

A Publication  
of the 2020  
Inward Outward  
Symposium

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Critical Archival  
Engagements with  
Sounds and Films  
of Coloniality

# ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Inward Outward is a project initiated between the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) and the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, and is supported by the Research Center for Material Culture (RCMC). This publication of the first edition of the Inward Outward symposium is supported by all three of these institutions.

The Inward Outward programming committee and editorial team of this publication would like to give their deepest gratitude to all presenters and moderators of the symposium and those who contributed to this publication:

Samuel Baumgartner, Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken, Marieke Bloembergen, Sadiyah Boonstra, Mette Charis Buchman, Andrea Zarza Canova, Brecht Declercq, Moira van Dijk, Mitchell Esajas, Giovanna Fossati, David Frohnepfel, Tao Leigh Goffe, Charissa Granger, Matthias De Groof, Clemens Gütl, Gerda Jansen Hendriks, Wigbertson Julian Isenia, Sebastian Jackson, Charles Jeurgens, Nancy Jouwe, Michael Karabinos, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, Rizki Lazuardi, Sri Margana, Jonas Van Mulder, Leila Musson, Hetty Naaijkens-Retel Helmrich, Jeftha Pattikawa, Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi, Sim Chi Yin, Eliza Steinbock, Deborah Thomas, Eef Vermeij, Gloria Wekker, and meLê Yamomo.

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This collection of works is published by Inward Outward, Hilversum, the Netherlands, 2020.

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Cite as: Miles, Rachel S., Alana Osbourne, Eleni Tzialli & Esther Captain, editors. *Inward Outward, Critical Archival Engagements with Sounds and Films of Coloniality: A Publication of the 2020 Inward Outward Symposium*. Hilversum, Inward Outward, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18146/inout2020> ↗

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# INTRODUCTION

On the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, the first edition of the Inward Outward symposium took place at the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision. Initiated between the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) and Sound and Vision, and with the support of the Research Center for Material Culture (RCMC), Inward Outward brought together archival practitioners, artists, academics, and researchers to explore the status of moving image and sound archives as they intertwine with questions of coloniality, identity and race.

There is something specific to sound and moving images as they hold a particular type of textured representation that uniquely captures the visual and aural qualities of who or what is being recorded. The experience of such resources—their offering a unique closeness with that which is recorded—imbues them with a particular power. Taking this materiality as a point of departure, the symposium reflected on the work of archives, and our work as archival practitioners, scholars, artists, filmmakers, and audio producers, when contending with sounds and images created in a context of coloniality.

The title of the symposium and of this publication—Inward Outward—evokes a sense of both movement and fixedness. It alludes to the ebb and flow of memory but also to the boundaries that determine who is included or excluded from the stories we tell ourselves about our past and contemporary colonial histories. It gestures to the materials that are brought in or left out of archival collections, and to the responsibilities archival institutions hold in their conversations with themselves and with the public. Using a critical archival approach as a base, the symposium provided a platform through which to explore

what “decolonizing” the sound and moving image archive—within and beyond the walls of established institutions—might look like. Such an approach entailed critically exploring the role of archives in knowledge production and investigating how archives, including their everyday archival tasks, play an active role in proliferating socio-political structures of power.

To continue the dialogues started during the two-day conference, *Inward Outward* is growing beyond the frame of a one-off gathering: through this publication, and a range of forthcoming events, we aim to provide a liminal space and a continuous conversation around issues of audiovisual representation, archiving, and coloniality. In probing the different processes involved in the creation, management, and collection of these materials in order to unpack heritage configurations that are imbued with questions of power and violence, we hope to generate new avenues for reflection, and different forms of knowledge, that may hold the power to destabilize the gaze and auditory afterlives of coloniality.

This publication collects different contributions from the speakers of *Inward Outward* that reiterate and reflect on the presentations that took place during the symposium; they interrogate how we might situate ourselves in relation to the materials we work with, and the locations we work from. The essays gathered in this publication thus continue some of the significant conversation threads started at *Sound and Vision*, but are by no means exhaustive of the rich exchanges that took place during the event or in the days that followed.

This collection was assembled through an invitation to all presenters of *Inward Outward* to contribute. While one approach would have been to divide the sixteen received pieces into thematic sections, we felt a more open structure spoke to the ways in which the different questions, perspectives, and critiques raised in the texts are thematically enmeshed with one another. The contributions found here offer a mix of different writing approaches and styles, including essays, reflections, and more sonic textual pieces. As a project that explores sound and moving image materials, you will notice that a number of the contributions have “Open Video” or “Play Track” buttons—these will direct you to various platforms online in which you can watch and/or listen to the materials shared.

In the table of contents we’ve offered a number of key terms alongside each entry to help navigate the works found here. You are invited to enter the publication by either going down the path of the long (and ongoing) conversation, working your way through text by text, or to pick and choose the works you are most drawn to by key terms.

The publication opens with an exploration of the archived life of Betty Paërl. Through their attempt to reconcile the gap between race, sexuality, colonial history, and the normative politics of archiving, [Wigbertson Julian Isenia](#) and [Eliza Steinbock](#) offer a reflection on the use of terminology related to the decolonial during the symposium.

[Sebastian Jackson](#) explores different ways in which people actively unmake social distinctions and blur racial boundaries in South Africa, and how they participate in the decolonization of intimacy in the contemporary moment.

[Matthias De Groof](#) adapts a text from his presentation on his documentary film project *Palimpsest of the Africa Museum*, that chronicles the renovation of the Africa-Museum in Belgium, seeing the renovation as a failed act of decolonization, and the filmmaking process as the creation of a counter-archive.

[David Fronhaphel](#) views “queer forgetfulness,” applied to archives and to dominant stories, as a productive way to create new affective breathing spaces that refuse to partake in structures of power.

[Charissa Granger](#) looks at her confrontation with the silences in Afro-Curaçaoan archives and explores how in working within this silence, in occupying it, we can imagine, and make our own narratives.

[Clemens Gütl](#) considers methodological approaches to historical sound recordings from Africa in the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna.

[Andrea Zarza Canova](#), a curator in the World and Traditional Music section within the sound archive at the British Library, reflects on the Museum Affordances project and explores opening materials to experimental and creative reworkings as a tentative pathway to decolonization.

Jonas van Mulder and Brecht Declercq delve into the *White Father's Society* of the Missionaries of Africa film collection to ask if, and how, archival practices and restitution policies can avoid reproducing the paternalistic historical dynamics that informed their making.

Moira van Dijk, Leila Musson, and Eef Vermeij ask how conversations on institutionalized archival practices that uphold colonial, imperial, and discriminatory practices *should* affect the International Institute of Social History's collection management and acquisition policies.

Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi, part of an independent curatorial project called *Views of the Ottoman Empire*, researches and collects archival footage from the former Ottoman territories. Using several examples, she shows us how archival attempts at organizing and describing collections often confound and do injustice to their various potential meanings and historical contexts.

Gerda Jansen Hendriks analyzes Dutch newsreels that were created in colonial Indonesia as part of Dutch-Indonesia shared heritage, asking "what is the value of these newsreels" and for whom?

Jeftha Pattikawa explores the importance of self-representation and community archives in retelling and complicating the power dynamics that inform the stories we tell about Moluccans in the Netherlands.

Tao Leigh Goffe reflects on intimacy and erotic power in the space of the colonial archive, explored through her creative practice as a PhDJ and by juxtaposing images of the archive with images and soundtracks of contemporary artists and musicians.

Deborah Thomas, who was a keynote speaker of the symposium, offers a reflection on her collaborative multi-modal and multi-dimensional project *Tivoli Stories*, exploring the potential for the archives they've

assembled in the project to carry affective registers that animate both individual and collective acts of witnessing violence.

Sadiah Boonstra's contribution is a reflection on the first day of the symposium, underlining what she sees as a continued struggle for change.

Esther Captain's text reflects on the second day of the symposium, exploring questions of positionality, accountability, and responsibility towards audiovisual archives.

As Esther Captain notes in her reflection, which in tandem with Sadiah Boonstra's thoughts are included as a conclusion to this publication, we come from different spaces and work at different paces, making conversation between us often fragmented. The "archive" (physically, conceptually and emotionally) has a different standing for an archival practitioner than it does for an academic, artist or activist (professional "lanes" that are often not so clear-cut), and, as Wigbertson Julian Isenia and Eliza Steinbock highlight, terms such as "decolonization" are leveraged and work to differing ends by those who employ them. Inward Outward wants to foster space for these variegated spaces and paces to intertwine, and for critical dialogue and practices to emerge. In reading this publication you are invited to travel across different media and professional grappling with the themes that animated the symposium. Collectively, they offer the kaleidoscopic commencements of a conversation we are committed to keep going.

If you have any thoughts or reflections in reading this publication we invite you to get in touch with us at:  
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— *Inward Outward 2020 Programming & Editorial Team*

*Rachel Somers Miles, Alana Osbourne, Eleni Tzialli & Esther Captain*



# Magical Terms: On Defining and Positioning the “Decolonial” and “Queer” in Archival Practices

WIGBERTSON JULIAN ISENIA  
(University of Amsterdam - UvA/  
Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis)

ELIZA STEINBOCK  
(Leiden University Centre for the Arts  
in Society)

Collection

Reimagining the Archive

Terminology

During the conference, we were moved to see the deep and sometimes shallow use of the term decolonization. The conference asked this guiding question that illustrates the importance of *effort*, of labor in the action of decolonizing: “What kinds of (new) models and methods exist that seek to question archival practices in an effort to ‘decolonize’ the archive?” For our contribution, we offer a short reflection on the use of terminology related to the decolonial. For us, the effect to decolonize the archive—or any other domain—harkens back to how the efforts to “queer” tended to expand rather than narrow down accompanying methods. It strikes us that to decolonize, like queering, can become used as a “magical term” that has a particular power when invoked by a researcher: it makes the work called for or carried out seem relevant and necessary. At the same time, these concepts often go undefined, and therefore risk being emptied out of meaning and actual critical action. We would like to focus on how concepts, practices, and methods require the trouble of being parsed and reflected on, even when—especially when—the work is tough and troubling.

In positioning our response in this way, we would like to elaborate on the question we asked of ourselves when researching for our presentation: what is the importance of positionality in queer and decolonial practices? To the question, *does one’s contemporary identity-based socio-political position offer a lens through which to research archival materials?*, we can answer a resounding yes. Yet, the “elephant in the room” problem is often methodologically how to account for these differences in positioning. Further, in working together as two differently positioned researchers, we are also curious how one might try to overcome

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**WIGBERTSON JULIAN ISENIA** is a PhD candidate of cultural analysis at the University of Amsterdam. He co-edited the special issue “Sexual politics between the Netherlands and the Caribbean: Imperial entanglements and archival desires” (*Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 2019). His latest article “Looking for Kambrada” received an honorable mention for the Gregory Sprague Prize.

the gap between one’s race, colonial history, and sexuality that might be seen as at odds with or conforming to normative politics and archival practices. Finally, in closing, we will gesture to how Betty Paërl, and our attempt to research her life, scattered among several specialized archives, helps us to reflect on the triangle of positionality formed between researcher-archive-collaborator.

### 1. Magical Terms

Magical thinking is when one believes that one’s own thoughts and desires can influence the world. Magical thinking might be considered committed by researchers who in merely citing an on-trend concept like queer or decolonial and believe that it does the work of “queering” or “decolonizing.” We gesture to the history of how unmarked or undefined terms like “sexuality” or “human,” or “human sexuality” for that matter, would be implicitly standing for heterosexuality or white man if left unscrutinized by researchers. The choice might be to either not say the term and do the work, or invoke the term as a full-fledged concept with its own histories and signatures, that is, as dated and signed by certain users/theorists. For us, the worst-case scenario is to use the term so lightly or so loosely that the only effect is you feel you can pat yourself on the back for knowing it is on-trend and “believing” that you have done enough just saying it out loud.

So, by now you might be wondering, what do *you* mean by decolonial? This question can be raised with a number of different tones: is it an attack or an ask for clarification? Terms are rarely understood in the same way since each discipline and even within disciplines, various speakers add nuance and layers of analysis to every concept. What might be supposedly obvious to some will not be obvious to all. The question calls for the researcher to be clear about the meaning and what the term actually involves, i.e. the way it relates to what the archival researchers think that they are doing.

We can turn to the discussion about decolonizing and engage with it on the macro level and find micro examples. For instance, Walter Dignolo insists on the decolonial option, as the ability to delink from the colonial mentality and knowledge systems (“coloniality”) and relink to other knowledge systems that are suppressed or under erasure. How does the archive you work with organize and elevate knowledge systems that privilege some forms of knowledge while eliding others? How might your research questions be orientated towards or radiating from coloniality? Where can you delink, and what would you relink to in an act of epistemic disobedience? More provocatively, Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang might ask, can we even decolonize

the master's house? Indeed, colonial archives, physical or imagined repositories where certain colonized people were studied, catalogued and regulated are precisely the sites of imperial power that people who invoke the term "decolonization" wish to critique. Tuck and Yang point us to the way "decolonization" has been used metaphorically (as in efforts to diversify archival materials) that fails to engage the material process of decolonization (as in the repatriation of Indigenous land and life).

## 2. Positionality

A related issue is the ways in which researchers can neglect positionality as a vital step in parsing their avowed use of concepts and framing their analysis of materials with those concepts.

Here we think of a positionality triangle that is key to acknowledging the various acts of epistemic violence when speaking on behalf of historical personages or events. The researcher forms a triangle with the archive and with their collaborators, such as those who assist and aid the researcher like the keeper of the collection, head of an archive, curator, librarian, actual historian, or other researchers. In terms of materials, the researcher might also be said to "collaborate" or think together with them, as "thinking objects."

As a Black, queer non-binary and male presenting person born in Curaçao, Wigbertson Julian grew increasingly more interested in finding instances where the histories of queer individuals and groups from the postcolonial Dutch territories interlaced. As a white, non-binary queer person based in the Netherlands (born in the U.S.), Eliza was eager to know what role did trans and non-binary persons play in these histories? What kinds of alliances were made, and solidarity practiced? When Wigbertson Julian chanced upon a figure, the white (we later found out) transgender woman Betty Paërl, who seemingly was active in these histories, we sought to combine our personal positionalities with the method of decolonization and the politics of transing. Our combined research agenda was to compare and perhaps find links between her earlier work, which was critical of the neo-colonial relationship between the postcolonial territories and the Netherlands, to her public writings on gender transition, and her later work as an SM dominatrix and sex-positive activist. And if we examine her dual gender/sexuality and anti-colonial activism in an analytical framework, how should this be done and why?

## 3. Betty Paërl

Our joint research venture led us to reflect on these questions—of magical terms and pauses for clarification, of positionality and the need to consider one's practice. Namely, the life's

work of Dr. Betty Paërl (1936–present) was at the cross point of at least three different vectors of activism and thinking: the liberation of sex/gender, sexuality, and former colonies, and these together with the collaboration with diverse groups and her partners. For example, she became an active member of the Suriname Committee, which was founded in 1970 by Surinamese and Dutch people in the Netherlands to promote solidarity with the Surinamese and Antillean people at home and abroad.

With her then-wife, Hetty Paërl, she made three political documentaries in 1973. Their starting point was the social engagement of the Surinamese committee with the workers on the Mariënborg sugar plantation and with the Maroons living in the Brokopondo district. It was the result of around three months' travel. They shot the films on 8mm, which required a double recording system. We think it significant that Paërl handled the Super 8 camera while her then-wife Hetty recorded the sound. Whereas working across different archives emphasizes the researcher who must see in stereoscope, that is, with two images that blend to generate a 3D view, their making of an 8mm audiovisual film brings out the importance of creative, political, and technical collaboration to create complex insights into the workings of neo-colonialism. Their duo-collaboration and camaraderie on the films also translated into the books written by Paërl. Betty wrote the texts while Hetty took charge of the illustrations. The illustrations, which also served as pamphlets and posters, summarize the grotesqueness and absurdity of the neo-colonialism of these Dutch companies, and their cartoonish bosses.

Paërl obtained a PhD in mathematics in 1968 and used the mathematical modeling of "catastrophe" to frame her life experience: a small difference in behavior, given social polarization of gender, can have big consequences, as seen in the clip of her on the following page on NPS' *Urbania* from 2001. Her example, and likely her own experience, is that a presumed man wearing lipstick can be hounded by colleagues, lose her wife, and be ripped from her child.

Following her social, legal, and medical gender transition, Paërl left working at the University of Amsterdam in 1988 as a math teacher and found intellectual stimulation in the dungeon. As a professional SM dominatrix and journalist, she made a career enacting and analyzing power exchanges. She was a journalist for the BDSM magazine for lesbian and bisexual women *Slechte Meiden* (1983–1990), the magazine of the national LGBT organization COC, *SEK* (1983–1987), the Dutch lesbian magazine *Diva* (1985), and the magazine of the lesbian SM group *Wild Side* (1993–1994).



Betty Paërl explains the mathematical modeling of “catastrophe.” (Source: *Urbania: Een Stadstriptiek*. NPS. 6 Nov. 2001. Television.)

[Open Video ↗](#)

So, our investment has also been to locate Betty’s work in various elsewheres and to make the connections that might not seem apparent at first. We refused to stop at the easy station of perceiving her as a transgender woman, but also as SM dominatrix who engaged with feminism and lesbian politics, or only as a white (passing) man/later trans woman who actively engaged in the liberation of Suriname and the empowerment of Suriname’s workers. Refusing to use magic words, then, we aim to analyze the various sites of struggle, located in different archives across different periods—so as to describe her to be as three-dimensional as possible. This would bring about thinking of history, her history and the history of the struggles she was involved in, as more than a single focus on queerness or decoloniality.

We offer these thoughts to you in homage to her, to honor her multi-positional activism. But also, because we experienced the direct, caught-in-the-act-of-researching need to complicate these power dynamics of being siloed into telling single stories based on practices of “single-focused archiving” that divided her history across specialized on-site archives.

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# Decolonizing Archives in the Digital Age

SEBASTIAN JACKSON  
(Harvard University)

Intimacy

Reimagining the Archive

Terminology

Decolonization, according to Gĩkũyũ essayist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, is a project of decentering Europe in relation to the rest of the world, and of recentering the myriad ways of being human which were marginalized under the political, economic, and cultural hegemony of European modernity (Mbembe). Decolonization is also about disputing, disrupting, and dispensing with the specious assumption that European (i.e. white) and masculinist epistemologies—or regimes of knowledge and modes of reasoning—stand in for universal, objective “Truths.” That is, truths about the human condition, and about the ontological realities of the cosmos more generally. Epistemic decolonization was not realized with the formal independence of the colonized world during the second half of the twentieth century, and the afterlives of its racist absurdities and violent contradictions remain yet unresolved. The struggle for the decolonization of knowledge, too, is ongoing. South Africa, which did not achieve democratic emancipation from white minority rule until the early 1990s, has only recently begun to take on the monumental task of decentering the symbolic power of whiteness, which remains deeply embedded in public spaces, institutions, and culture. Yet, there has also been a concerted effort to “recenter Africa” in public culture (Mbembe). In recent years, student protests have begun to transform university campuses—bastions of whiteness, centers for the production of colonial knowledge. They have torn down old monuments and erected new icons in the wake of the [#RhodesMustFall](#) movement; they have insisted on providing impoverished African students access to [affordable education](#); and, they argued forcefully for the [diversification](#) (or Africanization) of curricula, administrators, academic faculty and staff, and the [languages of instruction](#).

The decentering of whiteness in post-apartheid society requires a thorough reexamination of history and collective memory, for it is precisely through willful forgetting and denial, cultural amnesia or aphasia, and assumptions of innocence that colonial forms of whiteness continue to entrench themselves (Stoler, “Colonial Aphasia”; Wekker). But are institutional archives, and the academic disciplines concerned with knowledge production, not

also implicated in the legacies of European colonialism? They most certainly are. One cannot deny that nineteenth century anthropology—with its unyielding obsession with cultural and biological difference—made ample contribution to the invention of race as a category of human “otherness.” Nor should we forget that anthropology’s mandate to study the so-called “savage”—to paraphrase Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (7–28)—helped facilitate the discursive construction of the “civilizing mission” and the “white man’s burden,” lending credence and legitimacy to the political projects of racial subordination and colonial domination (Apter; Pierre). But then, a critical and historical anthropology, based on experimental ethnographic and archival methods, and which is rooted in a decidedly postcolonial, anti-racist, and feminist politics, is also well-positioned to examine and unpack the historical genealogy of racialized discourses and practices. Such a critical anthropology, which does not take disciplinary boundaries or its orthodoxies too seriously, can bring to light certain theories, practices, and strategies which call into question the socio-symbolic salience of whiteness and its undertones of superiority (Stoler, “Rethinking”; Thomas and Clarke; Mullings).

My own research explores the social and political mechanisms by which sexuality, desire, and intimacy were politicized and racialized under slavery, colonialism, and apartheid rule. However, it also examines the different ways in which people actively blur and unmake racial boundaries and distinctions, and how they participate in the decolonization of intimacy in the contemporary moment. In particular, my project examines the social and cultural legacies of South Africa’s so-called “Immorality Laws” (*Ontugwet*), which prohibited and stigmatized marriages and sexual relations between all “Europeans and non-Europeans” in order to maintain the “purity” of whiteness and the boundaries of rule. These anti-miscegenation laws were first implemented in 1927, but reflected much older social norms and relations rooted in slavery. Under the sway of the Immorality Laws, mixed (*gemengde*) couples—such as this pair from Johannesburg pictured on the next page in the 1940s—were deemed enemies of the state, and were subjected to incessant surveillance, police harassment, incarceration, and public humiliation.

“Mixed” or “coloured” children born from illicit interracial unions were rendered illegitimate, shameful, and tragic (Erasmus; Adhikari; Mafe). These Immorality Laws developed as the cornerstone of apartheid policy, and in 1968, were expanded to include same-sex intimacies as well (Hoad). Judith Butler (quoted in Graham 12) rightly argues that anti-miscegenation laws were not only violent because they prohibited



Taboo love in colonial Johannesburg.<sup>1</sup>

interracial sex, they also ensured the discursive and political foreclosure of possibilities for intimacy and love, in the sense that it became socially unthinkable to desire the Other. Ultimately, though, desire is unruly and ungovernable, and the political repression of desire often produced the very same desires it sought to foreclose. Given their inefficacy, these laws were finally repealed in 1985 (Klaussen).

I employ mixed methods in my research, which include visiting institutional archives and sifting through files, wandering through museums, doing participant observation research in public spaces, conducting semi-structured interviews, and reading novels. I also study contemporary debates about race and intimacy in public culture by analyzing TV shows, listening to talk radio, and following social media trends. I study how these debates are contested and

1

Image Reference: Author/origins unknown, date unknown. Copyright Getty Images. "Apartheid Timeline," *Gulfnews*, 15 March 2017, <https://gulfnews.com/world/africa/apartheid-timeline-1.1994303>. Accessed 13 Dec. 2019.

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Image Reference: Democratic Alliance Student Organisation, "In Our Future, You Wouldn't Look Twice" campaign poster, 2012. See Sipho Hlongwane, "The DA Youth Poster that Caused the Storm," *Daily Maverick*, 25 Jan. 2012, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-01-25-the-da-youth-poster-that-caused-the-storm/>. Accessed 16 June 2017.

represented in visual culture, and how images, films, advertisements, and other aesthetic forms actually intervene in the process of decolonizing the collective imagination, as South Africans endeavor towards the building of a "Rainbow Nation" from the ruins of apartheid. I first began my ethnographic and historical study of apartheid and post-apartheid society in early 2012, when I spent a semester at Stellenbosch University—the historical stronghold of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid philosophy—as a visiting international student. I came across the campaign poster pictured below, which was plastered to a pillar near the front entrance of the library.

The poster caught my attention because it seemed rather out of place on the university's predominately white and Afrikaans-speaking campus. I later learned that the youth wing of the Democratic Alliance, an important opposition party, distributed this campaign poster around university campuses across South Africa. The poster depicted a mixed couple and was displayed in public spaces. It sparked a storm of controversy and was debated on digital and print media for weeks (see Vincent & Howell). The vitriol with which conservative critics reacted, suggested that the liberal dream of a "nonracial" or "postracial" South Africa had not yet arrived (Goldberg).

Although traditional methodologies, based on "going to the archive" and making ethnographic observations by "being there" remain indispensable to critical social analysis, there is also a need to reimagine how we do participant



"In OUR Future, You Wouldn't Look Twice."<sup>2</sup>

observation and archival work. It is incumbent on us all to reconceptualize what archives are, what work they do, and how we may access them. The need for a thorough reconceptualization of archival research has, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, never been more urgent. Luckily, South African institutions and organizations have been digitizing their collections since the late 1990s—very much in the spirit of decolonization and democratization. Digital archiving organizations, such as [Digital Innovation South Africa](#)<sup>7</sup> (DISA), have made its resources digitally available to all—allowing me to continue plumbing its files for texts and images, from the safety of my home in the United States.

I am particularly interested in studying photographic images, films, and other visual representations which circulate digitally, because public debates regarding intimacy and racial identity in contemporary South Africa largely unfold in digital spaces. Decolonizing the archive is largely about what Achille Mbembe calls the “democratization of access,” about making the retrieval of historical memory more easily and widely accessible, especially to historically marginalized people. Accessing official archives often requires special permissions, which are not always easy to obtain; they tend to be highly centralized and bureaucratic, and the bureaucratization of memory-work tends to follow the mandate of some official discourse or another, some sanctioned version of history or another. What is included and excluded in archives such as these is not happenstance but reflects the political priorities of states and other institutions. Digital repositories are certainly more accessible, and do not always follow the same organizational logic as traditional archives; they allow for texts and images to be accessed from just about anywhere. For example, YouTube and Google Images do not necessarily rely on professional bureaucrats and archivists at all. Moreover, such platforms allow scholars, artists, and other interested persons to

participate more fully in the cultivation of our collective memories and histories.

While we should explore the various kinds of archives that have emerged in recent decades, it is also of import that we consider emerging theories of archiving, that we reconsider how archives function, and that we reimagine their productive possibilities in the ongoing struggle to decolonize knowledge. Towards that end, I want to focus on three particular ways of thinking about archives. Archives are collections and repositories of information which are more or less organized, and which can reveal a great deal about the memories, representations, and identities of the people and communities to which they pertain. Edward Said’s concept of the “cultural archive,” which I first encountered in Gloria Wekker’s work on “white innocence” in the Netherlands (2), is important because it speaks to the historical sedimentation of cultural beliefs and attitudes—the deep structures of feelings and thought—which constitute a society’s “common sense” about itself, and which becomes manifest in everyday interactions and people’s lived experiences. Secondly, I want to mention a similar concept, namely that of the “shadow archive,” from the work of photography theorist Allan Sekula, which refers to an “all-inclusive archive” which “necessarily contains both the traces of the visible bodies of heroes, leaders, moral exemplars, celebrities, and those of the poor, the diseased, the insane, the non-white, the female, and all other embodiments of the unworthy” (10). This concept refers to the social production of images, which accumulate as a vast but disorderly storehouse of hidden histories and long-lost memories. This brings me to the third concept, namely John and Jean Comaroff’s proposition that we not only “go to the archive,” but also that we build and collect archives of our own. Considering the expansive capacities of digital media in the contemporary world, opportunities for reimagining decolonial forms of memory-work and history-making have become bountiful and boundless.



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# Counter- Archive in *Palimpsest of the Africa Museum*

MATTHIAS DE GROOF

Artist Approach

Film & Video

Silence & Erasure

In 2013, the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium (now: AfricaMuseum) closed for renovation. Not only the building and the museum cabinets were in need of renewal; the spirit of the museum too, had to be brought into this century. The process of “decolonization” led to debates in a structural advisory committee, called COMRAF.

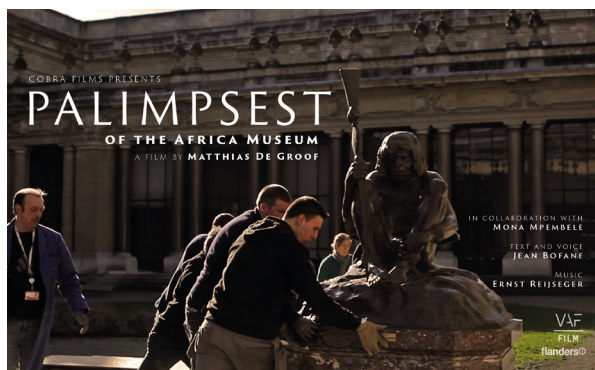
What follows is a reflection on fragments from our documentary that focuses on this renovation, entitled *Palimpsest of the Africa Museum*. On the one hand, the documentary tackles the museum-as-archive and includes and transforms moving images from the colonial film archive itself. On the other hand, the film resulted in building a kind of counter-archive by filming the process of renovation.

I understand “the archive” here as a socio-political repository based on power mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Narratives and conceptions of past and present emerging from the archive, helped the legitimization and construction of colonialism (Steedman 591; Stoler

83–103) and served colonial memory politics. Particularly in relation to colonialism, what is omitted, excluded, and denied in the archive becomes significant. Consequently, I understand the counter-archive here as a politics of remembering by creating what is invisible in the official archives. Counter-archives enable counter-histories, counter-historiographies and counter-memorial practices by counteracting archival epistemologies of power. Moreover, they become “a ritual space within which cultural memory and history are preserved” (Cvetkovitch 368, quoted by Ozban 8).

*Palimpsest* is the first part of a cinematic triptych (with *Lobi Kuna* and *Diorama*) about crippled, lame or failed decolonizations. While showing these failed processes, the triptych attempts to deal with the colonial heritage of the cinematic medium itself.

I remember John Akomfrah telling us during a guest lecture for a cinema class at NYU that “Nothing attests to the diasporic experience, in England. No street sign, no monument with which we can identify, whereas you,” he said, “are surrounded by everything that confirms your existence.” He then referred to what Orlando Patterson calls “the absence of ruins.” “Nothing attests to our existence,” he continued, except the archive.” Since the 80s, the Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC), of which Akomfrah is a member, dug into several audiovisual archives and made cinematic masterpieces, starting with *Signs of Empire* in the early 80s. Their works show us that meanings in the archive are never fixed; its images and sounds can thus be appropriated and their meanings altered. As Paula Amad would say, this is especially true for the film archive, since film’s multifaceted challenge to historicism is itself a counter-archival intervention (21). The indeterminacy of film and its undisciplined and fragmented styles, challenges and subverts positivist memory politics associated with the archive.



Poster of the documentary *Palimpsest of the Africa Museum* (2018). (Credit: Matthias De Groof/Cobra Films.)

In Belgium, we have an immense colonial archive, with many “signs of empire”; it’s called the Royal Museum for Central Africa. Indeed, in a way, the museum is an archive. The building—the biggest colonial monument in Belgium—needed to be restored. Some people must have thought: “Why not call the restoration a ‘decolonization’?” The question—how can a renovation of signs of empire possibly be compatible with a claim of decolonization?—brought us to film the very contradictory process, a process which points us to the very stubborn colonial nature of the archive. Before delving into three short fragments, the trailer of *Palimpsest of the Africa Museum* provides you with a general sense of the film.

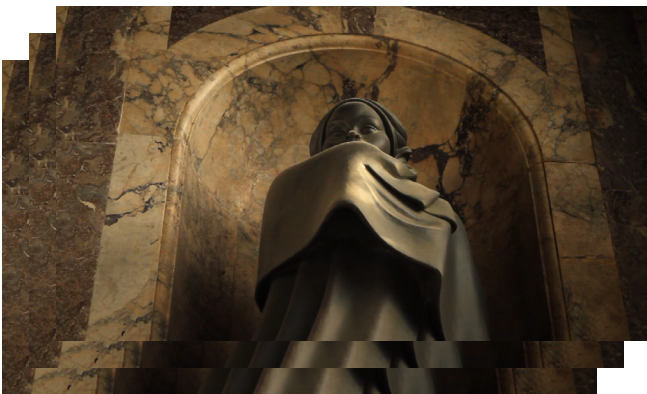
**MATTHIAS DE GROOF** is a filmmaker and researcher. He has held fellow appointments at the New York University, the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies in Finland, the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence of the Bayreuth University, the Waseda University in Tokyo, and the University of Antwerp.



Fragment of *Palimpsest of the Africa Museum* (2018).  
(Credit: Matthias De Groof/  
Cobra Films.)

[Open Video ↗](#)

A palimpsest is a phenomenon in which something, such as writing, is erased but its traces remain visible as something else is superimposed. When attempting to remove coloniality, its traces are never fully removed and often clearly reemerge as Toma Luntumbue Mutebe will attest to in the following clip, speaking about the idea of exhibiting stuffed animals in the renewed exhibition.



Fragment of *Palimpsest of the Africa Museum* (2018).  
(Credit: Matthias De Groof/  
Cobra Films.)

[Open Video ↗](#)

The statue of King Leopold II being removed in the clip is the same shot as in the trailer, but now with music by Ernst Reijseger. The statues visible thereafter also return at the end of the film and in the last fragment. They are highly problematic. These pieces of archive, these “signs of empire,” are racist metonymic depictions of a continent that is presented as available to the West. Now, what to do with these images of coloniality?

In an attempt to suggest a possible answer, the clip shows destruction of glass, of showcases.

The vitrines in which cultural artifacts are being kept, displayed, exhibited, deprived of their value, and imprisoned, are now opened or destroyed. The destruction is a moment of catharsis, a symbolic violence that reminds us of how decolonization is not a gentle process, but a disruption.

Next, vitrines are opened, and the artifacts are released and freed. But this brief moment of optimism of what decolonization *could be* is soon deflated, contradicted. The masks and statues are put back into the archive, into the collection. Collecting samples aiming to be representative of other cultures in order grasp them better is a foundation of colonial epistemology. Maybe the idea of the archive is itself colonial? It is telling at least to notice that the word “archive” is derived from the verb ἀρχω (*arkhō*), “to begin, rule, govern” (Liddell).

Our documentary makes use of pieces of archival film. In the last clip the use of archival footage stresses today’s continuation of the colonial logics of hunting and collecting. The following clip includes another piece of archival film. Before cutting to this material, however, the clip begins by visualizing the aforementioned contradiction between: firstly, the image of destruction (as a phantasma that is the imagination of the filmmaker); and secondly, the reality of renovation and the polishing of a colonial monument. Jean Bofane, the acclaimed Congolese novelist, wrote the voice-over for the film, and in this clip embodies the perspective of the cultural artifacts being archived, who continue to speak.

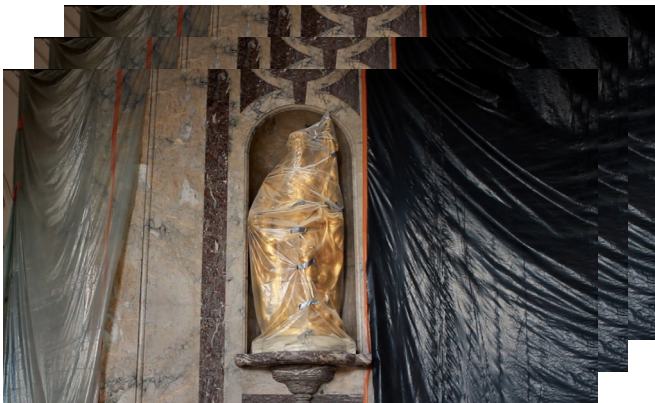
This old footage, this propaganda film found in the archives, again witnesses how coloniality works: it sees this mineral wealth as available to the West; it imposes on the colonies a model of development and progress, and extracts from



Fragment of *Palimpsest of the Africa Museum* (2018). (Credit: Matthias De Groof/  
Cobra Films.)

[Open Video ↗](#)

this its moral legitimacy; and in order to do this, it has to construct the colony as “not yet developed.” By showing traces of “the other” as our past, the museum functions thus as an ideological apparatus of Enlightenment with colonialism as its pinnacle. The archive functions similarly. It contains traces of the past, making progress tangible. However, what our use of archival footage in this documentary intends to do, is—on the contrary—show that there is no progress as such and that rather, the renovation is a continuation of this coloniality, but now with the rhetorics of “decoloniality”—or better, “decolonialism”—which clearly feed back into colonial practices.



Fragment of *Palimpsest of the Africa Museum* (2018).  
(Credit: Matthias De Groof/Cobra Films.).

Open Video ↗

In what ways does *Palimpsest* provide concrete examples of a counter-archive? Firstly, the film attempts to use fragments of the archive using found footage to counter the hegemonic ideology voiced by the archive itself. This is close to Gayatri Spivak’s notion of “affirmative sabotage” in which she offers an answer to Audre Lorde’s famous question: Can the master’s tools dismantle the master’s house? “Sabotage” dates back to the Industrial Revolution. Automated machines threatened to make human labor redundant, prompting workers to stop the looms by throwing their *sabots* (clogs) into the gears (Dhawan 71). “Affirmative sabotage,” set out by Spivak is the deliberate destruction of the master’s machine from within, meaning that you completely enter the discourse you criticize, so that you can reverse it from the inside.

But the film constitutes a counter-archive in another way, and this has to do with the methodology of filmmaking. Some of the most important perspectives of the film are ones voiced by the members of COMRAF. We asked for their collaboration on the film not in the least because as Afro-descendants, they provided the film with a point of view that shows what is at stake in a museum that decides on their image and cultural heritage. Conversely, COMRAF chose to collaborate with us not in the least because it would enable them to build with us an archive documenting the entire process and that consequently could be used as testimony of certain claims and evidence of decisions made. As *Palimpsest* has manifested, it is only one among all possible edits chosen of that counter-archive. It is only by being freely available, and open to re-edits, that this counter-archive can aspire to become an active agent for counter-histories.

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DAVID FROHNAPFEL

Affect

Institutional Approach

Reimagining the Archive

Silence & Erasure

# On Forgetting as a Queer Archival Practice

“The wall keeps its place,  
so it is you that becomes sore.”

—Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 2017

“I don’t know her.”

—Mariah Carey about Jennifer Lopez, from 2000 till 2020

According to Sara Ahmed, the histories of majoritarian groups have been hardened by their constant repetition into institutions. “Those hardenings of histories into barriers in the present” are so persuasive because they often do not have to present themselves as ideology and still win consent (*Living a Feminist Life* 136). They are hegemonic in their invisible claim for a universal truth. But those hardenings of history accommodate only a particular group of people and their specific needs. For those accommodated, the walls are often invisible. They became habitual, embodied and, hence, unacknowledged in their ideological particularity, such as white, cisgender, able-bodied, middle class, and male. Critiquing institutions as a blockage and unaccommodating can quickly trigger defensive reactions in those denying the ideological particularity and existence of the wall. Those hardenings of histories have been established by fading out their complicities in multi-dimensional forms of oppression along the axes of class, race, gender, and sexuality. By giving the historiography of majoritarian groups such a haptic dimension, we can begin to understand what Ahmed means by reflecting in her writings on brick walls as an experience of queer-feminist and anti-racist diversity work, and the frustration and violence that diversity workers have to experience when institutions are showing themselves resistant to meaningful transformation and refuse to challenge regimes of coloniality in the present. My text wants to ask how minority knowledge producers (Bilge 320)—those groups who have been historically denied a history—can navigate and challenge those concrete walls of memory institutions without becoming sore through their practice?

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Jack Halberstam has conceptualized forgetting in his book *The Queer Art of Failure* as a queer practice of remembrance for minority groups: “Forgetting, when directed at a dominant narrative rather than at subaltern knowledges, could become a tactic for resisting the imposition of colonial rule. [...] [I]n order to remember and recognize anticolonial struggles, other narratives do have to be forgotten and unlearned” (77). Taking my own experience of working as a forgetful queer in an ethnographic museum for several months into account, my text seeks to address if we can use forgetfulness as a conceptual framework to disrupt the normative order of the knowledge production of ethnographic collections without further silencing under-represented histories of archival objects within white, cisgender, heteronormative, and able-bodied memory institutions. Hence, I want to ask if we can conceptualize forgetfulness as a strategy for queering archival practices in order to open up spaces for new imaginaries of decolonial thought and kinship that challenge persisting systems of oppression in the present. What can we do with archival materials (and the staff working with those archives), so that we can productively detach them from the epistemic grip that majoritarian narratives have upon them? Is the only legitimate response to a lack of history to create new histories through a critical engagement with the materiality of historical archives?

For queer readings of historical archives, those questions are of particular concern because historical queerness is often transmitted covertly, indirectly, fleetingly, and without leaving material evidence. José Esteban Muñoz describes:

Queerness is often transmitted covertly. This has everything to do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack. Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility. (6)

Hence, Ann Cvetkovich argues for shifting the attention from the materiality of archives towards a radical archive of emotions:

Lesbian and gay history demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism – all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive. Moreover, gay and lesbian archives address the traumatic loss of

history that has accompanied sexual life [...] and they assert the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect. (241)

The emotional component of working with archives is often ignored, although different groups have very different emotional stakes in engaging with the past. Heather Love puts it adroitly: “For groups constituted by historical injury, the challenge is to engage with the past without being destroyed by it” (1).

### Lazy Identification Patterns in Archival Engagement

Gloria Wekker describes in her book *White Innocence* that interracial encounters are often grounded in a racialized common sense that has been established through four hundred years of imperial rule and still plays a vital, but often unacknowledged part in processes of meaning-making today. Following Edward Said, Wekker explains this racialized common sense as a cultural archive which is centrally located in our feelings, our minds, and our institutional realities (19). Colonial representations were designed with oppressive missions in mind. Many objects stored in ethnographic collections are not only the material result of violent colonial power relations but often also carry these ideological missions indirectly, which, I argue, cannot easily become nullified by discursive means—like writing a better critical essay about them; the materiality of these colonial artifacts has been used for such a long time in the process of creating distorted representations that shape our affective economies. Hence, these archival materials are never innocent and, relating to a deeper racialized cultural archive, they can easily trigger affective responses in audiences that lie beyond any discursive, curatorial control.

During my time working in an ethnographic collection in Germany I have often encountered what Gloria Wekker calls lazy identification patterns (170). Many white colleagues working in memory institutions follow these patterns in their inquiry of the past, which lead them into the production of new historical narratives where they try to redeem white history as good and benign—or at least as “not entirely bad”—by excavating a good white in colonial archives in order to delimit those from the bad whites. Ahmed has identified this identification pattern as a crucial aspect of progressive racism that recenters white heroes (“Progressive Racism”).

Whiteness manages to recenter itself as a dominant frame of discursive power in moments of pursued change and self-critique. This pattern is a way of reconstructing a benign self-image of white identity for a progressive milieu in order

to re-establish a problematic sense of centrality often in moments of a “disequilibrium in the [white] habitus” (DiAngelo 103) triggered by anti-racist critique questioning this very centrality. Racial bias is largely unconscious and conversations about race seem to conflict with a progressive self-image of being benign that hinders the recognition and accountability of whiteness as a “terrorizing imposition” (hooks 169). Many anti-racist scholars and activists have taught us: it is not a question of *if* we are racially biased but *how* white supremacy as a structure shapes our perception about the past, about the present, and the institutional reality we have inherited to keep whiteness as a structure of discursive and material power in place.

### Forgetting as a Politics of Refusal

During a TV interview in 1998, writer Toni Morrison describes how several reviewers of her books have accused her of not writing about white people:

I remember a review of *Sula* in which the reviewer said, this is all well and good, but one day she, meaning me, will have to face up to real responsibilities and get mature and write about the real confrontation for Black people, which is white people. As though our lives have no meaning and no depth without the white gaze. And I spent my entire writing life trying to make sure that the white gaze was not the dominant one in any of my books.<sup>1</sup>

Jennifer C. Nash quite similarly shows in her analysis of the institutionalization of intersectionality in women’s studies programs in the U.S., how Black feminism is often used in narrow terms as a *corrective* to white shortcomings of the discipline’s past and present. Nash describes this as a limited position offered for Black feminists in academia and as an intellectual banalization that refuses to give Black intellectual thought the depth and complexity it deserves outside of a direct relationality to whiteness (57) and its institutionalized requirements. For the context of art history, Mimi Sheller, following Gina Athena Ulysse, has also noted that “the violence of refusing to allow [B]lackness to be self-referential reiterates the white supremacy of Western art because it leaves only the aspiration to be included in white institutions” (Sheller).

1

I want to thank Magnus Elias for introducing me to this interview during a workshop he held for the 10th Berlin Biennale in 2018.



Morrison, Sheller, and Nash remind us about the importance of claiming centrality for minority knowledge projects that refuse to stay in a fixed and limiting position as a corrective for white problems and canons. I see the forgetting of these dominating frames as a productive way to decentralize a fixed relationship with dominant knowledge formations that can destabilize the false sense of centrality around them. Working as a minority knowledge producer for a majoritarian memory institution often leaves scholars with an inner conflict of being forced to strive for the recognition and validation by those majoritarian institutions while trying to negotiate ways to escape the centrality of hegemonic principles developed within those spaces for majoritarian people and their particular needs.

### Resume: Toward Affective Breathing Spaces

I have argued that sometimes forgetting hegemonic principles can become a politics of refusal in order to resist engaging with hardenings of history. Forgetting in a productive way can create new affective breathing spaces that refuse to partake in entrenched and exhausting structures of power that often recenter majoritarian concerns and feelings. Decolonial options are achieved, according to Walter Mignolo, through epistemic disobedience, which is a transdisciplinary method that strategically betrays epistemically correct reasoning and interpretation (205–206). But the process of “strategically-not-conforming”

to institutionalized norms through disobedient methodologies is often a privilege that many people cannot afford without paying a heavy prize, for example, in terms of personal career trajectories. Sirma Bilge has shown how “scientific cloning,” disciplinary coherent methodologies, and neglecting transformative epistemologies are often the main path offered for minority knowledge producers of color to become institutionalized in the neoliberal university (323). But performing institutional norms and trying to blend in can be an extremely stressful survival mechanism for many minority knowledge producers—one that comes along with a high cost as well, because it takes a massive amount of mental energy and constant self-surveillance to fit in and inhabit that institutional norm. Not everybody has the ability to do so. And more importantly, nobody should be forced to endure it!

Why should minorities not claim the centrality of their own experiences, emotions, habitus, knowledge, and histories, and, hence, reshape those highly outdated memory institutions altogether? Forgetting dominant narratives and institutional norms can be a decolonial option that unsettles the hardenings of majoritarian knowledge formations in order to decentralize knowledge and establish new affective breathing spaces where various minority knowledge projects can evolve in order to find new lexicons to speak with and accommodate one another.

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# “Looking Inward and Outward”<sup>1</sup>: Confronting Silence in an Afro- Curaçaoan Archive

CHARISSA GRANGER  
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Artist Approach

Collection

Representation

Silence & Erasure

Sound

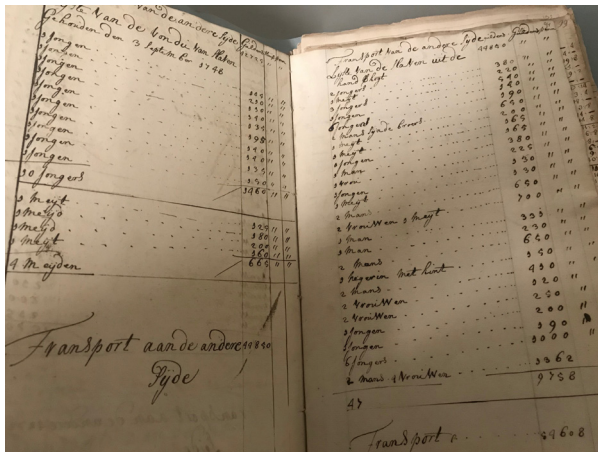
*I think more than anything I was just trying to get people to acknowledge how much of what we call “Caribbean history and culture” is, in reality, one vast silence.*

—Junot Diaz<sup>2</sup>

## Confronting Silence, Doing Wake Work

“We were never meant to survive” (Lorde)—neither were our stories of this survival. The Black archive is composed of silences, of unspeakable things unspoken (Morrison, “Unspeakable”). My first confrontation with this silence was personal, while working within my family archive to understand my matrilineal “afrosporic” (Philip 35) movements. Though able to go back six generations, dating back to the eighteenth century, birth dates are inaccurate, surnames are changed haphazardly for reasons unknown, and the migrations through the Caribbean islands that I was most interested in are unmentioned – Silence.

My second confrontation with silence was during a visit to the Zeeuws archive as in Middelburg. This archive concentrates predominantly on commerce; thus, the voices narrating the lived experience of Africans, names, and biographies of enslaved persons are unmentioned.<sup>3</sup> Ship logs, detailing bills of sales and



Unnamed and Unthought. (Credit: Image by the author.)

accountancy records of trades and names of slave traders are documented. “1 boy, 3 men and 1 negro woman with child” stand in for all the non-identified, no-named enslaved Africans who were part of the Dutch ships – Silence.

The Zikinzá ethnographic collection<sup>4</sup> is the location of my third confrontation with silence. This collection of Afro-Curaçaoan legends, stories, and songs does hold those voices and experiences that I am eager to resonate with. Tales and melodies were passed down generationally and these recordings offer them through the voices of the descendants of enslaved peoples. Even here the silences are deafening as song lyrics are partly sung in a Papiamentu/o precursor that I do not understand or melodies and lyrics are transformed through time and oral transition from one generation to another. In this way, lyrical meanings remain mired in uncertainty and supposition.

Accounts on the lived experience of Black people are, according to Dionne Brand, collected as “random shards of history” (19). Archival work for Brand thus turns to “what was left—even if it is an old sack, threadbare with time” (94). As much as we have available, there is just as much silence and unknown, and so we work at “the limit of what cannot be known” as Saidyia Hartman describes it (4), arguing for a “writing at the limit of the unspeakable and the unknown” (1). Concentrating on percussionist and composer Vernon Chatlein’s work within the Zikinzá collection, I consider how music enables an interaction with encountered silences, and how (re)composing and performance allow us to sit and commune with “histories that hurt” (Ahmed 50). Music sounds out into the silence, it engages with the vast absence, speaking to the nonexistent that is nevertheless haunting, causing what Avery Gordon describes as ghostly hauntings, a “disturbed feeling that cannot be put away” (xvi). What do we do with the silences within this particular sound archive? How do we make sense of such silences personally and politically? How do we confront and rework them when our archival material is scanty and the little available is often illegible, comprising cut and disrupted stories, describing pasts that are at times incoherent and unfinished.

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1  
Lorde 255.

2  
See Moya and Diaz.

3  
This is clearly stated on the website: <https://www.zeeuwsarchief.nl/en/research-our-collections/researching-slave-trade-in-the-archives-of-the-mcc/>.

4  
See the Zikinzá collection website: [https://dcdp.uoc.cw/zikinza\\_collection](https://dcdp.uoc.cw/zikinza_collection).

*For my people everywhere singing their slave songs repeatedly: their dirges and their ditties and their blues and jubilees, praying their prayers nightly to an unknown god, bending their knees humbly to an unseen power*

—Margaret Walker<sup>5</sup>

The Zikinzá collection is an audio collection comprised of 1,410 ethnographic recordings<sup>6</sup> of singing, storytelling and rememberings of Afro-Curaçaoans recorded between 1958 and 1961. The ethnographic work of the collection was done by anthropologist and poet Elis Juliana (1927–2013) and missionary priest Pater P.H.F. (Paul) Brenneker (1912–1996) in Curaçao. This collection was registered by Unesco’s Memory of the World program<sup>7</sup> in 2017 for its Documentary Heritage of the Enslaved people in the Dutch Caribbean and their Descendants (1830–1969). One recording from this archive, Bati Majo, will perform as an example through which I will discuss (re)composing and working within the archive.<sup>8</sup>

🎵 Play Track 1 ↗

In (re)composing, Chatlein explicitly does not use the archive for samples, where one isolates and cuts a sound excerpt for use. Chatlein says “I am going to grab that whole track and work with that whole track ... I am not going to cut and snip, when you do that you can make very beautiful shit, but the idea is to keep the voices as is ... so you get the story of the person, of the people.”<sup>9</sup> Using Ipads and sample pads, Chatlein mixes contemporary and antique technologies to sound out. Music software such as Logic Pro is used to join music and stories to create narrative. In this way, acoustic instruments and

electronics come together in live performances. Effects are added to instruments such as acoustic guitar, piano, percussion, and vocals in addition to the voices of the archive. Different Caribbean rhythms and drums such as tambú, bata, and cajón are used, recognizing that the archive is Curaçaoan, but that making connection through the region is important for igniting spaces of dialogue and gathering.

Working with the entire recording Chatlein can interject in between the spaces of the drags and slurs of the archive voices. Chatlein’s intervention is minimal, laying chords that float under the voice, allowing it to take its role as the melody. There is disruption in the way Chatlein uses reverb to bring the voice closer or move it farther away, playing with its proximity. Reverb also gives resonance, with twists and turns the tone and timbre change. With unhurried tempos and well-timed phrases, Chatlein plays bata drums under and in between the voice.<sup>10</sup>

🎵 Play Track 2 ↗

🎵 Play Track 3 ↗

Audio Credit: Track 2 and Track 3 composed by Vernon Chatlein, and performed by Vernon Chatlein and Aki Spardaro.

### (Re)imagining Silences: Putting Stories Next to Each Other

More silences. The names of Tula and Karpata, leaders of the 1795 uprising on Curaçao are not part of the recordings. Why are there no songs or stories about this event? There is documentation of a track (no. 612) with their names as title, but no audio account is available. Was this a story describing the revolt and uprising? Was music part of that revolt like those in Haiti at Bwa Kayiman? Were Tula and Karpata animated by drums? – Silence.

Though the silences that this archive embodies fund such unknowns and interpretative pitfalls, it also enables ways of (re)imagining new stories, futures, interpretations, and our own order of things. Working in this archive continuously

5

Walker 6.

6

Some of the recordings are missing. Where that is the case, there is a track number with the word “ontbreekt” next to it, meaning: missing or lacking.

7

It was selected for the Latin American and Caribbean regional registry and nominated for the international registry of the program, see: <https://werkgroep-caraibischeletteren.nl/slavenregisters-in-unesco-regionaal-register/>.

8

Listening example 1: Zikinzá track number T0033. <https://dcdp.uoc.cw/content/AA/00/00/10/50/00001/T0033-%20Bati%20majo.mp3>.

9

From a personal interview with Chatlein, 2019.

10

This characterization was from a live performance; the compositions change instrumentally and sonically between performances and recordings.

(re)arranges knowledge structures, disrupting ways of thinking, including our own. Moreover, working sonically, listening again and again, unlocked my hearing of the stories and I could put them in relation to similar yet differing myths and stories I heard as a child growing up, but also during my research, such as those of flying Africans. The voices unmoor questions as I take a journey with Chatlein and the melodies sung and stories recounted about their ancestors' experiences, about myths and the meanings they ascribed to music. On this journey we are guided by rhythm, sound, timbre, tone and effects. These sounds come out of *our*, as well as, *their* experience. (Re)imagining the unknown, we put our stories together and thereby stand in conversation with ancestors and each other.

Chatlein's work sounds out "at the limit" (Hartman and Wilderson; Hartman) of the silence, not to fill it but to embrace it, in a sense, to be intimate with it. Such work exemplifies that music and ways of sounding out are living archives, and as such are reservoirs of (re)imagining practices, and can be empowering to listeners. In music we encounter one voice which opens possibilities to feel and respond to others by picking up that voice and elaborating on it, play with it, incorporate it; we can join each other. The presence of the ancestors' voices is a sustaining force. Through such (re)compositions, music opens a transdisciplinary space to listen to, feel and examine the sounding out of the "afrospora" (Philip 45), claiming and freeing these voices that were and are often made to inhabit the border.

I conceive this way of (re)imagining in music as a response to the prevalent chorus about the silences and how they facilitate a space of non-history within the Caribbean. The doubt and suspicion aroused around Afro-Caribbean historicity are caused by the silences; but silence can be engaged with.<sup>11</sup> Our active engagement with the sounds, melodies and lyrics, mostly towards a quest for self-knowledge, exemplify that such an archive warrants complication and further demarcation. The excavation involved in this work requires (re)imagining and reworking

of Afro-Curaçaoan histories and experiences, and thereby creating a new archive that is in conversation with the silences and gaps of the extant one.

Working within this silence, occupying it, we can imagine, make our own narratives, ask what if? What does it take to? And what might it feel like to be? There is no remedy, material reparation or justice for expunged lives, historical and present trauma and colonial wounds. However, this space is rich in personal and collective meaning, especially where self-knowledge, -respect and -possession are concerned. It is important to acknowledge what is at stake personally in engaging with these voices from the past, especially within and against the bounds and limits of the archive and the silences it holds. Chatlein is building infrastructure for further listenings and readings of Afro-Curaçaoan past, present and future lived experiences.

### Futurities

*Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a second generation full of courage issue forth; let a people loving freedom come to growth. Let a beauty full of healing and a strength of final clenching be the pulsing in our spirits and our blood. Let the martial songs be written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of men now rise and take control*

—Margaret Walker<sup>12</sup>

Historically, Black lived experience and humanity have been unacknowledged and unremembered. This is part and parcel of the hurt that the saltwater passage brings (Smallwood). The haunting discussed at the beginning of this reflection is faced generationally; in my genealogical gaps for instance, in our structures of feeling, politics of pleasure and collective love-ethic. This haunting is continuously confronted in (non) fiction: from the ghost of a murdered baby that returns to terrorize 124 Bluestone Road (Morrison, *Beloved*) to the designed map to the doors of no return, through (re)imaginings of Zong (Philip; Sharpe; Saunders; Dabydeen; D'Aguiar), and the plantations that are burnt only to be rebuilt and set ablaze again.<sup>13</sup> Turning to music, I have presented one possible response to how we might experience and interact with the silence encountered in the Black archive, and the Afro-Caribbean archive more specifically. The practice of (re)imagining has been a powerful means for connecting and communing with the past and the unknown.

<sup>11</sup>

See for example, Morrison's project in *Beloved* or Hartman's notion of critical fabulation.

<sup>12</sup>

Walker 7.

<sup>13</sup>

See for example, Jean Rhys' Coulibri or Marlon James' Coulibre.

Preliminary work done on this project has been personal and political. In our meetings and conversations, Chatlein and I grieve together in different spaces in the Netherlands. Wherever we meet, we mourn and celebrate. We stand in awe of the beauty that was made under constraint and listen together to vocal timbres, textures and melody lines, and try to work through the possible meanings of lyrics. Going through the feelings and emotions that arise is part of doing this work. We both acknowledge the heaviness of the archive, the injustice and terror of slavery and colonialism and the contemporary social, political, economic inequalities that are legacies of those past injustices. We are concerned about the future because of the precarity of our islands' economic sovereignty. We are anxious and agitated by the current violent seizure and appropriation of land, cordoned off for high-rise hotels and to build military bases in order to wage war in the Global South. We fear the future implication of new and old forms of political and financial control as well as that of governmental organizations that exploit land and natural resources. However, at the end of each meeting about the Zinkinzá collection, we also recognize a lightness; a weight that is temporarily lifted while sitting amongst those voices – *Listening*.

Working with this archive we aim to make the collection relevant to people's everyday lives,

making the songs, stories and sounds part of that. Making it a collective community project, it can be alive as a source that promulgates everyday discussions and knowledges. The above can be put into action through community performance lectures and themed discussion series, online conferences and storytelling, and podcasts. It can enable active participation and communing with the voices. It also allows the archive to be spirited by different (re)imaginings. It can thus perform as a source of nourishment and healing. The aim here is to open a space for communing, where there is no soloist and we might be able to knit different voices together, including those of the archive; to question the archive and its political potential in our contemporary lived experience within the Dutch Kingdom. Space-making is critical to conversation having, especially where questions of liberation are concerned. This is a space in which we can (re)write, sing and dance alongside each other and ancestral voices. Communitarity can foster a space of knowledge and healing as we attend to each other, illustrating the rich potential of this archive in spite of its silences. Recomposing slave songs, using past experiences as a way to redress, to address, to question, to repair, we can imagine a different kind of possibility that is not rooted in trauma, but in continuous (re)imagining what it means to liberate ourselves in performance, in song, in melody, in music.

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# Critical Approaches to Colonial Sounds from Africa in Austria

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Collection

Context

Institutional Approach

Sound

Since its foundation in April 1899, the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna has been a port of call for Austrian researchers, especially from the fields of cultural studies and the humanities. In 1999, UNESCO included its Historical Collections as “documents of universal significance” in the World Register of its Memory of the World Programme. The Historical Collections consist of sound documents stored on mechanical sound carriers from 1899 to 1950 such as wax discs or gramophone records. On the occasion of its 100th anniversary, the Phonogrammarchiv began to release all of its early sound recordings on CD, accompanied by a booklet usually containing scientific commentaries, biographical data, and information on the contexts in which the researchers originally made the sound recordings, as well as text transcriptions or music notations, for example. Until now, the Phonogrammarchiv has published eighteen different series, which are all part of the publication of the full edition called *Sound Documents from the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences: The Complete Historical Collections 1899–1950*. The publication “Recordings in Egypt (Junker 1911) and the Archive (Stigler 1912–1913): Kenzi-Dongolawi, Nobiin and Arabic – Dholuo and Luganda” is one such series and is explored below as I consider methodological approaches to historical sound recordings from Africa in Austria.

### Colonial Sounds from Africa in Austria?

Alongside sound recordings, archives have taken in critical commentaries by speakers from colonized regions. However, it is only recently that the audible documents produced, collected, and archived by researchers all over the world since the last third of the nineteenth century have been included in discussions concerning colonial historiography and coloniality in general, and ethical issues, collection methods, and knowledge production in particular.

The capital of Austria has always been the center of Africa-related research in this country, and as such, it is hardly surprising that the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna also preserves a key collection of language and music recordings from Africa. This particular collecting history began during the acoustic era with field

recordings made in the former British and German colonies and protectorates of Natal, Bechuanaland and German South West Africa, as well as in Egypt, Morocco, Libya, and Nigeria (Gütl et al.; Schüller, *Rudolf Pöch's and The Collection*).

Sound recordings made directly on site in Africa have occasionally been supplemented by sound recordings with the voices of African people made in the recording studio of the Phonogrammarchiv in Austria. For this reason, studio recordings with people from present-day Uganda and Kenya, Morocco, Guinea, Angola, and South Africa are also part of the Historical Collections of the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna. How these individuals came into contact with Austrian researchers or the Phonogrammarchiv is still unclear for most of these collections. At the moment we only know that Robert Stigler, a doctor and physiologist, was involved in sound recordings with two men who were both taken to Austria from the former British protectorate of Uganda following an Austrian research expedition in the winter of 1911–1912, in which Stigler had participated as an expedition doctor. It is not clear from the historical sources whether these two men were invited, convinced, or even forced to come to Europe.

My thoughts concerning most of these early sound collections in African languages are that their analysis must not disregard the dynamics and effects of the colonial framework at play in their creation and afterwards. If we take only one of the sound recordings from 1912 as a short example, one aspect strikes me as particularly remarkable and worth mentioning: the text spoken by a 28-year-old man named Mori Duise on recording number Ph 1287 contains a warning of the colonial intrusion by Europeans into his country. According to the interpretation of Daniel Orwenjo Ochieng at the University of Nairobi, Mori Duise cloaked the warning in the metaphor of a disease entering the country from the sea (Lake Victoria?) (Ochieng 41–42).

### Sound Documents and Source Criticism

Sound recordings are by no means more authentic than other types of sources. Nor can a sound recording per se be a scientific source. It can only be of scientific value if certain conditions are met and accompanying information (metadata) is available. Sound recordings, like other historical sources, have factors that distort and potentially influence the reading of the material, for example the subjectivity of the producers, their intention when recording, etc. In the worst case, sound recordings could even have been knowingly distorted. If all of this is not taken into account in an evaluation of the material, misinterpretations may occur.

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For an accurate understanding of what is heard, it is advisable to consult and compare to other historical sources related to the sound recording. Thus, with the help of so-called source criticism, mistakes, errors or misunderstandings (e.g. in communication) can be uncovered. The research, compilation, and source-critical evaluation of supplementary information to the sound recordings (written documents, photos, films, interviews, etc.) are important steps in the analysis and are an integral part of the methodology.

Every single sound document that exists today in the Phonogrammarchiv was produced under certain conditions. The contexts of their creation are rarely obvious; they must always be reconstructed. Related questions such as the personal relationship or power relations between the respective researcher and the recorded person, biographical details of the protagonists, or the historical frame of reference to which texts on sound recordings refer, can only be answered after extensive research into the context of the audio material. The quality of the source interpretation of acoustically-stored contents is inextricably linked to the quality of the reconstruction of the contexts in which the recordings were created and used. Furthermore, sounds can only be “transported” for reproduction via sound carriers (such as wax discs or vinyl records) and their corresponding playback devices (such as a phonograph or turntable), and cannot be understood in isolation from the interpretation of the respective user (Gütl, “Afrikanische Geschichte hören?” 82–100).

### The Colonial Context of the Stigler Collection

In the above-mentioned example from the Stigler Collection, the important question of the exact circumstances that brought Mori Duise from the British Protectorate of Uganda to Austria arises. How did the African man come into contact with both the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna and the researchers named in the metadata that accompanies the sound recordings?

The Austrian members of the expedition to Uganda, which was led by the Viennese architect Rudolf Kmunke between October 1911 and April 1912, did not manage to make any of the sound recordings planned for Uganda, since the phonograph broke down on the spot and had to be sent back to Austria. Recordings indirectly related to this expedition have however been preserved at the Phonogrammarchiv: Kmunke and Stigler returned to Vienna “in the company of” two African men, namely the Dholuo-speaker Mori Duise mentioned previously and the Luganda-speaker Simon Kasajja who when in Vienna, at Stigler’s request, spoke

and sang into the horn of the phonograph creating audio recordings. The documentation held in the Phonogrammarchiv tells us but little about these men, and almost nothing about the overall historical context of the recordings made with them in Vienna. Even the motive for “immortalizing” their voices on sound carriers and the decision criteria for the content of the sounds, which were originally inscribed in wax, can only be deduced from historical documents found outside the Phonogrammarchiv.

For a full understanding of the sound recordings, it is important to mention the colonial conditions of the expedition. The four Austrian participants had hired 250 local porters, expedition guides, translators, cooks, “tent boys,” and African soldiers (*Askaris*) for the trip. With their help, they manically gathered geographical data, everyday objects, and human remains such as skulls, as well as living animals for European museums, archives, and the Vienna Zoo Schönbrunn. The circumstances of their acquisition should be viewed critically as violent and racist in the context of colonialism. Some objects taken, such as shields that held traces of battle, can be interpreted as silent testimonies to experiences of violence. Some of the porters had been forcibly recruited with the support of British colonial representatives and put in chains (Gütl, “Mori Duise” 133–155). In his travel book *Quer durch Uganda* [Across Uganda], Kmunke made no secret of the fact that he had his African “collaborators” disciplined with the painful hippo whip *kiboko*, and had acquired some “souvenirs” in Africa against the resistance of their original owners and in exchange for objects of little value (Kmunke 87; 103; 167). The removal and transfer of artifacts and knowledge from travelled and explored regions was, after all, on the agenda of most expeditions. However, this particular research and hunting trip also features several characteristics that distinguish it from similar, previous undertakings. Above all, it is Robert Stigler, whose research provided the expedition with the “scientific” veneer necessary to be taken seriously by contemporaneous scholars. His special interest developing in those days focused on so-called racial physiology.

The Stigler Collection (Phonogrammarchiv, Vienna: *Phonogramme* Ph 1208–1210, 1287, 1788 and 1794) clearly originated in the overall context of Stigler’s human physiological race experiments. These included extensive studies of blood, circulation, respiration, nutrition, body temperature, muscles, sensory organs, skin functions, pain sensitivity, and sleep behaviour. In addition, he made observations on sexual life, psychological tests and observations, and examinations of breast milk, and sound production. In 1911, he began performing these

experiments in colonial Uganda on porters and local African soldiers, as well as on African prisoners of a British military expedition, people from the areas where he travelled, and on his fellow Austrian travellers. Later he continued his experiments in Egypt and Austria.

The sound recordings in the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna form an integral part of the physiologist's investigations, yet Stigler never again referred to these sound documents in his publications. While the Phonogrammarchiv holds these audio recordings, on the other side, it lacks references to and resources on his other extensive human experiments.

An analysis of Stigler's research, lectures, and publications leads to the conclusion that his biography is comparable to that of other Austrian scholars in that their work was also clearly influenced by topics and methods rooted in colonial contexts. In the case of Stigler, he also later applied the methods he experimented with during colonialism, on prisoners in a prisoner-of-war camp during the National Socialist era. Up to 1970 he published the hypotheses and research results that he had collected in the first half of the twentieth century. They remained almost unchanged until shortly before his death in 1975 (Gütl, "Mori Duise" 133–155).

### Final Remarks

Based on the example cited above, and informed by other examples present in the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, the following can be derived from considerations on a source-critical evaluation of sound recordings. On the one hand an acoustic recording has its special value for historical research where other types of sources, such as written sources, are limited in their informational value. On the other hand, their usefulness for the historical sciences is limited if other accompanying information (e.g. details of the language, the place of recording, the time of recording, etc.) is missing. Conversely, it is also true to say that with each additional piece of information on the recording in question, the potential possibilities of adequately checking and interpreting the subjectively perceived sound increase. In general, the source value of a sound recording can only be assessed in the context of a source-critical determination of its relationship to other types of sources.

Additionally, it is a focus on the importance of context that can reveal materials created under duress and violence.

The historical sound recordings in African languages held at the Phonogrammarchiv are mostly products of interactions between several people. With the thoughts formulated in this essay, the question arises as to how European-African relations were shaped in connection with the sound recordings and what statements the acoustic recordings in the Phonogrammarchiv today allow about the African side of this complex history of interrelationships. Although the use of sound recordings for historical research represents a great methodological challenge, it also represents an opportunity to look at (or rather listen to) old sounds from today's perspective and to make them not only audible, but to make their messages actually (re-) understandable.

Many years of practical experience with sound recordings in the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, have shown that the consistent use of a methodological apparatus from the field of historical science has proved successful for evaluating and editing historical sound documents. These methods allow us, among other things, to reconstruct the biographies of the persons involved and to answer questions regarding their intentions, the organization and practical realization of research undertakings, the contexts of the creation and use of sound documents, as well as questions regarding aspects of their technical history.

As for sound recordings, these strongly force us to approach the subject with a focus on content and context while being critical of the sources. The need to approach the content and contexts of sound recordings from a variety of sources of different types and provenance calls for international, interdisciplinary, and intercultural scientific cooperation between the Phonogrammarchiv and proven experts. Since the beginning of its full edition called *Sound Documents from the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences: The Complete Historical Collections 1899–1950* these collaborations have proven increasingly important and successful.

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Collection

Context

Institutional Approach

Sound

# Pathways towards Decolonizing the Sound Archive

## The Collector as Producer

In an article entitled “The Role of Sound Archives in Ethnomusicology Today,” ethnomusicologist and archivist Anthony Seeger summarizes the historical interdependence of ethnomusicology, sound recording technology, colonialism, and archives. He looks at “the perceived, actual, and potential roles of sound archives in ethnomusicology” (261) and assesses the multifaceted impact of sound archives—understood as the repositories of research field work—on the history and future of the discipline. He highlights the public value of depositing field work in archives so that private collections can offer themselves up to international access and repatriation projects. As sound archives explore means of access, we see how practical, technical, and ethical solutions might contribute to decolonization, described by Elizabeth Mackinlay as one of the most pressing issues facing contemporary ethnomusicology.

Seeger raises an important point about the nature of field recordings:

The collector should consider him or herself to be a producer. All field recordings are produced; they are not simply “objective” sounds or events [...] and their usefulness depends to a great extent upon the collector’s reflection on the recording process itself. (272)

A “collector’s reflection” is not always available to archivists amongst collections of sound recordings, however there is often accompanying documentation explaining the sound recordings from a technical and contextual point of view. There is great potential for researchers, archivists, and curators to generate these reflections where a recordist has neglected to do so; to disentangle the conditions in which sound recordings are constructed as “truthful” and “objective” representations. Where a collector’s reflection exists, it can be dialogued with and expanded, through the

archivist’s temporal and critical distance. Sound recordings produced under colonial regimes should be prioritized for this interpretative process.

In this text, I write from the perspective of a curator working in the World and Traditional Music section within the sound archive at the British Library (BL).<sup>1</sup> My aim here is to initiate a reflective process on how decolonizing the collections in this section could take place.<sup>2</sup> By “decolonizing the collections” I mean finding ways to make audible the voices and knowledge of the communities present in them in an attempt to recalibrate what stories are told. “Decolonizing the collections” signifies a shift in the institutional attitude towards the histories of these collections and the institution itself, an open commitment to researching and interpreting the contexts in which colonial collections were produced, and to critically hold in mind that the very act of collecting—as an ethnographer or institution—in the pursuit of knowledge production is intrinsically linked to the enterprise of colonialism. “Decolonizing the collections” ultimately means that the institution, the BL, can relinquish its intellectual and physical ownership over sound recordings as they are put back into recirculation, entering a cultural and creative sphere where new meanings are created and those of the past are questioned.

The Museum Affordances / [Re:]Entanglements<sup>3</sup> project is in many senses a prime case study to illustrate a possible approach to decolonization. This project, funded by the UK’s Arts & Humanities Research Council, is exploring the “decolonial possibilities” of the archival legacies of a series of colonial anthropological surveys, including a large collection of wax cylinder recordings in the BL collections. Though this project enquires into the history of just one of over 450 collections of unpublished ethnomusicological recordings from around the world in the care and custody of the section, which span the history of sound recording technology,

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<sup>1</sup> The British Library Sound Archive became a department of the British Library in 1983, with the name the National Sound Archive (NSA). It was founded much earlier, in 1947, as an independent entity known as the British Institute of Recorded Sound (BIRS). Supported by Decca Records and a Quaker trust fund (Linehan), it occupied its first premises in 1955 thanks to the lease of a large property on the British Museum estate (Saul 171). In 1997, it moved to the British Library’s main site in London and adopted its current name, British Library Sound Archive.

<sup>2</sup> It is beyond the scope of my text to go into how this complex and multifaceted institution (the British Library) is grappling with its history and finding ways to decolonize its collections, but it is important to acknowledge the existence of the British Library’s Decolonisation of the Collections Working Group, a smaller Decolonisation of the Collections Steering Group, and a public commitment on behalf of the British Library to becoming an “actively anti-racist organisation” which is in the process of setting up various working groups, focusing on a range of issues including decolonizing the collections.

it provides ideas and inspiration for how to grapple with this task across the sound archive's collections.

### Re-Engaging with the Past: The Museum Affordances Project

One of the collections which most explicitly reveals the interlocking nature of colonialism and early ethnographic phonograph recordings is the Northcote Whitridge Thomas Collection (NWTC, C51). The sound recordings Thomas made form part of the ethnographic wax cylinder collection,<sup>3</sup> which gathers same format collections of varying provenances. Unsurprisingly, a unifying trait is that the geographies represented coincide largely with the British Empire, spanning East and West Africa, South Asia, Australia and Melanesia (Clayton 79).

The NWTC is the largest single collection within this umbrella collection and contains around 700 recordings on around 1,100 wax cylinders, a testament to the prolific activity of Northcote Thomas <sup>∇</sup> (1868–1936), who occupied the first post of “Government Anthropologist” for the British Colonial Office.

Between 1909 and 1915, Thomas was employed to gather anthropological data—with a particular emphasis on local laws and customs—in Southern Nigeria and Sierra Leone. He did this through widespread field work structured in tours, each with a focus on a different area and socio-linguistic group. In addition to data gathering, his anthropological surveying included photography, sound recording, and the collecting of artifacts and botanical specimens <sup>∇</sup>. The information he gathered was collated into reports published by the British Colonial Office and intended to inform colonial practices of “indirect rule”

3

Grouped as the ethnographic wax cylinder collection are approximately 3,200 recordings made on wax cylinders. Although smaller than the collection at the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv, the collection at the British Library is substantial and includes the first sound recordings made in Africa (Harry Johnston in Uganda, 1901), of Australian Aboriginals (Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen in 1901), and the earliest phonograph sound recordings made on the Cambridge Anthropological expedition to the Torres Straits between 1898–99 (Clayton 69). The collection was included on the UNESCOs Memory of the World International Register acknowledging its “global significance” and “universal value.” You can read more in the BL's press release.

(Basu, “N.W. Thomas”). As Paul Basu, Professor of Anthropology and principal investigator on the Museum Affordances project notes, “This appointment was an early experiment in the use of the emerging discipline of anthropology as a tool in colonial governance in the British colonial context.”

The Museum Affordances project sets out to critically examine the archival legacy of Thomas' work in order to develop a more informed understanding of its historical context. More vitally, the project brings this archival legacy into the present by asking “What do they mean for different communities today? What actions do they make possible? How might we creatively explore their latent possibilities?” (Basu, “About”).

The work Museum Affordances is doing with the sound recordings in the NWTC collection is collaborative, experimental, and creative. To start, the project is using digital technology to bring sound recordings documenting a particular location or event into dialogue with the photographs, artifacts, and texts that Thomas also assembled <sup>∇</sup>. These different media were dispersed to different institutions after Thomas' tours, and the processes of digitally reassembling them enhances our knowledge and experience of the historical contexts they document. By reuniting dispersed multi-format archives across different institutions in an online space, more direct access opportunities for future research in the UK and internationally are assured.

Although Thomas' collections physically remain at UK institutions like the British Library, an important part of this project's work consists of retracing Thomas' itineraries in Sierra Leone and Nigeria to return copies of photographs and sound recordings to communities. This direct interaction fosters awareness and potential interest in this archival legacy and is particularly meaningful to the descendants of those Thomas photographed and recorded over 100 years ago <sup>∇</sup>. These interactions enable key collaborations to be established, ones that the British Library alone would not be able to generate.

As well as community outreach in West Africa and its diasporas, the project has also forged institutional partnerships, for example with universities in the regions in which Thomas worked. Samson Uchenna Eze, a lecturer in the Department of Music at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, has, for instance, analyzed a number of Igbo songs recorded by Thomas. He has transcribed music and lyrics, and engaged young musicians to re-perform them and use them as creative cues for new works.

His familiarization with these sound recordings has spurred him to “rethink my own Igbo culture and heritage and to consider the important place of our Indigenous music traditions in building national consciousness” (Eze). It has also led him to reveal meaning which would remain hidden without his language expertise,<sup>4</sup> like with the lyrics of the song “Onye Ilo na-akp (The Enemy Keeps Calling)” which reveal it as a protest song, against the colonial regime.<sup>5</sup>

### Conclusion

Opening up the archive to projects such as Museum Affordances is an important way for the British Library to begin to create pathways towards decolonizing the collections. These should lead firstly to the communities where these materials have originated from, where raising awareness requires a huge investment. Without the input of local partners in the Museum Affordances project, the meaning of the NWTC collection remains obscured and partial, exclusive to its colonial history and the sound recordings continue to be physically and intellectually sequestered at the British Library.

Projects that aim to decolonize collections must go beyond generating interpretations about the colonial circumstances in which sound recordings were produced. Though new knowledge contributes to enriching historical accounts, the impetus that drives its generation relies on methodologies intrinsic to the very colonial context it attempts to untangle. Curators need to find frameworks for decolonizing collections

that go beyond a Eurocentric canon, defined by Achille Mbembe as “a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions.” In this ideal scenario, initiatives for projects to decolonize collections will originate within the communities whose voices, songs, and music are withheld in the collections. Curators will facilitate such projects and find ways to integrate Indigenous worldviews into collection management practices.

If, going back to Seeger, “all field recordings are produced [...] and their usefulness depends to a great extent upon the collector’s reflection on the recording process itself” we should go one step further and question the assumptions and biases embedded not only within this “collector’s reflection” but also the catalogue records these generate, kept in collection-holding institutions.

Revisiting an archive’s legacy through creativity and experimentation should generate new methodologies for field work, ones that engage critically with their impulse for knowledge production. If the aim of such projects is to better understand and (re)contextualize historical materials, what methods might be developed for this purpose that challenge colonial knowledge production and accumulation? While unresolved here, this is a question curators, archivists, and ethnographers will grapple with as they re-signify their roles and contribute to re-shaping the relationship of ethnographic disciplines, methodologies, and the archive.

4

Thomas’ recordings documented music, song and stories in many local dialects which have since been standardized. The Museum Affordances / [Re:] Entanglements project is working collaboratively with the Igbo Studies Initiative.

5

What the song reveals is more nuanced and is explained in detail in a [blog post](#) by Samson Uchenna Eze.

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# Curating the White Fathers Film Collection

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Archival Practices

Collection

Context

Film & Video

Institutional Approach



The film collection of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa (commonly known as the White Fathers) is the only audiovisual collection included in the Belgian Flemish List of Precious Heritage. It consists of 954 objects as sound (in multiple languages), image (all in 16mm), and combined reels, which together constitute 80 different content entities. These are mainly mission films from 1948–1960 and mainly shot in what today is the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi. The collection is still owned by the White Fathers, but deposited at and preserved by KADOC, the interfaculty Documentation and Research Centre on Religion, Culture and Society at the KU Leuven. In 2019–2020 meemoo, the Flemish Institute for Archives, in collaboration with KADOC–KU Leuven, the Royal Belgian Film Archive, and with the support of the Flemish Government coordinated its analogue restoration and digitization. The total collection held many copies and versions of the same material, such as black-and-white and colour versions, shorter edits, etc. The 202 best preserved elements that remained as close as possible to the original negative, constituting together the most complete versions, were chosen for restoration and digitization. If multiple language versions were available, the African language version and the Dutch and French versions were digitized (technical details below).

The White Fathers film collection, especially given this digitization project, offers a particularly valuable and significant opportunity for collaboration between heritage institutions and heritage communities, though White Fathers films have already been part of initiatives in the past, most notably the project *Mémoire filmée de la période coloniale*, a collaboration between the Royal Belgian Film Archive, AfricaMuseum, KADOC–KU Leuven, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles, Université de Kinshasa, Université du Rwanda, and Université du Burundi (Etambala and Van Schuylenbergh). The argument set out in this essay is that venturing into new collaborative

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Still from the trailer of the film *Walungu, een dag rond de grasbasiliek* (1955).

or restitution projects involving White Fathers films requires an accurate understanding of the particular character of their filmmaking. The following essentially takes up the question of the (possible) perpetuation of postcolonial, paternalistic approaches to “African culture” through heritage initiatives that engage with colonial sources. When can the exchange of digitized sources from colonial contexts between Western heritage institutions and heritage communities be considered an effective form of restitution and an avenue for postcolonial reparation, and when does it risk becoming an expression of technocratic paternalism and symptomatic of persistent (post)colonial inequalities? While this essay cannot, of course, aspire to offer a way out of this complex conundrum, it does seek to contextualize the issue within a specific historical and archival context.

The White Fathers film productions should be seen in the light of the post-war context of Belgian colonial and missionary film. As early as the 1920s, Catholic CICM missionaries were screening films in Léopoldville (Kinshasa) and Salesians and Benedictines were using cinema in Elisabethville (Lubumbashi). By the 1930s, the use of film technologies was widespread among missionary congregations active throughout the Belgian colony (Vints, “Beeld van een zending” 381–387). At the same time, native spectatorship remained very limited due to the segregation between white quarters and Black townships and a legal prohibition for Congolese to attend screenings of colonial or commercial films. In reality, however, it was impossible to prevent local people from watching films, and by the end of World War II, Belgian colonial policies became more lenient regarding native film consumption, eventually allowing for the emergence of colonial film productions made specifically for local audiences (Kapanga 254–256).

A significant portion of the films that specifically addressed local audiences was created by newly founded missionary film production companies. The Congolese Centre for Catholic Action Cinema was inaugurated in 1946, arising from the efforts of Catholic missionaries to allow cinema to be used for religious propaganda, fundraising, and evangelization. There were three major film production centers in the Belgian Congo: Edisco-Films in Léopoldville (Kinshasa) and Luluafilms in Luluabourg (Kananga), both managed by CICM missionaries, and Africa Films, stationed in Bukavu and Kivu and headed by the White Fathers (Diawara 14). The upsurge of homegrown missionary film productions was paired with a condescending and moralizing attitude towards native spectatorship. Colonial and missionary filmmakers clung to the notion that natives needed to be taught how to watch moving images, and hence productions had to follow principles of simplicity and visual continuity—although it must be said that this pedantic approach was, at that time, also applied to film audiences in Belgium (Vints, “Kerk en film” 16–17). One of the epitomes of paternalizing native viewers is *Les Palabres de Mboloko*, a series of 16mm colour animations from the 1950s created by the CICM missionary Alexander van den Heuvel; cartoons tailored for adult natives who were considered too immature to process feature films. Ch. Didier Gondola keenly observed that missionary filmmaking thus reproduced the inherent contradictions of Belgian colonialism, which trumpeted its own transformative prowess yet accommodated an immutable view of Africa and Africans (54).

Despite revealing recent work, historians of colonial film still struggle to find tangible

evidence of how precisely local audiences reacted to screenings of missionary and colonial films, how precisely they were “taught” to watch films, and how local actors were cast (Reynolds; Rice). While the digitization of the White Fathers films will provide an unprecedented rich source for new explorations in the history of missionary and colonial film, a great deal of background information can be gained from both published and unpublished sources related to their production and consumption. Periodicals published by the White Fathers often dealt with the topic of cinema and sometimes published testimonies of missionary filmmakers sharing background information about the production process. Likewise, the archives of Africa Films, preserved at KADOC-KU Leuven, contain documents such as scenario preparations, correspondences and administrative documents that give direct or indirect information about the objectives, the rationale and the creation process of these movies. This “paper trail” will be a crucial resource to understand and anatomize the visual and narrative strategies of White Fathers as screenwriters and directors. Interestingly, they show several instances of discussions of ethical issues. For example, in 1965 Africa Films received a request from the New York-based film production company Explorers International Films to use fragments of White Fathers films for the completion of “a film on primitive people around the world.” Replying to this inquiry, John Bell, representative of the White Fathers in Washington D.C, points out that the missionaries have a “moral commitment towards the Africans who have collaborated with them in film productions” (Bell). And when in 1949 White Father Antoon Van Overschelde received feedback from French confrères on a scenario for a new



Still from the trailer of the film *Walungu, een dag rond de grasbasilieek* (1955).



Cover of *Grands Lacs*.  
*Revue générale des missions  
 d'Afrique* (1955).

film, he is cautioned “not to slip into grotesque stereotypes similar to those used to portray Afro-Americans in early twentieth-century American film” (Masson). While expressions and comments such as these are still very much couched in a paternalist discourse—the African actors and spectators remain excluded from these conversations—closer examination will surely yield more elements that together reveal a much more complex and nuanced reality behind the scenes than one would suspect based on the stereotypical representations pervading the films themselves.

Curating the White Fathers film collection adds another layer of complexity to current discussions regarding digital restitution of audiovisual sources from colonial times. Like other missionary filmmakers, White Fathers screenwriters and filmmakers were fully sympathetic to the adage that Africans needed films tailored to their supposed capacities as a

film audience—“Il faut aux Africains des films africains.” The 1955 issue of the White Fathers periodical *Grands Lacs* shows precisely how profound missionaries considered the contribution of their films to be for native spectators. An article on missionary films for the Congolese states that it is the responsibility of missionaries to “respect, to capture and to preserve the richness of African culture,” and this in order to “return these treasures to the indigenous spirit” (Heuvel). The idea expressed here is that missionary filmmaking was salvaging age-old rituals, legends, and imageries from the cultural clear-cut brought about by Western modernity, echoing the conviction originated in nineteenth-century colonial ethnography that fieldwork and the collection of artifacts and audiovisual documentation could redeem Indigenous communities threatened with cultural extinction caused by cultural change imposed on them by colonization and global capitalism. Through their films, missionaries argued, decaying native traditions could be “restituted” (“restitué”) to local audiences. Cinema is thus attributed with the ability to lead native people back (“reconduire”) to their own cultural identity and their “patrimoine spirituel” (Heuvel).

Whether the exchange of digitized colonial sources between heritage communities can be considered an effective form of restitution, or should be seen as yet another expression of a technocratic paternalism symptomatic of persistent (post)colonial inequalities, is the subject of ongoing debate in heritage and archival studies. The paradox of the idea of the “authentic African film” produced by European missionaries calls for reflection about the extent to which this narrative might also covertly resonate in digital sharing and other forms of “restituting” audiovisual archives from colonial times by heritage institutions in the West. A combined critical disclosure of film and documentary archives, both of which cannot happen but with the consent of representatives of the White Fathers and involving all relevant communities and their representatives in DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, might avoid the risk of unwittingly reproducing precisely those historical dynamics that ought to be remedied in the future.

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## RESTORATION AND DIGITIZATION TECHNICAL DETAILS

For the master files, meemoo opted for common, widely accepted and sustainable file formats: DPX, 10-bit logarithmic in RGB without colour subsampling on a 2K resolution (2048 x 1556). The sound was stored in 24-bit, 48kHz LPCM-coded WAV files. From these master files a mezzanine copy with limited colour correction was created in Apple ProRes (normal, variable bit rate), with a 4:2:2 colour coding, at 25 fps in full HD (1920 x 1080), with pillar boxing or letterboxing applied if necessary to retain the original analogue film resolution and the sound in 24-bit, 48 kHz. The digitization was executed at R3Store Studios in London on a DFT Scanity film scanner from November 2019 until April 2020, by Nathan Leaman Hill and Gerry Gedge and supervised by Jo Griffin.

# The International Institute of Social History and the Decolonization Debate

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Archival Practices

Collection

Institutional Approach

As curators, we are well aware of the discussion on decolonization, especially in the museum sector. But until recently, there has not been an active debate about decolonization at our own institute. As curators we want to be more involved in this discussion on how institutionalized archival practices uphold colonial, imperial, and discriminatory practices and ideologies, and how they can be challenged. What does this mean for our institute and our acquisition policies?

### Blind Spots

Why has the IISH refrained from reflecting on its own position in the recent decolonization debate? A known pitfall for institutional archives is the self-image they hold of being neutral. This has also played a role at the IISH, where the founder envisaged an “independent, neutral, scholarly institution” (“A Detailed History”).

But the reason the IISH has not picked up the decolonization debate internally also has to do with the history and the content of the collections. The IISH is an archive with a different history and role in society than most other institutional archives in the Netherlands. Since its establishment in 1935, the IISH has been an archive for social movements that are threatened by repression. In the first decades of its existence, the IISH mostly collected from European countries within the pre-war years focusing on collections of movements that were under threat from Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union. The IISH began collecting on a global scale in the late 1980s, when most colonized countries had gained political independence.

By saving the archives of social movements that were under threat, the IISH aimed to redistribute the power of collective memory towards underrepresented groups in society. However, from early on there was a blind spot with regards to representation within the larger IISH collections, particularly in terms of language.

### Contested Collections

To decolonize the archives of the IISH, we could start by looking if there are any collections with contested ownership—as in, collections that were acquired or assembled in colonial times. The aim of the IISH—to collect archives from individuals and groups that were under threat—resulted in a focus on archives from emancipation/liberation movements and their supporters in the colonizing countries.

When looking for archives that document colonial history, we found a diverse list of archives whose provenance is not contested. If we look at examples from the former Dutch colonies Indonesia and Suriname, those range from a collection on the [Partai Kommunis Indonesia](#) (Communist Party of Indonesia), the [In Search of Silenced Voices Collection](#), to personal papers of activists like [Henk Sneevliet](#) or [Poncke Princen](#), who deserted and joined the fight for Indonesian independence.

A lot of collections from the colonial period are part of the Netherlands Economic History Archive (NEHA) that is housed at the IISH. The NEHA concentrates on the preservation of sources relevant to economic history, and thus also collects archives of companies and related organizations. In the NEHA collection there are, for example, bank documents that chronicle economic history and colonial exploitation in Indonesia, like the collection of the [Javasche Bank](#), (now Bank Nasional Indonesia).



Partai Komunis Indonesia (BG A58/821, small printed matter, Collection IISH).

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LEILA MUSSON is the collection specialist for the Arabic speaking world at the IISH.

EEF VERMEIJ is the collection specialist for Asia at the IISH.

The NEHA also contains collections on several plantations, for example, Collectie Plantage Klein-Pouderoyen <sup>7</sup>.

When looking at these collections, there are different stakeholders. On the one hand there are the interests of the IISH as an academic institute, and on the other, the rights of the creators of these collections and of the people that are involved in their history. Even if the ownership of the collections is not actively and judicially contested, that doesn't mean the conversation is over.

### **Institutional Challenges**

These ideas point the discussion in another direction: that we must understand in what ways institutionalized archival practices uphold colonial or discriminatory methods and ideologies. Because, even though the IISH holds collections and records from all over the world, the types and forms of memory and knowledge, as well as the descriptions, mainly follow traditional Western modes of archiving. In fact, the institute shifted towards professionalization in the last decades and conformed to general norms and practices of academic institutions/libraries; and these are in turn part of an entire system of knowledge production that has been described by UNESCO as extremely unequal. It is important to open the notion of the archive more broadly, to one that does not exclusively rely on aspects from Western epistemology, and that takes into consideration biases and how these inform and shape concepts, methodologies and practices.

The IISH has a responsibility to deal with this in an ethical way (Ketelaar). Archival practice can bolster dominant narratives and forms of knowledge, but can equally contribute to challenging those narratives by creating counter narratives and multi-perspectives (Dunbar). In practice, the archive is governed by processes of naming, categorizing, ordering, collecting, and deciding what is remembered, forgotten and silenced (Gruffydd Jones).

### **Archival Practices**

Over the last year a group of colleagues from different departments of the IISH has been meeting up to discuss inclusion and exclusion in archival practices at the institution. Changes have been set into motion with new possibilities such as linked data, tools from digital humanities, and other possibilities of making archives accessible.

#### Descriptions

If you take a look at the catalog entry for “Amane Afghan : haftanamah <sup>7</sup>,” a newspaper from Kabul, you will see there's little metadata: title, place of publication, language, and which

issues the IISH holds are solely available. You'll also notice that the title is not in the original language, but a transliteration; it's not possible to find the newspaper in our catalog or on our website, or any other search engine by searching for the title in the original language (Dari/Iranian Persian). As such, our metadata clearly does not hold enough information to find this particular newspaper from Kabul.

The systems we use for cataloging are designed for Latin script by default. In our catalog a visitor would first see the transliteration of a title. Unfortunately, many of our records only have (often incorrect) transliterated entries, without the corresponding names or titles, for example, in their original language.

In early 2020 a cataloging project started to enrich the metadata of some of our archives and collections with essential information in their original script. Enriching the metadata with data in original scripts or languages is not just about findability. Language representation is an archival responsibility. This (pilot) project is now finished and the titles in their original languages have been added (for Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, and Tamil) as well as the authority files (which hold a consistent vocabulary) for author and organization names, and names in the original languages in the archive content descriptions have been added.

Another example is the thesaurus we use for our audiovisual materials, where records have been tagged with outdated, incorrect or even derogatory terms. There is an ongoing project to update the thesaurus, but for now outdated terms like “gypsies,” “negro emancipation” and others still remain. While we work towards changing these, we are also working on how we can save these terms for historical posterity, to acknowledge that they were once used and so that this history is available for future historical researchers.

#### Digitization/Enrichment

Digitization and tools from digital humanities also affect access and use. Digitized materials can go through further data enrichment, which can connect objects/records from different collections worldwide and increase findability; and if something is easier to access and has more associated data, it can help to popularize study in that area, which can affect funding.

The data enrichment tools we use, for example are: linked data, connections to databanks, OCR (Optical Character Recognition), handwriting recognition, and entity recognition. Whether we apply these methods or not, the materials are usually easier to find once digital and can be used by those who cannot be in Amsterdam to physically access the archive.

## The Palestine Communist Party, 1919–1948 : Arab and Jew in the struggle for internationalism

Boeken en brochures

**Auteur:** Budayrī, Mūsá

**Taal:** English

**Fysieke beschrijving:** 289 p.

**ISBN:** 0903729547

**Gepubliceerd in:** London : Ithaca Press, 1979.

**Opmerking:** Bibl., index.

**IISG classificatie:** **Isr 129** (Israël, inclusief Palestina na 1880; sociale geschiedenis; sociale ideeën en bewegingen; communisme; verhandelingen.)

This image is a crop of a screenshot from the IISH catalog showing an incorrect classification. Many records are tagged with outdated terms (from IISH classification) that require updating to reflect current geopolitics, or that use terms for certain groups of people that are now viewed as dubious at the least, or even derogatory. In this example, the book is about the Palestinian Communist Party from 1919–1948 that belongs to Palestine, so why is the book not classified with Palestine? On top of that, the classification here is anachronistic as the Israeli state was declared only in 1948, so to classify it with the main keyword Israel (Isr 129) is incorrect, even though there's a substrata of keywords that might cover the topic of the book.

However, there are some critical notes to be made. There is a lack of text mining tools for scripts like Arabic and Farsi, for OCR and for handwriting recognition. In Dataverse, a platform for sharing and publishing research data online, census data from Egypt might have the title or content in Arabic, but the metadata are in English. What is more, the leading organizations for linked data are exclusively from West and North Europe, North America, and Australia, increasing the likelihood that a Latin script-centric perspective will be prioritized.

There are ethical problems with the digitization and publishing of materials concerning people who are not part of the decision-making process. The IISH has been digitizing files on demand and has larger digitization projects with external funding as well. But which collection gets priority, which digitization project gets funding, and who decides? What kind of knowledge, and whose knowledge, can be generated by digitization? Can standards be more flexible? Who has to give consent? And in what ways do people want to be archived?

Regardless of digitization and the online presence of collections, it cannot be a reason to not think about restitution or returning materials to the communities and people from which they came. With current digitization projects the standard practice is that the originals stay

in the country of the material's creator and the archival institute gets a digital copy. Still, these creators can be hesitant and distrustful. Big institutions have the resources (and power) to render the contents of archives readily available, however there remains an unequal exchange between the institution and the creator/subject/donor, while accessibility barriers such as unequal digital infrastructures endure.

### The Missing Voices

The IISH has started to examine what some of the missing narratives on labour relations could be in its own collections, and as a result has commissioned a study on how to collect materials on informal labour. In this project, domestic workers themselves are part of the process of creating an archival collection.

### This is Not the End

Examining the collections brings forward essential questions, such as: How did this collection come here and why was it acquired? On what authority does the IISH hold custodianship? Did the subjects documented by the records have an active role in custody claims, and if not, should the validity of the custodian role not be questioned? How can we think of institutional practices in ways that are accommodating to issues surrounding ownership and custodianship, and when do we make efforts to dismantle existing power structures?

The answer to these questions requires practices that contribute to the democratization of both knowledge production and institutions, beyond existing norms and concepts, including opening up the very notion of "the archive" (Richardson; Mbembe). What does the archive actually mean in our world? What is its role? How can we manifest a change in power dynamics in daily practices and archiving? It is an ongoing process and there are going to be a lot of challenges. Perhaps by working towards connecting archives, where non-state institutional archives could function as a hub in a network of expertise, there may be a viable role for these repositories.



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ELIF RONGEN-KAYNAKÇI  
(Eye Filmmuseum)

Archival Practices

Collection

Context

Film & Video

Institutional Approach

# Veni, Vici, Vidi. The Power to Conquer and to Film

The earliest still surviving films known to be shot in the Ottoman territory are those made in 1897 by Lumière Brothers' cameraman Alexandre Promio. They register his travel through the Levant; from Egypt to the Eastern Mediterranean, ending in Constantinople. From the invention of the cinema in 1895 until the beginning of World War I in 1914, the Ottoman Empire featured in various ways on the silver screen, mainly in films made by the foremost film producing European countries of the time, such as France and Italy. It is noticeable however, that the tone of the films produced in the earlier years of this timespan, mainly dominated by a fascination for the "otherness" of the Ottoman culture, gradually shifted. It seems to be the case that during the escalation of the Balkan Wars and in the wake of WWI, the Ottoman Empire gradually became "the enemy."

Since 2014 I have been part of an independent curatorial project we call Views of the Ottoman Empire, which aims to discover and show archival footage from the former Ottoman territories accompanied by live music and narration providing historical context. For each screening we select and recombine the films according to the desired theme. During research I have noticed repeatedly that footage catalogued under the innocuous genre of "travelogue" can actually contain various hidden levels of propaganda.

As an illustration, in what follows I share four films that I regularly use in my programs. All of these films are from the Eye Filmmuseum collection, surviving as prints used for screenings in the Netherlands, evidenced by the presence of Dutch intertitles inserted to replace the original ones.<sup>1</sup>

These early films are probably best read in the larger context of the commonly available images at the turn of the century; newspaper reports, postcards, caricatures, photographs, and illustrated lectures together formed the image one had of *any* distant country. For Western Europeans at the end of the nineteenth century, the image of the Ottoman Empire and its capital Constantinople seems to oscillate between

a desirable fairy-like faraway country and a barbaric, annoying neighbour, made up of an amalgam of Orient Express posters (from 1883 onwards), gravures accompanying "Orientalist" literature such as *Aziyadéh* (1879) by Pierre Loti, Mozart's popular opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (1782), numerous "Orientalist" paintings depicting the harems, and the often published sketches and caricatures portraying Sultan Abdul Hamid II, whose reign started in 1876 and abruptly ended in 1909 after his deposition by the Young Turks.

After roughly 1910, we notice that the language of the film's intertitles changes; drifting away from the fables of the *One Thousand and One Nights* atmosphere towards increasingly condescending expressions. The same places are no longer just "exotic," but also "curious," "strange," and "foreign." One of the many examples is provided by the film *Constantine* (France, Eclair, 1913) showing views of this spectacular Algerian city from various vantage points, preceded by intertitles distinguishing the "European city" from the "Arab city," while all the time we are clearly looking at the same city from only a slightly different angle.



*Constantine* (France, Eclair, 1913).

[Open Video ↗](#)

**ELIF RONGEN-KAYNAKÇI** is the curator of silent film at Eye Filmmuseum. Since 1999, she has worked on the discovery, restoration, and presentation of many presumed-lost films. She is directly involved with prominent archival festivals around the world as an advisor or programmer. Elif is also among the initiators of *Views of the Ottoman Empire* a travelling archival presentation project, screening in various countries since the summer of 2014.

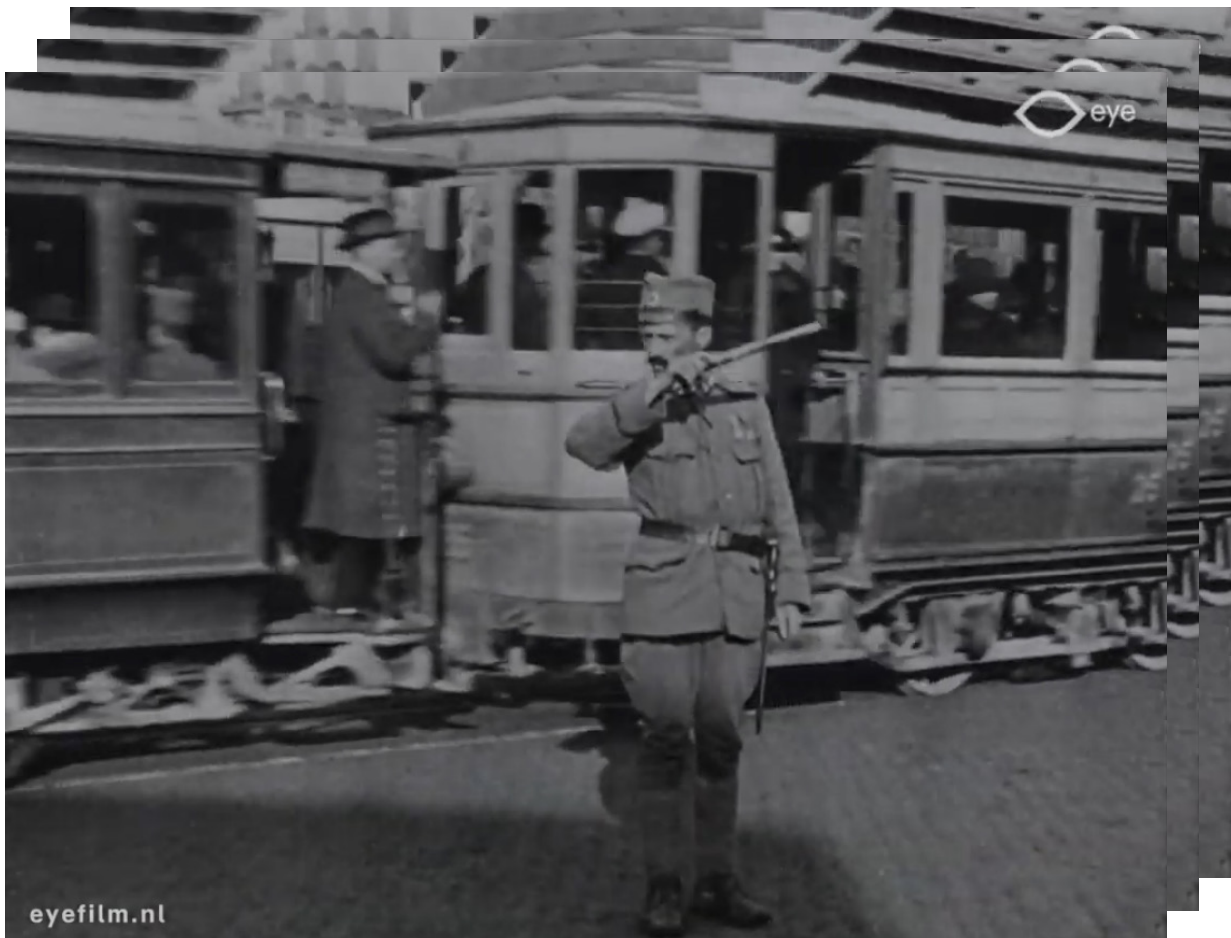
<sup>1</sup> In the following paragraphs I have translated the Dutch intertitles into English (which had probably already been translated from the original French or English version) adding emphasis to some words to illustrate my argument.

Once a territory is conquered, or ceases to belong to the “enemies” of the Western colonialist powers, the films again change their tone: still highlighting contrasts such as “Arab” versus “Western,” but also praising the beauty of the new territory, often drawing similarities with what can be seen as their Western counterparts—suddenly a positive, more inclusive language is employed. This language, which I call the language of “the conquered territory films,” seems to both hint towards and reinforce these new power relations, while also reminding home audiences that this part of the world has now become part of their own empire or nation, and as such there is nothing strange about it and it can thus be safely embraced.

*Belgrado* (France?, 1922?) is an example of this. Little is known about this film, except that it was distributed in the Netherlands by Hollandische Filmuniversiteit (HOLFU; the Dutch Film University). Despite the short catalogue title, the opening titles of the film read: “Belgrade. Capital of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slavs. / Following the St. Germain treaty (1919) Serbia became an extended kingdom.” in reference to the “Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes” established in 1918. The film is likely shot by

the French (or one of the other Allied forces nations) after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a consequence of World War I. It contains endless comparisons of Belgrade to Western European cities: “The city centre looks *just like any other West-European city.* / *Also here the traffic agents work hard.* / *Just like in our cities: big restaurants with large terraces.*” At the same time, it also seems to constantly “apologize” for the perceived backwards traditions of locals: “The ox-carts (a common appearance in Belgrade’s streets) form *great contrast with these modern images.*”; and also “apologizes” for the “unbecoming” behaviour and looks of the locals with statements such as “Belgrade has a *monumental station with a beautiful square in front.* / The farmers in their traditional clothes waiting for the train form a *contrast with this modern piece of architecture.*”

The difference in tone witnessed here is completely hinged to the political and historical context and is almost impossible to convey using the “universal/objective” and “timeless” descriptive tools of the film archives and their databases. The metadata falls short of categorizing these films fully, doing injustice to their various potential levels of meaning. The keywords



I *Belgrado* (France, ?, 1922).

Open Video ↗



*Tra le pinete di Rodi*  
(Italy, Savoia, 1912).

[Open Video ↗](#)

and standard plot descriptions give no hints about the context, leaving everything up to the researcher's knowledge of the subject and their interpretation.

This difficulty is evident in the Italian production *Tra le pinete di Rodi* [Among the Pine Forests of Rhodes] (Italy, Savoia Film, 1912). Despite its charming and romantic appearance this four-minute film is a political and military propaganda movie. It reaffirms Italy's claim over the island of Rhodes immediately after its Italian conquest in 1912, following four centuries of Ottoman rule since 1522. The film begins as a romantic travelogue, featuring the silhouette of an elegantly dressed European couple in the woods and by the seashore, but in its last minute suddenly cuts to show Italian army ships surrounding the island and ends in a nationalistic tone, with a hand-painted Italian flag as the end title.

My final example is the thus far unidentified film *Constantinopel, natuuroopname van de grootste stad van Zuid-Europa* (France?, 1920?).

2

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was the wife of the British ambassador to Turkey in the eighteenth century and published numerous poems and writings about life in *Constantinople* inspiring many "Orientalist" artists. Théophile Gautier's travel book *Constantinople* was first published in 1853, Edmondo de Amicis' *Constantinopoli* was first published in 1877, and *Aziyadé* by Pierre Loti was first published in 1879.

After struggling for many years to date this film I realized that it must have been shot during the occupation of Istanbul by the Allied forces (1918–1923). The unnaturally long main title of the film is conceived in the most "inclusive" way; suddenly we are not talking about the constantly exoticized capital of the Ottoman Empire, but rather, the "biggest city of Southern Europe"! The intertitles too insist on repeating the word "European": "The *European* shore with the beautiful Dolmabahçe Castle, entirely built of marble," or "Rumeli Hisar, a *European* fortress," etc. Although it is customary today to refer to different parts of Istanbul as Asian or European, films from the early twentieth century almost never use these descriptions, the only exception being the standard reference to the "Sweet Waters of Asia" (today's Göksu and Küçüküsu) often appearing in the travel writings of Westerners like Lady Mary Montagu, Théophile Gautier, Edmondo de Amicis, and Pierre Loti.<sup>2</sup> In fact, although many Constantinople films feature images of Üsküdar, it is not always emphasized that Üsküdar is on the Asian side as this would probably give away something that is definitely *never* mentioned, that both shores of the Golden Horn, or the entire historical peninsula with its trademark mosques and palaces, are actually all geographically situated on the European continent.

Put together, these title cards evoke a different feeling than those in the earlier films about Constantinople, making me believe that this film must have been shot during the occupation, employing the "language of the conqueror," emotionally annexing Constantinople to the rest of Europe.



*Constantinopel,  
natuuroopname van de  
grootste stad van Zuid-  
Europa (France?, 1920?).*

[Open Video ↗](#)

I would like to conclude by saying that we still need to further identify and understand the correct historical context of the images we hold in the archives, for only then can we understand their intent, or even their “raison d’être.” However, we should also realize that the ability to do so might go beyond the means of any individual film archive. A film archivist may be a film historian, but not a specialist in the geo-political history of particular regions. A film archive contains many types of footage, everything from home movies to feature fiction films, and archivists help to categorize and describe the footage to the best of their abilities, but one cannot expect them to immediately recognize

historical sensitivities in the footage they are describing. And even if they do, their institutional databases require a “neutral” language, free of interpretations. This type of footage is hard to fit into any category, not only in relation to film genres, but also in relation to seemingly basic descriptions such as geographic attributions that might have become impossible due to constantly shifting national borders. It is only through the help of others, specializing in particular periods, geographies, histories, cultures, and traditions, that the real potential of the footage waiting to be discovered in the archives can be brought to light.

# Nascent or Drowsy? Dutch Newsreels Made in Indonesia between 1947–1950

Gerda Jansen Hendriks  
(NTR Dutch Public Television)

Collection

Context

Film & Video

Representation

Can films produced within a colonial context have any significant meaning for nations now? And whose legacy do they represent? This paper tries to find an answer and a way forward for a specific set of films, namely, Dutch newsreels made in Indonesia between 1947 and 1950. During this period, Indonesians thought of themselves as being an independent nation, while most of the Dutch still thought the territory was part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. As the Netherlands did not accept the proclamation of independence by the Republic of Indonesia, a colonial war ensued, with the Dutch giving in at the end of 1949 by transferring sovereignty.

Between the end of 1947 and the beginning of 1950, more than 150 newsreels about events in Indonesia were made by the Gouvernement Filmbedrijf Multifilm Batavia. As the name indicates, this was a division of the Dutch Government Information Service. For the outside world though, the institute operated as an independent company and used only the second part of its name, Multifilm Batavia. The company ran a large, well-equipped film studio in one of the suburbs of Jakarta, Meester Cornelis. Besides newsreels, titled *Wordende Wereld* in Dutch, a whole range of other films were produced, including movies for an Indonesian audience.



Title image of the weekly newsreel *Wordende Wereld*. The still particular still of the title image is from the report “Herwonnen Vrijheid” [Regained Freedom], Multifilm, 1947.

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What do these newsreels tell us about a very important period in the history of Indonesia? One judgement comes from an Indonesian official, Wim Latumeten, who attended the Dutch-Indonesian Round Table Conference in The Hague in the autumn of 1949. His view was quoted in a report for the government (2 Feb. 1950, Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst [RVD] archive, inv.nr. 3533) concerning the continuation of *Wordende Wereld*. I use it as the main title of this paper: *Nascent or Drowsy?* Latumeten meant this as a rhetorical question. For him the newsreels did not represent a nascent world, as their Dutch title *Wordende Wereld* suggests. No, they reflect a bygone world, a world of backwardness and lack of modernity. So was the Indonesian official right? This paper discusses the value of these newsreels, most of which are held by the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision.

“Wordende wereld,” literally meaning nascent world, was what the Dutch producer of Multifilm Batavia, Mannus Franken, sincerely believed in. With the newsreel he wanted to show how the Dutch East Indies were developing from a colony into an independent nation. There was one “detail,” however, that he chose to neglect: for a lot of Indonesians in 1947, the independent nation was already there. To have some idea of the kinds of reports in *Wordende Wereld*, take a look at a story typical of newsreels all over the world at the end of the 1940s: the opening of a new road.

There are some remarkable inconsistencies in this newsreel. The voice-over tells us that the new road was an initiative of the local people. And sure enough, we see them having a party,



*Wordende Wereld* newsreel 19 depicting the opening of a new road—the last segment of the report.

[Open Video ↗](#)



with traditional music and dances in colorful costumes. The voice-over continues, stating that the people are very happy because this new road will free them from the threats of terrorists—this last statement being the Dutch expression for Indonesian independence fighters. One then wonders if the initiative really came from the local people at all. Moreover, you can see the actual, official opening is an all-white affair, with presumably the wife of the

Dutch administrator who cuts the ribbon.

In the movie theater, newsreels were shown under the heading of Multifilm Batavia. Multifilm was a well-known film company in the Netherlands, and before World War II, Multifilm Batavia was their branch in the colony. After 1945, Multifilm Batavia became a part of the film studio of the Dutch Government Information Service. Everyone who worked there was a civil servant and had to follow the rules of the Information Service. For the outside world though, the name Multifilm Batavia was kept, on purpose, to uphold the idea that the films produced were not government propaganda, but rather objective, neutral productions.



Title image of the company Multifilm Batavia/Haarlem. This particular still is from the *Wordende Wereld* report “Pontianak Ontvangt de Lt. GG van Mook” [Pontianak Receives the Lt. GG van Mook], Multifilm Batavia, 1947.

Following the rules of the Dutch Government Information Service appears to have not been very hard for the people who worked there. In general, they shared the belief of Dutch officials that Indonesia would become independent, in the short or long-term, and within the framework of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Of course, according to them, the Indonesians needed the help of the Dutch as the perception was that they were not yet capable of running

their own country. In this perspective, Indonesia was a nascent world, the Indonesians were on their way to adulthood, but not there yet. This attitude prevails in many reports and is most striking in ones that cover traditional craftsmanship, for example this story about making buttons.



The report “Van Kakebeen tot Knoop” from the *Wordende Wereld* series showing villagers making buttons in 1949 in the village of Pekalongan.

[Open Video ↗](#)

A voice-over telling us “it all depends on the intelligence and drive of the villager” may sound innocent, but conceals fierce paternalism to say the least, disdain lurking around the corner. One can wonder if a report like this, showing “drowsy” craftsmanship, has any meaning for present-day Indonesia. This gets to the heart of the matter: whose legacy do these newsreels represent? Before answering, it should be made clear that *Wordende Wereld* created many different kinds of reports, and really did bring news from Indonesia, as the subtitle reads.

The next example needs a bit of historical background. This is a report from June 1948. At that point in time, with international mediation, negotiations were taking place on Java between the Netherlands and the Republik Indonesia. However, in this conflict there is another group, the Indonesian Federalists, who oppose the one nation state of the Republik Indonesia with its leader president Soekarno. The federalists are supported by the Dutch. When a commission of the federal state of East Indonesia travels to Djokjakarta, the capital of the Republik Indonesia, a Dutch film crew goes with them and they make the first film that is known to the outside world of daily life in the Republic.



The report “Goodwill-Missie van Oost-Indonesië Op Reis” [Traveling Goodwill Mission of East Indonesia] from *Wordende Wereld* showing street views of Djokjakarta in 1948.

[Open Video ↗](#)

Even with the paternalistic voice-over and the rather embarrassing use of music, this is a report that can be valuable as cultural heritage for Indonesia, particularly since no film footage about this period is known from the Indonesian side. The newly proclaimed Republik Indonesia had its own governmental film service and made films and news reports, but it is not known what happened to these or if they are preserved. In this *Wordende Wereld* report, at least we get a glimpse of life in Djokjakarta.

Why is all of this material not kept in Indonesia itself? Regardless of the content, everything has in fact been filmed there. Additionally, when sovereignty was transferred, the newsreels were in Indonesia; the film studio in Jakarta and all its assets were formally transferred to the Republik Indonesia at the end of 1949. Production of weekly newsreels continued until March 1950—some of the Dutch cameramen stayed on and were employed by the Indonesian government. Newsreels of those months show president Soekarno on a state visit to India and Pakistan for example.

Shortly thereafter some unfortunate events caused a fire in the archives of the film studio; most of the newsreels went up in flames. Following this, the Indonesian Ministry of Culture asked Multifilm in the Netherlands if they would be willing to send them their copies of the newsreels; copies were in fact housed in the Multifilm archives in the Netherlands because *Wordende Wereld* was also shown there. Multifilm had no problems in sending their copies to Indonesia, they had no value to them anymore, but they did think wise to consult the Dutch

Ministry of Foreign Affairs first: would they be interested to have a look and maybe finance making copies of the reports that could have value for Dutch history?

The Ministry said yes, so a civil servant had a look and made a list; one of his choices later became a classic for Dutch viewers: the arrival of Prime Minister Louis Beel at the airport in Jakarta and the absolutely servile way the reporter asks him questions, starting with “Did you have a good trip, your excellency?” Journalism of bygone days.



Dutch Prime Minister Louis Beel is interviewed at Kemajoran, the Jakarta airport in the *Wordende Wereld* report “Ministers Beel en Jonkman Komen Aan” [Ministers Beel en Jonkman Arrive], Multifilm, 1947.

About forty percent of the newsreels were copied. After this, Multifilm shipped all of the newsreel film cans they had to Indonesia. End of story? In fact, no. In the beginning of the 80s the Dutch Government Information Service showed a renewed interest in the *Wordende Wereld*. The Indonesian government was all too happy to ship them back—in exchange for video copies. VHS is much easier to handle, they thought. But most of us know what this means—that these copies are hardly usable anymore. As such, since the beginning of the 90s all, or most, of the “original” *Wordende Wereld* reports are housed at the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision.

Until recently, Dutch scholars have had to make special appointments to view these films. But now, with YouTube, Vimeo and whatever online channels one can imagine, including Sound and Vision’s own channels, viewing can technically be made possible for everyone. A lot of these newsreels are digitized, but are not available

online. Not yet, anyhow, but this can change. Copyright ownership might be an obstacle, but according to Dutch law, government-produced films as these ones are, are free of copyright after seventy years. With the *Wordende Wereld* series being produced until 1950, the seventy year waiting period in fact comes to an end this year, in 2020.

In my opinion, it is important that these newsreels become available online, especially making them accessible to Indonesians as only then are they able to consider the value of these Dutch-made newsreels for their own history. And only then is a discussion possible about the meaning and importance of these newsreels for both countries. I would love to be part of that, because whatever the judgement may be about their content, the newsreels are part of a web of colonial heritage, shared between Indonesians and the Dutch.

**NOTES**

This paper is based on the PhD dissertation of Gerda Jansen Hendriks, *Een voorbeeldige kolonie. Nederlands-Indië in 50 jaar overheidsfilms 1912–1962*, Amsterdam, 2014, pp. 248–250; 271–309. <https://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.432630>.

# Verloren Banden: Moluccan Footage, Articulating Perspectives in Postcolonial Netherlands

JEFTHA PATTIKAWA  
(Verloren Banden)

Collection

Film & Video

Representation

Silence & Erasure

I was born in a Moluccan barracks camp in Vaassen, a village sixty kilometers from Hilversum. That same year the Netherlands was startled by a series of dramatic events: young Moluccans took hostage of a primary school in Bovensmilde and hijacked a train near De Punt. Two train passengers and six Moluccan youngsters were killed during a violent attack by the Marines. The Moluccan community at that time lived at odds with the Dutch government. Nineteen seventy-seven was the peak of a radicalization process that had begun in the mid-1960s. These Moluccan youth protested against the bad way their parents were treated.

The position of Moluccans in the Netherlands is influenced by colonialism. After arriving on military service order to the Netherlands in 1951 due to the decolonization process of Indonesia, the Moluccan community was housed in camps. Later, they were housed in special residential areas. Living in the camps and the special neighbourhoods resulted in the social isolation of Moluccans in the Netherlands,

causing serious socio-economic disadvantages. This isolation was further reinforced by the Moluccan community being focused inward on their own Moluccan republic. The image of Moluccans in the Netherlands was formed by resistance, protest, radicalization, and violence. Just before my year of birth an event took place that caused a deep wound in the local Moluccan community in Vaassen; an event that lasted two days, but has always stood in the shadow of a series of dramatic events that took place in the 70s. On October 14, 1976, the violent evacuation of a part of our barracks camp took place, enforced through (state) violence. The demolition had been planned for some time, but some families, including mine, refused to leave that part of the camp. The situation was even more complex because a new residential area built on the same site and that we were to move into, would replace the barracks camp.

There was a rumour circulating in the intelligence service that heavy weapons would be present in the camp. During the forced eviction,



the government decided to deploy a large police and military police force. The residents of the camp heavily resisted when the police entered. That day, many innocent families lost their barracks and personal belongings. The heavy weapons that were supposedly there, were never found. After this traumatic event, the community became even more closed. Distrust of the government grew and within the enclosed community unemployment and drug abuse among young people increased explosively. Of the estimated 1,100 inhabitants, 150 became addicted to hard drugs.

In September 1978, young Moluccans from the local community set up a welfare organization specially for Moluccans in Vaassen. This foundation, called Waspada—translated as “be alert and vigilant”—was created because there was no specific drug shelter for Moluccan addicts and unemployed, and because the existing Dutch drug help organizations were not able to reach the Moluccan youngsters. Many of the Moluccans using hard drugs felt uncomfortable and misunderstood by Dutch society. The young people had to find their own way and create their own tools to help their community, and to become a full part of broader society.

During this period, more welfare organizations specifically for Moluccans were set up by Moluccans in the Netherlands. Professor of Moluccan migration and culture Fridus Steijlen wrote about this in his co-authored book with Henk Smeets *In Nederland Gebleven* [Stayed in the Netherlands]: “The increasing use of hard drugs within the Moluccan community intensified in the mid-1970s. Subsequently, from 1977, around fifteen projects were created to help Moluccan hard drug addicts [...]” (298). Dutch institutions were not aware of these problems

among Moluccans. From the late 1970s, the Moluccan community in the Netherlands took the initiative to tackle the socio-economic problems themselves, specifically concerning drug use and the high unemployment rate. Thanks to these initiatives, which were a strong sign of the resilience of the Moluccan community, the problems would eventually be overcome, after which the Moluccan community could fully participate in Dutch society.

Back in the village of Vaassen during this period, various activities for young and old were developed by and under the umbrella of Waspada. In addition to the drug aid, there were sport and music activities, a printing company, and a video group. With video being a new medium of the time, one of the activities initiated was a video workshop. The film project named *Cermin*, which means mirror in Moluccan Malay, ran from the end of the 70s to the mid-90s.

In 2016, forty years after the evacuation of our barracks camp, I found an old photograph of young Moluccans with professional video equipment in a family photo album.

After an intensive search for these Moluccans with the video camera, I ended up in the attic of a former member of the video group where a treasure was waiting for me: more than 300 professional tapes with a total playing length of 144 hours consisting of Waspada footage showing the Moluccan perspective. This footage makes us part of intimate conversations between generations that had to find a new place. It shows daily life. It shows how we danced and made music. It shows traditional weddings, how families expanded, and how we celebrated for days. On the tapes one



can hear how the Moluccan Malay language became more and more entangled with Dutch as time went on, and how it eventually faded. The footage is about day-to-day routines within the community.

With a few core members of the video group—the makers of the footage—we investigated options for safely housing these valuable tapes. Of course our first option was the audiovisual archives of the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision. Unfortunately, we were rejected, the argument being that the institute already had enough material about Moluccans.

Together with the support of the local Moluccan community we took the initiative to digitize some of the tapes and organize exhibitions by ourselves. We mobilized the former residents of the barracks camp and many other Moluccans through walks, exhibitions, and during informal meetings in the living rooms of our community. Near the places where Moluccans used to be temporarily housed in the barracks camp, there are now residential areas where Moluccan families still live. These neighborhoods in the Netherlands have become a *lieu de mémoire*, places of remembrance for the community.

On Saturday, October 22 in 2016 we organized a walk to Vaassen; with a large group of people, we brought the videotapes back to the community. That day hundreds of people were waiting for us with the sound of the tifa drums and Moluccan songs. There were children and grandchildren of the first residents of the barracks camp; everyone joined. Our story was covered by the media and through the councilor of the municipality the footage has now found a place at the Gelders Archief. This means that the tapes are now being digitized in collaboration with this regional historic center, with the local Moluccan community providing the metadata and descriptions.

With their cameras, the Moluccan youth back then unconsciously recorded the period of growth and resilience of the community; it is a small and local history, but represents a larger Moluccan perspective. Archives are the foundation for the great historical stories that we

tell. Unfortunately the stories of Moluccans as loyal fearless soldiers in the service of the colony, and the violent “other” in the 1970s, still dominate the archives. These stories that pervade the archives tell how Moluccans arrived, were tucked away in barracks on the outskirts of society, and radicalized. But what happened next? And what happened after a large part of that generation became addicted and unemployed?

The footage shows how we organized ourselves, out of view of the media and memory institutions. And how, despite marginalization, isolation, and the resulting social problems, found a way to participate in Dutch society—from exile to migrant to citizen. The footage is unique in two ways: the images of Waspada show the resilience of the Moluccan community in postcolonial Netherlands, and the visual material was made by the community itself.

The importance of self-representation is best explained by the words of the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her TED presentation called *The Danger of a Single Story*. Here she speaks of what happens when complex human beings and situations are reduced to a single narrative. She says:

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. [...] It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. [...] Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story, and to start with, “secondly.” Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story.

In the Moluccan case, start with *Masohi* and *Muhabbat* or our *Adat*, the Moluccan traditions and rules of life that often formed the foundation of the Moluccan welfare organizations in the Netherlands, and not with the dramatic events of the 70s or the recruitment of Moluccans as ethnic soldiers in the colonial army, although these stories still dominate the archives. And you have a completely different story.

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# On Being Prone in the Archive: Black British Erotic Power and Sexual Healing<sup>1</sup>

TAO LEIGH GOFFE  
(Cornell University)

Affect

Artist Approach

Film & Video

Intimacy

Reimagining the Archive

Sound



Sound and vision are critical to my multi-sensorial archival methodology and to my praxis of storytelling. From my position as a PhDJ, a professor and a DJ, my practice involves deep listening as opposed to close reading that centers the full human sensorium to embrace an embodied experience. To me a syllabus is a mixtape. I see DJing and educating as analogous antiphonal processes that require a call and response of curation. Remixing is critical to my praxis as a Black woman living in the United States, because my simple physical presence defies expectations in both industries. I am always assumed to be the assistant and never the assistant professor. I am also never assumed to be a DJ, even when I am DJing, because I am a woman.

For cultural theorists like me who write about the human traffic of the transatlantic slave trade and what I call “racial indenture,” working in the colonial archive is what historian Jennifer Morgan has described as occupying a place on the verge of “breakthrough” and “breakdown.” Thus, reckoning with the affective toll and labor of archival research, I extend these concerns to imagine the potentiality of the European colonial archive as a space for sexual healing. Not dissimilar from the sacred and the profane terrain that Marvin Gaye oscillated between—of gospel tradition and R&B, I fantasize about an archival space that can be a site of transgression, of catharsis, and potentially elation. In the potential for elation lies the possibility of sexual healing, that is empowerment through the embodied libidinal experience as a resource.

The coloniality of the archive is both holy and full of terror, if we listen closely enough for the violence of the past.<sup>2</sup> Political economy without consideration of the sexual economy of the plantation is an incomplete rendering of modernity. Sexual violence with impunity against Black women and Native women continues to determine what Cedric Robinson called racial capitalism, and the attendant histories of racial enslavement, indenture, and

ecological extraction. Transgressive acts, such as clandestine forms of listening, and in particular what I identify as powerful or “erotic listening,” become possible at the door, the threshold. There is liminal power in listening, to channel Audre Lorde’s definition of the erotic as distinguished from the purely pornographic in her essay “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.”

“What is your after-hours fantasy in the archive, Tao?” This question was posed to me by an audience member of the Inward Outward symposium on archives, race, and coloniality. For my presentation there I designed a visual soundtrack that is a mashup of the visual/sonic aesthetic of Black British artists Isaac Julien, Floetry, Sade, and FKA twigs. To address the topic of intimacy in the archive here, I offer an accompaniment, a visual essay, as an answer to the question posed, in seven vignettes (see image on following page).

This text and the visual essay reflect on the call of the first panel of the symposium to “Reimagine the Archive.” Visuality as opposed to centering words adds a sensual dimension of intimacy to the cold, bloodless European archive of colonial accounting. To gesture to the anonymity of the archive, in my visual essay, I’ve chosen an image (bottom left) of archival boxes stacked on shelves. What room is there for intimacy on the dark shelves of the archive?

I follow in the tradition of Black British filmmaker Isaac Julien and his exploration of the place of intimacy in the physical archive of imperialism in his eight-minute film *The Attendant* (1993). While Julien presents an after-hours SM fantasy with whips, leather, and chains in a British museum between an older Black man gallery attendant and a young white man, a patron, I am centering the role of the Black British woman Julien gives us in this triangulation of desire as a way to understand my after-hours archive fantasy. It occurs to me that as a child growing up in London, my aunt who was visiting from America, lost me at the British

## 1

In the spirit of generous and generative citation, I’d like to give a shout out to the ongoing inspiration through the citational praxis of the roll call. Many thanks to my editors Rachel, Alana, Eleni and Esther for their tireless work. Thanks to Deb Thomas who delivered a vibrant audiovisual keynote in the archives. Thanks to the artists who provide the raw material and friends who provide the resource of listening and stimulating new thought in conversation about Black feminisms in the Netherlands: FKA twigs, Isaac Julien, Audre Lorde, Gaia Goffe, Grégory Pierrot, Eliza Steinbock, Julian Isenia,

Alana Obsourne, Nurul Razif, Natasha Lie Wah Hing, Tante Ann, Danielle Davis, Clara Smidt Nielsen, Arlette Mulrain. This investigation began in 2008 in a final paper for a seminar entitled “Race and the Pornological” taught by Anne Anlin Cheng at Princeton University. Thank you, Anne, for introducing me to the erotic power of critique and how the implicit tension of breaking something down can be generative and poetic.

## 2

Here I emphasize the word “for” in the vein of Tina Campt, to make a distinction from listening “to.”

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“What is your after-hours fantasy in the archive, Tao?”<sup>3</sup>

Museum when I was four years old. Feeling lost in the colonial archive has resonated with me as a memory of confusion rather than trauma. I felt enveloped by the archaeon as I wandered past the cases of Egyptian mummies wondering if I would find my family again. Four-year-old Tao consigned herself to having to stay in the British Museum after hours and being closed up in a sarcophagus.

In many forms the colonial archive, the museum, is such a trap, an oscillation between burial and excavation. There is only one way in and no way out. From my position as a PhDJ I sonically and visually remixed and transformed Isaac Julien’s *The Attendant* to examine how being stuck in the trap of the museum could be a power position. Remixing in a Jamaican resonance, I inverted the color scheme of Julien’s

3

Image References: Top row (1): Still from FKA twigs, “Papi Pacify,” *EP2*, Beggars Group, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OydK91JjFOW>, music video; Middle row left (2): Still of museumgoer on the floor from Issac Julien, *The Attendant*, 1992, film. X-ray filter added; Middle row center (3): Still of museum guard on the floor from Issac Julien, *The Attendant*, 1992, film. X-ray filter added; Middle row right (4): Still of woman listening from Issac Julien, *The Attendant*, 1992, film. X-ray filter added; Bottom row left (5): Stock photo, “Archive, Boxes, Documents,” Pixabay; Bottom row center (6): Still from FKA twigs, “Papi Pacify,” *EP2*, Beggars Group, 2013, music video; Bottom row right (7): *The Slave Trade* by Auguste Francois Biard (1833), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Slave\\_Trade\\_by\\_Auguste\\_Francois\\_Biard.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Slave_Trade_by_Auguste_Francois_Biard.jpg).

film with an X-ray filter, a photo negative effect to draw attention to the opacity and transparency of film. Inward Outward co-panelist Eliza Steinbock reminded me of the history of the significance of the X-ray for science, providing medical transparency in spite of the opacity of the body, of bones. As audio to my remixing of *The Attendant* for the symposium, I mixed a haunting track featuring Black British songstresses Sade (“Slave Song”), FKA twigs (“Home with You”), and Floetry (“Say Yes”).

The middle row of images in my visual essay here show a progression of three scenes from *The Attendant* that capture the oscillating dynamic possible in sadomasochism. On the left middle, the young white man is chained and whipped in the prone position. In the middle scene the museum guard, an older Black man, is face down on the floor, trading positions with the young white man. In the rightmost screenshot in the middle row we see the woman named by Julien in the credits as the conservator. She is the Black woman, my subject of interest, listening at the threshold to erotic noises between two men. They moan and she smiles with her ear against the wall, perhaps she derives pleasure because she is in on the homoerotic secret of the clandestine tryst.

In Julien’s film, the lovers, the two men, enact a tableau vivant of the famous painting *The Slave Trade* by Auguste Francois Biard (1833). I’ve included an image of the classic painting in the bottom right corner of my visual essay. Julien’s characters oscillate between the supposed “power” position on top and the prone position on the bottom. This is significant when we consider that when Black Panther, Afro-Trinidadian revolutionary Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) was asked about what position women in the movement could hold, he responded “prone.” Face down. While what he said may have been intended playfully or as a joke, the word prone, gestures to the intersectionality of exclusion against Black women who face racism multiplied by sexism and misogyny. It follows that legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined “intersectionality” in 1989 would also rally the call to #SayHerName through the African American Policy Forum in response to the silence surrounding the death of Black women and girls due to police brutality. Who cracks the whip? This was a question co-panelist Wiggerston Julian Isenia asked of the radical SM politics of Dr. Betty Paërl as well. Who is gagged in submission at the intersection of racialized sexual healing? The violence of the plantation whip is always the subtext. The woman between the men in Julien’s film, an older Black woman, a conservator in this postcolonial fantasy of sexual reparation for the transatlantic African

slave trade is silent. But all the characters are, only moaning. What is the Black conservator’s fantasy after hours in the archive?

Perhaps my fantasy is to know hers? Julien shows us the many roles Black women play to conserve institutions. Not only is this figure the museum conservator, she is also the wife of the museum guard, conserving domestic sanctity. In the quaint English home, before the attendant leaves for his shift he dutifully kisses his wife, the Black woman, goodbye. Won’t he see her at work? The Black British woman’s power to conserve the performance of a heteronormative household is in her silence. And yet at the end of the installation film she sings dolefully Dido’s Lament, “When I am laid in the earth” from Henry Purcell’s opera *Dido and Aeneas*. It is poetic and bittersweet. Though Julien does not center Black women’s erotic desire, he gives her the last aria, “Remember me, remember me, but ah! Forget my fate.”

These words could have easily been sung by another Black British contemporary artist, singer FKA twigs. In the visual essay, I juxtapose these X-ray filtered vignettes of Julien’s historical and sexual reckoning with FKA twigs’ music video for “Papi Pacify” (2013). In the song, she sings in a register of entwined pleasure and pain about difficult love as an act of endurance and sustenance from abuse. In the image in the top half of the visual essay, a Black man’s hands frame FKA twigs’ face and throat in an intimate act of (erotic) almost-strangulation. The threshold between pain and pleasure is important and blurry. The Black man’s hands suffocate the Black woman. FKA twigs has described the song as being about the perverse erotic dependency of an abusive relationship from which one cannot walk away. How do we understand the gendered, racialized intersectionality of such pain? Is there a possibility for sexual healing in the prone position? The center image of the bottom row is another screenshot from the “Papi Pacify” music video. I reference this emotionally abusive dynamic to dwell on the complicity of men of color, of Black men regardless of sexual orientation in the lives of women of color, of Black women regardless of sexual orientation. The juxtaposition comments on what Lorde describes as “using.” She writes, “to share the power of each other’s feelings is different from using another’s feelings as we would use a kleenex” (90). Lorde emphasizes that “use without consent of the used is abuse” (90). This is the oscillating dynamic in question in *The Attendant*.

On the uses of the Black woman in the archive, sexual healing becomes relevant again. FKA twigs has engaged with Lorde and on her own role as a healer through gesture. In her short

film *We are the Womxn* (2020), twigs draws on pole dancing as a resource for erotic exploration with dancers in Atlanta as well as with Black spiritual healer Queen Afua. In conversation with Clarissa Brooks, FKA twigs says, “as a womxn of color, the lineage of pain within my bloodline can be deafening.” Indeed, the mixed register of metaphors here speaks to “erotic listening” as the duality, the potential for the pleasure of poetics, or creativity, as much as it is a genealogy of inherited pain.

Shhh! We are meant to be quiet in the archive, in the library. Do we hear the shushing of the dominatrix, finger against pursed lips making noise without words in order to police, or is it the shushing of the sexy librarian, the sexy museum guard? The physical archive is a space where a decibel above a whisper is transgressive. Sonic and media archives offer different possibilities for listening, albeit within the privacy of headphones. Multimedia archives offer an occasion for a specific type of listening, listening for affect, for intonation, for intimacy. If we were to tune into the imperial archive and listen closely *for* instead of *to*, as Black feminist scholar Tina Campt recommends, I believe we would hear the reverberating din of a billion screams at once. Of pleasure or pain? Breakdown or breakthrough? The sexual healing of the imperial archive is located in the oscillation of uncertainty because both, pain and pleasure, can be true after hours in the archive of colonialism. There is beauty in the breakdown.

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# Form, Audience, Recognition: Transmediality and the Affects of Witnessing

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Affect

Artist Approach

Film & Video

Reimagining the Archive

Since 2012, I have been working collaboratively with Junior Wedderburn and Deanne Bell on a multi-modal and multi-dimensional project titled *Tivoli Stories*, which addresses the 2010 state of emergency in West Kingston, Jamaica. During the “Tivoli Incursion,” as the state of emergency has come to be called, security forces went into Tivoli Gardens in order to capture Christopher “Dudus” Coke, who had been ordered for extradition to the United States. Officially, seventy-four civilians were killed during this operation, but the number community members give is closer to two hundred. We have been assembling archives—including drone footage, archival footage, still and moving images of the contemporary landscape, still and video portraiture, and narratives. We have been interested in how these assemblages bring into being a range of affective orientations, themselves differently apprehended based on one’s location (politically, structurally, nationally, and psychically), and in what these affective orientations might do to and for audiences.

The intention of the project was not to showcase “trauma testimonies” of those community members who allowed us to record their narratives of the 2010 state of emergency. Instead, we wanted to develop a dynamic affective space in which the trauma of exceptional violence was deeply contextualized at many levels of scale, and in which the entanglements among these levels of scale remained open and unresolved questions that challenged the closed narratives of previous accounts. When I write about our practice, I call it “Witnessing 2.0” (Thomas). This is not the kind of witnessing we might expect from a truth and reconciliation commission or a human rights tribunal. Witnessing 2.0 is instead an embodied moral practice that seeks to produce intimacies to forge the basis for a new ethical register that destabilizes the boundaries between self and other, knowing and feeling, complicity and accountability, by encouraging an attunement to and responsibility for the various ways we are implicated in the processes we witness.

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*Tivoli Stories* generated an exhibit that opened at the Penn Museum in 2017, the 40-minute experimental documentary *Four Days in May*, and a 7:30-minute non-linear short film, and we are currently in discussions with the National Gallery of Jamaica to take a version of the exhibit there. This project has shape-shifted partly because of the kinds of materials we assembled. But it has also taken multiple forms due to the audiences we have sought to engage in different ways and toward different ends. While the 40-minute documentary, *Four Days in May*, speaks to a number of audiences, my feeling has been that its rightful audience is Jamaicans, because of what a familiarity with the events and the visual landscape can produce. Screening *Four Days in May* in festivals and on college campuses outside Jamaica where there is limited familiarity with local histories of political violence, I became disturbed that it was too easily being consumed as a “human rights film,” and that audiences seemed to be spending more time trying to understand what happened—the order of the events, the reasons for the responses, the geopolitical relations that would have caused them—than they were trying to understand what they were *feeling* from people on the screen. And despite the titling that I ultimately capitulated to including—titling that is really signposting rather than a word-for-word translation of Jamaican patois—several viewers became frustrated that they didn’t feel they understood what people were saying. I say this in this way because I have also shown the film to non-English, non-patois speakers in other areas of the world where anti-black state violence is normative, and these audiences have apprehended the film in profound ways beyond language. These experiences led me to want to experiment with another form, one that was non-narrative and non-linear, and one in which the sound (developed by Junior “Gabu” Wedderburn) did not correspond to the images. My sense was that this would potentially give viewers the freedom to abandon certain expectations of understanding in order to more fully immerse themselves in the affective relations of the visual and sonic landscapes.

Meanwhile in Jamaica, we have been experimenting with how a series of screenings, moderated public discussions about political and other forms of violence, and community-based ritual interventions addressing social and economic development in Jamaica might offer an alternative to the policy-driven approaches that normally constitute intervention within the public sphere. To date, we have screened *Four Days in May* in community-based settings in the parishes of Kingston, St. Thomas, and Portland, as well as at the University of the West Indies-Mona Campus. Given the intense political polarizations in Jamaican society,



*Four Days in West Kingston*,  
produced and directed by  
Deborah A. Thomas and  
Junior “Gabu” Wedderburn.

[Open Video ↗](#)

we have screened in spaces where people are already accustomed to coming together across partisan political boundaries. These screenings have been followed by moderated community discussions during which people have talked about their own experiences of state violence, about the broader history of violence in Jamaica and the legacies of the Cold War and U.S. intervention, about the effects of the transnational trades in drugs and arms, about the psychological trauma influencing contemporary decision-making, about the impossibility of measuring the long-term impact of states of emergency that result in significant civilian death, and about the extent to which they feel transformation is possible. What has been notable about these discussions is that when confronted with the narratives of people who directly experienced the violence of the state—narratives that detail both the quotidian and extraordinary ways violence has shaped their lives—audiences have reevaluated what they thought they understood about the events of May 2010. They have rethought their assumptions both about how political violence operates, and about the humanity of people who live in areas where it is rampant.

People who have seen both the 40-minute documentary and the experimental short have said that they feel the weight of the state more heavily in the longer version, and they feel the life people create, even in the face of

this weight, in the short. This is to be expected, really, as the longer film features people narrating their experiences of snipers shooting at them while they cowered in their homes, of watching their sons being executed by soldiers in the garden next door, of being dragged from location to location, tied to other men, wondering if they were going to die. However, this difference also brings us to the question of the relationships between politics and ethics, and of how visual and sonic archives can mediate or reconfigure these relationships beyond the Western universals through which they have been formulated. By disturbing the normative frames through which crime and violence have been represented in Jamaica, and by offering an alternative to the policy-driven approaches that normally constitute intervention within the public sphere, we have been seeking to understand the potential impact of alternative research-based modalities on different sectors of the national community, and thus to limn an alternative route through which meaningful social transformation could occur.

In our visual work, we are able to proximately juxtapose divergent scales, perspectives, and times. We are also able to reflect and generate affective engagements through the production and editing decisions that are made, engagements that are sometimes difficult to capture or represent through text. Moreover, because these engagements are stubbornly both unpredictable

and aspirational, our multi-modal work seeks willfully to accept this indeterminacy, while also attempting to awaken some sort of recognition of the domains in which we, as producers and consumers of events and their representations, are complicit. Working across multiple forms invokes the kinds of transmediation Christine Walley has written about. For Walley, using multiple media in ethnographic practice can offer new and potentially more diverse spaces for engagement as well as “possibilities for expanded dialogue in an increasingly unequal era” (624). Here, the term “transmedia” is coined not to evoke the use of multiple media platforms in research and dissemination, nor to highlight processes of adaptation from one media to another, but to extend “ethnographic narratives across media forms, with each component making a unique contribution to the whole” (624) in ways that might encourage more robust conversations about ethnography as process, relationship, and representation. It is these conversations we have sought to provoke with our work, and ultimately, I believe it is these conversations that can give us a sense of how, when, and why embodied freedom can actually counteract the constraints of historical violence-in-the-present, can help create the conditions of response-ability through real love, and can urge us to work through the complex entanglements of accountability in order to act reparatively, in concert, as humans.

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# The Archive as a Continuous Journey: Reflections on Day 1 of Inward Outward January 24, 2020

*The following is a reflection from Sadiyah Boonstra, who offered the closing words on Day 1 of the symposium. This text is an expansion of the thoughts she shared.*

## **S**truggling for Change: Intersectionality and Decoloniality

From the rich presentations, panels and discussions on Day 1, the image of a lively archive arena emerged in which struggles of coloniality, intersectionality, and identity took place on various levels and in different contexts. What surfaced was that historians, archivists, and the public are searching for different stories, histories, *herstories* and *theirstories*. We therefore need and expect different things from the archive, such as an intersectional and decolonial method and praxis to make the stories written more inclusive and produce new bodies of knowledge. Crucial in the power struggles discussed and that arose repeatedly in conversation is the need to uncover existing hierarchies of power and reveal the ways in which memory is politically controlled. Deborah Thomas' keynote opened the day addressing the violent normativity of the authority of archives; but how to document violence without reinscribing the violence of the system, she asked. Through a discussion of the multi-modal project she worked on with Junior "Gabu" Wedderburn and Deanne Bell, Deborah showed how affective ways of building and engaging with an archive of violence could undermine dominant narratives previously formed.

In the first session on reimagining the archive, intersectional approaches dealt with how archival power hierarchies have created unjust absences in the past and continue to do so, and how we might counter such hierarchies and lacunas. Sebastian Jackson looked at archives and images of racial representation in post-apartheid South Africa, and how the boundaries and possibilities of intimacy and its representation in the digital age are being redrawn. Wigbertson Julian Isenia and Eliza Steinbock argued that Betty Paërl's radical sex politics, and anticolonial and postcolonial work while siloed into different archival spaces

should rather be read "in stereoscope" as they inform each other. Tao Leigh Goffe explored the poetics of blurring the dichotomy between pain/terror and pleasure, by imagining how the archive as a physical space can be reinfused with affect and corporeality. Her visual soundtrack reimagined what could happen when encountering ourselves in the space of the archive, and what space the archive provides for intimacy. Inspired by Jack Halberstam's claim that "to remember and recognize the anticolonial struggles, other narratives do have to be forgotten and unlearned," (77) David Frohnappfel posed the question of whether creating spaces of forgetting can lead to new forms of knowledge.

Throughout the day the concept of decoloniality was invoked as an important strategy to dismantle the power structures of archival practices. The question is, however, in what ways are people employing the term and what does "decolonizing" mean for different institutions and people, how is it practiced, and how to develop mechanisms to facilitate multiple perspectives? Charles Jeurgens and Michael Karabinos saw technology as an innovative tool to decolonize the archive and facilitate record collection and distribution. They also regarded technology as a tool for multiplying perspectives and voices heard, and bringing out those suppressed. They explored how digitization implies the transformation of the materiality and meaning of the materials, making available digitally what was analog. However, they highlighted the dilemmas of this process as digitizing collections can reinscribe colonial processes. In the same session, Andrea Zarza Canova, a curator in the World and Traditional Music section of the sound archive at the British Library, reflected on the Museum Affordances project exploring the ways in which the British Library is addressing silences in their collection.

In the act of archiving, how do we make sure we do not transpose the processes of colonialism, of racism, onto a different medium, into different practices? If we continue to use certain kinds of problematic tropes—such as race and gender—as metadata, we perpetuate the system we seek to counter. As archivists, researchers and cultural workers it is important that our praxis does not entrench the errors of the past, but corrects them in order to establish collections in a critical manner, and describe those collections in a more accessible and inclusive way. Terminology is therefore of the utmost importance. Words are not just words, especially when they carry racist and derogatory meanings that symbolize oppression and degradation, and enact violence. There is still much room for archives to improve their engagement with communities represented in their collections, and to work

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together to, amongst other things and at the very least, confirm their databases don't make use of violent language.

### **Emotional Encounters and Subjective Connections**

The desperate need for change translates into a call for multiplicity in provenance, narratives, and records in a counter-hegemonic archiving process that is a collective and collaborative undertaking from research through annotation, to distribution and use. These pluralistic layers would contribute to the redistribution of knowledge production via networks and new forms of association. As Deborah Thomas notes, sounds, images, and emotions are all connected and reinforce the mental image held, which means that they offer a different way of consuming archival material. As illustrated in her keynote, engaging with the archive can become an act of citizenship, an embodied practice, and a form of co-performative witnessing producing intimacies; this could establish an affective, emotional framework capable of shaping socio-economic and political spheres. It is here that we can begin to reimagine a different kind of archive and other starting points capable of enabling more democratic futures.

Other speakers, such as Sebastian Jackson, Tao Leigh Goffe and David Frohnepfel also pointed out that archives are ultimately about people and their connection with the personal. This was addressed again at the end of the day by Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken during the roundtable discussion she moderated, asking: How can archives connect to and reflect our emotions, our identities, who we are, and where we see ourselves and our histories? There exists an anxiety to "remember," to know one's identity, so archives should allow for and facilitate such emotional encounters.

A different kind of archive would require a fundamental shift from the notion of objectivity which falsely suggests that there is one history that should be told, a history that can be created from the evidence in the archive. Today we should acknowledge and accept subjectivity as an unavoidable yet unpredictable, and sometimes incredibly significant, element in the archival process. For example, The Black Archives was created, building its own archive, in the course of activities undertaken to accomplish a specific purpose: rediscovering and telling untold, hidden stories and histories that are largely left out of more "institutional" archives. This reimagining the archive is about bridging the gap between the archive as an institution and the personal, to allow for subjective decisions, stories, and histories.

Jefftha Pattikawa spoke about diversity and inclusion at the National Archives of the Netherlands. Inclusive action empowers communities by decentralizing the production of knowledge, creating the conditions to write and include other histories. In this way archives counter, complicate, and reimagine systems in which narratives are being produced, circulated, and understood. This requires not just a change in access to and description of materials, but also that the recordkeeping infrastructure itself is transformed to include communities and give them agency and ownership in collecting, selecting, maintaining, and accessing archival materials.

### **Re-Enactment and Performance as Archival Praxis**

In an attempt to correct unequal power dynamics and counter dominant discourses with new and fresh methodologies and perspectives, many institutions and archives too, increasingly turn to artists. Artists approach the archive differently and look at its materials from a different angle, especially when these artists belong to the source communities of the archival records. The involvement of artists is a global trend followed by institutions in possession of collections of various kinds, be it books, manuscripts, visual art or sound and moving image materials. The Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision treads on this path and had invited Rizki Lazuardi as its first artistic researcher in residence in the year leading up to the symposium. In his talk "Not a Light Touch" Rizki spoke of the Indonesian context and addressed the "unsaid" of colonial-related aspects of the archive.

What happens in the absence of materiality when the archive does not exist or is crumbling? In the context of Indonesia, the archive as an institution is largely absent as a consequence of the structural neglect of archives of various kinds. To fill this gap and to prevent valuable historical material from complete obliteration, artists and others working in the cultural space started archiving as praxis. They engaged in a series of actions: collecting, cataloguing, digitizing, classifying, accessing, researching, transforming, creating meaning, and so on. They took on the roles of archivists, historians, and anthropologists or rather, they re-enacted these roles. As such we could see the archive as a performative act in which a string of actors perform various roles and take on a variety of responsibilities.

For his residency at Sound and Vision, Rizki explored a similar kind of praxis, using re-enactment. With a focus on the pest plague in the early twentieth century in colonial Indonesia, Rizki re-enacted the histories

captured in the archival records. Inspired by a record showing the burning of a house to curb the spread of the disease he convinced someone to let him burn a deserted house they owned in order to film it. Re-enacting the archival record makes histories visible in a new way. Performing the past is no longer a memory, but part of our present which can be relived to open up new emotional connections and engagements.

As we saw, finding new connections to the archive resonated throughout the day, showing a shifting relationship between archival practice, history, and historiography. The search for new ways of engaging with archives and for building a new kind of institution is a continuous journey. And on this journey, we must continue to critically scrutinize our own actions.

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# A Balancing Act:

Reflections  
on Day 2  
of Inward  
Outward  
January 25,  
2020

*The following is a reflection from Esther Captain, who offered the closing words on Day 2 of the symposium. This text is an expansion of the thoughts she shared.*

The first edition of the Inward Outward symposium took place over two full days of presentations, screenings, and debate. When curating this symposium, the program committee—of which I was a member—envisioned several groups of participants coming together, who on paper could generally be thought of as academics, archivists, activists, and artists. To me, the symposium beautifully illustrated the intersection of the roles that many of us embody, and the ways in which these are not fixed but regularly overlap. We saw this in action with a PhDJ, scholars who were dancers, filmmakers who are scholars, activists who are academics and the like. We have a multiplicity of professional and private identities that we can choose to take up and embrace or that we may want to reject and cannot detach ourselves from, often existing as some combination of the two, that can both inspire us into creativity and fill us with pain.

Browsing over the notes I took during the symposium, they give an impression of the topics we explored together—some of them extensively, but most of them to be discussed in more depth later, as if we were to set an agenda for future symposia. For me, it became even more clear that privilege allows those who have it to expend less energy on navigating the world generally, and in archival and academic spheres specifically, less energy in terms of the emotional labour these spaces, and the encounters and experiences in them, regularly demand. I found pleasure in the alternative approaches to archival work that were offered at the symposium, such as queering archival spaces, unmuting silences, freeing voices, and remaking legacies. It was inspiring to talk about the reparative space in archives for care and healing, and to envision a third space for granting accessibility and community building by doing archival work. Some participants suggested silence and forgetting as empowerment, as a refusal to speak the master's language, a reference to

the seminal work of Audre Lorde, while others considered the strategy of “affirmative sabotage,” to use the concept put forward by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. I found myself still hesitating between rejecting and embracing haunting memories of a colonial past. And I certainly felt, like other participants, that in my archival encounters I was also doing grief work.

In trying to understand the power relations involved in dealing with coloniality and the wish to decolonize, it seems useful to bear in mind that our questions with regards to archiving and historical storytelling come from different *spaces* and at different *paces*. Different *spaces*, as some of us work in “official,” sometimes “national” archives, museums, heritage institutions, research departments, universities, and the like during the weekdays where it might be difficult enough trying to “change things” being the lone maverick, lacking critical mass in the shape of colleagues who support the aim of decolonizing structural hierarchies. For others, work exists as creating, running, and continuing to amplify alternative spaces, smaller organizations, or assemblages that carve out their own paths and challenge systemically-sanctioned institutions. We find different *paces* as some people and organizations have just recently embarked on the journey of “decolonization,” thinking through what it might entail in the practices of their specific institutions. While others have decades of experience focusing specifically on these issues and are faced with much repetition in this endeavor, sometimes choosing to not engage in a debate as an act of self-preservation from combat fatigue, protecting oneself from having to explain or be exposed time and again. Thinking through the specificity of space and pace also foregrounds the idea of experience, and for me, raised more personal, embodied questions to reflect on: What does it mean to find yourself depicted time and again as the highly visible “other”? Or, what does it mean to find yourself invisible, or absent? Such experiences, for me, can clearly raise tension and discomfort as they are so highly personal. Indeed, some moments of discomfort were felt during the symposium when speaking and listening from different spaces and paces; but these moments can also be extremely generative when they are worked through, processed, and lead to more questions.

We have different bodies, histories, and experiences of self, and come from different locations, and as such have different experiences and genealogies that we are informed by. This acknowledgement serves as an invitation to further explore the importance of positionality, as brought up by Eliza Steinbock during the closing conversation of the symposium; how do our identities shape our understanding of

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the world, and in the context of the symposium, how do we approach archives, audiovisual materials, coloniality, race, and violence? As discussed together, audiovisual archives are not passive containers of material waiting to be explored. Quite the contrary, we saw the performative character of archives, as a liminal space endowed with the power to open up, give access to (or deny it), act, and perform.

We should think of our accountability and responsibility towards audiovisual archives, but also our complicity in sustaining the existing power relations within them. How are we to consider ourselves as implicated subjects? For sound archives, it raises the questions: Are we able and willing to listen, and who do we hear? For moving image archives: Who and what do we see and what is missing? How do we look and how do we frame? And what are the technicalities, the intricacies of archival practice, that sustain violent, racist imagery and framing?

In conversation we acknowledged the fact that some colonial archives have taken material so out of context by denying the agency of marginalized people, that the tapes, reels, discs, and documents have merely become a cemetery; for some of this material it is necessary to revive and reanimate it, so it can come back to life, for others, the question of the violence enacted through its access is an increasingly important ethical question. Colonial archives, known to cause damage and produce haunting memories, also contain secrets and desires. There is much intimacy involved in working with archival audiovisual material, as it is an embodied practice: of ourselves as researchers and practitioners on the one hand, and of the subjects in the archives on the other. In that sense, archival work is relational and intersubjective, asking for embodied ways of understanding. Engaging with this undercurrent of archives contains a spiritual dimension and also the potential power to heal.

# Critical Archival Engagements with Sounds and Films of Coloniality

