

A Field Guide

University of Cape Town

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Field Guide

MaBareBare: an imagining of khelobedu expressed in the present

This field guide serves as a manual to my doctoral submission in which taxonomic conventions of the PhD are under review. The realisation of this PhD project, which insists on its methodology as a manifestation of form as content, has required some unconventional approaches to its presentation. These appear both within the typescript (and are argued for there) and in the overall presentation as encountered when the box is opened. In my choice of materials, I have made careful decisions that are intended to both evoke and suggest the experiences of travel, archive and marginality, and refer to forms of practice that offer a context for my project. The PhD submission emphasises the physical act of participating and handling — encountering with the physical body through one's hands — associated with my approach to artistic practice and installation.

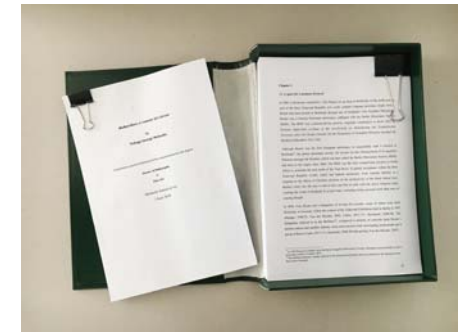
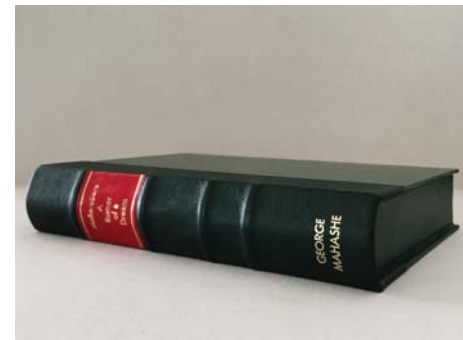
The PhD submission is contained in a storage box — the box — similar to those used in archives. This field guide is an explanatory list of the contents of the box. The box is intended as an archive of future possibilities; there is no right way to approach it. I recommend you start with what prompts your curiosity first.

The box



The box is the PhD, and this PhD comprises a number of things, amongst which is its own archive. This is an archive of my practice, which includes so much more than can be contained in this box. The box itself comprises documentation from various projects I have undertaken (both publicly and privately) as well as notes and sketches towards those projects. As an archive, it includes some of the ‘leftovers’ and ‘residues’ of my wider PhD project, including this submission. In essence the box refers to the PhD project’s continuing life in future publications, projects and exhibitions. Thus the PhD is presented as a tactile archive — a project in three parts — and this is the guide to it.

1. Solander box



The text of the thesis is contained within a dark green, round-backed leather book case (a Solander box) with the title ‘MaBareBare: A Rumour of a Dream’ written in gold on a red label. It takes the form of a loose-leaf document (typescript) emphasising its incompleteness. The Solander box was originally designed by Daniel Solander (an employee of the British Museum who accompanied Cook’s South Seas expedition on the endeavour in the eighteenth-century) to allow for easy access to precious documents while reducing the chances of damage to them through handling. While this is the thesis, its form, even as it acknowledges its colonial inheritance, is also intended to suggest the mimicking of a thesis, because it is not a presentation of knowledge produced but rather of knowledge in-the-making; a project not yet, nor perhaps ever, fully resolved.

The contents of the Solander box are divided in two parts, each held together with bulldog clips.

1. Part 1 comprises the introduction and the conclusion, constrained by scholarly convention.
2. Part 2 comprises four chapters, the narrative structure of which both reflects the process of travel and recalls the methods and approach of a film essay that I have employed in this project.

2. An archive of practice



My archive of practice is contained within a light green and mustard Solander phase-box labelled MABAREBARE. A Solander phase-box is a provisional version of the traditional Solander box, originally designed as temporary storage for fragile documents while they undergo conservation. Its outer colour is intentionally reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise*, or *Box in a Suitcase* (1935–1941).

The phase-box contains:

1. Ten 21.7 x 16.5 mm digitally printed, archival photographs (pigment ink on cotton rag) depicting contemporary Balobedu from my photographic series *Gae Lebowa* (2010). The ten prints comprise one black and white photograph and nine colour images. Included are portraits, photographs of people dancing, and guests at an event.
2. Fifteen 21.7 x 16.5 mm blackened silver gelatine photographs depicting ethnographic scenes photographed in Bolobedu in the mid-twentieth-century. The photographs are residue from my photographic installation *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012–2015), produced during my *Gae Lebowa/Fieldworks* (2015) exhibition in Bolobedu and my *MaBareBare/Telling Time* (2015) exhibition at the 10th Bamako Encounters African Biennale of Photography.

3. An open-top rectangular blue box with a variety of loose objects. The objects include:

1. Twenty-five photographic slides from *InBetween* (2014–2015), my installation depicting scenes of Christian-orientated communities in the late nineteenth century, as well as front and back views of photographic objects such as postcards and annotated photographs. These slides are accompanied by a photographic viewing loupe. To view these, place the loupe directly onto the slide and look against a source of light (like the sky or a domestic light).
2. Three unframed domestic reading glass lenses, a rolled sheet of tracing paper labelled 'camera obscura instructions' with guidelines for converting a room into a camera obscura, and a second smaller rolled sheet of tracing paper. The lenses can be used to focus the image of a camera obscura on to any surface or the provided tracing paper. Instructions on how to use the lenses and the tracing paper are included in the 'camera obscura instructions' document.

4. Fifty-six 21.7 x 16.5 mm laser-printed photographs depicting documentation of installation views of the exhibitions/installations produced during the course of this PhD project. These documentation photographs include installation views for new iterations of *Neither Nor II* (2014) re-conceptualised for this PhD project: *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012–2015); *InBetween* (2014); *Etcetera! Etcetera!* (2014); and *Camera Obscura #1-6* (2016-2017).

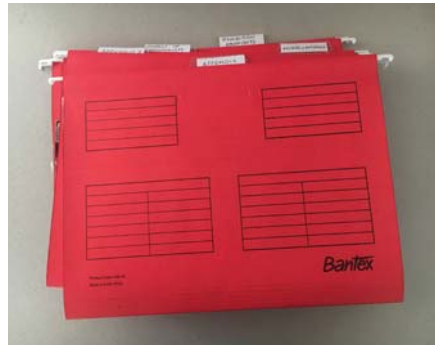
1. Fifty 21 x 29.7 mm laser-printed pages with two photographs on each sheet. The photographs comprise a mixture of personal photographs depicting images from my travels in the course of the PhD project. These include copies of noted-down ideas, copies of archived photographs and other documents, images from exhibitions I visited, as well as some personal images related to the PhD process. The purpose of the personal images is not intended to be understood; I simply include them here as a part of my archive.

2. A memory-stick with digital imagery encompassing all aspects of the PhD project and a Picasa programme (plug and play computer software programme). These images can be navigated using tags in the Picasa programme. A tag guide is included in the Appendix folder (Appendix 1d).

Instructions for using this memory stick:

First download the folder titled ‘MaBareBare’ and the Picasa icon to any computer desktop. Then simply double click on the Picasa icon, wait for it to open, and then choose the option to import images onto your desktop. The folder will appear in the Picasa platform with the name ‘MaBareBare’. You can follow the instructions on how to use the tags from the ‘Appendix 1d’ document and the Picasa guide video tagged ‘start’ — tags are indicated in an ochre font within the text of the thesis.

3. Documents



The ‘documents’ comprise two filing systems of documents related to my PhD project. This includes a black and white speckled filing box with five books, and a series of five red folders on a rail system. The books include published images of my installations, such as Camera Obscura #3 Projections (2016) from this PhD’s MaBareBare (2006–) project. The red folders comprise appendices for the thesis and other documents that set up a context for the wider PhD project (like seminal readings and handouts from exhibitions I visited).

1. The black and white speckled filing box contains:

1. One used pocket-size notebook from my MaBareBare notebook series produced on the occasion of my Gae Lebowa/Fieldworks (2015) exhibition.
2. A catalogue for Telling Time, Rencontres de Bamako Biennale Africaine de la Photographie (Silva Silva, Byrd & Chatap, 2015) produced on the occasion of the 10th Bamako Encounters African Biennale of Photography that I participated in.
3. A copy of selected pages from the catalogue for Afrotopia, Rencontres de Bamako Biennale Africaine de la Photographie (Yemi, 2015) produced on the occasion of the 11th Bamako Encounters African Biennale of Photography that I participated in.
4. Mock-up for the forthcoming publication Gae Lebowa to be produced by Fourthwall Books as part of their 2016 Photobook Award.
5. An artist-book Camera Obscura #3-Projections (Mahashe, 2016) published by A4 Arts Foundation on the occasion of an exhibition of the same name at A4 Arts Foundation in Cape Town.

2. The red filing system contains:

1. Appendix 1 — these are appendices directly related to the thesis.
 1. My conference paper ‘A Personal Take’, first presented in Dakar in 2014. (Appendix 1a).
 2. ‘Camera Obscura #4 — Refusal to Allow Mediation’ is an essay commissioned by curator Vivian Ziherl to be part of the Jerusalem Show VIII themed Before and After Origins’ post-exhibition publication for Frontier Imaginaries editions. (Appendix 1b).
 3. Other camera obscura iterations present a brief statement about the context of Camera Obscura #5 and Camera Obscura #6 that are not discussed in the thesis. (Appendix 1c).
 4. Tag index presents some tips on approaching the Picasa platform and a list of tags encoded on the images supplied in the ‘MaBareBare’ folder. (Appendix 1d).

5. George Mahashe Biography presents two samples of my biography, illustrating its format before and after my understanding of what a proper contemporary art biography looks like. (Appendix 1e).
2. Appendix 2 — these are appendices related to my fieldwork for this PhD project.
 1. My descriptive synopsis of sound reels with Balobedu language phonetic samples from 1952, found at UCT African Studies Library. (Appendix 2a).
 2. Copy of the assignment I gave to high school students for the Gae Lebowa/Fieldworks (2014–2015) project. (Appendix 2b).
 3. Image list for the Gae Lebowa (2010) exhibition. (Appendix 2c).
 4. My descriptive synopsis of the Transvaal archival holdings at the Evangelisches Landeskirchliches Archiv Berlin (ELAB) in Germany. (Appendix 2d).
3. Exhibition hand-outs.
 1. An assortment of exhibition hand-outs from my travels to Germany (Berlin and Frankfurt), Venice, Austria, Lyon, Dakar and Bamako.
4. Miscellaneous: This folder houses future propositions for research and projects.
 1. The folder contains a series of objects such as salt and copper, which I am prompted to think about outside of the constraints of the Western academy (and yet include here). These objects excite me because, as I learn of their khelobedu names and contexts, I am invited to ponder their significance to my imagining and expressing khelobedu. I include them here to signal their importance even if I do not deal with them directly in this submission.

5. Smells of coloniality — a series of ‘seminal’ texts and notes related to my PhD project.
 1. ‘Defining contemporaneity: Imagining Planetary’ by Terry Smith (2015)
 2. Hal Foster’s ‘An Archival Impulse’ (2004).
 3. Jacques Rancière’s ‘The Politics of Aesthetics: the Distribution of the Sensible’ (2004).
 4. Walter Mignolo’s ‘Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom’ (2009).
 5. Saidiya Hartman’s ‘Venus in Two Acts’ (2008)
 6. A photocopy of a photograph of Modjadji III with her seven counsellors found in the 1898 BMS Missionsberichte .
 7. Handwritten notes towards the conclusion. ‘On the Burden and Exhaustion of Being a Halfie’.
 8. A handwritten list of films related to the idea of a film essay given to me by a colleague while in Dakar in 2014.
 9. Handwritten notes by Paul Landau on the complicated nature of the adoption of, and relation to, Christianity by nineteenth-century people in southern Africa.
 10. A notation on the structure of an unrealised book project by contemporary curator and art educator Clare Butcher and me.

MaBareBare, a rumour of a dream

by

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Student number: MHSGEO002

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Fine Art

Michaelis School of Art

University of Cape Town

26 April 2019

Supervisors: Professor Carolyn Hamilton and Professor Pippa Skotnes

Declaration

I, Tebogo George Mahashe, hereby declare that the work on which this dissertation/thesis is based on my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, nor is being, nor is to be submitted for another degree at this or any other university.

I empower the university to reproduce for the purpose of research either the whole or any portion of the contents in any manner whatsoever.

Signature:

Signed by candidate

.

Date: 26 April 2019

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Abstract

This multi-part PhD submission builds on Premesh Lalu's (2009) assertion that an understanding of the subjectivity of the colonised is irrecoverable from the colonial archive. It does this through my quest for, and my encounter with, fragments associated with an episode of travel to Berlin by some Balobedu in 1897 and, subsequently, by myself in the present. This confrontation with the archive facilitates a meditation on an idea of *khelobedu*, as a subject effectively trapped by classical anthropology struggling to understand it (*khelobedu*) as a contemporary reality. *Khelobedu* is, amongst other things, the language and religion of Balobedu from north-eastern Limpopo province in South Africa. It is used in this PhD project as a conceptual tool to express the complexity inherent in the multiple subjectivities that I inhabit, encounter, respond to and mobilise; that, effectively, I practice.

I adopt a range of creative fine art methods to engage *khelobedu* outside of the prescribed and constraining methodologies of established academic disciplines historically developed as appropriate for the study of African cultural life. My methods involve travelling, dreaming and creative practice as process. Travel has entailed my journeys to Berlin to consult colonial archives related to Balobedu, as well as wider travel to other places (such as Dakar) to visit contemporary art institutions and attend key events profiling my chosen artistic methodologies. I have employed Balobedu dream practices as a way of understanding, and claiming, Balobedu subjectivity, as premised on political agency and opacity. The methodology of creative practice has necessitated the making and staging of art exhibitions and installations within the contemporary art circuit; and persistent documentation of my installations and travels (conversations, cafe encounters and so forth) *as* artistic process as well as of the demands of practice as a subject itself — specifically instituting several iterations of a camera obscura installation as a response to my dissatisfaction with the documentary impulse that I understand to 'trap' *khelobedu*. These methodologies emphasise the idea of play and participation aimed at forming a habit of practice. They collectively contribute to the PhD project as both diagnostic of, and a way of challenging and offering a resolution to, the problem of coloniality in the academy.

These processes of practice reiterate that the subjectivity of Balobedu is not just to be sought in the colonial archive but persists, and is recoverable, in contemporary Balobedu such as myself. Through the practices at the heart of this PhD project, I establish that my being a *Molobedu* cannot be separated from my positions as artist and academic, and so insist on an

understanding of Balobedu as contemporaneous, always ‘in time’ with all of time’s complexities, recognisable to contemporary subjectivities.

The imperative to resist coloniality and to risk a departure from the conventions of the PhD in order to imagine and express khelobedu determines the form of the thesis as an open-ended proposition, emphasising practice and, for now, provisionality.

Acknowledgements

Ke leboga thekgo ya setšhaba kamoka, le lijima le le thušitšego ka mošomo wo wa go bona khelobedu. Ke leboga batswadi, kudu kudu Mmamahasha-Mapula re ya go gopola. Ke leboga ka maatla thekgo le hlohletšo ya mogatša waka, wa mina-lehotie laka! Ke leboga lelapa la Mahasha peu ya Bolobedu, bagwera, le ditlogolo tša Mohale. Ke leboga Badimo le Modimo, kamoka ke ya babona. Ke leboga khelobedu le Balobedu, le nakhile ka matla. Le ge ke ngwadile ka polelo ye šile, Khelobedu khe kha tla!

Ke leboga thušo ya mašeleni le thekgo ya dinyakišišo go tšwa go Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative (APC), the Centre for Curating the Archive (CCA), bobedi di UCT; le National Institute for the Humanities and Social Science. Ke leboga Evangelisches Landeskirchliches Archiv Berlin (ELAB) ka go amogela dinyakišišo tšaka, le go ntumelela gore ke šomiše archive ya bona. Ke leboga le Elfriede Höckner ka go ntumelela gore ke šomiše archive ya gagwe.

The manifesto

This PhD project is an attempt to express my imagining of khelobedu within institutions of power (such as the academy) in South Africa and beyond. To imagine and express khelobedu is to accept that I am a contemporary subject whose reality cannot escape diversity or multiplicity. The urgency to imagine and foreground khelobedu, here and now — within a PhD project in 2018 — is drawn from an understanding that while the academy and the cultural institutions it effectively serves profess diversity, this diversity remains a theoretical ‘policy’. Therefore, this submission is an iteration of my imagining of khelobedu and the processes that underwrite that imagining, expressed from my contemporaneous position of Molobedu–academic–artist, aimed at turning policy into practice. I submit this practice as an archive for future consideration.

Preface

When I set out on this PhD project I was seeking the oldest photographs of Balobedu. I was looking for these because the practice of looking to archival photographs, as practised by photographers like Santu Mofokeng (1997),¹ promised emancipation from persistent misreading of my subjectivity (as an academic, artist, black, ‘colonised’ and Molobedu) by some academics that selectively study my ‘cultures’ and pronounce on them out of context. I endeavoured to do this as both a subject and researcher, using the very best reflexive methodologies. These methodologies emphasise the provenance and biography (trajectory) of the documents (such as photographs) being considered for study or engagement. These methodologies are employed as a form of reading against the grain, reading along the grain and, as has become more important, reading with a grain of salt. I embarked on this quest as a disillusioned scholar, having just witnessed the brutality and racism of sections of contemporary academy. I experienced these academics as hell-bent on continuing colonial endeavours, albeit under the cloak of reflexivity. I encountered this brutality in the wake of a co-authored journal article summarising aspects of my Master of Arts in Fine Art project.

The PhD project, on the other hand, had its own plans. What I know now, which I did not know when I began the PhD project, is that my quest is driven by an old desire, a desire not far removed from the quest for photographs of Balobedu but one I am yet to comprehend in future projects. This is a quest for the image and its mysteries, a quest to understand visions. This quest began when I was a child, making its first forceful showing when I was just eleven. Over a period of six months, just after the death of my favourite aunt on my mother’s paternal side, I was haunted by a dream. The dream would recur and advance bit by bit, frightening me, till one day I triumphed over it and it stopped. Years later, I still remember

¹ In 1997 Santu Mofokeng presented *Look at Me, the Black Photo Album 1898–1950* (1997), consolidating his research around the self-representation practices of urban black people through the Oral History Project of the African Studies Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand. The research led to a photographic installation of the same name. It not only illuminated the self-representation practices of black people and researched aspects of oral tradition, but also challenged the separation between the idea of fleeting and arrested in photography, as well as the latter’s capacity to coexist with written text and narrative.

the intensity of imagery of the dream. I still remember every detail as if I had had the dream only yesterday. I was not to have another dream like this for more than fifteen years.

Over the years I have explored the question of image, unconsciously, through photography. I have pondered and explored photography's capacities to make images in various ways, which is foregrounded in this PhD submission, but mostly I have become dissatisfied with photography — not because it has reached its limit for me, but because it has become impossible for me to be satisfied with the emphasis on representation that photography seems to find itself engrossed in. Thus this PhD, to a degree, is one plagued by a tension between my love for photography and an understanding that, in its current state, photography constrains more than it frees me.

I have also explored the question of image through a fascination with *khelobedu*. This fascination is one that thinks about myth and magic, focusing on the rich imagery that accompanies its articulation. This fascination is drawn from stories of what is commonly dismissed or stigmatised as witchcraft. This fascination also manifests as a visuality I have grown up with, a visuality informed by colourful costumes, dance performances and epic narratives of travel by those who came before me. All of these are delivered with a heavy dose of theatricality. These I would often see at family gatherings and other ritual performances I would chance upon as I accompanied my grandmother through various monthly pay markets across *Bolobedu*. I revisited these spaces through the production of the exhibition *Gae Lebowa* in 2010 (see Introduction). I am only starting to comprehend the meaning of such ritual. Such ideas have, in the past, found some articulation in forms of anthropology.

Above all, this quest for image or visuality, which I survey through an interest in *khelobedu*, is inspired by stories of magicians who could make one see things that were not there — such as stories of forests that one could walk through without ever seeing what resides there, or of people who could cross the wilderness without being noticed by the animals. I have only ever found a vocabulary for such stories through sci-fi inventions, such as *Star Trek's* holodeck (immersive holographic simulation).

All of these preoccupations — dream, *khelobedu*, photography and holodecks — find expression, sometimes clear and sometimes abstract, in my quest for a moment of travel involving several *Balobedu* visiting Berlin in 1897, and later in my own travels to Berlin and other places. This quest may be personal, but its encounters illuminate some of the most

pressing problems in the humanities, such as the issue of how to accept marginalised communities' contributions to institutional knowledge, on their own merits. It also sometimes stumbles into some interesting solutions, not easily achieved deliberately.

'Modiši yo bolo ke Morena'

Dipesalome 23

**Tša badimo baka ba go nruta go sepela leswiwing ke sena letšhogo,
ke tseba gore, modimo o sepela le nna.**

Guide to language

I spell the word ‘khelobedu’ in lower case when it denotes an idea and concept, and with a capital letter when it refers to the language or religion. *Khe-* is a prefix denoting culture, while *Ba-* is a prefix denoting the people, *Mo-* is a prefix denoting a person and *Bo-* is a prefix denoting place. Thus **Bo**lobedu refers to the place where **Ba**lobedu have their stronghold and where the seat of Modjadji is located, where **K**helobedu is spoken and one of the places where the practice of khelobedu is dominant.

In this text I have limited the convention of glossing what might be unknown terms for the ‘traditional’ Western reader (see Serpell 2017) and do not italicise Khelobedu words and concepts. As Serpell (2017) points out, while glossing can offer context, its presence may cast doubt on whether the original word has done its work. In particular, I am drawn to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s argument that the threat of ‘possibly’ losing a wider or foreign audience is an acceptable risk (cited in Serpell 2017). My decision to limit glossing acknowledges that to gloss is in itself disadvantageous because there is seldom enough space to gloss properly in a text due to word count restrictions and other publishing conventions. I take the position that there might rather be a need for separate treatises on key khelobedu concepts and words, and to leave it up to the reader to take the initiative to learn about other people’s contexts. My refusal to italicise khelobedu terms draws on Katleho Shoro’s call in her poem *Sesotho saka will not be written italics* (Shoro, 2017) to reject the italicising of vernacular languages.

In finalising this thesis I have had to observe a delicate balance between mediating my ideas in their specific context and register, on the one hand, and conforming to the expectations and conventions of a grammatically polished thesis text. There are thus places in the thesis where I have resisted the urge to veneer/polish my language in order to retain the texture and materiality of the points I am attempting to convey.

Thesis Component 1

Introduction

This PhD project is an intervention — in the form of an attempt to imagine and express *khelobedu* from my point of view — in the academy and, by extension, in cultural institutions such as museums of ethnography. I conceive of these two kinds of institutions as institutions of power in South Africa, which have long exerted control over what people think and know about matters of culture and, more particularly, cultural formations like *khelobedu*. This control is a problem because of the academy's persistent practice of researching the already known — all *Balobedu* know what *khelobedu* is, and many others around them have a good sense of what it is, even if they do not have a depth of acquaintance — and presenting the research as though it is new information. What is conventionally referred to in relation to a PhD as the production of new knowledge thus often amounts to a confirming or debunking of what is already known, and doing so in a particularly colonial way: that of seeking to render the object of enquiry as absolutely transparent. I experience this as a problem of being unable to imagine and express *khelobedu*, because the academy only values an explanation of *khelobedu*.

Khelobedu is the term for the language spoken by people who identify as *Lobedu*.² That is, *ditlogolo tša batho ba go buna kolobe ya thaba, batho ba go dula tswapone, basepedi ba go tsoma mafadi, ba go tseba gore thaba, le meetsi, ke tsela ya badimo, gore Bolobedu ke thabeng ye go dutšigo monesa pula. Ke batho ba go šupa Dadja le bokhalaka, balota tsele ya*

² One cannot be accused of being a *Molobedu*, one can only claim it. Being a *Molobedu* is constituted by how one claims the designation. This is achieved through an ability to identify and express concepts that are uniquely *khelobedu* in an otherwise entangled and forced language designation that insists the *Khelobedu* language is a dialect of *Sepedi*, which has now been reconstituted as *Sesotho sa Leboa* (*Sotho* from the north) to signal its inclusion of, and entanglement with, other languages endemic to the north-eastern parts of the *Limpopo* province. This is an ability to command the terms that constitute a language whose precision is just as obscure as its mythology. If a person speaks *Khelobedu*, it only sets the tone for you to ask them how they claim to be *Lobedu* — you ask them to demonstrate their command of the terms that constitute *khelobedu*. You ask them *ho ke reta* — to demonstrate their awareness or command of relations and history from the perspective of *khelobedu*. To generalise the terms that constitute *khelobedu* is to speak another language; *khelobedu* can only be expressed in *Khelobedu*.

go latela **monisa pula**. There are no general terms that define the ties that bind Balobedu; our origins are as diverse as our practices and **geographies**. One can only make a statement that is true only for oneself. To try to translate or generalise about such ties is a dissertation in itself. What is constant is the centrality of a rain doctor to our constitution as Balobedu.

Balobedu, if we can risk repeating the errors of apartheid and colonialism's language apparatus, are a group or federation of people, not necessarily defined by race, kin or tribe but by a form of complex political and social affiliation, centred on the office of a sacred rainmaker. Today, we occupy a territory commonly referred to as Bolobedu, which is a section of the north-eastern part of the Limpopo province of South Africa. Within our 400-year modern history,³ we are presented, ethnographically,⁴ as an active and 'central' polity among the wider South African indigenous polities in the region, accepting tributes and redistributing resources to maintain a balance within the region that falls under our jurisdiction. We withdrew from regional politics and adopted a policy of isolation and secrecy after 1894, when the Boers gained control around, and eventually within, our region. Our modern fame is associated with **Modjadji**, whose 200-year-strong dynasty (est. c.1800) revolves around the figure and office of a secluded rainmaker. This office is currently reserved for women, and has come to be referred to as the office of the Rain Queen, a terminology derived in part from Eileen and Jack Krige's monograph *The Realm of a Rain Queen: A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society* (1943 [1980]). I understand the title of Modjadji as one implying a doctor (ngaka) specialising in rainmaking, and as having less to do with a monarchy, whose right to rule is premised solely on hereditary lineage. Until

³ Pre-nineteenth century history, drawing on Balobedu oral tradition, places us as a key faction of the Monomotapa (Khalaka) southern African polity, who migrated south across the Zambezi around 1600 (Kruger, 1936; Krige & Krige, 1943 [1980]; Motshekga, 2010).

⁴ The ethnography of Balobedu has roots in the speculations of nineteenth-century travellers, missionaries and colonial administrators, focused primarily on the figure of Modjadji whom they described using motifs from Greek mythology, rendering her as a powerful sorcerer who commands the power of Pandora's box (Colliard, 1897; Haggard, 1888; Das Neves, 1879). Existing myth and rumour already circulating among the locals fuelled these speculations which writer B.H. Dicke implies were constructed by the Balobedu themselves (Dicke, [1936] 1937). The first attempt to discredit these myths by Reuter (1905) paints Modjadji as a sham, who used intimidation and trickery to advance her cause and to absorb her enemies' wealth.

recently, Balobedu had no official kingdom, culture or language status under South African law, which is a result of an apartheid-era ruling that demoted Modjadji IV (effective with the appointment of Modjadji V) to a chief on account of her gender (Motshekga, 2010:177; Nkosi, 2016). President Jacob Zuma overturned this ruling, establishing the Lobedu polity as a queenship, enjoying all benefits in terms of the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (Nkosi, 2016).

The language Khelobedu is not one of South Africa's official languages, having been subsumed in language policies under the umbrella of Sesotho sa Leboa (Northern Sotho). But to the speakers of the language, Khelobedu is distinctive, not so much because of its linguistic markers but because of its associated literacies.⁵ For Khelobedu is not simply a vernacular linguistic term: it refers to a larger complex of things, things that are conventionally described as 'culture', 'tradition' and 'religion'.

This PhD project is an exploration of khelobedu outside the frame of university and museum — anthropology — in which it has effectively been trapped. By anthropology I am referring to the wider discipline concerned with the study of man or what it is to be human, including speciality disciplines like social anthropology, archaeology and physical anthropology.⁶ In particular I am referring to social anthropology, which is interested in the study of Human societies (man) and his cultures (Hammond-Tooke, 1997:1) in their own contexts, especially through the practice and methodology of **ethnography**, characterised by participant observation. Khelobedu has been confined there because of its topicality for early colonists (such as missionaries), as well as their successors (twentieth-century social anthropologists and contemporary academics). I use the concept of topicality to acknowledge khelobedu as a topic of interest to colonists expanding into Bolobedu in the nineteenth century, as well as today as Balobedu fight for recognition of Khelobedu as an official language. The contemporary debates around the legitimacy of Khelobedu as a language hinge on contemporary negotiations of colonial- and apartheid-era ethnology of the kind practised

⁵ To speak of literacies is to acknowledge the accumulation of ways of knowing and knowledge about things catalogued within this language.

⁶ Elsewhere I have also noted Roodenburg's (2002:15) extension of this category to include biologists, zoologists, palaeontologists, geographers, historians, ethnologists and linguists (Mahashe, 2012a).

under the leadership of Nicolaas J. van Warmelo that established Khelobedu as a dialect of Northern Sotho (then referred to as Sepedi).⁷ The negotiation of Van Warmelo's ethnology (the study of the characteristics of different people and the differences and relationships between them [Oxford Dictionary]) requires further navigation of twentieth-century ethnography (the scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences [Oxford Dictionary]) which dominates the knowledge produced about Balobedu. These negotiations are currently underway through the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), which is demanding that Balobedu must produce a unique orthography (different to Northern Sotho) of the **Khelobedu language** before it is granted official status (Mathole Motshekga, personal communication, 2018, May 18). I also use the word topicality to suggest that the equivalent of the policy debate around khelobedu (the concept and the language) then is today the emerging approach of treating indigenous culture differently from metropolitan culture. The khelobedu case was seen then as confirming the proposition that 'indigenous' culture is not the same as European culture and needs its own specialist approach, anthropology.

1. Khelobedu's entrapment by anthropology and persistent coloniality

1.1. Khelobedu and anthropology

In this section I introduce khelobedu's position within the constellation of knowledge practices associated with late nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonial expansion, which developed into professional anthropology at the close of the nineteenth century. I do this in order to give a context for the conditions that gave rise to an archive on Balobedu that is currently circulating within or through the discipline of social anthropology and the study of its (social anthropology's) history.

⁷ N.J. van Warmelo was a linguist turned anthropologist, who served on several boards including the language councils for Venda, North Sotho and Tsonga. He became South Africa's state ethnologist in 1930, publishing his magnum opus *Anthropology of Southern Africa in Periodicals to 1950: An Analysis and Index*, in 1977, which consolidates the scholarship that gives rise to the knowledge of South African 'natives' (N.J. van Warmelo collection, 2003:ii). Balobedu feature greatly in this index, proving their topicality for the late nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century. The N J van Warmelo Collection is available at the University of Johannesburg Library (Rare books/special collection) with the identifier <http://hdl.handle.net/10210/3006>.

Because of the violent and brutal nature of the encounter that Boer colonists, German missionaries and European prospectors experienced upon their entry into the north-eastern region of southern Africa and Bolobedu in the mid-nineteenth century, news of Balobedu proliferated through early communications between the different colonist communities encroaching on what became the Transvaal region of southern Africa.⁸ The encounter was violent, not only in terms of reports of Balobedu and Shangaan people massacring invading colonists but also because of the nature of these massacres as falling outside of conventional warfare. Reports characterised the encounter not as one of trickery (not just guerrilla warfare) but one involving what they (colonists) thought at that time to be supernatural means associated with the mythology of Modjadji commanding Pandora's box — **magic** (Colliard, 1897; Dicke, [1936] 1937).⁹ Such communication included the genres of travel writing, missionary reports and early scientific journals. Sensational public speculation was also due to the many myths already at play, before the arrival of the colonists, within local communities living within and around a then larger Bolobedu region (see for example Colliard, 1897; Haggard, 1888; Das Neves, 1879). Such attention on Balobedu as a topic of interest was taken up from 1928 by Eileen Krige and published by, for example, the scholarship of Eileen Krige and Jack Krige (1943 [1980]) and Ferdinand Kruger (1936), within the disciplines of African studies,¹⁰ which include the discipline of social

⁸ There have been several attempts to enforce colonial rule in Bolobedu and the surrounding region, such as the commissionership of João Albasini to the Transvaal Republic government (set up in 1852) beginning in 1859. Bolobedu would only experience colonial occupation from 1894, when they accepted the Boer republic's General Joubert's involvement in the affairs of crowning Modjadji III. Prior to this Balobedu had launched sustained resistance against colonial forces such as Boer encroachment and French Christian missions, which Motshekga (2010:173–175) characterises as the 'Mudjadji wars'.

⁹ A cited example of Boers encountering brutal resistance in the region is the story of Janse van Rensburg's party who met their fate by tsetse fly (attributed to Modjadji's sorcery) and chief Shinhambane Maluleke Hlekane's brutal assault (Dicke, [1936] 1937).

¹⁰ Work on Balobedu ethnography officially began in 1928 when Winifred Hoernlé, who had started the anthropology department at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1924, commissioned Eileen Krige to conduct fieldwork in the northern Transvaal (Hammond-Tooke, 1997; Mahashe,

anthropology.¹¹ Khelobedu's topicality evolved over the last 150 years with the changes in the research interests of African studies, as a form of colonial administration discipline towards its current position that seems to function as a tool for undoing and uplifting the lives of those dispossessed by colonialism.

The work done by scholars such as Eileen and Jack Krige who worked in Bolobedu between 1932 and 1968 has yielded a large number of anthropological texts and archives (covering the wider spectrum of anthropology, such as culture, linguistics and botany) that added to the speculations and archives of the early colonists (mid-nineteenth century). This leads me to acknowledge that the wider discipline of anthropology was part of the apparatus of colonial administration, which relied on a collection of diverse practices and technologies, such as anthropometry, botany, geography, ethnography, linguistics, archaeology, **photography** and culture studies. This apparatus was also informed by amateur research of all kinds, including hobbyists and missionaries living in the colonies (see for example Reuter's 1905 publication), who were later joined by professional social anthropologists (like Eileen Krige) attached to academic and state institutions. The development of professional social anthropology formalised practices such as ethnology and ethnography, concerned with foregrounding and analysing an understanding of interlinked cultural systems, converging on an idea of 'culture contact' (see for example Krige & Krige, 1943 [1980]), into a mode of enquiry that proved useful to the administration of colonies because of its ability to describe in minute detail the

2012a). The first anthropological publication resulting from this research appeared in the *Bantu Studies Journal* in 1931.

¹¹ Hammond-Tooke (1997) elaborates the advent of professional social anthropology in South Africa with the appointment of Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) to the chair of social anthropology at the University of Cape Town in 1921. This was followed by the appointment of Winifred Hoernlé to the Wits anthropology department in 1924. These two departments were dominated by the British school of anthropology developed by Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski in the 1920s. Eileen Krige, who produced the bulk of the ethnography on Balobedu, was a senior student at the Wits anthropology department in the mid-1920s. She produced her major monograph, *The Realm of a Rain-Queen: A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society* (1943 [1980]) while a fellow at Malinowski's anthropology seminar at the London School of Social Sciences in the late-1930s (Kuper, 1983; Hammond-Tooke, 1997). At this time, Balobedu were already drawn in as a subject of anthropology from 1905, through Reuter's report to the South African Association for the Advancement of Science (Reuter, 1905).

lives and practices of colonised people.¹² Of particular interest for my research focus is the use of photography as a key **technology** and apparatus within ethnography. For example, Eileen Krige used photography as a form of **note-taking** as per Malinowskian fieldwork photography practice (Young, 1998; Pinney, 2011; Davison & Mahashe, 2012) where the camera documents all aspect of the fieldwork, including the presence of the researcher, for the purpose of creating an **archive** of the fieldwork.

The archives that resulted during the colonial period are now the subjects of contemporary social anthropology coming to grips with its colonial past. It is within this context that the concept of *khelobedu* is captured as a subject of colonial administration (in the nineteenth and twentieth century), particularly its (colonial administration's) scholarship today. That is, *khelobedu* is taken into custody physically through land dispossession and as an area of colonial knowledge production — a process of rendering *khelobedu* and *Bolobedu* transparent and knowable by outsiders, first in the service of enforcing colonial policies and now in the process of historicising and undoing them. Overall this section established that the topicality of *khelobedu* in the last 150 years has led to a particular type of institutional archive that is available and central to academic research today. This positioning of an archive related to *Balobedu* re-subjects *khelobedu* in a different way to the way it was subjected under colonialism.

¹² The advent of professional social anthropology (ethnography and ethnology) in South Africa led to a focus on *Balobedu*'s language, political structure, economy, ecology, technology, social structure and their history of cultural contact. This gave rise to a large body of ethnological and ethnographic work on *Balobedu*, work that includes scholarship by writers such as Krige (various publications from 1931 to 1981, discussed in the next point); Kruger (1936); Grimsehl (1955); Mönnig (1961 & 1963); Van Warmelo (1977); Davison (1984); Höckner (1998) and Schlosser (2002). Eileen and Jack Krige's work forms the bulk of scholarship and ethnography on *Balobedu*, focusing on the complementary functions of their institutions. This includes a substantial body of journal articles, book chapters, a dissertation and a major monograph (Krige & Krige, 1943 [1980], 1954 & 1956; E.J. Krige, 1931, 1932, 1938, 1964, 1974a, 1974b, 1975a, 1975b & 1981; J.D. Krige, 1934, 1939a, 1939b). The Kriges' wider archive includes a large body of photographic negatives and slides spanning 1932–1964 (Krige Photographic Collection, Iziko South African Museum), as well as the archive of Eileen Krige's key assistant Simion Modjadji, which are included in the Eileen Jensen Krige Papers (Campbell Collections at the Killie Campbell Africana Library at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban), which include transcriptions of *Lobedu* folklore and court cases from the 1940s to 1980s.

1.2. The problems of persistent colonial knowledge practices

In this section I introduce the idea of coloniality and the complementary debate about the politics of ‘knowing’, which inform my desire to approach khelobedu outside of the framework of anthropology. The idea of coloniality is currently enjoying vigorous attention within sections of South African universities, such as among the #Fallists associated with the #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa. This attention on coloniality plays out as a demand for the de-colonisation of South Africa’s tertiary education system and curriculum from Euro-American (global north academics) knowledge practices that do not answer local problems. I understand the #Fallist’s attack on the prevalence of Euro-American knowledge practices to be a critique on the unjust exclusion of black people and their ideas from the institutional culture of the South African university. This call revolves mainly around the proliferation and effect of unaffordable tuition fees and other racially exclusionary practices within the university. The condition of coloniality is generally criticised for its racist and violent implementation by the white elites who dominate the South African university. I discuss this de-colonial moment by first offering a discussion of coloniality and the Euro-American knowledge system’s demand for transparency.

My use of the idea of transparency in relation to knowing acknowledges the scholarship of Eduardo Glissant that has problematised the centrality of the discourse of, and insistence on, transparency (Glissant, 1997:111) in colonial conquest. This process of rendering subjects like khelobedu transparent subjects everything associated with the concept of khelobedu to the framework of ‘culture’, ‘religion’ and ‘tradition’ rooted in a dualist philosophy that ordered the world in evolutionary terms culminating in Western civilisation, which was seen as the only contemporary/modern culture at that time. In a way, the categorisation of subjects like khelobedu into transparent entities like ‘culture’ and ‘religion’ allows it to be compared to similar categories within Western civilisation. By dualism, I refer to the process by which the rise of Western civilisation and colonisation arranges or rearranges the world in binary term of European, which represented the civilised, and non-European, which denoted uncivilised. This would be what Niall Ferguson develops as ‘the West and the rest’ (2012). In khelobedu’s case this would be the nineteenth-century colonial invention of Balobedu (as in Valentin-Yves Mudimbe’s *The Invention of Africa* [1988]), through versions of disciplines like anthropology, as a primitive culture that is a precursor of European civilisation. This process is what Quijano and Ennis have theorised as coloniality (2000:549), which they

elaborate as a way of knowing rooted in a dualist (self and other), self-obsessed Eurocentrism based on oppressive knowledge practices.

I understand this dualism from Glissant (1997), Quijano & Ennis (2000) and Ferguson (2012) as the dominance of comparative knowledge practices that erase any existing knowledge practices in colonised societies in favour of ‘advanced’ Western knowledge practices. The idea of the comparative acknowledges the constant measuring of other cultures against the measure of the West. The dominance of this dualism implicates a question of subjectivity, which I understand to be rooted in colonial praxis, and its persistence up to today is a result of its embeddedness in dominant knowledge practices within university humanities. That is to say, subjectivity is the outcome of the practice of applying one’s sensibility within the flow of knowing. I understand coloniality to encompass the persistence of Euro-American modernist subjectivity (European modernity colonising the world), which I understand as, and use to describe, a European colonising subject with a particular sensibility and worldview associated with people of nineteenth-century Western Europe and America. Such subjects continue to imagine knowledge as serving and emanating from persisting colonising subjects and their enterprises (such as serving capitalism, which I accept as another mode or stage of colonialism). These Euro-American colonising subjects have, over the course of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonialism, been involved in a process of describing and subjecting other people (outside of themselves — like Africans) as a way of defining themselves. I understand that this way of knowing, through this kind of comparison, has remained as the dominant mode of enquiry in the academy after the end of nineteenth-century colonialism.

Through the effects of coloniality, *khelobedu* is relegated to the category of the primitive and is denied its existence contemporary with Western civilisation, limiting it as a signifier for Western civilisation. This process of subjecting colonised people through coloniality used the many diverse nineteenth-century technologies mentioned in the previous section, like writing, cartography, surveying, sonic recording, including photography, which was used to catalogue, describe, order and render transparent (knowable) their subject — people being colonised. This process of rendering *khelobedu* transparent and knowable to the European subject has resulted in a large body of archived documents, notably text and photographs, from the late nineteenth century.

In summary I have elaborated coloniality as the persistence of an attitude that privileges the dominance of colonising Western subjectivity and the centrality of a knowing rooted in the transparency of others, which is used to compare them to those in the West.

1.3. Reflexivity — ethics, the ‘halfie anthropologist’ and the search for a new textual form

In this section I introduce the idea of reflexivity as an effort from within the academy and some cultural institutions, like museums, to distance themselves from problems associated with coloniality. These efforts involve the inclusion of people traditionally excluded from the academy and the museum context — the subjects of social anthropology — as well as reforming the idea of an anthropological text. The idea of reflexivity, as it plays out in the humanities within most universities, is about being critical of the way we come to know something. This would include a critique of the dualist knowledge practices elaborated by Anibal Quijano and Michael Ennis (2000). In essence, I understand that this reflexivity is achieved by asking the question: How best do we accommodate the knowledge practices of those social anthropology studied in the past and now, practices that are marginalised by colonial praxis? This effort to be more critical and inclusive has two strands that are significant for this PhD project.

One strand is the consideration of collaboration and co-authorship with the traditional subjects of social anthropology. This collaboration is achieved through engaging with people from communities conventionally studied by social anthropology as interlocutors, as well as collaborating with ‘indigenous’ research councils (these councils represent the interlocutors’ interests) to determine what are acceptable research topics. I understand this interest in collaborating to be addressing issues of ethics raised by a critique of anthropologists presenting the ‘found’ cultural knowledge of others as their own new creation. Such critique is summarised in the scholarship of Linda Smith (1999) and Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln and Linda Smith (2008), which problematises the idea of *research* as a process of mining ‘indigenous’ (non-Western)¹³ communities’ knowledge without fully acknowledging, compensating or paying attention to the effects of the research on the investigated

¹³ For the purpose of flow in my writing I use the idea of indigenous, ‘non-Western’ and colonised communities interchangeably. This use recognises how for the period concerned (nineteenth and twentieth-century colonialism) such communities were collapsed as non-European.

community. Such effects may result from, for example, the public disclosure of sensitive information about a community. This critique has yielded methodological guidelines that insist that a researcher working with ‘indigenous’ communities should answer questions such as: For whom is the research? Who will it benefit? Has the relevant ‘indigenous’ authority seen and approved the research plan? Who will own the rights to the knowledge produced? This approach to research imposes an awareness of the politics involved in researching cultural knowledge belonging to non-Europeans.

While the part I have just discussed mostly involves Western researchers going into the domain of ‘indigenous’ communities to do research, there is also consideration of the ‘indigenous’ researcher moving into the academy. The individual involved in this move has been elaborated by Lila Abu-Lughod (1991) as the ‘halfie anthropologist’. The idea of a ‘halfie anthropologist’ refers to a situation in social anthropology where the subject and researcher are the same person at the same time, subjecting them to accountability to multiple constituencies (1991:466–470). Within this text I extend the idea of the ‘halfie anthropologist’ to all scholarship and endeavours where the proponent is both subject and researcher. Thus, I use the term ‘halfie’ beyond its application in social anthropology. Such halfie researchers are important in the process of elucidating contexts closed to the Western researcher. This sensitivity to an insider context is theorised as positionality, which Gillian Rose (1997:309) establishes as encompassing the effect of ideas of race, nationality, age, gender, social and economic status, and sexuality, which ensures unique perspective on issues associated with those positions. The positionality of the halfie — simultaneously self and other — has become a key marker of reflexivity in matters of relooking and addressing knowledge produced during or through late nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialism. These practices have been taken up within the humanities and are at the core of the role of ethics in humanities research.

Secondly, it (reflexivity) asks the question of what kind of technology (technologies like writing, personal narrative or photo essay) and resultant documents (journal article, novel or artist’s book) are best suited to move social anthropology beyond the traps of coloniality (Young, 1998; Nazaruk, 2011; Venkatesh, 2013). The publication of Malinowski’s diaries in 1967 sparked a debate within social anthropology that led to questioning the ability of anthropological monographs to contain observed culture and the nuances of the field site observed by the ethnographer. This is conventionally referred to as the reflexive turn (Venkatesh, 2013:4), which is an effect of the writing culture debate that led to a series of

experiments in methodology and form/medium within the field of social anthropology (Nazaruk, 2011; Venkatesh, 2013).¹⁴ These experiments are evident in the scholarship about photography's and anthropology's relationship, through an examination of institutionally produced colonial photographic archives, as seen in the work of Elizabeth Edwards (1992, 2001), and on forms of vernacular (non-institutional) photographic archives, as seen in Christopher Pinney's work (1997). These two scholars, working among others like Christraud Geary (1986 & 1988), Okwui Enwezor and colleagues (1996), Michael Young (1998), Santu Mofokeng (1999), John L. Comaroff, Jean Comaroff and Deborah James (2007), Jane Lydon (2005) and Tamar Garb (2013) position archived photographs' capacity to dispute and offer alternative insights into the reductionist and essentialist pronouncements associated with coloniality. This would be how archived colonial-era photographs allow alternative readings of culture (Edwards, 2001:107–130), different from those produced through coloniality, particularly when such photographs are engaged by people with an insider perspective as opposed to that of the original European photographer — the halfie advantage. For the purpose of this PhD project, the significant finding derived from the scholarship of Pinney and Edwards is one that highlights the role of art and artists working with colonialism-produced photographic archives, particularly of artists from the cultures represented in the archived photographs, in bringing alternative, affective readings and contexts to colonial archives.

Pinney and Edwards's identification of artists' contributions is amplified within discussions facilitated by the conference 'Fieldworks: Dialogues between Art and Anthropology' (Tate Modern, September 26–28, 2003) and the scholarship of Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright (2006 & 2010), in which social anthropologists conversed with artists as a way of moving beyond the simple quest for a better document, towards an interrogation of art as a key methodology sharing a lot of similarities with social anthropology (see section 4.2.1). Schneider and Wright (2010) emphasise the use of **fieldwork** and the centrality of an extraordinary relationship with a 'source community' as key pillars of the social anthropologist's and the artist's effectiveness in implementing the necessary methodologies and experiments required to move social anthropology forward. These experiments in anthropological methodology and form are particularly visible in both the museums of world

¹⁴ The experiments included forays into using the format of the novel, as well as creative use of cinematic devices through the subgenre visual anthropology.

cultures (formerly ‘ethnographic’ museums) and a variety of contemporary art platforms, which are manifestly interested in the subjective and affective strategies that artists working with anthropologically generated material bring to bear in critically engaging the problem of archive. This move seems to have a capacity to transcend the conventional approaches that limit existing attempts within the academy to create an inclusive approach to knowledge, or indeed value other ideas of knowing. I have observed some examples of this trend at exhibitions at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (2013, 2014), the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures (2014), the exhibition *Salon der Angst* (2013) at the Kunsthalle Wien, certain presentations of the 54th, 55th and 56th Venice biennales, and in the programming of the Centre for Historical Reenactments (CHR) in Johannesburg between 2012 and 2014. Key strategies related to this move are published in *FOREIGN EXCHANGE: (or the stories you wouldn’t tell a stranger)* (Deliss & Mutumba, 2015). Strategies employed in *FOREIGN EXCHANGE: (or the stories you wouldn’t tell a stranger)* emphasise collaborative work between artists, social anthropologists, creative writers, lawyers, descendants of communities associated with held artefacts and other scholars interested in the question of archive and ethnographic artefacts. Some of the practices involve inviting the artist to reside and work in close proximity to an ethnographic collection with other collaborators, with no obligation to produce a definitive work about the collection, encouraging the artist to simply consider a collection — that is to say, an invitation to deploy their methods of artistic practice (Deliss & Mutumba, 2015).

In summary, these two strands of reflexivity look to move disciplines like social anthropology and museology from coloniality toward what is being conceptualised as contemporaneity, by fostering an inclusive knowledge practice. The idea of contemporaneity, as discussed by Marc Augé (1999); Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor (1999); Zdenka Badovinac (2009) and Terry Smith (2008 & 2015), is an acknowledgement that all people and cultures occupy the same time — a rejection of social or cultural evolutionism. That is to say, the idea of all cultures ‘*being in time*’ (Smith, 2015:1) and not the perception of some cultures *being out of time* through coloniality’s relegation of ‘non-Europeans’ as living out of time (being primitive). In a nutshell, contemporaneity insists that there is no primitive person living among the civilised at any given time, all living people are contemporary and civilised. To this effect the academy seems to be committed to experiment with a different type of academic report that can accommodate the practices of its interlocutors, in a way that does

not uphold the dualist relationship that relegates the interlocutor's knowledge practices as primitive.

Contemporaneity is not just about those marginalised by colonialism and relegated to the category of primitive, but also about all people that have been marginalised by European modernity, nineteenth-century colonialism and the many oppressive practices that invents subjectivities of, for example, woman, Eastern Europeans and the non-European diasporas as inferior, through dualism and hierarchised practices that privilege a Euro-American subjectivity. Thus contemporaneity seeks to embrace subjectivities outside of the white European male from the ruling class *in time*, by emphasising the importance of such subjectivities' own points of view. I understand this idea of contemporaneity as a key part of the rationale for contemporary art. Within the context of contemporary art with its diverse institutions, some ethnographic and ethnology museums, such as the Museum of Ethnology Frankfurt, have reinvented themselves as museums of world culture and have embraced practices associated with contemporary art, particularly inviting artists and communities associated with their collections to offer alternative points of view on the ethnographic collections. I find such initiatives to be both positive and problematic, especially when it appears that the relationship benefits the institution more than the communities invited into the institution.

1.4. My disappointment with reflexivity

In this section I discuss my encounter with reflexive practice and the subsequent disappointment when realising that reflexivity is more interested in proving its viability than in facilitating my expression of *khelobedu* from my point of view. In 2008, my initial request to present my photographic project *Gae Lebowa* (2006–2010) at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) was criticised by Khwezi Gule, the contemporary art **curator** at the JAG, on the basis of its complicity with racist, colonial-era photographic and knowledge practices. The work I initially presented for consideration to be exhibited at the JAG depicted women and men from Bolobedu and surrounding areas, some dressed in what is conventionally understood as traditional clothing. These clothes are considered traditional because they share the same form and style as clothes worn during colonial times. In my case, the outfits I was photographing were quite modern, and symbolised an internal Balobedu clothing industry that did not assimilate Western dress sense. My initial idea for producing this exhibition was to make an ode to a glorious African visual heritage that was being punted by photographic

campaigns of South African fashion houses, like Sun Goddess and Stoned Cherry after 1994. These photographic campaigns were drawing on publicised ethnographic archives like those of photographer Alfred Duggan-Cronin displayed at the Bensusan Museum of Photography in Newtown (Johannesburg) and the Bailey's African History Archives (BAHA), which they were using to brief photographers and stylists working on the campaigns. For example, the South African fashion house Sun Goddess used images from the publication *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (Saint Léon, 1999) to brief me for a campaign celebrating Africa and southern Africa's golden age. My envisioned ode was at once an affirmation of an independent spirit, dignity and liveliness I recognised in the archived photographs and remembered from growing up in Bolobedu and, to a lesser degree, it was a rejection of persistent photographic representation of black people as poor and needing foreign aid. This later trend can be associated with relief campaigns that preferred to show only images of Africans in poverty-stricken conditions.¹⁵

My choice of subjects for the project followed categories of 'old woman', 'Bolobedu', 'builder' and so forth that were characteristic of nineteenth-century anthropological classification. The photographs were taken in a straightforward manner using a large format camera with Polaroid film (Type 55, producing a negative and positive image simultaneously), which had a quality of old photographs taken on nineteenth-century glass negatives. The conversation with Gule entailed a debate about why I was repeating photographic practices (what has been theorised as a colonial gaze) associated with technologies and the apparatus used to invent black people as primitive. This referred to my use of a particular type of black and white photography similar to that characteristic of nineteenth-century medical anthropology's anthropometric photograph or the essentialist photographs of photographer Duggan-Cronin mentioned earlier. Furthermore, I was questioned for using the same naming categories, such as 'Molobedu', used by colonial administrators and social anthropologists in texts such as the *The Pedi* (Mönnig, 1967). In essence, Gule was challenging me to demonstrate some criticality towards the history of photography and its role in persisting coloniality, pointing out that such criticality was key to

¹⁵ Purveyors of such images, namely NGOs reliant on Western relief funding, have been criticised by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:101–102) as extending the colonial-era invention of a subject that lacks identity and history into a subject lacking development and infrastructure, through an artificially produced discourse of deficit.

exhibiting the work as contemporary art. He suggested that I locate my project within JAG's traditional collections department, where my work would be in a better position critically to engage the history of anthropology and photography, which would draw my work into some form of a contemporary art context. I would later see this strategy in museums of world culture during the course of this PhD.

Through conversations with the traditional collections (ethnography) curator, Nessa Leibhammer, I came to understand the history of anthropology and photography, and their centrality in enforcing racist practices conceived by colonialism. The discussions with Leibhammer focused on ethical practices (reflexivity) within an ethnographic museum's museology. These practices included the emphasis on using people's full names and not generalising them to a tribal category; affording them a chance to comment on my chosen photographs and the photograph's exhibition context; as well as using colour photography to dissociate my project from the traditional use of black and white photography in anthropology. From these discussions, I began to reconceptualise my proposed photography project, choosing to use colour photography and focusing on a bi-weekly event in Bolobedu called *sekgapa*. I developed a narrative about the game and its role as political commentary, using this role to highlight Bolobedu's contemporaneity. I developed a discussion of the political significance of the songs sung at these *sekgapa* events as commentary on contemporary issues, such as the Mozambican migrants to the Bolobedu region, as well as a discussion of the contemporary significance of the economy underlying the 'traditional clothing' worn to these events. The project was subsequently accepted for exhibition as *Gae Lebowa* (2010) at the JAG through the traditional collection department.¹⁶

¹⁶ The exhibition opened in 2010, at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in Johannesburg, South Africa. The exhibition was also presented in its original design (images referencing the ethnographic photograph) at Gallery Momo (2010). *Gae Lebowa* (2010) involved three bodies of work that were presented across two adjoining rooms. The bodies of work included forty colour photographs, three large-scale (A0) black and white analogue photographs and a video presenting my narration of the complexity of negotiating the different discourses that were claiming a conversation with the process, aims and implementation of my exhibition. The three photographs and the video work were presented in a smaller room (main entry point into the exhibition). This also included a wall text that framed the project as being aware of the position of photography in nineteenth-century colonialism and my insider position as a Molobedu, putting these two points in relation to the demand for reflexivity

While I was happy with the outcome of the colour photographs and the more palatable register brought by my ethical approach to ‘collaborating’ with Balobedu, I was dissatisfied and not convinced that the resulting body of work captured **my** initial impulse that led me to embark on this project. When I began the project I had been interested in going to see Balobedu to affirm my own memory, ideas and imagining of my culture, but now I was only confirming or denying colonial ideas about Balobedu as a testament to their contemporaneity. I had never thought of Balobedu as primitive! So why was I nervous about their contemporaneity? I also felt that the colour images did not necessarily capture the majesty of the black and white portraits I had started out with. I suspected that the nervousness of ethnographic/traditional collection managers like Leibhammer, brought on by persisting critiques of coloniality, exerted great influence that compelled such curators to prize a performance of reflexivity above all, and my project was becoming a casualty of this pressure. With this dissatisfaction I resolved to bring back the black and white images with their original politically incorrect captions, and produced a **video** work of myself, framing the images as produced by an insider — a halfie testifying to my ‘automatic’ reflexivity. Through the production of the exhibition *Gae Lebowa*, I had felt that I entertained the curator’s need to perform a compliance with reflexive ethics, to a point that I infringed on my vision, which was interested in comprehending Balobedu as I experienced and imagined them. In essence I was defending against, and correcting, Western biases and not developing or expressing my own ideas about Balobedu.

levelled against anthropology and the ethnographic museum. In this room the works were labelled using my own originally intended naming structure (such as the unspecified ‘Molobedu’) thought to be complicit with old anthropological convention. The work, comprising forty A3+ digital colour photographs, were displayed without any contextualising data except for labels that identified the people in the photographs by name, as a way of being complicit with current reflexive conventions. These smaller images were presented in a second larger room adjoining the first room. One could see works from one room while in the other room, and the sound of the video work bled into the second room. *Gae Lebowa* subsequently travelled to Vienna as part of the exhibition *Moved Generations* at the Museum for Ethnology, organised through the GEZA (Gemeinnützige Entwicklungszusammenarbeit) *Young Photographic Artist Award*, June 18–21, 2010. I accompanied the exhibition and spoke at the opening. The three black and white photographs presented in the small room were also presented as part of the *New African Photography* exhibition, hosted by Gallery Momo in 2010.

While my dissatisfaction with the pressure to be more reflexive in the production of *Gae Lebowa* (2010) was easily overcome, through practices like institutional critique associated with contemporary art, I would encounter similar dissatisfaction experienced through the *Gae Lebowa* project again while working with archived photographs of Balobedu within the context of a Master of Arts in Fine Arts (MAFA) at a university. Institutional critique is a process whereby the structure of an institution is used to draw attention to itself as a way of critiquing and surfacing structurally marginalised conversations within that institution. This process looks to enforce the modern cultural institution's mission, such as the duty to the public it was invented to serve (Alberro & Stimson, 2009:5–7; Stearn, 2013; Badovinac, 2009). The publics include, for example, the civic public, artists or, in the case of ethnographic museum, the previously colonised public, which has become the key constituent of inherited colonial cultural institutions. For my MAFA project I worked with the Krige Photographic Archive as an artist and Molobedu interested in opening the collection to a wider audience outside of the academic community, conventionally imagined as the main audience of such material.¹⁷ My MAFA project involved a negotiation of reflexivity by going through processes of consulting relevant stakeholders and the minefield of 'reflexive policy', namely contemporary Balobedu institutions (Balobedu tribal authority); community elders; descendants of the social anthropologists and descendants of people pictured in the photographs I used; academics involved in writing the history of 1930s social anthropology of which Eileen Krige was a part; digitisation policies related to colonial archives; satisfying academic requirements associated with an MAFA degree; fighting older social anthropologists and social anthropology historians about respecting artists and halfies operating in the field of archive; practicing art; and insisting on respect for my decisions against complying with academic convention as dictated by my halfie positionality.

The MAFA project culminated with the photographic installation *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012–2015) wherein I insisted on presenting the Krige Photographic Archive as an analogue

¹⁷ The Krige Photographic Archive contained over 1500 photographs taken by Eileen and Jack D. Krige in Balobedu, between 1932 and 1943, and again in 1964 and 1968. These depicted all aspects of Balobedu social life, religious life, political life, technology and ritual practices. The collection is housed by Iziko South African Museum in Cape Town, South Africa.

photographic archive,¹⁸ whose presentation as wet silver-gelatine prints restricted the audience's ability to read the photographs as sources of information about Balobedu life (daily life and their response to colonialism and anthropology) in 1930.¹⁹ My accompanying thesis demonstrated my knowledge of 1930s photography, its relationship with social anthropology and contemporary efforts to practise reflexivity around colonial era photographs, as well as elaborate anthropological archives as Balobedu dithugula (sacred) objects in need of mediation by a khelobedu ritual specialist (motšhwara marapo). At the end of this, I still did not really scratch the surface of what I was interested in with regard to khelobedu or exploring my idea of a 'khelobedu ritual specialist' sufficiently. I could not see Balobedu; all I could see was the ghosts of old social anthropologists and their successors'

¹⁸ The installation *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012–2015) was not submitted as part of the MAFA submission. Only a selection of its residue was submitted as part of the installation *Neither Nor: Residues of a Four-Year Obsession with Balobedu, Anthropology and Photography* (Neither Nor 2012).

¹⁹ *Dithugula tša Malefokana* entailed an installation made out of two adjoining rooms. The first room comprised a well-lit gallery space with a series of hanging lines, where blackened photographs were hung on a wall. Opposite this wall there was a Perspex panel with images of the scanned diaries of Eileen and Jack D. Krige's fieldwork trips to Bolobedu, made between 1932 and 1943. The second room was secluded within the first room and was accessible through a curtain next to the Perspex panel. The secluded room was a darkened room with red light reminiscent of a photographic darkroom. In this room the audience was invited/instructed to take a sheet of pre-exposed photographic paper from a box and place it into a liquid bath (both provided in the room). The sheet of paper would then bring up a random image from the Krige photographic archive, which would turn black as it became fogged (blackened) by light entering from a light box depicting captions from the Krige diaries in front of the water bath. The audience was then instructed to take the blackened sheet of paper to the well-lit space and hang it on the wall. The installation was interested in exploring and emphasising the materiality of photography as a comment on the prominence of photography as illustration within the academy. The wider *Dithugula tša Malefokana* project (2012 — dissertation and installation) indulged in feminist and indigenous methodologies (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008) reflecting the demand for reflexivity from below as discussed above. This process established the ethnographic photographs as entangled (see Nuttall, 2009), complicated, materially unstable photographic artefacts that convened a diverse crowd, ranging from an array of Balobedu, the academics working with forms of ethnography and archive, and the art community in general.

interests in proving their reflexivity. The process of complying with reflexivity had once again interfered with my interest in *khelobedu*, from my own point of view. I had not even begun to articulate what I thought I meant by *khelobedu*.

After submitting my MAFA project I spent months trying to articulate my frustration with sustaining an interest in *khelobedu* from my point of view within institutions of culture in South Africa, namely a public art gallery (JAG's ethnographic collection department) and the university context.²⁰ I concluded that all my attempts to work on *khelobedu* within the context of reflexivity ended up being a conversation about the need to understand and reform colonial praxis or neutralise the accusation of coloniality. That is to say, the debates I engaged in with Gule and Leibhammer and the negotiations I navigated in the MAFA only addressed the conditions around the changing discourse of anthropology (and the role of photography in its founding) and anthropology's troubled relationship with a subject, such as *khelobedu*, and did not necessarily pay attention to me and the conversations I was interested in. In essence, it subordinated my *khelobedu* project to the needs of a reflexive anthropology. This conversation about neutralising the accusation of coloniality had an effect of re-subjecting *khelobedu* in the same way anthropology had done previously. It re-subjects *khelobedu* by inventing it as a marker of contemporary Western subjectivity and its self-representation as reflexive; in short, it results in more coloniality. I understand this coloniality to play out in how Western subjects flaunt their tolerance of halfies and artists (who must adhere to existing colonial praxis) as a sign of their reflexivity.

While the gallery context and the academic context I encountered offered some form of space to imagine and express *khelobedu*, this space was undone by a demand (brought by, and demanded by, such institutions for academic rigour) for the type of knowing born out of a transparent object, as criticised by Quijano and Ennis (2000) and Glissant (1997). Therefore, *Gae Lebowa* (2010), together with my MAFA project *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012), was pivotal in locating the problem dealt with by this PhD project as one that accuses the academy and its associated institutions of culture of looking to fashion a self-portrait at my

²⁰ My attempts to articulate this frustration resulted in a conference paper entitled 'A Personal Take, or Stuck in the Middle/Side and Going Mowhere: An Attempt at Imagining a Methodology for Engaging Colonial Photographic Archives, Histories and Subjectivities'. A copy of this paper is included as Appendix 1a of the submission.

expense. It is for this reason that I now seek fully to express my imagining of khelobedu. Thus, khelobedu is developed and used, in this PhD project, as a conceptual tool to deal with the complex and entangled imaginings by Balobedu of themselves, and about them by their neighbours; successive waves of colonial agents over the last two centuries; and me as a contemporary Molobedu insider, working as an artist and academic — a ‘halfie’.

1.5. The illegibility of colonised subjectivities — my lack of voice

The conditions that led to my burning desire to articulate the frustration I felt as an artist and Molobedu (a halfie working with a subject like khelobedu) after my two encounters with the reflexive turn has been elaborated by Premesh Lalu in his book *The Deaths of Hintsas: Post-apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (2009). Lalu draws attention to the problems in, or even impossibility of, accessing or including ‘indigenous’ or previously colonised subjectivity within the process of postcolonial historical production based on colonial archives and disciplines. I understand Lalu (2009) to say that the subjectivity of the previously colonised is not retrievable from or through the colonial archive. Lalu (2009) draws from the case of a contemporary Xhosa orator, healer-diviner Nicholas Tilana Gcaleka, who sought to use the currency of colonial archival material to effect a contemporary reimagining of Xhosa history and historical representation. In a nutshell, Gcaleka returns from Europe with a skull of a Scottish woman, which he claimed as the skull of the murdered heroic Xhosa king, Hintsas. On his return, Gcaleka’s is greeted by academics (historians), hired by the Xhosa ruling house, ready to prove that the skull in Gcaleka’s possession is not that of Hintsas, neglecting the question of what the effect of this move would mean for a wounded community. Through Lalu’s (2009) explication of the drama that unfolded, I understand Gcaleka’s move, his crime, so to speak, to be his use of an effect of the methodology of historiography and not necessarily the envisioned outcome of this methodology. Gcaleka’s recognition that the act of travelling, then searching through archives overseas, later returning with a skull that stands in for a missing Hintsas skull, is the appropriate process for restoring confidence in a Xhosa constituency wounded by the desecration of its revered symbol of resistance against colonialism. This recognition is key. That is to say, the act (methodology) of *going to find* is where the potency of Gcaleka’s intervention lies, not in whether the skull is or is not Hintsas’s. Through a discussion of Gcaleka’s move and its reception, Lalu (2009) demonstrates how the subjectivity of the previously colonised subject cannot get voice — is illegible — through historiography and the associated disciplined scholarship.

Through the book, Lalu (2009) establishes that the attack on Gcaleka happened because of an assumption that the academy and its client (what I understand possibly to be a colonially-invented Xhosa tribal authority) are the sole or intended audience of Gcaleka's move. This effectively mutes Gcaleka's possible accountability to more diverse audiences outside of the colonial institutions. I understand Lalu's (2009) book to point out that the rejection by the academic community of Gcaleka's efforts to reconstitute some Xhosa people around a different memory of Hintsá, by improvising methodologies and practices associated with historiography, indicates that historiography (and colonial-born disciplines) has a limit as a tool to reshape history to reflect the multiplicity (Glissant, 1997; Deleuze & Guattari, [1980] 1987) and diversity of our times (Lalu, 2009:42). That is to say, academic historical argumentation — the emphasis on evidence and authority — is unable to reflect the experience and contain the needs or interests of the previously colonised; and is therefore a form of coloniality. The way that the evidentiary process is employed against Gcaleka — questioning the rationality of how he found the skull — pitting his method against that of Western forensic enquiry (effectively using colonial-style 'knowing' strategies) — has the effect of turning Gcaleka in to a transparent subject, who could be disputed. In essence, Lalu (2009) points out that the process of privileging Western knowledge practices and outcomes (the obsession with evidence) over Gcaleka's practices and outcomes, points to a fatal discrepancy in the capacity of the reflexive cultural landscape. This effectively points out how the maintenance of a colonial-style relationship between power and knowledge remains intact, through the way an idea of archive is deployed — how an archive can or should be used. That is to say, Gcaleka's misuse of 'appropriate' archival practice is being used to impose a hierarchy of who is allowed to speak about what and be heard, and how they should do so.

1.6. Expressing khelebedu

My quest to express khelebedu is not unlike Gcaleka's quest for Hintsá's head. I am not seeking a proven truth or transparent facts. The quest and method are themselves the substance of my undertaking. To 'express khelebedu' is to engage in speculation and improvisation, because there is no way of knowing enough of it to generalise. Thus my quest to express khelebedu is an exercise in imagination, to fill in gaps and manage the complexities and inconsistencies that accompany khelebedu's diversity. For this reason, I will use the term 'imagining' rather than, for example, 'understanding' khelebedu, to ensure that the possibility of debate around the term 'imagination' remains as open as possible. I am

interested in the tension between the term's utility in the creative sense, as practised by some within the field of art to invent freely, but also as a critique of the politics of how subjective colonial imaginings (early colonist writings like Reuter's 1905 journal article on Modjadji) become 'objective' knowledge over time. Then the question around my insistence on imagination becomes: What informs this 'imagination'? In my case, it is a deep understanding of khelobedu derived from having lived it, being exposed to its capacity for philosophy through prolonged familial instruction and active participation in this philosophising over the course of my life. It is also informed by an understanding of Balobedu's visual culture, which has fascinated me for as long as I can remember. The tension between this visuality and the weight of its (khelobedu's) capacity for knowing is important in navigating my problem. Here, I use Hal Foster's idea of visuality, which Norah Campbell and Jonathan Schroeder (2011:1506), quoting Foster, express as 'the idea that there are many ways of seeing the world, establishing visuality as the way in which certain ways of seeing the world are created, including how we are allowed, made and able to see'.

The concept of imagining khelobedu rests on an idea of seeing (articulated as imagining) and practising (articulated as expressing) khelobedu for myself. That is to say, seeing and understanding that which I have not seen anywhere else, which someone outside of Bolobedu is not likely to see if I do not visualise it and, most importantly, that which I am compelled to seek out. To be drawn to this relation of seeing, centred on my seeing for myself and not for a powerful other, or the greater good (what I understand to be the rationale for coloniality), is imperative today, as the #Fallist era demands de-coloniality in thinking through the university curriculum. It is imperative because it marks a point in which it is no longer enough to be content just with waiting for the world or the powers that be to intuit and act on your behalf. Therefore, it was urgent to see for myself and create my own imaginings of khelobedu, drawing on wider ideas of archive, document and visuality, instead of accepting, wholesale, handed-down imaginings of khelobedu derived from a Western conception of archive, document and visuality alone. If I do not imagine it for myself, I will be forced to uphold the colonial institutions' imaginings of khelobedu, which is limited to whatever value such institutions see for khelobedu, or how much of its potential they can grasp.

To speak of an inability to express my imagining of khelobedu names my problem as not having the material or space to imagine and foreground it. Rather, this inability points to being unable to take full advantage of the space created by the demand for de-coloniality, and the demand for some form of reflexivity. It speaks to the problem of constantly fighting to

maintain the impulse to imagine and express *khelobedu* against the academy's persistent coloniality and its insistence that I explain this impulse within the confines of reforming the academy, instead of actually imagining and expressing it for whatever reason is called forth by my position as a *Molobedu*, and other marginalised designations I harbour.

While the idea of art offers a relief to this inability, through its emphasis on imagination and expression — in contrast to social anthropology's insistence on explanation and history of change over time — it is important that I do not confine my imaginings and expressions to, for example, the art gallery. I must imagine and express *khelobedu* in the heart of the institutions that legitimise and instrumentalise its marginalisation, as a thesis next to others, so that my efforts are not simply dismissed as the preoccupation of an artist or *Molobedu* but are accepted as the preoccupation of a *Molobedu* who is an artist and more — an academic too. I want to do this here, in the heart of institutions of power, so that my preoccupations are accepted as they are, without being prefaced by some other academic whose only contribution to my work is to transcribe it to a format coloniality can understand and appropriate. To leave my imaginings and expressions outside of this context would be to uphold existing problematic imaginings of *khelobedu* produced through coloniality. Furthermore, I want to do this imagining and expressing outside social anthropology and history (both suffering from the grip of coloniality). But I want to be knowledgeable about both disciplines. This would be what Walter Mignolo (2009 & 2014) establishes as the condition of de-colonial *practice* that knows coloniality without reproducing it.²¹ Thus the problem requires a radical move that brings what is conventionally seen as the province of vernacular practices into the heart of the academy, without being ignorant of the academy's ways.

²¹ Walter Mignolo, in the seminar 'On the Concept of De-coloniality', positioned de-colonial practice, or rather the idea of being de-colonial, as an exercise in thinking about colonialism. In this thinking, one is expected to read and consider as much as one can about the colonial project — including the colonial archive — without reproducing its knowledge or practices. That is to say, one should think about coloniality for the purpose of understanding it, not for the purpose of weighing its importance today or reforming it. The talk 'On the Concept of De-coloniality' was given at a seminar hosted by the African Studies Unit and the De-colonial Theory Reading Group, HUMA, University of Cape Town, August 13, 2014. The talk summarises ideas Mignolo develops in the article *Global Coloniality and the De-colonial Option* (Mignolo & Mignolo, 2009).

This positioning of the problem acknowledges that the academy is interested in change in the direction I am suggesting. My discussion earlier of scholars such as Edwards's (1992 & 2001) and Pinney's (2011) influence on anthropology's efforts to embrace the reflexive turn through projects involving archival photography, and the centrality of the artist in bringing new context to existing questions, attests to my insistence on the need to imagine and express *khelobedu* my way. Therefore, this PhD project addresses the problem of why it is that, even when the academy is poised, at least policy-wise, to encourage me to imagine and express *khelobedu* from my point of view, I am still unable to do so.

1.7. Summary of the problem

This PhD project problematises my relationship with the academy and some colonial-born cultural institutions, like museums of ethnography, as a 'halfie' expected to redress, transform and maintain (in colonial language) the academic project, instead of imagining and expressing *khelobedu*. This points to my susceptibility to subject *khelobedu* (subordinating it to the needs of a reflexive anthropology) by not observing Mignolo's (2009 & 2014) decolonial injunction to pursue an understanding of colonialism without reproducing colonial knowledge practices — knowing how *khelobedu* is subjected by anthropology without repeating anthropology's knowledge practices applied to *khelobedu*. That is to say, the problem is one of treating my interest in *khelobedu* in a way that envisions someone else outside of myself or other communities outside of Balobedu as the audience for *khelobedu*.

Thus the problem has been an 'inability' to express myself within institutions of power in contemporary South African society, without becoming a subject (object) in a discourse that values me as an indicator of colonial reality and its need for reform, and not as a reality *contemporaneous* with itself, interested in different questions beyond redress and reform, such as imagining and expressing *khelobedu*.

This is the seeming impossibility of going beyond specific disciplines, like anthropology, towards academic configurations capable of imagining and expressing *khelobedu* within the academy.²² Therefore, the problem addressed by this PhD project is that of coloniality, its

²² I acknowledge that the university includes a large number of inter- and trans-disciplinary projects and initiatives. However, I experience the culture of the university, especially in undergraduate

emphasis on a particular type of methodology and document, implicating a specific type of observer, alien to me. That is to say, the academy as a site of knowledge production does not value other approaches to knowing, such as valuing expression itself as a way of knowing (Elkins, 2017).

This problem affects my wish to move away from seeing late nineteenth-century photographs of Balobedu as documentary evidence of colonial reality, instead of merely archival documents visualising Balobedu. This is a problem that plagues my attempts to foreground my imagining and expression of khelobedu as some form of ‘diverse’ visuality.

This limit is in essence a discussion of the failure of my collaboration with the academy and its formal institutions of culture. As Quijano and Ennis (2000) point out: like the university, the colonial archive is a site of dualistic control, and any form of collaboration will always lead to comparison and analysis. Thus the problem at hand is the crisis of the institution of modernity and its inability to tolerate khelobedu, beyond being a marker of itself — coloniality’s inability to resist producing me, its collaborator, as an ‘Other’ or counterpoint by comparing my rationality with its own.

2. Research question

Given this limitation, this PhD project asks the question: How do ‘I’ see, or make visible, in a world accustomed to being told (explained to)?

This question draws from a much larger context and question, which asks: If the academy and cultural institutions like museums of ethnography have accepted the impossibility of keeping out of such institutions marginalised communities from which they draw their legitimacy, and have accepted the impossibility of preventing them from creating their own institutions and methodologies that facilitate the expression of such subjectivities, why is it that the marginalised are still unable to foreground situated imaginings of their reality, facilitated by aspects of the colonial archival holdings kept by such institutions?

studies, as still effectively rooted in coloniality-based disciplines as the cornerstone of higher education.

3. Methodology

This thesis engages with photographs and texts in archives; recorded dreams, rumoured dreams and **dreams** dreamt by me; images and **installations** seen by me and produced by me in Bolobedu, **Johannesburg** and Cape Town, **Dakar** and **Berlin**; as well as negotiations with gatekeepers, **immersions** in situations which I underwent, **conversations** I engaged in, and the effects and experiences of travel undertaken by me in the course of pursuing the PhD. In situating these kinds of engagements as the substance of my PhD project, I do many things that social anthropologists do and then report as ‘**ethnography**’, though the production of ethnography is not my purpose. The echo of an ethnographic approach in my work highlights the way in which ethnographic research relies on what the researcher apprehends. This allows me to foreground the challenge that I pose to the academy to consider: What does it mean for me to undertake research which relies on what I apprehend, with the particular literacies and expertise that I bring to bear? The ethnographer, most classically, is a person from another place, other than the one studied. In Africa, historically, that person has been from Europe or America. The person is certified as able to do this by having studied anthropology and being familiar with the method of participant-observation. Although I have undertaken social anthropology courses and have read widely in the anthropological field, the thesis resists that positioning, making use of a variety of other approaches alongside elements of ethnography.

3.1. The research **approach**

Where social anthropology focuses on telling and mostly uses photographs to support or illustrate the **telling**, I foreground my own acts of seeing and seek to make things visible for others to **see**. Making visible implies a form of seeing that does not report but leaves the vision open for other people to see. Telling is a form of documentary practice that directs a reader’s attention to a particular thing, which has the effect of obscuring other possible visions. I draw the idea of a distinction between showing and telling from Glenn Bowman (2004), who elaborates the difference in artists’ and social anthropologists’ relations to the ‘object’ of knowledge as being implicit in the distinction between showing (artist’s aim) and telling (social anthropologist’s aim). That is to say, the artist wants to show something immanent about an event; social anthropologists, like scholars in general, want to tell — want to dis-embed from the event a structure or process that can be told (Bowman, 2004). I reconfigure Bowman’s opposition of showing and telling by elaborating different types of showing. For example, in photography one can distinguish a showing that asks the viewer to

do something, referred to as documentary photography; and the showing that leaves the vision there for the viewer to see without expecting any action; what we commonly describe as expression. I am interested in the latter.

To alleviate the problem of coloniality and its emphasis on telling, and to satisfy the question of how I ‘see’ in a space built for ‘telling’, this PhD project understands the seeing proposed by my PhD project’s question to imply a current imagining and expression of khelobedu from my position, as a Molobedu, artist and academic. Thus, the aim of the PhD project is to see khelobedu by imagining and expressing it now, here, because it is in its imagining that it continues to function as a field of power and not as a subject of colonialism. The question tabled for this PhD project also encourages me to argue that it is not so much that my subjectivity — my desire to ‘see’ and express my imagining of khelobedu — is not attainable or cannot ‘gain voice’ (Lalu, 2009) through the colonial archives that document it; but rather, it is the conception of an **approach** to the existing methodologies with which one tries to imagine and express it that are inadequate. This approach is inadequate because it is conceived as engaged in a project of critiquing and reforming coloniality, through adhering to conventional disciplinary practices. These practices testify to the academy’s reflexivity, and are effectively imagined by the academy as serving someone other than me. In intervening this, I propose such radical methods as artistic practices such as those developed through **Dadaism**,²³ emphasising contingency, performativity and **nonsense** (Rasula, 2015); and ‘indigenous’ methodologies, such as an emphasis on **halfie** with multiple constituencies (Abu-Lughod, 1991), and de-coloniality conceived as a **practice** (Bhabra, 2014), which is elaborated by Linda Smith (1999) and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) as the questioning of whom the research benefits.

On one hand the thesis submission comprises many elements, which are squarely visual: photographs, slides, records of installations, catalogues and **boxes**. It deploys concepts that

²³ Dadaism was an art movement that proliferated in Europe and America in the 1920s and remains significant for contemporary art practice. The movement revolved around the Café Cabaret Voltaire, which presented a series of variety shows that rejected the salon conventions (formal exhibition spaces dominated by collectors and curators) and the role of the theorist or critic in the valuing of what an artwork is. The café was run by, and serviced by, artists gaining a reputation for fostering experimentation, collaboration and collegiality among its regulars. Key members include photographer Man Ray and conceptualist Marcel Duchamp.

are fundamentally visual. But the approach of creating a vision for the viewer to see applies not simply to the images submitted but also, importantly, to the text presented. It is a text in a form that mimics, but is not quite, a thesis: 274 A4 pages organised in terms of chapters, replete with footnotes and a bibliography, entitled ‘*MaBareBare, a rumour of a dream*’,²⁴ described as a thesis ‘submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Art’ and presented unbound, in a Solander box.

This text eschews ‘telling’ in favour of showing. Across four chapters I **attempt** to ‘show’ the processes that I undertook in the course of this research, leaving the vision there for the viewer to **see** without expecting any action.

Continuing process is a fundamental mode of work in art and is the core approach of this thesis undertaken, as it is, through registration at the Michaelis School of Fine Art. I understand this positioning and art methods to emphasise the idea of a continuing engaging and grappling with a topic, issue or event, by both those that initiate the engagement and those that encounter it later. This approach is quite different from that of producing and interpreting **data** to support a tailored argument with a firm conclusion. In the art context results are not gauged by matters of proof but by other capacities, such as the ability of the work produced to open up complex, even ambiguous matter for engagement.

My PhD project submission takes the form of a ‘work’ produced using the art method of continuing process. It comprises three elements contained within a storage **box**. Taken together, the storage box and all the items it contains constitute the archive of the practice — my process. What is in the chapters of the thesis-like text is the telling of stories about, and description of, this **continuing process**. I present this process in all its play, digressions, byways and **splay**. As a result of the idea that the process is the thing — the aim — in itself, there is no conclusion to be drawn, only a process to be processed, as it were. In so doing I have sought to ‘show’ something immanent, ‘to leave a vision for the viewer to see’. The text component of the work is part of the vision, and is there to be ‘seen’. What is key to keep track of is the PhD submission’s ability to make a form of knowing possible, to express the

²⁴ The phrase *ma bare* **bare** generally refers to things people say, or rumour, but more specifically it is an invitation to think critically about what is being said, in order to recognise the content of the message. The idea uses the speed of the format of the traditional rumour — malicious gossip — as a way of relating vast amounts of information.

full range of the possibility of the impulse being pursued — my imagining and expression of khelobedu as a **contemporaneous** subject.

This approach self-consciously poses productive problems for the academy, as it does not lend itself to the conventions of the PhD thesis. For example, the nature of the continuing process as leading to an archive of practice/process already complicates the convention of a PhD as producing packaged knowledge, the format of which is a compact, bound thesis designed to fit on a standard bookshelf. This submission is much larger and resists the readiness of a bound thesis. Furthermore, the nature of the submission as a performative proposition challenges the digital submission requirement because the impulse of the submission cannot be easily digitised. In essence, the physical form of the submission gives expression to the intellectual challenge of a PhD that cannot be readily accommodated.

As part of the foregrounding of continuing process, taking a visual approach and ‘showing’, I introduce two enabling concepts, dreams and visual cues as technologies. I then deploy my khelobedu literacy to explore and understand both of these features.

I started my quest by seeking out older photographs of Bolobedu, which I understood possibly to have been facilitated by Balobedu’s presence in Berlin in 1897. I believed such photographs would provide me with an opportunity to foreground Balobedu subjectivity through my practice as a photo-archival researcher and as an artist working with photographic installations. While on this quest for photographs, I would encounter and become compelled by a rumour of a dream experienced by a Molobedu while on the 1897 trip, said to be recorded in the diaries of missionary Fritz Reuter who accompanied the group of Balobedu to Berlin. This **rumour** was related to me by Elfriede Höckner, an Austrian academic who had worked on a comparative study of a late nineteenth-century missionary’s diary (that of Fritz Reuter) and an early-twentieth-century anthropological monograph (Krige and Krige, [1943] 1980) on Balobedu. This rumoured dream promised even more possibility for foregrounding Balobedu subjectivity because of my familiarity with some Balobedu dream practices, as well as its potential for artistic and imaginative interventions, establishing the **idea** of a **dream** as a key component of the PhD project. I pursued the idea of a dream as a Balobedu **technology** capable of foregrounding Balobedu subjectivity thought to be illegible. To conceive of the rumoured dream as a Balobedu technology draws on my understanding of dreaming as a practice, the content of which is designed to support the structure that makes

up the technology. That is to say, the idea of dream is a practice that perpetuates itself — a machine that keeps the culture of Balobedu (read subjectivity) alive.

To address Lalu's (2009) observation of illegible or irrecoverable subjectivities such as those of Balobedu in the archive, I aimed to be unconventional about how I searched for and foregrounded Balobedu subjectivity.

I understand this unconventional approach to draw from the emphasis on **practice**, foregrounded by my understanding of such a technology (**dream**). That is to say, it is facilitated by my **literacy** of the said technology and an understanding that it (dream) depends on a repeated practice of paying attention to dreaming. The remaining question became: Where would these practices best be articulated?

To this effect this PhD project has identified contemporary art as a space that may facilitate such practices. It is the understanding of this PhD project that the articulation of my imagining of khelobedu is dependent on an identification and occupation of cracks or spaces within contemporary art-based and art-friendly cultural institutions that encourage the development and use of wider literacies, beyond the written academic text; institutions like museums of world cultures (former ethnographic museums) that are committed to people like me developing and comprehending my own literacies, and are ready to learn these literacies with me, instead of insisting we limit ourselves to their existing 'colonial' literacies. The question of **literacy** is developed from a point raised by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge (2006) who note, 'unless scholars, supervisors and academics learn to see or fully read art [and by extension other alternative outputs], the case for art *as* research cannot be made' (2006:10).²⁵ I understand Macleod and Holdridge (2006) to be pointing to a literacy problem in the academy. I understand this illiteracy to be around images outside of the academic written text. Thus the literacy question extends the idea of being able to read and write written text to the realm of being able to see and experience images, in addition to the images created through written academic text. I use image to refer to all visualities or representations that lead to a mental 'picture' beyond just the pictures created through audio-visual technologies. This draws on Thomas Mitchell (1986) to elaborate the myth that opposes image and text. This is important because, as Ann Stoler points out in her book *Along the*

²⁵ The context of 'art *as* research' comes from a debate drawn from Frayling (1993) about the different objectives of artistic research within a PhD project.

Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense, the question of the colonial archive is one tasked with producing a particular type of legal document, an ‘image-text’ based on the written word, ‘a commitment to paper’ (2008:1). Such texts, which she elaborates on in detail, are designed to meet the **literacy** requirements of administering colonies and are based on the subjectivity of early colonial administrators.

My concern with ideas of literacy points to a realisation that, while I have spent a great deal of my life in the academy, being told I was not literate because I could not conform to the conventions of the academic written text, my ability to read and **see** other forms of images outside the academic written text has poised me to occupy other spaces based on different types of images such as photographic installations. I understand this literacy to depend on my multiple positions — my situations as academic, Molobedu and artist — which have become valuable assets that have led to various invitations as a collaborator with disciplined scholars in the academy.

I refer to ‘visual cues’ to indicate that, while Jonathan Crary (1992) and Foster (1988) draw our attention to the constructed-ness of the primacy of vision, I have spent the greater part of my research understanding the multiplicity and connectedness of the senses, from the access-point of vision. Thus, to use the word ‘cue’ is to flag how I access the matrix of sensory elements. It does not uphold the primacy of vision. Therefore, I call the sensory cues ‘visual cues’ because I generally understand them from the visual point of view. But, as the PhD project unfolds, they are established as multi-sensory and do not depend on vision as primary. The idea of cues also includes the register of fragments because, in reality, the quest for khelobedu visualities is a search for fragments of a moment past.

The aim of the thesis, of imagining and expressing khelobedu for myself, began with my quest for photographs of a party of Balobedu who went to Berlin in 1897, under the auspices of the Berlin Mission Society (BMS). I explored this through a quest for visual cues associated with that visit, drawing from archives related to the BMS’s Fritz Reuter, who was active in Bolobedu in the late nineteenth century. Visual cues here refer to the proliferation of pictures and their associated connections with other cultural, textual, audio and tactile object-based fragments that litter a series of archives, spanning the colonial and the local. These would be, for example, archived texts, such as missionary reports and diaries, performed or recorded koša (texts contained in songs), dithugula ritual objects, performed direto (oral histories), personal and colonial photographs in various states of materiality, history books,

myths about Balobedu and social anthropology monographs. All of these I experience as transmitting some form of image-rendering aspects of Balobedu subjectivity that is visible to me. The notion of visual cues flags the idea that the access point is only a cue in the wider spectrum of sensory cues. So when I say visual cues, I refer to those prompts, the experience of which is facilitated by cues of a visual nature. This would include how koša is associated in my mind with the costumes the dancers wear, or how my interest in a history book or social anthropology monograph from the 1930s is engaged by the materiality of its worn canvas, yellowing pages and the analogue nature of its illustrative photographs, each of which has a visual quality of its own. This is a literacy I have drawn from being an artist concerned with how things look, and being a Molobedu who cannot separate koša sung and costume worn. This is how all integrated cues are available to me at first — as pictures.

3.2. Methods

Some of the methods I have employed in this PhD project are highly unorthodox, and I argue that these unorthodox methods are what are needed, both to identify constraints and then understand and remedy them. These unorthodox methods are: travel and **ill-discipline**, artistic practice, seeing and not telling, and exploring cracks through my multiple positions. These methods are enacted within the context of long-practised continuous, process-orientated approaches, like play within the context of artistic practice and participant-observation in social anthropology. These long-practised methods also include procedures such as **photo-archival research**, **immersion**, artistic **practice** (or **cultural production** within contemporary art), iterations, and travel often understood as ‘field trips’.

3.2.1. Play and participation

Two existing or ‘conventional’ methods used by this dissertation employ fine art’s idea of **play** and social anthropology’s participant-observation as vehicles for gaining proximity to, and navigating through, an otherwise elusive subject of research. It is also important to note the work of Schneider and Wright (2010) who, as previously mentioned, argue that there is a lot shared by social anthropology and fine art in terms of methodology, particularly the centrality of immersive fieldwork to both disciplines.

The idea of play stems from a tradition within fine art, such as Bauhaus **photography** and its subsequent take-up in forms of conceptual art, where repeated engagement and action is understood to bring about a degree of understanding about the object being engaged.

Conceptual art, or conceptualism, is a mode of production that accepts an **idea** as the work of art itself — ‘The thought is the thing’ (Richards, 2002:35). Regarding play, Kevin Moore (2011) describes repeated action leading to insights as following Walter Benjamin’s ideas of play, as the act of doing something over and over to build confidence, instead of being goal-driven; emphasising play as a continuous attempt, leading to a habit of playing, which has the consequence of discovery or achieving deeper understanding. Play in this context emphasises the idea that the **process** of repeated creative practice (this PhD project’s definition of play) results in some form of knowing (as opposed to knowledge), which can be shared — emphasising play as a process of knowing. That is to say, play is knowledge in-the-making. Having said this, it is important to note that **artists** do make things. What is key to remember is that this labour is not in service, as is all other labour; it is not married to the idea of utility. So while play can lead to ‘things’, the emphasis is on play as a process and not in its result.

The idea of play within fine art is mostly associated with the removal of the traditional object of art — dematerialisation of art (Lippard, 1997) — such as the removal of a painting or sculpture from the traditional market (galleries and museums), which frees the artist’s impulse to create from the demands of the market, often obsessed with the object of art. In a sense this acknowledges that within this PhD project I may be engaged in methodologies associated with art, but I do not necessarily aim to create art objects per se. I am interested in the practice and processes associated with art making and evoke Lucy Lippard’s (1997) dematerialisation of the traditional object of art. It is also important to note that while play has been accepted as leading to tangible insights, derived from the processes associated with the making or unmaking of an art object, it is not the intention of this PhD project to convert the knowledge in-the-making — what Barbara Bolt (2007) terms ‘praxical knowledge’ — into a text that can be analysed for qualitative purposes, a ‘thesis’ on the implications of process as a methodology, for example. Overall, the intention is to **attempt** to form habits of practice (play), and not to report on the implications or meaning of the habits or practice. That is to say, it is about getting into the habit of doing something instead of analysing the process and ‘telling’ its significance — not committing the work of art to the general flow of labour within positivist ends.

The idea of participant-observation acknowledges a fieldwork model where physically participating in the research’s primary field site, with one’s own body, is valued for its ability to bring the researcher’s attention to structures only discernible by actively taking part in the structure’s functioning (Kuklick, 2011:1; Schumaker, 2001); for example, participating in a

ritual, as opposed to observing it from a distance or soliciting testimonies about the ritual from participants. Conducting fieldwork-based participant-observation is often characterised by a process of subjective reflection, often in the form of **notes** or **diaries** and other narrative-based recollections. Such reflections are usually recorded immediately after the event and are usually converted into thick descriptive texts, produced at the earliest free time after the event. Within this constellation of subjective **note**-taking, photography can be and is often used as an aid to memory, documenting events in a collection of images. Photography, used as an aid to memory, makes for an open-ended range of photographs or ‘documents’ that can be appreciated in a variety of ways when rediscovered in the **archive**, or when retained for later use or reflection. This is distinct from the strictly briefed images with an envisioned function — an illustration elucidating a specific aspect in a text that may accompany an anthropological publication. While this is my chosen method, it is important to point out that the object is not to practice ethnography but to take advantage of the method’s ability to make visible things that would otherwise be difficult to **see**. This resistance to writing up my participant-observation into an ethnographic text acknowledges that this process turns my subjective insights into an objective ethnography — telling — particularly for an audience other than the one which originates the insights, and so the method ceases to be useful for the questions raised by this PhD project.

The **idea** of **travel** as a mode of research (fieldwork), related to the practice of participant-observation, draws on the convention of the ethnographer’s field **note**.²⁶ Particularly, this is the diary entry that sets up **context** through dense descriptions of scenes observed, as a way of capturing the full range of factors influencing the participant-observer’s appreciation of what is learned during the observation. That is to say, it is a ‘note to oneself’ of things to remember when writing up research. Within this PhD project, this plays out as instances where my writing preserves and mimics the register of the diary or the ethnographer’s register, where I freely relate events as they unfold or as I recall them.²⁷ This strategy is employed in order for

²⁶ In this context it is important to acknowledge the impact of the publication *Seven Days in the Art World* (Thornton, 2012), which provides a vocabulary and narrative strategy for my handling of the diary register.

²⁷ I acknowledge the debt my use of the **idea** of mimicry owes to the work of Homi Bhabha (1984), who develops the metaphor and strategy of mimicry to drive home the impossibility of colonised subjectivities to fully be like the colonising subjectivity — the Anglicised African is meant to look

me to foreground and confess my reflexivity and its implied multiple positionalities. It achieves this by not attempting to hide the centrality of my insights on personal experience and the centrality of ‘random’ encounters to my insights. That is to say, the diary register seeks to resist the temptation to hide my position as a subjective observer, by not writing out or managing my personal impressions, as older anthropologists sometimes did when converting their notes to academic text. I am also not adhering to the practice of auto-ethnography, where personal narratives are subjected to systematic analysis in order to ‘tell’ or understand cultural experience. Mine simply lays it bare. Within the PhD project I have engaged in aspects of the methods described, in how I kept several written and audio-visual diaries and notebooks, documenting my participatory travels, such as a rant about my frustration at doing archival research in Europe, which becomes a video work within the wider PhD practice.

3.2.2. Exposure over time

Overall, this combination of the two methods described above is conceptualised within the PhD project as Exposure over Time (Exp/T), the formula for photography that refers to the amount of time a light-sensitive entity is exposed to reflected light, resulting in a referential image that can be ‘fixed’. The key aspect of the strategy provided by the two methods is that I am to expose myself, through fieldwork-based participant-observation, to (1) the academy, where my utility as an agent of discourse (a counterpoint to fuel debate) is legitimised and contested; (2) *khelobedu*, my contested subjectivity embodied in my lived experience of practising as a contemporary person from *Bolobedu*; and (3) the contemporary art world, an economy seen to facilitate the exercise of multiple subjectivities, operating through a network of residency programmes, roaming arts schools (collegial workshops) and international exhibition circuits, such as *biennales*.²⁸ The spaces mentioned above foreground my positions

like, but is not, an Englishman. Furthermore, my use of the term also acknowledges aspects of mimicry that can be traced within contemporary art to practices of the *Dada* movement’s *Cabaret Voltaire*, where satire (mimicry) and nonsense anti-meaning was used as a form of resistance to (or camouflage against) appropriation by theorists and scholars, seen to prey on the ingenuity of the artist.

²⁸ Participation includes working as a PhD-level researcher within the field of photography and archive (photo archival research in Germany and Cameroon); attending the biennale exhibition circuit in Europe and West Africa (Venice and Dak’Art biennales), and observing the conversion of museums of ethnography into museums of world cultures in Germany and Austria.

— situatedness — as an academic, a Molobedu and an artist, particularly occupying these positions simultaneously, without any implicit hierarchies. These participations are undertaken through the practice of play, and my active practice as an **artist**, repeatedly experimenting with **photography** and **camera-based installations**, within the contemporary art circuit.

3.2.3. Unorthodoxy

My interest in khelobedu has allowed me to occupy a variety of positions spanning: academic (as researcher and scholar in the archive²⁹ as well as at various fieldwork sites, such as Bolobedu, the university, West Africa and Western Europe); contemporary artist (as a photographer, installation-based artist and art professional); and as a maker of contemporary khelobedu texts in Bolobedu itself (as a citizen engaging my peers and community in khelobedu within a variety of platforms, such as Facebook, school workshops, public gatherings and other private spaces). This constant movement between the different positions has led to a series of ‘shortfalls’ in my capacity to stay true to one subjectivity; at the same time, it has allowed me to take advantage of some of the privileges associated with these different positions. It is within this discrepancy that the unorthodox methodologies foreground themselves.

3.2.4. Between travel and ill-discipline

An overarching unorthodox methodology for this PhD project has been travel, a motif that is central to the generative aspect of participant-observation’s fieldwork, and is the staple of the contemporary artist and research academic who travels to present their artistic practice and research at exhibitions and conferences across the globe. Within this PhD project, the method of travel takes the form of both academic (and later artist) travel to key academic and art events globally, and the constant research visits to Bolobedu in general, and specific visits to my family across Bolobedu, as well as visits to German archives.

The key aspect that establishes the practice of travelling for work and personal business, as a viable methodology, is how it foregrounds the possibility of ‘the encounter’, which I understand to be a central feature of **contemporary art** movements, such as happenings, and practices, such as installation art. Examples of this would be how I constantly travel without

²⁹ Here I am referring to the physical archives, as contained in buildings, and artefact collections.

planning or doing homework about who I am meeting or could possibly meet. This has allowed me to encounter people without a preconceived idea of who they are, which enables me to ask questions that keep conversations open, because of the effect of genuine interest. This includes not rushing to research those I encounter, or an exhibition I am going to see or have just seen. This permits me to maintain a level of naivety about my encounters.³⁰ This attitude to the possibilities of encounter reflects a general disinterestedness. To be disinterested — to have no immediate self-interest — is to not care too much for the business at hand, like climbing the career ladder by actively being on top of things or pursuing proven strategies with discipline, but to remain open to things that are not easily predicted (possibility). Within this PhD, an example would be my going to the Dakar Biennale's professional preview week without any context for how things work (like the need to arrange meetings with important art figures well in advance); or my accepting invitations to everything, even if they do not serve my career; or going to the beach with an acquaintance while everyone is at the hottest networking session at the biennale. During the beach encounter I would be introduced to another colleague who would eventually facilitate a series of key opportunities (such as access to some closed events I stumble across as I travel the art circuit in subsequent years) because we managed to have a meaningful conversation about my work on archives. Such conversations would not have been possible at the networking session where everyone is in speed-dating mode. I would generally understand my obsession with happenstance as a form of **ill-discipline**. This ill-discipline can be associated with what has been popularised as epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009), which I understand to call for a refusal to uphold the violent disciplinary tendencies associated with coloniality. In essence the idea of ill-discipline runs through my whole methodology, as it refers to not being faithful to the logical flow of key features of the traditional methodologies of social anthropology and art.

Another key aspect of my method of travelling is the advantage of seeing exhibitions, artworks and curatorial strategies in person, which is different from reading about them in catalogues. This is especially significant when seeing them over and over in different configurations, as I travel the contemporary art circuit. This is a process of seeing how

³⁰ Within art it is generally a rule that one should be aware of who is who (biography and important work), a job generally relegated to curators who chaperone artists to events, curating whom they meet and whom they do not meet.

different art contexts change and influence an artwork or artistic practice. For example, there is an advantage in being able to see a **multi-channel installation** like Isaac Julian's *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010) presented in a large museum, Zeitz Mocaa, in the centre of the city of Cape Town, and seeing a similar multi-channel installation, *Soudain, un Léger Mouvement dans L'ordre Naturel des Choses* (2016) by François Daireaux in a small contemporary art centre, the **Espace Khiasma**,³¹ in the **suburbs** of **Paris**. Through my repeated visits and participation in the exhibitions I frequent, I immerse myself in the context of art, in both its practice and its exhibition.

It is also important to understand that within contemporary art, **dinner parties** and informal socials are more than mandatory polite protocol. It is at dinners where one spends time in informal conversations with other practitioners. It is in extended formats like the **studio visit** or master class, at week-long parties or during weekends away, where relationships and collaborations are forged, much as how the Dadaists used the **Cabaret Voltaire** as a place for artists to sustain collegial relations and conversations that forged their movement. This also plays out in how I encounter **artists**, authors and theorists with whom I converse about their work, allowing me opportunities to gain insights into their thinking that do not easily fit into the standard published academic text. In a sense, my research has depended on **conversations** with 'experts' and actors in my field, limiting the emphasis on desktop research. Thus the conversation and the 'art visit' emerge as key methodologies associated with travel and, to a degree, artistic practice.

3.2.5. Between exploring cracks and distributed sensibilities

My use of the idea of distributed sensibilities acknowledges the mobilisation of positionalities outside of those defined and sanctioned by official or dominant legislative and social institutional structures, like government. This draws in part from ideas proposed by Jacques Rancière (2004) that the distribution of the sensible sets the divide between what is visible and invisible, 'sayable and insayable', and audible and inaudible — where sensible refers to the capacity to perceive, and distribution speaks to the politics of who controls or traffics this ability to perceive, who decides what is visible or sayable (Sayers, 2005). I use this idea in the crude sense that acknowledges the impossibility of a dominant society legislating the effect of my having multiple positions and sensibilities. In my case I draw on a

³¹ <http://www.khiasma.net>

sensibility derived from my being a **Molobedu**, academic and artist, which together position me in a strange relation to the project of knowing in a university system in the grip of coloniality. These sensibilities make it difficult to adhere to any conventional procedure as my positionalities constantly destabilise any hegemony envisioned by, or associated with, my different sensibilities, when they are seen as separate socio-political identities that do not mix. One example would be how my relationship with my **grandmother** and my great-grandmother, with whom I have spoken at length about **khelobedu**, makes it impossible for me to fully practise as a disciplined academic, chasing ‘facts’ about **Balobedu**. These relationships changed and affected how I see or perceive **khelobedu**.

While this advantage is a common phenomenon, described by the ‘halfie’ notion (Abu-Lughod, 1991), emphasising and insisting on this use at the same **time** as being an artist and academic is key. Overall, distributed sensibilities emphasise not disciplining one’s sensibilities for objectivity’s sake. The idea of distributed sensibilities also acknowledges the role of harnessing multiple positions accepted as residing in everyone (positions such as gender, race and class (Rose, 1997)). In contemporary art, the interest in archive — particularly within the scramble for an **African** vernacular archive, spurred by the prominence of the market value of vernacular photographic archives, such as those of Malick Sidibé — is driving a demand for more African cultural producers working with archives. This demand has led to many artists engaging the idea of archive as a form of direct self-representation, through referencing aspects of archive (like referencing the look of archived photographs) in response to European institutions’ requirement to fill gaps of African self-representation in their ethnographic collections. I am not interested in this aforementioned reformative aspect of self-representation. I am curious about the truth claim of the disavowed nature of ethnographic archives being replaced or overshadowed by the vernacular archives. This disinterestedness in the self-representation emphasis for artists working with archives, such as those produced by Sidibé, allows me to still participate in the archive-crazy art world as a sign of neglected questions of archive within the contemporary art context. That is to say, my sensibilities (ability to perceive) as a **Molobedu**, academic and **artist**, critical of self-representation practices (for artist working with vernacular photographic archives) that benefit only coloniality, has allowed me space to chart my own questions about colonised people in the archive. This is essentially facilitated by my position as a trained photo-archival researcher, a **Molobedu** collecting and interested in aspects of **Lobedu** oral tradition, and a photographer interested in the paradox of photography as both **fleeting** and still.

3.2.6. The film essay

For this PhD project a key influence has been the form of the film essay, among other forms, as practised within fine art, and a key methodological apparatus for managing the effect and idea of continuous-process. I have been drawn to this form because it has been established as emphasising the idea of an attempt (Bazin, [1958] 2003), which at once signals the idea of open-endedness, iteration or repeated action; it is not final. It is also conducive to containing the impulses (a need to inscribe diasporan personal experience in a society that suppresses its expression) of those marginalised by colonialism (Biemann, 2003). I am also drawn to it because of its use of multimedia collage, assemblage and installation art practices, in a way that facilitates a complex **story-telling** strategy that accommodates vernacular practices (practices outside the dominant Western institutionalised modes). A **film essay** is both an evolving theory and the proliferation of a series of practices trying to grapple with, and contain, the prevalence of audio-visual presentations that claim to be and are referred to as film essays (Rascaroli, 2008). In other words, the film essay is a space of negotiation as the form gains widespread use and exhibits contradictory practices. In particular, my interest in the form of the film essay recognises the idea of a film essay as ‘dissatisfaction’ (quoted by Lee, 2017),³² which I understand to be productive for the interest of this PhD project to be unconventional. I envision this quality as a process of mitigating my dissatisfaction with how the academy approaches the question of collaboration with previously colonised subjectivities and the academy’s insistence on disciplining our practices to conform to coloniality. It is important to stress the utility of the theory of essay as continuous attempt (Rascaroli, 2008; Alter, 1996), flagging the process of starting to do something ‘undoable’. Within art, the film essay is key in how ‘diasporan’ artists, like John Akomfrah, deploy it as **installation**, breaking with the ‘documentary’ aspects of such a presentation when presented in a classic cinema or on television.

While the turn to the film essay has a history in cultural studies, particularly in the work done by scholars such as Stuart Hall on the problematic process of representation and its relationship with the figure of the colonial archive, this thesis is committed to practicing

³² ‘To me, the essayistic is not about a particular generic fascination for voiceover or montage, the essayistic is dissatisfaction, its discontent with the duties of an image and the obligations of a sound’ (Eshun, quoted in Lee, 2017).

some compelling strategies of troubling, negotiating, or forgoing the problem of representation. Such strategies include those practiced by artists John Akomfrah through a particular approach to the practice and theory of the film essay. I understand this approach as committed to an attempt to articulate oneself from one's position instead of giving in to the rules of speech demanded by the dominance of the colonial archive in matters of representing black lives and experiences.

4. The PhD project submission

This PhD submission comprises: 1) the field guide, which you have already encountered; and 2) the box, an archive that contains the three components making up the bulk of the PhD project's submission. The field guide serves to offer some context and starting points for approaching my archive, contained in the box, including a list of its contents.³³ The box is a time capsule, a place where the PhD project, having reached its time limit, lies for future consideration. It emphasises the PhD as a continuing and incomplete process, presented as an archive of my practice. The idea of the PhD project reaching its limit recognises both the unrealistic timeframe given for a PhD in the humanities, within a South African university engrossed by the uncertainty imposed by a demand for de-coloniality, and the reality that the project of imagining and expressing *khelobedu* cannot be limited to a focused PhD format.

Overall the format of the archive is at once an illustration of my process of practising my subjectivity; being a contemporaneous *Molobedu* who is both an artist and academic, imagining and expressing *khelobedu* now and here; and a suggestion of the idea of a film essay that I originally envisioned as the practical component.

4.1. The archive: A PhD project in a box

4.1.1. The thesis-text — a rumour of a dream

The thesis, which you are currently reading, is titled 'MaBareBare, a Rumour of a Dream'. This text is not so much the official report — the thesis — of my PhD project as it is an illustration of the difficulty and paradox of maintaining a 'traditional' thesis when the very nature of the project is an 'anti-thesis', and where the conclusion recommends deferring the

³³ The yellow colour of my 'Field Guide' acknowledges artist Mark Dion's *Field Guide* project (*The High Line: A Field Guide and Handbook*).

report until there is sufficient critical mass of previously colonised subjectivities in positions of power to assess its weight. It also demonstrates my capacity as an academic, capable of executing tasks associated with the academy.

The introduction presents the problem of the persistence of coloniality and its obstruction to my desire to imagine and express *khelobedu*, and lays out my strategies for addressing the problem. The conclusion offers some form of resolution and argues for opacity and other forms of knowing to be better accommodated in the academy. It insists that this submission cannot fulfil the demands of the PhD and demands that only time spent be examined. It invites examination of the process and its presentation.

The body of the thesis is divided into four chapters.

1) The first chapter presents the early period of my PhD project and the search for photographic archives as my first **attempt** at giving voice to the subjectivity of the group of *Balobedu* who went to **Berlin**. It documents the way in which conforming to research conventions, and my expression of my authority as a scholar, dissolves into a desire to travel and see for myself.

2) The second chapter sets up a context for how I came to understand my enabling conceptual technologies, like the dreams and visual cues that I use throughout the PhD project. It is divided into two parts. The first part sets the context for how I encountered the **rumour** of a dream by a *Molobedu* who was in Berlin in 1897. It also sets out the context for my affinity to the **moving image** as an artistic form. The second part introduces the opportunities presented by institutions like museums of world culture and their encouragement of previously colonised subjectivities to pursue their own specific projects beyond the conventions of reflexivity. This is a discussion of artists in the archive and the discrepancy in their treatment by other scholars working in the archives.

3) The third chapter presents my excursions into contemporary art and introduces some of the structures that make the global art circuit conducive to the success of my project. The first part presents my encounters with the form of the film essay, the contemporary art circuit and **installation** as artistic practice. I briefly elaborate on the idea of the global art circuit, particularly the idea of contemporaneity and its emphasis on multiple subjectivities. The second part explicates some early exhibitions and installations I produced within the context of the contemporary art context. These explications are presented as ‘proof’ of a take-up of

my attempts to imagine and express khelobedu from my own point of view within the wider global art circuit and its interdisciplinary programmes.

4) The last chapter explicates the context of my *Camera Obscura #* iterations. The *Camera Obscura #* is a series of camera obscura works that I presented within a variety of contemporary art contexts such as in a biennale, as well as in a residency programme. This chapter presents the series as concerned with the effect of my practice of dreaming, my rejection of photography and my affinity with the idea of installation art. The chapter offers a glimpse into some early indication of my process's success at generating or opening up complex, even ambiguous matter for engagement.

4.1.2. MaBareBare, an archive of practice

A Solander phase-box titled 'MaBareBare' houses my documentary material from the installations I have made during the course of this PhD project. The use of the Solander phase-box and the colour green references Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise, or Box in a Suitcase* (1935–1941). The work presented in this context testifies to making art as part of my process, which gives rise to the form of the thesis.

The *MaBareBare* Solander phase-box includes **documentation** of iterations of the different works and events that I devised in the course of the PhD project. They are presented as my practice and are distributed between this Solander phase-box and a Picasa platform.³⁴ As a project, *MaBareBare* contextualises nine years of creative engagement with my imagining of khelobedu through exhibitions, installations, academic text and public orientated programmes. To call this submission an archive of practice points to an understanding that the practice itself is not an object of review but a continuing process undertaken simultaneously with the dissertation process and beyond (practiced outside of the academic context). The idea of an archive of practice draws from insights derived while I was on a studio visit to artist John Block at the Uferhallen Studios in Berlin, during the *Between the Lines* symposium programme in 2013.³⁵ The artist highlighted the importance of an archive

³⁴ Picasa is an image management programme developed by Google.

³⁵ The studio visit took place on April 16, 2013. The visit to the Uferhallen Studios included a visit to Sculpture Berlin, where artist Asta Gröting, who was also part of the *Between the Lines* symposium, talked to us about her artistic practice involving sculpture.

(of practice) for a professional artist, particularly for artists who do not make tangible work or finished products that can be easily collected.³⁶ This would be in line with conventional practice within contemporary art that establishes documentation as one of the conditions of a work as conceptual art. The artist showed us an organised filing system of documentation related to his practice, spanning his first show, the last one, including all planning material, as well as working plans and ideas for current shows. He then pointed out that when a **curator** comes for a **studio visit** he simply pulls out a folder with the relevant work or project to facilitate discussion with the curator. These insights positioned an artist's **archive** as a space where the beginnings of ideas for works are visible while allowing space to imagine where the **idea** might go without setting it in stone. This idea of an archive as a place to **see** beginnings, and imagine futures, foregrounds an argument by Michael Fried (2008:30) pointing out that an artist's work (referring specifically to photography) should be considered through questions of the artist's project, not in terms of where a particular work fits into the history of art — a telling of the significance of the artist through historiography. That is to say, artists should be considered by paying attention to their evolving bodies of work. This can be seen as priming one's understanding of how an artist explores a question or project unique to that particular artist over time. Archival practices I have just described facilitate recognition of Fried's proposition.

For me to present my practice as an object of review or examination (as a specific installation or a catalogue of works) would require us to establish criteria for its inclusion or evaluation, which would impose some sort of end point, counter to the intentions of this PhD project. The archive resulting from my experiments and presentations on a number of platforms serves to evidence my **attempt** at forming a habit of **practice**.

The archive is available in the form of physical objects in the phase box, as well as through the digital platform Picasa that acts as a form of artist's **notebook**. Through Picasa one can use tags to explore the digitally choreographed connection generated by the programme,

³⁶ This idea of an archive of an artist's practice is reinforced by the many exhibitions and survey exhibitions I saw during my fieldwork where documentation related to the production and documentation of actual ephemeral work was worked into the presentation of an artist's work, through a range of curatorial strategies. See, for example, the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* presented at the Foundation Prada at the Venice Biennale in 2013.

based on tags I have put on the material. A tag is a word or phrase applied to an image in the platform. These tags can be identified as ochre-highlighted-text — like *Lobedu* — throughout this thesis text.³⁷ The system of tags or unordered archives, references work by artist Josh Ginsberg (2013) as well as similar works such as *Zip: Corner Loving* (2016) by artist collaboration MADEYOULOOK where a ZIP file presents an archive of documents towards a project as a finished work,³⁸ refusing to supply the audience with a ready format for accessing the proposed work, inviting the audience to navigate the received material using their own sensibilities. Viewers of the Picasa platform are not required to draw conclusions, they are simply asked to participate in it.

The MaBareBare presents my ‘play’ within my attempts to think about ‘*an impulse to travel*’ as I try to visualise aspects of the different subjectivities involved in this PhD project and its rumoured dream — what I am conceptualising as ‘the practice’. This part of the practice consists of three bodies of work or experiments presented in the Solander phase-box:

1) The film footage archive from my ‘*deferred*’ film essay *Dream Me a Dream*, associated still photographs and digitised photographic prints from the different archives I have visited. The film footage archive consists of more than twenty hours of footage, spanning my travels locally and abroad, including different rituals practised by the different communities in all of my field sites — parties, conversations, scenes, protests, occupations, exhibition documentation (mine and other artists’ work). Samples of these are presented as digital clips, digital re-photographed clips and as still *screen-grabs* included in the Picasa platform.

2) A series of photography-based installations and a video work that I developed as a response to my work in the archive of the BMS. These works were presented as photographic installations, and have been exhibited in a series of local and international exhibitions, including the contemporary art biennale circuit, and in some conference presentations. These are documented conventionally as *installations* through *photography*, and as dispersed objects such as *notebook* handouts. Documentations of these works are included as printed

³⁷ My use of the colour palate of orange, references *Lobedu*, which means orange (a vibrant ochre-like colour) in *khelobedu*. The ochre clay is referred to as *letsoko* in *Khelobedu*.

³⁸ For *Zip: Corner Loving* (2016) see Wits School of Art’s (WSOA) online journal, see website <http://www.ellipses.org.za/project/corner-loving/>

photographs and original artefacts, and are presented in the Picasa platform as digital images with tags.

3) *Camera Obscura # 0-6*

A series of custom-built camera obscura installations (darkened rooms large enough to house a human body) that have been presented at exhibitions such as the [Bamako Encounters Photography Biennale 2017](#), the Künstlerhäuser [Worpswede](#) in Germany (2017), the Wits Art House in [Johannesburg](#) (2016) and a wall of the old city of [Jerusalem](#) (2016). These are documented conventionally as installations through photography.

4.2. Notes on the submission format

The submission format is in itself an acknowledgement of the nature of this PhD project as living out coloniality and the exhausting demands made by different bodies in the academy (like supervisors or research offices) on the ‘halfies’, which has the effect of gatekeeping in the name of the integrity of the PhD degree/title. It is, at once, a refusal to give up on the degree in the face of the undue scrutiny by the academy on account of my marginal position within the university system. It is also a demand that those who demand excellence join me in grappling with the impossibility of the promise of the PhD title in the face of de-coloniality. My archive, submitted through the [box](#), is an answer to the question of how this is relevant, to which the answer is always: **I do not know yet, but it is important.**

The idea is to express knowledge through active thinking and engagement rather than to prove it. This not only recognises a shift in thinking about ‘for whom’ the research is undertaken, challenging the idea of research as something done for a powerful other to effect a change in favour of a weak other, but also reiterates the idea that knowledge is a process of continuous revision.

The idea of archive deployed in the submission is not to mimic or engage in what archivists do. I use the format of the archive to manage what I experience as an impossibility inherent in my PhD project. It is a recognition of the utility of placing sensitive things on hold, for when it possible to address them sufficiently at a future [time](#). I use the idea of archive, but I am not invested in reproducing all its features exactly.

The format of the submission also addresses the problem discussed earlier, identified by Macleod and Holdridge (2006) as illiteracy of examiners and supervisors within the PhD art

degree. This submission addresses this problem by offering a wider practical ‘context’ of some aspects of art *as* methodology. This is not for the current examiner per se, but may be a resource upon which other people wishing a greater context can draw in future.

Exit Strategies

1. Tracks

1.1.A-track³⁹

Throughout the PhD project, people I respect from within the art world have expressed how they are puzzled at my decision to take on a PhD project instead of being a practicing artist; particularly when I could get the same access to resources and freedom as an artist, without the compromises associated with artists working in the academic context. Perhaps these people were pointing out that ‘artist’, what I now understand to mean the ‘contemporary artist’, as a title, held as much privilege and prestige, in matters of research access and mobility, as the title of PhD. This understanding is reflected through debates I have had with some artists I have encountered who would tell me how they finished their PhD thesis and are refusing to hand it in, or through the artists I meet who have PhDs and hide the fact so that they can retain their credibility as artists. I had thought about all sorts of arguments to counter these questions, but I had not thought seriously (until now) about the space open to the artist as a very particular kind of research space. I did think of it in passing as I tried to make a case for ‘art *as* research’ (Frayling, 1993), but I could not at that stage comprehend the art circuit as its own distinct research context, operating independently from the academic research context. I did not at that time understand the privilege I had as an artist, being privileged not because I would be sought after financially or have the liberty to do whatever I wanted, but because this context would never really ask me to choose between being a **Molobedu** and being an artist. It simply does not ask any questions except: Are you an artist? What artist means to you is your business. All that matters is whether you are committed to the practice of seeing and making visible. If you make visible by concealing, that is also fine. This is what Enwezor (2015:17–21) has elaborated as the prerogative of the artist. Enwezor also stresses that insight born of such prerogative can only be deployed within an art context, elaborating the form of an art exhibition as such an art context — as a space of public discourse. If we accept this to be true, then my question becomes: What is an exhibition after

³⁹ The concept of the A/B track references music conventions in hip-hop and mixtape practices where the A-track represents the censored radio version or the commercial version of an album while the B-track presents the artist’s original version or bonus tracks for fans.

contemporaneity, Duchamp and the advent of conceptual art? Is it a text? An installation? An idea? A manifesto? A practice? An instruction? A position? A situation? This is the question: How do I present my insights in the academy without betraying the idea of the artist's prerogative and the exhibition context?

1.2.B-Track

The different attempts at creating a PhD thesis text have made many points that deserve some reflection. The process of writing and rewriting this thesis has also reiterated the importance of process. I understand the nature of this process as one that encourages me to keep moving, practising and to not burden myself with premature pronouncements. Therefore, I am only writing this conclusion, which I conceive as an exit strategy, because the term of the PhD project has come to an end. It comes to an end just as I start to scratch the surface of the subjectivity of those marginalised by colonialism. Therefore I offer a sort of manifesto and acknowledge that some of the key insights that could be discussed are not going to be reviewed at this time.

2. An impulse to travel

Because of my concern with an impulse to travel, sparked by my quest for some visualities related to a delegation of Balobedu that ventured to Berlin in 1897, I have had the privilege of travelling to Berlin and other places over the course of this PhD project. I have come to accept these visualities, evident in the practice of dreaming, jokes and the impulse to travel, inscribed in various archives, as indicative of khelobedu subjectivity present in the Berliners and persisting in me today. I have explored these visualities through methodologies related to my concern with an idea of a film essay and have realised it through my experimentation with, and presentation of, a series of camera obscura works.

In my travels I saw a lot of things — riots, protests, exhibitions, strange cities, spectacular sites and artefacts — that will inspire and drive me for some time; I have had a lot of conversations, fights and revelations; I have dreamt and shared my dreams as instructions; I have invented and imagined stories about myself, Balobedu and my ancestors, some even reflecting delusions from nativist tendencies; I have read a lot of books, some useful and others painful; I have seen many films and listened to all sorts of music and stories; I have partied, witnessed events, performances, interventions, happenings, and participated in questionable behaviour; I have visited all sorts of gathering places, like those of the Dadaist's

Cabaret Voltaire and the bustling city of **Dakar**, some in upmarket places and others in the darker parts of cities, or in unimaginable rural settings; I have even created my own Cabaret Voltaire through the **Yellow Table** sessions; I have performed the ethnographer/anthropologist, artist, Molobedu and academic till I could no longer tell the difference between the different positionalities; I have played with **light** and the camera obscura. I have been invited to take part in exhibitions, conferences, imbizo, walks on the beach, **dinner parties**, some small some big; I have told jokes and stories; I have staged impromptu installations, some with audiences, some with none; I have read **missionary diaries** and kept my own; I have practiced trickery and explored every possible loophole around undue constraints; I have trolled countless **archives**, in buildings, on the internet, through people, some in my own **dreamscapes**; I have documented it all through photography and other means. I have literally exposed myself to khelobedu over **time**; I have imagined it and I have presented it to you here, as an archive of my subjectivity — my persistent attempts and rejection of coloniality. These encounters may perhaps reflect or even invert the experiences of the Berliner delegations.

What I have learned through these travels and encounters is not, and cannot be, the subject of this thesis. This text should be, and is, an affirmation of the need for more people like me (those marginalised by colonialism) to travel; find and explore their own ideas; engage in conversations from within the academy *without obligation*. They must do this within the academy because it is not enough to relegate such important work to isolated corners, only to appropriate it as discourse without giving it its due. But, most importantly, people like me should take this process seriously *for its own sake*. Only at that point, *when enough of us* (people like me) have undergone this process and have produced sufficient archives reflecting our interests, can we begin to analyse and take stock of what we learned during these times. To do it before this is to ask my kind to exhaust ourselves for nothing. The task of the academic in contemporary South Africa, at this particular moment — the #Fall era — is not to offer answers, or elaborate variations, but to occupy the position of learning ourselves as a key part of the academic project. Therefore, my PhD project calls for the development of more independent archives of, by and about contemporary people marginalised by colonialism, from within the academy, as the foundation of a possibility for a new kind of knowing, not afraid to see imagination and expression as good research outcomes. These archives should be engaged by us however we choose, without oversight. I stress the idea of ‘independent archives’ because the archives convened through

contemporary looting of marginalised communities' artefacts (past and present) to fill institutional gaps cannot be used for this purpose. They are already tainted by the institutional policies, mandates and archiving practices of such institutions.

In summary, I have learnt to travel without the burden of carrying others and have enjoyed experiencing the knowledge that, for me to imagine, express and know *khelobedu*, I am required to learn what *khelobedu* subjectivity is from practicing *khelobedu*. For me it has been through dreaming and the many interactions called for by this dreaming — like seeing a *sangoma*; learning what the role of *dream* is in my family, through talking to my *family*; and understanding the importance of, and proper conduct around, a *dream hut* and accepting its centrality for the constitution of *Balobedu* — through these lessons and encounters I have begun to see *khelobedu* outside of what I have learnt from, or through, anthropology. As Glissant puts it: the African diaspora cannot find their subjectivity in reason, they must look to jazz (Diawara, 2011). I found mine in the *practice* of dreaming.

Contemporary art and its exhibition context have provided fertile ground for me to imagine the methodologies that foster my comprehension of *Balobedu* subjectivity in myself. What I learn from contemporary art is that while there are 'rules' and forms of gatekeeping, it is in contemporary art's commitment to put artworks out there and leave the works to create their own context over time, that *contemporary art* better facilitates the needs of our time — in my case the need to imagine and express *khelobedu*. Instead of simply locating my creative impulse in contemporary art where it is encouraged, I lodge it here in the language of the academy, as an academic text, even if I may botch the expected conventions. As our discredited resident saint, Achille Mbembe, once eloquently put it, while reflecting on an inability in all languages to talk without clichés and mimicry: 'one must start by saying what one means even if it risks blasphemy' (Mbembe, 2010). This *chaos* is not just laziness; it is a refusal and an impossibility for my subjectivity to extend energy in a vacuum.

Therefore I only ask that I be allowed, or rather, I demand to spend more time here (imagining and expressing my *khelobedu*) without the burden of telling you what I saw or could possibly see. I believe it should be enough for you to know that the one way of seeing other subjectivities in the colonial archive is to be open to the possibility of seeing them.

So the new knowledge that the PhD promised can be found in my archive of travel as I *quest* for a moment of travel and the *rumour* of a dream.

The demand to end this now is to recognise that the university is still not well-poised for a disciplinary rapture. It still demands that we do all the work, and that we do it at the same time as the colonists, without acknowledging that the colonists have had time to lay the foundation for their rationale's and subjectivities' acceptance. To be asked to lay the foundation and build the house at the same time is to set up the house to fall, as all foundations must cure, but it is also to exhaust us unnecessarily. I demand **passage**, not for how polished my work is, but for the fact that I have dedicated myself to a foundation that needs to be built, without the hope of living in the house that will follow.

Thesis Component 2

Chapter 1

1. A personal quest

1.1. A quest for a moment of travel

In 1881 a missionary, the Rev. Fritz Reuter, set up shop in Bolobedu in the north-eastern part of the Boer Transvaal Republic, now north-eastern Limpopo province, South Africa. Reuter had been invited to Bolobedu through one of Modjadji's kin, Kgašane Mamatlepa. Reuter was a German Protestant missionary, affiliated with the Berlin Mission Society (BMS). The BMS was a pietism-driven mission, originally established in about 1824 by Prussian upper-class civilians as the *Gesellschaft zur Beförderung der Evangelischen Missionen unter den Heiden* (Society for the promotion of Protestant missions amongst the heathens) (Pakendorf, 2011:106).

Although Reuter was the first European missionary successfully to start a mission in Bolobedu,⁴⁰ his parent mission society, the Society for the Advancement of Evangelistic Missions amongst the Heathen, later the BMS, had been in the region since 1860. The BMS was the first evangelising mission in South Africa to penetrate the area north of the Vaal River. It gained acceptance within the Boer Transvaal Republic (ZAR), which had banned missionary work (mainly British) as a response to the effects of Christian missions on the productivity of the black labour force. Reuter's entry into the area is said to have put him at odds with the area's religious order, courting the wrath of Modjadji II several times, including being accused more than once of causing drought.

In 1896, Fritz Reuter led a delegation of seventy-five people, some of whom were from Bolobedu, to Germany within the context of the **Transvaal Exhibition** held in Berlin in 1897 (Bopape, 1998:71; Van der Heyden, 2002; Ciarlo, 2011:171; Reichardt, 2008:38). The delegation, referred to as the Berliners,⁴¹ comprised a mixture of converts from Reuter's

⁴⁰ In 1879, François Coillard, from the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, attempted unsuccessfully to start a missionary station (Coillard, 1897).

⁴¹ The Berliner reference usually referred to the German missionaries and was extended to the delegation after their trip to Germany.

mission station and satellite stations, some non-converts from surrounding homesteads and a group of Boers (Van der Heyden, quoted in Ciarlo, 2011:171; Reichardt, 2008:38).

The **Transvaal Exhibition** was part of the now controversial exhibition phenomenon referred to as world fairs, colonial exhibitions or world exhibitions, which included the subgenre of missionary exhibitions (Maxwell, 1999). The exhibitions were popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similar exhibitions took place in the major metropolises of Europe, the United States of America (USA), Japan, South America and China as well as in the colonies, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand.

Through my research into Balobedu, I have come across stories and rumours about the relationships between Balobedu and Reuter, particularly their entangled nature. One of my favourite rumours talks of a group of men who were part of Reuter's 1897 delegation to Germany. These men were said to be spies, sent by Modjadji to go and survey Reuter's world. As a photographic researcher, I couldn't help but wonder if there would be any photographic traces of such an excursion in the BMS's archives. Perhaps I could find the oldest, or perhaps even the first, photograph made in Bolobedu. Rudimentary Google searches using '**Transvaal Exhibition**' and '**Bolobedu**' turned up some **postcard** images from around the exhibition on eBay. I recognised the people as Balobedu and appreciated the signs of spectacular costumes that I have come to associate with Balobedu. These images subsequently vanished from the Internet.

Excited by the possibility of the photographs' existence, I conspired to find myself in Berlin to attempt to get into the archives of the BMS. When I did eventually get my hands on the photographs, I was excited beyond my imagination. I was peeking into a missionary's exploits in Bolobedu on the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I did not find any evidence of Modjadji's spies, at least not yet, but I had made first contact. Today, as I look at the photographs I copied, against the background of some English readings I have since found, on the BMS and Reuter's exploits in the Transvaal, an exciting world begins to emerge. My understanding of the colonial encounter sharpens, and the pull of the inconsistencies becomes even more appealing. All I can say about archives is that they hold many treasures, but the real treasure is the network of scholars that peruse them. Making contact with some of them was the most exciting part of my trip. What follows is an elaboration of the story of my

quest for ‘a moment of travel’ in 1897,⁴² a story to satisfy my question: Was the delegation’s performance spectacular? I had believed that the photographs I would find in the BMS archives would answer this question. It was a belief that my recognition of their spectacular performances and costumes would be the indication of Balobedu subjectivity, said to be illegible in the colonial archive.⁴³

1.2. In search of Balobedu visual cues from the late nineteenth century

These visual cues are what I envisioned as some form of subjectivity — in the German Protestant mission archive. The visual cues in question are of some Balobedu people who travelled to Germany in 1897 during the course of the Transvaal Exhibition (the contemporary theorisation of which is overcrowded with postmodernist critique of colonial representation practices). At this stage, my imagining of the visual cues had been in the form of photographs with which I would engage through my expertise as a photography-based artist and photo-archival researcher. Resident German missionaries, who were active in the northern Transvaal in the late nineteenth century, had possibly produced such photographs, and so I began this PhD with a survey of the BMS archive and a drive to locate these photographs by developing a biography of the archive. I wanted to understand the nature of the archive I wanted to access, where it was located and how to navigate the gate-keeping politics of the archive world.

In general terms, this chapter sets a historical context and establishes some form of political climate from which the trip originates — late nineteenth-century Bolobedu, as the German missionaries negotiated their position between two regional powers (Balobedu and the Boers) during a period of colonial expansion into the Transvaal. In particular, I look at the obstacles I navigated in the process of searching and attempting to access Balobedu subjectivity through this archive, amidst contemporary postmodernist discourse.

⁴² An extended version of this story was published in *Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative*, June 12, 2013 (Mahashe, 2013).

⁴³ I believed the performance to be indicative of Lobedu subjectivity, for Balobedu had been performing spectacular dances before the colonists arrived. I have witnessed them performed outside of colonial contexts many times and understand them to evolve over time, to accommodate changing times and contacts with other cultures and materials.

1.3. My story

My story revolves around *khelobedu* — knowledge about and by *Balobedu* — which exists in several forms within different classes of archive, spanning the Western and the so-called indigenous archive. I have chosen the archive of Fritz Reuter, who is mainly presented as a pioneer missionary in the north-eastern Transvaal, whose missionary society (BMS) was among the first to break into the Boer-controlled Transvaal area in the 1860s. I have chosen in particular a moment within *Balobedu*'s engagement with Reuter, during which Reuter arranged a trip to Berlin, Germany. This time-choice places *Balobedu* within the contested and complex economy of the world fairs, popular in the West between the 1850s and 1930s. The available archival records for this period can be found in the *Evangelisches Landeskirchliches Archiv Berlin* (ELAB),⁴⁴ as well as littered, in an uncatalogued fashion, in other archives related to the colonial fairs. It is also available as retrievable oral history within Reuter's mission station, Medingen in *Bolobedu*, and through secondary texts printed by the BMS — mainly by Reuter and his missionary contemporaries — and the Medingen church, through its different actors, such as *Philipus Modiba*, an influential evangelist in Reuter's mission station.⁴⁵

Because this is a PhD submission, which in itself is a form of authority-building exercise imagined as promising to create new reliable knowledge, popular conventions within the humanities demands reflexivity and mastery of the base literature related to the subject. This has entailed embarking on a process of locating Reuter and, by extension, his archive within the larger narrative of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century economy of actors, within the process of colonising southern Africa.

1.4. The missionary landscape in the nineteenth century

The search for Reuter's archive began with a German 101 language class, in preparation for reading the Reuter archive and the secondary materials, which were mainly published in German. This was a way of dealing with the first problems I found in accessing older sources

⁴⁴ <http://www.landeskirchenarchivberlin.de>

⁴⁵ Modiba was a key figure in the mission stations associated with the Medingen mission station. He was converted to Christianity by Kgašane, becoming one of the first missionaries in the region of *Ga-Sekgopo*, which later became an outpost of Reuter's mission station Medingen.

about Reuter's position, during my initial survey of scholarship on missionary activity in southern Africa.

Firstly, I found that most of the available English secondary sources about the missionary project⁴⁶ were dominated by a study of the London Missionary Society (LMS).⁴⁷ This literature focused on a biographical reading of the missionaries' trajectory, beginning with an analysis of the missionaries' social status or economic disposition before entering the mission, and then focused on the missionaries' training, with an emphasis on their intellectual lineage. This is used to locate some assumptions about their political views. This process is followed by an analysis of their conduct during their sojourn in the colony, emphasising their complicity with colonisation or lack thereof, as was the case with the LMS. It concluded with positioning the missionary project as a process of transcending class barriers inherent in the colonising countries and creating a new European modernity through settler communities in the colonies. A popular text within the critique of the Christian missionary project is presented by Dora Taylor, who uses the alias of a black woman Nosipho Majeke (1952), to drive home the branding of the missionary project as the foot soldiers of European colonisation. Here I did find information on the German Protestant missions, as the BMS missions are commonly called. At first the Hermannsburg and Moravian missions dominated the English information. These two mission societies are positioned in the literature as the pioneers of the missionary programme in southern Africa and often cited as the source of the intellectual lineage for the LMS (Pakendorf, 2011:107). The main insight that stands out for me about these societies is the idea of the one-way ticket; the idea that when you choose to

⁴⁶ Within this text I use the term 'project' to describe a series of large-scale endeavours related to, and arising out of, nineteenth-century colonisation and its many organised structures. While some of these structures are contingent, I understand their effects to manifest as structured action executed with great precision. In other words, the university's compliance with the structure produced by coloniality, whose effect plays out as the reflexive turn, appears to me as a conscious project of proving compliance with postcolonial critique of coloniality. I use the term both to describe actual projects in the traditional sense of planned, structured executions of an idea, as well as to describe the effect of contingent action arising out of a larger nineteenth-century colonial era imagination — what we conventionally refer to as modernity.

⁴⁷ Examples of this include the widely cited *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991) or Nosipho Majeke's (Dora Taylor's) *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest* (1952).

accept a mission assignment, it is a lifelong journey with no prospect of return.⁴⁸ This is unlike the English missions, whose continued connection with the mother country ensured consistency of the modernity they created in the colonies, with the society from which they originated.⁴⁹ The Moravians and other German Protestant missions, on the other hand, asserts Günther Pakendorf (2011:107), preferred being more isolated from the wider colonial structures and focused on creating replica communities of their mother country, but without the benefit or disadvantage of keeping up with its developing modernity.

Within the scholarship of the German Protestant missions that relates to Reuter's mission, there are some English and Afrikaans sources available. Unlike the scholarship on the LMS mentioned above, namely early (post-1960s) autobiographies by the missionaries, German Protestant missions' scholarship focused on establishing biographies and tracking the familial lineage created by the missionaries within the colony, documenting intermarriages and the creation of a homogeneous German community in South Africa. These include photographic illustrations. One such publication is *Berliner Missionare und Missionarskinder: Süd-Afrika 1833–1930* (Bund von Nachkommen Berliner Missionare in Süd-Afrika, 1930). The texts exclude any form of analysis of the missionaries' intellectual lineage. While one cannot strictly say that the BMS missionaries were given one-way tickets, as were the Hermannsburg missionaries, they were expected to live out their lives in the colonies. Most missionaries retired in South Africa and are buried here, some in the neighbouring towns where they retired, or in the villages they founded or worked in. Within contemporary scholarship of the BMS, which is well surveyed and summarised by Pakendorf (2011), tested by Alan Kirkaldy (2005) and critiqued by Karla Poewe and Ulrich van der Heyden (1999),⁵⁰ one also finds the

⁴⁸ The story of the one-way ticket was recounted to me by art historian Michael Godby, who had heard about it in a presentation at the conference 'Christian Missions in 19th and 20th Century Southern Africa and in Comparative Perspective: Passing Review and Breaking New Ground', Rhodes University, July 8–11, 2007.

⁴⁹ It is well accepted that the British missionaries used the missions as opportunities to advance their careers when they moved back to Britain. See Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) for more on this idea.

⁵⁰ An overview of the available sources dealing with the BMS is chronicled by Ulrich van der Heyden (1996), whom the Evangelical Lutheran Archives in Berlin tasked with heading the scholarship on the BMS and the wider German Protestant missions. A bibliography of texts made using the BMS archives is available on <http://www.bgm.de/bgm-e/Bibliography.html> [July 5, 2015].

replication of the systematic analysis common in the LMS scholarship, which charts intellectual biography, perhaps pointing to a compliance with the reflexive turn in the humanities. The LMS members are portrayed as liberal agitators (Pakendorf, 2011:111), drawn from the learned, upwardly mobile class (lower middle class), such as in the missionaries sent to the Tswana chiefs in *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). The BMS members, on the other hand, are emphasised as conservative, complicit people, drawn from the peasant class, with an emphasis on selection criteria favouring the artisan and the farmer classes (Pakendorf, 2011:108).

The initial stage of the search for the Reuter archive progressed, although attempts to learn German did not progress beyond my being able to navigate my way through a German subway system, library catalogue and ordering food. The imagined problem of language was transcended by the discovery of an active network of South African scholars who were currently working on the BMS missionaries and whose formulations I used as a guideline in my consideration of Reuter's activity in Bolobedu.⁵¹ These scholars included Annetjie Joubert, Kirkaldy and Lizé Kriel. In addition, I have since found a series of older texts (1940s–1970s) in Afrikaans and Sesotho, two languages I understand and have studied at high school level. These include testimonies and histories by Rev. W. Krause (Reuter's successor) and E. Ramokgola, A.O. Heese's papers (in the UNISA Library's Institutional Repositories) and some analysis by D.W. van der Merwe (1984).

1.5. The making of a missionary: recruitment and the BMS in the Transvaal

Once I had located the BMS within the wider missionary scholarship, I moved to locate Reuter himself, as a process of articulating aspects of his missionary career in my quest for his archive. To construct a biography of missionary Reuter, I have relied on a series of archival sources, such as the UNISA archives (UNISA Africana Library) and some secondary sources that all seem to develop from the book *Geschiede der Station Medingen* (Sauberzweig-Schmid & Beyer, 1913), most of which are summarised by Reuter's successor,

⁵¹ While I have been able to navigate my way out of learning German, I will acknowledge that two important works on Reuter exist in German. One is by Elfriede Höckner (1988) and the other by Van der Heyden (2002). While efforts to access insights through face-to-face interviews have led to a conclusion that their contents do not affect my project in an immediate sense, I do acknowledge that their contribution is important.

the Rev. Krause (1963).⁵² I also used aspects of Reuter's 1905 publication *Modjadje, a Native Queen in Northern Transvaal: An Ethnological Study* (Reuter, 1905). Overall, it can be said that the most comprehensive published biography on missionary Reuter is to be found in the *Dictionary of South African Biography* Vol. 1 (De Kock, 1969).

Fritz Reuter was born to a family of farmers in the countryside of Prussia in 1848.⁵³ It was only after his miraculous survival during the 1870–1871 Franco-Prussian War that Reuter considered becoming a missionary (Pistor, 1985). Accounts of his decision to become a missionary cite an encounter with God on the battlefield, where he saw the dead bodies of the black soldiers (referred to as the Mahomedians) who had fought on the French side and he wondered if they had known Christ. He had earlier made a pact with God that if God delivered him alive from this war, he would dedicate his life to Him. It was this scene of littered dead black bodies that may not have known Christ that led Reuter to seek a calling in the mission to Africa. Reuter joined the BMS in 1875. The questionable truth of this story, given the importance of creating an appealing biography, mostly edited by Hermann Theodor Wangemann,⁵⁴ is not of concern to this project.⁵⁵

⁵² These books can be seen to rely very much on Reuter's *Lebensbild*, a prescribed text within the BMS, developed by the missionary as an obituary anticipating future history, as well as modelling an image of the missionary as the principle face of the mission. In the case of Reuter, whom I judge as not being very scholarly, I suspect this text was created on his behalf, first by Beyer and then by Krause, most likely from his own narration.

⁵³ Reuter died in July 1940. He is buried in the cemetery across from the Lutheran church in Medingen. His wife, daughters and two grandchildren are also buried there.

⁵⁴ Wangemann (1818–1894) was the director of the [Berlin Mission Society](#) from 1865 to 1894. He is cited by Moses (2010) as the most influential director in the mission's history. Before being director of the mission, he was director of a Lutheran teachers' college from 1849.

⁵⁵ Poewe and Van der Heyden (1999) analyse Beyer's rollout of Wangemann's narrative strategies as a way to show how he used them in the construction of the narratives of the BMS *Missionsberichte*. This analysis accounts for the way Reuter's mission in Bolobedu has been told and perpetuated in subsequent renditions of the story by Krause. It can also be generalised that Krause's 1963 text seems to influence the rest of the secondary material in English and Afrikaans.

Reuter's profile was perfect for the BMS mission, which had been conducting missions to southern Africa since 1834 (Pakendorf, 2011). By the time Reuter joined the BMS it had already developed and led its mission to southern Africa past two milestones. First, it had managed to maintain a constant presence in the colonies, during a period when there was hardly any interest in Christianity's promise,⁵⁶ and the attitude of the existing colonial entities (administrators and traders) towards the missionaries' plans had become hostile, as a result of agitations by the LMS (Pakendorf, 2011).⁵⁷ In addition to this first milestone, the BMS had managed to get a foot in the door in the area beyond the Vaal, where the Boers, affected by and running away from the reforms brought about by the LMS missionaries, had established a new colonial frontier, free of British interference. This made the BMS a pioneer in terms of the missionary project in the area that later became the Transvaal.⁵⁸

The BMS entry into the Transvaal exposed complicity inherent in the mission policy of the BMS, a policy of non-interference prescribed by the doctrine of pietism, which made it compliant with the racial segregation policies adopted by the Boers in the Transvaal. The first mission into the Transvaal was among the Bapedi of Sekhukhune, and was headed by Alexander Merensky, who arrived in the area in 1859. The BMS mission was modelled around the development of a strategy of liturgical assistance to the black community, rolled out through a seminary.⁵⁹ This seminary was in addition to the primary schools commonly

⁵⁶ Kirkaldy and Kriel (2006) point out that during the early days of missionising in southern Africa, the missionaries could not compete with the security offered to potential converts by the chiefs, a security based on the local religions of southern Africa.

⁵⁷ According to Pakendorf (2011), the hostile environment resulted from the LMS missionaries' objection to, and challenge to, the morally questionable conduct of the settler communities in the then British colony. The LMS missionaries challenged slavery at the Cape on the basis that the British had already abolished slavery in 1833 and, therefore, it should not be practised at the Cape, which was a British colony.

⁵⁸ The BMS was preceded in the area by the Hermannsburg missionaries, who appear to have not made as big an impact in numbers as the BMS and later the Swiss missionaries.

⁵⁹ A.W.H. Merensky, in the paper 'Pioneers are not Forgotten, a Geological Research' (UNISA Archives, Hesse Collection of German Africana, date unrecorded), glorifies Alexander Merensky as a pioneer in the region, speaking mainly about Merensky's innovations in cartography. He also cites

associated with the mission stations. The seminary was aimed at raising a literate class that would carry the gospel to the people. Merensky's model can be seen to reflect the British model which created subjects rather than labourers.⁶⁰ Alas, within a decade, Merensky's mission had created a problem for the BMS. Two groups from the Botšhabelo mission station — the first under Dinkoanyane and the other under Marthinus Sebushane and rebel German missionary Johannes Winter — declared their independence and developed their own churches (Pakendorf, 2011:111). Among the reasons given for the breakaway was unhappiness with the authoritarian and paternalistic attitudes of the white missionaries. The breakaway groups went on to found the Bapedi Lutheran Church in 1892 (Pakendorf, 2011).⁶¹ By this time there was already a move within the missionary complex away from a liturgical model towards a more industrial model; the missionaries had noticed that the communities were more interested in technical help than theological help (SAHO, 2014).

Reuter's background as a peasant farmer made him suitable for the new revised BMS strategy. Although he was older than twenty-five years of age, the average age at which recruits graduated, Reuter went on to enter the five-year seminary under Wangemann, which would prepare him for the mission to Africa.⁶² Upon its completion, Reuter followed the BMS tradition and became engaged, in his case to Elisabeth Karoline Fredericke, who formed part of the mission community in Berlin. Alas, Reuter embarked on his journey to the colony, leaving behind his bride, who was to follow him in two years if Reuter's entry to the colony were successful. Reuter arrived in Durban and proceeded to the Transvaal, where he spent his first year at Mphome mission station, learning the region's languages (Krause, 1963), before heading for the northern Transvaal and Bolobedu, another frontier not yet fully explored by the Boers.

examples of his success with the mission station Botšhabelo and the so-called Bantu Seminar he founded.

⁶⁰ A criticism Pakendorf and the wider German missions levied against the LMS (Pakendorf, 2011:111).

⁶¹ For more details of the circumstances that led to the formation of the breakaway church, see Poewe and Van den Heyden (1999).

⁶² The biography of the seminary is discussed in detail by Kirkaldy (2005) and Joubert (2015).

1.6. Christianity and religion in Bolobedu⁶³

Traditionally, when a missionary embarks on a Christianisation mission in an area without a previous European missionary presence, he generally becomes a pioneer in being the first to bring the gospel to the people who ‘do not know God’. In Reuter’s case this was not true. As Peter Delius and Kirsten Rüter (2010) point out, the mission to the northern parts (northern Transvaal) of South Africa, the last of the South African regions to be formally colonised, was not about bringing the faith to the people. From this observation one can infer that the missionary’s contribution was to establish a structure to manage the administration of faith and, in some cases, to ensure that the people adhered to a particular version and interpretation of the faith. This idea of the missionary as an enforcer of culture, rather than a teacher of the faith, is captured well in a quotation from Frantz Fanon (1963:42):

The church in the colonies is the white people’s church, the foreigner’s church. She does not call the native to God’s ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor.

Delius and Rüter further point out that in most cases the missionaries found an already-established network, created by some members of the local communities, who had encountered the faith through their travels, for instance to the Cape. Therefore, in most cases, when the BMS entered the region, people had already been exposed to, and had already formed an opinion and critique of, the gospel. It is a well-accepted point that travel across southern Africa was common for indigenous communities and, as B.H. Dicke ([1936] 1937) points out, these communities were well informed of the developments and movements of the

⁶³ Note about references in this section: While most of the information at this stage of the research is informed by secondary sources, which include Reuter’s unpublished manuscript on Kgašane (Reuter, 1885), I have reworked the section to include some insights drawn from archived diaries of Fritz Reuter, to which I only obtained access after this stage of the research. I decided to do so to manage the discrepancies in texts, related to the work of the BMS in the Transvaal, emanating from a practice Delius (1983:108) and Bopape (1998:150) describe as essential to the mythology of the Lutheran church in the Transvaal. A fuller discussion of insights drawn from Reuter’s diaries is discussed in detail in the next chapter. See notes on the structure of the diary references in Chapter 2 in the section ‘The Reuter Diary and the Context of the [Transvaal Exhibition](#)’, footnote 23, ‘Note on Translation’.

colonising groups and the strategies they employed. A good example that illustrates these ideas (originators of the faith) is found and elaborated in Kirkaldy's book *Capturing the Soul: The Vhavenda and the Missionaries* (2005). Here, Kirkaldy points out that in Venda the arrival of white missionaries meant a demotion of the existing local missionaries and an outlawing of their configurations of church ideology. This demotion was accepted by some, but was opposed by others, who left the church and started their own churches, which accommodated their designs.⁶⁴

In Bolobedu's case, historical records (Reuter, 1885;⁶⁵ Krause, 1963 & 1981; Ramokgola, 1981; Krige & Krige, [1943] 1980; Dayhoff, 1999; Bopape, 1998) rightly present the faith as having arrived through Johannes Kgašane Mamatlepa,⁶⁶ who had spent some time in the colonies around 1867. Kgašane and his peers had embarked on this journey in order to earn some money to buy guns, a highly sought-after commodity in Bolobedu at that time. Kgašane was the inheriting son of Mamatlepa, who was one of Modjadji's chiefs and controlled a region in Modjadji's territory called Modubeng, north of present day Ga-Kgapane. During Kgašane's and his peers' exploration of the wider South African region, Kgašane made friends with a convert, Peka Napondo, who introduced him to the gospel, leading to his baptism. Variations of this account, which seem to emanate from Krause's 1963 text, place Kgašane as having decided to go out into the world to find himself a gun, instead of waiting for Modjadji — who provided arms to her chiefs — to provide him with one.⁶⁷ But instead, he came back with a Bible and a gun (Mashale, 2009).⁶⁸ Francinah Koena Mashale's

⁶⁴ As mentioned earlier, a similar scenario was faced by missionary Merensky in Sekhukhune, which eventually led to the creation of the Bapedi Lutheran Church.

⁶⁵ I suspect the unpublished manuscript 'Kgašane Mamatlepa', found in the UNISA Library's Institutional Repositories, is a result of Reuter's meeting, on compiling a biography of Kgašane, with his family. The meeting is noted in the 1885 diary (Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 57: TB I—III.1885.doc).

⁶⁶ Kgašane was born in 1846 in Bolobedu.

⁶⁷ In S.P.N. Makwala's play *Kgašane* ([1958 [1976]]), the quest for a gun is explained by saying 'a given gun ...'. See *Act I*.

⁶⁸ Krause (1963) notes that his companions had wanted to spend some time in Kimberly, but Kgašane refused, insisting he had found what he was looking for, the Bible.

account⁶⁹ is based on S.P.N. Makwala's theatrical play *Kgašane* ([1958] 1976), and is elaborated in part from a reading of Makwala's ([1958] 1976:6)⁷⁰ introductory biography of Kgašane. In the biography, Makwala makes it known that Kgašane was baptised in Port Elizabeth in 1870, which is consistent with Poewe and Van der Heyden (1999). Within the play, Makwala makes a further link to Kgašane's baptism by naming a Rev. Keizer as the BMS missionary who baptised Kgašane. The story of Kgašane's baptism and his subsequent role in the founding of a Christian community in Bolobedu are discussed in detail in M. Beyer's book (1913) on the founding of Medingen station and Christianity in Bolobedu in general. These stories are analysed by Poewe and Van der Heyden (1999:21) within the context of the resurgence of a culture of constructing evangelists' biographies. The analysis draws attention to the similarities in Beyer's construction of Reuter's calling narrative, and how Kgašane's rise as mission station founder is turned into a narrative, emphasising that it falls within the parameters of BMS director Wangemann's prescription of what missionary narratives (*Lebensbild*) ought to be. It is also important to note that, already in 1885, Reuter speaks in his diary about needing to create Kgašane's biography and canonise his martyrdom.⁷¹ These efforts culminated in the unpublished text *Kgašane Mamatlepa* (Reuter, 1885), which probably became a source of Makwala's play *Kgašane* ([1958] 1976). However one looks at it, Kgašane returned home a Christian and found his father sick. He was immediately inaugurated into his father's position and took a wife. Kgašane's family had thought that his Christian phase would pass and that, in time, he would outgrow it and tend to his duties as regional head and counsellor to Modjadji. But, as time went on, the faith grew and more people rallied around him and the gospel. Over time, he refused to become polygamous and continued to shun some of his duties, including rituals associated with his

⁶⁹ In addition to library research, Mashale's research included interviews with members of the then Medingen church steering council who knew both Rev. Krause and Rev. Ramokgola (Mashale, personal communications, July 31, 2014).

⁷⁰ Makwala's play is based on oral and library research, which included interviews with Kgašane's wife Joanna and other people who had known Kgašane when he was alive, as well as Rev. Krause. The characters in Makwala's book also correspond with some of the people mentioned in Reuter's 1885 diary (Reuter diaries, 2014/15: whole diary: TB I–III 1885.doc to TB X–XII.1885.doc).

⁷¹ In my reading of the 1885 Reuter diary, there is a passage where Reuter invites Kgašane's family to create Kgašane's biography (Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 57: TB I–III.1885.doc).

position within Modjadji's political and religious systems. This included the practice of polygamy associated with keeping the regions connected with the capital. Kgašane went on to found a Christian community and a church in Modubeng, where he had a congregation of twenty-eight people by 1883 (Krause, 1963:11). Consequently, the story of Reuter's entry into Bolobedu is presented, in the wider record, as being by an invitation from Kgašane.

Kgašane is said to have requested a missionary to be brought to Bolobedu from the then BMS Transvaal circuit superintendent, the Rev. J.F.C. Knothe (Mashale, 2009:35; Krause, 1963:9), whom he met in Petersburg in 1879.⁷² Running parallel to and complementing this story is another story of BMS director Wangemann who, on his first visit to Alexander Merensky's mission station Botšhabelo in 1867, was moved by the way the local community had taken to Christianity, and desired to extend this to the rest of the Transvaal (Poewe & Van der Heyden, 1999). On his return to Berlin, he preached in his report-back sermon about extending the mission in the Transvaal and gained the favour of Lady Charlotte von Medingen. Upon her death, Lady von Medingen bequeathed a sum of money for the establishment of a mission in the Transvaal. When Reuter graduated from the BMS seminary, Wangemann informed him of his mission to the Transvaal. Wangemann changed Reuter's original choice of mission station name, Mars-La-Tour,⁷³ to Medingen, in honour of Lady von Medingen, according to her request to have her family name given to the station paid for by her money (Krause, 1963:9–10). On October 13, 1881, Reuter arrived in Bolobedu, was seen and presented as an answer to Kgašane's prayers and request. Reuter originally planned to settle next to Kgašane's headquarters in Modubeng, but was advised by Knothe to establish himself high in the mountain near Kgapane's territory, to limit the risk of malarial fever, which had been ravaging the settlers for some time.⁷⁴ Poewe and Van der Heyden's

⁷² Krause recounts that Kgašane complained that regions of the Transvaal already had a missionary sent to them, except for Bolobedu. He then asked Knothe to send one to Bolobedu.

⁷³ This name was chosen to commemorate Reuter's calling to the missionary service in the Franco-Prussian war, where he saw the dead and dying Muslims who fought on the French side (Krause, 1963).

⁷⁴ The story of malaria is one of many myths in the ethnography of the Transvaal (B.H. Dicke has an unpublished manuscript dedicated to the tsetse fly and the malaria belt). One of these myths asserts that Bolobedu had created a malaria belt around their region as a defence against attacks and trespassers (Dicke, [1936] 1937). Knothe also notes that many settler families had perished in the

analysis of Kgašane's role in the establishment of Christianity in Bolobedu, as a deliberate narrative intervention by Beyer (1913) as per Wangemann's specification — conversion of a chief⁷⁵ way of converting the nation, within the making of a 'friends of the mission' friendly narrative⁷⁶ — does cast doubt on the credibility of the story. However, it does not take away from the reality that Kgašane did indeed play a central role in the establishment of Christianity in Bolobedu.⁷⁷

1.7. Tangents in the archive

These tangents represent a moment in my narrative where the story is written using a few time layers. For example, there are conversations with older scholars such as Günther Pakendorf, Ulrich van der Heyden, Elfriede Höckner and Annekie Joubert, both in person and via email, whose stories punctuate my early desktop research. Then there are stories that are told in the various locally available archives and secondary sources we have been using. These are contested by my grandmother's oral tradition, related to me at the time when I was reading the secondary sources, as well as some conversations with my grandmother and her sister after I had started reading the diaries. Then there are insights drawn from my initial reading of the Reuter diary, which are mostly my summaries of things Reuter notes in his diaries, which are read against his unpublished manuscript on Kgašane (1885). Then the final layer is developed by a rereading of Malekutu Bopape (1998) in the light of some discussions with my paternal family around dreaming and my personal family's connection with Kgašane. The convergence of these varied sources and time registers acknowledges a point in

region from malaria (Krause, 1963). Reuter, in his 1890s diary, constantly counts the number of people taken by the fever. Bolobedu are also said to have reserved the areas high on the mountains for themselves, designating the lower regions outside of the protection of the inner valley, to settlers and other migrants who flocked to the area seeking Modjadji's protection from various regional problems.

⁷⁵ There are some disputes around the positioning of Kgašane as a chief, as Bopape (1998:64–78) points out that the demotion only occurs after Krause rewrites the history of Christianity to limit the claim to the mission by the Medingen community.

⁷⁶ See Kirkaldy and Kriel (2006) for more on the BMS approach and design for converting kings.

⁷⁷ It is important to note that the complexity of the rise of Christianity in the colonies is a discourse in its own. While I have not paid full attention to it here, I would like to acknowledge the work by scholars such as Paul Landau who point out the complexities.

my research where the stories can no longer be neatly separated because some of the information I am using was not found during the normal course of research — but is drawn from private, well-guarded family insight. Some is contained in information I just did not have the literacy to comprehend, or I was not able to see the link initially.

1.8. The myth of Kgašane

This development, the internally-invited missionary, piques in me another debate concerning faith in Bolobedu: the idea of Bolobedu as a holy city and the immediacy of the fight between religions as opposed to a mere geo-political fight.⁷⁸ Kgašane's Christianity, and its obstruction of the function of the office he occupied under Modjadji, greatly angered some members of the Balobedu community, leading to several protests against him, which were lodged with Modjadji (Mashale, 2009). The tension caused by the debates between those who converted to Christianity and those who refused, is very evident and is reflected in the conflict revolving around the death of Kgašane.

Within three years of his setting up in Bolobedu, Reuter reported (1885) that Modjadji ordered an attack on Modubeng on Good Friday (April 11) of 1884, killing Kgašane and his church assistant (Krause, 1963:11; Bopape, 1998:8–81; Makwala, [1958] 1976:46–47). Reuter, who claims to have been bedridden with malaria, received Kgašane's wife and children, as he had promised Kgašane. Kgašane knew that he would be killed and had arranged with Reuter to take care of his people. Another oral account, which possibly conflates the two stories, reports that after Kgašane was killed, Reuter and the congregation fled to Botšhabelo, where they remained for some time, until Modjadji asked them to come back. Reuter's 1885 diary presents that Kgašane's congregation fled to Mamaila,⁷⁹ but it is a bit confusing since it has undergone several translations, from out-dated German script

⁷⁸ It can be further elaborated that Bolobedu moved on to become another breeding ground for the Zionist Church that now dominates the Limpopo province. The origins of this faith within Bolobedu is not yet developed, but I have heard several accounts that place an uncle of Modjadji II as having a hand in it, much to Reuter's discontent. Zionism was imported from America, but has almost no traces of the original religion. This can be seen as following the pattern explored by Kirkaldy (2005), in which the local formulation of the faith is developed separately from the influence of European formulation or prescription. This included blending local religions with Christianity.

⁷⁹ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 294–494: TB VI.–IX.1885.doc.

(Sütterlin) to modern German script, and thence to English. This translation issue, coupled with the inconsistencies in Reuter's spelling and outdated orthography of Balobedu names, might be the source of the confusion. For example, Reuter constantly refers to Basetelo, sometimes Rasetelo,⁸⁰ possibly a regional chief in their area, in connection to the movements of Kgašane's congregation after his death. Furthermore, the story of chiefs chasing out and threatening converts and missionaries is very common. Botšhabelo is one such case where Sekhukhune threatened and chased BMS missionary Alexander Merensky and his converts from his land, leading to the establishment of Botšhabelo mission station beyond Sekhukhune's land (Pakendorf, 2011:111). Botšhabelo means a place of refuge.

Krause (1963:11–12) confirms the events recorded in Reuter's diaries (1885–1986)⁸¹ with updated names, clearing some of the confusion. Krause indicates that when Kgašane died, his family went to live with Reuter, while the congregation and some elders, not wishing to remain in Modubeng, moved closer to their families in Ga-Mamaila. Bopape's (1998:62) text also confirmed this statement. The queen of Ga-Mamaila (name not given or unclear in Reuter's diaries) gave the congregation refuge, in defiance of Modjadji, because of her anger towards Modjadji who, Reuter notes, was accused of having killed the queen's mother.⁸² This community of displaced converts founded a new base there, which later became **Medingen's** outstation of Mamaila.

With regard to the story of Reuter and the congregation being invited back to Bolobedu by Modjadji, Reuter⁸³ explains how Kgapane (Reuter's neighbour and one of Modjadji's chiefs) had gone around telling everyone in the area that Reuter had fled Bolobedu, when Reuter had left to investigate and to resolve what had transpired in Modubeng. Reuter points out that the real story is that, after some time, Modjadji felt bad that her people had left to go to another queen and asked them to come back to her land. They refused to be reintegrated into the rest of Bolobedu, opting to stay with Reuter. This move is consecrated as the founding of the Medingen congregation and the mission station. This founding of Medingen, based on the

⁸⁰ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 33 and 149: TB I.–III.85.doc and TB VI.–IX.1885.doc.

⁸¹ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: 1885 and 1886.

⁸² Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 387–388: TB VI.–IX.1885.doc.

⁸³ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 424 (pg.119): TB VI.–IX.1885.doc. 119.

death of Kgašane and the incorporation of his deputies into Reuter's mission with Modjadji's blessing, speaks of and complies with the debates foregrounded by Delius and Rüter (2010), as well as Poewe and Van der Heyden (1999), about the nature of the Christian mission in the Transvaal, as being built on existing local evangelists' work.

1.9. Doubt

At this point in my research, I was starting to get uncomfortable with the authority-building exercise, based on desktop research, as I was beginning to suspect my authority was being based on mastering lies. And I was no closer to the photographs I was seeking in the BMS archive. In a conversation with my grandmother, who had been confirmed as a Christian at Modubeng and was a member of the congregation in the 1960s, she mentioned that Kgašane had been stoned to death, foregrounding the story of the attack as being by people in general, as opposed to Modjadji giving an executive order, as accounts by Reuter (1885) and Krause (1963) suggest. They maintained that he was shot. I often shared my research on Reuter with my grandmother because of my family's proximity to the Reuter and Kgašane legacy, through her grandfather, Mampatla Mohale, and his involvement in founding the Ga-Sekgopo mission station as a satellite to Medingen. Mampatla's story is possibly similar to that of Kgašane — founder of a Christian community prior to the BMS missions. He had also been on the 1897 Berlin trip, and I suspect he may have met his wife Masethea during that trip. This story, a love affair in Berlin, was one that I was hoping to develop as an alternative narrative to that of the colonial show and its gaze.

1.10. The story of Mampatla and Masethea

After my grandmother's passing in 2016, I visited her elder sister, Koko Maake, to ask for her help in arranging for me to put up an installation of a camera obscura, related to what I then thought as my PhD's practical component, on a hill overlooking Ga-Sekgopo satellite station. Until then, I had dismissed my family's presence and subsequent dominance on that hill as part of the general migration to a mission station to access a better life by a close-knit family. We spoke about the proposed installation, and I told her of my frustration with pressure to pay attention to the human zoo⁸⁴ narrative in my treatment of the story of the

⁸⁴ The idea of the human zoo relates to contemporary criticism of nineteenth- and twentieth-century variety exhibitions that exhibited colonised people, among other things, as part of the show-casing of

delegation that attended the **Transvaal Exhibition** in Berlin, Germany, in 1897. My frustration was because my interest in framing my story was and is around an impulse I see within my culture and family of going out into the world and seeing it for oneself. I felt this view was being bullied by a persistence in the scholarship of the **Transvaal Exhibition** by some academics, like David Ciarlo (2011) and Eike Reichardt (2008), who preferred the story of black people humiliated by the gazing eyes of Europeans and scientists, as directed by Van der Heyden's (2002:138) discussion of the nature of the exhibition moment as the beginnings of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin (Dahlem).⁸⁵ In this, **Koko Maake** encouraged me to press on with my story of travel, refreshing my understanding of the practice of walking about as a way of keeping culture contemporary and in sync with an ever-changing world. It is through this conversation about travel that the story of my grandmother's parents meeting during the 1897 trip to Berlin was relayed to me. **Koko Maake** told me that on their (Mampatla's and **Masethea's**) return from Berlin they founded a Christian community in **Ga-Sekgopo**, which later became a satellite station to **Medingen** under the leadership of **Philipus Modiba**.

A few weeks later I went back to Ga-Sekgopo to do a site visit of the proposed location for my installation. **Koko Maake**, who had enquired further about her grandfather, then took me to see the **grave** of **Mampatla** at the site where the old church had stood, before Mampatla and

colonial expansion. The criticism relates to the evolution of such exhibitions from a format where people from the colonies are invited to perform their cultural repertoires towards an emphasis in them performing their culture in a setting that casts them as primitive, establishing them as opposites of European modernity. This performance of culture included having colonised people presented in their natural environment (*in situ*), sometimes in cages for spectators to gawk at in the same manner as zoo animals. This contemporary criticism sometimes takes the form of restaging the human zoos as a way of highlighting the ill treatment of colonised people in such exhibitions. Examples of such criticism can be seen in the work *Exhibit A–C* series (2010–2017) by artist Brett Bailey.

⁸⁵ This also reflected my discomfort with the figure of Sarah Bartman as the Hottentot Venus, which still emphasised European fantasies, without stopping to imagine that she might have had some semblance of a life aside from the European gaze. Such discomfort is elaborated in Pumla Dineo Gqola's chapter (Not) Representing Sarah Bartmann (Gqola, 2010), where she meditates on the different ways in which black feminist women have attempted to imagine and represent Sarah Bartmann from a different vantage point that does not dwell on the scopophilia associated with the Western imagining of Bartmann as only brutalised transparent object or icon.

his wife founded the new Lutheran church in its current location on the satellite station. The grave was situated under a gigantic tree, nestled in an overgrown bush behind a Zionist church. It had been neglected for decades and the inscribed cement headstone had fallen over and was almost covered up by decayed leaves. We cleaned up the grave and spoke about the church, while **Koko Maake** apologised to Mampatla for the family's neglect of the **grave**.⁸⁶

It was in this context that I understood **Mampatla** to have been like Kgašane in terms of having had a Christian congregation prior to Reuter's arrival. The history of Christianity in Ga-Sekgopo exists as a notebook, which I photographed, shown to me by my great-uncle Thandabantu whom I had visited during the course of my MAFA project about another notebook on Balobedu's history. The **notebook** contains a narrative of how Christianity started in Ga-Sekgopo. It is in the fashion of notebooks requested by state ethnologist Van Warmelo, whose approach to ethnography entailed asking people to note down their histories and send them to him to consider. But it also represents the development of this genre into a local practice outside of Van Warmelo's context. This practice still exists today: for example my family society has a new notebook reciting the genealogy of **Masethea**'s descendants. From Thandabantu's brief mention of **Ga-Sekgopo**'s Christian history in our conversation, I understood that most of the pastors and evangelists that served the structures of Medingen station came from Ga-Sekgopo; but I did not pay attention to his mention of Mampatla as I did not know who he was at that time. This new context of Thandabantu's **notebook**, which my grandmother lost while planning to copy it, raised in me a desire to develop a story of **Mampatla's** and **Masethea's** life, based on what I had copied from the notebook, which could possibly be confirmed through records in the BMS archive, as well as through older members of the **Masethea** family society. This society, which was established in 2008, looks to link *Ditlogolo tša Mohale* (Mohale's grandchildren), as well as to shed light on the neglected history and relations among **Masethea's** and **Mampatla's** children and their descendants. During one of the annual gatherings, I spoke to my great-uncle who told me about a story recited by his elder sister sesi Sara (my grandmother's cousin), who spent a great deal of time with **Masethea** because **Masethea** lived with sesi Sara's parents in her old age. The story told of how **Masethea** often lamented the racist nature of Reuter who — after they had gone all the way to Germany, raised funds and collected clothes and shoes for the mission station and

⁸⁶ Documentation of this process can be found on the Picasa platform with the tags **Mampatla**, **Masethea** and **Ga-Sekgopo**.

its congregation — took the clothes and distributed them among the growing German community in the Transvaal, leaving nothing for the people who had done the actual work.⁸⁷ This sad story took me back to the narrative favoured by the reflexive academy. My uncle also told me of a man he had encountered through his work in education, who had worked around the [Transvaal Exhibition](#), and encouraged me to find him.

The man in question was Bopape whose PhD thesis (1998) interrogates Makwala's text *Kgašane* ([1958] 1976) as a historical biography, looking at what is factual and what is not, within the context of a Northern Sotho historical drama. Through this thesis I learned that indeed Reuter's and the mission's rendition of the death of Kgašane was fabricated (Bopape, 1998:71). Bopape questions Reuter's legitimacy as the father of Christianity and uses interviews with people who knew Kgašane to point out that Reuter was a liar who spread stories about Modjadji to undermine black people. Bopape argued that indeed Kgašane died by the will of the wider Balobedu public, due to a dispute around the Thugula charms entrusted to Kgašane by virtue of inheriting his father's position (1998:65). Through an explication of Kgašane as a doctor, in charge of the [koma](#)⁸⁸ drums that constituted the Lobedu national school, Bopape established a different imagining of Kgašane, in terms that not only undid the *Lebensbild* fabrication of Kgašane's life, but also illuminated aspects of Lobedu religious structure that had eluded me for some time. Overall, Kgašane's crime is based on an accusation that he had thrown the Thugula charms into the trunk of an unknown marula tree (Bopape, 1998:65). After several attempts to have this resolved through mediation (including Reuter as mediator), the situation reached a critical point and the public, for neglecting his duty, killed Kgašane. Bopape points to Kgašane's brother Malebelebe, who wanted control of the area, as the main instigator of the anger towards Kgašane. This established him as the culprit in Kgašane's death and not Modjadji (Bopape, 1998:65). Bopape's surgical treatment of this case, using all the bells and whistles of indigenous and reflexive methodologies, like the deployment of oral history alongside colonial archives, rejuvenated me. There is a lot to

⁸⁷ Bopape also notes that the donations that Reuter collected in Berlin never made it to the people they were intended for (1998:71).

⁸⁸ I understand this to be part of the Balobedu national school, where the knowledge held by an outgoing ruling generation is transferred to the next generation in preparation for Modjadji's ritual suicide, which enacts the dissolution of that government and creates space for the incoming Modjadji to reconstitute the government.

discuss about Bopape's treatment of the Reuter material, including clarification of the confusion around Reuter's involvement in the [Transvaal Exhibition](#).⁸⁹ But what struck me the most was his discussion of the dispute about the location of Kgašane's burial ground, in particular the mention of Nathaniel Mmolawa as the only person who knew the true location of the [gravesite](#). What was significant about this reference was the fact that this Nathaniel Mmolawa, who was Kgašane's right-hand man after saving Kgašane's life by killing two assassins attempting to kill Kgašane, was the great-grandfather of my father, from whom I was estranged. In my search for oral history on the Reuter mission, several people had asked why I was not speaking to my father's family about the Medingen mission. I had simply refused to do so because I knew another history of the family that did not match with that of the Lutheran faith.

Even more exciting was Bopape's mention of Mmolawa's participation in the [Transvaal Exhibition](#). Further inquiry and a visit to my paternal grandfather, confirmed that both Nathaniel and his wife Elizabeth (Kgašane's daughter) were indeed in Berlin in 1897. My grandfather presented me with a photograph of Nathaniel and his wife Elisabeth, a photograph I had seen as a child and written about in some discussion on my encounters with vernacular photography. This meant that all four of my ancestors — my paternal and maternal great-great-grandparents — were at the [Transvaal Exhibition](#). At this point my desire for the actual archives, particularly photographic ones, became even more urgent, so I parted ways with the now discredited authority-building exercise and planned to go directly for the visual archive. After all, all I had been doing was learning more about Reuter and preparing for accessing the archive remotely. Heeding the impulse of my forbears to travel, I decided to go to Berlin and find my way into the archive.

⁸⁹ Bopape's thesis established details of where lists of names of people who participated in the exhibition could be found, citing a letter written by Maria Krause dated November 11, 1953, detailing the names of people. He also cited an unpublished article by G.F.T. Kuschke confirming Ciarlo's (2011:171) discussion of the exhibition as part of an economic co-operation exercise (Bopape, 1998:71).

2. Ho Sepela ke go Bona: Journeys to and in search of images of the **Transvaal Exhibition**

The complex of the world fairs, and their colonial contexts, can be historically traced to the British Great Exhibition held at the Crystal Palace in 1851, which included a group of Zulu musicians (Boëtsch, Blanchard & Snoep, 2011). Historically, the world fairs were public shows, which brought the wider world beyond their country to a public that would otherwise never get an opportunity to see it. Naturally, with the colonial machinery and the technological innovations of the day, such as photography and the steamship, these fairs reflected the rise in voyeuristic tendencies, and the contraction of distances, that had begun to sweep across the colonial world.

As mentioned earlier, these exhibitions were popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and took place in the major metropolises of Europe, the USA, South Africa and elsewhere, sometimes including trade fairs. They were part of national, institutional and private initiatives aimed at stimulating economic and scientific, as well as self-awareness revolutions within Europe and the USA — what operates as modernity today (Bloembergen & Jackson, 2006; Ciarlo, 2011; Boëtsch, Blanchard & Snoep, 2011; Rydell, 2013). These initiatives were also a response to the changes brought by Europe's and the USA's exposure to the colonised world (Bloembergen & Jackson, 2006). I understand such exhibitions to have been involved in a process of defining the subjectivity of Westerners against that of the visiting people from the colonies. While the exhibitions offered a means of sustaining interest in, legitimising and maintaining colonies (presenting the colonies as good places to settle), they also served as popular entertainment for the different classes in the colonising countries, and eventually functioned as sites of scientific enquiry in what is now understood as racial science.

Today, the scholarship and criticism of world fairs is largely focused on the discourse of human trafficking and the degradation of both the colonised and the people from the colonising world itself. This scholarship is largely theorised through the notion of the human zoo as it is presented in the exhibition *Human Zoos: The Invention of the Savage* (2011),⁹⁰

⁹⁰ The exhibition was presented at the Musée du Quai Branly, from November 29, 2011, to March 6, 2012, in the west Mezzanine, by general curator Lilian Thuram, scientific curators Pascal Blanchard

which traces the practices to the sixteenth century. The flattening of the world fairs around the idea of human zoos has been challenged from within critical histories of anthropology and by scholars such as Anne Maxwell (1999), who points out that such narrative obscures the variety of genres that congregate under this exhibition format, giving examples of missionary exhibitions as one such case. Jack Thompson (2012:1) further notes that such missionary exhibitions, which became common in the late nineteenth century, tended to have had a commercial aspect to them. The flattening also ignores the changing historical context of the world fairs over the eighty years of their proliferation. I understand the flattening to be part of a contemporary obsession with self-reflexivity, where some European academics seem to launch such self-berating critiques in exchange for sympathy, or as an exercise of reclaiming authority in the wake of the rise of vocal ‘halfies’ in the academy. To criticise this flattening does not mean that one must engage in a process of proving how one colonial actor, in my case a missionary, was not a typical colonial actor within these world fairs. To unflatten the scholarship of the world fairs means that one must know the violence perpetuated by the world fairs, without losing sight of the ideas of some of the protocols, for example the health protocols developed to deal with the advent of large masses of people in confined urban spaces. Distinction should be made between the protocol itself and the abuse of such a protocol by unscrupulous scientists, looking to racialise the world. To focus on these scientists only leads to the development of a story berating the West’s disregard for other people’s lives. This approach does nothing to imagine or tell the story of the exploits of the people involved or the subsequent exploits, by their descendants, that have resulted from their ancestor’s past travels.

2.1. The Transvaal Exhibition

Drawing from Ciarlo’s (2011) and Bopape’s (1998) comments about the nature of the **Transvaal Exhibition** as falling within the genre of economic exchange (missionary exhibitions), and some reading between the lines of the BMS mythology in the Transvaal, peddled by Krause (1963), I understand that by 1894 Reuter had assisted Balobedu with food rations through two droughts, which he was accused of causing; made friends with Modjadji III; and had established the mission station as the hub of European traffic in the region.

and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep. Also see catalogue by the same name by Boëtsch, Blanchard and Snoep (2011).

Reuter's mission had also seen a rise in convert numbers, leading to a demand for more funding on Reuter's part, to expand his mission station's footprint.⁹¹ Like all missionaries of his time, he was at the centre of trafficking information about Balobedu, evidenced by his documented relationship with Native Commissioner Dahl and trader (later Native Commissioner) João Albasini (Dicke, [1936] 1937). More than just being at the centre of this information highway, he had begun to harness the power of the highway for his mission's own financial gain, as evidenced by his involvement in the [Transvaal Exhibition](#), which Bopape (1998:71) notes to be purely for profit.

The BMS itself published two journals, the *Berliner Missionsberichte* for the German community abroad and *Tšhupa Mabaka* for the local Christian community, both still in publication. Through the *Berliner Missionsberichte* the BMS supplied a steady flow of information about its various missions to its funding constituency. The advent of public photography in the 1840s and the proliferation of world fairs created a hunger for visuals from the colonies; Reuter poised himself to take advantage of this opportunity, resulting in my interest in the [Transvaal Exhibition](#). I expected to find some photographs in the light of Thompson's (2012:1) point that the missionary exhibitions had become a site for various types of photographic practices that proliferated around the exhibition genre.

The [Transvaal Exhibition](#) was a trade fair designed to shift policy in Germany towards an interest in the Boer as a trade partner, modelled along the lines of America. Ciarlo, in his book *Advertising Empire* (2011), has pointed out that this fair was designed to develop the Boer into an entity that could build a political presence in South Africa, similar to that of the USA. That is to say, the Boer could triumph over the *indigenes*, the way the British triumphed over the American Indians, to create a federation headed by the Boer. Ciarlo's position is supported by an unpublished article by G.F.T. Kuschke in the Hesse Collection of German Africana (UNISA Archives). While it is not crystal clear as to whether Reuter organised the whole exhibition directly, or merely took part in it by convening his delegation, it is clear that he made efforts to be included in it, or at least to be around it. My initial suspicion pointed to

⁹¹ Reuter's 1885 diary (Reuter diaries, 2014/2015: 1885.doc) is littered with notes of aid to Ga-Mamaila region, which consolidates the remainder of Kgašane's Christian community as Reuter's satellite station. After the collapse of Modubeng's Christian community when Kgašane was assassinated, those that did not want to move to Medingen stayed at Ga-Mamaila.

a situation in which Reuter took the chance to get the delegation to Germany, in the hope that they would get into the exhibition. In the absence of insight into the German literature about the event, conversations with the two scholars (Van der Heyden and Höckner) who have produced the literature, and another scholar who has criticised them (Pakendorf), I get a picture of Balobedu being taken to Germany in a substandard ship hired by Reuter and arriving to an unwelcoming reception by the BMS administration, who had not granted permission for the trip. Van der Heyden (personal communication, August 2013, day unrecorded) in particular points out that the trip was a risk on Reuter's part and that the BMS complained that Reuter had brought too many people without any notice, leading to a lack of proper accommodation. Van der Heyden further elaborates that the delegation was then housed in a baker's back room on the Kurfürstendamm. In contrast to this, Ciarlo (2011) has proposed that the **Transvaal Exhibition** was organised by Reuter and that Balobedu were the main attraction of the 1897–98 Völkerschau. Using a poster,⁹² Ciarlo maintains it shows Balobedu as the central attraction, pitted against the Boers who are supposed to pacify them in the process of creating an American-style frontier state. Van der Heyden, by way of contrast, maintains that Balobedu were in Berlin, but that they set themselves up on the **Kurfürstendamm** where they performed the 'Pagan Native' and the 'Civilised Native' plays on the street, collecting money from both performances.

Stories about why Reuter took the Balobedu delegation to Berlin vary, but the stories include an account by Reuter (Höckner, personal communication, September 15, 2013) of how, after a severe drought in the northern Transvaal in 1894, Reuter feared that Balobedu and his converts would not survive another drought in 1897 in which a lot of people died. To mitigate this fear, he arranged for a group of people to go to Berlin to ride out the drought. Either way, and however they got there, the delegation arrived and performed on two fronts: one group depicting the pagan native and another group the civilised Christian. Both collected money and other gifts and donations. They returned home safely after collecting substantial money towards their mission.

I now pause in the search for the **Transvaal Exhibition** to discuss what I was experiencing at that time as an urgent need to follow an impulse to travel as I dwelt on Balobedu's

⁹² Poster included on the Picasa platform with the tag **Transvaal Exhibition poster**.

participation in the **Transvaal Exhibition**. I will return to the Berliner's trip in the next chapter.

2.2. Go sepela ke go bona

My interest in subjectivity within this PhD project is based on exploring that which would be of interest to me, as opposed to that which is of interest to the dominant scholarly drive which seems to be gripped by colonial subjectivity (persisting colonial praxis). That is to say, I insist on a line of inquiry that is true to my position as a minority within the scholarship of such moments as colonialism and its resistance in history — something that is neglected by the proliferation of Western subjectivities in such scholarship. It is conceivable that there are many stories that can be explored in relation to the delegation's experiences on this Berlin trip, such as a case to be made for Reuter's and the BMS's interest in the **Balobedu** being in Berlin; or a case for examining their being drawn into the economy of the European gaze; or, as has become popular among the African diaspora, a case to be made for how the delegation subverted the colonial gaze.

I was particularly interested in an alternative imagining, moving away from the 'Why?' and 'How?' towards an interest in the question, 'To what effect?' That is to say, what legacy did this trip leave for subsequent generations of Balobedu, like myself, and what does it mean for my understanding of **khelobedu**? For me it had become enough to understand that this group of people found themselves in Berlin at a certain time, became witnesses to and actors in very specific things, which they indeed digested and contextualised in their way — a way that is possibly inaccessible to me or any other scholar engaged in historiography today. However, I was still very interested in discovering what they looked like, what their **performance** was like. I wondered if it was as theatrical as I imagined from my experience of Balobedu's affinity to performance. This is the source of my interest in visual cues in the form of photographs.

Overall, the idea that in 1897, my **great-great-grandparents** found it worthwhile to go on a journey to unknown lands, risking mistreatment, disease, death and prolonged periods away from their families, became a breeding ground for a more urgent interest within my project. I became obsessed with the idea of exploring the impulse and courage of my great-great-grandparents to explore and to see — to travel to unknown places and see how things are done there. I wanted to do the same. I wanted to **travel** and see as my ancestors did. And, most importantly, I wanted to do this seeing despite working in an environment that is not

sympathetic to this impulse for its own sake. An environment like a PhD degree within a university-context steeped in coloniality and dominated by people who were more interested in proving their reflexivity. This required me to adopt a ‘beg, borrow and steal’ approach I had observed in my study of the context around Kgašane and Reuter. This ‘beg, borrow and steal’ approach also implies a risk to the PhD project, in the sense that one can never possibly report on all aspects of what is encountered and that, even if one tries, one can never fully recover that report. This impulse to explore — to risk seeing by travelling — would later become the very subjectivity to be considered within this 1897 moment and subsequent instants. From here on, I became fascinated by, and reaffirmed, the original founding idea that led to my sustained engagements with khelobedu — to go and see. This founding idea is premised on the Sotho proverb ‘Go sepela, ke go bona’. This directly translates as ‘To travel is to see’, which implies that to open oneself to ideas beyond one’s comfort zone is to learn how others do things. From this idea it became unavoidable that the quest for the 1897 moment would have to engage such a process.

2.3. Embarking on a journey — being an artist

As elaborated in the introduction, recent developments in archival studies have created a space for serious consideration of other classes of archives, particularly photographic, personal artefacts, diaries or first-hand notes (drafts towards a finished work or report), which were, until recently, mainly considered as primary sources or illustrations within the wider tradition of historiography. This inclination within archival studies had created an environment conducive to engaging with such material (photographs and diaries) as knowledge itself and not as just mere supporting documents for other knowledge. These included interventions such as *Exhibit A*,⁹³ which I saw in Vienna in 2010 during my residency related to the presentation of the *Gae Lebowa* exhibition at the Vienna Museum of World Cultures. Taking advantage of this space, and using aspects of the authority-building

⁹³ *Exhibit A* was produced within the context of the Wiener Festwochen (Vienna) in 2010. I saw the exhibition at the Vienna Museum of Ethnology during the week of May 17, 2010. See exhibition context at <https://www.hollandfestival.nl/media/530755/Exhibit-B-ENG.pdf>

exercise, I plotted to find myself in Berlin, searching for visual traces related to this 1897 moment.⁹⁴

2.4. Making my way to Germany as an artist engaged in PhD research

Naturally, the process of going to Germany requires some accreditation and some form of funding. I had, through general desktop research and conversations with my local Lutheran bishop, established that the Reuter archive had been returned to the BMS, when the local Lutheran administration declared their independence from the BMS in 1969; and that the archival record relating to Reuter, held at UNISA, had gone missing and was not that comprehensive. I had also established that there was a series of scholars who were currently engaged in various projects about **German** Protestant missionaries. So there was an awareness of the research possibilities within the BMS Transvaal collection.

My initial attempt to secure access to the BMS material was not successful, largely due to misinformation on the BMS website. The reality was that such archives still organised themselves as a place for searching for specific sources (identifiable only by keywords) and not a place for just poking around aimlessly — without a clear rationale. This required one to access the archive from a distance, which supported the idea that the archive was to be engaged by the archivist, who alone can give access to things you already know about, things which you can describe in the fashion that the archivist has coded them — relying on desktop and biographical research. Thus, already the process of going into an archive meant complicity with colonial processes of knowledge production. This was further complicated by my lack of the advanced German language skills required to argue my way into the archive. Overall I realised that although there was a space conducive to alternative engagement in the archive, the institution itself was still stuck in the past and, although they wanted to, they really did not know how to move on.

While the odds appeared to be against me, earlier observation of the proliferation of the use of archive within the fine art complex offered a solution. The increased interest and opening up of alternative archival sources had also increased the frequency of visual images appearing

⁹⁴ The cues I imagined finding were visual in the material sense of photographs. Therefore, my search in the Reuter archives deliberately focused on the photographic archives and not other archives like letters.

within the academy, providing a platform for visual practitioners in the academy to call for better valuing of their visual work. The academy had embraced the visual turn, but there seemed to still be a need for some help to navigate a contentious debate between ‘classic’ researchers and artists working from within the university about what constitutes research. Part of the difficulty was not so much the proliferation or acceptance of visual images, which were already in high circulation, but the insistence by some artists on art *as* research, instead of art as merely illustration or subject matter in the process of ‘proper’ research.⁹⁵ There was an understanding that art leads to some form of knowledge, what Barbara Bolt terms praxical knowledge (Bolt, 2006:7),⁹⁶ knowledge-in-waiting. But some (Frayling, 1993) believed this knowledge had to be extracted through analysis, while others believed in the idea that the work itself was a form of knowing that should be accepted on its own terms. This includes ideas of knowledge *in-the-making* discussed in the introduction around knowledge that is on-going.⁹⁷

Furthermore, I had observed that there was a drive, mainly by museums of world cultures, to include the artist in their reflexive practices, as a way of dealing with the inadequacy prevalent within the academy around the status of images beyond subject matter, practising what seemed still to be a debate within the academy. I understand this to be a desire for people with expertise to deal holistically with other classes or conceptions of archive, such as

⁹⁵ The debate on the different types of research around art are summarised in the seminal text *Research in Art and Design* (Frayling, 1993), have been taken up in *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research* (Macleod & Holdridge, 2006:8) and have been summarised through the ongoing research published under *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (Biggs & Karlsson, 2010). In reference to artist and postgraduate research, a key book is James Elkins’ *Artists with PhDs*, on the new doctoral degree in Studio Art (2009), that discusses what is at stake in the conversation about artists in the academy.

⁹⁶ Also see Smith and Dean’s discussion of Bolt’s idea of converting praxical knowledge into generalisable facts (Smith & Dean, 2009:7).

⁹⁷ This debate would eventually mature into a discussion by James Elkins around the history of different and changing ideas of what constitutes legitimate artistic research in the university (Elkins, 2017). Through his presentation of the ‘four concepts of artistic research’, Elkins points out that, while the contemporary academy emphasises the ‘production of knowledge’, it has in the past accepted and foregrounded other outcomes, like expression.

photographs. This had established an ability to engage with archived artefacts from a creative point of view, as a solution to the problem. These apparent shifts seemed at the time to have become obsessed with the idea that collaboration and interdisciplinarity in the archive and its re-imagining, held a solution for the problem of image. Within these shifts, my politics and interests (interest in archives, politics of representation and desire for different research outputs) were in line with some of these concerns, and I was subsequently in line to continue my research on the 1897 moment from this position — a method of exploring cracks.

I then took an opportunity of taking part in the *Between the Lines* symposia, which included a trip to Berlin as part of its exchange programme. *Between the Lines* was a forum for artistic and academic dialogue between ten artists⁹⁸ and thirty art students from Germany and South Africa, with intensive exchange via two symposia and an exhibition.⁹⁹ *Between the Lines* aimed to reflect on and facilitate innovative artistic research that engaged specifically with questions of translation and mediation across social and cultural differences. The programme, designed by Candice Breitz (Berlin-based artist) and Colin Richards (historian at the University of Cape Town), included public and private discussions between artists and students at various art and culture institutions and artists' studio visits.¹⁰⁰

I used my participation in *Between the Lines* to find myself in Berlin, where I could explore the network of South African scholars who had amassed around the BMS archive. This chance to travel to Germany coincided with the presentation of findings by Joubert, who was tabling her team's study of the Hoffmann Collection of Cultural Knowledge (HC-CK),¹⁰¹ which is based on a third-generation BMS missionary active in the Transvaal in the 1920s. The HC-CK project is a multidisciplinary research initiative, consolidating some scattered late nineteenth-

⁹⁸ The invited artists were Ulf Aminde (DE), Yael Bartana (IL/DE), Candice Breitz (ZA/DE), Gabrielle Goliath (ZA), Asta Gröting (DE), Nandipha Mntambo (ZA), Zanele Muholi (ZA), Athi-Patra Ruga (ZA), Penny Siopis (ZA) and Ming Wong (SG/DE), with keynotes by Françoise Vergès and Achille Mbembe.

⁹⁹ The participating institutions included the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig and UCT's Michaelis School of Fine Art.

¹⁰⁰ *Between the Lines* was initiated within the context of the German-South African Year of Science 2012/2013.

¹⁰¹ See Joubert, Kriel & Biernacka (2015).

century missionary archives through cataloguing, digitisation and translation projects, as well as the creation of a publicly accessible online research archive/database. Prior to my trip to Berlin I had communicated with Joubert and secured an invitation to the reception at the South African embassy in Berlin where the presentation was being hosted under the German-South Africa Year of Science. At this event, Joubert introduced me to everyone involved in her research project. From this point of view, I was thrust right in the middle of the Protestant evangelical mission research drive, securing a chance to get into the ELAB archive.

My entry into the archive started with a lunch meeting with the director of the ELAB. I was invited to this lunch by Joubert, who had organised a facility tour of the ELAB archive for a group of scholars, librarians and library administrators from South Africa who had been involved in different aspects of the Hoffman project that she headed. This included a comprehensive digitisation project. It was here, in a stuffy cool room in the basement, while trying to make small talk with librarians and library managers, that I caught my first glimpse of the Reuter photographic material, nestled in an orange folder with Medingen written on the side. Joubert had seen it previously and hinted at its location earlier. There were other boxes simply labelled by region, for example, Transvaal. These contained images that I immediately recognised as depicting aspects of Bolobedu. Over lunch we discussed aspects of archive and archiving, as well as the story behind how Joubert and Wolfgang Krogel (ELAB director) ended up playing missionary Carl Hoffman and his young bride in Joubert's documentary film *The Making of a Missionary* (Joubert, 2013), to illustrate what it might have been like for a man to be finally united with his bride after two years separated by vast distances, as was the custom with the BMS missionary appointments. When it came to the question of my accessing the archive, Krogel stressed that one could not just arrive and expect to see the archive. One must arrange in advance, so that the material can be moved from the basement to the reading room in a controlled manner that maintained the integrity of the objects, stressing that rapid changes in temperature affected and hastened the decaying process.

This aspect of the hastening or slowing down of the process had become interesting to me as I had realised that the archive was seen as a place that arrested further development of the objects in its charge. This immediately inspired a story about how the impulse to restrict contamination in the archive is blocking deeper engagement with it. I told a story about a priest who had written in his diary with an invisible ink that could only be revealed with lemon juice and heat (a photographic technique), something I probably saw in an Indiana

Jones movie. The cryptic content of this diary remained hidden until one day an ill-disciplined researcher took tea into the archive. In his sloppiness he dropped the lemon on the diary and all was revealed. The story captivated the table and we began to talk about the artist in the archive, where I made sure to stress that it is not **ill-discipline** as such that leads to new discoveries but a fluidity that does not hold discipline above accidental insight. I elaborated to Krogel that I had followed all proper protocols in requesting permission to visit the archive, and had been in contact with Van der Heyden who had published on Reuter and is listed on the BMS website as the contact person for the archive. I had emails to attest to this. Krogel requested I forward the email correspondence and we arranged a formal meeting for a week later. I went in for the meeting and was allowed to look through one folder, which did not have any images related to the **Transvaal Exhibition**. Part of the conversation at this meeting revolved around accreditation and the requirement of a PhD candidacy and above for working closely with the archive. I replied by attesting to my PhD candidacy and we moved on to plan for an official research trip in that capacity. Krogel put me in contact with the archivist Karin Köhler to work out the details.

After months of back and forth communication with Köhler we eventually agreed that I would look through the entire Transvaal visual holdings, which were not organised or described, on condition that I describe the Reuter material. I returned to Berlin in August 2013. This second trip had been facilitated through an *Artists' Contact*¹⁰² award from the German cultural institution Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (IFA). This award is designed to facilitate extended working stays in Germany to foster exchange and substantive cooperation between German actors and cultural practitioners from transitional and developing countries. It is awarded in the fields of contemporary art, architecture, design, photography and media art, to artists, curators, art theoreticians, art educators, architects and designer through an application process, which includes a selection panel made up of leading figures in each field.

Over the course of six weeks I pored over the material and was disappointed to find no imagery that announced itself as of the Berliner delegation in Berlin. What I did find was a few images of people, like Kgašane's daughter Martha,¹⁰³ simply referred to as Berliners, with a caption that mentioned that they had been in Berlin in 1897. There were also postcards

¹⁰² See IFA (2018).

¹⁰³ This image is available on the Picasa platform with the tag **Martha** or **Berliner**.

showing the [Transvaal Exhibition](#) site and buildings, but nothing directly related to the delegation or, like those I had seen online during my preliminary research, showing people in some sort of musical performance. These were simply not there. While the direct object of my quest was not immediately visible to me, a survey of the Reuter material against those of his contemporaries and successors revealed a few insights.

2.5. The Reuter visual cues: flirting with the BMS photo archive

Firstly, I realised that Reuter himself never took any photographs. He relied instead on visitors to the station for his photography needs. There were also instances where he used the services of the famous studio run by Hugh Exton in Polokwane, now a museum, which is responsible for thousands of glass negatives depicting life in the then budding Northern Transvaal.¹⁰⁴ I also realised that Reuter's photography was not as adventurous as his counterparts in the BMS, who showed a bit more interest in photography's wider uses, in addition to the publicity-orientated photographs prescribed by the BMS. For example, photography in the service of ethnography as practised by missionary Hoffman is seen in an album accessioned as [Bmw2/200](#).¹⁰⁵ Documentary photography practices by his international contemporaries, such as photographs taken by Rev. John Harris's wife, Alice Harris, in the Congo documented Belgian colonial atrocities. Reuter was only interested in photography's ability to further his propaganda agenda and maximise his fund-raising initiatives. From this observation, I can generalise that most of Reuter's visual production was aimed at postcard production¹⁰⁶ along the lines surveyed in the publication *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards* (Geary and Webb, 1998). In my survey of Reuter's range of publicity postcard images and their variety, I observed that he really exploited with great skill photography and its relation to the postcard technique's reach and immediacy. I observed some new categories, such as using an image of his daughter on a postcard for publicity purpose, which I understand extends Christraud Geary's (1991) discussion of missionary photographs' private/public genre to new limits.

¹⁰⁴ Efforts to gain access to these images have proved to involve the same bureaucratic protocols as involved in the ELAB yet without the efficiency and competency in the staff. It would, however, make a good subject for another project after the PhD.

¹⁰⁵ See tags [missionary](#), [ethnography](#), [bmw2/202](#) on the Picasa platform.

¹⁰⁶ See tags [missionary](#), [postcard](#) on the Picasa platform.

Overall, the collection of images, most of which were removed from albums or from the mock-ups of the postcards (including images by Reuter's successor Krause), ranged from the very standard presentation of the converts in European dress, reminiscent of the photographs in Santu Mofokeng's body of work *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950* (1995), but rarely included the demeaning before-and-after photographs common among early missionary ethnographers. It also included casual photographs with colonial postcard genres such as those elaborated by Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb (1998), including church events, illustrations of a literate community and community skills development projects (craft work) — a mild or early form of poverty pornography, depicting a vibrant modern community. At times the photographs gave a glimpse of a **patriarchal tyranny** that exploited to the maximum the people's dream of a new community. The casual 'private photographs', in the fashion described by Geary (1991), such as those of the Reuter family and evangelists having a picnic, made me wonder how they managed to maintain that European white dress and **pomp** in Limpopo's unrelenting heat and red soil.

I went through the pictures, digitising them properly, while describing them according to the conditions of my access to the wider untouched archive. The images that had been digitised were cropped and altered to a point where they were useless for basic photo-archival research as specified by reflexive methodologies such as those prescribed by Joanna Salicki (2009), emphasising establishing the biography of the photograph by looking at the full original image and being able to track its changing use. In my digitisation practices I made a point to document the same image, in all its variations, as a printed photograph attached to a letter with descriptive caption sent by Reuter or Krause to the BMS headquarter with descriptive caption, in a mock up stage and in postcard form. I also copied the full back and front of the photographs without cropping them, as well as all the supporting and mounting cards.

In describing the photographs I became aware of the language I was using to refer to them, descriptions of class, gender, convert or non-convert etc. This language was problematic and reductive in a way contrary to the reflexive posture I expected of myself. This laid the foundation for what I eventually articulate as the problem of photography and its easy co-opting into evidence. I also realised that, in order to avoid such reductive tendencies, I would have to spend some serious time correcting and moderating my language and inventing other more palatable categories, to a point where that process itself might just become a PhD project. I did not want to do a PhD on correcting or updating colonial era language. Besides this being a mammoth task, I realised that the process of description implied the use of the

materials as sources, where one can search for a photograph by keyword, making them useful as research documents, but perpetuating a rather uncomfortable regime of knowledge production that convened a very specific scholarly crowd, such as historians. This made me deeply aware of engaging the archive for institutional purpose — institutions trying to critique themselves. Thus the description endeavour ended there.

2.6. Visual cues that constrain

While the images themselves had moments of liberation and facilitated a generative context for me in my quest for Lobedu visual cues and subjectivity, the theatricality I craved was visible in some pictures, even though there was awkwardness in the appearance of the people portrayed. Because of my capacity as a well-trained photo-archival researcher, my commitment to the cataloguing process took over, leading to a loss of interest in the actual photographs, which hindered my project. This was to show how the language and method of cataloguing, or formally constituting a photographic collection as researchable, is designed to make the subject knowable in ways that made me uncomfortable. I was also aware that from the available images there could have possibly been images from Berlin that were not labelled as such. For instance, there were images from Reuter's archive showing some Indians in a casual or celebratory mode, but there were no Indians in the Medingen station. These could have been taken during the Berlin trip. Such images could potentially facilitate a discussion about how the delegation spent its free time, which could subvert the persistent narrative of the dehumanising world fairs. However, to achieve this end, I would have had to undertake forensic photo-archival research to 'read against the grain' (Eagleton, 1986). I have undertaken similar endeavours in my efforts to find the postcard images I had seen on the Internet during my preliminary search for images of the Transvaal Exhibition. Through the use of references such as 'Völkerschau 1897–96', '*Kurfürstendamm*', '*Transvaal Ausstellung*', 'Lovedu'/'Lobedu' etc., I got into correspondence with a few dealers selling postcards around the genre of the world fairs. From this effort, I received back several replies with postcard images. Most of these images were of the same postcards as those I found in the ELAB, which depicted the exhibition. But none offered a viable link to my direct interest, based on seeing the group in action or that facilitated the kind of subjectivity I was interested in — people with an impulse to travel. Within this context I did undertake some forensic

photo-archival research around the postcards *Missionsfest in Medingen*,¹⁰⁷ produced in relation to the Medingen station. This included finding out who commissioned them, how many postcards or series were produced, who printed them, how many times the same image had been used in different postcard series, were people named and could I cross-reference them in other images? I also used research into the type of printing process and details about the listed printing house to estimate the date of production for the postcard. This research led me back to the BMS in-house printing press and only facilitated an enquiry into the technological history of the German printing press, the visual practices of the BMS mission or, at best, a forced reading of Balobedu subjectivity by theorising ideas of Balobedu self-presentation practices in the fashion of Elizabeth Edwards (2001:Chapter 5). That is, did Balobedu adhere to or subvert conventions? In other words, an enquiry into postmodernist subjectivity. These would only fill a gap in the knowledge of variations within colonial visual practices¹⁰⁸ and nothing around Balobedu visual practices. Overall, my search for subjectivity in the photographs was dashed by the process of describing the images, which drew my attention to the problem of rendering people transparent. Before this, I had never described images, at least not for an academic purpose, so through this process I technically stopped looking and seeing when I started describing the photographs — I started ‘telling’.

2.7. Searching in other archives

The absence of visual references conducive to the *Transvaal Exhibition* in the Reuter archive got me thinking about why they were not there, or where they could be. As mentioned before I had, at an earlier point in my research, come across postcards depicting the *Transvaal Exhibition* with people labelled as Balobedu, which have since disappeared from the Internet. I suspect they have been renamed or removed due to copyright violations.¹⁰⁹ This absence led

¹⁰⁷ The postcard has been used as an illustration in my article ‘In Search of Balobedu, a Research Trip to the Evangelisches Landeskirchliches Archiv in Berlin’ (Mahashe, 2013). This postcard can be found in the Picasa platform through the tags *Missions fest in Medingen*, *photo-archival research*, *Medingen* and *postcard*.

¹⁰⁸ Batchen ([2000] 2002:Introduction) criticises this approach as the limit of a theory that emphasises photography as a technology, leading to enquiries about the subjectivity of the industrial age.

¹⁰⁹ While negotiating with various collectors who had postcards that fitted my description, I noticed how such material was guarded jealously.

me to a conversation with Van der Heyden in Berlin, who has written on Reuter, the Transvaal Exhibition and the BMS. The meeting with Van der Heyden, with all its language problems, confirmed that it is possible that there are some images from other archives, as the exhibition was publicised in the local paper. His book has focused on the remaining material culture from the Transvaal Exhibition, held by the Ethnological Museum of Berlin, and not as much on the photographs generated by the event. He went on to direct me to the *Bundesarchiv*; the ethnological library in the Ethnological Museum of Berlin; the central Berlin archives for photography, the *Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz* (bpk); and the BMS library, housed at the original BMS building. Of all these archives and libraries the only one that had some useful information was the BMS library. Overall, the curator at the *Bildarchiv* elaborated to me that even if there were material related to the event in the wider German archives, chances of it being at a developed stage (accessible to the public, catalogued or researchable) were slim, as Germany was currently obsessed with the world wars and the Hitler period. Therefore, research into other periods of German history (particularly colonial history) was not as developed, or at least was not part of the national mandate. This was supported by email responses from the other archivists who simply said there are no photographs or postcards in their archives with descriptions as ‘Balobedu’/‘Lovedu’, ‘Kurfürstendamm’, ‘Transvaal Exhibition’, ‘1897–96’, indicating that all their archives been digitised, so if it is not on the digital archive platform they do not have it. I did, however; receive a newspaper clipping around the event from the *Bildarchiv*¹¹⁰ (image bank of cultural institutions). The clipping was from the *Berliner Tageblatt* for June 1, 1897, advertising the event as *Ausstellung am Kurfürstendamm Transvaal*, to take place at Kurfürstendamm and Savignyplatz station on Thursday, June 3, at five in the afternoon. It advertised a concert performance by a military band in uniform. This probably spoke of reports that Reuter not only took along Balobedu and other ‘indigenous’ groups, but also some Afrikaners. At the same time, this could be Reuter’s own band from the Medingen station, pictured in several photographs in the BMS archives,¹¹¹ or Reuter’s own military unit, since Reuter held a position in the army (Bopape, 1998). I also found a digital copy of the *Transvaal Exhibition*’s

¹¹⁰ <http://www.bpk-images.de>

¹¹¹ Images of the band can be seen in the Picasa platform with the tag [native band](#).

poster,¹¹² which I had seen and read about in Ciarlo's book *Advertising Empire, Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Ciarlo, 2011:172). The poster itself had nothing visually referencing any idea of Balobedu recognisable to me. It had been, as Ciarlo (2011) points out, an exercise in imagination, depicting a few 'ethnic-looking' people with a strong man wearing a zebra head in the foreground. The poster had the words *Berlin 1897 Transvaal* and *Ausstellung am Kurfürstendamm*. This in Ciarlo's argument was a depiction of Balobedu, who became the central attraction of the Transvaal Exhibition. At this time I had been exchanging some email correspondence with curator Yvette Mutumba who directed me to an archive attached to the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures. She recalled some reference to images related to some world fairs that happened in Berlin around 1897, yet unfortunately I was unable to make my way to Frankfurt at that time.

The trip to the BMS Library, on the other hand, led me to the *Berliner Missionsberichte* (BMS annual journal) publications, which were in Sütterlin, but a visual survey and a general Google translation of the contents (there was a section on Medingen in most periodicals) and captions led to some interesting finds.¹¹³ While I did not find any information accessible to me on the exhibition, I did find a photograph of Modjadji III as a young woman of about thirty. She was sitting on a mat wearing a leopard skin, flanked by her headmen. I proceeded to make some copies of selected entries of the *Missionsberichte* for the period concerned, in hope that I could peruse them for information at a later stage.

The photograph of Modjadji, as well as the constant reference in the *Missionsberichte's* index to mafadi (technical name for salt), led me back to a consideration of Balobedu again. The image of Modjadji as a young woman was interesting because it questioned an idea of Modjadji as an old woman, as is often the case. This change in thinking, back to the original idea of why I was interested in searching for Balobedu, as opposed to what is of interest and to whom, stayed with me for the rest of the time in Berlin. In my early search for Balobedu, I had often encountered a story of a group of people who left East Africa in search of salt,

¹¹² The poster is from the *Circusarchief Jaap Best* collection, printed by Adolph Friedländer, Accession No. 0992, Circusmuseum, Amsterdam. See website <http://www.circusmuseum.nl>

¹¹³ To facilitate my reading of the Sütterlin text, I downloaded images of the alphabet to facilitate my Google translations. I also realised I had been taught the Sütterlin script in grade 1 at the German farm school Westfalia.

ending up in southern Africa where they founded Bolobedu's predecessor in the Zimbabwe region. Again, it led me to a story about travel. I immediately stopped the visits to the archives. Over time, in my depressed state I produced a video work where my inability to formulate a narrative about my search for Balobedu led to a rant.¹¹⁴ With this rant I confined my lamentations to the inability to live up to my promise of being an artist capable of bringing a new perspective to the archive.

With this depression, I decided to spend the rest of my time in Europe doing other things, visiting museums and places I had visited during the *Between the Lines* visit and sitting in the parks and musing at the public nudity which was foreign to me. I joined my wife (who is a **curator** and gallerist) and Michaelis colleagues in Venice for our biannual visit to the Venice Biennale and, on a whim, decided to join my wife on her trip to France where she was accompanying an artist from the gallery she worked for, to the opening of the Lyon Biennale. There I met some of the artists I had been meeting in Berlin, as well as some other artists I had met through my wife's work, and watched them prepare for the show. This time I engaged these artists in conversation about the practice of art, instead of questioning them about the merits of institutional critique and the role of the artist in the museum of ethnography, as I had done in Berlin, where conversations had also been dominated by colleagues working with some form of cultural or African studies context.

At the end of the day, I was reminded of my old research question of Mafadi,¹¹⁵ and the very old impulse to travel. What had happened to me? I had begun to travel.

¹¹⁴ This rant can be seen with help of the tags **etcetera! etcetera!**, **rant**, **Berlin 2013** and **September**.

¹¹⁵ I came to know the story of **Mafadi** and its relevance to the origins of Bolobedu through a conversation with **Malatji**, a man who was introduced to me by the exhibition installer at **JAG** while installing the *Gae Lebowa* exhibition in 2010. He gave me a list of things I would need if I were to successfully seek Balobedu. Chief among these items is Mafadi.

Chapter 2

Part 1

1. My travels

1.1. A trip to Vienna

In September 2013, I travelled to **Vienna** on a trip I had organised prior to my disillusionment with the ELAB archive. I had set up a meeting with Lobedu ethnologist Elfriede Höckner. Her PhD transcribed and compared Reuter's account of late nineteenth-century Bolobedu (through a reading of Reuter's diary) with that of early twentieth-century social anthropologists (Krige and Krige's monograph *Realm of a Rain-Queen* [(1943) 1980]). The thesis was subsequently published as the book *Die Lobedu Südafrikas: Mythos und Realität der Regenkönigin Modjadji* (Höckner, 1998). I was interested in her copies of Reuter's diaries, which she had translated into modern German script from the original Sütterlin script. I had initially planned to use these diaries, in the classic historiographical manner, to beef up my historical context and background of Reuter and his mission in Bolobedu. On this trip, which was in itself a second **attempt** at visiting Höckner,¹¹⁶ I had set aside two full days to interact with her and to secure access to the transcribed diaries. I arrived in Vienna on Saturday, September 14, 2013, and left on Monday, September 16. Throughout my stay in Vienna I stayed with Höckner at her apartment. We used this opportunity to get to know each other's practices and research into aspects of khelobedu.

During this period I was also planning to visit the Vienna-based postcolonial academic Christian Kravagna.¹¹⁷ He had been introduced to me by my host at the IFA, Elke aus dem

¹¹⁶ In April 2013, on my first visit to Berlin, I was invited by Höckner to visit Vienna so as to facilitate an understanding of my request to use her research on the Reuter diaries. I subsequently arranged to meet Höckner in Vienna during the week of September 7–13, 2013. This visit was postponed because I had realised that getting preliminary access to the ELAB archive was a much lengthier process, and I opted to stay in Berlin and secure access to the ELAB archive.

¹¹⁷ Kravagna is professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. He is a member of Practice International (<http://practiceinternational.org/about.html>) and has edited books such as *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique* (Kravagna, 2002). He was recommended as a possible

Moore. But our schedules did not line up, as Kravagna was in **Berlin** during that time. This gave me a bit more time with Höckner and time to see the city again. Unlike Berlin, Vienna seemed more concerned with postcolonial debates surrounding the gaze, as I had experienced in the moment of the *Exhibit A* exhibition (2010).¹¹⁸ From the minute I met with Höckner, I could pick up on this engaged-ness, as the following days became filled with conversations in which she emphasised that the West (colonists) must pay for, and show greater sensitivity towards, what it had done in the past. We spoke much about the difficulties of doing research today — the lack of clarity and certainty around methods and authority. We also spoke about the problems of supervision — the emphasis on authority based on rigour, in a time when other things had become important, particularly a time when ethnology was implicated in the problem of colonialism and was trying to adapt.

Citing my frustration at not finding any compelling or suitable visual material on the **Transvaal Exhibition**, I expressed my interest in her copies of the Reuter diary, which I knew she had transcribed into modern German script. I had established this from a rudimentary Google translation of the summary of her PhD thesis, published in 1998 as the book *Die Lobedu Südafrikas: Mythos und Realität der Regenkönigin Modjadji*.¹¹⁹ I submitted that I was interested in Reuter's diary for the period of 1896–1899 because I was interested in establishing the trajectory (dates, names and so forth) of the **Transvaal Exhibition**,¹²⁰ to

contact, based on his work around postcolonial strategies and artists in the museum, which I had expressed to IFA as my research interest within my interest in navigating the idea of the **Transvaal Exhibition**.

¹¹⁸ *Exhibit A* was produced within the context of Wiener Festwochen (Vienna) in 2010. I saw the exhibition at the Vienna Museum of Ethnology, during the week of May 17, 2010. See exhibition context at website: <https://www.hollandfestival.nl/media/530755/Exhibit-B-ENG.pdf>

¹¹⁹ A German social anthropologist colleague, Katharina Schramm, had also read part of the introduction with me.

¹²⁰ This concern with Reuter's diary for dates and context reflects a reality about old archival records in a sense that the way we recall an event that has gained or lost importance over time does not necessarily reflect how it is archived. For example, Ann Stoler (2008:9–10) elaborates how a loose biography is useful to navigate an archive, citing that it is important for a contemporary researcher to know what mattered to whom, when and why. Such knowledge may help the researcher figure out how an event of interest may have been made a subject during the life of an archive.

determine Reuter's involvement, or to get some form of story about the experience of the delegates. I was also interested in the 1882–1886 period, to supplement what is known about Reuter's entry into Bolobedu, as I have done in the previous chapter.¹²¹ To this request she answered that I would have to read the whole diary, because it would otherwise be out of context. As we talked about my own research and the difficulties of finding direct visual material related to the time of the **Transvaal Exhibition**, we could not avoid the questions of the human zoo, a topic I had become tired of. In most cases it felt as if I was standing in for a self-imposed truth and reconciliation commission,¹²² where Europeans could confess their parents' sins in a bid to appear or be reflexive and critical of themselves, for some sort of amnesty from descendants of those that were harmed and offended by the parents' sins. At this point, I could no longer distinguish between genuine criticality/reflexivity and its performance.

As we discussed and negotiated for the transcribed diaries, her nervousness about giving them to me became clear. She told me a story of how there was a faction of Protestant scholars in Germany — I suspect she was specifically referring to scholars like Van der Heyden — who were interested, and had tried for many years, to take the transcriptions without crediting her or undertaking the scholarly and reflexive work that she considered to be ethically imperative to using the diaries. She spoke of their need for Reuter's diary entries for the purpose of cleaning up the role of the **church** in colonialism, but emphasised their laziness in not reading the Sütterlin script diaries. I would later encounter this group at a conference in **Wuppertal**, which I will discuss later.

¹²¹ This is of course of great significance as Reuter's entry into Bolobedu does, to a degree, challenge Nosipho Majeke's (Dora Taylor's) (1952) idea of missionaries imposing themselves on local communities, echoing Elphick's (2012) point that in some cases they slotted in with existing Christian communities.

¹²² The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was convened under Nobel Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Politically motivated crimes against humanity, committed during apartheid times, were confessed publicly in exchange for amnesty. The commission is widely criticised for peddling and instituting restorative justice (reconciliation between victim and perpetrator), window dressing the problems of apartheid-era atrocities, instead of a much-needed discussion about the surviving mechanisms that continue to uphold the legacies of the atrocities committed under apartheid.

After two days of discussions and my promising to honour the reflexivity project, she finally agreed that she would let me have access to the diaries, which were copied onto an old Apple OS format on stiffy disks, after she had updated them to a contemporary format and orthography. That afternoon she led me to a quiet part of central Vienna to what appeared to be an apartment block, where she showed me into a small but well-stocked Africana library (Dokumentations- und Kooperationszentrum Südliches Afrika [SADOCC]) that has a special focus on South Africa.¹²³ In the library there were also books on the Völkerschau (human zoo or people show) — some dealing with the visual production (posters and so forth) from such shows, but nothing specific to the *Transvaal Exhibition*. I was greeted by W. Sauer, who proudly told me of his young days when he was part of a group that forced Austria to boycott the apartheid state, emphasising their support (fundraising too) for Mandela. He also showed me a publication, which had a photograph of me at the Vienna Museum of Ethnology during the opening of the *Moved Generations* exhibition in 2010,¹²⁴ where I showed a large selection of photographs from the *Gae Lebowa* (2010) body of work and an installation of photographs from an undeveloped photographic series *Snap*.¹²⁵

After a short conversation about my difficulty in finding visual material related to my quest, he slowly introduced the topic of the meeting. He interrogated me on my intentions for the material, and tested my politics, as if he wanted to see what angle I would take to the diary. He eventually asked if I would be willing to sign a contract to attest that I would not omit Höckner's name in the credits for the translated diaries, or give the material to the undesirable scholars. The meeting concluded with an assurance by Sauer to Höckner that I was legit — that is to say I was a bona fide researcher who would uphold Höckner's interest in practicing responsible, reflexive research methodologies. Höckner intimated that she would get the documents ready for me and send them to me, followed by her translation of the diary entries, after she had updated the orthography and the computer format.

¹²³ The Library's website is available at http://www.sadocc.at/?page_id=571

¹²⁴ *Moved Generations* ran from May 18 to June 21, 2010, at the Vienna Museum of Ethnology.

¹²⁵ The series *Snap* (2006–2008) consisted of photographs made using disposable cameras to document my daily life around the time when I was working on the *Gae Lebowa* project.

1.2. Enter the dream: a rumour of a dream in Reuter's diary

On my last day in Vienna, I decided to part with Höckner for the afternoon and make my way to the cultural precinct in town to visit some art spaces that had impressed me when I was there in 2010, spaces like the Museum of Modern Art Vienna (Mumok). I saw a few exhibitions and was impressed the most by the exhibition *Salon der Angst* at the Kunsthalle Wien.¹²⁶ *Salon der Angst* took up the whole ground floor of the Kunsthalle, which is almost like a large, long, double volume warehouse. The overall concept of the exhibition dealt with questions of uncertainty, 'those diffuse feelings of insecurity and threat' (Exhibition handout, 2013), tracking such feelings, both historically and contemporarily, through works of art, spanning installation, video and other conventional art forms. The nature of the presentation was such that when entering the different areas within the sectioned space, one was sometimes overwhelmed with a clutter of images made up of different media, all vying for attention, while in some rooms there was space to breathe. In some cases, a large floor area would be given to one work, while in other areas many works would occupy the same size space. In some cases, sound from the different installations was isolated through noise reducing headphones, while in other instances the sound was left to bleed into other works. Within this exhibition, I was drawn to two works where artists engaged with some form of archive. The first work was Kader Attia's installation *The Culture of Fear/The Invention of Evil* (2013). In this work, which was tucked away into its own darkish corner as you entered the exhibition space, you were confronted with a series of floor to ceiling modular metal storage shelves, like those used in warehouses, archives and some museum stores. These shelves are packed with stacks of more than a thousand publications including magazines, newspapers and books from 1900 to the present. I recognised the older publications to present the French colonial imagining of Africa, while the newer publications showed a similar American imagining of a Muslim community. The installation gave me the feeling of being inside an archive's storeroom, particularly a feeling of the impossibility of looking through all the material, and the immediate realisation that nothing is new under the sun.

¹²⁶ The exhibition was presented between September 6, 2013, and January 12, 2014.

I understood Attia's use of installation (the choreography of objects in space) as a critique of the idea of 'archive as structure',¹²⁷ which relayed to me first-hand the potential of archival artefacts used as institutional critique within an art context. That is to say, how the objects displayed away from their institutional home are changed when in their new context, and comments on such institutions. I understand this to have a distancing effect that seems to render the structure more visible, by isolating it from its natural environment, thus drawing attention to some of its features. In this case, the location of a structure I associate with a colonial library's storeroom in a Kunsthalle emphasises the alien-ness of the structure, making Attia's work as much about the content (racist tropes) as it is about the structure that sustains the racism (colonial archive). This approach to archived objects is what I envisioned as a possibility for exhibiting the photographs I had gone searching for in the ELAB archive. For my PhD project's practical component, I had hoped to set up an installation that presents 'the impulse to travel' as a series of objects arranged in a space that draws attention to the constructed-ness of an archive. This would have been along the lines of the *Dithugula tša Malefokana* installation (2012), where I presented photographs from the Krige Photographic Archive in a reconstructed darkroom setting within an art gallery, as a way of drawing attention to the Krige photographs' materiality through an analogue photographic process. The second work was the video *1984 and Beyond* (2005–2007) by Gerard Byrne. This video-based installation was presented in a large room with clusters of box TV sets (and some objects from the work's film set) dispersed across the long room, with headphones confining each video's sound to its TV set. This work visualised a roundtable discussion of the same name by restaging the conversation through film.¹²⁸ *1984 and Beyond* featured a series of

¹²⁷ Attia's installation exhibited an actual support structure (filing shelves) associated with an archive and the way the shelves structures its content in a manner used by artist Boltansky in the 1990s. At the same time this installation also present actual archival material from the archives — magazines, tracking over time the different manifestations of European fears of cultural others — and similar contemporary publications, drawing the historical firmly into the present by resisting the impulse to reduce the colonial era paranoia as an epoch that has ended, by showing it to be an evolving cultural motif.

¹²⁸ The roundtable discussion is based on ideas presented in George Orwell's novel *1984* (1949). The panel discussion was published in the June and July issues of Playboy Magazine in 1963. This line of thought was developed into a talk titled *Aliens, Anthropologists and the Artist as Poison-less Dagger:*

men discussing the great debates, from the ideas of the Greek philosopher Plato all the way to going into space, presenting a glimpse of what people thought about key issues of human interest at particular times. The arrangement of the TV sets across the exhibition room was designed to mirror the way in which the film presents the various conversations as happening among four or five people at a time, happening in different parts of a building, as the actors moved around and took turns to speak. The clusters, which sometimes consisted of two or three monitors, presented the different actors' positions in relation to each other. Interacting with the clusters made me feel as if I were one of the actors, listening to what the other was saying and then, when I changed monitors, I was a different actor listening to the other speak. This arrangement drew me in and kept me listening to all the conversations, which was not usual for me as I am often impatient with video works.

In Byrne's installations, I was first excited by a provocation, which proposed that, were we to discover aliens 'out there', it would not fall to engineers and hard scientist but to anthropologists to define them. Furthermore it would not be long before the limitations of the anthropologists were recognised and the science fiction writers would be brought in to do the job. Such a provocation led me to ask why the sci-fi writers would replace anthropologists? What is it that the sci-fi writer does that the anthropologist does not do? Does the sci-fi writer occupy the same position as an artist or is the artist grouped with the anthropologists? Is it about imagination, the format of sci-fi writing in movie form? Or is it about the sci-fi writer's ideas of what constitutes fact or what is believable by audiences? I do not know the answer to why this proposition compelled me so much, but it stayed on my mind.

Secondly, I was excited by how Byrne extrapolates an archival document in the cinematic form. That is to say, how he improvises a written text, published in a magazine as moderated panel discussion, that may have taken place around a table, into a casual conversation set in a modernist building where peers walk, talk, sometimes taking long pauses, while casually contemplating and deliberating about pressing questions of their time. In this way, Byrne had taken a written text, similar in form and ideas (what people thought at a particular time) to the magazines Attia had displayed in her installation, and converted it into a film, transforming

On Contemporaneity and the Transformative in Contemporary Art, which I presented at the Wits Anthropology seminar series at the Wits Anthropology Museum (Wits University) on August 18, 2016. I have developed this talk into an MA course for Wits Anthropology under the title *Anthropology? Art? Some Encounters with Forms of Archive and Art* (ANTH4009/ANTH7018).

the written word into a spoken form that co-opted me as an actor in the conversation documented by that text.¹²⁹ That is to say, I was excited by how he made me part of the archived moment — **sci-fi** writers having the conversation in 1963 — by mobilising me as an active participant, through the way he choreographed my relation to the different monitors and actors, by grouping the monitors, and relations between the actors in the way he had. *1984 and Beyond* stirred me to question how I would approach the presentation of my quest for the 1897 journey by the Balobedu delegation. In a way it raised the question of how I would handle (1) the documents related to their journey; and (2) the transformation of a written text into a film. This made me question what kind of document would allow me the greatest freedom to present my interest, to foreground my imaginings of khelobedu and the idea of an impulse to travel. Byrne made me think about what kind of document was suited to what kind of strategy — what kind of document was suited to foreground my imagining khelobedu. Byrne’s approach spoke more to me, in relation to the possibilities of creatively presenting context of the **Transvaal Exhibition** as Balobedu’s ‘impulse to travel’, than Attia’s complex representation and interrogation of the structure and conditions of spectacle. Byrne’s strategy made me more aware of his, the artist’s, subjectivity as a contemporary practitioner, than Attia’s work did. Prior to my encounter with Byrne’s piece, **Attia’s** approach would have been my preferred method of presenting my delegation’s story in a materially-based visual archive (photographic residue from the **Transvaal Exhibition**; postcards and annotated photographs of those that had been to Berlin etc.). But could the documents I had found thus far (the postcards and other photographs) lead me towards an articulation like Byrne’s?

From this encounter with *Salon der Angst*, and particularly with these two works I have just discussed, I became aware of different ways to grapple with, and deploy, ideas of archive mobilised by artistic practice — in this case, the artist’s curating the actual objects from an archive into an installation piece, as in Attia’s **installation** *The Culture of Fear/The Invention of Evil* (2013). It also showed me how one can curate the context of an archive into an artwork. For example, an artist reinterpreting, reimagining or visualising the contents of an archive (prompts associated with, or contained in, the archive) by making new contemporary artefacts. Such artefacts can, for example, be a video-based work (**video art** or film essay) as in Byrne’s case, a gesture (an action that establishes a participatory relation between artist,

¹²⁹ Both Attia’s and Byrne’s work deals with texts that form part of an archive of what people thought about the unknown at a particular time.

subject and audience) or a new object. These ways are different to an approach to archive that speaks on behalf of or explains the archive. Here it is presented for you to experience it for yourself.

Overall, the key element to some of the practices explored in *Salon der Angst* is the presentation of ideas or propositions, not as a publication of the already known but rather as point of reference from which the audience is invited to respond, using their own critical or complicit processes, producing what I understand as knowledge-in-the-making.

Later that evening, when I went back to Höckner's apartment, I discussed the Byrne piece with her, indicating my interest in an alternative approach to what else I might find of the Lobedu delegation's exploits in Berlin. I emphasised my dislike for the historical or scientific approach to archival fragments and my inclination towards a subjective approach. I confessed my attraction to Byrne's work to be a hunger for something less concrete than photographs, expressing a growing desire to draw on the provocation of why sci-fi writers would be better suited to speak of change and wondered how I could go about doing this within the context of the *Transvaal Exhibition*. During the course of this conversation, amidst discussions about the kind of document that would offer more room for me to play with the idea of 'an impulse to travel' and my interest in subjectivity, Höckner recalled that she had come across a dream experienced by a member of the Balobedu delegation while in Berlin during the course of the *Transvaal Exhibition*. She suggested that such a dream might be the kind of 'document' I desired. Höckner's recollection of encountering a dream by a member of the Berlin delegation in Reuter's diary led to several discussions about the suitability of the idea of dream for exploring alternative ideas of subjectivity and visuality that I had just been encouraged to think about, from my encounter with Gerard Byrne's installation.

These discussions with Höckner were flanked by conversations brought about by my excitement about other exhibitions and artworks I had seen during the two weeks of travel before I arrived in Vienna and those I had just seen in Vienna, as well as older exhibitions that had come back to my mind.¹³⁰ Over the days I spent with her, I had been describing them to Höckner in detail. I spoke especially about exhibitions and works like *Exhibit A*, which I saw in Vienna in 2010, and works like *Wild Places* (2000) that I had seen in Vienna on that day (part of *In Progress* at the Mumok). I was particularly concerned by these two

¹³⁰ Before Vienna, I had been in Venice and Lyon to attend two biennales of art.

exhibitions' use of a particular type of institutional critique (critique sanctioned by the institution) that had rocked my faith in the use of subversion as an artistic strategy. My attraction to the dream signalled an interest in a bit more than just subversion or elucidating contexts around the [Transvaal Exhibition](#), which I had initially intended.

In accepting Höckner's foregrounding of the idea of a dream and its nature as a subjective object/document, I was interested in using it to draw some form of subjectivity that could perhaps bring me closer to *khelobedu* or to an experience of, or impulse of, the Berliners to travel. This promise of a subjective object seemed to be a productive way of bypassing the debates and the process of theorising or discoursing the idea of the human zoo, a subject and endeavour I felt was not useful to my project that is mainly interested in trying to surface or prompt a story about people who chose to go to a foreign country and explore it, just as their missionary was exploring their own.

My discussion with Höckner eventually led to an anticipation of the dream's capacity to facilitate a more complex, affective and subjective visuality, richer than that promised by the archived photographs I had found up to that point. The appeal of the dream's capacity for a more nuanced complexity also managed my anxiety with the overcrowded space of re-presenting or reimagining historic photographs within a museum space. These re-presented or reimagined historic photographs are mostly presented as institutional critique — participatory installations like Attia discussed earlier; and curated exhibitions of contextualised archival photographs hung on a wall, sometimes with additional displays of the archive's physical context, like files in vitrines or presentations of accession card showing changing practices of identifying archival objects. This format of the participatory installation and curated exhibition was my original plan when I began the PhD project. To call the field of exhibiting archival photographs overcrowded acknowledges the history of artists, in addition to practitioners of museology in general, working with archival photographic material. Here I am thinking of artists such as Penny Siopis and Santu Mofokeng. The worry about overcrowdedness also signals my discomfort with the rise in the number of people 'mimicking' (making kitsch versions) the kind of work done by artists like Mofokeng.¹³¹ This discomfort

¹³¹ Here I am referring to Santu Mofokeng's installation *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950*, which I had just seen in person for the first time at the Walther Collection in Neu-Ulm, Germany. While it was my first time seeing the installation, I have always known its legend through

recognises the dominance of subversion strategies (or narratives of subversion), in the way artists and other practitioners involved in the re-imaging archives field intervene or activate colonial photographic archives. The idea of subversion in this context refers to the practice of participating in the structures one looks to overthrow from within instead of doing it from without. Examples of the use of this kind of subversion can be seen in works like *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995–1996) by artist Carrie Weems Mae,¹³² or documented re-enactments by artist such as Pushpamala N. and Clare Arni's work *Toda H-26* (2000–2004).¹³³ In these cases the artists practise a form of institutional critique where contents and practices of institutions, like museums and photographic archives, are used to critique the very nature of such institutions. The positive take up and emulation of strategies used by the examples I have just given are indicative of what I am now experiencing as an overcrowded space of artists working with photographic archives in one form or another. More specifically, I am discouraged by the proliferation of what I am experiencing as half-baked attempts by some African-studies scholars to use the methods employed by the artists I

publications and articles like 'The Black Photo Album' (Mofokeng, 1999). Mofokeng's work is a result of a research project into the black middle class' self-representation practices, using photographs from vernacular archives. Its key distinction is how he approached the exhibition of the archive, pushing it beyond traditional museology interested in simply informing. Mofokeng's presentation of this work locates itself in artistic practice concerned with presenting the full subjective context (his, the discipline of museology, photography and so forth) of the archive instead of simply explaining it from an objective, disciplined point of view. The installation features a selection of found and collected photographs depicting the black middle class. To achieve his installation, Mofokeng copied the found photographic prints onto slide film, creating photographic slides, which he presented with an analogue photo carousel as a photographic slide show. A projected textual narrative punctuated the projected images. This body of work was published that year as *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950* (Mofokeng 2013) by Steidl and the Walther Collection. The catalogue has introductory text by Santu Mofokeng and an essay by James T. Campbell.

¹³² 33 toned prints (Weems n.d.).

¹³³ From the ethnographic series *Native Women of South India: Manners and Customs* (Art Gallery NSW 2000). This body of work is well analysed in Pinney's chapter 'The Problem with Anthropology' (2011:106–145, particularly 133–140).

have mentioned as an effect — using the techniques associated with the work by artists, without paying attention to the demands of the mediums they are using.¹³⁴

Drawing from this discomfort, I decided that the dream was the best object with which to explore a different context for the [Transvaal Exhibition](#) and any question of subjectivity that may still arise. I then adopted the dream as a key object of interest for the thesis. This decision to employ the object of a dream was also influenced by the lack of compelling (for me) photographic residue directly related to the [Transvaal Exhibition at the ELAB archive](#). In line with Byrne's use of video, coupled with my growing obsession with shooting video brought on by the development of a moving image (video) function on the standard still digital single lens reflex (D-SLR) camera,¹³⁵ I decided then that the Berliner dream would be visualised into some form of a film. We agreed that Höckner would send me a consignment form, to finalise our agreement for her to provide a copy of her transcription of the diaries for my academic use, followed by the diary for the year with the dream, as well as the other years I requested and, ultimately, the whole diary.

A month later I had the first dispatch from Höckner, with some diary entries from 1904, 1905 and 1906, but not from the years I had requested, nor of the Berlin dream. When I asked for the years I had requested, she responded by saying there was a technical problem with those years, and that I must not worry because it is good to get some grounding in the rest of the diary before I look at the years I want. The subsequent diary years she sent, which included 1903, 1898 and 1885 used in this thesis, were accompanied by small summaries, emphasising a Eurocentric self-reflexive judgement of Reuter and his mission. That is to say, Höckner's summaries reiterated how the Reuter project was one of dispossession, pointing out that there was an urgent need for redress.¹³⁶ There was still no Berlin dream.

¹³⁴ Such as the way Ayana Jackson uses the same strategy as Carrie Mae Weems but uses the medium of photography in an illustrative mode — as metaphor for a theoretical discourse — instead of in an effective way.

¹³⁵ An SLR camera is the common professional camera system that has a detachable lens. These cameras were strictly for shooting still photographs until 2008 when a moving image (video) function was included on the Digital SLR camera.

¹³⁶ For example, Höckner, in an email containing the 1903 diary, emphasises how that diary shows the way Reuter exploited the people at his station, who had to work without pay: as well as how he forged

Seeing that there was no dream yet, I looked at fine art methodologies — both research-based practices and playful practices within art. I was looking to draw on the ability of contemporary art to materialise, represent, invent and engage missing or inaccessible documents and objects, as a potential strategy for dealing with the possibility of not receiving the dream, such in, for example, Nontobeko Ntombela's *A Fragile Archive* (2012) at the JAG. Here, Ntombela used creative ways to present a missing Gladys Mgudlandlu painting — using a projected image of the painting in place of the actual object. Similar examples include Talya Lubinsky's *If we Burn There is Ash* (2016) at the Wits Anthropology Museum. Here, Lubinsky presented concrete replicas of historic clay pots (originally belonging to the Anthropology Museum) to portray and evoke commandeered pots the Wits Art Museum was refusing to make available to the Wits Anthropology Museum, because of object-conservation politics.

1.3. Cues that enable: the diary and dream as a context

1.3.1. The Reuter diary and the context of the *Transvaal Exhibition*

The general pattern of the translated diaries is one of inconsistency, such as, for example, the inconsistency in the naming patterns of people Reuter referred to regularly,¹³⁷ as well as lots of recollections of things that happened years earlier, comments left by the translators around unclear entries or interesting points of enquiry.¹³⁸ Sometimes entries for one year span several

ahead to build the church while people were dying of hunger (Höckner, email correspondence, May 19, 2014). I understand Höckner's notations to be over performing reflexivity.

¹³⁷ As in the case with Rasetelo mentioned in Chapter 1.

¹³⁸ Note on translation: The Reuter diaries used in this text have undergone three sets of translation or changes of various kinds. Firstly, they were transliterated from the out-dated German Sütterlin script into modern German script by Höckner, before 1988. Secondly, Höckner further updated the orthography of her 1993 German transliteration to fit with current German orthography, as well as to update corrupted Umlaut symbols, lost in the migration from old Apple Mac OS text application to current Microsoft Word document standards. Höckner labelled her Microsoft documents using the format *TB* for *Tagebuch* (diary), *I-III* for the first quarter of the year (months 1 to 3) or *X-XII* for the last quarter of the year (months 10–12), *1903* for the diary entry year, and *doc* for Microsoft document. For example, *TB.I-III1903.doc* is the diary for January–March 1903. This further underwent a third step, translation into English through a professional translation service by Trans

pages of text, divided into quarters with a report-like summary of the year's activities (how many converts, schools built etc.) preceding the quarters. Such a format is found in the entries for the years 1903 (used in this chapter) or 1885 (used mostly in Chapter 1). Sometimes the entry for a couple of years spans one page without a summary report, as in the case of the 1889 to 1902 diary entry. This discrepancy may be attributed to the selection process that Höckner followed, where she perhaps extracted only things that were important for her research. For example, she notes what a section consists of, giving a page number in the original diary, and then moves on to a more fully fleshed out description and transcription of another aspect in the same diary year. This selection pattern aside,¹³⁹ Höckner did mention, when we negotiated for the diaries, that Reuter was not the most diligent of diary keepers and cautioned me in a later email — when asked for her feedback on Trans Alba's translations of her work — to be careful with direct citations of Reuter. She mentioned that 'the older

Alba. To facilitate easy comparative reading of the translation against Höckner's German version, Trans Alba converted Höckner's Microsoft Word documents into an excel spreadsheet dividing sections of texts into numbered lines. These lines are then translated in corresponding columns (side by side), allowing easy inspection of the German and English texts concurrently, with an additional column with a reference to the Word document, as per Höckner's labelling. Thus, the two corresponding texts and a reference to the original Word document have the same line number. Within this thesis the reference to Reuter diary entries will carry the line number as per Trans Alba format, with a reference to Höckner's original Microsoft Word document name. Where possible, the page number of the original Sütterlin script diary is provided with the prefix pg. For example, *Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 706 (pg. 94): TB X.-XII.1903.doc*: Collection name: Trans Alba line number (original Sütterlin script page number): Höckner's Word document name. The '2014/2015' indicates the year of translation by Trans Alba.

¹³⁹ I could have compared the original diaries with the translations, or discussed Höckner's methods with her. These efforts were first thwarted by a lack of access to the original diaries. As soon as I realised that it would be a struggle to access the transcribed diaries from Höckner, as well as my translation team's (Trans Alba's) indication that they had the capacity to translate the original Sütterlin script diaries directly into English, I attempted to access the original diaries from the ELAB during my March 2014 trip to Germany, only to discover that the diary was part of a large consignment of documents sent to a private company for professional translation. While these digital files could be made available to me, the anticipated digitisation completion date fell well outside my translation timeframe. Also, efforts to get clarity from Höckner, who was generally available to me via email, coincided with the busiest period in the institution she directed.

German has many times a different spelling' (Höckner, email correspondence, November 20, 2014). My experience of the diaries, which supports Höckner's judgement, is that Reuter seems to have simply tried to put down basic ideas on key themes, which BMS director Wangemann would embellish.¹⁴⁰ Even with these conditions, as I read the diaries they became a generative cue that compelled me to engage them further as part of my quest for subjectivity.

1.3.2 Reading the diary

From the insights drawn through preliminary reading of the translated diaries, I noticed certain things that seemed to advance or at the least support the attitude I was developing in my quest for subjectivity and the research in general. I will now attempt to lift some of the key insights that informed the direction the research subsequently followed. For the purpose of this chapter, I focus mostly on the 1889 and 1903 diary entries, as they are the ones that offer the most relevant information for the context of dream and the [Transvaal Exhibition](#). In general terms the diaries cover topics as diverse as conversion rates; marriages; the cost of being a Christian; statistics for German activity in the region; infrastructure developments; details of Balobedu serving in the Boer wars; changes in tax collection; visits by colonial administrators; Reuter's advisory services to the Boers and Modjadji; deaths and pestilence — droughts, locust plagues, fever; chiefs or indunas and their relationships with Modjadji and the Boers;¹⁴¹ attitudes to Christianity and the role of missionaries in politics; land politics related to the introduction of Boer land titles and location allocations; labour politics as Balobedu enter the colonial labour system, and much more. Overall, the diary gives a good sense of key colonial era politicking and decisions related to Balobedu — a perfect survey of all actors, and by implication their archives, related to Balobedu's colonial relations.

The diary entries for the 1898–1903 period read like an account of those who had been in Berlin. Reuter constantly mentions that 'so and so' was also in Berlin, or the Berliners, as he boasts about the group's importance to his project in Bolobedu. As in the passage 'two of Mo's [Reuter's shorthand for Modjadji's] ministers, who had also been in Berlin, of whom

¹⁴⁰ See more on Wangemann's hand in the diaries of BMS missionaries in Beyer (1913). Aspects of this are discussed in Chapter 1.

¹⁴¹ Reuter positions these 'actors' (induna) as Modjadji's ministers, indicating some form of hierarchy or arrangements between them and Modjadji.

one had been a high sorcerer, attended instruction'.¹⁴² So far I have counted four of Modjadji's ministers (indunas), including Ndumbane, Modjadji's chief doctor, who had been to Berlin; and at least two other independent chiefs. The constant reference to people who had been in Berlin, as in some of the photographs I found in the ELAB archive, gives an impression that the pool of people who went with Reuter to Berlin became a core network linked to him by their experiences and promise (to Reuter's funding constituencies) for being good Christians and future converts. Perhaps the people who went to Berlin became the mission station's selling points as the diaries (and photographs) were eventually transformed into narratives in publications and postcards, aimed at generating funds for the missions. Perhaps the funding constituency felt a personal connection with the story of 'So-and-So' when donating to Medingen, because they had encountered 'So-and-So' from Medingen in person. This relationship between Reuter's mission, narrated through BMS diary writing and photography conventions, and the German Protestant funding public, who consumed Reuter's diaries through various BMS publication modes discussed in Chapter 2,¹⁴³ can be seen as an older form of the poverty pornography discussed by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013). This is a form of cultural consumption that Ndlovu-Gatsheni discusses in relation to the invention of black as deficit. That is to say, a positioning of the Balobedu subjectivity as needing the help of the German Protestant public by emphasising things Balobedu do not have, such as Balobedu as lacking schools, for example.

I also found an entry on Setabane, a delegation member who distanced himself from the congregation after the trip, indicating the possibility of some critical response by Setabane to the experience of the Berlin trip and the [Transvaal Exhibition](#). In the entry, Reuter complains about how, after all that he had done for him, including feeding him in times of drought, taking him to Germany and his living on his (Reuter's) farm, [Setabane](#) continues to be carefully distant.¹⁴⁴ This implies some form of expectation of return for his good deeds. Other interesting bits include the conversion of some Germans to Christianity by some of the

¹⁴² Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 471 (pg. 152): TB X–XII.1898.doc.

¹⁴³ These funders enjoyed access to aspects of Reuter's diaries through Wangemann's infamous missionary narratives, distributed in the *Missionsberichte* and missionary *Lebensbilder* (autobiographies).

¹⁴⁴ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 195: TB IV–VI.1898.

Berliners, further throwing in all sorts of questions as to what exactly the nature of their trip was. This story comes in the form of a letter from a German converted by the Berliners in Germany, who attests to his case not being unique.¹⁴⁵ This, of course, is interesting because it shifts the emphasis of Balobedu as merely passive entertainment for Europeans, and casts them as active evangelists, doing what is often seen to be the province of missionaries in colonised territories. They are not subverting but acting as full agents of Christianity.

1.4. The Transvaal Exhibition report back

In the translated 1903 diary, I found Reuter's accounts of an evening when a member of the Berliner delegation reported on the Berlin trip, revealing it to have been a great adventure. The report, delivered by **Makhumela**, is given on the occasion of a visit from the BMS mission inspector, Sauberzweig-Schmidt, whom the Berliners had met while in Berlin. Reuter introduces Makhumela as a master blacksmith who had operated a portable primitive forge during the 1897 trip to Berlin. With this introduction, Reuter goes on to point out how Makhumela so wished to be baptised but was being deliberately held back by Reuter, even after he denounced polygamy and his two wives had both been baptised. At the end of recounting Makhumela's quest for Christ, Reuter then muses about how he eventually baptises him after he sells his last goat during a drought to fulfil his promise of becoming a Christian. This entry is in one of Reuter's classic gloating narratives about his skills at manipulating or mastering his congregation and demonstrating their hunger for the miracle of Christ. I understand such narratives were specifically tailored to the German Christian community that funded missions like Reuter's. I understand this narrative not to have been about Makhumela or the Berliners' trip per se, but that the recollection of Makhumela's report on the trip was a device for Reuter to elevate the character of Makhumela, so as to make his quest for Christianity more personal for those who had encountered the Berliners in Berlin.

Reuter goes on to recount how Makhumela spoke of the experience with excitement, with storytelling skills that kept them laughing well past midnight.¹⁴⁶ Reuter further relays Makhumela's story of the hustle and bustle in the different ports they visited, including

¹⁴⁵ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 230: TB IV–VI.1898.doc.

¹⁴⁶ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 706–724 (pg. 93–98): TB X–XII.1903.

Madeira, where some boys were diving for gold. He describes Makhumela's imitation (mimicking) of the difference in the boys faces when they found gold and when they found copper.¹⁴⁷ He also recounted Makhumela's impression of sailing down the Elbe river, as well as meal time at Kommerzialrat Bolle's house, where the maids overfed them till the delegation's only defence was to say 'Dickbauch, Dickbauch' (fat belly). Reuter also recounted Makhumela's mocking gestures of the delegation's delighted response to a mountain of cakes at the BMS mission house. This is a pleasure I too had encountered during a visit to the BMS library's cafeteria at the same mission house. Reuter also relates Makhumela's mention of how the delegations sat in the dining hall, 'heathens' on the right, Christians on the left. The accounts ends with Reuter's mention of Makhumela's comic take on the Berlin zoo. Reuter recounts that after Makhumela's audience complains about sore stomachs from laughing, they beg him to stop, to which he replies, 'I will now leap to the Berlin zoo'. Without relaying what Makhumela actually says about the zoo, Reuter continues by saying: 'This was now open country for his [Makhumela's] humour and for his imagination, which was almost inexhaustible',¹⁴⁸ perhaps implying that this was a potent ongoing joke and point of conversation among the group. Without knowing for sure what Makhumela said, I accept this to have been an interesting interpretation on what was possibly a Völkerschau of some sort. While the references were comic, it may have been a pointed criticism of the Germans and their use of world fairs. This criticism may have eluded Reuter, whose recollection of the descriptions does not admit his awareness of any criticism. This entry was definitely a PR exercise on Reuter's part, as it demonstrated the success of the trip. This entry is most probably targeted for a specific marketing effect, like the ones mentioned earlier in reference to the German Protestant funding constituency. But even with this target, I could not help but be excited by my ability to recognise a khelobedu storytelling register that persists up to today.

1.5. The joke and the khelobedu register across time (a form of mimicry)

In my reading of the Reuter diary, particularly where Reuter skilfully recounts Makhumela's report on the experience of the Berlin trip, I was struck by the familiarity of the register used by Makhumela (carried through Reuter's narration), to drive home (to me) the collective

¹⁴⁷ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 712 (pg. 94): TB X–XII.1903.

¹⁴⁸ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 724: TB X–XII.1903.

experience of the delegation. My access to Makhumela's jokes was facilitated first by Reuter's constant reference to everybody being in stitches, that is people laughing so much that they cannot move; secondly, my understanding of the nature of such jokes as those that simply render a situation visible to the audience without qualifying or portraying it to them directly. That is, the joke simply directs your attention to a situation without telling you what you are looking at. For example, the mention of the Berlin Zoo at the end of Reuter's recollection and how Makhumela moves directly to it reminded me of the gift my family presented my wife and me at our wedding. They presented us with a seboledi, a specialist in Sesotho sa Leboa prose (Northern Sotho prose), whose jokes masked a scathing critique of Balobedu culture's view of the posture of a married man (their wandering nature, how you ought to behave or carry yourself), while unashamedly uttering in public, with vivid imagery, blasphemies related to the details of married sexual life.

The seboledi's main message was that a man must love his wife and that loving his wife is a series of repeated acts. I will begin by capturing his message in khelobedu to refresh my memory of what is both a spoken and a performative presentation, but also to acknowledge that this now calls for me to perform a narration of his performance, just like Reuter had to re-perform Makhumela's performance in his diary. *I use italicised text to indicate his break from his performance to ask for consensus; bold to indicate my narration of what he says or does, and italicised bold for my digressions offering context.* Normal text represents my memory of the seboledi's narrations.

Bare! Ke a tsopola. Monna ke go kissa mosadi wa we! *Akere o mo nyetši, o se ke wa tšhaba. O monokantšhe ntho ye o!* **A iša pele are:** monna yo mongwe le yo mogwe o ke khetela khedibana khawe—**ema a mpotšisa gore:** *khane bago khethetle mosadi naa?* **Nna ka re:** *auwa!* **Yena a re:** *good! Mara if ba go khethetle, goba ba a go gapeletša, mpotše ganabwale, ke tlo go lamolela—* **A ya pele a re:** ge momna a khethile khedibana khawe—**ape khedibana ke mosadi, mara botse botse, o apa ka 'mothopo wa bophelo' (meetsi), selo se basotho ba Lesotho ba se bitšago 'Lesotho'.**¹⁴⁹ **Ke ra yona Nnyo. Tshwarelo mara Khelobedu a khe rogane, Khe a reta!**—a se ke a duma tsedibana tša banna ba banwge! **Ge a khe apa taba ye. A thoma a re lemogiša gore:** *Gape nna a ke na taba. Le ge bana ba le gona, ke nyoko no*

¹⁴⁹ A kere ge makgowa ba botšiša motho putšišo ya go setsebalatšege ya gore 'o tšwa kae? Basotho ba araba ka bosa, bare, ke tšwa gare ga maoto a bomma.

apa! ge le sa rate, ba kobeng! ge taba e ya pele a buša a re: ge monna a khe rata mosadi wa gage, o tlo no bona a khe nwa khedibana khawe! O nyoko no bona a khe (**mmona**) kwatama fase ka dikhuru a khe diyo latswa o kare ke mpšwa. *a se nnte khane? A ya pele a re gaka a re: Khane khedibana kha ga go a khe na meetsi? Ape Khedibana a khe phwe! Ge a khe aba taba ye ya go kwatama, seboledi sa diyo kwatama ka dikhuru, kha thoma go dira o kare o latswa fase. Bwale batho ka moka ba homile! Ba ba ngwe ba patlamile le fase. Ape motho yo o apa ka nnyo le go latswana tša ka fase, gare ga bana.*

Just attempting to recount this story has already drawn me into khelobedu — what I now understand as the practices of diplomacy of speech without compromising your position — that are almost impossible to translate without practising them in the way I have just recounted and performed the story to myself. So I may perhaps not be able to perform the story again in English. But for the sake of taking you with me, I will summarise its effects.

The seboledi essentially drove the point about a man loving his wife by talking about how each man must choose his mush, spring or well (un-diminishable source of water), breaking to ask me if I had chosen my own wife. He then assured me that should I have been forced in to the marriage, he had the authority to free me from my disposition. The mush/well/spring is of course a woman. I use a mush to drive home ‘khediba’ as a particular type of water source that is always wet and visible, albeit not always in an obvious way; I use the idea of a well to indicate that it is a type of natural groundwater that can be passed down for generations; and the idea of a spring to draw attention to the mythical health benefits, or the ability of such a water source to grant you your wishes. The metaphors around a woman and water in Sesotho sa Leboa are endless, particularly in reference to rainmaking. The seboledi goes on to say each man must confine himself to his own well and not go chasing after other men’s wells. He further points out that to love a woman, to be faithful to one’s well, one must drink from it regularly, pausing to reiterate how you must kiss your woman at all times (one form of drinking), urging me not to let my wife’s mouth go dry, lest they laugh at me — it is my responsibility to constantly add water to this well. He tops this statement by going around the tent pretending to kiss the audience. At some point, when he discusses that if you love your wife you will just see her randomly giving you massages when you are stressed. He mentions this while giving my wife’s grandfather a mock-massage, effectively embarrassing him and causing a shockwave of laughter, which dissipates the tension caused by his disrespect for an elder he does not know.

To get back to the story of the well, as it is impossible to retell the story without digressions because the seboledi's story was one digression after another, linked by repetitions of kissing your wife and drinking only from your own well. When he delivers the line about drinking from your well regularly, he goes down on his knees and proceeds to show us how this is done. He drinks like a dog, with a rapid licking motion that sends even bigger waves of laughter to a point that even the most conservative audience members cannot contain themselves. This performance and speech was punctuated by constant conversations with the audience that drew us in as participants. We had to constantly confirm or deny his points. He also took this time to challenge possible objections to his performance, like how the presence of children will not deter him. This draws attention to the kids, who are all wondering what the fuss is about. That is: Why are the adults laughing so hard? What are they missing? With the act of drinking from the well on one's knees, he was not only illustrating the act of drinking water, but also indicating that it is not taboo to drink with your mouth the waters of your wife. That is to say, even cunnilingus is an acceptable practice (another form of drinking from your well), further driving the point that when you are married, you should not be deterred by ideas of tradition. 'It is open country', to use Reuter's words.¹⁵⁰ During the process of this story, he had also launched several attacks on the popular saying that a man is the province of many women — sort of challenging some notion of polygamy. This is the posture (of a Molobedu married man) he was challenging.

In a sense, my recognition of Makhumela's joke as a particular Balobedu practice compelled me to practice the art of the seboledi, which I was now familiar with. The seboledi not only told me about the posture of a married 'Lutheran' Molobedu man, but also delivered to me a **literacy** required to survive marriage. In other words, he was relaying the art of the language, of getting your grievances heard without breaking the cordialities required to sustain a happy marriage. He performed what my grandmother had offered to me the night before — the wisdom that says 'problems are caused by the mouth, and are rectified by the mouth' — albeit in a more detailed and flamboyant manner.

I had encountered this use of jokes as a vehicle for criticism many times in Bolobedu. For example, in 2017, when I went to my grandmother's paternal brother's funeral, Thobela

¹⁵⁰ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 724, TB X–XII.1885.doc.

FM¹⁵¹ radio personality David Lebepe (the deceased's nephew) was the motšhara marapo (programme director).¹⁵² Lebepe told a joke about a conversation with his young son, in which he asked the son what he wanted to be when he grew up. The son replied: 'I want to be an mfundisi [a pastor, a teacher of the Lord's word]'. Lebepe went on to elaborate his puzzlement about his son's lack of ambition: the son could be a lawyer, a president or even a prophet,¹⁵³ but he simply chose to be a lowly modest pastor.

Before I go on, let me give a brief context to the setting at the funeral tent. There was a table at the head of the tent with around five pastors of different faiths; a catholic priest, who had told us of his days as a stotsi (crook) and how the deceased's family took him in; two pastor in shiny suits from the charismatic church, who insisted on delivering the main sermon and almost had a physical fight with the two official apostolic priests who came from the deceased's congregation.

Lebepe went on to ask his son why he wanted to be a pastor when he could be anything he wanted to be in the new South African democracy. To this the son replied, saying he chose to be a pastor because he wants to be the first to eat at funerals; he wanted to be given the whole chicken. The response from the tent was out of control, everybody laughed and even the priests, who were a bit tense because of the joke being at their expense, were laughing uncontrollably. As he told this story, he was pacing up and down, pausing to look people in

¹⁵¹ National radio channel catering to audiences that speak Sesotho sa Leboa.

¹⁵² It is also important to note that the idea of seboledi, which I develop in my MAFA thesis as motšhwara marapo, can be historicised to the early days of the Lutheran church in the northern Transvaal, but I understand it to have been a practice found by the missionaries. My understanding is drawn from conversations with my grandmother's cousin, who was the family's resident seboledi, and have observed it with many uncles tasked with this position at all important functions. This register is an important aspect of teaching and learning the language used by adults to avoid unpleasantness. It is a form of diplomatic speak. In the MAFA thesis I discuss the function of motšhwara marapo as a master of ceremony, tasked with running events smoothly (Mahashe, 2012a). The seboledi is the same in that the terminology and style of address is the same, but the difference is that the seboledi would be the equivalent of a keynote speaker.

¹⁵³ Being a prophet in contemporary South Africa has become a rather lucrative business as we develop into a culture that finds comfort in men of God who preach future riches to the masses of poor people.

the eye, almost as if he were checking if they saw where his story was going. Lebepe finished by relating how he congratulated his son for being so observant and having his focus on food, something the son was clearly very interested in at that moment. And then he proceeded to stand with the pastors, placating the pastors by flattering them about their importance in the community and repeatedly thanked them for being first on the scene for the family in times of need. I sat there, puzzled as to why this story could be that funny. After the funeral, when it was time to eat, I returned to the tent to find the five priests sitting at the same table with a spread of special food, while noticing that the public table only had meat and pap. At that point the joke was complete: I could not hold myself in and I could see from the pastors' expressions that they could recognise the source of my amusement. The way Lebepe had told the story, with its heavy dose of mischief, was very similar to the way my seboledi had done, in the sense that it was a ridiculous performance. He used a form of mockery. Just as in the process of Lebepe delivering the son's response to why he lacked ambition, he constantly mimicked his son's confidence at the importance of the *mfundisi*, by mimicking how the charismatic priest constantly drew attention to their suits to indicate their importance.

In Reuter's recollections of the evening, he often mentions details of the way Makhumela used his facial expression to convey different personas — at times mischievous and at others serious, as when Reuter notes: 'When he then led us into the reading room, his already old face arranged itself into quite a different expression'.¹⁵⁴ I recognised such instances (changing facial expressions) as aspects of the performance I picked up in my seboledi and in Lebepe. For example, the way Reuter emphasises that Makhumela 'mimics' the faces of the young boys at the harbour in Madeira at once drew me into imagining Makhumela moving about showing faces to the audience as he tells his story,¹⁵⁵ much like how the seboledi engaged the audience at my wedding. I imagined how Makhumela patted his belly as he recounted the 'Dickbauch, Dickbauch' (fat belly) moment.

In a sense, the method Reuter presents as Makhumela's strategy for telling the story of the Berliners points me to the idea of *metlae*, which can be loosely translated as jokes that inform. *Metlae* is a form of joking that is not necessarily about showing something hidden or obscured, but rather points to the skill of rendering something visible, and having the decency

¹⁵⁴ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 720: TB X.–XII.1903.doc.

¹⁵⁵ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 712 (pg. 94): TB X–XII.1903.doc.

to smooth over the tension caused by the act of making visible, so as not to perpetuate unnecessary tension. It is much like satire, but satire's baggage as a racist trope that obliterates its subject without atonement disqualifies it. I understand this difference to lie in how satire has been used by people like South African cartoonist Zapiro or nineteenth-century Western advertisements¹⁵⁶ as a weapon to efface opponents who are not susceptible to disarmament through rational debate. So in a way I understand *metlae* to be a form of 'attack' that also apologises. It is diplomatic. It is much like the aphorism used, when dealing with a loved one, to be like a rat, to 'bite and soothe'. Perhaps the concept of jokes does not quite capture the depth of '*metlae*' or '*go gwerana*'.¹⁵⁷ Its essence is rooted in the aspect of diplomacy.

The more I think about it, the more it seems not so much about the accuracy of the content as about its ability to render something visible without casualties or trapping its subject. In essence, the register brought out by Reuter's recollection of Makhumela's strategy for relaying the Berliner's experiences of the Berlin trip indicated his affinity for theatre, which opens up my search for the question: Was their (the Balobedu delegation's) performance spectacular? That is to say, did they deliver on the theatricality I have come to associate with Balobedu's public performances?

The question of Balobedu theatricality (affinity for showmanship) lies in my experience as a child, of the dances and colourful costumes I encountered as I frequented the month-end pay markets with my grandmother; and later during the *Gae Lebowa* project where I visited the Sekgapa games,¹⁵⁸ which involved spectacular dance performances and costumes performed

¹⁵⁶ Zapiro is a South African cartoonist famous for his social commentary on South African politics. His brand of satire often uses racist tropes that can be seen to draw from racist stereotypes of black people.

¹⁵⁷ 'Go gwerana' is more like satire in its entertainment function, but I understand it to be more about the sport of making jokes than about some form of criticality.

¹⁵⁸ Sekgapa (women's 'games') is a bi-weekly event in Bolobedu, where women from each region take turns in hosting each other (within and between regions) for beer-drinking parties as a form of local economy. The dance performed at the event functions as a form of entertainment, but the songs are often loaded with political messages. The songs are also used as coded messages for relaying grievances to the ruling class.

for the locals without the spectatorship of outsiders. I had come to associate such performances with Balobedu's political and economic agency, which I understand to indicate some form of Balobedu subjectivity: it is not predicated on the desires of outsiders. This recognition of theatricality as a sign of Balobedu subjectivity, recognisable to me, is important because this thesis is concerned with the question of foregrounding Balobedu's subjectivity through and within colonial archives, where Lalu (2009) observes such subjectivity to be impossible to recover. Through the way Reuter describes Makhumela's delivery of the Berliner's report, I encounter Makhumela's 'theatricality' and experience it as a spectacular performance, which I read as some form of Balobedu subjectivity. Reuter's recollection reassured me that despite my not having direct details of their time in Berlin, their presence there was spectacular both in their experience and, I suspect, in their rendering of whatever they performed there. The recognition and appreciation of the register of Makhumela's jokes, and its indication of theatricality, is reinforced through mobilising my current literacy (honed by the wedding gift) as a space to imagine the event by reminding me that the spirit of khelobedu is well and alive; and is portable to the German language, as I suspect Makhumela's speech may have been in German, because Reuter mentioned that the speech preceding Makhumela's presentation was in German^{159, 160}

What I take from this encounter is that the presence of a joke in Reuter's diary does not imply a text to be reimagined, represented or analysed. This understanding is key to the enabling nature of this diary entry. That is to say, the joke does not necessarily invite interpretation or context around the contents of the joke but rather is an invitation for us to take the 'form' (the medium or technology) of the joke as a practice — an action to be repeated. Not just to make people laugh, but to understand why making people laugh in this way is important within a Balobedu context. By medium or technology, I am emphasising this type of joke as a cause to laugh (an action that leads to laughter). That is to say, telling a joke as process — a series of moves whose practice makes people laugh — is the thing we must pay attention to, instead of

¹⁵⁹ The mission used the German language only, changing to English after 1900. In the 1903 diary, Reuter mentions that government school master Jones and his wife came to give a four-week course on the English curriculum, further noting that the mission did not adapt to English, the young boys and girls would run to English schools to learn English (Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 732–733 (pg.103, 106): TB X–XII.1903.doc).

¹⁶⁰ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 700: TB X–XII.1903.doc.

paying attention to how one is made to laugh. This urges us to adopt the practice (telling jokes) and not be consumed by the technicalities of what constitutes or sustains the practice — it emphasised participation. What I take from this diary entry is an understanding that the subjectivity of Balobedu lay in their technologies, in this case the joke as a technology — a structure used for various effects. Therefore, this encourages me to focus on the fact of the technology as a marker of this subjectivity instead of focusing on the content delivered by this technology.

For example, my baby cousin sometimes asks if a specific ritual practice is our tradition, like the ritual wedding games she and other girl cousins play during our family's weddings.¹⁶¹ I often reply to her question, 'Is this our tradition?', by emphasising to her that playing games is the tradition, not the specific action of the game. The shape or content of the game is subject to one's discretion and imagination, and reflects the needs of the time. The very impulse to play games is the important lesson. That is how children learn the culture, and the shape and content should not be taken as the event. So, if communication is the key element they must learn from playing a particular game, it is only in their playing the game that they are forced to communicate. The form-playing and communicating (repeating the action) is the key; the content (what we play) is subject to imagination. The point here is that what the joke and my girl cousin's question of traditional ritual puts forward is that imagination is the province of a contingency, sustaining crucial structures outside of colonial interests. Therefore, the subjectivity of people marginalised by nineteenth-century European colonialism should not necessarily be judged only on content (something specifically important to colonists at that time) but rather on the need for that content to be imagined — the structure the content sustains.

It is important to point out that Reuter's diary is a cue that facilitates my quest for an imagining of khelobedu. It facilitates because it allows me space to occupy a productive relationship with some of the characters — the Berliners, my nineteenth-century ancestors and Reuter — and imagine their contexts as they converge in the founding and maintenance

¹⁶¹ Games as when girls present stones wrapped in foil as sweets to the visiting groom's party to symbolise that money is required to buy sweets. This is a form of request for entertainment by the bride's cousins to the groom, emphasising to him that he is obliged or expected to entertain them (receive them at his house) from the moment he indicates his intentions to marry their cousin.

of the Medingen mission and other satellite stations. I wanted the diary from Höckner because it offers some much needed backstories about actors in the Medingen mission station — what or who mattered to whom and when (Stoler, 2008:9), which helped me know what to search for.

Some events cannot simply be searched for by what we call them today. Therefore the diary gives me a much-needed vocabulary, such as names of people like my great-great-grandfather Nathaniel Mmolawa. This name allows me to have a productive conversation with my grandmother who, although she never answered or responded directly to my questions or to prompts I relayed to her from the diary, always gave me more cues to work with through her seemingly unrelated stories. Her stories often allowed me space to recognise certain aspects of the Christian constellations that developed before, during and after the golden age of the Medingen mission station. The diary facilitated a productive conversation, in that it provided space for my grandmother to correct or challenge lazy assumptions about my own personal history. That is to say, my mention of things from the diary to my grandmother gave her space or cause to push me to ask more of the Reuter archive, by emphasising its limits to knowing me (drawing attention to the impossibility of Reuter knowing and being able to record everything in a way that accounts for what my subjectivity is able to comprehend), while emphasising my capacity to know myself, like asking me why I ask her about Nathaniel Mmolawa when I know he was called Sebolai. Therefore, the conversations with my grandmother fuelled my awareness of the different access points I had to narratives around the [Transvaal Exhibition](#) or the delegates. She activated my distributed sensibility (my different positions in relation to the research) of being a contemporaneous Molobedu (one living in one's time) engaged with my family and communities on matters of history. Not history as confirmation of the already-known past events, but history as direct current matters that animate and play out in my lived life.

A case in point is the story of how my grandmother's brother died, after visiting their father who had left the family because my grandmother's mother could not accept her husband's practice as a doctor. The story came out when I tried to speak to my grandmother about Modubeng in Kgašane's district, where the first Christian community in Bolobedu thrived

before Kgašane's death.¹⁶² The story took the form of a memory of the first car she ever saw, a beautiful black car owned by an uncle of hers who was part of the Medingen constellation. It was at a funeral. The story quickly moved to her memory of her brother's death and funeral; and how her father came, but used medicine to hide from the family while living with them in the same house. This story, which mostly reads as an accusation of her father sacrificing her brother in order to graduate in the practice of being a doctor, gave me valuable insights into the dynamics of how Reuter's Christian doctrine not only broke up families but re-ordered them to conform to European standards: how he punished polygamy or how he insisted on denouncing anything related to Balobedu traditions, such as divination practices.¹⁶³ But the story also prepared me for some real life private and painful matters, brought on by discoveries in my enquiry into my paternal and maternal great-great-grandparents' involvement with the Christian faith and the Reuter mission.¹⁶⁴ I see the sources of things like families breaking up, evoked by my grandmother's stories; in Reuter's gloating and brief moments of righteousness, as he demanded families be dissolved, with far-reaching consequences for economic security for wider family structures organised around the marriage-cattle links so well described by Krige and Krige ([1943] 1980), links that ensure food security in times of drought and famine.

Overall, it is not the diary itself that facilitates my quest. Alone, the diary is just a document that illuminates the lives and strategies of missionaries and their colonial exploits. But when

¹⁶² Within this conversation, my grandmother also told me that she was confirmed (a year-long catechumen school) as a Christian at the Modubeng station church in the mid-1950s.

¹⁶³ It is important to note here that Reuter did not have that much power and that there were other reasons for people to put up with his irrational demands. See, for example, Landau's suggestions about why some people chose to adopt Christianity (beyond missionaries as a cause) at different times in South Africa (Landau, personal communication, July 16–18, 2015). He cites ideas such as choosing missionaries as an opposition to a particular king, instead of it being only about the love of Christ, pointing out that giving up polygamy and drinking were side effects of such a decision. Landau cites, for example, people like Thomas Tlou on 'native evangelists' and Leonard Ngcongco among others. For more on Landau's argument see *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Landau, 1995).

¹⁶⁴ This point also raised in me a curiosity about how the father pulled off being in the house without being seen.

used as a primer for me to recover a vocabulary or fragments needed to sustain a conversation with my grandmother, about key moments in her life (vocabulary like place names or practices that have mutated to such a level that they are unimaginable to a post-apartheid, Model-C¹⁶⁵ kid). Key moments are not just personal, in the sense that they affected her life, but are moments that guided certain decisions that shape my life today, such as a possible feud or reciprocal duties emanating from cattle links between my paternal and maternal ancestors. To recognise the register of the seboledi in the way Reuter recounts Makhumela's narrative strategies is rather inspiring. This recognition compels me to take seriously contemporary Balobedu, such as my grandmother and myself: recognising my grandmother and myself (and others like us) as enough to recover Balobedu's subjectivity. This then shifts my quest for subjectivity away from the validation of colonial archives. This recognition of my subjectivity is achieved by emphasising that the subjectivity I seek is not located back there in history and its preserved documents (the colonial archive, privileging its protocols and disciplines), but that it has been evolving and is alive and well today, in me and others like me. It is not put away for future generations, but it persists in all generations. What is interesting is also understanding how, after accusing Höckner of performing a postmodernist reflexivity, I found myself leaning towards the same position as I faced the brutal facts of Reuter's complicity and action within the colonial policies. But maybe the difference is that, when seeing such brutality in the diary, it does more than justify my anger against colonialism. Perhaps it is in the discovery of a value that does more than stoke my decolonial flames, one that encourages me to live and act. The conversation about my paternal and maternal ancestors continues to bring surprising discoveries beyond the scope of what the Reuter project is meant to be.

2. A rumour of a dream

After Trans Alba professionally translated the diaries, I read through four of the received nine years of Reuter diaries. But I failed to gain access to those of 1896 and 1897, which may have held key insights into the [Transvaal Exhibition](#). I have not found a dream recorded during the Berlin trip, though I have found another dream offered to Reuter by Kgašane's second wife as

¹⁶⁵ The term Model-C refers to the Black kids that were admitted to white public schools when apartheid fell. They are usually stereotyped as not being able to speak their mother tongue and to be disinterested in their culture.

a reason for re-joining the church after years of gallivanting through the beer-drink circuit in Bolobedu. In the 1898 diary, Reuter complains about how Sara, Kgašane's sister who was in Berlin, brought to the Medingen station a woman who had been presented to Kgašane by his father (Mamatlepa) as a second wife. Kgašane had rejected her in favour of his first wife when he converted to Christianity and denounced polygamy.

The woman refused to convert to Christianity when Kgašane forced his whole region to convert, opting to live in an illegal marriage with another man who was not a Christian. This woman, whom Reuter does not name, was now at Medingen with her five children, complaining that she was haunted by a dream. In the dream, Kgašane's father, Mamatlepa, tells her: 'Lead your children to the faithful of Kgašane and do not die in the desert'.¹⁶⁶ The presence of this dream indicates that, although I have not found the Berliner dream or any other dream, dreams may have been accepted by the BMS as part of the Christian faith.¹⁶⁷ Nonetheless, with this sign of a dream in the diary, I decided to cut my losses, my failure to locate the Berliner dream or the 1897 diary, and move on with other aspects of the PhD project.

Despite my decision to move on from the diaries, the idea of the dream became a compelling and fast-travelling spectre in the wider PhD project, attaining the status of a rumour, as people kept asking and talking about this absent dream as well as discussing possible ways to handle it, including a persistent conversation about Freud and his ideas about dreams. This persistent interest in the dream, on my part and of those who engaged my project, led me to a formal conceptualisation of the missing Berliner dream as a rumour, marking its presence even though it was not there. This quality of the dream as a rumour — fast travelling and persistent — is also based on its position as an unconfirmed statement based on Höckner's recollections of a memory from more than ten years earlier that may not be accurate.

¹⁶⁶ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 107–114 (pg. 33–34): TB I–III.1898.doc.

¹⁶⁷ The motif of a dream as a cause to convert to Christianity within late nineteenth-century Protestant missions is central to the call to serve God. However it was only acceptable as long as the dream is a message from God and not your heathen ancestors. For example, in the dramatisation of Kgašane's life in Makwala's play *Kgašane* ([1958] 1976), a dream (framed as God speaking to Kgašane) is used to illustrate how Kgašane is called by God to serve Christ through four prophetic dreams about establishing a Christian church in Bolobedu (Makwala, [1958] 1976:29).

Conventionally, rumour, referred to as ‘ma bare bare’ (hearsay or chit chat) in Northern Sotho, is today associated with malicious gossip and unreliable information. But it has also been known to be a critique of the expert authority’s inability to see things in plain sight. Within this thesis’s formal conceptualisation of the dream as a rumour, I draw from an understanding of Luise White’s elaboration of rumour as a call to criticality, whereby the presence of a rumour is seen as an invitation for those who know the context of the rumour to question why something is said, instead of focusing on what was actually being said (2000:60). My understanding of White’s formulation is that it relegates the hearsay and malicious gossip aspect of the rumour to a technology, a mode of transmission that serves the speed of dissemination and reach of the rumour’s actual message. That is to say, the gossip is a carrier for an underlying message reserved for those that know the context of the rumour. This, in my view, designates rumour as a locally-rooted story and message, designed to transgress barriers of time, media and culture, to elicit a critical response about a pressing issue from those who know the context of the rumour to the exclusion of those who do not. Such a formulation is in line with reports elaborated by Hermann Wittenberg (personal communication, October 21, 2016) of how colonists moving into southern Africa¹⁶⁸ constantly complained about the persistence of rumour as an anti-colonial technology, leading to calls for efforts to devise ways of defending themselves against its impact on their effort to bring the region under control. Within this thesis, the idea of dream can be understood as a context that begs the question of why a Molobedu would emphasise the motif of a dream, by offering it as a cause to convert to Christianity. What was the nature or conception of the dream in khelobedu that allowed it to have such power?

I am interested in this positioning of rumour as a call to criticality because, with the rise in profile of the idea of the Berliner’s dream within the PhD project, I experienced a persistent emphasis from some colleagues, and temptation from myself, to treat the Berliner’s dream as a document — a text to be read and analysed for information — instead of treating the Berliner dream as a cause or invitation to be critical of the idea of dream — to question what a dream is or could be beyond something to be understood. Such emphasis (by some colleagues) wanted to draw the Berliner’s dream as the subject of an inquiry and analysis, as I

¹⁶⁸ Hermann Wittenberg was a respondent to my paper ‘Camera Obscura #’ (Mahashe, 2016) presented at a conference hosted by the University of the Western Cape’s Centre for Humanities Research

eventually do with Kgašane's widow's dream. This tendency draws heavily on some traditions of Western culture's fascination with dream analysis, treating a dream as liable to produce an object to be elaborated and decoded with a third party, as practiced in Freud's dream analysis theory or in psychoanalysis (Freud, 1915). This is distinct from imagining it as a finished text for one person, emphasising its quality as an instruction — taelo in khelobedu — as I understand it to be, within khelobedu's **Thugula** complex. Dithugula are shrines dedicated to an ancestor or ancestors that, as I understand from Krige and Krige ([1943] 1980) and my own research (Mahashe, 2012a), is a place where one pays one's respects to one's ancestors within Balobedu's religious complex. Therefore, the idea of the Berliner's dream as a rumour allowed me some space to avoid this tendency — obsessing with the content of a dream — as its positioning as a rumour implies that there may be no dream. In this case there is no content to subject to the practices or discourse of analysis. It is a technology.

2.1. The offered dream: dream in the Balobedu evangelist context during the nineteenth century and today

From Reuter's tone, in responding to Kgašane's widow's dream, I get the sense that he understood the dream to be her device for shutting down questions of authenticity around her seeking Christ at that particular time. Reuter challenges the widow's use of a dream as a cause to join the mission station, with a discussion of how 'dreams are often illusion', further pointing out: 'and if you come here, you must also leave life in the wilderness and attend church'.¹⁶⁹ The first response gives me the impression that Reuter was trying to draw her dream into the realm of discussion and interpretation, judging it as a defence against his right to question her intentions to comply with Christian behaviour. At the same time, he does not directly challenge Kgašane's widow, whose dream speaks of an instruction to return to the mission station by Kgašane's father. This is an instruction Reuter cannot ignore because of Kgašane's legacy and his family's strong presence in the Medingen church. I get the feeling that the dream of Kgašane's widow is meant to, or has the effect of, bypassing Reuter's Eurocentric patriarchal tendencies that seem to have required explanations or some form of

¹⁶⁹ Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 113: TB I-III.1898.doc.

show of remorse for one's past sins.¹⁷⁰ Such explanation would have required Kgašane's widow to become a subject of punishment or some form of atonement, as Reuter was accustomed to demand from those that came to him with confessions of participating in 'heathen' delights, such as the many cases in the Reuter diary of young women who confess their sins with boys, leading to penalties and punishment.¹⁷¹ While Reuter imposes a condition of compliance with the Christian faith, should she (Kgašane's widow) be admitted into the Christian fold, as he does in the second part of the extract above, he is powerless to punish her for her past 'sins'. Reuter is unable to subject her.

This discussion foregrounds one of the key cues that animate why the idea of dream becomes an enabling force in this PhD project. For one, it points to a series of power structures that speak of agency; and on the other level, to how the idea of dream achieves the necessary leverage in these power structures. The dream or the idea of dream offers me a good way to deal with my discomfort with the idea of a document (a record that can be verified) and its position as a source of evidence. The space to deal with my discomfort depends on how the idea of dream establishes itself as an experience that only one person experience and narrates. This means that people receiving this narration have to take the person narrating the dream at his or her word about the reality of the dream having happened and its content. There is no way of authenticating the mention or content of the dream being claimed. The discomfort with the document draws on Lalu's discussion of the Hintska skull saga (Lalu, 2009) as a problem of the proliferation of evidentiary practices within the practice of historiography, which he observes as maintaining a belief that the colonised's subjectivity is irrecoverable in colonial archives. I am beginning to feel this discomfort within the wider practice of photo-archival research. In practice, this is a conversation about how reflexivity, as commonly practiced in the academy, has become synonymous with what Rose (1997) elaborates as a problem of Western researchers seeing reflexivity as an excuse to talk about themselves (their coloniality). This inward gaze on the Western researcher's part is practiced at the expense of being in conversation with those they have invented as counterpoints (those invented as colonial subjects). This plays out as succeeding colonists, talking about themselves, what

¹⁷⁰ This is a key idea as to the utility of the offered dream: how it bypasses the explanation or further elaboration renders opaque the narrative that produces the instruction.

¹⁷¹ See, for example, Reuter diaries, 2014/15: line 452–455: TB X–XII.1898.doc.

they (and their disciplines) did to colonised people and how they are correcting it, at the expense of conversing with the previously colonised towards developing solutions that are acceptable to both parties. This of course is not so much of a problem when the researcher is both subject and researcher but is a problem when the researcher is outside of the subject — when the researcher is a white European researching a Balobedu photographic collection or a Balobedu dream, for example.

The generative position that interests me in the dream of Kgašane's widow relies on the location of this dream as an offered dream.¹⁷² The nature of her dream can be understood as an offered dream and is in line with Sundkler's (1961) description of the conversion dream offered to missionaries.¹⁷³ From Sundkler's description, this entailed people going to missionaries or mission stations because an ancestor instructed them to do so, much like Kgašane's second wife, instead of, for example, Christ revealing himself to a potential Christian, as was the case with Protestant conventional narratives. See, for example, how Christ reveals himself to Reuter, leading to him taking up missionary work (Chapter 1 of this thesis). I understand a conversion dream to be a specially crafted presentation of a dream designed to allow a person to change cultural or religious affiliations without risking the social consequence of abandoning one cosmology or tradition for another. Hexham and Poewe (1997:132) note that, although the wider German Protestant missions did not fully approve of the practice of dreams as cause for converting to Christianity, the BMS accepted and encouraged the reporting of such phenomena. However, this was not preferred by the BMS because of the association of dream offering with the ancestor 'cult' and other divination practices of southern African cultures, such as Balobedu. Hexham and Poewe's (1997) observation is evident in Reuter's sceptical response to the widow's dream, in his 1898 diary. Versions of the practice of offering a dream to priests still persist today, within the South African Lutheran church, and I have heard of it being criticised by 'upright' Christians. This persistence is confirmed by Bishop M.P. Moila (personal communication, November 2, 2016) who noted that he has encountered the offered dream in relation to Christians offering

¹⁷² Besides the convention of the offered dream discussed here, I note Wilson's positioning of dreams among urbanised South Africans in the early twentieth century as proof of religious reality among 'pagans' and as an expression of religious truth for the Christians (Hunter, 1937:81).

¹⁷³ The context of the conversion dream is explicated by Sundkler (1961:265–275) within the context of Zionist conversion.

him a dream, mostly as a reason to put a tombstone on a parent's or grandparent's **grave** — a process he would preside over.¹⁷⁴ I understand such an offering, a dream as cause to erect a **tombstone**, forms part of Balobedu's Thugula complex,¹⁷⁵ where a dream is given to a diviner as an instruction to erect a Thugula shrine to an ancestor, or make offerings at an ancestor's shrine. Of course it is important to point out that within Lutheran practice the custom of worshipping at the tombstone is strongly condemned and is the reason why people are not encouraged to report a dream as a motivation to erect a tombstone. In this case, the offering of the dream to the diviner for erecting a shrine is not a request for interpretation of the dream, but a process of instructing the diviner that a ritual must be enacted. Therefore, the consultation is one that divines the nature of the ritual, based on the diviner using your identification of who requests the ritual, to determine how this particular person is to be appeased: should a cow with horns be constituted as a Thugula animal, or should you go find and clean a **grave** that is neglected or erect a tombstone?¹⁷⁶ The key element of this instruction is to call a crowd, or to be together with one's community (Mahashe, 2012a:Chapter 4). Thus the offered dream emerges as a self-imposed instruction to a mediator to enact an action in favour of the person offering a dream.

¹⁷⁴ Elsewhere, Bishop Moila, who is also an Emeritus professor of theology, has also elaborated that within the Pentecostalism and Zionist complex of vision, prophesy and dreams a dream is as a source of power from the spirit (associated with God) leading to knowledge of thing hidden from others (Moila 1988:36). With this I understand Bishop Moila to establish the Zionist prophet as possessing increasing power and knowledge through an ability to harness dreams.

¹⁷⁵ I have observed (Mahashe, 2012a) this positioning of a dream in Krige and Krige's work ([1943] 1980) among Balobedu, where dreams are discussed within the complex of seeing a diviner in the wider mental health complex related to *Dithugula*. See my discussion of Krige and Krige in Mahashe (2012a:Chapter 4). Bank and Bank (2013:19) also acknowledge this use of dreams in the divination complex. These ideas are supported to an extent by Sundkler's (1961) explication of the use of dream; and several citations of this practice of dream offering are confirmed in Van Warmelo's (1977) index of southern African concepts, a cross reference of terms used in South African ethnography.

¹⁷⁶ See the tag **graves** in the Picasa platform for video footage of Koko Maake and me cleaning my great-great-grandfather Mampatla's **grave**, as part of my search for the people who went to Berlin.

2.2. Dream as a document: The problem of narrated **dreams** in the archive

To further position my interest in the enabling quality of the context of an offered dream, it is important to distinguish it from a solicited dream. That is to say, an offered dream (self-imposed action) is distinct from an elicited dream (a solicited action). A solicited dream featured in the work of Malinowskian social anthropologist Monica Wilson who, in her 1930s research, solicited dreams from urbanised South African black subjects under colonialism (Wilson, 1936; Bank & Bank, 2013). I understand this process to have entailed Wilson asking her respondents to tell her what they dreamed or asking them to relate the dreams they remembered. I accept that this request would then set in motion a process whereby the respondent crafts a dream narrative to relate the content of the dream they remembered or had. The process was approximating what they experienced in a dream as an image conceivable to the person asking. It involves crafting a narrative of a dream from memory (remembering) in response to a context outside of oneself (Wilson's research), which Wilson noted down to use at a later stage in something they do not know; that is to say, someone instructing you to remember a dream that may not be on your mind at that particular time, asking you to create a narrative to recall it or describe it. This idea of an elicited dream also implies what Bank and Bank (2013:118) refer to as transcription,¹⁷⁷ 'copying with the least transformation of the text'.¹⁷⁸ This renders the dream as a quotation, or quotable in direct reference to the person that gave the dream — the dream is made to represent the person who complied with relating the dream. It subjects them. This subjection involves using the details related by the subject for analysis, which may open them up to comparisons and

¹⁷⁷ It is important to note that even though the recording form of transcription is meant to be verbatim and respecting the integrity of the text being recorded, it is not immune to interpretation, as one sees in some of Wilson's transcriptions. This is also pointed out by Bank and Bank (2013) whose text maintains that Wilson missed a great opportunity for analysis of her transcribed dreams while they were still fresh — which would have made the archived dreams more credible as evidence that Bank and Bank could appropriate.

¹⁷⁸ This is a process Bank and Bank (2013) elaborate as useful for taking down indigenous texts or unstructured interviews, which functions as a facilitation of a document that can be analysed at a later stage. With regard to the recording format of the dream offered by Kgašane's widow, it appears Reuter did not use the method of transcription but that of recollection, as he did with most of his diary entries.

objectification that may lead to undue scrutiny. In the case of Kgašane's widow, the dream did not undergo transcription but exists as a recollection. It exists as Reuter's recorded memory of an encounter with the widow's attempt to gain access to 'God's kingdom' without having done the work. This position of the dream's location as Reuter's recollection limits it (the **dream**) as quotable as a fact that someone had a dream they voluntarily related to their priest for their own personal use — employed as a political tool. At the most, this dream is only quotable as a sign of agency on the part of person offering it and, at a stretch, it can be made to represent the BMS policy on the practice of agency by its constituency. In this case it subjects the BMS and Reuter's attitude to dreams offered by their congregation.

My discomfort with the idea of the solicited dream comes from the implications of Bank and Bank's (2013:119) surprise that Wilson did not write up her solicited dreams in the final summary of her fieldwork, which they see as a great omission. Bank and Bank (2013) further speculate that she may have used the dreams to draw important clues towards understanding the everyday lives of the community she studied. But they complain that such insights are left out of Wilson's reports, because she does not subject them to sufficient analysis or present such analysis as evidence of her authority on urbanised black subjects' religious belief (Bank & Bank, 2013:19). What Bank and Bank criticise as Wilson's lack of interest in exposing the dreams, by publicly analysing them, is perhaps a significant observation that points to a positive understanding of the important function of the motif of dream between 1930s South African communities and some social anthropologists, active at the time. This understanding may imply that 1930s social anthropologists like Wilson, whose prolonged exposure to the different contexts within her field site, meant that she had a greater sensitivity to the limits of her research material, often distinguishing between what informs one's ability to research a particular subject and the actual research. I would argue, from my understanding of the **fieldwork** context of Wilson's peer Eileen Krige, whose work and archives I worked on for my MAFA degree, that the prolonged initial fieldwork and the repeated visits to their field site, long after their initial fieldwork, has an effect on the social anthropologist's accountability to the community they study, in a similar way that pertains to the 'halfie' anthropologist (an anthropologist who is accountable to multiple constituencies). While this may not be true for all 1930s social anthropologists, the attempt to practise such a form of accountability is lacking in the project of Bank and Bank. It is this discrepancy — a lack of multiple accountability by contemporary researchers to the source community, implicated in archived documents — that worries me about the conduct of contemporary social anthropologists or

researchers towards available archived documents produced by social anthropologists like Wilson; and, of course, to archives such as that of Reuter, whose position as a missionary is accepted as the predecessor to professional anthropologists.

Although Wilson's transcribed dreams are lost, or deliberately discarded or hidden as I suspect, the time Bank and Bank spent to make a case for the importance of the missing documents highlights a problematic advantage Bank and Bank and others in academy find in the archived documents of deceased social anthropologists — deceased researchers who are unable to challenge contemporary researchers' ethics. These documents are important, because the deceased social anthropologists had a unique proximity to the subjects they studied, leading to research that yielded nuanced insights that the contemporary researcher may never be able to achieve because of institutionalised ethics codes and the delicate question of reflexivity.¹⁷⁹ In light of this, Bank and Bank's critique of Wilson's disinterest brings up a problem I find to be indicative of a contemporary humanities scholar (such as a social anthropologist or historian) paying lip service to reflexivity; that is to say, a humanities scholar who is only interested in confessing their position as a colonial aid, without engaging the demands of confessing such a position. Such a demand would mean being accountable to multiple constituencies, like those navigated by their (Bank & Bank's) predecessors and the 'halfie'. For example, Bank and Bank do not respect or are not aware that there is a limit to how much the social anthropologist can know or disclose of a subject.¹⁸⁰ This lack of limit, or awareness, is sustained by what Van Staden (2017) describes as a saviour complex on the part of what I generalise as Western academics who study, or do research, related to or affecting non-Western people. That is to say, the reflexivity is obscured by an inflated and

¹⁷⁹ I have argued elsewhere that the problem with 1930s social anthropologists was not their lack of reflexivity but the existence of their archive in public cultural institutions that are not accountable to the people documented in such archives.

¹⁸⁰ If Bank and Bank were accountable to the subjects of Wilson's research (or their descendants), they would be compelled to pay more respect to the effects of their work on the subjects' descendants, instead of being accountable only to the academy's demand for their reflection on the history of their discipline. This is the tension between a reflexivity that is self-obsessed — where the researchers focuses only on their own their story, naval gazing — and the reflexivity where the researcher interrogates and is critical of their discipline with a wider context and multiple constituencies. In the case of Bank and Bank, I suspect they are the former.

unsustainable sense of doing good, where academics tend to buy into the idea that, because they are being reflexive about the impact of their research (aware and critical of their actions and the discipline's history), they are automatically doing good. I understand this to have an effect that results in such researchers stopping being reflexive just as the work of redress begins, effectively undoing the very impulse to be reflexive.

This insistence on extending the reach of their ability to know their subject also betrays the likes of Bank and Bank's selective relationship with archive, the key problem affecting archived documents such as solicited dreams. This selective relation manifests as them only consulting the archive to prove their point and not to understand its complexity. While I understand that Bank and Bank are not engaged in the first sense (they are not writing ethnographies), their use of the archive as some form of field site still carries the responsibility, like that of any fieldworker going into a field site. The Bank and Bank approach, as fieldworkers in the archive, is a problem of a social anthropologist not accustomed to fully immersive, long-term fieldwork (such as in Wilson's time), whose work is more reliant on theories and archives than on actual long-term experience of their field site's wider contexts. Such an experience would furnish them with the finer dynamics of their subjects' environments, as well as the inevitable personal relationships with their subjects — relationships that might demand respect and accountability. Their theories are inferred from a fraction of available information and tested on archives that are removed from or devoid of a direct fieldwork context: there is no way of really recovering the condition of the archive's genesis. Unlike Wilson, who was a long-term fieldworker, Bank and Bank do their fieldwork in the archive, drawing on Wilson's insights without fully immersing themselves in the context of Wilson's field site directly.¹⁸¹ This distance from the contexts of Wilson's archived subjects, on the part of Bank and Bank, often leads to representation practices that produce subjects as disadvantaged subjectivities, needing mediation. It feeds the saviour complex. This is a condition Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:101–108) and Van Staden (2017) critique as the discourse of 'Africa as deficit', which sustains an economy of aid and mediation

¹⁸¹ While the technicalities around whether Wilson did really do in-depth fieldwork can be challenged, as Bank does, by pointing out that she stayed with a store owner and only went into the field site during the day (Andrew Bank, personal communication, 2012, specific date unrecorded), she still did immerse herself in an aspect of her field site for prolonged periods, which furnished her with more context than Bank and Bank's.

professionals. These custodial practices entail analysis of archived material leading to expert authority on such material that, in turn, is used to dispute the subjects' knowledge of themselves and the same material, on the basis of the subjects' lack of rigour. This is a rigour based on the academics' access to time, which they use to satisfy standards set by themselves and want to impose on the subject. The question of time is very important as it flags my understanding that academic objectivity is a matter of time. Firstly, it is time in the sense that, by virtue of being academics, they have time to work their opinions into acceptable facts or standards. Secondly, it implies the time required to challenge successfully and overturn ideas that have benefited from decades of time, applied by countless colonial academics in establishing biased opinions, accepted facts or standards. These standards (time spent) include the very exemplary methods developed by 'halfies'; methods such as those elaborated by Smith (1999) and Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008) around indigenous and de-colonial research methodologies¹⁸²: albeit academics like Bank and Bank have had time to unpick the thread that makes the methodologies of academics like Smith (1999) effective.

With regard to archive, Bank and Bank's approach points to a seemingly persistent attitude to archives as places where one can extract bits of information while safely insulating oneself from the messy nature of archive as an entangled site of continuous struggle — a sort of field site with multiple constituencies. Within the context of an archive, I understand that scholars like Bank and Bank use discipline, and the alibi of reflexivity, to limit their accountability beyond their defined projects. Furthermore, when scholars such as Bank and Bank cannot escape the tightening noose of reflexivity in the archive, they relegate problematic or contentious areas of research to 'halfies', like myself. They relegate these areas of research to people like me on the basis of our suitability to enact the exemplary methodologies, which we profess, like those of Smith (1999) and Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008). And then scholars like Bank and Bank appropriate the results through referencing, without paying the price associated with such exemplary methodologies.

¹⁸² In summary, the methods put forward by scholars such as Smith (1999) and Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008) emphasise that research should reflect the methodological interest of, and be accountable to, the communities studied by the research; and that ownership of the research should rest in, or be shared with, the people researched.

It is this part (relegating problematic areas to halfies) that I most take issue with, particularly how halfies are used to bypass the reflexivity that seemed to accompany 1930s social anthropologists, who created such archives by virtue of their repeated fieldwork and the personal relationships (no matter how flawed) they developed with the people they researched, leading to networks of accountability to their subjects. The contemporary social anthropologists seem to be happy to delegate this kind of reflexivity to ‘halfie’ researchers, so that their traditional academic ability to infringe on their subject remains unchallenged by personal relationships with the subject or through facing accountability beyond the academy. This plays out in how ‘halfies’ remain the only ones disabled by their attempts at realising fuller reflexive research into colonial archives, painfully navigating and being accountable to many constituencies.¹⁸³ This leaves the ‘halfie’ researcher tired, while their white counterparts are fresh enough to appropriate the results produced by this exhausting work, without any opposition from the same ‘halfie’ researcher or having to practice full reflexivity. Because the work has been done, the work they are referencing is clean. This problem is foregrounded in how Bank and Bank (2013) discuss Wilson’s use of insights derived from solicited dreams,¹⁸⁴ pointing out that these could be subjected to more robust analysis for other ends (2013:19). I would not be surprised if most of this robust analysis is delegated to a ‘halfie’.

Wilson did not emphasise this robust analysis in her treatment of the dreams she had collected. She may have had a better understanding of the function of dreams in the society — as indicated by her noting that her subjects often treated her requests with suspicion, refusing to tell her, while others asked if she was training to be a *sangoma* or working for one, indicating the motif of the dream’s role in divination practices. Wilson’s disclosure of her subjects’ wariness around her solicitation of their dreams indicates a form of reflexivity on Wilson’s part that is often overlooked, because of the devastating effects of the work produced by social anthropologists such as Wilson. Wilson’s understanding of such a function of dreams, in divination practices, can be seen in her limiting of the analysis to her

¹⁸³ While I concede that there are social anthropologists who still do long-term fieldwork, I understand this, at least in South Africa, to be the exception rather than the rule.

¹⁸⁴ Bank and Bank (2013:19) confirm that Wilson used the research to confirm ideas around the persistence of magical belief, beyond the rural areas and into the urban areas.

own personal use — for her personal understanding of the dream and not for its wider speculative and reporting capacity, which Bank and Bank (2012) are promoting. Even with Wilson's sensitivity to the function of dreams, her boldness in soliciting, recording and transcribing them draws the subject's dreams into a realm of narration and archive that I find suspect. This exposes them to the Bank and Bank project, whose attitude essentially overturns Wilson's judgement in limiting her research material, positioning it and appropriating it as archive, through unsuspecting 'halfies' like me. What is key in my discussion and critique of the Bank and Bank position, in relation to solicited dreams, is that where Wilson does not push the boundary of total subjection of her respondents, Bank and Bank (2012) were ready to subject such material as archive by subjecting the solicited dreams to rigorous analysis.

The Bank and Bank situation draws sharp attention to the danger archived colonial subjectivities face today. It shows the dream, solicited or offered, is now in danger of further subjection as a consequence of contemporary custodial practices, valued by the likes of Bank and Bank.¹⁸⁵ It is the position of the solicited dream, as a quotable archival document (and the offered dream as an incomplete archival document), that animates and foregrounds the dangers of my position as a 'halfie' who is about to engage a possible archived dream. I take issue with the attitude to reflexivity of scholars such as Bank and Bank, because their conduct (selective accountability) puts sharp focus on how reflexivity is only about appearing to be aware, without enacting the responsibility that this awareness demands. I take issue because this is a position (being mindful of the demands of multiple accountability) that 'halfies' cannot avoid. More specifically, it is in how the halfie's work (with sensitivity to different constituencies) is undone, when the likes of Bank and Bank come in and selectively pick what they want, and reject what they do not want, as a way of continuing colonial practices of knowing.

Overall, the motif of the offered dream bypasses to a degree the initial colonial power structures, through its location as an instruction captured through recollection (as a limited

¹⁸⁵ I use the idea of custodianship in a broader sense to highlight that any form of academic practice related to colonialism is a form of custodianship, because it has the effect of subjecting the colonised. To call Bank and Bank custodians is to point to the power they hold in matters of telling the history of the marginalised.

archival document). This allows its originators to escape the trap of subjection, ingrained in colonial knowledge practices, because they do not elaborate the images of the dream, only what it instructs. This limits the extent to which they could be subjected through, for example, psychoanalysis. This is distinct from the solicited dreams' location as an elicited descriptive narration that is susceptible to transcription, which may lead to an archival document that can render its author susceptible to easy subjection. However, the offered dream does not necessarily escape the position of analysis when in the archive (as archived document): because of historiography and the discipline (academic rigour) of the likes of Bank and Bank, there is an eager supply of halfies like me, in a society obsessed with transparency and subjection in the name of knowledge. It is in the dream's location as rumour that this second problem of archive is escaped by my project. The location of this offered dream as a rumour has forced me, as a halfie who is susceptible to carrying the burden of being faithful to my multiple constituencies, to confront an aspect of **Balobedu** agency. By extension, the agency of others marginalised by colonial narrative forces me to consider another directive, within the practice of knowing. This directive is one that accepts that what I learn is only reserved for Balobedu, and more specifically the family involved in solving the effects and demands of a particular dream. But, more importantly, it is in the way the offered dream encourages me, as a halfie, to position my work in a way that is not easily quotable — the practice of an opaque way of knowing, a way of knowing that renders visible but does not necessarily pronounce on what it has rendered visible. This approach to knowing is precisely the aim of many of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century artists — to produce work that escapes easy assimilation, comprehension and appropriation, work that evades easy understanding.

2.3. A dream as a portal within divination practices: beyond the document towards practice

Because of the location of the offered dream in the Thugula complex, I endeavoured to speak to a sangoma about the idea of an offered dream,¹⁸⁶ particularly its role in the Thugula divination process. The sangoma elaborated the function of offering a dream to a diviner through a discussion of the practice of *u ku vula isifuba* — directly translated as 'opening up one's chest'. She elaborated that dreams were important indicators of one's health and that

¹⁸⁶ I have also consulted a diviner for personal reasons related to a dream.

the intensity of dreams, which also manifest as dreams one can recall,¹⁸⁷ points to communication from one's inner collective spirituality. The **idea** of collective spirituality acknowledges and leaves room for an understanding that dreams may give access to some form of shared consciousness. She elaborated that in such dreams (those you can recall) one does not see made-up things but rather recognises things, latent knowledge perhaps that is all around us — existing within us. These are things that are open and visible to us but which we often ignore or are unable to articulate in our day-to-day lives. The **sangoma** described u ku vula isifuba as a portal, opened up by the person afflicted by a problem, such as, for example, a dream. The portal is then used by the diviner to gain access to, or an understanding of, the patient's spiritual store. I have come to understand such a store as an archive of lived experiences, both our own and some passed on to us by our ancestors.¹⁸⁸ The access granted to the diviner through an offered dream leads to the diviner's communication with the patient's ancestors, who guide the diviner as to how to help the patient.¹⁸⁹ This idea of the portal emphasises a form of seeing, on the patient's part that helps the diviner connect with the patient's spirit-archive.

The sangoma also indicated that dream interpretation is possible with a diviner, but she noted that it is not necessarily the case when one offers a dream to a diviner. I understand this to mean that while one can seek out a diviner and present a dream to her, seeking advice on specific matters is different from when a diviner is offered a dream as a facilitator of a connection between the patient and the diviner. I have often heard of criticism of sangomas who request dreams as being suspect, criticised on the basis that they are analysing you and selling you a product instead of connecting with you and understanding the context of your problem. This implies that there must already be a dream in play, before you see the diviner. That is to say, you must be in possession of a complete dream, posing questions around how one comes to such a dream. In essence, it is the question of the source of the offered dream.

¹⁸⁷ Recall is not as much as remembered but more as still having access to the dream.

¹⁸⁸ An infinite archive related to the ancestors, residing in all of us — knowledge as ingrained in our being, I imagine. These archives also facilitate an ability to predict the future.

¹⁸⁹ Perhaps your dreams indicate to the diviner how much access to knowledge of the ancestors you have. This knowledge may guide the diviner in discovering how far back in your genealogy they need to delve, to understand your comprehension of the cause of the problem you are trying to solve.

This is a compelling question worthy of further research. This question brings to mind an idea I took from Sundkler's (1961) elaboration of Zionist prophets who respond to their disciples' offered dreams by telling them to go back and dream their dream till it is right; that is, to a point that they can recall it, or at least till they recognise its content clearly. Similar points are made by Krige and Krige ([1943] 1980) about people seeking help with a **Thugula** ritual being told to come back when they have a dream — that is, when they have an instruction. This request begs the question of what it means to dream the right dream.

2.4. Literacy

This question of opening up one's chest, dreaming the right dream or coming back when one has a dream is mostly about understanding one's vision, rather than simply trying to guess its content. This process also implies a dream **literacy**, because if the nature of offering a dream is not about interpretation then, when seeing a diviner, the person seeking help must already know what their dream is about, or rather what it instructs — e laela eng?

Around the time I began to work seriously with the motif of dream, a curator colleague related a story that had been shared with her by an artist who, after years of not knowing his father, was haunted by dreams instructing him to seek out the father he had never met. Upon finding him, the artist's father related that he too had been haunted, but by a dream that notified him of his imminent death and instructing him to conclude any unfinished business. The artist's father went on to relate the format of the dream to his son, the artist. Shortly after that encounter the father died.

This story, a son being compelled to seek out his father because of dreams, only to find the father just as the latter receives notice of his own death through a dream, led me, my curator colleague and the artist to engage in a series of informal conversations around why the two (the artist and his father) became embroiled in dreams, and how the father knew what a particular dream meant or instructed. Through the conversations it emerged that the artist had posed this question to his father, who related that his (the father's) grandmother had intimated to the father what such a dream meant. Other tangents in these conversations ranged from exchanges about dream cycles to different medicines and techniques available to amplify or clarify one's dreams. We concluded that it was by virtue of a conversation between generations — the grandmother in conversation with her grandson (the father), the grandson with his own son (the artist) — that the meaning of a particular **dream** is kept alive. Within the discussion of the medicine for clarifying one's dream, we embarked on a conversation

about why one would need medicine to clarify a dream and concluded that there was also an aspect of practice associated with dreaming. An offered dream is not something that happens once, but is a recurring situation allowing you time to tinker with it. This meant that the need for the medicine would help one, the artist or any person so inclined, be alert when one next has an important dream, which needs to be presented/offered to a diviner. In essence this would help the person concerned be alert to important messages that a dream instructs. This understanding established dreaming as a process of listening (in a sense of seeing or being attentive) or practising one's skills at listening. That is, to listen by continually engaging in dreaming, be it through the use of medicines, dreaming techniques or, as is usually the case, when there is a pressing matter needing attention; or listening to one's body's request to take enough time for sleep, so that a dream may manifest itself. This entails making the production of an offered dream a practice. With this understanding, I decided to engage in dreaming as a parallel process to making the film, perhaps even as a process of tailoring a dream I would offer to stand in for the missing Berliner dream.

Overall, the 'joke' emphasised my position as a key factor in foregrounding marginalised subjectivity, while the rumoured dream reinforced the importance of not discarding my agency and right to opacity found in the offered dream. If the joke showed me my position's capacity to know myself, the dream reminded me that I do not have to share this knowledge in a transparent way. I do not have to subject myself to foreground *khelobedu*. I only need to practise and express it.

3. Being exhausted, by the burden of being a halfie

3.1. The 'halfie', on attempts to maintain coloniality

What the Höckner encounter, and other encounters with custodians of archives, raised are questions of subversion and rigour, which are playing out as responsibilities on the part of colonised subjectivities ('halfies' incoming into the academy and other colonial institutions) towards the needs of contemporary people upholding coloniality in the academy and archive. This has led to sheer exhaustion on my part and has encouraged me to seek, with urgency, ways to facilitate my quest for imagining and expressing *khelobedu*.

The question of the offered dream as one that subjects Reuter (turns him into a subject of research) by out-manoeuvring him is important within the conversation about the status of colonised subjectivities in the archive. While the solicited dream may appear as the desirable

situation to mitigate Lalu's observation, it falls in the uncomfortable relationship that Lalu positions as the very problem of how the colonised subjectivity in the archive is marginalised. I understand that Lalu's observation about colonised subjectivity refers to the process of re-subjection that underpins the kind of extraction of subjectivity by contemporary academics. This I observe in the type of research valued by scholars such as Bank and Bank. This is what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), Quijano (2000) and others refer to as coloniality. That is the persistence of a colonial attitude to knowing, which I understand to be a process of recentring colonial subjectivity (colonial praxis) through the academic project's obsession with promoting the reflexivity of succeeding colonial disciplines and research imperatives (whites' navel gazing). That is to say, the academic project must be one of absolute knowing, based on rigorous processes, involving an investment of time that renders a subject or an object transparent to the researcher. This brings us to the kernel of Lalu's critique (2009) — the need to encourage a different academic project that can sustain and surface the presence of colonised subjectivity in a way that is generative. Of course, there is the problem of how such a different academic project could be hijacked by the academy. Lalu warns that this position is fraught with regressive, nativist tendencies, romanticising an invented precolonial past, when it goes unchecked by colonial subjectivity. It is one articulated as the 'halfie' or researcher, theorised by Abu Lughod (1991) and elaborated by academics such as Linda-Tuhiwai Smith (1999), in relation to aboriginal research interventions that foregrounded marginalised subjectivities' full control of research on, or related to them (the aborigines).

The key question here is the criticism that the motif of the offered dream has surfaced, the question of accountability and the effect this kind of accountability has on the 'halfie' — frustration at being instrumentalised and appropriated, leading to exhaustion. It shows the condition of this exhaustion as being instrumentalised to perpetuate coloniality. It is a question of how an older form of reflexivity on the part of the white academic is shifted to the 'halfie'. The offered dream's context, as a particular type of agency, offers relief from this exhausting situation: the dream as political agency.

In essence, the description of my encounters with the custodians of archives adds up to an understanding that being a halfie is exhausting. It takes away from my actual project, which

is interested in knowing myself and understanding what my ancestors achieved,¹⁹⁰ why the Berliners decided to travel to Europe and why I was compelled to do the same. It is less about informing. I am exhausted by being constantly asked to take care not to upset their structures; being told that I must maintain credibility as an academic and neglect my duties as a Molobedu. I am exhausted by being asked constantly to confirm their reflexivity by berating them, or patting them on the back for noticing that they did me wrong; to applaud and validate their good work at recovering one exemplary black person from the archive, when there are many more left buried because their distinctions lie outside of the academy's purview. I am exhausted by a constant expectation that I should be angry, and that I must lash out; exhausted at being asked to accept my subjection as a fact, a closed case, and that I should rather seek repatriation or compensation against the colonists than refuse the fact of my subjection or colonisation — that I must be strong. More than all of these, I am exhausted because I must share what I learn in a language they (the succeeding colonial subjectivity) can understand, when my language is sufficient to articulate what I know and, quite frankly, when what I learn is really not their concern.

3.2. Subversion and self-berating as reflexivity

While subversion was exciting, I could not help but be put off by the prevailing Eurocentric reflexivity obsessed with using such an event — the **Transvaal Exhibition** — as a self-berating tool. Even when the European-based diaspora community advanced a different angle on the realities around the power relations associated with the world fairs, their emphasis on the subversion tactics used by the visiting performers from colonised societies to deflect the colonial gaze of the European audience was still emphasising the inescapability of the colonial project. For example, the Cameroonian-German curator, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, told me a story about a Namibian prince who was contracted to perform as a 'primitive native' in the **Berlin Völkerschau** during the day while, at night, he would frequent theatres as a contemporary Namibian Christian, effectively subverting the colonial narrative

¹⁹⁰ This is very important if I am to be an effective academic and Molobedu. If we are to take the project of the precolonial seriously, we have to know when we are being nostalgic and when we are onto something unique.

of relegating Africans to the role of primitive man.¹⁹¹ While this kind of subversion was exciting, I had a problem with subversion because it was still foregrounding the power of colonial academy and its capacity to know you: their imposing gaze needed to be addressed. This makes impossible, in my view, an escape from spending all your energy on interventions against the colonial narrative.

In my articulating my irritation with expectations, and my susceptibility to taking part in Eurocentric self-berating or subversion discourses of ‘beat me up, trick me, anything for me to feel something’, I had realised, through my MAFA project — where emphasis was for me to translate the frustration of the colonised to a community constantly saying ‘I cannot grasp it: make me understand’ — that art in itself was not free from the problems I encountered in academy. They both demanded that I tend to their needs. In the academy, the disciplines inviting marginal subjectivities (like historian Andrew Bank inviting me to the history department seminar on the archives of 1930s women social anthropologists) viewed the goal as one being taught something one does not know, by someone who does know — with no sense of guilt. The artists in the archive field admitted to knowing what was wrong with colonialism and requested that I jolt them out of their inescapable dilemma of complying with coloniality, or you trick them to such an extent that they are forced to see you as an equal. In both cases it was a belief in art’s capacity to mobilise affect that promised them that art’s effective methods could bypass reason, and outflank their power to argue away their knowledge of the problem of persisting coloniality. In the long run this problem would establish itself as the problem of the institution (like the museum or the academy) criticising itself through artists and their practices and the failure of Hans Haacke’s transformation from within. The idea of ‘transformation from within’ draws on conceptual artist Hans Haacke’s defence against criticism by some sections of the art world, which insisted that the acceptance by artists of an invitation to collaborate, from cultural institutions seeking to enact some form of critical reflection on their role as public institutions, domesticated the artist. Haacke responded by noting that if artists are absorbed into such institutions, they will or should do the damage from the inside. Of course, this is not a failure of institutional critique itself, but rather a failure of institutional criticism invited by the institution needing critique, but not interested in going beyond critique.

¹⁹¹ Examples of this type of subversion have been noted in the publication *Kolonialmetropole Berlin* (Van der Heyden & Zeller, 2002).

3.3. My susceptibility to subversion: the problem of approaching the archive this way

Such a project — institutional critique from within — which I understand to be part of cultural recovery involved in excavating narratives that endear the colonial archive as facilitating my story, has become a key point of contention for me as it forces me to question the usefulness of the archives I am working with to archive my objectives. The question of the usefulness of, and reliance on, the missionary's archive, for example, is significant when one accounts for a move towards an interest in the makers and practices of the colonial archive — what I am problematising as persistent coloniality — to the exclusion of those subjected by such archives (previously colonised societies). This is particularly significant when this persistent coloniality is approached through an institutional critique from within that expects the previously colonised to participate in a project that does not fulfil their objectives (like imagining and expressing *khelobedu* on my part). This expectation envisions another audience outside of me through a performance of reflexivity, to show one's compliance with the new standards that emphasise ethics, instead of enacting the reflexivity in my favour. This entails spending a great deal of time sorting through and telling (in a very particular fashion) the coloniser's (archivist's) story. In my case, this is the story of BMS missionary Reuter as the context for a largely European audience interested in publicly endorsing repentance against colonialism. In Bolobedu this would play out as an interest in the recovery of Philipus *Modiba*'s biography, or those of figures such as Kgašane Mamatlepa or my paternal great-great-grandfather Nathaniel *Mmolawa*. Indeed, it is the love story of my maternal ancestors that played out in Berlin — and was possibly facilitated by the postcard images — whose influence and weight possibly overshadows Reuter's within the development of Christianity in Bolobedu.

Overall, the idea of just thinking and getting versed in the archive related to, and entangled with, *khelobedu* has brought me to a place where the wider archive related to *khelobedu* is not restricted to Reuter's archive, *Kgašane*'s archive, or the oral history we now desperately seek. In the end, it is a realisation that the *khelobedu* archive (which includes those related to the role of the Christian mission) exists in and through me, with all its methodological changes initiated by Bolobedu's constant contact with the wider world. This plays out through practices that have been handed down within my family and the wider Balobedu society (like the headstone, the inscription of verses and the implication of dreaming), over

the period before and after the rise of Christianity. This is the archive I am inclined to explore; it is also the archive brought out by my subjective consideration of Reuter's archive.

As I developed in my engagements with this archive, I realised that a de-emphasis of discipline and a staying focused on the goal (coloniality's goal) is the problem I understood from Lalu's (2009) characterisation of the Gcaleka saga. In my subjective position, which prevents me from paying enough attention to one aspect of the research (Molobedu or academic), I have learnt not to chase the answer but to follow the story, without over-analysing its inconsistencies. At the end, I am beginning to tell my story.

3.4 What the dream, **rumour** and joke allow

3.4.1. Freedom from colonial subject matter

It is key here to emphasise how both forms, dream and joke, emphasise practice as the central intervention in my project: one must tell jokes to understand jokes. But it also frees me conceptually to accept other types of materiality, such as the dream itself as a material. Drawing from Stoler's (2008) emphasis on how the process of colonial archiving was of a particular type of document, of significance to the colonist. The question of dream has foregrounded how the offered dream was and is a particular type of archival document that escapes the trap of the colonial idea of archive. It is a document that emphasises a particular type of mindset that allows me not to be so ashamed of being fascinated by the hologram or the idea of Modjadji as light,¹⁹² without it being stuck in language as imagined by the 1940s Language Board, which funded ethnographic research. This freedom is not that colonialism did not think of such things, but it is how I am encouraged to think about it, without the bias or fear of being deceived, which I think was characteristic of colonial-style rigor. This is also because I cannot be deceived, since being deceived does not compromise my project, but rather it may lead down a path of discovery. My complicity with the possibility of deception is a strategy I believe to be capable of bypassing colonial subjectivity and its colonial praxis. More than anything, it frees me from the **Transvaal Exhibition** as a subject of interest to the European and other colonial subjectivities, and allows me to simply focus on the structure

¹⁹² Popular legend speaks of the Balobedu sacred doctor's burial ground as a form of hologram, which one can enter without seeing what is really there. Aspects of this are discussed in relation to the camera obscura in Chapter 4.

exposed by the Transvaal Exhibition. Such a structure is Balobedu's boldness in travelling at that time, which was not unique as a Zulu delegation also embarked on such a trip to the Crystal Palace in 1850 as well the trip by the Savage South Africa troupe in 1899. It is only bold to a contemporary Molobedu like myself who has lived most of his life thinking we (Balobedu) were a small 'tribe', confined to a series of hills by tradition. The key here is that this change in thinking, brought by the boldness of my ancestors to travel to Berlin at that time, shatters a barrier of belief that Balobedu only travelled because a missionary thought about it. It restores an agency that they were choosing beings. They acted, pursued their objectives and expressed their desires; sometimes they lost, but sometimes they won.

This conception freed me from the tyranny of documentary practices, allowing me to explore *khelobedu* as more than a language, or culture. This then set up the grounds for thinking about *khelobedu* as a meditation on what is visible, from *Modjadji* as a meditation on light to the 'holograms' at *Dadja*, and to dreaming as a Lobedu-specific tradition. After all, the sacred rainmaker must sleep in the sacred heart, where a particular type of dreaming occurs. When a message is delivered in a dream, it is a much more revered message that cannot be ignored. But again, I caution that only clear dreams are admitted, not the daily ones.

3.5. Transcription, opacity and the offered dream as political action

This position (the way the offered dream seems to render Lobedu subjectivity inaccessible) seems to agree with my take on *Lalu's* critique of the recoverability of the previously colonised's subjectivity — the idea that the previously colonised's subjectivity's cannot gain voice through the colonial archives that has written them as a subordinate proposition (*Lalu*, 2009:62). If this offered dream's veracity lies in its ability to escape being captured as a subject, then why do I stick to it, if it confirms *Lalu's* critique? This thinking is flawed in a sense that the Balobedu subjectivity is accepted as one that is visible to a researcher looking for it. What is key for my understanding of Balobedu subjectivity is that this invisibility is in itself a form of subjectivity, taken for granted by people who are more interested in a transparent subject that can be easily deciphered. Also, the position may point to the ability of Lobedu people at that time to better ward off colonialism, more than we are able today. This points out how we are left without agency because of our compliance with the transparent project. What then is the capacity of opacity, a practice adopted by Balobedu in 1893, when they realised that the power of the colonist is a capacity to know?

The problem of the solicited dream and the question of what kind of documents are open to abuse is the key to what the offered dream provides for the research into subjectivity.¹⁹³ Reuter's account of Kgašane's widow is fraught with comments, making the offered dream unreliable as evidence, except in a forced confirmation of the persistence of traditional belief, to a unreliable colonial subjectivity. Also key is the way it is recounted as Reuter's narrative, not that of the widow. This means most of the analysis would be focused on Reuter's narration. When this lack of subjectivity is read by a colonised subjectivity, it becomes a testament of an opacity forgotten by some of us who have imbibed the colonial subjectivity. This opacity, with specific reference to Balobedu, is related to their decision, professed by some Balobedu I have spoken to and reiterated by Krige and Krige ([1943] 1980), to retreat into seclusion after 1894. I have come to understand this position, largely from the questions of who wants to know, or who commissioned my research. I received these questions from some Balobedu from whom I sought information as I went about enquiring into khelobedu. When the answer to these questions is that 'I' want to know, then I am answered and instructed that the knowledge is only for me. One case I will never forget is when my great-grandmother reiterated that I should not tell white people things because 'ba hlalifetle thoko': their ingenuity is unsustainable and does not lead to any good or, they are untrustworthy and malicious. Of course, I also understand this opacity from the now-popular position, foregrounded by Eduardo Glissant in the publication *Poetics of Relations* (1997). Glissant's opacity, which emphasises that transparency, is not necessarily universal (1997:111). That is, transparency is not the only position. He drives this point home by stressing a position that reiterates, 'we reserve[s] the right to be opaque' (1997:189), to be unknowable; or to be knowable on our own terms, as some South African social anthropologists from the 1930s eventually discovered when they found themselves having to undergo initiation which, I understand, betrayed their Western beliefs.¹⁹⁴ To understand this position, which has been

¹⁹³ Bank and Bank or the social anthropologist collecting dreams would go on to analyse the transcribed dreams. Thus, transcription is a form of notation that creates a particular type of document, close to the photographic document. They can both be admitted as a particular kind of evidence.

¹⁹⁴ I understand, from my research into Eileen Krige's papers and general speculation in Bolobedu, that Krige underwent female initiation, which was, my informant used to explain, why they let her in to the woman's council. Aspects of this line of thinking can be confirmed through Dell (2002:24),

with me since long before encountering Glissant's articulation, is an important resistance to what I understand Balobedu to have understood, as the main driver of successful nineteenth-century colonisation. It is my understanding that Balobedu could match the colonists in all spheres but could hardly fight their tenacity when they had insider information. The offered dream as a precarious document reminds me of how information can be delivered without rendering one transparent. My articulation of this position may be crude, but it is sufficient for me to press on with my work as a 'halfie', enquiring into pressing humanities questions without the burden of being exhausted by the tenacious insistence of the persistent colonial desire to know what I know (which is to know what khelobedu knows) just because good research is to be made public. This is a colonial desire to know what I know without answering or addressing pressing questions, such as who will control this knowledge and how will the proceeds from this knowledge be shared with those that produced it? The question of rumour also has a similar history within southern Africa and beyond, as a process of keeping the flow of information between the faithful (faithful to decolonisation), to the exclusion of those that persist in this colonisation. This is an important fact — insisting that colonisation is continuing as long as there are people who believe that custodial practices associated with colonial praxis must persist in the academy.

At the end, this section should emphasise that the dream encourages me to ask the question of what kind of document or, as it is playing out, what type of practice would offer me better freedom to know and express khelobedu, without the burden of subjecting it to actions that close it down for me and others like me, or depletes my energy unnecessarily.

At the end, the dream reinforces my subjectivity as real, reminds me that my preoccupation is as important as the preoccupation of the colonists and their persisting institutions that are important to them. Stoler (2008) has already established the precariousness of these subjectivities (colonists) and the advantage gained by time, but the dream reminds me that they are not the only ones who can master time. In the idea of the offered dream, I have found a reminder that Balobedu too have a monopoly on time. I may not understand it sufficiently at the moment, but I am freed by the mere fact of comprehending its existence. While my research has yielded significant insights into Balobedu's monopoly of time and archive, I

who points to Krige's privilege of being allowed to attend the Zulu initiation school, a privilege reserved only for initiated women.

seek the relative opacity professed by the #Fallists in reference to Fanon's point of the right to excel and fail, without the consent or nod of those outside the movement — with relative opacity.

3.6. On the utility of the dream

The motif of the offered dream (established by the nature of the widow's dream), particularly in light of u k uvula isisfuba and the practice of listening (dreaming as continuous practice), enables me to freely focus on the rumoured Berliner dream in its intended form and as I understand it (as a Lobedu-specific practice), and not as historiography would understand it (as a colonial practice, that is BMS tolerance of dreams or as an object that renders colonised people knowable, through analysis of a dream in the archive). This allows me to maintain my interest in khelobedu by distinguishing it from its location as a subject of anthropology.

Its location as a rumour enables me to bypass my and my colleagues' susceptibility to historiography and its disciplines of analysis, by forcing me to focus on the question of why a Molobedu would emphasise dream, causing me to question what a dream is in the Lobedu context. The answer to this is practice: the location of the dream as a rumour forces me to grapple with the question of what dream is, which leads me to an understanding of dream as a practice of dreaming, of listening to oneself.

This listening to oneself is important. If I am to take the motif of distributed sensibility seriously (the basis of being a contemporary artist), if the question of my legitimacy is based on the fact that 'I am doing something', then the 'I' must be solid. It cannot be a surrogate for what 'the Rational We' thinks. It cannot include projects like those of Bank and Bank. The motif of a rumoured dream reinforces my occupation of my distributed sensibilities — which include an insistence on opacity. It reinforces the **contemporaneous 'I'**.

Part 2

4. The figure of the artist

4.1. Artists in the archive

My interest in the relationship between archive and contemporary art coincided with my awareness of the use of archival photographs, and other archival media, as part of contemporary artworks, as seen in Santu Mofokeng's *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950* (1995), mentioned earlier, or Penny Siopis's *Obscure White Messenger* (2010).

Both used found or institutionally archived material to portray historical events or to represent historical subjectivities/experiences. This trend in using the archive in contemporary art has a long and diverse history, particularly in relation to the museum, which is responsible for archiving objects of cultural and artistic significance.

Artists have engaged the museum in a variety of ways for over eighty years, from Marcel Duchamp through to Andy Warhol and all the way to Mark Dion (Balken, 2013). Stearn (2013) has shown that since the 1970s, artists working within the tradition of 'institutional critique' have interrogated the idea of the museum and all it enables, either in the private domain (galleries and project spaces such as the German style Kunsthalle) or from within the museum itself, using the museum's own collection or other archives. Artists using this method include Fred Wilson who, amongst other things, reorganises and re-labels museum objects to reveal the systems that have given rise to their collections; as well as Joseph Kosuth, whose exhibition *The Brooklyn Museum Collection: The Play of the Unmentionable* (1990) juxtaposes images that draw, and have drawn, negative responses at different times for their political, religious, social and aesthetic qualities, as a way of displaying changing attitudes in museum practice, audience taste and reception. While the activity cited above mostly uses the curation and relabelling of objects as a strategy for critique, the museums of ethnography have used performance and installation, in addition to **curation**, as a strategy for involving and, following from this, implicating the audience in promoting new understandings or experiences of museum collections. Examples of this strategy include Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A, B, C* (2010–2017). Other similar examples of such practices (institutional critique) in South Africa can be seen in *Miscast* by Pippa Skotnes (1996), which was presented at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. This exhibition engaged the subjectivity of the individuals in the Bleek and Lloyd archive, the artist's subjectivity, the subjectivities of fellow scholars and the general audience, through juxtaposition, scale and space; engaging the body by forcing interactivity, the result of which was an emotional outpouring. These two approaches to archive have also been used simultaneously in curatorial projects such as the *Salon der Angst* (2013), discussed earlier, which included installations such as Kader Attia's *The Culture of Fear/The invention of Evil*.

The aforementioned strategy, which has come to be referred to as institutional critiques, was first developed by artists in the 1970s as a response to a failure by the public **museum** to serve its public. Institutional critique is a process whereby the structure of an institution is used to draw attention to itself, as a way of critiquing and surfacing structurally marginalised

conversations within that institution. A key driver of the importance of institutional critique to this PhD project is its promise to enforce the cultural institution's duty to the public it was invented to serve (Alberro & Stimson, 2009:5–7; Stearn, 2013; Badovinac, 2009). The publics include, for example, the civic public, artists or, as is common today, the colonised public who have declared their independence from colonial rule. Institutional critique, as practised by artists from within and without institutions of culture, has come to be synonymous with artists working with ideas of archive. Overall, the key element of some of these practices is the presentation of information, not as a publication of the already known but rather as points of reference from which the audience is invited to create or complement the knowledge, using their own complicity or critical processes.

I have practised this process of institutional critique as an artist interested in referencing aspects of the register of ethnographic photographs, through the context surrounding the production of my exhibition *Gae Lebowa*. This found itself lodged in a tussle between contemporary art's concern with the problem of representing someone other than oneself (or marginalised communities) and the ethnographic museum's hope that such expressions by an insider would move the debate beyond an impasse created by nervousness around anthropology's history of representing outsiders. In addition to this, one of the key methodologies employed within this phenomenon focuses on looking to, and drawing in, contemporary people associated with the previously colonised, to engage with the colonial archive and forms of marginalised archives, as a way of accessing or surfacing alternative views or experiences of colonialism. These practices can be observed in my MAFA project *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012). Here I engaged the Krige Photographic Archive at the Iziko South African Museum as a Lobedu insider, drawing on insights closed to Balobedu outsiders and, as an artist, deploying **literacies** associated with photography and contemporary curatorial practices that convened a bigger constituency. This would be the exhausting halfie position discussed earlier.

4.2. Transformation in the cultural institution

There is a lot of evidence that suggests that the artist and the previously-colonised subject have become rather active participants in the wider economy of formal and institutional attempts to think about different and alternative ways of knowing, within sites such as museums of ethnography. This is evident in how museums of ethnography enlist such subjectivities in the museums' efforts to reimagine themselves as museums of world cultures,

with a mandate to assume a non-racist, non-colonial posture that includes subjectivities associated with the previously colonised as audience, instead of as objects of study, as was the case in colonial times. This inclusion plays out as a request for transformation by artists and the previously colonised, by commissioning forms of institutional critique aimed at asserting such subjectivities, as the core public of such institutions.

Within art, figures in museums of art, as the museums try to update their skills and facilities to handle artistic practices associated with contemporary art — the proliferation of video art, performance art and photography — challenges institutions traditionally equipped to deal only with disciplined art, such as painting or sculpture¹⁹⁵ (Oguibe & Enwezor 1999; Bishop, 2006; Esche, 2011; Steeds, 2013). The **artists** and the previously colonised or marginalised subjectivities currently occupy the same structural positions as subjects within the museum. They are subjects in a sense that they are the rationale for such institutions' existence, housing the 'material culture' of the artist and the colonised and mediating its meaning. In a sense artist and the colonised are the subjects of institutions born out of the enlightenment projects of colonialism and modernism where knowledge about them has been produced without their input. This more recent desire by these institutions to be transformed by marginal subjectivities signals a move whereby both subjects (artist and previously colonised) have become unavoidable participants in the process of meaning-making about them. They participate in this meaning-making, by presenting and publishing their own material — what Badovinac (2009:1) has characterised as 'knowledge from below', challenging established authority by disrupting the conventional flow of who and where knowledge is produced. Artists access this space through practices derived from Marcel Duchamp's development of the exhibition as an artist's medium — the production of an exhibition as a work of art — instead of producing art objects to be included in an exhibition (artists represented by their objects). They thus become competitors to the art historian's exhibition. Alternatively, the previously colonised, as academics, study ethnographies of their own communities within the postcolonial academy or through tribal research councils that control the production of research into their communities (Smith, 1999). I am an example of a halfie, both Molobedu and scholar. Both artist and colonised subjectivities mostly use

¹⁹⁵ It is worth noting here that such a development within contemporary art cannot be separated from the inclusion of colonised subjectivities in Western art exhibitions, starting with exhibitions like *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) and 3rd Havana Biennale (1989).

practices associated with institutional critique. Both artist and previously colonised subject independently critique institutions, and institutions request artists and previously colonised subjects to critique them, to become the institution critiquing itself. For example, one can refer to the impact of Fred Wilson's work *Mining the Museum* (1993)¹⁹⁶ as an artist working with the medium of exhibition-making (curation) and as a black person working with the practices of representing black people in a historically racist museum. It is also interesting to point out that in my travels I have observed, within the contemporary art-from-Africa art circuit, that a lot of people engaged in this practice are both artist and previously colonised, as is the case with me. In-depth examples of the practices and debates around the issues raised above can be found in the exhibition and publication *FOREIGN EXCHANGE (or the stories you wouldn't tell a stranger)* (Deliss & Mutumba, 2015),¹⁹⁷ which is discussed in the next chapter.

As a transformation project, this plays out as these colonial institutions inviting artists and the previously colonised to engage (practice institutional critique) with their collections as parallel projects with other internal projects driven by, for example, social anthropologists and historians (who act as curators in the institutions like museums of art and ethnography), who still act as gatekeepers and dominate the interpretation of such critique. I use social anthropologists and historians because in most cases, with the exclusion of practical professionals (scientists, installation technicians, conservators), the disciplines that serve such cultural institutions often have a background in either history (including art history) or anthropology, or both.

The idea of the parallel project has, in part, the responsibility to inform the social anthropologist and the historian of more elusive practices of the artist or previously colonised subjectivity. So, to some degree, it is a case study for the historic institution and its experts, to better understand the producers of their key products. On the other hand, it is to enlist the services of a disciplinary cousin who does not seem to have the baggage (coloniality) associated with them, in terms of research output — a way to learn some new languages

¹⁹⁶ The installation *Mining the Museum* was presented at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore between April 3, 1992, and February 28, 1993.

¹⁹⁷ Shown at the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures, Frankfurt am Main, January 16, 2014, to January 4, 2015 (see *Weltkulturen Museum* [2014]).

produced by these new actors. An example would be to invite a halfie to the institution to engage the archive or collection. This halfies' accountability would be to constituencies beyond the museum and academy, such as being accountable to the object's source community of which they may be a part. This is understood by the institutions inviting the halfie to lead to insights and solutions that consider every constituency's concern. I have seen such a process at the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures, where one of the participants in the interdisciplinary exhibition *FOREIGN EXCHANGE (or the stories you wouldn't tell a stranger)* chose to focus their artistic intervention/practice on an object collected from a diviner who specified that uninitiated people should not see the object. The participant chose to display the object in a vitrine with a cloth covering the displayed object so as not to contradict the source community's demands, without betraying her commitment to show it. Thus, the participant mobilised her understanding of the historical subject, that is, the subject as an unethically collected ethnographic object; the contemporary art context; as well as a performance of a disposition that compels her to ask questions of transformation. The questions would bridge the gap between these concerns — performance of a postmodernist reflexivity. From this context, the art historian-anthropologist would then produce a parallel technical text (the introduction or context to the exhibition), relating the installation in the classical art historical/ethnographic language, with a postmodernist confession. This partnership acknowledges the reluctance by some artists/previously colonised subjects to reduce their work to a technical, cultural document. Such a move is seen as being counterproductive to the condition of art or indigenous methodologies — such as a demand for opacity. In this way, the artist/previously colonised subject creates a piece that pacifies the new constituency, which feels at home, while the historical text, produced by a social anthropologist or similar, eases the classic audience by explaining the links with tradition.

4.3. The artist as a poison-less dagger: the invited artist in the institution

I have come to associate this position of transformation, occupied by the artists and previously marginalised subjectivities, with a critique of poison-less dagger. The idea of the artist as a poison-less dagger refers to a practice in which artists are invited into institutions such as ethnographic museums, where they 'make' a socially acceptable intervention that gives the public a sense of reflexivity in these problematic institutions but reduces the artist's work to an alibi. These interventions ease the conscience of the European and former colony's public (which has bought into the public hysteria of criticality) about the persistence of colonial practices within such institutions, while allowing colonial institutions to continue

their historic practices of subjecting colonised subjectivities in the name of research and contributing to a reimagining of history to reflect the times. I first encountered this during a long layover in Amsterdam on my way back from Okwui Enwezor's 56th Venice Biennale. A friend and one of my constant collaborators, Clare Butcher,¹⁹⁸ took me to a local hangout spot where some trendy 'Dutch kids' — more like middle-aged kids — were enjoying some music that was popular when I was a teen. While bobbing to SWV, Monifa, the Roots, Jazzy Jeff and A Tribe Called Quest, I ended up in a conversation with a Dutch woman I had never met before who was in an interdisciplinary PhD programme. In telling her about my research interest in the role of the artist in the new cultural institutions (museums of world cultures) and discussing some key artistic interventions in institutions like the laboratory of the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures or the Vienna Museum of Ethnology, she voiced her concerns about how these institutions were using the artist in their agenda for appearing reformed — an accusation Hans Haacke has defended (Alberro & Stimson, 2009:5–7) by saying that if artists are co-opted by the institution, then they must subvert from the inside. She ultimately accused such artists of being poison-less daggers. I use the term poison-less dagger reflexively as I only encountered the term in 2015. I use it here to focus discussions I had already been having with other artists and social anthropologists during my initial time in Berlin in September 2013 while I was working through an articulation of what I was doing in Germany (engaging the colonial archive as an artist and Molobedu) amidst a pressing discussion (for German cultural producers) about the controversial Humboldt forum.¹⁹⁹

In my scholar's point of view, I understand the term to imply that the artist is being used by the institution to block the critical and cultural-theory scholar, who has the disciplinary ability to mobilise the cultural institutions' collections to destroy the institution's legitimacy — old

¹⁹⁸ Clare Butcher is an Amsterdam-based Zimbabwean cultural producer. She recently curated the education programme for *Documenta 14* (2017).

¹⁹⁹ The Humboldt Forum is a cultural precinct that will consolidate the Ethnological Museum of Berlin and the Museum of Asian Art into one experience. The forum's website positions itself as being interested in 'inviting people to find out how things in our world are related to one another'. Overall it has been marred by accusations of not dealing adequately with the provenance of some objects in the two collections, with most criticism saying that the organisers are not doing enough to address Germany's colonial history and how that history impacts on the position of the collections that will serve as its flagship.

school institutional critique. That is, perhaps, to call for the ending of the museum through a well-argued critique of power and its abuse, as opposed to reforming it by accommodating a new audience and updating the cultural institutions' visual strategy. This approach (my scholar's), in my view, signals an interest in fighting the battle at an institutional level (rooted in the academy, where the institution's legitimacy resides) as opposed to fighting it on a subjective and personal level (as supposedly artists do from an art context like museums and galleries or non-institutionally-based public interventions). I understood that she was suggesting using an argument to invalidate another argument, that is power fighting power — a sharp postmodernist critique that calls for the museum to end, on account of its inability to serve its publics. This is distinct from what I interpret as the public removing the influence of power from the table (exercised by such an institution's management) through personal practices, such as producing their own networks of production and ways of knowing, no matter how temporary — Badovinac's (2009) 'knowledge from below' and the 1970s institutional critique. Behind this accusation, which in my view has a lot of merit, is the assumption that such personal practices are ineffective and can be manipulated by power or even ignored, which I disagree with.

I have come across art practices that fit with this accusation; for example, in a photograph entitled *Wild Places* (2000) by Lisl Ponger which I saw in the exhibition *In Progress: Works from the Mumok Collection* at the Museum of Modern Art Vienna (Mumok) in 2013. The image depicted a white woman getting a word tattooed on her arm. One could see a series of other tattooed words on her arm that had been scratched out, as one usually sees in adverts warning or making fun of getting a tattoo of a lover while drunk, or tattooing the name of your first love, not thinking it would ever end. The names tattooed and scratched out were missionary, mercenary, ethnologist and tourist (in that order); the new name being tattooed was 'artist'. In some way, this image (photograph) can be seen as designed to or can be seen to visualise a series of discussions within the humanities and arts around colonial agents (and their disciplinary successors) and the discourse that arises out of their archived bodies of work. While the image could be analysed and unpacked in many ways that allowed me to delve directly into the then central questions in the PhD,²⁰⁰ I found the photographic work to

²⁰⁰ When I saw the work, before my encounter with the Byrne works, the question of my research was framed around questions of the role of missionaries in propagating colonialism. In particular, I was grappling with the question of why Reuter had taken a group of Balobedu to Berlin at that time.

be too illustrative. It was a highly thought-provoking illustration, but an illustration of discourse that answered or confirmed old questions instead of helping me raise new ones: the problem of the photograph trapped in a representation discourse. I found it so because, in my view, it merely served to name and berate the perpetrator of colonialism, in the hope of extending a feeling of justice to the victim, or a feeling of reflexivity to the descendants of colonists. I required more than just being given a feeling of ease, I wanted more.

I had encountered this idea of illustrating discourse earlier in my PhD travels, during the German leg of the *Between the Lines* symposia in 2013 when I had found myself irritated at the Jewish Museum Berlin. In the whole museum I found only the architecture and one installation, Menashe Kadishman's *Shalekhet (Fallen Leaves)* in the Void of Memory room, to really drive home the idea of Jewish suffering and our need not to forget it. *Shalekhet (Fallen Leaves)* and the architecture of the museum's new wing was showing us, or making space available for us, to experience the disorientation associated with the upending of stability by the Holocaust, while the rest of the exhibition (particularly the upper floors displaying Jewish culture and achievements) was telling us of the experience, and we were expected to take their word for it. I had found the rest of the museum exhibition to be too strongly invested in giving examples instead of facilitating curiosity, which I found to be one the important functions of a museum. In a sense, the essential difference is the effective part of the museum — the architecture — which facilitated knowledge in-the-making and an embodiment of the feeling of apprehension. We experience the icy disorientation of discrimination, whereas the other part of the museum was illustrative: we were being educated, and on the receiving end of knowledge. This approach, the museum as just an educational institution, educating a supposedly not-so-bright audience, made me more suspicious of the holocaust museum project as a whole rather than eliciting some empathy from me by asking me the follow-up question: What is it that you want in a museum? The positioning of the affective installation, preceding the explanations, almost invalidates the experience of the Jewish Museum Berlin for me. Perhaps a model of having two streams of museum experience, such as that used by the Apartheid Museum in South Africa, might have been more effective for me: you see either one or the other, and are welcome to come at another time to see the second.

While the Jewish Museum Berlin had struck an unfavourable chord in me, I had previously experienced another attempt to represent the suffering of African people under colonialism and racism that had initially elicited outrage in me but has since raised more questions about

the ideas (like knowing the plight of the marginalised) that allowed me to grow as a contemporary person engaged in questions of imagination, expression, representation, history and heritage.

One night in 2010, while in Vienna for the opening of *Gae Lebowa (Moved Generations)* at the then Vienna Museum of Ethnology, I was asked by the young intern looking after me if I knew Brett Bailey, to which I replied: I did not. She told me there was an invitation-only show by him that night, but since I was a South African exhibiting at the museum, she could try and sneak me in. I accepted her invitation and we agreed to meet at the museum. Once I was snuck in, I was shown to a chair in the large darkened reception hall of the museum. The room had many chairs arranged around a well-lit central plinth on which a young, seemingly naked black woman stood on a rotating platform. Besides the woman, all I could see were the feet of the other guests. The only light in the room was on the young woman. Short of closing my eyes, there was nothing else to look at. While the idea of seeing a young naked woman was interesting to me, the knowledge I had accumulated on the politics of the gaze made the whole experience rather difficult.

The music in the room was a sort of opera, very loud and sharp, something I would expect to hear played by some nineteenth-century armchair anthropologist in the men-only clubhouse while he pondered the mating rituals of some obscure tribe in the Congo — or at least that is how Hollywood movies would depict it. While sitting there I could see some black children, perhaps not older than ten years of age, come into the room and randomly pick an audience member and lead them up the stairs. I waited for my turn, and eventually after some time a child came my way, took me by the hand and led me, in the dark, up the stairs to a door on the left-hand side of the gallery, opposite from where my own work was displayed. The child left me there. A door opened and I was now in the service corridors of the museum.

Directly in front of me I could see a glass cabinet with two real live people displayed as if they were life-size diorama casts of so-called ‘first people’. They stood there, seemingly motionless in their unchanging culture, dressed in skins with spears and the like. As I went through the installation, I realised the pattern was referencing or perhaps invoking the different stages of colonialism’s interest and imaginings of the ‘other’ — the black, the female body and the non-white immigrant, so to speak. Towards the end of the installation, the presentation started implicating Europe’s contemporary humanitarian dilemmas, telling stories (showing rather) of the continuing legacy of the violence involved in dealing with

consequences of different forms of migration and other intercontinental travel. The last image presented by the installations was rather quiet, and potentially forgettable, compared perhaps with the image depicting an elderly woman sitting with a skull in one hand and a broken glass shard in the other while hearing a story of how people were forced to boil and scrape off the flesh of people they knew, in the name of science. The quiet image I referred to presented a contemporary-looking man sitting behind a sewing machine, quietly making what I recognised as some form of Herero headdress. I was then shown to a door and re-entered the public part of the museum in my own exhibition space. This made me feel a bit uneasy about my work being there, as if I was a façade to something a bit more hectic happening in the corridors — a veneer for day-time visitors not aware of the troubling negotiations happening in the museum’s service corridors at night. This discomfort made me feel like I was a poisonless dagger, and reminded me of the complicity I was accused of in my formulation of the original photographs for the *Gae Lebowa* exhibition. In my disturbed state, I turned down the invitation to drinks by my hosts and went to the hotel, where I wrote an angry post on Facebook, professing my disgust at Bailey’s use of the ‘black body’ in a way that perpetuated the violence he was trying to criticise. The performance/installation, which I later found was called *Exhibit A*, had hit a chord in me and I attacked it with all the reflexive criticality a young initiate of the politics of the gaze could muster. Bailey’s exhibition went on to travel and was subsequently shut down twice, with the criticism levelled at it for being a repetition of the violence against the ‘black body’ by a privileged white male thus branding it an exhibition of white privilege.²⁰¹

Over the years I heard murmurs, as the exhibition popped up, that Bailey’s *Exhibit A* had been designed to, and was instrumental in, swinging the debate in the formation of Austria’s policy towards colonial memorisation and human remains repatriation politics. I had heard somewhere that the people invited to *Exhibit A* were the main thinkers and academics involved in Austria’s repatriation debates. If I was to do a flash analysis of *Exhibit A*, I would say that by making the conditions of the colonial gaze a reality for the invited thinkers, who were wasting time debating hypothetical realities of violence without the knowledge of what it means to really gawk at someone (a black person), then Bailey’s exhibition can be seen to

²⁰¹ Bailey’s series *Exhibit A* and *Exhibit B* has courted controversy, with *Exhibit B*’s instalment at London’s Barbican shut down by protesters in September 2014 before it even opened. The exhibition continued to tour Europe until Bailey retired it in 2017.

have had a significant impact in transgressing the boundary between debate, theory and reality for those who witnessed it. Unlike the Jewish Museum Berlin where the affective basement levels are followed by the explanatory upper floors, the key to Bailey's exhibition was in how its affective impact was not diluted by explanations: you saw the exhibition and were left to deal with it and question yourself. The viewer was forced into reflexivity instead of being told to be reflexive. At the end, the exhibition appears to have been successful in shifting, or rather in moving the debate along. While I understand and support the mobilisation of various rights groups against Bailey's installation in 2014, my position towards it has somewhat shifted. While I still think it is a bad idea to display humans, even if it was for a good cause, conducted with consenting adults and their children, I am faced by the question of why it is that the most politically incorrect actions have such a game-changing effect, while the well thought-out, politically correct actions (such as *Wild Places*, 2000) breed nothing but debate; and not the progressive type of debate that leads to considered action but rather the type that just secures jobs and entrenches discipline (like the art of debating or historiography). The quiet image that had disturbed me so much had troubled me more because it drove home the point that 'we', the marginalised, are complicit with the European project of exhibiting their reflexivity, that we are not investing time in imagining our own transformations. While the immigrants working with Bailey were in a tight position, the willingness of Muondjo²⁰² to be party to Bailey's work surfaced an uneasy relationship in the entangled nature of European reflexivity. Marginalised and previously colonised people's longing for redress, as well as the persistence of inequality, lies in the question of who this entanglement serves better. It is this position that the custodial tendencies of Bank and Bank (2013) feed on.

While Bailey had achieved his affect through rapacious and transgressive means, the context that led to the #Fall movement through the #RhodesMustFall saga²⁰³ drew my attention to the

²⁰² Correspondence with Bailey confirmed the man with the sewing machine was the late Vevangwa Muondjo, a storyteller and Herero headdress-maker from Windhoek. He was an Otjiherero elder, singer of traditional songs, and one of the most esteemed makers of traditional Herero women's headdresses for official functions.

²⁰³ The #Fall movement or the 'revolution' associated with the **Fallists** has its roots in the #RhodesMustFall movement that demanded an end to the white domination of key institutions of

veracity of the idea of art even outside of its own context. There have been many attempts to practise some form of institutional critique on Cecil John Rhodes's stature and legacy in South Africa, but none was successful at the public level until Chumani Maxele threw poo on the Rhodes statue at UCT in 2015. The conditions surrounding the success of the #Fall movement in denting the legacy of Rhodes requires attention. In the text 'Black Pain Led me to Throw Rhodes Poo', Chumani Maxele (2016) details how they (Maxele and his collaborators) used an art event as an alibi to bypass possible security restrictions,²⁰⁴ by staging the 'Poo protest' on the opening day of *Infecting the City*.²⁰⁵ He notes that the choice for this strategic date was deployed as an answer to the possible question from university security, which would ask of them: 'What are you doing?' To which they would answer: 'We are participating in an art festival'. This design of masking protest as art is quite important when one considers that, even though they did not use art in its conventional sense, they understood the veracity of its function as legal critique, without the discipline and burden of knowing its historical function. That is to say, Maxele and his collaborators' ability to understand the crack that had been opened by colonial institutions' desire for transformation, through institutional critique by artists, is significant and perhaps restores art's defence against the critique of the poison-less dagger. I find Maxele and company's disposition to be an advantage against reformist tendencies prevailing in most artists today. This idea of a reformist attitude is based on a conversation with fellow artist Talya Lubinsky in which my suggestion to demolish the historical buildings that make up the current UCT main campus student residences to make space for bigger buildings to accommodate the growing number of black students at UCT (one of the important points raised by the #Fall movement) was self-censored as I became sentimental about the architectural form of the historical buildings. While we both agreed that the buildings in their current form were a waste of space (polite version — inefficient), our susceptibility to the lovely courtyard and the lovely arches drove us to an aesthetic solution that incorporates the existing structure with the new. While this is a

democracy (de-colonising the university curriculum, inaccessible education due the systematic exclusion of black people from the South African economy and the maintenance of colonial legacies).

²⁰⁴ Maxele names Baxolele Zono, Sabelo Mcinzima and particularly Wandile Kasibe as people involved in thinking through the strategy for protesting against the Rhodes statue.

²⁰⁵ *Infecting the City* is an annual public performance art exhibition, which takes place in and around Cape Town's CBD. See <http://infectingthecity.com>

great *idea*, it privileges the structure, colonial history and colonial architectural sensibility over contemporary needs. So, at the end it becomes a question of balance between preservation and rising to the needs of the present. Indeed, the idea of the poison-less dagger may refer to the susceptibility of the artist to reform, at the expense of meaningful change or transformation seen in Maxele and company's use of art. This susceptibility is in the form of the artist's attachment to the aesthetic history associated with colonialism and perhaps to the opportunity to use this moment to realise a challenging aesthetic realisation, through fine art's history as part of the humanities. This susceptibility is the problem when artists operate within institutional parameters — this names the problem as working in the academy.

4.4. A trip to Wuppertal

Within the context of the artist in the archive, and as a result of the lunch and conversation about artists in the archive I had had with the South African delegation from UNISA during my first visit to Berlin as well as subsequent seminars with some of the delegates, I was invited by Lizé Kriel to think with her about contributing to a study process commissioned by the German Protestant church. The study process, called 'Study Process on the Role of German-South African Church Relations during the 1930s, World War Two and the Apartheid Era', was located within a drive to assemble some insights on the conduct of the Protestant church under colonialism. Drawing on her knowledge of my access to the Reuter diary and the visual production of the BMS from the ELAB, she and her colleague Hans Lessing invited me to submit an abstract or proposal to contribute to the study process and the subsequent conference accompanying it.²⁰⁶ They invited me in my capacity as an artist, mobilising my insights into the visual production of the Protestant missionaries drawn from the work I was doing in the Reuter archive and the exhibition work I had done previously on the Krige Photographic Archive. The study process was in its second leg,²⁰⁷ dealing with the later periods of Protestant involvement with the project of colonisation. The group of scholars I was warned against by Höckner had been part of the first leg of the study process.

²⁰⁶ 'The Role of the German-South African Church Relations during the 1930s, World War Two and the Apartheid Era', March 11–13, 2014, Auf dem heiligen Berg, Ethnographic Museum, Wuppertal, Germany.

²⁰⁷ The first study was called 'The German Protestant Church in Colonial Southern Africa: The Impact of Overseas Work from the Beginnings until the 1920s' (Lessing & Kriel, 2012).

4.4.1 InBetween

I accepted the invitation and proposed the photographic installation *InBetween*, which would highlight the complexity of the wider German Protestant church's visual work in the colonies. The proposal stressed that it was important to make visible the different practices employed by the different missions across time, instead of isolating a specific time and actor, such as Medingen in the transition from Reuter to Krause in the 1930s and 1940s. I also stressed that this would avoid the trap of using archived images as illustrations for historical concepts. The proposal was accepted and a budget and installation assistant (based in Wuppertal) were allocated to the project. This was to be one of two exhibitions, the other being a series of drawings by William Ndabayakhe Zulu, curated and introduced by Hans Blum. In the discussion leading up to the production of the installation, Kriel and I discussed a series of texts and projects involving nineteenth-century missionary activity, contemporary research on their visual production and visual studies texts that elaborated the complexity of researching visibility through photography and exhibition practices. These included discussions around Nicholas Mirzoeff's *The Right to Look: A Counter History of Visuality* (2011); *Through a Glass Darkly: Photographs of the Leipzig Mission from East Africa, 1896–1939* (2013), edited by Adam Jones; and Richard Elphick's *The Equality of Believers* (2012). These discussions mitigated a problem around my proposal for an installation without a contextualising text — a written document explaining the effect of my installation — where their insistence on a contextualising text made me feel as if I was being asked to perform the work of the historian; or, indeed, to assume the position of informant. I was deeply resistant to this process, as I am in this 'thesis'. Such a contextualising text would have responded to the study process's requirement for my contribution to frame the BMS and its activities and ideologies in the 1930s. For example, in one of the conversations we discussed the approach of Alan Kirkaldy and Albert Wirz to some photographs from the BMS Venda mission, agreeing that I was not expected to do a reading of the photographs as Kirkaldy and Wirz (2000) do in their Venda work. That is, I was not expected to 'tell' how the photographs confirmed or debunked ideas about missionaries' practices at a particular period. We eventually agreed that I would give a short address clarifying my thinking around the installation and the study process objectives.

The installation *InBetween* (2014) referred to aspects of Santu Mofokeng's installation *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950* (1995). Its (*InBetween*'s) rationale drew from, and repurposed, images digitised during my time at the ELAB archive, when I looked through

the ELAB's entire Transvaal photography-based visual archive. This was excess to the visual material directly related to my area of research — a trip by some Balobedu in 1897. It was a process of looking at the wider BMS visual archive beyond the 1897 moment and the geographic location of my research (north-eastern Transvaal) as a way of practising the good photo-archival research standards prescribed by Salicki (2009) around the biography or context of a photograph. These research standards dictate an awareness of the wider context for the material being studied, instead of focusing immediately on one specific aspect — what Höckner had demanded of me in relation to my access to Reuter's diaries. For example, this would entail establishing the biography of a chosen photograph, such as the card-mounted photograph of **Johannes** and **Martha Kgašane**, with an annotation indicating that Martha was in Berlin — asking the question: Is this the only use of the photograph? Has it been used in other ways, or contexts?²⁰⁸ Another example of this is the photograph depicting Reuter with **Simson Rabothata**,²⁰⁹ which exists as a single image, a postcard, and as a card-mounted image with a typed caption that has been corrected with a hand annotation. It clarifies that **Rabothata** was not a missionary helper but a pastor at Tschakuma satellite station. *InBetween* also asked if the practice was unique to Reuter, or was it a common practice during Reuter's time, and whether the practice existed in previous or subsequent missionary periods. This approach to the Reuter archive brought an awareness of: 1) the different styles or registers between the preceding and subsequent frames of a published photograph; 2) the differences or similarities between the private and personal photographs of a particular missionary (including the different uses of both registers of image categories); 3) the differences between the different missionaries in the different stations; 4) the difference between the early missionaries and the later missionaries; missionaries that kept photo journals (in the style of the ethnographer) or personal photo albums, and the missionaries that produced images solely for publicity (only creating a marketing narrative); 4) Reuter's

²⁰⁸ Questions like, was the photograph only used in the *Missionsberichte* or was it also converted into a postcard, leading to questions of whether the photograph's meaning changed in the different contexts. This can be further complicated by researching and finding **Martha's** descendants and seeing whether they have a copy of the image and if the image performs a different politic as, for example, a framed image in the living room of Martha's descendants.

²⁰⁹ This photograph is on the Picasa platform under the tags: **Simson**, **Rabotata**, **Rabothata**, **helper**, **Tschakoma**, **FN55/04**, **2783/2**, **2048** and postcard.

mission's visual production outside of the [Transvaal Exhibition](#) (1884–1960s; 5) differences and similarities between early black and white prints and colour slides from the 1970s, using the register of what is now criticised as poverty pornography (development photography); 6) and, lastly, the differences and similarities between the way the various photographs were deployed in print form and as administrative records. That is, the mission director's use and manipulation of the different themes in the printed *Missionsberichte*, and the different classes of postcards produced by the BMS mission.²¹⁰

In my exploration of this best practice, I became fixated, on the one hand, on Reuter's material because of its direct relation to my research project and for the sentimental purpose of recognising particular locations and early expressions of practices that have been passed down to me, through my initiation in the year-long Lutheran confirmation school (catechumen school), as well as through the time I spent at [Ga-Sekgopo](#), which is one of the [Medingen](#) satellite stations.²¹¹ On the other hand, I was fascinated by seeing early forms of ethnographic photograph albums by missionaries who can qualify to be referred to as the predecessors of the Malinowskian social anthropologist. These albums reminded me of Krige's Balobedu album (from the Krige Photographic Archive) that I had engaged with in my Master's project. It was also interesting to realise the diversity of approaches the different missionaries took to the category of the private photograph, described by Geary (1991). In this regard, I was particularly excited by missionary Hoffman, whose album focused on his three daughters, documenting each and every stage of their lives through the Lutheran initiation school all the way to marriage. This draws rather interesting links with photographer Nicholas Nixon's photographic series 'The Brown Sisters' published as *Nicholas Nixon: The Brown Sisters: Forty Years* (Nixon & Meister 2014) or publications like *Misty Dawn: Portrait of a Muse* by Jock Sturges (2008). For example, Sturges photographs one girl throughout her life, producing a compelling portrait of her across time. These images of the missionary's [daughters](#) were at once intimate and personal, and at the same time a bit

²¹⁰ See Appendix 2d for my notes from the photo-archival research in the ELAB, noting my impressions and attempting to describe the images I was finding in the archive.

²¹¹ The setaseng (the station) in Ga-Sekgopo, where the Lutheran church and school are next door to my grandmother's maternal home, is located at the base of [Thabana ya Dafita](#), an area that belonged to [Mampatla](#) and [Masethea Mohale](#), who were both in Berlin.

creepy because of the obsessive nature of Hoffman's constant gaze.²¹² Overall, I used images from these three highly entangled strands of image categories both as a way of setting the context of the Lobedu material, as part of the wider BMS mission ideology machine, and as a sign of contamination (lack of clear distinction between private and personal photographs) initiated by the missionaries' personal photographs.

In summary, *InBetween* presents my fascination with the diversity of the BMS visual production, while investigating what had become distrust in the instrumentalisation of categories imposed by disciplined photography scholarship and the use of the isolated and static image in the humanities,²¹³ which often leads to things being taken out of context. During the exhibition opening, I addressed the conference delegates informally with an anecdote about undergoing confirmation school under the radical Bishop Mazebandlela (then just a pastor), whose political sermons still inspire me; and on how seeing the archive allows me some comfort in that the reach of the tyranny of the BMS cannot mute the spirit of Balobedu. During the conference's concluding session, Bishop Shekutaamba Nambala²¹⁴ found it important to mention *InBetween*'s failure in his address. He judged its insignificance to the study process on the basis that it was not useful in their deliberation on the culpability of the church in colonialism, and its aftermath. He pointed out that the study process needed to ascertain guilt in order for the church to atone, in a bid to institute a TRC-like ritual to cleanse the church of its historic transgression. With this judgement, Bishop Nambala dismissed *InBetween* (2014) in a kind but still condescending manner. He pointed out that while the installation did not serve the purpose of the study (answering questions of guilt), my presence was not a waste, as he perceived that Peter Callaway (an older historian) and I would benefit from what he had observed to be the start of a long and fruitful friendship that

²¹² These photographs can be searched for on the Picasa platform under the tag: *InBetween, daughters, 6-bmw 2/201*.

²¹³ Isolated from its wider production context and flow of events.

²¹⁴ Shekutaamba Nambala is bishop in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), and is also a qualified historian.

might benefit our individual academic projects.²¹⁵ With this kind rejection, Bishop Nambala emphasised that, as a historian, he was interested in hard facts that could be used in their (the Study Process council's) deliberations.

Later in a conversation with Kriel I realised that *InBetween* needed me to enlighten Bishop Nambala, by taking him through the installation and giving him the context of how the work could function as evidence — a form of context in relation to the study process's brief. I needed to relay my insights in a way that he understood. I was not inclined to this arrangement because I had conceptualised the installation around ideas of a confessional booth, which I realised as a translucent black box, where the confessing person is faced with their sins and graces (images depicting or evoking these ideas) privately, without me leading them. The Black Box, located in the ethnographic museum of the Wuppertal missionary seminary, was designed to be a private space, which the delegates could go to at their leisure, throughout the conference. I realised that the problem was that, besides his scepticism, Bishop Nambala did not have the literacy to read the work, or perhaps could not get over the positioning of me as an artist, while the study was interested in rigorous scholars. Indeed, I had heard some delegates joking about an artist pretending to be a scholar as the conference proceeded. Over the succeeding weeks I was encouraged to convert my expertise, which most scholars had picked up on, into a written text with the photographs subordinated to illustrations, so that I could still be included in the publication marking the culmination of that particular study process. While some academics were supportive of my resolve to keep the installation as is, there were still calls to have the documentation, or some doodles I was working on during some of the presentations, as the cover of the book, emphasising how beautiful they were.²¹⁶

At this stage I realised that it was not just the frustration of being undisciplined and uninterested in the academic report associated with researching the archive but also the position of the wider humanities scholars, who did not value the new turn in the way archives

²¹⁵ The bishop, academic Peter Callaway and I arrived early and took dinner together almost daily, discussing the complexities of researching the BMS archive and the inadequacies of the evidentiary practices that dominate it.

²¹⁶ Photographs of the doodles can be searched for on the Picasa platform under the tag: [InBetween](#) and [Wuppertal](#).

where being engaged. Most scholars were happy to have the artist drag out the images (which they themselves did not have the clear consciousness to drag out), lest they appear un-reflexive. They chose to refer to the images through the guise of analysing the artist's work. Indeed, some conference delegates did enjoy the installation in this way and made copies of the slides (or took photographs on their phones) while remarking how they had seen these, but never had the time to look at all of them together. While the Study Process Council had officially rejected my project, Kriel, herself a historian based in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria, reiterated her reflections on the conference, how the installation had made it difficult to deny the limitation of the approach, and the unconscious appropriation of visual metaphors by historians in the conference — or denial that they did indeed deploy the visual as a tool in their facts.

I went on to present a modified version of the *InBetween* (2014) installation two more times within a strict academic conference context, before accepting that such a setting was not conducive to the presentation of artistic work on its own terms. I would later encounter the 'Off Programme' within an academic conference setting, which I immediately understood to be a suitable context for the type of intervention I was interested in. The 'Off programme' or the 'Fringe' is an 'ancillary' event, taking place at an alternative venue outside of the main event's official venue — an event that is not on the official programme. I have been aware of the Off programme from within a contemporary art context for some time, largely as a fringe event piggybacking on the traffic brought on by a bigger event such as an art fair or biennale, but also as a complementary event managing the impossibility of the main event's capacity to stage a comprehensive contemporary art context. For example, Senegal's Dak'Art Biennale I visited in 2014 had an *In* and *Out* programme. I first encountered the Off Programme as part of an academic conference context through the programming of reinterpreting historical photographs-themed art interventions at the 'Validating Visual Heritage in Africa: Historical Photographs and the Role of the "Archive"' conference in [Buea](#), Cameroon, in 2015.²¹⁷ I

²¹⁷ The presentations of Reinterpreting Historical Photographs included a series of exhibitions, public art interventions, performances and film screenings.

would later encounter this kind of programming through *Africa Acts* presented in dialogue with the 6th European Conference on African Studies (*ECAS-6*) conference in Paris.²¹⁸

The modified version of the *InBetween* installation entailed reducing the room-size installation into a small 280x280x95 mm two-part box. I incorporated this new *InBetween* box into my *Neither Nor: Residues of a Four-Year Obsession with Balobedu, Anthropology and Photography* installation from 2012 as a fourth box, constituting it as *Neither Nor II* (2014). This reworking of *Neither Nor* was a conceptualisation and the first iteration of a single on-going artwork that would emanate from my interest and research into *khelobedu*. I paired the *Neither Nor II* installation together with the conference paper ‘A Personal Take, or Stuck in the Middle/side and Going Nowhere: An Attempt at Imagining a Methodology for Engaging Colonial Photographic Archives, Histories and Subjectivities’ (Appendix 1a). I presented this pair at the ‘Photographs of 19th and 20th Century Africa: Changing Perspectives and Object Histories in School Textbooks and Digital Archives’, as well as at the ‘*Validating Visual Heritage* in Africa: Historical Photographs and the Role of the “Archive”’ conferences in late 2014 and early 2015.²¹⁹ This would lead to my presentation of my artistic practice as my central propositions in exhibitions such as Bamako Encounters Photography Biennale. This reiterated the need to go beyond the dichotomy of academic context and art context as I became aware of contemporary art spaces that do not separate the two positions.

²¹⁸ *Africa Acts* is a performance festival highlighting the need for Africa to account for itself away from the dominance of the global North’s narrative of a continent in need (ECAS 2015, 2015). ECAS-6 is the 6th European Conference on African Studies. In 2015 it was held at the Sorbonne and at the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE) in Paris, July 8–10, 2015. The conference theme was Collective Mobilisations in Africa: Contestation, Resistance, Revolt’.

²¹⁹ The conference ‘Photographs of 19th and 20th Century Africa’ took place from November 25 to 29, 2014, at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal. The ‘*Validating Visual Heritage* in Africa’ conference took place from January 27 to 29, 2015, at the PAID-WA in Buea, Cameroon. This conference included an online platform presenting the wider context of the photography and archive initiative that gave rise to this conference. Available online: <http://african-photography-initiatives.org>

Chapter 3

Part 1 — Further travel, an encounter with contemporary art circuit

1. My second batch of travel

1.1 A trip to Frankfurt, January 2014

During my second stay in Berlin, I had exchanged email correspondence with a colleague, Yvette Mutumba, who had indicated that an archive in Frankfurt might have photographs that included images from the German Völkerschau, so after the conference in Wuppertal I went to Frankfurt to visit it. The Film and Image Archive is part of the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures. This museum also hosts the residency programme and project space the Weltkulturen Lab,²²⁰ known for its experiments in trans- and interdisciplinary practices around its ethnographic collection. After the Wuppertal conference and wounded as I was by my reception at the conference, I made my way to Frankfurt. At the archive, I searched for *Transvaal Exhibition*, *Lobedu/Lovedu*, *Völkerschau*, 1897, *Kurfürstendamm* and other keywords I had been using. I was disappointed to find no images directly related to my interests, but I did find some photographs of other world fairs that had happened in Berlin in 1896 and 1898 (Tempelhof) attributed to an archive in Hamburg housing the collection of famous merchant, businessman, and exhibition organiser Carl Hagenbeck.

I met Mutumba at the main building of the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures, who took me through the exhibition *FOREIGN EXCHANGE (or the stories you wouldn't tell a stranger)*²²¹ that she and museum director Clémentine Deliss had curated.²²² Participating artist Luke

²²⁰ <http://www.weltkulturenmuseum.de/en/labor>

²²¹ Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures, January 16, 2014, to January 4, 2015.

²²² Deliss has a PhD in social anthropology and has worked on a number of contemporary art exhibitions. Her projects revolve around questions of a contemporary reading of material culture, especially foregrounding a wider reading of such material through contemporary art practices. Her exhibitions include *Lotte or the Transformation of the Object* (1990), at the Styrian Autumn Festival, Graz, and the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. See <http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchLibrary/LotteortheTransformationoftheObjectLotteoderderTransformationdesObjekts>

Willis Thompson, who spoke about the process and idea behind his work *On EI620, 1887* (2014), accompanied us on the walkabout. Thompson's project, *Museum in Reverse*, involves some consideration of a funerary skull mask (Lorr) (with human remains) from the museum's collection, by responding to it with a gesture. Thompson's gesture involved making his allocated budget for producing an artwork for the *FOREIGN EXCHANGE* exhibition available to facilitate the repatriation of a Muslim immigrant child's remains to Nigeria where he could be buried without being subjected to the expensive grave-leasing practices in Germany.²²³ He exhibited a letter confirming the transfer of funds together with some images of the boy from when he was alive as part of his contribution to the exhibition. Thompson's gesture is a meditation on burial practices and is prompted by the skull mask.

During the walkabout with Mutumba and Thompson we ran into Deliss who was conducting a tour of the same exhibition for curator Simon Njami²²⁴ and a group of artists participating in a show that Njami was working on at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (MMK). As the group grew bigger, the walkabout became a sort of impromptu seminar. We discussed the way the different artists and the curatorial team responded to the different ways of tackling the question of ethnographic collections and their associated archives, as well as the politics of doing this kind of work today — mostly the same topics raised by this thesis. The walkabout was followed by lunch for Mutumba, Thompson and me at the Frankfurt Art School (where Thompson studied), at which we continued to discuss aspects of the process leading up to the exhibition. This included discussion of how the think tank working on the project included a variety of participants, among them lawyers, anthropologists, artists, writers, academics, historians and people represented in one way or another by the ethnographic collection. From the discussions, I

²²³ Thompson's gesture was a solution to Germany's grave-leasing practices that would have had the boy's remains excavated after 25 years, unless the family could afford to re-lease the grave again.

²²⁴ Simon Njami is an academic, writer and curator whose contributions to contemporary African art include *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* at the Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf (2004–2007), which also travelled to Johannesburg in 2007. He has curated several biennales on the African continent, including Bamako Encounters Photography Biennale, and is currently artistic director of the 2018 Dakar Biennale. He is a founding member of *Revue Noire* which published the seminal African photography anthology *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (Saint Léon, 1999).

understood that respondents did not necessarily work in collaboration per se but as individuals concerned with particular aspects of their interests or expertise in relation to a shared object, or dealing with different questions raised by the same object. The concerns, which overlapped those of other respondents — either because of the objects' shared status as ethnographic objects with particular legal or cultural position — were continually discussed and worked through collectively within the think tank. The manner of these discussions I understand to be trans-disciplinary (engaged in interdisciplinary (collaboration between disciplines) research, that moves beyond established disciplines toward new methodological and theoretical configurations. For example, the lawyer would be concerned with issues of the legal ownership of ethnographic objects collected from aboriginal communities, such as Thompson's skull mask (Lorr). These respondents, which Mutumba described as a form of think tank, were hosted in the same space for prolonged periods as residents (sometimes at the same time) by the museum, through the laboratory residency programme (the Lab). They enjoyed full access to objects in the collection, which they could keep in their studios or work spaces during their time at the Lab.²²⁵ This Lab took a form similar to that of an artists' residency programme, where artists being in residence is seen as equivalent to having a research fellowship in the academic context. The motif of the artist's residency has become a key feature of contemporary art, promoting prolonged immersion in one's practice, as well as fostering prolonged conversations with other contemporary art practitioners, like curators. We talked about how the residency functioned as a form of workshop between the members of the think tank, as well as between the curatorial team (comprised of art curators and anthropologists) and the think tank, characterised by weekly interviews leading up to the final exhibition. These insights facilitated the exhibition's curatorial position and were reflected in the exhibition and the publication (Deliss & Mutumba, 2015) that accompanied it. We also discussed the significance of the format of the process undertaken for the exhibition,

²²⁵ The Lab is housed in a villa adjoining the museum, consisting of apartments and studios of different sizes, where members of the think tank could reside for weeks or months while they engaged in the project. As part of the design of the residency programme's studio and residential units, special portable vitrines, vaults and other museum standard storage units were specially designed to allow the respondents' chosen ethnographic objects to be kept in the studios and apartments, away from the museum storerooms, for prolonged periods, without compromising the museum's conservation standards.

particularly within the frame of the artist in the ethnographic museum. Other interventions included *Google Image Search of Bow Holder* (2015), in which artist Benedikte Bjerre reverse-googled²²⁶ images from the archive and presented the results as part of her work. Through my experience around the context of *FOREIGN EXCHANGE (or the stories you wouldn't tell a stranger)*, I could not help but feel envious of the seemingly productive reception the artists involved in this process (the Lab) had enjoyed — the confidence in the respondents' process by the commissioning institution.²²⁷ I wondered about the difference between this reception (Thompson's reception at the Lab) and the reception I had encountered in the production of *InBetween* (2014) within the strict academic context (ELAB archive, Study Process Council, the humanities faculties, and what these institutions valued). While the Frankfurt encounter — seeing affinities in the Lab's processes and my own — bolstered my confidence that the work done by *InBetween* at the conference was important in shifting the discussion terms in a historical conference, I was also now sharply aware of the limitation of the strict academic context for my PhD project. My participation in the Wuppertal conference made me aware of how, in presenting my work in that context, I was negotiating my practice (with the academy) from a disadvantaged position. I was operating as an affect, an artist disturbing the comfort of the traditional scholar within the confines of an academic conference. I was not asserting my own interests enough.

²²⁶ To 'reverse-google' is to use an image as a search term (dragging an image into the search box), which then returns all images that match the searched image, using factors like image size, distribution of colour, facial recognition and so forth. In some cases, the search will return all available images of the searched image, allowing you to see where and how the image has been used. Sometimes it will return completely unrelated images that only share image colour distribution qualities.

²²⁷ Further correspondence with Mutumba (personal communication, February 8, 2017) did reveal that while there was a general confidence in the process by the director of the institution (Deliss) and herself, there was some scepticism by some of the other anthropologists in the institution, particularly on the point of a lack of expertise in anthropological or *museological* practices by the respondents handling precious artefacts. Deliss, who herself has a PhD in anthropology, has also worked extensively in the wider contemporary art context and institutions. I suspect her commitment, as opposed to the other anthropologists' commitment, reflects an understanding of the importance of the work artists and other non-academic respondents do.

Later that evening, the Frankfurt-based South African artist Bianca Baldi, whom I had met in Berlin, joined Mutumba and me as we visited the many exhibition openings happening in Frankfurt that evening. After the exhibitions, we ended up at a bar with Njami and the group of artists I had met at the exhibition walkabout earlier. In the process of Baldi and I relating to artist Maurice Pefura, our appreciation of Henri Cele's 6-pack torso in his portrayal of Shaka Zulu, in the TV series of the same name, I related an anecdote I had heard about Shaka having probably been a short fat man, whose image as a Spartan warrior was a product of British colonial fiction. While speaking informally about the persistence of the problems inherent in the TV series' representation of the encounter between the Zulu and the British colonists in the nineteenth century, we plunged into a heated conversation about who has the right to decide what is African; that is to say, who has legitimacy to represent Africa today. Njami pointed out that it was he, not the European museums and curators, who would define what Africa was. He referred to his show *Divine Comedy*,²²⁸ due to open a week from that evening at the Frankfurt Museum für Moderne Kunst, as an example of how he was advancing this position. He encouraged me to come and see the show and judge for myself.

I had only planned to be in Frankfurt for two days and was leaving the next day for Berlin, to visit the ELAB to try to make copies of the missing years of the original Sütterlin script Reuter diary. My translator had indicated that he was fluent in the Sütterlin script and could make translations of the missing years directly from the original diaries. I made my way to Berlin where I was disappointed to find that the diary had been sent for professional digitisation and would not be available for consultation for a few months. Somehow, there had been a communication error between the archivist and me. Her English was not good and neither was my German.²²⁹ With a few days to kill in Germany before my flight back to South Africa, I visited some of the museums I had visited the last time I was in Berlin, a practice I observed as a way to keep track of the trajectory of the institutions' programming. Among the

²²⁸ *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Hell, Purgatory Revisited by Contemporary African Artists*, organised by the Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK1), Frankfurt am Main, in collaboration with Simon Njami, March 21–July 27, 2014.

²²⁹ From the information I had on my visit 18 months earlier, the Transvaal material was not scheduled for digitisation for a few years. Hence I had to digitise the material myself to facilitate my research.

spaces I visited were the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) where I saw *Forensis*,²³⁰ which HKW presents as an exhibition concerned with the technologies and role of forensics as narrative imagination in state power formation. The exhibition drew on artists, filmmakers, activists and architects to invert the said forensics gaze as an aesthetic-political practice that could be used to fight the state's power abuse. Key to this exhibition is the HKW's self-positioning as drawing on 'a rapidly expanding field of artistic research and knowledge production',²³¹ emphasising the role of artistic contribution to a wave of new forms of knowing outside of the strict academic context, without necessarily distancing itself from in-depth research practice. I understand such forms of knowing, from my experience of the exhibition, to include making visible (showing) as distinct from telling. Seeing the impact (on my understanding of artistic research) of this exhibition as contemporary artistic practice, I decided to return to Frankfurt for the preview of *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Hell, Purgatory revisited by Contemporary African Artists*, to see how Njami's position related to this contemporary approach.

My experience of the Njami show was mixed. For one, I had already seen most of the work presented and I now was familiar with most of the artists (and their research practices), who included Yinka Shonibare, Kader Attia, Edson Chagas, Aïda Muluneh and Jane Alexander. The exhibition made me uncomfortable because it included a few artists whose positioning within the self-representation discourse raised uncomfortable questions for me about how this process continues the legacy of rendering oneself legible to, and within, the Euro-American economy of producing difference. That is to say, I was uncomfortable with the way the presentation of African artists' self-representations is often used to continue unproductive discussions about Africa by Western academics. The issue is not necessarily with the contemporary African artist's work itself, but with the seeming apparent reality that the European audience was simply not interested in a different conversation. I experienced this discomfort in relation to works such as *Iyeza* (2012) by South African-based Zimbabwean artist Kudzanai Chiurai. On the other hand, the exhibition's presentation in the Futurist MMK1

²³⁰ The exhibition was presented at the HKW from March 15 to May 5, 2014, curated by Eyal Weizman and Anselm Franke. See https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/forensis/start_forensis.php

²³¹ *Forensis* information leaflet, included in the Appendix 2.

building was exciting. Throughout this building I enjoyed how one could always see works across all three levels of the museum, as well as see across the different levels into different galleries, disrupting conventional linear presentation of works of art in clusters or as a neat narrative. There was always some connecting line of sight between the different levels and their separate galleries (heaven, purgatory and hell). Because of these lines-of-sight connections, the exhibition cohered as a single work instead of merely being a collection of works strung together by a general curatorial statement. The exhibition had transcended the format of an ‘installation of art objects’ into installation art. The exhibition was an experience and not a text. It did not just inform the observer about contemporary African art practices, but forced one to interact with them physically by making one aware of one’s position as audience. For the first time, I could appreciate the wider selection of these particular African artists in such a concentrated and dynamic space. It was like being able to see different exhibitions I had seen over the years as one exhibition. Indeed, Njami was pressing his vision of contemporary African art and it was expressive, sometimes with too heavy a dose of ‘African’ self-representation, but it moved me. Here was a cohort of artists defining for themselves what Africa is, both drawing on existing cliché and inventing new clichés about Africa and being African, while embedding real lived experiences and sometimes new ‘imaginings’ of Africa beyond its aesthetic history. In relation to the idea of ‘imagining’, it is important to note Enwezor’s and Okeke-Agulu’s (2009) point that for an African contemporary artist to ‘imagine’ Africa is a different thing to the West’s imagining of Africa, noting this process as sensitive to the location of Africa as contemporaneous — it was current and not an image of what Europe was in the past. This is distinct from the Othering position employed by European imaginings of Africa as outside of time — primitive. From *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Hell, Purgatory Revisited by Contemporary African Artists* press release, I understand the show to emphasise a look at contemporary African art beyond the postcolonial context or its exploration for historical and political content. Rather for the question of what African contemporary art offers the Western-dominated contemporary art discourse that has increasingly come under the influence of non-European protagonists (artists, writers, curators, theorists from the non-Western diaspora) (MMK exhibition press release).²³² Overall, I understood that the show was concerned with the contribution of contemporary African art to the larger contemporary art complex, by way of aesthetics — the

²³² <https://www.mmk.art/en/whats-on/die-gottliche-komodie/>

new languages, such as the *in situ* performative installation.²³³ African contemporary art was inventing and adding to the canons of art itself. The show, which Njami positions as not being about Dante's poem but about what we all have in common — the relationship with life, and by extension death — included 60 artists from twenty-two African countries (some artists based in the diaspora), including many artists based in South Africa.

1.2 Contemporary African art and the global art circuit

From my encounter with the context of contemporary African art through Njami's *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Hell, Purgatory Revisited by Contemporary African Artists*, I was now aware of the possibility it offered my PhD project. Contemporary African art is part of the wider contemporary art phenomenon, which most authors (Oguibe & Enwezor, 1999; Bishop, 2006; Sandqvist & Tzara, 2006; Smith, 2008; Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009; Terraroli, 2010; Weibel & Buddensieg, 2007; Weibel, 2013; Harris, 2011; Esche, 2011; Steed, 2013) elaborate as a series of elusive associations between traditional institutions of Western art, losing their grip as the global centre of art, and artistic **practices** brought on by the diaspora, challenging and transforming the very idea of art by complicating its criticism, rationale and production network through unorthodox artistic practices like installation, performance and events. This is seen as operating within a post-1989 globalised and reformed art circuit,²³⁴ premised on ideas of **contemporaneity**, which Smith (2015) elaborates as 'being in time'.²³⁵

²³³ Examples of this can be seen in the seminal exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), presented in Paris, where the use of ritual and 'the event' drawn from the so-called shamanistic outsider-artist's complex participatory performances have, over time, evolved to form new art categories that are understood as contemporary tendencies (Terraroli, 2010).

²³⁴ 1989 is acknowledged as a year marked by significant game changing events on a global scale, ranging from the opening of two seminal exhibitions in the global West/North (in Europe, the *Magiciens de la Terre*, and in Cuba, the 3rd Havana Biennale); the fall of the Berlin wall signalling the end of the Cold War in America and Europe; the fall of apartheid in South Africa; the Tiananmen Square protests in China; as well as the invention of the internet.

²³⁵ 'The multiplicity of ways of being in time, at the same time as others, right now, but also at earlier and future times, in ways that open us to other, non-modern temporalities (including indigenous knowing), and to other kinds of time' (Smith, 2015:1). Weibel (2013:28) also cites Marc Augé's publication *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds* (1999) as the theoretical premise of

Magiciens de la Terre (1989) is often the focus of discussions about the rise and significance of contemporary art, and by extension contemporary African art, because of the debates it generated against a hegemonic postmodernity, towards contemporaneity. However, it was the 3rd Havana Biennale (1989) that delivered the key ingredient to the importance of contemporary African art as an enabling force in the wider art complex. There is not much readily available information on the 3rd Havana Biennale (1989), as most authors (largely Euro-American) focused on *Magiciens de la Terre*. Esche (2011) has established the significance of this biennale, by emphasising its break from the Western-centred view of the state of art, symbolised by country-clustered pavilions, by organising the exhibitions around thematic lines where different curators (co-curators) took on an aspect of the biennale theme and worked with it across diverse geographies (dispersed countries). This effectively broke the Western-centred conception of art, allowing the point of view to be located in other parts of the world. Other significant points raised by Esche (2011) about the innovation of this exhibition include the use of alternative spaces, like coffee shops for the exhibition's seminars (also a new feature) and the inclusion of film programmes as part of the exhibition presentation. This effectively turned the biennale into a form of network of professionals, engaging the wider context of art and its location in the world, transforming it from merely being a showplace and establishing the biennale as a discursive space. From some general informal exchanges with colleagues about the significance of 3rd Havana Biennale, I understand that its innovations filtered into the approach of figures such as Okwui Enwezor,²³⁶ who extended the form of the thematic model and the use of a college of curators as a process of adding complexity to the format of the international exhibition, entrenching the position of the artistic director in relation to the international exhibition model (a title Duchamp had played with in the 1930s). The artistic director offered a vision that the college of curators interpreted, based on their own positions in the wider global art world. What is also characteristic of this move is the rise of the field of exhibition histories, where new

contemporaneity indicating it as a key ingredient to the elusive nature of contemporary art's theoretical underpinnings.

²³⁶ Okwui Enwezor is a prolific Nigerian curator, academic and founder of *nka: Journal of Contemporary Art*. He curated the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, titled 'Trade Routes: History and Geography' (October 12 to December 12, 1997). He went on to become artistic director for *Documenta 11* in 2002. He has also curated the 56th Venice Biennale (2016).

exhibitions working discursively with the **context** of historic exhibitions, bring complexity to the field of exhibition making.

Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009) elaborate that the increasing influence of contemporary African art, particularly within the exhibition context just described, can be seen in the development of residency programmes, academic fellowships, art fairs, art prizes, biennales and so forth, with some focus on artists and other cultural producers of African descent. These are dedicated to, and organised by, for example, prominent figures like Koyo Kouoh;²³⁷ Gabi Ngcobo;²³⁸ Bonaventure Ndikung;²³⁹ and Bisi Silva,²⁴⁰ among others, within the wider international and global art economy. These actors are visible at biennales such as the Bamako Encounters Photography Biennale;²⁴¹ São Paulo Biennale;²⁴² Dak'Art Biennale;²⁴³ curatorial schools such as Asiko Curatorial Intensive;²⁴⁴ curatorial strategies

²³⁷ Koyo Kouoh is a Cameroonian-born cultural producer and exhibition maker. She is the founder and artistic director of the Raw Material Company in Dakar. She curated EVA International — Ireland's Biennale (2016), entitled 'Still (the) Barbarians'. In 2017, she curated the Forum (talks programme) at the New York 1:54 Art Fair.

²³⁸ Gabi Ngcobo is the founding member of the Johannesburg-based collaborative platform Centre for Historical Reenactments (CHR) (defunct), and of as well as NGO—Nothing Gets Organised. She was co-curator for the 32nd Sao Paulo Biennale in 2016. She is currently the curator for the 10th Berlin Biennale (2018) entitled 'We Don't Need another Hero'.

²³⁹ Bonaventure Ndikung is a Berlin-based Cameroonian cultural producer. He is the founder of the art space Savvy Contemporary in Berlin, which he characterises as a Njangi — a form of the South African stokvel — among many other designations. He was the Curator at Large for mega exhibition *Documenta 14* (2017).

²⁴⁰ Bisi Silva is a Nigerian curator, writer and art consultant based in Lagos, where she runs the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA Lagos). She recently edited a comprehensive monograph on the hairstyle photographs of Nigerian photographer Okhai Ojeikere (Silva, 2014). She has curated exhibitions like *If I Could Save Time ...* (CCA Lagos, 2017) as well as the 10th Bamako Encounters.

²⁴¹ <https://www.rencontres-bamako.com/?lang=en>

²⁴² <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennials/sao-paolo-biennial/>

²⁴³ <http://biennaledakar.org>

such as NGO–Nothing Gets Organised;²⁴⁵ and institutional formats and residency programmes such as the RAW Academy.²⁴⁶

1.3 Dakar, May 2014

Having come to recognise the global art circuit and the space available, through contemporary art and its relation to contemporary African art, I endeavoured to take part in this circuit as both an artist and a visiting colleague, networking and participating with my fellow contemporary art cohorts (curators, academics, artists, collectors, art students) in events around the circuit. My participation in the global art circuit would entail applying for candidacy to international exhibition circuits as an artist; participating at conferences that locate themselves within this contemporary frame (a move away from those locating themselves in discipline); visiting international exhibitions such as biennales; taking part in residency programmes; and contributing to symposia as a peer within the wider contemporary art circuit. Upon my return from Frankfurt, I immediately made my way to the 10th Dak'Art Biennale (Dakar Biennale, 2014), curated by Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi,²⁴⁷ Elise Atangana²⁴⁸ and Abdelkader Damani.²⁴⁹ I had met Atangana in Lyon during my visit to the Lyon Biennale, where she introduced me to the commissioner of the Dakar Biennale, who encouraged me to submit a proposal for candidacy as an African artist through the biennale's open public call. From the nature of the conversation with the commissioner and Atangana,

²⁴⁴ Asiko is an international roaming curatorial school hosted by Bisi Silva through CCA Lagos. Its aims are to bridge the gap in critical methodologies that underpin artistic and curatorial practices within the African continent — Asiko has been hosted in Addis Ababa, Mozambique and Accra, to name a few.

²⁴⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/Nothing-Gets-Organised-NGO-1693239974254541/>

²⁴⁶ http://www.rawmaterialcompany.org/_about-RAW-academy

²⁴⁷ Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi is a Nigerian art historian and visual artist. He is currently the curator of African Art at the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA).

²⁴⁸ Elise Atangana is a Cameroonian independent curator and cultural producer based in Paris. She recently curated *Seven Hills* for the 2nd edition of the Kampala Art Biennale (2016).

²⁴⁹ Abdelkader Damani was trained as an architect and has studied art history and philosophy. His curatorial practice focuses on the interrelation between work, space, viewer and discourse. His publications include *Curatorial Practices Outside the White Cube* (2014).

which enquired into my status as an African artist, I understood that they were there to promote the 2014 *Dak'Art* Biennale to potential African artists exhibiting at the Lyon Biennale. Upon my return to South Africa, I submitted an application for candidacy into the 10th *Dak'Art* biennale but was not selected as an artist for the biennale. At this stage I had not yet learnt the art of global exhibition biography writing and the work I presented for selection was far from emphasising my position as a contemporary African artist. While the opportunity to participate is open to everyone, a good biography and a contextualising text that positions your work in relation to the theme is a key factor in distinguishing between artists in a large pool of submissions.

At first I was concerned about visiting the biennale without being a participating artist and without any gallery representation to facilitate my entry into events around the biennale, which I expected to have strict access control as I had observed at the Lyon Biennale. In response to my concerns, a colleague (Kabelo Malatsie) working as a curator pointed out that *Dak'Art* was the most open biennale of all and all I needed to do was to submit my request for a preview pass, as an artist or academic, to the biennale press office with all the required documentation on the biennale's online platform — and pitch up. On a whim a few days before the event opening, I submitted my request, booked my flight, had my visa expedited through the biennale accreditation platform and made my way to Dakar, Senegal.²⁵⁰ I arrived at the airport in Dakar to meet a host of art colleagues I had met over the years, through exhibitions, seminars and other private encounters, and was immediately made to feel at home. These colleagues included academic Ciraj Rasool;²⁵¹ social anthropologist Henrike Grohs whom I had corresponded with when I began my quest for Balobedu material in Germany;²⁵² participating artist Candice Breitz²⁵³ who co-organised the *Between the Lines*

²⁵⁰ The funding for this trip was facilitated through the PhD stipend. After the Dakar trip, I devoted a great deal of time working on funding proposals and learning the art of mobility and project funding. Such a skill is key to taking advantage of, and maintaining the mobility associated with, the contemporary African art circuit.

²⁵¹ Ciraj Rasool is a Cape Town-based academic whose research includes work on heritage and memorialisation. He was a participant in the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures think tank for the *FOREIGN EXCHANGE (or the stories you wouldn't tell a stranger)* exhibition discussed earlier.

²⁵² Henrike Grohs was the director of the Goethe Institute in Abijan, until her untimely death in a terrorist attack in 2016.

exchange programme I had participated in at the beginning of this PhD; and some fellow students from the UCT Michaelis School of Fine Art, who were there on the yearly MFA biennale tour.²⁵⁴ Everybody preached the same story — Dak'Art is the most open biennale. Just go to everything and say hello to everyone and you will be fine. Indeed, the event was as promised, everybody met everybody, exchanged stories about what to see, what projects they were currently working on, and we all seemed to congregate at the Alliance Française (French foreign cultural mission) for lunch in between all the events. These lunches and other social events are a key part of the contemporary art circuit, as a lot of in-depth discussions accompany them. Not in-depth in the sense of robust (although this is sometimes the case) but a sustained encounter with the same person or people over a few days discussing works encountered during the exhibitions.

The events on offer included seminars on pressing issues around Africa and the diaspora, as well as discussions on the trajectory and complexity of contemporary African art, including the problem of the top-down effect of the international exhibition in relation to the local exhibitions. Other events included book launches; master classes hosted through Bisi Silva's Asiko Curatorial Intensive roaming school; the ceremonial group visit to Goree island for a bit of history around slavery; and the art party hosted by Contemporary&.²⁵⁵ These events were in addition to the official openings and other events organised directly by the biennale. The main exhibition (the international exhibition), titled *Producing the Common*, included artists such as Ali Essafi, Samson Kambalu, Wangechi Mutu, Kader Attia, Nomusa Makhubu, Justine Gaga and Mimi Cherongo. The judging panel also reflected some key contemporary African art figures discussed earlier, like Bisi Silva and Nontobeko

²⁵³ Candice Breitz is a Berlin-based South African artist who works mostly with video. Breitz recently represented South Africa, together with Mohau Modisakeng, at the South African Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale.

²⁵⁴ Every year Masters students from the Michaelis School of Fine Art choose an international exhibition to visit in their first year of registration for the Master's degree. In my year, we went to the Venice Biennale and the group before me had gone to the São Paulo Biennale.

²⁵⁵ C& is an online journal for contemporary African art and the diaspora. Contemporary& prints a special issue publication for most major contemporary art events. Available online: <https://www.contemporaryand.com>

Ntombela,²⁵⁶ among others. The official programming also included independent presentations as part of the Off Programme,²⁵⁷ which included the show *Precarious Imaging* (2014) at the Raw Material Company, as well as an exhibition at Galerie Atiss²⁵⁸ where I saw artist Mame-Diarra Niang's performative installation *Éthéré* (2014). As part of my interest in making a film, I began my first conscious attempt to create a film by compiling the footage I made during my visit to the Dak'Art 2014 into a short film clip. The short film was published by APC's archival platform (Mahashe, 2014) together with a report-back essay on the event.²⁵⁹ I would later visit Dakar for a conference a few months later.

1.4 Berlin, September 2013

My reason for being so urgent about travelling to go see the *Dak'Art* 2014 Biennale was because, after my visit to Frankfurt, I had become very interested in the position of the biennale and the international exhibition as a discursive programme. That is the international exhibition as a seminar space, bridging a gap left by art schools. This interest was also because I had suddenly understood the benefit of seeing works of art in context, and in person, as opposed to relying solely on the publications that result from the exhibitions — this practice had developed into a key strategy. This was also fuelled by an encounter in Frankfurt where I visited the exhibition *Fassbinder–Jetzt* (2014), chronicling the contribution and work of filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder through his own films, as well as through new installations, video works and performative works by contemporary artists responding to cinematic innovations developed by filmmakers. This encounter with *Fassbinder–Jetzt* made

²⁵⁶ Nontobeko Ntombela is a South African academic and curator. She was recently guest curator of the Cape Town Art Fair's inaugural iteration of a new section, SOLO (2018).

²⁵⁷ The Off Programme or the Fringe is an exhibition platform outside of the official event, forming part of the wider exhibition's context. Off Programmes can range from invited contributions from the official organisers to self-directed contributions, independent of the main event.

²⁵⁸ The Raw Material Company in Dakar, Senegal, is a centre for contemporary art, education and society. The centre hosts exhibitions and seminars among other activities. See http://www.rawmaterialcompany.org/_home

²⁵⁹ The clip is included in the Picasa presentation accompanying this thesis. It can be searched for under the tags: *Dakar*, *archival platform*. It is also available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7eiQYS6xag>

me aware of the dynamic landscape of film making within contemporary art and encouraged me to see more films in their exhibition context.

The work I was eager to see at the Dak'Art 2014 was *Peripeteia* by John Akomfrah, whose work I had first seen at the HKW show *After Year Zero: Geographies of Collaboration since 1945*²⁶⁰ (2013) in Berlin on my second visit there. Because of my interest in visualising the rumoured Berliner dream into a film (after my discussion with Höckner and my encounter with the Byrne work), I had started to be interested in, and to pay attention to, films by artists, particularly when presented in an **exhibition context**.

I visited the exhibition *After Year Zero* immediately after I had returned from Vienna. Due to my ill-discipline and because I had not yet encountered the motif of contemporary art, I did not fully understand or comprehend the format of the exhibition as a discursive form. The exhibition opened during the same week as the Berlin *ABC* art fair and the Berlin Art Week, which in itself can be seen as a version of Euro-American contemporary art. That week I split myself between *After Year Zero*'s diverse three-day programme and the craze that surrounds the weekend long art fair, without fully immersing myself in either. My experience of the preview night of the *ABC* art fair was rather cold as I found it difficult to stay at the venue. Everybody was so well dressed and just hanging around quietly in little impenetrable clusters. The whole thing just did not invite someone who was not-in to join. I then went to the opening of *After Year Zero* where I was greeted by the loud sound of what I later understood to be a Mandela documentary, flaunting the rainbow nation, and a museum packed to the brim. While I could see that there were talks happening, I could not really concentrate as the place was brimming with exciting people. The whole thing was just electric and really invited me to mingle, much like in Dakar, just with more Europeans. Because I had not done my homework and did not really know what I was walking into (a version of what I later understand as some branch of the contemporary African art circuit), I went there unprepared and did not know the programme or when what started. I was simply there because an old studio-mate (curator-artist Clare Butcher) had insisted I meet a colleague of hers who was in Berlin meeting artists for a show she was working on. I later found that the colleague,

²⁶⁰ The exhibition opened on September 18, 2013.

Natasha Ginwala,²⁶¹ was a member of the 8th Berlin Biennale (2014) focused on archives, who was meeting artists working with aspects of archives. Through email and WhatsApp messages, Ginwala and I agreed to meet at the *After Year Zero* show. In the commotion, I never did manage to meet Ginwala, as the place was simply too full and neither of us knew what the other looked like. I later found that *After Year Zero* presented a series of films around the aftermath of 1945 and included a film installation and talk by Kader Attia, with whom I was still a bit obsessed. The speakers included some key figures working with the form of the film essay, such as John Akomfrah and the Otolith group.

While still enjoying the hospitality of the opening, I had to leave to go to a dinner party on the other side of town, organised by the Stevenson Gallery²⁶² together with Contemporary& around the ABC art fair. The dinner was attended by some interesting people including Berlin's Savvy Contemporary gallery's artistic director, Bonaventura Ndikung, whom I had met earlier in my trip. Ndikung had previously directed me to the work of artist Fred Wilson (around museums and difficult histories — institutional critique), as well as the figure of Ota Benga and the story of a Namibian prince who had performed in the Berlin Völkerschau as an African 'native' by day, and indulged in theatre as a gentleman at night, much to the delight of some German women who fell for him. Aspects of this story are presented in the publication *Kolonialmetropole Berlin* (Van der Heyden & Zeller, 2002). The academic, Christian Kravagna, whom I had tried to visit while in Vienna a week earlier, was also at the dinner. Of course I was not prepared and did not put two and two together. During dinner I sat next to film scholar Marie-Hélène Gutberlet, who had been to Bolobedu. We discussed the myth of Modjadji and the role of the idea of a trickster in art, a motif I used in my MAFA discussions of Modjadji, which I had also been encountering in many of the exhibitions I was seeing in Berlin at that time. Halfway through dinner Gutberlet and I decided to leave the dinner and go back to the *After Year Zero* opening at the HKW, where Gutberlet was one of the DJs at the artists talk programme. On the cab ride there we talked briefly about Akomfrah and South African film essayist Khalo Matabane. I would meet Gutberlet again a few months

²⁶¹ Natasha Ginwala is a researcher, curator and writer whose work engages aspects of archive. She was part of the mega-exhibition *Documenta 14* (2017). She is currently on the curatorial team at the Gropius Bau in Berlin.

²⁶² The Stevenson Gallery is a South African gallery, based in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

later in Dakar, where we were both presenting at a conference on colonial photographs.²⁶³ Later, after a series of conversations about film and shamanism, she would give me a list of films to watch.²⁶⁴

At the party, I met some of the filmmakers from the exhibition, including Jihan El-Tahri who is behind the documentary *Behind the Rainbow* (2009). This was the film whose sound I had walked into at the HKW earlier, filling the museum with ‘Mandela hysteria’ through Mandela’s loud, looped voice and the sound of *Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika*.²⁶⁵ The conversations that evening solidified my desire to make a film as a response to the rumoured Berliner dream Höckner had just told me about. The next day I returned to the HKW to see the show. The show’s different installations deployed a series of archival fragments and historical paraphernalia. In most cases, the films used historic and other documentary archives related to key figures, like Fidel Castro, from the post-1945 moment. *After Year Zero* also included a film programme that showed films like *From the Pole to the Equator* (Gianikian & Lucchi, 1986), which I watched; as well *Cuba, An African Odyssey* (El-Thari, 2007). It was here that I was first introduced to John Akomfrah’s work through the *Unfinished Conversation* (2013) installation. This film essay became the model for my envisioned film essay on the rumoured Berliner dream. A few months later I would see the same Akomfrah film essay as the *Stuart Hall Project* (2013), presented as a DVD (single channel screening) during a film evening organised by my colleague Memory Biwa in Cape Town. The DVD version was a whole different film. It was this moment of realising how the same film can be so different in a different viewing context that compelled me to follow my gut to see artist’s films in their exhibition contexts. So, I went to Dakar to see Akomfrah’s *Peripeteia* installation for this reason.

²⁶³ ‘Photographs of 19th and 20th Century Africa: Changing Perspectives and Object Histories in School Textbooks and Digital Archives’, November 25–29, 2014, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal.

²⁶⁴ A copy of this film list can be searched for on the Picasa platform under the tags: Gutberlet, the conversation, [Dakar, films](#).

²⁶⁵ *Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika* is the South African national anthem.

2. The turn to the film essay: what travel offered in relation to my practice

My travel back and forth emphasised the relief that travelling to see exhibitions brought to my work. I was no longer speculating or making guesses about the impact of key art movements that were affecting my work. I was now in conversation with them. I could appreciate and critique them myself.

Because of my excitement with the *Unfinished Conversation* (2012) and my subsequent feeling that the format of film, presented as an installation by artists like John Akomfrah, would be perfect for my treatment of the rumoured Berliner dream, I endeavoured to find out more about Akomfrah's work. Preliminary research into John Akomfrah's work established his methodology as one employing the form of the film essay, which is also referred to as the visual essay or the essayist mode. Most of the references I was to find, from contemporary art colleagues, emphasised the Black Audio Film Collective's film *Handsworth Songs* (1986) directed by John Akomfrah.²⁶⁶ *Handsworth Songs* meditated on civil unrest in the Birmingham district of Handsworth and in London, which reached a climax in 1985. The film used archival footage foraged from national television archives interlaced with what the Close-Up Film Centre characterises as 'multi-vocal voiceovers, a bricolage of sounds and images',²⁶⁷ which I understand to mediate a complex narrative often lost in conventional film presentations. John Corner (1996) further points out that *Handsworth Songs*' importance lies not just in its theme, highlighting issues of race that were not widely addressed in British film at that time. It was also important in how its aesthetic form raised debate about the practices employed by independent or experimental film — like an elitist attitude to entertaining the audience. The film resonated with my project because its use of archive and personal narrative mirrors my PhD project's departure point, as one rooted in some form of archive;

²⁶⁶ The Black Audio Film Collective members are John Akomfrah, Reece Auguiste, Edward George Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, David Lawson and Trevor Mathison. Their collective, like Sankofa, were part of the Black British Workshops in the 1980s (Fusco, 1988). The form of the collective or co-operative in British film is an important format as it foregrounds the centrality of collaboration and challenges to ideas of commodification and ownership of film works, as well as cooperation with bodies interested in radical change, such as trades unions and anti-racist groups (Dickinson, Cottringer & Petley, 1993).

²⁶⁷ https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/film_programmes/2012/handsworth-songs/

but also because of my growing awareness that narrative was becoming a key concern for imagining *khelobedu*. *Handsworth Songs* also offered a departure point to understanding Akomfrah's trajectory towards the *Unfinished Conversation* and other film essays.

Smoking Dogs Films, which is a production company founded by Akomfrah and two other members of the Black Audio Film Collective,²⁶⁸ elaborates that *Handsworth Songs* deals with the 'idea that the riots were the outcome of a protracted suppression by British society of black presence'. Furthermore, they also point out the 'songs' of the title do not reference musicality, but instead invoke the idea of documentary as a poetic montage of associations familiar to the British documentary cinema of John Grierson and Humphrey Jennings.²⁶⁹ Through these two positions, *Handsworth Songs* emerges as a film concerned with both the question of black subjectivity and how a population is subjected or suppressed, as well as being concerned with the question of medium and how a medium can be used to break the cycle of subjection and foreground systematically suppressed viewpoints — a concern with how subjection manifests. From this point of view the film essay as envisioned by Akomfrah and his colleagues promised me a way to alleviate Lalu's observance about discipline and historiography's effect on foregrounding colonised subjectivity, and my understanding that this limitation was a matter of approach (methodology) to the question of subjectedness and an adherence to the disciplined or persisting colonial idea of archive.

In addition, Smoking Dogs Films has an interest in foregrounding what they define as the fertile ground of the format of 'creative documentary, feature films, music videos and art-based films'. They emphasise an exploration of their narrative possibilities, which they explore through an awareness of the different cinematographic forms, from media such as

²⁶⁸ Smoking Dogs Films is made up of David Lawson, Lina Gopaul and John Akomfrah. For the purpose of this chapter, I will maintain the format of using Akomfrah's name in reference to the work he does with Smoking Dogs Films. It is worth noting Akomfrah's position about the idea of collectives and collaborations, drawing on the naming conventions of jazz bands practiced in the 1950s–1970s. He notes the implied reference to all members of the band, even if only one member is mentioned (Akomfrah & Gibson, 2016:59).

²⁶⁹ <http://www.smokingdogsfilms.com/projects/film/handsworth-songs/> [September 13, 2017].

35 mm to digital platforms.²⁷⁰ This positioning places an exploration of media as inseparable from that of subject matter, a condition true of all art, which only became clear to me through the idea of the film essay. I understand this to point out that, in my exploration of imagining or expressing *khelobedu*, it is just as important to explore media and form, for there can be no expression without form — just as the joke discussed earlier is a question of form. Thus, my interest in the film essay acknowledges its capacity to explore my subject matter and form simultaneously.

2.1 The film essay as a contemporary form

A film essay is, until it is not, the space where ‘dissatisfaction’ (Kodwo Eshun, quoted by Lee, 2017) with existing facilities (in all spheres of subjectivity,²⁷¹ representation and expression) is played out. That is, it is the place where the disenfranchised capitalise on the space that is not closed down by theorisation or regulation. It is a site of negotiation and debate, where there is no-one with an upper hand. I experience this as a space where theory has not yet won the day, where practice or cinematic and artistic practices still manifest as contingency.

Rascaroli (2008) points to the idea of the film essay’s proliferation today, while explaining and cautioning about the idea of the uncategorised or ‘*un-catagorisable*’ (my emphasis) (Rascaroli, 2008:25) to the usefulness of the form. Indeed, the label of ‘film essay’ has been slapped on almost every film form, to a point where everything that is not traditionally commercial is a film essay. What follows here is my crude attempt to introduce some of the practices and theories that have attached themselves to a moment of liberation as the subjected take to the importance of ‘The Essay’ — Adorno’s heresy (Rascaroli, 2008; Alter, 1996) — as a form that sets its own terms. Like the *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), the form of the film essay is a cause for debate, a place where disparity is cause for people to examine the state of things. We see this in Corner’s (1996) discussion of the effect of Salman Rushdie’s 1987 review of *Handsworth Songs*, as one that led to a productive debate about both form

²⁷⁰ Smoking Dogs Films was conceived to produce works of imagination and innovation within the fertile worlds of film, television and new technologies. <http://www.smokingdogsfilms.com>

²⁷¹ ‘To me, the essayistic is not about a particular generic fascination for voiceover or montage, the essayistic is dissatisfaction, its discontent with the duties of an image and the obligations of a sound’ (Kodwo Eshun of the Otolith Group, quoted by Lee, 2017).

and the theme of race in British film. Overall, from Rascaroli's (2008) article, the 'phenomenon' of the film essay is a call to keep open the possibility of conversations brought on by the proliferation of the film essay.

Conventionally, the film essay can be generalised as an audio-visual form, which represents complexity, through the deliberation on a public issue from a personal point of view, emphasising the idea of an attempt towards a particular action. It is my understanding, drawn from Bazin's ([1958] 2003) description of the film essay's key component as intelligence, that the film essay is at once a medium (a series of contingent practices), the vessel for representing research, and the methodology — the method with which one conducts the research. Unlike the documentary, which offers an informed opinion or argument about a particular public issue from the point of view of an objective third person, the film essay is a thought-piece, which is evaluative and deliberative, that attempts to highlight the complexity inherent in that public issue from a subjective or personal point of view.

The film essay has been described by Hans Richter ([1940] 1992) and André Bazin ([1958] 2003) and has been elaborated at length by Alter (2003 & 2007), Rascaroli (2008) and Corrigan (2011). They all describe it as a political, intellectual, personal, deliberative thought piece, in the tradition of the classic written essay, emphasising its ability to transcend the border between fact and fiction. As well, they point to its use of montage of narration, music, picture, text and personal experience to draw attention to the medium, the idea and the subject involved. Key film essays include **Chris Marker's** *Letters from Siberia* (1958), *La Jetée* and *Sans Soleil* (1982), Jay Rosenblatt's *Human Remains* (1998), Harun Farocki's *Images of the World and Inscription of War* (1988), and Akomfrah's *Handsworth Songs* (1986).

The film essay as practised within contemporary art is a device that puts into a compelling conversation historical fine art practices of the West (Euro-America), such as marginalised cinema (1960s avant-garde or film noir); experimental cinema (Dadaism's multimedia collage); and the political concerns of non-Western (African, Caribbean, Indian) and marginalised Western subjects, such as issues of race, gender, migration and slavery (Third Cinema). It mediates the complexity of experience and transforms the world and art itself, its practices and institutions. This conception of the film essay takes the form (audio-visual presentation) not from a cinematic or documentary mode presented on a screen to a seated audience for information or entertainment but from a platform that engages the entire space

and context of presentation. It is not just a film, but a series of 35 mm film slides (film reel) installed as a tent. That is, a film essay as something that can be presented on a curved screen without correcting the perspective, presented to an audience that comes and goes, without emphasising start and end point, without an obligation to inform or entertain.

Within the different forms of the film essay, I am particularly interested in those that use montage and collage. As an audio-visual form, the film essay straddles the technical and ‘traditional’ boundaries of fine art and cinema to realise a sensorial visual experience that blends the two. It relies mostly on a relational and interactive conjunction between photographic (moving and still) fragments, audio inputs (narration, ambient and composed sound) and socio-political ideas (conception of subject, and social experience of reality) as a strategy for conveying an idea, usually about a particular contemporary public issue (Alter, 2003 & 2007). The key idea in this conjunction, explicated by Bazin ([1958] 2003), is an emphasis on the way the different components relate to each other to form an audio-visual collage. That is to say, while the documentary may use the same inputs (e.g. images, sound and political intent) to illustrate each other, the film essay uses the same inputs as interrelated tools, making meaning together, instead of using them to explain each other, or using one to explain or illustrate the other (Bazin, [1958] 2003). Another key aspect of the film essay is its ability to synthesise existing archival footage and newly created footage in a way that can manipulate the experience of time and place.

Within the montage and collage form of the film essay, I am interested in the use of the compilation film and experimentation with collage, such as those practised by Agnès Varda in *Les Plages d’Agnès* (2009).²⁷² In this film, Varda films a projection of archival footage

²⁷² I was introduced to the work of Agnès Varda through Ming Wong, whom I had met in South Africa during the first leg of the *Between the Lines* symposia. I had then gotten into a habit of visiting him whenever I was in Berlin. On my second visit to Berlin Wong invited me to his studio for lunch with his studio mates. They shared three floors of a building in the Kottbusser Tor area. During lunch, we exchanged news about our artistic practices, current and past projects and the increasing role of forms of research in the practice. I discussed my interest in the film essay and archives. This functioned much like a seminar where strategies of working with research are discussed. After lunch, Ming Wong, who was then working on a video installation paying tribute to Japanese cinematographer Akira Kurosawa, shared his film collection and recommended the Agnès Varda film as a possible prompt for the type of film I was thinking about.

from her first film onto a moving screen mounted on a donkey cart, which moves through the city in which the original film was shot; meanwhile, Varda relates a story about one of the characters in the film to the character's/actor's son, who is sitting in the moving cart. Varda's juxtaposition of archival footage within a contemporary scene, and the insertion of her own reflections on the archival footage, create an immediate and relational conjunction between all the elements she is drawing together, giving an examination of the subject matter, medium and the subjectivity of the author (herself) simultaneously, while drawing attention to questions of time.

Blümlinger (2003) has identified a trend within contemporary practices for presenting the film essay, where the form leaves the cinema and television and moves into the museum and gallery space. Blümlinger further points out that this move is not just an appropriation of a new space or context for an established medium, but a new possibility for 'spatial and temporal transformation of visual images' (Blümlinger, 2003:99), drawing attention to the centrality of images in relation to the medium of transmission.

While the gallery space is no stranger to moving images, since video art and its role in installation has become one of the dominant forms of art today, the film essay explores the space in a different way. Lately, some video artists, or exhibitors of video art, want their audience to sit and watch video art as one would a film in a cinema. Curating.org (date unrecorded), in its special issue on film and video art *Curating Film*, illuminates this trend as a critique of the idea of video art as cinema and vice versa. This trend is evidenced in the advent of cinema rooms in art galleries, which try to recreate the cinema in its lighting and layout. The new spatial transformation by the film essayist takes the form of an installation. This is an installation of art that draws the attention of the viewer to the contents of an exhibition, both spatial and contextual, in one place. That is what Bishop (2005) has discussed in relation to the distinction between, on the one hand, presenting a series of paintings displayed in a gallery as freestanding objects accompanied by a wall text or catalogue — the presentation of artworks/objects — and, on the other, the presentation of paintings displayed in a made-up gallery (recreating a defunct museum from another era) as a way of drawing the viewer's attention to the idea of the gallery or museum itself — the presentation of an *idea*. Blümlinger's point about the new trend draws our attention to the idea of what happens when the standard flow of watching a film is disturbed, when a film is not watched passively in a cinema, sitting comfortably in the dark, from start to finish. Rather, it presents a film as something watched in a bright room, with nothing but a small

bench, a comfortable carpet and the option to go in and out as one pleases. This temporal and spatial disturbance changes the experience greatly, moving the cinematic event to a participatory experience, which is one of the key elements of contemporary art's installation art. This approach fosters a fragmented view which allows for contemplation of the object both while it is being experienced and after, as opposed to only after the experience. One of the contemporary key players in this trend in the presentation of the film essay is John Akomfrah, whose strategies within the trend described by Blümlinger can be seen in his film essay installation *Unfinished Conversation* (2012), introduced earlier, which also exists as the *Stuart Hall Project* (2013), which is more like the traditional documentary. In *Unfinished Conversation*, Akomfrah presents the *Stuart Hall Project* as a three-channel HD video, presented on three screens next to each other, delivering the hour-long, one-channel documentary in a shorter time. The use of the three screens allows one to view, simultaneously, concurrent and related world events, relating the events to Hall's interviews, which the *Stuart Hall Project* is forced to edit into some form of chronological order. The process is further complicated by the way the different stories move from one screen to another with such rapidity that the three scenes blend into each other, strung together by Hall's narration and Miles Davis's music, which seem to be attached first to one screen and then attached to another from moment to moment. Overall, the key distinction here is not just its use of film and its techniques, but also the use of space and the manipulation of temporality to initiate a heightened participatory impulse, where the audience takes part in the editing process, through the way they fit together the film essay presented on three screens. While *Unfinished Conversation* uses the three channels in the traditional format — three screens next to each other — artists like Isaac Julian have used the same multi-channel format in a more complex spatial arrangement, where the screens are in different locations and at different heights (*Ten Thousand Waves*, 2010), further promoting the idea of film essay as installation.

2.2 The promise of the film essay

My interest in the film essay is to harness its capacity as a conceptual methodology, considering a wide range of contingent practices and emergent theories. I find these practices and theories to be useful for thinking about subjection: mine; the Berliner who is rumoured to have had the dream; the conveners of the archive (Reuter, the 1960 Lutheran Church Council who sent it back to Germany, the BMS and the ELAB); contemporary actors claiming custody over the question and practice of archive (myself as an artist and academic; Van der Heyden

and Joubert; the German Protestant Church-appointed study process council); and Balobedu in general. That is to say: the public issue for my project has developed in to a question of visuality — a way of seeing, showing and being made to see, the exercising of subjectivity within the persisting Euro-American and colonial structure as an agent, and the exercising of my subjectivity beyond that relationship, by expressing khelobedu from my actual position (situated position) as a contemporary Molobedu who is simultaneously a scholar/academic and artist. That is to say, a resistance to fixed realities (of which the photograph is a correlative), an imposition perpetuated by buying into a Euro-American idea of **time** (time as linear), an emphasis on history as a denial of the present — being stuck in historical time. **Coloniality**. In short, I am interested in the idea of the film essay as the vehicle with which I imagine khelobedu in a productive environment. I accept its ambiguity as being essential in navigating my dissatisfaction with an emphasis in telling, when I am interested in showing — expressing khelobedu here, now.

3. Work attempt 1

3.1 ‘Dream me a dream so that I may transgress a border’

The quest to make a cinematic film essay ended as quickly as it began. Every time I had a story to relate to a camera, the story would never go beyond the introduction phase, so after several attempts I ended up with a series of introductory shots, but no story. These intros were in the style of a BBC documentary, where a presenter walks into the frame in a beautiful contextual setting and commences to introduce what he or she is about to present. This scene is what Wright and Schneider (2010) call the context (framing the discussion) section in ethnographic films, where an ethnographer primes the viewer for what they are about to see, mainly because it is anticipated that the audience may have no reference with which to comprehend what follows. Of course, in my case, I could only ever master the walk up to the camera. I just could not present the context.

I first experienced this problem during the last days of my second visit to Berlin when I first attempted to narrate the story of the Berliners’ impulse to travel. My attempt to tell the story of Balobedu — who, in 1897, practiced a mobility taken for granted today — was obstructed by a persistent story of a problematic missionary, thus Reuter, who had travelled to Bolobedu. It was also stalled by my own inability to tell a story to a camera that does not speak back, alerting me to the realisation that the story I was trying to tell was a story needing two people. The idea of narrating the story to a camera had begun as a form of an audio-

visual diary, field notes if you will, tracking my quest for the Berliner's dream that I had learnt about a few days earlier. I envisioned this diary as something I could draw on later when I was compiling my film essay on the rumoured Berliner dream. This would have emphasised my position as a contemporary person offering a personal meditation on my quest. Perhaps it could have become a fragment that could complicate the archival material I had found in the ELAB, or a subtext that could animate the dream I was expecting to find in the Reuter diary, which I was expecting from Höckner. This difficulty in speaking of the Berliners was partly because I knew more about missionary Reuter and not much about the Berliners. And I had been speaking to too many people who were concerned with the discourse of judging colonialism (here represented by missionary Reuter), to a point that I was unable to think or articulate my own ideas outside of the trend of berating the colonist impulse. To overcome this difficulty (which felt like stuttering), imposed by my own knowledge of the missionary project and my susceptibility to the postmodernist recovery project (academic reflexivity), I began to rant about my proximity to the Eurocentric subversion tendency and the expectation of criticality associated with academic reflexivity. Once I realised that the process of ranting had allowed me to break free from my inability to speak to a camera, I continued ranting for as long as the maximum time my camera was able to record, without stopping — producing a continuous take in a style reminiscent of Jean-Luc Godard's long car scene from his 1967 film *Weekend*, which broke away from the edited car scene. I continued this process three times, changing locations, as I realised how the objects in the Airbnb apartment I was renting helped give me content or visual reference for my rant. By the third rant I was ready to talk about the impulse to travel. In this shorter clip, I introduced a fictional character named Mabele, imagining him as a traveller whose story I would never tell in public. At the end, I had produced a twenty-six-minute audio-visual rant.

That afternoon, I visited Akomfrah's *Unfinished Conversation* (2013) for a second time, taking in the powerful excerpts of Stuart Hall speaking freely. This experience reinforced my resolve to respect my rant as a future archival fragment — a testament to an attempt to break free from the silencing of discipline and coloniality. I named the rant *Etcetera! Etcetera! Somewhere in There you May Find a Story*, emphasising 'Etcetera! Etcetera!' as the phrase that allowed me to continue ranting and not be stifled by my respect for the academic convention of not appearing flippant. I returned to South Africa and presented my rant to the art school's PhD committee (where I am registered for this PhD) as the direction for my envisioned film essay. The rant, presented as an online diary entry, was rejected as a video

work (video art) by some members of the committee on the basis that it was a waste of their time and was not interesting enough to keep the attention of an audience. In addition to pointing out the weight of video works that have come before me, such as those of legendary South African artist Berni Searle, they demanded that I show a bit more respect for my audience by, at least, getting out of my pyjamas or dress up a bit for the camera, as a show of effort; implying that I should employ some theatre, which had become a convention among African artists engaged in self-representation. The kindest comment advised that I edit the film to a short two-minute clip using the techniques I had described as characteristic of the montage. This last point is a valid and important comment, particularly in relation to the quality of works like those of Bernie Searle, but it did miss the point, the point being the work's distance from an interest in representation, particularly its function as a device for overcoming persistent policing of colonial style conventions that suppress subjectivities such as my own. Such coloniality would be one that imagines the audience as themselves and not myself, a work as one fulfilling the audience and not fulfilling the artist — not investing in a convergence of the two. I would not produce another rant for the film essay, but the format of the failed 'intros' became a ritual I practised in every country I visited — a series of stories that begin but never end. These would be joined by more footage of random shots of things that excited me, exhibitions I saw, but mostly shots of lights, conversations and parties that seem to accompany the contemporary art circuit.

The idea of using archival footage or photographs, as Akomfrah does in *Handsworth Songs*, was also thawed by the realisation that I liked collecting the footage more than I liked watching it or editing it into a comprehensible narrative. I became aware of how, every time I would go through my personal footage (footage taken throughout my travels), I would always spend more time there (looking through it) than working with the photographs I had found in the ELAB. I found myself shooting the footage I was editing on my computer screen with my cell phone because I became attracted to the lag that was caused by my computer's inability to handle that amount of audio-video data. That is to say, I became more interested in how an image would slow down and then suddenly speed up, sound would be disconnected from its picture, mirroring some of the aspects I liked about the contemporary film essay's use of cinematic devices, like manipulating the pace of the image and its relation to time or sound. This is also a device in video art. The process of recording these anomalies, which started as references for editing ideas, became more interesting as an end in itself than trying to recreate

the effect by editing my footage.²⁷³ This process became more about playing (repeated action) than producing. This practice of re-recording my footage can be seen also to play into the idea of ‘seeing and not showing’, as the process became about me exploring my personal video archive and my computer’s RAM capacity than manipulating my footage, and not as much about me preparing the footage for an audience outside of myself. This also served as a correlative for what I had begun to understand as a key point of interest in my own dreams and dreaming, which I had been practising,²⁷⁴ along with the attempts to produce a film essay. This practicing involved the rejection of the first dream as the right dream, but rather seeing it as an invitation to continue dreaming, as encouraged in Sundkler’s Zionist dreamers. The emphasis was on the practice of dreaming, as a continuous **attempt** vis-à-vis the process of reshooting the **footage**, as a process of clarifying my film essay. I was also intrigued by how, in the **retake** (reshooting), the camera would pick up and include my **reflection** on the computer screen, producing a collage of me shooting the screen and the images I was shooting, which added an aspect that spoke of the way the film essay was becoming about me looking rather than showing. Thus, as time went on, I spent more time reshooting the footage on my phone and searching through my saved footage, which subsequently tells the story of imagining my film essay. It tells the many stories emerging from my travels in search for the missing Berlin dream and the Berliners’ travels — stories implied and visualised by my own travels to places associated with the Berliners, through my quest for the PhD project and also in the general flow of my personal life, as the research brought me closer to my own family histories. I would call these experiments ‘Dream me a Dream so that I may Transgress a Border’ because they spoke to my urgent need to trespass some unknown barrier. While I was satisfied with the utility of this process in emphasising my subjection as a mirror of the Berliners’ subjection, the only question remaining was whether others would see these stories in the footage archive, and if it were important that they do?

²⁷³ These experiments can be seen in the Picasa software with the tag reference **screen grab**.

²⁷⁴ To practice dreaming is to be more attentive to the conditions that facilitate the natural process of dreaming. For example, maintaining good sleeping habits, not over-stimulating yourself before sleep, or meditating before you sleep. I elaborate on my dream practices in the next chapter.

3.2 An encounter in Paris

During the ECAS-6 conference of 2015,²⁷⁵ I had an unplanned encounter with a filmmaker in which we casually conversed about the form of a film essay. On that day, I had decided to go and watch *Miners Shot Down* (2015) during the early afternoon film slot²⁷⁶ instead of *Our Beloved Sudan* (2012).²⁷⁷ The latter was a film on the Sudanese self-determination referendum that also interested me but that had been scheduled at the same time. I chose *Miners Shot Down* because I had been away when it screened at Wits and at UCT, but mainly because it was a controversial film at the heart of many key debates I had engaged in on the sidelines, and I had not seen it. After watching the film, I had lunch with some South African colleagues and another colleague who had been based in South Africa for some time. They had all been to see *Our Beloved Sudan* and spoke very highly of it within the context of the film essay, which they all knew was on my mind. They were all going to the follow-up session where the film's director would give a talk on the film. I decided to join them and was disappointed to find that it was full and they were not letting any more people into the venue. My colleagues decided to go to other sessions, which did not interest me, and I opted to sit by myself at a restaurant nearby. After the talk, all the people who had made it into the Sudanese session flocked the restaurants in groups, filling up all the surrounding restaurants. Hungry, and needing a break after her talk, the filmmaker approached me sitting by myself and asked to join me. At this point I had no idea what she looked like, as I had not attended the session. I had only been intrigued by the abstract to her film and my colleagues' recommendation that I should look at her work. After a casual introduction of our respective context — two PhD art attempters at different stages, both struggling with fitting into a

²⁷⁵ The 6th European Conference on African Studies (ECAS-6) held at the Sorbonne and at the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE) in Paris, July 8–10, 2015. The conference theme was *Collective Mobilisations in Africa: Contestation, Resistance, Revolt*.

²⁷⁶ The documentary *Miners Shot Down* (2014) was presented at the ECAS-6 on July 10 (2–3:30 pm) at the Sorbonne.

²⁷⁷ The film essay *Our Beloved Sudan* (2012) was presented at the ECAS-6 on July 10 (2–3:30 pm) at the Sorbonne.

traditional ‘hybrid’ degree while we were interested in one aspect of the degree,²⁷⁸ interested in two complementary bodies of work, and both interested in the film essay — I expressed my disappointment in ECAS-6’s film programming, pointing out that the films on offer, mostly by African Studies scholars, were thin and only simulated the pace and motifs of the film essay and not the form itself. At this stage I was looking at every film exhibiting some form of emphasis in the positionality of the film maker as if it were a film essay, largely because everything sounded and looked to me like it fit with the essayist mode which was still ambiguous. For example, I experienced this in Jean-Marie Teno’s documentary, *Une Feuille dans le Vent* (2013) and, to a lesser extent, in Manthia Diawara’s *Conakry Kas* (2004, Yelema Production) and Filip De Boeck’s *Cemetery State* (2010, FilmNatie BVBA). The last two films were both distinguished as Films by Scholars, different to the others listed as films/documentaries.²⁷⁹ I elaborated that the ‘essays’ I had seen mimicked the style and not the actual practice of the film essay I was interested in. They mimicked the motifs of voiceover, repetition, collage of sound; visuals; found material (archival photographs); and new footage; as well as a collage of personal narratives mobilised against official narratives. While I respect them as a very effective genre, these presentations were overcrowding the space of the film essay in the academy, leading to this as the expectation of such a film essay and confusing me about what I was trying to do. This can be seen to reflect an observation by Rascaroli (2008) and Lee (2017) about the overcrowding of the essay form by any film sharing elements commonly used to describe the film essay.

²⁷⁸ A hybrid degree is one that comprises one part practice and another part written dissertation, with both parts weighing equal amounts.

²⁷⁹ In my engagement with the figure of the film essay mode I have encountered what is conventionally understood as African Cinema or Third Cinema, which I comment on as I try to describe my difficulty in understanding the parameters of a film essay. As such my comments on the genre I describe as the African studies film essay is not intended to generalise a complex genre, but merely look to highlight my process of learning about film as I travelled and made sense of my encounters with different cinematic forms in a journal-keeping style. I understand African Cinema or Third Cinema to be films produced from the vantage point of the so-called ‘third world’ (Buchsbaum, 2011) or films that embrace a revolutionary and militant approach related to ideas of decolonisation (Solanas & Getino, 1970).

In the same breath I expressed the horror of noticing that the only film that engaged the full spectrum of the motifs I associate with the type of film essay I was interested in²⁸⁰ was Rehad Desai's documentary *Miners Shot Down* (2015, Uhuru Productions). I criticised this film heavily for using an understanding of the capacity of the essayist mode to present a biased (not personal) account of a complex situation; what I experienced and saw was a group of mostly white Europeans, hungry to march an African president to The Hague for crimes against humanity. The ensuing discussions (after the screening of the film), largely dominated by expressions of European disgust of the type levelled at characters like Muammar Gaddafi and Idi Amin, confirmed my difficulty with the film and left me uneasy. In my criticism of *Miners Shot Down*, I had found that the director understood and deployed the complexities of the sonic register employed by the miners. This is like the mobilisation of what I understood as South African war cries, to pull at my affective instinct to rally around the Lonmin miners and Mgcineni Mambush Noki, the invented hero of the Marikana tragedy,²⁸¹ without affording the same courtesy to the police. At the heart of this criticism was a political position that understood the film as propaganda, aimed at taking advantage of several communities hungry for war against an indefensible government, swimming in a sea of incompetence and inherited social problems with no clear solution.

To me, what was key to *Miners Shot Down* was the deployment of the musical scale (something I understand as music as a material object) established by the priming the world has of South African war cries from films such as *Shaka Zulu* (SABC, 1986). This score composed by Philip Miller is on point and gut-wrenching. It was a calculated measure of balancing harmony with an intense anger that the majority of South Africans are feeling at that moment. I felt as if he (Miller) was using our musical scale against us, a scale my reason could not overturn. The music bypassed the objectivity and went straight for our hearts, compelling us to sympathise with the miners singing these songs, while leaving the police as a silent mob of uncertainty. Perhaps my grievance is that the film was so successful at the

²⁸⁰ At this stage I had concluded that the dominant filmic mode (I use filmic to emphasise the moving image, as opposed to the cinematic or documentary-essayist mode which is important, as it bridges the gap between the two) was the essayist form popular in documentary and independent films.

²⁸¹ The Marikana tragedy peaked on August 16, 2012, with the brutal killing of 34 protestors demanding fair wages for their labour from the Lonmin mine in Marikana. The strike had been going on for about six days.

affective level that there was no defence against it, and my politics were on the losing side. Perhaps the problem was not the film but the audience with whom I encountered the film. Against the measure of a film essay, it really went beyond just referencing the features of the film essay. It put them to work and it paid off. At the end of this conversation (more like a monologue), which included discussions about my (still) anonymous tablemate's difficulty in balancing her desire to make her films and the demands of a thesis, the filmmaker sharing my table revealed her identity as Taghreed Elsanhoury, the scholar whose session I had wanted to attend. She then proceeded to dish out some good advice that resonated with other advice I had received earlier, from film scholar Pervaiz Khan, about being true to the footage. To sum it up, Elsanhoury advised that I take seriously the things I did not like about the film 'essays' I had seen at ECAS-6; to keep working at the things I did like; and that I must remember that a film essay is an open medium that should serve me, not my audience or cinematic conventions. I understood these to be things that compelled me, like *Miners Shot Down's* use of a contemporary and historical South African music scales. My complaint about what I would later call the African Studies film essay, which brought me this advice, has its genesis in my frustrations with the blurring of lines between what is traditionally a documentary film and what I had established as a film essay. To this end I was encouraged to explore the form of the film essay (in my own attempts to make a film) as a series of unordered clips (image and sound) that can be seen as an archive — neglecting the creation of a narrative and focusing on comprehending the narrative that I was recognising in the footage I was already exploring as a personal archive. I would eventually find the things I craved — ambiguity and contingency — in the programme of Africa Acts,²⁸² a festival devoted to performance art in Africa and its diaspora. The *Africa Acts* programme ran parallel to the ECAS-6 programme. It included acts by performer Serge Kakudji, a musical performance by Neo Muyanga, and a sonic lecture with Ntone Edjabe. I spent the rest of my time at the conference attending Africa Acts.

3.3 The African Studies film essay

My frustration with what I had come to articulate as the African Studies film essay began and crystallised after seeing Grunebaum and Kaplan's 2013 film *The Village Under the Forest*, presented as part of Grunebaum's paper 'Unseaming Images: The Limits and Possibilities for

²⁸² <http://africaacts.ecas2015.fr>

Reconfiguring Albums of Complicity’ at the Viaduct conference (2015), where I also presented my attempts to produce a film essay.²⁸³ At this stage I had already started to encounter many films of a documentary nature (well-argued audio-visual presentations calling for action) that I saw as riding on the idea and momentum of the film essay Mode, manifesting as a series of interviews, found footage, archival photographs juxtaposed and collaged with personal photographs, complemented with a narrator and some strange, artsy, abstract imagery and music. Film scholar Pervaiz Khan mediated my complaint during a conversation around his presentation of Akomfrah’s *Handsworth Songs*, and through debates emanating from other presentations on similar issues. Khan’s point was simple. If I accept that the form of the film essay I am interested in is of the likes of John Akomfrah and Agnès Varda, then Chris Marker’s advice is key. The advice emphasised that one must pay attention to the footage and not as much to the aim or narrative of the project — what Khan termed being faithful to the footage; that is to say, to strive to understand what the footage asks of you; or, rather, what the footage is telling you, and not what you are trying to make it say. Thus, the film essay becomes an exercise in listening and watching rather than showing. John Akomfrah echoes a similar idea in a YouTube video interview²⁸⁴ in which he discusses how he deals with the difference between the films he makes for TV and those he makes for his art. He elaborates that, with the films destined for the art market, he follows the footage, which often correlates with his ideas and vision. He emphasises that, in this case, he does not worry about the films being abstract, which I understand to imply that in the films for TV the pressure to be clear often gets in the way of the story being told by the footage. Mitigating my worry about whether the audience would see what I was seeing in my approach to my video archive, he was giving me licence to be selfish about the film essay (as artists are) and, by extension, in the wider PhD project in light of its interest in drawing out marginalised subjectivities, which included my own.

My criticism of the African Studies film does not diminish its importance. On the contrary, in a disciplined field like social anthropology or history, it marks an important leap in the reforming of a conception of what constitutes research output in a problematic discipline. The

²⁸³ ‘Archival Addresses: Photographies, Practices, Positionalities’, Viaduct 2015, March 8–20, 2015, at the University of Johannesburg.

²⁸⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzw1ybDW9LY>

question of what I sensed as a film essayist mode, both in art and within African Studies, is important because it points to the recognition of this form of cinema or moving images' capacity to facilitate the marginalised to portray themselves and easily disseminate such portraits publicly. This adoption of the film essay mode also recognises the form's ability to endorse or encourage the use of some effective strategies, based on an understanding that audio-visual input affects people on a biological level — you experience it with all your body. This affect is premised on the use of specific traditions within the cinematic (staged) and the documentary (non-staged) traditions, such as first-hand accounts, raw footage, satire and propaganda. These strategies are used both through re-enactment and the selective editing of found or archival footage. So, in a sense, both the artist and the new African Studies scholar (my example is the social anthropologist) have identified a version of what can be seen as a film essayist mode as a productive model.

What I had disliked in the films I saw in the ECAS-6 (2015) film programme, and continue to see at conferences and in other gallery presentations, is an emphasis on the stylistic tendencies associated with the formal film essay mode, as I describe it in the introduction to this section. It is the use of form as a mere transmission device, without allowing the form to mutate or at the least to go beyond holding the audience's sympathy for a short moment. It is the simulation of affect as a series of tear-jerking scenes that can be easily overcome by reason and a well-crafted argument, as I often see presented at these conferences. What the Chris Marker film essay approach offers is me 'affect' itself, compelling me to take seriously what reason dismisses as propaganda. For me, the interest in the film essay form lives in discovering my susceptibility, and by extension my audience's susceptibility, to live audio-visual moving images — the affective dimension of the photographic. It is the strategic use of affect, through specific employment of sound or vision or space that is key to the film essay as an installation in the true Marker sense and as explored in some of Akomfrah's [installations](#). It was only after I came to understand the implications of the proliferation of a particular formulation of the film essay mode in the academy, the African Studies film essay, that the format of the film essay became shaky as a base for exploring Balobedu's subjectivity, perhaps because of its commitment to representation. Maybe this is what Rascaroli (2008) was warning against in relation to the labelling of every second film as a film essay. I have observed the rising use of the practice and theory of the film essay as a form within the African, cultural and gender studies departments in the academy to have the effect of reducing the film essay form to its basic elements of collage, voice over and

personal narration. This seems to have the effect of muting my chosen format of a film essay's capacity to complicate itself as a form and the medium with which it is transmitted. That is to say, the African studies film essay seems to only complicate the subject (like issues of migration or gender equality) portrayed by the film essay, and not the technicalities medium of film or conceptual frameworks making up the film essay as a form — it does not complicate a film essay's position as an attempt to grapple with all types of discontent, like subject matter, and a film's capacity to mediate such subject matter. Thus the film essay regresses into a cinematic treatment, a look or an effect, as opposed to a functioning conceptual framework negotiating practice and theory as it was originally theorised by Bazin, developed from the work of Chris Marker and carried forward by Varda's push for more opaque cinema and Akomfrah's towards the installation. Perhaps this is what Manthia Diawara quotes as Glissant's criticism of the transparency of the cinematic image, and the systematic and dogmatic stitching together to make meaning (Diawara, 2015). This is the thing that bothers me about the African Studies film essay: I was experiencing the African Studies context as relegating image and sound to illustration of an argument, leading it back to documentary. From my conversation with film essayist Elsanhoury, I understood the flattening of the potential inherent in a film essay as a form, to be a question of interest or time taken to complicate the open-endedness of the film essayist form.

Having understood the limit to my film essay as an overcrowded field (in my case it is crowded by African Studies film essays) and the reality that my experiments with the idea of a film essay had grown beyond the film essay mode as just a mediating cinematic form, I resolved to focus on the idea of installation — an artistic project presented in a strict exhibition or art context and as used by film essayist like John Akomfrah. As an installation, the idea of the form that is the film essay regains the quality lost by the African Studies film essay. Such a quality draws on installation as present (not historical but happening now), always different because it is determined by the here and now (Groys, 2008:77). My 'failure' to realise a film essay (its form as cinema) is because I was never interested in the film essay but in the space it occupied. Given Groys' (2008) exposition of the installation, it was the installation aspect of the film essay I was interested in. Again, it is the installation I seek in my interest in the medium of the exhibition and institutional critique, possible within the contemporary art context and all the other variations, happenings, events, etc.; an interest in Groys' (2008) openness, facilitated by the installation, the openness of contemporaneity.

Part 2 — Practice, the first attempt

4. An attempt at contemporary art — the space that encourages subjectivity

After the ‘trauma’ I experienced in the process of presenting *InBetween* (2014) within a strict academic conference setting, as I did at Wuppertal, I resolved to locate my artistic practice and PhD project in the different, and more hospitable contexts I was observing in my travels. This is the hospitality I observed through the **Off** Programme I was encountering at academic conferences, as well as through the contemporary art context in general (the global art circuit that I was frequenting). I understood these contexts to be drawing on ideas of contemporaneity discussed previously as ‘being “in” time’ (Smith, 2015). Within contemporary art and the conference-based artistic **Off** Programmes, I understand this contemporaneity to be the post-1989 moment that ended modernist time — time as future bound to the exclusion of ‘other times’ and subjectivities. In the coming sections I elaborate the process I underwent to occupy these different and hospitable contexts.

In all of this, I am reminded of a comment made by Penny Siopis during my PhD project’s practical review discussion, which changed into a seminar about the role of the artist’s PhD — a PhD in Fine Art.²⁸⁵ This one-hour review became a two-hour debate about how my PhD project’s artistic practice functioned as a critique of the very idea of an art school telling an artist what art is. During this review, Siopis came to my defence against a question raised by one of the Michaelis fine art lecturers present, who asked why a camera obscura that I had presented for the review is important *as* art. This question was based on an observation that a camera obscura is a common ‘technique’ and gimmick, available to the general public without the intervention of an artist. Siopis responded by pointing out that my camera obscura was significant *as* art because ‘I’ had chosen that particular ‘technique’ to drive in my point about an issue that was central to me. She further elaborated that this is accepted and expected within the contemporary art context, because it points to a deployment of my distributed sensibilities — me as a **Molobedu**, artist and academic. She stressed the fact that it is important for marginalised subjectivities to present their views regardless of what that

²⁸⁵ Penny Siopis is a South African artist and academic. Her work at the intersection of art and archive includes the video work *Obscure White Messenger* (2010). She was part of the *Between the Lines Symposia* (South Africa and Germany) that I was part of in 2013. She has exhibited extensively locally and internationally.

view's location and position is within Western art traditions or discourse. Siopis's point is a reiteration of the need to abandon Western time lines as the measure of ideas. Here Siopis was responding to the fact that I did not just come to the technique of the camera obscura blindly but had selected it based on my located-ness as a contemporary person. She further pointed out that the fact that my camera obscura work had generated such an intense debate about the nature of artistic practice was proof enough that my distributed sensibilities — my multiple locations in the academy, art world and Bolobedu — could touch a nerve that is often missed by traditional art.

For me this space — occupying contemporary art through my distributed subjectivity — is important because, in my travels to museums and to these international exhibitions with their collegial format, I am able to recognise my own sensibilities and not be pressured into subjecting them to undue scrutiny, because they are unrecognisable to Euro-American sensibility — coloniality. Thus, the space that enables within contemporary art is its insistence on taking seriously one's subjectivity and chosen technology, regardless of their positions in Western history. To this effect, Lalu's observation about subjectivity and historiography, the problem of illegible colonised subjectivity, is overcome through contemporaneity practiced in contemporary art. Overall, my interest in art on a global scale (contemporary art), particularly its ability to accommodate works that confront tradition with work alien to it or that foregrounds neglected traditions such as khelobedu or my opaque interest in light and installation, is as generative space that facilitates, where the wider academy — which, as I argue, is only interested in an appearance of transformation — restricts.

The contemporary art position — me as a peer and participant in the global art circuit — offers a space where the concept of multiplicity finds its fullest expression within the idea of contemporaneity. I understand this contemporaneity to house all the different theories and practices that facilitate my PhD project and me. These are ideas such as positionality (Rose, 1997) or the practice of opacity (khelobedu dream practices and Glissant, 1997). This is a departure from, and alternative to, postmodernism understood to underpin persistent coloniality (Cujano, 2000; Oguibe & Enwezor, 1999). In contemporary art, I am able to explore what I mean by imagining khelobedu, without the burden of having to answer or disclose the methods that I use to an unsympathetic colonial subjectivity. This refusal is not because the methods I use are unsound, but because the process of constantly relaying such methods to an unsympathetic colonial subjectivity distracts from my goal in a way that is

unjustified and undoes the project of transforming and redressing institutional imbalances caused by coloniality. It is in the exhibition, once the work is done, that the work of art enters, or exists as, a discourse, not at the beginning of the work — opacity in the creation of an artwork. It is this distinction that makes contemporary art suitable for incubating possible new approaches, whose existence depends on being shielded from gate-keepers, specifically tailored to such new approaches in the academy. These approaches are drawn from the marginalised's insistence on a new idea of knowing that is perhaps able to mitigate some of the unresolved pressing problems of our time. Okwui Enwezor, in his introduction to the 56th Venice Biennale catalogue (Enwezor, 2015), concedes the artist's capacity to see and develop solutions to the problems caused by modernity. He reiterates his respect for the opacity that is central to the artist's right to refuse to participate in the struggles of fixing humanity, but he foregrounds the exhibition of artistic work as key to the humanities with its duties to humanity. He notes that when artists do participate in discourse, it can only be within an exhibition and art context. Noting that it is only in the exhibition context (the art biennale being one such context) that the work of art enters public discourse and thus contributes to the humanities. As such, my PhD project has devoted a great deal of time to participating within the exhibition context. Thus, I have deliberately focused on publishing the practice rather than putting it up for examination. I have deliberately engaged in an exhibition context that evades the possibility of examination.

5. My practice within the contemporary art context

In my thinking around the idea of the 'ethnographic context', I had initially imagined it as a re-creation of an ethnographic museum in a contemporary gallery, in line with exhibitions such as *Miscast* (1996), or using an actual ethnographic museum, as in exhibitions such as *Mining the Museum* (1992). At the same time, the tension between the idea of institutional critique from below (as seen in the approaches of Meschac Gaba in *Museum of Contemporary African Art*, 1997),²⁸⁶ and institutional critique from within, as seen in Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A* (2010), compelled me to imagine the 'ethnographic context' as a form of decentred critique. A critique centred outside of the Euro-American institution (which

²⁸⁶ This work was first realised during Gaba's residency at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam in 1996 and 1997. Its first iteration, titled the *Draft Room*, was presented there in 1997 (Greenberg (2013)). I have seen a version of this exhibition at the Stevenson in 2011.

includes the academy) privileges some sort of institutional critique from below. In response, the ‘ethnographic context’ was reconceptualised as the *MaBareBare Project*, in line with my concern in this PhD project with the utility of rumour and an understanding of the Northern Sotho phrase ‘ma bare bare’ as a critique of an unnamed expert authority.²⁸⁷ Furthermore, I decided that the *MaBareBare Project* would be located in, and privilege, a contemporary art exhibition context, such as staging it in Bolobedu (my project’s founding location) instead of staging it in a museum in Germany, as I had done with *InBetween*.

5.1. *MaBareBare*: the ethnographic context

The *MaBareBare Project* (2006–) contextualises nine years of creative preoccupation with my imagining of khelobedu, which I express through exhibitions, installations, academic text and public-orientated programmes.²⁸⁸ As a project, it looked to consolidate all the projects that had materialised from my interest in khelobedu into one body of work, instead of treating them as different works responding to different impulses. These were isolating the installation *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012) as a masters project; leaving *Gae Lebowa* (2010) as merely a solo exhibition emanating from my personal project during my days as a fashion photographer; relegating *Modjadji, of Myth and Fantasy* (Mahashe, 2012b) as just an African Studies essay; or looking at *InBetween* as the product of academic scholarship and the needs of Euro-American institutions. This decision to consolidate my khelobedu works into the *MaBareBare Project* was inspired by Michael Fried’s idea of approaching artistic production (he was specifically referring to photography) by asking what the artist’s project is, instead of approaching it with questions of how it fits into the history of the medium it uses (Fried, 2008:30). This proposal I understand to be drawn from the Dadaist concern with how an artist tries to realise the same idea through different media and practices, from within

²⁸⁷ In addition to its reference to gossip, I understand the term *bare*, when isolated from the repetition in *ma bare bare*, to be a critique of the expert’s opinion that insists on its understanding of things outside of its purview. In essence, *bare* is the academic ‘We’ (authority based on consensus drawn from transparent subject), and I understand its use when repeated as *bare bare* to be a critique of this authority. Thus the phrase ‘*bagolo bare ...*’, which can be loosely translated as the ‘elders [those that came before] say ...’, is used when people in power try to stifle the designs of younger people.

²⁸⁸ The *MaBareBare Project* has an online presence as Exposure/Time. See <http://exposurevertime.yolasite.com>

an art context and without. In my case the project was clearly a concern with *khelobedu* or my location as a *Molobedu*, living today and wielding contemporary tools like academic research and artistic practice. My critique from below would emphasise me as the key constituency to be appeased, instead of bundling myself with a group such as *Balobedu*. This was a move to restrict the idea of *Balobedu* as a bounded community, which could easily be commandeered by an academic, claiming expert authority over the group; or by a community-building activist, experimenting on new forms of community; or even by a tribal councillor claiming to represent the ruling house of *Balobedu*. Therefore, the ‘I’ would not be about me as an unquestionable authority, or my flight of fancy, but about retaining my agency and not being subjected by well-meaning activists or academics who draw their legitimacy from looking out for my interests against bigger entities.

5.1.1. *Etcetera! Etcetera! Nestling Narrative*

Drawing from an earlier collaboration through the artist-run project space Parking Gallery,²⁸⁹ artist and fellow PhD candidate Ruth Sack and curator Thato Mogotsi invited me to collaborate on a project they were working on involving the Johannesburg City Library, which opened in 1935 as an *Africana* museum. Sack and Mogotsi were interested in responding to the position of the newly refurbished library as both an active public resource and as a colonial cultural symbol through artistic research practices. This would be a way of probing the institution’s effect on its public. Of particular interest to Sack and Mogotsi was an interest in exploring alternative forms of displaying knowledge.²⁹⁰ This exhibition also marked the Johannesburg City Library’s reopening.

I flew to Johannesburg for a site visit and to discuss the possible format of the collaboration or possibility of producing a new work. The context for the invitation was for me to respond to the context of the refurbished library in a similar way to how I had engaged with the South

²⁸⁹ Parking Gallery was an artist-run project space initiated by Simon Gush. It first operated in 2006 and between 2012 and 2014. The project space hosted a diverse range of *artist*-orientated events such as talks and exhibitions (see <http://www.parking-gallery.net> for more details on programming). I presented my installation *Dithugula tša Malefokana* at Parking Gallery in 2012. See website: <http://www.parking-gallery.net/2012/07/24/dithugula-tsa-malefokane-seeing-other-peoples-stories-telling-tall-tales/>

²⁹⁰ See press release : https://issuu.com/goethejoburg/docs/programm_marapr2014_final, page 9.

African Museum's Krige Photographic Collection on Balobedu, which led to my installation *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012). Or to conceptualise a new work within the context of my PhD research, which engaged earlier colonial context and disciplinary knowledge practices of missionaries in South Africa. From preliminary discussions, I had been interested to engage the library's Africana collection, which I suspected would hold some nineteenth-century texts and documents that could shed light on missionary activity in South Africa. I was also hopeful of finding some images related to the 1897 [Transvaal Exhibitions](#) that, according to some of the [postcards](#) I had found in Berlin,²⁹¹ may have been shown or presented in some form in Johannesburg. On my arrival I was given a tour of the library's different refurbished sites, including the Africana section with the restored vitrines as well as the restored public theatre within the library. During the visit, which happened during the rainy season in Johannesburg (March), I became drawn to the restored theatre that had been flooded with some storm water from an adjacent building. The gallery area in front of the stage had amassed a large puddle of water that reflected the windows onto the ceiling, creating a beautiful play of light as we walked through and around the puddle. Excited by this chance situation I immediately proposed a video work that would interact with this out-of-place pool of water. We agreed that since the exhibition was happening within the rainy season it was likely that the theatre would be flooded during the exhibition period. Through further conversations, I proposed my video work *Etcetera! Etcetera! Somewhere in There you May Find a Story* (2013), drawing on the previously described recorded rant about researching colonial archives that I had filmed while in Berlin the previous year. Sack and Mogotsi accepted this and I began making tests on how the video image would translate on water.²⁹² We decided to hold off telling the Johannesburg City Library management about the relationship between my proposed screening and the chance of the space being flooded, in case they decided to rectify the situation I was hoping to take advantage of.

²⁹¹ Use the tag [Transvaal Exhibition Johannesburg](#) in the Picasa platform to see the postcards.

²⁹² Sketches and tests images can be found on the Picasa platform under the tags: [nestling narrative](#), [Johannesburg library](#), [notes](#), [etcetera! etcetera!](#)

The exhibition was called *Nestling Narrative* (2014) and was spread across two sites,²⁹³ the Johannesburg City Library and the project space Goethe on Main.²⁹⁴ *Nestling Narrative* considered questions of narrative and archives, and *Etcetera! Etcetera!* fitted perfectly within this theme as it explored my attempts to escape forms that privileged missionary archives and narrative while exploring alternative forms of storytelling and displaying video. A few days before the exhibition opening, when the library management realised that my installation would take advantage of the flooding in the theatre, they decided to close the theatre to the public on account of health and safety until the flooding problem was resolved, effectively dashing the installation plans.²⁹⁵

To preserve the impulse of the proposed installation, I reconceptualised it for the Goethe on Main project space in the gentrified Maboneng precinct in downtown Johannesburg. With the blessing of the Goethe Institute, we choose an obscure area with a fire hose under a staircase near the entrance of the Goethe on Main project space, which could be easily flooded without causing damage to the structure and could easily be isolated from the lights illuminating other works within the space. To link the two exhibition venues, we sourced an identical carpet to the one that used to be in the Johannesburg City Library's theatre and installed it under the Goethe on Main staircase. We flooded the area and proceeded with the projection as planned. A small piece of the carpet was presented in a vitrine in the Johannesburg City Library as my contribution to the library leg of the exhibition.

The process of proposing and using *Etcetera! Etcetera!* to engage this library project, and the subsequent difficulties and solutions, had served as a way of thinking about the question of

²⁹³ The exhibition ran from April 3 to 20, 2018, at the Johannesburg City Library and Goethe on Main.

²⁹⁴ Goethe on Main is a multi-disciplinary project space functioning as a contemporary art platform for the Goethe Institute (a German foreign mission for culture). Goethe on Main operated between 2009 and 2016. See <https://www.goethe.de/ins/za/en/kul/sup/gom.html> for programming details.

²⁹⁵ The flooding would have been an embarrassment to the City of Johannesburg, especially as the city had recently received bad press for a burst sewer pipe in the Johannesburg Art Gallery's storerooms, courting narratives of the city's neglect of its cultural institutions.

my rant (the basis for the video work *Etcetera! Etcetera!*),²⁹⁶ not as just an expression of my frustration with academic conventions and Eurocentric colonial preoccupations but as a chance to explore a fascination with the idea of projected light that I had chanced upon in the Johannesburg City Library's theatre. The process also pointed out the instrumentality of the 'project space' which, over time, has become a refuge for hosting artistic projects that may not necessarily be accommodated by bigger 'national' institutions such as the Johannesburg City Library, the Johannesburg Art Gallery or the Wits Art Museum that may want to deal only with projects that do not upset or complicate their health and safety protocols, or engage in expensive special projects to circumvent health and safety concerns. The question of flooding a public institution for an artwork is not a new one. While most young artists would execute such an art act/work using guerrilla tactics as I had planned to do (by not informing the institution of my plans to take advantage of a naturally occurring and potentially embarrassing situation), I have encountered similar projects that have taken place with the full support of public institutions. For example, in 2015 while in Paris for the ECAS-6, I encountered the work *Acquaalta* (2015) by Céleste Boursier-Mougenot at the Palais de Tokyo Museum where the artist had flooded almost half of the basement level gallery for an installation staging the annual flooding of the Venetian lagoon.²⁹⁷ Through my participation in *Nestling Narrative*, I have come to understand the 'project space' as a space where young artists without the standing to demand high production budgets can realise projects that have potential for transgression or creative interventions that bypass the usual permissions and protocols of the formal institutions.

²⁹⁶ Within the *Nestling Narrative* exhibition, *Etcetera! Etcetera!* took the form of an installation where the video is projected on to a flooded floor surface, resulting in a reflected image that is visible on the ceiling or walls, depending on the angle the projected image hits the water. The effect of the water is further heightened when people walk on the flooded water, disturbing the reflection and leading to a distorted image.

²⁹⁷ *Acquaalta* ran at the Palais de Tokyo from June 23 to September 12, 2015. In this installation the audience was invited to pilot a boat across a man-made lake as a way to see some video work presented throughout the space.

5.1.2 *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* — some trips to Bolobedu

Gae Lebowa Fieldworks is a project born of a desire to give back to my community, not as charity but as a process of affirming that the European museums are not the only ones that require transformation or methodological updating. In 2014, while working on this PhD, I received funding from the South African Lotto Fund. I and some colleagues from the Centre for Curating the Archive (CCA) at the Michaelis School of Fine Art had applied for funding as an academic exercise during our masters project in 2011/2012. For the project, we had proposed a series of field trips that would use education and art as processes of thinking about the archive and its role in producing heritage, based on methods associated with a fieldwork model. I had specifically proposed a series of field trips to Bolobedu to record oral histories, with students in a school in Bolobedu. Because I was now in the PhD programme, the masters group had dispersed, and the reality was that the money had arrived two years too late. I had the opportunity to reconceptualise the proposal in line with my PhD project. I decided to keep the idea of fieldwork and emphasised a problem I had become aware of. Because I had entered the academy and was now living in Cape Town, I was no longer able to spend much time in Bolobedu, and I had identified this distance from Bolobedu as the reason for my inability to tell stories about Bolobedu. I had noticed that because I spent so much time with academics, in a largely Eurocentric city, I was more able to relate stories about their (academics') concerns. Cognisant of this situation, I reconceptualised the *Fieldworks* project to direct high school students to the vantage position of being based in Bolobedu, to appreciate the importance of using their time while still based in Bolobedu to engage in basic research while they still had the opportunity. The project would involve a series of field trips to Bolobedu for me, would engage three schools, working with Grade 10 visual art students, Grade 11 history students and the teachers responsible for these subjects. The project would entail giving the students an oral history assignment using some material drawn from my *khelobedu* research, to try to solicit oral history from their communities and elders. I would run workshops with the students and teachers around the role of archives in constructing history, and install an exhibition of the artwork I had produced from my work on *khelobedu*. In particular, the project entailed making all my research material (books, photographs and so forth) available to the students and giving them basic training on different ways of dealing with archive, or simply making them aware that an archive is not necessarily something in the past but an everyday reality in which they participated, through their use of platforms like Facebook or WhatsApp.

For this project, I worked with three high schools, namely: Kgapane High School, located in Ga-Kgapane (Bolobedu's location); Mahuletja High School, located in Medingen; and Masalanabo, located in Khehlakoni (Bolobedu's capital). I provided each school with a reader booklet and an iPad, both containing copies of the Balobedu photographic archives (my own, Fritz Reuter's and Eileen Krige's photos), with some written text-based archives and publications I had amassed through my research into Balobedu. I also provided each school with all the key texts that are responsible for the status of Balobedu as subjects of ethnography, texts such as Krige's *Realm of a Rain Queen* (Krige & Krige, [1943] 1980); a copy of the article *Who Killed the Rain Queen?* (McGregor, 2007); and the volume *The Mudjadji Dynasty* (Motshekga, 2010), among other titles. I also gave them digitised copies of a 1952 sound recording (originally on reel tape) by German linguist Ernst Westphal,²⁹⁸ containing samples of Balobedu grammar; as well as a copy of pages from a handwritten notebook with some 1930s transcriptions of Balobedu oral tradition, written by Lobedu councillor Albert Mathekga, collected by state ethnologist Van Warmelo.²⁹⁹

I conducted week-long monthly visits over eight months, spending a day with each school and an additional three days negotiating with different participants in the projects, like the Balobedu tribal council, the education department and the teachers involved in the project. I also took the opportunity to live with my grandmother, continuing a conversation I had begun in 2006 when I used to visit my great-grandmother. The *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* project (2014–2015) also included an exhibition and provision for a book component as per original funding application. For the exhibition, I negotiated to use the 1930 Cape Dutch reception house named 'Ntlo Tšhweu' (White House) built by the BMS as a reception house for Europeans visiting Modjadji III. **Ntlo Tšhweu** is located in the heart of the Balobedu royal

²⁹⁸ The recordings session was facilitated by Reuter's mission station. The sound recording includes a short oration of Balobedu history as well as a systematic survey of the grammatical variations in the Khelobedu language. These recordings are available at the UCT archives, under accession No. BC 1143. A descriptive synopsis is available as Appendix 2a in the red filling system.

²⁹⁹ The transcription by Albert Mathekga is archived in a notebook dated to 1936. The notebook is available in the Pretoria National Archives in the Van Warmelo collection, under accession No. 337, Vol. 30, item 179.

grounds, near the sacred hut **Malekhalo**.³⁰⁰ I had proposed to present the full *MaBareBare Project* in this building. Two weeks before the exhibition opening I was informed by the tribal council that I would not be able to let Shangaan students in to the venue (Ntlo Tšhweu) because of an old law that restricted Shangaan people's access to the Balobedu royal grounds. The reason given for this restriction was the location of the venue, which could only be accessed through a route that passed near the sacred Lobedu ascension hut Malekhalo. This area was forbidden for Shangaan people due to taboos around pork and an old betrayal dating back to the wars Balobedu fought against the Boers.³⁰¹ While there had been special provisions made to access the reception house without bridging restricted areas during apartheid times, that road had become overgrown and the tribal council had financial limitations for rehabilitating the special road that had been used by Gazankulu (Shangaan Bantustan) officials.

Confronted with this difficulty, I reconceptualised the exhibition component from a full exhibition presenting the whole *MaBareBare Project* into a pop-up installation presenting just two works, *Dithugula tša Malefokana* and *Neither Nor II*, using a shipping container that could be easily packed up and moved from school to school. The exhibition opened on March 3, 2015, at Masalanabo High School. For the exhibition we bussed in students from the other schools for the opening day, which included a keynote address by local Lobedu historian Moshakge Ballpen Molokwane, and a career exposition guiding the students in humanities career paths.

While the Lotto funding proposal had included funds for publishing an exhibition catalogue, I decided to conceptualise the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* exhibition catalogue as a notebook

³⁰⁰ Malekhalo is the sacred hut where the reigning Modjadji is required to sleep, in order to receive instructions (through **dreams**) from her ancestors about rainmaking and rain medicines. It is also the ascension hut, where the reigning Modjadji commits ritual suicide, after which her would-be successor must successfully enter the two-door hut through one door, take Modjadji's royal things (medicines) and exit out the other door, disappearing from the capital to go and practice rainmaking before she return as the new **Modjadji**.

³⁰¹ At this stage, I was yet to learn the relationship between Balobedu dream practices and consuming pork. Use the tag **pork** to access a video with **Malatji**, the Balobedu tribal councillor, telling me about the taboos on pork on the Picasa platform.

series.³⁰² This entailed a pocket size notebook, whose cover included images from the various archives the students had been working with.³⁰³ The notebook includes an inscription detailing the location and accession numbers of key archival holdings related to Balobedu. These **notebooks** were given to all attending students, as well as those who visited the exhibition. During the exhibition opening address I emphasised to the students that the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* project had not been about teaching them history, but to point out that they occupy a vantage point being based in Bolobedu now. The reason for giving them a **notebook**, and not a finished exhibition catalogue publication, and lecturing them on what I know about Balobedu was to emphasise their position as the conveners of future Balobedu archives. I stressed that they should, where they can, take time to speak to their communities (elders, peers and knowledgeable people) so that they are not at the mercy of foreign experts on khelobedu later in their lives. The idea was not to encourage oral tradition recovery but to emphasise that oral tradition is a process that continues today. To a degree I was encouraging the students to practise forms of Badovinac's (2009) knowledge from below. The exhibition coincided with an oral tradition recovery project commissioned by Lobedu elders, politicians and academic Mathole Motshekga,³⁰⁴ which had local researchers recording oral tradition in the area, leading to several requests by these researchers for the archived photographs from the students involved in the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* project. This increased the students' awareness of the power of such archives.

The key aspect of this project that stands out for me is the idea of the 'exhibition as a project', that is an exhibition as a series of continuing events that engage social realities instead of simply representing or drawing attention to the social reality. My ability to draw on contemporary art strategies, such as the use of shipping containers for pop-up exhibitions, was key in mediating a difficulty that a lot of artists face when working in communities that require sensitivity to their culture — something people with multiple constituencies ('halfies') cannot avoid. While I could have reacted to the Shangaan prohibition by using the opportunity to critique the problematic institution of the Balobedu Tribal Office, my choice to imagine a different space and format outside the traditional reliance on historic buildings

³⁰² The notebook series consisted of 350 identical notebooks.

³⁰³ An example of this notebook is included in the archive box, under part 3 of the submission.

³⁰⁴ The Balobedu queen in waiting is currently under the care of Motshekga.

under the custody of such institutions was key in emphasising contemporary art's ability to coexist with other ways of being in the world. While the position of the tribal office can be easily painted as backwards, it is my location as a Molobedu, bound by my culture to respect the views of my kin even if I did not necessarily share them, that is important. The decision to create a **notebook** series instead of an informative catalogue was also a key resolution. Not only did it draw on local traditions of 'the notebook' containing transcriptions of American songs, kept by many teenagers when I was growing up,³⁰⁵ but it also engaged some practices of artists and curators who are not bound by ideas of works of art and catalogues as simply the single object on a wall or the bookshop, which only a few **collectors** could buy. Such approaches can be seen in the rise of the poster as a take-away artwork, as practised by contemporary African artists, such as Edson Chagas in *Luanda, Encyclopedic City*.³⁰⁶

5.1.3. *MaBareBare* — telling time

In late January 2015, while presenting at the conference 'Validating Visual Heritage in Africa: Historical Photographs and the Role of the Archive'³⁰⁷ in **Buea**, Cameroon, two colleagues that had been part of the conference's Artist-in-the Archive programme suggested I submit an application for participation in the Bamako Encounters Photography Biennale, which would be directed by Nigeria-based **curator** Bisi Silva.³⁰⁸ I had known about the call, which had been widely circulated including in the C& magazine that I subscribed to, but it

³⁰⁵ Older forms of this notebook tradition are associated with a moment when South African state ethnologist Van Warmelo relied on oral histories written by locals for his ethnography of South Africa. Van Warmelo solicited and paid for written oral histories leading to a tradition of people writing their cultural history and folklore in A4 notebooks as a means of upgrading their local historical records and earning some income. I have encountered this practice several times within my family and in my research.

³⁰⁶ *Luanda, Encyclopedic City* presents Edson Chagas's photography series *Found Not Taken* at Galleria di Palazzo Cini as part of the Angolan pavilion, during the 55th Venice Biennale (2013). The installation consists of 23 photographic images printed as a poster.

³⁰⁷ The conference was held at the Pan African Institute for Development-West Africa (PAID-WA), Buea, Cameroon, from January 27–29, 2015.

³⁰⁸ <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennials/rencontres-de-bamako-biennale-africaine-de-la-photographie/>

was my colleagues' emphasis that the projects I had presented in my conference paper 'A Personal Take' (Mahashe, 2014b) spoke directly to the agenda of the famous photography biennale that motivated me. I had previously submitted my candidacy to the **Bamako Encounters**, several times between 2005 and 2012, but had not been selected. I had lost faith in my participation in the biennale. I resolved to try my hand again and remembered a conversation with Simon Njami in Frankfurt that had impressed on me that, in addition to good work, the selection of candidates rested in the candidate's skill in presenting their biographies and their insistence on their positions as artists within the contemporary African art context. I spent several days researching biographies of artists who were being selected for such shows, and re-edited my biography to conform to the format I had observed.³⁰⁹ While my previous biography had emphasised only my research capacity and thus painted me as an academic instead of a contemporary African artist, I reworked my biography to reflect a contemporary relationship between my research and the artworks I produced. Furthermore, I emphasised my ongoing participation in the wider contemporary arts circuit, as artist and academic, which I had not done before.

The call for the 10th edition of the Bamako Encounters emphasised an interest in 'an opportunity to critically reassess and propose new possibilities for discussing recent developments in photographic practice across Africa and the diaspora ... given the increasingly expansive uses to which photographic mediums are put by artists on the continent as they attempt to go beyond reportage, documentary and street photography by moving toward more conceptual and interdisciplinary practices'.³¹⁰ The call went on to position the curatorial focus as interested in harnessing an observation on how 'contemporary artists have become preoccupied with analysing how images come to document and represent reality by putting pressure on conventional understandings of the relationship between images and time'. Taking 'time' as its overarching theme, the biennale invited 'artists to consider and question the idea of time in order to propose new ways of thinking about the past, debating the present, and imagining the future'. They encouraged submissions for

³⁰⁹ A copy of my biography is available in the appendix folder as Appendix 1e.

³¹⁰ Full call for the 10th Bamako Encounters is available at <http://www.contemporaryand.com/exhibition/call-for-applications-the-bamako-encounters-2015/>

‘projects exploring time in relation to ideas of re-enactment, play, storytelling, installation and archival intervention’.

I responded to this call by presenting the *MaBareBare Project*’s concern with engaging the colonial archive through artistic practice, anthropological fieldwork and storytelling. In particular I foregrounded my interest in pressing against persisting custodial tendencies whose practices have developed into even more restrictive regimes of care and access. I emphasised how the rise in creative engagements with the archive has put pressure on the rules for creating history by openly employing play and imagination in the production of knowledge or other ways of knowing or producing compelling imaginaries that portray past event’s complexities. With regard to time, I related how the idea of ‘telling time’ is compelling because when we think of time we cannot avoid the reality that time only exists if it can be measured in events that can be marked and experienced as separate moments. For me photography, particularly the camera, has begun to draw my attention to the usefulness of seeing images not as a fixed fact but as ever evolving stories to be imagined as we go. I emphasised that the rise of photography had predicted infinite archives (Daguerre, 1980), and the rise of the Internet has provided an easy way of experiencing multiple dimensions of time. I concluded that for me, the archive allows me to experience time as not a linear progression of events but as events that can be experienced simultaneously.

I proposed *Etcetera! Etcetera!* (2013) and *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012) for the exhibition and was accepted as a candidate for the biennale. During several Skype meetings with artistic director Bisi Silva, she reiterated her interest in exhibiting a larger body of my work so as to give a fuller impression of the diversity of the practices I employed. We resorted to presenting the full *MaBareBare Project*, which comprised, at that time, *Etcetera! Etcetera!* (2013); *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2015); *InBetween* (2014) as it was presented in Wuppertal; and *Neither Nor II* (2014), which included prints from the *Gae Lebowa* (2010) exhibition. The project was presented across three venues, the old ethnographic museum, the new contemporary art wing and the specially built pop-up exhibition section in the Botanical Gardens attached to the Bamako Museum complex.

I travelled to Bamako a week before the exhibition opened and supervised the erection of the *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2015) installation, which was being presented in the gardens. Because of this installation’s quality as a darkroom, it encountered several difficulties due to its technical specification. Throughout the week it was erected, I received comments about

the challenge it had been for the carpenters, and the museum staff that had been tasked with its production had pushed their capacity as technical staff. This comment was also reiterated within the hanging of audio-visual aspects of Silva's presentation, which included a high number of video works. These situations drew the installation into the realm of transforming the museum by challenging its staff's capacities, which I appreciated because this was now happening on the continent instead of just happening in Europe and America, as is often the case with the work of contemporary artists from Africa. Together with these difficulties, *Etcetera! Etcetera!* (2013) and the video work accompanying *Neither Nor II* (2014) were not exhibited due to a shortage of the proper portable devices. Within this process I was also excited by the realisation that *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2015) had so excited the guard stationed at the special exhibition venue that he literally brought in a whole lot of people to interact with the installation, further highlighting how Silva's outdoor exhibition (located next to a public playground) served to allow easier access points for people who used the gardens but might possibly have excluded themselves from the museum, which I observed as having stricter access control.

To have attempted to present the *MaBareBare Project* in its full context, and for Silva to be interested in exhibiting it as an on-going project representing a practice (Fried's 2009 provocation), echoed the original inspiration for conceptualising the *MaBareBare Project* as such. The programme, which was supported by a series of lectures, artist talks, independent and collaborative **Off** Programmes, as well as school level educational programmes, reiterates Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu's (2009) and others' insistence on Africa and the diaspora's contemporaneity and their rootedness in the format of the 3rd Havana Biennale.

6. Thinking through the film essay: the impact of the ethnographic context for my idea of a film essay

My experiments with an idea of *Dream me a Dream* emphasised the centrality of an image rather than an image's content — the experience of seeing an image or images. More specifically, it is the emphasis on the idea of a projected image's treatment as a material object that makes the film essay as an installation interesting for me. This is of course a product of the process I underwent to present the video work *Etcetera! Etcetera!* as an installation for *Nestling Narrative*. While I found Varda's film essay *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2009) interesting, it was only in its ability to deploy narrative and visualise the mechanism of the cinematic medium that I was attracted to it as a reference for my film essay. With

regard to her treatment of film as a material object, I found Varda's discussion of her 'failed' film *Lions Love (... and Lies)* (1969), which never got projected in cinemas, fascinating, particularly her decision to show it, later in her life, as an installation that presented the film's actual reel as an image object, as she did in the installation *My Shack of Cinema* (1968–2013),³¹¹ instead of as projected moving images. Here Varda's film is experienced as a series of slide frames where the entire film can be taken in as one whole visual without the sound track, or one can choose to focus on specific frames. That is the film as a still photographic image, as opposed to projected fleeting images. This particular thinking and interaction with Varda's presentation of the film reel prompted me to rearticulate my positioning of the installation *InBetween*, which presented a pile of mounted slide film objects on a light table,³¹² as being concerned with the position of photography in relation to ideas of the fleeting image, instead of as just a critique or reflection on BMS missionary practice. This reconceptualisation emphasised the work's location within contemporary artistic practice, concerned with continuing transformation of the nature of the framed art object. This move looked to restore the work's original reference to Felix Gonzales Torres's *Untitled (Placebo)* ([1991] 2013) installation. Torres's installation entails lots of candy wrapped in silver foil, presented as a rectangle on the floor. The audience is permitted to take from the presentation, consuming the exhibition throughout its lifespan.³¹³ This is different to conceptualising the installation *InBetween* as a place where succeeding German Protestant pastors could confront their sins (privileging Western needs over the work). Furthermore, in rearticulating *InBetween* in relation to Silva's 10th Bamako Encounters Photography Biennale, with its concern about archives and what African artists were demanding of them, I developed a

³¹¹ The work was presented as part of the exhibition *Agnès Varda in Californialand* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), in October/November 2013. See <http://www.lacma.org/video/agnès-varda>

³¹² In most cases the slide film is projected. The use of a light table generally is part of the selection process but is not necessarily the intended output.

³¹³ Torres's work engages with the politics of art and HIV in the 1990s. He never sold the work as such, emphasising instead the practice of giving away things as the work of art. Instead he sold the rights to reproduce the work, which comes as an instruction on how to create it, making the piece a new work every time. This draws on the rationale that an installation is always a new work because it is always subject to the condition of the place in which it is installed.

narrative around the work's reference to a debate I had had with artist and PhD candidate Andrea Stultiens, during the course of the Buea conference in 2015. Drawing on conversations sparked by tensions between scholars who felt archival objects are precious and those who felt that photography is not as susceptible to the concerns of such custodial tendencies, I was among those who felt that, with photographic archives, we could definitely afford to be less strict about the importance of the original document. Through this discussion, Stultiens related an incident when working with Ghanaian vernacular photography archives, as part of her involvement with History in Progress Uganda (HIPUGanda). She related how vernacular photographic archives need to be protected and preserved, citing how her assistant, facilitating her work with Ghanaian vernacular photographers, tried to steal/take a negative depicting his mother while she was pregnant with him. Stultiens, who saw the attempt, reprimanded the assistant and offered to make the assistant a digital copy, while she kept the original negatives for posterity. This discussion, which disturbed me greatly, prompted a discussion of what is wrong with the assistant keeping the negative and subjecting it to whatever custodial tendencies he was interested in; also whether photographs are ever lost, or if they are just simply out of view of scholars such as Stultiens. It also brought questions of who had the greater right to the image, a European with institutional clout or the person represented in the image. This debate prompted me not to emphasise security measures for policing the slides used in the *InBetween* installation in Bamako, with the hope that the slides would perhaps find their way into other discourses outside of the academy and associated custodial institutions. I hoped that this would serve to challenge the discourses that arise from scholars who were developing a monopoly on vernacular archives.

InBetween also referenced the work of Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950*, discussed earlier. Mofokeng's installation consisted of a series of found historical photographs that had been copied onto slide film and presented as photographic slides in an analogue carousel projector, projected onto a wall. Here the presentation of the photographs as projected fleeting images with some textual narration reminded me of the form of the film essay that interests me the most, not as a cinematic project (cinematic in the traditional sense of a moving image in a cinema) but as a combination or juxtaposition of image and the verbal (audio/text): that is, a film essay, or rather an essay as a process of relaying what you know about something, through your own literacies — mine being the language of photographic installation. While the work that became *InBetween* used strategies

of Mofokeng's installation (the deferral of the photograph as a static object that can be interrogated at length) as well as Varda's installation (the moving image as a static object that could be arrested), it emphasised the idea of touch, referencing at once the process of rummaging through an archive as well as the process of reordering the story without a linear starting point. The process of thinking about *InBetween* as an installation, which had now undergone three public presentations (Wuppertal [2014], Buea [2015] and Bamako [2015]), reminded me of the utility of the installation as a format that encourages the repeated, yet nuanced presentation of an idea.

7. The limit of the film essay

Going back and exploring my original encounter with Akomfrah's film essay, while keeping in mind the thinking around Varda's and Mofokeng's intervention into my thinking on the idea of the photographic, I was thrust into thinking back on what had worked for me in the original Akomfrah installation, *Unfinished Conversation* (2013). I had seen the film essay both as an installation and as a DVD, and I was struck by the use of the three screens and the way the three screens deployed and directed my experience of the sound — how the sound and the three screens directed me to a structure of its composition. The installation was activating my experience of time, through Akomfrah's own editing, but also through the way the different screens presented different times simultaneously. The sound was further amplified by my inability to quickly make out which screen a particular sound bite belonged to, as if the sound was a separate but complementary register, a separate and at once integral medium. Regarding the DVD presentation, I found it to mirror my frustration with what I now called the African Studies or activist film essay — a collage of the elements that make up a film essay.

I had travelled to Venice to see this presentation of Akomfrah's wider work, including his Venice Biennale (56th) presentation *Vertigo Sea* (2015), which made use of a three-screen projection. A consideration of this revealed to me that it was not just the disturbance caused by the three-channel projection that interested me. But rather it was the exploration of the idea of projected image and the suspension of time registers created by the multiple images that animated my interest — that I had been exploring in my presentation of *Etcetera! Etcetera!* in *Nestling Narrative*, and what I had seen in the way Isaac Julien used the mode of multi-channel video **installation** in *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010) (Hartung, 2013). What is key about Julien's use of the multi-channel video installation in this case is that it does not

necessarily follow the idea of perspective or vantage point, as seen in the classic triptych painting or in the way Akomfrah uses the three-channel system in *Vertigo Sea* (2015) and *Unfinished Conversation* (2013). In this nine-channel video work (*Ten Thousand Waves*), the screens are placed in a scattered way viewable from different perspectives, much like in the multiple points of view of Akomfrah's installation of *Peripeteia* (2014) in Dakar, which facilitates countless associations or relations between different projections.

While I enjoyed *Vertigo Sea* and respect its interventions in the dialogue on the theme of migration and displacement, I found it to be an audio-visual feast more than I found it to be a compelling video art/installation-style film essay (a suspension of time and register) about an issue of representation which, to a degree, it was. Akomfrah had raised the bar in terms of what I expected of his work, and this presentation, as brilliant as it was, did not satisfy the appetite his work had created in me. The work really did affect me on a physical level, the proximity to the screen and the intensity of the images and the sound was on point. The problem for me was that it drew me more to the artifice of the big production video work, which I had previously associated with Isaac Julien's practice, than to the abstract nature of the reality he was presenting. The film left nothing to the imagination, no mystery for me. Perhaps I had now just become used to the three-channel video installation, so that I was inured to it. Or maybe it was that I had seen it at the end of Enwezor's *Venice* Biennale, with an overdose/excess of video and film works that bled into each other. In all of this I found myself drawn back to Akomfrah's *Peripeteia*, which I had seen at the 2014 Dakar Biennale, where Akomfrah presented it as a single-channel video on one curved screen, warping the projected image. The way the film was shot was, first and foremost, out of this world. It employed a series of grand sweeps (constantly moving camera-linear panning) in a scene (location) of overcast lush forest with a vigorously flowing river — a cinematic register that anchored the footage selected by Akomfrah in *Vertigo Sea*. This was juxtaposed with shots of a hooded character coming in and out of the scene, as if the camera pans originated from its perspective (wandering eye). The nature of the projection surface as a giant curve viewed from both a raised platform (4–6 m high) as well as from ground level, dwarfed and consumed the audience. It was interesting as it turned the river into an ocean with the waves going in all directions, as if it would sweep the character away, or you if you stood too close to the screen. Here again my sense of time, orientation and place was disturbed by the

affective effect of the warped image and the crushing sound,³¹⁴ reiterating my fascination with what might perhaps be regarded as video art within fine art — video art as installation. While video art is a bit more technical and refers mostly to the manipulation of the analogue medium exemplified by the likes of Nam-June Paik in *Magnet TV* (1965), which in itself disturbs one's experience of image, to think of the Akomfrah presentations as merely a multimedia installation is also not quite right, as this focuses mainly on the structure. For instance, one of the key multimedia installations I have seen is *Crystal of Resistance* by Thomas Hirschhorn at the Swiss Pavilion of the 54th [Venice Biennale](#) (2011), where an excess of sculptural forms was deployed together with an overdose of photographs and video screens depicting violent footage available on the web and in the news. Here the use of picture (photograph and video), as part of sculpture (spanning wall, floor and ceiling), was interesting and did indeed mess with my orientation. But it did not remove my location in the installation as a spectator — a centred observer with a rotating, but fixed perspective. Perhaps the key idea of an installation is one that raises the audience's awareness of their spectatorship. Akomfrah's Dakar presentation captured this for me.

³¹⁴ The idea of history's weight was carried in the image, the intensity of the sound and the magnitude of the projection.

Chapter 4

Part 1

It has been known for at least two thousand years,
that when light passes through a small hole into a dark,
enclosed interior, an inverted image will appear on the wall opposite the hole.

Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*

As elaborated in previous chapters, this PhD project had aimed to produce an installation-based film essay as part of the practical component of the submission. This installation-based film essay would have grappled with the complexities of the Balobedu delegation's trip to Berlin; my travels to Berlin and the associated quest for Balobedu subjectivity through the BMS's photographic archives; my different positions as academic, Molobedu and artist, and their associated literacies; and, most importantly, the motif of a rumoured dream, particularly its (the rumoured dream) invitation to dream a dream in its stead.

While the installation-based film essay had been the plan and does indeed have the capacity to achieve the PhD project's set task of imagining and expressing *khelobedu* today, instead I ended up producing a series of camera obscura installations as the main object of the PhD project.

The progression towards the camera obscura reflects the complication my dreaming presented to an idea of a film essay as a 'documentary' practice. The idea of the film essay as a 'documentary' practice refers to the nature of the film essay as a recording that can be replayed — it is a document whose image can be recalled in the same way every time. The progression also reflects my appreciation of the form of multimedia installation's capacity to facilitate the *visuality* I was experiencing in my dreaming. The shift on my idea of installation is also due to my encounters with different ways of presenting the film essay as an installation (discussed in the previous chapter), which pushes my interest more towards the idea of installation than it does to the filmic medium. That is to say, my interest in the film essay turned out to be an interest in the form of installation presented/installed by artists, working with experimental forms of the film essay.

In this part of Chapter 4, I offer some context around the processes that led to me taking up the camera obscura as a key aspect of my artistic practice, within the PhD project's exploration of a moment of travel in 1897.

1. The turn to the camera obscura

This turn was influenced firstly by my gravitation towards ideas of mobile or temporary/public installation practices³¹⁵ as a solution to some constraints I encountered with presenting the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* exhibition, comprising the installations *Neither Nor II* (2014) and *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2015) in Bolobedu. As discussed in Chapter 3, my confirmed venue, *Ntlo Tšhweu*, was withdrawn at the last minute due to cultural taboos around Shangaan students accessing Bolobedu's royal 'compound'. This limitation was animated by my desire to escape the traps of other ideas of a photograph. This reflected my frustration with incessant questions about the history or status of the BMS photographs I had collected in the ELAB archive, and the question of a photograph's inherent violence. I had become preoccupied with the question of how I could bypass the persistence of a particular understanding and use of archived photographs within the academy. It was encouraged by the reality that once I began making camera obscura images, at the same time as practicing dreaming, I could no longer accept or ignore my dissatisfaction with the idea of a repeatable image (documentary) open to the review and scrutiny that leads to subjection, as an unavoidable casualty of research.

1.1. The fascination with installation

The experimentation with the camera obscura as a solution to exhibition constraints was influenced by ideas of installation that I had encountered earlier in my travels to Germany and other instances of guerrilla installation practices I had heard about through colleagues. During a studio visit to the studio of Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson, organised as part of the *Between the Lines* (2013) symposia programme in Berlin, the studio manager spoke of a project to build a sphere in the Amazon forest. This discussion of the sphere was as a way of explaining the configuration of the Eliasson studio team, which consisted of more than sixty-five people, including several fulltime architects. Other key insights from this conversation included a discussion of the centrality of the studio's lunchroom and kitchen

³¹⁵ In a sense I was fascinated by the strategies of a travelling temporary exhibition as well as of a self-contained, permanent, public installation. These strategies often rely on contingent forms, such as using shipping containers, which are easy to lock up and leave, and architectural structures that are easy to produce, using standard materials and skills.

(eating and cooking together), which the studio manager highlighted as key to the development of ideas and the studio's artistic process.

The Eliasson Amazon sphere was a sort of clock, where a single large hole would create a beam of light that moved through the sphere throughout the day. In hearing of such a project I was excited about the sphere as a formally and aesthetically appealing shape, and the nature of the installation as a simple, light-based work. I was also excited by the sphere's location in the middle of a forest, which challenged any conception of an art audience I had at that time. This raised in me questions like: Why make an artwork in the middle of nowhere, where nobody may see it? This instilled in me an idea that one could just make projects as a way of simply exploring an idea one has, without any immediate utility beyond experimentation and expression. But it also emphasised the utility of letting the work of art exist as an idea people can relate to, without their actually seeing it, drawing my attention to the materiality of an idea within contemporary artistic practice, such as conceptual art. An idea as the work of art itself: 'The thought is the thing' (Richards, 2002:35) — this can be seen as alienated labour.

At this point, I had been thinking about how to take the original *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012) installation, produced a year earlier for my MAFA project, to Bolobedu, in line with reflexive methodologies that emphasised making one's research accessible to its 'source community'. The reworking of the **installation** reflected my decision to present all my artworks drawn from my research into khelobedu and Modjadji as the *MaBareBare Project* (2006–) within the PhD as I imagined at the time. Drawing from the Eliasson sphere **idea**, I imagined presenting the darkroom installation *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012) in the **Modjadji cycad forest**.³¹⁶ To realise this idea I embarked on a thought exercise where I re-conceptualised the *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012) darkroom installation, which originally consisted of two adjoining rooms, as a single transparent red glowing structure made of glass walls covered with red photo-safe filter film. I had gotten the idea to use a photo-safe filter film to maintain my envisioned structure as a light-safe space (**photographic darkroom**)³¹⁷

³¹⁶ The cycad forest, which once had a large flowing river with crocodiles, is a popular tourist site and is often used by locals as a braai and function venue. It is part of the Bolobedu Nature Reserve.

³¹⁷ A photographic darkroom for black and white paper developing consists of only a low wattage red bulb in a room devoid of any other light. Black and white photographic paper is not sensitive to the

from Mark Dion's tree installation *Neukom Vivarium* (2006),³¹⁸ which Dion presented at a Michaelis MA workshop in 2012. For my installation I wanted to create a room that functioned as a photographic darkroom, but would be experienced as a bright room full of ambient sunlight during the day, with a night light for getting the glow effect. That is to say, the room would meet the technical requirements of a photographic darkroom but would be experienced as a bright well-lit room. For this imagined installation I was extending a small aspect of the original darkroom installation, which entailed small wooden boxes with tracing paper that made up less than ten per cent of the original darkroom installation, expanding this small aspect into a full-scale room. I had wanted this installation to be located in the valley of the Modjadji cycad forest, where it could be visible to the inhabited surrounding hills, glowing red in the evening, hopefully raising questions or encouraging speculation about the structure's function. For this rendition, I had thought of stressing the *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012) installation as a meditation on the mythic Malekhalo hut. This emphasis would be a departure from the original framing of the installation, where I emphasised the photograph's materiality and was less interested in the darkroom's reference to ideas I had about Modjadji (as a meditation on light) and Balobedu. This was my original idea.

This thought exercise was of course overtaken by a realisation, during a location scout for the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* exhibition, that the walk to the envisioned installation site in the valley of the cycad forest would have been too long and dangerous for students who were only available for the exhibition opening for half a day. The route to the valley was also too steep, making the cost of installing *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012) there beyond what I had allocated to the exhibition. Furthermore, the forest had also overgrown since I was last there, in 2006. As elaborated in Chapter 3, my plans to use the two-roomed Ntlo Tšhweu reception house to stage the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* exhibition, for its links with the Reuter mission,

red spectrum of light. So a photographic darkroom is only a darkroom because the red light does not count as light for black and white paper.

³¹⁸ Dion's installation entailed a decaying tree (a nurse log) that had been taken from a forest and installed outside the Seattle Art Museum in a greenhouse structure designed by the artist to replicate the conditions in the forest from which the tree had been sourced. This installation used a film applied to parts of the green house glass to keep it transparent without betraying the requirements for the space to emulate the shaded conditions of a real forest.

were dashed by the Balobedu Tribal Council because of the Shangaan prohibition near the Malekhalo hut. I would eventually resort to use a shipping container to stage the exhibition.

In addition to losing the exhibition venue and reconceptualising the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* exhibition in a **shipping container**, I also experienced difficulty in accessing the negatives, from which the hand-printed photographs used in the original *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012) installation were made, further obstructing my capacity to present my envisioned installation in Bolobedu. The Krige Photographic Archive, used in my original installation, had since been moved from the defunct anthropology section of the Iziko South African Museum (SAM) to the new social history research facility, with new regimes of care and access.³¹⁹ In a nutshell, this change in the status of the Krige Photographic Collection (now archive) led me down a rabbit hole of museology custodial practices, which reiterated the problematic elevation of research as discourse to the exclusion of practice. The fight for accessing the Krige Photographic **Archive** for practice-based research involved arguing against the bias towards desktop research at the expense of artistic research.

1.2. The condition of being enough with the idea of a photograph

While going through my options for how to save the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* (2015) exhibition, which was now at risk of not having its key object — hand printed photographs from the Krige Photographic Archive — I was encouraged by a colleague who pointed out that my difficulty with seeing through a photograph-based installation was the perfect opportunity to move away from, and to test out, my solutions to what I had been criticising. This was the complication of photography and its easy appropriation into representation politics (the trap of self-representation discourses) and custodial practices, associated with cultural institutions such as the Iziko South African Museum and public/state archives. My colleague cited discussions we had been having about the ninth-century mathematician Alhazen; my obsession with the non-Western origins of the camera (the camera obscura); and

³¹⁹ When I first used the negatives in the Krige Photographic Collection in 2011–2012, the collection had been seen as complementary to some Balobedu material culture belonging to the SAM ethnographic museum (Davison & Mahashe, 2012). The collection had now become reclassified as cultural documents that offered contemporary researchers access to the ‘precolonial’ past — my MAFA research and its public presentation had effectively constituted the Krige Photographic Collection as an archive, priming it for public access and research.

the structure of my earlier installation idea, referencing Eliasson's Amazon *sphere* (my idea of a glowing structure in the forest). She encouraged me to pursue this line of thinking towards a new work that was perhaps free from the kind of photographic history, institutional politicking and custodial practice I was criticising: a work that is more reflective of the insights I had gained from repeatedly restaging projects such as *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2012) in different exhibition contexts, or a project that was reflective of my thinking about the context of the *installation-based film essay* — my concern with installation and the complex fleeting image. My colleague reminded me that it was not enough to read up on the camera obscura, which had become my theoretical preoccupation, as a way of theorising and bypassing a problem I was having with the idea of a photographic document. She further stressed that I needed move towards some form of realisation of a camera obscura in order to really make my ideas about the limits of a photograph take shape. She stressed that the camera obscura was more in line with how I had been talking about the PhD project and my fascination with the idea of *Modjadji* as light, as well as my descriptions of my experience of dreaming. From this conversation, I began to make sketches of how I could work the shipping container I had sourced for the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* (2015) exhibition into a camera obscura, drawing in part from conversations I had had with Jean Brundrit about her pinhole camera made from a shipping container (Josephy, 2004).³²⁰ I had also begun a conversation about the nature of a camera obscura with artist Mame-Diarra Niang, whom I had met in *Dakar* in 2014, drawing on her experimentation with the camera obscura in her bedroom.

The conversation with my colleague was drawing on my preoccupation with abandoning the idea of a photographic document, based on what I had articulated a few months earlier at a conference in Dakar.³²¹ In the ensuing discussion from my presentation of 'A Personal Take', I submitted that I had observed the problem, at least with reflexive practices around archived photographs, to lie in the attitude some sections of the academy took to what a photograph

³²⁰ The project entailed making a large pinhole camera from a shipping container, which she used to create a large photograph depicting a tourist scene at the Cape Town waterfront. I refer to the project as a pinhole camera to emphasise its nature as intended to produce a photographs.

³²¹ This was the conference 'Photographs of 19th and 20th century Africa: Changing Perspectives and Object Histories in School Textbooks and Digital Archives', November 25–29, 2014, Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal.

does or did in the past, without properly accepting its wider scope within other photographic traditions — its many histories. I articulated the problem as the impasse of a photographic discourse unable to move beyond one understanding of Susan Sontag's 1980s reflection on photography and violence (Sontag, 1977). This thinking was drawing, to a degree, on what I understood from Long, Noble and Welch (2009) and Batchen ([2000] 2002) as the under-utilisation of a photograph's ability to affect one viscerally (physically, beyond the intellect) as pointed out by Ronald Barthes's punctum — a photograph's ability to affect, or prick, one viscerally — in *Camera Lucida* (Barthes, 1981). This dissatisfaction is especially concerned with how such a use and understanding of a photograph is reinforced within practices associated with the archive: how photographs are accessed, such as the expectation that one must be a bona fide researcher; or ideas of their value as content — something to be read for what they depict or omit, or for the technological history it illustrates; and as an evidentiary documents, such as their value as evidence of previous violence perpetrated (or resisted in my Berliner's case); or their proving that the Berliners did indeed go to Berlin to participate in the human zoo; that is to say, how the approach to archived photographs such as those of the Berliners, which I went searching for in the ELAB, are often only valued as documents that testify to colonial violence and its resistance, in line with a particular reading of Susan Sontag. This also produces exasperation by what seems to be a tendency to limit the use of Barthes's punctum to its utility as a device to force people to confront the violence. This is distinct from understanding the photograph and Barthes's punctum as a cause, to be curious about why people travel, for example.

This led to a discussion, mainly between Marie-Hélène Gutberlet, whom I had met in Berlin previously, Lars Eckstein and me, about the persistent misreading or under-reading of Sontag's context in relation to photography and violence. We agreed that perhaps it was time we moved focus away from canons such as Sontag's toward theorists/historians such as Geoffrey Batchen, who we agreed seemed to be more interested in other histories of photography that could possibly offset the effects of a one-sided emphasis of Sontag and the photographic document. I ended off the discussion by pointing out that I was now turning my attention to non-Western origins of the camera and photography as a way of perhaps charting a new relationship with photography.

Later, in my thinking around this articulation about a photograph and my desire to turn away from the Western history of photography, I understood the problem to be about the idea that photography was taught from the point of view of the pinhole camera, which had an effect of

emphasising the photograph.³²² I resolved to nurture my interest in thinking about the relationship of photography, in its wider sense, to the camera obscura's emphasis on an observatory. I began this by focusing on the idea by *Alhazen*, an Arabic scholar, of using the camera to observe an *eclipse* in the ninth century.

2. Initial Ideas

2.1. *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* and the plans for a camera obscura

After two months of back and forth with the Iziko South African Museum (Social History Collections), I finally received word that I would be allowed to make use of the Krige Photographic Archive to make handprints from the original celluloid negatives one last time. I was assigned a cleaning lab, in which I set up a photographic darkroom and proceeded to make four sets of photographic prints for the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* (2015) exhibition's *Dithugula tša Malefokana* (2015) installation, and for other future iterations. While I had done a lot of planning work towards, and was excited about, the possibility and easy conversion of the container into a camera obscura, I decided that the students needed to see an 'analogue' photographic image. I felt that this was still important for their understanding of archives and photography. I decided to carry through with the exhibition content as planned, presenting *Dithugula tša Malefokana* and a *Neither Nor II* in the container. The plans I had made for a camera obscura, including some later experimentation with a *light-weight* polystyrene structure that could easily be installed in the Modjadji cycad forest, became *Camera Obscura #0*. This *Camera Obscura #0* was envisioned as a public arts project to be pursued after the PhD project. After the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* (2015)

³²² I have since established the camera obscura as the first assignment at Rhodes University, where I was, for a time, the head of photography at the fine art department. This entails students making their own room-size camera obscura and documenting aspects of their camera obscura through a variety of photographic techniques, which include analogue photographs all the way to digital video photography. This is distinct from previous assignments that incorporated the camera obscura as a demonstration of how a pinhole camera works, which only lasted one afternoon. Within this programme, they are engaged with the camera obscura as an on-going exercise for a period of three weeks. Aspects of this have also been introduced at Wits University through *Camera Obscura #2 Kheipône* (2016) that I discuss later in the chapter.

exhibition in Bolobedu, I moved to create a camera obscura in my toilet at home, as a move towards practising my desire for an experience of photography outside the **photograph**.

2.2. Camera Obscura #1 '**Toilet**'

To make my first camera obscura, I chose a room in my home that had one small window opening of about 300x450 mm in size. This was my toilet, which was about 1.6x1.6 m in size. Then I blocked out the window with standard black cardboard available at the stationary shop, using black lightproof linen gaffer tape to avoid light leaks or damage to my window frame. The choice to use cardboard was to ensure that light does not leak through the paper, as would be the case with normal 80 g black paper, but also to make sure that my holes are stable and do not tear easily. I used a towel to block off the light leaking from the bottom of the toilet door and blocked the keyhole with the black gaffer tape, creating a completely dark room. While I had read up on the camera obscura before, most of my readings were theoretical and did not deal specifically with the practical aspects, like how big a hole must be and so forth. The only technical advice I had on hand was from the website MrPinhole,³²³ which I have used as a technical guide and pinhole calculator for the usual pinhole exercise we give to first year photography students, as the first photography assignment. With this at hand, I made my first hole using a small pin, and was disappointed not to see any image. After a bit of trolling on the Internet, I found some specific formulas for making large pinhole cameras and camera obscura in general. I then made my hole bigger, about **5 mm**, and waited for an image to appear. I had also read that one had to wait for one's eyes to acclimatise to the darkness, to be able to see an image. So I went into the living room and stacked three Miles Davis **vinyl**'s on my gramophone and went back into the toilet and waited. After about five minutes, there was still no distinct image and I got impatient so, I looked through the hole where I encountered parts of my courtyard, parts of my neighbour's house, garden and colourful dollhouse. At that point I had come across the **peephole**, which is widely used in art³²⁴ but is mostly famous within the porn industry and as a marker of voyeurism.

³²³ <http://www.mrpinhole.com>

³²⁴ The peephole has been used in art by artists such as in Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés* (1946–1966).

Further reading also pointed out that the bigger the hole, the faster the image would become visible to my eyes.³²⁵ I made my hole bigger (about 1 cm) and indeed an out-of-focus, upside-down image appeared before me. The bright and colourful image was everywhere, on the floor, ceiling and walls; trapped on the glass screening my shower; including on the black card that hosted the hole. I could see the clouds on the floor, and the movements of the birds that frequented the wild berry tree in my courtyard, whose image rushed on the walls of my bathroom with incredible speed. I made many holes of different sizes and shapes with fascinating results, like the closely packed multiple image that forms when you make a long rectangular hole. I continued to experiment with different size holes and made use of a variety of domestic reading glasses to focus the light at a particular distance. I also began to use tracing paper as a way of trapping the image at particular distances from the hole, which led to sharper and brighter images. Because I had made many holes on that single black card, which I would obscure with the black gaffer tape, I began to appreciate the effect from leaving multiple holes uncovered, resulting in multiple images on the same surface. I would often use a combination of small and large holes, as well as a combination of natural holes covered with light-focusing optics. Such experimentation would eventually lead to the signature multi-image *camera obscura* installations I would make later. I also felt bad about the *obscura* facing my neighbour's house, so I experimented with mirrors at a 45 degree angle as a way of diverting the *camera obscura*'s view from my neighbour's yard into my courtyard, and to focus my view exclusively at the Johannesburg sky with its epic large afternoon storm clouds. I kept the *camera obscura* in my toilet for several months as both a site of experimentation and as a party trick for people who would visit my house. The use of larger (40–60 mm) holes, covered with light focusing optics, also allowed me to achieve bright *camera obscura* images at night. In all of my experimentation, I never once made a photograph from the *camera obscura* itself, except as documentation (using an SLR digital camera or my iPhone's camera) of the *camera obscura* itself. This would be me making photographs of my installation, which is distinct from making photographs from the image

³²⁵ The initial images made using the small hole were very dim and almost devoid of colour. They would eventually become slightly brighter and a bit more colourful as one spent more time in the *camera obscura*, but I personally never had the patience to wait for the image to become bright enough for me to see a good enough image.

produced by my installation. Documentation, both in photographs and videos from this initial experiment are available in the Picasa platform under the name *Camera Obscura #1, toilet*.

A month later, I presented my experiment with the camera obscura (*Camera Obscura #1 Toilet*), together with other works from the *MaBareBare Project* (2006–), as part of the PhD practical component review to the Michaelis School of Fine Art's internal higher degrees board. This camera obscura work was complemented by the ambient sound of random voice recordings spanning some imaginings of Balobedu and Modjadji, and the wider ambient sound from clips forming part of the film essay I had been working on.

Throughout this presentation, I was astonished at the amount of debate the obscura generated (both in favour and against), particularly around the question of my camera obscura's technical quality and the unexpected high colour, but also their (audience's) being inside a camera, which, it seems, was taken for granted by most people who were aware of the idea of the camera obscura. The debate also focused on how the obscura could be examined, and the kind of context required to not disadvantage the examiner's encounter with it. This concern was cognisant of the importance of the physical experience of the camera obscura, against the feasibility of having all possible examiners experience it. This debate was couched around an idea to present my camera obscura works as an instruction to the examiner, as per conventions in some conceptual art. Examples of conceptual art that uses the form of instruction include works such as Fluxus artist *Ben Patterson's Lick Piece* (1964) and the wider practice of artist Dineo Bopape, which includes works such as *Silent Performance* (2008).³²⁶

For this review I had presented an installation made up of two camera obscura images in a 5x7 m room, with the images falling on two suspended 3 m long x 1.2 m wide tracing paper, projecting parts of Table Mountain and the street scene outside my studio at Michaelis. The one bright image used a lens from domestic reading glasses focused at one metre from the hole; the other dim image was made using a natural hole projecting onto the second tracing paper (placed two metres from the hole) and onto the rest of the wall and ceiling of the studio. The installation was accompanied by a sound piece, where a woman narrates an extract from the *Bush Speaks* (Dicke, [1936] 1937) about a girl named *Mapula* (one who comes with the rain) who is abducted while at a river by a 'witch doctor' desperate to use her

³²⁶ In this case the instruction is to the curator installing the work.

as rain medicine for an area that had fallen out of favour with Modjadji. The choice of this extract was at once an ode or tribute to my grandmother, also named Mapula, who I had been spending a great deal of time with during my early experiments with the camera obscura during the course of the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* project (2014–2015). This tribute was important because of the constant discussions my grandmother and I had had about dingaka (different types of Balobedu ‘traditional’ doctors) against the backdrop of my obsession with Kgašane as an ngaka (doctor);³²⁷ and my grandmother’s life story and the different encounters with dingaka through her father’s and her husband’s best friends, who were both dingaka. I had envisioned the sound piece as a way of encouraging the audience to remain in the room long enough for them to see the second image drawn from the natural pinhole. Overall, the key area of discussion around my camera obscura developed into a debate about the nature of the camera obscura as a colonial relic, since every colonial town in South Africa had a camera obscura at some point, as well as its (camera obscura’s) position as a domestic party trick. As one of the respondents pointed out, every little girl or child with an eager father/parent had a camera obscura in their bedroom. This was a question of what makes my camera obscura significant as an artwork, to which another respondent pointed out the camera obscura’s location as reinforcing my distributed sensibilities. That is in the way the camera obscura mobilised my different positions as private person, academic, photographer and artist — its ability to reference magic, colonial history, discouraged photographic traditions and conceptual art. From this review’s highlighting of the impact of the experience of photography without the photograph, and the strong response to the camera obscura as indicative of my position as a contemporary artist, the camera obscura became a part of the PhD project as it joined the rumour of a dream and the idea of a film essay as points of practice, discussion and debate around my quest for the ‘1897 moment’ that animates the wider PhD project.

³²⁷ During the time I spent with my grandmother I was preoccupied with a narrative about Kgašane as a ngaka and what I later understood as the story of him hiding the rainmaking charms related to Modjadji’s ascension as a rainmaker. Kgašane is the founder of the Christian community in Bolobedu, whose bodyguard was my great-great-grandfather who had been to Berlin in 1897.

3. The effects of my experience of an exploded visuality of dream

In the previous sections I introduced the following factors: 1) a move to installation as a solution to custodial institutional politics and limitations; 2) the growing dissatisfaction with the photograph as a document that is governed by evidentiary and custodial practices; 3) my experimentation with the practice of making a camera obscura. These three factors crystallised in the adoption of the camera obscura as a solution to a complication I experienced with an idea of visuality (Foster, 1988:ix) of how we see and are made to see offered by the film essay, which is solved, to a degree, by what I discuss at the end of Chapter 3 as the installation-based film essay. This complication is a result of my experience with the practice of dreaming that I undertook concurrently with my efforts to make a film essay; described below.

In Chapter 3 I submitted that the question of the absence of the rumoured dream had been resolved through a process of my practicing dreaming. This dreaming literally involved me consciously dreaming, by practising forms of lucid dreaming I had always used unconsciously. It involved aspects of dream practices discussed in Chapter 3, particularly in relation to the idea of dreaming a dream several times, 'dreaming the right dream' that can be related as an instruction in your favour. I understand lucid dreaming, drawing in part on an informal interview with neuropsychologist Mark Solms (personal communication, June 24, 2014), to be a state of dreaming later in one's dream cycle (REM sleep) marked by paralysis and the dreamer's awareness of their dreaming. Literature (Taitz, 2011) further elaborates that such a state can be manipulated and leads to memory of the dream in the woken state. This process of practising dreaming promised, first, to facilitate the production of a substitute dream (substituting the missing Berliner dream) to be used as material in the installation-based film essay and, second, to give me access to aspects of Balobedu conceptions and mobilisation of the idea of dream, which I now understand to have established dream as a type of political agency based on opacity.

In practice, the process of dreaming challenged my conception of visuality, drawn from my understanding of the installation-based film essay. This conception of visuality (offered by installation-based film essay) can be seen as a simple relationship between audio, visuals (pictures) and text (graphic), used within some form of immersive environment; that is, a sort of multimedia installation where an image is formed by a seemingly conceivable relationship between sound, words, pictures and space. The idea of immersive environments draws from

an understanding of installation as being concerned with the creation of specific environments that become their own worlds, drawing in the audience as a conscious working part within the environment (Bishop, 2005:23). An example of an immersive environment can be seen in Hito Steyerl's installation *Factory of the Sun* (2015), which I saw at the German Pavilion during the 2015 Venice Biennale, or in Isaac Julien's nine-channel video work *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010), mentioned in Chapter 3.

The practice of dreaming (particularly the lucid dream state) proved to demand more of my conception of visuality, as I became aware of a more complex relationship between the different senses within the dream state. For example, I encountered this new complex relationship through my experience of not knowing whether an understanding (instruction or vision) derived from a dream (or series of dreams) was something that came to me as a picture (something I saw — picture of graphic text), as something I heard, as a thought or touch,³²⁸ or all of them at once, or if they were one and the same. That is to say, the hierarchy of the senses, such as the hierarchy between picture, sound, touch and thought, became confusing and confused. This ushered me into a more complex understanding of visuality (experienced through dream) as deploying a multifaceted, multi-sensorial platform I had not conceived before. This is further heightened by what I have experienced as a hyper-awareness of myself as an actor in this dream state.

Prior to this, my conception of the relationship between the senses was limited to the general manipulation of sound in relation to pictures (audio-visual) and the odd relation to space (spatial) discussed earlier. I have always been aware of how such a relation could be mobilised as one that creates meaning (senses in relation), but I had never been confronted with the confusion of not knowing from where an understanding came.³²⁹ For example, in an installation-based film essay, I could always tell which aspect of the multimedia presentation was informing me. In a way, the visuality of dream was one rooted in confusion about the source of my knowing.

³²⁸ This is as when, in a lucid dream, you dream that there is a person in the room, knowing that they are there because the person touched your sleeping body.

³²⁹ In my discussion of how, in *Unfinished Conversation* (2013), 'I could not tell which image is attached to what screen', I was not confused but overwhelmed.

This confusion may also be a result of the amount of information relayed in dream, in what I experience as a short **time**. That is to say, in the dream state, unlike in the installation-based film essay, I experience the relaying of information as independent of time — so it becomes a question of how an audio-visual presentation can be delivered in what time, as distinct from how the **dreamscape** can deliver diverse times in one moment. While a dream takes several minutes, and involves a series of dream cycles in one night, my experience of the dream or dreaming feels more as if it happens in an instant. The key here is that dreaming seems to manage the fleeting image's dependence on time by appearing to deliver vast amounts of information in a short time, information that would usually take a long time to relay with conventional audio-visual or moving image technologies. For example, in my quest for an installation-based film essay, I conceptualised it as an installation where a story was told at different points simultaneously, through the use of multiple monitors, as a way of matching the visuality I was experiencing through dream. I conceptualised this installation to entail a sixty-second **video** clip that would be presented through sixty monitors, all playing a different second of the sixty-second clip simultaneously.

In addition to the question of how different senses interact and the question of time, highlighted previously, this demand for a different visuality is brought forth by the emphasis (mine and Balobedu's) on dreaming as a practice (something you do), as distinct from an emphasis on a dream as a document (some narrative you recount). The difference is between a dream as something you do, without obligation to render its content into a narrative, as distinct from dream as a documented narrative to be analysed or visualised. This is, of course, an aspect of the problem addressed in the previous section in relation to the photograph.

In summary, dreaming introduces me to a different way in which the observing body can be, in relation to the different building blocks of the image (sound, words, pictures and space) in general. The visuality of a dream foregrounds the materiality of time in a different way to the installation-based film essay: that is, it brings into focus time and its role in the delivery of multiple images made up of different sensory cues. This is, of course, the question of immediacy associated with images in general, but more concretely it is in a dream's capacity to manage time better than the installation-based film essay so that I begin to be open to other ways of foregrounding subjectivity. My appreciation of dream's capacity to handle time better is aggravated by the obsession with abandoning the photograph; and dreaming's promise, or reminder, of an ability not to produce a referential. I was thinking about these complications, while the camera obscura was presenting me with a different relationship to

ideas about photography and installation — different to installation-based film essay. This different relationship was not as restricted by the issues of the document or the elevation of one sense over another. In a sense, the visuality offered by the installation-based film essay only reaches a limit in its efficacy for my project when tasked with matching the visuality I experienced through my practice of dreaming. The visuality offered by the installation-based multimedia film essay would not have been much of a problem if I had not been experimenting with the camera obscura at the same time.

4. What the camera obscura does

My interest in the camera obscura is not to mimic ‘dream’ but to reiterate the awareness of being in a dream, which I suspect is the source of my new understanding of visuality. That is to say, my interest in the camera obscura is in its ability to increase one’s awareness of being confronted with an image without the image being separated from its source. This is an interest in an immersive environment that testifies to its (the lucid dream and the camera obscura image) nature as an immersive image, without diminishing its currency: how you are woken up without fully waking. It is in how the camera obscura mobilises the confusion of knowing that you are in a picture (multisensory picture), but at the same time the reality of the picture is also the present, removing time from the experience of the picture. The image has not been separated from its flow in time by the production of a referential document.

It is in the context of confusion and lack of concrete representation that the camera obscura seems to meet the requirements of relating aspects of an opaque subjectivity like *khelobedu* — how the confusion involved in comprehending *khelobedu* makes it opaque. The camera obscura’s confounding of a person accustomed to the photograph (and so not knowing what and how you are seeing) becomes a key point of interest to the PhD project. Overall, the key to the utility of the camera obscura is the possibility of confusion, which may demand or become the basis of a different visuality. From this point of view the camera obscura succeeds and exceeds the film essay, which, to a degree, has been achieved in the form the body this ‘mimic thesis’ has taken.

In conclusion, it is important to understand that I envisioned seeing *khelobedu* by imagining and expressing it. These two tasks require me to uncouple my conception of time or the logic of narrative as one that follows a linear trajectory, delivered over a long duration of time. To achieve this objective, I needed to free my conception of visuality from linear time and perspective, by increasing my capacity to conceive of time/image/light differently. The

practice of dreaming facilitated this process. What I did not expect was how this process would compel me to adjust my envisioned practice (film essay) to account for this new visuality. With this in mind, I conceived the concerns of the PhD project as a moment of travel in 1897 animated by contemporary questions of subjectivity, opacity and dissatisfaction with documentary practices, as a camera obscura. This camera obscura implied at once the fleeting image (without a referential document) and the immersive configuration of the film essayist's installation in real time. This space does not look to mirror the dreamscape's capacity to relay vast images outside of time but to emphasise the body's capacity to perceive outside of linear time — past leading to future; that is to say, to perceive without the option of recalling, rewinding or forwarding. Therefore, it is through my practice towards installation (born out of an interest in a particular type of film essay practice), and dreaming as a process that has no referent and therefore no document to render its author as subject (dream as a seemingly opaque practice), that the opportunity to consider the camera obscura presents itself as a solution to my PhD project's multiple concerns with subjectivity, and imagining and expressing *khelobedu*.

Part 2

5. *MaBareBare* — Camera Obscura # works

This section presents the exit iteration of the PhD project, which is my practice of play with a camera obscura. The *Camera Obscura* # works form part of the *MaBareBare Project* (2006–), elaborated in Chapter 3 as a consolidation of my work drawn from an interest in *khelobedu*. These works (*Camera Obscura* #) have come to be the main body of work resolving some of the complexities of the PhD project's survey of an impulse to travel, first by the Berliners in 1897 and now by myself. The *Camera Obscura* # works consist of six realised camera obscura installations, presented publicly between 2016 and 2018 — *Camera Obscura #1–6*;³³⁰ drawings of possible camera obscura ideas like the '*Mars camera obscura*', as well

³³⁰ The *Camera Obscura* series (2015–2018) currently includes *Camera Obscura #1 Toilet* (2015); *Camera Obscura #2 Kheipône* (2016) at the Wits Art House in Johannesburg; *Camera Obscura #3 Projections* (2016) at the A4 Art Foundation in Cape Town; *Camera Obscura #4 Refusal to Allow Mediation* (2016) in the wall of old city of Jerusalem in Israel; *Camera Obscura #5 A Character's Quest* (2017) at the Künstlerhäuser Worpswede in Germany; and *Camera Obscura #6 Dream Me a Dream* at the Musée National du Mali in Bamako.

as two camera obscura installations still to be realised as public arts projects to be installed in Limpopo after the PhD. These are referred to as *Camera Obscura #0*.³³¹ In this section I present on the camera obscura as a form; elaborate on *Camera Obscura #2* and *Camera Obscura #3* context; and publish an excerpt of an essay that resulted from some conversations with curator Vivian Zihlerl around my positioning of *Camera Obscura #4* as a refusal.³³² A brief statement about the context of *Camera Obscura #5* and *Camera Obscura #6* are included in ‘the box’ as Appendix 1c.

6. The camera obscura as a form

A camera obscura is a darkened room with a single small hole, where an image of the scene outside of the darkened room moves (is projected) through the hole, appearing inside the room as an upside down image. In speaking of the camera obscura, one cannot avoid citing its use as a copying aid (tracing or drawing) within fine art. This use is often recounted in reference to the old painting masters like Vermeer (Steadman, 2002; Crary, 1992:29, 47; Scharf 1974:19) who used it in its classic form as a room housing a body. They would set up a darkened room and trace the depicted scene from inside the room. From 1650 the camera obscura’s design was miniaturised from a room sized affair, giving it its contemporary shape as a small box with inverting mirrors and a translucent ground glass, which hosts an image that can be traced (Scharf, 1974:21; Crary, 1992:30). This principle of the portable camera obscura is still used for the standard photography camera today. In this form (small box for

³³¹ The two *Camera Obscura #0* iterations include *Camera Obscura #0 Mefakeng* in Bolobedu’s cycad forest and *Obscura #0 Thabana ya Dafida* at the Ga-Sekgopo mission station in Limpopo province. Mefakeng refers to a cycad; the Modjadji Nature Reserve has a forest of a special cycad only found in Bolobedu, commonly referred to as the Modjadji cycad. Thabana ya Dafida is a small hill at the top of Setaseng (the station), in Ga-Sekgopo overlooking the Lutheran church and the capital. The hill is also referred to as Monyethaba in reference to Mampatla, my great-great-grandfather, who was in Berlin in 1897.

³³² Vivian Zihlerl is the artistic director of Frontiers Imaginaries. She has curated several exhibitions, such as the Jerusalem Show VIII ‘Before and After Origins’, the 3rd Qalandiya International Biennale and was recently invited as a guest curator for *Documenta 14* (2017) held in Kassel and Athens. Frontiers Imaginaries is a roving art and research foundation, incorporated in Amsterdam and with editions to date in Brisbane, Jerusalem and New York. It facilitates a programme of exhibitions, conferences and publications. For more information see <http://frontierimaginaries.org/organisation>

tracing) the camera obscura functions like a camera lucida, which is a handy and portable light refracting optical device that does not require a darkened chamber to be used, emphasising the multiplicity and diversity of imaging technologies that accompany the camera obscura. The camera obscura is also the subject of theoretical discourse and the scholarship of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century modernity, and its concern with subjectivity and the problem or idea of the observer. To this effect Jonathan Crary (1992) elaborates that the camera obscura ‘was embedded in a much larger and denser organisation of knowledge and of the observing subject’ (1992:27). In this context the camera obscura becomes a metonymy for changing ideas about knowledge and the idea of a knowing subject.

I first came across a camera obscura as a photography student in 2003, at the Bensusan Museum’s photography library in downtown Johannesburg. This modern camera obscura, which was located in a small attic, comprised a rotating tube with a lens and a 45 degree prism, projecting Johannesburg’s Newtown precinct panorama from above the building onto a round white table with adjustable height for focusing the image. I would later encounter a similar nineteenth-century camera obscura while documenting Athi Patra Ruga’s *Performance Obscura*,³³³ during the Grahamstown Arts Festival in 2012. Contemporary artists emphasising different aspects of the idea of a camera obscura have, in recent times, used the camera obscura as an art installation. Examples of this use of the camera obscura include *Ponte Obscura* by artists Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse,³³⁴ as well as Abelardo Morel’s *Camera Obscura* (on-going) series,³³⁵ and Zoe Leonard in the installation *945 Madison Avenue* (2014).³³⁶

³³³ *Performance Obscura* was part of the *Making Way* exhibition curated by Ruth Simbao. It was a collaboration between Athi-Patra Ruga and Mikhael Subotzky and was presented at the Observatory Museum in Grahamstown in July 2012.

³³⁴ *Ponte Obscura* forms part of twelve special rooms at the 12 Decades Johannesburg Art Hotel. See website: <https://12decadeshotel.co.za/the-rooms/>

³³⁵ See <http://www.abelardomorell.net/project/camera-obscura/>

³³⁶ *945 Madison Avenue* (2014), presented as part of the 2014 Whitney Biennale at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, is part of a series of related camera obscura installations that begun in 2011. See <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2014Biennial/ZoëLeonard>

My interest in the camera obscura focuses on the use of its technology's as an observatory by astrologers, scientists and mathematicians, where the act of observing is prized over the act of recording — where the primary use is to observe, where recording is secondary to seeing. Such use includes the use of a camera obscura for observing an eclipse. The use of the camera obscura in this way dates back to the fourth century, with most recognition given to Ibn al-Haytham's (*Alhazen's* in Latin) description of the naturally occurring phenomenon in the ninth century (Steadman, 2002:4–5).³³⁷ I am particularly excited by the emphasis on this use, on the idea of a camera as a space that houses a particular type of observing body; a body that is freed from obligations to keep or make a referential record (drawn directly from the camera, not copied or traced) to evidence (validate or prove) what has been seen, but also one whose image was not framed by a designated projection surface (as seen in the Bensusan Museum's camera obscura).

6.1. Camera obscura #2 Kheipône

In April 2016, Gabi Ngcobo, a curator and colleague at the Wits School of Art (WSOA) responsible for programming the Wits Art House window, invited me to conceptualise a work for the Art House space.³³⁸ The invitation was premised on creating a work in response to Alfredo Jaar's installation³³⁹ *Sound of Silence* (2016) being shown at the Wits Art Museum (WAM) in Johannesburg,³⁴⁰ which was next door to the Wits Art House space.

The Sound of Silence comprised a large silver metal-clad box with white fluorescent tubes on the front (the side visible to street). The structure was installed in the main gallery of WAM,

³³⁷ Ibn al-Haytham was an Iraqi-born scholar whose experimentation with light and vision founded the field of optics. He is credited with the development of the camera obscura (referred to as *Albeit Almuzlim*) as a device with which he explained how light and vision worked. See <http://www.ibnalhaytham.com/discover/who-was-ibn-al-haytham/>

³³⁸ The Wits Art House is a storefront exhibition space attached to the Wits School of Art.

³³⁹ Alfredo Jaar is a New York-based architect and filmmaker renowned for his light-based installations and site-specific works. His work sometimes deals with issues of how Africa is represented in the media. For the WAM show press release, see <https://arthrob.co.za/event/alfredo-jaar-the-sound-of-silence/>

³⁴⁰ Jaar's installation was presented at WAM from February 24 to April 10, 2016.

visible from the street through the museum's large window facade. The entrance to the box was at the back (the side opposite the fluorescent tubes), with a security guard enforcing that the audience only enter when the light was green so that the audience saw the installation as the artist intended — from start to finish.³⁴¹ Inside the sound-proof box the audience was confronted with a video-textual narrative (video with a white typed narrative on a black screen — no sound) recounting the story of Kevin Carter, the photographer who made the famous photograph of a starving Sudanese toddler watched by a vulture.³⁴² The whole interior of the installation is black (floor, walls, roof and seats). At the end of the narrative (about a minute later), two photographic flash lights pop, blinding the audience, after which they are confronted with the photograph of the vulture and little girl, before it fades into black.

My response to the installation (its subject matter) was cold. While I loved the aesthetic of the box and the nature of the box's interior, I was irritated personally by the narrative and the photograph because of its controversial position within South African education and photo journalism.³⁴³ I decided not to respond to the installation directly, resolving to reiterate my position of abandoning the idea of a photograph, by presenting my meditations on the camera obscura without direct reference to the problematics of Jaar's use of that photograph. In a way, this was a refusal to problematise Jaar's meditations on that photograph directly — what I saw as the elevation of a photograph or dominant attitude to photographing and using black people in such discourses. That is to say, while my first impulse was to frame my response in

³⁴¹ This is different to what I have been talking about in relation to the film essay as a presentation where you can start at any point in the film.

³⁴² The photograph was first published in the *New York Times*, on March 26, 1993, with the caption: 'A little girl, weakened from hunger, collapsed recently along the trail to a feeding centre in Ayod. Nearby, a vulture waited'. Carter won the Pulitzer Prize for his photograph depicting the 1993 famine in Sudan.

³⁴³ The photograph is part of the high school curriculum, and I am critical of Carter's glorification within South African photojournalism mythology, and how it seems to negate key debates about the role of white photographers in the mass desensitising of violent images of black people.

terms of critiquing Jaar's complicity with poverty pornography,³⁴⁴ I decided to frame it around what was exciting me at that time.

At this time, I had been preoccupied with the idea of a mirror, drawing in part from how I had noticed that people participating in the selfie rituals do not even take the picture anymore. They simply look at themselves in the live picture mode, sometimes only taking the picture as a matter of habit. That is to say, they use the selfie to gaze at themselves, instead of creating images to be shared with others or as an object documenting a moment for posterity.³⁴⁵ I had also been reading bits of Sabine Melchior-Bonnet's *The Mirror: A History* (Melchoir-Bonnet 2002) as a way of thinking about the phenomenon of being taken by one's reflection, which I was starting to understand to be as old as time. The fascination with the idea of the mirror was based on the lack of a referential picture — the image is always fleeting and ephemeral. I then worked on a proposal drawing on how the personal camera has somewhat shifted, from serving our need to share images with our loved ones into an electronic mirror. Through conversation with Ngcobo I proposed a camera obscura, which eventually evolved into a camera obscura-based mirror work.

The Art House space is a series of two 1x5 m rooms, each with two large windows, separated by a door (with a large glass windowpane) in the middle. This was a classic shop- front display area meant for installations of the shop's highlights. I elected to use only one room and Ngcobo used the other room to present *Untitled (Protest Banner)* (2012) by the Centre for Historical Reenactments (CHR).³⁴⁶ I initially proposed to build two one-person cameras obscura, accessible through the door in the middle of the two glass windows. This was in the traditional fashion of a person in a small darkened room with an image drawn from outside. A light trap, allowing access to the interior of the room, would replace the door. Through discussions with Ngcobo about the idea of photography and the mirror, as well as some

³⁴⁴ Poverty pornography is an economy based on photographs depicting black people as needing aid or mediation from the West.

³⁴⁵ The phenomena of Snapchat can be seen as the epitome of the practice of staring at one's analogue self without a care for the archival question of the image.

³⁴⁶ *Untitled (Protest Banner)* (2012) comprised a replica of a banner with the words 'They will Never Kill us All', drawn from a 1970s photograph of a rally or protest by struggle photographer Alf Khumalo. This work is a result of a project where the CHR went through Alf Khumalo's archive.

health and safety considerations, such as how do you stop vagrants from taking over the space as a home, I proposed a Khêipone (a mirror in khelobedu) as a peep-hole camera obscura.

Camera Obscura #2 Khêipone comprised a large mirror with two holes, which served as a facade for an inaccessible camera obscura. Passers-by could see, through a peephole (drawing on my 'toilet' camera obscura experience), an image of themselves looking into the camera obscura. This installation entailed blocking out the two big windows completely and replacing the door's glass with a mirror with two holes from which people could peek inside the door. The blackened out windows were each given one hole fitted with a 45 degree mirror on the inside and outside, both aiming at the area in front of the mirror. The area just inside the door (inside the room) was fitted with two sheets of tracing paper on which an image of the area outside the door would be projected. The eye-level hole in the mirror was for people to look through, while the high hole was for producing a third camera obscura image of the street scene in front of the Wits Art House storefront. This camera obscura (mirror work) installation comprised three separate camera obscura projections (that can be seen simultaneously): two projecting an image of the person looking into the hole in the glass door, and a third projecting an upside down image of the street scene opposite the Wits Art House. In addition, the mirror, when looked at from some small distance, hosted an identical, right-side up image of the street scene outside Wits Art House (same scene as that of the third camera obscura image).

This installation reflected my fascination with the idea of the mirror, both in its physical sense and in the photographic sense, where a camera obscura produces a mirror image of the scene outside. The installation invited people to look at their reflection and the street scene outside of the Wits Art House mediated in different ways. In practice the installation was limited in its success because, while the mirror-image of the person looking into the camera obscura was formed and visible through the peephole, the location of the Wits Art House under the shade of some large trees meant that their figures (audience) were mostly just dark unrecognisable shadows. In most cases the audience was treated to a bustling street scene and the random, disorientating, growing image of fast-moving figures that they would soon see to be people walking toward them on the walkway.

My conception of this mirror work had begun to bridge a gap in my understanding of my interest in the works of video artist Nam June Paik, such as *TV Buddha* (1976), particularly

his use of closed-circuit video technology, where a live image is perpetually visible as a fleeting photograph.

6.2. The dark/light room — an encounter with light and space

Aside from my reaction to Jaar's WAM installation subject, his wider work and approach to installation is key to opening up the wider potential of a darkened room for me. Before Jaar, I had been excited by, and working with, Zoe Leonard's idea that the camera obscura image was in itself a light source (Fiske, 2012), an image that illuminates the room, rendering the idea of the darkroom inert. It is both a darkroom and a light room. In my research into Jaar's work (including attending a lecture on his creative practice at the WSOA), I was struck by an obsession with the idea of what he called an architecturally perfect box (such as a black cube) and its use as a space for resetting an over-stimulated audience in an age saturated with image-heavy video art, social media and grand installations.³⁴⁷ I also appreciated his discussion about the practice of creating a 'pre-room' with red light as a way of fast tracking the audience's ability to perceive in the low light associated with a natural camera obscura.³⁴⁸ This practice of the 'pre-room' offered a different solution to aspects of the camera obscura I had resolved with a sound piece in my Michaelis review camera obscura.

In essence, I appreciated Jaar's approach to installation and his concern with light and space, particularly in view of a series of light-based installations I have come across in exhibitions over the last five years. The most influential of these was Kimsooja's *To Breathe: Bottari* (2015), exploring the centrality of the body as a resetting device and its capacity to reconcile what a rational mind cannot conceive as one. *To Breathe: Bottari* used juxtaposition between a large, bright airy room and a small dark anechoic chamber (a room free from external sound) to draw the audience's attention to the connectedness of light and darkness beyond the

³⁴⁷ Jaar spoke of his obsession with an architecturally perfect box in reference to the memorial installation *Geometry of Conscience* (2010), which mobilised a large cubed space with time-delayed door systems that usher and trap audiences in a pitch-black room laced with mirrors, that eventually turn into bright silhouettes of victims (and other Chileans) of the 17-year-long Pinochet military rule and dictatorship. The installation was installed in 2010 at the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, Chile.

³⁴⁸ Jaar has experimented with the camera obscura. He described a pre-room as a transition room used to reset the audience from one immersive environment (installation) to another.

opposing element.³⁴⁹ This thinking around Leonard's, Jaar's and Kimsooja's use of large spaces, the interconnectedness of light and darkness, and the body as a receptor (it is something experienced by the body as a whole) compelled me to want to experiment with a bigger camera obscura. This would investigate how the idea of a large room, as in Kimsooja's light room, would affect the experience of the camera obscura, especially in the light of what I had understood as an infinite visuality, brought on by my experience of the interconnectedness of picture, sound, thought and space in my dreaming.

6.3. *Camera obscura #3 Projections*

This camera obscura iteration developed from a conversation with artist and curator Francis Burger, who was working as a residency programme facilitator for the A4 Arts Foundation,³⁵⁰ which had just acquired an old building in Cape Town's District Six area as a base for the newly formed foundation. Burger had visited my home studio in Johannesburg, where I had been experimenting with *Camera Obscura #1 Toilet*, as well as a 2.4x2.4x2.4 m lightweight condensed polystyrene-cube camera obscura prototype on my rooftop.³⁵¹ Our conversations focused on my obsession with the camera obscura that houses a body and figuring out how to create a lightweight camera obscura model that could be easily installed in the Modjadji cycad forest — tests for *Camera Obscura #0*. We also discussed the idea of ngaka ya meholo (an apparition doctor) famous in khelobedu mythology. I had been thinking about ngaka ya meholo in relation to the camera obscura as a possible metonymy for how the doctor made apparitions. Ngaka ya meholo is some form of ngaka ya Sesotho — 'traditional doctor'. I do not know what the correct name for such a doctor is, but the doctor specialised in some form of apparitions. This kind of doctor has always fascinated me because my grandmother, with whom I had been spending some time during to the *Gae Lebowa Fieldworks* project (2014–2015), had been telling me about the exploits of my grandfather's doctor friend called Ngakana. The story that captured my imagination was one in which my grandmother had doubted Ngakana's power as a doctor; Ngakana then demonstrated his skill to her by creating an apparition of snakes inside the family's maize-meal bag. This story

³⁴⁹ The exhibition handout for *To Breathe: Bottari* (2015) is included in the red filing system labelled 'Exhibition handout'.

³⁵⁰ <https://www.a4arts.org>

³⁵¹ See images of the polystyrene structure with the tags [polystyrene](#), [camera obscura](#).

raised my curiosity about the mechanisms involved, leading to questions like: Was the apparition biologically stimulated or was it an optical illusion? I had encountered versions of this story throughout my childhood. For example, in the story of *Dadja*, the mountain forest where Balobedu kings (before the time of Modjadji) are buried, the story goes that if you wandered into the burial grounds, you could roam around the place but you would not see any sights related to the *graves* because the place has some anomaly or enchantment that conceals the nature of the mountain forest. Recently, while on a photography assignment in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, I was treated to a similar story about a Mozambican doctor who specialises in such apparitions to ferry Mozambican and Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa, through the game reserve.³⁵² I later recounted this story to some colleagues who reciprocated with stories about how most people crossing the Limpopo border through the game reserve use medicine that renders them invisible to the animals, or portrays them as bigger animals while crossing the game reserve.

Through this conversation and general discussions about the possibility of using light, brought on by the *camera obscura*, as a sort of cleansing aid for the new A4 building, Burger invited me to participate in a residency programme with the A4 Arts Foundation. The residency was aimed at interrogating or gauging the potential of their newly-acquired building in District Six, before it was renovated into a contemporary art institution. This is in line with the practice of an institution inviting an artist into its space to perform some form of institutional critique, as a process of mapping the building's and the location's history. The camera obscura's drawing in of images of the city and parts of District Six was imagined as some form of resetting of the building's occupation amidst ongoing debates about gentrification in District Six. The resulting residency lasted six months, during which I frequented Cape Town for short week-long stays to experiment on the camera obscura in the A4 building.³⁵³ After a site visit to the building, I resolved to work with the top floor of the three-story building. Together with Burger, we consolidated my proposed experiments within the large space around an idea of imagining the possibilities of *ngaka ya meholo*.

³⁵² The Transfrontier Park is a section of the Kruger National Park's shared game reserve between South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

³⁵³ Other residents working during this period include Dorothee Kreutzfeldt, the Apocalypse Pantry collective and Lauren Theunissen.

The building acquired by the A4 Arts Foundation was a warehouse previously used as a small shop and storage for a Chinese thrift shop. The 10 x 30 m rectangular building had been completely gutted with no internal walls, leaving only the raw wooden floors and the roof. The top floor had several medium-size windows on the short side facing the street, with one larger window at the back of the long side of the building facing the bottom of District Six. The A-frame roof was about five metres high with no suspended ceiling, only the supporting wooden beams and the wooden planks under the roof tiles. Over a period of four months I blocked out all the windows and began to experiment with different holes on the window sections. I also began to notice and keep track of the images produced by the natural holes that already existed in the building. For this process I used an A3 sheet of tracing paper to explore the potential of the images made by the natural holes in the building. Because of the large size of the space, I wanted to keep it open so as to archive a large image area, but I also wanted the option of being able to track some of the changing images as the sun moved throughout the day. For example there was an area in the middle of the building that had a small hole in the roof projecting an image of the sun that would only be visible between 10 am and 11 am. To archive the flexibility of the open space and ability to track different image possibilities, I made a series of screens of varying sizes and shapes mounted on wheels. These screens could be neatly packed away in a corner or moved around as I pleased. Because the building was still to be renovated, I was allowed to make holes in the roof, walls and floors, experimenting with images drawn from the second floor where artist Dorothee Kreutzfeldt and the Apocalypse Pantry collective had been busy with other projects. Every time I came for a stay at the residency, I would explore different holes and lenses, observing the different images at different time of the day and documenting them extensively, through photography (still and moving) and through notes, drawings, sketches as well as some written meditations (mostly in khelobedu) on colour, dreaming and magic in my notebooks.³⁵⁴ This documentation is compiled into an artist's book published in collaboration with A4 and Exp/T,³⁵⁵ presenting my experiments and my process with the camera obscura throughout the

³⁵⁴ A selection of these notes and drawings is available on the Picasa platform with the tags [projection](#) and [notes](#).

³⁵⁵ Exposure over Time (Exp/T) is the online platform presenting my artistic practice; it is also a registered company that manages my studio and art projects.

residency period.³⁵⁶ For this residency, there was no obligation to make an exhibition or a specific work; I was invited to play in the building and experiment with my own ideas and document them.

6.3.1. *Lebitla la Ngaka* (2016)

A key work/play/intervention within the A4 camera obscura process is a collaboration with painter Dorothee Kreutzfeldt, drawing on the installation of the *Apocalypse Pantry* collective working on the floor below my camera obscura. While looking through the many curiosities in *Apocalypse Pantry* collective's installation/workspace, I came across a sort of staff. The staff was made up of a long piece of reed with a long white acacia thorn at its head. The reed had two bird wings with two puff adder heads whose eyes were crusted with long crystals. The rest of the puff adder's skin, still attached to the head, was shredded into thin strips that moved with the wind. In conversation with Kreutzfeldt and Burger I imagined that, if I were an apparition doctor, my staff would look like this, leading to an impromptu play/performance about what this doctor's *grave* would look like. Kreutzfeldt then constructed a *grave* scene on the second floor under one of my camera obscura holes in the floor, using colourful 'tapeit', trinkets and black cards that registered as voids in the floor. I lay on the set with the staff by my side, as if I were a corpse. The image drawn by my floor-based camera obscura projected on to a small box with tracing paper in the top floor. We photographed (still and video) the resulting camera obscura image, while I performed the dead doctor in the grave. I had been projected from the second floor into the third floor. We called this 'play' *Lebitla la Ngaka* (2016).³⁵⁷ This play was accompanied by a hand-drawn

³⁵⁶ The publication, adopting the name *Camera Obscura #3 Projections*, used a combination of normal paper and tracing paper drawn from the project's extensive use of tracing paper for the exploring of possible camera obscura images. It drew heavily on photographs and photocopies of my *notebooks* and drawings, as well as my documentation photographs of the experiments. The publication forms part of a series of A4 publications exploring the processes of the artist invited for the residency programme. Documentation is also included in Picasa under the tags *#3*, *projections* and *A4*.

³⁵⁷ An image of this 'play' is in the artist's book with some notes describing the staff in Sesotho sa Leboa.

narrative in my notebook about how the doctor used the staff to divert images from one place to another as a process of concealing what is in front of one's eyes.

By the end of my six months of experimentation, the A4 camera obscura consisted of four main elements: a combination of a natural and a lens-based hole at the back of the building projecting a changing image of Cape Town City Hall onto the walls, ceiling and floor; a sliver of the sky projected on to a suspended screen in the front of the room, drawing the sky into the interior of the room; a series of fixed screens hosting up to six holes (natural and lens-based, some in focus and others out of focus) in the front of the building, projecting the street scene, parts of the city centre and Lion's Head (including multiple images of the setting sun); two lens-based holes projecting scenes from the second floor (including images of Apocalypse Pantry's and Simphiwe Ndzube's installations). I also had additional screens in the middle part of the room that could be used to explore any of the holes I made and other natural holes in the building.

Overall, *Camera Obscura#3 Projections* brought the sky, the street, the cityscape and the floor below into conversation, projecting an array of fleeting, time-specific images into the top floor of the building. The use of movable screens meant that I or the people that chanced on the building could interact with the projections by trapping the light or following constantly changing scenes, as light changed throughout the day. The project ended with an intimate daylong brunch over music and drinks to which I invited several friends and artists to come spend the day inside the camera obscura. I presented a talk on my process and experimentation with the *Camera Obscura#3 Projections* as part of the 'Visual Gateways' conference at the District Six Museum in Cape Town.³⁵⁸ An artist's book resulting from this residency project is included in the archive box.

6.4. Camera obscura #4 Refusal to Allow Mediation

Within the context of *Camera Obscura #2 Kheipône*, I had a conversation with author, stylist, DJ and artist Sinethemba Twalo inside the *Camera Obscura #2 Kheipône* camera obscura. This conversation led to Twalo subsequently inviting me to present an iteration of my camera obscura for the Qalandiya International Biennale, for which he was a guest curator under the

³⁵⁸ *Visual Gateways*, October 21–22, 2016, District Six Museum, Cape Town. See talk abstract in the red filing system under the label 'Exhibition handout'.

NGO collective.³⁵⁹ The installation was originally conceptualised as a medium-sized metal and wood structure on a rooftop of a youth centre in Ramallah, Palestine, but it was subsequently reconceptualised as an intimate space installed in the city wall of the old city in Jerusalem.

6.4.1. Excerpt of essay from *Camera obscura #4 Refusal to Allow Mediation*³⁶⁰

Camera Obscura #4 emerged from an invitation to respond to the central theme of ‘return’ for the 8th edition of the Jerusalem Show VIII, ‘Before and After Origins’.³⁶¹ The invitation to engage the theme of ‘return’ associated with Palestinians’ demand for freedom of movement between Palestine and Israel (*Jerusalem*) elicited an impulse in me to reject the position of solidarity with Palestinians. I rejected this position because I found this solidarity to inflate my status as mediator, advocating an imagining of *return*, which I found suspect. It was not that I found the idea suspect because I did not relate to it or felt that it was inherently flawed, but because of its location within a solidarity project that appeared to be involved in creating a forced united subjectivity amongst marginalised and oppressed people based solely on victimhood. I felt that it problematically occasioned the need for a mediator who could enforce *return* as a right on the victim’s behalf, rather than claiming a generative and autonomous position of a locally-rooted subjectivity, capable of acting for itself and engaging the global as peers. I hated how a diaspora community of liberals was telling me to relate to an idea solely because I could associate with being a victim.

³⁵⁹ NGO is a space in downtown Johannesburg owned collectively by curator Gabi Ngcobo, artist Sinethemba Twalo, artist Dineo Bopape and artist Donna Kukama. They host a variety of events around art, culture and experimental forms of activism. They form part of what is sometimes referred to as ‘alternative art space’ within the contemporary art network of independent institutions. For their programming and events see <https://www.facebook.com/Nothing-Gets-Organised-NGO-1693239974254541/>

³⁶⁰ This essay/short text is commissioned by curator Vivian Zihelr to be part of the Jerusalem Show VIII themed ‘Before and After Origins’ post-exhibition publication for Frontier Imaginaries Editions. The full essay is included in the red filing system as Appendix 1b.

³⁶¹ The show formed part of the 3rd Qalandiya International Biennale (2016) under the theme ‘This Sea is Mine’. The Jerusalem Show VIII was hosted by Al-Ma’mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, New Gate, Old City Jerusalem in Israel, October 6–31, 2016 (see E-flux 2016).

In response, I looked instead towards my seeing, in the hope that others might also engage in this seeing with me, and that somewhere in our shared seeing we might become peers, when a discussion of the concept of return could begin. I placed the camera obscura in the west wall of the Old City in Jerusalem through an aperture overlooking the boulevard from the Jaffa Gate. The camera obscura's facilitation of seeing — offering only a fleeting image — refuses a fixed point of reference. This causes the viewer continually to reassess — in the present — their understanding of a position. This refusal is not an attempt to reject the idea of *return* but to understand how else this position can be located within the realm of action, not as a right but as a practice. For in my attempt to translate the concept through a *khelobedu* context, *return* becomes a practice that one cannot escape.³⁶² My rejection is based on solidarity's insistence on rights, leaving it open to rejection. It is this locatedness that I find suspect.

³⁶² Go boya: a voluntary action acknowledging one's debt to home. Here I am using it as part of a saying that thinks about how one is compelled to go back home, emphasising the self-propelled need to go back home rather than the political right to a disposed home.

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