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Margaret Trowell's School of Art. A Case Study in Colonial Subject Formation

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Zusammenfassung

Margaret Trowell (1904–1985) founded one of the first schools of ›fine art‹ for Africans in the Uganda Protectorate in the 1930s. This essay argues that both Trowell's arguments for introducing fine art into the ›indigenous‹ curriculum and accounts of her teaching methodology reveal that, despite her extensive and sophisticated knowledge of the material cultures of East Africa, and despite her emancipatory intentions, the vision that underpinned her approach to art education was one aiming at the extension of colonial governmentality into the aesthetic realm.

In den 30er Jahren gründete Margaret Trowell (1904 – 1985) im Protektorat Uganda eine der ersten Kunstschulen für Afrikaner. Obwohl sie über umfassende und detaillierte Kenntnisse der materiellen Kulturen Ostafrikas und emanzipatorische Absichten verfügte, lassen ihre Begründung für die Einführung der ›schönen Künste‹ in den Lehrplan der ›Eingeborenen‹ und die Erläuterung ihrer Unterrichtsmethoden erkennen, dass Trowells Ansatz der Kunsterziehung letztlich zur Ausweitung kolonialer Gouvernamentalität auf den ästhetischen Bereich führte.



Susanne Stemmler (Hg.)

**Wahrnehmung, Erfahrung,
Experiment, Wissen
Objektivität und
Subjektivität in den
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*The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.*¹

I

When Margaret Trowell began campaigning for the formal teaching of arts and crafts to British colonial subjects in the Uganda Protectorate in the 1930s, she was partly motivated by her concern for the apparent decline of the region's 'native' cultures. Unless something was done, she warned,

“one whole side of the life of the African people will, at best, be submerged under western materialism for several generations, at the most it may even go altogether.”²

Trowell had reasonable grounds for making such a prediction: in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Christian missionaries had set out to undermine and to dismantle the indigenous cultures of East Africa so as to demolish the 'pagan' belief systems within which they were embedded. Producing Christian converts entailed, as they saw it, the obliteration of “native claims to culture”,³ and thus swathes of indigenous cultural production and practice were destroyed, confiscated and outlawed.

Until the 1930s, in the handful of schools in the Uganda Protectorate that offered a western-style education to the children of the indigenous elite, arts and crafts occupied the most inferior position in the hierarchy of subjects. To a certain extent, the parents were responsible: they sent their children to school “to learn the skill of the European”:⁴ they saw no sense in schools offering subjects that could just as easily be taught at home. Trowell also observed that handwork was something the students themselves seemed to feel was beneath them: “During those early years”, she later recalled, “any attempt to arouse interest in the indigenous crafts was met with a deep suspicion as an attempt to keep [the African students] down to a lowly level”.⁵ This was a reflection of

1 Edward Said: *Culture and Imperialism*, New York 1994, p. xiii.

2 Margaret Trowell: “Suggestions for the Treatment of Handwork in the Training of Teachers for Work in Africa”, in: *Oversea Education*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (January 1936), pp. 78–84, here p. 78.

3 Olu Oguibe: “Nationalism, Modernity, Modernism”, in: Olu Oguibe: *The Culture Game*, Minneapolis/London 2004, p. 47–59, here p. 49.

4 Esther Koeune: “Our African Schools”, in: *Uganda Teachers Journal*, Vol. 4, No.1 (July 1937), p. 38, quoted in George Kyeyune: “Art in Uganda in the Twentieth Century”, University of London 2002, p. 48 (unpublished PhD Thesis).

5 Mrs Margaret Trowell MBE, “School of Fine Art, Makerere University, Uganda”, Memorandum, Margaret Trowell Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MSS. Afr. s. 1825/114.

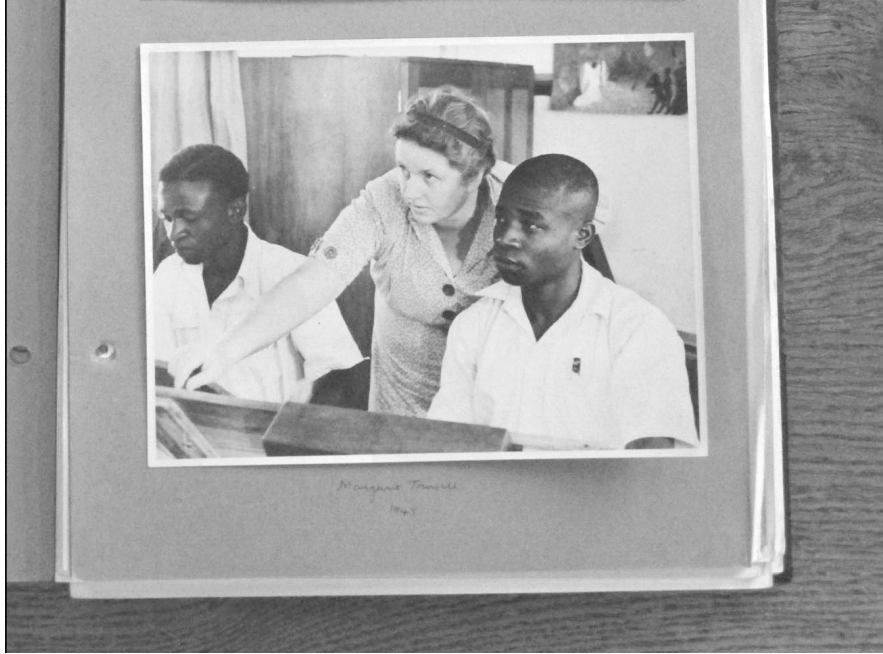


Fig. 1: Margaret Trowell teaching at Makerere College (students' names unknown, circa 1953).



Fig. 2: Margaret Trowell installing an exhibition of her students' work (date and location unknown).

local class politics – as Trowell herself explained, “[i]n Uganda there is a definite native aristocracy, and crafts are considered to be the work of the peasants”;⁶ but it was also perhaps an indication of the perceived superiority of a European ‘academic’ curriculum.

It should be noted that the colonisers’ wholesale reorientation of local economies, in particular the creation of a peasant class and an urban sub-proletariat, was designed to promote western materialism at the expense of indigenous cultural and economic practices. And given that an important function of any colony was to provide a market for the “cheap”, “shoddy” western products that Trowell so despised, it should have come as no surprise to her that it proved so hard to persuade “the girls” (that is, her adult female servants) to so much as “sew their own dresses”.⁷

Margaret Trowell fundamentally questioned the value of promoting materialist western culture in Britain’s African colonies. She conceded that one could not “reasonably” expect self-sufficiency from Africans already living and working in “European towns”,⁸ but she suggested that in a “primitive” place like the Uganda Protectorate, for the majority of indigenous population, “machine-made goods” were the “real luxuries”, because most of them still lived in abject poverty and squalor.⁹ She described contemporary indigenous life thus in an essay published in the British government journal *Oversea Education* in 1936:

“Home for [indigenous Africans] means a leaking mud hut, furniture a low stool, a few horizontal sticks covered with a skin for a bed, cooking and eating utensils badly fired earthenware pots, clothing a skin or strip of cheap cotton knotted toga-wise over one shoulder.”¹⁰

The teaching of arts and crafts was, Trowell argued, key to the success of Britain’s ‘civilising mission’. Given the “primitive” poverty in which, she claimed, most East Africans lived: “Of what use [was] it to attempt to raise their standard of living unless by the work of their own hands?”¹¹ At an “out-school” in a remote rural area, where the indigenous population still lived the “simple” life, for example, Trowell proposed, children could “really set to work to improve their local conditions” by making the things that their communities needed for “better living”.¹²

In advocating for the elevation of craft and craftsmanship as the soundest route to a civilised life in East Africa, Trowell repeatedly cited medieval Europe, “where small groups of people were self-supporting and yet where civilisation reached a high standard” as her inspiration and her example.¹³ By 1910, less than 20 years after the establishment of the Uganda Protectorate, the indigenous population was already agitating for the kind of academic education that (they assumed) would make them eligible for positions of

6 Margaret Trowell: “The Kampala Art Exhibition – A Uganda Experiment”, in: *Oversea Education*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (April 1939), pp.131–135, here p. 132.

7 Margaret Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts: Their Development in the School*, London 1937, p. 35.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 35–6.

9 Trowell: “Suggestions for the Treatment of Handwork”, l.c., p. 80.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

11 *Ibid.*

12 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, p. 35–36.

13 Trowell: “Suggestions for the Treatment of Handwork”, l.c., p. 80.

authority within the colonial administration.¹⁴ But to Trowell's mind, by 1936 there was *already* an "overabundance" of young East Africans in search of white collar jobs.¹⁵ What she felt was required, rather, was "the vigorous craftsmanship of a healthy peasant population",¹⁶ and it was Europe in the twelfth, and not the twentieth century that she deemed the most appropriate model. The Middle Ages were, Trowell claimed, the "door [...] best fitted" to East Africans' "stage of development" – a view which closely reflects the social evolutionist ideology that underpinned British imperial policy in this period, according to which, the brain structure and intellectual capabilities of Africans were believed to be far less developed than that of Europeans. "The African", according to the colonial administrator Lord Frederick Lugard's famous formulation, "[held] the position of a late-born child in the family of nations, and must as yet be schooled in the discipline of the nursery".¹⁷

Trowell's desire to remake twentieth-century East African culture in the mould of medieval Europe was also borne of her strong religious convictions. Although, to my knowledge, neither she nor her husband Hugh were ever formally employed as missionaries, they had met through the London University Student Christian Movement, and they both appear to have had a strong sense (Hugh was a medical doctor) that they had been called to East Africa, where there was "exciting work"¹⁸ to be done. Like many other committed European Christians of the period, Trowell displayed a marked dislike for the industrialised society into which she herself had been born. To her, modern Britain was "unimaginative" and "mechanical" – a profoundly alienating and spiritually impoverished place, where people were "cold and blasé and [had] lost the gift of entering into the world".¹⁹ What appealed to her about the Middle Ages was the centrality of religion to everyday life: it was, in her eyes, a time when work, play and the natural world were infused with spirituality, when "all the craft of the artist and musician, all the colour and wealth of drama were given back to the Creator".²⁰ The strong correlation between medieval Europe and early twentieth century Africa was, for her, evinced by the central role that religion and spirituality were known to have played in pre-Christian African societies, and in particular by the supreme importance of sculptural objects in ritual and worship in Central and West Africa.²¹ Life and society had changed too greatly in Britain for the clock to be turned back, but shaping the development of supposedly primitive,

14 " ... Uganda is in very bad need of education to enable her people to meet modern affairs. The present schools we have in Uganda are under the management of missionaries whom we thank very much but the standard of these schools is very low. It is so low that one who leaves these schools after having obtained a first certificate hardly gets any good job in offices." ("Minutes of a meeting of the Young Baganda Association, 22 December 1919", in: Donald Anthony Low: *The Mind of Baganda*, London 1971, p. 52, quoted in George Kyeyune: "Art in Uganda in the Twentieth Century", l.c., p. 34).

15 Trowell: "Suggestions for the Treatment of Handwork", l.c., p. 79.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

17 Frederick Lugard: *The Rise of Our East African Empire*, Vol.1, Edinburgh/London 1893, p.74–75, quoted in: Sunanda K. Sanyal: "Imaging Art, Making History: Two Generations of Makerere Artists", Emory University 2000, p. 32 (unpublished PhD thesis).

18 Elsbeth Joyce Court: "Margaret Trowell and the Development of Art Education in East Africa", in: *Art Education*, Vol. 38, No. 6 (November 1985), pp. 35–41, here p. 37; and Margaret Trowell: *African Tapestry*, London 1957, p. 15.

19 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 19, p. 7–8.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

culturally impoverished East African societies clearly represented an opportunity to resuscitate the lost medieval idyll, and unlike the generation of missionaries who preceded her, Trowell hoped that the spiritual dimension of East African cultures, rather than being erased, might simply be retooled in the service of a Christian god.²² In fact, given the low literacy rates among the indigenous population, very few East Africans could read the Bible for themselves, and so the visual arts and the theatre were crucially important ways of spreading the gospel. Art, she argued, was “far more important in the education of the child or convert than is argument, because it appeals to our subconscious emotions which lie deeper than our rational mind”.²³ Faith might be preached and read in the churches, but Trowell claimed that the “natives” needed to “see [...] with their eyes in order to understand”.²⁴

But schooling for Trowell – and, I suspect, for Lugard – did not refer merely to practical, technical and religious education; its aim was also to teach Africans to understand and hence to fit them to occupy the subordinate position ascribed to them within the colonial hierarchy. East Africans’ “blind leap from the primitive to twentieth-century life” had resulted in what Trowell considered to be a worrying “absence”, in Africans, “of any historical sense of the achievements and discoveries of the past”.²⁵ She observed, in “[t]he more sophisticated native who has had some education, has drifted to the towns, and has begun to use the material comforts provided by the white man”, not only a near total lack of agency (note the passivity of the indigenous subject of her sentence here), but also:

“an extraordinary lack of imagination or wonder; an acceptance of the achievements of the white man as something obtained without struggle or perseverance by the superior race. An aeroplane is just the white man’s bird which he has in all probability always possessed, cotton piece-goods may have grown in bales for all he knows and cares, and the solution of the problem of a rainproof roof will always be satisfactorily met by a sheet of corrugated iron.”²⁶

In Trowell’s view, exposure to European goods and technology under colonialism was not spurring East Africans into innovation and self-improvement. Rather, she perceived it to be fuelling their apparent laziness and complacency. Teaching “good” craftsmanship would, she argued, meet an “obvious”, and “*psychological* need”: firstly it would teach the colonised to appreciate the value of labour – “the worth of doing” – within the capitalist colonial economy. Secondly, the effort of learning to make things themselves would help to instill in Africans the idea that “the white man’s” social, economic and

22 For a fascinating discussion of pre-industrial (‘pre-lapsarian’) England as a model for missionaries seeking to ‘remake’ indigenous communities in nineteenth-century South Africa, for example, see John L. Comaroff: “Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience: Models of Colonial Domination in South Africa”, in: *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (November 1989), pp. 661–685.

23 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 16.

24 “As one old native woman remarked after a Christmas play, ‘We hear you preach and read in church, but we don’t understand. Now we have seen this thing with our eyes and we can understand.’” (Ibid., p. 13.)

25 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 36.

26 Trowell: “Suggestions for the Treatment of Handwork”, l.c., p. 79.

political advantages were borne of merit. In other words, learning crafts would help teach British colonial subjects to know their place.²⁷

II

By the 1930s there was more or less a consensus within the British colonial establishment, based on beliefs akin to Trowell's, regarding the benefits of teaching the indigenous African population crafts that would be "useful to various missions in the colony".²⁸ But the question of whether or not to educate them in the making of fine art – that is, art "created primarily for aesthetic and intellectual purposes and judged for its beauty and meaningfulness"²⁹ – remained far more controversial. Within the racist schema of social evolutionist doctrine, whereby, to quote Trowell herself, the "native African" was, in 1937, of equivalent intelligence and ability to "the unspoilt European child",³⁰ the sophisticated aesthetic sensibility purportedly required for the production of fine art remained "a crucial signifier" of the "civilised station" that so many Europeans still maintained Africans were as yet incapable of attaining.³¹ Thus, for example, Sir Hugh Clifford, a Governor of the Gold Coast colony, remarked:

"The West African Negro has often been reproached with his failure to develop any high form of civilisation. It has been pointed out *ad nauseam* that he has never sculpted a statue, painted a picture, produced a literature, or even invented a mechanical contrivance worthy of the name, all of which are perfectly true."³²

As Olu Oguibe notes in his 1995 essay, "Nationalism, Modernity, Modernism", this "underprivileging fiction" – that Africans were incapable of producing fine or 'high' art – "translated into a pedagogical principle", and many of Trowell's contemporaries involved in indigenous education elsewhere on the continent took the position that, since only Europeans possessed a genuine aesthetic sensibility, "[t]eaching an African the art of a white man [was] not only a waste of time but also a misplaced value".³³

But Margaret Trowell did not share this point of view. Her neo-medieval aspirations for an artisanal god-fearing Africa were predicated on a rejection of the European post-Renaissance segregation and hierarchisation of fine and applied arts, and the concomitant fetishisation of individual genius and sensibility. She preferred to define art as "all worthy human handicraft", "of the people and natural to the people".³⁴ As she wrote in an article for the *Uganda Journal* in 1939:

27 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 36 (my italics).

28 Akinola Lasekan: "Western Art on African Shores", University of Nigeria, Nsukka 1966 (unpublished manuscript), quoted in: Oguibe: "Nationalism, Modernity, Modernism", l.c., p. 48.

29 "Fine Art", in: *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fine_art (last accessed 21 September 2013).

30 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 49.

31 Oguibe: "Nationalism, Modernity, Modernism", l.c., p. 48.

32 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 48.

33 A comment by George Fowler left in the visitors book of the celebrated Nigerian modernist painter Aina Onabolu (1882 – 1963) in his studio in Lagos, 13 August 1938, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 48.

34 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 4.

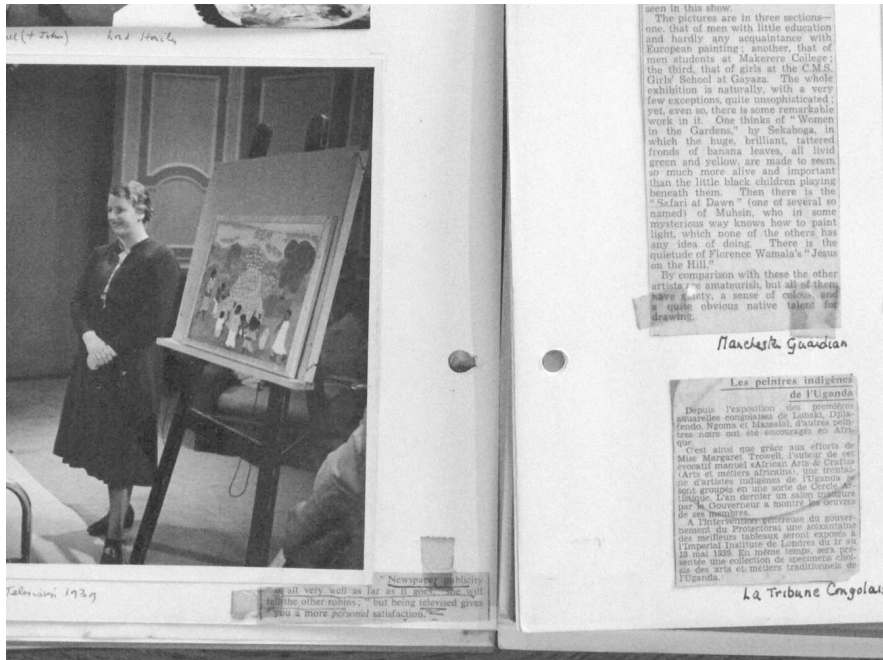


Fig. 3: Margaret Trowell on London Television in 1939 (left), promoting the exhibition of her students's work at the Imperial Institute.

“Anything which man makes, his house, his tools, his pots, can be a work of art, and when we are considering the art of a people who had no paper, canvas or paint, we must use the word in this wider sense. Even the usual distinction of ‘arts’ and ‘crafts’ gives the making of utilitarian but beautiful things a lesser artistic value than painting or sculpture, a distinction which I think we should try to avoid.”³⁵

Trowell’s position was that Africans were already artists, and the evidence was there for all to see. Furthermore, she believed that “pageantry and colour and symbolism” in all possible forms and media had to be pressed into the service of Christian religious instruction. Art was “necessary” to religion – “necessary as an expression of the feelings of the worshippers and necessary as an instrument of education”, used “both to express the highest in man and to teach a humble illiterate people, whose book had perforce to be picture, drama, and stone”.³⁶ Painting and sculpture were, then, vital tools in the struggle to bring indigenous East Africans closer to a Christian god.

I would argue, furthermore, that by virtue of the teacher training she received at the Institute of Education in London in the 1920s, Trowell actually viewed fine art education as essentially consistent with and not antithetical to the social evolutionist doctrine that

35 Margaret Trowell: “From Negro Sculpture to Modern Painting”, in: *Uganda Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 41 (1939), pp. 169–175, here p. 171.

36 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 16 and p. 7.

had hitherto precluded its admission to the indigenous curriculum in Britain's African colonies. Her teacher and long-time mentor Marion Richardson, pioneer of the British New Art Teaching and New Education Movements,³⁷ was an early proponent, within the United Kingdom, of ideas "centred on the proposition that art was an aspect of human development, the absence of which impaired mental growth and fitness".³⁸ Art must be taught, so the theory went, and creativity and self-expression must be encouraged in order for children to mature into healthy, well-rounded individuals. Thus Richardson developed and promoted a teaching practice designed to encourage "an essential creativity – and originating activity – in children not specifically destined for an aesthetic way of life", focusing on the nurturing and strengthening of each students' unique inner vision and their "power of seeing things in the mind's eye".³⁹ She did this by largely abandoning the traditional art syllabus, which was based on object drawing, and instead replacing it mainly with compositional exercises based on her students' mental visualisations. Unlike the technical and impersonal education then generally on offer, Richardson's teaching technique focused on the cultivation of sensibility. Giving the children "complete confidence in their inner vision as the seeing eye", would, it was hoped, enable them to express – and even to *be* themselves more fully when they grew up.⁴⁰

Trowell was building on such ideas when she later argued that it was essential for the proper mental and psychological development of East Africans that they were encouraged to "exercise [their] emotional and instinctive faculties through the practice of the arts".⁴¹ She claimed that the need for artistic expression had acquired "a special urgency in the transition of the African from the old primitive instinctual response to life to the new intellectual and rational approach":⁴² in other words, art was crucial to their development into civilised beings. Like her progressive counterparts in Europe, Trowell spoke against "the dangers of an educational system that stress[ed] the absorption of knowledge [over] the development of original creative energy".⁴³ Her task, and that of her colleagues in the colonies, "distressed by the African's attitude towards education as a means to a higher wage rather than a doorway to a wider life"⁴⁴ was to "teach the African

37 "The essential features of [the New Education Movement] have been identified as: taking account of the personality of the child; and aiming for a better society, a better world, a new era." (Bruce Holdsworth: "Marion Richardson (1892–1946)", in: Mervyn Romans (ed.): *Histories of Art and Design Education*, Bristol 2005, EPUB File, Chapter 10.

38 David Therewood: "From Imperialism to Internationalism: Policy Making in British Art Education, 1853 – 1944, with Special Reference to the Work of Herbert Read", in: Kerry Freedman and Fernando Hernández (eds.): *Curriculum, Culture and Art Education*, New York 1998, pp. 133–148, p. 139.

39 *Ibid.* For more on the work and ideas of Marion Richardson, see: Marion Richardson: *Art and the Child*, London 1946; Peter Smith: "Another Vision of Progressivism: Marion Richardson's Triumph and Tragedy", *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Spring, 1996), pp. 170–183; and Bruce Holdsworth: "Marion Richardson (1892–1946)", l.c.

40 See Roger Carline: *Draw They Must: A History of Teaching and Examining of Art*, London 1968, pp. 168–170.

41 Mrs K. M. Trowell: "Modern African Art in East Africa", in: *Man*, Vol. 47 (January 1947), pp. 1–7, here p. 4.

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.* While I can only agree that a well-rounded education should offer more than the enhancement of one's earning capacity, I cannot help but find disingenuous Trowell's and her contemporaries' frequently articulated 'distress' at some Africans' money-oriented attitudes towards education.

how to live better”.⁴⁵ Through lessons in art making and art appreciation, those Africans with access to formal European schooling could be led, Trowell argued, to develop more refined sensibilities, to acquire “good taste”, and to discover the “richness of life”.⁴⁶

An appreciation of the arts would help educated East Africans, Trowell claimed, to acquire not only spiritual, psychological and emotional fulfilment and “a sense of the value which a cultured people should attach to art”,⁴⁷ it would actually also help them to acquire *personality* itself: for she also believed that a key indicator of the backwardness of East Africans was what she deemed their weak sense of individual identity. And crucially, and in spite of her dislike of western materialism, she nonetheless viewed this lack of a strong sense of individual personhood as impeding East Africans’ performance in the capitalist colonial economy: “Unsophisticated man”, as she saw it, was insufficiently “conscious of himself as a person”, and instead identified too strongly as a member of a community, a tribe or a group.⁴⁸ As she stated in an excoriating assessment of “traditional” African life, delivered in the course of her presidential address to the Uganda Society in 1946, in “the old African set-up”, people were, in all aspects of life, excessively interdependent, and so there was little incentive for “over work as there was no money factor” and because all benefits were shared within the group, there was “no reason for storing the reward for extra work”.⁴⁹ The “Pre-Logical stage” would, she claimed, only be passed when “the African cease[d] to be merely a part of the tribe, which in its turn [was] subjected to the unseen forces behind the visible world, and [became] an individual looking out on a world of individuals”.⁵⁰ The child-centred New Art Teaching approach to the teaching of easel painting and sculpture in primary schools, in which the capacity for self-expression was nurtured and the pupil was encouraged to focus on developing and honing his or her own unique inner vision can, in this context, be seen, then, as an approach well-suited to encouraging indigenous East Africans to become more individualistic and self-sufficient – these qualities being “intrinsic” to the “pattern of life” to which an East African “must [...] acquiesce”, Trowell argued, if “he is to make terms with the modern world and have his share of it”.⁵¹

The indigenous population was at the bottom of the colony’s economic and social hierarchies. The appeal of a ‘European’ education for them was obviously its promise of a pathway to power, wealth and self-determination.

45 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 39.

46 Ibid, p. 17. Trowell describes her “experiments with Africans in regard to ‘good taste’” on p. 60–61.

47 Trowell: “The Kampala Art Exhibition – A Uganda Experiment”, l.c., p. 133.

48 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p.6–7.

49 Margaret Trowell, quoted in Anonymous: “The African’s Changing Values: Conflict Between Old and New: Uganda Society Presidential Address”, in: *Uganda Herald*, Vol. 50, No. 1846, 30 (October 1946), pp. 3–5, here p. 4. Founded in 1923 as the ‘Uganda Literary and Scientific Society’, the Uganda Society fostered and facilitated scientific, literary, social, economic and cultural activities in the Uganda Protectorate and the subsequent Republic. The society has been publishing the *Uganda Journal* since 1934. It was one of the earliest, most successful and most influential literary and scientific journals to emerge from Britain’s colonies. Until the late 1960s, the society was dominated by Europeans. Margaret Trowell was the Society’s President in the 1940s (I have not as yet been able to establish the exact dates.).

50 Trowell: “From Negro Sculpture to Modern Painting”, l.c., p. 173.

51 “But Africa has now tasted the new and having once tasted she cannot go back; she must go on into the new world and not pick and choose what she wants and leave the rest. *If she chooses the new world of better living conditions*, of transport and schools and hospitals, of cups and clothes and bicycles, *she must take it under the same conditions as the rest of the world and her pattern of life*

It was ultimately on the basis of these arguments – that, contrary to popular European opinion, Africans were indeed capable of art and, albeit to a limited extent, were already producing it; that learning to make and to appreciate the ‘higher arts’ would enhance their intellectual and psychological capabilities; that art would aid in the process of converting them to Christianity and better fit them to fulfil and to appreciate the role assigned to them in the British colonial state – that, in 1937, Trowell was able to persuade Douglas Tomblings, the then Principal of Makerere College School for Boys in Kampala, to permit her to offer classes to volunteer students on the verandah of her nearby house. Only three young men attended the first lesson, but the class soon grew in size, its initial make-up comprising chiefly pupils from the school, assistant teachers and dressers from nearby Mulago Hospital.⁵² In 1939, following successful exhibitions of her students’ work at Namirembe Anglican Cathedral in Kampala and at the Imperial Institute in London,⁵³ Trowell’s art classes were officially incorporated into the Makerere College curriculum, becoming first a “minor subject” and then an “optional major subject” on a par with English and Mathematics in the College Higher Arts Diploma – which was, at that time, the highest educational qualification attainable by Africans in the Protectorate.⁵⁴ When, after World War Two, Makerere College School began negotiations to enter into special relations with the University of London, Trowell mounted a spirited and ingenious campaign for the retention of the art classes.⁵⁵ She was successful, and so, when Makerere College was elevated to university status in 1949, it was highly unusual in doing so with a Fine Art department. The Makerere College School of Art is, to date, the first art school in East Africa known to have been based on the European model, and it was, until comparatively recently, one of a mere handful of institutions in all of anglophone Africa where it was possible for Africans to gain ‘professional’ training in the subject. It quickly attracted students from across the continent.

and thought must change accordingly.” (Margaret Trowell, quoted in Anonymus: “The African’s Changing Values”, l.c. pp. 3–5, p. 4 [my italics].

In Elsbeth Court’s account of Trowell’s teaching methodology, written in the 1980s, she observes that “[i]n the thirties there was no indigenous society or class larger than the tribe, hence there was no genre of contemporary or inter-tribal art” (my italics; Elsbeth Joyce Court: “Margaret Trowell and the Development of Art Education in East Africa”, l.c., p. 39). This seems to imply that for Court (and perhaps also for Trowell), one requires the context of a form of social organisation akin to the nation-state in order to produce contemporary art – or, at the very least, for Europeans to perceive a non-European art practice as being truly contemporary. It would follow, that an underlying long-term aim or outcome of teaching art in the colonies would be the development or strengthening of a ‘national-type’ cultural identity. I say ‘national-type’ rather than ‘national’, of course, because colonies are *not* nations.

52 Trowell: *African Tapestry*, l.c., p. 103.

53 Ibid, p. 105–107. Established as a result of the British Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886, the Imperial Institute was to establish permanent exhibition space for the British Empire in the nation’s capital. The British government changed its name to the Commonwealth Institute in 1958. It was closed in 2000.

54 Trowell: “School of Fine Art, Makerere University”, l.c., p. 6.

55 Trowell: *African Tapestry*, p. 107–109. See also Margaret Trowell: “Development of the Art School”. Memorandum, 1949. Makerere School of Art, 3 June – 29 July 1949. Collection: Confidential (Office of the President), Box 67, Ref. 593. Uganda National Archive.

III

It was this fine art curriculum, which Trowell developed with the support and guidance of Marion Richardson and her former tutors at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, that made the art school what Trowell herself described as a ground-breaking “experiment of great value”.⁵⁶ This is because by teaching figurative drawing, painting and sculpture, she was effectively introducing entirely new art forms to the region. Unlike in West and in Central Africa, there was no pre-existing tradition of figurative art in the East that Trowell felt she could either refer to for aesthetic strategies or, indeed, build upon. In the apparent absence of “great traditions” to observe and to negotiate, Trowell designated the cultural terrain in which she began teaching as “almost unspoilt virgin soil”. The “game” – which is how she referred to her task of developing of indigenous fine art practice in an essay in 1939 – began, as far as she was concerned, on ‘terra nullius’, and wholly under British instruction.⁵⁷

It is here, in relation to the teaching of figurative arts ‘not native’ to East Africa, that the concern first emerges, within Trowell’s texts, about the extent to which these art works, produced by African students under the instruction of a European teacher, trained in Europe, might be distinguished from those produced by artists or art students of European extraction. Her writing articulates a strong desire for this ‘new art’ to bear little or no European resemblance – even though, as she understood it, her students’ work had no indigenous aesthetic antecedents, and even though the form, the materials and the media had effectively all been introduced by her.

It must be acknowledged that Trowell’s aspirations for a distinct, “true African tradition of art”⁵⁸ are partly borne of her genuine appreciation of African cultures and cultural practices, and of her desire for those practices, rather than simply being “swamped beneath the inrush of Western goods and Western teaching”, to evolve and develop with self-confidence in the modern age.⁵⁹ And as Elsbeth Court points out, they are also rooted in Trowell’s mistaken belief that figurative image-making is a universal technique and not a “culturally-derived” practice.⁶⁰ Believing “picture-making” to be universal, she imagined that was possible, to a greater or lesser extent, to teach “the principles of art” without also imparting the cultural value system within which those principles were embedded.⁶¹

56 Trowell: “Modern African Art in East Africa”, l.c., p.1. See also Trowell: *African Tapestry*, l.c, pp. 103–128.

57 Margaret Trowell: “The Kampala Art Exhibition – A Uganda Experiment”, l.c., p. 132. There was one other British art teacher in the Uganda Protectorate at the time that Trowell began her classes: Geraldine Fisher, who taught art to the daughters of the indigenous elite at Gayaza – a Church Missionary School near the capital city of Kampala. She and Trowell mounted a few joint exhibitions of her students’ work but Fisher published very little, and she never enjoyed Trowell’s level of influence or recognition. For more on Geraldine Fisher, her approach and the work of her students, see George Kyeyune: “Art in Uganda in the Twentieth Century”, l.c., pp. 60–64.

58 Lord Hailey, quoted in Trowell: *African Tapestry*, l.c. p. 106 [my italics].

59 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 2.

60 Elsbeth Joyce Court: “Margaret Trowell and the Development of Art Education in East Africa», l.c., p. 39.

61 “I think that we should give to the African all that we have in our experience – the principles of art, the use of material, and the like, but that we should leave him as far as possible to express the African spirit in the product. We may then establish in time a true African tradition of Art.” (Colonial

Trowell's arguments in favour of the teaching of arts and crafts in the colonies are based upon the same assumption as the civilising mission itself – namely that the indigenous African population could learn from and adopt aspects of other cultures. Given East Africans' supposed cultural abjection, this was deemed an imperative: the colonial administrator Sir Donald Cameron, in his address to the Royal Empire Society stated, as a matter of official British Government policy, that “the cultural poverty of the native tribes” of East Africa made it “inevitable that they must get their culture from the West.”⁶² But as Mr H. Jowitt, then Director of Education in the Uganda Protectorate, warned in his preface to *African Arts and Crafts*, Trowell's guide for European art teachers, in 1937, “to alienate [the African] from his own art” would be “as deplorable as to alienate him from those of his own blood.”⁶³ It was of vital importance, therefore, that Trowell and her many ‘friends’ working in missions and schools all over Britain's African colonies, taught art and craft to the indigenous population. But it was of equally vital importance, however, that they found a way, in Trowell's own words, to “keep the children's work really African”.⁶⁴

It is my contention that it is here, in relation to the question of the aesthetic of this ‘new’ ‘African’ ‘fine art’, that the conflicting dynamics of colonial subject formation that inform Trowell's ideas and teaching methodology become visible. The social evolutionist theory underpinning British Imperial policy, to which Trowell herself subscribed, envisaged a progressive development of African cultures, but nonetheless held that those cultures would eternally remain (a) subordinate to European cultures and (b) as discrete, distinct and as circumscribed by genetic difference as it imagined racial categories to be.⁶⁵ Thus, in her arguments in favour of the British teaching arts and crafts to Africans, even though she was advocating the extensive transformation of a broad range indigenous cultural practices, Trowell in no sense appeared to conceive of British interventions as in any way altering the “essence” of these African cultures (or conversely, of British culture being altered by them).⁶⁶ As Sir John Hathorn-Hall, Governor General of Uganda, stated in his introduction to “Culture Contact and Social Change”, Trowell's presidential lecture to the Uganda Society in 1946, the British perceived their involvement in colonised cultures to be akin to the horticultural practice of grafting, whereby a shoot or twig is inserted into a slit on a trunk or stem of another living plant from which it then receives sap:

Administrator Lord Hailey, opening the exhibition of Trowell's students' work at the Imperial Institute in London in 1939, quoted in: Trowell: *African Tapestry*, l.c., p. 106).

62 Colonial Administrator Sir Donald Cameron, quoted by G. C. Latham in: “Indirect Rule and Education in East Africa”, in: *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (October 1934), pp. 423–30, here p. 424.

63 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. viii.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 3 (my italics).

65 See Charles H. Lyons: *To Wash an Aethiopian White: British Ideas of Black African Educability 1530–1960*, New York 1975.

66 See above.

“Culture was not a thing that could be transplanted, but it could be grafted. The job of those in the Protectorate who were not themselves African was to help the African evolve a culture suitable to his environment.”⁶⁷

The claim, in other words, was that it was not feasible for British culture to be assimilated by indigenous East Africans, but it was, however, possible for an ‘alien’ European culture to improve and to strengthen its colonised counterpart – *but without essentially altering it*. British involvement in the teaching of arts and crafts is therefore framed as proffering, with sympathy and understanding, no more than (much-needed) technical assistance and expertise.⁶⁸

However, according to the theory that was gaining ground among influential anthropologists like Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber and Ruth Benedict during the same period, and which has since become widely accepted, there is nothing *essential* about culture at all. Research demonstrated, rather, that cultural traits and cultural practices are borne of pedagogical relations – that is, they are learned behavioural practices which are developed by particular groups within specific contexts and under specific conditions, but they neither result from nor are reducible to biological inheritance.⁶⁹ Cultural practices migrate between groups. They evolve and mutate over time. If culture is, then, as Michel Foucault would later describe it, a set of “properties”, produced by particular “training practices”, it follows that a cultural practice cannot be viewed as the inherent property of a particular group. So-called cultural ‘essences’ are *learned*. And allowing for age, fitness, inclination and opportunity, “*anyone can learn anything*.”⁷⁰

Trowell’s contradictory aims, then, were to introduce new art forms derived from European culture into the context of the Uganda Protectorate in the 1930s and to ensure their immediate assimilation into an essentialist ‘ethno-nationalist ordering’.⁷¹ I would like to argue that both her motives in attempting to foster the development of an authentic un-European East African figurative art and her practical approach to achieving this were informed by the policy of Indirect Rule – a strategy of colonial governance adopted by the British in the late 19th century. Her approach to indigenous art education closely mirrors colonial policy in the same period, and provides a valuable example of

67 Quoted in: Anonymous: “The African’s Changing Values: Conflict Between Old and New”, l.c., p. 3.

68 See, for example, William Bryant Mumford’s admiring description of the efforts of their contemporary Albert Charton, Inspector-General of Education in French West Africa to improve and develop the standard of weaving in French colonies by giving the ‘natives’ instruction in the European techniques of the making and using of looms at regional craft schools run by European specialists quoted in: William Bryant Mumford: “Notes on Mrs Trowell’s Proposals”, in: *Oversea Education*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (January 1936), pp. 84–86. Trowell cites the example of Charton in both *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 46–7 and “From Negro Sculpture to Modern Painting”, l.c., p. 174.

69 See for example Franz Boas: *Race, Language and Culture*, Chicago 1995 (1940); Alfred L. Kroeber: *Anthropology: Race, Language, Culture, Psychology, Prehistory*, New York 1948; Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, New York 1934.

70 Paul Bowman: “Universalism and Particularism in Mediatized Martial Arts”, Conference Paper presented at the Conference “Total: Universalism and Particularism in Postcolonial Media Theory”, Institute for Media Studies, University of the Arts, Braunschweig, Germany, May 2013, in: http://www.academia.edu/3447058/Universalism_and_Particularism_in_Mediatized_Martial_Arts (last accessed 21 January 2014, unpublished), p. 4–5 [my italics]. See also Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, Stanford 1991.

71 Bowman, “Universalism and Particularism”, l.c., p. 4.

how colonialism intervened on the symbolic level in an attempt to create and to control a colonised subjectivity.

IV

With Indirect Rule, the British essentially gave up trying to turn the colonised into ‘pseudo’ or ‘potential Europeans’. They abandoned the policy of proscribing and destroying ‘native’ political systems and granting the colonised equal rights under British law (albeit, in almost all cases, only on paper). While the former approach, as General Jan Smuts, then Prime Minister of South Africa, explained in 1929, had given the “native [...] a semblance of equality with whites”, it was, he argued, “little good to him” because it supposedly “destroyed the basis of his African system which was his highest good”.⁷² If Africa was to be “redeemed”, Smuts went on, so as “to make her own contribution to the world”, then the British had to “proceed on different lines and evolve a policy” which would, he claimed, “not force her institutions into an alien European mould” but would rather “preserve [Africa’s] unity with her own past” and “build into future progress and civilization on specifically African foundations”. What Smuts advocated was full “institutional segregation”:

“It is only when segregation breaks down, when the whole family migrates from the tribal home and out of the tribal jurisdiction to the white mans’ farm or the white man’s town, that the tribal bond is snapped, and the traditional system falls into decay. And it is this migration of the native family, of females and children, to the farms and the towns which should be prevented. As soon as this migration is permitted the process commences which ends in the urbanized detribalized native and the disappearance of native organization. It is not white employment of native males that works the mischief, but the abandonment of the native tribal home by the women and children.”⁷³

Within this gendered imperialist ideology, woman figured as the emblem and carrier of culture. While fathers were thought to give children their ethnic or tribal affiliation, it was women who gave them “language and therefore the feeling of affiliation to their race.”⁷⁴ The stabilisation of “native” family life within the “tribal home” and “tribal jurisdiction”, therefore, was vital for the stabilisation of tribal or ethnic distinctions upon which the political system relied.⁷⁵

Arguably, what imperialist ideology held to be true of woman as the emblem of culture was held equally true of culture (and cultural practice) itself. And so just as Indirect Rule

72 General J. C. Smuts: *Africa and Some World Problems, Including the Rhodes Memorial Lectures Delivered in Michelmas Term, 1929*, quoted in: Mahmood Mamdani: *Citizen and Subject: The Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Kampala 2004, p. 5.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

74 Daniel Joseph Walther: *Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia*, Cleveland 2002, pp. 46–63, p. 46 and 47. See also: Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, New York & London 1995.

75 Smuts: *Africa and Some World Problems*, l.c., p. 5.

created legal institutional boundaries that enshrined and enforced the segregation of colonizer and colonized in South Africa and beyond, so too on a symbolic and aesthetic level, we can see in Margaret Trowell's work and in her writings how she seeks to erect and enforce symbolic boundaries in order to produce and preserve 'native culture' and 'European culture' as wholly separate entities, subject to discrete aesthetic jurisdictions.⁷⁶

This is one function of Trowell's habit of referring to African colonial subjects in only the most essentialist of terms. Outside of *Tribal Crafts*, the book she wrote with Klaus Wachsmann,⁷⁷ in which she describes the material culture of a diverse range of Uganda's ethnic and social groups, I have found few instances, prior to 1958, of her referring to the cultural production of sub-Saharan Africans in anything other than the most monolithic of terms. She begins her 1947 essay, "Modern African Art in East Africa", for example, by describing, in a nuanced and differentiated fashion, the material cultures of East Africa's many and diverse ethnic groups. But by the second half of the essay, these differences have been entirely subsumed: from then on, she speaks exclusively – and *always* in conjunction with the definite article – of "*the African's attitudes*", "*the African's needs*", "*the African's ideas*" and "*the African's abilities*".⁷⁸ This is not an "essentialist red herring"⁷⁹ that in the supposedly more enlightened 21st century can simply be passed over; rather I would argue that such language is key: it is one of the ways in which in her work Trowell inscribes, in totalising and ultimately reductive terms, the mindset and the cultural practices of Africans as homogenous, and produces and maintains a concept of European culture as its polar opposite:

"Every race and every nation has its *own tradition of art* and its art can *only be great* when it develops from that tradition and does not merely try to copy the art of other people. This is as true of Africa *as of any other country* [sic]."⁸⁰

It is on the basis of this constantly reiterated distinction between 'the African' and 'the European' that Trowell is able to build an argument for the insurmountable cultural difference between the coloniser and the colonised. In her texts, Trowell regularly reminds her imagined European reader,⁸¹ that these so-called 'Africans' have a "very different form of expression"⁸² which she then goes on to claim is alien, incomprehen-

76 See Michèle Lamont and Marcel Fournier: *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, London/Chicago 1992.

77 Margaret Trowell and Klaus Philipp Wachsmann: *Tribal Crafts of Uganda*, London 1953.

78 Trowell: "Modern African Art in East Africa", l.c.

79 "[another essentialist red herring but I'll leave that to one side too!]" John Picton, commenting, in parentheses, on Trowell's recollection of her desire to "contribute to the development of the art of another race" in John Picton: "Reality and Imagination: An Introduction to Visual Practice in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia", in: John Picton, Robert Loder and Elsbeth Court (eds): *Action and Vision: painting and sculpture in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda from 1980*, Rochdale 2002, p. 11.

80 Margaret Trowell: *Art Teaching in African Schools: Picture-Making*, London 1952, p. 7 [my italics].

81 The six-page picture book *The Prodigal Son: Pictures for Africans* (1938) and five-booklet series *Art Teaching in African Schools* (1949 – 1954) were the only books that Trowell wrote specifically for an indigenous African audience.

82 Trowell: "From Negro Sculpture to Modern Painting", l.c., p. 169.

sible and difficult to describe.⁸³ Even after more than 20 years of research and teaching in East Africa, in her memoir *African Tapestry*, published upon her retirement in 1957, she restates her sense of the utter remoteness of the colonised from her own European sensibility, with a turn of phrase arguably intended to echo the title of Joseph Conrad's 1899 novel: "we" – that is, Europeans, she writes – "cannot contact the heart of the matter in them".⁸⁴ Despite decades of intimate contact and exchange, the ideas, beliefs and experiences of the colonised remain dark and mysterious to Trowell, it seems, to the very end.

V

It is important to note that, within the colonial discourse of cultural essentialism, 'separate' cultures did not, nor was ever intended to mean 'equal' cultures: the problem Indirect Rule was invented to solve was that there was no sustainable or legitimate reason to deny equal rights to the colonised when both they and their colonisers were integrated within the same European-style juridical frameworks. If and when this occurred, the "fallacies" upon which the colonised were "deemed inferior and deserving of colonization"⁸⁵ were in constant danger of being exposed. Those who profited most from colonialism would be seen, then, for what they were – an 'alien minority' – who held power over those who suffered most – an 'indigenous majority'. What Indirect Rule enabled, therefore, was the stabilisation of racialised European domination through the establishment of "a politically enforced system of ethnic pluralism".⁸⁶

The false logic of colonial cultural essentialism is exposed by the continual necessity for political enforcement. Without it, the system could not survive. The Governor General of the Uganda Protectorate may well claim, as he did in 1946, that the indigenous population needed to "evolve" a culture "suitable" to its "environment",⁸⁷ but it was colonialism that was responsible for the changes in the local environment, and colonialism that required the transformation of indigenous ways of life. It was for this reason that it was always necessary for colonial subjects to be 'civilised': that is, *taught* to adopt specific aspects of European culture and behaviour.⁸⁸

If, however, the "native", who was being educated in European culture, should eventually start to behave exactly like the European or "prove to be of like endowment", then the "fundamental principle" of their "colonial dependence" would immediately cease to be sustainable.⁸⁹ Indeed, this was something the British were acutely aware of. As early

83 For example: "[...] we know practically nothing at all about the African's sense of beauty." (Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 21).

84 Trowell: *African Tapestry*, op. cit., p. 111.

85 Oguibe: "Nationalism, Modernity, Modernism", l.c. p. 48.

86 Mamdani: *Citizen and Subject*, l.c., p. 6.

87 Anonymous: "The African's Changing Values: Conflict Between Old and New", l.c., p. 3.

88 "[B]ourgeois individualism and the nuclear family, [...] private property and commerce, of rational minds and healthily clad bodies, for the practical arts of refined living and devotion to God" (John L. Comaroff: "Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience: Models of Colonial Domination in South Africa", in: *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (November 1989), pp. 661–685, p. 673).

89 Oguibe: "Nationalism, Modernity, Modernism", l.c., p. 48.

as the Imperial Education Conference of 1914, they acknowledged, on the one hand, the need to educate their African subjects,⁹⁰ but on the other hand, they recognised that if they genuinely equipped the colonised to compete economically with Europeans, “the question of colour” would “come to the front at once” and there would be “a danger of uniting all tribes against the white population”.⁹¹ It was for this reason that, as Olu Oguibe argues, the colonial authority “inserted and institutionalized a corridor of slippage that granted the colonized only partial access to the possibility of transition and transformation”:

“[...] as long as the colonized was precluded from acquiring full mastery of European ways, for as long as a passage of difference was maintained and the colonized remained confined to a state of aspirant inferiority, colonial dependence could be guaranteed. To undermine this dependence was to endanger the project of Empire and risk the loss of the colonies”.⁹²

This is what the institutional segregation of Indirect Rule enabled: it created, under the guise of “pluralism”, the “corridor of slippage” that rendered the cultural and political superiority of the coloniser unassailable by ‘naturalising’ the subordinate status of the colonised.⁹³

It is through the correlation of contemporary East Africa and medieval Europe that Trowell inserts just such a “corridor of slippage” in her curriculum: it is important in order to help African students develop their own work, she explains, to show them “good examples of the work of other nations”.⁹⁴ She recommends showing them reproductions of images like “medieval illuminated manuscripts”, “some of the early Adorations” and “Japanese colour prints”⁹⁵ and advises teachers always to choose “the simpler forms which are *more easy to understand than European painting from the Renaissance upwards*.”⁹⁶ “Present day art”, in her terms, was European art, and even though much of the most significant European art of the time was being influenced and inspired by the very sculptures and masks from West and Central Africa that Trowell wished her students would embrace as “their great inheritance”,⁹⁷ she would show them none of it, claiming that to do so would be to “overburden” them with European arts’ “conventions

90 Not least because the cost of Indian labour in East Africa was becoming prohibitively expensive. See Kyeyune: “Art in Uganda in the 20th Century”, l.c., p. 38.

91 *Imperial Education Conference Papers, East African Protectorate*, London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1915, p. 22, quoted in: Sunanda K. Sanyal: “Imaging Art, Making History”, l.c., p. 42.

92 Oguibe: “Nationalism, Modernity, Modernism”, l.c., p. 47–48.

93 Mahmood Mamdani argues in *Citizen and Subject: The Legacy of Late Colonialism*, (l.c.) that the logical conclusion of this principle is the Bantu Education Act, passed by the apartheid government in South Africa in 1953, which, while supposedly making provision for development of ethnically distinct institutions, in actual fact aimed to drastically curtail the educational opportunities of the black population.

94 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 59.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 59 [my italics].

97 Trowell: *African Tapestry*, l.c., p. 111. When I interviewed the late Charles Ssekintu, one of Trowell’s original group of students in October 2012, he told me that he and his fellow students thought that the West African sculptures Trowell showed them were “really ugly”.

and accretions”.⁹⁸ One of the key “accretions” that she refused to teach in the early years was two-point perspective, which she felt was alien to her students’ sensibility and world view. “When the African does discover how to represent a scene in perspective”, Trowell wrote in 1947, “he almost always draws as though he was observing his subject from high above it.”⁹⁹ The “crux of the matter”, she wrote, was

“that the unspoilt English child, or native African, will, if not interfered with, produce for his own pleasure, works of the nature of such things as the Bayeux tapestries or the illuminated manuscripts of the old monasteries.”¹⁰⁰

This, in turn, was the style of work that received institutional endorsement: one of Trowell’s students’ earliest patrons, for example, was the British War Artists Advisory Committee, who acquired ten paintings from the school in 1943 under a scheme “to encourage” the painting of local war activities by “Native-born Colonial artists”.¹⁰¹ According to the Imperial War Museum in London, in whose collection these paintings are now held, this scheme “favoured work that *avoided imitation*” of contemporary European art.¹⁰²

Trowell and her contemporaries further sought to guard against the potentially destabilising consequences of a too convincing ‘native’ performance of European cultural practice by casting the ability to appropriate and master the language and idioms of European visual expression in the most negative of terms. In fact, the ability to imitate, long recognised as a crucial feature of human learning processes – and, as Sidney Kasfir’s research has demonstrated, a practice that has long played a sophisticated and important role in aesthetic and philosophical schema in many East African cultures¹⁰³ – was framed instead as a positive threat to African development. Thus Governor-General Sir Philip Mitchell warned, in his Foreword to the catalogue for the exhibition of Trowell’s students’ work at the Imperial Institute in London in 1939, that Africans’ supposedly “special aptitude for imitation may be a great danger to them in the realm of art and aesthetics”.¹⁰⁴ Art was “a language”, Trowell asserted, and “to speak well a man must

98 Trowell: “From Negro Sculpture to Modern Painting”, l.c., p. 175. We know that Trowell was aware of the significance of West African sculpture and Central African masks for the European avant-garde because one of the key intellectual authorities to whom she refers when making her case for the high calibre of African art are the essays of the avant-garde artist Roger Fry, who organised some of the first exhibitions of ‘primitive’, cubist, postimpressionist and child art in the United Kingdom in the 1920s and who also championed the work of Marion Richardson. See, for example: *ibid*, p. 169 and: *African Arts and Crafts*, p. 31, also Roger Fry: “Teaching Art”, in: *The Athenaeum*, No. 4663 (12 September 1919), pp. 887–8.

99 Trowell: “Modern Art in East Africa”, l.c., p. 5.

100 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 49.

101 “Recruiting (Art.IWM ART LD 2742”. *Imperial War Museum*. <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/20585> (last accessed 7 January 2014). The war in question was the Second World War.

102 *Ibid*. [my italics].

103 See Sidney Littlefield Kasfir: “African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow”, in: *African Arts*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 1992), pp. 40–53 and pp. 96–97.

104 Sir Philip Mitchell: “Foreword”, in: *Catalogue of the Uganda Exhibition, 22 April–13 May*, The Margaret Trowell Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford. MSS, Afr. s. 1825/114. As Rey Chow has pointed out, such assertions also serve to reinforce the claim of the white coloniser that his language and his culture is the “original” and relegates colonised language and culture “to the position of the inferior, improper copy” (Rey Chow: “Keeping Them In Their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic

use his own tongue” and no other.¹⁰⁵ Copying was to be strongly admonished and actively discouraged.¹⁰⁶ Thus any imitation of Western-style art by Africans is always described by Trowell, in her writings, as “poor”,¹⁰⁷ and thus Trowell must “battle” with Gregory Maloba, her most talented early student, who was discovered as a boy at a Catholic mission making copies “in clay of Victorian plaster saints from photographs in some ecclesiastical catalogue”, to “counteract the plaster saint influence”.¹⁰⁸

And should a ‘native’ student deign to exhibit any art work in the European style, it does not appear to have been well received by the colony’s (majority European) community of fine art appreciators: in the review of the Makerere Students Exhibition that appeared in the *Uganda Herald* in July 1946, for example, the anonymous reviewer confesses “a feeling of disappointment” in the work of a student named Farhan, who was apparently studying for an Art Teacher’s Certificate Course at the time. Except for his subjects, the reviewer complains,

“there is nothing African about his painting – pure Slade School style, executed with very great skill, but completely conventional in the use of colour and design. Possibly as he intends to become a professional Art teacher that is desirable, but we hope that he will not attempt to restrain the imagination of his future pupils”.¹⁰⁹

It is worth noting how restraint and conformity, two of the qualities that the British claimed the colonised needed to acquire if they wished “to enjoy a greater share in the administration of their own affairs”, are here viewed as unbecoming.¹¹⁰

For Trowell, as for her counterparts in the colonial administration, artistic practices and cultural production of the indigenous population had, they claimed, to be developed “from *their own* past, guided and restrained by the traditions and sanctions which *they* have inherited”.¹¹¹ But as Lord Hailey’s remarks at the opening the exhibition of

Representation”, in: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York 2002, pp. 95–127, here p. 100).

105 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 51.

106 “We do not set children to copy other people’s essays, nor should they copy other people’s pictures; if they do that they will never learn to do anything on their own. Even a poor original picture is worth more than a good copy; copying should never be allowed in the school.” (Trowell: *Art Teaching in African Schools: Picture-Making*, l.c., p. 7–8.) This text appears at the end of the introduction to every booklet in the *Art Teaching in African Schools* series.

107 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 51.

108 As Trowell recounts it in *African Tapestry*, Maloba, who was the first of her students to become a ‘professional artist’, did gain access through her to images of contemporary European art, but only by sneaking into her library to look at books when she was out of the house (*African Tapestry*, p. 104).

109 Anonymous: “Modern African Art: Makerere Students’ Exhibition”, in: *The Uganda Herald*, Vol. 50, No. 1831, p. 15.

110 G. C. Latham, the director of Indigenous Education in Rhodesia and the Uganda Protectorate stated: “educated Africans must realise that if they wish to enjoy a greater share in the administration of their own affairs they just fit themselves for such responsibility, and that what they need is not so much a matter of book knowledge as of character. They have to learn self-criticism, reliability, self-control, and a genuine sense of responsibility before they can be entrusted with a considerable share in the direction of the destinies of their race.” (“Indirect Rule and Education in East Africa”, in: *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 7, No. 4 [October 1934], pp. 423–430, p. 427).

111 *Ibid.*, p. 423 [my italics].

Trowell's students' work at the Imperial Institute in London in 1939 revealed, Africans were *not entirely* free to express or even to define the so-called Africanness of their art: they were, he said, to be left "as far as possible" to develop in their own way, but the reality was that these were parameters over which they themselves did not enjoy overall control. As in other areas of colonial governance, ultimately it was not Africans who reserved the power to 'name' or designate their culture as appropriate or genuine:¹¹² in art, as in the drawing up of the penal code, the "traditions and sanctions" of the colonised were "moulded or modified [...] on the advice of British officers, and by the general advice and control of those officers."¹¹³ When necessary, the colonisers felt free either to invent cultural practices or to import them from elsewhere.¹¹⁴ Trowell's introduction of figurative art can be seen as an example of this: as Sunanda K. Sanyal has noted, despite her sophisticated knowledge and appreciation of East Africa's indigenous arts, she never once encouraged her students to draw on the formal aspects of traditional artefacts as a resource for the development of a modern artistic genre of painting and sculpture. In this respect, she consistently favoured the traditional European mode of picture making that she introduced from abroad.¹¹⁵

VI

And all the while, Trowell maintained that her influence on the aesthetic of her students' work was minimal. She was, she said, less of an "instructor" than a "friendly critic": simply there to offer encouragement, to help "the students follow their own path and avoid snares by the wayside, and to facilitate their constructive criticism of one another's work".¹¹⁶ But actually, and for all its considerable merits, the "friendly critic" method of teaching was more intrusive than it may have at first appeared. As Roger Carline noted, in his assessment of the methods developed by New Art Teaching Movement in which Trowell had been trained: "However much the professor may have considered himself as a figure in the background – a source of encouragement only [...] this is difficult to achieve, and doubly so when the teacher is a strong personality. Children are quick to note the teacher's reactions, observing what he praises or dislikes, and their work reflects his influence accordingly."¹¹⁷ Given Trowell's status and the institutional power

112 See Stephanie Lawler: "Disgusted Subjects: The Making of Middle-Class Identities", *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 53, Issue 3, pp. 429–466.

113 Latham: "Indirect Rule and Education in East Africa", l.c., p. 423.

114 See "[I]n East Africa the cultural poverty of the native tribes makes it inevitable that they must get their culture from the West" (Sir Donald Cameron quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 424). See also Terence Ranger: "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa", in: Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.): *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge 1983, pp. 211–262.

115 Sanyal: "Imaging Art, Making History", l.c., p. 87–8 and 91–93. Sanyal further argues that another reason Trowell refused to draw upon the aesthetics of traditional East African artefacts in her teaching of painting and sculpture because it would have resulted in abstract or non-figurative forms. Trowell displayed a marked personal antipathy to modernism in art; and her students' work also had to be figurative if she was to achieve her aim of pioneering a religious pictorial genre (see Trowell: "From Negro Sculpture to Modern Painting", l.c., p. 170; and Trowell: *African Tapestry*, l.c., p. 160).

116 Carline: *Draw They Must*, l.c., p. 160, Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., pp. 50–1 and Trowell: *Art Teaching in African Schools: Picture-Making*, l.c., p. 28–29.

117 Carline: *Draw They Must*, l.c., p. 160.

that she wielded, it is hard to imagine that her pupils did not try to make things they thought she would like.

Trowell's avowed aim was to externally "stimulate" – but without unduly influencing – her students towards the development of "a widespread school of national or racial painting or sculpture".¹¹⁸ She sought to achieve this by rarely if ever demonstrating how to achieve particular visual effect herself, and, following Marion Richardson, preferred to use storytelling to provide her students with a starting-point for their art works.¹¹⁹ At the start of each class, Trowell recalled that she would deliver a carefully prepared description of a scene, or a poem or story, "vivid enough", in her words, "to create a picture in the pupil's mind and yet sufficiently vague to allow full play to his own imagination". The idea was that the pupil would "learn to sit with his eyes shut, searching round in his mind until he [could] realise his picture clearly as a whole and in its various details", then set to work to get it down on paper.¹²⁰

As Sanyal demonstrated in his analysis of the sample description Trowell provides in *African Arts and Crafts*, this is a far from neutral way of setting work. He is able to show that Trowell actually provides verbal layouts for the images, suggesting areas of focus, telling her students what to include and what to ignore: "*Close in front of you are two women*", she says at one point. And elsewhere, perhaps more coercively: "But all this", she says, "is as it were, *in the back of our picture. You do not see it very clearly. For it is not that of which you are thinking.*"¹²¹ In a further sample description, in *Art Teaching in African Schools*, a set of pamphlets she wrote for African art teachers, she also dictates the mood of her students' work, saying: "It is all very exciting, and although I am sad for the man, I love the colours which I see."

Trowell was also reported to have actively discouraged experimentation of types of which she disapproved. Charles Ssekintu, one of Trowell's earliest students recalled that she once set them the task of making a suitcase out of papyrus reeds, sisal and raffia. When Ssekintu went further than instructed by painting and varnishing the suitcase he had made, Trowell was infuriated and reprimanded him publicly. Such was the magnitude of his offence, Ssekintu recounted, that she made him swear on the Bible that in any future class, if she told him to end a task at a particular point, he would "stop", and "never go beyond". Because answering her back might have carried a penalty of expulsion from Makerere College School, Ssekintu claimed that, thereafter, he always did exactly what he was told.¹²²

118 Trowell: "Modern African Art in East Africa", l.c., p. 1.

119 "They were, of course, very annoyed that I would not teach them the way. They have told me since that they felt I was lazy because I would never take up a brush and show them how." (Trowell: *African Tapestry*, l.c., p. 115).

120 Trowell: *African Arts and Crafts*, l.c., p. 51 and 53.

121 Sanyal: "Imaging Art, Making History", l.c., p. 88–90 [my italics].

122 Kyeyune: "Art in Uganda in the 20th Century", l.c., p. 68–9.

VII

In his seminal analyses of colonialism, written in the early 1980s, Homi Bhabha described mimicry as “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” A “complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline”, colonial mimicry, as Bhabha defined it, was “the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as *a subject that is almost the same, but not quite*.”¹²³ This was because, inasmuch as the objective of colonial discourse is “to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction”,¹²⁴ a system of “interpellation” – that is, a partial reform of the colonised’s manners, behaviour and personal identity – is required for the colonial system to function successfully in the interests of power.¹²⁵ The effect of mimicry on colonial discourse, Bhabha writes, is “profound and disturbing”: “For in ‘normalising’ the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms.”¹²⁶

Under Margaret Trowell’s direction, with official sanction and widespread approval, art education in the Uganda Protectorate participated fully in the interpellation of African colonial subjects and in the development of a non-identical colonised cultural space. An analysis of her approach further reveals the “other” knowledge of her pedagogical “norms” to be the “reforming, civilising” mission’s “disciplinary double”,¹²⁷ whose constant presence incites, within Trowell, complex forms of identification and disidentification. These result, in her work and in her writings, in a near-constant oscillation between venerating and despising East Africa’s colonised cultures, and between the assumption and abdication of her colonial agency.

Trowell’s ideas continue to impact decisively on discourses of art in and about this region.

123 Homi K. Bhabha: “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”, in: *October*, Vol. 28 (Spring 1984), pp. 125–33, here p. 126.

124 Homi K. Bhabha: “The Other Question”, in: *Screen*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1983), pp. 18–36, here p. 23.

125 Bhabha: “Of Mimicry and Man”, l.c., p. 127.

126 *Ibid.*, p.126.

127 *Ibid.*, p.127.