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“Since the Germans came it rains less.”

Landscape and Identity of Herero Communities in Namibia

“Since the Germans came it rains less”:
Landscape and Identity of Herero Communities in Namibia

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. mr. P.F. van der Heijden
ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties ingestelde
commissie, in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Aula der Universiteit
op donderdag 15 december 2005, te 10.00 uur

door Anette Gertrud Hoffmann
geboren te Limburg/Lahn, Duitsland

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Introduction

Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps (Edward Said 1994: 2).

The past is never really past in the making of landscape. It continues in the present. The answer of Magdalena Albert to my question about the living conditions in Ovitoto, "since the Germans came, it rains less," was one of the sentences that perpetually accompanied my research and writing about OvaHerero constructions of landscape.¹ Her statement speaks to the irreversible change that the experience of colonization, war, resistance and the subsequent dislocation brought about for the Herero, as for other African communities in Namibia. Mrs Albert's words carry nostalgia with them; I understand her as commenting on the severe legacy of imperialism, but also expressing the unavoidable contemporaneity of a past, both pre-colonial and colonial, that is never quite "over and concluded" but continues to act upon the present.

Still, Herero landscapes and places are not simply characterized by a past that took place in the area. Instead, the land is cultivated into a landscape by means of orature, mostly in form of praise poems (omutandu, or omitandu in the plural), as well as through performative acts that constantly reinscribe, relocate and negotiate history. Annemarie Heywood gives a lucid definition of orature as comprising much more than praise poetry, oral history and folktales:

By orature we mean the whole body of art, science, history and philosophy by which a speech community gives meaning to itself and its world, which is not stored in print but in human minds. ... Orature depends on a succession of human carriers and is "published" in specific social contexts (cited in Kavari 2000: 1).

Places and the landscape of the OvaHerero have survived colonization through these acts of re-signifying cultivation. I use the notion of cultivation here in the sense of artfully culturalizing the environment into a landscape that appears to consist of a similar texture, or thread, to borrow Clifford Geertz' image of culture as a web, as that which provides elements of the fabric from

¹ Ovitoto is one of the former native reserves that was established under German rule and is now communal land.

which cultural identities are constructed.² This may sound like an oversimplifying systematic, and, indeed, orature is not an all-encompassing meaning-producing machine.

What I wish to establish by means of the imagery of the fabric of the web that people spin for themselves, is the notion of an interacting, communicating fabric of social practice that embraces the making of landscape and personal identities alike: not only does praise poetry characterize and identify people and the landscape, but the same *omitandu* elementarily signify people as tied to the landscape and the landscape as essentially connected to people. Thus, the mode of production is similar and the oral texts interact, building a flexible body, or network of texts, that identify places and people, enabling the Herero communities to think, narrate, and perform places and people as intrinsically interconnected. In other words, the oral texts and, to some extent, the performative acts that are the objects of analysis throughout this book, produce narrated identities of people and places and mutually relate those identities. It is thus the collective activity of performing, speaking, and remembering that transforms the land from a physical environment into a landscape of meaning and beauty, invested with the ability to speak back in the present, and thereby harboring and communicating the experiences of the past. I regard the Herero productions of landscape as at once a social construction and an artwork. The landscapes created in this way provide the process and vehicle that focus the interpretations of the past in the present, but also mediate current and historical articulations of identity.

This is not to say that orature today, or in the past, equips OvaHerero with a general all-encompassing means to work out identities. Instead, orature is one element in the process of building up personal identities within the “relational positioning [that] is the work of culture” (Clifford 2000: 95). In Namibia, like everywhere else in the world, people have at their disposal a variety of discursive formations and performative strategies, but also material status symbols, some chosen and some imposed upon the person or group, out of which a combination may coagulate into personal or group identities. Regarding the making of identities, which Stuart Hall proposes as “the result of a successful articulation or ‘chaining’ [of the self] into the flow of a discourse” (1996: 6), which always consists of a variety of elements, this is not irreconcilable with the notion of narrated identities. But then, probably much like everywhere else in the world, a Herero kid in highschool in Windhoek may consider a pair of new sneakers of a particular brand

² Geertz writes: “Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (1973: 5). I use the imagery of the web here, as an image for the spinning and multilinearity of cultural practice, without wishing to define or determine a notion of culture to this image. For I believe, along with Mieke Bal, that definitions of culture are “inevitably programmatic” and that it is therefore “presumptuous to pronounce on what ‘culture’ is, except perhaps that it can only be envisioned in a plural, changing, and mobile existence” (2002:9).

more significant than a personal praise poem. That this same youngster may experience Herero orature as a “means to understand the interplay between subjective experiences of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which those fragile, meaningful subjectivities are formed” and thus as invested with identificatory values, is not a paradox (Gilroy 2000: 98). Again, like everywhere else in the world, in Namibia, too, modernity is the age of plunder, as Simon Frith has noted (1996: 109). Elements which provide the fabric of what people see as their identity may stem from irreducibly specific local sources and the societal interactions mediated by local cultural practice, but are also informed by enactments of sameness and difference as performed by the consumption and display of what Gilroy calls “branded commodities” that are part of interaction within a globalized world (107).

The reason why I bring up praise poetry as an element of the figuration of identities in relation to landscapes, is that I seek to explore the closeness between landscape and personal as well as collective identities as cultural constructions. If we understand of orature as bestowed with the suturing efficacy to link articulations of identity to specific locations, the issue is not how orature reflects on identities, but how it produces them together with a landscape of meaning. This proximity of landscape and people does not speak for an ecological narrative of natural ties to the land. Instead, what I want to stress is a specific closeness, established by cultural practices that counter the construction of landscape as that which is completely outside of the self. In her work about landscape and nature conceptions within artworks in the Western world, Petra Halkes writes:

Through centuries of Western culture, landscape has provided an attractive screen for the projection of desire to transcend the inadequate self into a larger, seemingly boundless entity. “Landscape” indicates a human conception of nature: it is generally defined as that what the human eye can encompass at a given time and place, of “nature”, which always exceeds the landscape. In the Western tradition “nature” embraces a seemingly infinite accumulation of objects that are outside the self (2001: 8, emphasis added).

The concept of landscape has to travel quite a bit, to borrow Mieke Bal’s central concept, from that which can be seen, acts as a screen for projection, and is conceptualized as outside of the self, as Halkes describes it, to a landscape that is spoken, performed, heard, and belongs to the cultural text in which the narrated self as part of a relational social construction is located. What

focuses the concept of landscape in this book and prevents its dissolution into insignificant vagueness, is the notion of landscape as something people do, that is, a cultural activity and construction with all its implications of specificity and cultural locatedness. Retaining the concept of landscape, albeit travelling with it into a different cultural setting, I propose to change the registers of how we analyze landscape as a cultural construction: if we can divorce the concept from its innate connection to visibility, to which notions like screening, beholding, vista, and panorama belong, we can come to an understanding of what a landscape that is told, heard, and remembered in words and voices can be.

Another important aspect in the construction of Herero landscapes is the notion of time. If the existence of every place of meaning begins with a speech act of orature, one that names, claims and characterizes; and if this act of signification is connected to deceased community members whose life gave meaning to the places; then both the performing of *omitandu*, as well as the listening to it enacts a landscape that is steeped in history. Landscape of the Herero, therefore, is not encompassed at “a given time and place” but always extends into the past of the communities. We must therefore analyze orature as merging the present and the past, that is, also, as producing a meaningfully located present by means of conjuring a collective past as well as the communities’ memories and historiology.

Seeking to unpack the culturally-specific practices of landscaping, as a process more than a finished product during which identities are articulated and historiology is made, I travel in time and space. In the first and second chapter I will explore the way in which orature works to produce landscape. Whereas I look at the fundamental features of the way in which the Ovherero perform this landscaping by analyzing how praise poetry operates and how personal as well as collective identities are tied to the landscape, in the second chapter I extend and complicate this approach by looking at different, often competing voices within Herero historiology and the production of a landscape of memory. In the second chapter I focus on the event of performing, and thereby, as I will argue “versioning”, of orature by a group of young women in 1954. The third chapter deals with practices of naming and creating orature under apartheid. In this chapter I analyze the capacities of orature to speak back to apartheid and articulate resistance by looking closer at an *omutandu* that was created to mourn the loss of the Old Location in 1959, when people revolted against their forced resettlement to a newly-built township and the demonstration escalated into the so-called Windhoek Shooting, turning it into an act of performative resistance. Chapter four is situated in the present, discussing Herero politics of commemoration and a bodily practice of re-connecting the members of the community with the

landscape as invested with the ancestors. Chapter five chapter juxtaposes the notion of subverting colonial power with a performative practice that appeared throughout the book, with a case study in which the subversion of the construction of landscape of one's own is impossible and thus creates the loss of places of meaning for a specific group of Ovaherero. In the last chapter I explore the potential of the concept of the diasporic as it appears to be put forward in comparative articulations that associate Jewish history with that of the Herero. In this chapter I analyze the historical change of the Herero's narrative of genesis during the colonial period, but also the possibility of being diasporic within one's "own" country.

As I have mentioned above, an analysis of Herero constructions of landscape must also travel through time because the landscape is anchored to salient moments of Herero history. Therefore I will give a coherent, albeit sketchy overview of Herero history, thereby focussing on topics that will recur throughout the book.

Let me start with what I would call the Golden Age of the Herero pastoralist society. This era is not the earliest time that is touched upon by oral sources, but certainly the time-span most often nostalgically referred to in contrast to the years under colonial oppression. The Namibian historian Dag Henrichsen writes that, after a time of rapid impoverishment and the loss of herds due to raids and conflicts with mainly Oorlam raiding commandos, it is in the second half of the nineteenth century that a redistribution of cattle wealth took place: "It brought about the collapse of the Afrikaner Oorlam hegemony and signaled the establishment of new Herero chieftaincies throughout central Namibia" (2000: 164). During the period of raids against Nama-Oorlam and Afrikaner groups, Herero groups managed to build up herds and accumulate wealth, not only in cattle but also in terms of acquiring guns, ammunition and horses. By the late 1870s the Ovaherero had established several chieftaincies reigned by ovahona (Big Men or chiefs), who had accumulated considerable amounts of cattle. Henrichsen writes that, according to missionary sources:

Kamaherero (ca. 1820-1890), leader of the Ohorongu clan, had some 76 large ozonganda [small settlements] under his authority, each comprising on average 300 people or 22,800 in total. He was not only the most influential Bigman but also the wealthiest, at least until renewed raids by Nama-Oorlam and Herero erupted in the 1880s. In the late 1860s his cattle wealth was estimated as being close to 10,000 head of cattle, in the 1870s about 40,000 cattle (171).

The immense increase of Kamaherero's cattle wealth speaks for what German anthropologist Michael Bollig and Dutch historian Jan-Bart Gewald call the "rapid repastoralization of the Herero communities" (2000: 17). This repastoralization, which also comprised a consolidation of wealth and hegemony, gave rise to a stratified pastoralist society "in close contact with the Cape trade network and missionary aspirations" (18). Henrichsen writes that ethnic identification at that time was "based on powerful claims to the land, i.e. wells and pastures, and those modern means of production like guns and horses" (185).

In the 1880s the conflict with Nama groups under the leadership of Hendrik Witbooi brought about a series of armed conflicts that resulted in the Herero's loss of their dominion over central Namibia:

In this situation Maherero [one of the powerful *ovahona*] sought to turn the tide by seeking support from the incoming German colonial forces in his struggle against the forces of Hendrik Witbooi. What started out as a small detachment of German colonial troops expanded and grew bit by bit, particularly under the leadership of Theodor Leutwein, until imperial Germany gained control over the territories of the Herero (18).

Additional to the loss of control over central Namibia, the rinderpest epidemic (1896) had a devastating effect on the Herero cattle economy. Within a few months, more than two thirds of the Herero herds had been killed by the disease. Bollig and Gewald write that

the economic destruction wrought by the rinderpest ensured that Herero chiefs, in seeking to maintain their people and power, were forced into selling ever greater swathes of land to the German colonial traders and settlers. (19)

The selling of the land and the increasing presence of German settlers and military led to tensions that resulted in the catastrophe of the German-Herero colonial war in which an estimated sixty to seventy percent of the Ovaherero lost their lives. In his letter to Gouverneur Leutwein, Samuel Maherero, who inhabited the (contested) position of the paramount chief of the Herero during that period, describes the reasons for the outbreak of the war as follows:

The war has not been started by me in this year, but it was started by the whites, as you know, that the white and in particular the traders, how many Herero did they kill with guns, but also by means of incarceration into prisons ... and the traders continued to cause trouble, and accused my people ... and started to make us pay and confiscate the cattle ... These things have started the war.³

Attacks of the Herero troops under Samuel Maherero against German settlers had started the war, but Maherero had counted on the possibility of negotiations with Leutwein (Kuß 2004: 68). Neither he nor other Herero leaders had expected the genocidal war that would almost wipe out their community. On the 11th of June 1904, Generalleutnant von Trotha arrived in Namibia, who replaced Leutwein and radicalized the war strategy according to his conception of a “Rassenkampf” (a war of races) that culminated in his notorious proclamation “I will not accommodate women and children, but force them to return to their tribe or have them shot” (ich nehme keine Weiber und Kinder mehr auf, treibe sie zu ihrem Volk zurück oder lasse auf sie schießen, cited in Kuß, 2004: 72, my translation).

After the devastating defeat of the battle at Hamakari, the surviving Herero fled into the Omaheke desert, where most of them died of thirst and exhaustion. Some managed to flee to Botswana (at that time British Betschuana Land), the remaining survivors were captured, incarcerated in concentration camps and were put to work as forced labor on civil and military projects. In 1908 the camps were abolished.

After the war, the German colonial regime sought to control all aspects of life of the Africans in the colony. All Africans had to wear pass marks at all times, mobility was restricted and movements of the African population were registered (see chapter 3). The following quote of the Windhuker Nachrichten of 1906 conveys the colonial wish for a complete subjugation of the Herero communities:

³ Der Anfang des Krieges ist nicht angefangen worden durch mich in diesem Jahr, sondern er ist begonnen worden durch die Weißen, wie du weißt, daß die Weißen und besonders die Händler, wieviel Herero haben sie getötet in diesem Jahr, sowohl durch Gewehre, wie durch einsperren in Gefängnisse ... Und die Händler haben es auch so weit getrieben mit den Schwierigkeiten, ihre eigene Schuld auf meine Leute zu schieben ... und fingen an meine Leute bezahlen zu lassen und das Vieh wegzutreiben

We demand that the Herero become accustomed to attitudes that are rooted in the German law that governs here, and that they construct their way of thinking according to this.⁴

However, as Krüger, Henrichsen, Gewalt, and others have argued, the strategies of survival after the war resulted in a process of reconstruction of Herero society. Although facing immediate control and economic hardship, Herero people fled from and sought to subvert colonial control. By the time the South African regime officially permitted cattle ownership, the Ovaherero herders had already started to rebuild their herds and had illegally settled in the areas of their former dwelling places (103). From the 1920s onwards, the South African regime established a reserve policy in order to prevent “kaffir farming,” to control the native population and to enforce the segregation according to the racist ideology. The majority of the Herero population was resettled in reserves designed for them in the North and the East of the country (Bollig and Gewalt: 46). The reconstruction of the Herero society after the war also had an impact on religious belief and practice. The survivors of the war converted to Christianity in greater numbers than ever before, seeking to “save some measure of identity beyond the control of the German colonial and military administration” (50).

In the 1920s, but especially after the burial of Samuel Maherero in Okahandja, (see chapter four) the reintroduction of ancestral worship, circumcision, and the re-kindling of Holy Fires throughout the country accompanied the attempt to reconstruct the Herero society. This did not lead to an outright rejection of Christianity, but rather to syncretism that was based on the texts of the Old Testament. Only following the Second World War did the increasing dissatisfaction with the indifference of the Rhenish Mission towards the oppressive colonial rule cause the Herero to leave the mission church and establish the Oruano church. “Within the Oruano church Herero could worship the God and Jesus Christ through the ancestral fire and practice what they believed to be the correct ways of living as indicated by their ancestors and the Old Testament books of Leviticus and Isaiah” (52). Today, the attitudes towards Christianity vary considerably within Ovaherero communities, ranging from engagement in Pentecostalist churches, to a complete rejection of Christianity as a colonial heritage. In the years after the Second World War, members of the Herero communities engaged in the anti-colonial struggle. The Herero Chief Council, for instance, played a crucial role in the

⁴ Wir verlangen, daß sich der Herero nunmehr den Anschauungen anpasst, wie sie hier herrschendes deutsches Recht vorschreibt, und dass er hieraus sein Empfinden konstruiert, cited in Gesine Krüger (2004: 103), my translation.

resistance against the forced removal of the inhabitants of the Old Location in Windhoek according to the notorious Group Areas Act of the apartheid legislation that led to the event of the Windhoek Shooting (see chapter 3) in 1959. The Herero Chief Council also sent permanent petitioners to the UN in New York to raise solidarity with the African population in Namibia at the height of apartheid. After 1959, Herero people engaged in the stronger party political organization of the independence struggle rather than in the guerilla war that began in 1966 and took place mainly in the North of the country. The first free elections in 1989 led to the victory of the SWAPO (the South West African Peoples Organisation) and finally to Namibian Independence in 1990.

The overview I gave here is one mode, an academic one to be sure, of “turning the uncertainties of history into manageable entities, into ‘readable’ texts” (Carol Muller 1999: 222). Herero orature as well as performative acts of memory opt for different ways to represent history. But neither *omitandu* nor the performances I will analyze in this book narrate history. Instead, history appears as part of the landscape that is filled with local legends, stories of origin, it is enacted by means of poems and stories that comment on change, voice protest against colonial oppression, reveal conflicts over and express claims to the land, as well as commemorate the dead and thereby personalize the space. Attempting to unpack the culturally specific practices of landscaping I will start with orature as a practice of claiming the land that establishes a beginning of Herero history in the area of central Namibia. Analyzing events of commemoration and orature that mourn and synchronically re-claim the land, I focus what can be identified as landmarks of Herero history. The colonial war against the Germans appears time and again, and with it the flight to Botswana, the incarceration into camps and the loss of the land. Further, the violations of human and land rights under apartheid feature prominently in the collective memory and historiology that is stored, represented and interpreted by Herero orature. But both mourning and commemorating, as we will see, are not only preoccupied with loss. Instead, the death lament that is the fundamental event of orature from which later poems derive is a productive device in the making versions of persistent and ongoing narratives of landscapes and identity.

Ehi rOvaherero

Landscape is a way in which people – all people – understand and engage with the material world around them. (Barbara Bender 2001: 3)

We call into question the idea of the uniqueness of landscape as a European construct, which still seems to prevail in recent writing on the subject. We thus agree with Terence Ranger's conviction that "it is not a matter of thinking that [Africans must have had a notion of landscape], but of being convinced that they did. Yet the question remains of how to get at it." (Ute Luig and Achim van Oppen 1997: 8)

Consider landscape as a verb instead of a noun. We "do" landscape (and this might be universal, as Bender and Luig and van Oppen suggest), in a similar way as we produce social space.

Landscape as a cultural concept may include, but also go beyond, the construction of social space, in that landscape is the mode of referring to a specific aspect, namely that of aestheticizing the environment.

The etymology of the term landscape points to considerable changes in the meaning of the term. The words *landscipe* (Old English) *landscepi* (Old Saxon), *landscaf* (Old German) appear already appear in medieval texts. Their endings, related to modern verbs as shape and schaffen, refer to the activity of creating a space by means of a localization of social norms and customs (Luig and van Oppen 1997: 9). This notion of landscape thus points to a "collective sense of belonging," to a bounded space or territory that was created by means of social activity, that is, more to a social construction than a natural environment. Of the meanings of landscape, which include both a genre of art (mainly painting) and an "objective expanse of terrain itself" or a "natural setting," not even the "objective expanse of terrain" exists outside of social practice (Christopher Fitter 1998: 86). Travelling, both in time and in space, the practice and the concept of landscape changed meanings, thereby displacing older ones.

"Landscape," writes Fitter, "was not introduced into English until the 1590s" (86). In both meanings, that of a physical segment of the land (as opposed to the cities) and as a genre of painting "new emphasis was given to the natural world (...). Increasingly, nature was regarded as an entity of its own, detached from and in some sort of tension with the social world" (Luig and van Oppen 10). Thus, before landscape paintings, geography and other practices that transform

parts of (what we now understand as) nature into landscape emerged, the concept of nature itself had to travel: from that which is the inherent specifying quality of every earthly thing into the non-animated environment in which human society is enveloped (10). Landscape is thus not a raw material to be represented in painting or any other form of representation, but always already a symbolic form, an artifact of whatever aesthetic form may be chosen. Before any secondary representations can take place, writes Mitchell, landscape is a medium of expression in which “cultural meanings and values are encoded” (1994: 14).

Thus we “see landscape” only insofar as this seeing itself is a “coincidence between a representation and that which a society assumes as its reality” (Bryson 1983: 13). Bryson’s notion that societies must conceal cultural and historic specificity to maintain the illusion of representation as objective or natural (in the sense of a pre-given environment) turns “any appeal to the natural attitude of painting,” and indeed, that of any representation of landscape, into a myth (Duncan and Ley 1993: 4). This concealment has worked so well that we manage to regard a specific kind of landscape painting at once as a unique European art form *and* as a representation of landscape in its own right.⁵

The question “but where is the landscape?” that I often encountered when speaking about Herero constructions of landscape points to a veiled cultural construction of landscape: that which produces an irreducible joint between specific representations and what we (as Westerners) “really see.” To put it simpler: we (as Westerners) will not see Herero landscapes. Simply, because sight is not the point. Herero landscape is not invisible, but neither is it constituted by visual practice. Stories and poems, rather than pictures, do landscape in this case. To make it seem even more complicated: Herero discourses and representations of their landscape depict qualities and features of landscape to which Western perceptions are often blind. Landscape as imbued with “meaning and power of its own” (Luig and van Oppen: 20), deriving from ancestral inscription, cannot be reduced to a mere object or commodity. This notion of landscape can be translated only if we understand landscape as a medium of cultural expression, which is reflective and constitutive of socio-historical processes. As such, landscape has been seen not as a uniquely European, but rather as a universal concept and practice.⁶

Rangers’ question of “how to get at it” points at the necessity to engage with cultural expressions and representations for the analysis of how communities build landscapes. In what follows I will try to read that which is not seen. For, what we see in Namibia, in most of the

⁵ For a critique of this narrative of European landscape painting see W. J. T. Mitchell 1994.

⁶ See for instance Martin Roessler, forthcoming, Robert Layton 1997, James Duncan and David Ley 1993, Barbara Bender and Margot Winer 2001, Terence Ranger 1997, Nicole Haley 1996, among others.

cases, does not represent the landscapes of the Ovaherero communities. Henrichsen gives a vivid account of the visible landscape:

Driving through central Namibia one is confronted with the demarcation of a settler colony. Wire fences to the left and right of the road stretch into infinity and only now and then a fence branches off into the veld. They demarcate large commercial farms and signal private property. Consequently they have few gates. Some of these gates have sign posts which indicate the main entrance to an estate. They stand out in the *seemingly uninhabited landscape* as isolated beacons of foreign worlds, as the names on the sign posts indicate: Berlin; Bodenhausen; Sturmfeld; Waldfriede; Apostel or Waterloo; Nelly; Diana North; Happyland; Sukses or Toekoms; Otjitambi; Okosongomingo; Otjipau; or Okaue Süd; etc.. (Henrichsen 1999: 1; emphasis added)

With this reflection on visible demarcations of ownership, Henrichson begins his seminal article about Herero praise poetry as constructing social space in central Namibia.⁷ Evoking this image of a landscape that mainly bears the traces and inscriptions of the settler's presence, I, too, search for a beginning, or an entrance, into the landscape I wish to analyze in this study. The image of the vast open space interrupted only by fences and the few signs with settler farm names belies the construction of the landscape by Herero people. These fences and names signify a settler space and over-write the Herero landscape. So do Namibian maps, which often show no marks of the places imbued with social meaning, or alter the names of those settlements that are crucial for the Herero community. The cultural practice of looking at landscape, the circular practice of constructing landscape through a framed gaze and representing this gaze by means of images does not, indeed cannot register the social construction of space and the making of the Herero landscape.

This chapter deals with a landscape construction that does not produce images and is not represented by images. No paintings, no photographs are available that would allow one to read or decipher this landscape. And yet landscape and a specific social space are produced, and I suggest that they can be read. What I will do in the following is focus not so much on what is not

⁷ I want to thank Dag Henrichsen: not only for his work that provided an entrance, guided me through the thicket of Herero oral genres and helped to overcome the feeling of hermetic exclusiveness these genres evoke at first sight, but also for his friendly way of encouraging me to work on praise poetry.

- as if something was missing - but on what is there: the texts, phrases, and words of orature that produce landscape and make it accessible.⁸

Dealing with the construction of *Ehi rOvaberero*, the land of the Herero, I will work with two concepts: landscape and the social construction of space. This is a theoretical distinction I draw for the sake of analysis. *Ehi rOvaberero* as the cultural construction I describe is both a landscape and a social space. Conceptually these two notions intersect: the notion of landscape provides a frame to read the aesthetic dimension but is intrinsically linked to social aspects of cultural practice, the social construction of space. The latter highlights social action, includes practices of control and of domination which are connected to and produce an aesthetic dimension. Speaking of these conceptually differentiable but not absolutely dividable aspects that are dimensions of a cultural construction in which both are inert, I divide what is intrinsically connected in order to decode process, praxis and the consequences of the space so construed.

Ehi rOvaberero as social space

Could space be nothing more than a passive locus of social relations, the milieu in which their combinations take on body, or the aggregate of the procedures employed in their removal? The answer must be no. (Henri Lefebvre cited in Michael J. Dear and Steven Flusty 2002: 133)

So we see the vast empty space in Namibia. And seeing as a Western cultural practice of doing landscape creates the illusion of accessibility, transparency, of being able to know the space or landscape we are in. The geographer Achim van Oppen made the remark at a symposium (held in 1999 in Koenigswinter) that it took geographers and others a long time to learn that the landscape in most (or nearly all) parts of Africa was actually not a wilderness, but a landscape that was culturally and physically shaped and transformed by its inhabitants. No wonder agency has become such a fashionable concept in anthropology and the related disciplines for the last ten or fifteen years: it might have been more the researchers who needed this concept, because they had ignored it so vigorously, than anyone else.

⁸ This does not mean that Herero people today do not in some or other way produce pictures that show natural environment. However, this was not a cultural practice in the last century and I suggest that it does not make landscape. The landscape and social space I speak of in this chapter is construed by means of texts, not pictures.

But then, there is no neutral way of seeing, “no vision without purpose” as Mitchell put it (1986: 38). Indeed, what was depicted as “the vast empty space” or the “wilderness” of Africa has long been revealed as the colonizer’s dream of perfectly accessible space.⁹

The idea of wilderness, as Jonathan Bordo has pointed out, is at once a “void and a voiding,” a clearing “bereft of culture” (2000: 224). What is seen as vast empty spaces in this respect becomes equivalent to wilderness, since wilderness, as Bordo convincingly argues, is a space without human witnesses, a space for which human meaning and connectedness, the occurrence of history, can be conveniently denied (245). That this wilderness or emptiness was made and not found and was therefore a consequence of a process of violent capture and dispossession, the successive dissolution of “signification by emptying and dissolving significance” (245) and involved the violence of over-inscription and re-signification, is not a new insight.¹⁰ But our Western way of seeing the landscape is still complicit with, or, perilously closely related to this instrumentally meaningful and culturally informed practice of emptying the space in the first place. Driving through central Namibia we still see a vast open space, interrupted only by the fences that mark, and estate names that signify, private property.

If this cultural practice, the Western way of seeing landscape, is very much “constituted through a cultivated or practised relation to pictures” (Bordo 2000: 245) and is therefore never innocent, but always already informed by cultural forms of representation, what do non-western ways of seeing create when looking at local landscapes?

The German anthropologist Martin Rössler gives a vivid account of how different ways of seeing can be:

I remember countless walks through the landscape of the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, accompanied by local friends. What the European outsider sees on such a walk is first of all a very beautiful landscape, and one is immediately inclined to comment on this “picturesque scenery”. By way of contrast, locals see quite different things, and these are what they find worth commenting on. Such issues mainly cover historical processes, stretching from myths of origin of the earth and mankind to movements of the ancestors, origin of political and social structures, and the foundation and shifting of settlements. (forthcoming)

⁹ See for instance J. M. Coetzee 1988, Patricia Hayes 2000, John Noyes 1992, Mary Louise Pratt 1986, among others.

¹⁰ Coetzee 1988, Hayes (2000) and Bunn (1996) for South Africa, Ranger (1996) for the Matopos mountains in Zimbabwe, and John Noyes for Namibia.

Hence, what people from Sulawesi saw in this landscape seems to be more informed by stories and narrations than by the cultural practice of relating to pictures. The universal issue at stake in the making of landscapes, or social spaces is the *making* itself. To be sure, this making is always related to the physical space societies find themselves in, or, in the case of colonization, the territory the imperial power strives to conquer. But physical elements may or may not be the dominant features in the actual making of landscape.

The notion of relation speaks about the practices of making landscape or constructing a social space in the way that it refers to production, inscription, mapping and the like, all of which are constitutive, not only of the space but also for the societies that constructed this space and live in it. These forms of producing social space and landscape are social practices, and according to the various ways they operate, these are inevitably specific cultural practices. These practices constitute the subject of this study.

Starting with the way in which social space and territory were constructed I draw on French philosopher Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. Social space, Lefebvre wrote in *The Production of Space* (1974), is produced by all societies, a universality that is complicated by culturally specific processes of signification and codification. In other words, all societies produce social space but the way in which this is done varies considerably. Inevitable for the understanding of the implications of the production of social space as material manifestations and mental codifications, mutually operative towards space and inhabitants, is Lefebvre's notion of production in multiple dimensions. He defines production as follows:

Production is not merely the making of products: the term signifies on the one hand "spiritual" production, that is to say creations (including social time and space), and on the other material production or the making of things; it also signifies the self-production of a "human being" in the process of historical self-development, which involves the production of social relations. (1971: 30)

As a consequence of this view of production, the codification of space can be read, but only incompletely. "Space speaks," he writes, "but it does not tell all" (1991: 142). What I will attempt in the following is an incomplete deciphering of Ovaherero social space and located social relations that are constructed by means of orature. Lefebvre's "reading" must be taken metaphorically as a de-coding of a "context of conventions, intentions and order" (142) given

through the capitalist organization and inscription of spatial order he describes, but also the deciphering of the language of monuments, sites and other cultural practices. In this chapter, my reading is concerned with texts of orature and the social and narrative conventions that make orature productive; it will be a deciphering of the construction of social and economically used space that praise poetry produces. “It is not the work of a moment for a society to generate (produce) an appropriated social space,” writes Lefebvre. Instead, this space is at once a product and a process, a constant reworking that provides a certain measure of social cohesion, to the extent that social identity is tied to that space. In order for this process to occur, it is necessary for the societies that so inscribe meaning onto space and construct social significance to have “at their disposal special places” (34). With such places I will begin.

Naming the land

Places like settlements, waterholes and wells in Namibia were previously named in Otjiherero. Looking at some of these place names and what is involved in the practice of naming helps to understand the way in which space is mapped, specified, and in some cases already socialized. Place names such as Otjomuise, the Otjiherero name for Windhoek, Otjandjomboimue for Karibib as well as Erongo, which is a name for a waterhole, provide information about the physical features of those sites. Otjomuise means “place of smoke” and refers to a warm spring, which created steam. Otjandjomboimue refers to a place of “one well,” and Erongo, coming from Otjirongo, “a place with water,” describes a well in the area that is now called the Erongo mountains. With their reference to environmental features these names map the land by means of storing information in place names. But, as Henrichsen suggests, with most places the mapping through naming, a practice that leads rather to a topology than a topography of the land, is more complex (1999: 3).

Take for instance Okahandja, one of the significant places of Herero history, where battles against the Germans were fought, important annual commemorations are held and the royal house of the Maherero family has its seat. Literally, the place name seems to refer to a small (the prefix *-oka*) broad (*-bandja*) riverbed. Interestingly missionary Vedder, who translated the name in that way did not see the paradox in these two adjectives and understood the name as referring to a wide, but short riverbed. Theo Kamupingene, in his interpretation of Herero nomenclature gives a completely different explanation. He writes that place names which start

with *-oka* always have “a special meaning – that of a ‘darling’” Thus, the name Okahandja entails a diminutive form that refers to “being loved” (1985: 67). According to this interpretation the place name for Okahandja encapsulates the information concerning a relation, that of an affectionate, almost tender relation of the (former) inhabitants to the place.

In the case of Omaruru, the name refers to a place where the sour milk (*omaere*) became bitter (*-ruru*), because the cattle ate a certain type of grass. The name of the place thus already includes the allusion to a story. Missionary Vedder, who got this story from an (unidentified) Herero informant, writes that when Tjiseseta came with his herd to the valley of the Omaruru river, the place was unpopulated and thus unnamed. Since there was not much grazing, the cattle ate the bitter grass that was there and produced bitter tasting milk. In the case of the Otjiherero name for Walvis Bay, Ezorongondo, Kamupingene speaks of a distortion of the original name, referring to the practice of re-naming that was common during colonialism. In this way he creates the notion of naming in Otjiherero as pivotal, that is, more “original” than the colonial name.

But, it has to be taken into account that the OvaHerero communities also over-inscribed previous land names when they came to settle in central Namibia, since the land was not empty then either. Thus, dealing with hierarchies of originality in terms of naming, we have to consider the possibility of an even earlier act of naming by another group that was over-inscribed by both the Otjiherero and the Afrikaans name. However, this is not what the name itself speaks about. Instead, the name tells the story of Tjiponda’s first encounter with the sea:

This original name for Walvis Bay (Ezorongondo) was given by a Herero nomad, called Tjiponda who once took his cattle there in search for grazing. It is told that he was astonished by the huge water which he thought was a “big dark forest” and exclaimed “*Ezorongondo ndi ba wotwa*”, meaning “a dark forest from which one cannot gain firewood”. (1985: 69)

Without intending to question Kamupingene’s expertise in this case – since he is an Otjiherero speaker and I am not – I think of this phrase, which certainly is part of a praise poem, “a dark forest from which one cannot gain firewood” as an allegory that is typical for *omitandu*. In this way the phrase would double the meaning it entails. Rather alluding to than actually specifying it, it depicts the seawater as a large amount of something that is actually scarce in the area of the coastal desert, namely open water and fire wood. Thus, although water is there, it is still of no use. Remarkably, by means of the allusion to wood, when actually speaking about water, and by

linking both to a lack, this phrase evokes the features of the coastal desert in which both trees and water are scarce.¹¹

Both the names Omaruru and Ezorongondo refer to a story, rather than simply naming physical elements of the land. By means of encapsulating a story many place names establish relations: life histories are tied to places and places become personified since they evoke events that are historically linked to people. As Liz Gunner writes, by means of identifying both people and places with historical events and interweaving all three dimensions, the personal story, historical events and a specific place, these names lodge people within the landscape (1996: 119). By means of the poetic activity of naming places, a network of meanings is ascribed to the land. The names become intrinsic elements of people's history that will be evoked by mentioning place names. In fact, for some older Otjiherero speakers the names of places operate as an initiation of a nearly synaesthetic reflex: hearing the names of places, I was told by Naftaline Tjikundi, she instantly wants to recite the poem. Upon hearing the names, that is, the highly structured genre of *omitandu* comes to the fore. Which hints already to the idea that "landscaping" in Herero culture evolves more around hearing and narrating or reciting than it is concerned with seeing and pictures. With that we are already very close to what *omitandu* do, hence, we are steeped in the aesthetic dimension of the performative inscription that I understand as doing landscape.

Let me return to the aspect of creating a social space, with which I will begin my reading of praise poetry. Praise poems for places, *omitandu* in Otjiherero, are the main means of creating a social space. This does not exhaustively explain what praise poetry does, but it provides a beginning.

Omitandu

Similar to the practice of naming, the way of banking social and economic organization in praise poems is a historical process. Both practices produce social space. Henrichsen's work provides an excellent reading of this process of creating a social construction of space in pre-colonial times. As mentioned above, Henrichsen speaks about a topology with which Herero pastoralists

¹¹ The interpretations of the names of Okahandja, Ezorongondo and Otjandjomboimu stem from Theo Kamupingene (1985: 66-70). The interpretations of Omaruru and Otjomuise I knew from hearsay and found them and the interpretation of Erongo in Vedder's unpublished manuscripts in the ELCIN archive in Windhoek (Vedder Manuscripte, Vol 8, pp 64-83).

mapped the land by means of a dense network of *omitandu* that named, claimed, banked information, historicized and thereby localized social relations.

Omitandu are but one of the genres of Herero orature. The word stems from the verb *okutanga*, to praise. Nevertheless, the nomenclature is somewhat confusing. The historian Dag Henrichsen, the linguist Ernst Damman (1987) and the anthropologist Kirsten Alnaes (1989) write about praise songs, whereas the linguist Jekura Kavari (2002) in his work about Herero praise refers to them simply as praises. In fact, *omitandu* are sung at most of the celebratory and formal occasions: at funerals, commemorations, weddings and other festivities. But, *omitandu*, or lines of them, may be recited in conversations, as part of stories, and in political speeches. Hence, they can be spoken or recited in non-traditional, informal contexts. Appearing for instance in political speeches, *omitandu* may be effective although displaced from their original framing. In these cases they enrich and broaden the conversation, speech act, or written text in which they are interwoven.

Oscillating between more or less formalized contexts, shifting between different signifying systems and complicating the distinction between the oral and the written, *omitandu* seem to dwell in an intermediate area of cultural production. Rather than forcing *omitandu*, together with other genres of African orature, into what Liz Gunner describes as “an uncomfortable cul-de-sac liaison with ‘tradition’” (2000: 2), we may understand them as part of a cultural strategy that at once conserves, but also imports and exports and thus lives in a vivid exchange with newer forms of cultural production.

I will use the term praise poems, because I deal with *omitandu* as poems, that is, I have had them mostly recited outside the context of festivities, and then transcribed and translated, and I subsequently deal with them in their written form. Highlighting the aspect of poetry, I refer at once to the limits of my reading, which leaves out the qualities of sound and festive surrounding, and instead stresses those aspects of poetry that survive the mutilation of transcription and translation.

Another confusing aspect is the word praise itself. *Omitandu* can be critical and may thus not be laudatory in all cases. What they do is rather qualify a person, lineage, place, or cattle. Kavari gives the following definition:

Praises are allusive, compact, socio-historical, genealogical, imaginative and eulogistic utterances which are believed to capture and evoke the essential qualities of the referent, and to identify it. (Kavari 2002: 19)

For the understanding of the social construction of space I will focus on the notion of relation, implied by Kavari through his reference to genealogies. *Omitandu* provide a network that basically consists of people, their genealogies, historical events, along with cattle and places.

In his attempt to read *omitandu* as a part of an oral archive that provides information on the socio-spatial organization of the Herero pastoralist's territory, Henrichsen uses them as sources of the local history that speak about the re-consolidation of the Herero pastoralist society in the late 19th century. *Omitandu* do not tell history. Rather they provide "established structures creativity" that are used to contain history (Joyner 1975: 262 cited in Coplan 1994: 19). Read with respect to their capacity to allude to historical events and structure social space, they speak about the consolidation of *ebi rOvaberero*, the land of the Herero in central Namibia. To be sure, this establishment of a claimed territory was not a peaceful poetic appropriation by means of texts alone, nor does Dag Henrichsen say so. Instead, the consolidation of *ebi rOvaberero* was directed against claims of other groups that were residing in central Namibia at that time, claiming exclusive rights on the pastoral utilization of the territory, which included the scarce resource of water.

Henrichsen writes that this became very clear during the negotiations with the colonial officials in the late 19th century during which Herero chiefs sought to legitimate their land claims. He writes:

Whenever colonial officials asked chiefs for "maps" on their respective areas of settlement, the chiefs ignored the settlements and claims of Damara, Nama-Oorlam and San. (1999: 19)

Not only was the land use of groups less powerful at that time often ignored, but the concept of *ebi rOvaberero* that "included the totality of localities defined as Herero places" (19) was used and manipulated during the negotiations with the colonial officials. By means of referring to graves in remote areas, the territorial claims of the Herero were extended to areas that were sometimes not actively utilized as pastoral land. Hence, the textual systems of inscribing areas of belonging and structuring utilization could be and were used strategically. The inscription of space with *omitandu* created an ideal pastoral territory that extended the sphere of actual political influence. What interests me here, is the use of the textual system consisting of named places and sites identified as graves and as a source of power in the process of creating Herero land.

Already consolidated social space, writes Lefebvre, serves “as a tool for thought and action” and is a means of domination and power, yet it “escapes in part from those who would make use of it” and therefore it extends beyond instrumentality (1991: 27). Many of the *omitandu* I collected begin with a phrase that establishes the relation between a male cattle owner to his cattle and thus creates ties between place, person and cattle. In some cases, like the following, Naftaline Tjikundi who recited the *omitandu* for me could recall only this first phrase, although she is one of the local authorities in the field of orature. For the place called Okarasewamomara this was “To the cattle of Munyima of Tjipepa: the black and white ox,” for the place Otjozonyati this was “To the smooth cattle of Ruheka.”

Both examples, like many others that start in a similar way, can be read as operative in structuring social space. By means of identifying the place name, the name of the cattle owner and physical features of cattle, the place is signified as occupied by the family who owns cattle with these specific features. As Naftaline Tjikundi explained: “In most of the cases the place is linked to the first person who died there. The family of this person has the right to use the land after his death.” Kamupingene writes that it is “customary to give what is called ‘*omutandu*,’ a ‘praise song’ to every place” and that this *omutandu* stems from or is part of the praise poem that was created at a person’s burial (1985: 68). In these personal praises, which are usually created by women who perform the death lament, historical events; important incidents of the life of the deceased person but also features that are seen to capture the personality or significance of this person; are interwoven. If the deceased person was a woman, the praise will often refer to “the house of” the male household owner, or it will start with sheep instead of cattle, since for women’s burials sheep were slaughtered rather than cattle. In all cases the first phrase bears an entitlement to usufruct rights, which in the absence of written titles of ownership in pre-colonial times had a status of an acknowledged right to use the pastoral land it referred to. Henrichsen writes that in the 19th century praise poems

articulated claims of utilisation and settlements by lineage with reference to specific places like wells, and or/graves. Each settlement of a family and its herds implied a grazing area, whose borders (*omuruko uokuti*) had to be constantly redefined, given the semi-nomadic nature of the pastoral society. (1999: 16)

Whereas there was agreement, as Charles John Anderson writes in 1856 “that he, who arrives first at any given locality, is the master of it as long as he chose to remain there, and no one will

intrude upon him without having previously asked and obtained his permission,” the inscription of the claim via *omitandu* worked post-mortem.¹² This inscription of the place by means of the unwritten text of an *omitandu* for a place that in most cases derived from an *omitandu* for a deceased person was definitely instrumental. It worked in the way that it extended the territorial claim that was initially legitimized by the act of settling at a site by means of orature. The *omitandu* did not replace the person with a text but produced an ancestor, a narrated person, instead of a forgotten deceased person. This becomes clear through the hierarchy of oral production: the praise for the deceased comes first, the *omitandu* for the place refers to this praise. Further, the *omitandu* for the place that mentions the name and claim of the first comer strategically creates and appropriates a pivotal point in the place’s history: one at which kinship and territoriality overlap and build a social space which frames relations with other groups and seeks to ward off future claims. The specific cultural process of filling the land with allocations, but also places of meaning and located identities, as we will see, produced a social space that constituted a cohesion of a socio-economic pattern. As such this social space had and still has an impact on (not only) the society that produced it.

But how are we to understand the effectiveness of inscription, how does the social inscription endure? Dealing with little material evidence, at least in pre-colonial times, except houses, or rather, compounds, wells, and graves, we have little chance to read the space along material signs. Still, borders were drawn and grazing areas were defined. This was done by means of iterated speech acts. Whereas the names of the places did not tell the owner, *omitandu* do. The *omitandu* for Ovitoto, the area where I did research, is a case in point:

To the big mountains which are at Katjiundja of Vikange.

To the child of Kambekura, the one which was killed by a cheetah while the people still like him.

Looking at the site we foreigners, will see the mountains. Hearing or reading the *omitandu* we Westerners will learn about Katjiunda and a fatal accident in which a child fell prey to a cheetah. The point of reference clearly is Katjiunda; not he is to be found at the mountains but the mountains are to be found where he lived and is present as an ancestor. Hence, the significance of

¹² Cited in Henrichsen 1999: 16. Charles John Anderson traveled and traded in Southern Africa, he presented his knowledge as an explorer in his travelogue *Lake Ngami Or Explorations and Discoveries During Four Years' Wanderings in the Wilds of South West Africa*. For the legitimization of land claims in sub-Saharan Africa as linked to the notion of “the firstcomers and their descendants as landowners” see Murphy and Bledsoe 1989: 123).

the place or area stems from a personal history and life, it is not simply given by the physical features of landscape. Thus, the human subjects make the place. But that is not the whole story, as we will see. *Omitandu* are the nodal points at which a web of genealogies and places is condensed.

Omitandu produce social space. Writing about the conventions of land tenure and a legal system based on *omitandu* I sought to provide the context, a signifying system, however incomplete, that will frame and help to understand the power of these performative speech acts that *omitandu* are. This context of a pre-colonial practice of land tenure provides the basic speech situation in which the performative speech acts could take place. This signifying system has lost most of its efficacy in terms of land tenure today. Social spaces, as Lefebvre writes, are not immune to change; their cohesion and effectiveness are not systematic to the extent that the social space could not be altered. Rather the space so construed “must rely on violence to endure,” or, like in the case of *ebi rOvberero* was violently changed by means of imperialist power (Lefebvre in Dear and Flusty 2002: 133).

Speaking social space

No direct personal knowledge of the people who own the place is needed to recall the poems, and with them the titles of usufruct right. Instead, the titles are recalled as belonging to the place names. During a wedding in Ovitoto, one of the female singers started her performance with a sung review, or rather recall, of the route she took to come to the place. Doing this, she mapped the route according to life stories that are interwoven in the places in the mode of adding a few lines of an *omitandu* to each of the place names she recalled. This is a common strategy of story telling in Otjiherero. Narrating the story of the war between Nama and Herero in the 19th century, Alexander Kaputu, a prominent local historian, interweaves fragments of *omitandu* for people and places into the story. Speaking about the retreat of Kahitjene’s warriors after being beaten at Okahandja he says:

It is this river where they went to ask for a place, *at the river that does not have river banks of mukaa Mbata*. Others migrated to near the ammunition and guns: *near the tiger of Kotjine* which is Grootfontein (...) *near the big hole of intelligents* which is the Tsumeb mine. (Heywood et al 1992: 8 emphasis on the *omitandu* fragments added)

Instead of naming the places, Kaputu recites the *omitandu* for the place. Kavari describes this narrative strategy as inserting the praise into a “slot.” This slot seems to be the proper location of the praise in the story: one which substitutes for the name of the place that is meant. Kavari writes that the performer expects the praises to be known. However, he admits that the listener (or reader) who does not have the specific kind of knowledge that is required to follow the track “is at loss” (2002: 274).

Here, too, the travelogue is illustrated in the mode of quoting *omitandu* that encapsulate information about the places that were passed. Note that since the places already were named and claimed, the warriors had to ask for a place where they could stay: they had to hear the invisible inscription in order to know the social space. Different from the singer at the wedding, Alexander Kaputu, who told this story to the interviewers of the Michael Scott Oral Records Project (MSORP), provided a double translation of the references, for instance “the big hole of intelligents” for the Tsumeb copper mine, in order to achieve a translation of the references to foreigners. Obviously the lexicographical (or lexico-oral) translation “the big hole of intelligents” is insufficient, it does not translate into the target language (English) that the Tsumeb mine is meant. Not every Otjiherero speaker will understand this allusion either. The difference of competence is rather that OvaHerero will expect allusions, even if the recipient does not know to which place it refers. Any understanding of the performativity of *omitandu* lies outside possible lexicographical equivalence within European languages, mainly because the narrative conventions of *omitandu* do not correspond to any literary genre in the West.

Kwame Anthony Appiah calls that which evokes the expectations of the recipient, in this case a crucial element of the genre conventions of *omitandu*, the literal intentions of the speaker. If “it will be often a matter of luck whether the relevant intentions are possible for both of two communities between which we are translating” (2000: 421), then, I guess, I am quite unlucky in this case. Even if I was able to translate the praise poems myself, which I am not, I could not mine the layers of allusion of which they consist. More importantly, the cultural practice of producing social space and landscape merely by (oral) inscription is absent in my culture. Still, I hold that neither the “making of landscape” nor *omitandu* themselves are unrepresentable. Understanding the meaning and function of *omitandu* requires “the production of a text whose relation both to the literary and to the linguistic conventions of the culture of the translation is relevantly like the relations of the object-text to its culture’s convention” (425). We need, as

Appiah writes, a “thick translation,” that is, one that delivers enough of the context of the literary production to come to a sort of understanding that evokes “genuine respect for others” (427).

The “thick translation” Appiah calls for is necessary here; it is one that enhances the imagination of Herero practices of “landscaping.” Kaputu’s translation of an allusive expression, embedded in a narrative intention that does more than refer to a place, into the name of a widely known locality, signifies equivalence in terms of location, not linguistic practice. Lawrence Venuti asks, whether a translation can ever “communicate to its readers the understanding of the foreign text that foreigners have?” (2000: 472). Not completely, and for specific reasons not in this case. Instead, it is my hope that my theorizing of the registers and conventions of the Herero practice of producing social space as well as of the making of landscape with *omitandu* will compensate for the gaps and insufficiency of my reading.

A thick translation, in this case, is a reading, one that involves a decoding that is inevitably also a re-coding, of a linguistic practice that has no equivalent in Western culture. Duncan Brown also suggests that equivalence or sameness is not necessarily the target. Instead, the search for sameness, and the resulting frustration of untranslatability may lead to an impasse: “a blocking of communication, which is not inevitable but ideological” (1999: 6). I acknowledge that sameness or a sure equivalence cannot be achieved. Instead, my reading seeks to achieve a relative commensurability, one that aspires to cultural transfer and an analytic engagement with the speaking voice of praise poems. A reading of that kind, as a relational cultural practice, relies on collaboration. This means all of the explanations of allusions found in *omitandu* were shared with me by OvaHerero. With this in mind, we can get back to the production of social space.

The singer at the wedding, like Alexander Kaptutu, did not personally know all the persons she “met” in her travelogue. Narratively passing through places, she recalled the people whose life and death made these places significant, and, since identity is located in a network of genealogies and places, to a certain extent, by virtue of the narratives involved, “made her”. Knowing the places, which she proved she did, is thus the knowledge of a textual map, a topology as Henrichsen termed it. Recalling this knowledge is a navigation through narrated social localities. Knowing the places, that is, knowing a huge amount of interlinked poems, further demonstrated her skills as a professional singer at festivities.¹³

The position of language in the process of making social space cannot be overestimated. In this case, language appears to be that which produces the places of meaning: located identities,

¹³ Unfortunately we were not able to tape this event in 2002. Renathe Tjikundi translated the song that initiated the performance and said that this is the usual way in which singers introduce their skills.

and personified places. Thus, although places of meaning are inextricably connected with persons, the social space is a narrated one. Locution and location converge when *omitandu* speak about people; places of meaning cannot emerge without being connected to people, people will not be praised, that is, invested with a narrated, albeit not completely fixed identity, without reference to places. Defined places thus exist by virtue of being recognizable through iterated acts of narration within Herero orature. This means the social space is constituted by means of orature and its social survival depends on orature, together with the social conventions that made the narrative appropriation possible. Places inscribed with meaning thus can and did survive their factual dis-appropriation by the colonial conquest: not in terms of legal ownership but, as we will see, in terms of social identification.

The production and fixation of this recognizability within orature, that is, beyond or after the actual appropriation of the space by a living person, is brought about by means of the lament, the *omitandu* for a deceased person. This speech act of the lament for a deceased community member, which is in most cases produced and initially performed by women, is the performative speech act by which the inscription of meaning is condensed. I have sought to delineate the conventions that organized patterns of allocation, or land claims in pre-colonial times. These conventions are the precondition of the performative speech act that produces social space and thus verifies the conventions. Therefore, for an understanding of the way in which both social space and landscape are created, a theory of performative speech acts is needed.

My understanding of the performative efficacy of landscaping by means of naming and claiming the land with *omitandu* draws upon American philosopher Judith Butler's theory of performativity, in which the performative speech act produces what it names, or, does what it says (1993: 13). She writes:

The illocutionary speech act is itself the deed that it effects (...) as utterances, they work to the extent that they are given the form of rituals, that is, repeated in time and, hence, maintain a sphere of operation that is not restricted to the moment of utterance itself (...) The illocutionary speech act performs its deed at the moment of its utterance, and yet to the extent that this moment is ritualised, it is never a single moment. The "moment" in ritual is condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of the utterance. (1997: 3)

According to Butler, the performative speech act obtains its efficacy not merely by means of its situatedness that is backed by institutionalization, or ritualized settings that define specific occasions such as legal sentences, baptisms, declarations of ownership and weddings. Instead, performative speech acts gain their authoritative force through iterativity together with a set of norms from which their citational power derives. Constituted through iteration, for Butler the norms are thus not stable but can be subverted. Butler writes: "Performativity is thus not a singular act for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms" (1993: 12). Since performative utterances both refer to a norm and at the same time contribute to the persistence of that norm, the possibility of subversion lies within the necessity of iteration.

As a citational act, the performance of *omitandu* and the practice of naming have to be iterable, comprehensible, and to a certain extent public. This means that neither of the practices constitutes landscape once and for all. Although the efficacy of performative act exceeds the very moment of its enactment, Butler's notion of iteration entails uncompleteness: that which necessitates repetition. For the working of *omitandu* within the ongoing process of creating landscape this means that there is a notion of *durée*, that is, the performative creation of landscape works, because it is institutionalized by social norms *and* a shared history, but it needs re-enactment to stay effective. In other words: performing landscape has an inscriptive power, because it cites previous acts of inscription.

Apart from citationality, it is a set of social norms and a shared scheme of meaning that effects the binding power of performative acts. The speech acts we deal with are both backed by conventions that authorize and effect consequences. Women who produce and perform the lament, in a momentary convergence of process and (transient) product, do so as invested with this social authority and efficacy that is attributed to narrative and social conventions. The agency at play here is thus not one of the sovereign subject and his or her personal will, but, as Butler writes:

The one who acts (...) acts precisely to the extent that he or she is constituted as an actor, and hence, operating within a linguistic field of enabling constraints at the outset. (1997: 16)

Whereas Butler focusses on the agency of language, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes the conventions that do not lie in language. For Bourdieu "authority comes to language from outside" (109); it is by means of the recourse to institutions and social conventions

that the speech act is effective. In terms of the legal efficacy of the titles of allocation, this is clearly the case here: they rely on what is seen as Herero tradition. My point, to which I will return in chapter five, is that within the Herero community's interpretation and practice, the focal point of reference for the accepted effectivity of those speech acts oscillate between the emphasis on social norms and the agency of language. In other words, it depends on whose norms and social values are at play. As we will see in chapter five, if the social norms that build landscape derive from what is seen as traditional practice and believe, these may not easily be subverted. In other cases, as in the following, narrations and speech acts, even if spoken under the "wrong" circumstances, do bear the power to subvert. When performative counter claims act against post-colonial patterns of land ownership that collide at least with the Herero community's understanding of social ownership and belonging, performative speech acts may indeed be enacted to subvert those imposed structures of land ownership.

Performative belongings

The idea to bury, say, a Herero worker on Kapp's farm near the airport, perform the death lament, and then legally claim the space, would seem completely ludicrous to every Namibian, Herero or not. The legal scheme that backed these kinds of land allocation patterns is not in place any longer. Nevertheless, there actually is a Herero grave on Kapp's farm and the owner felt compelled to erect a monument close to the road, so that Herero people who pass by can stop and pay respect. This is because there was already a grave, marked by a heap of stones, and it made Herero people stop and engage in one or the other form of dialogue with the deceased. Which means that in terms of historical reference, the inscription of social meaning in space is still effective, albeit not in creating legal land use rights.

Obviously the effect of inscription in some cases continues beyond the actual effectivity of the social conditions. The agency of language and its citationality that Butler stresses comes into play. I guess one has to believe in the changeability of social conventions, or at least be optimistic about it, in order to lay the force of agency in language and citation itself. For Butler, the iteration of the effective speech act bears the possibility of subversion. Acts performed differently, by people who are not authorized to do so, or under the "wrong" circumstances, are not necessarily ineffective: they may subvert.

In the case of Hameva's grave (or not Hameva's, since the identity of the person buried there is contested) near the airport, Herero orature entered a wider public space so that a performative ritual of recall insisted on the crucial importance of the place as belonging to a network of sacred sites. The contested story of Hameva achieved some prominence around 1999 and 2000, because Chief Kuaima Riruako publicly declared that the numerous car accidents on the road to the airport are caused by Hameva's spirit, who is offended by people's disrespect. Hameva, he explained to me in 2000, was a foreteller, a powerful chief. Hence, people who pass by his grave are supposed to stop, take their hats off and pay respect to Hameva. Since more and more Ovaherero neglect the required practice of ancestor worship, Hameva sends kudas (large gazelles), which jump onto the road and cause accidents. Mr. Gorn, the owner of Kapp's farm, who erected a hut and a cow made of plaster, declared that he did so because the stone heap that marked the grave was too close to the road and this was dangerous.

Alexander Kaputu, whom I also asked about the case, said that the person buried there was actually not Hameva (the powerful foreteller) himself, but his son, Zeu. He said that the grave monument, which was not actually the grave, because Zeu was buried in the hills close by, had been there since the 1950s. He too was quite sure that the kudas are sent by a spirit, (but then by Zeu), and cause the accidents. "He is a powerful ancestor, if you call upon him, he will answer" Kaputu said. Furthermore, other people in Windhoek mused about the strategic values of Riruako's claim to be related to Hameva, which represents him as the heir of a powerful family. "People do not like him much, you know, that's why he has to stress the power of his family" a Namibian friend said.¹⁴

Various aspects of performativity shape this story. First, and quite obviously, the text of the praise is not as fixed as it is according to its function of containing legal ownership: misunderstandings and manipulations are possible, the praise can neither be owned nor controlled completely. *Omitandu*, as we will see in other cases, are not only forever incomplete, since they consist of a potentially unfinished accumulation of layers of verses, but seem to have unpredictable lives.

The same is true of the performativity of rituals: once entering public life, they might set activities in motion that were not planned or foreseen. Indeed, one may end up with a colorful plaster cow erected by a white farmer to honor a Herero ancestor, without ever having intended

¹⁴ The interviews with Alexander Kaputu took place in 2001 at the NBC, the interviews with Chief Riruako in parliament and those with Mr Gorn at his farm in 2000. The person who gave this statement about Riruako does not wish to be named.

this to happen. But, what looks like a strategy on the part of Riruako to strengthen his position may well be his (strategic) interpretation of what is transmitted in orature.

Accidents that are seen as materialized ancestral power by some, and are results of unfortunate geographical position for others, nevertheless seem to be undoubted by Mr Gorn, who got involved in the whole story without his own choosing, as it seems. Interestingly he did not only move the monument, and was thereby involved in a ritual that he could not comprehend, as he said, but he felt compelled to build a hut in which prayers can gather. So was he, although he would not admit that *vis-à-vis* another white person (me), compelled by the force of the regularly performed ritual on his farm to seeing some justification done to the iterated reference to a historical ownership?

Riruako successfully managed to set off a discussion about his genealogical transmitted power position. At the same time he appealed to the conventions in terms of appropriate behavior, playing on a conservative understanding of shared social sense, which demands the worship of ancestors. And Kaputu, who occupies a position of high credibility in terms of orature, also had a word about the necessity of traditional practice in daily life.

The question where the agency and force involved in performative acts lies, I suggest, is situative, connected to the position of performer as well as beholder towards the attribution of the conventions. The performative power that Butler attributes to acts of reiteration, that is to accumulating “the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices” (1993: 227) draws on the history and conventionality of the practice. Naming and claiming, as we will see in later chapters (*Okurya Ehi* and *The Old Location*) play on this recourse to societal authority and traditional conventions; practices are performed under the “wrong” circumstances, that is, under a colonial regime that has violently shattered their felicity. But then the “wrong” comes from outside the community and is confronted with a reiteration of acts that have a pre-colonial history in which they had an authoritative effect. The echo of their binding power makes it possible to claim the land although there is no legal basis for the kind of claim that is made.

In other cases, the binding power of that which has once been ascribed to the land, for instance ownership, but also social convention and, with that, social restriction, places a bar on return, because the rules the place demands cannot be followed in the present. Reiteration, as an effective way to alter conventions, seems to be impossible. Which means that we will need both notions, that of strict conventionality that rejects alteration and that of the transformative agency of reiteration.

Otjongombe and Okandjira

Ehi rOvherero as a landscape is produced by iterated performances of *omitandu*. Although the praises are created for specific places they are far from static. People were and still are mobile, thus places and people are parts of a communicating web. The history and meaning of any place will be inextricably tied to other places, producing the spatial network of which the landscapes consist. Like any other place that belongs to ehi rOvherero, Otjongombe is an element of this network.

Otjongombe

To the cattle of Hengombe the one which is at Kautuma of Hengombe: To the sand of men.

To the cattle of Tjipanga.

To the smoked cattle.

To the cattle of Njunja of Tjिताura.

To the Ovambo person of Kamuveri.

To the heaps of grass as if there were trees needed.

To *omuhiva* (men's dance) of Kanari of the big stone which is at Muahao of Tjombe, the loved one.

To *omuhivabiva* that makes (a sound like) mbuu as if it has a mallet on his foot.

To the house of Tjaimba's wife Inaakatjani.

To the ox cattle of Kasembi of Tjavanga the one with a shoulder blade as a shovel.

The one of Tjomambo's house. to the naughty cattle of Unongo.¹⁵

Let me read this poem as far as I can get with the information I could gather interviewing Alexander Kaputu and Naftaline Tjikundi, who are local experts in terms of orature and Herero history.

The first line refers to Hengombe; he was the father of Kautuma who was the first person to die at the place and therefore qualifies as the owner of the place. Otjongombe is a village in the former reserve Ovitoto, where people were resettled after the camps (for Herero

¹⁵ The praise song was told to us by Naftaline Tjikundi in 2000. Renathe Tjikundi transcribed and translated it.

prisoners of war) were abolished. Otjongombe, the name of the place that simply refers to a place of cattle, or a place to have cattle (again?), may point to a place that was named before it had a history of settlement. This changed with the death of Kautuma. His father's cattle was sacrificed for him. The sand of men, I learned, was a meeting place that replaced the previously existent one at Okandjira, which is actually the seat of the local chief and would therefore be generally suitable for a meeting place. But, "Okandjira is a place of the war. People did not want to meet there any longer, since the memory of our losses made them sad," said Alexander Kaputu.

Okandjira, at least as it appears in praise poetry, seems to be charged with the horrors of war. The first line of the *omutandu* for this place was recited to me as follows:

To the sheep of Nambungu, where Ndenge's wife was busy making the skin soft and her nails got off before she finished.¹⁶

Struck by the strangeness of the phrase – why did this woman's nails get off? – I got the explanation that the colonial war started in the place. People were caught in the middle of their daily routine by the shock of approaching troops. Mr. Kaputu, who told me this, did not make clear whom he referred to as people. This may be a woman's perspective, not only because some of the men of Okandjira may have been included in the battle and could have known this before, since the first raids were initiated by Herero, but also because, as I already have said, women were the main creators of *omitandu*. Since the sheep of Nambungu refer to the burial of a woman, the inevitable question, which I cannot answer, is whether the first burial was that of a woman who could not escape from the approaching troops?

A very common allusion to the perversity of war, referring to cruelty beyond comprehension, is the dramatic inversion of the usual in praise poetry. Kirsten Alnaes, who wrote about the songs the Herero sung in Botswana about their flight through the Omaheke desert, refers to this inversion. In one song she recorded, it is said that "the lambs have gone to suckle the goats" (1989: 279). Further, there is the commonly told story that during the flight, women had to leave their small children behind and breastfeed their husbands. Whereas Mr. Kaputu insists on the historical truth of this story, and this possibility cannot be easily excluded, the *omutandu* of Okandjira shows the creative potential of this inversion. Normally, the woman

¹⁶ The praise song was told to me by Naftaline Tjikundi in 2000, Renathe Tjikundi transcribed and translated the song. Alexander Kaptutu provided the additional information during an interview in 2000.

would have used her nails to get the remaining hair off the skin and make it soft. In times of war, she loses her nails: things are perversely turned upside down.

Back to “the sand of men” of the first line, that is, as the name indicates, a sandy place near the river. After the war this place became the site where men gathered to make decisions – but also to dance. *Omubiva* is such a men’s dance, in which the reciting of praises and other songs is involved. The verb *-hiva* means to praise, to encourage, but it also refers to an augmentation “making things bigger than in real life,” said Mr. Kaputu. The big ox of Kasembi of Tjavanga may be case in point: “It was said that the shoulder blade of this ox was so big that people used it to scoop water from the well, said Mrs. Tjikundi. But the shoulder blade is also the part of the ox that is given to a favorite child, and, as Mr. Kaputu said, it was “in the old days put on the east side of the roof to make sure that there will be plenty of children and cattle.” Thus the shoulder blade of the ox of Kasembi of Tjavanga may refer to his wealth in this praise. The second time *omubiva* is mentioned, the stem of the verb is doubled, which emphasizes the intensity of encouraging, dancing and praising. This *omubivahiva*, was a “real dance” according to Mr. Kaputu, where men hollered like an ox which “had a mallet on its foot.” Such cheerfulness may have been not possible any longer at Okandjira that, at least in terms of dancing, was turned into a non-place by the horrors of the colonial war it witnessed. Places change, and as a result in this case, a center of male activity had to be shifted to another place. As repositories for memories, places contain meaning, but may not be accommodating, or may even be hostile in the presence. Thus the colonial war features prominently as a constitutive force in the making of Herero landscape. This is not possible without the poetic inscription that the *omutandu* for Okandjira provides: sadness and horror precipitated in the place, mediated by a poem that evokes the significant events with every reciting.

The poem is not descriptive, as the Western landscape tradition would have it. Natural elements of environment do not feature prominently in this poem: we only find heaps of grass that grows so tall as if it was to compete with the many trees in this area. Not much of landscape, it seems. And yet, this is the landscape. People who lived there, including the “Ovambo person” who could not be identified (neither by Mr. Kaputu nor by Mrs. Tjikundi), their cattle, graves and grieves, sad memories of the war, and lively festivities made this place. Natural elements like trees or wells figure in many praises but usually they are connected to either specific events or qualify the area in terms of their usability for the pastoral community.

What I did here was a quite fragmentary reading of the different elements of which the poem comprises. Stories, of which the story of the “sand of men” is but one, are encapsulated in

this praise poem. As the quoted passages show, *omitandu* do not narrate stories. They are rather like zipped data that have to be expanded. But then, there is no ready-made program for this. Bits and pieces of information have to be retrieved by asking Herero experts, but answers are not always available. This is partially due to the almost private allusions of the poem: in most of the cases people did remember, or were more willing to discuss references to public events and historical contents of praise poems. The “small” or rather, the more private stories are owned by people who know them, they may not easily be shared with foreigners.

In terms of the *omitandu* themselves, in which the stories are contained, ownership of the poems is a more complicated issue. Poems are neither commodified, nor authorized by a single person or family. But, as Johanna Katjipara told me (in 2004 in Windhoek) family praises are seen in a specific sense as properties of that family. She said:

Women must know the *omitandu* of their families. They used to learn them after their initiation. They had to know their *omitandu* before they got married and moved to their husband’s place, in order to defend themselves in difficult situations. When treated badly in their husband’s house, they would recite the poems to gain self-confidence by means of recalling their status and descend: “You cannot treat me like this, because I am the daughter of X, the niece of Y, my grandfather was Z”. Self-confidence is related to the knowledge of one’s family and genealogy.¹⁷

The ownership or possession of praises Mrs Katjipara refers to is different from ownership in terms of commodities. Instead, she suggests a possession in terms of relations. Many Herero people know and thus *have* praises as they have relatives, because performing a praise, as Mr. Kaputu said is always “a calling of the ancestors.” Thus the names that appear in praise poems are seen as actually *being* the referents, the performance of *omitandu* produces their presence. As Liz Gunner writes, the praise name given to a person during his or her life or thereafter “becomes absorbed into the fabric of the personality” (Gunner cited in Lütge Coullie 1999: 76).

Neither the poems nor the relations they establish are exterior to the self. It is rather that they provide the fabric in which the self can be articulated. The performativity of the praise turns the reciting into an act of communication, it conjures the presence of the ancestors. The communicative quality of the poems demands an understanding of the crucial dimension of

¹⁷ Johanna Katjipara lives in Windhoek, I met her at the history conference at UNAM in 2004. I want to thank her for the time she shared with me and the help she offered so generously with my research in 2004.

antiphony in this genre. If the poems augment a dialogue with the ancestors, the respond will be perceived by what I think of as “the inner ear” of the performer. In some cases, for instance at Okahandja Day, (on which more in chapter four), the performer will repeat the answer he heard in a lowered voice, so as to share his dialogue with the audience. Performative speech acts that evoke the presence of the ancestors feature prominently in wedding and healing ceremonies, where the success of alliances or the process of healing is inevitably linked to the blessing of the ancestors who are called upon.

Mediating the links to the land that is ensured by ancestral presence, praise poems establish a poetic accumulation of life histories and mytho-poetic chains of genealogies that are related to locations. *Omitandu* fabricate these interrelations between people, their histories and the places they were related to and which therefore provide the net of intersubjective and interlocal relations in which the individual identity is lodged.

Different from the legal ownership to which the first line of most poems entitled the family to which it referred, this possession is one of relating, or belonging to places and kin. As the statement of Mrs Katjipara shows, it is not enough to be member of a family or simply be in a place. In fact, some of the poems foster relationships to places in Namibia that are no longer inhabited by or even accessible to Herero people. It is thus not the territory or territoriality itself that constitute notions of belonging, but the dynamics of commemoration mediated by orature that evoke, create, but also determine relations to the landscape as a contingent reality in the present. The poetics of relation that is inherent in the relevant orature has to be known and performed to prove, or rather, reconstitute this relationality. This does not mean that specific poems are privately possessed and jealously protected from unauthorized use although they may not be shared with every stranger. Instead, intimate knowledge of the poems, the skill to tease out the stories that are compressed in allusions, that is, the ability to navigate within the repositories of communal knowledge and exegetic skills, are required to locate the self within this network and qualify for ownership. The more important a place or person is regarded to be, the more frequently the poem for this person or place will be interwoven into other texts; the relevance and reach of the poem grows within the community. Okahandja is a case in point: it builds a nodal point where landscaping intensifies, which allows the following reading.

Okahandja

The ability of praise poetry to exploit the symbolic capital of a particular culture had long been recognised, but its ability to collapse the heroic past into a heroic present, and in this way make memory work for it, has been underestimated. (Gunner 1999: 52)

The *omitandu* for Okahandja belong to the body of prominent poems that fabricated and continue to produce *ebi rOvaherero* as containing and establishing communal identities, various versions are known and circulate. The history of the place where battles with the Namas and the Germans were fought in the past, the yearly commemoration of the colonial war is held, but also the history of prominent Herero leaders (and their families) who lived there, embraces many personal histories. As a center of Herero history, Okahandja is a nodal point in a shared web of belonging.

Different versions and fragments of the *omitandu* for Okahandja, as it appears in the transcribed and translated versions I use here, range from recordings in the 1950s to Jackson Kaujeua's popular song "My Country," which he wrote in exile in the 1980s, to parts of a personal *omutandu* for Bishop Gotthard. Neither of these praise poems is identical to the others. Thus there is no authentic version, no single mode of knowing or telling the significant features that make up Okahandja. Instead, the versions stir up a variety of qualities, different meanings in combination, of the place that is seen as the capital of *ebi rOvherero* by many (Ohly 2000: 162). Let me start with the heroic past. Adelheid Mbawonddjou's version (recorded by Damman in the 1950s) starts with

Okahandja: Oocketundu rovabona.

Okahandja: the former homestead of our *omubona* (big men, chiefs).

Whereas she commences her *omutandu* of Okahandja by portraying it as the place where the *ovabona* (chiefs, or leaders) lived, Victorine Kaura refers to the graves of the *ovabona* and puts the phrase at the very end of her version (both in Damman 1996: 282-84). Read in the present, both allusions point to the prominence of the place as the location of significant history and the birth of a signifying practice: since 1923 one of the most important commemoration ceremonies of the Ovaherero takes place in Okahandja every year (see chapter four). A central site of this annual commemoration is the graveyard at which Maherero, Samuel Maherero, Hosea Kutako and

Clemens Kapuuo are buried. In a social and spiritual sense, their graves and their ancestral presence at the place turns Okahandja into the capital for the many Herero of central Namibia.

The end of Mrs. Mbwaondjou's version pulls the listener deeper into the history of the place:

Kotjimbuku weku
Kotjimbuku tjonzondu za Mujemua
OkOkahandja ngo.
Mba yanda mbo.

There are our spike-thorn trees.
There are the spike-thorn trees of Mujemua's sheep.
There is Okahandja, there.
With this I end (this poem).

The spike-thorn tree, writes Jekura Kavari, was the place where Maherero the *omuhona* of this area acted as a judge. The story goes as follows: after the death of a rich sheep owner named Mujemua, two of his nephews, who both claimed to be his rightful heir, brought the case of conflict to Chief Maherero to be heard. Instead of deciding right away, Maherero kept postponing the decision and slaughtered one of their sheep every evening. After a couple of days the nephews realized that their wealth was dwindling and decided to settle the case among themselves (Kavari 2002: 90).

In the *omutandu* performed by Joshua Kamberipe (in Damman 1996: 282-84, but also similarly in various others) this portrayal of Maherero as a wise and witty judge is juxtaposed in the following phrase:

Oomu ewe raKarukua ndi posa ayo nomundu moukoto
There is the stone of Karukua, which sounds as if it has a person inside

The stone with a hole, a hillock in the vicinity of the present town, is known as *Okawe kOndovi* and appears to be a palimpsestic site of historical inscriptions. Various versions allude to the stone as making sounds when the wind blows. This uncanny site "brings whispers to the lips of the Ovaherero" as Katuutire Kaura says, "holding secrets in its bosom" (quoted in Ohly 2000:

103). According to Mr. Kaura the stone is the bearer of cruel facts of Herero history “which we would like to forget” (163). But these too, are imbued in the landscape, precipitated on the rock that seems to remember, making sounds “as if it has a person inside.” The reason for the uncanny feelings the sound evokes lie in history:

This innocent looking piece of rock has a cave inside which is described as the black bottomless pit. Maherero, the supreme court judge, the executioner, found it very convenient as a pre-fabricated grave. Intransigent slaves were summarily executed and dumped into the bottomless pit. (163)

But not only slaves, who were mostly prisoners of war, were dumped into the pit: a story that accounts for Maherero’s dark side adds to the history of the hillock.

According to Kaura, Maherero, in a fit of jealousy, broke the neck of a young man whom he caught with one of his many wives. This young man, who belonged to the same clan as Maherero himself, was dumped into the hole “together with the bones of slaves and thieves.” After sacrificing a calf in order to cleanse himself from the deed Maherero said “I was given my name by my father, Tjambuaha and the name is Maherero. My mother is the sister of the bull-eaters, namely Kaureka and Kangombe. It is me, even yesterday, when I took care of the son of the family” (164). It is not clear to me whether Kaureka and Karukua are the same person, so that the difference in spelling derives from a mistake in transmission or transcription. In this case, the “stone of Karukua” would refer to the unnamed young man who lost his life in Okahandja.

Be that as it may, both stories in which Maherero features as the main character and which are encapsulated under the opaque surface of allusions, allow for a portrayal of the *omubona* that is not only laudatory. The two stories in combination transmit the irreducibly complex narration of a wise, powerful, and dangerous man. Interestingly, in Mrs Mbwaondjou’s version, the phrase that alludes to Maherero as a murderer of kin is left out. Did she simply forget the part, or did she wish to deliver a less disturbing portrayal of the *omubona*? Clearly, the flexible form of the praises, which consists of layers of more or less independent phrases, permits a “cut-and-paste” practice, that is, a montage technique that allows for both the polyphony of voices of (often unknown) authors and performers and a very personal interpretation. Reading *omitandu* in terms of their capacity for critique, the analysis must focus on this technique. Unfolding the stories hidden under the surface of allusions, the capacities for critical reviews, or affirmation may be registered only by comparison of what appears in which version and where.

However, what the phrase has to say about the history of the rock is not yet exhausted. Kavari writes, moreover, that the site was declared a national monument already in 1972, that is, under apartheid rule and a small sign at the place says that “on 23 August 1850 a sanguinary battle took place at this *keoppie* (Afrikaans for hillock) when a number of defenceless followers of Herero chief Kahitjene were murdered by Nama under the command of Jonker Afrikaner” (2002: 93).

Taking all these stories together, the rock figures as a dramatic site, with a cave inside that swallowed, yet still contains, and leaks, the voices of the victims of very different historical events: the landscape consists as much of layers of history as of layers of rock. But the sedimentation is far from static. Heaped layers of accumulated history are condensed in only one allusion. As if to make this allusion portable, and it is. If we follow the thread of stories into the intertextual network of orature that creates landscape, we land in another story.

Kavari, who translated and re-published one of the versions I referred to here, got this poem from the life history of Kahimemua, as told by Kenapeta Tjatindi (in Heywood et al 1992: 129). Kahimemua was a Mbanderu leader who fought against the German Major Leutwein “nicknamed the major of blood” (128) and got captured. Led to his execution he passes many places in this story, all of which are mapped by the relevant *omitandu*. Here again, a travelogue is illustrated by means of fitting in *omitandu*. The last station of his travel seems to be Okahandja where, according to the story, he tells the executors how to shoot him:

“Let me tell where you should shoot a bull. A noble should be struck between the eyes: that way I’ll die.” They fired a bullet which struck his forehead and he fell face down on both hands. He grasped the dust in both hands and fell dead on his back. He took the earth with him and the world began to milk a tiger. Today we are still milking a tiger. (130)¹⁸

Since Okahandja appears to be the last station of his journey, his execution may have taken place there. Wherever it actually was that he was killed, he is depicted as a man who sought to deny the invaders the possession of the land (130). Staged like a theatrical scene of a heroic tale, in this story he takes the land with him, (*ehi* means both soil or sand and land), rather than allowing the *Onaduitsi* (Germans) to appropriate it. Consequently, his life story, told as the travelogue of a

¹⁸ As far as I know, tigers usually refer to leopards. What Mr. Tjatindi wants to say with “we are still milking the tiger” is not clear to me. Earlier in the story Kahimemua is said to have cursed people and predicted the future. “The world will be milking a tiger” is one of his predictions.

heroic life history, includes the crucial elements of the praise for Okahandja and those for many other significant places.

But his story is not the only one that is narrated as a travelogue. The *omutandu* composed for Bishop Gotthard is a travelogue too, gathering a sequence of the praises of the stages of his life like the beads in necklace. The poem that was composed by Bishop Kanguotui amalgamates what he regards as the significant features of a different hero with phrases that refer to prominent locations of central Namibia. Again, we have a travelogue: important men seem to gather locations in their narrated life history like decorations or medals of honor. But then, this is more than the ornamentality of landscape operating as a mere background. Let me quote some lines:

Listen my child, I want to tell you
About our great shepherd
Of Christ's sheep
In our land, Maherero's land
About the days when he left
Our mountain pass of Kahuiko
Brought the word to Ondjambo, to Ondara
About the day when he took his leave
From the black one of MuKaza Hombo
Where Tjamuaha sits near the stone heap at the water hole
He then trudged over to Mujema's sheep bush which grows
At the rock of Karukua
At the belt of Kapehuri
At our rock which talks like an organ
And which plays the flute
(...)
Now there he is admired
Now there he is glorified
Now there offerings are made to him
Now there he is at home.
(quoted in Ohly 1990: 35-37)

How suggestive the image of the “great shepherd” becomes when embedded in the creative repository of a (formerly) pastoralist community. The amalgamation of the metaphors of Herero orature and those of Christianity works amazingly strong. The Bishop is narrated as a hero with similar features that operate within other heroic life stories. He is described as “the one of Christ’s sheep,” as if this was his personal genealogical poem. Thus he is not primarily linked to a prominent Herero genealogy but seems to be connected directly to Christ as a father, after whose sheep he looks. This strong claim does not exclude his linkage to more worldly, albeit deceased and thus ancestral, leaders: he meets the forefather of the great *ovahona* in Okahandja (Tjamuaha) and is at home in all the significant places that feature in the poem. Okahandja is one of them.

In this poem the stone of Karukua seems to lose some of its horror and is graced with a voice not “as if it has a person inside.” Instead, it sounds like an organ or like a flute, alluding to a pastoral idyll or the musical aspects of mass and prayer. The personality of the Bishop as intrinsically linked to the locations that make him and are re-signified by him, may accomplish a shift of meaning for the stone with the hole. The soundscape of Okahandja is narratively transformed from an uncanny place at which horrifying howls can be heard, albeit always in the somewhat ambiguous rhetoric of “as if,” into the graceful music of flutes or organs. That man is depicted as someone who bears the promise of change, thereby altering the landscape to which he is tied. Here, the landscape is not the picturesque background of a narrated portray: it is dynamic and may be altered by means of human interaction.

How effectively this altering inscription of the *omitandu* for Bishop Gotthard operates within the Ovaherero communities, I cannot say. Obviously human acting upon landscape, as in the cases of Okahandja, Okandjira, and Otjongombe, effects imprints or inscriptions that mould the landscape. How strongly an over-inscription, in this case of an already multi-layered inscription in stone, does work depends on the performative force of the *omitandu* as well as on the power and connectedness of the person as actor upon the land. Bishop Gotthard’s ties to the landscape are narrated starkly. For, promises of Christianity or not, Maherero’s land it stays. Although the poem has transformative qualities at the same time it adds the Bishop’s presence to an already constituted landscape. The beauty of the landscape is that of the accumulation of social relations that is mediated in the poetic frame of orature.

It is from that beauty of accumulation that Jackson Kaujeua borrows meaning and a sense of belonging in his song “My Country” that I will now read. His interpretation of the *omitandu* sheds light on the present vitality of these poems that lies in their stability-in-flexibility, or, in what Paul Gilroy has termed “the changing same” (1993: 101).

My understanding of the practice of landscaping via orature benefits from Gilroy's notion of "the changing same." The changing same, in this case, is not culture as a whole system of signification, but, similarly as in Gilroy's interpretation of black music, a term that seeks to define the stability in changeability of a genre. *Omutandu*, created in a specific language and form, do not stay the same. But while adding delicate changes, every performance has to bend to and will be molded by the conventional frame the genre demands. Alteration or additional inscription can only be accomplished within the existing frame of narrative conventions and by making use of the elements of its creative archive. The precondition for an *omutandu* to perform as an *omutandu* is recognition, that is, its citational quality.

Inscribing onto landscape does not work within a vacuum. In the critical stage of the performance that seeks to accomplish recognition, the performance has to draw on the signifying repertoire. In order to be recognized as an *omutandu*, the speech act has to cite the given formal convention, in which the poem for Bishop Gotthard succeeds. By iterating the elements that locally signify Okahandja, such as the spike-thorn tree, or the stone with a hole, the poem draws upon the known elements of existing versions and thereby firmly reconstitutes them. The same, as part of a cultural repository of landscaping, has to be called upon in order to achieve a different interpretation.

Evoking the "stone of Karukua" effectuates the re-constitution of the inscription that made it the "stone of Karukua," but then, in a re-signifying attempt, the sound changes. Again, whether this holds for a new interpretation of this part of the landscape remains unclear. There certainly is a Christian notion of redemption in the phrase in which the rock "talks like an organ" or "plays the flute," but positions towards Christianity are quite ambiguous amongst the Herero communities.

However, the flexibility-in-stability of the genre allows for a degree of syncretism that accommodates affiliations not only to notions of Christianity, but also the intersection of parts of the poem for Okahandja into modern music. Drawing upon the landscape as the same as that of the heroic tales, while at the same time framing it in the predicament of the present is a strategy that Jackson Kaujeua applies in his song "My Country." In this song Okahandja, Windhoek and other places in Namibia become markers of the land that has to be freed from the grip of foreign occupation and apartheid. Narratively travelling through his home country from exile, the song takes the listener on a musical journey through the country. Here, phrases of *omutandu* do not substitute for the names of places, but illustrate them. The language of the praise poem opens up

to a wider, albeit Otjiherero speaking audience. Starting with a poignant depiction of the miserable situation of forced exile and loss with the lines

Our country and our lives
We are staying on your behalf
In the desert (exile)
While struggling for you
While dying for you
(...)

Kaujeua strongly claims the country. After several repetitions of “our own” and “that country is our own,” Kaujeua switches the code and intersects phrases borrowed from *omitandu*:

(...)
After that you will come to Otjomuise
In Haurondanga of the wife of Komauua
At the horse and the rider
It's at the tall tree for rest
After that you will come to Okahandja
At the stone of Karukua which sounds
As if it has somebody inside
At the abandoned homestead of the father of Keja
At the (bean coloured) cow of Tjambi
Oowee oowee
Our own mother
Our own
Our own
Our own

(translated, transcribed and quoted in Kavari 2002: 41-43, emphasis added)

Prominent elements of the *omitandu* (for Okahandja and Windhoek, in italics) act as locative signifiers: the stone with a hole, the belt of Kapehuri. Again, the technique of montage leaves aspects out and accomplishes a personal interpretation of Okahandja; the desire of the songwriter

in exile seems to be not so much directed at a heroic landscape. The Chiefs are not praised in this poem: neither the spike-thorn tree nor the graves of the *ovabona* appear.¹⁹ Instead, it seems, there is an emphasis on suffering (the stone of Karukua, again), but also on ownership of land and cattle (the bean-colored cow of Tjambi), and skills of common people (the belt of Kapehuri).

This belt has a story, in which Kapehuri is depicted as a man with artistic skills, but also with a good deal of stubbornness, for he refused to give the belt to Tjamuaha (the Chief) who was his relative and asked for it (Kavari 2002: 91). Depicting Okahandja in this way, Kaujeua seems to opt for the inscription accomplished by the lives of common people, not heroes or chiefs. There is a notion of resistance in the story of Kapehuri who did not give in to the wishes of Tjamuaha and this seems to conjure with Kaujeua's reluctance to deliver a portrait of Okahandja in the light of a heroic past.

However, the narration of Okahandja seems to oscillate between different qualities, some of which are emphasized, and others neglected in the different performances. If we combine the aspects that appear in all of the poems I have quoted, we get the complex and vivid picture (again, I speak in the language of the visual about landscape in order to accomplish a reading) of the town. Okahandja is depicted as a place of wisdom and cruelty, a pastoralist area, a court yard, it is a location of the cruel and the heroic side of Herero history, but also a place to find craftsmanship, resistant commoners and powerful leaders, early trade relations and past wars.²⁰

Unfolding the allusions in the poems that bring stories to the fore and following the threads of some of the journeys the allusions initiate in various performances and texts I tried a deliberately strategic reading of the network of which landscape consists. There are significant nodal points, like Okahandja, which are staged as prominent mnemonic sites at which the narration of landscape, history and personal life stories accumulate and which anchor collective identity, but also, and more, minor sites of local significance, like Okandjira and Otjongombe. Together these places are narratively interwoven into a landscape: one that consists of places of palimpsestic meaning, condensed in *omitandu*, but is simultaneously based on the mobility of the praises, which travel, once composed as personal praises of a death lamentation, into elements of *omitandu* for places and from there into the travelogues of musicians, bishops and heroes alike, and that capture the significant aspects of mobile lives. The aesthetics of the landscape does not lie in the eye of the beholder, it is embedded in the poetics of narrated social relations. Thus, this

¹⁹ The Otjiherero term for the tree is the same in all poems: *Otjimbuku*, but the translations vary between spike-thorn tree, (which I think is correct), Mimosas, and sheep bushes.

²⁰ The trade relations I have left out, in most of the versions "the not buttoned gown of Karovi" is mentioned. Karovi was an English trader, (named Charles Lewis), who sold this gown to Maherero (Kavari 2002: 92-93).

landscape consists of layers of poetry, at once accumulative and flexible, producing sometimes conflicting meanings that account for the polyphonic qualities of landscaping, that is, as a verb, not a noun.

Ozombosiro

The question of “who speaks?” can only escape that *trompe-l’oeil* if its other, the question of “who does not speak?” is carried on its back like a parasite.

(Mieke Bal 2003: 105)

Only late in the course of my research did it dawn on me that the composition of praise poems among the Herero community is to a great extent women’s work: the work of remembering and recalling, of creating personal histories and those of the community. This does not easily become clear if you read transcriptions of Herero praise poetry, nor if you record orature. One reason for this is that *omitandu*, the genre of praise songs to which I refer here, are cited by women and men alike. The other reason is that individual authorship in general is not an issue. Composing praise poems is not a narcissistic self-expression. Instead, the whole point of composing personal praise poems is to characterize others, put their histories together, in the sense of re-remembering the deceased after the event of their death: a great deal of the praise poems are created during the mourning period that follows the death of a member of the community.²¹

Kavari writes that experienced women, that is, women who have a certain professionalism in terms of wailing, lead the chanting and lamenting during the time of the mourning (2002: 28). During that time a lament or praise is created that connects aspects of the person’s life but that also links praises for the relevant lineages, embedding the deceased in his or her social context. If we understand Herero concepts of identity as a dynamic, complex fabrication that, although determined by genealogy, gender and social status, is a fluid concept of being-as-becoming and as inevitably linked to social relations, it becomes clear that the activity of “narrating the person” after his or her death implies social power. This re-construction of the person after his or her death, the piecing together of a composite portrait of that person seems to have been and still is in many cases a woman’s activity. Thus, women had and still have a crucial position within this specific social sphere of articulation.²²

²¹ Different from for example the *sefela* genre of Basotho people (as described by David Coplan, 1994), self-praises are the exception within Herero orature. *Omitandu* are composed for others, which means that the social work of signifying personal specificity (or the specificity of a certain family) must be done by other members of the community and can therefore not be controlled by the praised person him or herself.

²² The process of social becoming does not end at the moment of death. Instead, what is created is the social person of the ancestor, a narrated person as Jean and John Comaroff put it, who is linked to his or her past but also to the generations to come and thus is a perpetually unfinished, never complete identity, constantly in the making (2001: 276).

This means that although women were and still are excluded from certain positions of power within the community, for example the position of a local chief, and their social position in the praise poems of places appears to be more or less limited to that of mother or sister of a significant male member of the community, their role in the process of the making of important places and persons should not be underestimated. The genre conventions that determine the positions of women in the narrative field of praise poetry and other poems do shed light on the social position of women. However, I do not wish to substitute language genres for an incompletely known social structure here. Instead, I see them as causing and effecting social formations to a certain extent, that is, as both constitutive of social status and relations, and capable of change. However, although nearly all narrated persons in *omitandu*, whether male or female, are linked to significant genealogies, without which a person does not socially exist, this position for women is quite limited and certainly less heroic than the narrated position of men within *omitandu*. Yet, praise poems for women do exist, albeit less heroic in style. The point, however, is the women's agency in creating landscape by means of their compositions of praise poetry.²³

By means of their position in the process of the fabrication of *omitandu* for places and people, women have the capacity to reveal, focus on, or even leave out, certain qualities and events of the life of that person or place. In this way women are in a position to socially signify not only people but also, connected to them, a landscape of social meaning. Since these praises produce public history and transmit this history by means of the iterative re-telling of the *omitandu*, albeit to a certain extent variable, they do not merely reflect but rather create social persons, networks and the significance of places. This does not mean that women are the sole creators of orature, since praise poems are also created by men, and men's war and hunting songs (*omuhiva*), as well as other forms of orature are crucial in the process of narrative compositions of *omitandu* for places. But, what at first sight seems to be a landscape that is exclusively signified by means of referring to male genealogies and heroic deeds may actually be a collective composition to a great extent created by women. Hence, in this chapter I will not single out identifiable authorship of female or male performers, since this is hardly achievable and would severely misunderstand the characteristics of the genre.

Although it is sometimes possible to trace performances at which a particular singer(s) performed a specific version of a praise, like in the case of the recordings at Omaruru that are the

²³ One of these, the poem for Adelheid Mbwaondjou, praises her as being a famous tailor, accounts for the special circumstances of her birth and connects her to Omaruru, where she lived, without mentioning any of her male relatives explicitly (Damman 1987: 241).

object of analysis in this chapter, this may not account for the first publication. Praise poems, as orature, are published, that is, released into the public sphere, at the very moment of their performance. Thus, the notion of an oral publication in this case involves the ephemeral quality of the spoken voice. No version of a praise song, not even if this particular song is repeatedly performed by the same person, may stay the same. Performers are as much listeners as they are singers and their artful compositions are informed by the multiplicity of versions they have heard.²⁴

This chapter deals with the cultural specificity of voices (*ozombosiro*) in Otjiherero orature, which appear to be dissolved from individual subjectivity. Whereas I intended in the first chapter to develop an understanding of a collectively created body of orature that makes landscape and provides the means to narratively construct identities, the entity of orature will be complicated in this chapter by looking at orature as a medium for producing histories as intoned by conflicting voices. Thus my emphasis shifts from a systematic structure of orature as a cultural compound that artfully constructs and embraces the collective and the individual towards the fissured polyphony of voices as speaking and making histories. The notion of delayed antiphony within orature that stresses the collaborative process of making histories inevitably has to abandon the call for individual authorship and, as Gilroy writes for the creative process of black music, lets the performer “dissolve into the crowd” (1993: 200). At the same time, the composite nature of the voice and the possibility of its contradictory position vis-à-vis other voices, stresses the plurality of history telling in Otjiherero orature. The sonority of one history is made impossible by means of the continuous re-interpretation in several versions of orature, which entails praise poetry, but also men’s and women’s dances and orally transmitted stories. Moreover, specifically the radical incompleteness of *omitandu*, deriving from the genre’s characteristic structure of consisting of several layers of phrases that have been created at different times, allows for interpretations of the past that are located in the present. But this present must be a present in which the specific pieces of orature are still told, that is, in which the orature is present-ed and therefore is vital for an interpretation of the past in the present

Copying and repetition as resources for the productive capacity of the singers are crucial elements in the process in which the speaking voices keep stories in circulation. Thus, as Peter Hitchcock writes in his work about dub poetry: “what makes history *telling* is not the individuation of the voice, as griots well know, but the process in which the story keeps getting

²⁴ To be sure, people are also readers. But not much of praise poetry can be learned by reading books. The radio has a very prominent position in the publication of Herero orature, especially the broadcasts that are produced and spoken by Alexander Jarimbovandu Kaputu in the NBC’s Otjiherero service.

told” (1993: 24, emphasis added). The voice in Herero orature is in the majority of the cases a voice not invested with individual authority but bestowed with the power and credibility of an established genre as well as with a meaningfulness that derives from the circulation of its words within the community. Thus we have to omit any notion of “the subject as the owner or site of the narrative voice” (Bal 2003:101). Additionally, the fact that *omitandu* consist of layers of textual fragments and are therefore rarely created by a single performer, makes the identification of the time of narrating, or praising, often impossible. Reading the transcriptions of praise poetry, we deal with a voice that lacks a referential subject; a disembodied voice of sorts. The disembodied voice is cut off from temporality and seems to have only a “present existence,” as Bal writes (92). This does change if we take into account the specific time-space of the performance. But even within the setting of the performance, the notion of an original, or, particularly originating authorship, often remains unclear.

When I asked Adelheid Kustaa, one of the performers of the session I will analyze in what follows, whether she or the other women whose performance was taped in the 1950s by Ernst Damman authored the poems they performed, she simply said: “I don’t know.” Individual authorship was not the point, so it seemed; what was relevant was the performance as such.

During the performances of praise poetry that at festivities often have the character of a friendly contest, each singer entertains the audience and proves her or his eloquence with situationally apt improvisations or the “versioning” of mostly known poems. Let me pause for a moment on the notion of versioning. Esther Peeren proposes in her work on popular culture to see versioning as “a centrifugal or decentralizing practice.” Thus, although versioning indicates continuity, that, in the case of praise poetry is linked to the possibility but also the necessity of recognition, versioning, as a verb implies the processuality of the action. Peeren’s approach opens the idea of versioning towards practices that extend the alteration of texts within different performances. She writes:

[versioning] as a generalized procedure not bound to a particular form of expression, versioning can be thought to bear on chronotopes, performative regimes ... It opens up space for the re-visioning and re-voicing of identity constructions and the principles of intersubjectivity across which these are articulated.²⁵

²⁵ See Esther Peeren’s forthcoming dissertation: *Bahktin and Beyond. Identities as Intersubjectivities in Popular Culture*.

Versioning, here, is the interactive process that accomplishes different articulations of identity, none of which is an authoritative or final version. As an interactive process, much of the specifically artistic structure and creative resource of praise poetry lies in the antiphony, that is, the call-and-response dimension of the voices. This antiphonic quality may not always be established within a single performative event, but be delayed, and is therefore rarely traceable for the researcher. Versions of praise may be answers to *omitandu* the performer recalls in the moment of her or his own performance, but these versions may stem from another event or reciting. I suggest considering the body of Herero orature as a field of communicating voices, which often rephrase or “version” themes that already exist within the body of Otjiherero orature. These voices inform each other and collectively carry on telling stories that matter for the community. Because of this inextricable dimension of collaboration and communication in the making of praise poetry, performers consider themselves as co-authors, whose individual creativity adds to the crystallization of specific aspects of stories that are passed on in the process of creating a polyphonic body of sometimes conflicting voices. Since the existing body of praise poetry, but also every specific piece of orature, is irreducibly polyphonic, neither a single subjective voice nor the illusory unity of the voice of Herero women or men can be clearly traced.

My focussing on Herero orature as a narrative space where voices and versions of the past are made and synchronically criticized will not lead away but always back to landscape. The objects that I will analyze in this chapter are mostly *omitandu* that were recorded in the 1950s. Most of them deal with the making of an alternative history from the perspective of the Ovaherero community. But, as we will see, colonial oppression did not unify the voices and the perspective of the colonized community of the Herero was not one. Instead, the voices of orature may reveal the contradictions of Herero historiography.

Wa zembwa vi?

During our visit of Okahandja Day in 2004, the year of intensified commemoration of the Herero-German war in 1904 – 1908 Dag Henrichsen showed us (friends from Namibia, South Africa, and me) the grave of Zacharias Zeraua, who was buried in Okahandja in 1915. What made the visit of this empty and quiet graveyard disturbing was the fact that this was the day of the commemoration of the famous Ovaherero chiefs (*ovahona*) in Okahandja, where hundreds of Ovaherero gathered around the graves of other *ovahona* to celebrate this event. The scene on this

graveyard was considerably different: we were the only visitors. Dag Henrichsen had “found” that grave while he was searching for the deceased of another family; none of us had any idea what to make of the neglect of that grave on the day of massive celebration and commemoration of the important Herero leaders. Did the knowledge about the location of the grave get lost during the turmoil in the aftermath of the war? Interestingly, at the same time the Zeraua family was engaged in the exhumation and repatriation of the body of Chief Michael Tjiseseta, another important family member, who fled to South Africa during the war and had died there in 1927.

The location of the dead literally matters in the Herero community’s politics: merely narrating a deceased person in terms of orature does not accomplish the re-unification of the community with its deceased members. Narrating the social bonds is not enough, as Mr. Hongoze explained to me according to the case of Michael Tjiseseta:

Michael Tjiseseta fought in the war against the Germans. He fled first to Botswana, came back to Namibia and from there fled to South Africa. There he was working in the mines. It is important for us to bring him back to Namibia, to re-unite him with his forefathers of the Royal House. He will get a funeral within the community and will be regarded as a hero who returned to his home. That is important for the younger generation to see, because they must understand the role of our heroes.²⁶

On our way to Omaruru, where I hoped to have the opportunity to ask the present chief Christian Zeraua about the grave of Zacharias Zeraua, we stopped to see the grave. Mr. Hongoze said he did not know about this grave and he did not want to speculate about the reasons for what seemed to be the forgetting of this chief before he had the chance to talk to Chief Christian Zeraua himself. We did not meet Christian Zeraua that weekend, neither did I get the chance to talk to him during my stay in Namibia in 2004.

Written history informed by archival resources tells us that Zacharias Zeraua believed in the promise of Von Estorff, a German military, who gave his word that the life of all Herero who would put down arms and surrender would be spared and they would be resettled to the areas where they came from. But under the command of the notorious General von Trotha “Zeraua

²⁶ Rudolph Hongoze is a former SWAPO activist and a close friend of the current Chief Christian Zeraua of Omaruru. I wish to thank Mr. Hongoze for his help during my research in 2004, especially for the weekend we spent at his home in Omaruru where he kindly helped me to contact Mrs Kustaa and Mrs Tjiposa whom I interviewed in Omaruru in August 2004.

was not permitted to return to Otjimbingue. Instead, in captivity Zeraua was immediately interrogated and charged with instigating the murder of ‘white’ settlers.”²⁷

Both Zacharias Zeraua and Michael Tjiseseta had fought in the war as Herero chiefs, leading troops of armed men, but the former surrendered, whereas the latter fled to avoid captivity. Whether Zeraua is seen as a spineless person and is therefore not worthy being remembered alongside the heroes cannot be said. However, the existence of a praise poem that criticizes the forgetting of Zacharias Zeraua and further discussions both with Mr. Hongoze and Mrs. Kustaa, suggest that we are dealing with an act of forgetting rather than with forgotten contents.

The history of Zacharias Zeraua and his position in the Herero community of the present, important as it may be, is not what I am interested in here. Instead, I will focus on the making and the critique of the making of histories during sessions of performing and recording orature that took place in Omaruru in 1954, exactly fifty years after the battle at the Waterberg.

In the 1950s the linguist Ernst Damman and his wife Ruth Damman conducted a series of recordings during which Ovaherero singers performed a variety of *omitandu* and other songs and stories. During the course of the recordings, women and men who performed at different places in Namibia were free to choose the songs and stories they wished to present. Especially in Omaruru, this freedom of choice in terms of both genres and contents of the pieces that were presented, seems to have led to a situation that was loosely framed – mostly young women came to perform together – and set off a creative process of antiphonic improvisations of impressive density. Already before I learned about the forgotten grave in Okahandja, the tapings from Omaruru struck me as a history lesson, or rather, one of the very rare written publications in which the performative act of making historiology was documented.²⁸

Let me start with what Damman calls an *oujina*, that is, a women’s song, which agitates against the forgetting of Zacharias Zeraua:

Omubona otjowakwawo, wa zembwa vi?

Ombara otjowakwawo, wa zembwa vi?

²⁷ See <http://www.klausdierks.com/Biographies/Biographies_Z.htm>: 8

²⁸ Johannes Fabian speaks of “popular historiology, as a term designed to cover both written and oral accounts, narrations of history as well as metaphistorical principles that account for the specific shape of shared memory” (2003: 489). I use historiology without the qualification popular, because in terms of Otjherero orature, of which I speak here, I found different versions of historiology, some of them official, in terms of being in line with “chiefly” interpretations, and some openly critical or mockingly ironic towards these interpretations. What accounts for popular in this case, if we do not want to make a simple distinction between the popular as not following the “archival truth” of scholarly history writing, and the written historiography, I find difficult to say.

Omubona Zeraua wa zembwa vi?
Ozeraua omubona otjowakwawo, wa zembwa vi?
Omubona otjowakwawo, wa zembwa vi?
Ozeraua oZeraua otjowakwawo, wa zembwa vi?
Omubona omubona otjowakwawo, wa zembwa vi?
Ombara ombara otjowakwawo, wa zembwa vi?

The chief, he is like the others, why was he forgotten?
 The king, he is like the others, why was he forgotten?
 Chief Zeraua, why was he forgotten?
 It is Zeraua, the chief, why was he forgotten?
 The chief, the chief, why was he forgotten?
 It is Zeraua, Zeraua, why was he forgotten?
 The chief, the chief, why was he forgotten?
 The king, the king, why was he forgotten? 29

I never came across any other performance in Herero orature that in a similarly emphatic way protested against forgetting. Reading this poem fifty years after its recording, the power of this insistence on remembering voiced by the women who performed it is still strong. In comparison with most other songs or poems in Otjherero, this *outjina* is strikingly non-narrative. No places, personal names, or allusions to events or stories appear from which to retrieve a hidden narrative. Instead, the song consists of the repetition of a question – *wa zembwa vin?* why was he forgotten? – and of the insistent emphasis on Zeraua’s comparability to other chiefs, which is underscored by the iteration of Zeraua’s name, together with the honorable titles *omubona* and *ombara*, which both can mean chief, king, or leader.

As Fabian suggests, talking about forgetting something bears an inherent contradiction in the way it negates what it seems to affirm (2003: 489). By pronouncing the forgetting, the women actually performed remembrance, that is, in this case, they produced historiology in the recitable form of a song. Asking the question “why was he forgotten?” thus does not seem to deal with a cognitive absence, or the incapacity to recall contents, but with an act of forgetting. Fabian suggests that once we leave behind the notion of forgetting versus remembering as contradictory

²⁹ Sung by Gustafine Kasuko Hiiko and other women in Omaruru on the 4th of April 1954, published in Damman (1987: 236) in Otjherero and German, translated into English by Renathe Tjikundi and myself in 2004.

possibilities of a merely cognitive capacity, we can understand memory as “requiring memory work carried out as remembering and forgetting” (490). In this way, forgetting turns into an action of the same kind as memory; it is something people do or do not do. Asking “why was he forgotten?” interrogates, and, as I see it, protests against this act of forgetting. Performing acts of remembering, and, as in this case, adding a song to the body of popular historiography, is not merely remembering, but narrating the past and thereby including it into present practice. These acts can be “critical, contestatory and at times subversive” (490).

With the interrogation of the practice of historiography that in this case is accused of leaving out a chief who was, at least in those women’s point of view, “like the others,” the performers protested against a politics of memory that denied Zeraua the status of a hero within the community. Performing the song that asks these questions added another voice within the conflicting polyphony of Herero orature. Moreover, insisting that he is like the others, that is, as much an *omubona* as those who are narratively remembered, seeks to restore his status within the community. In the absence of historiography authored from within the community at that time, being included within the body of retold orature was absolutely vital for a person’s social existence. Not being narrated, in a society whose archives were in the minds of the performers of orature, meant social death. Manthia Diawara writes that in West Africa, even today,

everybody wants the griot to sing his or her praises, for there is no recognition without a griot who can immortalize the deeds through his art. Lack of recognition by the griots is tantamount to failure in society. No one is important enough or respectable enough until he or she attracts the attention of griots. (...) Thus, in Mande culture *heroism is a function of the griots songs*. (1998: 88-89, emphasis added)

Even if the song performed by the women in April 1954 in Omaruru had been previously orally published, we can say that the women used their social power as performers, and managed to include their critique of forgetting, and with that, the memory of Zeraua in the body of oral historiography.

I do not know which degree of popularity this song achieved, that is, we cannot say whether or not their song was convincing. Revision of, or as in this case, the allusion to a story that is withheld is possible, but a single version of a story that is not recognized by other performers will reach its limits. Oral tradition, as Luise White puts it “emerged from versions of events that coexisted for generations” (2001: 289). A re-recognition within orature would only

succeed if both the voice and the content are convincing enough to be retold by others and are thereby kept in circulation.

However, obviously the women could not accomplish his recognition within the liturgy of commemorations. As we have seen, fifty years later, his grave was not included into the acts of commemoration. But, what becomes clear by means of the reading of the recording of these women's voices, is that Otjiherero orature provides people with an accepted medium for the making and criticizing of the making of historiography. This means, through orature we can not only "hear" voices of Otjiherero histories, but retrieve attempts to alter historiography. Herero orature provides a space for contest and resistance against colonial versions of historiography, but also for the conflicting voices *within* the community's historiography. Here, the critique of forgetting that those women in Omaruru articulated, emerges to be embedded in a voice of a song that speaks about forgetting while it remembers.

The predicaments of opacity

Thus, if the subaltern does not speak, as such, it is only within the logics and codes of the dominant discourse. (Peter Hitchcock 1993: 18)

Reading the transcribed and translated versions of the songs that were performed in Omaruru on the 4th and 5th of April in 1954, I found it striking that most of the songs speak about the war, the defeat, and the flight of the Ovaherero in 1904. Luckily, in 2004 I had the chance to speak with Adelheid Kustaa and Konstanze Tjiposa, who took part in the recorded sessions in Omaruru.³⁰ Adelheid Kustaa was quite surprised that I had come to ask about these recordings fifty years later. She had never seen this publication before, but was quite pleased with most of the translations.³¹ To my question why most of the songs the women chose to perform dealt with the war in some or the other way she replied:

That's what *omitandu* do, what they are for. But that was also what was on our minds that day. It was exactly fifty years after our people had to leave Omaruru. The Germans had a commemoration on that day too.

³⁰ I want to thank Mrs Kustaa and Mrs Tjiposa, who kindly answered my questions and shared their time with me, although I visited them without having an appointment.

³¹ Adelheid Kustaa reads and speaks German.

Interestingly, Ernst Damman, who also remarks this coincidence in a footnote, finds that the singers, although they speak about the defeat of their community, showed *no resentments* (1987: 252). What Adelheid Kustaa had to say about this performance sounded considerably different to me. Moreover, the choice the women made in terms of the songs they performed, speaks another language. Grief and the preoccupation with the ordeal of the community entered the stage of the recordings as wrapped within the opacity that is a crucial aspect of the Otjiherero genres of orature. The genre conventions of Otjiherero orature not only set the creative rules of creation and transmission, they allow for recognition and frame the anticipation of the audience. But, narrative codes that bring about “identification in one context, might make for alienation and hostility in another,” as Hitchcock writes (1993: 29).

Thus, opacity is one of the crucial factors in this respect: it simultaneously enables and complicates reception. For an analysis, not only of the recordings in 1954s, but for the position of Herero orature within a wider public sphere, a discussion of opacity is therefore vital. Speaking about *oriki*, a genre of Yoruba praise poetry, Karin Barber writes:

There is a sense in which they are simply not accessible at all viewed as words on a page. They are not texts that “speak for themselves.” Their obscurity goes beyond the opacity of particular verbal formulations or references. They are “obscure” because it is what they are *doing* that animates them and gives them their form of significance. (1991: 7)

I do not wish to endorse the notion of obscurity; neither does Barber. However, even in their performance in the original language the words of the *omitandu* do not speak for themselves. Their multiple meanings are not transparent, even the informed Herero audience must decipher it. Thus, when *omitandu* are presented, Herero listeners do not expect their meanings to be self-evident. Instead, it is by means of the genre conventions as creative rules, for both the narrator and the audience, that a communicative act is initiated. Barber characterizes *oriki* as inhabiting a space between the audience and the performer(s), deducing that

[T]he text, then, has to be understood first of all as the instantiation of an intention to be understood - an expectation of being heard - reciprocally anticipated and endorsed by listeners. (1999: 27)

The prerequisite for entering the game of associations and de-ciphering is the knowledge of the rules of the activity and the shared domain of cultural knowledge. The performative utterance in this interplay is the tip of the iceberg, floating in a sea of public history and cultural knowledge that is only partly revealed by means of the *omitandu* itself (Fabian 1990: 12 -13). Hence, the performance of *omitandu* may be best understood as the activity of an intersubjective play on allusions, embedded in the phrases that animate exegesis.

The performance of *omitandu* lays out an initial space for associative linking in which the phrases themselves are constituted as mere starting points that set off associative chains and hermeneutic speculation. As I have shown with my reading of the *omitandu* for Okahandja, these associative chains allow the recipients, and to a limited degree enabled me, to travel from one story to another through the ramified network of connected stories. *Omitandu*, like Bal writes for written texts, are “a labyrinth where multiple paths take us in different directions” (2003: 108). This notion of the labyrinth gestures towards the creativity and responsibility of the listener (and reader). Thus, it is quite likely that people chose considerably different paths, directed by their personal concerns and interests, but also enabled and delimited by the amount of orature they share with the performer. In this way, identifiable places and names that are brought up in the poems lead away from the words that are immediately told, to other performances, other pieces of orature, times, and narrators. This makes the single performance opaque. If we consider opacity and antiphony as intrinsic features of *omitandu* (and other highly structured genres of orature), it becomes clear that in order to come to any understanding of what actually happens, is performed, and voiced during the presentation of *omitandu*, one has to consult local experts.

Damman’s interpretations of the orature presented to him in Omaruru were certainly not hostile towards the voices that conveyed specific versions of oral historiology: but since he was preoccupied with linguistic research he simply dismissed them. This does not say much about the intentions of the women who were performing that day. The question whether the women intended to give a history lesson from the side of those who lost the colonial war to a German scholar on the day of the fiftieth anniversary of their defeat in Omaruru, thus remains unanswered.

History certainly looked considerably different from the side of the Herero communities than it did within the written historiography under apartheid. Moreover, beyond the stagings of orature within the community itself, there was no public sphere in which orature would have been granted a voice to interpret history from the subaltern (colonised) side. Neither my reading

nor the interviews with Adelheid Kustaa and Konstanze Tjiposa in Omaruru can provide evidence as to whether this making and recording of historiology was directed towards Damman and a possible wider reception as a publication (in Namibia? or in Germany?), or solely anticipated the response within the own community.

The texts Damman transcribed, translated, and published from the recordings are ordered within a logic of typologies in terms of “songs about cattle,” “songs about places,” “stories,” and the like. These typologies do justice to the words that were recorded, but do not take into account the inherent codification of *omitandu* that requires and anticipates the exegetic deciphering by the informed audience, an activity that supplements the speaking voice. Moreover, classifying *omitandu* according to those typologies conceals how the poetics of memorializing places or the praise of cattle may speak about collective experiences and thus create histories. Fortunately, as Luise White writes, the interviewer’s agenda, questions and technique does not make the interview:

people may speak about what they want, rather than what scholars want and what they say may be informed by the performers own complicated interests much more than directed by the questionnaire of interviewers, or the agenda of linguists. (2001: 296)

In my reading I privilege the choice of the women, in terms of what they wanted to perform on that day. Looking at these choices, we find a commemorative event of performing orature that sheds light to the possibilities of creative consociations, that is, the situatively inspired formation of a voice of productive memory and critique.

Stories to be passed on

Adelheid Mbwaondjou, Kristine Kapazu, Asnat Mutanga, Monika Komomungondo, Konstanze Tjiposa, Adelheid Muhipa, Gustafine Kasuko Hiiko and Erika Vei performed their interpretations of the experiences the community went through during and after the war.³² They

³² These are the named performers Damman credits in his publication; this may not have been all the women who performed on these two days in Omaruru. Adelheid Kustaa does not appear, but she seems to be younger than the other women, most of whom have passed away in previous years. It could be that she is not named, or that she changed her surname after marriage, but also that she was too young to be considered a performer, although

used orature as a forum to pass stories on. Out of the huge body of available orature they orchestrated a performance that conveyed their interpretation of past experiences, but also their critique of and suggestions for mnemonic practice. The orature they presented on these days consists of three songs about Omaruru, two songs about the Waterberg, where the devastating battle took place, the song about the forgetting of Zeraua, songs about the flight, two versions of a song that seems to speak about a cow that has to be lifted up again, and others. Like all Otjiherero praise songs the omitandu I will speak about, are highly opaque. Nevertheless, even in the translation at least the hints to historical events become quite obvious.

Consider these lines of what the women themselves called a mourning song for Omaruru:

*Oowami omuari waKaevaave wongwe yoo Vatje na Ndjoura,
omukazendu wangwa nana osemba omukazendu waKoruwe
Oowami omuari waTjiyaku
womuhanga mbu a tikira mongongo au ha ningi omuwonge
Oowami omuari wovita vya Kazera, Kazera wovita vya Mbonga wovita vya Nandjira
Hee indyeye, tu rireondondudu yetu yaMarurungi ri Kakoru ya Ndanga nge ri Kasewa koya Mbinga
obepundu ndja hepura ovarumendu woya Mbongora³³*

I am a young woman belonging to Kaevaave of the homestead of the father in law of Vatje and Ndjoura

The wife of a man who guided in a just way

The wife of Koruwe

I am a young woman, belonging to those of Tjiyaku,

(the one) with the necklace that fell off from his Adam's apple, without someone who will gather (the beads)

I am a young woman of the war of Kazera, of Kazera, the war of Mbonga, the war of Nandjira.

Hee, let us mourn our rivier Omaruru where Kakoru is, at the homestead of Ndanga, the homestead of Kaseva, at the homestead of Mbinga.

The widow who lost the men, lost those of the *oruzo* of Mbongora.

she may have joined the singing. According to Adelheid Kustaa, Christine Kapazu is the name of the singer who appears as Christine Kapavu in the printed publication.

³³ Damman 1987: 256.

In this part of the song the performer signifies herself as tied to the war. Kazera, who appears in the phrase “the war of Kazera,” is a member of the main singer’s, that is, Adelheid Mbwaondjou’s, family. Adelheid Kustaa said to me:

We considered ourselves as products of the war. Some of us were born during the war, some, like me, thereafter. The war and its results were what affected us most.

In the song that mourns the loss of Omaruru and its community, the *rivier* (Afrikaans for dry river bed) itself becomes the widow (*obepundu*), who lost the population that produced its meaning. The *rivier* is one of the local signifiers for Omaruru in all *omitandu* about Omaruru I found. In the poetics of this song this *rivier* is staged as a dramatic figure, one who grieves over the loss of the men, as a widow, while being mourned by the young women. It seems as if the highly affectionate relationship of the (former) inhabitants of Omaruru animates the place to the extent that the *rivier* was seen as married to the people, after their flight and the death of many of them the *rivier* must feel and be treated as a widow.

In the song the widow has lost the men, but also the members of the *oruzo* Ombongora. An *oruzo* is the patrilinear family line, and *ombongora* is a necklace made of shell-beads (Damman 1987: 258). The *ombongora* family line may be a metaphor that extends the meaning of an actual lineage. Bringing up the necklace as a condensed image of collectivity may speak about a flourishing community, both in terms of material well-being, since the necklaces had to be bought from Ovamboland, and as an image for an orderly social organization and communal cohesion. With the imagery of the torn necklace that falls from the neck of Tjiyaku, the song tropes the scattering of the population and the loss of social ties as a drastic change for the people of Omaruru that was caused by the war. The beads are falling to the ground “without someone who will gather them again.” To my question whether this speaks about the flight and the resulting destruction of the Herero community of Omaruru, Adelheid Kustaa said: “Yes, we were scattered all over, some people fled to Botswana, some to Ovamboland, many more died. We spend the years after the war searching for our families.” “Recollecting the members of the families like the beads of the necklace?” I asked. “Yes, yes, you could say so,” she said.

Again, like in the *omitandu* for other places, what makes the place is a poetics of relation. But in the mourning song for Omaruru the rupture the war had caused for the community is deployed. Here, the imagery, or better, the voicing of this rupture is poignantly illustrated in the

mode of a drastic alteration, that is, the shifting of the tropes that qualify the place in the *omutandu* for Omaruru. The *rivier* features prominently in versions of the *omutandu* for Omaruru as “our rivier, white of dust and heat in the middle, even if there is no cattle (that stirs the dust)” and as “the rivier that cannot be passed through by a pregnant woman or a woman with a baby on her back.”³⁴ In the version of Victorine Kaura that Damman published, “the *rivier* is for the men of (or with) *ombongora*, the tall ones, with broad backs and no bellies.”

In the mourning song, the picture changes drastically, the beautiful, life-giving *rivier* is abandoned and becomes the widow of the men of or with *ombongora*, which may signify both the necklaces of these men and their lineage. The image of the pregnant woman appearing in both the mourning song and the praise poem, is not directly linked to the image of the widow, which only appears in the mourning song. But certainly both tropes antiphonically communicate within the mourning song. Whereas the former alludes to fertility, expectation and new life, the latter metaphorizes the grief, death and loss that had changed the remaining community fundamentally. Since only the notion of antiphony makes this connection readable, I suggest that not authorship, but the practice of accumulating corresponding motives allows for the identification of the signifying voices. Out of the repertoire of orature an intense performance was orchestrated that inspired the reception and directed the exegetic activity of the participants onto the path of retrieval; that which allows to come to terms with the rupture in the history of a community deployed within poetic metaphors. In a poetic style, these voices in Omaruru proliferated into specific theories of what it meant to be dislocated, scattered, and suffering losses. Marginalized only within the wider sphere of public speech under apartheid, which suppressed the voices of orature, but not within the discourses of their own communities, these women, together with other performers of the genre, were the theorists of their community’s social experience.

In terms of landscaping, it is remarkable how the story of the suffering of the community is passed on: although the war is mentioned several times, neither the flight nor the community’s losses are brought up directly. For example, this line in the poem seems to talk about the flight to Ovamboland (northern Namibia):

Oo indyeye, tu rire Omaruru oruwe ndu ri Kasuto na Mukaravize

Ovibekuta vya Rukombo

Mbyaa vi kekuta kOndjambo

³⁴ This version was recited by Alexander Kaputu in 2002 and translated by Renathe Tjikundi. In a version sung by Victorine Kaura and published by Ernst Damman (1996: 287) the phrase is almost the same.

Oo let us mourn Omaruru, the cliff that belongs to Kasuto and Mukaravize,
whose hunger was not satisfied by the food of Rukombo,
but who were then fed in Ovamboland

This line does not directly refer to the suffering of the refugees, but alludes to the flight to Ovamboland that Adelheid Kustaa mentioned. Further, by means of an inversion that evolves around the term “widow,” passively *being abandoned* rather than active flight is brought up. Thus, the motive of suffering becomes dislocated within the poem, it shifts from those who actively fled towards the *passiones* of the *rivier* as an element of the known landscape. By means of this displacement, there is a transfer of personalization and a shift of focus from the community towards the *rivier*, which is deployed as much more than merely a passive witness of the dramatic events. While the *rivier* appears to be personalized, the suffering of the community is withheld from the surface of the poem. The suffering of losses thus appears to be displaced from the community to the landscape where it may sediment. Landscape in this way becomes imbued with meaning of its own; it is marked and re-enchanted by poetry as long as the songs are remembered and retold. What Luig and Van Oppen write for land shrines also holds true for the narratively constructed places as part of the landscape: they “reflect the fluidity of social relations, conceptualising history as mediation between present and past generations” (1997: 22). Thus, the metaphors, memories and stories attached to the land are ephemeral, and they speak exclusively to the communities who know about them. The meaning of the landscape persists only within the circulation-time of the related poetry, that is, again, the time in which the poem is presented.

The necklaces, too, metaphorize irreversible change: in both songs the necklaces appear to be condensed allusions; as an intact adornment they signify male beauty and wealth as well as social cohesion, whereas in the mourning song the change towards a torn necklace tropes the scattering of everything the necklaces stood for in the *omutandu*.

This mourning song seems to interrupt the usual course of accumulating allusions to events within one *omutandu* for a place. If we compare the song with the *omutandu* for Okahandja the severity that is inherent in the necessity to create a distinct mourning song becomes clearer. As I have shown in the first chapter, some of the stories that are alluded to in the praise for Okahandja, namely the ones that trope the deeds of Kamaherero at the stone that sounds “as if it has people inside” are disturbingly cruel. But, obviously, cruel (his)stories like these can be included in the layered body of a poem that consists of the heaps of allusions that make one

place. In the case of the devastation of the community of Omaruru, the rupture that is brought up in the mourning song belongs to another category, it seems to require a different song altogether. Recognizability is achieved and the interruption of continuity is articulated by means of the reference to known motives, like the *rivier* and the necklace, but these elements are then synchronously dislocated into another song. The mourning song ends with:

Hee, injeye, tu rire ondondu yetu o ha kondwa i omutumba nowatjivereko!
Hee yae tu rire Omaruru owe!
Hee yae tu rire Omaruru owe!
Hee yae tu rire Omaruru owe!
Tu rire ondondu yetu yOvakweuva!
Omaruru owee!
Oomukazendu wangwa nana osemba omukazendu wa Ngombombonde!
Opuwo!

Hee, let us mourn our rivier that cannot be passed through by a pregnant woman or a woman with a baby on her back!
Hee, yae, let us mourn Omaruru!
Hee, yae, let us mourn Omaruru!
Hee, yae, let us mourn Omaruru!
Let us mourn our rivier of the people of Kweuva!
Omaruru owee!
I am the wife of one who guided in a just way, a woman of Ngombombonde!
Opuwo!³⁵

At the end of the song, like in the beginning, the performer is embedded into a network of social relations by means of mentioning names.

As Damman (256) writes, *omuari* is the name of honor for a woman who just gave birth. Standing at the beginning and at the end of the mourning song, the motive of giving life frames this song, which prominently tropes the figures of the widow and the pregnant woman. The notion of “the one who guided in a just way” too, is repeated. Remarkably, here, this seems to be

³⁵ Published in Damman 1987: 256-257, translated by Renathe Tjikundi and me. Opuwo! (end!) Is a regular formula to end a performance.

a double allusion, since the one “who guided in a just way” may be one of the chiefs of Omaruru who had passed away long ago. As Adelheid Kustaa said, the names that are brought up refer to family members of the performers. But these names may stem from older *omitandu*, which means, the names may identify deceased family members, whereas the “I” speaks in the present. Since the performer’s voice speaks of herself being the wife of the chief who had “guided in a just way” in the first person, she identifies with and includes voices of the past, possibly that of the female performer who first published the poem and those who performed the poem in later years. Naming members of her own family, but at the same time alluding to a distant past, the performer doubles and thereby blurs the identity of the singer, fusing subjective positions into a polyphone voice and thereby linking separate times, performances, and positions to the place Omaruru.

Again, Gilroy’s notion of the changing same is productive, but this time not merely as a concept that points to the genre’s capacity of “borrowing, displacement, transformation and continual reinscription” (102). Instead, we are dealing with the complex syncretism of the genre with respect to identity constructions. The composite voice of this mourning song sheds light on the performative creations of identity. The voice of this song “borrows” other, albeit specific speaking positions and includes them into a complex creation that is at once fixed to a social and spatial network of relations, but simultaneously travels within the temporal possibilities these relations allow. In this way, identification with and by means of composite voices produce positions that are at once coherent and fluid, specifically linked to the place, and circular in time. Although this composite creation of the voice is polyphone and antiphonic, that is, communicating with other performances, *omitandu* and other songs may also direct the attention of the audience to one person, as we will see below.

Albertine’s grief

Whereas the mourning song tropes the loss of home that was experienced by the whole community, another song about Omaruru that was also performed during this session is preoccupied with one character: Albertine Tjiseseta, the former wife of Chief Manasse Tjiseseta:

Atitati omaye, vandu, Omaruru!

Atitati omaye, vandu, Omaruru!

Atitati omaye, vandu, Omaruru!

Vandu ondondu yetu yozobende nozondukana vaenda

Atitati omaye, vandu, Omaruru!

Atitati omaye, vandu, Omaruru!

Atitati omaye, vandu, Omaruru! Karupatine kondondu yozobende nozondukana vaenda

Mukazendu, o riri! Uandje Omaruru!

Karupatine, o riri! Uandje Omaruru!

Ondondu yetu ombwa ndji ha kondwa omutumba novatjivereko

Ee Rupatine, o riri! Uandje Omaruru!

Ee Rupatine, o riri! Uandje Omaruru!

Atitati omaye, vandu, Omaruru!

Atitati omaye, vandu, Omaruru!

Atitati omaye, vandu, Omaruru!

Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!

Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!

Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!

You people, our rivier with the mocking birds, insulting those who pass by

Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!

Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!

Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!

Karupatine at the rivier of the mocking birds, insulting those who pass by

Woman, don't cry! Omaruru of mine!

Ee Rupatine, don't cry! Omaruru of mine!

Ee Rupatine, don't cry! Omaruru of mine!

Our rivier, the one that cannot be passed through by a pregnant woman or a woman with a baby on her back

Karupatine, don't cry! Omaruru of mine!

Karupatine, don't cry! Omaruru of mine!

Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!

Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!

Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!

Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!³⁶

This song, or rather, its transcription and translation caused confusion. Trying to come to terms with this song at my desk in Amsterdam, I soon realized that I did not investigate thoroughly enough and therefore needed further advice. Fortunately I could consult Renathe and her brother Ephraim by telephone.³⁷

The name Omaruru, mentioned in the first chapter, encapsulates the hint to the bitter grass that grows in the area and makes the sour milk (*omaere*) taste bitter (*ruru*). According to this, and what seems to have been a mistake in the transcription, Damman translated the line he transcribed as “*Karupatine o riri! Tu yandje omaruru*” with: “*Karupatine weine nicht! Lasst uns bittere Milch geben!*” Which, translated into English, would be: “*Karupatine don’t cry! Let us give (or provide) bitter milk!*”. Reading this phrase over and again and trying to feel myself into the meaning of the words, I could not make sense of it. Renathe and her brother Ephraim both believe that it must be “*uandje*,” which means “of mine,” or “mine” instead of “*tu yandje*” which would be something like the imperative of the verb “*yandja*,” (to give, or provide). Secondly, with the term Omaruru, people would not refer to bitter sour milk, but would always have meant the place, they were sure.

“*Atitati*” is an onomatopoeic expression that utters surprise; in this case the term expresses the surprise about the taste of the milk that is unusually bitter. The birds that mock people seem to specify a kind of bird that is found in the area of the *rivier*, a fact that is deployed in the praise poem for Omaruru as “at the stone of birds.” Both the phrase about the birds and the one about the “*rivier* that cannot be passed by a pregnant woman, or a woman with a baby on her back” I find difficult to decipher. They could be metaphors, alluding to stories, but also simply recognizable qualifications of the landscape. I asked Adelheid Kustaa about the phrase with the pregnant woman and she said, it refers to the depth and the breadth of the flowing river, during the rainy season. Further she said that women who are pregnant are not supposed to get wet, because they tend to get ill easily.

However, the woman appearing as Karupatine in the song is actually Albertine Tjiseseta, daughter of chief Christian Wilhelm Zeraua and sister of (the forgotten) Zacharias Zeraua. Mrs. Kustaa said:

³⁶ In Damman 1987: 255, sung by Kristine Kapazu, translated by Renathe Tjikundi and myself.

³⁷ I want to thank Ephraim Tjikundi, who currently lives in Britain, and who kindly helped me to figure out a more adequate translation of the phrase during a long phone call.

We loved and admired her. She was a very strong woman. She and Manasse were both teachers in Otjimbingwe. When his uncle died and he became chief, Manasse took all his uncle's wives. Albertine left him because of that and stayed alone. She lived many years longer than him.

To be sure, this is not an *omutandu* for Albertine alias Karupatine; the conventional features, the praise song are missing. Moreover, what makes this song notably different from most other songs and praises I know is the striking absence of any other name.³⁸ Here, no plethora of names that signifies the social web in which the person is embedded is brought up. This implies that in this song Albertine is not identified by means of a poetics of relation to significant others. Instead, I suggest that it is precisely this absence of the social relations in the poem that signifies what the performers saw in Albertine and for what she was admired: a stubbornly individual and independent woman.

For the little we know about her makes her look exceptional. Albertine Tjiseseta, née Zeraua, was of a royal lineage and a member of the educated (mostly) Christian Herero elite of early colonial time. As with most Herero women of that time, the archive does not hold much information about them, and neither does historiography.³⁹ So it is not only within most of the Herero orature that these women feature only as wives, or daughters of prominent chiefs or leading figures. However, the performance of the young women in Omaruru, again, seemed to follow a different agenda.

According to Joris de Vries, Albertine died in Omaruru in 1951 (1999: 18), which means, she had lived more than fifty years longer than her former husband Manasse, who died during a typhoid pandemic in 1898. Manasse was elected chief of Omaruru in 1884. This may have been the time when Albertine left him, since she refused to be one of many wives in a polygamous, and therefore, from the Christian point of view, “heathen” household. Divorces were not unheard of in the Herero communities during pre-colonial and early colonial times, but they were probably not frequent either. Whether Manasse had much choice about the practice of levirate,

³⁸ The song for Zeraua, and a song about the reburial of Friedrich Maherero (Damman 1987: 233) are further exceptions. But unlike the song for Albertine the others seem to be preoccupied with specific events or incidents, (that of a reburial, or remembering versus forgetting), whereas the song for Albertine does not trope a singular event.

³⁹ Joris de Vries mentions her several times in his biography of her husband, Chief Manasse Tjiseseta (de Vries 1999). In the otherwise quite profound online chronology of Klaus Dierks, she appears only as daughter of Christian Willem Tjiseseta (see <http://www.Klausdierks.com/Biographies/Biographies_Z.htm>.). I do not intend to blame these historians; I did not find much material about her either. What this accounts for is rather the lacuna in terms of what the archive has to offer in biographies about women.

or whether he was compelled to marry his uncle's wives as a precondition to inherit the position of the chief, we do not know. In any case he chose to live most of the time in his polygamous household outside of Omaruru. Albertine's negative response towards his conduct must have been quite explicit, since after a short reunion due to Manasse's obligations towards the mission, he moved back to his wives and household outside Omaruru and said, according to de Vries, "he preferred to be buried rather than to live with Albertine" (45).

Albertine survived the war, but she lost (at least) her son Michael, who fled to South Africa, saw her brother Zacharias Zeraua being imprisoned and "forgotten," and she witnessed the devastation of the community of Omaruru in 1904. According to Adelheid Kustaa, the loss of Omaruru "was too much for her." Again, not telling her story, the women in Omaruru created a song in which Albertine's sadness is deployed and made memorable. Does the phrase "Omaruru of mine!" echo Albertine's mourning? Both Ephraim and Renathe explained to me that "*uandje*" means "mine," or "of mine" in terms of something that is very dear to the person who uses the term. "You use it when speaking about your girlfriend," said Ephraim, or "something that definitely belongs to you and not somebody else." Renathe said, "*uandje*" signifies something that belongs to *one person alone*. This notion of a place as belonging to one person alone is very exceptional, since significant places are usually made of layers of personal histories. However, if only in this song, Omaruru belongs to Albertine more than to others. Moreover, in this song that does not mention any of the prominent chiefs of that area, Albertine, who left Manasse, instead of Manasse or one of their male family members, together with the name of Omaruru itself, is elevated to a local signifier: she is the one who "makes the place" in this praise poem.

The repetition of the name Omaruru appears to be quite excessive. The name involves a notion of bitterness, that of milk, in the first place, which is the staple food of the pastoralist society. Thinking about the bitterness of milk, I cannot avoid the reminiscence to:

*Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts
wir trinken und trinken*

These lines of Paul Celan's famous poem "*die Todesfuge*" appear to me literally as a voice, I remember having heard his recorded recitation, while seeing the pictures of one of the

concentration camps in a television documentary.⁴⁰ Interrogating the notion of the voice as a concept of originality and authorship, Bal writes:

Nor can the voice claim *origin*, that other doxic cultural obsession. Origin implies generativity, and that perspective must be kept in its limited place. If words and images “come from” somewhere, it is from the culture that the work and its readers share, at least partially. They are picked up like graffiti and litter, from the roads we walk along through our lives. (2003: 107)

This is also true for the generativity of the analyzing perspective; it cannot claim originality. Here too, we weave together the bits and pieces of associative recollections that come to our minds while we are trying to retrieve meaning out of texts or con-textualize voices. Again, there is the “inner ear,” mine this time. The bitterness of milk converges with the notion of the blackness of milk, Celan’s oxymoronic metaphor that stirs up the horror in which, as in the case of the Herero genocide, “*der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland*.” How far do I get with these associative musings, if the reader and the performers *do not share* culture? Obviously the metaphors within this song speak to me, but how much sense do my associations make?

Quite certainly the performers were not influenced by Paul Celan’s famous poem; it may hardly have been known. But creative *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* of the women who were, according to Adelheid Kustaa “products of the war,” may opt for a similar turn and then the metaphor is not far fetched. The bitterness that is drunk and had to be endured in this poem may be of another kind than solely the one that is caused by the bitter grass of the area. But this other bitterness belonged to the daily life of the post-war society as much as the milk.

Seen in this light, the onomatopoeic expression of surprise about the bitter taste, with which the poem commences, prepares the audience for the sad content that will follow.

Damman translated this first (repeated) phrase with “*Atitati, Milch, ihr Lente, herbe*,” which would be “Atitati, milk, people, bitter!” whereas we opted for “Atitati, milk, people, Omaruru!”. Although I was told that “Omaruru” in the poem does directly translate into “bitter sour milk,” the bitterness of milk is an unavoidable association that is included in the place name Omaruru. Further, it is telling that what Kavari calls “the slot,” in which usually illustrative elements of the praise poem would be inserted, here is solely filled with the name Omaruru, whereas only two

⁴⁰ Published in: Celan, Paul (1985): *Gedichte* (Band 1) Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp p 41. As far as I know, the poem was first published in “Mohn und Gedächtnis“ in 1952.

references to the *omutandu*, namely the mocking birds, and pregnant woman who cannot pass through the *rivier*, appear in the entire song (2002: 274). Because of this, together with the sheer amount of repetition of this phrase that seems to embrace the other phrases, I suggest that the notion of bitterness prominently marks the place in this song. If we read the mourning song for Omaruru together with this song about Albertine, the imagery of the *rivier* as a mourning widow and Albertine's sadness conjure up an impression of a location of grief.

The song remains tightly captured by this topic, since there are no personal names that would lead away from bitterness and Albertine's grief to other stories that made the place. Whereas most other *omutandu* and songs function centripetally, that is, plunging the informed listener (and reader) into a sea of stories they allude to, this song operates in the reverse: the two emblematic local signifiers (the birds and the pregnant woman) are firmly embraced by the iterated phrases that emphasize Albertine's grief and the bitterness of the milk. In this way, although the poem is not narrating the cause of Albertine's sadness, her ordeal becomes the poignant center of the poem. According to Damman the mocking birds were seen as birds of misfortune, which in a magical way can cause hard luck for those who hear them (1996: 288). I interpret this song as follows: the bitter milk, together with the birds of misfortune, and Albertine's grief, condense and intrinsically locate the story of a community's ordeal and at the same time put one woman, who was admired and loved, in the center of remembrance.

So, do we hear particular women's voices in this recording? To be sure, the voices are specific: they speak about the narrative choices made by a group of young women on the day of the fiftieth anniversary of their community's defeat. In the case of the Omaruru recordings, the notion of voices as collective articulations of the group of performers does not lie within authorship, but in the very event of the performance as an antiphonic, collective artwork that has to be read as a whole. Thus the search for specific voices of critique or conflicting historiography within the community may lead to particular performative events, because the narrative direction appears within the accumulation of productive intertextual relations that may alter and add to each poem's meaning. During this performance in 1954 in Omaruru, the women used an antiphonic montage technique that allowed for a critical versioning of historiography by means of emphasizing the motives that were on their minds. The selective choice of this versioning is underscored by Adelheid Kustaa's words: "that was also what was on our minds that day."

With my reading of the songs I seek to trace echoes of an inspired mood that does not simply commemorate but wields creative power, a power "that conjures up the presence of exemplary past figures" (Michael Chapman 1996: 55). Compressed in the poetic mode of

performing orature, historiology was told and made. This historiology was committed to exemplary figures of the past like Albertine Tjiseseta, Zacharias Zeraua, but also to the community of Omaruru, and the place itself. Let me now turn to two more songs from this session, in which the women deploy the predicament and concerns of their present in the 1950s.

Resurrection of a cow

The songs from the performance in Omaruru that puzzled me most deal with a cow that had to be raised back on its feet. The two songs offer one motive. They were performed in two quite different versions, one directly after the other.

Ngai yeurwe yoomukaaKomuvero

Ngai zemburuka Nanda yamukaaNjaramena

Ngai yeurwe yoomukaaKondwite nomuukaaKondjuwo

Ngai yeurwe yoomukaaKondjupa yaKombwa otjiboro

Indjo, tu yeurwe muatje watate, ongombe opu yo, katuna yarwe.

Ngatu, tokukaera ozongaku noozombanda!

Ngatu rande ebozu rongombe, i tu kwatere ozongombe komurungu!

O toboni, mukaaKondjuwo!

Ndjo nguno Kautwerebo!

Yeura pona mbo!

Ami me kambura omarama, ove kambura otjiuru!

Yeura pona mbo!

Ami me kambura omarama, ove kambura otjiuru!

Yeura pona mbo!

Ya otama mukaaKoruwe

onene ongombe!

Mukaa Koruwe, mukaaKoruwe

onene ongombe!

Vatera, mukaaKoruwe!

onene ongombe!

That one shall be picked up, the one of the wife of Komivero

The one that is remembered by Nanda, of the wife Ndjaramena

It shall be picked up, the one of the wife of Kondjupa, of Kombwa, the straight one!

Come, let us pick it up, child of my father, it is only this one, we have no other!

Let us lack shoes and clothes!

Let us buy grass for the cow, so that it will produce offspring!

Don't be ashamed, wife of Kondjuvo!

Come here Kautwereho!

Pick it up there!

I will take its legs, you take its head!

Pick it up there!

It became old, wife of Koruwe!

The big cow!

Wife of Koruwe, wife of Koruwe, wife of Koruwe!

The big cow!

Help us, wife of Koruwe!

The big cow!

Ya otama ondendu, ondendu yongombe yovita vyaKazera, Kazera wovita vya Tjikoko, yaNandira

Ya otama ondendu yetu obakandwa i vavi i ngamwa omundu, ondendu yongombe yongwe

yaoVatja na Ndjoura

Ya omtama ongombo ya imba mba za Kondukwa yomurya omure ndja nwa Mbanongwa

Mba endere novanatje ovazandu pomatambo.

Hee ngatu imbure ongombe yetu:

Vatera mukaaKoruwe!

onene ongombe!

MukaaKoruwe!

onene ongombe!

MukaaKoruwe!

onene ongombe!

MukaaKoruwe!

onene ongombe!

It became weak, the cow of the war of Kazera, of Kazera, who was with the war of Tjikoko, the son of Nandjira!

It is weak our cow, the one that was not milked by bad people, by everyone (no one?), the female cow of the father in law of Vatja and Ndjoura.

It became weak, the cow of these people, who came from the calabash with the long thong, from which drank Mbanongwa,

who went away with the children on their backs.

Hee let us praise our cow!

Help us, wife of Koruwe!

The big cow!

Wife of Koruwe!

The big cow!

Wife of Koruwe!

The big cow!

Wife of Koruwe!

The big cow!⁴¹

Praising cattle is a habitual practice within Otjiherero orature. Quite often, the reference to bulls or cows operates to create metaphoric praise names that replace the actual names of families or are used as synonyms for a person. In this case the cow of the “war of Kazera,” that is, also the cow of those “who went away with the children on their backs,” stands for the whole community of Omaruru. Again, like in the mourning song, the war and the flight appear, but in these two songs both motives are combined with the weakness of a cow that is the only one that is left. The re-appearance of the motives of flight and war in different songs creates a productive connection between the particular songs. The recognizable elements that appear within other songs are reiterated, but then incorporated and reworked within the two songs that are directed towards the predicament of the performer’s present. The cow that became weak as the poetic subject in the poem appears to be a stark image for a pastoralist society that has to be reconstructed. Within the symbolism that gestures towards a pastoralist society, having only one cow tropes at once scarcity and hope.

Although these two songs may have been created at an earlier time, probably directly after the war, fifty years later they still speak about the performer’s concerns. Rather than merely invoking or constructing a past, this song invites the community to face the predicament of the present and join forces for a common interest. Whereas usually cows or bulls signify and are owned by specific families, this cow belongs to several women who are encouraged to raise it on its feet again. Depicting the performer’s families as owners of a single cow, ties them together as being collectively responsible for the well-being of the poetic subject of this song. Additionally, addressing a person by means of referring to his or her lineage is thought to evoke a feeling of pride and honor. During the war, I was told, women used to encourage the warriors with praises of their family lines, so as to enhance their strength and ability to endure the battle and make them fearless.⁴² This matches with the line “do not get ashamed, wife of Kondjuwo!”

The codified invocation of unity of a community who owns only one cow did not represent the social reality of that time in Omaruru. For one, the reconstruction of the cattle herds and thus of the crucial basis of livelihood in the rural areas had been on its way for several

⁴¹ These songs are “double translations”: I translated Damman’s translation from German, which is admittedly problematic. However, I found them too appealing to stay away from writing about them. Both versions are published in Damman (1987: 296-298) and are available as taped recordings in the Phonologisches Archiv in Berlin.

⁴² Personal conversation with Johanna Katjipara in Windhoek 2004.

years in the 1950s. But having no cattle was a shared, painful experience for many Ovaherero directly after the war. Within Ovaherero communities owning cattle meant and to a certain extent still means more than physical survival and well-being. Owning cattle is the *conditio sine qua non* for a great deal of social and spiritual activities that require cattle exchange or sacrifice. Both the exchange and the sacrifice of cattle provide social coherence; between the living in the former and amongst the living and the deceased in the latter case. The demand to join forces “to raise the cow again” thus is intrinsically tied to a (not so) metaphorical request to invest in the community’s social coherence. Evoking the struggle and success to reconstruct pastoralist livelihood directly after the war that had actually been experienced may thus gesture towards a comparable attempt to restore the community’s social coherence. Producing the memory of the struggle for survival in the aftermath of the war created an optimistic image of collective power, as well as that of an ideal past of joining forces, deployed in the *omutandu*, “which by means of its performative break with everyday speech evoked memories of the *ethos* of the community and thereby provoked hearers to act ethically” (Tyler 1987: 202, quoted in Coplan 1994: 259).

Hence, the collective ownership and concern about the cow may rather speak of a performative attempt to create this unity by means of evoking the productive metaphor of a pastoralist community as a source to reconstruct collectivity. Thus, not only did the performers in Omaruru have a specific, albeit not individual but collective voice, “in which art was not distinguished from utility” (Chapman 1996: 50), but they used it to articulate an urgent appeal. As performers they were licensed not only for critique, but felt the obligation to narratively provide a useful focus of communal solidarity. As we have seen, this could re-present the past, but also speak about the concerns of the present.

“We had to restore our community”, said Adelheid Kustaa, “we felt that this was our obligation.” To my question, who the people mentioned in the two versions were, she replied that those were the relatives of the young women who performed that day. “We wanted to encourage each other”, she said. “Joining forces to reconstruct the community?” I asked. “*Omitandu* remind us who we are,” Mrs Kustaa said, “it makes you feel stronger.”

The Old Location

Instead of singing of presidents, people sang of the assassinations of presidents. What counted were the ruptures in the continuity of history. [This is] because people then loved drama and their songs were like little dramas, always remaining vague and mysterious; they never told the entire story. With the amazing effect that [these songs] still, even today, are fascinating. One wants to explore what is missing. The imagination is challenged when listening to these songs (Greil Marcus).⁴³

The children of Nangolo and the children of Ndemufayo, all of them were gathered together. At our contaminated *etundu*, where the atrocities took place. Where we were hated. Where we said: build us a place here, we are not going to move (quote from the Old Location *omutandu*).

The radical incompleteness of *omitandu* has similar effects to the ones of the folksongs American music critic Greil Marcus speaks about: setting out to tell another story, they never tell all, leaving many questions unanswered. Thus, *omitandu* keep challenging the imagination of their listeners, while teasing out cultural knowledge and collective memories. Moreover, *omitandu* appear to speak in unpredictable ways over the course of their lifetime, that is, across the times in which they are remembered and recited. Writing about the poetic response of the Herero to their forced removal from the Old Location, the main object of this chapter is the *omutandu* that was created after the forced removal and in which the inhabitants articulated their ideas of collectivity and their will not to move.

This chapter is unruly.⁴⁴ It is unruly because I try to follow the tropes that the praise poem brings up in my reading. These tropes are widely divergent at different moments in time; all of them require supplements to be readable. Again, I attempt a thick translation. This time, however, more in terms of what the praise song does and the potentials with regard to landscaping and memory politics it offers, than by seeking to find equivalent meanings for the

⁴³ Greil Marcus is a journalist who writes about popular music in the US. The quote stems from an interview with Marcus published in the German newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*. In the interview, he speaks about folksongs that tell alternative and mythic histories that can be added to the official history of the United States (June 13, 2005, page 15, my translation from German).

⁴⁴ For her critical reading, lucid comments and many discussions in the kitchen, one of which led to the idea to compare *omitandu* with hypertexts, I thank Esther Peeren. I am also grateful for the critical comments Ruth Sonderegger gave on the first version of this chapter.

words of the poem. Following what I interpret as the trajectories of the poem, I will start with current memory politics in Namibia, where the memory of the Old Location has a specific place but the *omutandu* is neglected, if only in terms of national memory. From the present I will then proceed to the politics of subjectification and spatial segregation under apartheid, so as to set out the political climate and conduct against which, in 1959, the poem and the practice of naming the streets in the Old Location spoke. In the final part of this chapter, I will analyze the capacity of the poem to create landscape, a specific form of historiology and collectivity. Proceeding from the present into the past – from the predicated position of praise poetry in recent Namibian memory politics to the time at which the *omutandu* was created – I seek to tie together the dimensions of what I understand as acts of performative resistance in the present and in the past.

This chapter deals with forms of performative and narrative resistance by the Herero communities not only against colonial attempts to create both racialized colonial subjects and a segregated urban space according to the logic of difference, but also against recent attempts to re-narrate the history of the resistance by African communities within the urban space for the narration of the nation. Paradoxical as it may seem, the creations of orature that managed to produce a transgressive, alternative social space within and against the hostile social order of segregation in the urban space of Windhoek, appear to revolt also against the appropriation of the history of the Old Location and the rebellion of its inhabitants by the new nation state. However, the latter revolt on the part of the *omutandu*, which manages to at once restore and re-story the identificatory space of the African population, fails to register within the national representation of history today “as partial, partisan account whose destiny (it) is never to add up” (Ian Chambers 1996: 50). Let me start by outlining the place of the Old Location in recent memory politics in Namibia.

The elusive monument

The Old Location, like District Six in the centre of Cape Town, was demolished in pursuit of the apartheid dream of absolute racial separation. In Cape Town the resulting empty space remained, broken only by the churches and mosques that were left intact. In Windhoek, the destruction was virtually complete as the new suburb of Hochland Park filled the vacant space. Only the Old Location graveyard, which had been opened in the early 1930s remained (*The Namibian*, September 25, 1989, author unknown).

The final removal of the Old Location in 1968 was only the final step towards the complete removal of the African population from the vicinity of the town to a township eight kilometers from the center of Windhoek. By the time the government decided to remove the people from the Old Location, the urban African population had already experienced several displacements, as well as a series of restrictive laws that constrained their freedom to move around and dwell in the urban areas of Namibia. When in 1959 the inhabitants of the Old Location demonstrated against their forced removal to the newly built township, 14 people were shot by the police and many more were injured. The township to which people finally had to move was given the name Katutura.

Sondagh Kanguuehi, when asked how Katutura received its name, explained:

Katutura is the Otjiherero name for the township where people did not want to live, Councillors Alfred Mungunda and Joshua Kamberipa called the township Katutura, which means 'we have no permanent habitation?'. This name derives from the fact that since the whites came to our land, Katutura is the fifth location we have had to live in, in Windhoek. (...) because we had no permanent habitation since we were pushed around like furniture every now and then (Sondagh Kanguuehi, quoted in Pendleton 1994: 18-19).

Searching for traces of the Old Location as a foreigner in Windhoek in 2003 proved difficult. Remnants of the location where African people lived before 1968 had simply vanished.⁴⁵ As Gewald suggests, the thorough removal of these traces was intentional:

In establishing Hochland Park, the outgoing South African regime, which had been in illegal occupation of Namibia, ensured that all the physical traces of a crime committed against Windhoek's African inhabitants were obliterated from the urban landscape. The crime committed, and carried out by the South African administration in accordance with apartheid legislation, entailed the forced removal of the African inhabitants from the Old Location, and the subsequent razing of all the buildings that had stood there. By building Hochland Park the outgoing South African regime ensured that the Old Location would forever be no more than an image existent only in ever-failing memory and without binding to the physical world. (Gewald forthcoming)

Buildings, streets and other obvious traces of the Location have been removed from the place so systematically that even former inhabitants are no longer able to tell where their houses stood. At first sight, the only traces left of the Old Location are written accounts such as newspaper articles, documents in the archive, the booklet *An Investigation of the Windhoek shooting at the Old Location on 10 December 1959*, two books about Katutura (Pendleton 1974 and 1994), and a few articles addressing the events of 1959.⁴⁶ Some photographs from the archive are published in the booklet and in the book *The Colonising Camera* (Hartmann, Silvester & Hayes 1998). These documents seem poor compared with the Museum in Cape Town dedicated to District Six, a neighbourhood comparable to the Old Location which was demolished between 1966 and 1972.

Unlike in Cape Town, where the District Six Museum was established in 1994, in Windhoek there is no visible monument fostering the public memory of the Old Location. The absence of a physical monument for the event of the "Windhoek Shooting" in the urban landscape of Windhoek, however, should not be interpreted as a sign that the events are completely neglected by official institutions. Since independence, the "Windhoek Shooting" has become part of the institutionalised Namibian memory, which is a memory that re-interprets

⁴⁵ Although the resistance and the "Windhoek Shooting" took place in 1959, it took the town government another ten years until finally the last houses were destroyed and all the former inhabitants were removed to Katutura and other areas of town.

⁴⁶ Pendleton 1974 and 1994, several articles in the Southwest News of the 1960s that was reprinted as "A Glance of Our Africa" (1997) address the issue of the Old Location

colonial history “expressly directed towards the needs of the present” (Premesh Lalu 2000b: 2). Within the new national memory, commemorations may be seen as constituted with the aim to claim and recast the past so as to contribute to the national politics of the present. On December 10th of every year, an official commemoration ceremony recalls the victims of colonial violence as heroes of resistance. By means of carving out a single event of resistance (the “Windhoek Shooting”) and privileging one interpretation of this event, a patriotic master narrative is created in which the heroes of this episode of resistance are remembered alongside the heroes of the war for independence.⁴⁷

The “Windhoek Shooting”, which is only one part of the long history of the Old Location, thus became a crucial event within Namibian history. Gewalt explains this as follows:

The current Namibian government has a strong interest in history, albeit a specific account of history. It is an officially sanctioned history of heroes and struggle, which includes those killed in the Old Location, but not the Old Location itself (Gewald forthcoming).

Within this new production of history under the conditions of the present, the people killed in 1959 become heroes and, therefore, elements of the repository of history that concentrates on the heroic aspects of anti-colonial struggle. This process of re-articulation involves a contradiction described by the historian Premesh Lalu as a double-bind:

The paradox for nationalist commentary seems to be the following: to describe those who died as a result of conquest and colonisation as victims would refute their agency and confer supremacy on those who committed acts of violence, while claiming them as heroic would substantially minimise the possibility of mobilising their fates as a measure of colonial violence and brutality. (2000: 11)

As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has shown with regard to sites that produce national heritage, the creation of master narratives is intrinsically linked to effects of omission, since conflicting versions and the polyvocality of memory have to be eliminated.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ For a critical approach to the politics of producing heritage and heroic monuments in Namibia, see Gewalt’s forthcoming article (fall 2005) about the Old Location.

⁴⁸ She describes this process of creating a master narrative of immigration and the American Dream in her analysis of the Ellis Island heritage-site (1998: 177-187).

In the Namibian case, the strongly party-politically informed institutionalization of memory decided to cultivate what I understand as a seductive inversion: creating heroes and a heroic resistance where some Namibians still remember a brutal killing of unarmed victims.⁴⁹ Hence, although the official interpretation of the event as a crucial element of the struggle for independence creates a foundation for post-colonial identification, it simultaneously closes off more fluid, potentially controversial, conversational forms of re-interpreting colonial history.

Even though the people killed in the event of the Windhoek shooting are heroes now, this official memory does not include life in the Old Location, the memory of an era of communal experience in a place where apartheid did not completely determine people's way of living together and where the unaccepted boundaries of racial segregation were crossed. Distinguishing what deserves to be remembered and how, and appropriating the site and event of history, the institutionalised act of commemoration obscures conflicting versions of history as well as other forms and functions of memory. As Nora Shimming-Chase, one of the witnesses to the shooting, remarked in an interview:

What has been a unifying memory is not like this anymore. It is now party-politically stained, so that from my point of view the memory of these people and what they have sacrificed – their lives - for a “One Nation, One Namibia ” does not exist any more”.⁵⁰

Although I acknowledge, on the one hand, the absence of an official monument for the community that was destroyed, and, on the other, the appropriation of public history for party-political purposes, I do not wish to call this a case of amnesia. Public memory, not only of the escalation of violence in 1959, but also of life in the Old Location, does exist.

If the notion of “monument” is still related to the Latin verb “*monere*” – to remember, to recall, but also to mourn and to warn – then let me propose somewhat provocatively that there *is*

⁴⁹ To a question about the situation in the Old Location after the shooting, Nora Shimming-Chase, who lived there at the time, replied: “Unheimlich viel Trauer, Angst, die meisten Leute hatten einen Ausdruck im gesicht von totaler Verwirrung. Die habe das einfach nicht kapiert, es war das erste Mal dass tatsaechlich auf Leute geschossen wurde!“ [An incredible amount of sadness, fear, most of the people bore an expression of complete confusion on their faces. They simply could not understand it, it was the first time that people were actually shot at!] (unpublished interview with Nora Shimming-Chase, conducted by Oliver Diepes in 2000).

⁵⁰ From an interview with Nora Shimming-Chase by Oliver Diepes in 2000, originally in German: “Das was früher eine einigende Erinnerung war ist jetzt nicht mehr so. Das ist jetzt parteipolitisch befleckt, so dass meines Erachtens die Erinnerung an diese Leute und das was sie geopfert haben - ihr Leben – für ein One Namibia, One Nation, nicht mehr da ist.“ Nora Shimming-Chase left Namibia in 1962, when her passport was withdrawn because of her political activities. She served as Namibian Ambassador to Germany in the 1990s.

such a monument in the form of an *omutandu*, a praise poem for the Old Location. I understand this *omutandu* as a form of articulation and memorialization that, although it lacks the permanence of concrete materiality, could serve and be seen as a memorial: it is a persistent, collective creation that spoke back to the regime in an unexpected, different mode and at the same time mourned those who died in the violent event of 1959. The praise poem (re-)constructed the Old Location *post mortem*, as a social space and landscape, that is, as a cultural construction that negotiates identities. Creating a collective social space as an alternative to the politics of racial segregation, the *omutandu* is a powerful articulation of dissent directed against the (at that time recent) colonial politics of racial division, violent containment, and epistemic violence.

With my writing about the Old Location I have to bridge a gap, a distance in space and time, since neither the place nor the community of the location exist in the present. The Old Location itself seems to have faded into a mythical distance, kept alive by the polyphonic voices, if only a few, that are able or willing to recall. If the policy of apartheid was the force that caused the Old Location to disappear from the surface of Windhoek, it is the resistance of its former inhabitants that led to the survival of the memory of the community and its place. What Ulf Hannerz writes about Sophiatown in South Africa is to some extent also true for the Old Location:

The mythical community is still there, claiming its place, it would seem, in the useful past of the South African future. (1997: 169)

The Old Location was much smaller and certainly less famous than Sophiatown. Yet, recalling its community is a useful act of articulation in order to claim an urban past before and beyond the complete implementation of a controlled space.

Today, as Isabel Hoving suggests, an articulation such as the praise poem can be read with respect to its capacity to represent insights into a specific interrelation of space and identity, that is, as a transformation of space by means of re-creating and narrating a specific historical and social landscape in its historically identifiable situation (1999: 218). To gain these insights into the narrative and discursive constructions of Herero landscape, which spoke out against the carceral qualities of the colonial space, requires an understanding of the Herero production of landscape as grounded in the social world of this period. The power relations that constantly acted upon the experiences of the Herero communities and their cultural domains, and with which the narrative

constructions of landscape conflicted, demonstrate how Herero productions of social space were by no means frozen traditions, or incapable of reacting to social change.

In performing and remembering the *omutandu* for the Old Location, its Otjiherero-speaking inhabitants created and preserved an urban landscape. They accomplished the inscription of a specific memorable shape, meaning and history onto a place and a community that was irretrievably lost, made to disappear without leaving any visible traces on the surface of the colonial city-scape. Whereas both the Old Location and the conditions of life under apartheid seem to have disappeared, the *omutandu* survives as a narrated landscape. This landscape, as we will see later in this chapter is at once narratively linked to the cruelty of oppression, as a place “where we were hated” and “where the atrocities took place”, but also the space where people lived together, stubbornly ignoring racial categories.

In order to analyze what I understand as acts of performative resistance, I relate my analysis of the Herero production of social space in this chapter to the coercive space of the colony as produced by means of the legal structure, the oppressive power of the state, and the racist discourses that created natives. Although both the Herero and the colonial constructions of space appear to lie in the (not so distant) past of colonial oppression in Namibia, this is only true in terms of chronological linearity. “The postcolonial is at once a presence and an absence”, writes Richard Werbner (1996: 4). For the negotiations of identity among different communities in Namibia and for the cultural politics of the construction of public history in the present, colonial experience is far from absent in present-day Namibia. Specifically, in the politicized realm of the OvaHerero’s discourses about their identity today, the colonial past has the status of a poignant and at the same time productive presence: speaking about the colonial and pre-colonial past opens a platform to negotiate present and past identities.

Fantasms-to-be-made-real

What I seek to add here, modestly, is the proposition that it was the deployment of this language of the law, its ascent to hegemonic authority, that held colonial states together, even at their most disarticulated, least coherent, most impotent; that afforded them a means to make facts appear out of phantasm, illocutionary force out of illusion, concrete realities out of often fragile fictions. (John Comaroff 2001: 60)

Exploring the voices of what I understand as forms of performative resistance, I seek come to terms with the polyphonic construction of an urban landscape, a collective past, the fusion of voices and poetic imaginations that created a social space, but also a riposte against the epistemic violence of apartheid, although not against this alone. Dealing with practices of performative resistance – that is, with the *omutandu* and the practice of naming under the “wrong” circumstances – it is crucial to consider the contents that were rejected, that against which both signifying practices had to speak in the attempt to retrieve and construct a community that refused to consist of discrete colonial subjects. The poetics of antiphony, which I described in chapter two, provided a form to contradict the language of colonial coercion.

I regard these performative speech acts on the part of the Herero as speaking and acting against a language of subjection and oppression; a language that never consisted of words alone, since physical violence against Africans was an essential means of oppression during the colonial regime. Nevertheless, systematic violence that seeks to realize a hierarchy of races and implement a coercive order is itself articulate in that it expresses the will to subjugate. Violence, oppression, and the will to form colonial subjects are strange supplements to the understanding of the poetics of naming and a poem. But as with other *omitandu* we need these supplements to come to an understanding of what these voices were saying, because the voices spoke against forms of subjection and oppression: against what Comaroff calls the “illocutionary force out of illusion” from the side of the colonial authorities. In the following, I will briefly depict the main tropes that were part of the colonial strategy to create colonial subjects, realize a hierarchy of races, and instrumentalize the segmented space. These tropes reappear within the speech acts of the Herero, which will be analyzed later in this chapter; there, they are identified as mechanisms of subjection and racist discourses.

The will to implement an order onto the potentially uncertain space of the colony, especially in the urban region, which was perceived as a contact zone between the African and the European population, is exposed most evocatively in the colonial obsession with establishing legislative control over the space and its inhabitants: under South African rule, no less than 96 official acts that aimed to regulate the life and work of Africans in the urban areas were issued by the authorities (Pendleton 1994: 30). Discourses about the idleness of Africans as a social plague, the immorality of vagrancy, and ideas of degeneration in conjuncture with the metaphor of contagion, conspired to build a conceptual framework for the colonial attempt to regulate what

was perceived as an uncivilised population. This process of regulation was, in the first place, an effort to create colonial subjects.⁵¹

The actual realization of subjection and subjectification during colonial times is difficult to evaluate. How do we account for the obscenity of the will to synchronically racialize, subjugate and thereby produce the colonial subject under apartheid? Any attempt to read the colonial past through the language of law and through the attempts of the colonial regime to map and regulate the territory and its inhabitants, appears as what Comaroff describes as setting out to “know the beast by its effects” (2001: 38). But, however effective or limited the legal, discursive and physical coercion was in its attempt to create and legitimate a population of discrete colonial subjects living in a compartmentalized space, the effects of this attempt were real and managed to create a nightmare of coercion and surveillance based on the colonial dream of perfect separation. Thus, we have to deal with these effects within the language of the law and its realization if we are to understand that against which performative resistance spoke in order to transgress and reject both the process and the product of the colonial social space.

Contextualizing the space-time world of South West Africa, that is, the social conditions under which and against which the performative practices spoke, I touch upon the fundamental paradox of the colonial endeavor: while speaking about transforming “natives” into citizens according to the rhetoric of progress and the civilizing mission, the colonial laws and discourses defined, essentialized, and thereby cemented racial difference. These were the two contradictory aspects of the fabrication of colonial subjects: “the making of the serialised, modernist citizen” and the fashioning of the “ethnicised native” (Comaroff 2001: 46).

My discussion of the fabric of coercion experienced by the African communities of the colony will not include all the operational details of the apparatus of colonial control or a full chronology of the process of colonization. Instead, I isolate some of the central tropes and mechanisms vital for the codification of the South West African colonial “native politics”. The definition, individuation, and identification of the so-called “native” constituted the basic steps towards the creation of colonial subjects and the establishment of a politics of containment; that

⁵¹ In *Time and the Other* (1983) Johannes Fabian has shown how social evolutionists spatialised time through projecting the axis of time onto the globe, mapping the global space in terms of “natural” social difference, understood as expressions of different evolutionary periods. On this axis Africa was placed into a distant past, its cultures frozen in an anachronistic, a-historical space, “inhabited by cannibals, dervishes and witch doctors, abandoned in pre-history at the precise moment before the Weltgeist (the cunning agent of reason) manifested itself in history” (McClintock 1995: 41). According to these conceptualisations, for the colonisers Africa was not only a “vast empty space”, a territory to be exploited and mapped, but also a space of permanent crisis. The imperial project took place in a part of the world that was imagined on the evolutionary axis as backward in time, situated in the uncivilised, and therefore perilous, past.

is, the forced insertion of the African population into a system of racial categories and socio-spatial territories.

The locations

African settlements existed in the area of Windhoek before colonial occupation. The origin of the term “location” as describing an area where Africans lived, which was coined after the German colonial occupation, entails the notion of the constitution of separation. “Location” - *lokasie* in Afrikaans and *Nukhoegab* (black people’s place) in Nama - marks a turning point in the history of African settlements in the area. The term refers to separate places “in which the African population lived apart from the whites the term describes the situation during the colonial occupation” (Pendleton 1994: 12). For these African settlements, “location” articulates the formation and identification of a difference, not only between people of different skin colors, but also in terms of living conditions. Thus, it is only after the colonial encounter that this expression makes sense, since it names the distinction between the settlements of the black and the white populations of Windhoek and other urban areas. In this manner, the term “location” signifies the beginning of a new era of life under the conditions of colonial occupation, since the dwelling places of Africans in pre-colonial times would not have been referred to as locations.

Locations of black people, separated from whites, had existed since the German troops established their fort in Windhoek, though in an unorganised, unregulated way. “Though there are reports of a separate African location in the 1890s, enforced segregation on the basis of race only came about during the course of the German-Herero war” (Gewald forthcoming).⁵²

The history of the African settlements in Windhoek appears to be a history of displacements, a process of increasing “control over space and time” of the African population (Gordon 1998: 55). The process of urban planning and the enforced social separation of the white and the black population developed in different steps that can be analyzed as a route towards the increasing execution of control over the African population of Windhoek and their containment into townships: an ever-increasing distance between the black population and the center of town and an ever-stronger politics of racial separation and hierarchization within the African community.

⁵² Although proclamations that sought to organize racial segregation were already issued during the war, they were not wholly effective. However, the proclamations from before and during the war can be seen as preceding the policies established in 1907.

Part of the development towards complete control consisted of the tightening of the organization inside the townships, which meant that control was expanded from simply separating black and white settlements towards the regulation of life within the black locations. Whereas the locations were moved, in stages, to sites further and further from town, governmental control penetrated the inside of the Location. The surveillance carried out inside and outside the locations involved forced medical examinations of the women, registration, pass laws, the vagrancy proclamations, nightly curfews, police controls, an official anthropological examination according to the relations between the “races” followed by an official report, and so forth.

It has not been possible to ascertain the exact time the Main Location in Windhoek was established.⁵³ The authors of the “Investigation” state that the earliest documentation of the Old Location indicates that the settlement already existed in 1905. Yet, in the memory of the African population the series of removals seems to play a more important role than the origin of the location (Jafta et al 1995). Sondagh Kanguuechi says in an interview that by the time the Old Location was finally abolished, African people had already been forcefully moved five times:

First the blacks resided at a spot where the Grand Hotel today stands. One of the people who lived there is Christoph Tjiseta, amongst others. After that the second place where blacks resided, was the old non-white hospital, which today is where the railway houses stand along the Okahandja road. Thirdly, the blacks were moved to the place where we find the Altersheim in Church street. Fourthly, when the railway line was built to Keetmanshoop, most of the people were moved to the famous Old Location, with approximately one quarter of them still living in Klein Windhoek opposite the Roman Catholic Church. ...Out of the hopelessness and dismay the two aforementioned councillors named the township Katutura because we had no permanent habitation since we were pushed around like furniture every now and then. (quoted in Pendleton 1994: 18-19)

According to this account, the removal of the population from the Old Location was the fifth displacement in the history of urban African settlements. Since the first movements took place in 1912, this account not only speaks for the personal memories of Sondagh Kanguuechi. Instead, it

⁵³ The beginning of what later became the Old Location cannot be dated. The first evidence of the settlement dates back to 1905. The first official re-moving of Africans to the Old Location away from other, more unregulated locations, is mentioned in Wagner’s report for 1912.

becomes clear that members of the community took with them the memories of the different locations they were forced to leave each time they had to move on.

Being recalled and passed on as oral history from one generation to the next, the experiences of forced removals not only became part of a chronology of the urban communities. Rather, more actively, the labor of keeping alive and distributing the memory of the forced removals produced a public history of the African urban population that focuses on serial displacement. Seen in this light, it becomes clear that public history, as a specific cultural articulation, served as a vehicle for the enunciation of the community's experience in the urban space. An enunciation that made use of the available oral genres and practices. The performative aspect of telling and retelling countered the silencing force of censorship through speech acts, generating instead an alternative sphere of public speech. As McClintock writes: "Oral history is a refusal of the dismemberment of history, a laborious life-giver. It is a device against oblivion, a strategy of survival" (1995: 317). In this case, oral history produced a public history of forced removals and kept it in circulation. Hence, the iterative performance of telling these stories created a cultural archive, which, as Kanguuehi's statement shows, extends the means of personal memory.

I regard the acts of retelling the events of forced removals as part of the resistance against the hostile and ignorant discourses of apartheid, particularly in the way that these acts placed the experience of the inhabitants of the various locations at the center of a history that kept circulating. Crucial elements of this history, which black Namibians refuse to forget, are the seriality of forced removals and life under the conditions of a colonial paradox. Vagrancy, or what counted as vagrancy, was seen as a crime by the colonial authorities. At the same time, African people were time and again forced to leave the places where they had settled. Under these conditions, every dwelling place was insecure and people lived under a constant threat of being "moved around like furniture" whenever the administration decided to do so.

The forced removals in the urban area of which Kanguuehi speaks, might not have occurred in an exact chronological order as serial removals of one single community, but as events that overlapped in time and space. However, what becomes clear is that people sometimes experienced several removals in their lifetime. Nora Shimming-Chase tells in an interview how her parents had already been forcefully moved before, and then again when the Old Location was finally abolished and they had to move to Katutura. She goes on to say: "People used to say that as soon as the trees that we planted had grown high and beautiful, we were sent away again."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Interview with Nora Shimming-Chase 2000.

The separation of the African population, who had to live in areas designed for “natives” were, as I said above, not the only measures in the colonial attempt to accomplish the control over and the creation of colonial subjects.

“To carry passes at all times....”

Pass laws, which were already issued under after the war in 1907, under German rule, recorded and produced racial difference.⁵⁵ According to these laws, all Africans had to be registered and carry passes that were to be shown on demand to the police or any white person. With these passes it became possible to ascertain at all times whether an African person had left his or her district or reserve without permission. In this way, what officially counted as the identity of Africans was atomized, disconnected from their own social networks. Linking the person either to the reserves, the locations, or his or her working place as a registered “home”, the pass mark created a structure of belonging that had little or nothing in common with the identificatory landscape and social ties African people may have constructed themselves. The mechanisms of regular pass control were particularly tight within the urban areas, which were considered dangerous contact zones between the races.

Together with the vagrancy proclamation, which the historian Robert Gordon describes as “a key carceral piece of colonial legislation” (1998: 52), the pass laws allowed for rigorous scheme of surveillance.⁵⁶ Gordon suggests that the power of the vagrancy proclamation lay

⁵⁵ Under South African rule, the pass laws attempted to “ make provision for better control of the natives in urban areas in the interests of the natives as well as the Europeans. Experience has shown that there is a strong tendency for natives, both men and women, to drift into urban locations where in both cases they neither want to work nor seek employment. As they simply loaf and do not earn money honestly, they resort to illicit liquor selling, prostitution, gambling and other means to obtain it and generally degenerate. Under the new laws a proper system of registration is provided for and the administration will be able to exercise effective control and keep urban locations free of loafers” (South Africa, Annual Report 1924 paragraph 98, 1925 paragraph 100, cited in Gordon 71). Whereas under German colonial rule, every native, women and men older than 7 years were to carry a pass, under South African rule, women were excluded from the regulation and thus from the legal definition of being native. At the same time women were not informed about the their possibility to travel without such passes.

⁵⁶ He rightly argues that in earlier studies the effects of these laws, considered as mere tools to promote labour supply, were underestimated. The argumentation that supported the vagrancy proclamation was that it “provides for the suppression of idleness and trespass. Natives are allowed to select their own masters, and strict instructions have been issued forcing natives to take service with particular masters against their will. When a native is dilatory in finding employment, an employer may be indicated, and if he refuses to engage himself, he may be prosecuted under the Vagrancy Proclamation. Before sentencing natives under the vagrancy laws, magistrates are required to give the offenders an opportunity of taking employment in preference to undergoing imprisonment. Certificates of exemption from labour may be granted to natives having visible means of support, such as the possession of stock. Persons unfitted for labour by reason of old age are ipso facto exempted persons” (Union of South Africa, Official Yearbook of South Africa, Pretoria 1948, p. 1170, quoted in Gordon:

precisely in the vagueness of its legal definition of vagrancy. According to the proclamation, vagrancy could be almost anything: “wandering over any farm, being in, loitering near any dwelling, house, shop, store, stable, garden, vineyard, kraal, or any other enclosed place” (74). In short, vagrancy was seen as any kind of activity that was not labor or could otherwise be identified by the white population. By means of the vagrancy proclamation, forms of mobility that were crucial for the constitution and continuity of Ovaherero social identity were criminalized. In addition to the unclear definition of vagrancy, the proclamation’s extension of control produced a system of systematic and sustained terror, since vagrancy could be defined by any white settler and invariably led to the punishment of the African person accused. In this way, what counted as vagrancy, anything connected to idleness and nomadism, was seen as a problem.⁵⁷

Mobility, often described as “nomadism”, had been understood since the late 19th century not as an economic adaptation to the environment in the form of pastoralism, but as a state of mind that endangered the coherence and stability of European civilization.⁵⁸ As a state of mind, nomadism, or what was seen as such, was contagious and was considered a barrier to the colonial will to contain all inhabitants of the colony, whites and blacks, in their proper places.⁵⁹ This means that nomadism challenged civilization, which was seen as equivalent to sedentariness and, in conjunction with wage labor, as a state of human evolution that had overcome pastoralism. Noyes writes that “nomadism became another word for resistance to forced sedentarisation and

52). But, as Gordon rightly contends, this argumentation discusses only one element of the benefits the colonial administration sought to achieve with these laws; thus the argumentation conceals the underlying will for control.

⁵⁷ In 1920s Namibia, idleness and vagrancy were perceived as a threat to the morale and progress of the colony, and as a danger to the white population. For the colonisers, work was a fundamental requirement to keep the colonial economy going. The discourses constructed around idleness condemned it as degeneration, whereas work, defined as wage labour, was seen as a means, if not the only one, to ensure the moral behaviour and civilisation of the so-called “natives”: “Civilisation will never be developed on idleness (...) left to himself, he [“the native”] will simply sit in the sun and dream about women and cattle. (...) Work brings him in contact with civilisation and therefore necessarily assists the process of civilising him” (S.A. Annual Report 1926, p.98 cited in Gordon 1998: 71). The 19th-century discourses on idleness were neither descriptively accurate of the work of Africans, nor new. Already in the 16th century in the Cape Colony, Dutch and English settlers had introduced these discourses, which were virulent in Europe (Foucault 1967). What was seen as the idleness of the so-called “Hottentots” in the Cape Colony was not only an “anthropological scandal” for the colonisers, as Coetzee (1988: 22) remarks, but was also perceived as a sign of the underdevelopment of the “natives”. Again, the immorality of the “natives” was regarded as contagious, since it could lead to the discovery of idleness by the settlers themselves, which would culminate in an all-embracing moral decay (Coetzee 1988: 252).

⁵⁸ Noyes describes the concept of “nomadism” as a way to understand the other and the self in colonial discourses: “In 19th-century Germany, ‘nomadism’ was an epithet frequently applied with little distinction to pastoralist, hunter-gatherer and semi-agriculturalist societies. It was used as a description not only of actual indigenous social organisations or economies, but also of a propensity to wander, and inconsistency and hence an obstacle to civilisation” (2000: 1).

⁵⁹ Concern about the mobility of white trekkers or “poor whites” was caused by their way of life, which undermined the difference between “white and black” and challenged racial boundaries and civilisation defined as sedentariness (Silvester, Hayes & Wallace 1998: 20).

the landscape of the nomad became a space where he could escape from the confinement and disappear“ (2000: 5).

Hence, what was characterized as nomadism defined the potentialities of what Reynolds and Fitzpatrick term a “transversal space” (72), an alternative production of territory by means of social action. In terms of the social hierarchy of the colony, mobility endangered containment in the sense that it corrupted the spatial as well as the social hierarchy with its assumed ability to blur the assumed stasis of the “tribe” (see chapter six).⁶⁰ Labor and sedentariness, perceived as ways to civilize and discipline the “natives”, were the fundamental elements of the implementation of colonial control. The discourse about the “idleness of the native” (Coetzee 1988: 22) provided a tool to force the African population into the labor economy of the colony. This was justified by referring to the necessity of sanctioning moral discipline for the benefits of civilization. Thus, the attempt to coerce Africans into sedentariness was organized by means of a spatial pattern of reserves and locations for Africans, the vagrancy proclamation, and the issuing of the pass laws that constrained unobserved, unregistered movements.

The colonial authority’s attempt to constrain mobility, not only in the spatial but also in the social sense, may be seen as a model that differed irreconcilably from Herero constructions of social identity. Apart from economic patterns that were linked to mobility in terms of networks and social interdependence, Herero identity was inevitably connected to social relations. Identity as a social construction was by no means static, although to a certain extent determined by genealogical status and gender. Instead, it was built up over the course of a lifetime, constituted through experience, social relations and alliances:

Nobody existed or could be known except in relation and with reference to, even as part of a wide array of significant others; and second, the identity of each and everyone was forged, culminatively, by an infinite ongoing series of practical activities. (Jean and John Comaroff 2001: 268)

Although Jean and John Comaroff are writing about South African Tswana concepts of identity, I quote this passage here because I find it describes precisely the concept of identity as constituted, or rather achieved, by means of social relations within the Herero communities. This

⁶⁰ Detribalisation was feared to be the result of the permanent urbanisation of Africans. Wallace states that during the 1930s, the colonial authorities became increasingly alarmed about “the permanent urbanisation of Africans and their consequent perceived loss of connections to ‘tribal’ culture and authority (...) and that this was leading to a loss of control over Africans” (1998b: 135).

is demonstrated by the life histories of important men, who over their lifetime acquired influence through alliances, constituting their social status and rank through “wealth in people”. In this way, they became “significant others” for the people who referred to them, as we will see later in this chapter.

With regard to the essential meaning of mobility for the Herero communities, the severe constraints the pass laws, in conjunction with the vagrancy proclamation, placed on these communities becomes clear: in addition to the coercive grid of reserves and locations, as well as the Herero’s “moral treatment” consisting of their forced incorporation into the labor relations of the colonial economy, these laws restricted mobility and defined identity. By means of these laws, the disciplinary order was extended beyond the striving for a static spatial structure and directed immediately towards the relations and movements of people in space and time.

Writing about the logics of colonial mapping, Harry Garuba suggests that the mobility of the African population had to be restricted in order to achieve what he describes as “mimetic accuracy” (2002: 4) within an initially imagined cartography of race⁶¹. This means that the socio-spatial pattern of containment mirrored and produced the ideological blueprint of a defined social separation of races. Identification, forced sedentarisation, and the separation of the African population - in other words, the implementation of difference - was to be realized within a restrictive spatial pattern.

Again, we are dealing with Lefebvre’s notion of a space that “speaks”, and again, it does not tell all (1991: 142). Instead, what we can read through the social organization of the colonial space is the will for separation: the organization of contained subjects was never complete. The African population stayed mobile within the restricted possibilities of the coercive space, thus endangering the colonial aim of neat separation. But if, as Lefebvre writes, the process of making a social space cannot be separated from the product itself, and both act upon its inhabitants (see chapter one), even in the case of the forever incomplete realization of the colonial phantasm of perfect separation we are dealing with discursive and spatial practices that speak. And so do social figures like race and contagion, which operated as interconnected ideological concepts within the politics of separation.

Race, as the principal concept used to establish difference, comprised the core of what Garuba terms the will to contain the colonized subject: “to control the subject, she first had to be contained, not only in terms of physical containment within subject territories – colonies,

⁶¹ I thank Harry Garuba for the permission to quote from his paper “Mapping the Land/Body/Subject: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies in African Narrative” presented at the conference “Versions and Subversions” in Berlin 2002

protectorates, etc. – but also contained in “tribes”, territoriality demarcated, defined and culturally described” (2002: 1). The ideology of race, justified by alleged biological differences and operating as a mechanism to codify social hierarchies, necessitated separation and distance between the races. This distance was incomplete within the urban sphere of Namibia before the 1960s. Although the so-called black locations were already separated from the areas where white settlers lived, the African population of Windhoek still lived in the vicinity of the center.

One reason for this was the need to secure a labor supply for the urban areas, which made it impossible for the colonial administration to avoid the presence of Africans in the towns. On the other hand, according to the rhetoric of racial difference, the towns, seen as a zone of intense interracial contact, were regarded as spaces of potential danger to the health, security, and racial purity of the white population. Colonial discourses in Namibia thus built “a shifting web of ideas which meshed together the perceived necessity to secure labor with that to control ‘morality’, infectious disease and space in the urban context” (Wallace 1998a: 83). These discourses preceded and interacted with the laws that aimed to achieve full control over the urban space.

In addition to the rhetoric of race, the notion of contagion compelled what the historian Jeremy Silvester calls a “space of avoidance”, a deliberately planned “*cordon sanitaire*” that sought to produce a gap between the inhabited spaces in order to naturalize the distance between the different racial communities (1998: 141). From the beginning of colonial occupation, on the part of the colonizers, race relations in the urban areas were seen and dealt with within the “imagery of infection and epidemic disease” (Swanson 1977: 387). The ideas of infectious disease as a societal metaphor created an ideological fundament for the politics of segregation (387).⁶² Anne McClintock writes:

Through sexual contact with women of colour European men “contracted” not only disease but debased sentiments, immoral proclivities and extreme susceptibility to decivilized states. (McClintock 1995: 48)

What the figure of contagion marks, in short, is the bundled fear of degeneration through (not only) sexual contact with the natives. Both terms, contagion and degeneration as a consequence of contact, may be seen as metaphors for the disorder that endangered what was understood as

⁶² Swanson describes this phenomenon for South Africa. It holds true also for Namibia, not only under South African rule, but already under German occupation. For an example of the medical discourses and measures, see Eckart 1994: 268.

the social health of the colonial society: the “natural” hierarchy of race. With a rhetoric that included metaphors of health, contagion and the like, this social discourse was naturalized, obscuring the characteristics of its hierarchical construction and placing it in the realm of the natural, that is, beyond moral critique.⁶³

Moreover, metaphors of disease, generally qualifying whatever was seen as a threat to the implementation of order, were widespread. Together, these metaphors formed a conceptual web that embraced all forms of disorder and produced an image of a hierarchical social order as the image of social health. Thus, not only contact between Europeans and Africans, but the sheer presence of Africans in the town, “especially as unemployed and casual labor and thereby not readily subject of control of the master and servant relations was labelled the social pest, spreading like an epidemic, undermining all sense of security” (Swanson 1977: 391).⁶⁴

Hence, in accordance with the perverse logic of the apartheid ideology, the Old Location, as a settlement of Africans close to the center of town, *was* the disease. As a letter to the secretary-general of the United Nations suggests, from the side of African leaders the sanitation argument was understood as precisely the euphemism it was:

The new location (Katutura) was established so as to separate the Africans from the Europeans in accordance with the apartheid ideology. Although the Africans live separate from the Europeans today, their residential area is regarded to be too close to the European residential area. (Jafta et al 1995: 57)⁶⁵

“Underlying disciplinary projects”, writes Foucault, “the image of the plague stands for all forms of disorder” (1991: 199). Against the social plague, which comprises not only the mixture of races but all social phenomena that transgress the space of master-and-servant relations and which

⁶³ See also the seminal work of Stallybrass and White, in which the authors note how in 19th century London the slums were regarded as breeding places of filth and disease that emitted prostitutes and thieves, appearing as infectious in the imagery of social contagion (1985).

⁶⁴ Relations between whites and blacks in the colony were legally cemented through the Masters and Servants Proclamation, issued in 1920 (preceded by the German “Gesindeverordnung” from 1907). This proclamation was a key element for the organisation of the colonial encounter. It made sure to “penalise workers for withholding full effort, let alone striking, and its penalties included incarceration and corporal punishment which could be imposed for ‘desertion’, ‘unauthorised absence from work’, disobedience and allowed white farmers to punish ‘their’ workers” (Gordon 1998: 55). As a strict regulation of the social sphere, designed to make any other experiences or forms of “interracial” contact extremely difficult, the proclamation led to a deformation of social relations and defined a closed social space, which again amounted to a form of containment, intended to limit the dangerous space of interracial contact.

⁶⁵ This letter was sent to the United Nations by Hosea Kutako (at that time Herero Chief), Samuel Witbooy, Sam Nujoma (at that time president of the Ovamboland Peoples Organisation), and Uatja Kaukwetu (Vice President of the South West Africa National Union) on December 29, 1959.

would therefore lead to the corruption of the intended static order, only strict separation seemed an adequate remedy. It was therefore the colonial authorities' fear of social crisis within the perilous zone of interracial contact that justified the politics of separation. Hence, not only the space had to be "tamed and named" (Silvester 1998b: 138), but the colonizers' bodies and their community as a whole had to be safeguarded against "being infected" by the African population in the shared space of towns. According to ideas of white superiority, so-called interracial relations were perceived as an undesirable pathology that endangered not only the Darwinist moral of the colonial society but threatened to blur the racial boundaries essential to the colonial hierarchy. Statements by the colonial authorities demonstrate these concerns: "It has long been a scientific fact that this is undesirable - on the one hand, in order to maintain the repute of the white race, and, on the other hand, to avoid half-breeds."⁶⁶ Seen from this angle, the colonial politics of separation, pursued by means of the law and through spatial organization, was an ongoing process of ever more complex definitions, regulations, boundaries, borders and distances.

In the case of the Old Location, one of the main arguments for the removal of the African population from there to Katutura was to improve hygiene conditions. The government "considered the Old Location a 'shanty town' and a breeding place of disease" (Pendleton 1974: 28). During the negotiations between the government and the spokesmen of the Old Location about the removal, Uatja Kaukwetu told the Magistrate:

The authorities have the wrong idea, if they think we don't know what is good for us. We don't believe that anybody's life can be bettered by building him a better house alone ... We look upon the move as in the spirit of apartheid's policy. (Jafta et al 1995: 56)

As this passage demonstrates, not only the petitioners at the United Nations, but also the community of the Old Location, understood very well that the metaphor of contagion and infectious disease had a social meaning. Not surprisingly, they reacted with stern protest.

The colonial will for separation was further expressed by a series of laws and proclamations that aimed to legalize a social and sexual "*cordon sanitaire*". These laws first defined so-called mixed marriages and later any sexual contact between Africans and white settlers as

⁶⁶ Akten des Kaiserlichen Gouvernements, cited in Noyes 1992: 273.

illegal.⁶⁷ In this way, the politics of containment sought to implement partitioned social spheres. Within the urban area, this politics of avoidance reached its zenith with the removal of the population of the Old Location to Katutura in accordance with the Urban Areas Act. “Space speaks”, and, as the geographer Derek Gregory writes, “the production of space is not an incidental by-product of life but a moment intrinsic to its conduct and constitution” (cited in Kaplan 1999: 155).

The discursive and legal constructions that I have depicted here merely give an overview of the socio-political climate which led to the escalation of violence during the 1959 battle around the forced removal of the Old Location’s population. Seeking to give a compressed outline of the process of increasing control and oppression, I did not present a full chronology of the process of legalizing difference and distance. Although this may read as the narration of the implementation of a space of all-encompassing control and the production of an internalized order – this is not my intention. First of all, because, as I said in the beginning of the section, we cannot know to what extent the intended subjection of the “native” was ever really accomplished. Second, in view of the fierce protests staged against the forced removal, which intensified the general protest movement against apartheid in Namibia, it is clear that the colonial power was not “capillary”: the power of the colonial state’s disciplinary machinery did not stretch “autonomically and unseen into the very construction of its subjects, into their bodily routines

⁶⁷ Dag Henrichsen writes that the Kaiserliche Bezirksgericht declared the wedlock of a Herero woman with a German man invalid by way of declaring her a “native”, who was therefore not allowed to marry a German. “The native” was defined as “(Eingeborene) sind sämtliche Blutsangehörige eines Naturvolkes, auch die Abkömmlinge von eingeborenen Frauen, die sie von Männern der weissen Rasse empfangen haben, selbst wenn mehrere Geschlechter hindurch nur eine Mischung mit weissen Männern stattgefunden haben sollte” (Henrichson, 2003: 161). Providing a clear definition of the “native”, this verdict already seeks to prevent the blurring of racial categories through the existence of so called “half-breeds”. The Native Laws of 1907 not only prohibited Africans from owning cattle and land, but also proclaimed that government farms could not be sold to white farmers who lived together with “native women”. It is interesting, if particularly horrific, to note that at the very time these laws were passed, the “geneticist” Eugen Fischer was studying the corpses of 17 Nama prisoners of war in the war camp on Shark Island in order to develop his theories of “white racial superiority”. (<<http://www.klausdierks.com/Chronology/65.htm>>). Restrictions on “interracial sexual contact” were designed to hinder interaction between the white and the black population in general. In 1905, under German colonial rule, a proclamation sought to ensure that “unauthorised entry by whites to the native township after dark, as well as unauthorised loitering in the pontocks is prohibited” (Akten des kaiserlichen Gouvernements, cited in Noyes 1992: 272). Any kind of relationship between the races that was not regulated through the “Masters and Servants Proclamation” was considered undesirable and sexual relationships in particular were not only morally detested but condemned as unhealthy (Noyes 1992: 273). Legal marriages between “natives” and whites had already been prohibited under German rule in 1907. In 1934, the colonial regime went so far as to prohibit “illicit carnal intercourse” between the “races” in the Immorality Proclamation: “The Windhoek location superintendent was also alarmed that, without fencing the location sexual intercourse between the European and native cannot be effectively checked... and unfortunately there is abundant evidence of this” (Wallace 1998a: 85).

and the essence of selfhood” (John Comaroff 2001: 45).⁶⁸ Instead, the disciplinary power was identified and actively resisted by the African population. During the battle against the forced removal from the Old Location, Mr. Mbaeva, one of the spokesmen for the Old Location, said:

This apartheid that you are coming here to impose, you are trying to impose on a place that does not belong to you. Do you know that this place belongs to us and to us alone? We are people who are in our own land, and it is not necessary for us to go to another place. We will not condone apartheid. If we are moving to Katutura, we are condoning apartheid.⁶⁹

One response to the destruction of the Old Location consisted of a stronger, more tightly institutionalized resistance against Apartheid in the sphere of political articulation and in the struggle for the liberation of Namibia.⁷⁰ Another form of resistance is contained in what I define as acts of performative resistance, to which I will turn now.

The last two sections of this chapter deal with performative speech acts that deploy the specificity of the language of objection, positioned in a particular mode of constructing identity and landscape as inextricably interwoven. Both the re-inscription of meaning onto the space through acts of naming, and the re-narration of the history of the Old Location in the praise poem account for agency, drawing upon available conventions and repudiating the language of the colonial regime. As alternative constructions of space, they refuse subjection under the coercive space of the colony. Thus, they facilitate fragmentary insights into the specific relation between landscape and identity

⁶⁸ For an insightful critique of the Foucauldian perspective on the disciplinary mechanisms of the colonial state, see John Comaroff (2001) “Reflections on the colonial state, in South Africa and elsewhere: factions, fragments, facts and fictions“.

⁶⁹ Cited in Lau 1985: 23

⁷⁰ In an attempt to crush the beginnings of a resistance movement, prominent community leaders were forced into exile after the Windhoek Shooting. Sam Nujoma, who became the president of Namibia after independence, was imprisoned after the shooting and later forced into exile. Mbaeva was deported to Epukiro and later went into exile. SWANU members were also forced into exile, among them Zedekia Ngavirue. Others were sent by Hosea Kutako (who was at that time the paramount chief of the Herero) to Botswana and some of them were later trained as freedom fighters. Some months after the shooting, at the request of the Herero Chief's Council, it was decided that Sam Nujoma should join Jariretundu Kozonguizi, Mburuma Kerina, and Michael Scott in petitioning the United Nations (<<http://www.klausdierks.com/Chronology/98.htm>>). Elia George Kaiyamo writes that the historical significance of Herero resistance to the forced removal “lies in the fact that it set the stage for a coordinated struggle which was to characterise the political life in the country for the subsequent three decades“ (unpublished BA thesis 1990, Windhoek).

From naming-as-claiming to naming-as-referring

The landscape, that is the named locations in which the narrative events are grounded.
(Haley 1996: 15)

The attempted implementation of complete control left spaces of avoidance and evasion that were beyond the reach of colonial control mechanisms. Reynolds and Fitzpatrick, drawing on de Certeau, refer to these spaces as created by social practice, describing them as a “transversal space”:

It [the transversal space] contains all the possibilities that are precluded or excluded by the practice that the state uses to enclose the subject and reduce him or her to the proper. Transversal territory can be reached by transgressing the boundaries that those boundaries impose. People occupy transversal territory when they defy or surpass the boundaries of their prescribed subjective addresses. (1999: 7)

Although the spatial scheme was the product of an amalgamation of ideology *and* physical force in the colony, a transversal space existed, although very limited, since transgressing the legislative structure of forced separation inevitably led to punishment. Still, both aspects of the space may be regarded as existing simultaneously: the coercive space of colonial control and the elusive space that allowed for escape, resistance, subversion and the creation of alternative landscapes. The practice of naming the streets in the Old Location, thereby creating a social space, is such a productive practice of transgression.

Pendleton writes that in the Old Location Herero people named the sections where they lived after important people of their community and after places that were inhabited by OvaHerero. In 1968, when he visited the Old Location shortly before its final abolishment, people were able to tell him the Otjiherero names of the sections that were identified in this way. He could find 12 section names in Otjiherero that demonstrated people’s practice of naming places after persons and places crucial to the community. Pendleton considers the section names as “no longer of much significance” (1994: 13), providing the somewhat odd explanation that the places after which the sections were named had been lost after the war. However, the enduring efficacy of the practice of naming is shown in Jackson Kaujeua’s autobiography from 1994,

written nearly 30 years after the abolition of the Old Location, in which he addresses the sections by their names in Otjiherero.

I went back to our compartment and started to think of those cannons I had seen patrolling the dusty streets of the Old Location in the aftermath of the 1959 uprising. They would pass the main street, close to the *Ojikaoko* section and move on to the *Ojitoto* section. (1994: 84)

Mentioning the section names when he recalls events in the Old Location, Kaujeua maps the Old Location according to places he had known since his childhood by their Otjiherero names. Thus, whereas the main street is recalled without a name, the sections are characterized by names that are connected to other areas inhabited by Ovaherero. Referring to the streets by their names in Otjiherero, Jackson Kaujeua remembers them according to a poetics of relation, one that de-connects the places from the colonial pattern of a numbered space and recalls them as significant through specific names linked to ancestral connections.

For an understanding of the textualization of space by means of the practice of naming, it is necessary to trace how a “de-colonization of the mind entails a spatial logic of connection and separation” (Peter Hitchcock 2003: 34). The de-colonization of Namibia did not start after colonialism, but existed as an ongoing struggle for identity during colonialism. The re-territorialization of the space by means of acts of naming not only re-confirmed social ownership, but allowed for an alternative knowledge by the community about their space, displacing the universalistic qualities of the colonial space through specific knowledge.

An unknown, unnamed place provides insufficient conditions for the production of social meaning and notions of belonging in the Herero community. Places are inscribed with identificatory values and meanings through the act of naming. Moreover, if we recall the transformation of space according to the sign of social hierarchies, which left little space for counter-appropriations, the act of naming may be seen as rejecting the function of mere containment represented by the street numbers implemented by the state. Thus, the act of naming turned into an act of re-appropriating the “ability to signify” (Reynolds and Fitzpatrick 2002: 14). In this case, the appropriation of the space through the re-signifying practice of naming signified a kind of ownership linked to the establishment of a relation to places, since the act of naming could not dissolve the legal ownership by the state or the almost complete grid of control and surveillance. Instead, the act of naming may be seen to create small transgressive

spaces, identificatory islands linked to “an intricate and alternative consciousness of possession” independent of legal possession.⁷¹ Hence, although the space was structured through the universalistic grid of colonial control, denying the African population an identificatory anchoring to the space, it could be re-territorialized through the re-coding practice of naming that allowed for a social re-structuring of the urban space.

This naming is particularly important because it is through their names, connected to specific life histories and known persons, that places are remembered in Herero orature. As I have demonstrated in chapter one, by means of the performative practice of orality, it is through being mentioned in praise songs and life histories that these named places enter the cultural archive of the Otjiherero speaking communities. In this way, the Herero communities produce a landscape that acts as a mnemonic, a spatial archive that extends personal memory. Inscribed with social meaning, the landscape gathers the memories of the community, interwoven in a topology of meaningful places that circulate in Herero orature. Externalizing memory to the named places, as Nicole Haley says of Duna people in Papua, “helps to preserve them outside the vagaries of individual memory” (1996: 16). Hence, it is in this manner that the meaning of places is sustained even if they are not owned by Herero, or, as in the case of the Old Location, if the buildings and streets have been erased from the surface of the urban landscape. In naming the places, people performed a cultural practice, which they had brought with them from the rural areas. This is apparent in the following list:

The sections names were: Otjikatjamaha, referring to Tjamuaha, Mahereo’s father, Otjirukoro, Ozombapa, referring to people with white sheep, Onguatjindu, referring to an Ovambo healer, Otjitjaimba, referring to Chief Tjaimba, Otjikaoko, referring to the Kaoko area in the north of Namibia, Otjirera, Otjiseu, referring to Chief Seu, Omungambu or Otjimaruru, referring to the place Omaruru, Otjikuaima, referring to Chief Kuaima, Ombandi, referring to the people of Ombandi, who used to live in the Okahandja area, Otjimungunda, referring to Chief Mungunda (Pendleton 1994: 13) and Otjitoto, referring to Ovitoto. (Kaujeua 1994: 84)

Naming implies a form of sovereignty, not necessarily that of a single person, but of a community and a community’s conventions from which the power to name derives. As a speech

⁷¹ Peter Hitchcock uses the terms “alternative and intricate consciousness of possession” in connection to his analysis of Glissant’s writings about possibilities of local belonging in the Caribbean after colonialism (2003: 38).

act that expresses sovereignty, in doing what it says, the practice of naming under colonial conditions claimed the sovereignty of the Herero community at least to the extent that the power to name could be derived from its available and shared conventions.

Who named the sections and when it happened I could not trace. Therefore, it cannot be determined whether this naming was a speech act that, aware of its partial infelicity ironically responded to the situation, or whether it was embedded in a more straightforward ceremony of name-giving as claiming. In either case, it was a citation of the cultural practice of naming-as-appropriating. A double-consciousness according to the practice of “landscaping” under colonial constraints shines through the double act of naming: naming the space Africans could not possibly own in a legal sense reveals the colonial predicament. This predicament changed the relation to the land into a desire to re-affirm a connection from which the community had been painfully alienated.

Citing previous acts of naming that claimed the space and added a social component to the land, the naming of sections in the Old Location may be seen as a speech act that drew authority from previous acts of naming performed under different conditions. While in pre-colonial times this practice of naming a place issued land claims, as within the usufruct rights of a family, under the conditions of colonialism and in the urban area this practice, as a citational act, must have had another function. Whereas within the sphere of the social in pre-colonial times naming functioned as a legitimate claim and as an act of signification, the legal and social elements of the speech act were dissolved under the colonial regime. What this speech act was able to sustain, in the form of the reduced efficacy of the former speech act, was the social component of the practice of name giving. As a remainder of its previously accepted functions, in the Old Location the naming of places attached a social component to the space. It connected people to the places they inhabited and at the same time signified places as socially owned by their inhabitants.

Under sovereign conditions, and this can also mean the partial sovereignty in the communal areas of the reserves, the act of naming links a place to the first male ancestor buried there. In the Old Location, places were named after Herero people who had died long before and after places that had been inhabited before (and sometimes after) the war. Moreover, the naming of the sections after known places and people referred to the already established authority of known persons as well as the history of the places people came from. Hence, it connected the sections of the Old Location to the larger scheme of a local network of place names that held social meaning within the community. Drawing on the conventions of the community, the act of

naming may furthermore be seen as an act of including the Herero sections in the larger domain of Herero conventions and social networks and, therefore, as a refusal to allow the dismembering and alienation of the people living in town from the communities living in the reserves.

The changing of the practice can be read as an active response to changed circumstances. Even though its reduced function had altered from issuing a claim *as well as* socially signifying to inscribing merely the social component to the place, it was more than a mere reaction. The act of altering the practice led to the shift of the practice towards a more referential act of signifying through the naming after historical persons and (sometimes) abandoned places. It thus reflected a loss and commented on change, offering at the same time a strategy to cope with the situation under violent containment and a way to find a mode to transform the urban space. If Herero identity was inextricably linked to landscape, the act of re-coding the space from a mere carceral scheme into a network of significant places, may be read as a specific kind of survival strategy. This reading includes all the effects of the naming: on the one hand, it re-territorialized, creating a liveable environment for the urban community. On the other hand, it escaped the a-historic space of the colony by means of accumulating history in places and for the inhabitants. Furthermore, through its referential gesture, the naming added the community's history and memories not only to the specific sections of the Old Location, but to the overall situation, which was characterized by insecurity and by the permanent threat of iterated displacement. Ascribing African history to the situation in the Old Location spoke of the life before, that is, *beyond* colonial occupation, escaping the Herero's reduction to colonial subjects.

The act of naming under the conditions of colonialism can therefore be regarded as an act of social appropriation and signification that had the function of anchoring social identity to the space of the town and of explicitly adding Herero history to the Old Location. Under changed conditions, then, the altered act of naming-as-referring was transformed into an act of performative resistance, stubbornly citing a practice of sovereignty and social appropriation to remind the community of its history and at the same time gesturing to the paradox of the colonial demand for sedentariness-in-insecurity. The praise poem for the Old Location makes use of the cultural archive in a comparable way: employing the established cultural practice of composing mourning songs, the *omutandu* articulates resistance against the forced removal.

Our very big etundu

Stories spatialize by enumerating possibilities, by demarcating the boundaries of what is possible within a given place. (Reynolds and Fitzpatrick 1999: 69)

Like the museum for District Six in Cape Town, the praise poem is a community project that allows for a view of the past through the present (of 1959). It created a space for collective mourning, memory, and for the community's oral history that has sustained through the time that passed between 1959 and the present. As I mentioned in the beginning, even after independence the poem never entered the Namibian public sphere, remaining enclosed and exclusive within the Herero genre of praise poetry. As far as I know, it was never published or referred to in recent discussions about the absence of a memorial for the Old Location. This is Renathe Tjikundi's translation of the poem as cited by Alexander Kaputu:

The Old Location *omutandu*

At the *etundu* of Rukungurirangombe Kapahona of Ngarangua. The big one of Mutiro with a white cloth without lice. It is here, where the orphans are not crying and the widower does not feel lonely. At the *etundu* of Tjiooko of Naori of the *ovikerenge* stones where the cattle's hoofs do not spark light. At the tree of Hauzeu, the family in law of the Omutaki clan of the sheep of Muaheke. Tjonga of Kasimbona, her mother, Kanauanga's sister. The chief who has been told not to button down his hat, because if he would, they will lose the war. He crosses the front of Pirata's house with the cloth of Hekera at his back, when he went to the tree of Hauzeu, where (at this tree) he died (Hauzeu). He is the son of Zacharias Kukuri, or Kamaituara of the cattle of Adjii Kuzema. At Ngurumina of Tjipanga at Omanyengerere, the one who was born with very small eyes. The one of our gained cattle with omirumbira (white) tails, like a boy who was going to another place to check it out, like the bull of Rukuma of Kahuiko, the big one, with a mark on his stomach like a watermelon. Our etundu where we used to live near to each other, all of us. With the children of Kambunduava from the city and the children of Perekere's city of the guineafowl of Mukumango. And the children of Nunuhe. The place where we all have been together. With the children of Korota of Kauhinga,

with the blunt assegai that cannot tear a cloth. And the children of Kakuuoko
Kamukorouye Hiyaorumuna of Kandondou's cattle.

The children of Nangolo and the children of Ndemufayo, all of them, where they
gathered together. At our contaminated *etundu* where the atrocities took place. Where
we were hated. Where we said: "build us a place here, we are not going to move".

Our very big *etundu*.

Composed by several people and containing references to other poems, this *omutandu* is another
example of the composite, antiphonic voice of praise poetry. The translation into written English
represents merely a fragment of the *omutandu*. I call it a fragment because the performance, with
all its aspects of voice, sound, performers, presentation and audience, is missing. What is in fact a
process of creating, re-creating, performing and de-coding, of building a space for associations
and evocations in the performance, can appear in this text only as a written "quote."

Truncated as it is, in this version the poem still accounts for the creation of an alternative
landscape. Enduring by means of verbal transmission – that is, in its active performance from
1959 to the present – the poem reveals the community's determination to guard not only the
memory of the event of the shooting but also to save the community's existence from oblivion.
"Unlike the archaeology of written documentary, oral preservation is not accidental", writes
Coplan, pointing to the role of social agency as crucial for the preservation of orature (1994: 12).
If people only preserve what they regard as vital, thus consciously choosing not to forget, which
is how anthropologist David Coplan characterizes the domain of orature, then it is not only the
creation of the poem in 1959 that demarcates the will to create an alternative version of public
history and a re-conceptualization of the urban space. Rather, the transmission of the poem itself,
as an intentional act of iteration and recall that has led to its conservation over nearly 50 years,
speaks for the monumentality of the poem and its significance for the community.

Whereas Coplan speaks of the absence of literacy as a cause for the preservation of
history in a web of knowledge shared by the members of the community, I find that in this case
such an explanation would miss the point. The community of the Old Location was not illiterate
in 1959. *The South West News*, for example, constituted a forum within which people wrote about
the incidents of 1959 already in the 1960s. The paper circulated within the Location: it was read
and re-told in the community. Thus, especially after independence, the endurance of the poem
cannot be explained simply by the absence of written texts. The Old Location was frequently

addressed in the press and, in addition, members of the Location community spoke back to the government, vividly promoting their opinion regarding the forced removal.

As we have seen in the two previous chapters, praise poems, or what praise poetry does, is fundamentally different from the form and function of most written texts we know in the West. *Omitandu* have a specific place and function in Herero cultural practice and continue to occupy this space even though people do read, write, watch television, listen to radio broadcasts, and use the internet.

Due to the fragmentary, written form in which I deploy the praise poem in this text, it is, like the other poems I have analyzed so far, alienated from the performative staging and re-staging so intrinsic to its character. Thus, we cannot avoid fragmenting the sensory reception: the praise poem in this form can only be read, not seen as a performance, or heard as sound (as spoken language). Furthermore, a disjunction between audience and performer is created that is antithetical to the performance. In view of these inevitable shortcomings, I propose to understand the poem in this written form as incomplete, as “a narrow opening” that requires not only the context of the event but an orientation “not to the performance as self-contained artefact but to the performance as a ramified event” in which reception and the activity of interpretation are integral (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 241).

Again, as with the previous poems, the characteristic poetic form, which implies opacity, montage technique and polyphony, complicates the reading. In this reading, which privileges the aspect of the community’s act of resistance, I will focus more than before on the mode of reception, that is, on the activity of the listeners. As a productive image linked to the audience’s activity of navigation through the allusions, the poem opens up for the audience. I will compare the way in which the praise poem operates with the features of hypertext. As Sonja Neef writes in her work about calligraphic poetry, one of the central features of hypertextuality, achieved by means of connecting texts or words, is a blending or combining of voices (*das Hineintragen einer Stimme in eine andere*, Neef 2000: 142). It is in this way that composite voices emerge.

By hypertext I refer to a form of text that appears as a multi-sequential, non-linear writing consisting of “chunks of texts” connected by electronic links (Landow 1992: 4). This perpetually unfinished, open-ended textuality branches out and thus allows the reader to follow different paths of reading. Moreover it permits groups of authors to link their texts together. We know this model from electronic media, but I propose to use it to understand the activities involved in the performance of the praise poem. As multivocal texts, *omitandu*, like hypertexts, are dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense:

Constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousness as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousness, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other. (Bakhtin 1984: 18)

Different sequences, which may stem from different times and places, are connected together in a way that blurs the distinction between the various segments. Thus, no claims of specific authorship are made and hierarchies of invention seem irrelevant. Rather, assemblages of links expand possible associations. Moreover, the polyvocality of the text interweaves different positions, representing a variety of experiences and possible interpretations. Rather than allowing “a tyrannical, univocal voice” (Landow 1992: 11), *omitandu* permit the flow of conversation, the exegetic play with associations. Because of these features, *omitandu* are not suitable for master narratives such as the rather limited, patriotic reading of the “Windhoek Shooting”. Instead, *omitandu* appear to be evasive, open to shifting interpretations, and, in their situational evanescence, incapable of creating a single, normative discourse. Like hypertexts, *omitandu* dissolve stasis; they have the capacity to move their center according to the contextual frames in which they are re-orchestrated and performed, but also according to the specific, albeit never quite personal, contextual frame each listener will establish.

The Old Location praise poem is a case in point: consisting of different entrances that function as provisional points of focus, it offers a variety of starting points to re-evaluate the events of 1959 in the mode of a guided retrospective into the community’s history. In terms of starting points or entrances to the network of stories, Neef speaks of freed, or untied words (*befreite Wörter*), that is, words untied from the linearity of a narrative sequence (16). This does not mean that the words or the names of which a praise poem consists allow for unlimited interpretations. Here, as in the case of the Omaruru recordings discussed in chapter two, it is the event of the performance, together with the tropes the poems bring up, that frames the direction of the reception. Further, it is by means of the genre conventions, which function as creative rules for both the narrator and the audience, that an interactive hypertext can be created. Performing *omitandu* is thus a collective act in which not merely the citation itself, but also the activity of “navigation” – that is, the productive linking – may be regarded as creative acts.

The ability to navigate through the vast hyper-textual system of Herero orature with its intertextual links depends on the amount of poems, stories, historical events and names one

knows. Thus, the words and names mentioned lead away from the text that is being told to other performances, other pieces of orature, other times and other narrators. The text belongs to the listener rather than to the narrator. This is what makes the performance of *omitandu* an interactive process based on words that animate instead of narrate a text, so that the text does not have clear boundaries.

Rather than narrating a story or providing a chronology of events, the poem for the Old Location animates the collective memory of the members of the community. Seemingly without a coherent structure, the praise poem coalesces around its central motives, accumulating an assemblage of layers of references, hints, and traces, which are almost “*befreite Wörter*”, but not quite, because, as I said above, the context of the performative setting does not allow for unlimited interpretation but directs the exegetic activity into particular directions.

As a text with no clear boundaries, no clear beginnings and ends, *omitandu* can be productively compared with an assemblage of hyperlinks, centered and circling around a central idea or focal subject it seeks to qualify. In this case, the center of the poem is the idea of the location as an *etundu*. An *etundu* is usually understood as an abandoned homestead that has been left to decay. A homestead is a compound of several houses where an extended family lives. Referring to the Old Location as an *etundu* describes the Location as the residence of a small community in the imagery of the extended family, but already left behind. In this case, the place is lost rather than left, one might say, since the community was forced to leave the place, thus losing the kind of community that is nostalgically referred to as the place where orphans were cared for and the widower did not feel lonely.

Allusions and topics that are brought up in the poem lead to paths and destinations that must be known. Paths, as comparable to hyperlinks, direct the recipients to other hyperlinks or trajectories, creating an entrance to a potentially endless net of connected stories, poems, and other depositories of cultural knowledge. Comparable to the way hyperlinks lead to other texts, the references in the *omitandu* allow for associative choices, which are guided by the context of the event, by the available links in the poem, and by the existing texts.

Specific knowledge, which is usually endemic within the community, is required to unfold the meaning that is condensed in fragments or quotes, and to structure the plethora of names and traces of events that are heaped in the poem. As I have shown for other praise poems, different units of the poem may require completely different supplements to make them understandable. These supplements may be parts of other praises, stories, history, or anecdotes from the lives of prominent people. Some of the names mentioned in the praise poem lead to the history of

historical persons of the Herero community who are connected with each other and play a crucial role in the history of Windhoek.⁷²

Two famous men, Kukuri and Zacharias, his son, appear in the praise as encapsulated in several hints. The appearance of the allusions which lead to these men invert the chronology of their life histories and genealogies, starting with the probably best-known event, so as to guide the exegetic activity of the audience in a specific direction.

The first allusion I can identify brings up the “tree of Hauzeu”, presented as a distinct locality, a specifically known place in the vicinity of the center of Windhoek.⁷³ It is in this way that Hauzeu, also called Zacharias Kukuri, is introduced in the poem as a chief who is not named at his first appearance in the poem and whose identity is revealed when the praise mentions the tree for the second time, as the tree “where he went to die”. Hauzeu means “the heavy one” in Otjiherero and is a name for Zacharias Kukuri, given to him *post mortem*, most certainly in the event of creating a praise poem for him that referred to the circumstances of his death. According to Herero historiology, Zacharias Kukuri was one of several Herero men captured by German soldiers during the war and brought to Windhoek to be hanged. Alexander Kaputu narrates:

For he was the son of chief Kukuri and must die since Samuel Maherero had escaped to Botswana. They said that if they kill him, then that could serve as a symbol that they had exterminated the sovereignty of the Herero. (...) he was taken to a tree near the White’s cemetery in Otjomuise, which is still here today. I can show you his grave. He is still there until now, near the railway line to Aris: he is still there until now. (...) when he was taken to the tree, the tree of Hauzeu, as you hear about it, it was said: now you will be hanged to die. Heavily wounded as he was, he had a rope around his neck and was hanged. However, his weight broke the rope. Then the Germans said he was innocent and had to be released. But he himself insisted to be hanged again (...) (he said) “I have come to see the children of Tjamuaha’s house, those left in the camps of enslavement: to see them with my own eyes (...) this is why

⁷² I found most of the links that I used for my analysis of the poem in the volume of life histories collected and written down in the “Michael Scott Oral Records Project“ (published as “Warriors Leaders Sages and Outcasts of the Namibian Past“ by Heywood et. al. 1991), without which I would have been unable to follow the allusions in the text. Furthermore, I was fortunate to have an opportunity to interview Alexander Kaputu and Naftaline Tjikundi, who taught me how to deal with the tracks. What I mean by expert knowledge must be attributed to them.

⁷³ The tree of Hauzeu is also an element in different versions of the *omitandu* for Windhoek that were created before 1959.

I have come: take me up the tree.” They did and he died. He lies at Hauzeu’s tree. He had given himself to be hanged. (Heywood et al 1992: 115-116) ⁷⁴

Although the passage speaks of Zacharias Kukuri as a captive of the colonial war and of his execution by German soldiers, it stresses his agency in the situation of his violent death. He is thus remembered as a man who decided to die because he wanted to be close to the members of his community who had died during the war. In line with this interpretation, in the poem for the Old Location he is referred to as going to the tree of Hauzeu - which only *after his death* came to be known as the tree of Hauzeu - to die, not to be murdered by the soldiers. Neither the soldiers nor the colonial war are mentioned in the poem. Both the event and the context of Zacharias’ death must be known and linked to the given fragments in order to create meaning out of these sentences.

Violent death and deportation, the whole range of coercion and brutality, as well as the possibility of preserving some self-respect under conditions of constant humiliation, in short, everything that must have been crucial after the events of the shooting, have to be mined out of the poem by the audience. Zacharias Kukuri, who was killed in Windhoek, created a space of social significance for the Herero community in Windhoek. His history, presented as a retrospective, is understood as connected to the lives of those who inhabit this social space in the present. Moreover, bringing up his name, inviting the audience to think about his story, connects the violent event of the present (in 1959) with the atrocities of the colonial war.

By means of this reopening of the past, which gives way to altered interpretations in the light of the events of 1959, public history is created. Linking the circumstances of Zacharias’ death to the shooting of people who were demonstrating against their forced removal from the Old Location, generates a series of events, a historical coherence of oppression and resistance. Zacharias’ death stands at the beginning of a history of violence against Africans in Windhoek, which, at this point, culminates in the shooting in the Location and the forced removal of its community. What the poem evokes, then, is the extension of the Location’s history into a past that, in turn, adds meaning to the present.

Barber describes the focal motive of praise poems as a center of gravity around which the allusions are arranged “like lights directed towards a sculpture, independently from each other and from different angles in order to bring the sculpture to life” (1999: 30). Since there is no concrete, fixed center to the poem independent from the allusions that circulate around it, I

⁷⁴ This quote is part of the life stories of Kukuri and his son Zacharias as retold by Alexander Kaputu in 1985.

would compare it with a system of lights that sculpt the center. In order to reactivate the past and connect it to the present, fragments of other praises are interwoven in the poem. This creates “fat chants” (Barber 1991: 79), loaded with links and often enriched with the accumulation of meaning produced by many former performances. Hence, what makes these poems seem hermetic at first sight, gives an idea of their polyphone complexity at second sight. The performance of re-telling the death of Zacharias Kukuri thus adds the poignant context of (at that time) current events to an already existing life story. The circulation of names in the praise poem gives the Herero audience the possibility to complete the stories, that is, to follow the hyperlinks in the imagery of the web, in their own readings.

If we understand the entire body of praise poetry in the Herero culture through the image of a web woven out of the shared knowledge and memory of the community, it becomes more intelligible how praise poetry works. The Old Location praise poem was created but not entirely composed in 1959. Since this praise poem, as most others, is in large parts a composition of elements from other praises, it seems more precise to say that it was *orchestrated* in 1959. Again, the montage technique connects parts of the praise to fragments of other praises, in this case praises for individual persons. Even though the time of their composition lies in the past, often more than one hundred years ago, they are accessible in the present and thus exist synchronically. By means of the act of linking these stories together, the poem uses the available repository of orature to create new meanings in the present. In this way, this poem is extended into the past of the community, linking its history with the present. Moreover, in the situation of the overwhelming defeat of the resistance against the forced removal, the reference to Kukuri’s life history may be regarded as the identificatory act of re-anchoring the community in its history as centered around the spatial nodal point of the area of Windhoek, in order to prevent the loss of cultural identity under the conditions of painful suppression. As a landscape created by palimpsestic layers of poetry, the Old Location becomes a landscape that is made up of and witnesses Herero history.

Evoking the life history of Kukuri and his son Zacharias or Kamaituara by means of the mnemotechnique of the quote, the poem reaches far into the past. It begins with Rukuma of Kahuiko. Or, rather, with the cattle owned by that family: “the bull of Rukuma of Kahuiko, the big one, with a mark on its stomach like a watermelon”. Mentioning the bull as a reference to the family makes the allusions to this family even more opaque and more of a “deep play”, since the poem’s value is heightened through its amount of innate complexity. Following from this, it is

the sophistication demanded from its audience to navigate the sea of references that increases the value of the poem.

The appearance of cattle colors is a case in point: Otjiherero knows innumerable names for cattle colors, features, and patterns of color like stripes, stains, and the like. Often, these colors are significant metonyms for their owners, which means that the family that owns the cattle is known by the specific colors or features of their beasts. In some cases, a bull that is mentioned appears as a synonym that substitutes for a person. The bull may be qualified by features like strength, beauty, or courage, qualities that can be used to praise people and cattle alike.

It is only after the praise turns to Zacharias Kukuri, leading the exegetic activity in a certain direction, that it reaches further into the past of the family through the indication of precise cattle features. The mentioning of the cattle with *omurumbira* (something white) at their tails, and of the bull of Rukuma with a mark on its stomach like a watermelon, sets in motion the praise of Rukuma, who is one of the forefathers of Zacharias and Kukuri, his father. Since the praises for individuals are orchestrated from attributes and phrases that may be used for other family members, they lead back to an initial praise, or rather, to the oldest praise that can be remembered for a family line. Elements of the praise are often emblematic for a whole family (and their cattle) and thus involve a merging of identities or the inclusion of multiple individuals subsumed under the specific elements of a poem.

One of the features of *omitandu* is an incorporative mode of condensation through “floating attributes” (Barber 1991: 249), which may oscillate between and include several individuals and strands leading to different stories and layers of the past through merely one allusion. Specifying the identity of individuals with shared attributive components reaffirms family ties and deploys the completeness-in-mutual-dependence of the individual. This notion of identity as being connected to significant others, which is displayed and reproduced by the praise poem is fundamentally opposed to the colonial demand for individual knowability realized by the issuing of and request to wear pass marks. Representing and reproducing Herero identity as one that is created by and embedded in genealogies and social networks thus articulates a resistant social reality that does not bend to the colonial aim of subjectification.

Furthermore, the allusion that leads from his cattle to Rukuma points to two prominent figures, Kukuri and his son Zacharias, who are ostensibly re-related by means of mentioning their forefather Rukuma. This shows that through allusions that may incorporate links to several individuals, or even to a whole branch of a family, a system of signifiers is constructed. By means

of the representation of experienced relations lying in the past, condensed narrated relations, appearing as reduced to multivalent allusions, are created. These compressed nodal points, as potential entrances for exegetic activities, allow people to retrace or reconstitute their own relations to people or events referred to in the poem. In other words, in the mode of “boiling down” genealogies or stories, in which many people are included through multivalent allusions, the chance of the listener to recognize aspects of the history of his or her own family is immensely increased. Mentioning the children of known persons and places, in this case Nunuhe and Perekere’s city of the guinea fowl, which is Okahandja, has precisely this effect. Jekura Kavari explains this as follows:

Although that particular relationship is distant and cannot be traced, it is believed that all the members of the community are related in one way or the other. In this context OvaHerero use the proverb “*ovakuru va zjire kumwe*” – “elders came from a common ancestor”. Although they cannot trace the relationship, they are convinced that they are related. In this relation the word *ovanatje*, children, does not refer to the young ones but to all OvaHerero as descendants of common ancestors. (2000: 170)

Reaching back into the past and indicating attributes shared by members of a lineage, the poem incorporates the life history of Kukuri (the father) without explicitly naming him. The bulls with the white on their tails and the watermelon-like marked stomachs are referred to in the praise of Tjiraura. In the praise for Tjiraura, his family’s cattle is compared to Rukuma’s cattle, while Rukuma himself is not mentioned explicitly. Tjiraura is Kukuri’s father, who is remembered as having been born in 1790. Following the trajectory of Kukuri’s life history, it appears that it is intrinsic to the history of Windhoek.

Kukuri was the nickname of the man whose Herero name was Tjiraura Kamaisa. The name Kukuri comes from the Nama word (*kukurib*) for rooster, whereas his Herero name means “the one who will not abandon” (Heywood et al 1992: 113):

Kukuri has been captured by the Nama long before. They took him; but in the night he led other Herero children to escape back home. There were more than ten of them. He led the others by crowing like a cock. While the others thought it was a cock crowing, he gave the sign for escape. Therefore he is known. He has great significance (Heywood et al 1992: 116).

Kukuri travelled a lot in the hills of Otjomuise. He travelled a lot in the hills of Otjomuise and he joined together with Herero children in many wars. (...) When Kakuuoko was harassing the people, he took Kukuri to Otjomuise in banishment. (...) In the year 1840 Kakuuoko built a brick house. This house was built by Kukuri and his fellows. They recollected stones under servitude, for Kakuuoko had the gun. Kukuri worked in slavery until the year of freedom 1860, when the enslaved Herero were released and returned home. (Heywood et al 1992: 109)

The life story of Kukuri represents him as a man who was captured, but who had the astuteness to help others escape from incarceration. Since he had to stay enslaved and could only help others to flee, the passage stresses his social qualities, pointing to the value of mutual aid and interdependence within the community. The story speaks about forced labor in pre-colonial times under Kakuuoko (Jonker Africaner), which, under the present (1959) conditions of the apartheid policy, gains actuality on the one hand, and, on the other, may be understood as merely another episode of oppression.

Interestingly, the notion of laboring for others definitely has no positive connotation in this reference: rather, “collecting stones under servitude” indicates the hardship and coercive quality of labor for others. Again, one of the possible links, in this case one that I choose with my limited abilities of navigating in the repository of Herero cultural knowledge, leads to an interpretation of history as linked to the predicated situation of the present. Again, one possible track leads to a story that can be interpreted as an interrogation of the values that were proliferated by the colonial authorities. Here, forced labor is simply a form of coercion, a situation that one must seek to escape from.

As the story continues, Kukuri is represented as a rich and influential man in his later years, who refused to be baptized even though his sons tried to force him. In the case of Kukuri’s baptism, the story as told by Alexander Kaputu competes with another version of oral history, in which missionary Irlle succeeded in convincing Kukuri and baptizing him.⁷⁵

Herero orature is not invented by individual story-tellers. Therefore, it can be assumed that both versions represent positions from within the range of interpretations possible within public history. The contradiction the two versions raises is about more than simply two different

⁷⁵ In Andreas Kukuri’s version, Kukuri is baptised and given the name Abraham (Damman 1983: 32). According to Alexander Kaputu, it was precisely this name that led to a conflict, since Kukuri connected the name to the Otjihereo word “parama“, meaning “confused“ and said “ I am not confused or without direction, but you are“. He consequently refused to be baptised and cursed his children Zacharias and Elifas, who were both Christians (Heywood et al 1992: 114).

versions of historiology. Instead, it sheds light on the unresolved conflict between Christianity on the one hand, and the preservation of Herero religious belief on the other. Instead of deciding which version represents historical truth, these versions "allow for a fuller, and therefore truer, picture of the historical situation than any single factual account can provide" (Cheung 1993: 123).

Reaching very far into the past to remind the audience of Kukuri's life, the poem seems to mine Herero history for a time in which, although there were conflicts and power was distributed unequally ("for Kakuuoko had the gun"), bravery and the intelligence of individuals did have an impact on individual lives. Moreover, it evokes a pre-colonial past of social and spatial mobility, or what Clifford described as an indigenous *longue durée*, as if to point out that there was history before colonialism and there may be a future after it.

Parts of other poems are interwoven into the poem for the Old Location, not all of which will be identified here. Some names evoke the poems for other places in Namibia like Perekete, who seems to be a Nama, appearing in a version of the praise poem for Okahandja. Most importantly, people are mentioned who do not have a Herero cultural background, like Mandume ya Ndemufayo, a famous Kwanyama king, Nagolo d'Amutengya, an Ondongwa king, and Kakuuoko, who was an important Oorlam leader and the legendary opponent of the Herero during the Herero-Nama wars. The appearance of figures like Mandume ya Ndemufayo, who is remembered as a tragic hero in the colonial struggle, acknowledges heroic figures of Old Location inhabitants with non-Herero cultural backgrounds. Mentioning Ndemufayo, Nangolo and Kakuuoko on the same level as prominent historical figures of the Herero community is quite unusual in Herero praise poetry. It points to a unity-in-resistance in the moment of struggle and mourning. As Nora Shimming-Chase said:

We had a collective enemy. The feeling of being united was most important. ...[t]here was no clear separation, because at that time our liberation struggle was opposed against the South African Government and against any kind of ethnicity. People married across ethnic lines.

Mentioning the "children" of these men mostly means adult descendants and clearly points to the communal qualities of the Old Location.

Moreover, by bringing up these community members as connected to their forefathers, the *omutandu* reconciles historical opponents within the poem. Combined with phrases like

“*Etundu*, where we used to live close to each other” and “all of them were gathered together”, it nostalgically stresses the solidarity of a community that was able to bridge the gaps of cultural difference. In this manner, the poem speaks back to the colonial regime and discards the aims of apartheid. The protest against the forced removal as an element of apartheid policy is expressed overtly in the final sentences of the poem, where the Old Location is represented as the place where the “the atrocities” took place. The poem ends with the demand to re-build the already demolished Location and with an expression of the will not to move again, thus articulating a clear political demand.

As I already mentioned, in some respects the poem is different from other praise poetry. The most intriguing difference is the fact that the deceased are not mentioned in the poem that was created during the period of mourning for them. Usually, the praise poem would address the names, family, and events in the lives of the deceased. One possible explanation is that the people killed in the shooting are interwoven in the poem, hidden behind allusions to names and places that neither I nor Renathe Tjikundi, who translated the poem, could trace. Since Renathe was almost sure that they do not appear, there must be a reason for this. One possible reason for their striking absence may be that it would have been too painful to speak about them in the aftermath of what Nora Shimming-Chase, as one of the witnesses of the events, describes as “a shock that left everyone in complete disbelief. We did not believe that they would really shoot at us, *murder the people*”.

But then, as I demonstrated with my analysis of the “mourning song” and the song about Albertine in chapter two, opacity is a general characteristic of praise poetry. Thus, another possible motive for leaving out references to the victims of the shooting may well be the wish not to expose the victims, but rather to enclose them within the community that is reaffirmed by the poem. In this manner, the silence about the victims is more an attempt to retain their dignity than a sign of a traumatic loss of speech. The poem contains or even rescues the victims under the opaque surface of the *omutandu*, preserving their memory as intrinsically embedded in a poetic creation of landscape and the community’s memories. The people who were shot during the Old Location resistance are thus taken back into the community not as mere victims of the colonial conflict, and hence as colonial subjects *post mortem*, but as members of a community that defined itself beyond colonial oppression.

The refusal to evoke the perverse circumstances of the deaths of these victims avoids even the hyperlinks that lead to individuals and stories as brought up in other *omitandu*. Not appearing on the surface of the poem, but known by every member of the community and thus

definitely not absent, the victims are marked by an “articulate silence” (Cheung). “Silence as a will not to say, or to unsay ... can be a marker of agency” writes Chambers (1996: 51), suggesting that the absence of words may mark a presence of resistance that refuses to participate in the official record. The poem thus refuses to correspond to the will to knowability and control that marked colonial oppression. The absence of the names of the victims in the poem may signify the creation of an adequate language for dealing with the experience of a new form of colonial violence. By way of a strategic transformation into a form of opacity that completely refutes the colonial language of transparency, the poem adds another level of opacity, like a second barrier, as if to hinder unauthorized entrance. This alteration of the genre seems to seal the event of violence, not allowing any connection with known history and thus creating a salient moment of history through the absence of the names.

If we see the *omutandu* as a multi-vocal, multi-layered communal project of creating a space to generate public history, an alternative landscape of experience and a mourning for a whole community that is inevitably lost, the new level of opacity that refuses to name the deceased becomes more than a generic convention. The genre of the praise poem, I recall, does allow one to speak about persons and incidents without mentioning them explicitly. In the light of colonial history, this opacity marks collective resistance. The experience of colonial violence, suppression, and the colonial implementation of the coercive space necessitates opacity on a level that clearly differs from the play with signifiers I described above. The discursive resistance in this case can be productively compared with what Peter Hitchcock describes as *opacité populaire*, as a form of *marronage* (escape of the slaves) within (Caribbean) postcolonial writing. As I have argued, the not entirely successful but constantly humiliating colonial process of creating a space of absolute control over the so-called “natives”, was not achieved by means of the implementation of a legal system alone. Instead, it was in large parts a result of the discursive production of “the native”, combined with ideas of racial superiority, degeneration, disease and contagion. These discourses did not produce dominion in one step but grew and gained influence over the years, supported by the colonial legal system and its striving for spatial containment. Hence, “to combat requires not only conventional party-political organization, but strategies of discursive disarticulation” (Hitchcock 2003: 58). It is in this manner that opacity, putatively precise in this poem, shifts from a genre convention to a strategy of avoiding transparency and control or, rather, adds this strategy to the already available genre convention. Drawing upon a communally shared technique of opaque articulation that leads to a specific mode of interactive communication, the community evades colonial control “not just by hiding in the hills, as it were,

but by coding and overcoding languages of mutual recognition” (79). Hence, with the creation of an encoded but mutually recognizable text that can be activated only through communicative interaction and that permits entry only for members who share its cultural knowledge, an exclusive space and public history was produced. The narrative potential of naming and creating praise poetry could not completely escape spatial control or undo displacement, but, by creating an undecipherable alterity it acted against the underlying aim of producing colonial subjects under surveillance. Thus, instead of singing about the shooting, Herero people created an urban landscape of the past, thereby expanding the existing features of the praise poetry genre towards its potentiality of articulating resistance.

Okurya Ehi

We also view cultural memorization as an activity occurring in the present (...). Neither remnant, document, nor relic from the past, nor floating in a present cut off from the past, cultural memory, for the better or worse, links the past to the present and future...The interaction between present and past that is the stuff of cultural memory is, however, the product of collective agency rather than the result of psychic or historical accident. (Mieke Bal 1999: vii)

In order for people to gain control over their articulation of identity in the present, it is necessary for them to control how they define themselves in the past. Cultural memory, as an ongoing process of collective agency and interaction, as Bal suggests, links the past to the present and future. In line with this concept of memory, in this chapter I will analyze a particular ritual that connects space and places, the soil and the ancestors to the realm of the living in the present. The ritual, I contend, can be understood as a certain genre of mnemonic practice, one that creates places of meaning and puts forward an articulation of Herero identity as anchored to places and a past that is not a pure product of colonialism. The name of this ritual is *okurya ehi*.

Okurya Ehi is a term in Otjiherero that literally translated means “eating the soil.” The term is composed of “*rya*” the verb for “to eat” and “*ehi*” which means soil but may also be translated as land. *Okurya ehi* is performed during commemoration rituals and burials, but also in everyday life situations that require this practice. It can be understood as a ritualized practice of the Herero communities that is rooted in a local system of meaning. With its different layers of meaning in recent times, embedded in a specific social context linked to displacement and loss, it appears to have the capacity to gain powerful new significance in the postcolony. As such it is a part of counterhegemonic forms of articulation that seek to counterclaim the land, if only in a sense that lays claim on the possession of meaning: the kind of meaning that creates landscape.

“You must come and see Okahandja Day - it is our tradition!”

Those were the words of Eren Merero, when she proudly invited me to attend the commemoration ceremony.⁷⁶ Many other invitations followed, whenever I told people that I was interested in Herero culture, or in what Ovaherero often address to as “tradition.” As I see it, the repeated invitation to the commemoration ceremony demonstrates that many Herero people understand this event as a representation of different aspects of Herero identity in recent times. In order to analyze what is called *okurya ebi* in Otjiherero, I will start with a description of the most popular and widely-known occasion on which it is performed: Okahandja Day.⁷⁷ Like in all Herero practice linked to the veneration of the ancestors, it is mainly older men who address the ancestors and communicate with them.

Okahandja Day, celebrated in the third weekend of August, is certainly the most prominent occasion on which *okurya ebi* takes place.⁷⁸ Okahandja Day is a commemoration celebration for several deceased *ovabona*, important men or chiefs, of the Herero community who are buried in a little graveyard outside the town of Okahandja. Among them is Samuel Maherero, who died in exile in Botswana (at that time British Bechuanaland) and was brought to Okahandja in 1923 to be buried among his forefathers. The historical event of Maherero’s burial in the context of reconstruction is crucial for the understanding of the importance of the festivity in recent times. Krueger and Henrichsen write:

The burial of Samuel Maherero was an important reoccupation of a historical place and space, a political demonstration of Herero unity and a spiritual confirmation of the Herero community. Samuel Maherero, who had lost the war, was brought back

⁷⁶ Eren Frieda Merero works at the TUCSIN guesthouse in Windhoek, where I stayed for a couple of weeks. I want to thank her for her help, patience and friendly company.

⁷⁷ What I name “description” here, is a blend of my own experience in 2001 and 2004 when I attended the ceremony; statements that I got from Herero friends who were there with me; and texts that mainly historians have written: Gewalt (1998, 2000), Henrichsen & Krueger (1998), Hendrickson (1996, 2000) Werner (1990), among others. Although the ceremony has taken place every year since 1923, it might of course have undergone significant changes over time. For the 1930s Werner (1990: 490-97) describes political tensions between members of the *Otjiserandu* versus the Paramount Chief Hosea Kutako and other headmen, whose attitude was seen as too conciliatory towards the colonial government. “Disunity over the attendance of Herero Day (in Okahandja) was reported in 1937, when many Hereros did not attend the ceremonies.” (497). Hosea Kutako even tried to ban the annual ceremony altogether, since he felt that his authority was undermined by the organisation of the *Otruppe*. What appears today as a powerful exhibition of Herero unity is the result of a historical process of “struggle over the possession of the sign” (Comaroff, J. 1985: 169).

⁷⁸ Okahandja is the most prominent, but not the only place where annual commemorations for deceased *ovabona* (chiefs) take place. Other *ovabona* are commemorated in their areas, which are also linked to different flags (like *Otjingirini*, the green and white flag of the *Ovambanderu* linked to the *Kabimemua* Royal House and *Otjizemba* the black and white flag of the *Zerana* Royal House) and *Otruppe* organization branches.

home and took his place as a hero among his forefathers, in spite of all contradictions of his historical role. (Krueger & Henrichsen 1996: 158)⁷⁹

His burial gave rise to the commemoration ceremony that has been celebrated annually since then. Commemorating his burial every year can be understood as a reminder of past struggles against colonialism (Werner 1990: 501).⁸⁰

During the Saturday and Sunday of the weekend of the commemoration, Herero people from all over the country gather at a place outside the town of Okahandja. Many Herero men and women wear the uniforms of the *Otjiserandu* organization.⁸¹ Hendricksen writes that “wearing uniforms is the prerequisite for marching with the troops at the ceremonies” (1996: 218). During the commemoration ritual as it takes place today, members of the *Otjiserandu* movement wear uniforms, adorned with military insignias of different European but mainly imperial German sources. They hold military ranks that refer to the German military. The uniforms of the men do not, as it might seem, simply mimic those of the German troops. Organization and appearance of the *Otjiserandu* members rather reflects a “*new symbolic expression* incorporating elements drawn

⁷⁹ The meaning of burials and graves for the occupation of places and the fact that this meaning was also understood by the German settlers, becomes evident in the story of Raazemua Luther Zaire re-told by Gesine Krueger. In this story Raazemua, who had been working on the same farm for 38 years, expresses his wish to be buried on this farm. The German farmer rejects this wish because he knows that a Herero grave on the farm could be used as a claim “Wenn du einmal auf Voigtland begraben bist, dann sagen die Herero, das ist unser Land” (Krueger 1999: 289). In the end Raazemua gets his way in a kind of compromise: he is buried on the farm, but the German farmer organizes the burial in order to make clear, that it is he who rightly owns the land.

⁸⁰ Gewalt suggests that “a major aspect of Samuel Maherero’s funeral was that it was symbolic for the restoration of patriarchy in the Herero society. Furthermore, it was the first representation of Herero society as they believed it ought to be” (1998b: 120). Krueger and Henrichsen write “that according to oral history, ‘General’ Katjirovi of the *Otjiserandu* then [at Maherero’s funeral, A.H.] told the other ‘Generals’ and the old women to gather again every year in August to commemorate the occasion” (1998: 158).

⁸¹ *Otjiserandu*, (*Otjisherero* for the red or red thing), is the name of the Red Flag section of the *Otruppe*. (Linked to “*Truppe*“ in German). For the time after World War I, Krueger and Henrichson describe the *Otjiserandu* movement as “a mayor agency in the creation of new ‘national’ rituals and symbols, representing an idealised ‘Herero nation’ that acts on different levels.” (Krueger & Henrichsen 1998: 161). It coincided with an “awakening of national consciousness among the Herero” (Werner 1990: 500). Stronger than Krueger and Henrichsen, Gewalt interprets the *Otjiserandu* movement as inspired significantly by the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) of Marcus Garvey. Like the UNIA, *Otjiserandu* provided a network to support members and the symbolism for an independent organization and group consciousness that rejected white (colonial) domination at least on the level of signs. “Effectively, by copying the structure and images of the German military, young Herero men had set up a countrywide support and information network for themselves. ...The *Otruppe*, through the use of a number of traits usually considered to be characteristic of the colonial state, such as the issuing of travelling passes, the wearing of uniforms, and the issuing of printed proclamations, effectively laid claim to the same executive powers normally attributed to the colonial administration” (Gewald 1998a: 139). *Otjiserandu* (as well as *Otruppe* sections, linked to other flags), however, did not and do not wear arms at the commemoration ceremonies and never threatened the state at any other than a symbolic level. The importance of the uniforms for the self-definition of the Herero is also shown by half a century of dispute between the South African administration and the *otjiserandu* about the question of what counts as a uniform. Prohibitions to wear the uniforms were constantly ignored by members of the organization who insisted on the right to wear these uniforms as Herero uniforms (Krueger 2000: 300). Today, the *Otjiserandu* organization incorporates a youth section, which is an important forum to transmit “tradition.”

both from an idealized African past and from the European colonial order. They consist of widespread social networks on a local and national level” (161, emphasis added).

If we consider the aspect of transformation, that is, producing “a new symbolic expression,” by means of the appropriation of the formerly German uniforms, we come close to the expressive power of this performance. Since these uniforms and their performativity are a crucial aspect of the event of Okahandja Day, I find that a brief discussion of Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry is inevitable. If we take a closer look at the practice of wearing these German uniforms, that is, as a specific cultural practice rooted in local history, this practice seems to take issue with Bhabha’s concept: I suggest that this practice demands a shift of the focal point from where we analyze, in the way that it questions Bhabha’s assumption of an anticipated focus of desire.

Bhabha writes that while “the success of colonial appropriation depends on the proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure,” mimicry is at once “resemblance and menace” (2004: 123). The colonial demand produces the colonized’s need to imitate what is, for instance, fundamental for putative “Englishness” without ever achieving more than a “flawed mimesis” (125). Bhabha stresses this aspect of mimicry as incomplete sameness, in the way of being “almost the same but not quite” (122). But, he also emphasizes the ambivalent capacity of mimicry as producing similarity and thereby deconstructing the colonial authority. The deconstruction Bhabha speaks of operates by means of making use of the fetishes of colonial culture. In the moment of the colonized’s appropriation of this fetish, be it English manners, language, or cultural objects, the so performed similarity of the colonized other becomes a threat because it ruptures the status of colonial authority. What appears to be almost the same enacted by means of theatrical mimicry, is a menace to the order of static difference and thereby ridicules the significance of authority as well as it articulates resistance: “for the fetish mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them” (130).

The problem with this interpretation of mimicry, or what Bhabha also calls the metonymy of the similarity, is that although it is ambivalent, it seems to be solely addressed to the colonial authority, that is, in Bhabha’s interpretation, that which is desired and at the same time disrupted. Furthermore, even producing metonymy, in the way of a strategic iteration of almost-sameness, which transgresses cultural boundaries, does not produce something essentially new – a specific identity of one’s own - but perpetually remains trapped in the obsession of achieving what must remain the mere resemblance of the colonizer. But what happens to this notion of mimicry if we

doubt the desire to “become the same,” or, if we shift the center of this practice in so far as the colonial authorities or settler community is *not* the main addressee?

Seen from the other side, that of the Herero, who appropriated the military fetish of the power that defeated them, this can be seen considerably different. The radical re-interpretation of the practice of wearing these uniforms becomes clear, if we consider the notion of incorporation: that of the power of the enemy, which does not imply the fundamental transformation of the self into another person with (or completely lacking) another “essence.” Ovaherero ideas of incorporation, together with their notion of social identity as being-as-becoming change the picture of what seems, at first sight, to be mimicry in Bhabha’s sense. The aspect of incorporation, that is, the bodily appropriation, is crucial for the function these uniforms have for the Herero. An *Otjiserandu* member explained this effect of incorporation as follows:

If you wear the clothes of your enemy, the spirit of the enemy is weakened. You are wearing the spirit of his brothers and then they are weakened. Herero did do this; there is the sense of wearing the German uniform.⁸²

If, as I suggest, there is no underlying desire to become the same, this incorporation of the fetish of power created a new symbolic of Hereriness. The inaugurating moment of this new notion of Hereriness certainly was Maherero’s funeral.

This first powerful display of the *Otjiserandu* movement, as an indicator for Herero unity, took place at Samuel Maherero’s burial in 1923, when “the burial turned into a huge demonstration of mourning and parading. (...) The police counted nearly 2500 people attending the ceremony, including 170 on horseback” (Hendrickson 1996: 157). The *Otjiserandu* came into being during the time of reconstruction after the war, although as early as in 1880, young Herero men were reported to have worn uniforms. Since uniforms for men and long dresses in black and red for women are an intrinsic element of the commemoration, the *Otjiserandu* organization is a *sine qua non* aspect of the performance on Okahandja Day. The organization in which men carry military ranks, wear uniforms and perform exercises provides the official frame through which the whole ceremony gains importance and turns into a powerful exhibition of Herero unity and identity.

Female members of the *Otjiserandu* wear long dresses and head scarves in red and black. These dresses are often referred to as “Victorian style” dresses, which they appear to be at first

⁸² Quote from a statement of an *Otjiserandu* member in Botswana, cited in Hendrickson (1996: 227).

sight. However, the attribute “Victorian” certainly misses the point. The *Otjiberero* name for them is “*ohorokweva onde*” which means “long dress.” In the Herero community, this dress style is seen as the expression of mature female Herero identity. “(I)t marks women as social persons who literally embody perhaps the most potent forms of socially recognised power” as Hildi Hendrickson (1994: 26) writes. Today, at least in the rural areas, these dresses are usually worn by women after their wedding. Since the introduction of Victorian-style clothes by Emma Hahn’s missionary sewing school in the 1850s, the shape and pattern of the dress has considerably changed and reflected different Herero fashions. Hendrickson has shown that the dress is an expression of ethnic identity that does not merely reflect or mimic colonial power. Her detailed analysis suggests that Herero idea(l)s of femininity, dignity, as well as Herero ideals of beauty and ethnic identity, are represented by means of the dress style.

For Okahandja Day, the black and red dress is of great importance, it refers to the wearer’s connectedness to the flag (*omarapi*) and transforms them into participants of the commemoration festivity. With dresses made of about ten meters of red cloth, the women who are part of the parade literally wear the flag on their body and thus demonstrate loyalty to and membership of the *Otjiserandu*. The colors are linked to the Red Flag (*Otjiserandu*) of the Royal House of the Maherero family. Men wear mostly khaki uniforms with belts, hats, badges and other military elements. But it is not exclusively Herero people who are present. Gewalt’s colorful, if slightly exaggerated description of the event gives the following picture:

One of the biggest draw cards on the Namibian tourist calendar is the annual commemoration, held in the third week of August every year, of Herero dead in Okahandja. Busloads of camera-toting tourists, most on package tours from Germany flock to Okahandja to photograph and marvel at the sight of thousands of uniformed men and women marching in tight military-like formation to the graves of their ancestors. A few locals, the occasional anthropologist, a number of professional photographers, and a legion of red-faced European tourists clad in safari gear gape at the sight of young men (amongst other items) kilts, women in fiery red dresses, and officers shouting commands at the massed ranks. (Gewald 1998b: 118)

The passage describes quite accurately my own experience in 2001: Okahandja Day is a spectacle that attracts tourists and photographers (although not busloads of them) and Herero people alike but for different reasons. Photographs of Okahandja Day are found on every Namibian tourist

website and in every tourist guide, displaying an exotic event in a cultural calendar of a highly diverse society.

For Herero people, however, the day is an important part of their liturgical year. Commemoration ceremonies for deceased Herero leaders, connected to different flags or *Otruppe* sections, are held in April in Ndauha (Botswana), in June in Okeseta, in August in Okahandja, and in October in Omaruru. Today these commemoration ceremonies are occasions to represent the community and its "tradition" to a wider public. Bollig and Gewalt state that there is "no travel guide without Herero women displaying their out-of-time Victorian dresses and highly decorated uniforms and proudly riding horses at parades. These images leave little doubt that Herero identity can be captured in photography, in contrast to other population groups in Namibia" (2000: 3). For Herero politics of self-representation this means that they make themselves visible as a community by means of the performative power of the uniforms as a signifier. The uniforms function as an ethnonym that marks and produces ethnicity. Through their function as an ethnonym, the uniforms compose a defined social group that represents itself as a "relation of forces" (Amselle 1985: 21) in a plural-ethnic society.

In the course of the commemoration, parades with men on horses pass by and speeches are held by prominent (mostly) Herero politicians and regional chiefs. The speeches that were held on the occasion in 2001 addressed highly sensitive political issues of the Herero community in the wider context of the postcolony and the young state of Namibia: "first we are Herero and then we are Namibians," said Paramount Chief Riruako in the beginning of his speech in 2001, in which he later addressed the land question. In 2004 the speakers at Okahandja Day addressed the demand for the payment of compensation for the victims of the genocidal war from the German state as well as the official acknowledgement of German atrocities against Herero and Nama during the colonial war, voiced by Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul, a German minister at the ceremony at the Waterberg.

Aside from the official part, which displays the unity of the Herero community, Okahandja Day is also a social event in a less formal sense. Herero people who usually already arrive on Friday or Saturday of the commemoration weekend gather around the central place, where most of the ceremonies take place. People sleep in tents and meet relatives and friends from distant areas of Namibia and Botswana. Formal men's and women's dances are performed

and participants are introduced to the ancestors at the Holy Fire (*okuruo*) (Gewald 1998a: 144).⁸³ Elderly men sit under a roof on the central place and discuss politics and present community issues.

The ritual *okurya ebi* is embedded in this public spectacle of parades and uniforms, red dresses and flags, tourists, horses and photographers that exhibits Herero pride and political consciousness. *Okurya ebi* is performed at the climax of ritual action within the official ceremony on Sunday, which takes place at the graves of the ancestors. The following is a description of the ceremony that took place in 2001.⁸⁴

In 2001, on Sunday morning, Herero people formed a procession to walk together to the graveyard. In front of the graves the processions stopped and elderly men with high military ranks first asked the ancestors for permission to enter the graveyard, then addressed the deceased ancestors with greeting and wishes for the well-being of the community. Some chiefs and elder men took soil from the graves to their mouth. The sand was “tasted” or “eaten,” which means, some sand was taken from the ground with the hand and touched with the mouth or tongue by the person who performed *okuyia ebi*. This was repeated three times. After that a small stone was put on the grave by each of the ritual participants. When the stones had been placed, songs were sung, some Christian hymns and Herero praise songs (*omitandu*) that address the deceased. When the more official part was over, the Herero public was allowed to enter the grave site and put stones on the grave and pray.⁸⁵

⁸³ Gewald and Hendrickson describe these social aspects of the festivity as common to all ceremonies of commemoration that are linked to the *Otruppe* organization among the Ovaherero (Hendrickson 1996: 217, Gewald 1998a: 144).

⁸⁴ Gewald rightly suggested that the ceremony is never the same at different places and times. His description of the ceremony of the Green Flag that he attended at Okaseta in 1991 gives a different account of the rituals at the graves (Gewald 1998a: 133).

⁸⁵ Koehler describes *okurya ebi* at burials as follows: “Ist ein Mann gestorben, so geht der Älteste der Familie zum Friedhof, meist von einigen Verwandten begleitet. Sie nähern sich dem Friedhof von Osten. Keiner darf einen Stock in der Hand haben. Sodann nehmen alle ihre Kopfbedeckung ab. Der Alte kniet hinter einem Busch nieder und ruft: “Ich bin Soundso, Sohn des Soundso (bis zum fünften Vorfahren), und bin Haupt der Werft Soundso. Bei mir ist der Mann oder die Frau, der Sohn oder die Tochter des Soundso. Seine bzw. ihre Vorfahren haben den Toten weggenommen. Ich möchte den Toten in eurer Nähe begraben, damit er euch dienen kann. Ich bin gekommen, euch dies zu sagen. Zürnt nicht den jungen Männern, die hier bei euch ein Grab schaufeln.” Nach dem Anruf spricht er, indem er die Antwort des Ahnen wiedergibt: “Ja, ich höre dich, lass ihn kommen.” Sodann nimmt er etwas Sand auf seine Hand und berührt den Sand zweimal mit seiner Zunge. Die ihn begleiten, kommen ebenfalls heran, um den Sand mit der Zunge zu berühren. Man nennt dies “okuria ehi,” d.h. Erde essen. Nun öffnet der Älteste den Friedhof, indem er ein Blatt oder einen Stein auf das Grab des Ahnenhäuptlings legt. Alle anderen tu dasselbe. Das Öffnen des Friedhofs ist unerlässlich. Auch wenn ein Christ stirbt, wird es getan. ... Auf Farmen befinden sich hier und da Herero-Gräber. Wenn Herero dort vorüberfahren und darum wissen, halten sie an, um etwas Sand zu nehmen und ihn mit der Zunge zu berühren” (1956: 87). Early evidence of the meaning of soil from graves in ceremonies is also given by Irle: “von dem Grabe seines Vaters eine Schüssel voll Erde holen, er mengte es mit Wasser zu einem Brei, nahm ein Stueck Opferfleisch, tauchte es in den Zauberbrei und jeder seiner Leute musste ein Stückchen von dem Fleisch beißen. (Irle cited in Henrichsen 1998: 352). Earth from the

Later, the people left the graveyard, uniformed men and women paraded, and guests were welcomed. In 2001 a delegation of young *Ovahimba* came all the way from Kaokoland to attend the ceremony. They were warmly welcomed by the chiefs, since, as I was told, it is only in recent years that *Ovahimba* people were present at Okahandja Day. Their presence was seen as a success in the ongoing process of uniting Otjiherero-speaking people.⁸⁶ The display of unity is a crucial issue at the commemoration celebrations:

Throughout the commemoration, people are continuously urged to watch and learn. Participants and observers are continually urged to be on a good footing with one another. In the “unity” thus created, observers, as well as participants are told that here before them the prime aspects of Herero society are to be observed. In effect, the commemoration brings into being, albeit for a very short time, a representation of Herero society which the participants see as the ideal and to which they seek to conform their lived society. (Gewald 1998a: 145)

Later in the afternoon, the official speeches took place. Many prominent members of the Herero community were present and the speeches lasted the whole afternoon and evening.

Simultaneously, at the central part of the place, chiefs sprayed water on the faces of those who wished to be blessed, while uttering wishes for health and well-being.⁸⁷ “Chiefs are the mediators between the ancestors and the living.” said chief Kapuu in one of the speeches in 2001. As mediators they have the ability and function to connect the living with the deceased, but

grave of the father that is used in a ceremony is also mentioned by Missionary Felling in 1868 (Henrichsen 1998: 344).

⁸⁶ *Ovahimba* are an *Otjiherero*-speaking group in Namibia, who live in the remote North West of the country. Some Herero include them into a larger ethnic group of Herero, others do not. Often Herero refer to *Ovahimba* as “extremely traditional” which can mean both “backwards” and “more authentic.” Ohta writes that “most Herero usually state that the Himba retain old traditions which they (the Herero) have lost. For example Himba women dress in clothes of animal skin, which the Herero ceased to do long ago” (Ohta 2000: 299). However, most Herero feel related in one or the other way to *Ovahimba*, and thus their inclusion in a national commemoration celebration was welcomed. For a closer analysis of the relation between *Ovaherero* and *Ovahimba* see Ohta (2000) and Bollig and Gewald (2000).

⁸⁷ In 2001, when I was visiting the festivity, I was urged to take a blessing too. I had to approach the chief on my knees and water was sprayed on my face. Renathe introduced me to the chief and I was asked whether I knew Ute Stahl, another German scholar, who had lived in his compound for a time. Finding me somehow connected to people he knew, he asked me to send his best wishes to her, who had recently given birth to a child. I mention this event here to show that connectedness is of crucial importance and can be created across ethnic boundaries, especially by the agency of *ovahona* and under specific circumstances. The fact that I was connected to someone who was, at least for a time, more or less part of the family shifted the meaning of the event of the blessing from an act of politeness towards a foreign guest, into a more serious performance.

also the authority to speak for the ancestors. It is in this context that they can bless the members of the community.

In the context of the commemoration festivity on Okahandja day, *okurya ebi* seems to be merely a small part of the ceremonies. Framed by the powerful symbolism of the *Otjiserandu*, its importance can be easily overlooked.⁸⁸ However, Okahandja Day is not the only occasion at which *okurya ebi* takes place. As mentioned above, it is performed on different occasions and embedded in a framework of cultural meaning in which soil has a certain symbolic value.

Sand as a social substance

The ritual is usually performed at specific places of memory: graves, or places where people died, and where they may not be buried in every case. These places are thought to hold a certain meaning, power, and history that is intrinsically connected with the deceased person(s). Sometimes it is also said that the spirit of the deceased inhabits the place where he was buried or where he died. This seems to be of great importance, especially in cases when the (male) deceased is seen as an important or especially powerful person.⁸⁹

For an analysis of *okurya ebi* on commemoration ceremonies, it is indispensable to consider the ritual's relatedness to the practice as it appears in everyday-life situations and its embeddedness in the context of the meaning of soil as a substance for the Herero community in general. The following account demonstrates this embeddedness of the ritual practice in everyday life as well as a flexible mode of dealing with it. On the way to the area called Ovitoto, in a pick-up truck packed with Herero people on their way home for the weekend, I experienced a form of dealing with a situation that usually would have required *okuria ebi*, albeit in a more casual way. Passing a place where several people drowned in the river during the rainy season, I was told that usually men would get out of the car and perform *okurya ebi*, to address the deceased in order to avoid their annoyance. It was not performed this time because it was already night and it was raining, as Renathe explained to me. Perhaps my presence was also a reason that made the

⁸⁸ As far as I know, *okurya ebi* has not been addressed by scholars who have written about Okahandja Day, while the symbolism of the flags, uniforms and red dresses has been an issue in different publications (Hendrickson 1992 and 1996, Gewald 1995, 1998 a and b, Krueger and Henrichson 1998).

⁸⁹ At *Ombotozu* for instance, the spirit of a deceased person remains at the place and causes a certain danger that is connected to this mountain. Comparably, as I have shown in chapter one, at a place near the airport, a spirit of a very powerful person resides that can cause accidents to people who just pass by in their cars and do not remember and worship this spirit. As far as I know, there are no cases in which female ancestors are said to cause danger to the living.

performance inappropriate in that situation. But the men in the car stopped talking and took off their hats in order “to show that we are not ignoring them” as one man said.

This clearly shows that the performance of *okurya ebi* is not an automatism. In principle the dead have to be respected and worshipped, but there seems to be a certain situative space to decide to what extent one can or wants to respond to this duty. Situative context is also taken into consideration for the decision of whether a person is or is not apt to perform the ritual. Usually, and especially at very formal occasions like commemoration ceremonies and burials, older men or men with high ranks (in ceremonies connected to the *Otruppe*) perform *okurya ebi*. In situations where no men are present, women can also perform the practice. Renathe told me that when she was building her new house in an area of Windhoek where neither she nor her family had lived before, she had to ask for permission before she could open the space for her dwelling. In this situation it was she who did *okurya ebi* in order to address the spirits of unknown deceased who might dwell at the place.⁹⁰

The situation that Renathe explained to me shows that for virtually *every* place in Namibia (or the wider area of southern Africa where Herero people may have lived) the presence of ancestors must be assumed. According to this assumption, the soil in all areas that were once cultivated by Herero people is potentially imbued with meaning. Sand or soil is the ground on which the community lives (or lived in the past) and the actions and forces of life and death have transformed it into a meaningful substance. I use the term cultivation here not merely in the sense of a physical action that cultivates land or clears forests but in the sense of appropriation that implants social and spiritual meaning into the terrain. This notion of cultivation is an aspect of the landscaping I described in the first three chapters. But cultivation of that kind does not readily produce landscape,, rather, elements of landscape, or potential aspects of landscape are so construed.

Cultivating the soil in this way turns sand from crude physical matter into a social substance that need not be defined by means of the attachment to a certain known person to contain this value. This kind of cultivation, however, does not turn all places in the area into places of meaning with the same significance and value. It is the memory of the living as taking place in the present that is able to create specific places of memory. In the Herero community this memory is connected to stories and life histories of people who are known and remembered.

⁹⁰ Herero houses are often built by women. In the communal areas as well as in some areas of town, they consist of metal sheets that can be bought or found somewhere. In the communal areas, houses are smeared with a mixture of cow dung and clay on the inside, which keeps the houses better insulated. This work is usually also done by women.

These stories are intrinsically linked to places through ritual action and narrations like praise songs for people and places (*omitandu*). *Omitandu* mediate memory and make it accessible in the presence. Hence, there are different levels of meaning for places as well as for the soil.

As I have suggested in the first chapter, an understanding of appropriation, or, indeed cultivation by means of speech acts, is fundamental to the concept of *ehi rOvaberero*, the land of the Herero. It is in this way that landscape is made, or, inscribed into the land, in which Herero live and used to live in the past. This meaning is imbued in and represented by places as well as the soil. It is therefore the whole space of *ehi rOvaberero* that is appropriated and claimed in this way and that is structured by means of places that contain a special value, which is mediated by stories that are connected to people who are remembered in the present. Whereas the whole of *ehi rOvaberero* appears to be a space of meaning in a more abstract sense, drawing its meaning from the acts of cultivation I mentioned above, it is the known places that structure the space into an identificatory landscape. Specific meanings connected to particular places and persons that are remembered and retold are linked to rituals of recall that recreate the memory of those deceased members of the community. The importance of certain places also depends on the role of the deceased person(s) in Herero cultural memory and the power of the ancestor(s) that in a specific sense inhabit the places and have transformed the soil.

In order to deal with the complexity of the notion of soil as a social substance in general and at specific places, as well as the sense of places of meaning that are in turn linked to the soil that is valued in the ritual *okurya ehi*, the notion of soil as a social substance needs to be further elaborated. *Okuria ehi* is performed in situations that may be related to the abstract landscape of *ehi rOvaberero*, as in the case when Renathe was building her new house. Whenever a space has to be occupied, the known or unknown deceased have to be acknowledged. In the cases of known deceased with concrete stories and already established places of meaning, the repeated performance of *okuria ehi* recreates the value of the place and re-connects it to the living. In this way, the ritual is an element of the processes that (re)produce places of meaning.

The idea of soil that can be a kind of medium in general becomes clearer through the consideration of the role of soil in other contexts. Sand from the riverbed (or *rivier*) is used to prepare the ground for a new *Okuruuo* (Holy Fire). In many Herero families the *Okuruuo* plays an important role in the practice in which the elders communicate with the ancestors. Since the Holy Fire is the place where most of the ritual actions and veneration of the ancestors are performed, it needs to be treated with extreme care. Alexander Kaputu explained to me:

Sand for the Holy Fire is taken from the riverbed, from under a tree. It should be sand without footprints. Footprints are everywhere, you know, and people are buried in lots of places, even if you don't know. Therefore the earth is holy (*zera*). In the riverbed the earth is clean. The water has washed the footsteps away. For a new *Okuruuo* you must make sure that you do not have footprints of other people you might not know in the sand. Therefore the sand has to be purified by the river.⁹¹

For a new Holy fire, not only the proper place in a homestead is obligatory. As this passage demonstrates, the place has to be purified for this purpose. Any social traces of strangers that could contaminate it should be avoided for the initial kindling of this fire.

There is a reason for this caution that suggests the social nature of soil. Even if the person is not known, her or his footprints are thought to hold a certain power that is attached to the person and her or his life. In a social or spiritual sense the trace of a person is seen as contagious and the substances that were once in contact with that person can have further influence on the life of that same person and on others.⁹² In the course of the interview with Mr Kaputu I was told that sand from the footprints of a person can be stored at a safe place in order to guarantee that this person will safely return from a journey. This sand from the footprints of a person, as well as bodily substances from a person, can also be used for sorcery. Whether this practice has any meaning nowadays apart from hearsay I do not know. Alexander Kaputu referred to sorcery as “something Herero people do not do (but others do).”⁹³

Crucial for this concept of bodily substance and footprints having the *same* potential power and potential danger, whether this is actually used or not, is the idea that both are connected to a person. The possibility to misuse this trace of a person embodied in the sand for

⁹¹ From an interview with Alexander Kaputu in Windhoek at the NBC on 3 September 2001.

⁹² The term contagious of course reminds one of, and actually does stem from, Frazer's term “contagious magic.” Magic tends to be a quality often attributed to the activity of non-Western “Others,” and thus becomes a signifier for traditional societies as distinguished from rational modernity and inverse of reason. In spite of this drawback ideological use, the term contagious makes sense here and I use it to signify a certain quality of a *substance* in a contemporary system of meaning of the Herero (which is not shared by all Herero).

⁹³ Hendrickson states that these ideas and practices were valid during the lifetime of Samuel Maherero: “Herero indigenous religious thought of the period was of the type which posits that spiritual power can inhere in objects as well as in living things. In such a system, the body and everything associated with it may be considered spiritually charged. Thus Maherero's “mattresses, blankets, clothes, shoes and hat were buried with him so that no-one would be able to use them after him” (Pool 1991: 91). “In Samuel's day, even footprints were considered to contain the essence of the person” (2000: 139).

Vedder writes that “There are mysterious powers by which those who know how to utilize them, can bring misfortune, illness and death to others. As a rule these powers are only effectual when the practiser can get hold of things belonging to the person, he wants to harm, such as saliva, cut-off hair, pieces of finger nails, shoes, garments, dust which bears the footprint of the person concerned, in short anything which has in any way been in close contact with the person (Vedder 1966: 172-3, quoted in Hendrickson 2000: 240).

sorcery makes clear that one cannot deliberately undo this meaning to avoid the danger that is caused by the fact that the social and physical body leaves traces which can influence the life and well-being of a person. For the soil or sand this means that a persistent imprint or trace transforms it into a social substrate that has the capacity to transmit what it contains. Whereas for bodily parts this stems from a direct connection, for the soil this idea reveals the notion of a substrate informed through the body.

In order to analyze the meaning of *okurya ebi* it is also necessary to take into account that soil or sand in general is not seen as dirt in the sense of filth. Ideas of pollution or contamination seem to be attached more to the idea of soil as a transmitter of social substance than to ideas of micro-organisms and bacteria that might transmit diseases. As Mary Douglas suggests, both ideas of transmission can be seen as parts of systems of meaning that are shared by groups or communities and might lead to serious misunderstandings between those groups:

Both, we and the Bushmen justify our pollution avoidance by fear of danger. They believe that if a man sits on the female side his male virility will be weakened. We fear pathogenicity transmitted through micro-organisms. Often our justification of our own avoidance through hygiene is sheer fantasy. The difference is not that our behaviour is grounded on science and theirs on symbolism. Our behaviour also carries symbolic meaning. (1966: 68)

I suggest to replace Douglas' notion of fantasy in this context with systems of meaning, that change in time and came into existence at specific points in time and place. These systems of meaning are more than fantasies since they structure practice as well as concepts that derive from these systems. Hence they have consequences for the lives of people and must be acknowledged to be real.

Thus, sand that is turned into a social substance by means of human action can have an effect on people. Featuring diverse efficacies, it is valued in different contexts and can also be used as a remedy for pregnant women. During pregnancy it is advised to drink water mixed with sand. The explanations given by women whom I asked about it varied from modern medical discourse-versions indicating its use as a provider of minerals and other health reasons to shoulder-shrugging references to tradition.⁹⁴ As there was no sure explanation of this collective

⁹⁴ The information I draw upon stems from Renathe Tjikundi, Frieda Meroro, Enuncia (whose last name I do not recall), and Pam Claassen. Pam stressed medical reasons for the use of sand that is also widely used by South

practice among pregnant women it cannot be connected to a specific meaning of soil. However, Herero women articulated serious concerns about purity with regard to the soil used. It should not stem from the ground in Windhoek but rather come from the woman's own home village.

Reading what is not said

Ritual communication is not an alternative way of expressing something but the expression of things that cannot be expressed in any other way. (Stanley Tambiah 1985 cited in Bell 1992: 112)

What I have said about the meaning and function of sand in the Herero community is certainly fragmentary and does not describe all facets of meaning and practice linked to sand or soil that exist in the Herero community. Bringing up these fragments I suggest that *okurya ehi* is a practice that is embedded in a wider context in which sand has a particular value.

Specifically in the context of Okahandja Day, within the theatrical staging of the Otjiserandu, the ritual *okuria ehi* is a performative practice that evokes a notion of confrontation, juxtaposing the colonial experience of rupture together with a performance of coherence: that of a landscape that is connected to people of the past and the present. Doing this, the ritual does not narrate a story in a textual sense. But stories of and recent communications with a collective past may be made possible and transmitted in various ways outside of explicitly telling (his)stories. This easily becomes clear if we think of museums, monuments and the like. But the transaction of history may also lie "in mute meanings transacted through goods, practices, icons and images dispersed in the landscape" (Comaroff and Comaroff, cited in Vaughn 2001: 73).

Here, we deal with a performance of signification without words. Not the entire ritual action is silent, as I have mentioned above: the ancestors are called and they respond. But the crucial element for this chapter, the formalized practice of "eating of the soil," is done without

African women. Renathe explained that eating sand has the effect of absorbing some of the amniotic fluid and therefore makes the birth easier. Eating soil during pregnancy seems to be a widespread practice in Africa. An excursion to internet publications under the term "geophagy" or "pica" that is said to be practiced mostly in Africa and the US (by Afro-American women) appears to be strikingly untouched by the theories of social anthropology of the last decades. Geophagy is either described as archeological evidence for Europe (proved by the appearance of so-called cup-marks on churches and other buildings or on rocks attached to spiritual meaning) or recently practiced by Afro-American and African women. Especially the practice of the latter is strangely naturalized, which makes comparisons between those women and earth eating animals possible. (See: http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Abstracts/Diamond_99.html), <http://geography.about.com/library/weekly/aa092997.html> and <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/5579/pica.html>).

words. Neither was that which was done in the ritual narrated or interpreted by the participants in any way. That means, I did not come across any explicit self-interpretation of this ritual action within the Herero communities. Still, that which does not produce a text speaks in a different mode, and is therefore not mute, yet it may be even more elusive than the opaque texts of orature.

As Paul Connerton has argued, the social conventions, or in this case the (often silent) performative actions of the body, carry forward memory and form part of collective identity constructions (1989: 59). In this case the ritual is constitutive of a non-narrative history, which it at once makes and represents, although, as Megan Vaughan suggests, these unspoken practices may exceed the performer's explicit awareness of what is done (2001: 66). This does not mean that the unspoken practice is unconscious. Instead, memory and political consciousness may be persuasively enacted and invoked by means of a bodily action, that is, in this case, an act of bodily communication. This bodily communication creates another kind of knowing and a form of realignment with the ancestors, albeit one that is more difficult to scrutinize. Looking at the ritual, I am not, indeed cannot be, a participant: the creation of Herero landscape and history does not include me.

Fortunately for my attempt to analyze what the ritual does, *okuria ebi* is embedded in the context of intensified commemoration and collective recall. Moreover, there is a history of re-imagination, at which Okahandja Day changed into the event that it is today. The change of ritual in the case of Maherero's burial allows for an analysis of the logics of context that entered the arena when new rites were created or old ones may have been changed. But, although much has been written about the Otjiserandu movement, *okuria ebi* has not been mentioned in the context of the commemoration. Therefore I do not know whether or how the ritual of "eating the sand" has changed since, for instance, the loss of the land after the war.

However, as Connerton says, although rites are performed at a certain place and time, their contents may permeate non-ritual contexts:

Rites are not limited in their effect to the ritual occasion (...) Although demarcated in space and time, rites are also very porous. They are held to be meaningful because rites have significance with respect to a set of further non-ritual actions, to the whole life of a community. Rites have the capacity to give value and meaning to the life of those who perform them. (1989: 44-45)

What matters here is that rituals as “the building and contesting of social realities by the way of formally stylized, communicative action” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993: xviii), have the power to create meaning and communicate this meaning. Thus it may be through *okurya ebi* that a certain notion of the value of soil can be sustained.

“Eating the soil” to connect the members of the community in the present to the ancestors makes possible what it performs. This argument is obviously circular and I intend it to be, since I understand the logic of this ritual as a circular logic. It is circular in the sense that it produces the scheme of meaning that it draws upon and without which it could not make sense. The circularity derives from the irreducible interchange between the ritual as an act in the present, previous enactment of *okuria ebi*, and a scheme of cultivated landscape that draws its efficacy from a set of social norms and meanings. I suggest that although this is a non-discursive practice of landscaping, the ritual is a complementary element to the performative production of landscape by means of praise poetry. With complementary I do not mean a set of binaries, since there is no equivalent to the Cartesian distinction between mind and body within the theories of Herero culture. Neither is that which is not said but works, or is enacted through the body, more authentic, or bears, by means of embodiment, a closer access to the “real” of Herero culture.⁹⁵ Instead, it is a twofold cultivation that produces places of meaning with two different, albeit related practices. But, as we have seen, whereas the performances of *omitandu* always produce named, narrated and known ancestors as linked to the landscape, *okuria ebi* may also honor the presence of the unknown ancestors: those for whom titles and words are not known can be re-connected to the body of the performer of the ritual action.

In Okahandja, as in other important historical places, both practices conjure: *okuria ebi* produces the bodily realignment that complements the connection by means of praise poetry. In order to analyze this performative connection, I will recur to Butler’s theory of performativity on which I based my analysis of the performative speech acts of *omitandu* in chapter one.

Again, like in the case of the *omitandu*, the performative act of *okuria ebi* must be situated in a frame that authorizes the action. It is never complete but requires repetition. Hence it must be re-enacted to produce a coherent scheme of meaning and its effects. Iterability and reiteration are the features of the speech act, and of *okurya ebi*, that bring about what Butler describes as the capacity of the speech act to constitute and escape the moment of the performance. For *okurya ebi* this means that since it is performed as an element of the ongoing cultivation of the land, its

⁹⁵ For an insightful critique of the idea of embodied rituals as being “more real” or authentic than narrative or discursive representations see Vaughan (2001: 67).

effect extends the moment of the ritual itself both into the past and into the future. In this way, the meaningful places that are created by means of the practice exceed the moment of the performative act. On the other hand, and this is linked to citation as an aspect of performativity, *okurya ebi* can be performed because it has been performed, even if the former events did not occur in the same place. Thus *okurya ebi* is not a repetition of the very same practice but a practice that is citational in the sense that it refers to an already established chain of ancestors that produces coherence as well as the meaning of places.

The other aspect that makes the effect of performative acts possible is a set of norms, or, for the case of *okurya ebi*, a scheme of meanings that confers a binding power on the action performed (Butler 1993: 225). But, as Kelly and Kaplan argue, rituals are not expressions of structure but instead, “acts of power in the fashioning of structures, acts that make gods, kings, presidents, and property rights” (1990: 140). They have the power to do so by means of their close interaction with available schemes of meaning in the community, which are in turn reproduced through the ritual itself. Hence, the power to produce meaning in rituals does not stem from the personal will of the performer but derives from a prior set of meanings which informs not only the action itself but provides the authority of the performer. In the case of *okurya ebi*, the social hierarchy of the community is demonstrated and confirmed: the authority and social position of older men who perform the ritual at important occasions is expressed and at the same time re-gained through the power they display while communicating with the ancestors.

Despite of the circularity of their logic and their self-referential efficacy, rituals are not incapable of change. It is precisely because rituals are performative and what they constitute is never complete but relies on reiteration, that rituals are not static. As Butler argues, in the reiteration lies the chance for resistance and change. Since reiterations are never replicas of the same, but “echoes of prior actions” (Butler 1993: 227), the repeatedly enacted performance may include difference. The difference in performance can be enacted deliberately, which means that this is precisely the space where agency comes into play. If rituals iteratively constitute schemes of meaning through performativity, they must, in turn, have the power to inform these sets of meaning through practice.

The attempt to open up the quite complex entity of the ritual in order to analyze its effects requires “analytical scissors.” Of course the notion of “analytical scissors” contains an aspect of damage and in a certain sense I do see it like that. My analysis, fortunately, does not have the power to damage the ritual itself. However, the linearity of language damages the circle of meaning that can be thought but is difficult to express in language. What remains and appears

in the form of the text is fragmentary. But in another sense this might mirror the postcolonial reality of the Herero, which appears to be fragmentary, ruptured and playing with the different contents of their archives of memory.

To analyze the ritual I will approach it from different sides, so as to make a kaleidoscopic view possible. My intervention leads to several fragments about what the ritual does rather than what it means, and how it has shifted in postcolonial times. The dissection of an event into a series of aspects or features dissolves what appears to be closely interwoven. This provisional fragmentation, however, is necessary in order to gain insight into what the ritual actually does.

One important aspect of the ritual under consideration is a spatial one: *Okuria ebi* creates a specific social space that is part of the landscape. By means of the power to generate and communicate meaning, *okurya ebi* iteratively structures the landscape and connects the so cultivated landscape to the bodies of its inhabitants. A prerequisite for the power to structure that *okurya ebi* contains is the existence of a scheme of meaning in which the environment, which is *ebi rOvaherero* as a whole, has been structured and transformed into a social space through the cultivation of former generations. *Okuria ebi* actively and iteratively re-creates the space that turns out to be the ritualized environment for the very practice that responds to what this space requires. Or in other words, and again in circular ones, the ritual produces through iteration and citation the ritualized space that is closely connected to the ancestors and that will in turn require the ritual.

As we have seen, certain places demand the ritual, be it the building of a house in an urban area, the passing by a place where a fatal accident occurred, or the opening of the space for communication with the ancestors at a graveyard or for a burial. While opening places, responding to the request to worship the ancestors, or simply avoiding the danger of annoyance of the spirits, the ritual simultaneously re-charges the meaning of the land and thus fashions the situational as well as spatial context of its meaning.⁹⁶ Hence, places and the soil are the *conditio sine qua non* for this ritual action. *Okurya ebi* is not only performed at these places but *through them*, since they are the locations where the traces of the ancestors can be found, and, mediated through the soil, can be re-incorporated into the realm of the living. In this sense these places are means in the attempt to re-generate the relationship with collective ancestors, since the trace of the ancestors is still there, at the place where they are remembered. A distance in time is

⁹⁶ Strathern and Stewart use the image of batteries that are recharged in the sense of identity that is reproduced through rituals. This notion works only in the sense that the systems of meaning which provide the matrix for the reloading are already available (1998: 250).

reconciled by means of the activity of commemoration that re-members the ancestors, in the sense of connecting their trace, and symbolically themselves, with the realm of the living.

Another feature that produces the power of the ritual to create and reproduce a system of meaning and to communicate this meaning is the public performance of *okuria ebi*. At the prominent occasions where the ritual is performed, like commemoration celebrations, it appears to be a public performance in a particular context that communicates what is done. Addressed mostly to an Herero audience, it can be presumed that the perception works, which means that the audience understands what is done and feels included in the ritual. It is thus the communicative aspect of the ritual that enables the practice to act creatively and constitutively as “a vital element in the processes that make and re-make social facts and collective identity” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xxvi). Hence communication within the community is crucial, but it must be understood in a wider sense than linguistics alone: the crucial part of the ritual functions without spoken words, but is communicated through the body of the performer. Moreover, some of the participants are not living persons, at least in the Western sense.

I regard the ancestor spirits as participants here, since they are seen as persons who possess the capacity of agency and moral choice in Herero culture. Strathern and Stewart write that:

a person need not be a human being. In this sense another dimension is added [to the concept of personhood A. H.]. Meyer Fortes, for example, in a passage widely cited, pointed out that among the Tallensi a crocodile may be a person (Fortes 1987: 249) ... What is common in the domain of personhood is the picture of moral context of social action. Morality implies choice and choice again implies accountability. (2000: 10)

What I intend to argue with this quote is, that the ideas about and constructions of personhood are variable. As we have seen in previous chapters, Herero concepts of personhood emphasize a being-as-becoming that does not end with the death of the person. Thus, whereas most of the time the living are embodied persons and ancestors-to-be, the ancestors appear to be narrated persons. But, as the ritual practice demonstrates, Herero ancestors are not limited to being narrated persons, even though they appear to continue their social life also as narrated persons. Death usually does not demarcate the end of social existence, neither does it terminate the possibility of agency, (more of this in chapter five). Therefore I suggest seeing the Herero

ancestors spirits as persons. Hence, the fact that they speak through the bodies of the performers is not a symbolic action but an act of communication between persons.⁹⁷

At certain places where ancestor spirits live, they act and may cause danger to the life of people. Ancestors who inhabit places are part of reality since, as Teffo and Roux write that:

the distinction between the material and the spiritual has no place either in African thinking... The ancestors interact with mortals, and because the world of the ancestors is ontologically both analogous and contiguous to that of the mortals, that is, there is no difference in kind between these worlds....there is no logical problem with this interaction; category problems do not arise; the actions of the ancestors are believed to be within the regular patterns of events. (1998: 141)

As a consequence of the presence of the ancestors, and this leads to the third feature of the ritual, their annoyance is to be expected when people trespass social rules or the scheme of morals. Thus, such transgressions can cause severe misfortunes for the trespassers.⁹⁸ As the case of the frequent emergence of accidents on the road to the airport demonstrates, not remembering the ancestors, which means passing by at places where they dwell without performing any form of recall, is said to be a grave case of ignorance that upsets the spirits. It is in this sense that the spirits are the agents of an extended memory that inhabits places, one that helps to preserve memory outside the unreliability of individual memory. At commemorative rituals such as burials and rituals of healing, the spirits of the ancestors speak to the performer and, through him, to the participants. Vaughan writes that “you don’t have to be possessed yourself, by the spirit of an ancestor or an invading foreigner, to experience the history and the future of which they speak” (67). Herero ancestors may not speak about the history and the future, neither would OvaHerero

⁹⁷ As I have argued in chapter one, Herero ancestors can be seen to a certain extent as narrated persons, because they continue to be present mainly in praise songs that give account of their lives. These praise songs are in most cases created after the death of the person and sung in the mourning period that follows. Since different people who knew the person in different situations or phases of his or her life are participating in the creation of praise songs, the songs braid together aspects of that person’s life. It is in this way that the social life of the person continues. But ancestors are also remembered at specific places and at the family’s *okuruuo*. As part of social networks, relatives that can be referred to in order to construct family ties and as part of a genealogical series, ancestors continue to hold social functions. Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 268-272) suggest that the communication with these deceased persons continues by other means after death shows, that even after the physical death, a person’s social becoming is not complete. In this regard only stasis, that is, the end of being part of the social relations among members of the community, would mean social death.

⁹⁸ Marion Wallace writes about a case where a Herero woman broke her leg “because of her uncle’s failure to make the requested greetings to the forefathers. After a period of hospitalization in Windhoek, which did not seem to help, and with the intervention of diviners, she was removed to the countryside to make good the omission” (Wallace 1996: 11-12).

term the ritual as a case of spirit possession. Instead, what seems to be enacted is the re-charging of a connection, for which bodily communication with the spirits is inevitable.

As shown above, the environment that is socialized, and in turn gives meaning to the ritual action, is an inextricable part of the ritual. It is through this environment as an iteratively ritualized space that the embodied communication with the ancestors can take place. I take the concept of ritualized space from Bell who understands ritualization as “rooted in a distinctive interplay of a socialized body and the environment it structures” (1992: 8). Further, Bell sees the ritualized body as an effect of the “interaction with a structured and structuring environment” (116). According to Bell’s argumentation, this ritualized space or “symbolically schematised environment” emerges in a certain space-time, which is the ritual-time, and only then. For the structuring power of *okurya ebi*, I argue, this is only partially true. On some occasions, for example Okahandja Day, the ritual is performed in a context that structures time in that way. On other occasions, such as building a new house or passing by at places where people had died, it is integrated into every-day life. In every case it structures the landscape in a way that extends beyond the ritual occasion and keeps its meaning for the rest of the year. The re-remembering that takes place at the ritual moment is never a single moment. As a moment of condensed meaning, *okuria ebi* extends the situative context of the action into the past and to the future as a gesture of referring to the reconnecting of the community.

For all these reasons *okurya ebi* is an act of memory, one that recreates identities and the community. This act of memory is more abstract in the situations where unknown ancestors are addressed and more concrete in the cases where commemoration takes place at the graves of known deceased. This memorialization and recreation of identity is produced by means of the bodies of the performers who incorporate the trace of their kin into their living bodies and thus re-remember them into the realm of the living. Thus, another crucial aspect of the ritual is what it does to the performer and to the participants who are present in terms of the meaning created through embodied communication.

Strathern and Stewart suggest that the concepts of embodiment and communication provide useful frames for the analysis of ritual practices. With embodiment they mean “the entry of the social into the human body” (1998: 238), drawing on Bell’s notion of “the ritual body as one that is socialised into ritual action” (1992: 98). They further suggest that the body is the instrument of communication in ritual. This might not be true for every ritual action, but it is in the case of *okurya ebi*. There, the crucial part of ritual action consists of embodied communication. But this does not, as Strathern’s and Stewart’s concept of communication and

embodiment suggests, occur in two different phases of the ritual, nor does it signify two dimensions of a phase of the ritual (238). Performing *okurya ebi* is communicating *through* the body. As has been shown by Rappaport, the ritual act of kneeling produces a subordinated kneeler, which means it does not only symbolize but *is* subordination (cited in Bell 1992: 100). In the case of *okurya ebi*, embodied communication not only displays but produces a connected body that is linked to his or her kin and community.

Hence, I suggest that “eating the sand” is remembering through the body. At this occasion the deceased are not only present in the mind of the performers and participants but are virtually integrated into the living bodies of the performers. By doing this, a bodily connection is created that “produces a ritualised body through the interaction of the body with a structured and structuring environment” (Bell 1992: 98). This ritualized body is able to effect a shift of spheres. By means of bodily interaction in a ritualized space, at a specific moment, for instance the intensely ritualized time-space of Okahandja Day, the ancestors are reintegrated from the sphere of the spiritual into the social sphere of the living.

If we understand Okahandja Day as an occasion which draws upon all registers of mnemonic action to achieve the tremendous intensity of recall and representation, the participants experience (and even the visitors feel) that there is a logic of accumulation at play here. According to this logic of ritual accumulation, the ritual’s mode of incorporating the ancestors is complementary to the other performances that are staged at that event. In other words, I suggest that what the ritual does could not be achieved by speech acts alone.

Even though I agree with Teffo and Roux regarding the non-existence of totally separated worlds of the dead and the living, what I learned about the ancestor spirits in the Herero community is that they do not participate in the world of the living at every moment. The ancestor spirits do appear at certain moments and are suspected to be and can be met at certain places. Thus, I assume that there is a difference between the spheres of the dead and the living; one that may not be absolute, but is, more often than not, structured in a spatial way, albeit temporally specific as well. In other words, although the presence of the ancestors is called upon by citing praise poetry, there is a crucial difference between places and occasions in this respect. Herero people may not travel to Oshakati (in Northern Namibia) to honor a deceased family member unless there is the specific case of someone who is buried there. Neither is every moment of the daily routine, say, for instance, in the life of a teacher in Windhoek, seen as apt to communicate with this person’s deceased father. But Okahandja is certainly charged with history in a special way: mediated by means of praise poetry, the mobile lives of many *ovahona* meet at the

place (see chapter one). Intensified commemorative action and the presence of many members of the Otjiherero-speaking communities at Okahandja Day bring about the presence of the ancestors.

Ethnic identities are produced by means of the embodied communication, together with the speech acts and the staging of the *Otjiserandu*, be it by remembering of unknown but still Herero ancestors, or by remembering of known ancestors at specific places and times. In both cases the performers of *okurya ebi* respond to the specific situations that require the ritual create coherence. This may be genealogical coherence in situations where the ancestor is known, or ethnical coherence in cases of unknown but still Herero ancestors. Hence, the performance creates a social group and, through this, people who regard themselves as members of this group. The notion of temporal and genealogical connectedness and coherence that is emphasized by means of the ritual puts forward a notion of identity in a collective sense, an identity that is anchored to specific places as well as to a whole landscape of meaning, the past, and the kin.

Since chiefs who mainly perform the ritual at prominent occasions are seen as mediators between the living and the ancestors, it is their bodies that link the ancestors to the community. This bodily communication is mediated through the sand as a social substance. *Okuria ebi* gains additional significance through contextual setting, which it in turn produces. Hence, what *okurya ebi* generates through its spatial aspect, the effects of embodied communication, together with its effects on collective identity, is a social landscape and social identities that are tied to this landscape and to their past, their kin and through kinship to other members of the community. This may seem very similar to what praise poetry does, and it is, although complementary in the way that it doubles the link by means of embodied action. But, especially on Okahandja Day, the ritual does more than creating a landscape.

Re-appropriation and re-creation: attempts to reverse a moral dislocation

If a system of domination controls the representation of what is possible and what is natural, then a ritual of resistance breaks the hegemony over subjective consciousness of the ritual participants. It makes them conscious of the oppression and allows them to envision new communities and possibilities. (Kelly and Kaplan 1990: 135)

As I have argued, *okurya ebi* is linked to soil, to specific places and to the *ebi rOvaherero* as a whole. It connects kinship and territory in a ritual practice of remembering. But it does more. What transforms the ritual into a ritual of resistance and into the articulation of post-colonial ethnic identity is its connection to new symbols at a specific historical time and place. As a ritual of resistance today, *okurya ebi* is by no means an a-historical practice. It has a poignantly urgent political vocation that is firmly situated in the present as well as a history that accounts for colonial experience.

After the colonial war of 1904-1906, the German legislation sought to achieve domination and control over the Herero and Nama of Namibia in so far that:

Every tribal organisation will cease. Werfts deep in the bush which try to avoid political supervision will not be tolerated. They would provide *focal points for memories* of tribal life and days when Africans owned the land. (Deputy Governor Tecklenburg to the colonial office, 17/5/1904, cited in Bley 1981: 223)

In this context, Maherero's funeral, as an amalgamated, layered, ritual action that linked the land to the ancestors together with the newly created symbols of Herero unity, became a pivotal point in time and space. By means of the continuous commemoration of Herero ancestors who are buried in Okahandja at the date of Maherero's funeral, this historical event has been selected and thus established as a central moment in Herero history. The annual iteration of the performance of uniformed parading, speeches, the appropriation of the place together with the ritual *okurya ebi* turned into a ritual of resistance that can best be described as a form of articulation in the sense of Stuart Hall. He uses the term articulation with a twofold meaning: as articulating in the sense of uttering or expressing, but also as bringing together elements that do not necessary belong together, at a specific place and time and in a strategic sense.

An articulation is thus the form of connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. (Hall 1996: 141)

Okurya ebi need not necessarily have any political connotations, nor was it connected to uniforms and parading prior to Maherero's burial. The transformation of the ritual into a practice of resistance is a result of the new composition of elements founded at the funeral itself and of the

establishing of this celebration as a crucial part of Herero culture over the years. *Okuria ebi* still cites cultural meaning and performs the communication with the ancestors. But with a difference. Here Butler's notion of the possibility of subversion by means of a shift within the iteration holds. The iteration of *okuria ebi* gained a new layer of meaning with regard to the contradiction that unfolds on Okahandja Day. "Eating the soil" is claiming to own the land and being connected to it. But, Okahandja is a town and its central place and graveyard are *not* owned by Herero. Hence, what *okurya ebi* produces in the composition with the other elements that make up Okahandja Day, is a specific kind of double consciousness: one that interprets the land as rightly owned by Herero but at the same time is aware of the fact that *de jure* this is not the case.

As a performative practice the articulation that took place at Maherero's funeral did not produce meaning once and for all. The ritual of resistance as a form of articulation achieves its meaning through the annual reiteration. Moreover, I suggest that the transformation of *okurya ebi* through the linkage to the symbols of the *Otruppe* was not intentionally staged by specific agents with the aim to perform a ritual of resistance. The connection of the elements that compose Okahandja Day in recent times was orchestrated according and as a response to the necessities of a specific moment in history. The practice of *okurya ebi* as a cultural element that was already there was hooked to new symbols of Herero power. In this way, the repositories of cultural practice together with the experience of colonization and war were amalgamated into an event that produced and still annually creates a synthesis of these contradictory sources of culture and experience.

It is in this sense that *okurya ebi*, especially on Okahandja Day, has shifted into a ritual of resistance against colonial domination. If it can be seen as a ritual of resistance today, it is part of a postcolonial articulation in the sense that accounts for who and where the Herero are today. Whereas the "who" refers to collective identity, the "where" is not only located spatially but situated in the time and context of the postcolony. The articulation of identity in the postcolony cannot do without reference to the past, since that past is an intrinsic aspect of Herero identity today. As Gilroy says referring to Marx: "we make our identities, but with inherited resources and not under circumstances of our own choosing" (2000: 127).

Again, in the postcolonial situation, the notion of what Werbner has termed "a presence and an absence, the now in tension with the not-now, a politicised reality" (1996: 4) conjures. In this sense Okahandja Day represents the predicament of the postcolonial situation. The staging of the *Otjiserandu*, together with rituals of recall, productively deal with a past that is not yet past, since it is part of what construed Herero collective identity. In the direct aftermath of the war,

the uniforms of the *Otruppe* organizations had the effect of displaying Herero unity and power in “a language power understands” (Handler 1991: 71) and, as another aspect, the aim to spiritually weaken the strength of the enemy. Additionally, by using the fetish of colonial power, the wearing of the uniforms refuted the alleged absolute difference between the colonial authorities and the Herero population, thereby rejecting the hierarchy of races (see chapter 3). Here, a profound sense of being-as-becoming is displayed: if, both in a spiritual and political sense, the appropriation of “charged” objects of power enhances the spirit and strength of the wearer on a very deep level, then how can there exist such a thing as an essential substance of difference?

Using the objects of power, the Otjiserandu members displayed the reconstruction of their community and its ability to appropriate and re-encode the symbolic of colonial domination in their own sense. Today, although the *Otruppe* organization still exists, these uniforms display a presence of the past. Thus they are transformed into a symbol of Hereriness. The uniforms of the men, the long dresses of the women, together with the flags and the ceremonies of commemoration, expose ethnic identity, not as essential but as historical and dialogic, that is, referring back to the encounter with the colonial power that drastically changed the way of life of the Herero. As a sign of Hereriness the uniforms, as well as the dresses of the women, create a social group that, if only on the occasions of commemoration days, can be clearly identified according to this dress code. It is by means of the exposure of the uniforms and dresses and their mnemonic function that Okahandja Day acquires the performative power that refers back and represents their specific version of colonial experience.

Framed by the event of Okahandja Day, *okurya ebi* as a part of the commemoration celebration has gained new meaning by means of the encounter of the Herero with colonial power and the experience of domination and dis-appropriation as well as survival and the reconstruction of community. Embedded in the context of a demonstration of unity and political consciousness, *okurya ebi* shows the capacity of the Herero community to reformulate ritual actions in reaction to a changed context. Themes and schemes from a shared cultural archive are strategically restructured and thus reflect upon a changed context.

In this manner *okurya ebi* is an act of re-signification. It re-inscribes the meaning of places in the sense of the Herero that has no juridical relevance in the state of Namibia today. Instead it re-claims them in a moral sense. As an act of memory it re-members what has been broken apart during the war and colonial times. On Okahandja Day *okurya ebi* is performed in the spatial and situational center of a larger commemorative context. Performed by men in uniforms, in an event of speeches that address recent national and international politics, parading, the discussion of

community issues and Christian hymns, the ritual does not openly display or even narrate the symbolic re-appropriation it enacts. I suggest that the meaning of “eating the sand” is not, perhaps cannot be, openly discussed while it appears to be intrinsically interwoven in a context that displays elements of Herero history and memory. The social fabric harbours the practice “as the implicit language of symbolic activity” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1987: 193). It is an encoded form of practice that does not and may not be meant to literally speak out political aims and utterances.

This implicit politics is a politics of remembrance. Analyzed in the wider sense of the ritual, *okurya ebi* can be seen as a mnemonic action that re-connects the performers to the ancestors and the land. Re-generating and communicating the connectedness of the Herero to their land, the commemoration ceremony on Okahandja Day as a whole iteratively seeks to reconcile a “moral dislocation” (Teffo and Roux 1998: 142). This dislocation is understood as a rupture in the coherence between genealogical chains and the places that represent them. Without the places, ancestor veneration is not possible in the same way, since the ancestors cannot be met at the places where they dwell. The bodily communication that is mediated through the soil and the places cannot be performed without these places. If the places are lost, the link between the ancestors and the living is disturbed. As Davidson says, with the means of disappropriation and dislocation under colonial rule,

the ancestors were banished to the realms of impotence and anonymity from which there seemed no way of recalling them, and so, for living and yet unborn, there was no way of conserving the notion of community as these peoples had learned to understand it. (1994: 12 cited in Teffo and Roux 1998: 142)⁹⁹

Staged officially, commemorative rites for deceased *ovabona* at specific places demonstrate that these places belong to the Herero community even if that might not be the case according to property rights.

Okuria ebi as connected to commemorative rites in this sense belongs to a range of practices that perform counter-claims. Okahandja Day as a whole thus does not only represent claims and political consciousness as well as having the function to re-create collective identity, but produces political consciousness. The iterative reinscription of the places and the bodies of

⁹⁹ Davidson discusses the effects of moral dislocation in the contexts of a review of two books on the Mau-Mau uprising in Kenya in the 1950s.

the performers resignifies the connection to the land and re-produces a community that sees itself as attached to the ancestral land.

Under the restricted conditions of the situation as a minority in a postcolonial state that has not resolved the land question so far, the rituals of commemoration, rooted in a local system of meaning and responding to change, have the capacity to form the political consciousness that is a precondition for change. They perform the articulation of Hereriness in the past and the present in the entangled mode it appears to be.

Otjize

The recourse to another world offers the present an alternative vantage point for viewing current states of affairs. Indeed, the recourse to another space and time has always been one dimension of utopia and it is this possibility which also creates nostalgia, a sense of loss, as much as it does a sense of hope (Andrew Lattas 1996: 263).

The first speaker at the opening of the history conference in Windhoek in August 2004 under the title “Decontaminating the Namibian past,” Uazavara Katjivena confronted the audience with a re-telling of an episode of colonial violence that his grandmother experienced:¹⁰⁰

My grandmother was eleven years old when both her mother and her father were killed by German soldiers. She was captured by a German farmer and became a servant to his wife. Her traditional head dress was removed, her bangles were cut from her arms and legs and the ochre was washed from her skin. After she was stripped of all her clothes, bathed and washed, she was dressed in European clothes and was renamed Petronella. My grandmother told me about the suffering of my people and the loss of our culture and identity.

I begin this chapter with the re-telling of this violent act of stripping a young girl of her markers of identity in order to introduce the meaning of *otjize* that in this story was washed from the girl’s skin.

Today, this mixture of ochre and fat is often referred to as an ointment, especially useful as a protection of the skin against sun and wind in the arid climate of Namibia. At the same time Ovahimba people, an Otjiherero-speaking community, are referred to as people who dress traditionally and apply ochre to their skin, hair, and on adornments like necklaces and bracelets. Here the red color that their skins have when *otjize* is applied on it appears to be one of the signifiers of their ethnic group. There is therefore a double discourse about *otjize*, qualifying it at

¹⁰⁰ Uazavara Katjivena is a SWAPO veteran who lives in Norway. He and other members of the Herero community spoke at this conference about the experiences of the community during and after the war as these stories were transmitted within families and the community. The contributions of these participants allowed for different insights into Herero history and were often conflicting with scholarly history writing.

once as a physically functional ointment, a protection against the elements and, less explicitly, as a marker of Ovahimba ethnic identity.¹⁰¹

The story as Uazavara Katjivena told it, connects *otjiize* with the forced and invasive removal of elements of a cultural dress code and body care that communicated identity. In order to force the girl into a new social role as a servant, she was not only re-named, but had to be stripped of her Herero dress, bangles and *otjiize*. The story speaks of a “complete make-over” that had a symbolic dimension for both sides. Whereas the (not named) white people felt the need to remove these items in order to force the girl into the social role designated for her, she recalled the event with horror. It marked the loss of items that were intrinsically connected to her cultural identity. Between the story as experienced by Uazavara Katjivena’s grandmother and the retelling of this story at the history conference lie nearly a hundred years.

The account of the loss of *otjiize* on which this chapter focuses was recounted to me in 1999 by Naftaline Tjikundi. The meaning of this specific ointment may not be the same in the two accounts. Colonial and post-colonial history, that is, in this case, the history of a forced removal that comprises the regaining and then, again, the loss of *otjiize*, may have transformed the meaning that this ointment has for Herero women today. Even so, if the meaning of *otjiize* is not the same in 1999 as it was around 1906, both accounts characterize the ochre as an object with a specific history and value within the community. The account of the loss of access to *otjiize* as told by Naftaline Tjikundi speaks in and about the presence but also about social change, which, in this case, creates an impasse. This account, in which Ombotozu, a mountain in central Namibia where women used to go to dig for ochre, is central, allows for a closer look at *otjiize* as a social substance.

Ombotozu

There are many modernities. And neither should this surprise us. (J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff 1993: xxii)

¹⁰¹ Photographs of “the Ovahimba people,” especially young, bare-breasted Ovahimba women, but also men and children in traditional dresses and adornments, are circulated extensively on postcards, in travel brochures, and tourist advertisements. These texts and images produce a coherently traditional picture of Ovahimba people who thereby become the symbols for what is seen as the unspoiled tradition of a group of pastoralists in the remote Northwest of Namibia.

I heard about the Ombotozu mountain for the first time when Naftaline Tjikundi explained the use of *otjiẓe* to me: “*Otjiẓe* is for real Herero ladies and the Himba people. Ovaherero men don’t use it, it is for women. It also protects the skin against the sun.” Applying it on my arm she added: ”on your skin it looks funny because you are white.” When I asked her where the ochre is found, I got the following answer: ”It is found at Ombotozu, a mountain between Okahandja and Otjiwarongo. But that is a difficult place. You cannot go there. You have to go there with someone, a big man, he has to introduce you to that place. Without this introduction it is dangerous. The snake is going to bite you.” In the course of our conversation Naftaline explained that an ancestor spirit dwells at the place and that he has to be asked for permission to enter the area and dig for ochre.

Neither Naftaline Tjikundi nor her daughter Renathe knew anything more concrete about the person who died there. But Naftaline added: ”We, myself and other women from this area, used to go there and dig for ochre. Today we cannot go there anymore, we have to *buy* the ochre.” Saying this, she seemed to be sad and not willing to go into further details or answer my questions about snakes and spirits: “Maybe you better ask Kaputu, he might know.”

Alexander Jarimbovandu Kaputu nearly always knows. He seems to inhabit the position of main interpreter of Herero culture to outsiders. Asked to explain the danger of the Ombotozu Mountain, he said:

Herero ladies used to go there. Halfway they met a priest-chief who knew the place. He accompanied them to the place. When they reached the foot of the mountain, the priest kneeled on the floor and barked like a dog. The spirit asked him: “what is this dog barking for?” The priest answered: “ there are people who want to see you!” Then he would introduce himself: “I am so and so, my father is so and so, I am the grandson of so and so.” He had to mention his father, grandfathers, his uncles, all his ancestors he knew. He is not allowed to speak the wrong words. After that he would introduce the women and ask for permission to stay at the place and dig for ochre. He touched a stone at the grave and the women did the same. Then he could go and leave the women there.

The Herero have their own religion, which is different from the Christian religion. When somebody dies, his spirit remains at the place. The snake at Ombotozu represents the ancestor spirit. The snake reminds you to obey. Sometimes it also appears as a jackal or *umbepo* (Otjiherero for both wind and spirit). That means the

spirit is upset. Many people saw the snake at Ombotozu. I went there one day. There was nobody to introduce me. I saw the snake when I was climbing up the mountain: it was black spotted. I kneeled down and introduced myself. When I finished, there was no snake. The snake was gone.¹⁰²

After telling me this, he added: “you cannot just go and buy *otjiꝛe* somewhere!”

Why does the idea of buying *otjiꝛe* evoke such strong feelings of aversion? What does it mean that buying seems to be unacceptable in this case?¹⁰³ Simple associations made me think of something related to religion, the sacred – as opposed to the profane act of buying. But no, neither the mountain itself nor the ointment is considered sacred. “Difficult,” the qualification that was given to me when I first heard about that site, means difficult “because the place is dangerous,” Renathe explained. Writing about landscape, the first entrance I attempted in order to get closer to the meaning of *otjiꝛe*, was the mountain itself. A praise poem about Ombotozu does exist, but did not provide me with much help. The praise poem as remembered today consists of only one line:

The absence of hunger of Tjimbaru, who is surrounded by thirst, not by hunger.¹⁰⁴

Unfortunately even Alexander Kaputu did not know who Tjimbaru was, whether he died there of thirst, nor when that could have happened. He explained that the poem could also be taken as a qualification of the site, telling the traveller that he or she will find food (game, or edible plants) but no water there.

A story that was told by Elisabeth Kahiiko and written down by the linguist Ernst Damman in 1954 speaks about Ombotozu as the mountain where women went to find *otjiꝛe*.¹⁰⁵ In this story, a group of women is on the way to Ombotozu to dig for ochre. One of these women, who is pregnant, is constantly asked to stay behind and urged not to follow the others to the site. The pregnant woman refuses to follow the advice of her companions and goes to the mountain despite constant warnings. Digging in the pit she gets buried by a landslide and dies. When the other women realize that she died, they sing a mocking song in which the pregnant

¹⁰² Told during an interview at the NBC in 1999.

¹⁰³ Two other informants said that ochre was actually bought, but in both cases these people did not use *otjiꝛe* themselves and seemed to have a more indifferent relationship with the substance, not considering it of any importance.

¹⁰⁴ Told, among other praise poems, by Naftaline Tjikundi in 2000.

¹⁰⁵ Published as “Eine junge Frau, die Ocker sucht“ (Damman 1987: 92).

woman is the lover of a snake. Her parents, who hear the song, commit suicide. The story ends with the deceased woman remaining at the place, saying that she was married to the snake and gives birth to snakes.

In the Otjiherero original (and the German translation) the story is not much longer than the report of the story I give here. A very compressed, very cruel story. The explanations that Damman offers for this story are thin: he does not mention more than a putative trespassing of taboos on the part of the pregnant woman, which leads to the punishment, namely, the death of the young woman. Her parents commit suicide because of the unbearable shame brought about by a daughter who is married to a snake and will give birth to snake children. The story is moralistic, so it seems, designed to keep women in their place.

Women to whom I showed the story in 2004 were mostly amused. None of them knew the story. Renathe Tjikundi and Adelheid Kustaa¹⁰⁶ both said: “This is just a tale.” No incident of a pregnant woman who lost her life at Ombotozu was known to anyone. Neither could I get any explanation about whether and why the pregnant woman was not allowed to go to the mountain.

Restrictions for pregnant women seem to have been common in the past. One of the praise poems for Omaruru refers to the *rivier*, which cannot (or should not) be crossed by a pregnant woman or a woman with a baby on her back. Talking about these taboos of the past, which no longer seem to be valid, appears to be difficult. Whether women were willing to speak about these restrictions or not depended on the situative context of the conversation. Especially when friends and neighbors were around during the interviews, the interviewed women would come up with medical reasons, like “pregnant women catch colds more easily, when they get wet,” or they would deny any specific taboo for pregnant women altogether.

Renathe, with whom I discussed most of my interpretations in 2004, said: “You do not take your German fairy tales for real, do you?” Probably not in terms of taking them as history writing. But stories like fairy tales might report on the moral agendas of the past from which they come, if only in an encoded manner. Moreover, what is seen as just a tale speaks of a real site, an activity (the digging for ochre) that does, or rather, did take place there in the recent past. And a story has a snake in it, or, at least formally, something of the same species as appears in the warning about the place I heard from Naftaline.

Although my intention to connect the stories were easily dismissed, in this chapter I want to retain the key elements that appear in what the women defined as “a tale” and in Naftaline’s

¹⁰⁶ Adelheid Kustaa is 76 years old and lives in Omaruru. She could remember the recordings of 1954. I interviewed her in 2004 when I was searching for the women whose stories and poems Ernst Damman recorded in the 1950s.

warning. In the tale and in the warning snakes appear, both deal with danger. Thus, if I formulate it broadly, both are connected to social structure. In both cases, trespassing the rules of the place is perilous. The death of the pregnant woman did not really happen, as I was told, but a fatal snakebite may be expected at Ombotozu.

Snakes appear in recent accounts of witchcraft and sorcery. Seen from a Western point of view, which makes clear distinctions between what we see as natural and super-natural phenomena and between the magic and the real, these snakes seem to inhabit the threshold between two worlds: the sphere of the living and that of the ancestors and the spirits. That may not be their place within the Herero discourse, mainly because this threshold does not exist in the same way. If a border does exist at all, it is a fluid one. The natural versus the supernatural are ill-fitting categories in this case. So are simple binaries such as tradition versus modernity in terms of credible, accepted realities and discourses. Although rational explanations coexist with views that accept the existence of spirits and magic, the views that allow for the spiritual cannot be seen as remnants of an older teleological model that is dying out. In fact, both ways of seeing and experiencing the world coexist in contemporary Namibia. Thus, modernity does not appear to be a passage from superstition to rationality. Instead, what counts for real is a dynamic composition of elements that may stem from different teleological systems.

The philosopher Charles Taylor speaks of multiple modernities, as related in different ways to the various cultures from which they emerged (2000: 364). Modernization, in this sense, means the transition to a market-industrial economy, and a bureaucratically organized state, to name but a few of the changes that societies in Africa and elsewhere have undergone. All of these changes have an impact on cultural practice. Taylor suggests that, although institutional and economic changes alter forms of social practice, belief systems, technologies and the like, and some forms and institutions, converge world wide, people find ways of creative adaptation to changed life worlds and invent their own modernities (368-369). This leads to great differences of, and sometimes even within, local modernities. Taylor stresses the dynamic of contemporary belief systems and practice and their way of adapting, while at the same time patchworking specific social worlds with his term “social imaginary.” The term social imaginary, Taylor uses in place of the often static and somewhat beleaguered term culture, will help to analyze the meaning of *otjize* and the stories that coalesce around it. I will take the term social imaginary as distinguishing what may count for real, differentiating what is credible and what is excluded from the regime of the real and plausible. In this way the notion of the social imaginary forms a

continuum of what is plausible, of which, as I learned, the tale of the pregnant woman does not form part.

In Namibia, as in other African societies, magical practice and spirits are part of the social imaginary. They are part of the modern simultaneity of witches and factories, spirits and highways, market economy and faith healers. Witchcraft and discourses about it are part of the Namibian modernity that embraces all social strata, although the opinions about these phenomena differ individually. The existence of magic permeates social reality and the discourses and practices that deal with it cannot be dismissed as a folksy belief of the rural areas. Instead, magic practitioners offer their service in the cities and are consulted by people of diverse cultural and social backgrounds.

In Namibian discourses these spheres form dynamic ensembles. In September 2004, for example, there were reports on television of witchcraft cases in schools. Governmental institutions, which usually distance themselves from incidents like witchcraft, were called upon by the local communities to help in these cases. During the NBC report about the incidents, the government demanded that both witchcraft *and* superstition must come to an end. Seeing the report on television with Namibian friends, we translated this demand as “people must stop bewitching each other and believing in witchcraft.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, what seems to be paradoxical, at least in my social imaginary, - you can ask people either to stop practicing witchcraft, which means sorcery is real and to be condemned, or to stop believing in it, which categorizes witchcraft as superstition – does not necessarily figure as a paradox in Namibia. This episode exemplifies a discourse that I think of as a postmodern montage technique in terms in Namibian society, when dealing with what Westerners may call the supernatural.

The Ondara is a case in point: it is described as a giant python-like snake that is feared as both a huge reptile but also as the messenger of death. Whoever happens to see the snake, I was told, can expect a death in the family.¹⁰⁸ This shows that western taxonomic systems, according to which the snake is classified as a python, are appropriated and can be productively merged with local knowledge. This creates a discourse that makes use of both epistemic systems, thereby combining signifiers of the scientific language of taxonomy with the semantics of Herero

¹⁰⁷ Complaints about witchcraft cases in schools in the Otjinene region were reported on NBC news in September 2004. The case of a boy who produced fire wherever he went that was reported widely in the Namibian media in 1999 caused similar reactions. Here, too, the government was called upon to solve the problem with which the village in North Namibia could no longer deal. The reaction was a refusal to get involved in the case, but no complete denial of the credibility of the incident itself.

¹⁰⁸ Interviews with Alexander Kaputu and Naftaline Tjikundi in 1999.

knowledge. Both speak of danger; combining the two ways of speaking recasts prior meanings and resituates the existence of the Ondara within modern Namibia.¹⁰⁹

One problem about the tale certainly was that I could not distinguish the real, in which ancestor spirits exist who might send dangerous snakes, from what was seen as “just a tale.” As a foreigner, not only to the community, but also to the conventions of orature, I often cannot identify the rules of credibility that organize orature and distinguish history from fiction. Hence, what caused amusement and even embarrassment was that I tried to make a connection between the tale and what I was told about the mountain Ombotozu in 1999 in order to understand what this account means and what *otjiꞤe*, or rather the loss of *otjiꞤe*, means to Naftaline. The connection I tried to establish seems to make no sense in present-day Namibia. Nor does the story speak about or to the lives of women today. Even if there has been a taboo for pregnant women to go to Ombotozu, and even if the tale speaks about the dangers of transgressing this rule, this does not seem to have any relevance today. It is possible to speculate that the unknown ancestor at the site, who gets upset quite easily and sends snakes, is the spirit of the woman who lost her life there. But it may also be the spirit of Tjimbaru who is remembered in the praise poem. Both possibilities do not tell us more about the preciousness of *otjiꞤe* and the predicament of the women who cannot get it anymore. Nor does it explain why, if the place is dangerous, women do not simply buy *otjiꞤe* from somewhere else. There is more than one place in Namibia where one can find ochre, there is certainly plenty of it in the Northwest where many Himba people use it regularly.

OtjiꞤe as an adornment of the body that is worn on the skin and changes the appearance of the body, has a close relation to clothes. Not only does it protect the skin, but it adds something. Quite obviously it covers the body and adds color, it changes brown skin into shining, ochre-red skin. In order to analyze what else *otjiꞤe* adds to the female body of some Herero women, what makes buying it objectionable, and what makes its loss so poignantly felt, a closer look into the performative aspects of the traditional Herero dress is productive.

Pride and prejudice

¹⁰⁹ Johannes Fabian reminded me that the python appears in numerous myths and stories in Africa. In this text it appears only as an example of modes of explanation or the characterization of phenomena at which teleological elements of contesting systems of thought are combined.

Even if our own approach to things is conditioned necessarily by the view that things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with, the anthropological problem is that this formal truth does not illuminate the concrete, historical circulation of things. For we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, and their trajectories. (Arjun Appadurai 1986: 5)

Herero women dressed in *oborokweva onde*, the long dresses, belong to the usual picture of the shopping malls in Windhoek and also appear in the rural areas and small towns. Like the ochre-red skin for the Ovahimba, the Herero women's dress became an ethnic marker. In the public discourses in Namibia, these dresses are often depicted as a typical expression of Herero conservatism that is often seen as a sign of and resulting from a specific ethnic identity, rather than performing this identity. Anne-Marie Fortier writes:

It is easy to label such manifestations as “ethnic” and to encase them as traditions that testify to the continuity of some authentic, original culture (1999: 43). Consequently, some cultural practices are reified and naturalised as “typical expressions” of an ethnic identity; they are seen as resulting from that identity, rather than performing that identity. (49)

Writing about these dresses, Hendrickson has shown how what is seen as authentic and unchanging is actually the result of historical transformation within the community, in which the Herero community consciously appropriated an originally Victorian dress code and changed it into the emblematic vocabulary of Herero costumes. He writes:

These clothes represent Herero history and identity to the community and the world. The long dress has also shaped and been shaped by the increasingly conscious imagination and expression of a collective Herero identity in the plural social world of nineteenth and twentieth-century Namibia. (1994: 26)

An impressive interpretation of the performative quality of these dresses has been given by an artwork that was shown at the history conference at the University of Namibia in Windhoek in 2004. Delineating this artwork, the history of the long dress, and thereby following the

trajectories of the social biography of its fashion and appropriation for a while, does not lead away from *otjiže*, but allows me to concentrate on the historical transformation of symbolic meaning of dresses and adornments of the body within the Herero community. Moreover, it permits a glimpse into the articulation of meanings by means of the incorporation of objects into the definition of the social self within Herero communities, by which objects become emblematic for ethnic and gendered identities and, at the same time, reproduce the social realm from which they arose.

Two students of art and media studies created a long dress together with a Herero tailor. These two young artists, Karina Nambahu and Ponofi Veico, who are not coming from a Herero cultural background, produced an interpretation of Herero dresses as seen from the outside. The thematic focus of the exhibition was given: students were invited to contribute artworks that deal with colonial history in Namibia. The material artwork consists of a black Herero women's dress with white imprints of archival photographs. The dress was displayed on a figure without a face.

At first sight it is difficult to identify the images on the dress. They seem to be easier to re-identify for the viewer who knows the images from the archive or from publications than for a stranger. The photographs on the dress are images that belong to the cultural memory of nearly every Namibian. They have been circulated regularly in the public sphere in Namibia and belong to the picture of Namibia like the colorful and strangely shaped dresses of Herero women. The artwork consists of the long dress, *oborokweva onde*, which entails a bodice, with wide, long sleeves, a wide skirt and a headscarf of the same material. The color that was chosen for the artwork is rather unusual; it is all black and serves as a background or negative canvas for the white images that are printed on the cloth. The images on the dress remind one of negatives, which makes them look at once distanced and somewhat blurred or faded. The artwork connects the performative aspects of the dress and elements of cultural memory that putatively inform the performativity of the dress, by framing the pictures within the enclosure of the dress. By means of framing, that is, in this case, contextualizing anew, in a mode in which the dress and the images have to be regarded together, the artwork creates an associative relation between crucial moments in Herero history and the recent performance of ethnicity.

Three motives appear as images on the dress: Herero prisoners of war, the notorious and cruel picture of starved people in chains; Samuel Maherero, the Herero chief who led the war; and Lothar von Trotha, the German general who gave the so-called *Vernichtungsbefehl* (extinction order) that led to the killing and starvation of thousands of Ovaherero. The blurred quality of the pictures themselves creates a notion of distance, or even vagueness, which underscores the

distance in time. Moreover, as my experience at the exhibition made clear to me, the pictures could be identified only by people who already knew them. To me, this spoke about the strangeness of the dress at first sight and the necessity of a closer look. Indeed, forcing the visitors of the exhibition to give up the distance to “strangeness” was what it did and people virtually had to get in touch with the dress in order to identify what was to be seen on the images. A close look, together with knowledge about Herero history, is needed to come to an understanding of the function and the social meaning these dresses have for the Herero community.

However, in the artwork, the dress becomes the medium that communicates Herero history. Its design suggests a connection between the dress code and the colonial war. Although the link to colonial war tells but one story about the intrinsic relation of the Herero women’s dress to their community’s history, by linking the dress to history it depicts the performative and identitarian aspects of these dresses worn by adult Herero women at a glance. The artwork thus stresses the relation between the dress as an object and the memory of the Herero communities. In this way it establishes the notion of the mnemonic function of the dresses. In the artwork the dress becomes a canvas, bearing the propensity to establish material continuity for the elusive fabric of memory. Although the artwork directs the viewer to think of these dresses as more than a strangely anachronistic “Victorian” dress code, a view which often produces the prejudice of the Herero community’s stubborn traditionalism, at the same time it reduces the complexity of meanings these dresses bear within the community.¹¹⁰

In terms of cultural or ethnic representation, the long dresses of the married Herero women retains a significant position. The dress makes the cultural background of the women who wear it – and not all women do – recognizable both to the world and within their community.¹¹¹ Whereas many married women wear these dresses daily, men wear emblematic outfits only occasionally, such as, for example, the uniforms at commemoration ceremonies. As Hendrickson writes, the dress is a key symbol of gender relations, social organization and ethnicity. This is a position of signification performed on a daily basis only by the dresses of adult, married women. Both Ovaherero men and women refer to the dress as the traditional Herero dress. As such it displays cultural identity and is worn with pride and consciousness of its significant quality. According to Hendrickson’s interpretation, the dress not only alters the bodily

¹¹⁰ See the chapter Okuria Ehi for the notion of the “Victorian.”

¹³⁴ Working women, especially in towns, often find the dress inconvenient and wear it only occasionally. But it seems as if even most of the young, married women who live in town, although they may work in offices, banks, teach in school or at the university, work in shops and the like, do own long dresses and wear them, if only occasionally, with pride.

appearance of the wearer, but, through its wide form and high waist, creates the impression of pregnancy.¹¹² This, Hendrickson suggests, is an intended effect, since procreative power, linked to the ability to produce kinship networks, affect the strong position of married women in Herero communities.¹¹³ The making, maintenance and wearing of the long dress, all of which implies labor and self-discipline, quite literally entails a burden for the women who wear it and therefore seem to express the willingness of the mature woman “to comply with the priorities of adult life by wearing this clothing” (Hendrickson 1994: 41).¹¹⁴ Moreover, the dress itself confers the power and the force of social values: not only does it mark women as visually representing Herero culture, but it forces them into the proper behavior of mature women, which implies walking slow and with grace, sitting in a certain manner and the like.

This shows that the dress itself is only one element of a set that creates the style and pride of many married Herero women. Thus, what Hall writes about the self-expression of Jamaicans in Britain in the 1950s, especially in their “Sunday best,” describes quite well what Herero women wish to communicate with their dresses to the world outside of the community:

The clothes are those of someone determined to make a mark, make an impression on where they are going. Their formality is a sign of self-respect. These folk mean to survive. (Hall 1984: 4 cited in Jackson 1989: 59)

The connection to the colonial war of 1904-1908 that is suggested by the artwork of Nambahu and Veico certainly derives from associations with the performances at commemoration

¹¹² This was not always the case: pictures from the 1950s (and earlier) show Herero women wearing long dresses that are considerably less wide and therefore produced a slimmer appearance than the current fashion. The headscarf, too, looks different on older photos: it lacks the pointed extension or “horns“ on the sides (see Hartmann, Silvester & Hayes 1998: 26).

¹¹³ Hendrickson’s argument is more complex than what appears in this text. In her work, she distinguishes kinship networks according to the system of double descent of the Herero communities, arguing that the position of the men is weakened, due to the fact that their form of establishing continuity by means of ritual practices that connect the living to the ancestors successively loses meaning. According to Hendrickson, the position of the women remains powerful because the importance of the motherly line of descent is based on what is seen as natural ties that do not easily lose their meaning. Furthermore, she convincingly depicts the appearance of the dress and headscarf as connected to an aesthetic that highly values the beauty of cattle. The dress, making the wearer look corpulent and forcing the women to move slowly, which is regarded as graceful, together with the headscarf that intentionally resembles the appearance of cattle horns, creates a female appearance that reminds one of the beauty and social values of cattle (Hendrickson 1994).

¹¹⁴ The making of a long dress requires at least ten meters of heavy cotton cloth and an estimated amount of twenty hours of labor. Thus, the dress is not only heavy, with up to seven petticoats worn underneath, but washing and ironing it – most of the time with coal-filled irons – is time consuming. Younger women, like Renathe’s sister Doris, often express their unwillingness to wear this clothing. On the way to a wedding in Ovitoto, Doris got upset about Renathe’s slow walking while wearing the traditional dress and said that she will never wear it. Renathe was quite positive that she would change her mind as soon as she would get married.

ceremonies. As I mentioned before, during those commemoration ceremonies, Herero women wear these dresses in the colors of the flags of the branches of the *otruppe* organizations that arrange and perform the ceremonies.

But the transition from leather clothes to these dresses, at least among the mostly Christian elite, who may have had an avant-garde position, took place much earlier. Already in the second half of the nineteenth century, photographs depict women in long dresses as I mentioned in chapter 4. According to Hendrickson the wearing of European clothes corresponds with the emergence of Herero ethnic identity (1996: 240). This interpretation is contested by members of the Herero community who argue for a continuity of Herero identity from a much earlier time as will be discussed in the next chapter.¹¹⁵

However, a transformation of the politics of bodily representation during the nineteenth century, that is, a different dress code related to gender and social status, cannot be denied. Throughout history the dress changed considerably, and was appropriated and thereby transformed into the traditional Herero dress that communicates gendered social values. Therefore, the long dress became a symbol of Hereriness, rather than a sign of adaptation to European style. Today, its prominent position at commemoration ceremonies intrinsically links it to mnemonic practices.

The transition from leather clothes to cloth dresses was steeped in the history of economic change. Cloth and clothes, together with rifles, ammunition, and horses were highly valued goods of trade already in the second half of the nineteenth century. These items had not only utilitarian but also symbolic value within the Herero society.¹¹⁶ What interests me here, is that in the case of guns and clothes, utilitarian and symbolic values do not seem to collide with trade and commodification. Quite contrary to the case of *otjize*, buying these items was not objectionable or problematic. In the late nineteenth century, writes Dag Henrichsen, “Herero society developed into a ‘gun society’.” By this he means not only the massive armament of Herero communities, which had gained wealth during the second half of the nineteenth century, “but the fact that guns and gun owners were integrated into central social rituals in a way similar to cattle and herders” (2001: 180).

Integrating guns into rain-making rituals in the nineteenth century (180), like incorporating dresses-as-flags into commemoration rituals in recent times and the past, speaks about the capacity of Herero communities to transform objects and items into elements within

¹¹⁵ See chapter five.

¹¹⁶ See Hendrickson 1994 and Henrichsen 2001.

the registers of the social, where they become charged with social and symbolic value. Hence, the fact that trade and money are involved in the acquisition of objects did not and does not dissociate them from the realm of the potentially symbolic. Instead, it seems as if the fact that guns and clothing were involved in trade and socio-economic change, as well as connected to social engagements within the wide range of trade, of Christianization, marriage, family links and war, with Europeans and communities from the Cape, made them fit to “update” rituals and symbolic expression. Guns and clothes thus became part of gendered self-expression.¹¹⁷

The transformation of clothing modified the use of *otjiꞑe*. Whilst it was used to cover the body completely, including the leather clothes and metal adornments, this may have been neither necessary nor practical while wearing cloth clothes. Moreover, transition into Christianity, which took place in waves before and after the war, mostly implied a change in clothing style.¹¹⁸ Leather clothes, along with filed teeth, specific hairstyles and *otjiꞑe*, came to be described as markers of being heathen, or at least traditionalist. Today, only children in the rural areas wear leather clothes, usually before school-going age and when they are at home. The use of *otjiꞑe* seems to be common for children, but, as Naftaline’s account shows, it is still needed by some women.

Most of the older Herero women may own some items that cannot be bought. These items are, for instance, powder boxes made of turtle shells, filled with a perfume-powder made of aromatic tree bark, bottles made of horn to keep *otjiꞑe*, and necklaces made of beads of the same tree bark (*ozondao*). The pleasant smell of the perfume-powder, to me, seems to be as characteristic of the style of older Herero women as the long dress, and usually these two come as a pair. These items are highly valued by women who own them, probably because they cannot be bought and thus bear a certain preciousness that lies outside the sphere of monetary value. Their social value is increased, I was told, by the fact that the bottles and the powder boxes often are inherited from the woman’s mother. But, whereas the turtle shell really cannot be bought, simply because it is not sold (in fact the trade in those turtle shells might even be prohibited), this is not the case with *otjiꞑe*. I was told that *otjiꞑe* is sold by Ovahimba women.

Worn on the body, *otjiꞑe* is, as Naftaline said “for real Herero ladies,” very much like the long dress, but getting it is a completely different process. Both the meaning of *otjiꞑe* for some

¹¹⁷ As Dag Henrichsen writes “owning a gun became a symbol of manhood“ and “becoming a man increasingly meant not only to acquire livestock but to become a gun owner as well“ (2001: 180 and 181)

¹¹⁸ Writing about conflicts between Christianity, colonial officials and traditional authorities that involved the Ovambo communities in Northern Namibia during the 1930s and 1940s, Meredith McKittrick writes that “The weapons in such battles were goods and ideas that came with Christianity and colonialism – literacy, cloth, and church rituals, to name a few. Some young men and women abandoned their families and went to live with the missionaries, who gave them new clothes and new names (2002: 206).

women and the repulsion that the idea of buying it seems to evoke are grounded, I think in the performative process involved in its acquisition.

Like the long dress, *otjize* has a history, albeit one that is more difficult to trace. In the story of the girl, like in Naftaline's account, *otjize* is indexical for social and ethnic identity, but we cannot know whether it represents the same, or even whether the substance is the same. The girl of the first story may still have worn the leather dress and adornment of children. Whether this stood in contrast to the dress of the adult women in that family and community and, for instance, whether her mother wore a long dress or leather clothes is not clear. Hence, we cannot know the meaning of *otjize* in that community during the war. What becomes clear with the account is that the grandmother of Uazavara Katjivena recalls the event of her loss, as a girl, of the indexical items in terms of pain. Naftaline speaks with grief about the loss of the possibility to get *otjize*.

During the time that lies between the two accounts, *otjize* may have transformed, altered its meaning and status within the community. Like the long dress, bodily practices that are elements of Herero culture have undergone a history of several changes. Examples are, to name but two, the filing of teeth and circumcision, both of which lost importance before and after the war when the community was scattered, and both were re-imagined during the time of reconstruction.¹¹⁹

Terence Ranger's term "imagination of tradition" is helpful in this respect. The notion of imagination, rather than his former concept of "the invention of tradition," allows us to think about the processual implications of historical transformation in which many people are involved, over a longer period of time (1993: 81). Imagination is less static than invention "as once and-for-all an event" (80). Furthermore, the notion of imagination as a process of constant re-working allows for continual change, choice and contest within the process. What belongs to the social imaginary of identity is then at once selectively drawn from cultural repositories and the appropriation of new contents and forms. Moreover, in this chapter, imagination directs our view towards the visual in the double sense of the term image. Re-imagining the social self in terms of clothes and fashion involves the social symbolic of the visual appearance.

Describing the process of re-imagination of collective social identities as Herero after the destruction caused by the colonial war, identities were articulated (not only) in symbolic terms that were neither the product of colonial agency nor simply re-vived traditions of pre-colonial

¹¹⁹ I draw on Gesine Krüger's and Dag Henrichsen's notion of reconstruction as "the process of political, social, cultural and economic reconstruction of the Herero society in central Namibia during the inter-war period (that is, between 1915 and 1939) ... By reconstruction we mean a complex process of rebuilding a war-torn and apparently destroyed society" (1998: 149).

times.¹²⁰ This re-imagination reflected upon change in the way that it produced new symbols, thereby drawing from pre-colonial sources as well as fusing intercultural processes into powerful new symbols. Thus, using *otjiꞑe* that might have been an everyday item in the pre-war years, even if it incorporated social meaning, may have turned into a sign with a history of endurance, from a living social sign into a symbol of survival. But like the filing or knocking out of two front teeth that is not practiced any longer in central Namibia, the use of *otjiꞑe* currently has lost its meaning once again.¹²¹

Most of the younger women do not feel the need to use *otjiꞑe*. Why then, do I write about it, when probably the majority of the Herero women do not use it? I see Naftaline's account as the exemplary story of a shift in which two competing social worlds create a gap that is an impasse. Moreover, I understand *otjiꞑe* as a social substance that signifies and creates identity that is related to a place of belonging. Before I return to this impasse, it is essential to come to an understanding of the intrinsically social aspect of *otjiꞑe*. Therefore, I will now turn to the process that changes a crude physical substrate into a social substance.

Reminders of a snake

Let me return to Naftaline's account and begin with the way in which the women had to approach the difficult mountain. A specific, gendered choreography of travel and performance was required in order to deal with the danger of the place. When Naftaline told me that I cannot go to see the place, the reason given for this was the snake. Alexander Kaputu's account of his visit at Ombotuzu also begins with the snake. Although he is a well-known person in Namibia, the snake did not know him and, by means of its appearance, vigorously reminded him to perform the speech act that makes him identifiable. The snake, as Alexander Kaputu explained, is sent by the spirit who inhabits the place. It is sent as a messenger, representing the potentially malign power of the spirit. In this position, the snake forces the visitor to acknowledge the presence of the spirit and accede to its demands. These demands are not *of* the snake, but mediated by it. The snake is representing and extending the spirit that lacks a body.

¹²⁰ See chapter Okuria ehi, Krüger and Henrichsen 1998, Hendrickson 1994 and 1996.

¹²¹ I asked an older woman in Ovitoto, who had the two lower front teeth knocked out as a child, why this is not practised any longer and she answered: "Because you cannot speak English properly when those teeth are missing!"

In the worldview of most Ovaherero, spirits coexist with the living in the world of the living, although they do not have a human body. The physical death of a person is not seen as co-terminous with non-existence, or a complete disappearance from the world of the living. Neither are the spheres of the living and the dead clearly divided. Instead, ancestors are in a continuous relationship with the living, influencing the present as well as the future. This makes the ancestors perpetually significant, and enduring inter-generational responsibilities towards them are reciprocated with sacrifices and commemoration ceremonies. Rather than inhabiting two different spheres, ancestors and the living are distinguished by their being-in-time. The anthropologist John W. Burton writes:

The essential distinction between these states of being are defined by reference to the factor of time rather than character, essence or quality. This in part explains why sentiments of the dead must be respected after life ... (1978: 615)

Thus, rather than being in another realm, ancestors are from another time. Their existence and being involved in the presence connects the presence, for instance of a family line, with the past, and thereby creates a notion of duration and continuity.

Revisiting ethnographies on spirit possession, Janice Boddy writes about the temptation to treat spirits as merely metaphoric, that is, as symbols which express ill-fitting aspects of human identities, (mental) illnesses, fears, but also personified symbols of social change or societal conflicts, and representations of the past, to name a few possibilities, that cannot be lived or articulated otherwise.¹²² Again, the apparent absence of corresponding phenomena within the social imaginary of Western academics complicates translation. As academics we feel tempted to integrate the spirits into explanatory models of the West and thereby produce a sameness for the sake of comprehension. Looking at my own first impulses to come to an analysis of the stories about Ombotozu, I see this manner of explanation – making the spirits into representations of or for something, or even into mere projections – as a kind of academic exorcism. It offers a solution to get rid of the disturbing presence of phenomena that are outside the regime of plausibility in my own world. But dismissing the chilling reality of a dangerous spirit and changing it into “symptoms as dissociated facets” (Boddy 1988: 18) of the people involved, as the regime of my cultural imaginary (call it psychology) might direct me to do, would severely violate the

¹²² Boddy’s article (1994) is also informed by her own work about the *zar*, a spirit-possession cult in Sudan, in which mainly women are involved (1988).

reality of the people involved. Still, for my aim to render intelligible what is not plausible in my cultural imaginary and may not need explanation in the social world of many Herero, I might transgress accepted realities on both sides.

Let me consider spirits as social beings who interact with people and emphasize analytical categories rather than material substance, thereby circumventing the tricky sphere of belief and dis-belief (Boddy 1994: 413). In doing this I may treat the stories that I heard in terms of the conventions of their origin. Furthermore, taking spirits as social agents does not exorcise, but acknowledges, their power to act upon humans, comprising an acknowledgement also of their influence in the present that cannot easily be manipulated by humans.

This said, the stories deal with an ancestral spirit that originated from outside the selves, but from inside the social world of the people involved. The spirit at Ombototzu may not be considered a person proper, since it lacks a name and genealogy, both of which are inevitably elements of personhood. But it is still an agent within the social world. As an ancestor spirit, although of an unknown deceased person, it has an authority, which becomes persuasive through its capacity to threaten the visitors with its inherent danger and coerce them to perform certain actions. This becomes clear by means of the choreography of the performance that the composition of place, spirit and snake demand. Crucial for the position of power that the spirit has, is the notion of territoriality of the deceased, as I have shown in chapter one. The spirit at Ombototzu socially owns and reigns over the place.

Both Naftaline's and Alexander Kaputu's account stress the moment of arrival at Ombototzu. This moment of arrival at the place appears to be critical. The anticipation of an inevitable situation of danger demands preparation. In order to go to Ombototzu to dig for ochre, women had to ask a chief-priest to accompany them. At the site the priest knelt on the ground and barked like a dog. Only then would the spirit answer. Missionary Irlé describes the approach to an ancestral grave, when people wanted to ask for rain or health and the like, or just wanted to greet the ancestor in a similar way. To the animal sounds the priest utters, the spirit answers with "*Oviani* ? - Who is there? Which dogs are barking?" (1904: 84). In his reply the priest had to announce his family line in order to identify himself and avoid the sanctions of the snake

Here the importance of genealogical memory comes into play. Obviously it is not enough to have ancestors and be part of the web of genealogically-constructed relations; one has to prove it by means of a speech act. Elisabeth Tonkin writes:

People remember what they need to remember and in some societies, genealogical knowledge is an important resource, used to support legitimacy of a claim to political power or land...the very organisation of social life may be expressed in terms of genealogical relationships. (1992: 11)

In this case, genealogical relationships not only have to be known, but recalled vis-a-vis a spirit that inflexibly insists on and reminds of this performative act. Only by means of the act of speaking, which is always an active re-making and comprises the relationships that form the social web in which the self is embedded, are the priest or Alexander Kaputu transformed into persons before the spirit who then permits their presence at the site. Here, like in other commemorative acts, the identity of the person is established in terms of his or her relation to the family or the wider community.

This becomes very clear by means of the sequentiality of the different modes of utterances. The priest has to approach the spirit virtually as a non-person, barking like a dog, to get its attention and avoid danger. During the act of unfolding genealogies he establishes his personhood before the spirit, who acts as an interlocutor demanding this specific kind of identification. Thus, in the course of the performative act, the women's genealogies are exposed as well. Hence, the act of introducing the women to the spirit of the place by means of the priest is not possible without his intricate knowledge of their family links. In this way, social ties, not only between the people and the ancestral spirit, but also between the different visitors are ascertained by means of the iteration of their vocalization.

The collective aspect, in which the different people and the spirit act as mnemonic others during the interaction, is only one aspect of the intricate social dimension of memory at play in this situation. While all *acteurs* involved operate as mutually mnemonic others, who may verify or contest the recollections, the positions of authority are unequally distributed. The spirit clearly has the position of an authority of the longest duration as a social being, underscored by its ability to sanction those who transgress its rules.

“He is not allowed to speak the wrong words,” said Alexander Kaputu, referring to the precarious situation of the priest, but also to himself, for he was in the same situation. If speaking the “wrong words” is dangerous, this can only mean that the spirit actually *knows* the genealogical networks the people refer to. This is not surprising, since the existence of the spirit is much older than the people who visit him and the authorities of the ancestors derives from their position within kinship relations along with their age span.

Memory, in this case, can be controlled, insisted upon, and it is located at a specific place. The spirit as exterior to the persons who visit the place acts as an agent of memory. As an agent of memory the spirit's ability to validate personhood is selective: it does not know Alexander Kaputu, even though the latter plays an important role in the cultural sphere of the Herero community. Neither would it have known me, or allowed for an exception of the rules for strangers, had I dared to go to the place. What it can recognize is only genealogical memory expressed in words. The language of the praise poems spoken here is the one of the established language of orature that stresses the continuity of social relations. Hence, everyone who goes to the place has to be able to extend his or her social existence into the past, by means of connecting the self to genealogical networks. The spirit does not know people in their present existence, for instance as prominent radio broadcasters in the case of Alexander Kaputu. What counts at this place are the ties to ancestral networks, the personal position in a web of intergenerational relations.

Very much like old people who know the younger ones only by their family links to parents and grandparents, the spirit is informed about the state of family affairs through the connections made by means of unfolding genealogies. Hence, not only the social existence of the visitors is linked to the past, but the spirit itself is reconnected with the present social world. The act of re-memorizing the spirit with the world of the living and at the same time connecting the presence to the past has to be performed in a specific way. This is what makes the spirit into a true and rigorous agent of Herero history: insisting on a particular way to recall, that is, by means of the sophisticated genre of *omitandu*, which is one of the important modes of transmitting oral history within Herero communities.

Genealogies are never passed from one person to another, or shared in a group in the crude form of simply telling each other to which family one belongs. Genealogies are always wrapped in praise poetry "as the spices with which words are eaten" (Jekura Kavari 2000: 22). So, it is not simply genealogies that have to be known in that place, but also a mode of recall, a genre of speaking that has to be mastered. Moreover, insisting in a male voice that recalls (a "big man" is required to speak the words), the role of the spirit underscores what Eviatar Zerubavel describes as "the normative dimension of memory" (1996: 286). In this case, the normative dimension is linked to the rules of remembrance, regulating not only what or who should be recalled, but also by whom and in which way. These rules, held up by the spirit, exclude women, who are not allowed to perform the speech act in this place, from speaking the "right words." Insisting on these rules, the spirit seems to abhor social change. It does not accept the changes of

ownership of the land, for it seems to claim the sole authority at the place, nor does it allow for modifications of the performance that would acknowledge social transformation. Rigidly fetishized by an unbending spirit, for better or worse, not only memory, but the conditions of the past appear to be localized at Ombotozu.

The choreography of interaction that has to forego the actual gaining of *otjiꝛe* at Ombotozu can be described as an act of memory, that is, as Bal writes, “the product of collective agency” (1999: vii). Describing acts of memory as products of collective agency, Bal emphasizes the notion of memory as something that has to be actively performed as opposed to something that just happens (vii). Her notion of memory as a collaborative act reminds of Maurice Halbwachs’ idea of collective memory, which, as he writes, relies on the memory of others within the different groups (family, interest groups, the nation and the like) to which one belongs. This means that memory is not solely reconstructed by a single person’s mind (1992: 38). Writing more than 50 years after the publication of Halbwachs’ seminal work on collective memory, Bal, Brison (1999) and Huyssen (1995) emphasize not merely the aspect of collectivity in most acts of cultural memory, but share the assumption that the past has to be actively articulated to become memory. Writing about cultural memory, these authors stress the dimension of social collaboration, the function of the witness and the cultural codification of memory. In the case of the performance of Ombotozu Mountain, I recommend we find a fusion of these aspects, which in an act of memory re-confirm collectivity and shared cultural meaning.

But there is more to memory at Ombotozu. It is precisely as an act of cultural memory that the performance at Ombotozu and, with it, the access to *otjiꝛe*, contains specific conditions. Halbwachs refers to aspects of memory that are intrinsically linked to the interpellative aspects of acts of memory:

For they (the memories) are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them, *upon condition*, to be sure, that I turn toward them and adopt, at least for the moment, *their way of thinking* ... It is in this sense that there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection. (1992: 38, emphasis added)

I am interested in the notion of a condition of remembrance at that place: that which implies the specifically cultural, interpellative and localized aspects of the act of recall. For an understanding of the process that takes place and of Ombotozu, what it does and what it creates, it is productive to link the notion of collective memory with performativity. This brings us back to Butler's theory of performativity, regarding identities as performatively constructed through signs, like the long dress, and performative acts that produce signs, such as *otjiize*.

During the visit at Ombotozu, the local spirit forces people to remember specific genealogies, thereby re-creating collectivity in which it participates itself, and re-confirming the rules of this collectivity in which authority is granted to ancestors and older men. The spirit thus has the power to evoke memory that re-signifies: collectivity, the meaning of the place, positions within the community, but also the rules and role of memory. The re-signifying power of memory has a salient position in the Herero communities, since the cohesion of these communities to some extent relies on the memorialization of orally transmitted genealogies and history. The ability to resignify, that memory, along with a formalized practice of recall, possesses in this place, derives from cultural rules that grant authority to the rules and acts of genealogization that, in turn, bring about what they say. As Butler points out, this implies citationality, deriving from a social domain that confers binding power. By means of the performative act at Ombotozu, identities are re-constituted. At the same time, there is that crucial moment of danger at Ombotozu where the person "is not," the spatio-temporal moment in which one is not identifiable. Yet this does not erase the system of socio-cultural meaning in which the Herero visitor is embedded:

[N]either power nor discourse are rendered anew at every moment; they are not as weightless as the utopics of radical resignification might imply. (Butler 1993: 224)

The impossibility of radical resignification is clarified by the factor of danger. The liminal moment at which one "is not" is only dangerous in case one fails to enact what one is supposed to be at this place and before the spirit: a social being identified and identifiable by genealogically provable sociality. Thereby memory becomes the *sine qua non* for both the performative production and its prerequisites: a person as part of a collectivity that is held together by means of mnemonic practice. The demands of the spirit and the place thus echo the "convergent force" (224), from which the (re-)productive qualities of memory derive.

The rules of memory reconstitute social conditions which do not allow women to perform the act of recall themselves, but place them into the position of being “remembered for,” or being spoken for. This places women in the position, at least at this site, of “not being” unless being spoken for. At the same time culturally specific techniques of remembrance, the ability to speak the right words, which imply poetic form and genealogical content, have to be mastered by the performer under threat of death. Although the fatal consequences of being bitten by a poisonous snake must be seen as real, there appears to be an extended dimension to the notion of death in this situation and place. Not being remembered would cause the social death of the spirit. Spirits, like memory, are not immortal. Forgetting would be fatal to both.

Obedying the imperative to remember, that is, in this case, to know who one is and which social position in the community one has, the visitors re-create the meaning of the place at which collective and personal identity can be re-charged. But this practice of recreation is only possible if one is willing and able to submit to the demands that the spirit calls upon. This stresses the notion of the conditions; but these conditions are not only to be found in the words that are spoken. Unlike in the case of the grave on Kapp’s farm where the iterativity and citationality of a performance of recall and honor under the “wrong” circumstances had the power to induce the erection of a monument (see chapter one), in this case the citationality does not allow for modification. The “right words” that are required may not be iterated in absolutely the same mode during every visit at Ombotozu, but they have to be cited by a male elder, a representative of social authority within the Herero society. Thus, although the performance can be iterated and every visit requires repetition, the citationality of the performative act is restricted.

Again, I find it useful to juxtapose Butler’s emphasis on the possibility of subversion by means of an altered iteration with Bourdieu’s emphasis on the stability of social conventions and their delegates that bring about the efficacy, or “magic” of the performance. For Bourdieu, the magic of efficacy of ritualized acts that are backed by the power of social institutions lies in their symbolism and a societal contract (1991: 115). Thus, the illocutionary force of a performance may not derive its constructive (interpellating, producing) efficacy from words alone in every case. Treating language, or words as the prominent site of performative power, he writes:

[O]ne is condemned to looking within words for the power of words, that is, looking for it where it is not to be found. (1991: 107)

That which is said at Ombotuzu does not exhaust its message, nor does it explain the exclusion of women from the act of speech. It does not verbalize the position of the spirit in this case, for the spirit's name and genealogy is unknown. The spirit cannot be addressed as a deceased person and thereby positioned into a genealogy by means of the codified language of honor that *omitandu* provide. Still, the spirit is honored. Emphasizing the "conditions of felicity" (116), the conditions that make the performative acts valid and effective, Bourdieu stresses the notion of the delegate. The "performative magic," he writes, is only effective if the delegate "who is responsible for carrying it out in the name of the group acts as a medium between the group and itself"(116). The delegate does not, as Butler also stresses, act as a person, but by means of the authority that is granted to him by the community. The group, that is, in this case, the women at Ombotuzu, have to collaborate; they have to acknowledge the authority of the priest for the performance to be effective. But, if we accept the spirit not as a symbol for social values but as an agent exterior to the people involved, we deal with two delegates in this place, both endowed with authority by the Herero community. Different from "animist" spirits in some societies, (those who may, for instance, embody the power of stones and trees), spirits within the Herero communities are always deceased people. Their social power thus stems from the same social realm as that of living authorities.

Collectivity is recreated through this performative act, I wrote, but the act also establishes difference. The reproduction of difference is not articulated by means of words here. Instead, it is displayed by excluding the women from addressing the spirit. Within *rites de passage* writes Bourdieu, "the important thing is the line" (118), not the passage between two states of social being. With line, Bourdieu means a presumed (social) difference, in this case that between women and men. Although this is not a *rite de passage*, there is a liminal phase, a critical moment of danger. In this moment the differentiation, or line, not only between spirits and living beings, but also between women and men, is drawn. Circumcision, writes Bourdieu, does not only mark a distinction between men of a certain age and uncircumcised boys. Instead, it also distinguishes those who are not subject to the practice and those who are: women and men.

There is thus a hidden set of individuals in relation to which the instituted group is defined. The most important effect of the rite is one which attracts the least attention: by treating men and women differently, the rite consecrates difference.
(118)

Whereas the danger at Ombotozu exists for everyone who goes there, mastering the situation is not possible for women. Going to the place, they have to submit to the male authority of “speaking the right words.” More than at other places the social inscription at Ombotozu appears to be extremely persistent. To go there, being male is not enough. The place also draws a line between those who can prove the genealogical social with words and those who cannot, thereby distinguishing in quite an essentialist manner who counts as social being or who may be called *otjindu*, a “human thing.”¹²³ This does not render women “human things” nor does it account for a categorical subordination of women in social life generally. Rather, this line defines different domains of connectedness and the representation of this connection.

This may be the reason why *otjiḵe* is worn on the skin by women whereas Herero men do not use it: men can demonstrate their social position by means of direct communication with the spirits, women of the older generation may wear *otjiḵe* as a sign of connectedness to the spiritual world, to which they do not have direct access in most of the cases. It is for this reason that the grandmother of Katjivena had to be “cleansed” from the red ochre she wore on her skin. *Otjiḵe*, the iron beads and her hair style, were performative elements of “heathen” Herero identity. Henrichsen quotes missionary Dannert’s drastic request to have:

the iron beads and bangles torn off, the heathen hair dress cut off (this is always a decisive step during conversion to Christianity), the body cleansed of ochre and fat, getting dressed and wearing a head scarf in place of the fur hat. (Henrichsen 1997: 113-114, my translation from German)

Today the use of *otjiḵe* is less elementary a sign of Hereriness than it used to be. The long dress has replaced the use of *otjiḵe* as a bodily make-up. Still, as Naftaline’s account made clear, it is important for some women.

But since the performative act requires conditions of remembrance that are currently not available, the place became inaccessible for Naftaline and the women with whom she used to go there. Stressing the conditions of the performative act of recall, I focus on the apparent indisputability of those at Ombotozu. Here, it becomes clear that the constitution of the landscape that is imbued with spiritual and social power comes at a price. The stability and coherence of the ties between landscape and identity that were vital for the Ovaherero in times of colonial oppression can, at least at Ombotozu, not easily be dissolved. Thus, what Butler regards

¹²³ Being called *otjindu* is quite an insult: the term signifies a non-person in the social sense.

as Bourdieu's failure to consider the possibility of the "crisis in convention that speaking the unspeakable produces, the insurrectionary 'force' of censored speech as it emerges into 'official discourse' and opens the performance to an unpredictable future," (1997: 142) appears not to be an option here. At Ombotozu, the performative act of recall can *not* "break with existing context and assume new context" (150), simply because the spirit as a guardian of social convention places a bar on the reconfiguration of the context. Again, I am tempted to see the spirit as a representation of the conservative forces in Herero society that seek to preclude the opening up "to an unpredictable future". Clearly, this is because I believe that the stability of the concept of landscape was one of the significant elements that helped the social survival of the overwhelming distress of the colonial period. Again, I feel that my ideas about spirits as representatives of social structure reduce the complexity of a world in which spirits are additional agents of the social.

However, not the spirit but the entire performance of recall is my object of analysis here. Looking at this performance, it becomes clear that Butler's notion of, and hope for, the option to subvert the once-constituted social imaginary, in this case provides merely a theoretical possibility. In the reality of the performance this option does not exist. This points at Herero history and a cultural politics of resistance in which it was precisely the persistence of the social construction of ancestor veneration as tied to identity and the land that was crucial for the social survival. Thus, it may be for this reason that adapting and thereby changing the performance in order to adjust it to the needs of the present is not possible. Unsettling the certainty of the social construction, when precisely this certainty was and still is vital for the survival of cultural identity, might endanger the whole of social meaning and structure.

However, in other cases, Herero women can and do create and recite *omitandu* in different places and situations. In some cases, for example in the case of performing of *okuria ebi* (see chapter 4), where the practices of recall should be performed by men, women can replace them if necessary. This means that the rules of recall are often flexible, allowing for exceptions. But already in the story that was recorded by Damman, the rigidity of rules at Ombotozu is a dominant theme. Extraordinarily strict rules and the punishment when transgressing those rules lead to the death of the pregnant woman in the story. The story, together with the reactions of the women who heard or read the story in 2004, does not allow for an interpretation that creates a temporal coherence of meaning of the place. The story that I retold to Renathe and other Herero women already seemed to have lost its ability to speak of and to the social conditions of the community. Fifty years after Damman recorded the story, it appears to have lost its meaning

for the community that authored the story. Thus, today, the story does not allow for a retrieval of definitive meaning.

But the existence and content of the story about Ombotozu that involves snakes, the danger of trespassing the social rules and the position of women in the community suggests that this place has a salient position within Herero landscape. The mountain is clothed in palimpsestic layers of meaning and a contingency of spatial significance, albeit with altering contents. Thus, what may count as the conditions of the past on which the spirit so tyrannically insists, are the conditions of the past as seen from the view of the present. These social conditions, ways of remembering but also the social figurations that are so strongly defined and defended at the place, derive from the cultural background of the Herero communities, which often contrast with, and contest, the meaning of places of other communities in Namibia and the post-colonial state. In the case of Ombotozu, the authority of the spirit, which appears to be a delegate of a system of meaning, rules out the possibility of adaptation to recent conditions. Whereas other performative acts that create landscape a subversion of colonial or post-colonial conditions of ownership and the re-appropriation of the ability to signify places is possible to a certain extent, this appears not optional at Ombotozu. The fact that Ombotozu represents the values of the Herero societies, even if stemming from the past and not quite adequate today, makes all the difference.

Places of commemoration at which annual festivities of the Herero take place generally incorporate social meaning, because ancestor veneration is inextricably social, but are temporally inscribed with intensified significance during the event of the commemorations. By means of iterated performative re-inscription, these sites become spatio-temporally privileged sites of culture: they are "locations of culture," to borrow Bhaba's term. These places are "envelopes of space-time" (Massey 1995: 188) that constitute the specific topology of Herero history. The inscription with spiritual power and poetic meaning communicates claims of the Herero communities; thereby intentionally, at least for this specific moment, obliterating claims and belongings of others.

As I have demonstrated in chapter four, Okahandja, a small town in central Namibia where people of different cultural backgrounds live, becomes a site of Herero history once every year. Crowded with Herero people in uniforms, long dresses in red and black, with flags and horses, but also with tourists and journalists, as well as other Namibian visitors who come for the spectacle, Okahandja becomes appropriated by the events of Herero history. The interpretation of these events has altered over the years since its inauguration in 1923. Contingent is the

powerful appropriation and signification that connects the place with Herero history. Not visited often, and certainly not as prominent as Okahandja, Ombotozu Mountain seems to concentrate and gather social meaning by means of its local spirit. Although not included into a liturgy of remembrance, it appears to be a nodal point of intensified communication: it is a place where the once created landscape as a spiritually and socially animated space speaks back. For the same reasons it becomes a place of severe danger.

If we could wear glasses that make us see the social dimension of places and the multiple networks of social significance of the Herero landscape, what would we see? A web of social traces spun by the mobile lives of significant people, I guess. And nodal points, say, in red, where social meaning and the depth of history created thick points of significance. Suggesting red as the color of these nodal points, my imagination plays tricks on me. Trying to visualize what cannot be seen, I think of the fiery red of the women's dresses at Okahandja Day. The color becomes metaphoric for the intense atmosphere of commemoration, festivity, nostalgia and pride.

Clearly Okahandja is not the only place that is animated by performative acts of memory, intense social interaction with the landscape as well as spiritual inscription. The interactive capacity of the so construed landscape, as I have shown in previous chapters, is circular: places, once inscribed with meaning, speak back. Graves belong to this category of places, but also battlefields, places of birth, contested spots in time and space. Ombotozu is one of them. These places have the ability to re-establish the social values of the community. They are places where memory emerges, by means of the ability to communicate that the places themselves inhere. Once charged with meaning that derives from salient moments in history and the significance of the deceased, these places act upon humans. More than sites of memory, these places may be, like Ombotozu, difficult places that cause fear and respect. Their accessibility in the present becomes complicated through the transformation of the society around them. The danger at Ombotozu derives from the correlation of a powerful spirit with essentialist demands and societal shifts that interrupt correspondence. Demanding continuity where transformation is at stake, the place becomes haunted. Unlike in other places, where spirits are known, the demand to remember seems to be abstract in this place. What plays a prominent role here is the specific social imaginary itself and the conditions of remembrance that are essentialized at the place. But what it does is quite personal. Since the spirit itself is not known, it gestures towards remembering the self. According to the social realms to which the self adheres, the family, social relations, the genealogical ties become the crucial point of the required performance.

Demands of the place have been rigorous in the past, as Naftaline's account makes clear. But the place was accessible as long as a priest-chief who would accompany the women was available. Shifts within the social organization of the community have led to an absence of men in this position in that area. Where does that leave Naftaline and what does she lose?

Contested belongings

To answer this question, let me return once more to the place and the performative speech act. The women, who are not allowed to perform the act themselves, were nevertheless included in the process of remembering. Their identity, as an identity-in-relation-to significant others once displayed, the women became re-instated and connected to the place. The substance of *otjizze* is inextricably connected to this process. Thus, what the women took home and what they added to their skins contained the imprint of place-bound identity. Like wedding rings, *otjizze* is the sign of a performance that alters or, in this case, re-creates identity. Just as rings that look like wedding rings may be bought without the performative implications, the material substance of *otjizze* can be acquired otherwise, but that would not be the same. Other genealogies and places may be contained in the process of gaining the substance. *Otjizze* that is bought would shield the skin against the sun, but it would lack the ritual biography of the *otjizze* of Ombotozu, which includes the resignification of social identity as tied to genealogies and is inextricably connected to the place. The long dress, as I have shown above, became an emblem of adult Herero femininity by means of its inscription with social meaning. Despite obvious similarities the dress does not belong to the same regime of value as *otjizze*. Wearing it is performative, but its acquisition does not imply a performative act. Although both the signifying capacity and the contents of its performativity, which articulate elements of Hereriness to the world, are factors in what constitutes Herero women and what renders them inevitably social, this sociality is not the same in the two cases. The social realm to which the dress refers is less specific: it does not speak about genealogical relations, but signifies a broader connection to a shared cultural background.

Whereas the long dresses communicate meaning in the mode of a distinctive appearance that at once reminds of a colonial fashion but at the same time stems from Herero aesthetics that may resemble cows or mime pregnancy, *otjizze* is more difficult to scrutinize. It does not speak easily. But words, in the form of poetry, are intrinsically interwoven in the process of acquiring the substance. Praise poetry and the performative mode of production involved in the obtaining

of *otjizze* are what renders it exclusively social. Linked to the social domain of genealogical ties, the ochre is steeped in a regime of value that rejects commodification. Its specific value is linked to kinship relations and ties, both of which are incommensurable with monetary terms. Thus there seems to be a restriction on buying it rather than the impossibility of buying it. “You cannot just go and buy it somewhere” does not speak of a scarcity of the material substance, but rather rejects the dissolution of the tie between the substance and the specific mode of its production. You cannot buy memory or ancestors, or your position in a genealogical network, either.

The value of *otjizze* lies in bearing the sign of genealogies, which cannot, indeed may not, be performed verbally by women at the place. Not able to perform the ritual that is needed to get *otjizze*, women wear the performative sign of their skins. “Men don’t use it,” said Naftaline, “it is for real Herero ladies.” Like the dress, *otjizze* depicts gender-specific differences of performative (re)signification. Like the dress, but then tied to another realm of the social, *otjizze* is a sign of belonging. Whereas for the dress fabric is transformed into an emblem, the process that creates the social substance of *otjizze* is reversal. It is a process that transforms a performative mode of recall into a tangible, visible substance. What women took home from Ombotuzu is, then, the sign of their belonging to local social networks created by means of the formalized language of recall, but also by means of the re-establishing of the social imaginary.

Telling the story of a loss, Naftaline establishes herself as a person who misses something. Speaking about the loss of *otjizze*, she narrates herself as a person who misses an intrinsic element of her identity. Retrieving what I understand as the missing complementary parts of her narrative in this chapter, I tried a translation. Not of who Naftaline is or who Herero people are, but of what *otjizze* is and what it means to lose it.

“Spinning the self”, as Michael J. Dear and Steven Flusty describe the process of constructing the self, is a social process that includes the establishing of boundedness. But, they write, “we gather the materials of the self from the surrounding environment, from things, ideas ...” and in this case not without specific location, to be sure (2002: 304). In Herero communities the notion of significant others, the social web of located genealogies, provides the aggregate of which the personal self is an element. If the meaning of the self is represented and constructed through adherence to others, this cohesion is mediated. Memory and places serve as such mediators. And so does *otjizze* as a materialized symbol of adherence. Losing *otjizze* that is more an element than merely a representation of the social identity, to a certain extent dissolves the web of collectively created identities that are place-bound.

Naftaline's narrative of losing *otjiꞑe* represents, then, a shift within the Herero communities that leaves some women without elements of their identity construction. Others, for instance women of the younger generation, choose to do without. To shape her self-identity, Renathe, Naftaline's daughter, like many young Herero women, makes use of other ingredients. Windhoek, as the town in which she works and studies, has far greater relevance to her than places like Ombotozu. For her identity neither the place nor *otjiꞑe* are relevant.

Such options, writes Kwame Anthony Appiah, are limited: "We do make choices, but we do not determine the options among which we choose" (Appiah, cited in Dear and Flusty: 305). In some situations, as we have seen, there is not much choice at all. Ombotozu as a place at which a certain social imaginary is defended by a local spirit, does not transform easily. Which makes it an impossible place in modern Namibia, at least for Herero women.

Naftaline and the women who used to go to the mountain lost *otjiꞑe* and Ombotozu by means of social transformation. But most of them did not gain Windhoek as a significant place. Nostalgia, as Bal writes, is a way in which people relate to their past, "not false or inauthentic in essence" (1999: xi). Nostalgia in the narration of Naftaline may provide a minor substitute: it replaces the cohesion of the performative act at Ombotozu and its product, *otjiꞑe*, with a narration of a collective loss. Not unlike the diasporic articulations, to which now turn, this provides a mode to articulate a collective identity by means of something that is lost and can only be remembered.

Diasporic articulations

Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for (the principle of) nationality. (...)

Yet, the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things.

Do interests, however, suffice to make a nation? I do not think so. Community of interests brings about trade agreements, but nationality has a sentimental side too; it is both a soul and a body at once; a Zollverein is not a patrie. (Ernest Renan)¹²⁴

Current events in Namibia show the unwillingness of the Namibian government to integrate specific Herero commemorations within the liturgic pattern of the politics of national commemoration. In January 2004 a mass was held in Okahandja to honor the Herero and Nama victims of the genocide and remember the centenary of the outbreak of the war against the German colonizers. President Sam Nujoma, who was invited, did not participate in the event, nor did the government send a delegate. The organizing committee did not receive an answer to their invitation from the government.

Chairperson Arnold Tjihuko was asked whether he thinks this silence signified that the government was boycotting the commemorations. He answered:

When you invite someone you expect a yes or no answer, but if people simply keep quiet we can make no other conclusion apart from that there was no response.

(Petros Kuteeue in *The Namibian*, January 9, 2004)

The clear absence of a governmental response to the commemorations of Herero and Nama communities indicates a hierarchy of memory that is symptomatic of the politics of identity in Namibia today. In my view, these politics promote multiculturalism and heterogeneity within the territory while simultaneously rejecting alterity as a state of mind to be transcended.

¹²⁴ Both quotes stem from Ernest Renan's lecture delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882 (1990: 11, 18).

Understanding the national politics of remembering as crucial to the narration and fabrication of national identity, I suggest that the Namibian state currently fails to represent its heterogeneous population by ignoring the non-synchronous histories and dissimilar memories of the different communities in Namibia. As Etienne Balibar writes, the fundamental issue at stake in the fabrication of a nation state is the production of the people, or more exactly “to make the people produce itself continually as a national community” (2002: 221). In this sense, the rejection of the specific memory politics of distinct ethnic groups follows the logic of nation building, especially since this memory is foundational in an extra-national construction of identity. Herero and Nama commemorations that articulate alterity vis-à-vis the vigorous production of a new national subject seem to be understood by the government as irreconcilably antagonistic to the national project of identity building.

Seeking to fabricate a Namibian identity unproblematically hybrid, such as Namibian Herero, Herero Namibians, Nama-Herero Namibians and so forth, the new national politics in Namibia seems to rule out the specific memory politics of the Herero and Nama communities. Preoccupations with their colonial history by the communities who were the victims of the colonial war of 1904-1908 are seen as a dissident, often called “tribal,” divestment from the monolithic concept of new national identity. The SWAPO politics of political and epistemological decolonization in Namibia appears to be predisposed to promote the formation of a new national subject that has to transcend ethnic identity for the sake of the nation state. In this way, the once liberating project of nation building after colonialism privileges a particular anti-colonial history, a construction of a collective identity of Namibians, but at the expense of alterity within both the territory of the state and the discursive formation that founded this state. The Namibian sociologist Henning Melber argues that in Namibia the new elite operates with an often-militant rhetoric of selective history politics, nurturing a narrow version of a new collective memory that only serves the interest of this elite (2003: 15). In line with this politics, ethnic affinities and loyalties are seen as antagonistic towards the structure of the nation state.

Melber’s critique of the current identity politics in Namibia is certainly shared by many Namibians, especially those who are disappointed by the governmental withdrawal from the populist promises of the period directly after independence: the proclaimed radical socio-economic transformation of the wide range of structural inequalities has not yet been achieved. However, to do justice to the political attitude of rejecting ethnicity, this rejection must be understood in light of attempts to overcome the racism of the former apartheid regime. Since apartheid politics was a politics of making and marking racial difference, the first step to de-

colonizing Namibian society comprised a strong emphasis on equality. Thus, in terms of the endeavor to de-colonize Namibia, the utopia of a non-ethnic society was certainly productive. But the ethnic identities, regardless when they were constructed, pre-colonial or during the colonial period, did create communities, produced conditions of life and death, and are therefore the reality, problematic as it may be.

Gwen Lister, a Namibian journalist, addresses this dilemma when she interrogates current politics of land redistribution, which, together with memory politics, appear to be a neuralgic point in current Namibian politics. In an article in *The Namibian*, she asks: “If those who were primarily robbed of the land are the Herero and Nama, how does this fact figure when people are resettled?” (March 26, 2004). Her question inherently acknowledges the existence of different histories. Later in the article, she questions the practice of resettling people according to the Odendaal-plan, a spatial structure implemented during apartheid that divided the territory by means of a reserve system in which Africans were allocated according to their belonging to what was seen as different races.¹²⁵ Neither in terms of the utopia of non-ethnic Namibians, nor economically, does this pattern of land re-distribution make sense. But what does her question mean with respect to the notions of belonging and claims for ancestral land? All too often the Herero’s and other communities’ claims are dismissed as a strategic rhetoric in a conflict that is concerned only with economic disparities. In other words, indigenous grievances are often too simply reduced into economic variables. The claims for the land, which may express more than a critique against injustice, are repudiated as merely a way of misusing ethnic identities to achieve economic aims. To my mind we must also regard the land question, apart from being a pressing economic issue, as a symbolic discourse claiming the recognition of both, specific identities and the injustice and cruelties experienced in the past.

This inevitably leads to current discourses and accusations of “tribalism.” This term has become a buzzword describing and discrediting any kind of ethnic identification as backward. Arjun Appadurai writes that the term “tribalism” aims to discredit dissident ethnic loyalties, which endanger the project of the nation state. By means of a rhetoric that seeks to distinguish these movements from the territorially defined state, subversive ethnic affinities are regarded as uncivilized and “caught in a past which we have left behind” (1993: 789). This means that in Namibia today, comparably to the processes Radakrishnan describes for other postcolonial nation states

¹²⁵ For a historical analysis of land politics under apartheid and under the German colonial regime see Werner 2004.

[C]ertain positions vis-à-vis the sovereignty of the nation state are preemptively identified as erroneous and/or inappropriate. This is indeed a deadly formal procedure that ensures that certain articulations will not even be read as “historical contents” because they arise from positions that are inherently incorrect. (R. Radhakrishnan 1993: 763)

The dilemma of ethnic versus non-ethnic identifications demonstrates that ten years of independence did not inaugurate a new history and a new national subject. For many members of the Herero communities, the master narrative of the anti-colonial movement that neglects the versions of history fostered by their communities is unacceptable, because these communities constitute their identities as inextricably connected to a colonial war that did not end with victory.

Moreover, although most citizens in Namibia agree with the concept of the nation state, it must be kept in mind that this nation state, or any kind of societal unity, did not exist in the territory at the moment during which the different violent colonial encounters took place. That the colonial histories of the different communities are heterogeneous and often dissonant therefore remains unacknowledged. The current politics of under representation of these histories runs the risk of catalyzing what is now expressed as alterities into a feeling of chronic alienation. Yet, these alterities might not endanger the unity of the state at all. If the passage into citizenship is experienced by some communities in Namibia as a passage into minorization and inevitable hyphenation, this must be accepted and recognized, if one is not to sacrifice the benefits of the nation state. At the same time it is vital to revisit and revalue the “past with the intention to reclaim it” (Radhakrishnan 1993: 758). According to the dissimilar histories of colonialism in the territory, revisiting and reclaiming the past in order to make it productive for a de-colonization of the mind must take different paths. Today, most Namibians describe themselves in terms of assembled, rather than fractured identities associated with various not necessarily antagonistic and therefore “hyphenable” affinities. But identity constructions are changeable. As a result the hyphen might become the *Bruchstelle*, a weak spot, where relative alterities split up into radical alterities.

In order to produce a national consciousness, Namibian history is created as a series of steps towards liberation. By means of this national appropriation of history coherence is produced that merges together the histories of different communities and turns them into sequential events of a liberating process. Members of the Herero communities in Namibia mostly do not agree with the official reading of history that subordinates the war that their community

experienced at the beginning of the twentieth century as merely part of a series of anti-colonial wars that ended with the victory of the SWAPO. Articulations of identity, expressed and simultaneously produced by means of different public histories in Namibia, thus do not always assent to the master narrative of the history of the state. Instead, the different communities privilege different memories and historical events as constitutive of their articulations and formations of identity.

This chapter deals with precisely these kind of recent articulations, namely the expressions of identity within the Herero communities today that construct a relationship of identity and specific places in terms of a landscape of belonging. In their re-territorialization of identity, these articulations enunciate a notion of displacement and loss during the period of colonial history. What I will show at work here is a sense of “diaspora within” that locates modern Herero identity in the face of irreversible loss and displacement. Today, the largest part of the Herero communities that experienced this displacement and alienation from what most of the Ovaherero see as Hereroland lives in the Nation state Namibia. The fact of displacement within Namibia is a constitutive element of the communities’ discourses of their identity today. Articulated in the present, this diasporic identity challenges both elements of what Homi Bhabha calls the double time of the nation with supplementary narrations. Bhabha sees the nation as a contested cultural territory

[w]here the people must be thought in a double time; the people are the historical “objects” of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event; the people are also the ‘subjects’ of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious living principle of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process. (1990: 297)

While rejecting neither the new nation state of Namibia nor its history of anti-colonial struggle, the memory politics of the Herero community disturbs the narration of the nation in both aspects Bhabha describes. Herero memory politics constitutes the identity of the community in the event of the rupture in their history that is the basis of diasporic articulation in the present. Thus, this memory politics challenges the coherent totality of national history with a specific history that does not include all Namibians. Secondly, the state’s pedagogical attempt to create

national subjects by means of repeated acts of signification, in this case the liturgic pattern of commemoration is disturbed by the practice of performing specific events of Herero history, like Okahandja Day. As the negative reactions of governmental authorities towards Herero politics of memory demonstrate, the supplementary history and memory politics of the Herero does not simply add to the construction of the nation. The supplement of alterity, in terms of a diasporic identity inserted into the totality of the national narration, “is an adjunct, a subaltern instance” (Bhabha 1990: 305) and can therefore not simply be added to the coherent significance of the national history without changing it. Thus, to borrow an image from Virginia Woolf, supplementing the national narration with the diasporic predicament of the Herero community is like cramming too large a parcel into the pockets of an overcoat: it spoils the cut.

However, spoiling the cut of the national construction seems less the aim of the diasporic articulation than the effect of the necessity of maintaining identities that are inextricably tied to the land. Below, I will explore the implications of speaking of diasporic conditions of life within one’s own country.

Diaspora within

Because diasporic conditions within Herero communities shape the self-expressed sense of who they are, I endorse James Clifford’s argumentation in his seminal article on diaspora, that being diasporic and being indigenous need not be an oxymoron. It might not even be an opposition (1999). If movement, the freedom to travel, is crucial to the notion of belonging to a certain area and (socially) occupying a certain space, the loss of territory and forced separation from parts of that area as well as the confinement to particular, virtually fenced-in so-called homelands under the apartheid regime can be thought of as a loss of home. “Diasporas,” writes James Clifford, “usually presuppose longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future” (1999: 304). The distance, in this case, cannot be measured in miles. Although important places are mostly located in Namibia, many of them are lost by disappropriation. This alone may not be enough to speak of a diasporic condition. More important and poignantly felt is the impossibility of returning to an identity that is intrinsically linked to spatial practices which involves place-boundness as well as travel: a sovereign dwelling-in-travelling.

For rural communities in the present, being located in former homelands and surrounded by vast areas of white-owned farms still means an immense restriction on those practices of life that are defined by means of travel and movement. Furthermore, the loss of *ehi rOvaberero*, the land of Herero, after the war and the confinement to the so-called native reserves during apartheid, marked the end of a form of sovereignty linked not only to mobility and pastoralist land use patterns, but to practices of social ownership that are connected to graves and other *lieux de mémoire*.¹²⁶ Even today, commemorative practices of the Herero community are disturbed because some of these places are now located on farmland that is not owned by the community and has therefore become inaccessible. This means that although a part of the community stayed in the area, they were separated from places by colonization. The alienation of these places from their social owners restrains ritual forms of memory and the maintenance of identities that are inextricably tied to the land. In this case, I suggest, the term “diasporic” is a trope for predicated identities and an identificatory orientation towards lost, but always vividly re-claimed ties and territories. As James Clifford writes in the same article:

Dispersed tribal peoples, those who have been dispossessed of their lands or must leave reduced reserves to find work, may claim *diasporic* identities. Inasmuch as their distinctive sense of themselves is oriented towards lost ties. Inasmuch as their distinctive sense of themselves is oriented toward a lost or alienated home defined as aboriginal (and thus “outside” the surrounding nation state), we can speak of a diasporic dimension of contemporary tribal life (1999: 309).

“Diasporic” in this sense functions to indicate a specific articulation in an ongoing process of negotiating identity.

The diasporic dimension of Herero articulations of identity today is expressed by a desire to emphasize discontinuity, the iterative narration of the moment of rupture, a departure from home and from a time referred to as a time of sovereignty. Again, I draw upon Hall’s concept of articulation here, that is, with the double meaning of the term as expressing something and of being an articulated connection between two or more elements. The land as a social space and as a landscape forms a vital resource of making, maintaining and expressing identities. Articulated together with the notion of displacement, as at once a collective historical experience and the

¹²⁶ I use the term here in the sense of French historian Pierre Nora: “A lieu de memoire is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community“ (1999: XVII).

predicament of the communities' present, speaking about the land "carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing" crucial elements of collective identity in Hall's sense.¹²⁷

Articulation, in this sense, refers to a simultaneously expressive and constitutive connecting of elements that create social coalitions, identities and their agendas. In the case of the Herero, it is a discursive configuration that ties memory politics, the land question and the construction of identity together in a relationship between social forces and ideologies. Like other cultural elements such as religion, language and so forth, the question of land ownership need not in every case (historical and/or local) have such a political connotation. It is through the specific history of Namibia as a settler colony where the Herero were deprived of their land, in conjunction with the cultural background of the Herero in which the landscape is inseparable from identity constructions that this articulation emerged. Thus, although the land question including the struggle for its redistribution itself is absolutely fundamental to large parts of the rural Herero population because it is the basis for subsistence, this fact alone does not explain what I regard as diasporic articulation. Such an articulation links together the elements of being dis-appropriated, the rupture in what is seen as a coherent activity of creating and re-creating landscape, memory politics and the re-construction of identity. The shared cultural background in which landscape functions as a mnemonic and is therefore intrinsically connected to genealogies, builds an inextricable element of the articulation and thus moulds political consciousness, even in the absence of an all-embracing cohesive structure of a formal organization.

This is why the official discussion of the land redistribution, in which the land is seen merely as an economic basis for the development of the country, fails to grasp the complexities of this question to the Herero in Namibia. For stressing the tactical aspect of the claim for the ancestral land underestimates the status of the land for maintaining identity and reduces the notion of the diasporic condition to a mere economic predicament. If, instead, we understand "cultural politics as not secondary to more 'material' political and economic agencies," (Clifford 2000: 4) the discursive linking of memory politics and the land question becomes more than an operative tactic. Such a link unfolds its meaning for the identity politics of the Herero communities today.

The connection of particular elements from the cultural background of the community, together with the loss of the land *articulates* the Herero as a social formation and transforms

¹²⁷ In an interview with Lawrence Grossberg, Stuart Hall says: "it carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing etc. But we also speak of an articulated lorry (truck): a lorry where the front (cab) and the back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another" (Grossberg 1996: 141).

people's consciousness about their situation today. As Hall writes, this relationship functions dialectically: as the consciousness emerges, so does the community:

So it is the articulation, the non-necessary link, between a social force which is making itself, and the ideology or conceptions of the world which makes intelligible the process they are going through which begins to bring onto the historical stage a new social position and political position, a new set of social and political subjects (Grossberg 1996: 144).

Following these notions, I understand diasporic articulation as a figuration that constitutes Herero collective identity after dislocation and as a mode of postcolonial identity-in-formation.

In this way, diasporic articulation is a fundamental part of the postcolonial re-appropriation of cultural identity that seeks to reterritorialize, re-define and express identity in the ongoing process of de-colonization.

Routes versus roots

Roots, I sometimes think are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places (Salman Rushdie 1983: 86).

Tribal groups have, of course, never been simply "local," they have always been rooted and routed in particular landscapes, regional and interregional networks (James Clifford 1999: 310).

The OvaHerero communities living in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa do not claim indigeneness in the sense of firstness in the region. There is an official reading of Namibian history that clearly puts the "San" of Namibia in the position of the "first people." The Otjiherero name for the group of so-called San people is *Ovakuhua*, which loosely translated means "first people" or "people who have always been here."¹²⁸

¹²⁸ I use the problematic collective names (San, Ovakuhura) for the different Khoisan-speaking groups of Namibia, because these names are used by the Herero. I am aware of the fact that I refer to different groups with names different to their own. Suzman (1997: 97) refers to the term Ovakuhura (and Ovabusmana) as a name the Mbanderu (an Otjiherero-speaking community in Botswana) use to describe Ju/'hoansi. The term Ovakuhura is also used by Ovaherero in Ovitoto. Although the name itself acknowledges the "firstness" of these people, this

Present-day Herero discourses narrate their community's origin as a story of travelling, dwelling in different places, war, interdependences and tension with other groups. The modern myths of origin say that the community came to central Namibia from another area, searching for new regions to graze their cattle. The locations vary in different stories. In 2004, Usiel Kandji, one of the organizers of an exhibition about Herero history that was shown in Katutura, explained:

Nobody knows exactly when and from where the Ovaherero came to Namibia. But orature agreed upon an exact point of entrance into what is now Namibia: A place called Okarundu Kambeti. This is transmitted through orature. Herero people came to Namibia some 500 years ago, they came as a group via Angola from the Great Lakes area of East Africa.¹²⁹

All of the recent narratives of origin begin with travel.¹³⁰

This was not always the case. The existence of other narratives of origin that was obviously replaced by the currently privileged one, speaks for the flexibility of the Herero community in terms of a selective and decisive restructuring of the symbolization of origins and continuity. In older descriptions of Herero culture by anthropologists and missionaries, the myth of coming out of the Omumborongbonga tree appears to be the heathen story of origin of the Herero as told by themselves. In this story, which exists in different versions, Mukuru, which means "the old one," and his wife Kamungarunga are the ancestors of all Ovaherero. In all versions Mukuru and Kamungarunga descend from the tree. Two central motives are important

does not mean that Herero recognize their land rights. Suzman was told by a Mbanderu informant: "The Bushmen may claim to be the owners of this land, because they were here first, but it is not their land, it is Mbanderu land. If the Bushmen were the owners of the land, they would have stayed and fought, instead of running away, as they did when they saw the Mbanderu coming. The Mbanderu did not notice the Bushmen when they came. The idea that the Bushmen own the land is an idea of the whites to keep the blacks down" (1997: 97).

¹²⁹ Interview with Usiel Kandji in Windhoek, September 2004.

¹³⁰ I use the problematic collective names (San, Ovakuhura) for the different Khoisan-speaking groups of Namibia, because these names are used by the Herero. I am aware of the fact that I refer to different groups with names different to their own. Suzman (1997: 97) refers to the term Ovakuhura (and Ovabusmana) as a name the Mbanderu (an Otjiherero-speaking community in Botswana) use to describe Ju/'hoansi. The term Ovakuhura is also used by the Ovaherero in Ovitoto. Although the name itself acknowledges the "firstness" of these people, this does not mean that the Herero recognize their land rights. Suzman was told by a Mbanderu informant: "The Bushmen may claim to be the owners of this land, because they were here first, but it is not their land, it is Mbanderu land. If the Bushmen were the owners of the land, they would have stayed and fought, instead of running away, as they did when they saw the Mbanderu coming. The Mbanderu did not notice the Bushmen when they came. The idea that the Bushmen own the land is an idea of the whites to keep the blacks down" (1997: 97).

for the comparison with the recent narration of origin that begins with travel: the tree as a stark symbol for rootedness and the notion of ancestral origin. The tree appears in all versions of the Omunborongbonga story I have found. The notion of genealogy, which constitutes relatedness and/or difference, varies in different versions. Whereas In Brincker's written version the people who descend from the tree are referred to as *ovandu*, which means people in general, in the versions of Vedder, Katjivena, Irle and Köhler it is not clear whether people in general or specifically Ovaherero are meant.¹³¹

However, in the two versions written down by Irle and the one published by Katjivena the distinctiveness of the Ovaherero is established in different ways. In the story as retold by Katjivena, the granddaughters of Mukuru and Kamungarunga are the ancestral mothers of different ethnic groups. Kazu, the mother of the Herero, is married to Ndeo and they become pastoralists, whereas the descendants of Nangombe, the other granddaughter, are the Ovambo-speaking groups. The presence of men who did not descend from the tree and are not related to these two women, suggests that the story does not tell the origin of people in general, but the genesis of a group of people with common origin. The same holds for one of Irle's versions, in which the ancestral couple descends from the tree together with the cattle, whereas other people (so-called Bergdamara) descend from a rock together with other animals and small stock. In the other version written down by Irle, a difference between groups is established, but only after the birth from the tree. Here, black (Herero) and red (Nama) people derive their color from eating different parts of the cow that is slaughtered for the first-born daughter. Although the people who become red later on in the story are not related to the ones who ultimately become the Herero, the difference emerges belatedly, not by birth. The stories thus deal with origin and the emergence of difference. But the notion of difference itself is established in various ways, which appears contentious in the mode in which this difference is constituted.

Although the stories have been written down between 1886 and 1988, it is impossible to date their emergence or define periods in which different variations were popular. As with most orature, the authors are unknown, variations may have existed synchronically and thus do not allow the privileging of a dominant version. Dealing with versions that variously focus on difference or commonness of ancestry and versions that do not mention other communities

¹³¹ Brincker wrote down a version in Otjiherero: "Kuza ovandu va za m'omunborongbonga, u ri k'okooko, n'ouo omuti omunene tjinene, nu u n'ondovi n'ouo mbua kuala ovandu" (One says that men come out of the Omunborongbonga tree, it is a big tree in Kaoko and it has a hole out of which men are born) (Brincker 1886: 247, my translation from German). In all other versions the story is retold in English or German (J. Irle 1906: 75-76, U. Katjivena 1988 24-25, O. Köhler 1954: 82-83, H. Vedder *Manuskripte ohne Jahresangabe*, Vol. 4, p. 106, ELCIN Archive, Windhoek).

altogether, I cannot retrieve a discourse that accounts for a common position in terms of distinctive communities. What can be said is that, whether related to other groups or completely distinct from them, a common ancestry of all Herero is constituted in terms of location. This ancestral origin is tied to a region in the north, either Kaoko or Ovambo, which, again, varies in different versions.

Asking about this story in 1999 and 2000, the reactions of Herero people were often mildly amused, suggesting that my question showed nothing more than my own naivety. Recalling the situations in which I asked these questions about the Omunborongbonga tree now, the situation seems comparable with asking people in Amsterdam, say, in the tram, about Adam, Eve and the snake. No, nobody believes this now, and nobody seems to have really believed in this story, not even before Darwin. But I do remember that my grandmother was very upset about this whole story of evolution, which could do without divine interference and made us less “special” of a species than we were before. Does that mean that she, or any other Christian person in Europe, took the biblical myth of origin for real?

I think the situation would again be different if a person with another cultural background would ask people in Europe about the biblical myth of origin. Reversing the situation in terms of the backgrounds of researcher and informants makes clear that complications emerge when the recent parameters of what counts as real in a society are putatively unclear on both sides. This means that it becomes thorny to discuss the position and meaning of symbols in the absence of a shared realm of the real.

James Weiner writes that myths of origin “ask the listener to consider things that cannot possibly have an origin” (1998: 387). They provide a symbolical language with a set of images that codify established relations of difference between groups of people or origins that cannot possibly be known *post facto*. This means, even though the Omunborongbonga myth, like the ones that succeeded it, does not represent what may count for real, its allegorical language and contents may be seen as more or less appropriate for symbolizing origin and establishing a meaningful relation between the recent life-world and its beginnings. What interests me here is therefore the conflicting, ideological relationship between different stories of origin, which includes scholarly views of the ethnogenesis of the Herero.

Asking about the Omunborongbonga tree in 1999 in Namibia, nobody seemed to know or would tell the story. Instead, I was told that Herero people came to Namibia some 500 hundred years ago. Only later did I learn from Dag Henrichsen that until the 1980s older men used to visit Omunborongbonga trees on a farm in North-west Namibia. The farmer told Dag

Henrichsen that the men would stay near the trees for a couple of days to “discuss things.” What exactly was discussed and which function the trees had in this, he did not know.

The publication of a children’s book, in which some people descend from a tree whereas others already live in the area, and the people from the tree come to be pastoralists in the next generation, shows that the story did not vanish completely, but altered its meaning and positional context.¹³² Since this is a tale within a Namibian canon of stories for children, the problematic aspects were left out: the people who descend from the tree are not called Herero, nor is another ethnic group born from a rock. Instead, the other people are already there. In this way the story appears to combine aspects of several versions: the people who descend from a tree arrive in a country that is already populated by others.

However, as a story of origin the tale has been replaced. Taking both stories into account, the question is not which story is more authentic or more traditional. If re-placing a teleology of origin with another is part of a politics of articulation in which different “elements of tradition get hooked onto elements of modernity,” and then “these hybrid elements get re-connected with elements from the past – notions of kinship, place, revived tradition - to construct current forms of indigeneity” (Clifford 2000: 1), the question of authenticity has to be given up altogether. Rather, what interests me here is the notion of conjunctures within articulations: the selective, transformative creation of meaning as representing and producing current conditions of life. For me both stories belong to the mythic idioms of a cultural archive. Johannes Fabian writes that the notion of the archive in the sense of Foucault

might help to find an alternative to an oversimplified concept of culture as the depository of beliefs and values. According to Foucault the archive is not the sum of all texts of a culture; nor does it designate the institutions, which record and preserve texts. Rather, it “is the first law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events.” (1997: 91)

Defining what can be said and specifying how, the archive creates a certain regularity of discourses, but does not completely obstruct transformative or manipulative conduct. Instead, it “enables statements both to survive and undergo regular modification” (Foucault 1976: 130). Looking at a process of transformation, the concept of the archive allows for agency, that is, in this case, the creative replacement of a founding myth with a more adequate narration, while at

¹³² Meshak Asare is the author of the picture book with the title: *Die Kinder des Baumes* (1990, Lamuv Verlag).

the same time the concept of the archive limits the notion of invention. In this sense, the archive is at the same time a resource and a restriction, it allows for re-invention, a selective use of elements within a cultural practice in the process of symbolic production, but with culturally available resources that only permit a limited range of choice.

With this in mind, I return to the question of conjunctures, that is, the changes within the articulation of identity that allow for an interpretation of a current politics of identity. If the process of cultural change in the (post)-colony is not just a series of “breakdowns of ‘traditional culture’; and (it is) not made up of ill- or half-understood ‘reactions’ to the onslaught of Westernisation” (Fabian 1997: 19), how are we to understand this shift from roots to routes? With regard to the shift from a beginning of a community with ancestors who are born from a tree, to a community that decides to travel, the inevitable question is, why and under which circumstances did one story replace the other.

Initially, both stories belong to the realm of orature. They are cultural productions that reflect and articulate social processes and conditions of life. My analysis of acts of forgetting and remembering within orature promotes the crucial role of social agency in the transmission of oral texts. As we have seen in chapter two, the preservation or vanishing of oral texts is selective, but never accidental. It mirrors what people regard as vital. Forgetting as the other side of remembering implies agency as well. Moreover, orature as a genre of re-told narrations comprises a certain flexibility, the ability of creative transformation. Performers may ingeniously react to the situative context and alter stories. David Coplan (1994: 25) and Karin Barber (1999: 40) point out that metaphors and contents in poems as well as in stories reflect the change of life circumstances.¹³³

If the forgetting or vanishing of an entire story of origin together with the disappearing of a stark symbol is not accidental, there are grounds for the assumption that this symbol of natural rootedness at a certain point must have lost its value as an identificatory imagery. Hence, the complexity of the modes by means of which people construct, remember and lay claims to places or origins must be seen in the light of their history.

The Omumborongbonga tree, located and rooted in the remote North-West of Namibia, (Kaoko or Ovambo), evokes the image of immobility, a natural tie to a certain territory and soil.

¹³³ Coplan writes “ A good example is provided by Cope’s summary of the historical shift in values and images in Zulu royal praises (*izibongo*). During the eighteenth century, when the Zulu were a second- rank Nguni clan, praises resembled lyrical odes in which shrewdness, reciprocity, and diplomacy were emphasised. Animal metaphors portrayed Zulu chiefs as small species admired for cunning, quickness and beauty. With the rise of Shaka and Zulu imperial power in the nineteenth century, these images were replaced by lion, leopard, buffalo and domestic bull, reflecting the strength, aggressiveness, authority, confidence and social order of a monarchical state” (1994: 25).

Regarding the forced sedentariness of the Herero communities along with other so-called natives in the reserves and their opposition to these restrictions of their mobility, the notion of spatio-temporal stasis as “natural” might no longer have been a productive image. Although the Omumborongbonga myth might have had other implications for the Ovaherero communities themselves, the discourses and practical restrictions of the apartheid regime maintained and forcefully manifested a concept of native culture as rooted, stable and territorially segmented. Anthropological discourse, which naturalized the locatedness of the so-called natives, problematically served to change indigenous claims to territories into a physical belonging to certain areas. Within these discourses “natives are not only persons who are from certain places, and belong to those places, but they are those who are somehow incarcerated, or confined, in those places” (Appadurai 1988: 37 quoted in Malkki 1992: 29). This naturalization of belonging implied the idea of an ideal adaptation to a specific ecological environment, which, again, connects ethnic communities to a territory in a language of biology. A strong example of this fusion of biological and anthropological discourses, a fusion that suggests the comparability of ethnic groups with biological species, can be found in *Peoples of Namibia* by J.S. Malan: although describing “the Herero” as nomadic pastoralists, the schematic description begins with the heading “natural environment” under which the geography and vegetation of “Hereroland” are depicted.¹³⁴

The justification of the spatial incarceration of the so-called natives operated by means of the connection of territoriality to the distinctive ascription of the native’s status through his or her race. The territorializing of culture under apartheid entailed the moral dimensions of the pathologization of uprootedness: mobile people, willing to leave the place the colonial regime had designated for them were regarded as detached from what was seen as the natural environment of their culture, and therefore a danger to the project of civilization. Liisa Malkki has pointed out that sedentarist metaphors, like natural rootedness, re-affirm the partitioning of space into neat segments, as distinctive territories of nations or cultures, or, as in this case, races (1992: 31). If only for the so-called natives, in colonial Namibia mobility was linked to amorality and the loss of tribal culture. As I have demonstrated in chapter three, the colonial state restricted mobility by means of the pass laws and the prohibition of what was defined as vagrancy. Thus, the notion of travel as the origin of a distinct cultural identity transgresses not only the discrete spatial partitioning of the territory. Furthermore, the deliberate uprooting of the narration of origin

¹³⁴ J. S. Malan was state ethnologist during apartheid. The first edition of the book *Peoples of Namibia* was published in 1980, the present publication, still available, stems from 1995.

replaces what, through the essentialist lens of apartheid ideology, formed the natural origin and, therefore, innate place-boundedness, of the socio-economic practice of travelling. Hence, the Herero story of origin that begins with travel replaces the notion of the givenness of a natural origin through its emphasis on a practice that implies choice, as opposed to stasis, and thus stresses history and agency.

The currently privileged narrative of origin promotes a version of history that stresses ethnic continuity rather than ancestral origin. According to this version, the Herero arrived in Namibia as a distinct community, coming from the area of the Great Lakes in East Africa. Searching for a region to graze their cattle, the group split up in the area of today's Angola, where a part of the community stayed and became agriculturalists, whereas the others traveled further towards the South.¹³⁵ This narrative seems to be a delayed adaptation to the privileged scholarly reading of history as perpetuated by missionaries and anthropologists since the nineteenth Century.¹³⁶

Deconstructing the view of ethnic groups as neatly distinguishable and static, historians have doubted this version in the last decade. Jan-Bart Gewald, revising his own findings about ethnic origins, writes:

The work presented by Henrichsen suggests the existence of a particular pastoralist strata in the central Namibian highlands at the beginning of the 19th century. Essentially they shared a set of core ideas regarding, relating to and revolving around the ownership of cattle and a pastoralist economy. It was in drawing upon this, as yet ethnically undefined, stratum that Herero society developed, in the second half of the nineteenth century. Consequently the "Herero" *did not* come wandering into Namibia from the Great Lakes region over the course of the 16th century. (2000: 188 emphasis added)

Regarding both discourses, the early scholarly one by the missionaries, which promoted the idea of wandering tribes, as well as the current, mainly historical line of argumentation, which

¹³⁵ Interviews with Wisconsin Hekemo and Alexander Kaputu in 1999.

¹³⁶ Gewald and Bollig describe the idea of the long distant movement of solid, distinct tribes as promoted by the missionary Carl Hugo Hahn in the nineteenth century. This idea, they suggest, was informed by the concept of *Völkervanderung* that was virulent in contemporary German discourses of historians. "Hahn invented the Herero as a racial category and described them as 'beautiful black Negro people'. Hahn's theory was widely accepted among missionaries, whose categorisations preceded those of anthropologists. However, it is to the missionary Vedder that full credit must be given for developing and fleshing out the image of the Herero such as it exists in most of the academic literature of the present-day" (2000: 9-10).

considers Herero ethnicity as a formation of the nineteenth Century, the contemporary Herero narration of origin could easily be discarded as unquestioned essentialist and backward. But it is not that simple. The philosophy of language proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin offers analytic insights into the multi-actuality of the sign, or, in this case, a narration “whose meanings and values are never finally fixed but constantly subject to antagonistic efforts of articulation, from one discourse to the next” (Mercer 1990: 76).

The struggle for the possession of the sign, or over versions and meanings of symbolic resources, such as the differently accentuated narrations of history, arise because

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes one’s own only when the speaker appropriates the word adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation the word does not exist in a neutral or impersonal language...but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one’s own (Bakhtin 1981: 293-294).

A closer look at the contemporary version of the myth of origin that circulates in the Herero communities makes clear that although some aspects may stem from the theory of the “wandering tribes” as told by missionary Hahn, the narration has been transformed. The specific version of the narration that came about by means of appropriation, forms an evaluative re-articulation of the story. The theory that was brought up by Hahn and extended by other missionaries emphasizes the notion of racial difference, drawing on the assumption that the Herero were of Hamitic ancestry and therefore clearly distinguishable from the “Negro-type.”¹³⁷

Quite divergent from this, in all versions of the narrative of origin I was told, a relationship to the Oshivambo-speaking communities is established: the community split in the North and a part of the people became peasants. According to Alexander Kaputu, the close relation between the two ethnic groups is evident in the similarity of the two languages spoken by these communities. Furthermore, the notions of racial superiority, as deployed by missionary Vedder and his colleagues were absent in the Herero versions I found. This means that, although the story of origin may be informed by scholarly discourses of the nineteenth Century, it does not

¹³⁷ Bollig and Gewald (2000: 10) write that: ” Herero origins in the Great Lakes are based on the racist hypothesis of Hamitic migrations to Africa. In the early decades of this century (see Meinhof, K. 1912. *Afrikanische Religionen*. Berlin) believed to have found evidence for a major migration of peoples from the Near East to all parts of Africa...” Vedder suggests that the Herero “... differ too much from the Negro-type to warrant our including them in the negro-race without further investigation“.

draw on the same categories, but has been fundamentally altered by means of appropriation and a complete change of its purpose. The representational function of the narrative sheds light on the question of why elements of an older scholarly grand narrative are privileged over the recent historical deconstruction of the origin of ethnic categories.

I presume that, like the current discussion of tribalism, the discussions of ethnogenesis and the deconstruction of primordial ethnicity have not passed the Herero communities unnoticed. Yet, academic, anti-essentialist characterizations of Herero culture as a relatively recent construction are actively rejected. What is at stake in the establishing of an authoritative narrative of origin, is the emergence of what I understand as strategic theory. With this term I mean the selective appropriation and transformation of discursive elements for identity politics under specific conditions. This inevitably implies the requisition of the power to define the self. Again, like in the cases where *omitandu* provide a different reading and making of public history, the power of the narrative functions to promote alternative realities or life worlds. Salman Rushdie writes:

[R]edescribing a world is the necessary first step to changing it. And particularly at times when the state takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit the present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized. (quoted in David Murphy 2000: 38)

In the case of the narrative of origin, this connotes that even if elements were taken from a missionary-colonial grand narrative, form and meaning have been transfigured. The currently privileged narrative of origin expands a notion of continuity into a pre-colonial past, no longer by means of metaphor, but in the way of narrating the historical praxis of mobility *as well as* deliberate choice for a certain territory.

By strategically emphasizing continuity, the Herero community insists on a representability that is *not* the result of the epistemic power of the colonial state but grounded in their own version of history. Replacing the older myth of origin by a narration of origin that begins with travel and a community's deliberate choice for a pastoralist lifestyle of mobility, the recent story of origin stresses agency in a historical sense. Since this mobile way of life was constrained by means of the laws and restrictions after the colonial war in 1904-1908, the story

comments on the diasporic conditions which led to the alienation of life practices and the land under colonialism.

Life as travel

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our every day realities. If Lakoff and Johnson are right in that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3).

Ovaherero do not consider themselves to be nomadic. As pastoralists, they stayed at places for longer periods, holding cattle posts in other regions according to the local rainfall pattern in Namibia. Their life was thus more semi-nomadic or, one might as well say, semi-sedentary. This is suggested by a central trope in Herero orature: the notion of life as travel, moving with the cattle and having the sovereignty to choose where one wishes to go or to stay. Travelling freely in the region is a central practice referred to in recent Herero social self-description. But it is more than a practice: it entails what Lakoff and Johnson have described as “metaphors we live by” (1980). Seen in this way, life as travel is a conceptual metaphor that structures not only the practice of life, but the very conception of lives in time and space. Ovaherero were mobile people, not only in a spatio-temporal sense, but also in the sense of being as a form of becoming that is intrinsically linked to physical mobility. As we have seen, for instance in the praise poem for Bishop Gotthart discussed in chapter one that, only after bringing up many places to which he had travelled, ends with the words: “Now there he is at home” (Ohly 1990: 38). If travel is a concept of life, a person can be at home in several places.

This means that the diasporic articulation of the Herero nowadays is not so much about being local in the sense of having a home in fixed places since “time immemorial.” Thus, *ebi rOvaherero*, meaning literally “the land of the Ovaherero,” is a concept that does not easily fit into conceptual frameworks that consider indigenusness and diaspora as two opposing terms.¹³⁸ Nation states as well as land possession (in the Western sense) did not exist in large parts of

¹³⁸ Dag Henrichsen suggests that the formation of *EbiOvaherero* as an ideal pastoral landscape came into being as a result of historical processes in the middle of the nineteenth Century (*Herrschaft und Identifikation im vorkolonialen Namibia. Das Herero- und Damaraland im 19th Jahrhundert*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Hamburg, 1997).

Africa before colonialism. OvaHerero were “dwelling-in-travelling” in the area that later became a German colony, then a South African colony, and subsequently the independent state of Namibia. As I have demonstrated in chapter one, the concept of *Ehi rOvabrero* describes a landscape defined by means of social practices and pastoral land use. These practices created a pattern of social meaning that is intrinsically connected to praise poetry, which not only reflects but actually produces these connections. Local social networks and patterns of travel and mobility that can be traced in Herero poetry created a rootedness to the area that is conceptually beyond and geographically partially outside the nation state.

Hereroland thus is and was seen as a whole region in the area, a social space with a network of places of meaning, such as graves, waterholes, and places where historical events are located. The sense of place therefore does not so much refer to residence *in* a certain locale but to belonging *to* a certain area. *Ehi rOvabrero*, inscribed with meaning by means of social acts, poetry and memory, is itself a mnemonic for past generations, personal histories and cultural identity. These memories are inscribed on the land, as the following quote from the life history of Mbaha shows. He is remembered as an *Omuahona*, a prominent person of the Herero community:

Mbaha is buried at the place Otjikune. He is still there now. The Herero say “Truly, truly by the men’s river” when they praise the east of Okahandja. They praise the men’s river, all of them and say: ”It is, it is where Mbaha of Kapuku is, it is where Tjijorokisa of Muharua is ... : they *are* the men’s river.”¹³⁹

As the passage shows, places are often synonymous with their inhabitants and are remembered and valued together with them. The term *Ehi rOvabrero* thus refers to more than a region of physically used grazing land. Seen as a whole, it is a region of socially defined places, textualized in praise poems; it is a social and political landscape of identification (Henrichsen 1999: 19).

During colonial times and thereafter, important places have been lost in the sense of physical expropriation, but also in the sense of being expropriated by means of colonial inscription: named in different ways or claimed with different meanings that compete with those that the Herero attribute to them. As still another form of the expropriation of places, cultural practices of moving, travelling and inscribing places with social meaning were restricted under the circumstances of colonial rule and, due to foreign ownership, even today. Hence, a double loss

¹³⁹ This quote is taken from the life history of Mbaha. His life history is part of the body of Herero orature, it was re-told by Alexander Kaputu and published in Heywood et al 1992: 95.

affected Herero communities after the war: the loss of certain meaningful places and the loss of a spatial practice of movement that was constitutive within their practices of life. This double loss shines through in many casual self-expressions I encountered.

When, in one of my first interviews, I asked Magdalena Albert, a woman in her 70s, who lives in Ovitoto, a former reserve, about their conditions of life, she complained about the drought: “Since the Germans came, it rains less,” she said. Although remembering the past in a romantic way may have played a certain role in her statement, I propose to understand it as a more general conceptualization of the dramatic change effected through colonization. Due to the restrictions of mobility after the war, people could not move freely anymore, they could not follow the rain. Relying on the capricious local rainfall patterns in the densely populated areas of the former reserves, the pastoralist society had to cope with a severely increased risk due to the impact of drought. But this is only one aspect of the statement. I hold that statements like this also reflect the dynamics of social change after the colonial war in a symbolic way. Rain is one of the main matters of concern that people address to the ancestors. Like health and human well being, good rainfalls are not completely detached from human influence at least for the elder members of the Herero community. Instead, disobedience to the ancestors and social dissonance may cause bad luck manifested in the form of disease and drought. As Guy Thompson has shown for Zimbabwe, laments about the lack of rain and the current unpredictability of the weather obliquely debate the social dynamics of change through the colonial impact and critically compare an idealized past with the predicament of people’s contemporary conditions of life.¹⁴⁰

Especially for the elders of the Herero communities, the loss of the land is allied with the loss, or the increasing insecurity, of social practice. Speaking about the rupture in what is seen as a continuum of social life before the war is a way of narrating the history of the Herero as a before-and-after-story, in which the diasporic self is constituted within a tense liminality. “Since the Germans came” refers to the colonial war that changed the life of the Herero community completely; it articulates the diasporic predicament. As an element in discourse that indirectly critiques the ills of history, the utterance “since the Germans came” marks the desire to historicize the moment of departure as a moment of rupture, not only from home as a place but from a former social order. Dinah Kangumine answered my questions about life in Ovitoto simply by saying: “It’s a nice place, my parents are buried here.”

¹⁴⁰ “We are like fish that were reeled in”: Peasant understandings of modernity in Zimbabwe. Paper presented at the ASCA conference “Identities and Alterities,” 2004, in Amsterdam.

Both utterances give accounts of the conditions of life in the former reserve. While in the first quote the reserve appears to be where one was formerly “fenced in” by means of the land politics of the colony, the latter refers to being anchored to the former reserves by social meaning. The utterances of the two women suggest that the former reserves (which are the area where most of the rural population of the Herero lives today) were places where one felt both at home *and* circum-fenced, which means detached from other places that belong to the area and the socio-territorial concept of “home.” The former reserves were places where one wanted to stay as well as from where one wanted to leave.

The dilemma of belonging to a multi-local network of places under the conditions of confinement to the reserves during apartheid unfold in a conflict of the 1930s. In November 1929, the magistrate in Okahandja was informed by the headmen of the Ovitoto reserve that the Herero population wanted to leave the reserve due to an acute water shortage. Several meetings with the representatives of the reserve were held, in which possible new places of residence were discussed. The correspondence between the native commissioner and the magistrate documents a lengthy debate with severe communication problems. For example, the Otjiherero place names, like Otjiinuanaua (the place where one may drink pleasantly), did not signify places on the colonial map. Furthermore, most of the places the Herero chose for their resettlement were “white farmland” and therefore not available. During the course of the debate about possible places for their resettlement, Mr. Goddard, the Herero headman of the reserve, asked the magistrate, Mr. Thomas: “If we should go, would Ovitoto remain a reserve or become a white man’s place?”¹⁴¹ This question marks the turning point in the conflict. The magistrate answered that the government would decide what was to happen to the land. At the next meeting, all Herero withdrew their previously expressed wish to leave Ovitoto.

The debates between Herero people did not enter the official records of the Native Commissioner. But the presence of members of the Maherero family, who lived in Botswana at that time, indicates the weight of the decision to be made.¹⁴² What can be said is that the conditions of water supply did not drastically improve within a few weeks. Asking elders in Ovitoto about this incident of the 1930s, only one man could remember the case: “We did not

¹⁴¹ “Minutes of meeting of Ovitoto Reserve Natives held by the Magistrate in Otjongombe,” 13th March, 1929, Windhoek National Archive.

¹⁴² Traugott and Johannes Maherero who were visiting Ovitoto are relatives of Samuel Maherero and his father Kamaherero, who were both prominent Herero chiefs. In the letter to the native commissioner from April, 24, 1929, the magistrate expresses annoyance about the presence of Traugott and Johannes Maherero who “certainly, without any apparent legitimate business have been hovering about the Reserve for many months ... I gave instruction for the cancellation of their passes. I feel that with their departure, there will be the removal of a certain restraint from the people’s minds” (National Archive, Windhoek).

know what they wanted to do with the land if we had left. We did not want to give the place up, some people already died here.”¹⁴³

Although Ovitoto was established as a reserve only after 1908, in these few years a sense of belonging to this specific area was manufactured: mutual social relations between the place and the people who lived and died there fashioned ties that would have allowed them to leave the place temporally, but not to give it up completely. The weight assigned to the social ties to the place, considered more essential than an improvement of the access to water supply, must be seen in light of the post-war period. For this period, Gewalt writes that, apart from the surviving Herero’s complete disappropriation of and dislocation from their land,

[a]n attempt was made to take from the Herero all that defined them as such, and to mix them with other Namibians into a “single coloured working class”. In line with these aims, a series of laws had been passed which “aimed at totally changing the African’s personality by recreating their feelings, wiping out their memories, and making their legal status dependent on their political attitudes.”¹⁴⁴

Although the monolithic power of the colonial state and oversimplified binaries between colonizers and colonized have been questioned, the attempt to subordinate the African population must be seen as quite systematic.¹⁴⁵ The same is true for Herero resistance. Soon after the abolition of the camps, active attempts to reconstruct the Herero society set in. Krueger & Henrichsen note that

in the process of reconstruction the land issue was of central concern for the Herero. Resettlement and cattle accumulation started shortly after 1907 and accelerated sharply during and after the First World War. The constant reclaiming of ancestral land became both a political tool and a spiritual anchor. The reserves, despite incidents of military resistance became a vital option for many people and provided a basis for social and economical reconstruction (1998: 173).

Apart from the salient event of Samuel Maherero’s burial in 1923, which was certainly the most prominent act of performative reinvention of the Herero society by itself, reconstruction took

¹⁴³ Interview with Petrus H. in Ovitoto in 1999.

¹⁴⁴ Gewalt 2000: 212, quoting from: Bley, Helmut (1971: 224).

¹⁴⁵ See for instance Krueger and Henrichsen 1998, Bollig and Gewalt 2000.

place in the context of every-day life in the reserves. Circumfenced, marginal, but also shielded against the immediate influence of the colonial administration and the missions (Gewald 2000: 23), life in the reserves allowed for the re-introduction of polygamy, circumcision and ancestor worship. The conscious re-vitalization of cultural elements that were either neglected or prohibited during the years before, were a way of opposing the colonial state and, at the same time, allowed for an articulating and re-modelling of Hereriness.

Rituals of appropriation connected to burials, such as *okuria ebi*, as well as the naming of places and re-valued place-bound identities were essential after the experience of violent dislocation and de-humanization. These practices also worked in reverse and created a landscape inscribed with identificatory meaning, an accumulation of significant places, which were constructed from "articulations of social relations" (Massey 1995: 183). The territory as a social space that was created in this way could not easily be abandoned, as the events of the 1930s in Ovitoto demonstrate. The statements of the two elderly women in Ovitoto, "since the Germans came, there is less rain" and "it's a nice place, my parents are buried here," thus sum up the predicament they live in. Being both anchored to the place through a specific history and social practice and confined to the place because of the loss of mobility, produced a fundamental crisis not only for their survival as pastoralists in a dry country. Instead, the historically established relation to the land connected to forms of mobility and travel is crucial for the maintenance of the continuity of a multi-local pattern of places of meaning that are intrinsically linked to constructions of identity.

Multi-locality in this sense, "refers to the multiple sites of attachment of diasporic subjects" (Fortier, forthcoming) and allows one to think of belonging not only to one specific place, but to a network of places, connected through mobile lives and multiple attachments. Sedentary standpoints, which assume the primacy of one, and only one place of origin, therefore fail to grasp the complexity of identities as defined through synchronously and manifold place-boundedness.

Therefore, taking the possibility of a diasporic condition for non-sedentary societies into consideration makes it necessary to change the question of what it means to live under diasporic conditions.

Omuserekarere on different levels

Recent Herero self-representations, which are the basis of my discussion here, do not explicitly speak of diaspora. There is, however, an oblique indication that diaspora is an element of Herero experience. In the official discourse of elder men and leaders of the community, references to Judaism appear with significant frequency. These modern self-representations, which compare the fate of the Herero with that of the Jews, claim a diasporic identity by means of narrating a history of genocide, expropriation, suffering, but also of resistance and the capability of re-establishing identity after the war.

The modern articulation of Herero identity is a narration of a “thereafter.” Continuously re-narrating the myths of Herero heroes and their experience, which is always strongly linked to places or routes of travelling, tells the story of a loss. Creating a public history that re-enunciates these stories is part of a passionate research in the sense of Fanon: seeking to re-establish a located identity that is linked to the past and tries to make Hereriness intelligible in a way that clearly differs from colonial discourses.¹⁴⁶ As Hall argues, the crucial point of articulation is the search for identity, the reconstruction of identity as a bricolage after the rupture (1997b: 51). Such a search does not aim to find a true self that has been lost, nor can it mean the free invention of something new. Instead, telling the stories from before and after the war performs a statement about what Herero identity can mean today.

The comparison of Herero culture to a certain idea of Jewishness is more than a mere tactic in the struggle for recognition for those who suffered war and genocide under German colonial rule. Speaking about this crucial moment in Herero history in these terms is creating a site of resistance, a resource for self-inscription that seeks to ward off colonial inscriptions. Moreover, the emphasis on a “before” and “after” in Herero history locates modern Herero identity in the fact of displacement. That is to say, this displacement appears to be the constitutive element within the Herero’s own discourses about their identity today. Hence, in the metaphor of Judaism, Herero articulate their sense of self as diasporic. Since being a diasporic community means sharing a history of displacement, dispossession and suffering, Herero discourses of place point to a diasporic sense of community. The diasporic discourses of the Herero openly distinguish their culture from that of the nation state of Namibia. Speaking of the diasporic dimension of their history expresses the desire for recognition, whereas a complete

¹⁴⁶ Frantz Fanon speaks of “passionate research ... directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid area whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others“ (quoted in Hall 1971: 49).

commitment to the new nation state would risk the loss of specificity, that is, a second loss of a self-defined identity that was hard won after colonialism. Yet this does not necessarily entail separatist agitation. Rather, speaking about a Herero nation or culture as disassociated from the Namibian state might be a resource for self-reinvention.

A vital factor in the production of cultural identity by means of the diasporic articulation is nostalgia: speaking about something that was, about the circumstances of life before the rupture, is to constitute cultural identity after the fact. If only in this case, I suggest to understand nostalgia as a productive sadness. The nostalgic discourse performed in praise songs for people and places creates a collective feeling of anger and grief about the loss, but also a sense of pride that re-unifies Herero people in the present moment of remembering the past. Bal describes nostalgia as having a strategic value: "No mood, no sentiment is more apt to rally a larger cultural community around a shared cause" (1999: 73). Moreover, speaking about the loss theorizes the ills of the present conditions of life. The past evoked in nostalgic narrations is "a past called upon to provide what the present lacks" (72). Thus, nostalgic thinking and remembering is a prolific endeavor, attempting to transform the experiences of loss and displacement into a performance that produces postcolonial identity and has the power to create utopias. In the mode of the linking "a 'self-in-present' with an image of a 'self-in-past,' nostalgic memory plays a significant role in the reconstruction and continuity of individual and collective identity" (Spitzer 1999: 92). Thus, nostalgia becomes a source by which the community is creatively re-configured in the present as connected to the past. This production occurs by means of the diasporic articulation through the comparison with the Jewish diasporic condition.

A striking example that associates Jewish with Herero mythic history was given to me by Naftali Windisch, Renathe's grandfather, whose brother was one of the plaintiffs in the court case that was held in 2001 against German companies that benefited from the colonial war. He told us the story after an interview (about completely different topics):

The ancestor's sticks were given to Moses when he brought his people out of Egypt. Moses got the Old Testament too. When Moses went to heaven - he did not die, he just went - he left the sticks near the sea. The Germans came there and they took the Bible. The Ovaherero took the sticks. When the Germans later saw that the sticks brought luck to the Herero, they came here to search for them. They came to Okahandja to search for them. But the bible is for the Germans and the *okuruuo* is for the Ovaherero. The Ovaherero kept the sticks, because they are their luck. Then

the missionaries came; that was when the Germans took Samuel Maherero to Germany and gave him clothes.

The story gives an explanation of the conflict with the Germans that differs fundamentally from official versions I heard before (from both sides).¹⁴⁷ Since Mr Windisch is well informed about the present demand for reparations it can be assumed that he is well aware of the official reading of history concerning the war. Yet, he deploys what I understand as a kind of *omuserekarere*, a story to make people think.

The term *omuserekarere* refers to a particular genre in Herero orature, the so-called “truth stories.” These semi-fantastic stories encapsulate real events in metaphoric narrations like in an envelope, to be presented to the listener. *Omuserekarere* are part of a body of “opaque” genres that play with the art of “secreting” meaning in words (Barber 1999: 40). The recipients, in this case Renathe, and I, are invited to decipher the gap between the spoken words and what Barber calls the “vast hinterland of memory, experience and cultural knowledge to which the story gestures” (1999: 40).

The ancestors’ sticks that appear in the story are the representatives of the ancestors at the Holy Fire (*okuruuo*). As such they have a crucial position and meaning in the religious practice of the Herero. They are powerful objects deployed within a mnemonic practice, where they are considered to be manifestations of ancestors and the past. Transferred from one generation to the next they constitute genealogical continuity and the endurance of traditional values. Representing the ancestors, these sticks mediate between the living people and God, who cannot be spoken to directly. Saying that Moses was the one who gave the sticks to the Ovaherero places him within the sphere of the ancestors and says that the Herero inherited his lineage. If only metaphorically, this would mean that the Herero are closely related to the Jews. Conversely, not giving the sticks to the Germans can be read as rejecting any relation to them, both culturally and concerning the relation of origins. In the cultural context of the Ovaherero, both the sticks and the Bible are material elements of the cultural archive. Moses appears to be often present in Herero orature, especially in the context of leading his people through the desert.

In a version of the tale that, according to Theo Sundermeier, stems from the 1920s, the period of reconstruction of the Herero society after the war, the whites write the New Testament

¹⁴⁷ In different versions of Western academic history writing, as well as in the versions that the Herero tell on their festivities, the war broke out as a result of the conflicts over land and power relations in the German colony Deutsch-Suedwestafrika in 1904.

in an act of envy. Like in the version told by Mr Windisch, the whites choose the Bible and the Herero take the fire.

After a while they realised that the Bible is of little value for them. Therefore they went back to search for the fire. When they saw it in the hands of the OvaHerero, they shouted out: "Now we missed our chance and let luck fall into the hands of the Herero". Therefore, they wrote a new book, the New Testament, that is directed against the old one. The Herero believed in this book and threw away their luck. That is why they are now in despair.¹⁴⁸

Both versions of the story comment on the false promise of Christianity during colonization. If, as Sundermeier writes, the story stems from the 1920s, the trope of the corrosion of Herero culture through christianization, as a product of colonialism, must be seen as an argument for the re-constitution of Herero culture and religious belief in the wake of the movement of reconstruction that took place during that period. Re-telling it now it seems to offer a supplementary explanation for the predicament of Herero culture today. Distinguishing Herero culture so vividly from Christianity stresses alterity, but also the historical rupture as contrasting an idealized notion of cultural continuity. Both this, and the following story, evoke a proximity to Judaism in terms of the way the New Testament is related to the truth of the Old Testament.

The trope of the deceptiveness of the false Bible appears in many narrations. An example is the narration by Willy Njanekua and Kasisanda Muuondjo, who talk about Herero customs. Referring to Moses, they say that he received the right words from God, but that the Germans brought a Bible to the Herero in which the words were written falsely:

...and yet it is they [the Germans, A.H.] who wrote that. So the holy fire and the word of God belong to God. The Holy Fire, which was burning from the bush and spoke to Moses. And the word is the one God gave to Moses concerning to the Ten

¹⁴⁸ Zwei Gruppen von Menschen waren unterwegs am Ufer eines Sees. Die Weissen schritten voran, die Herero hinterher. Die Weissen stiessen auf ein brennendes Feuer und auf ein Buch das dort lag. Sie nahmen das Buch. Die Herero, die etwas später kamen, nahmen das brennende Stück Holz mit. Nach einiger Zeit bemerkten die Weissen, daß das Buch ihnen von wenig Nutzen war. Darum gingen sie zurück, um das Feuer zu holen. Sie sahen es in den Händen der Herero und riefen aus: „Nun haben wir unser Glück verpaßt und haben es in die Hände der Herero kommen lassen“. Darum schrieben sie ein neues Buch (=NT). Die Herero haben diesem Buch geglaubt, haben ihr Feuer weggeworfen und darum sind sie heute im Unglück (Sundermeier 1973: 91).
This version of the story was written down by Theo Sundermeier. He interprets the story as a reflection of the conflict between Christianity and the worship of the ancestral fire that was virulent in the 1920s (1973: 91).

Commandments to be given to the children of Israel. Now that all these things no longer exist, people fall sick and are unhappy, they don't get enough rain and sins are plentiful. But God made the Herero with their own religion. A man could speak to God. (...) Today, because the Herero have been deprived of their land, things have changed. The whole Herero nation is in despair.¹⁴⁹

In Mr. Windisch's narrative it is to Okahandja, one of the prominent *lieux de mémoire* in Herero cultural memory, that the Germans come to search for the sticks. As I have demonstrated already, this is not just any place. In many stories and songs, Okahandja is remembered as the place where the war with the Germans started. "We will always think of the war, when we think of Okahandja" I was told during an interview in 1999. Thus, although the war is not brought up explicitly in this story, it is never entirely absent when Okahandja is mentioned.¹⁵⁰

As the story continues, the Herero keep their sticks and the Holy Fire and, with them, the capability to produce and retain their cultural identity. In the following sentence of the quoted passage, missionaries and Samuel Maherero are mentioned. Most of the missionaries in the area were Germans. Chief Samuel Maherero's position in the Herero history is quite controversial. On the one hand he was a chief (*omuhona*) and a hero of the war. On the other hand, he achieved his position as a paramount chief by means of alliances with the missionaries and the German colonists; a co-operation that pressured, or, as other versions have it, enabled him to sell off the land that, from the viewpoint of the Herero, he actually did not own. Mentioning him in the context of a story that underscores the values of maintaining a specific tradition may be understood as a hesitant critique directed at his ambiguous position. Thus, although Samuel Maherero is not directly depicted as a political leader who was corrupted by Christianity and his alliance with the Germans, his function in the story might be to indicate the perils of compliance.

The parallel between the Herero community and the communities of the Jewish diaspora that Alexander Kaputu draws in a radio broadcast, has a very privileged position in recent discourses in Namibia, if only in terms of its range of dissemination. Kaputu is a well-known local historian. He creates and hosts broadcasts at the Herero service of the NBC and is therefore a prominent figure in the attempt to create memory for the retrieval of consciousness within the Herero community. Very aware of his position within his community, he often offers alternative

¹⁴⁹ Mr. Njanekua and Mr. Muuondjo were interviewed about Herero clans and customs during the Michael Scott Oral Records Project in 1985-6. The texts were published in Heywood et al 1992 (this quote: 146-147).

¹⁵⁰ The man I interviewed was in his nineties in 1999, his name is Petrus Hiuii, he lived in Otjongombe at that time. He asked me: "Do you Ovaduutsi not have places that remind you of wars?" "Yes," I said, "Verdun is such a place." But he had never heard of Verdun.

versions of history that compete with colonial as well as with academic history writings, and thus challenge the shortcomings of written history. In the broadcast I refer to, he explicitly compares the Jewish diaspora to the current situation of the Herero in Namibia:

We used to say that the old things were nice. The old things were nice, but now they are changed by the new ones. Now these nice things look as if they were nothing. When the years are passing and the seasons are passing and the centuries are passing, we will see that the old things were the right ones. For medicine, the roots of trees were cooked and then you drank the water or washed yourself with it. The wise person came to see you: that was the way. Now, in the meantime we were told that this is not the way and we must not use it, because these are bad things from a past world...It is important that people know their *eanda* and whether he/she is from Mbanderu, Ovazemba, Ovaherero, Ovatjimba or Ovahimba.

If you pay attention to these rules it does not mean that you don't accept others. There are people with Jewish beliefs, they stay in Israel and in other countries. They have rules and beliefs which are as ours, but theirs are written down, that is not to say that they don't like others, but they live together with their communities and behave according to the message of their forefathers. (...) I understand it that way, if I compare them with us. These people get their warnings clear and readable for each and everyone and it was also taught to them clearly (...) In the meantime we changed our rules. Dear listeners, you must be eager to keep our values, our attitudes and the events of our community's tradition, the beliefs. We cannot be the ones who violate our traditions to please others, because then we get *ovibuba* (severe problems) and die. (Radio broadcast by A. Kaputu, recorded in January 2001, translated by Renathe Tjikundi)

Stating that the Jewish diaspora communities kept their values and therefore survived as a community, Kaputu also warns his Herero listeners that the loss of traditional values will lead to the complete disintegration and decline of their own community. Thus, he concludes, tradition and cultural rules have to be known and followed if one does not want to end up in despair.

What sounds as an essentialist plea for non-assimilation was nevertheless moderated by Kaputu's advice to respect the values of other communities. However, he clearly discards what Mercer has called "multicultural normalisation" (2000: 234) as a complete relinquishing of the

collective values of the Herero community in favor of the nation state. Instead, he promotes the maintenance of distinguishable specificity. This opinion is offered to the public by means of the modern form of orature via radio and is made intelligible to a wider public by means of the comparison with the survival strategies of the Jewish community.

“We are equal to the Jews who were destroyed”

As these texts suggest, there surely are different reasons for the Herero to refer to Jewish identity. Both accounts significantly refer to Jewish identity in the context of the ability to retain and reproduce cultural identity. One possible explanation of the invocation of the Jews is their parallel suffering at the hands of Germans, for, like the Jews, the Herero experienced genocide under German rule. Another common element that explains the invocation is the experience of being repelled and driven into the Omaheke desert after the fight at the Waterberg (1904). This traumatic experience is remembered in the songs of the Herero in Botswana (Kirsten Alnaes 1989: 272) The flight to Botswana, the country where some Herero found refuge, is often compared with the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. For example, in some narrations there is a prophet who teaches the desperate survivors:

When we went to Botswana, there was a prophet among us who told us to stick to the Holy Fire together with the word of God, he said: “The person who brought you the word of God did not mean to teach you the ways of God, but his aim was to confiscate your land.” (Heywood et al 1992: 146-147)

The texts I cite here are not the only references to the Jewish diaspora that I found. There seems to be a whole body of orature that refers both to Jewish history and to biblical texts so as to compare Jewish experience with the experiences of the OvaHerero. These references have different reasons and motivations.

Quite obviously, there is a tactical value to this discourse in the recent request for recognition as victims of the genocidal war under the German colonial regime. This political issue was mentioned in the statement that Paramount Chief Riruako, who is known for his tactical

utterances, gave to a journalist: “We are equal to the Jews who were destroyed. The Germans paid for the spilled Jewish blood. We say: compensate us too. It is time to heal the wound.”¹⁵¹

With other references, as with most orature, it is more difficult to date their time of origin. Some statements, though narrated recently, might originate from the time of the direct aftermath of the war when a wave of conversions to Christianity took place. That happened directly after the experience of displacement and loss for those who survived the genocidal war. The stories of the Old Testament that were so immediate and understandable to the Herero in the direct aftermath of their own experience of exodus, might have been interwoven by Herero storytellers so as to make sense of them and make them intelligible to the Herero who sought refuge at the missions.

As Gilroy suggests, the story of the exodus, as it appears to be a “primary semantic resource” within the elaboration of slave identity and history, as well as a distinctive sense of time, has been appropriated by Afro-Americans (1993: 207). Here too, the exodus story marks the moment of drastic change as a constitutive moment for present-day collective identity. This is why the iterated narration of this distinctive moment in time, that is, the genocidal war, challenges what Bhabha terms nation time: it speaks of an end that is similarly a beginning; a beginning that dates much earlier than Namibian independence.

The burning bush that speaks to Moses and is at the same time the Holy Fire of the Herero, might be an example of the amalgamation of the written text and Herero orature. One considerable quality of the genre of Herero praise poems we have seen at work is the mixture of allusions. Characteristics can be taken from other genres or stories when they are felt to be powerful and match the aim of the praise. These features are used to give a stronger meaning to the utterances of praise and description. However, although the origin of some of the references to Jewish history are unclear, they are told and thus appear to make sense in the recent articulation of identity and the lament of the predicament of Herero culture today.

Thinking about postcolonial articulation I propose to consider these references as a wider discourse that seeks to define and re-inscribe a collective self after a rupture. “The diasporic self seeks to reterritorialise itself and therefore require a name,” writes Radakrishnan (1993: 765). If we translate requiring a name into *defining* the self in a language that can re-narrate the self and acquire its own history, the language of comparison is one with a double register: literal comparison to historical events and a symbolic reference to a history of suffering. Hall describes

¹⁵¹ This statement was originally published in *The Dallas Morning News* and is now to be found on a webpage called “Forgotten Victims”: <<http://www.pewfellowship.org/stories/namibia/forgotten-victims.html>>.

the language of Rastafarianism in Jamaica as such a double-bind: a “symbolic language for describing what suffering was like” and by means of which “people symbolically re-engaged with an experience which enabled them to find a language in which they could re-tell and appropriate their own histories” (2001: 290-291). In this sense, the comparison with the Jewish history may be understood as a diasporic articulation that refers to similar histories to make intelligible what has happened to the own community. Since the diasporic articulation is not discursively isolated within the Herero community, it aspires for recognition of their specific experience in the Namibian and international context. By means of transferring the vocabulary of the Jewish diaspora to the historical context of the colonial war and its consequences as experienced by the Herero communities, the diasporic articulation accomplishes the commensurability of the Herero history on an international stage. This discursive strategy of what I term “comparing to make explicit” accomplished to increase international awareness of the genocidal war that took place under the German colonial regime on an international level. The power of comparison, for instance of the prisoners of war camps in Namibia to the concentration camps under the Nazi regime, should not be underestimated. I suggest it was a consequence of the intensified circulation of stories of the German-Herero war in the international press that the German state apologized for the atrocities conducted 100 years ago for the first time in 2004.

In this sense, Herero discourses of who they are today are articulated, albeit sometimes obliquely, of a diasporic condition, in spite of the fact that they still live in Namibia, where they situate *ehi rOvaberero*. If we consider the function of praise poetry as linking identities to the land, together with the notion of travel as a conceptual metaphor, that is, a metaphor that structures perception, action, and thought, it becomes clear that this notion of diaspora is not a paradox: life was not merely seen as travel, but actually lived like a journey. Secondly, *ehi rOvaberero* is more than a territory. This means that speaking in terms of a diasporic condition articulates a double loss: of places of meaning and the freedom to travel, both of which intrinsically belong to a notion of home. Hence, an adequate account of Herero self-articulation requires the acknowledgement of a diasporic condition, experienced as an identificatory space under the constraints of the (post-)colony.

Concluding remarks

Let me frame my remarks at the end of this book with a question an ASCA scholar asked me when I began to work on this book in 2001. She asked whether my work about landscape would help in the court case set in 2001 by the Herero People's Reparation Corporation against German companies and the German state. At that time I answered it would not help.¹⁵²

Since then much has happened in the political struggle for reparation payments, the Namibian land reform, in the field of memory politics in Namibia, but also, albeit to a lesser extent in Germany.¹⁵³ The court case against German companies that profited of the work of Herero prisoners of war has not yet been decided. The political struggle for reparation payments demanded from the German state continues. Positive developments within the diplomatic relationship between Germany and the Herero in 2004 at first seemed to accomplish a diffusion of tensions between the two sides. At the occasion of the commemoration at the Waterberg (Ohamakari), where the historical battle between the Herero and the German Schutztruppe took place in 1904, the German minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul offered an apology for the atrocities that took place during the colonial war. She said: "in the words of the Lord's prayer that we share, I ask you to forgive us our trespass and guilt." Her apology was much appreciated at that time, in particular since representatives of the German government had long avoided an apology that could be seen a declaration of historical guilt that might be considered of relevance for compensation. The demands for reparation payments have been rejected on the side of the German government with the repeatedly expressed reference to the extraordinary amount of development aid that has been paid to Namibia since independence.

In the aftermath of her apology, Mrs. Wieczorek-Zeul has offered to set up a *Versöhnungsfond*, a fund to support the process of reconciliation of 20 million Euro. The promised aid was supposed to be used for development projects of which the Herero, Nama, and Damara communities, who were expelled from their land after the war, were to benefit. Until now the German cabinet has not made a decision on the topic. Both, the promise and the delay of its realization have provoked the anger of the Herero's genocide committee in the US. The committee declared: "we are disappointed by the unilateral action taken by German authorities. ... Germany cannot dictate the conditions of the solution of this conflict or decide about the

¹⁵² I thank Ginette Verstraete for this question that has accompanied my work on this book for the last four years.

¹⁵³ On memory politics in Germany see for instance Zeller 2003, Förster 2003, Melber 2003 and 2004, and Werner 2004.

monetary value of our sufferings.”¹⁵⁴ Later this year, Herero chief Kuaima Riruako said that the promised fund could not substitute for the reparation payments demanded from the German government.¹⁵⁵

By the end of August the dispute about reparation payments and a formal apology by the German government escalated. During a demonstration in Windhoek that was initiated by chief Riruako, at which the Namibian government was asked to veto a German seat in the World Security Council of the UN until the German government has agreed to pay reparations to the Herero, marchers carried a sign with the words “kill all whites”. The Namibian government, the initiators of the demonstration, and Rudolph Hongoze, as a speaker of the royal houses of the OvaHerero, have expressed stern disagreement with and dismay about those words. Mr. Hongoze said “we cannot associate ourselves with signals that threaten the life of others”.¹⁵⁶

Similarly to the case of the Herero communities’ struggle for recognition as victims of genocide and for reparation payments, the land question polarizes society in post-colonial Namibia. After 15 years of independence, 43 percent of the arable farmland is still in the hands of 4500 farmers, of which the majority is white, whereas 150.000 households share 42 percent of the farmland mainly in the communal areas.

The land reform process has been pushed forward since the election campaign in 2004. Recently the Namibian government issued a list of farms that are going to be expropriated against remuneration, thereby overthrowing the “willing seller – willing buyer” scheme that had been the policy after independence. This scheme gave the government the first option to buy farmland that comes on the market. The recent attempt of the Namibian government to accelerate the process of the redistribution of the land in Namibia can be seen as an answer to the growing dissatisfaction of many Namibians with the slow pace of redistribution and the persistence of socio-economic disparities within the Namibian society. During the last months, tensions among the rural population had increased, especially among the estimated 240,000 landless Namibians who await resettlement. The potential explosiveness of unequal distribution of agricultural land becomes clear in regard of the human development report of the UN, where Namibia “again claimed the top spot for the country with the greatest income disparity of the world.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in the Namibian *Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 15, 2005, my translation.

¹⁵⁵ *Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 19, 2005, my translation.

¹⁵⁶ *Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 31, 2005, my translation.

¹⁵⁷ *The Namibian* September 15, 2005.

Access to land, especially for the poor, landless population has been identified as one of the pressing issues already at the National Conference on Land Reform and the Land Question in 1991. During the seven days of that conference 500 people who were the representatives of all communities in Namibia debated the virulent problem of land redistribution and decided that a restitution of the land according to the pattern of land use that was in place before 1904, and from which for instance the Herero would have benefited more than others, was not realizable. Instead, the conference came to the conclusion that the land redistribution should consider the needs of the currently landless rather than seek to rectify historical injustice. This means that any claims to ancestral land were ruled out on the grounds that ethnic controversies around that issue should be avoided in the future.

This sketchy overview of the politics of land, memory and recognition in Namibia and between Namibia and Germany gives some insight into the predicament of the postcolonial situation and the challenge the Namibian state, but also the Herero minority is facing in regard to their identity politics and demands for recognition. The element of both memory and memory politics seems to be undervalued. This becomes clear, if we look at the German state's obstinate position of avoidance when facing the cruelties of the country's imperial past. It is against this avoidance that I offer this analysis of the making of landscape as tied to identities and history. To be sure, this analysis does not show a way out of the postcolonial dilemma. But I do hope to have contributed to redress a negligence of the colonial aspect of this dilemma.

On reading newspaper articles and online texts about the issues of the demanded compensation and the land reform I was struck by the fact that very few of the articles address the historical ties between Herero articulations of identities and the ancestral land. An exception was an online article of the Goethe Zentrum in Windhoek. Here Wolfgang Maier writes:

The Herero ... do not only demand money, as some observers want us to believe, but the recognition of cultural identity. ... With the application of the colonial law according to individual land ownership a fundamental identity-building basis of Herero culture broke apart.¹⁵⁸

Scholarly writing may address the identitarian aspect of the land question more frequently, but as the German anthropologist Larissa Förster rightly points out in particular "oral tradition is very rarely looked at when talking about the land question in Namibia" (2004: 2). This is a regrettable

¹⁵⁸ Quoted from: <<http://www.goethe.de/ins/na/prj/eri/mfo/de81278.htm>>, my translation.

shortcoming within the critical writings about memory politics in both countries to the compensation of which my study offers a contribution. Authors who criticize the lack of monuments, like in the case of the Old Location (see chapter 3) or the longevity of German war monuments in Namibia, like for instance the Rider in Windhoek, often are unaware of the existence of poetry that actually performs and fosters collective memory or, as in the case of the Rider, re-inscribes and appropriates existing monuments.

When in 1912 the war monument was unveiled, Gouverneur Theodor Seitz said:

The iron rider of the Schutztruppe, overseeing the country from this place, tells the world that we are and remain the masters [die Herren] here.¹⁵⁹

This monument to German militarism is contested in Namibia; some Namibians would like to see it replaced by a monument that reminds of the sufferings and losses the colonial regimes have brought for the African population. Remarkably, a look into Herero orature shows that at least here, already for over twenty years, a poetic reinscription has been accomplished:

Oomo kakambe kaingwi ngwa a yoro na yorerwa
Waana yaKavi mongoro nomundu otjitenda.

Here is the horse of the one who was laughing and laughed with
The sons of Kavi on the zebra and the man of iron.¹⁶⁰

Damman got this version, which belongs to the body of praises for Windhoek from Alexander Kaputu in 1981. This means that long before the end of apartheid in Namibia, the German monument was not exclusively German any more. Both the horse and the rider had been replaced: instead of a German soldier, we find a Herero warrior named Kavi, who belonged to the Maherero family, and was known for his extraordinary bravery. Again, as with so many personal allusions, the “sons of Kavi” at once refer to Kavi and multiply his personal presence within the poem. In the same vein the horse stays a horse and is changed into a zebra, for *ongoro*, means both. We do not know why the rider is laughing and makes others laugh, might it be because he finds himself on a (formerly German) monument in the middle of Windhoek?

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Joachim Zeller as follows: “Der eiserne Reiter der Schutztruppe, der von dieser Stelle aus ins Land blickt, verkündet der Welt, daß wir hier die Herren sind und bleiben werden.“ (2003: 192).

¹⁶⁰ In Damman 1996: 280, translated from German and Otjiherero by Renathe Tjikundi and myself.

Throughout my work on landscape and oral poetry I was hoping to find a place for what I would call the “Kavi-effect.” I found it here – at the end, where colonial history meets the postcolonial present. Saying that we need Kavi I do not mean to make a naive plea for the mocking effect of versioning as a kind of easy remedy against the predicament of postcolonialism on both sides. To be sure, neither the versioning power of praise poetry, nor the articulation of landscape can substitute for or undo socio-economic inequalities that are the continuing result of colonialism. But both the colonial history and the postcolonial present appear in a different light depending on whose version we choose to listen to. German and Namibian historians can only lament the lack of monuments and the persistence of the monolithic symbolism of German military monuments in Namibia, because they rarely know the praise poem for the Old Location and Kavi never entered the repertoire of the versions of history and landscape most Westerners, but also most Namibians know.

I propose that we need both to read the landscape, and with it the versions of history and the multiplicity of identity constructions: the iron rider on the horse to remind us of the grim past of German colonialism, but also of Kavi, who recalls that there is always more than one version or story. Learning to listen to the opaque and fragmented stories that praise poetry and performative practices are able to tell, may sharpen people’s senses and open these for hitherto inaudible speaking positions. Such learning may also allow insights into the discursive sites these practices open up and produce. For me as a German, learning about praise poetry I found myself embedded in the Herero landscape and at the same time compelled to question the totality of the colonizing power.

More stories like Kavi’s are needed on both sides, that is, more stories that version, open up and proliferate the existing multiplicity of voices, discourses and postcolonial identity constructions.

Summary

In this book I explore the production of landscape by Ovaherero communities in Namibia. The landscape I speak about is created by oral poetry, performative speech acts and collective acts of commemoration. These activities that “do landscape” do not produce images, are not represented by images and do not gain their socio-cultural effects in relation to the faculty of sight. Neither images, nor visual beauty are important in regard of the making of Herero landscapes. Thus, what may be called the main elements of landscape as an aestheticized environment in Europe since the late 16th century, that is, a socially informed practice of seeing together with the visual representation of segments of space (mainly in paintings), is not relevant in this case.

Calling into question the uniqueness of landscape as a European construct, as several ethnographers do, I suggest to retain the concept of landscape as a medium of expression in which “cultural meanings and values are encoded” (Mitchell 1994: 14). If we understand landscape as a concept, one that speaks about a social practice and production, the term remains vital while it travels inter-culturally. Emphasizing on practice and process of “doing” landscape I understand this production as a specific mode of cultivation. With cultivation I mean the activity of artfully culturalizing the environment into a landscape, of meaning and memory, but also as invested with a sense of belonging. Seen in this way, landscape is a social construction that varies considerably within different cultures, but also changes through time and at different locations. In order to understand the Herero landscape as an artful social construction, I analyze this landscape as a collective production, that is, at once a process and a product, with all its local and cultural specificity.

Different from Western conceptions, in which landscape provides an entity outside the self that may act as a screen for projection and a medium for contemplative regeneration, the landscape of the Herero is a fundamental element of the texts and performative acts that also articulate collectivity. Orature as a medium through which landscape and identities are constructed and represented is therefore one of the main subjects of my analysis throughout this book.

Orature, mainly in the form of praise poetry and but also as providing meaningful names for places, is a key element in the making of landscape. By means of reciting, performing and producing praise poems for each known and named location the space is socially owned, narratively mapped and inscribed with meaning. By means of the community’s cultural work of

persistently preserving and continuously proliferating the cultural archive of orature the landscape of the Ovaherero survived colonization. But more than this, it is through praise poetry that Herero historiography is transmitted and kept in circulation. Exploring the function and meaning of praise poetry that connects people with their genealogies, but also with places and cattle, my work investigates the interactive operations of this network of texts. Praise poems, as a crucial element of orature of the Ovaherero identify places and people. In this way praise poetry creates a landscape that locates and narrates people's histories of travel and dwelling, as well as their genealogies that reach back into pre-colonial time.

Another main element in the making of landscape are commemorative rituals that enact Herero history in the present. Places like Okahandja, where a commemorative ceremony that honors the heroes, recalls the terror of the colonial war, but also celebrates the community's resistance and survival, takes place every year do not merely provide the location for the festivity and the ritual of recall. Instead, it is by means of those rituals that these places are re-connected to and re-claimed by the community. At the same time these rituals tie the community with their ancestors, that is, the realm of the living is annually reanchored to a collective past and history is linked to the present. The community's sense of collectivity and belonging is recharged by means of these re-enactments of located history.

It is thus orature together with performances of remembering that provide the suturing effects which link landscape to articulations of collective identity. Both the performative acts and the oral texts create an articulation of landscape that is intrinsically tied to the production and expression of identities. The landscape of the Herero as produced by orature and performative acts that provide crucial elements in the making of identity is therefore not completely outside of the self, as the "other" of the self, but intrinsically linked to the self by means of the genealogical text that generates a notion of identity. I elaborate my analysis of the connection between articulations of collective identity and the making of landscape by means of reading performative speech acts and oral poetry.

In chapter one I analyze in detail how oral poetry produces both a social space, regional patterns of land use and tenure, but also the aesthetic dimension of landscape. The poetics of naming plays an important role in systematically socializing and signifying the space; naming is one element in the process of mapping the environment into a recognizable landscape. Further, the names of places that often encapsulate information about the locations appear to bring about at once a connection between places and their history and evoke an almost synaesthetic reflex in the listener: upon hearing the names of the places, I was told by an older informant, "one wishes

to recite the poem for the place”. Exploring both the meaning of place names and the systematic operation of the performative acts of orature that legitimized usufruct right in pre-colonial times, I draw on Butler’s theory of performative speech acts in order to come to an understanding of the productive and binding power of orature.

Whereas chapter one explores the systematic operations of orature, in chapter two the notion of polyphony and conflicting voices within Herero orature complicate, but also deepen my reading of praise poetry. In chapter two, a close reading of oral performances that took place in the 1950s and that were recorded by the linguist Ernst Damman, allow for an analysis of the making of a located history in central Namibia. Omaruru, the place where historical battles took place during the colonial war with the Germans, and from where Ovaherero had to flee after the battle, is inscribed with history within the performances that Damman collected. What becomes clear in this chapter, through the analysis of the recorded texts, but also with the help of interviews with two women who could still recall the event of the taping, is that women have a powerful role in the making and transmittance of oral history as well as poetry. Herero landscape, which appears to be a landscape signified by the lives and deeds of male heroes, is artfully created by the mourning songs that women create. This does not mean that women are the sole creators of orature since authorship within Ojherero praise poetry is never individual and both men and women recite the praise songs. Instead, praise poetry is generated by composite voices that merge in the event of the performance. Further, my reading of the antiphonic, often conflicting voices of memory exposes culturally accepted forms of critique that have to be mined out of the opaque allusions of praise poetry. In terms of the making of landscape I show how the history, mainly of the colonial war in this case, is inscribed into the landscape that in this way becomes the witness of collective history.

Chapter three deals with the forced removal of the African community from the Old Location in Windhoek under the South African regime in the 1960s. The praise poem that was created during the mourning period for the victims of the so-called Windhoek shooting, when fourteen people were shot because they revolted against their forced removal, created and preserved an urban landscape in the cultural memory of the Herero. Speaking against the coercion of the African population into the violent containment of racial segregation, in the social and spatial dimension, the poem creates an alternative historical landscape. My reading of the poem deals with the history of Africans in the urban space of the colony and the modes in which orature voices a vivid critique against racism and apartheid. Comparing the operation of praise poetry with features of the hypertext, in terms of radical incompleteness and ramification

that leads to other stories and poems that are stored in the shared archive of cultural memory, exposes another layer of the interactive play with allusions that takes place during the performances of orature. Further, the praise poem that was composed by several women after the defeat of the revolt against apartheid shows the creative capacity of oral poetry to use its generic feature of opacity in the way of criticizing the oppressive regime while at the same time rejecting the tyrannical demand for transparency and controllability.

In chapter four I analyze a ritual of recall, namely that of *okurya ebi*, which means eating the sand, that takes place at one of the most prominent annual commemoration ceremonies. Following the performances of Okahandja Day, at which male performers wear uniforms and the women wear long dresses in red and black, the colors of one of the Royal Houses of the Herero, I analyze the meaning and function of the ritual in which sand is “eaten”. Okahandja Day celebrates the survival and reconstruction of the Herero society after the genocidal war in 1904-1907. Parading in uniforms, political speeches, but also the social event of meeting kin and friends foregrounds cultural survival and displays present “Hereriness”, while recalling the colonial terror of German Imperialism. Moreover, the wearing of uniforms that remind of the German uniforms of the *Schutztruppe* do not simply display mimicry (in Bhabha’s sense) but the power to incorporate the symbols of colonialism in order to create a new symbolism of Hereriness. The ritual of *okurya ebi* is embedded in this colorful event. “Eating” the sand connects the participants to their ancestors and ritually reclaims the social and moral ownership of the land. Moreover, the ritual of eating the sand must be seen in a wider context, since there are other situations, which require the ritual. Eating the sand constructs Herero landscape as a socialized space that bears the imprint of human history and mediates the reconnection of the present inhabitants with the deceased.

In chapter five I analyze a very specific case of a loss: that of an adornment that Herero women used to wear on their skins. In the story of the inaccessibility of ochre from Ombotozu, as told by Naftaline Tjikundi, the strict rules of performances of recall unfold. *Otjize* (ochre) is a sign of genealogical and spatial belonging to a specific region in Namibia. Gaining *otjize* involved a performance of recall that became impossible due to the transition of social structure within the community. Still, a powerful spirit that resides at the place does not allow for a change of the rules of recall. Acquiring *otjize* was a ritual that transformed a performative mode of recall into a visible sign of belonging. In this case, the once constituted landscape that includes ancestral spirits who may act in their own right restricts the access to the place. Since the social transition cannot be reverted, the loss of access to the ochre that remains an element of social identity for

older women is irreversible in this area. Narrating the story of the loss provides a mode to articulate a collective identity by means of nostalgic memory.

The last chapter explores what I call the diasporic articulation of the Ovaherero in Namibia today. Political discourses of the Herero often compare their colonial history with the history of the Jewish communities in order to achieve recognition for the atrocities that were experienced under colonial occupation. In the mode of retelling their colonial history, the genocide during the colonial war, and the loss of what Herero regard as their ancestral land, the Ovaherero communities articulate historical specificity that does not easily submit to the narration of the nation in independent Namibia. The diasporic articulation not only reminds of the historical disappropriation, but also conveys the poignantly felt bar on return to an identity that was linked to a sovereign dwelling-in-travelling. The diasporic articulation that negotiates identity in this case indicates a desire to emphasize discontinuity; it is the iterated narration of a rupture from a time referred to as a time of sovereignty.

Nederlandse Samenvatting

In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik de productie van landschap door Herero gemeenschappen in Namibië. Het hier bedoelde landschap wordt geproduceerd door middel van gesproken poëzie, performatieve taaluitingen en collectieve herdenkingsactiviteiten. Deze activiteiten, die landschap “doen”, produceren geen afbeeldingen, worden niet gerepresenteerd door afbeeldingen, en brengen hun socio-culturele effecten niet in de eerste plaats tot stand in relatie tot het zintuig van zicht. Afbeeldingen noch visuele schoonheid zijn van belang als we spreken over Herero landschappen. De belangrijkste elementen van landschap als een geësthetiseerde omgeving zoals deze domineert in Europa sinds de late 16e eeuw, namelijk landschap als een sociaal geïnformeerde praktijk van zien gecombineerd met de visuele representatie van gesegmenteerde ruimte (vooral in schilderijen), spelen daarom geen rol in dit specifieke geval.

Door, net als verschillende etnografen voor mij, de unieke kwaliteit van landschap als een Europese constructie ter discussie te stellen, wil ik het concept van landschap behouden als een uitdrukkingsvorm waarin “cultural meanings and values are encoded” [culturele betekenissen en waarden gecodeerd worden] (Mitchell 1994: 14). Wanneer we landschap als een concept beschouwen – een concept dat betrekking heeft op een sociale praktijk en een sociale productie – blijft het, door al de interculturele bewegingen heen, vitaal. Ik leg daarom de nadruk op praktijken en processen die landschap “doen” en ik begrijp deze actieve productie als een specifieke vorm van cultivatie. Met cultivatie bedoel ik de activiteit waardoor de omgeving op een kunstige manier geculturaliseerd wordt tot een landschap van betekenis en herinnering dat tegelijkertijd ook geïnvesteerd wordt met een idee van behoren. Op deze manier opgevat is landschap een sociale constructie die zeer verschillende gedaantes aanneemt in verschillende culturen en die ook door de tijd heen en van plaats tot plaats verandert. Om het Herero landschap te begrijpen als een kunstige, sociale constructie analyseer ik dit landschap als een collectieve productie, als zowel proces als product, in al haar lokale en culturele specificiteit.

Het landschap van de Herero onderscheidt zich van westerse concepties waarin landschap als entiteit buiten het zelf staat en kan functioneren als een doek voor projectie en als medium voor contemplatieve regeneratie. Het landschap van de Herero, integendeel, vormt een fundamenteel onderdeel van de teksten en performatieve handelingen die collectiviteit articuleren. Orature (gesproken literatuur), gedefinieerd als een literaire vorm waarbinnen

landschappen en identiteiten worden geconstrueerd en gerepresenteerd, is daarom één van de belangrijkste objecten van analyse door dit proefschrift heen.

Orature, voornamelijk in de vorm van lofpoëzie (praise poetry), maar ook als een manier om betekenisvolle namen voor plaatsen te creëren, is een centraal element voor het maken van landschap. Door middel van het voordragen, opvoeren en produceren van lofgedichten voor bepaalde bekende en benoemde locaties, wordt de ruimte tot een sociaal bezit, narratief in kaart gebracht en betekenis gegeven. Ten gevolge van de culturele arbeid van de gemeenschap, met name het hardnekkig conserveren en continu uitbreiden van het culturele archief van orature, kon het landschap van de Ovaherero de koloniale periode overleven. Ook wordt door middel van lofpoëzie de Herero geschiedenis overgebracht en in circulatie gehouden. Mijn werk onderzoekt de interactieve operaties van dit netwerk van teksten door de nadruk te leggen op de functie en betekenis van lofpoëzie als een manier om mensen te verbinden met hun genealogie, met bepaalde plaatsen, en zelfs met vee. Lofgedichten, als een cruciale vorm binnen de gesproken literatuur van de Ovaherero, identificeren plaatsen en mensen. Op deze manier produceert lofpoëzie een landschap dat de Herero geschiedenissen van reizen en verblijven lokaliseert en vertelt, alsmede de Herero genealogie die terugreikt tot in het pre-koloniale tijdperk.

Een ander belangrijk element voor het maken van landschap zijn de herdenkingsrituelen die de Herero geschiedenis in het heden opvoeren. Plaatsen zoals Okahandja – waar ieder jaar een herdenkingsceremonie plaatsvindt die de helden eert en de verschrikkingen van de koloniale oorlog in herinnering brengt, maar die ook het verzet en het overleven van de gemeenschap viert – voorzien niet alleen in een locatie voor het feest en het ritueel van de herinnering. Het is eerder zo dat deze plaatsen, door middel van de rituelen, opnieuw met de gemeenschap verbonden en door deze gemeenschap opgeëisd worden. Tegelijkertijd verbinden de rituelen de leden van de Herero gemeenschap met hun voorouders, zodat het domein van de levenden jaarlijks opnieuw verankerd wordt in een collectief verleden, en zodat geschiedenis actief gerelateerd wordt aan het heden. Het gevoel van collectiviteit en van het behoren tot de gemeenschap wordt bevestigd door middel van deze reconstructies van gelokaliseerde geschiedenis.

Het is daarom gesproken literatuur samen met deze opvoeringen van herinnering die het “suture” effect produceren waardoor landschap met articulaties van collectieve identiteit verbonden wordt. Zowel de performatieve handelingen en de gesproken teksten creëren een articulatie van landschap die intrinsiek verbonden is met de productie en uitdrukking van identiteit. Het landschap van de Herero, geproduceerd door middel van gesproken literatuur en performatieve handelingen die cruciaal zijn voor de formatie van identiteit, bevindt zich daarom

niet totaal buiten het zelf, als de “ander” tot dit zelf, maar is intrinsiek verbonden met het zelf door middel van de genealogische tekst die een begrip van identiteit genereert. Ik baseer mijn analyse van het verband tussen articulaties van collectieve identiteit en het “maken” van landschap op lezingen van performatieve taaluitingen en gesproken poëzie.

In hoofdstuk 1 van dit proefschrift analyseer ik in detail hoe gesproken poëzie naast een sociale ruimte en regionale patronen van landgebruik en eigendom, ook een esthetische dimensie van landschap produceert. De poetica van het benoemen speelt een belangrijke rol in het systematisch socialiseren en signifiëren van de ruimte; benoemen is een element in het proces door middel waarvan de omgeving in kaart gebracht wordt als een herkenbaar landschap. De namen van plaatsen, die vaak informatie over de locaties bevatten, blijken zowel een verbinding tussen plaatsen en hun geschiedenis tot stand te brengen, als een bijna synesthetische reflex in de luisteraar op te roepen: toen ik de namen van de plaatsen hoorde, vertelde een oudere informant me: “one wishes to recite the poem for the place” [men zou het gedicht voor de plaats voor willen dragen]. In mijn onderzoek naar de betekenis van plaatsnamen en de systematische operatie van de performatieve handelingen van orature die het “usufruct” recht legitimeerden in pre-koloniale tijden, gebruik ik Judith Butlers theorie van performatieve taaluitingen om tot een begrip te komen van de productieve en bindende kracht van orature.

Terwijl hoofdstuk 1 de systematische operaties van gesproken literatuur onderzoekt, leiden het begrip van polyfonie en het bestaan van conflicterende stemmen binnen Herero orature in hoofdstuk 2 tot een complicatie en verdieping van mijn lezing van lofpoëzie. Een zorgvuldige lezing van opvoeringen van lofpoëzie die plaatsvonden in de vijftiger jaren en die opgetekend zijn door de linguïst Ernst Damman maakt een analyse mogelijk van de creatie van een gelokaliseerde geschiedenis in centraal Namibië. Omaruru, de plaats waar historische veldslagen plaatsvonden gedurende de koloniale oorlog met de Duitsers, en waarvandaan de Ovaherero moesten vluchten na hun verlies, wordt gegraveerd (“inscribed”) met geschiedenis binnen de door Damman verzamelde en opgenomen opvoeringen. Wat duidelijk wordt in dit hoofdstuk, door mijn analyses van de opgenomen gedichten maar ook door mijn interviews met twee vrouwen die zich de gebeurtenis van het opnemen zelf nog konden herinneren, is dat vrouwen een krachtige rol spelen bij het creëren en overdragen van gesproken geschiedenis en poëzie. Herero landschap, wat op het eerste gezicht een landschap lijkt dat betekenis krijgt door de levens en acties van mannelijke helden, wordt tegelijkertijd kunstig vormgegeven door de treurlieden die de vrouwen componeren. Dit betekent niet dat vrouwen de enige makers van orature zijn, want binnen Ojherero lofpoëzie is auteurschap nooit individueel en kunnen zowel

mannen als vrouwen de treurlieden uitvoeren. Lofpoëzie wordt gegenereerd door compositie stemmen die samenkomen in de gebeurtenis van de opvoering. Mijn lezing van de antifonische, vaak conflicterende stemmen van herinnering leggen cultureel geaccepteerde vormen van kritiek bloot die uit de ondoorzichtige verwijzingen in de lofgedichten gedestilleerd moeten worden. Met betrekking tot het maken van landschap laat ik in dit hoofdstuk zien hoe de geschiedenis, met name die van de koloniale oorlog, wordt gegraveerd in het Herero landschap dat op deze manier tot een getuige wordt van de collectieve geschiedenis.

Het derde hoofdstuk heeft als onderwerp de gedwongen verdrijving van de Afrikaanse gemeenschap uit de Oude Locatie (“Old Location”) in Windhoek onder het Zuid-Afrikaanse regime in de jaren zestig. Het lofgedicht dat tijdens de rouwperiode gecomponeerd werd voor de slachtoffers van de zogenaamde “Windhoek Shooting” – waarbij veertien mensen doodgeschoten werden omdat ze rebelleerden tegen de gedwongen verdrijving – produceerde en bewaarde een specifiek stadslandschap in de culturele herinnering van de Herero. Zich uitsprekend tegen de manier waarop de Afrikaanse populatie gedwongen werd tot de gewelddadige inperking van rassensegregatie in de sociale en ruimtelijke dimensie, creëert het gedicht een alternatief historisch landschap. Mijn lezing van het lofgedicht concentreert zich op de geschiedenis van de Afrikaanse bevolking in de stedelijke ruimte van de kolonie, en op de manieren waarop gesproken literatuur een levendige kritiek op racisme en apartheid ten gehore brengt. Ik vergelijk de werking van lofpoëzie met aspecten van hypertext zoals de radicale incompleetheid en de verwijzingen die leiden naar andere verhalen en gedichten die opgeslagen liggen in het gedeelde archief van culturele herinnering. Op deze manier leg ik een nieuwe laag bloot van het interactieve spel met verwijzingen dat plaatsvindt gedurende de opvoering van orature. Het lofgedicht dat na het neerslaan van de opstand tegen apartheid door een aantal Herero vrouwen werd gecomponeerd brengt de creatieve capaciteit van gesproken poëzie naar voren: hoe het genre-specifieke element van ondoorzichtigheid gebruikt wordt om het onderdrukkende regime te bekritisieren en om tegelijkertijd de tirannieke koloniale vraag om transparantie en controleerbaarheid af te wijzen.

In hoofdstuk 4 analyseer ik een ritueel van herinnering, namelijk dat van *okurya ebi*, wat “het eten van zand” betekent en wat plaatsvindt gedurende een van de meest prominente jaarlijkse herdenkingsceremonies. Naast de optredens van Okahandja Dag, waar de mannen militaire uniformen dragen en de vrouwen lange jurken in rood en zwart (de kleuren van één van de koningshuizen van de Herero), onderzoek ik de betekenis en functie van het ritueel waarbij zand “gegeten” wordt. Okahandja Dag viert het overleven en de reconstructie van de Herero gemeenschap na de genocidale oorlog van 1904-1907. Geuniformeerde parades, politieke

speeches, maar ook het sociale aspect van het samenkomen met familie en vrienden, brengen de notie van cultureel overleven op de voorgrond en uiten een hedendaagse vorm van “Herero-zijn”, terwijl tegelijkertijd de koloniale terreur van het Duitse imperialisme herdacht wordt. Het dragen van uniformen die lijken op die van de Duitse *Schutzgruppe* drukt niet simpelweg een imitatie uit (in de zin van Homi Bhabha’s “mimicry”), maar de macht die ligt in het incorporeren van koloniale symbolen om zo een nieuwe symboliek van Herero-zijn tot stand te brengen. Het ritueel van *okurya ebi* is ingebed in deze kleurrijke ceremonie. Zand “eten” verbindt de deelnemers met hun voorouders en herwint op een rituele manier sociaal en moreel eigendom over het land. Het ritueel van zand eten moet echter in een bredere context gezien worden, want er zijn ook andere situaties dan Okahandja Dag die hetzelfde ritueel vereisen. Zand eten construeert het Herero landschap als een gesocialiseerde ruimte die het stempel draagt van de menselijke geschiedenis en die de huidige bewoners opnieuw verbindt met de gestorvenen.

In hoofdstuk 5 behandel ik een speciaal geval van verlies: het verlies van een versiering die Herero vrouwen vroeger op hun huid droegen. In het verhaal van het niet langer beschikbaar zijn van oker uit Ombotozu, zoals verteld door Naftaline Tjikundi, ontvouwen zich de strikte regels voor de opvoering van herinnering. *Otjize* (oker) is een teken van genealogisch en ruimtelijk behoren tot een specifieke regio in Namibië. Het verkrijgen van *otjize* had voorheen een opvoering van herinnering om het lijf die onmogelijk werd door veranderingen in de sociale structuur binnen de Herero gemeenschap. En de krachtige geest die zich ophoudt op de plaats waar *otjize* verkregen werd laat geen verandering toe in de regels van de herinnering. Het verkrijgen van *otjize* was een ritueel dat een performatieve vorm van herinnering transformeerde tot een zichtbaar teken van behoren. In dit geval wordt toegang tot de plaats beperkt door een geconstrueerd landschap dat de geesten van Herero voorouders bevat die zelfstandig kunnen handelen. Omdat de sociale verandering niet tenietgedaan kan worden is het verlies van toegang tot *otjize*, wat tot op heden een element van sociale identiteit blijft voor oudere vrouwen, onomkeerbaar in dit gebied. Niettemin biedt het navertellen van het verhaal van het verlies gelegenheid tot het articuleren van een collectieve identiteit door middel van nostalgische herinnering.

Het laatste hoofdstuk onderzoekt wat ik de diasporische articulatie noem van de Ovaherero in hedendaags Namibië. De politieke discoursen van de Herero vergelijken hun koloniale geschiedenis vaak met de geschiedenis van de Joodse gemeenschappen om zo erkenning te krijgen voor de gruwelijkheden die de Herero ten dele vielen onder de koloniale bezetting. Door het hervertellen van hun koloniale geschiedenis, de genocide gedurende de

koloniale oorlog, en het verlies van wat de Herero zien als hun voorouderlijke land, articuleren de Ovaherero gemeenschappen een historische specificiteit die zich niet zomaar onderwerpt aan het verhaal van de natie zoals dit gepropageerd wordt in het onafhankelijke Namibië. De diasporische articulatie herinnert niet alleen aan de historische onteigening, maar drukt ook de sterk ervarene barrière uit die het onmogelijk maakt terug te keren naar een identiteit verbonden met een soeverein verblijf-in-verplaatsing. De diasporische articulatie van identiteit geeft uitdrukking aan de wens om discontinuïteit te benadrukken; het is de zich herhalende vertelling van een breuk met een verleden dat ervaren wordt als een periode van soevereiniteit.

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