EthnoScripts

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR AKTUELLE
ETHNOLOGISCHE STUDIEN

Encountering post-colonial realities in Namibia

Volume 22 Issue 1 I 2020

Paula Alexiou

Claiming craft, claiming culture – The creation of value in post-colonial Namibian craft markets

Ethnoscripts 2020 22 (1): 47-68
eISSN 2199-7942

Abstract

Tourist crafts in Namibia serve as memories of exciting trips and holidays. The consumption of craft intersects with the consumption of culture because craft is seen as a marker of cultural identity. Purchasing decisions are made by an evaluation of cultural attributes of objects on offer. This paper describes the valorisation process of craft in the Namibian craft market. The history of craft objects will be contrasted with the perspectives of the tourists on craft in order to demonstrate how value(s) is imposed on craft objects. By presenting the production chain of Namibian crafts, colonial traces in the creation of value will be exposed. This paper shows that the perceptions of the tourists contradict with the history and the conditions of production of craft objects which leads to a fetishization of the crafts.

Publisher:
Universität Hamburg
Institut für Ethnologie
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1 (West)
D-20146 Hamburg
Tel.: 040 42838 4182
E-Mail: IfE@uni-hamburg.de
http://www.ethnologie.uni-hamburg.de

eISSN: 2199-7942

Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter einer Creative Commons Licence 4.0 International: Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen.

Claiming craft, claiming culture
The creation of value in post-colonial Namibian craft markets

Paula Alexiou

Introduction

A man, a woman, and a boy (about 10 years old) walk across the parking lot towards the entrance of the Craft Centre. The boy tries to follow the lion's footprints painted on the floor. "Namibia Craft Centre – 100% Namibian Craft" is written on the board in front of the entrance. The family stops just before James'[1] stall, which is outside to the left of the entrance. James is a craft producer who has his own stall at the craft centre. On his shelf are a number of different (wild) animals made of wire and beads, wire and recycled plastic or metal. *"Das haben wir gesehen, und das auch, und das und das…"*[2] the boy begins to enumerate in German, pointing alternately to an oryx antelope[3], an elephant, a giraffe and a lion. *"Lass uns reingehen"*[4], says his mother and takes the boy by the hand. The three enter the Craft Centre, walk past the stand with the wooden bowls and wooden giraffes, past the woven baskets, the Makalani stones, the colourfully embroidered pillowcases and bags, the leather bags, past the colourfully printed fabrics and dresses, up the stairs. They walk past the table with the ostrich eggshell jewellery towards the café, where they are greeted in German by the Austrian manager and then sit down at a table on the terrace. On the wall of the café hangs a framed blackboard on which is written in neat chalk in German: *"Träume nicht dein Leben, lebe deinen Traum"*[5]. The Craft Centre, located in the centre of Windhoek, resembles a place like in a dream, a place that radiates creativity through its bright colours and diverse forms. Only the post office, which is also located in the Craft Centre and where a queue of locals forms every morning, stands out for its plain design among the other stalls. It seems a little out of place: a place of reality and everyday life in the middle of a place for travellers looking for souvenirs as a reminder of their holiday.

The Namibia Craft Centre is home to 40 craft shops run by different individuals or community-projects. The core activity of the Craft Centre is the promotion of objects as "traditional" Namibian crafts. As I will outline in

1 All names have been changed.
2 "We have seen that, and that too, and that, and that…" (translated by the author)
3 A Southern African oryx, also called gemsbok, is a large antelope and native to the arid regions of Southern Africa such as the Kalahari Desert.
4 "Let's go inside" (translated by the author)
5 "Do not dream your life, live your dream" (translated by the author)

this paper several processes of choice, redefinition, valorisation, and power take place. Although the focus is on selected handmade objects and their producers, in fact the idea of traditional handicraft often comes from a group of post-colonial elites who play the role of middlemen and -women between producers and consumers. I define post-colonial elites as a group of people who had a privileged position in society during colonial times due to their origin (mostly Germans or white South Africans) and who continued to benefit from economic wealth and power even after Namibia's independence. Along the production chain, certain narratives of objects and people are created and are redefined in interaction with the tourists who buy handicraft objects and their narratives at the market.

What effect does tourism have on Namibian handicraft objects and their narratives? To what extent do tourists' ideas about Namibian handicrafts contrast with the history of the objects? How do tourists' perceptions influence the production history and value attribution of the objects and vice versa? To answer these questions, I will use a case study to trace the history of an object, its production chain and the actors involved along the way. The history of the object will then be contrasted with the perspective of the tourists. Based on these representations, I argue that the acquisition of (Namibian) craft objects is about the claim to a narrative. These narratives are negotiated between producers, traders, and consumers of crafts. As Appadurai argues, "[v]alue is embodied in commodities that are exchanged. Focusing on the things that are exchanged, rather than simply on the forms or functions of exchange, makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is *politics*, constructed broadly" (Appadurai 1986: 3). The presentation of the history and journey of the objects will show how different agents in the field of crafts - manufacturers, traders, buyers - try to impose their own cultural values and ideas on things and people. I will furthermore argue that the creation of value in the Namibian craft market is defined by notions and definitions of craft, culture, and "authenticity". However, this way of giving meaning is far from being egalitarian in both local and global contexts. By presenting the production chain of the craft objects, including the involved agents, and contrasting it to the tourist's perception, I will expose colonial traces in the creation of value in the Namibian Craft Market. I will use the term commodity fetishism to describe the way in which the craft object is alienated from both its producer and its consumer by concealing the conditions of production.

During the field research process, I tried to be aware of the way in which I, as a white German ethnographer, also claim and negotiate academic understandings of the crafts. I have often found myself in the role of a mediator between producers and tourists, when producers have asked me about the expectations of (German) tourists and tourists about my knowledge of the history of objects. In this way I have certainly partly influenced the process of

negotiating the meaning and narratives of the objects. I would therefore like to point out that the meaning of crafts changes over time and place through interaction with different groups of people (including myself) and should by no means be understood as being static.

The article is based on a six week field research stay in Windhoek in July and August 2019 and a two month field research stay in February and March 2020, focusing on the objects and actors of the Craft Centre in central Windhoek. However, objects and actors of other Craft Centres, Markets and Shops in and outside Windhoek (mainly Swakopmund) were also considered in order to provide a general overview of the craft landscape in Namibia. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews with producers, managers, and tourists as well as participatory market observation, participatory art and multi-sited ethnography were conducted.

What is craft?

There are different ideas and perceptions about characteristics that classify an object as craft. Even though the lines that distinguish craft from other objects – especially from (higher) art – are blurred, there are some common assumptions about how and by whom craft objects are or should be made. As I will outline in this paper, the conception of craft as something old and pre-capitalist by many tourists has an influence on the creation of value in Namibian craft markets. Therefore, the following part provides an approach to a definition of craft.

In the evening of 5th March 2020, I attend an exhibition opening at the National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN) titled “Reflect. Namibia at 30 years of Independence”. The exhibition includes various works by individual artists in the field of visual arts. The artworks are for sale. A small note next to the artwork provides information about the name of the artist, the title of the artwork and its price. While walking through the gallery I notice an artwork, more precisely a collage, which I had seen before. The collage was shown last year in the Craft Centre. As shown with the photograph (*see Figure 1*), it was offered for sale in the Craft Centre among several other collages and other craft objects for the price of N$ 2500[6]. Here at the National Art Gallery, the same collage was for sale for N$ 8125 (*see Figure 2*). On the photograph, one can see that it is not surrounded by similar pieces but is represented as individual piece. How is it possible that the same artwork is offered for sale as craft at the Craft Centre for N$ 2500 and as art at the National Art Gallery for N$ 8125? In the Craft Centre, the collage was presented as craft among many others, while in the National Art Gallery it is offered as individual and unique art, which apparently increases its value drastically. What is the difference between craft and art, and can an object be both?

6 ~16 Namibian Dollar (N$) correspond to 1 Euro

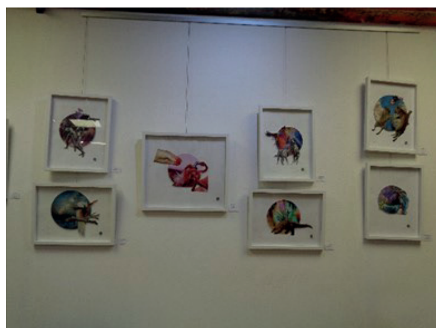

Fig. 1. Collage at the Craft Centre.
Photo: Paula Alexiou, 19th August 2019

Fig. 2. Collage at the NAGN.
Photo: Paula Alexiou, 5th March 2020

Sennett states that one of the ways art and craft can be sociologically distinguished is by the relative roles that agency and originality are considered to play in their production (2008: 68-73). Labelling objects as work of art is based on ideals of originality and creativity. Works of art gain public value because they "exposed and expressed the inner character of [their] maker" (ibid. 69), a belief that still influences popular understanding of art production today. In contrast, the public value of craft objects is based on the idea of socially or communally produced productive skills and abilities that are often thought to reflect localized local traditions or cultural identity, rather than exposing and expressing the internal creative processed by individuals. Thus, Cant argues that one aspect by which craft is distinguished from art concerns definitions of authorship (2016: 20). Craft objects are generally perceived as being 'from places' rather than 'by people'.

That a work of art should be an expression of the artist's character and his personal world view leads to a paradox: "art is sold like a commodity but is produced [...] as an object of intense personal expression" (Plattner 1996: 23). Art commodities are different from other commodities because its quality cannot be discerned solely by its visual attributes. The price of an artwork is less influenced by its physical nature than by social and historical factors. The value of the object is thus determined by its socio-historical context rather than its physical quality (ibid. 19). There is practically no relationship between production costs and price of a work of art. In contrast to craft objects where the main criteria for their prices are production costs which can be divided into material costs and invested time.

The contemporary sense of 'craft' did not appear until the late 19th century with the beginning of the Arts and Craft Movement (Dormer 1997: 5-6). Craft, which was one of the categories of art, became divorced from art and the design during the 20th century. This divorce has led to the separation of 'having ideas' from 'making objects' as well as to the idea that comprises a mental attribute named 'creativity' that precedes the knowledge of how to make things (ibid. 18). Furthermore, art usually seeks to address and reflect on an experience, world view or current problematic situation, while crafts

are expected to represent local commonalities and traditions. Crafts are considered suitable markers of cultural identity. For many craft makers, the distinction between art and craft is a question of status that has to do with money. When an object has the status of art, it is mostly more valuable than an object without that status. According to the philosopher-critic Arthur Danto, art can be anything, but only if it's recognised as such by the so called "artworld" (Danto 1964) which includes "a loosely organised community of artists, art professionals and interested bystanders" (Metcalf 1997: 68). Thus, the collage (*see Figure 1 and 2*) was first presented in the Craft Centre as one of many craft objects produced with productive skills and abilities. However, the "artworld" declared it to be art that expresses and exposes the individual character of the maker through creativity. The status of art that the collage gains through its presentation at the National Art Gallery makes the object more valuable than without that status which allows the maker to sell it for a much higher price that it was intended to be sold as a craft object. The status of craft mainly depends on the separation of 'making' from 'meaning' and the separation of the arts into categories of 'higher' and 'lower' (Dormer 1997: 19). Thereby 'higher art' is attributed an aesthetic value that has an inspiring, spiritual, or emotional character and has no practical everyday utility. Craft work, on the other hand, does include objects with a use value (Greiner and Pröpper 2016: 216).

Metcalf defines craft based on the following characteristics: First, it has to be a physical object. Second, it must be made predominantly by hand, and third, traditional craft materials and techniques are used. With "traditional" he means "materials, techniques and formats that survive from pre-industrial production" (1997: 70-71). The Ministry of Industrialisation, Trade and Small-and-Medium-Sized Enterprise Development (MITSMED) of Namibia uses the following definition: "Craft is the production of a broad range of traditional and contemporary items, made predominantly by hands as individual pieces, utilising rudimentary tools and uncomplicated or traditional skills and involving some combination of functional, aesthetic, innovative, decorative and cultural traditions; heritage; and sometimes religious significance" (MITSMED 2017: 7). In both definitions the term "tradition" seems to play a significant role. Not only in those definitions but also in conversations I had with tourists about the characteristics of craft, crafts were defined as "traditional" – often meaning "old" – objects made by the local population primarily for their own use. Craft means *"mit einfachen Mitteln Dinge zu machen, die man bei uns nicht kennt, nicht mehr"*[7] (Isabell, a german tourist). "Tradition" appears to be something from the past, something old, even pre-industrial. But, as Hobsbawm argues, tradition is often invented by people from the present. Repetition of materials and technics implies a continuity

7 "to make things with simple means that are not known where we live, not anymore" (translated by the author)

with the past (Hobsbawm 1983: 1). But "the continuity with it is largely factitious (..) they [invented traditions] are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition" (ibid. 2). Crafts are often seen as the production of pre-capitalist, non-market-oriented objects. At the same time, they are now strongly integrated into the globalized and capitalist market. Greiner and Pröpper similarly argue convincingly that crafts are a global practice, a production in a globalized economy (Greiner and Pröpper 2016: 220).

An unambiguous definition of craft is difficult, since there will always be objects that cannot be clearly assigned or that are viewed differently by different people. We have also seen from the example of the collage that one and the same object can be classified both as a craft and as art, depending on context, location, and presentation. Although differences in the expectations of art and craft and their status can be identified, the transition from craft to art is fluid. "At each point in its movement through space and time, an object has the potential to shift from one category to another and, in so doing, to slide along the slippery line that divides art from artifact from commodity" (Phillips and Steiner 1999: 15). In the following part I will sketch the Namibian craft landscape and present some craft objects as examples.

The Namibia Craft Centre – An overview of core objects

> *"For centuries, the traditional production of handicrafts served utilitarian and cultural purposes and was linked to individual tribal identities in communal areas" (MITSMED 2017: 8).*

The quote from the Ministry of Industrialization, Trade and SME Development shows that crafts were historically considered as objects that have a practical use for their makers. As tourism increased a few years preceding Namibian independence, the production of traditionally made items from mainly natural resources on a commercial basis for the urban market evolved (ibid.). NGOs initiated interest in handicraft which led to the establishment of craft outlets. For the producers, craft making was "a supplementary activity, to gain cash when there were no other agricultural or household demands on the producer" (ibid.). The involvement of various organisations, especially NGOs increased around the time of independence (ibid.). The Namibia Craft Centre opened in 1990 in Windhoek, hosting 40 different stalls today. The craft objects are mostly bought in craft shops, street markets or craft centres, the Namibia Craft Centre in Windhoek being the largest and best known. Many of the stalls are run by NGOs or different community projects, some of them are run by individual producers or traders. Most craft producers are based in the communal areas in the northern regions of Namibia, while mainly traders and managers are based in the capital. "Producers rely on

community-run craft centres, a few retail and wholesale buyers and lodges to access markets for them" (ibid. 22). The following is a short presentation of some objects that can be found in the Namibia Craft Centre - but also in various craft shops and street markets.

Wood carvings

One of the most represented craft objects in Namibia are wood carvings. You see them in every street market, craft shop and craft centre (*see Figure 3*). Most popular are wooden animals, especially giraffes and elephants, but also larger bowls that people usually use as salad bowls. Wood carvings are not uniquely Namibian. They are sold in many countries all over the world, mainly on tourist markets. In Namibia, most of the wooden animals and bowls that are sold to tourists are not produced locally but are imported from Kenia because *"it's cheaper and easier to get it from other countries"* (the manager of the Namibia Craft Centre). A few times a year, people from Kenia come to Namibia with loaded trucks full of woodcarvings to sell it to the Namibian traders who sell it on the street or in craft shops with a profit to tourists.

Fig. 3. Woodcarvings at the Craft Centre. Photo: Paula Alexiou, 17th February 2020

Beaded animals

Also very popular in the Namibian tourist market are beaded animals (*see Figure 4*). The beaded animals are considered Namibian craft because they are produced locally. The material (wire and beads) is sold in Namibia, but the beads were made in China. The animals are mainly giraffes, elephants,

oryxes, lions and geckos. When I asked James why animals, he answered *"Why animals? Because people they buy what they see here"*. Most producers of beaded animals – including James – come from Zimbabwe. The beaded animals are also one of the few types of objects that are only made by men. The question why men from Zimbabwe living in Windhoek produce the beaded animals was often answered with *"They know better how to make it"*.

Fig. 4. Beaded animals at the Craft Centre. Photo: Paula Alexiou, 17th February 2020

Makalani kernels

"You don't find it [Makalani kernels] anywhere else in the world, only in Namibia. They are the only Namibian souvenir that I have seen", tells me my interview partner on the street market in Windhoek. Makalani stones resemble chestnuts in shape and size. They grow on palm trees, called *Hyphaene petersiana* which can be found in south central Africa. In Namibia they grow in the northern regions where the kernels are collected by the Makalani carvers to be sold in Windhoek and other towns. Animals (lions, elephants, giraffes, zebras, etc.) are carved into the stone with a knife. Often the stones are provided with a small leather band and sometimes beads to sell them as key rings (*see Figure 5*). Many Makalani sellers work on the streets and try to sell their pendants there. Most Makalani carvers have learned the skills from family member. Usually, it was reproduced what has been seen with other carvers. The kernels almost always show the same motives: wild animals in different variations and compositions. The answer to the question why animals, is the same as for the beaded animals. *"The reason for them [the tourists] to come here is to see animals"* (a Makalani carver).

Fig. 5. Makalani kernels as pendants at the Craft Centre.
Photo: Paula Alexiou, 12th August 2019

Woven baskets

Woven grass baskets are probably one of the objects with the oldest history at the Namibian craft market but were historically not considered as craft but as functional items for domestic use. They were made in the north of Namibia and were used for harvesting, winnowing, carrying goods, and for storage purposes. The baskets are made from natural materials, such as the Makalani palm (*Hyphaene petersiana*) leaves which can only be found in those northern regions of Namibia. With the introduction of plastic boxes and especially Tupperware at the beginning of the 20th century, plastic largely replaced wickerwork and more plastic boxes and less woven baskets were used. When tourism increased after independence and the market for "traditional" craft started growing the basket weaving techniques were revived and regained importance (conversation with the manager of the craft centre and the manager of a basket weaving project). Today the market around basketry – as well as many other craft production – is run by NGOs or community projects who are *"supporting sustainable livelihoods of marginalised communities in Namibia through the development, sales and marketing of innovative crafts"* (Omba Arts Trust). Historically the women used plain patterns and natural-coloured palm leaves but since the community projects started and the baskets were sold on the tourist market, new different co-

lours and patterns were implemented (*see Figure 6*). Different and individual colours and patterns are important because *"rarity increases the value. [...] The more unique the more willing are people to pay"* (one of the managers of the community project).

Fig. 6. Woven baskets of Omba Arts Trust at the Craft Centre.
Photo: Paula Alexiou, 17th February 2020

Ostrich eggshell jewellery

Ostrich eggshell jewellery is the oldest craft production in Namibia. The ostrich eggshell bead is the oldest man-made bead and believed to be more than 10,000 years old (Miller and Sawchuk 2019). They were mainly made by the Ju/Hoansi in northern Namibia. The eggs were usually eaten, and the eggshell could be used to store water. The broken eggshells were made into beads for trading and decoration and today for selling on the tourist market.

Fig. 7. Ostrich eggshell jewellery at the street craft market.
Photo: Paula Alexiou, 12th August 2019

Just like the woven baskets, the ostrich eggshell jewellery is merchandised and sold through NGOs and community projects. After the production in the rural areas in the northern part of the country, they are sent to the Craft Centre or craft shops in Windhoek to be sold to tourists. However, since there are not as many ostrich eggshells in Namibia today as there were a few decades ago, they are often imported from neighbouring countries such as South Africa or Botswana (Interview with a project manager). Even though groups of the Ju/Hoansi who are part of community projects which are supported and managed by NGOs are producing the ostrich eggshell jewellery locally, many of the jewellery one finds on street markets from individual traders is imported from neighbouring countries, as several traders on street markets told me.

This is only a small selection of products that are sold as Namibian Craft. Other products include leather bags, metal animals, sewn Herero dolls, pottery, animals made from recycled materials such as plastic cans or espresso capsules, colourful fabrics, batik bags and tablecloths, and embroidery. Some of them, like the Makalani kernels or the woven baskets, are produced locally in Namibia from natural resources, some, like the woodcarvings, are imported from other African countries and many others are produced or elaborated in Namibia, but the material for them comes from other countries, like fabrics from Ghana or beads from China.

> *"You got an elephant, a wooden elephant, it's a wooden elephant to a tourist, you know, we know, that one comes from Kavango, that one is from Zimbabwe, this giraffe is from Kenia [...] We live in a global world, so everybody produces anything [...] you got the Chinese who produces African print dresses that looks like it comes from Africa, so you can't say: this is South African or this is Namibian, you know, it has its origin perhaps in South Africa or in Kenia" (the manager of the Namibia Craft Centre).*

We live in a globalized world, but where does the need to take something local come from? And what does locality mean for the tourist at the craft market? Many of the objects offered at the Craft Centre are part of community projects run by post-colonial elites. Often the products are not made locally or are made from imported materials. Woodcarvings are imported from Kenia, Zimbabwean men are making Namibian craft out of beads produced in China, ostrich eggshells for the as typically Namibian advertised "San jewellery" are imported from neighbouring countries and new shapes, patterns and colours are invented for "traditional" baskets because uniqueness seems to increase the value. Neither the origin nor the design of the objects is traditional. Locality seems to play only a marginal role, which contradicts the often-stated definition or idea of craftwork as something rooted in old "traditions". In the following section, I will look closer at one specific craft object or

respectively one kind of craft object: embroidery. I will follow the production chain – more specifically the part of the chain that takes place in Namibia – and the valorisation process of the object before I take a closer look at the tourist's perspective on Namibian craft objects. The case study will show that neo-colonial value chains dominate the production of embroidery.

The history and journey of the object: The case of embroideries

The art of embroidery is the craft of decorating fabric or other materials using a needle to apply thread or yarn. In Europe, the technique flourished as an important household skill for young women as a means of decorating otherwise drab textiles. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women from Germany, as wives of missionaries, brought their technique of embroidery to Namibia and imparted the skill to the Namibian women (Travel News Namibia)[8]. Through colonialism a German practice was imported to Namibia. Embroidery is thus a colonial invented tradition. Today, embroidery products at the Namibia Craft Centre and in various craft shops are sold primarily to tourists and advertised as "products that celebrate Namibian rural life" (Travel News Namibia). The women who are making the embroideries are part of community projects, which are either run and managed by NGOs or by a group of post-colonial elites, which means German or South African families. I will now have a closer look at the story and the production of the embroidery products from a community project called "!khoba", but I will also reference to and draw parallels with the products from another NGO community project called "Penduka".

Penduka, based in Katutura, the former township of Windhoek, is an NGO founded 1992 that offers training in craft production – mainly, but not exclusively in embroidery techniques – to *"low income and disabled Namibian women to support themselves"* (Penduka flyer). *Penduka* is selling the products in a local shop as well as online and is exporting to the Netherlands and South Korea (interview with the manager of production of Penduka). They are working with women in rural areas as well as with women who came to the city without employment opportunities and now live in Katutura. The women are trained in embroidery techniques and "how to tell stories through embroidery". They call it "storytelling embroidery" or "village embroidery", because the design is based on the women's life at their village. With different colours, they are stitching their life stories on various fabrics, which are then processed into pillowcases, tablecloths, bags etc (ibid.).

"!khoba" is another community project, which is not run by a NGO, but by a German-Namibian family. The word "!khoba" is taken from the San language and means "wild animals of Africa". The *!khoba* project is a community project founded 1983 by three German Namibian sisters on their farm in

8 https://www.travelnewsnamibia.com/news/koba-project/

the Otjiwarongo District. The idea of the project was to provide income to the wives of the farmworkers. The sisters started to teach the Namibian women embroidery techniques and were selling the finished products on a monthly street market in Windhoek. They soon expanded their business, employed more than 300 women who were doing embroidery and opened a stall at the Craft Centre in Windhoek and various craft shops in Windhoek and Swakopmund. In 2005 the headquarters of the project was moved from the farm to Swakopmund.

Otjiwarongo

On the farm in Otjiwarongo, the *!khoba* project was started in 1983. It is the oldest community project with embroiderer groups in Namibia. The materials – the fabric (cotton) and yarn – are bought by the project leaders in shops in Windhoek. The fabric and yarn sold there are imported from South Africa or North Africa. The materials are then delivered to the women on the farm, who stitch the fabric. The design is given by the project founders and managers and is usually pre-drawn, so that the embroiderers only have to re-stitch the patterns. The women are not permanently employed but are paid according to the number of pieces. Until 2005, the production hall was located on the farm, then the headquarters and workshop were moved to Swakopmund. Many of the women can work from home. Most of the women still live on the farm and work from there. Once a month Heidi[9], one of the founders of the project, travels from Swakopmund to Otjiwarongo to the farm to collect the finished embroideries and distribute new fabrics and yarn.

Swakopmund

The studio is located in Swakopmund, where the finished embroideries from Otjiwarongo are processed into pillowcases, tablecloths, bags and kitchen towels before being transported to shops in Swakopmund and Windhoek. This is also where Heidi lives. She is responsible for transporting the embroideries from the farm to Swakopmund, organising the further processing and the delivery of the finished products to shops in the surrounding area and to Windhoek. I met her in August 2019, and she took me to the factory and to one of her shops. In the studio were two seamstresses who transform the embroidered fabrics into finished products. In contrast to the embroiderers in Otjiwarongo, they are on a permanent contract. The studio is not very large, there is space for two tables with a sewing machine and four other tables for storing. When I entered the studio, a woman was working at the table with a sewing machine, the unfinished fabrics piled up on the tables next to it. Heidi showed me some samples and explained the designs. They

9 The name has not been changed because of the publicity of the project and the founding family.

now have two employees in Swakopmund who draw on the designs before the fabrics are brought to the embroiderers in Otjiwarongo. At the beginning the sisters themselves drew the patterns. As the name of the project indicates, it is mainly wild animals (elephants, giraffes, lions, etc.) that are chosen as designs. From time to time new designs are added and the type or shape of the animal changes, but the motifs remain essentially the same. For the animal motifs the carvings of the Makalani kernels are often taken as a model. New designs are usually created and painted by the founders themselves. Sometimes they also let the embroiderers stitch their own designs, but these usually do not sell well. The women on the farm prefer to create motifs of village life, people and chickens in many bright colours, or more abstract patterns. They have no connection to the wild animals they are given as patterns. Framed embroidery patterns hang on the wall of the studio. They show people working on the farm, village life or more abstract patterns (*see Figure 8*). These are the creations of the women on the farm and the initial motifs of the embroidery group.

Fig. 8. Framed embroidery patterns at the !khoba-studio in Swakopmund.
Photo: Paula Alexiou, 22nd August 2019

Windhoek

The finished products are picked up by Heidi's sister or niece from Swakopmund and brought to the Craft Centre in Windhoek. Here the embroidered pillowcases and tablecloths are sold to tourists. The pillowcases mostly show animal motifs on subtle fabric colours. *"Bunt ist nicht so für alle. Die Leute,*

die hierherkommen, mögen das zum Anschauen, aber nicht zum Kaufen"[10] (one of the managers). Popular fabric colours for tourists are beige, olive-green and grey. *"Sometimes the African style is very wild with all the prints and the colours, but I like it more basic, maybe two colours, not too loud"* (Nils, a tourist from the Netherlands). Most tourists who come to Namibia visit national parks like *Etosha* to see wild animals. They associate wild animals with Namibia or more generally with Africa, which is why animal motifs sell most well. In addition to the animal motif, the name of the respective embroiderer is stitched on each product (*see Figure 9*). This should give people the feeling of having acquired something personal and individual and makes them feel more connected to the producer. Until a few years ago, *Penduka* also had a stall at the Craft Centre, where they sold their embroideries. However, they did not make enough profit and gave up the stall again. According to the manager of the Craft Centre, this is because their colourful designs and village motifs were not well received by the tourists. The designs of the *Penduka* embroideries differ from those of the *!khoba* project. *Penduka* motifs show the village life of the women in many different colours. They are similar to the initial motifs of the *!khoba* project, which now only hang on the wall of the studio, but are no longer sold.

Fig. 9. Embroidered pillowcase of "!khoba". Photo: Paula Alexiou, 19th August 2019

At the stall in the Craft Centre and in the shops of the project salespeople are employed. So while there are permanent and non-permanent employees at the respective locations of the production chain – the embroiderers in Otji-

10 "Colourful is not so for everyone. The people who come here like it to look at, but not to buy." (translated by the author)

warongo, the seamstresses in Swakopmund and the salespeople in Windhoek – the managers of the project are mobile and travel back and forth between the locations of the production stages. At the same time, the German Namibian managers represent both the beginning and the end of the production chain. The beginning by founding the project, deciding on the products and designs, placing orders, and procuring materials. The end because the profit from the sale of the products goes back to them, which they then administer and from which they in turn pay wages, procure new material, and place new orders. So while the embroiderers – as well as the seamstresses and the salespersons – have only limited and temporary control or influence over the product, the project managers have control over it at any time during production.

The tourist's perspective(s)

> *"Was ich überhaupt nicht leiden kann, ist diese Massenware. […] Ich such' schon etwas Authentisches"*[11] *(Susanne, a tourist from Germany).*

Various encounters with tourists at the Namibia Craft Market illustrate the paradox of authenticity, which manifests itself in the search for an adequate representation of the country's culture and tradition on the one hand, and for something unique, not (tourist)market-oriented and non-capitalist on the other. Susanne bought an embroidered bag from the *!khoba* project. It is important for her to know that the object was produced in Namibia. *"Das ist von 'ner Fraueninitiative. Das finde ich immer gut, wenn ich sowas weiß"*[12]. The fact that the name of the embroiderer is stitched on the bag makes it both individual and Namibian for Susanne. She classifies as mass-produced goods the small carved wooden elephants, which in her opinion always look the same and are offered at all craft markets. The practical utility plays a key role for the purchase decision as well.

In subsequent conversations with other tourists, the phenomenon of searching for something authentic, but at the same time unique and not produced for the tourist market, was to become a main criterion in the choice of crafts. In total I spoke with 15 tourists, 14 of them from Germany. Although tourists make different purchasing decisions and value various objects differently, there are common values and perceptions that manifest themselves in the buying criteria. The search for something authentic, something not mass-produced and not primarily produced for the tourist market became

11 "What I can't stand at all is this mass production. […] I am really looking for something authentic" (translated by the author)

12 "This is from a women's initiative. I always find it good to know something like that" (translated by the author)

evident in all conversations I had with tourists. However, there are different perceptions of what is considered authentic and what is not.

For Oliver and Maike, a married couple from Germany, the practical value of the objects is important. Decorative objects are usually only bought as gifts for friends at home. Oliver and Maike bought several wooden bowls, beaded animals, tablecloths, embroidered pillowcases, baby clothes and a rock crystal at the Craft Centre. Maike is especially fascinated by the beaded animals. "*Ich find die ganz typisch afrikanisch, das gibt's nirgend woanders. [...] Das sind ja die Tiere, die leben hier in diesem Land und das verbindet"*[13]. Oliver, however, rejects the wooden giraffes and elephants. *"An denen geh ich einfach vorbei, weil das sind Massenprodukte"*[14]. Both found the woven baskets remarkably interesting but considered them as too expensive. *"Wir hatten erst nach Körben gesucht, aber dann haben wir die Holzschüsseln gefunden. [...] Die waren günstiger"*[15].

Nils, a young tourist from the Netherlands only bought four postcards because he was travelling with his bicycle. Two of the postcards show nature motives, one the dead valley in the Namib desert and the other the dune landscape. The other two cards show the Himba women and the San in supposedly "traditional" clothing.

> *"They [the postcards] look beautiful and they show things that you don't really see normally. They also have postcards of elephants and lions and they are nice as well but I like to send postcards that are really unique, that really show specific things about this country and elephants, you see them at other places [...] especially the San, I really like this because I like cultural traditions, and I want to see these people also in the real. [...] You don't see this anywhere else and they look so happy" (Nils).*

Like Susanne and Oliver, he classifies wooden animals as inauthentic because they are *"specifically made for tourist. [...] I don't see people making animals for themselves. I mean, what are they gonna do with that?"* (ibid.).

That the authenticity of a craft object often depends on its practical value for the local population is also demonstrated in an interview with Jonas, a student from Berlin who travelled to Angola and Namibia for a biology project. Jonas tells me that he hardly buys any souvenirs because they lack practical use. Moreover, the objects of the Craft Centre, which are tailored to the tourist market, do not appeal to him, as he does not see himself as a tourist

13 "I find them very typically African, you can't find that anywhere else. [...] These are the animals that live here in this country and that is connecting" (translated by the author)

14 "I just walk past them, because they are mass products" (translated by the author)

15 "We looked for baskets first, but then we found the wooden bowls. [...] They were cheaper" (translated by the author)

and has not visited many of the tourist destinations. In Angola, however, he had bought fabrics, as they have a practical use. "*Das hab ich auch benutzt und das benutzen auch die Einheimischen und deswegen ist es ok, wenn ich das mitnehme*"[16] (Jonas).

The paradox of authenticity became most clear during an encounter I had with Thomas. I was sitting on a bench at the Craft Centre talking to one of the dealers when Thomas, a tourist from Berlin, came by and sat down next to me. It was his first day in Namibia. I asked him what he thought about the Craft Centre and if he had bought anything. He told me that he usually always buys souvenirs as a memory of his travels *"um ein Stück von der Reise und vom Land mit nach Hause zu nehmen"*[17]. But that day he did not find anything at the Craft Centre. Things at the Craft Centre were too much geared towards tourists. *"Touristen sind ja immer die Anderen"*[18], he said with a smile. Two weeks later I met him again. He described Namibia as "Soft Africa", a travel destination that offers enough comfort, but also adventure. On his journey through the country he has meanwhile found suitable souvenirs for him. He told me about a medical stick and a mask from an antique shop in Swakopmund, about a ceremonial hatchet made of bone that he bought in Okahandja and about two rock crystals that he had discovered near the Spitzkoppe at a stall of a street vendor. On the one hand the objects should be unique and special, on the other hand they should be recognizably "Namibian" or have a "traditional" utility value. It seems that it is the combination of "uniqueness" and "tradition" that makes an object desirable and classifies it as "truly genuine". At the same time, an object gains value and significance if it has a supposed practical value for the local population. It was important to Thomas that the souvenirs he takes home from his trip have a cultural value. By this he meant that they are also produced by the producers for their own use and not just for the market, as he believes is the case with the Craft Centre.

The examples show that tourist's notions of authenticity differ from one person to another. Some tourists find some objects at the Craft Centre that they consider as "authentic" Namibian craft. Other people regard the Craft Centre as too commercial and not authentic, which is why they look for authenticity in other places. The differences to the own culture are often emphasized. Tourists are looking for something "special" that they do not know from home. When I asked Monika, a tourist from Germany, if she also takes souvenirs or crafts from other countries, she replied that she has only been to the USA and Europe so far, *"und da will ich nichts mitnehmen. Das ist mir*

16 "I used that one and the locals use that one too, so it's ok if I take it with me" (translated by the author)

17 "to take home a piece of the trip and the country" (translated by the author)

18 "Tourists are always the others" (translated by the author)

zu gleich"[19]. Even though the purchasing decisions of the tourists vary, it is nevertheless evident that a practical value is linked to the idea of crafts. The objects gain in value and significance if it is assumed that they also have a practical value for the local population. Tourists consider "authentic" Namibian craft as objects, which are not primarily produced for the market, but for own purpose and use. This leads to a paradox, because the Namibian craft market is highly integrated in the capitalist mode of production whereby the product is alienated from the producer and the conditions of production are hidden from the consumer.

Commodity fetishism – The creation of value in the Namibian Craft Market

Marx (1867) was concerned with the issue of how goods are presented and perceived in a peculiar way under capitalism. The basic condition of capitalist production is the separation of producers from the means of production. The labour market that emerges from this process is the ideal condition for the appropriation of foreign labour by the owners of money and the means of production. The producer possesses only one commodity, which he can sell, and which has no immediate use value for him without the means of production, namely his labour force. The fetish character of the commodity derives from the peculiar social character of commodity-producing labour (Marx 1867: 87). The capitalist mode of production and socialization is itself the result of the separation of producer and means of production. It is based on the class division, which itself constitutes the peculiar character of commodity-producing labour: owners of the means of production and capital on the one hand, and workers who possess only their labour force as a commodity, on the other. Our everyday experience has nothing to do with the social labour relations between people. We buy a commodity and take it home with us without knowing what form of work and what kind of production process is hidden behind it. All we see is the exchange relationship of the work products in the form of their price. The market disguises the origin and production of the goods. The product is objectified work. The objectification makes it possible to separate the worker from his product, i.e. to alienate him. In capitalism, the product does not belong to the producer, but to the capitalist who owns the means of production. Thus, the worker loses the control over his product (Quante 2009: 87). More original than the alienation of the product is the alienation of labour itself. The worker cannot decide about his work, he must do what the capitalist tells him to do (ibid. 87-89). The product made for the market is the reaction to demand, that is, the fulfilment of other people's needs. But since the goal of alienated labour is merely to secure one's own

19 "and I don't want to take anything with me from there. That's too much the same for me." (translated by the author)

physical existence, the worker does not establish a relationship with the buyers of his products. The concrete needs that his work is supposed to satisfy are as unknown to him as the people behind them (ibid. 255).

The same applies to the production of crafts in Namibia. The people and processes that are part of the production of an object and its marketing are camouflaged. More than that, certain aspects of production are highlighted in order to conceal others. Stitching the name of the embroiderer on the pillowcase is intended to suggest a direct connection to the producer. This imagery of a direct link between producer and consumer ignores the managers, the middle-(wo)men who stand between producer and buyer. Even though dependant on tourist's desires and therefore tourist images about Namibia, the managers solely decide about the design, material, production process and value of the craft object, as the example of the embroidery project shows. As cultural "mediators" they act as knowledge producers and experts and are central to the movement of handicrafts in the (inter)national market. Tourists are looking for things that correspond to their ideas and criteria of authenticity. They want an object that has a cultural (utility) value for the local population – or the group they identify as owners of local culture and "tradition". Those who want to sell things to tourists satisfy this need through images that encapsulate and manifest the tourists' ideas and expectations. In the case of Namibia, these are mostly pictures of wild animals or people in supposedly "traditional" clothing. Such images are in turn perceived by the tourists as a definition of cultural values. This fetishization "hides from view not just the machinery but also the competitive capitalist way in which it operates" (Carrier 2010: 682).

Conclusion

Souvenirs have been used to evoke memories of exciting trips and "exotic" holidays. The pressing issue is not why tourists desire a souvenir. Visitors want to take home something to remember Namibia by. The more interesting questions is what specifically attracts tourists to certain craft and how do they choose what is worth taking home. They are claiming a piece of their trip and experience in form of a craft object that they can easily take back home. The claim to craft as a piece of the journey is therefore also always a claim to culture. Claiming a narrative in form of a craft object means claiming a piece of the local culture because craft is considered to be a suitable marker of cultural identity and the material expression of a local culture. The creation of certain narratives of objects and of people takes place in interaction with the tourists who buy craft objects and their narratives at the market and take them home with them. Definitions and discourses are conducted within a framework of power relations in which some, but not others, assert their ideas about craft. In this paper I have tried to show that the creation of

value of Namibian craft is influenced and shaped by definitions of craft as "traditional" objects made of pre-capitalist materials and technics, by tourists' perceptions of "authenticity", and by the production chain and traders who respond to tourists' assumptions. Using Marx' concept of commodity fetishism for my argument, I tried to show that the actual processes, conditions, and people (including the German-Namibian managers) involved in the production of the tourism crafts are absent from the value that the tourists-consumers attribute to the crafts they buy. The Namibia Craft Centre is a trans-nationalized and globalized craft market, in which post-colonial elites decide on designs, means of production and price and where the locality only serves as a reminiscence. The case of the *!khoba* project is a striking example for the colonial heritage in the craft market. A technique that came to Namibia through German colonialism is today sold to German tourists as "traditional" Namibian. In addition, it is a German-Namibian family – descendants of the former German colonial officials – who guide and determine the production of the embroideries. The producer has only marginal authority or power over the object. Embroidery is thus a colonial invented tradition. The paradox, that the producer of craft objects who is usually seen by the tourist as the real holder of "authentic" cultural identity and "tradition" but has almost no influence on the product itself, remains undetected. Tourists are looking for something that does not exist in this way. Authenticity – as desired by the tourists – turns out to be an illusion. The managers camouflage the conditions of production in order to meet the tourists' expectations and images of authenticity.

References

Appadurai, Arjun (ed.) (1986) The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cant, Alanna (2016) Who Authors Crafts? Producing Woodcarvings and Authorship in Oaxaca, Mexico. In: Wilkinson-Weber, Clare M. and Alicia Ory DeNicola (eds.) Critical Craft. Technology, Globalization, and Capitalism. London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic: pp. 19-35.

Carrier, James G. (2010) Protecting the Environment the Natural Way: Ethical Consumption and Commodity Fetishism. Antipode 42 (3): pp. 672-689.

Danto, Arthur C. (1964) The Artworld. Journal of Philosophy 61 (19): pp. 571-584.

Dormer, Peter (ed.) (1997) The Culture of Craft. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Greiner, Clemens and Michael Pröpper (2016) Hands, Skills, Materiality. Towards an Anthropology of Crafts. In: Wonneberger, Astrid, Mijal Gandelsman-Trier and Hauke Dorsch (eds.) Migration – Networks – Skills. Anthropological Perspectives on Mobility and Transformation. Transcript-Verlag: pp. 207-229.

Hobsbawm, Eric (1983) Introduction: Inventing Traditions. In: Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger (eds.) The Invention of Tradition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: pp. 1-15.

Marx, Karl (1867) Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels – Werke, Band 23. Berlin/DDR: Dietz Verlag.

Metcalf, Bruce (1997) Craft and Art, Culture and Blogy. In: Dormer, Peter (ed.) The Culture of Craft. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Miller, Jennifer M. and Elisabeth Sawchuk (2019) The tiny ostrich eggshell beads that tell the story of Africa's past. The Conversation: https://theconversation.com/the-tiny-ostrich-eggshell-beads-that-tell-the-story-of-africas-past-128577 [24 May 2020].

Ministry of Industrialisation, Trade and SME Development [MITSMED] (2017) Growth Strategy for Namibia's Handicraft Industry and Associated Value Chains.

Namibia Craft Centre. http://namibiacraftcentre.com [01 August 2020].

Omba Arts Trust. http://www.omba.org.na [01 August 2020].

Phillips, Ruth B. and Christopher B. Steiner (1999) Art, Authenticity, and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter. In: Unpacking Culture. Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds. California: University of California: pp. 3-19.

Plattner, Stuart (1996) High Art Down Home. An Economic Ethnography of a Local Art Market. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

Quante, Michael (2009) Karl Marx. Ökonomisch-Philosophische Manuskripte. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Sennett, Richard (2008) The Craftsman. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Travel News Namibia. https://www.travelnewsnamibia.com/news/koba-project [01 August 2020].

Paula Alexiou is a M.A. student of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Hamburg, Germany. She has obtained her B.A. in Social and Cultural Anthropology and Philosophy at the same University in 2018. Her main research interests are in the field of economic anthropology, post-colonial studies, theories of value and material culture. She has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Namibia.
paula.alexiou@gmx.de