The politics of ‘othering’ in Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu’s
*Taming My Elephant*

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Abstract
In post-colonial theory, the concept of ‘othering’ is commonly used by critics to describe the process by which the colonizer defines him/herself in relation to an inferior “other”: the colonized. This paper shows that in the anti-colonialist struggle, new dynamics emerge. The formerly colonized subject enters an altered power relation in which he or she practises forms of ‘othering’ as well. The case study of Namibian writer Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu’s autobiography “Taming My Elephant” reveals how this habitus has hampered SWAPO’s project of ‘national reconciliation’. In a personal account of her path to exile and back home 12 years later, Amulungu presents herself as an outspoken SWAPO-supporter. However, an analysis of her life narrative, while focusing on practices of ‘othering’, exposes persistent misalignments of and challenges for the post-colonial nation which are in conflict with the dominant political discourse. In the discussion of the performances of othering described in “Taming My Elephant” Amulungu’s life narrative comes to be seen as a correction of the state-written narrative, which glorifies the liberation struggle and celebrates Namibia’s ‘unity in diversity’. Simultaneously, it retraces how Amulungu overcame othering, undertook reconciliation in the private sphere and, together with her ‘interracial’ family, has created a peaceful cohabitation of black and white Namibians.

Introduction
Namibian people have a vast cultural diversity. Although the apartheid system strived for decades to divide Namibians along racial, tribal and cultural lines, the people of Namibia identify themselves as Namibians first. Due to the apartheid laws, deep divisions in particular between Whites, Coloureds and Blacks was [sic] unavoidable and the country is still struggling to erase the ugly scars of apartheid.1

Approximately 30 years of German colonialism followed by more than 70 years of South African occupation: Namibia’s history is one of repression, resilience, resistance and revolution. Twenty eight years after independence in 1990, the scars of colonial regimes

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are still visible in the country, as the author Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu highlights in the quote above. At the same time, individual experiences of colonial times and the struggles of Namibians who fought for independence are not well documented, as Melber asserts lamenting that “the ‘literature of struggle’ remains remarkably little developed.” In light of this, Amulungu’s life narrative *Taming My Elephant* from 2016 offers an educative account of a woman who made great sacrifices for the independence of her country and who, as her story shows, would make a great contribution to “erase the ugly scars of apartheid” in post-colonial Namibia.

In recounting her path to exile and back home to Namibia, Amulungu aligns herself with those post-colonial, “marginalized and victimized” authors who “use their writings to explore a legacy of oppression and injustice”. My reading of her narrative demonstrates how, in so doing, Amulungu shares her experiences of being ‘othered’ in colonial and post-colonial Namibia. However, her memoir is not merely a personal insight into discriminatory experiences of apartheid. Amulungu also reveals how she demarcated herself from the colonizer – the ‘Other’ with capital ‘O’. Post-colonial theory commonly focuses on the practices of ‘othering’ performed by the colonizer who consigns colonial others to inferior positions. However, *Taming My Elephant* shows that this interpretation of (post-)colonial power dynamics ignores the perspective of those formerly colonized and neglects their agency in the colonial context. This paper claims that Amulungu’s narrative depicts signs that the colonized subject practises forms of ‘othering’, too. These performances play a particular role in her personal narrative, as it is also a “love story that brought two families and cultures together”. Here, her reviewers refer to her interracial marriage to the white German-Namibian Wilfried Brock. Their relationship required both Amulungu and Brock to renegotiate colonial power dynamics, mental structures and behaviour patterns. The following analysis discusses how *Taming My Elephant* mirrors Amulungu’s experiences and also her own practices of ‘othering’ in pre-independence Namibia, during her twelve years in exile and back in her home country when she returned with her new white partner.

I maintain that her writing in general, but especially a reading of her memoir with specific attention to the mechanisms of ‘othering’, allows for an alternative and critical reassessment of the dominant historiography as written by SWAPO. The narrative of national reconciliation and Namibian ‘unity in diversity’ appears in a new light when read against the backdrop of the practices of ‘othering’, which complicate the reconciliation of black and white Namibians in the post-colony.

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‘Othering’ in theory

The concept of ‘othering’ has its roots in philosophy and in psychoanalysis, where it has been the subject of in-depth interpretation and discussion. In these disciplines it is commonly understood as a form of self-construction by a subject in relation to an ‘other’. The focus on the juxtaposition of self and other has been further translated from Hegel, Lacan, Lévinas et al. to feminist theory, and then to post-colonial theory. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. point out that forms of ‘othering’ in (post-) colonial contexts differ extensively from classical philosophical thought. Philosophers detect reciprocity in ‘othering’ between the individuals that encounter each other and construct their distinction of the self from the other:

[S]uch a reciprocity allows mutual relations between self and Other in which both may at various times willingly function as objects for the Other. But in post-colonial societies, the participants are frozen into a hierarchical relationship in which the oppressed is locked into a position by the assumed moral superiority of the dominant group.

Hence, there is no balanced exertion of influence in the relationship between colonized and colonizer — a change in position is unthinkable and instead a fixed hierarchy is installed. Staszak calls this “the asymmetry in power relationships”, claiming that “[o]nly the dominant group is in a position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the particularity of others (their otherness) while imposing corresponding discriminatory measures”. Thus, in this power matrix the colonizer assumes the role of the ‘Other’ — the “grande-autre”, in Lacan’s words, while the colonized is the inferior ‘other’ with a small ‘o’. The mere existence of the ‘other’ is vital for the construction of the ‘grande-autre’ — in a constant comparison, the inferior ‘other’ serves as a reference point to legitimize the colonizers superiority and dominance.

In this constellation, the difference between the two groups and their total separation is central for the generation of a sense of self, of an in-group identity, juxtaposed with those who are excluded — the out-group. This pattern of binary thinking was vital in the imperialist project and European expansion: “The gradual establishment of an empire depended upon a stable hierarchical relationship in which the colonized existed

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7 A more detailed discussion of these theories, but especially of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic might be a fruitful field of further study. However, due to the limited scope of this paper, his theory cannot be further analyzed.
10 Ibid.
12 Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies*: 155 (original emphasis).
as the other of the colonizing culture”. The establishment and maintenance of this hierarchy were further legitimized by a racial ideology and the accompanying discriminatory practices: The dominant out-groups were “stigmatizing a difference — real or imagined” using the others’ ‘differentness’ as “a motive for potential discrimination”. Hence, differentiation in this context is not only based on simple, individual prejudices about the respective other, but also closely connected to firm beliefs in a ‘racial’ difference and the inferiority of the black ‘race’. This ideological fundament separates ‘othering’ from ‘common’ practices of stereotyping and generalization and turns it into a political act — a colonizing practice as part of a colonialist habitus.

The Cameroonian critic Achille Mbembe further elaborates on the dynamics of ‘othering’ in the colonial context, claiming that “the problem is not that Western thought posits the self (self-identity) as other than the other”, but instead it is Europe’s negation of the native’s humanity that lies at heart of othering in the encounter of colonizer and colonized. This echoes the assertion in Frantz Fanon’s The Fact of Blackness that, when facing the colonizer, the black subject experiences negation. In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon claims that colonialism implies “a denial of all culture, history and value outside the colonizer’s frame” and hence it is “a systematized negation of the other”. In Mbembe’s terms: “the native is only so far as he/she is a thing denied, is only in as something deniable. In short, from the standpoint of a “self” of one’s own, he/she is nothing”. In the following analysis, I assess how the subaltern reacts to these forms of negation, investigating whether subaltern writing can be seen as a counter-action against this history of denial and discrimination.

**Writing in Namibia**

In post-colonial theory, autobiography is often seen as a “powerful quest for identity, for self-knowledge and self-recognition, particularly meaningful in colonial and postcolonial times”. In this context, the recollection of one’s own history and the colonial past of one’s country takes a central position — in this respect Ifowodo argues that “the theme

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19 Mbembe, *Postcolony*: 187 (original emphasis).
of a ‘return to the past’ constitutes a key trope of post-colonial discourse”.21 The subaltern writer finds empowerment in narrating her/his history and securing the power of articulation over it.

The exploration of Amulungu’s motivation to publish *Taming My Elephant* exhibits these intentions to ‘write back at the center’. In a personal statement, the author points out:

> There are many Namibians, in particular our white compatriots, who have no interest in [history] and I was surprised one day when a daughter of a friend asked me the question: Why did you go into exile? For them, apartheid and occupation were no big deal and therefore what we experienced in exile is none of their business. After all it is done and over, why still talk about it?

With this account, Amulungu expresses her need as a subaltern writer to “recover hidden history” and teach the unknowing population about the hardships of the struggle generation.22 This unknowing population, however, is not solely the white minority, but also Namibia’s younger generation, as indicated by the entry in Amulungu’s narrative, where the author discloses her reasons for writing:

> Why did I decide to write this book? Well, I started feeling awkward being with people who did not know that much about me […] I first thought about sharing my story with my family. Although so dear to me, they do not know half of me, maybe even less than that. They are, however, convinced that they know me well.23

She refers to her four children, three of them are so-called ‘born-frees’ who were born into an independent Namibia and never experienced their parent’s generation’s struggles for national liberation: “When I look into the eyes of my four daughters, I see their absolute conviction that I have always lived in Ludwigsdorf”.25 Little do they know that Amulungu had to travel a “long route to adjust to [her] life as it is today”.26 She identifies a “visible leap between [her] childhood life to [her] children’s lives”; this discrepancy refers to her cultural heritage and her traditional background.27 In an attempt to close this gap between her children and herself, Amulungu aligns herself with those post-colonial writers who “give voice to their selves and their cultural context”.28 She took up the pen to preserve the knowledge about her efforts, achievements and sacrifices:

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22 Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, “Re: questions about your book”, e-mail received by Julia Rensing, 20 July 2017 (see Appendix).
24 Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant* : 3.
25 Ibid.: 5.
26 Ibid.: 3.
27 Ibid.: 7.
My first concern was to provide my children with some account of my back-
ground in order for them to get some understanding of the society I was from 
and the path I had travelled before settling into the posh Windhoek suburb of 
Ludwigsdorf.29

By being a woman and a writer in post-colonial Africa, Amulungu challenges the 
“silencing and marginalizing of the post-colonial voice by the imperial center”.30 In The 
Empire Writes Back, Ashcroft et al. highlight the empowering function of writing for the 
subaltern subject.31 For the formerly colonized author, writing serves as a means to 
question the “dominant ideologies and discourses” of the colonial system and to assert 
agency over his/her story.32 I claim that Amulungu’s work is not only part of this 
undertaking to write back to the imperial center, but that she also exposes, unsettles 
and corrects the dominant political discourse as it is crafted by SWAPO. They celebrate 
“Unity in Diversity”, decreed silence, forgiveness and forgetfulness to cover up 
Namibia’s “dire past”, as Kößler calls it.33 For the investigation of this thesis, a brief 
historical and political overview will follow.

Namibian challenges

As my analysis in the following pages will show, the practices of ‘othering’, which 
continue to hamper national reconciliation in post-independence Namibia, are a reperc-
cussion of foreign rule, apartheid and colonialist bodies of thought. Clearly, a de-
construction of such a legacy is a challenging task in a country such as Namibia, which 
“must face the heritage of close to a century of very authoritarian regimes, the ideology 
of which, from German colonialism to apartheid, was based on that of racial 
inequality”.34 The nation today consists of solely 5% white Namibians; however, the 
patterns that white minority rule established in the pre-independence era have 
continued unabated.35 To this day, the reverberations of these regimes can be felt in 
Namibian society, where “gross inequalities” prevail.36 Melber and Kößler state that

29 Amulungu, Taming My Elephant: 4.
30 Ashcroft et al., Empire Writes Back: 82.
31 Ibid.: 6, 77, 172. In this respect, Spivak draws attention to the “double subjection of colonized women” 
(quoted in ibid.: 175).
Expression, Fictions of Identity”, in: idem, Autobiography & Independence: Selfhood & Creativity in Post-
33 Joseph Diescho, “The Link between Truth, Reconciliation, Justice and Peace”, Breaking the Wall of Silence 
(BWS), 1997: 2-10 (6); Reinhart Kößler, Namibia and Germany: Negotiating the Past, Windhoek, UNAM 
Press, 2015: 11.
34 Ingolf Diener, and Olivier Graefe, Contemporary Namibia. The First Landmarks of a Post-Apartheid 
35 Ibid. 25.
36 André du Pisani, Reinhart Kößler and William A. Lindeke, The Long Aftermath of War – Reconciliation and 
Transition in Namibia, Freiburg, Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, 2010: x. Diener and Graefe draw attention to 
the vast internal disparities in Namibia, pointing out that “the whites, who represent barely 5% of the entire
Namibia is one of the countries with “the highest social inequality rates worldwide.” They explain that “a tiny German-speaking minority remains on average the most privileged part of society” — this small group make up less than one percent of the population. Numerous further critics discuss Namibia’s “postcolonial condition” where conflicts over land, “differential access to material and symbolic resources”, privilege and power and access to education, continue to be heatedly debated and remain unresolved.

Substantial reasons for the perpetuation of misalignments and inequalities, established during colonial times, can be found in the reconciliation politics that the new government adapted after independence in 1990. In order to prevent further bloodshed and to guarantee peace and stability, SWAPO aspired to invent and design its nation anew. To do so, they decided to cover the past with a veil of silence, while simultaneously “the new government’s policy of national reconciliation urges Namibians to forget the past and to forgive each other”. To initiate this, but also to prevent the escape of white capital and provide a positive climate for foreign investment, they granted amnesty laws “of unconditional nature” which allowed white Namibians to remain in the country and to maintain their positions, properties and privileges. Equally, this strategy enabled SWAPO to obscure the crimes it committed during the liberation war. Particularly noteworthy here is the “detainee issue”: As there were many cases of Namibians being attacked or spied on by their own people, “SWAPO detained a number of Namibians in certain African countries on charges of spying for South Africa”.

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39 i.e. the demand for reparation in the form of the Herero and Nama’s lawsuit against Germany or the ongoing debate within the country concerning possible land redistributions. Du Pisani et al., *Long Aftermath of War*: viii, x; Melber, *Understanding Namibia*: 3, 145.
were tortured and tormented by SWAPO soldiers.\textsuperscript{44} Innocent exile-Namibians were also affected.

SWAPO was never made to account for these unlawful activities, as lamented by various critics, journalists and in testimonies by persons concerned.\textsuperscript{45} In total “only 153 SWAPO detainees were released from exile, leading to claims that many more had been left behind alive in the dungeons”.\textsuperscript{46} Hunter specifies further that to this day “approximately 2,000 detainees are still missing” as they were never freed from their prisons in Angola and Zambia.\textsuperscript{45} Twenty eight years after SWAPO came to power, their handling of these issues from the past remains disputed among scholars and Namibian civil society. They lament that the government’s imposition of the so-called “veil of silence” on significant chapters of Namibian history, such as the detainee-issue, served its hegemonic retention of power.\textsuperscript{48} Their veil of silence “obscured contestations about the past”, and repressed inconvenient memories.\textsuperscript{49}

The detainee affair is only one issue that SWAPO’s reconciliation program seeks to silence. Another source of criticism is the fact that the government never openly disclosed the methods, goals and conflicts of ‘national reconciliation’: Hunter laments that the instalment of this program and the passing of amnesty laws was not preceded by an official discourse or an inclusion of the Namibian nation.\textsuperscript{50} In general, SWAPO’s reconciliation project aspires to reassemble Namibia’s black and white community, reintegrate its dissidents,\textsuperscript{51} prevent secessionist endeavours\textsuperscript{52} and avoid discussion of the atrocities SWAPO committed before independence as well as those committed by former oppressors. From this highly simplified summary, it emerges that SWAPO saddled itself

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\textsuperscript{44} Hunter, “Getting the Balance”: 430
\textsuperscript{46} Hunter, “Getting the Balance”: 410.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. 430; Kößler, Namibia: 101.
\textsuperscript{48} Hunter, Politik der Erinnerung: 211.
\textsuperscript{50} Hunter, “Getting the Balance”: 404.
\textsuperscript{51} A terror unit called Koevoet, which “tortured and killed Namibians to obtain information about SWAPO’s freedom fighters”; this unit “recruited locals as henchmen, committed numerous crimes against civilians in the Namibian-Angolan border area, creating an atmosphere of fear” (Nda Mona; Hunter, “Getting the Balance”: 404f.). The organization consisted of approximately 250 ‘white’ South Africans and 750 ‘black’ Namibians (Hunter, Politik der Erinnerung: 54). The controversy around these black Namibians and their participation on the South African side in the war has drawn public attention and criticism repeatedly ever since the liberation of the nation. First in 1994, when 64 of these soldiers and their families wanted to return to Namibia, then increasingly, when some of these “former SWATF/Koevoet members demand[ed] to be recognised as war veterans” (ibid.: 62; Kamwanyah, “Reconciliation”).
\textsuperscript{52} In 1999, the Caprivi region sought secession from the rest of Namibia (Höhn, “Justice”: 473; Hunter, “Getting the Balance”: 403).
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with a mammoth task: to reconcile a highly divided nation. Silence and amnesia were decreed as essential pillars of this undertaking. However, SWAPO’s postulated necessity of forgetting should be seen rather as a disguise of a selective denial of history. Selective, as theirs was an imposed partial amnesia: SWAPO was keen on propagating and remembering specific parts of history in a repetitive and controlled celebration of the “liberation gospel.” Additionally, despite criticism of their strategies for dealing with the past, the government hail the alleged successful reconciliation of its nation, as seen from current president Hage Geingob’s words:

After Namibia’s independence was secured, we needed to develop a new narrative for an independent country that had been fractured by apartheid. We had to overcome the hatred of the past — hatred between blacks and whites, and between different linguistic and ethnic groups. We focused on reconciling Namibia to ensure peace. We succeeded in building a reconciled society.

To further spur the sense of unity among Namibians, they introduced the “new principle of ‘unity in diversity’” to the nation in 1993, once “the global discourses of multiculturalism had arrived at Namibia’s shores.” This slogan mirrors the idea of Namibians having distinct but “harmoniously coexisting” cultures and serves to further the “tolerant accommodation of cultural difference.” The development of this narrative suggests that SWAPO detected the essential need to forge togetherness in its torn and severely divided nation. In their active propagation of Namibian ‘unity in diversity’ the government systematically and regularly presented ‘unity’ “as a precondition for ‘peace’, national development and what Nujoma called ‘the spirit of national reconciliation’.” SWAPO’s controversial logic that unity precedes reconciliation hints at flaws in the government’s chosen path as well as in the methods of achieving reconciliation and also in the transparency of their political discourse. In light of this background, it hardly seems surprising that in Namibia public debate is rather underdeveloped.

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53 Hunter, Politik der Erinnerung: 211.
54 Melber, Understanding Namibia: xv.
57 Ibid.
59 Melber, Understanding Namibia: xiii.
to be under the censorship of the colonial minority regime – with the difference that this is self-inflicted”.  

This lack of discourse on Namibian history must be kept in mind when analysing Amulungu’s memoir, which breaks this silence on the past. In the following pages, I show how the analysis of *Taming My Elephant* with specific focus on ‘othering’ reveals inconsistencies in SWAPO’s ‘unity in diversity’ narrative. At the start of the book, Amulungu introduces the idea that reconciliation remains “unfinished business” and states that a reminder of this functioned as the trigger to write her autobiography. When a car guard approached her to inquire about her relationship with the white man and ‘coloured’ children with whom she regularly goes to the gym, she “clicked”:  

From this brief exchange with the car guard I realized how much my present family life perplexed an ordinary Namibian who shared my background and experience. I later on also established that a good number of my peers initially wondered whether my marriage to a white man was not stressful for me.  

This situation can be read as the author reminiscing that her inter-racial relationship is still striking in post-colonial Namibia. This circumstance made her see the importance of discussing the history of her interracial relationship and the bias in black and white Namibians’ thinking in the past and possibly in the present. The encounter made her aware of the immense challenges she had overcome – specifically the cultural differences between her husband and herself - which were a major issue between them. She admits that she herself has practiced forms of othering, but that she succeeded in overcoming it: “his skin colour became a challenge for me for some time, but it gradually became a non-issue”. This foreshadowing is a first indicator of her own practices of othering – it was his whiteness that was a challenge to her, a marker of difference and a hindrance for them both.  

To elaborate on this issue, Amulungu tells of her journey starting from her childhood in Namibia’s rural north Ovamboland, which she left as an 18 year old girl to join SWAPO’s independence struggle. Taken into exile in camps in Angola and Zambia, she was then sent to France for her studies. She returned to Zambia to share her education with the camp inhabitants, where soon afterwards she “met a remarkable young man whom [she] was to marry some two years later”. As she looks back on this life full of challenges, Amulungu sees how she repeatedly had to get rid of her ‘elephant’. In Ovambo culture the elephant stands for a major issue that comes up and requires those who encounter it to devote all their attention to its resolution. However, she concludes from her current writing position that in face of the various struggles and ever-changing...
living conditions she had no choice but to tame her elephant. It is this challenging path and this personal progress that she reveals to her reading public.

Being ‘othered’

In her autobiography, Amulungu delves far into the past to when she was a small girl living in Ovamboland. She tells of her experience of colonial rule in pre-independence Namibia. From early childhood onwards, Amulungu was exposed to racism and discrimination, exercised by the ruling white minority — thus from an early age she was subjected to ‘othering’.

She remembers that her first encounters with white powers were with missionaries from Finland and Germany, who settled in Ovamboland to proselytize the community. She explains: “The missionaries demanded that people change their traditional lives as they considered the local traditions as pagan practices”.

In this description, Amulungu already offers an idea of the mindset behind the white’s civilizing mission. However, white exerted influence in many ways at that time, as Amulungu was growing up under the South African apartheid regime: “This change was later reinforced by the South African government and people’s lives changed for good”. This “change” she describes came with a system of oppression and segregation, built on a particular power matrix: “apartheid considered non-Whites as sub-humans and black people found themselves at the bottom of it all”.

With this, Amulungu introduces the practice of ‘othering’ and the quote summarizes the racist ideology on which the colonizer’s thought pattern is based. This particular form of othering — one-dimensional, and top-down from colonizer to colonized — is very much in line with the traditional post-colonial studies’ understanding of the practice. Her depictions reflect the colonizers’ “systematized negation of the other”.

For example in moments where she recalls the encounter of the Ovambo people with the white missionaries and South Africans in her area. As part of their civilizing mission, they settled, then suppressed traditional cultures, languages, and structures and altered the natives’ lives for good. These “changes” that white people heralded were perceptible on a daily basis and imbue her childhood memories.

Amulungu learned that these people led very different lives, isolated and detached from the black Ovambo people. Separation was universal; apartheid implied a strict spatial division of South West Africa’s black and white population. The author exemplifies this

66 Ibid.: 2.
67 Ibid.: 11.
68 Ibid.: 12.
69 Ibid.: 11.
70 Ibid.: 288.
71 Fanon, Wretched of the Earth: 182.
72 Amulungu, Taming My Elephant: 11.
with one specific experience she had together with her mother. As a child of a simple farmer’s family she once visited a white suburb, with “well-arranged houses on each side of the street”, and “white children playing in huge yards”.

They wanted to sell tomatoes in this white neighbourhood when a white girl stole a tomato from them and walked away. The girl’s mother showed no interest in the behaviour of her daughter. The little girl then threw the tomato back to Amulungu and her mother, in what she perceived as suitable treatment of them. The author highlights that this encounter was just one of various stories in which black Namibians experienced subjugation and suppression by white people. These memories serve as examples of her “being othered” – deemed as subordinate, serving as the colonial ‘other’ that elevates the white colonizer to the dominating position. Hence, her account illustrates that “othering is a dialectical process because the colonizing Other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects.”

Growing up in an environment where such moments were a common part of everyday life, the author states clearly how being ‘othered’ eventually became a norm: “As young black adults, we knew too well that Whites were there to mistreat, abuse and belittle us and our minds were set to quietly find a way to protect ourselves”. With this, she emphasizes how ‘othering’ by the colonizer was not only practised by individuals, but that, as she eventually realised, was a system. Amulungu reveals how the insurmountable barrier between black and white was inculcated in her. However, when she later went into exile, Amulungu found herself in a situation where she exercised forms of ‘othering’ as well — and I maintain that these practices function as signs of a reversal of the colonial power structure. Her unsettling of colonial hierarchies first occurred when she met her future husband, Wilfried. Their encounter also led her to engage in ‘othering’, as she drew very strict boundaries between herself and the white other. This practice would become an immense obstacle between them, as will be elaborated upon in the following chapter.

### Encounter with the white ‘other’

In her autobiography, Amulungu offers an in-depth account of her different stations in exile, from Namibia to Angola, Zambia, France, back to Zambia and finally back to Namibia. This depiction of her life journey is very personal and conveys the hardships the author had to endure. Amulungu tells of the pain she went through when she was in exile showing what it really meant to be a refugee: “I […] had shed tears and cried myself to sleep so many nights before reaching the state of acceptance of the hard reality of our situation as a struggling people.”

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73 Ibid.: 209.


75 Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies*: 156 (original emphasis).


77 Ibid.: 229.
focalization on the subaltern subject functions to move her sentiments, challenges and experiences to the centre. It stands exemplary for the shift in perspective in post-colonial subaltern writing: The reader shares the perspective of the (formerly) colonized, instead of having the colonizer tell the stories. To achieve this, she shares her past sorrows and thoughts when in exile:

One day, but only one day, we would prevail. At times that one day appeared to be within our reach. But there were also times, when that one day was quite remote. There were even times when that one day could be possible only in the lives of our children or even that of our children's children. But our background and our experience had sharpened our determination for high sacrifices for that one day, even if that one day would come way beyond our generation.78

Amulungu conveys to her children’s generation that it was their parents’ commitment that brought freedom. While the description might generate recognition of the immense self-sacrifice that was demanded of Amulungu and her comrades *Taming My Elephant* is not solely about Namibia’s fight for independence. It is also a woman’s life narrative, the story of her children, a romantic novel about her and Wilfried and a family history. Hence, she tells of another major challenge in her life: “The Arrival of a White Comrade”. In this chapter, Amulungu reveals how her husband, Wilfried, entered her life. Her previous explanations of the total separation of black and white people let this title appear as an oxymoron. She employs this strategy to puzzle the reader but also concedes that she experienced the same sort of confusion when meeting this white man. Amulungu puts the reader in her position; she was convinced that a white person could not possibly be a comrade. Nevertheless, this is how Wilfried had been introduced to her at their first encounter. Amulungu worked as a tutor at UNIN, the camp in Lusaka (Zambia) where she taught French.79 In the corridor, she ran into the director of UNIN, Hage Geingob, who was in the company of a white man. Director Geingob presented this man with the words “This is Comrade …”.80 Amulungu was shocked and incredulous: “Did I really hear the word ‘comrade’? [...] Comrade was a sacred word for us”.81 It had a “special significance” for her fellow freedom fighters.82 It was solely reserved for people within their own group – white people had no access to this community that fought against colonial oppression, instead they were all seen as the oppressors, the ‘Others’:

Although it was not an official position, we at the back of our minds knew that whites in Namibia were the reason for our struggle. Yes, it was a system, but the system was run by whites and at the same time this system gave privileges to whites only. And hence our plight! And here I was in front of one of my respected national leaders introducing me to a white comrade! Those days, when we spoke to each other, and referred to each other as comrades, we

78 Ibid.: 229 (original emphasis).
79 Ibid.: 199.
80 Ibid.: 200.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
meant Namibians. Could this be the case? If things were all right for this white
person back home, what was he doing here?83

Her surprise shows how remote she considered the possibility of a black and white
togetherness. In outlining her thoughts during this specific encounter, the author not
only underlines the total separation of the two groups, but also the essential importance
of her exclusive “in-group” — her black comrades.84 In the anti-colonial struggle in exile,
far away from apartheid-ruled Namibia, the formerly colonized have entered into a mode
of resistance where they are no longer solely the “out-group”, the inferior ‘other’.85
Their anti-colonial movement allowed them to assume a position in the “in-group”, who
in return “stigmatize a difference” — which is, in this example, Wilfried’s whiteness.86 In
this reversal of former power dynamics, the struggling people find empowerment
through radical demarcation from the ‘Other’. Hence, to Amulungu in the construction of
this in-group, a welcoming of the white ‘Other’ seemed unimaginable and her words
mirror her extreme bias towards Wilfried. At the same time, her questions (i.e. “what was
he doing here?”87) show her inner reassessment of the position of white Namibians in
the anti-colonial struggle and that, until then, she had been unaware of their
participation in the fight against apartheid.

As her memoir further unfolds, Amulungu traces back the development of her
relationship with Wilfried. It evolved from an incidental dinner together with other friends
to further follow-up dinners for which Wilfried visited Amulungu. These visits eventually
became an everyday habit. During all these encounters, it never occurred to her that
Wilfried was romantically interested in her. Amulungu tells how she realized that she was
unable to see Wilfried as an individual human being, but “was blinded by his colour”88

The notion of being white in Namibia during those years was really notorious.
The superiority of Whites was inevitable. They were in charge and Blacks were
at their service. This master and servant relationship was enforced not only by
the system but had also been enforced by individual Whites for generations. In
the end this type of relationship became a norm […] non-Whites grew up with
this notion of Whites being bosses and it was compulsory to always respond to
them by saying ‘Ja baas’; meaning ‘yes boss!’ I guess that it was inadmissible to
respond ‘No Boss.’ It always had to be yes. This special status of whiteness was
automatically extended to their children. White children were simply klein baas
(small boss). This kind of subjection could only lead to a deepened division
between Whites and non-Whites.89

Her assessment of this hierarchy of colonized and colonizer highlights clearly how
pervasive the colonial ideology was. Amulungu reveals how this system determined

81 Ibid.
84 Staszak, “Other/otherness”: 1f.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Amulungu, Taming My Elephant: 200.
88 Ibid.: 216.
89 Ibid.: 209 (original emphasis).
people’s mindset — Namibians were socialized in a way that they held either the ‘master’ or ‘servant’ position. Alternatives were non-existent, a choice was impossible. Amulungu describes how she was formerly ‘othered’ into the position of a ‘servant’ by white ‘masters’. This demonstrates that — as identified by post-colonial theory — the domination of the colonizer relied extensively on the subjugation of black Namibians. However, this popular interpretation of ‘othering’ neglects the perspective of the colonized subject — the “hidden history” of those who were not given a voice to share their stories.\(^90\)

Amulungu’s account of Wilfried’s and her difficult encounter shows that her attitude is not solely a reaction to white peoples’ ‘othering’ but that she has also assumed a habitus of demarcating herself from white people — even though Wilfried demonstrated none of the attitudes, actions or values of a White colonizer. When she was then confronted with the fact that Wilfried was in love with her, she found herself in a deep conflict, leading her to see no other solution but to distance herself from him.

I might have reacted differently if Wilfried was a white man from a different country. As much as I admire his kindness and caring attitude, I could not find a convincing explanation about what he would do with his Namibian whiteness. Would he just throw it out of the window? How could he if he came from a community which capitalized so much on this whiteness, to the extent that it became a decisive element of their identity?\(^91\)

Her thoughts portray the centrality of colour in South-West Africa and in exile. It was the decisive marker in the performance of othering. Amulungu explains that people’s whiteness was not only constitutive of their identity it was also constitutive of black people’s attitudes towards the white ‘Other’. She was not able to see Wilfried as an autonomous person, notwithstanding of his colour. To her mind white people were all racist oppressors. She accused Wilfried of sharing the colonizers’ ideology. Based solely on their skin colours, togetherness was impossible while their difference was total. In John A. Powell’s understanding, this is a central characteristic of ‘othering’: He describes it as a process that engenders persistent inequality, consistently denying any form of connectedness.\(^92\) Amulungu’s memoirs indicate that othering was dialectical: as a reaction to practices of suppression and discrimination, the colonized assumed the firm conviction that black and white do not belong, and adopted their own forms of separation.

In this respect, *Taming My Elephant*’s function as a medium to voice the subaltern’s experiences and perceptions is significant: Amulungu’s autobiography does not aspire to reproduce a balanced report of black and white people’s ‘othering’. She does not contrast Wilfried’s experiences with her own inner challenges. Instead, with its internal

\(^{90}\) Kilomba, *Plantation Memories* : 10.

\(^{91}\) Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant* : 226.

focalization, *Taming My Elephant* puts the focus on her views, feelings and thoughts. The writer speaks “from the point of view of those who are subjugated and unheard rather than those who are at the centre of any society (the ruling class)”\(^{93}\). Thus, her work reverses traditional colonial power structures, which ascribes agency to her as an author but also to her as a (formerly) colonized subject. By describing her practices of ‘othering’, she places the subaltern subject in the foreground, not on the periphery and disturbs the colonial power matrix. Amulungu demonstrates that in response to a colonial history of discrimination, subjugation and oppression the subaltern also produces mechanisms of ‘othering’, which allows the deduction that reversing ‘othering’ and voicing these experiences entails potential of empowerment for the subaltern subject.

In these new dynamics, demarcation from the colonizer was vital, but first and foremost, loyalty and solidarity among the subaltern, her ‘in-group’, were indispensable. These principles were driving forces in the united struggle for independence of the colonized, but would soon become an obstacle in Amulungu’s private life. She recalls the thoughts that troubled her, when she felt a growing affection for Wilfried: “Was I not about to betray my own race?”\(^{94}\) This is not only an expression of her past worries, but also a genuine question that highlights the complexities haunting post-colonial societies. She includes her readers in her internal conflict. Amulungu encourages her black and white audience to consider whether her relationship has been — and presumably might still be\(^{95}\) — a betrayal of her community.\(^ {96}\) Furthermore, she puts this dilemma in the context of that time: During apartheid, ‘othering’ was inevitable and interracial-marriages were even forbidden: “in Namibia, a relationship of this kind would have been unheard of. Why should we ignore this reality of our society back home simply because we were temporarily outside the country?”\(^ {97}\) As stated earlier many white Namibians might have had little knowledge of the magnitude of racial segregation for Namibia’s black population, since they were always positioned at the powerful end of the system. At the same time, this regime might also be intangible for her younger public. Thus she constantly refers back to the system, explaining her experience of it: “It was in force during my lifetime and I knew of people who had to leave Namibia because they had become entangled in multi-racial relationships. This was no fiction”.\(^ {98}\) Her words underline the seriousness of racist ideology, apartheid’s consequences were a living reality for Amulungu — her narration is not a fictive love story.

\(^{93}\) Habib, “Protest Writing”: 170.
\(^{94}\) Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*: 216.
\(^{95}\) Hence, she is even stimulating a debate on the topicality of this question.
\(^{96}\) However, it is also striking that in this discussion she guides the reader: The way she characterizes Wilfried portraying him as very sympathetic and decent. The reader empathizes with him, hoping for a happy end.
\(^{97}\) Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*: 213.
\(^{98}\) Ibid.: 212.
Through various examples, Amulungu portrays vividly how her inevitable practice of ‘othering’ had reached a stage that forced her to end their acquaintance altogether. She arranged that Wilfried should no longer visit her regularly, as she came to the conclusion that their “different colours were an overriding factor”. Sharing these past thoughts clearly positions Amulungu as the agent in their relationship. It was her, the subaltern female subject, who was ‘othering’ and who decided that their difference is total. In seeking her distance from him, Amulungu reversed the power structures, but her ‘othering’ was not only pervasive but destructive, as she recalls: “this situation […] was beginning to wear me down”. Thus, while at first glance, her behaviour appears like a counter-assault against the system, her emotional account of it portrays the effects of othering. It was not solely a self-affirming, empowering act, it also caused her sorrow and pain. Eventually, she “realized how cultural and personal differences can be invi-dious”. This message to the reader might even qualify as a warning against the prejudicial thinking in which she engaged.

In the end, Amulungu had to learn that her feelings for Wilfried would prevail and finally, a conversation with a friend convinced her to stop ‘othering’. The friend’s incomprehension of her prejudices towards Wilfried relieved Amulungu from her plight, as she emphasizes “I made peace with myself” and “I felt cleansed from my self-inflicted guilt”. She saw that not only might she not be betraying her in-group, but that she even had the approval of her subaltern community to give Wilfried a chance. But after the two of them had taken this decisive step, the next major obstacle still awaited them. They had to reveal their inter-racial relationship to their families and compatriots and assert their togetherness after their return home.

‘Othering’ after repatriation

When Amulungu finally ‘tamed her elephant’ and stopped ‘othering’ Wilfried, she was nearing her twelfth year in exile. As she recounts this moment in their relationship, she simultaneously discloses the historical context. She describes the sentiments of the year 1989, where suddenly voices grew loud proclaiming the approaching independence of Namibia. For her, this was an unforeseeable development and Amulungu communicates her joy and excitement in the book. Independence — an event that Taming My Elephant might re-inscribe into the collective national memory - and her return to her homeland were decisive moments in her life and in the history of Namibia. She emphasizes:

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100 Powell, “Keynote”.
101 Amulungu, Taming My Elephant: 213.
102 Ibid.: 216.
103 Ibid.: 225.
104 Which was finally achieved in March 1990 (Amulungu, Taming my Elephant: 302).
we could return home without any hindrance and at any time of our choice. We had been deprived of this natural way of life for so long, hence the endless joy. But at the same time, and this was specific to me alone, I was aware of my being a problem. Till then, I never imagined that as a person I would be a real problem to anyone. Suddenly, I had become one. Wilfried’s parents were increasingly concerned about their son's position in relation to me. They had not yet met me, but they knew about my skin colour. It is easy to reverse roles, isn't it? It was now my turn to have my colour become problematic.}

As mentioned before, Amulungu’s memoir serves to convey the historical complexities of the (post-)colonial condition to the reader. Through her eyes we witness how the colonial regimes directly and painfully affected individuals: Amulungu as a black person had become a problem as her future in-laws were unwilling to accept their son’s relationship. Hence, another major ‘elephant’ had shown up: Returning home to Namibia implies being exposed to ‘othering’ mechanisms on a new scale. Wilfried, but also Amulungu, have to face the attitudes of other Namibians, their respective families and the newly formatting Namibian society. Her apostrophe “It is easy to reverse roles, isn’t?” can be read as a direct address to her Namibian reading public. She reveals to her compatriots, black and white, that the practice of othering is not solely reserved for one group. As they return home, both Wilfried and Amulungu, must now fear being the objectified ‘other’.

The newly repatriated couple struggle to settle down back in their homeland and to find their rightful place together in independent Namibia. The author recounts their difficulties with the prevailing beliefs in Namibia that apartheid, occupation and exile were “no big deal”. Amulungu discloses that the return itself was a major challenge, as the country had become alien to her. At the same time, standing up for their relationship in this apartheid-ridden country was a burden on both of them. The author describes how it took her several weeks until she finally found the courage to tell her family about her new partner. Her family took it relatively well. They were understanding and gave Wilfried a chance. His parents, however, responded with a lengthy silence towards their son, unwilling to accept his relationship with a black woman. Interestingly, instead of hurt and anger, Amulungu showed nothing but understanding for their attitudes: “I knew what they thought and felt about me. I did not blame them. I understood and did not expect anything different. I was born and bred in the same country. That was simply how things were those days”. Her explanation shows that Amulungu is well aware of the effectiveness of othering. She did not take it personally but blamed the system which had moulded the people: “I understood the reasoning and the reasons of such reasoning, we had just turned a page as a country and there was

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105 Ibid.: 225.
106 Ibid.
107 Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, “Re: questions about your book”, e-mail received by Julia Rensing, 20 July 2017 (see appendix).
108 Amulungu, Taming My Elephant: 259.
no going back. Antagonistic views about one another were certainly present and were
going to accompany us for a while as a nation, but as long as they were held silently.\textsuperscript{109} However, the Brock family’s attitude to Amulungu was not held silently and the author
had to endure their discrimination. At the same time, she highlights to her audience that
her reaction must not be perceived as a form of subordination. She was determined not
to accept being ‘othered’: “I was also very clear in my mind that under no circumstances
would I allow my skin colour to be called into question.”\textsuperscript{110} In these lines one sees how
she uses her subaltern author’s voice to emphasize her authority: she stands above
their othering and asserts her agency in her and Wilfried’s love story. And Amulungu’s
endurance proved fruitful. She became pregnant and as her in-laws would soon become
grandparents, they saw themselves forced to reach out to her before their grandchild
was born. The author recounts how she suddenly received a letter from her mother-in-
law:

\begin{quote}
My future mother-in-law explained that she and I had an interest in the same
man, but of course for different reasons. And for that reason, she went on, it
was in the interest of the two of us to put our differences and misunder-
standings behind us […] they wholeheartedly welcomed us in the family and
that from then on, Paleni and I should call them \textit{Vati} and \textit{Mutti}. Lastly, she
pointed out that it was important for her to draw my attention to the fact that
they as a family speak German, and they obviously would continue doing so.\textsuperscript{111}
\end{quote}

Strikingly, Amulungu’s tone in these lines is quite neutral and portrays no anguish. The
detachment in her words seems puzzling in view of the “message of a colonizer: Mine is
the only acceptable culture and you will assimilate” that resonates from the letter.\textsuperscript{112}
Their statement suggests that Wilfried’s parents were willing to loosen their strict
rejection of her but in fact, their demarcation was still total. In Powell’s words, they
continue to underline their separation, pretend that both groups do not belong, while in
reality they do belong together as a family.\textsuperscript{113}

Again, Amulungu as the autodiegetic narrator “looks at the past from the vantage point
of present” and as such, asserts her authority.\textsuperscript{114} She uses her narrative to explain her
in-laws’ reservations:

\begin{quote}
Today, when I think back as a mother, I can feel what went through the mind of
my dear mother-in-law. All mothers want the best for their children. And that
best can only be associated with what one is familiar with. Anything else is
suspicious, if not mistrusted.\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.: 267.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.: 259.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid. (original emphasis).
\textsuperscript{112} Brenda Ayres, \textit{The Emperor’s Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney’s Magic Kingdom}, New York, Lang,
\textsuperscript{113} Powell, “Keynote”.
\textsuperscript{114} Habib, “Protest Writing”: 172.
\textsuperscript{115} Amulungu, \textit{Taming My Elephant}: 257.
In highlighting her comprehension, Amulungu appeals to her public to also be more understanding. In this respect, the wording “dear mother-in-law” stands out, given the fact that she reflects on the discrimination she has experienced. This writing strategy serves to foreshadow to the reader that in her current writing position, Amulungu has forgiven Wilfried’s parents. She explains that they were all victims of the legacies of apartheid: “By the time I walked into the home of Wilfried’s parents as a daughter-in-law, the apartheid system in both Namibia and South Africa was unabated”.

Hence, although this regime was legally suspended, “the stigmas of a century of segregation are present not only in the spatial and social organization, but also in the intimacy of people’s hearts and minds”, as Diener and Graefe assert. This context needs to be considered when assessing black and white people’s ‘othering’ in *Taming My Elephant*.

Looking back today, I realise that under the circumstances, my parents-in-law had a number of understandable concerns. Until my appearance in their lives, they had no black person within their yard except for the gardener and the cleaning lady. They never had a black person taking part in their life and sharing the same facilities. None of their family members, friends or acquaintances had known this either. All this was a new and abrupt phenomenon. On the other hand, I too had my concerns. I knew about the views held by white people towards black people […]. The situation obliged us to co-exist.

Again, Amulungu displays understanding but at the same time, she clearly states that she, too, had her reservations. What is more, she underlines to the reader the avant-gardist role that Wilfried and she played. They were one of the first ones in their circles to break out of the white Namibian’s habitus of ‘othering’ the black population. “In any case, pioneers of any adventure always have to endure the clearing of the way”. Her label “pioneers” emphasizes the importance of her interracial marriage for the progress of Namibia. While Wilfried and she encountered each other as equals, they both had to undergo this experience of being ‘othered’ by Namibian society. This indicates that in post-independence Namibia, black Namibians are no longer the sole victims of discrimination and she states clearly that Wilfried’s inclusion into her family was also a difficult process: “My side of the family was no different”.

In the rural north amongst the Ovambo tribe, Wilfried was an exotic object; never before had white people been sitting, sleeping and eating in a homestead. Children, her relatives and passer-bys alike saw him as an attraction and he had to endure being ‘othered’.

Gradually, their respective families grew accustomed to this condition and even accepted their marriage. However, ‘othering’ was not restricted to her private sphere but was a national phenomenon. Amulungu describes how her interracial marriage caused many people to turn their heads — “not only from one section of society, but from across the

\[116\] ibid.: 288.
\[117\] Diener and Graefe, *Contemporary Namibia* : 25.
\[118\] Amulungu, *Taming My Elephant*: 289.
\[119\] ibid.: 281.
\[120\] ibid.: 279.
board” — it was a practice common to all Namibians, black and white. This couple remained a peculiarity: “By the time we married, there were no more than five other mixed couples in Windhoek, if not in the entire country. It was a novelty and we attracted attention as we moved around”. At this point, Amulungu reflects on her partnership in the national context. The author divides Namibians’ reactions into “two classic expressions”: “The glare of the whites portrayed complete perplexity at a fellow White being completely out of his mind. As for my people, they clearly displayed a sense of betrayal by a fellow Black marrying an enemy”. Her account exposes the thought patterns of the different groups in Namibia and the mindset of those people that SWAPO aspired to form to “One Namibia, One Nation”.

In this respect, her book functions as catalyst for change: it is an invitation to the reader to assume the other group’s perspective. This change in position might then allow one to see the efficacy but also the arbitrariness of ‘othering’ based on skin colour. Furthermore, this in-depth examination sheds light on the different sources of the colonizer’s and the colonized practices of othering: While white Namibians’ ‘othering’ is grounded in racist, imperial thought, black Namibian’s othering has its roots in the experience of white supremacy and oppression. Hence, while the power structures differ vastly, for both groups ‘othering’ “produces difference and problematizes it”. However, Taming My Elephant shows that alternatives are possible and Amulungu’s life story functions as a role model, portraying “the beauty of cultural diversity”. She eventually discarded demarcation wholeheartedly and underlines: “my parents-in-law and in particular my mother-in-law and I made an amazing effort”; they reached the point where “mingling with each other became a natural state of affairs for our two families”. Their familiarity, togetherness and friendship were extended to their respective communities. Hence, in her personal environment, their interracial relationship really brought about change. Amulungu underlines how this unforeseeable process was an immense benefit for her and she wants to share this great learning effect with the reader:

There is certainly a conclusion to be drawn from this unexpected turn of events. Cordial relationships and appreciation are after all possible among diverse human beings. Wilfried’s family and I started off as two distinct communities, convinced that we had absolutely nothing in common. Even our belonging to the same human race did not enter our mind as a unifying factor. We initially could not see much beyond our skin colour. The only thing we certainly had in common was that we mistrusted each other. Black people lumped white people together as oppressors, and white people lumped black people together as

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121 Ibid.: 281.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Becker, “Commemorating Heroes”: 537.
126 Amulungu, Taming My Elephant: 274.
127 Ibid.: 289f.
Kaffirs. There was no room for individual consideration, and not even the slightest effort was made to establish facts. Perceptions spread like wildfire and became anchored in people’s minds and as soon as the other race appeared, one saw nothing else but flashing red lights.\textsuperscript{128}

Her quote summarizes the invidiousness of discriminative thought and discloses the complex “scars of apartheid” that Namibians in general and Wilfried and she in particular, had to cope with.\textsuperscript{129} The common practice of ‘othering’ is highly generalizing, stereotypical and discriminative and it has affected all of Namibian society. It is striking that Amulungu does not exclude herself from these observations, as seen in her use of the first-person plural pronoun “we” in statements such as “we initially could not see much beyond our skin colour” and “we mistrusted each other”.\textsuperscript{130} Nevertheless, with \textit{Taming My Elephant} Amulungu depicts her personal progress in this respect and thus, her life narrative functions as a positive example for her nation. Her love story illustrates the enrichment through a multi-racial family, the “beauty of cultural diversity” which is only possible when ‘othering’ becomes a practice of the past.\textsuperscript{131} And Amulungu proudly portrays the outcome of her liaison with Wilfried: In her book she inserted 17 photos of her family, her friends and herself. They underline what she and Wilfried have achieved: at the time of her writing, they were celebrating their 27\textsuperscript{th} anniversary and leading a happy family life together with their four children. What is more, they have also succeeded in settling into their respective families: “the two of us finally found our rightful places in each other’s family”.\textsuperscript{132} Thus she has genuinely overcome othering and formed a new unity with her in-laws:

\begin{quote}
Today, I have nothing but appreciation and admiration for my parents-in-law. Despite my evident caution during the initial years, they made every effort to reach out to me. My slow pace to reciprocate did not discourage them in any way. In no time, I became one of their daughters-in-law and one of the mothers of their grandchildren. My mother-in-law, in particular, became a strong pillar for me.\textsuperscript{133}
\end{quote}

What is more, Amulungu uses her life-narrative to address her mother-in-law specifically: “The other thing which I highly appreciate, is my mother-in-law’s availability to look after her grandchildren…. \textit{Danke Mutti}!”.\textsuperscript{134} Writing this in German puts her mother-in-law in an exclusive reading position. Amulungu voices her gratitude and in doing so, she shows respect for her addressee’s culture. This strategy demonstrates the benefits of cultural diversity that the national political rhetoric of Namibia’s ‘unity in diversity’ also postulates. In this respect, Amulungu’s account appears as a realistic version of it. Her life narrative is an example of cultural diversity that also depicts the pain, obstacles and

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.: 291f.
\item\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.: 11.
\item\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.: 292.
\item\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.: 274.
\item\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.: 291.
\item\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
efforts that this unity demands. Furthermore, the author uses her public persona to inform her national and international audience about the ongoing task of counteracting inequalities and ‘othering’:

there is no doubt that we need to make effort to forge the unity among ourselves, but changing people’s mentality takes time […] although we cannot claim that we are a united nation, we identify ourselves firstly as Namibians before anything else, e.g. our language groups.135

With such statements, she offers a more nuanced picture of Namibia’s allegedly reconciled nation. Her insight into the thought and behaviour patterns, as well as the habitus of ‘othering’ on both sides, allow her to see the complexity of genuine reconciliation. Contrary to SWAPO’s depiction of reconciliation as a simple act, if not a condition that has already been achieved, Amulungu shows us some of the individual burdens and difficulties on the path to a possible private reconciliation.

Conclusion

While the SWAPO slogan “unity in diversity” might not – yet? – describe Namibia’s society as a whole, it appears as an appropriate label for Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu’s love story and family history. The author’s life-narrative serves as a role model, a private example for a national mission: to overcome othering, celebrate belonging and forge genuine reconciliation among Namibians.

The critical reading of Taming My Elephant with regards to the politics of ‘othering’ uncovered hidden messages about the state of the post-colonial nation. While, throughout her book, Amulungu depicts herself as an outspoken SWAPO-supporter,136 the focus on her account of ‘othering’ allows her to question the dominant political discourse. The government’s celebration of ‘unity in diversity’, successful reconciliation and ‘One Namibia, One Nation’ ignores individual struggles and persistent misalignments within the country. These inconsistencies are draped in a veil of silence that this analysis of Amulungu’s memoir can reveal: Reconciliation cannot be state-imposed but has to be performed by Namibians themselves in the private sphere. This post-colonial encounter, however, is hampered by practices of othering on both sides — that of the former colonizer and that of the former colonized. Naturally, these two positions can never be equated, seeing as they are connected to different positions of power and stem from different ideological regimes — in the case of the former colonizer, an imperialist ideology with a firm belief in white superiority and in that of the former colonized, an anti-colonial movement, seeking empowerment, liberation and the defeat of the colonial Other. As unlike as these habitus might be, both forms of othering share the same firm belief in a total differentness of the respective O/other.

135 Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, “Re: questions about your book”, e-mail received by Julia Rensing, 20 July 2017 (see appendix).
136 Cf. the entire chapter “Many Thanks” where she salutes and thanks SWAPO.
Through this glimpse into Amulungu’s private history, her audience learns how she was ‘othered’ by colonizers in South-West Africa and, after repatriation, by Wilfried’s parents. In response to these experiences, Amulungu also assumed the practice of ‘othering’ and began to shake up colonial power structures. She demarcated herself from white colonizers and was extremely biased towards Wilfried. This paper has discussed whether in reversing ‘othering’, the subaltern subject regains a sense of empowerment and reclaims agency. It has shown that this practice remains exclusionary, hinders genuine reconciliation and may even be destructive. *Taming My Elephant* revealed that Amulungu found real empowerment in writing her life story and in personal reconciliation. The author has carved out a place for herself in the literary field. In so doing, she counter-acted the history of silencing the subaltern; she found a voice and went public with her own personal story and with her national appeal to overcome ‘othering’. Thus, she taught her readers the following lesson on how to tame Namibia’s elephant: reconciliation necessarily has to begin in the private sphere, perhaps aided by love and affection. Only then can it expand to the broader context of Namibian society as a whole and finally enable actual ‘unity in diversity’ on a national level.

**Appendix**

Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu, “Re: questions about your book”, e-mail received by Julia Rensing, 20 July 2017

Dear Ms Rensing

I am sorry that I could not respond earlier due to other pressing work related issues. Let me go straight to the point.

1. I am very humbled and of course surprised that you got interested in my book to the extent that you are contemplating writing a master thesis on it. I now fully understand how you got interested in the Namibian history especially in the liberation struggle history. You had a chance to bump into a Namibian who could share his life story with you. This part of our history is so peculiar and unless if you have experienced it yourself or you have engaged someone who went through it like in your case, it is difficult to understand and appreciate it. There are many Namibians, in particular our white compatriots, who have no interest in it and I was surprised one day when a daughter of a friend asked me the question: Why did you go into exile? For them, apartheid and occupation were no big deal and therefore what we experienced in exile is none of their business. After all it is done and over, why still talk about it?

2. As far as the national reconciliation is concerned, we have made a good start, but we have a long way to go. But when you look at the racial tensions and hatred before independence and what we managed to achieve during 27 years, namely peace and stability, many of us are surprised. Things could have gone very wrong in Namibia if all us have not made an effort to restrain our-selves from violence. Secondly, although we cannot claim that we are a united nation, we identify ourselves firstly as Namibians before anything else, e. g our language groups.
And I guess many of our white compatriots no longer think of an alternative home country because realistically, that is not easy. Of course, nostalgia will remain especially with our generation. Our children have a different mentality, Namibia is the only home. There is no doubt that we need to make effort to forge the unity among ourselves, but changing people’s mentality takes time.

3. As for the reviews, they are minimal for the time being. Those I got are from friends and family members. My husband’s brother who lives in Germany sent me a sweet email. I get positive comments from the German speakers in Namibia, one went to the extent of suggesting a German translation of the book. Another one I recently met in Windhoek but she is from Swakopmund wants to organise a small gathering to have a discussion on the book. I look forward to that; this will probably be in September when I visit my parents in law.

All the best

Trudie Amulungu

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