

Situating Africa An Alter-geopolitics of Knowledge, or *Chapungu* Rises

Ruth Simbao

Only when universities on the continent fully recover and take their rightful—and leading—role in the production of African scholarly knowledge will African studies in the rest of the world become a truly strong field (Paul Tiyambe Zeleza 2009:133).

This journal issue marks the beginning of a new partnership with *African Arts* as Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, joins the editorial consortium. As the National Research Foundation Chair in Geopolitics and the Arts of Africa,¹ I will work with collaborators based largely on the African continent to produce one issue of *African Arts* per year. This first issue has grown out of conversations with artists, curators, and writers based in Uganda, Zimbabwe, and South Africa at a publishing workshop organized by Rhodes University, as well as an institutional collaboration with Makerere University in Uganda. It also includes a dialogue with colleagues in Tanzania, Zambia, Nigeria, Egypt, South Africa, Benin, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, the US, Uganda, and Angola/Portugal. A core goal of our work is to significantly increase the participation of authors based on the African continent as a way of strengthening our discipline with a scholarly approach that takes seriously an alter-geopolitics of knowledge as a decolonial concept (Koopman 2011; Mignolo 2002).²

At the time of writing and compiling the articles for this *African Arts* issue, Rhodes University, or UCKAR—the University Currently Known as Rhodes (a name that registers the lobby for an official name change)—was disrupted by heavy-handed police presence and the intermittent sound of rubber bullets being shot at students.

RUTH SIMBAO is the National Research Foundation Chair in Geopolitics and the Arts of Africa at Rhodes University, South Africa. She heads the Arts of Africa and the Global South research team, and recently founded the PROSPA publishing program and the Art POWA network. www.ru.ac.za/artsof africa/, www.ru.ac.za/ruthsimbao, r.simbao@ru.ac.za.



1 Lee-Roy Jason. Documentation of the police response to the Fees Must Fall protests on the University of Witwatersrand campus. 2016. Photo: Lee-Roy Jason

Along with other campuses across South Africa, this place of knowledge-production became, for many students and staff, a site of intense trauma and violence (Fig. 1). Shortly after the nationwide higher education protests peaked and the militaristic response of the police severely deepened the crisis, students and colleagues at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, similarly experienced a lockdown accompanied by violence and state control when President Yoweri Museveni officially shut down the university (Marks 2016; Niwamanya 2016). How do we grapple with knowledge-production when the people producing knowledge—students, lecturers and researchers—are being faced with physical harm in response to the fact that they are, in part, challenging epistemic violence? How do we write about the arts of Africa in a global academy that still privileges Western epistemological traditions when questions that are being asked on the African continent about ways of situating Africa, African knowledge, and African universities³ result, at times, in the spilling of blood? How do we teach from this body of knowledge that we and others in our discipline produce when the people we teach and learn from are not safe in our places of learning?

In this First Word and in the dialogue “Reaching Sideways, Writing *Our Ways*,” I reflect on the current status of the scholarly field of the visual and performing arts of Africa at this particular time of revived calls

on the African continent for the decolonization of knowledge (Heleta 2016; Mbembe 2016). It is significant to recognize that the recent protests in South African higher education, which incorporate a critique of curricula and pedagogical approaches in South African universities, were historically preceded by the call in the late 1960s by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Henry Owuor-Anyumba, and Taban Lo Liyong at the University of Nairobi to decenter Western modernity and British literature, to prioritize African literature by abolishing inherited structures, and to place Kenya, East Africa, and Africa at the core of the curriculum in order to focus, first and foremost, on the situation of Kenyans and Africans (Garuba 2015; Ngũgĩ 2012; Gates 1984:10–13).⁴

Refusing both a universalist defense of post-place constructions of knowledge and a continentalist defense of reductionistic notions of knowledge, I contemplate how Africa is situated in our discourse. My use of the word “situating” refers to a positioning that is physical and metaphorical, and draws from lived experiences guided by specific situations.⁵ Viewing all geographies as situational—that is, deeply embedded and simultaneously contingent, constitutive and process-based—I argue for a geopolitical approach that displaces the typically conservative and masculinist framework of geopolitics in international relations. Less chauvinistic, top-down forms of geopolitics might extend into areas such as critical geopolitics that draws on poststructuralist ideas of discourse and representation (Jones and Sage 2010), feminist geopolitics that includes a politics of social justice (Dowler and Sharp 2001), anti-geopolitics that registers challenge and resistance to state-centered



2 Sethembile Msezane, *Chapungu—The Return to Great Zimbabwe*, 2015.
Photo: courtesy of the artist

3 Kiluanji Kia Henda. *Redefining The Power II* (with Shunnuz Fiel), from the series *Homem Novo*, 2011.
Photo: © Kiluanji Kia Henda, courtesy of the artist and Galleria Fonti

geopolitics (Routledge 2003), subaltern geopolitics that emphasizes nonhierarchical entangled ways of relating (Sharp 2013), and alter-geopolitics that is collective, interconnected and nonbinary (Koopman 2011).

At this time of revived activism on the African continent concerning the “politics of knowing” (Ngũgĩ 2012), a number of Africa-based contemporary artists are producing works that assert the need for further and more radical forms of change in society and in the art world. A lack of social justice—at times evident in ongoing epistemologies of violence (Heleta 2016:2)—is actively challenged by artists Sethembile Msezane, Kiluanji Kia Henda, Thania Petersen, Masimba Hwati, Xenson Znja, Mbali Khoza, Eria Nsubuga SANE, Sikhumbuzo Mkan-dula and Rehema Chachage discussed in this *African Arts* issue. The works of these artists engage with critical questions with regards to categories that are devised in the act of naming the world (Freire 2005:87), decisions that are made—periodically on behalf of others—and voices that problematically fall on ears already tuned out.

CHAPUNGU RISES

On April 9, 2015, the statue of the imperialist mining magnate Cecil John Rhodes was removed from the campus of the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa. This followed the ignition of the Rhodes Must Fall movement a month earlier by UCT student Chumani Maxwele when he flung human excrement at the Rhodes statue as a form of protest against the lack of transformation at the university.

While the enormous bronze statue was lifted down from its pedestal eighty-one years after it had been unveiled, a new figure rose upon her own plinth as she spread her wings and stood her ground for the duration of the colonialist’s fall (Cover). Wearing a

veil sometimes worn at a coming-of-age ceremony, this figure—conceptualized and performed by the artist Sethembile Msezane—signals a new coming-of-age: a generation

of students and activists who demand free and decolonized education, as well as a new wave of artists who are transforming the way artistic knowledge is being produced and consumed in the contemporary art world.

Titled *Chapungu—The Day Rhodes Fell* (2015), the performance makes reference to the soapstone sculpture of a *chapungu*—the Zimbabwe Bird that is a national emblem—that was looted from the ancient city of Great Zimbabwe by European hunter Willi Posselt and sold to Cecil John Rhodes. This stolen *chapungu* was the only sculpture of the bird owned by a private individual and was placed in his Groote Schuur home in Cape Town, South Africa. “The Zimbabwe Bird and the house together became an extension of his political ego” (Matenga 2011:209), revealing Rhodes’s “obsessive desire for immortality,” which he attempted to purchase (Maylam 2005:159).

Despite appeals for the bird to be returned to its rightful home in present-day Zimbabwe, this particular sculpture remains at Groote Schuur.⁶ Msezane’s performance *Chapungu—The Return to Great Zimbabwe* (2015) (Fig. 2), serves as a form of protest as she uses her own body to symbolize the power of the *chapungu* that many view as an able protector, a guiding spirit, or a divine messenger whose absence from Zimbabwe thwarts positive socio-political change. By corporeally enacting the return of this legendary protector and by demonstrating the potential efficacy of protest, this figure denotes the agency asserted by a new generation of protesters, many of whom have put their bodies on the line in protest movements such as

Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall.

South African journalist Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya (2016) stresses that the Fallists—as the student protesters are known in South Africa—ought to be clear about “what it is they want to see rise” once what they desire to see fall has fallen. Playing with the analogy of the fall of Rhodes’s and other statues in order to symbolize the need to break down systemic injustices and inequalities more broadly, a number of relatively young artists have powerfully stepped up to portray new figures that embody alternative articulations of power. Youthful figures either rise upon repurposed pedestals, as seen in Kiluanji Kia Henda’s photographic series *Homem Novo* (2011), or they insert their own ad hoc plinths into the urban landscape, as is evident in Msezane’s *Public Holiday* series (2013–2014) that recalls particular historical events and forms of national commemoration.

In the *Homem Novo* series, Kiluanji Kia Henda photographs contemporary figures well known in Luanda such as the fashion designer Shunnuz Fiel dos Santos, who pose on empty pedestals (Fig. 3) as the artist “invents new worlds and composes new realities” (Cobb 2014:63). In Msezane’s *Public*



Holiday series, a veiled female character boldly writes women into contemporary interpretations of history in the performance-based photographic works *Untitled (Heritage Day)* (2013) (Fig. 4), *Untitled (Youth Day)* (2014) (Fig. 5), *Untitled (Worker's Day)* (2014) (Fig. 6), and *Untitled (Day of Reconciliation)* (2014) (Fig. 7).

In February 2016 I cocurated a selection of eight artists' for the Tomorrows Today competition at the Cape Town Art Fair with Azu Nwagbogu. We titled the exhibition "Consuming Us," inviting thoughtful contemplation of our ways of consuming and being consumed as a human species, as a society, as art lovers, and as individuals. We attempted to turn the lens around in the context of a commercial art fair and at a time when an "Afrifad" (Simbao 2008) dominates the Africa focus of many international art fairs.⁸ One of the participating artists, Thania Petersen, reflects in her artwork on the ability to move inwards rather than be consumed by exterior forces that label and stereotype groups of people—particularly, in her context, Muslim people.

In *Belongings of Adulthood* (2015) (Fig. 8) Petersen grapples with her inner conflict as a Muslim person brought up in a secular and consumerist society. As a child she felt guilty for loving her Barbie doll as much as her prayer bag. Reflecting on this as an adult, Petersen unpacked the bag she was using at the time and photographed the contents—a

bank card, makeup, and a copy of Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari's text *Western Civilization Through Muslim Eyes*. While this book turns around the Western gaze in order to evaluate and critique the materialism and anti-Islamic propaganda of modern Occidental civilization, the spilling of the contents of her bag reveals, for Petersen, the same conflict, discontent, and confusion that she experienced as a child.

Masimba Hwati—the winner of the art fair competition—similarly questions ways of delineating and constricting knowledge particularly in relation to outside views of Africa. As he discusses in the dialogue (see p. 16), the analogy of pushing and steering the wheelbarrow is used to critique the external forces that can rob people of their agency. In the installation *Don't Worry, Be Happy* (Fig. 9), Hwati contemplates the world's typical positioning of Africa through his wheelbarrow-table. This object, he says, suggests "the absurdity of definition, containment and homogenization of the African continent" and reflects "the most common approach towards 'Africa'" (Hwati cited in Simbao 2016a:9–10).

Kampala-based artist Xenson Znja similarly plays with interpretations of the wheelbarrow in his outdoor installation *Ndiboota Exporters* (Fig. 10) at the 2016 Kampala Biennale. Perched in a tree, Znja's wheelbarrow carries unknown cargo that is wrapped up for export, possibly facilitated

by the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).⁹ Even though the wheelbarrow is airborne, alluding to a Utopian dream,¹⁰ it has been steered into an ineffectual position.

The ambiguous cargo is carefully wrapped in barkcloth, which is recognized by UNESCO as an important form of Baganda cultural heritage and alludes to the Luganda saying "*okuuma lubugo nga lubaale mubbe*," suggesting that one is jealously guarding an empty shell while the real value or the substance of the object is gone or has already been stolen.¹¹ The evocation that the export of the cargo might be associated with the AGOA reveals the criticism directed at this act, which argues it was drawn up without sufficient consultation with African actors and that it does little to benefit Africans (Sisay 2013). In light of this interpretation, what might this work reveal about the way the arts of Africa are desired, packaged, circulated, moved, or controlled?

While Petersen's work questions the implications of her culture and religion being viewed as a spectacle through Western eyes, and Hwati and Znja play with the form of the wheelbarrow in order to question the room left for agency in the global circulation of culture, capital, and power, Mbali Khoza asks whether or not it matters who the knowing subject (Pechey 2011) or speaking subject is. In her site-collaborative¹² performance *What Difference Does It Make Who Is Speaking?* (Fig. 11) at the Eastern Star Press

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4–7 Sethembile Msezane, Performances from the *Public Holiday* series. Clockwise from top left: *Untitled (Heritage Day)*, 2013; *Untitled (Youth Day)*, 2014; *Untitled (Worker's Day)*, 2014; *Untitled (Day of Reconciliation)*, 2014. Photos: courtesy of the artist



Museum in Grahamstown,¹³ Khoza was surrounded by galley proof presses, wooden printers' trays, and printing blocks used in the production of the nineteenth century *Eastern Star* newspaper, as well as the words "Should everyone have a voice? Who gets to decide? Who speaks for you, and what are they saying?" that were part of the museum's permanent display.¹⁴

Khoza methodically pierced a long scroll of blank paper with a threadless needle, scarring the surface with seemingly meaningless perforated holes. The sound of the metal needle penetrating the thick paper was amplified through a microphone, as a sound recording of a man speaking Soninke was "translated" by the artist and "stitched" into the paper using isiZulu phonetics as a guide.¹⁵ This performance was inspired by the work of Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera who, in his novella *House of*

Hunger (1978), compares the act of writing to a violent stitching of a wound.

In this work Khoza questions the importance of the speaking subject being able to speak and write in her or his mother tongue, as well as the role of placing words on paper. Using her work as a springboard, I pose the following questions: Does it matter that in the field of the arts of Africa the majority of authors publishing in globally visible scholarly platforms are based in the global North? Is it a problem that not many scholars based in the North publish in scholarly arts journals produced on the African continent? Is it a concern that relatively few authors based in Africa publish in *African Arts*? To what degree does it matter that the majority of Africa-based authors publishing in *African Arts* work at academic or arts institutions in South Africa, and that the majority of these authors are white? As Mbali Khoza asks: What difference does it make who is speaking?

SCHOLARSHIP AND THE CENTER OF GRAVITY

While this new wave of artists accompanied by a new wave of curators active on the African continent indicates a significant rising in terms of art production and agency on international platforms, it is critical that scholarly writing produced by scholars based in Africa matches this rising and plays a more important role in shifting the center of gravity in the global academy. I probe the current disjuncture between the relatively high global visibility of a select group of artists working on the African continent¹⁶ and the relatively low international visibility of scholarly writers based on the continent.¹⁷ I consider this in light of a "geography of

reason" that critiques the fallacy that some people theorize and other people "experience" (Gordon 2006:37)¹⁸ or are "reservoirs of raw fact ... from which Euromodernity might fashion its ... axioms and certitudes, its premises, postulates, and principles" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2011:1). In particular, I question what this disjuncture reveals about the ways in which academic knowledge is controlled within a global academy that still "claims theory as thoroughly Western" (Tuhiwai Smith 1999:29).

I recently conducted a survey of three journals—*African Arts*, *Critical Interventions*, and *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*—as a way of considering the weighting of authors based in the global South and on the African continent.¹⁹ I view the South as a loose conceptual framework





8 Thania Petersen. *Belongings of Adulthood* (2015) from the *Barbie and Me* series. Diasec print. 100 x 70 cm.

Photo: courtesy of the artist and Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town

9 Masimba Hwati. Detail of the installation *Don't Worry, Be Happy* (2016), for the "Consuming Us" exhibition and Special Project competition at the Cape Town Art Fair curated by Azu Nwagbogu and Ruth Simbao.

Photo: Ruth Simbao

and thousands of African academics moved to institutions in the North, playing a significant role in establishing "flows of influence [that] are multiple in directions and levels." That said, many scholars in African universities are of the opinion that the valorization of "ambivalence and hybridity" in contemporary critical theory, produced largely (but not exclusively) in the North, largely ignores the "specificities of African subjectification" that continue to be "written in pain and suffering, sweat and blood" (Zezeza 2009:130). Compiling this *African Arts* issue during the Fees Must Fall protests indicates to me how pressing recognition of this disjuncture between theoretical approaches and lived experiences is.

The survey that I conducted does not make definitive claims about particular journals, institutions, authors, or places, but aims to generate a wider discussion about the production, control, and reception of knowledge. I do not suggest that authors based in the North can't produce excellent knowledge about the arts of Africa, or that authors based in the South necessarily produce better scholarship in this and related fields. However, I do submit that *African Arts* and other publications in the field will be significantly stronger and richer once we shift the center of gravity to include considerably more scholarship from the African continent and the African diaspora.

Comparable arguments have been made in our field by Rowland Abiodun (2014) and Kwame Amoah Labi (2015), and in the Humanities and Social Sciences more broadly by Paul Zeleza (2009), Mahmood Mamdani (2011), and Saleem Badat (2016). Writing specifically about art

studies in Ghana, Labi (2015:103) argues that an increase in "critical local voices" would play a significant role in diversifying knowledge, and Abiodun (2014) points to the value of deep understanding of indigenous African languages. Teasing out the distinctions between research on, for, with, in, and of Africa, Badat (2016:7) proposes that research of Africa can play an important role in "institutional transformation, and building new academic and institutional cultures that genuinely respect and appreciate social and epistemological difference and diversity, and social justice in the domain of knowledge making."

There are a number of issues to think through in the goal to increase participation from the African continent. Firstly, it is important that articles by scholars based on the continent are not perceived as being ghettoized in these particular *African Arts* issues that Rhodes University edits, thus perpetuating rather than challenging a "territorial epistemology, [which is] a derivation of the ontology of essences" (Mignolo 2012:xvii). Scholars based in Africa can, of course, publish in any *African Arts* issue, and while the issues that Rhodes edits will stress scholarship of the South they will not exclude scholars from Europe and North America.

Secondly, it is critical that an increase of articles by scholars working on the continent is not viewed as a mere addition to a stable core of knowledge, but rather as an exciting

that links to situational geographies of exclusion and geographies of resistance based on shared histories of colonialism and ongoing processes of decolonization. While there are various ways that one could formulate such a survey, due to my current interest in geopolitics and the production of knowledge at higher education institutions, I chose to consider where authors are situated as knowledge-producers.²⁰ On average, about 13.5% of authors publishing in these three journals are based in the global South and about 86.5% are based in the global North. If one were to break down the global South further, about 12% of these authors are based on the African continent, leaving 1.5% of authors based in other parts of the global South. Additionally, if one considered the tendency for the South African academy and art world to dominate the African continent due, in part, to the myth of South African exceptionalism (Lazarus 2004) that was perpetuated by the international art world in the 1990s and early 2000s (Nelson 2004:12), then only about 1.5% of authors are based on the rest of the African continent.

While the global South and the global North are not areas constrained by physical coordinates, their embedded situatedness is far from irrelevant. As Zeleza (2009:111) points out, the "social composition and intellectual terrain" of African Studies changed significantly when African universities were in crisis in the 1980s and 1990s



opportunity for all of us to see the core of our field of study strengthened and potentially reframed. As Walter D. Mignolo (2002:85) writes, it is not enough to merely open up a field of study to more scholars or to export it to other places, but the “starting point of knowledge and thinking must be the colonial difference . . .”²¹ In other words, the goal is not just to add new content, but also to question the control of knowledge and change the terms of the conversation (Mignolo 2011:122–23). How do we all—as contributors to and readers of *African Arts*—engage with these issues and facilitate these goals?

Thirdly, it is important to consider that an editorial partnership based at a South African university could be viewed as a perpetuation of South African exceptionalism in the same way that in the 1990s and early 2000s South African artists sometimes found themselves in the position of unwittingly standing in for the whole African continent in large “global identity exhibitions” (Simbao 2015b:263). It is critical that, as we move forward with this task, meaningful collaboration with Africa-based colleagues is prioritized, and that a good portion of this collaboration reaches beyond South Africa, possibly resulting in another African university joining or succeeding Rhodes as a consortium partner.

Fourthly, it is important that the goal to redress “un-located assumptions about knowing and knowledge-making” (Mignolo 2011:118) is not misinterpreted as an attempt to overdetermine links between locatedness and knowledge-production. (Certainly the goal to increase the participation of scholars on the continent does not assume that all art historians in Africa focus on the arts of Africa or aspire to publish in *African Arts*.) The drive to delink essentialist associations of the identity or location of knowers and the knowledge they produce is a critical part of not treating scholars and artists as tokens of their culture or location (Mignolo 2011:118; Magdy 2003).²² This does not, however, erase the need for an embodied politics of knowing. All scholars need to grapple with their locatedness as knowledge-producers, recognizing that unlocated, universalist, or globalist thought is a blind spot in the decolonial concept of an alter-geopolitics of knowledge. The need to “focus on the knower, rather than on the known” in non-essentializing ways in order to “question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge” (Mignolo cited in Badat 2016:6) must not be confused with the need to free the knower from essentializing and overdetermined locatedness.

Importantly, this goal to increase the participation of scholars based on the African continent in international scholarly forums such as *African Arts* starts neither from a

position of mere complaint about exclusion, nor from a suggestion that participation is nonexistent. Rather, this goal builds on the desire of a number of *African Arts* readers, and responds to what I recognize as a very positive shift that is already beginning to take place in our field and more broadly. While this shift in our field is, in my observation, stronger in art production and in curating than in scholarly writing, there is value in acknowledging this broader climate of change.

Progress in changing “epistemic dependency” that often remains “parallel to economic dependency” (Mignolo 2011:119) can be seen, for example, in the African Humanities Program (AHP) of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). Since 2009 this program has enabled a number of Africa-based scholars (including scholars in heritage and the visual and performing arts²³) to pursue predoctoral and postdoctoral fellowships at African universities rather than at universities in the privileged North, thus playing a role in strengthening academic institutions on the African continent. While the funding comes from the US, Africans on the continent have played a significant role in driving, shaping, and running this program.

Further, this shift can be seen in the ways that African Studies organizations globally are rethinking their relationship to the African continent and in the rise of “home-grown” (Spooner 2015) organizations on the continent. The African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) was founded in 2013, and the ASAA president, Lungisile Ntsebeza, explains that the organization’s goal is to “promote Africa’s own specific contributions to the advancement of knowledge about the peoples and cultures of Africa and the Diaspora” in order to “ensure that the continent of Africa becomes the main world seat/site/home/center of the study of Africa and its peoples of African descent.”²⁴ Rather than claim in simplistic terms that an African Studies organization on the continent will differ essentially from organizations beyond the continent, ASAA openly questions to what degree African Studies “practiced by Africans especially based on the continent will be different from that which is pursued outside the African continent.” Importantly, scholars on the continent are playing a leading role in these discussions.



10 Xenson Znja, 2016. *Ndiboota Exporters*. Mixed media installation (consisting of a wheelbarrow made from wooden planks, barkcloth and rope) in the gardens of the Uganda Museum. Kampala Art Biennale, September 2016. Photo: Fiona Siegenthaler

In 2007 the Council for the Development of Social Sciences Research in Africa (CODESRIA) called for the Africanization of the Social Sciences and Humanities on the African continent, identifying as a key problem the fact that “the global North and West tends to tie African researchers to the agendas set by those organizations and agencies, making them instruments and accomplices of their own marginalization” (Kistner 2008:94). Addressing this concern, the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) was launched at a Higher Education Summit in Senegal in 2015, aiming to strengthen research across the continent through collaborative effort in order to “catapult Africa to the cutting edge of research on global challenges” (Habib in Spooner 2015). Emphasizing self-reliance and collaboration, the alliance—made up of sixteen universities in Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda, and South Africa—aims to “increase Africa’s contribution to global cutting edge research output to 5% from 1% over a 10-year period.”²⁵

AN OPEN CALL

It is evident that valuable systems are already being put in place to support a new rising²⁶ of scholarship on the African continent in the twenty-first century, and importantly this impetus is coming from proponents on the continent. New alliances and programs such as ARUA and AHP are foregrounding the need to collaborate, work as peer institutions, and pool resources in



11 Mbali Khoza, 2014. *What Difference Does It Make Who Is Speaking?* Performance at the *Eastern Star Press Museum* as part of the *Blind Spot* performance art program curated by Ruth Simbao. National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, South Africa. Photo: Ruth Simbao

a context that can ill afford the multiplication of research expenses often seen in individualistic and territorial academic environments.

I take this opportunity to invite colleagues to participate in a new program: Publishing and Research of the South: Positioning Africa (PROSPA) and a related network, Art POWA (Producing *Our Words* in Africa). PROSPA is a residency and publishing program that falls under the Arts of Africa and the Global South research team that I run in the Fine Art Department at Rhodes University. Annual artists' and writers' residencies that are at times explicitly linked to each other aim to strengthen the relationship between art production and scholarly writing within the global South. Annual publishing workshops hosted at various African universities aim to cosupport (in the sense of supporting each other in reciprocal ways) Africa-based scholars in the process of preparing manuscripts for publication. A modest number of fellowships and bursaries are available, and meaningful research collaborations are sought.

The Art POWA network will be an online community of scholars specific to our field and will focus on scholars based on the African continent. Scholars will be profiled, their works will be featured with links to publications where applicable, and information about writing and publishing processes will be shared. The goal of Art POWA is to link relevant scholars on the continent with each other in order to strengthen research through collaboration and knowledge-sharing, to increase the international visibility of Africa-based scholars as a way of shifting the

center of gravity of our field, and to contribute to the building of the next generation of scholars in the arts on the African continent.

The goals of PROSPA and Art POWA form part of what I call a "strategic southernness," which addresses a particular need at a particular time (a strategy that is relevant today might not be—and ideally will not need to be—relevant

in the future) and is adopted by scholars who are driven by approach rather than simply their locatedness. While the current need is, I submit, to increase the momentum and the international visibility of scholarship produced on the African continent, this is the responsibility of *all* scholars and should be done in a collective, interconnected, and nonbinary way.

Notes

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1 This Chair was awarded to Rhodes University in 2015 by the National Research Foundation and the Department of Science and Technology, and is part of the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI). It is run by the Research Chair, Ruth Simbao, and includes a group of Postdoctoral Fellows, Research Fellows, Research Associates, and PhD, Masters, and Honors candidates known as the Arts of Africa and the Global South research team. For a full list of participants see www.ru.ac.za/artsofAfrica/.

2 An alter-geopolitics of knowledge draws from Koopman's (2011) notion of alter-geopolitics and Mignolo's (2002) notion of the geopolitics of knowledge.

3 During his tenure as the Vice-Chancellor at Rhodes University (2006 to 2014), Dr. Saleem Badat regularly encouraged staff to consider how a "University on the African continent" might differ from an "African University" in relation to curriculum transformation and institutional culture.

4 Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, Henry Owuor-Anyumba, and Taban Lo Liyong called for the abolition of the English Department at the University of Nairobi, questioning why British literature was at the heart of the curriculum in independent Kenya. They asserted that such an approach was colonial and chauvinistic, and their challenge resulted in the English Department being turned into a Language Department and a Literature Department (Gates 1984:11).

5 See my article "Infecting the City: Situational Performance and Ambulatory Hermeneutics" for a more in-depth analysis of situational performance and situational relationships to place. In this work I draw from the creation of situations proposed by the Situationist International group that called for "something new, creative, and transformative that entailed agency, participatory subjectivity, and self-determination that broke with passive engagement with the environment" (Simbao 2016b:6).

6 In 1981, shortly after Zimbabwe's Independence, South Africa returned four of the *chapungu* carvings that it had possessed, and the pedestal of another bird held in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin was returned to Zimbabwe in 2003 (Ebrahim 2016).

7 The selected artists were Gresham Tapiwa Nyaude, Kyle Morland, Lady Skollie, Masimba Hwati, Mathias Chirombo, Rehema Chachage, Ruby Onyinyechi Amanze, and Thania Petersen.

8 Examples of contemporary art fairs that focus on Africa are 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London and New York, the 2016 Armory Show in New York, and the AKAA (Also Known As Africa) art and design fair in Paris. Given that the international discourse of "contemporary African art" developed concurrently with the curatorial turn, biennialization, and the rise of global art fairs, it is important to acknowledge that commercial art fairs play a significant role in the production of knowledge and that various forms of consumption are thus at the heart of the dominant discourse. While I do not suggest that we should (or could) completely reject the commercial aspect of the discourse of "contemporary African art," it is essential to consider the ways in which capitalist-driven systems play a role in shaping knowledge, and to ask how this relates to issues of privilege and geopolitics (see Simbao 2015b).

9 Personal correspondence with Xenson Znja, January 2, 2017.

10 Ibid.

11 Thanks to Xenson Znja, Eria Nsubuga, Angelo Kakande, and Kiriggwajjo Anatole for assistance with this Luganda saying.

12 I use the term "site-collaborative" or "site-situational" instead of the term "site-specific."

13 My description of this performance is based on my analysis of this work in "Blind Spots: Trickery and the 'Opaque Stickiness' of Seeing" (Simbao 2015a).

14 This wall text provided information about the South African journalist Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje (1876–1932), known as Sol Plaatje, who played a role in founding the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) that later became the African National Congress (ANC).

15 Personal correspondence with the artist, April 2014.

16 The fact that only a select group of artists enjoy this high visibility raises important questions around issues of value and the control of "standards."

17 While art criticism from the continent is gaining international visibility due to the recent increase of various online platforms, I refer here specifically to scholarly writing and academic publishing.

18 Using the term "aesthetic feudalism," Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo (2012:x) similarly critiques the hierarchy in which text lords over orality or doing.

19 This survey was conducted with the help of Tinika Nuen in 2015 and only took into consideration articles, leaving out exhibition reviews and book reviews. Articles taken into consideration dated back to the early 2000s and, if one were to use these statistics in a more conclusive way than I do here, then it would be important to break down the dates in a more detailed way, keeping in mind that *Critical Interventions* was founded in 2007.

20 If one were to reformulate this survey to consider the demographics of contributing authors, then it would probably be evident that *African Arts* is a lot “whiter” than, for example, *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*. Of course, a higher proportion of authors in the North who are of African descent contributes to a complex and nuanced understanding of the global North and the global South.

21 Emphasis added. In this assertion Mignolo draws from the work of Anibal Quijano and Enrique Dussel.

22 As Mignolo (2011:118) writes, we can’t assume that “if you come from Latin America or Algeria, you have to ‘talk about’ Latin America or Algeria,” and similar critiques of tokenism are discussed in the visual arts.

23 Fellows of the ACLS African Humanities Program who work in our field include Elinaza Mjema, Abubakar Sani Sule, Eytayo Ijisakin, Edwinus Chrisantus Lyaya, Nomusa Makhubu, Abdullah Mohammed, Harrie Uvietobor Bazunu, Okechukwu Charles Nwafor, Amanda Tumusiime, Angelo Kakande, Ngusekela Moma Mwakalinga, Kylie Thomas, Rotimi Omoyele Fasan, Jill Frances Weintraub, Ozioma Onuzulike, Freeborn Odiboh, Ruth Simbao, Munyaradzi Manyanga, and Imani Sanga.

24 The African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) website, <http://www.as-aa.org/>. Accessed August 2016.

25 ARUA concept notes, January 2017.

26 To talk about a rising in Africa-based research does not imply that Africa does not have a history of strong knowledge-production traditions whether articulated in writing or speech. Rather, it points to a contemporary “waking up from the long *dossis* of Westernization” that challenges the fallacy that there are some places of “non-thought” (Mignolo 2011:119). It also points to new commitments post the crisis period in African universities a few decades after Independence—a period which South Africa now appears to be entering.

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