actual and epistemological extensions into and over Namibia. We should not assume to 'read' Namibian artists through a South African lens, but we also lack the frameworks to avoid this. Fostering further Namibian scholarship, especially by critical black scholars such as Mushaandja, will be essential if art historians are to avoid augmenting the 'big brother' effect.

Following the lead of Bollier and Williams, transnational theorising is critical for more sophisticated understandings of Namibia's Independence War and those whose lives it dramatically affected - whilst acknowledging the ongoing utility and appeal of 'the nation' in terms of constructing identity and belonging, for both the state (eg. Longford 2020) and for individual actors, as we see in Uambembe's use of *samakaka* textiles.

Brandt's thorough and detailed theorisation of "new practices of self" has been a central framework for this research, even though she risks reproducing the 'double layer' of coloniality, despite her sincere self-reflexivity, both as a white scholar writing on black artists, and in terms of centering South African artists in her analysis. In multiple ways, the practices of Mekondjo and Uambembe align with Brandt's hypothesis: in the wake of the ruptures of war and colonisation, land, place and the gendered body are central (even if not always explicit) in the artists' conceptions, process and choice of mediums. Whilst not exclusively defined by their familial and personal legacies of the war, Mekondjo and Uambembe are staunchly self-

determining feminists - resisting and filling gaps in the "patriotic histories" which they necessarily invoke. They offer new perspectives, primarily those of women and children during the war, but on modes of history-making as well.

Are these practices as "new" as Brandt claims? The answer is not clear cut and demands further investigation. There is certainly a blossoming of such work across the region, as both she and Mushaandja make clear, but Biwa's research suggests that our epistemological frameworks have not been un-conventional enough, decolonial enough, to be fully cognisant of earlier, longer-standing practices of this nature. There is a need to explore and build African concepts of performance and memory in African art history, as Mushaandja has started to do.

Ideas around 'history', historical enquiry and scholarship, and historiography have been central to this research, undoubtedly stemming from my previous disciplinary training. I have asked how certain types of history-telling have mobilised the artists to act, and in turn, how they have mobilised history for their own history-making purposes in the present. In asking these questions, I have closely followed revisionist historical analyses of Namibia's Independence War, specifically those about Namibians in exile (given Mekondjo's own childhood in exile) and about Angolans in the SADF 32 Battalion (given that Uambembe's parents were affiliated with this unit). The artists, especially Uambembe, not only engage with some of this same research but operate as revisionists-in-parallel themselves.

I term Uambembe's and Mekondjo's respective strategies as those of 'dis-placement' and 'counter-rupture', as they mobilise and appropriate the archive and related memory and bring these into "new discursive fields". They do this in "[t]he present [which] shapes how the past is known, encountered and performed" (Alexander et al 2020: 827). The photographic archive is a tool - a way to access, engage with and re-present contested pasts (such as Cassinga), marginal pasts (such as the violent management of domestic relations in the 32 Battalion), or even 'lost' pasts (such as precolonial life among the Owambo). In speaking and sharing their very personal narratives through their art, the artists open up ways to know the collective past and the collective self as well.

The artists and their artworks do not act 'alone': their constructions are made in dynamic, dialectic, multi-directional ways, notably (but not exclusively) in conversation with scholars and academics studying and revising the same history. This study thus also offers fresh insights

on interdisciplinary exchanges and collaboration for knowledge-making: I have chosen a 'glass half full' approach, focusing on the positive productive capacity therein, though I acknowledge that a closer examination of socio-racial power dynamics might problematise these relationships.

This research has also considered the ways in which certain artistic modalities, especially performance, prove to be effective crucibles for processing and distilling unspeakable trauma, intangible grief and party political dis-ease. My investigation only reveals the tip of the iceberg and proffers case studies in miniature. In Chapter 2, I explored Tuli Mekondjo's referencing of ancestors in her work more broadly, and the explicit harnessing of spirituality in her performance practice in particular. In Chapter 3, I considered how Uambembe circumvents the 'rules' of legitimacy and authority with the *The Crocodile Lover*: like other fairytales that have come before it, the traumatic nature of the story is obscured and its political content (both regarding gendered violence and the sensitivities of talking about 32 Battalion) is made spectral. As both Brandt (2020) and Mushaandja (2021) have demonstrated, these sorts of practices - frequently emotive and oral - are still very new and mostly unwritten and untheorised, although Mushaandja's work certainly begins to do this.

Importantly, performance offers the prospect of healing as well. Mekondjo refers to some of her modalities as "mending the lost connection to [her] ancestors"; like some of Uambembe's performances, although directed further back in time, they are an invocation of restoration. As Namibian artist Hildegaard Titus reported to Brandt (2020: 137), "It is not about focusing on trauma, but to heal from it. We are tired of pain". In sum, spirituality in southern African performance art will be a fruitful avenue for further research, and no doubt require interdisciplinary work at the interface of psychology, anthropology, art history, and history of religion, among other areas.

In terms of additional avenues for research, in Chapter 1 I acknowledged that 'Angola' remains an absence in this project. The Portuguese language barrier - another colonial legacy - is perhaps a key factor in keeping Angola at even more of a distance in the South African imagination and in art history than Namibia. There is still much work to be done in this regard, and bilingual archival and oral history research, alongside transnational theorising, is clearly needed if we are to properly interrogate other manifestations of South Africa as empire. Such

work could take the form of collaborative international, inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral research.

Last but not least, in my introduction, I pointed to the dearth of empirical research on race, art history and art commerce in South Africa. This project has offered insights into how, in relationship to two specific artists, Guns & Rain as an emerging gallery has frequently operated in the interstitial spaces between commerce and scholarship, and fostered dialogue across this interface. The positions of galleries as organisations - and gallerists like myself as individual agents - are complex and seldom monolithic or homogenous; nor are they necessarily only driven by commercial agendas. As such, the effects of these actors vis-a-vis prevailing social, economic and racialized structures are undoubtedly variegated, and sometimes contradictory. This research is suggestive of new avenues for more rigorous, granular, art history of the 'private sector' of South Africa's art world.

To conclude: in her analysis of Ratcliffe's 'aftermath' landscape photography in southern Angola, Brandt (2020: 120) talks about the "disjuncture between seeing and knowing", stating that "[i]t is precisely in *the gap between that which is visible and that which remains unseen* that complex cognitive workings are provoked". This research offers a modest attempt at exploring this gap in the practice of Tuli Mekondo and Helena Uambembe, and pointing to its potentialities for coming to terms with the legacies of empire and war in southern Africa.

# Appendices

## 1. Additional Figures and Photographs



**Figure 24.** Tuli Mekondjo in Studio, Windhoek, March 2020.
Courtesy of Vilho Nuumbala.



**Figure 25.** Helena Uambembe in Studio, Pretoria, April 2020.
Courtesy of Alet Pretorius.



**Figure 26.** PLAN fighters (men and women) marching with SWAPO Flag, Kwanza-Sul, Angola, 1977. National Archives of Namibia: Reference Number 15831.
Courtesy of Tuli Mekondjo.



**Figure 27.** Women working in the field, Kwanza-Sul Refugee Camp, Angola, 1983. National Archives of Namibia: Reference Number 13929.
Courtesy of Tuli Mekondjo.




**Figure 28.** South African Defence Force 32 Battalion dress insignia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/32_Battalion_(South_Africa) (Accessed 17/04/21).






**Figures 29 and 30.** Helena Uambembe *Caminho de mata, caminho de flores, flores de amore (Road of death, road of flowers, flowers of love*), 2019. Performance, FNB Joburg Art Fair. Courtesy of the artist and photographer Zivania Matangi.



**Figures 31.** Helena Uambembe *Therapy for the Black man (in honour of...),* 2019. Performance Courtesy of Phumlani Ntuli and Helena Uambembe.





**Figures 32 and 33.** Improvised Event Set-up for the Online Zoom Opening of "The Borders of Memory" (15 April 2020) and Panel Discussion (21 April 2020). Photos by Julie Taylor.

## 2. Selection of Artist Statements, Interviews and Email Exchanges

### a) Email exchanges with Tuli Mekondjo about the Red Line

From: Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com>
Date: Mon, Mar 30, 2020 at 10:31 AM
Subject: Re: Red-line neutral Zones/ War/ Full Details
To: elizabeth mbumba
Cc: Dudu More

Thanks so much Tuli for this detailed info.
It's funny, I spent half the weekend reading up about the Red Line (in relation to your work), so I was quite amazed to see the subject line of your email!
I have two fascinating articles by Kreike and Bollig (not Lennart Bollifer) that I will send to you.

Can you also please send us your artwork titles, mediums, and dimensions too, as per normal. Including them in the same document is fine.

Many thanks
Julie

On Mon, Mar 30, 2020 at 10:26 AM
elizabeth mbumba wrote:

Hello Julie and Dudu,

Attached, please find the details of the new artworks. Feel free to contact me with any questions :-)

Kind Regards,

Tuli

From: **elizabeth mbumba**
Date: Wed, Apr 1, 2020 at 10:03 PM
Subject: Re: Red-line neutral Zones/ War/ Full Details
To: Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com>, Dudu More

Okay :-)

Attached, please find short statement

Its quite difficult writing about war but I tried my best, advice and suggestions most welcome ;-)

On Wednesday, April 1, 2020, 09:18:56 AM GMT+2, Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:

Hi again Tuli

I know we've been talking a lot already about this work :)
but nonetheless please also send us your artist statement.
If possible, by end of tomorrow Thursday.

As usual I'm sure I'll send through more questions, lol!

Many thanks
Julie

On Mon, Mar 30, 2020 at 1:43 PM Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:
Super, thanks Tuli!

On Mon, Mar 30, 2020 at 1:18 PM elizabeth mbumba wrote:
Resending with titleS etc :-)

b) Tuli Mekondjo Artist Statement for The Borders of Memory

**Artist Statement by Tuli Mekdondjo**
**Received from the artist by email 1st April 2020**

**RED-LINE NEUTRAL ZONES : OITA/ WAR**

To protest against war, one should be capable of dramatizing the horrors of its core. To be conceived by its nature and to be birthed from its blooded womb has bestowed upon my existence, rivers of nost algia and a desire to explore and revisit the very core of my coming of being. Growing up in Refugee Camps ( Angola) on ''foreign'' land, the notion of a deeper connection to this bruised, blood soaked soil, amidst conflict has been vague. My sense of kinship to this ''foreign'' land has always been through the eyes of my parents. Deep within my core, I was from ''everywhere''. Conflict and segregation was rife during the time of their youth in Namibia, my parents left their villages and crossed the border into Angola, to fight a war. They were determined youth, strongly rooted in the ideology of war, to liberate their motherland and to fight for an independent Namibia. Mothers fought a war, with their babies suckling their bosoms. They became casualties of a war, and their minds were occupied, confronting death and a fear of passing away on foreign soils, is for eternity buried with them in mass graves, fathers lost in immortal combat. Death came to them in the bluest of hues, for their eyes saw the last glimpse of a blue sky. I saw myself in their faces, their determination, fighting spirits and sternness stared back from their archival faces. I'm of the rivers, of the lush greenery of an aching land, its soil saturated with blood and of memories of wars, of displacement, of births, of death, a witness and protector

of youth, now resting between the crevices of its earthy folds, they fought for hope and a peaceful tomorrow.

### c) Email exchanges with Tuli Mekondjo about Archival Permissions

From: **elizabeth mbumba**
Date: Thu, Mar 5, 2020 at 11:15 AM
Subject: Re: Request for Copyright permission- Photographs at National Archives of Namibia
To: Graham Goddard, Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com>

Dear Graham,

I presented your email to the lady at the National Archives of Namibia and she said that you need to write them an official letter/
email stating that no copyright permission is required for these photographs.

She said to email this letter to the Head of Archives, Mrs Beauty Matongo:

Please CC me and Julie,also CC Albertina in this confirmation email, she will be the lady assisting me with the photographs.

Email:

Thank you for your assistance.

With Kind Regards,

Tuli

On Monday, March 2, 2020, 01:20:13 PM GMT+2, elizabeth mbumba wrote:

Dear Graham,

All the requested images are at the National Archives of Namibia. I went through the list ( reference numbers) with one of the workers at
the Archives and she pointed out that these reference numbers ( Photographs) are at Mayibuye Archives.

Thank you so much for your assistance, I will see them ( Archives) tomorrow and I will show them your email.

With Kind Regards,

Tuli

On Monday, March 2, 2020, 09:54:04 AM GMT+2, Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:

Dear Graham

Thank you for your quick response. I'm coping Tuli (Elizabeth) here so that she can address your queries below.
I believe the prints are at the Namibian archives.
Kindly keep her copied in any replies.

Many thanks
Julie

On Mon, Mar 2, 2020 at 9:50 AM Graham Goddard wrote:
Dear Julia,
The reference numbers are not the same as ours. Do you know if the requested images (prints) are at the Namibian Archive? If it is then they do not have to get permission from us. Except if it's John Leibenberg's images from the 1980's. In the early 1990's we had someone here from the Namibian Archives, making selections of images that pertain to Namibia. They do not have to ask us permission to use those images.
Sincerely,
Graham.

On Mon, Mar 2, 2020 at 9:22 AM Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:
Dear Graham

Thank you very much for taking my call this morning.
As mentioned, please see Tuli's email below.
We would be most grateful for your response as soon as possible, as Tuli is working towards an exhibition coming up quite soon in April.

Many thanks
Julie Taylor
076 294 5332

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **elizabeth mbumba**
Date: Wed, Feb 26, 2020 at 4:15 PM
Subject: Request for Copyright permission- Photographs at National Archives of Namibia
To:
Cc: Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com>

Dear Mr/s Andre,

My name is Tuli-Mekondjo,I'm a mixed media Visual Artist, based in Windhoek Namibia. I was born to Namibian parents at the Kwanza-Sul refugee camp, Angola in 1982.

I'm writing to request copyright permission for the following photographs that are at the National Archives of Namibia. I intend to use these photographs in conjunction with my mother's photographs,taken at Nyango Refugee Camp, for a collaborative artist performance/ exhibition with an Angolan Artist based in Johannesburg.The exhibition will take place at the Guns and Rain Gallery in Johannesburg.

My focus is on images of mothers, children at war and being born/living in refugee camps, specifically the Namibian refugees that lived in the 4 camps in Angola and Zambia.

Even though I was born in the Kwanza-Sul camp, I grew up in the Nyango camp ( Zambia).This collaborative work is very much personal to me because it's my life story, my origin from the camps.
I'm revisiting my childhood through these images and recreating a narrative that is very much deeply rooted in the minds of the mothers, fathers and children who lived in these refugee camps.

All images that I intend to use, I will include proper acknowledgement of titles.

The below cited photographic materials are at the National Archives of Namibia:

-13631
-13509
-13312
-13187
-13186
-13154
-12787
-12779
-12531
-12377
-12374
-12360
-12330
-12333
-12323
-12321

From: **Graham Goddard**
Date: Wed, Mar 11, 2020 at 10:15 AM
Subject: Re: Request for Copyright permission- Photographs at National Archives of Namibia
To: Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com>

Dear Julie,

We can't give the Namibian Archives a letter giving them a "blanket"copyright

for the material that was given to them by the Mayibuye Archive. That material is from the IDAF (International Defence And Aid Fund) Collection. The images are problematic because of the way IDAF amassed those images. But there are a number of "orphaned" images in the IDAF collection that can be used. The Namibian Archives should use their discretion and take responsibility in the way they use or distribute those images.
Sincerely,
Graham.

On Tue, Mar 10, 2020 at 7:11 PM Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:
Dear Graham

I hope all is well.
Sorry to pester you on this, but just following up, because Tuli is preparing for an important exhibition,
and there are some time constraints, unfortunately.

We very much hope you may be able to kindly assist with this letter?

Thanks so much
Julie

On Fri, Mar 6, 2020 at 11:16 AM Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:
Good morning Graham

Many thanks for your further assistance regards Tuli's work.

We really appreciate it. Do let us know if there are any questions we can assist with.

Many thanks
Julie

On Thu, Mar 5, 2020 at 11:15 AM elizabeth mbumba wrote:
Dear Graham,

I presented your email to the lady at the National Archives of Namibia and she said that you need to write them an official letter/
email stating that no copyright permission is required for these photographs.

She said to email this letter to the Head of Archives, Mrs Beauty Matongo:

Emails:

Please CC me and Julie,also CC Albertina in this confirmation email, she will be the lady assisting me with the photographs.

Email:
Thank you for your assistance.

d) Tuli Mekondjo Artist Statement about "Kaleipo Nawa"

**Tuli Mekondjo Statement about the artwork ''Kaleipo nawa, oha tutala ngaa kutya otashi ka xhulila peni/ Stay well, we see, where it will end''**
**Received by email from the artist 20th April 2020**

STATEMENT

''Kaleipo nawa, oha tutala ngaa kutya otashi ka xhulila peni/ Stay well, we will see, where it will end''

During the 1960's border war between Namibia ( SWAPO) and South Africa ( SADF), thousands of young people from the northern part of Namibia, left their villages and cross the border into Angola, to be trained as SWAPO PLAN combatants.
Young men and women dropped out of schools and joined SWAPO, with the promise of educational opportunities. This artwork retrace my parents and all of their fellow comrades' footsteps on this journey that they had treaded on, as young people who left their villages and families behind, in order to fight a war. I imaged them leaving Namibia in secrecy, as to not anger their parents and as a collective within their minds, these were their parting words: '' Kaleipo nawa, oha tutala ngaa kutya otashi ka xhulila peni''. I thought of fearful youth, tremulous for leaving their homesteads without the blessings of their parents, and without having to eat the '' traveller's meal'' of Mahangu porridge and dried wild spinach (evanda). They marched on, with the hope that their parents would keep the sacred fires at the ''olupale'' burning, as a signal for their return, one day.
When I was a young child living at the Nyango Refugee camp in Zambia, I vividly recall my mother hopping on a bicycle with all of her intimate possessions tied up in a small bundle, that was firmly secured on the rack of the bicycle. I immediately registered that she was leaving, she then began cycling away and I started crying for her, begging for her not to go, not to leave me behind. As children this was our reality ,our parents left us behind, within the boundaries of the refugee camps, as they ventured on for educational opportunities overseas. Some of our parents returned to us after a couple of years, sometimes it would be the very last time we would see them and some of them listened to the whispering fire at the ''olupale'', summoning them to return home.



e) Tuli Mekondjo Artist Statements about various individual artworks

**Artist Statements about individual works by Tuli Mekondjo**

**Received from the artist via email on 7 June 2020**

## SHORT STATEMENTS



When a child is born ( Kwanyama),
it is customary that a traditional ceremony is carried out by her maternal relatives to ado rn the child's waist with the reddish beads ( Ondjeva), made from oyster shells.
The reasons for wearing ondjeva vary with each clan.
Originally, the child is adorned with ondjeva to keep spirits away and as a symbol of identity for the wearer. Young, unmarried girls wear their beads to

celebrate a certain stage in life: virginity and the crossover into womanhood. The ondjeva is also worn by women without children and it is only removed at childbirth and is given to the newborn during the traditional ceremony. When I eventually came to Namibia with my mother, I had my ceremony and I was adorned with my odjeva by my grandmother. I treasure it very much because it used to be my grandmother's, then it was passed on to my mother, then to me. When my brother had his daughter, I had the honor of adorning my niece with her ondjeva, during her ceremony. My mother's req uest from the refugee camp, was her way to connect with the traditions from home and to make sure that, I had an identity, and belonging to my maternal clan.
In Uukwanyama there is a saying that says: A woman without her ondjeva is considered ''naked'' like a snake.



Bipolar II, is a reference to the time in my life (high school years) I felt like being in two polarities, almost like surreal kind of reality. I had to grow up real fast .
When my mother past on, I went to boarding school in another town, and would visit relatives during some weekends / holidays. It was a tough time because I was mostly left on my own devices, up to the point that I had to get a weekend job, at a coffee shop, in order to make money and to look after myself, while going to school during the weeks. I had an identity crisis and my mind was always burdened with thoughts of abandonment. There was a constant sense of not be longing, and I wasn't able to connect with my extended relatives, in order to talk about my feelings of sadness and loss. I was a young person, who was about to have a nervous breakdown and I felt alone in the world, without parental support. I had to figure it all out on my own, without a support system.



Due to my identity crisis, it also influenced my self- confidence. I had moments in my life were I would ''self-sabotage'' and would miss out on opportunities because I always felt like I wasn't good enough at anything. I lacked role models and motivational talks from relatives. I was more worried about my survival and to always have a job in order to create a security and to be self-reliant. I'm a reflective soul by nature and I'm able to honestly look myself in the mirror and to be face –to- face with my own brokenness. I'm unable to shy away from that '' ugliness'' because I have been looking at it ( myself) for so long, that I acknowledge it when it's present. Whenever I would ''self-sabotage'' I have always wanted to take flight , to get away from it all but I couldn't , I could only pretend to be a bird , bare , with all my fragility and survival instincts, that's all I could be.

I met



Vilho 5 years ago and he has always been an interesting soul. He is attached to his skateboard and camera and Loves to capture Alternatives folks etc all over Windhoek.

I always sense him to
be deeply soaked in pursue of capturing something interesting with his keen eye. I will never forget the story he told about his sense of freedom,
freedom is skating down a Windhoek hill at 4 am in the morning, on his way to Katutura.

f) Tuli Mekondjo Q&A about her "Forest Series"

**Q&A with Tuli Mekondjo regards her 'Forest Series' (which came after the Borders of Memory)**

**Received from the artist by email 15th May 2020**

## Paris Work

## Forest

**1.You seem to be back into ''colours'' again having worked with more monochrome palette for the Borders show. Can you tell us about that?**

-I have never parted with colors and I believe that colors will always be
central to the work and I'm experimenting with adding more colou rs to the plants. In the case of the
Borders show and being monochromatic, I felt the need to
not ''hide'' the imagery of war behind plants and colors, war is n ever a colorful affair, there's a lot of grayness and terror involved. With the Borders show, I wanted to try something different and to treat the canvases appropriately. I have noticed
that the canvases tend to evolve a little, based on the subject matter and that also helps or plays a role with regards to
the mood emanating from the pieces.

**2. You have mostly used images of women in your work but here you have used mostly men. Tell us more.**

-I have come to realize that, culturally we are
very much conditioned to believe
that we are only a certain kind of gender, based on how we look outwardly ( male or female), thanks to Christianity. When we really look deeper on the make-up of the chromosomes, there's a lot more going on imbedded within our ''wiring'', the idea

of just ''male'' or ''female'' outwardly dissolves. In Oshiwambo tra dition, before Christianity , the ''namunganga''
( healer) was always a queer soul. One of my good friend ( Kuku) is Ovambo, a healer and is queer, and that makes me
very happy that there is a
gradual awakening and we are retracing our steps backwards, in order to reconnect with our ancestors and our authentic selves. When it comes to LGBTQ+ themes, I would like to not limit myself to only a certain gender/ colour /creed because we're not
simply male or female and it's important for me to include every one from all walks of life.

**3.Do**
**you think about veils and veiling different in relation to men and women? What other questions arise when we**
**consider people whose**
**identities are more fluid and they perhaps define themselves as neither?**

I
would like to believe that the veil was never gendered, both m en and women would veil themselves whenever they stepped on the grounds of their sacred tabernacles to worship.
The veil became gendered once the
society of men decided to impose their patriarchal ideologies on women. I suppose today, society view veiled men as queer
because ''real men'' do not wear veils. In African cultures, we have lost the embracing of gender fluid individuals, they
were important mediators and connectors to the ancestral realms. The time has come to let people identify what they're feeling dee p within. What is gender and who are we (society) to label or
to put gender-fluid individuals in boxes, with the
goal of ''correcting'' them? Our
true selves should not be measured by the make-up of
our genitals but we should rather consider our authentic self, which is the core coding of our chromosomes.

g) Email exchanges with Frieda Lühl and Tuli Mekondjo about Windhoek exhibition

From: **Julie Taylor** <julie@gunsandrain.com>
Date: Thu, Jun 4, 2020 at 9:04 AM

Subject: Re: Proof-reader recommendation
To: Frieda Lühl

Hi Frieda

Thank you for your update....

That's very interesting about the panel. Do you know why there is still so much discomfort? I'm curious whether its more about personal emotional trauma or if it's more about being monitored by the state, for example.
Do you think there is an opportunity to try and have smaller intimate conversations?

The US protests are impacting everyone, including in the art world. The conversations are very heated and intense.
I would be interested to hear more about what kinds of discussions are happening in Namibia.

About the catalogue, it's primary manifestation will be digital at this stage.
Printing would be nice but of course it's very expensive. So I don't really anticipate printing unless maybe
we get an institutional partner or something for a future project.

So sorry about FB!!! :/ I can try and post the event for you if you get really stuck.
Let's speak soon
Julie

On Thu, Jun 4, 2020 at 8:15 AM Frieda Lühl wrote:
Good Morning Julie
Quick feedback, we will hang Tuli's work on Sunday.
Against my expectations it seems people are not comfortable discussing the border war in public, our panel is shrinking. I spoke to Tuli about it last night, and we might change the panel to something else. The George Floyed protests in the US also sparked a major discussion between artists here so we might do a informal non public discussion but it is all not decided yet.
I'll send you pictures when everything is up.
Wow about the catalogue, looking forward to see it. Will it be in print?
Thank you for sharing the exhibition on your online channels, it brought some new digital visitors to the Project Room.
Have a good day and we'll speak soon.
Best Frieda

P.S.I made a huge mistake yesterday in login out of my Facebook account and can not log back in again. Hopefully we can get back in today, holding Thumbs.

**The Project Room** - Frieda Lühl

On 3 Jun 2020, at 21:04, Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:

Hi Frieda

Please find attached both texts .
Whilst the Oshiwambo is not proof-read yet, you could still use it for layout testing purposes meanwhile ;)

I'm excited that you'll be able to use these, and I would really like to know whether it makes a different to the audience.

(Btw, at the end of June I have an intern coming for a short internship - she has very good design/layout skills so I'm going to get
her to make a professional catalogue in all 3 languages - woopwoop).

till soon,
Julie

On Wed, Jun 3, 2020 at 8:56 PM Frieda Lühl wrote:
Hi Julie
just spoke to Tuli, it is fine if we can get it to the printers by Friday morning.
Have a good evening

**The Project Room** - Frieda Lühl

On 3 Jun 2020, at 20:28, Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:

Hi Tuli, many thanks for your efforts. The statement should hopefully only take someone ten minutes to check, so really hope one of them can assist in the next day or so?

Frieda, I'm sure you want it asap but let us know the very latest deadline in case you want to print it?
For me to add it to the digital catalogue will be quick and easy :)

On Wed, 03 Jun 2020, 20:05 elizabeth mbumba, wrote:
UNAM Press just got back to me now, how much time do we have left?!

----- Forwarded Message -----
**From:** Kinahan, Jill
**To:** elizabeth mbumba
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 3, 2020, 04:16:26 PM GMT+2
**Subject:** RE: Proof-reader recommendation

Dear Tuli-Mekondjo

It sounds quite wonderful, and I would love to help. Unfortunately we do not have any expertise in Oshikwanyama, but I can refer you to two people who have been good with editing this language for us.

1. Bishop Lukas Katenda
2. Mr Immanuel Shipanga

Wishing you the very best for your exhibition,
Jill

**Jill Kinahan**
Deputy Director: Centre for Research and Publications
UNAM Press Publisher
**University of Namibia**

**From:** elizabeth mbumba
**Sent:** Monday, June 01, 2020 10:46 PM
**To:** unampress
**Subject:** Proof-reader recommendation

Dear Sir/ Madam,

My name is Tuli- Mekondjo and I'm a local visual artist who is looking for recommendation for a proof- reader that can read the curatorial write- up, that is translated from English to Oshikwanyama, before printing, for The Borders of Memory exhibition that will be at the Project Room next week.
It's a very short write - up and simply need a 2nd person to read it.

Thank you kindly for your assistance,

With Regards,

Tuli-Mekondjo

h) Interview: Julie Taylor with Tuli Mekondjo, 21 Feb 2021

**Formal Interview Questions posed in writing to Tuli Mekondjo**
**Received from the artist via email 2nd February 2021**

**How did you become an artist?**
**[this was covered in your interview with Elize - we can check if there's anything else you want to add]**
-Still the same answer

**Who were your earliest influencers and mentors in terms of art?**
**[same as above]**
-When I think back, growing up in the 90's, my primary school didn't have art as a subject and going to boarding school, my high school didn't have an art program either, it stopped a few years earlier before I got there, I know this because they were still displaying student artworks in the foyer. I remember, always studying every artwork and admiring them. As a black kid, growing up in the 90's there were no artists mentors in my community, I got to know about John Mwafangenjo, Kahlo and Klimt way later in my life.

**Can you say more about the shift between Bellowing Mind and later work especially Borders of Memory? Looks like a shift from very inward-focused to more outward-focused...**
-The Bellowing Mind work was very much about me trying to make sense of who I'm. I always felt like an ''outsider'' even with my extended relatives. I met them when I came to Namibia after Independence. When my mum past on,and I have grown older, it became even more difficult to ask questions about my family: Where did they come from? How do I fit in there? There was always this aura of vagueness, and a vacuum of emptiness, and ''rootless''. When she past on, everything unraveled, my nuclear family structure was completely shifted and dysfunctional, we were being looked after by older cousins, my step-dad started seeing other people and he would live between our home and his girlfriend's house. In the process he contracted HIV/AIDS, my siblings were still young and I was sent off to boarding school. While at boarding school, I had no support, even when I would call my step-dad, I was not helped. High School was so tough, no support and I was always worried about my siblings, living up north with my frail step-father. My sister, until today is still scarred by discovering the lifeless body of my step-dad, on his bed, they were very close and she 's still traumatized by this .I still remember when he once visited me, in Swakopmund and he came to the little coffee shop where I was working, he was so frail and really sick, I was ashamed of, seeing him there, because I was angry ( ….. it was difficult because I was in high school and struggling) until today, none of my colleagues knew that was my step-dad, it was so difficult for me too, but I know he was very proud, observing me working. He is really the only dad I know, I knew him from Nyango Refugee Camp, I was only a kid when he became my mum's boyfriend. I still remember their wedding in Nyango. In the bellowing mind, I dealt with the absence of my biological father, all of my life. As a kid I saw him a couple of times when I came to Namibia with my mother. I met him again as an adult about 3 yrs ago.
There's abandonment issues that I'm dealing with still today. I have been on a journey all my life, internally and physically, I still don't know where I truly belong.

These difficult life events, shaped me into the person I'm today, I'm still self-reflecting and I know for a fact that, if it weren't for all those dark moments, I wouldn't be able to carry the burdens that comes with being named Tuli-Mekondjo.
I'm definitely not a weak soul, although some souls think that I'm, the truth is that, I have been evolving internally too, the burdens of a heavy heart, that I used to carry around, went away one day, then all of a sudden there was a sense of calmness and contentment, and unfortunately that blinds a lot of people, thinking that I ain't got no emotional muscles, but what do they know, they haven't walked a mile in my shoes, there's no way they can know….

**In the spirit of "co-authorship", is there a historical text about the Namibian Independence War that we can consider reading and discussing together, as part of this research process?**
-I got a book called ''SWAPO CAPTIVE'' by Oiva Angula, I will send you the ''Contents'' list and we can pick from there.

**There is a tension between descriptions of exile camps in Angola and Zambia as "refugee camps" and "military bases". Why do people use the terms that they do, and how do you view this debate? Which terms do you use and why? Is this relevant for your art?**
-I think people use these different terms based on their personal experiences of this war. My step-father and father would definitely refer to them as '' military bases'' because of their combatant, fighting on the frontline training. Mothers with children would refer to them as ''refugee camps'', a place of temporary safety for their children. Young people would call them '' exile camps'' because of the education opportunities, that they were promised, once they have joined SWAPO. Perhaps it's pointless to try and have a single description, because these camps were not only in different locations ( I think there was an education camp in Tanzania too) they served different purposes. In my case, because I was still a child, I would refer to my experience as a ''refugee camp'' with a hospital and a school, we would watch kino on the soccer field, I had a three-wheeler bike and every mother in the camp was my other mother, they always fed all the children in the camp. One day ,Nyango almost became a ''military base'' when we were told to pack up and to go and set up new makeshift homes in the bush, due to fears that the SADF was planning to attack the camp in Zambia, I stayed in the bush with our mothers for a week. It is relevant for my work because I cannot only focus on my own experiences but on the experiences of everyone else, the truth is that, even though we were in exile, in camps etc, our experiences are not the same, we each got a unique story to tell.

**What is the role of the archive in your work? Why have you chosen to draw so much on photographic archives?**
-There is something about old photographs, they tell a story about a time capsule that is long gone, photographs captures the essence of the souls forever frozen in their poses, gestures and pains, regrets and joys. What were their profound memories of the pasts that they knew? Could any of our very own ancestors be captured in one of these archival images, without us knowing of them? For some people, they're simply photographs of people, long gone but for me there's a connection, is almost like a remembrance for me, what if I was there before, before this lifetime. My other thought is this, what is the point of locking up archival images in institutions, and have all kinds of restrictions on who is worthy of having access to these images, if the very people ( their ancestors) who are captured in these images, have no access to look at themselves, then who are these images for? For how long must we wait?

So, the photographers from Colonial times, made money from photographing natives, without asking for consent, they captured their poverty, hardship and grouped them according to Intelligence etc and yet today, we are limited to look at ourselves, to start asking questions, to be able to have access.

**How do you see the medium of photography in relation to your other mediums (mahangu, painting - which we have already talked about a lot, and also in your Elize interview)**
-Still the same answer.

**You seem to have been captivated with imagery of women during the war - not only as mothers and soldiers, but also as farmers, for example. Why has this been so important to your work?**
**(you covered this a bit with Elize, but perhaps we can expand)**
-One of my fondest memory of me growing up in Oshakati, right next to the little airport, that was used by the SADF during the war, and living in one of the SADF soldiers homes, post – Independence, is of my mother, setting up a vegetable and fruits garden, in our backyard. She planted mangoes, Papayas and guava trees, she then set up an onion, tomatoes, carrots, beans and maize beds. I remember working in my mother's garden, preparing the soil, planting the seeds, watering the plants, pulling out the weeds and harvesting the crops . All of these skills were taught at the refugee camp at Nyango. Was it nostalgia for my mother? While at the same time putting food on the table for her family. These memories are important to my work, because I'm not only remembering my childhood from the camp but I'm also understanding now, how my parents, were still intertwined within the memories of their own experiences of the war and the mundane duties of everyday life, raising children and toiling the soil. I know now, when my mother set up that garden in our backyard, it was her soul, longing for Nyango.

**Do you identify as a feminist? How do you define feminism/what is feminism to you?**
-I think I'm a lot of things and being a feminist is definitely one of them. To me, it means being self-reliant and to confidently stand one's ground, even if they try to discourage your spirit. To be a fighter for those in need first, before my own needs. To never give up on yourself, no matter the circumstances because in the end, you only got yourself. We live in societies in which women are told that they're less worthy, and that patriarchy is the only norm. When you look at it, the societal machinery is designed to discriminate the female gender and unfortunately, a lot of us women are guilty of feeding it, subconsciously and consciously.

**Do you think your work speaks to broader feminist discourses and can you comment on this?**
-Yes, I believe it does, because within the work, I deal a lot with not only myself but also with struggles of women and the importance of self-empowerment and the importance of dismantling the status quo that is rooted in patriarchy. A good example is this, due to cultural oshiwambo norms, my biological father simply expect me to be okay with him, without asking questions, whatsoever, where was he, all my life? This is a deep conversation that is necessary between the two of us, I got so many questions and he better have the answers.

**If you don't feel that you identify as a feminist, what are your thoughts on the way history has been told from a largely male perspective?**

-We all got to be feminists, both men and women. How can we only have a male dominated history, thought process etc? And for how long must we keep listening/ be taught this male dominated perspective? We all need accountability for our shortcomings and as women, we really need to hold men accountable.

**What is the role of the spiritual and spirituality in your work?**

-Because I'm a spiritual being. I know this this crazy but I once saw something drifting in my window at night, and it was the spitting image of what I look like now. In that moment, I kept thinking to myself, ''there's a version of myself existing already in the other realm''…. I was terrified of course, because I have never seen anything like it, I just know that, I'm here now but I'm also there already. I don't always tell this story because I don't want to scare people, …….I still remember my eyes, following me drifting softly in the window, I know what I saw….two versions of ourselves….

**There is a growing body of performance work by Namibian artists. Why do you think this is?**

-It was the awakening of the ancestors, in these new bodies. It is time for healing and restoration and it is time to express our narratives that is very much rooted in a painful history. We have to confront these pains, these traumas, there's a tremendous shift in spirit.

**You have sometimes chosen to work with a traditional healer for your performances. Why? And what response does this evoke from your audience, if any?**

-Why? I have had a spiritual awakening, a re-connection to my ancestors and I feel their presence with me. They carried me through all my difficult moments. They come across through the work and they are very vocal, I'm just a channel. Some people have a spiritual connection to the performance and understand the role of the traditional healer, and for some people, it is too strong of energies and have this ingrained fear of a traditional healer. I suppose this is understandable, in Africa we have been ''stripped naked'', deep from within in, our Pagan Gods have been demonized and replaced with a Western God, we were made to fear the traditional spiritual part of us, and unfortunately, the traditional healer, was demonized too, as a soul that casts evil spells.

**Will you continue to work with healers for your future performances, and if so, why?**

-Yes, because we need to get away with this mentality that healers are bad. It is time to reconnect with our ancestors. How can we be alive and not be spiritual and not remember our ancestors, we have lost so much, the time is now to re-root.

**What is the role of the pre-colonial past in your work, and how do you navigate learning about it?**

-The main role of it, is to educate not only myself but the many young Aawambo who have no idea, what our ancestors looked like pre-colonial and pre-Christianity. Unfortunately this history is not taught in schools, they taught me Jan van Rebeek instead. I had no idea of my own people. Most Aawambo youngsters believe that the Pink,cotton material that we wear is the original Aawambo traditional attire. We have lost the art of intricate hair braiding/hairstyles that communicated your standing in the society. We have lost the art of worshipping the moon, folklore is slowly dying out. One of the best way of learning about pre-colonial past, I

have discovered is to spend time with the elderly, they remember their childhood so vividly and how the Christians came to their villages. I have decided to make recordings of their remembrance of childhood / nostalgia. I'm constantly in search of images from that era, and literature that was written, documenting and describing pre-colonial Namibia. Both sides are relevant in understanding pre-colonial Namibia.

**SWAPO frequently dominates the way that history is told in Namibia. What are your views on this? How can and are people telling alternative histories?**
Its a true fact and it's a sad one, and it needs to be challenged. SWAPO cannot speak on behave of the people, is that true democracy?
Or freedom of speech? What are they hiding? How can we not speak about the ''torture dungeons'' for example. People are creating alternative platforms in order to tell their stories by writing about their life stories in exile,
the artists are creating artworks that would create platforms of discussions about the history of this county.

**Regards the artwork "Meme Nekaya", why did you choose *stitching* for the Red Line, as opposed to, for example, paint or markers?**
-The Red Line is still here with us today, it's tangible and I still cross it every time I travel up North to the village.
The Border War was fought from the Red Line, going up North of Namibia , into Southern Angola. In ''Meme Nekaya'' it is symbolic, a reminder of a war, confinement and control of movement of people, living North of Namibia.
A country with a single ''border'' within it, generations later, we are still crossing it.
It is symbolic in the sense that, women were not allowed to come close to this Red Line, the line was used as a recruitment point for contract laborers ( mostly young men at first ) to go and work at the diamond mine in the south or at Walvis Bay Harbour, building the railways and mining the copper at Tsumeb and Kombat.
When you touch the red stitching, it's a tangible reminder of the history of Namibia, that is still erect to this day ,at Oshivelo.

**Regards the artwork "Meme Nekaya", have you ever been interested in tracking down the woman in the photograph? What might it yield in terms of oral history?**
-I have thought about it, it will be an interesting journey / documentation to track her down, I hope she is still with us. In terms of oral History,she should have been a National treasure.To me I would be gaining another mother.

### i) Helena Uambembe Q&A for *The Borders of Memory* Catalogue

**Written Q&A with Helena Uambembe for Guns & Rain Exhibition Materials and Curation**
**Questions drafted by Julie Taylor and DuduBloom More**
**Answers Received from the artist by email on 10th April 2020**

**We recently discussed "who is authorised to speak about history". As I understand it, you have been deeply dissatisfied by dominant narratives about 32B. What do you hope to open up, or communicate, through your work more broadly?**
I would like people to known that there is more to the story of the 32 Battalion than the narrative of the terrible ones or the abandon children. I want to make people who know about the history that there where black people in this unit and those who don't to know about it. All in all these soldiers where/are people who lived loved and laughed; and had children and whole families.

**You said in a recent discussion that "the work has shaped up to be something completely different from when we first spoke in Jan. To how it is now, where I'm thinking more about the idea of 'home' and how one builds it". Your interest in the idea of home seems to be linked to a few things. Partly, it seems to be linked to the legacies of displacement (whether Angolans in Buffalo, or Angolans in Pomfret, or yourself as a 'diasporic South African' (not sure how to put it!)). It also seems to be linked to your interest in the position/role/lives of women within 32B? Can you say more?**

As much as women where not active in battle fields they were active in the sustainability of 32 Battalion. They took care of the men fed them clothed them and back the home of the men/soldiers

**You also said you were wanting to challenge stereotypes about the military, scary image of 32B, precisely by pointing to the 'normalities' of life at Buffalo? For example, the decoration of homes, the schooling of children, cake bakes and so on. And you feel the use of 'feminine' fabrics is part of that counter-narrative?**

The fabrics that I have used in my work speak to the home in Pomfret when I was little. It was well decorated in 90's kitsch style and neat. We had religious boards up, family photos, doilies and house plants. Although Pomfret was a military town the military aspect was not hyper visible. People tried to build homes and raise families.
I use the motif of the buffalo quite a lot in this new body of work, as the buffalo was the insignia of the 32 battalion, the buffalo is synonymous with musicality especially in South Africa, I try and subvert it by making out of fabric, using thread to make it softer. The waterproof tent is used because it is very familiar to me, it was the first homes of the soldiers and their wives in Buffalo and also when they first moved to pomfret. The tent used as homes was used in World war 2. Even with that people tried to make this temporary shelter into homes, the women still put in their personal feminine touch.

**Overall, how do you feel this body of works is similar to, or different from, early bodies of work? What have you learned along the way?**

I am known for my performative work and my 2D work is predominantly print making and photography. This work focuses more on materiality.
Even than though I did not perform in the normal usual sense I felt as though making this work was performative, the idea of stitching and embordery being feminine work is a performance, the performance of preparing to make ones house beautiful or presentable.

Can you tell us more about why you use the Samakaka fabric, and what is it, to you?
I associate the samacaca with my performed Angolan identity. The samacaca is synonimace with Angolan identity, the geometric patterns are borrowed from the Mumila tribe and the colours are usually red, yellow, black and white, similar to that of the Angolan flag. The Pomfret community still identifies as Angolan, most of them wear the clothing made of the samakaka.

**Linked to that, how do you understand the term "traditional'" - because I understand that for some people, Samakaka is seen as a 'touristy' type fabric? Also, how does the nation of 'traditional' link to the notion of 'home'?**

Well now it may be so, but it is having been a form of national identity, you could not buy it online, it was only coming from Angola. Recently it has become popular internationally. You find it a lot in the fabric shops in Market street / Albertina Sisulu street in Jonesburg CBD. I

asked about the price at on of the shops and the salesman said to be its original and I asked him from where and he said Vietnam. So only now it is seen as touristy, back than only an Angolan person would be wearing it in South Africa.

**[Dudu] [we listed them separately based on the fact that Dudu is coming at your work with less background info than Julie]**

**From your research on displacement and through your own experience, how does one then find the 'home' that everyone is looking for, or that place of belonging? Do you think the search ever ends?**

For me the search never ends. For the Pomfret community home has been the people that are round you, there is no physical attachment. For home is my family. But I still long for that distant home that my parents left behind and spoke about so fondly.

**In the history of any type of war, the stories of the women who were involved and affected are usually ignored, hardly told and deliberately silenced. Through what you have learnt, what is the difference between the recollection of war told from the side of masculine as opposed to stories told from the side of the feminine?**

There is a vast difference, the men speak openly of their experience. Because of the trauma they faced, and the constant silencing women are more reluctant to speak. If they do speak, they speak less of their pain and more of what their partners or other people went through.

### j) Interview: Julie Taylor with Helena Uambembe, 7 February 2021

**Notes (not transcribed)**
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS Helena Uambembe**
**Researcher: Julie Taylor, 1284282**
**February 7th 2021 via Zoom**

**How did you become an artist?**
Is this a trick question?! I was always interested in art, visual art in high school. What convinced me was seeing the work of Goya, I wanted to paint but I'm not painting! Studied art at TUT. We even dropped off my portfolio together with my high school teacher. Started studying in 2013, National Dip in Fine and Applied Art finished 2016, went back again 2018, for Honours.

Art Lovers Pretoria exhibition was right after I finished my diploma. They were Holographic works in photoshop. I used Giant Sable antelope and springbok to make patterns. It was a different me back then.

**Regards your use of the animal symbols - is there any continuity between then and now?**
The Sable is Angola's national animal, rare, it was believed to go extinct but it survived and surviving right now. [I was interested in ]That association with people...and how the war was implicated.

**You said "Different me back then" - what do you mean?**

I don't think I was as confident in my work...I know that for a fact… I didn't have my concepts cemented. A lot of things changed and a lot of it changed after I met Teresa which was also in 2016. We really started talking about 32. I don't think I had the guidance….When I took a break in 2017, I just decided to go into Joburg into the art world and see what do I want to do...in varsity I was getting guidance towards academics (we always need black women in academics) but there was this lack of belief in black female students to make it out as successful artists, as practising artists so I was conflicted between the two. I don't think I wanted to have that life just working in an office [job]. I still think academics is important. I try to write still. [I try to do] a writing project or conference once a year.

**Who were your earliest influencers and mentors in terms of art? Tell me more about Teresa?**
I met her at a baby shower. She looked different from most Angolans. She had an Afro, this brown dress, was aspace child. We started talking, I'm studying art. Mentioned textiles and had this idea that textiles was beneath me. She was at Wits but was the only other Angolan woman. She was already doing performance, a year ahead of me. I was really getting into Angolan artists from Angola and the diaspora. When I googled them, the first people I found were Kilaunji etc all these male artists. [I loved] [Nastio] Mosquito. "Fuck Angola, Fuck Africa". It was very thought provoking work, performance, including music, archive, language,...I was like WOW! This guy is amazing. I want my thinking to be in the same line. His father is Ombundu from the South. I haven't met him yet but met his sister. She's an art dealer for a company in Angola. He's based in Belgium.

Also Mary Sibande. In 2017 I thought I was going to do a BTech. After Black Portraitures conference, I was blown away by the amount of creatives in Joburg and black creatives in the world. I met Mary at Black Portraitures, she was looking for an assistant. I get a lot of advice from her still. I worked for Mary for 2017. But still kept in touch.

**In what ways do you see yourself as Angolan, and in what ways do you see yourself as South African? Do you communicate these identities through your art, and if so how?**
It's neither here nor there. It's about performing identities. That's what it is right now. It's constantly changing as I'm learning and unlearning. As much as I live in SA, it feels very performative because I always had weird experiences navigating in SA, being called foreign out in the open, verbally attacked for my features...hanging onto the Angolan ID gave me a sense of comfort and belonging even though it is performative because it's distanced. And yet it isn't because I have a whole community from Pomfret who identify as Angolan who still carried on with language, foods, etc and adapted as they went along.

**Can you say more about your use of Portuguese titles?**
Language is weird! It's a construction of things, ideas and people. There are times that I catch myself thinking in Portuguese and dreaming...in what language do people dream in? Their home language or acquired language? So titling sometimes just comes naturally in terms of how I'm thinking about the work while I'm making it. Sometimes by what music I'm listening to while I am making it. Eg. [the artwork I made called] *Lembranca*, the whole body of work revolved around home and what it felt and sounded like. The Portuguese that I grew up with was heavily accented with Ombundu, had a heavy accent, and would be considered broken [BY WHOM?]. Lots of Angolans take the language very seriously,

grammar and pronunciation people are very passionate about it….There are 18 other languages in Angola! IT's hard to get books, dictionaries. My niece cannot roll her 'Rs' and I can't either. Most Ombundu can't roll their 'rs'. Ends up sounding like 'L'. Bread would be 'blead'.

Why is that not a valid way of speaking? Some sounds in Western languages are not in African languages. Sometimes my titles will be off because I've not mastered the language, or my grammar will be wrong. But why is it not valid if it sounds right in my head?? Language is always a tricky one. I'm informed by sounds by what I hear, by how I speak and think, music that I listen to. I tend to gravitate towards Lusophone music while I'm in production that may influence the title.

Ombundu is a language I love, but I don't speak it, I understand some. Relatives do speak it. There is a fear that the language dies.. And then so do the people, identity and culture. Quite a large language popuation in Angola.

**How do you reference those SA/Angolan identities through art**?
Most of it is Angolan...perfprmance and art making is very much influenced by my Angolan side. Maybe with a touch of commentary on Namibia. It's always from my perspective as an outsider in SA terms. That's something I'm yet to resolve. Two weeks ago this man was verbally violent over something so little. His way of attacking was "you foreigner". It actually hurts. It is loaded. Even asking the question where do you come from, is very loaded.

**Angola was a Portuguese colony; Namibia was a South African colony - how do we understand 'the colonial" in this context, and what does it mean for understanding the relationships between the countries in the present?**

It's a question I often ask SAfricans, "when are we going to talk about Namibia?" I don't think it's ready to talk about, there's a refusal to talk about it. It's such a complex history, and so deep. Every time you think you understand it, then you read how the parliament used to be former slave house. There was a palace for a woman who used to be a big slave trader - she was considered mulatto. I don't think in my community we've really engaged with hcolonialism in that sense. We've engaged with racism and colourism that comes with colonialism but I don't think people have really had conversations with colonialism in that sense. And maybe I haven't really looked at it in a deep way in a way that artists are expected to do….there's an expectation that you will speak about colonialism but it's something way more complicated than that that lead to a 40 year long war and its aftermath.

**This expectation is interesting, can you explain more?**
I think in general, people of colour and from the continent, there is this expectation to talk about colonialism and trauma that is rooted in colonialism. I think it's something we also unconsciously do. For example Zandile Tshabalala's self portraits. They are very set up scenes. The idea of luxury, the idea of relaxation, of paradise for black women...but at the same time you can read exoticism, reminders of how black women were painted, esp women. Irma Stern. But they are enjoyable and beautiful paintings. That you can enjoy with

ease. Cf. Banele , Wonder Buhle, the technique is there, it's beautiful work, yet most people are asking where is the concept?? For me, it was looking at these beautiful images of black people just *being*. And that I want to do one day. I hope I get there! I would like to see more without having to talk about colonialism, which is not to say it's not important or valid, because it's work that needs to continue, esp if we want to reach a consensus about decolonization, but that maybe includes work that is easy to look at and joyful and easy and makes people of colour to smile.I just want to be a carefree black girl...

**Questions around citizenship and belonging appear to be quite central in your work. Is this the case, and can you explain more? What about space and place...I'm thinking here more specifically about life at Buffalo, life in Pomfret...**
Because of movement and migration of my family, Buffalo is a key point of reference, then there's Pomfret which is my place and space that is no longer what it was and oftentimes there's a question, will it exist in 10 years or so? So place and space always plays a lot in my mind. From Pomfret I moved to Potch and then Pretoria. Besides Pretoria, Potch was a weird town but allowed me freedom to occupy the space in my own way. Being able to walk about and pick up fruit without being caught or killed, swimming, walking in fields, going on little adventures. I'm also tied to Pomfret where there was a sense of freedom and freedom and movement. You could walk. Like spaces in Pretoria and Joburg, it's like, am I supposed to walk here? Feelings of freedom or illusions of freedom. But I was much younger.

**What have been your main modes of researching the history of the war, and which have been most fruitful for you?**
The most fruitful were the oral histories. Going to speak to people. It gave me more of an insight into Buffalo, to understanding, putting context into events that happened. Versus having read the go-to which was Breytenbach's and Naude's book. This led me rather to go the oral way, go speak to people, because there were all these gaps, which were very problematic and one sided. It brings up the question of why are males writing and talking about things? Even though it's valid, someone has to start it, but why does it have to be men? Reading those histories those books, led me to go speak to people which led to much more important stories. In the context of history, Corona happened to all of us, it was a shared experience, versus those personal stories,like, the guy that supposedly ate the bat that led to this whole thing...why would he eat the bat? It's the same with 32 Battaltion and the histories. Like how [SADF Colonel] Breytenbach arrived at Mupupa and it's almost similar to Columbus finding America etc!

**Why do you think women's voices have been so apparently quiet in the history of the war, in particular with regards to life at Buffalo?**
I think there's almost a fear and a shame aspect to it. As much as they were victims they were also very much active…. There is this constant shaming of women within our community that even comes up now...like remember when that aunt did ABC? It becomes this person's identity. Eg Infidelity...you become that... its never forgotten. There is this woman who left her husband went to Namibia, it became who she was. There was someone who pried, asking questions. Versus, are you ok? You're alive, we thank god for that. A woman leaving is a very brave act. It's sad that sometimes she has to leave her children behind. But it's not only that she was selfish, [it's also] that she was caring for her mental health, maybe she didn't want to die. The husband takes on a saintly role, a victim

even though he's a grown-ass person who should be able to fend for themselves. There is this avoidance and fear of speaking. Of having a voice.

**How do we disentangle regular gender structures and the history of war?**
Quite a lot has to do with the war in particular. The experience of loss. And shame. Very Salmy, being beaten by someone other than your partner.

**Can you explain more about the relationship between your "2D" artworks and your performance practice? What does performance mean for you, and what does it allow you to do differently from other parts of your practice?**
Performance came about as a way to retell some of those stories , esp with Teresa. Because it's like how do you retell a lot of these stories that are very traumatic and also hard to process as a listener but also for the person, how do you approach it with sensitivity. So performance came about as a perfect way allowed for storytelling. One of the performances that I enjoyed was the Crocodile Lover that I did with our collective, looking at marriages and how violent they were...in the sense that the soldiers were forced to get married, and women getting into those marriages because it was a survival technique. How do you tell that your father or grandfather might have got lashes to go and marry his wife. A loveless way of living because of survival. The Crocodile came about because it was a fairytale, written very fairy tale like, we had the moon which was godmother to this crocodile who wanted to fall in love and find a woman and the only way was the moon granting him a wish till midnight. This woman was desensitised to the partners she'd had because she'd survived, and when this guy offered her a way out she ran with it only to realise that he is a crocodile and then only to realise she was dreaming it while living in that reality. So performance allowed for that, to make these stories fairytale because they are almost unreal. Who does that?! And why not make it even more unreal. And also to avoid naming people, Teresa and I got warned that you don't want to talk about 32B because there are political implications. Now I'm curious, how far can I push it? Maybe I'm jumping now but the photographic work allowed me to push it...I showed it in Luanda with Paula and it was actually the first time that Jonas Savimbi was shown in a museum in Angola!! The very first time that any imagery of him was shown in a public space like that. It brought up a lot for a lot of people.

Crocodile Performance was at Goodman, you can check vimeo.

**Performance work is on the rise across our region - do you see/feel this trend as well? Why do you think that is?**
I think what I'm observing is the ritual aspect to it...whereas putting something stagnant may be an aftermath of the performance but it's also looking at other ways...African artists can express themselves in modern ways of making art. So maybe it's that. Sometimes I feel like there is ...I felt 2-3 years ago there were more performance artists..and especially female artists...who express themselves performatively...and now it's gone quiet...not as much as it used to be. Maybe in Cape Town there is still a performance presence but in Joburg I haven't seen much.

**Maybe performance caters for trama and gender….?**

**Can you talk about your work in relation to decoloniality in contemporary South Africa? Can you comment on themes of resistance in your work - countering dominant narratives?**
Maybe there's a disconnect between Africans and African nations. The fact that we report more on Western news than what's going on with our neighbours - we'd rather report what Trump said than protests in NAmibia or Angola. I'm filling in those gaps is talking about Namibia as best as I can. Even it's just telling the story of 32 that may bring to light what had happened. But then again who engages with art without just seeing pretty pictures?

**JT: comments on limitations of art as a discourse**

It's about filling those gaps, trying to educate...through the small number of people who engage with art. Not everyone engages with history. We choose what we engage with. A lot of people don't really engage with African history, even Africans themselves.

**Do you identify as a feminist? How do you define feminism/what is feminism to you? Do you think your work speaks to broader feminist discourses and can you comment on this?**
Yes I do see myself as a feminist. I think for me even the word equality is so complicated. I think it would be maybe where women, myself, have a sense of freedom. That's where I am right now in my thinking. My 27th year and I really haven't voiced this out but where I see myself is radical in comparison to my mother and sisters. Where I'm 27 I don't have a husband or kids...and I'm not even *aspiring* for a husband or kids, or even a man. For me that is radical right now. At my age my mum had several kids, was married, my sister had her son already….so did my other sister...and a lot of women within my community So me *not* aspiring to that is a sense of freedom. The fact that I can choose what partner I have, be it or long term or the moment, or just saying I'm going to Cape Town without blinking or worrying. That I can almost be a carefree black girl. And maybe one day remove the 'almost'!! And be a careful black girl living in SA. I would want that for a lot of women. Even if they choose family, if they choose partners, it's from their own free will. Them being mothers but being able to be carefree girls in general. Who are just happy. Who are not overburdened, who are not abused, who are not scared, who won't be shamed...for being mothers or being single mothers or not wanting to be mothers and go into a clinic and get an abortion without being lectured or being told they are going to hell...to be able to get into a taxi….I could go on and on. These are the things I'm enjoying and also because of my gender I cannot enjoy fully. And maybe because of Covid as well.

**Can you comment on the FNB Performance?**
I wasn't trying to present as a male. Putting on a uniform and what does that mean? What power comes with a uniform? I wouldn't flag anything in particular...haven't read feminist writing in a long time...but I think people who do inspire me are those radical women who were involved in revolutions. You know Josina Machel, who I really look at, those communist women who loved black men, who supported revolution, who fed revolutionaries, or even those who fought and died. Writing is important but someone has to do the ground work. Those are women who I look to.

**Can you say more about the Buffalo Symbol?**

I first used in performance at Point of Order titled Shinganji - 2018 - Under Kutala Chupeto - funding from Goethe - had travelled to Pomfret. Then it was a symbol of death and it has evolved over time and it's something that will keep evolving. Right now, what the buffalo means, it's a big beast, large, stubborn, able to fight off lions. That's how I'm looking at it right now. With the mask and performance it might take more of a African spirituality and masquerade sense and meaning. It's something I keep on using. I'll be using it more because it can ...I borrow from the African mythology...Cameroonian mask...an animal can take on so many complexities and take on so much meaning….I think the Buffalo camp was there first and then the [military[ insignia…Usually [these names and inspiration come from] what's around [ in the immediate surroundings] likePica Pau [woodpecker] School….

**Can we talk a bit about Lennart and Tteaching and InterDisciplinary research?**

Lennart is a better researcher than I am and better researcher tan I am. A Lot of his writing influenced my thinking around the community and making of the works. Esp the paper "Gendering" influenced me when I made How to make a Mud Cake. I'm still thinking about it as creating new work…. So that's important, it just makes sense having the visual representation and the written work [in parallel]. It may not be focused on my work specifically but it can show and exists beyond just my work.. What I like about Lennart and what's diff about him is how he positions himself...how he takes on this position of learning not just engaging and disappearing...he constantly engages with it.I don't think before that even Angela Mcintyre hasn't engaged with women ….someone who had engaged with women /...even if women weren't willing, to find ways of speaking of gender in the military. That's what I enjoy about him. Esp these white boys you'd be explaining, and they want to tell you what you already know but it's very closed off information. Why are you trying to educate me about it when I know about it already? Why aren't you willing to listen to me? Lennart is willing to listen.

Classes: I did one, doing the second one on Friday. It's weird being a guest lecturer. I've lectured before at TUT…. but it's fun, it's interesting, it's a very small class of 5-6 students. Very deep important questions of things I've never thought about in terms of my work, but so far, so good.

## k) Q&A with Julia Rensing and Sindi-Leigh McBride, University of Basel

**Ways of Reading: Contemporary Art and African Studies, University of Basel**
Sindi-Leigh McBride (s.mcbride@unibas.ch)
Julia Rensing (julia.rensing@unibas.ch)

**With your particular experience with Tuli in mind, why invite an artist to make a presentation to historians (or other disciplines)?**

**Julia**: Our course "Ways of Reading" addresses all kinds of disciplines. Our students (as well as we -- Sindi-Leigh and I -- as lecturers) come from the fields of history, African Studies, art history, education etc. We use Art as "data" or "material", so to say, to critically engage with specific issues in African Studies (such as questions around gender, environmentalism or colonial histories). This is important because our approach to art is not specifically from one of these mentioned disciplines, following one discipline's methods, research questions and rules but instead we want to look at art as a way to think critically about African Studies as a field and our positions as researchers in it.
For this, it was crucial for us to involve the artists. In the guest talks, we learn about their work and their artistic practices directly from them and we can all engage in a meaningful conversation together, instead of having our seminar situated in Switzerland only, looking at artistic practices from Namibia (for instance), while being placed in Europe -- without connecting it back to those who create the work and to the discourses the artists are positioned in. I think the (virtual) presence of the artist and the joint conversation allows for a deeper, more critical and personal approach and work ethic for us in academia. The insights we gain from artists and from engaging with their work move beyond the theoretical and often detached analysis that we as academics are trained to perform in African Studies.

**What were/are the 'outcomes'/knowledge generated of the seminar? Or was that not 'expected'? Is it more about process?**

**Sindi-Leigh:** We prescribed two texts and one suggested text, as well as shared Tuli's work beforehand. The students were asked to prepare questions and submit these before, with the idea that the questions would guide the discussion. What ended up happening was a lot more intimate: Tuli shared her personal motivations etc and the students responded to that either by asking biographical questions or sharing their own personal responses to some of the content she shared. This was a really great outcome that can perhaps be directly attributed to Tuli's style of talking about her work. In terms of knowledge produced, it was useful to have her speak personally and personably about her work so that the focus of the session (temporality, archive engagement and reinterpretation etc) could be animated by real, material experience.

**Do you plan more than one seminar/workshop with each artist? And if so, do the expectations of the second one differ?**

Julia: Our course is structured in three main sections: temporalities, gender and environmentalism. For each section we invited one artist (two from South Africa, one -- Tuli -- from Namibia). We also hope to invite the artists again for a workshop that will take place after the completion of the course, but due to Covid, the date is yet uncertain. We hope that this encourages students to engage on a deeper and on a more long-term basis with the questions raised in the course and with the creative practices of the artists they got to know during the seminar. This would allow us to establish a more familiar connection between course participants and the artists and make our engagement more thorough and sustainable.

**Do you think that research and pedagogical 'methods' such as the above could be considered a feminist methodology?**

Julia: I am not sure about this. What might be feminist about it is that we thought a lot about the artists we invited, the art works we discuss in general in the seminar, the texts we chose and the platform we give to whom and what critical issues we want to discuss (positionality, gender, privilege). This approach is more intersectional though then solely feminist. However, a political dimension or a political ethos is important in the kind of work we are doing as researchers, as lecturers and as students in the field of African Studies -- and this might be the feminist angle in our methodology, although we would not have labeled it as such.

**To the extent that it is disrupting extant 'hierarchies' of knowledge-making within the academy, where fine art has often been dismissed as 'soft skills'?**

Sindi-Leigh: neither of us have training in either fine arts or art history; and the class brings together students from varied backgrounds but about half are art history MA students, the rest are from a variety of fields. What this means is that at multiple levels (the syllabus, the lectures, the students engaging with it, the artists visiting etc), there is a cross-pollination of theory and intellectual skill sets as we try to breathe new life into African Studies as a discipline. More than we are necessarily contesting existing knowledge-making hierarchies, we are proposing new ways of reading into the structures of those hierarchies, in a sense looking at the politics of knowledge-making via African Studies and contemporary art from African artists.

## 3. Guns & Rain Gallery Newsletters and Invitations

a) Exhibition invitation sent on 9 April 2020





Guns & Rain: Contemporary fine art from southern Africa View this email in your browser

GUNS & RAIN

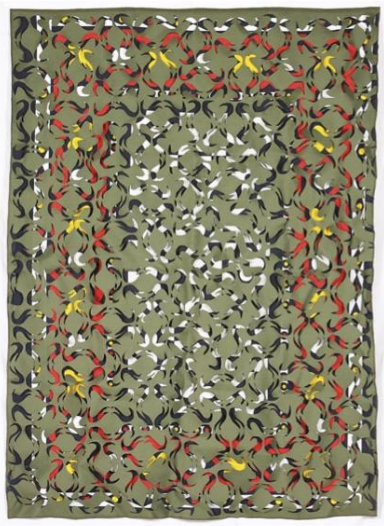
As we hail from lockdowns around the world, join us in this brave new age of virtual programming! We are delighted to invite you to the online opening of our new exhibition **"The Borders of Memory"**, by Tuli Mekondjo (Namibia) and Helena Uambembe (South Africa/Angola), whose work explores the tangled histories and legacies of Namibia's war of Independence, also known as the "Border War". We're bringing you an exciting line-up of events, including Instagram studio visits, and a Zoom talk by Berlin-based historian Dr Lennart Bolliger. See the full programme below...

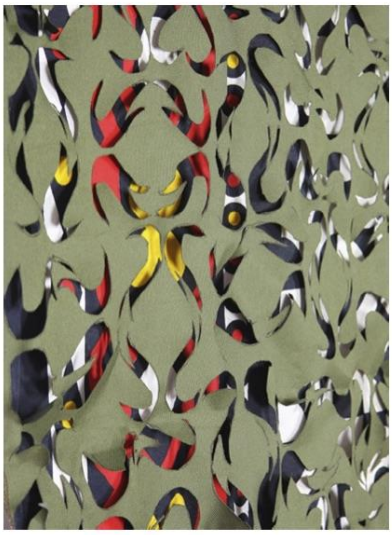


**Online Opening & Toast**
**Wednesday 15th April**
**6pm SAST + CET / 5pm BST / 12pm EDT / 9am PDT**
Join us on Zoom (please test the link in advance to avoid any technical hitches)
BYOBW - Bring your own beer/wine
The catalogue and other exhibition content will be shared in our reminder email.

**Live InstaVisit to Tuli Mekondjo's Home-Studio**
**Saturday 18th April**
**4pm SAST + CET / 3pm BST / 10am EDT / 7am PDT**
Live on Instagram

**Live InstaVisit to Helena Uambembe's Home-Studio**
**Saturday 25th April**
**4pm SAST + CET / 3pm BST / 10am EDT / 7am PDT**
Live on Instagram





**About the Exhibition:** Tuli Mekondjo (Namibia - b.1982, Angola) recounts that meeting Helena Uambembe (South Africa/Angola - b.1994, South Africa) was "like meeting myself". The two artists' life biographies are, to a degree, inversely mirrored, and have been fundamentally shaped by Namibia's war of Independence, also known in South Africa as "the Border War" (1966-1990). Information around the war was highly censored during apartheid and, even today, there is a disconcerting historiographical gap in how the war of its "fifth province" is (not) remembered in South Africa.

Mekondjo was born in Angola to Namibian parents who joined liberation movement SWAPO in exile in the early 1980s. Uambembe was born to Angolan parents in Pomfret, northern South Africa. Escaping Angola's civil war in the '70s, her father became a member of the 'infamous' South

based in Namibia to counter SWAPO.



Dissatisfied with both dominant narratives about the past and a host of 'absences' at the communal and personal level, both artists in different ways have pursued archival and oral history research in a quest for understanding, healing and belonging. They offer new postcolonial, postfeminist vantage points from which to engage with a history which has mostly been told by men, variously as one of patriotism, heroism, betrayal or PTSD.

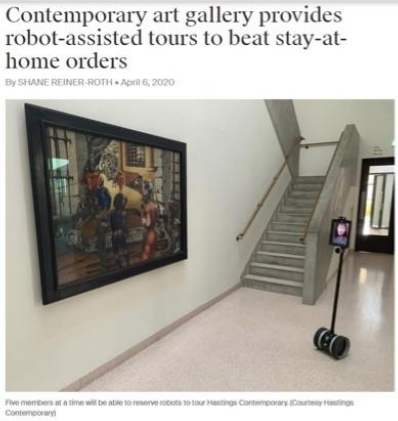
**Online Historical Talk:**
***"Dilemmas, Disruption and Displacement: Thoughts on Southern Africa's Wars of Decolonization and Their Legacies"*** by historian Dr Lennart Bolliger, followed by a panel discussion with the artists.

**Tuesday 21st April**
**6pm SAST + CET / 5pm BST / 12pm EDT / 9am PDT**
Please register to receive the Zoom link
We welcome questions from the audience, which you can submit live via the Zoom Chat box. The talk will be recorded and made available afterwards.

We are thrilled to bring together cutting-edge historical research with contemporary art. Due to COVID-19, Lennart will be joining us live from Berlin, but we hope he'll be back in southern Africa soon!



**Dr. Lennart Bolliger** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Humboldt University of Berlin and a visiting researcher at Wits University. Together with Dino Estevao, he is conducting a research project on the history of Angolan civilians who were associated with the SADF 32 'Buffalo' Battalion. He is currently working on a book manuscript entitled *Apartheid's Black Soldiers: Military Collaboration and Transnational Armies in Southern Africa.* He holds a doctorate from Oxford University.




## Fancy a gallery tour with a robot?

"Hastings Contemporary, a small gallery on the southern coast of England, has gone one step further than its peers by offering videoconferencing robots in the space that allow up to five “visitors” at a time to roam its halls". More in the Architect's Newspaper.




## The world loves an art heist - but who solves the mysteries?

"In the dead of night, as the rest of the world is asleep, someone might call Arthur Brand in his Amsterdam apartment with secrets about a stolen work of art. Brand can't tell them that it's an inconvenient time. “You have to work 24 hours, seven days a week,” says the investigator, “because if you give them too much time to rethink it, they'll never call back.” More via the BBC.

**Stay safe and please follow our updates** on Facebook and Instagram!

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Want to change how you receive these emails?
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b) Exhibition opening reminder sent on 15 April 2020





Guns & Rain: Contemporary fine art from southern Africa

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GUNS & RAIN

**TODAY!** Join us on Zoom for the online opening of our new exhibition *The Borders of Memory*, by Tuli Mekondjo (Namibia) and Helena Uambembe (South Africa/Angola), whose work explores the tangled histories and legacies of Namibia's war of Independence, also known as the "Border War".

**Online Opening & Toast**
**Wednesday 15th April**
**6pm SAST + CET / 5pm BST / 12pm EDT / 9am PDT**
Join us on Zoom (please test the link in advance to avoid any technical hitches)
BYOBW - Bring your own beer/wine ;)

If you can't make the opening, enjoy our new video (thanks to our intern Kayra Uguz) and explore the show on Artsy.
The catalogue PDF can be found here.

You can also follow our updates on Instagram and Facebook.
For the rest of the exhibition online programming, please read on below.



**Live InstaVisit to Tuli Mekondjo's Home-Studio**

Live on Instagram

**Live InstaVisit to Helena Uambembe's Home-Studio**
**Saturday 25th April**
**4pm SAST + CET / 3pm BST / 10am EDT / 7am PDT**
Live on Instagram



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**About the Exhibition:** Tuli Mekondjo (Namibia - b.1982, Angola) recounts that meeting Helena Uambembe (South Africa/Angola - b.1994, South Africa) was "like meeting myself". The two artists' life biographies are, to a degree, inversely mirrored, and have been fundamentally shaped by Namibia's war of Independence, also known in South Africa as "the Border War" (1966-1990). Information around the war was highly censored during apartheid and, even today, there is a disconcerting historiographical gap in how the war of its "fifth province" is (not) remembered in South Africa.



Mekondjo was born in Angola to Namibian parents who joined liberation movement SWAPO in exile in the early 1980s. Uambembe was born to Angolan parents in Pomfret, northern South Africa. Escaping Angola's civil war in the '70s, her father became a member of the 'infamous' South African Defence Force (SADF) 32 Battalion, a unit whose majority were black Angolan men, based in Namibia to counter SWAPO.

Dissatisfied with both dominant narratives about the past and a host of 'absences' at the communal and personal level, both artists in different ways have pursued archival and oral history research in a quest for understanding, healing and belonging. They offer new postcolonial, postfeminist vantage points from which to engage with a history which has mostly been told by men, variously as one of patriotism, heroism, betrayal or PTSD.

**Stay safe and please follow our updates** on Facebook and Instagram!

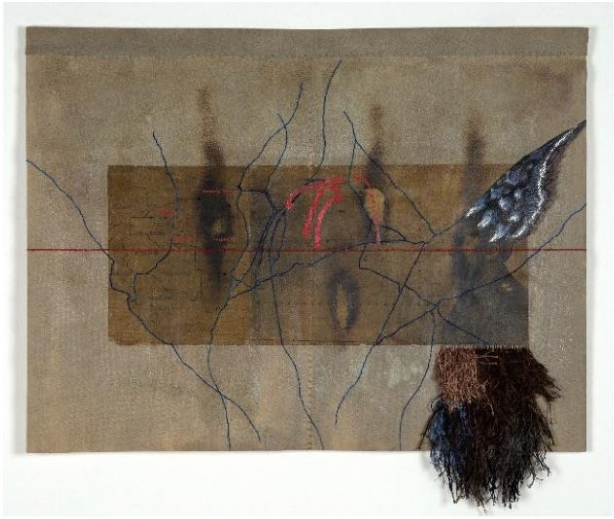
c) Exhibition opening Zoom link sent on 20 April 2020





Guns & Rain: Contemporary fine art from southern Africa

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GUNS & RAIN

**Thank you for your RSVP for tomorrow's event with Dr Lennart Bolliger**, which brings together historical research with contemporary art.

In advance, we encourage you to look at the catalogue for the art exhibition "*The Borders of Memory*": https://bit.ly/3bk4lly
and at our short 3 minute video: https://bit.ly/3ezDWI7

**Please see the details and Zoom link below.**
We recommend testing the link in advance. You will be able to join via browser only if you prefer, but with reduced capabilities.
The talk will also be recorded and made available afterwards.

Spaces on Zoom are limited, so if you can no longer make it, please let us know.

Kind regards
Julie Taylor, Director, Guns & Rain | +27 (0)76 294 5332

***"Dilemmas, Disruption and Displacement: Thoughts on Southern Africa's***

Uambembe (SA/Angola). Read more about the artists' work down below.

**Tuesday 21st April**
**6pm SAST + CET / 5pm BST / 12pm EDT / 9am PDT**
Live on Zoom
**Join Zoom Meeting**: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/595373324
Meeting ID: 595 373 324

During the Q&A we will be taking questions via the Chat Box in Zoom.

It is also possible to join the talk via phone:
Meeting ID: 595 373 324
Find your local number: https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kcQFgltnxI





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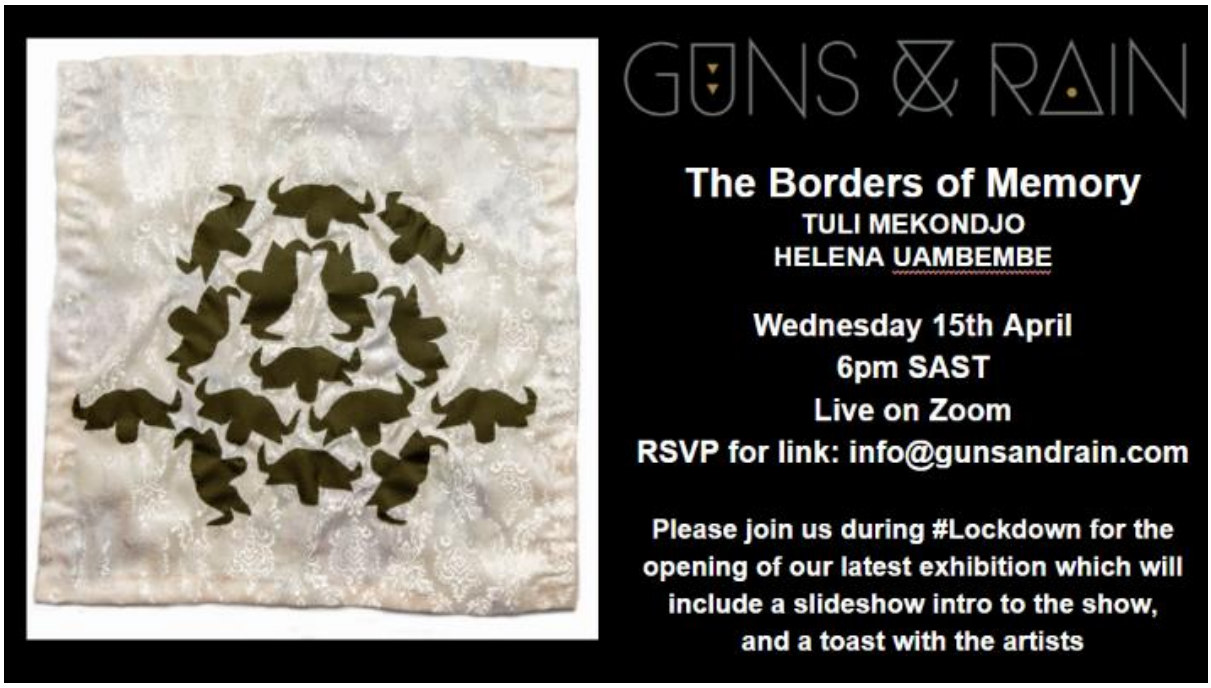


Watch our short 3-minute video about "The Borders of Memory" exhibition.

**Stay safe and please follow our updates** on Facebook and Instagram!

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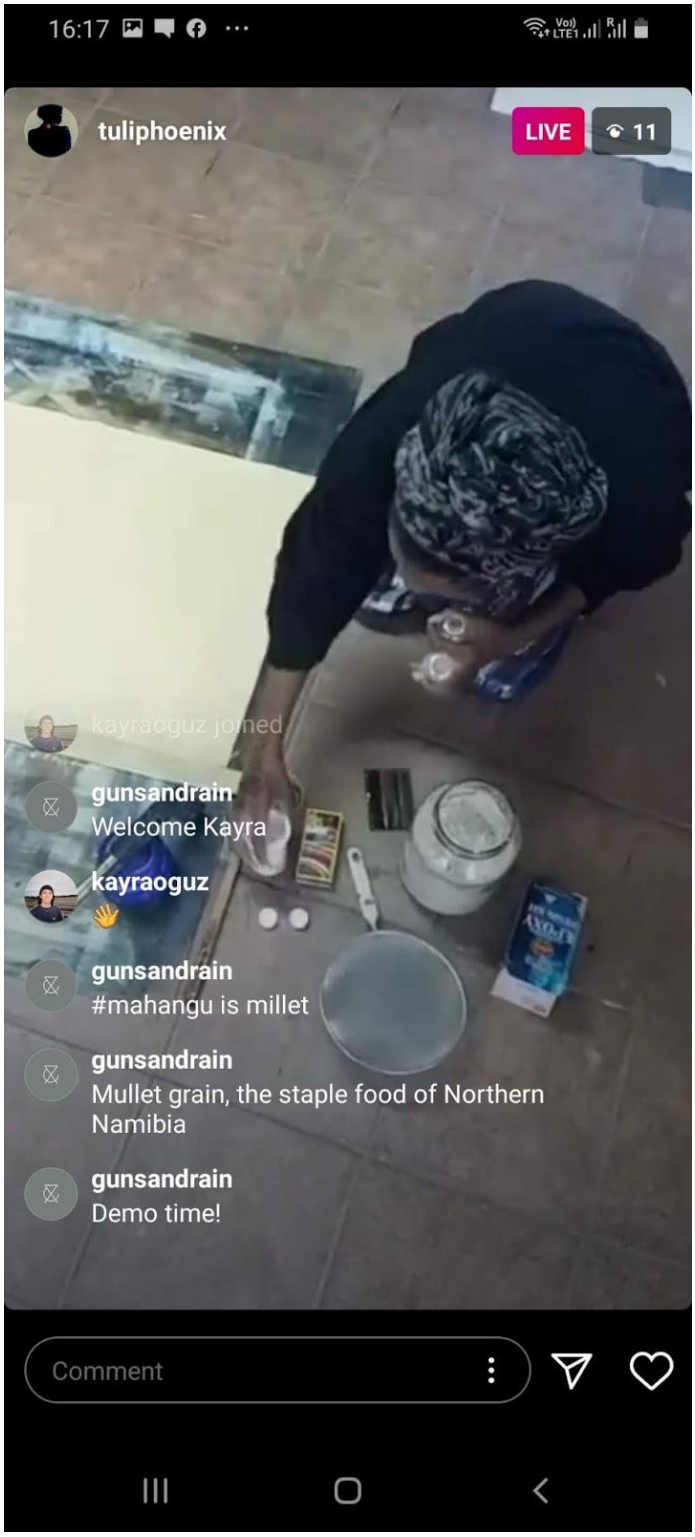
d) Whatsapp exhibition invitations and Instagram Live Screenshots



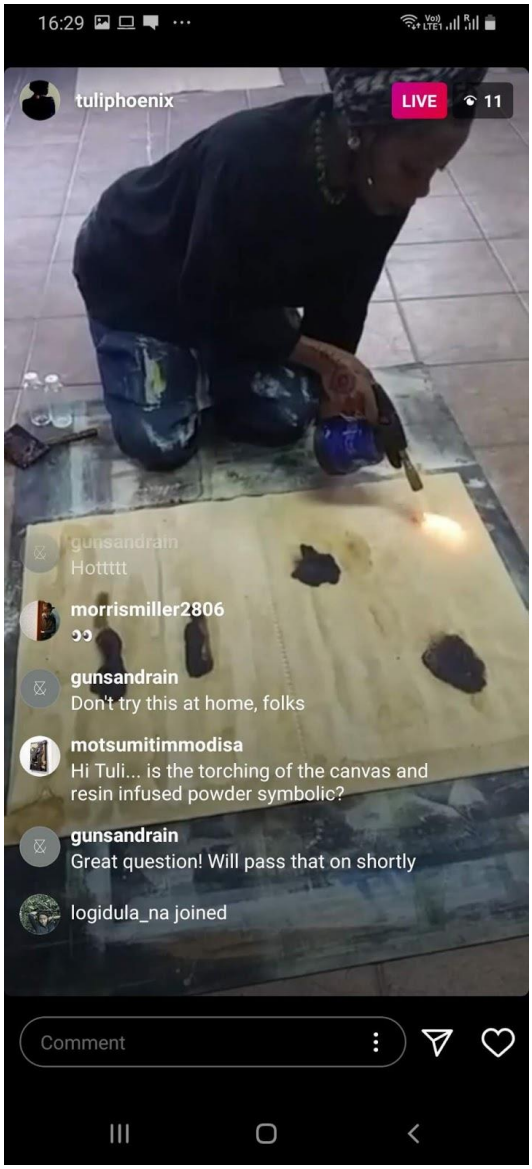

Online Opening Invitation issued by Guns & Rain

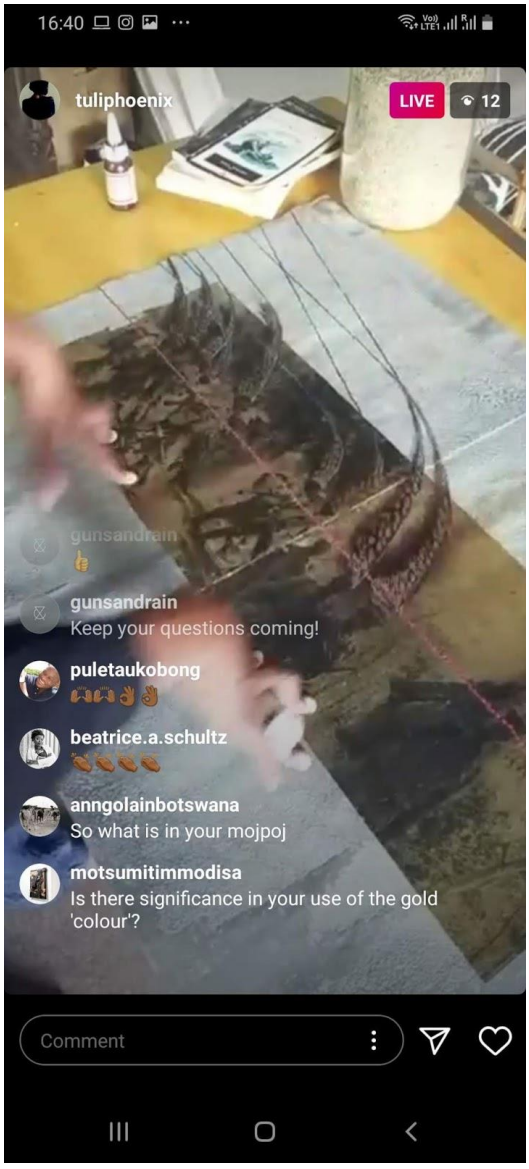


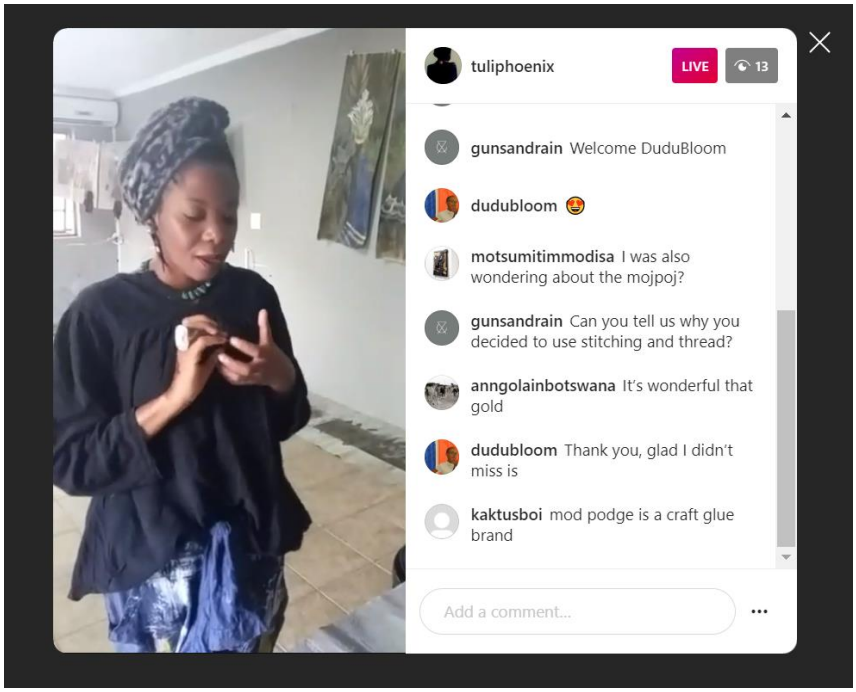

Instagram Live Event Invitation issued by Guns & Rain


16:17
tuliphoenix
LIVE
11
kayraoguz joined
gunsandrain
Welcome Kayra
kayraoguz
gunsandrain
#mahangu is millet
gunsandrain
Mullet grain, the staple food of Northern Namibia
gunsandrain
Demo time!
Comment

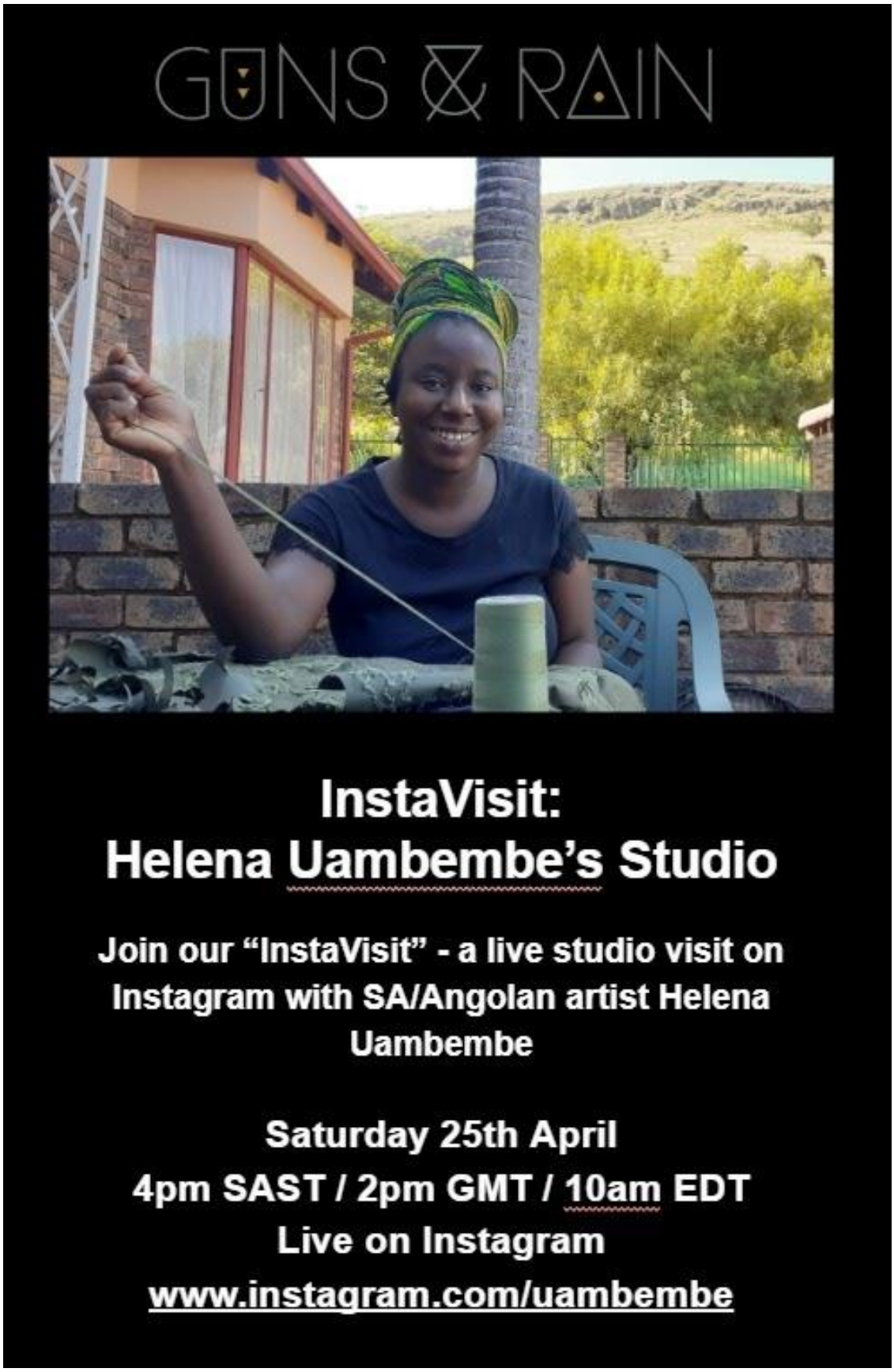

16:28
tuliphoenix
LIVE
12
marthamukaiwa
Firestarter!
gunsandrain
Haha yes
kayraoguz
Love this
gunsandrain
Hottttt
morrismiller2806
gunsandrain
Don't try this at home, folks
Comment


16:29
tuliphoenix
LIVE
11
gunsandrain
Hottttt
morrismiller2806
👀
gunsandrain
Don't try this at home, folks
motsumitimmodisa
Hi Tuli... is the torching of the canvas and resin infused powder symbolic?
gunsandrain
Great question! Will pass that on shortly
logidula_na joined
Comment


16:40
tuliphoenix
LIVE
12
gunsandrain
gunsandrain
Keep your questions coming!
puletaukobong
beatrice.a.schultz
anngolainbotswana
So what is in your mojpoj
motsumitimmodisa
Is there significance in your use of the gold 'colour'?
Comment


tuliphoenix
LIVE
13
gunsandrain Welcome DuduBloom
dudubloom
motsumitimmodisa I was also wondering about the mojpoj?
gunsandrain Can you tell us why you decided to use stitching and thread?
anngolainbotswana It's wonderful that gold
dudubloom Thank you, glad I didn't miss is
kaktusboi mod podge is a craft glue brand
Add a comment...

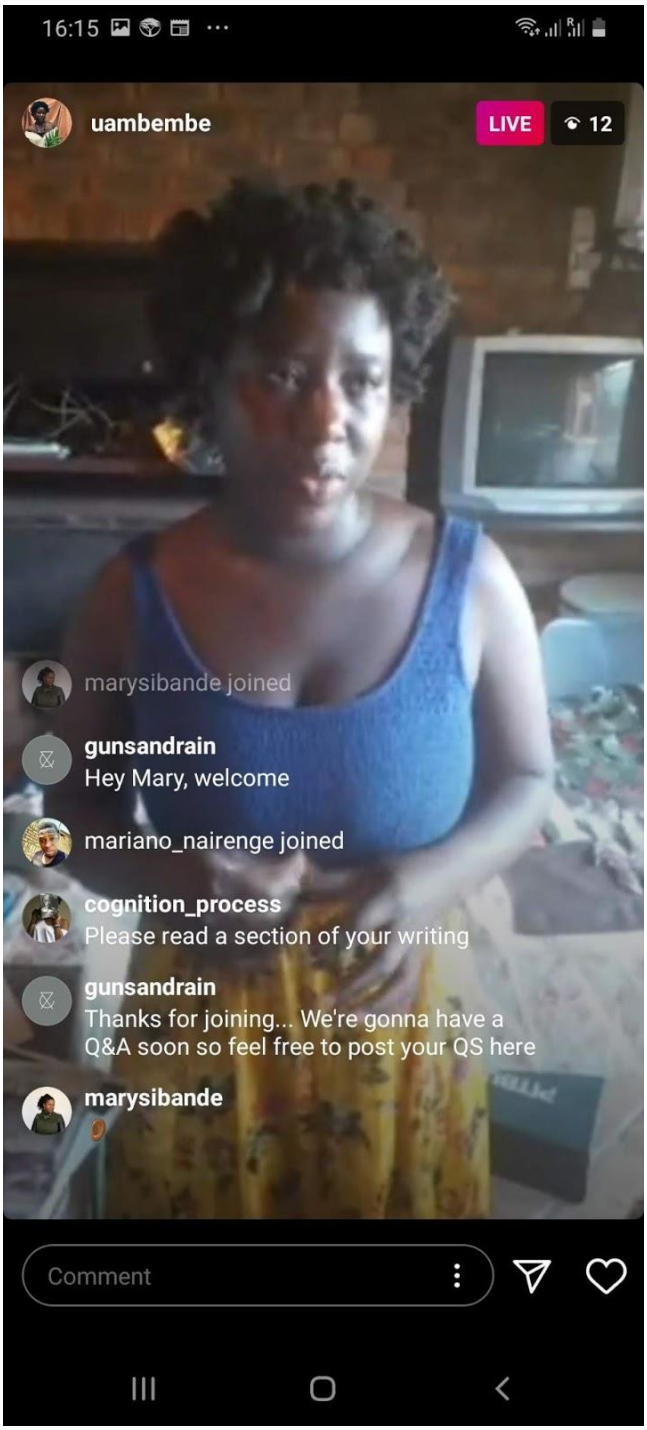
Instagram Live Invitation

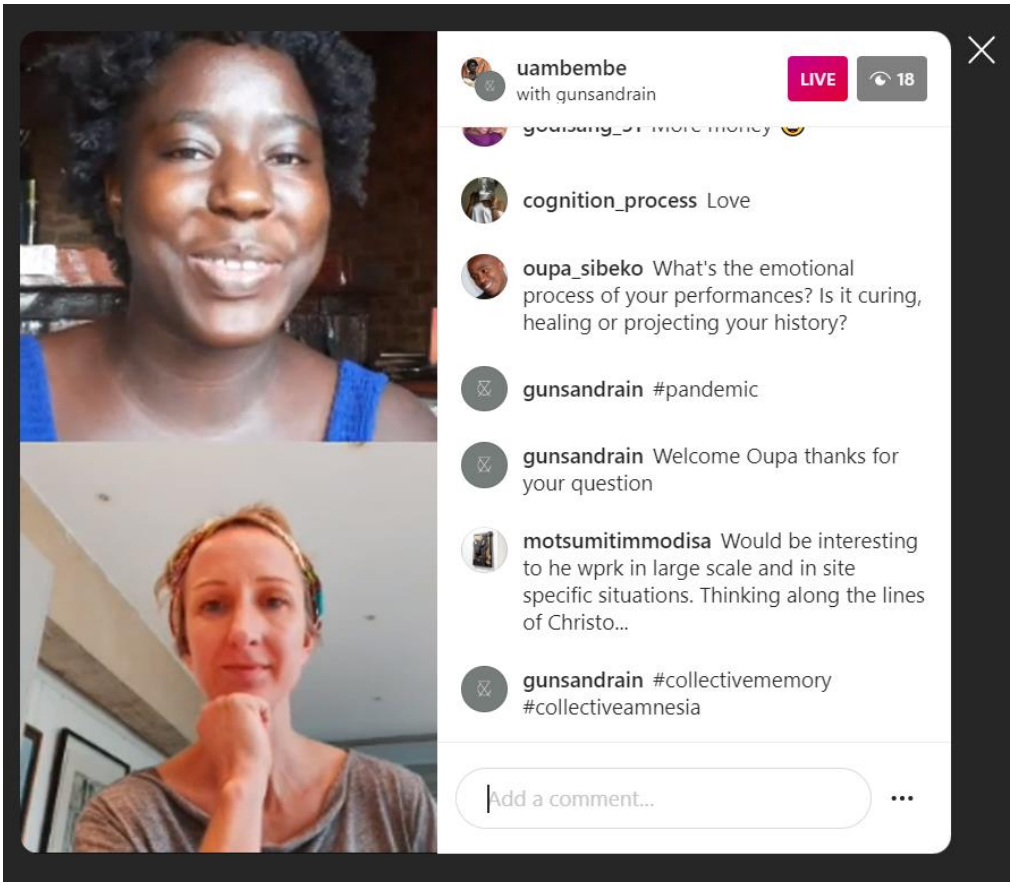


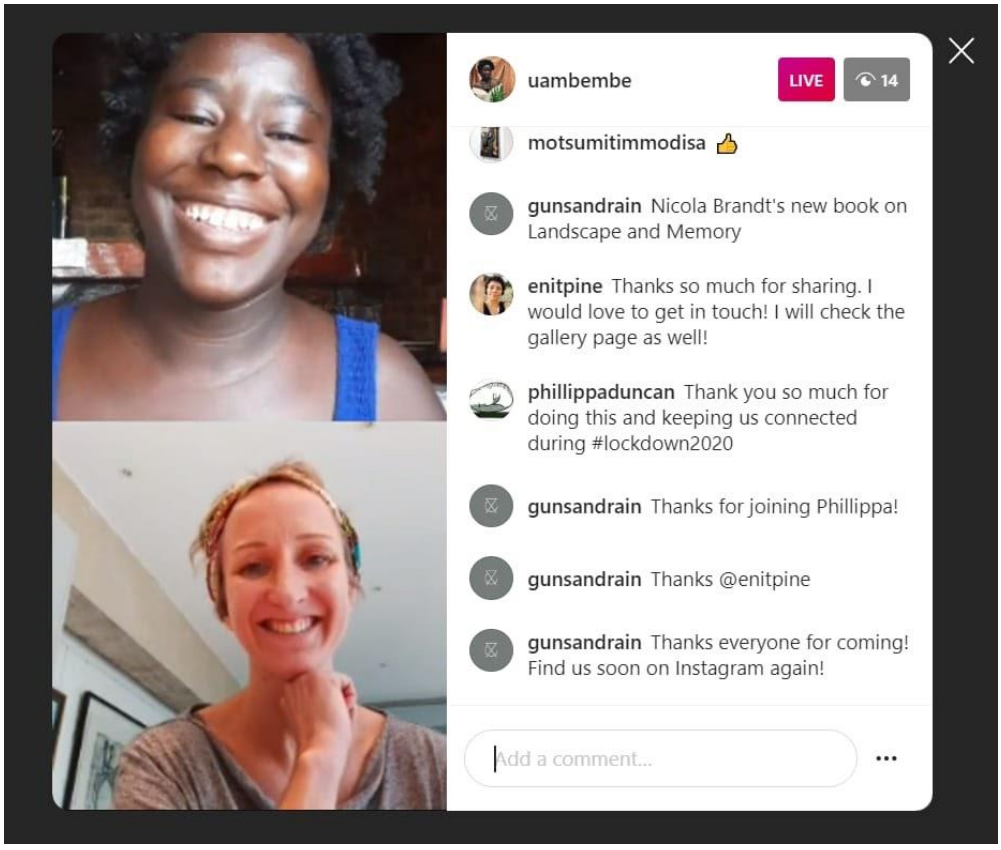
Instagram Live Event with Helena Uambembe, 25 April 2020.

Selection of screenshots taken by Julie Taylor.




uambembe
with gunsandrain
LIVE
18
cognition_process Love
oupa_sibeko What's the emotional process of your performances? Is it curing, healing or projecting your history?
gunsandrain #pandemic
gunsandrain Welcome Oupa thanks for your question
motsumitimmodisa Would be interesting to he wprk in large scale and in site specific situations. Thinking along the lines of Christo...
gunsandrain #collectivememory #collectiveamnesia
Add a comment...


uambembe
LIVE
14
motsumitimmodisa
gunsandrain Nicola Brandt's new book on Landscape and Memory
enitpine Thanks so much for sharing. I would love to get in touch! I will check the gallery page as well!
phillippaduncan Thank you so much for doing this and keeping us connected during #lockdown2020
gunsandrain Thanks for joining Phillippa!
gunsandrain Thanks @enitpine
gunsandrain Thanks everyone for coming! Find us soon on Instagram again!
Add a comment...

Panel Discussion Invitation issued by The Project Room, Windhoek, Namibia
Courtesy Frieda Lühl.



**4. "Dilemmas, Disruption and Displacement": materials pertaining to Lennart Bolliger's online lecture and panel discussion with the artists**

a) Notes from preparatory meeting with Bolliger, Uambembe and Mekondjo

From: **Julie Taylor** <julie@gunsandrain.com>
Date: Thu, Apr 2, 2020 at 4:24 PM
Subject: Meeting Notes - Thurs 2nd April - Lennart/Tuli/Helena/Julie
To: elizabeth mbumba, Helena Uambembe, Lennart Bolliger

Hi everyone

In case useful, just sharing my (very rough, typo'd) meeting notes below!
I'll use these to carry on with our planning.

Best
Julie

From Me to Everyone: 03:53 PM
Helena: the work has shaped up to be something completely different from when we first spoke in JAn
To how it is now, where I'm thinking more about the idea of 'home' and how ones bulilds it
Amongst the chaos.
Idea of labels again. How the 32 Battalion often labelled as Terrible Ones... stereotypical nasty labels but people still managed to build homes, raise children, etc
That's where a lot of the fabric works comes from, and the silhouette cut-outs.
Using these beautiful feminine decorative fabircs.
Eg my house in Pomfret and it's set-up. Images of the father at war...but at the same time so very beautiful, well decorated, clean, organised
How do we break those words and stereotypes
Julie: links closely to migration, displacement, the need for home and belonging
Lennart: Dino sang the school hymn to the principle.
"On the banks of the Okavango, a home from home we built"
Tuli: when I was a young girl in Nyango, you didn't really know that you were at war...you were just a kid growing up
On the other side of the river, there were Zambian citizens. In the morning you can wave at them, we waved at each other but we could never cross to the other side to hang out with them
From Me to Everyone: 03:57 PM
We started off living in a hut house and inside we had a bed, pictures from magazines...but they depicted people from the West/white people. They were stuck onto the mud wall of the house. WE had everything, we cooked there, etc.
IT was just like being at home. Later on we moved to a container house and we set up home there
These archival images where I see women making bricks and building... they would grow mielies and vegetables. AS a young kid it was 'normal'
But one day we were all ordered to go into the bush, told to drop everything, take the children and move into the bush.

That was our home for a whole week we stayed out in the bush, because they were afraid oaf a strike
You would still get a hiding from your mum.
If your mum was not around, you'd get a new type of mummy to raise you, like your mother
My mum raised another boy who became my brother
Helena: on that topic of raising kids: it was very common in buffalo and pomfret that lot sof kids were adopted by other families
There are many adults now who don't know who their biological families are...they found adopted families to be part of along the way
From Me to Everyone:  04:05 PM
In the SA set up, each tribe stays on it's own.  So you got integrated in that way, adopted in that way
Common survival technique.
Bringing people together to survive
Helena: really attractd to waterproof canvas used for tents. Because in Buff and Pomfret the first homes were made form tents
Tents are used at funerals in Angolan custom
For my mum's funeral it was a green huge military tent that was rented
That's the type of fabric that I found.
Using the motif of the buffalo...as the 32B insignia
Buffaloes synonymous with white Afrikaner male identity, trying to explore this obsession
Using the national cloth of Angola which popped up post-war.  Blac k white red and yellow are the main colours and those are the same as the flag
Synonymous with ANoglan identity and pride
Panel that I found in Marabastad
I asked where they came from, the one woman knew...
AFter Cape Town, I was working around MARket street in Joburg, and I passed one fabric shop and it seems to be trending
"very cheap, original".
It may be made in Vietnam now!  but it's Angolan
From Me to Everyone:  04:13 PM
Ideas around origin, and identity
What is really Angolan?
Kind of reminded me of décor in our houses...
Going into embroidery as well...
The one i'm currently sewing is buffalo heads....the idea of this beautiful perfect home and having this green olive fabric with buff silhouettes and military cut outs imposing on that home....
Also thinking about the home I grew up in in Pomfret, how it was decorated, the fabrics used.  And also things that took place in the home - events, happy moments, sad moments... and how it always had to do with the military even if it wasn't mentioned
Julie: aesthetic trace, imprint that comes through into the domestic
present?  Invisible presence
HElena: there were women who competed fr the best decorated house...the making o doilies was a thing...
Attempt to try and live or perform a normal life as possible
Julie: the cake bake at Buffalo

HElena: my mum baked and sold bread...so did siblings... there wasn't electricity ….
Julie: ideas of multiple knowledges and histories... co-authored histories
From Me to Everyone: 04:18 PM
Who is authorised to speak about it?
Helena: that question consumes me a lot
Questions around people of colour speaking about the past
Who does history belong to?
Tuli: do you think we make it difficult because we don't believe people of colour ourselves when they tell stories?
We are conditioned to believe and respond in certain ways?
Why is it so difficult for us? to trust...to believe...
Helena: in my experience it's in the SA context.
I met someone at the Less Good, one of the directors, I'm taking part as a mentor for the academy.
WE were doing a workshop on Head and the Load.
Around WWI and African Soldiers used in WWI and the hardships they faced. Some of the stories are just horrible. He was leading the workshop and we were talking...
He said he grew up in Phola Park pre 1994....
How do you enact pain...
I went to him afterwards re Phola Park... those soldiers are mypeople...
He was in disbelief, and I started giving him background story of 32B and Angola/Namibia etc
He said, this can't be it...
Disbelief amongst other South Africans, where the shared history is not discussed at all. It's like it didn't happen.
From Me to Everyone: 04:18 PM
The narrative of apartheid only happened in SA and that was it.... that's what a lot of people believe

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Disbelief amongst other South Africans, where the shared history is not discussed at all. It's like it didn't happen.
The narrative of apartheid only happened in SA and that was it.... that's what a lot of people believe
We were discussing Lamentations of Judas. People turned me away
but when the filmmaker went there, he probably bribed them, and they spoke to them.
Here I am, a child of the community with skills to write and record from an insiders pov, and try not to exploit them...people weren't so open to me

b) Online Opening: Audience Zoom Chat Comments, 15 April 2020

17:58:30 From Nic to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : You're looking great!

17:58:40 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com to Nic(Privately) : :)

18:00:42 From karin heissler to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : this is great!!

18:01:36 From DuduBloom More : HI everyone, thanks for coming. Welcome :)

18:01:48 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com : Welcome everyone!

18:02:43 From Marina Mottin : Hi from Basel, everybody!

18:04:48 From Sakhile Matlhare to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Hello Julie!! :)

18:09:42 From gwen meyer’s iPhone : hello from california

18:10:01 From Helena Uambembe to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Hi Julie Dudus pC is dying

18:10:12 From iPhone d'Anne-Sophie : hello from France Paris

18:10:38 From Suta Kavari : Hello from Oxford :)

18:10:52 From Mariette : Hello from Amsterdam

18:11:14 From Nic to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Dudu's PC died, she's trying to log on with phone

18:12:23 From Geri Augusto : Hello to everyone from Providence, Rhode Island (by way of Brazil and Angola, too)

18:13:05 From Sicelo Nqaba Dlamini : hello from Eswatini (Swaziland)

18:14:05 From DuduBloom More to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Can you add me as co host again please, unless you already have

18:14:29 From Azwimpheleli Langalanga : hello from Johannesburg

18:17:35 From DuduBloom More to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : I cant tell from the phone call if you’re recording

18:18:26 From gwen meyer’s iPhone : really amazing work

18:20:21 From Medeine : congrats to you all!

18:20:58 From Refilwe Nkomo : Amazing! Well done Tuli and Helena.

18:21:07 From Refilwe Nkomo : Thank you for your work

18:22:27 From Sakhile Matlhare : Thank you Julie! And thank you and well done Helena and Tuli! Greetings from Germany :)

18:22:28 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com to Sakhile Matlhare(Privately) : Please share your questions...

18:22:34 From gwen meyer's iPhone : hello Thule can you speak something about how your work process revealed what you didn't know about the angolan war

18:22:43 From lieslebarrath : Julie - do you have the work in your gallery and available for a virtual viewing now?

18:22:45 From gwen meyer's iPhone : Tuli sp

18:23:01 From Emma Kaye : Thank you Julie, this is really great!

18:24:40 From gwen meyer's iPhone : thank you

18:25:05 From lieslebarrath to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : And to what extent did Tuli and Helena interact during "the making"?

18:25:06 From Shekeshe : Thank you Julie, well done Helena and Tuli. Very important work.

18:25:11 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com : https://www.artsy.net/show/guns-and-rain-the-borders-of-memory-tuli-mekondjo-and-helena-uambembe

18:25:35 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARqPbmEtqcE

18:25:43 From Emma Kaye : Helena and Tuli, really important work and narratives to bring to light!

18:27:19 From Kayra Oguz : Tula, my question is: why are archival photographs primary in this body of work?

18:27:26 From Suta Kavari to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Hi Julie. Thank you for this experimentation, its a nice distraction from the monotony. You mentioned in your opening remarks that Tuli's work, and perhaps also Helena's work drew a lot on the stories of the women and children, whose voice and stories are normally marginalised in the retelling of history. Was it challenging collecting and recollecting those stories, even from memory, in creating the work? And what were some of the interesting memories that came up during the process

18:27:53 From DuduBloom More to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Helena lost connection, she's reconnecting

18:28:06 From Medeine : Hi Julie, Helena, Tuli! Great work. Would love to hear more about the use of birds/feathers in Tuli's work. And if Helena could talk about the repeating shapes cut from textiles she uses in some of her works.

18:28:46 From Bev Butkow : Well done everyone. Please can you ask Helena where she made the art

18:29:20 From Geri Augusto : Living in Angola during many of the events resonated in Tuli's and Helena's work, I recall the hardness of the deaths and the movements of people and cattle and things. Your art genders things like the Cassinga massacre in "softer" materials, but still in ways that invite deep reflection. Are the pieces going to be shown to Angolan audiences? And have ex-soldiers (in any of the actor-countries) had a chance to interact with your work?

18:35:57 From Phumulani Ntuli to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : There is an interesting way of questioning history and narrative and I think both artists attend and handle these sensitivities differently. I am interested to find out how both artist think about the tensions between fiction and documentary practices in their works?

18:36:34 From Phumulani Ntuli : There is an interesting way of questioning history and narrative and I think both artists attend and handle these sensitivities differently. I am interested to find out how both artist think about the tensions between fiction and documentary practices in their works?

18:37:26 From Sakhile Matlhare to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Hi Julie. One aspect we thought was very intimate about Helena and Tuli showing together is that their families seemed to have fought on opposite ends during the war? Did this play a role in deciding to show together and/or inform either Helena or Tuli in their practice or their research process for this project specifically?

18:37:32 From Marina Mottin : Tuli, what about the red thread on your first works?

18:38:59 From Nic to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Maybe Helena muted herself?

18:39:18 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com to Helena Uambembe(Privately) : trying to unmute you

18:39:52 From DuduBloom More to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Helena is having network issues

18:40:00 From Nic to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Helena has a wifi problem she says

18:40:44 From Helena Uambembe to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : i am back

18:41:29 From gwen meyer's iPhone to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : i am so interested in how you are using archival images to unpick so to speak your narrative - photography has a certain agency in this way of working — did you Tuli look to any other artists from the continent that are using archival

images to bridge gaps in memory and reconcile your own personal history your personal narrative

18:41:39 From DuduBloom More to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Kayra also asked a Q, not sure if you've asked already

18:41:42 From gwen meyer's iPhone to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : if time

18:41:44 From Sweet Freedom : This is such a lovely and informative session. To connect so warmly across the net to get these artists in our own living rooms. thanks to the Guns and Rain team and the artists. History is an important source for meaningful art

18:42:15 From DuduBloom More to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Pin Helena

18:42:45 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com to Nic(Privately) : CAn yo u pls copy paste all the chat room stuff

18:43:51 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com to DuduBloom More(Privately) : CAn yo u pls copy paste all the chat room stuff

18:44:27 From DuduBloom More to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : sure

18:46:01 From Emma Kaye : @sweetfreedom, I totally agree, it is so lovely to experience an 'opening' that we are otherwise not able to attend not being physically present at the gallery. Wonderful to meet the artists and to be able to 'meet' the artists and to have what seems like a more intimate questions and answers. Surprisingly liberating.

18:46:17 From Marina Mottin : I am interested in both artists' choice of materials

18:47:40 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com to Sweet Freedom(Privately) : thank you!!!!

18:47:56 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com to Emma Kaye(Privately) : thank you!

18:49:30 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com : Our online Artsy exhibition: https://www.artsy.net/show/guns-and-rain-the-borders-of-memory-tuli-mekondjo-and-helena-uambembe

18:50:02 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com : A short video (thanks to our intern Kayra!) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARqPbmEtqcE

18:51:03 From Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com to Tuli-Mekondjo M(Privately) : sound is good when you hold up your mic :)

18:52:11 From Emma Kaye to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Really, thank god you left Google to do this. It was a brave and incredible step that is now producing and exposing profound work. What a

journey you have been on and not always easy but where you are now is extraordinary. Total respect.

18:54:13 From Marina Mottin : Thank you for sharing

18:55:06 From lieslebarrath : Thanks for getting us together Julie

18:55:17 From karin heissler : thank you so much; congratulations !

18:55:26 From Sakhile Matlhare to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Thank you Julie! This was a really inspiring presentation! *cheers*

18:55:41 From Mariette de Haan : Many thanks from Sunny Amsterdam ;)

18:55:44 From Marina Mottin : Julie, Thank you and unmute us from time to time :-)

18:55:45 From Phumulani Ntuli : Awesome insights and congrats

18:55:47 From gwen meyer's iPhone : thank you this was really great well done to both artists and gallery to get this online so appreciate

18:56:09 From Kayra Oguz : Thank you Julie—this was very well done from you and the artists

18:56:39 From Pule : This was epic! Thanks for setting it up!

18:57:31 From ASnA Zoom : Thank you Tuli, Helena and Julie for a wonderful launch event. I look forward to seeing more of it and to future conversations! Best Wishes, Christian Williams (Bloemfontein)

18:57:48 From Marina Mottin : Wonderful, thank you again

18:58:03 From Carmen Ford : Thanks Julie, Helena, Tuli, and G&R team, brilliant

18:58:19 From Nic to Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com(Privately) : Music not coming through?

18:59:04 From Bev Butkow : Well done everyone. Beautiful interesting and relevant work. Well put together Julie. Thank you

19:00:25 From Frieda Lühl : this was great, thank you Julie &team. Congrats Tuli & Helena for this great exhibition of very important work

c) Julie Taylor Speaking Notes for Bolliger Lecture & Panel Discussion, 21 April 2020

**Zoom Event Speaking Notes - Julie Taylor - 20th April 2020**
**For Lennart Bolliger & Panel Discussion 21st April 2020**

**Instructions**:
You're all muted.
You can chat to the group and to each other via the Chat Box (bottom menu)
Screen View options
This event is being recorded and will be made available afterwards

While we wait, please take a look at the exhibition catalogue if you haven't already:
https://bit.ly/3bk4Ily
We also have a short video made by our intern Kayra:
https://www.facebook.com/gunsandrain/videos/214096346551244/

**WELCOME**
Welcome everyone and thank you for joining us tonight.
My name is Julie Taylor and I'm the director of Guns & Rain gallery, based in Johannesburg. The silver lining of COVID-19 is that we're able to gather together in new ways, and I'm thrilled that we're joined tonight by people from all over the world - Namibia, the UK, the US, Switzerland - special welcome to Prof Gordon in Washington DC, Professor Alexander in Oxford and of course many from across SA - journalist Leonie March in Durban, DR Christian Williams in Bloemfontein and others. Fantastic to have you here.

Many of you are new to the gallery, and you may be wondering why an art gallery is hosting a talk by an historian. By way of brief background, Gun & Rain works with emerging contemporary artists from 7 different African countries, and our focus is primarily on social and political issues, including identity politics. My own interests stem from multiple disciplines, as well as from research in Namibia, and so when I became aware of the overlaps in focus between Lennart Bolliger and the two artists, Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe, it felt effervescent, for want of a better word.

For tonight's event, we do a diverse audience, many of you are in academia, but similarly many of you aren't, so I just want us to keep that in mind in terms of how we engage.In academia the tendency is to gather everything together, to analyse it, to neaten it and to tie up loose ends as much as possible. But in the world of art practice, it's often very different - sometimes it's precisely about the loose ends, and being comfortable with the ambiguity of loose ends, learning from process - and the many different interpretations, often subjective, that can emerge from art.

I think what Lennart and the artists hold in common is their work to shed light on histories that have been marginalised in various ways. What's been most exciting for me about this joint project is how modes of historical enquiry and thinking might contribute to contemporary art practice, in a processual way, and vice versa, how art and artists might help probe this history.

Without further ado, it's a great pleasure to have Dr. Lennart Bolliger with us tonight, joining from lockdown in Berlin. Lennart is a postdoctoral fellow at the Humboldt University of Berlin and a visiting researcher at Wits University. Together with Dino Estevao, he is conducting a research project on the history of Angolan civilians who were associated with the SADF 32 'Buffalo' Battalion. He is currently working on a book manuscript entitled *Apartheid's Black*

*Soldiers: Military Collaboration and Transnational Armies in Southern Africa.* He holds a doctorate from Oxford University.

1. **Helena and Tuli:** this is obviously still a new body of work, but how have people in your communities responded to your art? In particular, I'm asking about those who experienced the war, or who have been significantly affected by its legacies (your parents generation or others who grew up in displaced communities like you)
2. **Helena and Tuli:** Lennart's research challenges received wisdom/dominant narratives about the past, including for example, SADF military memoirs and SWAPO's patriotic narratives. Based on your own experiences and research, what do you think of this idea of (your parents/communities having been on) "opposing/opposite sides"?
3. **Lennart**, this collaboration has involved bringing two very different disciplines together. As a historian engaging with contemporary art about your specific field of interest, what has it raised for you? Has it brought new perspectives?

**WRAPPING UP**

**Thank you so much to Lennart, Tuli and Helena.**

Thank you all once again for joining us.

If you haven't already seen the artwork, please take a look at the exhibition catalogue if you haven't already: https://bit.ly/3bk4Ily
We also have a short video made by our intern Kayra:
https://www.facebook.com/gunsandrain/videos/214096346551244/
The gallery is very active on Instagram and Facebook, so you can find us there too.

In terms of our programming:

We do have one more event coming up this week, which is a live studio visit with Helena Uambembe on Instagram, taking place this Saturday afternoon. Details are on Facebook.

If you would like to join our mailing list, please drop me a line, julie@gunsandrain.com

d) Lennart Bolliger Lecture Transcript, 21 April 2020

# Dilemmas, Disruption and Displacement: Thoughts on Southern Africa's Wars of Decolonization and Their Legacies

*Introduction*

This presentation aims to provide some historical context to the work of Tuli Mekondjo and Helena Uambembe. Some of it draws on research that I conducted for my PhD and, more recently, for a postdoc project. The research has focused on the history of black Namibian and Angolan soldiers who served in apartheid South Africa's security forces in the 1970s and 1980s. While I am the person presenting tonight, I want to point out that I have conducted this research together with Simi João as well as Helena's brother-in-law, Dino Estevao. I would like to thank both of them for their collaboration and friendship.

I have divided the presentation into two main parts. First, I will give a brief overview of some of the aspects of the Namibian liberation struggle, which I think are most relevant to our discussion. As Julie Taylor wrote in the programme for *The Borders of Memory*, the life biographies of Helena and Tuli have "been fundamentally shaped by Namibia's war of independence, also known in South Africa as 'the Border War'". While the struggle was fought internationally, I will focus on Namibia and Angola in the 1970s and 1980s. The struggle's history is complex and riddled with various actors with often confusing acronyms. I have sought to avoid as much confusion as possible and I hope that you will bear with me.

Second, I will discuss some aspects of the three themes in the title – dilemmas, disruption, and displacement. I will do so with regard to the two organisations that Tuli's and Helena's parents were part of. As mentioned in the programme, these two organisations were the Namibian liberation movement, SWAPO, in the case of Tuli's parents and 32 Battalion of the apartheid-era South African Defence Force (SADF) in the case of Helena's parents.

As we have a very diverse audience joining us tonight, I have decided to talk not only about historical research but about some of the broader, often difficult questions it raises. These questions are not unique to the conflicts discussed tonight. Some of them may have come up in your own personal lives – like they have in Helena's and Tuli's. These questions also test the limits of historical research and, I believe, may require us to turn to philosophy or, indeed, the arts.

*Historical Overview*

After the First World War, South Africa occupied the former German colony of Namibia, which was then – not very creatively – called South West Africa. Following the Second World War, South Africa introduced the system of institutionalised racial segregation, better known as apartheid, and began to rule the country essentially as a South African province.

In the early 1960s, the Namibian liberation movement, SWAPO, was formed and began to send members abroad to seek assistance in its fight against the South African regime. In the late 1960s, SWAPO began with the armed struggle against South African occupation and, as a result of the increasing repression and the escalating war, more and more Namibians went into exile. When Angola, which borders Namibia in the north, gained its independence in 1975, many Namibians suddenly had an even more direct route into exile. After arriving in Angola, they came to live in "refugee camps". Among them were Tuli's parents.

At the same time, armed SWAPO guerrillas now also had a more direct route back into Namibia, which caused concern for the apartheid regime. Starting in late 1975, the SADF began to launch military operations into Angola to fight SWAPO and to prevent the new Angolan government from assisting the Namibian liberation movement. In large part due to these invasions, Angola's war of independence quickly turned into a civil war between rival liberation movements.

During the first major invasion into Angola, the SADF formed a military unit that would later become 32 Battalion. The unit was headed by white South African officers but consisted mostly of black ex-guerrillas. These soldiers had previously belonged to one of the Angolan liberation movements, the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA). However, most of them had essentially become refugees after their liberation movement dramatically collapsed in late 1975. Among these soldiers was Helena's father.

A unique aspect of 32 Battalion, in comparison to the rest of the SADF, was that women and children were also affiliated with the unit. When the black soldiers of the unit were relocated from Angola to a camp in northern Namibia, they were accompanied by hundreds of women and children. These women and children were also fleeing from the escalating civil war in Angola and came to live at the base of 32 Battalion, called Buffalo. In short, both Helena and Tuli grew up in refugee communities. The journey of how their parents and others like them ended up in these communities was often fraught with various dilemmas.

*Dilemmas*

In fact, many people in both Namibia and Angola faced extraordinarily difficult choices during these times.

One of the dilemmas that sympathizers of SWAPO faced was whether they should remain in Namibia or join the movement in exile. If they decided to become politically active within Namibia, they risked harassment, imprisonment, torture or assassination by the security forces. If they decided to go into exile, they often had to leave friends and family behind; perhaps their elderly parents or younger siblings who required their care and support. Some did not tell their loved ones about their decision to go into exile out of fear of getting them into trouble.

As they made their way across the border in the dark of the night, they risked being arrested by the security forces or being reported to SWAPO guerrillas by people who did not know them and found their movements suspicious. In fact, many Namibians felt caught between SWAPO and the security forces. As one person explained to Siegfried Groth, a German pastor working with Namibian exiles: "We live between two fires. Either you side with the South Africans or with SWAPO. If SWAPO men come at night, asking for help, and you don't help them, then that means you're on the South African side, and you may have to pay with your life".[41]

In late 1975 and early 1976, the future soldiers of 32 Battalion faced the dilemma of remaining refugees on the move or joining the South African military that had supported the Portuguese colonial regime in Angola. As refugees, they and their family members risked starvation and persecution by soldiers who belonged to rival liberation movements. Young children were particularly vulnerable, and many died of thirst, hunger and exhaustion as their families were fleeing south, seeking refuge in Namibia.

In northern Namibia, many black soldiers and their families were moved to a refugee camp, called "Tin Mine", which was being administered by the SADF. In 1978, the South

[41] Siegfried Groth, *Namibia – The Wall of Silence: The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1995), 28.

African military informed the people that it was going to close the refugee camp and presented them with the choice – if one can even call it that – of either going back to Angola or joining 32 Battalion. Those who decided to join the SADF were relocated to Buffalo base. Among those who returned to Angola, many were killed in the post-independence civil war that was by now ravaging the country.

I suggest an important takeaway from studying these dilemmas is that people's actions do not necessarily reflect their beliefs. Still today, many people in Angola, Namibia and South Africa accuse the soldiers of 32 Battalion of having consciously fought *for* apartheid. Knowing the incredibly difficult choices that these soldiers and their families faced, I believe it becomes difficult to maintain such an argument.

At the same, in cases where SWAPO members decided to remain in Namibia in order to look after their elderly parents, does their decision reflect a lack of commitment? And the those who did make it into exile: were they more privileged, braver or just luckier?

*Disruption*

After they joined SWAPO or 32 Battalion, many people's lives were further disrupted in different and often shocking ways.

Namibians joined SWAPO for various reasons; many traveled into exile in search of further education. However, as was the case in other liberation movements, some Namibians were coerced into military training for SWAPO's armed struggle. As a result, they warned each other about being assigned to certain camps, such as the Kongwa camp in central Tanzania. According to one man interviewed by the scholar, Christian Williams, they warned each other: "Please, if you hear that you are going to Kongwa, don't agree! … There's no education. It's only a bush for fighting".[42]

As more Namibians joined SWAPO in exile and the movement came under increasing military attacks by the SADF, other internal conflicts developed. One major issue revolved around the fear of spies being sent by South Africa to infiltrate the movement. From the 1980s onward, an estimated 1,000-2,000 SWAPO members were detained in camps in southern Angola. There, an unknown number of them were abused, tortured, and executed as suspected South African spies. Several hundred people "disappeared", and never returned from exile. Since then, the treatment of the so-called "ex-detainees" has repeatedly been the focus of heated debate and controversy in Namibia.

In the newly formed 32 Battalion, discipline was violently enforced. In the first years of the unit's existence, an unknown number of black soldiers were executed for various "offences". These ranged from desertion or retreat during battle to refusing an order to petty theft. Black soldiers were also regularly punished with a heavy leather whip called *sjambok*. In the bush, soldiers were whipped mainly for refusing to follow orders or sleeping while on guard duty. In the base, they were hit for various reasons, which included alcohol abuse, illegal trade, and complaints about their salaries.

The violent punishment with the *sjambok* was also extended to civilians who lived at the Buffalo base and were subject to the military authority of the unit's leadership. The wives of soldiers were whipped mainly for adultery or illegally brewing home-made beer. The children of soldiers were hit by members of the military police or their teachers for missing school or not doing their homework. As one man recounted: "You couldn't miss school because the [military] police would go around the [base] and if they find you, they will *sjambok* you".[43]

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[42] Christian A. Williams, "Exile Biography and Un-National History: The Story of Kaufilwa Nepelilo", *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 11, 1 (2017), 154.

[43] Interview with Nilton Bernardo, Pretoria, 11 February 2020.

I would suggest there are two sets of important questions that arise from these disruptions. The first one relates to the complex make-up of different "sides" during conflict. Does it make sense to think of the Namibian war of independence in terms of two opposing "sides" – SWAPO versus the SADF? Were the SWAPO members and the commanders who imprisoned and tortured them on the same "side"? Were the white officers of 32 Battalion and the wives and children of black soldiers who they whipped on the same "side"? If so, what do we mean by "side"?
The second set of questions relates to the violence experienced by people. What are the effects of violence such as the one perpetrated among members who belonged to the same liberation movement? What are its effects on people's understanding of themselves and others?

*Displacement*
The third theme, displacement, of course runs through the histories discussed so far, and I think it is also central to Tuli's and Helena's work.
In 1989, after more than two decades of armed struggle, Namibia gained its independence. In the process, between 40,000 and 50,000 Namibians were repatriated to Namibia. More than 80 per cent of people returned from Angola while about 9 per cent returned from Zambia and the remaining 10 per cent had been living in more than 40 different countries around the world. More than a third of returnees were younger than 18. Like Tuli, many of them had been born and grown up outside of Namibia.[44] They were "repatriated" to Namibia, a country where their parents were from but where they themselves had never set foot in. As Tuli writes in her artist statement: "My sense of kinship to this 'foreign' land has always been through the eyes of my parents. Deep within my core, I was from 'everywhere'".
In 1989, the SADF decided to relocate the soldiers of 32 Battalion and their families to South Africa. More precisely, they were moved to a military base at Pomfret, a remote and abandoned asbestos mining town in the Kalahari Desert close to the South African border with Botswana. Within 15 years, the soldiers of 32 Battalion and their families had been displaced twice: first from Angola to Namibia and then again from Namibia to South Africa. While most soldiers and their partners were originally from Angola, many of their children were born in Namibia and later South Africa. As a result, many soldiers and their families feel like they have, in a sense, become "strangers everywhere". In our interview, one man related a typical conversation with people in South Africa, who would ask him and his friends: "'Where are you guys from?' 'We are from Pomfret.' 'No, where are you originally from?' So you have to explain yourself and it's a long story."[45]
I think that the questions around displacement and, as a result, around belonging are at the heart of Helena's and Tuli's work. Where and what is home? Where do I belong? In Angola, Namibia or South Africa? Everywhere or nowhere?

[44] Charles P. Gasarasi, "UN Resolution 435 and the Repatriation of Namibian Exiles", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 3, 4 (1990), 351.
[45] Interview with anonymous interviewee, Pretoria, 4 February 2020.

## e) Transcription of Online Panel Discussion on Zoom, 21 April 2020

"Dilemmas, Disruption and Displacement: Thoughts on Southern Africa's Wars of Decolonization and Their Legacies": an online talk by historian Dr Lennart Bolliger (Humboldt University), followed by a panel discussion with visual artists Tuli Mekondjo (Namibia) and Helena Uambembe (SA/Angola), moderated by Julie Taylor (Guns & Rain).

Recorded video available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZejVzkG7kxY

LB: Lennart Bolliger
TM: Tuli Mekondjo
HU: Helena Uambembe
JT: Julie Taylor

JT: And I'm going to kick off that discussion with a few questions but after that we will take questions from all of you. Please share your questions in the [Zoom] chat box and we will then facilitate the Q&A with Tuli and Helena, hopefully all of our connections will stay stable.

JT: So Helena, this is obviously a new body of work but you have been working around these themes now for some years and I think what would be interesting for me and probably for many in our audience tonight is - how are people in your communities responded to the work and in particular I'm wondering about those who experienced the war or who have been significantly affected by its legacies. So that could be your parents' generation or those who grew up displaced communities as you did. So any thoughts on how people have responded to the work would be so interesting?

HU: Hi everyone, thanks for joining us. It has been quite mixed - I mostly show my work to my family and they experience displacement directly, so in my family I have eight siblings all together. I was the only one born in South Africa, the rest were born in Namibia. With my brothers they are very proud, so happy that I'm trying to communicate the traumas that they have faced and I've inherited. With my sister it's a bit complicated, she's the eldest, born in 1973, so she really saw transition in all forms from - transitional Independence to having to flee to Namibia to South Africa, so a bit complex to deal with and I think it triggers some memories with her. So there are very mixed feelings from a lot of people, when I try and do research there are people who are just like "no I am not talking about it" and there's some people who are more open to discussing it. Hearing Lennart's paper has also triggered some memories in me, so yeah it's a very complex situation.

JT: Thanks for sharing those thoughts and I think one of the things that struck me about what you shared when we first started working together was just the kind of layers of silence that exist about the past and in particular in the context of South Africa. You said something along the lines of - "it's as if this past didn't happen, the past between South Africans and Angolans, it just didn't happen, no one talks about it". So I think your work is so important and potent for trying to open up some of those conversations.

JT: Tuli, I'd like to ask the same question to you in terms of how people have responded to your work thus far or how you might hope for them to engage in the future. I know it's a new body of work, we haven't had the chance to show it in Namibia yet because of the lockdown but hopefully will have the chance to do that in the not too distant future. Would love to hear your thoughts as well.

TM: Hi everyone, thank you for joining us. I'm really happy and I would love, I hope that we will have the opportunity to exhibit this work in Namibia, so people from wherever in Namibia can come and have the opportunity to look at the artworks. My goal for this body of work - um, I would like to open up some dialogue with the aim of examining the apparent discord between the war veterans in SWAPO and also the so often called orphan 'struggle kids' or the DDR [Deutsche Demokratische Republik/East Germany] kids in Namibia. I feel like we are able to engage with each other about our various collective experience from this war and just to talk about how it is still in our lives 30 years later, after Independence and the focus should not only be on the war veterans and I know this is the issue with Namibia is that the focusing a lot on the war veterans but they should also focus on the so called 'struggle kids' that were born and raised in these camps. We struggle a lot, you know, a lot of the struggle kids and DDR kids struggle a lot with mental health issues, addiction problems, traumatic experiences. Some of us came from the camps not knowing who our parents are because we were taken, and especially in the case of the DDR kids, they were taken from the camps when they were like really small and they were turned over to East Germany and a lot of them they grow up with identity issues and what happened was that, when we came to Namibia we have difficulties, you know, we are unable to [integate into] this society and this society is unable to grasp who we are why we struggle and why we are unable to cope and why we also struggle, there are issues - you know it doesn't matter if it's a struggle kid or a DDR kid or even former veterans, they commit suicide, they have experienced from the war. It is also an issue of identity, I struggle with issues of identity and we seem to have this love-hate relationships with SWAPO, you know, there are times where you see the struggle kids are like "Viva SWAPO! SWAPO is our party" and everything but then on the other side is this issue, they feel like they're staying in tents next to the SWAPO headquarters for example you know because they want answers, they want to have opportunities, you know maybe finding a job, you know, just some type of opportunity. Maybe to stay even, but there's no structure. I think what happened is also after Independence the government failed to put up solid structures that could have effectively helped facilitate a smooth settling in, transition into this society for the returnees, the struggle kids and also for those who fought in this war when they were inside of the country, you know, people are suffering from post traumatic disorders and then it's just crazy - maybe crazy is not the right word - but I think it's just interesting that this whole country, the country emerged from a war, and, um, without any kind of post-war traumatic disorder intervention platform in place, we don't have that. That could have catered for and met the psychological needs of the Namibians, the returnees, the struggle kids, and everyone else are put in the country that is still growing with PTSD, due to the horrors of war and you know, I just that's what I want this work to, you know, this is my goal for this body of work.

JT: Thanks Tuli, such interesting insights, that I think it actually leads well into my next question which is: Lennart's research very much challenges challenges received wisdom and dominant narratives about the past for example - what people might have read in SDAF military memoirs, what people might have received through SWAPO's patriotic narratives, I'll turn back to Helena here.

JT: [Helena,] Based on your own experiences, what do you think of this idea of your parents, your communities, having been on opposite sides, opposing sides - you know, this is something that Lennart's research clearly complicates, um, so I would be interested to hear what you make of that. Helena over to you...

[lost internet connection with Helena]

TM: I actually want to talk a little bit more about how it was the northern part of Namibia, you know, these opposing sides, with regards to Namibia, northern part of Namibia, the South African Defence Force. So I think it created a complicated situation or situations, because some of [SADF] Koevoet and 32 battalion and so called Makakunyas, members, were also Namibians you know the Aawambo people ...and they were recruited by South African Defence Force. I guess you know, they got to the villages and then what they would help to terrorise households and the you know they would just come there in the household, then they would want to know where the combatants are they hiding, did they maybe make a turnaround there, they would like force their own people to just give information about the combatants. But obviously after Independence, um, they were pointed out. The communities obviously stepped forward and they were, like, victimising these people also, and these people were in fear of their lives. I think people just got really angry and they obviously started beating people and pointing them out as traitors because they were part of the Makakunyas, as they are referred to in the northern part of Namibia. I think that's also very interesting just to look at that everybody's from the same tribe and yet there's still those opposing sides people, victimising their own, just because of the fact of as the South African Defence, the Makakunyas, the Battalion 32. I think this is the reason why Namibia should just wake up now, you know, just think this is a reason why we need reconciliation in Namibia, we need to start talking about this war, people need to start talking about what happened in these camps, how we were all affected by this war, our leaders in government need to wake up and need to be accountable and to be able to talk about this war. You know just to bring forth reconciliation, hold people accountable and also with the hope of to forgive each other. It's really complicated, war is a very complicated story.

JT: I think Helena's connection is apparently a bit better now so we're going to try her again. Helena, if you wanna jump in and also talk about this idea of opposite sides?

HU: I think the opposite sides come from the grander narrative that is often said to us by the state or for patriarchal reasons, or even nation building reasons. South Africa's history is very complex and I've been encountering a lot of people who have had some knowledge of 32 [Battalion].... and so...Nhlanhla is a theatre maker and performer and he was telling our workshop that he was he grew up in Phola Park and he remembers the soldiers and how they get beaten, and immediately I felt like oooh s**t, that is me, that is part of my history. But it's way more complex than what it has been fed off and not just in South Africa but also in Namibia. I think when I met Tuli I immediately thought "OK we're kind of on opposing sides, or, history says that we are on opposing sides, but through research and actually talking to people you find out how complex it is, it is not just black and white, and I think this goes down to a lot of history and I think it's important that everyone kind of researches or tries to research the complexities of it, and that's what I've tried to bring forth in my work. Because the narrative of 32 [Battalion] is in South Africa, a lot of white veterans or white South Africans do know about it and see it as one of these grand, one of the greatest units of military history ever. And usually they forget the black body, even in celebrations you find all these white generals or white guys will charge, and maybe one or two former black soldiers would be in the picture and everyone else is forgotten. And really when you try and question them on their position, in the horrors that happened, there's this denial, on them either they were too busy to know what was going on in the community or one said "you know I'm a man of God I believe we are all equal". But in the time of Apartheid and war, not *everyone* was equal apparently. And it's important I think we need to challenge such narratives, we need to take people, um, we need to take people to accountability, not just the Apartheid government but also the current government, people who were involved, even like people like my dad, um, also question how….their positions in certain things. There is choice that people make, but sometimes the choices are never as simple as we kind of read it.

JT: Absolutely. Thanks for that and I think I've been struck by - in the context of so called "opposite sides" - I've been struck by how much similarity there is in your investigations artistically, in the way that you are both bringing in gender, you're both bringing in the lives and experiences of women, of children, you're both bringing in this theme of displacement, questions around belonging, and those are themes that Lennart has also raised. So we're starting to get some great questions coming through [on Zoom], um, I think in light of those, Lennart, I'm going to hold off. I think you know what I was going to ask you (!) but we will hold that off till the end. Let's have a look at some of the questions, I've had a question first of all from Nic Oldert, he's wondering - "Is the border war perhaps less forgotten in Angola, and could Lennart comment on this?".

LB: Um, I think I'm not quite sure if it has been more forgotten in Angola than it has in South Africa, but I would say that, what was certainly the case in Angola is that the war of Independence has been very much overshadowed by the post-Independence civil war. Erm, yeah.

[silent pause]

JT: Oh sorry apologies, I was muted there. Thank you Lennart, a question coming in from Christian Williams – "Tuli mentioned the silence surrounding struggle kids in Namibia, what strikes me as someone who has written about Namibia's struggle kids in exile and now lives in South Africa is how much is said about struggle kids in Namibia and how Namibian that conversation is. Tuli and Helena, what have you learnt about the conversations about struggle kids in different Southern African countries, do you see artistic work like your own as possibly opening up a regional conversation about struggle kids?" I think that's a really interesting question. Helena, Tuli, would either of you like to comment on that? Who wants to start? Helena?

HU: [laughs]. Ooer. Struggle kids. I think when it comes to struggle kids in South Africa which is my context, it's usually associated with people who have experienced Apartheid in South African space. Like people who have gone into exile, or children with no family who have gone into exile, or they've done something towarsd Apartheid which is usually associated with the bigger parties. I think in terms of Apartheid, what quite a lot of South Africans don't understand is that it didn't just happen within South African borders. It really impacted Southern Africa as a whole. If we look at Zimbabwe, Mozambique, what happened to Samora Machel and a lot of people in Mozambique, also people who went into exile in Mozambique. Even in Angola, the destruction that the South African army did there, in Namibia which is completely forgotten, people...there are a lot of people who do not know that there was a time when South Africa occupied Namibia, and that the shadows are still felt by Namibians today. So I think... in our community being in Pomfret or being born in Pomfret or having the association with Pomfret, we are not seen as struggle kids. Or having that association - "so you're Angolan? Soldier?" It's a question we get a lot, my sister in the workforce gets that question quite a lot. We are not associated with struggle kids - it's usually an association with the enemy, if that is the correct phrasing.

JT: Yeah that's so interesting, and again sort of speaks to layers of different types of layers and forms of exclusion and inclusion in these kinds of narratives. Tuli, would you like to comment at all in response to Christian's question about maybe opening up conversations between different groups of struggle kids across the region?

TM: Yeah I very much like that idea, I think it's an awesome idea for all these struggle kids from Southern Africa to, you know, to create some type of platform where we can sit together and

just talk about our experiences, and how we are coping in our new homes, these countries. I think it's needed and kids need the support, if our governments can't support us and I think it's maybe it's about time we start supporting ourselves, and to you know start uplifting ourselves, and giving each other the support that we needed but we're not actually getting from you know the veterans that were actually supposed to take care of us. But yeah, I think I really love that idea of us coming together and supporting each other.

JT: I think it points to perhaps an unexpected role for contemporary arts as a mode for opening up some of these conversations - and as a mode for opening up conversations across so called "opposite sides", whatever that means, different groups in this history. We have got a question from Leonie March who's a journalist - "I would be interested why you think there is this silence around the war and its complexities both in Namibia and SA, in societies, families and also on a national level". Helena, would you like to comment on that and Lennart also, maybe we'll hand over to you next.

LB: I think I'm not quite comfortable with this idea that there is this silence around the war, I think as with many other issues, it's about whose experiences or stories are heard beyond perhaps the family or small communities. For example, I think in South Africa there is a sense that white veterans or white people more generally keep silent about their own experiences, but if one goes to the Voortrekker Monument at certain times of the year it doesn't look very silent to me, they very openly celebrate the units that they were in, the war that they fought in. I think at the same time, to be speaking more about a topic that has come up in my research a lot, I do think that in Namibia as well as South Africa, a lot of people feel uncomfortable talking about the topic of collaboration. Of course in South Africa it is slightly different because Jacob Dlamini has written about this in his book on [collaborators] and so I would since perhaps that I would say there is a certain kind of silence around collaboration and I think the reason for that is, once one goes beyond the perhaps most obvious category of 'collaborators', which might be people returned from the NC and into police, or the 'collaborators' of 32 battalion, one sees that all kinds of people collaborated and that very likely both ANC and SWAPO had a lot of its members who collaborated with the Apartheid regime in various ways - and I think neither the ANC or SWAPO government has a lot of interest in openly talking about who these collaborators were.

JT: Thanks - really interesting- and I think I mean there's lots more to be said about modes of remembrance. Helena, Lennart and I recently went to the Voortrekker Monument to look at some other military memorials there, it was a really interesting trip which was very insightful for me,being with both of them together. Another question coming in from Mike who I think is in the UK: this is a question for both of the artists Tuli and Helena - "to what extent do you feel that the terrible history you've experienced has been fundamental in influencing your work, has it been essential?" And a follow up question - "does your work as artists help you to deal with the trauma on a personal level? I hope it'll also help others". So Tuli, perhaps you would like to comment on that, how you feel this history has influenced your work and whether it's actually been essential to your artistic development.

TM: Yeah it is very much, because number one, it's my life story and it has helped me a lot to, you know, to know go back in (time) and to try and really understand also my parents' journey, my parents' origin, like what actually happened to them, how did they decide that wanted to cross the border into Angola, and what motivated them to go and fight, what were their reasons. So it's very much my story - and as an artist it's important for me to try and go back and to try and understand who I am, where I come from, you know, like my own notion. Of course yeah it has helped me to deal with my own traumas, and also to try and deal with my own issues of

identity, you know, like when I was growing, actually I've never seen, for example, what I looked like when I was a little girl, as I never owned those pictures, and I've always struggled to actually know who am I, where do I belong, how did I look like. And this whole series of work has really helped me to connect with my nanny, she's like one of the young ladies that looked after me when I was small in one of the camps, and she had a picture of me as a little girl, and that was just mind blowing to me. I couldn't...I looked at this picture of me as a little girl and I started crying, because I just couldn't, I couldn't believe that there was actually a picture like that out there, that I've never seen. You know, my mum passed away when I was 12 years old, and I couldn't even reach out to my mom to speak to her, to ask about how it was like for her and me, growing up in this refugee camp. So when I met my Nanny you know we sat down, looked through the albums and we found some interesting pictures and there were moments where we were crying. And for me that's part of the healing process, part of dealing with my traumas, of understanding who I am where I come from and it gives me comfort you know because I realised now that my nanny is obviously my other mother, I can go to her, I can speak to her, I can actually ask anything I want about this war, about our life, our homestead, or our house in Nyango, for example. She knows a lot because she was there with us and she raised me from when I was a little girl so I'm comforted in that idea... that all this time I thought I'm broken, I don't know who I am, then I have this nanny... who I can actually talk to her about Nyango.

JT: Thanks Tuli, yeah so many, you know, very personal things there and we really appreciate you sharing so openly with us - and I think you've been super brave in terms of the archival research you've done, looking through both public archives, personal archives, it's a really intense process, so yeah I wanna sort of acknowledge that in terms of your work. Helena, maybe you want to comment on this as well in terms of how this very difficult history has influenced your work and perhaps given it its power.

HU: I kind of chuckled at my question, because I thought maybe if I didn't experience or come from this history, I might not have so much trauma or anxiety. Or like inherited trauma, you know, maybe life would have been a bit simpler, but then again it might have been boring! The history is violent but it somehow makes my life a bit more interesting, and it definitely influences my work. For lockdown, I'm in my sister's house where I was raised, and I'm going through a lot of my old workbooks and I've always had a thing about talking about this history, even from high school. I think it was that notion of struggle with identity which I still question now, I won't lie. So the history definitely does influence my work very much, it's the centre of my work actually, and in terms of helping, it definitely helps me because I try and make sense of everything through the art through writing as well, and I think I'm helping kind of educate other people, who don't know about it. I've met people, I mean people who have encountered my work, being able to tell them about it and then most of them don't know about their history, or about the different countries. I think it helps other people with my brother, my brothers and my nephews, they really support the art that I do, with the research that goes into their learning other things that they didn't know, and I sit with my dad. I showed him some of my work - he is really proud I won't lie - the last time I was on a research trip where I went to X with my team and it was kind of a mixed race team, and he was like, I'm really happy, you know, you came with a friend who is white, and not from what he remembers of you know white people and having different positionality. Most of the time he sees me as a photographer as I take a lot of pictures, and I try and archive them even, so he's really happy that I'm archiving what we're doing and their lives in there, so yeah, it helps.

JT: Thanks so much for sharing... we've got some great questions coming in, [...]I've seen your question about South African struggle kids I'm going to come back to that, just going to skip to Lennart for the moment. There's a question for you here about some methodological challenges.

I don't know if you've seen that in the chat box? “What are the methodological challenges you faced whilst working on this subject, I presume you had to follow certain oral history trajectory. If yes, did you find enough official documents that corroborates with the experiences shared by participants and victims and as a researcher when someone works on a conflict often she finds it difficult to keep herself as an objective observer of the past have you faced the same dilemma?”

LB: Really easy questions, thanks! Where should I start. I think you're right, there's a lot of methodological challenges. The first one having to - just like Helena said - that with positionality - and so I found it absolutely essential to work with people such as Helena’s brother-in-law, who grew up in the battalion, to work with him in order to get to know people and being able to interview them, which is also why I thanked both him and X without whom I would have not been able to do this kind of research. About official documents - so that is definitely one of the most upsetting and frustrating aspects of my research because it is very hard to come by ‘official documents’ from the South African security forces for two reasons. The first one is that in the late 80s and early 90s millions, an unknown number of documents were destroyed in South Africa, or they were ‘lost’ on the way from Namibia to South Africa - so a lot of official documents simply don't exist anymore because they were destroyed. And the other reason why it's really difficult to find official documents is that all of the documents that are at the Department of Defence archives in Pretoria, all of the documents that relate to these security forces after 1970 are all classified, a small number of them have been declassified, but in order to get to documents declassified, it's a very time intensive process and it costs money. One has to know people in the institution, so it is incredibly difficult to get access to these archives, which is not only frustrating for me but I think is really upsetting in a context such as South Africa and Namibia, that is very much trying to reckon with its past in various ways. Have I found it difficult to remain an objective observer of the past? Yes. And I have to admit that especially the more recent work of mine is very much motivated with the aim of challenging narratives of 32 battalion other units which have very much been shaped by white officers of these units. So I have clear political aims.

JT: Thank you Lennart, we're having some wonderful questions and insights coming through on the group chat. You can use the chat box to submit your questions and read what other people are sharing. We are running a bit longer than I had anticipated, but I think everyone seems to be finding the discussion interesting so let's let's keep on going. So here's a question from Thandiwe, I guess this is for both Tuli and maybe Helena in particular, since Helena is based in South Africa - “do you feel as though South African ‘struggle kids’ get more shine than the rest of southern African struggle kids. I myself am a South African struggle kid but I don't think that conversation is open yet here, is the definition the same in all contexts?” So Helena, maybe you want to take this one?

HU: I think what do you mean by “shine” or is it just attention that South African struggle kids or South African in general get in terms of struggle and survival? I say that because having also come from a context of Angolan history and narratives, it is a country that faced the war for the longest time. The difficulties are kind of forgotten on the African map or it is like - OK is the country above (Congo?) called Angola? I I get that quite a lot like that surprise when people try to place me, they mention all the other countries that my features belong to, and then Angola is just never mentioned. I think it's not just struggle kids in South Africa, but just in Africa in general, they just focus on South Africa, and maybe because of Nelson Mandela, who knows you know! How do we kind of share each other's stories equally and listen to each other? Not just through our struggle but also a similarity. Things we have achieved as a continent. I think it goes back to kind of experiences that African foreigners face in the country and like it's a question of South Africa, in their sympathy or understanding of other countries in the continent; do ordinary

South Africans take the time to know it's going on in the continent? or is South African just kind of focused on what's going on within their countries and their borders. Yeah, I think as a nation, introspection has to be done.

JT: Thanks Helena, we're getting some great comments and questions coming through. Geri [Augusto], in the US thank you so much for your comments. She's just saying how time she looks at the artworks by both artists she reads something new and something fresh, and there's so many different elements that's come through which speaks so much to land, livelihoods, gender, gender relationships, the home, textiles, all of these things - and she says "I'm convinced that shown all over the region these works can open up a dialogue". And she's curious to hear your thoughts about that. A question from Dan Hodgkinson who says "I had a discussion with a 20 year old Fallist - that's referring to the various fallist movements that have been underway in South Africa since 2015 - fallist activist friend last year who insisted that her understanding of politics was incommensurate with that of her mum's, it wasn't that they were different but they literally couldn't understand each other. Does that dynamic have a bearing on this discussion, are there some things which can't be understood across generations?" I think some very interesting questions there. Tuli maybe you want to comment on this? I think both Tuli and Helena will have views on this but something about intergenerational differences.

TM: Yeah those differences are very much apparent, I know about this because it's so common for example where the SWAPO veterans keep to their sides, you know they just keep to themselves, and they are so so rooted in their narrative as veterans and what they faced for this country, everybody else should listen to them. And I think they're not so much interested in everybody else's opinions especially the young people, what they say is just like, what do we know, you know, we were just born in these [refugee] camps, but what opinion do we have? They are the ones who were fighting, they were the ones who created the country, so they feel that they know more or there they feel like they have more knowledge about what to say and in the case of the SWAPO government, that they know what is right for the country. There is just a huge gap between young people and this generation, you know, the elder generation. I don't understand why there's so much denial and why they (can't) just open up platforms where we can all just, like, people can just talk and discuss issues that they feel like need to be discussed. One example of a of a leader being in denial is, like, right now in Namibia, we have in our state hospital literally like falling, everybody knows in the Namibia the hospital is in a very X state and of course our leader was there the president went to the hospital and he was confronted by a very young Namibian, confronting him like, 'can you not see the state of the hospital you are standing in this, you're standing here now in hospital can you not see how horrible it is?' And he got angry actually because for him it was like, how can this young person question [me] about the state of the hospital? For him it's perfect and there is apparently nothing wrong with the hospital, but then they are able to build a new SWAPO headquarters next to this state hospital, and then you sit thinking, you know, you could have used that money to build a new hospital or renovate this one that is falling apart. But this is our reality, where our leaders, this older generation, just feel like they know better and that young people we're not allowed, we're not supposed to question them about anything.

JT: Thanks Tuli, yeah interesting insights there into intergenerational differences and struggles. We are starting to run out of time so I'm going to sort of zoom ahead a little bit - excuse the pun - with some of the questions. This really interesting question from Helen Harris who I think is in the US. Maybe Helena you might consider taking this question - "what would a true acknowledgement of this history look like? these artworks seem very well placed to combat ideas that support the kind of South African exceptionalism when it comes to the history of Apartheid". We might have lost Helena, Lennart would you like to step in and share any ideas?

[Helena lost internet connection]

LB: Yeah again, I think this is a really difficult question and I think partly because I'm not sure if I'm not being from Namibia or South Africa, I am in the best position to answer this question, what does a true acknowledgement of this history look like?

JT: We'll wait for Helena to come back and save you from that one.

LB: I'm not trying to evade the question, perhaps I am also not understanding it well enough, I'm just saying that given who I am and where I am from, if I'm in the best position to say what a true acknowledgement of this history would look like.

JT: Sure, thanks, and also from another one from professor Geri Augusto just referring to casspirs and the casspirs being a symbol right across the region, because South Africa deployed them so widely and how those, you know, can open up a dialogue because everyone or many people experienced this history. Lots of interesting comments coming through and I know that some of you also have to leave soon, so we're going to wrap up in the next few minutes, but please continue to share your questions with us, even if we can't take them all now, we would love to receive them by email, or in the chat box just before you go. I would love to keep the discussion going. Helena is back so we'll come back to her, Helen Harris' question - she says she's thinking about a critical mass of narratives and their visibility in terms of the artworks. So Helena, I don't know if you want to comment at all on that last question about whether these artworks can sort of combat certain ideas around South African dominance of narratives? And then I think we'll have one more question and bring it to a close after that.

HU: Oh my goodness. I think [this is] a discussion I always have with my mentors in terms of why we make art, and what is the purpose of art. Historically if art is important but then again we also have to ask who is art really serving, because art has an economical value to it, so it doesn't serve for everyone, for example like in this Zoom discussion, that we are able to have with our internet, our laptops, our smart cell phones, not a lot of people from conflict will be able to access it because they probably don't have access to cell phones or smartphones, or the network is really bad that side. Not a lot of people from Namibia will be able to access this, you know. Even so, it's a question I've always battled with, especially when I really started digging into the history even though, yes, I do have the right to this history, I do have the right to talk about it, I'm in the right position, I have the platform to discuss it and educate other people. But then again I always felt like "Who am I really helping?" you know. For me and... and just for my family, what about the rest of them you know. It's a thing we need to ask ourselves even as an academic, Lennart, I'll pick at you, you write really beautifully, but then how many of the veterans you met ...in the northern Cape will be able to read your paper in English, even if it were to be translated in Portuguese ... how many will be able to access it, or even how many of their children will be able to access it in their school library? So yeah who is art really for and why?

JT: Yeah lots of great questions there and highly relevant I think, it applies to art as well as academic research. I know many of us who have done fieldwork grapple with this question of, you know, how we make our findings relevant to people after the fact. Okay, we are going to wrap up in a few minutes. One more question coming through from Larissa - and maybe this one is for you to Tuli - "based on your experiences and research, what kind of support or action would you like to see on a regional or national level to possibly prevent further intergenerational trauma?" I have to ask you to keep your response quite brief, thanks.

TM: I think the most important here is to start with dialogue, we need to start talking about it, we need to, we can't just be in denial. You know, you're too young or I'm older so I am smarter than you, and you can't tell me what to say, or what's on your mind. I think the most important thing is that we need to start talking about it, that's all, we need to start talking.

JT: Thanks Tuli. Yes, dialogue I think sounds like a key part of the answer there. I want to wrap up with one last question to Lennart and before I pose that question, I just want to say to everyone thank you so much for joining. If you haven't already seen the artwork that we're talking about please look at the catalogue, we also have a short video, which I will share in the chat box again for those of you who joined late. The gallery is very active on Instagram and Facebook, so please find us there too, we do have studio visits coming up with Helena this coming Saturday if you want to join us live on Instagram, all the details are on Instagram and Facebook. I have also just shared my email address if you want to contact us with more questions or requests. So to wrap up my final question to Lennart - this collaboration has brought together two very different disciplines, history and contemporary art and I would love to know from you, as a historian engaging with contemporary art about your specific field of interest, what has it raised for you and has it brought new perspectives?

LB: First of all I would like to say that perhaps on a more personal level as well, that I have found it very inspiring and encouraging to meet both Tuli and Helena, as part of this collaboration. It is really inspiring and encouraging to see that they try to grapple with, I think, oftentimes very similar questions, in different ways and from different backgrounds and different perspectives. With regard to the connections between their art and my research, I think there's two points. The first one is that I was quite struck by the similarities between or some of the similarities of how Tuli and Helena grew up, for example with regards to the fact that many young people were not raised by their own parents or biological parents, but by close relatives or members of the communities, which has made me think of both of their histories in new ways which will be very helpful to a new research project that Dino and I are conducting on the history of the military community that formed around 32 Battalion. I think the second point that's more coming from Helena's more recent work on domesticity or trying to create a home in 32 Battalion, I think it's also made me more aware not to solely focus on the more grim aspects of this history such as the violence... and not to take away from that or deny it - but also to look at the efforts of people within the community. Whether it's women decorating their homes, trying to create homes for their families, or whether it's the teachers or principals at the school to create the community. So to keep that in mind and not to deny that, and perhaps also bring it out more, to end on a more positive note.

JT: Thank you very much Lennart. And yes, I also think that sometimes the tendency is to focus on what we call in art history 'the spectacular' and I think part of what both of the artists are doing - and in particular Helena is really looking at - the less spectacular but equally important themes around home domesticity, belonging and of course gender is essential to all of that. Thank you so much to everyone who's joined from all around the world, it's been fantastic being here with you this evening. We have recorded this video so for anyone who would like to revisit it later or to share with friends and colleagues please do. We'll stay in touch with you and look forward to continuing the conversation in whatever way in the future. Thank you so much for being here and goodnight.

## f) Panel Discussion: Audience Zoom Chat Comments, 21 April 2020

00:13:46 Nicola Brandt: Hi everyone, I can't hear you… will tweak things a bit on my end to see if I can get it working. Will keep the camera off, if you don't mind
00:13:57 Christo Doherty: HI Christo here. My connection's not good, so I'm just running audio.
00:14:08 Daniela Lilja: Hi, can the speaker mute her audio, there is an echo
00:14:14 Leonie: same here, audio only. Hello everyone!
00:14:19 rey: much better
00:14:20 Frieda Lühl : much better
00:14:20 Phumulani Ntuli: Its better
00:14:24 Mike Ingle: Hi Everyone, Looking forward to a good afternoon
00:14:24 ASnA Zoom: its better
00:14:28 Nicola Brandt: working...
00:14:28 Istvan Lele: Hi Nicola, try clicking "Join audio"
00:14:28 Christo Doherty: Better!
00:14:57 Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com: While we wait, please take a look at the exhibition catalogue if you haven't already: https://bit.ly/3bk4Ily
We also have a short video made by our intern Kayra: https://www.facebook.com/gunsandrain/videos/214096346551244/
00:16:50 Steffen List: Hello every one, I am Ina
00:39:36 Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com: Please take a look at the exhibition catalogue if you haven't already: https://bit.ly/3bk4Ily

00:57:10 Steffen List: When it comes to the opposite sides in Namibia, it is still very much like that today. You are either SWAPO or rubbish. When looking at the recent elections, we see that Dr. Iitul was expelled from SWAPO because he challenged the presidential candidate. It's either my way or hit the High way.
00:58:20 Steffen List: Veterans who fought for Swapo received grants where as the ones who were fighting for the South African army received nothing to this day because they fought for the wrong side.
00:59:27 ASnA Zoom: Tuli mentioned silences surrounding "the struggle kids" in Namibia. What strikes me, as someone who has written about Namibia's struggle kids in exile and who now lives in South Africa, is how much is said about "struggle kids" in Namibia and how Namibian that conversation is. Tuli and Helena, what have you learned about conversations about "struggle kids" in different Southern African countries? Do you see artistic work like your own as possibly opening up a regional conversation about "struggle kids"? - Christian Williams
01:04:19 Mike Ingle: Without the terrible history that you and your parents experienced, would
01:05:37 Leonie: I would be interested, why you think that there is this silence around the war and its complexities both in Namibia and SA both in societies, families and also on a national level? - Leonie March
01:05:44 Mike Ingle: Sure I'll get back to you
01:07:40 Mike Ingle: To what extent do you feel that the terrible history you have all experienced has been fundamental in influencing your work? Has it been essential?
01:09:56 ThandiweN: Do you feel as though South African "struggle kids" get more shine than the rest of Southern African kids? I, myself, am a South African "struggle kid" but don't think the

conversation is open yet here. is the definition the same in all contexts?
01:09:59 Mike Ingle: Does your work as artists help you to deal with the trauma on a personal level? (I hope it will also help others)
01:10:21 Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com: thanks for the questions everyone, keep them coming...
01:17:10 Deborshi Chakraborty: To Lennart,
As a historian, what are the methodological challenges you have faced while working on this subject? I presume that you had to follow certain oral history trajectory. If yes, did you find enough official documents that corroborate with the experiences shared by the participants and the victims? And as a researcher, when someone works on conflict, often she finds it difficult to keep herself as an objective observer of the past. Have you faced the same dilemma?
01:17:27 Laurence Stewart: Thank you for the interesting discussion everyone!
01:18:00 Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com: for anyone who just joined, Please take a look at the exhibition catalogue if you haven't already: https://bit.ly/3bk4Ily

01:21:13 Geri Augusto: I read something different into your pieces--Tuli and Helena--each time I look at them (which has only been a few days). For those who were living in Angola and Namibia and even Mozambique or any "Frontline" state, the pieces all together are a regional dialogue. It is just one we never or seldom spoke about aloud, and seldom if ever spoke about together with South Africans. I could take just one of the elements--Caspirs! sorghum grains raised by women and destroyed by armies, children raised in camps or in homes where every home had a weapon, hiden or open, the cloths woven and worn and made into soft architectures that filled in where the hard furniture was not available. I find these all in the works. I am convinced that shown all over the region, they can open up a dialogue. South Africa itself should and must be a part of that dialogue, I think. Your thoughts?
01:22:26 Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com: Thank you Geri, great insights there...
01:22:46 Dan Hodgkinson: I had a discussion with a twenty-year old Fallist activist friend last year, who insisted that her understanding of politics was incommensurate with that of her mum's. It wasn't that they were different but that they literally couldn't understand one another. Does that dynamic have a bearing on this discussion? Are there somethings which can't be understood across generations? - Dan Hodgkinson
01:27:24 Helen Harris: What would a true acknowledgement of this history look like? These artworks seem very well placed to combat ideas that support a kind of South African 'exceptionalism' when it comes to the history of apartheid.
01:29:25 Geri Augusto: please mention Casspirs! They are a symbol right across the region, because South Africa deployed them everywhere. Seeing them in a work of art triggers (sorry for weaponized pun) myriad thoughts, and opens up a dialogue never had.
01:31:49 Steffen List: I do not know if in Namibia, there will be dialog between the veterans and the children. For some of us who's parents died in the war, we may not ask questions and it's as if all is forgotten. I personally feel that Namibia will have to wait for the passing of the big SWAPO heads before the actual truth comes out. Swapo wants to be seen as the saviour of the people but have forgotten the

off springs of their comrades that did not return. I personally am very interested in seeing how the Big heads will react to this exhibition.
01:35:11 Mike Ingle: Unfortunately, I have to leave the meeting now. Thank you all very much. I hope to contact Julie/Tuli soon.
01:35:56 Helen Harris: It's not a fair question really- I guess I was thinking about critical mass of narratives and their visibility.
01:37:11 larissa bolliger: based on your experiences/research, which kind of support/action would you like to see e.g. on regional or national level, to possibly prevent further intergenerational trauma?

01:39:38 Helen Harris: Thank you Helena! Such a wonderful answer.
01:41:13 Anne Historical: thanks all - was nice to hear you
01:41:24 Julie Taylor - Guns & Rain - www.gunsandrain.com: If you haven't already seen the artwork, please take a look at the exhibition catalogue if you haven't already: https://bit.ly/3bk4Ily
We also have a short video made by our intern Kayra:
https://www.facebook.com/gunsandrain/videos/214096346551244/
The gallery is very active on Instagram and Facebook, so you can find us there too.

In terms of our programming:

We do have one more event coming up this week, which is a live studio visit with Helena Uambembe on Instagram, taking place this Saturday afternoon. Details are on Facebook.

If you would like to join our mailing list, please drop me a line, julie@gunsandrain.com

01:43:58 Lebogang Mogul Mabusela: Wonderful work Helena and Tuli.
01:44:59 Chris: Very interesting discussion: thanks to all!
01:45:00 jocelynalexander: Thanks so much Julie, Lennart, Tuli and Helena - wonderful art and words both.
01:45:17 Leonie: Many thanks!
01:45:34 Helen Harris: Thanks!
01:45:35 larissa bolliger: thank you very much to the 4 hosts!
01:45:41 Gina Figueira: Thank you!

g) Excerpts of Attendee Feedback about Panel Discussion 21 April 2020 received by Julie Taylor via Email in April 2020

**Talk Night**

- Wonderful work Helena and Tuli - Lebogang Mogul Mabusela
- Very interesting discussion: thanks to all! - Chris
- Thanks so much Julie, Lennart, Tuli and Helena - wonderful art and words both. - Jocelyn Alexander

"Thank you so much for that Julie. I wish I had the words to express how moving and astounding I find these artists and their work, and what a delight it was to see you and Lennart in action." From Prof Alexander in Oxford :)

"Congratulations on a really fascinating online discussion yesterday evening. I think you are demonstrating that gallery activities can not only continue, but can be enhanced, through online platforms! I'm really impressed by the way that you're using a variety of social media to co-ordinate discourses and attention around the art." -- From Prof Christo Doherty at Wits

"Lennart's presentation of the history which he related so directly to Tuli and Helenas background really made this exhibition grow in importance for me.
My personal experience with the border war is only this one as a little child. Twice a year my uncle who fought on the SA side would come home from the north. I clearly remember his kaki uniform and brown hat and he always brought these food boxes. In there were biscuits, dried fruit, jam, coffee etc all in little packages which we used to play shop with.
For many Namibians, especially those south of the red line, this war could have been in another country so little effect did it have on everyday life. And yet it changed everything.
It would be great if we can find a way after lockdown and all to share this exhibition in Namibia and I would gladly offer my space at the Project Room. As you Tuli said it would be a great way to start the dialogue and share this history that many don't know.
Julie, you are making this online exhibition an amazing experience which I'm following closely and learn so much. I guess we have to stick to online exhibitions for a little bit. " -- From Frieda Lühl in Windhoek

"Julie, I sat in on the talk today and it was fabulous!!!! Thanks so much for hosting this. We had to leave Johannesburg suddenly when South Africa went into lockdown and our visas were revoked and we were given 2 hours to leave. Our hearts remain there and we are determined to return at a future date . In the mean-time I am most grateful for the continued connection." - from Vivien in the US

"Julie: simply incredible! What an achievement and such a unique opportunity to engage with two extraordinary woman from opposite sides of that war - both young and beautiful and hugely talented women. Lennart is brilliant. The art work is so deeply moving" -- Lynne Taylor

Excellent presentation yesterday: thank you. - Mike Ingle, UK

Thank you so much for the fascinating panel discussion, the beautiful exhibition, and for bringing/ making it available to see online. I am also very impressed with your gallery's focus and curation of artists: truly amazing topics and artists covered! - John Edwards

What an excellent discussion you chaired so very admirably this evening!

What a wonderful gallery you have! Presumably named after David Lan's classic book (his new title *As If By Chance*)...Hope to see it sometime...Best wishes, Chris - Chris Saunders

Thank you so much for inviting me to this. I found the presentation very stimulating and it was a fantastic way to connect to the art community. - David Brits

My partner and me would like to congratulate you on how you lead this special talk, what a challenging task.
Very professional, calm and empathetic, you gave room for these so different personalities of Tuli and Helena.
You could almost grap the words, the emotions, even though it was only via Zoom.
It takes a lot to create an atmosphere to make this possible. - Susanne Bolliger

It is I who must thank you, and Helena and Tuli, especially. The serendipity of finding your catalogue, and the rich interactions it led to are one of the bright spots in a "trumped" up, corona capitalism-bared inequalities month! - Prof Geri Augusto at Brown

h) Email exchanges with Tuli Mekondjo about Oshiwambo translation

From: **Julie Taylor** <julie@gunsandrain.com>
Date: Mon, Jun 1, 2020 at 8:43 AM
Subject: Oshiwambo Translation Check
To: elizabeth mbumba

Hi Tuli!

Further to Kashindi's attachments, do you have suggestions for how best to check the Oshiwambo translation?
It would be great to get your own review, of course, if you have time?
And also because you are closely familiar with the content already.

Then perhaps you feel that a second reader is also needed, you might have someone in mind?

I would say that the most urgent is the short curatorial statement, which I guess Frieda would like to print for the exhibition (and which we can also use in the catalogue).

Many thanks
Julie

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **namtrans lation**
Date: Sun, May 31, 2020 at 7:40 PM
Subject: Re: Translation Quote Requested (via Tuli Mekondjo)
To: Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com>
Cc: elizabeth mbumba

Hi Julie

Attached please receive the Portuguese final  one. The translator fully agree with changes made. There was a word "decair" which was just highlighted he says it reads fine. The Portuguese shorter one that was sent I hope it is fine since there were no comments.

NB: Oshikwanyama - I hope  Tuli can read Oshiwambo or it can be given to anybody you may wish to check and then if there are comments we will work on them.

regards

Kashindi Ausiku

On Fri, 29 May 2020 at 15:18, namtrans lation wrote:
Noted he will do.

On Fri, 29 May 2020, 15:13 Julie Taylor, <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:
Hi Kashindi

Hope you are well.
Please see attached for suggested corrections to the longer text.
Please can your translator review and advise us further accordingly.

Thank you
Julie

On Thu, May 28, 2020 at 4:12 PM namtrans lation wrote:
Great, thank you.

On Thu, 28 May 2020, 16:04 Julie Taylor, <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:
Many thanks Kashindi, will try to come back to you asap.

On Thu, May 28, 2020 at 8:38 AM namtrans lation wrote:
Hi Julie

Attached please receive the Portuguese translation.
NB: The footnote is refusing to be copied to the last page maybe you can advise or help with this.

The timing is fine with Portuguese if there are queries because the translator will travel at weekend.
Regards

On Tue, 26 May 2020 at 09:58, Julie Taylor <julie@gunsandrain.com> wrote:
Dear Mr Kashindi

I hope this finds you well and safe.

My name is Julie Taylor and I work with Tuli Mekondjo who kindly passed on your contact details.

We are looking for translation assistance for the attached document.
I understand there are options for Oshikwanyama or Oshindonga.
We would like Oshikwanyama but curious to know whether the pricing differs?

Could you kindly give us a quote as soon as possible?

Look forward to hearing from you further
My best regards,
Julie

i) Bolliger Lecture Translation in Oshiwambo

# Omaupyakadi, Omapiyaaneko nomafininikotembuko: Omadiladilo kombinga yoita yokulwifa oukoloni moumbuwanhu waAfrica naashi ye tu fiila

*Etwalemo*

Osheetwapo eshi otashi lalakanene okuyandja eudeko lopandjokonona loilonga ei ya longwa ku Tuli Mekondjo naHelena Uambembe. Imwe yomuyo oya kufwa momapekapeko oo nda ninga eshi kwa li handi lilongele onghatu yange youndokotola (oPhD) namahapu oopaife eshi kwa li handi ningi oproyeka yange konima eshi nda mana oPhD. Omapekapeko okwa li e likolelela kondjokonona yovalaule Ovanamibia novakwaita vaAngola ovo va longa momatanga oita aSouth Africa meedula de1970 ne1980. Shaashi aame handi ningi osheetwapo onguloshi yonena, onda hala oku shi holola kutya onda ninga omapekapeko pamwe naSimi Joao osho yo nasuwala yaHelena Dino Estevao. Onda hala oku va pandulila elongelokumwe noukaume wavo.

Osheetwapo shange onde shi tukula moitukulwa yakula ivali. Tete, ohandi ka yandja engongo pauxupi laimwe yomoinima ya kuma Ekondjelomanguluko laNamibia, oyo handi diladila kutya oya fimana meenghundafana edi. Ngaash Julie Taylor a nyola mopoloxolama yOmaulikodimbuluko oiningwanimwa yokeengaba pefimbo loita, ondjokononanghalamwenyo yaHelena naTuli "oya kanghamekelwa koita yekondjelomanguluko laNamibia nongaashi ya shiivika moSouth Africa ongoita yokeengaba". Ofimbo oita ya li tai luwa pamufika wopaiwana, ame ohandi likwatelele kuNamibia naAngola meedula de 1970 ne 1980. Ondjokonona yekondjelomanguluko oya li ya kilikita noya li idjuu nokuudika ko omo mwa li ovakufimbinga va yoolokafana ve na omadina taa ngwangwaaneke ovanhu. Onda kendabala okukelela engwangwaaneko olo ngaashi tashi dulika nonde lineekela otamu ke lididimikila nge.

Oshitivali, ohandi ka kundafana oinima imwe yomoipalanyole itatu oyo ya ulikwa moshipalanyole – omalimbililo, omapiyaaneko nomafininikotembuko. Ohandi ke shi ninga she likolelela komahangano avali omo ovadali vaTuli naHelena va li mo. Ngaashi sha tongwa mopoloxolama, omahangano aa avali oo Ehangano lEkondjelomanguluko laNamibia, omo mwa li ovadali vaTuli no 32 Battalion yefimbo lokatongotongo etanga leameno laSouth Africa (SADF), kombinga yovadali vaHelena.

Molwaashi otu na ongudu yovapwilikini vomaukwatya a yoolokafana tave tu waimine onguloshi yonena, onda tokola ndi ka popye, hakombinga ashike yomapekapeko opandjokonona, ndele ohandi ka kuma yo kombinga yoinima imwe momumbwalangadjo oyo hai tukula efimbo limwe omapulo madjuu. Omapulo aa inae likalekelwa ashike pamahokololo oita aa taa ka kundafanwa onguloshi yonena. Amwe omuo otashi dulika a holokele meenghalamwenyo deni dopaumwene – ngaashi a holokele meenghalamwenyo daHelena naTuli.

Omapulo aa otaa konakona yo apa pa xulila omapekapeko opandjokonona nonda itavela kutya otaa ka pumbwa tu ye mokutala ondunge yomoule ile omaunghulungu.

*Engongo lOndjokonona*

Konima yOita yOtete yOunyuni, South Africa okwa kufa ko oshitukulwa shaNamibia eshi kwa li sha kolonyekwa kuNdowishi, osho kwa li sha pewa edina itali shambula hashi ifanwa South West Africa. Konima yOita Oitivali yOunyuni South Africa okwa ka eta po omulandu pambelewa wokutukaula ovanhu pamaluvala oipa, wa shiivika nawa okatongotongo, nokwa hovela okupangela oshilongo ongoshitukulwa shaSouth Africa.

Petameko lomudo 1960, ehangano lekondjelomanguluko laNamibia SWAPO ola totwa nola hovela okutuma oilyo yalo kondje yoshilongo oku ka konga omakwafo opo li kondjife epangelo laSouth Africa. Lwopexulilo lomudo 1960 SWAPO okwa hovela okukondjifa epangelo laSouth Africa a homata, nosha etifa ehapupalo lomafininiko noita i pimbile, nOvanamibia vahapu ova ka ya moupongekwa. Eshi Angola ou a pala eengaba naNamibia koumbangalanhu a manguluka momudo 1975, osha ka palela Ovanamibia vahapu ondjila yokuya moupongekwa. Konima eshi va fika moAngola ova ka kala meekamba dovapongekwa. Mokati kavo omo mwa li ovadali vaTuli.

Pefimbo olo tuu olo, ovakwaita va homata voSWAPO navo ova ka kala ve na ondjila ya yeuluka yokushuna moNamibia, osho sha ka eta omalimbililo kepangelo lokatongotongo. Okuhovela lwopexulilo lomudo 1975, Etanga lEameno laSouth Africa ola hovela okutuma omatanga alo oita moAngola a ka lwife SWAPO noku ka kelele epangelo lipe laAngola liha kwafele etanga lekondjelomanguluko laNamibia. Molwaashi oshitukulwa shakula shaAngola omwa ka kala tamu ningilwa oiponokela oita yaAngola yemanguluko oya ka lundulukila moita yopashiwana pokati komatanga oo taa kondjele emanguluko.

Pefimbo loshiponokela shotete shakula moAngola , Etanga leameno laSouth Africa (SADF) ola tota po etanga loita olo la ka lukwa kohainga 32 Battalion. Etanga la tya ngaho okwa li tali kwatelwa komesho kovanambelewa ovatilyane vaSouth Africa, ashike omwa li mu na ovakwaita vahapu vovalaule. Ovakwaita ava ova li nale mehangano ekondjelimanguluko laAngola ledina the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA). Nande ongaho vahapu vomuvo ova li va ningwa eenghwatwe konima eshi ehangano lavo lekondjelimanguluko la teka po ombaadilila lwopexulilo lomudo 1975. Mokati kovakwaita ovo omo mwa li xe yaHelena.

Oukwatya we likalekelwa wetanga lo32 Battalion meyelekanifo nomatanga aeshe oSADF, omwa li ovakainhu nounona ovo va li ve limanga kumwe netanga olo. Eshi ovakwaita ovalaule vetanga olo va tembulwa okudja koAngola va twalwa kokamba i li koumbangalanhu waNamibia, ova findikilwa konduba yovakainhu nounona. Ovakainhu ava nounona navo okwa li tava faduka po ehapupalo loita yopashiwana oyo ya li moAngola nove uya va kale mokamba i li pokamba yo 32 Batttalion hai ifanwa Buffalo. Pauxupi, Helena naTuli ova putukila mokati kovapongekwa. Olweendo langhee ovadali vavo navamwe ve va fa ve lihanga ve li mokati kovanhu va tya ngaho osha li shi yadi omalimbililo.

*Omaupyakadi*

Paushili, ovanhu vahapu moNamibia nomoAngola okwa li va taalelwa konghalo idjuu yokuninga omatokolo.

Amwe omomaupyakadi oo kwa li ovayambididi voSWAPO va taalela ongeenge nava kale moNamibia ile nava tauluke eengaba va ye moupongekwa. Ngeno ova tokolele okukala mopolitika ofimbo ve li meni laNamibia otave litula moshiponga shokutilifwa, okuidililwa

modolongo, okuhepekwa ile va dipawe kovakwaita vaSouth Africa. Ngeno ova tokolele okuya moupongekwa, luhapu ove na okufiya po ookaume kavo neefamili davo, ovadali vavo neendenge davo odo da pumbwa efiloshisho neyambidido lavo. Vamwe ihava lombwele ovaholike vavo kombinga yetokolo lavo lokuya moupongekwa shaashi ova tila oku va tula moupyakadi.

Eshi tava ka tauluka eengaba oufiku, ohave litula moshiponga shokukwatwa po komatanga omutondi ile va lopotwe kovanhu ava vehe va shii nove wete omalinyengo avo taa limbililike kovakwaita voSWAPO. Paushili, Ovanamibia vahapu ove lihanga ve li ashike pokati kaSWAPO nokomatanga omutondi. Ngaashi omunhu umwe e shi fatululila Siegfried Groth, omufita Omundowishi oo kwa li ha longo nOvanamibia ava va li moupongekwa : “Otwa kala tu li pokati koshilaleko nomukonda. Oto tokola kutya oto liameke kOvaSouth Afrika ile u ame koSWAPO. Ngeenge ovakwaita voSWAPO ove uya oufiku, tava pula ekwafo, ndee ino va kwafa, nena otashi ti kutya owa ama kombinga yaSouth Africa notashi dulika u dipawe.

Lwopexulilo lomudo 1975 nopetameko lomudo 1976, onakwiiwa yo 32 Batallion oya kala ya taalelwa komaupyakadi eenhauki edi da xupa po tadi shuna ile tadi djoina etanga loita laSouth Africa eli la kala nokuyambidida epangelo loukoloni lOvaputu moAngola. Ongeenhauki, vo neefamili davo ova li moupyakadi wokufya ondjala nokuhepekwa kovakwaita ava va ama kehangano ekondjelimanguluko li li omhinge navo. Ounona vanini ovo unene va li oihakanwa navahapu ova fya kenota, kondjala nokeloloko eshi eefamili davo kwa li tadi i onhapo okudja koumbuwanhu tava kongo eameno moNamibia.

Moumbangalanhu waNamibia, ovakwaita vahapu ovalaule neefamili davo okwa li va tembulilwa kokamba yeenhauki yedina “Tin Mine”, oyo kwa li hai kondololwa koSADF. Momudo 1978, ovakwaita vaSouth Africa ova shiivifila ovanhu kutya otava ka pata okamba yeenhauki oyo ndee tave va pula va ninge ehoololo ngeenge – oto dulu oku shi luka ngaho – ngeenge otaa shuna koAngola ile otava djoina o 32 Battalion. Ava va tokola okudjoina oSADF ova tembulilwa ko Kamba hai ifanwa Buffalo. Mokati kaavo va shuna koAngola, vahapu vomuvo ova dipaelwa moita yopashiwana yokonima yemanguluko ei kwa li tai mbonyauna po oshilongo.

Ondi wete kutya oshinenenima osho tu na okulihonga momaupyakadi aa oshosho kutya omalihumbato ovanhu haalushe haa ulike eshi va itavela musho. Fiyo onena, ovanhu vahapu moAngola, moNamibia nomoSouth Africa ohava lundile ovakwaita vo 32 Battalion kutya ova lwila okatongotongo ve shi wete. Eshi ndi shi omatokolo madjuu oo a li e na okuningwa kovakwaita ovo neefamili davo, onda itavela kutya oshidjuu okwiitavela nokukalela omapopyo e li ngaho.

Pefimbo limwe, peemhito opo oilyo yoSWAPO ya tokolele okukala moNamibia opo i tonatele ovadali vavo, etokolo la tya ngaho otali ulike okuhenelitulemo? Naava nee va findana okuya moupongekwa: ova li ve na omauwa mahapu, omapenda ile ova ninga ashike elao?

*Omapiyaaneko*

Konima eshi va djoina oSWAPO ile 32 Battalion, eenghalamwenyo dovanhu vahapu oda twikila nokupiyaanekwa pamikalo da yoolokafana notadi halukifa ovanhu.

Ovanamibia ova djoina oSWAPO molwomatomheno a yoolokafana; vahapu ova ya moupongekwa va ka mone ehongo la wedwa po. Ashike, ngaashi hashi ningwa

momahangano makwao ekondjelomanguluko, vamwe vomOvanamibia ova li va fininikilwa okuya momadeulo opaukwaita etanga loSWAPO. Eshi osha etifa opo va kale tave lilondwele kombinga yokutwalwa keekamba donhumba ngaashi kokamba yokoKongwa oyo i li pondingandinga yaTanzania. Pauyelele wa yandjwa komulumenhu umwe oo a pulwapulwa komunafikola, Christian Williams, ohave lilondwele: “Kwafe nge opo ngeenge wa udu kutya oto i kokamba yokoKongwa, ino shi itavela! Kaku na elongo. Oku na ashike oluxwa lomalwoodi.”

Eshi ovaNamibia vahapu va djoina oSWAPO moupongekwa naashi omaponokolelo oSADF a kala taa hapupala opa ka tukuka omashilafano amwe omeni. Oshinima shimwe shakula sha kala po osha kala oumbada wokutila eendaadi edi da tumwa kuSouth Africa di uye di ndaade ehangano. Okudja momudo 1980 okuyuka komesho, omwaalu woilyo yoSWAPO tai tengenekelwa pe 1000-2000 oya li ya idililwa meekamba domoumbuwanhu waAngola. Omwaalu wovaidililwa uhe shiivike okwa li tau hepekwa nowa dipawa eshi tava fekelwa ve li eendaadi daSouth Africa. Ovanhu omafele ova “kana” noinava aluka mo vali moupongekwa. Okudja opo, osho sha ningilwa ovanhu ovo kwa li va idililwa osha kala oshitwa shopokati meenghundafana odo di li omhinge noiningwanima oyo da ningilwa moNamibia.

Mo 32 Battalion ei opo ya totwa po, eduliko ola kala tali findilwa mo nonyanya. Meedula dotete dekalepo letanga olo, omwaalu uhe shiivike wovakwaita ovalaule okwa li va dipawa “molwomanyono” a yoolokafana. Omanyono oo okwa kwatela mo okufiwa po ile okufaduka po pefimbo lolwoodi ile okwaanya okushikula omalombwelo ile okuvaka ounima vanafangwa. Ovakwaita ovalaule luhapu okwa li hava handukilwa nokudengwa nongola hai ifanwa oshamboko. Moixwa, ovakwaita okwa li hava dengwa unene ngeenge va anye okushikula omalombwelo ile ngeenge va hangwa va kofa pefimbo loilonga. Mokamba, okwa li hava dengwa omolwomatomheno a yoolokafana, oo a kwatela mo elongifonai lomalodu, oipindi ihe li paveta ile okungongota kombinga yeendjabi davo.

Ehandukilo lonyanya nokudengwa noshamboko okwa li yo haku longifwa mokudenga ovakwashiwana ava kwa li hava kala mokamba yedina Buffalo nokwa li ve li koshi yewiliko lopaukwaita metanga olo. Ovakulukadi vovakwaita ovo okwa li hava dengwa unene ngeenge va i moixulo ile va dunga otombo inava pewa epitikilo. Ounona vovakwaita okwa li hava dengwa koilyo yetanga lopolifi ile kovahongi vavo ngeenge va faula okuya kofikola ile ngeenge inava ninga oifiilwalonga yavo. Ngaashi omushamane umwe e shi hepaulula: Kakwa lli to dulu okufaula ofikola shaashi ovapolifi okwa li hava patolola mokamba nongeenge ove ku mono, oto dengwa nongola.

Ondi wete ope na omapulo avali a fimana a dja momapiyaaneko omu. Otete otaa popi kombinga yetungepo lidjuu okuudika ko leembinga odo mbali da yoolokafana pefimbo lomashilafano. Oshi na ngoo ondunge yasha okudiladila kombinga yoita yekondjelomanguluko laNamibia shi na sha neembinga odombali tadi kondjifafana – SWAPO na SADF? Oilyo yoSWAPO neekomanda odo da li de va idilila meedolongo noku va hepeka oda li ngoo kombinga imwe navo? Ovanambelewa ovatilyane vo 32 Batallion novakulukadi nounona vovakwaita ovalaule ovo va denga ova li ngoo kombinga imwe navo? Ngenge osho otwa hala okutya shike ngeenge hatu popi “ombinga”?

Omapulo omativali otaa popi kombinga yomahepeko oo a ningilwa ovanhu. Oilanduli yomahepeko ngaashi oo a ningilwa mokati koilyo oyo i li mehangano ekondjelimanguluko la faafana oilipipo? Oilanduli oyo meudeko lovanhu okuliuda ko vo vene nokuuda ko vakwao oilipipo?

*Omafininikotembuko*

Oshipalanyole oshititatu, osho tashi popi kombinga yomafininikotembuko, otashi popi kombinga yondjokononona ei ya kundafanwa fiyo opopo, nohandi diladila kutya oi li oshitwa shopokati koilonga yaTuli naHelena.

Momudo 1989, konima yefimbo leedula omilongo mbali dekondjelomanguluko, Namibia okwa mona emanguluko. Momukokomoko omo Ovanamibia vomwaalu u li pokati komayovi 40 000 no 50 000 ova alukila koNamibia. Eepelesenda dovanhu di dule pomilongo 80 oda aluka koAngola ofimbo ovanhu ve li lwopeepelesenda 9 va aluka okudja koZambia neepelesenda edi da xupa ko di li 10 odovanhu ava kwa li hava kala moilongo ya yoolokafana i dule po 40 mounyuni. Omwaalu wovaaluki u dule poshititatu shimwe owounona veedula di li koshi yo 18. Ngaashi Tuli, vahapu vomuvo ova dalelwa nova kulila pondje yaNamibia. Ova alulilwa koNamibia, oshilongo oko kwa dja ovadali vavo ashike vo vene inava enda ko nale. Ngaashi Tuli a shanga moshishangwa shaye shopaunghulungu: “Omaliudo aa a kwatakanifa nge kedu eli ndihe shiiko onda kala alushe nde a talela mefano lovakulunhu vange. Meni lange, ondi udite kutya onda dja ‘keshe pamwe.’ ”

Momudo 1989, oSADF oya tokolele okutembulila ovakwaita vo 32 Battalion neefamili davo koSouth Africa. Ngeenge handi popi kondadalunde, okwa li va tembulilwa kokamba yovakwaita i li koPomfret kokadoolopa ke li kokule ko oka tembukwa ke li mOmbuwa yaKalahari popepi neengaba da South Africa naBotswana. Meni leedula 15, ovakwaita vo 32Battalion neefamili davo ova tembulwa peenhele davo luvali: Lwotete okudja koAngola tava i koNamibia nopo nee okudja moNamibia nokuya koSouth Africa.

Nonande ovakwaita vahapu novakulukadi vavo ova dile koAngola, ounona vavo vahapu ova dalelwa moNamibia nokonima okoSouth Africa. Nomolwaasho, ovakwaita vahapu neefamili davo ove udite kutya vo ova ninga “ovanailongo keshe pamwe”. Momapulapulo etu, omulumenhu umwe okwa hokolola meenghundafana odo kwa li a ninga novanhu moSouth Africa, ovo tave ke mu pula nookaume kaye: “Omwa dja peni hano?’ ‘Otwa dja koPomfret.’’Ahowe, omwa dja peni konduko?’ Ou na nee okulifatulula ove mwene ashike ehokololo olile.

Ohandi diladila kutya omapulo a dingilila oshipalanyole shomafininikotembuko, naa aapa wa dja oku li yo oshitwa shopokati shoilonga yaHelena naTuli. Eumbo oli li peni neumbo oshike? Ohandi di peni? OkoAngola, okoNamibia ile okoSouth Africa? Okeshe pamwe ile nghi na apa nda dja?

j) Bolliger Lecture Translation in Portuguese

# Dilemas, perturbações e deslocamento: Reflexões sobre as guerras de descolonização da África Austral e seus legados

*Introdução*

Esta apresentação visa fornecer algum contexto histórico ao trabalho de Tuli Mekondjo e Helena Uambembe. Parte disso se baseia em pesquisas que realizei para o meu doutoramento e, mais recentemente, para um projeto de pós-doutoramento. A pesquisa baseia-se na história dos soldados negros namibianos e angolanos que serviram nas forças de segurança do apartheid da África do Sul nas décadas de 1970 e 1980. Enquanto eu sou o orador esta noite, quero salientar que fiz essa pesquisa em conjunto com Simi João e também o cunhado de Helena, Dino Estevao. Gostaria de agradecer a ambos pela colaboração e amizade.
Dividi a apresentação em duas partes principais. Primeiro, darei uma breve visão geral de alguns dos aspectos da luta de libertação da Namíbia, que acho que são mais relevantes para a nossa discussão. Como Julie Taylor escreveu no programa The Borders of Memory, as biografias da vida de Helena e Tuli "foram moldadas fundamentalmente pela guerra de independência da Namíbia, também conhecida na África do Sul como" Guerra das Fronteiras".
Enquanto a luta foi travada internacionalmente, vou me concentrar na Namíbia e Angola nas décadas de 1970 e 1980. A história da luta é complexa e cheia de vários atores com siglas muitas vezes confusas. Procurei evitar o máximo de confusão possível e espero que vocês tenham paciência comigo.
Segundo, abordarei alguns aspectos dos três temas no título - dilemas, interrupções e deslocamento. Farei isso em relação às duas organizações das quais os pais de Tuli e Helena faziam parte. Como foi dito no programa, essas duas organizações foram o movimento de libertação da Namíbia, SWAPO, no caso dos pais de Tuli, e o Batalhão 32 da Força de Defesa da África do Sul (SADF) da era do apartheid, no caso dos pais de Helena.
Como temos audiência muito diversa em nossa companhia esta noite, decidi falar não apenas sobre pesquisa histórica, mas também sobre algumas das questões mais amplas e muitas vezes difíceis que ela levanta. Essas questões não são exclusivas dos conflitos discutidos esta noite. Algumas delas podem ter surgido nas vossas próprias vidas pessoais, como nas de Helena e Tuli. Essas questões avaliam também os limites da pesquisa histórica e, acredito, podem exigir que nos viremos para a filosofia ou, de fato, as artes.

*Visão histórica*

Após a Primeira Guerra Mundial, a África do Sul ocupou a antiga colônia alemã da Namíbia, que era então - não muito criativa – chamada Sudoeste Africano. Após a Segunda Guerra Mundial, a África do Sul introduziu o sistema de segregação racial institucionalizada, mais conhecida como apartheid, e começou a governar o país essencialmente como uma província da África do Sul.
No início da década de 1960, o movimento de libertação da Namíbia, SWAPO, foi formado e começou a enviar membros ao exterior para procurar assistência na sua luta contra o regime sul-africano. No final da década de 1960, a SWAPO começou com a luta armada

contra a ocupação sul-africana e, como resultado da crescente repressão e da escalada da guerra, mais e mais namibianos foram para o exílio. Quando Angola, que faz fronteira com a Namíbia no norte, conquistou a sua independência em 1975, muitos namibianos repentinamente tiveram uma rota ainda mais direta para o exílio. Depois de chegarem a Angola, passaram a viver em "campos de refugiados". Entre eles estavam os pais de Tuli. Ao mesmo tempo, os guerrilheiros armados da SWAPO agora também tinham uma rota mais direta de volta à Namíbia, o que causava preocupação ao regime do apartheid. A partir do final de 1975, a SADF começou a lançar operações militares em Angola para combater a SWAPO e impedir o novo governo angolano de ajudar o movimento de libertação da Namíbia. Em grande parte devido a essas invasões, a guerra de independência de Angola rapidamente se transformou em uma guerra civil entre movimentos de libertação rivais.

Durante a primeira grande invasão a Angola, a SADF formou uma unidade militar que mais tarde se tornaria o Batalhão 32. A unidade era chefiada por oficiais brancos da África do Sul, mas consistia principalmente de ex-guerrilheiros negros. Estes soldados pertenceram anteriormente a um dos movimentos de libertação de Angola, a *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA). No entanto, a maioria deles havia se tornado refugiada após o decair do movimento de libertação no final de 1975. Entre esses soldados estava o pai de Helena.
Um aspecto único do Batalhão 32, em comparação com o restante da SADF, era que mulheres e crianças também estavam afiliadas à unidade. Quando os soldados negros da unidade foram transferidos de Angola para um acampamento no norte da Namíbia, foram acompanhados por centenas de mulheres e crianças. Essas mulheres e crianças também estavam a fugir da escalada da guerra civil em Angola e passaram a viver na base do Batalhão 32, chamado Buffalo. Em resumo, a Helena e a Tuli cresceram em comunidades de refugiados. A jornada de como seus pais e outras pessoas acabavam nessas comunidades era frequentemente repleta de vários dilemas.

*Dilemas*

De fato, muitas pessoas na Namíbia e Angola enfrentaram escolhas extraordinariamente difíceis durante esses tempos.
Um dos dilemas que os simpatizantes da SWAPO enfrentaram foi se deveriam permanecer na Namíbia ou se juntar ao movimento no exílio. Se eles decidissem se tornar politicamente ativos na Namíbia, arriscariam assédio, prisão, tortura ou assassinato pelas forças de segurança. Se eles decidissem se exilar, muitas vezes tiveram que deixar amigos e familiares para trás; talvez mesmo os seus pais idosos ou irmãos mais novos que precisassem de cuidados e apoio. Alguns não disseram aos seus entes queridos sobre sua decisão de se exilarem por medo de causar problemas.
Ao atravessarem a fronteira no escuro da noite, corriam o risco de serem presos pelas forças de segurança ou denunciados aos guerrilheiros da SWAPO por pessoas que não os conheciam e consideravam seus movimentos suspeitos. De fato, muitos namibianos se sentiram presos entre a SWAPO e as forças de segurança.
Como uma pessoa explicou a Siegfried Groth, um pastor alemão que trabalha com exilados da Namíbia: “Vivemos entre dois incêndios. Ou você fica do lado dos sul-africanos ou da SWAPO. Se os homens da SWAPO vierem à noite pedindo ajuda e você

não os ajudar, isso significa que você está do lado da África do Sul e talvez tenha que pagar com sua vida " [46]

No final de 1975 e no início de 1976, os futuros soldados do Batalhão 32 enfrentaram o dilema de permanecer refugiados em movimento ou se juntar às forças armadas sul-africanas que haviam apoiado o regime colonial português em Angola. Como refugiados, eles e seus familiares corriam o risco de morrer de fome e perseguição por soldados que pertenciam a movimentos de libertação rivais. As crianças pequenas eram particularmente vulneráveis e muitas morreram de sede, fome e cansaço quando suas famílias estavam a fugir para o sul, em busca de abrigo na Namíbia.
No norte da Namíbia, muitos soldados negros e suas famílias foram transferidos para um campo de refugiados, chamado "Tin Mine", que estava sendo administrado pela SADF. Em 1978, as forças armadas sul-africanas informaram ao povo que iriam fechar o campo de refugiados e lhes apresentaram a opção - se é que se pode chamar assim - de voltar a Angola ou ingressar no Batalhão 32. Aqueles que decidiram se juntar à SADF foram transferidos para a base de Buffalo. Entre os que regressaram a Angola, muitos foram mortos na guerra civil pós-independência que agora estava assolar o país.
Sugiro que seja importante levar em consideração esses dilemas: as ações das pessoas não refletem necessariamente as suas crenças. Ainda atualmente, muitas pessoas em Angola, Namíbia e África do Sul acusam os soldados do Batalhão 32 de terem lutado conscientemente pelo apartheid. Conhecendo as escolhas incrivelmente difíceis que esses soldados e suas famílias enfrentaram, acredito que se torna difícil manter tal argumento.
Da mesma forma, nos casos em que os membros da SWAPO decidiram permanecer na Namíbia para cuidar de seus pais idosos, sua decisão reflete uma falta de compromisso? E aqueles que chegaram ao exílio: eram mais privilegiados, mais corajosos ou apenas com mais sorte?

*Interrupção*

Depois de ingressarem na SWAPO ou no Batalhão 32, a vida de muitas pessoas foi interrompida de maneiras diferentes e muitas vezes chocantes.
Os namibianos ingressaram na SWAPO por várias razões; muitos foram para o exílio em busca de educação superior. No entanto, como aconteceu em outros movimentos de libertação, alguns namibianos foram forçados a treinar militarmente para a luta armada da SWAPO. Como resultado, foram avisados de que seriam designados para certos campos, como o campo de Kongwa, no centro da Tanzânia. Segundo um homem entrevistado pelo estudioso, Christian Williams, eles foram avisados: "Por favor, se você souber que está a ir para Kongwa, não aceite! ... Não há educação. É apenas uma mata para combater". [47]

À medida que mais namibianos ingressavam na SWAPO no exílio e o movimento passou por crescentes ataques militares da SADF, outros conflitos internos se desenvolveram. Uma questão importante girou em torno do medo de que espiões fossem enviados pela África do Sul para se infiltrarem no movimento. A partir da década de 1980, cerca de

[46] Siegfried Groth, *Namibia – The Wall of Silence: The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1995), 28.
[47] Siegfried Groth, *Namibia – The Wall of Silence: The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1995), 28.

1.000 a 2.000 membros da SWAPO foram detidos em campos no sul de Angola. Lá, um número desconhecido deles foi abusado, torturado e executado como suspeitos de serem espiões sul-africanos. Várias centenas de pessoas “desapareceram” e nunca mais voltaram do exílio. Desde então, o tratamento dos chamados “ex-detidos” tem sido repetidamente o foco de fortes debates e controvérsias na Namíbia.
No recém-formado Batalhão 32, a disciplina foi violentamente aplicada. Nos primeiros anos de existência da unidade, um número desconhecido de soldados negros foi executado por vários "delitos". Estes variavam de deserção ou retirada durante a batalha a recusar uma ordem e pequenos furtos. Os soldados negros também eram regularmente punidos com um chicote pesado de pele chamado *purete*. No mato, os soldados foram chicoteados principalmente por se recusarem a seguir as ordens ou dormirem em turno de guarda. Na base, eles foram agredidos por várias razões, incluindo abuso de álcool, comércio ilegal e reclamações sobre seus salários.
O castigo violento com o *purete* também foi usado em civis que viviam na base de Buffalo e estavam sujeitos à autoridade militar da liderança da unidade. As esposas dos soldados foram chicoteadas principalmente por adultério ou por fazerem bebida fermentável ilegal em casa. Os filhos dos soldados foram chicoteados por membros da polícia militar ou seus professores por faltarem à escola ou por não fazerem as tarefas de casa. Como um homem contou: "Você não podia faltar à escola porque a polícia [militar] passeava pela [base] e, se o encontrassem, eles o chicotearíam". [48]
Eu sugeriria que há dois conjuntos de questões importantes que surgem dessas interrupções. O primeiro diz respeito à composição complexa de diferentes "lados" durante o conflito. Faz sentido pensar na guerra de independência da Namíbia em termos de dois "lados" opostos - SWAPO versus SADF? Os membros da SWAPO e os comandantes que os prenderam e torturaram estavam do mesmo lado? Os oficiais brancos do Batalhão 32 e as esposas e filhos de soldados negros que eles chicotearam estavam do mesmo lado? Se sim, o que queremos dizer com "lado"?
O segundo conjunto de perguntas refere-se à violência sofrida pelas pessoas. Quais são os efeitos da violência como a perpetrada entre os membros que pertenceram ao mesmo movimento de libertação? Quais são os seus efeitos no entendimento das próprias pessoas e dos outros?

*Deslocamento*

O terceiro tema, deslocamento, obviamente percorre as histórias discutidas até agora, e acho que também é central para o trabalho de Tuli e Helena.
Em 1989, após mais de duas décadas de luta armada, a Namíbia conquistou sua independência. No processo, entre 40.000 e 50.000 namibianos foram repatriados para a Namíbia. Mais de 80% das pessoas regressaram de Angola, enquanto cerca de 9% regressaram da Zâmbia e os 10% restantes viviam em mais de 40 países diferentes a volta do mundo.
Mais de um terço dos retornados tinham menos de 18 anos. Como a Tuli, muitos deles nasceram e cresceram fora da Namíbia. Eles foram "repatriados" para a Namíbia, um país de onde seus pais eram oriundos, mas que nunca haviam pisado. Como Tuli escreve em sua declaração artística: “Meu senso de parentesco com essa terra 'estrangeira' sempre passou pelos olhos dos meus pais. No fundo do meu núcleo, eu era de 'todo lado' ”.

[48] Siegfried Groth, *Namibia – The Wall of Silence: The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1995), 28.

Em 1989, a SADF decidiu transferir os soldados do Batalhão 32 e suas famílias para a África do Sul. Mais precisamente, eles foram transferidos para uma base militar em Pomfret, uma cidade remota e abandonada mineira de amianto no deserto de Kalahari, perto da fronteira da África do Sul com o Botswana. Em 15 anos, os soldados do Batalhão 32 e suas famílias foram deslocados duas vezes: primeiro de Angola para a Namíbia e depois novamente da Namíbia para a África do Sul. Enquanto a maioria dos soldados e seus parceiros eram originalmente de Angola, muitos de seus filhos nasceram na Namíbia e mais tarde na África do Sul. Como resultado, muitos soldados e suas famílias sentem que, de certo modo, se tornaram "estranhos em toda parte". Na nossa entrevista, um homem relatou numa conversa típica com pessoas da África do Sul, que perguntavam a ele e a seus amigos: "'De onde vocês são?' '' Nós somos de Pomfret. '' Não, de onde vocês são? ' Então você tem que se explicar e é uma longa história. "

Eu acho que as questões sobre deslocamento e, como resultado, sobre pertencimento estão no centro do trabalho de Helena e Tuli. Onde é que é o lar? Onde é que eu pertenço? Em Angola, Namíbia ou África do Sul? Em toda parte ou em lado nenhum?

[1] Charles P. Gasarasi, "UN Resolution 435 and the Repatriation of Namibian Exiles", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 3, 4 (1990), 351.
[1] Interview with anonymous interviewee, Pretoria, 4 February 2020.

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