

Africa is presented in UK and US media through prevailing visual narratives of population growth, epidemics and poverty. This continual overexposure to similar images creates a familiarity with a visual narrative which is rarely questioned and often feeds into a narrative of ‘Afro-pessimism’ (Nothias, 2014).

In most of the photographic material on Zambia, the country is represented predominantly through these prevailing narratives of Africa, and the economic change and urbanisation is rarely discussed. By 2030 (United Nations, 2019) half of Zambia’s population will live in cities. While Zambia is considered to be one of the 47 ‘least developed’ countries (United Nations, 2016) it is changing rapidly and if the visual arts are not engaging there will be no visual response to this change.

Over the last ten years, my colleagues Gerald Mwale, Geoffrey Phiri and I have been working together to build the foundations for sustainable institutional and artistic collaborations in Zambia and to explore how collaborative artistic networks from the global North and South can challenge the still existing visual narratives and promote visual self-governance through photography.

This paper charts these collaborative approaches and signposts to the potential of future photographic education and research in Zambia. It also discusses the broader issues of North/South academic collaborations and why they are often difficult to sustain. After this I will showcase some of the outcomes from the photographic workshops held in Zambia last month.

My interest in Zambian photography and photography education started in 2004, when I was working in Zambia as a freelance photographer for an UK NGO. I had worked as a freelance photographer for over a decade and was always keen to work abroad. Many photographers work for NGOs at a reduced rate to enhance their international portfolio. I was one of them. While in Zambia, I started to ask questions on why local photographers were not hired by NGOs and the responses all pointed at lack of visual education opportunities for photographers.

Bwire M Musalika highlighted the lack of training facilities for African photojournalists in 1994: “They are mostly not formally trained in the profession and are academically far less educated in comparison with other journalists”. 25 years later the photographic industry is still without any academic foundations and photographers mostly learn through informal and

formal mentoring arrangements and focus on the commercial jobs. “Unfortunately our biggest problem we have in Zambia is we don’t really document our visual history and our pioneers in photography.” says photographer Edwin Chibanga. In my interview with him he expresses his worry that there is no incentive to uncover the history of photography in Zambia because of commercial pressures on photographers and he hopes that “formal education in photography might [change] our thinking”.

After initial seed funding from the British Council, Gerald Mwale, journalism lecturer at University of Zambia and I received an Educational Partnerships in Africa Grant in 2009. In the next eighteen months we wrote the curriculum for the BA(Hons) Photography at UNZA. We developed a curriculum with critical teaching and country-specific contents based on Zambia’s needs identified through academic exchanges, industry roundtables and writing intensives with British and Zambian colleagues. During the curriculum writing process we had to navigate biases and we had to actively develop our intercultural communication skills and raised our awareness of what it means to de

colonialize our collaboration. Stoneman (2013) describes in *Global Interchange: The Same but Different* the dangers of not being aware inherent biases: “Clearly, the terms of academic activity and judgment deployed in global exchanges are not neutral or objective, but specific and determined. Without conscious or conspiratorial intent, they can reinforce the channels of one-way transmission and influence and efface the way in which Otherness is manufactured, experienced, and understood in the world” . While we were excited to learn from each other to build the curriculum content, we were more naïve about our institutional challenges.

We had not recognised that we had to facilitate institutional learning as well. Dr. Insa Nolte, former chair of the African Studies Association of the UK, argues that the problem of treating researchers and higher education institutions from the Global South the same as their Northern counterparts is that some of the funding requirements make sense in the UK university context but do not meet African HE requirements or practices.

For example, financial arrangements had the potential to derail our EPA project from the very start as our finance department had no experience working with a Zambian university and therefore did not pick up the institutional differences in the financial planning stage of the project.

The collaborative curriculum writing became a cultural exchange and an opportunity to learn, network in a creative atmosphere beyond the project scope and helped our institutions to overcome some of their initial mistrust. Together we created the foundations for the first BA Photography course in Zambia. At the end of the project, we had buy-in from the University

of Zambia and Anglia Ruskin University through a memorandum of understanding, but... we could not secure follow-up funding from UK funders or the Zambian government. We had no other option then to put the project on ice and to wait for the University of Zambia to create the conditions for the course to fit into the institutional structure. Until then, our shiny new curriculum is sitting on a hard drive gathering virtual dust.

Zambian Art Historian Roy Kausa makes a strong case for UNZA to finally see this project through: “What next for the arts in Zambia? Can this country produce visual art, music, dance, drama, popular theatre and create employment like the case in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa? The answer is a big yes! However, in order for Zambian artists to achieve that goal and compete on international stage, and turn art into business the National Arts Council must lobby government to establish proper fully fledged art colleges in all provinces and 2 universities, one on the Copperbelt and one in Lusaka.” (17. January 2019, Facebook)

In 2017, while waiting for the BA Photography to make its way through the bureaucratic maze, artist Geoffrey Phiri and I organised a photography workshop in collaboration with the Visual Arts Council during my Generation Z exhibition at the Henry Tayeli Gallery in Lusaka. We brought together a group of seven early career artists and photographers for a nine-day workshop discussing Zambian emerging photographic and broader lens based culture. The workshop created a creative social space or Handlungsraum (Moentmann, 2002) in which participants were encouraged to explore a wide range of visual narratives. The decolonization of workshop environment was at the forefront of our intentions for this collaboration. Stoneman observed during a North South film making workshop in Marakesh in 1990 that “The expositions from the south relativize an insular and self-perpetuating image system from the north; such discourses may begin as productions of individual self-expression by the filmmaker and can go on to realize a broader social effect as they spread through their audiences.” Therefore, the workshop was designed to discuss and counteract these self-perpetuating images and activate diverse visual narratives and create an atmosphere in which it was possible to foster empathetic, democratic and reflective peer to peer feedback processes. In *Towards an ethnographic turn in contemporary art scholarship*, Fiona Siegenthaler (2013) describes this collaborative interaction between artists as “encountering the ‘Other’ as an individual, a colleague, a brother-in-arms, and a person with whom to share ideas, artistic and personal interests, and a social as well as an art-related practice’ (p744). The individual narratives the Zambian photographers chose to explore were encouraging creative self-development and included fashion, documentary and fine art practices. We were

dealing with complex themes like cultural heritage, ancestry, conservation and social injustices. The resulting photographs were deliberate localised counter-narratives to the prevailing western stereotypes. The resulting photographs were presented alongside my Generation Z exhibition at the Henry Tayali Gallery at the end of the workshop.

A number of art collaborations have recognised the importance of these learning spaces and organisations like the Nigerian art and photography movement Invisible Borders “recognise the inevitable importance of collaboration in the building of a solid life-long artistic foundation” (2019). Invisible Borders sees itself “at the frontline of an idea that will ensure greater productivity in the contemporary African arts scene”. One of their projects invites photographers, artists and writers on collaborative trans-African road trips documenting everyday life as it presents itself to them as they are passing through. Results of these collaborations were shown at the 2015 Venice Biennale curated by Okwui Enwezor. Enwezor was interested in the interaction between art, art institutions and modernity on the African continent. Speaking at the event Who do you think you are? Culture, identity and the contemporary art museum (2017), Enwezor highlights the responsibility galleries and universities need to take for decolonizing art production in their countries.

Last month I therefore return to Zambia for a second workshop with the Visual Arts Council. This year’s photographic workshop focused on the Kalingalinga district of Lusaka.

Narrowing the theme and activity of the workshop came out of discussions with my Zambian colleagues. We felt that focusing multiple and diverse visual responses on a specific area would allow us to highlight the diversity of access points and interpretations, which in itself would allow for diverse storytelling and deconstruct the idea of a singular African visual narrative. Ghanaian academic Prosper Tsikata observed, that: “These [African] countries are framing and representing their own stories and experiences, challenging the ‘one-size-fits-all’ assumptions by participating in the creation of media themes by themselves, about themselves and for themselves, with the possibility of influencing how others frame and represent them. This is a clear departure from the past.” (Tsikata, p40)

The district of Kalingalinga exemplifies the rapid modernisation of Lusaka and the economic, social and societal changes that come with that. We invited photographers and visual artists to respond collaboratively to Kalingalinga in a wide range of styles including documentary, still life, fashion and conceptual and fine art practices. According Douglas Harper (2012): ‘these collaborative methods are among the most important in visual sociology and anthropology. They often broach subject matter that could be studied in no other way, and

when empowerment is the result of research (...) it signals a very big step for social sciences in general.'

The evaluation of the workshop is ongoing and a number of outputs still are in post-production. Some of the early observations are that the photographers felt enriched and empowered to speak not only about their photographic process and practice but also about social condition they encountered while engaging with Kalingalinga's microcosm. It highlighted that the arts can be catalyst for a broader debate and "should be tapped for the diverse cultural transformations they can make" (Kabanda, 2018)

My colleague Geoffrey Phiri, who co-organised the workshop summed it up like this: The potential or rather the ability to tell our own stories is very much the essence of the "Stories of Kalingalinga" workshop. These images tell our tale. [...] There is definitely no doubt that we are headed in the right direction, we are building a network that will be active long after the workshop. [...] My hope is that other institutions will come on board and thus the visual stories of Kalingalinga and Zambia will continue to develop."

Results from the collaboration will be exhibited in January 2020 in the Ruskin Gallery in Cambridge and later that year at the Henri Tayali Gallery in Lusaka.

-END-

Bibliography:

Tsikata, P. (2014). *The historical and contemporary representation of Africa in global media flows: Can the continent speak back for itself on its own terms?* *Communicatio*, 40(1), 34-48.

Invisible Borders (2019). *Manifesto*, <http://invisible-borders.com/manifesto/> (accessed 10/2/2019)

Harper, D. (2012). *Visual Sociology*, Routledge, New York

Kausa, R. (2019). *Facebook post to Matthew Mudenda*  
<https://www.facebook.com/matthew.mudenda/posts/2284927468207270>  
(accessed 17.1.2019)

Kabanda, P. (2018). *The Creative Wealth of Nations Cambridge*, University Press,  
Cambridge

Siegenthaler, F. (2013) *Towards an ethnographic turn in contemporary art scholarship*,  
*Critical Arts*, 27:6, 737-752

Stoneman, R. (2013) *Global Interchange: The Same but Different* In Mette Hjort (Eds.). *The Education of the Filmmaker in Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas*. London : Palgrave Macmillan.

United Nations (2018). *World Urbanization Prospects 2018*,  
<https://population.un.org/wup/Country-Profiles/> (Accessed 5.6.2019)

Online resources:

[www.kerstinhacker.org](http://www.kerstinhacker.org)

[zphotonet.blogspot.com](http://zphotonet.blogspot.com)

Hacker, K. (2018). *Generation Z: Visual Self-Governance through Photography*. In: *Personas and Places: Negotiating Myths, Stereotypes and National Identities*. Waterhill Publishing, New York, NY, pp. 27-41 (<https://arro.anglia.ac.uk/703060/>)