Introduction

"The archive is [...] a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history."
— *Saidiya Hartman*[1]

"The archive as evidence to discover.
The archive as a cemetery.
The archive as matter."
— *Onyeka Igwe*[2]

"The archive was not a building, nor even a collection of texts, but the collectively imagined junction of all that was known or knowable, a fantastic representation of an epistemological master pattern, a virtual focal point for the heterogeneous local knowledge of metropolis and empire."
— *Thomas Richards*[3]

"The archives are multifaceted and a dynamic inheritance from the ancestors that can be found in all spheres of life."
— *Wanelisa Xaba*[4]

1 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 2; see also pages 16–17 in this book.

2 Onyeka Igwe, *Unbossed and Unbound: How Can Critical Proximity Transfigure British Colonial Moving Images?* (PhD diss., University of the Arts London, 2021), 60.

3 Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 11; see also page 21 in this book.

4 Wanelisa Xaba, "An Awkward Dance With the Black Middle Class: On Decolonial Scholarship, Grief, Anthropologised Ancestry and the Cleansing Role of Fire," *Imbiza Journal For African Writing* 1, no. 2 (August 2021): 86; see also chapter 2 pages 147 and chapter 3 page 199 in this book.

> "The archive means we are counted in history."
> — *Muholi*[5]

The archive as a death sentence, a tomb, as a cemetery, as inheritance, the archive as a nodal point in the production of knowledge – there are a myriad of ways in which the archive is defined and conceptualised by thinkers from various disciplines ranging from history to cultural and post-colonial studies, from the social sciences to contemporary art. This ambivalence around the concept forms the core subject matter of this book. My interest is specifically informed by the creative and innovative ways in which contemporary authors and artists from Namibia both respond to and engage with archives' different push and pull forces to negotiate the country's complex history.

As I was writing this introduction, I listened to a comment made by performer, artist, and cultural worker Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, who addressed the 'trouble' of the archive. During a talk, he reflected on an artist residency at a German museum, at which he was commissioned to explore the institution's photographic repository. Mushaandja asserted: "As a young Namibian being invited to work in a colonial archive that has images from this history, is immediately entering into a crime-scene."[6] His statement resonates with an observation made by the late Nigerian-born curator and art critic Okwui Enwezor who deduced that "archives represent scenes of unbearable historical weight."[7]

However, despite this unbearable weight – or perhaps because of it – there seems to be a growing interest among both Namibian artists and authors to turn to archives in the endeavour to engage with the past, to speculate about the present and to craft new visions for the future, as we will see throughout this book. For the post-colonial nation, this work remains an important yet troubling one, given that the colonial past casts a long shadow on the present: Namibian society grapples with the legacy of a long struggle against two consecutive colonial rulers, officially starting with German occupation in 1884 and ending in March 1990 when the country was liberated from South African colonial control and from their system of apartheid. Autobiography and art offer avenues to negotiate this history and to attest to personal experiences and perspectives on the past for Namibians who

5 Quoted in Suyin Haynes, "'The Archive Means We Are Counted in History.' Zanele Muholi on Documenting Black, Queer Life in South Africa," *Time*, 3 December 2020, https://time.com/5917436/zanele-muholi/; see also pages 34–35 and page 93 in this book.

6 Visual Arts Network of South Africa, "VANSA – Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja Artist Talk," *Facebook*, 20 October 2022, https://www.facebook.com/VisualArtsNetworkSouthAfrica/videos/nashilongweshipwe-mushaandja-artist-talk/526932745926772/.

7 Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography between History and the Monument* (New York and Göttingen: International Center of Photography and Steidl Publishers, 2008), 33, https://sites.duke.edu/vms565s_01_f2014/files/2014/08/enwezor2008.pdf.

continue to feel impacted by and implicated in this history. This book pursues a reading of literary and artistic works that draw on public, private and alternative archives in order to express personal views about the reverberations of history. In four case studies, I interrogate how authors and artists position themselves in the present, address identity crises and traumata and find new commemorative strategies to further healing and express calls for justice.

As the title of this book suggests, I understand this practice as both a response to and a way of 'troubling archives,' and I deploy the term's ambivalent meaning as a conceptual framing in my book. The Oxford English Dictionary defines:

> trouble, v.
> ('trʌb(ə)l)
> "to put into a state of (mental) agitation or disquiet; to disturb, distress, grieve, perplex."[8]

The archives that the creative practitioners grapple with, in the case studies presented in this work, do exactly that, albeit in different ways; they distress, agitate and perplex those who access them. At the same time, it is this troubling nature that draws artists and writers to the archival repositories. The archive's traction may be linked to what scholars in the field of critical archival studies identify as its potential for contestation.[9] By means of reflecting on these dimensions, I appropriate another sense of the verb for my readings. According to the OED, to trouble also means:

> "to disturb, derange; to interfere with, interrupt; to hinder, mar."[10]

Hence, by troubling the archive, authors and artists actively disturb, derange, interfere and interrupt the logic of the archival order. Their creative intervention, with archival material, challenges gendered and racialised modes of representing Black life, fabricated narratives on family identity or inadequate routes by which to commemorate the past.[11]

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8 Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), s.v. "trouble," CD-ROM (v.4.0.0.3).

9 Carolyn Hamilton, "Archive and Public Life, in *Babel Unbound: Rage, Reason and Rethinking Public Life* by Lesley Cowling and Carolyn Hamilton (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2020), 125.

10 Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), s.v. "trouble," CD-ROM (v.4.0.0.3).

11 Throughout this book, I capitalise 'Black' to denote a political and social category, as well as a cultural group with shared experiences, rather than referring to a color. 'White,' on the other hand, is written in lowercase, as it is historically tied to power and privilege, which I do not wish to perpetuate symbolically by capitalising it. Additionally, I place the term in single quotation marks to highlight the constructed nature of 'whiteness.'

The works that I have selected for analysis share a focus on the experiences and lives of women throughout the history of Namibia; they are also mainly written and created by women writers and artists. While this choice was strongly influenced by a sensitivity for gender and post-colonial theory, the central incentive to focus on the selected texts and artworks was inspired by the distinct ways in which these authors and artists proffer new perspectives on the past that contest dominant narratives and modes of history writing. The strategies and their effect are the central interests of this book. Thus, this study's main concern lies in questioning *how* Namibian creative archival interventions challenge the foundations of knowledge production both with and without the archive. By centring women's accounts of colonial experience, this book's core aim is to explore how their works not only enrich our understanding of the past but actively contribute to a re-conceptualisation of what counts as 'archive.' In following this aim, each chapter explores how the selected artworks and literary texts critique the ways in which archives influence the production of knowledge, how an intervention in knowledge practices might offer more nuanced, personal approaches to the past and, quite importantly, how the materiality of archival findings bears potential for intervention.

The role of photography is crucial in all of my case studies. As we will see, my interrogation of auto/biographical accounts by writers from the generation that experienced the country's transition from apartheid to a post-colonial nation shows how the authors Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu and Ulla Dentlinger interlace their written narratives of life with photographs gathered from diverse repositories. In doing so, they generate hybrid image-texts that proffer a certain narrative of self and simultaneously speak to the development of visual cultures in rural Namibia from the 1960s onwards. The subsequent case studies shift the view to Namibian multimedia artists from the following generation. Over the course of the following two chapters, I explore how the artists Tuli Mekondjo, Imke Rust, Vitjitua Ndjiharine and Nicola Brandt use their creative modes of expression as a way to modify and to refigure archival photography. My analyses of selected artworks by Mekondjo, Rust, Ndjiharine and Brandt reveal how these artists convert problematic modes of representation into redesigned aesthetics, thereby challenging the archival order and critically interrogating the place of memory among their families and within the post-colonial nation.

My final case study moves on to question the practice of archival research and its relation to history-making more explicitly, by means of conflating my interest in visual and narrative texts. In the last chapter, I investigate a family estate that I was entrusted with and the history of a German settler woman whose home – farm Frauenstein near Windhoek – serves as a central setting in a novel by South African author André Brink. In attuning my analysis to the unexpected links between my research on the entirely unexplored historical material, and Brink's fictionalised account, this chapter makes explicit the central questions at the heart of this book:

how is knowledge with and against the archive produced? What kind of potential for contesting the archival logic do literature (namely, auto/biographical accounts and fiction) and art hold? Finally, what are the lessons that these creative archival interventions teach us in the humanities, academia and archival research at large?

Interrelations: Cultural Projects and Contemporary Political Discourses

In a global political and cultural climate, in which the issue of restitution of cultural goods and calls for the decolonisation of institutions, public spaces and practices of knowledge production remain heatedly debated, the questions outlined above are evidently of larger socio-political interest and exceed the academic terrain exclusively. The international discussion on material belonging and practices of keeping forms the discursive space in which my interrogation on creative archival interventions is situated. The authors' and artists' responses to archival dynamics may also offer avenues out of discursive impasses, given that the debate on restitution seems to have become stalled and preoccupied with legal questions that pertain to 'owning' and the duties to repatriate primarily.

With regards to the legacy of colonialism in Namibia more specifically, the country's complex colonial history and its repercussions on the present received heightened attention around the world when the Namibian and German governments started their bilateral negotiations in 2015 on the issue of reparations for the genocide between 1904–08.[12] As I am writing this introduction, both governments are in the final stages of completing their joint declaration on the genocide. The initial draft, completed in May 2021, drew significant criticism, prompting negotiations for an addendum. Following changes in political leadership in both Germany and Namibia, the parties have resumed talks, aiming to conclude the agreement in 2025.[13]. It is clear, however, that this agreement will remain controversial. Key criticism centres on the negotiated apology, which many Herero, Nama, Damara,

12 It is important to note, however, that Namibians have been petitioning the United Nations as early as the late 1940s (with Herero Chief, Hosea Kutako, being one of the first to do so in 1946), calling global attention to the South African regime's human rights violations. (See: Dennis U Zaire, "Namibia and the United Nations until 1990," *Konrad Adenauer Foundation*, n.d., 39–40, https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=326947fe-2317-be35-a68a-0a7a2d2afe75&groupId=252038.) However, I am focusing on the most recent developments in terms of world-wide recognition and engagement with Namibian colonial history.

13 Loide Jason, 'Genocide Talks to Resume … NNN Encapsulates Oil, Land, Unemployment, Corruption', *new era*, 8 April 2025, https://neweralive.na/genocide-talks-to-resume-nnn-encapsulates-oil-land-unemployment-corruption/

and San people feel will be imposed without their proper inclusion in the process, as well as on the scope and distribution of financial compensation.[14]

While the question of an appropriate acknowledgement and reparation remains disputed, a growing number of cultural institutions responded to the increased pressure to publicly address their implication in histories of injustice. Examples of this can be found in the high number of projects and art residencies commissioned by German institutions that were devoted to German colonialism and its legacy.[15] The German cultural sector at large also shows a heightened sensitivity to the country's colonial history and has similarly been funding more projects in the last decade, following the trend of 'decolonising knowledge.'[16]

These developments are often promoted as positive trends towards greater cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding, paving the way for a possible future reconciliation. However, scholars and creative practitioners have expressed serious scepticism towards the political agenda and in terms of these projects' authenticity. One example is writer Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor who gave a powerful and provocative keynote to the international conference 'Colonialism as Shared History. Past, Present, Future' (October 2020), a conference organised by the Federal Foreign Office, the German historians and by the Gerda Henkel Foundation.[17] In it, she dismantled the idea of a 'shared history' as a hypocritical framing.[18] As a metaphor for the horrors of colonialism, she paints a picture of a violated, raped, robbed

14 For further points of critique, see: Henning Melber. "Germany's Genocide in Namibia: Deal Between the Two Governments Falls Short in Delivering Justice," *The Conversation*, 7 January, 2025, https://theconversation.com/germanys-genocide-in-namibia-deal-between-the-two-governments-falls-short-of-delivering-justice-246719#

15 See, for example, the exhibition *Freiburg und Kolonialismus: Gestern? Heute!*, at the Augustinermuseum Freiburg im Breisgau; the project *Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures*, at the Humboldtforum Berlin or the cross-institutional collaboration *Ovizire · Somgu* at the MARKK in Hamburg, explored elsewhere in this book; for other examples of cultural 'decolonial' work see projects by the literary archive Marbach, the arts academy Schloss Solitude or events by Goethe Institutes across the globe.

16 In this book, I will use single quotation marks to flag the contested character of the term 'decolonisation' as raised by different academics, cultural workers and activists who draw our attention to the ways in which it has increasingly become co-opted, appropriated and hijacked for both different discourses and projects. See for example: Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2022); Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (September 2012): 1–40.

17 Gerda Henkel Stiftung, "Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor | Derelict Shards: The Roamings of Colonial Phantoms," *L.I.S.A. Wissenschaftsportal Gerda Henkel Stiftung*, 9 October 2020, https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/sharedhistory_keynote_owuor.

18 Published keynote address: Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, "Derelict Shards & The Roaming of Colonial Phantoms," *The Elephant* (blog), 6 November 2020, https://www.theelephant.info/analysis/2020/11/06/derelict-shards-the-roaming-of-colonial-phantoms/

and murdered family whose experience of violence and trauma cannot possibly be conceived of as a shared one with the very same psychopath who inflicted this pain on them.[19] She continues to ask, then, what it is exactly that is being shared in the aftermath of colonialism by addressing the conference organisers, Germany at large and her broader audience:

> The purpose of the colonial project was singular:
> Seize wealth and profit by all means necessary, even genocide. And your people did so with extraordinary success. Nothing says 'shared' as does African goods building European economies for 400 years. [...] There is a Mount Everest of debt to the African continent that has not ever been repaid, let alone referred to; it includes royalties in commodities illegally benefitted from for over 400 years. These include coffee, diamonds, gold, and uranium. Human labour, taxes. This is just a start. [...] If we are to trust in the shared intent to repair historical wrongs, are you suggesting that you are prepared to endure what assessing and unravelling the economic matrices would entail? Are you yourselves prepared for what you will lose?[20]

Ending her speech with similarly strong remarks, Owuor states: "We are weary and wary of you. […] We are tired of bleeding every time we meet you. You are exhausting […] You are soul-draining. You feed off violence."[21] With a view to the power imbalances between those who initiate cultural and academic projects and their invited interlocutors from the Global South, Owuor prompts us to question who really profits from a commissioned cross-cultural engagement with the 'shared' colonial past. Cultural worker, writer and musician Asher Gamedze and Mushaandja similarly express their weariness in a conversation about what they term the "contradictions of colonialisms" in today's cultural sector. [22] Both are suspicious of how the recently achieved global attention to the Herero and Nama genocide and the issue of reparations coincided with a sudden increase in projects and funding from Germany.[23] They argue that the very fact that allegedly collaborative projects are being mandated and "bank-rolled by the Europeans" is sadistic.[24] From the very onset, these cultural projects largely rely on the historical injustices and imbalances that they aim to address, while simultaneously maintaining, perpetuating and making money from them.

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19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Asher Gamedze, "New (i.e. Old) Migrations," *People's Stories Project*, 29 December 2019, https://www.psp-culture.com/culture/new-i-e-old-migrations/.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

Reflecting on his experience with German administrators, and their extractive approaches in commissioned arts residencies, Mushaandja argues: "Them being interested in the memory, culture, politics […] automatically comes with control, they want to control the narrative. That's not even a hidden thing" but is instead illustrated by the often-echoed reminder "this is German taxpayers' money."[25] However, despite these strong points of critique, many (African) artists remain dependent upon networking and funding opportunities to advance their careers. This is particularly true for Namibian artists who are living and working in the post-colony, where the financial support for creative practitioners in the cultural sector is rather limited. This is not only due to Namibia's restrictive cultural policies, but also to prevailing colonial structures that mark the country's cultural and social landscape.[26] As we learn from artist Vitjitua Ndjiharine: "There are challenges for Black artists living and working in an economy controlled not only by foreign interest, but a minority White population."[27]

Due to these power dynamics, many Namibian creative practitioners' income and artistic future often rely on their participation in residencies abroad that are committed to the issue of colonialism, which reduces their freedom of expression to an exclusive engagement with this theme and historical frame. The predicament that emerges from this is that African experiences remain imagined as being tied to the history of imperialism and colonialism exclusively.[28] Topics independent from or outside of this frame – such as love, futurism, self-determination, local experience, present-day culture – appear inconceivable.[29]

Commemorative Practices With and Without The Archive

Circling back to Saidiya Hartman's epigraph to this chapter, and considering archives as "a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body," we are reminded of the emotional challenge implied in these (allegedly lucrative) art residencies that are devoted to exploration and engagement with archival reposito-

25 Ibid.

26 Naemi Meier, *Narrative Dekolonialer Kunstpraxen in Archival Art: Besprochen an Den Beiden Künstlerischen Zeitgenössischen Positionen Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja Und Vitjitua Ndjiharine* (Master's thesis, unpublished, University of Basel, 2022), 56.

27 Paula Alexiou, Camilo Angola, Maling Freytag, Moritz Gemmeke, Tilman Garenflo, Hanna Siegert and Michael Pröpper, "Encountering Post-Colonial Realities in Namibia," *Ethnoscripts Zeitschrift Für Aktuelle Ethnologische Studien* 22, no. 1 (2020): 139.

28 Thembinkosi Goniwe, "Debating and Framing *SPace: Currencies in Contemporary African Art*," *African Identities* 9, no. 2 (May 2011): 189.

29 Ibid.

ries.[30] Mushaandja illuminates how troubling this highly sensitive task can be for creatives and scholarship recipients:

> For some of us, it is incredibly triggering and traumatising to re-encounter these images and moments. The work of reconciliation, remembrance and healing require[s] safety and sensitivity especially for the communities that inherited the pain and long-lasting trauma of colonial violence.[31]

As we have seen, however, whether European museums and cultural institutions are able to offer the necessary safe space for artists to revisit the past remains questionable. Moreover, both Hartman's and Mushaandja's words powerfully evoke the violence that resonates from photographs of the colonial era, the brutality that led to the creation of archival holdings in the first place and the ways in which archives continue to haunt those who feel impacted by the history of colonialism and imperialism.

This sinister dimension has become increasingly important in public debates on the issue of 'decolonising' European institutions. In their seminal study on the importance of restitution of cultural goods from the colonial era – which has significantly contributed to bringing these themes onto a global political agenda – Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy emphasise how the great majority of objects in European museums "have been ripped away from their cultures of origin by way of colonial violence."[32] Reflecting on the insights shared by African interlocutors during their research, Sarr and Savoy conclude that "archives have become a veritable topos of *missing links*," explaining further that "the conditions – of exchange, purchase, gifts, and symbolic or physical violence – in which the removal of these objects took place, have left their marks on the collective memory as much as the absence of the actual physically displaced objects themselves."[33] The recent efforts of institutions to reinvent themselves, to reform archival politics and to question the issue of ownership may be understood as positive developments against this backdrop. However, precisely how sustainable these endeavours will be remains to be seen, given that issues of control and accessibility remain a bone of contention in these discourses. After all, it is only through residency programmes that temporary access to previously locked up archival repositories is granted for many artists and researchers from the Global South. And structural problems remain: cultural objects, artworks, documents and photographs from the colonial era were not only taken to European

30 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 2.

31 Mushaandja, "Documenting and Representing Legacies of Violence: (De)Coloniality?" 38.

32 Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics," trans. Drew S. Burk (Paris: Philippe Rey/Seuil, 2018), 87, https://www.about-africa.de/images/sonstiges/2018/sarr_savoy_en.pdf.

33 Ibid.; emphasis in original.

archives, libraries and collections, but are still often exclusively kept there; this implies that so-called 'source-communities' often barely know about their existence.[34] How are these stakeholders ever to claim ownership and express their interest in such material? Scholars in the field of critical archival studies have increasingly addressed the coloniality of power that defines archival structures, calling for a reform to make previous owners the core target group and to gear archival practices to their needs specifically.[35]

In many ways, Sarr and Savoy's framing of archives, as the topos of missing links, also holds true for the context of Namibia in which, and ever since the period of looting, there have been relentless demands for the return of cultural objects, 'human remains' and other archival holdings.[36] While it may be argued that this material absence left "marks on the collective memory" of the communities, as Sarr and Savoy have, it remains equally important to stress how Namibians have always engaged in diverse commemorative strategies by which to maintain and pass on their knowledge and memories of the past. Oral narratives – transmitted from one generation to the next – are examples of this. In Herero oral culture, *Omitango*, so-called *praise songs*, are particularly crucial as media to "praise and comment on a particularly remarkable subject, place of person," as Larissa Förster writes.[37] Other examples include annual commemorative rituals practised by the Herero community, re-enactments and the use of material elements or the establishment of cultural institutions to either remember or reinterpret the genocidal war.[38]

Commemorative practices attend not only to the horror of the genocide, but to German colonialism at large, experiences during South African colonial rule and the terror of apartheid as well as to the long battle for freedom during the Namibian liberation struggle, which officially ended in 1990. While these practices can take many

34 The term is to be conceived with caution since it implies that 'source communities' were solely the *origin* from which an object, artefact or even a member of that group (often equally problematically called 'human remains') came from, but now might *belong* somewhere else. The term 'previous owners' captures that the rights of belonging still pertain to that group more accurately.

35 Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in Archives," *ARCHIVARIA, The Journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists* 81 (2016): 24.

36 See the earlier footnote on 'human remains;' many critics argue that the term 'ancestors' is more accurate, capturing that we are talking about relatives of certain groups and not simply a 'remainder' of a person.

37 Larissa Förster, "Land and Landscape in Herero Oral Culture: Cultural and Social Aspects of the Land Question in Namibia," *Namibia: Analyses and Views* (Berlin: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2005), 4, https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=3692d0b0-10eb-74da-d4df-6c022907371c&groupId=252038.

38 Larissa Förster, "From 'General Field Marshal' To 'Miss Genocide': The Reworking of Traumatic Experiences among Herero-Speaking Namibians," *Journal of Material Culture* 13, no. 2 (July 2008): 192.

forms – being performed either publicly or privately – Namibian independence and the emergence of the sovereign nation-state saw the establishment of new collective and state-organised commemorative events, symbols and rituals.[39] At the same time, the formation of an independent government also made it possible to call for international and official recognition of the war against the Herero and Nama as genocide.[40] We have seen how this state intervention, by bringing the memory of this gruesome period onto a global political agenda, might also fail to meet the demands of those still suffering from the aftermath and the trauma of the genocide ever since the fraught negotiations between Germany and Namibia that started in 2015.[41]

What is notable, however, is how Namibians have always found ways to transmit knowledge, to keep up commemorative practices and (in different ways) to archive material elements in the face of colonial oppression of both regimes – Germany and South Africa – and in the face of a post-colonial state pushing to dictate national commemorative narratives and practices.[42] The colonial exploitation of labour, the apartheid regime and particularly the system of contract work made it difficult for Black Namibians to accumulate and to safeguard possessions or to build commemorative infrastructures. Yet, people have crafted avenues to do so. In the following case studies, we will explore some of these strategies and will also direct our attention to the ways in which Namibians both question and challenge state-mandated routes of memorialising, celebrating and remembering the past. Such practices and repertoires contribute to vast repositories of resources that can be understood as Namibian alternative archives or counter-archives to national or colonial ones. This assertion calls for a more detailed unpacking of the prevailing understandings of 'archives' as well as of how conceptions of the term have shifted over time.

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39 Consider, for example, the official establishment and annual celebration of Namibia Independence Day on 21 March or the ways in which Namibia's city scape is dotted with statues honouring the heroes of the freedom struggle.

40 Förster, "From 'General Field Marshal' To 'Miss Genocide,'" 192.

41 For Herero and Nama activists and those in solidarity with the communities, the struggle for recognition and compensation remains unresolved, which implies an active opposition against the state's negotiations in the matter.

42 In reference to this, confer: Justine Hunter, "Getting the Balance Right Between Justice and Sustainable Peace?" in *The Long Aftermath of War: Reconciliation and Transition in Namibia*, eds. André Du Pisani, Reinhart Kößler and William A. Lindeke (Freiburg i. Br: Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, 2010), 403–33; Reinhart Kößler, "Facing a Fragmented Past. Memory, Culture and Politics in Namibia," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33, no. 2 (June 2007): 369–373.

The Archival Turn

> Conventionally, 'archives' are understood as cloistered spaces, where stuff is packed away and safely stored. If not actively sealed off from public scrutiny, there their treasures wait, accumulating dust until, perchance, a lonely (and duly accredited) researcher arrives.[43]

This basic definition, as introduced by Carolyn Hamilton, frames archives as neutral or innocent repositories of documents and material that attest to the past and that offer access to stories and biographies from long ago. However, the anthropologist and historian is also quick to dismantle this understanding as a misperception, stressing how already "the *presence of an archive* is invariably a power-laden assertion in public life," given that it lays bare a claim about the archived subject or area "as having a history worth preserving, investigating and reinvestigating, in perpetuity."[44] The archive's power dynamics have become a focal point in the social sciences and humanities, as well as in critical archival studies and cultural discourses at large, ever since the so-called archival turn of the 1990s. Informed heavily by post-structuralist thought, and particularly philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, the archive has been questioned and refigured as "at once expression and instrument of power," as archivist Verne Harris explains with reference to both of the aforementioned French thinkers.[45]

Foucault and Derrida contributed extensively to a shift away from pragmatic conceptions of archives (such as the one outlined by Hamilton above) and towards a critical rethinking of the archive's interrelations with control, power and knowledge through their pertinent works *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*[46] (1995). In *The Order of Things*, published three years before *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault more closely interrogated the mechanisms of knowledge production and laid bare how our conceptions of 'truth' and reality always rely on certain epistemological assumptions.[47] In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he tied his analysis more directly to the role of the archive in knowledge production, proposing in his famously cited quote that: "the archive is first the law of what can be said."[48]

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43 Hamilton, "Archive and Public Life," 127.

44 Ibid., emphasis in original.

45 Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (March 2002): 85.

46 The publication was initially a lecture given at an international conference in London in 1994, with the original title "The Concept of the Archive: A Freudian Impression."

47 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2006). First published 1966.

48 Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 145. First published 1969.

Foucault emphasises the archive's discursive power, its function as the ordering system that both structures and guides what counts as knowledge.[49] However, his definition of the term remains largely abstract. Ambiguity is also central to Derrida's work, who stated rather directly that "nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word 'archive.'"[50] Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* takes Foucault's analysis of the notions of knowledge and power further by directing our attention to the archivist, the institution and its laws as well as to archival mechanisms.[51] Following his line of thought, we see how the archivist, by virtue of archiving, writes knowledge into being while, simultaneously, the institution and the laws that govern it authorise these knowledge creation processes. It is here that Derrida's analysis has been most influential for post-colonial thinking about the archive, given that he dismantles how:

> There is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.[52]

In countries with a colonial history, such as Namibia, the questions of access, participation, interpretation, ownership and control over archives remain particularly vexed. In contemporary discourses on 'colonial' or 'imperial' archives, the dimensions of who shapes, writes and archives history (and whether, or how, these records can be made to speak to a post-colonial nation) remain troubling for archivists and users alike. On a pragmatic level, 'colonial' or 'imperial' archives can be defined in purely temporal terms, as, for example, Thomas Richards does in his study on how the 19th century British Empire relied on data and information gathering to "control knowledge," thereby both establishing and maintaining its imperial power.[53] For the case of the 'Namibian colonial archive,' author and library scientist Ellen Ndeshi Namhila similarly proposes a temporal classification when she writes in '*Little Research Value.' African Estate Records and Colonial Gaps in a Post-Colonial National Archive*:

> Colonial archives are, in the context of this study, defined as both archival records and archival institutions that were created and maintained under colonial rule, i.e. in the political context of a territory that is not sovereign but ruled by another

49 Ibid., 145–146.

50 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 90.

51 Ibid., 17, emphasis in original.

52 Ibid., 4.

53 Richards, *The Imperial Archive*, 4–6.

> country, and in a colonial situation, i.e. in a social context where people are treated in a discriminatory manner according to their ethnicity, race or origin.[54]

In his preface to Namhila's book, Namibian historian Dag Henrichsen emphasises what her research on missing, mismanaged and neglected files and records reveals, namely "the epistemic foundations" of colonial archives: the ways in which the life of the 'white' colonial elite in the country has been meticulously processed and documented, while the "dead Natives" are largely left out in the production of history.[55]

Many scholars in the field follow this tack by linking the 'colonial' archives not only to a particular timeframe, but also to what the content of the repositories both shows and tells. The issue of representation is evoked by various writers who critique the epistemic injustice of how the material attests to Black experiences, which – if they are recorded at all – are "seen through white eyes."[56] With regards to visual repositories more specifically, the patriarchal mode of representing women, controlled by the male gaze is particularly troubling.[57] The colonial archive's "aesthetic order, which notoriously put[s] the black female body on display and fixed colonised Africans within essentialist gendered, racial and tribal categories" is a central issue of concern for academics, artists and activists alike who turn to archival photography to dismantle and to challenge these modes of representation.[58] In the selected case studies, we will engage with the different ways in which scholars and creative practitioners read and re-interpret photographs from the colonial era in greater detail. At this point, what is crucial is how the archive has increasingly come to be seen as a "site of contestation."[59]

Researchers in the field call for a shift in reading practices of archives in the endeavour to rethink the concept. Laura Ann Stoler's reflections were particularly important in promoting a change in approaches to archives, advocating for a reframing from "archive-as-source to archive-as-subject."[60] For her, this implied no longer conceiving of archives merely as "sites of knowledge retrieval, but of knowledge production."[61] Taking this intervention seriously implies that it is not enough to turn to

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54 Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, *"Little Research Value:" African Estate Records and Colonial Gaps in a Post-Colonial National Archive* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2017), 9.

55 Dag Henrichsen quoted in Namhila, *"Little Research Value,"* xiii.

56 Harris, "The Archival Sliver," 73.

57 Margie Orford, "Gathering Scattered Archives," in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, eds. Sarala Krishnamurthy and Helen Vale (Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2018), 43.

58 Darren Newbury, Lorena Rizzo and Kylie Thomas (eds.), *Women and Photography in Africa: Creative Practices and Feminist Challenges* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 13.

59 Hamilton, "Archive and Public Life," 125.

60 Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (March 2002): 87.

61 Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," 87.

archival repositories for the extraction of knowledge. Instead, a critical questioning of the archive's suggestive truth claims, the practices of archiving and the power dynamics therein is also needed. Stoler argues that we must read archives "along their fault lines as much as against their grain" by means of dismantling the epistemological patterns that make up the archival order, while challenging them at the same time.[62]

Interestingly, despite this radical questioning of traditional understandings of archives and their epistemic foundations, a fascination with archives as sites of knowledge and as a concept seems to remain. Instead of rejecting them altogether, cultural practitioners and researchers explore their multiple layers of meaning and the analytic yield of new reading practices. The definition of what counts as an archive has been opened extensively throughout the course of these changing approaches, as Stoler argues:

> In cultural theory, 'the archive' has a capital 'A,' is figurative, and leads elsewhere. It may represent neither material site nor a set of documents. Rather, it may serve as a strong *metaphor* for any corpus of selective forgettings and collections – and, as importantly, for the seductions and longings that such quests for, and accumulations of, the primary, originary, and untouched entail.[63]

In my reading of Namibian art practices and auto/biographical accounts, I follow this wider approach to archives, acknowledging what Arondekar terms as the "figurative flexibility of the concept."[64] Instead of positing a fixed working definition of archives for my reading of the case studies, I approach the auto/biographical accounts and artworks with openness to the new, innovative formations and reconceptualisations that Namibian artists and writers themselves propose. This mode of analysis helped me to access how cultural practitioners diversify what counts as archives and how their reconceptualisations enrich archival research practices at large. In the conclusion of this book, I will reflect on the potential of creative archival interventions and will also assess the limits and stakes thereof.

The Archival Turn in the Arts

What were the motivating forces that drew artists and cultural practitioners to archival repositories or to the archive as a theme of interrogation? In his seminal

62 Ibid., 109.

63 Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," 94, emphasis in original.

64 Arondekar, *For the Record*, 2.

article "An Archival Impulse," art historian Hal Foster notes how an artistic interest in archives was already strong in the pre-war period's art scene, in which artists explored the form of photomontage as political commentary.[65] Later, artists increasingly engaged with the 'archival' by drawing from informal archives and produced those as well.[66] The upsurge of the archive-trend in the art scene of the 1990s (as part of the archival turn) is strongly connected to broader epistemological shifts at the time, such as post-structuralists' questioning of what counts as historical fact, or late manifestations of "postmodernist appropriational practices" such as "the turning inside-out of the institutions of modernism," as Cheryl Simon explains.[67] The artistic sector's increasing pull to the archive also occurred during a rising global and interdisciplinary interest in memory that also emerged in the 1990s and continues to thrive.[68] As part of this development, it has not only been questioned how history is written and from whose perspectives, but more vigorously how we remember, how memory is shaped and controlled as well as who is remembered and who is not.[69]

These preoccupations have been tested and explored in various forms of artistic archival interventions for many years now. In 2008, Okwui Enwezor curated the well-received and much-cited exhibition *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* that precisely addressed the central role of archives in contemporary art and showed a selection of works by artists who explored the potential of photographic images to speak to topics such as the ones outlined above: memory, history, identity and loss.[70] The overall exhibition's purpose was to show how:

> archival documents, information gathering, data-driven visual analysis, the contradictions of master narratives, the invention of counter-archives and thus counter-narratives, the projection of the social imagination into sites of testimony, witnessing, and much more inform and infuse the practices of contemporary artists.[71]

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65 Foster, "An Archival Impulse," 3.

66 Ibid., 5.

67 Cheryl Simon, "Introduction: Following the Archival Turn," *Visual Resources* 18, no. 2 (January 2002): 102.

68 Carbone, "Archival Art," 258.

69 Ibid., 258.

70 Exhibited from 18 January until 4 May 2008 at the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York. Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography between History and the Monument*, 22; International Center of Photography, "Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art" media release, January 2008, https://www.icp.org/sites/default/files/exhibition/credits/sites/default/files/exhibition_pdfs/Archive_PRESS.PDF.

71 Ibid.

From this outline, we can glean how political and philosophical discourses inspire creative practices. More importantly, however, there is a reciprocity in this dynamic that I aim to emphasise in this book by shifting the view to artistic work's potential to open up new perspectives on theoretical debates. Art not only provides visual or textual commentary to the archival discourse, but also actively contributes to a redress and reconceptualisation of the archive, as we shall see.

Today's theoretical and creative archival engagements are often dedicated to archival silences, omissions and discriminations. Both researchers and artists who explore the histories of slavery, colonialism, imperialism or the history of the marginalised in oppressive regimes more broadly grapple with what Carine Zaayman has framed as "the anarchive," in other words, "that which is not contained by archive, that which is without archive."[72] Examples of this abound; we may think of Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* (2007) in which she meditates on the history of the Atlantic slave trade, her own geological implication therein and introduces the story of an elusive archival figure, Venus, a young girl tortured to death on a British slave ship.[73] Other recuperative projects committed to the biographies of Black women whose lives figure (often only in the cracks and margins) in colonial archives are Yvette T. Christiansë's *Unconfessed* (2007) or Zaayman's article "Anarchive (Picturing Absence)," in which she turns to the biography of Krotoa, also called Eva van de Kaap, who worked as a servant and later translator for the colonial administrator of the Dutch East India Company Jan van Riebeeck.[74] Krotoa married and had children with a Dutch colonist and in her various roles had to mediate the worlds of the colonial society and her indigenous community. She was eventually abandoned by both and died in 1674 on Robben Island. Krotoa remains an important figure in the South African imagination and collective public memory on the era of slavery and colonialism due to the large number of historical accounts and archival sources that attest to her life. Nevertheless, Zaayman concludes:

> Krotoa's is a story of loss. Though there are extant archival documents, originally contemporary with her life, that mention Krotoa, this material is limited and exists only in the writing of others where she makes but a sketchy appearance. There is no coherent or physical archive dedicated to Krotoa as such.[75]

This predicament that Zaayman highlights with Krotoa's story is crucial. She emphasises the frustration with the limits of archival reconstruction that call for critical –

72 Carine Zaayman, "Anarchive (Picturing Absence)," in *Uncertain Curature: In and out of the Archive*, eds. Carolyn Hamilton and Pippa Skotnes (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2014), 319.

73 Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008); She continues this contemplation in her essay "Venus in Two Acts."

74 Yvette T. Christiansë, *Unconfessed* (New York: Other Press, 2007).

75 Zaayman, "Anarchive (Picturing Absence)," 305.

and creative – responses. We find various examples of performers, artists and writers who engage rather directly with the anarchive of historical figures. In the case of Krotoa, spoken word artists Toni Stuart produced a performance that "seeks to re-imagine her story through her own voice, in an effort to disrupt the white male colonial gaze through which her story has largely been told."[76] Similar artistic and scholarly engagements with the lives of elusive archival figures are those committed to Sarah Baartman, a Khoi woman born in colonial South Africa who was taken to Europe and exhibited in public shows as spectacle. Scholarly reflections include those of Natasha Gordon-Chipembere, Yvette Abrahams, Pamela Scully and Clifton Crais, Carli Coetzee or H.B. Young, to mention but a few.[77] As a symbol for (colonial, patriarchal) voyeuristic exploitation, she is reimagined in artworks by Senzeni Marasela (*Sarah Baartman Remembered*, 2005), Lady Skollie (*Untitled. [Hottentot Skollie]*, 2016; *Objectifying Thyself Before Others Do*, 2016) or in the play *Venus vs. Modernity* by poet Lebo Mashile and directed by Pamela Nomvete and Koleka Putuma (2018).

Where are the differences between these forms of engagement – scholarly works and artistic ones – and where do they share grounds? While scholarship often aims to dismantle the epistemic injustice of the colonial archive and its problematic modes of representation, many of the artistic examples listed above show how creative interventions move one step further. Scientific research seems to remain dedicated to reconstructing their biographies, as far as the archival record allows, and to reestablishing visibility for the historical figures when it comes to a recuperation of those who were silenced, marginalised, misrepresented or forgotten. A search for notions of factuality and objectivity seems to prevail in this quest, even though the "role of archives and records as arbiters of truth" has long been debunked as a myth.[78] Disciplines such as history thus aim for transparency in their methods and approaches, which implies addressing dead ends and archival silences directly. In comparison, writer-researchers like Christiansë, Hartman or

76 Toni Stuart, "Krotoa-Eva's Suite – a Cape Jazz Poem in Three Movements, by Toni Stuart," *Africa in Words* (blog), 28 May 2018, https://africainwords.com/2018/05/28/krotoa-evas-suite-a-cape-jazz-poem-in-three-movements-by-toni-stuart/.

77 Natasha Gordon-Chipembere (ed.), *Representation and Black Womanhood: The Legacy of Sarah Baartman* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Yvette Abrahams, "Disempowered to Consent: Sara Bartman and Khoisan Slavery in the Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony and Britain," *South African Historical Journal* 35, no. 1 (November 1996): 89–114; Pamela Scully and Clifton Crais, "Race and Erasure: Sara Baartman and Hendrik Cesars in Cape Town and London," *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 301–323; Carli Coetzee, *Written under the Skin: Blood and Intergenerational Memory in South Africa* (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer Limited, 2019), 3; Hershini Bhana Young, *Illegible Will: Coercive Spectacles of Labor in South Africa and the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

78 Lesley Cowling and Carolyn Hamilton (eds.), *Babel Unbound: Rage, Reason and Rethinking Public Life* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2020), 11.

Zaayman are not only mindful of the myth to find 'truth' or 'facts' in the archive, but they also aim to transcend the limits set by purely academic working methods. They turn to narration as a mode by which to fill archival gaps (Christiansë), to develop "critical fabulation" as a strategy to approximate and reflect on what *could have happened* (Hartman) or they employ the camera as a tool to attend to that which the archive withholds (Zaayman).[79] For artists, poets or writers, the code of conduct in their practices sets no boundaries. Free associations, imaginations and narratives are central parts of the endeavour to create what Foster termed "counter-hegemonic archives."[80] A prominent strategy to achieve this is to re-envision and assert the agency and subjectivity of those neglected in official writings of history. The resulting new perspectives on the past challenge dominant historical narratives and commemorative routes. Following anthropologist Ferdinand de Jong:

> Postcolonial artists explore colonial archives in order to produce an art of emancipation. Through the return, recuperation, and reenactment of archives, they point to the potential of forgotten pasts and unanticipated futures lingering in the imperial archive.[81]

The aspect of temporality is crucial, given that many archival interventions not only aim to address past wrongs, but also to craft new knowledge and an alternative visuality for the future. The term 'creative archival intervention' used here – which will reoccur throughout the course of this book – largely follows Vera Heimisch's understanding, who highlights the concept's versatile nature.[82] She argues that a common denominator of interventionist projects is their critical stance towards the extant social order and their aspirations to criticise and challenge the status quo as a form of "decolonial resistance."[83] In a similar vein, theatre scholar Azadeh Sharifi understands 'interventions' as crucial strategies for the self-empowerment of marginalised subjects, explaining how they are "necessary 'disruptions' of hegemonic cultural discourses."[84] With regards to the cultural discourse on the archive

79 Yvette Christiansë, *Unconfessed*; Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11; Zaayman, "Anarchive (Picturing Absence)."

80 Foster, "An Archival Impulse," 9.

81 Ferdinand de Jong, "At Work in the Archive: Introduction to Special Issue," *World Art* 6, no. 1 (2 January 2016): 14.

82 Vera Heimisch, *Interventionen* (Bremen: Heinrich Böll-Stiftung, 2020), 29–33, https://boell-bremen.de/sites/default/files/2020-11/Interventionen_0.pdf. Based on Vera Heimisch, *Künstlerische Inverventionen als dekoloniale Strategie?* (Master's thesis, Univeresität Bremen, 2020).

83 Ibid.

84 Azadeh Sharifi, "Antirassistische Interventionen Als Notwendige »Störung« im Deutschen Theater," in *Postmigrantische Visionen: Erfahrungen, Ideen, Reflexionen*, eds. Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018), 209.

itself, I argue that creative archival interventions contribute to new approaches and to critical reflections on the archive as both a term and a concept.

This can also be observed in Namibia's cultural and creative sectors, where an increasing number of artistic interrogations are committed to the issue of the archive in a broader sense, engaging not only with public, state archives but also with private ones. The hegemonic structure of Namibian archives is often prevalent in these works. It is the predicament mentioned previously that records attending to Black Namibians are often sparse, dispersed and scattered, since the German and South African colonial rule not only neglected a proper documentation of Black life, but also made archival practices difficult for private individuals and families. Conversely, vast settler archives in the form of family estates, photo albums or state records were neatly processed and safeguarded and, thus, remain more readily available for critical examination. In the face of this situation, Namibian creative practitioners explore alternative modes of knowledge production and turn to performance and the body as channels to transmit their perspectives on Namibia's past, present and future. Artist and scholar Nicola Brandt has examined this trend in detail in her book *Landscapes Between Then and Now: Recent Histories in Southern African Photography, Performance and Video Art*, proposing a conceptual understanding of these expressive strategies as "new practices of self."[85] A central element of these vanguard practices is the notion of embodiment. In her analyses of selected works, Brandt unpacks the distinct ways in which contemporary artists use multimedia and performance, as well as cross-disciplinary and documentary strategies, to give physical expression to embodied histories, memories and knowledges of places and landscapes.[86] Mushaandja shares a similar understanding when reflecting on his own changing approach to archives over the past years, stating:

> As a queer, Namibian artist, I no longer see traditional archives as the only place where the past can be preserved. My body is also an archive; it contains memories that go far beyond colonial and post-colonial experiences. The homes of our families in Namibia, the places where our everyday life takes place, are also archives.[87]

What Brandt's observations and Mushaandja's assertion reveal is an undimmed interest in new Namibian archives as well as in individually and collectively shaped alternative archives. Creative strategies in the Namibian art scene stretch from

85 Her analysis is not confined to artistic work in Namibia only, it also looks at creative practices in Angola and South Africa. See: Nicola Brandt, *Landscapes Between Then and Now: Recent Histories in Southern African Photography, Performance and Video Art* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).

86 Ibid.

87 Elisabeth Wellershaus, "'Let's Have Tea and Sing Love Songs!,'" *Goethe-Institut*, 2019, https://www.goethe.de/prj/lat/en/spu/21732422.html.

archival intervention, with so-called colonial or imperial photographic archives (as can be seen with works such as those by Mekondjo and Ndjiharine, which will be explored in this book), to the production of entirely new forms of knowledge.[88]

Video installations, paintings or documentary practices such as photography or auto/biographical accounts create knowledge that can be materially stored and preserved. In this vein, they become projects of the past and present, for the future. These emerging archives not only reinscribe subjects into history, but they retain prevalence beyond the time of their making. In comparison, live art is rather "ephemeral and immediate," as Katlego Disemelo argues.[89] Performance work takes place in the now and is characterised by its instantaneousness and contemporariness.[90] Yet, these embodied practices have the potential to work as subversive and immersive interventions in the public sphere, where artists claim a right for visibility, challenge reactionary traditions and propose new visual and commemorative cultural practices that impinge upon the future.

These reflections on archival art offer clues as to how creative practices that 'trouble archives' can shape our realities. Approaching these alternative archives, counter-archives, embodied archives and "living archives," requires an openness to their innovative formations which, in turn, calls for the development of methods to access their meanings.[91] Conventional strategies of mining for "nuggets of fact[s]" and information extraction – which largely defined conservative historical research methods – are no longer adequate.[92] Instead, more emotive and nuanced readings (as well as tactile or sensory approaches) are needed in order to access the complexities of new, emerging Namibian archives.

88 See the performances by Namibian performance artists Nesindano Namises, Hildegard Titus, Ndinomholo Ndilula, Gift Uzera and Muningandu Hoveka.

89 Katlego Disemelo, "Performing the Queer Archive: Strategies of Self-Styling on Instagram," in *Acts of Transgression: Contemporary Live Art in South Africa*, eds. Jay Pather and Catherine Boulle (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019), 220.

90 Huda Tayob in conversation with Jumoke Sanwo and Ali Hussein al-Adawy, "The Archive Is a Portal for Reimagination," *The Archive of Forgetfulness: Conversations with Neighbours*, accessed 31 January 2023, https://archiveofforgetfulness.com/Podcast-series.

91 Stuart Hall proposed the term "living archives" to debunk the "fantasy of completeness" of archives, and the conception of them as inert, finite collections. By conceptualising archives as "living," he stresses how they are "present, on-going, continuing, unfinished, open-ended" and how meanings depend on their usability in the future. See: "Constituting an Archive," *Third Text* 15, no. 54 (March 2001): 89–91.

92 Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michèle Pickover, Graeme Reid, Razia Saleh and Jane Taylor (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, 2002), 9.

Theoretical Framework and Methods

As an African Studies project, this study draws on memory-, post-colonial-, gender and critical-archival studies as well as literary and visual studies, history and political theory. My reflection on these fields helps to develop the theoretical groundwork for my analyses that I will introduce in the following section, but which will be further refined within the single case studies. To be clear: this is not a historical study of colonialism in Namibia with a side glance at the creative sector. Instead, my main concern is to critically reflect upon the production of knowledge with and against the archive through the media of art and literature. Other themes that are central to this book include: the role of photography as a 'document' or 'record' of the past as well as the dynamics of memory. In my reading of the selected case studies, I will explore their relationships and tensions with what is conceived as 'history' and 'knowledge.'

Developing this book's research question was strongly motivated by my reflection on my own role as a researcher in archives. As flagged previously, I was entrusted with a family estate that once belonged to a settler woman from German South-West Africa (analysed in Chapter 4). In approaching this entirely uncharted material, I first began reading the records "along the archival grain," as Stoler calls it, in the endeavour to reconstruct biographical details, to order and to index the hundreds of letters and photographs that I encountered.[93] As I increasingly came to face archival limits, gaps and problematic truth claims (this is a 'white' settler private archive which, in many instances, echoes racist stereotypes, deploys ethnographic modes of representing Black subjects and repeats settler myths and fantasies about the colonial world order), I began to question the epistemic foundations of this kind of knowledge production more vigorously. Realising how archival research needed to open up and engage alternative sources and other perspectives, I was inspired by academic, feminist writer and activist Pumla Dineo Gqola. In her book *What is Slavery to Me?*, Gqola argues how current scholarship must be attuned to gender and post-colonial concerns. This requires moving away from strict foci on a single medium and, instead, involves combining and cross-examining different sources together. She proposes a postcolonial feminist methodology that implies reading academic texts alongside creative expressions in order "to broaden the terms of academic debates."[94] Gqola continuously tests and develops "new ways in which meaning might be further harnessed by placing the creative and the explicitly

93 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rtrg.

94 Pumla Dineo Gqola, *What Is Slavery to Me? Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010), 210.

critical alongside one another," which was crucial in my own thinking about methodology.[95]

My focus on creative practices is partially a response to this. Beyond that, it is motivated by the selected works' innovative and subversive interventions with the archive. Taking Gqola's assertions seriously further implied treating other creative texts, expressions and works as equivalents to standard secondary sources, such as academic reviews and interpretations. Moreover, my data-collection for analysis included input gathered from oral interviews conducted in Namibia, South Africa, Switzerland and Germany as well as clues and information from the mentioned countries' diverse archives.

Despite my disclaimer that this is not a study in the field of history, by nature of this book's subject matter, a historicist approach is what the readings of my single case studies require – to a certain extent. Historicism, as an approach, helps to place the auto/biographical accounts, the novel and the selected artworks into the social realities about which they speak. However, since my aim is to question how such realities are constructed, my reading is also influenced by New Historicist thought as developed by Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault whose works, as introduced in my reflections on Foucault's work, pivot around the critical interrogation of the specific knowledge systems of a certain time, era, geo-political context et cetera.

I also take into account how literary studies have been reforming themselves and will draw from the theory of postcritique. Post-critical scholars argue against critics' distanced approach to texts, in which they assume the role of a detective, searching for hidden meaning only and considering texts as symptoms of something concealed that they need to debunk.[96] Post-critics, such as Rita Felski, call for a reading that considers a text's agency, i.e., the "uses of literature" (and, by extension, artworks) and what it does in the world: "How it acts and reacts, absorbs and inspires, transports and is transported across space and time."[97] Instead of considering a work as a mere product of its historical context, she is instead interested in the entanglements of art and politics, their ties and reciprocities.[98] This implies that postcritical theory encourages a reading of texts with and for empathy, affect and attachment.[99] In a similar vein, scholars who critically engage with 'the colonial archive' underline the importance of affect, "radical empathy" and a "feminist ethics of care" as modes of engaging with archival repositories.[100] This kind of sensitivity

95 Pumla Dineo Gqola, "Whirling Worlds? Women's Poetry, Feminist Imagination and Contemporary South African Publics," *Scrutiny2* 16, no. 2 (September 2011): 5.

96 Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 22.

97 Rita Felski, "Postcritical Reading," *American Book Review* 38, no. 5 (2017): 4.

98 Felski, "Postcritical Reading," 4.

99 Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski (eds.), *Critique and Postcritique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 10–17.

100 Caswell and Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in Archives."

and openness is crucial in my approach to the case studies and I elaborate on my distinct methods of analysis in each of the chapters.

Let me now return to the correlations and frictions between history, memory, the archive, photography and knowledge to clarify my intentions in bringing these concepts together in this book. Throughout the course of post-structuralists radical overturning of what had previously been accepted as 'truth,' (that is, as metanarratives and knowledge) scholars such as Hayden White applied this line of questioning to the mechanisms of historiography. In the words of Kuisma Korhonen, White revealed the constructed character of history-writing:

> The mere collection of facts, which can be compared to the work of a detective or a journalist, is [...] not yet historical discourse [...] but rather formation of an *archive* that can be accessed and analyzed [...] For White, *historical discourse* is, by definition, interpretation of this archive of past events by means of narration.[101]

White stresses the fictional element in any kind of historical narration and further emphasises the weaknesses of those archives upon which the narration is based. He argues that the archival fragments available for analysis never offer a complete picture on an event or a period and are compiled rather randomly.[102] White states that all "historical knowledge always comes to the present in a processed form" and that our knowledge of the past is unstable and, in itself, only one fictional version of what might have happened.[103]

What is the status of memory in this? Is it similarly just a certain version of knowledge, a particular format to package the experience of history? Contemplating on the differences of memory and history, Gqola argues: "whereas memory is a shadow always hovering and governing our relationship to the present and the future, history is the art of recording and analysing this consciousness of the past."[104] We might approach this 'art of recording and analysing' critically and with a mindfulness of White's argument about history writing as a construction. However, Gqola's contention emphasises how memory bears a certain emotive presence that historical reconstruction lacks. This sense of presence in memory is, once again, evoked by Pdezisai Maedza who understands memory as "performing history" and follows Avishar Margalit and Duncan Bell when arguing: "Memory is not defined by the degree of its correspondence of accuracy or validity of its accounts [...] Memory

101 Kuisma Korhonen, *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History-Literature Debate* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 12, emphasis in original.

102 Hayden White, "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing," in *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History-Literature Debate*, ed. Kuisma Korhonen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 29.

103 Ibid., 29.

104 Gqola, *What Is Slavery to Me?*, 7–8.

can be understood as '*knowledge from the past*. It is not necessarily *knowledge about the past.*'"[105]

For the artists and writers presented in this book, their modes of expression function as channels to revitalise certain knowledges from the past. To assess the politics of memory in the Namibian context, I will discuss questions about trauma, postmemory (as conceptualised by Marianne Hirsch) as well as the functions and potentials of transgenerational and multidirectional memories, drawing on Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela; Gqola and Michael Rothberg.[106] Following the itineraries of memory, it is vital to proffer an understanding of Namibia's complex history that is not rigidly nation-bound, but which is more encompassing and attuned to the ways memories stretch across or transcend borders. Thus, in specific chapters, I explore Germany's, South Africa's, Angola's as well as Zambia's entangled history with Namibia and also include South African perspectives in the case studies.

In line with the understanding that memory is something that is enacted, performed and alive, Enwezor suggests that it is the artist who can act as the "agent of memory," or the agent that activates memory.[107] In his reflection on the themes of his exhibition *Archive Fever*, he writes how artists turn to archives as "a site of lost origins," where they reconnect with the past, revitalise memories and even renegotiate the relationship between the past and the present.[108] Indeed, the connection of memory and the archive is an issue of fierce debate in academic scholarship.[109] Many critics stress how archives function "as spaces of and catalysts for memory," arguing that the holdings and repositories may trigger commemoration.[110] On a more critical note, however, scholars such as Verne Harris draw our attention to the politics of the archive, emphasising its incomplete character which implies that the records are nothing but "a sliver of social memory."[111] With reference to the history of South Africa, he lays bare how state control of archives is directly related to a manipulation

105 Pedzisai Maedza, *Chains of Memory in the Postcolony: Performing and Remembering the Namibian Genocide* (PhD diss., University of Cape Town, 2018), 13, emphasis in original.

106 Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (ed.), *Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition: A Global Dialogue on Historical Trauma and Memory* (Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2016); Gqola, *What Is Slavery to Me?*; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

107 Enwezor, *Archive Fever*, 46.

108 Ibid., 47.

109 Ibid., 35.

110 Carbone, "Archival Art," 257; Harris, "The Archival Sliver," 65.

111 Harris, "The Archival Sliver," 64.

of social memory that he takes as evidence how archives are placed in the service of regimes in power and, thus, and not as reflections of reality.[112]

Similar concerns are central to the debate on the potentials and limits of archival photographs to function as historical sources. It remains a widespread assumption that the camera is a neutral recording device through which to document history, whereby photographs are considered to be authentic representations of the past. In these framings, the photograph's "indexical quality" is evoked repeatedly.[113] However, both scholars and creative practitioners working in the field have long been dismantling photography's implication in particular "discursive regimes of truth;" influential in this regard were the studies by Elizabeth Edwards.[114] Her work has been seminal in interrogating the relationship between photography and history.[115] In line with Edward's work, Rizzo argues how "photographic images are not unmediated reflections of reality, or the past, but the product of framings and selections."[116] She draws our attention to the medium's usages by colonial regimes where it served to identify and classify "colonized subjects along the lines of race, gender, citizenship, and nationality."[117] This aspect is problematised by many of the artists discussed in this study who use their practices to craft counter-proposals to what is discursively explored as 'the colonial gaze.'[118]

Apart from this factor, there are other aspects that draw creative practitioners to the medium of photography, as we will see. For many, photography's ability to secure a glimpse of the past and preserve an image of the present for the future remains an important feature. In this spirit, Teju Cole states: "A photograph shows what was, and is no more […] in this sense, every photograph is a time-lapse image, and photography is necessarily an archival art."[119] With a similar emphasis on the importance of recording a life, a time or an experience, South African artist Muholi emphasises the power of their practice to counteract the historical erasure of Black

112 Ibid., 65–78.

113 Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs and the Sound of History," *Visual Anthropology Review* 21, no. 1–2 (April 2005): 41.

114 Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 11.

115 Ibid., 41.

116 Lorena Rizzo, *Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa: Shades of Empire* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019), 217.

117 Ibid., 244.

118 For more in-depth considerations of "the colonial gaze," see: Hartmann, Silvester, and Hayes, *The Colonising Camera*; Awam Amkpa, "Africa: Colonial Photography and Outlaws of History," in *African Photography from the Walther Collection: Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive*, ed. Tamar Garb (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 242; Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 12.

119 Teju Cole, "Disappearing Shanghai," *The New Inquiry*, 30 September 2012, https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/disappearing-shanghai/.

queer and trans people from public records, asserting, in a nod to the new visual history which they create, that "the archive means we are counted in history."[120] However, with a more critical view towards photography, visual artist and photographer Lebohang Kganye calls attention to the "fabricated nature of photographs" and interrogates family narratives by intervening with her own visual family archive.[121] Reflecting on this process she explains:

> I have discovered that identity cannot be traced, just like the camera; it is a site for the performance of dreams and to stage the narratives of contradictions, half-truths; erasure, denial, hidden truths. A family identity therefore becomes an orchestrated fiction and a collective invention. While these images record history, it is only a history imagined.[122]

Family pictures as identity constructions, the photograph as testimony or the photo album as a visual *aide-mémoire* are only some of the central characteristics that occupy the heart of the counter-archives, new Namibian archives and archival interventions that will be presented in this book.[123] The function of the photograph as a trigger or conservator of memories makes it an intriguing object of exploration for all of the artists and authors selected. Amulungu and Dentlinger's curation of photographs for their auto/biographical accounts as well as Mekondjo, Rust, Brandt and Ndjiharine's refigurations of historical images and manipulations of aesthetic orders are, as we will see, powerful interrogations of hegemonic memory politics.

A Guide to the Case Studies

This book presents four case studies in which I discuss three literary texts, four artistic works and one family estate in tandem with archival and oral research. Each chapter is conceptualised in a way so as to set two texts in relation to one another. My choice to juxtapose these specific works is guided by their shared conceptual themes as well as the texts' respective formats. Readers may engage with the chapters as single entities and independent analyses of unique works; alternatively, readers may approach them systematically one after the other as a journey to access the diverse

120 Haynes, "'The Archive Means We Are Counted in History.'"

121 "Ke Lefa Laka – a Solo Exhibition by Lebohang Kganye," *The Market Photo Workshop*, 2 August 2013, https://marketphotoworkshop.co.za/2013/08/02/ke-lefa-laka-a-solo-exhibition-by-tierney-fellow-lebohang-kganye/; Simon Njami and Sean O'Toole (eds.), *The Journey: New Positions in African Photography* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2019), 61.

122 "Ke Lefa Laka – a Solo Exhibition by Lebohang Kganye."

123 Paul Grendon, Giorgio Miescher, Lorena Rizzo and Tina Smith (eds.), *Usakos: Photographs Beyond Ruins: The Old Location Albums, 1920–1960s* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2015), 12.

negotiations of Namibian histories. This tack aims to interrogate the past's significance for the here and now; more importantly, this structure reflects the critical take on history and memory as multidirectional (see chapters 2 and 3) and history as circular. It responds to the need to move away from linear approaches to historical events, and readings thereof, in order to proffer an understanding of the ways in which histories and memories move, travel, linger on and permeate the present in non-linear ways.

Chapter 1 discusses auto/biographical accounts by Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu (b. 1958) and Ulla Dentlinger (b. 1951). In my reading of *Taming My Elephant* (2016) and *Where Are You From? 'Playing White' Under Apartheid* (2016), I investigate the role of photographs in auto/biographical accounts and the reciprocal relations between text and image in order to examine how Amulungu's and Dentlinger's works contest, correct or even complicate 'grander' national narratives. Both writers, in their 50s and 60s, 'returned to the past' to reflect on their lives in constant transition, albeit from very different vantage points. Amulungu uses the genre to record her memories of apartheid rule, her participation in the liberation struggle and her return to the post-colonial nation. With her book, she offers a personal counter-proposal to what 'reconciliation' means in Namibia. Dentlinger reflects on the past through the lens of an (allegedly) 'white' Namibian whose family had jumped the colour-line. In seeking understanding of their 'coloured' identity, she scrutinises family narratives and photographs to confront her implication in colonial histories in order to fill the gaps in the personal archive. This chapter shows how both authors conjure a "poetics of relation" to attest to the past, with reference to Édouard Glissant's work and Judith Lutge Coullie, Stephan Meyer, Thengani H. Ngwenya and Thoms Olver's *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*.[124] With their creative entanglement of text and images, they set themselves in relation to narratives of others, to past selves as well as to national narratives.[125] In this way, their auto/biographical accounts function as alternative, affective archives for the authors to find a sense of belonging in Namibian post-colonial society and its cultures of remembrance.

In Chapter 2, I continue to explore the potential of photographic archives to renegotiate the past, but I broaden my research subject to encompass multimedia art. Focusing on the creative practices of Tuli Mekondjo (b. 1982) and Imke Rust (b. 1975), I examine how the past remains meaningful to Namibians from the generation

124 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Judith Lutge Coullie, Stephan Meyer, Thengani H. Ngwenya and Thomas Olver, *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/Biography* (Honolulu: University Of Hawaii Press, 2006).

125 Here I draw on Ciraj Rassool's research on auto/biographies' interrelations with narratives of the nation. See: Ciraj Rassool, *The Individual, Auto/Biography and History in South Africa* (PhD diss., University of the Western Cape, 2004), https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/The%20Individual%2C%20Auto-biography%20and%20History%20by%20Ciraj%20Rassool.pdf.

following Amulungu's and Dentlinger's who were born and raised at times of political transition. In the interpretation of a selection of their 'archival art,' I discuss how Mekondjo and Rust turn to "postmemories" (Marianne Hirsch) – memories that preceded them and were passed on to them – in an attempt to seek an understanding of the histories in which they are implicated.[126] Drawing on Nomusa Makhubu's theory of "visual currencies," I interrogate how the artists engage with private and public photographic archives and 'convert' the 'original meaning' and values that they associate with the images.[127] With their creative practices, Mekondjo and Rust subvert known visual signifiers as well as gendered and racialised modes of representation. Analysing their mindful and attentive approach to the material, I reflect on theoretical considerations of an "ethics of care" as developed by scholars such as Temi Odumosu, Marika Cifor and Michelle Caswell to better understand the politics, power dynamics and emotional labour involved in opening 'colonial' and family archives.[128] Putting Mekondjo's and Rust's work in conversation with one another allowed me to access these intricate discourses via subjective routes, as both visualise and interrogate family narratives and personal struggles as well as their own positionality in larger Namibian and transcultural histories, myths and imaginations.

Chapter 3 further advances the analysis of multimedia artworks by female creative practitioners who grew up in Namibia at the time of the country's transition from colonial occupation to independence. These artists engage with the archive as a way of reckoning with colonial and apartheid history. This chapter's focus will lie on the transnational, cross-disciplinary exhibition project *Ovizire · Somgu: From Where do We Speak? (2018–2020)*, whereby I single out the works of Vitjitua Ndjiharine (b. 1988) and Nicola Brandt (b. 1983). I compare their artistic responses to contemporary debates on the "colonial ties" of ethnographic institutions, issues of representation and identity politics.[129] The project began with a critical interrogation of the ethnographic museum's photographic archive in the Museum am Rothenbaum (MARKK) in Hamburg. Confronted with the limits of producing art in the confining space of the museum, the team decided to position a series of their works within the MARKK to deliberately criticise the institution while moving a specific set of art out and into

126 Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*.

127 Nomusa Makhubu, "Visual Currencies: Performative Photography in South African Contemporary Art," in *Women and Photography in Africa: Creative Practices and Feminist Challenges*, eds. Darren Newbury, Lorena Rizzo and Kylie Thomas (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 227–248.

128 Temi Odumosu, "The Crying Child: On Colonial Archives, Digitization, and Ethics of Care in the Cultural Commons," *Current Anthropology*, 61, no. 22 (October 2020): 289–302; Caswell and Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics"; Caswell and Cifor, "Revisiting A Feminist Ethics of Care in Archives," in *Radical Empathy in Archival Practice*, eds. Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez, Shannon O'Neill and Holly Smith, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3, no. 2 (2021): 1–6.

129 *Ovizire · Somgu. From Where do We Speak?* exhibition texts (Hamburg, Windhoek: M.Bassy and Frans Nambinga Arts Training Center, 2018–2020).

the alternative exhibition site M.Bassy. In 2019 and 2020, *Ovizire · Somgu* was further developed and moved to Namibia. With a view to the evocations of Brandt's and Ndjiharine's works in these distinct spaces, I explore the potential of restitution and restorative justice through relocation and artistic intervention. While Ndjiharine manipulates and reconfigures historical photographs from the colonial era, in order to explore collective experiences of formerly colonised and oppressed people, Brandt turns to the private family archive as a way of grappling with her own positionality in German-Namibian entangled histories. For my analysis of their artistic practices, I draw on Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory" and other resonating approaches to memory, such as those developed by Pumla Dineo Gqola.[130] As a way to assess the significance of location for commemorative practices and memory politics, I take my cue from relevant studies such as those by Pierre Nora, Susannah Radstone and Astrid Erll.[131]

In Chapter 4, my analysis transcends genres, formats and complicates the relationship between fact and fiction; I propose a cross-reading of a novel with historical material from a family estate with which I was entrusted. In doing so, I combine my interest in the roles, functions and configurations of the archive in contemporary literature as well as my interest in the negotiation of positionality and identity lodged in this practice. In order to achieve this, this chapter moves away from auto/biographic texts in a stricter sense and examines the resonances of a novel that centres on a German woman (protagonist Hanna X) and on her path to German South-West Africa (GSWA) and on historical archival material evolving around the life of a German settler named Lisbeth Otto, née Dömski. This chapter brings fictional and historical sources into conversation with one another because of their shared interface: the farm Frauenstein. Frauenstein was the place in which Lisbeth Dömski lived at the time of the German-Namibian war and thereafter. It is also a place that figures prominently as a temporary home for Hanna X in the book *The Other Side of Silence* (2002) by André Brink.

As a conceptual framework, I develop a reading for the 'resonances' of the novel and the estate, inspired by Julie Beth Napolin.[132] Gearing my analysis towards the resonances between Brink's book and my own archival research allowed me to uncover the unlikely connections between the experiences of the fictional character Hanna X and those of Lisbeth Dömski in GSWA in the early 20th century. Both

130 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; Gqola, *What Is Slavery to Me?*

131 Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoires (1984–1992)* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1939); Susannah Radstone, "What Place Is This? Transcultural Memory and the Locations of Memory Studies," *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (November 2011): 109–123; Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (November 2011): 4–18.

132 Julie Beth Napolin, *The Fact of Resonance: Modernist Acoustics and Narrative Form* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).

women were orphans living in precarious conditions in Germany. In search of a better life, they embarked on their journey together with the earliest 'dispatches' of single women sent by the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft (German Colonial Society) to balance the 'white' settlers' gender disproportions in the colony. Both women settled on the farm Frauenstein where they experienced and witnessed different forms of violence during the genocidal phase from 1904 to 1908. By following their routes, I came to face the challenges of stepping out of the archive's colonial framework. Searching for ways to broaden my reading of the material, I was able to retrace a person whose letters figured in the estate. Rosine Xoagus was the daughter of a former employee of the Otto family. Our conversations in Katutura (the former Black township of Windhoek) were a way to engage with what Hall calls 'living archives,' that is, knowledge about the past that is embodied and in constant transformation.[133] In my reflection, I am mindful of how archival material does not attend to the perspectives of previously colonised people in unmediated ways. Stepping out of the estate's logics allows me to respond to the blind spots in archival repositories and to test possible ways of making the material meaningful today.

With this chapter, my role shifted from external interpreter in my initial case studies to active agent "at work in the archive" in this last study in which I develop my own archival practice.[134] My impetus for this is not only the coincidental seizure of 'ownership' of the family estate; rather, it is driven more by my curiosity about how we can crack open the epistemic foundations that underlie every kind of archival engagement. In assuming the role of an archival researcher – much like Brink's alter ego narrator – I realise how there remains a drive to find the 'real history' in the dusty, old letters, photographs and files and to excavate the 'facts' about the past in the repositories. Perhaps here I must admit that, yes, in many instances I wondered what *really happened* on Frauenstein, what Lisbeth Dömski's life *truly* looked like and whether she did not ultimately happen to be the same person as Brink's fictional character Hanna X. Juxtaposing my research with Brink's book was a way to critically interrogate the origins of such conceptions and to interrogate the constructed character of historical narrations. Much like fiction, archival researchers write clues, fragments and myths into allegedly coherent narratives.

Thus, by following Gqola and by exploring academic work and scientific readings "alongside more deliberately creative expressions," I show how both are "epistemological projects which gain from, and feed off, one another."[135] More impor-

133 By "living archives," I stretch Stuart Hall's approach to the term by suggesting how archives are not only constituted by a "heterogeneity of topics and texts, of subjects and themes," but also how they can be embodied and understood as a "never-completed project" of knowledge that rests with a person. See: Hall, "Constituting an Archive," 89–90.

134 See: de Jong, "At Work in the Archive."

135 Gqola, *What Is Slavery to Me?*, 209.

tantly, while both may question the production of knowledge about the past based on archives, purely scientific research cannot do much to counter their logics. In comparison, art and literature offer a broader range of possibilities for contestation. What we can learn from these media is that it is not the reproduction of past events as realistic as possible to "how they really were" that counts, to loosely reference Leopold von Ranke's famous quote.[136] Instead, archival interventions critically rethink that which is accepted as 'knowledge' and include counter-narratives and perspectives that were formerly silenced. In different ways, the works by Amulungu, Dentlinger, Mekondjo, Rust, Ndjiharine, Brandt and Brink shift our view to nuances that have been forgotten, but which need to be remembered, resonating with questions once posed by South African photographer Santu Mofokeng: "How do we deal with the memory of the past? Who owns this memory? Do we need this memory? What is re-memoried and how? How long is the memory? Who can be trusted with this memory?"[137]

To this, we might add considerations that are central to the works examined in this book. What do we gain if we begin to approach the arbitrary, dynamic and multidirectional itineraries of memories that archival engagements evoke? How can these broaden our understanding of the contested terrains of memory-making and archival knowledge production in Namibia? Perhaps equally importantly, we might ask: What are the limits of creative archival interventions and what is at stake when opening and interfering with archival repositories?

136 Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichte Der Romanischen Und Germanischen Völker von 1494 Bis 1535* (Leipzig, Berlin: Reimer, 1824), vi, my translation.

137 Santu Mofokeng, *Chasing Shadows: Santu Mofokeng: Thirty Years of Photographic Essays* ed. Corinne Diserens (Munich: Prestel, 2011), 149.