

CHAPTER 4: THE STORY OF THE WATERBERG, NAMIBIA.

Where is my mother – the Waterberg?

sung by the Botswana Herero,
Prince Kamaazengi Marenga I¹(10-07- 2019).

(Author's Notes: The approach to creating pages of the thesis as transparent surfaces and overlaying them visually to resemble a palimpsest is increasingly used in this chapter and culminates in invoking the Waterberg itself as a palimpsest. I weave the Waterberg chant – the *omitandu* – by the Herero chant singers through Section 7 on the history of the Waterberg by overlaying it as transparencies on which both the Herero and English versions of the *omitandu* are viewed.)

1. Introduction

This chapter explores the Waterberg, my chosen sand site, and how the layers of eco-geo-cultural history and identity read as a palimpsest of this site.

I begin this chapter by briefly describing the road culture of Namibia and the experience of driving to the Waterberg. Through the concept of the palimpsest, I introduce the ecology and geology of the Waterberg. The historical and cultural background of the Waterberg, originally as an oasis, and currently as a Namibian Wildlife Resort, is explained. This is done in relation to the geological structure of the Waterberg as an aquifer, since the natural, alongside the cultural and the political history of the place, constitute the erasure and inscription that make the palimpsest.

I begin with a view of the history of the Waterberg through the eyes of the first known people to have lived there, then the pastoral nomads and their oral 'ownership' of the land. This way of life was interrupted – erased from the text – by colonialism, the Battle of the Waterberg, and the subsequent genocide of the Herero people. Artists who explore the German-inflicted Herero genocide through their work are discussed. Examples are South African artist William Kentridge and Namibian artist Touaovisiua Katuuu.

¹ Prince Kamaazengi I is a descendant of Chief Marenga, one of the prominent leaders from the scattering after the Genocide. He is from the Botswana Hereros who stayed there when Chief Samuel Maherero led his people through the Omaheke to Botswana and then to the Waterberg, ZA. He refers to himself as a poetrepeneur and practises as a performance poet, as well as a writer and publisher of poetry.

Further extending the metaphor and the method of the palimpsest, in relation to booknesses, (see Chapter 2) books such as *The Hendrik Witbooi Papers* and *Natives of South West Africa and their treatment by Germany* are reviewed. The chapter concludes with a section on the Waterberg today as a palimpsest of eco-geo-cultural history and identity.

2. Palimpsest as site

The Boyd/Hoskins metaphor for landscape as a “historical palimpsest” invokes both cultural and physical change with reference to our sense of place.

Physical geography explains the development of the palimpsest landscape as:

one where, in any given region, the different landforms that make up the landscape are not of the same age, with some surface landforms being very young because they are being shaped at the present time (such as gravel bars within today's rivers), and other surface landforms being old (sometimes millions of years old) because they were shaped under climatic conditions or by processes that are no longer present in that region (Bloom 2002).

An example of the above are glaciers leaving scouring marks as the ice retreats. When describing sedimentation, Hoskins (1955) refers to the palimpsest as “layered scratches”. This is important as a particular site may be determined by its geology, ecology and culture; our history on this earth is written and rewritten, like the palimpsest, and so too is our perception of a particular site. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida (1998:360) also uses the term palimpsest for the changing (rewritten) identities of place in his reference to Aleppo and the history of a city. The following quotation is from an architectural investigation, inspired by Derrida, into another urban heritage site:

[A] landscape or site, which has been inhabited for long, consists of layers of history. This history is sometimes reserved in forms of small physical remnants, monuments, memorials, names or collective memories of destruction and reconstruction. In this sense, a site/landscape can be presumed as what Derrida refers to as a ‘palimpsest’. A palimpsest whose character is identified in a duality between the existing layers of meaning accumulated through time, and the act of erasing them to make room for the new to appear (Farahani, Mahmoudi, Setayesh, & Shokrollahi 2015:218-231).

Thus, the function and uses of the land bring to mind the questions of *ownership* and *politics of place*. In the process of colonisation, a palimpsest of colonising political and cultural ownership overwrites the perception of land. This was poetically expressed by a Native American Chief, Seattle of the Suquamis, in a speech held in 1854 in response to the land ownership policy of the colonial Americans. [The words of Chief Seattle are viewed as a transparency \(page 68\). Page 69, which can be seen underneath, is meant to be experienced simultaneously. The intended effect can be seen as a digital palimpsest on page 70.](#)

Colonialism and the enforcement of dominating cultures and political frameworks such as Apartheid, therefore, have a palimpsestic effect on indigenous cultures and places. This is evidenced in the history of my chosen site, the Waterberg, Namibia, with German colonisation and active domination of the land. The idea of land ownership did not fit the framework of Herero cultural beliefs and practices (see Section 7 on the history of the Waterberg).

In *Ghosts in the palimpsest of cultural memory*, Kevin Cryderman² argues that “[i]n postcolonial discourse, the trope of the palimpsest emblemizes colonial history and its series of writings, overwritings, and erasures”. He maintains that, tragically, “[t]he palimpsest implies that colonial trauma is not just singular and discrete events, but an encompassing and long-lasting pattern of writings and erasures on land, colonial bodies, and colonized minds”. In this manner he argues that “... the palimpsest implies not just a resistance to current oppression and violence but also a remembrance of the past, which informs the present even though there may be only traces or buried silences of 'official' historiography” (2002:2).

In *Key concepts*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1998:176) maintain that the concept of the palimpsest ...

... is a useful way of understanding the developing complexity of culture, as previous 'inscriptions' are erased and overwritten, yet remain as traces within present consciousness. This confirms the dynamic, contestatory and dialogic nature of linguistic, geographic, and cultural space as it emerges in post-colonial experience.

In both colonisation and war, palimpsest occurs in the erasure of indigenous identity and the rewriting of ownership and identity. However, crucially, such erasure is never wholesale. Palimpsest allows for a reading through, a discovery, interwoven and yet discrete voices. Histories emerge by paying close attention to it.

² Kevin Cryderman, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. This we know; the earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected

(Stevenredhead [sa]).

3. Roads to the Waterberg

In Namibia we like to drive. And we will drive far just for a weekend. This is the great equalizer, as road travel, whether privately, commercially or by taxi, is our main form of transport. To the coast, the dam, the farm; to camp at rock pools in the desert after the rain – mostly anywhere is a destination in a desert country. There is the thrill of being on the open road, under a huge blue sky, challenging regularly graded gravel roads; the heat, driving through inhospitable – and often uninhabitable – regions, defying the odds to get to your destination. The Afrikaners here call it *padgees*³. Jackson Kaujeua, the Namibian folk singer, in his song *O’wekeenda* refers to the calling for the road (see Chapter 3) “*to make dust like when the guinea fowls run*”. Hopefully, the destination will be an oasis in the desert. Such is the Waterberg plateau, my chosen sand site.

To get to the Waterberg from Namibia’s capital city, Windhoek, one must take the B1 west through Okahandja, towards the coast. Then, for the scenic route, one must turn left onto the C22. Here you will drive through savannahs of yellow grass and acacia, with red termite hills, as you head towards the twin points of the Omatako⁴ Mountains. After these, you will see the red sandstone chimneys of the Waterberg plateau emerging from the distant, flat horizon. This is the shortest route at 3 hours 11 minutes, 305 km comprising of primary, secondary and tertiary (inconsistent gravel aka *sandpaar*⁵) roads. Thus, roads of sand take me to my sand site (see Figure 30).



Figure 30: View of the Waterberg from the Namibia Wildlife Resort rest camp. January 2019. (Photograph by the author).

³ Afrikaans for being drawn by the spirit of the road.

⁴ Herero for buttocks, which is odd because the mountains are pointy, and not round.

⁵ Afrikaans for sandy roads.

Palimpsest allows for a reading through a discovery, interwoven and yet discrete voices. In Namibia we like to drive. And we will drive far just for a weekend. This is the great equalizer, as road travel, whether privately, commercially or by taxi, is our main form of transport. To the coast, the dam, the farm; to camp at rock pools in the desert after the rain – most of a where is a the that a use of the. There is the of the warmth of the open road, under a huge blue sky, challenging regularly graded gravel roads; the heat, driving through inhospitable – and then the of the road, driving to a odd of your destination. The Afrikaners here call it *padgees*³. Jackson Kaujeua, the Namibian folk singer, in his song *O wekeenda* refers to the calling for the road (see Chapter 3 again) “to make dust like when the quinea fowls run”. Hopefully, the destination will be an oasis in the desert. Such is the Waterberg plateau, my chosen sand site.

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. To get to the Waterberg from Namibia’s capital city, Windhoek, one must take the B1 west through Otjomuwa, to the coast. Then for the scenic route, one must turn left onto the C22. Here you will drive through savannahs of yellow grass and acacia, with red termite hills as you head to the coast. The mountains of the Waterberg are pointy. And here you will see the red sandstone chimneys of the Waterberg plateau emerging from the distant, flat horizon. This is the shortest route at 3 hours in minutes, but it is comprised of primary, secondary and tertiary (inconsistent gravel aka *sandpaaf*⁵) roads. Thus, roads of sand take me to my sand site (See Figure 30).

The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. This we know; the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected

Figure 30: View of the Waterberg from the Namibia Wildlife Resort rest camp. January 2019. (Photograph by the author (Stevenredhead [sa]).)

³ Afrikaans for being drawn by the spirit of the road.

⁴ Here for buttocks, which is odd because the mountains are pointy, and not round.

⁵ Afrikaans for sandy roads.

4. Sand sites in the Waterberg

The Waterberg⁶, in the Otjozondjupa⁷ Region, has proven that a large variety of sands with different histories are available from one terrain. Additionally, each has many layers of eco-geo-history and culture, creating metaphorical sediments of identity as palimpsest. For example, the cultural identity of a site changes according to its 'ownership' and function, in relation to its eco-geology.

The Waterberg (Afrikaans for 'water mountain'), is known as 'Ondunduyomeva' in Herero, meaning 'water is coming out of the mountain'. It is also referred to as 'Oueverumue', for 'narrow gate', referring to part of the geological structure of the plateau. During my visit in October 2015, I worked my way the 200 metres up, from the bottom of the mountain, to its top. Figure 31 indicates the 'harvest' of my sand collection, the 'record' of the pilgrimage, as I was making my way up from the savannah below, through the terraces, to the rock chimneys at the highest point.



Figure 31: Waterberg Plateau Park soil samples, October 2015 (photograph by author).

⁶ The Waterberg is a national park in central Namibia on the Waterberg plateau, 68 kilometres south-east of Otjiwarongo (Google maps 2015).

⁷ Herero for 'place of calabashes' – gourds dried and hollowed out to be used as storage vessels for water, and thus another affirmation of the water and sand together making this site: Water + berg

From the bottom to the top, I documented the following information in my artist's notebook:
Sand Sites Namibia: 2015-'20 (see Figure 32).

4.1 The C22 *en route* to the Waterberg on the savannah plains: Vibrant, red sand from the termite mounds on the savannah (Figure 32 & Figure 33). Consistency: loamy and granular. Smells like insect juice.



Figure 32 (left): Termite hill C22 route & Figure 33 (right): Close-up of texture of termite hill sand (Photograph by author 2015).

4.2 The road to the graveyard through the savannah plains: Orange sand nearby the graves of the German soldiers killed in the Herero-Nama Genocide, (1904). Consistency: dry and dusty. Smells like dust.



Figure 34: Graveyard of German soldiers killed in the Herero Genocide (Photograph by author 2016).

4.3 Waterberg Mission Station ruins

4.3.1 Grey brick sand from wood fired bricks. Consistency: powdery. A strong smell of wood smoke. In this multi-sensory experience of sand, the smells capture traces of past events. The sand itself is a palimpsest of a particular place. The layers shine through and reveal older inscriptions.

4.3.2 Red brick sand from sundried bricks. Sandy. Smells of both red soil/sand with a slight whiff of wood smoke. Consistency: crumbly. Figure 35 shows the combination of the two types of brick.



Figure 35: Mission Station ruins, indicating the red sundried and grey wood fired bricks (Photograph by author 2018).

4.4 Mountain streams: Black loamy soil from the spring rivulets emerging mid-way down the mountain. Consistency: very earthy with inclusions of vegetation: wood, seed, stick, leaf. Smells very 'forestry' and damp (see figure 36).

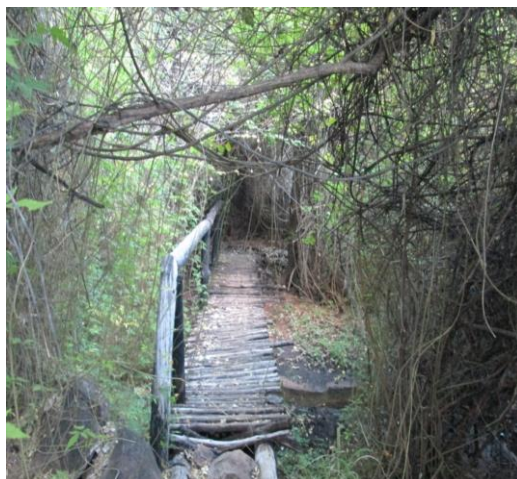


Figure 36: The mountain stream (Photograph by author 2018).

4.5 The rest camp and campsite: Although slightly below each other, they have similar sand, both tired and exhausted by human traffic over time.

4.5.1 The Rest Camp, previously the German police station after the Genocide. Unimpressive, brown sand, thin – as the impression left by the police. For me there is an *Unheimlichkeit* about the sand in this police place. Consistency: dry and earthy. No remarkable smell. Today, this is where the Restaurant is situated. The former meaning of the place has been almost completely overwritten. What used to be the jail is now the wine cellar. New, happier, and prosperous meanings overlay the former, and which of the customers still detect any bitter-sweet aftertaste in their glasses? The building was constructed from hewn red sandstone from the area. Figure 37, from *The Book of the Waterberg*, shows, on the left, the texture rubbing made of the quarried red sandstone.

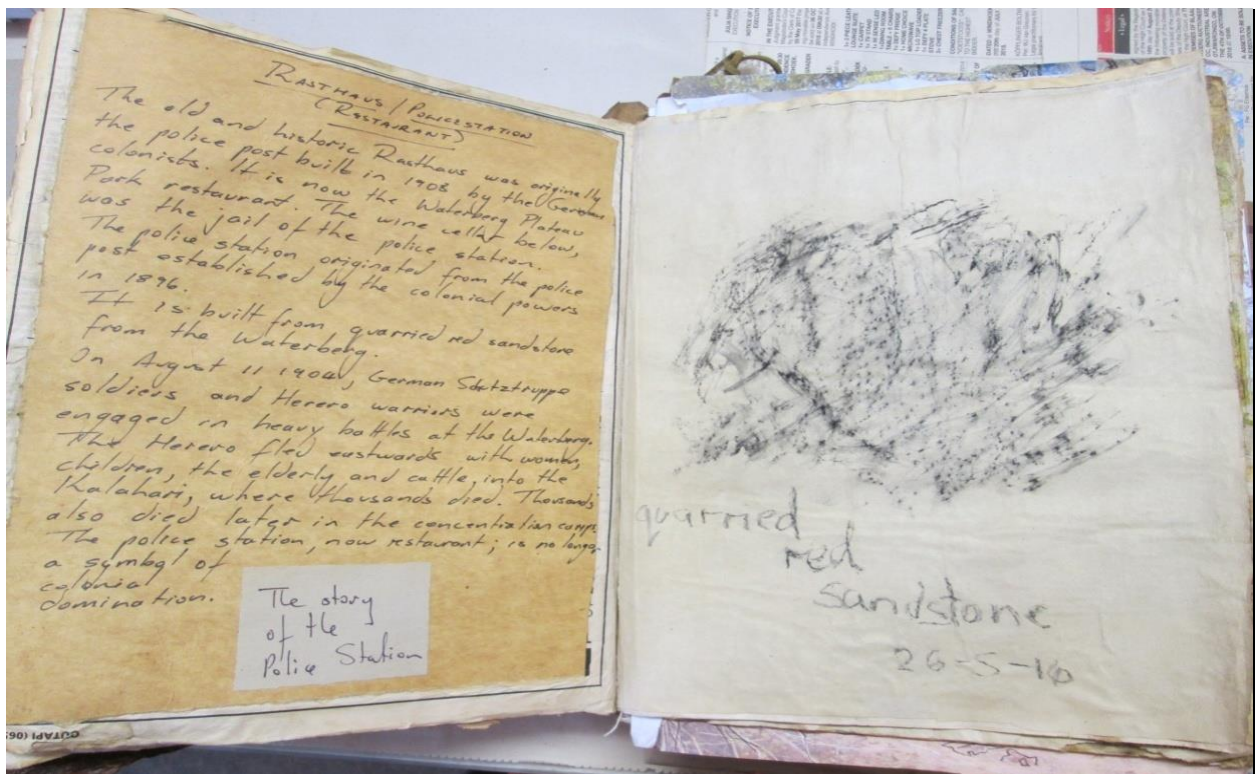


Figure 37: *The Book of the Waterberg*. Pages on the then police station, today Restaurant (Photograph by the author 2020).

4.5.2 The campsite, under the *Ombarumbumba* tree (the tree where the ancestors came through). This area comprises of brown sand. Consistency: dry and earthy. Smells like dry earth. How deep under the surface of this palimpsest do the ancestors prevail? Do they appear to the campers, or are they as dormant as the souls of those who had perished in the wine-cellar/jail nearby?

4.6 The old orange and apple orchard irrigation channels: These date from the time that the Waterberg became a German police station. Consistency: fine, purple-red, earthy loam (colonial). Leafy, forlorn smell. Today's Namibia Wildlife Resort chalets are also on this level (see Figure 38).



Figure 38: Old orange and apple orchard irrigation channels (Photograph by author 2017).

4.7 Purple-red loam from the sub-tropical forested slopes: halfway up. Consistency: loamy. Smells loamy too.

4.8 Waterberg top: Red (a brighter red that glows in sunlight) layered with sun-bleached pink sand from the sandstone rock on top of the plateau. Consistency: Fine and sandy. Figure 39 shows the rock chimneys at the top of the mountain rising out of the sub-tropical forested slopes.

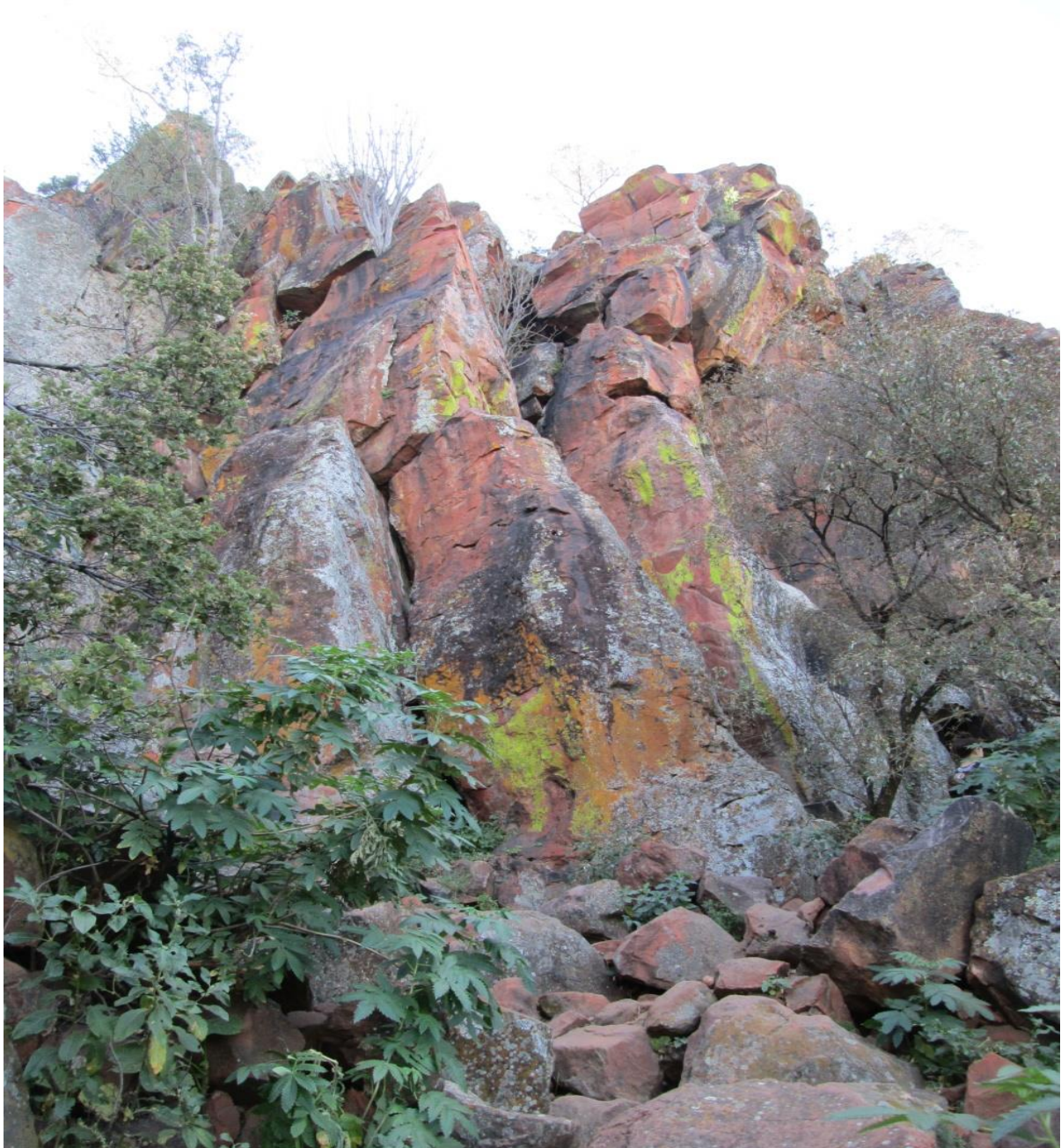


Figure 39: Fossilised red sandstone chimneys at the top of the mountain (Photograph by author 2018).

4.8.1 Plateau cave floor. Orange sand. Consistency: Fine and sandy. Smells dry.

4.8.2 Top of plateau. Waterberg Etjo sandstone – pale pink (faded red and bleached by millions of years of desert sun). Consistency: powdery. Smells of hot dust and sun. The image below shows the older and younger types of sandstone on the mountain top.



Figure 40: The older (pink, bleached) and younger (red) types of sandstone found on the top of the mountain (Photograph by author 2018).

I collected samples from these levels. In their variety of consistency, texture, hue and smell, the different sand layers of the mountain-palimpsest appealed to me for their aesthetic qualities (see Figure 41 on the key of the sand sites). But moreover, of course, each sample I collected is a signifier, dense in meaning – of ecological, geographical, and historical relevance. Perhaps I was not realising it at the time, but what I recorded in my artist's workbook (see below) were traces of the inscriptions and erasures over time on the Waterberg palimpsest's sand substance.



Figure 41: Waterberg Sand Sites. Artist's *Book of the Waterberg* (Photograph by author) 2017.

Figure 42 is my view of the escarpment – my own personal map – in my artist's notebook, marking the selected sites, describing the hue and texture of the sand, as well as the smell. For example, the red sandstone has a sweet, sunbaked smell. The subtropical forested slopes have an even sweeter smell, but with loamy undertones, while the old orchard area has a woody smell. And then again, the fired bricks from the old mission station ruins smell smoky. The savannah at the base of the mountain just smells dry and dusty.

The 'maps' that follow are shown below, and are 'transparent' and meant to be seen overlaid in resemblance of a palimpsest, as on pages 83 and 84.

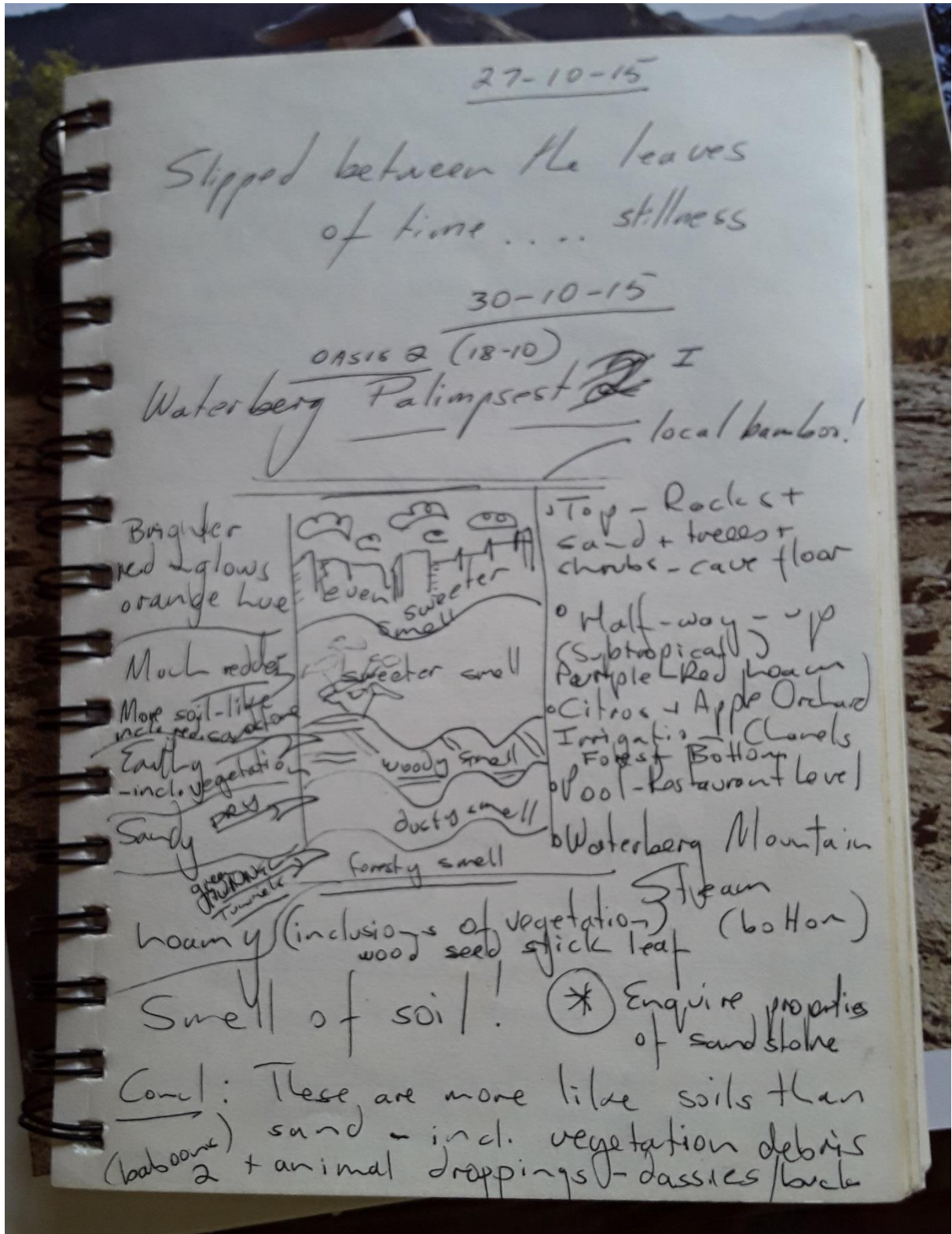


Figure 42: The layers of the Waterberg. Frontal view of the escarpment. (Artist's Notebook 2015). (Transparency layer).

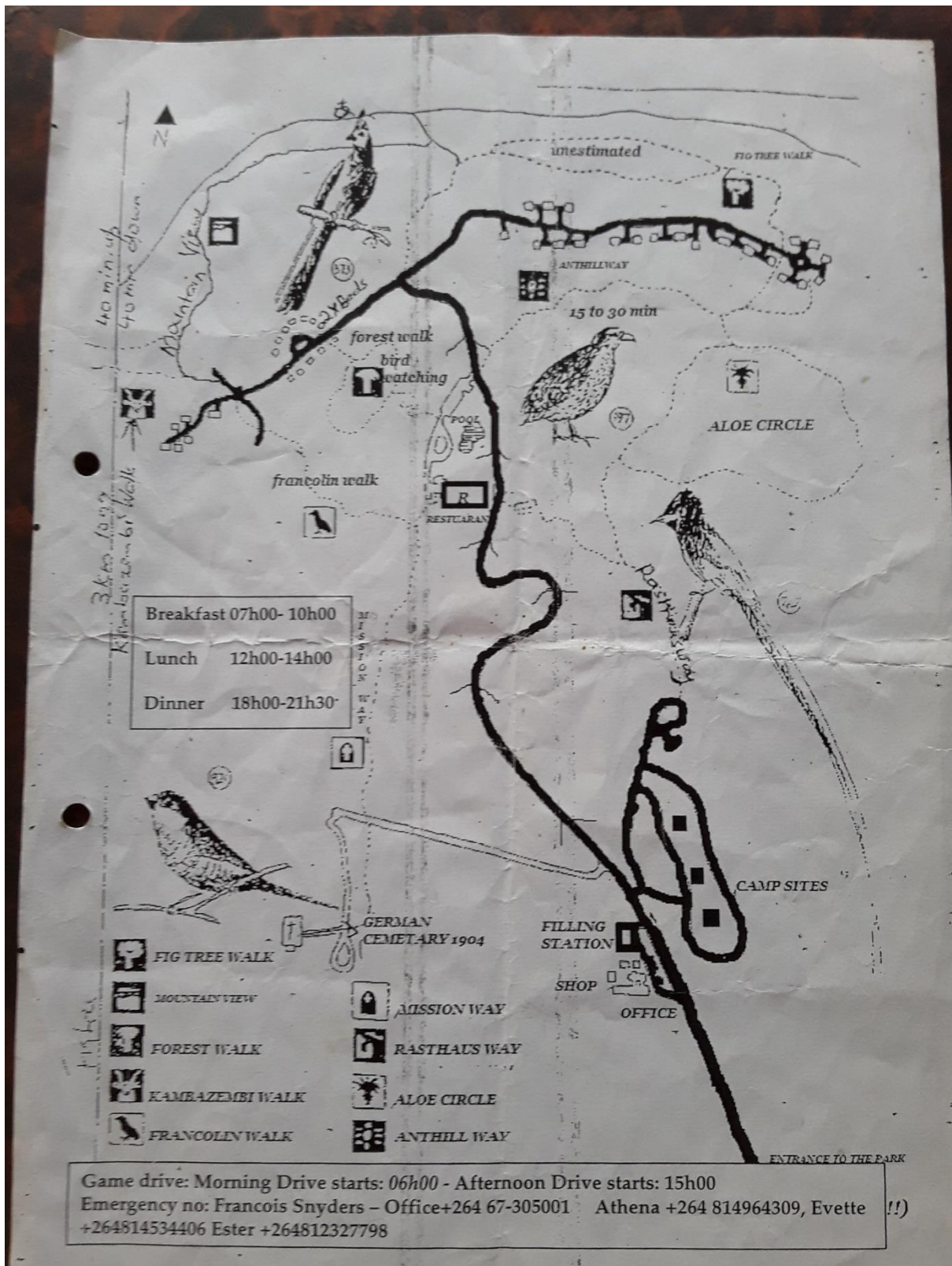
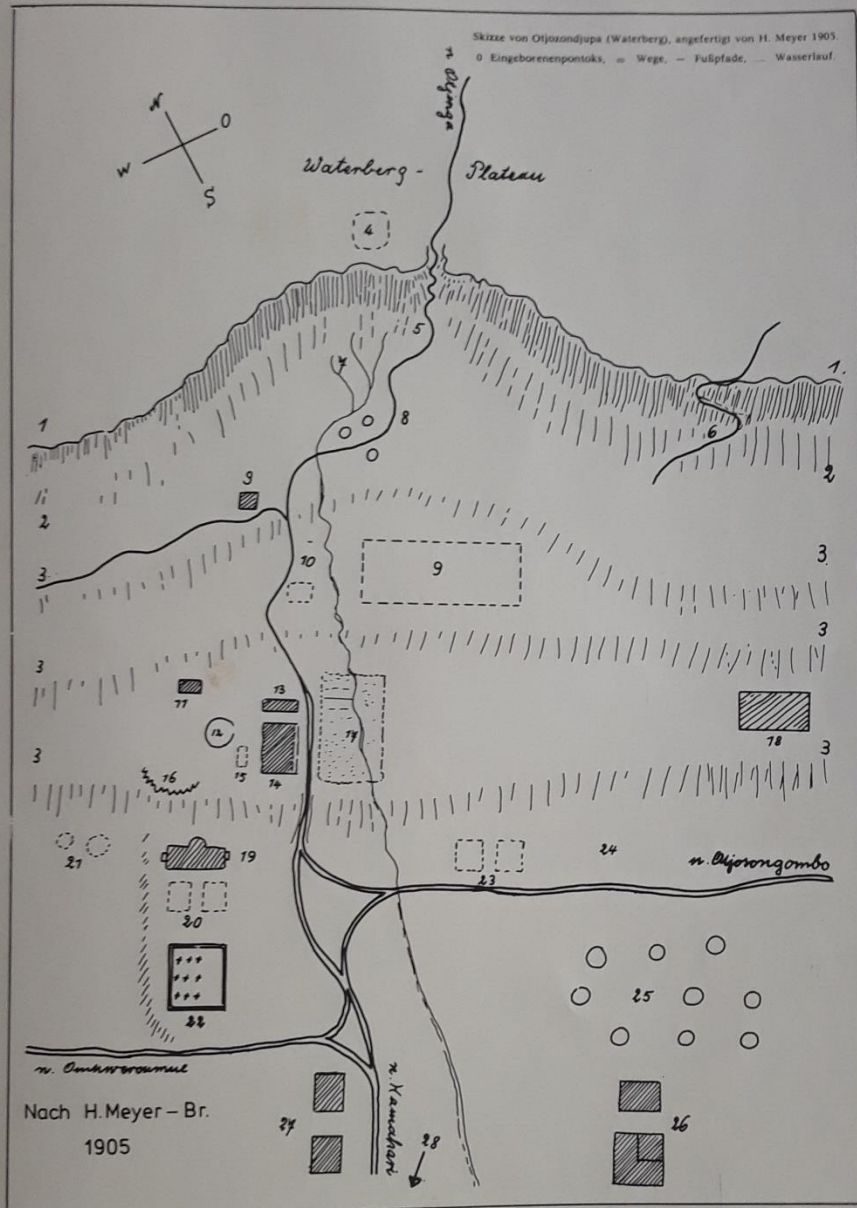


Figure 43: Namibia Wildlife Resort map of the Waterberg sites and trails (Camp handout).
 (Transparency layer)



1 - Drop of the Waterberg Plateau; 2 - Detritus slope; 3 - Terraces; 4 - Heliograph station; 5 - Footpath up the detritus slope; 6 - Narrow path to the plateau; 7 - Springs; 8 - Old huts; 9 - Troop camp; 10 - Troop gardens; 11 - Stone house slope; 12 - Stone kraal belonging to the mission house; 13 - Missionary's built by light-duty soldiers at No. 1 Field Hospital; 14 - Mission house; 15 - Kitchen barracks built by light-duty soldiers at No. 1 Field Hospital; 16 - Herero waggon-shed; 17 - Mission garden; 18 - Military post; 19 - Church, as from 18 August 1904 typhus section; 20 - Tents of the fieldwork; 21 - Quarters of the natives at the field hospital; 22 - Cemetery; 23 - Supply tents; 24 - Outspan; 25 - Old field hospital; 26 - Store of Gustav Sonnenberg, completely destroyed; 27 - Store of Wecke & Voigts, completely destroyed; 28 - Some 800 m further, Kambazembi's settlement with the grave and the ox-head

Figure 44: H. Meyer, *Skizze von Otjozondjupa* (Waterberg, 1905). [\(Transparency layer\)](#)
 Figure 44 is a 1905 map by H. Meyer, indicating the German occupation of the Waterberg with the establishment of the police station. (Mossolow, 1993:59). This provides an interesting juxtaposition with the Namibia Wildlife Resort map shown in Figure 43.



Figure 45: Artist's scroll of the geological sand map of the Waterberg (Photograph by author 2016). [\(Transparency layer\)](#) This is the palimpsest I experimented with in my early creative methodology, showing a geological sand map of the Waterberg.

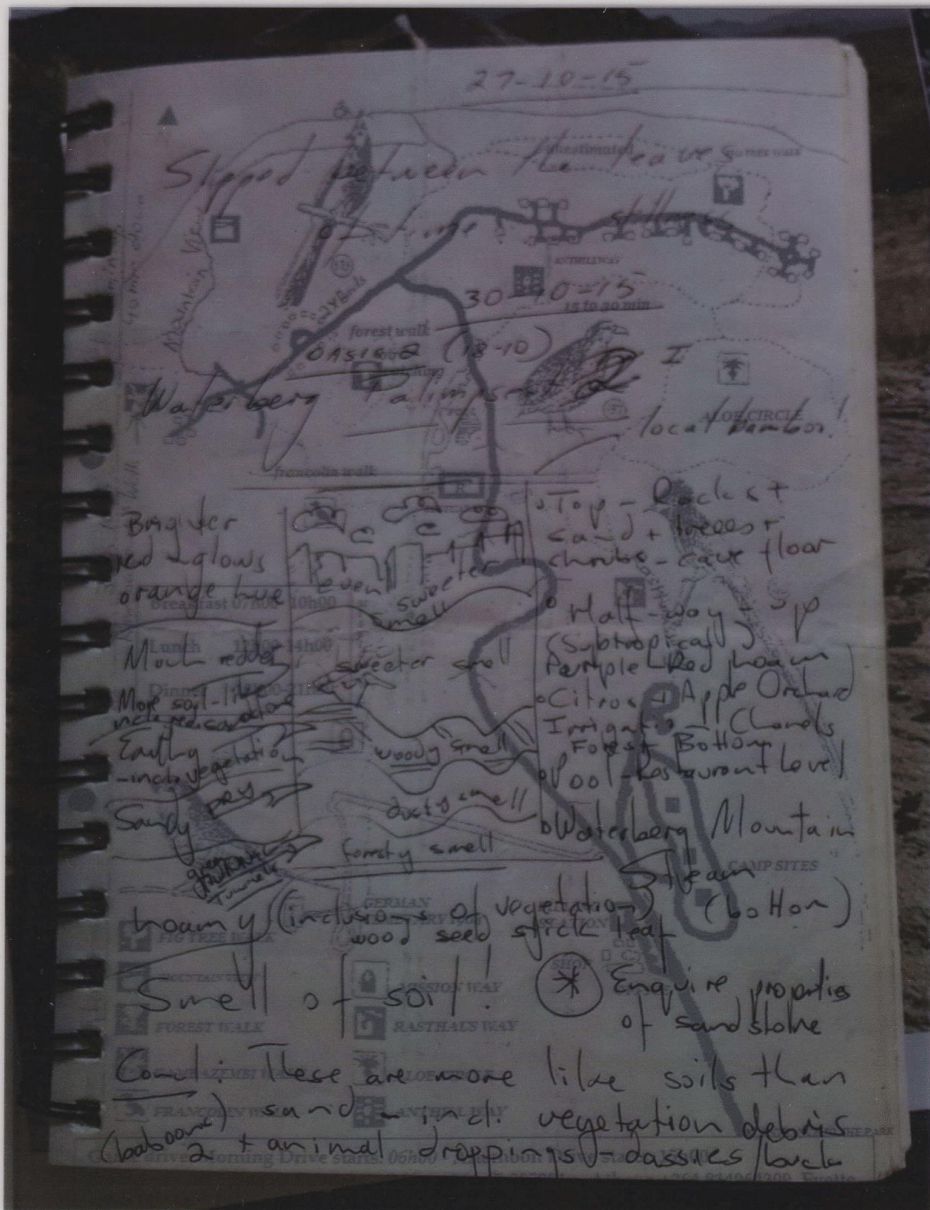


Figure 42: The layers of the Waterberg. Frontal view of the escarpment
 Figure 43: Namibia (Artist's Notebook 2015). Waterberg sites and trails (Camp handout).
 (Transparency Layer)

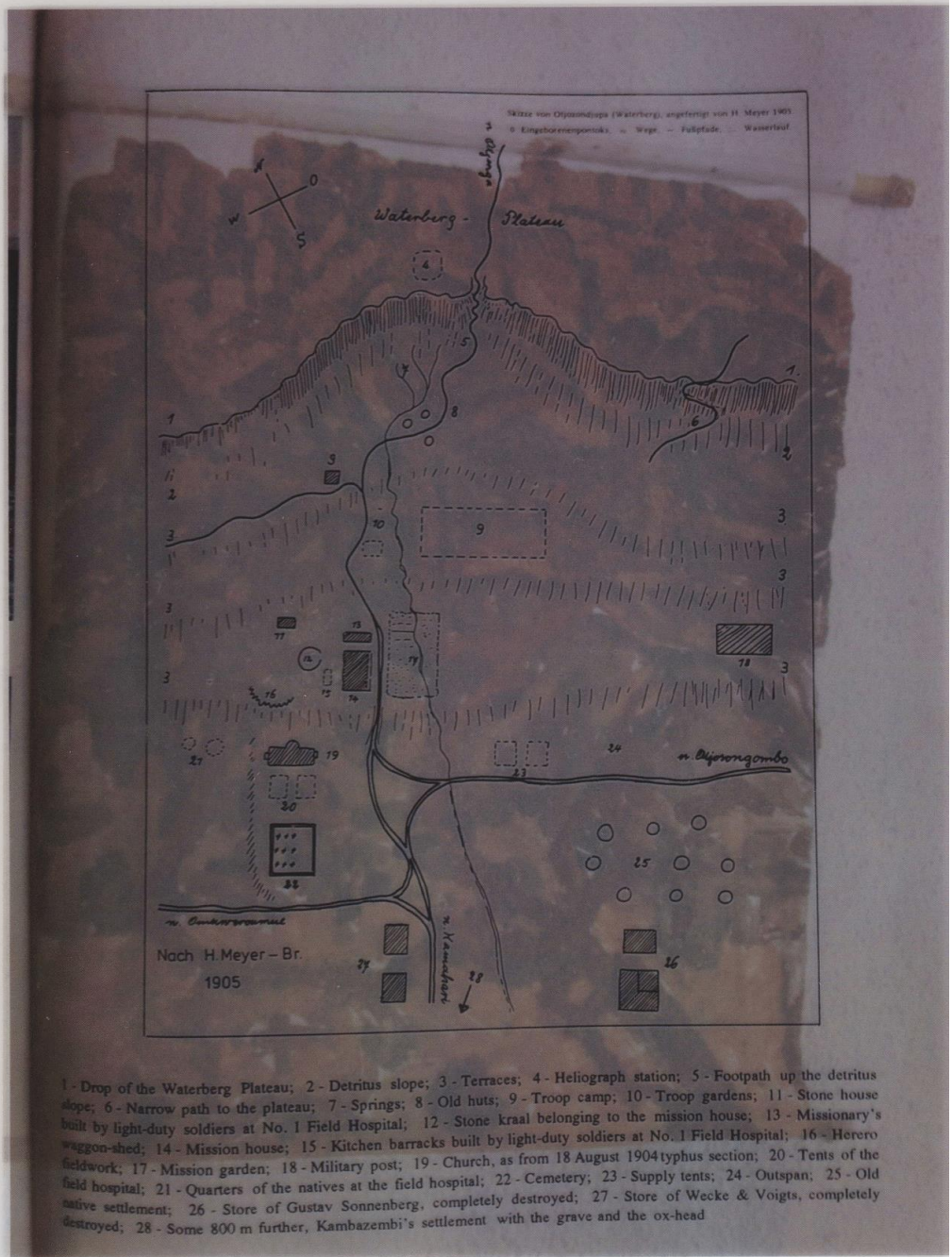


Figure 44: H. Meyer, Skizze von Otjozondjupa (Waterberg, 1905). (Photograph by author)
 20 Figure 44 is a 1905 map by H. Meyer, indicating the German occupation of the Waterberg with the establishment of the police station. (Mossolow, 1993:59). This provides an interesting juxtaposition with the Namibia Wildlife Resort map shown in Figure 43.

The four overlaid 'maps' on the previous pages provide a palimpsest of different times – historical and geological. They demarcate different types of 'ownership' of the Waterberg.

I have always found the outdoors magical, spiritually inspiring and rejuvenating. To be in that space we culturally demarcate as 'nature', hiking, climbing, drawing or meditating, are some of my favourite activities. It gives me a sense of being at the source – the origin of life. Mankind's fabricated realities become just that – fabricated, and largely meaningless – when in the heart of nature. Unfortunately, the very distinction we make between 'nature' and developed and inhabited areas is the reality of our 'developed' and 'civilised' modern industrial world. This is where man has dominated the *other*, the wild and untamed, the 'primitive', in the name of progress. We now see the result in ecological degradation and non-sustainability – and it is not very 'civilised' at all.

This is likewise evidenced by colonialism – the domination and exploitation of people and places, also, here in Namibia, for resources and labour. I always believed in taking an eco-feminist stance, which, however, makes me question the following statement by Stacy Alaimo in *Undomesticated ground: Recasting nature as feminist space*:

Environmental feminists have long insisted that feminism needs to take the materiality of the more-than-human world seriously. The mainstream of feminist theory, however, has, more often than not, relegated ecofeminism to the backwoods, fearing that any alliance between feminism and environmentalism could only be founded upon a naïve, romantic account of reality.

Isn't this "naïve, romantic account of reality" (Alaimo & Heckman 2008:4) in itself the patriarchal gaze of the other? Is this not still looking at 'nature' as the *other*? We are nature, and yet we constantly have to remind ourselves of this salient fact?

5 The Waterberg as an oasis

Being a desert country with vast tracts of uninhabitable spaces, many places in Namibia have originated historically and logistically as oases. The oasis is used for water, shelter, grazing and hunting, and is essential to survive traversing the desert. It was the crossroads of nomads, pastoralists, explorers and colonisers. It served as beacons of shifting territories. Their surroundings became areas of conflict in the fight for survival and territory from as early as the pre-colonial wars through colonisation and into apartheid.

Besides being an oasis, both in the past and still into the present, the Waterberg is also a site that functions in a spiritual manner. For the Herero, it is also home to the *Omumbarombonga*

tree⁸ where, in their creation myth, it is believed that the spirits of the ancestors and the animals came down through the tree (Wende 2009:5). This can be juxtaposed with the Biblical creation myth of Adam being created from dust.

6 The Waterberg as a protected nature resort

Waterberg, like Etosha, is a Namibia Wildlife Resort (NWR). These are protected ecological and historical areas which contain the palimpsests of eco- and geo-history dating from nomad to explorer, from 'territorialist' to coloniser, from Apartheid, through the Liberation Struggle, to Independence, and now, thirty years of post-independence.

6.1 Nature, ecology, geology and sand: of dinosaurs, dragons, meteorites and fossils

As a sand site, Waterberg is unique because its plateau is comprised of petrified reddish Etjo sandstone, formed by windblown red desert dune sand from the Kalahari Desert. It dates back to the Karoo Age, 300-130 million years ago. Geologically, it is considered to be one of the most varied and interesting attractions in Namibia, because of the eroded sandstone chimneys, dinosaur footprints, San rock art, numerous springs and, consequently, abundant wildlife. The metaphor of the Waterberg as a palimpsest is again all too apparent: some layers have been effaced, washed out, carved away, but in some places the old-old narratives remain clearly inscribed, next to, or on top of one another, right under my fingertips. The water from the springs continue to bleed onto the surface like wet ink (Figure 43).

The Waterberg is a vast 'sand-parchment'. The length of the plateau extends 48 kilometers in a north easterly direction, with a width varying between 8-16 kilometres, and an average height of 1700 metres, giving way to the Kalahari Desert in the east (Grunert 2000:38). The youngest deposits are of sand blown in from the present-day Kalahari (Grunert 2000:42).

As already mentioned, amongst other names in the Herero language, the Waterberg is also referred to as *Ondunduyomeva*, meaning "water is coming out of the mountain". The obvious question is, how does the water come to be in the mountain? And this water is always coming out of the mountain, even during years of drought. How can this be, especially in our desert country? The answer has to do with the porous Etjo sandstone which absorbs the rainfall from the plateau, as well as the water running down the vertical fissures. Here, in the subsurface, it meets the Omingonde Sequence of shale layers, and the water emerges as a contact spring.

⁸ *Combretum Imberbe*, known as the Leadwood tree in English (*Tree Atlas of Namibia* 2015).

These spring outlets are evidenced by dense vegetation, for example, at the rest camp (Grunert 2000:42). In other words, the mountain-palimpsest is a porous parchment; it operates as a giant sieve – self-replenishing. Figure 46 indicates this.



Figure 46: The emergence of springs along the Waterberg on a model of a contact spring (Grunert 2000).

Figure 42 showed the artist's interpretation of the geological layers, from a frontal view, with observations on flora and smells of the different soils. This geology is now evidenced by the diagram above (Figure 46).

6.2 Fauna and flora in the Waterberg

The Waterberg shelters approximately 25 game and more than 200 bird species. It is abundant with eland, rare species of black and white rhino, antelope such as sable, roan, bushbuck and tsebe, as well as Cape Buffalo, which are numerous (Waterberg and Surroundings 2013:121). So are the baboons – very numerous. They often try to raid the food and belongings of visitors at the chalets and in the campsite. On one camping trip they actually tried to open the hatch and doors of my bakkie. The magic of the Waterberg palimpsest is the multitude of live narrators on its current surface.

The foot of the plateau comprises of acacia savannah, and rises to “lush, green sub-tropical dry woodland of tall trees and grassy plains at the top” (Waterberg and Surroundings

2013:121). Trees such as the African leadwood⁹ and wild fig proliferate. There are also ten species of fern, of which two are endemic to Namibia and Angola (Waterberg and Surroundings 2013:121).

The red sandstone buttresses host huge stretches of lichen. This is all very unusual for a desert country. Additionally, two-legged, three-toed dinosaur tracks of 150 to 185 million years old are found imbedded in the sandstone on top of the plateau (Waterberg and Surroundings 2013:122). Again, we are reminded of the passing of time – could these footprints have been the first inscription of life on the Waterberg palimpsest of ecology?

On the farm Hoba-West, the Hoba Meteorite, the largest in the world, can be found weighing in at 50 tons of nickel and iron, and dated between 1000 to 300 million years old. Some things can neither be washed nor scraped from the palimpsest. On the farm Harasib, 60 metres below ground in a cave called Dragon's Breath, is the world's largest underground lake with a surface area of almost two hectares. The huge cavern of solid rock can only be accessed by ropes and caving equipment (Waterberg and Surroundings 2013:124).

7 The history of the Waterberg

The images of text on the following pages of the *Omitandu/Chant of the Waterberg*, in Herero and in English, are taken from Laurissa Förster's "Land and andscape in Herero oral culture" (pp. 6-9). They form a palimpsest of oral history.

On pages 93 and 94 the images of text are viewed as transparent and semi-transparent to resemble palimpsests, a visual metaphor for the continuity of oral culture established through the repeated performance and reproduction of this ephemeral art.

⁹ The Omumbarombonga tree – is the ancestral tree of the Herero.

**OMITANDU¹³**

(1)

Kaondeka kaTjombua onaaKakura
omumbanda
kongeama yaTjambaza
omukova mbwa tukirue nomaihi
wozonyanda korumbimba

ondundu yozondjima omarunga
yozonjoka omapongo nde ha rumata
ondundu ndji ri omuatje
waKangombe
omukwendata wojaKatuse kaTjivanda
eye Kambazembi waKangombe
Kangombe wa za mu Tjueza.

(2)

Tji mo tara posyo mukuma mbwini
komukuma weyuva rongurova
ondji ri omuatje waMujazu
eye Pejangu.

(3)

Tji mo tara komukuma mbwina
ondji ri k**Okamuru** kovineya
kondjuwo yomukazendu waHoke.

(4)

Amakumunika nawa p**Okarupahu**
pondjuwo yomukazendu
wanguwomake nu ngu ha u zongoro
otjowamwari Nangombe.

(5) (Omuverumue)

Pongotwe yondundu tji mai tanauka
nai
opongombe yoviuru yaKapui na
Kajore
ndjaai tutuma onyama ayoo ombura
mozoni.

Figure 47: Omitandu 1. Transparency 1.

(6)

Tji mo tara nai
oku indji oya **Kozongominja**
ookoutana waTjirondero waKuhanga
outana mbwa ngarere omaryo nu
ngurova a karira orutjindo.

(7)

Tji mo kotoka mba nai
okutja op **Otjikaru**
oopozonduwombe zahiyaKavari
Kaengombe
womusuko waTjizumo waNdjoura
ombandi
ngwa tezere orutjindo rwomutena na
ha kondisa ondunda yakarora.

(8)

Tji mo yaruka nai
okutja we ya motjiendo tjomuzandu
waRukoro
mu Katjimbonda waRukoro
Okambukomatemba.

(9)

Tji mo kotoka mba nai
Otjozondjupa tjinga atji ri nao
tji wa tanauka mba nai
momuramba wa**Vitombo**
opu pe na tate wahiyaTovekua na
hiyaNangombe
ongombe yaMunduva
ongerero yomaoko nu ndji he ri
oyamarama

Epumbi Kaengombe onaaMuvi
Muherero
Kaukundua omuho wokuoko nu mbu
he ri owamarama
u ri mbo.

Nu aa kanwa pozombango
zozondundu otjondjima ondwezu
eye Tjiponda wooKarukua na
Nangombe,
ongombe ya Munduva
omuatje waKamarenga
ngwaa turire kOtjahevita
we yekutira mbo
u ri mbo.

Otjozondjupa tjinga tji ri nai
u ri nai
oopomuramba wa**Vitombo.**

(10)

Ondji ri **Ohamakari** yaKakonge
okona ku kwa tira ouye potjirongo
tjovita
Ehi ri hanike mokati.

(11)

Imba **Otjozongombe**
ondana yaMihe ongozu
ndji ha taurire oina
ndj iri koMutima waMungendje.

Figure 48: Omitandu 2. Transparency 2.

"PRAISE SONGS"¹⁴

(1)

Kaondeka of Tjombua and Kakura,
the second wife
at the lion of Tjambaza
whose skin was rubbed with the milk
of goats that were being herded
mountain of the thievish baboons
and of the tame snakes which do not
bite
mountain that is the child of
Kangombe
of the matrilineage of Katuse of
Tjivanda
- he is Kambazembi of Kangombe
Kangombe, who was born of Tjueza.

(2)

(Okatjonzondjupona)

When you look close to that side
the sunset side
it is the child of Mujazu
- he is Pejangu.

(3)

When you look to that side
it is at **Okamuru** of the hidden things
at the house of the wife of Hoke.

(4)

While it looks nice at **Okarupahu**
at the house of the woman
who falls on her hands and not on her
knees, like the child of Nangombe.

(5) **(Omuverumue)**

Behind the mountain, when the
mountain turns like this
at the cattle with the big nostrils, (*the
cattle*) of Kapui and Kayore
the meat of which was shining like
raindrops on ozoni-berries
(*when it was slaughtered*).

(6)

When you look like this
to that side of **Okozongominya**
at the calves of Tjirondero of Kuhanga
the calves that went grazing where
later the people settled.

(7)

When you come back here like this
that is at **Otijkaru**
at the oxen of the father of Kavari
Kaengombe
of the brave lady of Tjizumo of Ndjoura
who traced her brother on his trek so
that it did not reach the small hill of
the small river.

(8)

When you move to this side
that is when you come to the grave
of the son of Rukoro
to Katjimbonde of Rukoro
that is **Okambukomatemba**.

Figure 49: Praise poem 1. [Transparency 3](#).



(9)

When you come back here like this
when **Otjozondjupa** lies like that
when you have turned here like this
in the river of **Ovitombo**
that is where my father is
who was born of the father of Tovekua
and the father of Nangombe
the cattle of Munduva
who was the last-born with arms, not
with legs
the Giant Kaengombe who was like
Muvi Muherero
Kaukundua with a shin bone of the
arm and not of the legs
he is there.

And he used to go to drink at the
mountain pass like a male baboon
he is Tjiponda of Karukua and
Nangombe
the cattle of Munduva
the child of Kamarenga
who was staying at **Otjahevita**
he died there
he is there
when **Otjozondjupa** is like this
he is there
in the river of **Ovitombo**.

(10)

This is **Ohamakari** of Kakonge
that is the site where the people died
at the place of war
the land where the people split (*and
fled to Botswana*)

(11)

Here is **Otjozongombe**
the tame calf of Mihe
which does not jump (*to run after its mother*)
which is to Mutima of Mungendje."

Figure 50: Praise poem 2. [Transparency 4](#).

OMITANDU ¹³	
(6)	(1)
Tji mo tara nai	Kaondeka kaTjombua onaaKakura
oku ingi ayokazoro	omumbanda
ookoulana wafira	kongeama yaTjambaza
outana mbwa na	omukova mbwa tukirue normalhi
ngurova a kama onyaka	wozonyanda korumbimba
	ondundu yozondjima amarungo
(7)	yozonjoka omapongo nde ha rumata
Tji mo kotoka mba	ondundu ndji ri omuatje
okulja opOjijikaru	waKangombe
oapozonduwotri	omukwendata wajaKatuse kaTjivanda
Kaengombe	eye Kambazemi waKangombe
womusuka wafira	Kangombe wa za mu Tjueza.
ombandi	(2)
ngwa tezere onyaka	Tji mo tara posyo mukuma mbwini
ha kondisa ondunda yokawo	komukuma weyuva rongurova
	ondji ri omuatje waMujazu
(8)	eye Pejangu.
Tji mo yaruka nai	(3)
okulja we ya mo	Tji mo tara komukuma mbwina
wafukaro	ondji ri kOkamuru kovineya
mu Katimbende wafukaro	kondjuwo yomukazendu waHoke.
Okambukomatamba	(4)
	Amakumunika nawa pOkarupahu
(9)	pondjuwo yomukazendu
Tji mo kotoka mba	wanguwomake nu ngu ha u zongoro
Ojizondjupa tiri	otjowamwari Nangombe.
ni wa tanauka m	(5) (Omuverumue)
namelanzaba wafitamba	Pongotwe yondundu tji mai tanauka
oou po ngatle	nai
nyawangombe	opongombe yovluru yaKapul na
angombe yaMur	Kajore
angero yomada	ndjaal tutuma onyama ayoo ombura
okambazaba	mozoni.

Figure 47: Omitandu 1. Transparency 1.

4

"PRAISE SONGS"

(1)

Kaondeka of Tjombua and Kakura,
 the second wife
 at the lion of Tjambaza
 whose skin was rubbed with the milk born of cattle of Kapui and Kayore
 of goats that were being herded
 mountain of the thievish baboons
 and of the tame snakes which do not bite
 mountain that is the child of Kangombe
 of the matrilineage of Katuse of Tjivanda
 - he is Kambazembi of Kangombe
 Kangombe, who was born of Tjueza.

(2)

(Okatjonzondjupona)
 When you look close to that side
 the sunset side
 it is the child of Mujazu
 - he is Pejangu.

(3)

When you look to that side
 it is at **Okamuru** of the hidden things
 at the house of the wife of Hoke.

(4)

While it looks nice at **Okarupahu**
 at the house of the woman
 who falls on her hands and not on her knees, like the child of Nangombe.

(9)

When you come
 when Otjonzondjupa lies like that
 when you have turned here like this
 in the river of Ovilombo
 that is where my cattle is
 and the father of Nangombe
 the cattle of Munduva
 who was the last-born with arms, not with legs
 the Giant Kaengombe who was like Muvi Muherero
 Kaukundud with a shin bone of the arm and not of the legs
 he is there.
 And he used to
 the cattle of Munduva
 the child of Kanga
 who was staying
 he died there
 he is there
 when Otjonzondjupa is like this
 he is there
 in the river of O

(5) **(Omaverumue)**
 Behind the mountain, when the mountain turns like this
 at the cattle with the big nostrils, (the meat of which was shining like raindrops on ozoni-berries (when it was slaughtered).
 (6)
 When you look like this
 to that side of **Okozongominya**
 at the calves of Tjirondero of Kuhanga
 the calves that went grazing where later the people settled.

(7)

When you come back here like this
 that is at **Otjijkaru**
 at the oxen of the father of Kavari
 Kaengombe
 of the brave lady of Tjizumo of Ndjoura
 who traced her brother on his trek so that it did not reach the small hill of the small river.
 (8) people still fond
 When you move to this side
 that is when you come to the grave
 of the son of Rukoro
 to Katjimbonde of Rukoro
 that is **Okambukomatemba**.

(10)

This is **Ohamakani** of Kokongide
 that is the site where the people died
 place of war
 land where
 fled to Botswana

(11)

This is **Ojizongomine**
 the tame cat
 that is **Okambukomatemba**
 which is the kingdom of Nangombe

Figure 49: Praise poem 11. Transparency 31.

The history of the Waterberg has and continues to form a transient palimpsest of layered perceptions of different peoples with different narratives over time. Against that, the palimpsest of geology and ecology seems to continue today as before.

7.1 The first people

The Khoisan were the first people who used the Waterberg as an oasis. This is evidenced by the rock paintings one can see there. Their lifestyle was nomadic. Their relationship of survival with the land and its plants and animals was symbiotic. Is this not infinitely wiser than our exploitative and consumer lifestyle of today? In their symbiotic relationship with the land as hunter gatherers they lived in harmony with the earth, not taking more than needed, keeping the balance and ensuring the future. In the Waterberg there would be that perfect oasis, with water all year round and an abundance of game and plant life. When they travelled, they buried their ostrich eggshell water containers in the sand in strategic places for future journeys and returns.

7.2 Ancestral lands and pastoral nomads

In contrast to the Khoisan, the Herero were pastoral nomads, travelling with their cattle from oasis to oasis. From central Africa they travelled to present-day Namibia in search of grazing and water for their herds of cattle. These herds of cattle constituted their wealth, in the past, and to the present day.

Despite the differences between nomads and pastoralists, the traditional Herero chants which capture the history of the Namibian land through song bear similarity to those of the nomadic Aborigine people of Australia, who sang their land into being, as referred to in Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (1987). The songlines are invisible pathways, ancient tracks made of songs, which tell of the creation of the land, linking up all over Australia. It is the religious responsibility and ritual for the Aboriginals to travel the land singing the ancestor's songs – singing the world into being, again and again.

The Waterberg and its surrounding areas are extensively referred to in Herero oral culture. Amongst its many names, the Waterberg is also referred to as '*Kaondeka*', the area being a subject of description in oral history, poems, speeches, and praise songs. Jackson Kaujeua (previously mentioned), was an eminent folk singer of Namibia, who brought to fame the Herero folksong of the Waterberg by the same title – '*Kaondeka*' (1994). '*Ndundu yomeva*' (Mountain of water) is a popular song sung at many schools all over Namibia, celebrating the mountain.

These texts are based on the oral genre of the Herero which is known as *omitandu*, meaning praise songs. “Nearly every place inhabited either permanently or temporarily by members of the Herero society has been given one or more *omitandu* that are known not only to the communities that live at such sites, but also to the wider Herero-speaking community” (Forster 2005:5-6). What is no longer inscribed on the palimpsest – that which the wind carries away as dust – remains as sound; memory in words still sung. A praise poem has to be performed to be brought into existence – then it is erased; then evoked again, as the occasion arises – and every time it is performed, it is not quite the same as the previous time.

This making and erasing constitute a rhythm that can be related to the palimpsest, aurally inscribing and re-inscribing continuously changing events. Both Kavari (2002) and Ohly (1990) (the latter cited here) refer that:

Omitandu recall, describe, praise and comment on a particularly remarkable subject, place or person. Usually, they are part of singing and dancing performances carried out by male and/or female singers, dancers and oral historians at social gatherings like weddings or funerals. *Omitandu* on places form a major group within the genre of *omitandu*.

These often very elaborate recitations refer to names of people (mainly men), their cattle, sites of the buried, as well as events which took place in the area, and form an oral and mental map of the area. Interestingly, it is the burial of ancestors and relatives that indicates communal ownership of that area. Dust to dust – returning to the land ... sand ...

Additionally, “[t]he National Broadcasting Corporation’s (NBC) radio programmes usually cover Ohamakari Day, which commemorates the so-called ‘Battle of Ohamakari’¹⁰ on 11–12 August, by having oral historians narrate the history of the war in the Waterberg area” (Förster 2005:17). Every year, the Herero commemorate this date with marches and speeches and the retelling of the battle.

¹⁰ The term Battle of Ohamakari, as used in the Herero oral tradition, corresponds with Battle of the Waterberg as used in German oral tradition, German colonial and contemporary popular literature.

Dag Henrichsen¹¹ of Basler Afrika Bibliographien¹² in his journal article “Ancestral lands in the late 19th century central Namibia: The visions, realities and limitations of an Ehi Ovaherero” ([sa]:17-18) explains that the view of Herero pastoralists from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards:

[w]as rooted in a specific concept of territoriality for a people in need to sustain a semi-nomadic economy and society in the unpredictable semi-arid highlands of central Namibia. Land shortage and the access to land, i.e. pasture and wells or, more precisely, natural and artificially created water points, were a constant and principal issue for the pastoralists.

This territoriality involved skirmishes with other communities¹³, such as the Damara and Nama-Oorlamse¹⁴. Aided by the influx of guns and horses, this led to the construction of “ehi rOvaherero”, meaning Land (and also sand) of the Ovaherero. He describes that this was narrated through, and supported by, the praise poetry of the Herero. The aptness of the palimpsest as metaphor for this process, is quite apparent:

The term implied both political and **idealised** claims to territory, in particular wells and pasture, throughout central and even southern Namibia, irrespective of actual settlements. This concept, deeply rooted in an historical understanding of Herero being nomadic cattle herders in need of open or rather flexible access to pasture and water, was incessantly narrated through praise poetry and 'contained' in the memorialisation of water points, the ancestors and their graves (Henrichsen [s.a.]:18).

Henrichsen continues to state that these memorised praises “... uphold claims to settlement areas and rights of access to natural resources”, and that:

[v]ery much being an expression of a historical sociology of a pastoral people, praise songs tie people, cattle and 'land' together or rather, they naturalise people and cattle in a topology of locations, as such providing memory devices to articulate claims to localities like pastures and water points. Taken as a whole, praise songs can be read as 'legal charters' with

¹¹ Dag Henrichsen is a Namibian historian who heads the Archives of Basler Afrika Bibliographien and is a lecturer at the University of Basel in Switzerland. He is a well-known author on Namibia, for example *Claiming space and power in pre-colonial central Namibia: the relevance of Herero praise songs* (1999).

¹² Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB)'s archive comprises predominantly unpublished text, image, sound and film from private collections and organisational archives. These are complemented by thematically organised press and ephemera collections. Their focus areas are Namibia and southern Africa in the twentieth century. Characteristic of the many archival collections is the interrelation of different formats, adding to the research potential of the collections.

¹³ Previously referred to as 'tribes', in the process of decolonisation the less loaded term 'communities' is now often given precedence, although many people continue to self-identify as belonging to a 'tribe', regardless of the colonial administrative ordering principles also embedded in the history of the word. The palimpsest, again, is a useful method to explain how society over centuries erase and rewrite the meaning of the same concept.

¹⁴ In the Cape Colony – still under the Dutch VOC – the word was used to refer to the Khoikhoi as they lost their independent way of living and adopted more and more Dutch ways – especially the Dutch-Afrikaans language.

which Herero people encode or define claims to particular places and territory and with which to challenge counter-claims by rival parties. (Henrichsen [s.a.]:18-19)

Additionally, “[w]omen were crucial in articulating this vision as they were principal transmitters of praise poetry and, as such, of the morality and pastoral world view embedded in their recitals and performances” (Henrichsen [s.a.]:20-21). This provides both a matriarchal and pastoral background of oral ownership of the land, which was overlaid in the palimpsest of identity with the land by a patriarchal and colonising mentality.

This was the pastoral backdrop when German colonialism began to establish itself in central Namibia in the 1890s. The society was an economically rich and modern pastoral society in its material culture and practices, with wells for water and cattle as wealth – and also as signifier of status and means for trade. The arrival of the Germans marked an interesting cross-section between geographical time, social time and ‘event time’¹⁵ – it was an event that changed the use of the soil, and as such caused rupture in pastoral processes that had moved and changed very slowly prior to the rupture. Many everyday events did not have any effect on the pastoral time, but the German colonial intervention certainly did by 1908.

... rupture and erasure – also palimpsest processes ...

Many leaders and informants have varying stories of the scramble for land. There are many interpretations of this story. One version of these tragi-comic stories about *Lebensraum*¹⁶ by German agents is recorded by Kirsten Alnaes¹⁷, through interviews with the Mbanderu section, in her article, “Living with the past: the songs of the Herero in Botswana” (1989:275):

The Germans came and told Kahimemua that they wanted the land "Well," said Kahimemua, "bring plates, buckets and baskets and we will give you land." Containers were brought and Kahimemua had them filled with soil. "Here you are," he said to the Germans, "here is land for you." The Germans became furious and said they did not want soil you can put in containers; they wanted our land our country. And so the Germans attacked us and killed Kahimemua.

The concept of chiefs as being representative of *ehi* (sand-land) and not owners of the land, which was a European conception, clashed with that of colonialism.

¹⁵ The French historian of the Mediterranean world, Fernand Braudel (1902-1985), proposed this way of thinking about historical change: the environment changing very slowly and cyclically, societies changing in ways that can sometimes be observed in a single lifetime, and individual lives playing themselves out, so to speak, on the surface of historical time, rendering some individuals inconsequential and others unforgettable.

¹⁶ Loosely translated as living space.

¹⁷ Alneas (born 1927) was affiliated to the University College London as a social anthropologist.

7.3 Spiritual colonisation – the Waterberg as a mission station

When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.

(Desmond Tutu)

In the section above, the story – not 'ownership' – of the land was sung, described by cultural and environmental ties which reinforced the cultural and spiritual belief system of the Herero people. With the arrival of the missionaries, they tried to impose their Christian belief system onto the local 'heathens'. This imposed a new layer of spirituality upon the land.

Dr. N. Mossolow's¹⁸ *Waterberg. On the history of the mission station Otjozondjupa. The Kambazembi tribe and Hereroland* (1993) documents the narratives, treaties and procurements of the territory at the time. He describes how in 1844 the Rhenish Mission Society in Germany instructed the Rev. Carl Hugo Hahn to establish a mission station in the Otjozondjupa region. Rev. Hahn was the founder of the Rhenish Mission station at Otjikango (Gross Barmen). From Gross Barmen he undertook a journey to Otjozondjupa to find a suitable place to establish the next mission station with the eventual aim to plant a chain of stations from the south to the north (Mossolow 1993:4). This was a kind of spiritual colonisation for the *Lebensraum* of the soul.

In 1873, the Mission Society in Germany appointed Rev. Heinrich Biederbecke to establish the mission station in the Waterberg (Mossolow 1993:7). On his arrival at Otjondjupa, Brother Biederbecke described the mountain:

... I was surprised by the beauty of the place. It is situated at the foot of a densely wooded mountain range which rises from the plain in terraces. At the top, it ends in a crest which is some 60 feet high and which consists of gigantic blocks of red sandstone which stand vertically next to each other. At the foot of this crest – and that is so remarkable in a country so poor in water – there are several springs (quoted in Mossolow 1993:8).

From 1891 to 1904 the Rev. Eich (Mossolow 1993:15), then heading the mission station at Otjozondjupa, reported on the Herero's attitude: "[t]here is great indifference to the Lord's Word among the heathen, both at the station itself and in the outlying areas". We see here a palimpsest of conflicting spiritual beliefs leading to claims for land and souls. Nevertheless, today, ninety percent of Namibians are Christian.

¹⁸ Mossolow (1 July 1910 – 9 November 1988) was a Russian- born Namibian historian and archivist.

7.4 Colonialism, the Battle of the Waterberg and the German-Herero Genocide

With streams of blood and streams of money I will exterminate the Herero
(General Lothar von Trotha 1904)

Waterberg – the ultimate oasis in the desert; the mountain from whence the water comes; the desert oasis. But contradicting this contemporary view of the Waterberg as an oasis, an area of protected, preserved and enshrined nature, is the second word that instantaneously springs to mind: genocide. Unfortunately, the Waterberg is also infamous as the site of the Herero Genocide by German colonial forces in 1904.

There is a vast amount of literature on the Genocide. Art – visual, literary and other media – offers a means of approaching the incomprehensibility of the Genocide. Elizabeth R. Baer¹⁹ (2018) is one scholar whose work illuminates the challenges. *The Genocidal gaze* is an analysis on the 1904-08 Namibian Genocide. The focus is on the concept of the genocidal gaze, and the African gaze of resistance. She explores the different modes of perception of dominance and victimhood through the eyes of German and African authors by means of literary texts and art. These are:

- the diaries of Hendrik Witbooi,
- Gustav Frenssen's colonial novel *Peter Moor's journey to Southwest Africa* (1906-7),
- post-Holocaust texts by German Uwe Timm,
- the work of Ghanaian novelist Ama Ata Aidoo
- and South African artist William Kentridge.

Baer explores the concepts of racial superiority: *Lebensraum*, and *Rassenschande* (racial shame – reflecting anti-miscegenation) as well as the shameful methods used by the colonial forces, such as concentration camps, death camps, starvation and the killing of women and children. Through these, connections between the Ovaherero and the Holocaust (1940) are demonstrated.

General Von Trotha's above statement of 1904 encapsulates the German *Vernichtungsbefehl* ("annihilation order") against the Herero and Nama people in that "Every Herero will be shot". It is striking that a place ecologically so harmonious as the Waterberg is synonymous with the

¹⁹ Elizabeth Baer is a research professor of English and African studies at the Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota. From 2016-2017 she served as the Ida E. King Distinguished Visiting Scholar in Holocaust Studies at Stockton University in New Jersey.

Namibian Genocide still today. The “Battle of the Waterberg” (1904) is said to be the first genocide of the twentieth century, in that eighty percent of the Herero people were exterminated (with poisoned wells and dying cattle left behind), and the rest dispersed, a diaspora, driven into the Omaheka desert (Herero for place of deep sand). Some ended up in Botswana; others moved away from the Waterberg to the current-day Limpopo, South Africa (Henrichsen [s.a.]:1-3).

a genocide for land

blood soaking into the sand

water poisoned

dead cattle

survivors fleeing into DEEP SAND.

And those who died – dust to dust

erasures, but marks of the remainders still there

The Waterberg becomes a palimpsest of death.

Figures 51 to 53 on the following three transparent pages (in the hardcopy version) create a palimpsest of book covers and poster images referred to in some of Baer’s references. They create layers of past and present references to and information on viewpoints of the Genocide. The effect can be seen as a digital palimpsest on pages 105 and 106.

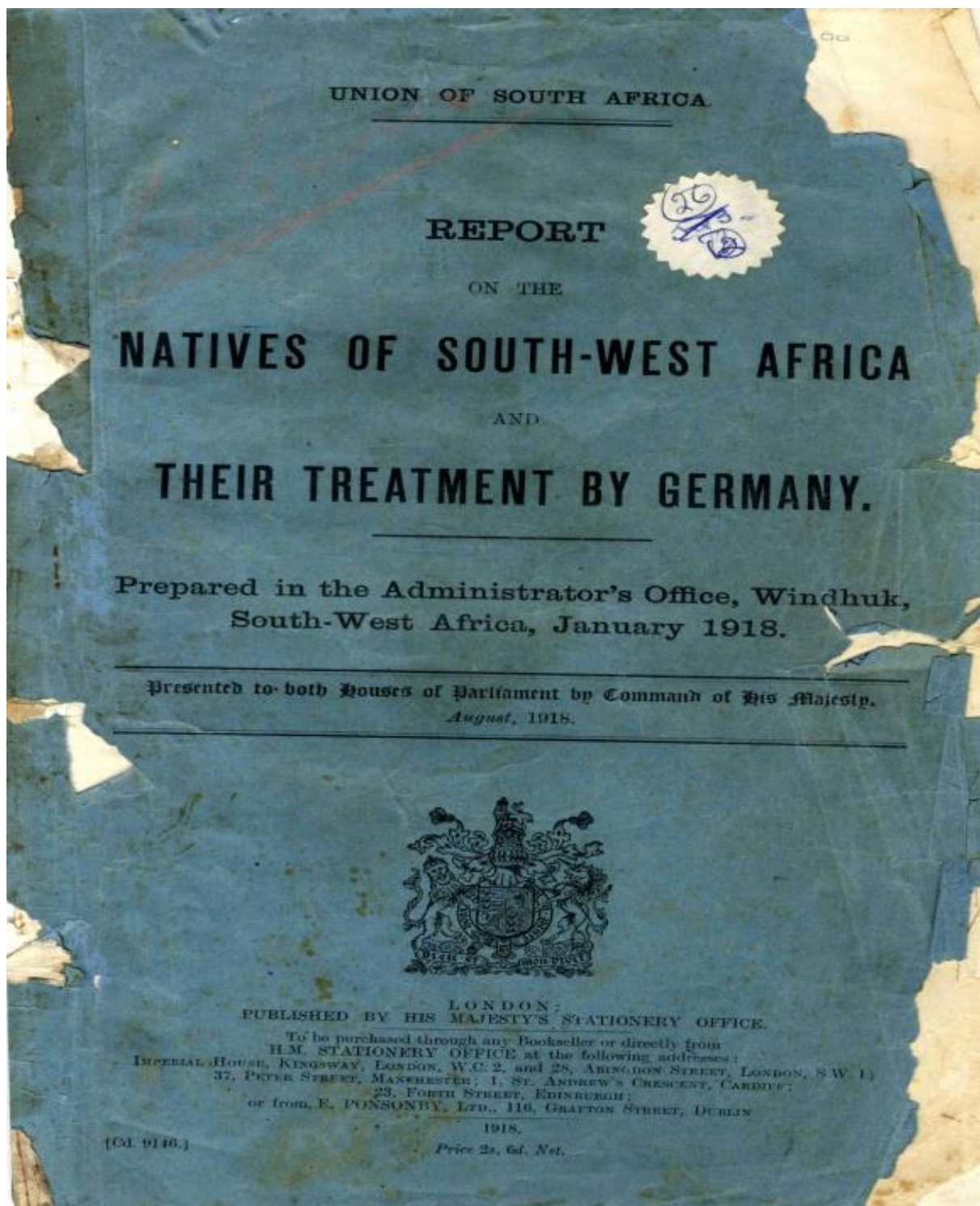


Figure 51: Report on rules and records as to how the indigenous people were treated up to 1918. [Transparency layer.](#)

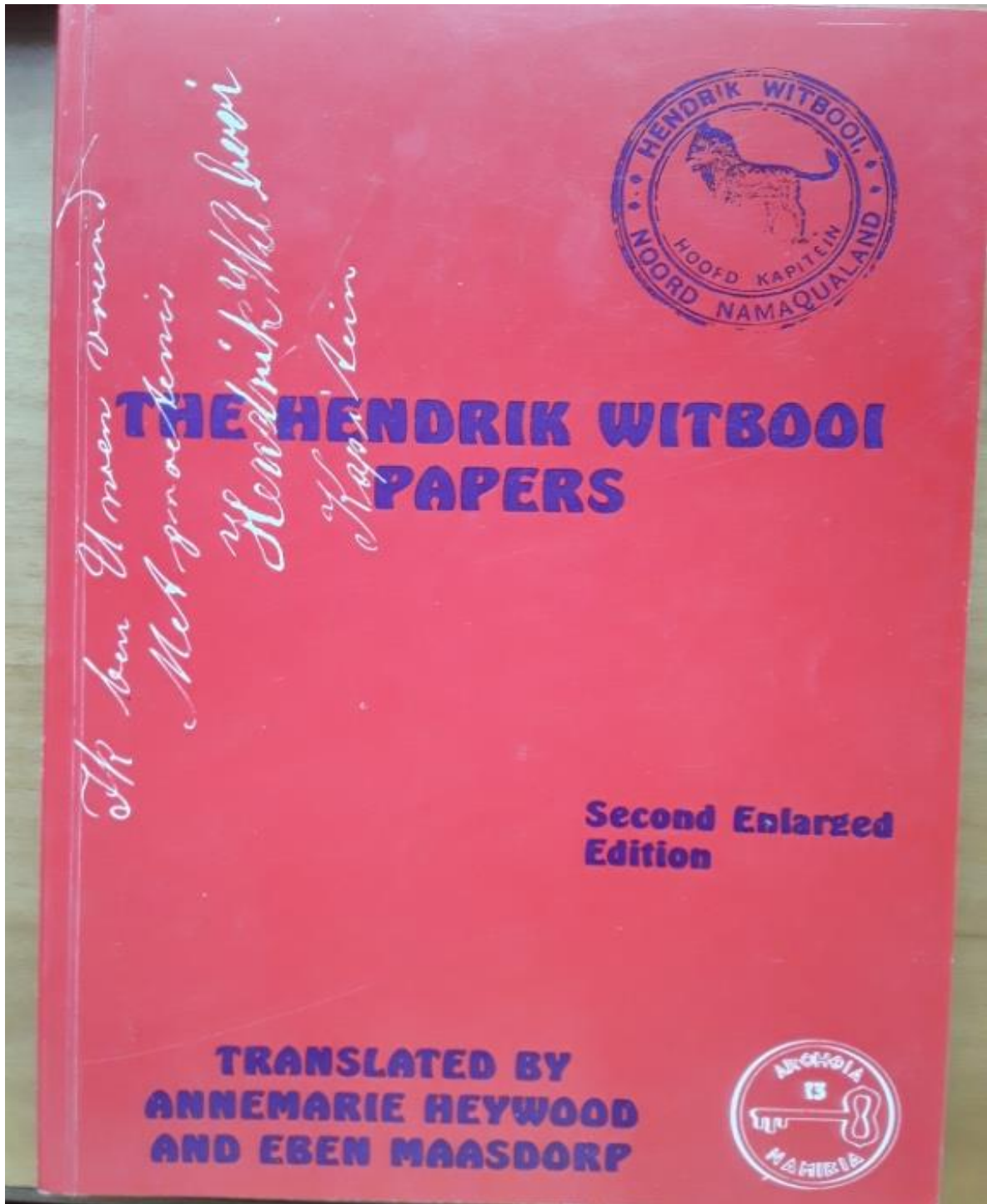


Figure 52: The red book, was the blue book. (Transparency layer).



Figure 53: Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture Poster at the Namibian Archives.
(Transparency layer).

Figures 51 to 53, on the following three transparent pages, create a palimpsest of book covers and poster images referred to in some of Baer's references. They create layers of past and present references to and information on viewpoints of the Genocide.

The three following pages, including this one, are viewed as layers of transparencies.

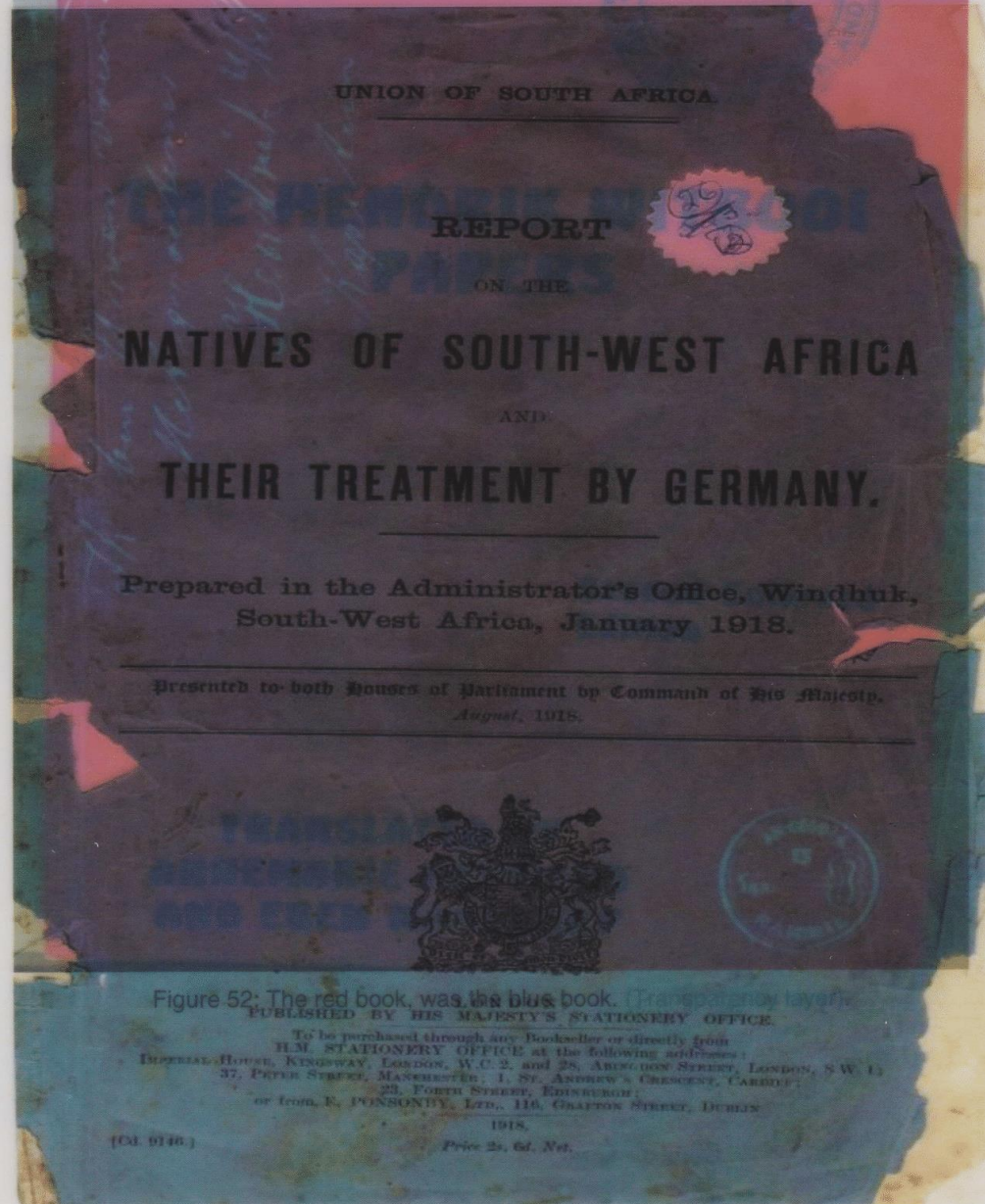


Figure 51: Report on rules and records as to how the indigenous people were treated up to 1918. Transparency layer.

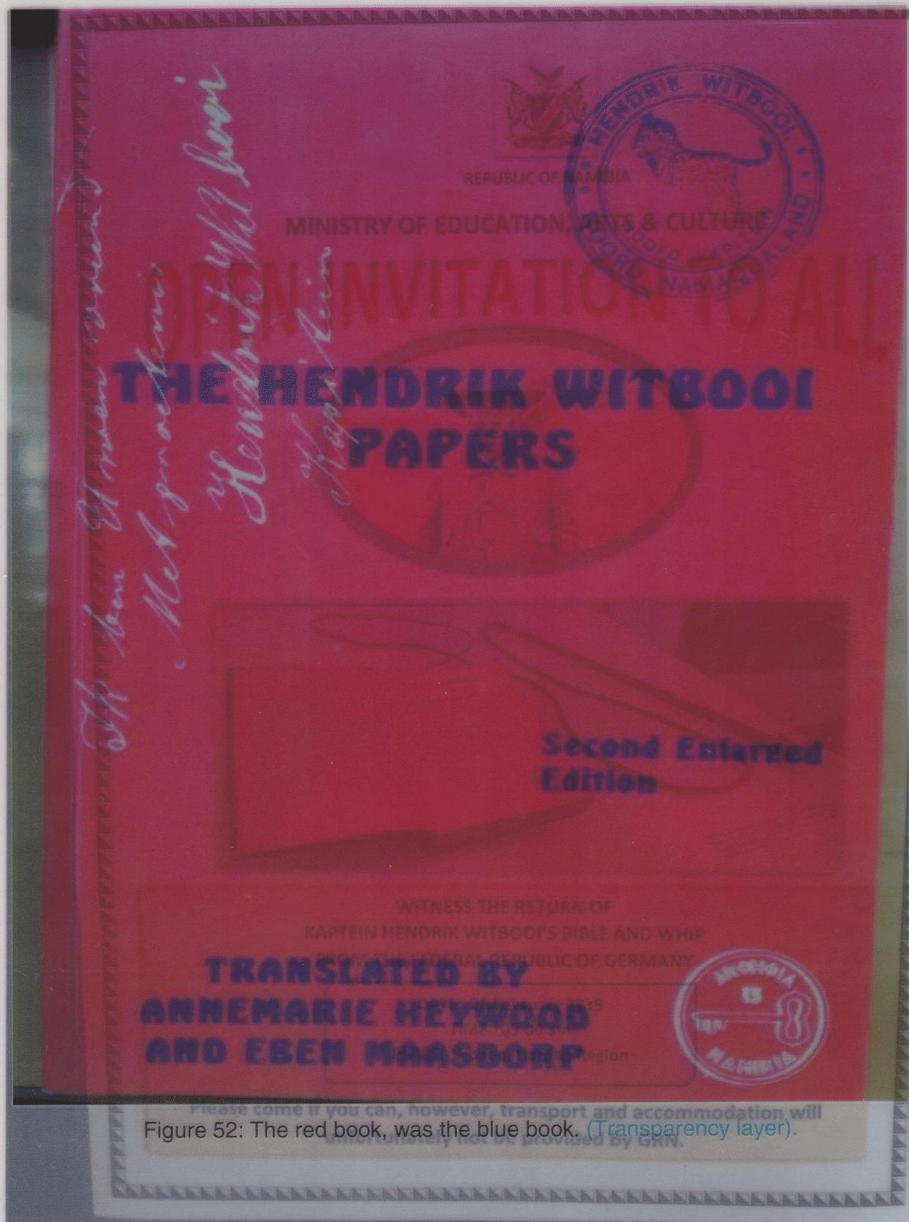


Figure 52: The red book, was the blue book. (Transparency layer).

Figure 53: Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture Poster at the Namibian Archives. (Transparency layer).

7.5 The Waterberg after the war – Police station

The identity of the Waterberg has transformed from an oasis to a mission station, to a battle site, and then to a police station and field hospital. In 1904, Captain Baron von Welck of the 1st Field Regiment stationed at the Waterberg “constructed a road from the upper terrace to the Waterberg Plateau, using explosives” and in 1905 “built a stone wall around the military cemetery”. In 1910 the police station “Rasthaus am Waterberg” was completed (Mossolow 1993:44).

In terms of the Governor’s ordinance of 31 March 1905, the Landespolizei, (Territorial Police Force) was established, and this force was reorganized following the Imperial Ordinance on 4 October 1907. The country was divided into police districts, Waterberg became Police District 1, and a supply depot for the stations in the north, as well as a post for the inspecting officer, were to be established there (Mossolow 1993:44).

With reference to the above, war and consequently colonisation brought ‘land’ police and ‘territorial’ police and ‘inspectors’ – as if the land were a criminal to be held captive and monitored! This last layer in this part of the palimpsest is war, violence, dissemination, military control and domination. The land is dominated, tamed, exploited – blasted into submission – the layer of the oasis as palimpsest has sadly been overwritten.

8 Artists and writers exploring the Genocide

How does a community come to terms with events and atrocities such as genocide and domination? How can this be countered, not only by the victims, but also by those trapped in the traumatic aftermath of the events? How does a community live with events such as these? How are they commemorated and retold? Historical fiction is one means of working through traumatic memory, and art is another. In this section I briefly look at some examples.

8.1 Mari Serebrov’s *Mama Namibia*

This history of events told in Mari Serebrov’s²⁰ fictional narrative, *Mama Namibia* (2013), is based on the experiences of twelve-year old Jahohora during the War of the Waterberg. Rather than giving up their ancestral homes, the Herero people were forced into the Omaheke to die, on General von Trotha’s declaration. The narrative tells of Jahohora searching for her

²⁰ Mari Serebrov has a master’s degree in journalism and history from The University of Arkansas and has written and contributed towards a number of books. *Mama Namibia* is her first novel. The story comes about through a chance encounter which resulted in her being adopted into the Herero culture. As a result of this research, she was appointed by Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruko as an advisor to the Genocide Commission for the Herero Traditional Authority.

family while hiding from German soldiers. It also shows the perspective of someone from a pastoral background. For instance, the Germans used mirrors and sunlight to communicate with the *Schutztruppe* patrols, flashing Morse code messages across the desert, which was perceived as a strange kind of magic. Serebrov's novel takes me into the heart of the victims, and shows me the events through their eyes, in a way 'historical facts' do not.

This dreadful annihilation is manifested by the colonial viewpoint of debasement of the other – the savage; the heathen, as mentioned by Elisabeth Grosz (see previous chapter). Eco-feminists Stacy Alaimo and Susan Heckman echo this philosophy in *Material feminisms* (2008). What Namibia is still waiting for, is an admission of guilt and a formal apology by the current German government.

8.2 Kentridge's *Black Box / Chambre Noire*

Being of Jewish descent, South African artist William Kentridge was familiar with the Holocaust as well as the stigmatisation of the 'other' in a sense more personal than for many. In his installation piece *Black Box / Chambre Noire* (Figure 54), Kentridge "draws symbolic links between this first genocide of the twentieth century and the Holocaust, initiated less than thirty years" thereafter (Baer 2018:99). Kentridge explores not only the Herero genocide in the then German South West Africa, but also other political genocides during the time of German colonialism in Africa through his mixed media and video work. Whereas Kentridge seeks the connections between successive genocides and a kind of genealogy of evil, my interest is the peculiarity of the Waterberg events: that which was inscribed by the Germans after they had razed the surface, some of it still 'readable' today – and other aspects, effaced.

In *Black Box / Chambre Noire* Kentridge explores socio-political dichotomies through the use of charcoal and pastel drawings and video. Through this process, remnants of the past, like history and memory, remain visible in the present. His trademark process of inscription, erasure and re-inscription is palimpsestic in approach. These images are captured through photography and animated through video.

Here Kentridge creates a theatrical production in "which he crafts layered, multimedia performances combining objects and their cast shadows, puppets and puppeteers, as well as his signature traces and erasures into moving image projections and set designs" (Guggenheim 2019). The website further explains that:

[r]eflecting on this historical incident, Kentridge explores the Freudian concept of "Trauerarbeit," or grief work, as a labor without end. This

ongoing investigation dovetails with the artist's unrelenting and self-reflexive examination of process and meaning. In creating a work that reveals the motors of representation, Kentridge renders these means transparent, removing the veil behind which selective, subjective memories are crafted into grand narratives of history. Resisting closure, the work problematizes simplistic constructions of history using binaries of past and present, victim and victimizer, spectacle and spectator.

Kentridge therefore explores the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised with the palimpsest as method.



Figure 54: William Kentridge. *Black Box / Chambre Noire*. 2005. Mixed-media installation with video, 22 minutes (Guggenheim website 2019).

Baer's analyses of this artwork focus on Kentridge's "exploitation of animation and the ways in which animation alternately embodies and critiques the *genocidal gaze*" (2018:99-100). She continues to observe that:

Because of the performative nature of *Black Box* – museum goers sit on chairs to watch the workings of the miniature theatre – and the inclusion of items from the archives of German Imperialism, the Holocaust, and Apartheid dramatically conveys to its audience the lethal nature of the involved ideologies.

Baer continues to aver that, “*Black Box* is a palimpsest that emphasizes the profound damage that the genocidal gaze and silence about genocide visits upon subsequent generations” (2018:100). Kentridge produced a palimpsest of history through a palimpsest of artistic media.

8.3 Tuaovisia Katuua. *Otjitoro Otjindjandja*

A contemporary Namibian artwork by Tuaovisia Katuuo²¹ (Figure 55) exploring the German-inflicted Herero Genocide utilises the tradition of Herero doll-making as part of the artistic technique. These dolls were originally made of leather, and later of fabric. In the artist’s own words, “*Otjitoro Otjindjandja* means genocide or massacre, and this artwork is about the Herero, Nama and San who died in this genocide. In this artwork the red colour represents blood, the dolls represent the people that died during this massacre” (Tuaovisia Katuua, via email 1-25-19). I have worked with this artist before (see the next chapter on my studio work), and we agreed to team up again for a collaborative piece that will contribute to the exhibition component of this thesis.



Figure 55: Tuaovisia Katuua. *Otjitoro Otjindjandja*. Mixed media. 2016. (Collection of the National Art Gallery, Namibia).

²¹ Tuaovisia Katuuo is a contemporary Namibian textile artist, art lecturer and Unam Visual Arts graduate and is known to the author. She is known for utilising traditional African doll-making as an art medium.

9 Conclusion: the Waterberg today

Today the Waterberg is a protected area. It is a place of peace and preservation of the contemporary ecology. What used to be the police station is now a restaurant. The previous jail in the cellar below is now the wine cellar. In what was during the Apartheid era known as South West Africa, the history of the Waterberg as the Waterberg Plateau Park began on 15 June 1956 when two portions of the plateau were declared as national monuments by the Monuments Commission, the Scientific Society and representatives of the Kameradschaft Ehemaliger Deutscher Society (Waterberg and Surroundings 2013:121).

After the attainment of the Namibian Independence in 1990, it became the Namibia Wildlife Resort which it still is today. As a national resort, it belongs to all the people of Namibia, and is part of our ecological inheritance. It is now an oasis for everyone, regardless of colour or creed. This reminds me of my interlocutors' underplaying of the genocidal history in their conversations with me about their memories, knowledge, and stories of sand. The Waterberg proves to be not only an ecological and geological palimpsest, but also a palimpsest of cultural and historic events and perception, from trauma to healing.