

One lens three views

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Abstract

This document explores the complexity of the Zulu Reed Dance in the context of creating a photographic record of the event in various narrative styles within the genre of documentary photography. The author-photographer acknowledges their subjective contribution in the image making process, and uses this understanding to demonstrate a continuum of subjectivity that operates depending on the visual narrative being constructed. To contextualise the photographers approach, the document explores the social, political and economic landscape, and the dominant visual record produced by media. A qualitative review of six national newspapers demonstrates that the media view is relatively generic and does not attempt to engage with alternative perspectives. The document also explores critical theory on the subject of the qualification of a photographer to provide an accurate record outside of their cultural status. The author considers the validity of image production and the reception of the work as indicative of a continuum of subjectivity. To demonstrate this fluidity, the photographer produces three photo essays, all made at the same event at the same time with very different narrative outcomes. These photo essays can be found the accompanying book titled 'One lens three views'.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide a framework for the interpretation of three photo essays produced at the Zulu Maiden Reed Dance, *uMkhosi woMhlanga*, in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. This document and the photo essays, attempt to explore the complexity of the Reed Dance and how these complexities influence different narrative styles within the genre of documentary photography. The truth-value associated with documentary photography is not exempt from elements of emotion and subjectivity, and I specifically use this knowledge to explore what I have called a continuum of subjectivity.

I also acknowledge the work of contemporary photographers such as Sabelo Mlangeni, Zanele Muholi, Candice Brice¹ and Paul Weinberg² who have explored various narratives related to the subject, and informed a richer understanding of South Africa's contemporary cultural landscape.

In 2012 I photographed the ceremony as a tourist, and returned in 2013 with the specific intention of challenging myself to capture an alternative view of the Reed Dance. Media coverage of the event, as I had observed, was predominantly limited to the generic image of a group of maidens with reeds held high or of King Goodwill Zwelithini in traditional Zulu Chief regalia. From a visual perspective the Reed Dance is a photographer's dream; it is colourful, emotive, set in the rural environs of KwaZulu-Natal, and is one South Africa's largest and most significant cultural celebrations. This is *the* royal occasion in South Africa. For tourists there is no doubt that the journey to the remote area delivers on its 'authentic African' promise. The unique experience of witnessing thousands of bare-breasted maidens, *ntombi's*, adds a sense of visceral authenticity to the event. In this context the semi-nakedness of the maidens is a cultural rather than a sexual declaration, but there are tacit reminders that their nakedness has not escaped certain gender stereotypes. The ceremony also attracts political and business leaders, and dignitaries from around the world who shower the King with gifts as he, in return, royally entertains them in VIP areas.

There is a danger of accepting the experiences of tourists and dignitaries, or the snapped 'front-pager' taken by journalists, as records of the event. To describe the weekend ceremony in a simple descriptor is virtually impossible, but if there were one then it would be that the *Umhlanga* is a ceremony celebrating virginity. I will attempt to explore the fragility of chastity and the complexity of the representation thereof in this document. The

¹ The work of Sabelo Mlangeni, Zanele Muholi and Candice Brice are discussed at length in the book by Awam Amkpa and Tamar Garb, *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013).

² Paul Weinberg, *Moving Spirit: Spirituality in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2006).

'authentic African' image, a concept that has its origins in anthropological and ethnographic record, continues to be a sought-after aesthetic in contemporary photography, both amateur and professional.

In chapter one I reflect on my experience of attending the Reed Dance, aware in particular of my emotional response to bearing witness to the unfolding event. In chapter two I look at the various 'landscapes'; political, social and economic, and how these directly or indirectly influence the Reed Dance. These landscapes provide a glimpse into the complexity of the event and allude to the impact of the commodification of culture. Chapter three explores discussions around images made of the 'exotic', either as a result of cultural tourism or as the intended work of a photographer. In this chapter I also look at the 'view' represented by national media in an attempt to understand the projected global image of the Reed Dance maiden. Chapter four provides an overview of the accompanying three photo essays, and supports the concept that a photographer works at different levels of subjectivity. This, I will show, ranges from the *image for social change* on the one end to the detached capture of an exotic record on the other.

This mini dissertation is a companion to the photo book "One lens three views".

Chapter 1

An overview of the Reed Dance

The Zulu Reed Dance was re-introduced by Her Royal Highness Queen Mantfombi, the third wife of King Goodwill Zwelethini, in the early Nineties. The old custom, known as *umcwasho*, was intended for young unmarried girls to perform labour services for the Queen Mother. The practise took place in rural villages, but with the re-introduction of the ceremony as a national Zulu tradition, the girls now perform a reed and dance ceremony as a symbol of their chastity at a gathering hosted by the King. The reeds they carry will be used to enforce the reed walls of the royal kraal enclosure. The reeds are also symbolic of the strengthening of their womanhood³. The involvement of the royal women in the organisation of the Reed Dance continues the tradition of bonding, learning and sharing between women through the generations.

The maidens, together with their matriarchs, travel to the Royal Enyokeni Palace from as far afield as Swaziland, Botswana, Pondoland and Johannesburg. Many have travelled up to 16 hours (some sleeping on the side of the road) to make their pilgrimage to the Enyokeni Palace. Once at the royal grounds, the young girls, or *ntombis*, undergo a virginity test to validate their participation in the event. The *umhlohis*, the term for women who perform the virginity test by inspecting for an intact hymen, will inspect some 30 000 young girls before the ceremony. There are many myths surrounding the festival - one is that if a girl is not 'pure' her reed will break when presenting it to the King and in so doing, publicly disgrace her and her community.

The atmosphere on the day of the Reed Dance is quite unlike any cultural event that the authentic-experience-seeking tourist may encounter. The sheer scale and sight of the thousands of bare-breasted maidens all colourfully dressed in their traditional garments, singing and holding their tall river reeds high, is a spectacle of cultural grandeur. Their jubilant voices and stamping feet provide a rhythmic African euphony. A 2km-tarred road inclines gradually up to the kraal (refer Figure 1 below: map reference 7 to 1), providing a perfect vantage point to take in the spectacle. The more observant visitor may notice the reed-disguised high security entrance around the kraal, replete with its own adjoining police station (map reference 2), equally disguised. They may even notice the VIP parking area abundant with luxury vehicles and a private helicopter belonging to a Zulu prince (map reference 3 and 4).

³ *Traditional Festivals. 2. M - Z* (ABC-CLIO, n.d.).

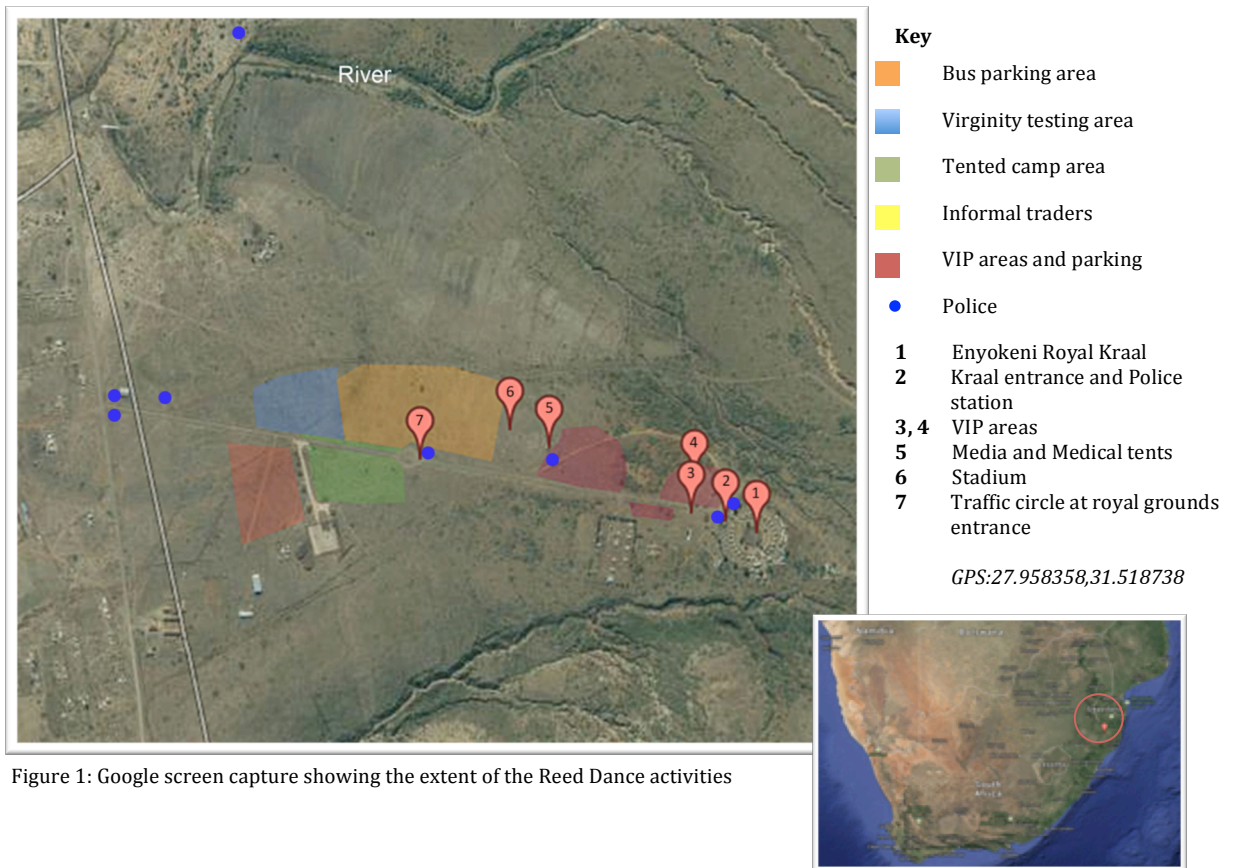


Figure 1: Google screen capture showing the extent of the Reed Dance activities

The maidens make their way through the kraal entrance (map reference 2) and around the final turn to the stacking area for the reeds and the awaiting entourage of the King, village chiefs and extended male family. For most of the girls this will be the first and only time they see the King. The girls will perform a last dance and some of the girls will perform a more revealing dance of high leg kicks (the King has requested that maidens no longer wear the revealing skirts with an open back, *izinculuba's*, but instead cover their bottoms). The enthusiastic high leg kicks however, reveal considerably more. It is here that many of the VIPs, tourists and media gather to spectate, and record the event.

After almost 6 hours of reed procession, the royal entourage moves to a large tented catering venue (map reference 5) where VIPs, sponsors and village chiefs are lavishly entertained. The formalities include a gift-giving ceremony and speeches from politicians, religious leaders and the King. During these lengthy proceedings, the maidens are expected to remain on the field (map reference 6) waiting for the King. This Zulu custom competes for the attention of the girls, many of whom choose instead to wander into the informal trading area to satisfy their curiosity. It is here that an influx of traders and general curious onlookers has gathered and are preparing for 'the party of the year'.

Eventually by late afternoon the King delivers his address to the reduced audience of awaiting maidens. In the address, the King highlights the need for the maidens to be

aware of the influences of peer pressure and the dangers of social media. The King also encouraged the maidens to embrace their culture as it too adapts to modern times. As a demonstration of this, a display by a group of synchronised motor bikers, rev a war-cry reminiscent of Zulu warriors going into battle. Ironically and sadly reflective of a dominant patriarchal mind-set, the bikers' leather strip is complete with an embroidered emblem of a naked white female wearing a bikini and straddled across a motorbike.

By early evening most of the visitors, VIP's, tourists and media have left the Enyokeni Palace grounds. There is a sense that the pageantry, at least until tomorrow, is finished. At this time, I sense disquiet in the changing mood of the festivities. The landscape is littered with plastic bottles, polystyrene food containers and packets being swept up in the hot dry afternoon wind, and the visibly dehydrated and exhausted maidens form long queues for food and water. A small number of water drums provide the only access to fresh water, resulting in long queues of maidens waiting with buckets and drums to collect water. This reminder of the rural inequalities perpetuated by a patriarchal culture and the lack of delivery of basic services to rural areas, appears amplified in this microcosm of activity. Many of the maidens retreat to the sanctity of their accommodation tents, where they are separate from the public and can catch up on much-needed rest before the dance festival the following day.

Cars packed with young men are now entering the open trading area. The large stage in the soccer stadium is blasting hip-hop tunes between educational announcements, while in the adjacent open area, the beer is flowing and the mood is escalating into a party atmosphere. It is this party atmosphere that reminds me of an earlier conversation with a petrol attendant, who expressed disappointment that he would not make the 'party of the year'. This discord in the proceedings' intentions raises in me a sense of foreboding for the obviously vulnerable maidens. I am aware that my location as a female photographer is contributing to my assumptions about the unfolding events. I cannot discount, though, that some maidens appear to be drawn to the event more by this party, and the possibility of an interaction with a man, than they are by the official ceremony and what it symbolizes.

As the stadium loudspeakers broadcast warning messages about human trafficking and human rights, the vibe coming from the partygoers, who seem intent on catching the eye of a virgin, is strangely undermining this message. The maidens appear easily enticed by the flirtatious glances, the hilarity around a pop-up karaoke bar, flowing beer and the lure of loud music from elaborate vehicle sound systems. As darkness descends and I leave the

Reed Dance for the evening, my unease recognises a primal hunting atmosphere, and I am reminded of four reported rape cases from the previous year.

Despite all the ongoing revelry, for many of the maidens the dance ceremony the following day is the highlight of the weekend. Here the maidens, colourfully arranged by district, compete against each other for the accolade of the best dance routine. As an observer it is my impression that the dance ceremony is by far the most tangible and authentic African experience the weekend has to offer.

Once the maidens have performed their dance in front of the royal family and the village chiefs on the final day, the ceremony comes to a close. There is one last opportunity for the maidens to say their goodbyes and purchase any small keepsakes or food from the pop-up vendors, before they board the awaiting buses and journey back to their districts.

I left the Reed Dance having experienced the emotional extremes of the event -from the tangible moments of joy, contagious pride and the undeniable empowerment radiating from the maidens, to the undercurrent of sinister and hideous intentions and visible acts of abuse. The uncomfortable intersection of the innocence and fragility of youth and the exploitative agendas, made me wonder about the role of documentary photography in telling the hidden story. This is the Segue to 'one lens three views'.

Chapter 2

The landscape of the Reed Dance

2.1 The braiding of King and politics

There is a sense that the Reed Dance is at a delicate cultural and political juncture. This stems from a growing need to modernise cultural practises for fear of the youth losing their sense of cultural belonging. As the custodian of Zulu culture, it is the King's duty to employ new strategies of engagement with the youth. The pressure to modernise culture appears to go hand in hand with commodification, or, as Comaroff and Comaroff put it, "In fact, KwaZulu, the ethno-nation *itself*, seems to be mutating slowly into a culture park, a tourist destination, the *ur*-space of tradition in the country at large."⁴

When the Reed Dance was reintroduced, it was also intended to be the cornerstone of Zulu culture and political renaissance. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), portrayed as the guardian of the essence of Zuluness⁵, aggressively campaigned for an autonomous and sovereign Zulu King in the 1990's despite a feud between the King and Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of the IFP. The feud was political; the King had sympathised with the ANC, who were edging into the Zulu IFP stronghold for votes. The King is also the head of the state-recognised institution of Traditional Leaders, which includes all the local chiefs of the Zulu nation. In 2000, these traditional leaders formed a private investment firm called Contralesa with the specific intention of representing the Zulu culture, its customary law and the collective rights of its people⁶. The objective of Contralesa, which recognises the sovereign rulership of the King, was to develop into a strong financial body. Today it is one of the country's most powerful private investment corporations.

The practice of compulsory virginity testing, *ukuhlolwa kwezintombe*, was introduced around the time of the first democratic elections in South Africa (1994), at a time when the HIV/AIDS pandemic started to take hold⁷. In 2005 the South African Parliament introduced the Children's Bill, essentially banning the practice of virginity testing. The ban was met with outrage from community leaders, who claimed that virginity

⁴ John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁵ Gugulethu Sebenzile Nkosi, "Umkhosi Womhlanga (Reed dance) as a Tourism Enterprise in KwaZulu-Natal: Perceptions, Policies and Practices" (Thesis, University of Zululand, 2013), <http://uzspace.uzulu.ac.za/handle/10530/1282>.

⁶ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.*

⁷ Louise Vincent, "Virginity Testing in South Africa: Re-traditioning the Postcolony," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 8, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 17-30, doi:10.1080/136910505000404225.

testing fostered a value of chastity amongst the youth⁸. The protection of children under the Children's Bill applies to all children under the age of 18 years, and states that the child will be protected from unfair discrimination on any grounds⁹. In reality, all maidens participating in the reed ceremony, regardless of age, are required to go through a virginity test.

Adding to the confusion around the government's legal standpoint is the historical national denial of the enormity of the HIV/AIDS problem, commonly dubbed 'Mbeki's HIV/AIDS Denialism'¹⁰. Thabo Mbeki, the South African State President from 1999 to 2008, who's African Renaissance ideology implies "African solutions for African problems"¹¹, engendered an interpretation by cultural leaders that virginity testing is supported, or at least will not be obstructed, by government¹². The African Renaissance calls for the re-traditionalizing of culture, and for the renewal of values and social practices that shape public life¹³.

An added complication to what constitutes traditional cultural practice is The Traditional Courts Bill. The Bill coincided with the period of AIDS denialism and appears to entrench a second-class justice system for rural people. More significantly, the Bill further turns back the clock on women's rights. A glaring omission in the Bill is the acknowledgement of crimes against women, including conjugal rape, incest, statutory rape and rape that take place during the forced marriage of girls who are legal minors¹⁴. The Bill was recently (October 2013) raised in parliament and reviewed on the grounds of it being unconstitutional. Despite the fact that the Bill is under appeal, there are considerable questions about how it came to be in the first place. The ANC has been criticised for its support of the Bill, which appears to have been passed in return for voter support from traditional leaders. According to gender activist Nomboniso Gasa, "President Zuma's polygamous lifestyle, rape trial – in which he was found not guilty – and his labelling of

⁸ Carolyn Rumsey, "Culture, Abstinence, and Human Rights: Zulu Use of Virginity Testing in South Africa's Battle against AIDS" (University of Ottawa, 2012).

⁹ "Children's Act 38 of 2005 - Booklet - Childrens_act_booklet.pdf," August 5, 2013, http://www.info.gov.za/events/2013/cpw/childrens_act_booklet.pdf.

¹⁰ Poul Rohleder et al., *HIV/AIDS in South Africa 25 Years On: Psychosocial Perspectives* (Springer, 2009).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, "Virginity Testing: Managing Sexuality in a Maturing HIV/AIDS Epidemic," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (2001): 533–552, doi:10.1525/maq.2001.15.4.533.

¹³ Elias K. Bongmba, "Reflections on Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (2004): 291–316, doi:10.1080/0305707042000215374.

¹⁴ Nomboniso Gasa, "The Traditional Courts Bill," *SA Crime Quarterly* no. 35 (2011): 23.

unmarried women as 'a problem' are changing the signs of a new cultural tone,"¹⁵ and only perpetuates the disenfranchisement of women.

The evidence of political influence is a dominant theme at the Reed Dance. Foreign diplomats and political party leaders vie for the attention of the King, bestowing gifts and generous offers of partnership.

Sadly, not all these gestures are befitting of the respect due to such an occasion. One such display was from a political leader intent on making an entrance by driving at unreasonable speed up the Enyokeni Palace road in a cavalcade of luxury vehicles. This was in spite of the availability of an alternative ring road that other VIPs had used, and caused the girls in the procession to leap out the way to avoid being knocked to the ground.

"This was our day, now it belongs to them," commented one of the matron leaders.

2.2 A Zulu Culture of imputable sexual morals

Human Rights and Gender Commissions, as well as many other women's social groups, support the claim that reintroducing virginity testing under the guise of 're-traditioning' culture is hugely problematic. Under the South African liberal democratic political system, gender activists such as Leclerc-Madlala¹⁶ and Gasa¹⁶, argue that the Reed Dance is 'highly exploitative' and sexist as it only targets young girls, and suggest that virginity testing is enforcing the gender inequality that is propelling HIV/AIDS¹⁷. Furthermore, the results of the test are made public and the girls who fail the test often face humiliation within their community¹⁸. Scientifically it is almost impossible to prove that a broken hymen is as a result of sexual intercourse - some hymen are more elastic than others and can actually regain their shape after penis insertion, anatomical abnormalities of the hymen are known to occur, and constriction of the perineal muscles can cause tearing¹⁹. It is also possible to engage in other (possibly riskier) sexual activities such as anal penetration and 'thigh sex', neither of which penetrates the vagina. According to Leclerc-Madlala, thigh sex is taught to the girls as an alternative sexual activity as it does not jeopardise their

¹⁵ "S.African Women Rights at Risk as Zuma Woos Tribal Chiefs," accessed January 7, 2014, <http://www.trust.org/item/20121204000100-yg12z/>.

¹⁶ Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala investigated the Virginity testing in KZN - Medical Anthropology Quarterly 15(4):533-522, 2001. Nomtoniso Gasa is currently a research, trainer and analyst for Gender, Politics and Cultural Issues. Gasa was interviewed on 702's Redi Tlhabi show to discuss the issue of virginity testing.

¹⁷ Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, "Virginity Testing: Managing Sexuality in a Maturing HIV/AIDS Epidemic.", Medical Anthropology Quarterly, 15(4):533-522, 2001.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

virginity and is considered socially acceptable. One is also led to question why a woman's sexual activity should be subject to public knowledge and criticism, while men's should not²⁰. Activists would argue that this discriminatory and invasive practise also perpetuates the notion that sexual intercourse outside of marriage is acceptable for men, but not for women.

Against the backdrop of South Africa's growing gender violence statistics, the virgin is in even more danger due to a prevailing myth that sexual intercourse with a virgin will cure a man with HIV/AIDS.

A further dynamic in the South African social landscape is the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act No. 120 of 1998, which recognises *customary* polygamous marriages²¹. Under civil law, the act of polygamy is illegal. The legal practise of polygamy applies only to men and not to women. It would appear that cultural practises continue to reinforce patriarchal proclivity.

2.3 The influence of the changing tourism and economic landscapes

Three significant economic shifts have impacted the Reed Dance ceremony in recent years: (1) the introduction of commercial elements in the form of 'brand experiences'²²; (2) the call by King Goodwill Zwelithini for Tourism SA to promote the annual 'event'²³; and (3) the controversial invitation to other races to join the ceremony²⁴. What was a cultural ceremony dedicated to the rite of passage for many Zulu maidens is now in the powerful clutches of exploitative, commercial elements.

BIZcommunity, the online brand-centric website, posted in the month prior to the ceremony that "brands have the opportunity to participate at the event by providing free samples to the visitors and special gifts to the Royal Family and the 200 dignitaries in

²⁰ Lindiwe Mlandu, "Reed Dance 'Highly Exploitative,'" *Eye Witness News*, September 22, 2013, <http://ewn.co.za/2013/09/03/Reed-Dance-highly-exploitative>.

²¹ "Is Polygamy Unconstitutional? – Constitutionally Speaking," accessed October 6, 2013, <http://constitutionallyspeaking.co.za/is-polygamy-unconstitutional/>.

²² Biz Community, "Annual Royal Zulu Reed dance," News, *Biz Community*, 2013, <http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/74/97868.html>.

²³ SABC, "SABC News.com - Zulu King Calls on Tourism SA to Promote Reed dance: Sunday 1 September 2013," *Zulu King Calls on SA Tourism to Promote Reed dance*, September 2013, <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/4c8dea0040f00508baacbb434f2981a1/Zulu-king-calls-on-Tourism-SA-to-promote-Reed-Dance>.

²⁴ "Indian Maidens Set to Join Reed dance - KwaZulu-Natal | IOL News | IOL.co.za," September 2, 2013, <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/kwazulu-natal/indian-maidens-set-to-join-reed-dance-1.1571687#.Ui1Ur8saySM>.

attendance.”²⁵ The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture provided large tented areas for organisations to present their products to the maidens, while inside the VIP marquees brand ambassadors had the opportunity to shower guests with gifts and samples. According to an Expanding Branding spokesperson: “Words cannot do justice to this event, and you simply have to be there to feel it. The brand engagement level is so ‘off the scale’ that it must be the single best opportunity to get some traction with a huge number of consumers that otherwise might never try your product.”²⁶

The number of informal traders flocking to the area for this lucrative weekend is out of control. Shacks and gazebos line the road to Enyokeni Palace. Traders sell their wares to the maidens and the thousands of gathering spectators who have gained access to the open area. Anything from cheap Chinese-made sunglasses and lipsticks to chicken legs and popular fizzy drinks are for sale, and the maidens are lured away from the safety of their enclosed tented area to the attractions of refreshments, food and keepsakes.

In King Zwelithini’s bid to SA Tourism, he requested that the Reed Dance receive the same attention as the Dusi Canoe and Comrades Marathons²⁷. This puts the Reed Dance squarely in the category of an organised tourism event. The 2013 Reed Dance also saw the participation of a white British national, which in itself raised scepticism from some of the Reed Dance maidens. It was also announced that Indian maidens would join the ceremony next year. Omie Singh, an ANC member of the provincial legislature in KwaZulu-Natal who announced this positive intercultural initiative, said “the history of the Reed Dance will change forever.”²⁸ These hints at commercialisation skirt the edges of a commoditised culture, more specifically the body of the young virgin. There is little doubt that the regional organisers, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), have cultural integration on their agenda. Perhaps this is a strategy to keep the youth engaged in cultural activities, in a way that echoes a more tolerant and mixed society. Perhaps there is a political agenda for the ANC to have a more active role in what is perceived to be a predominantly IFP-centric event. Whatever the motivation, the global “cult of heritage”²⁹ trend is to resort to things ethnic as a means of ‘empowerment’ and an opportunity to create new viable economies³⁰. As

²⁵ Biz Community, “Annual Royal Zulu Reed dance.”

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ SABC, “SABC News.com - Zulu King Calls on Tourism SA to Promote Reed dance: Sunday 1 September 2013.”

²⁸ “Indian Maidens Set to Join Reed dance - KwaZulu-Natal | IOL News | IOL.co.za.”

²⁹ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.*

³⁰ Ibid.

KwaZulu-Natal has the highest rural population and the highest HIV/AIDS infection rate³¹, an economic revival could alleviate much suffering of the local population.

In *Ethnicity, Inc.*, Comaroff and Comaroff examine the marketing and making of identity, directing their focus on how “commercial representations may shape people’s cultural identities as well as affect notions of belonging and cultural citizenship in daily life.”³² The Comaroffs suggest that the appropriation of cultural elements for commercial gain is often at the loss of cultural understanding in the process, saying “the more successful any ethnic population is in commodifying its difference, the faster it will debase whatever made it different to begin with.”

As cultural villages such as Shaka Village or the Reed Dance ceremony attempt to give tourists an authentic African experience, there is a danger of the ‘Zulu virgin girl’ becoming a cultural ideal to be purchased within tourism. There is even the possibility that the Reed Dance could become a participatory cultural event, something that has already occurred with the British maiden’s participation in 2013. Cultural tourism, as part of a larger process, is without doubt a substantial income-generator, where people feature as artifacts. The lines could soon blur between the ‘Zulu virgin girl’ at the cultural village and Zulu maiden on her rite of passage. How long will it be before the maidens will expect payment for their portraits and join the trend by using their bodies as a commodity?

Considering the social, political and economic landscapes as outlined above, the future of the Reed Dance as an authentic African tradition is being challenged on both a conceptual and practical level. Conceptually, the idea of revitalising culture is often romanticised, and the very people intended as the participants are the ones who pay the highest price. On a practical level, the infrastructure and ownership of the commercial enterprises, appears to have lost sight of the essence of the pilgrimage. The lines between exploitation and consent are blurred. What constitutes the revitalisation of culture is perhaps really a watering-down of tradition for the sake of modernisation.

³¹ Ina van der Linde, *HIV/AIDS in South Africa: At Last the Glass Is Half Full*, n.d.

³² Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.*

Chapter 3

Photographers exposed

3.1 Subjectivity and the photographer

“A photograph is a way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it — by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir.” Susan Sontag ³³

To photograph at the Reed Dance poses many ethical dilemmas. It is not only what Sontag presages as an act of appropriating the thing that is being photographed, but as social media grows exponentially, the act of photographing and sharing has become a tool whereby we vicariously devour other people’s lives. We appear to justify the capture of these bare-breasted women under the guise of ‘authentic record’ and are vindicated in doing so because we are members of a tour group, or a VIP, or indeed merely an onlooker. What is incongruous is the statement by the Royal Household Trust, aired on SAFM on the days preceding the Reed Dance, asking visitors to “respect the privacy of the maidens and refrain from taking inappropriate images.” This statement is perhaps misleading, because the bare-breasted maidens are the only subject or the ‘souvenir’ as Sontag suggests, to photograph. It is my understanding that the call to respect the privacy of the maidens is about the dissemination of the images on social networks as fetishes for the viewer. Much has been written about fetishism, and although Sontag’s analysis was written over thirty years ago, her belief is that images are torn away from their place in life; they are frozen and fetishized to the extent that they appear normal. The other extreme is that these images find themselves on soft porn or blog sites with little or no attempt at providing a context.

Liz Wells suggests that the nature of documentary realism has changed in form, status and characteristics, and also over time in response to social, political, economic and technological advances³⁴. The early black and white photographic documents typically framed rural people as belonging in the past and having no place in the present. Their

³³ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1st ed. (Picador, 2001).

³⁴ Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London [u.a.]: Routledge, 2009).

subjects become objects framed as primitive or spectacle. Photographic documents like those of A.M. Duggan-Cronin³⁵, for example, if compared to the contemporary work of Zanele Muholi³⁶, demonstrate Wells' point that documentary loses its stable identity and becomes dispersed through a variety of practices. It may be that these early photographers have unwittingly created nostalgia around the lost tribe. Andrew Putter's recent portraits, *Native Work*³⁷, demonstrate the contemporary re-appropriation of this desired authentic African portrait. The growth of cultural tourism or the 'heritage industry' has led to a great demand for pictures that show us something of the world that was.

What then is an 'appropriate image' of the Reed Dance? Who qualifies to take these appropriate images and disseminate them in the various digital forms? How does one retain the context of the image in a way that is respectful of these individuals who have made a vow of chastity? Are these new visual narratives in any way echoing the complexities of the Reed Dance?

Perhaps there is some provocation on my behalf, as the photo essays I present here are three very different approaches to the same subject matter, produced under the same conditions and at the same event. Martha Rosler³⁸ speaks of 'liberal sensibility' to illustrate the subtle and often insidious ideological undercurrents present in some documentary photography. Rosler argues that photographs of the poor and dispossessed are framed by a liberal rhetoric and morality, which stand in the place of political activism³⁹. While I concur, I also suggest that there is a continuum on which one can place this subjectivity. It may be inconvenient to suggest that many of these ways of seeing have become somewhat exhausted by academics, in an attempt to pin a particular stereotype to a particular photographer. Fortunately, this allows scope for a photographer, as well as the genre in which they photograph, to evolve. Rosler's sentiment is similar to Sontag's, as both acknowledge the powerless subject and the appropriator.

The continuum I propose suggests a level of social detachment when making images as mere souvenirs of an experience on the one end, while on the other end that supports social change, the image making process involves a level of social attachment. The fluidity of the

³⁵ Corinne Diserens and Walther Collection, *Contemporary African Photography from The Walther Collection : Appropriated Landscapes*, 1st ed.. (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2011).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Andrew Putter, "Native Work: An Artwork by Andrew Putter Consisting of 38 Portrait Photographs (with Photography by Hylton Boucher, Kyle Weeks and Andrew Putter)," *Kronos* 38, no. 1 (January 2012): 249–260.

³⁸ Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)," *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (1989): 303–340.

³⁹ Liz Wells, *The Photography Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003).

photographer to move along this continuum provides the context to 'read' the three photo essays.

The literature on documentary photography around representation and the roles and responsibilities of the photographer, is vast. An important debate in the context of a white female photographer documenting a rural subject is the *Grey Areas Debate* of the 90's. The debate argues who is 'qualified' to represent the subject in an appropriate way, and who is 'able' to represent the subject in an appropriate way. Applying the debate to the Reed Dance is challenging. The Grey Areas Debate was initiated by Okwui Enwezor, who referred to the female white artists representing the female subject, as perpetuating a racist stereotype with no ability to produce 'authentic' images. Enwezor's article, *Reframing the Black Subject*⁴⁰, stresses the point that despite the claim of sisterhood expressed by a female white artist representing a female subject; their artwork falls into a trap of a stereotypical gaze. In response to this, Ruth Kerkham, in *A deadly Explosive on Her Tongue*⁴¹, reminds us that the most vocal critics of the representation of the black female body by white female artists, are too often male. Kerkham also suggests that: "In a South African context it is precisely such a pitting against each other of anti-racist and anti-sexist debates that has occurred and has led to both camps launching heated attacks at one another. What has, unfortunately, been forgotten is the fact that both groups were initially searching for ways to deal with and respond to oppression, and what has resulted instead is an ugly, often self-serving monopolization of the very oppression they set out to challenge."

bell hooks similarly argues that elements of rituals that are empowering and subversive may not be visible to an outsider looking in, suggesting that it is easy for white observers to depict black rituals as spectacle⁴², a view shared by Enwezor. The narratives presented in the accompanying three photographic essays, question the assumption that a photographer practises from a singular location and therefore challenges the views of Enwezor and hooks.

Much of the way we interpret images is dependent on the accepted philosophies of the day. We forget, or fail to ask, how and why our understanding of the image changes over time. It is useful to take the original intention into consideration but this does mean that the result is not renegotiable. Documentary photography remains a social investigation despite the mode of representation, and should be embraced as such. The 'truth-value' of documentary photography – that the photograph is evidence of an event having taking place

⁴⁰ Okwui Enwezor, "Reframing the Black Subject Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation," *Third Text* 11, no. 40 (1997): 21–40, doi:10.1080/09528829708576684.

⁴¹ Ruth Kerkham, "A Deadly Explosive on Her Tongue," *Third Text* 14, no. 50 (March 1, 2000): 45–60, doi:10.1080/09528820008576836.

⁴² Wells, *The Photography Reader*.

at a particular time - does not always bring about social change, or need to, but it does uncover a story. Despite the academic arguments about who is qualified to represent a group of people or an activity, the fact remains that photographs are made, distributed and recontextualised all the time

To demonstrate some of the visual complexity around representation and recontextualising of images over time, I present the following two examples:



Fig 2. Woman seated in a studio
Imprinted: 'Zulu girl waiting for her lover'

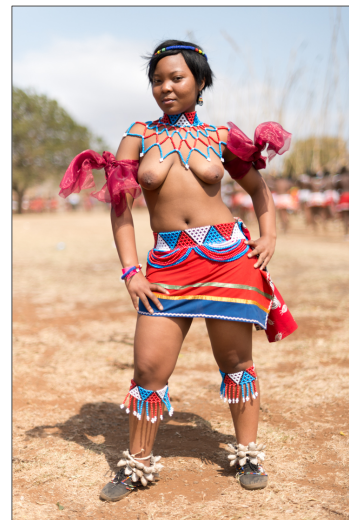


Fig. 3 Reed Dance portrait
#ZuluMaiden

The first image, Fig 2, titled *The young Zulu maiden*, photographed by Barnett & Co in their Cape Town studios in the 1890's and imprinted with 'Zulu girl waiting for her lover', demonstrates what scholars have labelled as the gaze of a white colonial male ethnographic photographer, objectifying the female African body and, some would add, reinforcing bourgeois privilege. The discussions around representation of 'the traditional' in photography in South Africa are vast. Tamar Garb in *Figures and Fiction: South African Photography in the Perfect Tense*⁴³, states that "Frequently referenced is the anthropological and ethnographical past that has provided the conceptual framework through which Africa's people have routinely and repeatedly been pictured. Vexed, controversial and compromised, this massive and complex archive, still only partly uncovered and understood, has become part of a material culture of the present, ripe for appropriation, reappraisal and critique." Garb goes further to say that "No ambitious contemporary figural photographer in

⁴³ Tamar Garb, *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl; London, 2011).

South Africa works without taking cognisance of one or other of their legacies, whether to honour, refute or mimic them.”

The second image, Fig 3, an image taken by me on the day of the Reed Dance, has innuendos of a similar ‘African exotic’, and would support Garb’s suggestion of derivative imagery. The context of the second image, also needs to be considered if the academic argument of representation, discussed above, is to be fully explored. The pose of the maiden is a response to a social media driven society and an idea of posing for an audience that is extended by the photographer. The title of the image is *#ZuluMaiden* and references the Twitter handle used to share images on the social network. The ubiquitous cell phone camera has influenced the behavioural readiness of the maidens to pose for pictures. In addition to the intentions of a photographer (amateur or professional), there is an expectation by the subject that goes beyond the photographic, anthropological or documentary record.

Without this context, perhaps an alternative title could well have been *‘Young Zulu Maiden hoping to catch the eye of a possible husband’*. Many of the *#ZuluMaiden* images in the photobook, were taken in response to the maiden’s request to “shoot me, shoot me”. This raises an alternative consideration that the validation of an experience has shifted to the subject as well. Has the camera and the action of taking images at every hint of an experience, changed our world so much that whether you are subject or photographer, the experience is only made complete by the sound of a shutter release?

It is perhaps what Susan Sontag refers to as the ultimate appropriation – needing to have reality confirmed and experiences enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted. The sound generated by a mirror release camera appears to ratify this validation despite the fact that the shutter release sound of a compact or cell phone camera is merely a recorded sound file. This sound is neither real nor functional. What Susan Sontag perhaps did not foresee is the advancement of technology that enables image making without sound, and thus a more devious appropriation that suggests an implicit aggression in silent image ‘taking’. Concurrent with the growth of the amateur photographer is the trend, perpetuated by tourism mediators, to promise the traveller the perfect picture holiday. Exotic tourism is perhaps the fastest growing tourism segment, but it is also creating a distasteful trend for the ‘authentic’ African image - when the image capture becomes the sole purpose of the traveller. In this context I would agree with the arguments of Hooks and Enwezor as I pause to wonder if any of the tourists who

arrive at the Reed Dance are aware of the cultural-economical conflict their desire for the exotic images has on this region, and on the spiritual integrity of Zulu culture itself.

Until now the assumption has been that either photographers, amateur or professional, or tourists are the ones generating the vast amount of imagery disseminating from the Reed Dance. Many of the smaller modern cameras have exceptional functionality and connectivity, and are easy to conceal and generous in the image-making capacity. Despite the restriction of recording devices and the accreditation process for media personnel, it appears that cell phones, iPads and compact cameras are as much a part of the traditional dress as beads and animal skins. A comparison of Figure 3 and Figure 6, both showing a maiden posing for the 'photographer', would answer the earlier question of who is qualified to take an appropriate image. Camera accessibility has negated qualification. Enwezor's rather scathing point of view regarding sisterhood becomes questionable in this context. Figures 4 and 5 further prove that the argument of location as a photographer is as varied and unquantifiable as the images themselves.



Fig 4 Young Zulu Prince recording the maidens



Fig 5. Young Zulu Prince recording with a tablet device.



Fig 6. Young maidens record their own mementos of the day

3.2 A media view exposed

In an attempt to contextualise the visual narratives of the Reed Dance it is also necessary to look at the media coverage of the event. Photojournalism and documentary are linked by the fact that they have a relationship with real events. To expand on the concept of what or who constitutes a valid point of view, I've examined the Reed Dance news stories in six national newspapers over the two-day period of the event (Sunday 1 and Monday 2 September, 2013). The publications were chosen based purely on availability in the town of Ulundi, and at uShaka International airport and the Cape Town International airport. For this analysis I paid particular attention to the photographer, the photograph[s] and the theme[s] of the news reports. The publications include *City Press*, *Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Independent*, *The Mercury*, *Sunday Argus* and *The Star*. Refer to the scans of these publications in Appendix 1 and the tabled analysis in Appendix 2.

The result of the examination revealed a general image construct that consists of a group of the maidens, singing and holding their reeds. The only variance is the singling out of the British maiden by *The Star* and the *Sunday Argus* and, in the case of *The Star* (Table 1) the inclusion of a 'height disadvantaged' maiden. None of the images give any context to the scale of the event, either geographically or in terms of the masses of people who attend the weekend celebration. All the reports appear to rather focus on the number of maidens, Enyokeni Palace, the VIP's and how many people were injured. The photographs and captions are relatively bland and reference the obvious. Rather than being attentive observers, media photographers are under pressure to get the "photo-op" rather than provide insight.

The Mercury had a clear political intent, with no images of the maidens and only the exchange with ANC Indian community representatives and King Goodwill Zwelithini. In the case of *City Press*, the photograph of the maidens competes with other imagery on the page, including that of celebrities and innuendos of sex, violence or other forms of the spectacular.

The 2013 event was plagued by organisational and logistical shortcomings. It was only the *Sunday Argus* and the *Sunday Times* that mentioned some of the more overt happenings, such as the collapsing tent and hospitalisation of injured maidens. There was no mention of the long queues for water and food, or the lack of toilet facilities or rubbish removal. The *Sunday Argus* mentioned that 90 people were treated at mobile clinics, mostly for dehydration (omitting to highlight the poor access to water). There was no media coverage

regarding the important ZAZI⁴⁴ initiative, an initiative that promotes and educates the young girls of their constitutional rights. ZAZI stressed issues around human trafficking and unprotected sex, HIV/AIDS and STD's, but none of this was reported.

The most significant observation, in my review of the publications and from my own experience at the Reed Dance, was that all the photojournalists were black males. With the exception of the British maiden and her boyfriend who were making a documentary film, the official imagery disseminated on global networks, is limited to a black male media view. Although the gender dynamics that this observation raises are too vast to cover in this document, new critical theories addressing the feminist geography in the leisure and tourism landscape are adding to the debate of 'gendered spaces'⁴⁵. It is important however, to acknowledge that the complexity of this power relationship promotes the gendering of the male gaze and the disenfranchisement of feminine experience⁴⁶. Comaroff and Comaroff also suggest that as the mass media take possession of cultural traditions, even those that they celebrate, they reduce their "unique character to interchangeable sameness."⁴⁷

Despite a rise in the awareness of abuse against women in South African society, the media, who have owned the visual space until recently, appear to perpetuate a male media gaze that supports this sameness, or perhaps in this case, even blindness to the greater issues at hand. These six national newspapers represent a visual narrative that is consumed by a global audience – disseminated on social networks and re-distributed by media agencies. The banality of their message does little to enhance the understanding of this rite of passage, and perhaps even trivialises the importance of this cultural tradition. They show a limited view of the event without researching context, relevance or implication. It may be that as new media horizons expand and other image generators have a space to articulate their voice, the dominance of a single view will be challenged.

⁴⁴ The ZAZI Women and Girls Campaign is a joint initiative undertaken by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Johns Hopkins University (JHU) HIV Communication Program with funding from the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and a range of partners including the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), the Department of Health, and the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities.

⁴⁵ Annette Pritchard and Nigel J Morgan, "Privileging the Male Gaze: Gendered Tourism Landscapes," *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 4 (October 2000): 884–905, doi:10.1016/S0160-7383(99)00113-9.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.*

Chapter 4

One lens three views

The three photo essays created as companions to this study each have a different story to offer about the Reed Dance. It is hoped that the subtext will remind the viewer that the photographer is operating on a continuum of subjective engagement with the subject matter, and that the resultant views prove the existence of alternative narratives at any one given time. Because the nature of photography is fluid and diverse in its application, it is naïve to perceive these three essays as categorical reflections of truth. They are visual records, influenced by the acknowledgement that they have the ability to authenticate real events yet are loaded with the spatial politics that have been discussed in this study. The three photo essays are:

Photo Essay 1: The Maidens Exposed

Photo Essay 2: Postcards

Photo Essay 3: Portraits (#ZuluMaiden)

4.1 The Maidens Exposed

The documentary style of the first photo essay reveals a visual narrative that reflects reference points in my subjective moral landscape. The empathy I have with the young maidens influences my need to look for visual sensitivities and subtler nuances that resonate with any moral displacements I observe. My place as a hybrid-citizen journalist means that I can be both advocate and witness to the events that unfold. This is not an objective look at the Reed Dance, yet the signifiers can be considered to point to a truth that is currently South Africa's disgrace, the increasing abuse of women.

The photographs, shot digitally and converted to black and white in postproduction, are presented here in a linear order. The linear order is important as it speaks to the unfolding sense of unease I experienced over the ceremonial weekend, and which I discuss in chapter one. The removal of colour is in part a stylistic reference to traditional documentary photography, and assists in uncluttering the view of the experience. Extensive captioning is used to supplement the information and reveal the complexity of the event. The role of captioning is to provide essential context that is intended to augment the information and the validity of the image record.

The use of black and white images supported by text is a familiar style for documentary photographers, both in implicit critique and practise. The documentary ideal of no editing of the image is somewhat blurry, allowing the photographer to emphasise without digitally adding or removing pixels from the image (the general rule of thumb). Digital enhancements are commonplace, for example the 2013 World Press Award photograph by Paul Hansen, was accepted despite debate around the laying of three images to create perfect lighting emphasis ⁴⁸.

The word *exposed* used in the title of this photo essay has multiple meanings: expose is to make visible by uncovering, it means to cause someone to be vulnerable or at risk, and it refers to the public display of ones genitals. *Exposed* is also a photographic term, which refers to the result of light falling onto the strip of film negative, thus recording the scene or 'reality' of the framed area. The use of the term in this context is an intentional pun. The pun also alludes to a more sinister narrative: the exposure of the Reed Dance as a victim of the potentially greedy eyes of cultural tourism and the commodification of culture.

It is my hope that this photo essay will reveal some of the unreported realities of the Reed Dance and challenge the production and consumption of images of such an experience.

4.2 Postcards

Postcards is a series of portraits taken of the pop-up photo-entrepreneurs against the backdrops of their makeshift studios. These portraits are juxtaposed to a collection of unclaimed prints of posing maidens, printed by the photographers on site. Many of the 30 000 maidens, who are all likely to want a keepsake of their pilgrimage, flood to the informal trading area to have their Reed Dance journey validated in print. The studios, some elaborate and some less so, are erected during the course of the weekend. First count of the studios on the Saturday afternoon of the event was five, but by mid-morning on Sunday, in time for the dance ceremony, this number had risen to twenty-six. The pop-up photo booths or studios vary in their technological savvy - generators run printers that churn out postcard size colour prints, assistants scurry between photographer and printer with memory cards and cash while soliciting business on the run. There is a clear sense that this is a quick business deal as opposed to a considered studio portraiture.

⁴⁸ Corinne Diserens and Walther Collection, *Contemporary African Photography from The Walther Collection*.

Despite the authentic Africanness of the Reed Dance, the traders seem oblivious to the disconnect they have created. With backdrops of palm trees and dolphins, an ornate Japanese landscape or cascading waterfalls, the maidens pose with added Indonesian props or the more popular Zulu shield, spear or reed, and claim their portrait. There is a visual collision of ethnic disjuncture; the photographs are humorous, bordering on incredulous.

The postcards raise the question of what it is *we* choose, select or deselect, to validate *our* experience. The photographs appear to create a visual fantasy rather than a visual record of the event. Strangely, the more authentic looking portraits, where photographers have used a natural background, such as traditional African print fabric, do seem less fanciful and as a result less interesting than the elaborate, sometimes gaudy unrealistic landscape scenes. The fanciful backgrounds also appeared to be more popular with the maidens.

Perhaps the pop-up studios are creating a hidden counter-archive of authentic African portraiture, where the subtext is sadly more in line with the direction in which re-traditioning is headed; disconnected from its origins. It appears that there is a continuum of visual contradiction: on the one end of the scale the tourist seeks out an 'authentic African image' to secure their African experience, and on the other end, the maidens choose to ratify their rite of passage with fanciful images, many around constructed fantasies. There is a disconnect, I believe, as the maidens shift from an intimate experience (virginity testing) to needing to have their reed dance reality confirmed.

4.3 Portraits

The third essay explores the notion that photography acts as a supplement to an experience, a process perhaps of photographing the 'thing' that we want to remember, like *aides-memoire*, as Sontag suggests⁴⁹. The act for most tourists is to put the camera between themselves and the event that they are encountering, almost as if unless photographed, the event did not occur. The photograph becomes an instrument of mental tourism, and colonises reality. Clive Scott in his book *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language*, talks of this practise as turning an experience into the "impotence of image, something without the right of reply, something subservient to the photographer's gaze."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Sontag, *On Photography*.

⁵⁰ Clive Scott, *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language* (Reaktion Books, 1999).

The portraits in this photo essay represent a distilled moment of exchange between the photographer and the subject in the viewfinder. Despite the repetitive pose (full body portraits) using the same camera settings and angles, these images manage to become a record of individuality, nuanced by the subtleties of each self-arranged pose, the traditional dress and the subject's engagement with the camera. Like the Barnett & Co images of the 1890's, will these records freeze the maidens in a factual past with little hope of a future? Rather, I think these images have a digital future where they will be viewed and re-contextualised by agents of circulation and presentation. The role of these portraits has changed from anthropological record to exotic African authenticity, touted and sold to anything from stock agencies and tourism sites, to school text books.

I have specifically chosen not to title these portraits with individual captions. This supports Sontag's belief that we greedily appropriate what we like, taking on the ownership for ourselves with little acknowledgement of the subject. I do however sub-title the whole photo-essay as *#ZuluMaiden*, to suggest the digital dynamic of social media and the further genericising of the maidens. This intention is to dramatise the 'speechlessness' of the maidens and disarm them of individuality. It also serves to demonstrate the reluctance of the tourist to engage with their subject beyond the simple record of presence. Despite this intentional disenfranchisement, they in fact become semantically richer.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

“One of the tasks of photography is to disclose and shape our sense of the variety of the world. It is not to present ideals. There is no agenda except diversity and interestingness”

*Susan Sontag*⁵¹

I began this study to enrich my understanding of the Reed Dance and to capture it in a visually interesting way. My interest in the documentary image began in 2009 and the text of Susan Sontag has strongly influenced my process ever since. One of the challenges of documentary photography is finding the hidden story by daring to look away from the obvious. Initially I thought that this would be a single story of what happens behind the scenes of the ceremony, but the result was three very different stories. My experience changed my understanding of this unique rite of passage and the pressures that modern society has placed on it. I feel that the ceremony is still largely visually unexplored, despite a proliferation of images available on media networks.

In chapter one I write about my experience of being at the ceremony, and the subjective way in which I observed the unfolding events. This clearly comes through in the first photo essay, and I've proposed that this point of view is valid and necessary in contemporary South Africa. In chapter two I explore some of the political and cultural aspects of the ceremony and the effects of commodifying culture as a form of empowerment. What this reveals is a labyrinth of stakeholders on almost all levels of engagement, often in conflict with each other. The *Postcards* photo essay reveals a playful flirtation with a culture on the brink, if not already, of commodification. In chapter three I discuss relevant academic texts in an attempt to contextualise the criticism that these photo essays are likely to receive. Some texts argue the validity of a white female photographer who photographs the female black subject. It is through these texts that the idea of a continuum of subjectivity supports the validity of the work presented. Furthermore, I investigated the media perspective and found that the media view is mostly a generic representation, with little engagement with the complexity of the occasion or its purpose for the maidens.

⁵¹ Sontag, *On Photography*.

Presenting my own visual work in the format of three photo-essays is also an attempt to support Sontag's opinion that there is not merely one perspective of an event but indeed many. The clutter of images populating the networks will ultimately become what Susan Sontag says are a "series of unrelated, free-standing particles; and history, past and present, a set of anecdotes and *faits divers*." As the photographer I have not only created three very different photo-essays of the same event taken at the same time, but have exposed a connected and deeper narrative of the ceremony as a whole. The different stylistic approaches of these photo-essays are largely enabled by my ability to move along a continuum of subjectivity and an innate curiosity to find the hidden story. It is the hidden stories that are the ones that find their way through the clutter, and delight, inform or shock the viewer. Ultimately this is the intention of the documentary storyteller. Revealing the darker side of the Reed Dance is countered by the ingenuity of the photo-entrepreneurs, and the maidens, who while seemingly disempowered by the event, appear to gain a sense of self. It is my opinion that the Reed Dance is also an empowering and enriching experience despite the subaltern practices the maidens endure. The teachings by the matriarchs, the confirmation of virginity and the ritual of the reed ceremony appear to concomitant a strong sense of belonging to a tradition despite it undergoing change. On the simple continuum of 'one lens three views', the extremes of these three stories are quite distinct. I have accomplished what I set out to do.

By way of concluding I would like to add a final observation that I found deeply disturbing. The overnight explosion of commodity microcosms has exposed a metanarrative that is alarmingly indifferent to the dignity of the maiden's journey. Those familiar with the history of South Africa may observe a continuity of the romanticisation of African cultural practices, and the burgeoning patterns of exploitation under the guise of cultural tourism.

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PUBLICATION	REED DANCE HEADLINE	IMAGE BLURB	IMAGE	COMMENT
<p>City Press Sunday 1 Sep Front Page</p>	<p>Amatshitshi</p>	<p>Thousands of young women and girls gather at Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini's Enyokeni Palace in Nongoma, KwaZulu-Natal, yesterday for the yearly <i>Umkhosi woMhlang</i> (reed dance). The festival was attended by top politicians like the IFP's Mangosuthu Buthelezi</p>	<p>Close crop of three young maidens. Although bare-breasted their breasts do not dominate the visual. The capture shows the singing and as they are holding their reeds, the maidens were still to offer their reeds to the king. The names of the maidens are not revealed although it was established that that they were from the Ladysmith district.</p>	<p>The City Press banner dominates the front page; words such as BATTLE and Raunchy catch the attention. A reminder that violence and sex sell. A large image and a blurb but no new report represent the reed dance. Gupta TV and Nelson Mandela's release from hospital dominate the news stories. In the reed dance blurb, attention is draw to the political attachment to the reed dance by mention of the IFP leader.</p>
<p>The Sunday Independent Sunday 1 Sep Page 2</p>	<p>Sweet moment</p>	<p>Princess Makelile left, and Princess Ngobangothando share a tender moment during the annual reed dance at KwaNongoma, northern KwaZulu-Natal, yesterday.</p>	<p>Princess's kissing. Reeds and group in background.</p>	<p>Emphasis on Royal family princesses. Representation of reed dances by visual and blurb only. No news story. It is tradition that the maidens of the royal household make a special entrance. The media generally tend to view this image as the image to capture, often leaving straight after they have the shot.</p>
<p>Sunday Times Sunday 1 Sep Page 6</p>	<p>Cellphone snapper arrested at reed dance ceremony.</p>	<p>KEEPING TRADITION: More than 30 000 women flocked to the annual Zulu celebrations at eNyokeni Royal Palace in Nongoma yesterday.</p>	<p>The image is dominated by a lens barreling effect bringing one maiden into focus while the others in the group are out of focus. The maiden is not named.</p>	<p>The reed dance article dominates the top left-hand side of the page. The image is visually interesting because of the barreling effect although the technique is questionable here. Perhaps it is an attempt to be more creative or give the appearance of being in the moment. The elements contained in the image are singing maidens and the reeds. There is little context, nor are we given any context about the girls i.e. which district they come from or their names. The news story gives more detail about the event, leading with the cell phone pornographer and then the story of the British girl, and the conditions (dehydration and wind). The article does not mention virginity, virginity testing and the purpose of the event (learning).</p>
<p>Sunday Argus Sunday 1 Sep Page 2</p>	<p>Marquee collapses at reed dance</p>	<p>Stealing the show: All eyes were on 20-year old British student Ella Pill at this year's reed dance</p>	<p>White maiden, medium close up, carrying reeds</p>	<p>The marquee collapse story dominates the page, cluttered with adverts and weather. The image is fairly random in its composition, possible the only shot the photographer managed to make of the British girl. The story leads with the tent collapse, the British student participating in a documentary film, heavy security, arrest of pornography claim man, logistics blunder, leaving maidens stranded and leading into story about matric exams. The piece is informative and gives a hint of the camaraderie of the girls attending the reed dance, the logistics of getting them there and some of the sacrifices they made to get there (or not). There is no mention of virginity testing, the Indian maidens or any of the tensions between rights groups. The article does allude to the reasons for the increased security, which has less to do about the security of the maidens and more about an existing feud in the area.</p>
<p>The Mercury Monday 2 Sep Front Page</p>	<p>Reed Dance Maidens killed Indian maidens to join in next year</p>	<p>No image in lead story. Second lead blurb: Kind Goodwill Zwelithini with Vivian Reddy at the Reed Dance in Nongoma at the weekend.</p>	<p>The image is a close crop of KGW and Vivian Reddy both appear preoccupied with their cell phones. KGW is in traditional African gear and Reddy in a suit. Both wearing sunglasses. The kraal reeds in the background put their interaction in the royal kraal where the Indian ANC member would have offered the gift to the king</p>	<p>The Mercury leads with coverage of bus accident that killed eight girls and 1 parent. The story is a bit lost net to the headline of Mandela going home. The positioning and the fact that there is an image used for the second story, presents the second story as more significant. The coverage is dominated by the Indian participation (next year) and the bus accident.</p>
<p>The Star Monday 2 Sep Page 4</p>	<p>Cultural event to help bring communities closer in KZN Eight killed and 62 injured as bus transporting maidens involved in horror crash</p>	<p>RESPECT: Every September, over 30 000 Zulu maidens gather as the Enyokeni Royal Palace in Nongoma to participate in the Reed Dance <i>umkhosi woMhlanga</i>. Ella Pill joined the cultural celebration that promotes respect for young women and preserves the custom of keeping as virgins until marriage.</p>	<p>The main image dominates the page. The journalist has captured the white British girl dancing in the front with her fellow maidens. The second image draws attention to a 'height disadvantaged'. A maiden. Bothe images are tightly cropped of the groups of dancing maidens after they have given over their reed. A third much smaller image (thumbnail) gives some perspective to the event showing maidens walking up the road with their reeds and a smaller group of girls observing them.</p>	<p>The British maiden dominates the visual and she is singled out not only in name but also because she is white and she chose to cover her breasts. The act of covering seems to highlight the 'nakedness' and otherness of her presence. Maidens at the front of the group have a higher 'rank' and her position here is quite imposing. It appears the publication is attempting to be politically correct by including a physically disadvantage maiden. The coverage in The Star was by far the most in-depth and also reported on the Zazi initiative. This initiative firmly puts the reed dance as open to maidens of other cultures. Other participating cultures would not have to take part in the virginity testing but their virginity would be vouched for their virginity. With the Kings blessing and the Zazi initiative, it will not be a surprise if very soon this becomes participatory exotic tourism.</p>

Appendix 2: Publications



The Mercury
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Front Page



The Star
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City Press
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