



By PRINCE K 08/10/2017

The Land, you bear witness to  
Is NO ORDINARY soil  
IT is the dried blood OF those CHILDREN  
LOST to the night  
IT is the dust  
in the dustbin of history  
WHICH was forced into our eyes  
As INHERITANCE

This Land...  
Is the debris of destroyed homesteads  
Of a people crushed, cattle confiscated  
It is the fossil remain of all that and more  
THE Ghost in the room dressed all in white  
IT is the MURMUR of MANACLED memories  
NOW suffering from acute amnesia  
UNDER The new demon-craftic arrangement

This Land...  
IS THE trees whose truth lies under ground  
IT IS the MOUNTAINS vomiting smoke every morning  
THE fire is the sun in our faces  
MANY a star can bear witness  
The minister of land is but a MINI-STAR\*  
SHINING not further than his own reality.

“This Land” – is a poetic intervention on land issues. (As Prince says “A poem is a historical document”).

This page is viewed as a transparency and the text of the poem overlays the first page of Chapter 3 as visual invocation of the palimpsest. The reader should imagine the words of the poet imposing themselves on the underlying academic endeavour and superseding the scholar's faint text underneath.

## CHAPTER 3: STORIES OF SAND

When printed on paper, the previous page (Prince's poem about the land) is viewed as a transparency and overlays the first page of this chapter. For a digital rendering of this palimpsest, see page 36.

To see a World in a grain of Sand  
And Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your Hand  
And Eternity in an Hour

William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence* (1803)

### 1. Introduction

Sand has always fascinated me: its materiality, its texture, and its hue. How could there be so much of something so small all over the planet? How could it be so finite yet so infinite? And why doesn't it all fly away? Does gravity keep it here and bring it back when it blows in the wind? I relish its touch, feel from the smallest grains found to the largest. Each grain is the product of a slow transformation – from rock to grains, eroding over millennia. The fine golden sand of the Port Alfred beaches in the Eastern Cape was the first type of sand to hold sentiment for me regardless of its place of origin. At this beach I spent time in my childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

The red sand of the Kalahari was my next love, the Kalahari being shared by South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. I was intrigued by its fine consistency and vibrant, glowing red colour, as well as its aesthetic quality. It became a source of inspiration in my art, and I wondered how I could work with it. It was this sand which inspired one of my first artistic experiments with sand as an art material (see Figure 16). I was travelling through the Namib desert and found rusted wire at an abandoned work site. I began to construct the dragon out of this. Later, on a trip to the Kalahari Desert, I collected the sand. At home in my studio, I was inspired to combine the two elements because of the similarity of the red rust and the red sand. So I built up layers of sand to 'flesh' out the dragon. It developed into a kinetic mobile sculpture casting beautiful shadows in motion. This inspired the title for an interactive mixed media exhibition with spontaneous poetry, *Dancing with the Desert Dragon*, held at Loft Gallery, Windhoek in 1996 (see Figure 17).

CHAPTER 3 STORIES OF SAND

# This Land...

The previous page (Prince's poem about the land) is viewed as a transparency and overlays the first page of this chapter to resemble a palimpsest.

## A poetic intervention

To see a World in a grain of Sand  
And Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your Hand  
And Eternity in an Hour

By PRINCE K 08/10/2017

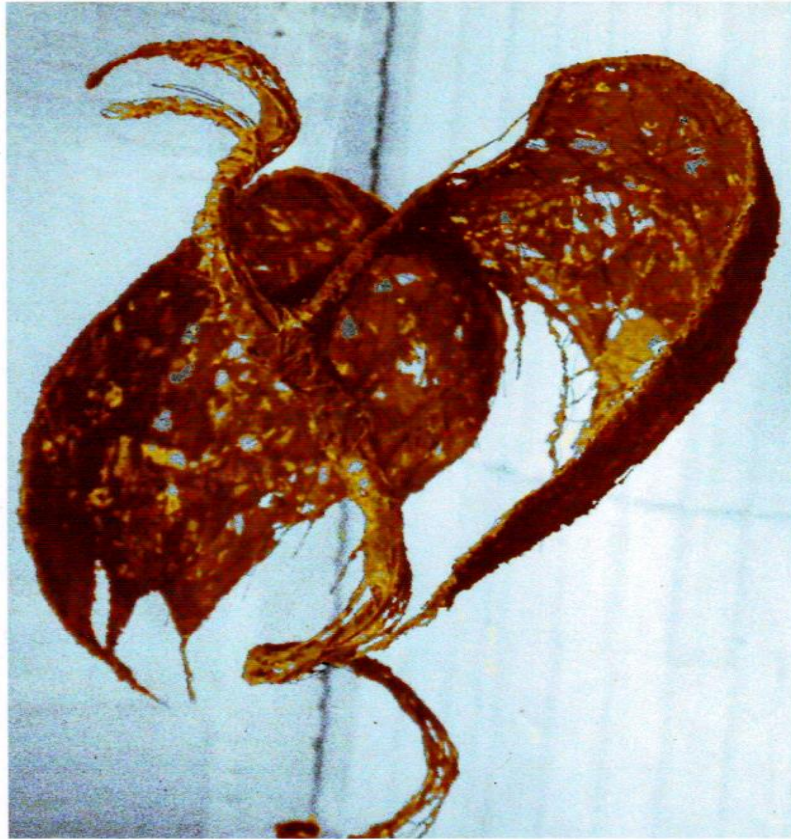
William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence* (1803)

The Land, you bear witness to  
Is NO ORDINARY soil  
IT is the dried blood OF those CHILDREN  
LOST to the night  
IT is the dust  
Sand has always fascinated me: its materiality, its texture, and its hue. How could there be  
in the dustbin of history  
WHICH was forced into our eyes  
As INHERITANCE  
And why doesn't it all fly away? Does gravity keep it here and bring it back when it blows in  
This Land.  
the wind? I relish its touch, feel from the smallest grains found to the largest. Each grain is  
Is the debris of destroyed homesteads  
Of people crushed, cattle mistreated  
It is the fossil remain of all that and more  
golden sand of the Port Alfred beaches in the Eastern Cape was the first type of sand to  
THE Ghost in the room dressed all in white  
It is the MUMMUR of MAGICALS memories  
NOW suffering from acute amnesia  
childhood, adolescence and adulthood.  
UNDER The new demon-craftic arrangement

This Land...  
IS THE red sand whose thuribles under ground  
IT IS the MOUNTAINS vomiting smoke every morning  
THE fire is the sun in our faces  
MANY a star bear witness  
The minister of land is but a MINISTAR\*  
SHINING not further than his own reality.

experiments with sand as an art material (See Figure 16). I was travelling through the Namib  
"This Land" is a poetic intervention on land issues. (As Prince says "A poem is a historical  
document")  
of this. Later, on a trip to the Kalahari Desert, I collected the sand. At home in my studio I  
was inspired to combine the two elements because of the similarity of the red rust and the  
red sand. So I built up layers of sand to 'flesh' out the dragon. It developed into a kinetic  
This piece evolved as a beautiful shadow in motion. This inspired the title for an interactive  
Chapter 3 as visual invocation of the palimpsest. The reader with the Desert Dragon, held at  
mixed media exhibition with spontaneous poetry, *Dancing with the Desert Dragon*, held at  
Loft Gallery, Windhoek in 1996 (See Figure 17), academic endeavour and superseding the  
scholar's faint text underneath.





## DESERT DRAGON

Wire & Kalahari Sand  
(L = 112cm x 80cm)

Figure 16: Kay Cowley. *Desert Dragon* (Found rusted wire and Kalahari sand 1994).

*The Loft Gallery*  
presents multi-media works by the artist  
**Kay Cowley**



You are cordially invited to the opening of the exhibition "Dancing with the Desert Dragon" on Tuesday the 8th October 1996 at 19:30 at the Loft Gallery,  
Enke House, 59 Birkhof Street, Windhoek.  
Telephone: 857 55011

*Dancing with the Desert Dragon*  
the Experience in multi-media art

*A whole story - ours to some of the artworks:*  
*Desert Dragon:* The title of the exhibition is derived from this work, which is best described as a hanging sculpture, created from rusted wire, gauze and Kalahari desert sand. Its positioning transforms it from a conventional artwork to an innovative interpretation of common mythology combined with the natural forces of wind and weather in a "senseless form".

*Snake:* Representing, this is the principal snake personified in shimmering orange, red and burgundy wire, twisted, fused and coiled like a spring, ready to dance with the winds.

*Rakpanda:* A presentation of the classical fertility theme, embodied in stone, exuding an air of simplicity and innocence.

*Mama Africa:* A stone torso, representing the archetypal mother of Africa, simultaneously fierce and feminine.

*Together:* This universal theme is explored in a variety of media and presentation.

*If Fishes were Wishes:* ... or Wishes were fishes, the rains would never be late again, as the title of this work derives from the Oshonmba proverb for the blessing of the wishes: "The fish are coming."

*Liberty:* Based on Delacroix's "Liberty leading the people", this image questions the elusive perception of modern day women in contemporary society.

*Message:* An ecological exploration of "...where will we be in the 21st Century?" (E. Long)



*Rakpanda:* Stone sculpture, 565mm x 215mm

Figure 17: Flyer for the opening of *Dancing with the Desert Dragon* (1996).

This chapter explores the stories of sand with specific reference to geology, creation myths, proverbs and conversation with people in the Waterberg. [These pages are viewed as transparent and semi-transparent surfaces and layered to create a palimpsest of stories.](#) Sand functions as a metaphor for land too – although each is a distinct concept, I will show how they are connected culturally, politically, and aesthetically. Sand as a geological substance is discussed, as well as specific types of sand found in Namibia, such as Alluvium sand, Arenosols and Dune sand, to cite but a few (Figure 18). The uses of sand are also mentioned and elaborated on by referring to practices such as cultural rituals and the nutritional benefits of termite hill sand. Structures of sand occurring in nature, such as termite hills, are explored. Sand as sentiment underscores creation myths and sayings of sand. I then focus on stories of sand collected from my chosen sand sites, in the Waterberg, Namibia. The exploitation of sand and illegal sand mining in Namibia, and its effects on our environment, are discussed. I conclude with examples of inspiring artists using sand as an art medium.

## **2. Infinity in a grain of sand**

Blake saw not only infinity in a grain of sand, but also eternity. The smallest of particles, yet the most underestimated, sand is the end product of millennia – particles of ancient mountains, the very origins and bedrock of our Earth. It is constantly changing, yet everlasting. The particles make up the whole. They make up our Earth – the soil that we depend on to nurture us all. Sand-soil-land – this defines our identities, our origins, our cultures, our sense of place. Our history on this earth is written and rewritten, like the palimpsest, in sand.

Focusing on the environment – the sand/the land – that precarious desert environment of Namibia with its sensitive ecology and its tenuous balance between desert and water, becomes a vital source of artistic exploration. It draws a parallel with now fragile traditional environmental practices, contrasting with contemporary urban multicultural society in a fast-developing technological world. Thus, my intention is to create works of art that explore a *sense of place* in terms of identity in the oasis, Waterberg, in my home country, Namibia. With this goal in mind, I must mine the stories of sand, and research its history as a metaphor and cultural signifier of meaning.

While there is minimal documentation on the use of sand as an artistic medium,<sup>1</sup> there is an existing literature on the use of sand as an art form<sup>2</sup>, as in traditional cultural practices, site-

---

<sup>1</sup> Documentation on the technical and artistic practice of the material itself is hard to find, other than in commercial sand art craft applications. Over the years, I have explored and developed my own techniques and combinations of emulsions in relation to a variety of sand types.

<sup>2</sup> See section 5, Sand as an art medium.

specific art, sand sculpture and craft applications. These sources include Tibetan and Buddhist sand mandalas, beach sand sculpture and commercial sand craft. What is lacking are contemporary aesthetic exploration and multi-disciplinary documentation of sand as a signifier of meaning, specifically in Namibian art. This study serves, at least partially, to address this gap in existing knowledge.

Contextualised within Ashcroft's (1989) post-colonial approach in *The Empire writes back*, the way sand is used and described in Namibian cultures is explored. Ashcroft, in his chapter "Place and displacement", maintains: "[i]t is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (Ashcroft 1989:8). Here, in post-independent Namibia, we share views on sand from a Namibian perspective – an African regard for the soil of a source of origin, identity and growth.

The concept of the palimpsest as layered past-and-present historical perspectives occurs not only in history, but also in ecology and geology, as time rewriting the terrain continuously. And sand plays a role in this, especially in the makings of the Namib Desert:<sup>3</sup>

The sands that make up the sand sea are a consequence of erosional processes that take place within the Orange [Gariep] River valley and areas further to the south. As sand-laden waters drop their suspended loads into the Atlantic, onshore currents deposit them along the shore. The prevailing south west winds then pick up and redeposit the sand in the form of massive dunes in the widespread sand sea, the largest sand dunes in the world. In areas where the supply of sand is reduced because of the inability of the sand to cross riverbeds, the winds also scour the land to form large gravel plains (Spriggs 2016:1).

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Bagnold (1974:19-20) speaks of traveling sands as rewriters of terrain. Like on a palimpsest, sand erases and inscribes geological time.

### **3. Sand as substance**

Words that come to mind when discussing the materiality of sand are planet (Gaya); earth; land; ground; terra; sand; loam; clay; mud; silt; and dust. The geological properties of the types of sand in Namibia are analysed through information on soil distribution in the country (Africa Soil Information 2013). Sand keys of the different sand sites in the Waterberg are created for this study in Chapter 3: 'The Story of the Waterberg.'

---

<sup>3</sup> The Namib Desert comprises of the Skeleton Coast and the Kaokoveld in the north, and the widespread Namib Sand Sea along the central coast (Spriggs 2016:1).

In this section, the geological and ecological background of sand is explored within the framework of geological enquiry as explained in *The changing earth: exploring geology and evolution* by James Monroe and Reed Wicander (2011). This concept is supported by Geoff Bailey's<sup>4</sup> paper "Time perspectives, palimpsests and the archaeology of time" where he explores "... the meaning of time perspectivism, its relationship to other theories of time used in archaeological interpretation, and the ways in which it can be implemented through an analysis of the palimpsest nature of the material world we inhabit" (Bailey 2006:1).

It is within this context that he defines palimpsests as:

... [a] universal phenomenon of the material world [which] form[s] a series of overlapping categories, [varying] according to their geographical scale, temporal resolution and completeness of preservation. Archaeological examples are used to show how different types of palimpsest can be analyzed to address different sorts of questions about the time dimension of human experience, and the relationship between different types of processes and different scales of phenomena.

Michael Welland's<sup>5</sup> book *Sand, the never-ending story* (2009:iii) provides material on sand as substance. Here sand is defined, its evolution clarified, uses explored, and its ecological planetary role illuminated. Welland draws links between the surface of the earth and other planets in the solar system – all having a common denominator, namely sand. An example are the dunes on Mars.

Contrary to popular opinion, what defines sand is not substance, but size. Particle size, used by geologists, range in diameter from 0.0625 mm (or  $\frac{1}{16}$  mm) to 2 mm. A particle in this size range is termed a sand grain (Welland 2009:9). Although most sand consists of quartz grains, places such as beaches contain sand which is from crustaceans. Sand has also evolved from rock and volcanic lava (Welland 2009:3). Over and above this, it is fascinating to find out that a grain of sand can evolve through many lifetimes over eons:

The whole process is cyclic, over and over again, each time the grains carrying with them microscopic evidence of their parentage, their genetic origins. The majority of quartz sand grains are derived from the disintegration of older sandstones; perhaps half of all sand grains have been through six cycles in the mill, liberated, buried, exposed, and liberated again ... reborn repeatedly (Welland 2009:6).

---

<sup>4</sup> Geoff Baily works at the Department of Archaeology, University of York, United Kingdom.

<sup>5</sup> "Michael Welland is a geologist who has worked around the world in the energy industry. Publisher of many books, including *Deserts*, he is a fellow of the Geological Societies of America and London and the Royal Society for the Arts and Commerce" (University of California Press [s.a.]).

Loes Moddermann's microscopic photograph (Figure 18) of grains of sand reveals a world in a grain of sand where the components that make up the particle are evident at a microscopic level.

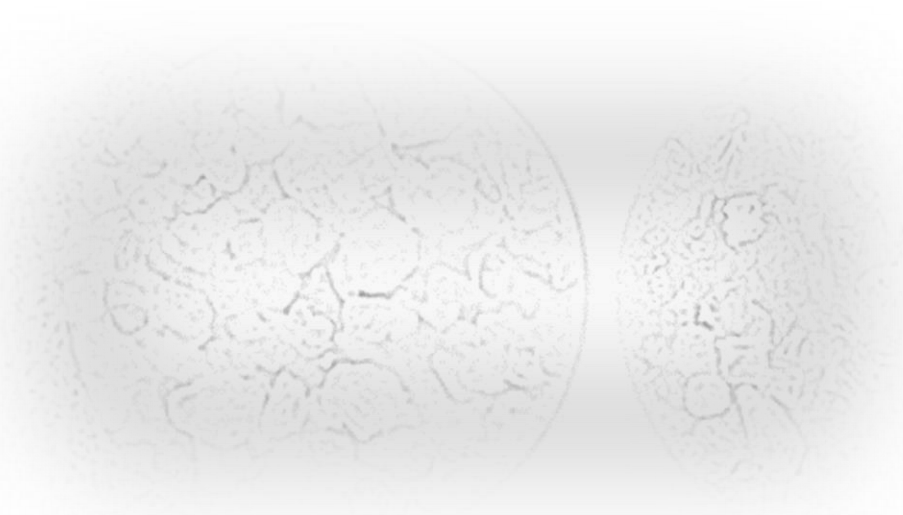


Figure 18: Loes Moddermann's microscopic photograph of grains of sand (Voice of America, 14 April 2010).

Sand, in quantity, as in deserts such as the Gobi, produces sound. The term 'singing sands' is derived from that (Fessenden 2015:B14). It is a booming sound created by the sand grains rubbing against each other as the desert dunes move.

### **3.1 Types of sand in Namibia**

The main types of soils in Namibia are listed by the University of Cologne (2015) as: Alluvium (sand, gravel and calcrete plains), Arenosols, Calcisols, Cambisols, Coastal salt plains, Dune sand, Fluvisols, Gypsisols, Leptosols, Luvisols, Regosols, Rock outcrops, Solonchaks and Solonchets. Figure 19 shows the geological distribution of the different dominant soil groups of Namibia. Nevertheless, a variety of sand, with varying compositions, can be found in one identified area.



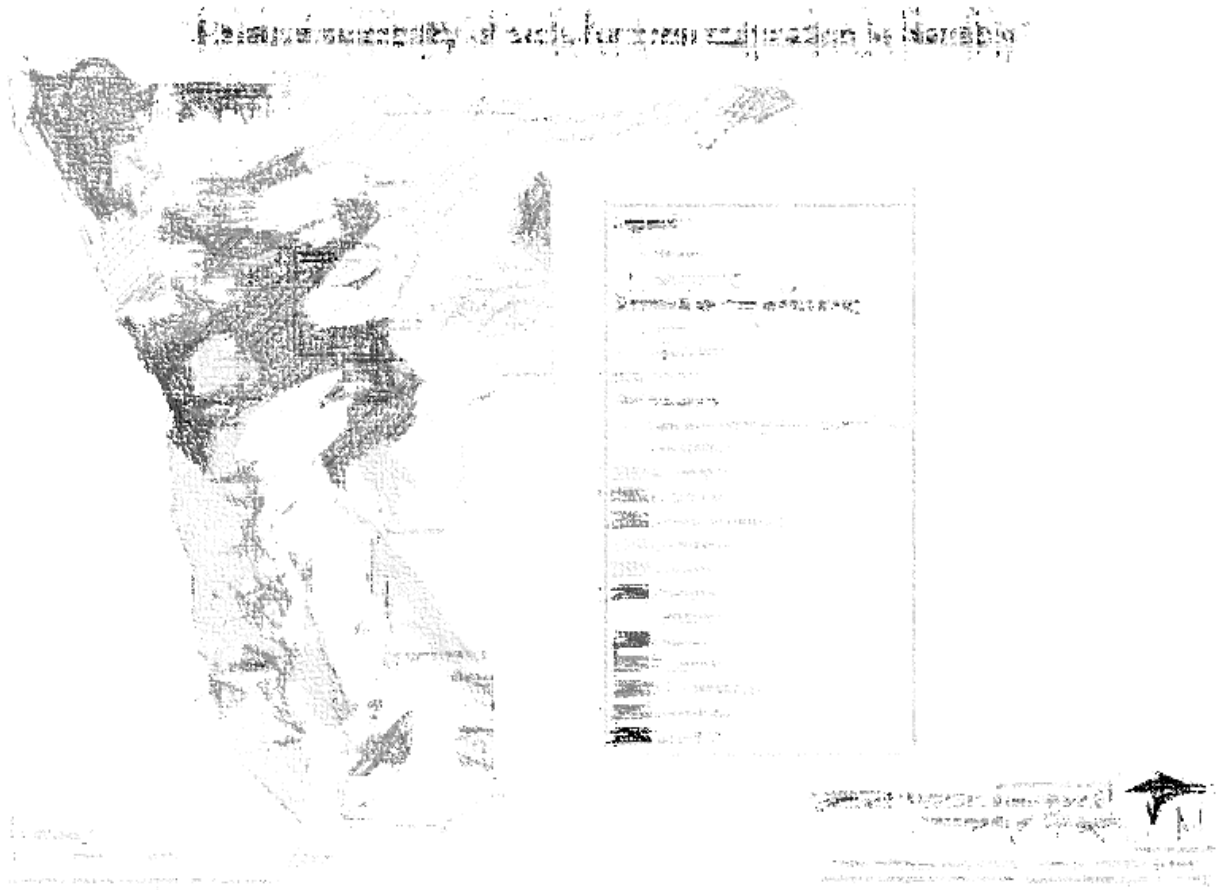


Figure 19: Relative suitability of crop cultivation in Namibia (University of Cologne, 2003).

### 3.2 Uses of sand

The uses of sand are infinite. For a seemingly inconsequential substance, sand is vital to much of our industry, past and present. In the eras of scroll writing, the inkpot was accompanied by the sand pot. Sand was sprinkled over the ink to assist in drying it. Time was measured by the movement of sand in sand timers, and these were made of glass. Sand is also used for the production of glass and mirrors. It is used to create abrasives such as sandpaper and grinding discs.

Sand is also used for building, construction and cement. Our fast-moving global urban development is using sand at an unprecedented rate. Whilst sand may seem unimportant and unnoticed at first, it has become a vital ingredient in our modern lives for the construction of cities, roads and windows. It has also been used to create land extensions and artificial land masses, for example in Holland and Dubai.

In e-technology sand is used for phone and computer screens, silicon chips, solar panels and other electronic equipment. This material continuity between a finger drawing in sand and swiping a touch screen is quite uncanny ... And until today it is not uncommon for people to draw maps in the sand for each other, indicating direction and features of terrain.<sup>6</sup>

According to Vince Beiser<sup>7</sup> (2019a:2) "... sand is also the second most consumed natural resource" after water. He continues by saying that "... people use some 50 billion tonnes of 'aggregate' – the industry term for sand and gravel, which tend to be found together – every year" (Beiser 2019a:3). This has resulted in sand exploitation and illegal sand mining which is discussed later in this chapter (Section 5). As a result, sand exploitation and illegal sand mining are having a detrimental effect on our environment, rivers, estuaries, deltas and oceans. Most importantly, sand is vital for our environment as well as agricultural and animal production. We are therefore dependent on it for our very survival.

### **3.3 Structures of sand**

In this section I briefly discuss types of structures of sand created in nature. For example, wasps, certain types of bees such as 'rooibye'<sup>8</sup>, swallows and termites use sand to build their nests – their own personal brand of architecture.

#### **3.3.1 Sandcastles of Namibia**

The termite hills, as shown in Figure 20, dominate the savannahs of Namibia and are locally termed 'sandcastles of Namibia'. They house complex communities of termites which play a popular role in Namibian cuisine. There are different types of edible termites, both winged and crawling, especially during the rainy season. During this time of the year, huge mushrooms grow on the termite mounds and are also considered delicacies by many Namibian cultural communities. Termite hill sand also plays a part in the building of huts, the making of mud bricks and is also used for nutrition and as a dietary supplement (see 4.1.3 Sand sites and stories).

---

<sup>6</sup> This links to the palimpsest of maps of the Waterberg I have created in Chapter 4 and my own palimpsest 'sand map' of the Waterberg. Instead of drawing into sand, I have drawn with sand in my artist's workbook on the pages of "New Africa".

<sup>7</sup> Vince Beiser is the author of *The World in a grain: the story of sand and how it transformed Civilisation*.

<sup>8</sup> Afrikaans for red bees which are common to the Namibian highlands, deserts and savannahs.



Figure 20: Termite Hill, C22, Namibia, Africa (Photograph by author 2015).

### 3.3.2 Desert roses

Colloquially known as desert roses or sand roses, these rose-like formations of crystal clusters of gypsum and sand grains are unique to parts of Namibia's desert coastline, especially in places outside Swakopmund<sup>9</sup>, Henties Bay<sup>10</sup> and Luderitz<sup>11</sup>, where they grow in the desert. The climate of the Namib coast is unique as fog created by the cold Atlantic Ocean meets the hot Namib desert air, creating condensation. Today, desert roses are becoming increasingly rare. The large structures of the past are seldomly seen anymore (see Figure 21).



Figure 21: Sand Rose. (Photograph by author 2020.)

---

<sup>9</sup> Coastal town on the edge of the Namib desert, and the Atlantic Ocean.

<sup>10</sup> Coastal town south of Swakopmund and the Sossussvlei desert, and north of Oranjemund.

<sup>11</sup> Coastal town north of Swakopmund.

#### 4. Sand as sentiment

Godfrey Baldacchino's<sup>12</sup> article on "Re-placing materiality. A Western anthropology of sand" describes sand as that which has "... become a powerful visual, emotive and experiential component of tourism" and "ventures an ontological explanation for the Western world's acquired and now gripping fascination with this particularly mundane material". He argues that:

This engagement with sand's materiality is a culturally determined response, and extension of an encounter with what is seen to be real, in the context of a contemporary experience that is increasingly given over to virtual objects and representations (Baldacchino 2010:763).

Those who collect sand for aesthetic and sentimental reasons, often do so because of the origin of the sand. In this sense, sand is a signifier for both personal and narrative meaning.

What is it about the idea that within its minuteness a grain of sand encapsulates greater things, that it is a metaphor for a grander scale, that it has a story to tell? There is a temptation to anthropomorphize, to gaze into the weather-beaten face of a sand grain and see ourselves reflected, our own life stories, our own journeys, our own worlds, to see the grain as an individual with a *character*, as well as a member of a family and larger clans, extended global tribes (Welland 2009:iii).

For those who experience a fascination with sand, Welland (2009:14) clarifies that:

Sand collectors call themselves *arenophiles*, or 'sand lovers', from a mixture of Latin and Greek. The word *arena* derives from the ancient Roman habit of covering the ground in amphitheatres with sand (*harena* or *arena* in Latin) – to soak up blood.

From a 'sand lover's' perspective, the above definition is very unromantic. He continues that, "[t]he pure Greek would be *psammophile*" which "is commonly used also to describe plants and creatures that are sand-loving, forging a livelihood among the grains" (Welland 2009:14). This has a more symbiotic association with sand as an ecological bedrock for life and sustenance.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Godfrey Baldacchino is Canada Research Chair (Island Studies) at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada; Visiting Professor of Sociology at the University of Malta, Malta; and Executive Editor of *Island Studies Journal*. Authored and edited books are *Global Tourism and Informal Labour Relations* (Pinter 1997) and *Extreme Tourism: Lessons from the World's Cold Water Islands* (Elsevier 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Whilst soil comprises of liquids, solids and gases consisting mostly of organic matter and "sand is a natural material that consists of at least 85 percent sand-sized particles ... made up of quartz, or silicon dioxide", the one cannot exist without the other, as sand is a component of soil (difference between sand and soil). This study focuses on sand, because Namibia, being a desert country, consists of more sand than soil. The varying sands do, however, contain their own ecosystems and certain desert plant life can only grow in sand.

## 4.1 Creation myths

The sands of time rewrite our histories, identities, faiths, beliefs, perceptions. Sand is fundamental to the geology of our planet, so aptly named Earth. Not only is it global, but it is also universal as regards other planets such as Mars with its Martian dunes. Aside from its geology, sand is imbued with spiritual references in the creation myths, fables and artistic expressions in many cultural groups all over the world.

Producers Bernd Eichinger and Dieter Geissler created the fantasy film *The never-ending story* (1984) based on the novel *Die unendliche Geschichte* (1979) by Michael Ende. The tale revolves around a grain of sand which symbolises imagination in a dying world called Fantasia. The protagonists' quest to save this last grain – and thus imagination – forms the plot of the story.

Many early civilisations all over the world tell of creation myths where grains of sand are the fundamental components of the Earth's creation. Many also believe that their Creator formed the people and animals of Earth with clay (sand and water), and then breathed life into them. David A. Leeming's<sup>14</sup> *Creation myths of the world* narrates examples of this. For example, in Africa, the Shiluk from the Nile in the Sudan refer to their God as 'Juok', who created man from clay. He fashioned Europeans from white clay, Arabs from reddish-brown clay and Africans from black earth (2010:242). Efe, the Congolese creator, made Baatsi (man) out of clay, covered him with skin and filled him with blood. The Malagasy creator noticed his daughter making dolls out of clay and took a liking to them and breathed life into them. And thus, the first people were created. In Polynesia, their God made the first woman out of red clay (2010:11). Red clay itself – and red ochre – hold many spiritual and religious connotations in many cultures, including Namibia's Ovahimba. In the Bible, God made Adam from dust, and breathed life into him.

Michael Welland's book *Sand – the never-ending story* (2009) refers to a creation story told by the people of the Pacific Northwest. Their ancestors, the mermaid and the raven, are the protagonists. The raven was circling the endless ocean when he saw and fell in love with a beautiful mermaid. He asked her to marry him, and she agreed on condition that he made her some land where she could sit on a beach and dry her hair. The raven procured the help of the seal and the frog to retrieve some sand from the bottom of the ocean:

---

<sup>14</sup> David A. Leeming, PhD, is professor emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT.



The raven then flew up into the strong winds above the ocean and scattered the grains to every corner of the world. At the place where each grain fell into the ocean, an island was formed: small islands from the tiny grains, large ones from the biggest grains (Welland 2009).

And that was how the world began. The marsh people living in a floating world created by marsh islands featured in the Tad Williams novel *Memory, sorrow and thorn* (London 1993) refer to their creator as “He who steps on sand”. In a land of water, marsh and no solid land, it is only a divine being that will be able to step on solid ground.

## 4.2 Sayings of sand

In the Otjiherero language, a number of proverbs and idioms feature sand in the form of dust and mud. These are found in Jekura Uaurika Kavari’s<sup>15</sup> book *Omiano vya Tjipangandjara. Otjiherero proverbs and Idioms*.

The proverb, “*Sosanyo pao kuvanyo*” in its literal translation means “fat mouth must give to dust mouth”. The origin of this is that “[w]ealthy people’s mouths are smeared with fat because they are well-fed, while poor people’s mouths are dry because they have very little to eat”. The general meaning and context are that “[t]he rich should use their wealth to assist the poor” (Kavari 2013:51).

Another proverb, “*Ondengapo/ohoze kai nu ondanda/omunoko*” translates as “[t]he first to come does not drink mud” of which the origin is “[t]he cattle in front come first at the waterhole and drink the cleanest water because cattle walk in the pond while drinking and the water becomes muddy. Therefore those that come later will drink muddy water”. The general meaning for this is: “[h]e who arrives first has a better chance or gets the better choice” (Kavari 2013:57).

“*Ehi ra ura ovikombe, ovakazendu v aura ovarumendu*” has as its literal translation: “[d]ust conquered brooms and wives conquered husbands”. This has as its origin: “[w]hen the dust in a room piles up and becomes too much, brooms will find it difficult to sweep the dust away. When women talk too much, men find it difficult to control them” (patriarchal assumptions noted ...). The general implication is that “[t]he situation has changed and things are in

---

<sup>15</sup> Professor Kavari is Head of the Languages Department at the University of Namibia. He holds a PhD in African Oral Literature from the school of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (UNAM Press, University of Namibia, 2013).

disarray”. “It is used when a situation has become unmanageable” (Kavari 2013:148) (... gender bias noted ...).

### **4.3 Sand sites and stories**

On 5 and 6 December 2018, while doing my research in the Waterberg, I had semi-structured conversations on the significance of sand with a number of persons living and working in this area. Their individual narratives are found on the pages that follow, reproduced with their permission, and with ethical clearance granted by the University of Pretoria (GW20180839HS).

The following individual narratives are viewed on transparent and semi-transparent pages in the hardcopy version of this thesis. See the overlays on pages 54 and 55 to resemble this effect on screen: the palimpsestic characteristics of human storytelling: layered, multiple, ephemeral, fading and resurfacing.

**Gelasuis Kaneyumara (1966-05-05)** has worked at the Waterberg Plateau Park as a cashier, waiter, and trainer of staff for 27 years. What follows is his story about sand:

My people, the Cheireigu are from Okavango. We have *lesovangani* (black sand) for planting *mealies* and *mahangu*. Like in the Waterberg – the citrus orchards – this sand is also black. It has vitamins, like in Tsumeb, where things grow well. The *lezere* (white sand) – well, you can't plant well there. But if you add cattle dung to the white sand it can turn black for planting. The white sand is not strong. River sand is for building and making bricks. In Okavango, *maguni* trees (lemon trees), are from God, if you dig under the sand there it is black. Food in the bush is from God. It is the traditional food of the elders.

Near the huts, they plant the trees, and crouch under them, rubbing their hands together with white bird droppings (*guanna*) and sand, to call on the ancestors for help, hunting or planting, and thanking them too. These are the stories of the ancestors. We call sand *efu* which is also land. *Efu lietu* is motherland.

My people use sand for planting and building. Clay from the river is for houses and pots. Children make cattle and cars for toys. Sand is important for planting, housing, and cultural production. Sand mining (exploitation) in Namibia is the same as in Rundu, where they are cutting down the trees. We get food from these trees – *nozivi* (red fruits). *Nogongo* trees make *kaspembe* (alcohol). The village chiefs must stop illegal sand mining, or else trees and crops can't grow. What about the future? No shade – no food. No sand – no land. It is because of the black sand in the Waterberg that the Germans came here. And, also the water. Shady trees. Plenty of shade trees. All free from God. Oasis in the desert.

The year 1989 saw the opening of Waterberg camp, in a building of which many skulls and bones were found. Nothing can change here now. The old colonial pictures show the past. When tourists come, they see their family members in the graveyard, at the time around August 26<sup>th</sup>. The Hereros hold commemoration to remember – the old people. They also visit their ancestors. God's people are the Herero. He stopped the war. Like the story of Noah's ark. 'Leave everything' said *Tate* [Father] Sam [founding father of Namibia, Sam Nujoma] 'We have peace and security. I don't want blood in my land again'. In Herero, the song *Kahondeka* is about the Waterberg, its fruits and animals. Water from the mountain. Water is in all the surrounding lands. All around the plateau – the place of water. The water is from underground. In one year the water did not come, so they (Herero) called on the elders, to speak to their ancestors traditionally, and the water came back.

Nothing happens in the Waterberg today, it's just to keep the stories. The cemetery only has other cultures and its history. The one outside is for the Herero. Traditionally, women stay outside the graveyard. Germans did not finish the Herero; they cannot finish God's People. Many Hereros visit and complain about the old colonial photos but they should leave everything [in] the past. God made the plateau, the animals. The water is God's water.

**Ignatius Heita (1977-05-13)** works as a waiter at the resort. This is his story:

My people are of mixed culture, my father is Owambo of the Kwanyama and my mother is pure Herero. I grew up at Okakarara and Otjiwarongo. I consider myself a Herero as we take the tribe of our mothers. When we grew up, we collected the sand from the termite hills, which is like clay – we made animals like horses, cattle, oryx and people as well as houses. My grandmother stayed with my mother and taught us how to make such objects. They do not make clay pots but cook their food in the stomach (with grasses and liquid) of the slaughtered animal over the fire.

Some sand is edible, that which is close to the termite hills, and dug up, was often eaten especially by pregnant women. It is very tasty. This gives appetite and peacefulness. They believe it makes the baby strong. Children eat it a lot, it is healthy, and helps with minerals. It made us strong and energetic.

In the German Colonial times, they asked the Herero Chief Maharero Kambazembi for land and they brought him sand in a basket. They told him nobody owns the land. Jackson Kauyewa's [Namibian folk legend] song *O'weekenda* describes leaving town for the weekend (a culture of all Namibians) as to "make dust like guinea fowls" *Tjita oruuma otja onganga*. There are many sand roads.

In Genesis, the world was formless, and then God separated the water from the land. And then there was dry land and water separate. These are the words we use for sand: *Ehi* (sand) from the *Rotjitundu* (termite hill) is *ririwa* (edible). Sand is *eheke* and soil/land is *ehi*. Clay/mud is *omunoko*. The earth is *ouye*. Dust is *oruume*. We traditionally use sand from the termite hills mixed with normal sand and small stones and fired for bricks. Nowadays they use cement to harden the bricks.

Sand is important for the animals, such as termites (*ozohumburi*) from the termite hills (*otjitundu*). The flying termites after the rain are also edible. Mushrooms (*omayoka*) also grow on them. Birds (swallows) build their nests from sand, and others build nests in the sand.

*Swartbye* (black wasps) build houses of mud. In the rainy season, the warthogs play in the red, white, or yellow clay. Then we say we saw for example: a red pig. For the traditional huts they used cattle dung and sand and clay from termites (sticky from termite spit) to cover the saplings. Sand – mud – is used by the children for making toys. Small shoes can [be] made bigger by mixing sand and water and filling the shoe. Leave shoes for two days and they will be bigger.

Sand is important to our people – we are coming from the land; we are made from the sand. We return to the land when we die. We are the sons and daughters of the land. When Jesus made the blind man see, he took sand and mixed it with spit, put it on his eyelids, and then the blind man saw again.

In Namibia, we need laws to protect our soil. In Okakarara, where I grew up, the sand was taken from the rivers for building, a person required a permit from the headman to sell or dig. Waterberg for me is for employment where we maintain the ecology and wildlife. Also, the site of the genocide and often thought of as a site of trauma, but now it is healed. Waterberg for my people in the traditional times means: *Omeya ngeza mondundu poo/ondundu yomevo* (water is coming from the mountain). It is a special place. The founders of Waterberg are the Hereros and they have been here because of the water and cattle, and wild fruits. Long ago big dams lay here, which are now fossilised. The grass was good for grazing and hunting. The water comes from inside the mountain. Most of the *Omumborombonga* trees are here in the Waterberg. It is our ancestral tree, used as medicine by boiling the leaves. The coal from such a woodfire is dried and powdered and used for healing wounds. It is also used for healing after male circumcision.

Today the Waterberg is different from the pre-colonial and colonial times. No more hunting – no more crop production. As a wildlife resort all is protected. It is important for our future generations, and we also bring our children here to learn about history and nature. Certain plants and trees will not survive in other places. It is important for different sand types for different plants.

**Joyce Muzite (1968-06-12)** is the tourist shop manager at reception. This is her story about sand:

My people are the Lozi people from the Zambezi region, Katimo Mulilo. We don't have any stories about sand. These are the words we use for sand: sand – *mushabati*, soil – *muvu*, clay – *mubu waku mateha*, mud – *ilongo*, earth – *lifasi/naha*, loam – *mubu wo muso wo nunile*, land – *ibu/simu* which is for planting and living, and dust, which is *liluli*.



We use sand for traditional houses which are built using clay. From that we also make traditional pots. Children make clay toys like cattle, animals, and people. Soil is also used for planting vegetables and *mahangu*, *mealies*, fruits, and pumpkins. Sand from the termite hill has medical uses: sand from the top of these termite hills is used for curing diarrhoea, and for stopping bleeding during pregnancy. Premature babies are buried underneath termite hills. Our people do not eat the termites as they bring gallstones.

Sand is important to my people for growing crops. Finding drinking water in the rural areas is done by digging a deep hole in the sand. This water is used for everything. Nowadays we get water from the pipes. Sand is part of our culture as we make different pots for beer, water, and *mahangu*. They also take the clay to shape bricks and burn them for bricks for building houses. It makes the house cool inside.

I have not heard about sand exploitation, but it is important in our culture as we get the sand from the river to build houses. Traditional housing is made from cattle dung (it is like cement) and clay. The Waterberg is for me a place of employment and for nurturing conservation and wildlife. There are no stories from my people about the Waterberg. The way I see the Waterberg is that it is good for tourism. Dust to dust. We come from the earth, and to dust we return.

**Willem Tjingeo (1979-04-20)** is the security guard at the resort. He is referred to as a 'deep' Herero which implies 'very cultural and traditional'. **Maxwell Mbaha (1993-03-18)** is part of the maintenance crew and acted as a translator and participant together with his elder. This is their story:

My people are the Herero people from Okakarara. If someone passes away, the people throw sand on the coffin in the grave. In the white culture they use flowers, but in the Herero culture the Pastor, or the Older uncle, will take a shovel and fill it with sand, and the people (men and woman) will queue up and, one by one in a single file they will take a pinch of sand and throw it into the grave.

When a person from far away comes for the first time to that place, the elders take you aside and give you sand to put in your mouth and ask you to spit it out 3 times, so that the ancestors will accept you and so that you are not rejected, or you will suffer bad luck. This is also done with water, after the funeral the Older uncle takes water and gives it to all the people to spit out, so that they do not carry the spirit of the dead from the funeral.

The same thing is done when a young person is having bad luck in the city/sickness/eyes, he is taken home to the village, where the Older uncle takes a mouthful of water and spits it in his face which cleanses him or her from bad luck. The ceremony takes place at the Holy Fire, where you connect with the ancestors. The Holy Fire's ash is called *omatue* and is used for cleansing and healing after it is smeared on one's forehead and body.

When one travels to another country, upon arrival they are encouraged to put sand from that place in a bowl of water, and use the mud [for] cleansing oneself with it – this is believed to be making peace with the spirits of that place or country.

So: we have these traditional ways with sand, but not stories. We use sand for healing. Some people eat sand, near the termite hill, for pregnancy or children growing up needing vitamins. So, it is for healing, for eating, and, also, for living, so it is important for life. Sand exploitation is not good. Sand for planting *mahangu* is taking all the vitamins from the sand. New sand costs and fertiliser costs money, and plants take time to grow, taking the livelihood from the people. Laws should be introduced, to protect farming and grazing land.

As a Namibian, if I hear about the Waterberg, I am happy. It is an Oasis in the desert, and it is beautiful, green, colour blessed by water. It is our ancestral place and it is our paradise which is peaceful. Namibia Wildlife Resort tenancy has created peace and prosperity through conservation. The past and the genocide carry no relevance.

For me, as a security guard, the way I see the Waterberg, is that I am not in a village, not in Windhoek, and happy to have a great job in the Waterberg – free water and free electricity. Another thing about sand, is the story of shoes – wet sand to make them bigger. Sand is also for wounds, and for healing. It is for cleaning pots and plates. It has many uses for example, uranium and silicon. [Pages printed on transparent and semi-transparent surfaces in the hardcopy, end here.](#)

---

**Gelasgisa Kaneyumara (1966-05-05)** has worked at the Waterberg Plateau Park as a cashier, waiter, and trainer of staff for 27 years. What follows is his story about sand: an stay outside the graveyard. Germans did not finish the Herero; they cannot finish God's People. My people, the Cheireigoo are from Okavango. We have *lesovahani* (black sand) for planting *mealties* and *mahangu*. Like in the Waterberg as the citrus orchards – this sand is also black. It has vitamins, like in Tsumeb, where things grow well. The *lezere* (white sand) – well, you can't plant well there. But if you add cattle dung to the white sand, it can turn black for planting. The white sand is not strong. River sand is for building and making bricks. In my people are of mixed culture, my father is Owambo of the Kwanyama and my mother is Okavango. *maguni* trees (lemon trees), are from God, if you dig under the sand there it is pure Herero. I grew up at Okakarara and Utiwarongo. I consider myself a Herero as we take the tribe of our mothers. When we grew up, we collected the sand from the termite hills, which is like clay – we made animals like horses, cattle, oryx and people as well as houses. Near the huts, they plant the trees, and crouch under them, rubbing their hands together. My grandmother stayed with my mother and taught us how to make such objects. They do not make clay pots but cook their food in the stomach (with grasses and liquid) of the slaughtered animal over the fire. planting, and thanking them, too. These are the stories of the ancestors. We call sand *efu* which is also land. *Efu lietu* is motherland.

Some sand is edible, that which is close to the termite hills, and dug up, was often eaten. My people use sand for planting and building. Clay from the river is for houses and pots, especially by pregnant women. It is very tasty. This gives appetite and peacefulness. They believe it makes the baby strong. Children eat it a lot, it is healthy, and helps with minerals. It made us strong and energetic. Children make cattle and cars for toys. Sand is important for planting, housing, and cultural production. Sand mining (exploitation) in Namibia is the same as in Rundu, where they are cutting down the trees. We get food from these trees – *nozivi* (red fruits). *Nogongo* trees make *kaspembe* (alcohol). The village chiefs must stop illegal sand mining, or else trees and crops can't grow. What about the future? No shade – no food. No sand – no land. It is because of the black sand in the Waterberg that the Germans came here. And, also the *Katuywa's* [Namibian folk legend] song *Oweekenda* describes leaving town for the weekend (a culture of all Namibians) as to 'make dust like guinea fowls' *Ijita oruuma otja onganga*. There are many sand roads.

The year 1989 saw the opening of Waterberg camp, in a building of which many skulls and bones were found. Nothing can change here now. The old colonial pictures show the past. In Genesis, the world was formless, and then God separated the water from the land. And when tourists come, they see their family members in the graveyard, at the time around August 26<sup>th</sup>. The Hereros hold commemoration to remember – the old people. They also visit their ancestors. God's people are the Herero. He stopped the war. Like the story of Noah's ark. 'Leave everything' said *Tate* [Father] Sam [founding father of Namibia, Sam Nujoma]. Clay/mud is *omunoko*. The earth is *oye*. Dust is *oruume*. We traditionally use sand from the termite hills mixed with normal sand and small stones and fired for bricks. Nowadays they use cement to harden the bricks. 'We have peace and security. I don't want blood in my land again'. In Herero, the song *Kahondeka* is about the Waterberg, its fruits and animals. Water from the mountain. Water is in all the surrounding lands. All around the plateau – the place of water. The water is from Sand is important for the animals, such as termites (*ozhumbun*) from the termite hills (*otjilundu*). The flying termites after the rain are also edible. Mushrooms (*omayoka*) also grow on them. Birds (swallows) build their nests from sand, and others build nests in the



sand. *Swartbye* (black wasps) build houses of mud. In the rainy season, the warthogs play in the red, white, or yellow clay. Then we say we saw for example, a red pig. For the traditional huts they used cattle dung and sand and clay from termites (sticky from termite spit) to cover the saplings. Sand and mud is used by the children for making toys. Small shoes can [be] made bigger by mixing sand and water and filling the shoe. Leave shoes for two days and they will be bigger during pregnancy. Premature babies are buried underneath termite hills. Our people do not eat the termites as they bring gallstones.

Sand is important to our people – we are coming from the land; we are made from the sand. We return to the land when we die. We are the sons and daughters of the land. When Jesus made the blind man see, he took sand and mixed it with spit, put it on his eyelids and then the blind man saw again. Sand is part of our culture as we make different pots for beer, water, and *mahangu*. They also take the clay to shape bricks and burn them for bricks for. In Namibia, we need laws to protect our soil. In Okakarara, where I grew up, the sand was taken from the rivers for building, a person required a permit from the headman to sell or dig. Waterberg for me is for employment where we maintain the ecology and wildlife. Also, the site of the genocide and often thought of as a site of trauma, but now it is healed. Waterberg for my people in the traditional times means: *Omeyan geza umondundu pool/ondundu yomhevo* (water is coming from the mountain) but it is a special place. The founders of Waterberg are the Hereros and they have been here because of the water and cattle, and wild fruits. Long ago big dams lay here, which are now fossilised. The grass was good for grazings and hunting. The water comes from inside the mountain. Most of the *Omumborombonga* trees are here in the Waterberg. It is our ancestral trees used as medicine by boiling the leaves. The coal from such a wood fire is dried and powdered and used for healing wounds. It is also used for healing after male circumcision. In his elder, Tibus is their story and happy to have a great job in the Waterberg – free water and free electricity.

Today the Waterberg is different from the pre-colonial and colonial times. No more hunting – My people are the Herero people from Okakarara. If someone passes away, the people no more crop production. As a wildlife resort all is protected. It is important for our future generations, and we also bring our children here to learn about history and nature. Certain plants and trees will not survive in other places. It is important for different sand types for different plants. (men and woman) will queue up and, one by one in a single file they will take a pinch of sand and throw it into the grave.

**Joyce Muzite (1968-06-12)** is the tourist shop manager at reception. This is her story about sand: a person from far away comes for the first time to that place, the elders take you aside and give you sand to put in your mouth and ask you to spit it out 3 times, so that the people are the Lozi people from the Zambezi region, Katimo Mulilo. We don't have any ancestors about sand. These are the words we use for sand: sand – *mushabati*, soil – *muvu*, clay – *mubu waku mateha*, mud – *ilongo*, earth – *lifasi/naha*, loam – *mubu wo muso wo* people to spit out, so that they do not carry the spirit of the dead from the funeral. *nunila*, land – *ibu/simu* which is for planting and living, and dust, which is *liluli*.

Amongst the interviewees, though of a variety of cultures, it was noted that there are similarities and differences in their stories about sand.

More than one interlocutor shared the wisdom of using sand to stretch shoes. In all the conversations, the medicinal value of sand, and the role of sand for cultural and traditional purposes, were raised. For example, several interlocutors confirmed the belief that sand near the termite hills has nutritional value for pregnant women and growing children. It became clear from my conversations that there is broad consensus that different types of sand from different areas of the termite hill have different medicinal purposes. Sand from the termite hills was a recurrent theme, from its nutritional value to its use as building material, being mixed with normal sand and cattle dung to make bricks. This sand from the termite hill has a clay-like quality. This explains why this clay, or mud, was mentioned as often used by children to make toys. All the interlocutors quoted above focused on the agricultural uses of sand. Here, the value of the sand with regard to planting and building was often determined by referring to its colour and source, for example nutrient-rich black sand for agricultural purposes, and white sand and river sand for building and brickmaking. Clay was recognised by the interlocutors from different communities as a common denominator for building and making pots. It also came across as common knowledge that, in the rural areas, drinking water is found by digging a hole in the sand.

Most interviewees were concerned about illegal sand mining and sand exploitation beginning to occur and recur in their respective areas. They also showed their awareness of the corruption and bribery surrounding this and called for laws of protection. Distinct differences were expressed on the use of termites as a source of food: some praised its health, and others categorically stated that they are harmful to eat.

In many cases there are similar words and meanings for the term *ehi* – referring to sand-land-motherland. All acknowledged that they come from the land, they are made from the sand, and will return to the land. The way interlocutors referred to the practice of throwing sand in the grave also gave it spiritual value.

The experiences of sand as expressed by my interlocutors reflect a cultural palimpsest of Namibian cultures in one place. This was evidenced in their conversations with one another, which are a cultural palimpsest of commonly understood phrases from the different cultures: *Nee man*, *Macht schnell*, *Oshi Nawa*, *Aweh*, and *It is making me to be angry* (Namlish).



My conversations with the employees at the Waterberg conservation area gave me a different perspective of lived experiences of the Waterberg, one of layers of social cultures and perceptions. Previously, I experienced the site mainly through nature (ecology, geology and environment) and history (Herero oasis, the Genocide and a nature resort). A striking similarity in the conversations with all the interlocutors was the expressive way in which they all stated that the Genocide was something of the past, as if they insisted that the topic should not be brought to the surface again.

## 5. Sand exploitation and illegal sand mining

The European Soil Charter of 2003 states: “Soil is a complex natural resource of fundamental significance to life, so essential and so obvious that it is the most overlooked element of the environment”. The question is, to what extent does the charter provide any protection and control over this so-called infinite resource? Illegal sand mining is a problem in most developing countries, especially in Africa, and in Namibia specifically, where it is sought after for construction and mining, often by foreign ‘developers’. A case in point is a report in *The Namibian* newspaper titled, “Back of the Book” (Kahiurika 2018a:B3) which refers to illegal sand mining as “a global and lucrative business”. This article focuses on the Mayor of Ondangwa, Paavo Amwele, and businessman Otto Niimboto Shikombe mining sand illegally at Ondando Village in northern Namibia. This mining often removes entire *mahangu*<sup>16</sup> fields which provide the traditional food of the Oshiwambo people.

Under the same section, *Issues* features Vince Beiser’s article “He who controls the sand: The mining mafias killing each other”.<sup>17</sup> He focuses on the crime and corruption arising from this activity around the world. He explains: “[r]apid urbanisation has made an ordinary commodity suddenly precious: sand. As cities continue to voraciously need concrete, glass and asphalt, illegal sand mining has sparked a global wave of violence” (Beiser 2018a:B3). Beiser focuses on the challenge in developing countries: “The number of urban dwellers in the world has shot from fewer than one billion in 1950 to almost four billion” and “the UN predicts another 2,5 billion will join them in the next three decades”. Beiser estimates that the “more than 48 billion tons of ‘aggregate’” currently used for construction all over the planet per year, “is double what it was in 2004”. He goes on to cite examples of black markets, bribery, violence and deaths arising from illegal sand mining in countries such as Kenya, Israel, Morocco, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, and India.

---

<sup>17</sup>Originally published in *The Guardian*, The Pulitzer Center on Crises Reporting supported the reporting for this article.

Pohamba Shifeta, the Namibian Environment Minister, addressing the Council of Traditional Leaders' Annual Meeting in Windhoek, denounced illegal sand mining, on the grounds that it "negatively affects government plans on attaining food security" (Kahiurika 2018a:B3). He refers to this as causing "severe land degradation, [and] loss of human lives and livestock". Shifeta expresses concerns that "sand mining in crop fields has caused severe top soil erosion, thereby degrading the soil quality, which results in reduced productivity" occurring in northern parts of the country. He emphasizes that the "issue affected the ministerial implementation of the Environmental Management Act of 2007".

According to this Act, an environmental clearance certificate is required for sand mining permits to be issued by a traditional or other competent authority. The Ministry had noticed that some 'Traditional'<sup>18</sup> authorities issuing sand mining permits "lacked awareness about the relevant provisions of the act". Shifeta informed the meeting that a new questionnaire had been developed "which requires all mining applications to be approved at all levels of Traditional and Regional leadership before final approval by the Environment Commissioner". This comes in response to recent media reports exposing "illegal sand mining at various towns in the northern parts of the country, including under the Uukwambi Traditional Authority, at the Swakopmund River in the Erongo region, and at Groot Aub outside Windhoek and many other areas" (Ndanki 2018a:5).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the writings of Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Donna Haraway (2014 & 2015), and Karen Barad (2007) all provided impetus for this study through the ecological awareness they raise from a post-colonial, feminist perspective. Donna Haraway's *Anthropocene, Capitalocene Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble* (2015) inspires an eco-feminist viewpoint, which apart from exposing the damage done, presents optimism in a new way forward through Art and Science activism.

---

<sup>18</sup> Traditional leaders such as the headman of a village are represented by the Council of Traditional Leaders.

## 6. Sand as an art medium

Using sand creatively as a form of eco-psychology and a spiritual and cultural metaphor for affinity with the land is explored through the work of the following contemporary artists: Nikolaus Lang,<sup>19</sup> Motoi Yamamoto,<sup>20</sup> Annalei Ketterer<sup>21</sup> and Jane Alexander<sup>22</sup>. Yamamoto is known as a salt artist and does not use sand, but his working methodology with salt as material is inspirational both spiritually<sup>23</sup> and insofar his chosen substance is similar to sand in consistency.

Nikolaus Lang is inspired not only by the material of sand and ochre in the Australian deserts, but also by the relationship between the Aborigine peoples and their land.



Figure 22: Nikolaus Lang, *Ochre and Sand: Dedicated to the Vanished Tribes of the Flinders Ranges and Adelaide Area*. 1987. Ochre and sand on fine white art paper. 6 x 600 x 504 cm (Lang 2015).

---

<sup>19</sup> Nikolaus Lang is a German artist (b.1941) who has created artworks using sand and ochre from Australia, inspired by visits to, and participation in, art workshops in the country (Nikolaus Lang Curriculum Support 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Motoi Yamamoto, an internationally acclaimed contemporary artist from Hiroshima, creates large-scale salt sculptures and metaphysical 'salts cape' installations by 'drawing' with salt (Mint Museum [2003]: [s.a.]).

<sup>21</sup> Annalei Ketterer, born in Southern Germany 1966, studied at the University of Munich and School of Fine Arts, 1992 and is well known for her decrustate technique with sand (<http://decrustate.net/information/artist-biography/>).

<sup>22</sup> Jane Alexander is a South African sculptor often focusing on themes of colonialism and apartheid.

<sup>23</sup> Salt is known as a purifier.

Figure 22 is reminiscent of scientific samples. The eye is attracted to the relationship and tension created between the two-dimensional blocks of paper and the three-dimensional quality of the piles and groupings of sand, stone and ochre.

Loosely translated as *Earth Impression*, Lang's relief piece (Figure 23) appeals to me precisely for that: its three-dimensional quality. Of course, it reminds one of a geological cross section of earth, yet somehow it is more than that, as the surface used appears to writhe and buckle itself, in the manner of geological seizures. The red and yellow ochre creates a vibrant contrast, enhancing its strong tactile quality.

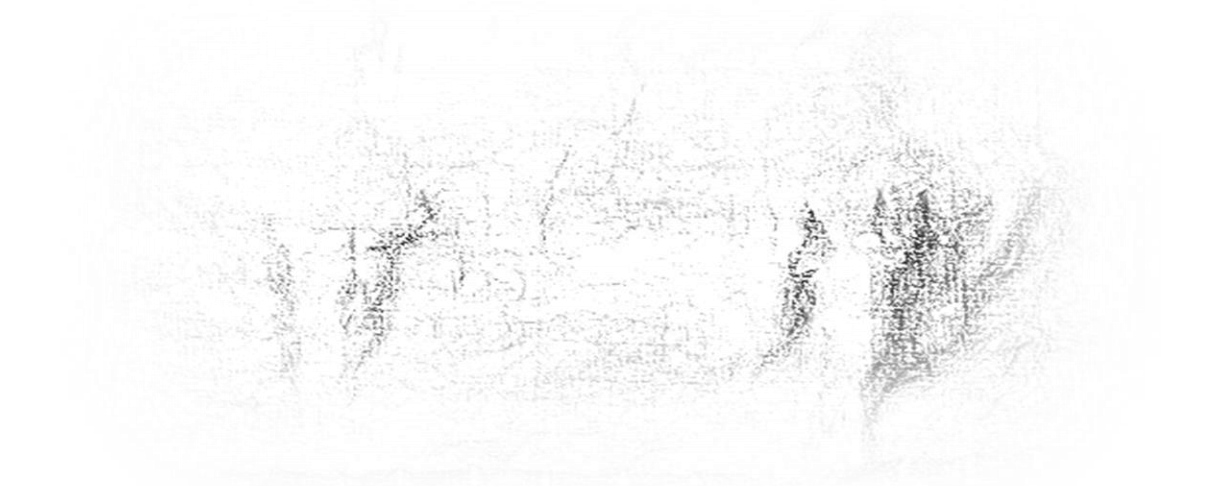


Figure 23: Nikolaus Lang, *Erde Abdruck* [s.a.]. Mixed media, sand and ochre (Nikolaus Lang. Google Images: 2015).

The following images (Figures 24 –25) show Motoi Yamamoto at work, drawing with salt:



Figure 24 (Left) & Figure 25 (Right): Motoi Yamamoto, *Floating Garden*. Salt. 2012 (Motoi Yamamoto. Google Images: 2016)



Figure 26: Motoi Yamamoto, *Labyrinth*. Salt. Solo Exhibition: Salz / Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne, Germany. April – June 2010 (Motoi Yamamoto. Google Images: 2016).

The artist's iconography and patterning is also a source of inspiration. The technique is that of a personal calligraphy in salt. The notions of inscription and erasure it invokes are aptly reminiscent of a palimpsest.

I was acquainted with and inspired by Annalei Ketterer, an artist of German origin, while she worked in Namibia during the first ten years of Independence (1990 – 2000). She was exploring techniques and emulsions for 'lifting' various textured areas of desert surfaces known as "*decrustation*". She is currently based in Berlin.

Ketterer has travelled all over the world, especially to deserts, to create her 'decrustates'. On the artist's digital site, *Decrustate Collective: Art Objects of Earth Surfaces*, she refers:

With these originals I am able to highlight most important ground-related topics: in the arts and culture, about land ownership, land distribution and management, about pollution, degradation and climate change. I am not the originator of the works: I collaborate with the elements, the origin. I do not add to the perfection of natural creation. The objects are what they are. I call this ground truth.

Ketterer's processes have been impressive, expanding to surfaces of up to five square metres, owing to developments in the emulsion and lifting techniques (Figure 27).



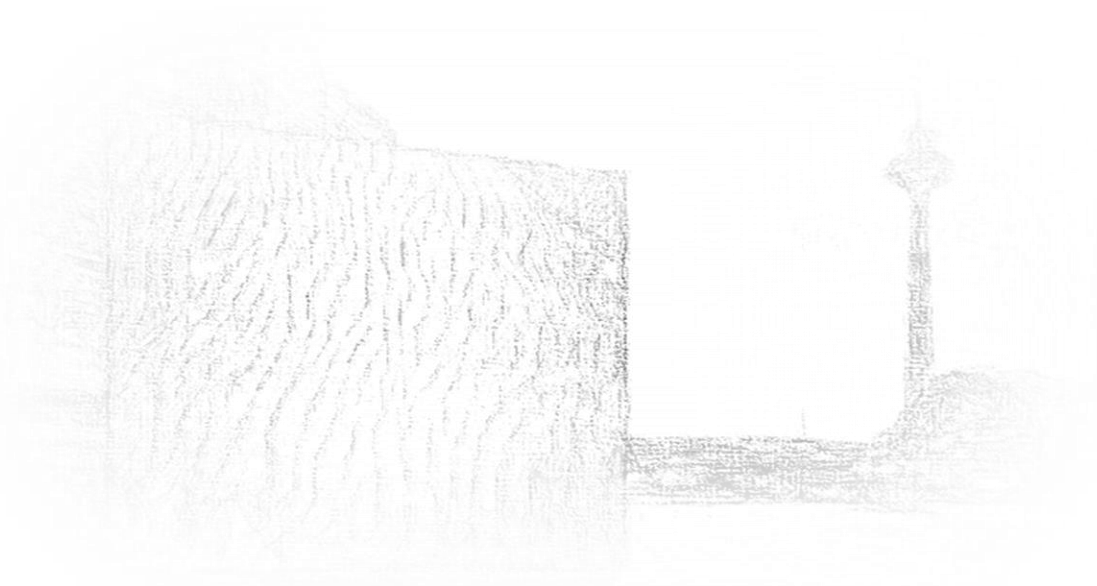


Figure 27: Annalei Ketterer, *Decrustate*. Soil, 5 x 5m. Berlin Festival (Decrustate website: 2015).

In the *Origins* section of her website, Ketterer credits Namibia as the origin, inspiration and source of technique for the descrustates:

Living in the Namib Desert the natural phenomenon of fog occurring in deserts captured my attention. Fog settles on ephemeral earth surfaces without changing their aesthetic appearance and temporarily binds these surfaces. Inspired by this observation I dedicated the following years to permanently binding earth surfaces in various regions of the planet. Found and taken out of their origin in deserts, mountains and cities, they are thin crusts (3-7mm) of unchanged, original earth surfaces from 0,1m<sup>2</sup> up to 12 m<sup>2</sup>. I gave my technique the descriptive name of DECRUSTATION (from decrustare, Latin for to peel). DECRUSTATION transfers earth surfaces into earth objects in the context of art (de-contextualisation).

Ketterer has used her work to support many environment related exhibitions and projects globally, including Earth Day celebrations.

South African sculptor Jane Alexander's installation "African Adventure" (1999–2002), (Figure 28) employs Kalahari sand for the context of the installation. The Kalahari Desert spreads across South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. It has a characteristic red ochre colour. Given the colonial history of southern Africa, it carries significance regarding land rights, colonialism and liberation. Who owns the desert, one might rightly ask? The Tate website describes the installation as that which "addresses different histories of European engagement with Africa". The website continues to state that, after Independence, South Africa ...

... quickly became a fashionable tourist destination and an entry point to the rest of the continent. Travel agencies like African Adventure in Cape Town, after which this work is titled, emerged in response to the demand. African Adventure comprises thirteen figures on a rectangle of red earth, which references the infertile soil found in Bushmanland, an arid area of South Africa historically occupied by the indigenous KhoiSan people.

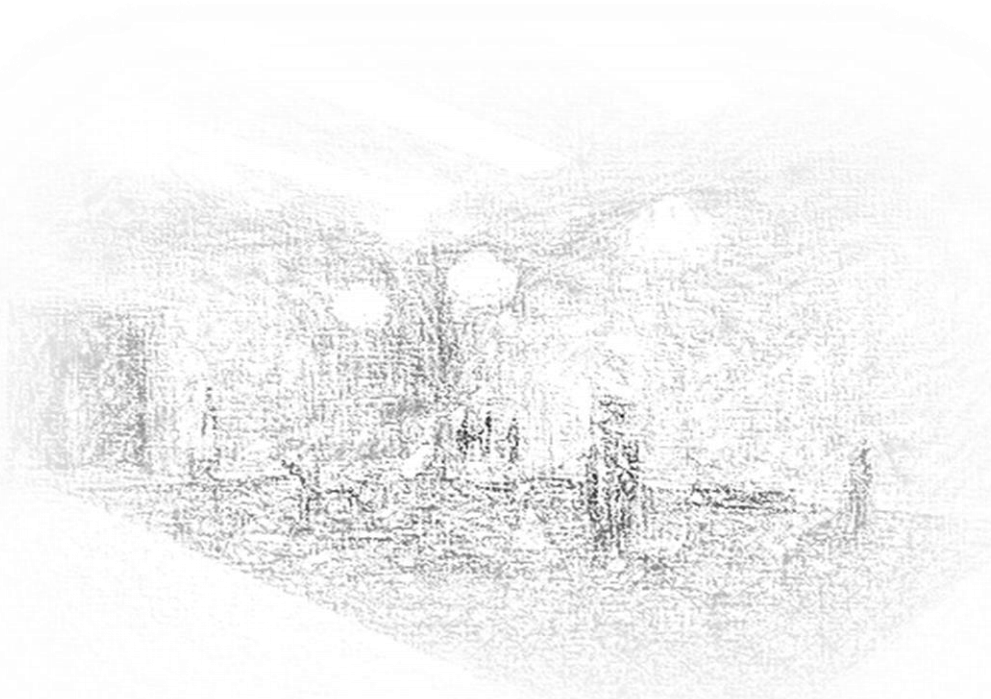


Figure 28: Jane Alexander; *African Adventure*, 1999–2002. Tate Photography (Tate: 2016).

In this artwork Alexander 'grounds' the installation with red sand from the Kalahari, creating a 'site' which, although historically occupied by the Khoisan, is now juxtaposed with the presence of other strange figures and artefacts, causing a palimpsest of history and identity with the land. The red Kalahari sand becomes a signifier of 'place'. This serves as an inspiration to me, as I am working with a number of sand sites in the place of the Waterberg, and these sites carry an eco-geo-cultural history and identity to be explored.

## 7. Site-specific art, land art and earthworks

While the artists discussed above used sand in constructions and installations which were spatially removed from the sites where the material was sourced, it is also inspirational to take notice of sand featuring in site-specific art. Every art history student is familiar with American sculptor Robert Smithson's (1938–1973) *Spiral Jetty* on the Great Salt Lake shore in Utah (1970) – as monumental as it is invasive. In contrast, British sculptor, photographer and environmentalist Andy Goldsworthy's (1956) use of sand in his site-specific land art (Figure 29), appeals in its ephemeral quality and also in the sense that it is created in nature, from nature.



Figure 29: Andy Goldsworthy, *River of Earth*. Land Art. 2009 (Andrew Goldsworthy: 2015).

## 8. Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I reviewed artists working with the concept of the palimpsest, whilst here I have reviewed those who use sand as a medium. I have also looked at site-specific artists, which relate to the fact that I am working with different sand sites in the area of the Waterberg. I did not create site-specific art, since I am working in a nature protected area. The inspirational artists referred to in this chapter encourage me to work with the process of palimpsest, with sand as a signifier of place, meaning and identity.