

Abstract

In this study I explore the Waterberg plateau, Namibia, through identified sand sites in the area, looking into their ecology, geology, culture, and history. I use sand as an artistic medium, not only for its aesthetic quality, but also as a complex signifier of place. I collected sand samples from the different sites, took photographs, drew and wrote notes, made sand palimpsest scrolls, and conducted interviews with numerous individuals who crossed my path during my studies, including poets and experts in the field. These interviews take the form of conversational transcripts where the stories and reflections of people of the Waterberg are being relayed. I constructed an artist's workbook of the Waterberg plateau, exploring the different sites continuously deconstructing and reconstructing, inscribing and erasing the written and visual information. Finally, I created an installation of rows and layers of people by making use of the sand taken from the ten selected sand sites and based on the geological layers of the Waterberg plateau. I animated this through video and sound in the form of poetry and chants. Together, these outputs comprise the practice-based research component of the study.

The thesis component of my study explores the journey of practice-based research. It reflects on a performative practice-based approach woven throughout the submission. Each chapter in this thesis is titled a story, and through progression, forms layers of palimpsests. I begin with written documentation on and exploration of the palimpsest. Layers of information begin developing into a tangible palimpsest of layered images, texts and concepts. I drew inspiration from Elizabeth Grosz's writing on "Nietzsche and the Choreography of Knowledge" in her book *Volatile Bodies* (1994), which covers the history of the concept of the palimpsest and its applications with regard to eco-feminism and the corporeality of the female body. I apply this to the land.

This is followed with an inquiry into the geological origins and material nature, as well as the sentiment, of sand. Sand is explored both as a signifier of eco-geo culture and identity, as well as an aesthetic material. The latter is supported by visual examples of artists and their artworks using sand as an aesthetic medium. Through sand, I then discover and investigate the Waterberg, Namibia, my chosen oasis, as a manifestation of a palimpsest – sand sites of ecology, geology, culture, history and identity. I begin with the historical and cultural background to the Waterberg, using visual documentation and brief descriptions of the geology of each site. The focus then shifts to the present, where the Waterberg is now a protected national Namibian Wildlife resort, which in theory, belongs to the nation. The emphasis is on ecological awareness from post-colonial, feminist perspectives.

The creative exploration as process conducted throughout the study is documented through studio work, comprising *The artist's workbook of the Waterberg* as object, sand palimpsests and the installation of different sand people. This culminates in documentation of the exhibition, and installation with performance "“EHI” WATERBERG, NAMIBIA *Ehi - Sand/Land Rights/Rites*". The installation is discussed as expression of the Waterberg as an eco-geo-cultural historical palimpsest of identity.

Keywords: Waterberg, Namibia, sand, place, palimpsest, identity, eco-feminism