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I want to begin by talking a bit about my identity, positionality, and my political commitments because each of these things frame my approach to the archive and how I interpret materials.

My positionality is important here, not just in the ways my identities position me as an outsider to the communities I write about, but also in the way my subjectivity as a Zimbabwean scholar offers a particular kind of insight and intuition. Indigenous methods are integral in grounding insurgent knowledge in a worldview that reflects the community in question, particularly as their knowledges and identities have been erased through the colonial structures into which they have been subsumed. I am offering an account that centers understandings of, relations to, and harm by structures, not simply as alternative histories but in service of the creation of a "non-imperial grammar" that is practiced "through unlearning the imperial one" to quote/paraphrase Ariella Azoulay.

In this vein, ubuntu philosophy offers a useful counter-hegemonic orientation and fashioning of what constitutes ethical personhood and humanity itself. As described by fellow diasporan Panashe Chigumadzi in the Shona context, if one wanted to know if another was a person they might ask the question: "*Munhu here?*" or "Is this a human being?" One might answer yes or no depending on their conduct, because one's personhood is dependent upon their relation to others. One might also ask the question "*Kuaita kwemunhu here?*" or "Is this how humans behave?" either in reprimanding a child for their bad behavior or in addressing a particular group of people regarding historical treatment of Black/African people. In response to the foundational question "*Munhu here?*" one might respond: "*Aiwa, murungu*" or "*No, they are a white person*" because of their historical mistreatment of indigenous people. Put otherwise, white settlers, have not been considered *vanhu*, people, because of their historic failure to treat the indigenous people with *hunhu*, humanity".

As a Shona person, this way of knowing personhood translates into a scholarly responsibility compelling me to do two things. First, my personal and other African indigenous relationships to the dead has reframed my study of genocide to a study of violence as part of a commitment and responsibility to deceased people I understand

as ancestors (i.e. the dead), though they are not *my* ancestors. It is a refusal to adhere to the Enlightenment bifurcation of science and religion and the privileging of positivism, which simply turned into a reformulation of Christian and colonial values that undermine assertions of African/Black personhood. Secondly, refuse to perpetuate a colonial narration that rigidly asserts chronological, ontological, and epistemological boundaries that foreclose possibilities of an intellectual robustness in analyzing relationships between imperial science, genocide exceptionalism, and genocide denialisms. Rather than understanding my subjectivity as the thing that simply colors otherwise "objective" research work, I take seriously my subjectivity as an epistemic position that must displace hegemonic knowings and historicizations of genocide and German imperialism, an epistemic authority, and also a crucial means of entrée and making relation with survivor communities.

Similarly, with regards to studying Togolese history as a Togolese refugee, Marius Kothor wrote about *embodied evidence* as an epistemic orientation beyond obligatory methodological attention to research subjectivities. She cites historian Moses Ochonu in stating that understanding continental history can come from "smelling, feeling, tasting, seeing and hearing" spaces and moments and processes of inquiry, and that "the smells and tastes of Africa in the present can provide clues to the past and vice versa." She encourages a drawing upon our intimate familiarities to guide us, and I drew upon both my beliefs in traditional spiritualities as well as the history of the Gukurahundi, a period of ethnic — even genocidal — violence perpetrated by the ruling party, including individuals still in government such as current president Emerson Mnangagwa (and now-deceased former president Robert Mugabe). Kothor writes: "Can my affective response to this history constitute a source of historical knowledge? Can it be a form of evidence that informs my writing in productive ways? If so, what is it evidence of? Moreover, how do I embrace my subjective relationship to my work without getting lost in the navel-gazing that can accompany autobiographical accounts, thereby pushing my historical actors out of the frames of my analysis?"

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The very elements that made Jackie Sibblies Drury's play *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884–1915* (henceforth referred to as *We are Proud to Present…*) amusing also made it troubling. The play is a meta-play about the making of a play: it depicts six actors attempting to make sense of and

present their own dramatized and fictionalized performance of the real like 1904–1908 genocide of Ovaherero and Nama people. The play fascinatingly illustrates how the actors' attempts to recall the timeline of the genocide and parse out what can and should be shared with the audience leads to a deterioration of the production and a traumatizing end to the performance for one of Black actors in particular. The divergence in the actors' creative priorities — do we focus on the German story or the Ovaherero story? — is reminiscent of the messiness of collective remembrance and the way that identity largely informs exactly what you are interested in remembering as well as the *reliability* of that remembering. Central to acknowledgement, after all, is legibility; and legibility, after all, is a kind of assimilation into dominant frames of knowledge and understanding.

The Ovaherero and Nama genocide is unique in its firstness: historians largely agree it is the first genocide of the 20th century. But even this uniqueness or firstness is insufficient to unsettle the foundational nature of indigenous African genocide on the continent, which includes the transatlantic trafficking and trade in enslaved indigenous African peoples that is foundational to modernity itself. How can the necessary death of Black people constitute the kind of acute crisis of recognition required to animate urgent politics of restitution? Blackness exists within the sub-ontological realm where being human is impossible to claim. Attempting to recognize the subject—and to understand the trajectory from pre-colonial indigenous personhood and sovereignty to "native" colonial subject to post-genocide indigenous subject within a postcolonial "native"-ruled African nation-state—means we must refuse this universal humanity and an Africanness that exists solely in its relationship to European coloniality.

Returning to the play, what does it mean to try to tell a people's story, a story of genocide, via the humanized perpetrator? This is often what happens when German genocide in its South West Africa colony is studied for its implications on contemporary German politics or Germany's morality rather than recognizing the political chain reaction that it set off on the continent and in the region. Or if not a perpetrator that is humanized, it is one whose own maturation or *spiritual cleansing* is actualized through reconciliation or historiographic resolution. It's the same act of narration, a process of narrative construction, that compels remembrance and recompense through begrudging and self-flagellating guilt and penance (with aspirations towards absolution) as opposed to earnest and restorative and *comprehensive* accounting for wrongdoing. The primacy of the recitation of "I'm sorry" or a manipulated and truncated "we recognize" supersedes and will always be prioritized over the aggrieved and affected communities coming to dictate the terms of reparation or transformative justice. Within the staging

of Drury's play, the foregrounding of the interaction between the German settler-soldier and his wife within this landscape of imperial genocidal atrocity feels like an apt allusion for how recollections of phenomena favor the prioritization of psychological profiling and contestations over historiographic situations of event-process over the materialities of the communities that were harmed—the peoples who survived the genocide and who exist in the present. "There might be some distant representation of African bodies … but the love is foregrounded" reads one italicized stage direction. Blacks occupy space and they certainly existed in time, but they certainly lack interiority, political agency, or their own expert and *objective* historiographies.

Previously, I wrote that the glaring absence in this debate around continuity, both the historical and contemporary iterations of thinking about the relationship between the Ovaherero and Nama genocide and Nazi fascism that followed decades later, is that of Black study and of Black people themselves: that there has been a shocking deprioritization and disinterest in both living and dead Black people, that the consideration of deceased *and* living and speaking Black African people has been almost wholly abstracted as subjects of historical contemplation when they are enduring continuing conditions of colonial dispossession and still demanding recompense for their suffering. What is the function of depoliticizing attempted extermination as simply an "ideological" matter as though there are not, per the violent dictates of the nation-state system, clear and distinct political motivations for othering, demonizing, and attempting to exterminate entire peoples? What if this story were to begin with indigenous Namibians rejecting the deal rather than that critical rejection being relegated to an end-of-story afterthought in western news coverage? What if African materialities comprised a major core of the debate rather than simply our interpretations of the violence of their oppressors? What if the Ovaherero and Nama were entrusted as suitably reliable narrators such that we held their worldviews, historical interpretations, ongoing traumas, and calls of reparations as *our* defining truths?

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There's a moment in the play — the section that I asked you all to read — that really highlights to me what feels like the stakes, or perhaps if not the stakes, the underlying topographies of this debate that seems to be professionally captured by historians. The play slips back and forth between process and presentation: between the rationale of the actors and their performative conclusions, between the negotiations of memory and the presentations to be publicly observed and reflected upon by audiences comprised of the public writ large.

In this part of the process, the actors are grappling with the current state of representing Ovaherero people in the play, someone arguing that the focus on the wife's letters to her husband fail to reveal anything about the facts of genocide or the people murdered by the imperial force that the loving, longing husband represented. They go back and forth about improvisation: that they "shouldn't be making things up" and "shouldn't be doing anything other than what's real," but that they're focusing on the woman's letters because they're "the only thing [they] actually know." The letters are the only first-person accounts of the genocide, Actor 2 claims indignantly: "The letters don't have any evidence of anything happening to the Africans. They don't mention one prison camp, one hanging, one incident…" Actor 1 chimes in saying: "I'm not saying the genocide was made up. I'm just saying we don't have physical evidence…"

"He's just saying it's not like the Holocaust," says Actor 5, making explicit the political analogy at the heart of this debate. "With the Holocaust, we have documents, we have testimonials, we have pictures," says Actor 1. "Six million people and we know all of their names. Every single one" — a dramatic characterization and overstatement that nevertheless encapsulates the ontological transformation of Nazi genocide from particular to epochal (i.e. definition-setting, morally and politically universalized).

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Part of what feels at play here, with regards to the alleged absence of evidence, is a contrast of the nature of survivorship and the relationship between experience and the veracity of claims and testimony. With the Armenian genocide, and certainly with the Nazi Holocaust, there are extensive photographs and images of the genocidal process and there are also many many firsthand accounts and images of survivors. In 2019, I visited Armenia around the annual commemoration of Genocide Remembrance Day on April 24th; and I visited the Genocide Memorial, Tsiternakaberd, multiple times. The museum complex is filled with images of camps, of victims and survivors alike, of orphans, of destroyed villages. Similarly, there is no shortage of photographic or narrative evidence of Nazi brutality: for example, in order to more widely publicize the Nazis' violence, photography units accompanied American and British Allied forces who liberated concentration camps in order to document the conditions that Jews and Roma and other victims were subjected to.

I say all this to say that the presence of this material evidence affirms the legitimacy of survivors and their descendants, and they offer a scaffolding upon which the testimonies of survivors (a small number of whom are still alive today) can be structured. I want to contrast the firsthand testimony of the survivor with that of the intergenerational transfer of memory: a communal testimony maintained by the descendants of survivors who, by the merits of their blackness and Africanness and indigeneity and colonial subjugation, were and are not understood as violable. They were neither people who could speak nor deserved to speak; they were colonizable people who experienced a violence characteristic of the colonizing form and the racial hierarchy into which they were slotted. But we know, as Africans, the strength and the depth of these familial stories: we understand the emotional ties to our ancestral lands and the lands upon which our ancestors are or should be buried. Yet how do we translate our indigenous metaphysics into a structure of language that is legible to the western episteme?

Despite the alleged absence of evidence of genocide (though I continue to insist that "absence" is its own kind of presence), we can identify three main phases of the collection of human remains in German South West Africa and transport to Berlin. The first period is in the pre-war early days of colonial rule, the period from 1884-1903; in the 1890s, imperial military officers increasingly began to participate in the collection and trade of human remains. The second period is during the 1904-1908, in which skull collectors were most notably "colonial and medical officers" who used the cover of war as an opportunity to collect valuable scientific materials. Dr. Hugo Bofinger was in German South West Africa from early 1905 until June 1907, and during his time in the colony he headed the ward for imprisoned natives and founded the bacteriological laboratory in Lüderitz Bay on April 23, 1905 and served as staff surgeon for the *Schutztruppe* from August 18, 1905. During this time, it is suspected that heads of numerous deceased prisoners were removed, preserved, and sent to Berlin—this is corroborated by material evidence on skull remains in the Charité collection, whose inscriptions indicate that possession of skulls came from handovers between military physicians or colonial officers and scientists in Germany. The final stage of this collection was the post-war period, from 1909-1914, a period of a more materialized colonial infrastructure. Collection was more varied, and included "[colonial] administrators, government doctors and geologists, or cartographers and land surveyors" each working in formal capacities.

While ethnology and comparative anatomy were part of standard scientific practice, we might conceptualize them as their own kind of ritual practice: this militarized science is a sacralized scientific method and study, a genocidal science that produced white German life through the severing of indigenous/Black African ancestralization. Through

the process of indigenous demands being made of German institutions for repatriation, the long-contested histories of colonial dispossession and property ownership — as manifested by curatorial politics and practices of the museum — are being reanimated. We can refer to this praxis of acquisition, display, and withholding as *archival incarceration*, which seeks to describe museum holding as an expression of state governmentality. "Incarceration" describes the arresting of historical record and, thus, time itself in such a way that indigenous peoples are always pre-historical and pre-modern: they represent pasthood and primitivity via permanent affixing within historical ethnographies, and so are always beyond the possibility for present citizenship. The word also describes the holding of biomatter as a part of the structure of imperial security as human remains and cultural artifacts were often taken from colonized and occupied populations — positioned as civilizational threats to coloniality — as trophies and objects of study that stabilize historical record and foreclose alternative historiographic possibility. In its "forensic death-writing," the carceral archive produces what Dan Hicks calls a "necography." The term describes a process of acquisition (whether provenance is "legal" or questionable at best) that functions alongside state processes of enclosure and primitive accumulation that commodify indigenous material cultures (while disappearing the peoples themselves) and then permanently extracting them from their community contexts such that objects no longer narrate life, but "death histories." Archival registries are not value-neutral records, but documentations of a transnational structure of looting in which remains were circulated within museological and scientific institutions in the Euroamerican world.

Geography, as Katherine McKittrick writes, is a "visible spatial project that organizes, names, and sees social differences (such as black femininity) and determines *where* social order happens," including the "classificatory *where* of race" that *de*spatializes blackness and Africanity (allowing for institutions to make claims of ownership over African artifacts and remains).

The arguments made by the Ovaherero and Nama communities fighting for restitution and the repatriation of remains on one hand and the German and Namibian nation-states on the other illustrate not only contesting political positions, but phenomenological ones. It is the battle between the Westphalian nation-state and the indigenous peoples precluded from agency and futurity by the dichotomizing arrangement of coloniality that flattens ideas, practices, and ideologies into oppositional paradigms. This binary is illustrated, for example, by the competing timescales. The western perception is that time is only ever forward moving, progressive, and linear; the genocide has long ended and reconciliation is imminent. The demands made by survivor communities,

rather, reflect an idea of present materialities as a continuation of genocidal dispossession. Imperial historiography vis-à-vis time is also picnoleptic where historical omissions become exculpatory: "nothing has really happened, the missing time has never existed," Paul Virilio writes, which is to say events, genocidal processes, and communities are disappeared from both material archives and epistemic record. Indigenous history, by contrast, is multidirectional — Ovaherero and Nama chronologies and historiographies necessarily describe an ongoingness of genocide because the skulls of the dead are still incarcerated in imperial [museum] facilities. Western refusals to repatriate remains reflect a notion of imperial time as a stabilizer of humanity, a category from which the Ovaherero and Nama peoples are clearly precluded.

In the clashing of these epistemes, indigenous communities attempt to express the inexpressible: the sheer magnitude of genocidal loss and the responsibilities that survivor communities have in attempting to redress historical devastation as best as they can. The doubt and denial of testimony only amplifies the suffering of communities already in pain, both the physical suffering of genocidal violence experienced by the dead and the ontological  and spiritual wounding of the descendants. One of the greatest difficulties of genocide is the attempt by indigenous communities to make legible the "cognitive and emotional" incommensurability of communal loss and mass violence, and the varying relations to the crimes of genocide and its legacies, which western institutions have sought to qualify and quantify. For example, the German Museums Association has proclaimed that while people in charge of physical anthropological collections should be mindful of genealogical connections between remains and living community members, "from an ethnological perspective, memories of a deceased person fade after approximately four to five generations" or approximately 125 years.

While the organization states that this should only be a guideline in individual cases and dialogue should be sought in repatriation cases outside of this, these deadlines represent a scientistic political imposition because of how western mathematics in cases of genocide order non-western cultures on an "ontological level," from the expressions of death tolls to financial compensation to a kind of statute of limitations on restitution claims and the quantification of presumed familial memory. This numeric imposition is a epistemicidal framework within which all other modes of understanding are subsumed and subjugated, either altogether erased or still subordinated as "alternative knowledges." While scientific methods attempt to identify and individuate remains, the Nama Traditional Leaders Association have instead emphasized a sense of collectivized community impact and articulated on the "moral, social, and spiritual" re-

sponsibility "to ensure the burial of the remains of our families." It is clear then, that these metaphysicalities translate clearly After I was refused access to the Von Luschan collection in the American Museum of Natural History in 2018 (I can share a little bit more about that in our discussion), I informed the Nama Traditional Leaders Association and asked a series of questions about the significance of repatriation. From one such reply, they said:

> "Skulls and human remains of Nama origin must be buried in Great Namaqualand in accordance with centuries old Nama religious customs… The Nama believed the human soul returns to its Master, the Creator Tsui//goab, upon a person's death. Equally the human body is created from soil of earth and thus must be returned to the soil. The graves in which the remains will be buried are marked extra ordinary into monuments as per Nama custom…He died under extraordinary circumstances and rose from death many times according to Nama folklore. His graves were turned into monuments made of rocks, as people who passed by each grave said praises to Him and added another rock. Many of the graves are still found in Great Namaqualand. According to Nama culture, the spirit of the deceased remains restless until it is returned to the soil from which it is made by the Creator."

So then what are the implications of housing/hoarding and displaying people's bones either as some anthropological evidence or as unverbalized victor's spoils? Beyond the clear ethical and political questions of whether or not remains should be returned to the peoples to whom they belong, there are some less obvious to us but no less meaningful consequences. Cultures that venerate ancestors or understand life cycles beyond Christian linearities that hold life and death as discrete hold funerary traditions as particularly important rites of passage. The ability for a dead relative to successfully transition bears implications for not only their post-corporal state of existence, but also for their lineage and all of their descendants. A body that cannot be buried—the skull of someone who perished in a concentration camp and whose remains were kept for ethnological study, a body that was excavated from a properly buried grave, a body whose remains have been preserved and are displayed in a museum—is an individual whose posthumous state has been disturbed. But within our realm of understanding, the prevention of the performance of proper funerary rites is a manifestation of the natal alienation central to racial capitalist processes of social death: of maintaining the relationship of a socially dead individual or community purely through those who have subjugated them. The taking of body parts, whether as a sadistic trophy or for societal edification in museums and academic institutions (or an interaction of the two), is a

both the delegitimization of these rites of passage and an act of familial disruption. While physical anthropological collections are typically regarded as containing *objects* so long as they are not individually requested and/or identified, members of affected communities tend to understand them collectively as *ancestors*. This natal alienation is bi-directional. On one hand, this action denies the prematurely or unnaturally dead an opportunity for proper passage; on the other, it denies living relatives the opportunity for some semblance of closure through some religiously/culturally/socially sanctioned treatment. The keeping of remains is representative of both a dislocation of the dead from their lineage and an extraction of the person from their culture, a particularly pernicious act in the case of peoples who've experienced cultural genocide and/or whose cultures are otherwise subjugated.

While unrecognized by western epistemes, this, *still*, is a form of historical record.

Eunsong Kim describes how museum spaces, particularly archival storage facilities, are cold and alienating by design: because the objects held hostage therein are fixed into "the condition of object immortalization." She describes the museum as a kind of mausoleum that trap kept objects permanently in time, an indoor iteration of the colonial production of racialized space, particularly notable considering the co-evolution of the museum and the penitentiary. The objects are preserved in carefully climate controlled conditions which ensure "protection against touch, exemption from humidity, from environment, from too much heat or too little, from the notion of unruly temperatures." And it is this fastidious conservation efforts, ironically, that excises and preclude the objects from the "possibility of context and history" beyond that which is afforded by the institution. She forges a natural complement with Christina Sharpe's conceptualization of anti-black weather. Hers is an analogy between the chilled artificial ecology of the museum archive and Sharpe's conception of how "the weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place" and "trans*forms Black being."

Part of the impetus for the keeping human remains and other indigenous/non-white/non-western artifacts in colonial archives is an attempt to mediate civilizational collapse. Terror management theory describes not only the anxiety produced by the inevitability of one's own death individually, but the shared cultural worldviews deployed in order to offer a sense of death-transcendence or immortality — a durable identity. This can be literal as with the creation of cultural or religious afterlives, or it might be symbolic which describes both material and symbolic extension of the immortalized self (e.g. the family, artistic works, etc.). TMT can also offer an explanation for the cul-

tural worldviews that produce historiographies and epistemes that naturalize both racial-civilizational domination and subjugation: the structuring and stabilization of time manage the existential anxieties presented by movements and discourses in favor of decolonization.

Azoulay describes how contemporary usages of the word "art" emerged in the 18th century and was linked to an imperial conception and desired mastery of time: "art" exists as a part of an imperial dislocation that forces indigenous communities into discrete linear epochal orderings. The accumulation of art and artifacts for and within museum displays and archives, which is a part of the same process of imperial plunder and dispossession (the collection, sale, and circulation of indigenous remains within natural history archives seems like a clear collapsing of these discrete categories), is "a way to avoid engaging with the world shared with others." The museum space within which remains are held is a curation of European superior relation to materiality, a historical strategy of collection that offers a fragmented and incomplete description and definition of a given object and so subordinates and disappears indigenous knowledges in the process. According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, epistemicide is/was "one of the conditions of genocide": here, it is the protracted twinned process of attempting to annihilate a people and then recontextualize them at will within the historical canon.

This Eurocentric world-making, however, is destabilized by subaltern state and non-state actors, social movements, and articulated political demands (i.e. inquiries into and demands for the repatriation of remains) that attempt to challenge the concentration of political and epistemic power within western states and institutions. This investment in maintaining the project of *colonial scientia* in its spatial, chronological, and subjective aspects motivates institutional inertia and refusals in returning and repatriation indigenous art, artifacts, and human remains. The relationship between anxious and dutiful civilizational maintenance and these refusals is birthed from western obsessions with object permanence that might clash with other cultural understandings that certain objects or human biomatter are not meant to exist forever. The refusal to repatriate human remains is a result of a colonial teleology, which renders *objects* as necessary and functional regardless of how they came into possession and use.