

CHAPTER 5: STUDIO WORK AND EXHIBITION “*Ehi*” WATERBERG, NAMIBIA

Ehi – Sand/Land Rites/Rights

1. Introduction

This chapter explores the process of the material component of the study through practice-based research. The final outcomes of this are documented in the catalogue and videos. In what follows I describe how the practice-based component of the study, focusing on ‘sand’ as material and metaphor for identity, culture, and land, is explored through the palimpsest. My companion text for illustrating this from an eco-feminist stance is Elizabeth Grosz’s *Volatile bodies* (1994). Grosz (1994:14-17) criticizes the way an alignment with “male perceptions and desires” reduces the female body – and ecosystems alike – to material surfaces for inscription, constantly written and rewritten upon. We see patriarchal culture playing itself out in the roles of the dominator and the dominated. This also applies to colonialism, culturally inscribing upon the very body of the colonised an identity and value system which is alien to them. And it is this notion which becomes evident in the final outcome of the performative component of the installation “*Ehi*”. In this installation, the performative component comprises of the aural ‘inscription’ of three different voices or perceptions of the Waterberg. It begins with my eco-feminist poem about nature, in this case the Waterberg, as our source of life – our Mother. I therefore inscribe an eco-feminist point of view or perception of the Waterberg. Prince’s poem overlays this with a contemporary and patriarchal view on the land as that which is owned and exploited, and which is a source of corruption. Gotti’s chant reinforces the cultural perspective of the Herero people’s traditional, unwritten, oral ownership of the land.

The studio work and exhibition take the palimpsest as subject matter and artistic method – given the parallel between the palimpsest, the land and existing aesthetic forms of expressions as outlined in Chapter 1. Both Hoskins (1955) and Hicks (2010) serve as an inspiration here. Dan Hicks’s terms such as “cultural geography” and “anthropological archaeology” indicate the intersection between archaeology and socio-cultural anthropology which I have explored through the material of sand. The concept of the anthropological archaeologist excavating new meaning is not unlike that of the artist working with new material – in this case physical material such as sand. This concept also applies to the exploration of the subject matter in terms of place: sand sites in the Waterberg. In this respect “the interdisciplinary study of material things in the social sciences” will support the artist’s concept of exploring “the relationships between the ‘social/cultural’ and the ‘material’” and “the idea of relating human and non-human worlds” (Hicks 2010: 25-29).

Using light as an illuminating element, I first decided to experiment with the palimpsest as a screen. Grosz's book *Territory and art. Deleuze and the framing of the earth* (2008) draws a distinction between Western and Eastern architecture by referring to the fact that the Japanese "raise screens to the wind, light and rain" (Grosz 2008:64). Here the screen is described as a plane for virtual projection, being a "hybrid wall-window-mirror" (Grosz 2008:64). Such palimpsests offer not only the possibility of writing and rewriting the eco-geo-cultural history of a site, but also provide a way of looking through the events, by having them reflected back to one. Through this, various layers of eco-geo-cultural and historical knowledge give a more holistic identity to a particular site.

The studio work comprises my artist's diaries (Figure 56), creative sand samples, my artist's workbook on the Waterberg, Namibia, and an exhibition entitled "**“EHP” WATERBERG, NAMIBIA Ehi – Sand/Land Rites/Rights**". The exhibition took place from 6-10 July 2020 at The Project Room, Windhoek West, Windhoek, Namibia. This exhibition showcases the above, with the focus not only on *The Book of the Waterberg* but also on sand palimpsests of the Waterberg as the original creative samples. Research and documentation were also done through photographs and my artist's diaries. The main focus of the exhibition is the installation, also entitled "**“EHP” WATERBERG, NAMIBIA Ehi – Sand/Land Rites/Rights**". It comprises of one hundred sand dolls, from the ten identified sand types in the Waterberg. This is a mobile installation modeled on the geographical structure of the Waterberg aquifer (see Chapter 4). The exhibition is supported by a catalogue and two videos.

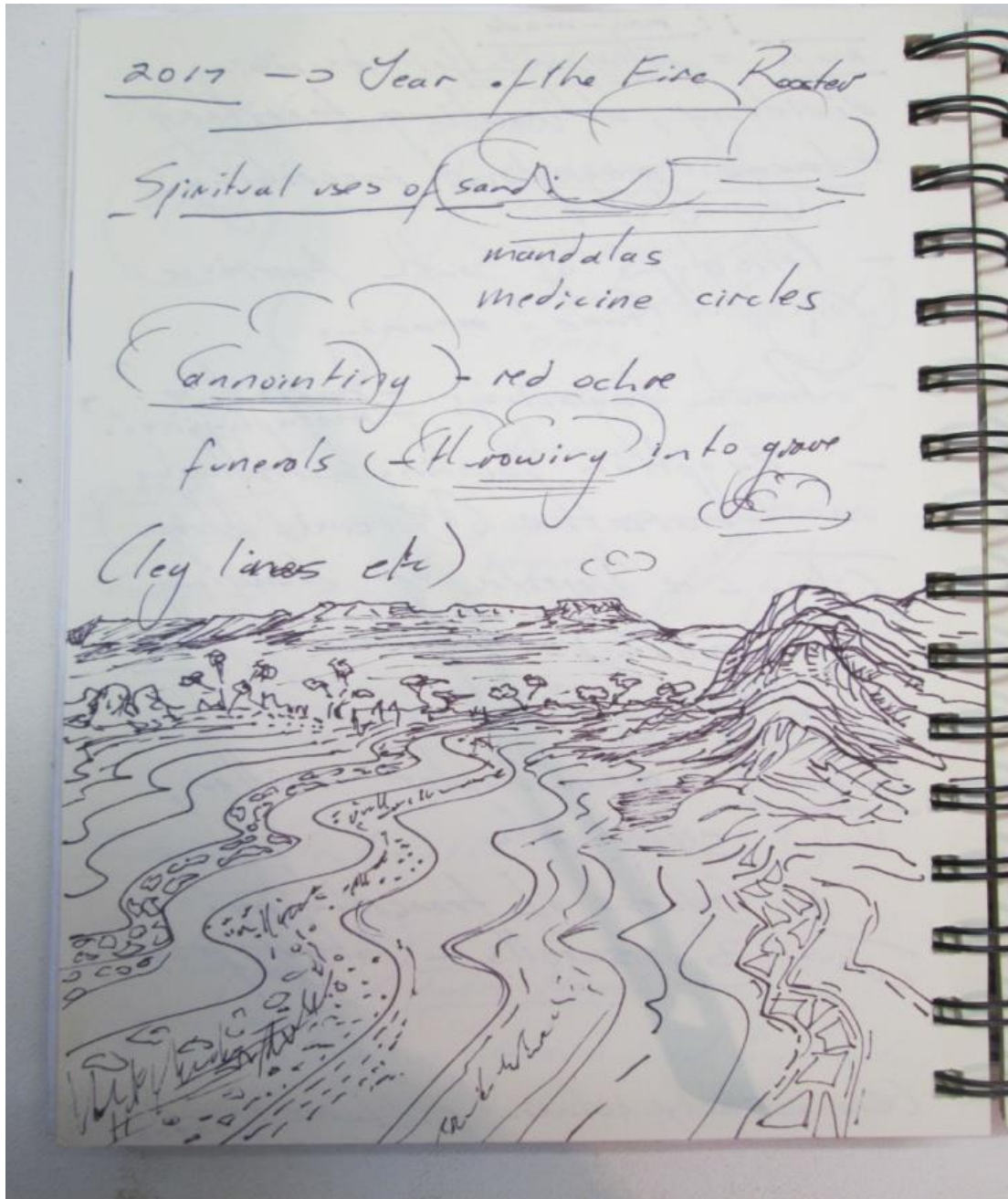


Figure 56: Page from artist's notebook.

The first video is *The Book of the Waterberg*, with my narration and the turning of the pages. We, the viewer and I, 'read' the book together. The second video is of the installation "**EHI** WATERBERG, NAMIBIA Ehi - Sand/Land Rites/Rights" with the performative component of contemporary poetry and traditional chants.

2. The Book of the Waterberg



Figure 57: The front (left) & Figure 58: The back (right) cover of *The Book of the Waterberg* (Photographs by the author 2015-2020).

The *Book of the Waterberg* is my handmade artist's workbook comprising cattle leather, found snakeskin, cardboard, and layers of worked and reworked papers from a deconstructed old Namibian telephone directory. Included are sand samples from the different identified sites, texture rubbings, natural materials from the area, inserts, and text on these specific places and features of eco-geo-cultural history. This book was already under construction when I was coincidentally directed to the exhibition of Jack Ginsberg's "Booknesses" at the University of Johannesburg (2017). This increased my inspiration by providing a large number of artistic books as examples from which to draw insights – formally and conceptually (see Chapter 2). Included in my book are inscribed and re-inscribed drawings and paintings derived from my photographic documentation of identified sand sites in the Waterberg. Both "Booknesses" and the concept of the palimpsest inspired *The Book of the Waterberg*.

The Book of the Waterberg has been a continuous process from the beginning of this study. The working process on this book has been one of inscription and re-inscription, as well as construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. In the image below we can see how pages have been pasted together, removed, cut away and remade. Different types of paper layer old surfaces for new inscriptions. Past inscriptions such as parts of the directory show through the new layers here and there. The process of paging back and forwards was echoed in the working of the pages, back and forth, separately, together, randomly. The

following section (2.1) documents aspects of the book, but not every page due to the volume of the book. The video, however, shows a paging through the book, with oration, from beginning to end.



Figure 59: Construction and Deconstruction. The working process of my artist's workbook (Photograph by author 2015).

2.1 Inside *The Book of the Waterberg*

The image below shows the front cover insert created from found materials at the top of the mountain. After sticking the front pages together against the cover, I carved a block into this for the cave top insert. The reconstruction and deconstruction of this is palimpsestic in terms of methodology. This was inspired by the materials I found on the top of the mountain – the red sand, bones and seedpods. I decided to recreate a fossil-like image of this by embedding these into the sand. Due to the porous nature of the sandstone, some of this crumbled away from time to time, and had to be reconstructed. The repeated exercise and moisture caused a buckling of the whole solid 'page' which reminded me of geology. On the righthand side of the book I have written, pasted over, and reinscribed the different names for the Waterberg in different languages. These layers of 'meanings' of the Waterberg provide a palimpsest of human identification with the place.



Figure 60: Front cover insert created with materials from the top of the mountain. Mountain top sand, bones, seedpods. Artist's *Book of the Waterberg* (Photograph by author 2015).

Figure 61 shows the sand key for the sand sites selected at different places in the Waterberg. This is near the back of the book.



Figure 61: Sand Key – selected sand sites in the Waterberg. Artist's *Book of the Waterberg* (Photograph by author 2015).

On the right-hand side, I created a block, again by pasting many pages added together. Into this I carved out circular insets for the different types of sand from the identified sand sites in the Waterberg. Into each of these I fixed the sand for that specific site. This serves as identification in hue and texture of sand from each of the ten sites. This reference serves as a guide to the structure of the installation “Ehi”. Again, the palimpsest serves as a metaphor for construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction.



Figure 62: Right-hand page of the sand key indicating sand sites. Artist's *Book of the Waterberg* (Photograph by author 2015).

On the left-hand side I pasted thin semi-transparent paper over the text of the telephone directory, partially erasing the text. I took paper layers from the cut-out circles from the insets and pasted them in a mirror image of the opposite page. Onto these, I inscribed the identification of each sand site. Again, the process is palimpsestic in its methodology in terms of construction, erasure and trace, reconstruction and re-inscription.

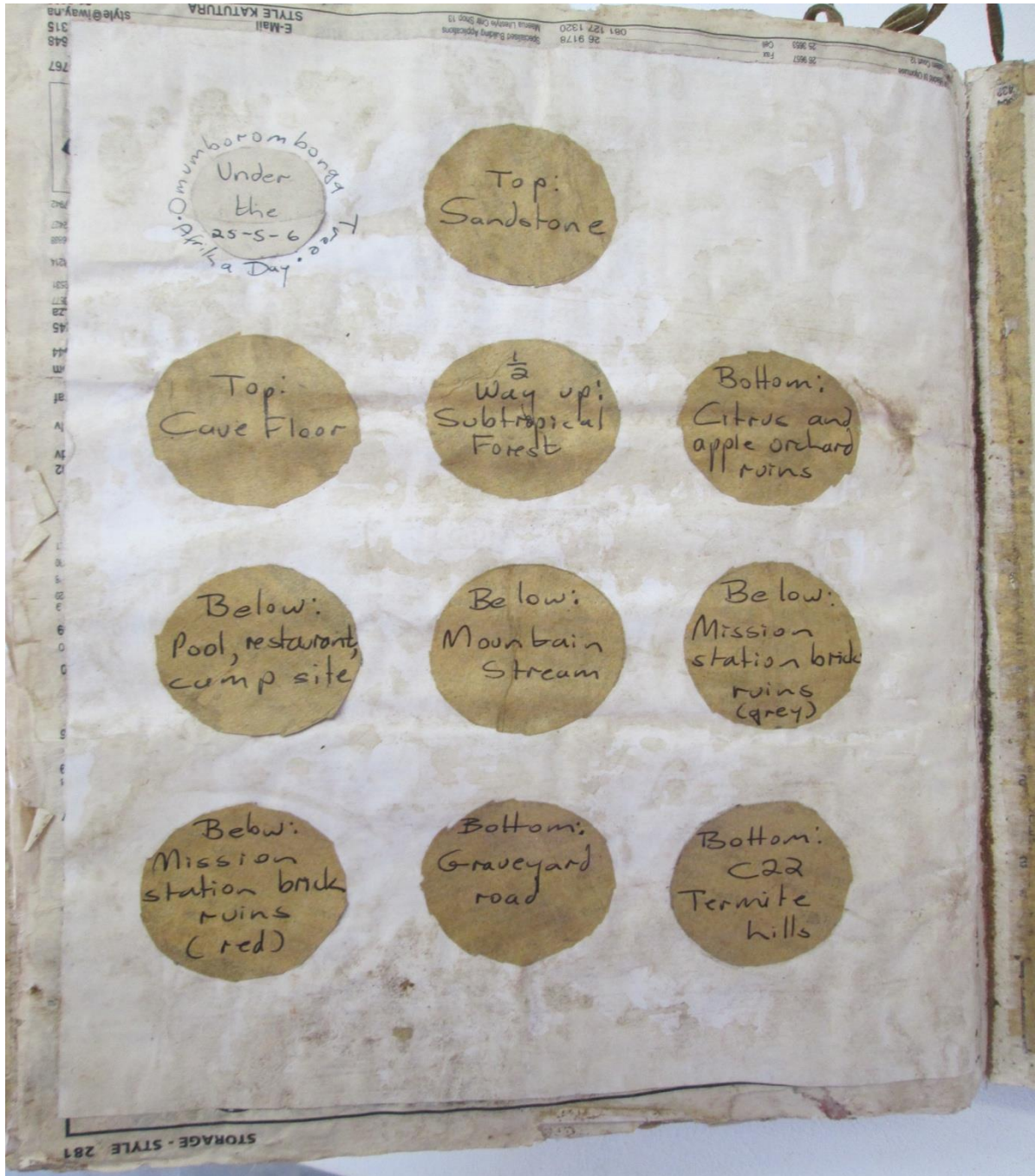


Figure 63: Left-hand page of the sand key indicating sand sites. Artist's *Book of the Waterberg* (Photograph by author 2015).

Figure 64 is a collage showing my interpretation of the battle fought on the top of the Waterberg. The process of creating a collage is that of the palimpsest – in the methodology of erasure, in covering over and building up the underlying layers, and creating layers of textures and hues, whilst some of the underlying areas show through.



Figure 64: The Battle of the Waterberg. Collage.
Artist's Book of the Waterberg (Photograph by author 2015).

Figure 65 shows the “Genocide Monster” (left) and the “Woman and Child Victims” (right) of the Genocide. “Genocide Monster” is an expressive collage creating a palimpsest of layers of newspaper texts and brown paper. “Woman and Child Victims” was created from rust found on the mountain and is now wired into the page. This features the sand site on the top of the mountain. The methodology is that of booknesses in its deconstruction and reconstruction and the pages become layered like the palimpsest.



Figure 65: Left – The Genocide Monster. Collage. Right – Woman and Child Victims. Rust and copper wire. Artist’s *Book of the Waterberg* (Photograph by author 2015).



Figure 66: New Africa. Collage and red sand from the top of the Waterberg. Artist's *Book of the Waterberg* (Photograph by author 2015).

Figure 66 celebrates 'New' Africa as the Herero people survived the Genocide. The red sand used is from the mountain top where some of the Herero were trapped. It is a palimpsest of layers of paper pasted over the directory pages. Some of the underlying text shows through creating intertextuality. Red sand from the mountain top was used to 'draw' over these layers of erasure as re-inscription, creating a palimpsest.

Figure 67 is a page insert of the ancestral Omumborombongo Tree of the Herero, made from materials found under this tree. Once again, a block was constructed by the pasting and layering of pages. Layers of previous inscription show through, creating a palimpsest. In the manner of booknesses, this was deconstructed by cutting into the block to create an inset for the sand, bark, seedpods, leaves and a piece of rusted metal found under the tree. This tree is at the current Namibia Wildlife Resort (NWR) campsite, previously referred to as number "25 Old native settlement" on H. Meyer's 1905 map of the Waterberg (see Chapter 4). This creates a palimpsest of layers of differing 'ownership' and identity through the history of the site. There are layers of ancestral identity, colonial imposition, and contemporary transience. When experiencing the current NWR campsite on my own, aware of these waves of 'ownerships', I was overcome by a sense of the forgotten and feelings of desertedness.



Figure 67: The Story of the Omumborombongo Tree. Sand, bark, leaves and seedpods from the campsite. Artist's *Book of the Waterberg* (Photograph by author 2015).

On the left page (above) layers of erasure and inscription give the names of the tree in different languages, including Latin, and describe its botanical properties as well as cultural and spiritual significance, creating different layers of cultural identity with the tree and the site.

Figure 68 shows, together with an introduction of the geology and man-made history of Waterberg (left), a texture rubbing of the characteristic red sandstone (right). This was done with charcoal from the fire and sand from rubbing together two pieces of the rocks from the mountain top. This creates a layered image that is a palimpsest of both the texture and substance – therefore a geological palimpsest of the rock.



Figure 68: Texture rubbing with red sand from the sandstone. Charcoal and sand. Artist's *Book of the Waterberg* (Photograph by author 2015).

Texture rubbings were also done using the quarried red sandstone which was used for the construction of the old colonial German Police Station, now restaurant, as well as the bark of the Omumborombongo tree. These are incorporated into the pages of the book. The texture rubbing lifts the impression off the surface, creating a palimpsest of illusionary textures of these elements.

Figure 69 uses materials found when exploring the sand site of the mountain stream where bamboo grows to extreme heights. Here, the snakeskin (insert) was found. Cattle leather was used to support the insert. Again, the layering of differently textured and coloured paper, plus the found materials from the site, create a palimpsest of the ecology of the site. Once more, layers of previous inscriptions show through.

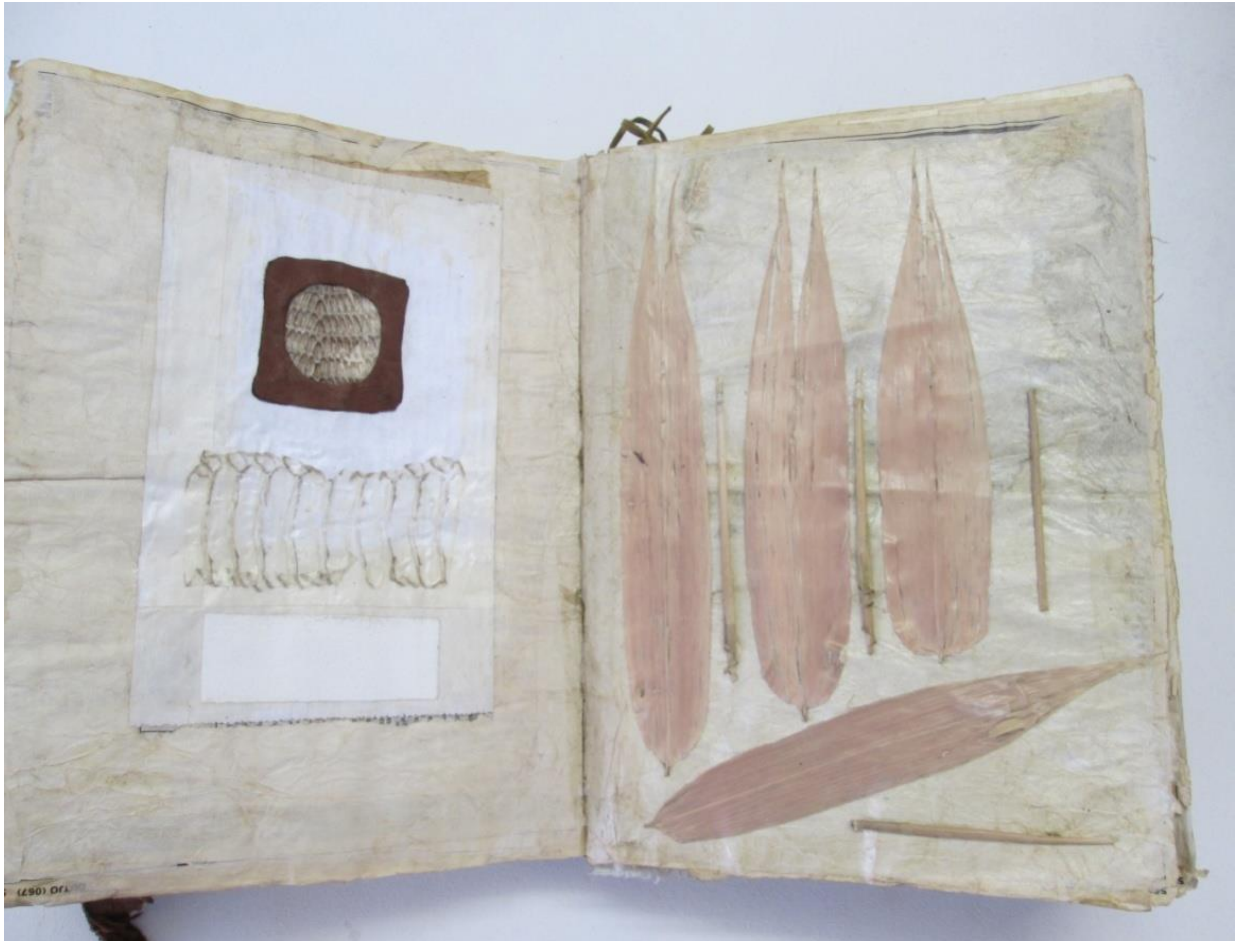


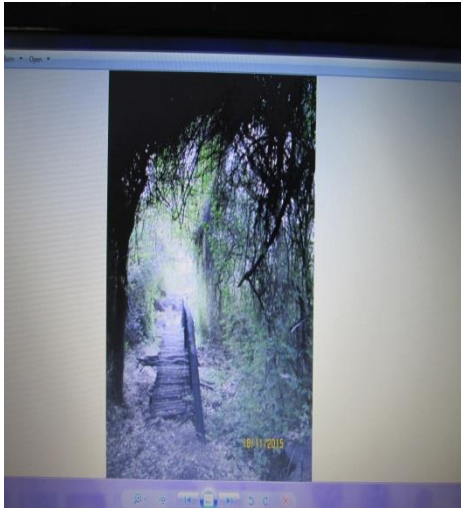
Figure 69: The Mountain stream (prior to inscription). Snakeskin, leather and bamboo.
Artist's Book of the Waterberg (Photograph by author 2015).

Some pages show hand-drawn or painted images of the site itself. The working process of transferring images from photographs was palimpsestic in approach and technique. This was done through inscribing and re-inscribing continuously with different media.

To clarify: This process began by photographing a particular site, in this case the mountain stream (Figure 70). I then transferred the image to the laptop and printed it out in colour. From there I inserted a page of carbon paper¹ between the printed image and the page. I then drew on top of the picture, thereby inscribing the image, through the carbon paper, onto

¹ Once used in the typewriter, a significant instrument of colonial administration, to make duplicate typed pages of letters and reports that decided the fate of indigenous populations.

the page of the book. These transcribed drawings of the various sites were used as beginnings for colour drawings and paintings in the book. There is always the future possibility of drawing into these images as well. In the process the images were transformed from photographs to tracings, to drawings, and then to paintings, which, in itself, is the process of palimpsest. Each individual colour print-out, and the carbon paper, as well as the inscription on the pages, also reflect the process of palimpsest through inscription and re-inscription. The thumbnail images in Figure 70:1-8 document the process.



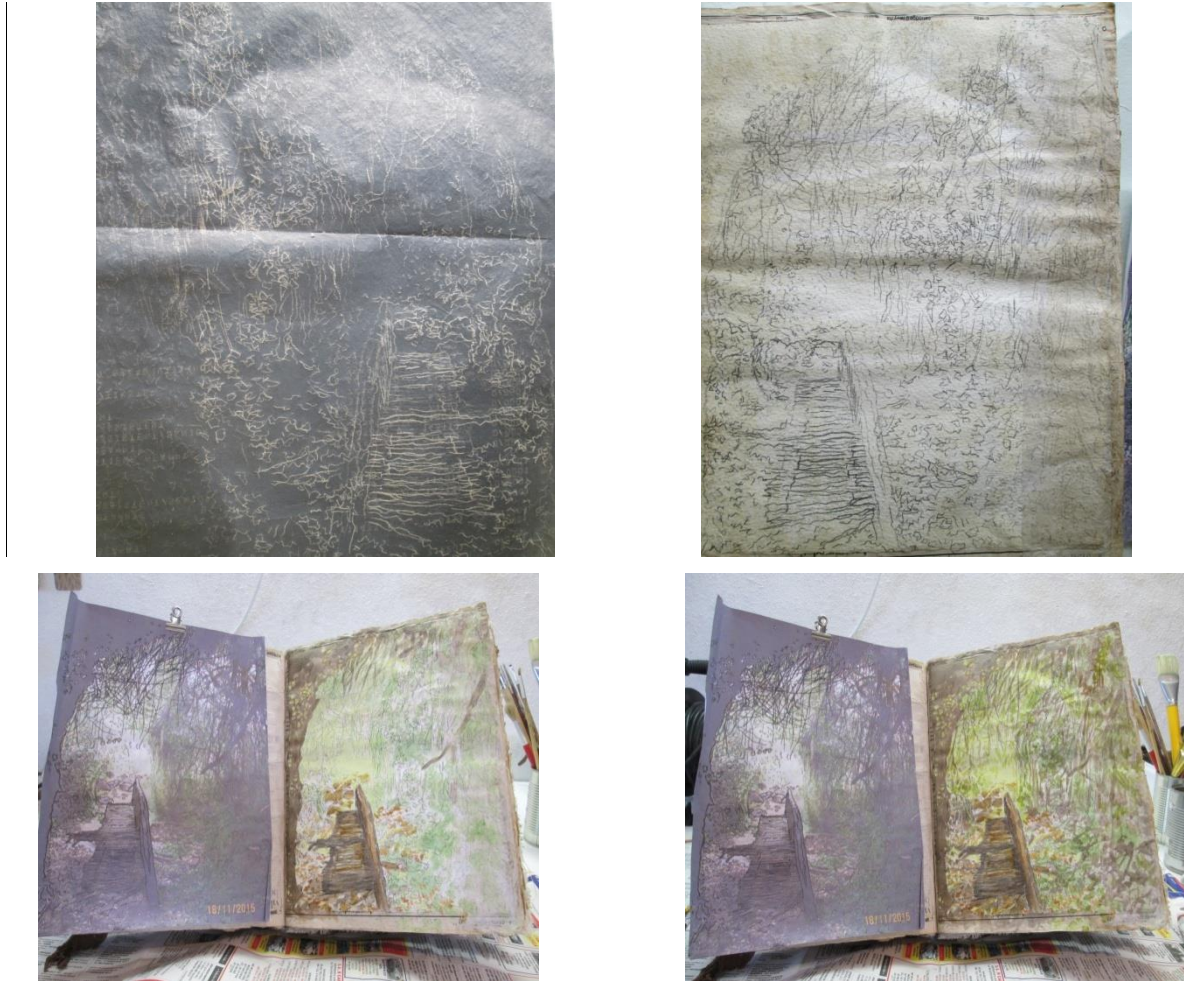


Figure 70: Thumbnails 1-8 show the process of transcribing image to book (Photograph by author 2015).

The video on the *The Book of the Waterberg* shows virtual documentation of the book by the turning of the pages and my voice-over about the book.

3. Waterberg Palimpsests

3.1. Creative samples

The creative samples comprise of small-scale palimpsests experimenting with the illumination and translucency of layered sand from identified sand sites, on recreated scrolls, made with bamboo from the area. These have been inspired by the research into palimpsests presented in Chapter 2. Within this concept, the illuminated screen as a framing device for information refers to the Japanese screen – as mentioned by Grosz (2011:12) in *Chaos, territory and art* with regard to the framing of the earth, evolution and art. She maintains that “screens emphasize the void” (Grosz 2011:64), describing the screen as a plane for virtual projection – a hybrid wall-window-mirror (Grosz: 20). This leads to a perception of palimpsest as method/framing device.

When hung in the window to dry, my small bamboo scrolls revealed themselves as 'illuminated 'manuscripts'! Front-lighting highlights the texture and hue of the sand. Backlighting illuminates the sand itself, creating a totally different image which highlights the particles of the sand, almost suggestive of textiles in impression (see Figure 71 – Figure 73).

Figure 71, Figure 72 and Figure 73 show these experiments in which I created palimpsests with a variety of sand from Waterberg and viewing them with both front and back lighting creating an 'illuminated manuscript". The sand is used in layers to indicate the geological strata of the Waterberg.

In the two preceding paragraphs I retained two successive versions describing one and the same observation made during my research. I did this to maintain a glimpse of the palimpsestic reworking of a thesis on the computer screen. In the first version my excitement about the revelations resulting from creative experimentation is perhaps too pronounced for academic writing, but I could not bring myself to seeing this version irretrievable erased by the software. Hence, I present both as evidence of thesis-writing as, in essence, a process of continuous re-writing.



Figure 71 & Figure 72 : Waterberg Palimpsests 1. Left- front lighting. Right- backlighting (Photograph by author 2015).



Figure 73: The close-up photograph of Figure 69 (Photograph by author 2015).

Figure 73 creates an image in its own right. It carries suggestions of a cross-section of geological layers of the earth, and at the same time reminds one of a satellite photograph. These types of sand create a layered and sedimentary palimpsest of the ecological and historical events that played out on the site.

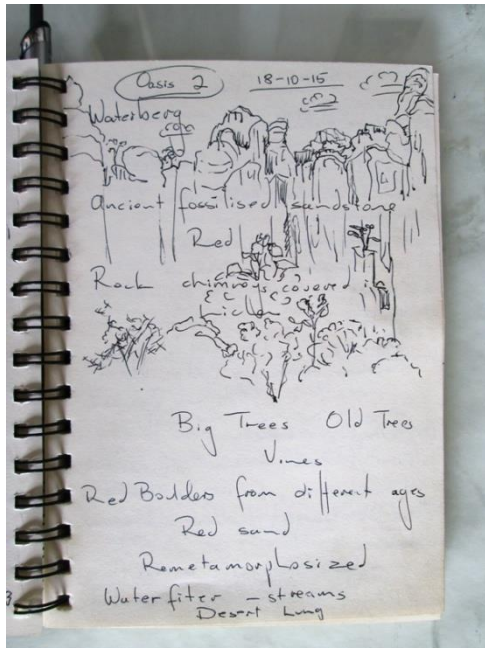


Figure 74 & Figure 75: Left – excerpt from artist's diary on the layers of the Waterberg. Right – Back-lighting on Waterberg palimpsest 2 (map) (Photograph by author 2015).



Figure 76: Palimpsest indicating the structure and geological layers of the Waterberg (Photograph by author 2015).

Figure 76 shows the distinctive variety in hue and texture of the different geological layers of the selected sand sites from the top of the mountain to the savannah at the bottom. The striations mirror the structure of the mountain.

4. Installation: “EHP” WATERBERG, NAMIBIA – *Sand/Land Rites/Rights*

4.1. Installation inspiration

The inspiration for this installation came from participating in the 2019 Independence Exhibition at the Namibian Arts Association Heritage Trust in Windhoek, Namibia. The exhibition was titled “How Independence came to me” and was curated by Elise Huyssteen. The curatorial concept (call out February to March 2019) behind this was an invitation to artists, curators and the public to submit objects, artefacts, art, videos, information, documentation, or photographs that symbolised independence and culture in Namibia. Selected artists were chosen to work with assorted materials within the concept of the exhibition. Some of these artists brought their own materials. We were free to make it ours. As I had nothing in hand, I selected objects and artworks that suggested components of what Independence meant to me, then and now.

The Namibian Independence (1990) was a life-changing and liberating experience for me. As a bright-eyed and positive, freshly graduated artist and a newly liberated Namibian everything seemed possible. Finally liberated from the oppressive and inhibiting regime of Apartheid, we could come together and work together for a bright new future. We would not be judged for being different. Laws would be progressive, not restrictive. The documentation of the installation follows below:



Figure 77: "Independence 2019", in process (Photograph by the author 2019).



Figure 78: Kay Cowley, "Independence 2019". Installation. Arts Association Heritage Trust (Photograph by the author 2019).

This was my curatorial text for my artwork:

Independence came to me through John Muafangejo's "Hope and Optimism in spite of the present difficulties"². His work bespoke humanity and democracy, but most especially Unity. This epitomised the first and following Independence celebrations with the slogan of "Unity in Diversity". We still practise this today. The installation juxtaposes Muafangejo's print, the Independence celebration poster, Barbara Pirron's colonial trunk, and Tuaoovisa Katuuu's brightly coloured multitude of tradition-based, cloth dolls. Originally, this trunk was packed for jumping ship and kept in readiness in case of emergency. People of all colours and creeds were living in fear and paranoia, with suppression and oppression, continuously in fear of revolution, under the Apartheid Regime of supremacism. This trunk is now decolonised. Instead of a "Pandora's box" of fear, it is juxtaposed with the dolls symbolising the many united and free Namibians. The colonial past is unpacked, and freedom is celebrated. (Kay Cowley 2019)

Working on "How Independence came to me" inspired me to work with the African dolls, in multitude, but translated into different types of sand. I call these doll-like objects 'sand people'. These represent human fragility ("dust to dust"); the many lives lost in the genocide at the Waterberg. Instead of brightly coloured textiles, I decided to use hessian for the armature, and surface them with the different sands from the various sand sites, thus following the process of palimpsest and focusing on the materiality of my medium. This process reminded me of the way the Ovahimba rub red ochre, mixed with cattle fat, into their bodies as well as into animal skins and cloth. This would create the metaphor of human origin and identification with each of the sand sites. I was also inspired by the creation myths (see Chapter 3) where the creator breathes life into clay to create life. I decided to create a mobile installation similar to "Desert Rain" (see Chapter 1). Instead of a circular hanging structure, however, I decided to use mesh in a square shape of 3 x 3 meters, and hang the sand people in rows. In doing so I wished to echo the notion of the geological strata of the Waterberg.

After studying the geological history of the Waterberg, and noting that its structure as an aquifer formed a geological palimpsest, I decided to hang the different sand people with transparent fishing line, suggesting the different geological strata, as well as the structure of the Waterberg plateau. By arranging the sand people in their different rows, according to site, on the structure of the Waterberg mountain, I could metaphorically rebuild the mountain with the sand people. The original intention to hang them in rows, like the media images of

² World-renowned Namibian printmaker John Ndefasia Muafangejo (1943-1987) was born in Ovamboland, Angola, moved to Namibia (then South West Africa) in 1956 and studied and worked intermittently at Rorke's Drift, South Africa, between 1967 and 1974 before returning to Ovamboland, and eventually, Katutura, Windhoek (South African History Online 2020).

refugees' laundry hanging up on fences³, came about through drawing the association of homelessness between today's refugees and the then victims of the Genocide. This was modified when I realised that the Waterberg, as an aquifer, was also a geological palimpsest and I wanted to echo the shape of the mountain, and where the sites were. The identity of these sites is manifested by the sand people from each specific site. Therefore, apart from the methodology of construction, the installation becomes a three-dimensional palimpsest of the eco-geo-cultural history and identity of sand sites in the Waterberg.

The performative approach included poetry, praise and chants. I included my artist's statement in the form of spoken poetry/prose to create a performance component to the installation:

THE WATERBERG, NAMIBIA

This is the story of Ehi - Sand/Land Rights /Rites

This story is about sand

This story is about land

This story is about the Waterberg

Our Land

Our Mother

Ehi

Sedimentary strata of geology – ecology

Source of life

This story is about palimpsests – the written – erased – rewritten

Deconstructed and reconstructed

Layers of perception

Of memory and history

Of culture and identity

Who are we?

Our Land

Our Mother

Ehi

(Kay Cowley August 2020)

³ Refugees: forced migration is an age-old historical phenomenon, and has been monitored by the United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees over the past half-century (refworld.org), but the massive spill of refugees from the Mediterranean into Europe over the past five years had made a particularly strong visual impact via global media.

The next performance component was Prince performing his poem on Land Rights (Chapter 3) and the *Omitandu*/chant by Gotti the praise singer (Chapter 4). My poem focuses on the land as mother, nurturer, and source of life, whilst Prince's focus is on land rights, and Gotti's chant orates the Battle of the Waterberg. These are three significantly different perceptions of the land, one of eco-feminism, one of contemporary political cynicism and one of historical anger and despair. These create a palimpsest of varied perceptions of the Waterberg. They are by no means compatible, yet these form layers of sound and sand, creating a palimpsest of sound and images (see video of "Ehi" installation).

4.2. Creative practice

A sand key for the installation was created using hessian and sand, in order to assess the viability of working these materials together. Then sand from the ten different sites in the Waterberg was experimented with to gauge the compatibility of the surface and the different sand types. These samples were then pasted onto a homemade scroll for identification purposes. The images below show the outcome of this process with the ten different sand sites indicated.



Figure 79 & Figure 80: Left – Sand key for installation. Right – final sand key scroll. Sand and hessian (Photograph by artist 2020).

The images below show the construction of the hessian armatures for the sand people. The A3, A4 and A5 sizes respectively indicate the fathers, the mothers and children, families that make up a society. These dolls are created by wrapping the fabric over and over itself, building up by layering, in the process of palimpsest.



Figure 81: Hessian dolls for armatures of the sand people (Photograph by artist 2020).

As mentioned above, while working the hessian dolls with layers of sand, I realised that the process of rubbing the sand into the hessian, coincidentally, was very similar to that of the Himba people rubbing the red ochre (mixed with cattle fat) into their cattle skins and onto their person. One by one these dolls were transformed into sand people, metaphorically signifying the sand sites in the Waterberg. Through the palimpsestic process of layering the sand of each site into a sand family, I created a human identification with each site and thus a community. I could not resist the analogy of myself as female creator outperforming and overwriting religious doctrine restricting itself to notions of the creator as male.



Figure 82 & Figure 83: Left – red sand mountain top. Right – pink sandstone mountain top (Photographs by artist 2020).



Figure 84: Mountain stream sand (Photograph by artist 2020).

The images below show three of the sand people once the sand has dried. The varying hues are more evident here than during construction.



Figure 85: Dried sand people. From left to right: mountain stream sand, pink sandstone, red sandstone (Photograph by author 2020).

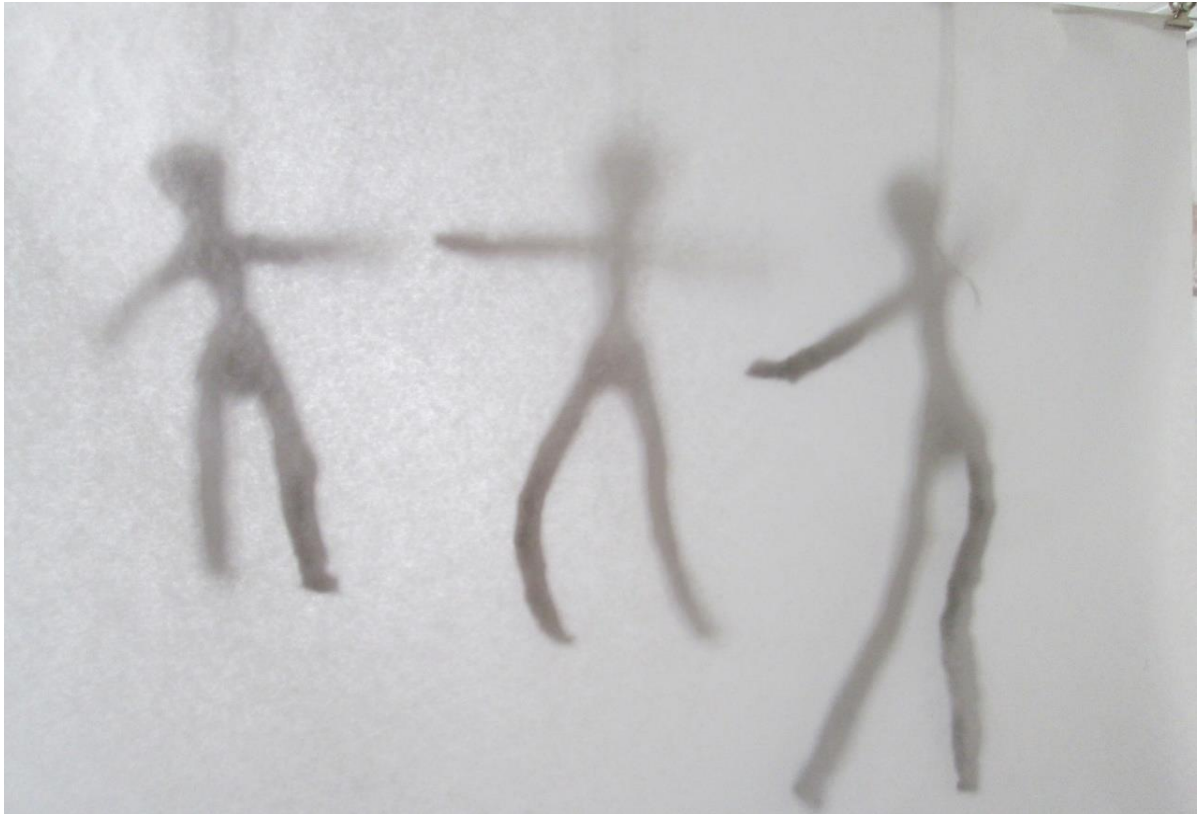


Figure 86: The sand people viewed from the back of the screen, accidentally creating an illumination (Photograph by author 2020).

As previously mentioned, these sand people were hung in tiers, grouped according to sand site, according to the geological structure of the Waterberg aquifer (Chapter 4). There is a dual layer of significance in the hanging, or suspending, of the sand people: while some images invoke memories of colonial executions, the overriding intention is the elevation of the sand community: they rise above historical depravation and soar over the landscape (much as they remain a part of it) like a soaring mountain landscape in a process of becoming.

The image in Figure 87 shows the final construction and chaos in the studio.



Figure 87: The final row of sand people – C22 road and termite hill sand – hanging to dry. In the background individual groups of sand people are ready for packing (Photograph by author 2020).

4.3 Setting up the installation at the Project Room

The Project Room was booked from 6 to 10 July 2020 for installation, performance and documentation. The thumbnail images below (Figure 88 – Figure 93) document the process of setting up the installation. I was assisted by the ‘Ehi Team’ comprising of Frieda Luhl (Project Room owner), Betty Tuauovisiua Katuuu (collaborating Artist), Elise Huyssteen (Curator), Dewayne Goagoseb (Videographer) and Actofel Ilova (Cataloguer).



Figure 88 (left) & Figure 89 (right)



Figures 90 (left) & Figure 91 (right)



Figures 92 (left) & Figure 93 (right)

We began by outlining the plateau at the back, with the row of pink sandstone people, recreating the characteristic dip in the middle, and trying to indicate the sandstone chimneys. From there we demarcated each geological level and sand site on the left-hand side with the relevant sand people, so as to link up the structure three-dimensionally. This process of restricting the Waterberg in space was like the palimpsest as we built up the layers. The images below (Figure 94 – Figure 99) show the final installation.



Figure 94: “*Ehi*” Installation. Front View. Sand people suspending on fishing line from mesh (Photograph by author 2020).



Figure 95: “Ehi” Installation. View from the right. Sand people suspended on fishing line from mesh (Photograph by author 2020).



Figure 96: “Ehi” Installation. View from the left. Sand people suspended on fishing line from mesh (Photograph by author 2020).



Figure 97: “Ehi” Installation. View from the back. Sand people suspended on fishing line from mesh (Photograph by author 2020).



Figure 98: “Ehi” Installation. Close up. Sand people suspended on fishing line from mesh (Photograph by author 2020).



Figure 99: “Ehi” installation at The Project Room (Photograph by author 6 – 10 July 2020).

It was as if we had rebuilt the mountain, from top to bottom, putting down roots. What resulted was a palimpsest of geological layers made up of sand people from the different sites. Somehow, they were reminiscent of San paintings in their pictography, narrating the history and people of the site. At the same time, they were not grounded, but suspended – was it the diaspora – or just memories of the lost?

4.4 The performative component

The original intention had been to have Prince, the poet, and Gotti, the praise singer, to perform together with the installation, creating an interactive component. This would then be documented through video. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions at the time, it was not possible for them to come to Windhoek during that period. As a solution I asked them to send me WhatsApp voice notes of their poem and chant respectively, which worked out to be quite fun, as one could send two to three ‘takes’ and then choose the best. So, I decided to create a voice overlay together with the filming of the installation instead (see video “Ehi”) making a palimpsest of sound and image. This created a powerful effect with the disembodied voices. Portraits of the ‘performers’ were included in the catalogue and video. This inspired me to write a poem for my artist’s statement, and to use a voice-over also for

the video. It was interesting – more immersive – rehearsing it over the voice notes, and then selecting the best one. Prince helped me to rehearse the correct pronunciation of *Ehi* over WhatsApp. The written versions of Prince’s poem and my artist’s statement are included in the catalogue. In accordance with custom and culture, Gotti’s chant, as an embodied performance of an oral tradition, was not printed or translated.

Working with fellow artists, writers, poets, performers, and media practitioners was creatively stimulating and the project took on a life of its own. It was through dialogue and collaboration that ideas were stimulated.

5. Conclusion

My original intention with the message of the installation was concerned with ecology and the environment, for example, nature preservation and the detrimental effects of illegal sand mining. I felt it was positive that such a rare ecological place such as the Waterberg be preserved and open for all Namibians. Unfortunately, this is not really true for the poor and the marginalized who cannot afford commercialized leisure in nature conservation areas. I could not see what ‘new’ my study of the Waterberg could contribute if my main focus were to be on the Genocide, since so many scholarly and literary works have been dealing with this, and similarly, also with the issue of war reparations which continue to be a bone of contention between Germany and Namibia.

It was only when the performative component came into play through sound creating a palimpsest with sand that the question of land rights and land rites became a stronger message. My poem is an environmentally feminist praise poem for the oasis and ecology of the Waterberg and symbiosis with the earth. Yet, the disembodied voice of Prince orating his poem was contemporary, political and aggressive, dealing with issues of who owns the land, and the corruption surrounding this. Gotti’s disembodied historical and cultural chant in Herero of the Battle of the Waterberg and its violence was aggressive and angry, carrying the scars of colonialism and its awful decimation – an erasure of the people and their cattle – their wealth, and their way of life. Personally, I do not believe that we ‘own’ the land. The question and action of ‘ownership’ cause conflict, inequality, and environmental degradation. In the photographs and video footage the sand people, animated by sound, are reminiscent of San paintings, reminding us of the first people of the land, providing another layer to the palimpsest of the Waterberg.

Nevertheless, the poetry and chants provided powerful political and cultural components to the installation. The three voice clips focusing on environment and sand rites (me), land rights (Prince) and culture (Gotti) provide a palimpsest of varying perceptions and memories of the land, the history and the ownership thereof. The concept of the palimpsest applies to colonialism, as culturally inscribing upon the very body of the colonised, an identity and value system which is alien to them.

Through the process of practice-based research, I created a body of work comprising of artefacts such as *The book of the Waterberg*, palimpsest sand scrolls and the performative installation of sand people, “*Ehi*”, based on the geological structure of the Waterberg as an aquifer. These were created through the process and methodology of working through the palimpsest in its metaphorical and material layers. The related research added to the palimpsest in the exploration and excavation of the layers of ecology, geology, culture, history ... giving identity to each sand site in the Waterberg.