



# The South African Arts Scene and European Cultural Institutions - A Troubled Relationship?

**By**

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**A research study presented to the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies in the School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, at the University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Critical Diversity Studies**

**Supervisor: Prof Cuthbeth Tagwirei**

**February 2023**

# Contents

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# Ethics certificate

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**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE**
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| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: DIV060922** |
| **PROJECT TITLE** | The South African Arts Scene and European Cultural Institutions - A Troubled Relationship |
| **INVESTIGATOR** | Josephine Heide |
| **SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR** | Social Sciences/Centre for Critical Diversity Studies |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 24 October 2022 |
| **DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** | **Approved Unconditionally** |
| **RISK LEVEL** | LOW RISK |
| **EXPIRY DATE** | 24 October 2025 |

**ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE** 25 October 2022

(Dr Cuthbeth Tagwirei)

cc: Supervisor: Dr Cuthbeth Tagwirei

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**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR**

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

**Signature** **Date** **31.10.2022**

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# Acknowledgements

I express my gratitude to the faculty, WiCDS staff, family, and friends who helped me through each step along the way to finalise this work.

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Cuthbeth Tagwirei, for your support, patience, and honesty. I am grateful for your mentorship over these past months.

Thank you to my patient and critical reader, Nico Schneider, for your invaluable critique, knowledge, and feedback.

To my parents, thank you for always encouraging me to find and follow my own path and for extra-supporting me on the final sprint.

Thank you to my children, Juno and Jaro, for enduring a mother that 'always had to work'. And for making me laugh.

Finally, to my husband, Jan. Thank you for believing in me. You are my anchor and you helped me through the tidal waves of this process. I could not have done this without you. Thank you for your love, care, and for always having my back.

# List of abbreviations and used terms

## Abbreviations

BPOC – Black persons and people of colour

CCI – Cultural and Creative Industry

EUNIC – European Union National Institutes for Culture

ECIs – European Cultural Institutions

IFAS – Institut Français d'Afrique du Sud (French Institute of South Africa)

GI – Goethe-Institut

NGO – Non-governmental organisation

POC – People / person of Colour

## Explanation of terms

### Use of racial categories

Following Asfour and Khan (2018), this research utilises official South African racial categories as established during Apartheid and their continued usage post-Apartheid: "White" (persons of white European descent), "Black" (local indigenous Black Africans), "Coloured" (persons of mixed race and descendants of Malaysian/Indian/ Mozambican slaves and prisoners), "Indian" (persons of South Asian descent that arrived as slaves in Cape Town in the seventeenth century and, in the second half of the nineteenth century, first as British-indentured labourers and then as merchants), and "Asian" (at one time it included Indian and Chinese but later primarily addressed people of Chinese descent as well as new post-democracy Chinese, Pakistani, Indian, and Sri Lankan migrants). Where the term "black" (lowercase "b") is used, it is used in preference of "non-white" and includes Black, Coloured, Indian and Chinese South Africans, as does the term "people of colour". These terms are also used to indicate identification with blackness as a political self-affirmative project and stance. Generally, "White" and "Whiteness" relate specifically to the South African context, whereas "white" and "whiteness" refer to more general / international discussions. Quotes follow the original capitalisation and usage of authors in their contexts/works with regard to racial terms such as "white", "black", or "coloured". (cf. Asfour & Khan, 2018, p. 187)

## European (cultural) institutions

For the purpose of this research, 'European cultural institutions' or 'European institutions' will be used as umbrella term that comprises the National cultural institutes of European countries that have agencies in South Africa, such as Goethe-Institut (Germany), British Council (Great Britain), Pro Helvetia (Switzerland), Institut Français/ Alliance Française (France), Italian Cultural Institute (Italy), and others. 'European institutions' in the context of this work does not mean corporate bodies of the European Union (EU), except in cases where it is made explicit.

## Local

A critical investigation of the use of the term 'local' would in itself be a worthwhile research project. The term is contested (cf. Mac Ginty, 2015), especially in the context of developmental aid and peacebuilding disciplines. However, this research project uses a working definition of 'local' that refers to individuals, communities or works that geographically are located in South Africa. 'Local' in this research refers to the physical place of being or origin. This research project explicitly divorces itself from traditional colonial notions of the term that Mac Ginty (2015) argues persist among some international organisations and donor states, "namely that [local] is static, rural, traditional, incapable and waiting to be civilised, developed, monetised and shown how it can be 'properly' governed. Many international organisations and donor states have adopted a more sensitive language, but the world-view of the 'civilising' metropole and of the centrifugal transmission of expertise and governance modalities is very much alive" (p. 841).

## Interview partners

This research does explicitly use the term 'interview partner' or 'expert' instead of the conventional term 'participant' as it assumes the interviewed experts as conversational and co-thinking partners who contribute their expertise and knowledge to the research on eye-level. The researcher–participant relationship implies a hierarchy and power dynamic, which this research actively seeks to dismantle. The chosen terminology is part of this power-critical practice.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary power relations between the Global South and the Global North. As such, they have practical implications for how cultural cooperation between European institutions and local[1] South African partners is conceptualised today. Colonial heritage still affects how partnerships are built and how projects materialise within the context of transnational, intercultural work. European cultural institutions[2] continue to be present on the African continent after the formal demise of colonialism and they are perceived as important cultural actors and facilitators (Kouoh, 2013). However, their presence and the mechanisms of their work do not come unquestioned or without ambiguities and tensions (ACC, 2021; EUNIC, 2021; Kouoh, 2013).

Drawing from the concept of coloniality/decoloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a, b, 2015, 2020; Mignolo 2007, 2009; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018; Grosfoguel, 2007), this research critically examines the relationship between South African artists and European cultural institutions. More specifically, this study aims to investigate the key research question: *What does the experience of South African artists who receive support from European cultural institutions reveal about the power relations that are at work in the cultural sector?*

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[2] For the purpose of this research, 'European cultural institutions', 'European cultural institutes' or 'European institutions' will be used as umbrella terms that comprise the national cultural institutes of European countries that have agencies in South Africa, such as Goethe-Institut (German), British Council (British), Pro Helvetia (Swiss), Institut Francais (IFAS) (French), Italian Cultural Institute (Italian), and others. 'European institutions' in the context of this work does not mean corporate bodies of the European Union (EU), except in cases where it is made explicit.

The core analytical interest lies in interrogating to what extent these power dynamics are influenced by colonial legacies.

In order to gain insights into the experiences of South African art practitioners with regards to the underlying research question, a qualitative research process was conducted, comprising narrative interviews with South African artists to elicit their lived experiences. The obtained data were studied by way of Narrative Analysis and the investigation is informed by the theoretical framework of decoloniality.

This introduction provides an overview of the background of this study before attending to the research problem and purpose. Chapter two offers an overview and critical analysis of the contemporary and relevant literature in the studied field, and in a second step presents the theoretical framework that underpins this research. Chapter three introduces the methodological approach, and chapter four discusses the findings of this research, while chapter five sums up the discussion and draws conclusions.

## 1.2 Background of the study

European national cultural institutes were put in place as an instrument of cultural policy and diplomacy (Paschalidis, 2009) and were founded, by their respective countries, with the mandate to promote their national culture and language, domestically and abroad (Kizlari & Fousecki, 2018, p. 133; Smits et al., 2016). Over time, the initial focus on European diaspora communities shifted, facilitating local populations' access to information about Europe, and connecting the cultural sectors of foreign and host countries (Lien & Lo, 2017, p. 14). The institutions, along with their various related bodies and activities, such as scholarships, academic and cultural exchanges, language courses, art exhibitions, theatre and concert tours, became a standard feature of the official external cultural policy of the West, typically funded by and reporting to their Foreign Affairs Ministries (Paschalidis, 2009, p. 281; Smits et al., p. 31). While a majority of European cultural institutions are managed at central level by their respective governments (e.g. as diplomatic missions), around one third are operating as independent organisations via a so-called 'arm's length' principle

(Smits et al., p. 30), which ensures the organisation's autonomy from its government, but simultaneously situates it under governmental patronage (Kizlari & Fouseki, 2018, p. 134).

The major historical momentums that shaped the positioning and purpose of the different cultural institutes were the *Cold War*, during which culture was politicised and turned "from a vehicle for ideology into a synonym of ideology" (Paschalidis, 2009, p. 282); and *Neo-Colonialism,* which is characterised by the retention of colonial power and influence in the former colonies through the preservation or promotion of economic and cultural ties between metropoles and their former colonies. During this time, the narrative of the 'civilising mission' was replaced with the discourse of 'development' (Paschalidis, 2009, p. 283; Kizlari & Fouseki, 2019). Another significant event that altered the modus operandi of European cultural institutions was the *Maastricht treaty* of 1992, which facilitated the development of EU instruments of cultural cooperation and eventually led to the foundation of the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) network in 2006.

In the course of this development, the programmatic approaches and discourses of the European cultural institutions have shifted, creating more room for multilateral partnerships, which coincided with a change in language from the former emphasis on 'service,' 'support' and 'development', to 'multiculturalism,' 'bridge-building,' and 'cultural dialogue' (Paschalidis, 2009, p. 284). Critics, however, argue that despite changes in programmes and rhetoric, the language and narrative of help and support is still persistent in the agendas of European institutions although no national body acts out of purely altruistic reasons, but follows a clear political strategy (Oforiatta-Ayim, 2013, p. 123).

This development, paired with the void of structures, funds and political will in many African countries to support their independent cultural scenes (Kouoh, 2013; Njami, 2013), builds the fertile ground for complex power dynamics that manifest in tensions between dependence and independence and affect the arts and cultural sectors in these countries, including South Africa, where currently eight European cultural institutions are present. Among others, the most active and visible in the arts scene

are the British Council (Great Britain), Pro Helvetia (Switzerland), Goethe-Institut (Germany) and Institut Français d'Afrique du Sud (France).

### 1.3 Research problem and purpose of the study

Cultural cooperation between European actors and local (South) African partners is fraught with challenges, given the historical backdrop and skewed preconditions as shown above. This often manifests in multi-layered conflict situations between funding bodies and receiving artists, based on misunderstandings, divergent intentions, or a lack of mutual acknowledgement and shared agendas. Artistic partners have also expressed crticism of the nature of partnerships with reference to colonial legacies that seem to shape the institutions' work to date (The People's Stories collective, 2022; Kouoh, 2013). Cultural and art practitioners on the continent, such as Oforiatta-Ayim, criticise that foreign cultural institutions "happily" fill the lack of cultural offers and local governmental support by extensive programming, and thereby "shape the cultural output of the continent" (2013, p. 123). This seems problematic in terms of power, not only with regard to financial influence, but also in terms of narrative authority. Local art practitioners have also addressed the urgent need for transformation, pointing to the almost naturalised power structures in the prevailing funding system (Oforiatta-Ayim, 2013), which is built on institutional authority and "stale frameworks established over time and through politics" (Karlsen, 2013, p. 86).

This research project is located in this conflicted environment, with the objective of investigating the reasons that can lead to conflict, as well as looking at how collaborations can thrive and flourish despite the skewed preconditions. Regardless of the recurring challenges in cultural cooperation, there seems to be little academic appetite to study the complexities of the relationship. This research therefore casts more light on the power dynamics at work in these relations and the debates that take place in the daily practices of artists and institutions.

> In the current climate of politicised cultural collaboration, it seems to be up to the artists and curators to develop new norms when the authorities themselves do not.

> Meaning that an individual, such as the artist or the independent curator holds a real power in any collaboration within the art system, even without the authority that is given by institutions, politics or finances (Karlsen, 2013, p. 86).

Karlsen's quote above speaks to the premise that underpins this research, which is that art and artistic practice can create meaningful discourse and be powerful tools of change. In South Africa, the arts took on a significant social and political role during the anti-colonial resistance movements and the struggle against Apartheid, be it in the form of performance protest, freedom songs or poster-art (Jolaosho, 2021; Leffler, 2019). However, South African artists' perspectives are not overly represented in the academic discourse surrounding the research problem defined above. For these reasons, this research project intends to elevate the perspectives of art practitioners and thus offers a specific lens to the exploration of the problem.

Although the above discussion of the research problem refers to the prevailing binary of the *powerful institution versus the disempowered artist*, it is built on the hypothesis that the investigated relationship is more complex and layered, and that artists convey multi-faceted perspectives and experiences with regard to the set of questions at hand. For these reasons, this study foregrounds the artists' narratives in the form of interviews.

The personal interest of the researcher in the topic arose from her work as an employee in the cultural programmes department at the Goethe-Institut Johannesburg, where she grapples daily with the questions of how the colonial heritage that the institution carries impacts the work, and how the power dynamics that are ingrained in the funder-recipient relationship can be more aligned.

In order to dismantle these issues, decolonial theory was found to be a useful tool and theoretical foundation, as it offers an analytical lens that enables a critical examination of the slanted power dynamics that are assumed to be an expression of colonial remnants. In order to explore this hypothesis, decoloniality serves as both the theoretical framework and analytical instrument that inform the critical questions which underpin this research, as well as the methodology used to analyse the collected data. Furthermore, decoloniality proves particularly helpful in unpacking the issues

with respect to their specific local setting and context in post-colonised and post-Apartheid South Africa.

### 1.4 Research questions

The main research question is: What does the experience of South African artists who receive support from European cultural institutions reveal about the power relations that are at work in the cultural sector?

The following sub-questions further help to guide the analysis:

- To what extent is the power dynamic between South African artists and European cultural institutions influenced by colonial legacies?
- Are the experiences of artists in this context shaped by the intersectionality of different identities / positionalities, such as race and class?
- Do European cultural institutions in South Africa meet the needs of the local arts scene, or does a desire for transformation surface in the interview partners' stories?

### 1.5 Conclusion

This introduction provided background information and identified the research problem and purpose of the given study. It outlined the complex terrain and the challenging preconditions for cultural cooperation between South African arts practitioners and European cultural institutions, whose relationship is investigated by examining artists' experiences. Given the South African setting in a highly racially segregated society, the introduction concludes that it is imperative to explore whether the experiences of artists in this context are influenced by their racial identity and positionality when scrutinising the existing power dynamics. Decolonial theory offers a critical analytical lens, thus helps to expand the critical dimension of this research. Ultimately, the research aims to elicit how the gained insights can contribute to identifying potential for decolonial transformation and more equitable cultural

cooperation. The following chapter will provide an overview of current debates in the studied field and introduces the theoretical framework that underpins this research.

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it aims to give the reader an overview of the currently existing scholarly debates that are relevant in the context of this research and why they are valuable to be considered. Secondly, the theoretical framework that informs this research and the methodological and analytic approach of this work, is discussed.

In order to answer the key questions – what do the experiences of South African artists who receive support from European cultural institutions reveal about the power dynamics that are at work in the cultural sector, and to what extent are these power relations an expression of coloniality? – this chapter sets the scene with regards to the specific locale and existing discussions in the studied field.

The chapter is divided into two sections. "Charting the Territory" aims to give the reader a synopsis of the specific context of South Africa's arts landscape before reviewing relevant literature that deals with power dynamics in the domain of international cultural cooperation. This section develops an understanding of the particular historically rooted characteristics of the local arts sector, and the related dynamics. The section that follows, discusses why decolonial theory is a suitable theoretical frame for this research, and how it has been adapted to the specific cultural and local context in South Africa.

## 2.2 Charting the territory: Overview of local context and relevant literature

### 2.2.1 The socio-political context of South Africa's arts landscape

To thoroughly understand the preconditions and challenges that contribute to the complexities of the investigated power relations, it is necessary to first locate the study within the South African cultural landscape and arts sector, as well as within the specific socio-political context that impacts on the power dynamics in the sector. This is done using research and policy reports conducted by South African Cultural

Observatory (SACO, 2017)[3] and the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) (Gaylard, 2010). These reports offer useful statistics and demographic insights into the situation of artists in South Africa. Research by Malatjie (2013) and Koloane (2003) that points to relevant issues of social positionalities of artists and the situation of independent art spaces that fuel the power dynamics, are also of interest to this research.

The report, "An Assessment of the Visual Arts in South Africa" (Gaylard, 2010), was commissioned by the Department of Arts and Culture in South Africa and is considered to be a major comprehensive and representative examination of the visual arts sector in South Africa. Its main purpose is to gain an overview of the status quo of the sector and to generate knowledge about its impact and contributions to society and the economy, to identify potential for development, and to formulate recommendations on measures that can support the growth of the sector. This research project is not limited to the visual arts, but comprises various artistic fields, such as performing arts and interdisciplinary practice; nevertheless, the findings in Gaylard's study are relevant for this work. Until 2010, there has been no comparable comprehensive study, making its results useful for the given research field. One of the main findings of Gaylard's study, which speaks to this research project, is the conclusion that the visual arts play an important role in producing critical reflections and pointing at pressing social issues:

> The core contribution of the [visual arts] sector revolves around the generation of compelling representations and propositions related to our understanding of who we are in a complex and rapidly changing world. The capacity of the work of artists to challenge our familiar and established patterns of perception and attitude, and to invoke both wonder and critical reflection, is fundamental to understanding the importance of the visual arts in a society composed of multiple identities, realities and ways of being in the world (Gaylard, 2010, p. 7).

Gaylard's study values the contribution of art to society and acknowledges its ability to stimulate, propose and interrogate (Gaylard, 2010, p. 70). This argument is

[3] SACO is a statistical and socio-economic research project, launched in 2014, which charts the socio-economic impact of the Arts, Culture and Heritage sectors and the Cultural Creative Industries in South Africa (SACO, 2017/18, p. 3)

significant to this research, which foregrounds the social relevance of the investigated field of arts and culture.

Next to providing a critical appreciation of the arts sector, Gaylard (2010) offers some important demographic insights into the position and work circumstances of the 280 South African visual artists who participated in the survey. It reveals some of the challenges artists face, among them access to funding (Gaylard, 2010, p. 156). A striking finding is that the importance placed on different issues seems connected to racialised experiences. Black artists were more concerned about access to funding or the cost of materials, whereas white artists articulated the lack of buyers and industry promotion as a bigger concern (Gaylard, 2010, p. 156). This is important in flagging the racialised experiences of artists. Gaylard's report (2010) neither investigates the racial differences further nor analyses the reasons for the differences. It nevertheless provides a point of departure for analysing Black artists' relationship to European funding institutions and how it differs from that of White artists.

The report presents some useful numbers: While only 5% of all respondents have applied for support from international arts funding bodies, National Arts Council (18%), Department of Arts and Culture (9,4%) and Private Foundations (7,3%) are the most popular potential sources of funding. It is interesting to note, however, that funding applications to international institutions are the most successful with a 66,7% success rate (Gaylard, 2010, p. 161) which places them in the position of an indispensable promoter of the sector.

Gaylard's study also investigates the role of independent (meaning 'non-commercial' and 'non-governmental') art organisations within the cultural ecology of South Africa and concludes that they play a vital role in providing platforms for the presentation of new and/or experimental work that is not necessarily commercially viable; and for exposing emerging and established talent to different stakeholder environments and opportunities for creative and professional growth: "These organisations […] play a significant role in the rethinking of the contemporary arts in society, often with a trans-disciplinary and activist framework" (Gaylard, 2010, p. 108). Gaylard also notes

that these independent spaces[4] often survive based on a mix of funding sources and models, but generally in quite precarious circumstances.

At this point, it is useful to look more in-depth into the role and situation of independent arts spaces in South Africa, additionally to that of independent artists. It is necessary for this research because these spaces are part of the dynamic that is under investigation, and artists mostly operate from or within the context of such spaces.

Malatjie (2013) offers a useful analysis of the independent arts scene in South Africa (mainly Johannesburg and Cape Town) by firstly defining "independent art spaces" as "alternative" or "experimental". She argues that the term "alternative" is contested and ideologically loaded, as it suggests being at the margin, and thus at the periphery, of a hierarchically structured art system, where it opposes those structures at the centre, which are mainly commercial galleries (Malatjie, 2013, p. 368). "Artist-run" or "run by independent curators" are other terms used to describe the location and identity of such spaces that "challenge the status quo" (Malatjie, 2013, p. 368). Malatjie, however, maintains that her definition of "alternative" rather describes initiatives or spaces

> that aim to bring to the fore strategies and methodologies that are progressive and not necessarily mainstream or foregrounded. This is not to suggest that these structures are in opposition to the mainstream, but rather that they have chosen to exist outside it. This is not to assign the alternative to a state of marginalization; instead, it can be argued to exist in the centre of its own selected realm (2013, p. 368/369).

Using "alternative" with the above affirmative connotation is strategically smart as it points to the crucial role that such spaces play within the South African arts landscape – as active and vital players in the centre of the field (not at its margin). Apart from their structural and organisational modi operandi, alternative art spaces are also

[4] Within this context, the report also lists the Goethe-Institut-initiated art space "Goethe-on-Main", which ran from 2009-2016 in the Maboneng precinct of Johannesburg's inner city, as one of only a handful of independent arts spaces (Gaylard, 2010, p. 109). This is interesting since this project was initiated, run and financed by the Goethe-Institut South Africa, and thus its characterisation as "independent" might seem contradictory. This could indicate that there is no single definition of "independent" (space or artist), but rather that multiple forms of "alternative" exist within the arts realm (see also Malatjie, 2013).

characterised by their alternative approaches to programming and location. They often create programmes that leave room for experimentation and failure, and allow for the unfinished work, the work-in-progress, to be exposed to an audience in order to further evolve. They "rely on the organic formation of things", as Malatjie says (2013, p. 371), and often promote cross-disciplinary works.

Malatjie (2013) identifies collaboration as a key element of alternative spaces, many of which practice a collaborative approach to the development of new ideas and the production of new work. She notes that they acknowledge "multiple voices in the production of artworks" (p. 372), whereas

> commercial galleries […] are mainly interested in the modernist idea of the autonomous artist. Artworks, and perhaps even ideas, are better marketed in this way. In an alternative space, where the concentration is more on ideas than on capital, numerous forms of relationships are formed and often relished (Malatjie, 2013, p. 372).

Location is another distinctive feature of independent art spaces, which are often located in such a way that allows for community engagement and communal sharing. In South Africa's cultural metropoles – Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban – independent art spaces deliberately choose a different location in the city than their commercial counterparts that are often located in the suburbia, which speaks to the question of who can access such spaces.

Later in her paper, Malatjie also points to problematic power relations and the issue of funding and survival of such spaces:

> Qualms about requesting institutional funding are numerous, and include the fear of a loss of autonomy with regard to programming in the space. As a result some alternative spaces shy away from asking for money from institutions in case those institutions attempt to dictate the manner in which the space is run (2013, p. 375).

She suggests that some spaces avoid relying on funding to "keep their doors open", and that ideological reasons influence this decision (2013, p. 376). This echoes concerns articulated by other African practitioners (Kouoh, 2013; Karlsen, 2013; Oforiatta-Ayim, 2013). It seems to be an overarching worry that funding institutions

in general, foreign funding agencies such as the European institutions not excluded, interfere in the (South) African arts sector with regards to output generation, but also modalities of management and administration, by imposing their standards. This speaks to the dynamic between funding institutions and funding recipients in the art world which is of interest here.

Malatjie (2013) and Gaylard (2010) provide useful background information and definitions that give guidance in understanding the South African arts scene. It must be acknowledged, however, that Gaylard's report and its statistical findings are from 2010 and, in the 13 years since, transformations and shifts have occurred. Unfortunately, there is no updated report available.

South African Cultural Observatory (SACO) provides more recent reports that contribute statistics which are useful for this research in terms of locating art practitioners within the cultural landscape of South Africa. One of them is SACO's baseline report (2017) that maps the South African creative economy. One part of this report analyses levels of employment in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs). An interesting finding that is relevant to this research are demographic profiles of cultural occupants.

The range of workers included in SACO (2017) is somewhat broader than 'artists'. It comprises different occupations in the realm of arts, culture and creative economies. Significantly, the demographics and barriers to transformation that SACO provides speak to different positionalities of art practitioners and point to the socio-political climate that they operate in. A general finding was that, while the majority of cultural workers in the CCIs were black Africans (66.5%), followed by Whites (20%), Coloureds (8.9%) and Indian/Asians (4%), "it was established, firstly, that cultural occupations are somewhat less racially diverse than non-cultural ones, and secondly, that Whites are still over-represented in certain cultural domains of the industry" (SACO, 2017, p. 7), compared to the overall racial representation in the South African population[5]. One

[5] The overall racial representation in the South African population currently is 80,97 % Black African, 8,81 % Coloured, 7,66 % White, 2,57 % Indian/Asian (Statistics South Africa, 2022).

reason for the unproportioned representation of BPOC in the cultural workforce is unequal access to tertiary education (p. 8), given that Black people often still have less access to quality education than their White peers in the post-Apartheid era.

Another finding that constrains transformation in the cultural sector is that cultural jobs offer lower job security and fewer employment benefits compared to non-cultural jobs, which demonstrates that it is more likely for middle-class people to go into the cultural and creative sectors, despite the potential risks and precariousness of the sector (SACO, 2017). Class therefore is another determining social category.

The key demographics revealed in the SACO study are relevant to the research because when analysing the narratives of art practitioners who have participated in this study, it will be crucial to interrogate to what extent racial and social positions and identifications influence experiences of the power dynamics between European cultural institutions and the local arts scene.

One hypothesis of this research is that the experiences of artists, especially in South Africa, are highly racialised, class-related and dependent on educational background. It is most likely that due to the intersectionality of such experiences, other identity categories such as gender, disability or sexual orientation also play a role. The reviewed literature, however, highlights issues related to racial identification and formal educational training. Therefore, this research focuses on these two analytical categories when investigating the experiences of the interviewed practitioners. Having established this, it is useful to further interrogate the specific setting of the South African arts scene in this regard.

The late David Koloane, South African painter, provides a crucial analysis of the positionality of Black artists written from his own perspective and experience as a Black artist in South Africa during and post-Apartheid. In his drawings, paintings and collages he explores questions about political injustice and human rights, but he has also produced a number of foundational analytical texts about the South African art world in connection to the socio-political context. Koloane (2003) observes that colonialism and Apartheid have created the

> paradox of a dominant white minority enmeshed within a majority third world component […] The schism created by the policy of racial discrimination has despite the miracle of the new dispensation – Nelson Mandela's national reconstruction and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – not as yet translated into resolving the racial divide and the immense disparities (p. 119).

He maintains that these disparities also reflect in the creative sectors. While music, theatre and dance (performing arts) may seem to have achieved a certain degree of transformation in terms of the racial divide, the visual arts prove to be the artistic discipline with the least integration because of their required specialised skillset that largely depends on "educational qualifications, class and the ambience of environment" (Koloane, 2003, p.119). Koloane continues, arguing that "the majority of black practitioners are devoid of qualifications and those based in the rural areas […] often have little educational background" (2003, p. 120). He traces this back to the Bantu Education Act of 1955, which relegated Black people to an inferior level of education, the implications of which are still felt today. Therefore it is no surprise that a majority of White artists enjoy the privilege of tertiary level education not afforded by their Black counterparts (Koloane, 2003, p. 119).

Koloane (2003) further argues that only those who are affluent enough to afford the standard arts supplies will be able to produce quality painting or sculpture. Practising a visual arts profession successfully in South Africa therefore becomes a matter not only of race, but also of class. The consequences of Apartheid are not just pivotal for the individual artist, but are felt at a systemic level. Koloane explains this by discussing the availability and accessibility of vital art infrastructure, such as museums, art galleries and libraries. He ascertains that, like educational institutions, these are often located in white residential areas. Given that black residential areas, often townships, seldom have an institutionalised art infrastructure, the communities in these areas often rely on informal art centres as the only alternatives that provide a basic education in artistic disciplines and give exposure to artistic experiences (Koloane, 2003, p. 120).

Koloane (2003) also mentions that, interestingly, such centres during Apartheid depended entirely on corporate or foreign funding, with most foreign funding coming from the Scandinavian countries at that time. Other European cultural and funding institutions, such as the Goethe-Institut, only opened their South African branch offices post-Apartheid and, therefore, were not active during those years.

Apart from the unequal access to quality and tertiary education, and the lack of opportunities, Koloane also accounts for a discriminatory practice of referring to the work of artists based in urban settlements as "township art", thereby differentiating it from mainstream art which is produced by White practitioners (2003, p. 120).

As Koloane shows, the divide of the utterly different points of departure for Black artists, compared to their White peers, is extreme, but not surprising given South Africa's Apartheid history and long-prevailing discriminatory practice. It therefore can be assumed that Koloane's theses and results are still relevant today, even if his elaborations are 20 years old. Asfour and Khan (2018) more recently refer to his works and comment that his observations are still valid to date. They argue that White art and artists, as well as White-centred art education and intellectual debate about art still dominate the arts system in present-day South Africa. The following chapter contains further elaboration on their observations because they prove useful to refine the theoretical framework of this research by showing the intersectionality of White supremacy and coloniality. At this point, however, the important takeaway from Koloane's work and the demographic insights about the positionalities of South Africa's artists mark two important parameters – race and education – that build analytical categories in this research.

After having located the South African arts landscape within its specific locale, this chapter now turns to the various challenges of transcultural artistic collaboration between European and African partners, and the power dynamics inherent to such partnerships.

### 2.2.2 Power dynamics in the realm of international cultural cooperation

Finding academic work that specifically tackles the problem of cultural cooperation between European and South African partners proved difficult. This task was even more challenging where literature on the power relations between South African artists and European cultural institutions was concerned. This might point to a research gap. However, knowledge production in the arts sector is largely practice-centred, as the academic pursuit of the experiences is not necessarily central in the arts. Therefore, it is plausible that academic work around the research questions at hand is rather limited. However, arts practice offers interesting and critical inquiry as shown earlier. It therefore is reasonable and crucial to include non-academic text in the review of literature. Furthermore, drawing from experiential knowledge is part of critical research, and an experience-centred enquiry is the key method of this study. Incorporating such material, therefore, is valuable to further contextualise the research within a broader debate and experiential field.

The literature studied and presented in the following paragraphs are practical guides in the form of toolkits (van Graan, 2018 and EUNIC, 2021) and the insightful and versatile report of a symposium that explicitly discussed critical questions of cultural cooperation between European institutions and African practitioners (Kouoh, 2013).

European institutions are engaging with the issue of power relations using different approaches. The EUNIC network is a EU-funded European organisation that has recently started engaging in the question of fair collaboration in cultural relations and has commissioned a “Fair Collaboration Toolkit” that was published in 2021 (EUNIC, 2021) with the objective to investigate how fairer cultural cooperation can be achieved by EUNIC members working with local partner organisations around the globe. EUNIC also has a cluster in South Africa, which is one of over 130 worldwide. Except for Pro Helvetia, the European institutions included in this research are all part of this cluster. However, the toolkit was not designed for the South African context specifically, but rather offers tools and frameworks in order to support practitioners working in the field of cultural relations generally. At its core is a suggestion of what the pillars of fair collaboration could look like according to the research conducted:

> The initial lines of inquiry raised for this commission included (but were not limited to) equal partnerships in terms of ownership and implementation, fair remuneration, fair representation/inclusivity, language, environmental sustainability, financial sustainability, programme impact on local contexts and communities, and the sustainability of networks created (EUNIC, 2021, p. 4).

By identifying essentially what "fair" and "collaboration" mean, the report speaks to issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as the ethical dimension of cultural relations (EUNIC, 2021). It also mentions the shortfalls of globalisation, namely "the challenges of inequality and segregation; of [failed] international solidarity; and of facing the ecological dilemma" (EUNIC, 2021, p. 9). It finally touches on decolonisation as a practice that needs to become an inherent part of international relations and diplomacy, and mentions the failure of multiculturalism (2021, p. 12). However, the paper does not provide a thorough analysis of why these are questions to be considered and where these issues derive from (which also is not the objective of the toolkit).

Nevertheless, one of the questions on which the EUNIC project was based, is: "Can any collaboration be designed fairly when there is a power imbalance through funding, e.g one-source/dominant funder setting the rules?" This question is very relevant for and at the core of this research project. The toolkit used the question as a prompt and motivation for engagement rather than trying to find an answer to it. Yet, the paper is useful to get an idea of the institutions' stance on collaborative work and the surrounding challenges they have identified. What is also interesting to note is that their research draws largely on non-academic texts, such as policy papers, manifestos, charters, toolkits, and institutional think-pieces. Partially, that might be because the academic body of work surrounding the topic is not vast. It may also be because they did not aim to conduct research grounded in scholarship, the intention of their project being rather to provide a practice-based toolkit.

EUNIC, however, did not take note of a critical toolkit of this nature that already existed when they commissioned 'their' toolkit. "Beyond Curiosity and Desire: Towards Fairer International Collaborations in the Arts" (2018) was written by South African art

and cultural practitioner, scholar and playwright Mike van Graan who was commissioned by the Belgium-based, international IETM network[6] to compile a toolkit, drawing from his vast experience in international cultural cooperation. Given his positionality as a practitioner from the Global South, van Graan was a sensible choice to develop a guideline for power-sensitive cultural work. His guide points to similar issues as the EUNIC material, but is rather intended for creative practitioners from privileged backgrounds to sensitise them for issues related to unequal power relations that play out in transcultural arts projects, especially with regards to the impact of structural privileges, unequal access to resources and imbalanced power distribution among project partners. It is not particularly aimed at the relationship or collaboration between European funding institutions and local practitioners, nor is it related to the specific local context in South Africa. Nonetheless, an important insight from the guide is the intention to make any practitioner aiming to collaborate internationally or with partners across different cultural backgrounds aware that such exchange or collaboration never takes place in a power vacuum. As van Graan (2018) writes:

> Moreover, vastly different belief and value systems, traditions and worldviews inform how people think of themselves, how they make meaning within the world, and how they relate to others. Cultural and aesthetic differences, different artistic traditions together with the manifestations of inequality, bring pressures to bear on such collaborations. Against this background, and particularly when one party may be providing the lion's share of the project funding, overt or unspoken power relations have the capacity to derail the artistic collaboration or to influence its aesthetic outcomes (p. 8).

Van Graan's argument above clearly illustrates that power dynamics play an important role in the collaboration between partners.

The two reviewed toolkits demonstrate that there is an awareness of the power relations at play in transnational and transcultural collaborations, and that they need

[6] IETM – International network for contemporary performing arts is one of the oldest and largest international cultural networks, representing the voice of over 500 performing arts organisations and individual professionals working in the contemporary performing arts worldwide. (https://www.ietm.org/en/about, URL accessed 22.12.2022)

to be considered carefully by all partners involved when conceptualising and conducting projects and partnerships.

Another insightful piece of material that offers a useful discursive framework is "Condition Report: Symposium on Building Art Institutions in Africa" (Kouoh (ed.), 2013). The book contains a collection of essays from art practitioners and representatives of cultural institutions that report from a symposium held in Dakar in 2012. It was organised by Raw Material Company – Center for art, knowledge and society, in cooperation with Goethe-Institut and the German Federal Cultural Foundation. The symposium looked at issues such as space, power, funding and collaboration. Among others, it asked the questions "What are the dynamics that former colonial powers produce through their continuous strong cultural and artistic presence in post-colonial territories?" and "What potentials exist despite the political and economic environment on the continent that is characterised by setbacks and disruptions?" (Kouoh, 2013, p. 9). The publication proposes a discussion on the "pitfalls of dependence, and how these can be turned to one's advantage" (Kouoh, 2013, p 9). Many of the essays it contains, refer to collaboration within the context of foreign cultural relations. This piece of literature encompasses mainly thoughts and narratives from *African* arts practitioners and offers valuable insights to the questions posed by this research.

Karlsen (2013), one of the authors in this publication, points out that there are plenty of examples in the art world where "funding bodies predetermine artistic programmes through, say, nationality, or the instances where large-scale institutions are unwilling to question their own working methods in what are, supposedly 'collaborative' projects" (p. 85). Karlsen argues that the political power imbalance between two countries on a symbolic, financial and political level is similarly reflected in cultural cooperation. Karlsen upholds the "premise that art creates discourse, rather than art comes from discourse" (2013, p. 85). As such, she asserts, that "neither borders, nor finances, will limit these expressions" (2013, p. 85). She however argues that "artistic expressions are created and exist in this world as complex potentialities" (2013, p. 85). Furthermore, when critically examining the art system, one must draw the conclusion

that despite the inherent independence of artistic creation, borders and finances do set boundaries to creative expression. In which ways exactly remains to be determined. This research intends to provide insights into the experience of artists in this regard by asking questions around the interference of European cultural funding institutions in the local arts scene in South Africa.

"Condition Report" (Kouoh, 2013) offers some crucial leads and indications as to how this question might be answered. Several authors in the publication speak to issues of in/dependence, or rather what are commonly referred to as the 'pitfalls of dependence'. In order to examine how such dependence is created in the context of cultural and artistic production that is relevant here, 'independent practice' needs to be defined. Backer (2013) offers such a definition. She proposes that "independent" means "not [being] beholden to any individual or entity whether public or private, thereby avoiding any imposed form of censorship and enjoying full artistic freedom and intellectual control" (p. 81).

As shown in the introduction, European cultural institutions often pursue specific agendas within their mandates and, as such, enact 'soft power'. In this context, 'soft power' also relates to European institutions determining cultural and artistic programmes. This happens not only through conceptualising programmes according to their respective political agendas, but also by choosing which partners benefit from their funding and other methods of support, and by maintaining a certain practice of gatekeeping (often collaborating with the same partners and thereby giving weight to specific voices). When Backer refers to "intellectual control" as part of independence, she implies that dependence is not only created in financial terms, but also with regards to the intellectual and creative output that is produced.

Oforiatta-Ayim (2013) sees this practice as assuming *narrative authority*, which she deems problematic:

> Looking at their extensive programme of concerts, talks and exhibitions, I felt uncomfortable at the role they [foreign cultural institutions like IFAS and Goethe-Institut] were playing in shaping the cultural output of the continent, which seemed dangerously close to that of writing our narratives for us (Oforiatta-Ayim 2013, p. 123).

Simon Njami (2013), recognised as one of the most important voices and curators of African descent in the global arts sector, also critically engages the question of dependence: "Most of the time, […] these [independent art] spaces claim their intellectual and moral independence, but are far from commanding the financial autonomy that would enable them to envisage programming over the long term" (p. 24). Njami writes about the paradox that the survival and sustenance of supposed *independent* spaces relies on state funding or the "generous" support of international organisations. According to Njami, these spaces must thus find other ways of developing in order to "envisage genuine freedom of action" (2013, p. 24). Njami describes independent art organisations as "spaces of counter-power" (2013, p. 24) whose contradictory fate is to engage in a dialogue with the governments of their respective countries (or the governments of foreign countries embodied by European cultural institutions).

The question to ask is what genuine or true independence would look like. Is dependence necessarily a part of a colonial legacy and can it not be avoided? Do art practitioners accept it since they would otherwise not be able to create any work? Or would a decolonial practice in this context mean to completely disengage the dependency on governmental or foreign funds? Hence, the 'pitfalls of dependence' prove to be an important issue to look at in this research.

Additional to the issues of in/dependence, Oforiatta-Ayim (2013) voices another concern in her contribution to the report. She addresses not only the narrative power and influence European institutions hold, next to their financial potency, but also the issue of missing transparency, "or rather respect" (p. 123) as she says, in honestly communicating this power and the political agendas that determine programming. In comparing the rhetoric of such institutes with that of NGOs, she addresses one more crucial issue that is relevant in understanding the dynamics that are of interest here: that, on the African continent, governments often are "still young, still inexperienced, still learning to walk and navigate" (Oforiatta-Ayim, 2013, p. 122), and that international NGOs are trying to fill the gap by deploying foreign employees to do the job, although they are often lacking the local knowledge of languages and cultures,

and generally quite habitually live their ex-pat life completely separated from local populations. This is often the same case for employees of European cultural institutions who occupy the leadership and decision-making roles in these institutions (as opposed to the local employees), which could be interpreted as part of an institutionalised and historically grown culture of white supremacy that is demonstrated by these institutions, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and that influences decisions and behaviour.

One of the guiding inquiries of this research is to what extent the examined power relations are an expression of colonial legacies. A central premise of colonialism was the assumption that white (European) ways of doing, leading, governing, creating and meaning-making are superior to those of the indigenous people (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a, 2015, 2020; Asfour & Khan, 2018). Practices, as described above, clearly relate to such a colonial heritage and relations. Interestingly, the terms 'white supremacy' or 'coloniality' are hardly used by any of the authors in the report to describe the apparent power dynamics, which might be an indication that their ways of meaning-making are not theory- but experience-based. However, even without utilising those notions, it becomes obvious that the authors criticise the dependencies that are created by European cultural institutions, and the narrative and creative authority that they assume despite insufficient contextual and localised knowledge.

What needs to be acknowledged at this point, however, is that the issues around power dynamics are complex and multidirectional. It is not a one-way road, and the binary of the powerful institution and the powerless artist or art organisation is simplistic and therefore not useful in order to engage in a multi-layered discussion around power dynamics. The authors in this publication do address this complexity. Karlsen, for example, maintains that artists and curators indeed possess a certain power that is not given to them by any institution or authority, but that is inherent in their role. She writes that "these individuals can provoke situations through their own practices that unmake rituals and oppose powers, challenging processes that otherwise copy existing models" (2013, p. 86). Karlsen advocates for *collaboration* as a method of opposition. She insists that no one, independent curators or artists not

excluded, is operating outside the system, but rather "intrinsically implied in the structures they operate within, slowly changing them by constantly redirecting their focus from protection of interests to open curiosity" (2013, p. 86). Critically investigating power dynamics must always mean to acknowledge that power is manifold as it operates on different levels and in various ways.

### 2.2.3 Conclusion

The above provided overview constitutes the background for this research. To summarise the general direction the reviewed literature takes, a few conclusions can be highlighted.

In terms of the socio-political context and the cultural landscape in South Africa, the important takeaway that is central for this research, first of all, is the acknowledgement of the social significance of the arts sector – a crucial precondition that justifies the relevance of this study within critical social research.

Secondly, the discussion of the South African arts sector points to a commonly observed precarity of the sector and of independent arts practice in particular. *In/dependence* emerges as a central theme from the reviewed literature, both in the local South African context as well as with regards to power dynamics with foreign institutions. Key questions formulated by African practitioners revolve around the definition of 'independent' as progressive and 'alternative' in terms of programming and modes of operation, but also with regards to financial sustainability. In this context, the 'pitfalls of dependence' are highlighted by many authors as a determining factor in the relationship between African art practitioners and European cultural institutions, referring mainly to the ambiguities and compromises that go hand in hand with a relationship that relies on an unequal power balance – in financial terms and also with regards to 'narrative authority'. Furthermore, insufficient transparency regarding agendas and a lack of local knowledge on the side of European institutions are recurrent themes in the literature reviewed. Consequently, to investigate if such experiences of dependence and unequal power dynamics reflect in the narratives of the interview partners, is central in the investigation of the research findings.

Another significant conclusion is that identity categories such as race and class systematically intersect in determining South African artist's experiences in the sector that still struggles with its colonial past. The perpetuation of structural discriminatory practices and white supremacy are mirrored in the local arts sector and the situation of Black artists in particular. Given that the racial positionality of artists highly influences their practice and experiences, the assessment of artist's relationships with European institutions can only be meaningful when identity categories such as race and class are taken into account in the analysis.

Lastly, as an overall conclusion, the acknowledgement of the complexity of power dynamics and of power as multifold is integral in the literature reviewed. Thus, particular attention to the convolutions of power needs to be paid in the discussion of the research data.

The reviewed literature, however, proved to be limited in terms of the insight that it provided with specific regard to the research questions that underpin this study. Firstly, the available research and practice-based material did not explicitly investigate South African artist's experiences with European cultural institutions. Secondly, the reviewed literature largely was lacking a critical investigation of the correlations between those relationships and conditions of coloniality. This study intends to close this gap to some extent.

Given this intention, the next section discusses the theoretical foundation that serves as point of departure for the subsequent analysis.

## 2.3 Theoretical framework: Decoloniality

The framing of this study within research that is concerned with unpacking colonial legacies necessitates a thorough engagement with decolonial theory. The purpose of this section is to develop an understanding of which notion of coloniality/decoloniality underpins this research. Firstly, a brief overview of the origin of decolonial studies will be provided, followed by a discussion of the concept of decoloniality as opposed to decolonisation, with a specific focus on the South African context. Finally, this

section covers literature that applies the framing of decoloniality to the studied field of arts and culture.

### 2.3.1 Origins of decoloniality

The theoretical offerings of *decoloniality* prove extremely valuable to make sense of the above outlined complex of the skewed preconditions of colonial and Apartheid-history and subsequent institutionalised practices in the context of international cultural collaboration. Furthermore, decoloniality is not only a buzz word in today's critical scholarship, but it is increasingly used by European cultural institutions and artists to position their work and intentions.

The term 'de/coloniality' was first coined by the Latin American scholar Aníbal Quijano (Mignolo, 2009). Walter Mignolo (2007, 2009), alongside his fellow scholars Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Ramón Grosfoguel, continued working and expanding on Quijano's notion of coloniality, and to date belong to the most significant decolonial thinkers. Those thinkers were highly influential to their African peers. As Kumalo writes: "The decolonial tradition as developed by scholars of the Latin American school of thought […] has been immeasurably useful in the thinking of those situated in Africa who are treating similar questions and concerns" (2021, p. 163). African decolonial scholars (such as Ndlovu, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 2015, 2020; Mpofu, 2013) regularly base their work on the Latin American school, which is indicative of its great relevance for the (South) African discourses around coloniality and decoloniality. South African scholar Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a) notes:

> This thinking links well with the main Latin American perspective which emphasizes analyzing modernity from colonized and subaltern standpoints to reveal its enduring negative impact on the ex-colonized world. Furthermore, the Latin American perspective has already made impressive advances in unpacking complex epistemological and discursive issues that are very relevant for understanding the postcolonialism in Africa – the last part of the world to fight and defeat direct colonialism (p. xiii).

Kumalo (2021), however, cautions that decoloniality may have different meanings in different contexts and that the historical course of each place is significant for the genesis and manifestation of the concept in its respective context. Therefore the theoretical framework of this research is built on (South) African scholarship on decoloniality, but will not neglect the Latin American origins of the concept that provides important intellectual groundwork for the decolonial project. It is also significant given the fact that South American countries achieved independence from their European colonisers already in the early to mid-19th century (Devenish, 2013, p. 310), much earlier than the African countries, where this process only started in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b).

This research aims to explore if and to what extent the "colonial power matrix" (Grosfoguel, 2007) is at work in the context of the relationship between European cultural institutions and the local arts scene, and how the specific location, time, and socio-cultural context in post-Apartheid South Africa plays into that. It is therefore inevitable to take a specific (South) African lens on de/coloniality into account, which the next section will cover.

### 2.3.2 Decolonisation vs. Decoloniality: The South African case

Decolonisation in South Africa, compared to most African countries, proved a complex and lasting struggle that continues to date. Technically, South Africa declared independence from British colonial rule in 1910, but remained a self-governed territory within the British Commonwealth until 1961 (Devenish, 2013). However, the Afrikaner Nationalist government that took over in 1948 created the Apartheid state, which enforced rigorous systematic racial segregation[7] and established a rule that denied indigenous and non-White migrant populations in the country their basic rights

[7] During Apartheid, the government imposed different official racial categories which undermined and discriminated all populations designated as "non-White". The different race allocations of the Apartheid government were: "White" (persons of white European descent), "Black" (local indigenous Black Africans), "Coloured" (persons of mixed race and descendants of Malay/Indian/Mozambican slaves and prisoners), "Indian" (persons of South Asian descent that arrived as slaves in the seventeenth century and, in the second half of the nineteenth century, first as British-indentured labourers and then as merchants), and "Asian" (at one time this included Indian and Chinese, but later primarily addressed people of Chinese descent as well as "new" post-democracy Chinese, Pakistani, Indian, and Sri Lankan migrants) (Asfour & Khan, 2018, p. 187)

and, as such, freedom and liberation for decades to come. Apartheid thus continued the colonial condition, though without an external European oppressor in place. With the end of Apartheid, racial segregation ended officially as the 'Rainbow Nation' was born, but racial discrimination continues post-Apartheid and has a lasting impact on people's lives as contemporary research shows (Koloane, 2013; Asfour & Khan, 2018).

In the context of South Africa, decolonisation can thus not be conflated with the technical independence that the country gained from its former coloniser, because one unjust system was merely replaced by another. Consequently, the call for decolonisation grew louder in the years of the anti-Apartheid struggle (Kumalo, 2021) which eventually led to its collapse in 1990, after decades of resistance.

> Ultimately, and in a belated and circuitous manner, a genuine democracy in a unified and consolidated state for all the people of South Africa was to transpire. This was a negotiated process of liberation and not essentially decolonisation, and was the final stage in the historic and prolonged process for South Africa – ensuring democracy and freedom for South Africa and all its diverse people. Decolonisation is, however, a recurring constitutional and political theme in the process of change and reform in South Africa's history during the 20th century (Devenish, 2013, p. 313).

As Devenish (2013) writes, the struggle for decolonisation continues in the post-Apartheid era. He therefore distinguishes between "pseudo" and "genuine" decolonisation. More appropriate, however, would be the distinction between 'decolonisation' and 'decoloniality' as decolonial scholars like Ndlovu-Gatsheni argue. To arrive at this terminological differentiation, it is useful to first define 'coloniality' as opposed to 'colonialism'.

The concept of coloniality was introduced by the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, and further elaborated by the Argentinean decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo and others (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 487). African scholars largely draw on the definition of coloniality suggested by their Latin American peers. To clarify the difference between colonialism and coloniality, Grosfoguel (2007) proposes that

> We continue to live under the same 'colonial power matrix.' With juridical-political decolonization we moved from a period of 'global colonialism' to the current period of

> 'global coloniality.' Although 'colonial administrations' have been almost entirely eradicated and the majority of the periphery is politically organised into independent states, non-European people are still living under crude European/ Euro-American exploitation and domination. The old colonial hierarchies of Europeans versus non-Europeans remain in place (p. 219).

Although not writing about the specific setting of post-Apartheid South Africa, Grosfoguel's deliberations and reasoning are worthwhile applying to the context of this research. Drawing from the "conceptual and theoretical tools of the critical coloniality perspective" (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 7), South African scholar Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a) utilises three different analytical levels to unpack the meaning of the "neocolonisation" of Africa, which he calls, inspired by Spivak (1990) and Nkrumah (1965), the "entangled situation where the African and the Western world meet under highly racialized, hegemonic, hierarchical and unequal terms" (2013a, p. 3). The analytical tools that Ndlovu-Gatsheni proposes to unpack, understand and theorise the consequences of "neocolonisation" are: coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being (2013a, p. 3).

*Coloniality of power* refers to the articulation of the continuation of "colonial mentalities, psychologies and world views" into contemporary relationships between "Westerners and Africans" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, p. 8). These relationships are characterised by an exploitative power relation that weaves through cultural, social and political spheres. *Coloniality of knowledge* alludes to Eurocentric epistemologies that have replaced "African modes of knowing, social meaning-making, imagining, seeing and knowledge production" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, p. 8) and have since assumed a "character of objective, scientific, neutral, universal and only truthful knowledges" (p. 8). Lastly, *coloniality of being* refers to the dehumanising and depersonalising realities of colonised Africans that continue to shape people's lives until present day (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, p. 9). The lens of coloniality, through these three analytical levels, helps to understand contemporary life in (South) Africa and the various power relations at play in different social, cultural and political spheres. For that reason, Ndlovu-Gatsheni's three categories of how coloniality manifests will be utilised to examine the research findings of this study.

To sum up, decolonisation did not overcome coloniality, and the South African case is a good example to demonstrate this. As a concept, coloniality is a useful tool to unpack colonial-like power relations that still exist today. It thus offers a highly valuable analytic lens for this research, which investigates whether colonial patterns can be observed in the relationship between South African artists and European cultural institutions.

To tackle the shortcomings of decolonisation, decolonial scholars vouch for a decolonial epistemology as the most seminal and promising concept for the future of Africa. As the term decoloniality already suggests, the concept speaks to undoing, unthinking, and unlearning coloniality. In attempting to find a useful theoretical framing for decoloniality, it is valuable to consult Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a; 2013b; 2015), who emphasises in his various works that the distinguishing characteristic of decoloniality in the African context is its origin in genuine African ways of knowledge-making and meaning-making, and its neglect of "Euro-North American-centric" perspectives.

> Decoloniality is not only a long-standing political and epistemological movement aimed at liberation of (ex-) colonized peoples from global coloniality but also a way of thinking, knowing, and doing. It is part of marginalized but persistent movements that merged from struggles against the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, and underdevelopment as constitutive negative elements of Euro-North American-centric modernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 485).

In conclusion, there are two points to be made in distinguishing decoloniality from decolonisation. Decolonisation can be understood as a process – the act of the withdrawal of the colonising powers from their former colonies and the political and administrative independence those countries achieved thereafter. As shown above, this process was not successful. Decoloniality takes account of this unfinished task of decolonisation and vigorously exposes coloniality in its hidden manifestations. Decoloniality thus carries the notions of both a continued *process* of unlearning, unmasking and contesting the "Eurocentric domineering epistemologies on Africa"

(Mpofu, 2013, p. 105), and can also be viewed as a *state of being* that represents the future vision of a liberated Africa.

Having established an understanding of coloniality and decoloniality, the theoretical point of departure of this research project is attained. Taking forward Ndlovu-Gatsheni's notion of decoloniality as a liberatory "way of thinking, knowing, and doing", and embedding it in the context of this research, the following section will further unpack its meaning – looking at the spheres of arts, culture and academia which are relevant for this study.

### 2.3.3 Decoloniality in South African arts and academia

This section addresses how decolonial theory is utilised by South African researchers in the spheres of arts and academia. Critical scholarship on decoloniality (Kumalo, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2020; Mpofu, 2013) speaks to the fact that decoloniality can only be achieved when it emanates from the realms of the soft powers, such as culture and academia (Ndlovu, 2018; Kumalo, 2021). As Ndlovu-Gatsheni asserts, "this is because the domains of culture, the psyche, mind, language, aesthetics, religion, and many others have remained colonized" (2015, p. 485). Consequently, the spheres of arts and culture need to engage in the decolonial enterprise. In (South) Africa, numerous scholars and cultural activists have committed in this endeavour already (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Asfour & Khan, 2018; Muyanga, 2019; Kumalo, 2021), which the following examples will illustrate.

Musician and scholar Neo Muyanga (2019) speaks to a central theme in decolonial thinking, which is to undo the colonial habits of infantilising and undermining indigenous knowledges and practices and assuming superiority and finesse of Western or Euro-North American-centric techniques and skills – especially in the realms of music, arts and art education.

> after doing research i realized that there are not enough examples, at all, that show african music in its beauty in an arts program. there are still a lot of words, and very strong ones, that talk of ominousness when looking at indigenous knowledge, they see it as dull and poor. western music is still the one that is taught with vigour in the arts

> programs here at home. but that is not how it should be, that we leave things as they are, not caring about african music but on the other hand we keep saying we want to undo the damage and cruelty that was caused by the discriminatory laws of the past years (Muyanga, 2019).

A crucial question that Muyanga and others address is if decolonial arts, culture and scholarship should not only incorporate a non-Western-centric canon and methodology, but should also be written, presented, and taught in indigenous African languages – rather than in English or other colonial languages as the prevailing mediums of communication.

The question of language is, in fact, one of the key questions of decoloniality. Citing Kunene (1992), Kumalo (2021) asserts that "[…] the idea of language imposition as a strategy of power and political control must be kept in mind as a crucial political and social question" (p. 162). One of the persistent challenges for the decolonial project is the ominousness of English and other colonial languages that continue to function in service of white supremacy. Therefore, one of the principal premises of the decolonial project is to bring indigenous languages to the fore. For decades, authors like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) have advocated for linguistic decolonisation and stressed the crucial role of language in constructing cultures, histories and identities.

The revolutionary project of decolonising language also manifests in the sphere of the visual arts. In this relation, Asfour and Khan (2018) make a crucial point about "Whitespeak" in the arts. The authors demonstrate how Western language and Eurocentric notions of art ultimately determine the whole South African art sector. They argue that "White colonial values that are located in 'arts' education systems are still based on foundational European colonial-modernity discourses (with all of their racial and ethnic biases)" (Asfour & Khan, 2018, p. 189). Critically highlighting the dominance of "White European settler values" that continue to permeate "artistic value systems and related artistic discourses" (Asfour & Khan, 2018, p. 190), the authors make a case for a necessary change in the South African art world. They argue that the "White habitus determines the social practice of the art fields not just through a determination of what is art, but also importantly through 'structuring structures'"

(Asfour & Khan, 2018, p. 190). Thereby they point out how deeply intertwined white supremacy is with coloniality – especially in South Africa. Consequently, they propose that a decolonised art system will only be achieved if it is based on genuinely Black African art definitions and value systems, and when an appreciation and acknowledgement of Black African art in its own right and on its own terms takes place.

The question that Asfour and Khan's (2018) suggestion provokes with regards to this research, is whether a collaboration between South African arts practitioners and European cultural institutions can ever be 'decolonised' given the fact that European institutions, via their 'job description', represent 'white colonial/European values'. Muyanga's (2019) and wa Thiong'o's (1986) elaborations on how a decolonised arts practice, arts education and language can be achieved, further complicate this question, which remains to be answered in chapter four, but is mentioned here as it points to how the theoretical framework will be applied to this research project.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter charted the terrain by providing an overview of current debates and literature in the studied field. In the second section, the theoretical framework that underpins this research was introduced.

As the study investigates to what extent colonial legacies play out in the dynamic between South African arts practitioners and European cultural institutions, a number of examples of how decolonial theory is applied to the sphere of arts and culture provides a direction regarding which particular dynamics and concepts have to be paid attention to in the analysis.

In order to answer the research questions that underpin this study, the outlined theoretical framework helps to discuss and analyse the research findings, utilising an analytical lens that particularly focuses on markers of coloniality that emerge from the interviews. The theoretical paradigm also informs the methodological approach of this research, which will be presented in the following chapter.

# CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline a methodological framework that translates the critical decoloniality approach of this study into an operational tool for analysis. The following sections introduce the chosen methodological approach, which is Narrative Analysis, and discuss its suitability and limitations with regards to this research. Subsequently, the data collection technique and the interpretative framework will be explained, followed by a discussion of ethical considerations.

## 3.2 Methodological approach: Narrative Analysis

This study is particularly interested in the experiences of South African art practitioners and their perspectives on their relationship with European cultural institutions. The research therefore focuses on how South African artists assess their experiences of collaborating with these institutions and how they frame their experiential knowledge in their narratives.

Squire (2008) asserts that narratives are a way of meaning-making as they transfer and value experience-based knowledge and allow the expression of dynamic subjectivities and the revelation of multiple truths (p. 19). Narratives therefore provide a suitable data source to investigate the complexities of the research problem at hand.

In social research, however, there is a broad variety of methods to identify, observe and analyse experiences at different levels of social interaction, such as Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1994; Malagon et al, 2009), Critical Discourse Analysis (Cervera et al, 2006; Janks, 1997), or Thematic Analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In the case of this research project, an experienced-centred approach to Narrative Analysis (Squire, 2008) has been chosen as the method best suited to achieve the research goal. Given the theoretical foundation of this research in decolonial theory, Narrative Analysis proves particularly appropriate because of its power-sensitive properties.

Narrative Analysis is a widely used, multifaceted, qualitative research method that allows for the exploration of both micro and macro levels of personal and contextual

information, taking into account that narratives often shift between personal meaning-making and collective histories (Squire, 2008; Botsis & Bradbury, 2018, p. 413).

Squire (2008) notes that "some experience-centred researchers view narratives as representing, fairly transparently, both experience and the realities from which it derives" (p. 6), which enables the researcher to draw conclusions about particular life experiences and embed the findings in the respective social, cultural, historical and political contexts in order to relate them to broader social issues (Boonzaier & Van Schalkwyk, 2011, p. 271).

Moreover, the researcher learns about the interview partners' contextual identities and positions in relation to categories of power and how these function in the specific contexts (Boonzaier & Van Schalkwyk, 2011, p. 282), all of which are significant properties with regard to the research project at hand.

### 3.3 Data collection: Experience-centred interviews

To obtain narratives of South African artists, semi-structured experience-centred interviews with six South African art practitioners were conducted. Rabionet (2011) points out that "qualitative interviewing is a flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experience" (p. 563). Semi-structured interviewing was thus chosen as the most appropriate data collection technique to obtain original narratives that elicit particular experiences (Squire, 2008, p. 9). A semi-structured approach allows for sufficient autonomy of the interview partners[8] in telling their stories within their own meaning frames, and prevents imposing the researcher's authority in the interview process (Boonzaier & Van Schalkwyk, 2011), which is one of the ethical considerations that this research bears in mind, specifically with regards to power dynamics ingrained in the interviewer-interviewee hierarchy that this interview technique balances.

[8] This research does explicitly use the term 'interview partner' or 'expert' instead of the conventional term 'participant' as it assumes the interviewed experts as conversational and co-thinking partners who contribute their expertise and knowledge to the research on eye-level. The researcher–participant relationship implies a hierarchy and power dynamic, which this research actively seeks to dismantle. The chosen terminology is part of this power-critical practice.

In order to enable mutual agency between researcher and interview partners, Boonzaier and Van Schalkwyk suggest a "free-flowing narrative method of interviewing that ensures that the research endeavor [is] not dominated by the researcher's meaning frame" (2011, p. 272). The strong emphasis on the interview partners' agency in narrative research is an important asset compared to more standardised forms of research.

The interview partners were chosen by way of purposeful sampling based on their profiles as experts with at least ten years of professional experience in the independent arts sector in South Africa and abroad, and their experience in collaborating with European institutions such as Goethe-Institut, Pro Helvetia, British Council and/or Institut Français. An additional criterion in the sampling process was to obtain a racially diverse sample, given that being an artist in South Africa is a racialised experience. The sample of interview partners therefore needed to represent both, black/BPOC and white identifying artists. The ratio of racial identifications among the six interview partners who agreed to participate in the research is: two identified as black, two as persons of colour, one as white, and one who did not allocate himself to a race category. The gender proportion is: three women, two men, and one identifying as non-binary.

The interview partners were drawn from the professional and personal network of the researcher and by way of snowball sampling. The six persons that accepted the invitation to participate in this study are all trained artists and/or art producers. Four of them widely shared their experiences with European institutions from their perspectives as representatives of South African art organisations, rather than sharing about their experiences as individual artists. One interview participant spoke in her double role as representative of the British Council and local practitioner. Two interview partners, Ashraf Johaardien (playwright, actor, CEO of Business and Arts South Africa) and Mike van Graan (playwright, cultural policy adviser) did not choose to remain anonymous, and therefore their clear names are used, while the other four interview partners are represented by aliases.

Four interviews were conducted in person and two online via zoom. All sessions were audio-recorded with prior permission of the interview partners. The interview protocol was developed using three different interview segments (as per Galletta, 2013). The opening segment includes an introduction to the research purpose and is crucial for the process because it provides the initial narrative on which the interview builds in a reciprocal manner, understood as a confidential exchange of information and ideas. The middle segment offers the opportunity for the researcher to probe deeper into some aspects mentioned by the interview partners, drawing from the newly gained insights in order to obtain nuances and broader contextual levels. Finally, the concluding segment provides the opportunity to the interview partners to reconsider their statements and to engage in clarification, meaning-making and critical reflection (Galletta, 2013, pp. 48-52).

The interview questionnaire that guided each interview includes a set of adaptable key questions that enables the researcher to carefully deepen thematic exploration as significant topics evolve throughout each narrated interview. As per the semi-structured interview technique, the types of questions are varying in their open-endedness and specification, in order to "elicit data grounded in the experience of the participant as well as data guided by existing constructs in the particular discipline within which one is conducting research" (Galletta, 2013, p. 45). These guidelines in mind, the interview questionnaire is informed by the research objectives, as well as the theoretical framework. As per Galletta's (2013) suggestion, a pilot interview was conducted to field-test the questionnaire. The pilot testing helped to revise and refine the phrasing of questions, as well as their order and usefulness. This pilot, however, gathered so much useful information that it was included in the analysis.

### 3.4 Data analysis and interpretative frame

The primary procedural approach applied in the interpretation of the data is the extraction of emergent themes and thematic patterns (codes) by way of reading and unpacking the collected material carefully and thoroughly (Squire, 2008). This process is iterative, meaning that the data analysis is carried out in a cyclical procedure by

repeatedly referring back to the data and checking the evolving interpretations against the gathered information (Galletta, 2013, p. 119; Squire, 2008, pp. 10-11). As the data collection process generates a great volume of material and, accordingly, a richness of meanings, it is imperative for the analysis that the identification of themes or thematic patterns maintains a clear relation to the research questions (Galletta, 2013). Therefore, the rigorous and transparent documentation of the evolving interpretive process and the derived codes, their origin, the ideas they carry, and how they are related to other codes, is crucial for the analysis (Galletta, 2013, pp. 122-124). The extracted themes were then explored theoretically by embedding them within the specific South African context and the theoretical framework of decoloniality, which provides the analytical categories for this investigation.

Despite its advantages, Narrative Analysis poses challenges that need to be addressed. The approach is characterised by a theoretical and methodological diversity that has been criticised for making it difficult to establish a clear-cut definition and to formulate tangible methodological guidelines. Squire (2008) highlights this ambiguity by asserting that "analysing the meanings of experience-centred narratives is a […] controversial project" (p. 10). The main challenge – and most contested area – lies in developing a comprehensible interpretive frame as the risk of making prescriptive assumptions and using non-transparent criteria while interpreting the data is relatively high (Squire, 2008). Squire also states that the whole method, especially its outcome and interpretations, are highly dependent on the researcher's stance, which imposes a limitation on the understanding and interpretation of the stories told (2008, pp. 10-13). The threat of blending personal biases into the interpretative frame requires the researcher's heightened awareness of issues such as positionality, as well as situational and structural power dynamics.

In light of these challenges, the interpretative frame for this research was carefully developed, drawing from a thorough and critical review of relevant practice-based literature, and informed by the theoretical concept of de/coloniality, particularly the critical decolonial epistemology as developed by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015). This epistemology centres genuine African ways of meaning-making and knowledge-

making that are aimed at liberating "(ex-) colonized peoples from global coloniality" (p. 485). Decoloniality, Ndlovu-Gatsheni explains, is "a way of thinking, knowing, and doing" (2015, p. 485). The methodological and analytical frame of this research is inspired by this paradigm of unpacking, undoing, unthinking, and consequentially unlearning coloniality. In accordance with this principle, the analytical categories were not pre-defined based on the literature and concepts reviewed during this research, but they derive directly from the data collected in order to give emphasis to the interview partners' themes and perspectives.

### 3.5 Ethical considerations and self-reflexivity

To ensure the provision of a safe space for the interview partners in this research, all necessary ethics protocols were observed. Informed consent, identity protection and confidentiality were guaranteed. The consent form ensured that the interview partners understood their rights, including the right not to answer a particular question, to end the interview or to withdraw from the study at any given point in the research process. The consent form also assured each research participant that the information shared would be handled with strict confidence.

However, complying with ethics protocol alone does not guarantee that ethical considerations are deeply grounded in the research methodology. Implementing a decolonial methodology and a critical social research paradigm in fact also demand a critical reflection of the challenges that are implied in the traditional distribution of power and knowledge between researcher and interview partners. This means exposing how power operates and choosing a research methodology that intentionally counters the perpetuation of unequal relationships, and avoids reproducing dominant or binary ways of thinking and making sense of the world. Reflexivity, in this regard, looks at the research activities and the relationship between the researcher and her interview partners in order to locate potential interference, which, as Galletta (2013) points out, "is likely to alter the data and interpretation. Reflexivity requires the researcher to be vigilant, always anticipating ways in which research methods and ethics may be compromised" (p. 104).

Lather (1991) remarks that critical researchers necessarily need to develop a practice of "self-reflexivity that will enable [them] to look closely at [their] own practice in terms of how [they] contribute to dominance in spite of [their] liberatory intentions" (p. 15). A main challenge in this regard, and given the investigated subject matter, is the researcher's positionality as an employee, and therefore a representative, of the Goethe-Institut, which is one of the European institutions that are subject to this study. On the one hand, this grants the researcher valuable insight while, on the other hand, the personal involvement in the power dynamics in question carries the risk of influencing the analysis. It is likely that the positionality of the researcher affects the outcome of the interviews and the analysis to some extent because of several aspects. Firstly, the researcher as representative of a German funding institution holds a certain power, for example with regards to funding decisions. This power might distort the researcher–interview partner relationship. Secondly, as an employee of this institution, she might be inclined to present her employer in a good light. Thirdly, as a white middle-class person of German nationality, she holds a structural privilege that represents colonial continuities and directly derives from white supremacy.

The acknowledgement of these aspects is part of a critical research practice, which refrains from assuming a 'neutral' position that makes the positionality of the researcher invisible in the research process. In overcoming the challenges related to the researcher's positionality, interview partners were carefully chosen, and none of whom have had a direct professional engagement with the researcher. The researcher approached the interviews with humility and in the spirit of wanting to learn, given that she was speaking to experts who have a vast experience and profound in-depth knowledge accrued over many years. The interview partners also explicitly stated their willingness and motivation to participate in the research in appreciation of the research topic and given the chance to shed more light on the questions at hand.

Moreover, and in spite of its above-mentioned challenges, one of the unequivocal strengths of the chosen methodology is to include such ethical considerations that aim at balancing the interviewer-interviewee hierarchy. Boonzaier and Van Schalkwyk (2011) argue that the narrative methodology emphasises the interview partners'

agency and allows them to voice their experiences within their own meaning frames (p. 267), which is why it was chosen. In order to further balance the power relationship between researcher and interview partners, the interview partners were invited to check the analysis and interpretations. This invitation, however, was not accepted by the interview partners, who instead placed confidence in the researcher to derive her own conclusions. The impression was that all interview partners spoke from a place of expertise and confidence and no one expressed feelings of self-censorship, vulnerability, intimidation, or fear of negative consequences while contributing to this research. The participation in this study was the free will and choice of the interview partners, and no one withdrew from the research process at any point.

It must be acknowledged, however, that an examination of power relations always contains levels of resistance and discomfort on both sides as the intention is to get to the details of what informs and shapes such relations, and to unpack the inherent complexities. Ultimately, any social research remains ambiguous to a certain degree. As Steyn (2015) suggests, using a privileged position to support marginalised truths and contribute to their visibility, is part of a critical research practice. Acknowledging her privileged positionality, it was the intention of the researcher to act as an ally and respectively shape this research in a spirit of solidarity.

## 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methodology that informs this research, clarified why it was chosen despite its inherent challenges, and described how the research was conducted. It explained, in detail, how participants were chosen and how data were collected and analysed by the researcher. The ethical considerations that apply to the research were discussed, highlighting challenges with regards to power distribution between researcher and interview partners, and the researcher's positioniality, and concluding that Narrative Analysis is an appropriate research tool to tackle such power dynamics. The next chapter presents and analyses the collected data.

# CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

> "I think within South Africa, there's an inevitable challenge of trying to do decolonial work with European institution funding." (Mandisa)

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research results and explores the extent to which the "colonial power matrix" (Grosfoguel, 2007) is at work in the interplay between European cultural institutions and the local arts scene in South Africa. It looks at how the specific context, as well as the positionality of the interview partners play into that. The analytic process itself is inductive, focusing on the experiences that the interview partners shared and, from there, arriving at thematic codes and their interpretations. The voices of the interview partners remain principal throughout the analysis. It is imperative for the analysis, however, that the identification of themes or thematic patterns maintains a clear and close relation to the research questions that underpin this study. It is therefore useful to remind the reader of these questions:

- To what extent is the power dynamic between South African artists and European cultural institutions influenced by colonial legacies?
- Are the experiences of artists in this context shaped by the intersectionality of different identities / positionalities, such as race and class?
- Do European cultural institutions in South Africa meet the needs of the local arts scene, or does a desire for transformation surface in the interview partners' stories?

The research questions provide the point of departure for the analysis and inform the analytical categories and thematic codes derived from the interview narratives. The analysis pays particular attention to how power dynamics are expressed in the narratives. Thus, the investigation of the manifestations of power is interwoven in each of the categories, which provide the structure for this chapter.

## 4.2 Relationship building

Since this analysis investigates the relationship between art practitioners and European cultural institutions, the starting point is to look at how relationships are built in the first place. From the interviews, several recurring themes surface that are related to different aspects of relation-building. The most outstanding is the *human factor* aspect, referring to the individuals working in the European institutions. As individual employees are the point of entry for the practitioners, they describe their relationship and the dynamics with those institutions as highly dependent and varying, based on the individuals and the positions they currently hold within the institution:

> A lot of these relationships that one has with these institutions are less institutional than they are personal. You've got these institutions that exist in order to do particular forms of work, but it really is on the basis of relationship that one might have with a particular individual within these institutions that these institutions come to be partners. (Mike)

Most striking in the narratives is the emphasis on the fact that foreign decision-makers who are deployed by their respective countries usually only stay for a period of four to five years, and with every change in leadership or personnel, the programmatic direction and approach shifts according to the particular person's individual agendas, skillsets, experiences, and knowledge. It was positively noted that some individuals are "very committed and involved and did the research, and formed the relationships very actively" (Mike), but on the other hand left behind a vacuum when they left the country, which implies a negative shift and means practitioners have to start building their relation anew every time the staff changes. Some interview partners are frustrated about this fact and describe the process as labour-intensive and not leading to fruitful, stable, and long-lasting partnerships. Mike comments: "It's almost making you feel like you're not making progress."

Another aspect that all interview partners stress, are the different levels of knowledge of the South African arts scene and its needs, which are existent in these institutions and depend on the people who currently work there. Some European institutes, such as British Council and Pro Helvetia, were pointed out by the interview partners as

having a particularly high ratio in local staff who are knowledgeable with regards to the local context, which is evaluated as very helpful. Isla accounts from her experience:

> The director of the project […] is a South African who was working there [at Pro Helvetia]. And so I felt very supported. I felt this programmes officer really understood the nature of the project and was very supportive of it. […] So there was this sense of, 'Yeah, we've encountered these issues before. We understand things.'

This statement shows how the experience of the partnership was amplified because the individual project coordinator in the institution was able to offer appropriate support, expertise, and understanding of the local specifics, which helped the project thrive.

In another instant, collaborating with Pro Helvetia, Isla recalls a positive and valuable experience, which she attributes to the fact that

> there were South African programme coordinators, and I think they had a South African director. So there was a strong South African team there at the time, and all of those guys are just super solid. […] I don't know if it was the organisation that was easy to work with, or if it was the programmers that were easy to work with. Which is also a thing in the arts industry, right? You can have the same organisation but different leaders will inspire different results.

The level of familiarity with the local scene does not only impact the quality of the relations and the projects that emanate from it, but the interview partners also recognise the fact that the relation varies in terms of power dynamics if they are working with South African peers as opposed to foreigners. Subsequently, it is significant whether the particular institution allows South Africans to fill in senior positions with decision-making power or not. Mandisa comments:

> The British Council […] have the most local staff. So the dynamic is quite different in that sense that you're working not with someone from another country […] who's a professional sort of representative moving from country to country. But you're working with people who are from here and often from the art sector themselves. That is a very different dynamic. […] I think the dynamics, the kind of hierarchical dynamics, also differ. Obviously all of these places that have local offices have some local people. But for example, at Goethe-Institut, those people are very

> junior. Whereas in Pro Helvetia and British Council, they're very senior. They can make the decisions about where the money goes.

Some interview partners also highlight that their relationship with the institutions not only depends on the insider capacities, professional skill and contextual knowledge of the employees, but also on the *political agendas* of staff members in the institutions. Interview partners cite differing experiences on how this impacts on their relations. Mandisa notes positively with regards to more South Africans taking on positions in European cultural institutions:

> In the British Council, people join with a kind of political agenda at a kind of recognition of their insider capacities, […] and they take on the jobs for that purpose. Which of course is less the case if someone is from somewhere else.

Mandisa's comment refers to the political agenda of a staff member correlating with their descent and embeddedness or identification within the specific locale. In her view, a South African has a different personal motivation and a more political agenda in the pursuit of their work within the institution than a foreigner.

Apart from professional competence and local embeddedness as determining factors, one interview partner stresses *emotional intelligence* as another aspect that enhances or complicates relationships, especially with regards to colonial legacies that the institutions carry and that demand staff to responsibly and sensitively deal with the issues that arise from the historic responsibility. Personnel choices in this regard are paramount. Mandisa describes Goethe-Institut's decision to send inexperienced and insufficiently informed people to former colonies such as Namibia as "really strange":

> That is a good example of sending slightly dumb people. And why you would send them to former colonies? […] It's like sending a little sheep into the wolves, and that for me really doesn't make sense when you have such an ethical responsibility in that context.

Historical awareness and sensibility, as well as knowledge with regards to colonial heritage, plays into the emotional intelligence that Mandisa deems significant in terms of how relations evolve with staff members who represent the institutions. In a similar line of thought, but with regards to the precarious socio-economic situation that South African artists often find themselves in, Simphiwe explains:

> Those people who help and support, who represent the institutions, you have invited some of them to your houses. They know the situation. They know where you come from. But still, […] these individuals that represent and work for the institution, I don't think they're educated enough about the sensibility.

This is related less to knowledge of the local arts scene than to knowledge of the socio-economic circumstances of a majority of people in South Africa, and that a person from abroad, especially the Global North, might not be sufficiently sensitive towards.

Ashraf, however, notes a positive shift with regards to personnel decisions that European institutions are making:

> New practitioners are coming into some of the foreign agencies with a more open mind and coming in wanting to co-create and collaborate.

In conclusion, the *human factor* component is decisive when it comes to building, maintaining and developing partnerships with European cultural institutions and refers to the professional and personal features of the staff members that the interview partners deal with. The quality and nature of these partnerships, according to the interview partners, is determined by individual agendas, capabilities and their insider or outsider positionality in the local art scene, as well as by hierarchical structures within the institution.

### 4.3 Colonial legacies

The second analytical category that was identified and relates closely to the main research question is *colonial legacies*. As Maldonado-Torres observes, "coloniality survives colonialism" (in Mignolo, 2009, p. 6), and this reflects through culture. One of the interview partners, Mike, underscores this idea when he says:

> So the point is that in this structurally unjust world, where hard power is exercised through politics, economics and the military, *culture* plays a very important role […] It's about whose values, whose way of seeing the world, whose understanding of human rights is the correct one, is the hegemonic one. […]. And if that is the context, then it has to do with coloniality in a very deep way.

Culture is a sphere where coloniality surfaces. Mike emphasises the profound impact of culture as *soft power* by stressing its crucial role in maintaining and deepening coloniality. As this research locates itself within the cultural sphere, the interview narratives were closely scanned for indicators of coloniality that derive from the experiences of the interview partners. These indicators were defined drawing from Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2013a) analytical levels of coloniality – which are *coloniality of power*, *coloniality of knowledge* and *coloniality of being* – and are based on the themes that were identified in the narratives.

### 4.3.1 Extractivism

One theme that recurrs in the interview partners' narratives is the issue of *extractivism* or exploitation, related to how the European institutions approach the partnership and how they determine the value of artists, artistic projects or cultural products.

> As we all know, when outsiders see something of value, then the tendency is for that to be exploited. So it's a fine line. We want to be seen, but we also don't want to be exploited. (Isla)

As opposed to a balanced give-and-take relationship, some respondents report an imbalance in terms of who benefits on which levels from the partnership in their experience. Isla explains that the institutions "get a lot more than they pay for". She relates this to the labour, networks and relationships that she invests as artistic partner in a project, while the institution does not do a lot of the groundwork, but profits in terms of its visibility and perceived engagement.

> I'm not saying the money is unhelpful, it's great, but often there's this sense, we'll give you 30 grand, which you're grateful for, but then […] they get a lot. They get their logo out there; they get to put it in their programmes list; they get to look like they are very active and busy on these projects. And possibly sometimes they are. […] But other times it really is just a logo. There's not a lot of groundwork that the actual office people are doing. (Isla)

Isla's account alludes to a certain risk attached to partnerships in terms of the partners' investments, which in her view seems higher for the artist than the institution. It is also a question of how value is being measured, and how much the monetary value

that is invested in a project or partnership weighs, compared to the idealistic, artistic, or social benefit the project generates.

Alice calls this process "intellectual mining". In her view, the dynamic between the European institutions and the artist or art organisation they collaborate with often leads to

> a mining of intellectual property, intellectual thought, intellectual conversation, but also cultural experience.

The analogy used alludes to extractivist industrial and capitalist practices such as mineral mining, one of the most efficient colonial strategies to pull resources from the colonies in order to fuel the growth of the metropole's economy and wealth. Using *mining* as a metaphor for draining intellectual resources from the host country is a strong allegory to express frustration about a process that clearly generates a lopsided relationship.

On a more general note, referring to the capitalist mentality of colonial powers, Ashraf remarks that the South African art world is

> deeply entrenched in a colonial kind of mind-set in that way that it's built very much on Western-Eurocentric capitalist constructs, which are not endemic to how arts and culture live naturally on the continent and in South Africa.

Ashraf's comment does not refer to a colonial legacy experienced in the direct interaction with European institutions, but is more a general analysis of the colonial inheritance that the South African arts sector carries. However, some interview partners report their experienced relationship with the European institutions as encompassing extractivist and exploitative traits, which point to colonial heritage.

### 4.3.2 Imparting knowledge

Another indicator of coloniality that the interviewed experts cite in their narratives, is the common practice of *imparting knowledge*, which closely relates to the colonial key premise of *assumed* European intellectual superiority and supremacy of skill. Though the responses of the interview partners that relate to the hierarchical

relationship of *teacher-learner* are linked to past experiences, and a change of this dynamic was acknowledged more recently, the top-down paradigm of a European institution coming to teach the local community is deeply entrenched in a colonial tradition and closely relates to Ndlovu-Gatsheni's *coloniality of knowledge*. Alice accounts:

> Maybe four or five years ago, it seemed to me that the model of cultural relations or exchange agencies, especially those that really forefront or foreground the bilateral relationship, the mechanism used to be quite traditional in that it used to be very much representative organisation like the UK coming into local country and either imparting knowledge, imparting skills, giving workshops, doing some sort of development capacity building, training or initiative.

In this context, Ashraf notes that the coloniality lies in "believing that you have the answer" and superimposing this understanding on others. They account for an experience related to a collaboration between a South African University and the British Council. The project was about fostering young playwrights in South Africa.

> The British Council insisted that their contribution be used to bring British playwrights out to South Africa to teach them how to write plays. So therein lies everything that was wrong […] I find that deeply problematic.

This example reflects a common practice of European institutions. Regardless of the intentions in these instances, the question is what this practice reveals about underlying paradigms and how deeply entrenched they are in colonial practices. Even if the intention is a good one, the idea alone that young South African playwrights should learn from their British peers, and not the other way around, is problematic.

Alice, however, comments that

> this double-speak of teacher/learner/imparter [is] a lazy narrative to necessarily assume. I think it's a lot deeper than that.

She does not further elaborate her comment, but indicates that there is a complexity that needs more unpacking. She also notes that this model seems outdated and "combusted on itself".

> I know from a South African point of view, that [the teacher-learner] narrative certainly was rejected by many of us working in the cultural space […]. So it just didn't work.

The recent development in bilateral or multilateral cultural cooperation seems to have taken account of this critique. Lately, more institutions have committed to the reverse approach by facilitating South-North and South-South exchanges, taking account of the idea of mutual learning and sharing knowledge that 'cultural exchange' actually implies (Paschalidis, 2009, p. 284).

### 4.3.3 Narrative authority

A further theme that emerges from the narratives and speaks to the analytic category of colonial legacies is *narrative authority*, which suggests a power in determining cultural outputs that ultimately emanate as narratives from (South) Africa. Often, these narratives are closely connected to the respective agendas that European institutions pursue, and that are decided "very far away from my context", Isla remarks.

> There is that sense that someone has already pre-decided for you what kind of themes you're going to cover. […] It feels to me like someone somewhere […] makes a decision about what's on the agenda. And then that stuff trickles down to the people on the ground. And we go, okay, now we need to make a play about climate change. Even if you haven't been doing that ever. But you're an artist who's desperate to make work, and you've got opportunities for this European funding, but you have to make something about climate change. And you're like, 'Oh, I better make something'. […] If you had given us […] that budget with no strings, would we have made a show about climate change? Probably not. It's a tricky space […] If you had given me that money just to be an artist, just to make a play, in my style, in my medium, in my genre, would I have chosen to make that play about […] climate change? Probably not.

Isla's narration touches on many aspects that contribute to the complexities of the investigated relationship and power dynamic. In terms of *narrative authority* as an emergent theme in the interviews, her experience is a good example of how the underlying agenda of the institution pre-defines the narratives/themes/stories that subsequently emanate from the South African art scene. Therein lies significant power: to determine and frame what the discourses are, in a top-down manner, instead of investigating what themes, questions or interests drive the local scene.

Other interview partners likewise emphasise their experiences of adapting to the agendas or discourses as defined by the respective country's foreign policy.

> And so within the African continent, we will in fact almost never be party to those policy discussions. So there is always a policy made elsewhere. And yet, these things were supposed to happen in the form of partnerships. My experience has always been, that we would then on the African continent need to panel-beat our projects, which might be the same project, but we would need to reframe it in terms of the new discourse. (Mike)

> You get some group of people in Germany to develop a curriculum as if somehow they're going to magically know what is needed. (Mandisa)

Ashraf notes that those agendas often are

> not necessarily aligned to the [host] country's needs but more so to the agency's needs, which can sometimes be a little bit missionary in terms of what they think they can bring as expertise, which can be problematic because South Africa has quite a deep and robust creative and cultural history.

In terms of pre-defined agendas and themes, Mandisa recalls a conference about decolonisation that the Goethe-Institut held in Cameroon, and her impression is that engaging with this concept on the side of the organisers seems more like a "clever career move" because "decolonisation had become a big thing in Germany", than an honest and serious engagement with the questions surrounding decolonisation. Mandisa doubts that the institution really "cared" and thus questions the motivation behind choosing this thematic focus.

Apart from pursuing a particular political agenda that then affects the cultural output of the host country, European institutions, according to the interview partners' accounts, also hold narrative authority by occupying an active role in shaping the cultural landscape of South Africa. One means of achieving this is through funding. Mandisa states that the extent to which the institutions wield influence depends greatly on budgets:

> I think there was a period when Goethe-Institut was incredibly influential about who did what. Because they had the most money and they had more money by a large mile. So they were doing a lot more work. […] So they have big projects, and they're selecting who gets to be part

> of them and kind of driving a lot more of the conceptual framing. […] I think there was a period […] when British Council became quite influential cause they had big budgets. […] when there's big money, that definitely has an impact.

Another way of impacting on the South African scene is through providing space, especially since it is rare. This is positively noted by all interview partners, but for Mandisa, there is also a negative connotation connected to taking up space:

> I think the other thing that becomes quite influential, that I assume is partly why Goethe-Institut has opened LAPA[9] now after closing the space in Maboneng, is that because there are so few project spaces in Johannesburg and there's so few open exhibition spaces, those spaces become quite vital. […] The Goethe space at Maboneng for a while was showing really good shows. And […] it wasn't because people wanted to go to Goethe-Institut, but because there weren't really other spaces with that kind of infrastructural support […]. So that's definitely influential.

Another way of wielding influence and exerting narrative power, whether intentional or not, is a practice that Mandisa refers to as "gatekeeping" which she observes in her experiences, mainly with the Goethe-Institut. She describes this as a problematic practice by the institution that chooses a certain individual whom they support substantially and repeatedly. In doing so, the institution not only determines whose (international) visibility is boosted, but also forfeits the chance to invest more widely in the local infrastructure, subsequently fueling the precarity of the sector:

> The other thing that I think is very influential, is that […] they pick people, they pick individuals, and then they pump into individuals. And suddenly an individual is very present and very involved in a lot of projects, then they're moving internationally and become quite visible. I think that can be very influential about who gets in and who doesn't, and I think can be quite dangerous as a kind of gatekeeping model. And I'm not sure it's always intentional. For example, there was a point when I was being asked by the Goethe-Institut to do things that had nothing to do with me, like facilitate a programme in Rwanda on migration. And I was like, 'I know nothing about migration, […] there's definitely somebody else who would be better at this.' But they do this thing of picking a person and then investing in that person's visibility quite substantially. (Mandisa)

[9] LAPA is a collaborative art residency space that Goethe-Institut opened in 2021 in Johannesburg's Brixton neighbourhood.

The epistemological and discursive power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a) that *narrative authority* implies, is part of the colonial power matrix (Grosfoguel, 2007) at play in this context. This mechanism sometimes works more subtly, other times more overtly, as several interview partners remark with regards to the French model of cultural cooperation and the respective concept of the Institut Français on the African continent. Mandisa comments:

> This is definitely the most evident in francophone Africa, where the Institut Français is often really powerful and influential […] the Institut Français in Dakar is just massive […] they run the scene. […] so the Institut Français becomes one of the main ones. And anybody who runs any kind of art space works at the Institut Français at some point.

In Alice's perspective, the French way is

> to announce a platform for French culture, not so much as an affiliation in local sub-sets, but to really prioritise French culture and keep it alive and almost dominant, for creative economy purposes, but also to encompass a lot of the colonial powers in francophone Africa, […] to keep kind of a unified bond around that.

Mike's comment adds to this impression of a quite overtly exercised colonial power:

> The French Institute is very much about serving French and cultural hegemonic interest. And my experience has been that unless the French themselves are initiating a project and coordinating it, they're very reluctant to be engaged.

The extent to which colonial relations are still in place or manifest in cultural cooperation differs from institution to institution. Compared to the Institut Français, the British Council historically takes a different approach, which is connected to the British way of colonisation, as Mandisa remarks:

> I think that in former British colonies, it's not quite as intensive. Partly because the British approach to colonisation meant that there was a little bit more infrastructure left behind. And a lot of those countries are more financially [independent], there's more kind of local circular money moving through the arts, so you're not quite as dependent on outsiders.

The experiences of the interviewed experts accumulate accounts of *narrative authority* – or epistemological and discursive power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni) – and prove as significant indicators of coloniality.

### 4.3.4 Procedural authority

Another signifier of coloniality, and more specifically of *coloniality of power*, is an articulation of the continuation of "colonial mentalities, psychologies and world views" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, p. 8). This emerges in the theme of *procedural authority* that persists in the narratives of the interview partners. *Procedural authority* suggests power in imposing certain administrative regulations with regards to the expenditure of funds and the reporting thereof, also known as monitoring and evaluation principles. These principles are utilised to track and evaluate how funds have been spent, and if the planned objectives have been achieved. The critique expressed by interview partners is not related to the fact that such measures are in place, but that the reporting instruments are not developed in cooperation with the partners, and rather represent standards developed by the institutions and their respective governments without taking local particulars into account.

Alice describes the monitoring and evaluation principles at the British Council as "defined by the Global North", and as demanding in terms of "very specific ways in which we were measuring impact and which unfortunately were very financially driven". In her experience, many local practitioners are "not necessarily understanding of that process."

> And then you break your back to make the project happen in accordance with the cultural organisation's specifics, which is always time-intensive. The reporting is always quite heavy and tedious. Especially if you're new at it and if you don't understand the principles, especially for M & E, a lot of it doesn't make sense and then increases suspicion and then, when money doesn't come through […], then it becomes like, 'shoot me now' […] because the red tape you need to go through in reporting and in giving them what they want is immense. And I think in that context, you start speaking to very much a 'bend for the donor'. (Alice)

Alice, although speaking in her double function as local practitioner and representative of a European institution, imagines herself in the position of a grant recipient and acknowledges the tediousness of the reporting processes as required by the institutions.

Mandisa describes reporting procedures as "patronising", and especially the European Union's requirements for reporting as utterly "divorced" from the work itself. She observes:

> They [the EU] approach power from this hyper bureaucratic kind of position because there is no relationality and therefore not more nuanced ways of determining trust, or not even trust, but determining value and outcome of the work that they're funding. It's purely based on the numbers.

In another instant, while partnering with a Belgian funder that is active on the African continent, Mandisa recalls that the funder was "insane":

> You had to report on every last cent. For example, […] they demanded your boarding pass […]. And they were threatening to not pay for the flight. […] this is like the most patronising nonsense. […] They were creating dynamics where the assumption was that you're trying to steal.

The frustration that Mandisa expresses in recounting her experience is connected to an implicit suspicion that European institutions entertain about their local partners, which on the side of the partners can appear as an expression of mistrust or lack of confidence towards the partner's ability to spend the money for its designated purpose. The regulations around financial reporting then epitomise a way of exerting control and authority.

*Procedural authority* as an expression of colonial power is a potent tool European institutions use to measure impact and eventually determine the nature and outcome of partnerships. This *procedural authority* is multidimensional in its consequences with regards to its effect on the investigated relationship – not just in terms of its influence on the way in which processes are monitored and outcomes are evaluated, but also with regards to ultimately measuring what is of value and what is not. Ashraf sums this up succinctly:

> There's a lot of undoing and unlearning to do in terms of what we recognise as being of value because they [the European institutions] have gotten into our heads in terms of best ways of making.

### 4.3.5 The saviour narrative

Mike expresses a sharp criticism of the global power structure that underpins the investigated relationship. He declares cultural diplomacy itself as a form of 'neo-colonisation', as a way of cementing Europe's soft power and deepening Eurocentric values and world views:

> Even if it's under more progressive language, […] it's still very much a colonising agenda. It's coming from a particular kind of cultural space. It's premised on particular values and ideological assumptions. It is about serving an agenda in a culture diplomacy way, which has to do with how Europe sees the world, how Europe understands its role within the world, and these institutions being part of Europe's soft power. So it's an incredibly colonising agenda. Even though people might not recognise it or not want to concede to it, that is the reality.

This view closely corresponds with Mignolo's (2007) notion of coloniality as "disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization, and being good for everyone." (in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b, p. 13).

As the experience of the interviewed practitioners shows, they indeed recognise the colonial agendas hidden in supposed good intentions such as "help" and "partnership". The impression that the European institutions' work is embedded in a *saviour narrative*, surface in some experiences that were shared by interview partners. Mandisa refers to several instances where she felt the institutions understood their work in terms of a "false sense of charity":

> So much of the European funding has to have this veneer of fairness somehow, and veneer of merit. And so much of it is being used in more nuanced ways, but it needs to still maintain that false sense of charity […]. It's like, 'the starving children of wherever' – I think it's very much within that very long standing imagination. Even though the people who work professionally in the industry know that that kind of work is not very impactful.

What Mandisa finds problematic in the context of European funding is when a developmentalist agenda underpins the cultural work that these institutions do on the African continent, and that such an agenda usually carries the notion of "help" for an 'underdeveloped' continent – an underdevelopment forced on the continent by Europe through colonialist exploitation (Rodney, 1972/2018; Paschalidis, 2009). The saviour

narrative stems from the idea that Africa needs help developing – by European standards that is – and this help ironically is offered by the former colonisers. The "false sense of charity" that Mandisa exposes in her account, is deeply connected to the perpetuation of colonial narratives and a white supremacist rhetoric present in the "longstanding imagination" of the European agent of change and the passive African recipient of his benevolence (Asfour and Khan, 2018). For these reasons, the *saviour narrative* is identified as a further marker of coloniality in the narratives of the interview partners.

In conclusion, the colonial legacies of European cultural institutions are clearly felt by the interview partners and they manifest in different spheres of cultural cooperation. Extracting intellectual resources, imparting knowledge, assuming narrative and procedural authority, as well as employing a saviour rhetoric were identified as indicators of coloniality that surface as themes in the interview narratives, and that determine the power dynamic between the partners. The distilled themes closely match Ndlovu-Gatsheni's analytical categories of coloniality, which help to unmask colonial relations.

### 4.4 Practitioners and European institutions in the South African arts and cultural space

In order to understand the relationship and power dynamic between South African cultural practitioners and European cultural institutions, it is important to embed the narrated experiences in the broader context of the South African arts and cultural landscape. After providing an overview of the assessments of the interview partners of their working conditions in South Africa, this section attends to the expressed positive aspects of the experienced relationship with the European partners, before turning to its shortcomings.

### 4.4.1 Dysfunctionality of the South African art sector

> The arts and culture sector is under-funded, underutilised, underrepresented, under-acknowledged. (Alice)

To contextualise their experiences and perceptions, all interview partners explain the conditions under which they work, mainly by pointing out shortfalls and structural deficiencies that crystallise as recurring themes in the narratives. The dysfunctionality described by the practitioners mainly manifests as lack of spaces, infrastructure, funding, and political acknowledgement of the sector's needs and contributions, which results in a cultural brain drain.

Isla bemoans a systematic under-acknowledgement of the value of arts and culture, starting with a public school curriculum that ignores arts, and continuing with a government that overlooks the sector as a valuable resource. Isla notes that art cannot exist for its own sake in South Africa. There always has to be an added value such as 'social cohesion'. If a project does not tick that box, it will not receive government funding. Simphiwe's narrative seconds that. Consequently, in their perception, the arts funding landscape in South Africa is "desperate" (Isla). This assessment does not only refer to insufficient funds being made available to the arts sector, but also to the way those funds are distributed and administered.

> I would much prefer to deal with European funding and cultural bodies then our own, which is really sad. […] I do feel like they are more human. You can find a human face on the end of the email or the end of the phone. And that face can be regular. So you can speak with that same person and they have at least some interest in your project beyond just a number. Which is not my feeling, not my experience with the national lotteries. (Isla)

Feeling under-appreciated by their own government, both Isla and Simphiwe evoke the image of artists as "beggars" in order to express where they are situated in the hierarchy of the South African economy – on the lowest level of the societal and economic power structure. Simphiwe even reports of suicides that artists he knew have committed in despair "because of no funding and no opportunities", which draws a grim picture of the South African arts landscape.

Another issue that recurs frequently in the artists' narratives is the lack of independent and well-equipped spaces where South African artists can continuously develop and present work. Connected to that is the difficulty of sustaining one's practice and achieving longevity, partly because of the nature of project funding that seldom allows for long-term and strategic planning, despite the fact that the impact of such would be more sustainable.

Roughly, these are the conditions and gaps where the European cultural institutions plug in. Given this "desperate" environment, many of the interviewed practitioners report positive aspects of their partnerships with European institutions, which the following section discusses in more detail.

### 4.4.2 European institutions create opportunities for South African artists

*Creating opportunities* is an often-evoked theme that the interview partners use to describe the benefits of their relations with European cultural institutions. *Enabling connections and networks* as well as *creative cultural exchange* are among the most used thematic categories to describe the kinds of opportunities the institutions create for their partners. Ashraf recalls several experiences in which they personally benefitted from such support:

> I think those kinds of creative cultural exchanges are really important – number one, for exchange of knowledge, information, ideas. And for building networks and platforms for exchange, because you can't do it on paper, you can't do it on WhatsApp, you can't do it on email. You physically need to inhabit those spaces where the work is made, engage with those artists. […] just the human connection facilitated possibilities for collaboration that are beyond a Euro.

The networks and relationships that subsequently develop through such opportunities are emphasised as particularly vital with regards to generating more longevity in comparison to mere project funding. Another aspect of such opportunities is the international exposure and access to international platforms that European cultural institutions enable through residency programmes, touring opportunities or travel grants, and that are also regarded as extremely valuable to boost artistic careers.

With a more specific connection to the needs of the South African arts sector, all interviewed practitioners note positively that European institutions are *filling gaps*. In correspondence to the above discussed deficiencies of the local cultural landscape, *filling gaps* relates to a number of different dimensions. One dimension speaks to the recognition of the "value of art for art's sake"; Isla elaborates:

> I feel ironically more appreciated when I'm dealing with an institute like Pro Helvetia or Goethe. […] To be honest, you have to fit yourself into these moulds on either side. But at least on the one side, these cultural institutions help you to feel a little bit more seen as an artist in your medium, and not just as a tool of the state. So I think they have an important role, but a complicated role. […] I wouldn't want to see these cultural institutions disappear because they really are the source of work and recognition for lots of people.

Another gap the European institutions fill is "experimental and edgy" programming (Alice), and providing performance/exhibition opportunities for new artistic work. According to some of the interviewed experts, the South African audiences and art institutions are "traditionally quite conservative" (Alice) and "you'd never perhaps have the audience to show it to here" (Alice), or the stage to present work that is out of the ordinary. Therefore, the opportunity and "room for experimentation" (Isla) are highly appreciated by independent practitioners. Other interview partners highlight that European cultural institutions offer and create space for artists to develop and present work – crucial infrastructure that is highly sought after as a result of the dire lack of such spaces in South Africa. The negative notion of *filling gaps*, on the other hand, is the creation of *ambiguous dependencies*, which will be discussed in the following section.

### 4.4.3 The flipside of European funding in South Africa

While discussing the role that European cultural institutions play within the cultural landscape of South Africa, the interview partners also voice their criticism of where the institutions fall short. In connection to this, several themes emerge from the narratives and these are discussed below.

#### 4.4.3.1 Ambiguous dependencies

As explained in the previous section, owing to a shortage of funding opportunities for South African artists, the European cultural institutions fill in as a significant source of income for the independent art scene, as emphasised by all the interview partners. However, the flipside of this role is that it immediately creates a relation of *dependence*, which comes with various ambiguities.

Isla, with discomfort, uses the image of "sucking up" to explain how she often feels in view of the dependency on (European) funding and the concurrent desire to work and create:

> There is a kind of sucking up that you do […] we so wanna make work, and in order to make work, we need support and we need funds. So we look around. […] And we look at our own agencies and organisations and funding bodies and we're like, 'Oh my god, that's very complicated and very political and very corrupt,' for the most part. And then we go, 'Okay, look, we can get some funds over there', but […] we might need to put a certain mask on in order to speak to the Europeans.

Using the metaphor of "putting a mask on", Isla refers to compromises that artists make in order to access the needed funding, but does not elaborate further on what exactly she means. In another comment Isla speaks to a kind of self-censorship she needs to succumb to when interacting with European institutions. Comparing her relationship with European cultural institutions to that with South African funders, she uses another metaphor to illustrate her point:

> On the one side you're a little bit more yourself because at least South Africans dealing with other South Africans. So you can freely critique. […] It's like the difference between going to your mother's house and being like, 'This meal is not so nice…' – you speak a little bit freely. And then going to someone else's house and being like, 'This meal's not so nice, but I recognise that I need to be grateful for it.' […] I'm definitely gonna censor myself in some ways. So that's what I mean by there is this sense of sucking up. And I wonder of the honesty of this kind of relationship.

To what extent the funder-recipient relationship tolerates or even appreciates criticism is one of the persistent issues articulated by the interview partners. How

freely criticism of the institution can be expressed, and whether it has to be modified, is a factor that contributes to misalignments in the relationship. Mike alludes to this in his narrative. With regards to artists having to fit in or subordinate themselves to European agendas in order to access funding, he comments:

> The role of the European institutions is basically servicing the soft power needs and agenda of Europe. […] Those of us who are engaged within these kinds of partnerships need to understand that that's also what we are part of. And I think many people kind of engage with it because there's a dependency on resources that they might not get elsewhere, but at the same time, they have a critical ambivalence towards that engagement. So dependence on the one end and yet a critical engagement on the other, insofar as a critical engagement doesn't compromise the access to resources. (Mike)

There are several layers of meaning that Mike elicits. The key message in his statement is that the dependency on funds forces artists to engage with a European agenda. Even if they are critical of it, the critique can only be expressed insofar as it does not jeopardise the access to resources. One interview partner speaks of a "bend for the donor" in this context, which articulates the issue quite well.

Speaking to the theme of dependence, and the compromises artists indulge, Isla remembers her younger self and the personal 'cost' that came with the funds:

> In my twenties and thirties, I was like: 'I need to impress, I need to not mess up this relationship. I need to take on the thing that I've promised to do' – very much about promises, like 'How's it gonna look, what else is this gonna lead to? Are they gonna think well of me?'

In her statement, Isla recalls her fear of failure and the felt pressure to perform to the satisfaction of the funder, or even exceed the expectations of the funder, because not impressing them would potentially have lead to the lost opportunity of securing future funding.

Isla's narration shows how high the stakes are for the artists and that the personal investment in the relationship with the institution, on the side of the artist, is sometimes a question of survival. This is where the experienced power imbalance becomes utterly clear – it is skewed in that the investments in this relationship that cannot be measured in monetary value do not seem equal for all partners.

> I feel like the role of the artist is like stuck between a rock and a hard place. It's not a free position. There's a lot of negotiation that has to happen in this three way between artists, South African audiences and institutions, and also it feels like we are locked into a relationship that we just have to keep going because certainly if these [European] institutions left, it would be bad for South African artists. (Isla)

However, as Isla's statement above illuminates, *not* engaging is not an option, despite the implied conditions and compromises.

#### 4.4.3.2 Dishing out chocolates, and then what?

Another level of dependence is created through the nature of project funding, which is often designed in such a way that it supports short-term projects rather than creating sustainability and longevity. Ashraf calls the project-oriented and singular funding approach, which is not unique to European cultural institutions, "BarOne funding":

> 'BarOne' funding is the kind of funding where the artist needs to keep coming back. For another bar, a BarOne being a chocolate. So it's dishing out chocolates at a street corner when the chocolate is up. And then what?

His comparison of distributing funds to "dishing out chocolates" is striking. It touches on the addictive factor of funding (chocolate) which ultimately creates a relationship of dependence, in which the recipient constantly has to come back to the supplier for another piece of chocolate in order to survive. Ashraf's question, "and then what?" alludes to an aspect that Alice likewise bemoans, which is that when funding is no longer available, it often leaves partners "stranded" (Alice), which understandably leads to frustration on both sides. Alice speaks to this in her narrative:

> So this increased donor dependency, which I see happening so often, increases huge areas of entitlement. And I think also increases huge spaces of antagonism. Then it does become about the money and the agenda, and then the face of it changes, […] relations start souring.

In Alice's experience, the "danger" of "working with local partners in a long-term way" is that the relationship can begin "souring" if it is merely or mainly based on finances, especially if the support cannot be sustained for a longer period or does not lead to

self-sustenance. According to Alice, this is the case at least half of the time in her experience of partnering with European cultural institutions.

There is a contradiction in Alice's narrative. On the one hand, she explains that long-term relationships with partners hold a certain risk in that they lead to a higher level of dependency. On the other hand, she expresses her frustration about project funding being a "drop in the ocean" and the inability to plan proactively and design long-term programmes, because budgets are only decided and released on an annual basis. The expressed ambivalence is in fact rooted in the institutional structure that presents a restriction in terms of sustainability, and ultimately makes it impossible for practitioners to forge long-term relationships with European institutions.

#### 4.4.3.3 Not doing the homework

Another persistent theme throughout the interview narratives is the critique that the European institutions are 'not doing their homework'. Simphiwe comments:

> They don't have the sensibility of what the South Africans need […] they're not interrogating what is really happening in this environment. […] they are missing the point.

According to Simphiwe, "That's one of the most important things that these institutions are failing at". It is a heavy critique that probably points to one of the pressing issues that the artists who are part of this research grapple with, which relates back to the question of agendas that resonate throughout the interviews: "Why are these institutions here? What is their agenda? Do they care?" (Simphiwe)

Mike makes an important point in criticising the obliviousness of some European institutions, which manifests in "denying the actual conditions on the continent and in South Africa". To emphasise his point, Mike gives an example of European agendas that aim to foster creative industries in Africa:

> In most parts of the continent, you simply don't have the markets to sustain creative industries in the same way as you might have in Europe. To make creative industries a key part of policy, is to deny the actual conditions on the continent. And in the South African context to emphasise the creative industries as the primary or only thing, is to deny 55% of the population access to the arts because 55% of the population live below the poverty line, so don't have

> disposable income to buy a theatre ticket, to download a movie, or to take a Spotify subscription.

Mike's example brings the theme of European institutions *not doing their homework* to the fore, revealing the absurdity that foreign agendas can assume when not considering the "actual conditions". This ignorance speaks back to the colonial mindset that presumes superiority of knowledge, or at least portrays a confidence on the part of the instuitutions of "believing that you have the answer" (Ashraf). This is linked to formulating agendas without involving those who these agendas are intended to serve. So the question Simphiwe poses – whose purpose do these agendas actually serve? – is legitimate.

On a positive note, Isla mentions a case that shows the reciprocal engagement that she would like to see from European institutions more often:

> It might be nice if they themselves were awake to what is going on. […] If it was a little bit more of a two-way street. There's this sense of, 'We have to think of the European connection and then go knock on the door of these cultural institutes and convince them to let us in'. […] It would be nice if there was some reciprocal investigation of who was doing what on a very grassroots level, to see if the connections can be made from the other side. I feel like LAPA is closest to what I have seen that does that so far. They've embedded themselves in an actual space, in an actual part of Joburg. Where real South Africans are living and working. It's still pretty 'bougie', but it's at least a start at trying to be somewhere else, not only at the institute in a fancy part of Joburg. […] It's at least a start in being like, 'Okay, we are here. Let us go out and see what people are doing'.

The engagement and reciprocity that Isla speaks to as significant aspects that would contribute to a more equal and enriching relationship also resonate in other interviews. Alice notes that a lack of reciprocity in the relationship between practitioners and institutions "leads to a lot of suspicion and a lot of understandable mistrust", which in turn compromises the partnership significantly.

Apart from the institutions insufficiently doing their research, some interview partners lament another omission with regards to the coordination of activities and agendas amongst the different European institutions that operate in South Africa. In this context, Alice notes:

> I think there is this very delicate, mindful responsibility of cultural organisations to recognise saturating the sector, oversaturating partners' capacity, duplicating work that leads to saturation…, not talking enough. […] I think it could be a little bit more streamlined.

Ashraf ascertains something similar in their assessment:

> The lack of alignment and the lack of strategic engagement or agreement on a direction is mind-boggling. The duplication and the waste is quite horrifying. […] if I didn't know that they sit around a table and share their plans... And yet they step over one another and rush to do the same thing. […] I do believe that there's quite a lot of still deciding what must happen. And deep breaks in alignment, but certainly you see it playing out in the politics of Europe now. I suppose that's a mirror in the way those agencies show up in South Africa.

The misalignment between the institutions that both Alice and Ashraf speak to is certainly something that they are particularly sensitive to in their respective positions as regional departmental head (Alice) and CEO (Ashraf), given that strategy planning and policy advising are part of their job descriptions.

In conclusion, section 4.3. analysed the interview narratives in terms of the themes that surface in relation to the role that European cultural institutions take up within the South African arts landscape. It became clear that the interview partners have ambiguous experiences and perceptions in this regard. On the one hand, they flag the important role of the institutions as facilitators and funders, given the "desperate" and "dysfunctional" state that the local arts sector and infrastructure is in. On the other hand, the interview partners voice their concerns about relationships of dependence that are created, and bemoan the shortcomings of their European partners with respect to their awareness of local matters and their ability or will to respond to them.

## 4.5 The myriad of power dimensions

> In very many instances where I am with practitioners, […] it used to frustrate me a lot when the conversation always ends up being around the evil funder, coming with their objectives and making artists do things that they don't want to do. (Alice)

Having discussed the different themes and aspects the interview partners raise in their narratives, the manifestations and modes of how power operates surface at times explicitly, and at other times more implicitly. In the quote above, Alice expresses her frustration about binaries such as the "evil funder" versus the 'poor artist' being evoked, and with this statement speaks to the need of unpacking the complexities in this relationship, rather than getting stuck in simplifying ways of addressing power. All interview partners speak to the convolutions of power that are inherent in their relationships with European cultural institutions. Unpacking these complexities and advancing to the fine grain of their narratives is the purpose of this section.

Mike notes that his experiences need to be understood within a "broader kind of structural, unequal relation. There are those with resources and those who require resources." But he emphasises that this does not necessarily mean that the party in need of resources does not hold freedom of choice:

> Depending on what the agenda is, accepting that 'Okay, these are the criteria that you use to determine whether we are eligible for funding or not', or these are the conditions under which we are able to access funding, then we as beneficiaries need to decide if that's okay, if it doesn't compromise us in any way.

Mike is also convinced that, apart from the choice of engaging or not, artists can decide to "either be aligned with hegemonic positions, challenge them, or adopt a more kind of nuanced position."

These comments express the ambivalence of the artists' position in the relationship with European cultural institutions. Mike acknowledges that art practitioners hold a certain power to contest simplified narratives and counter hegemonic positions. This power and the freedom of choice, however, can only be exercised when the criteria and conditions are transparent.

Alice uses the image of a "disco ball" to express her view on the multi-dimensionality of power:

> I don't think it is necessarily linked to Global North-Global South structures, I don't think it necessarily is linked to purely economic reasons or reasons of disguise and soft power, only. I

> think it is more like a disco ball and myriad of different dimensions that kind of make the whole thing. […] There's so many layers of complexity.

Alice's comment illustrates her recognition of power as pluriversal. One of the layers of this complexity surfaces in an observation that Mandisa makes, which completely overthrows the binary of the "evil funder" and the artist as victim of their wilfulness:

> The big thing for me is that your job is based on me doing my job, right? If I don't do my job well, I make your life really difficult. If you have nobody to fund, your job is useless and you might as well be unemployed. So we are colleagues. We're like committed to the same agendas. We want to see the same things happen, and so we need to make them happen. There are many people I work with where that's very clear. I respect their work, they respect my work, and we're like allies in trying to make the same kind of thing happen.

Shifting the perspective on the investigated relationship in the way Mandisa does paints a different picture: without the artists and their work, the work of the institutions would lapse. Seeing the relationship in this light, as a collegial engagement where both parties strive for the same goals and mutually respect and acknowledge each other's work as "allies", immediately shifts the narrative of the powerful institution versus the oppressed artist.

The question is how this translates into a day-to-day engagement and work relationship. Contributing to the complexity and diversity of perspectives, Mandisa states that, especially when the institutions and the people who work there recognise power dynamics or try to tackle them, it often complicates the relationship even further:

> What I see quite a lot with [a Dutch funding organisation], that they're very aware of power dynamics, so they often don't even wanna tell you what they want. They'll try and sort of make it as if there is no power dynamic when it's just not the case. Or they will take on a lot of the burden of trying to translate what's happening at the local level to the models that they have at an international level. […] Then they'll try and play these strange games where they let the local context do what it needs to do, and then try to squeeze that into what happens at a senior level. And then the senior level will push back and then they're gonna have to try and squeeze that into what's happening at the local level. And I think that's people who are trying to take on this activist position as 'insiders', who choose to go into the belly of the beast to enable

> change. But it can be a bit overwhelming, particularly when they don't take local people into their confidence as allies in that process.

The core message of this statement is that an awareness of the power dynamics does not undo them. What emerges from Mandisa's account is her acknowledgement of and appreciation for the attempt of people working in the institutions to "hustle the system" and make things work within the given constraints. However, she cautions, this does not eliminate the "very complicated power dynamics that are always there" (Mandisa)

Adding another layer to the "myriad" of power dimensions, Alice notes that in her understanding,

> where it does become a power dynamic in the arrangement or agreement with cultural organisations and the local practitioner, I think that power dynamic increasingly has become something of privilege and experience.

Although she does not elaborate further what kind of privilege and experience this concerns, the comment induces further investigation into the research question regarding the impact of racial identity and educational background on the relationship. The following section will shed light on the interview partners' experiences in this respect.

### 4.5.1 Racialised and classed experiences

So far, the thematic exploration of the interview partners' narratives was not particularly concerned with the impact that specific racial or educational positionalities and their intersectionality wield on the experiences that were narrated. This section explores the themes related to experiences that interview partners shared in connection to this. Interestingly, only two interview partners actively address and reflect their racial or educational positionality in the interview.

A recurring theme connected to positionality is *access*. Isla notes that, in terms of connections and relationships,

> it is easier for me to access spaces – any kind of spaces, online spaces, physical spaces – as a white South African, especially when it comes to European institutions. And a big part of that is language. And the skills and resources in order to first of all encounter these opportunities, but then also apply for these opportunities. I can write a good funding proposal and that's because I'm educated to a high level, to a high standard. It's also because I've spent time in Europe, so I'm codified. I can codify. […] I can go to these cultural evenings and I can rub shoulders and I can communicate in a way that Europeans are sensitive to and that I'm sensitive to. That is a very fundamental way. […] I think we can't actually underestimate language, and not just language, but understanding of what is required, and what is actually being asked for. […] I have an understanding of what they really want. I can see past the funding call and be like, 'Okay, what they really want is to be able to showcase this particular thing'. So I can write a proposal that fits into this thing. I have this sort of broader worldview because I have travelled, because I'm educated, because I have free and regular access to the internet and data, and a car and so on. […] I always have, and I continue to benefit from that access as a white South African of European descent, without a doubt.

Isla refers to her abilities to operate in a certain language and to decode specific cultural meaning which grants her easier access to the institution in the first place, but also to the funding itself. In her narrative, she connects these advantages – her high level of education, her international experience, her uninterrupted access to resources – to her whiteness.

As discussed in chapter two, in South Africa, race is inherently entrenched with access to education, resources, mobility – in short, with class. Isla is very aware of her white privilege and the intersectionality of her different positionalities, knowing that some of her black colleagues struggle more than she does with regards to accessing the offerings of European institutions, but also in terms of building and maintaining a trustful relationship with them. She notes:

> I think that you would get a very different response from a black South African trying to access these spaces as from me. […] I'm thinking also about levels of trust, how it's probably much easier for me to trust a European institution with my background, than it might be for a black South African theatre company, because I have much less of a fear of being exploited. Even though I recognise the possibility for being exploited or for being manipulated, I have never

> felt that very keenly. Whereas I can imagine a black theatre maker in my position might be more scared of that.

Isla's narrative is a good example to portray how white privilege works in subtle, deeply integrated ways. In comparison to her black colleagues, she feels more confident in the relationship with European institutions. She feels that she *belongs* in that space and that she can more easily build trust than her black peers, as she does not have to fear exploitation – which are the workings of white supremacy and coloniality. In Isla's narrative, *trust* emerges as a theme that is intertwined with questions of race, and experiences of discrimination and exploitation that are deeply rooted in colonial heritage, and have manifested in South Africa's society, which remains highly unequal, even thirty years after the end of Apartheid.

Access is not the only theme that emerges from the narratives in connection to positionality and privilege. Isla contemplates that her white privilege also comes with a feeling of *entitlement*:

> I'm of European descent. So obviously I can access and fit into those spaces much easier, and importantly *feel more entitled* to those spaces than my black peers and colleagues. For example, with the British Council, I'm like, 'Yes, my grandmother is British, I spent 10 years in the UK, I have connections with British artists.'

Descent and race occur as determining factors of not only successfully *accessing resources* but importantly also *feeling entitled* to these resources. A feeling that is deeply entrenched in white privilege (Bhopal, 2018), and is not just an individual sentiment, but an expression of an understanding that is ingrained in white supremacy. As Bhopal (2018) notes, white privilege operates in "subtle, nuanced ways […] and allows white identities to be seen as superior, which manifests in the overt treatment of blacks as less important and inferior" (p. 27).

Simphiwe's account can be connected to Bhopal's observation:

> If I come with my British passport, then I go to this foreign country, and then I don't look like myself, like this [looks down at himself, referring to his skin colour], I look different. They'll be

> different to somebody from Nigeria, from South Africa, with a green passport[10]. You understand those small little nuances? It's something that is really integrated. But do these institutions also understand these things? […] The other thing that happens often is: they [European institutions] are inviting an artist, they're gonna give them money. Maybe a day later, they're paid later. It's terrible, terrible. The artist, you know, is an artist anyway. He doesn't have money in the first place. He goes to a foreign country. It means he's gonna be there for two days, not eating. […] You know, if we understand that we are so privileged with so much… And the person is going through all of this terrible interrogation before they even enter.

In this account of his experiences, or experiences of fellow black artists, Simphiwe touches on many layers of how white privilege operates. For example, that it ultimately results in discriminatory practices towards BPOC, such as the racial profiling that he encountered while travelling internationally. He also wonders if the institutions are even aware of these dynamics, which he considers as "really integrated", thus somehow invisible or unconscious. This points to another characteristic of white privilege, which according to Bhopal (2018) "operates as a given, in which many of those who are white may not necessarily recognise or even acknowledge its existence." (p. 21). Simphiwe's account of the artist who goes hungry because he is not paid his per diems in advance is an enlightening example. It highlights the omission of the institution to anticipate a certain artist's financial situation, which might be a result of assuming one's own privileged position as the norm, and consequently being unaware that this is not the case.

The above stories of experienced reality highlight the effects of intersecting identities and the entanglements of race and access to resources, race and education, race and mobility; and underscore how different positionalities impact on the artists' encounters with European institutions and the power dynamics that evolve subsequently.

[10] Many African countries have passports in different shades of green.

## 4.6 Ways forward: Decolonial practices and strategies for future collaborations

This section shifts the gaze forward and, deriving from the interviews, suggests ways towards a more decolonial approach to cultural cooperation – in Ndlovu-Gatsheni's spirit of *liberatory thinking, knowing and doing*.

### 4.6.1 Pre-condition: Acknowledgement of involvement in continued colonial relations

As a pre-condition for a more equal and decolonial partnership between South African art practitioners and European cultural institutions, the acknowledgement of the involvement in continued colonial relations surfaces as a request of the interview partners.

> I think there's very little acknowledgement of the role that they played in contributing to the status quo at the time. And I think it starts with that kind of acknowledgement first. From that point, you can then start to see how you do things differently. Otherwise you keep on repeating the way you've been engaging. […] How we continue to contribute to the lack of transformation and decolonisation, and deconstructing that power dynamic is a very important first beat. South Africans are very keen to jump into action and do things, but I think those moments, those difficult conversations, those moments of difficult reflection are essential, and we skipped over them with our partners, with ourselves, the partners with themselves, to understand how we do it differently. (Ashraf)

Ashraf's comment importantly points to the reciprocity of this process of reflection and conversation, involving all partners alike. They emphasise the importance of critically reflecting on the past and deconstructing power dynamics in order to identify ways forward.

Alice also points to the important role of "understanding and acknowledgement and accountabilities of past legacies and deep hurts":

> The deep hurt, I think, sometimes is in the un-acknowledgement of what's going on. And I think the conversation, it stills, or it halts… and becomes one of mistrust and paranoia.

The difficult conversations about both the past and present conditions are a crucial first step towards more equal and fruitful relationships. If they are avoided, it leads

to mistrust and paranoia, as Alice points out, which is not a good foundation for a partnership. “Inviting a space of critique” is what Isla suggests in this context, which points to a similar purpose of critical engagement and contemplation.

### 4.6.2 Trust and shared value as foundation for a common agenda

Sharing more tangible ideas about how a future vision of collaboration could look like, the interview partners place much weight on the mutuality of values and trust that needs to be established in order for the partnership to thrive. Alice believes in “synergy in idea and ideology” as a precondition for connecting in a meaningful way. Only when partners are collaborating on the basis of shared value, and are mutually “understanding the nature of their collaboration” (Alice), will the relationship become equally beneficial.

How can *shared value* be achieved? Alice notes, as a point of departure, that mutual respect and trust need to be established, in addition to a “curiosity in each other's culture and in each other's artistic practice.” This affords a practice of attentive listening.

Ashraf argues that *shared value* needs to be *“co-creative”* and that this currently is not the case in the interaction between funding agencies and artists. They are not the only interview partner that place emphasis on *co-creation*. Alice shares this conviction:

> In fact, with all the programme ideas you can come up with, with all the impact studies you can do, with all of the areas in evidence-based, research-led change that you'd like to make, it is only when you get the true and meaningful co-creation with a partner, that it can materialise.

She does not elaborate further what she means by “true” and “meaningful”, but Mike makes a helpful comment in this regard. He accentuates mutual respect, trust and understanding, and the will on the side of the institutions to hand over power as pre-requisites for *co-creating* and *co-learning*:

> It does need to be much more of a partnership approach. […] It requires people in power, people with political power, with economic power, with cultural power, to be a lot more modest and humble and more trusting of their partners *to give over power to shape the*

> *agenda*, and to not think that because they have economic muscle, political muscle, cultural muscle, that they therefore have the need to, and the right to, shape the projects that are happening, but actually to do it much more on the basis of mutual respect and non-ignorance, and understanding of the other. (Mike)

In connection to the question of how a more trustful and respectful approach to the investigated partnership could look like, the themes of *transparency* and *honesty* arise repeatedly. Trust can only be built on the basis of honesty about intentions and agendas. It is important for all partners to know the basis of their engagement.

Summing up, in order to adopt a decolonial approach to partnership between South African practitioners and European cultural institutions, the interview partners suggest *co-creating shared value* on the basis of mutual trust and respect as a point of departure for more equal relations.

Deriving from this process, the *mutual development of agendas and programmes*, is a logical suggestion that emerges from the interviews in connection to future visions for collaboration. Several interview partners recommend developing agendas via a shared process, rather than deciding out of context about an agenda that is supposed to benefit local partners.

> A very good example for me was when we sat down with Goethe-Institut at the head office, […] and talked through these things and what it meant. And so that came to be reflected in their policy and in the way that funding was made available […]. So we were at the source of the formulation as opposed to being recipient. (Mike)

In Mike's example the roles of the partners have shifted from the binary trope of donor and recipient towards perceiving practitioners receiving funding as co-creators in the process of developing a common agenda, which contributes to more equity in the relationship.

Closely connected to this is a need for more *attentiveness and recognition* on the part of the European institutions with regards to context-specific needs. Mike suggests that the idea of creating a mutually beneficial agenda affords a more active approach and engagement from the institutions. He proposes that more investigation into the local

needs and conditions are necessary. As a starting point, he recommends to ask the following questions:

> What is it that we can do *with* our partners? How do you [partners] understand the agenda? Where can we overlap? How can we do this *together*? […] How can we, with the money that we have, possibly leverage more resources, or use what we have, in order to serve an agenda that overlaps with our agenda and with what you guys regard as priorities?

Mike's suggestions resonate closely with what Isla requests from the institutions:

> Maybe more active investigation into what artists need in order to make work. […] being approached like 'We see what you're doing and actually we think there might be a nice tie with this project or with a funding call that's gonna happen next year'. […] It might be nice to know what is going on. What is your [institution's] plan for the next three years so that we [artists] can prep rather than just responding to calls, which is often quite last-minute. […] I guess if I could dream freely, it would be for the approach to be both ways.

Isla identifies the close observation and enquiry of what is actually needed, and actively reaching out to artists whose practices match certain funding calls or programmes, as part of a more reciprocal approach to embarking on a partnership.

In that line of reasoning, to be more beneficial for the local arts sector, Ashraf suggests regular check-ins as practiced by the South African government among their agencies and partners:

> What are we doing? How do we make those resources best benefit who they're intended for? I really like that as a moment of alignment. […] I think that that kind of coordination is fantastic because it means that you find your stream, you find your place, and artists find their best fit for who can support them. I think that that's a model that our government actually could teach the European Union. They've done a really good job at it.

As Ashraf recommends, learning from the host country – from South African practitioners and institutions – contributes to a more decolonial approach to cultural cooperation. Isla, on the other hand, would like to see "more interaction between cultural institutions and our government", but for the purpose of "help[ing] them [the South African government] to see the value of the artists that they have, in a different way, with outsider eyes."

What these comments speak to is a more reciprocal engagement and streamlining on different levels – not only between South African arts practitioners and European institutions, but also between the institutions and the South African government, and between the institutions among themselves.

### 4.6.3 Sustainability / sustenance

The pros and cons of long-term engagements between the partners have already been discussed earlier in this chapter. However, the sustainability of the effects of the partnership is a topic that emerges throughout the interviews and relates to decoloniality in such a way as it ultimately decreases levels of dependence that are currently still part of the colonial continuities that reverberate in the relationships between European cultural institutions and South African art practitioners. A longer-term engagement allows for a slower process of setting the parameters for the partnership to flourish in terms of shared values and co-creation. With regard to how the relationship can create more sustenance, some practitioners suggest to focus more on non-monetary ways of support. In this context, Simphiwe argues that it is important

> to help the artists to understand the business of the arts. How to take care of and run things for themselves so that it's sustainable. […] It's like you teach people how to fish themselves. To keep on giving them pieces of fish tastes nice, […] but that's the problem, because then we keep on going the same way.

Isla proposes more in-kind support that responds more closely to artists' needs:

> What can you offer us that is not only about this money? I mean, money is important, but it could also be like a website, or help with designing a website, or rehearsal space, or paint… whatever it is […], other kinds of resources in-kind or support in-kind that is […] also about helping more on the ground.

Mandisa's comment points in a similar direction:

> I think often, these people don't realise how much more they have. They are getting reports all the time and they're learning from so many people all over the place, they're actually often super knowledgeable. And because we're kind of on the ground doing the work, we don't always have the bigger-picture-sort-of-knowledge, and I think that that knowledge is not

> shared enough. They often have massive networks, […] they know who's out there and they know what work is happening and that doesn't get shared enough.

Sharing knowledge, networks and resources more, and enabling skills development, are ways in which the institutions could contribute in order to improve the long-term effects of the partnership and to eventually break out of the cycle of generating new dependencies.

### 4.6.4 Endorsing one's own practice / taking action

Lastly, a theme that emerges from the interviews in terms of taking steps towards a decolonised future of cultural cooperation, is *self-effectiveness* and *self-appreciation* on the part of art practitioners. Ashraf suggests that

> it is really so important that we don't wait for institutions of power to endorse our practice and for us to be responsible and archive our practice.

They also place confidence in artists to be able to effectively deconstruct colonial ways of making:

> This prejudicing of […] Western styles of making work is a deeply problematic colonial legacy issue, which needs to be deconstructed and can only be deconstructed by artists.

Ashraf also points to the pro-activeness and responsibility of South Africans themselves in driving the "dynamic shift" that is needed, by

> more proactively inviting our foreign visitors and partners to partner with us in ways that *we* know would work.

All these suggestions address the necessity of efforts to deconstruct colonial legacies in the relationship between European institutions and South African art practitioners to be initiated and followed through by all partners alike. It is not a one-way street and does not just demand that European cultural institutions transform, but also holds the artists accountable as active agents of change. In this spirit, Alice wishes that

> local practitioners would fiercely engage in the work a lot more. And in saying that, also hold governments to account. […] [Because] those people are so great at what they're doing and are holding the sector in such meaningful ways.

Isla proposes integrity as an essential part of a decolonial practice:

> We need to retain our own integrity. […] I feel that speaks to the decolonial aspect: Can you be allowed to exist of your own accord or do you always have to be existing in relation to someone else's gaze? […] this sense of where can we exist – confidently and honestly – in our own spaces.

In that line of thought, she puts forward a radical idea that has to do with the endorsement of artistic practice and levels of trust: for European institutions to disperse funding with no strings attached.

> Giving that 500,000 Rand with no outcomes already, with no expectations already. That's a radical thought. […] Find a theatre company to support, just for support's sake, because you believe that they're good at what they do, no matter what they make.

Mike suggests establishing African institutional equivalents in Europe in order to achieve more two-way engagement and reciprocal knowledge production, which would shift the goalposts of transcultural cooperation.

> Why don't we find ways in which we have African equivalence in Europe? […] an Africa House of Culture in Berlin, an Africa House of Culture in Paris? That would serve the whole continent. […] A lot of people in Europe simply don't know about Africa. […] We need ways in which those societies are educated about Africa, about Africans, and have much more access to how African cultures work.

## 4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented the research results and thoroughly analysed the collected data, using a narrative methodology and a critical analytical lens informed by decolonial theory.

The analysis focused on discussing the identified narrative themes, highlighting conditions for building relationships, identifying colonial legacies that surfaced in the conversations, and evaluating the specific South African setting. The complexity of power dimensions was acknowledged and the analysis showed that the intersectionality of different positionialities further complicates power dynamics. Lastly, the analysis presented ways forward that were suggested by the interview

partners in terms of potentials for transforming their relationship with European cultural institutions.

The ways that were proposed by the interview partners to embark on a journey towards more decolonial collaborations between European and South African partners were manifold and refer to different levels of *liberatory thinking, knowing and doing*; liberated from conventional ways of approaching cultural cooperation by way of co-creating and co-learning, based on shared values, mutual trust, and a dialogical engagement. Placing confidence in the capabilities of artists to be agents of change is crucial in this endeavour.

# CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This research undertook to explore the extent to which the power dynamics observed in the relationship between South African artists and European cultural institutions relate to colonial legacies. Previous research and literature show that the relation between European and (South) African partners can be conflicted and that preconditions for partnerships are often complex because of historical entanglements in colonialism, political agendas and shifting goalposts, as well as the dysfunctional condition of the South African arts sector, and the inequitable, segregated society in the country. Decolonial theory proved useful as a critical analytic tool and theoretical lens through which to investigate this troubled terrain. In advancing to the details of the sources of the dissonances, an experience-centred Narrative Analysis of interviews with South African art practitioners offered enlightenment.

The investigation of the accounts shared by the six South African practitioners found that their experiences indicate an asymmetrical power dynamic in the relation, and corroborate the perpetuation of colonial conditions on different levels. The manifestations of coloniality in the narratives were partly explored using Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2013a) notions of *coloniality of power* and *coloniality of knowledge* that were connected to interview partners' descriptions of the various scopes of authority that European cultural institutions exercise, such as narrative authority and procedural authority.

The power imbalance and colonial legacy was also palpable in the interview partners' accounts of exploitative practices, knowledge imposition and neo-colonisation disguised as charity and development aid. With respect to the permutations of power observed in the narratives of the interview partners and reviewed literature, structural and systemic factors proved integral to the perception of the quality of the partnership and to perceived levels of dependence. Interview partners critically pointed to a disproportionate dependence on European institutions, mainly because of a lack of sufficient other sources of funding and support available to artists in South Africa. The research found that the dependence provokes ambiguity around the

involvement of European cultural institutions in the local arts scene on the part of the practitioners, which corresponds largely with the literature reviewed in chapter two.

However, the narratives of the interview partners contain diverging connotations with respect to European institutions filling gaps in the local arts sector. On the one hand, they create dependencies, on the other, they hold space for meaningful exchange, and offer platforms for experimental artistic positions that would otherwise remain marginal. Enabling artists and art organisations to create and produce is what the interview partners perceived as particularly valuable, even if this required compromise. Despite the often skewed dynamics, the research found that the European cultural institutions in South Africa clearly occupy a legitimate place in the cultural landscape and play a significant role according to the perspectives of the interview partners.

Other aspects that were identified as impactful on the relationship are connected to "the human factor" – to the personalities of staff in the European institutions, their emotional intelligence to navigate local complexities, their historic knowledge, as well as their ability and willingness to learn. Interview partners emphasised the need for a collegial interaction that is based on mutual respect and requires a certain humility that should be cultivated by the institutions, particularly with regard to their ability to listen closely and to identify the actual need by deferring to the expertise and knowledge of local partners.

Some interview partners perceived their relations with European institutions as rather superficial engagements and criticised the lack of honesty and transparency. The desire surfaced to transform partnerships into more committed relationships built on mutual trust and shared value.

The insights from the interviews potently illustrate that power dynamics that evolve in the relationship between European cultural institutions and South African art practitioners are neither static nor unidirectional, and that power is not concentrated in a single source, but is a complex configuration that manifests in a "myriad" of dimensions.

A tendency to address decoloniality in binary tropes, however, was observed, but is not surprising given South Africa's colonial and Apartheid history. Yet, it was also clear to the interview partners that decoloniality in this context does not mean to disengage from European institutions, but rather to engage in different ways that recognise how power works, who has power, and how power needs to be shared.

A transformational process aimed at achieving more equitable and meaningful partnerships must involve the institutions and the practitioners alike. The critical interrogation of power and colonial legacies is a challenging enterprise, but is a necessary precondition for transforming practices that are rooted in colonial heritage and characterised by their complexity. Unpacking the many intersecting layers requires space that allows for difficult conversations, even if they are dissenting. It also requires those in powerful positions, and who are accustomed to wielding authority, to participate in permitting and building alternative power configurations.

The interview partners, however, were not very hopeful of this as a realistic endeavour, owing to the inherent difficulty of giving up privileged positions. Although they were invited to dream freely, their imaginaries were neither very radical, nor particularly optimistic. They all grappled with an answer to the question of what a more equitable partnership could look like.

It was acknowledged that this is a challenging endeavour as it is difficult to unlearn what has been practiced over many centuries and on so many levels. The process involves immense vulnerability and emotional labour by all who strive to understand and disrupt power. As Alice said, there are still feelings of "deep hurt". The historic injustices and infringements cannot be undone, but need acknowledgement in order for a process of healing to be allowed.

*Recommendations for practitioners*

In summarising ways towards a more decolonised practice in the field of transcultural collaboration between South African arts practitioners and European cultural institutions, the study formulates recommendations on four levels. As a pre-condition, the reciprocal acknowledgement of the involvement in continued colonial relations is

recommended, which involves holding space for difficult conversations. Secondly, mutual trust and shared values need to be established as a prerequisite for equitable collaborations, which can be achieved by identifying synergies and co-creating ideas. Ideally, this is followed by the mutual development of agendas and programmes and includes a thorough analysis of the actual needs and pro-active outreach by the institutions. Reciprocal learning is a crucial requirement in this process. Thirdly, partnerships must strive for a sustainable perspective in terms of financial sustenance and time. The more time partnerships have to develop, the richer and meaningful their outcomes will be. More equitable partnerships should strive to decreasing levels of dependence. One way of achieving this is through offering more non-monetary support on part of the institutions, such as sharing resources, knowledge and networks. Lastly, this study recommends that art practitioners endorse their own practices in the spirit of self-appreciation and self-effectiveness. Deconstructing long practiced colonial ways of making and being, and establishing new modes of collaborating, needs to be a mutual endeavour by both, the institutions and the practitioners.

The study concludes that future research is recommended to be undertaken to grapple with these suggestions and to come up with more tangible ideas and recommendations about how a truly decolonial collaboration can be achieved between partners entering the engagement from differently privileged starting points. What practical steps need to be taken to operate within a decolonial paradigm? Future research could take on the objective of investigating whether cultural cooperation can overcome colonial legacies, as long as a relation of dependency is at the core of its foundation. To what degree is it possible in a partnership – but also on a more systemic level – to debunk, to confront and to combat the epitomisations of power? Can the historically grown power constellations really be subverted? Exploring these and further questions could be an interesting research endeavour.

*Limitations of the research*

The scope of this research however poses a certain limitation to its findings in that the represented perspectives are limited – on the one hand by the number of

interview partners who contributed to the research, on the other hand by a restricted array of diversity in standpoints and experiences represented. Future research should therefore expand its scope in order to gather more perspectives and include voices that represent other stakeholder groups, particularly local and deployed staff members of European cultural institutions. Involving a multiplicity of experiences and standpoints would correspond to the acknowledgement of this layered research complex.

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# ANNEX

Interview questionnaire

**Title of research project: *The South African Arts Scene and European Cultural Institutions - A Troubled Relationship?***

**Name of researcher: Josephine Heide**

*Research intro and purpose:*

*I want to examine the power relationship between South African artists and European cultural institutions that operate in the country. I am particularly interested in the perspectives on and assessments of this relationship emanating from the experiences of art practitioners in their narratives. With this study, I hope to contribute to identifying what the problematic aspects of the work of European cultural institutes in South Africa are, and how these are embedded in the larger context of questions around coloniality and decoloniality. I intend to offer a specific diagnosis of the problem by elevating the perspectives of the artists, and analyse if European cultural institutions in South Africa meet the needs of local arts practitioners, or if the desire to transform this relationship arises among the research participants.*

*Thank you for being part of this research endeavour!*

*Let's begin…*

1) Please tell me a brief background story about yourself and your practice as artist in South Africa.

2) What is your experience with European cultural institutions in South Africa, and how do you perceive their role in the cultural landscape of South Africa?

3) How would you describe the character of your relationship with European funding organisations? (How do you perceive the institutions' and your own role in this rapport?)

4) Would you say you are able to pursue your artistic practice independently or have you ever experienced that European institutions interfere with or limit your

work? Please explain in which ways.

5) Do you feel a need for the relationship to be transformed and if yes, why and in which ways?
What would the partnership and collaboration with these institutions ideally look like for you, if you could dream freely?

6) Does 'decolonization' or 'decoloniality' mean something to you in this context, if yes – please explain, what?

7) Lastly, do you have anything you want to add, clarify or share additionally?

*Thank you so much for participating in this research and sharing your experiences, stories and ideas with me.*