



Owela Theatre & Performance Seminar/Workshop 2021 *Genealogies, Orientations and Raptures*

13th and 14th October 2021

Venue: ZOOM

Registration link: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_JqU8fCKQT0aFgeGiHx5uwQ

In partnership with the National Theatre of Namibia and Odalate Naiteke Practice-as-Research Programme.

Conveners: Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja and Nelago Shilongoh



October 13th: (14h00 – 17h00)

BACK TO FUTURES OF WORK

TIME	PRESENTATION	PRESENTERS
14h00	Welcoming: Why a Theatre and Performance Seminar on/in Namibia?	Nelago Shilongoh & Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja
14h30	Keynote address: National Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy: Reflecting on the Policy making process With Discussant/Respondent	Dr. Christiana Afrikaner Ndemufayo Kaxuxuena
15h30	Intergenerational Dialogue about the Covid-19 pandemic and the future of Namibian theatre	Nelago Shilongoh and Sandy Rudd
16h00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The [Earth] Project (performance) Artists' Poster about how they collaborate 	Gift Uzera and Muningandu Hoveka
16h45	Closing of day 1	Conveners



October 14th: Papers, performances, and conversations (08h00 – 17h00)

GENEALOGIES

Facilitated by Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja

TIME	PRESENTATION	PRESENTERS
09h00	Day 2 welcoming and house keeping	Conveners
09h15	A conversation about Gais: Damara Traditional Music	Engelhardt #Unaeb with Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja
09h45	Theatre for Development in Namibia	Donald Matthys
10h15	Mulilo, Toyi-Toyi and Decolonial Love in Oudano Practices	Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja

TEA BREAK 10h45 – 11h00



ORIENTATIONS

Facilitated by Nelago Shilongoh

TIME	PRESENTATION	PRESENTERS
11h00	A Study of Theatre Histories and Contemporary Performance Pedagogies: Reflecting on African Performing Arts in Namibia.	Josefina Ndapanda Awala
11h30	Representation Matters: Performing Colourfulness and Baster Identities in Namibian Theatre	Jonathan Solomons
12h00	A conversation about Dance & Somatic Practices: Building Physical Theatre Ensembles in Community & Educational Contexts	Dr. Philippe Talavera and Stanley Mareka with Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja
12h30	From The Cheap Seats: An Arts Writer Reflects on Namibian Theatre and the Role of The Press	Martha Mukaiwa
13h00	Reflections	Prof. Sarala Krishnamurthy

SHORT BREAK 13h15 – 14h00



RAPTURES

Facilitated by Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja

TIME	PRESENTATION	PRESENTERS
14h00	Performance poetry - a safe space?	Frieda Mukufa and Dr. Hugh Ellis
14h30	Queer Capsules	Zindri Swartz
15h00	Queer Poetry & Performance at Crime Scenes and Graveyards	Keith Vries
15h30	'Critical Intimacy' in Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja's Tea-Time-Performance Ondaanisa yo Pomudhime ("The Dance of the Rubber Tree") in 2018 in Hamburg	Julia Rensing
16h00	'Practices of Self' Towards a Theory of Embodied Entanglement with Others, Place and Non-Human Beings	Dr. Nicola Brandt

SHORT BREAK 16h30 – 16h40



WE ARE STILL IMAGINING FUTURES OF WORK...

TIME	PRESENTATION	PRESENTER
16h40	Negative Factors that Affect Namibian Rural Traditional Performers in the Arts Industry	Ismael Sam
17h10	Reflection & Afterword	Helen Vale
17h25	Closing	Nelago Shilongoh & Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja

ABSTRACTS

1. A Study of Theatre Histories and Contemporary Performance Pedagogies Reflecting on African Performing Arts in Namibia.

Josefina Ndapanda Awala

ABSTRACT: This thesis explores the potential of theatre studies to develop and evaluate the relevant quality of pedagogies in Namibia institutions. The report is covering selected histories of indigenous performing arts and contemporary performance by focusing on what is referred to as African Performing Arts program in Namibia. The study provides an overview of theatre pedagogies, praxis, and research of Namibia theatre. This research is creating general information on how to recognize theatre



as a reflection of human needs that demonstrate an understanding of the relationship among the artists, audience, and society. The paper is educating and directing artists on various acting techniques, class performances and identify career opportunities in acting and technical production. The investigation highlights the difficulties the researcher has experienced in the theatre industry and their observations on local arts colleges to expand the scope of theatre in Namibia. The aim of this project is to expose that professional practice in theatre is essential and facilitates artist's self-expression. The study is geared towards encouraging and supporting theatre students to learn and understand the dynamics of theatre histories, pedagogies, and performances.

2. Theatre for Development in Namibia

Donald Matthys

ABSTRACT: Namibian theatre has always been political. Many scripted works are used as a tool to shine light on something other than drama itself; human rights, domestic abuse, sexual health/behaviour, education, sex work, poverty, corruption, inequality, etc. Despite this, Namibian theatre remains a luxury good and remains inaccessible to the masses most affected by these socio-economic ills and thus used for mere entertainment value. Theatre for Development can be used to inspire change if aspects such as indigenous languages and targeted community engagement are used to identify and explore the root causes around socio-economic issues. Tapping into community-driven theatre will make community members see their circumstance from the viewpoint of fellow community members and help them better understand their situations and surroundings. Theatre for Development in turn gives communities clarity on the reason, and/or solution and allows them to draw agendas of their own. Government and development agencies can use Theatre for Development to enhance the quality of life among vulnerable populations. However, the interregional limited/lack of development artists and theatre groups, as key drivers, hampers Theatre for Development, especially since theatre in Namibia is largely centralized.



3. *From The Cheap Seats: An Arts Writer Reflects on Namibian Theatre and the Role of The Press*

Martha Mukaiwa

ABSTRACT: It's a strange and beautiful thing to be a critic in a theatre industry as small as Windhoek's. One day you're a stranger, scribbling suspiciously in a dark row, the next you are an integral community cog capable of profiling, promoting and assisting in building an industry you love from the amplifying pages of the nation's largest daily newspaper. For what is an arts writer, other than an ardent art lover playing the dual role of critical commentator and, frankly, fan? Over the last decade, I have watched countless theatre productions and seen Namibian theatre evolve and move between the traditional, the avant-garde, activist and experimental. From work by veteran theatremakers such as David Ndjavera, Keamogetsi Joseph Molapong, Sandy Rudd and Aldo Behrens to the new school talents of Nelago Shilongoh, Senga Bockerhoff, Blessing Mbonambi, Ashywn Mberi, Jenny Kandenge, Lloyd Winini, Zindri Swartz and Hafeni Muzanima, local theatre has taken many shapes and forms even spilling into the streets in striking performance art by Julia Hango, Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja and Shilongoh. Mine is no definitive or extensive account of Namibian theatre. It is simply a rumination and remembrance of a finite number of plays that have stayed with me. It is an essay on how, in my opinion, these productions and personas pushed theatre forward. It is what I, a humble arts writer, saw from the cheap seats.



4. 'Critical Intimacy' in Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja's Tea-Time-Performance *Ondaanisa yo Pomudhime* ("The Dance of the Rubber Tree") in 2018 in Hamburg

Julia Rensing

ABSTRACT: In *Ondaanisa yo pOmudhime* (The Dance of the Rubber Tree) performed in December 2018 in Hamburg, Namibian performer, educator and writer Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja powerfully claims, "Let us burn the museum / Let us burn the books, the art, the walls of toxicity", calling for decolonization of public institutions (museums and archives), public spaces and practices of knowledge production. Yet, in the same performance, staged in the public art salon MBassy in Hamburg, he also urges his audience: "Let us have tea and sing love songs", addressing a group of interlocutors seated at a laid table with delicate china tea sets, British biscuits, hot coffee and tea.

This paper investigates Mushaandja's critique of the colonial archive and his strategies of engaging his audience in his tea and coffee party by considering this multi-layered performance as a subversive act that plays with notions of intimacy and relation juxtaposed with elements of targeted confrontations and disruptions. In my analysis, I draw from Nomusa Makhubu's interpretation of Zina Zaro-Wiwa's "food interventions" and Makhubu's use of Sarah Nuttall's theory on *entanglement* to show how Mushaandja engages with space, communion, intimacy, food, and consumption as means of dismantling the colonial continuities lodged in these concepts. By exploring the productive tensions between intimacy, harmony and radical confrontation, Mushaandja's performance breaks with hegemonic conceptions of being, seeing or making sense of the world and of archival repositories that host alleged 'knowledge' of the past. *Ondaanisa yo pOmudhime* emerges as a performative act that imagines elusive possibilities of love and reconciliation within the critical spaces of disruption and contestation.



5. *Mulilo, Toyi-Toyi and Decolonial Love in Oudano Practices*

Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja

ABSTRACT: This paper begins by tracing fire as indigeneity and resistance culture in selected historic performance encounters. It uses these African genealogies of performance to reflect on the public performance work; *I AM HUMAN* by JuliART, *What's Love Got To Do With It?* by Neige Moongo, *Limbadungila* by Tuli Mekondjo and *[theKhoest]* by Nesindano Namises. I write from the practice of curating these performances for *Odalate Naiteke* 2020. In addition to these performances, the paper also reflects on nation-wide protest action performed by the *#ShutItAllDownNamibia* movement in 2020. I posit that these recent performances in various public spheres make claims to indigeneity while taking up space by protesting hetero-patriarchal nationalism in post-apartheid Namibia. Unlike theatre and performance work in the first two decades of Namibian democracy which were geared towards development, nation-building and ethnic reconciliation, these 'new' performance practices turn to what Maldonado-Torres (2017) has theorized as decolonial love. In doing so, they return us to 'trance formation' by shapeshifting and shamanic body practices such as *Xoma* and *Tsutsube* archived in rock art paintings in Dâures mountains and ǀgangu conservancy areas.

The contemporary performances are actively resisting and transgressing dominant cultural ideologies while mapping and experimenting with indigenous concepts of performance. One such concept is Oudano which denotes expansive notions of play, performance, and performativity. These movements offer undisciplined practices of performance, ultimately demonstrating Oudano's citational, orientational, trans-temporal, mobile and colloquial nature. It is through concepts such as Oudano that these performances mobilize nation-wide attention and action towards gender, restorative, and epistemic justice.



6. Representation Matters: Performing Colourness and Baster Identities in Namibian Theatre

Jonathan Solomons

ABSTRACT: I write as an artist and writer myself, having written numerous articles on performance in Namibia and having staged on the National Theatre of Namibia backstage, telling a story of the Coloured and Baster community. I would like to explore this notion further by interrogating the representation of these identities through the various facets provided by contemporary Namibian performing artists whose work addresses these themes. This includes looking at practices of theatre makers such as Lize Ehlers, Senga Bockerhoff, Frederick Philander and Severius Majiedt. I am interested because this has not been explored widely in the Namibian theatre landscape. Coloured and Baster identities are often misunderstood and overly simplified in many contexts and I would like to address those ideologies and build conversations around what these identities mean to the community. The stories that have been told by writers, actors, singers and artists belonging to these ethnic groups throughout the history of performance in Namibia will be the basis of my analysis. As a passionate advocate for the arts and proper representation of this community, I feel that this would be a great opportunity to examine, challenge and shape the perceptions of Coloured and Baster identities. I will look at how this discourse can contribute to building a sustainable and unified industry through diversity.



7. Negative Factors that Affect Namibian Rural Traditional Performers in the Arts Industry

Ismael Sam

ABSTRACT: This chapter focuses on the various negative factors that affect Namibian rural traditional musicians and traditional dancers, additionally factors that drive some of these performers away from their cultural practices and associated instruments. More importantly, the chapter also places emphasis on the negative effects of digital piracy of African traditional music, especially by the western world.

In addition, the chapter discusses these socio-economic challenges affecting customary norms and health status of Namibian rural traditional performers. It also addresses the issue of inadequate and in some way inefficient educational framework to help this community to overcome poverty especially for the upcoming generation. Furthermore, the chapter is situated in critical and decoloniality theories by focusing on customary practices negatively affected by western influences whose effects were compounded by the practice of apartheid in both Namibia and South Africa. It also discusses the ways in which Namibia is implementing or attempting to implement *the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage* and *UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*.

Therefore, the chapter will introduce the importance of awareness on the safeguarding of Cultural Heritage and emphasizes on arts and culture policies that will guide the readers how to promote and preserve our national Cultural Heritage and our traditional performers.



8. 'Practices of Self'

Towards a Theory of Embodied Entanglement with Others, Place and Non-Human Beings

Dr. Nicola Brandt

ABSTRACT: One's body and identity are entangled with place. This mutually constituted relationship is not static but ever changing, constantly activating diverse temporalities and power structures.

Artists in Namibia are increasingly drawing on highly imaginative and cross-disciplinary approaches to investigate deeper truths, and are oriented towards 'new practices of self,' including the interrogation of concepts of space/place and representations of landscape in varying ways. Motivations diverge, but are often also interconnected, from the desire to explore questions of 'personal identity, belonging, and the production of new forms of knowledge, but also as a deliberate means to reclaim space (and land), and a sense of self-determination, especially in relationship to the body. Some of these critical strategies and aesthetic modes include aftermath, appropriation, counter-narratives, opacity, collectivity and performativity.'

Drawing on decolonial, eco-feminist and queer methodologies, I would like to reflect on these intersections and entanglements between environment, place and identity. How might these ideas assist in turning us towards a more self-reflexive and embodied experience of place, but in the same instance, help us also to decentre and critique our specific locatedness and viewpoints. For example, what do others and the environment ask of us? How can these 'practices of self' help us relate to non-human beings? And how might some of these emerging cultural practices offer some possibilities in a time that radically asks for socio-political engagement and environmental adaptation.



9. Performance poetry - a safe space?

Frieda Mukufa and Dr. Hugh Ellis

ABSTRACT: Poetry, the etymological meaning of the word itself, comes from the Greek noun *poiesis* whose related verb means, “to make”. Therefore, “to create poetry” or “make poetry” is not necessarily to write it down on paper. In Namibia, live performance has been one of the main avenues, if not the main one, for the promotion and sharing of poetry since Independence (Ellis and Stevenson, 2018).

Indeed, modern African poetry as a whole has been very active in projecting the inner experiences of the people as well as mediating socio-cultural and political experiences (Jenkins, 2002). This is evident with the Spoken Word platform in Namibia, as well as others such as the Windhoek Open Mic Night and various ad hoc performance poetry spaces.

Marginalised people in Namibian society have adopted this medium as their own; these are inclusive of the LGBTQ+ communities and women (Mukufa, 2020), who through Spoken Word have made sharing and healing from trauma their main objective. Through performance poetry, an initiative that served as a safe space for women was born. Performance poetry has also frequently functioned to highlight inequities in Namibia between rich and poor and between black and white.

The question is whether performance poetry in Namibia truly continues to function as a ‘safe space’ for these marginalised identities, and whether it can continue this role, since, like all performing arts in Namibia, it has been severely constrained by Covid-19 restrictions, organisational concerns and economic recession. It also is questionable how it can manage the tensions between more and less privileged members of the performance poetry movement. Another key consideration is how far performance poetry can establish roots in poorer communities and can develop its place within an African tradition and aesthetic.



10. Queer Poetry & Performance at Crime Scenes and Grave Yards

Keith Vries (Keith Black)

ABSTRACT: This piece is used as an analysis as a Queer poet living with Bipolar Disorder on a stage was traditionally not created to accommodate my sufferings and triumphs. Using the lens of the decolonised, daring, defiant and bold black body to paint new pictures, I've come to learn that telling our stories on our own terms is perhaps one of the most reliable ways for us to survive alongside our people. Traditional masculinity, coupled with the capitalist, normative, conscripted attitudes and forms, doesn't make room for inclusive narratives that humanize us all. Through the art of poetry and the force that is performance, I believe that we can pave a new road in which our stories are the tar on which we will drive to get to the future.

11. Queer Capsules

Zindri Swartz

Queer Capsules is a short exhibition depicting Namibian Queer theatre focusing on selected productions staged at the National Theatre of Namibia. These recent productions include my own play *Prime Colours* (2014), *Revere Them Those Men* (2014) by Hafeni Muzanima, *The Encounter* (2017) by Jason Kooper, *Battered* (2019) by Donald Matthys (2019), *Anna and Christelle* (2019) by Ndali Mupopiwa and Mel Mwevi, *Die Stoep* (2019) by Jonathan Sasha, *Three Sisters* (2020) by Bret Kamwi and *Boet & Sus* (2021) by Lize Ehlers. I use capsule as a metaphor to describe the drug-like, unsettling and destabilizing nature of these plays which signify a queer era in Namibian theatre. Gathering documentation in the NTN archives has proved that more should be done to



preserve our priceless memories of theatre practices in general. I am trying to understand whether works like these existed prior to this new era considering the absence which highlights the erasure of the LGBTIQ+ community in Namibian society at large.

12. A conversation about Dance & Somatic Practices: Building Physical Theatre Ensembles in Community & Educational Contexts

Philippe Talavera, Stanley Mareka with Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja

This conversation with Philippe Talavera of Ombetja Yehinga Organization (OYO) and Stanley Mareka of Equipped Dance Academy reflects on their work as founders of these physical theatre platforms as well as how they have used dance and somatic practices to facilitate educational and community work. The conversation is guided by some of the following key questions. What is the role of embodiment (or working with and in the body) in facilitating learning and culture? How has the idea of building an ensemble changed/shifted since you began your company? How can we strengthen and advance dance and physical theatre education in Namibia?

13. A conversation about | Gais: Damara Traditional Music

Engelhardt #Unaeb

/Gais is the indigenous music of the Damara people, yet many Damara speaking people do not know much about this art form. The researcher of this paper is Damara and only found out about /Gais in the past 10 years. /Gais plays an important role in the Damara people's daily lives since it was used for healing, celebrations, weddings, birth of a child, initiations, and other rituals. /Gais was very purposeful in that regard as many of those activities were not complete without song and dance. This



presentation will therefore unpack musical devices on the identification of | Gais and unpack the aesthetics of the | Gais. The presenter is also interested in the disappearance and continuities of /Gais in Damara communities for preservation purposes.

14. Intergenerational Dialogue about the Covid 19 pandemic and the future of Namibian theatre

Sandy Rudd and Nelago Shilongoh

This conversation responds to two issues- the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on Namibian theatre and performance as well as the lack of intergenerational dialogue. The pandemic restricted mobility of arts and culture while enforcing the new normal of social distancing. Consequently, this has left the sector (practitioners and institutions) in a vulnerable position inviting us to re-imagine sustainability, innovation, and care work in the industry. The pandemic has also created an opportunity for intergenerational dialogue, as a gap that is deeply reflective of Namibia, as a post-colonial nation.

15. The [Earth] Project (performance): Artists' poster about how they collaborate

Gift Uzera and Muningandu Hoveka

The [Earth] Project is a conceptual performance piece on the element 'earth' curated through videography with original soundscapes and movement.

The concept explores the relationship between the human, as a manifestation of earth, and its home (earth). Whatever you do to yourself, you do to your home (earth/body) and has an impact on the environment/climate. The human and the



earth mirror each other e.g. qualities of growth, morphing through movement, the memory of time etc. We explore the ways in which we mirror earth and vice versa.

INFORMATION ON PARTNERS:

Owela Festival:

Officiated in 2019, Owela Festival was developed by Kaleni Kollektiv, as an artistic research lab and three-part festival between Namibia and Germany. It was developed and organised by the Kaleni Kollektiv and is the fruit of a three year long collaborative process with extensive online and offline conversations, workshops and travels between Namibia and Germany. Together, the collective of cultural workers, artists and scholars created the space to discuss decolonial cultural work and present questions on the future of work through performance, installation, happening, public debate, film screenings, theatre and workshops.

Odalate Naiteke Practice-as-Research Programme:

Odalate Naiteke Practice-as-Research Programme is a Katutura-based initiative focused on radical learning and culture since 2018. It curates art and performance in public spaces around Windhoek city, forging critical engagement through resistance culture, radical histories and public education. The programme is situated in the methodology of Practice-as-Research for its practice orientation as a basis of knowledge production.



INFORMATION ON CONVENERS:

Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja

Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja is a performer, educator and writer with practice-research interests in archives and public culture (performance, visibility & spatiality); critical pedagogy; queer praxis and movement formation. His recent PhD performance project Ondaanisa yo pOmudhime (Dance of the Rubber Tree) at the University of Cape Town's Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies is a queer intervention practiced through Oudano, an African concept of performance. This work has been performed widely at festivals, museums, theatres and archives in Germany, Switzerland, South Africa, Cameroon and Namibia. He is also involved in curative projects from time to time, such as the John Muafangejo Season (2016/2017), Operation Odalate Naiteke (2018/2020) and Owela Festival (2019).

Nelago Shilongoh

Nelago Shilongoh is a theatre maker, visual culture researcher, curator, and performer whose work is predominantly influenced by reflections and research on identity, and how history and the present marry. She is an award-winning performer and theatre director with centeredness on decolonial themes. Since 2019, she serves as the Artistic Director at the National Theatre of Namibia.