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## Introduction

### The Gender of Ethnographic Collecting

Carl Deußen & Mary Mbewe

What is the gender of ethnographic collecting? This question, if asked at all, is often given little attention in the study of ethnographic collecting.<sup>1</sup> In the museums that house most ethnographic collections amassed during the colonial period, it remains equally unasked. Objects are thought to reveal something about the gender relations of their original owners, but the gendered circumstances of their acquisition and of imperial expansion at large are almost never addressed. Instead, displays suggest a neutral perspective. Yet as so often, “neutral” just means “male”, as the vast majority of collectors were men and created these collections from their specific gendered perspective in the field. In those cases where the collections were made by a woman, this exceptionality also vanishes behind the assumed irrelevance of the collector’s gender. In this issue, we aim at challenging this neutral perspective and provide a range of perspectives on the gendered

dimensions of ethnographic collecting. The issue centres the role of gender for histories of imperial ethnographic collecting, collections, and the related knowledge-making projects. It is about interrogating the ways histories of collecting are, conventionally, accounts told from masculine perspectives, producing gendered understandings not only of these histories and collections but of the practices and societies from which these collections are made.

Our contributions were first presented at the *The Gender of Ethnographic Collecting* workshop held in May 2021 as part of the DCNtR blog’s Debates series.<sup>2</sup> Participants reflected on the gendered dimensions of collections made from indigenous communities during the colonial period. It has long been accepted that colonialism had a distinctive epistemic dimension, which was upheld by disciplines such as anthropology and other knowledge-making projects.<sup>3</sup> Under this colonial episteme, people and human experiences were hierarchically classified according to racial categories and ethnography and ethnographic collecting were key components in these processes. However, the colonial regime did not only rely on race as an organising category but also on gender. There is now a growing literature on how many aspects of colonialism and its discursive techniques were gendered male.<sup>4</sup> Still, not much analysis has been done in regards to how ethnographic collecting and its resultant knowledges were and continue to be gendered.<sup>5</sup> His-

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1 There are, however, a range of good studies on the impact of gender on collecting in general. See, for example, Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994); Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” in *Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Reaktion Books, 1994), 84–102; Beth Fowkes Tobin and Maureen Daly Goggin, “Materializing Women,” in *Women and Things, 1750–1950*, ed. Maureen Daly Goggin (Routledge, 2017), 1–15; Beth Fowkes Tobin, “The Duchess’s Shells: Natural History Collecting, Gender, and Scientific Practice,” in *Material Women, 1750–1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices*, ed. Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Routledge, 2017), 247–64; Kate Hill, *Women and Museums 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (Manchester University Press, 2016); Kate Hill, “He Knows Me... But Not At the Museum: Women, Natural History Collecting and Museums, 1880–1914,” in *Narrating Objects, Collecting Stories*, ed. Sandra H. Dudley et al. (Routledge, 2012), 184–96.

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2 To see these earlier contribution, visit <https://boasblogs.org/debates/?blog=humboldt>.

3 Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (Routledge, 1978); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Harvard University Press, 1999); Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition – Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Duke University Press, 2002); Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2016).

4 Angela Woollacott, *Gender and Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), For a good summary of these connections, see.

5 There are, of course, some good exceptions. See, for example, Frances Larson, *An Infinity of Things*

tories of collecting have usually been limited to a generalised engagement with the relationship of collector and subject, ignoring gender and how it may have impacted the results of these knowledge-making projects. Taking this general observation as a starting point, this issue reflects on a series of questions:

- What is the relationship between ethnographic collecting, gender, and imperialism? Is there an imperial masculinity specific to ethnographic collecting?
- How far can ethnographic collecting be understood to be a gendered activity and in what ways can the resulting collections and knowledges be understood as gendered?
- What is the relationship between the gender of the collector and that of those collected from?
- In how far do styles of display highlight/occlude/sustain the gendered histories of collections? How can new museologies challenge these?
- What are the methodological considerations/implications for a gendered approach to the study of histories of ethnographic collections?

Considering these broader questions, Godwin Kornes discusses the ambivalent legacy of Antonie Thawka Brandeis (1868–1945). Brandeis was the daughter of Zanzibari princess Emily Salme Ruete and married the German colonial official Eugen Brandeis, with whom she moved to Jaluit, part of the German Pacific colony of the Marshall Islands. There, she assembled an expansive ethnographic collection, especially

through her contacts with local indigenous women. While Brandeis remained unacknowledged for her ethnographic work, she made significant collections that are today located in Freiburg (Museum Natur und Mensch), Berlin (Ethnologisches Museum), Cambridge (Peabody Museum Harvard), Stuttgart (Linden-Museum) and Hamburg (MARKK). Kornes article recovers her career as a collector, focussing especially on her ambivalent position as a woman of colour, colonial governor's wife, and ardent colonial activist.

Viola König equally highlights the often-overlooked contributions of female collectors. She does so by focussing on the lives and collections of five women who collected in North and Central America in the 19th and early 20th century: Elisabeth von Wrangell, Cécilie Seler Sachs, Elly von Kuhlmann, Odille Morrison, and Estefanía de Broner. Through close readings of the biographies of these female collectors, König puts emphasis on restrictive circumstances of 19th century collecting, which was considered a reserve for men, with female collectors being considered amateurs at best. She shows that the women she discusses were not given due consideration, remaining in the shadows of their male counterparts. However, as König highlights, these five women were nevertheless able to develop their own criteria and methods of collecting.

Bansoa Sigam's paper introduces the concept of *sheritage* "as a way of making women and the cultural heritage associated with them visible." By focusing on the collecting histories of *akure* necklaces from Central Africa by the missionary ethnographer Fernand Grébert, Sigam demonstrates how the lack of gendered perspectives on the history of collecting obscures the impact of collecting practices on gender dynamics in indigenous societies. Using a gender-focused approach in reading the archives associated with these practices and a close analysis of the objects, Sigam demonstrates how the necklaces were collected directly on women, who most likely wore them

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- How Sir Henry Wellcome Collected the World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Emma Martin, "Charles Bell's Collection of 'Curios': Acquisitions and Encounters During a Himalayan Journey," in *Narrating Objects, Collecting Stories*, ed. Sandra H. Dudley et al. (Routledge, 2012), 167–83; Claire Wintle, *Colonial Collecting and Display - Encounters with Material Culture from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013).

throughout their lives as a representative symbol of their status in society. The forceful collection directly from the bodies of these women, Sigam argues, “are testimonies of the forceful transformation of the Fang society in colonial times with regards to cultural norms and gender dynamics, specifically impacting women’s lives.”

Like Sigam, Richard Hölzl focuses on an instance of missionary collecting: Benedictine missionary Meinulf Küsters’ 1927/28 expedition in Southern Tanzania, commissioned by the Munich Ethnographic Museum (today: Museum Fünf Kontinente). He demonstrates the importance of examining missionary masculinities and the “deep contexts” that underlay the collecting practices of missionaries. Küsters’ collection of highly sensitive objects used during male and female initiations was done within the context of racialised and gendered notions of missionary masculinity in which missionaries labelled African initiation practices as pagan and primitive, justifying their attempts to stop these practices. As a result, “[m]issionary collecting [...] was thus embedded in Eurocentric, physically and epistemically violent cultural practices and a colonial culture of claiming religious and cultural superiority.”

Carl Deußen extends this discussion on masculinity by demonstrating how European collectors, who were usually male, were influenced in their collecting practices by their own self-identity and masculinity. This process of forming European masculinity worked through the simultaneous denial and appropriation of indigenous masculinities. Through a close textual reading of field diaries, analyses of collecting practices and display of ethnographic objects by German ethnographer and collector Wilhelm Joest (1852-1897) from his stay on Zanzibar in 1884, Deußen demonstrates how these processes were core to creating and defining the European self and the indigenous Other.

Victoria Chitungu’s paper examines the representation of gender in the permanent exhibitions in Zambia’s four national museums. She demonstrates how the displays favour a masculine and male-centred representation of technologies and cultural practices, ranging from Stone Age to Iron Age technologies, and including cultural practices such as traditional leadership, basketry, and female initiation. Chitungu argues that these forms of problematic representations have roots in the ways curators during the colonial period represented African societies as patriarchal, and the failure of post-colonial museum curators to transcend these problematic representations. The result of these male-centred exhibitions and display practices is that women’s narratives and experiences are obscured.

In the final paper of the collection, Mischka Lewis opens up profound questions on the limits of the (colonial) archive and its potentialities. Lewis proposes that we “re-think the empty spaces [within the archive] where enslaved and indigenous women are erased and explore innovative approaches to reading records and writing histories.” Her discussion of the nature of the colonial archive, characterised as it is by fragments, erasures and silences, highlights important convergences between and among the preceding papers, inviting us to develop productive ways of dealing with the complicated archival foundation of our inquiry into the gendered past. Lewis herself does this by examining a “collaborative praxis of historians, artists and cultural practitioners in a post-apartheid context who use archives and images from the past to evoke memory and pedagogy - inviting us to write a different history of ethnographic material in archives and rethinking the representation of histories in Cape slavery.” In a way, Lewis’ contribution provides both a conclusion and an outlook for the discussions that this issue and the work-

shop invited. What is the place of objects, ethnographic texts and other archival traces from colonial field sciences and collecting expeditions in today's museums? Are these remnants of imperial expansion necessarily bound to the violent contexts from which they were taken,

or can they be used to tell different and liberating stories of the people from who created them? We think that this volume shows that whatever the answer may be, a thorough analysis of the gender of ethnographic collecting needs to be part of it.

## The Ambivalence of Gender

### The Collector, Ethnographer, and Colonial Women's Movement Activist Antonie Brandeis

Godwin Kornes

Several museums in Germany and the US hold collections of material culture from Micronesia, gathered by Antonie Thawka Brandeis née Ruete (1868–1945) during her stay on the Marshall Islands. She accompanied her husband, Eugen Brandeis (1846–1930), who served as imperial governor of the German protectorate for two terms from 1898–1906. The most important Brandeis collections are located in Freiburg (*Museum Natur und Mensch*), Berlin (*Ethnologisches Museum*), Cambridge (*Peabody Museum Harvard*), Stuttgart (*Linden-Museum*) and Hamburg (MARKK). The latter also includes the most significant collection of photographs Antonie Brandeis took and developed on the Marshall Islands and Nauru, including the original glass plates. Next to being an ardent collector and photographer, she also produced a large body of ethnographic and colonial writing and committed herself for nearly three decades to the German colonial women's movement (Kornes 2021).



**Fig. 1:** Antonie Brandeis with her husband Eugen (second from the left) and three unknown German men, presumably at the Brandeis residence in Jaluit. © Leiden University Library, Or. 27.135 H5.

Unlike her husband, however, who worked as a colonial administrator in Oceania in various positions for close to two decades (Spennemann 2005, 1998; Baumann/Klein/Apitzsch 2002: 46–47; Linnekin 1994; Treue 1976: 100, 114–122), Antonie Brandeis has received considerably less attention. It appears that despite her diverse roles and activities, she remained largely in the shadow of other, more prominent people. This applies not only to her influential husband, who was at the centre of a controversial public debate in 1905/1906 about the abuse of power in the colonies,<sup>1</sup> but also to her famous mother.

Antonie Brandeis is the daughter of Emily Sayyida Salme Ruete née bint Sà id Al-Sà id (1844–1924), which makes her the granddaughter of the Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar, Sà id ibn Sultan Al Bu-Sà id (1791–1856). Her mother, who was the daughter of a slave-turned-wife of the Sultan, grew up in the royal palace in Zanzibar, where she fell in love with a merchant from Hamburg, Rudolph Heinrich Ruete. When she decided to leave with him for Hamburg, convert to Christianity, and marry him, she was disowned by her family. The couple settled in Hamburg and had three children, Antonie being the oldest. In 1870, Rudolph Ruete died in a tram accident, which led to a sudden and tangible economic decline for his family. As a culturally estranged Arabian woman and single mother of three, Emily Ruete struggled with the social realities in Germany. Her tragic life, which is heavily interwoven with the history of slavery and colonialism in East Africa, as

<sup>1</sup> For more than a year, German colonial atrocities were the subject of heated debates in the Reichstag, the German parliament. This took place after a whistle-blower in the colonial department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs leaked classified files and information to liberal parliamentarians and the press. Brandeis was one of several colonial administrators who were accused of brutality, in his case for exercising corporal punishment, which was officially prohibited in the German protectorate of the Marshall Islands. Complaints against him apparently were covered up at Foreign Affairs (Spennemann 1998: 40–50; Erzberger 1906: 82–85).

well as German imperial politics, has received a considerable amount of attention, both in academia and popular culture (Ahmed 2020: 91–112; Roy 2015; Waldschmidt 2006; Schneppen 2003, 1999; van Donzel 1993, 1987). This is not least due to the fact that she is said to be the first Arabian woman to have published an autobiography (*Memoiren einer arabischen Prinzessin*, 1886), which was also translated into English and French (Roy 2015).

Next to her mother, Antonie's brother, Rudolph Said, was a public figure, too. As an author and diplomat, he left an imprint in the history of German and British colonial relations with Arab countries and East Africa (Ahmed 2020: 122–140; van Donzel 1993: 109–140). As Ahmed underlines, there is an obvious continuity between Emily Ruete and her children regarding their individual entanglements with colonialism (Ahmed 2020: 112–114). There also are commonalities within the family, I would like to add, when it comes to the significance of intercultural autobiographical writing and complex transnational life trajectories in the era of New Imperialism. Against this background, it is fascinating to investigate the legacy of Antonie Brandeis with a focus on both gender and imperialism.

Only two articles have explicitly focused on her role as a collector, both based on research on her earliest and largest collection in Freiburg. Brüll (1995) laid the groundwork by writing Antonie back into the history of her own collection, which for close to a century was mostly attributed to Eugen Brandeis, who donated it to the city of Freiburg in 1900/1901. Brüll also portrayed her as a dedicated collector and ethnographer, who had high professional standards for her own work. Salmond (2018) provided a concise and convincing analysis of collector and collection from a gendered perspective. She also emphasised Antonie's "complex position as a woman of colour occupying a privileged position within a repressive colonial regime" (Salmond 2018: 160), which is a particularly interesting point about her biography. A recent article by this author, based on ex-

tensive archival research, portrays her agency as a collector and provides the first-ever coherent account of her life (Kornes 2021). With the exception of short references to her contribution to Harvard's Pacifica collection (Watson/Dorhout/Rogers 1996: 64) and her status as the privileged wife of a colonial administrator, with enough time on her hands for collecting (Loosen 2014: 248–251), so far nothing else has been written about Antonie Brandeis, the collector. Regarding her role as a public proponent of colonialism, she has received slightly more scholarly attention. For more than 25 years (1907–1933), she was actively engaged in the Women's League of the German Colonial Society, as well as several other conservative colonial women's associations, and played an important role in the foundation of the Colonial Women's School in Rendsburg in 1927. In addition, she published articles in journals of the German colonial movement on a regular basis, focussing on her years in Micronesia, ethnography, and especially the contribution of women to colonialism. In this context, she is referenced as an exemplary case in point in a couple of studies on the colonial women's movement and gendered aspects of German imperialism (Loosen 2014: 249–252; Walgenbach 2005: 134, 147, 290; Reagin 2001: 84, Wildenthal 2001: 184–185). Still, these accounts mostly treat her as a representative of a particular system, institution, or ideology, without contextualising her colonial activism with her biography more thoroughly; presumably, due to a lack of sources. In the following, I will approach the life and work of Antonie Brandeis from a perspective of gender, based on preliminary findings from ongoing research on the provenance of her collection at the *Museum Natur und Mensch in Freiburg*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.freiburg.de/pb/,Len/1576576.html>. The project is funded by the German Lost Art Foundation. I wish to extend my gratitude to the von Brand family (Maryland) for granting me access to an extensive private collection of personal documents and letters of their great-grandmother, Antonie Brandeis.

### The Gender of the Collector

Given the male-dominated institutional environment in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, few women were able to make a mark as ethnographic collectors.<sup>3</sup> Among these, Antonie Brandeis stands out for her high demand for professional habitus. We do not know whether her interest in collecting was triggered by a request by the Freiburg museum at the end of 1898, even though that seems plausible. Around November 1898, the magistrate of the city of Freiburg began contacting high ranking officers in the German colonies with requests for collections (Himmelsbach 2018: 149). On 6 April 1899, Eugen Brandeis replied in a letter to the Freiburg museum that he was willing to contribute, noting that his wife was already busy collecting.<sup>4</sup> But already in January 1899, just five months after her arrival in Jaluit, she mentioned the existence of a growing collection of particularly “precious” objects.<sup>5</sup> Throughout her stay on the Marshall Islands (1898–1904) and during a visit on Nauru in 1903, she put together an extensive collection of ethnographic objects, which she either donated or sold to the above mentioned museums.<sup>6</sup>

In order to meet academic requirements of ethnographic collecting, she corresponded with experts such as museum anthropologist Felix von Luschan, whose lectures she attended

during a furlough in Berlin in 1901.<sup>7</sup> At the time, this was still an exceptional thing for a woman to do and she had to ask the professor for his explicit permission. Von Luschan, on his part, displayed a great interest in her Nauru collection and advised her about taking field notes and describing objects. In this regard, Antonie Brandeis constitutes an interesting case for a laywoman with professional ambitions, who blurs O’Hanlon’s (2000: 12–13) distinction between primary and secondary collector.

She produced a considerable body of ethnography, which she used to supplement her collection with cultural and historical context in the form of extensive commentary and which she also published as articles in colonial and ethnographic journals. Furthermore, beginning with her arrival on Jaluit, she taught herself photography, which she actively used as a medium to document her ethnographic work. Today, this multi-layered documentary legacy provides invaluable resources for researching the collection’s provenance.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, she established and maintained professional contacts with scholars and museum practitioners, which often led to different forms of cooperation, centred on her collection. For instance, she participated at several colonial exhibitions, either by displaying objects from her Micronesian collection or contributing as a regional expert.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, however, it was men who used her work for their own academic projects and who reaped its benefits. Eugen Brandeis received the honour and accolades for his donation to the city of

<sup>3</sup> See Brüll (1995: 131–133) on Lotharia Müller, Salmond (2018) on Elizabeth Krämer-Bannow, Gosden / Knowles (2020: 139–166) on Beatrice Blackwood, and Finney (2021) on Cara David, just to give some examples with a regional connection.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Jaluit, dated 6 April 1899; Stadtarchiv Freiburg (SAF C3/241/1).

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Jaluit, dated 23 January 1899. In another letter dated 9 April 1899, Antonie Brandeis confirmed that she was collecting for Freiburg (both letters courtesy von Brand family).

<sup>6</sup> Her collections for Freiburg, Stuttgart, Berlin and Hamburg were donations; the one in Harvard is based on her Berlin collection, which she retrieved in 1931 and sold to Peabody in 1933. So far, the author could establish more than 700 inventory numbers in the various collections with a multitude of objects.

<sup>7</sup> Correspondence with Antonie Brandeis (1901–1909), part of the partial estate of Felix von Luschan at Staatsbibliothek Berlin (StB DE-611-BF-1604).

<sup>8</sup> Most of her ethnographic museum collections also include photographs. Her main photographic collection is preserved at MARKK’s historical photo archive in Hamburg.

<sup>9</sup> These include the German Army, Navy, and Colonialism Exhibition in Berlin, 1907; International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden, 1911; “Frau im Haus und Beruf” in Berlin, 1912.



Fig. 2: A Marshallese woman weaving sail mats from Pandanus leaves, photo taken by Antonie Brandeis, ca. 1899/1900. © Museum Natur und Mensch, XHF II.148.



Fig. 3: A strip of unfinished sail mat in the Brandeis collection (II/1309), demonstrating the delicate weaving patterns. © A. Killian, MNM Freiburg.

Freiburg, instead of Antonie (Brüll 1995: 133),<sup>10</sup> while the bulk of her written and unpublished ethnography was used by Augustin Krämer and

<sup>10</sup> See also the entry on the Brandeis donation in the Honour Roll documentation project of the Museum Natur und Mensch: <https://www.freiburg.de/np/Len/1582690.html>.



Fig. 4: Antonie Brandeis, with her oldest daughter Margarete placed on a fine mat (neided) and an unknown young man looking on, in Jaluit. © Courtesy von Brand family.

Hans Nevermann for their monograph on the Marshall Islands (*Ralik Ratak*, 1938). Her status as a collector and ethnographer within early 20th century German anthropology therefore still needs to be assessed.

### The Gendered Collection

Her collection stands out for its rich documentation of the material culture of everyday life and especially the sphere of production. This includes the gendered domains of work and craft, with a particular focus on the materiality and techniques of weaving, jewellery making, tattooing and body-art, fishing, boat-building and seafaring. As Salmond (2018: 159) has noted, her collection is not characterised by an exclusively male or female bias, but rather presents a balanced gendered representation of Marshallese society at the time. Together with her

ethnographic notes and photographs, her collection thus provides tangible impressions of gendered crafts, like the weaving of Pandanus leafs for sails and roofs, at the time typically done by women.

While she did not record the names of previous owners, she notes that she built her collection mainly through barter with local women. They provided her with objects for which she gave gifts in return; depending on what the women wished for and the value of the respective object (Brandeis 1908: 37). She also notes that she received an abundance of presents from the wives of local chiefs, whenever they came to visit Jaluit.<sup>11</sup> She also asked older people to reproduce specific objects, which had become rare or out of use (Brandeis 1908: 37). Today, her collection is rediscovered and potentially re-appropriated by Marshallese women, who find inspiration in old patterns and techniques for weaving mats (*jaki-ed*). In how far her collection can be understood in terms of reciprocity, given the unequal power relations of colonial rule (Thomas 1991: 4–5), is of course a quite different question.

### The Collector and Gender

Antonie Brandeis unwaveringly identified with the ideology of colonialism as a civilising mission. For more than 25 years (1907–1933), she was an active proponent of the German colonial women's movement, which propagated a conservative and nationalistic ideal of imperial womanhood (Walgenbach 2005; Reagin 2001; Wildenthal 2001). At the same time, she perceptively noted the cultural change and destructive impact colonialism wrought on Marshallese society (Brandeis 1902: 192). In her writing, she displays an idealised, paternalistic affection for the people of the Marshall Islands, and especially those of Nauru, at times interspersed with a racist devaluation of peo-

ple with darker skin tones (Brandeis 1902: 192; Loosen 2014: 424–426). In this, her colorism resembles that of her mother (Ahmed 2020: 106–107).

In light of this, her ethnography constitutes an ambivalent legacy, which also has to be taken into account when one tries to understand her collection. Still, her rather unusual background and her status as a woman of colour in imperial Germany challenge any approach simply dismissing her as a representative of imperialism, whiteness, and the hubris of European salvage anthropology. In how far her gendered colonial mind-set influenced her perception of Marshallese gender relations and what impact this had on her collecting strategies is one aspect which deserves further exploration.

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from Jaluit, dated 2 March 1900 (courtesy von Brand family).

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## Invisible

### Female Collectors in Colonial and Postcolonial North and Central America

Viola König

Ethnographic collections from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were evidently exclusively attributed to men. However, women were involved. In fact, women created their own collections. But the inventories do not necessarily reflect their names, even less their specific roles. In this article, I will introduce the biographies of five women who collected in North and Central America in the 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their circumstances of collecting differed from those of men, although men played an important role and made their collecting possible in the first place. Later, in the course of the 20th century, women started collecting as their own enterprise. However, for the 19th century, the situation can be described as follows:

- It was not considered important to mention female collectors by name;
- Women collected through their husbands' professional positions, or they collected for their male clients;
- Nevertheless, women developed their own criteria and methods of collecting;
- A higher number of unreported cases of female collectors can be assumed.

I will introduce Elisabeth von Wrangell, Cäcilie Seler Sachs, and Elly von Kuhlmann, three women who accompanied their husbands, the German governor of the Russian Colony of Alaska, the famous scholar and founder of the German 'Altamerikanistik', and the German ambassador to Guatemala. The final two women were locals: Odille Morison was a Tshimsian-Canadian from British Columbia and Estefanía de Broner was a Totonac mestiza from Veracruz, Mexico. Both of them collected for German clients: Franz Boas and Hermann Strebel.

### Elisabeth von Wrangell, née Baroness Rossillon (1810–1853)



Fig. 1: Elisabeth Theodora Natalie Karoline von Wrangell de Rossillon (1810-1854), wife of Admiral Ferdinand von Wrangell, Governor of Russian Alaska. © Wrangell family, published by Cornelia von Wrangell.

The Baltic German Baron Ferdinand von Wrangell (1796-1870) was appointed governor of the colony of Russian America in 1829. During the five years of his administration at the capital New Archangelsk or Sitka, Alaska, he conducted extensive scientific research in the area and implemented many important reforms. The 20-year-old Baroness Elisabeth was the first wife of a governor to accompany her husband to Sitka, travelling for 18 months through Siberia on horseback, giving birth to a baby daughter on the way in Irkutsk. However:

“A Governor's wife did not have a formal function in the Russian-American Company (RAC). They were not employed and did not earn a salary. Thus, scholars have not attached any importance to these women [...] Nor have scholars considered the informal function these women had in the colonies” (Rabow-Edling 2010: 1).

Clearly, Elisabeth was actively involved. The Wrangell's “new progressive attitudes toward

the Native Peoples [...] had stabilizing effects on racial tensions which had formerly run high". Elizabeth was "unique in her routine visits to Creoles and Native Tlingit", establishing friendships with Tlingit women (O'Grady 331f.).

She "was a tireless charity worker" and used her role as "Sitka's First Lady [...] as a kind of mediator between European civilization and native culture", because "in contrast to many other pioneer women [...] von Wrangell openly expressed her desire to get to know the native inhabitants and learn about their way of life. She invited local chiefs and one chieftainess to her house, showing them hospitality and kindness." (Rabow-Edling 2013: 40f.)

The Wrangell collection is attributed to Ferdinand, but I believe that part of their collection goes back to Elisabeth, who probably received gifts from her new friends. She had sent her collection back home to Reval (Tallinn) to the hands of her father, Baron Wilhelm von Rossillon. Even before the couple returned to Russia in 1835, Elizabeth's father, who was born at Marburg, Hessen, donated 51 objects of the Wrangell collection to the Senckenbergische Gesellschaft at Frankfurt am Main. Apparently, the baron had received approval from his daughter for such a donation being the collector and owner. Elisabeth died in March 1853. The collection is housed today in the Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt.

### Odille Morison (1855-1933)

Three decades after the Wrangell's had returned to Europe, Odille Morison was born hundreds of miles south at a Tsimshian big house in Fort Simpson, located on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia. The Tsimshians are neighbors of the Tlingit, both groups share a matrilineal social structure. Odille's mother Mary belonged to the Killer whale lineage. Odille's father François Quintal Dubois was a French-Canadian fur trade employee at the Hudson's Bay Company. Odille was educated at the Metlakatla mission village in the

Christian faith and became a teacher herself, but continued the Tsimshian cultural practices and traditions. She acted as a translator, interpreter and community correspondent in English and Tsimshian. In 1872, Odille was married to Charles Morison, the HBC manager at Fort Simpson. Like Elizabeth, Odille lost her first three babies and had more surviving children later, and like the Wrangell family, the Morisons welcomed international guests at their open house.



Fig. 2: Odille Morison and her children, ca. 1890. © Public domain.

However, Odille became best known for her close collaboration with the anthropologist Franz Boas, whom she met at Port Essington in 1888 for the first time. Her biographer Margret Atkinson states that contrary to the assumption that only white male colonizers took an active part in the wheeling and dealing of ceremonial and cultural objects, Odille's reputation as an established cultural expert and as a translator sets her apart from the majority of other collectors of artifacts (Atkinson 2008: 69). Franz

Boas had hired her as a linguist, but when he found out about Odille's cultural network and knowledge, assigned her a special task. In 1891, he offered money for "a good collection of implements formerly used by the Tsimshian", and a "full explanation as to their use and meaning". Boas needed the objects for the Chicago World's Fair where he acted as a curator for the ethnography exhibits. With the help of her extended Tsimshian family, Odille collected over 140 artifacts, including totem poles and a text called *Legends and Traditions of the Origin of the Zimshian Tribes of Indian N. W. Coast British Columbia*. Today, her collection is housed at the Chicago Field Museum under the name of Franz Boas. Odille Morison, who had moved between the Tsimshian and Anglo-Christian cultures throughout her life, died in 1933.

Odille was well aware of the dangers that collecting for foreign white clients posed for her own cultural heritage, and took it into account in the method of her collecting and dissemination of information. Even though she "provided rich documentation in English and Tsimshian" and "her notes [...] go beyond describing and naming the specimens and include some observations on chiefs, secret societies, and the relationship of iconography to myths", she did not "provide provenience data other than, and in only some cases, "Nass River," or "Skeena River"" (Halpin 1973: 42f.). When Boas asked for a totem pole for the World's Fair, she provided an unusual unique pole with a mix of several Tsimshian crests carved on it, which was not considered as "genuine" by later critiques. However, "all poles were the property of the chief and a particular family lineage; it would have been a major breach of Tsimshian protocol for her to sell property that did not belong to her family." Perhaps, she wanted her collection to be representative for all Tsimshian villages and "therefore, had a pole either carved or located to reflect this" (Atkinson 2011: 153-154).

### Caecilie Selser Sachs (1855-1935)



Fig. 3: Caecilie Selser Sachs, co-author of *The Collectors. At the Exhibition. The Woman in Home and Work*, Berlin 1912. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ethnologisches Museum.

Caecilie Selser Sachs, born in Berlin in the same year as Odille, was acting in the shadow of a famous scholar. But undoubtedly, the yield of her husband, Eduard Selser (1849-1922), would have been much smaller without the empathic and patient commitment of his wife. In 1885, Eduard Selser and Caecilie Sachs were married, an event that would become as significant in Eduard's life as his employment at the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde* or the completion of his doctoral degree. But only in the last decades the work of both Eduard and Caecilie Selser has been recognized by the academic community, an honor that was long overdue (König 2005: 131). Without Caecilie's commitment, Eduard's work is inconceivable. Much more than a travel companion, Caecilie was active as an ethnographer, botanist, professional photographer and posthumous editor of Eduard's writings. In addition, her financial dowry as sole heiress of the banker Löbl Guttentag contributed essentially to the Selers' life as independent researchers. They bought a house in Berlin Steglitz, where they had an excellent library. Under such perfect conditions, Selser's career developed straightforwardly, as did his study of the ancient cultures in the Americas. Between

1887 and 1911, the Selers made a total of six research trips to Mexico and Guatemala. When Eduard was sick, Căcilie went alone with a native guide. She complemented her husband's interest in archaeology, linguistics and iconography by studying the contemporary culture of the indigenous peoples they met with. Above all, she was the communicator, the one who established the social contacts and helped to build up the collections accumulated during their travels.

The Seler collections of some 13,000 individual numbers were given as a whole into the possession of the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin. Yet the Selers were critical about collecting:

“Much has been collected in México, but almost nowhere has one taken the trouble of noting exactly where the objects came from or researching the origin of the pieces when this was doubtful.” (Seler 1960, II: 289).

The Selers' did not carry out their investigations unprepared. They predetermined their aims and prearranged contacts, taking into account the inconveniences of overland journeys to distant areas of Central America at the end of the 19th century. The results of the collecting trips were published in the works of both Selers, but it was Caecilie who left behind a lively, exciting and scientifically rigorous book for a broad readership, *Auf Alten Wegen in Mexico und Guatemala [On Ancient Paths through Mexico and Guatemala]*, including an illustrative impression of the conditions under which acquisitions were made (Seler 1900). We learn from Caecilie about their close connections to persons of German origin who received and housed them on their journeys, but also the indispensable letters of recommendation from the president of the Republic of Mexico, Porfirio Díaz, and the “spiritual” letter from the archbishop of Oaxaca, Monsignor Gillow, announcing their visits to indigenous communities (König 2005: 131f.). Caecilie's report on their stay in Nochistlan in the Mixtec Alta is most instructive about the method of bargaining for artefacts:

“[...] It was as usual: to the first question about such ‘antiquities’, first a surprised shaking of the head, then the standing answer: we do not have anything like that. After repeated, more pressing questioning: yes, we can find the same, but the children are playing with it, throwing it around, breaking it. Then one of the members of the family remembers that this and that object must still be lying in this or that corner; finally, some things appear, one acquires something for a few centavos and receives the promise: we will look for it and bring it. That is the general course with variations in all of the houses. A bit of practice and patience is indeed necessary in this business. But the people keep their word, and on this evening and the following days our room was overrun by women, men, children, who brought things, good and bad, whole and broken, fine and coarse” (Seler 1900: 40ff.).

Caecilie seems to have been well aware of the sensible or even semi-legal provenance of some of their acquisitions, such as the Lienzo Seler II/Coixtlahuaca II: “Due to a fortunate coincidence we could acquire such a painted linen cloth measuring 4 m squared, which comes from the village of Coaixtlahuaca”. Up to today it is not known how the work left its community of origin: as a purchase, a gift or “loan”?

### **Estefanía Salas de Broner (ca. 1850-1907)**

Even though Caecilie never received the same scholarly reputation as her husband, she was not at all silenced and is known as an author. In contrast, Seler's contemporary colleague Hermann Strebel, a merchant and malacologist from Hamburg, who had worked in Veracruz between 1848 and 1867 and later specialized on archaeological objects from this area, is much better known than the woman to whom he owed his collection and who sent him reports and drawings which he published under his name (Strebel 1884).



Fig. 4: Estefanía Salas de Broner, „a Misantec Scholar of our Culture“. Drawing by Ernesto Plácido Cervantes, 2003.

Strebel, like Seler, did not excavate in Mexico himself, instead, he collaborated with Estefanía Salas de Broner, a Totonac-speaking mestiza from Misantla, daughter from a rich local family in the vanilla business. Married to merchant Federico Broner from Hamburg, she made various business trips to Germany. Salas excavated and collected for Strebel between 1880 and 1890. The so-called Strebel collection was later sold to the Berlin Museum and smaller parts to Leipzig and Hamburg. Seler briefly mentions Strebel's "Mexican friend, the honored collector Doña Estefanía Salas" (Seler 1912a: 232). Obviously, Strebel benefited from this extraordinary woman's enthusiasm to learn more about her Totonac heritage. Estefanía, who is still highly regarded in her hometown, seems to be the first female archaeologist of Mexico. However, her professional colleagues in Mexico criticized Estefanía's excavations from the very start, denouncing the looting and export of archaeological pieces. In an 1888 newspaper article, they complain: "there is a lady who does magnificent businesses buying at a vile price from the hands of the Indians,

true curiosities, and sells them by weight gold to a house in Hamburg". Up to today, the influential opinions of archaeologists such as Ignacio Marquina are representative on this issue. He complained that a large number of tombs in the State of Veracruz were destroyed by Estefanía and her assistants "with the object to provide data for the work of Hermann Strebel" (García Marquez 2014: 26), an opinion shared by famous archaeologist Eduardo Matos Motezuma (2012: 48). 150 years later, this claim is difficult to substantiate; the archaeologists seem to have tried to discredit Salas de Broner by painting the image of a second enterprising Malinche, betraying them to her German "correspondent archaeologist".

#### Elly von Kuhlmann (1892-1964)



Fig. 5: Elly von Kuhlmann, Berlin, ca. 1908. The author's grandmother puts her arm around her best friend. © Viola König.

My last case is a personal one. It is about my Berlin grandmother's best friend. Grandma often used to talk about Elly von Kuhlmann's exciting life. Elly née Windler was married to the German ambassador to Central America, Wilhelm von Kuhlmann, and spent a decade with him in Guatemala (1924-1934). Grandma described Elly's large collection of textiles and was proud to have received several gifts from her. Unfortunately, unlike Elly, she did not keep a single piece. All her belongings were burnt du-

ring a bombing raid in Berlin in 1943 and on the flight to West Germany. But she had her memory, including things like the recipe for foamy Guatemalan chocolate, which she made with a simple wooden whisk replacing Elly's lost carved original. They stayed in close touch until Elly died in 1964.

One year before grandma died in 1981, I was a young assistant at the MARKK in Hamburg and charged with completing the inventory of its collections from Guatemala. I could not believe my eyes when I came across the "Elly von Kuhlmann Files" and her well preserved beautiful textiles. The former museums director, Franz Termer (1894-1968), was a well-known specialist on Central American archaeology and anthropology. Penny describes their relationship:

"By 1962, she was an energetic seventy-year-old woman and proud of her collection, which she had arranged according to governmental districts and tribes. Termer corresponded with her for decades about Guatemala and her collections, and already in 1951, she had donated a part of them to Termer's Museum. Her collections were indeed exceptional" (Penny 2021: 137).

In 1963, the year before she died, another donation of 12 pieces followed.<sup>1</sup> However, these 26 pieces were just a small fraction of her collection: In 1964, the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin received a donation of 154 pieces<sup>2</sup>:

"Elly von Kuhlmann, Wiesbaden, had bequeathed her collection of recent textiles, which she had gathered in the villages around Lake Atitlán, Guatemala, to the museum in Berlin in her will. These items of clothing for everyday life and festivities, which were collected systematically, and uncommonly well-documented, are a valuable addition to the collection of Indian folk goods" (Eisleb 1973: 184).

Elly, who had moved to Wiesbaden in 1936, had not forgotten her home town and its famous museum. Surprisingly, the MARKK in-

herited Elly's five albums including 400 photos from her sister Anne-Marie Windler in 1996, who still lived in Berlin. The pictures, taken by Elly in the 1920s, proved to be a real treasure, portraying Maya life, landscapes, Fiestas, the German community, but omitting the "sick dirty people from the Baja Verapaz" mentioned in her correspondence (Meier 2011: 337). The Kuhlmanns were rooted in the ancient German-conservative "Kaiserreich". In Elly's letters to Termer, we see concern about the behavior of the new Nazi movement and later government, confirmed by Termer in a letter: "Our people, together with the envoy, behaved unbelievably awkwardly [...] what a different sort of people were the v. Kuhlmanns" (Penny 2021: 137).

## Conclusion

This paper introduced five women who were much more than happily married housewives and part-time collectors. The wives of government officials, such as Elisabeth von Wrangell and Elly von Kuhlmann, were tied into the loyalties of their husbands, but they both managed to get involved and empathize with their indigenous environment. Caecilie, who always wore short hair, was active in the German feminist movement and fought tirelessly for suffrage and equal opportunities for women. Her 40 publications include the monograph *Women's Lives in the Realm of the Aztecs. An Aspect of Ancient Mexican Cultural History* (1919). During the Nazi era, after her husband's death, Elly chaired the regional association of Evangelical Women's Aid of Nassau Hessen. She negotiated with the regional church in order to secure the independence of the association's work and strongly opposed the takeover by the Nazis (Drewello-Merkel, Christiane 2020).

I wonder, whether Elly, if she had traveled to Guatemala once again after 1945, would have finally captured the sad facets of the indigenous "Volksbild" such as poverty, exploitation and disadvantage in her photographs? As a

1 Information by Christina Chavez, 6/30/2021

2 Information by Boris Gliemann, 7/01/2021

young and politically uninformed woman, she was already a good observer, but did not want to record the existing misery, keeping only the bright sides. However, with her experiences of a brutal war, with the devastating result of the years of National Socialist policy, she would certainly have been very aware of the importance of documenting the dark side of her host country.

All the presented women mastered special skills, acting as photographers, botanists, drawers, linguists, translators, ethnographers and social workers. They shared leadership qualities in their ventures. And yet, they were not the only ones. We need to find out more about female collectors and their engagement in the building of museum collections. The example of Estefania's digging methods shows that female collectors need to be examined just as critically as men when it comes to the provenance of their collections. At the same time, others such as Odille and Caecilie were well aware of the problem of collecting objects from an indigenous context, be it that they came from their own society or from foreign cultures. In the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, women gained more and more rights and became increasingly independent. However, as Caecilie Selzer complains on several occasions, women were far from having the same professional opportunities, awards and design options for their lives as their husbands. But the women presented in this article were all cross-border commuters and tested their options, for example, by acquiring additional qualifications, and by creating their own collections. Thanks to their efforts, the next, or post-war, generation of women was able to study cultural anthropology, carry out independent field research projects and create thematically targeted collections.

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## African Cultural “Sheritage”

### The Case of Akure Metal Necklaces. Missionary Ethnographic Collecting on Women in Colonial Gabon

Bansoa Sigam



Fig. 1: Open and broken akure collected by Fernand Grébert. © Johnathan Watts. Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, ETHAF 011688.

Ethnographic collections acquired by museums during the colonial period are seldom analyzed in terms of gender. Yet this prism of analysis allows for a renewed consideration of collections that have in fact frequently had gendered labels, such as: “forbidden to women” or “for/of women”. This is especially the case for material culture from Central Africa, resulting in a partial view of how gender dynamics are conceived within particular societies and obscuring the impact of the collecting practices on these dynamics. Moreover, this lack of attention often renders women as either invisible or collateral victims of colonial violence in the societies from which the sacred and ritual objects, common daily tools, ornaments and regalia were removed. By using a gender-focused approach in telling the story of ethnographic collecting, the

paper introduces the concept of “sheritage”<sup>1</sup>, as a way of making women and the cultural heritage associated with them visible. This paper sheds light on a particular aspect of the history of ethnographic collecting – collecting directly on women – by analyzing a corpus of metal necklaces, here called akure<sup>2</sup>, collected between the 1910s and 1930s in modern-day Gabon by the missionary ethnographer Fernand Grébert. It explores what akure necklaces are, physically and symbolically, and discusses the impact of their removal directly off of women’s bodies in the context of colonial missionary ethnographic collecting.

#### What are Akure Necklaces and How Do We Know Them?

Akure necklaces are metal necklaces originally produced by the Fang people, whose territory in Central Africa spans parts of Cameroon, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. Most of the written and visual information available about these necklaces comes from texts that were produced by missionaries and explorers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that no specific study of akure necklaces and their collecting has been made since these descriptions. This paper aims at filling this void by transdisciplinarily making use of the archival material from the museums and collectors. It seeks to gain more insight into the practice of collecting specifically on women and the type of impacts and implications this collecting practice might have had on the women and the gender dynamics in Fang society at large.

<sup>1</sup> The word “sheritage”, the merging of “she” and “heritage”, has not yet been used, and my doctoral thesis introduces and develops this concept with a focus on understanding the specificity of ethnographic collections from Central Africa with regards to women, their cultural heritage and its transmission.

<sup>2</sup> In Fang, the plural of “akure” is “bakure”; however, for clarity purposes, “akure necklaces” will be used.

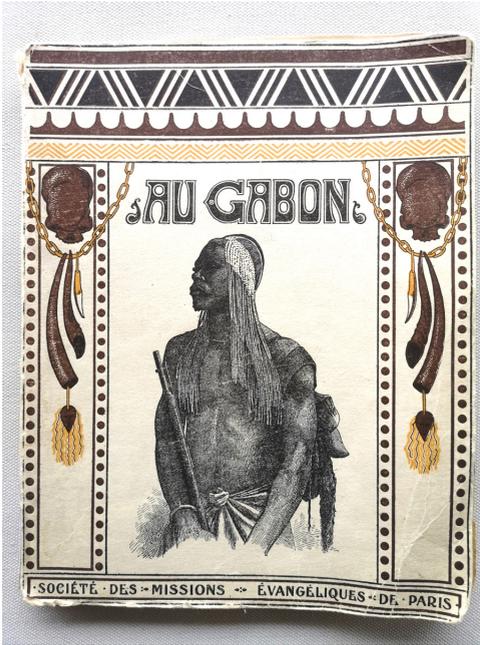


Fig. 2: Book cover of *Au Gabon*, 1928 edition, by Fernand Grébert.

The first texts describing Fang people and their way of life emerged in the second half of the 19th century (du Chaillu 1853, Tessman 1913, Grébert 1922) and were written by European and US-American explorers and missionaries, who had entered the area as early as 1842. These texts are monographs encompassing detailed accounts and interpretations of what explorers or ethnographers were witnessing and collecting, combined with written or visual depictions and *mise en scène* of the local population. One major ethnographic reference on Fang people is the 1913 monograph *Die Pangwe* by Günther Tessman. The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the intensification of missionaries' work in Gabon, who were sent mainly through the American Presbyterian Mission and the Evangelical Missionary Society of Paris. This resulted in an increased production of missionary archives and texts.

As John Cinnamon (2006) has shown, colonial missionaries have been prolific contributors to the production of knowledge, despite paradoxically studying cultural practices they

were actively contributing to destroy. Their mission consisted in spreading the Christian faith, converting as many souls as possible in competition with other missions, while putting an end to any indigenous practice that was linked to a non-Christian way of life.

Fernand Grébert, who was a missionary pastor of the Evangelical Missionary Society of Paris, and copious ethnographer and collector, gives an account of the rivalry between the Catholic and the Evangelical Missions in Gabon. He shows that the competition among the missions even led to abductions of converts, in a quest of creating the largest congregations and becoming the religious authority for the most people: "The Catholic mission seems to be established to counter or compete with the Evangelical mission rather than to win souls. All means are good: espionnage, abductions, blatant lies etc. [...] Where the Catholic mission does not live alongside the Evangelical mission, it withers away like a parasite without a tree."<sup>3</sup>

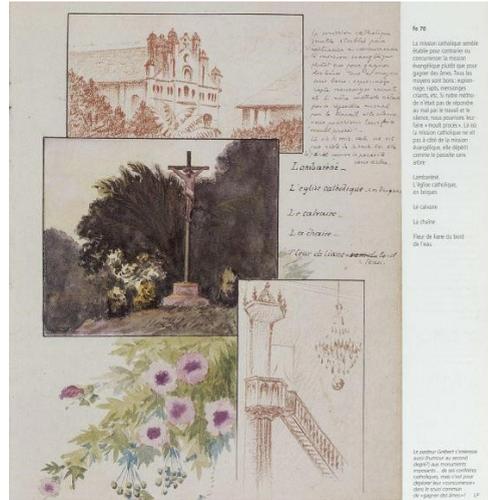


Fig. 3: Folio 70 by Fernand Grébert of the Catholic Church of Lambaréné.

3 Author's translation of the caption of folio 70 depicting the Catholic Church in Grébert's album. The French original reads: "La mission catholique semble établie pour contrarier ou concurrence la mission évangélique plutôt que pour gagner des âmes. Tous les moyens sont bons : espionnage, rapt, mensonges

Grébert, who was stationed in Gabon from 1913 to the early 1930s, combined his evangelizing work with ethnographic work and the collecting of material culture. His collections fed at least two ethnographic museums in Switzerland during the colonial era.

The last decades of the colonial period (1884-1960) saw an increase in collecting of Fang cultural material. In fact, the collecting of especially ritual and sacred objects reached its peak in the 1920s, after the military operations between France and Germany that took place on Fang territory during WWI. As Ghysel and Kaehr point out, these operations led to “a relative social disorganization and thus less vigilance” over these objects (2007:45). The collectors included colonial agents, army officials, factory workers and missionaries. Museums acquired their collections directly from the collectors or their relatives, or indirectly through the art market, or at colonial exhibitions. Most of the akure necklaces that can be found in the museums’ ethnographic collections in Europe have been collected during the colonial period, or shortly after.



Fig. 4: Thick metal block with symbols found on akure necklaces, collected by Grébert. © Johnathan Watts. Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, ETHAF 023109.

criants etc. (...) Là où la mission catholique ne vit pas à côté de la mission évangélique, elle dépérit comme le parasite sans arbre.”

### Akure and the Archives: Materiality and Immateriality

Akure necklaces are thick adorned pieces of circular brass or copper with an opening in the back. This supposes an insertion through a wider opening and the subsequent bending of the thick metal ends directly on the wearer. Weighing between 1 and 2 kilos a piece on average, these necklaces seem to be pieces of jewelry that are challenging to put on and extremely difficult to remove, especially without forcing and breaking them open. In fact, they appear to have been designed to be worn for a lifetime. These metal necklaces are most often decorated with geometric incised symbols. Similar incisions can be seen on permanent body adornments, such as tattoos or scarification in visuals and photographs from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of Fang people. For instance, in Grébert’s drawing albums that describe all aspects of Gabon, including the people and culture, akure necklaces are drawn mainly worn by women (folio 143, 220) or as part of a convolute of objects, classified thematically, alongside forgings (folio 93); or depicted within scenes (folio 191, 280, 301). From his drawings, they are also recognizable in the collections he sold to the Museum of Ethnography of Geneva (MEG) and the Museum of Ethnography of Neuchâtel (MEN) between the 1920s and 1950s.

Besides the formal depictions and descriptions, his drawings of akure necklaces and the associated captions give interesting insight into three different aspects of the use and collecting of these necklaces. They inform on how long akure were supposed to be worn, the technique to install them and that some necklaces had been removed directly from women’s necks and replaced by twisted vines as replacement necklaces.

Firstly, he points out akure necklaces were supposed to be worn for a lifetime and describes them as “brass necklaces cast in one piece, and closing on the subject, with a hammer

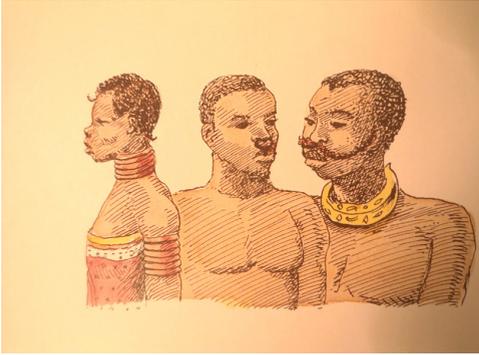


Fig. 5: Drawing from Grébert's second album, Folio 301. The caption reads: "in replacement of the brass necklaces, sold."

blow, definitively"<sup>4</sup> He has drawn the procedure in folio 280 but the removal of these necklaces for collecting is not shown nor explained. Tessman, however, provides a vivid account of how akure necklaces are inserted and how difficult it is to remove them (1913: 191). When describing the difficulty of removing the necklace, Tessman describes the wearer as "the patient"<sup>5</sup> who must lay on its back, while one end of the ring is attached to a stump, the other end is fixed by a strong rope to a lever which spreads it.

Besides the term "necklaces", akure necklaces are often referred to in French as *torque* in the museum inventories. Etymologically, the word *torque* comes from the Latin verb *torquere*, a verb that has both a literal and a figurative sense. Literally, *torquere* means "to bend", while figuratively it means "to torture". The removal and collecting process of these particular *torques* highlight how both senses of the word *torquere* are relevant. The violent aspect of the removal appears not only in relation to the procedure but also on the objects themselves, which frequently can be found forcefully spread and broken in the museum collections.

<sup>4</sup> Grébert (1940), Folio 29, Letter M.

<sup>5</sup> In quotation marks in his text.



Fig. 6: Broken akure collected by Fernand Grébert © Johnathan Watts. Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, ETHAF 013849.

### Akure as Status Symbol

*Akure* necklaces' weight and physicality, the manner in which they were put on, and the fact that they are described as meant to be worn for a lifetime suggest that they may be an important status symbol for their wearers, a status acquired at some point in their lives and for possibly a lifetime. The information provided by Grébert, who has collected them, associate it specifically with women. Could the installation of an akure be considered as a traditional rite of passage in women's lives? Could it be that wearing an akure constituted a formal transition into adulthood or motherhood? Did the akure indicate a specific role in the society for the person wearing it? The ethnologist Louis Perrois, who has worked on Gabon, specifies that "any woman who was *merely considered*<sup>6</sup> in Fang society at the time wore an *akure ad vitam eternam* (folio 280)". It is not clear what type of consideration he refers to, but it gives an indication of the necklaces as status symbol, specifically for women.

Given the previous elements and the historical context, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the status in question could be linked to marriage, which was often polygamous in Fang society. Concerning marriage, Grébert is

<sup>6</sup> "Considered" could be understood as having value within society.

clear that part of his mission in Gabon is to destroy the polygamous Fang unions that stand in direct opposition to the traditional Christian wedding based on, in his terms, the “monogamous union of a man and a woman”. “The Kingdom of God has to rise pure and luminous on the ruins of the Kingdom of Evil, without compromising with any bad manifestations of paganism” (1928:132). It was for this reason *impossible* in his opinion for the two systems to coexist.

Chapter XVII of his monograph *Au Gabon* is titled “The Pagan Wedding and Polygamy”. There, Grébert analyses the contractual agreement that underlies the traditional marital union of the families of the bride and groom in Fang society at the time. Based on how the unions were built, he explains that it could be seen as a lending contract of the bride. He identifies the dowry as the price exchanged between the families, and if at any point during the partnership the woman decided to retract, the dowry would then have to be paid back to the husband’s family as a means of compensation; the different wives in a polygamous union would then be each under different contractual agreements, with a dowry each.

If in fact akure necklaces are pieces linked to the marital status of women in traditional Fang society, their removal and collecting by a missionary in a colonial setting could be seen as a symbolic act of transforming the society from which they were removed. In the same chapter on the pagan wedding, Grébert describes the implementation of the transformation of the contractual agreement used in the traditional wedding by the colonial administration, from a loan to a purchase of the woman. Any change of partner and polygamy being forbidden, there would be a fixed price, set by the administration, for the woman that would be thus bought and become the rightful possession of her spouse; he could then work for the colonial administration, unbothered by pecuniary solicitations from his wife’s family, according to Grébert (1928: 136). From status symbols of the women who were wearing them, akure neck-

laces became in the collecting process trophies of the missionaries, who were collecting and selling them. Collecting directly on women can be seen as a proof of victory over what Grébert deemed as paganism in Fang society, attesting to the souls *won*. And at the same time, the material culture he collected being in use served as testimony of a certain authenticity valued by the museums that were to purchase them.

### Akure in the Museum

When confronted with akure necklaces in museum collections today, three elements are to be noted. Firstly, many akure necklaces are broken and spread out on one side, indicating a forceful opening of these pieces that have most likely undergone the removal process described by Tessmann. Secondly, several entries show that the breaks are due to the retrieval of the necklaces, and finally, the retrieval was done directly on the women. For instance, the old registered entry of the *akure* inventoried under III.C.294 by the Museum of Ethnography of Neuchâtel indicates that it was: “broken when taken from the neck of the woman who was wearing it”.<sup>7</sup> It is unknown from the online registrar if this is a purchase that had been made from Grébert but it is very likely that the akure necklaces bought from Grébert were removed in similar conditions, since he sold hundreds of material culture items, including several akure necklaces, to the two ethnographic museums of Romandie.

His extensively documented archives, especially with his drawings and ethnographic accounts, can be connected to the museum collections and archives created consequently; collections for which orders were often placed by the museum, as shown for instance by Grébert’s exchanges with Eugène Pittard, who was director of the MEG from 1901 to 1951.

<sup>7</sup> MEN Online Collections Database, <https://webcegene.ch/>.

An example of such an order appears in a letter dated February 22<sup>nd</sup> of 1930 addressed by Pittard. He commissioned Grébert to bring back items for the museum, specifically weapons, tools, amulets, fishing and hunting equipment and insisted their price should be low and the pieces “ancient without any European influence”.<sup>8</sup> At this point the two men had been exchanging by letters for about 15 years, the first exchange in the archives dating back from 1917.

The case study of these akure necklaces is a telling example of the entanglement of material and immaterial stories of ethnographic museum collections from Central Africa. These object biographies reveal the use of colonial force over women, specifically through the practice of collecting of their cultural heritage directly on them. This untold story about women emerged by using a gender-focused approach in analyzing akure necklaces in ethnographic museum collections. Intersecting Grébert’s ethnographic accounts and archives with Tessman’s, this paper aimed to show that akure necklaces and their removal are testimonies to the forceful transformation of Fang society in colonial times with regards to cultural norms and gender dynamics, specifically impacting women’s lives. Here, the intersection of the archives with the materiality of the necklaces has given insight into how and why these pieces may have been collected, the intended impact of their collecting on the gender dynamics and the possible change of status it could imply for the women undergoing the akure removal. Because of their biographies impacting women’s lives, status, heritage and transmission within the Fang traditional society, akure necklaces could be seen as elements of cultural “sheritage”.

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<sup>8</sup> “Anciens pour ne pas refléter des influences européennes” MEG Archives - letter February 22nd 1930 from Eugène Pittard to Fernand Grébert.

## Missionary Masculinity and Ethnographic Collecting

### The Gendered Context of a German Museum Expedition to Colonial Tanzania in 1927/28

Richard Hölzl

Catholic missionaries were prolific collectors of ethnographic objects for Western museums and furnished a good number of missionary museums and exhibitions (Loder-Neuholt 2019, Gómez 2007). The renewed interest in the history of missions as part of colonial and global cultural entanglements have acknowledged missionary contributions to the sciences and to colonial knowledge (Harries/Maxwell 2012). Yet, the characteristics of missionary collecting and knowledge are rarely given sufficient scrutiny (an important exception: Harries 2007). My aim is to demonstrate why examining missions and their characteristic masculinities is important for understanding colonial ethnographic collecting. These masculinities inscribed themselves into the practice of collecting and the resulting collections. Why masculinities? Because the religiously defined self-perceptions of missionaries and the often very distinct masculinities connected to them structured the “deep contexts” of collecting.<sup>9</sup>

The case study presented here examines a collecting expedition commissioned by the Munich Ethnographic Museum (today: Museum Fünf Kontinente) and conducted by the Benedictine missionary Meinulf Küsters (1890-1947) in 1927/28. “Deep context” refers to a several-decades-long conflict that involved a variety of local actors in and around the Benedictine mission in Southern Tanzania, where the expedition took place. The conflict was rooted

in strong moral and religious convictions and gendered self-perceptions. The distinct version of colonial masculinity guided the cultural boundary-making between European missionaries, African Christians and local communities, but also other European colonialists, and certainly men and women within and around the mission. Each group brought their own understandings of social and intimate relations to the table. The collecting expedition became embedded in this deep context. The collected objects attained significance in a conflict that came out of and was fueled by gendered and racialized identifications and boundary-making efforts of missionaries.

In the further trajectories of the collected objects as part of a larger collection and of exhibitions in a European museum, this deeply gendered and often violently colonial context was silenced. The objects became first detemporalised, signifying “primitive life and culture” in the late 1920s, and then aestheticised signifying “masterpieces of African art” towards the end of the 20th century. The European “social life” (Appadurai 1986) of the collected objects and the process of epistemic ignorance connected to it (Proctor/Schiebinger 2008) certainly warrant a study in their own right and can merely be hinted at here.

I focus on a set of objects which made up a small part of what came to be known as the “Küsters Collection”. It includes three circumcision knives, several antelope horns for wound-dressing powder, a wooden pipe box, two pearly hats, a medicine horn, skirts of dry grass, two rain sticks for boys, four wooden sculptures (female), and a wooden sculpture (bush spirit). The objects were used during the initiation procedures known as *Unyago* in the Mwera language and were collected in South-east Tanzania among Mwera communities at Mnero and Ndanda.<sup>10</sup> The Benedictine monk and priest Küsters, who also was a trained eth-

<sup>9</sup> Among others, Londa Schiebinger has demonstrated the role of gendered perspectives on colonial knowledge gathering and particularly knowledge relating to sex and intimacy (Schiebinger 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Presumably, some objects (the pearly hats) were produced for Küsters by local artists (Reuster-Jahn 2003).

nographer with a doctorate from Leipzig University, worked as an assistant director at the Museum in Munich. Before his expedition to Tanganyika, he had explored stone artifacts in South Africa (Sarreiter 2020). In addition to a large amount of cultural objects, the expedition produced filmed material, photographs, and sound recordings. A number of texts and photographs which resulted from the expedition were edited and published for the first time in 2012 (Kecskési 2012). While collecting, Küsters also functioned as the mission's school inspector. In this function, he visited and supervised several 100 teachers employed by the mission in an almost equal number of schools throughout Southern Tanganyika. In many cases, mission teachers, apart from functioning as interpreters and local experts, carried out the actual acquisition of the objects and negotiated prices (Küsters, 4 March 1927). The nuns and monks of the Benedictine mission had arrived in East Africa in 1887 along with German colonial rule and attempted to evangelize the Southern half of today's Mainland Tanzania, with varying success (Napachihi 1998). Today, several Benedictine monasteries exist in Tanzania at Hanga, Peramiho, and Ndanda.



**Fig. 1:** Exhibition “Collection East Africa Expedition Dr Küsters” (1929), Ethnographic Museum Munich. © Küsters, Meinulf: Archive St. Ottilien Abbey (Personal file).

### Deep Context, Deep Conflict: The Benedictine Mission in Southeast Tanzania

One of the main goals of the mission's leadership was to suppress the initiations (*Unyago*) of the Mwera, Makua, Makonde and Yao, which they saw as “pagan” and deeply immoral. In the summer of 1908, the revelations of the young African teacher Innocent Hatia triggered a “moral panic” that rolled over the mission in the second half of 1908. Innocent was the son of the Mwera leader Hatia IV who had been severely punished by the German colonial government because of his participation in the Maji Maji war (1905–1906) against colonial occupation. His son Innocent became his successor as community leader (“chief”) in the 1920s and remained a pillar of the local Catholic community in the following decades. As a church elder, he became the head of the Catholic Action Committee, and presided over the mission's “christianized” initiation procedures, which were established after 1939 (Hözl 2017).

The Benedictines interpreted the young Innocent's narrative of *Unyago* primarily as sex education and physical preparation for sexual intercourse. It included: boys' circumcision; girls' genital cutting; manipulation and extension of the female genitalia (Wembah-Rashid 1975, 106). The results were pressing enquiries among African mission personnel, violent interventions in the actual initiations, and urgent appeals to colonial authorities, which were, however, reluctant to stir further conflict among the societies. The chronicle of the mission station of July 1908 states: “The second part of instruction [during *Unyago*] is [...] a seduction into sexual intercourse with women. This is explained in every single detail. [...] The parts of female genitalia, [...] the ways to conduct intercourse, that they get naked in front of the woman and vice versa, also the step by step procedures exercising intercourse, the ways of touching women to induce sexual lust.”<sup>11</sup> The

<sup>11</sup> All translations from German originals are my own.

station diary concludes that Unyago basically was „a system devised with devilish cunning in order to seduce young women into very refined ways of fornication“. For the following initiation period in 1909, the chronicle noted: „They go on in secrecy, but they are afraid. And when an initiation is discovered, the participants and leader will regularly feel the staff of the RP Prior [mission leader] [...] we have had the Christian children and other school children taken out of the communities by the government chiefs. They are under our care right now“ (Chronicle Ndanda, July 1908 and July 1909). The oppressive policies of the mission – which in effect stalled evangelization and put converts in a precarious situation, forcing them to break with their families and communities, or resort to secrecy – lasted for three decades. In the late 1930s, African Christians and Benedictine mission leaders agreed on a Christian version of *Unyago*.

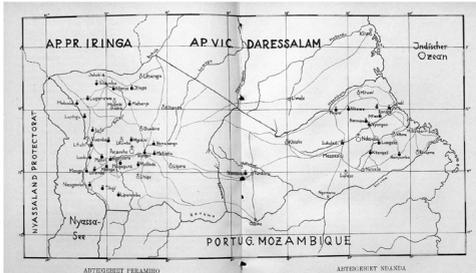


Fig. 2: Benedictine missions in Southern Tanganyika. © H. Meyer, *Wir besuchen unsere Missionare*, *Missionsblätter* 42 (1938), 144f.

### Mission Theology, Celibate Masculinity, and Racial Segregation

The fierce reaction of European missionaries was fueled by the fear that deeply ingrained traditions and deviant intimacies would taint the fundamentals of Christian faith and communities. Intimacy was at the heart of missionaries' engagement with ethnographic knowledge production and collecting. Once a mission had successfully evangelized local communities, the focus would shift to pastoral care, in

order to guide converts along largely Eurocentric moral pathways. In the colonial and Catholic context, pastoral work attempted to enforce (by physical violence, social, economic, or religious exclusion) a narrow moral codex based on neo-scholastic theologies. These upheld a paternalistic, monogamous family and household ideal, and saw physical intimacy legitimate solely for procreative purposes. Deviating intimacies were taken as signs of a relapse into "paganism". To quote the philosopher Valentin Mudimbe (born 1941): The "missionary powers of eradication" rested on the perception that "paganism" was "unfaith", carried the "stamp of the infidels", and was "thus evil in its own being" (Mudimbe 1997, 58).

These theologies teamed up with a form of colonial masculinity which distinguished itself from African Christians and other male European colonialists. Adhering to strict monastic vows, the missionary monks claimed a superior status, affected neither by the much discussed moral and psychological crisis and cultural decline of European masculinity in the tropics (Bischoff 2012) – "Tropenkoller" –, nor the constant urge to return to the "primitive" and "pagan" ways that allegedly endangered African Christians. To put it bluntly, white Catholic missionary masculinity and its ideas of superiority rested on the claim that they themselves were in control of their intimate urges regarding women, while others were not. Widespread prostitution and extramarital relations seemed to attest to the inferiority of other male European colonialists, the persistence of initiations and other rituals supposedly underlined the continuity of "paganism" and immorality among African Christians of all genders (Weidert 2007). Christian, let alone celibate monastic masculinity already afforded extensive boundary-work in an increasingly pluralistic Europe (Werner 2011). This was even more the case in colonial Africa, where religious, gendered, and racialized forms of "othering" intersected in the perceptions of European missionaries. As a result, the church hierarchy and the Benedictine monasteries remained segre-

gated by gendered (until today) and racialized criteria (until the 1980s), while African Christian communities remained under scrutiny and suspicion for many decades.

### Collecting and Conflict: The 1927/28 Expedition

The collecting process enacted by Küsters proceeded in a climate of conflict and secrecy. In summer of 1927, Küsters wrote to the Museum in Munich: "I am sitting here amongst the Mwera at the foothills of the Makonde plateau, while in the immediate vicinity the initiation celebration of the girls is taking place – although at a still secret place. The boys' initiation should not be far off. I hope to get my hands on some of the clothes, medicines and instruments, and I have made contact with some people about this" (Küsters, 15 Aug 1927). Eight months later, he hoped that he might film "the open celebration" at the end of the initiation period: "The secret practices certainly cannot be filmed; I am happy enough to have found some informants who gave me some explanations" (Küsters, 4 March 1928). Who were these "informants"? Generally speaking, mission teachers were doing most of the actual acquisitions for Küsters' collections. At the time and place they were liminal actors, negotiating a narrow path between losing their livelihoods from the mission and alienating their families and constituencies. But they were also intermittent figures of authority in the local colonial society who channeled communication with and access to the socially and economically powerful missions. African teachers at the Benedictine mission in Tanzania were invariably male until the 1940s, when African nuns began to enter the profession. Yet, in practice, mission teachers' wives had significant positions in local societies and facilitated their husbands' teaching in many ways (Hölzl 2016). They were sought out by missionaries for explanations of the "female sphere" of Tanzanian societies. Possibly, they were also included in the

collecting process without being represented in the archive.

For the village of Mnero, Küsters' personal field diary also lists several local dignitaries as "informants" (Küsters 1927, 15). Among them was the *ntotela* Kolumban Litolito Makota, a local community leader, who is present in the missionary archive time and again as church elder and interlocutor of mission personnel as well as researchers like Küsters. Makota was among those critical African church members who convinced European mission leaders to change their stance on initiation in the late 1930s. Around 1934 he approached a missionary after yet another sermon against initiation and argued: „Nyata mwe, myata! Kuchela mikongo, leka miba jika, nyata mwe! [...] Shame on you and shame again! You cut valuable fruit trees and let the thorny bushes overgrow. Shame I say! [...] You tell people in Church they shall not steal, they shall not lie, they shall not act slovenly. That is exactly what we tell our children. Then again you forbid them to join the *Unyago* initiation and we tell since time immemorial: *Unyago* must be held. Yesterday, they listened to us, today they listen to you. Tomorrow they will stop holding *Unyago*, but they will also steal, lie and become slovenly. This is how you ruin our country" (cited from Ntetem 1983, 158; my translation). Makota challenged the view that local traditions had to be eradicated in order to achieve a stable Christian society. On the contrary, he argued that mission policies were based on a lack of understanding of the (inter-generational) coherence of local society and would lead to its dismantling.

Küsters and other European missionaries were engaged in conflicted cooperation with local dignitaries, church elders, and teachers. On the surface, this was a decades-long, established negotiation among men. Initiations (including the objects representing them), however, were organized separately for boys and girls by senior men, women and ritual experts of both genders respectively. Girls' initiations were events that related girls, their mothers, and the female leaders, ritual experts, and el-

ders of communities. They were also not a singular event, but were re-enacted e.g. during pregnancy (Hokororo 1961). Initiated boys and girls would be presented to the entire community again in a concluding ritual celebration. Küsters had particular difficulties in attaining information on girls' initiation and acquiring the connected objects. He finally enlisted the help of a European nun, Sister Sabrina, who delivered medical care to the women in the village and procured at least some initiation objects, if not much explanation about them (Küsters, 27 Oct 1927). Sister Sabrina's position as a woman missionary was obviously crucial to the collection process, as were the contributions of women missionaries in many other vital parts of mission practice including evangelizing. Officially, however, the nuns were relegated only to facilitating the practical life of the mission (i.e. washing, cooking, farming) and care work (i.e. boarding schools, health care). In the history of ethnographic collecting, figures like Sister Sabrina, a European nun, are even less present, than male local experts and intermediaries (Willmot 2012). Finally, nothing remotely personal is noted on the Mwera women who provided the objects and conducted initiations. In missionary chronicles these female community

elders, instructors, and ritual experts are referred to in a derogatory fashion as "old wives". Their practices were described as "even worse" than men's and as preparatory or ancillary to sexual abuse by men (Chronicle Ndanda Station, July 1908).

### Conclusion: Hidden Gender Conversations

This short essay is an invitation to stray from the immediate transactions of the collecting and exhibiting process (the "museum's archive") and to explore the deep and wide context of ethnographic collecting. The narrative resulting from these explorations may seem unusual in the current museum-driven histories of collecting, in as much as it circumvents the materiality of the collected objects and also the variety of social meanings they held in the societies they originated from, or which they acquired in European exhibitions, museums, and depots. More could and perhaps should be said about how certain objects helped fashion the sociocultural and economic positions of ritual experts, healers, or artists at the time and place of collecting; how they aided the formations and representations of male and female authority within local societies; how in Munich, upon arrival, the objects were classified, catalogued, and stacked in the museum depots – after having been presented to the public in a grand, if rather unsystematic exhibition in 1929, or how the wooden sculptures alone resurfaced in several exhibitions as "African art" and "masterpieces of African sculpture" during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Ubbelohde-Doering 1953, Jahn 1994).

Instead, I have highlighted the gendered and racialized characteristics of missionary practice in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mainland Tanzania and connected ethnographic collecting to it. The case study discussed objects which originated from the initiation procedures of the Mwera communities of Southeast Tanzania and were collected during an expedition in 1927/28 for the Munich Ethnographic Museum



Fig. 3: Exhibition "African Art", Amerika-Haus, Munich 1953. © Felicitas Timpe, Picture Archive Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CCO 1.0.

by the ethnographer-monk Küsters. The process of collecting and the objects themselves were invested with meaning by the mission's perception of initiation as a sinful and immoral reproduction of "paganism", threatening the integrity of African Christian communities. Missionary collecting as illustrated here was thus embedded in Eurocentric, physically and epistemically violent cultural practices and a colonial culture of claiming religious and cultural superiority. This culture rested on the missionaries' self-perception of superior masculine self-control. Boundary-making efforts (in the fields of race, gender, and religion) made collecting difficult, secretive and indirect. Mission practice as a whole was bound to a set of intermediary actors – e.g. mission teachers and church elders. These also facilitated the process of collecting and mediated ethnographic knowledge. Rather incidentally, these actors found their way into the ethnographic record, often reduced to stereotypical roles such as "informants", or "objects of study" (Küsters, 27 Dec 1927).

At first glance, this form of missionary ethnography seems to have been a conversation among European and African men. Examining the collecting expedition along the categorical lines of gender and race, however, revealed a more complicated hierarchy of visibility, in which the male ethnographer took center stage, and African male local experts were epistemologically positioned (objectified) in relation to his research interests. Due to the separation of boys' and girls' initiation (and the gendered structure of societies in the area), however, this list of *dramatis personae* proved insufficient. The male European ethnographer not only relied on the work of male African intermediaries. He had to enlist a European woman missionary to broker contact to those senior women who governed and conducted girls' initiations. While the European nun is mentioned in the ethnographer's correspondence in passing, female African ritual experts were almost fully eclipsed as partners

in the conversations in the records of both, the mission and the museum expedition.

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## Collecting Masculinities

### Wilhelm Joest and the Masculinity of the Other

Carl Deußen

Masculinity is not a topic often encountered in the contemporary ethnographic museum. If the subject is raised at all, it is only to characterise the lives and practices of peoples of colour: men's houses, male-only associations, and warrior masculinities. This obscures that the collections on display were created by gendered individuals, the vast majority of whom were men. These collectors related to the world around them and the people from which they collected as men. Their concerns with and anxieties over their own masculinities and that of the Other defined how they chose the objects that should be taken to Europe to be put on display. In addition, many of today's collections were acquired during the colonial period when concerns about the correct performance of White<sup>12</sup> masculinity were omnipresent. As Bill Schwarz points out, "the white man could only be a white man in relation to others: his whiteness and his masculinity acquired meaning only in relation to those who had no claims, or lesser claims, to whiteness or to masculinity."<sup>13</sup> Schwarz's argument raises two questions: first, what were these "lesser" masculinities against which White masculinity was constructed, and, second, how were they defined and kept apart? I argue that ethnography, both as collecting and writing, was one of the fields in which this process of interpreting and ordering racialised masculinities took place and which was crucial for the creation

and maintenance of White masculinity. I propose that the collections assembled during the imperial expansion can tell us much about this process.

In this short essay, I use the archive of German ethnographer and collector Wilhelm Joest (1852-1897) to think about his perception of other, racialised masculinities and what this process reveals about his own masculine identity. I offer a close reading of one passage from his diary and one photograph, both stemming from his stay on Zanzibar in 1884. It lies in the nature of these archival sources that they represent only Joest's personal perspective, which is defined by racist and supremacist thinking. This essay does not offer an objective rendering of the situation on Zanzibar, nor an account of how the men of colour on Zanzibar understood themselves and their masculinity. Rather, I am interested in Joest's perception of these other men and what it can tell about the construction of his own masculinity. I will discuss Joest's writing in mostly neutral terms, but it should not be forgotten that it comes from a man implicitly and explicitly involved in the violence of imperial expansion.

In the diary entry, Joest describes a parade of the "irregular" forces of the Zanzibar Sultanate and the photograph shows him wearing the garments of the Zanzibari upper class. The diary entry from 9 May 1884 begins with a description of the scene where the parade is about to begin:

In front of the palace, the first floor of which is occupied by the Sultan, while the ground floor is occupied by the main guard with 1 battalion of Persians, dirty, indolent and probably just as cowardly lads in brown uniforms with black fezzes, a lot of people were already gathered in anticipation of the morning parade. Soon, 3 small groups of about 80 men of the Sultan's irregular troops, or troops not drilled according to the European system, arrived. It was the most motley company I have ever seen, from naked Swahili to Central Africans completely veiled, except for their eyes, Balochis, Arabs,

<sup>12</sup> Racial designations are capitalised to highlight their artificiality, in accordance with APA recommendations.

<sup>13</sup> Bil Schwarz, *The White Man's World, Memories of Empire*, Vol. 1 (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20-21.

Comoro people, yellow, brown and black Negroes armed with long broad (Solingen) swords or short crooked (ditto Solingen) daggers with richly decorated silver filigree scabbards around the body, powder horn, percussion cap, bullet bag, amulet, fetish, knife, tobacco, etc., etc., often silver-plated long fuse or flint-lock rifles, the butt thickly padded but covered with rubber.

Vor dem Palast, dessen 1. Stock der Sultan bewohnt, während Parterre die Hauptwache mit 1 Bataillon Persern, schmutzigen, faulen + wahrscheinlich ebenso feigen Kerlen in braunen Uniformen mit schwarzem Fez eingenommen wird waren schon Menge Menschen in Erwartung der Morgenparade versammelt. Bald zogen denn 3 Fähnlein à ca. 80 Mann des Sultans irregulärer resp. Nicht nach europäischem System gedrillter Truppen an. Es war die zusammengewürfelteste Gesellschaft die ich jemals gesehen, vom nackten Suaheli bis zum an die Augen verhüllten Zentralafrikaner, Beluschen, Araber, Komoroleute, Gelbe, braune + schwarze Neger bewaffnet mit langen breiten (Solinger) Schwertern, oder den kurzen krummen (dto Solinger) Dolchmessern mit reichverzierten silberfiligran Scheide, um den Leib, Pulverhorn, Zündhütchen, Kugeltasche, Amulet, Fetisch, Messer, Taback usw. usw. lange oft silberbeschlagene Lunten- oder Steinschloßgewehr die Kolben dick gepolstert aber mit Kautschuk belegt.<sup>14</sup>

Even before the parade begins, Joest shows how he constructs non-White masculinities: through racial designation, the rating of appearances and the derivation of specific qualities. The soldiers guarding the palace are “Persians”, which Joest determines by their looks. In accordance with this racial ascription, he also

<sup>14</sup> The excerpt is taken from Wilhelm Joest's diary 15, pp. 31-34, held at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum. The German text has been edited slightly for intelligibility; the English translation is mine.

describes them as dirty and indolent and from that basis draws his conclusion about their masculinity: they are “probably just as cowardly.” To make the connection to gender explicit, Joest uses the term “lads”. The sentence shows how racialisation through clothing and character and the definition of masculinity were closely intertwined in Joest's perception and description.

This process repeats itself when the parade begins and Joest has to quickly make sense of the different types of men he is confronted with. Again, he uses racial denominations to sort what he sees, adding some references to skin colour. Clothing also plays a role in defining racial types and Joest invocation of the opposition between nakedness and veiledness serves to underline the variety of racial Others. It is clear that there is not only one racialised masculinity he has to comprehend and relate to but a whole range of them. Central in this first paragraph, however, is the description of objects, specifically weapons. Joest names a variety of them, showing the men of the Sultan to be well-equipped soldiers. Through their prior racialisation, which is equally materialised through the reference to their “fetishes”, they are rendered threatening to White masculine supremacy. Joest must have felt threatened indeed, because he hurries to establish (twice) that their impressive weapons were actually made in the German steel factories of Solingen. Their imposing masculinity is thus relocated to the White man, who, in the end, remains in control over technology and thus over the more “primitive” masculinities.

In the next section, Joest uses the ideal of White masculinity to further qualify and order the soldiers:

Costume beyond description, often only turban or fez. Often completely, often half Arabic + this bunch, now with the rifles on their shoulders, dancing to the beat, singing, trampling, roaring, often shouting + jumping around as if in epileptic convulsions. For the first time I realised what it would mean to fight against

the fanatised troops of a Mahdi, in the looks of these people, who were stirred up merely by noise and boasting, especially those lads from the Arabian coast, there was so much animalistic fury and bloodlust that I would rather fight with 1 regiment of Chinese + 2 regiments of Japanese than with 1 battalion of these guys.

Tracht unbeschreiblich, oft nur Turban oder Fez. Ooft ganz oft halb arabisch + diese Bande nun die Gewehre auf d. Schulter, im Takt tanzend, singend, trampelnd, brüllend, oft wie in Verzuckungen von Epileptischen aufschreiend + herumspringend. Zum 1ten Mal wurde mir klar, was es heißt gegen fanatisirte Truppen eines Mahdi kämpfen, in den Blicken dieser nur durch Lärm + Renommisterei aufgeregten Menschen, zumal der Kerle von der arab. Küste lag soviel thierische Wuth + Blutdurst daß ich mich lieber mit 1 Regiment Chinesen + 2 Regimentern Japanern schlagen möchte wie mit 1 Battaillon dieser Kerle.

While the first paragraph conveyed the impression of a relatively well-equipped and organised army, Joest here puts emphasis on lacking discipline and fanaticism to show how different these men and their soldier masculinities are from White Europeans. Whereas White soldiers move according to their drill in unison, these soldiers do the opposite, they move freely and wildly, they are loud and savage. Joest then links this interpretation to four different discourses. First, the Zanzibari soldiers are described in terms of sickness, “as if in epileptic convulsions.” As Warwick Anderson has pointed out, both physical and mental health were dimension in which White masculinity in the colonies was framed and contested.<sup>15</sup> By linking the soldiers to epilepsy, Joest places them in an ambiguous role: they are both lacking the civil-

isational restraint needed for true masculinity, but that makes them, in a way, more dangerous, because they come to represent the contagious madness of the “tropics”. This image is reinforced through the reference to “animalistic fury and bloodlust”, adding the dichotomy of man/animal to that of health/sickness.

Interestingly, this ascription of animality is already qualified racially. It is especially the “lads from the Arabic coast [referring to the East African coast]” that are linked to animals, thus creating a racial hierarchy of savagery. That this hierarchy is also expressed in terms of masculinity becomes clear in the second part of the sentence. Here, Joest compares the masculinity of the African men with that of Chinese and Japanese soldiers, stating that he would prefer fighting the much bigger number of East Asian men in a regiment rather than the smaller Zanzibari battalion. Two different racialised masculinities are placed in direct comparison to highlight both the supposed cowardice of one group and the ferocity of the other. Racialisation and gendering work together to create a worldview in which men of colour are defined either by lack or excess in comparison with White men.

Why Joest would go to such lengths to paint the Zanzibari troops as dangerous and threatening emerges from the fourth connection he draws: fanaticism. Joest even rhetorically places himself in a position of temporary wariness to underscore the danger that such “fanatised troops” would pose. This links the passage to his general concern about Muslim masculinities, to which he returns throughout his writing, warning against the threat they pose to White civilisation and once even going as far as advocating genocide against the whole population of the rebellious Aceh province to prevent an imagined global Muslim uprising.<sup>16</sup> The racialised masculinity thus fulfils the function of legitimising imperial intervention by Ger-

<sup>15</sup> Warwick Anderson, “The Trespass Speaks: White Masculinity and Colonial Breakdown,” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1343, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2171066>.

<sup>16</sup> Wilhelm Joest, *Welt-Fahrten: Beiträge Zur Länder- Und Völkerkunde, Erster Band* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1895), 272–74.

many in Zanzibar; because the soldiers are marked as so different and threatening that a pre-emptive attack to save Western civilisation suddenly appears necessary and justified. Even if such connections only emerged explicitly in short phrases in ethnographic text, they nevertheless were tied to an imperial politics that relied on the othering achieved through racialisation and gendering to remain ideologically functional. And by purchasing weapons in Zanzibar and moving them to European museums, Joest gave this politicised gender imaginary a material basis. One could argue that the scimitars in display cases signified an Otherness that directly influenced the eventual loss of independence of the Sultanate to the German and British empires.

However, not all masculinities Joest saw at the parade were imagined along these lines:

[...] Well, these Balochis with their long shawls, held around the forehead with a ribbon (à la cloying minstrel), of course with bare chest, whose round soft shape hardly gave away the gender, dancing, smiling, + swaying, they reminded me of the quadrille dancing, overly eager or immature loudmouth or barracks hero at home - they made me feel nauseous.

[...] Nun, diese Belutschis mit ihren langen Laken, um die Stirn mit einem Band festgehalten (à la süßlicher Minnesänger) natürlich nacktem Oberkörper, dessen runde weiche Form kaum das Geschlecht erkennen ließen, tänzelnd, lächelnd, + wiegend, sie erinnerten auch an den quadrille tanzenden Handlungsbefflissenen oder unreifen Kriegs- resp. Kasernenhelden zu Hause - sie machten mich unwohl.

Similar to the East Asian regiments, Joest describes the Balochi soldiers as lacking masculinity, and in fact being effeminate to the point that they provoke a bodily reaction from him, a feeling of nausea. Although he does not yet have the conceptual vocabulary to express his feelings, Joest's description is similar to con-

temporary renderings of homophobia as a bodily feeling of revulsion. The passage shows that Joest's masculinity was defined not purely on the conscious textual level, but that it was felt and embodied, to the point where he would show a bodily reaction to men whose gendered expression felt threatening to him. While he can frame the threat from the savage East African soldiers in clear military language and make sense of it, this threat of effeminacy goes beyond what he can express and he has to revert to the unspecific description of nausea. This bodily dimension is also mirrored in the description of the Balochi soldiers, whose bodies and movement become the major signifier of their effeminacy. This bodily reading is complemented by a continuation of the focus on objects, but while before weapons were given centrality, here Joest does not mention them at all (even though as soldiers at a parade, the Balochi men must have been armed). Instead, it is their long and flowing garments that come to define their character.

While the performance of masculinity of the Balochi men is connected to Joest through bodily language, the scene itself is anchored in concerns about White masculinity through direct comparisons with Europe. First, Joest compares the Balochi clothing to that of a "cloying minstrel", thus placing this form of gender expression in Medieval Europe and firmly in the history of the West. The Baloch soldiers are thus not only a racialised form of deviant masculinity, they also represent a danger for White men who could become effeminate just as well. This is further emphasised by Joest's comparison of the Balochi with certain young White soldiers, ironically called barracks heroes, who also, for their lack of "real" war experience, run danger of becoming effeminate through the dancing of the "quadrille". Of course, the difference is that, for Joest, the Balochi soldiers are determined to be effeminate by their race, whereas among White soldiers only some fail to show proper masculine conduct because of their specific constitution. The passage illustrates the double function of

describing racialised masculinities. On the one hand, depictions of lacking or excessive masculinities define proper White masculinity as their opposite: White men are White and men because they are not like non-White men. Yet at the same time, and somewhat contradictorily, they also serve as a warning: White men always have to be careful and protect their racial and gender position, lest they become like their racial Other.

Finally, there is a third thread of thinking about racialised masculinities running through Joest's description: admiration. Take, for example, the following observation related to the parade:

The negroes make good for the courage they may be lacking with their sheer strength – I saw some magnificently built men.

Die Neger ersetzen den ihnen vielleicht mangelnden Muth durch Kraft – ich sah prachtvoll gebaute Menschen.

The sentence begins with the caveat that the “negroes” might be lacking courage, but then goes on to describe them in a clearly positive light, as strong and “magnificently built”. This positive description shows how Joest could indeed identify positive aspects in the masculinity of men of colour. There is even some envy in Joest's description, a sentiment that also surfaces at other times when he is writing about Black male bodies. There is a certain similarity between these descriptions and the work of Graham Dawson on T.E. Lawrence: a desire for the masculinity of the Other and a need to incorporate and appropriate it.<sup>17</sup>

This perspective equally finds itself reflected in one of Joest's photographs, taken on Zanzibar and published in his travelogue *Um Afrika*



Fig. 1: Wilhelm Joest, dressed up as an upper-class Zanzibari. © Um Afrika, 1885.

[*All Around Africa*].<sup>18</sup> According to the caption, the picture shows Joest in the “traditional garment of a distinguished Arab on Zanzibar”. Joest does not give further details on the production or meaning of the picture, but it seems clear that it expresses a certain admiration for the racialised masculinity it represents. Little surprising, the Arabic weapons also described during the parade, sword and dagger, form the visual centre of the photograph, linking Joest directly to those warrior masculinities. How can this appreciation be made sense of in light of the depreciative descriptions of the parade? As Dawson points out, elements of racialised masculinities could be appreciated, either according to their usefulness for the imperial project or their connection to aspects deemed lacking or declining in the European metropo-

<sup>17</sup> Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), chap. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Wilhelm Joest, *Um Afrika* (Köln: M. Dumont-Schauberg, 1885).



Fig. 2: Wall decorations in Joest's Berlin apartment. © Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte.

le.<sup>19</sup> However, these qualities, while positively connoted, were imagined to be without balance or purpose. Arab men might possess a higher sense of masculine independence than their British counterparts, who were enclosed by the constraints of modernity. East African men might show a physicality that went beyond that of White male bodies, softened by civilisation. But in the end, these qualities did not allow these men of colour to surpass the limits of their racial characters. Only when assumed by White men, through ethnographic understanding and scholarly diligence, did these characteristics become potent; hence the trope of the White scholar surpassing the “natives” in their own area of expertise, be it their language, cultural practice, or their masculinity.

<sup>19</sup> Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, 182–85.

This trope appears often in Joest writing and it represents a form of gender expression that could be termed an ethnographic masculinity, combining the rational self-determination of the modern White man with the more archaic forms of savage masculinities. As the pictures show, this process of appropriation was effected in part through the acquisition of the material expressions of the masculinity of the Other, and ethnographic collecting can also be imagined along these lines. Thus, while depiction of racialised masculinities defined White masculinity and marked where it had to be protected, it also designated the aspects of the Other that could be appropriated to complete White masculinity where it was felt to be lacking.

In conclusion, I want to think about how these ideas relate to Joest's ethnographic collection, which is held today in several museums in Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands. As

I have shown, objects and materiality play significant roles throughout the text in defining the masculinities of the Other and allowing Joest to relate to it. When he returned to Europe with his collection, it helped Joest determine his identity as a White man, also in the metropole. Joest elaborately decorated his residence in Berlin with the objects he did not give to museums and as can be seen on this photograph, the arrangement of weapons on his walls were an integral part of this design. Claire Wintle has analysed a similar case, that of Richard Carnac Temple on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, showing how the organisation of collected weapons according to the “trophy paradigm” allowed Temple to elevate his own masculinity over that of his subjects.<sup>20</sup> Taking my own discussion of Joest’s text into account, I would argue that this form of display not only ordered White and racialised masculinities into a hierarchy, but defined White masculinity in the first place. And, following on Dawson’s ideas, it also represented an act of appropriation, of becoming a better version of the men of colour who had wielded these weapons.

This discussion shows that we are still far from a comprehensive understanding of the processes that linked the racialisation of masculinity and the collecting of (ethnographic) objects. But it is clear that masculinity played a significant role in how these collections came about and how they can be interpreted today. Thus, it seems clear that the museums that display these collections have to address their gendered origins and, in so doing, offer an arena for critical reflection on the imperial history of masculinity and ethnography.

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<sup>20</sup> Claire Wintle, *Colonial Collecting and Display - Encounters with Material Culture from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 85–87.

## From Caveman to Craftsmanship, a Gendered Conversation

### The Case of Ethnographic Displays in Zambian Museums

Victoria Phiri Chitungu

#### Introduction

Museums in Zambia were first introduced during the colonial period. According to Friday Mufuzi<sup>21</sup>, early Europeans in Zambia showed little interest in studying the history of the local people. This is attributed mainly to the contemporary European opinion that considered Africans not to have any history. Some European scholars at the time, such as Hugh Trevor-Roper and A. P. Newton, argued that Africa as a continent had no history because of its lack of written records, thus its history could only be reconstructed through the study of the material culture of its people<sup>22</sup>. The advent of colonialism in Zambia, which started at the end of the 1800s, witnessed a surge in the number of European settlers, scholars and missionaries taking an interest in collecting and studying the cultural materials of the local population in a bid to understand them. By 1924, the country was transferred from the British South African Company (B.S.A co.) to the British Colonial Office, a transformation that brought into the country a number of colonial administrators that were directly involved in the study of the material culture of the local people. One was Hubert Young, the Governor of Northern Rhodesia, who was involved in the archaeolog-

21 Friday Mufuzi, "The Livingstone Museum and its Contribution to Zambian History, 1934 - 2006". A Thesis submitted to the University of Zambia in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of the Doctor of Philosophy in History, 2010, p. 205.

22 J.D. Fage, "The Development of African Historiography", in KI-Zerbo, J. (ed), UNESCO General History of Africa I: Methodology and African Prehistory (California: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 30 - 35.

ical research of the country. District Commissioners who were in charge of various districts in the country were also expected to collect, record and report on the culture of the local people in their district notebooks<sup>23</sup>.

By 1934, the first museum in the country, the Rhodes Livingstone Museum, was established where the materials collected from different places by different people were to be displayed for mainly curious European settlers. The museum also employed researchers that were to carry out the research in different disciplines such as Prehistory, Ethnography, and History. Using the material culture of the local people in the three major disciplines above, the museum reconstructed the history of Zambia and through public exhibitions, the materials were displayed for public education and enjoyment which later became the mission statement of the National Museums Board of Zambia up to date.

#### The Caveman: Early Man's Technology and Development

The findings of archaeological research, stone tools and rock art paintings, are displayed in the museum under the theme 'The Caveman' to give evidence to the oldest signs of human activity in Zambia and information on early humans in Zambia. This section forms the introduction of all public exhibitions in all the five national museums in Zambia. It takes more or less the same format, displaying the stone-tool kits of different technological stages of development as follows:

The Acheulian tools, which are the oldest signs of human activity in Zambia, dating as far back as 200,000 BCE. The main focus of the tools of this period is the "hand-axe". The tools suggest work related to land clearing and hunting. The most significant material culture of the Acheulean period was the evidence of hu-

23 Friday Mufuzi, "The Livingstone Museum and its Contribution to Zambian History, 1934 - 2006", p. 207.

mans' use of fire<sup>24</sup>. The first evidence of fire in Sub-Saharan Africa comes from Kalambo Falls in Zambia, thus Zambian museums take pride in displaying this evidence in all the five museums. The archaeologists explain that the use of fire by early humans demonstrates control of the environment by the ability to protect themselves from wild animals and hunt them using fire and smoke.

Next is the Proto-Stillbay industry dominated by bone tools, the oldest known in Sub-Saharan Africa. The archaeologists interpret the nature of these tools as indicating a people that relied heavily on hunting. Zambian museums take pride in the Proto-Stillbay industry because it is associated with the Broken Hill Man or *Homo Rhodesiensis*, named after the country in which the skull was discovered, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). He is celebrated as the maker of the Central African Middle Stone Age industries<sup>25</sup>. Also celebrated are the Lupeban period tools which were dominated by a large, blade-like point, shaped like a leaf, suggesting that the tools may have been mainly used for work related to wood working or they would be cut up in small pieces as spear points, suggesting the tools were used for hunting purposes<sup>26</sup>.

Another period of significance for Zambian prehistory is the Mangosian industry from around 7,500 BCE, which produced flake tools with sharp edges. Significant to this period is the understanding that these flake tools with their sharp edges could have been used in the invention of the bow and arrow, an important technological achievement of this period<sup>27</sup>.

The last part of the stone technology is represented by the Nachikufan and the Wilton industries. The makers of the Nachikufan tools relied on the use of bow and arrow, their tools characterized by arrowheads, burps and drills, hammers, bored stones and grinding stones. The Wilton culture was characterized by small thumbnails scrapers made on the end of blades and objects of personal adornment like beads made from ostrich eggs<sup>28</sup>.

What is notable of this section's display at three particular museums, namely the Livingstone Museum, Lusaka National Museum and Moto-Moto Museum, are the tools that dominate each technological phase and the associated economic activity of the industrial phase of human development. The tools such as the hand-axe associated with chopping wood, the bone tools associated with hunting, the blade-like points associated with woodworking and hunting, the flake tools associated with the invention of the bow and arrow, stone hammers and the use of fire associated with hunting and keeping wild animals away, dominate the narrative of the displays. These tools and activities conjure up masculine technologies and economic activities. The feminine kind of technologies such as the bored stone, the grinding stone and the use of fire for food processing – implements and activities that bring out feminine roles and tools in today's world – take a back stage. This kind of narrative and the material culture celebrated in each stage leaves little room to imagine the early inhabitant of this country being anything else but a cave 'man'. It is hard, with this kind of display, to imagine a cave 'woman' or economic activities and technological inventions that can be attributed to women.

The Nachikufan period is also associated with Rock Art paintings, which date back to 6,000 BCE and can be divided into two types – the naturalistic and the schematic kind of paintings. The naturalistic paintings give vivid

24 J. D. Clark, *Kalambo Falls Pre-Historic Site*, Vol. 1, p. 97.

25 D.W. Phillipson, "The Early and Middle Stone Ages" in B. Fagan (ed.), *A Short History of Zambia* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 48.

26 J. D. Clark, *The Stone Age Cultures of Northern Rhodesia and the Possibilities of Future Research*. Supplementary to the *Museum Handbook*. (Livingstone: RLI, 1939), pp.135–6.

27 Phillipson, "The Early and Middle Stone Ages", p. 57.

28 Clark, *The Stone Age Cultures of Northern Rhodesia*, pp. 107–119.



**Fig. 1:** Pre-History exhibition at the Moto-Moto Museum. Top left: hand axe for chopping; top right: scrapers for scrapping skins of animals. Bottom second left: a pick, used for chopping and digging; third left: a bored stone used as a weight for digging. Right: a bolas used for hunting animals and a burnt wood confirmation of man's use of fire to scare animals and hunting.

pictures that depict mainly people hunting animals, while the schematic kind of painting are mainly abstract<sup>29</sup>. The rock art paintings exhibitions concentrate on the naturalistic paintings that emphasize the hunting rituals that portray men's activities and less on the schematic art. The exhibitions do not demonstrate how the symbols of the schematic art are used by today's women and how they have impacted on their actions, spirituality, experiences and understandings across ancient history<sup>30</sup>. Over eighty symbols linked to the schematic rock art are still used in 21<sup>st</sup> century Zambia among the Bemba and Chewa in female initiation ceremonies. They are used, among other things, to spiritually transform girls to women, bolster female reproductive knowledge and fertility<sup>31</sup>. Although the female initiation ceremonies are exhibited, the linkage between the schematic

<sup>29</sup> R.A. Dart "Rhodesia Rock Engravings: New Theories and Clues", *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 11/07/1931, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Catherine Cymone Fourshey, Rhonda M. Gonzales, Christine Saidi, *Bantu Africa. 3500 BCE TO PRESENT*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 54.

<sup>31</sup> Fourshey, Gonzales, Saidi, *Bantu Africa. 3500 BCE TO PRESENT*, p. 108.

rock art and the current female ceremonies is not there.

### Handymanship

The end part of the Pre-History exhibitions introduces the visitor to the Iron Age, which is a period that preludes to modern Zambia. The Iron Age, as the term suggests, revolves around the iron technology that came after the Stone Age period.

The most celebrated Iron Age discovery of Zambia is the Ngome Ilede dating from 680 to 950 CE, where a number of tools and goods associated with the Iron Age period were discovered. Copper ingots, iron bells, hoes, axe blades, and iron bangles were found together with human skeletons. The copper ingots shed light on the economic activities of the period while the iron bells and gongs were attributed to rulership and the political activities of the people of the Iron Age period. The copper ingot were almost identical in shape, size and weight, demonstrating the skilled handymanship of the people of the period<sup>32</sup>.

In other places of the country, iron objects associated with the Iron Age period have also been found. At Kalambo, iron slags and smelting furnaces have been found, providing evidence of the presence of the Iron Age peoples in Zambia, the knowledge of iron working and the process of extracting it from the ore<sup>33</sup>.

Alongside iron implements, pottery sherds are also associated with Iron Age sites and the Iron Age period. At one of the oldest Iron Age site cultural sequences, the Kalundu mound, pottery and bones of domestic animals such as goats and cattle were discovered, depicting a life that is not very different from the contemporary lifestyle of the people in the surround-

<sup>32</sup> B.M. Fagan, "Excavations at Ingombe Ilede, 1960 - 2", in Fagan, Phillipson and Daniels (eds.), *Iron Age Cultures in Zambia (Dambwa, Ingombe Ilede and the Tonga)*. Vol 2, pp. 58-184.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-102.



**Fig. 2:** 'Ilungu', the iron smelting furnace in the Moto-Moto Museum Ethnography gallery. In the background, 'Insaka', the men's traditional shelter can be seen, where a demonstration of iron smithing is displayed.



**Fig. 3:** A display of different iron implements produced from 'Ilungu', the traditional furnace and the 'Insaka' men's shelter at the Moto-Moto Museum Ethnography gallery.

ing areas of Kalundu. This discovery demonstrates the linkage of the Iron Age period to the Bantu-speaking people of present day Zambia.

The pottery sherds' traditions, such as ceramic assemblages, decorative styles, shapes and sizes have helped in the interpretation of the Bantu migrations into Zambia, which started after 3500 BCE in the Cameroon area of Northern Africa<sup>34</sup>. Through the exhibition of the pottery sherds showing how they help illustrate the Bantu migrations, the museums have been able to confirm where most Bantu speaking people of Zambia today came from.

However, prominent in the Iron Age exhibitions throughout the five National Museums in Zambia is the emphasis on iron smelting. At Moto-Moto Museum and Lusaka National Museum, a life size iron smelter dominates the exhibition space of the Iron Age era. With it goes the display of different iron implements to show the craftsmanship of the people that worked the iron. This goes together with the introduction of political organization that introduces chieftainship or systems of organized and centralized rulership to Zambia. It is safe to say that since iron working is a man's domain, this part of the exhibition celebrates men's

work and their skill. It also promotes the notion that iron working brought about chieftainship in Zambia and as such gives a male attribute to chieftainship and rulership.

What is absent in this part of the exhibition in both museums is the role of pottery in the political and spiritual development of Zambian society. The exhibitions fail to point to the variation in the timeline between iron technology, a predominantly male technology and pottery, a predominantly female technology. The timeline shows that pottery is an older technology dating as far back as 9400 BCE while iron technology emerged several millennia later around 1800 BCE<sup>35</sup>. The exhibitions do not emphasize this historic tradition, the material science, spiritual tenets, and the complexities of the technological processes involved that the woman technician had to observe to make a pot. The significance of the name of the potter, which in most Bantu speaking languages, those of Zambia included, took on a variety of a social imagery verb for the Creator (God)'s action to create humans, i.e. 'Bumba', 'Mumba', 'Mumba'<sup>36</sup> is not shown. The emphasis on Iron working in the Iron Age era that is associated with political organizations obscures pottery,

<sup>34</sup> Fourshey, Gonzales, Saidi, *Bantu Africa. 3500 BCE TO PRESENT*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.



**Fig. 4:** Choma Museum display on Tonga baskets. The focus of this display is utility and provenance. The display fails to capture the use of these baskets in the documentation of spirituality, history, art, and production and reproduction narratives of the Tonga women basket weavers.

which exists side by side with iron smelting in this era and as such makes political history seem masculine and the role of pottery in political development absent both in the language used and in the visual presentation. Since women are associated with pottery and not iron, their presence in technology, science and politics is not as visible as in the iron working that is associated with man.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the History section of the two museums above, displaying traditional political organizations, which is a prelude to today's politics in Zambia, only show material culture attributed to traditional rulership associated with male chiefs. They also list and put emphasis on male chiefs even though precolonial Zambia had just as many female chiefs. Precolonial Zambia was also 80 percent matrilineal and matriarchal<sup>37</sup>. In addition, Zambia still has female rulers to date, even though the colonial government tried to eliminate them by either ignoring them, promoting male rulers over female rulers, as was the case between Bedyango and Mukuni of the

<sup>37</sup> Kambidima Wotela, "Deriving Ethnographical Clusters of Comparing Ethnic Differentials in Zambia", *World Cluster Journal*, 17 (2), 06/02/2010.

Leya people of Livingstone<sup>38</sup>; or even encouraging male opponents to take over female rulership, as was the case with Nawaitwika of the Namwanga people of Nakonde District<sup>39</sup>.

The examples above demonstrate that handymanship, in the form of science and technology, nation-building, politics and governance is presented in a manner that associates it with masculinity and obscures women and their contribution to the skills involved.

### Craftsmanship

Choma Museum and Crafts Centre in Choma of Sothern Province and the Moto-Moto Museum in Mbala of the Northern Province of Zambia give good examples of women and craftsmanship. The two museums have detailed displays on women's crafts in their permanent exhibitions. At Choma Museum and Crafts Centre, the main women-related craft in the craftsmanship category is basketry. In the tradition of the Tonga-speaking people of the Southern Province, basketry is a woman's craft<sup>40</sup>. The skill transferred from one generation of female relatives to another is an old craft associated with the history, production and reproduction, spirituality and artistic values of Tonga people, among other things<sup>41</sup>. However, the emphasis on basketry in this exhibitions is on the utility of the baskets and not on other values such as those mentioned above.

According to Siampondo basket weavers of the Gwembe Valley, basket weavers use baskets to record their group's history, belief systems and values that have been associated with the

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Bedyango, Livingstone, 02/03/2018.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Chieftainess Nawaitwika, Nakonde, 18/07/2018.

<sup>40</sup> E. Syabbalo, "Tonga Crafts in Figures, Sinazeze", no date, Gossner Service Team.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Siampondo basket makers, Gwembe, Gwembe Workshop, The Women's History Museum Zambia and The Museum of World Culture Sweden, 25/10/2020.



Fig. 5 and 6: Nyenyezi, the star, and Chibize, the Zebra, a representation of animal life and its centrality in Tonga culture and traditions.

Tonga people for centuries. The basket patterns that are woven into the baskets are not only artistically beautiful but carry messages and emphasize values that make up the Tonga history, culture and traditions<sup>42</sup>. The basket itself is seen not only as an item of domestic utility but an economic symbol that Tonga women have used as a medium of exchange as well as a measure of items of economic value throughout their history. The patterns have also recorded historic events in their history. An example is

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

*Iguwo*, the wind pattern that records the Tonga people's sudden economic dependence on the waters of Kariba Dam. The dam was created in 1959 as the largest man-made lake in the world and the pattern was influenced by the unreliable patterns of wind characteristic of the surface of the water body. *Iguwo*, the wind pattern also symbolizes the unreliable wind that brings rain to the arid and drought prone areas that the Tonga people were relocated to after the creation of the Kariba Dam<sup>43</sup>. Patterns like the *Ingazi*, the stilted house, records the traditional architecture of the Tonga people in their ancestral homeland, which is now a rare feature at their present location.

Other patterns such as *Nyenyezi*, the star, are a reflection of the celestial bodies that include the moon and the sun, which are strongly linked to womanhood in the Tonga tradition, representing beauty, reproduction, and spirituality such as their belief in *Leza*, the Supreme Being that is sometimes represented with the symbol of lightning<sup>44</sup>.

Another pattern of significance in the Tonga tradition and culture is *Chibize*, the Zebra. The pattern tells the story of nature and the central position of animal life in Tonga culture. This is demonstrated in most Tonga clan names that are also names of animals, such as *Mpongo* (the goat), *Mudenda* (the elephant), *Sulwe* (the hare) etc. Most importantly, however, among the matrilineal Tonga, clan names are inherited only through female relatives. A child will inherit their clan name through their mother's lineage. After death, a name is inherited only through their mother's lineage, as is the case in many matrilineal societies, where the clan is the center of all social relations<sup>45</sup>.

These narratives, which are part of the tradition of basket weaving, do not only record the

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> MT Mazimba Kaunda, A HISTORY OF THE UNGA PEOPLE OF THE BANGWEULU SWAMPS, PRE-COLONIAL TIMES TO 1953, (Lead First Enterprises, 2021), p. 63.

Tonga people's history and traditions, but also indicate women's position in Tonga culture, not only as artists, but as the core of the Tonga societal identity and as the scribes of the group. Sadly, all these aspects are missing in the exhibition on Tonga basketry as a handicraft.

Another example are the Mbusa. At Moto-Moto Museum, Mbusa, the teaching aids in the female initiation ceremonies of the Bemba people of Northern Zambia are shown. They are molded from clay and take different forms and shapes, some naturalistic while others abstract, and are used to teach different lessons to the initiates. Some Mbusa take the form of things in the environment such as animals or forms of domestic utensils such as pots and hoes. Others are abstract and take the form of dots or rings.

The Mbusa are exhibited not only as vessels of knowledge but as artistic vessels made by women. Mbusa is an ancient art of multimedia teaching and creativity that can be traced to the Stone Age rock art of East and Central Africa<sup>46</sup>. It is based on the old fundamental conceptions of creation and existence among the Bemba and related groups. Mbusa, although meant for teachings for both female and male initiates, are created solely by women experts called *Nachimbusa* (owner of Mbusa) or *Kabumba wa Mapepo* (the creator/leader of worship)<sup>47</sup>. The whole process of making and teaching using Mbusa is connected to the spiritual as well as environmental and cultural realm of the society into which the Mbusa is created. The teachings address a wide range of lessons that address the social, spiritual, psychological and physical well-being of the initiates that derives lessons from the environment as well as the social and cultural values of society.

Unfortunately, the exhibition of the Mbusa at Moto-Moto Museum gives a generalized and oversimplified explanations of their func-



Fig. 7: The basket weaving workshop. In the picture are three generations of Tonga female relatives that help each other make the baskets and in the process pass on the ancient skill of basket weaving.



Fig. 8: A display of Mbusa at Moto-Moto Museum.

tion. It is devoid of the scientific, psychological, environmental and rich cultural background in which Mbusa are created. This approach devalues the knowledge of the object as well as the maker; rendering women's knowledge systems as not worth being part of accepted bodies of knowledge. Thus, craftsmanship in this context makes Mbusa not to be appreciated as a part of scientific knowledge systems that understand psychological, environmental, and social and health issues.

The examples from the two museums above show how even when an effort has been made to showcase women's skill in handicrafts, the displays do not engage the wide perspective in which these skills are utilized both in form and function by the women experts that exe-

<sup>46</sup> Christine Saidi, *Women's Authority and Society in Early East – Central Africa*, (University of Rochester Press, 2010), p. 111.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 131.

cute them and the society for whom they are created.

### Conclusion

The examples in this paper show how most Zambian museums, influenced by their first curators during colonial times, emphasize male narratives and the role of men and their influence on society, while women's narratives and women's influences on society are either missing or obscured by men's activities. The patriarchal biased narrative has continued after the colonial period, were post-colonial museum curators have taken up and maintained the colonial perspective. This is the case even where oral history and other forms of evidence such as archaeology, art and language demonstrate otherwise. While most curators would like to change this kind of narrative in the National museums of Zambia, they find it difficult to change permanent exhibitions due to poor funding. To get round this problem, most curators make use of short and temporal exhibitions that do not need a big budget to execute. The future, however, looks promising as discussions on the disadvantages of colonial narratives in museum exhibitions in Africa are becoming increasingly popular.

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## Artistic Interventions in the Historical Remembering of Cape Slavery

Mischka Lewis

“The dead do not like to be forgotten, especially those whose lives had come to a violent end and had been stacked sometimes ten high in a set of mass graves...” (J.M Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 2005)

“The archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhoea, a few lines about a whore’s life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history.” (Saidiya Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts*, 2008)

“What does it mean to cry about ancestral knowledge kidnapped by an institution that is (literally) built on the bones of our ancestors?” (Wanelisa Xaba, *The Black Body As A Moving Ancestral Archive*, 2021)

In recent years, there has been an outpouring of critical and decolonial scholarship on colonial museums and archives, specifically in relation to the difficulties of retrieving the voices of black indigenous enslaved women. Historians note that traditional archives are incomplete and written primarily by powered functionaries or dominant groups.<sup>48</sup> Yet, there remains a paucity of scholarship that looks at archives of Cape colonial slavery to challenge the constructed meanings within silences and erasures; to be explicit about the archival limits

<sup>48</sup> See Nigel Worden, “After Race and Class: Recent Trends in the Historiography of Early Colonial Cape Society,” *South African Historical Journal* 62, no. 3 (September 2010): 589–602.

and understand that these limits hold power that potentially make absent multiple possibilities in narrating indigenous black women’s lives. An acknowledgement of archival limits is not an alternative mode; instead it’s a proposition to understand absence and fragments contained in archives and museums differently, to re-think the empty spaces where enslaved and indigenous women are erased and explore innovative approaches to reading records and writing histories.

This paper examines the collaborative praxis of historians, artists and cultural practitioners in a post-apartheid context<sup>49</sup> who use archives and imageries from the past to evoke memory and pedagogy<sup>50</sup> - inviting us to write a different history of ethnographic material in archives and rethinking the representation of histories in Cape slavery. In this view, my approach seeks to rethink the idea of ‘critical archive’ from that which is trapped in the carcerality of western conventions. Through an embrace of traces, fragments and affect we can confront loss, silence, and erasure within archives, not as a charred aftermath or negation of history, but as a remembrance of why enslaved women’s voices are silenced and the archival process of absenting them.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> South Africa has a recent past that has been shaped through modernity by intersecting forms of oppressions such as slavery, colonialism and apartheid. The “post-1994 post-apartheid “constructed South Africa forges a collective identity of the “rainbow nation or new South Africa.” For this paper, I think of the “post” signifier as articulated by Saidiya Hartman’s (1997) through the “afterlife of slavery.”

<sup>50</sup> Pedagogy in this sense refers to alternative ways oppressed indigenous and black women empower themselves in contemporary South Africa and intersecting power relations. In other words, although hegemonic structures exist in social relations and knowledge productions- oppressed groups know their worlds differently, act and make meaning through different modes.

<sup>51</sup> I am suggesting that silence and absence allows us to rethink the presumed stability and coherence of archives as records of the past, i.e., silence as a limit of what was recorded which constitutes a search for

## Traces of Violence

In reflecting on writing about enslaved women in South Africa's past, feminist scholars have noted that it is a scene of loss and absence fraught with contradictions that require unconventional and multi-layered approaches in tracing enslaved memory.<sup>52</sup> Writing about enslavement and slavocratic societies in South Africa, Pumla Gqola states, is informed by the sparse records within the Cape colonial repository that provide a mere glimpse into the lives and worlds of enslaved women.

On the other hand, readily available are volumes of written texts in the archive that animate how the enslaved were viewed by settler communities and the colonial imagery of blackness and gender. Zine Magubane's seminal work on how ideas about race, class and gender became crystallised in South Africa provides insight into the lens of contradiction. Magubane argues that there is a corpus of written texts and archival material that project "black images in the white mind", but there is a silence about the "white image in the black mind."<sup>53</sup> Magubane's analysis poignantly unearths how the emerging capitalist political discourses during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century shaped society and contributed to specific ideological inscriptions that can be read from archival material she consults.

Questions around gender and sexuality in archives gives us insights into the limits of the archive. Sharifa Ahjum uses the notion of "Other's other"<sup>54</sup> to describe the multiple negotiations

black gender undergoes within settler colonial law during Cape slavery, fundamentally excluded from humanizing imperatives (marked as property) and positioned in relation to white masculinity and femininity which holds the hegemony of humanness. The ignorance of indigenous and black gender enacted through the use of gendered violence was a means to justify captivity and the structure of gendered difference to buttress Dutch and British empires.

Critical questions of representations and subjectivity are important for indigenous black radical feminists. Who speaks, for whom and whose voices are heard? These questions share insights on the deconstructing *Othering* of indigenous black women. Subjectivities here speak to feminist conceptualisations of identities as fluid, intersectional and multi-layered.<sup>55</sup> Gender here is to be read as not the sole determinant of indigenous black women's identity. Oyeronke Oyewumi provides prolific insights into the problematic of western feminist approaches located within bodied binaries and exposes the danger of using imposed categories as origin. It's important to state that indigenous feminisms do not necessarily find power imperatives in the biological or corporeal concepts that denote the body as a locus of biological determining social position. Instead, Oyewumi argues that investigations into gender in African cultures must go beyond biological deterministic discourses because gender is neither biologically determined nor is it socially constructed. Instead, it is an invention.<sup>56</sup>

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an affective memory and a grammar of language that writes the memory that silences and absence hold.

52 Pumla Gqola, 'Like three tongues in one mouth': Tracing the elusive lives of slave women in South Africa,' in Basus'iimbokodo, bawel'imilambo/ They remove boulders and cross rivers: Women in South African History, ed Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 21-22.

53 Zine Magubane, *Bringing the Empire home: Race, class and gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 129.

54 Sharifa Ahjum in "The Law of the (White) Father" in *Women and Slavery: Africa, the Indian Ocean*

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World, and the Medieval North Atlantic, eds. Gwyn Miers Campbell, Suzanne, and Miller Joseph (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

55 See Desiree Lewis, "African Gender Research and Postcoloniality: Legacies and Challenges," in *African Gender Studies A Reader*, ed. Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005), 381-95, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-09009-6\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-09009-6_21); Njoki Wane, "African Indigenous Feminist Thought," in *The Politics of Cultural Knowledge*, ed. Njoki Wane, Arlo Kempf, and Marlon Simmons (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011), 7-21.

56 Oyeronke, Oyewumi, *African Gender Studies: A Reader* (Springer, 2016), 3-21.

To read the archive as a trace amongst many goes beyond concerns of dates; it's about the intentions and perceptions of officially curated records and what they mean for present curations of historical representations. In other words, the archive is not only an institution that classifies, consigns and allows for consultation with material objects like documents or artefacts of the past, but also as a "sign-effect of its cause"<sup>57</sup> where history is made up of traces of the past that act as a sign of past actions read in present effect. Trace then becomes both dateable and a stretching of time, projected into a public memory which brings alive social and political meanings "in view of establishing probable, plausible narratives."<sup>58</sup>

### Dismembering Archives

Entering archive(s) of slavery, there is a need to consider meanings within the absences, erasures, and silences. I am at pains with the violence of the archives and subsequent writing of histories that reproduce violence, evoking the unbearable and unspeakable through "simplified, quantified and seemingly objective account[s]."<sup>59</sup> Reading and facing the laments of archival silences to excavate gendered enslaved narratives whilst trying to make sense of it all, I am at pains with the difficulty of retrieving the voice of enslaved women from these colonial depositories. Hartman in *Venus in Two Acts* calls the archive a "death sentence, a tomb" for the enslaved girls who appear fleetingly as satire jokes and violated bodies, evoking the desire to tell stories that resist recuperation and yet represent the lives of women and children who appear in fragments within officially curated records. Being wedged in a constitutional dis-

ciplinary thinking<sup>60</sup> and making sense of these archival silences whilst trying to express it in a grammar of language that conveys this is constrained by a disciplined thinking. Conventional methodologies, embedded with particular ideological positions, denies the plurality of historical writing and chokeholds the analytical power in various structures of language and meaning-making. Narrating archival fragments requires exceeding the confinements of the archive as it has been traditionally thought by historians, to interrogate the limits of the archive *not within a footnote but as a subject of study itself*.

It matters in how historical events, moments and representations are (re)produced and how they illuminate scripted violent reproductions of colonialism. Indigenous black and enslaved women, in the colonial archive, including the 19<sup>th</sup> century Cape archive, are already projected through the realm of sexual violability and colonial desire.<sup>61</sup> Saidiya Hartman, in challenging the constraints, evokes imagery to write a narrative of gestures that relay archival refusal. Alluding to a spectrum of speculation in *Venus in Two Acts*, Hartman asks, "is it possible to exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive?"<sup>62</sup> For Hartman, storytelling involves critical speculations about the gaps and silences of officially curated archival records and thinks through the subjunctive to open narratives that are within conditions of absence and erasure. Fleshing out the historian's relation to the archive, in this case, is paradoxical: exposing one to both a site of possibility and impossibility.<sup>63</sup>

The paucity and evasiveness of historical documentation on lives of enslaved women in

<sup>57</sup> See Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 278.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 170; 181.

<sup>59</sup> Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, 2 (2008):2.

<sup>60</sup> In reference to the traditional Historical disciplinary thinking that considers colonial archival evidence to be legitimate.

<sup>61</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 11-12.

<sup>62</sup> Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, 2 (2008),2

<sup>63</sup> Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 3.

South Africa, usually provided in court records, slave sales and passing records, requires innovative ways of looking at slave and indigenous women's presences in history.<sup>64</sup> Feminist imperatives require an examination of "unconventional" locations that "function as valuable sources of contestatory meanings,"<sup>65</sup> urging historians to interrogate the notion that traditional archives are the only repository of valuable knowledge.<sup>66</sup> It is only through awareness of limitations of archives that a nuanced understanding of slave and indigenous women can occur.

### Archival Refusal

Living in Sacred memory, overcrowded metropolitan cities surrounded by colonial imperial visions – spatially, architecturally. Peeking through Huri Ꞥoaxa, wedged in the sacred places of human memory and oral testimony, ||Hui !Gaeb. Erratic spirits of Abo Abogan, not easily stuffed and closeted in towered buildings of colonial aesthetics. Secured for imperial desires – and antipathies so deep and enmeshed in neoliberal humanism – for so humanist the hundred and thousands of Khoi Warriors were murdered to prove ownership. Decades and centuries later – private ownership or "you'll be prosecuted" – our struggles – private ownership: the skies, beaches, the soil. "Water overflows with memory. Emotional Memory. Bodily Memory. Sacred Memory."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Pumla Gqola, "Like three tongues in one mouth," *Women in South African History*, ed Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 37. Also see P. Gqola, *What is Slavery to me?* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press), 1-7.

<sup>65</sup> Gqola, "Like three tongues in one mouth," 32. Gabeba Baderoon's Malay cooking as an alternative archive encodes meanings of Malay traditions and enslaved women is one such example.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid* 36- 38.

<sup>67</sup> Ritual inspired by quotation from Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sex-*

An engagement with Sacred memory, associated with ancestral memory, traces ways in which knowledge is embodied, manifested and evoked through spirit.<sup>68</sup> Spirit knowing is a mechanism utilised to making the world intelligible. Rinaldo Walcott, in discussing Cathy Carruth's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in relation to the cultural traumas of Africans and black diasporic people illuminates how "in the absence of detail" imaginative representations acts as flashbacks which "bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred."<sup>69</sup> Walcott's lens of bearing witness to past trauma in the contemporary opens a sea of inquiries related to how artists may represent the void of absence. What possibilities exist to attempt representations of the past that make sense of trauma enslaved and endured?

The questions I broadly meditate on are: what do artistic archives such as storytelling and sacred knowledge have to offer for the narrating of history in museums? When chronology is disrupted through evasiveness, absence or silence, what negotiations are made to construct a historical discourse? What is the potential or foci of critical and reflexive methods and how are these experiences analysed? To think through these contradictions and paradoxes as productive tensions enable the possibilities of plausible courses of action in (re)membering colonialism and slavery.

In meditating on memory, in this context Sacred memory, it is a vast and expansive terrain that refuses positionality of the material archival. It is not tied to the limits of earthly time, enclosed in colonial maps or positions, not dependent on the corporeal body; instead, it moves in between spaces of mind-body-soul, refusing to be "imprisoned as exhibit in

*xual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred, Perverse Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 318.

<sup>68</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 14-15.

<sup>69</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, "Middle Passage: In the absence of detail, presenting and representing a historical void", *Kronos*, 44 (2018) 63.

a museum or archive.<sup>70</sup> African cosmological systems are complex and varied, both located and dislocated across geographical boundaries.<sup>71</sup> The migratory nature of African spirituality comes through in varied contexts of internal crossings, which Alexander refers to as a “pantheon of inheritance.”<sup>72</sup> This crossing draws from African belief structures and practices; local migratory sensibilities; different consciousness of culture and languages; fauna and flora ecologies; and violent conditions of (dis)possessions. In this light, humans are simultaneously earthly (biological) and spiritual beings.

A spiritual encounter is a “dangerous memory,” traces of Abo Abogan (ancestors) lives, dreams, visions, shadows or hauntings, vibrations of feelings, a reflection which may come through intersectional manifestations.<sup>73</sup> In order for the Spirit to come into being, they require embodied beings, manifested in the quotidian. Therefore, it goes without saying that legal and missionary records only give us proximate access into the daily living experiences. They are unable to convey the intimacies of the interior lived experiences which cannot be expressed in colonial ways of recording-remembering. This draws parallels to the idea of archival refusal, a refusal of the Spirit to be consigned in categorical records, to appear as

fixed and unchanging or defined by the state corpus, colonialists or me as a History student. The Spirit moves through multiple mediums and possesses the power of refusal into submission and being captured. What if the histories we are telling is an archival refusal? What negotiations are made to highlight this, or do we remain epistemologically deaf to the impasse? In the spirit of praxis, of doing the work, Alexander, as a historian, explains the utilisation of sacred memory, the memory of ancestors, as a channel for expressing the textures of their lives, beyond the confines of captivity narratives contained within colonial/traditional archives. At what point do we face the reality that the formal conceptualisation of archives through jurisprudence lenses are used as western hegemonic disciplinary mechanisms?

### **Sacred Memory and Subjectivity**

For many feminists, experience is epistemically valuable in understanding subjectivity. However, what has been missing is the spiritual nature-shifting from personal to Sacred memory. It is within indigenous feminisms that the spiritual is political,<sup>74</sup> in ways that “no longer contest mediating the traffic between the personal and the political.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, I ask the question of what significance is the body in the making of experience, understanding spiritual work as a body praxis or form of embodiment which is concerned with the way people come to inhabit their bodies from becoming habituated. Explaining spirituality as an embodied process through inscriptions on bodies, in memories, flesh and stories beckons us to question how sacred knowledge is inscribed in every-day lives of women through spiritual labour. Another form may be ceremonial rituals through which healers become habituated to the spiritual which is transposed

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70 Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 314. Alexander’s arguments raised questions for me around how one embodies rituals in written form. And what negotiations are made in terms of the performativity and meanings produced? Dreams, sacred practices, and spiritual manifestations are not constituted as a historical study, yet indigenous black histories are informed by the connection of mind-body-soul in contrast to the western Kantian models of scientific enquiry through mind-body binaries.

71 There are various manifestations of being reminded of “locatedness, rootedness, and belonging” that maps out subjectivities in individual and collective relationships to the spiritual.

72 Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 319.

73 Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 337. Intersectional manifestations signifies Spirit ability to inhabit vast planes of consciousness.

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74 Oyewumi, *African Gender Studies*, 23, 67 & 381.

75 Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 323–24.

onto the body.<sup>76</sup> In this explanation, Alexander constitutes the body as a site of memory, not for sale as insinuated through colonial power nexus, but a living memory and entanglement that gives insights into the process of spiritual embodiment.

The body acts as an encasement of the soul, medium of spirit, repository of a consciousness that derives from a source of a trans-temporal residing. Thus, spiritual knowledge attained through the process of embodiment is to be understood as a pathway. The intelligibility relies on the social-spiritual connections of a community to decode sacred knowledge; therefore, it is inconceivable to think of women like Krotoa or Sarah Baartman<sup>77</sup> without descending a message to and of collective presence. This reflects the body not tied into dualisms, but a triad of mind, body and spirit.<sup>78</sup> This is important in understanding how this embodiment provides grounding and anchor for these entangled elements to shape subjectivity.

### Artistic Interventions

It therefore comes as no surprise that we find many artists commanding sacred knowledge to creating aesthetic expressions, whether it takes place through creative mediums such as storytelling, poetry, rhythm or visual arts and performances, which is of particular interest for this paper. Artistic interventions suggest art, body, memory, sacredness, and history are fundamental to negotiating *what is remem-*

<sup>76</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 325.

<sup>77</sup> See Yvette Abrahams, "Was Eva Raped?" Kronos, UCT, 1996.; eds Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes, and Gary Minkley. *Deep Histories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002.); Yvette Abrahams, "Colonialism, Dysfunction and Disjuncture: Sarah Baartman's Resistance" *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 58, 2003.

<sup>78</sup> The process of embodiment signifies the entanglements of body and memory, more so it posits the understanding of a sacred memory in action-lived experience.

*bered and forgotten*. The body is a subversive archive testifying to the presence and subjectivity of Cape enslaved and indigenous women, situated within a realm of thinking about slavery transnationally through Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific passages. Affective modes and artistic interventions provide a different way articulating the past which the officially curated archive may fail to do, particularly if historians insist on treating it as fact and evidence.

### Artist intro: Deidre Jantjies

Deidre Jantjies descends from the /Xam, N/uu, Nama, a professional flamenco dancer, activist passionate about the historical stories of women. She is the founder of *Na Aap Productions*, a fully integrated, broad based production company, screening untold stories and history of Southern Africa. Jantjies has a long history of stage performing, she took these skills and started writing her own stories that she is creating into short and feature films. She works extensively on narratives closest to her heart. She has also produced and written a 12-minute x 13 Episode Animation Series broadcasted on her Youtube channel called *Stories in die Wind*<sup>79</sup>; magic realism stories from the natural habitat of Southern Africa, highlights that which connects the young and old indigenous people, and cultures.

### Em(bodi)ment

In conversations with artist and performer, Deidre provided insights on themes related to embodiment of Sarah Baartman and memory performance of flesh, in other words how knowledge is embodied and manifested through flesh. Through examining historical flesh narratives attached to indigenous and black women, we explored how women nego-

<sup>79</sup> *Stories in Die Wind*, accessed September 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9ZG4RCCXz8>.



Fig. 1: Deidre Jantjies.

tiate these meanings through embodied interventions in post-slavery South Africa. The artistic embodiment of excessive flesh through Sarah Baartman positions the body as a site of memory through which both Sacred dimension of self and collective memory can be transmitted. Simultaneously, navigating the terrains of the spectacular violence of being marked as excessive flesh in a society where dominant western beauty standards are centralised, where the white supremacist and patriarchal gaze violates. The interior expressions during our conversations spoke to the scientific narrative where flesh is evoked as transgressive/shameful/unacceptable. Using the story/performativity of her own embodiment, Deidre utilises artistic modes to disrupt the distortions of who she is. Her hypervisibility is an opportunity to re-negotiate the meaning of her embodiment.

Deidre explores affective terrains through modes of shape-shifting, allowing her to channel Spirits and memory, using entry points of flesh/body as a way to bearing witness to the enduring trauma and repossessing spatio-tem-

poral understandings of the present for pedagogical intent. An exploration on artistic interventions to re-member slavery in South Africa, through embodied narratives, could potentially open strands to explore in what ways knowledge(s) are embodied and transmitted through sacred self, performative art, and storytelling. In reflecting on the artistic mode of Magic Realism in film and performance, Deidre describes it as a process where she imagines *what she would've done, what she would've looked like* in a spiritual connection to reflect, [...] *who she is, her real voice to become an instrument in her story. /This is how I believe we should be telling stories, we do not have anything tangible/archives/full written documents – we can use our imagination and explain those things, the belief systems our ancestors practiced.*

Throughout the interviews, I was reminded by Deidre of *rootedness, locatedness and belonging*. Through creative and imaginative inflection, a sense of self is shaped through the “abstraction and remnants in the psyche which

ensure that yesterday lives in tomorrow.<sup>80</sup> As an artist, Deidre's engagement with the archive for storytelling does not search for new knowledge of the past. Neither is it an attempt to discover history. Instead, she considers it a necessary spiritual labour of her work as a storyteller and embodied artist. As a keeper of stories engaging a counter colonial narrative, she is aware its contents are not readily available but utilises the archive to re-inforce counter memory and continue the circulation of connecting kinship ties to gain an understanding of lived experiences.

### Question of Ethics?

In discussing ethics, I am not referring to the regulation practices of ethics committees. To think in terms of a code of practice within a particular discipline limits the possibilities of narrating variegated histories of experiencing colonialism, or as echoed living the enduring trauma. Instead, I foreground reflection on issues of (self-) representation and activism to navigate the limits of the archive, grammar of language, memory and authority; this situates questions around positionality of the researcher within an ontological engagement whereby we craft meaning to invoke ideas of how spirituality as a historical representation is not reduced to religious/cultural invocations but rather social formations of everyday experiences.

This process also complicates ideas around the "politics of taking on research sites and making expert knowledges, as well as the politics of leaving places alone when one cannot adequately grapple with one's responsibility to those sites of knowledge making."<sup>81</sup> Implicating ourselves in a relational process to the research outcomes goes beyond problematizing objectivity which forecloses space for criti-

cal reflection on aspects that influence the research process and mutual insights that inform the practice of writing oral histories.<sup>82</sup>

### Constructing with Radical Vulnerability: Collaborative Praxis

The praxis of radical vulnerability returns to the question of ethics related to "how and why one comes to a story and to its variable (re)tellings." The act of storytelling has a pedagogical and methodological intent that "confront[s] ways in which power circulates and constructs the relationalities within and across various social groups,"<sup>83</sup> asserting unavoidable gaps/silences that emerge. However, embracing radical vulnerability as "mode of being" invokes ethical and methodological encounters to recognise that academic knowledge is enriched through creative dialogue with artists and activists. Collaboration(s) with artists and activists in archival praxis play an important role in the intergenerative dialogues across social and institutional borders.

Conversations and sharing stories become an opening for collaborative praxis, authoring from multiple locations to negotiate marginalised representation and depletions of violent renderings that read women as absent subjects. Decentering authorial voice recognises that a plurality of being means kindling the politics of building horizontal comradeship, sharing visions of liberation, dreams and learning together. This process, Richa Nagar and Koni Benson echo, are "co-determining"<sup>84</sup>, dependent on the various aspects of research; writ-

<sup>80</sup> Pumla Gqola, *What is Slavery to me?* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>81</sup> Nagar, *Muddying waters*, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Nagar reflects that little discussion in feminist discourse focus on the speaking with approach to navigate negotiations of political productions – signifying reflexivity and positionality as processes.

<sup>83</sup> Nagar, *Muddying waters*, 14.

<sup>84</sup> Koni Benson and Richa Nagar, "Collaboration as Resistance? Reconsidering the Processes, Products, and Possibilities of Feminist Oral History and Ethnography," *Gender, Place & Culture* 13, no. 5 (October 2006): 583–84.

ing productions; dialogues that do not impede on self-determined action and where conceptual worldviews may differ from academic paradigms.

In recognizing collaborative and accountable research, radical vulnerability is centralised in exploring the analytical use of co-authoring with communities. The poetics of relationality and its entanglements becomes apparent and can be utilised as productive tensions in navigating knowledge production. The purpose of situating co-authorship destabilises the grounding of a definitive and universal truth of past/present lives underpinning the importance of multiple truths as meaningful to analysing positions towards and of the communities being studied.

For artists like Deidre, to see Khoe and San

reflected in African films enables a mirror of reflections where currently the mirror remains distorted and fragmented, thereby continuing the historical violation of unspoken intergenerational trauma that affects lives today. Deidre's insights on artistic interventions and utilising embodied knowledge confront the idea of archives as not simply bearing witness to the past but also bearing witness to the form of the archive; the condensing of lives in judgement summaries and paying attention to the overlapping subjectivities of myself reading the archive. Identities play into artistic work and creations, and in the same way they are reflected in knowledge production: we leave traces of our(self) in the stories we tell. We are not outside observing the world, but within the world, immersed in the story and not distant.

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