Chapter 1: Between Text and the Visual: Auto/Biographical Accounts As New Namibian Archives[1]

Prior to turning to the analysis of the auto/biographical accounts by Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu and Ulla Dentlinger, I wish to first provide a brief disclaimer regarding the title selection for this chapter. My incentive to interrogate what lies 'between text and the visual' is less to establish a binary between the two media, but instead to propose a reading of the knowledge space that emerges when both come into contact. In my analysis of *Taming My Elephant* (2016) and *Where Are You From? 'Playing White' Under Apartheid* (2016), I focus on the ways in which the authors interlace textual and visual narratives to construct a narrative of life by drawing on their private photographic archives as well as from public and alternative archives.

Despite stark differences with regards to their positionalities, family backgrounds and the routes that their lives took, the women's accounts bear certain parallels, as we learn from Amulungu's opening remarks at a reading in Zurich on the 23rd of February 2020:

> As much as we come from places very far apart, closely 800km – she from Rehoboth and I am really from the north of Namibia closer to the border of Angola – we have a similar experience as Namibians. Both coming from rural areas, both having something to do with land and animals and so on, but at the same time, because of apartheid being confined to certain areas.[2]

Amulungu and Dentlinger were born in the 1950s in rural areas of Namibia and, due to the political situation, share experiences of deep loss, having been uprooted and displaced from their childhood homes, their communities and their countries. Over

1 I would like to thank Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, Bayron van Wyk and Nelson Mlambo for their input and for the generative discussion of this chapter's contents.

2 Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu and Ulla Dentlinger, *Die Namibische Geschichte Neu Schreiben: Lesung Und Gespräch Mit Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu Und Ulla Dentlinger* (Literatur Haus Zürich, 23 February 2020).

the course of their lives, they found themselves in states of constant transition that required recurring efforts to both reposition and to situate the self. In 2016, when both authors were in their 50s and 60s, they 'returned to the past,' reflecting on their histories in writing. The country's multiple imperialisms constitute the framework within which Dentlinger and Amulungu negotiate notions of belonging. The two wars of the 20th century in Namibia (the genocide and the war of liberation) remain crucial in relation to questions of experience, trauma and identity. Auto/biographical writing functions as a medium to position the self as part of transgenerational communities and cultures of remembrance in the process of reckoning with the past. However, while Dentlinger's book re-narrates her experiences of 'jumping the colourline' and moving from coloured to 'white' spaces and subject positions during apartheid, Amulungu's auto/biographical account attests to her transition from Namibia's rural north into exile, the liberation struggle and back home again after independence in 1990.

In setting their works in relation to one another, I do not intend to unpack the women's biographies' samenesses or differences in closer detail. Instead, my subject of analysis is the books' aesthetic forms and evocations, and my comparative reading is motivated by an interest in exploring creative archival practices and the ways in which histories are (re-)written, as outlined in the introduction. In order to generate an understanding of how both Dentlinger and Amulungu engage photography in their project to renegotiate the past, we might first question why they resort to auto/biography as a mode for self-expression. Tracing the roots of the genre, scholars commonly refer to autobiography as a "Western product" or a "European phenomenon" that grew increasingly important as a means to constitute bourgeois subjects in post-Enlightenment period and culture.[3] Despite these origins, literary and post-colonial studies have long witnessed the trend that writers from the Global South and the diaspora appropriate the genre as a political move to attest to the experiences of colonialism, resistance and liberation, to reject colonial indoctrination and to purport new postcolonial epistemologies.[4] In these post-colonial readings, certain themes and motifs are recurrently evoked that need further scrutiny.

3 Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (ed.), *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), xv; Susanne Gehrmann, "Africa," in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 897; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run: A Smith and Watson Autobiography Studies Reader* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2017), https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/maize/mpub9739969. n.pag.

4 Mita Banerjee, "Postcolonialism," in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 131; Gehrmann, "Africa," 953.

In the emancipatory spirit of 'writing back at the centre,' auto/biography is often framed as "a key component of the narration of nation."[5] Historian Ciraj Rassool interrogates the relation of auto/biographical production in relation to narratives of the nation in greater detail and with a focus on South African literary landscapes. He observes how auto/biographical accounts have commonly been used as agitators for the liberation movement, political solidarity, the development of new national identities or as "vehicles for transition narratives of reconciliation, healing and nation-building."[6] Shifting the view to authors from Namibia, I explore what kinds of implications 'the nation' and changing national narratives had for the writing subject's identities. Approaching Amulungu and Dentlinger's work as a 'corrective' to larger national narratives is a response to Rassool's call for heightened attention to biographical – and I would add *auto*/biographical – contestation.[7] In his analyses, Rassool uses the term "auto/biography" to signal the proximity of both forms of texts.[8] I choose to speak of 'auto/biographical accounts' as a way to acknowledge that other forms and expressions of life exist that resist easy categorisation by borrowing from Coullie, Meyer, Ngwenya and Olver who further indicate how autobiography and biography "flow into each other."[9] This point is critical due to the importance of oral histories in Namibia and in Amulungu's and Dentlinger's texts in particular.

A second theme that calls for critical interrogation is the framing of auto/biographical writing as "merely personal" and "merely narcissistic."[10] With their focus on the individual's lived experience, auto/biographical accounts continue to carry a reputation as self-indulgent and self-centred.[11] In comparison to the genre's tradition as the writing of "great men" and "'great' public lives," the analysis of women's life storytelling has often been reduced to its tendencies towards using a more personal tone.[12] However, with regards to post-colonial writing, critics often underline how authors from the Global South emphasise collective experiences, thereby positioning the self as an inseparable part of a community.[13] I was certainly drawn to

5 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2002); Lydia Wevers, "Autobiography and the Nation," in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 228.

6 Rassool, *The Individual, Auto/Biography and History in South Africa*, 6, 200.

7 Ciraj Rassool, "Rethinking Documentary History and South African Political Biography," *South African Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (April 2010): 28.

8 Ibid., 46.

9 Coullie et al., *Selves in Question*, 8–9.

10 Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run.*, n.pag.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Gehrmann, "Africa," 923; Banerjee, "Postcolonialism," 131.

both books due to the distinct ways in which they challenge prevalent, male-dominated 'meta-narratives' on Namibian history, proposing more nuanced, personal and previously unseen perspectives on the past and its reverberations in the present. The views that they offer trouble preconceived constructions of what community, 'whiteness' or a commemoration of the past in Namibia might entail. Besides this, in my case study, I intend to show how both women do something more than merely write self-centred narratives on their lives or another, more personal, script of the nation. Through a dedicated analysis of both women's books, I aim to complicate oversimplified readings along post-colonial or gender-lines, while remaining mindful of how the tendencies mentioned above are reflected in the books. Reading their hybrid image-texts with a particular interest in the role and function of photography helps to show how, as autobiography scholar Timothy Dow Adams writes, text and photography are both media that allow for self-retro- and introspection; they are "increasingly self-conscious, and combining them may intensify rather than reduce the complexity and ambiguity of each taken separately."[14]

Rassool's theories, as well as Coullie, Meyer, Ngwenya and Olver's *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography* serve as a theoretical backdrop to explore how Amulungu's and Dentlinger's auto/biographical accounts relate to narratives of the nation and are placed in larger "web[s] of narratives."[15] Their aesthetic strategies to rethink and rewrite history evoke what Édouard Glissant has termed a "poetics of relation," which brings to the fore the significance of relationality and proximity in *Where Are You From? 'Playing White' Under Apartheid* and *Taming My Elephant* as well as the intimate dimensions at play between the text and the visual.

1.1: Ulla Dentlinger's *Where Are You From? 'Playing White' Under Apartheid*

In *Where Are You From? 'Playing White' Under Apartheid*, Ulla Dentlinger negotiates what she calls "a tormenting question" that haunted her throughout her life.[16] With her book, she 'works through' her family's history. Dentlinger returns to the Rehoboth area and confronts her relationship with her former home. Rehoboth is an actual, concrete place in rural Namibia; at the same time, it is an imagined space, evoking a certain association, representing a specific socio-political constellation and a community of 'racial-mixing.' The 'Rehoboth Basters' descended from indigenous Khoisan inhabitants of the Cape Colony and Trekboers. They migrated

14 Timothy Dow Adams, *Light Writing & Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xxi.

15 Seyla Benhabib quoted in Coullie et al., *Selves in Question*, 3.

16 Ulla Dentlinger, *Where Are You From? 'Playing White' under Apartheid* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographen, 2016), 7.

from the Cape and established settlements south of the Orange River during the 19th century, but would continue their exodus to Namibia under the leadership of Hermanus van Wyk in 1868.[17] In the 1870s, they peacefully settled in the Rehoboth area approximately 90 km south of Windhoek.[18] Today, the place is most popular for its people "of differing cultural and genetic backgrounds," and Dentlinger describes the Rehobothers as "the quintessential mixed race community in southern Africa."[19]

Dentlinger's parents were descendants of German colonial soldiers and local women of mixed backgrounds, Sabina Olivier and Suzanna Bezuidenhout, both of whom were said to have been of Dutch-Slave origin.[20] Her paternal great-grandfather and maternal grandfather came to the colony in 1892 and 1905 respectively to join the German Schutztruppe (literally "Protection Force") – one as a soldier and the other as a saddle-repairer, both hoping "to make it in Namibia," as the author describes.[21] Their ideological dispositions or colonial convictions are difficult to grasp for Dentlinger, knowing that they had joined the Schutztruppe at times when the Germans fought against Witbooi at Hornkrans, or later against the Herero and Nama in the genocidal period, while both would then go on to eventually start a family with women from the local communities. They settled in the Rehoboth area with their families after working in several professions as entrepreneurs and craftsmen. Both ended up working as farmers, struggling to make ends meet. When South Africa later established their system of apartheid in Namibia, Dentlinger's descendants were assigned (although not consistently) the status 'Coloureds' – a category which interpellated people into a state of exteriority, placing them external

17 The Afrikaans term denoting the community's 'ethnic mixing' is adopted by the Rehoboth Basters themselves. See: Cornelia Limpricht and Hartmut Lang, "The Trek of the Rehoboth Basters," in *Rehoboth, Namibia: Past & Present*, ed. Cornelia Limpricht (Windhoek: Solitaire Press, 2012), 8; Shampapi Shiremo, "Hermanus van Wyk: The 'Biblical Moses' of the Rehoboth Baster Community," *New Era*, 27 May 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20120331025848/http://www.newera.com.na/article.php?articleid=38914.

18 Cornelia Limpricht, "Farms and Families: Land Tenure in Rehoboth," in *Heritages and Cultures in Modern Namibia: In-Depth Views of the Country: A TUSCIN Festschrift*, ed. Cornelia Limpricht and Megan Biesele (Windhoek, Göttingen: Klaus Hess Publishers, 2008), 141; Shiremo, "New Era – Hermanus van Wyk."

19 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 21–26. It is crucial to consider that while these may be the most popular associations with Rehoboth and its people, the Basters were, however, for a long time rather minor political players in the area, which was largely controlled by Nama and Herero communities. For a more in-depth discussion of this, see: Patrick Pearson, *The History and Social Structure of the Community of the Rehoboth Baster Community of Namibia* (Master's thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1986).

20 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 28.

21 Ibid., 99–103.

to "the space inhabited by the racially pure" as essentialist views would posit it.[22] Anthropologist Zimitri Erasmus elaborates:

> To be Coloured is to be outside of whiteness and European-ness. It is to be inside of non-whiteness and non-European-ness. To be Coloured is to be outside of hegemonic ideas about what it means to be African. These ideas conflate blackness with African-ness. To be Coloured is to be outside of hegemonic ideas about what it means to be Black.[23]

In South Africa, these identity categories were legally cemented by the Population Registration Act of 1950. The act was never implemented in Namibia. However, the categories were still used and were put into effect, thereby impacting the lives of Namibians at that time and in the future to come. While the term had a similar valence in many regards in both countries, the meaning of 'being Coloured' in Namibia is complex. Andrea Rosengarten argues that German colonial and South African apartheid rules contributed to the formation of 'coloured' as an emergent socio-racial category, whereby she is mindful of how the "category was not a pure invention of the colonial state, but also formed through the claims and agencies of African actors."[24] She asserts how, throughout the years, "African agents […] continued to challenge, undermine, and/or hone for themselves the meaning of the category and evaluate its consequences for their rights and livelihoods in spheres of local and international power."[25]

As we will see, Dentlinger and her family members continuously challenged and partially even defeated the imposed labelling, which implied living with the consequences of what a change of identity statuses entailed. With her heritage, Dentlinger inhabits a position that falls between many cracks of Namibian society and commemorative communities. In her book, she attends to these experiences. In doing so, she occupies a unique position in the Namibian literary landscape. Her book neither centres on the issue of German colonial legacies in particular, since it is not the sole factor that defined her background, nor does it approach the experiences of apartheid and liberation from the perspective of someone who was directly affected

22 Zoë Wicomb, "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970–1995*, eds. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 101–2.

23 Zimitri Erasmus, *Race Otherwise: Forging a New Humanism for South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017), 7, https://muse.jhu.edu/book/60602/.

24 Andrea Rosengarten, *Other "Coloureds": Constructions of a Socio-Racial Category in Colonial Namibia under South African Rule, 1915–1939* (MA-MSc thesis, unpublished, New York and London, Columbia University and the London School of Economics, 2014), 6.

25 Ibid., 55.

by anti-Black racism and who joined the struggle. However, apartheid policies influenced her life journey in various ways. While she is not the first Namibian woman to turn to auto/biography to negotiate the past, her position as a writer originating from Rehoboth and her trajectory from there to cosmopolitan places remains largely unrecorded.

Most prominently known for the genre in Namibia are narratives of life that record the experience of the liberation struggle that were written either by those who stayed in the country or by refugees who lived in exile.[26] In reference to the former, critics recurrently consider author and library scientist Ellen Namhila's *The Price of Freedom* (1997) as the first published autobiography written by a Namibian woman. Mushaandja, however, aptly points out how, long before the appropriation of the genre, Namibian women secured and transmitted their experiences of colonialism and apartheid, for example, through oral narratives.[27] Nevertheless, the mode of writing about the self became increasingly popular after independence and remains so to this day, despite the fact that publishing opportunities in the country are rather rare, urging many to turn to publishers abroad.[28] This also applies to Dentlinger's book, which was published by the *Basler Afrika Bibliographien* in Switzerland. While writing and publishing is not financially viable as a full-time job for most authors, due to the small market and readership in Namibia, more recent developments such as that of the popular literary magazine *Doek!* show that Namibians continue to find ways to generate platforms for publishing and that an interest in Namibian stories remains undimmed.[29]

This impulse for Namibian writers to take to the pen may be attributed to an urge to fill "different 'silences' in both pre-and post-independent Namibian literature" as identified by André du Pisani.[30] Such silences surround the experiences of exile and return, lingering traumas or feelings such as despair and longing, which are not adequately addressed in official historiographies. Critics commonly refer

26 Martha Akawa, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2014), 10.

27 Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, pers. comm., 6 December 2022.

28 Sarala Krishnamurthy and Helen Vale, "Introduction," in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition* (Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2018), 12; Henning Melber, *Understanding Namibia: The Trials of Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5; Henning Melber, "The Shifting Grounds of Emancipation: From the Anti-Colonial Struggle to a Critique of Post-Colonial Society," in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, eds. Sarala Krishnamurthy and Helen Vale (Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2018), 29.

29 This is due to the fact that readers need the economic means to purchase the books, the privilege of time to read and access to bookshops. See also: Krishnamurthy and Vale, "Introduction," 15.

30 André Du Pisani, "Foreword," in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, eds. Sarala Krishnamurthy and Helen Vale (Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2018), vii.

to South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) rules and regulation, which dictated the modes of commemorating the past, with regards to the lack of an encompassing, nuanced public debate on certain facets in history. As we will see, while SWAPO's narratives were central to uniting and mobilising people during the struggle and to forging national unity when democracy was achieved, their hegemonic memory-making impeded upon endeavours to collectively address and to engage with troubling aspects of the past.

Although historically "both a European and a male-dominated genre," auto/biographical accounts offer a means to voice alternative histories and to counter official state narratives.[31] These historical contexts and implications need further consideration, given this chapter's main interest in the role of writing *and* photography. Namibian women not only write against SWAPO narratives, but the records they contest also date back to earlier colonial histories and legacies. As Namhila teaches us, official Namibian historical records privilege the perspectives of the colonisers, while information about Namibians' biographies remains sparse and if they are secured, the records follow the logics of the German or of the subsequent South African colonial regimes.[32] Dentlinger was confronted with these archival structures, as she only possessed a slim photographic and material repository from which to draw in her endeavour to revisit the past. By interlacing her literary work with photographs, she reclaims two types of media that were neither easily accessible to her nor to many during apartheid Namibia. Both are technologies of self-representation that follow the impulse to document the past and to portray a certain image of the self for the present and future.[33] Following Karen Redrobe Beckmann and Liliane Weissberg's assertion that "autobiography bears a structural resemblance to photography in both its referentiality and its uncertain relation to truth and fiction," will help us to pay closer attention to how this image of self is constructed.[34]

While Dentlinger both writes about and visually presents places from the past in her book, she explicitly frames her auto/biographical account as "a women's book,"

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31 Kelly Jo Fulkerson-Dikuua, "Conceptualising National Transition: Namibian Women's Autobiographies about the Liberation Struggle," in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, eds. Sarala Krishnamurthy and Helen Vale (Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2018), 58–59.

32 Namhila, "*Little Research Value*," 3; Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, "The Role of Archives in Colonial Injustices and Historical Reappraisal," in *Colonial Repercussions: Namibia 115 years after the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama*, ed. Judith Hackmack and Karina Arite Keller (Berlin: European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights and Akademie der Künste, 2019), 52.

33 Lee-Von Kim, "Autobiographical Revisions: Photography in 'Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes' and Claude Cahun's 'Disavowals,'" *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 29, no. 1 (January 2014): 113.

34 Karen Redrobe Beckman and Liliane Weissberg (eds.), *On Writing with Photography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), xiv.

referring to specific women who influenced her life.[35] By placing the "self in relation to others," to follow Coullie et al. here, Dentlinger (re)builds affiliations and renegotiates questions of belonging, identity, detachment and silence.[36] Where conversations about the past have been shut down in her childhood, after living more than 30 years outside of Namibia, Dentlinger revisits her place of origin, turning to friends and family members and interviewing them and writing down their stories alongside her own autobiographical account.

Coullie et al. remind us how authors turn to auto/biographical accounts primarily as a means to position themselves. However, their narratives are also always situated in relation to other, larger narratives and embedded in social relations.[37] Hence, autobiographical writers relate earlier to later selves, reflect on the self in relation to others and weave their auto/biographical narratives into larger collective accounts.[38] What Andrew van der Vlies called "playing host to the stories of others" in his analysis of Wicomb's novel *Playing in The Light* (2006) can, in Dentlinger's case, be conceived as a strategy to find an understanding of the developments in the past with the help of the perspectives of others.[39] Yet, it is also a necessary move to confront the gaps in one's family archive. The author explained that, in addition to the lack of transmitted knowledge on family history, written records such as letters, diaries or family photo albums that document the past also barely exist.[40] While Dentlinger spoke with many informants, raising questions that had previously been taboo, she centred the biographical accounts of her beloved friend and family employee on Ou Lenas as well as on her aunt Hedi to sketch her own life journey. While the women's stories are closely connected, their biographies speak to the different statuses that the apartheid state assigned to the people living in colonial Namibia. Moreover, her book also illuminates how people found "avenues out" – out of Rehoboth and out of imposed racial categories, thereby resonating with Erasmus' observations with regards to South Africa:[41]

> People defied the boundaries imposed by apartheid logics as much as they used these logics to 'pass' for White or Coloured […], and to 'expel blackness' from family histories […] These acts, fraught with emotion, were intricately interwoven with everyday struggles for access to various degrees of rights, opportunities,

35 Ulla Dentlinger, pers. comm. 13 February 2021.

36 Coullie et al., *Selves in Question*, 2.

37 Ibid., 4.

38 Ibid., 1–5.

39 Andrew van der Vlies, "The Archive, the Spectral, and Narrative Responsibility in Zoë Wicomb's 'Playing in the Light,'" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (September 2010): 584.

40 Dentlinger, pers. comm. 13 February 2021.

41 Dentlinger, pers. comm. via email, 27 February 2021.

> respectability and leeway conferred by the higher tiers of apartheid's legalised racial classification system.[42]

Dentlinger attends to these performances of defiance and contestations of identity. When loopholes presented themselves, her parents and Hedi "jumped the colour-line" and were (re)classified as 'white', as we will see.[43] Her writing is an attempt to make peace with these experiences and with the burden of history.

Reflecting on the past from the vantage point of the present means, in Dentlinger's case, looking at Namibia and her experiences in the country from the outside, living in Europe (but visiting Southern Africa frequently) and maintaining strong bonds to places and people. Living a cosmopolitan life, having spent many years in South Africa and the US, and now being based in Germany and France, Dentlinger's life has been one of constant transition. However, while her latter relocations were self-determined, escaping and moving out of her childhood home was a choice that was made for her. Her parents thought that Dentlinger's leaving of Rehoboth (as a specific socio-political and geographical location associated with mixed heritage) was the key to attaining freedom and a better future. The author, for reasons which were unclear to her, has always been officially classified as 'white'; she could not trace any legal document in which the status 'coloured' had been assigned. However, by virtue of living in the Rehoboth area, Dentlinger would have been perceived as 'coloured.'[44] To maintain and secure the 'white' status for their daughter, escaping and growing up outside of Rehoboth was deemed as crucial.

Her parents' identity statuses were more complicated. The exact developments are messy and incongruous, even to the author. On official documents, Dentlinger could retrace that her parents were once labelled as 'white', as, according to the author, all habitants in the area born before 1922 had been given the status 'white'.[45] Researching further, she then found that her parents were classified as 'coloured' in later documents, which was again revoked when her father bought the farm Seeis in order to leave the Rehoboth area in 1963.[46] To visually attest to this and to offer an insight into the ambiguous practices of labelling and forming identities during apartheid in Namibia, the author incorporated her parents' marriage certificate, which first categorised them as coloured but was then edited in 1963 to 'blanke,' as seen on the top of the document.

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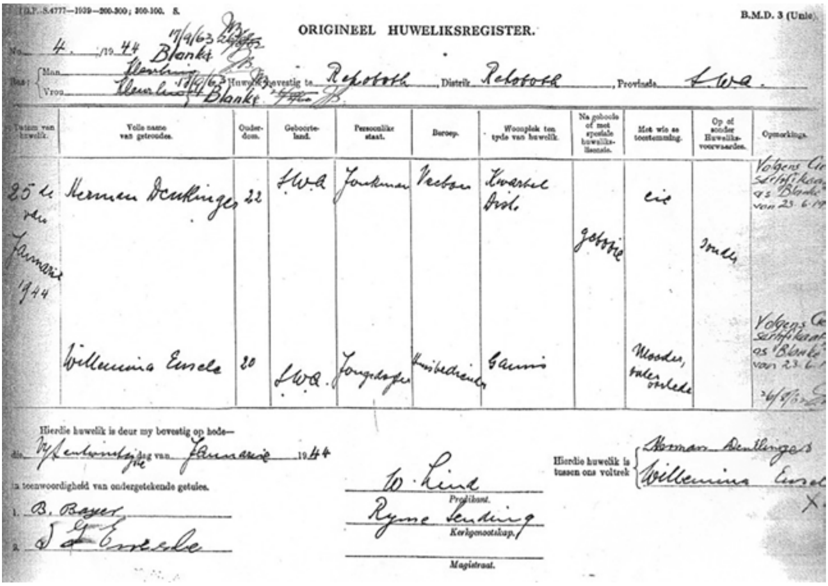
42 Erasmus, *Race Otherwise*, 12.

43 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 59.

44 Ibid., 118.

45 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 18 February 2021

46 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 10 April 2021.


B.M.D. 3 (Unie).

ORIGINEEL HUWELIKSREGISTER.

No. 4. 19 44 Blanke

Bevestig te Rehoboth, Distrik Rehoboth, Provinsie S.W.A.

Datum van huwelik.	Volle name van getroudes.	Ouderdom.	Geboorteland.	Persoonlike staat.	Beroep.	Woonplek ten tyde van huwelik.	Na gebooie of met spesiale huwelikslisensie.	Met wie se toestemming.	Op of sonder Huweliksvoorwaardes.	Opmerkings.
25 ste van Januarie 1944	Herman Dentlinger	22	S.W.A.	Jongman				eie		Volgens Sertifikaat as Blanke
	Willemina Ensele	20	S.W.A.	Jongedogter		Gamis		Moeder		Volgens Sertifikaat as Blanke

Hierdie huwelik is deur my bevestig op hede—

die ... dag van Januarie 19 44

in teenwoordigheid van ondergetekende getuies.

1. B. Bayer
2. [illegible]

W. Lind
Predikant.

Ryns Sending
Kerkgenootskap.

Magistraat.

Hierdie huwelik is tussen ons voltrek
Herman Dentlinger
Willemina Ensele

Figure 1: Image on page 117. Caption: "Original marriage certificate for Herman Dentlinger and Willemina Ensele (sic), 25 January 1944, signed by Pastor Lind. Reclassifications in 1962 and 1963 by Pastor Jakobus Beukes."

The text passages and photographs I will focus on were selected for my analysis because they speak to key places, moments and people in Dentlinger's life; I will prioritise the accounts in which she re-narrates her own story over those focusing on Ou Lenas and Hedi explicitly. The entanglement of both media play an important role in the practice of situating and constituting the self through writing and curating.[47] Integrating the insights gained from interviews and conversations with the author, I chose to specifically focus on photographs that she spoke about at length and that were particularly dear to her, as well as those images in the book that are not shown, but are instead being remembered and re-narrated and, through this, crafted and conjured.

47 The author had an editorial team that accompanied her writing process and guided her curatorial decisions in terms of images selections with her publishing house, the Basler Afrika Bibliographien in Switzerland. Choosing a publishing house outside of Namibia speaks to the academic circles which are accessible to the author. Simultaneously, this decision has had an impact on which audience her publication can reach.

1.1.1: Renegotiating the Childhood Past

From the very first contact with the book, readers are offered a visualisation of the narrating voice. The cover shows a photograph of a small girl with a light complexion, approximately 5 years old, in a white dress and with a ribbon in her blond hair, holding a white doll in her arm. She is looking sternly back at the photographer, standing in front of what appears to be a clay house wall. She must be exposed to the sun, as sharp contours of her shadows are cast on the crumbling façade. In many ways, this image introduces certain key aspects that allow for some contemplation about Dentlinger's complex subject position growing up in apartheid Namibia.

Figure 2: Original version of the title cover. Courtesy: Ulla Dentlinger

From the text, we learn that Dentlinger was first raised on the farm Kwartel, 45 kilometres west of Rehoboth, where the family lived in very simple and poor conditions: "Being stock farmers during the early 1950s and owning no land, we had to

be mobile, much as pastoralists had been during the previous century."[48] Thus, in dry seasons, in need of pasture for the animals, the family moved to other farms temporarily – to Namtses or Verlos – where the image above was presumably taken around 1956.[49]

The image's background locates young Dentlinger in this arid, pastoral Namibian landscape while the conceivable social markers, such as her doll and what she assumes to have been her Sunday-dress, stand out from the rural environment. The white doll is a reminder of how racism is deeply ingrained in the global capitalist market, manifested in commercial products (the doll) and in questions of representation (photography). Similarly, the doll speaks to the identity status that was deemed admirable in the Dentlinger family. Despite a general awareness of the family's mixed background in the community – even though it was unspoken – there was a strong strive towards 'whiteness' amongst family members. It was the idea of 'Deutschtum' (Germanness) in specific that they longed for. With an ironic undertone, Dentlinger explains: "The Germanness in Namibia is a wonderful avenue – a wonderful 'hat rack' to hang your identity on. If you wanted to invent yourself […] you can easily use German culture as an avenue. It presents itself very easily."[50]

After World War II, many German speakers in Namibia saw themselves confronted with the end of their colonial revisionist hopes, facing the need to reposition themselves in the colony.[51] Consequently, they continued to grow their alliances with Nationalist Afrikaners – a rapprochement that, on the one hand, promised additional voters for the Nationalist Party while allowing German speakers to secure their racially based privilege in the colony on the other.[52] Reinhart Kößler explains that this alliance relied on shared ideological worldviews, allowing for German speakers to safeguard their "cultural and linguistic profile."[53] After 1949, German immigrants continued to move to what was then South-West Africa and, thus, German speakers "regained and consolidated their position in farming, commercial and professional sectors."[54] Throughout the course of this transition, the association of Germanness with economic wealth (as much as with a distinct culture and identity) was becoming further cemented – for which the period of German colonial rule had laid the groundwork.[55] In Dentlinger's words, there existed a "dominant

48 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 74–75.

49 See image caption on the imprint page.

50 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 13 February 2021.

51 Reinhart Kößler, *Namibia and Germany: Negotiating the Past* (Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2015), 107–108.

52 Ibid., emphasis in original.

53 Ibid.

54 Thomas quoted in Kößler, *Namibia and Germany*, 109.

55 Ibid.

cultural ideal that Germanness is desirable."[56] Due to the German line in the family, they felt drawn to claim it, which is what her aunt Hedi ended up doing. In the early 1950s, she left Rehoboth, moved to the popular 'white' settler town of Swakopmund that aimed to emulate Germanness. Her strive for an uplift, modernity and for a life outside of the Rehoboth rural farming communities is reflected in the image above. While only little knowledge was passed on about the few existing images, Dentlinger assumes that it was her aunt Hedi who was the photographer of the early family images, since she acquired access to the 'European' technology through her new environment of Swakopmund. In an interview, Dentlinger explained that photography was a foreign concept for her family who neither had a camera in the house nor had photographs of relatives hanging on the walls.[57] In addition to a lack of familiarity with the medium, Dentlinger explains that the family also had no interest in photography:

> It was [...] this concept of shame, feeling inadequate, shame about your background, mostly because you were uneducated. It was shameful, it was low-class, it was nothing to show off about but to hide and keep it secret. You were just ashamed and felt demeaned and inferior, so you are not going to hang photographs of your ancestors on the wall.[58]

As Wicomb (with reference to Liz Gunner) illustrates, this notion of shame is "located in the very word *Coloured*."[59] The construct, designed by the South African nationalist government, is based on the idea of miscegenation, "the origins of which lie within a discourse of 'race,' concupiscence, and degeneracy."[60] In Dentlinger's book, we learn how her family responded to these apartheid logics and ideologies. She speaks about the subtle ways in which notions of shame and guilt would linger with the family and would cloud the atmosphere whenever attempts were made to address the past.[61]

However, despite the mythic presence of a family burden, Dentlinger's text uncovers how childhood memories of home contain a diversity of sentiments and associations. At the place in which the family's archive leaves voids, the author herself conjures images of places from the past that were formative for her. She illustrates her childhood home in Kwartel in detailed accounts. The "little red brick house" with its "corrugated iron pitched roof," the design of the rooms, their interior as much as precious memories of the *kleinhuisie*, the simple outhouse toilet, are all described

56 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 13 February 2021.
57 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 10 April 2021.
58 Ibid.
59 Wicomb, "Shame and Identity," 101.
60 Ibid., 92.
61 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 9.

meticulously and with a nostalgic tone.[62] Similarly, the "humble home" in Kwartel Wes, where the family would move after 1957, is described comprehensively, with depictions of the house's architecture, the furniture or the kitchen's "mud and dung floor."[63] These reflections on the family's homes and life-style speaks to the ways in which cultures and communities were entangled in the Rehoboth area. Dentlinger describes how the family's culture would be a "mélange" that was interspersed with "bits of Khoikhoi culture and bits of German culture" – one example being the fact that the family spoke Khoe, Afrikaans and would later switch to German.[64]

She would also recall certain family artefacts in her descriptions of her childhood memories, such as enamel tableware or specific delicate glasses which were cherished objects – some of which are still in the author's possession.[65] These moments are reminders of how material objects can be laden with significance, can trigger memories and can conjure a wide range of emotions.[66] Teju Cole, in *Known and Strange Things*, elaborates how objects can be much more than mere *aide-mémoires:*

> Objects, sometimes more powerfully than faces, remind us of what was and no longer is [...] Objects are reservoirs of specific personal experience, filled with the hours of some person's life. They have been touched, or worn through use. They have frayed, or been placed just so. [...] We look at them for the way they cooperate with the imagination, the way they contain what cannot otherwise be accommodated, and the way they grant us, to however modest a degree, some kind of solace.[67]

As Dentlinger had been socialised to believe that wallowing in history was taboo, objects might provide this kind of solace when the past remains burdensome and troubling. They are cherished heirlooms that make up her sparse family archive. By re-narrating these memories, which are connected to spaces and objects, Dentlinger not only crafts and secures a mental image of her home *in lieu* of a photograph, but she also counter-acts the family's silencing of conversations about the past.

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62 Ibid., 32–34.

63 Ibid., 79–80.

64 Dentlinger, pers. comm. via WhatsApp, 25 April 2021.

65 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 79–80.

66 Zosa De Sas Kropiwnicki observed this with interviewees who grew up as children in exile during the South African liberation war. See: *Exile Identity, Agency and Belonging in South Africa: The Masupatsela Generation* (New York: Springer, 2017), 60. Following a similar argument, Memory Biwa also investigates how memories and perceptions can be "passed on through artefacts which were embedded with sensory meanings." See: "*Weaving the Past with Threads of Memory,*" 98.

67 Teju Cole, *Known and Strange Things: Essays* (New York: Random House, 2016), 143.

Reflecting on her narrative strategies, I take my cue from literary scholar Kentaro Kawashima who proposes the pairing of the binaries *collecting* and *scattering* in his reading of autobiography in the 20th century.[68] Kawashima explains how the notion of scattering has become central in writing about the self at that time, when identity came to be understood as fragmented and was defined by difference, rather than coherence. Additionally, he notes: "Without *collecting*, however, there would be no autobiography at all, because from the very outset it is written for the archiving of biographical data and facts."[69] I follow his assertion and remain mindful of how auto/biographical work usually adheres to a chronological logic. Just like archiving, it structures information, arranges material, conceives of a corpus and suggests rationality and relation between time, places, individuals and events. Dentlinger's work equally pivots around the extremes of a scattered, sparse archive, a fragmented self and the desire to make sense, to collect and to re-connect the loose ends with the aim of finding meaning in the process.

In her account of her childhood past, the domestic space – the family home – appears as a place of retreat amidst a socio-political environment that was both unwelcoming and unaccommodating to the difficult subject position that the family had obtained. This reflects in the author's explanation: "I feel very much attracted towards miniature, social spaces in Namibia but that doesn't mean to the larger, national space" and she similarly rejects the "Rehoboth Gebiet," claiming she feels "nothing about it."[70] The family's endeavours to pass as 'white' while living in the Rehoboth area also made them vulnerable. Resorting to the safe family space, the everyday life with its chores, the farm labour, braais, familiar smells and sounds allows for nostalgic reminiscences despite, or in light of, a complex colonial history and colonial presence that defined and regulated the lives of the people in South-West Africa. The symbolic mustard-coloured curtains that "remained tightly drawn across the single window" speak to this image of an external world that was to be shut out.[71]

Dentlinger's auto/biographical account offers further clues that indicate how narratives of identity and culture manifested themselves in the family space: She recalls a print on the wall, one of the only and rare images that were ever displayed openly in the Dentlinger home. It showed Berchtesgaden – a rather dark, sinister, dreary forest landscape with a light-coloured castle standing out from the landscape. It was inherited from Dentlinger's maternal grandfather, was never cleaned or reframed, and it is still in family possession today with her uncle, who

68 Kentaro Kawashima, *Autobiographie Und Photographie Nach 1900: Proust, Benjamin, Brinkmann, Barthes, Sebald*, (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 23.

69 Ibid., 26, emphasis in original, translation mine.

70 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 13 February 2021.

71 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 80.

"was particular about having it."[72] While a German audience might immediately link this image to Hitler's favourite holiday resort, the author is sceptical that her family knew about this history. Yet, this image allows for contemplation on how images function as "tools for identity formation," as literary scholar Hazel Tafadzwa Ngoshi asserts, and how the photograph serves as a vehicle for family members to fashion the self, to build a relation to an imagined German space and culture.[73] Furthermore, it is a reminder of how the home is also a space in which subjects are being socialised and where certain perceptions of selfhood and identity are being transmitted.[74]

Figure 3 (left): Photograph on page 73. Caption: "My parents on their wedding day, 25 January 1944."
Figure 4 (right): Photograph on page 76. Caption: "My father with myself, May 1952."

72 Ibid., 78–79.; Dentlinger, pers. comm. via WhatsApp, 25 April 2021.

73 Hazel Tafadzwa Ngoshi, "When the Written and Visual Texts Collide: Photographic Images and Acts of Memory in Zimbabwean Autobiography," *Scrutiny2* 17, no. 2 (September 2012): 60.

74 There are further instances in Dentlinger's narrative that speak to the family's tendencies to construct and to claim a sense of 'Deutschtum' – her grandmother's much-loved German pop songs "blaring out into the air of the dry, hot, semi-desert of the Basterland" is one such example. See: Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 74.

Dentlinger recalls excavating images from the family archive that were never openly shown, neither in her maternal nor in the paternal family's households. Two of them were portrait photographs, presumably taken in Germany, of the two men in the families that first settled in Namibia. As official and professional portrait photographs, they could have functioned as a material link to Germany and were a visual testimony to the family's German line. However, they were neither displayed in the family homes nor in Dentlinger's book – except in the form of a narrative description of one of them, which speaks about the opacity in practices of curating, showing and safe-keeping.[75] Just like these framed portrait images, the two photographs below were retrieved from Dentlinger's mother's estate. Dentlinger suspects that they were kept secured and hidden, since she had not known about them prior to inheriting the estate.[76] She contests her family's rules of display and secrecy by inserting these images into her narrative and by exposing them (verbally or visually) to a broader reading audience.

Auto/biographical writings and collections of photographs can never offer a comprehensive account of a person's or family's history; instead, they are merely selective records of certain moments in time. The fragmentary nature of Dentlinger's family archive adds to this. Her implemented photographs casts spotlights on specific events and situations; there are gaps that remain only partially re-narrated by the author. In many instances, there is no direct correlation between the images shown and the accompanying text, indicating, as Adams remarks, that photographs in auto/biography do not solely serve to supplement or to verify a text; rather they are unreliable narratives in their own rights.[77]

In the case of figures 3 and 4, for example, the images are paired with Dentlinger's reflections on her early childhood, growing up on the farm in poor conditions. She asserts how the family was of "lower economic class, at most lower middle [class]," thereby evoking a dissonance with the images that we see.[78] In both photographs, Dentlinger's parents are neatly dressed, reminding us of the importance of clothing as a social marker for self-fashioning and the ways in which European aesthetics manifest themselves in peoples' styles. Given their backgrounds, the choice of clothing and the presence of the camera hint at the importance of the occasions being photographed. For the wedding, the camera may have been used to capture this special day, with bride and groom posing for the photo, while the context of figure 4 is less clear. Both images emanate senses of affiliation and affection; we see wife and husband seated closely together and the loving father holding the baby tightly. While the notion of family celebration

75 Ibid. 99.

76 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 10 April 2021.

77 Adams, *Light Writing & Life Writing*, xxi.

78 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 75.

and togetherness is a reading that the photographs suggest, I am interested in the deeper layers of histories that are lodged within them, mindful of how images can lure us into certain interpretations or affective responses.[79]

If we move beyond what is merely visible and relegate our attention to Dentlinger's auto/biographical text, we learn that the relationship between father and mother was not necessarily romantic, but was instead pushed by a desire to "to marry up," in pursuit of 'whiteness,' forging family bonds that should be, in her grandmother's words, "as German as possible."[80] Dentlinger's aunt would explain to her: "You had to marry *half-slag* – someone of mixed ethnic background […] The lighter, the better."[81] Such moments in her book offer counter-narratives in juxtaposition to the sense of family harmony that photographs, such as those above, might emanate when isolated from the text. However, as much as images themselves are fabrications or visual constructions, an auto/biographical text is equally a form of construction or, in Avtar Brah's words, an "*interpretive retelling*" that can centre, accentuate or omit information.[82] I was confronted with this more directly in the author's and my conversation about figure 4. In an interview, Dentlinger spoke about a nebulous family narrative that she connects with the photograph, remembering that it presumably shows a special kind of family outing. She assumes that it was, once again, taken by her aunt Hedi who took the camera along on the family's first attempt to escape the Rehoboth area. By moving to Mozambique, her parents and aunt hoped to discard their identity status as mixed-raced. Her father's dressing up and their constructing and recording of a certain self-image was, thus, an essential part of the family's cultural/aesthetic practices to substantiate their aspirations to 'whiteness,' respectability, a different life and a different status. Dentlinger recounts how, with their light complexion – "the prerequisites for jumping the colour line" – they had hoped to live up to this constructed self-image.[83] However, for reasons unknown to the author, the undertaking failed and would only be repeated six years later:

> [The] uncomplicated and sheltered rural way of life came to an abrupt and painful end when I turned six. It would take me decades, with extensive personal growth and leaving the country, to once again consider Rehoboth and its surroundings as a home of sorts. The changes that came about in 1957 and the following year were related to my schooling and underlying that, to our ethnic identities.[84]

79 Rizzo, *Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa*, 216.

80 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 98.

81 Ibid., 98.

82 Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora, Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 10, emphasis in original.

83 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 83.

84 Ibid.

Hoping to gain access to 'white' schools and a better future, one free of the confinements of the coloured identity status for their daughter, the parents had agreed that aunt Hedi would take her to Rhodesia. The separation from her parents and sister would forever rupture a previously unquestioned bond with her home. Dentlinger's narrative attends to her struggles and to the experience of deep loss, being displaced, homesick and the experience of having been offered neither explanations nor affection in Rhodesia.[85] Her life would remain in constant transition from this point on. Dentlinger was sent to a German boarding school in Cape Town. While family plans had paid off, being placed in this new 'white' environment required recurring efforts to both position and situate the self. In many ways, Cape Town offered new possibilities – and expectations – to identify and reinvent the self.

1.1.2: In Re/Search of the Self

As we have seen, the family's reticence towards engaging with practices of self-presentation and building a family archive (in the form of photographic work, written texts and oral histories) was closely connected to their attempts to "jump the colour line," their discomfort with family history and their socio-economic position as pastoralist farmers in rural Namibia.[86] Having been uprooted from Kwartel Wes and moving to Cape Town would recalibrate Dentlinger's approach towards these issues. In different ways, her auto/biographical account speaks to her endeavours to re-interpret and re-build her relation to home by constituting the self through writing and photography.

Figure 5 (left): Photograph on page 79. Caption: "My sister at Kwartel Wes, early 1960s."
Figure 6 (right): Photograph on page 78. Caption: "My mother at Kwartel Wes, early 1960s."

85 Ibid., 84–85.

86 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 13 February 2021; Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 117.

Having been introduced to a vividly practised visual culture at the boarding school, Dentlinger began to document her life, to take family pictures and to craft a photo album with the images accessible to her. Figures 5 and 6 are the first examples of her earliest moments of contact with photography as a practice. According to the author, they were taken with her first camera during one of her holiday visits to the farm in Kwartel Wes in the 1960s.[87] In her writing, she reveals that, at that time, she developed a growing discomfort about being associated with the Rehoboth area.[88] These moments in her book speak to the ways in which race and class consciousness had been internalised and how Dentlinger's uplift to a new milieu pushed her to dissociate herself from her home and from what it stood for. At the same time, she emphasises the persistence of a strong family bond and, in particular, the deep affection between mother and daughters. The images above offer clues about these ambivalences. Reflecting on their context, the author remembers grappling with the contrast between her new home, Cape Town, where people had big, lush gardens and her arid and dry family home in Kwartel Wes, reasoning, "Of course, you would go and place yourself in front of the only green tree there was."[89] Thus, these images reflect Dentlinger's early race and class aspirations. Unlike the majority of the other, older photographs in *Where Are You From?*, which predominantly locate the photographed subjects in front of a distant horizon and vast, dry land, these images with the green cactus (as seen in the original photo print, but not in the book's version) stand out as a backdrop. Despite Dentlinger's desire to circumvent an easy identification with the dry farm location, the massive plant as well as hints of green and brown fields in the background do connect these images to a Southern African landscape. With sister and mother posing for the camera, their warm smiles directed towards the photographer, the images emanate a sense of intimacy. In light of the photographs' context, however, the images seem to host a complex amalgam of dissociation, affiliation, love and distance. These notions are neither immediately evident at first glance from the photographs, nor from her text, in which she recounts the family's move to Kwartel Wes, daily routines and anecdotes. Here we are reminded of what Adams called the "referential dilemma" of photography and autobiography: we expect them to speak to reality in direct ways but, as he concludes, "Since reference is not secure in either, neither can compensate for lack of stability in the other."[90] Instead, he draws our attention to how both media complement each other, often in affective and evocative ways.

Thinking along these lines elucidates how both photography and text can be used to reminisce about loved ones who have passed on. Years after her mother's death,

87 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 10 April 2021.

88 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 91.

89 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 10 April 2021.

90 Adams, *Light Writing & Life Writing*, xvi–xxi.

Dentlinger would remove her photograph from the album, frame it and position it on her desk. For the book, it was then digitised, incorporated and reassembled with the photograph of Dentlinger's sister. Her careful handling of the photograph speaks to her attachment and to her devotion as a curator and compiler. In printing the images in her book, Dentlinger partially relinquishes control over the images, exposing them to a larger public. However, inserting them into her auto/biographical account also allows for new strategies to *frame* the images by means of narration. She emphasises her admiration for her mother and sister with her text, integrating their pictures to "advance claims of affiliation."[91]

However, the outlined context of the photographic occasion considered in conjunction with these claims reminds us of the difficult position that Dentlinger occupied, echoing Susan Sontag's observation: "As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure."[92] In a position of uncertainty, Dentlinger carves out a space for herself as a writer, striving to find closure through the means of writing and photography. Part of this endeavour was Dentlinger's (re)search into the self and the family, which implied travelling back home, conducting archival research in Germany, Namibia and Switzerland and contesting certain family myths.[93]

1.1.3: The Narratives of Others

The research for her book prompted Dentlinger to re-establish old bonds, for example with the family friend Ou Lenas, who had been employed by both her mother and grandmother to help in the household. Years after her leaving Rehoboth, the process of self-introspection also led the author to look more closely at the biography of the family's former employee. At the same time, writing about Ou Lenas also allowed her to reflect on apartheid politics, the hierarchical structures of the time and how her family contested or navigated these. Dentlinger recalls:

> I felt that the relationship between my mother and the female farm employees was exceptional. […] I truly loved the two women. […] They interacted with us casually and confidently. Yet, already to a child's eye, I could notice odd distances being imposed and maintained. One was the differently reserved drinking uten-

91 Lee-Von Kim, "Scenes of Af/Filiation: Family Photographs in Postcolonial Life Writing," *Life Writing* 12, no. 4 (2 October 2015): 403.

92 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: RosettaBooks, LLC, 2007), 8. First published 1973.

93 For example, her previously glorified ancestor was hailed as a successful entrepreneur but, as archival records have shown, then went bankrupt. See: Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 104.; Dentlinger, pers. comm., 18 February 2021.

> sils. Another was an unspoken physical distance. I picked up the subtle clues and acted accordingly.[94]

Kößler explains how the forms of discrimination enacted against other ethnic groups in Rehoboth by those who were of mixed-race background and considered themselves – as Dentlinger's family had – as whit*er* is represented symbolically in the dish cloth that young Dentlinger would put on Ou Lenas lap before sitting on it.[95] Today, the author conceives of this as an ambivalence between seeking "physical closeness" while at the same time having internalised ideas of racial difference and feeling urged to take a certain distance from her "surrogate mothers" – as she calls both Ou Lenas and the second employee Ou Marias.[96] This ambivalence emerges as a typical characteristic of the relationship between German-Namibian employers and domestic workers in Namibia.[97] Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber defines this relation as one marked by a "tension between proximity and distance," whereby the notion of proximity or even intimacy is often emphasised on the side of the employers, with reference to the fact that their employees were seen as virtually part of the family.[98] This resonates strongly with Ena Jansen's study on domestic work in South Africa, entitled *Like Family: Domestic workers in South African History and Literature*. Jansen critiques how "the lives of practically all South Africans have been touched by the institution of paid domestic work" and yet there remains a "textual silence" around the issue – a lack of representation of the experience of domestic workers in literature, politics, culture, et cetera.[99]

Dentlinger's return to Namibia – her tracing of Ou Lenas to speak with her about the past – may be an act to fill this silence, to listen to Ou Lenas' version of the past and, perhaps, to find an understanding of old childhood perceptions and family habits. As we have seen, autobiographical writers relate earlier to later selves as a way to make sense of their experiences and to place themselves in the present.[100] Reflecting on her childhood, now that apartheid was over, appears to be a way of

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94 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 33–35.

95 Reinhart Kößler, "Rezension: Ulla Dentlinger Where Are You From? 'Playing White' under Apartheid," *Afrika Süd* 1 (2017): 42.

96 Dentlinger, pers. comm. via WhatsApp, 25 April 2021.

97 Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber, "Die Ehemaligen Kolonialherren: Zum Selbstverständnis Deutscher Namibier," in *Namibia-Deutschland: Eine Geteilte Geschichte; Widerstand, Gewalt, Erinnerung. Publikation Zur Gleichnamigen Ausstellung Im Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum Für Völkerkunde Der Stadt Köln*, eds. Larissa Förster, Dag Henrichsen and Michael Bollig (Cologne: Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum of Ethnology, 2004), 232.

98 Schmidt-Lauber, "Die Ehemaligen Kolonialherren," 230–232.

99 Ena Jansen, *Like Family: Domestic Workers in South African History and Literature* (Wits University Press, 2019), 5.

100 Coullie et al., *Selves in Question*, 1.

grappling with her position to the politics of the past. The photograph that accompanies Dentlinger's reflection seems to break with previous efforts of distancing.

Figure 7: Photograph on page 34. Caption: "Ou Lenas, my son Stephan and myself at Tierkolkies, 1994."

The image shows Dentlinger and her son together with Ou Lenas on one of their family visits to Namibia in 1994. All three are laughing and interacting with each other. The photograph emanates the closeness, light-heartedness and intimacy that Dentlinger describes in her book as being much more central to their relationship than the gesture of distancing. The image seems to both accompany and amplify her words, due to its emotive qualities. It may touch the viewers and make them smile along with the photographed subjects. However, the photograph does not speak to reality in unmediated ways and, thus, needs a narration in order to make sense.[101] The entanglement of both media crafts meaning by combining the practices to show *and* tell, thereby guiding the viewers'/readers' perception.

The notions of trust and familiarity between the women further emanate from Dentlinger's retelling. Ou Lenas confides in her and, after years of separation, speaks to her about the violence that she had experienced in her marriage. The position of Ou Lenas' biographical account in Dentlinger's book is crucial, given that it generates insights into complex gender and race structures within the Rehoboth community. As "the communal midwife, doctor and healer," she was indispensable

101 Matthias Christen, "Photography," in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 650; Rizzo, *Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa*, 217.

for the people: "All and sundry came to her for treatment."[102] However, the author also attends to the difficult status of Damara-women[103] in the Rehoboth community because, historically, they "were looked down upon by other pastoralists such as the Nama and particularly the Herero" who, in the 18th and 19th centuries were very influential in the area, even up until the 20th century and, more specifically, under apartheid, when the mixed-race Baster community would gain the highest status in the social hierarchy.[104] Considering her family's relation to their former domestic worker, Dentlinger argues:

> By rights she was an employee, but was never treated as one, nor did she act as one. She was simply part of our lives, as an equal in her own right. […] Ou Lenas never once made any mention of prejudice towards her on the basis of genetics or ethnicity. I would like to believe that on the farm, we actually defied apartheid in many ways.[105]

Reflecting back, she describes the relationship with the two employees Ou Lenas and Ou Marias as unconventional in light of apartheid's logic. Both of them were strong-willed, eloquent, lively and humorous women, whom she barely ever saw working.[106] However, such a reasoning is intricate when considering the fragile position of domestic workers in Southern Africa during the colonial era and the insecurity that they faced in terms of their livelihood. Again, this claim to family membership, rather than employment relations, resonates with Jansen's research on how domestic workers' precarious statuses continue to have an impact on their (mis- or under-) representation. She explains "For many decades, fieldwork done by 'white' sociologists and anthropologists was the only written source of information about the experiences of domestic workers," and further elaborates how 'white' authors increasingly began to take to the pen and to tell the stories of a Black person.[107]

Similarly, Dentlinger's account of Ou Lenas leaves us solely with her perspective on how the women on the farm in rural Namibia perceived their relationship, reminding us, like literary scholar Tracey L. Walters did, of the "intersectional oppression that denies black women opportunities to control their own narratives."[108]

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102 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 48; Kößler, "Rezension," 42.

103 According to Dentlinger, Ou Lenas identified herself as Damara. See: *Where Are You From?*, 33.

104 Rosengarten, *Other "Coloureds,"* 15–20; Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 128.

105 Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 48.

106 In other passages, the author would, however, also reflect on the more discriminating attitudes of her father with regards to his behaviour towards sheep herders, whom he punished violently if errors occurred. See: Dentlinger, *Where Are You From?*, 77; Kößler, "Rezension," 42.

107 We may think of Elsa Joubert or André Brink. See: Jansen, *Like Family*, 9, 118.

108 Tracey L. Walters, *Not Your Mother's Mammy: The Black Domestic Worker in Transatlantic Women's Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 2.

This also prompts the question how a narrative *about* and not *from* Ou Lenas is able – or not – to attest to her subjectivity. A crucial point to consider is the fact that her full name remains unmentioned. While the reference to Dentlinger's friend and former domestic worker as 'Ou Lenas' might be a sign of affection for the author, it also mirrors a naming practice that was and remains common in (former) apartheid societies where local names were adjusted, replaced or Christianised by the 'white' minority. These naming practices reflect blind spots in archives that make it difficult, if not impossible, to fully attest to someone's identity and to restore their biography.

While the domestic space was a point of juncture in which intimacy and friendship across racial lines might have been possible, Namibian activist and artist Hildegard Titus calls for heightened attention to the fact that domestic workers had their own family obligations and were often forced to put their own and their family's needs behind.[109] The contact that results from this relationship is one of structural difference. While Black domestic workers, by virtue of their job, are and were commonly intimate and well acquainted with the world of their employers, the opposite is often not the case. Conducting oral interviews with Ou Lenas and integrating her story in the book emerges here as an attempt to counteract this imbalance. However, as debates on positionality in literary studies show, writing about somebody else's life from a different perspective remains controversial. Reflecting on Ou Lenas and the issue of identity categories, Dentlinger asserts in a reading in Zurich:

> The government can make all sorts of policies and tell you what to do and how to behave but people on the ground will kind of self-identify [...] On the farm in Namibia, I realised how people were really self-identifying themselves – which is something that we can do now today that apartheid is over. I mean we can call ourselves now what we want to – or nothing at all.[110]

While her call to contest apartheid labels is important, especially in a country still grappling with extreme socio-economic inequality, this liberty of self-fashioning is not easily feasible to everyone – and has never been.[111] The grade of accessibility to freely constitute the self differs for Namibians and people's confinements are closely

109 Martha Mukaiwa, "Titus' 'Without Question' Explores Intricacies of Black Servitude," *The Namibian*, 14 June 2019, https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?page=archive-read&id=189549; Gabeba Baderoon, "The Ghost in the House: Women, Race, and Domesticity in South Africa," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1, no. 2 (September 2014): 178.

110 Amulungu and Dentlinger, *Die Namibische Geschichte Neu Schreiben*.

111 Ralph Marenga and Job Shipululo Amupanda, "The Coronavirus and Social Justice in Namibia," *Politikon* 48 (April 2021): 1; Reinhart Kößler, "Namibia | bpb," *bpb.de*, accessed 27 April 2021, https://www.bpb.de/internationales/weltweit/innerstaatliche-konflikte/54796/namibia.

linked to the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. German and South African colonialism are "the root cause" for the prevailing unequal distribution of resources and prospects for progression.[112] In the face of this socio-economic situation, Dentlinger speaks about her past life in poverty and free identity constitution in the present from the position of someone who left the area and could uplift herself because she passed as 'white', thereby paving the way to a German school that would eventually lead to a cosmopolitan life.

However, it is crucial to attend to the tone that she chooses to narrate this trajectory when assessing these aspects. In contrast to the common reproach of auto/biography, as a self-centred, self-celebratory genre, Dentlinger approaches the past and her own developments with self-doubt and mindfulness.[113] Her work shows that despite – or, perhaps, precisely because of – the sensitivity of the discourse on identity formation during and after apartheid, engaging in a dialogue and sharing one's experiences, struggles and sacrifices is vital in a nation that is still wounded by the past. In this regard, Dentlinger explains how she sympathises and identifies with "the coloured people" in Namibia who, according to her, "have a very difficult position" under the SWAPO government, claiming "the issue of us mixed – but who is not mixed? I mean, that's my message. It is swept under the carpet because our voice was not strong enough."[114] Writing her own auto/biographical account, as well as the narratives of Ou Lenas and her aunt Hedi, is a contribution to making Namibian historiography more polyphonous.

Her choice not to centre her own story alone, but instead to highlight, interrogate and visually represent the relations that influenced her reminded me of Glissant's notion of a "poetics of relation," which describes how identity is formed and constructed in relation to others, instead of being a "root identity."[115] Drawing on his concept, while reflecting on the stakes of dismantling the construction of 'whiteness' as pursued by Dentlinger's family, elucidates the book's particular strength. It is an important contribution to a discourse on identity that remains vexed and, in many instances, silenced in Namibia. In my discussions with the author, she shared that renegotiating her history was a sensitive endeavour.

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112 Namibia ranks as one of the world's most unequal countries, with a Gini coefficient of 59.1 (2015), second only to South Africa. Poverty rates increased, due to the Coronavirus-pandemic, with the country ranking 117th among 157 countries on the Human Capital Index. See: "Namibia – Overview," *World Bank*, accessed 14 February 2023, https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/namibia/overview; Kößler, "Namibia | bpb;" Marenga and Amupanda, "The Coronavirus and Social Justice in Namibia," 1.

113 Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run*. n.pag.

114 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 18 February 2021.

115 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 18; "From the Archives: Édouard Glissant & Derek Walcott in Conversation about the Epic," *Poets House* (blog), 15 October 2018, https://poetshouse.org/from-the-archive-edouard-glissant-derek-walcott-in-conversation/.

Dentlinger had strong concerns about opening the family archive, contemplating (for example) the risks of reprinting the photographs of her maternal grandmother Susanna Bezuidenhout, who came from the local community. She was uneasy about possibly racist reactions from her reading public or the vulnerability to which she would expose the photographed subject. It was in those moments that Dentlinger feels "taken aback," by the powerful reverberation of racist ideologies.[116] Despite the long process of working through the past, the socialisation under apartheid has left its marks. Dentlinger's grappling with these legacies elucidates the need for a more emphatic discourse on how the past impacts the individual in Namibia and its diasporic world. Her newly build "affective archive" and her intimate writing about her ambiguous racial heritage undoes the myth of allegedly finite identity categories.[117] In this way, her book destabilises apartheid narratives on 'whiteness' and racially separated worlds. By opening her private photographic archive and entangling the images with a textual reflection on her life, Dentlinger shows how grappling with the incongruities of racial identifications impacted on people's lives.

1.2: Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu's *Taming My Elephant*

Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu first began to write about her life in 1998, aiming to provide her family with an understanding of her cultural background and the path that she had travelled "before settling into the posh Windhoek suburb of Ludwigsdorf."[118] In her prologue, she explains: "I had to travel a long route to adjust to my life as it is today, but they don't know much about this effort."[119] Raised in the rural north of Namibia, Amulungu was part of the first cohort of missionary schoolgirls who – overnight – would become members of the liberation movement, when SWAPO soldiers took them across the border to Angola. Her life in exile – with sojourns in Angola, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Senegal, France and Yugoslavia – would only end 12 years later when Amulungu returned to Namibia after independence in 1990. She

116 Dentlinger, pers. comm., 18 February 2021.

117 I am borrowing loosely from Marietta Kesting's analysis of Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi's and Lebohang Kganye's practices as "affective archives" and from Andrew van der Vlies interpretation of how Muholi produces "a new archive of affect and affiliation." See: Marietta Kesting, "Affective Archives: Re-Animating Family Photographs in the Works of Lebohang Kganye and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi," in *Women and Photography in Africa: Creative Practices and Feminist Challenges*, eds. Darren Newbury, Lorena Rizzo and Kylie Thomas (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 205–226; Andrew van der Vlies, "Queer Knowledge and the Politics of the Gaze in Contemporary South African Photography: Zanele Muholi and Others," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (December 2012): 152.

118 Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant* (Windhoek: UNAM Press, 2016), 4.

119 Ibid., 3.

would then become the ambassador to Senegal and was based in Dakar. Today, she is retired and permanently settled in Windhoek with her family. Reflecting on her experiences, Amulungu felt both perplexed and amused upon seeing how her own children and the younger generations did not know much about the struggles of those who had either experienced apartheid or went into exile.[120]

In the years before her debut book was published in 2016, further impulses encouraged her to create a more encompassing account of her life. One such impulse was the surprised reaction that she would often get in response to her family constellation, being married to a 'white' Namibian of German descent and having three daughters together.[121] In her writing, she discusses the lines of division that continue to separate the Namibian population as a result of colonialism and apartheid, and she attends to both the importance and challenges of reconciliation. Here, the personal insights that she shares are instructive responses to the state-written, celebratory narrative of reconciliation as manifested in slogans "from 'One Namibia, One Nation' towards 'Unity in Diversity,'" as we shall see.[122]

In the analysis of Amulungu's representation of the self through writing and incorporating visual material, it is vital to take into account how her publishing team accompanied her curatorial decisions and had a say in the composition of her book. Amulungu chose to publish her book with UNAM press, the University of Namibia's scholarly publishing unit.[123] With this, she located her book in a Namibian literary landscape, thereby positioning her own voice as a writer in post-colonial Namibia. In consultation with UNAM press, and due to technical (and financial) reasons, the photographs in *Taming My Elephant* are not located separately within the text, but they are grouped together, printed in black and white and colour in one batch towards the last third of the book. This design generates a different reading experience when compared to Dentlinger's text-image constellation. Instead of engaging with the visual and textual narrative simultaneously, readers study one after the other in its current incarnation, perhaps taking more time to explore the photographs when approaching their position in the book or going back and forth between reading and viewing.

120 Ibid., 3.; Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, pers. comm., 11 May 2022.

121 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 4.

122 Michael Uusiku Akuupa and Godwin Kornes, "From 'One Namibia, One Nation' Towards 'Unity in Diversity'? Shifting Representations of Culture and Nationhood in Namibian Independence Day Celebrations, 1990–2010," *Anthropology Southern Africa* 36, no. 1–2 (January 2013): 34–46.

123 Melber, "The Shifting Grounds of Emancipation," 29.

1.2.1: Remembering Home

In many ways, Amulungu continues the tradition of other Namibian women writers before her who documented (and thus preserve) their journey to exile and back home and their simultaneous transition from childhood to adulthood.[124] In doing so, these authors are writing women's experiences into the historiography of Namibia. However, Amulungu's crafting of her auto/biographical account goes further. She chose a distinctly personal tone in order to secure her family history as well as the history of her ancestors.

The visual entry to Amulungu's book already directly links *Taming My Elephant* to a specific cultural context: a drawing of an elephant's head embellishes the cover, framed by red and pink stripes on top and bottom, typical for Odelela clothing. The author explains that the elephant is a reference to the Oshiwambo saying, "We will do as agreed if the night does not give birth to an elephant."[125] If an elephant appears, then it becomes a priority for all villagers to get rid of it, while everything else would remain on hold. Her title, thus, indicates how she faced so many challenges in her life that she had no other choice but to adapt and to remain strong in the face of obstacles. However, her auto/biographical account is more than a mere testimony to these experiences; it is also, as she calls it, a "family effort."[126] She is not only locating her book in Oshiwambo culture, but also amidst a loving family who, with joint forces, supported her auto/biographical project.[127] Her daughters contributed the idea for the title and designed the cover image, while her husband created maps which visualise Amulungu's journeys, as well as a family tree that retraces her family lines.[128]

The centrality of family is also reflected in her endeavours to reconstruct her ancestors' movements. Similar to Dentlinger's approach, Amulungu is "playing host to the stories of others" in the way that she returned to her childhood home to interview people and to generate an account of their experiences, where they came from, how they settled in the village and how they crafted their lives during colonial rule.[129] She was inspired by seeing how her husband Wilfried Brock, and his well-known settler family, had their history neatly documented with a rich family archive

124 In a similar vein as authors like Lydia Shaketange, Libertina Amathila or, as mentioned previously, Ellen Ndeshi Namhila. See: Fulkerson-Dikuua, "Conceptualising National Transition," 59–60.

125 Original: "*Ongula osho tatu ningi ngele uusiku ina wu uvala ondjamba*," Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 2.

126 Amulungu and Dentlinger, *Die Namibische Geschichte Neu Schreiben*.

127 Amulungu, pers. comm., 30 March 2021.

128 Ibid.

129 van der Vlies, "The Archive, the Spectral, and Narrative Responsibility," 584.

consisting of letters, memoirs, family trees and pictures dating back to 1800.[130] In an interview, Amulungu attests: "But in my case I had none of that."[131] When asked whether she consulted other archives for her book research, Amulungu would explain: "The archive would not speak about the Oshiwambo-speaking people. It will talk about church, because that's when people started writing. But if you really want to understand the background of tribes in Namibia, you need to talk to people."[132] In bringing people's oral histories into textual form, she generates this archive herself, reminding us of the potential of auto/biographical contestation in the face of a history of silencing African experiences in the archive through systematic "miskeeping" of records that attend thoroughly to the lives of the colonised.[133]

We learn from Amulungu's re-narration of her ancestors' oral histories, for example, about the mobility of Oshiwambo-speaking people in northern Namibia and how love relations, cultural codes, pregnancies or colonists' land claims were important factors that all pushed people to move. By exploring her ancestors' *routes* and *roots*, Amulungu responds to the absence of written accounts on their experiences.[134] In '*Little Research Value,*' Ellen Ndeshi Namhila elucidates "the emotional and social value of genealogical data," by emphasising the importance of such recorded information for the individual with regards to "citizenship matters, inheritance and property disputes."[135] Here, similar to Dentlinger, Amulungu's recuperation of her family's narratives evokes the image of collecting and scattering – of (re)composing a fragmented archive.[136] She returns to her origins and claims a sense of belonging despite the years of absences and the cosmopolitan life that she would eventually lead. After the long phase of living in exile, she generates an account of affiliation in order to transmit it to future generations.

The description of her ancestors' movements throughout various villages in the north, with the ultimate settling of her grandparents in the village Omayanga, is contrasted with the experiences of forced mobility during the contract labour system, established by the German colonial regime and extended by the South African apartheid regime. The recruitment of men would separate families, shatter family structures and make letter writing a necessity for staying in contact. However, the

130 Amulungu, pers. comm., 30 March 2021.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Rassool, "Rethinking Documentary History," 28.; Henrichsen quoted in Namhila, "*Little Research Value*," xi.

134 For a more detailed discussion about the significance of *routes* and *roots* in relation to diasporic identity see: Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 112.

135 Namhila, "*Little Research Value*," 1.

136 Kawashima, *Autobiographie Und Photographie Nach 1900*, 26.

lack of infrastructure or equipment did not allow for easy communication, often requiring improvisation. Amulungu's account speaks about these conditions and the long periods between letters: Recruited sons were thought to be dead; they would only learn about deceased family members months later or would find conflicting information written in the letter and on its envelope, in cases when the letter's content had to be updated. As the author explained, there is no family archive that safeguarded these letters and only oral narratives about them prevailed.[137] In these regards, Amulungu's work speaks to the structural absence of her ancestors' biographies in conventional archives. Entry was only granted through documentary records of the contract labour system, which increasingly affected all aspects of life in the north. The number of recruited men from northern regions grew from 17,494 in 1948 to 30,129 in 1960s.[138] The implications of this were far reaching and can be approximated through archived accounts by workers. Men spoke out against oppressive working conditions, the brutal ways in which they were treated, the low payment and the hardships of traveling to the places of employment.[139] When resistance to these conditions was increasingly organised and with the foundation of the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) and later SWAPO, the record-keeping would increase further. However, these records barely attend to the feelings and emotions of those affected by the system. Amulungu responds to this by setting the focus on her relatives' lives. Her references to the socio-political environment provide an understanding of the context in which these narratives were located, yet they do not take centre-stage in her narrative.

The author's text and her use of imagery become more personal when she turns to her own childhood past. In light of the absence of any visual representation, either of the places in which she grew up or of herself as a child, Amulungu resorts to her memory:

> Home will always remain a place that is full of childhood memories. Every time the notion of home occurs to me, I travel back in the past and see myself running in the green *omahangu* field, or stopping at a fig tree to pick figs on my way to my grandmother's homestead. I see myself walking next to the oxen assisting my father to plough the field.[140]

With a nostalgic tone, she conjures up an image of home that is peaceful, thereby locating herself as a child in a pastoral, idyllic Namibian landscape and in a safe family space, leading an innocent, harmonious village life. There is a sense of longing

137 Amulungu, pers. comm., 30 March 2021.

138 Marion Wallace, *A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 255.

139 Ibid., 256.

140 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 42, emphasis in original.

in her reminiscences, her interactions with family members and the places that she traversed. She describes:

> It is this rural setting which comes to my mind when I recall my childhood. And it is not only the images of this village life, it is also the smells attached to it: the smell just before the rain, the smell of fresh milk, the smell of fresh wild spinach cooked with home-made butter, the smell of firewood in the sleeping hut. It all smelled special and different. Today, whenever I go back home, that smell is no longer there. Or at least, I can no longer smell it. Is it because I have been elsewhere? Or has my childhood village lost its origin?[141]

Amulungu's return to the scents of the past illuminates the "embodied, relational and temporal nature of memory-making."[142] Resorting to these sensory memories speaks to a deep connection to places from one's past and the specific embodied experiences of locality, albeit in terms of the disruption through relocation and diasporic *errantry*.[143] In relating the present to the past self, the author articulates the felt discrepancy between the now and then. The elapsed smell becomes emblematic of a greater experience of loss – an unimpaired return to home is impossible. As her open question suggests, the self and the places of the past have changed.

By retracing her own path from childhood to adolescence, Amulungu paints a picture of a humble village life. She grew up surrounded by relatives, with daily routines defined by chores from cooking to attending to kids and cattle. She intersperses these village memories with observations of transformation: roads being built, the increasing presence of cars and 'white' men and the spread of Christianity. The Okatana Roman Catholic Mission Station would become particularly central for Amulungu when she started going to school there. She happily moved to the hostel and enjoyed studying, given that life in the village was defined by work. The author recalls how these were her first acquaintances with an "outside world," whereas previously her only conceptions of home and belonging were defined by her immediate surroundings and the family space.[144] South Africa's homeland policies actively crafted this framework:

> We were restricted to certain areas, I as an Ovambo-speaking person would have to stay in Ovamboland and go to school in Ovamboland. […] At the time I grew up,

141 Ibid.

142 De Sas Kropiwnicki, *Exile Identity, Agency and Belonging*, 26. See also Memory Biwa's exploration of *sensory memory* "as conscious and unconscious embodied histories." Biwa, "*Weaving the Past with Threads of Memory*," 99.

143 Framed by Glissant as a condition of identity in exile that is rhizomatic and understood "no longer completely within the root but also in Relation." Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 18.

144 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 62.

> I was not even aware of the word apartheid. South Africa made sure that we did not know about these things. So, I knew about my village, the people who spoke the same language as me and that's it.[145]

Amulungu's earlier, narrow conception of home would be broadened in 1973, when she went to the Canisianum Secondary School, first in Okatana and then in Anamulenge.[146] She encountered other Oshiwambo speakers with different intonations than hers, prompting her to recalibrate her conception of the north, Ovamboland and the community of which she was a part. These clues resonate with Coullie et al.'s observation:

> While the actual experiences of many individuals in southern Africa are regionalist rather than national (in the sense that they either cross state borders or do not share in the real or imagined community of the nation-state in a meaningful way), most auto/biographical accounts lean towards a narrative alliance with national identities.[147]

Stepping out of her village proffered new reference points for identification to the author, which implied crafting bonds with other members that claimed belonging both to the region and her culture. Amulungu would later extend this practice of identifying with broader collectives and, finally, with the "imagined community" of the nation when she joined the struggle for independence.[148]

1.2.2: Exile: Visual Cultures in Transition

At the Canisianum Secondary School Amulungu would be acquainted with new practices of documentation, knowledge production and media imported from Europe by Catholic teachers. In 1975, Amulungu had her first photograph taken by her German language teacher when she was 17 years old. Amulungu's caption indicates how she dressed up in her "favourite yellow Sunday dress."[149] We see her in a long shot, with her gaze averted, immersed in a flowery bush. Edda van Gompel, who came to Namibia as a volunteer and her partner, then known as Frater Gerhard, took the image (figure 8). The couple would make it a habit to photograph students, initially, as van Gompel explained, as a leisure activity.[150]

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145 Amulungu and Dentlinger, *Die Namibische Geschichte Neu Schreiben*.

146 Amulungu, pers. comm., 30 March 2021.

147 Coullie et al., *Selves in Question*, 6.

148 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2016).

149 See caption of figure 7.

150 Edda van Gompel, pers. comm. via phone, 19 May 2021.

She recalls how, while it was natural for the couple to own cameras, local people did not have access to the apparatus. Hence, the students of the Canisianum developed a great interest in photography.[151] It would become a tradition at the missionary station that students dressed up on Sundays and approached the couple, excited to have their pictures taken. Two images in her book were taken as part of the Sunday tradition. Amulungu smiles radiantly into the camera in the close-up shot with her friend Agnes. In the image below, her expression is rather modest, her gaze directed pensively towards an unidentifiable destination.

Figure 8: Photograph after page 190. Caption: "At Canisianum in my favourite yellow Sunday dress in 1975. We looked our best on Sundays."

151 Ibid.

Reminiscing about the photographic moment, van Gompel recalls how her sitters would pose upright and stiff with stern and serious expressions on her faces in the Sunday tradition's beginning phase – much in line with early European family portrait photographs, when long exposure times would not allow for movements.[152] This resemblance allows for contemplation as to whether students learnt about these forms of posture through contract labour portraits or through the European photography that they encountered. As a way to capture more jovial expressions and faces, the couple would increasingly take snapshots, which encouraged students to eventually pose in more casual and friendly manners. Amulungu in particular was not shy about smiling and performing for the camera, according to van Gompel.[153]

However, apart from a reflection on the development of visual culture in Amulungu's life, Edwards reminds us that "[o]wnership of photographs, and access to photographs is an important material consideration."[154] This consideration is crucial with regards to the image at hand because it is Amulungu's earliest visual documentation of herself and, as such, occupies a special position in her personal photographic archive today. While van Gompel maintained that the couple habitually shared the photographs that they took with their students after developing them, Amulungu explained that the picture only came into her possession after she visited her former teachers in Germany, when she was in exile and studying in France.[155] She remembers: "We would go through all the photo albums, they had quite a lot of photos of us."[156] She further explains:

> Amazingly, they kept the photographs to themselves. They gave me my photographs whenever I visited them. […] Finally, now that they are getting old, they asked me if I wanted to receive the entire album […] They decided to send me all the photographs (our old memories) so that I can share them with my old schoolmates. […] So, I am busy scanning and just circulat[ing] it among us former students.[157]

Retracing the itineraries of the image raises questions with regards to the politics of restitution between Africa and Europe, material possession as well as claims and values connected with photographs. Amulungu considered the images to be their

152 Ibid.

153 Ibid.

154 Edwards, "Photographs and the Sound of History," 35.

155 Amulungu, pers. comm., 30 March 2021; van Gompel, pers. comm. via phone, 19 May 2021.

156 Amulungu, pers. comm. via email, 28 April 2021.

157 Ibid. Notably, Amulungu's and van Gompel's explanations differ here – the couple claims to have immediately shared most images, only keeping a few specific ones, such as single portrait shots of each student, class photographs or pictures taken during festivities held at the school.

"old memories," resonating with Kawashima's understanding of photography as a "mnemonic storage device" for writing auto/biography.[158] Her practice of reprinting the fragments from a distant past and exposing the images to the public gaze can be understood as a way of safeguarding, archiving and sharing transient imaginaries as well as cherished material objects. Moreover, by incorporating the photographs into her auto/biographical account, Amulungu claims ownership *and* authorship of framing the past and the self, thereby recovering and "gathering scattered archives."[159]

For her auto/biographical account, the author retrieved and reflected on the dispersed traces she left in the world, living in permanent transition as a refugee. Her 12 years in the diaspora were heralded in the middle of the night in April 1977, when SWAPO soldiers entered the girls' dormitories at the mission station and – without questions raised or explanations given – embarked with them on the path into exile, across the border to Angola.[160] Many documents in Western archives consider the events to be an abduction, setting forth how the Catholic school "was ambushed by around 30–50 SWAPO-people," explaining how "[t]he school kids […] were kidnapped and taken by foot to Angola […] Some of the kids could escape, 126 were abducted."[161] For example, the Ernst and Ruth Dammann archival repository, housed in the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, speaks critically of the occurrence. Wary of SWAPO as an organisation and their influence on the young students, the couple notes: "The children were 're-educated' in Angola and trained to use weapons. One never heard again of the boys."[162] While the van Gompels had always sympathised with SWAPO and their mission to liberate the country, the couple also still speaks of a kidnapping when thinking back to the night in 1977.[163] They particularly remember the fear that they felt when the girls were taken away by soldiers. Still being shocked about the occurrence, the couple is today understanding about SWAPO's move as well as today's reframing of the event.[164] In official SWAPO narratives, the heroic deeds and achievements are glorified and hailed as part of the 'clean,' albeit bitter, struggle for liberation.[165]

Amulungu's book paints a more personal and reflective picture of the experiences in exile, written from the perspective of someone who identifies strongly with

158 See: Christen, "Photography," 652.; Amulungu, pers. comm. via email, 28 April 2021.

159 Orford, "Gathering Scattered Archives," 39–56.

160 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 74.

161 BAB, Ernst und Ruth Dammann, PA.39 III.G.2, my translation.

162 The Dammanns were a German couple who went on a research trip to Namibia (1953–1954), during which they photographed Namibian families, couples and individuals and recorded their voices as part of their research on Namibian languages and oral literatures. Ibid.

163 Van Gompel, pers. comm. via phone, 19 May 2021.

164 Ibid.

165 Akawa, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle*, 2.

the liberation movement and with SWAPO as a political party today. When describing the early days of entering the liberation struggle, she does attend to the fear, perplexity and worries amongst her group; however, the author equally elucidates how the students would soon be politicised and, after military and educational training in the camps, began to embrace SWAPO.[166] She recalls: "Slowly but surely, we glided from the naïve, narrow minded and traditional human beings to vibrant members of a liberation movement."[167] In many ways, her recollections echo Frantz Fanon's claim that anti-colonial movements introduced "the notion of common cause, national destiny, and collective history into every consciousness."[168] Amulungu remembers:

> To start off, we had to get used to the name Namibia. [...] Back home, we spoke of our respective villages, churches, schools, and that was almost it. And specifically for me, my world started at Oshakati and its surroundings and ended at Anamulenge and surroundings. What was beyond these two places, irrespective of which direction, was foreign [...] We finally understood that being Namibian meant so many things. We did not speak the same language. Neither did we share the same culture. The struggle was our unifying factor.[169]

Forging a sense of unity in the exile communities was critical to overcoming ethnic divisions, introduced by the German regime's "divide et impera" strategies, which forcefully restructured space and fragmented the population.[170] These were continued by South African policies such as the Odendaal Plan, which implied systematic and comprehensive forced resettlement and the creation of ethnic identities and communities.[171] Amulungu's narrative speaks to the shift in identification that grew out of the liberation struggle, where the idea of a united Namibian identity was born.[172] Looking back, she reflects on how these new conceptions of nationhood and home would become strong reference points for the refugees in exile: "We were to carry this sense of belonging and responsibility wherever we went in the world."[173]

In many ways, the author's narrative of her involuntary entry into the liberation struggle speaks to Glissant's theory that "[e]xile can be borne, even when it comes as

166 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 98.

167 Ibid., 121.

168 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 51. First published 1961.

169 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 91–122.

170 Reinhart Kössler and Henning Melber, *Völkermord – Und Was Dann? Die Politik Deutsch-Namibischer Vergangenheitsbearbeitung* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2017), 12–14, emphasis in original.

171 Akuupa and Kornes, "From 'One Namibia, One Nation'" 7.

172 Melber, "The Shifting Grounds of Emancipation," 22.

173 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 119.

a bolt from the blue."[174] While her auto/biographical account attends to the painful experiences of uprootedness and the struggles of a life in transition, Amulungu also acknowledges how the agony of the past and liberation were a "collective achievement."[175] In stressing the centrality of the shared commitment to the struggle, the writer partially chooses "not to focus on the *distinctiveness* of the subject's experiences, but rather on its *typicality"* as a way to appeal for recognition for the generations' sacrifices and for the value of solidarity.[176] It is in these moments that readers might feel reminded that the author writes from a position of a (former) state worker and (former) ambassador. The present, remembering voice seems closely entangled with discourses about the nation and about national identity. However, by sharing more personal insights, emotions and private experiences, Amulungu's auto/biographical account oscillates between collective and individual narration. Through the interplay of the written and visual texts in her book in particular, Amulungu allows for intimate glances at the writing self. In this respect, Lee-Von Kim reminds us that "[t]he presence of family photographs" in auto/biographical accounts "draws the reader in as an intimate, a confidant. Here, photography supports and augments autobiography's claims to intimacy, familiarity, and revelation."[177] In this vein, Amulungu's book does not straightforwardly or simplistically align with narratives of the nation and "ready-made stories of the nation in microcosm," to echo Rassool's framing.[178]

The image below is particularly instructive for contemplation about diasporic identity formation, the function of the photographic archive and regarding practices of forging a sense of belonging in a state of transition. It was taken in 1978 or 1979 at the Okatana Catholic Mission about two years after Amulungu's departure.[179] We see her family posing together for the photograph. The photographic arrangement and the presence of chairs hint at a negotiated occasion.[180] Both parents are seated and, while the younger boys are leaning on their mother, the older brothers are standing upright, their eyes directed at the camera. Apart from the slight smile on the boy's face, all family members are looking sternly and seriously towards the photographer, thereby highlighting the staged character of the photographic moment. What strikes the eye are the photograph's signs of decay: a multitude of thin lines and creases and a sepia tone that signals the fading of colours. These traces

174 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 5.

175 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 7.

176 Coullie et al., *Selves in Question*, 27.

177 Kim, "Autobiographical Revisions," 109.

178 Rassool, *The Individual, Auto/Biography and History in South Africa*, 7.

179 While the book indicates the year 1979 as the date of the photographic occasion, Amulungu stated in an interview with the author that it must have been taken in 1978. Amulungu, pers. comm. via WhatsApp, 6 May 2021.

180 Grendon et al., 8.

are signs of the photograph's trajectories and travels through different spaces and times.[181] Amulungu remembers: "We did not have many belongings and when we left a place, we left with all our few belongings. So, we also moved with our photographs, which we kept very preciously in envelopes between our clothes."[182] As an aide-mémoire of loved ones on Amulungu's journey, the picture serves to evoke a sense of family presence in times of transition. It emerges as a cherished and precious item, one safely guarded and yet heavily used and worn by practices of affection. After more than 40 years of circulation, the image found its safe, digitised position in the book.

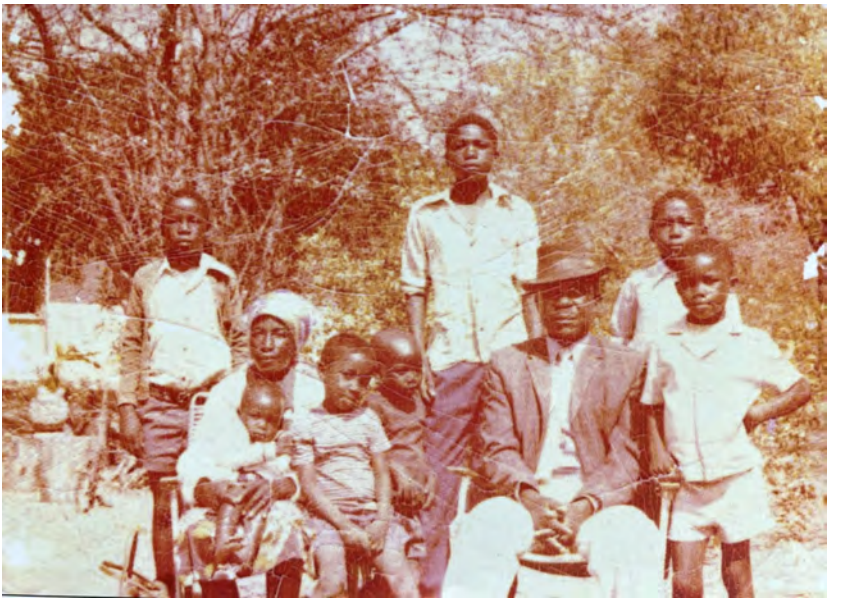

Figure 9: Photograph after page 190. Caption: "My parents and my seven brothers in 1979, just before the death of my mother."

While her text does not refer to the picture directly, Amulungu speaks about the significance of letters and photographs during her life in exile. Since communication with families during the war posed a danger to their security, both types of media remained a rarity and had to travel complex routes with the help of trusted indi-

181 Ibid.

182 Amulungu, pers. comm., 30 March 2021.

viduals.[183] It was not unusual that photographs went missing from the envelopes on the itineraries from Zambia and Namibia to Germany and back again.[184] The context of figure 9 speaks to this complex, organised transfer while, simultaneously, dismantling the family portrait as a fabrication. The author explains how Father Houben, via whom she would contact her family, had taken the image specifically for Amulungu. When seeing Amulungu's mother at church, he would ask her to bring the whole family: "So my parents had dragged all these many boys to church on a Sunday so that this image can be taken," the author reflects:[185]

> The idea was for us in exile to keep in touch with our family members at home and vice versa. Having photographs of our loved ones whom we could not meet for a long time meant a lot to us. It kept us going and gave us hope. In my case, it was interesting to see my little brothers growing up over the 12 years. My youngest brother was born when I was already in exile and I knew him only from pictures.[186]

Photographs function as "cherished objects and important tokens of affection" that serve to advance a sense of affiliation in the face of absence, resonating with Susan Sontag's consideration that pictures may "supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives."[187] The different forms of dispersion and absence connected to the image directly relate to the visual economies of apartheid Namibia and South Africa. In consideration of the position of photography in South African families, Marietta Kesting asserts how "[t]he apartheid regime had left traces that were mostly marked by the absence of photographs showing the whole family together."[188] Notably, Amulungu's own absence is most striking in the picture at hand. The author further asserts that, on the occasions that Father Houben wanted to take the family picture, it was common that not all family members would be home. In the case of the image above, her sister was at nursing school and her father was on contract work in Walvis Bay, from which she deduces: "I am sure Fr Houben waited until my father was back a year later [after the birth of my brother] so that he could take and send me this image."[189] In other instances, when members were absent, Houben, as photographer

183 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 133.

184 Ibid.

185 Amulungu, pers. comm., 30 March 2021.

186 Amulungu, pers. comm. via email, 28 April 2021.

187 Grendon et al., *Usakos*, 13; Kim, "Scenes of Af/Filiation," 403; Sontag, *On Photography*, 8.

188 Marietta Kesting, "Affective Archives: Re-Animating Family Photographs in the Works of Lebohang Kganye and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi," in *Women and Photography in Africa: Creative Practices and Feminist Challenges*, eds. Darren Newbury, Lorena Rizzo and Kylie Thomas (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 217.

189 Amulungu, pers. comm. via WhatsApp, 6 May 2021.

and intermediary, would seek family members out individually to take additional photographs.[190]

It is a common characteristic of family photography to portray the family in an idealised fashion. However, the example above emphasises the additional complexity of crafting an idyllic family portrait in an apartheid context in which families were often dispersed, separated either by apartheid laws or by death.[191] This looming absence due to a death, which would take place after the taking of the photo, is foreshadowed by Amulungu's caption: "My parents and my seven brothers in 1979, just before the death of my mother."[192] The text guides the reading of the image and indicates how, for the author, the significance of the photograph goes beyond what is merely seen, given that it symbolises the family's loss. In reference to her choice to insert the image, she explained to me: "I wanted to show the faces of my little brothers, just one year before the death of my mother." [193] Incorporating the image accompanied by the caption was a way to express her sympathy with them and to acknowledge how they had to "face the world without a mother."[194]

With her book, Amulungu also negotiates her own pain by returning to the moment when the tragic news was conveyed to her via a letter. Interestingly, while Amulungu re-narrates the letter's content and pays testimony to the meaning of the words, the author did not either store or safeguard these material relicts from the past: "Now that I am thinking about it, it is surprising that I haven't kept any of the letters I received while in exile. […] My conclusion is that unlike the photos, we do not value letters. Once I have learnt about the letter's content, I do not see any reason of keeping it."[195] In the historical contexts of colonialism and apartheid, it was common practice for readers to destroy letters after receiving them. The network of communication or the letters' contents might endanger the writer, recipient or friends and families of both. Examples of this can be found in Kaujende's Sister: "Letter from Karibib" (1909), Tsitsi Dangarembga's "The Letter" (1985) or Motshabi Molefhe's "Lend me a Dress" (1991).[196] This practice might have been a subconscious one because Amulungu did not recall actively deciding against keeping the letter. The auto/biographical recollection offered an alternative means to archive the letters. Through re-narration, Amulungu remembers the grief she felt and she works through her losses in re-narrating it. The author incorporates further

190 Amulungu, pers. comm. 30 March 2021.

191 Kesting, "Affective Archives," 207.

192 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, after page 190.

193 Amulungu, pers. comm. via email, 28 April 2021.

194 Ibid.

195 Amulungu, pers. comm. via WhatsApp, 6 May 2021.

196 All of them have been referenced and printed in: Margaret J. Daymond et al., eds., *Women Writing Africa. The Southern Region*, 1st ed. (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2003).

photographs of beloved, deceased friends in her book, thereby commemorating and paying tribute to them.[197] Closely grouped together, these images resemble a form of photographic album, a medium to revisit and to commemorate the past and those who perished. The images are crucial to the work of memory, as they provide a sense of continuity, comfort, solace and thus they helped their viewers and keepers to remain strong in face of hardships and to prevail.

In this vein, Amulungu's narrative attests to how constant adjustment and prevailing became a "normal way of life" in exile.[198] While the liberation struggle waged on at home in Namibia, Amulungu travelled to France where she would further her studies, become a wife and a mother. The author illuminates how she and others adapted to the diasporic condition and crafted their lives in changing circumstances. Interrogating what the diasporic condition implies for a sense of self, Glissant argues how the concept of identity can no longer be tied to a notion of a central, core root; it must instead be reconsidered as rhizomatic.[199] His "poetics of relation" does not discard the idea of rootedness altogether, but emphasises the idea of "an enmeshed root system," a spreading network, a concept of self that centres the "relationship with the Other."[200] Examining narratives on exile in the South African context, De Sas Kropiwnicki notes how these are primarily told as stories of "liberation, mass movement and a triumph over adversity," emphasising that exile meant much more for the people who experienced it: "It was about everyday struggles, far removed from politics; about personal relationships and their failings; […] about children and their searches for belonging and meaning."[201] The photos that Amulungu incorporated attest to this.

Figure 10 shows Amulungu on her wedding day, marrying her first husband Aaron in Ljubljana in 1983. Today, the writer reminisces how the image transmits a multitude of meanings. Looking at the picture, she sees herself "getting married unsuspectedly that a year later I would be thrown into a turmoil far away from home."[202] In her auto/biographical account, readers learn about the agony and pain that would follow in the aftermath of the photograph when her husband abandoned her, leaving her alone and pregnant in Ljubljana: "This was certainly too much for me to bear. I was away from my usual base, France, I had no money to purchase another ticket, and I was simply at a loss. […] I considered everything, including committing suicide."[203] The tone of her text transports Amulungu's sorrow and

197 See, for example, the images of Agnes and Marina with whom she spent her adolescence (Agnes) and with whom she went into exile (Marina).

198 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 114–162.

199 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.

200 Ibid.

201 De Sas Kropiwnicki, *Exile Identity, Agency and Belonging*, 2.

202 Amulungu, pers. comm. via email, 28 April 2021.

203 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 173–174.

devastation. Photographs as "visual incisions" or "fragments of time and space" can remind us of slippery moments of joy that were simultaneously embedded in broader histories.[204] Looking at the past from the vantage point of the present, Amulungu is now at peace with this chapter in her history, stating: "It's part of my life and that it ended up badly, I had no control over that but from that marriage I have also a child – Paleni. So, I thought I should also put it there [to show] that, in the end, things turned out good for me."[205]

Figure 10 (left): Photograph after page 190. Caption: "My first wedding, to Aaron in Ljubljana, Slovenia (former Yugoslavia) in October 1983."
Figure 11 (right): Photograph after page 190. Caption: "With my first daughter Paleni in Clermont-Ferrand, France, in May 1985. A calm baby is a delight for a young student mother."

While the images show private moments of her daily life, Amulungu's writing continuously ties her experiences back to the political situation. In this way, the hybrid image-texts place the subject simultaneously in an everyday as well as a broader political context. The author states: "No matter where we were, we remained close to our struggle. This had become our *raison d'être*, an inexplicable source of inspiration and belonging. Whatever we were doing, wherever we were, the ultimate objective was clear in our minds: the independence of Namibia."[206] Her being part of the liberation movement remained crucial as she longed for the country's independence abroad. These repeated gestures to the nation remind us of her status as a refugee.

204 Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 3; Grendon et al., *Usakos*, 14.
205 Amulungu, pers. comm. via email, 28 April 2021.
206 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 147–148, emphasis in original.

Ariella Azoulay's analysis of the relationship between photography and citizenship is instructive in shifting the attention to the photograph's resonances. In *The Civil Contract of Photography*, she examines the possibility for stateless people to pursue political agency and resistance through photography, stating: "When the photographed persons address me, claiming their citizenship in photography, they cease to appear as stateless or as enemies, the manners in which the sovereign regime strives to construct them. They call on me to restore their citizenship through my viewing."[207] Amulungu's personal images convey this notion of restorative agency and this is furthered by her narrative.

The author repeatedly evokes her strong alliance with SWAPO politics, the cause of the struggle and the exile condition in various statements in her book.[208] However, even with her strong focus on relations, her book is not a political manifesto; rather, it is an account of how the self has been constituted in exile. This becomes tangible not only in her photographs, where we see her as a loving mother, friend, fellow student or sister (and barely ever alone), but also in her tireless emphasis on the centrality of collectivity, solidarity and togetherness. This sense of unity, which was actively crafted by SWAPO amongst the members of the liberation movement in exile, would be probed when Amulungu met her future husband Wilfried Brock at the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka and even more when both returned to the liberated nation after independence.

1.2.3: A New Namibian Family Archive

In *Taming My Elephant*, Amulungu speaks at length about her internal struggle to overcome prejudices against the "white comrade" who had joined the liberation movement.[209] The national consciousness forged in exile to unite Namibia's different ethnic groups could not easily encompass Namibians of European descent:

> Although it was not an official position, we at the back of our minds knew that whites in Namibia were the reason for our struggle. Yes, it was a system, but the system was run by whites and at the same time this system gave privileges to whites only. […] If things were all right for this white person back home, what was he doing here?[210]

Amulungu's question became more pressing as the two of them developed romantic feelings for one another. Her explanations of the difficult path to find trust in the possibility of a relationship with a 'white' man is coupled with a black and white

207 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 17.
208 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 188.
209 Ibid., 198–227.
210 Ibid., 200.

snapshot that shows both "right at the beginning of everything."[211] Below the image, their marriage photograph from 1990, attests to both their love and perseverance, despite the author's difficulties to overcome her reservations as well as the obstacles both faced upon their return to Namibia. While this would be the long-awaited journey to Amulungu's country of origin, the relocation implied renewed efforts to re-position the self and to find a place in the new nation together with her partner. Her understanding of home – the abstract concept that she had longed for during her 12 years in exile – had to be negotiated yet again. Amulungu recalls her thoughts upon her arrival: "Is this Windhoek, the capital, we have been referring to whenever we spoke about home? […] Well, this was apparently home."[212] A feeling of belonging could not easily set in. We are reminded that, before leaving, Amulungu's conception of home was in Brah's words, her "lived experience of a locality" – hence confined to the north of the country.[213] The sense of unity and belonging, as it had been crafted in exile, is juxtaposed with her feeling of a strangeness, one pointing to the mythic nature of national identities and, effectively, dismantling the nation as an "imagined community," as conceptualised by Benedict Anderson.[214]

How does auto/biography serve to constitute the self in the post-colonial nation? With regards to the challenges of forging a sense of belonging back in Namibia, the author's responses to the state-crafted narratives of reconciliation are particularly instructive. As Michael Akuupa and Godwin Kornes explain:

> During the anti-colonial struggle, people were united in their state of oppression and identified as opposing colonial rule. However, once the state of colonial oppression had come to an end, the newly and hard-fought freedom allowed for multiple, political subject positions which go beyond the colonial dominator-dominated dichotomy and may be 'national' as much as they may be sub-national, regional and/or ethnic.[215]

As a way to translate the spirit of unity from the liberation struggle into the post-colonial Namibian nation, SWAPO spurred the programme of national reconciliation through slogans such as 'Unity in Diversity,' and political speeches that celebrated an allegedly achieved reconciliation and covered prevailing lines of division in the country with a veil of silence.[216] These policies towards nation-building and uniting a highly fragmented population were important in light of the heavy marks

211 Caption of photograph.

212 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 232.

213 Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 188–189.

214 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

215 Akuupa and Kornes, "From 'One Namibia, One Nation,'" 19.

216 Hage Geingob, "What the President Said on 21 March," *New Era*, 24 March 2015, https://newera live.na/posts/president-21-march; Akuupa and Kornes, "From 'One Namibia, One Nation'";

left by both colonialism and apartheid. However, the incongruencies of the narrative of reconciliation and the prevailing lines of division (with regards to political, economic and social factors) in the nation remain heatedly debated by various scholars, activists and authors.[217] A central bone of contention in SWAPO's approach to reconciliation is its glorification and celebration of certain parts of history, while other chapters remain disregarded and concealed.[218] Akawa calls this SWAPO's "'we-liberated-this-country' eulogy," while Heike Becker refers to the celebration of SWAPO's foundation myth as Namibia's "master narrative," that hails how "SWAPO brought us freedom through the barrel of the gun."[219] The state-decreed partial forgetting was meant to reunite Namibia's Black and 'white' community, reintegrate former enemies (i.e., Koevoet, see below) into the nation as well as to cover SWAPO's own atrocities and human rights violations committed during the liberation struggle – to mention only a few points of friction.[220] Despite the existing research on these issues, as well as repeated critique articulated in Namibia's public press, there remains a lack of national debate around the past and its legacies. [221]

Against this background, Amulungu's auto/biographical account contributes to the attempts of earlier autobiographical writers to further a discussion on the country's history. She addresses remaining cleavages and obstacles that hamper national reconciliation – for example, when meeting fellow members of the new Namibian nation, such as former Koevoet soldiers who had moved back into the family neighbourhood. Koevoet, the counterinsurgency unit, consisted of young black men who were recruited by 'white' officers and were placed under their command; they committed numerous brutal crimes against civilians.[222] After independence, they returned to Namibia, "were back at their homes and were now mingling with civilians,"

Sabine Höhn, "International Justice and Reconciliation in Namibia: The ICC Submission and Public Memory," *African Affairs* 109, no. 436 (2010): 475.

217 Akuupa and Kornes, "From 'One Namibia, One Nation,'" 11.

218 Melber, *Understanding Namibia*, 2–3.

219 Akawa, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle*, 2; Heike Becker, "Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana: Memory, Culture and Nationalism in Namibia, 1990–2010," *Africa* 81, no. 4 (November 2011): 522.

220 For a more detailed account see: John S. Saul and Colin Leys, "Lubango and After: 'Forgotten History' as Politics in Contemporary Namibia," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, no. 2 (2003): 333–353.

221 See, for example: Ndumba J. Kamwanyah, "Reconciliation At The Crossroads," *The Namibian*, 1 September 2017, https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?page=archive-read&id=168783. ; Nadja Ofuatey-Alazard and Nicolas Grange, "ReMIX: Africa in Translation: Namibia," *bpb*, 2016, https://www.bpb.de/mediathek/254149/remix-africa-in-translation-namibia.

222 Becker, "Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana," 523; 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 Lindeke (Freiburg i. Br: Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, 2010), 404–405.

as Amulungu observes.[223] The author speaks about the fear she felt when learning of Koevoet's presence in the communities:

> Koevoet had inflicted untold suffering including death among the black Namibian population during the war. Since they were part of the apartheid military machinery, they had stayed in army barracks and they only appeared among the population when there was need to terrorise them. And here they were now, back just like everybody else. [...] Uncertainty, mistrust and suspicion were automatically unavoidable.[224]

Reflections like these show how the post-colonial nation was war-torn, scarred by the legacies of apartheid and was fragmented.[225] Amulungu had to face these lines of division personally, when she and her partner disclosed their relationship to their respective families. Her present voice looks back at the period of silence that followed when Brock dispatched the news to his family: "I knew what they thought and felt about me. I did not blame them. I understood and did not expect anything different. I was born and bred in the same country. That was simply how things were those days."[226] Mindful of her own initial reservations, she understood how "antagonistic views about one another were certainly present and were going to accompany us for a while as a nation."[227] Here, Amulungu's family situation mirrors the challenges of the broader society as a micro-history.[228] Her narrative of private reconciliation emerges as an example on how to overcome cleavages: through empathy and mutual encounters. In many instances throughout her text, the author shows understanding for her husband's family and their prejudices against her: "Today, when I think back as a mother, I can feel what went through the mind of my dear mother-in-law. All mothers want the best for their children. And that best can only be associated with what one is familiar with. Anything else is suspicious, if not mistrusted."[229] By marking her speaking position in the present, Amulungu hints at the possibility

223 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 246–247.

224 Ibid., 247.

225 Akuupa and Kornes, "From 'One Namibia, One Nation,'" 9.

226 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 259.

227 Ibid., 267.

228 Similar to Rassool, literary scholars often speak of auto/biography as "micro-history," *The Individual, Auto/Biography and History in South Africa*, 7. See, for example: Klaas van Walraven (ed.), *The Individual in African History: The Importance of Biography in African Historical Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 33–37; Sigurður G. Magnússon, "The Life Is Never Over: Biography as a Microhistorical Approach," in *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, eds. Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (London: Routledge, 2017), 43–52.

229 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 257.

of perseverance, emphasised by her appreciation of her – today – "*dear* mother-in-law."[230]

The hard-won mutual acceptability, appreciation, and trust between Amulungu and her mother-in-law receives special attention in the book. From a gender perspective, it becomes visible how the women's relationship and Amulungu's daughters in particular were crucial in the slow process of building affiliations. This implied getting acquainted with the places and homes of the respective other families for all family members. Amulungu explains how she was reluctant upon entering the Brock's exclusive worlds in Swakopmund and Klein Windhoek, finding herself in places "where black people would not be."[231] Her need to orient herself in democratic Namibia once again evokes the reverberations of apartheid administration and restriction of spaces, land and territories. With time, Amulungu was able to craft a feeling of home in these previously unknown places of the country and family spaces, to the point where "mingling with each other became a natural state of affairs for our two families."[232]

Figure 12: Photograph after page 190. Caption: "The Brock Clan in Brock Street in Windhoek in 2006."

230 Ibid., my emphasis.
231 Ibid., 263.
232 Ibid., 290.

The author visualises this with numerous family photographs of herself with her children, her husband and both of their families. With regards to the picture above, she explains that it was taken in the context of her husband's German settler family's reunion. As we learnt previously, the Brocks have always actively kept a family archive, documenting their history and cultivating family photography – a tradition that had an impact on Amulungu. Brock's mother, "being a very family loving person, looked for every opportunity to celebrate her family," enjoyed taking photographs – which gestures to the consideration of family photography as gendered practices, as evoked by Langford and to be explored in further detail in chapter 3.[233]

On the occasion of his father's 80th birthday, the family walked to the Brockstrasse to create this family picture. As Amulungu and her husband explained in an interview, the street is named after the family business 'Woermann, Brock & Co.,' as well as after the great-grandfather Max Brock, albeit indirectly, who came to Namibia in 1895.[234] Even today, the family is well-known for their business established in 1894 as well as their private shipping company, the 'Woermann-Linie.'[235] They built important structures for the trade between the colony and the metropole through their different enterprises, thereby playing a central role in Germany's colonial project as entrepreneurs. According to Wilfried Brock, his great-great-uncle Adolph W. Woermann in particular was crucial in these involvements, acting as an outspoken advocate of German colonialism and as an advisor to Otto von Bismarck in colonial affairs.[236]

Casper Erichsen, Nadja Ofuatey-Alazard and Nicolas Grange state how the early generations of the family are said to have participated in the establishment of concentration camps during the war against the Herero and Nama, exploiting prisoners as forced labour for their business.[237] To this, Brock adds that the company organised the transport of 'Schutztrupplern,' horses, war equipment, et cetera and, through such different activities, they emerged as profiteers of German colonial policy in Africa and from the colonial war.[238] Brock speaks directly and in unembellished fashion about the involvement of his family, highlighting how he had no impact on what his ancestors did. He always felt strongly about taking his own stance

233 Amulungu, pers. comm. via email, 28 April 2021; Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 26–27.

234 Brock, pers. comm., 16 May 2022.

235 The business was formerly entitled 'Damara & Namaqua Handelsgesellschaft.' The name was changed in 1909 once other partners were bought out. Brock, pers. comm. via WhatsApp, 15 March 2023.

236 Brock, pers. comm., 16 May 2022.

237 Casper W. Erichsen, *"The Angel of Death Has Descended Violently among Them." Concentration Camps and Prisoners-of-War in Namibia, 1904–08* (Enschede: PrintPartners Ipskamp B.V, 2005), 49, 119; Ofuatey-Alazard and Grange, "ReMIX."

238 Brock, pers. comm., 16 May 2022.; Ofuatey-Alazard and Grange, "ReMIX."

towards politics – for example, when he decided to refuse conscription and instead become a member of SWAPO during the liberation struggle.[239]

Amulungu's decision to incorporate the photograph of the broader Brock family, with its many links to Namibia's violent colonial history, carries many implications. In the face of ongoing campaigns in Namibia and beyond to rename streets that honour European settlers and/or explicitly refer to colonial actors from the past, this image emerges as a sign of conviviality, harmony and reconciliation. Amulungu positions herself in this family constellation as "a proud, tested member of the Brock clan."[240] She neither seems to align straightforwardly with political calls for a 'decolonisation' of the public sphere, nor for the removal, intervention or critique of relics from the colonial past. If she does, then her politics are kept private. In posing for this image, Amulungu claims access to places that had not been welcoming previously. In a way, she inscribes herself into history and positions herself in the public spaces in which the legacies of the past remain visible. Perhaps, like her husband, she takes more private political stances without generalising past and present historical entanglements and the legacies of families. Speaking about the image today, Amulungu explains that, for her, it stands for the couple's achievements, having transcended initial tensions and differences. Looking at the image makes her both acknowledge and appreciate what it means to belong to two distinct cultures.[241]

The author couples the picture with further photographs of everyday life with her daughters and her husband in various places around Namibia, as well as family snapshots in the north, showing the reciprocity of family exchange and the mingling of cultural and social worlds that shape their lives. We see her grandmother sitting on the ground in a homestead, holding Amulungu's twin daughters, or her daughter carrying a baby on her back, pounding Mahangu, while other photographs show mothers and daughters as grown-up women wearing Odelela dresses. With this visual documentation of family life, the author reaffirms her belonging to the north and asserts her remaining bond with Ovambo culture. The poetics of relation and aesthetics of reconciliation that Amulungu conjures with her photographic assemblages allow for contemplation about the ways in which they may "advance claims of affiliation," as Lee-Von Kim writes, asserting how photographs "can be marshalled in the service of a […] family narrative."[242] The narrative evoked is one that celebrates both family harmony and cultural diversity. With images such as the ones

239 Ibid.

240 See, for example: Peter K. W. Tan and Christoph Purschke, "Street Name Changes as Language and Identity Inscription in the Cityscape," *Linguistics Vanguard* 7, no. 5 (August 2021): 1–13; Dagmar Wittek, "Berlin Swaps Signs on Streets with Colonial Names," *DW*, 12 February 2022, https://www.dw.com/en/berlin-swaps-signs-on-streets-with-colonial-names/video-63973566.; Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 293.

241 Amulungu, pers. comm. via email, 30 March 2021.

242 Ibid., 403; 414.

described above, or statements like, "[s]uch is the beauty of cultural diversity," Amulungu's auto/biographical account seems to align with SWAPO's conception of unity "through the tolerant accommodation of cultural difference."[243] Much in line with SWAPO ideals, the family is conflating Namibia's diverse cultures in one space – in the microcosm of the family and as citizens of the national space Namibia.

However, despite this proximity to SWAPO narratives, Amulungu's auto/biographical account is not a mere reflection of the nation as a microhistory. She attends to the difficult path as a "mixed-couple" to feel accepted and to feel at home in post-colonial Namibia.[244] Reflecting back on their marriage just after independence, the author writes: "I could feel the heavy look at us. This was not a common wedding in the Namibia of those days."[245] She continues: "By the time we married, there were no more than five other mixed couples in Windhoek, if not in the entire country. It was a novelty and we attracted attention as we moved around."[246] Even today, many Namibians are still perplexed about her family constellation, which is often still perceived as a rarity: "In Namibia, although bit by bit it's happening, many people still think it's a difficult life. Some of my friends look at me and say 'poor you.' But I don't feel poor."[247]

Amulungu claims visibility and acceptance for her family and her design of life by positioning herself and her book in this larger Namibian community and confronting such reactions. She writes to attest to her experiences, as a mother, a wife, a refugee, a repatriate and as a Namibian. Stuart Hall reminds us: "It is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are."[248] Hence, in writing her auto/biographical account and constituting the self through photographic curatorial practices, Amulungu gathers scattered fragments from the past, fills gaps in family histories and constructs an archive herself, to pass on to her children and the following generations, for them to draw on and learn from as a way forward to a better future.

243 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 274; Becker, "Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana," 538.

244 Amulungu, pers. comm. via email, 30 March 2021.

245 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*, 274.

246 Ibid., 281.

247 Amulungu, pers. comm. via email, 30 March 2021.

248 Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Social Justice* 20, no. 1/2 (51–52) (Spring-Summer 1993): 111.

1.3: Conclusion

As referenced in this book's introduction , Muholi once remarked that "the archive means we are counted in history" – a statement that evokes that some kind of visual or textual record is a prerequisite for being inscribed into the past, present and future.[249] We have seen how, in the cases of Ulla Dentlinger and Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, their slim family archives as well as official archival repositories were unable to attest to their life journeys. To counter this, both authors have created hybrid image-texts that document their childhood past in rural, colonial Namibia, personal sacrifices, separation and identity crises. Placing these accounts alongside each other helps to transcend an internal partition of Namibian historiography that commonly runs along racial lines. While both writers share ground, in how they attempt to correct the ways in which Namibian history has been written, a closer look at the distinct meta-narratives that they are writing against uncovers the distinct corrective impulses that are central to their works.

Dentlinger's *Where Are You From? 'Playing White' Under Apartheid* speaks to the permeability of race and class statuses and the ways in which these were interconnected. Her book reveals the fluidity and inconsistencies of racial identifications: Where apartheid narratives on clear-cut identity categories suggested clarity around subject positions, Dentlinger's deconstruction of 'whiteness' offers intimate insights into the emotional struggle connected with imposed identity categories as well as with aspirations to escape them. In this way, her book not only contests apartheid narratives, but also family taboos that aimed to hide and to silence a complex and difficult legacy. By comparison, Amulungu's *Taming My Elephant* also generates a personal archive that was priorly absent. However, the voids that she addresses are different to those that Dentlinger sought to fill. As official framings of exile, the return to the post-colony and national reconciliation omit the challenges and personal sacrifices, Amulungu shares her private family story to trouble and extend one-dimensional SWAPO narratives.

Discussing Dentlinger's and Amulungu's auto/biographical accounts alongside one another elucidates the challenges connected to this work. For both, writing their books involved gathering scattered or previously undocumented information, conducting oral research and tracing photographs of the past. Moreover, both share their personal experiences of loss, pain and longing in a life of constant transition. While for Amulungu the struggle to find a place in Namibian society and historiography ended well, for Dentlinger, after having left Namibia and maintaining a critical distance from her country of origin, the post-colonial nation did not seem to hold any promises. Reaffirming her roots in the country remains difficult in light of the identity crises that she has endured. In this vein, the women's auto/biographical

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

accounts are not self-indulgent celebratory success stories, but are instead negotiations of a troubling past that remains haunting in Namibia.[250]

Photography's role plays a crucial part in this. As we have seen, family photographs can trigger auto/biographical storytelling; as memory images, they prompt processes of reflection.[251] In addition to these functions, the selected images in Amulungu's and Dentlinger's books contribute decisively to both the tone and affect of their work. Interlacing their narrative with photography evokes a sense of intimacy. Shirley Jordan writes: "As it explores the potential of telling through showing, visual autobiography plays with photography's propensity to position us as intimates, privy to what only those closest to the autobiographical subject would normally see."[252] Her observations point to the potential of positing the reader as an intimate. Yet, Dentlinger and Amulungu also expose themselves to a degree of vulnerability in this practice, given that they open their narratives of self and family photographs to a public audience.

In doing so, they not only allow for empathetic engagements with an individual's past and Namibian complexities, but there is also a subversive, political dimension to this practice. The authors' themselves craft "affective archives" in the face of Namibia's history of knowledge extraction (with colonial archives having been established and built by the colonial regime and with history largely having been written and told by colonial agents), and in the face of a sparse family archive to hold on to.[253] Amulungu and Dentlinger restore, secure and renegotiate the past as curators, authors, archivists and as researchers. Their affective archives are not only repositories of the self, but – as introduced previously when borrowing from Andrew van der Vlies – both women are "playing host to the stories of others" as they are accommodating and paying tribute to the experiences of friends and family members with their auto/biographical accounts.[254] Drawing loosely on Éduoard Glissant helped to show how, with their self-reflexive, affective approach, Amulungu's and Denlinger's intimate counter-narratives employ a 'poetics of relation' to situate themselves in relation to others, past selves and past homes that are no longer there. They also po-

250 In reference to Smith and Watson's discussion on the reproach that autobiographies as narcissistic and self-absorbed narratives of a subject's life. See: Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run*., n.pag.

251 Kawashima, *Autobiographie Und Photographie Nach 1900*, 9.

252 Shirley Jordan, "Chronicles of Intimacy: Photography in Autobiographical Projects," in *Textual and Visual Selves: Photography, Film, and Comic Art in French Autobiography*, eds. Amy L. Hubbell, Ann Miller and Natalie Edwards (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 53.

253 Kesting, "Affective Archives"; van der Vlies, "Queer Knowledge and the Politics of the Gaze in Contemporary South African Photography," 152.

254 van der Vlies, "The Archive, the Spectral, and Narrative Responsibility," 584.

sition themselves in the present by conjuring a poetics of identity construction that allows for an empathetic discourse about the past.[255]

255 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*; Coullie et al., *Selves in Question*, 1–2.