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A failing anthropology of colonial failure: following a driver's uniform found at Amani research station, Tanzania

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The remains of Amani, a century-old scientific laboratory in Tanzania, are quintessential modern relics. When anthropologists turn to such infrastructures of, originally colonial, knowledge-making, their own implication with the object of their study – and with its epistemological and political-economic origins and order – becomes part of the ethnographic pursuit. This entanglement between researcher and research material should challenge familiar realist modes of ethnographic writing 'about' such places that elude the anthropologists' own, compromised position within them. Matters are complicated further when the studied knowledge-making sites already are broken, having failed their purpose – as in the case of the vestiges of an abandoned colonial institution. In this essay, I wonder how such ruins of knowledge-making might transform the knowledge made by anthropologists working within them. Instead of just adding 'reflexive' confessions to realist accounts, could writing take part in the defeat that the scientific station's remains seem to embody – writing not 'after/beyond' but 'going along with' failure? Drawing on non-representational ethnography, and poet-anthropologist Hubert Fichte's embrace of epistemic defeat as anticolonial method, I trace my engagements with just one fragment of the scientific station – a driver's uniform. In doing so, I experiment with an object ethnography that 'fails' to detach author and object, or settle the question of failure, and instead foregrounds performativity, ambiguity, and mirth as starting points for an ethnography of, and in, our modern ruins.

I had a research station

'I had a farm in Africa', opens Karen Blixen's imperialist novel *Out of Africa* (Blixen 2001 [1937]: 13; see also Ngũgĩ 1993). Read 'station' for farm, to evoke the irony and ridicule, and the colonial shadows, that riddle my decade-long attachment to Amani, a research station in northeast Tanzania, and my entanglement with the inherent violence, and pleasures, of knowledge-making there. Together with fellow anthropologists, I first came to Amani in 2014 (accompanied by an elderly British entomologist who had lived there in the first postcolonial decades, and guided by a local naturalist who descended from station staff), as part of a larger study of 'memorials and remains' of medical science in Africa. Occasionally joined by other scholars and artists, we returned to Amani six times in the following years, to explore the layered remnants of German and British colonial science and early Tanzanian national medical research.[1] Taking inspiration also from

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contemporary archaeology and anthropology's archaeological turn (Dawdy 2010), these 'excavations' focused on the presence of material traces of multiple pasts, and the remaining inhabitants', as well as our own, engagements with them (Geissler, Lachenal, Manton & Tousignant 2016).

On these journeys, the ease and pleasant sociability of which themselves were constant reminders of colonial-derived privilege, we gathered increasingly detailed, if strangely purposeless, knowledge of the minutiae of Amani and those who had worked there during the second half of the twentieth century, around and especially after Tanzania's independence. This idiosyncratic collection of scientific and intimate, powerful and insignificant, material and immaterial objects deepened our attachment to Amani, which began to resemble the longing, indeed homesickness, professed by the elderly people we met, who had worked there in the postcolonial 1960s and 1970s (Geissler & Kelly 2016*a*; Geissler *et al.* 2020). Yet, although obviously framed by colonial violence, historically derived differentiation, and enduring injustices, our historical-anthropological *Wunderkabinett* did not yield simple moral-political meaning, nor add up to one overarching, 'critical' narrative. Rather, it resembled the eclectic naturalist collections of specimens and observations that the entomologists, doctors, botanists, and administrators who had gone before us had thoroughly but inconclusively assembled, and eventually donated to museum collections, stored in attics, or left behind in Amani, where insect and plant activity were absorbing them back into local ecologies of decay and growth. Indeed there was an affinity between (our) ethnographic practice and the knowledge practices of natural history that we endeavoured to study. Below, I attend to one of the vestiges we collected, to reflect on ruination, failure, and the potential of defeated anthropological knowledge: the livery of a retired driver from the early 1980s, the last exemplar of a tradition of colonial and postcolonial staff uniforms in Amani.

A failed place of science

Since the region's German colonial occupation, Amani has been a – sometimes world-leading – site of biological and agricultural, medical and anthropological research. It was founded in 1902 as a forestry institute and botanical garden on a hilltop in the eastern Usambara Mountains, dispossessing the local Shambala-speaking inhabitants (Conte 2004). After the German defeat in the First World War, agricultural research endeavouring to improve cash-crop farming continued under British leadership, until the director of a newly created malaria research institute in 1948 lobbied the colonial government to let him take over the, by then apparently under-utilized, agricultural station. After Tanzania's independence in 1962, this institute was gradually 'Africanized', as it then was called, until Amani in 1979 became part of the newly founded National Institute of Medical Research (NIMR) (Poleykett & Mangesho 2016). During the following decades, scientific activity in Amani declined, due to shrinking external funding, austerity policies, and changing international scientific priorities.[2]

Throughout its history, Amani was alternately derided as a costly folly and mothballed, and reinvented and imbued with new promise (see Alexander, introduction to this volume, on cycles of failure). As a heterogeneous assemblage of architecture, landscape, and apparatus, it accumulated traces of different sciences, and of imperial conquest, 'colonial development and welfare', postcolonial nation-building, and subsequent state decay, becoming a polyvalent modernist ruin, of a specific, settler colonial mould (Ghyselen, Geissler, Lagae & Mangesho 2017). Today, Amani

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is maintained by a shrinking cadre of elderly NIMR staff living in the station's workers' settlements, who cannot stem its progressive decay. Given Amani's history of reinvention, current visions of its revival as a university campus, a centre for herbal medicine research, or even a museum should not be dismissed. Yet, for the moment, the station is a 'ruin': an edifice that no longer fulfils its designated function, succumbing to entropy on account of nonhuman and human life. Rain, plant growth, and insects enter its crevices, and the remaining inhabitants slowly 'use up' the ruin, 'cannibalizing' (Alexander 2020: 13), or rather 'composting', its spolia.

Ruins seem to evidence failure, but surveying the station's vestiges, it remains unclear what failed: colonial occupation, its ideology, science, or modernity as a whole (see Scott 1998)? Decolonization and Africanization, the nation-state impoverished by austerity policies (Ferguson 1999)? Or the original inhabitants before the advent of colonial science, who lost livelihoods and epistemic legitimacy (Mavhunga 2017)? In line with this special issue's focus on 'after failure', I will suppress the conventional critical impulse to pass judgement on failure and success, or diagnose what failed when, concentrating instead on Amani's contemporary presence.

Ruination and afterlives

Since the turn of the millennium, ruins of colonialism, like postindustrial, postsocialist and other ruins after modernity, have attracted anthropological interest, often drawing on Ann Stoler's (2013) recognition that colonialism has not ended, but pervades the present, emanating 'ruination', an ongoing accumulation of failure or process of 'rot'; and that colonial ruins accordingly are not self-contained marks of an ending, monuments in an aftertime, but continue to exercise effects on those living with them – including ethnographers, as Yael Navaro-Yashin acknowledges in her reflections on ruination and melancholia (2009: 11; see also Gordillo 2011; Schwenkel 2013).

Ethnographies of Africa's modernist ruins, inspired by James Ferguson's (1999) recognition of colonial and postcolonial remnants as key strata of contemporary social reality, provide rich accounts of architecture (Hoffmann 2017; Smith 2018), industry and extraction (Hecht 2018; Mususa 2022), infrastructure (Kopf 2022; Yarrow 2017), health care, and science (Calkins 2021; Droney 2014; Prince 2020). These show that modern ruins are not inert sites of loss and ending, but lived with, pushing beyond their sometimes stubborn original forms, used and altered, ripe with multiple temporalities and unfulfilled promises (Tousignant 2013). They remain open to projects and aspirations, if not necessarily the ones they had been intended for. And hence they are sites not merely for contemplation, but also for ethnography.

'Ruin ethnographies', variously foregrounding or de-emphasizing historical failures (decolonization, the end of socialism, austerity, neoliberalization), study the present as an aftertime 'beyond' failure, examining others' predicament, resilience, aspiration, or creativity. In an empirically and analytically rich, realist ethnographic tradition, such representations of social worlds after the recession of modernist projects are usually about others, not about the ethnographers or about relations between own and other, present and antecedent that might constitute a broader, albeit contentious, 'we' (Gupta & Ferguson 1997). Even when authors acknowledge personal affective responses to such ruins, these remain marginal to their ethnographies, despite Stoler's (2017) insight that we are all implicated in ongoing processes of colonial differentiation and ruination. Thus, my own earlier ethnography of a ruined Kenyan medical laboratory around the millennium chronicled old laboratory men's lives and longings for (scientific and

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personal) 'past futures' (Geissler 2011: 300); but although I previously – as a student of zoology – had worked with these men in their laboratory for several years, sharing some of their professional everyday experience and the temporality (if not the content) of their longing for erstwhile progressive horizons, as well as navigating colonial-derived inequalities, this experience never became overtly part of my ethnographic account.

Here I wonder how we instead could write *within* the ruins of shared aspirations and histories – mindful of different positions of class, 'race', gender, and generation – to bear witness to our lasting entanglement in ruined projects and projects of ruination. How could we reduce the representational distance, indeed superiority, of realist ethnography, which writes *about* ruin dwellers' lives in ruins as if these were remainders of *their* failed projects, not ours? How could our texts go beyond complementing ethnographies of ruined lives with 'reflexive' penitence concerning our privileged position and enduring postcolonial relations, which reiterates rather than erodes historically derived modes of domination? Could one embrace the ruin of both empirical material and ethnographic form as another mode of critique?

This question, rooted in anthropology's decades-old 'crisis of representation', is especially pertinent when studying *modern* ruins, notably those of scholarly knowledge generation – vestiges of scientific institutions created to produce colonizing knowledge about their surroundings (Graboyes 2015; Tilley 2011). Here, anthropologists are implicated, not just by way of political-economic privilege, but epistemologically. When we first arrived in 2014, Amani's inhabitants' first question – 'what research' had we brought (back)? – placed us straightaway in a German-British hereditary line descending from Franz Stuhlmann, the first director, a zoologist-botanist and anthropologist from my own hometown of Hamburg.

If we – heirs to a colonizing anthropological gaze that observes others from the comfort of privileged identity – set out to generate knowledge about such research sites, not only is our material being implicated in enduring colonial violence, but also our method and writing risk extending the very forms of knowing embodied in the object we study. Should this situation not also ruin our compromised modes of knowing? Could we embrace breakdown and fragmentation, equivocality and confusion, refusing to explain or diagnose, analyse or reach closure? What ethnographic form could extend rather than represent a ruined postcolonial knowledge site?

Defeat as anti-colonial stance

An anthropologist who explicitly embraced epistemic defeat as tool of anti-colonial scholarship (Neumann 1991) was the German Hubert Fichte (1935-83), a prolific but, in terms of academic recognition, failed researcher (e.g. 2012 [1977]) who was only recently canonized as a key figure of the discipline in Germany (Haller 2012). In his posthumously published seventeen-volume poetic ethnography of transatlantic religion, *Geschichte der Empfindlichkeit* (History of Sensibility), Fichte sought a 'new language' for the humanities, mixing concrete, materialist description of religious practices and political-economic realities, interviews and myths, anthropological and historical literature, newsreel and intimate diaries of personal everyday life – transgressing distinctions of own and other, past and present, here and there .

Distancing himself from what he perceived as colonial-inflicted, dominating, ordering, successful academic discourse – notably structuralism – Fichte avoided causality and meaning, explanation and interpretation, and declared himself, by

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contrast to his academic contemporaries, as not 'emerging victoriously' (1976: 119). Instead of critically penetrating or analytically grasping reality, he aimed to hover 'gently' (*sachte*) at its scarred surface, gathering fragments and tracing relations, always from his own in-between, queer, place (Neumann 1991). Yet, while seeking to undermine the colonial gaze, Fichte also acknowledged that his 'we' – white, male heirs of empire – 'are the victors', inescapably caught up in the continuity of colonial power relations. He found himself thus in an anti-colonial double-bind (Fichte 1976: 120): pursuing liberating sensitivities from a dominating subject position, but aware that moral-political posturing cannot undo one's material/economic position.

Fichte's awareness of positionality, embrace of contradictions, and openness to fiction and poetry speak to the ethnographic surrealism of Michael Taussig (who shares Fichte's focus on the pervasive violence of imperialism and seems to have been aware of his scholarship) (Neumann 1991: 263). His sensitivity for the material world and fleeting-but-weighty moments of connection with and within it – moments that do not add up to a single structure of interpretation – resonate with current anthropological interest in the 'affect' arising from movements and attachments in the (material) world (Stewart 2007). Fichte combines broadly Marxian materialist preoccupations with political-economic reality with a sensitivity (his *Empfindlichkeit*) not unlike the 'new materialists' care for things, and their stories told 'with' rather than 'about' matter (e.g. Haraway 2016). The layering and juxtaposition of observations and experiences that mark Fichte's texts and his refusal to explain speak, from the other side of anthropology's 'postmodern' turn, to the 'messy' fragmentation that science and technology studies has since tried to make us appreciate (Law 2004), as well as to contemporary naturalist ethnographers' 'writing as refusal' (e.g. Raffles 2020), and to the re-evaluation of failure in queer theory (Halberstam 2011), or in what Stewart (2008, drawing on Sedgwick 1997) calls 'weak theory'.[3]

Tracing

A generation ago, in an era of political decolonization and anti-colonial struggles, Fichte foregrounded the dialectics of colonialism, the productive equivocality of anti-colonial anthropology, and the role of affect and performativity for an ethnography of (and against) the enduring colonial condition (Diederichsen & Franke 2019). Without emulating his poetic style and vitriolic rejection of academic prose, our approach to scientific 'traces' in Africa in the 'memorials and remains' project, and our cultivation of tracing as method and textual form, take inspiration from Fichte's always-already compromised anti-colonialism that seeks neither absolution nor purity, but unreservedly traces tensions, ambiguities, transgressions, and excess (Geissler *et al.* 2016; see also Lachenal 2022).

In our collaborative work, we focused on 'traces', *pace* Stoler, who associates the term with 'pale filigrees, benign overlays with barely detectable presence' (2017: 5), 'shorn of potency and commanding force' (2017: 20). The unclear form and indeterminacy of traces, their oscillation between invisibility and recognition, involuntary memory and deadly force, their material durability across past, present, and future, their accumulation of contradictory meanings (and potential meaninglessness), and their ability to persist and permeate are what give them a protean potency (Stoler 2017: 30-1).

As remnants without fixed significance, traces are not to be read, assigned meaning, but encountered: found or not, used or ignored, engaged or erased. They are not to be charted or collected like 'data', but followed, unfurling their relations and

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extending these. Tracing is a tactile and caring method (see Stoler 2017: 348) that entails proximity, receptiveness, exposure, and vulnerability. It requires willingness to be led by the material, as in a forensic 'art of paying attention' (M'Charek 2023), and to entertain 'counterintuitive' moves, 'listening to images' (Campt 2017) or to insect-eaten archivalia to find their unexpected resonance in diasporic hymns (Manton 2015). Tracing links objects and human actors, including the ethnographer, distributing attention across an expanding web of associations and relations that appears unlimited but is constrained by the ethnographer's movement among traces that call it forth.

The resulting object ethnography records the ethnographer's engagements with materials and other humans and unfolds their relations to past events, actors, and relations, and to their potential futures, as they are made and remade in each encounter, without arranging them into a chronological 'object-biographical' or historical reconstruction. Rather than representing the world, such ethnography seeks to expand it, akin to the practice of 'curation' advocated by Kate Brown (2019) in regard to toxic legacies that, often coextensive with colonial residuals, have become part of landscapes, architectures, and bodies (including at Amani), and must not be contained or explained (away), but traced in their living (sometimes deadly) diffused forms (see also Fennell 2018).

'Toxic' (not by metaphorical slippage, but materially contaminated with persistent, nefarious residues), colonialisms are not fixed in time or place, do not begin or end, but sediment and accumulate, move, morph, mutate, and generate, calling for new ethnographic modes. With regard to colonial ruins, tracing is not about diagnosis and judgement, separating failure and success, or critiquing the causes of failure, but about 'uncrafting objects of failure' themselves (Alexander, introduction to this volume), not so much moving 'beyond' failure (as in ethnographies of lives *despite* apparent failure) but moving *along with* failure, 'staying with' the failing things, the remnants of failure, ethnographically unfolding their plural temporalities.

The uniform

A medium-sized, shirt-like 'safari' jacket with four sewn-on pockets, matched by a pair of wide trousers, locally produced in the 1970s. Heavily faded, the garment's original grey-green colour is preserved where (now missing) buttons and pocket-flaps had protected it from daylight. The sleeves are extended with 5 cm of green material, which also was used to patch up transversal tears in the trousers above the knees. The high-framed black cap with faux-leather visor and buttoned strap likely predates the uniform. A brass coat of arms, to be pinned to the front of the cap, is kept in a small (former Vaseline) tin.

As Clyde Mitchell observed, uniforms shaped 'Africans'' experience of colonial occupation as a 'fixed hierarchy', in which 'a set of distinctive uniforms advertised social position', and invited performative appropriation, as in the Kalela dance's 'pantomime of social structure' (1956: 12). Uniforms worn by Africans embodied shared identities and collectives, sometimes across racial divides, but also subjection and inferiority, underlined by the comparatively poor-quality garments issued to them (Parsons 2004: 24). They could reference colonial violence and provoke fear and anger (Rathbone 2013; White 2000), but also give their bearers status vis-à-vis those lacking European dress, and negotiate access to the colonizer's powers (Hendrickson 1996). They were thus objects of desire, entitlement, and claims, and missed when employers no longer issued them (Hansen 2000: 189).

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Uniforms invited mimesis, role-play, and make-believe, and could be used as a masquerade to assume undeserved status or deceive (Poppe 2013), which in turn drew the colonizers' 'sartorial' dismissiveness (Mokoena 2016). Their ambiguity became apparent around decolonization, when khaki became unfashionable in Nigeria (Renne 2006), and Zaïrians replaced Western suits with Mubutu's 'abacost' (Mulunda 2022), while Zambians included the colonial 'bush suit' as national 'safari suit' (also 'Kaunda suit') into their national arms (Hansen 2023). Meanwhile, the assistants of the 'Africanizing' Rhodes-Livingstone Institute for social research in Lusaka changed from khaki to business suits, while their left-leaning British mentors continued to wear the khaki shorts they had gleaned from colonial administrators (Schumaker 2001: 48, 123, 247).

Like Amani's buildings, books, laboratories, vehicles, and gardens, the driver's uniform is a piece of a disintegrating whole. Yet, unlike other vestiges of Amani, it is not left behind, but privately owned and recognized as a keepsake and potential heirloom. It has endured for decades, breaking and being mended, embodying both fragility and durability. The old-fashioned uniform references multiple, contradictory pasts as it has evolved across diverse political eras and their hopes and failures: German colonial conquest, when job-specific uniforms were introduced; the British occupation, when this particular type was designed; Tanzania's progressive nationalism, when this specimen was made; and subsequent reordering and decline, when uniforms are no longer issued, but old ones continue to be used as tokens of continuity and recollection, and props of everyday status performance.

Driver

My colleague Ann H. Kelly and I first met Mr Shabani, a long-retired driver in his eighties, during the above-mentioned project in 2014 at a roadside marketplace, where he waited for us with two age-mates on the veranda of a mud-walled shop raised above a bus stop on a busy, unpaved road. We had come to ask him about Amani's past, together with Aloyce Mkongewa, a young nature guide living in Amani, son of a lab-attendant-turned-clinician, and grandson of the first research station director's cook, who had become our research assistant. Mariele Neudecker, a British-German artist, who approached ruins, naturalist science, and ethnography with an equal measure of postcolonial discomfort and romanticist naturalism, filmed and photographed the old men and us, the veranda, the road, the children, and other onlookers as Mr Shabani recounted his life.

His father had assisted a botanical research officer in Amani and in 1952 received 'a medal from England, from the Queen'. 'We looked for it in vain', he added, 'probably someone took it and sold it. Only the container remained'. From his father, Mr Shabani heard about the prewar agricultural station, the old botanical gardens with their 'German treasures' and valuable medicinal plants (Gerrets 2019*a*; 2019*b*), the 1949 arrival of Donald Bagster-Wilson, founder of 'Malaria', as workers and neighbours call the station; and he vividly retold events such as when, in the 1950s, a particularly 'harsh' demobbed NCO turned 'Malaria Officer' nicknamed the 'Tall Boss' (*bwana mrefu*) had burned in his car after a drunk-driving accident: 'His dog came running to the office making noises, like iih!'

It was through his father that Mr Shabani got a job as *taniboi* or 'turnboy' (in East African English, a helper travelling with the station's vehicles) around 1950. Later he became a driver, who no longer loaded the car himself: 'Only if I drove alone with a boss,

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I had to show him respect by not letting him carry the luggage'. Before independence, he was promoted 'Head Driver' for the moustached, pipe-smoking, very British director Bagster-Wilson. After decolonization, which Mr Shabani welcomed, as did all African (and many European) staff, he drove the 1960s left-leaning, anti-colonial Dutch mission doctor Jan Lelijveld, appointed by the British funders as last European director to 'Africanize' Amani, and, in the 1970s, Phillip Wegesa, the first African director. Noting that since his retirement he had hardly even gone to the nearby market, he recalled the pleasures of the long journeys abroad he had undertaken, to Kenya and Uganda, on 'official business', carrying a passport, crossing national boundaries, staying in hotels, spending generous allowances in foreign cities.

His bosses, he said, praised him as a fast and safe driver: 'Whoever is driven is the boss, you are just the driver … The boss was to be respected; he could tell you "drive slowly", or "drive fast, so we don't miss the aeroplane", and in any way he wanted'. Underlining the potential of humiliation, but also conviviality, he added: 'I didn't like going with harsh bosses … on a trip, you must be comfortable, talk freely – if you dislike each other, it's not enjoyable'. He retired in the early 1980s, as the station's slow decline commenced. Sharing these stories of 'long ago' with his age-mates gathered with him on the verandah, they laughed about their youthful exploits, the idiosyncrasies of the bosses, and the long-gone progressive national project they had been part of. In their recollections, the station retained its beauty and potential: 'Amani used to be a very big place. No matter what it looks like now, it has a very good name in this world'.

Re-enactment

As physical evidence of this distant past, Mr Shabani then unwrapped his last uniform from a plastic bag. 'We used to be given a new cap and two jackets, a pair of trousers, and white shirts every year. … This uniform I got in 1980, before I retired'. As we passed the items around, he pulled a tin from his pocket, in which, wrapped in a piece of newspaper, lay a brass badge with the insignia of the East African Community that he carefully fixed to the front of the cap.

> When you worked well, you got small things … With the first hat, we were given this 'crown' [and] told to take care of it – that's why it is still new. I will pack it well again and keep it in the box. I take it out sometimes, but I use the hat without attaching it. You will never see it if you come to my home … It is small, but if you sell it, it can bring a lot of money.

As he pulled the uniform over his clothes, he felt into its pockets and recalled: 'In one I had a spanner, and the other I might have carried groundnuts'. With the cap on his head, he stood to attention and saluted us, the returned researchers from Britain. He remembered his pride at the uniform when he went home to his family in the village. 'This uniform brought respect even from police, [who] considered me their fellow boss [*bwana*]. They stopped me, but you heard them say: "Oh he is like us"'. This association with state power was not unambiguous, though, and during fieldwork, villagers commonly suspected drivers of being blood-stealing *mumiani* or *chinjachinja* – local names for a colonial version of vampires (White 2000). Encouraged by the role-play, Aloyce asked for permission to put on the uniform, which on his young body looked even more tattered, and imitated the old man's mock 'British' habitus and accent. Laughing, he exclaimed: 'This was Amani!', adding that his father and grandfather, when working at Amani, had worn uniforms, too. The canopied shopfront had become a stage

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Figure 1. Mr Shabani displaying his uniform at our first meeting at the market, 2014. (Polaroid © Mariele Neudecker.)

for children and passers-by (and the artist, filming over their heads), and the garment a prop of intergenerational storytelling about a lost world (Fig. 1).

This performance exceeded the scholarly collection of oral histories on colonial science that we had envisaged. It drew us into the plot as extras, re-enacting a colonial comedy reminiscent of the 'Carry On' movies that had entertained British and Tanzanian staff and village youth in 1970s Amani. The old man's posture, expressing authority and subjection, felt even more awkward today than it would have done then. It implicated us, anthropologists of colonial heritage, in the latter. We were outed as revenants, uncomfortably stretched between present and past. The exaggerated British accent evoked past humiliations and mocked white authority – including ours. It echoed older instances of joking and mocking, for example about the pipe-smoking ex-Lieutenant-Colonel and Director, whom the drivers named 'dope-smoker' (*banghi*), and the traits of other 'bosses' (*bwana kubwa*): one forgot his child over his preoccupation with catching flies, others drank too much liked 'ladies', or physically assaulted African staff.

Maybe the old man also smiled about his own youthful vanity? Or was it a mournful, nostalgic expression, if not for colonialism or the order it had bequeathed to the new nation, then for his past male authority? Aloyce might have ridiculed his father's generation's colonial deference, but he shared the bystanders' curiosity about the long-gone order and predictability of Amani that the uniform embodied – indeed, his eagerness to accumulate and connect arcane facts about Amani's past spurred our infinite quest for traces (e.g. Geissler 2019) – and when walking through Amani, Aloyce often expressed longing for what he called its erstwhile 'beauty'. Meanwhile, the children just giggled over old men being funny.

Archives

In the station's archive, we found descriptions of uniform colours and shapes for different job groups, and order letters to a local tailor with sketches indicating details and sizes. These documents classified the cast that had populated Amani's

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Figure 2. Photograph from the album of Dr Jan Lelijveld, mid-1960s.

mid-twentieth-century stage by class, race, and skills. Drivers ranked low, above casual workers, below technicians, South Asian administrators, and European scientists (later their Tanzanian heirs). The latter had been free to choose their own wardrobe, although many, up to the 1970s and including some Tanzanians, stuck with khaki. At the time of independence and 'Africanization', when Mr Shabani was a young driver, the older, upper-middle-class British scientists still brought their clothes (including formal dress) from home, while their younger, socially more diverse colleagues adopted casual attire, colourful shirts and dresses, even African batik.

The 'subordinate' staff uniforms' styles carried colonial aesthetics across the threshold of political independence, but they also conferred progressive African identities, as the postcolonial scientific vanguard of the new nation. Uniforms remained attractive to staff, who suggested improved styles (such as long trousers) and insisted on their fair and regular distribution. Uniforms were symbols of an ordered, predictable, progressing world – before and after decolonization. Then, new uniforms were issued annually, by an institute that also provided housing and electricity, repaired infrastructure, tended the landscape, and procured water and firewood, and milk and manure from the station's cattle, all minutely documented in archived receipts. This order ended with the austerity of the late 1980s, that is, before four-fifths of today's population had been born, and had acquired a mythical quality.

Drivers are rarely photographed. Sitting in vehicles, they remain invisible parts of the infrastructure. Two photographs, taken within a decade around 1970, illustrate the uniforms' persistence across changing political and cultural contexts. The first, a mid-1960s black-and-white picture from a director's photo album, depicts his Ford Zephyr (Fig. 2). The driver stands next to the car, but the exposure, favouring paler complexions, makes him unrecognizable in the shade (see, e.g., R. Benjamin 2019:

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Figure 3. Photograph from the album of Dr Frances Bushrod, 1974.

104-8). The uniform, and his formal posture directed at the camera, in contrast to the director's relaxed manners and attire, signal hierarchy and raise colonial associations, in spite of this particular director's strong, lifelong anti-colonial commitment.

By contrast, a series of 1970s colour photos from the album of a European Ph.D. student, who had studied disease-bearing mosquitoes together with the first Tanzanian Ph.D.s at Amani, has a different feel. Taken during a trip to Kenya, on a roadside in evening light, the first shows a bearded British scientist smiling at the photographer, facing away from the young Ph.D. student, whose long hair he seems to hold, while her Tanzanian colleague smiles from the background. In the next, she poses arm in arm with another Ph.D. student in front of the Land Rover, beside a scientist wearing a comical battered hat. The third shows the group from behind (Fig. 3). The young woman, in front of whom the hatted Tanzanian scientist now seems to kneel, turns at the waist and waves at the camera. On the edge of this postcolonial, female-centred tableau stands the driver with his brimmed uniform hat, looking towards the sunset.

Congregation

Long after the end of the original project's fieldwork, in 2018, our family attended Easter service in Amani's Anglican church, built before independence in the workers' settlement below the station. We tried to hide in the back rows, but were ushered into our ancestral seats of sorts, in the swiftly vacated front pews. With a quiet smile, an old laboratory technician passed over his psalter, dustwrapped in the Institute's mosquito-and-microscope arms. The choir, whose young members had replaced the modest Mothers' Union outfits of the past with crisp, wax-print uniforms, advanced towards us, swinging to what sounded like Congolese Rhumba. The leader teasingly invited us to join and, under the expectant smiles from congregation and family, escape was no option. Sheltering from the worshippers' bemused gaze, I retreated through the rows

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of dancing women and youths towards the altar. Yet the sight of my frozen hips made even the church elders seated there lose their old-men-of-science composure in fits of laughter.

Again, I heard older mirth through the hymn's layered beats – although colonial laughter at the colonizer had presumably been less overt. My fruitless attempts at falling into the collective movements re-enacted a long history of physical awkwardness, of khaki shorts out of rhythm and tune. As John Raybould, an octogenarian British entomologist who had spent the 1960s and 1970s in Amani had confessed when we, a few years earlier, had attended a wedding feast at the station's dilapidated clubhouse, dancing had not been his 'thing' even when he was young – although he certainly had preferred the African staff club over the stuffy, middle-class, 'colonial' Amani Club. Other scientists' party photographs from the time suggest that he wasn't the only expat with this handicap. Despite their longing for *Ujamaa* solidarity and post-independence *communitas*, it had not been easy to join in the unfamiliar beats. Amani's Tanzanian denizens, in their turn, had swiftly appropriated the tin drums of the school's marching band for their own church band, and had livened up the postcolonial Anglican psalmody with the rhythms that I now was struggling against.

After the service, we stood in front of the church with the male elders, former laboratory staff, who wore suit-and-tie or 1970s-style Kaunda/Nyerere suits – uniforms with a postcolonial twist – looking old-fashioned beside the colourful costumes of the choir youths. I had donned a black Kaunda suit that I occasionally wear to reconcile formal occasions with tropical temperatures, which earned me amused remarks as nowadays it is associated with retired civil servants or domestic workers. According to his sons, Mr Shabani, too, was wearing his uniform for celebrations in the village, where he was a respected elder, or just to walk around 'when he felt like remembering'. Dressed like this, the elders performed 'modern' men of science and government in front of an audience of less well-to-do villagers, women, and children. They spoke Kiswahili and English rather than Shambala, reflecting their cosmopolitan origins from around Tanzania, where they had been recruited among the then rare school-leavers. Like Mr Shabani, they had later bought fertile land near the station, and while sustaining their families with wages from 'Malaria', they had planted clove trees, which now gave them a steady income. Their houses were cemented, often in modernist designs, and their gardens decorated with exotic flowers, whitewashed stones, and lawns, reminiscent of the station's heyday.

The men's dress code, like their privileged place in the community, derived from their professional past and had endured across historical ruptures. Like the architecture of church, school, labs, and staff housing, and the landscape of lawns, exotic trees, and hedges, the uniforms' design references colonial discipline as well as postcolonial futures, partially fulfilled promises that live on in the tight-fitting Congolese *sappeur* version of the choir uniforms. In people's present lives, uniform suits still mark dignity and aspiration, hold together biographies by evoking earlier life stages, and create the collective of those who once were part of a progressive endeavour. European (male) anthropologists are naturally included among these retirees from modernity, especially if they sport a white beard and wear a Kaunda suit. The uniforms convert the role of 'enlightened' vanguard of science into a respected position in the present: as church elders and successful family men, whose future is secured by regular harvests and rising global spice markets, their wives' business acumen, and above all by

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their well-educated children. Unlike abandoned buildings or apparatus, uniforms are not mere ruins after failure. Living beyond their intended form and function, they embody memories, achievements, and pleasures, and uphold the station's unfulfilled promise.

Collection

Our open-ended fieldwork in the remains of the decaying station brought together a network not just of elderly people around Amani and, in fact, the globe, but also of things: maps and (unbuilt) architectural plans, stored experimental devices and chemicals, Super-8 reels of daily life and work, a buried laboratory bottle in an abandoned roadside bar, sentimental English novels in the guesthouse, Wilhelminian[4] furniture in village homes, tree-high feral tea plants in the former botanical gardens, rows of geraniums bordering overgrown lawns around collapsing bungalows – and surprising connections between them, extending from Amani into European homes and attics, museum collections and laboratories (see, e.g., Kelly 2016).

From our entanglement with the traces grew an urge to care for and hold on to them – maybe an old anthropological impulse to salvage remnants of a modernist culture threatened by rainwater, insects, fungi, and plant growth; maybe an even less innocent compulsion to own and order. This urge to gather, and show, led to an exhibition about Amani in the ethnological museum of my hometown, Hamburg, once Germany's colonial harbour, on the occasion of the centenary of Germany's 'loss' of its colonies, including *Ostafrika*, and the foundation of Hamburg's university (formerly its Colonial Institute) in 1919, which incidentally involved some of Amani's scientific staff.

The driver's uniform was an attractive exhibit: a trace of the station, modestly sized, still used, not just an inanimate thing but evoking its owner's living body. Some days after the church service, we went (together with my teenage son, and our colleague Jehu as driver) to Mr Shabani's home, a permanent house with several bedrooms, next to his sons' homes, and with black-and-white Frisian hybrid cows – first introduced to the area by the station's herd – tethered outside. The sons came to greet us in their father's living room, curious about the unexpected visit of researchers from 'Malaria', as the old man introduced us. When I commented on the uniform caps hanging on the otherwise bare wall, a son remarked, laughing, that his father liked wearing them. The old man fetched the rest of the uniform, and we sat down to talk about the exhibition. As often, we had spoken of our errand too early, before properly greeting family members and taking tea, displaying precisely the undue haste and rude eagerness we are known for (Fig. 4).

While the prospect of the tattered uniform as museum exhibit surprised the family, the idea that Amani deserved commemoration resonated with their perception of the station's importance, and their patriarch's role in it. Our request to borrow the uniform triggered reflections on its monetary value, and historically grounded fears of exploitation. One of the sons proposed a price – I had, naïvely, not anticipated an economic transaction, since I had come to borrow, not buy the uniform – and after we agreed on a fee, a daughter-in-law suggested putting this in writing. A grandson, who, on his grandfather's lap, had seized the opportunity to play with the caps, went for his exercise book, and we signed two copies of an agreement. Before we left, Mr Shabani set about to return the brass coat of arms – the 'crown' – to his bedroom, but I convinced him, if somewhat ashamedly, to let me have it as well.

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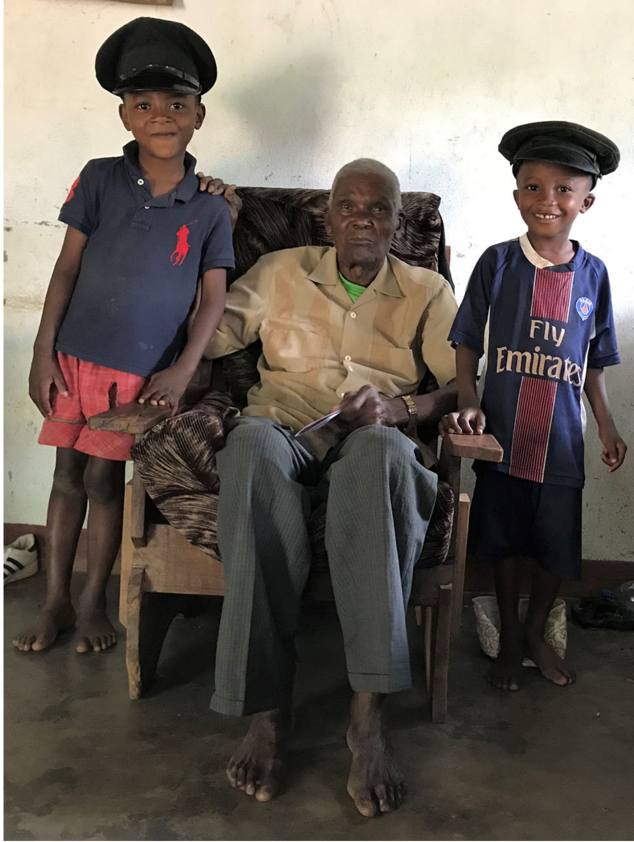

Figure 4. Mr Shabani at home, with his grandsons posing with his drivers' caps for, respectively, 'official travel' and everyday field use, 2018. (Photo by the author.)

We left in temporary possession of the now priced object, much like previous generations of scholars from Amani, who had, driven by wonder and acquisitiveness, brought together eclectic collections of natural and cultural specimens, and who had taken them on long journeys, leaving their rightful owners behind. My impersonation of colonial ethnographic appropriation felt less light-hearted than previous unexpected re-enactments during fieldwork, as it so evidently was shaped by the enduring political-economic injustice of our historical relation, and echoed older stories of expropriation in the name of science: the acquisition of Amani's 200 hectares of land, allegedly for 12 rupees, by the German East Africa Company; or the craniums exhumed, stolen, and brought to German museums by Amani's first director, Franz Stuhlmann, a colonial soldier, naturalist, and 'anthropologist' (i.e. 'racial scientist').[5] Our comparatively progressive goal to create an exhibition on postcolonial Tanzanian science could not assuage my embarrassment (in front of our politically aware son at that). Nor did I find comfort in the family's evident satisfaction about the 'price' they had received in a transaction, the inequality of which they presumably took for granted after 120 years of experience, and that the uniform embodied.

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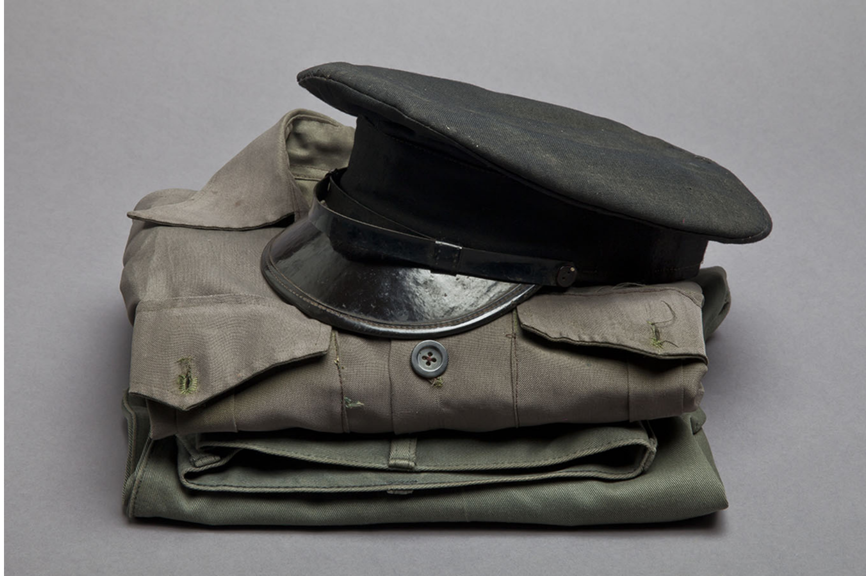

Figure 5. The uniform, photographed for the Hamburg exhibition, 2019. (© Paul Schimweg, MARKK.)

Entwesung

Some months later, I handed the uniform with other objects on loan from the station to a curator of Hamburg's museum of ethnology for a six-week *Entwesung* (disinfestation) in a nitrogen chamber to halt microbial decay and kill insects that could be transmitted from real-life settings to the museum collection. The term – literally 'removal of being' – connotes the removal of living beings, of life force or inner essence.[6] Step by step, from the hasty acquisition contract, through gassing, inventorying, and insurance value assessment, the lived-in garment was converted into a supposedly lifeless museum exhibit that smelled not of engine oil, the owner's body and cooking fire, but insecticide.[7] Extracted from the old man's everyday life, it became 'ethnographic stuff', as the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius had called the African artefacts that he, a century earlier, had brought to the same museum (Fig. 5).

Founded, like Amani, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in 2018 the museum investigated the colonial crimes that may have accounted for its collection and considered restitutions (Gaupp *et al.* 2020). The newly arrived objects – produced after decolonization but evoking deeper memories – did not settle easily here. As exhibit, the uniform resembled the nineteenth-century wooden Tanzanian burial figurine that Stuhlmann, Amani's first German director, had given the museum in 1909, and which the exhibition displayed with other curiosities collected by Amani's scientists. But whereas these African products appropriated by colonial collectors fitted into the logic of a colonial museum and its twenty-first-century decolonial self-critique, the worn modernist uniform of an old but still living man retained despite the chemical cleansing an ambiguity that resisted decolonial categorization. It was neither African nor European, had no unequivocal moral meaning as colonial booty or indigenous creation, nor did it fit a clear temporality: did it represent the past (and which past?), the present, or an unachieved future?

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A newspaper feature announcing the exhibition showed the uniform on a hat stand, cap on top, a rubber-gloved curator by its side; on another photograph, the uniform lay spread out on a white examination table, the curator's hand gently lifting the jacket collar towards the camera. Ironically, given her commitment to museal decolonization, the images evoked older representations of collector and object, hunter and trophy (the journalist's text extolled the challenge of acquiring the uniform). The uniform's status as a postcolonial object that was erroneously but persistently associated with colonialism, and which entered the museum against prevailing currents of restitution, and connoted domination and masculine discipline eschewed by museum staff, was problematic for the curator, who wondered 'how to adequately deal with objects like this, … that tell contradictory stories? … How does one handle objects shaped by their colonial entanglements?' (quoted in Stiekele 2019: 9).

Display

By cleansing its name of the term *'Völker'-Kunde*, which carries legacies of ethnic essentialization and 'scientific' racism, rebranding itself instead neutrally as MARKK (Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt), the museum sought to perform a clean break with its colonial past (Gaupp *et al.* 2020). To this end, the building's earlier metropolitan-centred geographical organization had been abolished, and exhibition halls were whitewashed like modernist galleries, to dispel the 'exoticizing' darkness of earlier ethnographic displays, especially on Africa, that were suspected of 'othering' and of obscuring colonial violence. Where I, as a child, on Sundays could, like our colonial forebears, choose between 'going to' America, Africa, or Asia, signposted in the marble-clad entrance hall, today, visiting families are offered thoughtfully composed exhibitions on, say, contemporary African fashion design, cross-cultural connotations of wolves, or the history of museum illustrators.

The listed Wilhelminian vitrines, now associated with colonial modes of representation (von Zinnenburg Carroll 2017), were boarded up, and museum colleagues did not respond favourably to my suggestion to re-create a naturalist diorama across times, complete with driver, scientists, assistants, plants, animals, and people, even ethnographers, or to take curatorial inspiration from Orhan Pamuk's artful displays of narratively entangled commemorative objects.[8] I would have rather liked to fill display boxes with messy material assemblages – re-creating the curated collages of incidental finds in our co-authored book on *Traces of the future* (Geissler *et al.* 2016), on which the exhibition was based – allowing visitors to appreciate the traces' excess and ambiguity, and be surprised or even delighted, in the sense of Walter Benjamin's 'dark joy of the finding' (2003 [1940]), by their affective pull.

The uniform was an exemplary 'find', rich in contradictory clues – straitjacket and Sunday best, humiliating and dignified, ruining and promising – capturing the ambivalence of the postcolonial-modernist research station. Intertwining historical times and positions, it confused taken-for-granted perceptions about decolonization as rupture from the colonial past (be it in the 1960s or now), and triggered, as we have seen, (re-)enactment and role-play. Ideally, it would have invited the (mainly 'white', generally privileged) exhibition visitors, across the reflective surface of the vitrine's glass, into identification or dialogue with the former bearer(s) and their contradictory existence, countering any all-too-simple historical distancing from the 'colonial' agents, in favour of acknowledging the present past as a shared, compromised legacy.

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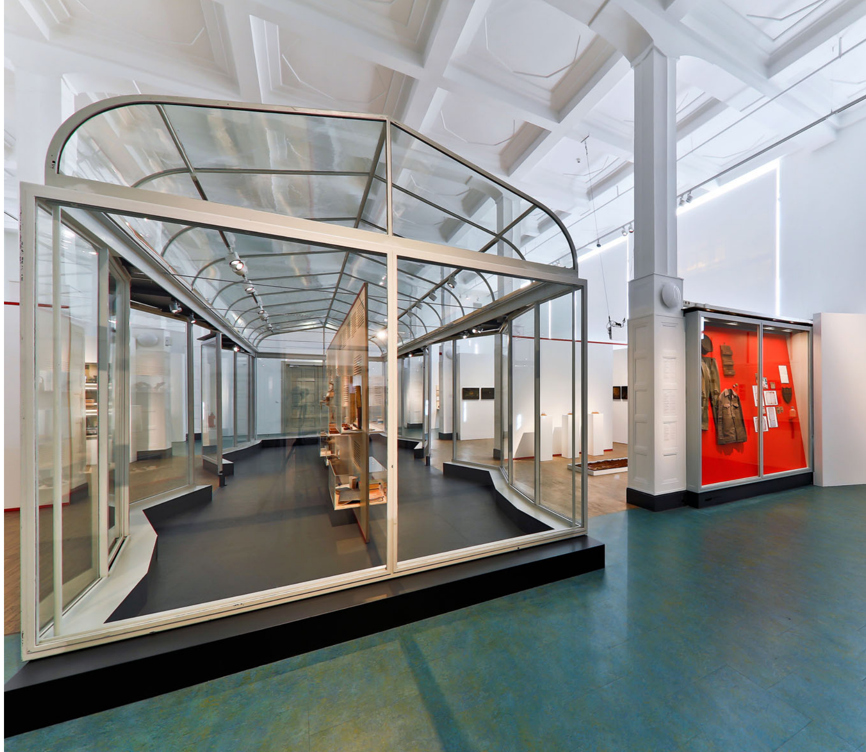

Figure 6. Exhibition view 'Amani', MARKK, Hamburg; uniform in the red vitrine, 2019. (© Paul Schimweg, MARKK.)

Yet the uniform ended up somewhat lonely and dull in a vitrine with an explanatory text (Fig. 6). Without the clutter of historical and everyday attachments that it had taken us to in Amani, the grey, worn garment fell silent, became meaningless, or invited overly facile interpretations. It only returned to life during curatorial tours when it occasioned stories and raised questions about local lives, or if it was viewed in relation to the performance of the Kenyan-German artist Syowia Kiambi, who, dressed in a similar Kaunda suit and a mask from the museum's collection, rummaged through colonial-inflected museum spaces and historical photographs of Amani. Some of the museum visitors were frustrated about the inconclusiveness of the exhibition, even mistook equivocality for colonial revisionism, and demanded more explicit interpretation (Calkins 2020; Gaupp *et al.* 2020), while others appreciated the opportunity to engage with the objects without didactic instruction and, as one polite reviewer put it, were happy that this exhibition 'raised more questions than it answered' (Zinnecker 2019).

Return

Thankfully, the uniform did not end up silenced in its vitrine. Unlike the older exhibits, preserved for posterity, now calling for restitution, it was on temporary loan. Yet its return was not without suspense: after the COVID-19 pandemic had prematurely closed the exhibition, I got stuck with it for two years, fearing that the elderly owner might never see his property restored, which would have rendered our

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appropriation and re-enactment of colonial guilt final, leaving me open to his heirs' justified suspicions. Wherever the uniform had ended up, the garment would have turned into heritage, instead of passing on with its owner, which I had come to think of as the most fitting end for its material life.

In this impasse, the first submission of this essay ended with a contrived funerary fiction, and I was relieved when I, before final resubmission, could carry the uniform back to the Usambara mountains and rewrite the piece On the morning of the restitution, made momentous by its long deferral, Mr Shabani welcomed Aloyce and me with great warmth on his veranda. The old man above all seemed to appreciate that we indeed had returned: 'When other researchers come, they should follow your steps [learn from you]'. The cheeriness, amplified by the backdrop of laughter from gathering sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren, resonated with my own sense of relief.

Learning from our previous impolite rush, we started chatting, but our host reminded us that visitors should show what they brought before conversation. Thus, we unpacked the exhibition catalogue and leafed through it together. Ceremoniously handing the book to his son, Mr Shabani stated 'there's money in this book' – which Aloyce insisted was not about monetary value but worth. Mr Shabani greeted the uniform with palpable pleasure, and put it on, before he opened the tin with the 'crown' – which I, for fear of losing it, had kept with trepidation in my pocket throughout the plane journey. Passing the cap around, his children respectfully repeated his remark, 'it had travelled so far', before placing it on their father's head with a chuckle. If the uniform's *Wesen* (animated being) had been suspended in the museum, its liveliness had now been restored. If anything, its somewhat futile sojourn in the former metropolis had added to its potency back home. The weak exhibit returned as powerful heirloom.

As the daughters-in-law served tea, we paid the remaining fee, which may have been the reason why one of the sons had asked Aloyce, when his father was unwell, whether we would come back. The old man examined the unfamiliar $50 bill and folded it before storing it inside the house. 'He will keep it', Aloyce surmised. 'He will not use it – it has another value for him'. As if to support this, Mr Shabani returned to show us a 1942 10-cent coin, which he and fellow 'treasure-hunters' had found in Amani's German ruins (Gerrets 2019*a*). When we eventually left, he followed us to the gate, wished my children well, and told me to bring them back; turning to his grandchildren gathered behind him, he valued an altogether different kind of trace: 'These ones, they are the benefits (Kisw. *faida*) of [the work at] Amani!'

Dissolution, by way of conclusion

Above, I followed, and occasionally pushed or shifted, a (broadly colonial) trace across situations – between a former colonial outpost and its erstwhile metropolitan centre, everyday use and exhibition display – and across time, between colonial origins, postcolonial lives, and decolonial politics of representation. Our tracing proliferated social, material, and temporal entanglements, without hope for an interpretative endpoint, in recognition of the enduring presence of colonial violence, and that the anthropologist's position in it – as Fichte reminded us – can never be right, must remain ambiguous, as was underlined by our own facile mobility, and our power to move materials, if temporarily. The museum's overall representational project, on the other hand, aimed for historical closure within a 'decolonial' framing, wishing to step out of the shadow of colonialism (and behind it, the darkness of fascism). The tension between moral-political commitment and enduring political-economic

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privilege was here perceived not as an opening, but as a source of discomfort. This *Ambivalenzintoleranz* (inability to engage ambiguity), a useful, if ungainly key term of current public debate in Germany (Bauer 2018), seeks to turn coloniality into a 'an object[t] of failure' (Alexander, introduction to this volume). Yet, in Fichte's terminology, might this, too, qualify as a 'victorious', conquering discourse?

The curatorial collaboration, balancing quite different modes of de- and anti-colonial knowledge-making, almost rendered the uniform lifeless, but never quite, as it continued to raise questions. Is its indisputable modernity vis-à-vis, for instance, the wooden burial figurine, to be associated with the violence and discipline of colonial science, and is its ruination evidence of colonialism's failure? Could it thus serve as a historical boundary object to mark the museum's decolonial stance? Or do its form and 1980s origins instead reference the postcolonial promise of scientific, socialist Africanization? If the latter, is its tattered present state indicative of failed decolonization? Or should it remind us that colonialism hasn't failed – it still shapes the world – and that anti-colonial liberation hence remains an enduring aspiration? Why had the uniform remained in use, forty years after it was issued, its bearer retired, and the station declined? What was its enduring appeal? Does it signal social status, or emanate nostalgia? If so, for what? Empire, scientific socialism, or youthful masculinity and memories of pleasure? And why had a German anthropologist 'collected' it for an ethnographic museum, in 2018?

As a piece of clothing, the uniform engendered performances: from the owner's everyday status display and the role-play of his grandchildren; through the involuntary re-enactments it drew us into – variously playful or emphasizing togetherness, distancing and marking economic inequality, or embarrassing and exposing; to the display as boxed-in, yet unruly historical artefact, the curator's posing with it; and finally in its engagement by an actual performance artist. On each occasion, the uniform established new connections and took on new shapes. Not least, it dissolved the anthropologists' control over the object, their representational distance, and produced unexpected surprises. During our fieldwork in Amani, we had sought to harness this excess in controlled, staged re-enactments of mid-twentieth-century scientific research (Geissler & Kelly 2016*b*). This approach was fruitful, but at the time we had not recognized the greater importance of the involuntary re-enactments, when the objects overpowered us, moving us in unexpected, often awkward ways.

As Sigmund Freud (2002 [1905]) taught us, from repressed ambiguity and uncanniness springs laughter, and, indeed, a thread of mirth runs through our engagements with the uniform. About what and whom do we laugh? Does laughing reflect powerlessness or resistance, create distance or communion, and is it hidden or open? Who can laugh when, about what and whom? Do we, the ethnographers 'after' colonialism, ultimately laugh (or are laughed at) about our own inextricably ambivalent progressive but privileged position in this historical legacy, or about its uncanny propensity to escape our knowledge-making attempts?

Following these performances, and the resulting mirth, our object ethnography dismantles the object of failure that the initial impression of the colonial ruin had invited us to construe. And dissolution might thus be a fitting end to the object itself (DeSilvey 2017). Whether the uniform unravels after the owner's death – be it as discarded waste or as funeral suit – or through everyday use and the grandchildren's play, such a transformation would complete the unravelling of the tattered garment – and by extension of Amani research station – as the object of failure that this essay sought to

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contribute to. The residuals will become part of future processes, through recycling or composting, and what remains will sediment and accumulate like other past hopes and disappointments, with the plastic visor and buttons as durable marks of the modern stratum for some time to come.

As for the postcolonial anthropologist, our editor introduced this collection by pointing out that Beckett's melancholy phrase from *Worstward Ho*: 'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better', had been grossly misread and abused by innovation ideologues as an incitement to move on 'beyond' failure; on the contrary, Alexander implied, *Worstward Ho* is a lament about the inevitability of collapse. Another image from Beckett might fit the reflections above, about the anthropologist who faithfully stays with the sedimented material remainders of failure, instead of rushing to critically overcome, order, or move beyond them: the mound of accumulated debris, into which Winnie cheerfully sinks, slowly but inevitably disappearing, in Beckett's play *Happy Days*.

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NOTES

[1] René Gerrets, Ann H. Kelly, Peter Mangesho, and Branwyn Poleykett, as well as Aloyce Mkongewa, engaged more or less continuously with Amani and each other. The research group's shifting composition did include Tanzanian scholars and artists, but most were of non-African origin. The awkward 'we' below sometimes refers to this heterogeneous group, within which the ideas put forth here took shape; used in a generic sense, 'we' designates anthropologists, mainly from European institutions (sometimes including present and past), who share political-economic and historical privilege and often a 'white' positionality.

[2] It should be emphasized that postcolonial medical and scientific research of course did thrive as a collaborative effort elsewhere in Tanzania – often led by scientists originally trained in Amani, some of whom achieved national leadership and world-wide recognition. Thus, while the station failed its purpose(s), this does not apply in the same way to its inhabitants, nor to science itself.

[3] 'Theory that comes unstuck from its own line of thought, to follow the objects it encounters, or becomes undone by its attention to things that don't just add up but take life of their own as problems for thought' (Stewart 2008: 72).

[4] 'Wilhelminian' designates the heavy, ornamented, often historicist style fashionable during the reign of Germany's last emperor (1890-1918), the era of German colonialism and of Amani's foundational phase.

[5] A journalist's enquiry alerted me to the research stay in Amani, in 1904, of the 'racial scientist' Theodor Mollison, who later supervised the studies of Nazi murderer Josef Mengele.

[6] The term was also used in the context of German extermination camps (see Weiss 2013: 89). For a thorough tracing of chemical, lexical, and economic continuities between conservation, colonialism, and extermination, see Arndt (2022).

[7] This was my perception, although, instead of insecticides, today museums use odourless nitrogen gas.

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[8] See Kowal (2019) on the 'postcolonial' display of a colonial collector's effigies in an ethnographic collection, and their removal as part of museal 'decolonization'.

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L'anthropologie défaillante d'un échec colonial : sur les traces d'un uniforme de chauffeur découvert à la station de recherche d'Amani, en Tanzanie

Résumé

À Amani en Tanzanie, les vestiges d'un laboratoire scientifique vieux d'un siècle constituent la quintessence des reliques modernes. Quand les anthropologues s'intéressent à de telles infrastructures servant à l'acquisition de connaissances initialement coloniales, leur propre implication dans l'objet de l'étude, comme dans ses origines et son ordre épistémologiques et politico-économiques, devient une composante du processus ethnographique. Cet enchevêtrement entre chercheur et matériel de recherche devrait remettre en question les modes réalistes habituels de rédaction ethnographique « à propos » de ces lieux, qui échappent à la position compromise de l'anthropologue en leur milieu. Tout se complique encore quand les sites d'acquisition de connaissances étudiés sont en mauvais état, ayant échoué à atteindre leur but, comme le sont les vestiges d'une institution coloniale à l'abandon. L'auteur se demande ici comment ces ruines de lieux d'acquisition du savoir pourraient transformer les connaissances acquises par les anthropologues qui y travaillent. Au lieu d'ajouter simplement des confessions « réflexives » aux récits réalistes, l'écriture pourrait-elle participer à la défaite que semblent incarner les vestiges de la station scientifique : une écriture non pas faisant suite/allant au-delà de l'échec mais « accompagnant » celui-ci ? À partir d'une ethnographie non représentationnelle et de l'approche de la défaite épistémique comme méthode anticoloniale selon l'anthropologue-poète Hubert Fichte, l'auteur relate ses interactions avec un fragment de la station scientifique : un uniforme de chauffeur. Il expérimente ainsi une ethnographie de l'objet qui « échoue » à dissocier l'auteur et l'objet ou à régler la question de l'échec et, au lieu de cela, met en avant la performativité, l'ambiguïté et la joie comme points de départ d'une ethnographie de, et dans, nos ruines modernes.

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