

**ECO-EROTIC DECOLONISATION AND KHOISAN
REVIVALISM: A RESEARCH-PERFORMANCE STUDY
OF THE INSEPARABLE SENSATE EXCHANGE
BETWEEN LAND AND BODY AS A REGISTER FOR
RE-INDIGENISATION**

BY

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the eco-erotic belonging of Land and body through performance practices as acts of embodied decolonisation and re-indigenisation through the Khoisan hydromythic figuration of *Die Waterslang* (The Water Snake). Drawing on ritual, trance and other tools of visceral performance-making in site-specific contexts, the study is produced from the bodied *material* power of Land, objects and practices in a relationality wherein the human is connected to a vaster field co-inhabited by beings that exist in entirely non-human modes. It is a performative ethnography that, in the processes of coming to matter, redefines ethnography (through rubbing against Khoisan anthropology) and performance practice.

Methodologically, it is a research-creation study grounded in Indigenous epistemology that utilises an ecology of practices and techniques for intra-active¹ making and thinking where there is a continual, inseparable sensate exchange and influence between practice and analysis. Conceptually located in the overlapping fields of Performance Studies, Indigenous feminism, New Materialism, Queer Ecology, Decolonial Studies and Sexuality Studies, it proposes the eco-erotic as a contact zone where the violent legacies of settler colonialism can be disrupted and new narratives and ways of being can emerge.

It makes and thinks through three research-creation performance events presented at significant sites in and around Cape Town: Spier Estate in Stellenbosch, the Slave Lodge in Cape Town, and the Amazon development at the Liesbeeck River Confluence. Through these interventions, it proposes eco-erotic decolonisation and embodied knowledge production as a register of Khoisan Revivalism and re-indigenisation.

Keywords: Performance Studies. Indigeneity. Decolonial Theory. Eco-erotics. Khoisan Revivalism. More-than-human. Sexuality Studies. Ritual.

¹ "intra-action" is a neologism coined by feminist physicist, Karen Barad (2007) for "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies", where in contrast to interaction, agencies do not precede but co-constitutively emerge through their intra-action. Unlike interaction where agencies are separate and individual, intra-active agencies emerge as distinct "only in relational to their mutual entanglement". (2007:35)

Guidelines for Accessing the Practice While Reading the Thesis

Accompanying this written thesis is the submission of a website that contains the entire practical component of the thesis in digital form. The website, which contains photographs, video and other ephemera, while being a work on its own, should be read in tandem with the chapters.

These are some guidelines for access:

- In a style that runs throughout, the website content is linked in each Chapter heading. For example, clicking on the heading Abstract above will direct you to the home page of the website. The heading 'Chapter 1' leads to the corresponding materials that are referred to in this Chapter and so on.
- Material that informs the making/thinking of the project is linked as it arises in the text with instructions such as 'view here' that can be clicked to open.
- Non-essential supplementary material mentioned (mostly in Chapter 1) is available on the website, but not linked, and can be viewed at the reader's discretion.

It is important to take cognisance of the fact that this is a performance research-creation study in which performance and research are a somatic/semantic co-production and that Live Art cannot adequately be rendered in writing or even video. The performance descriptions, thus, in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 serve merely as a diagram of complex associative atmospheres generated in the live event, and the narrative timelines detailing the processes are outlines that belie the interwoven spectrality of performance making. The mode of being arrived at in the moment of performance exists predominantly extralinguistically, and in this regard, I draw on Glissant to insist on a "Right to Opacity". What is theorised are the complex forces and frictions at play in the intellectuality of research-performance making. These occur at differing intensities that, as an embodied writer, are felt somatically. As an example of this visceral engagement, Chapter 4 required a thorough engagement with Bushman Studies in order to lift the sepulchral monolith of this cannon off my extant body and tongue. The descriptions and digital renderings of the various works serve as catalysts for and reflections on the written chapters while bringing the reader more closely into the immersive nature of making.

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Wynand Herholdt, research partner in the ways of the heart.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Frank Weimers – this is for you, thank you.

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List of Acronyms

ASCs	Altered states of consciousness
BDSM	Bondage, Domination/Discipline, Sadism and Masochism
D/s	Dominant/submissive
DEIC	Dutch East India Company
GKITC	Goringhaicona Indigenous Traditional Council
GKKTIC	Goringhaicona Khoi Khoi Traditional Indigenous Council
ICA	Institute of Creative Arts
IDs	Identity Documents
IR	Intimate Reparations
LLPT	Liesbeeck Leisure Public Trust
OCA	Observatory Civic Association
S/M	Sadism/Masochism
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resources Agency
TKLA	Traditional and Khoisan Leadership Act
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UCT	University of Cape Town
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VOC	Dutch East India Company
WCFNC	Western Cape First Nations Collective
WOF	Womb of Fire

Chapter 1: Introduction

'Aus' sounds like the Khoekhoegowab word 'Aus' (like *oudste* in Afrikaans), but it means the wise, first-born woman in the family. 'Aus', linked to water, is a motif denoting fountain, blood or 'big snake' Bam, J. 2021: xxviii

This research-creation study is produced by the relationship between water, the big Snake – *Die Groot Slang/ Die Water Slang* and me, a first-born daughter. *Die Waterslang* is a hydromythic figure recalled through stories in diverse Khoi and 'Coloured' communities as a fragment that has survived erasure across the colonial cleave. This (un)canny liquid survivance is what this research-creation project study intimately follows as a decolonial force that flows through body, community and Land as it comes to matter; returning to itself, abruptly changing direction, metamorphic and relational. In the process, it remembers a register of Khoisan indigeneity. Remembering is a polyvalent activity that includes retrieving memory erased by colonialism across time, suturing the dismembered body fractured by present and intergenerational colonial violences and bringing together the members of an extended kinship in a relational web of human, more-than-human kin and Land².

As I draft this in November 2023, unspeakable atrocities are being waged against the Palestinian people, who are forbidden from catching rainwater to drink because Israel owns the rain. In Palestine, Tigray, Sudan, Congo, colonial genocide continues and worldwide extractive devastation goes on and on like a merciless, apocalyptic 'curse', as Tyson Yunkaporta (2019) calls this closed linear system that the West has imposed on Life. Of what significance is the Arts at this point, of what value is intimacy with waters beyond direct action to halt pipelines, stop fracking, and coastal drilling? It feels insurmountable, but what is becoming ever clearer as the world unites for the Palestinian people, is that the clarion call *From the River to the Sea*³ is a liquid call for all Life and Land. As we realise our deep planetary entanglement more and more, counter-stories well up and burst through cracks in settler walls and rivers speak in their more-than-human ways to those who care to listen.

² "Land" is capitalised throughout this thesis in a reference to its use in Indigenous Studies where its use denotes the historical and sacred connections to Land and the web of relationships that comprise Land as an animate materiality outside of ideas of property.

This thesis asks and explores the question of re-indigenisation across genocide and erasure through the relationship of body and Land. What possible knowledges are co-produced in the eco-erotic intimacy of this relationship? What can performance research offer to re-indigenisation? How can thinking with the more-than-human mythic aquatic help us "flood the bivalve of the post-colonial" as De Smet (2013) says? How can we reinstitute these more-than-human beings as "figures with a job to do, as modes of dissolving hardened structure, and thereby allowing alternate forces and alternate narratives to emerge" (2013:11).

In pursuit of an answer, this thesis traces three research-creation performances in a cumulative investigation of relationality through the Khoisan mythic aquatic (*die Waterslang*) as a register of decolonisation and re-indigenisation and water as a counter-hegemonic mode that overflows and is in liquid excess of the colonial. Each performance is a chapter that is somatically/semantically co-produced by a relationship of body and Land that is mnemonic and epistemological. This 'carnal knowledge' production exists at the confluence of ecology, Indigenous studies and sexuality studies that can be termed eco-erotics (Nelson, 2017) and proposes a sensuous relationality with the environment that is at once decolonising and regenerative; the inspirations and implications of which will be fleshed out more fully as this Chapter unfolds.

Following this first introductory Chapter, the first performance discussed lays out a socio-historic contextualisation, the second is an exploration of a possible erotic re-rendering of the colonial contact zone, and the third performance study delves into the sensate exchange between the bodies of the performer and the more-than-human mythic being of the Land.

1.1.1 Ancestral Relations

In keeping with the protocols of Indigenous scholarship, this is a good place to position myself and expand on Aus June Bam's quote above. I am South African, and was racially classified as Coloured. This particularly fraught moniker is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two, as is my use of the term Khoisan, but for the purposes of this introduction, what is important to note is that this identity is characterised by colonial erasures on various registers that invisibilise the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism. In response, retrieval and re-memory have been a dominant feature of my research-creation as a practice of becoming and freedom, and because of my location as a performing artist, these processes have been embodied somatic/semantic sense-makings.

1.1.2 Paternal Ancestors – the Pull of the Sea

My paternal ancestors are Cape Muslim, and the family story extends back to 'die slawetyd' (the slave times); memory of a pre-slave past is passed down in story, in the gestural repertoire of ritual, in language usage and food³. My Master's thesis, entitled, *Remembering the post-slave female body through performance: Reflections on a Body of Work/Water* (on the website, non-essential), traced this body of work from my paternal grandparents' bedtime story across the Indian Ocean to Java, where I lived and studied for five years. In this multi-year research-creation (beginning with the play *What the Water Gave Me* in 2000 and ending with the Master's thesis (2017), I examined embodied decolonisation through storytelling and through the sacred dances (that I studied at the Art Institute of Indonesia in Surakarta) of the Javanese Naga goddess of the South Sea, *Nyai Loro Kidu*⁴. The thesis viewed the embodied experience of these dances as capable of recovering eco-erotic attunement in a counter to the somatic alienation engendered by colonialism and located water as a mode of dissolving colonial divides in imbricated cognitive/somatic ways. In my post-performance research, I discovered the Javanese mystical concept of *Kitab Teles*, the *Wet Book* of the body as the primary source of knowledge (Beatty, 2004:161), antecedent to written religious texts such as the Quran. The syncretism of Javanese Islam that incorporated Tantric Buddhism, Hinduism and Animism allowed space for my performing body that I had not experienced in the Islam I grew up with in Cape Town, in a sensuous experience of fluid affective porosity that was erotically relational and at the same time considered sacred. I saw this retrieval of my body within the space of Islam as decolonial.

³ I refer to Bahasa Indonesia and Malayu words such as *Mandi* for bathe, *Myang* (etymologically related to the word *Moyang* meaning ancestor) for incense; practices such as observing *Malam Juma'at* (Thursday night or Friday eve) as *Spoke Aand* (ghost night), and the culinary evolution of a creole Cape cuisine. These are traced in greater detail in my Master's thesis.

⁴ The goddess of the South Sea, Nyai Loro Kidul, takes the Sultan of Java, through successive generations, as lover, trysting with him every year to order the relationship between the human world and the spirits of the land such as Nagas who precede humans. In the process, she confers rulership. This relationship lies at the heart of Javanese Culture and statehood. The Bedhoyo Ketawang, a sacred dance, the choreography for which was given to Sultan Sengopati in 1585 at his underwater meeting with the goddess, celebrates and ritually enacts this intimate encounter between the chthonic serpent goddess and her human consort.

1.1.3 Maternal Ancestors – Upstream to the Kat River

The current phase of research-creation which this thesis explicates is propelled by a bodily yearning for belonging to Land, which I intuit as a co-produced eco-erotic encounter at increasing levels of intimacy, inspired by Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* (1978) and read through *Kitab Teles, The Wet Book* of my own body, this time following my maternal Khoisan ancestry. Imagistically, this is a movement from the ocean through the river mouth upstream into the contour of rock and the meander of the stream. My mother's people trace their story to the Kat River Khoi settlement (1829 -1851) in the Eastern Cape, established by the colonial British as a buffer between the Colony and the amaXhosa from whom they were trying to take Land, and ending with a Khoi rebellion against colonial rule. This settlement's complex history is a microcosm reflecting the colonial pressures and racial schisms of the time and goes beyond the scope of this thesis. From historical accounts such as Ross (2015)⁵, I surmise that my great, great-grandmother was either Ghonaqua from the area or from the surrounding Khoi missions such as Bethelsdorp. From my mother's accounts, her family was proud of being from the Kat River. She didn't know why; all that the family story definitely recalls was that great, great-grandmother was married to a German man, Jeggels, who was also married to a Xhosa wife, and the three shared a home with their many children, again a microcosm of the Colony at the time. Recently, my mother told me that her grandmother had often referred to Jan Smuts, South African Prime Minister (1919 to 1924 and 1939 to 1948), as "Onse Jan" (Our Jan), which led my mother to believe that the Kat River family supported the British against the amaXhosa. Once again, this is emblematic of the complex relationship to whiteness and African indigeneity that has resulted from colonialism and Apartheid for Khoisan descendants.

Unlike in Java, where, despite Dutch colonial invasion (1816-1941), the culture remained largely intact in song, text, music and ritual practice, Khoisan indigeneity has survived genocide and systemic dispossession of Land, identity and body; dismembered bodies in the Khoisan context are literal, as pickled genitals in European museums attest. As Adhikhari (2010) points out, the term 'genocide' only came into broader usage in the 1980s. Adhikhari adds that in South Africa, "the terms 'extermination', 'extirpation' and 'extinction' are commonly applied to the Cape San in ways that imply what would later be called genocide." (2010:137). Research participant Tauriq Jenkins of the Goringhaicona states in the transcribed interview in Chapter Two that the genocide of the San and Khoi peoples still remains largely

⁵ Ross, Robert. (2015). The Possession and Dispossession of the Kat River Settlement.

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unacknowledged in South Africa. Scholarship on the restoration and revival of Khoisan indigeneity is emergent and still, as Verbuyst points out, "sparse and highly critical" (2023)⁶. In the face of a continuing extinction narrative that impacts colonised bodies in ways that have been erased by the colonial project, a performance study of remembering and retrieval of necessity becomes strategically polyvalent and polysemic in that it reconfigures body, relationality and memory whilst at the same time, to quote Virginie Magnat, "redefining both ethnographic research, shaped by the discipline of anthropology, and performance practice, informed by Western theatre." (2012: 35).

1.1.4 Campbell, The !Gariep and Sources

The intention to undertake this study was first spoken of at a ritual re-enactment of a Hokmeisie !Nau ⁷ (that can be watched [here](#), where I watched a group of Griqua women make offerings of sweets and tobacco and call to *die Groot Slang* in a trash-filled stream in Campbell, Northern Cape. I was there with a team filming a documentary in which I was employed as a presenter, entitled *The Khoekhoe Saga*, a series which first aired on SABC 2 in February 2023. I use the word 'study' to refer to Moten and Harney's (2013) term, which acknowledges that intellectual work already exists in the world around us in the 'sociality' that emerges intra-actively between people, and that this happens outside of and in relation to the academy, opening up new possibilities for knowledge production (112). This is elucidated more fully in the Methodology section below. For now, I will describe the event that took place in Campbell.

That night at the river, we witnessed a re-enactment of a *!Ncabasas*, as they called it. A schoolgirl performed the role of the *hokmeisie* (initiate) and the elders took on the roles they would have at such an event. We had missed the time; a *!Ncabasas* had been planned for later in the year, and the community weren't sure if a real *!Ncaba* should be filmed at all. Part of the re-enactment was the added bonus of narration by the various members of the community who described the event, told us what was happening from moment to moment and gave performance notes and instructions to the participants. We waited outside the house until the performer was dressed and then, in a large procession, took her down to the river. At the river, the elders took sticks and smacked the water in a special way that called the sleeping

⁶ Rafael Verbuyst article <https://africasacountry.com/2023/01/how-to-make-sense-of-khoisan-revivalism> accessed April 25 2024.

⁷ I use the words !Nau, Ncaba, Ncabasas interchangeably for this rite of passage ceremony which reflects the way it was used by the people in Campbell.

Snake. After they threw sweets, tobacco and herbs in the water, the working part of the ritual was over. Then everyone explained how it worked, what was done afterwards to care for the initiate and described their memories of their own *!Ncabasas*. There was dancing, and we walked everyone back home.

There are numerous studies of the Griqua at Campbell, notably genetic and osteological (Brink, 1923). As early as 1919, skulls were taken from Griqua graves to determine Griqua genetic heritage and to determine or refute Griqua claims to indigeneity (Raber & Morris, 2025). This invasive scientific racism in response to the Griqua's refusal of colonial classification over such an extended period attests to how the Griqua challenged regimes of control and power. Although a full discussion of the Griqua is beyond the scope of this study, the experience with the Campbell Griqua community points to the complexities that constitute the ground of this study; while the ritual, *die Waterslang*, and the river offer potential for dissolving, exceeding and overwhelming hardened structures, allowing possible regeneration to emerge. This method of inquiry exists in opposition to grave-digging for skulls and then cutting them up to ascertain their rights to the ground they lie in. Instead, it employs other ways of engaging with the dead, the more-than-human, and the ground that will be explored specifically in each chapter/performance.

To return to Campbell, the Griqua began as a community of freed slaves, maroons (escaped slaves), outlaws and others who sought freedom from the Colony, led by Adam Kok the First, a Free-Black burgher who amassed over 3000 head of cattle by his own labour on 'loan land' acquired from the VOC in 1751. In 1771, this Land was taken from him by the VOC, and Kok, his extended family and many followers began their epic multi-generational trek through South Africa. Along the way, they repeatedly established and built thriving settlements, only to be displaced and dispossessed again and again by the Dutch and later the British, finally finishing this flight desperately reduced on the Sotho border at Kokstad. Initially referred to as Baasters or Bastards (the Colony's way of distinguishing them from whites and 'true' indigenes), it was on the advice of the Rev. John Campbell (unhappy with the pejorative name Bastards) that they renamed themselves Griqua, and created a constitution, laws and a judicial system. When I travelled the route of the Griqua trek, I visited the Waterboer home in Griquastad and saw the 'hanging tree' in the Waterboer family's backyard, where the Griqua meted out the first colonially informed punishments on Khoisan bodies. The town where I witnessed the *Ncabasas*, Campbell, was named in honour of this Reverend and was one of the settlements to which the Griqua moved in their journey of fugitive freedom.

It was in Campbell that I started to listen for the susurrations of the serpent, and as we continued travelling and filming, I prayed and made offerings, throwing coins into the !Gariep

and greeting *die Grootslang*. It seemed fitting that this self-styled nation of maroons pointed the way in this study. The drunk elders (because alcoholism is epidemic and the cheapest alcohol is sold next to the church and police station in small towns all over South Africa), by a trashy river, the schoolgirls and young mothers so excited to share stories and dance, pointed the way; the matter-of-fact way they said of *die Waterslang*: "Ons roep hom en hy kom, as hy nie kom nie is daar 'n probleem". *We call him and he comes; if he doesn't come, there's a problem.*

This relationship to the river, the Snake and erotic autonomy as a sacred potency honoured in an individual body by an entire community was a compelling reminder of the central Javanese relationship with Nyai Loro Kidul, the Naga goddess of the South Sea, that had infused my Master's research. The differences in the contexts of the two rituals, one with intricate offerings and dances, and the other a remnant struggling for its continuation, were provocative, as also was the commonality – the matter-of-fact recognition of a mythical aquatic being as autonomous and agential. I continued to gather *Waterslang* stories along the Griqua route we travelled and was struck by the excitement and erotic charge that was sparked in the narrators as they spoke, and their playful insistence on speaking obliquely or in riddles about family members or friends that had fallen in love with the being by the water, only to disappear for days or weeks. The Water Snake mythology exists throughout Southern Africa, and in fact globally, with similar motifs and associations. Located these stories within a broader Indigenous epistemological context with a particular Khoisan inflexion. This location is not in order to validate claims to indigeneity, but in order to trace the particularities of *die Waterslang's* resilience as a source of survivance. The trash-filled river in Campbell, the economically impoverished community fighting for recognition, the Griqua trek and their continuing resistance against continual colonial incursion, the contrasting joyous talk about rituals and observances, the elders' firm conviction in the existence of the Snake and the playful stories along the way; all coalesced around the figure of *die Waterslang*.

I was seized by this "beyond-human imaginary" (Chao and Enari: 2021) and the possibility of tracking *die Waterslang* across "storied existences of both human and beyond-human communities of life across their multiple and situated contexts, along with their co-constitutive relations". I intuited, that much as in my previous body of work, where the encounters with Nyai Loro Kidul, as a figure of liquidity that welled up from a precolonial past to flood the "bivalve of the post-colonial" (De Smet, 2013) in a process that retrieved affect and Eros on somatic and cognitive scales, so too *die Waterslang* held liberatory potentials for radically re-imagining Indigenous survivance for body and Land.

Tracking this story, I found diverse variations of *Die Waterslang /Die Groot Slang*, the metamorphic more-than-human being who lives in rivers, ponds and streams but, most often, springs or sources of particular potency. Sometimes an attractive man or woman, a snake with a jewel in its head, an owl, a lamb, a malevolent whirlwind, exchanging fat with and becoming an Eland; this figure protects, avenges, instructs, beguiles, seduces, initiates and bestows gifts.

In the urban context, an interlocutor in Cape Town, Sally Willemse from Mitchell's Plain, told a story of a wounded and bleeding woman she had met in a taxi. The woman had been taken to a deserted riverbank by a boyfriend who then attacked her with a knife, stabbing her repeatedly. The woman called on the *Grootslang*, who rose up from the river and helped her disarm the man and drown him. Bleeding from multiple wounds, she fled to the national highway (the N2) and managed to catch a taxi (where Sally Willemse met her) back to the city.

1.1.5 Kharkams, Okiep – *Die Oog* (The Eye)

In the first year of this study (January 2022), I tracked the stories to the small town of Kharkams, in Namaqualand, Northern Cape, to the home of friend and colleague Jason Jacobs⁸ and his grandmother, Mama Hettie Farmer. Nama is the most widely spoken remaining Khoekhoegowab (Khoi Language), and hence Namaqualand (Land of the Nama People) is also seen as a source for remembering Khoisan ways of knowing. One evening, Mama Hettie told us three *spook stories* (ghost stories) that are transcribed in full in this link [here](#) and summarised below. The stories are not analysed for narrative structure or technique and staging in this thesis; instead, they are viewed, together with the *!Ncabasas* in Campbell, as a source from which the research-creation (as a type of story) flows. The word for Spring in Afrikaans is *fontein* (fountain), and the word used colloquially for the source of the spring is *die Oog* (the eye). On the website, Mama Hettie's full transcripts are titled "*Sprokiefontein se Bron*" (Storyfountain's Source). In her stories, Mama Hettie referred to the fountains and springs as *die Oog* and made explicit in one story below the connection between serpent, fountain and eye in a polysemy that invokes the aperture through which the serpent sees and is seen or known. This same aperture is where this research-creation emerges, and Chapter Four returns to this polysemic fountain-eye.

⁸ Jason Jacobs is a writer, director and filmmaker, based in Kharkams where he has created a theatre and film company with members of the community there. He focuses on Nama culture and Indigenous revival of which his recent prize-winning film, *Carissa* is an example. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt28522108/>

Mama Hettie's Stories:

1. *Mama Hettie and her sisters were out tending the sheep when they found an injured owl by a spring. They cradled and played with the owl like a baby so much that they only realised the time when it was dark and the sheep were all gone. Over hills and through valleys they ran in the moonless night until they heard the sound of their mother's voice and followed it home. The sheep had returned to their pen long before, and their mother forbade them from ever going to that spring again.*

2. *Long before Mama Hettie was born, her mother and her sisters went out walking with their new babies on their backs in 'n abbavel (an animal hide baby carrier). They stopped at the spring (the same one) to bathe their babies, dusting them with baby powder and rubbing their bodies in petroleum jelly, when a whirlwind came up over the water. Mama Hettie's mother grabbed the baby's nappies, and they all ran. The following day, she woke up with an eye infection. The grown-ups said that she had refused to give die Waterslang what it wanted, which was to meet the new babies that had been bathed in the spring. That is why it tried to take the nappies. Her lack of perception resulted in an eye infection, because the spring too is an eye – the eye of the Serpent.*

3. *Mama Hettie's mother was watching the animals when the animals suddenly darted off. At the same time, she heard sounds like corrugated iron or a hide being pulled over a stone. Looking up, she saw a man dressed like a missionary in black and white watching them from up on a hill. He was attractive, and she could feel him calling her. This time, she listened and ran away as fast as she could. She didn't know for sure, but the people said it was die Waterslang, disguised as a man.*

On the same field trip in January 2022, we visited Byron Klassen, a dancer from Garage Dance Theatre, a dance company in Okiep, Northern Cape. Klassen told us a very different type of *Waterslang* story involving his grandmother, Magrieta Mouton (15.08.1932 – 11.02.2021), that contrasted with Mama Hettie's cautionary tales.

Byron Klassen's family story of Ouma Magrieta Mouton:

Ouma was an exceptionally beautiful young woman. So very, very beautiful that one day, die Waterslang came right to their front door for her. He was disguised as a handsome man, but Ouma's mother recognised him as the Snake by his feet. His feet gave him away. She was afraid, and she didn't want Ouma to invite him in; they say you must never invite him in. Till this day, we don't know if Ouma invited him in, but she went with him. She disappeared with him. She was gone for many weeks, and nobody knows till today what they did together. People never talk out about what they do there; it's a secret. But when she came back, she

had gifts of healing through touch. She became famous for her gifts; people travelled from all over the country for her uitsmeer⁹ massage. They would fly to her place for healing. One doctor said she was putting him out of business. She could see malicious winds and spirits in her patients' bodies and had the power to push them out. Also, when she returned, she was even more beautiful than before and very sexy. That's why she had five husbands, because of the Snake.

While Mama Hettie's cautionary tales about an often dangerous and deceptive sentient world are warnings for wayward children, Klassen's grandmother's story is a tale of a maiden who defies her mother and the collective cautions, and follows the more-than-human being to his sub-aquatic realm to return overflowing with erotic vitality that comes into effect relationally through the contact zone of touch, the corporeal intimacies of massage and sex. Magrieta Mouton's act of defiance is a rejection of the behavioural strictures of church-informed morality in order to pursue the uncanny. Following the serpent, perhaps becoming its lover, goes against the logics of original sin that trace back to Edenic dispossession and expulsion from the garden. Her choice, to leave the respectable decency of home and church, expresses a powerful loyalty to the vitalising force of a mythic order that exceeds the colonial. In short, Magrieta Mouton's affair with *die Grootslang* unsettles settler sex. The term, settler sexuality is formulated by Scott Morgensen (2011) who sees settler or modern sexuality as a white, heteronormative "function of the biopolitics of settler colonialism" that regulates Indigenous sexuality while supplanting it with modern sexuality, which Morgensen suggests is founded in colonial societies, and not the European metropole, as a biopolitical means to regulate native and settler populations. As a formation in opposition to racialised 'primitive' sexualities (including the queer), modern sexuality "cannot be separated from the education of desire presented to subject racialised peoples and peoples assimilated into whiteness by the sexualised violence that defined a white-supremacist society" (33). Foundational to modern sexuality is its distinction from and evolutionary superiority to the 'primitive' sexualities of colonial subjects.

The implications of this erotic contact zone between Byron Klassen's grandmother and *die Grootslang* are thus simultaneously 'unsettling' and also transcorporeally generative as her gifts attested. This story of a relationship with a precolonial mythical aquatic being awakened me to the erotic as an embodied decolonial force capable of challenging the Biblical narrative of shame and expulsion from the natural world to trace an older source of erotic aliveness and

⁹ *Uitsmeer* (lit. rub out) is a Khoi massage practice where the masseuse tracks the disease in the patient's body and pushes it, in the form of wind, out of the body.

connection. Allied with this was a centring of pleasure as an interruption of colonial legacies of trauma that proposed a different way of being in the body of the world. Adrienne Maree Brown (2019) terms this pleasure activism, which she sees as "the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy" (2019:14). Magrieta Mouton followed her desire for uncanny intimacy, and her reaching towards the contact zone of skin with a being of an entirely different ontology offered possibilities for fracturing intractable colonial categories and separations on multiple scales. Anishnaabe scholar Melissa K. Nelson (2017) expresses this coeval process of decolonisation and revitalisation as follows:

Reclaiming our eco-erotic birthright as human beings and Indigenous citizens requires a peeling away of the colonial and religious impositions of patriarchy, heteronormativity, internalised oppression, original sin, shame, and guilt (among many other idiosyncratic layers), especially in relation to our bodies and our capacity for intimacy and pleasure. These beliefs are based on a fear of the wild and uncontrollable, both in nature and in ourselves. After centuries of oppression, expressing the joy and diversity of our Native sexualities is truly an anti-colonial, liberating act. Questioning the internalised authoritarianism that denies and demonises our psychospiritual and animal closeness to "nature" is a decolonial and revolutionary act of survivance (2017:235).

Klassen's grandmother, Magrieta Mouton, passed on in 2021, but her story is still recounted in the family and beyond. Nelson (2017) sees these oral stories about women and their sexual intimacies with more-than-human beings as "original instructions" in ways in which to relate to nature and more-than-human kin that she terms eco-erotics. For Nelson, the contact zone of eco-erotics is facilitated and supported by "communities that practice oral traditions about territorial attachment to ancestral places and beings" (2017:231). In this tradition, sex becomes symbolic of an ethical and emotional exchange of obligations between humans and the more-than-human. Nelson goes further to suggest that these stories show how Indigenous women have adopted the role of establishing and continuing kinship ties and interspecies agreements with the more-than-human world and also how the stories of trysts with more-than-human beings "offer fruitful ways to Indigenize queer ecology, 'green' Indigenous erotica, and reclaim Indigenous erotic intelligence that recognizes women's (and humans') inheritance as pansexual, eco-erotic beings that have ethical obligations to our more-than-human relatives" (2017:237). These "visceral ontologies of intimacy" (237), are a "reclamation of Indigenous erotic intelligence" (237) that are *meta* (higher or after) and *trans* (beyond) sexual encounters with the more-than-human world and also, through the potential to be aroused by anything, *pansexual*.

That this porous, polymorphic intimacy is not foreign to our bodies is attested by the trillions of micro-organisms (outnumbering our cells by 10:1) that share space inside our skin. As Stacy Alaimo (2010) reminds us, most of the four of the five kingdoms of organic Life do not require sex to reproduce, the majority of human cells are intersex, and the Schizophyllum has 28,000 genders. Leaning into Alaimo's (2010) figuration of queer trans-corporeality, bodies become porous affective fields of flows and relationships in communication with other agential bodies that together form 'the environment' which is inextricably a part of these bodies. I read into this fleshy interconnection and its refusal of binary logics with Anzaldúa and Keating (2002), as "a process that opens apertures between worlds, rewir(ing) brain, body and erotics" (2002:25). Also implicated in this rewiring is Sylvia Winter's (2015) formulation of the first and second set of instructions read alongside Nelson's (2017) oral "original instructions". Wynter's first set of instructions is DNA; the second is the stories we tell about ourselves or the word that becomes flesh, where, as Wynter (in McKittrick, 2015) elaborates, the story or myth we tell of ourselves neurochemically imprints on our beings to create a hybrid Bio-mythological being or Bio-Mythoi. Stories we tell about ourselves and where we come from become, for Wynter, Macro-origin stories such as Christianity and Capitalist Scarcity that affect our relationships with ourselves, our cells and our worlds. Stories of encounters with *die Waterslang* by implication, then, challenge the Christian colonial concept of original sin and its capitalist continuation of scarcity or expulsion from nature as Wynter's 'second set of instructions' and open apertures (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2002) for rewiring an eco-erotic intimacy with a more-than-human inhabitant of the fecund Land. The capitalisation of Land here refers to the use in Indigenous Ethico-onto-epistemology (Barad), where connection to the Land, viewed as a set of interrelationships with living beings, is seen as spiritual. Viewing Land as property and as a resource for capitalist accumulation and the "colonial disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represent a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence" (Tuck & Yang, 2012:5).

This research-creation project aims to cultivate, through performance, "visceral ontologies of intimacy" (Nelson, 2017:237) with Land and the bodies (human and non-human) who live there as a counter to this violence, that at the same time retrieves a vital eco-erotic intelligence as a register of indigenous revival. Taken further, this intimacy necessitates recognising the other, the more-than-human as beings with their own agency, their own sexuality, their own powers; and not as a projection of the human mind as modern psychology would have us believe. This recognition of the material agency of the non-human is anti-colonial at its core, as the brutality with which the colonial project has confronted 'superstitions' and 'primitive beliefs of the natives' and the continued thingification (Cesaire, 2000) of all non-human (and non-white and western human) life in the support of ever-increasing capitalist

accumulation demonstrates. The retrieval, then, of embodied ways of relational knowing is not only a proposition of somatic and environmental justice but also of epistemic and ontological justice, in that it "reinstates invisible beings of metamorphosis" (Latour, 2013) in a relational recognition that includes pleasure.

1.2 Research-creation as Methodology

Knowledge is also regarded as a sacred object, and seeking knowledge is a spiritual quest that may begin with a prayer or a ceremony. (Chilisa 2012:106)

I quote Chilisa, above, in order to position the Griqua *!Ncabasas* and the stories as the prayer, ceremony or study (Moten & Harney, 2016) that begins this thesis, and to consider the polysemy of both modes of research-creation, and the invisible being of metamorphosis (Latour) *die Waterslang* as an intertwined "crafting of ontologies" (Barad, 2007:163). Here, Barad indicates the exploration of technologies within which nature and culture interact (1996:163). Additionally, Chilisa (2012), grounds this study as an African Indigenous Epistemology that utilises what Isabel Stengers (2005) refers to as an ecology of practices and techniques for intra-active making and thinking where there is a continual, inseparable exchange and influence between the two, making the term research-creation a more felicitous description than the more widely used practice-as/led/based-research.

To clarify, the hyphenated "research-creation" is a Canadian term brought into use through the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council as a funding category for arts research. However, artist researchers have taken on the term, reading and thinking expansively into it. Errin Manning explores how the hyphen "opens up the differential between thinking and writing" (2016:20), and suggests that:

"Research-creation does much more than what the funding agencies had in store for it: it generates new forms of experience; it hesitantly acknowledges that normative modes of inquiry and containment often are incapable of assessing its value; it generates forms of knowledge that are extralinguistic; it creates operative strategies for a mobile positioning that take these new forms of knowledge into account; it proposes concrete assemblages for rethinking the very question of what is at stake in pedagogy, in practice, and in collective experimentation" (Manning in Colin and Sachsenmaier, 2016:27).

For Manning, research-creation "creates an opening" for Moten and Harney's (2013) idea of the Undercommons, which views the University's funding structure as being reliant on

disciplinary framing and categorisation. This tends to hierarchise certain knowledges over others, narrowing to disciplinary parameters the openings that learning could allow. Manning, through her reading of Moten and Harney, posits that "(t)he mode of critique that operates as an academic trope stifles the very opening through which fragile new modes of existence can come to expression. What if knowledge were not assumed to have a form already?" (2016:9). Following Bergsonian *intuition*, Manning uses research-creation to explore the possibilities of creating problems that give rise to new areas of thought, questioning how practice can open up these new relationships of thought and how crafting philosophical concepts itself is an act of creation.

Manning further suggests that the combination of research-creation as an academic category with Moten and Harney's 'study' moves the emphasis from artistic practice to "the exploration of how modes of making and thinking become consolidated in emergent, collective forms of practice that are artful, if not necessarily artistic in the strong sense" (2016:13), expanding on 'artfulness' where "Artful practices honour complex forms of knowing that are collective, not because they are operated upon by several people, but because they make apparent, in the way they come to a problem, that knowledge at its core is collective." (13) What occurred in Campbell and through the stories above, then, was what Manning describes as the manner in which the artful allows the feeling of an opening, an aperture within a process or 'study' that is on its "way to becoming a practice" (13). The collective knowledge created by the people performing at the river, the observers and the more-than-human custodian of the water created the opening for the emergence of this research-creation study. This opening or aperture then became clearer through the stories of Mama Hettie and Ouma Magrieta; this enabled me to honour the complexity of collective knowing on its way to becoming the practice of performance and to dwell in the space of emergence. Manning also reorients the concept of art by turning to the medieval definition as "the manner" or "the way". This incompleteness is a trajectory of motion that is in opposition to the definition of Performance taken from the French "to furnish completely". Research-creation then is able to destabilise parameters of performance and research, performance and process, and reach for the incipient trajectory of Moten and Harney's 'study'. The above makes it clear that this is *not* a performance-as-research project but a research-creation study where assemblages generate meaning, making, and thought. The thesis, then, by its nature, is a snapshot at a point in an ongoing conversation, an aperture opened and then closed.

1.3 Visceral Creative Practices

As you will see in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, which discusses the three performances, the creative practices were constructed as the aperture (Anzaldúa, Keating, 2002) for other modes of being to emerge, for the body to access stories across time that are present in a space. The techniques for generating this are those of the performer, somatic techniques, enhanced affective attunement, embodied deep listening, sensing-feeling, and deepened interoception. Dramaturgically, the performances employed the creation of sacred space and attempted to induce non-ordinary states in order to access the text/choreography/score to be used. The creation process entailed ancestral offerings, breathwork and journeying, and consciously directed dreaming and rituals. This 'style' of performance making is articulated by Josephine Machon as 'Visceral Performance', which she sees as practiced predominantly by women artists (according to Machon) who centre the body as a site for a "complex blend of highly charged mappings -individual, emotional psychological, sexual, historical, cultural, political" (2009:28). Machon states:

"this style enables practitioners and audience members alike to tap into pre-linguistic communication processes, and engages with an awareness of 'the primordial' via such sensually stimulated perception. Merged with this is the potential to engender a certain feeling of transcendence, of comprehending ideas, experiences and concepts in a unique way. As a result, this style produces a response of disturbance that can be simultaneously challenging and exhilarating, at once unsettling and pleasurable" (2009:1).

She traces the antecedents of 'visceral performance' to ancient ritual practices that have found expression in avant-garde performance of the 20th century, especially in transgressive women practitioners such as Urban Bush Women, Blondell Cummings, Meredith Monk; from the late 1960's onwards, Pina Bausch and Robert Lepage, and for the translation of viscosity into text, Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker*. My recent performance text, *Womb of Fire*, which does not form part of this study but relates to the themes, is an example of the ways in which I have produced visceral language in my work. While my text-based plays endeavoured to provide greater transparency and access for diverse audiences on multiple levels, the works made in this research-creation project are textless and challenging to analyse from within. Machon discusses the difficulty of rendering into writing this kind of sensate "at once corporeal and arcane" (2009:2) practice that is experienced in the body of the audience in an inarticulable manner that often defies discourse and suggests the term "'(syn)aesthetics' (from 'synaesthesia', the Greek syn meaning 'together' and aesthesis meaning 'sensation' and 'perception')". This describes both the visceral performance-making and the theorising of this

performance-making as a "fused and sensate approach to artistic practice and analysis" (2009:14). This allows for the language of the flesh to be articulated so that 'corporeal memory' or 'embodied knowledge' is produced through a "*chthonic* (from the Greek, 'of, or to, the earth') impulse" (2009:5). Synaesthetics, then, derived from the neurologically-recognised condition in which senses are fused, becomes a double-edged rendering of sense-making as both semantic meaning-making and somatic sensing, sensation and feeling. This fused semantic-somatic making-sense/sense-making, both produces practice and is able to provide "a non-linguistic, instinctive, intertextual and intersemiotic mode of interpretation and analysis." (2009:6) Machon stresses that this mode is heterogeneous and open to play. The performances themselves thus became "visceral ontologies of intimacy" (Nelson, 2017:137) that are tracked through journal entries detailing the interoceptive experience of live performance that then offer prompts or intuitions for research.

Whilst the methodological strands of making and thinking lie in Manning's research-creation and Machon's (syn)aesthetics, the overarching frame is a practical, context-based, Indigenous Research paradigm where the practices involved in making ritual performances are extrapolated to include research as ritual making or ceremony. One of the core practices that has developed over time in my work is the creation of sacred space as the site where the performance takes place through the dramaturgical creation of sacred space as scenography. I do this through invoking the elements and directions in a configuration that is utilised globally and that I have used in my personal creative practice since the 1990s, when I began to develop my performances as ceremonies. For the purposes of this study, the practice will be referred to by the Bakongo name for this cosmogram, the *Dikenga*.

Zimbabwean Rutendo Ngara (1997) discusses the *Dikenga*, an African relational cosmogram, through unpacking *Ubuntu*, an Nguni word that translates as "I am because we are" (a person is a person because of others) as a relational philosophy of personhood. She traces the word's etymology to '*Ntu*', which is a reference to the all-pervading force of Life itself, or Spirit. Referencing Jahn (1961), Kagame (1970), and Phillips (1990), Ngara reminds us that the commonly held concept of *Ubuntu* extends beyond the human to include four aspects of *Ntu* as ontologically described in Proto-Bantu linguistic use. They are: 1) *Mu-Ntu* or *Aba-Ntu* – 'reasoned' beings – living, dead or unborn as well as more-than-human deities and also trees because they link the living to the ancestors; 2) *Ki-Ntu* – unreasoned beings – plants, animals, minerals and objects of use; 3) *Ha-Ntu* or space and time as a locational relation; 4) *Ku-Ntu* – an abstract feeling or modality such as beauty. Along with these four compass points, which also exist in the cosmogram as directions (N, S, E, W) and as elements (earth, water, fire, air), there also exist layered dimensions; the realms of the upper world or above, the lower world or below, and the realm of day-to-day human experience, the centre.

Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson's monograph '*Research is Ceremony*' (2008) overlays ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology onto the four interrelated quadrants of the medicine wheel to produce a research paradigm. He states: "Just as the components of the paradigm are related, the components themselves all have to do with relationships. The ontology and epistemology are based upon a process of relationship that forms a mutual reality. The axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining accountability to these relationships" (2008:71).

The four aspects of Ntu overlaid across the *Dikenga* provoke a relationality across time, space, human and more-than-human, the living and the dead. In this way, temporal multiplicities are made present, the ancestors and the unborn are linked with the living in an interdependent, interrelated ecology of forces, all of whom are re-presented in the present. For Ngara, this complexly interwoven way of knowing becomes also a way of healing. In my practice, my body forms part of the site of healing, and both receives the restoration or remembering that the performance aims at and gives of this material labour as an offering to the interrelated multiplicity implicated in the process that is configured by the coordinates of the particular work. In Xhosa tradition, ritual is often referred to by the noun *Sebenza*, meaning work, just as in the Cape Muslim community, it is called a *Werk* – a ritual is work, the artist is a cultural worker conducting a ceremonial work for her community.

Whilst our ancestors are called into the space to participate in the work, other beings that exist in the realm of Ngara's *Kintu*, *Hantu*, *Bintu* and *Kuntu* are also invoked, recalled and restored to their relational space. Just as the body is remembered as a site for all its relations, the geographical site is also one of networked interconnection, where radical relationality as an indigenous ontology, epistemology and axiology proposes a reciprocal kinship to place that carries filial obligations. Following this, a confrontation with the traumata of colonial violence on the body is also a confrontation of the traumata of the Land. This recognition of shared pain and the embodiment of the geography of place at performance sites was part of the ritual to renew relationships with the Land as animate and interconnected, and a *Werk* for the Land and all the ancestors and spirits of it.

The embeddedness created by research-creation within an Indigenous paradigm, such as the *Dikenga*, calls for a reconceptualisation of nature in ways that account for myriad "interactions between phenomena that are material, discursive, human, more-than-human, corporeal, and technological" (2007:4-5). This allows for "the agency, significance and ongoing transformative power of the world" (Barad, 2007:4-5) to act upon the processes of making and thinking in ways that are emergent and co-constitutive.

Water itself goes through the Dikenga or medicine wheel on various levels, moving elementally through the circle; the air of water as clouds, the fire of water as a rushing stream, the water of water as a river and the earth of water as the ocean. Joanne Barker (2019:1) turns to "water as a mode of analysis that informs and instructs, thinking with other Indigenous women who hold and care for water as life, as a dearly beloved relative". Tracking and tracing the bodies of water connected to each performance at various registers, it also becomes a method of thinking and making. Penny Bernard (2013) notes that throughout southern African knowledge systems, water is considered a powerful living force through which humans communicate with the spirit world. In this view, the spirit world is the source of water and of all Life. The relationship between water spirits, traditional healers, and water emphasises that the waters themselves are bodies of knowledge and that indigenous relationships and practices with these knowledges occur in interconnected physical, spiritual and social landscapes. In Indigenous people's stories across the globe, being taken under the water by a water spirit is itself an experience of 'study' (Moten & Harney, 2013).

Inspired by both my ongoing personal practice and Shawn Wilson's (2008) *Research is Ceremony*, I allowed this research to act upon me in initially undetermined ways in a relationship that, like my creative practice, is sacred. One explanation of how sacredness functions in research is given by Wilson, who elucidates that the space between people, between people and Land, and between other beings is considered sacred in Indigenous spirituality. Ceremony thus works to increase the proximity and close the distance between people, Land and the more-than-human until they are present in the same space. This creation of intimacy is sacred. Wilson sees knowledge as existing in the connections or relationships that emerge from the Land, an Indigenous research paradigm that strengthens these relational intimacies, making it a ceremonial and sacred practice (2008:87).

I consider the ways in which I work in this study to be sacred in that they use practices such as the Dikenga, trance, divinations and sacred medicines, and deal with the agential powers of more-than-human beings of entirely different ontologies. For example, the rehearsal process for both *Intimate Reparations* (Chapter 3) and *Kaaimanblom* (Chapter 4) was preceded by a consultation with diviner Julia Theron, who uses her grandmother's name, Gogo Rosina, when she practices as a Sangoma or Diviner at her *Dikenga* Medicine Clinic. Theron is initiated in the Swazi and Venda lineages. Her practice of *ditaola* or throwing the bones is supported by extensive plant medicine knowledge, and she prescribes herbs from the divination diagnosis. Practised widely in Southern Africa, *ditaola* has survived in spite of missionary and governmental attempts to stamp it out.

Theron says of her practice:

At the Dikenga Medicine Clinic, we use the *ditaolo* (Tswapong divinatory tablets), together with Fondo, Majoi and Ngonyama knowledge systems pertaining to *izangoma* practice. The throwing of the bones is not random – it renders a precise relational ordering of the divining tablets. It is associated with commandment, an activity that is ordered, prescriptive, and authoritative. The bones taken from the dead instruct (direct, divine for, select for) the living. Tswapong divination is purposive; *ditaola* offers selections of *molao* (law) that command, govern or regulate. (Taken from a phone voice message on the 16th of September 2024)

In addition to addressing the ancestors about the performance, receiving advice on the proper protocols to protect the performance space, rituals to undertake before performances, etc. I utilised the symbols and figurative associations from the reading to create a dramaturgy for the performance itself, and refer to Gogo Rosina's divination as directorial notes during the performance. Thus, from the inception, the performances exist in a relational African ecology of beings addressed as sacred.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO's) 2003 Convention defines the term "Intangible Cultural Heritage" to refer to Indigenous uses of the term 'sacred'. It is my view that the *intangibility* of the UNESCO term elides the *material* power of Land, objects or practices and their agency¹⁰; By contrast, the term 'sacred' implies a relationality that acknowledges the agential power of space/place, story, practice wherein the human is connected to a vaster field. In Indigenous decolonial struggles, the 'sacred' has been used to protect places, spaces and practices from exploitation and destruction. My perception of this work as 'sacred' necessitated an openness to initiations beyond the research plan and a respectful accountability to both thinking and making into what emerged. It also means that I hold the values of accountability and relationality to all Life encountered in this study, itself an offering to *die Waterslang*.

¹⁰ Indigenous Studies and "the Sacred" Author(s): Mary L. Keller. Source: American Indian Quarterly, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Winter 2014), pp. 82-109. Published by: University of Nebraska Press. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/amerindiquar.38.1.0082> 23

1.3.1 Conceptual Strands

Whilst this research-creation study is an intertwined synaesthetic making-thinking articulated above, it is nonetheless possible to parse out discrete strands that inform conceptualisation.

1.3.2 *Die Oog/The Serpent's Eye – The Aperture*

Aquatic beings are found in hydromyths across the globe; from the Nagas of South and South East Asia, to the river deities across the African continent, to the Aboriginal Rainbow Serpent (Yunkaporta), to Kundalini Shakti in India, to the Aanishnabeg Mishipizhu. As custodians of sexuality, fertility and water sources, water deities in multiple contexts are perceived to be intimately connected with the erotic as a vitalising, generative force flowing through both human and the more-than-human. Melissa K Nelson (in Doerffler et al., 2017) argues that Mishipizhu's active presence in the Ojibwe imagination "serves as an important indicator of traditional ecological knowledge about a moral landscape that supports cultural resilience" (Doerffler et al., 2013:214). Tyson Yunkaporta (2019:81) uses the Aboriginal Rainbow Serpent to demonstrate "First People's Law or the first law of thermodynamics where energy is neither created nor destroyed but moves "across multiple spheres that are infinitely overlapping, spiralling inwards and outwards, extending everywhere that light can go (or has gone or will go)." He contrasts this with the closed system of "Second People's Law", the second law of thermodynamics, which is finite, entropic and linear. For Yunkaporta, the application of the laboratory-based premise of the second law of thermodynamics to the ongoing, open system of Life in all its multiple complexities is a 'curse', a 'false pattern sung onto the whole from a fragment', that inevitably leads to borders, walls, apocalyptic end-times.

In order to *look at* the subject matter in a manner that does not perpetuate colonial violences and separation or curse by singing false patterns (Yunkaporta, 2019), this study views these entities and the processes co-constituted with them through Haraway's (2016) posthuman tentacular lens so as to better *see/feel* and *become-with* as modes of viewing that escape an all-seeing God eye, and allow for an embodied, situated visuality as a way to approach Invisible Beings of Metamorphosis (Latour, 2013) that focusses on connections not nodal points. Whilst Latour (2013) suggests ways in which we can recognise the materialism of invisible beings by attending to their specific ontological requirements and forms of veridiction, Haraway's posthuman compound eyes require looking through many different lenses and frames simultaneously, as well as looking through water where sensation carries

across great distances and submerged seeing becomes seeing-feeling. Tyson Yunkaporta says of the serpent's visuality:

"The Serpent loves the water because that is what allows us to see him, and he communicates with each of us this way, but he is not just an entity of water. He is an entity of light. The part we are seeing... is just a line across the edge of a sphere. The line moves across multiple spheres that are infinitely overlapping, spiralling inwards and outwards, extending everywhere that light can go (or has gone or will go), and the Rainbow Serpent moves through this photo-fabric of creation. He goes under the ground, too, because light has been there in the past, and he is not limited by linear time. Ah, but is he a wave or a particle? I guess that depends on how you're looking at him, but we would see him as a wave, a snake, because he is constantly in motion across systems that are constantly in motion and interwoven throughout everything that is, was and will be. There are infinite variations of him in all shapes and sizes throughout the world—wyrn, dragon, Uraeus and many different names in different regions, taking the shape of the spirit of those places" (2019:68-69).

The complex visuality of *die Waterslang* calls for a mode of observation that avers fixed vision, is conceptually heteroglossic, webbed and transdisciplinary, and partakes of local Indigenous knowledges whilst being grounded in the flesh of feminist embodiment enlivened by performance practice. It is a transcorporeal (Alaimo, 2010) way of looking at the flesh of the world across disciplines. As it is only through the wellings or secretions *generated between*, or as Yunkaporta says, across multiple overlapping spheres, that this thesis is able to track the motion of these spectral beings of metamorphosis. My intra-action (Barad 2007) with these slippery, metamorphic, more-than-human beings is what Haraway calls "a reinvented coyote discourse obligated to its sources in many different heterogeneous accounts of the world" (1988:594). Like the Coyote trickster figure of the American Southwest, *die Waterslang* suggests that though mastery is relinquished and the possibility of being hoodwinked is strong, rigorous observation is still required. As Latour (2013) reminds us: "Invisible Beings have a demanding form of veridiction and particular ontological requirements that can be followed rationally; their originality comes from a certain debiting of alteration, which explains why invisibility is among their specifications" (2013:181).

The recognition of the material agency of hydromythic beings in this study, that is, at the same time posthuman and decolonial, also sees these ways of knowing as an embodied re-storying of colonially based *macro-origin stories* (Wynter, 2003), which will be expanded on below. In brief, *die Waterslang* as a myth or story is in excess of colonially-based macro-origin

stories (Wynter) and as such, Khoisan Indigenous Revival becomes one of the ways it spills, moves, overflows. Because of its location in rivers and springs, this retrieval is intertwined with a desire for tangible, imaginative socio-ecological justice inextricably informed by ideas and affects of relational agency and entanglement.

Thinking outside of domination and supremacy, in a webbed way, where the connective strands become the sites of greater vitality than the nodal points, infuses my disciplinary approach in this thesis. I bring into webbed relationship Indigenous Studies, New Materialism and Post-humanism, especially Barad's Agential Realism, Sex-radical feminism, Feminist Critical Race Theory, Sexuality studies, Indigenous Eco-erotics (as articulated above), Performance and Theatre Studies and Decolonial Theory. This disciplinarity echoes Machon's (syn)aesthesia as a "fused and sensate approach to artistic practice and analysis" (2009:14). Further to this fusion, the study also leans into what Barad (2007) calls an *ethico-onto-epistemology* where "knowing is a material practice of engagement as part of the world in its differential becoming" (2007:90) that cannot be separated from our responsibility to the world of which we are a part.

Seeking relational sanctuary means that the processes of performance-making themselves are offered as an interstice that invites alternate relations and engagements to emerge between disciplines, people, the environments the works are made in, as well as the modalities of making. Following this line of thought, the written thesis itself is located in such an aperture, with the word's optic associations that are, like Haraway (1997) and Barad (2007) suggest, diffractive, so that disciplines are read through each other in order for difference to proliferate. Weaving (or waving like Barad's quantum objects) through the entangled webs of anti-colonial and decolonial theory, new materialism, indigenous scholarship, and inquiries into Khoisan identity revivalism, the discipline of embodied performance research-creation (as located with the performing body) traverses the web arachnid-eyed, transcorporeally vibration-sensitive, metamorphic. In this way, these fields connect through and become-with the body in performance to produce generative ways of knowing or new knowledges. Simply put, I am proposing to think with *die Waterslang*, an invisible being of metamorphosis, encountered as an alive, agential presence that employs trickster-logics always in excess of what I know, and not as an anthropological relic or a metaphor.

What follows below is a brief summary of some of the strands that inform this study.

1.3.3 New Materialism

"According to agential realism, knowing, thinking, measuring, theorising and observing are material processes of intra-acting within and as part of the world." (Barad, 2007:92).

This project's nature and relationships to the human and non-human beings it studies are nestled into the entangled response-ability of Barad (2007), the vibrancy and animacy of Bennet (2010) and Chen (2012), the material urgency of Alaimo and Hekman (2008) and the art of recognising invisible beings offered by Latour (2013). Latour's tools for encountering 'invisible beings' involve acknowledging them to exist independent of modern psychological interiority with an agency of their own. Further to this and generative to this research-creation project, Latour theorises into the reinstitution of beings of metamorphosis, who "offer paths of alteration that are at once terrifying (since they transform us), hesitant (since we can deceive them), and inventive (since we can allow ourselves to be transformed by them)" (2013:201).

The view afforded through Barad's and Haraway's diffraction as a non-reflexive visuality allows for the material complexity of *die Waterslang*, a being of light that can be seen through the medium of water, as Yunkaporta (2019) says, in order to be more fully recognised. Closely allied to the Indigenous relational web of all Life and our responsibility as care-takers of other lives, this diffraction does not only "make manifest the extraordinary liveliness of the world" (Barad: 2007:91) but also reminds us of accountability to the world – to all our relations (human and more), and to participate in the world's "differential becoming" in our knowledge practices. Alongside New Materialism, the thesis resonates with New Animist discourse, such as Harry Garuba (2003; 2012).

1.3.4 The Term 'Khoisan', Khoisan Revivalism and Re-indigenisation

Identity and its terms are constantly forming and reforming academically and politically in governmental nomenclatures and also in populist strategic self-identification. I view the Apartheid governmental nomenclature of 'Coloured' as a strategic erasure of both Indigeneity and difference, and use it specifically in this context within this study. Within the revivalist movement itself, terminology is contested. Tauriq Jenkins, the Goringhaicona High Commissioner, uses the term 'San and Khoi' as the preferred terms currently being advocated for, as expressed by the A!Xarra dialogues 2019-2020 (Bam, 2021:xxii), whilst the governmental terms in use are Khoi-san or Khoisan (ibid). These terms have come to replace the perjorative *Hottentot* that became *Hotnot* and *Boesman* or *Bushman*, though, like Dawid

Kruiper (1935–2012), Khomani leader, prefer to identify as *Boesman*, finding the term San deriving from a Khoekhoegowab word meaning vagabond, pejorative. Additionally, the distinction between Khoi and San is not as monolithic as the atavistic colonial definition claims it to be. June Bam (2021:5) writes of ongoing San foraging practices and rituals amongst the Cape Flats Khoi community until the 1970s, that belie this sharp distinction and speak of a more entangled intimacy. On the 29th of November 2023, I attended the *Monologues for Gaza* protest action at the Liesbeeck River, where I met Charne Kreeling, a Griqua Princess who mentioned that she felt herself to be spiritually !Xam, a sentiment I had heard before from younger people exploring San and Khoi Revival. For her, it is a question of practice and bodily response in ritual, the knowledge that the body produces. This resonated with me in respect of *Kaaimanblom*, the performance examined in Chapter 4.

Given the above, I use the term Khoisan in this study, both for convenience and to attest to how people are never as fixed as colonial categories ascribe them to be, and to show that San and Khoi are not distinct but share knowledge from a precolonial past. To continue in a relational vein, I am much indebted to Aus June Bam's monograph *Ausi Told Me* (2019). She was a student in my mother's biology class at Grassy Park High School in the 1970's, and found my mother, a black woman with a science degree, inspiring¹¹, and it is fitting that I now sit at her feet too in this re-indigenisation project, inspired by the manner in which she thinks with the Land (Rondevlei) where I played as a child.

I also draw on Lorenzo Veracini and Rafael Verbuyst (2020) and Verbuyst (2022) for particularities of how South African settler colonialism, as Patrick Wolfe (2006) suggests, is a history that has not stopped. For Khoisan descendants, genocide continues structurally in various modes in contemporary South Africa. Verbuyst (2022) and Deumert and Brown (2017) offer an understanding of the creativity of Khoisan Revival as a heterogeneous re-invention. These creative acts of Indigenous survivance (Vizenor, 2008) that activate presence in the face of historical erasure are what Chao and Enari (2021) call "strategic audacity", which utilise imagination that is 'radical, decolonial, emplaced, storied and relational' (Chao and Enari 2021). Chao, Enari and Vizenor are part of the global Indigenous scholarship that I draw on, such as Wilson (2008), Barker (2017; 2019), Doerfler et al (2013), Starblanket (2018), Kovach (2009), Tuhiwai-Smith (2007), Chilisa (2012) and Yunkaporta (2019). In the southern African context, I am informed and inspired by the teachings of Gogo Rutendo Ngara (2019) of the

¹¹ From a phone conversation with Aus June Bam 27 February 2023

Credo Mutwa Foundation, for shedding light on the conceptual frameworks of southern African Ethico-onto-epistemology in both practice and analysis.

1.3.5 Black Feminism, Sexuality Studies

The Indigenous eco-erotic proposition above emerges in my performance practice out of a deep dive into sexuality studies that follows the trajectory of BDSM (Bondage, Domination/Discipline, Sadism and Masochism) through the feminist sex wars, to sex radicalism and Critical Race Feminist scholars of kink and Black female sexuality: Elizabeth Freeman (2010), Amber Jamilla Musser (2014), Jennifer Nash (2014) and Ariane Cruz (2016), who position Black female sexuality as liberated from erasure and respectability politics. Whilst deeply indebted to Audre Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic*, I depart from Lorde's views on BDSM, and with the scholars listed above, view black female kink as a site of liberation, pleasure and embodied reclamation. I further theorise the entanglement of race, sex, trauma, and kink through Avgi Saketopoulou (2023), Saidiya Hartman (2022; 1997) and Corie Hammers (2019).

These are some of the ways that this dissertation interacts with the aquatic being, *die Waterslang*, to generate knowledge. This knowledge production is intra-actively embodied and consequently in excess of what can be rendered theoretically.

1.4 The Performances/Chapters and Weblinks

The performances and chapters are co-eval processes of research-creation and can be viewed online by clicking on the chapter headings as described in the Guidelines. The three performance chapters do not follow the chronology of actual performance events, but are laid out in this particular sequence to elucidate and develop the proposition of this thesis. Chapter 2 traces the terrain of Khoisan Revival in Cape Town against the historical and contemporary backdrop of settler colonialism. Following the logics of collective knowledge production, the Chapter approaches *die Waterslang* only obliquely, focusing instead on the struggles surrounding the Liesbeeck River, and the Chapter suggests relationships between human and more-than-human as an activist proposition. Against the backdrop of Chapter 2, Chapter 3 explores the possibilities of exorcising colonial harms from the body of the performer and the body politic. It does this through BDSM, kink and ritual in attempts to pervert the objects of oppression so that they instead become objects of reconnection to Land. In the process, it aims to unsettle, through fetishising *die Waterslang* and kinking revivalism. The explorations of Chapters 2 and 3 provide the scaffolding for Chapter 4, which utilises Chao and Enari's

"strategic audacity" to make a claim for the reinstatement of a more-than-human being through strategies of trance and ritual that rub up against the authenticating loop of Bushman Studies. This final work, performed over four hours on three different nights in a river, comes the closest to following the thought-in-the-act of research-creation, and also to co-constituting meaning with the more-than-human actant encountered in the event. The Conclusion looks at the study's attempt (and failure) to grasp *die Waterslang* through Glissant's right to Opacity and reflects what meanings this creates for Khoisan Revival.

Before continuing, I would like to clarify the description of performances in the thesis. It is important to take cognisance of the fact that this research-creation is done from within the high-intensity experience of performance. This is a state of excitation and overwhelm, where multiple attentions flood the consciousness at the same time, making for a constant, subtle navigation. This mode of attending does not allow for analysis such as audience response, etc., that would occur when watching a performance. The descriptions are what could be salvaged, parsed, and notated after the moment of intensity. It is therefore important to view the website as an adjunct.

1.4.1 Chapter 1

This Chapter lays out the conceptual framework, methodology, literature review, the structure of the thesis and the individual chapters. Relevant video, images and ephemera are linked as they are referenced in the body text, and the webpage for the Chapter can be viewed by clicking on the chapter heading. The Griqua !Ncau detailed above was filmed by Clinton Nefdt and Shamiel Albertyn under the direction of Johann Abrahams, who identifies as Hessequa from Genadendal. The video forms part of a documentary series, *The Khoekhoe Saga*, aired on SABC 2 in 2023. I was employed as a co-presenter in this series and worked particularly on the Griqua Migration, following the journey of the Griqua from Cape Town to Kokstad through the settlements they established. This journey was facilitated by Pastor Aaron Messelaar, Head of Administration of the Griqua Royal House, who accompanied us on the journey. The edit provided was narrated by Thabo Bopape and written by Johann Abrahams in a made-for-TV style intended to be accessible to a TV audience. It does not reflect the views of this thesis or my personal views of the situation, nor does it accurately depict my experience in Campbell or amongst the Griqua people. For example, the edit contains interview footage taken after the re-enactment by the river that contradicts what was said that night at the river, especially with regard to virginity.

1.4.2 Chapter 2: Lamentation at the Liesbeeck River

This Chapter explores the last performance in this project, a communal lamentation project undertaken in 2023 at the confluence of the Liesbeeck, Salt and Black Rivers, where Amazon is developing its Africa headquarters on a floodplain that is also a Khoisan sacred site. It is located as a first chapter in order to contextualise Khoisan Revival by examining the ongoing settler colonial logics impacting Khoisan indigeneity in South Africa. The positioning of the Chapter acts as a frame for the chapters/performances that follow.

An international project between Arizona State University and the University of Cape Town (UCT), the video trailer made by the team accompanies this Chapter with permission. Unfortunately, the completion of the entire film was delayed by many months and could not be included at the time of submission. Filmed by Janaki Sadana with direction by Professor Micha Espinosa from Arizona State University and Dr Sara Matchett from UCT, this edited footage forms part of Micha's extended Lamentations that occur at various sites, such as Donald Trump's border wall between Mexico and the USA. The video expresses the ways in which the Chapter deals with community, in that it is a community project made possible by many. Along with this video are voice notes, photographs and other ephemera.

1.4.3 Chapter 3: Intimate Reparations

The performance of *Intimate Reparations (IR)* was the first performance undertaken for this study. It plays with racialised BDSM as sensational traumatophilic (Saketopoulou 2023), erotohistoriography (Freeman, 2010) to kink the colonial contact zone and imagine new erotic futurities. The related webpage offers navigation to the three iterations of this performance and to a pre-production page with a privacy setting that requires the password ABRREH001 to access.

1.4.4 Chapter 4: Kaaimanblom

Placed as a final chapter, the 2022 performance, *Kaaimanblom*, was part of Spier Constellations 2022 – *Nine women in the Wilderness* and took place around and in a river on the Spier Estate. It represents both the summation of the study's trajectory and a departure from the known in practice and theory that best expresses the co-creation of knowledge that this thesis proposes. Beginning where *IR* leaves off, *Kaaimanblom* explored an eco-erotic relationality with the more-than-human that exceeds colonialism.

The video in this Chapter is selected raw footage from the performance, filmed over a 2-hour duration on two nights, filmed by Wynand Herholdt. There is also an edited video compiled from the entire performance in the style of a dance video, created in collaboration with Josh Adams, that attempts to capture the internal feeling of performing this piece.

1.4.5 Chapter 5: Conclusion

This closing chapter is a brief summation of the key findings of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Lamentation

sacred

beads

crowns

candles

queens

cattle

cattle song

cattle in the body

cattle in the earth

dragonfly

praying mantis

water snake

orange ochre

resilient green

lavender

distress signal

be the amp

animal fat from Eland

preparing the senses

frankincense-myrrh- imphepho¹²- juniper berries-calamus root burn

smells of fennel and grass

waters receiving all our trash

water energy rising

wetlands – colonised- in the name of global capitalism

wetlands taken away in the name of global capitalism

water forsaken in the name of global capitalism and corporate lawyers

liminal space between highways and building

bodies of water – we are bodies of water.

the water in the world and water in us.

we are part of the ecosystem

we are the confluence of the stars

*repeat of history – memory of water – repeat of history – memory of water – repeat of history
– memory of water*

Khoi and San – sacred and respected

forced to forget

grass as white wool

place of prayer

¹² Impepho (*Helichrysum odoratissimum*) is a shrub that grows throughout Southern Africa and is used to connect with or call the ancestors in diverse indigenous communities. Its Afrikaans name "Hotnotskooigoed" (Hottentot bedding) is a linguistic referent to the Khoekhoe use of the plant as bedding. Apart from the skin healing, anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial benefits of the practice of sleeping on impepho, there is also a relationship with dreaming.

place of reflection

place of memory

place of letting go

ground myself, ground myself, ground myself

when we go to the river

be ready for the god to come through

crazy dreams- where we are -we are in each other's dreams

AWARENESS – We are the vessel – with our bodies, our ancestors, our dreams

the river is awake

stepping into the river – into its history- into my history- into our collective wound

your gonna hear

the vibration

the dancing of the rivers within myself

communities living inside me

my water is thicker than my blood

the people are speaking

my water is ancient

it is time time

the revolution is in us

the river is in us

WE LAMENT.

The above is a poem of images collected from a group conversation in a rehearsal for *Lamentation*. The poem lays out the themes of this chapter/performance, that of collective mourning, of loss and remembering and of finding new ways to mourn what has been rendered 'ungrievable' through extinction narratives, the necropower of settler colonialism and its 'business as usual' destruction. Initiated by Professor Micha Espinosa from the University of Arizona as part of a larger body of work that focuses on rites of mourning at contested sites, *Lamentation* engaged with the confluence of the Liesbeeck, Salt and Black rivers at the Amazon.com development site.

The last performance in this research-creation project, I position it here, first after the Introduction, in order to contextualise Khoisan Revivalism for this thesis and for the chapters to come. Prefacing the journey into my research-creation with *Lamentation* is an intentional opening of floodgates through which water, memory, and ancestry may flow in a manner that includes the effluents of current contestations. The project opens an aperture into the often-murky waters of Khoisan Revivalism, drawing on the colonial archive as context for the ongoing and current struggles around Land and identity.

The performance (including the rehearsal process) is positioned as a ritual with the river as a potency that critiques the selling of a floodplain as a resource for capitalist development. This fluid overwhelm is what I call the eco-erotic as an environmental relationality in which human and river are reciprocally connected in a cognitive, affective and emotional – as well as physical – terrain. Settler logics of clearing flood plain or forest, of empty Land made property, assume an understanding of humans as separate from Land that is rendered as a resource to extract or put into service, but not as a living relation. As Errin Manning writes, "What whiteness imprisons, incarcerates, rapes, kills, and devalues is not first and foremost the *person*: it is the very thought of non-separability" (2023).¹³ My reading of *Lamentation* as an act of embodied decolonisation is informed by Poka Laenui's (in Battiste, 2006) recognition of five stages of decolonialism: *rediscovery and recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action*. These stages are fluid and can occur simultaneously. The performance of *Lamentation* questions whether the fluid outpouring of mourning can produce a liquidity that "secretes its own coordinates" (2013) and floods stable categories and separation on various scales; between the stages of decolonisation, between pasts and futures, between human and non-human bodies.

¹³ Errin Manning in e-flux journal 2023 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/135/529855/the-being-of-relation/> accessed 24 May 2024.

Read in this way, *Lamentation* becomes a performance in which the river participates. Mourning itself becomes more-than-human, more than nostalgia at loss or empathy with the pain of another being or another time, but as an agential actant that is sensed as *Ku-ntu* (Ngara, 2018), an independent abstract power, force or, as Bayo Akomolafe says¹⁴, "a large territorial beast with humans as organelles" that enlists bodies as it comes to matter.

In the chapter that follows, I trace current contestations around the site and the Khoisan Revivalist movement; this is followed by a discussion of the South African settler colonial context, the colonial archive, and finally *Lamentation* itself.

2.1 The Liesbeeck River Site and Khoisan Revivalism

The performance site of *Lamentation* at the confluence of the Liesbeeck, Salt and Black River is called |*Gamirodi !Khaes* (Khoekhoegowab for Place of the Stars) by the [Goringhaicona Khoi Khoi Traditional Indigenous Council](#), who see themselves as descendants of the original inhabitants, is also the site of the contested and controversial Amazon Africa Headquarters development. This is a place that yields layers of contestation, history, relations and resistance that will be more fully unpacked later in this chapter. For now, I will outline the legal battle around the site.

The following section is a transcript of an interview recorded on 2nd May 2023 with Tauriq Jenkins, High Commissioner of the [Goringhaicona Khoi Khoi Traditional Indigenous Council](#) (GKKTIC), who also participated as a performer in *Lamentation*.

In August 2021, the Observatory Civic Association and the Goringhaicona Indigenous Traditional Council launched an application against the Liesbeeck River Trust, the City of Cape Town and the Provincial Government in order to stop the River Club development. The application was done in two parts; we asked for an interim interdict and then for a review to put aside all the approvals that were given to the developer in order to build. And the two main approvals we are dealing with were that the Impact Assessment was completely rejected by the Heritage authority, Heritage Western Cape. The Provincial Government totally ignored that assessment and took a political decision to veto that. And the fact that the City's own environmental department also appealed the environmental assessment for the development, and the City of Cape Town and the mayor took a political decision

¹⁴ <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/we-do-not-feel-emotions> accessed 9 September 2024.

which ignored what their own professionals were saying. There are those kinds of process-driven technical aspects that we felt had to be taken up and then of course there is the issue of meaningful public participation, the fact that the Khoi and San were not meaningfully engaged and we feel that whatever so-called engagement was orchestrated forms of manipulation basically designed to create a façade of consent, while instigating various smear campaigns against those who opposed the development. So, currently, we have a situation where there were about nine court cases, various appeals, a case against me in my personal capacity, and a contempt case. Right now, we are focusing on an appeal that I am taking to the Supreme Court for a case against me.

The façade of Khoi and San consent Jenkins refers to above is the splinter group called the Western Cape First Nations Collective (WCFNC), spearheaded by Chief Zenzile Khoisan, with some members who had left the Goringhaicona. This newly formed coalition is supported by the Liesbeeck Leisure Public Trust (LLPT), which demonstrated support for the Amazon development on the grounds that it would provide employment and a world-class cultural heritage site for the Khoi. On the opposing side were the Observatory Civic Association (OCA), made up of people living in the local community, and the Goringhaicona Indigenous Traditional Council (GKITC), who trace their ancestral Khoi land to the area around the Liesbeeck. As the protests at the site and the court cases continued, there were ugly public brawls outside the court and attempts to discredit and slander Jenkins and the Goringhaicona. The litigation lasted for over two years. It was later revealed to the press and the courts that there had been money offered to members of the LLPT for supporting the development and discrediting its opponents.

Subsequent to the performance and the above interview, Faye Rahl Botha writes:

"The court proceedings seemed to have finally ended in July of this year, with the Observatory Civic Association (OCA) being forced to yield to the financial and legal pressure of continuing their sustained resistance. The Supreme Court of Appeal refused their request to appeal the High Court's earlier ruling, which dismissed their application to interdict the River Club. The OCA settled out of court and agreed that they would no longer be pursuing litigation, having spent most of the roughly R1 million they had raised through crowdfunding, and being forced to pay a portion of the City's legal costs. The LLPT ultimately won the case litigated by the OCA and GKITC and was able to continue the development. However, in August, an affidavit by former GKITC member Ebrahim Abrahams revealed that the developer had attempted to bribe several people and organisations into supporting

them (Abrahams, 2023:8). Abrahams also asserted his belief that many of the media articles on the case were propaganda for the developer (Abrahams, 2023:4)

An article in the Daily Maverick newspaper of August 2022 further lays out the bribery of Khoi leadership by Amazon and the smear campaign against Tauriq Jenkins [here](#), in which Ebrahim Abrahams, a former member of the GKKITC, testified to being induced by other members of the GKKITC to meet with the developers, who offered bribes to discredit and smear Jenkins.

The factionalism between Khoi leaders in the case that included public fights outside the courtrooms portrayed Khoisan Revivalism in the same damaging light in which it is viewed by detractors: as fractured and riddled with infighting. The mocking tone of some press articles (read one [here](#)) reinforced the perception that Khoi politics was not worth serious consideration. The City, Amazon and the newly-formed WCFNC asserted that the development would bring jobs and utilise an 'empty and degraded' site. The claims of WFNC exist in an entirely different register to Jenkins's appeal for a heritage site that acknowledges the river itself as a sacred body and part of a larger network of flows connecting mountain streams, wetlands and sea.

The discussion that follows starts with an excerpt from the interview with Tauriq Jenkins that was recorded as part of the *Lamentation* project on 2nd May 2023 in Cape Town. It is used as a catalyst for a detailed background on South African settler colonialism from colonial contact to the present day, and as an exploration of Khoisan Revivalism in this context. The chapter then moves to a description of the project, followed by a brief discussion of the work itself.

Transcript of Tauriq Jenkins:

The confluence of the sacred Liesbeeck and Black rivers is an important historical precinct, part of the broader Two Rivers Urban Park and seen as an epicentre of liberation and resistance, a place where the first wars were fought against colonial aggression on the 1st March 1510, against the Portuguese D'Almeida, when the San and Khoi defended that terrain from an ostensible invasion. This site is extremely important in terms of how the colonial project anchored itself in this country. There are three very important things that this site represents: firstly, when Jan van Riebeeck took over the site in 1657, he placed a military barracks where the observatory now is, and by doing that, formed the particular combination that would become the template of conquest and domination. The second thing he did was to put up a palisaded hedge all along the Liesbeeck to its source in Constantia,

which became a frontier zone that prohibited indigenous communities from access to the river. It also became a frontier for settler expansion. Thirdly, he employed slaves from the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) colonies and tilled the topsoil, converting pastoral Land to commercial agriculture. It was these three things that became the colonial machine as it moved on from this site. This site embodies these complexities, and it locates a return to the sacredness of these rivers as an act of restorative justice.

In 2023, the world's largest company imposed its own monument on top of a floodplain between two sacred rivers in ways that violate both provincial and national environmental protocols and policy. It goes against the Paris Agreement as far as climate change is concerned, and it involves two governments in a private development. The City of Cape Town and the Western Cape Provincial Government have formed a partnership with a private company called the Liesbeeck River Development Trust to ensure that Amazon has its African headquarters stationed on this site, which is also a site that is undergoing a nomination for national heritage status with SAHRA, the South African Heritage Resources Agency, which was also ratified by President Cyril Ramaphosa in Cabinet in 2020 as part of the Khoi and San National Resistance and Liberation routes. It is also listed by the National Department of Arts and Culture as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Tauriq Jenkins, transcript of interview (2.05.2023).

The term 'Khoisan' is a colonial conflation of the terms Khoe and San, coined in the 1920s to categorise the non-Bantu click-language speakers of southern Africa, both genetically and linguistically. It is a contested term, but has become appropriated by self-identified activists and artists. (Alim et al., 2021; Brown & Deumert, 2017 in Barnett et al., 2022). Many people (such as Jenkins) don't use it, but as Bam (2020) points out, these terms are in flux and find redefinition over time. I have decided to use the term Khoisan in this study because of the term's widespread popular usage and its acknowledgement that the distinction between Khoi and San itself was a colonial construction, and that "the static, racialised, indigenous demographic entities found in Eurocentric scholarship" do not adequately describe the past or provide helpful frameworks for navigating the present or future (Bam 2021:xxvi). Further, I am of the view that answers to the question of identity do not lie in "blood" or DNA, themselves products of eugenicist categorisations (half-blood, full-blood, mixed-race, and so forth) that found the most extreme expression during Apartheid. Erasmus (2013), arguing against this dangerous biocentric foundation of belonging premised on DNA testing, draws our attention to

its unreliable nature in its conflation of "genes with 'populations', 'race', geography and social identification" (2013:42), and its dependence on the interpretation of scientists who are paradigmatically still informed by notions of 'race' (42-43). She quotes Wynter (2003), who points out that the "natural scientific model of a natural organism" (2003:21) that pre-exists all other models of being human instead of co-existing with them, is a hegemonic model where science replaces religion as the global master narrative, presenting the Darwinian, genetic origin story as an apolitical, *a priori* condition. Wynter, following Fanon, suggests instead a sociogenic model where social activities and not blood roots constitute belonging. Erasmus challenges the geneticist "singular bio-imaginary" (49) and cites Haraway's recognition that a solely biogenetic appreciation of human-ness falls woefully short as it doesn't take into account that only about 10% of the cells in our body are actually human, the rest being occupied by bacteria, fungi and myriads of other life forms expressed in forms that are not static, hierarchised and rigid, but much more protean and fluid. Khoisan resurgence, then, cannot be reduced to blood=quota essentialism. Here Wynter's 'sociogeny', "opens to processes of self- and social-conception as these happen at the interface of the body and the particular socialisation of mind/way of seeing" (Erasmus 2013:49).

The dispute around the Amazon site demonstrates that part of what constitutes Khoisan Revivalism, which has been violent, masculinist, and also racist in the way it asserts Khoisan indigeneity against other South African people. Indeed, the media often portrays these aspects in an ironic, mocking tone. At a 2017 interfaith prayer gathering on Table Mountain organised by then mayor Patricia De Lille¹⁵, which I attended as part of the documentary, *The Khoekhoe Saga* (mentioned in Chapter 1), the Khoekhoegowab speaker was mocked and ridiculed by others at the event during his prayer. Language activist Bradley Van Sitter's praise singing at the 2019 State of the Nation address likewise provoked criticism and censure. During the filming of *The Khoekhoe Saga*, I also met with certain chiefs who seemed primarily interested in the remuneration offered by the Traditional and Khoisan Leadership Act (TKLA) and the potential third-party deals with independent investors (such as mining companies) that would, in effect, enrich leaders personally at the expense of the communities and Land they serve. A *Daily Maverick*¹⁶ article by Takudzwa Pongweni (23rd February 2023) describes objectors to this Bill, claiming that it functioned in the same way as the Bantu Authorities Act

¹⁵ <https://www.talkofthetown.co.za/2017/05/26/watch-religious-leaders-pray-cape-town-water-crisis/> accessed 11 October 2024.

¹⁶ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-02-23-traditional-and-khoi-san-leadership-act-challenged-in-constitutional-court/> accessed 11 October 2024.

of 1951, which created the Bantustans. With corruption endemic within South African politics and as systemic as the 2022 Zondo commission on State Capture exposed, it is unsurprising that this would operate similarly in Khoisan politics.

Corruption and factionalism in Khoisan politics exist outside this particular inquiry. What this thesis follows is an impulse in excess of political strategies and transactions, one that is aligned with global indigenous movements in the recognition and defence of the more-than-human, an epistemic shift away from capitalist strategies that enable actions such as the TKLA leadership entering into resource extraction agreements with investors. This impulse, as Jenkins explains with regard to the Liesbeeck site, simultaneously acknowledges historical complexities and represents a "*return to the sacredness and extraordinary beauty of these rivers as an act of restorative justice, the return of a splintered and dislocated community back to the African self where that umbilical connection to the soil can begin to heal and is reconnected because our language is the Land and the River*".

For many self-identified Khoisan descendants, what is called Khoisan Revivalism is a therapeutic project of finding belonging and remembering through centuries of intergenerational trauma that continues in different settler colonial manifestations. Of great significance is the belonging found in a reconnection with the Land. Indeed, the Land question is of vital importance to those who lack basic housing and experience continuing waves of dispossession. Expressions of revivalism have also offered an embodied spiritual interconnection to the Land across what De Sousa Santos (2018) calls 'the abyssal line' of colonialism in ways that "Colouredness" as a category cannot. Echoing Fanon's much quoted formulation "The disease is alienation, the cause is colonialism, the cure is revolution...", Verbuyst and Veracini posit – "The condition is "settler colonialism" and the healing, "indigenous resurgence"" (2020:3) – with reference to artist Sylvia Vollenhoven's *The Keeper of the Kumm* (2016), which is subtitled *Ancestral Longing and Belonging of a Boesmankind* (Bushmanchild). Vollenhoven describes her journey with *The Keeper of the Kumm* as "an intuitive and creative response to a social current that is moving us away from the dangerous shores of division. Away from the systematic dispossession of being "coloured" to being an African with a claim to the Land and its story" (2016:4). Vollenhoven's healing journey – she was physically ill and recovered as she wrote the book – is an example of an imaginary that is open to self and social conception that expresses ways of seeing and knowing that are just as much remembering or reclamation of pasts as they are emergent afro-futures. In line with this aesthetic exploration of Khoisan Revivalism that I feel generates Afrofutures are the works of Jason Jacobs, mentioned in Chapter 1, and interdisciplinary artist/Xam (Sam) Fortuin. Both artists are creatively prolific whilst nourishing new relationality to Land and community, Jacobs in Namaqualand and Fortuin in Tshwane North. These artists propose a possibility for re-

indigenisation that exists outside of internecine conflicts and identitarianism while reaching towards a spiritual reconnection to Land as inclusive of all life, not just human, a paradigmatic possibility as an act of survivance.

The complex expressions of Khoisan Revivalism are in many ways a response to the complexity of settler colonial formation in South Africa; below, I outline this as a context for this chapter and as a backdrop to the thesis as a whole. I lean into Verbuyst (2022) and Veracini's (2020) analysis of South African settler coloniality and its impacts on the San and Khoi, and June Bam's (2021) 'Cape Herstorigraphy', which lays out settler colonial ecocide and points to Khoisan eco-cultural resilience. Bam's (2021) monograph fleshes out our relationship with Land as an act of Indigenous survivance. I then also expand on 'Colouredness' as a category of abjection, as this formulation becomes important for the reading of *Intimate Reparations*, the performance discussed in Chapter Three.

2.2 Settler Colonial Contexts

"Settler colonialism is a global and transnational phenomenon, and as much a thing of the past as a thing of the present. There is no such thing as neo-settler colonialism or post-settler colonialism because settler colonialism is a resilient formation that rarely ends." Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini (2013)¹⁷

Patrick Wolfe's (1999) assertion that settler colonialism is a 'structure' not an 'event' that functions historically, and in the present time, as a "history that does not stop" is a defining analysis for settler colonialism as distinct from colonialism. Settler colonialism is a formation marked not by the exploitation of native populations but as one centred on 'land' itself, where, in the settler bid to obtain and maintain Land, the indigenous population is marked not by exploitable presence but by *disappearance* or *elimination*. For Wolfe, "the logic of this project, a sustained institutional tendency to eliminate the Indigenous population, informs a range of historical practices that might otherwise appear distinct – invasion is a structure not an event." (1999:165)

Wolfe suggests that the same logic that informed frontier killing has transmuted "into different modalities, discourses and institutional formations as it undergirds the historical development and complexification of settler society" (2006:402). He advises that we chart

¹⁷ Editors statement, *Settler Colonial Studies*, 3:1, 1, DOI: [10.1080/18380743.2013.768169](https://doi.org/10.1080/18380743.2013.768169)

these transmutations for insights on how settler colonialism functions in the present day according to the same logics.

Using Wolfe's (1999) framework that prises open the 'monolith' of colonialism studies, Lorenzo Veracini's *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* examines settler colonialism as a transglobal mechanism. Veracini tabulates the population economy of global settler colonial states as one based on dichotomies (i.e., good and evil, civilised and primitive, culture and nature), the most essential being the one separating coloniser and colonised" (Veracini, 2010:16). Veracini describes a "system of relationships comprising three different agencies: the settler coloniser, the indigenous colonised, and a variety of differently categorised "alterities" (2010:16). This biopolitical economy is the way in which the population is managed with the ultimate goal of the disappearance of Indigenous and Exogamous (non-settler) others. This disappearance is progressively maintained through techniques that range from genocide to the carceral system of both jails and created slums, and also to assimilation into the settler class (16-17). Providing categorical sets of overlapping exogamy and indigeneity, settler and Otherness, Veracini posits that the central position of the settler is both indigenous and exogamous in the simultaneous claim to the terra nullius of the new Land and the roots of Europe. Indigenous others are rendered either as picturesque noble savages or as degraded others, and are assimilated or, more often, made to disappear. 'Invasive exogenous others', such as refugees or immigrants, occupy a space where they are waiting to be admitted as settlers or face constant threats of deportation. The lowest position in Veracini's tabulation is that of "abject others", 'those who have lost both exogenous and indigenous status and claims to land or community' (28). Veracini and Verbuyst's (2020) *South Africa's Settler-Colonial Present* examines South African settler colonialism's effects on the Khoi and San "as a mode of domination defined by a logic of elimination or containment rather than exploitation", whilst the population legislated as 'native' were exploited as labour in the colonial and Apartheid states. This enables a reading of the classification of 'Colouredness' as existing in Veracini's (2010) tabulation of settler colonial population economies in the category of 'Abject Otherness' made possible through the logics of extermination that led to the erasure of Khoisan indigeneity and its disappearance into the category of 'Colouredness'.

"I experience abjection only if an Other has *settled* in place and instead of what will be 'me.' Not at all an Other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be." (Kristeva, 1980:10, Italics, mine)

Abjection, according to Kristeva (1980), is the condition of being cast off from the symbolic order because what the abjected part of the whole represents would cause a

boundary-dissolving rupture. In the settler colonial state, the abjection of particular population groups is required to maintain this symbolic order. In South Africa, the 'othering' involved in the creation of 'Colouredness' allows for the very visceral monstrosity of systemic genocide to be abjected out of the body politic onto an 'other', upon whom it is foisted as an inherent biological or intractable historical condition. 'Colouredness' (viewed as a metissage of slave, settler and indigenous populations) as a category of miscegenation, carries a freight of impurity, concupiscence and moral degeneracy, into which claims to exogamous or indigenous categories become subsumed and erased. What remains for the abject othered body when indigeneity and exogamy are erased is what Zoë Wicomb identifies as "ontological shame" (Wicomb in Atteridge & Jolly, 1998). The fluid excess of miscegenation is also a boundary disruption, a border crossing that disturbs "identity, system, order" (Kristeva, 1980:4) that, for Fanon (1967), is the secretion of race (122) in response to the rigid cleave of separation that is colonial occupation. Emblematic of this abjection is the dissection of Khoisan bodies (for the modern scientific project) and an accompanying constitution of miscegenation as a fluid contagion that needed to be legislatively contained.

The 'abject' in the South African settler colonial context is what is expelled from the imaginary in order to maintain the separation required to continue the symbolic order and keep at a distance the violence of the Khoisan genocide upon which, along with slavery, modern South Africa is founded. In terms of slavery, the social death (Patterson 1982) that deprives slaves of heritage, motherland and kin is a disappearance that makes of slaves and their descendants abject exogenous others, never settlers. In South Africa, slavery is rendered 'picturesque' (Baderoon, 2014), simultaneously eliding the extreme brutality of its history and rendering it open to cultural exploitation. A recent (2022) example of this, that depicts the settler colonial imaginary's flirtation with the impurity of fluid contagion whilst maintaining cleanliness through cognitive erasure of history, is a product line developed to represent the values and history of the Franschhoek aspirational lifestyle farm Babylonstoren¹⁸, owned by Afrikaner media billionaire Koos Bekker. The farm has a restaurant, an organic garden designed by a French architect and described by the Sunday Times as the "Versailles of vegetable gardens¹⁹", and a tasteful "fine living" store that operates both online and from its premises. Advertised on its website and sold at its upmarket on-site store was the *VOC Spa Range*

¹⁸ Babylonstoren is a lifestyle wine farm in Franschhoek, Western Cape owned by media billionaire, Koos Becker.

<https://shop.babylonstoren.com/za>

¹⁹ d'Arcy, Susan (2024-01-10). "[Babylonstoren: the Cape's coolest hotel gets a major upgrade](#)". ISSN 0140-0460. Retrieved 2024-01-10.

featuring lotion, body butters and soaps made from spices from the Indies, such as clove and nutmeg, romanced as "Our VOC-scent pays homage to the trade ships of the Dutch East India Company that carried spices and other exotic goods to the Cape's shores". The range was discontinued after a social media outcry²⁰ in which descendants of slaves decried the erasure of the violent histories of the VOC and its spice and slave trade and its dispossession of the first people in what is now Stellenbosch.

(The first iteration of *Intimate Reparations*, Chapter Three, takes as its site the Spier wine farm in Stellenbosch and navigates abjection in the body politic on and with the bodies of the performers in relationship with the Land).

'Colouredness' has and continues to "typify a synthesis of indigenous and exogenous degeneracy" (Veracini, 2010) in the South African imaginary that allows present and continuous dispossession. Veracini encapsulates this positioning as follows:

These people are disconnected from their Land and communities, are the subject of segregative practices that are construed as enduring, and are principally characterised by restrained mobility (the absolute opposite of a settler capacity for unfettered mobility). Ongoing repression, of course, is one crucial element in the production of abject Otherness. However, even a recognition of native title, or a recognition of indigenous sovereignty in the context of renewed "treaty" traditions, as they discriminate between indigenous Others that retain entitlements and those who do not, is a crucial site for the constitution of abject Otherness. If the settler collective epitomises a synthesis of indigenous and exogenous virtues, the abject Others typify a synthesis of indigenous and exogenous degeneracy. (2010:28)

An example of such a 'renewed treaty' is the failure of Khoisan land claims after the end of Apartheid in 1994, when the new dispensation did not redraft colonial policies that had dispossessed the Khoisan or acknowledge this harm as requiring justice and reparations. Veracini (2006) identifies strategies of eliminating indigeneity as types of what he terms 'transfer'. With specific regard to the South African Khoisan context, Veracini and Verbuyst (2020) show the continuity of the "elimination of the native through both dispossession and transfer". Transfer may not take the form of physical elimination, but strategies such as replacing the native with settler populations, containment, assimilation and disavowal of indigeneity carry the same logic despite the fact that they may be unwitting or socially accepted in form. (2020:4).

²⁰ See <https://twitter.com/rabzia/status/1536641641339043840> as an example.

Academically, June Bam's critical eco-feminist contribution, *Ausi Told Me (2021)*, writes against the epistemological cementing of 'abjection' and what she calls four "scholarly assumptions" concerning erasure, which are unpacked below:

- The predominantly male, Eurocentric, liberal, African neocolonial 'extinction' discourse that San and Khoi people at the Cape virtually all died out, along with their knowledge and cultural practices, as a result of the smallpox epidemics of the 1700s.
- The predominantly Afrikaner nationalist discourse that the San people are an essentialist, 'pure-blood' group of people who have not been culturally hybridised.
- The post-modern discourse that indigenous people's claims to land as 'first-contact people' are falsely based on post-1994 identity politics steeped in the constructed histories promoted under Apartheid.
- The historical, Marxist discourse that argues that claims to indigeneity amongst the Apartheid-constructed 'coloured' group in South Africa amount simply to tribal and racial thinking (2021:xiii).

2.2.1 The Colonial Archive

June Bam (2021) identifies contemporary scholarship on the Khoi and San as based on precolonial methodology that closes down knowledge production and continues erasure through epistemicide. In her monograph's eco-feminist approach, she posits that a narrative of erasure from the Land originated with the cartography of the time that portrayed Khoisan settlements as sparse or at falsely great distances from the Cape. The fictive *terra nullius* established by maps such as Sparrman's *Hottentot Journey* of the late 18th Century was a travelogue documenting Anders Sparrman's travels through southern Africa, the Pacific and the South Seas and detailed his impression of the plants, animals and peoples (who he depicted as backwards savages) that he encountered. Sparrman's famous chronicles were foundational to European geographic knowledge of the time and remained the dominant doctrine informing Apartheid (2021:144). As Bam reminds us, most of the early written accounts of people, such as "*Kaffraria, or Land of the Hottentots*"²¹, despite being imaginary and based largely on hearsay, nonetheless informed official history to the point of being taught in school textbooks during Apartheid (2021:143).

²¹ Dapper (1668), ten Rhyne (1686) and Grevenbroek (1695) in *The Early Cape Hottentots* (Schapera and Farington 1933).

Ausi Told Me clarifies how the imperial project colonised Land as an *entire system* – flora, fauna, geological and human life, erasing situated knowledges produced in relationship with Land, whilst at the same time using specimens to build colonial science, which in turn rationalised the commodification of that same life for economic ends. Bam explicates that academic institutions and museums were founded on collections of 'exotic' plants, animals and humans. The British and Natural History Museums and the British Library, for example, were founded on the 'exotic' collections of Hans Sloane (1660-1753), president of the Royal College of Physicians and of the Royal Society, who relied on colonial slave routes to 'discover' specimens. The fascination with the strange creatures encountered in the lands invaded was epitomised in the obsession with Indigenous women's bodies; the story of Sara Baartman being the most well-known case, with her brain and genitals displayed until 1974 in specimen jars at the *Musée de l'Homme (Museum of Man)* in Paris²².

Hand in hand with the scientific project came the 'civilising' Christian missionary project that erased spiritual practices and knowledge systems. Bam quotes Dr John Phillip of the London Missionary Society, who in 1828 wrote of the Griqua: "In the year 1800...they were a herd of wandering and naked savages...without knowledge, without morals...wholly abandoned to witchcraft, drunkenness" (2021:144).

Rendering Khoisan as drunken savages provided the justification for the Caledon Code of 1809, which aimed to steer the 'Hottentots' from a life of vagrancy and drunkenness by enforcing contract labour on farms and the carrying of identification documents. This directly affected the Khoisan people's freedom to practice nomadism. In order to escape incarceration, they contracted themselves as farm labour, since employment and a fixed address made them officially 'not Hottentot' (2021:145). Thus providing for legislative erasure. The Caledon Code's enforced apprenticeship enabled raids on families where mothers were killed so that their children could be taken (2021:145) and apprenticed on farms. Accompanying these eliminations, missionaries made forays into communities to 'save' those who weren't incorporated into the system of contract labour and apprenticeship. At the same time, the rise of social Darwinism contributed to the belief that 'primitive natives' would not be able to withstand the power of Western civilisation and 'salvage anthropology', in which white ethnographers attempted to preserve 'the vanishing native', gained traction (2022:71). As

²² As part of the documentary *The Khoekhoe Saga*, I interviewed Jean Burgess, Chief of the Ghonaqua, who had placed Sara Baartman's uterus and brain back into the land as part of the repatriation ceremony in Hankey, Eastern Cape. She spoke of the deep grief of the experience and how it had shifted the way in which she understood the relationship between land and women's bodies.

Verbuyst (2022) notes, this was also the climate in which Bleek and Lloyd began their project of recording the stories of the vanishing native. Bleek created the linguistic categories of 'Hottentot', 'Bushman' and 'Bantu' (a term of Bleek's own creation), which he posited as having evolutionary implications based on race and 'culture'. This spurious taxonomy became highly influential (Gilmour, 2016 in Verbuyst 2022:71). Along with this went an increase in the transport of human, plant and animal remains to European institutions as taxonomic fascination increased. Khoisan fossilisation and elimination went hand in hand as a scientific project.

(Chapter Four examines how the performance *Kaaimanblom* employs body, Land and water to erode this fossilisation and revitalise the endemic more-than-human mythical figures trapped in the permafrost of the anthropological museum.)

2.3 Settler Colonial Modernity

The 1913 Land Act cemented and institutionalised centuries of dispossession by granting 87% of the Land to whites and the creation of 'Reserves for natives' with the remaining 13% of the Land. These reserves (which later became Bantustans) were constructed around Black ethnic categories when populations became coerced into labour for the colonial capitalist project. Khoisan populations were not allocated reserves but were subject to direct rule, which, along with the history of genocide, created a particular kind of colonial rule with long-term material consequences. Under Apartheid in the Republic of South Africa, dispossession was enforced by mass forced removals. Families and communities were divided according to arbitrary racial categories entrenched in law, and subjected to 'separate development' at all levels of social and institutional life. Wolfe (2006) says of settler colonial spatiality that "the blatant racial zoning of large cities and the penal system suggests that once colonised people outlive their utility, settler societies can fall back on the repertoire of strategies (in this case, spatial sequestration) whereby they have also dealt with the native surplus" (2006:404). The Bantustans represent a prime example of this sequestration of surplus populations. Highly evident in Cape Town, racialised zoning practices create urban geographies difficult to traverse for poor people of colour, who remain sequestered in outlying ghettos.

The Population Registration Act of 1950 fixed racial categories of Coloured, Cape Malay, Other Coloured, amongst others, and the Khoisan were legislated out of existence (2022:76). Hand in hand with this bureaucratic elimination went the romanticisation of distantly located, primitive San in both science and the media. Laurens Van der Post's novels, the film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* and anthropologists such as Tobias (1956) helped to paint the San

as existing in a picturesque Edenic purity that made them part of an environmental 'preservation' impetus that still holds considerable capital in neoliberal conservation agendas.

Apartheid policies of 'divide and rule' effectively pitted racialised communities against one another by, for example, ascribing more rights to 'Coloured's than Blacks and fostering notions of racial purity and tribal affiliation to land amongst Nguni-speaking people through the creation of Bantustans and men-only labour camps for migrant workers in the cities and the mines.. 'Coloured' privilege was accorded through a proximity to whiteness that remained unattainable. As Verbuyst points out (2022:78), different strategies and processes of colonisation were employed for different groups; Nguni speakers, for example, were not subject to policies of assimilation, annihilation or the extinction discourse that affected the Khoisan.

In Apartheid public discourse, the narrative of abjection was famously typified in former President F.W. De Klerk's wife, Marike De Klerk's 1983 statement:

"U weet, hulle is 'n negatiewe groep. Die definisie van 'n Kleurling in die bevolkingsregister is iemand wat nie 'n swarte is nie, en ook nie 'n blanke nie, en ook nie 'n Indiër nie, met ander woorde, 'n nie-mens... Hulle is oorskiet. Hulle is die mense wat oorgebly het nadat die volke uitgesorteer is." (Anesca Smith in vryeweekblad.com 28/09/2021).²³

"You know, they are a negative group. The definition of a Coloured in the population register is someone who is not a black, and also not a white, and not an Indian, in other words, a **not-person**... They are leftovers. They are the people that remained after the peoples were sorted out." (Anesca Smith in vryeweekblad.com 28/09/2021)

How this imaginary continues into the post-Apartheid public discourse is typified by journalist Nomakula (Kuli) Roberts's 20th February 2011 article in *The Sunday World* entitled *Jou Ma se Kinders: eish I miss daai lippies vannie Kaap*²⁴, in which the journalist refers to 'Coloured' women as drunk, uncivilised and oversexed. The title of the article plays with an Afrikaans term that means "your mother's vagina", with the by-line "lips of the Cape", a hint at labia. Roberts's article exposes the enduring nature of what Yvette Abrahams has called "the

²³ <https://www.vryeweekblad.com/menings-en-debat/2021-09-28-camissa-n-nuwe-naam-vir-die-ander-k-woord/> accessed 21 March 2023

²⁴ Your Mother's Children: Eish I miss those lips of the Cape

Great Long, National Insult"²⁵, the hypersexualisation of Indigenous women and the obsession with their genitals.

The two quotes are similar in their prurience; De Klerk's Afrikaans 'oorskiet' connoting more than just leftovers but also excess – semen in this case, that ties in with Roberts's overt declarations to demonstrate the abject fluid contagion of miscegenation imagined around 'Colouredness' as a flow from colonial contact through Apartheid into post-transition South Africa.

The 1994 transition of power and the end of Apartheid did not bring the transformation that had been hoped for, and the euphoria of rainbow nationalism gave way to a post-transition frustration with the lack of significant change. Both Verbuyst (2022) and Bam (2021) make the point that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of 1994 did not address or even hear the claims of Khoi and San descendants, and that the process itself was "politically driven and expedient rather than restorative and just" (2021:6). This is in line with global colonial reconciliation moves; Audra Simpson reads reconciliation in the Canadian settler colonial context as "a seduction package, (it is) an affective promissory note that things will be better."²⁶ Khoisan activists felt that despite participation in the Anti-Apartheid struggle and resistance to co-option by the Apartheid government, the historical particularities of their situation as indigenous people who bore the brunt of the first colonial contact remained unacknowledged in the 1994 transition. The TRC would only hear land claims if land dispossession occurred after the 1913 Land Act, effectively excluding the Khoisan from acknowledgement of harm, and more importantly, reparations. Verbuyst and Veracini (2020) discuss how the focus on Anti-Apartheid has obscured the particularity of Khoisan grievances, which date back to the 1600s. The post-1994 calls for recognition of Khoisan indigeneity were met by the government with what Deborah Bird Rose (1996), writing in the Australian settler colonial context, terms 'deep-colonising', where "assimilation and co-option are offered but not acknowledgement of indigenous status, a form of elimination that while ostensibly decolonising enforces the denial of indigeneity" (2020:10). Further to these grievances, it was felt that the United Nations (UN) transitional justice mechanisms were not applied to Khoisan concerns or communities and as the 2018 SAHRC report states, injustices were not addressed or remedied, either in the form of a public apology or reparations, resulting in a "a continuing affront to the dignity of the

²⁵ YVETTE ABRAHAMS (1997) The great long national insult: 'science', sexuality and the Khoisan in the 18th and early 19th century, *Agenda*, 13:32, 34-48, DOI: [10.1080/10130950.1997.9675585](https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.1997.9675585)

²⁶ From a YouTube talk at the Wheeler Centre at 54mins: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRiW2CJDt00> accessed 6 May 2024

group"²⁷. Veracini and Verbuyst (2020) explicate that the current ANC government operates by settler colonial logics with regard to Khoisan groups, in which "post-Apartheid South Africa inherited settler colonialism as structure without understanding, discussion or detection. It is as if Apartheid was let go so that settler colonialism could endure" (2020:4).

Currently, governmental policy in response to increasing activism by the Khoisan Revivalist Movement is in a continuing state of flux and refusal to acknowledge Khoisan Indigeneity operates in modes of what Tuck and Yang (2012) identify as 'colonial equivocation' whereby all experiences of colonial oppression are homogenised, an example of which is Gwede Mantashe's statement to Khoisan activists: "Do not think like a minority, because you are part of a [African] majority" (in Verbuyst 2016:87).

Mantashe's advocacy for a 'postcolonial Africanism', in the light of Wolfe (2006), Veracini (2022) and Verbuyst's (2016) cogent arguments, ignores the fact that settler colonialism is an ongoing project. Tuck and Yang (2012) point out that postcolonial critique often celebrates "empowered postcolonial subjects who seize denied privileges from the metropole" (19) in ways that do not challenge the colonial at all. Of particular importance to this study and its critique of postcolonial South African politics is Tuck and Yang's (2012) reminder that "the postcolonial pursuit of resources is fundamentally an anthropocentric model, as land, water, air, animals, and plants are never able to become postcolonial; they remain objects to be exploited by the empowered postcolonial subject" (1). Moreover, systemic material and cognitive dispossession from the Land has created, as Jenkins explains above, a 'Coloured' population that does not identify as African. Mantashe's statement, which neither acknowledges settler colonialism nor the particularities of Khoisan oppression, then becomes an example of colonial equivocation that affirms Veracini and Verbuyst's (2020) controversial argument that Apartheid disappeared so that settler colonialism could continue.

In terms of contemporary governmental activity around Khoisan claims, legislative accommodations ranging from the 1997 National House of Traditional Leaders Act to the Khoisan Leadership Act of 2019 demonstrate what Wolfe (2006) calls 'repressive authenticity'; Khoisan leadership is forced into governmental structures such as the National House of Traditional Leaders in order to be recognised as authentic. The Traditional Affairs Bill of 2013 for example was criticised in the South African Human Rights Commission Report of 2018 because it recognised only five Khoisan groups, retained Apartheid geographic boundaries with inadequate land restitution, and placed onerous expectation on Khoisan communities to

²⁷[https://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/National%20Hearing%20Report%20on%20the%20Humn%20Rights%20of%20the%20Khoi-San%20-%202014%20March%202018%20\(003\).pdf](https://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/National%20Hearing%20Report%20on%20the%20Humn%20Rights%20of%20the%20Khoi-San%20-%202014%20March%202018%20(003).pdf) accessed 31 March 2023

prove membership by resubmitting, on an annual basis, lists of community members with their Identity Documents (IDs) and addresses; restrictions and expectations not placed on other groups. The South African Human Rights Commission Report confirms that the Bill reinforced "rigid, colonially-constructed identities", placing restrictions and expectations on Khoisan communities that were not placed on other groups.

In short, Khoisan activists feel that settler colonial policies and strategies of the previous Apartheid regime are still replicated by the current regime. To date, South Africa has not ratified the International Labour Office's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989, No. 169 (ILO 169), which would enable Khoisan activists' claims as 'First' Indigenous peoples to be recognised through the convention's recognition of prior occupancy, as well as economic, social and cultural distinctions. Verbuyst (2022) is careful to make the point that Khoisan Revivalist activists do not want to be seen as 'more indigenous' than other South Africans, but merely want the recognition of a specific set of oppressions that predate Apartheid and the reparative justice that accompanies this.

There have been criticisms from the academic and activist sector that post-1994 claims to Khoisan indigeneity are instrumentalist attempts to gain power and Land, or that these claims are tribalist and essentialist and hark back to Apartheid-era ethnicity (Boonzaier 1994). Boonzaier's (1997) statement in the *Mail and Guardian* claims that "the leaders of such groups are much more conscious and calculating about the way they manipulate symbols than the rank and file who see images that resonate with them"²⁸. While this hierarchical perspective on "leadership and rank and file" may hold true for some of the sectarian political machinations, such as those evidenced in the Amazon case above, it does not resonate with other emic expressions of Khoisan Revivalism that manifest in highly individual, often deeply spiritual articulations as detailed above.

In the heterogeneity and complexity of Khoisan Revivalism, from hip-hop in Mitchell's Plain stadiums, Rastafarians selling mountain roots, academics, artists, grandmother storytellers, 'uitsmeer' (massage) practices, to Griqua priests and a plethora of self-identified chiefs, we see an undeniable emic efflorescence. For many, as the stencilled graffiti on Woodstock walls says, "The Time is *!Nau*²⁹".

²⁸ Chief Little takes on a big job.' *Mail & Guardian* (1997) <https://mg.co.za/article/1997-07-25-chief-little-takes-on-a-big-job> accessed 31 March 2022.

²⁹ '!Nau' is a Khoekhoegowab word for ceremony or initiation rite. The play on '!Nau' and the English word 'Now', carries an urgency to Khoisan Revival in the present and to time as ceremonial.

2.3.1 The Lamentation Project

He'many Molina Vargas (2020) says of mourning the Selk'nam of Chile, who are (like the Khoisan) officially extinct:

"We want to find ways to mourn differently, i.e. to critically decolonise mourning through efforts to unlock the confining of the Selk'nam, the spirit-matter of Karokynka, and their mutual entanglement to the past, affirmatively reclaiming their rights to futurity, supported by new amorous coalitions."

I initially intended this chapter to examine expressions of Khoisan Revivalism through looking at various activist propositions by Khoisan-identified musicians, botanists and writers. Instead, the *Lamentation* project provided an opportunity for the experience of revivalism as direct performance activism. This shift foregrounded emergence as a methodological feature of research-creation, reminding me of my part in a relational field in which I was but one actant.

In the section that follows, I detail the background to the project, the rehearsal process and finally the performance. This process of rehearsal and performance assumed a more traditional form than the other two performances discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. In most theatre productions in which I have participated, such as in *Lamentation*, embodied research and creation happened on the rehearsal floor and is then fixed so as to be repeated in the performance. In this structure, common in most theatrical productions, the director facilitates exploration for the performers and makes decisions about the final shape and content of the performance. In the context of *Lamentation*, where a film was produced, these decisions were made to facilitate a final edit and elicit cohesive performances from the individuals in the large group. This approach differs from performances in Chapters 3 and 4, where research-creation occurs moment-to-moment during the performance itself. The discussion that follows then, focuses more on the rehearsal process as the improvisations and discussions that happened around them were, in this case, the aperture through which both this chapter and the performance flowed. The discussion on the performance is notably short because I participated in only a section of the entire work. During the times when others were performing, the rest of the company remained in the dressing room so as to be out of the camera frame and the shot. The entire group performed only one section at the end of the day. The engagement required for the performances was also guided by the constraints of performing for a camera, gestural clarity and the ability to repeat with precision for a pick-up shot if technical problems with equipment occurred. Except for the last scene with the entire group (mentioned above), voice

and sound were recorded separately in the studio. The bulk of the research-creation, then, occurred during the rehearsals and not in the final performance.

In terms of how the work functioned ritualistically, Intentions were set with prayers, offerings and impepho at the site before the rehearsal process began. This opened a durational ritual container that held the gathering intensities of the rehearsal process and the performance day. The aperture of the ritual container was released and closed after the performance.

2.3.2 Background

Performed and filmed at the confluence of the Salt, Black and Liesbeeck rivers, Cape Town, on 30th April 2023, the project was initiated by Professor Micha Espinosa of the University of Arizona, who is also an artist/activist who regularly performs with *La Pocha Nostra* and the Creative Director of the Fitzmaurice Voice Institute. *La Pocha Nostra*³⁰ is a multidisciplinary arts organisation founded in Los Angeles in 1993 by Guillermo Gómez-Peña that is devoted to "erasing borders". The Fitzmaurice Voice Institute³¹ was founded by Katherine Fitzmaurice and teaches the vocal technique that she created. The project was inspired by Espinosa's body of work on decolonial lamentation, which in her practice stems from forms such as "llantos" (weeping, crying), and "gritos" (a Mexican cry—often associated with a call to autonomy, national or otherwise(2020)³² wherein voice is a political art used "to fight against the state under fascism and racial capitalism" (2020). Espinosa says of lamentation as a collective activity that "in terms of voicing a lament, the experience is close to an ecstatic experience—beyond language—which is beyond the construction of self... beyond individual pain, it is a group activity, and it is a way to have a shared consciousness" (2020). Sound, for Espinosa, is able to "cut through the illusion that we are separate", travelling through the air, through bodies, resonating across time and space, resisting containment, borders and frontiers. We cannot shut ourselves off to sound as we might with images that we can turn away from or close our eyes to. When we lament, we add our voices to a chorus that expresses rage and grief that are unspeakable and unable to be contained in just one skin. Espinosa has performed communal lamentations at contested sites such as the Mexico–US

³⁰ <https://www.guillermogomezpena.com/la-pocha-nostra/>

³¹ <https://www.fitzmauriceinstitute.org>

³² From Ybarra, P. (2020). Interview with Micha Espinosa and Garrett Johnson. *Performance Matters*, 6(2), 85–93. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1075802ar>

border wall. Her work with Guillermo Gomez Pena's *La Pocha Nostra* reflects her ongoing anticolonial activism.

The community of performers from the University of Cape Town that were part of the project all shared a similar methodological approach to ritual as a decolonial activist proposition that involved radical relationality and deep listening to the human and non-human. The very idea of using the Liesbeeck River Amazon development as a site was in response to a dream that one of the company members, Yonela Makoba, had, where she dreamt she heard the Liesbeeck River crying for help. Thus, from the outset, the project was underpinned by an animate relationality that proposed that the *sound* of a weeping river can be heard by a human in the environment, cutting, as Espinosa states, "through the illusion that we are separate."

2.3.3 Rehearsal Process

5th April 2023: The first group meeting facilitated by Sara Matchett (UCT) and Micha Espinosa, with participants Yonela Makhoba, Adriana Jamisse, Ntombi Makhutshi, Freddy Nyezi, Liphelo Mathews, Lukhanyiso Skosana, |Gamirodi Tauriq Jenkins, Lonwabo Notana and myself.

11th April 2023: The group goes to the site at the confluence of the rivers across from the Amazon development to ask the river for permission to perform *Lamentation*. We bring objects to offer that grow our own connection to the river. I bring a jar of honey filled with cinnamon and sweet spices that I made as a home altar offering for the Yoruba river Goddess, Oshun, a practice that I started in the 1990s. I also bring Eland fat left over from the performance of *Kaaimanblom*. Adrianna Jamisse brings a Mozambican song, which she teaches us to sing. Jenkins recounts the history of the site, called |Gamirodi !Khaes in Khoekhoegowab, which translates as Place of the Stars. He explains that the name refers to how clear the sky is from this locale and also how certain astronomical constellations align with Lion's Head Mountain on significant days. The confluence of rivers, together with the astrological alignment, made this place a site for sacred ceremonies for the Goringhaicona and other Khoi and San groups. Jenkins then leads us in a prayer in which we call on Sara Baartman, Krotoa, David Stuurman, and reference our own ancestors as custodians of the four directions. We share the offerings we have brought with each other and then go down to the river to pray.

15th April 2023: The group attends a Fitzmaurice Voicework workshop that is also open to the public. The Institute's website states:

"Fitzmaurice Voicework combines adaptations of classical voice training techniques with modifications of yoga, shiatsu, bioenergetics, energy work, and many other disciplines. This integration serves to harmonise the *voluntary* and *involuntary* aspects of the nervous system and the voice."

Fitzmaurice Voicework will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4; suffice to say here that this work consists of destructuring and restructuring. Destructuring, informed by Wilhelm Reich's de-armouring and Richard Lowen's continuation of Reich's work with Bioenergetics, comprises the stimulation of an involuntary tremor using the modified yoga positions in which the muscles are both contracted and released, activating the Golgi Tendon Reflex. These postures then stimulate involuntary tremors that affect the parasympathetic nervous system, resulting in the release of tension that produces an embodied and resonant voice. The workshop is a five-hour introduction to Fitzmaurice Voicework led by Espinosa and Matchett. The group discusses the *Lamentation* Project, and participants use Fitzmaurice techniques for an embodied inquiry into ideas around the river. Observations arise about the proximity of Fitzmaurice to ancestral trance, and one of the participants experiences a light trance after a tremoring sequence. Jenkins observes that the tremor, as a physiological technique that makes access to the ancestral and more-than-human world possible, is what colonialism has taken from Khoi and San descendants. Chapter Four holds a more thorough discussion of trance, but for now it suffices to note that Jenkins's observation of the use of the tremor to retrieve a stolen Khoisan relationality resonates with Eduard Glissant's *tremblement*, as a thinking that trembles with the earth in a "counter (to) all the systems of terror, domination, and imperialism" (Glissant, Obrist, 2021). In southern Africa, this tremoring, called *ukutyityimba* in isiXhosa and *!Kaukan* amongst the San, is used to enter trance states and commune with the ancestral realm. Read alongside Glissant's *tremblement*, Jenkins's feeling of tremoring or *ukutyityimba* as retrieval across colonial erasure somatically extends *entremblement* to open up questions about embodied decolonisation through this trembling immersion in an affectively inextricably connected world. As Glissant says of "the poetics of trembling—it allows us to be in real contact with the world and with the peoples of the world", and as Jenkins proposes, across time with the ancestors. Though identity is not renounced, because the practitioner returns to the comfort of themselves after the immersion in *ukutyityimba*'s "whirlwind of encounters" (Glissant, Obrist, 2021), *tremblement* in this mixed sense becomes a poetic/somatic hospitability to more-than-human ontologies, entangled histories and epistemologies.

18th April 2023: Rehearsals begin with an opening ritual conducted by Ntombi Makhutshi with prayers to the spirit, ancestors, and water. After a brief warm-up that consists

of a few tremor positions, we share our objects and reflect on our experience of the river. Espinosa creates the image poem above from this discussion.

19th April 2023: In this session, Espinosa deconstructs the physiological mechanisms, or the form that grief takes in the body. The group engages in inquiry, which locates this as a sinking, a backwards motion, as opposed to laughter or anger, which manifests as a forward-moving bodily disposition. We work with the image of waves of grief flowing through the body, at different scales from the cosmic, where the body reaches up to cry to the gods and down to beat the dust; to the personal, where the grieving body grabs at itself, clutching clothing, beating itself, hands curling upwards imploringly; to the communal where grieving bodies reach for each other, holding and rocking together; to the deeply intimate and private. This extends to scales of vocal sounds that move from private to polyphony, where keening voices harmonise, creating dissonance and rhythms with other voices. The group develops a chorus with one or two members at a time that allows their sound to swell. The Fitzmaurice principles of restructuring with the activation of the deep abdominal transverse muscle support our vocal health and embodied expression, and the destructuring warm-up has released tensions so that voices are unobstructed and sound can move without harming the vocal chords.

As an antidote, Espinosa leads an exercise that stimulates laughter in the body, and we regulate the intensity of the lamentation with play. We are training our bodies and voices to hold larger sound and to grieve for what is greater than us. Espinosa guides us through a movement and voice sequence in response to the image poem, which she reads.

20th April 2023: Espinosa leads us through a sequence of exercises to prepare us for performance and for cultivating ease with 'the gaze' of the camera. We create movement phrases in small groups from images that stuck out for us in the improvisation, using the Khoekhoegowab clicks in addition to other sounds. These movement phrases form the basis for the ritual performance.

2.3.4 The Performance

As detailed in the Guidelines for reading, this description of the performance is cursory, given the impossibility of rendering the entangled atmospheric intensities of an event in which I was but one participant. Additionally, as detailed above, the mode of performance required in the Lamentation project is not one that affords extended awareness and research-creation during the performance. Our performances were brief, repeated for the camera with an emphasis on camera angles and capturing some of what we had found in rehearsal. Performances were done individually in order to get a clear shot for the camera. The rest of

the company was in the dressing room, helping each other prepare for upcoming scenes. Please also refer to the webpage for a fuller sense of the performance. At the time of writing, the completion of the full video had been unexpectedly delayed by many months, and unfortunately, only a trailer is available on the webpage.

1st May 2023: The performance takes the form of a film set day, with an early call, make-up and costume and filming small group and individual sequences prior to the full group sequence. The day starts with logistical problems, costume make-up, picking up late cast members, etc. When we finally gather, Tauriq Jenkins initiates the building of an altar on the ground on which he places ceremonial items connected to the site.

My journal entry: *It is very definitely a ritual space, participants feel their personal ancestors arrive, and some have to be helped out of trance states with water and other techniques. We share a strong awareness of more-than-human presences; many see/feel them in different ways. Some see the water serpent rise up, thick and green. In this group lament, I feel as if I am observing my body and emotions labour, I see images and feel the water move through me on a long journey from vleis across the Cape Flats aquifer, through the eastern slopes of Table Mountain. There is anger and sadness passing out of our mouths, proclaiming itself as an agential force moving through bodies of Land, water, flesh, as it comes to matter that it is somehow ecstatic. The feelings my body expresses do not stick or affect me; they pass through. I am very aware of the chorus, and I see little snakes or lines of light running across the grass from the river that feel like wild joy. There is aliveness and joy here.*

"Reviving Indigenous artistic practices, as sites of co-imagining through constellations of co-creation, is part of ecological and community-based reconciliation and healing. Key to this process is the act of reciprocal recognition, a core practice that fosters ethical relationality, helps cultivate our Indigeneity, and honours the circle of life." (Vicki Kelly, 2021: 183)³³

If Shawn Wilson's (2008) definition of the sacred is followed, then *Lamentation*, in its building of relationships for a brief moment at the river, was a sacred practice; it fostered intimacy with each other, the dead and the more-than-human. The resacralisation of Land as a web of interconnections was perhaps the most powerful activist proposition of this performance. J Kameron Carter (2020) says in *Otherwise Worlds*, "the religion of whiteness is the propertization of the earth, (...) that rests on a mythic substantialization and imperialization

³³ Kelly, V. (2021). Radical Acts of Re-imagining Ethical Relationality and Trans-systemic Transformation. *Engaged Scholar Journal*, 7(1), 183–202. <https://doi.org/10.15402/esj.v7i1.70759>

of the sacred converted into a brutalizing property-concept that now theo-politically organizes the space-time of modernity" (160). While the Amazon development continues apace, *Lamentation* unsettled propertisation in the bodies assembled by the river, retrieving the sacred through an act of liquid excess. Implicated in this was a sacred (Wilson) cultivation of radical kinship that extended beyond identitarian bounds of individual bodies, cultural groups, the human, and time. Communal mourning overwhelmed separation and called forth Kelly's (2021) reciprocal recognition of each human other, of Khoisan ancestors, of river ancestors, of more-than-human beings because, as Haraway exhorts, "kin are unfamiliar (outside what we thought was family or gens), uncanny, haunting, active" (2016: 103).

In the affective interrelation cultivated through embodied performance, the performers willingly offer themselves to "spirit-possessed dispossession beyond capitalist logics of propertied self-possession" (Kameron-Carter, 2020:160) in a particularly South African hydropoetic imaginary that emerged as common to the group.

To end this chapter, I return to the person who dreamed, Yonela Makoba and her reflections on the project recorded in a voice note (listen [here](#)) on Monday, 24th March 2024:

"Nothing can be proven, I can't prove the dream, all I can say over and over again is that I dreamt the dream... That the river is a snake, that the snake is me, me and the snake and the river...in realms that intertwine, that rub against each other, that flow into each other... To feel rivers and animals inside ourselves, to feel tremors of mountains, to resonate with the stuckness of the river, I don't think it is in the colonial project for us to do that".

Chapter 3: Intimate Reparations

The pairing of the erotic with historical atrocity manifests a series of interlocked contradictions: humiliating but dignifying, selfish but generous, explicit but veiled, daring but cowardly, tender but cruel. The matter of how traumatised bodies can make bids to soften the grasp of histories to which they did not consent but to which they are nevertheless subject is that complex. And it is that urgent. (Saketopoulou, 2023:130).

This chapter is positioned after *Lamentation* (Chapter 2) in order to follow the current of re-indigenisation that this thesis proposes. However, *Intimate Reparations* was the first performance (in linear time) of the series. It served as a bridge between my previous body of work and the emergent research-creation of this study. The former phase, of which the play *Womb of Fire* was the final part, was characterised by an excavation of colonial violence on the female body. *Womb of Fire* (WOF) used archival stories of two women from the first years of the South African Colony: Grote Katrijn of Pulicat, the first female bandit slave at the Cape, and Zara, a Khoi servant who was tried and sentenced to impalement posthumously for the crime of suicide³⁴. Gesturing towards reclamation at the very end, *Womb of Fire* was situated at the meeting place of colonial violence and the female body. Coming directly after *WOF*, *IR* was a reorientation from the retelling of colonial harms towards pleasure as an act of survivance that reached towards eco-erotic intimacies. BDSM (Bondage, Domination, Sadism and Masochism) perverted this transition towards pleasure in unexpected ways.

Interlocutor Siphumeze Kundayi, artist, Dominant, sex-positive educator and co-creator of Holaa Africa (<https://holaafrika.org>), which is "a Pan-Africanist digital platform that focuses on the politics and presence of sexuality on the African continent", is one of the inspirations behind this work. They say of their practice and this movement from trauma towards pleasure:

I'm in a place in life where the only thing I'm interested in is my (black queer humxn) freedom. And this decision came after years of deep gender, race and queer

³⁴ These stories were researched from archival record by Mansell George Upham from his *First Fifty Years – a project collating Cape of Good Hope records* accessed at <https://www.e-family.co.za/ffy/ui46.htm>

activism. Drawing inspiration from pain and injustice, I was constantly embodying the energy of death, and I centred those who caused the deaths. ... my work (...) evolved into work that centres black queer narratives, both feminine and masculine, presenting not as an extension of any injustice done to our bodies but as a reconnection with self. We exist beyond fucked up histories. Beyond the violence enacted on us. So we may as well create, find practices that help us get to the root of who we are, not what has been done to us.

The chapter that follows traces *IR*, not a straightforward movement from a necropolitical somatic order to pleasure-centred erotic decolonisation, but rather the *kinking* of the colonial racialised contact zone of skin that *played* with historical pain as traumatophilic (Saketopoluou, 2023) corporeal sensation, that unsettled both BDSM and decolonisation. I begin below with a contextualisation of the sites of the three performances. This is followed by a discussion of the Pre-Production phase and the germination of the work, locating kink and BDSM as a research-creation study. The Rehearsal section that follows includes a discussion of the making of the work, the kink scene in Cape Town, BDSM, BDSM and feminisms, Race Play and finally, Ritual and BDSM. Interwoven through this discussion are personal reflections on the performance and making. The Performance section follows this, and lastly, there is a summation reflecting on how the work advanced the study.

3.1.1 Site: Landscape, Brandscape, Traumascape

Intimate Reparations consisted of three iterations performed in late 2021 and early 2022 at four sites in and around Cape Town. Performed by Wynand Herholdt and Rehane Abrahams and described as a *decolonial BDSM ritual performance*, each iteration was in direct response to and in communication with the following sites. Each iteration may be clicked on to lead to the related webpage.

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| November 2021, | Iteration #1. Spier Constellations, Stellenbosch. |
| February 2022 | Iteration #2. Embodiment Cape Town, Salt River. |
| February 2022 | Rehearsal Performance Body Politic, Theatre Arts Admin Collective, Observatory. |
| March 2022 | Iteration #3. ICA Live Art Festival, Slave Lodge, Cape Town. |

The eco-erotic nature of this project proposes Tumarkin's scar tissue as extending through the bodies of Land and humans in ways that must be addressed interrelationally and

holistically. This section discusses the site with a focus on Spier as an example of a 'lifestyle farm', the Slave Lodge and the Liesbeeck River site are examined respectively for their co-constitution of the characters or embodiments performed at each. The same dramaturgical structure was followed in each performance, with specific differences in the objects used. For example, the slave bell and wine at Spier, *Nymphaea Capensis*, river mud and salt at Embodiment, and flowers, a prayer mat, and a Javanese *Kris* dagger at the Slave Lodge performance.

3.1.2 Stellenbosch: Colonial' Creative Countryside'

3.1.2.1 Iteration #1

The wine farm, Spier, currently operates as what Scott (2013) calls the "Creative Countryside", offering "a type of consumerism that is increasingly focused on the aesthetic, semiotic, and libidinal content of the products that circulate through global markets" (2013:24) as part of a Cognitive Cultural Capitalism of the Cape. The website has a dropdown titled 'Heritage' where it lists human occupation as follows: San – 7000 years ago, Cochoqua – 500 AD to 1690 and then "Cape of Good Hope founded by Jan van Riebeeck". The list continues to slave arrival, the founding of Stellenbosch, the title deed to Spier signed to Arnoud Jansz in 1692, building renovations, wine production, awards for Art promotion and wine, etc. Until 1993, when the property was bought by Richard Endhoven, the farm was operated as a conventional wine farm. From this time, Spier began to host arts events, festivals and started biodynamic and sustainable farming. Also around this time, the new post-Apartheid dispensation required farmers to cede ownership of farmworkers' cottages to the workers who occupied them. Before this could take effect, Spier evicted these workers, retaining ownership of the cottages, one of which director and curator Brett Bailey has occupied for more than 17 years. In post-apartheid, Spier has developed as a sophisticated player in the Stellenbosch 'brandscape', demonstrating what Scott (2013) calls "aestheticized land use intensification" (20).

Stellenbosch as a brandscape for enlightened/cultured Afrikanerdom, it is unabashedly Eurocentric and uses symbols and names of the colonial past, such as *Compagniesdrift* (a bottling facility), and the Babylonstoren *VOC spa range* in a manner that elides the brutality of the past while romancing it, along with care for their workers and nature, for marketing purposes. Stellenbosch, as simultaneously a brandscape and traumascape, is symptomatic of the duplicity with which coloniality is utilised and perpetuated under the guise of a post-apartheid pastoral in the broader Western Cape.

Constellations³⁵ was conceived by Bailey as an opportunity to provide employment for performing artists during COVID-19 restrictions. The first event in 2020 was an antidote to the isolation of the pandemic while avoiding infection through outdoor location, small audiences, sanitiser and audience masks, and the gentle nature of the works reflected this time. The event proved popular and continued in COVID-free 2021, and with the curatorial theme of "Into the Woods", Bailey invited performers to seek out the strange, the unsettling, the mysterious and as the curatorial brief urged, "the less vanilla the better" in line with Bailey's own provocative theatre-making style.

The audiences at Spier are invited to buy into the idea of the creative countryside, as Michael Mc Kinnie (2012) suggests to "'purchase', through the performance, temporary 'ownership' over a distinct and non-replicable time, place, and experience" (19) allowing them to "imagine themselves as productive economic subjects of a particular kind – the property-owning bourgeoisie" (29).

IR engaged with this current reality of Stellenbosch winelands creative countryside as a particularly cynical form of settler colonialism through an attempt to 'unsettle' property ownership of Land and body as the same cognitive stranglehold using shock to rupture this cognitive buy-in. The drunken farm worker exposes the presence of the past and the recitation of the wine farm names during the flogging, a reminder that the Land was cultivated by slaves and taken from the Cochoqua. However, when the board members attended, we complied with the request not to "mention the funders" in the list of wine farms. Given that Stellenbosch as a brandscape sells a "type of consumerism that is increasingly focused on the aesthetic, semiotic, and libidinal content of the products that circulate through global markets" (Scott, 2013:24), it becomes difficult to determine if *IR* impacted with site for the audience in any way beyond perhaps extending the largesse of the land-owning bourgeoisie to include the avant-garde as part of its non-replicable, experiential product. A direct confrontation with property ownership in Stellenbosch was, however, not the aim of our performance; rather, we were laying bare the terrain, playing with it and reaching into new relationalities.

³⁵ Constellations webpage: <https://www.thirdworldbunfight.co.za/spier-program>

3.1.3 Salt River: Cape Town Kink, Gentrinaaiers³⁶

3.1.3.1 Iteration #2

Embodiment Studio (mentioned above) is a rope bondage studio located at the Spice Yard on Voortrekker Road in close proximity to |*Gamirodi !Khaes – Place of the Stars*, discussed in Chapter One, the confluence of the Liesbeeck and Black Rivers with the Salt. Container yards, dumps and salvage yards line the street. At night, container trucks park along the street at this location and foot traffic is predominantly street sex workers and the houseless from an extensive settlement around the train tracks and derelict buildings. An example of aestheticised Land use intensification in Salt River, which has been allowed to fall into post-industrial ruin by the city, enabling this type of gentrification, the Spice Yard is a 'creative hub' type space with alcohol distillers, electronic dance music party organisers, clothing brand manufacturers, etc.

In this iteration, Wynand played into the hip, white Salt River gentrifiers, oblivious to the spatial politics of their land use. My character drew on the abject drunken woman allied to the Bush Spirits from the Spier iteration, the Womb of Fire character, Zara, as a spirit who roams the in-between spaces of Cape Town, such as the houseless encampments *Onder die Brug*³⁷, and was also connected to the river confluence, houseless community and sex workers nearby.

For this performance, we collected *Nymphaea Capensis* roots, leaves and mud from a pond. The plant began to rot and we used this to cover my body, costume and props made of objects found in the street so that the character smelt strongly of the river and vlei. This informed both my characterisation and the audience's sensory experience of the character who started her progression into the space from the street with a shopping cart of props and a bucket with the rotting *Nymphaea Capensis* on a very windy and dark night, trailing salt along her path. For this iteration, the flogging was accompanied by a litany of the names of rivers in Cape Town, interspersed with the salt to rub into Wynand's wounds. This character was the most abject of the three iterations, her grief and rage becoming understandable to me only with the Lamentation ritual of Chapter 2, which occurred at the confluence site.

³⁶ The term Gentrinaaiers (Gentrifuckers) appears graffiti-ed onto walls in the areas of Woodstock and Salt River. It is a response to spatial injustice and resistance to the gentrification of this neighbourhood through 'Urban Renewal'.

³⁷ Onder die Brug or Under the Bridge is one of many houseless settlements in the area, located under a bridge adjacent to train tracks in Salt River, Cape Town.

3.1.4 Slave Lodge: The Grotesque Picturesque of Cape Town Tourism

3.1.4.1 [Iteration #3](#)

At the Slave Lodge, the performance took place in the outdoor courtyard underneath and in between the plaques of Jan Van Riebeeck and his wife, Maria de la Quellerie. The character of the farmworker from Spier became a flower seller as a reference to Gabeba Baderoon's (2014) critical insight into the 'picturesque' rendering of Cape slave descendants that erases the brutality of slavery and its continuing legacy, whilst making slave descendants complicit with the system. The geographical proximity to both the Bo-Kaap, described on the Cape Tourism site as "*known for its vibrant, predominantly Muslim, Cape Malay community and its equally bold flat-roofed colourful houses and cobbled stone roads*³⁸", and the flower sellers on Adderly Street informed this choice, as well as the choice to portray Wynand's character as a tourist with a camera. The Cape tourism website entry on the flower sellers³⁹ proclaims: "*The flower sellers of Adderley Street are as much a part of Cape Town as Table Mountain, good wine and fresh fish – for more than 150 years they have been selling their flowers from Trafalgar Place.*" Little has changed in the way of branding the city since colonial times. The website continues with wistful descriptions of Coloured women and details of the Group Areas Act forced removals; "Memories of that terrible time are still vivid for many of the flower sellers. But they are a tough group of people – even though they still bear the psychological scars of being uprooted, they continue to ply their trade". In this iteration, the ships that carried slaves were listed interspersed with contemporary container liners, such as Maersk, to list the continuation of shipping lines of exploitation.

The movement through sites followed the waters, from Stellenbosch and the Eerste River to the now abject confluence of the Salt, Black and Liesbeeck Rivers, towards Table Mountain and the canalised underground flows of what was made into the Heerengracht, which then became Adderly Street, where the Slave Lodge is situated. This topography was tracked using Maria Tumarkin's definition of traumascapes as "a distinctive category of place, transformed physically and psychically by suffering, part of a scar tissue that now stretches across the world" (Tumarkin 2005:13). The performers embodied human figures of place as keys to the conflict of the particular space in a colonial, racialised relationship. At each site, we

³⁸ <https://www.capetown.travel/neighbourhood/bo-kaap/>

³⁹ <https://www.southafrica.net/gl/en/travel/article/flower-sellers-rooted-in-cape-town-flower-sellers-of-adderley-street>

explored the recuperation of that particular black femme body and the reparations offered by the white male body across Land and time.

3.2 Pre-production: Tethered to Nature

(The password for this encrypted webpage above is: ABRREH001.)

Around the time of conceptualisation, thinking around my thesis had caused a deepening engagement with *die Waterslang* and eco-erotics, the entangled relationship of sex and nature and the possibilities that queering (or kinking) this desire for intimacy with more-than-human others held for decolonial vitality. Could the erotic be used, following Lorde's Uses of the Erotic, to find ways of returning the Land to earth other than liberal capitalism's transfer of property deeds? What potentials did the erotic relationship with Land and the inhabitants that make the Land (human and more-than-human) hold for making autonomous sovereigns that could not be owned? Given the performing body's capacity for affective contagion and porosity, could the erotic be used to enter into relation with the more-than-human and how? What questions could arise from bodies outside of the impasse that Hartmann describes:

Could an idea of freedom fundamentally bound to property do anything other than reproduce dispossession and confirm the alienability and disposability of life and capacity? Could democracy built on racial slavery and settler colonialism ever sustain freedom, repair what has been broken, return what has been stolen, release the Land to earth, provide to each according to their needs, and enable all to thrive? The answer remains a resounding "no." (2022:xxxiv)

Following the emergent research-creation impulses with *die Waterslang* as an eco-erotic ordering principle, led me to explore and expand eros through a Shibari (Japanese rope bondage) ritual. I was invited to perform this ritual as a submissive by a Sensual Dominant whom I will refer to by the respectful honorific, Goddess. This is in keeping with protocols in D/s (Dominant/submissive) culture, where the submissive does not call the Dominant by name but by a respectful honorific. The ritual's intention was as an antidote to harmful capitulations I had made to heteropatriarchy in my private and professional life. I was in the process of leaving both an abusive marriage and a long-format telenovela that was characterised by toxic gender relations, glamour and the camera's gaze. The session was an intentional return to and reclamation of the erotic as a source of vitality and power, with the recognition that my desire to submit had to be acknowledged and encouraged, but 're-tethered/ re-wired/re-rigged' towards pleasure and autonomy. I discovered that I enjoy playing the role of submissive in a

D/s dynamic. I find the abdication of control similar to the experience of performance and training, and relish the deep devotion these acts inspire. This ritual occurred in a natural setting on the slopes of Table Mountain, and the spoken intention was "to bind me to my true nature".

Goddess says of their practice as a Dominant:

The core inspiration for my Kink practice doesn't actually originate within BDSM. So much of our everyday life has hints of kinky expressions. And mine began when I was a kid. I had a relationship with a neighbour kid who was about 4 years older than me. It had elements of the caregiver and the little's dynamic⁴⁰. I don't remember if we labelled it anything, but in West African societies, these sorts of homoerotic power exchanges between girls were called 'supi', and I've forgotten what it is called in East Africa. I grew up watching womxn serve food by kneeling, and in some cultures, womxn lie down. Yes, we can talk about the gender inequality of it, but remove that and add consent, and all you have is a service kink. Gobelas make their initiates kneel. They sit at their Gobelas' feet. The more sadistic ones make their initiates crawl on their knees, catching things with their mouths while their hands are bound behind their backs for hours, as part of their training to teach humility. Again, we can either criticise them for being cruel or romanticise the spiritual awakenings, but it is masochism. So without knowing anything about BDSM, I learnt Discipline/Dominance, I learnt about submission, sadism, masochism and bondage, so boom! We have a reason for the black folk to give themselves permission to enjoy their kinks, because our ancestors have been enjoying their kinks in their own way. Our people continue to enjoy kinks in their own way. So we may as well make this shit ethical and create contracts and rules and protocols for these dynamics we find ourselves forcing on each other lowkey.

The ritual with Goddess was preceded by consent and limit agreements, memorandums of understanding, and safety protocols in case of any emergencies. The creation of a respectful, safe container helped to create the sense of sacredness that carried on throughout the entire experience. Being bound in Shibari knots produced in my physiology a deeply meditative flow state that endured for the length of the tie and then continued into the next few days. This experience was akin to moments I had experienced at a 10-day Vipassana silent

⁴⁰ Caregiver and Little are BDSM roles where the *Little* plays at infantilisation, being a baby or child and the *Caregiver* plays the adult or parent.

retreat, but of longer duration and perhaps deeper than I achieved during Vipassana meditation. This meditative state is known as 'subspace' for the submissive and 'topspace' for the dominant in the BDSM (Bondage Domination Sadism Masochism) community, and has recently received scholarly attention for its similarity to extreme ritual and altered states (Greenberg, 2019; Lee, Klement et al., 2016; Carlstrom, 2021). I will return to these states in the discussion below on ritual and BDSM, but for now, these states have been scientifically examined in the studies above for the neurobiological activation of a complex set of functions that include activation of endocannabinoid and opioid receptors, according to Sagarin, Lee et al (2015). While both top and subspace are characterised by autotelic absorption or 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), topspace exhibits enhanced cognitive functions while subspace exhibits diminished executive functioning, associating it with transient hypofrontality, where an altered state is defined as "a qualitative alteration in the overall patterns of mental functioning so that the experiencer feels that his/her operations of consciousness are radically different from ordinary functioning" (Tart, 1972:1203).

Goddess says of Shibari:

I love Shibari because it frees. It closely resembles binding rituals that many cultures all around the world use as a way of cleansing or purifying. Tying certain knots or weaving certain patterns using wool, straw, rope, etc, to protect or ward off evil spirits and to free stuck or stagnant energy.

The experience with Goddess opened up practical performative uses of the erotic. The focus on the decolonial possibilities of this is particular to my personal story, and while the writers I reference below may share these ideas, they are not shared by Goddess, who feels that the enjoyment of pleasure in itself should be enough:

I do have to say, though, that while BDSM provides a lot of room for openness and safe practice for marginalised communities, it is historically a very racist space and continues to be so even to this day. There is often the obligation for black kinksters to not only decolonise through kink but to decolonise the kink space itself. To me, it feels like a more important conversation than whether black people should be doing Kink or not. Of course, we should. We can do whatever the fuck we want. How do we create safe spaces for the doing of the fucking that we want?... That's far more important. We deserve to have our pleasure not be politicised or scrutinised because of the barbaric actions of white people. Our pleasure does not need to be for anything other than our enjoyment; it does not need to be revolutionary for it to be valid, it does not need to be a part of some epic healing journey for it to be worthy. I have had quite a few conversations with kinky black

folx who challenge existing BDSM practices and are finding ways to make it safer. I've encountered even more online, hosting safe events for black kinksters. People who are dedicated to educating black Doms and grooming black subs in a way that takes into account historical triggers as well as any other trauma.

They are redefining some of the language used to describe play and dynamics. For example, the Mxster slave play you mention in your chapter is being swapped for Devotion play, and subs becoming devotees instead of slaves, and the honorific Mxster being done away with. I personally love being called Mxster, but I don't refer to the sub as a slave. Mxster for me is from my love of Kung Fu films and the idea of mxstering your abilities. So there is no association with slavery.

Goddess's kink practice is a radical reformulation of BDSM towards a Black, queer generativity that exists outside of oppressive structures and violence. My experience with Goddess was one of autonomy and the reclamation of erotic vitality as a part of nature. This is examined in greater depth below.

3.3 Making: Getting Dirty with the Colony

Upon receiving the invitation from curator Brett Bailey to perform at Constellations 2021, I initially intended to create a solo dance or movement performance on the site. The choreography would be a series of image-based body-texts (also called Butoh-Fu) inspired by the methods of Tatsumi Hijikata, founder of Butoh, who gave dancers poetic images to place into the body that would provoke a visceral response and stimulate external movements. I intended to construct an image poem investigating my research, something I had done several times before in performance. My partner, Wynand Herholdt, challenged this repetition of old forms and suggested that I use the opportunity to directly confront my research preoccupations – Land, power, race, the erotic and ritual – in performance with him. At the time, I was struggling to find the confluence of all these conceptual streams, and of course, embodied research-creation as a stated methodology was the appropriate tool. I was inspired by the work of recently deceased Mistress Velvet, and her use of BDSM to educate her white cisgendered heterosexual clients on decolonial theory and black feminism. I was particularly struck by her theorisation and practice of receiving reparations as offerings from her submissive clients. I was struck by a photograph of a kneeling naked white man with the words "Reparations Now" written on his back in lipstick while Mistress Velvet flogged him. Velvet is a sex worker, and her master's thesis, entitled *Forbidden Vitalities: Black Femme Sexwork and Possibilities of Resistance* (2017), has as one of its objectives:

To position BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism) as an experimental playground for Black femmes to not only find (non)radical healing through domination over white cisgender men, but to reclaim femmehood and/or (re)appropriate the category of "woman" as a way to dismantle cisgender heterosexism (2017:1).

In contrast to Mistress Velvet's racialised, gendered transactional sex work with white Cishet subs and the attendant power differentials, Goddess's creative play with black queer narratives that build freedom for her subs exists outside of regimes of power and proposes "a type of affective excess that presents the enabling force of a forward-dawning futurity" (Munoz, 2009:23). Goddess says:

...muse relationships. Which resembles Ds' relationships. It is an exchange of creative energy instead of a power exchange. I take care of my muses and subs, their mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing is most important to me. So my work with them evolved into work that centres black queer narratives, both feminine and masculine, presenting not as an extension of any injustice done to our bodies but as a reconnecting with self. ...Each muse, telling their own story. Their true selves in full view. This is how freedom is built. This is creation energy. And creation energy is sexual energy. Our greatest tool for healing. ⁴¹

Whilst I desired the forward-dawning futurity of Goddess's practice, I could not elide the necessity of wrestling with the settler colonial in body and Land. Goddess's deeply nurturing erotic liberation was a utopian horizon (Munoz, 2009), but it was the complex entanglement of power, pleasure, race and trauma in Velvet's practice with white men in the US settler colonial context, that came to serve as the catalyst for working with Wynand's white Afrikaner body in a South African context. Positioned between these two radical Doms, the work began to emerge.

As a first step, I created the programme note for Constellations '21 (below), leaning heavily into Velvet's ideas and Ariane Cruz's (2016) *The Color of Kink*. This provided the parameters of racialised BDSM and kink whilst also offering a directional flow for the performance. This movement was from Land and body as racialised colonial property, to Land and body as fugitive spaces of new queer ecologies where, as Hartmann (2022) states, we could "release land to earth" (xxxiv). In a way, this was a movement from Mistress Velvet's

⁴¹ From an email conversation March 29, 2024.

modes of erotic labour to Goddess's creation energy, from settler colonial power regimes to an erotic autonomy that exceeds the colonial.

Programme Note for the performance at Spier:

Intimate Reparations – an embodied critical powerplay –(Children of Bondage remastered)

The work is a ritual performance that explores decolonisation of the body/Land. It examines the intimate entanglement of race, power, colonial sex and violence through ritualised bondage and domination on and with the racialised body. In the performance, Rehane Abrahams and Wynand Herholdt offer their bodies as a site for ancestral/historic excavation. The piece uses BDSM, kink and Shibari as modes of speaking the unspeakable – the 'pornography of empire' and the colonial grotesque. In the process, the performers try to imagine emergent fugitive spaces of new queer ecologies and multi-species relational intimacies.

In rendering tangible the tethering of black female sexuality to the history of chattel slavery and colonial violence to contemporary capitalism, a bondage rope connects the past to the present, but it also reveals the past as the present (and future). What happens when the racialised, gendered power roles are reversed? When a white male body is bound and tethered in submission to a black femme body? What permissions are asked, what historical pain is viscerally experienced, what taboo pleasures felt? What can the performers access by offering their bodies as a site for this history to play out? What histories of the Land are excavated through the performing bodies? And what futures can be called in through binding the body to tree, to rock, to grass; through obedience to nature's ties of interconnection; through submission to the Earth? Can we dream of invoking the libidinal law of the Land itself? Can the performers cultivate a resonant bodily tenderness that reaches out to include all humanness, all species, all ecologies of being?

The title of the programme note is clear about the intentions of the work from the outset. *Intimate Reparations (IR)* is critical, bodied and plays with history and power. The reference to the standard text on South African slavery, Robert Shell's *Children of Bondage* (1994), as 'remastered', is a play on the disruption of the historical master/slave narrative as well as a play on the term 'remastering' which involves rendering an outdated format in film or music from analogue to digital while still keeping the original content intact. The remastering in *IR* takes the form of reformatting the text-based literary study to the physical body and Live Art performance.

For the conceptualisation of *IR*, materials and actions associated with historical colonial domination and punishment (a whip, a lynching tree, ropes, a collar), were employed to elicit a physicalised conflict between desire and aversion, shame and pleasure, past and present, in the bodies of the watching audience, for as Saidiya Hartman says, the crimes of slavery were not only witnessed, but staged, made into a 'spectacle', a 'scene' (2022:22). BDSM deliberately plays with notions of the 'scene', and *IR* invited the audience to question this display on multiple levels, doubling down on ideas of a BDSM 'scene' and of 'making a scene' without closure of meaning. Hartman's critique of the spectacle and the empathy aroused when a white body takes on the suffering of black bodies was part of the discomfort presented, along with the sticky disquiet of voyeurism and being forcibly subjected to exhibitionism. At one point in the performance, Wynand was paraded around the audience on all fours on a leash. At the Spier performance, he was deliberately presented to people in the audience for their personal view. Multiple discomforts and taboo pleasures, including disgust and aversion to the spectacle, were presented to the audience.

As part of the rehearsal process, we listed our aims for the performance:

- We aimed to perform a ritual for the Land in which we acknowledged that continued colonial violence was shared across the bodies of all on the Land, including the spirits of the Land, endemic plant life, water courses, ways, and animals. We intended to offer our bodies as sites for excavating these colonial histories at the most intimate levels.
- We felt a need to render visible and plastic, interraciality and kink, with pertinence to Coloured female sexuality in South Africa: what Zoe Wicomb (1998) refers to as ontological shame, the corporeality of miscegenation and the enfleshment of colonial foundations of sexual violence.
- We wanted to explore Wynand's whiteness not as identity but as Errin Manning says, a "genocide of relation" (2022:9), as "the pretense that the lines that demarcate the boundary between me and you protect you, protect me, from the wilderness of all that cannot be contained (and must be kept at bay)" (2022:16). For Wynand personally, this was the violent legacy of Afrikaner masculinity, a paternal grandfather in Orania (the Afrikaner white separatist town founded in 1991), the hardening separation he felt inside himself, the disavowal of his queerness and softness predicated on preserving ancestral privilege through maintaining boundaries between the Laager and the world.
- We wanted to use the space at Spier to challenge what we saw as the continuing aggrandisement and romanticisation of colonialism and the VOC, as evidenced in the naming of wine farms and restaurants such as Compagniesdrif, etc. We wanted to

highlight the effects of alcohol on the Land through agriculture and the people of the Land through the historical dop system and its legacy of alcoholism in poor black communities. Wynand's own alcohol addiction formed part of this investigation.

- Through the ritual space, through BDSM as a transport, we wanted to flee the plantation. This was a child-like proposition, as though we could run away into the bush to play out what ailed us, to call upon the river and the spirits and our ancestors and ask the Land to take us back.

3.3.1 Divining a Dramaturgy

As a preamble to our work together, we went for a divination to Sangoma Julia Theron to ask permission, to locate ourselves in the interconnected relationality of the space and to gain insight into potential dangers and the more-than-human energies we were working with. Salient points from the divination were: (1) Lumwe (Nymphaea Capensis of Chapter Four), as the water maiden, versus the crocodile – confronting the crocodile of fights, evil, disagreements, hostility, conflict with a very innocent and tender sensuality. (2) The energy would work through our families first, and then outward to the people and kin and the Land. (3) The Bush Spirits would be active and present. They are a category of beings who represent wildness, the untamed in Land and body that exists outside culture, agriculture or otherwise, chaotic and very strong.

Julia Theron advised us to cast a protective circle around the performance area with medicine that she gave us; to reach out to the bondage community in Cape Town for support; to speak the names of the wine farms in the area, and to negotiate inevitable conflict with care.

Goddess agreed to hold the ritual aspect of our performance. She instructed us to perform a series of daily meditations and to make an offering table to her ancestors and ours. We honoured the Goddess by drawing the veve for Erzulie (whom She holds sacred) onto the ground at the sites at Spier, and inviting her water spirits and ancestors with prayers by the river. We were also instructed on how to release her and her ancestors at the end of our run.

3.3.2 The Cape Town Kink Scene/Gentrinaai'd Kink

BDSM scenarios require labour and preparation for regular practitioners. For newcomers such as us, it required education, training, enskillment, practising knots and ties, learning which body parts should not be tied, and learning how to check for safety, blood flow, and nerve damage. Flogging, too, required technique and dealing with limits, triggers,

boundaries and what power exchange meant for us in a rehearsal room. Wynand found it hard to hand over power and struggled as a first-time performer, while I found the responsibility of being Dominant and rehearsing with a non-performer challenging.

Staci Newmahr (2011) lists four learning processes that a top or Dominant has to undergo: "acquiring technical skills, ensuring safety, understanding modes of scene communication, and understanding and handling emotional and psychological impacts on the bottom" (221).

In order to build the technicity of the rope bondage and to safely inflict pain during the performance, we attended training sessions at Embodiment Rope Space⁴². The PR on their ticket purchase site states: "Embodiment Rope Space is the love child of a group of volunteers from different walks of life coming together to actualise something we think the world needs: a queer safe(r) space for exploring kink as a healing, connective force". From their website: "We believe that this artform is a transformative modality, giving those within our community the opportunity to transmute shame and guilt into beauty, connection, pleasure, art and joy." Led by Astrid and her partner Sim, the Embodiment' scene' falls into what Margot Weiss (2011) refers to as the new guard of S/M, not transgressive or threatening like the old guard of the San Francisco Folsom District leather bar scene. There is a largely middle-class, tech-literate community of people with hierarchies related to skill and experience that is, as Weiss comments, "more formalized in its knowledge production than it was in the 1970s" (2011:68), through an emphasis on aftercare, written agreements, limits and guidelines. While the BDSM scene, according to members of Embodiment, is predominantly white, wealthy and heterosexual in South Africa, Embodiment (or rather Astrid) intentionally seeks to create space for black and queer practitioners. Astrid intentionally aligns with well-known Cape Town rope practitioner Tapiwa, whose Instagram handle [@sungakonji](https://www.instagram.com/sungakonji) is ChiShona for rope bondage, and for performers such as Mamello Sejake, who is engaged in a study of Kink as empowerment for black women. Astrid attempts to create a BDSM community that goes beyond Weiss's (2011) analysis of the new guard and includes practitioners of colour that reframe kink in various guises. Globally, this is represented by practitioners like the "ecofetishists"⁴³ sacred sadism, who advance Sprinkle and Stephens (2021) ecosexuality to examine relationships with the earth in terms of Domination and Submission. However, Embodiment and its circle of

⁴² <https://www.embodimentropespace.co.za/>

⁴³ <https://sacredsadism.com/about>

radical kinksters are only a small part of the Cape Town BDSM scene, which, on the whole, is still racially segregated. Goddess says of this racism:

Kink is also quite classist, having been reserved for the monied elites for the longest time. Unfortunately, our society is still very much economically divided along racial lines, with white men at the head of the table enjoying the largest piece. But you know what, desire, and being kinky doesn't belong to anyone and doesn't cost a single thing, so it's a free-for-all at the end of the day. I carry all of this into every play session, every ritual, every punishment or reward, every negotiation of safety and everything that I create.

The community is tight-knit, meeting for weekly jams or practice sessions that are organised according to skill level and rope play parties where participants can practice their skills on one another.

In the time between conducting this research (2021) and submitting the PhD (2025), Astrid has left the country, and with her has gone the radicalism of the scene. Currently, the enskillment provided in this scene produces practitioners who offer services and private events that are upmarket, trendy and predominantly white. They have even entered the Cape Town New Age community, and in my view, now add to the list of hollowed-out expropriated radical practices. In my view, the studio has become an exact fit with Weiss's (2021) new guard and their vanilla brand of kink, gentrifying not only the physical neighbourhood but also the potential spaces of radical embodied practices.

3.3.3 Violent Encounters

Astrid gave us an introduction to rope bondage and taught us a few ties specifically for the performance – uplines from the wrist to the tree and wrist binds that would be bearable for a longer duration and not endanger the nerves or other tissues of the wrist. She repeated the new guard modern mantra "Safe, Sane, Consensual" (Weiss, 2011:viii) with safety instructions ranging from nerve anatomy, body parts to avoid and the dangers of 'sub-drop'. It was at Astrid's suggestion that we incorporated 'aftercare' into the performance. 'Aftercare' is a term in the BDSM community for practices that restore the nervous system after the experience of 'sub-space' or 'top-space'. Ranging from checking on possible wounds from impact play, soothing overwhelming emotions resulting from the intensity of the experience, assisting to regulate after hormonal floods of oxytocin, dopamine, and prolactin, and for BDSM tops or Dominants, cortisol (Greenberg, 2019).

Commonly, aftercare consists of hydration, comforting or soothing activities such as cuddling or bathing, eating protein, and gentle care as the participants return to everyday reality. This fugue state can last for days after a particularly heightened scene, and for Wynand, new to performance and its attendant euphoria and post-show slump, the risk was increased – something we unfortunately only became aware of after his experience of returning to his job the day following a performance. We had created a three-part structure to the ritual based on Von Gennep's Separation, Liminality and Incorporation, in which the first section was a meeting of the two characters and setting the conflict, the second was the S/M flogging and humiliation scenario, and the third was aftercare. The aftercare as part of the performance was inadequate, and I felt that I, as the Domme, had failed in my responsibility to safeguard Wynand's emotional wellbeing.

At the heart of this lies a friction between the Cape Town "new guard" scene's neo-liberal BDSM 'consents' and what Avgi Saketopoulou (2023) calls limit consent. Saketopoulou formulates a distinction between affirmative consent, which allows for control of a situation and agreement to the known, and limit consent, which acknowledges the opacity inside both oneself and the other. For Saketopoulou (2023), limit consent is consenting to the emergence of what is opaque or unknown within ourselves, what refuses our grasp and is evoked through the interaction with another. We are consenting not to something we do or that is done to us, but to what arises in response to the unknown or is opaque in the other and in oneself. Saketopoulou sees this kind of surrender to the unconscious in another as integral to extreme types of erotic and also aesthetic experiences.

However, given the capitalist conditions under which we make our livings (Wynand's film industry job), affirmative consent offers the kinds of control that would ensure functionality for work, whereas limit consent, which allows that chaotic feelings could arise from opaque parts of self or situation, as with *IR*, exists in excess to the demands of capitalist productivity. I will examine how BDSM refigures time later; for now, it serves to note the way these experiences refuse the synchrony of productivity for queerer temporalities, and unsettle the ability to participate in capitalist labour. The friction between "old guard Folsom leather kink" of the 1970s, and new guard neo-liberal "safe, sane and consensual" enough to return to the tech-job on Monday, questions whether there is indeed anything radical remaining in this scene.

In addition to the BDSM rehearsals, we also trained with a stunt person to choreograph the fight that would move us from the first section to the central part of the work. At a pre-show rehearsal for Brett Bailey, the curator of Constellations, felt that the fight we had choreographed

was too 'performed' and pushed us to raise the stakes and fight at the edges of our strength. The work was extreme in its impact on both our bodies.

3.3.4 BDSM: Playing with Power

According to Amber Jamilla Musser (2014), BDSM is an acronym for bondage, discipline (or domination), sadism, and masochism (as a type of sexual practice). The practice of BDSM, still largely considered perversion or sexual deviation, is classed as a paraphilia or abnormal sexual desire by the American Psychiatric Association, along with homosexuality and paedophilia. It was only with the 5th edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (APA DSA, 2013) that it was depathologised by the distinction between paraphilia as a proclivity and paraphilic disorder as practices resulting in harm⁴⁴. More recently, there has been research into BDSM as part of healthy sexual expression, with one Dutch study (Wismeijer & van Assen, 2013) demonstrating higher psychological wellness for BDSM practitioners than a control group. Greenberg (2019) asserts that there is no one definition of BDSM and synthesises what he calls a family of practices as follows: "BDSM is any activity that involves an intentional and consensual exchange of power and/or pain, humiliation, physical or psychological restraint, or other intense sensations with the intention of experiencing pleasure or desirable sensations" (222). The term 'sadism' entered the lexicon through Von Krafft-Ebbing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1892-English translation) as a reference to the Marquis de Sade's writings on the pleasures of inflicting pain. Masochism also made its appearance in von Krafft-Ebbing, the term referring to Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, through the case study of a man who enjoyed sexually submitting to and being humiliated by a woman. For von Krafft-Ebbing, this submission was so antithetical to notions of masculinity at the time as to be pathological.

In Amber Jamilla Musser's (2014) monograph exploring masochism as a diagnostic tool for viewing power and domination, the entry of masochism into scientific literature through a feminisation of manhood marks its potential to upend social hierarchies and inaugurates its connection to the subversive (4). Musser tracks the connection of BDSM to subversion and exceptionalism through Freud, Foucault, Bersani and Edelman. For her, Freud reorients von Kraft-Ebbing's view of masochism as pathological social disruption to one in which 'masochistic

⁴⁴ American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric. [https:// doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596)

desires' are a result of a troubled unconscious and thus a universal danger that finds expression in the exceptions to the norm, and makes normative wellness a correlate of complete early childhood development. Freud then recasts BDSM practitioners as exceptions to healthy sexual norms – the apogee of which is, of course, reproductive heterosex. Musser reads Foucault's enthusiasm for BDSM, the power of the erotic and the erotics of power, the liberation of pleasure from genital and reproductive fixations, and BDSM as a technique of the self, as one predominantly oriented towards gay men. She notes that in this case, power exchanges occur between equals, and questions how these exchanges could function if the power relations were unequal because of race, able-bodiedness, and social class.

Musser enquires into BDSM as a space where difference is revealed rather than obscured by exceptionalism, and subversion through reading BDSM practices through the hermeneutics of 'Flesh' and 'Sensation' (19), where 'flesh' is the marker of difference in the external world and 'sensation' allows for thinking about flesh, not as essentialist, objectivised and identarian, but as something in motion. This reading allows for an understanding of "how difference is made material through the particular understandings of sexuality, subjectivity, and agency" (30) and opens up space for inquiry into BDSM, race and power.

3.3.5 BDSM and Feminisms: Sex and War

Before moving into racialised BDSM and ritual, it is necessary to briefly locate *Intimate Reparations* and its feminism. While a deep discussion on feminism is beyond the purview of my study, it is important to locate the feminism of the work by touching on the discourse around BDSM from the sex wars to sex-radical feminism, and finally to the contemporary moment, where my reading and practice is inspired by the theorisation of Elizabeth Freeman (2010), Amber Jamilla Musser (2014), Jennifer Nash (2014) and Ariane Cruz (2016). That this is particularly fraught terrain is moot, and yet the space of hot entanglement conjured by these writers, and personally experienced through public performances of *Intimate Reparations* allows for intimacy with the 'unspeakable' that goes beyond the 'political grammar of injury and recovery' (Nash, 2014) that dominates analysis of black women's bodily subjectivity, to perhaps map out new pathways of power and pleasure.

Feminism has held a historically dualistic position with regard to BDSM; the 'Feminist Sex Wars',⁴⁵ the anti and pro-pornography debate of the 1980s, was at the height of this. This

⁴⁵ The Feminist Sex Wars

dichotomy was encapsulated by a T-shirt slogan worn by activists at the Barnard College Scholar and Feminist Conference in 1982 that proclaimed "For Feminist Sexuality, Against S/M." The conference, themed "*pleasure and danger*", marked a sea change in theorising the complexity of female sexual pleasure under patriarchy, and can be viewed as sex-positive or pro-pornography (Vance, 1984). In antithesis, anti-pornography action culminated in Dworkin and McKinnon's 1983 attempt to legally abolish pornography through a court ordinance. The court case was unsuccessful on the grounds that it contravened Second Amendment rights to free speech, despite Dworkin and McKinnon's insistence that pornography is 'an act', not 'a speech'. BDSM was directly associated with pornography and believed to perpetuate patriarchal domination and violence against women.

Those women who practised BDSM or claimed that it could be feminist were decried. Ruth Linden et al.'s (1982) collection *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis* was largely a response to the insistence of lesbian BDSM practitioners, the Samois Collective⁴⁶, that lesbian BDSM was a viable feminist practice. In this collection, black scholars such as Alice Walker and Audre Lorde, and others such as Darlene Pagano, expressed their opposition to BDSM, particularly of the master/slave dynamic and BDSM's accoutrements of whips, collars and restraints looted from colonialism's chattel slavery. They argued that BDSM encourages and condones abuse and violence, especially for women of colour. Alice Walker, for example, states: "The more ancient roots of modern pornography are to be found in the almost always pornographic treatment of black women, who, from the moment they entered slavery ... were subjected to rape as the 'logical' convergence of sex and violence...conquest, in short" (in Linden et al., 1982:42). In Lorde's interview in Linden et al. (1982), she states in support of her view that pornography is antithetical to the erotic life of women, "as a minority woman, I know dominance and subordination are not bedroom issues" (259).

For both the conceptualisation and this reading of *Intimate Reparations* I lean into contemporary black feminist scholars such as Nash and Cruz, who argue that black feminism and pornography do not necessarily hold an antithetical relationship, rather that this relationship, though volatile, offers an opportunity for critical interrogation of danger, on the one hand, and power and agency on the other for black female sexuality. Cruz (2016) sees historical black feminism's analysis as lacking nuance regarding the polyvalence of pornography and its radical potential through a focus on narratives of 'damage' and 'injury' against black women at the hands of pornography and BDSM. Cruz, for example, views

⁴⁶ Samois Collective existed in San Francisco from 1978 to 1983 and was founded by Pat Califia and Gayle Rubin. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samois> accessed 23 May 2023)

"BDSM as a critical aperture for elucidating the dynamics of racialized shame, humiliation, and pleasure that undergird the genre of commercial contemporary interracial pornography" (21). These scholars utilise anti-pornography's critical interrogation of pleasure and power and pro-pornography's embrace of pleasure as positive in all forms, foregrounding race, and of relevance to *IR*, the *performance* thereof, in their sex-radical feminism.

At the time of the 'sex-wars', however, sex-radical feminism emerged to provide a necessary disruption to the pro and anti- pornography debate. Sex radicalism attempted to create cultural space for women's pleasure, not only freedom from danger, centring sexual autonomy as well as subjectivity, and acknowledged that "arousal, pleasure, subordination, and dominance are co-constitutive, and emphasized the contingent and complex meanings inherent to each pornographic text" (Nash, 2014:16). My own youthful feminism was inspired by the sex radicalism of Re/Search's 1991 volume, *Angry Women*, that featured writers and performance artists like Annie Sprinkle, Kathy Acker, Veronica Vera, bell hooks and Susie Bright. Bright's statement in response to Andrea Dworkin's disgust with Holocaust sexual fetishism in Israel expresses sex radicalism's understanding of the complex entanglement of sex with dominance and violence:

I'm sure that for people who find themselves sexually moved by some of the awful history of the Holocaust, it's quite a contradiction to deal with; you can't just sit back and think, "Why am I, a Jew, turned on by any of this? How can I be? Am I self-loathing?"...sex takes anxiety and prohibition and all these things we become numb or rationalist or linear with – sex takes them and just rips them out of your clit! It handles that kind of material in a completely non-rational manner. I'm not surprised that holocaust imagery would be the hot porno topic in Israel any more than I'd be surprised that religion and history and war in any culture you visit have had a tremendous impact on the sexuality and what is considered "exciting" and "titillating" in that culture." (Bright in Juno, 1991:202).

Bright's reference to felt sensation and bodily arousal within a conflicting state of desire and aversion, especially in the violent settler colonial context of Israel, finds amplification in Freeman's 2010 assertion that BDSM "relentlessly physicalizes (sic) the encounter with history", contributing to "a reparative criticism" through remixing the "materials of a traumatic past" (144). That traumatic pasts relentlessly haunt the present and replay their brutalities on bodies on a mass scale is evident from the continuing atrocities committed by the Israeli settler project. I am not suggesting BDSM as healing for these phenomena, rather using Bright's comment to lift the lid on the sexual charge that past violences trace through bodies. Perhaps turning towards the complex sensuality of atrocity can be traumatophilic (Saketopoulou,

2023) and offer ways for traumatised bodies to soften the grasp of histories to which we did not consent (2023:130).

3.3.6 Race Play at the Surface of Skin

Also referred to as "slave play," "nigger play," or "cultural trauma play," race play typically uses racist epithets, role playing, scenes (for example, the antebellum slave auction), tools, and props that stage and eroticize racial difference and histories of racialized exploitation. (Cruz, 2016:106).

Race play forms part of a 'kink subgenre called "edgeplay," a term used to denote sexualities that are risky and that court forces of sexuality and of memory, the intensities and impact of which cannot be anticipated ahead of time" (Saketopoulou, 2023:110). The term 'play', central to this practice, is defined in the context of BDSM by Weiss (2006) as "a form of labour in which things that are deadly serious (social inequalities, power differentials, structural forms of suffering) are reworked in new ways" (238).

At Spier Wine Farm, across the river from the slave bell, *IR* used a tree to stage the scenario in which Wynand Herholdt was bound at the wrists by a rope to a branch, his torso stripped and flogged. The rope, in the context of racialised BDSM, makes visible what Cruz (2016) refers to as the 'formative links' between black female sexuality and its history of non-consensual violence with a practice of consensual violence. The rope is a symbol and tool of violence and power, but crucially, in a consensual BDSM scenario, also of pleasure and play. Suggesting that it is possible for racialised BDSM or 'race play' to critically interrupt dominant/subordinate relationships and their histories, Cruz asks, "How do we acknowledge what *matters*—the historical, social, and political contexts that script slave/master and Indian/cowboy scenarios while accessing pleasure in their staging?" (37). This consideration of what *matters* instantiates the materiality of overlapping contexts on the body itself.

Simultaneously observing and violating taboos, what is proposed is that the boundaries and boundedness between racialised bodies and what they signify become blurred, smudged (as Cruz suggests), occasioning the possibilities of playing at or with race, rendering its construction, its performances, readable through foregrounding and eroticising taboos such as racist epithets. In the Spier iteration of *IR*, epithets riffing on the word 'meid', such as

'plaasmeid', 'teelmeid', 'naaimeid',⁴⁷ were sensuously inscribed on Wynand Herholdt's skin in red lipstick, in one performance eliciting a loud "Yoh!"⁴⁸ of shock from an Afrikaans male audience member. These words form part of a Coloured female lexicon of shame, referring to domestic labour in white households from colonial slavery to the present, the reproductive labour of 'breeding' offspring for slave labour and the sexual labour for the white master. As Zoe Wicomb says, "those that have mated with the coloniser" carry on their skins the shameful "marked pigmentation of miscegenation" (in Atteridge & Jolly, 1998:92-93).

Layered onto Wynand's heavily tattooed skin in bright red pigment, the words simultaneously feminise and racialise him at the site of racialisation itself, the skin. Following Bernasconi's (2012) analysis of race as a border concept inscribed through sexual transgression, Cruz identifies what she calls 'racial sexual alterity' as the way in which black womanhood is constituted by historically constructed racial and sexual otherness, not at the core but at the border. Skin then becomes the continually shifting and redrawn border of inscriptions that are historically linked to power. Feminising and racialising the skin in this way can expose the no-thing that race is, the constantly redrawn colour-line on the border of the skin. BDSM is, after all, as Freeman(2010:164) reminds us, 'skinplay' or 'leathersex' where leather both covers and is skin, distancing and intensifying at once. Interracial play within BDSM *sensationalises* (in Musser's term) this border crossing, using it (in *IR* specifically) to cross what Manning (2023) calls 'the cleave' of whiteness.

For Musser (2014), sensation is the way in which BDSM is able to undercut identitarianism at its border, where the *perception* of internal reality and external reality converges. Manning (2023) argues that because there is no stable phenotypical difference between white and black bodies, because of the no-thing that race is, "the separation has to be performed, every time anew, across all figurations of lives cut apart from worlds. Whiteness is every move toward overseeing, toward propertying, toward segregation." Read this way, *IR* then, utilised sensation on the performers' bodies to interrogate overseeing, propertying and the separation that Manning suggests is whiteness.

⁴⁷ *Meid*, from the Dutch word for girl, came into Afrikaans as a derogatory term for women of colour. It implies subservience and is never used to refer to white women. *Plaas* means farm, *Teel* is used to refer to the breeding of animals and *naai* is a swearword that translates as "fuck".

⁴⁸ *Yoh* is an Afrikaans colloquial emotive interjection indicated surprise or shock.

3.3.6.1 *BDSM and Trauma*

At the outset, I should state that personal psychological therapy was not the aim or under investigation in *IR*. I discuss it in this section in order to lead to the section that follows it, on Erotohistoriography, where *IR* is indeed located. It is, however, important to briefly discuss trauma and BDSM as a potential re-rendering (of that trauma) across time with the body.

Studies such as Hammers (2019) and Cascalheira et al (2021) examine the curative effects of BDSM on past trauma through re-experiencing and re-rendering past violation. Beyond the ability of talk-therapy, a bodily confrontation of past violence makes possible a somatic re-ordering of trauma, in line with Peter Levine (2010) and Bessel Van der Kolk's (2014) perspectives on the enduring presence of traumatic memory in the body, in which the body can articulate the past experience in the present time in a manner that does not necessarily make narrative sense but is a somatic resistance and empowerment against the stifling bodily rigidity that is traumatic residue. Hammers (2019) depathologises traumatic repetition, the much maligned 'retraumatisation', through viewing the re-doing of past trauma in the present time as an active erotic economy that produces "alternative embodiments such that new orientations to the world and others take root" (495-6), in other words, possible futures. Saketopoulou (2023) suggests a "hospitable attitude to the revisitation of trauma, as traumatophilic." "Traumatophilia does not overlook or diminish the impact of trauma but offers, instead, a way of working with the recognition that we cannot turn away from our traumata, that we are strangely drawn to them" (2).

In *IR*, past traumas were not made present on my body, the carrier of intergenerational raced, gendered and sexual abjection, but on Wynand's white, male body with its attendant privilege. What was made visible to me by this displacement was my own performance of identity itself, the performance of raced and gendered injury and abjection, the ease with which it had become fixed, and, over the years, ossified. While my lived experience or intergenerational pain was not erased, there was the possibility to be at a remove from it or to remove it, to unbind the bodily tethering to the limits of respectable responses to that trauma, to the narrative of injury and repair. In this way, playing with or at race as a serious labour became a freeing from its inscription on my skin as my sole burden. To implicate Wynand's body in the suffering of race is to assert, as Saketopoulou does, that "colonial history is not the history of the trauma of Black people (or people of colour) alone; it is the shared history of the traumatic relationship between White people (and/or colonizers) and Black people (and/or the colonized)" (127). The willingness to share pain acknowledges that whiteness has historically foregone this pain, making it the sole burden of blackness to bear. Wynand's willingness to

bear this pain unflinchingly was deeply moving for audiences at the Slave Lodge performance, who stated: "That is what it will take to begin to acknowledge the suffering of colonialism" (informant Nina Callaghan). Hammers (2019) views this effect of BDSM to lighten the load of trauma through Diprose's (2002) "corporeal generosity".

The body at risk is a generous body, a body that is opened to the other. And this erotic generosity is creative in transforming the other's embodied situation, and hence existence, through a self-metamorphosis that... does not reduce the other to the self. Becoming flesh is a project directed toward and beyond the other, a giving without calculation that nevertheless gets something in return through the future possibilities it opens (2002:86).

Viewed this way, Wynand's abjection was not punishment but shared labour, a willingness to share extreme somatic intensity and the shattering of a singular self that generated an empathy that was not determinate on the erasure of the other, but rather created space for multiplicity. My labour, as the careful, caring though violent top, was as Hammers suggests, "to take on (and take off) the bottom's corporeal and psychic burden, such that generative modes of becoming and healing emerge" (501). I did this for both the sub characters I was playing and for Wynand's body. My taking on the corporeality of the overseer allowed Wynand to disidentify with this historical positioning, opening new relational possibilities. At the same time, to turn the weapon on the master empowered the characters I played. The switch (a BDSM term that connotes the switching of top and bottom roles) then allowed for a disruption of historically held positions, an emergence of relationality that, in its generosity, spilt beyond our bodies; our performance utilised our personal trauma and personal erotic relationship to address the transpersonal and collective (that ultimately cannot be separated).

3.3.7 Erotohistoriography: Kinking Time

To turn now to the revisiting of collective trauma as a potentially generative activity in BDSM, Elizabeth Freeman (2010) suggests that slavery's historical baggage can be opened up and its contents reformulated (164) through what she terms *Erotohistoriography*, a method utilising the body as a tool to effect encounters with the historical past within the hybrid present (95). Freeman suggests that the bodily encounter (through specific bodily dispositions) with objects or symbols from the past in a present that is open to hybridity can elicit corporeal responses that themselves produce historical understanding or knowledge (96). Drawing her argument from De Sade's use of representations of the *ancien regime* in the context of revolutionary France, she suggests that BDSM's rearrangement of visceral sensation "reorganises the relationships among emotion, sensation, and historical understanding. Its clash of temporalities ignites historical possibilities other than the ones frozen into the "fate" of

official histories" (168). Through laying bare the dominant power relations of a specific time, the "formal dialectic" of BDSM is able to offer a reformulation of history (147) by utilising a 'switch' or shock, releasing new bodily encounters with history in the present time that are capable of operating collectively, resulting in a prising open and re-rendering of the traumatic past, specifically the colonial past. This calls on not only the personal embodied past, but also the socio-historical past in which the body is embedded, and offers a way that the body in the present time must be considered as capable of producing academic knowledge.

"Erotic inquiries of this sort also challenge our most cherished modes of scholarly procedure. We end up having to admit the possibility that performance, affect, and even sex itself, through the work they do with time and history, might be knowledge practices" (173).

3.3.8 BDSM and Ritual

"Redressive action encompasses a heightened attention to the events that have culminated in the crisis and to the transfiguration of the body in shared ceremony, making it a vessel of communication, flesh to be loved, and a bridge between the living and the dead" (130).

Hartmann's words above could well be a description of the ritual aims of *IR* that point to embodied decolonisation as a counter-practice of visceral knowledge production in the face of colonial epistemicide, of re-establishing relationality with the more-than-human. Malidoma Somé defines ritual in this context as a "return to the ancient with a plea for help directed to the world of the spirit" (1993:42).

The chronplasticity generated through BDSM in *IR* is amplified through invoking "Hantu", space-time (explained in Chapter 1), and its ability in ritual to shift and become multiple. This is made possible not only through the use of historical objects and symbolic actions, but through the substantial corporeal investment of pain, both in the fight and in the flogging scenario. In *IR*, the psychic and physiological pain generated in performance was an offering to the intersecting networks of relations that the ritual configuration specifically invoked. Somé (1993) argues that pain is the result of the old order resisting the new within the multiple layers of reality that constitute the body. For Somé, pain is the body communicating in the only language it knows of the violence occurring when an old system of knowing is "kicked out" of the body.

"The person bears the pain as a creative action, connecting that person with his or her highest self, which prescribes an alternative to spiritual death... It is commotion, emotion and a call for a rebirth. It teaches that one must return to a mode of living that began with life itself. And it draws from nature and the cosmos life-essence that seeks to align itself with the existing powers" (41).

Somé acknowledges that although the results cannot be predicted, pain is a powerful language in the ritual context. Newmahr (2010) distinguishes four discourses of pain in BDSM: 1) transformed pain in which the experience of pain is disavowed and reworked into pleasure; 2) investment pain, which acknowledges pain as unpleasant suffering and is akin to the athlete's 'no pain no gain' in that it is future-reward focussed; 3) sacrificial pain, which is also results-focussed – suffering for the purpose of a greater good, and 4) autotelic pain, in which pain is acknowledged as such, but is enjoyed (397). Identified as predominantly experienced by women (Newmahr 2010), sacrificial pain is what Wynand experienced in *IR*.

Studies on mystical experiences in BDSM, such as Greenberg (2019) and Baker (2016), hold the view that these practices fill a spiritual void, reporting participant findings that range from experiences of spirit presences, visions, interoceptive shifts, etc. Rarer examples, such as Raven Kaldera (2006), a transgender practitioner of BDSM and self-styled Northern Tradition Shaman, employ the ordeal of BDSM as a tool to generate effects beyond personal experience. Northern Hemisphere inquiries into pain, ritual and BDSM draw a genealogy from the Modern Primitive movement of the 1980's, captured in Vale and Juno's (1989) eponymous publication in which Vale states: "All physically felt body modifications are a form of time travel linking us with both the past and the future, as we reaffirm our relationship with the only "spaceship" we will ever intimately know: the human body" (2). Whilst I acknowledge modern primitive practitioners as influential for current evolutions of ritualised BDSM as precursors of current BDSM community formations, *IR* as an example of a BDSM ritual performance occupies a different register, one that implicates an African feminist decolonisation of the erotic and a re-indigenisation through ritual work. The work exists, as Pather and Boule (2019:3) note,

within a precolonial and decolonial African genealogy of ritual, ruptures and experimentality... that is integral to African tradition and protest culture. Site specificity, ritualised performance and notions of embodiment have been central to South African cultural practices of healing, shamanism, mourning, initiation and celebration for centuries – certainly long before colonial contact.

3.4 In Performance: The Bush Spirits vs The 'Creative Countryside'

Spier Constellations curated by Brett Bailey: the audience gathers for their tickets and a free glass of wine on the manicured lawn at Spier. Then they are divided into groups and assigned a guide. Each group will see four performances of 30-35 minutes each, ranging from traditional music to Butoh, stories and discussions. From 20h00 to 22h30, they watch by lamp and firelight, led through the dark from site to site with no control over what they will see next. The performers, too, move to a new location each weekend over a period of four weeks, perform their pieces four times a night for an audience of 10 people per performance, seated on logs around the fire. The following detailed description reflects the intentional crafting of *Intimate Reparations* for this performance, which happened directly after the rehearsal period. This structure served as a basis for the other iterations, which were recapitulations of this performance with site-specific differences that are mentioned in the section on Site. As the other performances are iterations and repeats of the structure created at Spier, I detail only this performance.

On the far side of the site, Rehane (She) dressed in blue farmworker overalls and a *kopdoek* (headscarf) squats with her pants down, urinating while drinking wine from a *papsak*⁴⁹. She sees the audience, pulls up her pants and starts to make her way towards them, singing and dancing, staggering and falling, as if drunk. The audience sits around the fire where a large pot is heating up. The majority of them refuse to look at the drunk woman who comes closer, forcing herself into their presence, dancing around the circle, drinking from her papsak, forcing them to look at her.

From my notes: *I wait to perform, I pour alcohol on myself and on the ground. I don't drink it; I need to stay very sober to navigate the work. I speak to the spirits of the Land, I let them smell the liquor on me. I feel into the Bush Spirits, I feel the explosiveness of bush corralled into productivity. I do this until there is a feedback – like a buzzing in the air that is palpable on my skin and as a visceral pressure inside, a lack of focus in my gaze and a loosening in my limbs. Something wakes up in the Land around me, in me, and thrums. When*

⁴⁹ "Papsak" is the term for the plastic foil bladder typically inside boxed wine, sold very cheaply in poor, black, often farming or rural communities that have legacies of the 'dop system', where farmworkers were paid for their labour in alcohol, and where there are now very high rates of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. Banned in the papsak form in 2007, the sugar fermented alcohol is still sold in plastic bottles called "rooidoppie"/ red cap between R10 and R20 a litre.

the thrumming reaches fullness, when it is too large to be contained by my body, I bring it into the space.

Wynand (He) enters with the audience and takes a seat on one of the stumps arranged around the fire. He is dressed in a nondescript smart casual shirt, jeans and boots, like an audience member. He leans over, takes a log and places it in the fire. She sees this and, roaring with rage, attacks him. The real fight ensues, and the two scuffle and wrestle hard on the ground. He tries to get away. She jumps onto his back, strangling him, pinning Him down. She overpowers him, grabs hold of his face, forces open his mouth and spits in it. In some performances, She kisses him. He is pinned down, unable to move, with her knees on his wrists, sitting on his chest. She lifts her blue overall jacket; underneath it, there is a collar with ropes attached to it. She undoes this and ties the collar around His neck. She makes Him take off his shirt, drags him to a nearby oak tree and ties his wrists above his head in an upline to a tree branch. He remains there, tethered. Suddenly sober, She takes a flogger and a costume from where it was placed on the tree. She removes her overalls. She wraps herself in a brown *shweshwe* kimono, sits on the log where He sat earlier and singing softly to herself. She slowly rolls fishnet stockings up her legs and ties on a pair of high-heeled combat boots.

The change into the Kimono is a stilling, I feel calm. On one level of awareness, I am annoyed that I still have to be doing this labour for whiteness, for race. I put on the Shweshwe and the heels, and I don't feel powerful, I feel like I'm playing the strong black woman now – some stereotypical fetish of black womanhood. It's so damn boring, I sing to myself a song of the river goddess Oshun to comfort myself as I tie on the boots. I ask myself, "In what Afrikaner fantasy does this character exist? I feel like the audience relaxes as I roll the stockings up my legs and tie on the 8-inch heels. They relax because this gaze is safe and familiar, a woman sexing up is safe, Servants in Shweshwe singing is safe. I'm angry about that too, but I tie on the boots and sing." Afterwards, I realise that the audience probably relaxes simply because there is no violence happening in this moment, and they get a chance to catch their breath.

Once dressed, She walks over to the tree and begins to flog His back, slowly at first. Positioning the papsak on her crotch, She pisses wine onto his body. She rings a bell, like one used to call servants, near his ear; she slaps him in the face. The flogging increases in intensity, and with every stroke, She calls out the name of a wine farm from the surrounding area, alternating pissing on him with the papsak and calling out the farm names as She flogs, stopping to ring the bell and to draw racist epithets on his body with red lipstick. These actions are repeated for 10 minutes.

There is a charge to my annoyance that comes perhaps from childhood experiences of violence from an adult, it is as if I clothe myself in their feelings – a dull disconnection from

the pain of inflicting pain and an irritation at having to perform this task, a disgust for the person I am brutalising and a desire for control. It is a hard, spiky feeling in my body as if violence is bursting out of my limbs onto the other, weaker person. At the same time, I am meditative, contemplative, careful – performing the tasks as we planned and rehearsed. I suppose this is top-space, this care, this is control. Everything is calculated, there is space, and things are slowed down.

Wynand (from a post-show conversation), the smell of the wine and the dirt combined, being covered in that smelt rotten, the wine was cold, very cold, I felt a lot of shame, I felt powerless, self-disgust. I don't enjoy pain usually, but there was a level of euphoria through the pain – not in a pretty way – a lot of visions of suffering, of how racialised suffering is – of how racialised violence is for bodies and genders. Like I screamed and shouted "Stop! Stop!" but no one helped me, the audience just watched. I felt completely helpless, but at the same time, like I deserved this. The sensation took me to another realm, it made me feel high, I can't say pleasure, it was an altered state. In a way, I felt my suffering in this moment was an attempt to remove a little bit of suffering from the global load, like taking a little of that pain onto myself onto a white, privileged body. Energetically, I have the privilege to take on some suffering, and maybe that makes it less for someone else, somewhere.

All the while, He has been shouting, crying, pleading. When it feels to Her that He has reached a limit, She unties him. He crumples into her lap, and they sit together. She ties the ropes into a 'bulldog harness' across His chest with a lead at the back. Holding the lead, She walks him. He fetches a plastic tub, positions it close to the fire, fills buckets with water from the river and pours them into the tub, fetches the pot on the fire, which is now full of boiling water, places this into the tub, fetches the pot on the fire, which is now full of boiling water, places this into the tub, and fills the tub with flowers. She sits, watching Him, undoing Her shoes, removing Her stockings. He leads Her to the tub, removes Her gown, and helps Her into the tub. She submerges Her body in the water. He takes a jar of ochre, He mixes it with water and covers her skin with it. Covered in ochre, She returns to the tub, this time with Him. The roles are dropped, they become bodies, friends, lovers. Sometimes it ends here, sometimes She rolls out of the bath onto the ground and dances; sometimes they walk away together. The cycle ends.

The ritual after untying becomes very soft. I soften, there is a singing inside me, a keening. Every time the water comes, my body rushes with sensation; it gasps that I am allowed this, that I am allowed pleasure, softness, ease, sensation. That someone will serve my body, tend to it gently. Always to the point of tears at the tenderness of it. The balm of the warm water. Then, I dance in the mud and roll around in the dirt or spill the bathwater or run

into the river. Sometimes it feels like it is only then that I come alive, as though the performance only starts now.

In the first performance, people get up and make quite loud, performative exits within the first two minutes. We had rehearsed that I was collared in the beginning. An audience member felt triggered by this and complained to Brett Bailey and Barbara Mathers, the production manager. After a discussion, we decided to remove the section with collaring and rehearsed the structure detailed above. Despite this change and the programme note that was made available, people still walked out of some performances. We struggled to meet the 30-minute time slot for each performance and were advised by Bailey to play with duration, ending whenever we did and then beginning again, irrespective of audience arrival or departure. This made the audience voyeuristic at times, as if they were spying on what could be lynching or 'dogging'⁵⁰, an act of secret violence or public sex.

From a Voicenote by Brett Bailey (8 May 2023): In a nighttime setting of dust and shrubbery and water, each group of spectators caught only a segment of the total work with no sense of what had preceded or what would follow. To audiences, this was pretty challenging, like they'd stumbled on something intense and left before there could be any resolution. The performance was physically and emotionally very taxing, and with the audience so close, there was no faking, nowhere to hide. It was very in your face, confrontational and quite disturbing.

Saketopoulou (2023) discusses audience responses to Harris's *Slave Play* (2019), which dealt explicitly with interracial kink and sex in the first act:

"The play exerts an ethical kind of sadism that is exigent in that it issues a necessary and imperative call to the audience to endure something difficult, something that will challenge them through its intensity and *by means of what it repeats*. Theatre goers who are able to bend their will (to stay in the theatre and to give themselves over to the play rather than trying to "control" their reactions, or inhibit their pleasure, or leave) might then be able to endure an aesthetic experience that both strains and excites, calling something forth in them, something that can be perverse and overwhelming (109).

Saketopoulou's italics here reference the repetition of the power relations of chattel slavery, which was perhaps what the Spier audiences found repulsive and refused to bend

⁵⁰ A British sexual slang term for participating in or watching sexual activities in a secluded public place such as a park or car park. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/dogging>

their will to. At the Body Politic performance, however, women, and one young black woman in particular, told us that they had felt aroused by the inflicting of pain on a white man's body and by the fact that in the Femme Domme scene of the performance, my character was fully clothed, while he was exposed. She enjoyed this inversion, and after an initial feeling of uneasy shock at her enjoyment, she allowed herself to feel pleasure in what she was watching, despite the fact that it was 'wrong'. At Embodiment Rope Studio, the audience, largely from the kink community, found the performance arousing and thought-provoking. At the Live Art performance, audiences understood the work a lot better. At Spier, however, the largely middle-class, white Stellenbosch audience seemed unable or unwilling to give themselves over to the work.

Following the intensity of the flogging scenario, we immersed our bodies in ochre, flowers and water, symbolic of the different relationship to the Land that was made possible because of the performance. The moment of aftercare, which we had conceptualised as the post-liminal or incorporation (Von Gennep, 1909), was an attention to the body that instantiated a remembering, following Hartmann's formulation, in which violation and devastation are acknowledged and re-dress carefully attends to the "body as a site of pleasure, Eros and sociality", reconnecting severed natality across the breach, or as Manning calls it, "the cleave" of colonial harm (2020:130). Of course, redress and repair remain incomplete because of the magnitude of the "cleave" and the ongoing damage of racialised capitalism; however, *IR's* aftercare, in its attempt at restoration, demonstrates what Freeman calls "carnal hope" (162). This carnal hope is an eco-erotic proposition. Repair is possible only by attending to the "cleave" or "genocide of relationality" and restoring and revitalising intimacies between the human and more-than-human world. As Wynand removes the Kimono and helps me into the bath, my body is restored in erotic encounters with water and soil (at Spier), as a pansexual reclamation of indigeneity and an expansive, hopeful carnality. It becomes, as Melissa Nelson says, a "peeling away of the colonial and religious impositions of patriarchy, heteronormativity, internalized oppression, original sin, shame, and guilt (among many other idiosyncratic layers)" (Barker, 2017:235), which is deeply decolonial in that it penetrates to the libidinal core desire for interrelated "survance". This reaching out and touching was where *IR* ended; it was also where the next work, *Kaaimanblom*, began.

3.5 The Abject Earth: Down with the Ground and Dirty

Like the play parties of the BDSM communities, *IR* performs its erotic intimacy publicly, whilst its ritual, in the tradition of African and Afro-diasporic Live Art practitioners such as Jelili

Atiku, Albert' Ibokwe' Khoza and Anguezomo Mba Bikoro, is made public in order to address the suffering of the collective. *IR*, however, does not 'act out' its intimacy or its ritual, it is not a 'ritualisation' as per Catherine Bell (1992) and it does not partake of intergenerational behaviours as per Joseph Roach (1996); the intimacy is evoked in real time, the ritual is a set of indigenous technologies applied to the performance in order to invoke a specific end. The effects sought are not personally spiritual, but the personal spiritual is employed as a tool in the ritual work.

"Interembodied sexual experience that is powered by transgression's search for escalating excitations has the extraordinary potential to recapitulate the scene of implantation, that is, to undo the links between enigma and its translations" (Saketopoulou, 2023:54).

The "scene of implantation" that *IR* seeks to recapitulate is what Darieck Scott (2010) terms "the originary history of violation" (9). Implicated in this originary history, both for Scott and for the formulation of this chapter, is the racialised settler colonial category of 'object otherness' (Veracini, 2010). *IR* plays with abjection as a category, condition and affective disposition that is able to overwhelm the stabilities that "the cleave of whiteness" (Manning) instantiates, through techniques of escalating sensational excitation. This play occurs at the limits of racialised skin as a contact zone, roles are switched, abjection that is normally extruded out of the body politic onto the raced, gendered Coloured woman is invited in and onto the body of the white man as something to be performed, spectacularised, played with and at. However, the humiliation of Wynand's body does not confer onto my body the stability and boundedness of whiteness as an aspirational position; instead, the process of visiting abjection onto him opens up the possibilities for my character's apparent ultimate humiliation that occurs at the end, when I roll around in lace lingerie in the dirt and mud of spilt bathwater at Spier.

During one performance, a young Coloured woman could not hide her disgust at this. It was as if, by becoming dirt, my character was throwing away all the power she had taken during the scenario. We had crafted this as a point of retrieving power through inviting erotic connection with the Land, but what this young woman's response illuminated was that from the outside, this point of power "assume(d) a form that seems repugnant even nonsensical for its conditions of appearance are defeat and violation" (Scott, 2010:9). I read this point at the end of the performance through Darieck Scott's (2010) formulation of *Extravagant Abjection*, where the journey of the performance has systematically erased ego-protections and revealed the "constellation of tropes that we call identity, body, race, nation" as utterly penetrated and "without defensible boundary" (9). For Scott, capabilities emerge here through the unflinching,

manipulated depiction of the originary violation, or in Saketopoulou's terms, "the scene of implantation". What emerged in regard to the inquiry into re-indigenisation was not a standard lionisation of identity that is found in Revivalist discourse, but rather a counter-intuitive power found at the point of boundary dissolution. Through leaning in to the erotic allure of the abject and the amplification of humiliation, *IR* perverts both BDSM and Indigenous Knowledge/Politics. There is no cleansing or washing away of history in the bathwater at the end, but a further overwhelming of the contact zone of skin with ochre and mud (at Spier) that pushes the boundary towards human and more-than-human in an eco-erotic invitation that exceeds respectability and 'upliftment' in identity politics. This perversion of the politics of Khoisan Revivalism is taken even further through perverting *die Waterslang* as a fetish. Anne McClintock (1995) traces the movement of the concept of the 'fetish' from its initial coinage by Charles de Brosses in 1760 as a term for the 'primitive religion' of peoples outside of European Christianity to its usage by Karl Marx in 1867. Marx described the notion of 'primitive' spiritual practices in industrial economic modernity as 'commodity fetishism'. Finally, in 1905, Sigmund Freud applied the term 'fetish' to sexual perversion. McClintock says:

Religion (the ordering of time and the transcendent), money (the ordering of the economy) and sexuality (the ordering of the body) were arranged around the social idea of racial fetishism, displacing what the modern imagination could not incorporate onto the invented domain of the primitive. Imperialism returned to haunt the enterprise of modernity as its concealed but central logic (1995:182).

Implicated in this re-figuration of *die Waterslang* was the potential for re-storying what Sylvia Wynter (2003) refers to as the 'second set of instructions. The first set is our DNA, and the second, the stories we tell about ourselves. Wynter (2003) suggests that these non-genetic second instructions programme us neurochemically, the word becoming flesh through the establishment of hormonal dispositions to stimuli that alter our physiology. For Wynter, the master narrative of Christianity and original sin wired as penitence into the punishment/reward areas of the brain has been replaced with the master narrative of economic scarcity that is tightly bound to the Darwinian narrative as a biological fact. Together, economic scarcity and Darwinian science scaffold the current biomythoi, Wynter's term for the human flesh/story hybrid, and slot neatly into the neural paths already carved by the Christian expulsion from Eden and the demonisation of the erotic represented by the figure of the snake.

Leaning in to this nexus of economy, sex and spirituality, the fetishised *Waterslang* became a re-ordering principle, or more-than-human presence, capable of offering ways in which the erotic could burst through colonial categories and constructs in an engagement that destabilises and dissolves identitarianism, respectability politics and uplift. In turn, ritual

perverted BDSM by subjecting it to function in excess of the encounter, where BDSM (and all its attendant intrapsychic complexity) becomes simply a ritual technology. No longer subversive or exceptional, BDSM is made to become, as Somé suggests, a ritual technique where pain is used to kick the old system out of the body (1993) so that a new relational mode can be sought.

Chapter 4: [Kaaimanblom](#)

The performance of *Kaaimanblom* took place as part of the 2022 season of Spier Constellations, entitled *Nine Women in the Wilderness*, curated by Brett Bailey. Positioned as the last performance in the study, *Kaaimanblom* engages with the themes of embodied decolonisation, re-indigenisation and relationship with the more-than-human in the most direct way of the three performances, overtly attempting to achieve the stated aims of co-producing indigenous eco-erotic knowledge through an intimate embodied encounter with the more-than-human. What occurred, however, was entirely in excess of the initial intentions of the piece, as its slippery becomings forced unexpected reckonings, complicating the somatic to semantic movement. It is one thing, via Manning (2016), to refute initial categorisation in knowledge production, but another to actually find oneself within the relational field as it is forming, and yet another to attempt to render this experience in writing. The *presence* of the 'invisible being of metamorphosis' (Latour, 2013), in this case the Eland spirit, as an actant complicated the performance, and even more so the writing, as this more-than-human being embodied through performance exists in extra-literate modes. I would go so far as to suggest that the enfleshment of this mythical being encountered in *Kaaimanblom* is anti-literate, as a counter to the epistemic flatness of its anthropological rendering. Unlike *Intimate Reparations*. Where *die Waterslang* was fetishised as a crafted concept that was relatively transparent, in *Kaaimanblom*, *die Waterslang* intra-acted in a "co-compositional engagement with the associated milieu of emergent relation (as) an *environmental mode of awareness*. (Manning, 2014:6) Implicated in this was *die Waterslang's* metamorphic polysemy that manifested in performance as becoming Eland.

More so than the other two performances discussed, what occurred in *Kaaimanblom* was what Manning (2014) terms as:

The making-felt of a co-compositional force that does not yet seek to distinguish between human and nonhuman, subject and object, emphasizing instead an immediacy of mutual action, an associated milieu of their emergent relation (6).

What was extruded as a by-product of this engagement (or what I am able to grasp) was, as articulated in Chapter One, a redefinition of "both ethnographic research, shaped by the discipline of anthropology, and performance practice, informed by Western theatre" (Magnat, 2012:35). This is primarily what this chapter does; it rubs performance practice and anthropology against one another in order to make sense of *Kaaimanblom*.

To do so, it travels first through a discussion of pre-production and rehearsal before laying out an in-depth narrative description of the performance that takes the form of embodied insider ethnography. This narrative description is necessitated by the fact that this particular work (unlike the other two) was not conceptually crafted before it commenced, and the research that it produced was experienced as somatic epiphanies in the real-time engagement in the relational milieu. This is a simultaneous opening out of the experience of performance and an insider account of an eco-erotic co-composition of meaning. This section is followed by a discussion of the implications of what emerged in this for both performance ethnography and for anthropology, and how I view this bodied "environmental mode of awareness" (2014:6) to function as a register of re-indigenisation.

4.1 The Snake's Lily as Actant

Kaaimanblom, Lumwe, Tswii (Sotho), intekwane, ikhubalo lechanti (Xhosa), blue water lily, Cape water lily, frog's pulpit, blue lotus (Eng.); blouwaterlelie, kaaimanblom, paddapreekstoel, blou plomb (Afr.); izubu, iziba (Zulu), *Nymphaea Capensis* or *Nymphaea nouchali* var. *caerulea*.

The word *Kaaiman* is thought to be a reference to the English 'Cayman', with reference to the name of the Kaaiman river in the Western Cape; however, there is no record of crocodiles ever inhabiting this river. The dictionary of South African placenames attributes this name to the *Leguan* (Monitor Lizard), which may have been found in this river.⁵¹ Another story is that the Nama word *kei*, meaning great, and the Afrikaans/English word '*man*' joined together become Kaaiman or Grootman/ Big man and refers to the belief that it is improper to call some beings, such as *die Waterslang*, by their true names.⁵² According to stories from informants collected by the Afrikaans Taal museum⁵³, *Kaaiman* is one of the *Grootlang's* names.

Allopathically, like the rest of the *Nymphaea* family, *Capensis* has neuroactive effects, according to medical research⁵⁴, specifically anxiolytic and sedative. In the southern African

⁵¹ https://archive.org/stream/DictionaryOfSouthernAfricanPlaceNames/SaPlaceNames_djvu.txt

⁵² <https://www.kaaimansadventures.com/history.html#:~:text=He%20said%20that%20the%20name,the%20crocodile%20of%20the%20Nile>

⁵³ <https://www.taalmuseum.co.za/daars-n-slang-in-die-water/>

⁵⁴ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292982801_Effects_of_Methanolic_Extract_of_Nymphaea_capensis_Leaves_on_the_Sedation_of_Mice_and_Cytotoxicity_of_Brine_Shrimp

traditional medicine pharmacopoeia, it is a balm for the wounded feminine⁵⁵ and a medicine for women in transitional stages, from menarche to menopause. In the Griqua Menarche ritual I attended in the Griqua settlement in Campbell, Northern Cape, which inspires this study and particularly this chapter, the older women call the Serpent from the river to bear witness as custodian of the young woman initiate's erotic autonomy. At this ritual re-enactment, if the Serpent refused the offerings laid on the water, it meant that the young woman's autonomy had been compromised. This would necessitate that rites take place to re-order the entire community and restore the young woman. When the rites were completed, the initiate would be taken back to the river and *die Groot Slang*, as he is called in Campbell, would receive the offering only if she was restored to complete autonomy. In this situation, the *Kaaimanblom*, growing in the swampy waters of the river or pond, becomes the prescription for the affliction of an entire community, of which the harm experienced by the young woman is a symptom.

I first encountered this plant in 2005 when I was doing the play [Spice Root](#), which was a rite for washing the dead of the middle passage from Indonesia to South Africa in an attempt to lay to ground the floating roots of my enslaved Indian Ocean paternal line. I was prescribed the plant as powder to bathe in by Sangoma, Julia Rosina, who told me that the medicine would dance. I didn't know what she meant and didn't think much about it, but as I drifted off to sleep after bathing that night, I saw and felt a sensation inside my body, a being other than I, undeniably dancing. It didn't last for very long, but it was unexpectedly bright and joyous. Since then, the plant has come up in nearly every pre-performance divination for the work I make. In [Womb of Fire](#), I sang out the plant's names in a scene where the text reconfigured the dismembered and dissected genitals of Zara, the Khoi character in the play, in the swampy waters of the Princess Vlei⁵⁶. *Lumwe* (as Julia refers to the plant through her Sangoma lineages) appeared again in the divination for *Intimate Reparations*, and Wynand and I collected plants and mud from a pond filled with the lily that we used in the performance at Embodiment CT.

The interdimensional mosaic of associations this plant holds has resurfaced again and again, and the title of this work serves many functions. It refers to its inspiration at the Griqua

⁵⁵ Informant traditional healer and herbalist, Julia Rosina.

⁵⁶ Princess Vlei is a wetland located in Grassy Park on the Cape Flats. According to legend it is named for a Khoi princess who was abducted from the vlei by Portuguese sailors while she was bathing in its waters. When I was a child in the 1980's, the vlei was filled with *Nymphaea Capensis* and flamingos. On Sundays there were church baptisms, trances and picnics. The water is now very polluted, the lilies and flamingos have gone but there are moves by the local community to preserve and protect this beloved body of water. See

<http://www.princessvlei.org/about-princess-vlei.html>

Ncabasas (mentioned above), to the generative companionship of *Nymphaea Capensis* in my practice and, as the performance and chapter reveal, a synecdoche for a polysemic metamorphic mode of being. This is important, as it introduced polysemy as a mode of transformational or metamorphic being encountered in this performance. By this, I refer to both the actual other-than-human being encountered and to my own transformation in a process that is co-constitutive.

4.2 Pre-production: Bones and Rivers

The initial proposal was planned following a visit to Okiep at the start of 2022 and was inspired by a sheep hipbone hanging from a tree in Byron Klassen's yard (Klassen is a member of Garage Dance Theatre). During the visit to Byron Klassen's home, he told us of the family's concern about his sister, who had newly returned home from Cape Town. She had been involved in a violent relationship with an abusive man in Cape Town, and the family was worried about her continued contact with him. They feared that he would convince her to leave Okiep and return to him. The man had a gun and had threatened to kill her if she left him. The family feared that he would resort to any means, including witchcraft, to bring her back. As we left, I noticed a sheep hipbone hanging from the tree in the yard (cf images Chapter 1). I recalled a story told to me by the Griqua women in Campbell after the ceremonial re-enactment. Some of the women told me that if a young woman went away from her home following her *Ncabasas*, and the family became concerned for her safety, they would hang the hipbone of a sheep from a tree in the yard. The hipbone would inform them through dreams and feelings about the wellbeing of the young woman. If she were in danger, the hipbone would call her back. I asked how this worked. They responded that they didn't know *how*, but knew that it *did* work and that they had learnt it from the *Grootmense* (big/older people).

Given the context of the Klassen family's concern for the young woman far from home with the violent man in Cape Town, I inquired about the hipbone. Byron didn't know, saying only that his father had one day returned home with a hipbone found in the veld, which he hung in the tree. His father offered no explanation about it to the rest of the family except to ask that it not be removed. Byron assumed that it was decorative. Shortly after the hipbone was hung in the tree, the sister returned home. Was this a Khoisan tradition that extended to many communities? The powerful image of the pelvic bone hanging from a lone tree in the dry Northern Cape yard and its connection with the Griqua *Ncabasas* in Campbell seemed like the perfect starting point for the research-creation that I wanted to undertake. Conveniently, I would be able to use the premises and networks of Garage Dance to help in the creation of a

work. I made plans to return to Okiep later in 2022 to create a piece with the company. These plans fell through due to logistics, and on 17 November, Brett Bailey requested that I replace a performer who had cancelled in the *Constellations 2022* season, entitled *Nine Women in the Wilderness*.

On the walk to the site, an islet between the Gobos and Eerste rivers, Brett shared his curatorial vision. In Benin, he had visited a sacred forest where only women priestesses practised with their snakes. Tourists and those visiting for healing consultations walked through the forest to and from the priestesses in their groves. "As you walked, there was a woman and a snake, a little further, another woman and a snake and another, all doing their own thing, in their own world", he said. He was struck by their power, by their sanctity and the sanctity of the place, and that they were free to be in the forest with their snakes, the spirits they worked with. This was what he wanted to conjure on the little island in Stellenbosch. I took his curatorial vision as a confirmation that the work should be done at *Constellations 2022*. My site, intended for the artist who had cancelled, was the only one of the nine directly on the water. At this point, I still intended to stick to what I had planned to explore in Okiep, but as a solo performance exploring the *Waterslang*, the Griqua *Ncabasas* and the sheep hipbone. There is a butchery at Spier, and Brett offered to find a hipbone, which he suggested I use as a mask.

4.3 Rehearsal: In Conversation with the Bones

The first rehearsal with Bailey was scheduled for 28 October 2022. Prior to this, I consulted Sangoma Julia Rosina for a divination. As with *Intimate Reparations*, I utilised the divination as the parameters of a dramaturgy to create the work and as directorial guidance during performance. The divination was predominantly about the Eland as the main influence on and protector of the performance. This seemed irrelevant to my planned performance inquiry, but I took the ball of Eland fat prescribed by Theron to rub on my body during rehearsal and performance.

Later that day at the rehearsal, I discovered that the butcher had no sheep hip bones for me to use as a mask. Starting to rehearse, I applied the Eland fat as per Julia Theron's instructions and began to improvise in the water. On seeing this, Brett Bailey suggested that instead of sheep bones, I use an Eland skull that he had. I decided to follow what arose in performance and created a structural container with simple repeatable actions that traversed and activated the site.

4.3.1 Bushman Studies and the Authenticating Loop: Bone, Rock, Paper

I had not yet read any of the San or Khoi anthropological literature before creating the performance. I anticipated an entirely different knowledge paradigm; only post-performance did I begin to see the experience with the Eland as part of a broader Khoisan ethnography, particularly Bushman studies. That this was the only extant literature on the subject compelled me to immerse myself in it, especially Low and Lewis-Williams's work, to make sense of my embodied experiences. This was a strangely paradoxical knowledge complex to be caught in, with escape not entirely possible. My journey had already been mapped by Lewis-Williams (2015), Chris Low (2012), et al., and what I encountered had been described and fixed in the authorial voice of archaeologists and anthropologists in a far-away space and time – the Kalahari and the Past. This forced a confrontation with a personal sense of 'inauthenticity' in locating the ground from which to speak of my encounter with the figure of the Eland, over-represented and to an extent bound in the anthropological canon. Verbuyst (2023) points out that the 'decolonial turn in Bushman Studies' includes emic perspectives from self-identified Khoisan "who do not fit the conventional script or mould of Bushman studies" (2023:49). Was there a way that my scholarship, like theirs could counter the discourse of extinction and erasure of both the Eland spirit and my indigeneity (2023:49)? Was there a way that the experiential active *presence* of the Eland in *Kaaimanblom* could be seen as an act of survivance (Vizenor, 2008) which Vizenor says "is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories are active presence" (1993:15). Was there a way that I could offer corporeal generosity or hospitality for this figure to inhabit the world and exist outside of anthropological and archaeological texts?

Audra Simpson (2014) says that "Western ethnography on the Iroquois seeks to place Indigenous people and their 'culture' in a continuous position of newly arriving in the anthropological imagination just around the time of land dispossession with their disappearance imminent "(178-9). For Simpson, this is done through an "authenticating discourse on culture and history that permeates the literature" (178) that supports and is supported by early ethnography. In the case of South African early ethnography, the Bleek and Lloyd archive is seen as the "Bushman studies Rosetta Stone", which, until Andrew Bank (2006) contextualised the production of this archive, has endured uncontested, acting as the

reference for all later inquiry into 'Bushman' epistemologies and cosmologies. As Ciraj Rassool (2006)⁵⁷ says:

Notions of cultural salvage and remarkable equality have served to create a kind of cult out of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, whose archive has been understood in a very limited way as a system of linguistic and cultural documentation and which has been mined for a lost, extinct authenticity. These dominant meanings and idealised notions of significance were incorporated into world heritage when the Bleek-Lloyd Collection (UCT and South African Library) was inscribed on the register of UNESCO's 'Memory of the World' Programme in 1997. According to the nomination form, Bleek and Lloyd's notebooks serve as a "Rosetta Stone" which has enabled scholars to decipher the meaning of southern African rock art. Because of the insights it has made possible in southern Africa, 'advances [were also made] in the study of Australian and European rock art.¹⁹

The Rosetta Stone of 196BCE is inscribed with a decree in three *scripted* texts, Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs, Demotic and Ancient Greek. The Bleek and Lloyd archive, in contrast, is a translation into text of embodied Land-based ways of knowing; or, in Diana Taylor's (2003) terms, a San repertoire translated into a colonial archive. To refer to this translation, across the cleave of the colonial and from situated body to Victorian text as a 'Rosetta Stone', in my view, activates what Tyson Yunkaporta (2019) calls 'a curse' – a false pattern sung from a fragment onto a whole system, the effect of which is the weakening of that system. This system of San knowledge production, in my view, is a "co-compositional engagement with the associated milieu of emergent relation (as) an *environmental mode of awareness*" (Manning, 2014:6).

There have been contestations and corrections of the Bleek and Lloyd collection of 'Africana' of the vanishing native, but dominant studies have remained uncontested, in what Simpson calls an "authenticating loop" (192). In this paper trail, both the past and the present of Indigenous people are defined by "white prescience" (192). What Simpson recognises as a "fetishization of authenticity" places the scholar in the position of ownership and appraisal and closes down "semantic and ideological space" for the contemporary descendants of the 'vanishing native' to inherit (192). This mode of examination, which does not apply the same scrutiny to the interrogators, reinforces the "doubt and fragmentation" of settler colonialism; as

⁵⁷ Rassool, Ciraj. (2006). Beyond the Cult of 'Salvation' and 'Remarkable Equality': A New Paradigm for the Bleek-Lloyd Collection. *Kronos*, 32(1), 244-251. Retrieved October 18, 2024, from http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-01902006000100011&lng=en&tlng=en

Simpson says, "There are people with deeply entrenched, genealogical connections who are under scrutiny, who are debated, who are disenfranchised" (167).

Unlike the Mohawk Nation, to which Simpson belongs, the Khoisan are broadly considered to have already vanished; moreover, moves towards revival are met with scepticism, as I mention in Chapter One. As a result, it has become accepted that Khoisan cosmology exists authentically only in the furthest geographical/temporal reaches or in the "authenticating loop" (ibid) of ethnographic literature. It is my contention that the colonial schema of 'Africana', as Peter Merrington (in Delmas & Penn, 2012:195) terms the "settler-originated concept for the interpretation of southern Africa", continues in the anthropological canon on Khoisan cosmology and ritual practice with only very recent critical interruption by Khoisan-identified scholars on the processes of representation involved. The colonial paradigm that allowed Dorothea Bleek to render !Kabbo's obvious desperation at the severance of his connection with the Land, as picturesque and not as urgent to material survival, continues through a depoliticised Bushman studies. What is required is (in the case of the Khoisan, just as with the Iroquois, as Simpson discusses) an inquiry into how:

"Cultural analysis may look at difference as not the unit of analysis; when culture is disaggregated into a variety of narratives rather than one comprehensive, official story; when *proximity to the territory that one is engaging in is as immediate as the self.* (italics mine) What, then, does this do to ethnographic form? ... when we do this type of anthropological accounting, "voice" goes hand in hand with sovereignty at the level of enunciation, at the level of method, and at the level of textualization. Within Indigenous contexts, when the people we speak of speak for themselves, their sovereignty interrupts anthropological portraits of timelessness, procedure, and function that dominate representations of their past and, sometimes, their present" (2014:242).

As an embodied research-creation practice, then, *Kaaimanblom* challenged the disembodied flatness of archival modes that exclude contemporary bodies and indigeneity in a manner that produces a new performance ethnography (Magnat) that exceeds both the ethnographic archive and Western performance through the intra-active (Barad) embodied co-presence of the 'vanished native' and an 'extinct' mythical being of the Land. One narrative that potentially interrupts a singular story, this chapter investigates trance with an Eland spirit as an insider-ethnography that does not dissect transformation or tranceformation (Guenther, 2020), whether it is a hunting disguise, a practice of daily life connected to food and sex (Parkington, 2003), but seeks instead to explore what emerges from the embodied eco-erotic relationships in and with the Land. As a practice of Indigenous Khoisan retrieval and revival, this rubs against the

anthropological canon whilst at the same time utilising the research of this canon in order to flesh out its inquiry. It does not look from above at a relational world view as a vestige of a palaeolithic ontology, but sees relationality as the basis of Indigenous ethico-onto-epistemology, as activism, as a way to think ourselves out of the planetary harm wrought by human supremacy and settler colonialism. It examines this, as it does every performance created for this study, as an act of healing.

4.4 Performance: Breathing Life into Bones

The section that follows is a brief immersion in the experience of performance that begins with an almost cursory description of the structure that the audience saw and then moves to sections from journal notes presented as an intimate insider auto-ethnographic narrative of the performance of *Kaaimanblom*. Information arrived moment-by-moment from an expanded interoception that navigated not only the internal physical states, but also responded to the environment, attempting (often failing) to distinguish between prompts that came from the performer (myself) and those that came from another. This journal entry locates the impulses from which the research for this chapter emerged.

Performed four times a night, each time for a different audience, the action sometimes extended over multiple audiences or contracted and began again, so that after the first round, it was not certain at which point the sequence began or ended. The sequence was based on a backwards movement through the Dikenga/medicine wheel beginning in the North, the place of death, and ending in the East, the place of birth and newness. The decision to move backwards through the circle was made early on in pre-production.

4.4.1 What the Audience Sees

I sit on the medicine wheel I have drawn in clay, covered in a white cloth. I emerge from the cloth and begin to move and speak. I cross the river and hand an audience member the cloth, asking if I can trust them with my skin. I lift the Eland Skull and begin to move with it in the water. I place the Eland skull on the ground and fall into the water. (If it has become dark, I carry two oil lamps across the river so that I am lit on the other side). I cross the river and cover my body in white clay. I dive across the river and climb the aerial silk and wrap myself in it. I fall out of the silk into the water. These actions begin again and repeat for over four hours.

4.4.2 What I See/Feel

Pre-show: I arrive early and lay out a *Dikenga* in white clay, red and yellow ochre. The Eland skull is similarly encircled in concentric clay circles. I make offerings to the water of ceremonial honey and herbs. I climb the oak tree and rig the aerial silks for the final part of the sequence. I wait for the audience on the riverbank under the cloth, I listen and pray, I rub myself with eland fat – on my heart, my feet, the back of my neck, my wrists. When the audience settles, I begin each cycle of performance with a story that addresses the audience directly. (This is a directorial input from Brett Bailey.)

4.4.3 Journal Entries

The entries have been edited for brevity to take a form akin to Butoh-Fu discussed in Chapter 3.

Performance #1: low crouch – arms reach for skull. Body 'unfurling' – Tremor. Breath into sound – moving upwards through the body. I become aware of a presence other than me – bigger than I am.

Performance #2: The skull is heavy to hold. A voice saying "don't put it down". Movement between my meat body and Eland bone body. Between life and death. Passing materials to each other. My meat is becoming its meat. `A voice saying "not enough fat." I am not enough, I do not have enough fat, not femme enough, not Khoi enough. I lose energy and become tired.

Performance #3: The presence is still moving in my spine, in my lower abdomen. I am exhausted. It goes. It moves downstream, disappearing into the reeds.

After performing, there is pain in the small of my back and at the base of my skull. I received feedback from a friend in the audience who said the rest of the audience didn't 'get it', and overheard a woman who commented that I kept 'flashing' them. My body responds to this by clenching around the pelvis and hip flexors. From this point to the last performance, my coccyx is sensitive.

Saturday 5: Before the performance, I rub fat on the small of my back and the back of my neck. Body becomes hot – vision trembles, I repeat the fat – notice the same effect. The audience is late. It is cold, so I apply more fat to my neck, chest, belly, and base of spine. I hear the words "yes, more fat".

I understand now that the voice in performance #1 wasn't saying that I was not fat enough, simply instructing me to apply more fat.

Performance #1: Listening deeply now. Eland arrives, and it feels happy.

Performance #2: A lump on the back of my neck. I probe it with my mind, and it grows and feels meaty. Is it an illness? I see in a flash to the right of me –Eland with a hump on the back of its neck. Not illness then, just meat becoming. Following the fleshy protrusion, articulating the spine to its shifting contours, the head hangs low, and hairs sprout. A bursting sensation of heat emanating from the fat on my chest. Heart feels huge. A lot of blood in me, a lot of tissue, fluid. I am meaty and able to sustain the performances this time. I lay down the skull, my arms twist up behind me. I can't straighten them. I fall into the water, arms release. Afterwards, I read in the literature that this 'twisted tetany arms' is common in San trance.

Now, the body becomes a shifting meat animal when I pick up the skull. I listen to instructions – images or voices. I misinterpret often. When I listen correctly, a light goes on in the body – more energy becomes available – I can move forward.

Performance #3: Pelvis is clenching. I struggle to not 'flash'. In the cocoon, struggle to cover genitals. I bruise my little finger. A flood of relief when I am finally decent. But there is also anger in my lower belly. I start to menstruate instantly. I am perimenopausal and haven't had a period in months, but I am bleeding now. Now I have to hide this from the audience, too. I continue to bleed for the entire run, stopping abruptly in the week after the performances. My body is not my own. Afterwards, I encounter references to the Eland in Menarche rites, and I wonder whether it required my blood or if my body was just rebelling against the pejorative gaze of the audience.

Friday 11: I am no longer aware of separate performances. Images blur. Body is restricted and angry about the 'flashing'. I am afraid that I will bleed through my costume, that my body will rebel. The skull tugs erotically, I try to resist, to hide, but then it hides. Then I cooperate completely. A very bloody, joyous animal emerges. Afterwards, I am exposed, naked, and shy. Where is die Waterslang in all this? In the water, I see/feel – form doesn't matter, dead or alive, meat or plant or water. Movement between things, between states, becomes plant, animal, water, so pleasurable. This fluidity is for this state right now; it does not exist in the day-to-day human world, but I can return here again if I enter properly. I panic, suddenly I am anxious about my aliveness – aliveness can be a kind of supremacy. The Eland opens gates – like geometry, like a puzzle or the Pac-Man maze made of lines of light. It's funny. It's a joke, is it making jokes with me?

I am depleted from giving so much after this Friday night performance, and I'm unsure if I will be able to gather enough energy to perform again on Saturday night. My coccyx is very painful; I wince when I walk. The Saturday show is rained out. That night, I dream of a woman whose body becomes filled with gold. The gold travels up her throat to her head; she says, "This is mine, only mine". In the dream, I feel that I don't want it to be only mine. I want to share it. Afterwards, I read that becoming golden is often described in San trance.

Friday 18: It is joyous to dance with the Eland skull; we miss each other and get excited when we meet. We journey through mountains, plains, and rivers. Intricate rock crevices, tiny plants in between rocks, then the Land opens. The whole body transforms now. In one show, a bird calls, only stopping when I look up and greet it.

Brett Bailey is in the audience, and I give a careful performance that is correctly pitched, timed and placed. He gives post-show notes that contradict his rehearsal notes, advising that I dispense with his earlier note to project my voice and performance above the water, and keep it a private ritual. He suggests I address the water, the trees, and the frogs.

Saturday 19: I perform for the tree that I hang from, I sing for the water, the birds, the frogs. I pick up the skull and follow Theron's divination advice to make the sound of Eland hooves; I start to click with my mouth. Suddenly, the herd arrives. I forget about dual consciousness, performance notes and technique. Just follow the herd – in one body, on the ground, in the herd, moving through, grass, hoofs, rocks, fat, hair that hardens into horn. There is a long, white shining form with an Eland head and a human body. I want to stay with the herd, head down on all fours, but it commands me to stand. What is it? Has the clicking called it? I think it's a picture of me, then I see a glam Disney Princess, and everything flattens. So no, it is not me, that's too flat. It is more-than-me, looking at me. I realise this, the light goes on in my body and depth returns. Depth is an extended sense field – many wheres. The figure smiles at me – sees me look at it. I want to stop the performance and shout to the audience. Do you see? Do you see that? Have you ever seen anything so magnificent? Is this the Eland Spirit? Joy lasts for the rest of this performance, and the audience leaves. I don't need to do more. But I have to put on a show for the audience. Do the moves, try not to freeze in the cold, night river.

I am radically altered by this performance. The section that follows is an attempt to parse the encounters of *Kaaimanblom*.

4.4.4 Reclaiming Trance as Technique

The most abject figure of savagery to the modern subject—the symptom of the exclusion and asymmetry—was "possession," the condition of passive experience where the subject fully became a medium, and was fundamentally made, animated, and moved (Anselm Franke, 2012).⁵⁸

I have experimented with altered states of consciousness (ASC's), specifically with what can be called trance (and what I will be referring to as trance) as an extension of the performer's dual consciousness⁵⁹ in solo live art performance contexts at the following occasions: A performance for Dia de los Murdos in the Mission District in San Francisco in 1996, a performance at a sculpture exhibition opening in Prawirotaman, Jogjakarta in 2006, at the Indian Ocean Symposium at the Institute for Islamic Art in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2007, at Bledog Art Space in Mas, Bali in 2009, at the Borderlands Festival in Kommetjie in 2017 and in the 2022 *Kaaimanblom* performance at Spier. My practice exists as Pather and Boule (2019:3) state of contemporary South African Live Art, "within a precolonial and decolonial African genealogy of ritual, ruptures and experimentality... that is integral to African tradition and protest culture", and it is my contention that a performance study of embodied decolonisation precludes the inclusion of trance as a site of critical inquiry.

The techniques I used in *Kaaimanblom* come from performance training that has sedimented and become unconscious through repetition over many years. These techniques are garnered from Butoh, Javanese dance, various trainings at UCT, Grotowski, and, more recently, FitzMaurice Vocal Technique, as well as participation in various practices of *thandaza* (IsiXhosa for prayer) learnt through participation in prayers and rituals and ancestral trances, sometimes with drumming and breath. These practices and trainings all develop specific embodied attunement and attention. I have not used trance in theatrical performances that rely on repetition and accuracy. I have, however, set up sacred ritual space, a *Dikenga* or altar, for every one of my own works and know what the presence of more-than-myself feels like in performance. I have also experienced varying states of trance in rehearsal for theatrical

⁵⁸ Anselm Franke, *Notes on n Exhibition*. E-flux journal issue 36, 2012. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61258/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/>

⁵⁹ Dual consciousness is a concept from Stanislavsky: the performer employs two simultaneous awarenesses – one inside the feeling and being state of the performance and the other completely aware of the outside world and the technique of performance, akin to the Balinese Inget/Engsap mentioned below.

productions, one of which was an accidental and violent full possession. I relate this experience to shed light on the frictions around trance and performance.

This occurred in a rehearsal room at one of the major theatres in Cape Town in 2017. Two other cast members and I were instructed to enact a ritual, call a specific spirit into the room and go into trance as an improvisation to generate dramaturgical material. It was assumed that this would be acting and that we would act 'as if' in a trance. As we improvised, an altered state of consciousness began to overtake my body. I screamed and my body undulated uncontrollably, accompanied by the sense of a hardness covered in blood and a screaming female face that was also covered in blood. I cried out to the director for help as I lost control of my body and bladder (one of the effects of trance states). Eventually, the director took me out of the state. After this experience, I felt as though I had injured the back of my head; there was pressure on the back of my neck, and I was very weak. This lasted for some months, until at a consultation for something entirely different, the diviner diagnosed that I was carrying the spirit of a woman on the back of my neck. It took much ceremony and labour on both our parts to dislodge this person and to cleanse and seal my field. I subsequently learnt that *Sangomas* believe that people who have died violently appear to the living as if covered in blood.

This experience highlights the friction between the remnants of colonially informed theatre spaces and modes of thinking and the decolonial. While consciously I understood this as merely an exercise, my body and breath committed to trance. It was assumed that it would be fake, that we would 'act' as if; that it was a theatre after all. My mistake was also professionally embarrassing; the urination was mentioned in the stage manager's report, read by the management, who joked about it. I was told by the stage manager that 'Coloured' people are not expected to go into trance, making my experience even more implausible to them. It becomes clear then that the ethnographic narrative around trance as exotic and exceptional carries through institutionally from the academy to the theatre.

Virginie Magnat's (2017) article on voice and scriptocracy suggests that the assumption of 'theatrics' is at the base of the split of trance states from performance in the Western tradition. She traces this to Plato's anti-mimetic prejudice in the *Ion*, where the *Ion*'s rhapsodic success can be attributed to either inspiration (possession by a god) or techné (the craft of performance) that would render it 'fake'. Magnat further traces this view in ethnographic discourses that "literate the Other" (2017:6) through either pathologising trance as mental illness or viewing it through the theatrical (simulation) versus anti-theatrical (sincerity) Platonic lens.

Yet these modes can be and are often straddled in performance along a continuum of deployment of awareness. I Wayan Lendra (Grimes, 1997:271) explains this phenomenon for "the Balinese trancer (who) experiences both a state of acute awareness, a state of the true self (*inget*), and a state of being unaware (*engsap*)". Kalpana Ram's (2013) monograph on spirit possession examines case studies that range from unwilling malignant possessions to cultivated mediumistic trances; her reading offers a way out of the binary of agency versus possession through what she characterises as the development of familiarity and intimacy. For Ram, this intercorporeality between the spirit and the human medium develops slowly over time, as the body has to "adjust(s) to and accommodate(s) the insistent presence and demands of a being radically different in its ontology" (173). Ram states that this process continues until the body is not merely occupied by the spirit but invited in through ritual and technique, ultimately developing "a relationship that allows more accessible channels of fluidity and communication between the human audience, the possessing spirit, and the subjectivity of the medium" (146). And this is where Ram notes Western scepticism arising, at the point where the medium *performs* for the audience whilst simultaneously utilising technique and inspiration. Despite that, many modern theatrical innovators (Schechner, Grotowski, Artaud, etc.) are inspired by and assimilative of majority world practices, Western performance traditions are considered to exist in a flow where modernity is a state evolved out of animism (Garuba, 2012). In this regard, Magnat (2012) quotes Cree theatre theorist and practitioner, Floyd Favel, who suggests that Western theatre be viewed instead as "the younger brother" of indigenous tradition, noting that the two mediums "connect at a spiritual level. In the moment of performance, higher self is activated, and it is at this higher plane that theatre and tradition are connected and related" (Favel in Magnat, 2012:35). One of the last students at Grotowski's laboratory in Italy, Favel also suggests the development of indigenous performer training; "a training of body and voice and theatre improvisation based on aboriginal concepts of time, space, humour, position of body, placement of voice and breath, etc."⁶⁰ Magnat (2014) says of Favel and other Grotowski-trained performers:

"The modes of transmission developed by those among them who went on to pursue their own creative research privilege an ecosystemic conception of organic life processes, and their teaching supports a performance paradigm in which embodiment, nature, and spirituality are interdependent. Such a perspective values the type of embodied knowledge transmitted through cultural practices that

⁶⁰ FLOYD FAVEL: "THEY THOUGHT AHEAD SEVEN GENERATIONS" *Interview by Greg Doran*
<https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/sci/article/view/8180/9237> accessed 9 August 2023.

connect the organicity of the human body with the organicity of the natural world. The spiritual dimension of these practices is foregrounded by Indigenous pedagogy" (2014:205).

In Magnat's (2014) interview with him, Favel describes his work with Grotowski and with Rena Mirecka, an elder Grotowskian knowledge keeper, as healing, much like a ceremony. He views healing as the main aim of technique for performer and audience and sees technique as functioning as 'cleansing' in the same way as ceremony, so that there are no obstacles between self and other, self and nature, and self and cosmos, and that this implies coming into good relationship with all, including ancestors and the more-than-human (2014:42). Richard Grimes describes in *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (1997:243), his experience as a witness of one of Grotowski's paratheatrical events:

"The Theatre of Sources is a metahunt, the object of which is to deobjectify one's world. It is a hunt for a way of moving that allows earth, sky, foliage, animal and "other" to appear as subjects. The self that is hunted is not just my own private, ego-constituted self, but a selfhood that surrounds me."

For this stage of his practice, Grotowski invited 'witnesses', not audience members, to the performance events. There is a different expectation from invited witnesses than from an audience that may be attending for a wide variety of reasons, including entertainment. Grimes's comment on the performance he saw demonstrates an awareness of how to *enter* into the performance and participate in an affective co-experiencing.

Grotowski's training to facilitate this type of transmission, works with what he calls the "primary position of the body" to cultivate "primary energy", which he sees as dances of Damballa in Haiti, in India as Tantra, where the Serpent at the base of the body is awakened, in Tibet as Reptile energy, amongst the San as the boiling of *!Num* and for I Wayan Lendra, the Balinese *Agem* (1997:278). According to Grotowski, this position, which involves a forward pitch of the torso and bent knees, is used to allow the 'primal or Serpent energy to flow through the body in a journey that begins at the pelvic bowl and travels up the spine, vitalising and charging the body on its course; not for the purpose of trance, but in order to increase the vitality and presence of the performer's body. This finds echoes in Fitzmaurice Vocal Technique, in which it is called the 'focus line', and once again, this position is employed as a channel for unobstructed vitality to flow through the body on the breath and voice with the objective of communication with an audience. The resultant vocal resonance is fuller as it passes through the body unobstructed by blocks, and more embodied because of the voice's journey through the body along the 'focus line'. Called 'restructuring', it is a conscious sideways deployment of the ribs on the inbreath and a pulse from the transverse abdominus muscle in

the pelvic bowl on the outbreath, which travels down and around the groin, up the spine and out through the brow point or third eye. One of the key pillars of the methodology, 'Restructuring', is taught after 'Destructuring' is learnt. According to Fitzmaurice:

"The Destructuring work consists of a deep exploration into the autonomic nervous system functions: the spontaneous, organic impulses which every actor aspires to incorporate into the acting process. The tendency of the body to vibrate involuntarily as a healing response to a perceived stimulus in the autonomic "fight or flight" mode (as in shivering with cold or fear, trembling with grief, anger, fatigue, or excitement) is replicated by applying induced tremor initially through hyper-extension of the body's extremities only, thus leaving the torso muscles free to respond with a heightened breathing pattern. At the same time, a great deal of unaccustomed energy, waves of tremor, and, ultimately, relaxation, flow throughout the body, sensitizing it to vibration, and increasing feeling and awareness" (1996:2).

With a lineage that stretches from Wilhelm Reich through Alexander Lowen's bioenergetics, the Fitzmaurice tremor is used as a de-armouring of trauma so that vitality or Reich's orgone energy, the vital animate erotic energy or life force, can flow freely in the body. Orgone, Prana in Hinduism, Chi in Chinese medicine, also !N/um or !N/om in Khoi and San cosmology and healing. The tremors in the body during destructuring are similar to the southern African isiXhosa *ukutyityimba*, and to San *!khauken* shaking or trembling. In the Fitzmaurice Technique, the stated purpose is to clear obstructions to vocal vitality for the goal of performance; everything else experienced is a by-product and practitioners are advised not to attach 'personal (psychological) story' to the sensations or emotions that arise in their bodies, but to allow them, enquire into them and develop the capacity to hold them. By contrast, for Floyd Favel, the Cree scholar, and for indigenous practitioners in South Africa, the purpose of ceremony and these kinds of somatic deployments is healing or cleansing of obstructions to right relationship. Because the self is not in isolation, blocks in the body are the result of a network of forces, including the socio-political, spiritual and historical environment. Would the practices in their animist fullness even be accessible to subjectivities rigidly constrained by imperial power? In the process of adapting techniques for Western subjectivities, what is essential to the source practices is stripped away. In the process, bodies become discrete, individual units.

4.4.5 *Frottage* with Bushman Studies

This epistemological stripping away of source practices is evident too in recent studies of Bushman trance, whereby neurophysiological interpretations universalise Bushman trance experiences. Below, I quote extensively from Chris Low's (2015) neurophysiological interpretation in order to demonstrate the authenticating loop, the universalisation of Khoisan practices as a common human heritage and the persistent inhospitability to the more-than-human.

In rock art studies of the San and their ancestors, the archaeologists Lewis-Williams and Dowson have drawn attention to the shared nervous system of present and past anatomically modern humans as the root source and explanation behind geometric patterns found carved and painted on rock surfaces. These, the archaeologists believe, represent entoptics, or patterns that all people purportedly see when in certain altered states of consciousness (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 2000; Lewis-Williams 2002). On a similar 'universal' basis, Keeney has located explanations of spirit possession in the spontaneous movement of limbs. Drawing on Gregory Bateson, Keeney describes how, in San dancing, as in certain other forms of 'ritual' dancing, an arc of muscle synapses can become locked into a self-reinforcing cycle of stimulation and relaxation that leads to clonus, or shaking. As this shaking is apparently spontaneous, people who experience it, who are thinking outside of biological mechanisms, attribute the explanation to something, or usually, someone else, moving their body or limb. Keeney proposes that this 'supernatural' third-person movement lies behind ideas of spirits coming into bodies. Keeney interprets the shaking of the San as one example of accessing divinity through spontaneous body movement (Keeney 2007:890). My interpretation pushes Lewis-Williams's neurophysiological commonality of entoptic experience towards a somatic neurophysiological basis for commonality of feelings, if not ideas. Just how close we can get to ideas is a difficult problem, but some light is shed on the matter by Keeney's notion that if people are not analysing their body through a reductionist scientific lens, an overwhelming human response to spontaneous body movements is to attribute the movement either to an outside force or an inner 'spirit' possession. (...) The most prominent accounts of San dancing, principally from Marshall (1962; 1969; 1999), Lee (1967; 1968; 1979), and Katz, emerged from fieldwork undertaken in the late 1950s through to the late 1960s, with Katz's *Boiling Energy* (1982) being read by many as the definitive account of San healing dances. Marshall's approach was more descriptive than theoretical but nonetheless highly valuable. In contrast, the interlinked work of Lee

and Katz was rooted in Lee's cultural ecology approach, to which Katz added insight from his background in psychology. Despite their differences, the overwhelming legacy of all three ethnographers is that the healing dance is less about medicine and more about an egalitarian ritual that encourages social cohesion and co-operation and provides hope to a self-reliant and highly vulnerable group of hunter-gatherers" (32-33).

Seen through Shawn Wilson's (2008) claim that the "purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves", social cohesion is also medicine in that it brings the community into coherent relationship with each other and the cosmos. In this view, individual health is constituted by the health of the relational environment in which the individual is embedded; the healing of a body, then, is the healing of a set of extended relationships. However, it is not my intention to position Indigenous research methodologies against that of Bushman studies at this point; what I am moving towards is the creation of my own discursive space in the context of the only extant research on the subject, Bushman studies.

Low's description of Katz, Lee and Marshall's social cohesion theory as providing hope to a 'highly vulnerable' community demonstrates Tuck and Yang's (2012) settler move to innocence; indigenous communities are rendered as at-risk. This 'at-risk' portrayal depicts indigenous populations as in danger of extinction, through poverty, self-extermination by alcoholism or other behaviours related to an inability to deal with modernity, or assimilation into modernity and thus the loss of authenticity. This vulnerability, this at-risk condition, validates salvage ethnography in its various iterations and, in part, also Keeney and Low's embodied participation in ritual.

"The Native (understanding that he is becoming extinct) hands over his Land, his claim to the Land, his very Indian-ness to the settler for safe-keeping. This is a fantasy that is invested in a settler futurity and dependent on the foreclosure of an Indigenous futurity" (Tuck & Yang, 2012:14).

Low's (2015) embodied contribution to Bushman studies exists within the authenticating loop and uses, in addition to fieldwork, the work of Bradford Keeney to make his deductions, taking part in Keeney's course to inform his research. Keeney's 7-month course is currently available for a membership fee of \$3,600 on the Sacred Ecstatics website. As part of this course, Keeney and his wife offer an online "*n/omastery*—a virtual monastery saturated

with n/om, the Kalahari Bushman word for the spiritual fire and vibratory, electrical life force."⁶¹ The methodologies used in *Sacred Ecstasies* are in part supported by Keeney's Bushman studies research and his status as a healer recognised by Kalahari elders who conferred on him the title "Heart of the Spears" (Keeney, 2007:10).

Read through Tuck and Yang (2012), Keeney plays out the settler move to innocence through the "adoption fantasy" in which he becomes Bushman while maintaining and even expanding, through profiting from his encounter with the community, settler power and privilege. His adoption by the 'Kalahari Bushmen' is a "mythical trump card" in the game of "settler innocence" that "spins a fantasy that an individual settler can become innocent, indeed heroic and indigenized, against a backdrop of national guilt" (15). Sherene Razack (2007) analyses Sara Ahmed's (2000) reading of the film *Dances with Wolves* in which Kevin Costner becomes 'Sioux without 'becoming' to the point of "dancing their dances". She writes:

It is the white man's agency that is the point of *Dances with Wolves*. He alone is transformed through his encounter with the Sioux, while they remain the mechanism for his transformation. He becomes the authentic knower while they remain what is to be known and consumed (379).

Low traces his theoretical ancestry to Keeney (*Heart of Spears*), Bushman Studies' very own Kevin Kostner in *Dances with Wolves*, as a source for a neurophysiological understanding and as an authenticated embodied space to follow within the 'exotic' practices of trance. Both Keeney and Low offer an interpretation of San trance as a universal biological birthright for the purposes of healing. Low states, "I attribute this phenomenon to the fact that we all have the same body and the body not only defines the nature of human sickness but is the locus and performative medium of therapeutic techniques" (2015:32).

Just as in the performance practice contexts discussed above, this foregrounding of technique is precluded by the excision of more-than-human relationality despite the re-iterated understanding within Bushman studies that Khoisan cosmology exists in relationship with Land. Low (above) makes references to how understandable it is to attribute neurophysiological experience to the supernatural, to think that a neurophysiological response is in fact something outside the individual body. Audra Simpson (2016) discusses settlement and its structure based on the eradication of indigeneity as a structure that "shapes

⁶¹ <https://sacredecstasies.com/guild/> accessed 22 October 2024

discernibility and the desire for discernibility" (188). What cannot be apprehended by the ethnographic eye is discounted because it exceeds the paradigms of ethnography.

This industry of fact-checking has created a body of ethnological knowledge that has circumscribed the Iroquois past (and present) to the domain of white prescience. As well, it has created a limited semantic and ideological space for contemporary Iroquois people to inherit. It has ignored social history, ignored (for the most part) mainstream political process, and, in so doing, ignored the bulk of Iroquois experience. When desire and fetishized authenticity set the research agenda, as it has in the case of the Iroquois literature, it places the analyst in a position of cultural appraisal (and ownership) rather than analysis (76):

In the post-performance process of writing this chapter, I came up against the circumscription that Simpson addresses and struggled to find "semantic and ideological space" to write of my experience outside of the authenticating loop and outside of an exotic, brink-of-extinction authenticity. What seemed like a throughline throughout the ethnographic literature was the insistent repudiation of Khoisan informants' accounts of intra-action with the more-than-human. Following Macharia's (2019) idea of *Frottage*, enabled a rubbing against this ethnographic refusal, like skin against rock. Through this rubbing a fissure in the edifice of Bushman Studies was revealed that became the critical aperture through which the subjects of my research-creation project could spill "between worlds, rewir(ing) brain, body and erotics" (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2002:25). I view this aperture like the eye of a spring, Mama Hettie's *Fontein se Oog*, which is also *die Waterslang's* eye, that secretes its own co-ordinates. In this aperture, this eye, Eland is remembered from a fragment.

4.4.5.1 Reinstating the Eland Spirit⁶²

The section that follows reinstates the Eland as an "Invisible Being of Metamorphosis" (following Latour, 2013) by following firstly Garuba's ideas of African animism, then parsing fragments from the canon of Bushman studies, problematised in this study but nonetheless part of the ecology that constitutes knowledge making around the Eland. The Bushman studies canon is then placed in a "co-compositional engagement" (2016) for somatic to semantic sense-making of the performance with Indigenous Feminism in order to arrive at the eco-erotic

⁶² Following Latour, 2007.

as an embodied "environmental mode of awareness" (2016) that remembers the Eland and Khoisan indigeneity.

Animism has functioned as the metaphoric receptacle for everything that is a negation of the modern, and the goal and structure of the African order of knowledge bequeathed by colonialism has been to *decipher* and *translate/transform* these worlds into European constructs and fit them into European theoretical models. (Garuba, 2012)⁶³

Given that the colonial order of knowledge is predicated on a rejection of the primitive, except within anthropological studies as discussed above, Garuba asks how it is possible to escape this paradigm whilst stuck in the language and paradigm of modernity. Garuba cautions against a linear temporality in which New Animism emerges from modernity, much like scientific modernity was seen as an evolution from the primitive state of animism in a narrative of Western progression, where the principal subject remains the ever-advancing modern Self. He suggests instead that animist knowledges are an "always already recognized coeval presence in the lifeworlds of those conscripted into modernity". Recognising that Land and life are co-constitutive in their animacy, it becomes clear that the anthropological re-interpretation of what Khoisan informants say to be true about the Land and its beings is an epistemicide that permits a cultural, spiritual and geological/corporeal extractivism – an ethico-onto-epistemicide, the survivance of which requires Garuba's (2012) new vocabularies of re-enchantment.

4.4.5.2 Therianthropy: Multimodal Fluidities

"Beings that combine human and nonhuman features", says Pieter Jolly (2002) of Therianthropes. He goes on to consider four interpretations of what these beings encountered in rock paintings symbolise: "animal-masked/costumed shamans, shamans transformed into animals or other creatures while in altered states, the spirits of dead shamans and the human-animal beings of San myth" (2002:85). Mathias Gunther's (2020) more contemporary contribution to the therianthropic discussion, forms part of what Verbuyst terms "the decolonial

⁶³ E-flux journal, 2012: issue #36: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61249/on-animism-modernity-colonialism-and-the-african-order-of-knowledge-provisional-reflections/> accessed 5 November 2023.

turn in Bushman studies" (2023)⁶⁴ that attempts to bridge the subfields of 'Bushman studies' and New Animism or the Anthropology of Ontology (2020:vii), which takes cognisance of the recent paradigm shift to a relational epistemology rather than the "old" evolutionary perspective. Referencing a wide array of human-animal hybrid beings, Guenther asserts that metamorphosis and indeed therianthropy exists "within the realm of the conceivable and the possible, existentially and epistemologically" (2020:56). Evidentially based in the Khoisan Rosetta Stone of the Bleek and Lloyd archive, he reads the fluid porosity between human and animal, plants, more-than-human beings and time as a phenomenological continuum or spectrum of embodied experience, where mimesis is not disputed as 'fakery' but seen as a movement towards a more complete metamorphosis. Guenther posits hunting as the primary driving force for human-animal fluidity.

In an earlier example, Parkington (2003) expounds on therianthropy, especially the Eland, through categorisation, distinctions and binaries; sacred (as in trance) and carnal (sex and food), men (for whom hunting is the only "profession") and women (for whom childbirth is the only "profession"), and the boundary of human and animal, which he sees as the "central issue in understanding southern African rock paintings and engravings" (2003:135). For Parkington, the Eland, as the hunted animal par excellence, symbolises the conflicts between these binary states, with the Eland therianthrope as an expression of the difficulty in reconciling boundary conflicts. In an example of Simpson's 'authenticating loop', Parkington states:

The evidence we have comes from nineteenth-century accounts of /Xam San thoughts from the Karoo as recorded by Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek (Bleek, 1924; 1931; 1932a,b,c; 1933a,b; 1935; 1936; Lewis-Williams, 2000; Lloyd, 1911), more isolated fragments from the Drakensberg mountains (Orpen, 1874), Namibia (Guenther, 1986; Thomas, 1950) and the northwest Cape (Von Wielligh, 1921) and from twentieth century ethnographic observations of Kalahari San hunter-gatherers (for example, Biesele, 1993; Guenther, 1986; 1999; Lee, 1979; Marshall, 1976; Silberbauer, 1981) (2003:136).

Parkington's dichotomy between sex and other human activities possibly has its foundations in the sanitised portrayal of Khoisan as a legacy, beginning with Bleek and Lloyd's Victorian depiction of innocent child-like spiritual beings or as Phillip Tobias says (in Jenkins,

⁶⁴ CRITICAL ARTS2023, VOL. 37, NO. 5, 40–56 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2024.2311700> Accessed 15 May 2024.

2010:26), "Peter Pans' of humanity they have been called, and well do these baby-faced, pygmoid, yellow-skinned huntsmen deserve the title".

Wittenberg (2012) compares this Bleek and Lloyd depiction of innocence to stories collected by Leonhard Shultze 50 years later from Khoi informants in Namaqualand and Namibia. He suggests that Bleek and Lloyd's Victorian excision of the libidinal, scatological and satirical in Khoisan stories did more than just disallow Khoisan voices from self-representation, but also laid the foundation for a "restrictive cultural politics" that endures in the South African imaginary still. In much the same vein as Khoisan representation is the contemporary Bushman figure in the South African coat of arms, whose original erect phallus, as seen in the Linton Panel of the Iziko National Museum, Cape Town, was photoshopped out for the coat of arms. Bleek, too, made "a few slight omissions and alterations of what would otherwise have been *too naked* for the English eye", as he states in the preface to *Reynard the Fox*, which Wittenberg examines.

Implicated in this boundaried ordering that excises the erotic in the Khoisan imaginary is an excision of the erotic as a connection to Land. The contention of this thesis is that it is not so much that the Khoisan imagination animates the Land and the more-than-human beings inhabiting it, but that the Land IS animate, and it is erotic, and the Khoisan imagination exists as a part of that. Instead of ordering categories or taxonomies that distinguish the borders of men, women, animal, this thesis posits Nelson's 'contact zone' as a research site of "'getting dirty"—a messy, visceral, eco-erotic boundary-crossing entanglement of difference. That is also required to "engender empathy and kinship and a lived environmental ethic" (2017:232).

In the contact zone, we can be polymorphous and pansexual, marrying all manner of dassie or porcupine or tree without infantilising colonial erotic excision or Christian burdens of shame. We can flirt with an Eland who may actually flirt back. Following Nelson (2017), these carnal contacts are pansexual stories that advance a "transhuman concept of nationhood" cemented through intimacy.

Joanne Barker's (2019) *"Water as analytic of indigenous Feminism"* views water's ability to instruct and (in)form, to hold memory and change state as a capacity enabling it to "cross-multiple kinds of boundaries between beings and between seen and other-than-seen worlds" (2019:5). Lewis-Williams (2015) describes the connection between the Eland and the waterhole, through which it is able to journey along a three-tiered axis mundi from the realm of the dead below, the central human realm and the realm of the gods above. According to San cosmology, the Eland is born from !Kaggen's sandal thrown into a watering hole, attesting, as Lewis-Williams (2015:88-9) asserts, to the San belief that beings are able to reassemble themselves from a fragment into a whole. For Khoisan Revivalism, drawing on this more-than-

human imaginary and knowledge production is more than 'strategic essentialism'; it becomes an act of "strategic audacity" (Chao & Enari, 2021) that helps us to understand how an erased culture can be reconstituted from fragments and used to retrieve the losses of colonisation.

The mythical Eland spirit's power is based on its polysemic embodied ambiguity. In purely physical terms, the fact that the male contains more fat, a quality commonly associated with femaleness, makes the Eland gender fluid as recognised in Bushman Studies with Lewis-Williams describing the Eland's "somewhat androgynous" (2015:90-1) nature. The scent of Eland fat, famously emitting a sweet potency associated with supernatural power (2015:96) is also a state-shifting material in that (like water) it moves from liquid to solid (Low, 2012:91). As my journal entries in the Performance section demonstrate, the fat of the Eland is a transport, it's substance able to move bodies between worlds. The same fat is also thought to derive from the other metamorphic tutelary being, the snake, who participates in the polysemy of gender mixing, fecundity, sensuality and water. This migration of essence, fat, from the snake, makes the Eland also species-fluid. Low (2012:89) relates the account of a Ju|'hoansi woman, Tixai, who explains that the Eland derives its fat from the python, carried on the wind – they share fat. Lewis-Williams recognises the Eland as the "foundation for San contact with the supernatural" (Lewis-Williams 1981; 1997 in Lewis-Williams, 2015:90-91), which he attributes to the polysemic proliferation of potencies. It is my opinion, however, that the Eland is foundational to contact with other places and other times as a fact of the Eland's materiality, its agential reality, its metamorphic existence, its more-than-human beingness.

Assembled from a fragment like bone or hide or preferably fat, welling up from that locus of multiple boundary crossings – water – the Eland spirit is a queerly radiant, tutelary being of passage between states: male and female, life and death, human and more-than-human, the subterranean, the gods and everyday life, creation time, ancestor time and the present. It stands at boundaries and invites us across, to dance in Nelson's fecund and funky 'contact zone'. I view this trans mode of being as a Queer Ecological Ontology.

4.4.6 Un-settling Time

Primal time or Creation time is where the Eland spirit dwells; it is where we journey to meet with them, because as Lewis-Williams notes, "The Eland myths have all the features of Primal time" (2015:82), and in it, we can encounter what Lewis-Williams (2015) calls beings of the First Order. Primal time or First Order, according to Lewis-Williams (2015:81), is a time that precedes humanity, when animals could become people and people could become animals. This time is removed from the present and accessed through myth and trance, because primal

time 'spills' over into present time. In this study, the method for temporal disruption is the body, and the section that follows leans in to Mishuana Goeman's (in Barker, 2017) connection between an eco-erotic unsettling of the patriarchal concept of 'original sin' and a decolonial re-inscription of time and space.

By disrupting the linear and patriarchal narrative of original sin that begins with knowledge produced from her embodiment, a Native feminist praxis can begin to tackle the cycles of destruction or even to dismantle the narrative that colonisation, or conquest, is complete. Creation is not a linear progression, but it is foundational to settler logics (Goeman in Barker, 2017:117).

Goeman (2017) weaves spatial injustice outward in a connected fashion from violence against women's bodies, to family, community and geography. She asserts that place and scale become disconnected and isolated through colonial spatial control that demarcates differences in scale of value in what she terms a 'freezing' of scale. This distances Indigenous bodies from the Land or place that constitutes their sense of being. Goeman (2017:102) suggests thinking of the body as a geography within scales of interconnected geographies, remarking that the language used to occupy and settle Land and displace indigenous bodies is often temporal in that it proposes 'progress' or evolution for populations. Goeman (2017:115) proposes the 'body as a meeting place' where overlapping scales of time, place, memory, ancestor, community, Land, and water connect. This echoes Gogo Rutendo Ngara's formulation of extended Ubuntu, in which *Kintu*, *Muntu*, *Hantu* and *Bintu* comprise an interconnected relational cosmos. Drawing from Ngara's *Hantu* -the entanglement of space and time, it becomes possible to step out of the temporal binary with Garuba (2012) and to sit with time as a relation within an extended circle of interconnected beings. To view space-time as a relation, albeit of a radically different ontology, on which existence is as dependent as it is on water, air, fire, and plants, allows for a de-mechanisation of physical principles or an 'unfreezing' of scales. This state shift from frozen to flowing, is the power of liquidity that in *Kaaimanblom*, allows animist figures from the precolonial past to well up and flood 'the bivalve of the postcolonial' as Raissa De Smet Trumbull (2013) suggests, so that they are not merely themes or tropes but become or are acknowledged to be "figures with a job to do, as modes of dissolving hardened structure, and thereby allowing alternate forces and alternate narratives to emerge" (2013:11). De Smet Trumbull (2013) is speaking specifically of *Nyai Loro Kidul*, the Javanese Naga goddess of the South Sea, an 'invisible being of metamorphosis' as Latour (2013) would call her, with a radically different ontology (Ram, 2013) to the human but with serpentine resemblances with die *Waterslang* and therianthropic, like the Eland spirit. The Javanese Naga goddess, however, is very present in Javanese culture, whereas the Eland Spirit has been relegated to the peripheries of time and space, following the same settler

colonial extinction trajectory that has erased Khoisan identity and knowledge production, of which the Eland is an intrinsic part. This places the Eland Spirit on Nelson's (2017) critically endangered species list as a victim of colonial erasure and 'monocultures of the mind'. In my opinion, the Eland Spirit, as a being of creation time allied with water and with the Serpent, is, as Nelson asserts (2017:245), vital to 'Indigenous cultural health, resilience, general cognitive diversity as well as the maintenance of sacred relationships between humans, land and water.' Through an eco-erotic engagement with space and time in the boundary-crossing medium of water, this being, frozen in the permafrost of the anthropological canon, was able not just to thaw but to well up and overflow into new narratives. Like the engagement with *Nyai Loro Kidul*, Javanese goddess of the South Sea, the engagement with the Eland was sensual, fecund, voluptuous – the erotic modes in which water communicates through human bodies. For Goeman (117), the recognition of the relationship with the more-than-human in the Land, and the rippling out of this on all scales, challenges the colonial narrative of separation of human from Land that begins with the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Here I return to Wynter's (2015) second set of instructions, where original sin, Darwinian science and economic scarcity merge in a particularly lethal colonial cognitive snare that shapes our neurobiology and relationships with the world. An eco-erotic relational entanglement proposes a re-storying or re-wiring of this macro-myth to one of imaginative relational fecundity; implicated in this is a re-storying of linear time.

To travel with the Eland to creation time at ever more intimate scales of proximity until we occupied the same skin was to travel to creation time and participate in re-creation. Learning from the more-than-human to use the erotic to challenge scales of separation across time is learning to "know the maps inside ourselves, the cycles of creation and re-creation, life and death." (Goeman in Barker, 2017:117)

Travelling in creation time through the body with the Eland as a tutelary being allowed a re-creation of a long-severed relationship between the Land, the human and the more-than-human kin. Because, as Yunkaporta reminds us, "Creation time isn't a 'long, long ago' event, because creation is still unfolding now, and will continue to if we know how to know it" (2019:66).

4.4.7 Re-indigenisation: Not Extinct

What this offered to processes of decolonisation and Khoisan re-indigenisation was the possibility of embodied erotic retrieval of a relationship that had been colonially severed, disavowed and demonised; and the reinstatement of a being presumed extinct. Both of these

offers have the potential to revitalise "Indigenous peoples' long-term, ancestral connections to specific places and particular more-than-human others" (Nelson in Barker, 2017:231) in a manner that is liberatory, joyful and sensuous. The pansexual carnality of the encounter speaks to the original impulse to create a work on femme erotic autonomy and yielded an understanding of a shameless, agential use of the erotic (following Audre Lorde) to create kinship that exists in opposition to colonial, patriarchal control of sexuality. *Kaaimanblom* discovered a potency with which to enter into the relational field with the more-than-human, in the process co-producing new embodied modes of existence and knowledge made possible by the generous, generative queerness of the Eland Spirit. If our bodies are able to re-member the Eland from a fragment, what else might we retrieve across the colonial cleave?

I am still struggling to find words to express this encounter and the love I feel for the being I encountered. It goes beyond the cultivation of intimacy as a conservation strategy, beyond radical polysemy, queering time, gender and species. It is joyous like the sea in summer, like the scent of fynbos in the midday heat, round and fat and sexy and cold to the bone, like wind through grass and a lover's whispered breath in your ear. And this too is decolonial Indigenous revival.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research-creation thesis set out to follow and prove the uncanny liquid survivance of the mythic Khoisan *Waterslang* as an embodied, decolonial force. It proposed a mode of relational attending to and with body and Land, which it viewed as eco-erotic. Through performance and research as ceremony, it traversed time to re-render ancestral relations and activate land-based knowledges in processes that challenged colonial cleaves and disciplinary boundaries. Active, agential and fluid, the more-than-human beings with which it engaged demanded forms of veridiction that rubbed up against identarian modes of Revivalism (Chapter 2), respectability politics (Chapter 3) and the Bushman Rosetta Stone (Chapter 4). This eco-erotic *Frottage* (*Macharia*) forced reckonings with the ground, water and spectrality across various registers.

With the performing body at its limits, it offered sensational overwhelm and released self-possession to become hospitable for other modes of thinking and being to flow through. Through this labour, it instantiates Beings of Metamorphosis (Latour) as "figures with a job to do, as modes of dissolving hardened structure, and thereby allowing alternate forces and alternate narratives to emerge" (De Smet, 2013:11).

Journeying through the grounded histories of Khoisan genocide and its afterlife in Chapter 2, it plays in Chapter 3 with race, sex, violence and power to loosen the grip of colonial bio-mythoi and release property to Land. In the resultant un-settled state, it cultivates an eco-erotic hospitality to "spirit-possessed dispossession beyond capitalist logics of propertied self-possession" (Kameron-Carter in Lethabo King et al., 2020:160).

Following a hydromythic more-than-human being, revealed that the slippery, metamorphic indeterminacy of this figure complicated the already unstable proposition of Live Art as research practice, as *die Waterslang* insisted on its creaturely right to opacity (Glissant, 1997). Instead, it left stories and rituals as secretions which by their fluid nature exceeded any definitive grasp but yielded an aperture, an opening out into multiple relational possibilities with human, more-than-human and time itself. One of the main ways it traversed this terrain was through the use of embodied indigenous southern African techniques of trance, *!kauken* or *ukutyityimba*. The trembling body opening out to co-constituted relationalities, instantiates a trembling mode of thinking. The arrival at this trembling node of emergence reveals Glissant (1997) as a continual interlocutor in this research-creation project. Like Glissant (2021), "I had to find trembling thinking by myself, alone — if you are to find *tremblement*, you have to find it

by yourself, because a system of interdependence is conceivable only if you are really independent in your own mind".

With each performance and chapter, a confrontation with my own dominant identitarian modes arose as I was caught short at the fracturing of intentionality by the unpredicted intrusion of the other-than-human that I invited in, but was still unprepared to encounter at such scale and force. If this research project was, as it purports to be, ceremony (Wilson, 2008), it would appear that I spent these years under the water, schooled by an Aquatic more-than-human being, and insofar as I was looking into it, it too was looking into me, with eyes of springs and fountains that opened, winked, blinked and, as reported in Chapter 2, wept inside my body. At the time of writing, I do not yet know if I will emerge with gifts like Magrieta Mouton did, but my eyes have changed through prolonged submersion to emerge trembling with the vibrant materiality of co-becoming Land.

When I began conceptualising this study, I proposed to ground this spectrality in the flesh of feminist embodiment enlivened by 'performance practice'; but what this research-creation project has made clear, however, is that flesh is not as stable and solidly reliable as initially assumed. In fact, the process has revealed that far from being the ground of identity, bodies are so complexly interwoven in their eco-erotic co-becoming that they cannot but refuse identitarianism. This complicates Khoisan identity politics within an Indigenous Revival movement that is already assumed negligible within the contemporary South African settler colonial landscape. Unable to shore up definition, what the proposition of eco-erotic co-production of knowledge in the performance events offers to Khoisan indigeneity instead are possible conditions for new relational ecologies and registers that exist outside of what dominant modes take "for granted in the name of neurotypicality, in the name of volition, of intentionality, of agency" (Manning, 2016:21).

That this gesture of opening out comes to Khoisan indigeneity through *die Waterslang*, a figure spectrally present in global Indigenous hydromyths, at once supports claims to that indigeneity and also asks more of it. If indigeneity is to be found in kinship with Land in ways that exceed settler colonial or capitalist logics, then that relationship requires filial obligations that are also in excess of settler colonial logics; not only in terms of conservancy but also as a re-wired mode of thinking, acting and relating.

Indigenous Land acknowledgements are not a one-way flow. They require spirited dispossession of propertied capitalist logics, the recognition of Land and the more-than-human as agential and, as this thesis demonstrates, the desire to cultivate emergent intimacies with our more-than-human kin in ways that destabilise us and exceed our grasp.

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