

Binary and the Bushmen: Counting the Cost of the Code¹*Siona O'Connell*

Introduction

To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder - a soft murder, appropriated to a sad, frightened time.²

Every time the security buzzer allows me access to the University of Cape Town Manuscripts and Archives fortress, I am flooded with various emotions: somewhat relieved that I am allowed to cross the threshold; unsure if my student card has enough credit; hesitant. It is such a restricted space, with controlled access and reeking of categorisation, order and control. I want to assert that it is white space, with all the attendant concerns this brings in post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa; and I always enter with the unshaken belief that somehow I do not belong there, that I am an intruder. I am a Coloured woman and I believe it impossible for me to ignore the issues of race in any sphere in post-apartheid South Africa, as I have lived through, been shaped and informed by, the restrictions and parameters imposed on me as a result of my darker skin tone. I grew up during apartheid, and witnessed the forced removals of my family. The ubiquitous sign, "Whites Only," is indelibly etched on my memory. There are other threads that connect, including the derogatory label "Boesman," a term which is often directed towards members of the Coloured community.

This paper investigates the photograph, the archive, and the Bushmen. In particular, it will examine the genre of archiving and digitisation. I will investigate the photographic medium as one that speaks of the dead, and therefore of death. My overall aim is to open up dialogue on ownership of Bushman visual imagery in the archive. As the archive may be on a path to digitisation, the paper's intention is to look at the cost of photographic digitisation to the Bushman body. My position in this paper may be considered polemical or drastic, some may say extreme and impractical, as I directly challenge the University of Cape Town to examine its position on the material culture of Indigenous people in Southern Africa.

As a photographer, I acknowledge the joy of the medium, yet the act of taking a photograph is fraught with issues of ownership, violence and representation – a series of issues I struggle with. This is part of my personal dilemma, having trained as a photographer during my undergraduate degree, successfully facilitated many photographic and visual art workshops among underprivileged youth and adults, and exhibited in a gallery space. For the past eight months, I

have been involved with a group of Bushmen at !Khwatla San Culture and Education Centre, using art – particularly photography – to interrogate their past, present and future. This process entailed much soul searching, and is largely responsible for the fact that I am now unable to pick up my camera to take any photographs. Part of my ongoing research is the search for an ethical, happy-medium of taking and displaying photographs.

Upon entering the archive, the feeling of intrusion and voyeurism is re-enforced as I slip on the white gloves and start rummaging through photographs. As a photography enthusiast I am always intrigued by this medium. I enjoy the magic of the camera and the pleasure it gives when used by someone who has never had the privilege before. It is an expensive medium, and I am highly cognisant of this as a South African, when the cost of printing thirty six exposures is the equivalent of a day's wages for many South Africans. It is undoubtedly my passion too, and I am plagued by the many conflicts that accompany shutter release. I am acutely aware that a photograph is a visual medium – one looks at a photograph – and with this in mind I know that there is no innocent gaze.

The photograph provides a unique platform for interrogation on many levels, including the gaze, ownership, agency, remembering, and violence. It is more than a collection of pigments on light-sensitive paper. The genre is a system of representation with all the attendant concerns. To represent, to produce meaning through language, discourse and image is an area that is fraught with difficulties, as Foucault, Sontag, Benjamin, Barthes, Saussure and others have well illustrated. I assert that Foucault's reading of representation and discourse bears particular relevance for any discussion of Bushmen imagery. His discursive approach to representation (discourse, knowledge and power and the question of the subject) is summed up in his comment:

Here I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (langue) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of language: relations of power not relations of meaning.³

I struggle, therefore, at the pleasure I receive when looking at these photographs in the archive. I appreciate the delicate shading of blacks, whites and greys, critique the composition and marvel at the lighting. Yet, at the same time, I cannot ignore the indelible fact that in the archive I am looking at preserved proof of the violence embedded in colonialism in Africa. In her most recent book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag comments on the violence which is inherent in photography. She interrogates violence and photography, not only in the physical act of shutter release, and asks the all important question: 'How can we look?'⁴

Following Sontag, it is clear that there are several acts of violence in the process of taking and viewing photographs. Both the photographer and the viewer are then instruments of violence, and the question therefore needs to be asked: If

after viewing a photograph of violence I proceed to do nothing, does my looking degenerate into an act of complicity? If we enter into this debate, perhaps then we will begin to understand that with the act of looking comes responsibility and accountability.

Searching through the manila folders in the archive, I note with sadness that many of the subjects in the photographs are not named and are filed away in scrap notebooks, an overpowering indication of their place in the colonial world. How, then, can I come to terms with the archive? How can its contents begin the act of reparation to the traces of the bodies it contains?

Photography in Africa

Although this paper is not centred on the role of photography in Africa, a brief mention is appropriate as the medium played such a commanding role in the othering of Africa. The invention of the device in the mid- nineteenth century in Europe resulted in a medium that rivalled painting in the depiction of 'the real'. This scientific device, with the ability to capture using the effects of the optical, the mechanical, and chemistry, gave birth to a genre that encapsulates the realms of science and art, one that "fixes a moment in time."⁵ The introduction of the camera to Africa would lead to a further entrenchment of the practice of othering in colonial and post colonial Africa,⁶ with a particular focus on the Bushman body as an object of nature and for study.

Photography was taken up around the world very unevenly and, in most of Africa, prior to colonial occupation in the late nineteenth century. The camera travelled the same routes as mercantile and colonial interests.⁷

The camera therefore played a strong role in the construction of the image of Africa. As Neumann confirms, "The camera and the photographic image have played a considerable role in imagining that '[T]his is the way Africa should look.'"⁸

Bushmen were measured, prodded, cast and photographed with their corporeal being the main focus of any 'knowledge' production. In 1969, Darwinian biologist, Thomas Henry Huxley initiated a project to produce a photographic record of the races of the British Empire.⁹ Edwards asserts that this project was underscored by "Ideas of racial science and hierarchy and colonial powers that made Huxleys 'well-considered plan' imaginable in the first place." Harris maintains that:

in the interaction between photographic images and colonial discourse, it was the colonized subject's "body... rather than that of speech, law or history" that was the essential defining characteristic of "primitive" bodies.¹⁰



Figure 1: Scrap Book 1. Photographed by Dale Washkansky (2007) from collection BC 151 University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives.

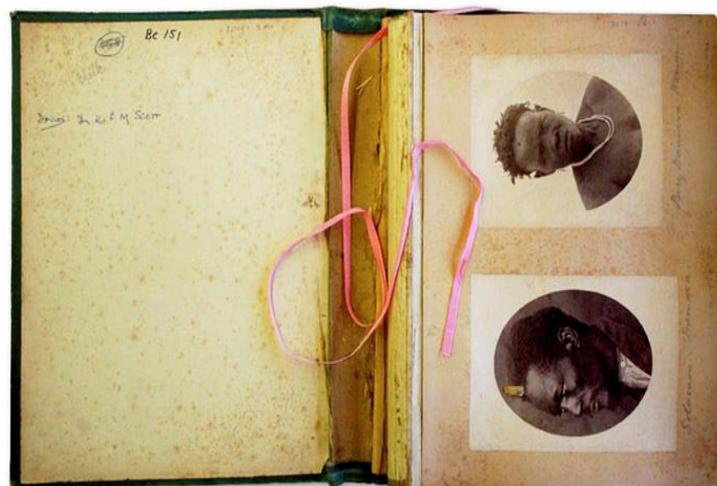


Figure 2: Scrap Book 2. Photographed by Dale Washkansky (2007) from collection BC 151 University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives.

The camera was largely responsible for witnessing particular violence and invasion on the Bushman body, as Pippa Skotnes of the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art asserted in her exhibition *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (1996). The controversial exhibition, which was held in the Iziko South African National Gallery, and the accompanying publication, focused on the history of the Southern African Bushmen, the effect of colonisation on the group, and the subsequent genocide of the group. It is interesting to note that the impressive exhibition catalogue does not include a single essay from any Bushmen contributor. This pattern is repeated again in Skotnes' latest achievement, *Claim to the Country: The Archive of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd* (2007).¹¹

Wilhelm Bleek, brother-in-law of Lucy Lloyd, was responsible for organising the Breakwater Prison series of Bushman photographs for the 1869 British Colonial Office project. Edwards comments on Bleek's role in the process:

[A]dding names, ages and measurements, as in the case of the Bushmen...the race is dying out and dwelling in regions which are generally inaccessible and hardly any photographs existing represent genuine Bushmen.¹²

As editor and curator of *Miscast*, Skotnes is successful in that the reader and viewer are left with no doubt as to the degradation of this diverse group. Photographs abound, due largely to her considerable efforts in locating them in archives and museums across the globe. The majority of the photographs work to dehumanise the Bushmen, rendering them a homogenous group, and placing them firmly as the 'Primitive Other' against the benchmark of civilization, the white European male. The Bushmen are depicted in black and white photographs often standing next to a measuring stick, clearly illustrated as specimens – from 'nature' rather than 'culture' – for scientific study. The powers of those photographs extend beyond the edges of the paper, as the image of Bushman, a European construct, remains as the overarching picture. They are taken out of context, viewed as 'backward' elements (in evolutionary terms) from Africa's wilderness, and are seldom, if ever, given the courtesy of being named.

For the Bushmen, the camera captured and froze their image as different and primitive, and to overcome this legacy is a struggle as the controversy around *Miscast* illustrates. Skotnes herself faced criticism as "she was accused of imposing an externally derived identity of 'Bushman,' either that of victim or sensual object."¹³ Michael Godby, writing in the *Miscast* catalogue, leaves the reader with the despicable image of how dehumanising these photographic practices were. Included in the directions for photographs of the time, Godby notes that "the subject was to be photographed naked in the four anthropometric poses, with a plainly marked measuring scale places in the same place."¹⁴ This is the image that has pervaded the construct of the 'Bushman', and the photographs are as insidious and deplorable as the collection of their body parts as trophies on display.

In an essay entitled “Network Subjects or, The Ghost is the Message,” Nicholas Mirzoeff asserts that:

Photography reasserted discipline by racialising the body within space ... this racialising of the camera transformed the device from a modest reaffirmation of the self in the panoptic gaze into a powerful expression of racial hierarchy ... the white subject finds reassurance from within his panoptical that he is not black and has photographs to prove it.¹⁵

This sentiment is echoed in the many Bushman photographs, negatives and contact prints, which are housed in archives in South African academic institutions, archives, libraries and museums. The University of Cape Town is no different, and holds many object collections and manuscript archives, with The Bleek and Lloyd collection being arguably the University’s most illustrious archive. It is certainly a feather in their collection and ownership cap. This collection, which happens to be a United Nations site of the Memory of World, includes collections of Bushmen oral history, documents and photographs. This archive lays bare the relationship between the Bushman, the coloniser, and the legacies of this relationship. I have no doubt that there are countless arguments that the University of Cape Town is the right place to house the collection; that its current and convenient placement allows for academic discussion, scientific research, and debate, and that, in the name of preservation, research and knowledge production, it should continue to be so. I agree that this is a contentious area as there is much to be gained from research and information dissemination. I ask whether this can be achieved within the ambit of respect and recognition for the subjects and their descendents. I emphasise that one cannot simply hide behind the arguments that, one ‘this is for research,’ or two, ‘I am just a photographer’.

Perhaps it is in considering a new space for knowledge production that a meeting place may be formed: a clearing that will allow for input, ownership, and comment from all parties. This space calls for an unprecedented move, one that will force the university to venture beyond its comfort zones. An effort that acknowledges that although the university was given the collection, it has to begin to address the fundamental question of ownership of these photographs, authorship, reparation, and dare I say it, repatriation. It has to consider the value of photographs beyond that of a tool of recording and representation. Perhaps the route will include an honest investigation by the university into death and black bodies, so poignantly illustrated by the approach of certain university academics and representatives to the Prestwich Street remains.¹⁶

Sites for re-interrogating erased histories

For South Africans and particularly the residents of the oldest port city in South Africa, Cape Town, issues arising from the contestation of burial sites offers a platform for interrogation of endings and beginnings, a questioning beyond the physical boundaries of the sites indicated. The early colonial burial site found at Prestwich Street, Green Point provides an arena for South Africans living in a

post-apartheid South Africa to delve into their own past, and an opportunity to deal with neglected and self-consciously denied aspects of Cape Town's history. The site provides the potential for the salient facilitation of an engagement with ideas of heritage, power, home and memory, and serves as an invitation for Capetonians and other South Africans to confront their own positions on the remnants and repercussions of a not-so-distant past as the democratic South Africa only a mere fourteen years old.¹⁷

The arrival of colonialism in the Cape in the mid-seventeenth century set in motion a pattern of contestation on several fronts, the remnants of which are still felt today. As with other parts of Africa, slavery played a crucial role in the shaping of the heterogeneous make-up of the Cape Colony, and even though slavery at the Cape spanned a period of just under 200 years, a period almost five times as long as state-sanctioned apartheid, this fact seems to bypass the day-to-day cosmos of this cosmopolitan city. "In this city there never seems to be a willingness to take up [the issue of genocide and the] destruction of human communities that were brought from across the globe".¹⁸

Derrida's question is resonant: "But, first of all, is there a history of silence?"¹⁹ Poet, writer and academic, Gabeba Baderoon, elaborates the point one step further when she writes:

the dominant ways of determining the boundaries of the human under apartheid, which were inherited from the colonial era, did not recognize Black people as human, and therefore did not recognize their deaths as deaths. Control over the meanings of death is an indication of who is regarded as human.²⁰

Baderoon comments that since the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, the country "has been faced with death – death long unrecognized, death denied – and its corollary, unburied bodies."²¹ The unmarked gravesite near Prestwich Street is a contemporary reminder of the legacy of colonialism and its offspring, apartheid, and a reminder that erasing, or denying, the lives of human beings has a painful heritage in our haunted past.²² Baderoon's poignant comment sums up my concerns over the value and regard of black bodies, and is a powerful indication that even in death, they are seen as inferior or, even, nothing at all.

Martin Legassick and Ciraj Rassool's recent work, *Skeletons in the Cupboard* (2000), which discusses the extent of the trade between grave robbers and South African and European museums in the early twentieth century, has called upon South African museums to take stock of their collections of bones.²³ Perhaps their call should have been levelled at the UCT archive as well. As Shepherd articulates the point:

For present purposes, we might note that the events around Prestwich Street leave open a number of questions concerning UCT's involvement as an institution. These include questions of

accountability in the relation between an institution which styles itself as ‘a world-class African university’ and the different publics that it serves, and in which, notionally at least, it is embedded.²⁴

I am reminded of Frantz Fanon’s groundbreaking work on violence and the black body. Fanon’s writings in Algeria, at the northern end of the African continent, have particular resonance for these images. Born in 1925 in the French colony of Martinique, psychiatrist and anti-colonial activist Fanon’s work, *Black Skin White Masks* (1967), raises questions of race, corporeality, the gaze and the epistemic violence of colonialism.

The white man wants the world; he wants it for himself alone. He finds himself predestined master of this world.²⁵

As colour is the most obvious outward manifestation of race it has been made the criterion by which men are judged, irrespective of their social or educational attainments ... I have read it rightly. It was hate; I was hated, despised, detested, not by the neighbor across the street or my cousin on my mother’s side, but by an entire race.²⁶

As a black man, whose life work and experiences underscored his being, Fanon articulates the invention of the human, and is preoccupied with the question of the black body not being human. “A feeling of inferiority? No a feeling of non-existence. Sin is Negro as virtue is white.”²⁷ Fanon’s other feted work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1966), was written when his body was under siege (he was dying from leukaemia), as well as being situated in the landscape of Algeria which was in the midst of active liberation and struggle. Fanon is therefore well versed in the language of violence, and raises the issue of violence in relation to colonialism and liberation. He stresses that colonialism, and by implication, the practices of colonialism, are violent in themselves. Torture (as evident in the Algerian war of independence) is indicative of this violence being perpetrated on the black body.

Fanon is preoccupied with the body, as there are significant visual and non-visual ways in which oppression marks the body. Identity, space and the body in space are all articulated through the body. Before anything, blackness is seen, and after that first viewing, the black body is constructed as different, lacking in relation to the cornerstone of civilization and humanity, the white colonialist figure. Visual representation, asserts Fanon, is foregrounded because “of the constitutive role of ‘the look’ as a site of power knowledge, of the sexualisation of the gaze, and its fantasmatic fetishisation of the body and the skin as signifiers of racial difference.”²⁸

Fanon is convincing in his argument that power resides in the flesh, the corporeal, which then is translated into words, labels and binaries – and I would like to add, photographs. Perhaps the university will address the question of whether it has a role in ensuring that the black body is subjected to further violence after death. As outlined earlier, these photographs of the Bushmen were

taken violently, and speak of violence. At the very least, the university has to consider building good relationships with the many different Bushman groups and communities and together to embark on a process, one that will include dialogue on culturally appropriate access and authorship. Anything less is an insult.

Restitution, ownership and reparation

Perhaps the university can begin this process by looking at the United Nations report on the protection of cultural and intellectual property which argues that “each indigenous community must retain permanent control over all elements of its own history.”²⁹ At the heart of the debate is the question of who owns knowledge and history. The battle for ownership of not only photographs but other indigenous material culture and human remains, sketches out the concerns that rage between knowledge as universal and knowledge as culturally constrained.³⁰ This is not easy territory, as repatriation, it may be argued, resurrects racial ways of thinking about groups. Another challenge is that repatriation ignores that humans are bounded entities and that culture, identity are fluid. Sociologists Helen Watson-Verran and David Turnbull proposes an avenue which may lead out of this dilemma when he writes that:

the ways of understanding the natural world that have been produced by different cultures and at different times should be compared as knowledge systems on an equal footing.³¹

A large part of the project at !Khwatla San Culture and Education centre centred on historical imagery of the Bushmen. Dale Washkansky and I showed them hundreds of photographs that we had collected in the archives as well as from LLAREC. For most of them this was the first time that they had seen these images. The auditorium was very quiet, but the reactions and reflections on the faces of the group spanned all emotions. They reacted with sadness, anger and disbelief, both at the atrocities that had been committed against their forefathers and mothers, but also at the fact that they had not seen these pictures before. This was especially true of Maseko Emmanuel, an elderly !Xun man. He could not speak any English or Afrikaans, but through a translator expressed vehemently that these photographs were a part of their memory, their present and future, and should be available to, and discussed by all Bushmen, especially the youth. He struggled to comprehend that there were several naked images available on the LLAREC webpage, with no one able to defend these Bushmen once again. Death, memory and forgetting, power and injury are caught up in this performance at the archive. How is the photograph situated in regards to memory – an enigma in itself? They are, I contend, intrinsically connected: both are paradoxes, speaking at one of absence and presence, of forgetting and remembering. As Aristotle insists: “to remember the future is not possible...nor is there memory of the present...But memory relates to the past.”³² In this regard, I assert that the archived Bushman photographs may find its place in the recognition of the past, as a tool of recognition.

What are the protocols in dealing with cultural materials that reside in archives? What progress, if any, has been made to ensure inclusiveness and legitimacy when dealing with material that speaks so emphatically of colonial violence and racism? At what level and to what extent, are the Bushmen involved in any decision making regarding documents and photographs of their experiences and knowledge? What cognisance, if any, is taken of the fact that filed away in countless manila folders, categorised and classified, are the remains of the dead Bushman? I contend that these photographs should be treated with the same respect and dignity as that which was ultimately afforded to the remains of Saartjie Baartman.³³

Re-figuring the photograph

In his well known book *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes records his attempts to recover memories through family photographs (he was looking for a photograph of his mother who had just died in an attempt to “bring her back”), and reflects that the photograph has the unique ability of capturing in the present, an event that happened in the past. In this paradox, the freezing of time (considering that time cannot be frozen), Barthes brings the dual persona of the photograph to the fore – the relationship between what has been and the present, and that that the moment of the release and closing of the shutter of the camera is like a death, it is gone forever.

Other shared traits include the magic of photography, as any first time visitor to a darkroom will attest. Barthes too confirms this in his comment that, “we keep in mind the magical character of the photographic image.”³⁴ In West Africa, photographers were long called “image magicians” and even today, studio names such as Magic Photo Studio or Mr. Magic are common.³⁵ Magic, photography, death and spectres are thus kindred spirits in Africa. As Behrend and Wendl suggest:

In many African languages, the word for (photographic) “negative” is the same as for “ghost or dead spirit” and that photos have been in many places integrated into ancestor veneration.³⁶

If the photograph then features so largely in the arena of death and memory, how can any discourse on the continued archival and digitisation occur outside of those to whom these dead are intrinsically connected? Who will pay the price if this question is ignored and thousands of Bushmen photographs are digitised and released into cyberspace, for the entire world to own, prod and gaze at once again? If the white walls of the archive are extended into the unlimited space of the internet, what price will the Bushman once again be expected to pay?³⁷

The roots of the archive are firmly entrenched in colonialism. The practice of collecting by missionaries, travel writers and ethnologists all combined to produce a vast network of knowledge that today form the outlines of the state and other archives. This knowledge collection entrenched the power of the colonialist – he constructed knowledge within the realm of his cosmos and ambitions. I therefore concur with Lalu in his assertion that: “archives function

very directly to define and sustain the relative intensities of power”:

It is important to bear this in mind when we proceed about the deliberations about the politics of digitizing African archival resources, especially given the competing configurations of power in discussions of archives.³⁸

The roots of the archive, theorist Jacques Derrida asserts, lies in the etymology of the term “archive.” The word has a connection to the Greek work *arkheion* (meaning place, address) of the *archontes* (those who rule and command).³⁹ Bell astutely sums up Derrida’s assertion of archives, power and control:

[I]n this space, set off from public place, rulers have the right not only to store official documents, but also to interpret them. The right to govern is always already a hermeneutic right, the right to assign meaning to and to make sense of the documents which, taken together, furnish the foundation and justification for the law.⁴⁰

The archive too, according to post-colonial theorist Achille Mbembe, is about death:

Archiving is a kind of interment, laying something in a coffin, if not to rest, then at least to consign elements of that life which could not be destroyed purely and simply. These elements, removed from time and from life, are perfectly recognisable because it is consecrated: the archives. Assigning them to this place makes it possible to establish an unquestionable authority over them and to tame the violence and cruelty of which the ‘remains’ are capable, especially when these are abandoned to their own devices.⁴¹

And so the performance between death, black bodies, photographs, injury and ownership play out in the apparent safety of the archive, which has several routines, among them gathering, selecting and preserving records. Within these activities, strategies of representation help to create, order and preserve the world within which these archives are placed. I want to assert that if the archive is about classification, echoing the ideals and interests of its owner, the institution, what then is the role of the institution in post colonial, post apartheid South Africa? I concur with Becker “that the power of the archive’s classifications in shaping subsequent research: gaps appear that remain to be filled, and the archive’s system of categorizing materials resists the conceptualization of new problems.”⁴²

An impressive collection is a jewel in the university’s crown (as the LLAREC webpage and the accolades heaped on Skotnes by the institution for her work with the Lucy Lloyd Collection attest), and ideology, power and prestige are the offspring of these collections. It is a self-referencing machine, unable or perhaps reluctant to relinquish control. The archivist chooses, selects and categorises and is, according to Becker “charged with documenting and preserving that which is

considered valuable, the museum (archive) has also become the institutionalized arbiter of value, determining what is worth collecting and saving for the future."⁴³ This is certainly the case with photographs both in conventional and digital archives as the archivist both selects, removes and produces meaning in these images. The archive is the gatekeeper to the access of these images by both public and private institutions, generously permitting "through their networks of power to underscore institutional goals."⁴⁴

The archive as gatekeeper was tangibly illustrated as a result of my visits; having a student card, I was allowed entry. However, there was a strict process to be followed to access any images, and I ask how an illiterate, non-English or Afrikaans speaking, non computer literate Bushman from Botswana, Angola, Namibia, or South Africa would be able gain access to the archive in the way I did so. The LLAREC webpage opens with the following description of the collection at UCT:

Curated by three major South African institutions, the Lloyd and Bleek collection is an archive of narratives, drawings and documents of and by the |xam and !kun people of southern Africa. Collected in the 19th century by Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek it is unique as an archive of indigenous life and thought, and has been recognised as a UNESCO site of the Memory of the World.⁴⁵

The question of ownership of photographs alongside other material culture is contentious, as Jane Anderson asserts:

[Photographs, sound recordings and films] hold an immediacy of representation, for instance, representations of place, of ceremony, of knowledge. That it is this material that raises quite intense questions of authorship and ownership is significant too because in the history of copyright law these have been the types of materials that have posed challenges for copyright law. For copyright law has struggled with determining creative endeavour, and hence justifying ownership of this material. A reflection upon these types of indigenous cultural material should alert us to the often hidden histories of instability in narratives of the genesis of intellectual property law.⁴⁶

Anderson's assertion is of particular relevance to UCT, and I contend that an investigation, however difficult, into ownership, copyright and authorship is long overdue.

Future challenges

The Bushman body, as Skotnes went to great lengths to illustrate, has and continues to be, the site of deplorable violence and invasion. To some extent this is illustrated by the trophy heads, diorama body casts and the anthropometric photographs collected. More insidious and pervasive evidence of this violence can be seen today in the group, who struggle to find their place beyond that of the exotic, primitive 'other'. Land dispossession, struggles with ownership over

indigenous knowledge, violence, extreme poverty alcohol and other abuses are the day-to-day realities of this group. What role can the photograph in the archive at UCT play in dialogue and healing for the Bushmen? Elizabeth Edwards comments that:

The mechanisms of photographs are complex. They are more ambiguously dynamic as they function in the real world, and within daily experience, not merely in some imagined or reified theoretical world.⁴⁷

This is territory littered with challenges, as it provides a point of intersection on many difficult issues, including that of copyright and Indigenous knowledge. Is there a positive space in which to view these photographs? I know that these are complex questions which underscore the genre of photography. These difficulties should not however preclude an inclusive investigation by all parties. As Appadurai proposes:

We have to follow things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in these forms, their uses, their trajectory. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things.⁴⁸

Appadurai's assertion is particularly relevant considering the Bushmen photographs in the archive. If this material culture of the Bushman is owned and access controlled by others, how can these photographs take their place and create meanings and knowledge for this group? I would like to assert that in retaining the status quo, the Bushmen will continue to be merely spectators of their past which is orchestrated, debated and constructed by others. Whereas Edwards contends that

In this, the signifying properties are photographs in museum contexts in exhibitions are fully recognized...Yet in many ways photography seems to have been remarkably untouched, beyond debates of 'positive' and 'negative' imaging, despite the centrality of visual anthropology in debates on representation...[and] little has been done to displace them or explore other ways of using photographs.⁴⁹

I argue that the aforementioned comment applies strongly to UCT. I am at a loss to explain how this institution, apparently concerned about transformation, has not opened up a debate on ownership, display and access of these images. I am bewildered that the university lauds the achievements of Pippa Skotnes with scant regard for the Bushman bodies that are yet again, reduced to vulnerable, naked bodies on the internet. Perhaps it is in rethinking the gallery space, and a concerted and joint effort to name those in the photographs, that some initial steps may be taken. A clearing that will allow for input, ownership and comment from all parties. Walter Benjamin puts it powerfully when he sketches the photograph as a link between the past and the future, "Photographs give evidence of that long past minute where the future is nesting, even today, so eloquently

that we looking back can discover it.”⁵⁰

Elizabeth Edwards too considers alternate spaces, those that challenge conventional viewing of ethnographic images. She suggests, and I agree, that perhaps it is in the blurring of the borders between ethnographic and other photographic art practices, the inclusion of the voice of Indigenous peoples that initial steps may be taken. She asserts too that photography be reconceptualised, no longer being a genre of statement, but rather one of translation, of continuous dialogue between image and culture.

As an artist, I appreciate the freedom that the fine art genre gives in attempting to debate issues of representation. As problematic as it is, to a large degree, many artists attempt to find answers. I assert only that any attempts should still be within the ambit of respect. Perhaps a concerted focus to acknowledge that photography is subjective, and its great ability to ‘capture a moment in time’ is perhaps its greatest downfall. Its inherent failure that denies what came before, and what is still to come. The University of Cape Town’s Manuscripts and Archives would do well to refer to the strides made in Australia regarding protocols on Indigenous peoples, knowledge and cultural materials. The progress made in respect of ownership and access to indigenous material in Australia, America and Canada, to name just three countries, is just a click away on the internet.⁵¹ Steps taken, Malik explains:

include the Hopi and Apache in America demanding control over cultural property of, and information about their respective tribes, including all images and text. In Australia, Aborigines have sought copyright law over all paintings and photographs of the Australian landscape that they believe is central to their spiritual life.⁵²

I therefore question how a South African university is apparently oblivious to the rights of Bushmen to their cultural material. As a very diverse group struggling to articulate and find meaning in the homogenous label of San, I assert that very few !Xun, Khwe, Khomani, Naro and Hai//om, to name a few, have had the privilege of access to photographs of their dead. This privilege is neatly kept aside for academics and artists, and the anointed few who feel free to re-photograph, prod, digitise and write about this group of people.

The film photograph and its digital counterpart have much in common, not the least being their composition of numerous dots, pixels. This is accurately illustrated in Henry Talbot’s lace prints (1845) and his assertion that photography is the art of fixing a shadow.⁵³ He recognises that the medium is one that records the absence of light, and Barthes, referencing Talbot, contends therefore that photography is, “a binary (and therefore numerical) system of representation involving the transmutation of luminous information into on/off tonal patterns made visible by light sensitive chemistry.”⁵⁴ The construct of the Bushman body epitomises the binaries of othering: nature versus culture; black versus white; literate versus illiterate. Digitisation and releasing Bushman images will further re-enforce the practice as it has an unholy alliance with the

binary code inherent in computers. The exotic 'other' will be placed in cyberspace and represented by electronic data where the where the circuit is either on or off, absent or present, zeroes and ones. I propose that the aforementioned scenario is a metaphor for the historical and contemporary position of the Bushman. A scenario sanctioned in the name of progress and research. As Michael Christie puts it:

It would be easy to assume that these digital objects actually contain knowledge, but in fact they are simply information: series of ones and zeros. The digital object is a re-presentation or an artefact of an earlier act of knowledge performance /production.⁵⁵

To contemplate the digitalisation of imagery and texts outside the ambit of Indigenous peoples, their rights, and traditional knowledge, reduces the indigenous body, and ignores the enormous framework which underscores that image or text. The digitisation of any archive in post-apartheid South Africa provides a platform for engaging in debate on the reconstituting of the archive. As Lulu asserts:

In the attempts to stage such a shift, the status of the archive has emerged as a source of uncertainty. In some instances it is perceived as a site of retrieval and representation, in others as a site of power and in others it is viewed as a site where the production of history is already underway.⁵⁶

It has to be noted too that:

over the last decade, numerous foundations in the United States of America have provided unprecedented support for the revitalization of African universities and their libraries, especially through digitisation of African materials and the development of associated information technologies.⁵⁷

The digitisation of the Lucy Lloyd Archive was funded largely by the Mellon Foundation and according to Skotnes (2007) is an ALUKA partner.⁵⁸ As noted in a personal e-mail from Pippa Skotnes, "The project was funded by the Mellon Foundation, De Beers and UCT, with funding in kind from Scan Shop. No stipulations other than from the Mellon Foundation that the material once digitized should be made available for scholarly and educational research. In addition we joined Mellon's Aluka Project which will conserve the digital copies in the future." Without commenting at length, perhaps it is judicious to ask whether initiatives like this are contributing to the lamentable fact that Africa once again is the consumer of knowledge produced by the global north. I note that there is not a single stipulation about access being made available to the Bushmen, and ask whether in the midst of this impressive funding for this project, no funds were available for a program to ensure this access.

Before any photograph or text is scanned, the archivist or institution needs to ask

many ethical questions. Who does the material belong to? In whose interests does it serve? Which structures does it accept and which does it marginalise or exclude? Who are the storytellers and scriptwriters of the Bushman archive at UCT? As Christie comments:

Every digital object requires some metadata to render it searchable, and the process of writing metadata is a kind of naming. Giving something (a story, a video, a photo) a name makes it locatable materially and conceptually. The name provides a textual link to the object describing it to some extent but never exhausting its content. (It may for example identify a storyteller but not anyone else whose presence shaped the telling). The process of naming objects is the beginning of the structuring of knowledge.⁵⁹

The Bushman photographs in the archive both speak of loss, othering, death, and spectres of a haunted past. In Algerian-born French theorist Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1994)⁶⁰, the author discusses the notion of ghosts as the return of that which history has repressed – ghosts are the traces of those who were not allowed to leave a trace. Derrida writes that:

ghosts must be exorcised not in order to chase them away but in order 'this time to grant them the right'...to...a hospitable memory...out of a concern for justice.⁶¹

For ghosts, as the traces of those who have not been allowed to leave their mark, can be read as the victims of a history who return in order to see that the wrongs are rectified, that reparation is paid, and their contribution and names are honoured. They demand and are entitled to this acknowledgement Derrida uses the term "hauntology" to describe another sphere of being (or another realm of ontology) to describe this phenomenon, this space, "the past as that which is not and yet is there - or rather, here, this 'virtual space of spectrality.'"⁶² As Derrida reminds us, ghosts are not just the object of the gaze for they look at and summon us.⁶³ It is to this summons that the University of Cape Town's archive on Bushmen should respond, taking a bold step in contemplating that perhaps their role be re-imagined.

Notes

¹ I use the term Bushmen as a result of discussions with a group at the !Kwa ttu San Culture and Education Centre on the Cape West Coast. I work with a diverse group of twelve Bushman men, women and youth, using visual art and photography as a means of entry into dialogue on the construction of their image. A colleague, Dale Washkansky, and I asked them what term they preferred, and all stated that although both San and Bushman are labels that have been forced on them, they refer to themselves firstly as !Xun, Khwe, Khomani, etc. and broadly as Bushmen. The project will be documented and presented as my mini-dissertation for my Masters degree at the University of Cape Town's Centre for African Studies. A copy of this paper and any other papers which feature the Bushmen will be given to WIMSA (Working Indigenous Minorities of Southern Africa) for their records.

² S. Sontag, *On Photography* (Penguin: London, 2002), pp. 14-15.

- ³ M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p. 277.
- ⁴ S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Strauss and Giroux: New York, 2003). Walter Benjamin too raises the point of violence in photography, connecting it to hunting. See W. Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," in A. Trachtenberg, (ed.), *Classic Essays on Photography* (Leetes Island Books: New Haven, 1980), pp. 199-216. See also Susan Sontag's, *On Photography* (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 7.
- ⁵ S. O'Toole, "This is Not Photography, This is Just Boring," in G. Grundligh, (ed.), *The Cape Town Month of Photography* (The South African Centre for Photography: Cape Town, 2005), pp. 4-5.
- ⁶ The term 'othering' is used with reference to Edward Said's groundbreaking work, *Orientalism* (1978). This work is a concrete study of a paradigm in which the author discusses the Western propensity of double representation – the construction of 'The Other' – with reference to the Western view of the East, the oriental. Said's definition of Orientalism in Western literature talks about the concept that is "part of the vast control mechanism of colonialism, designed to justify and perpetuate European dominance." See E. Said, *Orientalism* (Perigrine: London, 1978), pp. 25-26.
- ⁷ P. Hayes, J. Silvester and W. Hartmann, "Photography, History and Memory," in P. Hayes, J. Silvester and W. Hartmann, (eds.), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (University of Cape Town Press: Cape Town, 1998), p.10.
- ⁸ R. Neumann, *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles Over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998). See Introduction and Chapter 1.
- ⁹ E. Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Berg: Oxford, 2001), p. 131.
- ¹⁰ B. Harris, "Photography in Colonial Discourse: The Making of 'The Other' in Southern Africa, c. 1850-1950," in Hayes, Silvester and Hartmann, *The Colonising Camera*, pp. 20-24.
- ¹¹ See P. Skotnes, *Claim to the Country: The Archive of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd* (Jacana: Johannesburg and Cape Town; Ohio University Press: Athens, 2007).
- ¹² Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p. 140.
- ¹³ P. Landau, "An Amazing Distance: Pictures and People in Africa," in P. Landau and D. Kaspin, (eds.), *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2002), p. 2.
- ¹⁴ See M. Godby, "Images of //Kabbo," in P. Skotnes, (ed.), *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*. (University of Cape Town Press: Cape Town, 1996), p. 120.
- ¹⁵ N. Miezoeff, "Network Subjects or, The Ghost is the Message," in W. Chun and T. Keenan, (eds.), *A History and Theory Reader: New Media Old Media* (Routledge: New York and London, 2006), p. 340.
- ¹⁶ N. Shepherd, "Archeology Dreaming: Post-Apartheid Urban Imaginaries and the Bones of the Prestwich Street Dead," in *Journal of Social Anthropology* 7(1) 2007, p. 7.
- ¹⁷ The demise of Apartheid was marked by the first democratic elections held in April 1994, and the adoption of The South African Constitution in 1996.
- ¹⁸ Shepherd, "Archeology Dreaming," p. 7.
- ¹⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 35.
- ²⁰ G. Baderoon, "The Underside to the Picturesque: Meanings of Muslim Burials in Cape Town, South Africa," in *Arab World Geographer* 7(4) 2004, p. 182.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- ²² For a compelling read on the issue of the Prestwich Street remains, see Shepherd, "Archaeology Dreaming." In short, the Prestwich Street saga began in May 2003 when human skeletons were uncovered during initial excavations for an exclusive real estate development near Prestwich Street in Green Point. At present, the area is undergoing rapid gentrification (it is in close proximity to the much feted Victoria and Alfred Waterfront) with property prices (and attendant exclusion on the grounds of price) escalating steeply. It is interesting to note that forced removals of Black and Coloured residents in the 1960s and 1970s took place in this area as part of the Apartheid practice – one example being the relocation of Vista High School in Prestwich Street to the non-white area of Bo-Kaap. In colonial Cape Town, Green Point existed on the periphery of the town, and as Shepherd attests "for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it lay outside the formal boundaries of settlement, and a marginal zone which was the

site of the gallows and place of torture....[a s]ite of a number of graveyards...of numerous undocumented, informal burials...made up of a cross section of the underclasses (of all races) of colonial Cape Town” (pp. 4-5). The site, in spite of the division of races and othering by colonialists and subsequent apartheid legislation, was a significant one, in that it was a tangible illustration of the integration of different groups and races, albeit in death.

²³ M. Legassick and C. Rassool, *Skeletons in the Cupboard: South African Museums and the Trade in Human Remains, 1907-1917* (South African Museum and McGregor Museum: Cape Town and Kimberley, 2000).

²⁴ Shepherd, “Archeology Dreaming,” p. 10.

²⁵ F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press: New York, 1967), p. 128.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²⁸ S. Hall, “The Afterlife of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why now? Why *Black Skin White Masks*,” in A. Read, (ed.), *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, (Seattle: Bay Press), p. 20.

²⁹ K. Malik, “Who Owns Knowledge,” in *Index on Censorship* 36(3) 2007, p.166.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

³¹ H. Watson-Verran, and D. Turnbull, “Science and Other Indigenous Knowledge Systems,” in N. Stehr and R. Grundman, (eds.), *Knowledge: Critical Concepts* (Taylor and Francis: London, 2005), pp. 345-6.

³² Aristotle (translated J. I. Beare and G. R. T. Ross), *Parva Naturalia*, 449^b 10-15, in W. D. Ross, (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1931), as cited by J. Jonker, *The Silence of the Dead: Ethical and Juridical Significances of the exhumations at Prestwich Place, Cape Town* (Masters Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2005), p. 54.

³³ Saartjie Baartman (1789-1815) was taken to Europe in the nineteenth century and exhibited as a sideshow attraction under the name Hottentot Venus. Her remains were repatriated to South Africa from France in 2002.

³⁴ R. Barthes (translated by R. Krauss), *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Hill and Wang: New York, 1980), p. 138.

³⁵ See Landau, “An Amazing Distance: People and Pictures in Africa,” pp. 1-27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁷ I photographed a series of images from Pippa Skotnes’s LLAREC website on 20 October 2007, which I have in my possession but which I have chosen purposefully not to display in this paper for reasons of respect and ethics. See <http://www.lloydbleekcollection.uct.ac.za>. Last accessed 25 October 2007. This was done in response to Skotnes’s assertion that “I could comment on these statements but the fact is that I have not yet systematically digitised the photographs, not yet applied for funding to do so and so not published them in cyberspace!! So the assertion is, at present, a little ungrounded in fact.” P. Skotnes, Personal Communication, October 2007. Skotnes commented further that “these [images] are merely part of the documentation of the Miscast project and do not form part of the digitising of the archive process at all. There are a very tiny part of my LLAREC collection of photographs.” It is noted from the website that “individual images and documents included in this website may not be reproduced, downloaded, copied or re-used in any way without the permission of the copyright holders.” The “Scrap Book” images were photographed from the collection BC 151, University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives (MAD) in September 2007 by Dale Washkansky.

³⁸ P. Lalu, “The Virtual Stampede for Africa: Digitization, Postcoloniality and Archives of the Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa,” (University of the Western Cape: Cape Town, 2007) in *Innovation* 34 2007, p. 28. See also pp. 28-44.

³⁹ D. F. Bell, “Infinite Archives,” in *Substance* 33 (3) 105 (Special Issue: Overload) 2004: 148-161. See <http://links.jstor.org/sici=0049-2426%282004%2933%3A3%3C148%3AIA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Q>. Last accessed 10 September 2007.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

⁴¹ A. Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” in C. Hamilton, V. Harris, M. Pickover, G. Reid, R. Saleh, and J. Taylor, (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive* (David Philip: Cape Town, 2002), p. 22.

⁴² Becker, “An Archive Constructs a National Culture,” in *The Journal of American Folklore* 105

(415) 1992, p. 8.

⁴³ Becker, "Picturing our Past," p. 3.

⁴⁴ Becker, "Picturing our Past," p. 4.

⁴⁵ LLAREC online. See <http://www.lloydbleekcollection.uct.ac.za/index.jsp>. Last accessed 25 October 2007.

⁴⁶ J. Anderson, "Indigenous Knowledge, Intellectual Property, Libraries and Archives: A Crises of Access, Control and Future Utility," in M. Nakata and M. Langdon, *Indigenous Knowledge and Libraries* (UTSE Press: Sydney, 2005), p. 73.

⁴⁷ Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p. 3.

⁴⁸ A. Appadurai, (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 5.

⁴⁹ E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p.185.

⁵⁰ Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," in Trachtenburg, *Classic Essays on Photography*, p. 202.

⁵¹ I am indebted to Professor Martin Nakata, Chair of Australian Indigenous Education, and Director of Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia for his input on the aforementioned concerns. At every request he was willing to share knowledge, and refer me to others who are facing similar challenges.

⁵² Malik, "Who owns Knowledge," pp. 166-167.

⁵³ These lace prints were a series of contact prints where lace was placed directly on photographic paper to register the play of light. Here binaries are accurately visually presented: absence, presence, black, white.

⁵⁴ The words of Roland Barthes cited by G. Batchen, "Electricity Made Visible," in W. Chun and T. Keenan, (eds.), *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader* (Routledge: New York and Abingdon, 2006), p. 28.

⁵⁵ M. Christie, "Computer Databases and Aboriginal Knowledge: Learning Communities," in *International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts* 1 2003, p. 4, as cited by C. Richmond, "Libraries and Knowledge Centres in the Northern Territory," in Nakata and Langdon, *Indigenous Knowledge and Libraries*, p. 27.

⁵⁶ Lalu, "The Virtual Stampede for Africa," pp. 28-29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ A Report on the Workshop on the Politics of Digital Initiatives Concerning Africa. Available from Premesh Lalu, Department of History, University of the Western Cape.

⁵⁸ For a further discussion on the DISA-ALUKA project, see A. F. Isaacman, P. Lalu, and T. I. Nygren, "Digitisation, History and the Making of a Postcolonial Archive of Southern African Liberation Struggles: The Aluka Project," *Africa Today* 52(2) 2005: 55-77.

⁵⁹ M. Christie, "Computer Databases and Aboriginal Knowledge: Learning Communities," in *International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts* 1 2003, p. 4. Available online. See <http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/ik/pdf/CompDatAbKnow.pdf>. Last accessed 19 April 2008.

⁶⁰ J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (Routledge: New York, 1994), pp. 40-46.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁶² J. Labanyi, "Coming to Terms with the Ghosts of the Past: History and Spectrality," in *Contemporary Spanish Culture* 1 (1)1 2002. Available online. See arachne.rutgers.edu/vol1_1labanyi.htm - 72k. Last accessed 24 October 2007.

⁶³ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 7.