

On the longevity of visual colonial stereotyping and its influence on twenty-first-century societal and identity debates

Sobre a longevidade da estereotipagem visual colonial e sua influência nos debates sociais e de identidade do século XXI

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Abstract: This paper engages with current societal identity debates related to select postcolonial southern African circles, whose European origins can partially be traced back to the creation of the colonial photography genre. The contemporary visualisation of non-white Africans in the European landscape is linked to a genre that was born in the times of High Imperialism. As a child of its time, colonial photography laid the foundation for both racist and racial depiction patterns of certain African peoples and what their *supposed* traits and looks were from the coloniser's point of view, thereby creating *seeing patterns*. Until today, social debates and political movements are linked to the visualisation of non-white peoples. This project is about the historical muting of sub-Saharan Africa through stereotypical images and its links to the shaping and maintenance of postcolonial identity debates concerning racialised visualisation traditions in Europe. This repetitive visual blinding is another form of colonial aggression by constantly perpetuating certain image(rie)s and thereby facilitating colonial mentalities. Examples presented below show how far-reaching the colonial photographic stereotypes are by not limiting the scope of seeing traditions to photographs. Instead, other areas of visible everyday spaces like street names, monuments, statues, lawsuits or book covers are included.

Keywords: Stereotyping; postcolonialism; whiteness; visual history; African history

Resumo: Este artigo dialoga com os atuais debates sobre identidade social relacionados a determinados círculos pós-coloniais da África Austral, cujas origens europeias podem ser parcialmente rastreadas até a criação do gênero da fotografia colonial. A visualização contemporânea dos africanos não brancos no contexto europeu está ligada a um gênero que nasceu nos tempos do Alto Imperialismo. Como um fruto de sua época, a fotografia colonial lançou as bases para padrões de



representação raciais e racistas de certos povos africanos e de seus supostos traços e aparência do ponto de vista do colonizador, criando assim padrões de ver. Até hoje, debates sociais e movimentos políticos estão atrelados à visualização dos povos não brancos. Este projeto é sobre o silenciamento histórico da África subsaariana por meio de imagens estereotipadas e suas ligações com a formação e manutenção de debates identitários pós-coloniais sobre tradições de visualização racializadas na Europa. Essa cegueira visual repetitiva é outra forma de agressão colonial ao perpetuar constantemente certas imagens e imaginários, facilitando, assim, as mentalidades coloniais. Os exemplos apresentados a seguir mostram o alcance dos estereótipos fotográficos coloniais, sem limitar o escopo das tradições de ver às fotografias. Em vez disso, são abarcadas outras áreas de espaços cotidianos visíveis, como nomes de ruas, monumentos, estátuas, processos judiciais e capas de livros.

Palavras-chave: estereotipificação; pós-colonialismo; branquitude; História visual; História africana



Introduction

In the past years, we have seen heated public debates on identity and race amongst varying constituencies in Europe, Africa and beyond. Topics included in these discussions engaged with how to (re)define the matter of Blackness within the Global North, Europe in particular, concerning a society that has become increasingly diverse and multinational during the last two centuries (SEALY, 2019). Main reasons for this are post-colonial and post-World War II migrations to Europe from non-European regions as well as the more recent migrations to Europe based on mostly outer-European political conflicts. All these migration movements steadily but surely increased an already decades long period of ethnic and religious diversification, that is most visible in Europe's more urban areas. Whereas previous (im)migration waves of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries in Europe tended to be caused by inner-European wars, colonial empires bringing in colonial staff from abroad or labour migration during the Cold War from friendly states, the twenty-first century is confronted predominantly with refugee waves from conflict zones within and without Europe.

The common denominator important for this paper is that the last ca. 150 to 200 years have diversified societies and realities in Europe, which in turn have challenged prior seeing traditions that were dominated by a worldview based on *white* culture and Christianity as a global norm (WEKKER, 2020). This paper analyses the visual-cultural link between the creation and questioning of *white* seeing traditions that went from advocating a *white* worldview (including racial stereotypes related to it) to being challenged by non-white constituencies in Europe and beyond. To do so, photographs from colonial contexts are understood here as a base of operations, but the research goes beyond that and includes other public spheres of colonial visualisations.

Photographs from colonial contexts were representative of a colonial mindset or mentality and they helped in the ideological distribution of racial stereotypes through various pathways (on historical stereotyping KNIGHTS, 2014, 242-67). The colonial photographic genre is then compared to twenty-first-century cultural and political movements that attempt or already are breaking up mentioned seeing traditions. These movements include activities where the constituencies affected by racial stereotyping attempt to regain their agency to regain control over the visual heritage created during modern colonialism. They also include what I coined counter-colonial visualisations:



the aim to contradict and / or re-narrate racial stereotypes and viewing patterns from a decolonised and / or postcolonial perspective. This is, amongst other things, in line with Wa Thiong'o Ngũgĩ's work (NGŨGĨ, 2005). Ngũgĩ's thought practices of decolonising cultural landscapes linked to African literary sources can also be adapted to visual practices that are not limited to photography but make a more general point on seeing traditions that include public spaces and everyday experiences.

In my research on visual connections between African and European history, the intention is to reverse the mirror by focusing on cultural entanglements that link Europe with Africa in relation to the development of a European interpretation of what the African continent and especially its peoples supposedly look like. For this purpose, I study visual history and use visual ego-documents, like photographs that were created in the High Imperialism era from the 1880s to the 1920s by European photographers in southern Africa.² These images give access to less polished insights into socio-cultural developments of modern eras as witnessed from below, thereby allowing a micro historical approach (MAGNÚSSON; SZIJÁRTÓ, 2013). Photographs function like an open window to certain *zeitgeists*: they allow the historian to tell a version that differs from official history as told by national governments, schools of thought or politically polished collective memories (HAYES; MINKLEY, 2019).

One starting point of analysis is how the historical practices of othering helped create visual stereotypes during the colonial era thereby also influencing visual collective memories in both the colonial metropolises and peripheries.³ The range of topics included into these debates went wide and far. Most dominantly, it included matters of religious affiliation, (dual / multiple) citizenship, national histories and even social acceptance and recognition as equals based on someone's skin colour. As is known, the modern European colonial project turned into an increasingly global affair since the mid fifteenth century with Portuguese trade ships sailing south past the South African Cape of Good Hope (then more fittingly known as the Cape of Storms) to Asia and later also going westwards to the Americas. Jumping forward to the late nineteenth century and the era of High Imperialism, not just trade routes and (human) goods were part of the colonial project anymore but the scientific categorisation of human races and with it, the creation of (pseudo-)scientifically backed racial hierarchies (MANGAN, 2011). Then modern colonial sciences like ethnography and anthropology helped establish, support and maintain the idea of human racial categories. The same sciences were also instrumental to establishing the



concept of the so-called white race, i.e. European and Christian, as the norm and every non-white person became an aberration of said norm (FRANKENBERG, 1993; HALL, 2002; MOHANRAM 2007).

In addition to already existing scientific tools the invention and availability of mobile photographic equipment that could be shipped abroad and used during scientific colonial expeditions further helped increase outreach options at colonial institutes in Europe (KEMP, 2011). As a result, photographs enabled and increased exponentially the mass distribution of visual heritage amongst the general public in the shape of photo postcards from the colonies, slide shows in European cities or published books like travelogues enhanced by not just drawings as before but now also with photographic images.⁴ A prominent example of a two-tome travelogue on a scientific expedition in 1910-1911 to Western and Central Africa is *From the Congo to the Niger and the Nile; an account of the German Central African expedition* by Duke Adolf Friedrich of Mecklenburg (MECKLENBURG, 1912).⁵ As a result, a visual heritage based on colonial goals and mindsets as well as racial and racist stereotypes was in the making that would manifest, spread globally and remain in place for decades and centuries to come.

Social psychologists Mark Schaller and Charles Stangor stated that both individuals and groups commit to stereotyping others to categorise, simplify and understand the world around them better (STANGOR, SCHALLER, 2000, 64-82). Stereotyping can thus also be understood as a by-product of cognitive processes to order one's environment (KNIGHTS, 2014). Nowadays, century-old racial stereotypes are either enhanced or countered depending on the community in question (HALL, 2013, 223-276). As a result, publicly voiced prejudices against *non-white* people(s) accompanied by nationalist and populist messaging have seemingly increased whilst simultaneously counter voices calling for inclusion and a re-definition of European heritage are becoming more vociferous too. These opinions and debates happen in private homes as much as in public spheres. For instance, the removal of discriminatory street names or statues that glorify former colonisers or supporters of slavery cause heated public discussions in countries like Germany, the UK, Belgium, Namibia, South Africa and the USA.⁶ Especially in the US-American context, debates on decolonising public and private spaces are generally further advanced than in Europe (examples on this issue are discussed in the next sub-section).

The African-European trajectory is chosen for two reasons. Firstly, because the infamous *scramble for Africa* and portable photography went hand in hand



with each other (PAKENHAM, 1992). Secondly, to analyse the evolution of cultural mass images between ca. 1880-1920. The idea is to mirror the beginning of today's image of Africa by returning to late nineteenth-century colonial photography, root out the origins of how the African continent was seen then, the manner how this view has developed since and how it can be linked to contemporary attempts to counter-narrate colonial racial stereotypes of the non-European other. This is accomplished by questioning why some visual stereotypes of the non-white African Other in Europe persisted, and others did not (KAPUŚCIŃSKI, 2008). Ultimately, the mirror is reversed and cases of re-narrating the historically dominant *Bildsprache* (German: image language) are presented. Such examples included moments of members of the global south using colonial visual sources, re-interpreting them, and thereby gaining agency over their possibly own language. To accomplish this project, interdisciplinarity is provided by combining analytical theorems ranging from Erwin Panofsky's three steps for the art historical analysis of visual sources, whiteness studies, micro history, global history, oral history and collective memory studies with each other (CONRAD, 2017; HALBWACHS, 1991; JÄGER, 2000; MAGNÚSSON; SZIJÁRTÓ, 2013; PANOFSKY, 1980, SHIWEDA, 2019, p. 181-208).

The mentioned long-term effects of colonial stereotyping and othering can be seen in ongoing attempts of identity-finding processes and the creation and maintenance of a collective memory. To change those identity and collective memory creation paths, the power centres with their origins predominantly in the global north need readdressing (DIAWARA, LATEGAN; RÜSEN, 2010). This is achieved by including members of formally colonised societies with historical connections like being colonised or having migrated to Europe. For the sake of brevity, this project focusses on a visual narrative from select sub-Saharan countries that have and are creating their own narratives by taking control of their respective visual heritages. This is done by centering the analysis on the Republic of South Africa and Namibia to potentially continue to further regions like the Congo later.⁷ The country selection is based on a combination of historical connections, available archival material and related already accomplished anti-colonial movements in the visual, cultural and art sectors. In short: counter-colonial visualisations.

Photography in South Africa and Namibia were created and existed in three forms: European, African and colonial.⁸ Whilst overlap between the three categories exists and was inevitable, most research tends to explore these fields separately from each other. To avoid remaining in this dividing approach



the following pages will engage more thoroughly with ideas that colonial photography cross influenced, its long-term effects (for instance on urban spaces) as well as current challenging forces and voices coming from the African subcontinent (HAYES; MINKLEY, 2019). An attempt is made to show how the idea of Europeanness in its demarcation of the non-European has created a globally transmitted image of what it means to be from sub-Saharan Africa and southern Africa in particular.⁹ This is followed by how current movements by constituents of the global south – be it in Africa or people with sub-Saharan African heritage residing in Europe – actively approach historical stereotypes of African peoples with the aim to create counter-colonial visualisations and replace them with updated interpretations. At a later stage of this research, it will also become necessary to analyse which seeing patterns tend to persist and are immune to changes and what the reasons for that immunity might be.

Finally, the goal is to filter out the origins of artificially constructed and idealised stereotypes of the *typical* African and the *typical* European to better understand some of today's (still) visible socio-cultural misunderstandings and tensions within a multicultural Europe. Resentments and language used since the migration crisis of 2015, for instance, have shown that several European national identities often rely on establishing which markers are non-European to then dissociate themselves from them. Therefore, returning to photography from colonial contexts, the creation of seeing traditions in general and the depiction of the *non-European* is a necessary first step to highlighting specific origins of Europe's identity when contrasted to southern Africa. The next step is to highlight any remnants of the stereotyping process in the twenty-first century and lastly the analysis of current-day movements that attempt to replace colonial stereotypes with "counter-colonial visualisations". The definition of Blackness is therefore intimately linked to the creation of cultural whiteness. Following a photographic case, the upcoming pages will highlight some recent projects and events that have challenged colonial seeing patterns within photographic contexts and public spaces. These examples include political movements to remove statues or monuments, gain rights to historical photographs of the non-white other and more. Given the early state of this project, the overall results will be presented at a later stage.

Photography, Examples, Movements and Collective Memory

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, photography has



developed into a product that lent itself to and facilitated both mass production and mass consumption. Now, in the twenty-first century, the manifold global societies are more reliant than ever on, if not addicted to, visual stimulation and entertainment. A reality without reproducible visuals seems to have become unimaginable. Fittingly since the pictorial turn, visual sources have received increased recognition within academia as historically relevant sources.¹⁰ Based on the exponentially growing importance of *Bildsprache*, W.J.T. Mitchell argued in the 1990s for a pictorial turn in the humanities with the aim to not lessen the value of written or verbal sources but to also no longer ignore their importance (MITCHELL, 1995). This progress occurred at the same time that social history and post-colonial studies took foothold, making visual sources part of the same chronology and the need for more sources, more angles, more historical voices and outlets. Based on my previous research in Belgian, British, Dutch, German, French, Italian and Swedish archives it is now time to connect these global developments by analysing the long-term effects of colonial photography and stereotyping on visual collective memories and identity debates in twenty-first-century Europe and Southern Africa.

A European identity is based not only on what it wishes to portray – what it identifies with – but also on what it excludes from it and defines as non-European, i.e. not worth identifying with. In this regard, identity, stereotyping and collective memories intertwine with each other (HALBWACHS, 1991). Maurice Halbwachs' definition of an approach to collective memories is that human beings and their respective memories depend on a collective context and cannot develop outside of a collective setting. Understood this way, the definition of the past is a social construction that is passed on from one generation to the next but also fluid and changeable. It is influenced by school teachings or new developments in the present and it varies depending on a group's social, cultural and economic background. Therefore, different groups can create different understandings – memories – from the same event. For instance, colonisation. When groups with different collective memories of the same event mix, frictions can occur, identities require redefinition and narratives need to be changed. According to this reasoning, any given person grows up in and with a pre-existing set of memories and values passed on to him or her from his or her peers. Once born, we are taught what to remember and how to see our environment. Our collective memory is, initially at least, one pre-selected for us by our families, our social strata and religion. Which brings me to Susan Sontag's comment on seeing traditions (SONTAG, 2008).



Every human individual is brought up amongst a set of often pre-existing images – real or imaginary – that informs us how to see, analyse and gauge the world around us. Thinking along this vein stimulates the need to combine a collective memory approach with a seeing tradition approach.

Whilst my research makes use of Halbwachs' collective memory approach, it also includes a racial aspect to it, which is missing in the original application of his theoretical method. Reason being that for his work Halbwachs focused on three groups: the family, social class and religious community. He thereby excluded the possibility of a racial memory. What Wertsch refers to as 'blank spots' in Halbwachs' theoretical approach is therefore important for this paper that aims to include racial experiences into the analysis of collective memories (WERTSCH, 2008). Considering that Halbwachs developed his theorem in the early twentieth century one can argue that it too was influenced by a colonial mindset since he grew up when the French collective memory embraced colonialism and Europe's superiority towards Africa. Halbwachs' collective memory idea was based on a European worldview and exclusive of other ethnicities.

Before continuing to the next section with case studies and examples, it is essential to add that memories are not only a private but also a public matter. Their creation, as Aleida Assmann states, has often been politicised by, for instance, heads of states, members of the elites or other influential institutions with both monetary and political powers (ASSMANN, 2021). Other modes of influence include schoolbooks and curricula, memorial days or *lieux de mémoires* as Pierre Nora and Jay Winter refer to them (NORA, 1989, p. 7-24; WINTER, 2014). *Lieux de mémoires* (memory sites) are sites and landscapes that are historically important to a nation or group of people. It is therefore recommendable to consider and include the influence of certain elites, political agendas as well as group dynamics to the creation of public spaces, e.g. statues, veteran cemeteries, monuments and the selective choosing of certain memorial days over others (MACMILLAN, 2009).

Who decides what a group is to remember and what not? Which mindset shall be passed on? To answer these questions, the following section presents a selection of examples of past actions that enabled the creation or maintenance of collective memories and how current movements intend to change them. The examples range from the contestation of memorial days, the (un)successful removals of select statues or monuments, lawsuits against institutions profiting from colonial endeavours, debates on the restitution and repatriation



of colonial heritage to their countries of origin and other kinds of political protests. Above all, contrary to the often top-down official streams that are involved in creating collective memories, the counter movements tend to be pushed by bottom-up movements (DIAWARA; LATEGAN; RÜSEN, 2013).

Numerous related bottom-up approaches were first fought in the USA before crossing the Atlantic and being adapted in other geographical areas around the globe. Bottom-up actions and debates included the removal of confederate statues, repatriation of Native American heritage objects to their rightful / original heirs, the abolition or rededication of Columbus Day and the removal of racist language from national databanks in museums (BOLDRICK, 2022; TREEN, 2019, p. 173-183). In fact, the first case study I wish to present combines the US-American backdrop with the grown importance of visual primary sources like photographs and how they are treated currently.

Renty Taylor Case

The so-called Renty Taylor case is a superb case study to begin with as it involves visual primary sources from colonial times and current developments in twenty-first-century USA. It is about an ongoing lawsuit in which Tamara Lanier, a descendant of the former slave Renty Taylor (ca. 1775 - ca. 1865), sued Harvard University on its ownership of daguerreotypes by Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz that portray her ancestor Renty and his daughter Delia in the year of 1850 at the Edgehill cotton plantation in South Carolina, USA (BARTH, FÄSSLER, 2018). Together with further enslaved workers – Alfred, Fassena, Jem, Jack and his daughter Drana – the Taylors were forced to strip for a eugenic research study that was to prove the inferiority of the so-called black race. The photographs were taken by Joseph T. Zealy for professor Agassiz (BARBASH; ROGERS; WILLIS, 2020; HUBER; MACHADO, 2010).

Agassiz was a Swiss-American scientist who enjoyed great respect during his time. He was known for his strong belief in Charles Darwin's work and the polygenic theory and thus believed that people of African descent ranked lower on a racial scale with the *white man* being in first position. For this reason he also advocated for the non-mixing of races. His racial belief system strongly influenced his scientific output. The law suit was supported by Agassiz' family as well with the aim to make amends for their ancestor's actions and to show that they do not share his worldviews. Nowadays, the Lanier and Agassiz families are of the opinion that Harvard could (or should?) make amends to



Mrs. Lanier and her family for profiting of the daguerreotypes, for instance, by using Renty’s image for a book cover and exhibits.¹¹ By returning the daguerreotypes, Harvard could distance itself from the “white supremacist theory Agassiz espoused” and that everyone must evaluate fully their “role in promoting a pseudoscientific justification for white supremacy (HARTOCOLLIS, 2021; MOSER, 2021).” Agassiz is a prime example of a renowned nineteenth-century scientist whose worldview and research output was linked to the so-called racist sciences that built upon racial hierarchies, supported racial segregation and was common amongst supporters of colonialism or colonial systems (IRMSCHER, 2013; MENAND, 2001-2002, p. 110-113). Therefore, it is of tremendous value for this paper that his daguerreotypes – possibly the oldest still existing ones – of South Carolinian slaves still exist. After Agassiz gave them to Harvard University their existence was forgotten only to be rediscovered in an attic at the Smithsonian in 1976. These early photographs are valuable visual examples of a European mindset and how humans of African descent were viewed in comparison to other so-called human races amongst the white elites in Europe and North America. Comparable to the ethnological photographs made in colonial contexts in Africa, Agassiz forced the models to undress before photographing them.

The common procedure of forcefully undressing non-white photographic models for scientific purposes is a recurring subject and moment of repeated racial violence that is inherent to photographs taken in colonial contexts. In order to not repeat and profit from the colonial and racial violence committed in such photographs, there have been voices condemning any kind of use and publication of colonial photographs that show humans. The idea thereby is to put a final stop to violence committed and avoid any further opportunity of voyeuristic sensationalism. Instead, the respective models in those images shall regain their dignity by not being only viewed as scientific objects. In line with changing the narrative, attempts were made to regain agency over colonial photographs. One example for this is the art installation “You Name It” by Sasha Huber at the art gallery Autograph in London, UK.¹² Huber is of Swiss-Haitian heritage and she engages with the Renty and Delia Taylor photographs by applying a postcolonial perspective. Instead of repeating the initial act of violence committed by Agassiz and Zealy who forcibly undressed their models Renty and Delia, Huber dressed the Taylors before displaying their images in London. Being clothed rather than nude supplies the models with newfound dignity. Huber thereby challenges the methods of how we remember (HUBER,



2022).

Colonial Photography: A case study from Northern Namibia

The visual codes in the anthropometric photographs from the Omhedi region in Northern Namibia share some similarities with the Taylor photographs despite being taken almost 80 years later in the late 1920s. As before, racial stereotypes prevailed and many images were staged to fit Western aesthetics as much as political goals like in the case of Namibia that was under South African indirect rule then. Colonial seeing traditions as practiced in early daguerreotypes were further harnessed, professionalised but also re-interpreted in twentieth-century southern Africa by white photographers like Alfred Duggan-Cronin¹³ and C.H.L. Hahn¹⁴ (SHIWEDA, 2019, p. 181-208). Nonetheless, in her book chapter, Napandulwe Shiweda makes a compelling case on how colonial photographs can both apply the colonial gaze at the moment of their creation yet function as a national group’s collective memory a century later. To do so, Shiweda discusses the photographic legacy by Duggan-Cronin from the Omhedi region by explaining the historical and political circumstances of the images’ production to then refer to their relevance in twenty-first-century Namibia.

When Duggan-Cronin travelled to Namibia to take photographs of Ovambo people, he was assisted by Hahn. Latter helped Duggan-Cronin with his local knowledge and introduced him to local dignitaries. At a first glance, Duggan-Cronin’s images do not stand out stylistically or differ from other *African* photography of the time. They are in line with the “principles of physical anthropology” (SHIWEDA, 2019, p. 191) by focusing on tribal dress, jewelry, architecture and polygamy. Whilst Duggan-Cronin himself stated that he wanted to take photographs of the Ovambo people before they too become Europeanised and their *original* culture dies, he also did not refrain from staging photographs and positioning his models according to Western seeing traditions and aesthetics (GODBY, 2010, p. 54-83) – even adding the occasional necklace or fur coat here and there to the models. Regardless, Shiweda argues that merely focusing on the photographer’s agenda and position of power does not do justice to the Ovambo models. Instead, she states that “although Duggan-Cronin’s photographs conformed to particular colonial stereotypes, his subjects participated in new forms of self-fashioning” and to think that “these photographs are simple representations of the supposedly traditional

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way of life of the indigenous peoples is to disregard certain tensions [and agency] within them (SHIWEDA, 2019, p. 186).”

As in the other examples in this paper, seeing traditions based on colonial racist worldviews are nowadays subject to re-contextualisation and critical analysis. Given colonial power structures in place until decolonisation most Namibians and Ovambo people never received access to the manifold photographs taken of them. This process has only been happening in the last 10-20 years. What is interesting to mention for the sake of this paper is Shiweda’s contemporary research that informs us about how the same photographs are being re-used by today’s Ovambo descendants to re-establish connections to their ancestors and cultural traditions. These images are no longer seen as “a colonial construction: instead, [the descendants] look at them appreciatively, almost with pride (SHIWEDA, 2019, p. 202)”. In fact, current developments have gone as far as to using the photographs in the reconstruction of an “Ovakwanyama cultural identity and its newly restored kingship at Omhedi (SHIWEDA, 2019, p. 204)” in 1996.¹⁵

Unwanted (?): Statues and Monuments with Colonial Contexts

A prime example for one of the most fiercely fought and famous cases on the removal of a colonial heritage statue is the South African *Rhodes Must Fall* (RMF or #RhodesMustFall) movement from 2015. This particular movement began at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and later even moved on to Oriel College in Oxford (UK) (NYAMNJOH, 2016). Given its successful result, the RMF movement was later used as a blueprint for comparable events elsewhere. UCT student protests prompted the RMF movement. They wished to see a statue of Cecil John Rhodes, the famous British coloniser, mining magnate and former Prime Minister of the Cape Colony (South Africa), removed from his high plinth at a prominent location on UCT campus grounds.

In his time, Cecil Rhodes (1853-1902) was known for being a stark supporter of British colonialism and the scramble for Africa as well as being the name patron for colonies like Rhodesia (today known as Zimbabwe) and institutions like the Rhodes University in Grahamstown (South Africa). Initially not a wealthy man, Rhodes died a middle-aged man with a substantial fortune and in his last will he gave parts of his estate around Table Mountain to the land of South Africa. Those grounds became part of UCT upper campus and the famous Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens (ROTBERG, 1988). Nowadays he is



most commonly known as the founder of the Rhodes Scholarship Programme. Within southern Africa (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia etc), however, his name at times still seems omnipresent due to memorials, schools, street names or landscapes that are in his name. Often, members of local societies are not in favour of abolishing his name, for instance, as in two select cases in Zimbabwe: a preparatory school in Gweru and the Rhodes gravesite in Matobo (KENRICK, 2019).

The RMF movement itself is to be understood as a post-Apartheid, anti-racist and decolonising movement that questions the ongoing existence of racial inequality in former European colonised territories in southern Africa. Francis B. Nyamnjoh argues that the protests were not only about fighting xenophobia in the world but afrophobia (NYAMNJOH, 2016). The search for a self-controlled national or ethnic identity that is free of *white* domination or white supremacy entails the need to shed oneself of constant reminders that once upon a time one's community was subject to repression and racial segregation. This includes internal and external shedding procedures of the past. Internally, by acknowledging that change comes from within and needs to be voiced to become visible. Externally, by ridding one's surrounding of constant reminders of the past that keep you down, e.g. statues and memorials. In an academic setting like a university, internal shedding was achieved by attempts of transformation. "Transformation became the catchword, catchall and catchon about the unfinished recalibration of the hierarchies of humanity that had informed relations, privilege and poverty in apartheid South Africa (NYAMNJOH, 2016, p. 100)." Despite representing the country's majority population, also at UCT, the black community was creating a new self-esteem despite or because of still being treated like second-class citizens. A new sense of identity was in the making and the RMF movement is exemplary for this time of change.

Based on its South African success the RMF movement influenced or ignited other debates and activisms on taking down or re-contextualising public shrines with colonial contexts. Some such examples are the toppling of the statue of *Edward Colston* (1636-1721) in Bristol (UK),¹⁶ the *Leopold Must Fall* movement in Brussels (Belgium) (PRONCZUK, ZAVERI, 2020), the *Piet Hein* Monument in Rotterdam (Netherlands)¹⁷ and the *Reiterdenkmal* in Windhoek (Namibia) (BECKER, 2018). All these examples show how identity debates are and have been happening across the globe within different (post)colonial contexts. Their commonalities are that their supporters are engaged with a (re)shaping



of identities in Africa, a (re)shaping of African identities abroad and how some fields of references are being rewritten as we speak in an attempt to continue the decolonisation of collective national memories.

Restitution Report 2018

Another prominent example that has and still is causing lively debates amongst the public, in museums and academia, is linked to President Macron's statements during a visit to Burkina Faso in 2017, when he promised the restitution of cultural heritage (mostly African) to their respective countries of origins. After his return, the researchers Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy received the task to survey the French artefacts and culture landscape to establish how many African objects are currently in France, where they are located precisely and how they entered the country in the first place (also known as provenance research).¹⁸ The report was published just a year after President Macron's announcement and it reads as the disclosure of an entire appropriation and alienation system that led to the capitalisation and redistribution of art assets throughout Europe during the colonial period. The history of the African collection is European history. A history that is stored away in Europe's museums, research institutes and private collections. According to Savoy and Sarr, the newly opened Humboldt Forum in Berlin alone holds a staggering 75000 African objects. To compare, the Parisian museum on non-European art, Musée du quai Branly, holds 70000 and the British Museum in London around 69000 African objects (SARR, SAVOY, 2019).

In the original French report that is based on President Macron's mandate, he asked Sarr and Savoy to do interviews and working sessions with involved stakeholders in France and Africa. Macron also asked for concrete proposals and a possible timetable to potentially return cultural artefacts to Africa. He also demanded "dialogue and participation must be inherent to all stages of this work" (SARR; SAVOY, 2018, p. 100) thereby opening a door for public discussions about his new cultural policy. Since then, many international debates have happened by the French initiative's fundamental demands for a reorientation and the return of important cultural assets. States like Nigeria, Benin or Namibia, who had been petitioning for the restitution of cultural assets for decades voiced their support for Sarr's and Savoy's report (CODREARADO, 2018).

However, some African curators reacted more critically to the European

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initiatives regarding returns. For instance, Flower Manase, Tanzanian curator in Dar-es-Salaam, remarked that before any returns are made African experts should always be consulted first and involved accordingly in the decision-making process. This was due to the large amount of artefacts in Europe and inadequate equipment of local Tanzanian museums. Moreover, restitutions are not always a priority since not every object is wanted back (BLOCH, 2018). Other African scholars pointed to the ethno- and eurocentric character of museums as institutions which explains why they tend to arouse little interest among local visitors in Africa. In addition, many colonial African objects came from historical cultures with spiritual functions that no longer exist. As Tanzanian journalist Charles Kayuka stated: “It’s time to repair our stolen identity (...). But the masks and fetishes that are now stored in European museums – it would be no use returning them because these pieces are no longer of any value to Africans. They are empty, dead, and lifeless – they have lost their original meaning because they are torn out of their context and become meaningless objects. Because they weren’t art objects, but religious and magical ritual objects. That is the only reason why they were so important for African societies at the time (BLOCH, 2019).” Within the realm of restitution debates, it is therefore important to keep in mind that museums are European inventions. According to the French art historian André Malraux, museums do not put objects into but rather wrench them out of context (GRASSKAMP, 2014). Unsurprisingly, most Western ethnological museums were created during colonialism and are themselves carriers of colonial mindsets.¹⁹

Conclusion

All the above issues and examples have some commonalities and it is necessary to ask: What effect do racialised stereotypes have on the idea and definition of being European (or white) or of African heritage (non-white) in an increasingly culturally and globally intertwined reality? In addition, how do racial and cultural stereotypes influence debates on identity in the twenty-first century? The main claim presented in this paper was how the sciences of the High Imperialism era facilitated the creation of the colonial photography genre that would then go on to develop and spread racial stereotypes and a colonial mindset by means of the neutral scientific tool the photographic camera (RIZZO, 2013, p. 328-354). The camera became a supportive and additional tool to the spread of colonial seeing traditions to public and private spaces. Whilst until



the late nineteenth century mostly paintings or sketches and public shrines like memorials and statues helped maintain and spread a colonial racist mentality locally, photographs from colonial contexts reached people easier by means of mass distribution, for instance through books, posters and mobile slide shows. Mentalities could be transported globally and help cement a European understanding of the world and its peoples accordingly. Photographs became an additional tool to maintaining and spreading a colonial mindset thereby joining the other means of collective memory and identity-shaping tools.

By applying a mirror to *white* identity, the idea of this project is to investigate the origins, expansion and stereotypical endurance of the *non-white Other's* depiction in today's Europe and which effect it has had on the shaping and maintenance of Europe's self-portrayal thereby highlighting the role of the global south in it. The visual juxtaposition of European and non-European – or *white* and *non-white* in postcolonial terms – informs the reader (or viewer) of a very specific sender-receiver-dichotomy that is based on the assumption that people create their identities in line with and in contrast to others (SANDLER, 2013, p. 37-61; ZOCCHI, 2019, p. 1-27). The past 150 years and the invention of photography as a modern mass medium have shaped an image of peoples around the world. As such, European photography from colonial contexts has helped to form and distribute prejudicial views on and of other people(s) whilst at the same time confirming the coloniser's own identity (RIPPE, 2015).

Mentioned views became part of cultural memories through text books, the arts, public spaces adorned with statues to then enter into the spaces more commonly ascribed to any society's or nation's collective memory (LANGBEHN, 2010). Traditionally within modern history and especially linked to the creation of nation states, the written word was taught to be the preferred tool to influence a nation's identity-shaping processes. Nevertheless, I argue that this is based more on academic or intellectual arrogance (by preferring to rely on literature) than on everyday experiences concerning nation building from a micro-historical angle. Not to forget that historically speaking publishing houses can be hesitant to postcolonial theories or decolonising efforts. As, for example, in the case of the majority of current-day Namibian publishing houses that tend to be owned and controlled by Namibians of German ancestry and are seemingly less inclined to publish works that assess their heritage critically (HOOG, 2022, p. 264-281).

Despite past and current social and political developments since Africa's decolonisation, a visual world order narrative continues to be in place – one



that continues to perpetuate a stereotypical image of Africa. Above all, it is unfortunate that this narrative still has more in common with colonial times than with the twenty-first century by holding on to visualisations of violence, exploitation, dehumanisation, infantilisation and victimisation when referring to the entirety of the African continent. The constant – often even subconscious – repetition of colonial and stereotypical visual patterns makes it harder to create and distribute an updated and non-Western identity based on collective memory from the agency of sub-Saharan Africa. The global north's traditional viewing traditions are seeing traditions, that need to be changed in accordance with today's developments (SONTAG, 2008).

Movements that question the markers of European identity and collective memory have become increasingly powerful and louder in the last decade with some of their goals being the creation and communication of a revised self-image of Europe that is more diverse and more representative of societal realities as experienced daily. One contemporary example of a change of agency towards the narrative of colonial pasts is the toppling of colonial statues or the renaming of colonial street names. Another are works of art that use European colonial archival sources to then Africanise or de-Europeanise them (KUSSER, LEWERENZ, 2005, p. 214-245). The contemporary importance of this research are its links to current societal issues like civil unrest and the search for a multicultural identity in twenty-first-century Europe. Further examples include the Black Lives Matter movement, the spread of nationalist and populist activities, migration policies at EU level or identity politics more generally. By stepping back in time, engaging with European visualisations of non-Europeans in colonial photography, a link is established that puts the spotlight on today's racial prejudices as much as highlights the need for Europe's identity to acknowledge its non-European co-ingredients.

Images – be it in the flesh like in a picture or in the shape of generational oral traditions – helped form identities across the globe. Therefore, collective memories and stereotypes found within them are more often than not the results of micro-historical pathways and unofficial influences. They influence how one sees the world (BERGER, 2009). In short: in a world with social media outlets, images and imageries play a mightier role than before. Not just photographs are therefore of importance but also other sites where colonial mind-sets can be seen like in street names, museums, statues, monuments and national commemorations. This increases the importance of researching current movements and events that try to shake down the foundations of the



historical visualisation of the European by including the legacies of other areas like the sub-Saharan continent and its own constituents. This project's goal is thus to be understood as part of a political and cultural counter movement to the global north and its narratives. As such, the research aim is to both analyse continuities as well as breaks within the establishment of a seeing pattern that juxtaposes African and European interests and places them centre point within a twenty-first century backdrop.

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Notas

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²On the visual turn and use and acceptance of photographs as historical primary sources, see: Jäger (2000); Paul (2006). On the definition and historical background of ego-documents: Schulze (1996).

³For more on othering and subalterns see Said (1993); Said (2003); Spivak (1988).

⁴In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, postcards with photographic images from the colonies were a very popular genre and public good. For more see Geary e Webb (1998), Jäger (2006, p. 134–148), Sturani (2001, p. 13–24).

⁵For more on Duke of Mecklenburg’s life and colonial expeditions: Diebold (2019), Natermann (2022).

⁶In many European towns, street names have colonial backgrounds and honour colonial brutalities. Nowadays this causes a bitter after taste for those who cannot fathom why past wrongs remain unquestioned in the public sphere (Kopp, 2016, p. 11). For instance, the Petersallee, named to honour Carl Peters the so-called founder of German East Africa (Tanzania). Due to public and activist protests, the street was not renamed but rededicated to Hans Peters in 1986, a Nazi resister. By renaming streets, putting them into context, implementing information boards or commemorative plaques, a self-critical examination of any country’s colonial history is promoted. Very recent developments include the renaming of two streets in Berlin’s Afrikanerviertel on 2 December 2022: the Lüderitzstraße was changed into Cornelius-Fredericks-Straße and Nachtigalplatz is now the Manga-Bell-Platz (Hofmann, 2018). Cornelius Fredericks (1864-1907) was a Bethany-Nama leader and an anticolonial liberation fighter in former German South West Africa (Namibia) (Hillebrecht, 2003). The Manga-Bell-Platz honours the royal couple Rudolf Duala Manga Bell (1873-1914) and Emily Duala Manga Bell (1881-1936) (Austen; Derrick, 1999). As Duala royal couple (Cameroon) they fought the German colonisers, which led to Rudolf’s execution in 1914.

⁷As a third country of analysis, I will add the Democratic Republic of Congo (including the Congo Free State and Belgian Congo) once research on the other two nations have ended. Concerning research on Congolese photography, I recommend the work by Sandrine Colard. (COHEN; COLARD; PAOLETTI; CULLEN-MORALES, 2016; COLARD, 2022).

⁸Almost the only academic publication that focuses on colonial Namibia and photography is by HARTMANN, HAYES, SILVESTER, 1999.

⁹A comparable approach is also in colonial projects like Dutch-Indonesian. LUTTIKHUIS (2013, p. 539-558).



¹⁰For more on the pictorial turn from a historical sciences perspective: CURTIS (2011).

¹¹The original images are held by the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University (Signatures: Renty, 35-5-10/53057 and Delia, 35-5-10/53040).

¹²See here for the link to the images discussed: WHO [...]. (2022).

¹³The Irishman Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin was known for his “native studies” at the Kimberley diamond mines and his publication *The Bavenda in Bantu Tribes of South Africa* published by the McGregor Memorial Museum in Kimberley (1928). Shiweda’s analyses the aforementioned book.

¹⁴Carl Hugo Linsingen Hahn was the South African Native Commissioner from 1920-1946 and produced an extensive amount of ethnographic photographs.

¹⁵The Ovakwanyama are an Ovambo tribe that had been kingless for 79 years. Namibia’s independence in 1991 and the collapse of Apartheid enabled the reinstallation of past kingships.

¹⁶The Edward Colston statue was erected in 1895 and toppled in 2020 during the global Black Lives Matter protests. Initially, the statue was erected to celebrate Colston’s philanthropic acts, but large portions of his accumulated wealth were linked to his part in the transatlantic slave trade. Previous attempts to remove the statue in a controlled manner or attach a plaque to the plinth did not come to fruition and certain members of the public and anti-racist groups ultimately lost their patience with local politics and took matters into their own hands. Colston’s Day at Bristol”. *The Times*. London. 14 November 1895 10 (SIDDIQUE, 2020).

¹⁷MAY [...], (2018).

¹⁸Particularly important here the report on African colonial objects in France as commissioned by Emmanuel Macron: (Sarr, Savoy, 2018). *Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics*.

¹⁹One prominent attempt to decolonise is the AfrikaMuseum in Tervuren, Belgium (Musée Royal de l’Afrique Central). It reopened in 2018, but whether its decolonisation was a full success is debatable, see: (HASSETT, 2020).