Unbossed and Unbound:
How can critical proximity transfigure British colonial moving images?

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abstract

This research engages the Colonial Film Unit (CFU), and its history as the propaganda arm of the British Empire, to expose how the visioning technology of cinema and the archivisation of the CFU's materials fuel the transformation of a racist colonial imaginary to fixed *truths* of the colonial black subject. I argue that this imaginary exists within the epistemological formation referred to as Colonial Thought. To combat this several theoretical strategies have emerged in archival studies such as reading against the grain, auto ethnography or critical fabulation, all of which have influenced moving image practices. However there remain ethical questions, in terms of whether these methodologies sufficiently exist outside of the very knowledge systems that create totalizing and racist understandings of blackness. This research develops and deploys critical proximity; a methodology that embraces illegitimate forms, outside the bounds of Colonial Thought, to transfigure colonial moving images and produce audiovisual works that challenge hegemonic ways of knowing.

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There is no order or beginning to this list for everyone and everything came at moments that don't need to be defined by linear time.

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Author's note

The thesis proceeds as a narrative dissection of a reverence for the archive. A series of scenes taken from experiences at four of the main sites of my archival research; the British Film Institute National Archive, British Empire and Commonwealth Museum Collection, The National Archive and the National Film, Video and Sound Archive (Jos). Each chapter contains a narrative and sensorial description of the experience of being at the archive as well as a relevant brief history of the institution. This combination of my situated experience of the archive is reflective of the methodology of critical proximity, centring my encounter with the archive and interspersing multiple ways of knowing in the thesis, so that fiction, poetry, quips or asides, commentary and academic writing sit alongside one another in equal value.

Critical proximity is explicated over the course of the chapters of this thesis, mirroring the way in which the methodology developed over the stages of PhD research. The first chapter sets out existing theoretical movements and the ways in which their critiques influenced the formation of critical proximity. The second chapter, through a discussion of trends in moving image practice that relate to the questioning and problematising of historical orthodoxies, identifies gaps, absences and insufficiencies whilst highlighting the sensorial affects of moving image work that I have affinities with, concluding that critical proximity draws from practitioners who target non-discursive other ways of knowing. Chapter three explicates the founding knowledge framework of both the content and grammar of colonial filmmaking, naming it Colonial Thought, and asserting critical proximity's rejection of this epistemology through the adoption of multiple ways of knowing. The final chapter demonstrates how the practice, a co-conspirator in this research, exemplifies critical proximity as a methodology and charts the experimentation

with methods and critiques its deployment in five works. I conclude with a chapter that offers and ending to my story of 'unlearning reverence for archives' of colonial moving images."[i]

[i] ''Onyeka Igwe and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay', KW Institute for Contemporary Art, 26 November 2020, https://www.kw-berlin.de/en/onyeka-igwe-and-ariella-aisha-azoulay/.

I went looking for myself in the archive (an introduction)

'This current moment is both the long ago past and the future that we've awaited. That's the thing we call the present isn't it, like always, already, all the time collapsing the distinctions.'[1]

I went looking for myself in the archive. I found an unnamed woman from Onitsha, Nigeria, dancing for Queen Elizabeth II in one of the many newsreels produced by British Pathé. The newsreel covered the royal tour of Nigeria of 1956 - across stadiums from Kaduna, in the North to Enugu, in the East. Various groups produced displays of *native* life for the royal inquisitors showing off their "…village handicrafts…"[2], traditional cooking methods and *tribal* dance displays, which the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh watched from a safe distance away in the stands. The newsreel was filmed four years before Nigerian independence and a year before my mother's birth in a village not very far away from the Enugu stadium as a Nigerian subject of the British Empire. The voiceover in the newsreel introduces a group of women dancing and then the frame closes in on one woman (Fig.1). She never looks up, so the camera lens doesn't capture her face, only her dancing body.

I found myself in her stoop, bended knee and rounded arms, she beckoned me to memories of my grandmother, my mother and recollections of myself. I was startled into this connection and frozen in the moment of recognition; there was a through line that joined her to me. What if life was infinite, and if as Alan Lightman posits,

[1] Christopher Harris, 'In Conversation – Christopher Harris & Karen Alexander' (Talk, ICA, 28 March 2019), https://opencitylondon.com/news/focus-in-conversation-christopher-harris-karen-alexander/.
[2] British Pathé, Royal Tour - Nigeria Dances, 1956, https://www.britishpathe.com/video/royal-tour-nigeria-dances.

'…grandparents never die, nor do great-grandparents, great-aunts and great-uncles, great great-aunts, and so on, back through the generations, [are] all alive?'[3] Watching this woman dance on my screen, put me in my place in the line of others, dancing stooped, eyes averted, to a silent but deeply known rhythm. I was awakened to my '…blood memory…' in watching this woman dance.[4] Memory of a movement that exists in '…the black before and before…'.[5]An uncodified ancestral movement that cannot be captured by language but is known in another way, a way outside of the bounds of which I have been taught to know.

Figure 1. Still from Royal Tour - Nigeria Dances (1956) ©British Pathé

[3] Lightman, Alan P. *Einstein's Dreams* (Toronto: A.A. Knopf Canada, 1993).138.
[4] Martha Graham, *Blood Memory*, First edition (New York: Doubleday, 1991). 9.
[5] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013). 17.

This encounter with colonial moving images was the prompt for a research project and serves as a succinct description of its scope, which I further detail in this introduction. I began this project in the wake of the #RhodesMustFall campaign in South Africa and the UK, and political movements across the United States of America that called for the destruction of Confederate monuments.[6] Understanding the archive of British colonial film as a monument akin to those being mobilised against, and with Orlando Paterson's 'Absence of Ruins' ringing in my ears, I conceived of this research as contributing to a realignment of the way in which British society thought of the people, places and cultures of the former British colonies. [7]This realignment was to be achieved by the establishment of a new decolonial cinematic language. Lofty aims. Throughout the course of the research these aims have been grounded and the experience of archival encounters, creating new work, critically appraising scholarship, and most importantly being in the world, have shifted perspectives on the terrain of this research as well as its potentialities. I will now discuss some key problems, pauses and challenges that marked the research journey, while taking the opportunity to define some of the key terms that I will be using and reusing throughout this text.

The faded lustre of Decolonisation

At first, this research was situated within the field of decolonial studies. I argue that decolonial, as a term, was not then as ubiquitous as today. It had not

[6] For more information on these campaigns see Bosch, Tanja. 'Twitter Activism and Youth in South Africa: The Case of #RhodesMustFall'. *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 2 (1 February 2017): 221–32,
Cox, Karen L. 'Opinion | Why Confederate Monuments Must Fall'. *The New York Times*, 15 August 2017, sec. Opinion,
and #RHODESMUSTFALL. '#RHODESMUSTFALL'. Accessed 12 March 2020. https://rmfoxford.wordpress.com/.
[7] The title of Paterson's novel, *An Absence of Ruins* was cited in a talk given by Zadie Smith, to suggest that the nations established post-colonially lack monuments that attest to a recorded history. The absence of these monuments and their ruins, to Smith, is the condition of blackness in the West. Smith, Zadie. *Zadie Smith Presents "Swing Time"*. RIBA, 21 November 2016. [Talk].

overtaken intersectional as the watchword of the zeitgeist or become a term that had been reduced to a '…performative gesture…'. [8]Decolonial is a tricky word, it has several meanings according to its many conjugations. As decolonisation, I refer to the end of formal or juridical relationships of extraction between several European powers and their former colonial employs. It is a historical period that I am bracketing from the 1947 partition of the sub-continent of India to Zimbabwean independence in 1980.[9] I refer to decolonise and decolonising, instead, as the impending action Frantz Fanon hinted at in the conclusion of *The Wretched of the Earth.* Writing to his fellow revolutionaries, he implores,

> 'For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a *new* man.'[10]

I understand decolonise, in Fanonian terms, not simply as a critique of colonialism and its methods, but as a total disavowal of coloniality in terms of epistemology, and as a clarion call for a new approach to ways of thinking, '[to decolonize is…a task that involves the *radical* re-founding of our ways of thinking.'[11]

Fanon reflected on both the physical and mental toll of colonialism in his texts *Black Skin, White Masks* and The *Wretched of the Earth* - the latter is famed for its controversial opening chapter on decolonisation, 'On Violence'. In these texts he establishes the tyranny of colonial powers, not only in terms of material conquer, but

[8] The White Pube. Twitter Post. 2019.
[9] I understand that there are many ways to frame a historic period of decolonisation, but I use these dates as I consider them to mark a specific period in the decolonisation of the twentieth century British Empire and this research focuses on British colonialism.
[10] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Warrington, Pelican Books (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983). 255 (emphasis mine).
[11] Achille Mbembe, 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive' (Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), University of the Witwatersrand, May 2016). np (emphasis mine).

also in a violence of *thought* which produced '…a succession of negations of man…'.[12] That is, thinking that produces some as human (the coloniser) and others as subhuman (the colonised).[13] He argues that this *thought* causes psychic damage to both the colonised and the coloniser, even producing sexual desire as a pathology.[14] Aimé Cesaire poetically summarises the extent of the tentacular reach of colonialism to all elements of social reality,

> '*I* am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out…*I* am talking about millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life – from life, from the dance, from wisdom.'[15]

So, for a new world, decolonised, Fanon urges for it to be made not in the image of colonial Europe but a *new* image. Fundamentally, he is calling for a new way of thinking, new epistemologies.

To summarise my use of the term decolonial in this text, the formal political, juridical and economic entanglements which can be argued to have ended with the liberation struggles of the end of the last century is referred to as **decolonisation**, but in terms of an epistemic fracturing**, decolonise or decolonising** signify the always ongoing process that Fanon argues for.[16] Decolonial is the labour of perpetual undoing and

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[12] Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 252.
[13] Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*, Get Political (London: Pluto, 2008). 82.
[14] For further descriptions of these psychological maladies see Chapter 5, 'Colonial War and Mental Disorders', Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Warrington. Pelican Books. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, pp 200-244 and Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Get Political. London: Pluto, 2008.
[15] Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York; London: Monthly Review Press, 1972).. 43 (emphasis in the original).
[16] I understand that many argue through theories of neo-colonialism that there remains legal, economic and political dependency between Western powers and former colonial states, see Nkrumah, Kwame. *Neo-Colonialism. The last stage of imperialism*. London: Nelson, 1965. However, I am making a distinction between Fanon's demand for an overturning of dominant ways of thinking and the occupation of nation states.

reforming against the image of colonial power and hegemony.[10] It is with this definition that my research originated.

I differentiate between decolonise and decolonisation to emphasise an aspect of colonialism that exists elsewhere, outside the conventional material scope of land and labour – Colonial Thought. It has been argued that '…colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest…is based on the contempt for the native and justified by that contempt'[17], it is dressed up in other guises, but this is the raison d'être. This allows the coloniser to *justifiably* take land, to kill, to rape, to maim, to educate, to civilise or to save. The justification is what I am naming Colonial Thought, which in turn is founded on positivist epistemology.

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge - what counts as knowledge and how it is arrived at. Philosophy has long been preoccupied with questions of knowledge and there exists a vast body of scholarship concerning this, from Hellenic philosophers to the present day, which it is not possible to adequately delve into within the bounds of this research. Instead from this theoretical expanse, I accept there are several theories that relate to the central question of epistemology - '…what sort of grounds are such to provide justification for our beliefs?'.[18] Therefore, it follows that the justification for colonialism mentioned above must be based on a way of knowing. A worldview that makes such action possible. I argue that Colonial Thought has a

[10] I recognise that this way of defining decolonial is contested. There is a breadth of work from Latin American scholars that understand the term, through Walter Mignolo, as the 'radical transformation of the modern/colonial matrix of power which continues to define modern identities as well as the relations of power and epistemic forms that go along with them' Nelson, Maldonado-Torres, 'Césaire's Gift and the Decolonial Turn'. Radical Philosophy Review 9, no. 2 (2006): 111–38, 115 This is a rich area of scholarship with critiques of the narrowness of Mignolo's conception coming from feminist and indigenous academics such as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, 'Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization', South Atlantic Quarterly 111, no. 1 (1 January 2012): 95–109."

[17] Aime Césaire. *Discourse on Colonialism*. 41.

[18] Stephen Everson, *Epistemology*, Companions to Ancient Thought 1 (Cambridge: University Press, 1990). 10.

positivist basis - a way of understanding the physical world which relies on scientific thinking. In explaining the roots of British Imperial endeavour, Thomas Richards singles out Victorian positivism and its assessment that '…the best and most certain kind of knowledge was fact. The fact…generally was thought of as raw knowledge.'[19] Fact can be proven right or wrong according to the rules of natural science, so knowledge is obtained through the senses, being and observing the world and the operation of reason, using the rational mind.[20] Sense data from the body and the possession of a rational mind are invaluable instruments in justifying how beliefs become knowledge according to this framework.

Foucault argues that knowledge formations such as Colonial Thought, produce social objects, things made real by a specific way of knowing the world.[21] The key invention of Colonial Thought is the human imaged in the shape of the white European man and classified according to an interpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution.[22] Colonial Thought proffers that there is a hierarchy to humanity which places whiteness at the top of a totem pole of civilisation and renders all non-white counterparts sequentially underfoot. In this way the invention of race and its connection to the so-called evolution of man, '…consistently (re) produces the others of Europe as global subaltern subjects.'[14] The nascent disciplines of anthropology and ethnography, the study of cultures and peoples, sought to scientifically evidence race through various "medical"

[19] Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire.* (London: Verso, 1993). 4.
[20] Peter Halfpenny, *Positivism and Sociology: Explaining Social Life*, Controversies in Sociology 13 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982). 87-113.
[21] David R. Howarth, *Discourse* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000). 3-11.
[22] Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, Borderlines 27 (Minneapolis ; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). 178, Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 252, Katherine McKittrick, 'Substructure', *Dont Wear Down*, 2019, 39–41. 30 and Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender / Robyn Wiegman.*, New Americanists (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 1995). 4.
[14] Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. 186-187.

signifiers such as craniology,[23] locomotion and comportment, providing again a scientific justification for racism and therefore colonialism. Colonial Thought can be understood, via Césaire's scorching *Discourse on Colonialism*, as the 'the basis of the European civilization project', Sylvia Wynter's work explains the process behind the production of humans and non-humans through this epistemology and its necessary companion, colonialism. [24] In chapter four, I will further untangle the tautological relationship between Colonial Thought and colonialism, connecting Wynter's project on the re-enchantment of humanism with Fanonian decolonisation.

Colonial Thought is known by other names — in the literature that traces the genealogy of European dominance – '…modernity…',[25]'…Greco-Latin…',[26]'…Western…',[27] or '…European…',[28] however I choose this classification in order to make it distinct from specific geographical places and historical moments, so that there is space for other meanings of Modern or Western or European to exist separately, outside of colonial. Further, I am interested in demonstrating the direct relationship with the approach to knowledge, Colonial Thought and the action of colonial conquest, '…the production of the African subject as non-human - or subhuman, as an object and property arises not simply through the economic necessities of the slave trade but according to the epistemologies attending vision and their logics of corporeal inscription'.[29] People are differentiated because of their skin colour and this

[23] For further commentary on the racist use of craniology and the work of its foremost proponent Petrus Camper, see Miriam Claude Meijer. 1999. *Race and Aesthetics in the Anthropology of Petrus Camper: 1722-1789 / Miriam Claude Meijer.* Studies in the History of Ideas in the Low Countries. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
[24] Maldonado-Torres, 'Césaire's Gift and the Decolonial Turn'.115.
[25] Wiegman. *American Anatomies*.36
[26] Lewis R. Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015). 129.
[27] Alvina Hoffman, 'Interview – Walter Mignolo', E-International Relations, 21 January 2017, http://www.e-ir.info/2017/06/01/interview-walter-d-mignolo/.
[28] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (October 1985): 247–72. 247.
[29] Wiegman. *American Anatomies*. 4.

difference is claimed to signify less intelligence, lasciviousness, violence —– *inhumanity* –— justifying treatment that, committed against those considered human, would be unethical or criminal or ungodly.[30] Colonial Thought tendered the racial as *the* way of reorganising global social space, and that has aftereffects for the ways in which black, indigenous and people of colour are understood today.[31]

Returning to decolonial studies, as a field of inquiry that this research was originally proposed to exist within, I note that over the lifespan of this research project, the meaning of decolonial has changed in the public consciousness, drifting away from the Fanonian definition. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang discuss this expressly in their investigations into the decolonisation of education in settler colonial societies such as Canada. Invoking the Fanonian definition of the term they decry the slide into metaphor,

> 'When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym.' [32]

This metaphorization means that, colloquially, decolonise has been used to signify difference, or the diversification of an existing canon. For me, decolonise exceeds decolonisation struggles of the mid twentieth century and it exceeds the concepts of diversity. As Fanon described, it exposes '…contingency in a world that once seemed to

[30] Césaire. *Discourse on Colonialism*. 42-45.
[31] Ferreira da Silva. *Toward a Global Idea of Race.* 194.
[32] Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40. 3.

be absolute.'[33] Taking the now popular concept of decolonising the university as an example,[34] accordingly this would entail a complete rethink or overhaul of the concept of the university as a place of learning from the ground up. Universities would, therefore, not look or behave in the same way as they do today, because the very knowledge systems that have created the institution would be troubled and so transformed. I conceive of decolonising as perhaps beyond the limits of our current collective imaginations. Today's talk of decolonising is muddied and diluted from Fanon's original clarion call. In this way, it no longer made sense to couch the research in this field because I do not seek alignment to the term unfanged, despite the project still remaining '…anchored in specific forms of scepticism and epistemic attitudes out of which certain critical questions and the search for answers are generated.'[35] This research instead heeds Fanon's call for a new humanity, by utilising the work of Sylvia Wynter on genres of humanity in my methodological approach, but without sheltering under the banner of decolonial studies.

Moving Images

The second field of enquiry of this research is film studies, in particular, colonial filmmaking. It is important to define here what that entails. I began by surveying www.colonialfilm.org.uk – a repository of films collated under the auspices of an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded research project into films relating to the

[33] Gordon. *What Fanon Said*. 128.
[34] This very university has recently set up a Decolonising Arts Institute that I hope to see, proverbially, burning down the foundations of the institution.
[35] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique—An Introduction', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1 (1 January 2011): 1–15. 1.

British Empire. This collection contains titles that do not conform to popular understandings of film. Films produced by the state through the Colonial Film Unit, early ethnographic films, films produced by industry and businesses, as well as the amateur recordings produced by apparatchiks of the colonial machine: administrators, district officers, missionaries and so on who took 16mm cameras along with them on their Imperial adventures. As I didn't want to narrow the breadth of my inquiry and miss the various forms of filmmaking produced within the expanse of colonial activity, I prefer to use the looser term of moving images rather than cinema, film or video.

The eye, and vision more generally, are central to theorisations in film studies. From concepts of the *kino-eye* to birds' eye view, the eye is the organ and sight is the sense through which moving images are, primarily, channelled and communicated to the spectator. At a basic level, the camera lens borrows names, structure and functionality from that of the human eye. The eye too, is connected to positivist epistemology and so too Colonial Thought. Grimshaw states that '…vision within Western culture enjoyed a privileged status as a source of knowledge about the world.'[36] The camera like the earlier technologies of vision, the microscope or telescope, allows the human eye to see better and so '…film [becomes]…a scientific instrument, an improved eye.'[37] The camera has been used to service both science and the state through the production of visual evidence.

Both artists[38] and scholars have noted the relationship between vision, early cinema and colonialism, '…cinema was intimately bound up with the expanding

[36] Grimshaw, Anna, The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology / Anna Grimshaw. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). 5.
[37] Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1996). 14.
[38] The ripe connections between vision, moving image technologies and the colonial project here recently mined in César, Filipa & Henderson, Louis. 2017. Op-Film: An Archaeology of Optics [Exhibition]. Gasworks. 27 April – 25 June 17. The show consists of documentary evidence in several vitrines that plot the progress of optical technology for military and colonial uses.

horizons of modernity and enabled people to see more, and to see differently.'[39] Tom Gunning coined the phrase '…cinema of attractions…'[40] to describe the '…period of actuality films [that] begins with the ceaseless documentation of modern life, especially defined by movement: of crowds, of trams, through cities and landscapes.'[41] Catherine Russell identifies the world fairs where women and men from across newly discovered lands would be paraded to European audiences for their peculiarity, as one of these attractions.[42] The *differences* supposedly inherent in the physical bodies of the colonised would be displayed, measured and presented, with a positivist spin, to the public who would peer at these specimens of racist typification. Cinema took this distant looking to new heights, allowing the audience to be transported to the natural habitat of the colonised but protected by the long-range vision of the camera mounted far into the distance peering on, again.[43] It follows that cinema would become a necessary evidencing tool of the nascent *science* of anthropology and ethnography.[44] The literature contends that '…the viewer is confronted with images of people who are not meant to be seen as individuals but as specimens of race and culture…',[45] cinema functioned identically to the world fairs, exhibitions and freak shows that established the 'truth' of race, or better still – the '…imagined biological community…'.[46]

Image is an important word to stay with because it is the root of the word imagination, telling us something of the possible connection between images and the

[39] Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). 54.
[40] Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions' in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker, eds., *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1990), 56.
[41] Bettina Malcomess, 'Moving Image as Chronotope of the Colonial Imagination.Pdf' (unpublished, 20 March 2017), http://wiser.wits.ac.za/content/moving-image-chronotope-colonial-imagination-12706.np.
[42] Russell. *Experimental Ethnography.*51.
[43] Ibid 52.
[44] Cinema has remained to today in a complicit relationship with the academic discipline in the shape of visual anthropology.
[45] Rony. *The Third Eye*. 24.
[46] Ibid 24-26.

reinforcement of the colonial imagination. Seeing was knowing; colonial moving images confirmed the knowledge perpetuated and circulated by elites in the academies, newspapers and salons of the West. But what colonial moving images show is not unadulterated, it is a product of the colonial imagination - a series of neurotic stereotypes that are repeatedly fixed by the visualising technology of the camera. Homi Bhabha argues,

> 'The stereotype impedes the circulation and articulation of the signifier of 'race' as anything other than its fixity as racism…The stereotype can also be seen as that particular 'fixated' form of the colonial subject which facilitates colonial relations, and sets up a discursive form of racial and cultural opposition in terms of which colonial power is exercised.'[47]

Colonial image-making seeks to tell us of the colonised, however as Russell asserts '…films of native peoples become legible as documents of colonialism, not documents of native people.'[48]

My research is concerned with moving image work produced between 1932, the year the report commissioned by the British government *The Film In National Life* was published and called for the establishment of the Colonial Film Uni, and 1955 — when the unit was disbanded. The Colonial Film Unit is my temporal frame because it is the explicit enunciation of moving images as a particular 'device for colonial administration' of the British state.[49] Within the colonial context, this is the moment when the state identifies moving image as capable of doing the work of its colonial project, a project that produced fantasies of the nations that it was adding to its map and then '…collected and united [this knowledge] in the service of state and Empire.'[50] I argue that this material is the production and reproduction of stereotyped understandings of the

[47] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture / Homi K. Bhabha.*, 2nd. (Routledge, 2012).26.
[48] Russell. *Experimental Ethnography.* 5.
[49] Tom Rice, 'Colonial Film Unit', 2010, http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/production-company/colonial-film-unit.. np.
[50] Richards. *The Imperial Archive.* 6.

colonised subject.

Disenchanting (the) archives

This research exists as part of what some would call the archival turn.[51] Both in social sciences, contemporary art and, more specifically, moving images practices, there has been a critical mass of work utilising and questioning archival material. My interest in archives was awakened by watching the Pathé newsreel, *Royal Tour to Nigeria,* but I have always had an affinity for history, an interest in reaching back into the past in order to create connections between then and now. As I will later elaborate, archive research is a form of time travel. At the outset I had a reverence for the archive at the same time as acknowledging, as detailed above, that colonial moving images were cloaked in racist ways of thinking and my ambition was to explode, expose and/or expand the archive. This contradictory attitude to archives was to be addressed through the research.

Many have observed the partiality of the colonial archival record and sought to restore parity, equity and dignity to the injustices carried within the written, aural and visual records. These strategies, aimed at challenging and destabilising the grip of archives, are numerous, and range from exposing what is missing, hinted at or obscured, to establishing physical counter archives. In the first chapter, I will define archives for the purposes of this research, but here I outline different approaches to the study of archives in order to constrain the field of enquiry of this research. I begin with approaches that emanate from the reckoning with history that was heralded by

[51] Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013). 44-46.

'…postcolonial modes of cultural analysis…'.[52] The body of scholarly work that is grouped together as postcolonial theory, deals with history in '…the continuing aftermath of colonialism.'[53] This aftermath is a historical record that is partial, constructed, or, as Spivak describes, a '…narrative of reality…', that further oppresses the colonised and cements the colonial imaginary as the truth of the matter.[54] Using discursive frameworks from literary and critical theory, postcolonial studies sought to create new historical narratives that 're-inscribe the agency of such marginalized subjects – to retrieve the authorial voice of such subjects' and attempts to tell their stories.[55] Postcolonial theory is broad and has been critiqued extensively, which I don't go into here as it is not the remit of this research. Instead, I choose to employ the work of Spivak because of her theorisations on the colonial archive.[56]

Spivak sets out to show that the archive contains the process of the worlding of worlds. [57]Worlding of worlds is the creation of social reality using specific knowledge frameworks. By examining the historical record or '…documenting and theorizing the itinerary of the consolidation of Europe as sovereign subject…', she lays out how the British created legitimacy for their colonial endeavour.[58] Spivak plots the ways in which the British constructed a world in which they *should* be in power over inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent - the process by which Colonial Thought is used to legitimise colonial activity. In doing this and making it visible, Spivak is able to reveal '…the

[52] Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics /.* (London: Verso, 1997).5.
[53] Matthew Kurtz, 'A Postcolonial Archive? On the Paradox of Practice in a Northwest Alaska Project', *Archivaria* 61 (2006).88.
[54] Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (New York ; Sydney: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 66–111.76.
[55] Kurtz,.2006. 'A Postcolonial Archive?'. 86.
[56] For a good summary of these criticisms see Chapter 1 of *Moore-Gilbert, B.J. Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices,* Politics. London: Verso, 1997.
[57] Spivak. 'The Rani of Sirmur'. 253.
[58] Spivak. 'The Rani of Sirmur'. 249.

assumptions, strategies and rhetoric through which a given narrative, whether political, literary, historical or theoretical, is grounded or mediated.'[59] That is the deconstructive nature of her postcolonial criticism. *The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives* is exemplary of this. Spivak identifies three actors of colonial rule: Captain Geoffrey Birch, David Ochterlony and the East India Company. Tracing their correspondence, about the potential sati[60] of the wife of the deposed King of Sirmur, only known as Rani, allows Spivak to show '…the records…[of] the soldiers and administrators of the East India Company constructing the object of representations that becomes the reality of India.'[61] As Captain Birch writes back to England of his activities whilst riding on horseback through the Simla Hills telling the *natives* exactly who they were subjects to, the fantasy or rumour of rule becomes concretised '…by his sight and utterance.'[62] Spivak's work establishes the archive as the place in which the worlding of worlds is visible, where epistemic violence is laid bare. Her oppositional reading of the archive positions it as a tool of Colonial Thought and so illuminates its workings.

An unintended consequence of the deconstructive method is an immersion in the people that wrote documents in the archive. There is a danger of centring how the archive got to be, who wrote records within it and how they wrote, whilst those marginalised within it remain that way. In the *Rani of Sirmur*, Spivak examines the various ways in which the Rani's name was mistranslated and unrecorded by multiple agents of the East India Company, and in doing so recirculates those mistranslations and focuses on the conduct of the colonisers. I have some uneasiness with a focus on the

[59] Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*. 84.
[60] Funeral ritual of self-immolation performed by some widows in South Asia.
[61] Spivak. 'The Rani of Sirmur'. 249.
[62] Ibid 254.

coloniser, even if the goal is to reveal the machinations of colonial power held uniquely by archives. Perhaps this is a question of attention and care and where that lies. I resolve to be attentive to those objectified by the archive.

For this perspective, I looked to the work of Saidiya Hartman and her concept of critical fabulation. Hartman deals with archives of slavery, records that rarely contain accounts of those enslaved but instead '…about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses.'[63] Hartman is conflicted in her dealings with these archives as she notes the violence that is re-enacted in reading and disseminating these records but at the same time she feels a duty of care to those obscured within them.[64] She desires to, in some way, restore a woman who is only referred to as the Black Venus, to something like humanity. Hartman conceives of the archive, similarly to Spivak, as a world builder,

> '…the archive of slavery rests upon a founding violence. This violence determines, regulates and organizes the kinds of statements that can be made about slavery and as well it creates subjects and objects of power.'[65]

Hartman is interested in countering this violence, and on the face of it, she '…longed to write a new story, one unfettered by the constraints of the legal documents and exceeding the restatement and transpositions.'[66] In earlier work, Hartman advocates using intuition and common sense as an analytic, '…not generally considered legitimate objects of historical inquiry and so contrary to the grammar of the archive.'[67] In using these illegitimate forms, she hopes to challenge and scar the material.[68] This thinking imbues her musings in *Venus in Two Acts*, where she considers how to '…"try the

[63] Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (17 July 2008): 1–14. 2.
[64] Hartman, Saidiya V., *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* , Race and American Culture (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).. 1.
[65] Hartman. 'Venus in Two Acts'. 10.
[66] Ibid 9.
[67] Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection*. 11.
[68] Ibid 11.

tongue"…' of the Black Venus and fill in the enormous gaps in this archival record.[69] Hartman sees the fictive nature of this pursuit as '…a form of compensation or even as reparations, perhaps the only kind we will ever receive.'[70] Hartman formulates a method in which to achieve this,

> 'This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration. The method guiding this writing practice is best described as critical fabulation.'[71]

The fruits of this radical labour are best exemplified in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval,* a text I gorged on under the heat of an Athens sun, as if it was a chick lit summer read. That is not to denigrate the writing but to foreground its incredible readability. *Wayward Lives* takes penal records, social services reports, sociological studies and police investigations as a basis from which to write the lives of black women, in cities such as Philadelphia and New York, in a vital moment between the end of slavery and the dominance of Jim Crow. Hartman argues that these women were attempting to stretch the limits of freedom and she writes accounts of queer love, free love and riotous assemblies. She takes liberties to write these lives, fabulating individual tales from a paucity of archival remains, writing that '[s]tate violence, surveillance, and detention produce the archival traces and institutional records that inform the reconstruction of these lives; but desire and the want of something better decide the contours of the telling.'[72] The stories Hartman writes implicate her, they are born of her desires and inflected with her own history, ideas, perspectives and positions.

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[69] Ibid 2. The phrase 'try her tongue' is taken from M. Nourbese Philip. *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. Charlottetown, [P.E.I.]: Ragweed Press, 1989.
[70] Ibid 4.
[71] Ibid 11.
[72] Saidiya Hartman, 'The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (July 2018): 465–90, https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-6942093. 470.

She would herself cop to this, explaining in an interview, 'the writing and the thought that propels it is the desire for a radically different order than the one in which we're living.' [73]And in one of her earlier texts she notes the ethical conundrum this leaves her in, 'my account replicates the very order of violence that it writes against by placing yet another demand upon the girl, by requiring that her life be made useful or instructive, by finding in it a lesson for our future or a hope for history. We all know better.'[74]

Hartman's observation resonates with Spivak's argument in *Can the subaltern speak?* - a text that delimits the reach of attempts to re-represent the subaltern. Spivak's argument takes on two parts. First, she dismisses the attempts by Western elites to remove themselves from an accounting of the subaltern, the possibility of letting the subaltern speak for themselves. In her dissemination of a conversation between Foucault and Deleuze, she contends that in posing theory as action and failing to understand dual meanings of representation, Deleuze ends up failing to represent the subaltern and instead acting through theory (the voice of the Western elite) and leaving the subaltern mute, again.[75] However, more pertinent to this research, is her evaluation of the Subaltern Studies group, scholars from the Indian subcontinent, whose work, informed by postcolonial theory, mined the archives for '…marginal narratives (subjects, agents, insurgent activities, etc)' and categorised those as subaltern.'[76] Spivak argues that in '…attempting to tell their stories, the Subaltern Studies group opens up a whole can of epistemological worms.'[77] This is because, in creating the category of subaltern populated by a myriad of heterogeneous experiences, subjectivities, desires and lives, the

[73] Thora Siemsen, 'Saidiya Hartman on Working with Archives', 18 April 2018, https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/saidiya-hartman-on-working-with-archives/. np.
[74] Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection*. 14.
[75] Spivak. 'Can the subaltern speak?'. 70.
[76] Beverley Best, 'Postcolonialism and the Deconstructive Scenario: Representing Gayatri Spivak', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 17, no. 4 (1999): 475–94. 479.
[77] Ibid.

Subaltern Studies group essentialises the very same people marginalised by the archive. They too imagine a reality that is then made real by their scholarly writing – they world worlds. Spivak argues that '…the group falls prey to its own critique…' and calls this being '…inside the enemy.'[78] For her, representing or giving voice to the subaltern, always falls foul of essentialising, and in effect allows the historian to retool the subaltern for their own purposes.

Hartman's method of critical fabulation can be categorised similarly, failing to meet Spivak's standards. So, in incorporating aspects of its form into my own work, it became necessary to thinking through Elizabeth Birmingham's idea that, it

> '…is not that [archives] will enable us to recover and converse with the lost dead, to understand them in a way that is definitive and true, but that they will help us recover ourselves, help us discover that we do not know we were the dead, inhabiting the crypt, repeating dead histories in dead languages.'[79]

Spivak and Hartman's work taught me that archival research is about the present and inevitably is always in some way about the researcher themselves and so I resolved to be present and accountable in this work.

The archival turn also manifests feminist methodologies of research. These can be defined as '…overlapping and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of history that takes as their starting points a deep scepticism about history's claim to truth and transcendence.'[80] Recognising the limits of structures that create institutional archives and instead of analysing archives for the machinations of patriarchal power or imagining

[78] Ibid 476.
[79] Elizabeth Birmingham, *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, ed. Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan (Carbondale, [Ill.]: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008). 144.
[80] Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order / Kate Eichhorn.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013). 17.

the lives of those held by the archive, these methodologies seek to valorise marginalised histories through the establishment of new archives. The Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York or the Her Noise archive at UAL are examples of these kinds of efforts, '…these collections...*resituate* feminist knowledge…seizing the archive as an apparatus to legitimize new forms of knowledge and cultural production in an economically and politically precarious *present.*'[81]Archives, here, are sites of knowledge production and counter archiving against state and institutional archives, providing the opportunity to take over the means of production.

I was therefore drawn to the June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive (JGPACA), which held collections of films and associated materials relating to the history of Black British cinematic culture from the 1960s and its confluence with the wider African Diaspora. Researching these films and talking with June Givanni, who established and maintains the collection, provided insight into the social, political and economic contexts that produced work that I had long been familiar with as well as introducing me to filmmakers that are criminally widely unknown.[82] I was also witness to the silo that the archive finds itself in, in a wider context. A lack of funding and fundamental appreciation for its content means that JGPACA is not sustainable, requiring crowdfunding and patronage to barely stay afloat. Ultimately June recognises that it is necessary for the archive to be taken into the guardianship of a larger institution, to preserve its longevity, much the same as similar queer and feminist archival projects.[83]

[81] Ibid 4 (emphasis in original).
[82] For more on this see Igwe, Onyeka. 'June Givanni in Conversation with Onyeka Igwe, ICA, June 2017'. MIRAJ 6, no. 1 & 2 (2018): 180–89.
[83] The acquisition of queer archives by larger institutions is discussed here, Arondekar, Anjali, Ann Cvetkovich, Christina B. Hanhardt, Regina Kunzel, Tavia Nyong'o, Juana María Rodríguez, Susan Stryker, Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici. 'Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion'. *Radical History Review* 2015, no. 122 (May 2015): 211–31.

From this experience, I would argue that counter archives can be subsumed by their institutional antecedents, depriving them of the vital oxygen that necessitated their creation.

Another take on archive research is Fatimah Tobing Rony's use of the third eye to mark her inquiry into the archives of early ethnographic cinema. The third eye put simply is the '…experience of viewing oneself as an object…the racially charged glance…'.[84] She is interested in representation, specifically, how the Other is represented and, riffing from Fanon, the feeling of disjuncture that occurs when people of colour go looking for themselves in the archive but don't recognise their mirror image. Rony writes descriptive passages where she imagines the objects of colonial film as employing this third eye. The passages have a timeless quality - perception of a different form of time, perception that is seen in more dimensions, so is not quite contained by language and perception that is always contingent.

For Rony, '…a third eye attempts to put together all the dispersed fragments of identity into other-never seamless-selves.'[85] Like Spivak and Hartman, she is well aware that '…the critic may become the unwitting propagator of a new postcolonial form of fascinating cannibalism, a reification that further entrenches the category of Same and Other, Western and Indigenous.'[86] However she seeks out and imagines the operation of the third eye in the people she observes within the archives, in an effort to '…negotiate new ways of thinking about the relationship between the camera and the people it

[84] Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC ; London: Duke University Press, 1996). 4.
[85] Ibid 17.
[86] Ibid 13

films…'.[87] Further, Rony also details other adoptions of the third eye in the '…open resistance, recontextualization of archival images, parody, and even refraining from representing certain subjects…' of indigenous Hopi filmmaker, Victor Masayesva.[88] The third eye is the ability to see beyond the dichotomy of Subject and Other; it is symbolic of other ways of knowing. She says of James Baldwin, '…with a third eye, Baldwin was not only rejecting a discourse which represented people of colour as "savages" but also the Western notion of rational linear history.'[89]

It is here, with my third eye employed, the tools of critical fabulation and heeding the warnings of both Spivak and feminist counter archiving projects that my research asserts itself. This has been a by no means exhaustive delve into archival methodologies, but an overview of the ones surveyed throughout this research which led me to my own — critical proximity.

Morphing Methodology

My contribution to knowledge is a methodology developed through the process and experience of research. Critical proximity has always functioned as the enclosure in which I gathered several approaches to the archive.[90] I have occupied a term coined by Bruno Latour in imagined conversation with Donna Haraway where he offers proximity in opposition to the distance championed by positivist empiricism. This term seemed appropriate for a methodology that challenged Colonial Thought. Accordingly, critical

[87] Ibid
[88] Ibid 213
[89] Ibid 194
[90] Bruno Latour, 'Critical Distance or Critical Proximity?' (unpublished, 2005), http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/P-113-HARAWAY.pdf.

proximity originally included auto-ethnography as a method, which can be understood as a response to the legacies of anthropology and ethnography. Here I will unpick the theoretical underpinnings of the development of critical proximity as a methodology of practice and this thesis.

Anthropology[91] reached a crisis moment in the late twentieth century, '[f]or ethnography, the undermining of objectivist science came roughly at the same time as the collapse of colonialism.'[92] It became impossible to ignore the racist, eugenicist and hierarchising foundations of this intellectual pursuit. It was necessary for those still vested in the study of other cultures, nations and peoples to rescue it from itself. The predicament rested on the position of the anthropologist or ethnographer. Wasn't the act of someone from outside a culture going out to observe and report on a different way of life always going to be bound up in the '…western middle class need to explore, document, explain, understand and hence symbolically control the world…'?[93] And so the intentions of the anthropologist become important to assess, and by extension, the individual, themselves. This signalled *the reflexive turn*[94] in anthropology that spilt out into the social sciences writ large. It was argued that there became '…ethical, aesthetic and scientific obligations to be reflexive and self-critical.'[95] In this redefined and self-critical mode, the positionality and intentionality of the observer become just as relevant as the

[91] I use anthropology and ethnography contemporaneous to each other through this text. I understand ethnography to be the specific study of cultures whilst anthropology is the general study of human societies.
[92] Dwight Conquergood, 'Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics.', *Communication Monographs* 59 (1991): 179–94. 179.
[93] Jay Ruby, 'Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology, and Film (1)', *Semiotica* 30 (1 January 1980), 153.
[94] It is important to note this reconfiguring of anthropology does not exist solely in the West, 'Africans have been destroying the classical frame of anthropology. By emphasizing the importance of the unconscious and questioning the validity of a universal subject as the center of signification, they simultaneously demand a new understanding of the strange object of the human sciences and a redefinition of anthropology, history, and psychoanalysis, as leading disciplines of self-criticism.' Mudimbe, V. Y., *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, African Systems of Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). 50.
[95] Ruby. 'Exposing Yourself'. 154.

objects of their research. So, the anthropologist is exposed and is required to, according to Jay Ruby, '…deliberately, intentionally reveal… to his audience the underlying epistemological assumptions…'.[96] The exposure of the researcher's methodological approach inadvertently exposes them, because their subjectivity, the way they are in the world, informs this.

Donna Haraway calls reflexivity; '…feminist objectivity…' and claims it as part of a deconstructive method.[97] It is a different way of visioning the world which, '….allows us to be answerable for what we learn how to see.'[98] The researcher puts themselves at stake in their work, and the audience - be that the reader or viewer -now has more information in order to parse the knowledge created by the particular disciplinary endeavour. From this, auto-ethnography and dialogical anthropology, as well as feminist and postcolonial approaches, have been championed as methods that assuage colonial and racist legacies. In this way, I thought of my work as in keeping with an auto-ethnographic tradition.[99] Mary Louise Pratt defines autoethnography as,

> '…instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are texts the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations.'[100]

[96] Ruby. 'Exposing Yourself'. 157.
[97] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99, 581.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Auto-ethnography is contested with some questioning its veracity in terms of the so-called duty of social sciences to be to be 'analytic not merely experiential' Delamont, S. 'Arguments against Auto-Ethnography' (Conference Paper, British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Institute of Education, University of London, 5 September 2006). 1. However It is because of this shift in emphasis and refutation of the positivist foundations of ethnographic frameworks of knowledge that I was interested in auto-ethnography, initially.
[100] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Second edition (London: Routledge, 2008), 9.

So, adopting the apparatus of ethnography but employing it to communicate Othered perspectives. I looked to the work of Zora Neale Hurston, famed for conducting anthropological research into her own exclusively African American community and writing in the black vernacular which elevated the language to the heights of Great American literature.[101]

Auto-ethnography can be understood as a demonstration of feminist objectivity with the researcher embedded within the research and inverting Dwight Conquergood's seminal observation of traditional ethnography, where the personal is repressed '…in favor of abstracted theory and analysis.'[102] However on closer inspection, auto ethnography still reifies ethnography as a discipline. Anthropology and ethnography are deeply implicated in Colonial Thought and again returning to Spivak, I argue that using the tools of this epistemological framework does not allow space for a new kind of worlding because of the still remaining attachment to scientific thinking in these disciplines. Further too, auto ethnography proposes a binary between knowledge that is *objectively* based and knowledge that is subjective. Increasingly, this kind of binary approach to knowledge became insufficient for my research. Binaries foreclose the possibility of multiplicity, in presenting critical proximity as an opposition to colonial ways of knowing I would be inside the enemy as Spivak described, creating a hierarchy of knowledge. I attempt instead to build a methodology that rejects scientific thinking and binary opposition and occupies the liminal space of enumerate methods of knowledge production.

[101] See Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God. New York: HarperP erennial Modern Classics, 2006 and Neale Hurston, Zora. Barracoon: The Story of the Last 'Black Cargo'. EPub edition. Richmond: MIRA, 2018.
[102] Conquergood. 'Rethinking Ethnography'. 181.

Critical proximity has proven hard to fix and this theoretical insecurity reassures me that I am on the right path to producing an approach that falls outside the containers of language, reason and therefore Colonial Thought. However, it is necessary to sketch its nature through the theoretical landscape from which it emerges and is formed in relation to. Critical proximity builds upon the legacy of the reflexive turn. It is reflexive in both senses of the meaning, stating its epistemological grounding within the work, and revealing the researcher's subjectivity as well as their proximity. Further, critical proximity is an all-bodied encounter with the archive that produces moving image works that are infused with ways of knowing that do not belong in Colonial systems of thought. The works produced attempt to transfigure the archive in the manner Fred Moten describes, as '…a dehiscence at the heart of the archive and on its edge—a disorder, an appeal.'[103] In other words piercing the fabric of the archive creating a wound that spreads, rendering it infected or affected forever more.

Two awkward questions fizzle in the deployment of critical proximity in my practice. First, an anxiety that is consistently returned to in the work of knowing postcolonial scholarship: am I falling prey to my own critique - am I inside the enemy and not aware?

> 'The colonized intellectual, at the very moment when he undertakes a work of art, fails to realize he is using techniques and a language of the colonizer.'[104]

Second, is it enough as a response to the epistemic and representational violence of colonial moving images? It's not possible to answer these questions at this juncture or,

[103] Fred Moten, 'Black Optimism/Black Operation' (unpublished, 2007). 11.
[104] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Get Political (London: Pluto, 2008).109.

perhaps at all, but is important for them to linger, be present in my practice and be returned to in conclusion of this thesis.

Watching colonial moving images raises ethical questions. I argue that a racist imaginary is imbued in the film products that were created by and alongside the British state's colonial endeavours. The material reproduces stereotypes, a worlding of the places and people captured by film. In this way the very knowledge systems used to create the work are transmitted through viewership. The origin of my research interest lies in what simultaneously occurs when watching colonial moving images, as these are the only way to see the earliest representations of people from large parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East on film. I began with the question of what happens when I go looking for images of kinship, of people who lived in the places that my parents, grandparents and great grandparents lived in the British protectorate of Southern Nigeria? Yes, I encounter racism, but I also encounter pleasure and I learn. It is a complex pleasure, to be parsed and the learning, too, to be examined. So, what happens when I go looking for, find and watch colonial moving images, is that I encounter a problem, an ethical problem of what is to be done with these images. I concur with Neimanis that I '…learn from Spivak and others that solving it, is not the task; the task is rather living ethically with the problem.'[105]

It is necessary here to unpick the ways in which ethics will be understood in this research. It is often assumed that there are *Ethics*, one irrefutable way that is the *right* way to approach potentially fraught situations. This is inherent in institutional evocations of the term, the idea that the ethics of a situation can be decided based on boiler plate

[105] Astrida Neimanis, 'No Representation without Colonisation? (Or, Nature Represents Itself)', *Somatechnics* 5, no. 2 (September 2015): 135–53, 150.

answers to a bureaucratic form or in the newfound role of *ethical* as a prefix to a variety of modes of consumption. These colloquial slippages belie the subjective and interpretative nature of ethics as I understand it.

In outlining her own ethical framework,[106] Denise Ferreira da Silva, explains ethics as pertaining to the '…betterment of the World…'.[107] This capitalised world is in reference to Ferreira da Silva's interpretation of social order which is predicated on particular understandings of who has the right to subjectivity and who is relegated to objectification, tracing along the lines of hegemonic racial hierarchy.[108] Fundamentally, for her, ethics is widely understood as an individual choice, or as part of incremental improvements to this particular social order. In reference to the examples of ethical consumerism I made earlier, ethicality by this definition, would be the adoption of living wages for garment workers in South East Asia and the end of fast fashion. However, Ferreira da Silva argues that this kind of ethicality can only go so far, as it attempts to remedy a social world fundamentally broken by the '…effects of raciality…'.[109]It is ethics for a world that is already constructed unjustly, so ethics can only ever be sticking a plaster on a rotting corpse. Instead she advocates for a *Black Poethics* that '…aims for the end…' of the World – an ethics that ends the world as it is and would herald a social order that returns humanity to black people.[110]

For my own conception of ethics, I borrow from Ferreira da Silva's conjugation of the ethical, '…a Poetic engagement with humanity begins with affectability

[106] I am necessarily skipping over the history breadth and depth of discussions of ethics and moral philosophy as that is a discipline in and of itself that is only partially rather than wholly relevant to my research.
[107]Ferreira da Silva. 'Toward a Black Feminist Poethics'. 82.
[108] Ibid 87.
[109] Ferreira da Silva. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. 178.
[110] Ferreira da Silva. 'Toward a Black Feminist Poethics'. 81.

(relationality, contingency, immediacy).'[111] In this quest for betterment, in relation to the people held by the archival gaze, I am interested in my responsibility to them. Rather than working on behalf of or for them, the guiding principle is a relationship of proximity which is examined through the lens of care.

'Black care is an essential practice of attentiveness.'[112]

In this care, I acknowledge the violence, be that physical, psychic or epistemic, of these images and therefore the attention that needs to be paid to their recirculation. I acknowledge the ways in which colonial moving images have rendered the Other non-human and am accordingly attentive to those representations and their aftermaths. The people represented in the images are long dead, so their permission, opinions and consent cannot be sought. So, it is a caring that cannot be verified. This again ties in with my understanding of ethics as a series of questions, thoughts, meanderings or attempts rather than anything definitive. In other words, I am trying.

Karen Barad explains that '[e]thics is therefore not about right response to a radically exterior/ized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part.'[113] To contend, ethically, with the problem of colonial moving images is expressed in critical proximity as a methodology. It is not definite and resists mastery, instead it is a permeable enclosure that houses several different ways, experiments and gestures to address the issues that I have outlined. Borrowing from Moten, this methodology attempts to think and say in as many ways as possible,[114] incorporating what Avery Gordon describes as

[111] Ibid 89.
[112] Calvin Warren, 'Black Care', *Liquid Blackness* 3, no. 6 (December 2016): 35–47. 46.
[113] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Duke University Press, 2007).393.
[114] Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 2017).xiii.

'…subjugated…marginalised and discredited knowledge from below and from outside the institutions of official knowledge production.'[115] Beyond, simply, working against socialisation and education that emphasises reason applied to evidence as the one *true* route to knowledge, critical proximity also requires using the specific experience of encounter with the archive, and its ethical implications, as a departure for the production of works that transfigure colonial moving images and require an audience to think again and again.

Critical proximity emerged as a response to moving image practices that were made with the intention to challenge canonical historiography but that I deem to still be constructed using the epistemological framework of Colonial Thought. Further, the ambition of the methodology is to transfigure the contents of the colonial film archive so that the films do not continue to reproduce the racist ideologies that are embedded in both their form and content. This is to be achieved by the two features of critical proximity:

a. An all-bodied encounter with archives, where subjective sensorial reactions are registered, foregrounded, and valued.
b. The use of a multiplicity of knowledges, rather than Colonial Thought, to communicate these encounters and produce moving image works that provide the space for colonial moving images to be known in *other* ways.

[115] Avery Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins*, First edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).114.

A guide for the reader

The opening chapter, Scenes from the British Film Institute National Archive. deals with the role of archives in this research, sketching out the impetus of the entire project through an exploration of Derrida's *Archive Fever*. The chapter then moves on to determine the ways in which the archive is conceptualised in this research so, as to outline how it will be challenged through the operation of critical proximity. I would recommend watching *No Archive Can Restore You* (2020) during or after completion of this chapter.

Chapter two functions as the practice review of this thesis. Using the experience of a visit to an exhibition curated from the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum Collection as a structuring device, I explore the different approaches undertaken by moving image artists to transform images. Primarily these are artists who have attempted to challenge the orthodoxy of Western history-making in their practice, and I group their efforts according to corresponding methods, ultimately assigning disrupting and sounding images as close cousins to my methodological approach of critical proximity. As a variety of practice is discussed in this chapter, and so as not to muddy the waters none of my work is recommended to be viewed here.

Next, the third chapter uses the scaffolding of Sylvia Wynter's theories to understand the ways that blackness has been constructed by Colonial Thought. Calling on examples from the Specialised Technique of the Colonial Film Unit to demonstrate how the very fabric of colonial moving images produces a black subject that is inherently abject. In doing so, chapter three clarifies the necessary work of critical proximity to

challenge this representation of the colonised black subject. I recommend watching the *No Dance, No Palaver* (2017-2018) series after the completion of this chapter.

The final chapter is an in-depth overview of the methodology developed through the undertaking of this research - critical proximity – an assessment of the body of practice developed over this time. The five individual films are analysed for the choices made in their production and in light of the key features of critical proximity: my encounter with an archive and the use of other ways of knowing. I recommend watching *the names have change, including my own and truths have been altered* (2019) at the conclusion of this chapter.

The thesis ends as is customary with a concluding chapter that takes stock of all that has come before and reflects on my contribution to knowledge, the extent of critical proximity's transfiguration of the archive and most importantly answers the questions of *where next?* both for my own research and this field of enquiry.

From the start of this research, I have had a quote virtually stickied to my computer desktop and I would like to prepare the way for your reading of this thesis with it:

'O my body, make of me always a man who questions!'[116]

[116] Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 181.

1. Scenes from the British Film Institute National Archive

Documents: paper files, books, magazines, journals.
Film: 8mm, 16mm, 35mm nitrate, digital transfers (.mov and .mp4).

In lobbying the British government for a National Film Archive (NFA), the authors of a 1954 report, *The National Film Archive*, stressed the equanimity of film and written documents, '…film archives may well play in the future a role comparable to that which the great book libraries have played over the last five hundred years.'[1] The British film archive project NFA commenced in 1935 with the National Film Library, when the new technology, which was already beginning to become established, was viewed as having limitless potency, and so an ambitious plan to preserve all films screened in the UK was designed. Issues with copyright, the commercial priorities of production companies and the emerging Hollywood juggernaut meant that this was not possible.[2] In 1954, this report was published defining what kind of films were worthy to be held in the newly minted NFA.

The report provides insight into the rationale behind the establishment and functioning of the NFA. It begins with a thought experiment, imagining a 350-year-old cinema history, '…if these films had survived, they would have provided for us a kind of telescope through time, enabling us to look back directly into the life and movement of the Elizabethan period.'[3] This reveals why film and, therefore an archive of it, was seen

[1] National Film Archive, *The National Film Archive* (London, 1956, 1956).5.
[2] Ibid 4-14.
[3] Ibid 3.

as being useful to the state - it would allow for a closer examination of the past, a chance to really *know* how people lived and what *really* happened. The enhancement of sight and its connection to more and deeper knowledge is championed as the prevailing quality of cinema; it is '…a medium of scientific research, of historical record of education, and of art…', a sharp knife in the toolbox of Colonial Thought.[4]

Achille Mbembe argues that the archive has a double-edged relationship to the state, 'On the one hand, there is no state without archives - without *its* archives. On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state.'[5] The NFA lobbyists successfully argued the former, perhaps by appealing to the state's desire to pioneer. Being first was similarly the impetus behind the establishment of other national institutions, such as the British Academy's network of research institutes, soft power games were tools of persuasion.[6] The report's authors point to rival archives in the US, France and Germany and the UK's role in co-founding the International Federation of Film Archives in 1938. And therefore, argue that a national archive is in the national interest both internally and externally. The NFA became '…one of the first film archives to be established anywhere in the world.'[7]

The lobbyists were, also, looking for funds and assurances of survival, '…films can only be preserved permanently in the national interest by a national

[4] Ibid 4.
[5] Jo Botting, 'Jo Botting Celebrates 75 Years of the National Film Archive', *Sight and Sound.* 20, no. 8 (2010): 13–14.
[6] In the establishment of the British Academy at Athens, the presence of the French and American institutions in the city were cited as the reason that the Great Britain needed one, as they did not want to be left behind. George A. Macmillan, 'A Short History of the British School at Athens, 1886-1911', *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 1 (1911): ix–xxxviii.
[7] Botting. 'Jo Botting Celebrates 75 Years of the National Film Archive'. 13

organisation which has itself some self-assurance of its permanence, which enjoys the confidence of the film industry, and which is endowed with the resources to bestow on its films.'[8] They argued it was vital for the UK to have permanent visual records of itself - for history, for posterity. The state was convinced and granted funds to the NFA in 1955, and then passed the Film Statutory Deposit Bill in 1969 stating which films, under law, were to be preserved. The archive was to be administered by a state funded body, the British Film Institute, and tasked with preserving all films certified and exhibited in the UK. The report also made pains to single out the archiving of government films under the purview of the public record office and of all films '…which record in a unique manner historically important subject matter.'[9] It is under this banner that the films made through the Colonial Film Unit are classified and retained.

For all the talk of the preservation of national history, access to the NFA is limited both physically, economically and psychically. Mbembe further elaborates his take on state archives, asserting that the state does not desire the collective memory of itself that the archive could provide, '…states have sought to 'civilise' the ways in which the archive might be consumed, not by attempting to destroy its material substance but through the bias of commemoration…the ultimate objective of commemoration is less to remember than to forget.'[10] Archived films are inconspicuous. They are, literally, hard to watch and poorly disseminated because of the complications of ownership, financial renumeration, material conditions, technological obsolescence and politics.[11] Films

[8] National Film Archive, *The National Film Archive.* 4
[9] Ibid 7.
[10] Mbembe. 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits'. 24.
[11] The complicated and latent nature of state organised film archives has been discussed in detail in Orphan film discourse and I don't go into detail here as my research is more interested in the functioning of archives rather than their institutional history or nature.

historically have been marked, filed away, and sheltered from the public by a paternalistic state and private institutions that claim to house a nation's cultural heritage.[12] Due to this, the archive of these apparently historical snapshots of British life do not facilitate a public or national knowledge. State archives can be seen as being part of the process of national forgetting. [13]

The archive of colonial moving images

As well as entanglements with the state, the architecture of the archive – the building records are housed in – is also, traditionally, held in high regard. The symbiotic relationship between the archive as a physical space and its contents are often highlighted, '[t]he archive has neither status nor power without an architectural dimension.'[14] The building itself reinforces and confers meaning onto archival material - because when an object is housed in a particular place, organised with a prevailing institutional logic, overseen by a person with specific training, and treated with reverence, it becomes a valid archival object.

The NFA exists in multiple locations across the UK, most notably at the J Paul Getty Jnr Conservation Centre in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire; the Master Film Store of the BFI National Archive, Gaydon, Warwickshire; the bunker of BFI, Stephen Street, London; BFI Reuben Library and BFI Mediatheque on the Southbank and finally on a web only platform; the BFI player. Admittance to the first two locations is reserved for

[12] Cohen, Emily. 'The Orphanista Manifesto: Orphan Films and the Politics of Reproduction'. American Anthropologist 106, no. 4 (December 2004): 719–31. 726
[13] Mbembe. 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits'. 24.
[14] Ibid. 19.

the sporadic heritage open day (Fig. 2), when the public are permitted to see pre-selected and sanitised parts of the archive, whilst all the London locations are open to the public at varying levels of ease. The mediatheque is free to use, as well as the Reuben Library after research credentials have been verified. However, along with BFI player these locations carry the least material and most heavily curated titles. BFI Stephen St is the most accessible location with the largest breadth of films, as the official research and viewing arm of the NFA. This comes at a cost - £16 per hour of film. It could be this, a lack of marketing, cuts to funding of staff and/or public uninterest that leave the archive scarcely utilised.[15] All this is to say that the regimes of order that govern and reproduce the BFI National Film Archive leave it hidden from sight, a metaphor that is not lost during visits to BFI Stephen St descending the lift into the dark bowels of a building in the heart of central London.

[15] I learnt this anecdotally by talking to the workers that administer the archive at Stephen St.

Figure 2. Poster of Heritage Open Day for J Paul Getty Jnr Conservation Centre in Berkhamsted, 2012.

The "archive" I am researching does not conform to a singular vision, it is disparate. It is, instead, spread throughout several archival institutions and locations across the UK and former British colonies, overseen by people with varying degrees of knowledge, expertise and experience, organised variously and sometimes left in the bins

by the side of Bristol Temple Meads station.[16] It does not perform as a traditional institutional archive and instead of being united by architecture, it is united by its epistemological framework. To differentiate, I refer to it as an archive of colonial moving images eschewing both location and singularity.

This archive is categorised by the Victorian idea that knowledge can be controlled and bestows ultimate power, that having the monopoly over knowledge means control over Empire.[17] The archive of colonial moving images is '…a fantasy of knowledge collected and united in the service of state and Empire.'[18] It is a product of Colonial Thought purporting to give visual evidence of how to know Britain's colonies, fitting into pre-existing stereotypes of people, places and customs. And so, it is made up of films and documents created by the British state through the Colonial Film Unit, its offshoots, and less codified predecessors, by corporations and industry operating in British colonies and by functionaries of the British Empire (civil servants, military, and religious missionaries).

Postcolonial scholarship has identified the connection between the invention of cinema and the colonial project — it's use as a tool by the emerging 'sciences' of anthropology and ethnography, themselves used as ways to prove the existence of racial hierarchies.[19] The films in the archives examined for this research established a 'hegemonic colonial discourse, [and] mapped history not only for domestic audiences but also for the world.'[20] This entails that these archives carry and can reproduce the

[16] This is a reference to the state of some of the former British Empire and Commonwealth Museum collection which Bristol Archives staff described to me, during a research trip in 2017.
[17] Richards. *The Imperial Archive*. 7.
[18] Ibid 6.
[19] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2013), 100 and Rony, *The Third Eye,* 9-14
[20] Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 103.

hegemonic historiography of the colonial project.

For this research, I have encountered and used material from the British Film Institute National Archive, London; Bodleian Library, Oxford; British Empire and Commonwealth Collection at the Bristol Record Office; The National Archives, Kew; National Film, Video and Sound Archive, Jos, Nigeria; Nigerian Film Unit Archive, Lagos; Pitt Rivers Museum Archive, Oxford and Unilever Archive, Port Sunlight, Merseyside.

27th Jan '17

I'd been told to go visit E, an academic who was interested in the archives of the Colonial Film Unit and who was tangentially involved in a previous research project that created www.colonialfilm.org.uk. The site that should have been bookmarked on my browser but that I insisted on typing in, each time. The website that if the internet was material would be dog eared or wine stained or stuck to the bottom of my shoe.

E was most interested in South African material and I sighed to myself that familiar sigh, that learnt sigh which comes automatically when recalling the confusion of reading 'Disgrace' or a haphazard conversation about race I once had, when trying to make friends with the new girl at school, who had recently moved to London from

Durban. But I still went to see E, out of curiousity or just a need to busy myself, to keep on encountering these archives wherever they were - as a test to see what I would find and what it would do to me.

E had the totally clichéd office of an academic, the kind that only television dared to spoof - books piled high in a cramped room with paper strewn everywhere, light and noise streaming in from a huge window. We chatted about Africa, archives, colonialism, Bristol and mutual points of contact, for there were many. Like the guy that literally 'mans' the steenbeck at the BFI on stephen Street. He always bemoans its lack of use, telling me how many people had come to see films in that last week. You can always count it on your hand. He promised he'd sneak me in, bypassing the bureaucracy of payment and approval, but I've never tried (I'm too timid to test the rules sometimes). The last time I went there he had tried to trick me by asking what the most important thing in life was, without

missing a beat, I replied...

time.

He was impressed, "no one, ever, gets that right!" he said, as if being right was a possibility.

E graciously let me see everything surreptitiously obtained from the BFI archives. It was all on VHS but luckily, we were in a film studies department and they had a couple of VHS players and TVs - surely one would work? But what followed was a comic tale of missing and incorrect cables, visits to local electronic stores on the neighbouring high street, chats with overworked and exasperated technicians and the gentle slippage into preordained generational archetypes of older technophobe and younger digital native.

Eventually we worked it out and I played the first film suggested, 'STAMPEDE' or 'BORN IN FLAMES'. The VHS player was tracking and the white lines across the television screen reminded me of an itchy feeling I used to get

When I was a kid and our tapes didn't work properly, but at the same moment, the present tense feeling of the simple pleasure of placing a tape in the player and hearing the clicks and whirrs that meant something was about to start. I watched the first ten minutes without much interest, but then came the customary dance break. The bit that always gets me. It seemed to me that <u>all</u> films I watched from the archive from <u>any</u> African territory had a scene where people dance. It's usually in a rural setting. There is a circle. There are drums. There is a white filmmaker behind the camera eating it all up and thinking to himself how real this is, how authentically Africa...

But watching it here in E's office,
it feels different.

Not so different. Much more ecstatic.

I must ignore,

that I will read the director, Stella Court
Treatt's, journals.

Where she explains that,

she was trying to make a nature film,

that she thought she was being ingenious by
substituting out the animals, for people.

Or do I?

I think I should,

but I do know this fact and it doesn't
take any of my pleasure, in watching these women
move, away.

But I worry a lot.

I worry about looking at them again.

I worry if it's OK

see their bodies?

Then I think maybe I am a prude,

and that the nudity means something different to them,

it means something like,

"look where you came from?"

Like it means history.

But I don't know.

Desire for the archive

Derrida's *Archive Fever* has become the touchstone for most contemporary critical forays into archival studies.[21] It is this scholarship, reflective of the archival turn but offering critical approaches to a reappraisal of the archive, that my research looks to.[22] Derrida's concept of the archive is as a site of both illogical desire and pursuit. Carolyn Steedman divides Derrida's conceptualisation of fever into two parts, the first as a sickness or as he calls it '*…trouble de l'archive…*'.[23] The institutional archive is troubled from its beginnings because of its connections to state power, '…the fever or sickness of the archive is to do with it's very establishment, which is at one and the same time, the establishment of state power and authority.'[24] She argues that the archive is faulty or rotten at its core because the state are the architects of its contents, and that then, because of the value of the archive, history is made from this corruption.

Second, Steedman discusses '…the feverish desire…for the archive: the fever not so much to enter and use it as to have it, or just for it to exist.[25] For Derrida, the archive is a contradiction, it is always out of reach, so this fever for it, this burning passion is

[21] See Stoler, A.L., 2009. *Along the archival grain: epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J, Steedman, C., 2001. *Dust.* Manchester University Press, Manchester, Carolyn Hamilton, 2002. *Refiguring the archive* / edited by Carolyn Hamilton … [et al.]. Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht; London, Singh, J., 2018. *No archive will restore you*, 1st edition. ed. Punctum Books, Santa Barbara, CA, Thomas Richards, 1993. *The imperial archive: knowledge and the fantasy of Empire*. Verso, London Foster, H., 2004. 'An archival impulse'. *October* 110, 3–22.

[22] I make this distinction in order to narrow the vast academic work that exists in terms of the archive, to those who have come after Derrida and are interested in the ways in which the archive is used to think through issues of 'history, identity or memory' Jane Connarty, Josephine Lanyon, and Picture This Moving Image, *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists' Film and Video.* (Bristol: Picture This Moving Image, 2006). 6.

[23] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).. 90 (emphasis in original).

[24] Steedman. *Dust*. 1.

[25] Ibid 2.

unquenchable.[26] '*…mal de l'archive…*'[27] is the predominant way in which Derrida's work is understood, and has resonated for many in contemporary art. Okwui Enwezor's 2008 exhibition, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, riffs off Derrida and there have been numerous colloquium, conferences and writing that reference fever to describe the way in which archival material has been used in artistic practices.[28] So, in this vein, it seems essential here to uncover my own fever for the archive and sketch out from where it arises.

Derrida's text is a discussion of Freud's *mal de l'archive* (the full title of the text is *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression)* and categorises it as nostalgia or the 'painful desire for a return to authentic and singular origin'.[29] It is painful because the archive will not deliver the authentic and singular origin, there will always be more to look for, more to find because its beginning is intangible. Freud resides unabashedly in the scientific positivist camp, so the archive is being used as an original source, or the ultimate evidence. It is '…archive as a way of knowing…'.[30] In a flourish towards the end of the text, Derrida illuminates what it exactly means to have archive fever, after pages and pages of description and obfuscation -

> '…never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it… It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostaglic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.'[31]

[26] Derrida. *Archive Fever*. 90-91.
[27] Ibid 90 (emphasis in original).
[28] Artspace Editors, 'How the Art World Caught Archive Fever', Artspace, 2014, http://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/the_art_worlds_love_affair_with_archives. np.
[29] Derrida. *Archive Fever*. 85.
[30] Steedman. *Dust*. 2.
[31] Derrida. *Archive Fever*. 91.

Not only is the archive itself troubled, but the pursuit of the past through it, also, sickens.

Nostalgia and homesickness bring to mind a Welsh word that many have found hard to translate into English - hiraeth. It refers to a homesickness and/or nostalgia for a place that is no longer and/or never was. The 'no longer' or 'never was' are helpful descriptors for my own complex feelings around diaspora. Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* is an exploration of these types of feelings, '…our ancestors…had a sense of origins…we on the other hand have no such immediate sense of belonging, only drift.'[32] Unlike Brand, I can trace where my family are from, but there remains a disconnect between myself and that land because of lacks in language, cultural memory, familiarity and ways of being. This is a common complaint, and so Derrida's evocations of nostalgia and homesickness remind me of a kind of hiraeth, a '…condition of black diaspora, the violent removal from the land you are indigenous to, be it through economic migration or the imperialism of chattel slavery.'[33]

Derrida's conceptualisation of the relationship between archive and archivist, appears to come to bear, it feels familiar to the experience of the impetus and condition of this research. The archive fever arises from a desire for *my* origins. It is no coincidence then that the archival image I was first drawn to was one of a woman dancing stooped, eyes averted. It reminded me of myself, of my grandmother, and triggered a feeling of connectivity across space and time. That newsreel started a pursuit of sister images that would allow me to feel a similar connection to origins, accelerating '…the drive to awaken the dead, those repressed effaced memories, to understand "her footsteps in the

[32] Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Vintage Books Canada, 2002). 118.
[33] Onyeka Igwe and JD Stokely, 'Hiraeth, or Queering Time in Archives Otherwise', no. 16 (2018): 15. 14.

ash"…'.[34] It is a way of pinpointing the beginning of myself which exists both here and there,

"I have gone looking for myself in the past to find roots."

To answer the question "where are you from?", I have, in line with my Western education, sought evidence, and the first place I thought of looking was the archive. This could be described as clichéd or cloying but after elucidations on the meaning of archives, it is more accurately and fundamentally revealed to be myopic.[35] This type of desire for the archive can lead to puppetry — the archive becomes a prop leaned on in order for one to be able to speak. There is a danger in this research of tooling the archive of colonial moving images to tell a singular story that is my own.[36]

Critical proximity, as an experiment in using other types of knowledge, those subjugated by Colonial Thought, can address the *trouble de l'archive,* it's malformation born from particular approaches to knowledge and governed by state power. But what of my *mal de l'archive* - the rabid search for home, for origins, for beginnings in the archive? It is because of this, I argue, that, my particular encounter with the archive should be embedded in the research, as Mbembe notes '…however we define archives, they have no meaning outside the subjective experience of those individuals who, at a given moment come to use them.'[37] The contents of the archive is disseminated via the historian or artist or family member and so it is enmeshed with their subjectivity in a given time and place. Observations of this kind appear in the work of those who championed reflexivity in social sciences when there became '…ethical, aesthetic and

[34] Derrida. *Archive Fever*. 95.
[35] Julietta Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You*, 1st edition (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018). 25.
[36] For Steedman's warnings about this type of research see *Dust*. 77 – 81.
[37] Mbembe. 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits'. 23.

scientific obligations to be reflexive and self-critical.'[38] By focusing on the person doing the archival work and how their impulses, drives, ideas - maladies as perhaps Derrida would describe them - implicate the material uncovered, critical proximity provides a mechanism to address the issues that arise when asking the question, why am I so interested in the archive?

Why do we have to keep it?

The archive as evidence to discover.

The archive as a cemetery.

The archive as matter.

There was an episode of a popular podcast, *Radiolab* that explored '…the story of a few documents that tumbled out of the secret archives of the biggest empire the world has ever known, offering a glimpse of histories waiting to be rewritten.'[39] The podcast charts the David and Goliath tale of a group of Kenyans who were able to take the British government to court, and win, in the first ruling against British colonial violence and misdeeds. Pertinently, they did this by using some documents found in an undisclosed archive. The journalists contrast Kenyan oral traditions - different ways in which knowledge is passed down, disseminated and guarded through generations, with the evasions and redactions of the British state's legacy of classification and documentation of its archival estates. Ultimately the government is brought down by its

[38] Ruby. 'Exposing Yourself'. 154

[39] Matt Kielty and Jamie York, 'Mau Mau', Radiolab, accessed 8 August 2019, https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/mau-mau.

very own archive because someone remembers a number - the identifier of a document that detailed the atrocities that the British army committed against Mau Mau dissidents.

This tale exemplifies Mbembe's argument that '…the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state…'.[40] In this story, I saw the possibility that the archive could be used to unlock the barriers of state power and to perform what I thought of as its function – to provide the necessary evidence. I can see this for its romanticism now, for the simple way I wished to understand the functioning of archives. It is necessary, with the hindsight of research, to question this way of viewing the archive and think through the many ways in which archives, especially those that hold colonial and colonial moving image material, operate in social reality, as well as specifically, for me. In this way, I will track how I have considered and/or understood archives over the course of this research.

The first way in which I have understood the archive is as evidence used to prove historical narratives true. In this conceptualisation, archives become sites of knowledge production. This is knowledge according to the positivist epistemological formations – the bedrock of Colonial Thought - explained in the introduction. The archive is the very foundation of the way in which knowledge is most popularly socially understood, as it is where people are encouraged to go, to find out *truths*. This can be argued to constitute a teleological approach to knowledge, another facet of Colonial Thought. Walter Mignolo argues that a key feature of colonisation was that '[w]estern Civilizations impose its conceptualization of time.' [41]A time that is unipolar, going in

[40] Mbembe. 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits'. 23.
[41] Hoffman. 'Interview – Walter Mignolo'.np.

one direction in a straight line, so that the past is behind and the future in front. Accordingly, time moves forward, linearly, with increasingly rational minds producing greater understanding of the world. It is necessary to gather this and accumulate the sum total of human knowledge in the archive.

Archives are built as '…an allergic reaction to what can be lost…', what might not be captured in this accumulation.[42] It is why so many contemporary considerations of the archive focus on what is lost or missing, for what is not captured by the archive often becomes what is not known. The case of the Mau Mau legal proceedings traces the process of a historical event moving from the not known to the known due to the discovery of its archival simulacrum. The fight to fill those gaps is a fight for the status of history. This conceptualisation, treating archives as the root or the locus of a particular type of knowledge production, allows for an assessment of how stories become history, as much of postcolonial studies sought to do (as mentioned in the introduction).[43]

Therefore, the archive is always and already colonial after Imperialism, because of the place of evidence in the knowledge formations that create Colonial Thought. Institutional archives relating to the black experience are formed through the mechanism of a specific kind of knowledge production — the strain of Western positivism that was the cornerstone of the colonial project.[44] These archives are part of a 'European cultural project…', which is motivated by a deep desire to '…catalogue, and thus order, or impose a hierarchy on, the fruits of colonial theft.'[45] The cataloguing, ordering and intrinsically connected imposition of hierarchy is the work of archivisation in

[42] Oliver Chanarin, 'Bandage the Knife Not the Wound' (Archives and Embodiment Conference, Central St Martins, 4 July 2019). np.
[43] Moore-Gilbert. *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*. 5.
[44] Richards. *The Imperial Archive*. 4.
[45] Maya Mackindral, 'Diverus', MICE Magazine, 11 April 2016, http://micemagazine.ca/issue-one/diverus. np.

institutions. It is where value is assigned to collections of the past, and this *value adding* makes it history.

I have demonstrated that the archive is a way of reproducing a specific knowledge whilst simultaneously creating the hegemonic formation of how we know. I am using hegemony here in the Gramscian sense as a method of creating social consent.[46] Positivist epistemology is framed as the reasonable way to answer the question of *how to know*? because of the operations of what Gramsci would describe as the masters of hegemony - elite institutions. And so, the archive of colonial moving images contains and promotes colonial fantasies of blackness that have and do sustain the racial regimes of power that order social reality. Institutional colonial archives contain the logic of a Western colonial positivist knowledge; they are '…a force field that ... pulls on some 'social facts' and converts them into qualified knowledge, that attends to some ways of knowing while repelling and refusing others.'[47] Further embedded in archival research is the pursuit of discovery, contiguous with the origins of the colonial endeavour. The historian is looking for that titbit, anecdote, link, object, inkling that no one has ever found before, that was hidden from view, which can be used to understand the past that little bit better, Steedman writes '…in one view, the practice of history in its modern mode is just one long exercise of the deep satisfaction of finding things.'[48]

Archivisation, the process of making an object into archive is of primary interest, Derrida argues,

> '…a science of the archive must include the theory of this insitutionalization, that is to say, the theory of both the law which begins by inscribing itself there and of the

[46] Antonio Gramsci and Quintin Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 8. pr (New York: International Publ, 1985). 242-246.
[47] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense / Ann Laura Stoler.* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009). 22.
[48] Steedman. *Dust*. 10.

right which authorizes it. This right imposes or supposes a bundle of limits which have a history, a deconstructable history.'[49]

The archive, here, is not a phenomenon or simply an architectural space, but a vital cog in the mainstreaming of epistemological machinations. In this vein, Ann Laura Stoler examines archives '…as peculiar cultural artefacts and instruments of knowledge production.'[50] Stoler considers how archives are produced and the forms that govern this production - the way things are written, from linguistic styles, to penmanship and marginalia. Stoler argues that within the colonial archive, other knowledges or even convergent ideas, are contained in what is unwritten and what is hinted at. In focusing on '…archiving-as-a-process rather than archives-as-things…',[51] Stoler reveals the construction of the colonial archive as a fantasy of total and universal knowledge. Rather than, reading against the grain, which Stoler identifies as the customary approach of those embarking on colonial discourse analysis through archival sources, Stoler wants to '…explore the grain with care and along it first.'[52] This immersion in the archive allows Stoler to find what others have missed, but also centres both herself as a researcher and the people or state or institution that orders the archive. There is a danger, then, of concentrating on how the archive got to be, who wrote records within it and how they wrote them – a focus on the colonial, whilst those marginalised within it remain that way.

This research started with an understanding of archives as evidence and was formed in the midst of feminist, postcolonial and post structuralist critiques of the power

[49] Derrida. *Archive Fever*. 4.
[50] Matthew Kurtz, 'A Postcolonial Archive? On the Paradox of Practice in a Northwest Alaska Project', *Archivaria* 61 (2006).. 84.
[51] Ibid 48
[52] Ibid 50

of archives to determine social facts.[53] The aims were pointed towards deconstruction, channelling these kinds of insights, '[t]he final destination of the archive is therefore always situated outside its own materiality, in the story that it makes possible.'[54] For, if it is possible to see the ways in which the archive props up certain ways of knowing the past, it is possible to both reconsider these ways of knowing and perhaps resuscitate others that lie dormant.

The second way I have understood the archive is as a cemetery.[55] It is the place where those who have gone before are kept and sometimes revered. A place where researchers seek to find out further information, most often, about important people in history, where the diaries or personal letters of the type of figures that write history, those that won the wars - are kept. State power often resides over here too. The twenty (formerly thirty) year rule of UK public record keeping renders this kind of documentation, from people in political power, hidden for a generation - lessening the impact of potentially inflammable discoveries. In many ways the archivisation of this type of information is a way for the state to defang present action by putting it in the past tense. The ownership, too, of this material allows for the ownership of the narrative of the individuals contained in the archive.

However, the archive is not always only a cemetery for the lives of the victors, it also has the potential to bring '…to life those who do not for the main part exist…'.[56] Foucault dwells on this or is propelled by this in *The Lives of Infamous Men.* He distinguishes this text by stating that it is not a history book but instead '…an anthology

[53] See Spivak, G.C. 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' 66–111.
[54] Mbembe. 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits'. 21.
[55] Ibid. 19
[56] Steedman. *Dust*. 70.

of existences, lives of a few lines or of a few pages, countless misfortunes and adventures, gathered together in a handful of words, brief lives chanced upon in books and documents.'[57] For Foucault, history does something else entirely, it '…clutters up and occupies our memory…' curtailing the space for another or other ways of thinking through people, events and incidences.[58] Foucault instead wants to connect to something outside of the story, motivated by '…primary intensities' in the act of seeking out, collecting and republishing archives that feature the unknown and often unnamed.'[59] He observes that what marks them is '…an encounter with power.'[60] It's almost as if the archive is a dragnet accidentally picking them up like the dredges and rubble that line the ocean floor. So, too the archive can be a cemetery for the infamous.

This conception is vital for my research into the archive of colonial moving images as this research is concerned with the ramifications of what happens when I go looking for myself in the archive. The predicament can be observed too, in the cry for representation that is heard in mainstream arguments about race and image making.[61] An example of representational politics in contemporary British cinema is *Belle*, a 2013 film made by Ama Asante, that has its origins in the 1779 painting of Lady Elizabeth Murray and Dido Belle that hangs in Kenwood House, London. The director was compelled to know the story of the black woman who appears in an eighteenth-century painting because it is rare. Images of black people from the turn of the twentieth century

[57] Foucault. *Power, Truth, Strategy*. 76.
[58] Steedman. *Dust*. 67.
[59] Michel Foucault, *Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton, Working Papers Collection ; 2 (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979). 77.
[60] Ibid
[61] I am referring to arguments in the media which foreground the importance of representation in popular culture such as Alex Laughlin. 'Why It's so Powerful to See Yourself Represented in Pop Culture'. Washington Post. Accessed 16 March 2020 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/05/05/why-its-so-powerful-to-see-yourself-represented-in-pop-culture/ and Bennett, Alanna. '23 Reminders That Representation Is Everything'. BuzzFeed. Accessed 16 March 2020. https://www.buzzfeed.com/alannabennett/reminders-that-representation-really-is-important.

on the newly emergent film technology are rare in the same way. When searching the online directories of the National Film Archive the only films, I found of black people in early film culture, were colonial. They had emphatic titles like *This is Nigeria*, *Towards Wholeness* and *Men of Two Worlds*. These films were created by the imperial powers to tell a story of people and places they had overcome, a story that justified their presence in these places by demeaning and retarding the Other, '…the object of the Colonial Film Unit, like that of every branch of colonial administration, is to raise the primitive African to a high standard of living.'[62] These racist regimes of power are intrinsic to the films, and the archive, in its guise as evidence held, and because of the laissez faire approach to archivisation, it can be argued, reproduces these ideas. But still, sitting in the bunker of BFI Stephen Street, I was able to see images of people from across the former colonies of the British Empire. The archives of colonial moving images can be a cemetery for unnamed, unknown and most often unspeaking colonial subjects. Although I don't concede that it is possible to know them through these representations, it is an opportunity for visual connection and so, the possibility for these images to be known in other ways.

The final way in which I have understood archives is as '…matter that has duration…'.[63] Matter. My experience of visiting paper archives is best categorised by the smell of the once wet paper, the sound of pages being carefully prised apart, the feel of the paper between white gloved hands, or if you're in a progressive institution, your own naked flesh. This is sensorial experience that is not just about the eyes but all of the ways in which the body experiences material, '[t]he material nature of the archive – at least

[62] 'Colonial Cinema' II, no. 4 (1943).
[63] Yannis Hamilakis, 'After interpretation: remembering archaeology' 20 (2012): 47–55. 53.

before digitalisation - means that it is inscribed in the universe of the senses: a tactile universe because the document can be touched, a visual universe because it can be seen, a cognitive universe because it can be read and decoded.'[64] It is hard to discount, in the experience of visiting an archive, the human labour that goes into the creation of the material. That there was someone once sat similarly to you, at a desk by a light, creating *archive.* I was once lazily flicking through some very boring papers in a bland Map room at the top of a 1930's library when I came across very violent and abstract scrawling over existing handwriting explaining that the author was extremely ill and that all that came before should be discounted (Fig. 3). I touched the paper, feeling the different textures and tracing a finger over the brittle hard angles of the attempted deletions. In an instant, I was transported to imaginings of a middle-aged man, propped up in bed dressed in a Victorian nightshirt feverishly writing with pen and ink then collapsing, only to reread what he had in written between waking and dreaming, aghast at his candour. I saw in my mind's eye a repetition of this scene, over and over again.

[64] Mbembe. 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits'. 20.

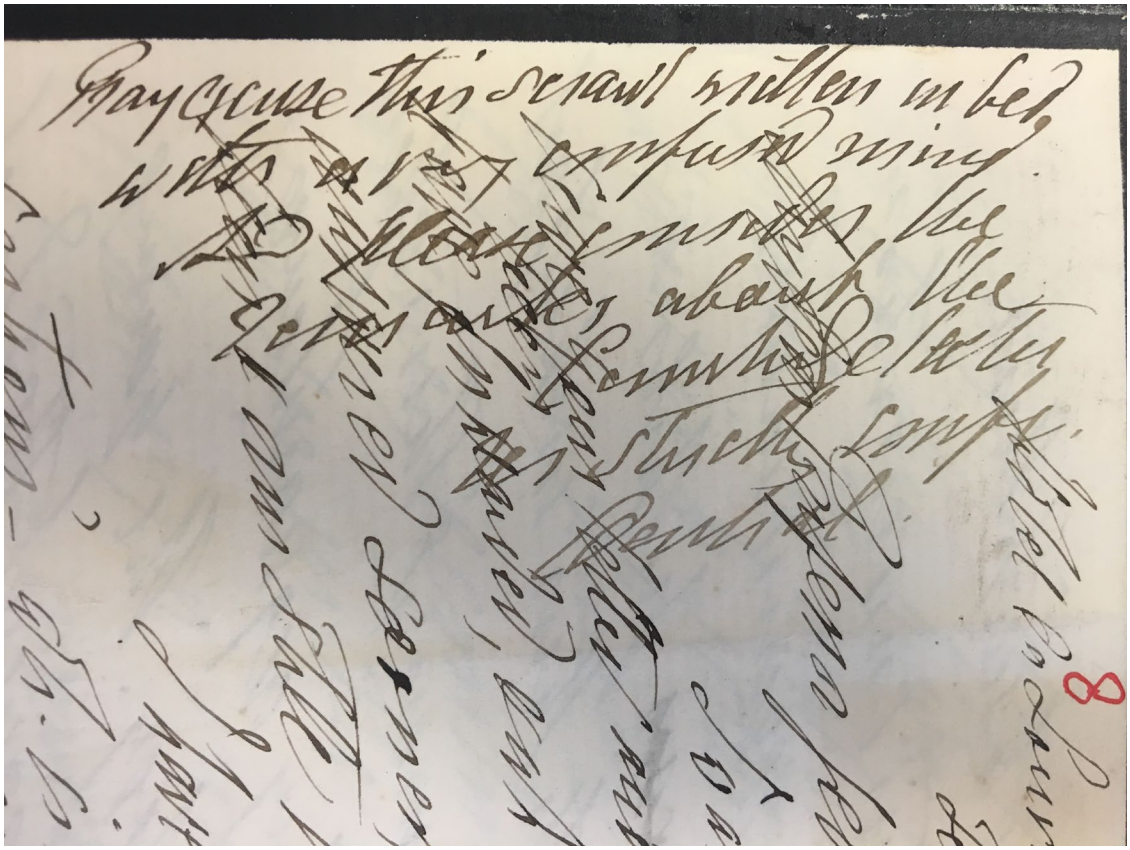

Figure 3. Extract from British School at Athens institutional papers (unlisted)

Matter allows the researcher to transport in time, and '…engage with [the archive's] multi-temporal character, to show how they continued living and interacting with humans, through constant "reuse" and reworkings.'[65] Borrowing from Saidiya Hartman, archival research is a kind of time travel and the documents become amulets that activate portals of time.[66] This is even more apparent with film, it is memory made material. Not only are films made of matter that can be touched, smelt and held by a researcher but also it is argued that '…more than any other visual medium, film and video most closely mimic cognitive memory, with various elements that constitute sensory thought.'[67] Affect theory speaks to the ways in which film can appear to function

[65] Hamilakis. 'After interpretation: remembering archaeology'. 53.
[66] Saidiya Hartman, 'Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: In Conversation with Saidiya Hartman'. [Talk].
[67] Cohen. 'The Orphanista Manifesto'.720.

in the same way our minds do, making it comparable to cognition, imagination and dreaming. 'Cinema comes close to us…it…occupies our sphere…'; that is, the sphere of the bodily. [68]

There is a corpus of work looking at '…the spectator as a corporal-material being…'whose materiality and senses are stimulated by the cinematic form.[69] Film scholars have now established the body as a legitimate site for exploration, discussion and theory. This theory has centred on the question of how cinema comes to be sensually experienced inside of our bodies – this is a question of affectivity. Being a concept very much routed in the body, a body that arguably has remained elusive in academia,[70] affect is a contested concept that is difficult to tie down; '…there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect.'[71] It is not the same as a feeling or emotion, for emotions and feelings can be interpreted and named.[72]Affect can be understood as a more primal or raw level of bodily experience that escapes the naming process because it happens before cognition, before thought.[73] Affect is '…intensity…' experienced by the body, it operates '…at a membrane between the sensible and the thinkable…'.[74] It is argued that the rapid assemblage of still frames that appears to be movement - the central trick of cinema - is what makes it closely aligned with affect. The speed of images leaves no space for reflection and therefore engender a bodily reaction

[68] Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2009).2; Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman, *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography*, 1995.329.

[69] Vivian Carol Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2004).55.

[70] D Donn Welton, *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).8

[71] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation / Brian Massumi.*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). 27

[72] Ibid 28.

[73] Ibid 25.

[74] Laura U. Marks, 'Thinking Multisensory Culture', *Paragraph* 31, no. 2 (July 2008): 123-37.133.

that comes before meaning–making.[75] The images on the screen are perceived as if unfolding like images in the physical world. The separation between our eyes and the screen or the skin of the body and the skin of the film is blurred and fractured. Cinema causes the body of the spectator to experience cinema as both here and there.[76] It is in this way that moving images are arguably uniquely effective as an *affective* medium.

The films I watched, from the archive of colonial images, are the *matter* of a cultural memory of the people, places and cultures of the former British colonies. They have the potential to fall into familiarity, so that they come to populate my mind's eye or my own dreams and imaginings of those people, places and cultures, so that they become indivisible with one another. But I can also touch these memories, I can hold them to the light and squint as I pass them through my hands and animate them manually. It is because of the material nature of the archive that my research has sought to appreciate the ways in which the archive is known through the body.

The idea that women carry archives in their bodies has almost become aphorism due to its overuse, and recent studies arguing for the existence of transgenerational trauma appear to provide the necessary scientific rigour for these ideas.[77] However, I am instead interested in returning to Martha Graham's question - '[h]ow else to explain those instinctive gestures and thoughts that come to us, with little preparation or expectation?'[78] I was introduced to Martha Graham's ideas through a contemporary dancer, Zinzi Minott and her performance *What kind of slave would I be?* (2017). Minott

[75] Massumi. *Parables for the Virtual* 28
[76] Sobchack. *Carnal Thoughts*. 71
[77] See Gump, J.P., 2010. 'Reality matters: The shadow of trauma on African American subjectivity'. *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 27, 42–54; Kellermann, N.P.F., n.d. Epigenetic Transmission of Holocaust Trauma: Can Nightmares Be Inherited? 7; Costa, D.L., Yetter, N., DeSomer, H., 2018. 'Intergenerational transmission of paternal trauma among US Civil War ex-POWs'. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA 115*, 11215–11220 and Brown-Rice, K., 2013. 'Examining the Theory of Historical Trauma Among Native Americans'. *TPC 3*, 117–130.
[78] Martha Graham, *Blood Memory*, First edition (New York: Doubleday, 1991).. 9.

was thinking through the resonances in movement, dance and percussion she had recognised across the African diaspora.[79] How could these ways of possessing one's body have been shared across time, space and generations? Graham and Minott understand the body to be an archive because it can perform movements and gestures that remember and repeat other movements and gestures. An answer to Minott's question comes through Rizvana Bradley's conception of gesture as migratory.[80] Gesture(s) travelled through the African diaspora establishing the body's potential to be '…a witness, testament and document…' of comportment and sociality - knowledge outside of the purview of cognitive systems that traditional archives entomb.[81] It follows then that embodiment, gesture and dance are key components of critical proximity, the methodological approach I have used in archival research, and that I will return to in later chapters. Thinking of archives as matter entails, therefore, that the archive of colonial images has a '…sensorial character and nature which becomes animated through trans-corporeal, affective entanglements and engagements.'[82]

In outlining the three main ways that I have understood the archive in this research, I have also revealed the ways in which I hope to challenge its nature – by contesting its power as evidence, the kind of dead people it promotes and the ways in which we can know it. Archives as the foot soldiers of a state project in the marshalling of collective memory have bounds. They are fixed and the knowledge that they hold becomes shrouded by this. The work of critical proximity, of this research project, is to

[79] Zinzi Minott, *What Kind of Slave Would I Be?*, 22 April 2017, [Performance], 22 April 2017. [Performance].
[80] Rizvana Bradley, 'Black Cinematic Gesture and the Aesthetics of Contagion', *TDR: The Drama Review* 62, no. 1 (22 February 2018): 14–30.21.
[81] Rebecca Schneider, 'Limb to Limb: Archives, Interinanimacy, and "Instructions for Becoming"' ([Lecture], Archives and Embodiment Conference, Central St Martins, 4 July 2019).Talk].
[82] Hamilakis. 'After interpretation: remembering archaeology'. 52.

expand or open what the colonial film archive contains, to stretch against the bounded limit with desire, but without expectation, for transformation. It is to engender a destabilisation that allows for gaps, rupture or even dehiscence through which multiplicities can flood, to pry open some breathing space so that the knowledge formations instilled in the fabric of institutional archives do not remain the *only* one.

This chapter's elucidation of the way in which archives are to be understood, in this research, is a priming ground for the viewing of *No Archive Can Restore You.* Paradoxically the last work produced for practice, it explores the presence and weight of colonial archives in a Nigerian context rather than from the perspective of the UK. The work is situated within the abandoned former Nigerian Film Unit building, part of a network of self-directed outposts of the Colonial Film Unit. Braiding images of discarded archival documents, rusty cans of long-thought-lost films, ghostly remnants of the workings of the deserted institution and the tactile presence of archival and natural material, this film represents a conceptualisation of archives as matter, evidence, and a cemetery of the known and unknown.

No Archive Can Restore You (2020)

2. Scenes from the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum Collection

Film: 8mm, 16mm, 35mm nitrate (early vinegar syndrome and mould), digital transfers (.flv).
Documents: paper, lever arch files and museum brochures.
Sound: cassette and CDs.

The Bristol Archives acquired the photographic, film and sound archives from the now defunct British Empire and Commonwealth Museum (BECM). They were awarded funding over three years to catalogue and digitise over 500,000 photographs and 2,000 films. Through my research I had developed a relationship with the archivists in Bristol, one implored me to visit an exhibition of photographs taken from the BECM collection called Empire Through a Lens (2018). The experience of viewing the material on display provides a schema for the analysis of moving image practices that contend with the political and historical questions of colonial legacy. This chapter takes the form of a journey through the exhibition alighting to discuss key strategies I observe in practice: regretting, unloading, contextualising, sounding, and disrupting images.

It was difficult to find the exhibit. Back in Bristol, after leaving 10 years ago, I was visiting a place I had walked past many times but never entered. The Bristol Art Gallery and Museum is nestled beside and almost hidden by the Wills Memorial Building; the last great gothic building built, earlier in the twentieth century atop one of Bristol's nuisance hills for cyclists, Park Street. Wills Memorial can be seen across Bristol and demarks the space in which the university takes over the city. The last time I was at Wills was for my brother's graduation and the Bath stone had been newly cleaned. Today, it was still gleaming bright. The art gallery and museum were full of children. I had forgotten it was the summer holidays and they were dragging around wearisome parents attempting to tire out their kids for a few hours. Most of them had been there

before. I had not.The building was designed confusingly, or I was unable to navigate it. It was much larger than I had imagined, and stairs led to rooms full of landscape paintings and portraits from the nineteenth century. I stumbled into and was stuck in the Enlightenment section, distracted by a staff member who was radioing to find out where the Constable was.

After descending the stairs several times and attempting to consult a map, I accidentally found myself at the place I wanted to be. I slowed down and developed a methodology to peruse the images and video on show. I first looked at the images, then scanned down to read the biographies of the selectors, then looked right to read their descriptions and finally back again at the image. This head dancing continued, and I took snaps of some of the images and parts of the didactics and eavesdropped on passing conversations. But I had almost forgotten why I was there, what I was trying to get from coming to see these images, in this place. The archivist had invited me. She had sent me newspaper clippings side stepping the brewing furore over Edward Colston's name emblazoned across Bristol streets, schools and buildings.[1] Articles featuring historians claiming '…Bristol's positive contribution in documenting the empire…'.[2] She had sent me an assorted selection of comments that people had written on a noticeboard about the exhibition.[3] Those complaining that the images were too provocative, decrying

[1] Edward Colston was a slave trader from Bristol, who has been celebrated in the city with several social and civic buildings bearing his name. A campaign was started in 2016, in the wake of Rhodes Must Fall to address Bristol's role in the slave trade and Colston's place in the city. See *Countering Colston - Campaign to Decolonise Bristol*. https://counteringcolston.wordpress.com/ Accessed 2 Jan. 2020.
[2] Mike Pitts, 'Historians Working towards a Full Imperial Reckoning for Britain', *The Guardian*, 22 November 2017, sec. Letters, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/22/historians-working-towards-a-full-imperial-reckoning-for-britain. np.
[3] For full list see https://exhibitions.bristolmuseums.org.uk/empire-through-the-lens/explore-the-collection/ Accessed 3 August 2018.

racism. Where was Ireland, Australia and Canada? When will we ever learn? People also celebrated: seeing themselves, being interested/provoked and finding the *truth*.

The images hadn't been left to speak for themselves, selectors had been carefully picked from Bristol's academic and cultural community, and their impressions and reflections of the images had been given space underneath to offset, to contextualise — to excuse? The descendants of people who worked for the British Empire, who travelled across the colonies to implement and ensure the workings of the Imperial machine, were making a play for the independent spirit of their forebears: they were rebels, the higherups didn't like them, they fought for the natives, etc etc etc, as if this individual contribution (as told to them) could make up for something in the larger scheme of things, other than assuaging their guilt. What to do in this tricky bind, when you are implicated as adjacent to a perpetrator of colonialism or you have benefited from the imaginary that constructed blackness in antithesis to whiteness? In what way can it be talked about?

Regretting Images

Miranda Pennell faces these questions in the body of work in which she undertakes '…colonial forensics…', weaving her own familial histories into the archive, sitting alongside these controversial histories.[4] In describing her own work, Pennell emphasises an approach that attempts to narrativise and dramatise her research into the archives. [5]In this is the idea that the archives do contain *truth* than can be excavated, but one that is currently obscured by the vestiges of the colonial. The forensic analogy is

[4] Sukhdev Sandhu, 'The Host', *Sight & Sound*, April 2016, https://mirandapennell.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/sight-sound_the-host_april.pdf.
[5] Miranda Pennell, 'Thought & Image: Processes of Reciprocity' (Birbeck Cinema, 4 May 2018). [Talk].

important here, because Pennell is looking at a more acute scale, she is looking closer to see what is underneath to garner something that can be held up to scientific scrutiny. The audience is invited on the journey, to witness alongside the artist, their journey of discovery.

In, *The Host* (2015) a voiceover, in the guise of a reflective diary, documents Pennell's journey in discovering more about the photographs and ephemera in her recently deceased parent's belongings. Her father is the way into the story, as he is the reason that the family were there, in Iran at the time of the Shah and his doomed leadership. *The Host* is resplendent with uses of the personal pronoun, the film is voiced in hushed, meditative tone by the filmmaker, and Pennell's hand often emerges into the frame as she lays down photographic artefacts of her family's colonial past. The film proceeds like a forensic investigation, images are evidence, in some way at odds with the reflexive approach the work supposedly takes. Foley sound effects are used to conjure an imagining of what it was like for Pennell's father to live and work in these times. The audience is invited to hear, as he would have, the various rooms of the house he lived in, even hearing a pen scratching as it would have while he wrote his observations. All the attention and care that is brought to the material through Pennell's subjective presence in *The Host* produces insight and empathy for her parent's story — a story of those who are part of the colonial patchwork, a story oft told by the historical record — rather than the intention of the work, to reveal the consequences of the fictions ordained by the archive.

In further commentary of her own work, Pennell noted her self-imposed limits, 'I can't represent the voice of those othered so instead expose the [colonial ways] of

thinking to critical analysis.'[6] She is restricted to outlining the British perspective because of her connections to it. The work becomes a critical assessment of the myth making and tropes of British colonialism. But sometimes that is hard to read because of the necessity of repeating the words or showing the images that the work is supposed to be critical of. For example, in clips from Pennell's new work, there is a recording of a man who was part of the British army, sent to deal with the uprisings in Southern Nigeria. He describes the women as brutal, harangued and angry,[7] and an image follows of a young girl repeating beckoning movements and gazing straight down the lens of the camera. I had seen these images before and had previously noticed the playfulness of the young girl. However, now that the image followed the foul descriptions of the British soldier, the image had curdled somewhat, creating space for a sinister reading. It's hard to know as the audience what to think of that voice, what Pennell wants us to think too. She treads a fine line in reproducing the colonial to examine it, a line that I am not sure it is possible to traverse successfully. The intention or context given to the images does not release them from the grip of the colonial imaginary.

Pennell's work can be seen in concert with a glut of works from the mid-2000s onward that address postcolonial discourse in artists' film and video. According to some, this was part of a '…historiographic turn in contemporary art, particularly the examination of repressed, alternative or marginalized histories, as well as the desire to look at history not through a nostalgic prism, but as a tool of knowledge that illuminates

[6] Ibid

[7] Eerily similar to descriptions of Black men's *subhumaness* by police officers after they have killed a person in *self-defence*.

the present.'[8] In exploring this work, I often rest on the issue of authorship that Pennell's films bring to light. The question of who is making the work is vital in an assessment of it. There are dicey, ever unsettled questions that stalk these works.

Louis Henderson's practice explores the accepted histories of the colonial past without addressing his own position in these deconstructions. In *Lettres du Voyant* (2012), the microscope is on Ghana whilst *Black Code/Code Noir* (2015) explores the connections between colonial law and contemporary predictive policing algorithms. His latest work explores the history of Haiti from both within and in the popular imaginary.[9] In all these works the author is hidden, famous black theorists and artists such as Drexciya, Derek Walcott and Eduard Glissant are quoted and conjured. On other occasions the artist's words are spoken by a generically accented African narrator or collaborations are made with Haitian artists. Henderson's work grapples with the colonial legacy, attempting to critique the ways in which the history of those times has been told. In this work, Henderson experiments with form and structure pairing technology, algorithms, mining metaphors, poetry, and theatre with a critique of the ways in which the history of colonialism has been understood. In watching this prolific artist's work, I am constantly left asking why are *you* so interested in these themes? Hannah Black writes, '…racialized individuals are still the magical bearers of race…'.[10] These words ring in my ear, distractingly. In Henderson's work there seems to be a fixation on this and the authenticity of black people in telling stories of colonialism. In an effort to put blackness

[8] Katerina Gregos, 'Raising the Phantoms of Empire Post-Colonial Discourse in Recent Artists' Films', *Mousse Magazine*, March 2010. 7.
[9] Louis Henderson, *Overtures*, HOME Manchester, 21 April – 10 June 2018. [Exhibition].
[10] Hannah Black, 'The Identity Artist and The Identity Critic', artforum.com, 2016, https://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=201606&id=60105.

front and centre, black people are used to signify, which reduces and essentialises, echoing Spivak's critique of elite European theorists. A recent review of Henderson's exhibition at HOME, summarises my position on the work, 'As a white European artist, Henderson's intervention in this time and history has a charged, and under-interrogated, politics.'[11] The key is in the use of the word, under-interrogated, for I do not argue that he or any other white artist can't make work on this topic, but that whiteness is rarely present or interrogated in the work, and I am interested in why this is the case.

A contemporary of Henderson, who collaborated with him on an exhibition, has a different approach to the questions of subjectivity, authenticity and authorship.[12] *Luta ca caba inda* (the struggle is not over yet) is a project initiated by Filipa César in 2011, to reactivate the revolutionary archive of film material from Guinea- Bissau. César describes this project as collaborative, working with the original filmmakers, Sana na N'Hada and Flora Gomes. The cover page of the book detailing the work of the project is a long quote from Sana na N'Hada himself. The intention of Cesar is to trouble the convention of single authorship and focus on collectivity, ideas that appear politically to be held by the artist and are reflective of the politics of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), which was the driving force for the creation of the films in the archive.[13]

[11] Laura Harris, 'Louis Henderson, Overtures', The White Review, May 2018, http://www.thewhitereview.org/reviews/louis-henderson-overtures/. np.
[12] Filipa César and Louis Henderson. *Op-Film: An Archaeology of Optics*, Gasworks, 27 April – 25 June 2017 [Exhibition].
[13] Filipa César, Tobias Hering, and Carolina Rito, eds., *Luta ca Caba Inda.Time Place Matter Voice. 1967–2017.* (Archive Books, 2017). 7-12.

This move away from the singular authorial voice is too evident in the work. Beginning with, *The Embassy* (2011), César's subjectivity is absent, visually, throughout the film. The voiceover which knits the images together is again an unnamed African man, however this time he is embodied. We see his hands moving over each page of the photo album — pausing, caressing and gesticulating over the faded photographs. The hands offer another layer of communication, reinforcing or sometimes contradicting the words that the narrator speaks.

The use of hands also creates a direct line in the film between the spectator and the narrator. Here, rather than the narrator addressing the audience through the proxy of the artist, the spectator is directly addressed and further to this put in the position of the narrator. The camera is positioned in such a way that we look down upon the photo album in the same way that we would if we were handling it ourselves. The film plays out continuously in one single shot, so that the spectator feels as if privy to the encounter. We hear the ambient noise of people outside the room, placing the spectator in the room also. In seeing the narrator handling the paper, pushing it down, stumbling as he turns the pages and attempting to unstick pages that have glued together through longstanding neglect, we almost feel the album between our fingers.

César, to coin a phrase, puts skin in the game, but she offers the skin of the narrator rather than her own. In the credits, we see that the words spoken by the narrator were co-authored by the artist. The content of the commentary is an open-ended mixture of detailed explanation, historiography and asides that are left hanging redolent with

unexpressed meaning, '…this is interesting there is a black among the whites…'.[14] I venture the words that the narrator utters forms some part of the artist's reflection on the subject matter.

In *Conakry* (2012), César tries out another method of approaching the archive. Nixing her voice completely in favour of giving space to two other artists and activists, Grada Kilomba and Diana McCarthy, to proffer their own reflections on the material. *Conakry* acts as a recording of a performance, the camera follows Grada Kilomba as she walks through an elaborate and classical building stopping to read from white sheets of paper. Grada stands in front of projected images, so that the skin of the film combines with her own (black) skin, meshing the time of the images with the time of the recording and the time of the viewer watching. Time is of central concern in this work; Kilomba, in remarking about the silence of the films, says that she speaks because "the sounds associated with these images have not arrived yet - maybe they never will". This separation between the sound and image says something about *then* and *now*. César repeats this technique of projecting images over a reflective speaker or guide in a later work, *Transmission from the Liberated Zones* (2016).

The latest work of *Luta ca caba inda* acts, as a culmination of the endeavour — *Spell Reel* (2017), is a feature length film that César states she conceives of as a '…collective film…', co-authored by n'Hada and Gomes especially, who narrate parts, but also by all the 'allies' that helped with the project.[15] Film festivals, biennales and art

[14] Filipa César, *The Embassy*, 2011.Film].
[15] Filipa César, *Spell Reel*, 2017. [Film].

galleries appear to be resistant to accepting the idea of a non-singular author, consistently referring to César herself as the director.[16] The films act as a work of consignation, giving status to the archive of PAIGC revolutionaries as the national film archive of Guinea-Bissau.[17] 'Consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration.'[18] And so throughout the film, be it in the voice of Sana na N'Hada or audience members interviewed after watching the projections of the archive films, it is repeated that this archive tells the history of Guinea - Bissau, which is important and is now being re-remembered. *Spell Reel* is both the depiction and catalyst for the re-remembering.

César again plays with time, she visually matches, foreshadows and back references images to create a sense that the past is occurring in various spatial and temporal places. There is a section in Cuba where the revolutionaries from Guinea-Bissau are using machetes to cut grass, this is shown using archival celluloid and in the present day in Cacheu, Guinea-Bissau, the projection of this archive is recorded and placed alongside the archival images in the edit. The next frame is contemporary Guinea-Bissauans doing the '…humble work…' of cutting grass on the road with machetes.[19]There is a direct line between then and now, which supports the thesis of the film that the archive creates a collective memory which allows people to re-remember a history that always was.

[16] See: https://www.whitstablebiennale.com/project/spell-reel/, https://archive.ica.art/whats-on/bfi-london-film-festival-spell-reel, https://www.moma.org/calendar/film/3846 Accessed 16 October 2017.
[17] Derrida. *Archive F ever*. 3.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

Grada Kilomba describes '…cinema as a decolonial act…', this ethos can be gleaned from *Luta ca caba inda* as a whole.[20] César attempts to return the rotting and formerly lost film matter of the PAIGC archive to its rightful place as the tool to tell stories of the history of Guinea - Bissau. The struggle that is not over yet, is that against a colonial power, in this case, Portugal, where Filipa César is from. So those personal insights float above me when watching the work made in this series. How do the relations of power, history and position feature in the work and why aren't referred to? It appears that the way in which César has dealt with this question, is to make work that leaves herself and her own perspectives unmarked, and instead features others, who are mostly black, in front of the camera, or conceptually. This methodology, I think, comes from the idea that it's important to give space for those who are most directly affected by an issue to speak on it. However, there is a danger that this gesture reinforces an idea that colonialism and its consequences exist in blackness, signified by body and voice, and that whiteness, doesn't need to be, or is not worth, interrogation and so is not present. Watching this work leaves me with questions about the subjectivity of its absent author.

In a question and answer and session after a screening of his work, Henderson made a mea culpa,

> 'For a long time, I used to refuse to do this, what I am about to do, and nowadays I insist on doing it more. Which is, before I wanted to keep the film, just speak about the film itself in a way and not have to try and legitimise it with any personal history, but then more and more, recently, I don't understand why that was something I insisted on doing, because now actually I think it's more important that we understand more personal histories behind people's impulses to make works in certain situations.'[21]

[20] Filipa César.*Conakry*. 2012. [Film].
[21] Louis Henderson, Screen Research Forum: Louis Henderson presents Letrres Du Voyant, 8 March 2017. [Talk].

Henderson identifies a trend or pattern in both the film and art worlds, that frown upon personal histories or the autobiographical, deems that it is lesser, must be hidden and is not appropriate fodder for conversations about *good* artwork. This, too, is legible to the audience, they would read it as lesser, not right, *not done.* Illegitimate. Instead, relying on the autobiographical or seeking legitimacy from it, is distinctly the realm of marginalised artists, '[t]he assumption seems to be that theories of race/gender are always autobiographical and drawn from singular experiences.'[22] For me, this type of thinking or attitude to artmaking coincides with colonial ways of thinking, the demarcation of legitimate and illegitimate forms of knowledge in which those practised by marginalised communities are always considered as the latter.

In considering both Henderson and César's work together, through this pattern of obscuring their place in the work, the binary of Colonial Thought is bolstered. As Spivak argues, representing or giving voice to the subaltern in this way, always falls foul of essentialising, and in effect allows for the retooling of the subaltern for one's own purposes.[23] Dionne Brand's lilting and poetic text, A *Map of the Door to No Return* features a fever dream of a review of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace.*[24] She situates the book in its time and demarcates Coetzee's oeuvre before and after the end of apartheid in the extent to which he was able to plainly talk about race. *Disgrace* was the most explicit discussion on race for Coetzee and in truth for Brand it was a discussion about whiteness. Similarly, I unite the work of Pennell, Henderson, and César by a regret for the power and domination of the colonial imagination, but also for the ways in which their whiteness

[22] Black. 'The identity artist and the identity Critic'. np.
[23] Spivak. 'The Rani of Sirmur'. 253.
[24] Brand. *A Map to the Door of No Return*. 125-134.

and connection to the power and spoils of the colonial legacy is foregrounded or absenced creating ethical questions. Questions that swim in my head when watching these kinds of works: why are these films being made now, who precisely are they for and what are they supposed to be about? These artists relationship to visibility and presence, leave these questions lingering and they remain unanswered.

I am acutely aware that my blackness is never separate from the work that I make, especially on the subject of colonialism, but at the same time it can be used as an ethical get out of jail free card. In this way, I am interested not only in practices that are made by marginalised or identity artists in themselves but instead in those imbued with other knowledges that allow for it to contend with colonial histories and legacies on multiple registers.

Unloading Images

I mainly absentmindedly stumbled through the exhibition. Yes, I had a system but there was half hearted adherence. I felt duty bound to be there and that began to bug me. The archivist wanted me to see that they were trying to make up for, to account for the past. My mind wandered and the straps on my backpack, close to my neck, began to make my shoulders throb, A familiar dull throb that reminded me I spent too much time at a desk.

But then, I saw this image.

Figure 4. Merry Xmas, photograph in album, photographer unknown, Nigeria, 1923 © Bristol Archives

It is the most striking to me in the exhibition. I didn't need the commentary to understand or contextualise. All these topless men ornamentalised says enough, said it all.

1925. BADAGRY. MERRY XMAS.

It's an image that makes you stop because of its simplicity, not only in composition and colour but in the ideas that it clearly transmits. Tina Campt remarks of the multiple sensory registers of an image: visual, sonic, and haptic.[25] I think of the multiple registers of images in a more expanded sense, yes, sensory, but also epistemological and libidinal

[25] Campt. *Listening to Images*. 18.

and intuitive and something(s) else entirely. These registers cycle through when I look at this image.

Heavy. Dull. Wincing.

The room got cold, got stuffy. There is less air and I am stiller than before. I am locked here looking and I feel alert - undisturbed.

It's for a Christmas card, they must have thought it was so cute, so fun. A postcard that they sent back to the family in England but with a touch of colour. Authenticity in the exotic. Like the video I posted on instagram of my family dancing to trap versions of Christmas hymns - broad caricaturing for a laugh.

I want to touch these men, just a hand on a shoulder, just a tiny bit of warmth. I wonder if it's because I can see their skin, they feel closer to me, but they have been caged in the image and, and I want to bridge that gap somehow.

A song occurs to me - 'Sometimes I feel like a motherless child. A long way from home, a long way from home.'

Low, heat from the fleshy part underneath my eyes.
Gaze lowers.

An image can be too loaded, too charged, too much. It can make you want to run from it and dissociate. I look harder at this one, at every single black man standing bolt upright looking straight on. From the didactic, I am told this is a famous image, but I have never seen it before, I survey the gazes (Fig. 5). They are hostile, defeated, ashamed, fed up, disenchanted and things that I cannot and do not deign to know how to name. It is a painful image to me because it's so stark. There is only one thing to see in it.

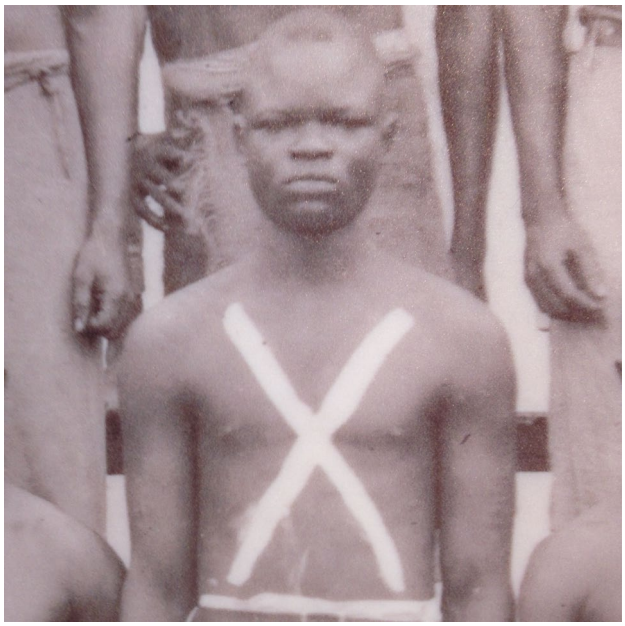

Figure 5. Insert of Merry Xmas, photograph in album, photographer unknown, Nigeria, 1923 © Bristol Archives

The gaze is something that I return to, time and time again. When I look at colonial images, its often the first thing I notice and the longest thing that I linger on. Perhaps following on the lineage of Foucault's thinking on power, it is my attempt to locate the '…margins, gaps, and locations on and through the body where agency can be

found.'[26] A particular collection of films made by the Mill Hill Priests is exclusively made up of women looking down the barrel of the lens, depicting hairstyles and fashion for the classification-minded colonial lens.[27] Their gazes are various, playful, errant, rebellious, diffident and unfazed. The ability to watch these women perform blackness provides an answer to a question that I frequently ask myself – why, despite knowing the visual trauma contained and reproduced by these images, am I so attracted to them? It is to allow the possibility for the people captured by colonial images to look back - for these gazes. bell hooks has argued the necessary reality of multiple gazes that allows for the possibility '…if not of agency, resistance or opposition, then, most important, of fugitivity.'[28]

The fugitivity, power and possibility of the female gaze are central themes in *Reckless Eyeballing* (2004). Christopher Harries plays with surfaces, inversion and the gaze, to encourage his audience to look again at an iconic image of Pam Grier and see what, how, and why she looks, at the same time. We see Pam Grier in multiple ways, from the pixels of the image, a blurred Rorschach test version, to a slowed down, colour stripped version. The image is treated in a variety of ways and repeated allowing for a closer examination. Harris' manipulation provides new questions for the image. This is a favoured technique used by filmmakers attempting to engender closer inspection of images from audiences. How to get people to see what they have been taught to ignore? The opening scene of *Pays Barbare* (2013) is exemplary of this. There is a silent ten-minute study that excruciates in its length. There are no distractions from the images of

[26] bell hooks, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators', in *Film Theory : A History of Debates*, ed. Marc Furstenau (London: Routledge, 2010).229.
[27] These are films in storage at the Bristol Archives and not publicly accessible.
[28] Campt. *Listening to Images*. 79.

Mussolini dead and the crowds at Milan public square in 1945. The film is slowed down to a stutter so the viewer can see everything and dwell on the minutiae in the corners of the images that are often ignored. The hat that a man wears, the gesture of another, the glint of a watch or the look in a woman's eye. It is hard to stay looking, there is so much detail and space to be filled by the viewer's observances, prior knowledge, and imaginings. The silence reinforces this. Robert Lumley coins the technology Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi created to achieve this form of filmmaking the '…analytical camera…'.[29]

> 'In describing his method of working, Gianikian identifies what he sees as a transformation in his way of looking at images…He writes: 'by dwelling longer on the images "by hand", I memorised details that I would have overlooked during screening.'[30]

In making work that attempts to deconstruct or overturn accepted histories or accepted ways of thinking, inciting the viewer to dwell longer and see anew is an important impetus. In this way, many filmmakers employ the manipulation of existing images to produce '…a new work of … "critical cinema" consisting of a systematic critique of the original.'[31]

In *Reckless Eyeballing*, Harris does not only manipulate and repeat images for the viewer to see differently, but he also manipulates sound too. A phrase is repeated throughout the work which returns us to the conundrum Harris is wrestling with,

[29] Robert Lumley, *Entering the Frame: Cinema and History in the Films of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi / Robert Lumley.*, Italian Modernities ; v. 10 (Oxford ; New York: Peter Lang, 2011).48.
[30] Ibid 54.
[31] Ibid 50.

"She will never look".

Harris explores in this film, the possibility of an oppositional gaze for black women. hooks argues that '…all attempts to repress our/black people's right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze.'[32] The film ruminates on this idea through the gaze of Pam Grier. We see her look and others look back at her. There is danger, monstrosity and sexuality provided as possibilities of this gaze. At the end of the film, the repetition gets stuck as Harris leaves his questions unanswered but still churning, '[c]an she look back, or will she too be pinned and mounted by the gaze? Or is there a place for an African American female spectatorship, an active subject position inside visual culture?'[33]

These works are examples of practices that seek to unmoor images from the original intentions of their authors, through a redirection of the audience's gaze. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi want to prevent the colonial gaze and create a more circumspectual looking while Harris seeks to alert the audience to the racist male gaze of mainstream American moviegoing. I have identified unloading the image of its preconceived function, as an important strategy across a range of moving image practices that seek to redress the historical record in the reuse of archival material.

Contextualising Images

I wonder about my own spectatorship in looking at the images in the exhibition. How active is it exactly? It's nice to have the didactic unmoored from the neutral and in

[32] hooks. 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators'. 229.
[33] Michael Sicinski, 'Between Two Eyes: Four Emergent Avant-Garde Film/Videomakers for the New Decade', *Cinema Scope*, 2011, http://cinema-scope.com/features/features-between-two-eyes-four-emergent-avant-garde-filmvideomakers-for-the-new-decade/.

the voice of each individual with their equivocations and personal histories combining across the span of the exhibit. To be led in some way to and from the images. Referring to the Badagry image, Mark Sealey comments,

> 'Reading the photograph now allows us to connect the colonial mindset across space and time, creating a cultural affirmation of the racist attitudes so prevalent in the making of images of black subjects in Africa and within the imagination of Imperial Britain.'[34]

What does that do to the images? Does this commentary change them? Has the Badagry image morphed in some way because I know that Mark Sealey agrees with me about the objectification of the men in the image? I understand an ethical calculation has been made, for the Bristol Archives these images can't just be observed, they need scaffolding. But which images, for whom, when and where? Perhaps more importantly what can that scaffolding do?

The type of critical cinema mentioned in reference to Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's endeavours concerning Italian colonial history as well as the generation of filmmakers noted by Mousse magazine as being part of an historiographic turn, has often been scaffolded through commentary. Be it text or voice, this commentary has served '…to convey essayistic thinking in film…'.[35]

[34] Bristol Archives. 2018. *Empire Through the Lens.* Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery, 30 Sep 2017 – 31 Aug 2018. [Exhibition].
[35] Laura Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks* (Oxford University Press, 2017).115.

The essayistic is a type of thinking that can meander, considering various points of view and positions, circling but maybe not quite landing on a definitive answer. [36]Or maybe it is thinking that is rooted on a thesis and offers ideas and arguments to support that. Erika Tan's *Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within and Through* (2014) exists as the latter but without a reliance on commentary to contextualise. Using the conceit of an encyclopaedia to structure the film which features objects from a colonial museum in Malaysia., Tan argues through these images, the limits and violence of the colonial desire to classify, whilst plotting the reach and effects felt by it as the colonial legacy. The encyclopaedic structure is not alphabetical, immediately upending the linearity of an anticipated A to Z and gesturing towards the work of the film - an unordering. Throughout the film, Tan encourages the audience to identify with those depicted by the colonial museum. F for Fidelity, a highly immersive section, uses foley sounds mimicking what can be imagined to be heard from the images of the archives (birds, walking, etc). This is followed by a black screen and more sounds. Tan is attempting to create a purely sensorial experience of being there, putting the audience in the position of the people shown in the colonial archive. This is a direct contrast to the foley sounds employed by Pennell in *The Host*, who was working to put us in the shoes of her father, an employee of British Petroleum. This drive to put the experiences of those colonised back into the museum is dealt with more subtly in the section, V for Voice, a scene of young boys playing in the water. The only sounds heard are yelps, playful screams and gargles of fun as well as the constant stream of gushing water. Because of the preceding scene, we are encouraged to understand these sounds as the types of voice or experience left out of the colonial museum displays.

[36] I am avoiding using the term essay film to talk about this type of work. I find the term to be too much of a baggy catch all containment that lumps a lot of diverse film and video together around a common trait that can be found in a lot of work. Instead essayistic refers to an approach rather than rendering it form.

The film uses voiceover to bring story to the empty spaces, models and bones on display in the museum, pointing to a ghostly haunting of the space by the people it has attempted to contain. With this film, Tan suggests that the attempts at classification, ordering and control are not possible, enough or have not succeeded. There is more than an encyclopaedia entry or the colonial museum to the story of this place.

Laura Rascaroli uses the term '…vococentrism…' to name a way essayistic thinking is often deployed. [37] *Territories* (1987), a film which revels in its multivocality, demonstrates the ways in which voiceover can be used to provide context to images and allows for positions to be argued in the work. *Territories* begins with two voices: a male and female staggered but repeating the same line:

> 'We are struggling to tell a story, a herstory, a history of cultural forms related to black people.' [38]

This refrain is repeated by male and female voices separately throughout the film, embodying *his*tory and *her*story respectively. The multivocality of the film appears to offer a range of perspectives but the message or argument is actually conveyed through voices with lived experience of the topic. There is also doubled voice, this time two women in unison, who are depicted watching images of the carnival (Fig.6). We don't see them speaking but instead watch them watching, the camera's position putting the audience in place watching the 16mm Steenbeck. The two women talk of stereotypes as stereotyped images of carnival are displayed, and underneath the plummy tones of a

[37] Rascaroli. *How the Essay Film Thinks*. 115.
[38] Isaac Julien/Sankofa Film and Video Collective. *Territories*.1984. [Film]

conventional nightly news broadcast voiceover enunciate a mainstream description of Notting Hill Carnival. The images and voiceover of the two women contextualise this voice, so that the audience distrust it. The broadcast voiceover becomes comical and feels put on, again signalling for it to be read by an audience appositionally. Not all voices are of equal value in this film, the double female voice represents the argument of the first part of *Territories* - herstory. The second part of the film is then argued through the queer male voiceover, history, who is again depicted doubled but this time visually, in embrace with another black man. This doubling represents the collective lived experience of black people in the UK through events like carnival and friendships or loving relationships, a solidarity against the lone and dominant voice of hegemonic representations of blackness.

Figure 6. Still from Territories (1987) © Isaac Julien/Sankofa Film and Video Collective

Erika Tan and the Sankofa Film and Video Collective are provided as exemplars of practices that employ essayistic thinking. This approach to practice allows for

commentary, not only delivered in the conventional "voice of God" manner but incorporating text and the multiplicity of voices, to contextualise material that the practitioners wish to question and problematise.

Sounding Images

After hearing Bessie Smith's version of 'Sometimes I feel like a motherless child', for the first time, I played it again and again. It resounded in me. The tremble and control in her voice as she elongated the refrain resonated at the membrane underneath the surface before the flesh,[39] bringing cold into my bones. I wanted to use it in some work, but it felt too on the nose, so obvious that it would drown out the images. So, I was surprised that it returned to me when looking at an image that I too felt was crystal clear. Maybe like was attracting like. I had imagined an audience filled and disturbed by Bessie Smith's voice so that the images I had created and assembled would be forever transformed by the song out of my own control. So, I refrained. This was an experience I had when watching Arthur Jafa's *Love is the Message and the Message is Death* (2016). It's an artwork whose images are dominated and somewhat drowned out by the song that structures them. The film is made up of a collection of images of black life, collected over the years by Jafa. It is made up of vernacular, historical and juridical material covering the heights of black life from music, dance, sport, and creativity, to the lows of the quotidian nature of violent black death. There are so many images that are hard to keep track of and the music is so thick with meaning that all the material is received at the same emotive register of Kanye West's gospel inflected *Ultra-Light Beam*. This is a song with an impatient energy, giddy with purpose, brio and revelation. It '…is a plea, a

[39] The flesh here is to be understood in terms of Hortense Spillers, as that 'zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse' Spillers, 'Mamas Baby Papas Maybe'.66

confession, an anointment…'.[40] This gets all over the images. Everything from the highs of ecstatic Pentecostal utterances, women whining to the lows of hysterical crying and Freddie Gray being shot in the back is what, for Jafa, blackness means and so, is hallowed.

Fred Moten provides a phonographic reading of looking in his text, *In the Break.* Through examining the death and the images of Emmett Till's open casket, Moten argues that there are latent '…complex musics of the photograph…'.[41] Like Campt, he suggests listening to images, they provide an 'aural aesthetic'[42]. For the photograph of Emmett Till, sound comes before the image as a fractured sound of memory, or warning. or the realisation of the state of black life.[43] It is the primal scream of '…black mo'nin…'.[44] There is space between the image and the sound which allows an interaction that establishes a particular experience of looking.[45] In moving image practice, the relationship between sound and image is hard baked into the form.

The films made for the National Film Board of Canada's (NFB) Souvenir series, work through the creation of a space between sound and image that allows for the viewer to look at the images again. The NFB selected four filmmakers to work with their archives to create short works for the Aboriginal Pavilion at the Pan Am games in 2015. *Mobilize* (2015) starts paced by a regular pulse; the images depict the lives of indigenous

[40] Ryan Dombal, 'Kanye West "Ultralight Beam" [Ft. Chance the Rapper, The-Dream, Kelly Price, and Kirk Franklin]', 12 February 2016, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/tracks/17987-kanye-west-ultralight-beam-ft-chance-the-rapper-the-dream-kelly-price-and-kirk-franklin/.
[41] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003),.200.
[42] Ibid
[43] Ibid 198-202.
[44] Ibid 202.
[45] Ibid 200.

people in Northern Canada. People chopping wood, walking on the snow, travelling across bodies of water in canoes, are cut together at a fast but steady pace. As the film progresses, the pace quickens and the '…fearless polar punk rhythms of Tanya Tagaq's..' throat singing accelerates the rhythm and alerts the viewer to oncoming danger.[46] The images, too, speed up, and show indigenous people navigating less natural terrain in more urban settings. The pacing and soundtrack serve to make me, the viewer, uncomfortable, threatened, or uneasy even. The filmmaker uses the soundtrack to make the audience look at certain images with suspicion while others are conjured as more natural and unassuming.

The soundtrack by Tribe Called Red, made for *Sisters & Brothers* (2015) again serves to point the audience towards danger. The sound and vocals increase when archival images of priests, who ran the residential schools in Canada famed for their violence, racism and the attempted eradication of indigenous culture, appear on screen. Repetition is reinforced by the score and the music breaks down when the visual associations between the children at the school and the annihilation of bison reach their zenith at the films climax. *Bleed Down* (2015), shares images of the residential schools used in *Sisters & Brothers*. Tanya Tagaq's singing this time provides a mournful and haunting atmosphere for the images, that gets heavier as scenes of death, the evisceration of the land and pillage increase. This film is an indictment on Canada, transforming images that were used to celebrate Canada's relations with First Nations communities into emblematic tombstones of the near eradication of their ways of living.

[46] Caroline Monnet. *Mobilize*. 2015 [Film].

The Souvenir series uses archive films against the purposes they were created for. The oppositional intentionality of their usage is emphasised by a musical soundtrack rather than text or commentary. To the uninitiated, Tania Tagaq's voice, or the traditional singing sampled in A Tribe Called Red's track are voices without an easily recognisable language and so the vocality is affective and establishes a visceral and embodied presence over the images.

Transfigured Night (2013/2018) is based on a poem and musical composition by Richard Dehmel and Arnold Schoenberg, respectively. The poem features a man promising a woman that their love can transfigure an inopportune situation that they find themselves in, and Akomfrah uses this metaphor to describe the relationship between the post-colonial state and the post-colonial subject. One of promise, with the state promising that hope, ambition and love can transform the situation of its citizens.[47] Akomfrah uses archival images of several African leaders in this moment of promise, delivering speeches to their people as well as visiting American dignitaries. He also features quotes from Frantz Fanon and contemporary material of older people looking off into the distance and younger ones walking in slow motion towards the Lincoln memorial in a two-screen installation. For such an image heavy piece, with two screens of visual information that allow for time(s) to be felt all at once, it is remarkably sound led. I can't fully piece together the providence or precise history of the images, but the sound roots my spectatorship and provides clues to the way in which Akomfrah wants them to be viewed. The soundtrack is made up of Schoenberg's composition which I do

[47] MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology, John Akomfrah and Lina Gopaul, Transfigured Night, March 3, 2014, accessed 3 September 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbbTH_ER6PM.

not recognise, and African folk songs from the 1920's and 1930's with which I have faint familiarity - I do not know when I heard it, but I have heard it before. This familiarity to sound and rhythm was reminiscent of my experience of watching, *They Called me Black* (1978).

Hung from the ceiling, in the middle of the room as you entered the *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* (2018) was a projection that arrested. Black people screaming "Negra" over and over with images of hands clapping, hips moving and Victoria Santa Cruz standing adroit, cut in pace with the beat. The short film is in Spanish, so I didn't understand the details of the words, but I sensed through the ways in which the sound was delivered that they were saying "Negra" for me rather than *at* me. Santa Cruz has a defiant gaze that overcomes, and along with the repetition of the words and familiar drumbeat serves as an incantation, a call to arms, to prayer, to knowledge. I got this, I felt this, not because of the words that were being spoken, but in the essence of the film, because the artist was doing something else in the arrangement of sound and image which reached beyond direct one to one interpretation. A work that activated the necessary nodes of my diasporic being in the world. The polyrhythm, dancing, her stance, the clarity of her strident figure. It all tapped into something of me and for me.

Without the explanation which I sought, it was clear in a similar way that *Transfigured Night* was a lament, a reflection on a failed promise that the leaders did not deliver. The night was not transfigured, and the darkness remains, to this day. In this way, instead of the soundtrack transforming the archival images, it structures them and provides the map with which to navigate the images.

Through an exploration of existing practice, I have pinpointed the use of sound to condition viewership of archival films, otherwise. This is most notable in the Souvenir series, as all the artists use ancestral and indigenous music traditions to shake the dominant narratives of Canadian history. This approach chimes with the privileging of other ways of knowing, the sonic rather than the visual, that is a feature of this research's methodology and so, these works inspire my own practice.

Disrupting Images

Pacing back and forth through the second floor of the Bristol Art Gallery and Museum, I looked over the images again and again. I saw what they had tried to do, I saw the ways in which the heavy weight of keeping and displaying colonial images had been laid down or passed onto the viewers of the exhibition. But it felt insufficient. There was a lack in my experience - the ways in which I was being encouraged to see these images was not adequate to move me or transform the images into multiplying potentialities. I was looking for an experience like the one I had felt on encountering *They Called me Black* on the third floor of Brooklyn Museum.

Aimé Cesaire bombastically offers a way to think through how to name this lack. He argues that there are two different ways of knowing: scientific and poetic.

> 'In short scientific knowledge enumerates, measures, classifies, and kills…The ground of poetic knowledge, an astonishing mobilization of all human and cosmic forces.'[48]

[48] Aimé Césaire, *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry, 1946-82 /*, CARAF Books (University Press of Virginia, 1990). xliii – xlvii.

He pits them against one another, arguing that scientific is poor because of its need for classification, for reasoning. This makes it incomplete, while poetic knowledge captures all experience, is '…soul and being.'[49] The soul and being can often be left out of attempts to rescue, reconceptualise, or reconsider images laden with colonial debt.

Perhaps invoking these or other ways of knowing outside the Western positivist traditions allows for a different experience of images. In *An Ecstatic Experience (2015)* Ja'Tovia Gary scratches, paints and animates archival footage of African American protest and resistance in its multiplicities. The treatment of the introductory images, their repetition, which reinforces the rhythm of the score, produces a meditative space that allows the audience to see the images that come later in other ways, perhaps in another mindset. Gary's hand scratching over Ruby Dee's slave monologue feels instinctual and free form, as if we are watching in real time the shapes, lines and colours that the words make the artist feel and produce. For me, the techniques used in *An Ecstatic Experience* allow Gary to succeed in her ambition to '…explode the frame.'[50] and make a work that enters a space not occupied by the meaning making norms of Colonial Thought. The combination of animating the archival images, the score, and rhythmic cutting all serve to create '…new circuits and aesthetic accountings of blackness, sociality, and obliteration. Arcane and prodigious, *An Ecstatic Experience* deregulates the American archive, compromising it with the mapping of states of freedom and strategies of resistance.'[51]

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ja'Tovia Gary, 'JΔ'TΔΔΔΔΔVIΔ On Twitter', Twitter, 2017, https://twitter.com/jatovia/status/944717447680151553.

[51] Courtney R. Baker, and Michael B. Gillespie, 'Cinema Notes / American Letters /', ed. Elizabeth Reich, *ASAP/J* 2 (22 June 2017), http://asapjournal.com/cinema-notes-american-letters-elizabeth-reich-courtney-r-baker-and-michael-b-gillespie/.

Cesaire is strict about the division between scientific and poetic knowledge but I am resistant to the advocation of one way of knowing over another. There appear to me to be multiple ways of approaching epistemology and the creation of hierarchies in this vein are counterproductive in an ethic or politic, even, one that seeks to reveal the violence of hegemonic colonial ways of knowing. *La Cabeza Mató a Todos* (2014) offers other modes of knowledge with which to approach the moving image. It features an actor who '…brainstorms, with a black cat, "how to build a spell" to end a war. and rid Puerto Rico of its colonial aftermaths.[52] The sound of a bird chirping begins and repeats throughout the film crescendo-ing to a trance like effect. There is a thunderstorm that bisects the film and brings some levity to the intensity of the actor on a hammock, pondering the "absolute destruction of the machinery of war". There isn't a linear temporality to the work, the viewer pops in and out of something that is always already taking place. This is a film that is doing something, and what exactly that is, is unclear, or more aptly, unknown to me. The scene that follows involves our interlocutor dancing to the sounds of thunderstorms and punk music. We peep at this through darkness, barely lit faces, and obscured parts of the body never complete as the images that populate the frame. The dancing, instead of performance or entertainment, because of the discordant way it is filmed, feels like energy. Did the film cast the spell that the actor speaks of at the beginning?

[52] Monica Uszerowicz, 'A Half-Documentary, Half-Fantasy Telling of the Caribbean's Colonial Past', Hyperallergic, 20 May 2016, https://hyperallergic.com/300319/a-half-documentary-half-fantasy-telling-of-the-caribbeans-colonial-past/..

Beatriz Santiago Muñoz's work has been described as the '…mixing of indigenous mythologies with present-day characters, geographies, and culture.'[53] The work of Karrabing Film Collective performs in this way. They are an Aboriginal collective who make films about their lives in Karrabing country, Northern Territories, Australia. Their film *Night Time Go* (2017) serves as re-enactment or reimagining of an event that was not visually recorded. Through the archive footage at the beginning of the film, we learn that during the second world war, several distinct aboriginal groups were transported away from the coast to war camps in the interior of Darwin, because of White Australian fears of collusion between Aboriginal communities and Japan. The use of the archive at the beginning lulls me into a familiar wrestle between the seduction by the authority of the historical image and scepticism of its truth claims. The Karrabing Film Collective exploit these expectations of the viewer, firstly, through the manipulation of the archive and then in the second half of the film, when their adherence to the historical record lessens, and another version of the events portrayed from the perspective of Karrabing ancestors. This intentional blurring allows for the challenge to Australian national history to blend with official documentation. But this is a distinctly indigenous film. Like all of their work, the re-enacted scenes use language and cultural references that are not always directly translated or unpacked. The archive and the new footage meld together as the film continues and this purposeful conflation disrupts the authority of the historical, allowing space for distinctly Aboriginal accounts of the past.

I first watched *La Cabeza Mató a Todos*, on a hot day, the hottest day of the year in a South facing studio, so I had to block out the sun as I watched. This compounded the

[53] Kadist, 'La Cabeza Mató a Todos', accessed 6 September 2018, http://kadist.org/work/cabeza-mato-todos/.

inability to see a dark, indiscriminate, and unyielding image. I did not want to watch anything after, it felt as if my eyes had been imprinted and I shouldn't dilute that. When considering work that deals with blackness and the aftermath of colonialism, too often the 'sense' that prevails is cognition, thought — reason applied to evidence. The building blocks that created and sustained the colonial project. In feeling through this theoretical terrain with critical proximity, a concept that is fuelled by illegitimate knowledges: those considered naive, unimportant or redundant by Colonial Thought, I pursue moving image practices that eschew cognition and instead look to be close to, with or amongst their topic of enquiry.

This is not an exhaustive review of the practice encountered during research, (all works consulted during this PhD are listed in the bibliography). instead, I have grouped practice by strategies employed to challenge the hegemony of the colonial imagination, paralleling my experience of the same strategies at the Empire through a Lens exhibition. I draw affinities with practices that address historical and political questions using non-canonical and sensorial strategies. The use of the sonic to transform the meaning of images by stimulation of a viewer's personal memories or non-discursive responses has influenced my own practice. The work of John Akomfrah in Transfigured Night, Purple and throughout his collaborations with Eddie George and Trevor Mathison in the Black Audio Film Collective are resonant. Recently, Trevor Mathison worked on the sound for Garrett Bradley's film, America (2019), that without dialogue manages to restage lost archival moments from African American history, allowing for the audience to make meaning using only Mathison's reverberant score.

I also value the work of those who seek to disrupt, and challenge received images. Both the work of Ja'Tovia Gary and Christopher Harris speak to this. I was struck on encountering Gary's An Ecstatic Experience, by her inscriptions on the archival image,

disabusing me of their sanctity or vaulted status. This method directly influenced the production of Specialised Technique and began the puncturing of my reverence for archives.

The work I remain most drawn to, and where the ambition for my own practice resides, are those that produce an almost alchemical enhancement of the senses. Moving image works that may be resistant to definitive capture but leave me with a feeling, or target my metaphysical senses, or open up, what Rony would describe as, my Third Eye, or, perhaps as one would colloquially say, stayed with me. La Cabeza Mató a Todos left its imprint behind my eyes, They Called me Black resounds in my stomach on days of insecurity and I rehearse the gestures from Zina Saro Wiwa's Table Manners (2014-16), in my own hands whenever I sit down to eat Ogbonna soup.

3. Scenes from The National Archive

Documents: paper files, bound reports, handwritten letters, memos, and questionnaires.

The Colonial Film Unit (CFU) was established in 1939 within the portfolio of the Ministry of Information, also newly established in the same year. It was the first film division making films for, about and in the British colonies but not controlled by the Colonial Office (explained by the desperation for war effort propaganda). It also provides an outline for the ways the British state made subjects in the national image. The Ministry of Information (MoI) '…was an experiment with government propaganda on an unprecedented scale.'[1] For the first time British wartime propaganda[2] at home and abroad was being directed from the same place - a single government department. This overhaul of the status quo came from the belief in '…high and steady morale as a requirement for victory in total war.'[3] In order to achieve this, posters, radio broadcasts, press, books, theatre and film were deployed to boost morale and spread the war message. The message being communicated was simple, it was a case of *us against them,* and in order for this message to work, the 'us' needed to be defined and visualised. Film was, therefore, an important medium. Nazi Germany had Leni Riefenstahl and the US had Frank Capra - the British needed their own war propagandist filmmaker and that was to be found, or if necessary, *made* through the Ministry of Information.

The colonies aided the war effort - men were enlisted to fight whilst land and labour were marshalled for manufacture of vital goods, such as artillery, weapons and

[1] Simon Eliot and Marc Wiggam, eds., *Allied Communication to the Public During the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).21.
[2] The state was funding projects from the likes of Humphrey Jennings and Len Lye around this time that would birth the British Documentary movement and contribute to burgeoning avant-garde cinema.
[3] Ibid 22.

food. However the idea of 'us' was weak in the diverse lands of the British Empire, '…a district officer in Barotseland, Northern Rhodesia, had reported that talking about the war to the Lozi was like "addressing an assembly of deaf mutes on conditions in Mars".'[4] The war was far away and *they* didn't get it, so the MoI wanted to bring it closer, and ensure colonial subjects remembered that, as a saying at the time went, 'This War is Your War Too.'[5] Cinema was deemed important to this cause, 'England's ruling elites had great faith in the power of the cinema as an instrument of persuasion when communicating with the masses.'[6] They thought this was especially so for people without formal education.[7] Cinema had mass appeal and so could spread ideas fast, efficiently and surreptitiously through the guise of entertainment. It had been long thought that film was the easiest way to pass ideas on to the largest amount of people in the shortest amount of time.

The idea for the colonial film project had been germinating for over a decade at that point. A resolution was passed at the Imperial Conference[8] of 1926 stating, '… 'it is of greatest importance that a larger and increasing proportion of the films exhibited throughout the Empire should be of Empire production.'[9] There was concern that the burgeoning American film industry could be having a detrimental effect[10] on the '…backward races…'.[11] It was thought that the Empire should monitor and control the

[4] Rosaleen Smyth, 'The British Colonial Film Unit and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1939–1945', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8, no. 3 (January 1988): 285–98, 286.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Colonial Film Unit, 'Films for African Audiences', *Colonial Cinema*, June 1943.1.
[8] Annual gatherings of the British leaders of colonies in London.
[9] Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, *The Film in National Life* (S.l.]: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1932).126.
[10] Tom Rice, *Films for the Colonies : Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).62.
[11] Commission on Educational and Cultural Films. *The Film in National Life.* 126.

powerful and seductive medium of film. Another similar resolution was passed at the Imperial Education Conference of 1927 and the original resolution was re-ratified at the 1930 Imperial Conference. Reports were issued, such as 'The Use of the Kinema in the Guidance of Backward Races' (1931) and 'The Film in National Life' (1932). Experiments were undertaken in the use and production of film in East, South and West Africa as well as Jamaica and Malaya.[12] Despite the volume of support in favour of this project, funding was not forthcoming and film projects occurred piecemeal around the Empire. It took the second world war for a centralised and funded government project to make '…use of cinema as a means for spreading knowledge and developing intelligence amongst adult populations.' [13]The Colonial Film Unit endured until the mid-1950s and the first puffs of the '…winds of change…'.[14] During its time, the CFU adapted to and reflected '…the Government's shifting attitudes towards Africa.'[15]

Perhaps because of its hasty and muddled beginnings, as well as the harried nature of a war time government, the CFU did not meet the orderly standards that the Imperial Conferences had conceived. The Colonial Office did not approve of the MoI running the unit, fearing that their specific agenda would not be met by the needs of wartime propaganda. An arrangement was made, so that '…the Colonial Office would have the final say on colonial propaganda policy, with the right to exercise a veto.'[16] This caused confusion and created a unit that was working at '…cross purposes…' with the Colonial Office, which in turn was biding its time to have full control over the CFU after the war.[17] This time would come in 1950, but in the meantime, there was a power

[12] Ibid 136.
[13] Ibid.
[14] In 1960 British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan made a speech colloquially known as 'The Winds of Change Speech' declaring Britain's intention to 'willingly' allow the colonies to seek independence.
[15] Rice. 'Colonial Film Unit'. np.
[16] Smyth. 'The British Colonial Film Unit and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1939–1945'. 288
[17] Ibid.

vacuum that allowed the CFU to shape itself and its film output according to the theories and ideas of its first employee - William Sellers. Sellers had spent the 1930s working in health in Nigeria. He had originally used lantern slides to educate rural populations but had eventually graduated to film, making instructional and educational films before the war. In 1939 he had travelled back to the UK and while there, proposed his practice as the framework for what would become the Colonial Film Unit. He then worked with George Pearson to design the unit's ethos, practice, and processes.[18]

One could expect that the first film produced by the CFU would explicitly refer to the war effort, after funding for the unit only came from the morale boosting demands of the conflict. On the contrary, the unit's first official output is more telling of its general purpose to, '…harness motion pictures for Imperial pursuits…' or the dissemination of the aspirational British subject.[19] *Mr. English At Home* (1940) is a day in the life of a *typical* English family (Fig.7). It is a slow film that labours its point. The silent film begins with the oldest child of the family waking up, on a still and fair morning, washing and getting ready and then joining his immaculately dressed father at breakfast. His father then leaves for work, but not before being handed his hat by his apron-clad wife. The film is made up of quotidian activities like these or waiting gaily for a bus, buying groceries, cooking, knitting or building toy airplanes in what feels excruciatingly like real time. Everything is ordered, clean and neat.[20] Everything is strict, and everyone conforms. Everything is *right. Mr. English At Home* is instructional. The key message the Colonial

[18] Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, N.C.: Chesham: Duke University Press ; Combined Academic distributor, 2008).109; Glenn Reynolds, *Colonial Cinema in Africa: Origins, Images, Audiences* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc, Publishers, 2015).164-166; Rice. 'Colonial Film Unit'. np. and Smyth. 'The British Colonial Film Unit and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1939–1945'.286-287

[19] Reynolds. *Colonial Cinema in Africa*. 165.

[20] Rice. *Films for the Colonies: Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire*. 61.

Film Unit set out to communicate to the colonies, throughout its existence, is transmitted in this film —— *watch and learn, this is the way to be! And with our help, even you too can be civilised.*

Figure 7. Still from Mr English at Home (1940) © Colonial Film Unit/BFI National Archive

The records of the Colonial Film Unit; meeting minutes, memos, budgets, surveys, and correspondence can be found in The National Archives at Kew. The British State enshrined the collection of records and a record office in law, in 1838.[21] The definition and scope of these records was defined by *The Public Records Act of 1958,* requiring government departments and state bodies to keep records of historical value and transfer them to The National Archive. These documents can be made publicly

[21] The National Archives, 'History of the Public Records Act', text, *The National Archives* (blog), accessed 17 December 2019, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/legislation/public-records-act/history-of-pra/.

accessible after 20 years (originally it was 50 years but amendments in 1967 and 2013 reduced this). [22]The CFU was always a project of Empire, designed as any other arm of the Imperial body, to *develop* colonial subjects by moulding them in the unit's own *British* image. The latent premise of this ambition is the imagined colonial subject. A subject that is not enough or not quite *right* or backward or primitive or illiterate or licentious - black.[23] In this way the films of the CFU provide insight into the British colonial imagination of the black subject because these films were instilled with the task of eliminating it.

[22] Some are never publicly available because of the Official Secrets Act or are subject to heavy redaction.
[23] The British state makes a distinction between its dominions (which consists of British or European subjects in places like Canada), Asia and the 'Tropical African Empire', (Commission on Educational and Cultural Films. *The Film in National Life.* 129 -136), the latter is described as the most backward and illiterate. This corresponds with arguments that blackness is considered the inversion of human and so at the bottom of a racial hierarchy that Colonial Thought institutes and reproduces. See Silva, Denise Ferreira da. 'Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(Ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World'. *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 81–97; Sexton, Jared. 'Unbearable Blackness'. *Cultural Critique* 90, no. 1 (2015): 159–178 and Katherine McKittrick editor, ed. *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. I will therefore be focusing on the colonial construction of the black subject as this was prime target of the Colonial Film Unit.

27th October
2019

Sitting there at the octagonal tables of the National Archive reading room, I got a thrill at the musty smell of the pages. I looked around the room for anyone to censure me as I slowly raised my face to the pages to deeply inhale the smell. It's awful, not a pleasant one and I don't usually seek out displeasure but I liked this. I traced my fingers along the pages, following the cursive of 1920's colonial zeal. It's almost impossible to read what they wrote. One of the archivists that led the introduction to The National Archives, this morning, explained palaeography to me - for pre-modern texts, it is necessary for researchers to be literate in hand-writing styles. I hadn't conceived of not being able to read written English or that this kind of literacy was contingent

on the particular place, space and time you found yourself in. I laughed at that kind of naiveté.

I rubbed my finger over the embossed Colonial Office seal and thought about how they made it. The lion, horse and crown with insignia. Who made it? My imagination is sometim es limited when it comes to the practical construction of useful objects and I was straining to understand this one. I returned to the indentation, counting in my head the many fingers that may have passed it between theirs like I was doing. I went to take the box that these documents were delivered in, with the aim of shaking any debris free but then I remembered where I was, looking up at backs hunched and faces burrowed into the past.

Unfortunately, most of these documents were typed so I couldn't elicit personality traits or moods from the peculiarities of an individual's handwriting. Gloriously, though they were notes in the margins. Marginalia that suggested disobedience that the author hadn't thought about anyone seeing. And then there were the farewell phrases. I relished getting to the end of a letter, a agent somewhere like Nairobi would send to his superior in London, always impressed by the lengths the author would go to show their sincere submission to the hierarchy of their profession:

'I have the good fortune to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant'

William Sellers and the Giant Mosquito

William Sellers had a theory about the types of films that the Colonial Film Unit should make. It is been best described by an anecdote he told and has been repeated in several texts detailing the film making grammar of the CFU.[24] As the story goes, Sellers was showing a film about malaria to a small village in Nigeria in the 1930s. The film was supposed to educate the villagers about how malaria was contracted - mosquitoes carried the disease and when they bit an individual the disease was transmitted. This was communicated by a close-up image of a mosquito biting human flesh. The film ended with suggested methods to prevent being bitten by mosquitoes, the goal being that these films would facilitate lower malaria transmission rates. Sellers asked the villagers what they thought of the film, hoping to be able to write up their responses in the form of evidence that could be sent back to London as proof of the success of his educational projects. However, the villagers dismissed the film, lamenting those poor people that lived in a place that had giant mosquitoes![25]

I have told the Sellers anecdote during several screenings, talks and conversations about my work. It never fails to elicit a laugh. My response is nearly always, a wry smile followed by a quick coda explaining that this response allowed Sellers to develop a filmmaking style for the CFU which was predicated on the idea that the eyes of those black villagers were different, defective in some sense.[26] And that this idea was not

[24] James Burns, 'Watching Africans Watch Films: Theories of Spectatorship in British Colonial Africa', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 20, no. 2 (June 2000): 197–211, 199; Stephanie Newell, 'Screening Dirt: Public Health Movies in Colonial Nigeria and Rural African Spectatorship in the 1930s and 1940s', *Social Dynamics* 44, no. 1 (2 January 2018): 6–20, 12 and Timothy Burke, '"Our Mosquitoes Are Not So Big": Images and Modernity in Zimbabwe', in *Images and Empires : Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Paul S. landau and Deborah D. Kaspin (Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 2002), 41–56,.41.
[25] William Sellers, 'Making Films in and for the Colonies', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 101, no. 4910 (16 October 1953): 829–37. 831.
[26] Larkin. *Signal and Noise*. 160.

dismissed until in 1954 with Peter Morton-Williams's report, 'Cinema in Rural Nigeria', which found that, low and behold, Nigerians did have the same appreciation of '…two dimensional images…[and]…the same depth of field as Europeans.'[27] The audience always seems to feel admonished for their laughter.

Sellers used this incident to create the rules for the CFU and his version of colonial cinema:

> '1. The general tempo must be slow, and the length of individual scenes must be twice or three times as long as is usually considered necessary for English school audiences.
> 2. The content of any given scene must be very simple in its composition, because natives view all objects on the screen with equal interest, unless the important object is clearly emphasised. Close and mid shots are therefore preferable to long shots.
> 3. Strict accuracy is vital in portraying native habits and customs. Mistakes at once turn a serious film into a comedy.
> 4. No camera tricks of any sort. Continuity must be clearly maintained in all changes of scene, even if it means using three shots where one would normally do for audiences more used to film technique.
> 5. Films must be made as silents. A master commentary is then written, and is added by a native commentator, or by disc records, through a microphone during each performance. This system is vital, owing to the great variation in local dialects.'[28]

In essence the films were supposed to be simple, slow and literal (an excruciatingly accurate description of *Mr. English at Home).* A one to one reflection of reality so that the audiences could understand, assuming '…different cognitive capabilities for the European and African spectator…reasserting a division and highlighting the intellectual and cultural superiority used to justify colonialism.'[29] CFU officer J.B. Odunton put it best, when describing these films, '…there is no scope for the free play of imagination.'[30] Sellers also advocated that the locations should be local and specific to the audiences,

[27] Ibid 108.
[28] Sellers. 'Film for Primitive Peoples: A New Technique'. 10.
[29] Rice. *Films for the Colonies: Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire*. 67.
[30] J.B. Odunton, 'One Step Ahead', *Colonial Cinema*, June 1950. 29.

and that the people who feature in the films should also reflect on-the-ground circumstances.[31] The native commentators, referred to in the rules would stand by the projection and translate the content into the local language.[32] Most of the CFU output was newsreels, educational films or documentaries but sometimes morality tale dramas were made. These always presented strict binaries with '…a division that came to define colonial dramas splitting backward from modern, African from Western, bad subject from good.'[33] The lesson to be gleaned was always one of forward progression towards civilisation, toward Mr English. These films, in both content and form, understood the black subject to be malformed in some way. The visual language of the films addresses a perceived lowly intellect while the content of the film aimed to train the black subject to civilise.

This isn't to say that Sellers and his ideas were shared by all.[34] He had a longstanding public disagreement with Julian Huxley - a colonial official that used educational films during his time working in Kenya.[35] Huxley agreed on the propaganda potential for film, but thought that film literacy was a case of education and that Africans, similar perhaps to the apocryphal story of those who first saw the Lumiere Brothers film and ran out of the factory at the sight of an oncoming train, could be taught how to *read* film. He described Sellers technique as '…too boring and uninteresting.'[36] Further there were also Africans who criticised the assumptions inherent the CFU's filmmaking style.[37] However, Sellers conducted his own publicity blitzes,

[31] Smyth. 'The British Colonial Film Unit and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1939–1945'. 287-288.
[32] It has been noted that some of these translators went off script and it is not known exactly what was communicated to audiences! See Larkin. *Signal and Noise*. 95.
[33] Larkin. *Signal and Noise*. 86
[34] See Odunton, J.B. 1950. 'One Step Ahead', in *Colonial Cinema* VIII, 29–32. And the responses to the article for a taste of the arguments within the CFU on the form that Colonial Cinema should take.
[35] Smyth. 'The British Colonial Film Unit and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1939–1945'. 288.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Larkin. *Signal and Noise*. 110.

defending his methods to his superiors and in public forums.[38] *Colonial Cinema* (1942-1954) also became the mouthpiece for the CFU line, providing insights into the workings of the unit, audience responses, unit office reports and parables about the merits of the serious filmmaker versus his intuitive compatriot (Fig.8).[39] This and the conflicting organisational structure, with oversight coming from both the Ministry of Information and Colonial Office, meant that Sellers' method prevailed as he '…asserted himself, and was widely recognised in official circles, as the authority on African film-goers' aesthetic tastes.'[40] This continued largely[41] until much needed *evidence* was sought in the shape of Morton-Williams report published in 1954 which questioned the efficacy of the films and therefore precipitated the demise of the CFU in 1955.[42] Sellers himself had an about turn, confessing in 1958,

> '…to the Brussels conference on cinema in Africa south of the Sahara that films were more likely to be effective if they were made 'entirely by Africans'…European filmmakers, Sellers concluded, did not have sufficient understanding of the customs and culture of the people for whom the films were made.'[43]

Regardless, Sellers and his 'Specialised Technique' are indicative of the ways in which the black subject was constructed by the colonial imagination and reproduced through its films. [44]

[38] See Sellers, 'Making Films in and for the Colonies'. *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts 101*, 829–37.
[39] Colonial Film Unit, 'A Production Parable', *Colonial Cinema*, March 1945.19-20.
[40] Newell. 'Screening Dirt'. 10.
[41] The unit did become more decentralised after the end of the war, with self-directed units under the purview of directors, who were more flexible with Sellers' style, in Nigeria, Ghana and Central Africa emerging.
[42] Larkin. *Signal and Noise*. 95.
[43] Smyth. 'The Post-War Career of the Colonial Film Unit in Africa'. 175.
[44] Odunton. 'One Step Ahead'. 31.

Figure 8. Front cover of Colonial Cinema Vol 11, No. 11, March 1953

9th January 2018

'keep my name out of your mouth'

I was looking for my own name in the lists of people that had testified at the Aba Women's War commission of enquiry. There were scores of pages of women's names but I knew I would find it. Despite, growing up in Leyton without meeting anyone that shared my name and strangers extolling its uniqueness and beauty - in place of what they really meant, that it was unusual - I knew my name was common somewhere else. My name got stuck in people's mouths, held there by unfamiliarity and fear. If my mind wandered off during the register at primary school and I forgot my pace, a sharp intake of the teacher's breath alerted me to the fact that it was my turn.

I turned the pages of the report and laboriously wrote down the names, fully unable to actually pronounce them. It reminded me of my

Mum waking me up one morning after the post had come and shoving a DVD box set with my grandmother's face emblazoned on it. She told me to watch it because then I would know everything. I did, at distance and with dissonance, I watched my family grieve, I watched the colours of their uniforms, the colours of the earth and the sky. And I understood nothing. It was a heavy object, like a dusty old document I requested from The National Archives. So then, I reviewed it with ~~scholar~~ scholarly interest, and it reminded me of something I'd seen somewhere else. It was like watching a Jean Rouch film. I still didn't understand but now, I had questions. All I needed to do was ask.

Later, I went back to my mother and had her repeat each name, clearly, syllable by syllable into my phone so I could replay the names to myself when I went to sleep, hoping to subconsciously imprint them via my memory onto my tongue, in the same way I tried to pass my GCSE French oral exam when I was 16.

Wanting to be Human Too

W.E.B DuBois once described race as a '…group of contradictory forces, facts and tendencies.'[45] It is a tangle of an idea that makes sense through the exercise of power, Foucault theorises, through naming, containing and control.[46] It is the power of the ordering and deciphering of imagination into social facts.[47] The idea of race goes hand in hand with colonialism. Colonialism takes on numerous guises acting in concert but dispersed through multiple incidents of time. I argue that today, colonialism is most present in the ways in which knowledge is conceived, the Colonial Thought I defined in the introduction. This Thought produces social facts, and one of these is the black subject, understood as the antithesis to the white European subject.

Blackness has been theorised in diverse intellectual strains, from post-colonial studies to critical race theory, to black studies, to African studies, to the rival contemporary American trains of thought - afro-pessimism and black optimism. My research is not concerned with an analysis of the potential merits of these enumerate worldviews, but instead uses the work of Sylvia Wynter as a guide to explain the ways Colonial Thought produces the black subject, as a subtraction. I will then go on to link these ideas to the methodology of critical proximity that takes heed of Wynter's practice, one which '…narrates (knows) who and what we are is/as the ongoing invention (and reinvention) of…worlds.'[48]

[45] (William Edward Burghardt) W. E. B Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, [1st ed. reprinted] / new introduction by Herbert Aptheker (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson, 1975), 133.
[46] Foucault. *Power, Truth, Strategy*. 128.
[47] Lee Grieveson and Colin McCabe, eds., *Film and the End of Empire* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Houndmills, 2011), 277.
[48] McKittrick. 'Substructure'. 41.

A note on why? Sylvia Wynter's project is accumulative - she is thinking through the same concerns, over and over again, leading some to claim that you can grasp the entirety of her thinking '…through engaging with *any* of her articles and essays.'[49] She is repeating the question, what does it mean to be human? And she answers with a story - stories of the '…overrepresentation of Man as if it were the human…'.[50] The style of her writing, too, is indivisible from her project. Through her writing, Wynter is '…inventing a heretical (interdisciplined) analytical frame that exceeded typical ways of knowing.'[51] There is an overlapping and layering of thought that replicates the concerns of multiplication and complication that I have sought in the development of critical proximity as a methodology. Her work is consumed with questions about how society can reconfigure its key principles through other ways of knowing, and my research attempts to create a methodology that transfigures the archive, again through other ways of knowing. Her work is an ally to the aims and methodology of this research project. Sylvia Wynter, also, lived the majority of her life in Jamaica, initially under British colonial rule and this proximity led me to seek out her work, but my research does not adhere to some contemporary mores of representational politics.[52] Katherine McKittrick, a Wynter scholar, argues that because of her identity, she '…offer[s] innovative and imaginative ways of understanding humanity and, as well, engender modes-praxes of liberation that are outside western eurocentricities and its attendant to racial logics…'.[53] I use Wynter to anchor these discussions of subjectivity, blackness and humanity because I think her blackness and womanhood are instructive to her thinking but I do not have a

[49] Walter Mignolo. 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?' in Katherine McKittrick editor, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); 106-123,111 (emphasis mine).
[50] Sylvia Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument', *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337, 267.
[51] McKittrick. 'Substructure'. 30.
[52] I am referencing an over reliance on representation as an ethics of engagement and way to achieve equity, noted in Chapter 1.
[53] McKittrick. 'Substructure'. 39.

policy to cite only black women. I think this is maybe a subtle difference but important to bring attention to.

Wynter's understanding of the human and its social world begins with her take on epistemology. Human beings are not simply defined through physiology but also through or by the present hegemonic order of knowledge.[54] Instead of knowledge frameworks based upon '…principles and rules of knowing…',[55] she posits that epistemology is based on the naturalisation of the stories that we tell about the observable world. For Wynter, the rules of knowledge are collectively created. She argues that in every society, humans deny agency through a transfer of responsibility to institutions outside of themselves, like God, gods, ancestors, spirits, science and so on. She names this the '…. space of otherness.'[56] The rules and principles of knowledge are placed here, and they are reproduced through sociality - the symbols, stories and myths of a given society. So, '[t]o study "Man" or "Humanity" is therefore to study a narrativization that has been produced with the very instruments (or categories) that we study *with.*'[57] Wynter embarks on a retelling of the stories that underpin knowledge frameworks that have produced the human as a white, European, heterosexual and able-bodied man. In keeping with the literature theme, Wynter names the different versions of humanity, *genres*. [58]

[54] Wynter. 'Sylvia Wynter, 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, Of Desêtre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project', in *A Companion to African-American Studies*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 107–18, 116.
[55] Mignolo. 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?', 107 (emphasis in the original).
[56] Wynter. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, Of Desêtre'. 133.
[57] Mignolo. 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?'. 107.
[58] As an artist working with moving image, genres are also applicable, and I have transposed Wynter's play on genre to my own adoption of multiple ways on knowing that features in critical proximity. These other ways can, therefore, too be considered as different genres of human.

The genre of human that dominates the social world today is Man.[59]In explaining how it came to be that Man is the way in which society understands humanity, Wynter traces the changes to the conception of Man. In doing this she divides Man in two - Man^1 and Man^2. Man^1 is '…the first variant of Man…' a product of medieval times, it was used to distinguish the human from the Divine. [60]So that Man^1 is not God but created by the Divine and so can instead be ruled over by a monarch who has Divine Right and direct connection to God. Man^1 is '…. defined as political citizen and/or subject of the state…'.[61] Man^2 supersedes the first genre, around the end of the eighteenth century with Darwin's theory of evolution. But that scientific theory is the story that initiates a change that has been developing or better still, required since 1492. 1492 is the year of Columbus' *first encounter* with indigenous peoples on the continent of America.[62] This is the start of European colonialism, and in the desire for the land and riches of foreign lands, it was necessary for European conquerors to construct the inferiority of the natives, '…the "first encounter" shook the basis of medieval thinking and …. also apprehending the world through a disavowal that casts alternative /non-European modes of being human (the newly dysselected inhabitants of the Americas) as the Other.'[63] This reasoning was used to legitimise colonial savagery. It is important to observe that Wynter is a scholar of Spanish and Portuguese studies, this is her point of entry. She is looking at colonialism from the Columbus' encounter, so traces the movement from Man^1(pre-1492) and Man^2 (post 1492) through this lens. With this Wynter ties the emergence of Man^2 to colonialism and the regimes of knowledge

[59] It is clearly not coincidental that it is the masculine term, the category of human is racialised and gendered.
[60] Wynter. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, Of Desêtre'. 123.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Interesting that this date is also becoming key in defining the beginning of the Anthropocene, as the murder, farming, disease, enslavement, and migration caused by colonialism precipitated the Earth's warming. See Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, 'Defining the Anthropocene', *Nature* 519, no. 7542 (March 2015): 171–80,
[63] Mignolo. 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?'. 99.

associated with it. Denise Ferreira da Silva argues that with this Wynter makes a break with Foucauldian thought.[64] For the idea of epistemology producing subjects is one of Foucault's but Ferreira da Silva reads in Wynter's work a rewriting of Foucault. Foucault does not attend to the colonial,[65] so Wynter enters to make a connection that he fails to, and one that Ferreira da Silva claims is patently obvious.[66]

Man^2 became necessary because of the distinctions between the European genre of human and those inhabited by the Other but it is made sense of through the frameworks of thought ushered in by Darwinian science. For Wynter, the key question in different epistemes is what is considered Human which changes, through time and space. Man^1 related to an episteme centred on the Divine, and Man^2 resides in one in which God has been supplanted by science as the space of otherness. So, the '…second variant of Man—defined in now purely secular, because biocentric, terms.'[63] Biocentric because the human is created by evolution rather than by a divine being – science is the explanation. She states that biocentrism allows that,

> '…the real-life referents of the Human Other to Man in its new conception were to be all non-Western population groups, once colonized and discursively and institutionally classified (outside the terms of their own once-autocentric self-conceptions and kinds of being human), as "Natives," it was to be the population groups of sub-Saharan Black African descent (including the now-free New World descendants of the former Middle Passage slaves) who would now be made discursively, as well as institutionally, into the primary referent of racially inferior humanity.'[67]

[64] Denise Ferreira da Silva. 'Before Man: Sylvia Wynter's Rewriting of the Modern Episteme', in Katherine McKittrick editor, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); 90-105, 97.
[65] Spivak also makes a similar critique of Foucault and his lack of attention to the subaltern in Spivak, G.C., 1993. 'Can the subaltern speak?', pp. 66–111.
[66] Ferreira da Silva. 'Before Man: Sylvia Wynter's Rewriting of the Modern Episteme' 97
[67] Wynter. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, Of Desêtre'. 125.

The '…natural dysselection…' of the Other is what can be understood as the idea of race described by DuBois so aptly at the beginning of this section.[68] In turn, race and the inbuilt hierarchy of its conceptualisation is evidenced by the social facts of colonialism - that there are people in the world that are ruled over by those of European descent, or the white race. Once again, circularity returns, with colonialism - the very thing that necessitated the development of Man^2 - becoming the explanation of this genre of human. The specific way of knowing is projected as *truth* through the natural sciences which maintains that humanity is represented by Man^2.[69]

Wynter has explained how humanity came to be understood in different ways and how in this current episteme of secularity and science the human is conflated with,

> '…all members of the population group of European descent, classified as the white race, allegedly proven by the very nature of their dominant position in the global order over all other groups, now classified as non-white "native" races, that they had been, as a "race," optimally selected by evolution to embody ostensibly the biological norm of being human.'[70]

She has demonstrated that the human is a product of the social rather than of the natural as science claims. Their perceived naturalness allows these stories to become enshrined in law, a '…juridical-economic…' process which provides solid and stable ground for the continued reproduction of these stories as facts through time and space.[68] From the black codes in nineteenth century USA to the Sus laws of the 1970s and 1980s in the United Kingdom to contemporary algorithms of predictive policing software across the globe. It also, for my case, gets reproduced in film. Mr. English is the archetypal Man^2. Sellers and the Colonial Film Unit's output communicates both to, '…human beings classified

[68] Ferreira da Silva. 'Before Man: Sylvia Wynter's Rewriting of the Modern Episteme'. 126.
[69] Ibid 133.
[70] Ibid 125.

as *Indians, Natives, Negroes*…', as Wynter remarks, in the colonies, and to the white people in Britain, an inferiority that is innate but to be corrected through education. [71]An inferiority that is made real, experienced and internalised.[72] Science, the discourse that has come to dominate social knowledge production and produce an exclusionary genre of human, also produces the archives that I research. Colonial and state archives are instruments of Science, governed by this framework and, as previously detailed, used as an evidentiary tool in the reproduction of history.

Wynter would describe the movement from the genre of human to the lived reality of individual people as - '…the sociogenic code…' - a concept that she develops from Frantz Fanon.[73] In *Black Skin, White Masks,* he relays the now infamous story of a train journey where he encounters his blackness,

'"Mama see the Negro! I'm frightened."'[74]

Through this experience he reflects on his objectified reality, his '…being through others…'.[75] He has knowledge of himself through a white child's knowledge of him as a black man that is an inherently negative one - something to be scared of or ashamed of. For Fanon there is no way to understand the human in purely biological terms, there is always also a symbolic register, '[b]eside phylogeny and ontogeny stands *sociogeny.*'[76] Blackness has a social meaning, so a black subject understands themselves as both

[71] Wynter. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, Of Desêtre'. 128 (emphasis in original).
[72] Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 4.
[73] Ibid 127.
[74] Ibid 84.
[75] Ibid 82.
[76] Ibid 4 (emphasis mine).

subject and subjected. DuBois deems this double consciousness.[77] Wynter extends sociogeny, or '…this relating of the socialized nature of the individual subject to the production and reproduction of the social order itself…' - the sociogenic code/principle.[78]She defines this as,

> '…the information- encoding organizational principle of each culture's criterion of being / non- being, that functions to artificially activate the neurochemistry of the reward and punishment pathway, doing so in the terms needed to institute human subjects as a culture- specific and thereby verbally defined, if physiologically implemented mode of being and sense of self.'[79]

A sense of self is caused, influenced, determined by social forces. The sociogenic principle is Wynter's response to the Cartesian question. She is arguing that this particular episteme's genre of human determines selfhood, as 'I am who I am in relation to the other who sees me as such; and, in a society structured upon racial hierarchies, becoming black is bound up with being perceived as black by a white person.'[80] So, not only does Colonial Thought produce a story of humanity with an objectified subject that it names black and establish laws, economic structures and social reality that reproduce blackness as inferior, but also through representational devices, like film, make real a '…lived experience…' of blackness.[81] Colonial moving images are the white child in the story exclaiming "I'm frightened" and making Fanon realise that he, *himself*, is something to be frightened of.

[77] W. E. B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (London: Routledge, 2016). 1-11.
[78] Sylvia Wynter, 'Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be "Black"', in *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America,* ed. Mercedes F. Dúran-Cogan and Antonia Gómez-Moriana (New York: Routledge, 2001), 30–67. 40.
[79] Ibid 54.
[80] Mignolo. 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?'. 99.
[81] Wynter. 'Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be "Black"'. 31.

18th Dec 2019

Back Again. At the now familiar octagonal tables, breathing in the musty aroma of unseen papers. I didn't know the proper name for the flouncy velvet object that kept pages open. Nor did I know how to retrieve the ribbon ~~that~~ of the paper packages that my documents came in. I did know to sit alone, though, to try and plead a table to myself away from prying eyes - from the tuts, murmurs and sighs of etiquette enforcement.
I also had my own habits: a notebook, pencil and smuggled ink pen hidden in a back pocket.

I was reading a report, 'FILM IN NATIONAL LIFE'. An innocent title belied by my ~~need~~ of constant need for breaks. If I smoked, I would have. Next best thing was looking at my phone.

I usually spent my time here harried, excitedly turning pages - expectant. Not

Knowing what the next page held but ever eager to get there. I usually ordered too many documents, worried throughout a session that I wouldn't make it through. I might have to skip large sections of a document which made me doubt my rigour, but I always made it through. This time, I only had one report, in fact it was only a short twenty page ish section within that report, but I would struggle and force my way to the end.

My mind conjured treats I could bribe myself with to ensure I finished the task. I bristled, recoiled, looked away, made fits and starts.

'primitive peoples'

'inferior'

'Backward races'

'Uncivilised'

I didn't want to look up at anyone else in the archive for I knew the feeling that would follow if I accidentally made eye contact. The feeling of someone else's projection of myself inscribed in their eyes. Something I couldn't deny seeing. I recalled the shifting

eyes of the older white man who stood next to me at the Arthur Jafa exhibition, as he looked at me and then the screen displaying a black woman grinding on a bed to a song I can't remember now. I watched him ask himself and then me, with his eyes,

"Is that you?"

And then look back at me, longer, and with more confidence, confirm,

"Yes! That's everything that you are."

Tell to Tell (other stories)

Sylvia Wynter's work sets the terrain for understanding how colonial endeavour created a mainstream understanding of the human that has excluded the Other(s) and how this became '…hegemonic and dominant…' through social objects of Colonial Thought, like colonial moving images.[82] Her analysis provides insights into the operation of the archive at the foundation of my research. It would follow then, that the way in which she thinks herself out of the problem of the overrepresentation of the human by Man would also be of use to my research aims. Wynter, like Spivak before her, argues that Colonial Thought cannot be relied upon to unmake its products. [83]It is not possible to revalorise blackness because the conception of the dominant genre of human is predicated on the devalorisation of black physiological characteristics and '…ethno cultural differences…' through the over-valorisation of whiteness.[84] Mignolo observes that '[s]he is not looking to change or supersede epistemic categories and established knowledge, but rather seeks to undo the systems through which knowledge and knowing are constituted…',and that undoing resides in the her earlier identification of the importance of narratives to knowledge frameworks. [85]Wynter argues that '…literature can provide a unique and specific kind of insight—that is, knowledge of the "system-specific modes of mind" …'.[86]

[82] Mignolo. 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?'. 109.
[83] Ibid 104.
[84] Wynter. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, Of Desêtre'. 115-117.
[85] Mignolo. 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?'. 106.
[86] Demetrius L. Eudell '"Come on Kid, Let's Go Get the Thing": The Sociogenic Principle and the Being of Being Black / Human', in in Katherine McKittrick editor, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); 226-248, 230.

So, for Wynter, the possibilities in '…a new human project after Man…'[87] lie in the Word - that is stories, symbols, myths and ideas. If Man came to dominate humanity through stories, then other stories can be created, but, more than this they cannot reside in the same knowledge frameworks that have preceded, they must be stories that are delinked from Colonial Thought and so '…engage in epistemic disobedience.'[88] This is a call to '…create now our own Word', which has implications for a practice employing critical proximity. [89]

Criticisms of Wynter usually begin here, with her interest in the '…re - enchantment of humanism…' and her methodology of the Science of the Word. I use Wynter's work to clarify the connections between colonial imaginary and the creation of black subjectivity in the work of the CFU. In many ways, criticisms of Wynter are about differences in approach to answering the question of, if so, what next? Or thinking through how to go about creating this new Word. Or what is the nature of after? Differences in what Karen Barad would call an ethics of approach. These are the questions too that coalesce in this research project once the racist underpinnings of the archive of colonial moving images have been affirmed. So, in many ways, the methodology of critical proximity is in direct conversation with Wynter's scholarship.

Understanding the work of Sellers, through the lens of genres of the human, entails that the films made by the CFU are part of the apparatus of the colonial project. They construct the human in the guise of the white European and their aim was to teach colonial subjects how to act and become civilised. In so doing, the films inform, and then

[87] Wynter. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, Of Desêtre'. 158.
[88] Mignolo. 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?'. 106.
[89] Wynter. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, Of Desêtre'. 160

through exhibition in mobile vans across the continent, remind the black person that this colonial imagination is how they are perceived in the world. In seeking out these films in archives and in considering reusing their material, how can I ignore the ways in which these very images are permeated by destructive agency? Critical proximity, then must respond to Wynter's demand for the refusal of the persistence of images that re-represent the dominant genre of human. This means there is a requirement for my practice to utilise other ways of knowing, or represent other genres of human, outside of the bounds of Colonial Thought.

Here then, the series of works, *No Dance, No Palaver* is relevant. These three works seek to visualise the anti-colonial protests known as the Aba Women's War, in defiance of the Colonial Thought represented by written records held in British state archives. Using non-canonical ways of knowing such as gesture, movement, song, Igbo language idioms and sound, these films communicate the events of the uprising, otherwise. One of the films, *Specialised Technique,* refers to Sellers' grammar of colonial filmmaking, reclaiming the term and enabling the images to perform in ways contrary to their maker's intention. Further discussions of these works, and all the practice made during research continues in the following chapter.

Watch *No Dance, No Palaver* (2017-2018)

4. Scenes from the National Film, Video and Sound Archive

Film: 8mm, 16mm and 35mm (some vinegar and mould eaten).

The Colonial Film Unit developed a self-directed unit in Nigeria to meet the demands of production in 1947. It started by training 3 local men and then developed subunits across northern and southern British ruled territories that were active in producing newsreels for local events and exhibiting colonial films through mobile cinemas.[1] In 1959, in the run up to Nigeria's Independence the activities of the Colonial Film Unit were administered by the newly formed Federal Ministry of Information who created the Federal Film Unit, widely known as the 'Film Unit.'[2]

'The Film Unit [was] a hangover from the colonial administration'[3] and produced largely the same content of newsreels, '…pedagogical documentaries…imperial spectacles…' and narrative morality tales.[4] It was also staffed by technicians who were trained primarily at the Overseas Film and Television centre, which acted as a hub for cinematic education across the former colonies. They were trained in the style and production regimes of the Colonial Film Unit, which had only recently debunked the physiological assumptions of William Sellers' Specialised Technique. Further the Federal Film Unit was being used by the new post-colonial state in the same ways as its predecessor had been by the British government, as a vehicle for publicity and

[1] Françoise Balogun, *The Cinema in Nigeria* (Enugu: Delta of Nigeria, 1987).21.
[2] Emmanuel Haruna, 13 December 2018. [interview].
[3] Balogun. *The Cinema in Nigeria*. 21.
[4] Larkin. *Signal and Noise*. 98.

propaganda, '[a]fter independence the use of cinema for state publicity was wholly adopted from the British.'[5] After the end of the Biafran War, films were created and exhibited throughout the country as part of an 'Enlightenment campaign' to build and institute a unified national consciousness.[6] The Film Unit was created to produce non-fiction films. Narrative films were being produced by a burgeoning Nigerian cinema scene, outside of the unit, influenced by traditional travelling Yoruba theatre that would later become Nollywood. This, coupled with the Film Unit's dwindling output and ballooning size made it unfit for purpose by the 1980's.

For all these reasons and with the institution of the Second Republic of Nigeria in 1979 the creation of a new body was established, the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC). The NFC had several functions that would see narrative film recognised, a national film school created, as well as providing much needed financial assistance to Nigeria's filmmaking community. The 1979 act also established the archives, the National Film, Video and Sound Archive (NFVSA). The work of the Film Unit now came under the auspices of the NFC and all of its equipment, staff and films were moved to a new location in Jos. Jos, in Nigeria's northern Plateau State, was envisioned as the base for a 'Black Hollywood', with plans for a purpose built film facility in Shere Hills.[7] It was also deemed perfect for a film archive because of the climate, much cooler than the archive's existing location in Lagos with its '…humidity and water salinity.'[8] From 1989-90 there was a mass migration of films made both during the days of the colonial and federal film units from collections in Kaduna, Enugu and Lagos. The NFVSA also was tasked with

[5] Larkin. *Signal and Noise.* 103.
[6] Haruna. [interview].
[7] Balogun. *The Cinema in Nigeria*. 25.
[8] Dr. Sokomba, 6 December 2018. [interview].

retrieving films from the UK. The film unit often sent reels to be processed in labs in London and would not always receive the positives back or sometimes anything at all. The first director of the archive, Dr Sokomba believed that they were able to gather a lot of missing titles in this process.[9] Originally the archive was based at the National Film Institute, Jos, part of the educational facility and film museum but it is '…today situated at the permanent site of the Nigerian Film Corporation, located at Shere Hills, in Jos Plateau State.'[10]

[9] Sokomba. [Interview]
[10] British Council Nigeria, 'Film/TV and Music Content Archiving Research', Internal (Lagos: British Council Nigeria, unknown).2.

JOS · 10/12/18

I sat on a chair opposite Mrs G. trying and failing to open the sachet of powdered milk she had given me for my tea. I put too much in and it was still too hot but I brought it to my lips and waited. E came in and sat down, she looked annoyed and then began talking. It wasn't Igbo but I didn't know what it could be. Piecing things together from snippets of English, road safety had fined E on her way into work for a small infraction.

After relaxing, she greeted me. I wasn't sure who she was, not putting two and two together that I had met her the week before. She just talked to Mrs G and I continued to drink my too hot, too milky tea. A, then walked in and the three women continued to converse – vexed and amused in equal measure. E turned to me, out of the blue, and explained that there was a problem. The archive had no electricity, the ~~complete~~ completely automated shelves and lighting ran on a generator, but the Germans had

used it all up on their previous visit.

I thought back to last week, watching the two representatives from an archive in Berlin get goaded into dancing at the film festival awards night in Abuja. The German foreign office was filling in where Austerity Britain had let its councils, cultural attachés, rotary clubs and commonwealth ~~sch~~ scholarships lapse, to fund cultural projects across Anglophone Africa (because you can't step on the French's toes or, so I was told). I dismayed at the machinations of soft power playing out across this archive in Nigeria. Money being dangled, and borders redrawn and drawn over again in conference halls and meeting rooms in Berlin. I had been encouraged by a visiting academic that actually there were good intentions underneath it all, people really were interested and passionate about this. I bit my lip and just observed German, Spanish and American dignitaries, delegations, sponsors, goodwill messages, honours and presentation busts of Ife during the film festival. I wouldn't do that at home but my usual response didn't feel right here, sitting by the Jabi lakeside. I was a

a guest and I didn't want to make too much noise!

Back in Jos, I thought quickly.

"Oh I knew there might be some entrance costs so its OK for me to pay for the diesel for the gen"

I thought again that I didn't want them to think I was too rich, to alert the phantom gangs of Northern cattle rustlers who were peeking their heads out every time I opened my purse.

"My university has funded this trip, so I can pay."

The three women began to argue about the ethics of me paying, circling around the facts - the organisation didn't have the funds so the only way I could see anything was to pay. Then A recalled her trip to London in 2014 when she paid to watch colonial films at the BFI archive. I latched onto this too keenly. I relished funding comparisons to the UK. It was embarassing - my overzealous

eye for sameness. I wanted it bad, when it was all wrong. All same, all different.

So, it was settled, and we began to hot up the money:

19,500N diesel
6000N transportation
1500N stabiliser
4000N DVI cable
6000N battery to jump gen
5000N neutraliser.

I asked about the last one, assuming it was something to do with the generator, but E responded that it was evaporated milk we needed to drink to combat the vinegar and acid we'd be inhaling in the archive. I blinked and said that I had never heard of that before.

Critical Proximity

Critical proximity, as a methodology, emerged from critique. Viewing a wealth of moving image practices that aimed at a corrective of colonial historiographies, I experienced disappointment. There was something missing in these works of revision, which I address in the second chapter, they sufficiently highlight the issues, contexts and therefore explain why colonial history marginalised, disenfranchised and depersonalised former colonial subjects. But to communicate this idea they use the very frameworks of thought they rail against. This omission seemed extremely important to me, as, like Wynter and Spivak, I could not see how and end to the persistent and pernicious marginalisation of people of colour through thought could be achieved through the same thought. In this way, my critiques have a political standpoint. I aim for my practice to perform a political function, one in which as Keguro Machira describes, we can '…remember freedom.' [11]Or as conceptualised in the previous chapter, a project in which those rendered non-human by colonial modernity can be included in the category of human.[12] I argue that this requires both ontological and epistemological transformation.

> 'Is it possible to recognise the ideological and material violence enacted in colonial era archives — the missing names, the indifference to African desires… — even as we mine those sources for whatever information they might provide?' [13]

So, watching existing work I experienced a feeling of not far enough and not quite there. An ouroboros, because the way in which the works repeated the knowledge systems they

[11] Keguro Macharia, 'Fragments toward Freedom', *Gukira* (blog), 2 March 2018, https://gukira.wordpress.com/2018/03/02/fragments-toward-freedom/.
[12] Wynter. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, Of Desêtre'.158.
[13] Keguro Macharia, 'Archive and Method in Queer African Studies', *Agenda* 29, no. 1 (2 January 2015): 140–46, 145.

critiqued was in their studied distance, not necessarily the absence of the author in the work itself, but distance to the people they were attempting to re-establish. Critical proximity takes on the converse of this absence and demands being close to, next to, with and amongst the various subjects suspended in celluloid by the colonial project, and making that relationality visible.

If Colonial Thought is buttressed by 'the slippage between vision and knowledge' then critical proximity is saturated by a multiplicity of epistemological formations.[14] There is not one way of knowing and so not one way to come to that knowing. In the encounter at the archive, a surfeit of instincts, desires, feelings or senses can be provoked by the material. For critical proximity, it is important to be open to all the ways the archive can, as Foucault describes,'…stir…more fibres in me…[it's]…intensities…[and your]…'vibrations…'.[15] Put simply critical proximity is about being *here*, in the archive, *open* to other ways of knowing, and using this as a point of departure for making moving image works that speak to the ethical dilemma of looking for oneself in colonial moving images or looking, as Fanon describes, at '…being through others.'[16]

In order to provide greater clarity on critical proximity, this chapter evaluates its operation through the approaches and decisions made in practice. It does so by considering these works in terms of the encounter with the archive that produced them and the other ways of knowing that are deployed in achieving them. The other ways of

[14] Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, N.C. ; London: Duke University Press, 2005).41.
[15] Foucault. Power, Truth, Strategy. 177.
[16] Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 82.

knowing are grouped loosely in terms of the emphasis given to embodiment, sound, and the disruption of images, in the later part of the second chapter.

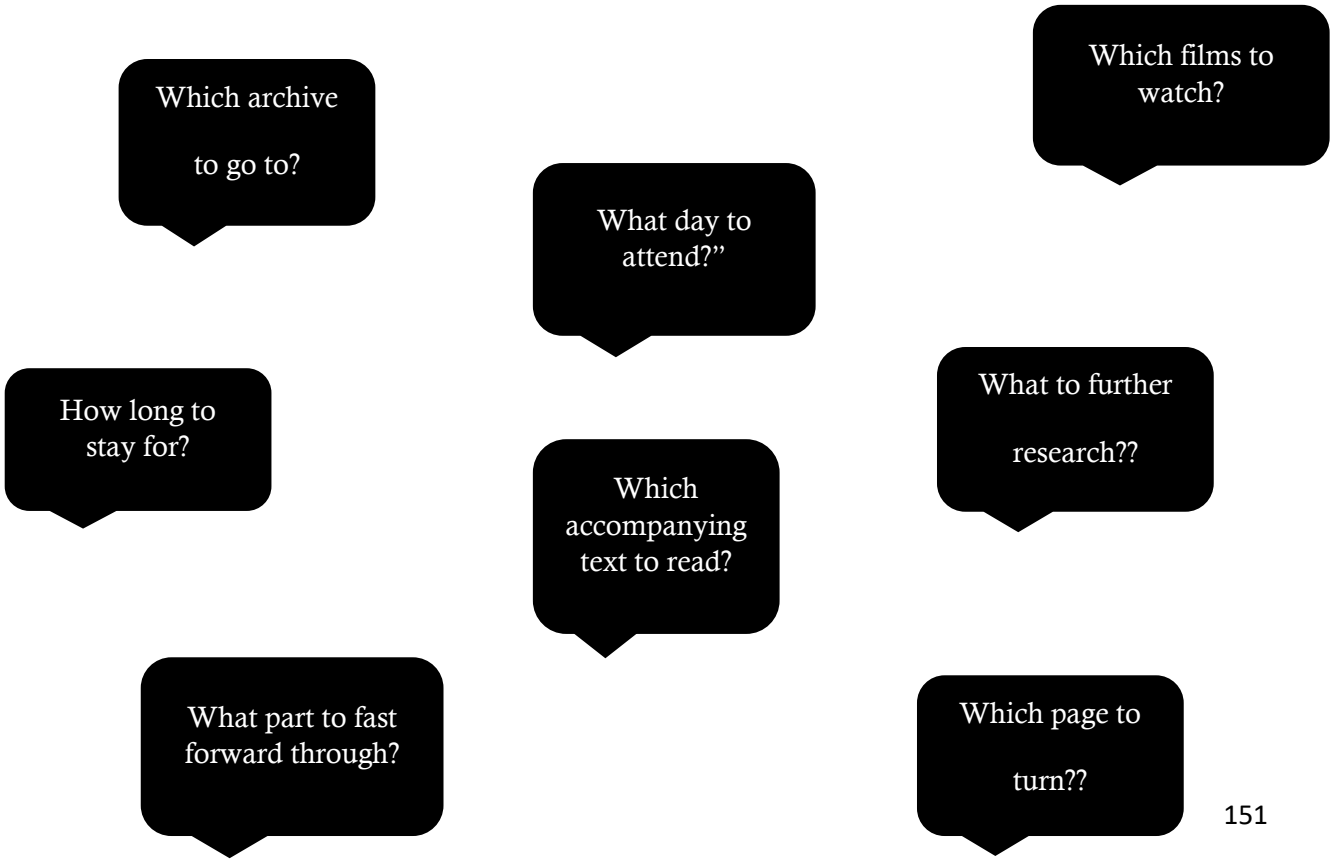
No Dance, No Palaver is a series of three works made up of *Her Name in my Mouth* (2017), *Sitting on a Man* (2018) *and Specialised Technique* (2018).[17] The works were united in their exploration of an event, the Aba Women's War, through archival material. The Aba Women's War or Riots is claimed to be one of the first anti-colonial protests in Nigeria. It was almost exclusively undertaken by women who were protesting taxation, which was not commonplace in South eastern Nigeria before colonial rule.[18] *the names have changed, including my own, and truths have been altered* (2019) is a story of my grandfather, the story of the *land* and the story of an encounter with Nigeria — retold at a single point in time, in a single place, '…trying to tell a truth in as many ways as possible.'[19] And finally *No Archive Can Restore You* (2020) is set in the Nigerian Film Unit building, one of the first self-directed outposts of the Colonial Film Unit which stands empty on Ikoyi Road, Lagos, in the shadow of today's Nigerian Film Corporation building. The old, rotting films housed in this building are hard to see because of their condition, but also perhaps because people do not want to see them. The film imagines 'lost' films from the archive in distinctive soundscapes, juxtaposed with images of the abandoned interior and exteriors of the building.

[17] it is important here to make a distinction between a series and a trilogy. Trilogy suggests linear progression, when instead these works were different approaches to a methodology, connected thematically.
[18] van Allen. 'Sitting on a Man'. 172.
[19] Mutambu. 'Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival'. np.

The evaluation of practice is a fraught and sometimes self-loathing terrain to navigate. The practice I have made is designed to provoke conversation with others, as it does not provide answers. The methodological approach was designed to shy away from proclamation and instead open up a space to bloat the boundary lines of what is sayable in how we communicate about Others. The practice has screened, throughout the course of this research, across the UK and abroad, providing several opportunities for conversations about the work with audiences at film festivals, academic conferences, artists talks and community groups. In some way, I attempt to match the spirit of these discourses in a critical evaluation of the work produced throughout this research project by answering questions that have both been put to me in post screening contexts as well as those I posed to myself in the making of the works.

Encountering Archives

Researching archival materials is one of constant decision making:



This is even before selecting clips or passages of material to use in further moving image work. Stalking all these decisions is what is left floundering in the inverse. The things missed and left out because of the desire, whims, passions, interests, background, identity and history of the person doing the choosing. Within archives, these decisions and decision makers are not presented, they are hidden in plain sight so that the archive becomes a disembodied actor doing this specific and particular work. To operate outside of this framework and to hold onto the tenets of being close to, with or amongst, I, as the researcher and mediator of an archive need to be located within the work. This location means that my encounter with the archives becomes of equal importance to what is found within it.

Carolyn Steedman's *Dust* considers the moment(s) of encounter with the archive in great and engrossing detail, '…he inhaled the by-product of all the filthy hands that have by circuitous routes, deposited their end products in archives.'[20] She evokes the physiological impact of archive research, what the consequences are of touching and breathing in the past when a researcher is seeking knowledge. Critical proximity is invested in a consideration of the tools used to gain that knowledge. In the way that touch, breath, sound - all the senses become receptive portals that are to be heeded.

Critical proximity can also be seen to converge in theorisations of presence. Gail Lewis, influenced by Nishnaabeg scholars Lorna Simpson and Wanda Nanabush defines

> '…presence, or in fact the verb 'presencing'…[as] an epistemological and ontological praxis of emergence based on felt connection among human and non-human, ancestral and contemporary life. It contests and has the potential to detoxify the

[20] Steedman. *Dust.* 27.

effects of colonial discourse (historical and contemporary) in which Indigenous peoples are rendered invisible and/or insensible.'[21]

Echoing notions of care, accountability and relationality, presencing acknowledges that the '… "here-ness"..[and]…"aliveness"…'[22] of a particular a person who inhabits other cosmologies being present in a space, can imbue that space with that cosmology, or at least create the possibility of making it known. It is a defiance, signalling difference or diffidence by making presence known. 'The 'present'… is a political position, the temporality within which liveability is produced and bodies are enfleshed.'[23] Critical proximity differs, as it resists the essentialism of the automated impact of presence and is not limited to one particular cosmology or worlding, it is instead a considered deployment of other ways of knowing based on my personal encounter with an archive.

After an early presentation of my work, someone asked a question. They wanted to know if I had thought of what archives meant in other places. They gave the example of the work of the artist Kitso Lynn Lelliott, *My Story is No Doubt Older than Me* (2016), where the artist stands on the land of a former slave market layering ghostly images on top of her own. They went on to explain that in this work, for this artist, the archive was the land - what did I have to say about that. At the time, I had nothing, but this prompt has allowed me to think of the contingency of my understanding of the archive, to think of the archive outside of the state, outside of scientific positivism, outside of Colonial Thought and what it might mean in another place. This question was also revealing of

[21] Gail Lewis, 'Questions of Presence', *Feminist Review* 117, no. 1 (November 2017): 1–19, 4.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Macharia. 'Archive and Method in Queer African Studies'. 144.

my vantage point as an artist from the Nigerian diaspora making work in the UK that is predominately seen by non-Nigerian audiences. A conversation with Diana Agunbiade-Kolawole, an artist of Nigerian descent, further crystallised these understandings. After a screening of *No Dance, No Palaver* at the CinemAfrica festival in Stockholm in 2019 she probed me about the relevance of my identity as an artist of the diaspora. Her take was that I could only make this work because I was looking at Nigeria from a distance, with a British education and cultural background.

These questions, thoughts, feelings and urges allowed me to locate the aim of a research trip to Nigeria. I wanted to address the question of what archives meant there. Or more accurately my question was, what do archives mean, to me, in Nigeria? So, the final two films made as part of this research are predicated on an encounter with film archives in Nigeria. I visited the NFVSA in Jos and the original archive building in Lagos, used when the Colonial Film Unit was in operation, pre independence. *the names have changed, including my own, and truths have been altered*, then, is an exploration of the diverse representations of myself and multiple ways of thinking through an encounter with physical archives in Nigeria as well as a meditation on my encounter with archives over the past three years. The beginning of the film acts as an echo chamber in an attempt to prepare the viewer for how I would like them to approach what is to come. I was taken by Christopher Harris' idea of setting up the parameters of how to look, at the beginning of a work.[24] So, the film starts with the recording of a projector slide performance of some key images that I saw whilst viewing the archive of colonial moving images and that stayed with me (Fig. 9). Images that had me second guessing

[24] Harris. 'In Conversation – Christopher Harris & Karen Alexander'. np.

myself in terms of the intentions, motives and operations of my practices. Images that had me asking whether I should reproduce them. Images that had me wanting to talk more to the people they represented. The effects these images have had on me has directed the form of the films that I have made. This film then introduces and reintroduces Onyeka as the person encountering the archive in different places and times.[25]

Figure 9. A still from the names have changed, including my own, and truths have been altered (2019) Courtesy of the artist © Bristol Archives

In many ways that question that I set out to answer when travelling to Nigeria was always going to be unanswerable. I knew that I couldn't have claim to any type of knowledge of what archives meant in Nigeria and that there were going to be many ways in which archives were culturally understood. I attended the Zuma film festival 2018 International workshop on Film archiving and creativity and witnessed the audience

[25] I used my name here because the figure that features in the film is not a stable identity, which I will unpack later in this chapter.

groan during a presentation on the importance of film archiving in Nigeria. People asked why they should care, exclaimed that it was old, colonial, shameful and that the country should be moving forward. I had wanted to see films at both archives I visited in Jos and Lagos, but this was not possible for different reasons that span the technological, economic, cultural, and practical. *No Archive Can Restore You* deals with absence in the archive of viewable films that was perhaps because people do not want to see them or because the archive did not mean the same thing in Nigeria. It also addresses the archive as a physical space and the colonial residue that I brought to my experiences there. During my time visiting this archive in Lagos and the collections of the former Bristol Empire and Commonwealth Collection in Bristol, the geography and architecture of the buildings served as metonym for the operation of the archive of colonial moving images.

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I liked these women, I tried to follow between the Hausa and Yoruba words that rebounded across the room and gave a shallow nod each time a new visitor came by Mrs G's office and offered their welcome. They were arranging their leave for the holidays: go to a wedding in Niger state, Port Harcourt, go back to the village for Christmas or get enough warm weather clothes for a trip to Houston in late December. They affectionately introduced me as the one that wrote the email. I wrote a lot of emails, before I came to the, to the same people, and then other people that I had been directed to from people who answered my emails. I blushed because I realised that there had all been read,

"I thought you were South African because of your short hair, when I was in Berlin, I saw there was a fashion for short hair for all the South Africans, really short. But then I saw you talking to Mrs G and she said it was Onyeka, And I said, uh our Onyeka? The one who emailed?"

But they didn't think I was a nuisance, they wanted to help - I think. They proudly unveiled the scanner they had received, a gift from the German foreign ministry. It was the third of its kind on the continent but hadn't been used since its grand gifting, a year previous. The chain-smoking manufacturer had refused to give them the manual, so they had to email him (he did not want to be telephoned) if they had a technical question of which there were many so they didn't email and so hadn't used it.

The 3 ladies had enlisted two technicians, or two men, to operate the scanner. Mr. A and ~~Mrs.~~ Mr. S squabbled over the correct procedures for getting the scanner to work throughout the first day, us women sat and waited. I tried a few times to suggest options, possibilities, ideas but was politely listened to and my words then promptly forgotten.

Other ways of Knowing: Presence, dance and gesture

In reference to Louis Henderson's appropriations of black bodies in his practice, I mentioned Hannah Black's article, *The Identity Artist and the Identity Critic*. In it, she untangles the bind that artists who are women, non-binary, disabled, queer, black, Asian, latinx - those considered to have *identity* - find themselves in when making work and putting it out in the world.

> 'People who are not white men are seen as individualized carriers of a biopolitical surplus … the identity artist has to exemplify a race/gender category, but as soon as she steps into the institution's embrace, she becomes an example of universality. She is artificially cleansed of race/gender even as she is called on to represent it. Tokens are currency, and currency only exists insofar as it's exchanged.'[26]

This expectation of artists that are not white men also comes with the assumption that not only are '…theories of race/gender are always autobiographical…' but that autobiography is demeaned.[27] In the positivist knowledge framework of Colonial Thought that also permeates mainstream understandings of high and low, good and bad, pop and serious, public and private, the personal is relegated to lesser than. In this way the utilisation of embodiment can be seen as antithetical to Colonial Thought. And so, as challenge to this, an '…act of love against the foreclosures of reason…', the body became the initial way I experimented with using other ways of knowing in early work. [28]

There is a way in which the presence of particular bodies is also a political act, that incongruity can in some way awaken memory of what has come to pass, creating

[26] Black. 'The identity artist and the identity critic'. np.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Singh. *No Archive Will Restore You*. 18.

both a particular poignancy and suggesting a position, '…to erase the body is to erase the memory, and while this particular Black body is here in this white space … there is a memory.'[29] However, as discussed in chapter two, there are ways in which artists have utilised the presence of black people in the frame to signal authenticity and therefore the rightfulness of a political argument whilst obscuring their own white identities. All these discussions consider the presence of bodies in the frame through lenses that can be traced back to various theories of embodiment. There's an assumption when people comment on an artist's presence in their work that they are referring to a *true* and singularly stable individual. However, going back to Gail Lewis' definition of presence, this is not the way I intend my own body to function. It is not considering bodies as ciphers for beliefs and social standing, as Oyěwùmí describes in her critique of Western approaches to being.[30] My identity is not elaborated on, the me of it is not important, critical proximity is not equal to the personal in the way Hannah Black talks about the demand placed upon identity artists to be visible but instead my presence in the work points to a specific person out there looking, touching, feeling and interpreting the archival materials that are being shown in the works. This is important ethically as there is selection and curation occurring, which is a power that needs to be accounted for. It is not a universal, unknowable, and unseeable author but instead a present, partial and particular one. It is important that the first film in the series sets this up. Throughout *Her Name in My Mouth* my body is visible doing archival work, choosing pages, tracing letters, and examining detail. That is one way the reinforcement of my 'here-ness' operates in the work.

[29] M. NourbeSe Phillip, 'Interview With An Empire', *LEMONHOUND3.0* (blog), 12 December 2017, https://lemonhound.com/2017/12/12/m-nourbese-philip-interview-with-an-empire/.
[30] Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis ; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).1.

On entering the archive, I was at first interested in capturing and keeping hold of all the ways in which my body responded to it, the flare of the nostrils when reading something absurd or that I disagreed with or the smell of paper that had once been wet but had been dried out carefully over time. Knowledge elsewhere, more than just from the eyes. My entire sensual experience of archival material was in consideration and it is through this that the encounter with the archive was to be visually represented. In, *Her Name in My Mouth*, I attempt to conjure the feeling of being in the archive in order to highlight those other sensory responses. In this way, I try to depict how it felt to touch the different textures of archives. The opening shot of the film is my hand touching Dutch wax prints, an omnipresent feature of traditional clothing worn across West Africa, I rub the material together and the sounds created are heard in the soundtrack. This shot is linked to me touching the paper of the Commission of Enquiry in the same manner, rubbing a finger down the page so a squeak can be heard, visually and sonically linking both the cloth and paper as material of archives. The middle section of the film is a documentation of archive research, filmed rostrum style, with the lens of the camera acting as my eye looking down at material. The sounds of handling the report, turning pages or unfurling maps are prominent in the soundtrack throughout, again, to put the audience in the location of my encounter with the archive. Details of the report are edited as a selection of close-up shots in quick succession to draw the audience to the partial manner in which I viewed the material, drawn to certain words or emblems. Again, reinforcing the particularity and partiality of the research. Pages are flicked by without being read and a wide shot of the pages of the report is blurred, foregrounding Glissant's ideas of opacity, that '[t]he thought of opacity distracts me from absolute

truths whose guardian 1 might believe myself to be.'[31] So this blurring dismisses the supposed importance of the material being viewed – its ability to tell us the *truth* of the matter.

In making *No Dance, No Palaver* I wanted to see how the women's testimonies bound in the archive could be communicated in other ways - if it was possible for the testimonial to exist outside of the written. Inspired by the ways in which I have experienced memorialisation in Nigerian diaspora communities, I attempted to design *Her Name in My Mouth* as a memorial to the women of the Aba Women's War. In many different forms of celebration, be it weddings, births, deaths, birthdays or anniversaries a variety of souvenirs are made to mark the occasion. So, in the film I wear a t-shirt with the face of one of the women that appears in the archive, as if I am celebrating the lives of those unnamed both in the paper and moving image archive. The wrapper I tie, also references these customs. Clothing in *Sitting on a Man* serves a symbolic purpose; collaborating with two dancers, Emmanuella Idris and Amarnah Amuludun, I asked them to choose attire based on reviewing the ethnographic descriptions of the women's war as well as the archive films of women and children dancing, alongside their own backgrounds, histories and particularities. The clothing was their way of interpreting what they would wear if they themselves were sitting on a man, whichever *man* that was, today. In this way, presence in the work is not simply as a black body giving credence to the concepts that the images carry, but instead as a representation of an individual symbolically appropriating other ways of being to convey knowledges of an archive.

[31] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 192.

Dance was integral to the protesting women of the Aba Women's War, so dance and movement was always going to be present in *No Dance, No Palaver* but it functioned differently in the three different works. *Her Name in My Mouth* is largely a film without dialogue, which allows gesture to be the central mode of communication. This was influenced by the notion that gesture is '…a point of transfer for the cultural exchange of knowledge.'[32] I was interested in the ways in which the movement of one's body could be a way in which knowledge was both created and shared using only that language. From the experience that I had watching the woman in the Pathé newsreel dance and awakening some kind of '…blood memory.'[33] I wanted to use my body to convey something of the women's testimonies. My experience of Nigerian culture too, is through an appreciation of bodily communication. When visiting I would watch the ways my mother expressed herself without words using her hands, shoulders or full body jerk. I remember friends noting that my sister, mother and I all expressed mirth in a similar fashion wordlessly rocking our heads and shoulders back with a hand, palm facing out, upraised. There is a subsection of meme culture dedicated to the expressionism of Nollywood actors.[34] All this is to say, that in my understanding of a particular Nigerian way of knowing, the body is a vehicle that drives it. So, taking from both remembered movements and Nollywood scenes, I created a serious of movements for the final scene of the film to communicate the refusal that I read between the lines of the testimonials of some prominent women involved in the Aba Women's War.

[32] Bradley. 'Black Cinematic Gesture and the Aesthetics of Contagion'. 21.
[33] Graham. *Blood Memory*. 9.
[34] Hannah Giorgis Adewunmi Bim, '23 Reasons The Best Vines Come From Nollywood', BuzzFeed, accessed 7 March 2019, https://www.buzzfeed.com/hannahgiorgis/who-scrub-this-floor.

As critical proximity is a methodology that exists in order to approach the ethical problems raised in watching colonial moving images, working with dancers for *Sitting on a Man* was an opportunity to try enacting accountability and responsibility for those captured by the camera. The express goal of this film was to visually show what it might look like to be *sat on.* The camera, and so the audience was the man in question and the dancers could conceive of this protest in any way they desired. I set some parameters with the venue and timings as well as providing Emmanuella and Amarnah with archive film and written ethnographic material relating to the Aba Women's War to enable their choreography. It's important to note that this meant that I was selective about what they saw and how they came to know the events of the uprising. I asked them to think about how they wanted to be filmed, the music they wanted to dance to and the clothes they wanted to wear. In watching CFU films, I often had questions around the participation of people in the films, so it was important that the dancers had agency in the ways in which they were to be depicted on screen. In the final edit, the contemporary dancers and the archive material of women dancing, from a collection of ethnographic films made by George Basden, missionary cum anthropologist, in the late 1920s, are in relationship to one another, forming a version of the dance circle on a three standalone screen installation (Fig. 10).

I was made aware of the Aba Women's War when flicking though my great uncle's autobiography, he was attempting to date his birth around the time of the protests, but I have later discovered it has been a touchstone in exploring African resistance and rebellion more generally. Most recently seen as a re staged photograph in

Omar Victor Diop's exhibition at the Autograph.[35] I was interested in using it as a focal point for practice as it was an event undertaken solely by women so that using critical proximity to visualise this event addresses the absences inherent in Colonial Thought's conception of humanity.

A key feature of this uprising, and what both I and ethnographers at the time, were attracted to, is the protest practices of the women.

> '…"Sitting on a man" or a woman, boycotts and strikes were the women's main weapons. To "sit on" or "make war on" a man involved gathering at his compound, sometimes late at night, dancing, singing scurrilous songs which detailed the women's grievances against him and often called his manhood into question, banging on his hut with the pestles women used for pounding yams, and perhaps demolishing his hut or plastering it with mud and roughing him up a bit. A man might be sanctioned in this way for mistreating his wife, for violating the women's market rules, or for letting his cows eat the women's crops.'[36]

Tens of Thousands of women in districts across Owerri, Aba and Ikot Epene *sat on* the offices of the warrant chiefs and district officers in order to halt further taxation and remove these functionaries of colonial rule.[37] In retaliation, the British sent police soldiers to quell the uprising. 'On two occasions, clashes between the women and the troops left more than 50 women dead and 50 wounded from gunfire.'[38] The government set up a commission of enquiry that sat in 1930 to hear evidence about the riots, establish who was at fault and how to assign blame.

The report itself, held at The National Archives in Kew, was the archive material that *No Dance, No Palaver* is based on, with the title taken from a comment from one of

[35] Omar Victor Diop, *Liberty/Diaspora*, Autograph ABP, 20 July – 3 November 2018, [Exhibition].
[36] Judith van Allen, '"Sitting on a Man": Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 6, no. 2 (1972): 165–81,170.
[37] Ibid 173-174.
[38] Ibid 174.

the British officials at the Commission. The written report is the way in which this event is studied, today. I attended a seminar at Oxford University where master's students in African studies were using testimonies from the women as evidence for their own contemporary historical enquiries into the Aba Women's War and anti-colonial protests. It seemed to me symptomatic of the archive's functioning in the world that the women are trapped within *written* text. For western modernity and the frameworks of thought that emerge from it, 'the act of writing signals truth-value and indestructability'.[39] The way in which the events of the Aba Women's War are conveyed are within the strictures of a colonial worlding and so it was fertile terrain to attempt to activate this very archive for other means. Furthermore, there was scant visual representation of the protests, that I could find, save a few unattributed photographs populating blog articles on the event.[40] The task with *No Dance, No Palaver* was to convey the Aba Women's War by being close to, with and amongst its archival remnants while using other ways of knowing to communicate that archive. I used several different approaches to experiment with critical proximity.

[39] Weheliye, Phonographies. 30.

[40] For examples see, http://kentakepage.com/the-aba-womens-war, or https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/aba-womens-riots-november-december-1929/#sthash.uzAC3jBS.dpuf. Accessed 16 March 2020.

Figure 10. Documentation of Sitting on a Man at the exhibition there's something in the conversation that is more interesting than the finality of (a title) (2018). Photos by Daniel Bode

From my experience of encountering the archives of the Colonial Film Unit and the personal collections of colonial bureaucrats at the Bristol Record Office, I noticed the propensity for dance in colonial moving images. The camera was most often placed at some distance from the dancers, able to capture the whole of the dancing in a wide shot. In some more technically daring films such as *Challenge in Nigeria* (1956), a variety of shots were used, and the scenes were edited to the rhythm of the drums that drove the dancers forward. In my view the dancing always served a moral purpose, depending on where it came in the film. If it was at the beginning it confirmed to the viewer the African's lasciviousness or backwardness that was to be overcome through the course of the film and if it was at the end it symbolised a happy ending or triumph over hardship. Fundamentally dance was used in these films to signify what the colonial imaginary considered to be blackness (Fig. 11). In films like *Three Roads to Tomorrow* (1958) and *The Boy Kumasenu* (1952) dancing in clubs of the newly urbane in city centres evokes the dichotomy between old and new, country and city, pagan and civilised. In these films, 'the state offers a fantasy it demands to be taken as truth and creates occasions to force

obedience.'[41] This fantasy turned truth relied on a series of stereotypes wherein blackness is tied to dancing and represents both all that is good and bad about the black Other. Noting this and buoyed by the words of Katherine McKittrick, '[d]ance is the enunciation of black livingness.'[42] I intended *Specialised Technique* to shake the associations between black people and dance through experimentations with the images themselves. The work used dance as a way in which to both reveal the knowledge drawn upon in the grammar of colonial filmmaking and return this dancing to livingness. I too am present in attempting to broach this boundary as I dance in the film. Scenes from the archival films are projected onto the leather skirt I am wearing, allowing me to dance with the people in the archive. My body blocks the light of the projector, putting me in direct proximity with the moving images.

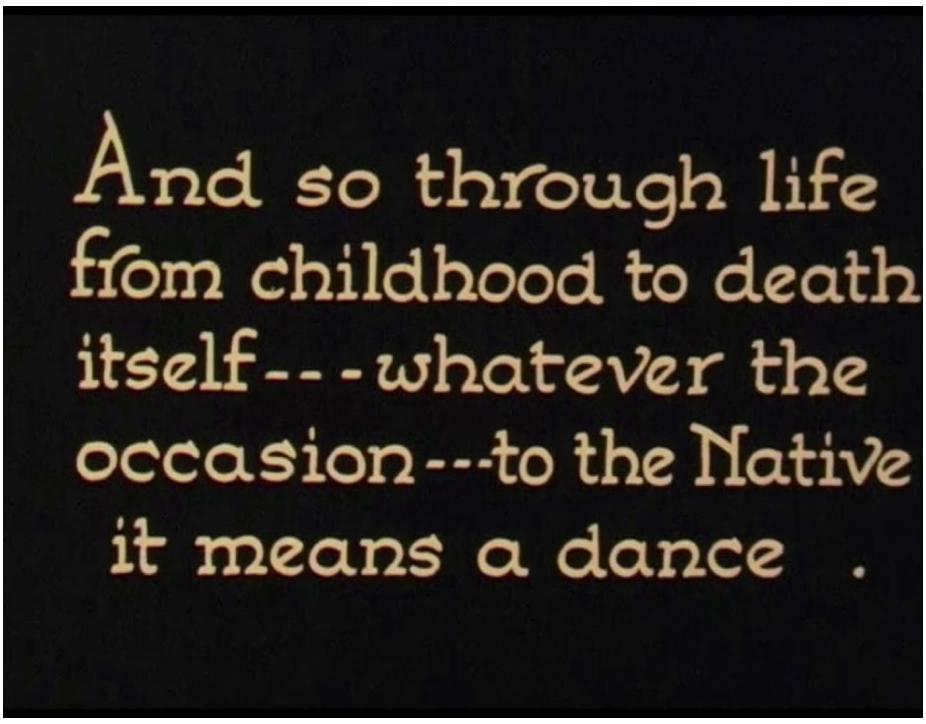

Figure 11. Still from Africa Dances' part 3: Dancing competitions and masks (1930) ©Bristol Archives

[41] Larkin. *Signal and Noise*. 107.
[42] Katherine McKittrick, 'A Black Sense of Place: On Algorithms and Curiosities' (UCL Institute of Advanced Studies, 24 April 2017).

Rather than dance per say, movement features in *the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered*. The film uses four different narrative devices to tell different versions of the story of my paternal grandfather setting up the village that my parents both grew up in, called Njezie, Arondizuguo, Nigeria. Or a story of how I have come to know the place(s) I am from. One of the narrative devices used is that of the chorus. Inspired by the chorus of classical theatre that used song and movement to accompany the story being told on stage, I co-devised, with dancer Titilayo Adebayo, a series of phrases that represented each character in my mother's telling of this founding tale and then linked them together with movement (Fig. 12). The theatrical impact is apparent in the staging of the scene, it is filmed in a black void of a theatre space calling back to the dance performances of *Sitting on a Man*. It was important also that the different narrative techniques had a distinct visual style, so this scene looks different from the others, employing lightning and camera movement to distinguish from scenes that precede and follow it. The camera movement is at the level of the performers, moving with them and anchoring the audience in the choreography. The chorus scene is introduced by an image of a slide which reads,

> "The Witches of Oguta. These old ladies are held in great awe by natives old and young."

infecting the performers which the touch of the mystic and referencing theatrical depictions of the chorus as witches such as in *Hamlet*. This inference, as well as the blue lighting and doubling of the performers, combine to alert the audience to the type of storytelling attempted in this scene.

Figure 12. Still from the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered (2019). Courtesy of the artist.

I saw Titlayo Adebayo perform in Trajal Harrell's *O Medea* (2019) as part of a five-woman chorus reinterpreting the Classic Greek myth of Medea. Harrell describes this as refiguring '…the work's ethics, politics, and performative possibilities in a contemporary context.'[43] Influenced by this approach, I worked with Titilayo to draw inspiration from our shared Nigerian heritage to create the phrases and movements. Similarly, to *Her Name in My Mouth*, I mined knowledge of family members gestures and movements to take the place of words in describing characteristics of the protagonists and driving the story forward. This approach dabbles with opacity, making some things clearer to others in the work.

Across this research practice, the presence of myself or other performers, dance and gestural movements points to the body as the source of possible ways of knowing the

[43] Trajal Harrell, 'O Medea', Onassis Foundation, accessed 3 January 2020, https://www.onassis.org/whats-on/o-medea.

different archival encounters that birthed each work. The body is used to communicate the impact of this material at a sensual, affective or *felt* register rather than as meaning making. The body communicates opaquely, to be understood through layers of meaning that could be triggered by personal experience, heritage, art history and so on. Critical proximity does not just offer one alternative knowledge framework to challenge Colonial Thought, so embodiment was not enough and I used other ways of knowing to produce new work from the archive of colonial moving images.

Other ways of knowing: Trying her tongue

Trinh T.Minh-ha describes her approach to ethnographic film making in the voiceover for her film, *Reassemblage* (1982) as speaking nearby, '…a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it.'[44] She is making a distinction between this, and her perception of the way in which filmmakers have claimed to speak for the people they show on screen and the ethical line that is crossed, for her, in doing so. This line, too, was one that I needed to traverse in making this series of films, cognisant of the ways in which the testimonies from the women of the Aba Women's War were noticeable for their limitations, the choices I made regarding language and voice were a testing ground for the potential of critical proximity as a methodology. Beginning first with the absences of the women's voices in the written report, I used recordings of names of the women involved with the protests as part of the soundtrack

[44] Nancy N. Chen, '"Speaking Nearby:" A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-Ha', *Visual Anthropology Review* 8, no. 1 (March 1992): 82–91,.87.

for *Her Name in My Mouth*. I asked my mother to speak these names because I wanted to ensure the names were correctly pronounced. I appreciate the feelings of defilement that can sometimes be associated with mispronunciation and in keeping with the memorialisation of these women it was important that was correct. This same impetus features in the soundtrack of *Sitting on a Man*. One of the dancers mentioned that while watching the archive films, she missed the sounds of the women dancing. This influenced her choice to dance barefoot, she wanted to return the sounds of syncopation to the women. Her intervention convinced me to design a soundtrack that would do this, highlighting the sounds both dancers' feet made as they moved.

Further, I was interested in imagining what the '…scurrilous songs…', detailed in ethnographic descriptions of sitting on a man, could be. Again, I returned to my mother and through her own network of Igbo women in the UK and Nigeria, she recollected snippets of songs that might have been sung, which I used in the soundtrack of *Her Name in My Mouth*. I thought a lot about who this film was for, who the intended audience was. The answer to this resided in the ideas of relationality and accountability that come with seeking proximity, this film was expressly for the women of the Aba Women's War, the women in the archive films that I had selected and those who descended from them. So, none of the Igbo words are translated and some people are in the know and others aren't. This goes a way to reinforcing gesture, another way of knowing, as the central mode of communication in the film.

Conversely in *Sitting on a Man,* the language spoken is English and this is conducive to the audience I was making the work for. The descriptions of the practice

spoken by two women, one in a plummy British accent and the second a digitally enhanced voice reflect the origins of the ethnographies. The excerpts used in the film were from Sylvia Leith-Ross' *African Women, a Study of the Ibo of Nigeria,* with a forward written by the former Governor of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate,[45] and Margaret Mackeson Green's *Ibo village affairs.* The nature of the voices indicates these words were devised by British women in the colonial era to describe the Igbo women they were living with and researching. However, I wanted the sound of those voices to be in some way distorted, so signalling to the audience that it wasn't to be taken as read. Accordingly, digital enhancement and the doubled layering of both voices was used. Fundamentally, the intention of the sound was to interact with the largely enjoyable images of women moving with skill, power and grace. Aware of the surplus of images of black women dancing that exist in mainstream culture, I didn't want the audience to be lulled into a particular type of appreciation or stereotyping. The voiceover acts as a corrective to that.

There is no voiceover in *Specialised Technique*, however language plays a strong role. The film is made up of a series of questions being asked to the archive such as: is this OK? Or, why do you look down? I used the first person in order to alert the audience to the presence of the artist doing this questioning, but this is muddled throughout the film by the second person, *you.* I adopted this after reading works of critical fabulation by Saidiya Hartman.[46] The second person shifts in her text allowing the reader to be with the central character; following her, looking at her reciprocally with Hartman writing

[45] From 1912-1914 this was the precursor to the amalgamated colonial Nigerian state.
[46] Particularly Hartman, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Historires of Social Upheaval*. New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company. 2019.

next to her. In this way, the use of you forces the audience to collude with the same accountability that I am requiring of myself. Visually, the text is placed on the image not as subtitles but in such a way that is serrated or absorbed by the images themselves as if to say that the questions belong always with the archival material (Fig. 13).

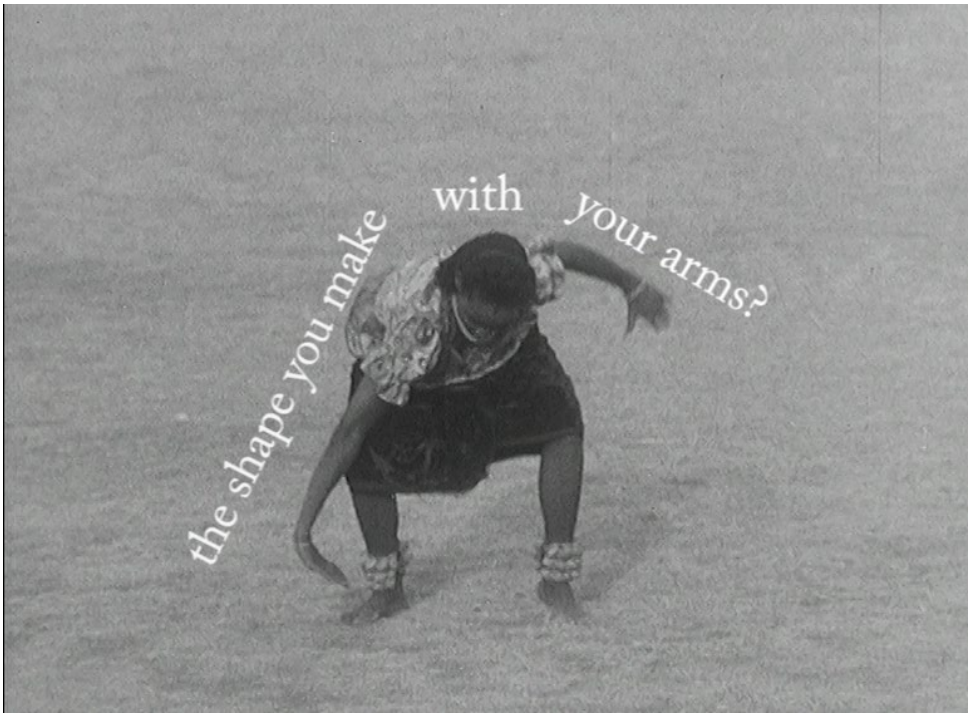

Figure 13. Still from Specialised Technique (2018). Courtesy of the artist.

This grammatical experimentation is furthered in *the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered.* This is a film of many I's embodied by the same voice. Another of the narrative modes of this work is the diary entry. I narrate sections of the film that begin with a date and then tell the story of a part of my visit to Nigeria. As the narrator, I interact with other people whose speech is visualised by captions that are superimposed on images. The image track of these diary scenes is of Nigeria, as *land*. Shot on digital video, images of red dust roads, my grandfather's house, livestock and the archive building in Jos populate the disconnected diary scenes. This is the main structuring device in the film, bringing all of the 'stories' together into one container. The

grammatical person narrating the scenes changes each time, from first person singular to second to third – I to You to She. The effect this has is to trouble the identity of the person doing the narrating. So, the narrator is not singular with one perspective but instead can be comprehended in the multiple. Rather than presenting a binary, the introduction of the third person suggests the possibilities beyond duality or opposition. This refers to the way in which I conceive of presence operating within the practice. It is important that I am seen doing the archival work and, in *the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered* there is an image of me touching the stains the film left on my hands (Fig. 14). But I want to emphasise my fallibility and partially, I, as the narrator, am not a contingent knowing author. The change in grammatical person serves to demystify the idea of a single, all-knowing and even authentic narrator, which is often '…the voice of God of traditional documentary.'[47] Rascaroli notes that 'narration...is the process of finding the right distance', dabbling with personal pronouns is a way of thinking through how close to come to the archive - whether to be with it, or just close to it or inside and amongst it.[48]

[47] Rascaroli. *How the Essay Film Thinks*. 117.
[48] Ibid 153.

Figure 14. Still from the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered (2019)

The myth of the two brothers is also narrated by me. This again reminds an audience that the several stories of the film are all filtered through one source – this is subjective archival research. In another play of grammar, the story is told in the conditional tense – would. The conditional tense can refer to the past, the future in the past or express an in-between possibility. In using would, I wanted the audience to understand the story as located in multiple times. This myth could be a story of the past or a story that hasn't yet come to be. As argued in the first chapter, Colonial Thought understands time in linear terms, as a straight line pushing towards progress. There are many more conceptions of time that contradict this teleological thinking, '[d]ecoloniality instead opens up to the multiple times of cultures and civilizations upon which Western Civilizations impose its conceptualization of time.'[49] Breaking with linear time to represent it amorphously through the narration of the two brothers myth, provides the

[49] Hoffman. 'Interview – Walter Mignolo'. np.

presence of other ways of knowing time in the work. Multiple times and multiple selves are experimented with the narration of *the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered*, adding to the multiple narratives, narrative devices and visual styles to create a film resplendent with and rejoicing in multiplicities of knowing – an ambition of critical proximity in practice.

— JAN 4th 2019 —

By the end of my stay, I was exhausted due to spending my nights in Jos sleeping with the television on, in an effort to insulate myself from the unknown outside. [redacted] My room was a cocoon, no light could get through the three deep barrier of bars, nets and blinds. I couldn't see much and could only piece together bits of sounds: hotel workers moving about the complex or a fellow guest waking me up at 6am with gospel songs playing from his phone as he exercises in a full winter puffa jacket. People repeatedly told me that Jos would be cold, cold like England and I laughed when they called it 'Little London', because that was not possible - they didn't know. But it was cool in the mornings and I regretted not packing enough layers. Everyone could tell I wasn't from there because my arms were always bare.

One night, I caught a local news talk show, 'Your Views'. In a discussion on the upcoming national elections, a panellist remarked,

"But what about in <u>this</u> Nigeria with no light, no water"

So what of a Nigerian film archive in these very same conditions? Where the British Council remarked that 'The sensitive nature of the films make it necessary that specialized air conditioners should be on most of the time, but our findings revealed that power is a great challenge to the film archive', where the films are hard to see because of the combination of a uncompromising German scanner manufacturer and underfunded and undertrained staff, where the everlasting film is rotting and disintegrating due to vinegar or where copyright is disrespected with aplomb resulting in the permanent infeasibility of the institution sustaining itself?[50]

I left the NFSVA with imaginings of the list of films I had picked from the directory but had been unable to see:

[50] British Council Nigeria, 'Film/TV and Music Content Archiving Research'.2.

Another Step Forward

Count Your Blessings

Gifts From Britain

Sir Gwain's Farewell

Towards True Democracy

Festival of Dancers

Dancers of Our Land

Nigeria's Heritage

Black Heritage

The Making of a Nation

Returning to Fred Moten's theorisations on the relationship between sound and image (see Chapter 2), the intention behind the collaborations with sound designers and composers for *No Dance, No Palaver*, was for sound to act as a drag on the image, taking it into another spacetime, another meaning or another way of knowing that relied on more than both the visual and the sonic. The music and sound design were all created by others, working with a different person on each film. The sounds of a coral necklace, often worn by Igbo women during celebrations, rubbing together, were used as the foundation of the soundtrack of *Her Name in my Mouth*, blended with the processed sounds of women singing during the composer's grandmother's eightieth birthday celebrations in south eastern Nigeria. This complements the themes of celebration, but the diffraction of sound creates a haunting element, bringing forth the presence of the women in the Commission report.

For *Specialised Technique* I plied my composer with the words disjuncture, coil and discordance to create the soundtrack. The intention was to go further than the ways in which the effects used on the voice in *Sitting on a Man* disturbed, muddled or complicated a reception of the images. The resultant bass heavy sounds evoke a connection to dub and Soundsystem culture. The sound is not only heard but felt in the body. Historically sound has been an avenue to reach other ways of knowing, more closely allied to black cosmologies.[51] Sound has been used by black people to examine the orthodoxy of colonial modernity, '…black cultural production casts a sonic shadow on Western modernity only to return it recoloured to its (im)proper place within said galaxy.'[52] Through experiments with sound, narration and text *in No dance, No Palaver*, I was

[51] Weheliye. *Phonographies*. 6.
[52] Ibid 45.

attempting to eschew both the logocentrism and vococentrism that have been associated with Colonial Thought by ensuring '…there is no compact, structured, closed argument, but a space of disjunction and *multivoicedness'* [53]

With the final two films in this body of research practice I worked with field recordings made during the research trip to Nigeria. This features briefly in sound design elements of the *the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered* but that film is mostly made-up narration as discussed above. *No Archive Can Restore You*, however, was conceived as a sonic intervention. My experience of encountering film archives in Nigeria was marked by absence. I could not see the films I had wanted to. Instead, I was given a directory that listed the names, durations and dates for films held in the collections. These were films that I could imagine but not see, which prompted the idea of creating a soundtrack that could *visualise* these archive films. In doing this, I was turning away from the vison dominated and logocentric Colonial Thought, providing a space for the archive to be sounded out. Chion describes sound in audiovisual work as providing an added value that can temporalise images, structure vision or create empathy with a story.[54] However sound here is intended to operate both in tandem but also, importantly, distinctly to the images. The sounds are not rational, speech and language are rarely heard and instead sound goes beyond, into and beneath the images. It was conceived in 5.1 surround sound so; spatiality is a critical factor. The sound is heard and experienced above or beneath the audience, it can be described as thick or thin, near or far.

[53] Rascaroli. *How the Essay Film Thinks*. 124 (emphasis in the original).
[54] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1994), 6-24.

Allusive, evocative and irrational sound is described as feature of a lyrical essay film.[55] Laura Rascaroli's text, *How the Essay Film Thinks*, an attempt in expanding the definition and scope of essay film tries to recover lyricism from an understanding that it '…contradicts rational thinking…'.[56] She argues that the lyrical can be considered another form of thinking, '…it is not subordinate to logical thinking or separate from it, as an addendum, rather, it is argument and instrument of argumentation.'[57] This train of thought demonstrates the differences in my methodological approach. I am not interested in rescuing marginalised, subordinated, illegitimate or poetic knowledges by squeezing them into the knowledge framework of Colonial Thought but instead exposing them to the air and allowing them to be of equal value. So, '…affective spectatorial response based on lyrical impression made by images and sounds…' produced by *No Archive Can Restore You* is critical proximity in practice, utilising other ways of knowing sound.[58]

Other ways of Knowing: Disrupting Images

Despite the Aba Women's War not featuring in any films made by the Colonial Film Unit or in the personal collections of those working for the British Empire, archive footage is included in *No Dance, No Palaver*. I selected from a range of films in these two collections, films that were made predominantly in Nigeria but sometimes Sub-Saharan Africa in general. They were the films made closest to the time of the Aba Women's War in 1929 and within the lifetime of the film unit itself which ceased in 1955. bell hooks, in

[55] Rascaroli. *How the Essay Film Thinks*. 154-163
[56] Ibid 163.
[57] Ibid 156.
[58] Ibid 162.

speaking to the intersectional ways in which black women in the US experience oppression, calls for the movement from the margins to the centre. For her, '[t]o be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body.'[59] Many have adopted this phrasing to describe similar political approaches in which those marginalised are recentred. This impetus led the use of archive in this first film series. I enlarged, slowed down and reformatted images of women who were sometimes hidden at the edge of the frame in order for them to be more prominently seen. This was most noticeable in *Her Name in My Mouth* whilst *Specialised Technique* served as a series of formal experiments in what can be done to the image. In attempting to shake the stereotype out of the colonial footage, I tried in as many ways as possible to change the way in which the audience saw the various people on camera. Converting the film to individual frames and then reanimating them or digitally drawing on them, slowing them down or tripling them and reprojecting were all techniques utilised in order to create a pensive spectator,[60] '…uprooting us in the films unfolding [to] situate us in relation to it…'.[61]

Reusing these images was a constant reminder of the racist imaginary that conceived them, begging the question - is it at all possible to reuse these images? Are they so tainted that any effort to show them again in another way can only ever fail? This was once asked of me in the question-and-answer section of a screening and though my answer fixated on the qualified nature of ethics, it is a question that remains fundamentally unanswered. For some, image making is always already embroiled with

[59] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2014), Ix.
[60] I am borrowing Raymond Bellour's theory on the effects of photography in cinema to refer to the manipulations of moving images in my own work that rendered still frames with the photographic qualities he speaks of.
[61] Raymond Bellour, 'The Pensive Spectator' 9, no. 1 (1987): 6–10,122.

its origins, '[w]hen we speak of "shooting" with a camera, we are acknowledging the kinship of photography and violence…'.[62] If, as I have argued, the '…obsession with visualism... is at the centre of the modernist project…', the hegemonic avenue through which knowledge is obtained, then a project like critical proximity that privileges unhegemonic ways of knowing runs into potential roadblocks when working with the visual.[63] So, then it becomes a question of where you draw the line, are these images to be rescued? Is this a radical project or one of reform? After working heavily with archival images in *No Dance, No Palaver* there was scope to explore the challenge of transfiguring the archive through the creation of new images using the archive as a departure. Is it possible for these images to sit alongside archival ones and act as a dehiscence to the imaginary that underpins them?

So, with the last film that was made, I did not use any archival images. Instead as mentioned in the previous section on sound, I alluded to the archival titles through the soundtrack. *No Archive Can Restore You* is a departure from previous work, as it does less. I was consistently preoccupied with the concern that it was barren, all the other works, continually reinforcing my ideas or my arguments through visual layering and collaging. The layering and collaging are present audially, but the image is straightforward. This, again, was the intention, to challenge the orthodoxy of vision. There is a narrative to the image track, the viewer is on a journey of discovery, moving from the particular to the general and presented with visual clues of the nature of the derelict and abandoned building (Fig. 15). After the reveal of the stacks of film cans littering the building, the

[62] Teju Cole, 'When the Camera Was a Weapon of Imperialism. (And When It Still Is.)', *The New York Times*, 6 February 2019, sec. Magazine, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/06/magazine/when-the-camera-was-a-weapon-of-imperialism-and-when-it-still-is.html.
[63] Rony. *The Third Eye*. 30.

sheer extent of the decay and damage are emphasised. The audience is then taken out of the archive the way they came, left with the pulsating remnants of a place forgotten.

The slow tracking shots and high production values give this film a touch of the elegiac which can suggest a romanticisation of film as a medium, or archives in general.[64] This ambiguity is also reinforced by the lack of contextualisation of the images, only rooms are shown - the building is never seen externally in situ in a Lagosian cityscape. Ultimately this could be anywhere and anytime. This was the danger of resisting the production of a film that visually was linear or made *sense*. The audience is left with a lot of space for input, but the intention was for the sound to affectively drag the image away from notions of romance or nostalgia and cast the '…sonic shadows…' of the residue that colonial moving images continue to generate in the present.[65]

Figure 15. Still from No Archive Can Restore You (2020). Courtesy of the artist.

[64] The idea of the fetishization of film as material has come up several times in reference to my work and is as yet unexplored.
[65] Weheliye. *Phonographies*. 45.

As alluded to, in Chapter 3, some critique Sylvia Wynter's desire to rescue the category of human.[66] Her work strenuously outlines the way black people have historically sat outside the category of human in both of its incarnations — Man[1] and Man[2].[67] However, instead of calling for the end of the world à la Denise Ferreira da Silva, she suggests the reframing of the sociogenic principle, that is the 'symbolic and organizational framework of a social order or network that defines what is and what is not part of life'.[68] For her, all social orders throughout time and space have this symbolic framework as a way in which to make sense of nature. Origin stories are a way in which humanity is linked in Wynter's conception, stories told to transfer responsibility outside of a given society or culture. The reorganisation of the existing dominant framework, allowing for new genres of human which includes those previously excluded, can be achieved through the creation of new narratives, myths and origin stories.[69] Again Wynter is furthering traditional Western scholarship, Levis-Strauss wouldn't have gone so far as suggesting myth was equal to scientific knowledge, concluding, in his seminal assessment of myth, that '…of course, it remains different in a way, and inferior in another way.'[70] Myths and stories can be considered an adversary of Colonial Thought and it is with these ideas that I thought through how to push critical proximity further.

[66] *Sylvia Wynter – Always Already Podcast*,2018, https://alwaysalreadypodcast.wordpress.com/tag/sylvia-wynter/
[67] Wynter. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, Of Desêtre'. 131-151.
[68] Corinn Gerber, '"Because We Cannot Manage What We Cannot Measure, nor Can We Deny What We Have Not Documented": The Queen's English, Dark Sousveillance, and Black Feminist Opacity', *MICE Magazine*, Summer 2018, http://micemagazine.ca/issue-four/%E2%80%9Cbecause-we-cannot-manage-what-we-cannot-measure-nor-can-we-deny-what-we-have-not.
[69] Wynter. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, OfDesêtre'.160.
[70] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978),17.

Taking up Wynter's call to think through '…a genre of humanity (bios-mythos) that both generates and expresses a capacious pedagogy (poetics) of who and what we are (black) that is an undoing and unravelling of plantocratic colonial time-space…'. I conjured a myth of my parent's birthplace, drawing on stories passed down through the maternal side of my family, the structure of classical mythology and Nigerian folktales. This myth establishes a genre of human that because of its placement alongside archive material, representing Man2, is elevated to the same value as the bios-mythos of Science. This myth titled, 'There Were Two Brothers', peppers *the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered* and is depicted by archival images from the Colonial Film Unit and British Empire and Commonwealth Museum Collection.

> 'The work of mythology is to guard against things being forgotten. What is thought to be in danger of slipping from view must be inscribed. Mythology does not deal with what is true and what is false: it deals with what is important.'[71]

The myth of the two brothers, then, tells an important story, one where truth is negligent, but the audience is introduced to the ways that it is possible to know the land that is presented throughout the film, as well as the multiple subjectivities that narrate the film. This is a story that is not told in full, some information is withheld, because '…myth is repugnant to science, whereas poetry is in accord with myth…'. [72] The story does not contain facts and uses the archival images to tell a story, whereas the CFU explicitly made these images to educate and instruct — to tell facts. In this way, I make the images work at cross purposes to their intentions. The images now tell a different story, one that does

[71] Wamuwi Mbao, 'Dry like Steel: A Wrecking Ball of a Book—Wamuwi Mbao Reviews Adam Habib's Rebels and Rage: Reflecting on #FeesMustFall', *The Johannesburg Review of Books* (blog), 6 May 2019, https://johannesburgreviewofbooks.com/2019/05/06/dry-like-steel-a-wrecking-ball-of-a-book-from-the-hashtag-seasons-wamuwi-mbao-reviews-adam-habibs-rebels-and-rage-reflecting-on-feesmustfall/.
[72] Césaire. *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry, 1946-82.* iii.

not equate blackness with inhumanity but instead reflects a different genre of human. *the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered* is the work that best achieves an aspiration of critical proximity, to sit as many ways of knowing next to each other and next to colonial moving images in order to demonstrate the surfeit of epistemological formations and dampen the operation of Colonial Thought.

Watch *the names have changed including my own and truths have been altered* (2019)
password: roughthink

In this chapter, I have elucidated how the methodology of critical proximity manifests in the research practice, detailing the encounter with the archive that prompted different ways of knowing that are weaved into the five works produced. In outlining the intentions and decisions that went into the production of the work, I have evaluated the operation of critical proximity in practice. In the concluding chapter I will draw upon this to reflect on the efficacy of the methodology and where the research could go next.

Gathering Winds (to conclude)

This thesis lays bare the very individual desires and impulses that foreground this research. I understand it as part of a political project. Politics is a contested term, a mantra I learned to recite in the first week of my undergraduate politics degree, political has come to mean, for me, anything that pertains to answering the question —*how do we live together?* How do we live with an archive that contains not only racist representations of those from the former colonies but also, as laid out in the third chapter, is produced using a knowledge system that will always render some non-human? How do we live in a social reality in which colonialism and its aftermaths are both understood and communicated according to the contents of these very same archives? I wanted to address these questions by creating a methodology and body of work with a potency that could offer up other ways of knowing and understanding of those caught by the colonial gaze and, so, transforming the colonial legacy of the UK. It is almost embarrassing to nail down these aims as word, in this text. It feels naïve. Naïve, to imagine potentialities in which some *films* can contribute to changing social reality, but I cannot deny this intention, this need for the question of colonial residue to be answered in a public way. The tremble between idealism and reality is resonant in this research project and my approach to practice. My first research project was based around the argument that speech not only possessed a characteristic that produced action but could also change the social world simply through utterance. I am still working within that context.

I have often read a blurb, summary or press release about an artwork and then experienced it, left stranded in the gulf between the artist's ambition, or intention, and my own reception. The artist promised too much and/or the work wasn't doing what

was promised. There is something missing, a lack. That lack can consist of zeitgeist hopping, naivete, misunderstandings, irony, trolling or disconnection. A conclusion demands a reckoning of sorts. Did I do what I said I would do with this research project? So, now then, is that the goal of this final part - to pre-empt any oversights and name them? Before I get there, I must go back. I will alight on what has gone before as a reminder of the shape of ideas and practice that both this thesis and the research itself has taken.

This research must have begun, but perhaps will not end with archives. I initiated discussion of the archival dimension of this project with a brief history of the British Film Institute National Archive, explaining the founding ideology that established the institution. It was important to differentiate this study of archives as one concerned with state and institutional bodies rather than local and counter archive initiatives. Initially, I bought into the potential corrective power of the archives as evidence but then experienced them as places of institutional forgetting where the rules of engagement continually changed at the whim of the institution, reflecting enshrined organising principles. Derrida's conception of archive fever helped to reveal my own motivations. I uncovered my desire for the archive as a desire of origins, a way of understanding and conversing with the experience of diaspora. The research also clarified how I would understand the meaning of archives in the social world, elevated as sites of knowledge production, places where the past could be acquired and constructed. The analysis of the existence and functioning of archives bolstered an aim of the research, to destabilise their consistency, to expose the fragility and contingency of their hegemony and reveal the reality of a pellucid archive.

These encounters with archives and conclusions I arrived at influenced the type of artistic work that I reviewed. I sought out moving image practice that either used archival material or was in some way contending with a historical record that marginalised. This led to conversations around authenticity and embodiment, as well as ethical assessments of works that Gregos observes as intending to create '…a counter-narrative to Western myths and stereotypes about Otherness.'[1] In paying closer attention to these artists, I was able to articulate an unease in watching their works, whiteness remained absent and under interrogated. That was not a space I was looking to fill, but in seeking out allegiances in other practices I noted that the work I was most invested in did not use archive at all, or contain the formal or intellectual qualities of a category such as essay film. It was instead work that resonated at frequencies outside of the cerebral, that created visual associations and came back to me in dreams. Where symbols, colours, feelings or the resonation of my internal organs provoked by the vibrations of bass - rather than meaning- making thoughts - are the lingering remnants of the audio-visual experience. Or where the physical space of the gallery or the cinema is transformed and so transmits the audience otherwise and otherwhere. An intangible quality, a curious and enigmatic thing, but a quality that allows for space, that does not foreclose the activation and participation of the audience, that expects the *final* work to be the beginning of a collective conversation. Completing a review of practice, I resolved to look for this type of work and to situate my own practice there.

Conversely, watching the material from the archive of colonial moving images prompted a different kind of search. In an attempt to pin down how humanity was portrayed in these films, I discovered William's Sellers Specialised Technique, which

[1] Katerina Gregos, 'Raising the Phantoms of Empire Post-Colonial Discourse in Recent Artists' Films', *Mousse Magazine*, March 2010, 157.

gave a name to the insights I had gleaned from watching the CFU films. Chapter three is dedicated to this and uses Sylvia Wynter's theorisations on how Colonial Thought developed a concept of humanity that excluded blackness, to explain how William Sellers generated a colonial filmmaking grammar that profligated these ideas. For a research project which aims to, in some sense, rescue the archive, Wynter's ambition to resuscitate the category of the human was a helpful guide. It oriented an understanding of the interplay between epistemology, ontology and a lived experience of selfhood, which, I argued, the repeated viewing of colonial moving images negatively interfered with. Chapter four, finally, critically assesses the practice made over the course of the research and consolidates critical proximity as the methodological guide for this work.

Dancing Too Close

The methodological approach of this research foregrounds the self - my own specific encounter with the archives - so as to reinforce and remind that there is a person doing the work of curating what the audience sees from the archive. That *I* is suffused with political positions, ideas, an identity and a background. My looking is a partial one and critical proximity demands this emphasis. The practice was produced concurrent to archival research, a review of practice and a review of relevant literature, so *I*, the researcher, have continually changed as a result of all that I have been exposed to, as well as new experiences and changing circumstances. In that way, looking back at the practice chronologically is revelatory for the adaptations made, accordingly, to the methodology of critical proximity. The creation of the *No Dance, No Palaver* series in the first two years of research allowed for a period of reflection on critical proximity and a chance to appraise how the works operated in the world.

There were some things that it became clear I hadn't made decisions about — areas to further the methodology. All the films in N*o Dance, No Palaver* are roughly six minutes in length, however this was not intentional. They all ended up this way because of an intuitive response to the methodology. As a series of experiments, all the films rest on several ideas or impulses that are reflected in the rhythmic approach to editing. The films are short scenes emanating from compressed ideas, edited in proximity and with a lean structure. Short duration is permissible of this, whilst I think longer films need to have an arc that speaks to narrative - linear or otherwise - structure needs to be more explicit and developed. These reflections prompted the making of *the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered*. I wanted to handle something longer, not to join a bandwagon for which film length is tied to the linear progression of film career

success, but to work with structure. Critical proximity did not have anything explicit to say about length, so I was interested in experimenting with making a film that required an internal logic and more deliberate composition.

This meant a new approach to making work - one where I planned the types and styles of shots that I would make before I went to shoot on location in Nigeria, where I wrote pages of diary entries during pre-production and production stages expressing thoughts and concerns around the creation and ethical implications of the work, where I went on a solitary residency abroad with a lot of time and space to complete post-production, where I developed and re-developed the idea, where I made multiple revisions and exposed the film to an increased number of eyes, notes and feedback to push the work in other directions and where I, for the first time, worked with a crew taking on the role of director of not only an idea but of people.

My methodology has also, necessarily, been touched by both economic and logistical considerations. Several of the works made have been commissioned and so their exhibition pre-determined. This is most apparent with *No Archive Can Restore You,* co-commissioned by both KW Institute for Contemporary Art and Tyneside Cinema. The work has two iterations, one short version made for the cinema context and a forthcoming expanded work made for gallery exhibition. For the cinema version, which has been included in this research, the 5.1 surround capabilities provided opportunities to extend my experimentations with the sonic as covered in chapter four. However, I would not, necessarily, have worked in 5.1 if it had not been for the commission. I mention this to draw attention to the fortuitous facets of my methodology. This is also the highest budget film that I have worked on, costing £12,000, which allowed for many new possibilities in my practice, that too altered my methodology. I again worked with a

crew, this time nine people and for the first time in my work, I didn't self-shoot the film. I sat on a chair, watching a monitor replying "yes", "no" or "mmmmhmmmm" to questions from the DOP and crew. Visually, this film has a completely different style to its predecessors because of the camera, lenses, crew and professional grading - because of money. It looks distinct to the DIY, bricolage aesthetic of my practice to date. I am also not present in the work, embodied on the screen, breaking with the dominant way I have conceived of the methodology in practice. Increased production values communicate beyond content and place the work in other contexts. Does critical proximity work with bigger budgets and increased personnel? I am not sure what kind of proximity, sensuality and handicraft is present in *No Archive Can Restore You*.

As I will be working next with gallery exhibition, I envision future preoccupations to revolve around space. I haven't conceived of a work, from the outset, spatially. They were all intended for a single screen and then adapted for gallery spaces. I am interested in thinking further about what my methodology has to say about the way in which audiences experience the works in space and adapting my practice towards that. I recently went to *O'Magic Power of Bleakness* at the Tate Britain.[2] I recall the experience of watching *Fiorrucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999), years ago, as one of wonder and small pleasure, in many ways similar to the experiences of watching people dance in the CFU films. I deeply resonate with individual expression of feelings, states, ideas and stories through the movement of bodies. But this reaction was quietened in the exhibition. The huge concrete motorway underpass dominated the space and the audience's experience of the video and sound work was given short shrift. This is often a complaint when

[2] Mark Leckey, *O'Magic Power of Bleakness*, Tate Britain, 24 September 2019-5 Januray 2020, [Exhibition].

attending audio-visual installations and so, in moving towards this type of output I foresee questions and experimentations rather than answers. What are other ways of knowing space? How can the experience of watching a moving image work be augmented by the physical arrangement of the gallery? What other objects and materials can join in this conversation? How can repetition be explored in three dimensions?

No archive can restore you.

In introducing this research, I hinted at a reverence for the archive that would need to be addressed later and which came into sharp focus when sharing my practice with audiences who came from similar experiences and backgrounds to my own. They probed me harder and further than most. The most recent of these encounters occurred at Yale University in the autumn of 2019. I was screening *Specialised Technique*, which had screened for over a year at that point, in art galleries, film festivals and cinemas. I had given several presentations and attended question and answer sessions about the work and the whole *No Dance, No Palaver* series. I thought I had said all that needed to be said about that aspect of my practice. I was repeating myself with practised answers and rehearsed laughter lines. There was a complacency, perhaps indicative of a complacency that shrouded my estimation of archives, now that I was so firmly inside of it all. I sat in a coffee shop in New Haven, revelling in the Stars Hollow of it all, listening to Marius Kothor, the respondent to my work for that evening's screening, attempting to politely ask a question. We had been talking about archives in general, our research experiences and the issue of repatriation enlivened by the surprising endorsement of the French

government,[1] but she ventured, "why do *we* still bother with archives?" I took that *we* as an accusation and she meant it so. The *we* she was referring to was those who had been wronged by the colonial archive I was examining – black people. She was referring to those who had worked to explain the ways in which the very systems of thought that created archives as a site for producing and enshrining a type of knowledge that uplifts some and subjugates most others. At the inception, I had dismissed existing oppositional approaches to archive studies - reading against the grain or along it, the amplification of marginalised histories, the practice of exposing the gaps, pauses and ellipses in the archive, critical fabulation, reflexivity, auto-ethnography and so on. I remembered Spivak's critique of being inside of the enemy, of reifying the very system that is being *held to account* through the attention and light that research shines on it, and now Marius was subtly accusing me of this. This was not the first time this had happened. During a screening in 2018 of the same work, an audience member had argued that she didn't think that it was *right* to reproduce these images because she didn't believe that they could be freed from their origins. I had adroitly responded by citing a difference in ethics of approach but here Marius was asking me to account for my relationship to the archive, again.

This research is clearly premised by a distrust for state archives, in the very least and my reference to Fred Moten's idea of a dehiscence is testament to the approach undertaken to address the paucity of these archives. My aim was to create material that could sit inside the archive of colonial moving images and infect it some way, creating a wound that would spread through anathematic origins. Transform. Transfigure.

[1] Full details of the Macron commissioned report that advocates for the repatriation of African artifacts, arts, and archives can be found here: Savoy, Bénédicte, and Felwine Sarr. 'The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics'. Translated by Drew S. Burk, 2018.

Transduce. I wanted to create a new shelf inside the archive building where all that is bitty, unresolved and impossible could reside. I was accepting archives as the site of knowledge production and by working with them, using critical proximity, interrupting their operation. But Marius' question demanded I answer, why? Again.

Why create another shelf in the same rotting building?

Why insert the multitudes, the messy, the complicated and the conflicting into the solidity of the institutional archive?

Why exist inside a model that has produced a partial knowledge of *we*?

The only faithful answer I could give was a negative, in the shape of this long thought-out denunciation of archives. My interest in archives stretches back almost a decade, so much so that the archive and my moving image practice has comingled. In some ways it is part of my identity as a filmmaker, a line in an artist's statement. But now, I am not sure that I will work with them again. It is not from fatigue, or the difficult experiences of watching racist archival material, that people repeatedly enquire about, or extortionate and gatekeeping licensing costs, but because I do not want to give archives of the state so much air. I do not want to name everything from the past, archive. Julietta Singh points out that this practice has become habitual.[2] There is a tendency in language for reduction and diminishing, for social reality to foreclose the possibilities of realities outside of hegemonic formations. The archive is just that. It is an organising principle that necessarily delimits. The category and language of the archive delimits ways of approaching history.

[2] See Singh. *No Archive Will Restore* You. pp. 15-21 for more on the repercussions of the expansion of the meaning of archives.

In reading Wynter again and more closely, I can draw inspiration for a retreat from the archives. In a recent interview Wynter talks of the Third Event, stating that 'what was once there must die' and that 'we can narrate this problem in a different way'.[3]

The language, conventions, and structures of Man[2], of which the archive has been shown to be endemic of, must be done away with. For the third event, for a new human to emerge, inclusive of blackness, the reverence for the archive must die. My research interest was crystallised after the production of a film, *We Need New Names* (2015), "names" and "new" are returned to again and again in this thesis and so it is apt to recite the same phrase — we need new names! — at its close. A new system of naming *altogether* so as not to reproduce the concepts, ideas, objects and social facts of Colonial Thought. Reformation will not do.

My Dad who is rarely in the UK, save for a yearly health check-up, saw *the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered* recently on one of those trips. I asked him what he thought and after admonishing me for some misspellings and mispronunciations he said, "I'm not sure that if you knew the *real* story from start to finish you would understand it from this film". I argued a little, saying it was kind of the point (!), that I wanted to mimic the experience of hearing my grandfather's story or to communicate my fragmented understanding of Nigeria, or masculinity, or *him* through these snippets and half tellings. But it reminded me of another comment I heard after a screening, one that stung. I showed the film to a group of women my mother's age and one remarked, "I think you need to be an academic to understand this". This was work that I thought might speak to them, apart from cognition, on a level below the surface,

[3] Bedour Alagraa, 'What Will Be The Cure?: A Conversation With Sylvia Wynter', 7 January 2021, https://offshootjournal.org/what-will-be-the-cure-a-conversation-with-sylvia-wynter/.

on that level which Hortense Spillers' calls flesh, but in truth maybe it just speaks to me — my flesh.[4] That is a humbling realisation of scope, maybe I can only transfigure the archive for myself.

There is a demand for PhD research to produce new knowledge, for we are always hurtling forward into a brave new world, accumulating more and more knowledge until, until…When this is critiqued, I have heard the riposte, "well you don't have to do one if you don't like the system". Ignoring practical considerations of short-lived liberty from precarious finances as well as the benefits of increased time and space, this response also forgets that a challenge to these conventions can come from repositioning the clamour for the new with a return to the old. My concluding thoughts on the archive beg the question of what next for the research and for my own practice? To answer that I want to engage with a tale as old as cinema - *time.*

> 'This current moment is both the long ago past and the future that we've awaited. That's the thing we call the present isn't it, like always, already, all the time collapsing the distinctions. And so, I try to see the ruins and the film as a porthole to foregrounding that reality in which most of our ways of navigating experience is to assume a discrete past and a future that we're working towards as if they are not all present in every single moment.'[5]

Many different cosmologies consider time as circular (Fig. 16). In considering and contending with historical legacies of violence, subjection, and damage there is no need for the visual evidence and representation of the archival document. The present is laden with the past and this quote from Christopher Harris reminds that time, as a concept, can be considered otherwise. Not as separate entities divided into past, present, and future but as a constant enmeshment of moments. I am still invested in a continued search for a

[4] Hortense Spillers, 'Mamas Baby Papas Maybe', *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 64–81, 67.
[5] 'In Conversation – Christopher Harris & Karen Alexander'. np.

filmmaking practice that targets bodily reaction, vibration, or enhancement of senses, rather than cognitive or didactic *understanding*. Understanding that reduces social reality to *facts, truths and essences* that have been naturalised by a system of thought whose agenda is fundamentally '…linked to the spirit of conquest and discovery.'[6] I would like to hold the past, present and future in the singular space of the frame and allow multiplicities of sound, movement and images to point towards these unbounded temporalities as well as communicating the expression and interrogation of ideas, concepts and questions formed through investigation and research.

[6] Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*.111.

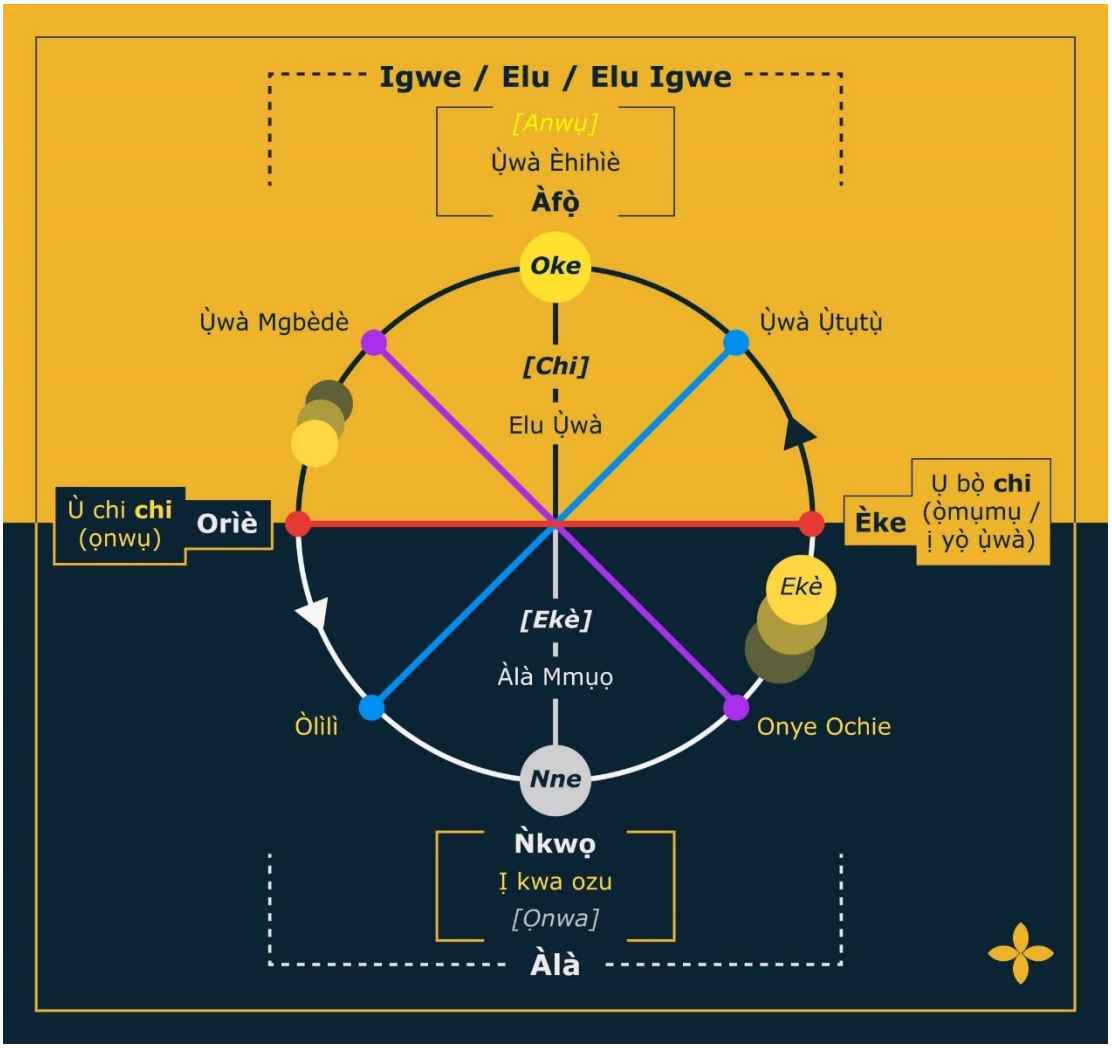

Figure 16. The Kongo cosmogram - an example of pre-colonial West African cosmology. Obiakoizu A. Iloanusi (1984)

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