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**ABJECT / ETHNOGRAPHIC / AFRICA: MATERIAL ENCOUNTERS ALONG THE CAPE-TO-CAIRO ROUTE**

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by

**Ana Karina Menezes de Morais (Alirio Karina)**

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The Dissertation of Ana Karina Menezes de Morais is approved:

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Professor David Marriott, chair

_____
Professor Gina Dent

_____
Professor James Clifford

_____
Professor Anjali Arondekar

_____
Professor Premesh Lalu

_____
Lori Kletzer
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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# Abstract

## Abject / Ethnographic / Africa: Material Encounters Along the Cape-to-Cairo Route

**Ana Karina Menezes de Morais (Alirio Karina)**

Culture, the customary, and the role of (colonial) anthropology in creating these remain critical problems for African thought. Debates about the "inventedness" and "authenticity" of African materials and practices exist alongside various political projects which seek to mobilize ideas of Africanity. This dissertation examines the confluence of these problems, through particular attention to the ethnographic frame through which African subjects are transformed (racialized and indigenized) into proper objects of anthropological attention. Based on a year-long research journey along the historic Cape-to-Cairo route, this dissertation examine ideas of race, culture, and Africanity as they emerged in cities and museums along its path, and four sets of ethnographic materials: Zulu objects collected by Max Gluckman during his doctoral fieldwork, 1940s-era Zambian witchcraft objects, turn-of-the-20th century ethnographic postcards of Zanzibar, and museological and literary representations of Nubia. These are examined as materials with claims to ethnographic and historical truth, articulated by messily situated colonized subjects, for whom there are political consequences for understanding an object to be an ethnographic one. In doing so, this dissertation explores how an attention to the ethnographic illuminates the role of anthropology (and its layered, extra-curricular aftermaths) in making imperial and neocolonial possibility, and how such an

attention accordingly provides an idiom both through which to read the political structures of the neocolonial present, and through which to expand African political imagination. Crucially, this idiom does not offer a simply nativist narrative of redemption, in which the already-desired emerges as the viable alternative to the already-known. Instead, this dissertation stays with the ethnographic trouble Africa is in, and the entangled political and epistemic disability and possibility this trouble has produced

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## Preface

When I disembarked the Shosholoza Meyl train to Johannesburg in early 2017, I began what felt like the heart of the research towards my dissertation. I had set myself a discrete task: travel to Cairo, as much as possible overland; visit and study anthropology-adjacent museums and their collections in cities along the way; and pay attention to how traveling this route was inviting me, forcing me, to think and talk with and about the African continent. My dissertation, I imagined, would be about how the relationship between the Cape-to-Cairo route and the museums situated along it created senses of place and belonging, in the eyes of Africans and visitors to the continent (especially the many themselves following the route) alike. I hoped to work on objects that had been collected by anthropologists, or that were akin to those collected by anthropologists, and I wanted to focus my attention to those that—by having travelled, or by how they were displayed, or by some detail of their craft— spoke especially to matters of place-making.

The train service that took me from Cape Town to Johannesburg is named after *Shosholoza*, a "traditional" call and response song in a mix of Ndebele and Zulu, written from the perspective of migrant miners from what was then Rhodesia, and historically sung together by miners at work. The lyrics express, in solidarity with others bearing the brunt of colonial exploitation, the imperative to carry on:

> Shosholoza
> Ku lezontaba
> Stimela siphum'e South Africa

Wen'uya baleka
Ku lenzontaba
Stimela siphum'e South Africa

*Go forward*
*Through those distant mountains*
*On this train leaving South Africa*
*You are leaving*
*Through those distant mountains*
*On this train leaving South Africa*[1]

Thinking *Shosholoza* through the idiom of the "traditional" transforms something with origins as a work song into something quite Other. There is a sense in which this transformation occurs in good faith: the song can certainly be called a folk song, and be understood as traditional as a result. But "traditional" works differently here than it might as the author note to, say, Scarborough Fair; the song is comparatively recent—it can only be as old as the very late 19th century—, has a definite and political origin, and—perhaps most importantly—was the product of a context in which the "traditional" was already and continues to be weighted by colonialism as something that people *are*. It would be inaccurate to call *Shosholoza* a work song today; it has taken on many lives upon leaving the mines, first as an anti-Apartheid and anti-colonial struggle song, and since—in every implied peculiar valence—as South Africa's unofficial national anthem. And in the midst of all of this, it is "traditional", and—perhaps because its resistant history and its service to the myth of Rainbow Nation unity have allowed it to be—proudly so. This complex history

[1] Translated with assistance from Sonya Cotton.

mirrors those I had planned to explore in my dissertation research, that surround kinds of visual, material and public culture variously understood as "traditional", "customary", "cultural", "heritage", "ethnic", "indigenous", "native", "anthropological", "ethnological", and—the term that would later gain precedence in my thinking—"ethnographic".

Starting my work at the Wits Art Museum, working on materials collected by anthropologists for the University of the Witwatersrand's Museum of Ethnology, I did not know what I would find in its collections. I had had the sense that I would write a survey chapter that would establish the baseline for an anthropological sense of ethnographic museum culture, against which I could think about the other lives these materials—and the ideas of culture they are implicated in—would have. The materials I was interested in had recently been relocated to WAM from the anthropology department at Wits, and had not yet been catalogued or even fully unpacked; I worked on them as they were found, sketching them, noting details in their craft and condition, and photographing them and these details. One morning, I walked with Julia Charlton, the Senior Curator, to the storeroom where we saw several objects the museum's interns had found for that day; we both remarked upon a long carved wooden object that was clearly—even from a distance—very carefully worked, with an aesthetic force absent in most of the other objects I had studied. I avoided working on this object while there were simpler objects to examine, but ended up deciding (in hindsight, fairly arbitrarily) not to break the sequence of accession numbers I had been working on. I examined this object closely for nearly

an hour—holding it in my gloved hands, following many details of its carving, and scribbling them at length in my notebook—but I could not draw it, and did not photograph it. I was overwhelmed by its representations—nauseated by them—and did not want to reproduce them. As these stories go, this object stayed with me; it was all I talked about, and eventually, towards the end of my time at WAM, I decided I wanted to draw and photograph it after all. More than that, the dissertation I had imagined writing was on its way to vanishing, its first ethnological survey chapter coming to be replaced in my mind by a set of meditations on this "Carved Stick for Sale to Europeans" collected by Max Gluckman during his doctoral fieldwork.

When I got to the Livingstone Museum, my next "field site", I still thought that the initial plan was more or less viable. I had hoped to work with some of Livingstone's materials, and to orient my chapter around his collecting, that of anthropologists (particularly those of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institution), and the way British imperial ideas, and particularly Christianity, developed a life in Livingstone and Zambia more broadly. I quickly learned I would not have access to the accession register, so I could not select materials by their collectors, provenance, or frequency of exhibition. I found too that while I could work with the materials in the Livingstone gallery of the museum (one exhibit case at a time) I could not work with any of the broader Livingstone collections. Knowing I had to select a class of materials and study them together, the witchcraft collection I had viewed on my first day in the museum was suggested to me. I hadn't wanted to study witchcraft objects—I didn't want to deal with witchcraft at all, never mind the set of objects I

found in that store room, composed as they were from human and animal remains, seemingly reveling in the violence it took to bring them into being. But I came to realize that—much like the carved object at WAM—my reluctance was a response to the trouble the witchcraft objects posed, and that rather than avoid the trouble (not least in a dissertation that was, in some sense, about the making of an idea of Africa) I realized I should, following Haraway, rather stay with it. After a densely productive research stay, I boarded yet another train (and bus, and train) to Dar Es Salaam, where I examined the exhibits of a few museums, including the "Village Museum" on the outskirts of the city.

Over this time, I made a brief trip to Zanzibar. Unlike the rest of the dissertation I imagined myself to be writing when I left the US, I had already completed archival research and found materials to ground my chapter on Zanzibar. I had studied a set of photo postcards held by the Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University the summer before leaving for "fieldwork". These postcards were mainly from the territories now known as Uganda, Zanzibar, and Kenya (though there were some South African and West African postcards), and generally dated to the late 19th and early 20th century. I took extensive notes on the images on the rectos and any writing on the versos, systematically going through these materials. I had thought that by studying ethnographic postcards—a representational form that travels, while also (discursively) mapping those depicted into socially and geographically bounded units—I would produce a chapter considering how these postcards were central in the production of ideas of African

placedness. But I found that I kept returning to a few particular postcards, which were not so much about *place* as about *people*, throwing the imperial subjectivation across the collection into relief. These postcards came to organize the chapter, and my attention in Zanzibar. While visiting museums, speaking to people, and wandering around Stone Town in the midst of Eid al-Fitr celebrations, I was no longer concerned with the global, as much as with the particular effects that Zanzibari instantiations of imperialism had had in delimiting social and—particularly in the ever present shadow of the Zanzibar Revolution—political life.

After leaving Zanzibar, I travelled to Mombasa—easily the most bustling of the cities along my route—and then Nairobi. I reached Nairobi at the worst possible time: the campaigning for the 2017 general election was wrapping up, and the city was, as a result of the aftermath of the 2007 elections, anxiously anticipating a round of ethnicized electoral violence. This possibility loomed large; a few days before my arrival, Christopher Msando—the head of information for the Electoral Commission, and a major figure in the development of the new Kenyan voting system—had been tortured and killed. In the midst of this, I visited the Nairobi National Museum, but could not visit Nairobi's equivalent to Dar's Village Museum ("Bomas of Kenya"), as it had been put in the service of electoral logistics, nor could I arrange to visit its collections as I was told I needed to have applied for a research permit in advance of my arrival (something which had appeared impossible). Within days of my departure to Khartoum, I was told this was untrue. I planned to return to Kenya following the conclusion of the Cape-to-Cairo trajectory to conduct research

in the NNM collections.

By the time I arrived in Khartoum, the dissertation had already undergone one radical reimagining—inspired by the objects I studied in Johannesburg and Livingstone, which then also shaped my encounters with the museums in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi—, from a dissertation fundamentally about relationships to place to one about one particular mode of relation—abjection, which I read through Julia Kristeva and the ensuing uses of it to think with racialization. And race was everywhere in Khartoum. However unspoken, it was a grounding part of an Arabist national orientation that could not be escaped in daily life. But unlike everywhere else I had been, whenever I spoke about my project there—and, granted, I spoke about it to an English-speaking absolute minority, only occasionally having it translated in some form to Arabic-speaking acquaintances—the idea of a project about "Africa", and especially an "Africa" that included Sudan (and not just as the location for a historic Meroë), was exciting, and urgent. Many people described Sudan as in the midst of an "identity crisis", in its status as the sub/Saharan borderland between "Africa" and the rest of the continent, and in its simultaneous political Arabism and structural exclusion of blacker Sudanese people. After a month spent visiting and revisiting museums, scrambling daily to attempt to get a visa to Egypt, and hiding from the summer heat, I made my way to Aswan by bus and ferry.

In Aswan, my imagined dissertation came to shift to its present form. I visited the Nubian Museum in Aswan, and found—to my great surprise—an ethnographic gallery at the end of the circuit through antiquity the museum invites

visitors to follow. This gallery featured two dioramas—one small, and one extending the length of a corridor. I had already known that Upper Egypt was the place where Egyptians imagined there to be racialized—not quite Egyptian—Egyptians, but I was struck by the fact that these same subjects were also anthropologized. When I got to Cairo, this did not repeat itself—the anthropological was nowhere to be seen: the National Museum was solely concerned with antiquities; the "ethnographic museum" was impossible to even enter, since it had come to share a security gate with parliament following the January 25 Revolution. And where, elsewhere on the continent, nationalist museums had put undesirable anthropologization to new work under the sign of "heritage", (non-Upper) Egyptians had no "heritage"—they had an ancient *lineage* instead—and were perhaps accordingly absolutely not African, absolutely not black, absolutely modern. The chapter I had planned—comparing the ethnographic museums in Khartoum and Cairo—had become impossible, but my fascination with Egypt and Sudan as representing two borders to "Africa" had only been heightened, and I left Egypt with a sense that my final chapter would examine ethnographic fiction about Upper Egypt and Sudan, as a way of accessing a relationship to the cultural that was only marginally featured in the projects of national public history.

By the time I returned to Santa Cruz, I was thinking the various materials I focus on in my dissertation, as well as the set of problematics I wanted to think through and with, in terms of the "ethnographic". Abjection was still an instrumental idea—as was, in veiled ways, the project of place-making along the Cape-to-Cairo

route. But the project was no longer *about* an imperial railway fantasy meeting ex-colonial museum culture—the project was no longer even concerned with Cape Town or Cairo!—as much as it was now situated in that meeting place. Instead, the dissertation became about the power of the ethnographic to create (new) political terrains on the African continent, with aspects of these emerging as distinctly racial, distinctly cultural, and distinctly about the promise of a resurgent sense of continental Africanity.

## Introduction

In 1996, Archibald Monwabisi Mafeje published *Anthropology and Independent Africans: Suicide or End of an Era?* This text was written as a response to the critical turns of the 1970s and 1980s at a time when their most important interventions were in the process of transmuting into a very peculiar kind of canon. Armed with this new canon entirely comprising its staunchest critics, anthropology now promised to attend to new objects, to work with a new representational ethics, to newly insist on critiquing the normative above even as it studied the marginal below, and—ultimately—to become a new discipline, with all colonial scores fully settled. Mafeje was not seduced. Instead, he offered a searing and rigorous indictment of the recuperation underway, charging that the Northern anthropologists who had taken the task of deconstructing anthropology—to varying degrees of success[2]—had wholly failed to reckon with the reconstructive project to follow. In the absence of this reconstruction of scholarly attention to the African continent—of new disciplinary structures developing the insights of anthropology into radically different forms of knowledge—the recuperative project sedimented. The question today is no longer, "Should we continue to practice anthropology?". Instead, it is now, "How do we—as politically thoughtful anthropologists—transform the discipline?". To this

[2] Of the texts Mafeje examined, *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) was the sole in which he found an example of a complete deconstruction of anthropology. It is no coincidence that this text is one concerned with the future of *ethnography* and not that of anthropology.

emerging question, Mafeje offered the central provocation of his monograph: that anthropology, and the broader imperial system of humanistic thought of which it formed only one part, were wholly irrelevant to ex-colonial Africa. This reflected what Mafeje characterized as the impossibility of reconstructing—after the critique—an ex-colonial *anthropology*, as such a discipline would necessarily be grounded in the pursuit of alterity, in the transformation of its interlocutors into Others, of Africans into reflections of imperial fantasy.

Importantly, to Mafeje, this problem was specific to *anthropological* possibility, not to *ethnographic* possibility. All of the critiques Mafeje articulates in *Anthropology and Independent Africans*, as well as the broad discursive arrangement of the text, are structured around an implicit sense that regardless of what happens to the discipline of anthropology, there is something about the ethnographic mode of encounter, relation, attention and inquiry that must be preserved. As a result, the project of dealing with the coloniality of anthropology becomes irrelevant, and replaced by the urgent question of how to make African subjectivity—in all of its complexity, and through all of its difference—a political, epistemic and methodological priority for any post-anthropological scholarship on the African continent, and how to do so through and despite the challenges posed by ethnographic approaches. Extending the Northern deconstruction of anthropology offered by *Writing Culture* into an *African* deconstructive project, and offering the beginnings of a reconstruction of knowledge practices, Mafeje insists upon a subtly radical redefinition of the term "ethnography". Instead of a monologic text in which the studier-subject produces

knowledge about the studied-object—and against even the gesture to imagine a dialogic text produced by a studier-subject in conversation with a studied-object—which must be authorized by the assumption of the author's intrepid traverse of a chasm of alterity, Mafeje's ethnography is a text that does very particular kinds of (self-referential) social work. In the section that follows, I will quote Mafeje extensively, as his careful and layered way theorization of ethnography, and his Africa-bound criticism of anthropology, form the grounds for how I conceptually approach ethnographic materials.

> As units of analysis, my 'social formations' were not defined according to their ethnography but according to their modes of organisation. So it did not matter what people were called Ba-Nyoro, Ba-Ganda, Ba-Hindi, Ba-Hima, Ba-Hutu, Ba-Tutsi, etc., but what they were actually doing in their attempts to assert themselves. It struck me that in the ensuing social struggles people try to justify themselves and not so much their cause which remains hidden. They do this by authoring particular texts which give them and others certain identities which in turn become the grammar of those same texts, the rules of the game or, if you like, the *modus operandi* in a social discourse in which individuals by virtue of their ascribed identities are assigned categorical statuses and roles. Now, we have arrived. It is these texts which I refer to as 'ethnography'. They are socially and historically determined i.e., they can be authored and altered by the same people over time or similar ones could be authored by people with a different cultural background under similar conditions. Therefore, 'context' is most critical for their decodification. (Mafeje 1996:34)

Mafeje's ethnography is a particular kind of text that: ascribes identities, turns these into the conditions of possibility for the text itself and potentially for broader social life, and in doing so confines those to whom it ascribes identities to positions in a quasi-biological taxonomy of social life. In this way, the "ethnography" as a genre of

writing is a generalized form of the structural functionalist study, the "ethnographer" the creator of recursive and stifling norms masquerading as the creator of true positivistic knowledge. Mafeje is not a writer of ethnographies (nor am I, nor is this dissertation an ethnography). He is also not an "ethnologist", for to consider himself as such would be to treat the quasi-biologization of functionalism's organismic metaphor as though it corresponded to the real instead of produced it (and ideas of race within it). Instead, Mafeje (1996:34-35) thinks about ethnography in a way that recognizes both that the quasi-biological productively structures ethnographic sense of identity, these remain productive *fictions*, which must be examined and interpreted alongside other kinds of ethnographic texts. As such,

> Ethnographic texts defy ethnological stereotyping because they are equivocal. Whether this gives them such flexibility as to embrace the particular and the universal at one at the same time, as has been suggested by Amselle (Mudimbe 1994:52-55), it cannot be gainsaid. But it would appear that refutation of 'ethnological reason' does not necessarily dissolve the grammar of ethnographic texts. People carry in their heads certain classificatory systems or signposts which are their source of identity or orientation. All these put a very heavy burden on our concept of ethnography.
>
> As I conceive of it, ethnography is an end product of social texts authored by the people themselves. All I do is to study the texts so that I can decode them, make their meaning apparent or understandable to me as an interlocutor or the 'other'. What I convey to my fellow social scientists is studied and systematised interpretations of existing but hidden knowledge. In my view, this marked a definite break with the European epistemology of subject/object. Nor did it depend on my ideological or libertarian instincts. It was simply a recognition of the other not as a partner in knowledge-making, but as a knowledge-maker in her/his own right. Whether I discover this through conversations as Griaule and Dumont, through interviews, recordings, participant observation, oral traditions, artistic expressions, or written accounts, it is immaterial. Because all of these are so many different

> ways of reaching the same objective, namely, understanding the other. (Mafeje 1996:35)

Read closely within Mafeje's critique of anthropology, this "ethnographic text" is a social 'text' produced by the subject-objects of anthropological attention. In contrast to what Mafeje characterizes as Northern views of ethnography—and even the Northern critique of ethnography—this ethnographic text is an ambivalent and obfuscated form of documentation of social life, which—in the interest of working through difference—Mafeje then takes on the role of *interpreting* (and thus, well or poorly). These ethnographic texts can take many forms, so what becomes important is not the method but the methodology. To move away from the reification of the fictitious that "ethnology" continues, Mafeje proposes the use of "historical categories" that are "not the monopoly of the observer" (Mafeje 1996:35)—that is, categories understood in and through historical context, and understood as historical claims and claims to the historical. Such categories disable the god-trick (Haraway, 1988) through which anthropology has made claim to scholarly authority from above, render the taxonomic irrelevant, and instead foreground the necessity and messiness of speculation and interpretation. Moreover, they underscore that scholarly writing about ethnographic texts must pose itself not as any kind of original source but rather as a translation that is always asking to be contested, corrected, and brought into further conversation.

That the ethnographic texts in question—the original sources—are of various kinds underscores how ethnographic attentions have never been solely scientific, nor

has it been the case that the borders between the commercial, scientific, administrative, and presumptive have been impermeable, with only few openings for crossing. Moreover, while he sees no political value in sustaining the work of anthropology, Mafeje is under no illusions that it is possible to be politically thoughtful while thinking Africa outside of the *ethnographic*. Between the value of the ethnographic as a mode through which to come into conversation with (actual) difference, the multiple violences of its myth-making, and how the history of anthropological scholarship is entangled in the histories of colonialism in whose shadow everyday life must be lived, the ethnographic is not only everywhere on the continent, it is the chief grammar within and against which Africanity is articulated. Crucially, it may also offer African thought a path through the seeming problem of the continent's inescapable inventedness.

This problem is partly a product of old historical habits about how to study the African continent—a reliance on archives, in which colonized subjectivity cannot be found except phantasmatically (Lalu, 2009). It also reflects a recognition of how any encounter marked by uneven power relations will produce uneven transformations, with the less powerful subject internalizing the influence of the powerful[3], and seeks to recognize how colonial administrations (classically, the British and those that followed after them) willfully manipulated the ways colonized subjects related to

[3] This understanding is explicitly articulated by scholars such as Mary Pratt (in *Imperial Eyes)*, but also underlies Monica Hunter's *Reaction to Conquest*, Bronislaw Malinowski's *The Dynamics of Culture Change*, two major early anthropological works concerned with the cultural consequences of the colonial encounter.

their lifeworlds. More broadly, it also reflects an attempt to reckon with how the terms (the borders!) we have to think through these problems are European in origin—and often mythical in character—, and that even the question of whether or not they can be translated onto the non-European places they are used to examine is complicated by the fact of centuries of rule (and so they can and do, even as—when read against many indigenous languages—they cannot and do not). But even if all of these considerations amounted to a full case for Africa, Africanity, and African customary forms to be deemed "invented"—and I am not convinced that it does—so what? The answer can evidently not be to pursue, in place of the Africa that is, the return to some pure Africa prior to its invention[4]. However, it is no more coherent to treat the troubling of ideas of cultural authenticity and facticity as the final task. Invented or not, and however imported the terms in which it is lived, ethnographied difference is both at the heart of much contemporary African life and the most ordinary sign of the limit of assimilationist colonial violence.

By using the term "ethnographic", rather than Mafeje's or the more conventional meaning of "ethnography", I am examining a frame through which subjects are transformed into (among other things) the proper objects of anthropological attention. As such, the "ethnographic" in question is the "ethnographic" that modifies anthropological "texts", "photographs", "objects" and

[4] This accusation is often levelled at African proponents of decoloniality, but rarely at those who make myths of authentic Africa do the work of Protestantism and Catholicism, for example to closet homosexuality or deny abortions.

"methods". That is to say, it is a descriptor of a kind of scholarly object that must always exist in reference to the kind of subject Fatimah Tobing Rony (1996) characterizes as "ethnographiable". More broadly, this anthropological sense of the "ethnographic" tells us that, after the implicit "encounter", the encountered have been grouped—grammatically, adjectivally, have been *modified*—by a common form of knowing that has structured our ability to imagine and relate to the worlds of the (classically, colonized) ethnographiable. So the "ethnographic" here is not only an attribute things possess, a way that things can be—it is also a way of bringing things into being as objects of scholarly interest, as objects of an (ex)colonial world, after coming into encounter with their difference. But while this "ethnographic" is a mode of encounter with an extensive imperial history characterized by its use by sometimes reluctant colonial agents to describe colonized subjects, it is also not reducible to an imperial mode of attention, nor does it reflect conspiratorially fictive encounters with the (formerly) colonized world. Reflecting this, Valentin-Yves Mudimbe writes:

> The African figure *was an empirical fact*, yet by definition it was perceived, experienced, and promoted as the sign of the absolute otherness. (Mudimbe 1994:38; emphasis mine)

This dual grounding—in the real and in malevolent and constructive fiction—is fundamental. The ethnographic reflects the lives people actually live and signals survival against colonial assimilation—and thus the possibility of alternate ways of imagining and living life, of an absolute discourse (Mudimbe, 1988). And it is this grounding in experiential reality that gives the ethnographic force in the service of

colonial violence. But, importantly, this also grounds its power more broadly as a mode through which subjects, objects, practices, places come to be understood. Moreover, despite the proliferation of criticisms of attachments to culture as the product of postcolonial inabilities to see through its colonial invention, this power is not equivalent to that of colonialism.

Specifically, as Mafeje's analysis has shown, the ethnographic is not equivalent to the anthropological. However, the ethnographic does form the experimental, social and *real* basis for most anthropological scholarship (the aspects, read with a late 19th century eye, whose empirical facticity could be mistaken for scientific truth), which is also the mode which we—and potentially with curiosity (Clifford 2003: 26) and care, and ideally unblinded (Cf. Nyamnjoh 2012)—come into encounter with the contingent materiality of how others—how the Others—live. In this way, it may seem that the ethnographic I am describing is coherent with Sherry Ortner's (1995) use of the term, in which the ethnographic is a methodological, political, and ethical approach grounded in a concern with the Geertzian thickness of social experience—and as such forms the ground for anthropology (indeed, seemingly any scholarship on the formerly colonized world), at least when done right. I am sympathetic to the argument that scholarship is weakened by an unwillingness to think with subjectivity as it exists and emerges and insists instead in thinking with the idea of subjects, a habit Ortner ascribes to "thin" work. But ethnographic-as-thick is a compromised concept. First, it is *politically* compromised by its recuperation as the tidily desirable aspects of anthropological positivism—and so Ortner finds an ethnographic not only

without epistemic violence, but one that has ultimately moved beyond it, such that anthropologists can return to the business of doing anthropology post-*Writing Culture*. Second, it is *theoretically* compromised by its unwillingness to think the ethnographic as existing beyond the confines of academic scholarship. It seems necessary to attend to the many public and commercial afterlives of anthropological work, not least as the imperial ideological terrain into which the ethnographic encounter fits as something not uniquely anthropological (and in which its anthropological articulations were not routinely or even especially "thicker" than others). Ortner's ethnographic is a gesture towards methodological attentions to lived experience (and to the lived experience whose difference is inevitably marked as cultural) that are of definite value, but it is ultimately under-thought.

This under-thinking is all the more concerning in that it emerges as a response to work which Ortner identifies as "refusing" this thickness, which not incidentally is work concerned with the political conflicts and "resistance" of typically ethnographied subjects. For Ortner (1995:184), thickness promises an "enriched" subject, instead of the "impoverished" subject who comes into view when subjectivity itself is thrown into question. This enriched subject is then a requirement for questions of resistance (which, here, more broadly mean "power") to gain force. In a peculiar way, not only has anthropology redeemed and overcome its imperial past, it has become the terms of possibility for adequately thinking counter-imperialism! More troubling still, the *anthropologization* of the subject is no longer a question. Not only is the epistemic power of anthropology mitigated by the

"counterforce" of the anthropologized (Ortner 1995:189), it does not warrant suggestion that the subject in question may not want to be represented, that those studying over-anthropologized communities may have an obligation to balance the pragmatic need to communicate ideas with an ethical consideration for opacity (Glissant 1997). Moreover, this argument ignores the fact that scholarship can indeed be "transformative" (Ortner 1995:191)—and without being "romantic" (Ortner 1995:177; cf. Abu-Lughod 1990)—while focusing on doing something other than articulating the vagaries, contradictions, and general messiness of social life. Some collapsing of this mess seems necessary for work to reflect upon the political rather than report it, and such reflections must be part of any task seeking to examine the ethnographic as a form of subjectivity and subject-making, especially when thinking with a continent in which the ethnographic has been unparalleled as a definitional force.

If the ethnographic is what has come to define how the African continent is understood, what Julia Kristeva articulates as "abjection" comes to define how Africa and Africanity are *related* to. The figure of the African (a figure who is marked both as Black and Indigenous[5], and whose blackness and indigeneity differently come into and out of focus) is made visible through an *abject* relationship to the

[5] I have chosen to capitalize these terms only when referring to the symbolic encounter with Blackness and Indigeneity, with a subject who figures as these. I have also chosen to use the term "Indigenous", despite its somewhat awkward fit to the African continent, because I am seeking to distinguish between racializing and indigenizing processes that I will argue come together in the figure of the "Native".

ethnographic (as mode of attention, encounter, response through which Africanity retains the residual real). Indeed, Mafeje's "alterity" is congruent with Kristeva's (1982:2) "radically excluded" abject that propels the affected to "the place where meaning collapses", both of which resonate with Spivak's (1988) unspeaking subaltern. Kristeva's abject is not simply the spiritually or physically degraded, but rather the target of a specific relation of simultaneous compulsion and revulsion, matched by an affective dyad of temptation (or fascination) and horror. Kristeva writes:

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. *It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire*, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. *Apprehensive*[6]*, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects*. A certainty protects it from the shameful—a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, *a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.*
>
> When I am beset[7] by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable object. The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an

[6] In the French, this word is "apeuré" (Kristeva 1980:1), frightened; this distinction is important as "apprehensive" means both fearful and *anxious* (the latter of which is not a meaning present in *apeuré)*; this translation choice thus seems to weaken the distinction Kristeva poses later in the passage, between the abject and the *objet petit a*, and more generally in *Powers of Horror* between abjection and desire.

[7] In the French, this word is "envahie" (Kristeva 1980:1), invaded; "beset" implies a threat that has yet to breach the borders, here of the symbolic order; but abjection is rather an absolute breach. Thinking this in terms of its original meaning, this could be translated as "overwhelmed by", or (perhaps splitting the difference) "encroached upon".

> ob-jest [ob-jeu][8], an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. *The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I.* If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, *what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.* (Kristeva 1982:1-2; emphasis mine)

The encounter with the place where meaning collapses—where the conditions of possibility for social life are unsettled—is more than a threat. It is a traumatic event, emerging from both ordinary and spectacular circumstances, that must (and cannot fully) be disavowed—the affective and relational dualisms that characterize abjection (the response to the abject) aim to resolve the crisis posed by the abject, to suture the symbolic order, but the abject remains in excess hinged as it is to "a reality that, if [acknowledged], annihilates" the subject (Kristeva 1982:2). This relationship between the abject and the real is paramount. While the ethnographic is the sign through which African subjects become truly, mythically, Native—and which recursively

[8] The choice of the word ob-jest reflects Roudiez's attempt to maintain the playfulness and poetics of Kristeva's original paralleling of "ob-jet" and "ob-jeu" (Kristeva 1980:1). In the clause that follows, Roudiez translates "petit «*a*»" (Ibid.) as "an otherness", in so doing somewhat obscuring the specificity of the *objet petit a* as not otherness itself, but that within the other that is the object of desire. Kristeva's distinction, while not as elaborated in *Powers of Horror* as that between abject and object, is generative: the abject broadly shares the property of constituting social life of the *objet petit a* (abjection more accurately establishes the conditions of its possibility), though with inverted relations to meaning (the *objet petit a* enabling its constitution, the abject demanding resolution for the social order to be maintained). But where the *object petit a* is a remainder of the symbolic order, the abject is a remainder of the *real*.

comes to define the African as such, it is also the sign through which lived African difference comes into view, and the facticity of this difference exceeds its symbolism. As such, following from Kristeva, the ethnographic becomes that which the African subject—and, in different ways, the Black subject—is at once forced to disavow and not permitted to escape. This operates in mirrored form for the European subject, for whom blackness and nativeness form a critical symbolic root for European anxieties, and for whom abjection can be understood as an affect of European imperial subjectivity.

Throughout the dissertation, the epistemic violence that seems to circle the ethnographic appears to be the product of how the ethnographic is made abject. This may suggest that even the power of the ethnographic lies within its abjection (and this certainly appears to be the case for the witchcraft objects in the second chapter). But there seems to be something about how the ethnographic is grounded in real experience that may serve as a generative point of origin for a different kind of political possibility that has yet to fully emerge. This seems to be at the heart of Mafeje's distinction between the alterity-producing anthropological and the ethnographic, which—while retaining recursive reference to the anthropological—is something at once slightly and altogether different to it. Reading Mafeje and Kristeva together, anthropology can be understood as a strategy for the management of the crisis of meaning posed by the ethnographic *abject*. And as the ethnographic carries such layered meaning—a referential relationship to colonial fictions about the Native, as a result a relationship of seeming equivalence with the continent

understood to be the absolute origin of both figures, but also a sense of holding meaning about how subjects act their lives and inhabit their own experience—its abjection is layered in meaning too. There is the abjection by anthropology, but also many others, all towards the end of "safeguarding" the conditions of possibility for (ex)colonial culture (Cf. Kristeva 1982:2).

Following this reading, what would be necessary is a different mode of relation to the ethnographic. Though in different terms, that was largely the challenge that the authors of *Writing Culture*, *Time and the Other*, *Anthropology and the Historical Imagination*, and their many unpublished precursors and their published successors (most notably the journal *Transforming Anthropology*) took up for the discipline of anthropology. The most obvious culprit for this relation within anthropology would be those various texts, belonging to the ethnological genre Mafeje points to, that minimize the ethnographic in pursuit of broader comparatist theoretical truth; this is a mode of writing that is understood to be dead but that has successors in various modes of even thoughtful comparatism, that nevertheless intentionally or unintentionally strive to make the other comprehensible on the terms of the self. But the trouble with even the anthropological work that does *not* do this is the sense that there is something, if not exactly natural then at least worth naturalizing, about a fascination with the ethnographic. This fascination—which appears on the surface to be equatable to a care for difference, a concern for the ethnographied[9]—does not represent a change of relation from abjection, but instead

[9] This appearance of care and concern under the guise of fascination is reflected in

a change of direction within it. What the objects in this dissertation seem to suggest is that the way to not abject the ethnographic—the way to not abject Africa, blackness, indigeneity—is to become willing to inhabit (with) it instead. In "staying with the trouble" in this dissertation (Cf. Haraway 2016), I am attempting to write about the ethnographic in a way coherent with this intuition.

By "staying with the trouble", I am also seeking to resist an impulse that is common in African Studies, to manage the problem of the ethnographic by appeal to the historical. This is often articulated as a specific refusal of the more fictional ethnographic ideas that surround the continent. In one of the most absolute articulations of this position, Paulin Hountondji (1981) invokes the diversity of African position and experience, and the role of anthropology in producing a mythology of African experience, as evidence against any project of "Africanity". Hountondji's remarks are written as deliberate provocations in the midst of a broader critique of ethnophilosophy, in which the collective Africa in question is willfully constructed through anthropological writing and in the process uncritically nativist; it is also significant that Hountondji's more recent thought wrestles with how to think African indigenous forms after colonialism[10]. In light of this, I am not responding to these remarks in the spirit of critiquing *his* thought, but rather because they nevertheless crystallize a sophisticated version of a set of positions on African

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Ortner's case for thickness, discussed above.

[10] For an example, see his 2002 chapter "Knowledge Appropriation in a Postcolonial Context" in Hoppers, ed. *Indigenous Knowledge and the Integration of Knowledge Systems: Towards a Philosophy of Articulation;* or his 1997 edited collection, *Endogenous Knowledge.*

thought, and the possibility of laying reasonable claim to anything called "Africanity", that are most often left unsaid, and that together stifle the possibility of truly recognizing the historical meaning of the wealth of African lived experience. Hountondji writes:

> My definition of Africanity, like that which I propose for philosophy, is firstly a provocation. It aims to recall that in the most ordinary sense of the term, Africa is a continent, not a philosophy or a system of values, that this word designates a portion of the world, nothing more, that this concept is a geographic concept, empirical and contingent, not determinable *a priori*. The African is not necessarily someone who believes in God [or][11]—as so many

[11] My insertion. Elsewhere, I have sought to keep my translation as close as possible to the original text. A note here that I differ in minor ways from Mudimbe's (1988:50) translation of portions of this passage; most notably Mudimbe translates "appauvrir" as "weaken", where I translate it as "impoverish" (an alternate translation Mudimbe offers in the ensuing analysis) in order to retain the word's reference to "richesse" (wealth in my trans., richness in Mudimbe's) in the clause that precedes it. I have chosen to translate it in this way to retain the force and poetics of Hountondji's provocation. The passage in the original French (undivided):

Ma définition de l'africanité, comme celle que je propose de la philosophie, est avant tout polemique. Elle vise à rappeler qu'au sens le plus courant du terme, l'Afrique est un continent, non une philosophie ou un système de valeurs, que ce mot désigne une portion du monde, sans plus, que ce concept est un concept géographique, empirique et contingent, non déterminable *a priori*. L'Africain, ce n'est pas nécessairement quelqu'un qui croit en Dieu — comme aiment à le ressasser tant d'anthropologues bien pensants — quelqu'un qui pratique le culte des ancêtres et croit à la réincarnation des morts; ce n'est même pas — dans un autre registre — quelqu'un qui, forcément, lutte pour la libération de son peuple (au sense où on est parfois tenté de parler du <<vrai Africain>> par opposition au faux Africain ou à l'Africain insuffisamment africain); c'est tout simplement quelqu'un qui se rattache, par son ascendance biologique, à cetter portion de monde qu'on appelle l'Afrique, qu'il soit par ailleurs croyant ou athée, pieux ou impie envers les ancêtres, patriote ou politiquement inconscient, révolutionnaire ou réactionnaire, etc. L'Afrique comprise comme un concept géographique, c'est la possibilité reconnue d'une pluralité de valuers concordantes ou discordantes, le lieu de contradictions multiples engendrant, par leur mouvement, le mouvement même de l'histoire. Il fallait donc commencer

> well-meaning anthropologists like to think—someone who practices ancestor worship and believes in the reincarnation of the dead; the African is not even—in another register—someone who, necessarily, fights for the liberation of his people (the sense in which it is sometimes tempting to speak of the "true African" in opposition to the false African or the insufficiently African African); the African is simply someone who is connected, by biological ancestry, to this portion of the world which is called Africa, whether he is believer or atheist, pious or impious towards the ancestors, patriot or politically unaware, revolutionary or reactionary, etc. Africa understood as a geographic concept, this is recognized possibility of a plurality of concordant or discordant values, the place of contradictions engendering, by their movement, the very movement of history. (Hountondji 1981:52; my trans., emphases original)

While it seems that Hountondji is retaining the geographic sense of "Africa", his proposed definition of "Africanity" reduces it to a genetic claim to belonging, something nearly amounting to a diaspora-wide one-drop-rule Blackness-as-Africanity. I say "nearly" because there obviously are non-Black continental subjects with claims to (recent) African origin. This racial moment is worth pausing on. First it strips Africanity (and African forms of racialization) of any specificity for the sake of refusing fictions that appear anthropological; black Africans and black people elsewhere are all Africans, undifferentiable, and racial Africanity is returned to the

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par *démythifier* l'africanité en la réduisant à un *fait* — le fait tout simple, et, en soi, parfaitement neutre, de l'appartenance à l'Afrique — en dissipant le halo mystique de valeurs arbitrairement greffé sur ce fait par les idéologues de l'identité africaine. Il fallait, pour penser la complexité de notre histoire, rendre à sa simplicite originaire le théâtre de cette histoire et, pour penser la richesse des traditions africaines, *appauvrir* résolutement le concept d'Afrique, le *délester* de toutes les connotations éthiques, religieuses, philosophiques, politiques, etc., dont l'avait surchargé une longe traadition anthropologique, et dont l'effect le plus visible était de fermer l'horizon, de clore prématurément l'histoire.

table (and this is a necessary return) by refusing the African as Native. Second, because part of the goal of this undifferentiability is the refusal of the idea of a true African, and specifically the refusal of the idea that Africanity might be a political orientation or praxis, the racial and post-imperial reckoning that should characterize trans-Saharan thought is effaced, replaced with a profoundly unsimple and unneutral sense of Africanity that manages to have very little to do with the terrain it defines as its purview, nor its history. Hountondji continues:

> It was thus necessary to begin by *demythologizing* Africanity, reducing it to a *fact*—the simple, and, in fact, perfectly neutral fact of belonging to Africa—by dispelling the mystical halo of values arbitrarily grafted onto this fact by the ideologues of African identity. It was necessary, to think the wealth of African tradition, to resolutely *impoverish* the concept of Africa, to *strip* it of all ethical, religious, philosophical, political, etc. connotations, with which a long anthropological tradition has overloaded it, and whose most visible effect was to close the horizon, to bring a premature end to history. (Hountondji 1981:52; my trans., emphases original)

Africanity here is incoherent unless it is stripped of all meaning; to resolve this, Hountondji proposes a 'simple' redefinition, in the hopes of expanding the continent's historical horizon. Instead, it seems to me that it does the work of actually foreclosing what had only appeared not to be possible. To resolve the problem posed by nativism, Hountondji offers a fictively neutral Western frame for what historical contingency and difference mean, in which Africa is plural to the point of meaninglessness, and with the effect of delegitimizing political projects animated by a full sense of Africanity. The rejection of a claim to "true" Africanity appears here to be in especially bad faith, since it criticizes the artifice of a project

aiming to produce Africanity, rather than describe it, and further ignores the value of an articulation of affiliative commitment contra one of identitarian belonging. But most oddly, this rejection is predicated upon the idea that the ethical, philosophical and political connotations of "Africanity" are somehow *anthropological* in character, and that the wealth of African tradition which will emerge once Africanity is stripped of myth is somehow not. It seems that here, Hountondji has inverted the scope of anthropological responsibility to knowledge about the continent, rendering it irrelevant to the precise object of its study (particularized African alterity) and crediting it with a depth of authority on a concept to which it has only contributed through the *scale* of its claim to authority to the particular, and even then only as one among many imperial voices. Moreover, as the authority anthropology claims to both the African particular and the universal is grounded in lived ethnographied difference, the refusal of Africanity here registers as reflecting a desire *not* to be ethnographiable, at the expense of those whose lives inhabit that register.

However, the "tradition" the impoverished Africa might produce a wealth of is significant in another way: it is a past-coded articulation of the ethnographic, promising not living custom, but enlivened historical practice. This gesture to the historical is not without sacrifice: we lose the presentness of African difference—of Black Indigeneity—as experienced, practiced, desired and remembered by multiple continental and diasporic subjects. And, while attempting to valorize the customary, coevality is nevertheless denied (Fabian 1983). In fact, history becomes the discipline which is invited to resolve what I have described as the crisis of meaning posed by

the ethnographic abject. Importantly, this crisis is now post-anthropological. The ethnographic no longer presents what appears to be its own intrinsic (and which is actually a European colonial sense of its) crisis, but is further made abject by the impossibility of disentangling real from myth, and thus the anthropologization of the ethnographic brings African life itself into crisis. The attachment to history here is thus an attachment to the possibility of continuing to abject the ethnographic, only now ostensibly because of its grounding in the unwanted fictive instead of the unwanted real. As a result, it seems that the more useful response to the mess of meaning the ethnographic poses for the African continent is to abandon the fiction of essence, of neat definition, of thought outside of history, memory, power, desire.

In *Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe wrestles with these problematics, in a book that broadly is examining what it means to constitute the field of "African philosophy", and more broadly what it means to think of "African thought". In fact, Mudimbe uses this argument of Hountondji's as an evidentiary point regarding continental frustrations with anthropology, and the grounds for its refusal, within a broader analysis of African claims to historical subjectivity with fraught attachments to European modes of thought. This tension between anthropological fiction and the attachment to history that emerges in an attempt to dismiss the former is of sharp significance. In *Invention*, it offers partial grounding for an exploration of the terms of possibility for thinking an "absolute discourse" (Mudimbe 1988:213) belonging to the African continent in ways exceeding the geographic or lineal but nevertheless irreducible to imperial episteme. This absolute discourse is a constitutive

terrain for an African practice of knowing that is legible in the intimate and ordinary acts of everyday life, that is not reducible to the imperial (nor to any fantasy of the precolonial), and that instead reflects a claim to culture, knowledge, discourse, Africanity.

In *Idea of Africa*, Mudimbe extends this project to consider how to examine Africa and Africanity itself, in light of the task of navigating the imperial discourses that in some ways appear to have created, and in others to have obfuscated, this absolute discourse. In the chapter titled "Which Idea of Africa", Mudimbe (1994:61) reads ethnographic museums as tasked broadly with "converting overseas territories to the self and imagination of the West", and in doing this work in the shared service of ethnological reason and colonialism. As such, he reads their "representations" as forms that "should be negated in the long run", as they remain "witness to a "primitive" past". But as Mafeje noted, "the refutation of 'ethnological reason' does not necessarily dissolve the grammar of ethnographic texts" (1996:35). Instead, it seems necessary to reckon with the 'equivocity' of such texts, rather than attempt to rid them of myth, in attempts to think African subjectivity and the discourse that emerges from it. As a result, in examining African material culture in this dissertation—and, more broadly, extending this approach to other ethnographic genres of African materials—I push back against Mudimbe's idea that African museum objects are best understood not through the frames of anthropology or art history—not as artefacts or artworks—but as *worked objects*. For Mudimbe, worked objects are historical accounts, subject to many of the same constraints that shape

how we must understand accounts within the archives of colonial administrations, but with a critical distinction: the worked object is given material form by *those whom it is tasked with representing*. Mudimbe (1994:68) writes:

> Indeed, African worked objects signify an "archival" dimension with a commemorative function. They impress onto their own society a silent discourse and, simultaneously, as loci of memory, recite silently their own past and that of the society that made them possible.

Mudimbe's worked object does not exactly reproduce the appeal to historical subjectivity that shadows the Hountondji excerpted above. While this object is understood as a material practice of memory, it is also a living one, "reproducing, in its own successive concrete images, its conceptual and cultural destiny, which, often and explicitly, is a testimony to a will to remember or to forget certain things" (Mudimbe 1994:69). Indeed, the silence of the worked object's discourse points to a necessary familiarity, to a way of knowing accessible through recognition and practice, and not readily articulable even as it comes to punctuate a form of collective thought. Moreover, the object has a dual character as both instantiation of the continuity and transformation of heritage and functional, socially useful thing. As such, the worked object exceeds the mere account, and offers a vision of memory that has been complicated by a refusal to situate it in the past. But in following Hountondji's resistance to ethnographic fictions, Mudimbe appears to underestimate their importance in producing the ethnographic grammars against which African life is lived. This choice is especially striking given that the relationship between a "silent discourse" and a recitation of history that Mudimbe ascribes to worked objects is so

commensurable with the recursive authority to define and describe identity-bound social life that characterizes Mafeje's "ethnography".

Thus, borrowing from Mudimbe an attention to the worked object, but refusing to impoverish it of the worst of its ethnographic meaning, I attend to material culture as wilfully fragmentary and obscure texts, operating within any or many of the genres of memoir, manifesto, satire, speculation, and critique. And while it is accessible only partially and speculatively—decoding these accounts is "an ambitious and, at the same time, completely ridiculous task" (Mudimbe 1994:67)—, these seeming obstacles to rigor appear to actually generative openings for theoretical inquiry, and openings made all the richer by their status as originary forms of self-writing. I retain an attention to Mudimbe's "three minimal criteria" through which to understand worked objects—the social role of their producer, the broader conditions of social reproduction[12], and the objects' function. Indeed, it is by attending to the ethnographic character of such materials that one might reckon with how "the 'primitives' can digest—and have been, at least intellectually, digesting—the West and its mythologies" (Mudimbe 1994:69). Reading the ethnographic means encountering a subject who is brought into subjectivity by the violent machinations of imperial capitalism, who is navigating colonial legibility while exceeding it, and for whom the obligations of historical memory are articulated in language that totalizes

[12] I am also doubtful of the logic under which Mudimbe (1994:67) here produces the following list of social subjects, which appears to (poorly) taxonomize rather than think the production of subjectivity: "blacksmiths, healers, hunters, members of secret societies, women".

social life into the reduced form in which it was colonially legible. Put differently, reading the ethnographic means reading moments of colonial encounter, in the hopes of gaining new insights from understanding how the unfolding of these encounters reveals a structure of possibility and constraint for African politics and discourse alike.

This task necessitated an experimental and multi-sited approach. This multi-sitedness was not for the sake of comparison for comparison's sake—not to illuminate by contrast—but rather aimed to take seriously what it means to think about a continental project of Africanity, and what such a project means in light of how Africanity is forever shadowed by the ethnographic. As these two concerns are radically connected, but appear in distinct proportions in different African contexts—with one or the other emerging as primary in different places (if they are not both wholly suppressed), and in ways which make these difficult to examine jointly without the inclusion of differently-situated analysis—a single-sited approach, however rich, could not come to respond to these larger questions at the level at which I have posed them. Moreover following a reconstruction of the Cape-to-Cairo route, this project became grounded not only in Cape-to-Cairo as a particular pathway through the most fantastic and ideologically loaded elements of British imperialism, but also in the territorial, racial, economic and cultural configurations of Africanity that have emerged through, alongside and despite that fantasy. Thinking with these configurations means thinking them as they emerge within various ethnographic genres, and so also thinking them as expressions of a relationship to

the ethnographic and to Africanity that is distinct from the ways they *operate* in relationship to these two ideas.

While the objects studied in this dissertation are varied—museum objects, museum exhibits, commercial photo postcards, maps, and literary texts are all read with and against distinctly anthropological literatures—the dissertation is grounded in their commonality as the situated forms put into the urgent service of creating (or, later, displacing) ethnographic subjects. Moreover, these various ethnographic materials collectively reveal different aspects of the functioning of the ethnographic at different places and points in time, as well as different ways the ethnographic has been knotted with and reflective of imperial capitalist imperatives. In the process, my work attends not only to the production of culture, but following from Mafeje and Mudimbe alike (not to mention the countless others), excavates from the ethnographic a historical materialist mode of account, through which I seek to surface the processes by which race and culture—understood already as the hinge for African subjection—might also offer experiential grounds for a different kind of politics on the continent. In doing so, this dissertation becomes able to surface problems of region-making, the travel of ideas—the transformation and entanglement of ideas against regions, within and against histories—that, when placed into analytical conversation, offer a faint sketch of what an African absolute discourse, and ensuing forms of potentiality, might look like.

In light of this, I am concerned with identifying and defining the ethnographic in ways that include both the subjects and objects of anthropological attention and

other materials that exist outside of anthropological intent—perhaps without any intentions at all—but within a structure of relationship to anthropology. By doing this work with attention to the African continent—the context which is overdetermined as defining and defined by the ethnographic—this dissertation is also examining the production of "Africa" as a site of sociopolitical possibility. However, in so doing I resist the impulse to consider Africa to be trapped by this ethnographic cast—trapped by the past, by culture, by radical otherness—recalling that there is an ease with which attacks upon this idea of trappedness are reactive to (and accepting of) colonial paradigms in ways that reproduce, rather than disrupt, African alterity. Instead, I examine the obfuscatory role that the ethnographic has played in disguising other valences of imperial power. Furthermore, I attend to how the ethnographic has gained this capacity through the scale with which African subjects and objects have been cast as such. As a result, rather than building my work against the absence of African subjectivity in colonial archives, I study a plurality of different kinds of collections of materials with claims to ethnographic and historical truth, attending to these as varying modalities of historical account, articulated by messily situated colonized subjects. Thus I examine the political consequences of understanding an object to be an ethnographic one. In doing so, I explore how an attention to the ethnographic illuminates the role of anthropology (and its layered, extra-curricular aftermaths) in making imperial and neocolonial possibility, and how such an attention accordingly provides an idiom both through which to read the political structures of the neocolonial present, and through which

to expand African political imagination. Crucially, this idiom does not offer a simply nativist narrative of redemption, in which the already-desired emerges as the viable alternative to the already-known. Instead, this dissertation stays with the ethnographic trouble Africa is in, and the entangled political and epistemic disability and possibility this trouble has produced.

The first chapter, "Un/Canny: Analysis of a Social Situation in a Carved Stick for Sale to Europeans," examines one object collected in the 1930s by the anthropologist Max Gluckman. The object is a two-toned wooden staff, with two uncanny carvings: one of a man's head on the top of the stick, and one of a female figure on the stem. I argue that the relationship between these two figures articulates experiences of colonial domination and an understanding of the colonial gaze that situates the colonized Zulu subject not as subhuman or inhuman but as at once human and not, and as such as a figure possessed of abjection, who can neither be related to nor a relation disavowed, and who, by virtue of this impossibility, disrupts the order of the (colonial) social world. Crucially, this abjection is not a statement of real or fixed circumstance, but rather a contested political claim that is refused, reframed and winked at by the object. Moreover, the complex sense of the abject that is articulated in this object reverberates throughout the following chapters, in different ways, coming to signal a recurring mode of relationship to Africanity (as blackness and indigeneity).

The second chapter, "Sovereign Magic: on the Nature of Witchcraft in Livingstone, Zambia" studies the entanglement of Christianity and magic in

Livingstone. This is an opportunity to read two practices as congruent, where the maligned "witchcraft" is echoed in the practices of Pentecostal churches and in the Catholic magic of transubstantiation and glossed in ways that marry European witchcraft mythology and local witchcraft practices. But it is also an opportunity to read their difference. Local witchcraft practices–and local witches–are understood to be involved in the creation and management of death, which is then reflected in their aesthetics. Working with a set of objects previously studied by the anthropologist Barrie Reynolds for his work, *Magic, Divination, and Witchcraft among the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia*, I consider how the objects, as things often shrouded and buried, composed of human and animal body parts in superimposition, offer an abject aesthetics of witchcraft. Following from the first chapter, this chapter thinks through this aesthetics as representing an abject, heretical—and absolutely sovereign—practice of counter-modernity. Read against contemporary anthropological writing within the "occult turn", these materials ultimately reveal the faults in the political romanticization of agency and the resistant, while nevertheless underscoring the necessity of forms of political imagination and organization that radically differ from—and exceed the possibilities of—the sovereign.

The third chapter "Postcards from Zanzibar: Imperial Geographies of Mechanicity and Absence" is a study of early twentieth century postcards depicting the Zanzibar archipelago. Through various visual and textual tropes, these postcards cast as "native" Zanzibari subjects who would have been enslaved either at the time of photographing or in the very recent past, and trafficked to Zanzibar following

slave-raiding in Central and Eastern Africa earlier in their lives or lineages. By examining how the framing of these subjects as "native" naturalizes their continued exploitation just as emancipated Zanzibar is brought into British dominion, this chapter interrogates the competitive imperial motivations for the European pursuit of abolition in Central and East Africa, and their implications for understanding the contemporary disarticulation of Arabness and Africanity on the African continent.

This analysis is developed in the fourth chapter, "Between two Africas: Nubia in the ethnographic imagination". This chapter analyzes the symbolic value of Sudan, as the sub/Saharan borderland between two Africas, of Upper Egypt as the country's remaining anthropologized terrain, and of Cairo, as at once the terminal point in the Cape-to-Cairo route and emblematic of further linkages – to Europe, and the Arab world. This chapter explores how the ethnographic enactment of continental identity in these museums offers a unique space to think through the region-making implicit in anthropological vision. Woven through this analysis of the museums is a discussion of two literary texts - a novel, and a book of short stories, both set in and concerned with "Nubia" - through and against the differing attachments in their narratives - to culture, to politics, to history - and the ways they are understood to communicate Nubianness by their reviewers and readers. By studying these museums and texts together, I explore how the disavowal of the ethnographic (in all of its racial and cultural senses) in Sudan and Egypt is an attempt to narrate of capitalist modernity in terms of ancient lineages, and against any sense of relation to the rest of the African continent. I argue that, in resurfacing the

ethnographic, we may find a resistant frame through which to think Africanity north of the Sahara.

Across these four chapters—and in ways reflective of my encounters with the Cape-to-Cairo route as a field site—a set of problems common to inquiry about Africa emerge through different facets. Problems of time, culture, modernity, religion, slavery, race, region, continent arise in tandem with problems of scholarly authority and political legitimation. It is not the task of this dissertation to resolve these problems, nor even to offer certain resolution to the questions that motivate its inquiry and through which these problems gain newfound urgency. However, by staging these questions together with the ethnographic—as approach, encounter, method, but also as (often abjected) sign for the (often abjected) African continent—this dissertation works to illuminate the connections between these problems and a broader set of epistemic and political processes that have shaped colonial and ex-colonial African social and political thought. By working through the role of the race-making, culture-making, and region-making valences of the ethnographic (and in many ways, of anthropology) in forging African imperial possibility during and after formal colonialism, this dissertation aims to refigure debates on African circumstance towards a new examination of African possibility.

## Analysis of a Social Situation in a Carved Stick for Sale to Europeans

> "The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist."
>
> Fred Moten, *In the Break*, p1.
>
> "I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance."
>
> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p87

In the passage of *Black Skin, White Masks* from which this quote is sourced, Frantz Fanon articulates a sense of impossibility, where black subjects are disabled from existing as anything but black, in the eyes of the white—a look which, Fanon argues, is impossible to escape or return (Fanon 1986:83). This trap of colonial recognition, of the violence of colonial thingification, is one of the concerns of this chapter. Fred Moten's insistence that subjects can resist—can refuse—the terms of their objecthood, offers another point of departure. Reading these moments together in another way, one finds that there are objects that can refuse, (even) while there are subjects who cannot. This space of constraint, in which modes of resistance and acquiescence and everything in between are confined by whatever openings colonial habit and practice allow them—this is where one must position the subjects and objects of this chapter.

This chapter examines how processes of becoming-Native (of becoming a raced and indigenized African colonial subject) are articulated in a carved object

collected in the 1930s by the anthropologist Max Gluckman, for the Museum of Ethnology of the University of the Witwatersrand. The object, accessioned as a Zulu "Carved Stick for Sale to Europeans", is a two-toned wooden staff mimicking a knobkerrie in its form, with two uncanny carvings: one of a man's head on the top of the Stick, and one of a female figure on the stem[13]. The particular form of these two representations—and how this form works with the tones of the wood, and how these representations work together—cannily articulates experiences of colonial domination, and an understanding of the colonial gaze, in a tangled account of Zulu gender, race and indigeneity. By examining the carving's articulation of Zulu abjecthood, one finds that the ethnographic and the abject are the form and relation that reflect colonized understandings of colonialism and its processes of subject-formation. The entanglement of this within South Africa's history clarifies that the ethnographic is a modality of political economic articulation that is grounded in but not reducible to ideas of culture and colonialism alike. Instead, it reflects a European crisis when faced with an African ordinary that then comes to produce a European ordinary predicated upon an African crisis.

The Stick invites an analysis of colonial subjectivation in which African subjects are at once black and indigenous, and in which such subjects are not racialized as subhuman, or nonhuman, but as at once human and not. This is an analysis of subjectivation from more than the margins: it comes from a place

[13] In order to avoid terminological confusion, from this point forward I refer to this object as the Stick or the carving.

rendered abject, that cannily and uncannily equivocates between recognizing this interpellation and ridiculing it. These concepts are especially useful when grounded in the knowledge that racial and colonial encounters produced different experiences of the world (Fanon 1986:116), and that psychoanalysis offers an archival—or ethnographic (Doane, 1991:211)—account of European colonial subjectivity. Like other archives of the colonial encounter, this is a messy one, revealing as much about the anxious, defensive, European attempt at mastery of world and self as about the grasping contingency of European empire. Against this, the Stick reveals a sense of Zulu identity, marked by the specific threats colonialism posed to gendered social life, that is grounded in a sense of its own *epistemic* mastery. This articulation of Zulu identity does not offer a resistant frame for African studies, but rather instantiates the promise of an outside to colonial ideology—perhaps, a kind of sovereign position—from which questions of blackness, indigeneity, and the ethnographic are brought into relief.

The Stick makes this critique—perhaps is able to do so—through several layers of opacity. As an object, its materiality immediately allows it to be dismissed as a site from which to understand culture (Geertz 1973:12), but even in contexts where its materiality is not considered an obstacle—such as museums of ethnology—the Stick is still not a natural fit. Aimed as it was for sale to a European, the carving's accession offers a challenge to anthropological ideas of authenticity. Considered an art object—or, at least, a craft object—the Stick's aesthetics come to exist almost for their own sake, with its sophisticated finishing and detailed work coming to evidence

this aesthetic and the skill of its carver in producing it. In this process its specific contextual argument—rooted as much in ideas of Zuluness as the experience of the colonial encounter and resultant enclosure of a Zulu community—is elided. By thinking the aesthetic and the ethnographic together—the latter, with the help of the text Gluckman wrote from the same context in which the Stick was carved—the problems raised by ethnographic vision and the art-historical gaze, while highlighted, give way to the claims made by the Stick itself, and the possibilities that emerge from taking its agency (Gell 1998) seriously.

Through this analysis, this Stick offers an example of how African material culture can articulate experiences and critiques of European settlement, race-making, and—more broadly—colonization on the African continent. Instead of being the European projection of colonial anxieties into a fixed result—or, in other renderings, the transformation of this projection into some later racial essence—this Stick uses the abject as an opportunity to theorize from below a knowledge of European colonial subjectivation that exceeds even that of the anthropologist tasked with studying it, and in doing so demonstrate that there remains a world beyond the reach of the imperial hand and gaze, even as that world is continually threatened by European colonial and apartheid power. Moreover, the Stick's composite and uncanny account of Native-making speaks to urgent debates within African Studies about the present status of culture and tradition in light of what now seems an inescapable coloniality, about the possibility (and desirability) of thinking Africans as indigenous, and about the utility and specificity of "blackness" for thinking about the

ex-colonial African continent. The Stick's uncanny representations of abjecthood gain their theoretical resonance as articulations of a form of colonial race-making that extends to the present (McClintock 2013:71)—and across the Afro-diasporic world (Scott 2010). Importantly, these articulations are at their most potent when they are read through the Stick's identity-claiming ethnographic practices, rather than when it is read primarily through its aesthetics, as an attention to the ethnographic claims in such objects underscores the effaced African ordinary in items relegated to museums.

This carving is not what it appears at first glance or upon close looking. Instead, it reveals itself through the very multiplicity of encounter that makes the object so significant. One of a set of four knobkerries and similar objects collected by Max Gluckman during his fieldwork in what was then Zululand, and accessioned with other objects to the Wits Museum of Ethnology in 1938, the Stick is immediately striking. Its polished two-toned wood, its detailed carvings and its form—mimicking a knobkerrie in shape, but with a smaller decorative carving in place of the knob and another carving upon the stem all give it the character of an object that, unlike much of the rest of Gluckman's accession, is at home within an art museum, a fact signaled by its naming. Both carvings are representations of people—a Zulu man's head on the top; a Zulu woman standing upright on the stem.

Upon closer looking, the representations on the stem were striking in their uncanniness, and deeply unsettling as a result of how evenly this mapped onto colonial ideas of the Zulu subject, and colonized African subject more broadly. The

head on the top has two small, close-set carved out circles for eyes. Eyebrows are carved and blackened on. A carved line for the mouth, extending beyond the span of the brows. The ears, probably the most complex part of the head carving, have defined details (an identifiable tragus, helix), with eye-holes which here represent the ear canal. The head wears an *umqhele*, a headband, signaling its Zulu maleness. From the neck down, the rest of the Stick begins, incorporating the entirety of the Stick into the representation of the head. The *umthombothi* wood had been carved such that its two tones run vertically along the Stick. About three quarters of this is a lighter tone, which runs around most of the back of the object. The darker tone encompasses the head on the top of the Stick excepting a small patch, the figure carved into the center excepting certain edges of the body, and a narrow stripe of wood connecting these and extending down the Stick. The dark-toned portions are thus both highlighting the details that are carved into the Stick, and racializing them. It thus cannot be incidental what these representations look like, nor that within this nexus of uncanny racialization, the head becomes personed, carrying within its body, or as its body, a very strange figure.

This figure is comprised of a head, a body with unusual proportions (visible in profile especially). This body wears a waist-belt and short skirt with a flap covering the genitalia and inner thigh. The body has breasts, and is wearing the appropriate attire for a young Zulu woman, and is both easily and inescapably legible as "woman". But studying the head, it is scarcely human-like, at best uncannily humanoid, but really only in relation to a body that signals human slightly better. The

face reads as primate, lacking even ears (instead having indentations on the sides of the head). The eyes, nose, mouth are like the head carving, but their placement on this head disallows their being easily read as human (and thus does work to undo the humanness the head on the Stick more easily assumes), even as the figure is necessarily read as a Zulu woman. On both top head and on the body carving, the eye-holes look dead, empty; on body carving, with the limp/dangling pose and animalistic rendering, the eyes appear zombified, as those on the head carving come, in turn, to appear.

Even the more-human body is not really human-like upon closer looking. The limbs are oddly rounded and swell at the (oddly placed) joints. The torso has very unusual proportions. The buttocks are oddly positioned, and matched by (one) oddly large shoulder/bicep on the carving. Strangest of all, and adding to this carnival of the monstrous and uncanny, are the hands and feet on this carving. The "hands" are claw-like stumps, with indentations between fingers carved into them, very gently—not so much to be fingers, as to let the viewer know that the forms at the end of the arms are complete and should be understood as hands. Outside of the confirming matrix of all of the other aspects of this carving, the hands would not be so noteworthy. The hoof-like feet, however, could never escape notice. In fact, the downward-pointing round objects with wedges of wood cut out from them (upon legs that are unusually knobbled, matched by odd, curvy, knobbled arms) are only legible as feet because they are on a humanoid body. But on this body, exposed breasts and particular forms of clothing signal a Zulu womanhood that is

nonetheless not human but primate, animal, beastly, monstrous—even as it is a necessarily human womanhood too. And this is what is held by the head, in its body, in its uncanny, abject darkness that is surrounded (enclosed, encroached upon) by light, orange-toned wood; by colonial whiteness.

It is on the third encounter—upon engaging with the object as a thing crafted by a person, within a context, with an intended audience—that the object begins to reveal an account. What seemed at first to be simply the uncomfortable materialization of European ideas about African and black abjection reveals its self-awareness, its performativity. The Stick is not presenting a European theory of Zuluness; it is presenting the intimate Zulu knowledge of that theory, how it worked, and what it might cause, whilst taking the form precisely of an object that would need this to be noticed through a multiple encounter—of an object which would first pass for an ordinary work of fine art, and then for a work which captured—"cannily"—Zulu subjectivity, whilst secretly, cannily, capturing and critiquing colonial subjectivity from a firmly situated stance.

There is, of course, yet another encounter—the very first—with a young Max Gluckman, conducting doctoral fieldwork in a Zulu reserve that will eventually be published and gain later renown as "An Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand", or the Bridge Paper. Over this period, he collected objects more readily legible as Zulu items—spoons, matts, knobkerries, that may have been in use or exemplars—as well as two objects that had been made to be sold to Europeans—perhaps like, perhaps unlike himself. The social system lived in these interactions—

with white employers, traders, missionaries, administrators, and anthropologists (that is, those with power over money, consumables, morality, law and representation/knowledge)—was one marked by multiple modalities of violence to Zulu people and life-worlds, and presented a phantasmatic (if not the real) threat to proper Zulu womanhood (mediated, properly, through a respective Zulu man). Responding to this, and making a canny forecast, the Stick articulates the deep contingency of Zulu futurity. Zulu male subjectivity is under threat, encroached upon—the material consequences of it being perceived as abjecthood, and being rendered objecthood as a result.

This encounter offers insight into the social worlds the Stick was placed into. Gluckman would later write that (aside from temporarily resident anthropologists like himself), "only certain types of Europeans [. . .] live in these reserves"—namely, "administrators, technical officials, missionaries, traders, [and] recruiters" (Gluckman 1940:1). These would have been the most frequent purchasers of African craft objects of all varieties. Missionaries and administrators often sought to collect objects glossed in ethnographic terms, and were often critical to the establishment of ethnographic collections in museums[14]. This either took the form of collecting used objects—often a difficult task for those who, unlike the anthropologists, missionaries, or administrators, were not familiar persons—or commissioning

[14] For some examples of work addressing missionary collecting, see Wingfield 2016, Cannizzo 1998, Kasprycki 1998, Smith 1997, Rubel & Rosman 1996. Collection by administrators is explored in Wanless 2001, and the role of colonial administrations in making "collections" out of pluralities of things is examined in Nelson 2007.

exemplars of such objects from local crafters (Cf. Knowles 2003). But they—excepting perhaps the anthropologist— would also have been the most frequent purchasers of decorative craft objects, the kind which are now understood as African art but whose crafters are nonetheless absented and irrelevant. But while these groups would have been the likely target market for an object like the Stick, they are not the only "Europeans" those living in the reserves would encounter. The Afrikaans and British white South Africans - the "farmers, industrialists, [and] householders" (Gluckman 1940:1) - to whom black men would have sold their labor presented face of colonial relation - if not its structure - that, together with interactions with buying publics, would have been formative for the development of an understanding of the political entanglements of whiteness/Zuluness(/Africanity).

If this carving was intended to be sold to an administrator, or a missionary, then it would have been crafted precisely for those people intimately embedded in the structures of colonial race-making—the very structures that created and managed the ethnic and racial ideas that are captured within the Stick, and without which (should it have even existed) it could not carry the same resonance. And if the Stick was crafted with the migrant worker's employers in mind - not necessarily as purchasers, but as a reference point for the kinds of ideas of the self that are acceptable—then it would have assumed a different kind of racism as the grounding for white racial understanding. Instead of the paternalist gaze of the missionary and administrator, with intentions (sincere or not) of raising a childlike, animalistic native up to something resembling civilized adult humanity—"but not quite" (Bhabha

1994:85)—we find the aggressive capitalist exploitation of the farm, factory and home owner, and the rearticulation of the racism of the missionary and the colonial administrator into a felt violence. This violence - and this broader process of racialization - is directly addressed in the Stick's form and craft. Moreover, it is because of these processes - and the embeddedness of even the sympathetic European colonial figures into these processes - that an object that renders Zulu men and women (and black Africans more broadly) as uncanny, zombie-like beasts, could be sellable, to Europeans.

The structural functionalist[15] labelling of the Stick tells us that it was crafted for sale to Europeans. It ended up being sold to one, who, while perhaps not the European the crafter had in mind, nevertheless appears to have interpreted it as a curio—an object defined by its relationship to the market— But the two objects crafted "For sale to Europeans" are not, in this move, reduced to pieces of decorative craft.[16] Instead, by bringing these objects to the Wits Museum of

[15] Structural functionalist thinking continues to be pervasive in museum anthropology, often born out of a sense that a social world (is all that) can be reconstructed from a set of objects, but also as a consequence of the particular subjects who are well-represented in ethnographic museums, and the terms which guided that collection, accession and display. This chapter attempts to offer a way to think objects differently: not as proof of culture, or a way to salvage it, but necessarily still bound within it; not as quasi-archaeological evidence but as social actors.

[16] More contemporarily, this stick is interpreted as African craft art; this alternative meaning does not change the fact that the stick (unlike Western art, or even - some - contemporary African art in Western styles) is not anticipated to have an opinion, or to speak upon th world, but rather to be part of a culturally particular mode of beautifying the world.

Ethnology collections, and accessioning them under names that rendered it impossible to think them outside of colonial contact, Gluckman should be read as gesturing against the senses of bounded authenticity that then characterized the colonial museum and the late-colonial structural functionalism alike, especially given that a response to the latter is at the heart of the Bridge Paper[17]. The Stick was encountered as an object worth collecting as a result of the ethnographic gaze. While Gluckman collected a wide assortment of objects, he gave to the museum nothing that would immediately signal the entanglement of the colonial and colonized in the same social world, as he argues in the Bridge Paper, other than the two objects crafted for sale to Europeans, and an object crafted in a school. In the process, the Stick becomes imaginable as an object that is perhaps less attuned to reflecting upon the intrinsically Zulu, and more attuned to expressing colonial contact; as an object that is at once ethnographic and not.

Like the other objects—a "Beaded waistband for sale to Europeans", and a "Wooden cup carved in school"—the terms with which the Stick is labelled in accession comes to signal where boundedness fails (that is, where the object makes the viewer face the colonial encounter), and suggests that these objects were not truly ethnographic objects, but rather other kinds of things made, perhaps in

[17] Such a reading is congruent with Chris Wingfield's analysis of the role of the photographs of the Bridge ceremony as developing the insights that would structure the paper. Wingfield argues that it was Gluckman's later reading of the artefacts of his own presence at the ceremony—particularly, his photographs and fieldnotes—that enabled him to develop the analysis of race relations that appears in the paper.

ethnographic register, by an anthropologized people. In this case, through its being defined by the ethnographic as the absence of the ethnographic, the Stick appears at first to be an object best comprehended on other terms. Here, it remains striking that Gluckman never actually engages with this object after collecting it, merely leaving it to the museum in an exceptional gesture of criticism that is complete by virtue of the naming of the object. But, while the collection implies that it cannot—not least in positioning the Stick alongside the "true" knobkerries in its order of accession—this Stick does make claims about Zuluness. These claims are grounded not only in an articulation of the social system which is threatening the foundation upon which Zuluness might be built, but also in a resistant articulation of what Zuluness actually means. It is perhaps because the object fits the form of something that will not embody an argument[18] that its argument can come into being—it can wink, because it knows it has eyes we do not see. Moreover, it can wink at Gluckman, who comes to write his own account of the entanglements of empire and Zuluness in the Bridge Paper, but dismisses the Stick - whose European he became—as, if not a mere curio, then something not much more than one.

The reason that the Stick is legible as curio at all is because it was so skillfully crafted; the level of care put into its carving far exceeds that which is necessary for a socially-useful object. Its form demonstrates a deep understanding of the *umthombothi* wood, the work being carved so as to take advantage of its grain and curvature, and

[18] Indeed, I would be surprised if every craft object did, even every craft object by the same crafter.

the woods tonality aligning with the intended design. At a distance, the details of the abject depiction vanish. That is to say, it is not that the carvings appear monstrous or inhuman by some accident of poor skill. However, the particular and careful stylization of the carvings allows it to mask the argument it is making under the guise of individual artistic endeavor or the imitation of other marketable styles. Indeed, the carving of faces that do not quite look like real faces—often with features exaggerated to a point of near-caricature, sometimes the product of exceedingly fine detail—is a fairly ordinary find in Zulu carving and sculpture, and African sculpture more broadly. However, these zombified figures cannot be only style—they exist within a broader political, economic and ideological terrain in which the carver lived, and to which he[19] responded. More importantly—especially as, in the end, the carver's motivations cannot truly be known—the Stick is nevertheless a potent account, and one which takes advantage of its opacity to those who buy it—who must buy it, to allow its maker an income in proto-Apartheid Zululand.

The racial ideas captured by the Stick are uncomfortable not only because they so smoothly reproduce the colonial, but because they are uncanny. The Stick does capture Zulu people as things, as animals, as inhuman. But in doing so, it captures Zulu people as at once clearly human and clearly not. Humanity and non-humanity are superimposed, into a composite racialized person that cannot be fully discarded as other, nor fully incorporated into the human, nor situated neatly upon some

[19] The carver would have almost certainly been male.

liminal threshold between the two—it must be both, even as it cannot be either. This aesthetic contradiction is uncanny, and the object is unsettling as a result. However, this superimposition is not only about the Stick itself, and how it collapses the boundaries between subject and object in its representations, and positions the black person as uncanny. Crucially, the superimposition also stages the abjection of blackness. The object is grotesque not only because the animality of the necessarily human African subject is presented as an uncanny site of contradiction, but because this contradiction foregrounds a peculiarly colonial site of impossibility. This impossibility is of distancing the humanity of the European from the humanity of the African—a distance which falls apart through the necessity to read the object as representing people to read it at all—and the ensuing attempt to define European colonial subjectivity away from the animal—which comes, then, to be entangled in what it might mean to be human. Put differently, the depicted Zulu figure—who stands in more generally for the Native, who is at once Black and Indigenous—is at once the same and the opposite of what the Europeans for whom the Stick was intended would render themselves to be, thus can neither be related to nor refused, and thus comes to stand outside of the possible (whilst nevertheless clearly remaining within).

Critically, the Stick is offering this not as a representation of what the world actually is, but as a pointed criticism both of how colonial race-making created Zulu people as racialized subjects, and of how this process rendered the Zulu person as a site of impossible relation, *for European colonial subjects*. Indeed, as Kristeva argues,

abjection is not a property inhering to the source of the emotional response—it is about what comes to be understood and experienced as abject, and as such, what comes to embody, to the abjected, the inescapable contradictions and crises that delimit the social world. This is not to say that this carving teaches us only about the viewer, the intended buyer, or the colonial. This is for two reasons. The first, and most important, is signaled by the fact that for Kristeva, the abject is "neither subject nor object" (1982:1). As a result, what happens when the abject is overlain onto a subject—woman and Zulu and black and native—, and later comes to define the encounter with a class of subjects—(woman or) Zulu or Native—is that this subject can recognize their ostensible abjecthood, carve this abjecthood, and thus, winking, refuse it. As a result, the Stick invites us to think the ethnographic as a response to the sense in which the abject offers a fixed product of the colonial gaze and encounter. By being carved through ethnographic registers, the Stick presents an opportunity to consider the returned gaze, and how the doubled consciousness (Dubois, 1903) and doubled vision (Hartsock, 1983) of the colonized allow the objects crafted by those seeming abjects to embody a distinct argument about (gendered) Zuluness, blackness and nativeness, that is firmly situated, and that holds its own against contemporaneous analyses of the same experience, and contemporary analyses of colonial Africanity and post-colonial blackness alike.

The uncannily composite nature of the Stick's representations—and the abject European coloniality that it signals—is crucial to how the Stick engages in contemporaneous and contemporary debates about Africanity and blackness. Instead

of race creating a binary of what is and what is not human—or a spectrum of differing access to the human—racialized subjects are necessarily human, even to the colonizer, whilst being also necessarily not. Again, this interplay is made possible by the European idea of what the colonized are—and how they relate to European colonial subjectivity—articulated by Freud in an excerpt from his essay on the uncanny. He writes:

> It seems as if each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to this animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has passed through it without preserving certain residues and traces of it which are still capable of manifesting themselves, and then everything which now strikes us as 'uncanny' fulfill the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression. (Freud 1955a:240-1)

In order to fully grasp the implications of this quote, it is necessary to unpack the implicitly disparaging relationship between primitivity and animism—and how this relationship implies an equivalence between so-called primitive humanity and animality. For Edward Tylor (1871), whose theorizing of anthropologized people Freud adopts, human societies all follow a linear historical path, from practicing simple cultural forms to complex ones. In his version of social evolutionism, anthropologized peoples are simply at an earlier cultural stage— they are literally the past to Tylor's European colonial present. And as their culture is so simple, their religion—the cultural form through which their attempt at mastering the world would be narrativized (Freud, 1955b:76)—is accordingly simple—the world is alive. But the temporal work that "primitive" does here is not only to signal a stage in

cultural development. Despite Tylor's adamance that humanity was of a single species—and thus, that cultural difference did not signal species difference—the evolutionism of the time, and the anthropological context in which they wrote, does not allow for the simple disentangling of the primitivity of culture and genus, both of which become locked in temporal unity. The anthropologized subject becomes evidence of the newfound distance from animality possessed by early humankind, the evolutionary missing link (Wynter 2003:266-7). As a result, primitive animism is also necessarily primitive animality.

Returning to the excerpt; its idea, of a European subjecthood that develops past an earlier stage of animal-adjacent animistic humanity (captured by the ethnographic primitiveness of the Zulu carving) is uninteresting for its analysis of colonized subjecthood. However, it is fascinating evidence of European anxieties and assumptions about the colonial (and thus racial) encounter, and of how this anxiety was ultimately about the European being forced to encounter an animality in himself. This encounter with the animal is dual—it is the great ape from which European literate society has uncomfortably found itself to descend, just as it is the so-called primitive subject, who through the ethnographic marriage of time and place (Fabian, 1983), comes to represent the dark European past, refracted back. Importantly, in this colonial encounter we find not only the uncanny but the abject, for the native—when rendered as self—is not an other that can actually be rejected, but is rather a self that must be disavowed as a condition for entering the social world. The impossibility of moving towards or away from the anxious truth of the

native causes a crisis for the European colonial subject, a crisis that the Stick materializes in its uncanny form. But the uncanniness of the Stick's form offers a corrective to Freud—it is not that the encounter with the self as past/animal is uncanny, but that the encounter with the past and the animal is inextricable from the encounter with the self as human. This means that the encounter with the human must be an encounter with the repressed past/animal.

This means too, that the Zulu subject presents a problem for the colonizer. The colonial problem is not the need to resolve the strangeness of the other, but the simultaneity of the other's subjecthood and objecthood, such that the European colonial subject is subjected to continual reminders of their own animality. Unlike Bhabha's (1994) conception of mimicry, where the colonized respond to the colonial desire to render the other familiar, here the other is rendered strange instead. Where the colonized mimic would, in line with colonial pressure, discard the animal, and in turn be cleanly related to as only human—and thus too be brought together with the colonizer into a shared symbolic terrain—the abjects the Stick captures encountered the opposite, where the burgeoning "homeland" system in South Africa presented the solution of discarding the human, insisting upon the animal[20]. This was a process

[20] This reduction to "animal" looks a lot like "subhuman" because of how the human reemerges at the extremes, is brought back as "child" to be "civilized" (which is difficult to distinguish from "animal" to be "domesticated, but not simply resolved through that—the child, while existing liminally in some senses, does not really present a boundary problem—the child is child, and must relate to the world in specific ways, and may thus come to attain full franchise in the society in which they are brought up, whereas even the most civilized African will remain at best influentially peripheral to colonial society. In that sense, the understanding of the colonized African subject as a child subject is the polite replacement of animal with

that was already underway when Gluckman first entered his field site in "Zululand", and it is articulated in the Stick as a warning about the threats colonialism brings—discussed at length later in this chapter. As a result, the Stick is looking back at the looker—even as, in this case, the looker seems not to notice—in full awareness of the terms it is being cast in. The Stick is abject and knowingly not—knowingly something else—and in this there is an assertion that those who see abjection in Zulu subjects must be seeing wrongly, and the warning that this ill-sight will be devastating.

While the Stick is uncanny and abject, in different ways, it is also canny—knowing, theory-embodying, claim making. Put differently, the Stick is winking. It is winking many different winks, on many levels, that are differently accessible as a result of the mode of the Stick's form, its skilled crafting, and the ethnographic lens through which it was understood. This wink is sometimes a laugh, always a secret, crafted into possibility against the expectation of its absence. It is the wink of the canny, that expands the political horizon by positing a knowing colonized subject - who can thus be neither the object nor the abject - who continues to exist as a subaltern, whose subalterity offers not just the danger but the *promise* of being unheard—of being unreadable (cf. Spivak 1988; Pratt 2007:4). As Geertz reminds us, we cannot understand the wink as a wink until we come to grasp the thickness of the context which brings it into being as something more than—different than—a twitch

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child, an articulation of self-avowed good intentions, and little else.

or a blink (1973). Without understanding the object's political and social context, and the terms of its collection, in terms that exceed and resist the ethnographic and abject, its claims become invisible. However, what Geertz misses in his derision for the idea of "material culture"—a violin, he scoffs, is not the playing of one (Geertz 1973:12)—is that, while objects are opaque, and must be thought together with the social world and not as social worlds themselves, not only can objects make social claims, but these claims may be fundamentally entangled with their form, craft, and the terms through which we bring these objects into social being.

Importantly, the Zulu encounter with Europeans—with employers, traders, missionaries, administrators, and anthropologists (that is, those with power over money, consumables, morality, law and representation/knowledge)—was one characterized by structural violence and violation to Zulu people and lifeworlds. What remained of Zulu ways of knowing and living in the world—already violently rearranged by British rule and the imposition of barely waged labor, a rearrangement which itself catalyzed the emergence of a Zulu ethnic identity[21]—was at risk of disappearing. Responding to this, and making a canny forecast, the Stick articulates the deep contingency of Zulu futurity. Zulu male subjecthood—which, entangled as it is in ideas of Zulu female subjecthood, actually stands for Zuluness—is under

[21] For Zulu identity—an identity that amalgamates the colonized and the imperial into one—could only come into being in the face of an antagonism that built, if not unison, then solidarity. Accounts of the creation of this political horizon can be found in Marks 1986; Vail 1989; Cope 1993; Mahoney 2012; Hamilton & Leibheimmer 2017.

threat, encroached upon—the material consequences of it being perceived as abjecthood, and being rendered objecthood as a result. This encroachment—mirrored in the surrounding of dark brown figures by light brown wood—is that which transforms Zulu land into the Zulu reserve on British and then (more explicitly) white land, Zulu male life into the life of the miner and factory worker and passbook holder, Zulu forms of thought into something subordinated to British rule even as parts of it are allowed to persist and flourish. That is to say, the Stick articulates a critique of European *colonialism*, from the standpoint not only of the racialized but also of the indigenized.

Zulu indigeneity is a profoundly contested idea. In South Africa, many Khoe-Sān people (who have the greatest historical claim to authochthony) have, since 1994, claimed First Nations status, on the grounds of their lack of political recognition and authority in the post-Apartheid nation. This kind of territorial claim to indigeneity elides a racial objection: under apartheid, Khoe-Sān people and their descendants were assigned the race of "Coloured", which was a comparatively privileged category compared to that of "Black". In light of this, it becomes tricky that claims that Khoe-Sān identity need be more central in South Africa are often grounded in a resentment of "Bantu" power. This "Bantu" corresponds to the apartheid-era "Black"; more crucially, it references the black populations that migrated to the region during the period known as the *mfecane*, following the violent rise of the Zulu Kingdom under Shaka. "Kingdom" is something of a misnomer; the Zulu Kingdom was an *imperial* force, and through its growth during and following the *mfecane*, many

other groups were displaced and incorporated into it. In absolute terms, the Zulu Kingdom could make few claims to autochthony, but many Zulu subjects would have been autochthonous to the lands they inhabited, having been incorporated into the empire after conquest as equal citizens[22].

Moreover, conquest by the Zulu Kingdom—while an event of immense proportions - was conquest within a set of familiar logics, by and into a familiar group of people. The reorganization of life implied by this would have been well within the realm of the fathomable. The reorganization of life under European colonialism presented instead a radical disruption not only of the life one might live but of *what the world was*. In the words of Fanon, "the social panorama is destructured" (1986:33). This involved a newfound inequality to strange people who operated in strange ways and demanded one's complete re-subjecting and exploitation by strange means as a condition for survival. It was also, from early on in the history of Zulu-European contact, something Zulu people feared and repeatedly declined to cede their sovereignty to. More importantly, the European colonialism brought the Zulu—the African—ordinary into question[23]. This process,

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[22] In the process of this assimilation, many Ndwandwe clan and ethnic identities were subsumed to "Zulu", with many of these clan names surviving as surnames today. Inheritors to these clan and ethnic identities (that have been overwritten by the "Zulu" accounts of the Kingdom's history) have begun to assert their Ndwandwe-ness in proto-nationalist cultural and political organizing; this is richly explored by Mbongiseni Buthelezi in his 2012 dissertation, *"Sifuna umlando wethu" (We are Looking for our History):Oral Literature and the Meanings of the Past in Post-Apartheid South Africa.*

[23] Here I am thinking with Boatema Boateng's keynote, "Black Indigeneities and Regimes of Sovereignty," in which Boateng proposed a definition of indigeneity in which it is characterized by the unsettling, or severing, of the possibility of social

which was territorial, but which really transformed every frame of social life, is what I read as indigenizing. This indigenizing occurred on the African continent on an exceptional scale, categorically, and nearly absolutely, transforming the continent from a place in which people lived into one populated by Natives. In light of this—and while it is of course necessary still to attend to imbalances of power as they emerge after formal independence—the claim to indigeneity-as-authochthony seems to fetishize the precolonial as a legitimating strategy for claims to political *priority*, in ways that appropriate indigenous criticisms of mass-settler conditions from other locations to efface the generalized social disruption that characterizes mass-indigenous terrains.

Zulu claims to indigeneity—or, Zulu articulations of culture, or social claims to behavior as recognizably "Zulu—are contested in another way. They are seen as the progenitors of ethnonationalism, and one which (usually, tacitly) is presumed to be violent in character. While this presumption has seemingly been validated by the Afrophobic proclamations of the current Zulu King, Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu, ethnic partisanism is certainly not on the rise in South Africa. Despite this, debates around Zulu (and other South African and African) claims to indigeneity and sovereignty have become a cottage industry, fueled by the threat of the customary and those once assigned to manage it as forces that may once, to quote Charles Piot's blurb for the Comaroffs' (2018) *The Politics of Custom*, "usurp the role of the state that once

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practices being left unremarked as "just the way things are".

brought them into being". This text seeks to resolve what its editors lay out as a paradox of African modernity: the "resurgence of chiefs" as political figures (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2018:vii). In the passage that follows, the Comaroffs offer a brief synopsis of debates that surround the naming of leaders of non-European political forms.

However, the most striking gesture that takes place in these pages nearly opens the book: the Comaroffs write that "chiefs" might "more accurately" be referred to as "indigenous sovereigns" (Ibid). In this gesture, the specificity of chieftainship as political form is collapsed, presumably for how the term flattens differences between various kinds of African polity, is of European origin, and ultimately is seen as characterizing a political form as intrinsically inferior and immodern. But when this is replaced with the comparatively nebulous "indigenous sovereigns"—which manages to declare chiefs equivalent to kings while declining to do so, while also offering the seductive proclamation that ethnic practices on the continent are indigenous ones—the intention seems clear. Impotent and quaint chieftainships are (now, better) understood as possessing sovereign power at least on the level of African states, if not greater to theirs, with absolute dominion over their claimed ethnic kin. In a closing remark in their discussion of naming, they describe Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's (1983) volume, *The Invention of Tradition*, as having "noted" (the ostensibly self-evident truth, rather than 'argued') that:

> "So-called traditional ways and means [. . .] are always historically wrought phenomena, often ones of relatively recent vintage" (Comaroff & Comaroff

2018:viii).

Here it seems urgent to contest how claims to invention have come to serve as legitimating forces for the defense of the clearest inheritors of the colonial—here, post-independence nation states. With an illusory ease, the customary comes to appear as colonial as the administrations that promoted versions of it, and to thus represent some kind of hypocritical and insidious return of the colonial. In contrast, modernity is allowed a historical certainty it does not possess, against which tradition, indigeneity, and other words used to connote the ethnographic are asserted as problems, by virtue of their ostensible (colonial) historical specificity. By contrast, the account of indigeneity offered in the Stick suggests that contemporary South African invocations and practices of custom reflect *both* radical disruption—of territories, modes of thought, modes of life—and its refusal. The subordination to an indigenized condition and the (at least, epistemic) refusal to become indigenous, from a standpoint not of investment in European categories but insistent investment against them: this is the 'outside' to the imperial that the Stick, winking, reminds us never fully collapses under its influence. This reminder, contra the citational utility of *The Invention of Tradition*, aligns with Thomas Spear's (2003) argument that to read colonial administrations as "inventors" of African traditions is to transform an uneven power relation characterized by contestation, struggle and (the constant threat of) repressive violence into one of absolute and undisputed authority[24].

[24] Indeed, Terence Ranger was himself thinking along congruent lines by 1993, preferring readings of the continent's relation to tradition which "suggest, rather than

Instead, following Mary Louise Pratt (1992:6), colonized subjects are never totally possessed, never totally powerless, instead making decisions (if not always choices) that are strategic and selective in their encounters with colonial authority and colonial demands. Indeed, while we may argue that colonial administrations are themselves canny for working through the registers in which colonized people are invested, this does not signal the coloniality of those registers, but the deep limitations of European domination which must come to encompass that which it cannot accept in order to become a feasible political form. The Stick—by reproducing the colonial uncanny, whilst cannily winking past its buyer's ability to recognize what is in plain sight—is insisting that there is a mode of engaging with time - with colony, race, native, continent - that refuses the colonial terms in which these topics are raised. In the case of the Stick, it manifests through ethnographic forms that are at once of the colonized and the colonizer—that are of the contact zone (Pratt, 1992). The Stick signals that ethnographic material culture (as what the colonial cannot truly hold) offers an outside to the epistemic totality[25] that

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a single great tradition coming to an end under colonialism, a pluralism both before, during and after colonialism, and which suggest that while colonialists were inventing 'tribes' and narrowing cultural choices, peasant intellectuals could make their own enlarging uses of 'tradition'". (Ranger 1993:80)

[25] Importantly, this is the only outside that can be read into the Stick, and it is one predicated upon an intimate (internal) understanding of the workings of white power in South Africa. As such, I am distinctly not reading the carving as offering an account of Zulu sovereignty, or some other attenuated form of Zulu ability to maintain a coherent and expansive domain of their own making, and am skeptical generally about the viability of such a claim. By the turn of the 20th century the Zulu were a conquered people. Moreover, even considering contemporary invocations of Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu's authority, it seems unlikely that a world in which leftist

colonialism appears to have created, in which European colonial subjects came to be authorized with the force of Apartheid rule (Mamdani, 1996), thus becoming, explicitly in South Africa and implicitly elsewhere, "the master, whether real or imaginary" (Fanon 1986:106n). By recognizing claims to Zuluness in cultural forms that can only be cast ambivalently in European taxonomies, one can read the limits to this colonial mastery.

Thought thusly, this carving is—even as it is made to be sold to colonial figures, even as it reproduces colonial ideas, even as it is the product of the encounter—a refusal of the colonial, from its churches and legislatures to its offices and factories and farms. This refusal is authorized by the knowledge of colonial race-making, of the ways life has been transformed by colonial rule, and ultimately, by a prescient awareness of the dangers of continuing under these terms. Indeed, only ten years after these objects were accessioned, the British colonial system of segregation that had already situated its carver into a Native Reserve would come to be formalized under Apartheid. The Stick was sold to an anthropologist conducting fieldwork in Zululand who would proceed to write his own explication of the Zulu-Colonial dynamic, in deeply colonial terms that—while careful to establish the fundamental antagonism between Europeans and Zulus, and careful to think the "social system" in place as in only a temporary equilibrium—manage to render the

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anthropologists are unsettled by claims to power via custom might be the same world in which such claims are authorized and legitimated by easily-panicked foreign investors or the ex-colonial states that back them.

idea of racial antagonism under colonialism a theoretical novelty, and nevertheless frames contact as a story of participation, non-participation, and varying allegiances. The Stick underscores, in contrast, the importance of thinking various modes of colonial dispossession and subjugation, and thinking these modes and colonialism more broadly as an intrinsically violent process.

In the process, the Stick is also refusing colonial ideologies of race, that tell a story about what Zulu people are—biologically, socially, culturally. The monstrous woman in the zombified man of the Stick that winks, as though these figures are characters in costume, passing for colonial blackness, not at all what they appear but appearing well enough that European buyers might not even think twice. The presentation of a racial model of animal/human simultaneity— the superimposition of animality upon the human figures of the Stick—is not what Zuluness is, nor what Zulu people understand themselves to be. It is, instead, the canny articulation of the historico-racial schema through which European colonial subjects encounter black subjects, and which comes to be engraved[26] upon the Stick just as it is epidermalized onto black skin. But, even as it uses it to articulate itself in the world, the Stick is not controlled by this schema, is not fixed by it, does not cease to move in the world in other means, on other terms. Crucial to this is that the Stick recognizes and makes

[26] I prefer thinking the epidermal-racial schema through engraving rather than Bhabha's more textual "inscription" (in Fanon 1986:xxviii) as a nod to Fanon's insistence that the racial encounter happens on a visual/perceptual/material level—it is not confined to, or even instigated by the realm of ideas, but brought into force by material difference.

use of its abjection cannily—it is not brought into being as an abject, but recognizes the interpellation of Zulu people as such, and winks.

This—a mode of looking back, without the colonial looker even realizing they are being looked at—is not something reflected in most critical scholarship on blackness, and its framing as abject. Returning to the passage of *Black Skin, White Masks* with which this chapter begun, we find Fanon, in the midst of the repeated encounter with himself being encountered as black by white strangers:

> I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all historicity , which I had learned about from Jaspers. Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other . . . and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea. . . . (Fanon 1986:84**)**

This is an account of Fanon encountering his status not as object but *abject* in the eyes of French society. The corporeal schema—already underlain by a historico-racial schema, constructed out of a sociohistorical mythology (Wynter, p267) about race and what it means—collapses. This superimposition is important: for Fanon—prior to the collapse that results from the internalization of one's own abjecthood—black men come to understand their phenomenal existence through a historico-racial schema that is *under but after* the corporeal. The black body is encountered by the black subject first as one's own actual body operating in the world, before it comes to

be encountered as also a raced body. And this racialization fundamentally alters the terms of the corporeal schema above it, rearranges the encounter with his body in new terms—and so, encountering a world in which he became a raced subject, "[Fanon] was called on for more" (Ibid.). What remains after Fanon is forced to encounter himself as the object "jettisoned. . .toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 1982:2)? The black subject is split—into a body, an object in search of recognition, and an other, recognizing itself reflected back through the white gaze. Thus Fanon floats between the statuses of subject and object, attempting to resist this trap but being locked into negating it. And so he is repulsed, but not by his own abjecthood—for he is not, actually, abject. He is repulsed by the encounter with himself as the abject that is encountered by the other whose recognition—as subject, not abject—he seeks.

The Stick stands very differently in relationship to whiteness. For the Stick, the black indigene—the Other—is not simply other as a reflection of the European colonial experience of their alterity. The Native is Other because they are actually different to European colonial people, and the Stick has no qualms with being other in this way. Thus the problem is not the otherness at all—difference can take many meanings. It is that the blackness, primitivity, nativeness of the other encountered by colonialism present a crisis for *white colonial subjectivity*. This ostensible boundary problem between the animal and human is "resolved" by affirming the animality of the native, but is also of course irresolvable because the native is not animal, is human, and is evidently living a life outside of the animal. Culture is particularly

powerful here, as evidence of humanity (Cf. Tylor, 1871), and evidence of thought, and thus mind—and thus not merely an animal, animate body. And thus, culture is also—rather than being what overdetermines the native into place—what grounds a mode of resistance that is uninvested in the terms in which it is racialized, even as it is aware, and wary, and knows to refuse them.

Indeed, by portraying colonial race-making in resistant ethnographic terms, the Stick is underscoring too the fundamental entanglement of Black and Indigene in the colonial imagination of Africa. Both in its ideas and form, the carving suggests that the race cannot be understood outside of the dispossession, exploitation and social dissembling that European rule brought, that that process is bound to ethnographied visions of culture, and that, however entangled these ideas may be, they are not totalizing: they are even malleable enough, to the right carver, to become evidence for their own lack of totality. In the process, the Stick offers an account of African Blackness that is not intrinsically about race relations, as much as it is about a structure of colonial relation, and thus that contests the idea that only African settler colonies experienced racializing processes. Moreover, it insists on the specificity and refutability of racialization on the African continent.

These points are striking when read against Jemima Pierre's (2012) *Predicament of Blackness*, a text concerned with making race a thinkable form for the contemporary African continent. Pierre's text is a response to the common retort that blackness is a misguidedly American(ist) imposition to thought about the African continent that is better understood through ethnic pluralism, but it seeks to

identify blackness on the continent by finding features that mirror American counterparts, or that emerge in the shadow of a more clearly-identifiable whiteness. In the process, Pierre writes a convincing account of how American grammars for thinking about race come to travel, and of whiteness as a form that is colonial even into the present. However, her account of blackness is wholly disarticulated from the context in which it is found, in ways that reproduce the logic of the irrelevance of race in inverse—race exists because race does not form part of the condition of ethnographiability, and an untenable opposition between the two African products of European rule—the Indigene and the Black—is sustained. Perhaps as a result, Pierre does not read the refutation of African Blackness as anything other than an error. The Stick's own canny refusal suggests that such articulations correspond to attempts to exist outside of European racial terms, rather than reflecting their absence as forms structuring social life. But the contemporary refutations are unlike the Stick's refusal in that they do *not* correspond to a categoric rejection of European norms and practices, instead coming to encounter Blackness not as the Other's abject, but as their own.

This is not dissimilar to the way in which abjection works for Darieck Scott. In *Extravagant Abjection*, Scott thinks the abjected as those who are excluded in the making of another's subjectivity. Seeking not to reduce blackness to the ineluctable horrors of white supremacy, he inverts abjection into a disguised heroism. This move is doubly revealing. First, Scott is taking abjection as the truth of black experience, and using that as an opportunity to imagine reclaiming black suffering,

newly exalted as evidence of something else. For if, resistance offers a "diagnostic of power" (Abu-Lughod, 1990:42), then power offers a diagnostic of resistance and we can understand these to be one substance—in this case, the entangled black pain/power—which forms the baseline of what blackness is. This thinking is seductive. It thinks black pain capaciously, as something politically generative, whilst appearing to offer an alternative to the failure-of-blackness that black abjection implies. But in the process, it ignores a crucial component of Kristeva's formulation of the abject - abjection springs from something that is not really there - and leaves us not with a theory of black subjects, but of black abjects. Second, Scott seeks to reclaim abjection[27] via a seeming reactive inversion - it becomes, instead of anti-black power, black power. In the process, Scott is accepting that the terms of the encounter have been set—and ceding an epistemic sovereignty that the Stick altogether refuses to. In this attempt to "try then to find value for what is bad", Scott has "unthinkingly conceded that the black man is the color of evil" (Fanon 1986:153).

But even as the Stick does not make this concession, its conceptions of the social world are not without shortcomings. The Stick's two carvings juxtapose married masculinity against female futurity in ways that situate Zulu womanhood as under attack. Indeed, the stem carving does most of the work of positioning

[27] The abjection he is reclaiming extends more broadly than the Kristeva, which is how this inversion makes sense. Kristeva's abjection is not about power at all, but comes to be entangled with power in the world. Scott's abjection is about the subjects framed as abject, and is entangled with power from the beginning.

Zuluness as subjected to colonial violence, particularly that violence of a racializing kind. As a result, the carving appears as concerned with the defense of particular modes of Zulu masculinity as it is with Zulu liberation and colonial refusal. Attempting to read these two concerns together, we might recall the forced changes to the Zulu social world that come with the development of the migrant economy under proto-Apartheid. Zulu men would be working away from the reserve, stuck in the lowest orders of colonial proletarianism, with scarce pay, working conditions at once immediately terrible and likely to induce later suffering thy would not afford to resolve, living in overcrowded and unsanitary hostels. Moreover, as the zombified male head on the Stick suggests, this form of living was one which, in fundamental ways, did not map onto ideas of what Zulu life should be.In this context, not only were Zulu women left to pick up all of the slack—in maintaining social and bodily existence—left by the third of men leaving to work (Gluckman, 1940); black South African women more broadly come to form the backbone of the economy of what will become Apartheid, designed as it was to exploit their agricultural labor to minimize worker wages (Wolpe, 1972).

Meanwhile, the absence of Zulu men from the reserve—now effectively the women's sphere—would reactivate fears about their safety around British administrators and other residents[28]. While this was a fear justified by the routine

[28] This fear is described in the trader Corneliis Vjin's memoir, *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, published in 1880. This is a text strongly coloured by ethnocentrism: Vjin describes the position of Zulu women when the men are present as one of quasi-slavery, commenting that women do all of the work while men "solely" slaughter and manage cattle, and hunt, as though this domestic/public division of labour were truly

with which African women were raped by white South Africans under the British and Apartheid administrations and the socio-legal barriers that prevented these acts of sexual and racial violence from being understood in those terms (Gqola 2010; Cf. Hartmann 1997), this is not only about specific violences to Zulu women—or even about the specificity of their generalized suffering under colonial domination—but their symbolic position within a social system in which, even as they were working in common towards family and future, women were subordinate and expected to remain firmly within the Zulu domestic sphere (Masuku 2005). Indeed, the Stick posits not only that Zulu women are harmed by the colonial encounter, but that (if they are not already) they are threatened with being made monstrous, inhuman (and, by extension, unZulu). Thus the colonial administration presents a phantasmatic (if not real) threat to proper Zulu womanhood. Moreover, this proper Zulu womanhood exists in relationship to a respective Zulu manhood, as subordinate and internal—perhaps, as the heart, whose destructive transformation towards

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unfamiliar (Vjin 1880:6). But Vjin's writing is also admiring towards Zulu governance and military discipline, and especially towards the King, Cetshwayo kaMpanda. In light of this, the remarks below (from the section "Zulu Opinion of the Whites") appear, on the whole, to be reliable, while also indicating a Zulu familiarity with the European slavery that had transformed the East African coast:

> The main part of the talk […] was that the Whites 'were very bad people. Since they had only just before set the King upon the throne, why had they now come to fight with him, in order to kill him and take away his country from him?' In fact, the Zulus had the idea that the Whites had come to capture all the males, to be sent to England and kept to work, while the girls would be all married off to (white) soldiers, and their cattle would, of course, all belong to the English Government. Hence, when it came to fighting, they fought not for the King only, but for themselves, since they would rather die than live under the Whites. (Vjin 1880:15)

monstrosity then leaves a seemingly stoic, numbed Zulu man in its wake.

Thinking back to the carving's canny play within and against ethnographic casting, this sense of threat casts Zulu womanhood as the erased site in which culture, heritage—and ultimately, perhaps inevitably, futurity—reside. As a result—and in complicated, not easily recuperated ways—the processes of becoming-Native that the Stick identifies are not only gendered in advance; they instead suggest a structure of gender that is made Native in advance, and that must be comprehended not only in terms of gender relations, but in terms of corresponding to different (spatial, epistemic) terrains of colonial encroachment, and different boundaries for the possibility of sustaining life outside of it.

## Sovereign Magic: on the Nature of Witchcraft in Livingstone, Zambia

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated.
>
> Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, p1.

In her 1975 review of Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Hildred Geertz identifies a problem with Thomas's sweeping history of ideas—he fails to define "magic" outside of the terms his other ideological protagonists use to criticize it. The borders of the magical come to be delineated by that which should be, but is not, there—reason, practicality, religion. To Geertz, Thomas thus reduces all systems of magical belief to wholly psychological phenomena, tantamount to supernatural pep talks, which cease to be important in the 17th century as Thomas identifies a reduction in need for supernatural aid and an increase in practical self-reliance. But, for any such psychological effect to exist, magic must be reasonable—so under what terms does it make itself such? What, actually, is magic? Here, I am not interested in fleshing out Thomas's psychological account of magic, nor in defending the psychological-rationalist reductionism of the many anthropological accounts that preceded his, but in contesting Geertz's challenge itself. What if there was a form of "magic" that not only was framed as existing on the outside of normative knowing and being, but which sought to be framed as that outside, which sought to become that outside? To willfully exist outside of juridical and ecclesiastical law and logic, of

scientific rationality—to exist, perhaps, against it, as a sovereign without obligations?

Such a form of magic would present a radical threat to the knowable and governable and livable world. It is such a form that we find in the news reports and rumors of witchcraft that seem to orbit the African and Afro-diasporic world. This witchcraft[29] kills, maims, and terrorizes innocent and marginal Africans. It remains a problem after over a century of colonization that brought about its criminalization, the refusal of the traditional and a new Christian antagonism to (non-ecclesiastical) magic, and after post-colonial African governments that sought to unite despite the traditionalisms of tribe. In the process, it becomes the sign of the most shamefully savage, of the utmost impossibility of desiring the non-colonial, and thus a site of crisis for a reimagined African Studies.

To make sense of this story, we need to come into encounter with the

[29] I use the term witchcraft here, in following the Livingstone Museum's nomenclature, which is itself coherent with a lineage of writing from Barrie Reynolds to Evans-Pritchard, and with the popular terms with which these practices are typically described in Zambia and beyond. Accordingly, I refer to the practitioners of witchcraft as "witches" (whereas practitioners of other kinds of magic might be diviners or witch-doctors). In some scholarship, my use of witchcraft is congruent with "sorcery"; in other scholarship and social contexts, "witchcraft" and "sorcery" are used interchangeably. In doing so, I also am responding to a set of arguments about nomenclature that would avoid the use of "witchcraft" or "sorcery" altogether, in favor of terms that speak to indigenous meaning rather than colonial assumption, and that avoid the pernicious connotations that come with "witchcraft", "sorcery", "witchdoctor". However, this logic falls flat in contemporary Zambia, where witchcraft is called witchcraft, and bears the traces of the colonial encounter. Moreover, the attempt to avoid the negative connotations of these terms ultimately reflects a misunderstanding of (or unwillingness to understand) the extent to which these practices produce social violence. A further note is that, in the Zambian case, the term "witch", and thus the term "witchcraft", is not understood to be gendered, although male witches are understood to be more powerful (see Mufuzi 2014).

Livingstone Museum,[30] in Livingstone, Zambia. Our first encounter takes place in the Livingstone Gallery of the museum, dedicated to the life and travels of the missionary and doctor David Livingstone, who is framed in this gallery as possessed of a missionary abolitionist zeal that near-single-handedly ended the Indian Ocean slave trade[31]. The gallery displays his personal effects, collected items, as well as pages from his letters and journals. In the middle of one of the two display cases holding his books sits his weathered copy of *Culpeper's Complete Herbal*, with a photocopy of the book's frontispiece, and a label:

> About the book, Livingstone remarked: "my first medical book, that extraordinary work on the astrological medicine".

The second encounter takes place in the ethnographic gallery[32]. At the very

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[30] This museum was founded as the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum, after both David Livingstone and Cecil John Rhodes, the mining magnate who conquered what is now Zambia as part of his personal colony of Rhodesia. It was affiliated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, and would occasionally accession items collected by anthropologists working under the latter's auspices. The RLI has since been renamed the Institute for Economic and Social Research (INESOR).

[31] As the museum's Livingstone Gallery narrates—and an artist's impression of the scene shows us—, David Livingstone died kneeling in prayer, and was discovered by the fiercely loyal freedmen who followed him on his travels, who proceeded to transport his body to the coast, to Zanzibar, so that it could be returned to England. Of course, Livingstone was not a man traversing the continent simply freeing slaves with noble ambition in his heart—he was a missionary, gathering a following of converts, hoping to expand British domain in Africa by uncovering more of the continent, and to replace the slave trade with "legitimate commerce" (a change that scarcely affected the substance of East African enslavement, often resulting in the further exploitation of the previously enslaved, whilst aiding the extension of British moral and territorial purchase on the continent).

[32] Specifically, it takes place in the part of the ethnographic gallery that is labelled "MUSEUM", and arranged with conventional museum displays, and not in the

beginning of a series of displays that travel from TRADITIONAL MEDICINE, through WITCHCRAFT, to DEATH (and BEYOND…), a small label informs the viewer that there are three kinds of traditional medicine items: herbs, which are prepared ointments and oral medicines of predominantly plant origin meant to cure various ailments; stimulants and depressants, which amplify or diminish a person's (sexual, reproductive, psychological) capacities; and charms and talismans which, when worn, confer power to the wearer.

These two moments are suggestive. They point to the fact that the Livingstone Museum—following quite neatly in the footsteps of Evans-Pritchard—builds a careful distinction between objects that belong to the realm of the "magical" and those that pertain to "witchcraft". In the case of the latter—the objects of this chapter's attention—this distinction marks not only a difference in what these objects are capable of, but—perhaps more importantly—a difference in how these objects should be related to. In this chapter, I examine these objects as material things critically embedded in modes of ethnographic interpretation—signaled by both the museum's taxonomy, and the writing of anthropological monographs seeking to understand "belief" and its associated material culture—in an ethnographically-entangled process of missionary evangelism on the African continent, and in other, legal and political, moments of the colonial encounter. Reading these moments together with the sociopolitical threat that witchcraft and its

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preceding part of the ethnographic gallery, a two-room installation work ("Our Village"; "Their Town") depicting the subtler violences of colonialism.

associated material poses, I argue that the museum's framing of these materials works to (symbolically) mediate their sovereignty, while nevertheless ceding to their power. Moreover, when read against theories of postcolonial politics that rely upon an analogy to witchcraftness, these violently heretical objects demonstrate the necessity of thinking witchcraft not as mere circulated objects of belief or superstition, but as real challenges to the authority of postcolonial African states.

The witchcraft objects held by the Livingstone Museum had been accessioned, primarily following witch-trials, between the 1940s and 1960s, and studied by Barrie Reynolds—then the Keeper of Ethnology at the Livingstone Museum.[33] These objects fell into a few categories. Functionally, many were containers (some of which were openable, others of which were not—possibly signaling that they were meant to keep something/body in, or out), many were kaliloze guns used both by witches to kill their enemies and for witch-hunting, a few were large brushes, several were snake familiars whose form the witch would adopt on night missions, while there were also other kinds of familiars divining baskets and associated objects. Among the remaining objects there was a magical telephone for communing with the otherworld, a magical aeroplane for traveling large distances, a writing/drawing tool, several items of regalia, and a large wooden box filled with witchcraft paraphernalia. Visually, the objects shared other traits. Some were made from common materials—a

[33] The objects are deeply associated with Reynolds, and this collection is generally referred to within the museum as the "Reynolds collection", despite the fact that Reynolds is not listed as the collector for any of these materials. I will use this nomenclature in this paper.

particular rough-woven fabric covered in multi-colored plastic pearled beads, particular recurring patterned fabrics – that signaled they were likely made by the same person. But many of them shared other material traits. Several objects used seeds of the Lucky Bean Creeper (poisonous seeds which are shiny, red and black when dried), which were embedded onto the object using dark clay or resin (another feature of many of the objects, across makers), with slightly fewer featuring strings of small beads embedded in the same way. Several others were shrouded in huge layers of fabric (at times signaling that the object was a snake, at times to hold a precarious object together, at times both) that had clearly been darkened on the surface by burial. Many objects involved parts of animal bodies – hooves, hides, tails, turtle shells, feathers—and combined these with wooden and other natural and crafted materials. Several too—especially the kaliloze guns, but also a skull-shaped object, and a necklace of teeth—involved human remains, either teeth or pieces of bone. Viewed together, most of the objects seemed like they fit in an aesthetic collection—even some of those which were not part of the same accession – from the first day I saw them, with objects not part of the Reynolds collection but on the same shelves being quite easy to tell apart.

These objects were composites, crafted from a variety of different (primarily natural) materials that did not seem to fit, usually held together with dark clay/resin that appeared equally unsuited to the object's components. One significant subset of these were objects seeming to employ impossible taxidermy. Some of the objects I studied employed fairly ordinary taxidermic practices. One item, a paper-stuffed baby

crocodile skin, would have been used to steal cattle. With a carefully sewn seam along its underside, at first glance this object looked like a perfect example of the taxidermic form. Upon closer inspection, its limbs seem overstuffed, to the point that they cease to look like limbs. In part as a result of this overstuffing, and in part as a result of the normality of the taxidermy, this object unsettles the viewer[34]. Most of the objects I studied were even stranger. The most striking was an object crafted to look like a zebra's leg filled with a zebra's tail – it was a container and/or a brush of some kind, and it was actually crafted from many things: zebra hide, a hoof (likely equine), a combination of multiple animal tails for the tail, as well as wood and thread. But even non-taxidermic objects combined these forms in similar ways. While most of the kaliloze guns were made simply of wood, a sawed-off human bone, fabrics wrapped around them and beads attached with resin – itself an extraordinary and unsettling combination – some were more extravagant. One had a purple glass or semi-precious stone glued on, with an inverted pound coin beneath it; another had a warthog tusk and an animal's claw wrapped together to form the handle. Similarly, several of the objects involved turtle shells which were painted, clay-covered, and/or decorated with small strung beads, or with large multicolored plastic pearls. The brushes would involve a combination of wig hair, animal tails hair, wood, beads, and large animal horns. The magical telephone was a small animal horn

[34] It is unsettling both as a baby *crocodile*, and thus something whose procurement demands an encounter with death, and as a *baby* crocodile, that could be held, hidden.

with thick soft fur stitched all around it and a jar lid with sticks, resin and lucky beans forming the "earpiece". The "receiver" was a painted plastic cylinder filled with things that would rattle. In these cases, the objects come to look magical through the internal consistency of a mode of relating disparate forms and objects and components that does not match the norms of how these objects should be relate with, in the event that (like the beads, and unlike the skulls) they should be related to at all.

In other cases, where the objects had aesthetic value—where they were well-crafted, were referential of the familiar, or were intricate in their form and decoration—their appearance remained jarring. One object was made from a set of warthog tusks, still attached to the bone, around which printed fabric was wrapped; it distinctly recalled the torso of a woman raising her arms. The intricate snake familiars—whose carved faces recall the more mundane carvings found in the tourist market a few minutes from the museum—were deliberately frightening to look at. The wooden heads, carved in the likeness of the witch whose snake form they would become, have exaggerated facial features that bulge out, and are often decorated with materials that both augment their power and their visual menace. One such familiar had both seeds of the Lucky Bean Creeper affixed to the center of each eye and human hair (likely from the head of the witch himself). The heads form the tops of otherwise uncarved slabs of wood. The "bodies" are wrapped with a tremendous amount of murky-colored fabric, often with other objects (like scissors and animal claws) slipped inside and around these layers. This wrapping recalls a straitjacket and

a snake at once, while the tone of the fabric indicates the familiar's hiding by burial. Another such object was a necklace comprised entirely of human maxillary incisors, attached by coils of wire to a copper choker. This necklace, comprising at least ten people's front teeth, seemed to come alive when moved. The teeth, loosely connected to the copper core, would shift very slightly. In all of these cases, these objects were crafted with a great deal of attention to their form and aesthetics, which echoes more familiar objects while utilizing materials that render this reference to the beautiful quite frightening.

Especially the case of this necklace, the kaliloze guns and the snake familiars, this has to do also with how several of these objects invoke death worlds. Objects involving human body parts and remains become inescapably entangled with the questions of how they were gotten, the morbid hope that they were stolen from graves, and – in the case of the guns – the fact that the death that was necessary to build the object is a death that comes to generate death. For all of the objects with Lucky Bean seeds on them, the entire object comes to be a signal for a relationship to the world of the dead – and the dangers of crossing the witch who has that relationship, and the dangers of messing with this object that is decorated with poison, a death-bringer. For the guns and the snake familiars, the shrouding of the objects and their burial is a reminder of precisely what these objects have the power and intention to do[35].

[35] As a counterpoint to this now faded (deactivated) power we see the present material condition of the objects. As many are made of natural materials (especially hide, hair, or dense patches of fibre), almost all of the objects are decaying, with

In the case of nearly all of these objects, their power and intention seems, to Western audiences, to manifest through supernatural means[36]. Take, for one example, the kaliloze guns found in the collection. The barrels of these guns are sawed-off and hollowed portions of human arm or leg bones, often with hole bored into the top. The bones are attached to wooden stocks, and wrapped with multiple layers of fabric, and sometimes also involve other materials. Aimed through a hole in a wall, or at the sun, it can kill its target at any distance, except if the target is wearing a needle charm. By inserting needles (usually broken) under the skin, the magic of the kaliloze gun is reflected back at its sender. This person would usually be either a witch or a witch-finder, in the one case utilizing witchcraft's power to kill for personal gain and private retribution, and in the other performing a kind of vigilante justice. Regardless of intent, the supernatural mode with which this killing takes place presents something of a scholarly problem. While this problem might be resolved by treating magic and science as two different objects of faith in which the world appears governed by unchanging natural law, "though one happens to be false and the other true" (Evans-Pritchard, 1965:28), this resolution proves unsatisfactory and superficial to Evans-Pritchard, who insists upon the need to (scientifically) compare the two modes of understanding the world—magical and empirical—in any given context. In some ways, this is what Evans-Pritchard does in his foundational book, *Witchcraft,*

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small insect infestations resulting in dramatic shedding.

[36] In Zambia, the operation of witchcraft objects, as well as broader witchcraft and traditional medicinal practices, do not exceed the natural.

*Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937), in which he explicates Zande cosmology as operating through a system of beliefs that seek to explain and respond to that which is left out of Western analyses of cause and effect—instead of the how questions, the why questions: why then, why there, why them. Moreover, these beliefs then produce practices that help the Zande social structure[37] retain stability in light of potentially destabilizing accidents and deaths. Thus, Evans-Pritchard produces a psychological account of witchcraft, in which it is a way of dealing with the inexplicable misfortunes of everyday life, that also—in trying to be sympathetic to magic—imagines it to be the exceedingly rationalist counterpart to Western naturalist modes of inquiry (Mills 2013). This witchcraft is not truly agential—not only does it not actually harm anyone, but it doesn't actually act; witchcraft is a discourse that is applied after the fact, to a world that is correctly understood through western science.

As a result of the colonial entrenchment of this division between the supernatural and the rational/scientific, Zambian belief in and fear of witchcraft comes as something of a surprise. Zambia—seen as modern, urban, educated, distant from "tradition"—does not make sense as a home for indefensible superstitions from a forgotten past, while its predominant Christianity allows visitors to assume magic belief would have been replaced, as in Europe, by religious faith

[37] Which Evans-Pritchard already recognizes to not take the form of the "traditional", as Anglo-Egyptian intervention had already forced the relocation of the community he studied, and would do so again shortly thereafter, moves which in some ways disabled "traditional" ways of living.

(Cf. Thomas 1971). Of course, that is not what witchcraft is. Not only is witchcraft a thoroughly modern practice, that has come both to adapt in turn to the conditions of colonial and postcolonial Africa and to assist African subjects in adapting to these changes themselves (Geschiere 1997; Moore & Sanders 2001; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Mufuzi 2014), Zambian witchcraft is also invariably colored by colonial influence. Distinctly European magical fears—of black cats, of walking under ladders—come to form part of the language for talking about a local "witchcraft" that itself earned its name through the colonial encounter, and the reckoning with this form as equivalent to that historically present in Europe. This connection may have been tenuous in the early encounter—indeed, it was still complicated in 1930s Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, where Evans-Pritchard used a language of "witchcraft", "magic", "oracles" that he recognized was inadequate to the task of describing the capacious modes of the social theory he was capturing. However, the question of "mistranslation" becomes murkier when we return to postcolonial Livingstone, a place where European missions and their postcolonial American counterparts have been entrenched for centuries. Zambian witchcraft was changed by its framing with European logics. Some of this involved the appropriation of European symbolism (Mufuzi 2014; Reynolds 1963). The kaliloze guns again provide an immediate reference here, both in terms of their form (referencing guns, with some quite distinct references to revolvers and rifles) and in the materials they are decorated with. But more broadly, it is the Christian nature of the encounter with colonialism that shifts the meaning of these witchcraft objects.

This shift is perhaps most clear when we consider the medicinal objects in the Livingstone Museum collections. Unlike the objects considered witchcraft objects, which traffic in and produce death, the objects the Livingstone Museum framed as medicinal were built around magically (as charms) or medically (as herbal cures) refusing the death which the witchcraft objects created, refusing the decay of the body, and instead healing it. The herbal materials are catalogued as botanical clippings, occasionally with notes indicating the appropriate methods for usage and the illnesses which these materials would aim to heal. This pharmacological collection strategy grants these materials a scientificity that allows them to be read as a valued form of "indigenous knowledge". But what brings these herbal materials and the charms together is the peculiar way in which the museum comes to define the category they do not form a part of—witchcraft. Where the magic of protective charms is a magic that heals or does no harm—and a magic that, perhaps as a result, needs little justification for even a very Christian Zambian to recognize—witchcraft is the magic that is about doing violence and—in the case of the needle charms that protect against kaliloze gun attacks—surviving the reflection of violence you have attempted. This distinction seems solid enough until one remembers that the most provable supernatural-related violence that the region sees takes the form of killings of marginal subjects for body parts, which can then, medicinally, assist in the production and sustenance of power. By delimiting violence of this kind to the world of witchcraft, the museum creates a neater division between different modes of vernacular practice than seems to really exist; this move may reflect a deliberate

attempt to cleanse the "medicinal" of its more horrific components, such that "medicine" in its whole—not only in its pharmacological form—can remain an indigenous form immune to moral critique.

Due to the museum's taxonomy and how it is reproduced by Christian responses to witchcraft and medicine materials, these objects come to be inscribed by a very European binary: they are either white or black magic. This idea is now hard to unravel from these materials. The white magic that is beneficial and socially acceptable becomes "medicine", or "divination"; the black magic that is anti-social and violent, is "witchcraft" (Mufuzi 2014). This distinction between social benefit and anti-social violence mirrors the origin mythology that animates tourist life in Livingstone. Livingstone, town, is named after Livingstone, man, who is memorialized as the uniquely goodhearted missionary who brought both salvation and abolition to the region. The ultimate anti-social black magic would then be the violence of slavery, the abolition of which is understood to be of material and moral concern—a concern both with the end of raids that brought upheaval to the north of what is now Zambia (and the danger of being abducted into slavery through these raids) and with the wrongness of the enslavement of African kin. Its counterpart is then the healing force of Christianity, spread by Livingstone. Indeed, contemporary Christianity in Zambia—even after excluding the more willfully syncretic African Independent Churches—is a thoroughly magical phenomenon. From the transubstantiation in Catholicism and consubstantiation in Anglicanism, to the more recently imported Pentecostal and Charismatic churches where locals find

themselves possessed, speaking in tongues, gaining special powers, and being healed by the word of God and the hands of their preachers, there are not only profoundly supernatural ways in which ordinary and spiritual life is expected to be structured, but these supernatural modes are amenable to those governing local ideas of magic. This commensurability of religion and witchcraft in Zambia then produces local witchcraft practices not as impossibilities but as evil presences in the world; the fear of witchcraft and its objects would then come to be central to conversion in the region.

In the Livingstone Museum, the problem of the agency of these witchcraft objects—of their evil, deathly power—is resolved by their deactivation by a witchdoctor prior to their placement on open shelves, and the restriction of access to any active objects accessioned after the last deactivation event. In the process, the museum both builds an archive of materials that can no longer threaten[38] and recognizes their threat as real. But this is not the only comment that the museum makes. The structure of its galleries offers another set of remarks. The ethnographic gallery is set up so as to critique colonialism and its effects on Zambian lives. Its entrance is marked by a curved reed fence, with sand on the ground; once the other side of this fence, there is a sign that says, "Our Village". The proceeding room has several thatch-roofed buildings set up within, sandy floors, many traditional items

[38] This absence of threat is limited to when these objects remain deactivated—the object that ceases to be an archival or curatorial object is an object that might be reactivated by another witch, and used again to cause harm. For this reason, witchcraft objects on open displays are sometimes stolen.

meant to communicate how Zambians would have been living in the villages–although also many objects, like jerrycans and bicycles, that signal that this is life under colonial rule. There are also many figures–3D sculptures of people living their lives in this environment, with these objects; the paintings on the walls continue the scene into the distance. In the next room, labelled "Their Town", the floor ceases to be sandy, and is instead structured like a street, with pavements along the sides, and where the visitor walks in the road. Right in front of the entrance is a huge building, with a sign labelling it Mirage House on that side, and a government office and people's bank on the others. The story of this transition is clear—the urban promises of colonialism and postcolonial modernity proved mere mirages, with life in the cities and towns of Zambia being no easier than life in the villages, led on "traditional" terms. Next to the building, a payphone, a street light, and–along the wall, extending to the right side of the entrance–a scene showing an industrial project helmed by a complaining European man, people struggling for work, and people debating whether the work–and, by extension–the colonial project is worth it. Unlike in the Our Village scene, here, all of the figures are two-dimensional wood cut-outs (or part of the murals). On the right side, we see a church, children walking to school, and a small shop set up in a tin shack, complete with dry goods. Walking around the building, there is a car with wood cut-out figures driving, being stopped by police, while another person sits on the corner, begging.

A sign on the arched wall reading "Museum" marks the end of the installation space and the beginning of the conventional ethnographic exhibits, while

also chronologically and critically situating museological knowledge in and after the destabilizing colonial encounter. Thus, the structure of the ethnographic gallery suggests that the indigenous cosmologies reflected by the witchcraft objects (as opposed to by the museum, or the anthropologists that read the museum, or the colonial administrators who seek to reorganize social meaning for political and economic gain) are an inheritance Zambians cannot abandon. In making this move, the Livingstone Museum both invests in the scientificity of the research museum and challenges the singularity of its authority. The museum, we should understand, does have some (curated, colonial) relationship to truth, and as such is a resource in coming to comprehend anew the Village in the midst of (and after) the Town. Between the affirmations of and attempts to manage the threat of witchcraft and the exalting of forms of life that—while not excluding its trappings—resist the logics of Zambian modernity, the Livingstone Museum is not making any optimistic claims about the potentiality of the future. Instead, it is reckoning with the problem that these witchcraft objects pose, as potently agential materials fundamentally entangled in indigenous ways of knowing that are at once overdetermined signs of primitive savagery, that come only to take newly harmful forms after colonialism and into the present.

This problematic has shaped decades of postcolonial scholarship on witchcraft, where it is often addressed by studying experiences of witchcraft or witchcraft accusations through a set of concrete harms which (beyond any magical meaning) they are understood to provide psychic or critical commentary upon. For

Rosalind Shaw, for example, the transatlantic slave trade is manifest in spiritual and magical ways in Sierra Leone, acting as memories of a violation that is left unspoken in ordinary life (Shaw 2002). For other scholars, in similar ways, witchcraft is the manifestation of the lived social violence of capitalism. This mode of thinking witchcraft, in which it is often cast as part of an "occult economy", hopes to take seriously the modernity of practices that are uncomplicatedly situated in the traditional past. In *Modernity and its Malcontents*, the Comaroffs attempt to rethink all ritual on the African continent as forming part of "efforts of people to empower themselves, [and] thus to assert a measure of control over worlds often perceived to be rapidly changing" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993:xiv), while asserting the importance of thinking ritual as symbolic action. Thus, the Comaroffs replicate Evans-Pritchard's psychological dismissal of the occult. However, where for Evans-Pritchard magical practices have a stabilizing function, for the Comaroffs, they "[figure] in a moral economy capable of addressing the raw realities of misfortune and inequity" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993: xvii). The occult here is transmuted into a form of ritualized social criticism, which may come to have tangible effects. This speaks to an idealized occult world, in which the eminent adaptability of witchcraft (Geschiere 1997) uniquely positions it as a resistant force to those geopolitical changes that affect everyday life in harmful ways (Moore & Sanders 2001:11). But the practice of witchcraft that the Comaroffs identify routinely becomes subordinate to the moral critique that witchcraft is seen to enable. They write:

> African witches have a long legacy. Their signifying potential, moreover, has proven to be unusually dynamic and versatile. They travel across broad horizons, take up residence in towns, become mistresses of money, markets, and motorized transport, wear makeup and modish attire. They also become the personification of capricious commodities, the sirens of selfish desire. Thus Schmoll shows that Hausa "soul-eaters" in rural Niger consume the life essence of their fellows out of insatiable, uncontrolled craving. Theirs is an antisocial lust that finds its "meat" in the bodies of children, and hence subverts the process of social reproduction itself—this, Austen reminds us, being a very general motif in African witchcraft. (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993: xxv)

This brief historic analysis of the doings of witches is subsumed into an account of the soul-eater as a commodity that comes to threaten Hausa heritage, that reveals the moral margins of society and their shift. The Hausa witchcraft accusation is then a quasi-Marxist critique from which we might better come to understand the economic violence of African modernity. It should then come as little surprise that the discussions of magic in *Modernity and Its Malcontents* are animated by the idea of the fetish. This is a layered reference. It is the feitiço which gives "fetish" its name—the enchantment, the magical object, the product of sorcery, the supernaturally animate—just as it is the Marxian commodity fetish—which, by virtue of the magic with which circulation hides the social, becomes a veil masking what is real. This is not just a rhetorical parallel—for the Comaroffs, much of what witchcraft appears to veil is capitalism. As a result, and despite its stated concern with taking non-Western forms seriously in their own right instead of as reflections of the West (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xiii), this text presents us with an unveiling of the occult, which is "truly" a criticism of newly entrenched forms of accumulation. Witchcraft is

simply a metaphor for capitalism.

Similarly to Mbembe's argument about commandement, for Sean Redding, witchcraft becomes the sign of colonial power in Union-era South Africa. Redding quotes a passage from Monica Hunter [Wilson]'s Reaction to Conquest, in which Wilson presents an argument about the witchcraft done to the Pondo by Europeans:

> Quoting an unnamed informant, she [Monica Wilson] elaborated: 'All ubuthi [material for sorcery] comes from Europeans. They are the real amagqwira (witches or sorcerors).'. . . Informants, when asked, replied that store-keepers and individual Europeans in Pondoland did not kill Pondo by witchcraft or sorcery, but 'It is that European, the Government, who ukuthakatha [does harm by witchcraft or sorcery'." (Wilson, Reaction to Conquest, 316-17). (Redding 2006:10)

For Hunter's Pondo informant, the Union of South Africa is a witch, and colonial rule takes place by means of witchcraft. As Redding elaborates, the most frequent target of this mode of witchcraft accusation was the colonial tax, which demanded a fundamental and immediate restructuring of local forms of life, and whose authority (however illegitimate) could not be ignored. To Redding, this reading of white power as witchly is entangled with early evangelism, where the alignment of Christian missions and their associated civilizing projects—training grounds for appropriately proletarian, though at least initially elite, African subjectivities—with the colonial administration colored local understandings of what the supernatural could do, and for whom. The social disruption and violence of the sorcerer—the colonial administration, broadly construed—operated through the fetish of British currency, entrenching and facilitating the colonial government's power at the cost of

indigenous lives and life. Here, like for the Comaroffs, witchcraft is a metaphor—witchcraft accusations are indices of social anxiety, and thus critiques of the decidedly not supernatural operations of the colonial and postcolonial market and state. Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders offer a rejoinder:

> "Is witchcraft, or the occult more generally, offering a critique of globalization and modernity? Must it do so? Is witchcraft really about symbolic politics? Could it be that anthropologists are telling a popular liberal tale through 'others' and, in the process, inadvertently reinscribing the very 'us'-'them' dichotomies we seek to dismantle? It seems most unlikely that, in all cases and places, people are resisting or critiquing the technologies and conveniences of modernization, and they are certainly not shy of the capitalist relations needed to acquire them." (Moore & Sanders 2001:13)

Why should allegations about occult harm so neatly mirror a left-centrist critique of capital and the modern world? Why should witchcraft be fundamentally about any such critique—why should it be reduced to discourse? By thinking witchcraft not as a practice with a social life, and instead as simply the accusations and rumors about whichever particular witch, and to the density of such accusations across history—this scholarship fails to account for why the language of witchcraft in particular works to track "changes in processes of consumption, production and political control" (Moore & Sanders 2001:11) on the African continent. In order to address these questions, one must first be willing to take witchcraft as real. On one level, this might mean taking a more "rounded picture of reality, one that provides for both the visible and invisible dimensions of our world" (Nyamnjoh 2001:47). But even if one is unwilling to countenance the agency of an invisible world, witchcraft is real and

agential nonetheless. The snake familiars of the Reynolds collection are especially suggestive here, as they (unlike their European cognates) are understood to be deeply entangled with the life of the witch. The familiar must be fed (usually eggs), just as the witch must be fed, and blood must flow through familiar, just as blood must flow through the witch, or the familiar and the witch will die. But this materiality is not necessarily that of extreme social violence. But that is the violence of the practices that come to be excluded from the realm of the medicinal—the medicine murders and maimings of children, the elderly, and people with albinism. By failing to reckon with these, and with how conveniently witchcraft accusations seem to map onto critiques of capitalist modernity, witchcraft is wholly excised from the material and social world.

Francis Nyamnjoh's analysis of magic in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon offers a direction for resolution. Here, where sorcerors are at once wholly estranged from social life and possessed of an "undomesticated agency" (Nyamnjoh 2001:44). This "undomesticated agency" is not only the malevolent power of sorcery; it corresponds too to the greed and pride of the economic and political climber, as part of a world in which everything—all resources including life itself—is understood to be finite, and in need of balancing. In both cases, close and distant kin are sacrificed—their lives traded at the market of a shadow world, Msa—to attain position and power. While this certainly appears to be a vernacular criticism of capitalist accumulation, it also seems to make a broader claim: witchcraft has a wild power, free of the influence of any but the witch, that, if left undomesticated—or at

least unchallenged—will continue to consume its kin until there are no spirits left, and its power is absolute.

What does it mean to consume one's kin? This is an expression of the most antisocial of violences—not only the cannibal consumption of other persons, but the consumption of family, the literal eating of the family that grounds one's presence in the social world. This consumption neatly mirrors that of body parts in medicines to attain power and wealth. But it speaks more broadly to how witchcraft comes to be an utterly socially dissembling force. The materials in the Reynolds collection—their aesthetics, materiality, social importance, and magical power—unmoor us and their contemporaries alike from the bounds of the social world as we have been brought to understand it. The witch's otherworldly knowledge, signaled by the material and aesthetic mismatches in the construction of these composite objects, violently unmakes the boundaries of our worldly knowledge. In other words, witchcraft is abject. This is not as the overdetermined signifier of the horrors of the African primitivity, although an awareness of this may well be incorporated into witchcraft practice. Instead, witchcraft is the deliberate crafting and embodiment of abjection, latching onto its position as both marginal and threatening—this much can be seen even in the materiality of the Reynolds objects, with their malevolent superimposition of human remains with craft materials, natural dangers and animal parts. Instead of being a mere survival from a shameful traditional past, it continues to dissemble the boundaries of social meaning in ways that are capacious enough to incorporate the iconography and logic of colonialism. Whether we are concerned

with the witchcraft of the medicine murder or that in which killing itself operates through more occult means, we find a problem of relation. We cannot want witchcraft—even as we might want its heresy—and yet it remains, producing spectacular violence and spectacular objects, all of which unsettle the social. In response to this, we see witch-finding. Sometimes this takes the form of the (magical, or otherwise) identification of "true" witches, potentially a trial in which their materials are brought into evidence, and the imprisonment or (magical) death of the witch. But most witch-finding is not like this, rather the form that mirrors European witchcraft accusations, targeting elderly women *en* masse. But we also know that medicine killings and maimings continue to take place in astounding numbers—and the market for such body parts thrives especially in electoral periods. There is something seductive about witchcraft, about the power that it possesses and is capable of transmitting. This power is not just a discursive referent to things that have actual power. Witchcraft is a necropolitical practice, invested with the power to create, and in the creation of, "death-worlds" (Mbembe 2003: 40). As a result, rather than being a form of critique, witchcraft seems to correspond to a form of commentary (critical or aspirational or something murkier) not on capitalism, or the particular workings of any given African nation state, but on sovereign power, and those who appear to (seek to) wield it.

Indeed, witchcraft is a form that challenges the sovereignty of African states. This challenge is regularly expressed in ordinary life. In one version of this, witchcraft is an evil obstacle to the salvation of the continent, to be overcome

through novel ecclesiastical practices (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015). This point is especially salient in Zambia, whose official Christianity has resulted in explicitly non-secular forms of governance following the election of Frederick Chiluba, a Pentecostal Christian, to the presidency in 1991. Following this line of reasoning—one that seems to reflect the general Christian consensus on witchcraft in Zambia—witchcraft is heretical, but not as discourse or representation. Instead, witches are actual combatants in a cosmological war[39], one which it is imperative for Christianity to win (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015). In a somewhat parallel story, witchcraft is a superstitious practice that is a burden to governance and its potential to provide liberated futures (Okeja 2012). This line of criticism reduces magical beliefs and practices to a backwards misreading of the real that produces frustrating noncompliance with the paternal authority of the state. Here the Zambian state's position offers a useful conclusion. In the Lusaka National Museum—a fairly empty and politically-tinged museum, situated next to a government office building that houses several ministries—the International Museums Day exhibit for 2017 ("Museums and Contested Histories: Saying the Unspeakable in Zambia") featured panels on witchcraft and albinism, among others. The witchcraft panel, while in

[39] This tale of the Christianity v Witchcraft war further complicates the idea of the "occult economy" which serves as a mode of criticizing capitalist value structures. That is due to the Christian evangelical churches (whose leaders are conspicuous in their consumption and almost as rich in moral authority, and whose members tithe heavily), whose work entangles the capitalist and the moral and supernatural, whose adverts litter notice boards and the walls of buildings, and whose churches can be found on every block.

principle standing alone, provided the context through which to understand the other. Witchcraft and magic—including their medicinal and defensive forms, and especially including the forms that enable the accumulation of wealth—are the necessary conditions for the maiming and murdering of albino Zambian adults and children. Tremendous and pervasive violence is incorporated into an illicit economy of supernatural power; superstition, if not evil itself, produces evil. And this violence is of urgent concern not only because it is horrific, but because it persists, spiting national attempts to manage it[40]; and because its occurrence compels international observers to call for intervention, thus reminding African governments of the subordinate position of their own "sovereignty".

In contrast, the heretical violence of and for witchcraft is not trapped by any obligations to appease others—any such death or maiming serves only the witch, and perhaps a series of hired hands, willfully doing violence to others in order to bring about or maintain the wealth or power of the witch in question. There is no decorum to maintain—no acts of violence which might (need to) be justified—nor anyone to account to. There is opposition—the colonial and postcolonial state

[40] The most obvious of these are the attempts to criminalize witchcraft, primarily under British rule, efforts which actually served to criminalize witchcraft *accusations* (see Redding, Gewald). But other anti-witchcraft (and, anti-magic) sentiments animate African government, most clearly where public health and internal security seem to be at risk. These sentiments share a mixed lineage from both European attempts to produce modern colonies and modes of anticolonial anti-tribalism that were the result of wariness of the threats posed by attachments to ethnicity to the making of new nationalisms, but that also took the form of a wariness with practices under sign of the traditional past instead of the modern (and in the case of Zambia, socialist) future.

attempts it, as do Christian churches, and the entanglement of their challenge to witchcraft—or rather, of witchcrafts challenge to both—signals that witchcraft's heretical position may also be a sovereign one (Cf. Fasolt 1998). The attempts to criminalize witchcraft and the evangelical framing of witchcraft as enemy force alike signal that witchcraft presents a critical disruption of the sovereignty of the Zambian state (Cf. Byrd 2011; Federici 2004) that must somehow be restructured from crisis into a difference that is either internal or external to the workings of the state.

Here, it may be useful to turn to another theoretical account of occult power on the African continent, one in which the occult appears primarily as metaphor, again through the form of the fetish. This extended metaphor allows us to read an account of the occult into what might otherwise simply be an account of postcolonial power. It begins, in the French and English versions of Achille Mbembe's On the Postcolony, as such[41]:

> The basic argument of this study is that commandement seeks to establish itself [s'instituer] through the mode of the fetish. (Mbembe 2000:141; my translation).
>
> In the postcolony, the commandement seeks to institutionalize itself, to achieve legitimation and hegemony (recherche hégémonique), in the form of a fetish. (Mbembe 2001:103).

Here, the fetish is the ideal form through which illegitimate authoritarian colonial

[41] I am disinclined to take the English version as a simple corrective to the French, as the English version of this chapter was originally published, in similar form, as an article entitled "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony" prior to the French publication of *De La Postcolonie*.

power, and its postcolonial successor, operates. This fetish appears primarily to be the fetish-as-veil, although Mbembe makes use of the more occult origin of the term. But here, the fetish is also what structures our relations to the obscene, vulgar, sexual, phallic. Thus, this contemporary-politics-as-fetish is not only a veil but a carnival masquerade, which forces us to reckon how political discourse is permeated with reactive and chaotic performances that undermine the recognition of political relations. Mbembe offers an account of how the grotesque, excessive and obscene come to be incorporated into the workings of political power. What initially exceeds the capacities and domains of postcolonial governance comes to form part of what ratifies and enables the workings of the state. These changes can be read as the workings of a state that is aspiring to the modernity that seems to be otherwise unique to witchcraft, which is possessed of an infinite adaptability and responsiveness to change and external interpretation. As a result, Mbembe's power-as-fetish—or perhaps, power-as-witchcraft—is capable of internalizing any obscenity or excess that should disrupt it. This analysis, when applied to witchcraft, is commensurable with what we have seen before.

But on what level does this power-as-fetish operate, as far as commandement is concerned? Is it what might establish the authority of the state, or what legitimates it? If we reduce the fetish to the veil which masks the political real, then perhaps both are true. But if we think the fetish here as capaciously as Mbembe does in this chapter, neither possibility seems convincing. Postcolonial potentates do not institute themselves by radical incorporation or any other means—they are instituted by a

mere handover of power from a colonial commandement established by routine violence[42]. Moreover, the terms of such handovers violently constrain African government policy, as Mbembe acknowledges in the preceding chapter of On The Postcolony, in a discussion of the impositions of World Bank and IMF. What remains relatively unconstrained is a discursive terrain. The second possibility, in light of this remaining discursive terrain through which power might hope to be legitimated, seems more amenable. However, Mbembe goes on to forcefully argue for an African postcolonial drama in which all parties have been radically disempowered, and both the state and the subjects of its regime are locked in a violent powerlessness due to their intimate, unwilling "conviviality" which Mbembe offers as an analytic of superior complexity to the binarism of passivity or resistance (Mbembe 2001:104). Moreover, there is a confusion of terms. This is a postcolonial drama in which the commandement (already the structure of hierarchical violence) figures as a tyrannous regime of domination (Mbembe 2001:103)—while hegemony may still be of relevance here, the pursuit of legitimacy seems ill-suited not only to the fetish but especially to the regime existing in convivial relation to radically disempowered subjects. Regardless of how political discourse might be performed here—with or without the fetish—we are left without a material account of the kind of sovereign power actually possessed by African states, and the terms through which that sovereignty might be challenged or dissembled, and instead offered

[42] This argument is central to the two chapters preceding this one in *On the Postcolony*.

something very close to an account of total domination.

But even the domination that seems total comes to an end. On the first of November 1991, the results of the Zambian presidential election were announced. Following a staggering defeat, Kenneth Kaunda telephoned Frederick Chiluba to concede his defeat, and congratulate the new president. Shortly thereafter, in a press conference,

> Chiluba called on Kaunda to remain in the country and help rebuild it[43]. "I want the fears to vanish, to disappear from his mind," he said. "There will be no witch hunting. Kenneth Kaunda is the father of this country, so we must show him respect." (Maier 1991).

Chiluba's declaration that "There will be no witch hunting" is a loaded play on words, referencing the fact that Kaunda was the subject of myriad accusations of witchcraft. Indeed, it nods at the legitimacy of the accusations against Kaunda—which is not so much a recognition of Kaunda's witchness, as of the growing popular frustration with his singular power that, together with international pressure, produced the multiparty election event in which he was unseated, and of how this late autocratic rule was tantamount to witchcraft. But more than that, Chiluba is declaring his own authority and capacity—perhaps by virtue of this democratic election—to control the world of witchcraft, to dissuade it from action. These two

[43] This statement is complicated, as it becomes clear prior to the 1996 presidential election—for which new laws were passed barring non-Zambian born people from candidacy—and in the following year—when he was stripped of his Zambian citizenship altogether—that Kaunda was not welcome except as a subordinate figure to Chiluba and his MMD.

figures—Kaunda the witch, Chiluba the vanquisher—together tell a story of the success of Zambian sovereignty. The witch's undomesticated agency is domesticated—subordinated—to the newly Christian state by means of a democratic election. But there is more than one threat of witchcraft in this account—there are also the multitudes desiring occult retribution, the witch-hunters in waiting. And where Kaunda's witchcraft-of-sovereignty is overcome by Chiluba's electoral victory, this latter witchcraft (which is also the sovereignty of the rioters who had unsettled Kaunda's Zambia and led to the election), that threatens to compete with Chiluba's role of authorizing violence for the state, is comfortably incorporated into Zambian statecraft, becoming part of what confirms Chiluba's own legitimacy. The witch is dead! Long live the witches!—or so Chiluba, victorious, will tell us.

Perhaps this signals the incorporation of "witchcraft proper" into Zambian nation-building. The use of witchcraft by politicians to attempt to establish their position is certainly suggestive of this. Perhaps witchcraft then takes the form of a commodity whose circulation is attuned to the whims of the state, or its capitalist corollaries. But perhaps instead of witchcraft being incorporated into the workings of the Zambian nation, it is rather independent of and coextensive with Zambian sovereignty, a font of illicit power that is engaged by those who desire its legitimate corollary. The idea that witchcraft could be incorporated into governance belies both the utter social disruption produced by witchcraft and the fact that, even as politicians attempt to access power by means of witchcraft, they can never acknowledge that—to locals—they are witches and—to international observers of

multiple kinds—that they are primitive, superstitious, and willing to corrupt social life to attain power. Instead, it seems that witchcraft holds its own. It has become the immediate point of reference when discussing ascension to the kinds of wealth and position whose power is progressively less constrained. This does not seem to signal that witchcraft is equivalent to the tropic, populist witchcraft accusations that follow those who have attained some form of power (not least because they also follow those who have not). Instead, what it seems to indicate is that witchcraft, as a distinct, independent, unsubordinated sovereign form, is the sign through which power is understood.

## Postcards from Zanzibar: Imperial Geographies of Mechanicity and Absence

> "But the postcard is a naive "art" that rests, and operates, upon a false equivalency (namely, that illusion equals reality). *It literally takes its desires for realities.*
>
> Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, p44 (emphasis original).

In *The Colonial Harem*, Malek Alloula examines a set of mock-ethnographic colonial postcards depicting Algerian women, whose collective iconography interplays two European fantasies of the Arab world. The first, that of Arab cultural and religious alterity, takes the signs of the veil, the domestic scene, the barred windows, the family, as well as various details of attire. The second, that of the seductive and lascivious Arab woman, unveiled, is depicted through bared breasts in fictive repose, face- and breast-framing jewelry, translucent attire (often, translucent headscarves). This second image is always played against the first. Reflecting this, Alloula's final plate, captioned "*Scenes and Types*. Arabian woman with the Yachmak", depicts a woman in a black veil which falls against her shoulders, connected at the forehead by what appears to be a piece of ivory to a black lower-face veil, which extends down the woman's chest, narrowing to the bottom of the frame where the woman's arms appear to meet. This black fabric forms something akin to negative space, against which the woman's naked breasts are highlighted, divided as they are by the draped sign of the Other. In Alloula's reading, the postcard—by allowing for the assumptive conflation of representation with reality—can indeed be manipulated, drenched in Orientalist iconography, to tell a familiar story. In this colonial fantasy of Algeria, we

find that French men must save veiled and trapped Algerian women from Algerian men (cf. Spivak, 1988), with the promise of erotic spoils. The veiled woman and the unveiled woman become two sides of the coin of a necessary imperialism. Alloula ascribes the possibility of this false equivalency to the postcard form itself, whose plain captions we expect to report the real instead of the phantasm—an expectation built upon the coloniality of the postcard form. What this analysis misses is that the captioning in question—the captioning of mock-ethnographic postcards—is never actually plain. It is bound within an ethnographic mode of articulating the place and life of ethnographiable people, and the authority that this mode is granted to inform us about the life of the Other, despite even what a photograph may obviously seem to show. Even in the event that its iconography does not readily recapitulate colonial fantasy, the authority of anthropology allows photo postcards cast as ethnographic such a flatness of reference that the viewer may ignore what the postcard actually carries within its frame. This is not, then, simply a question of visual troping, but of epistemic authority.

Importantly, ethnographic photographs were foundational to the development of both the discipline of anthropology and anthropological and scientific ideas of race (Edwards 1992; Pinney 2011). However, studies of these photographs fail to account for the extensive ways in which these photographs also create ideas of place—both in their depictions and in their travels—and how the ethnographic mode of capturing race and place extends far beyond the typological photographs (the simulation of which Alloula's text documents) that are often treated as capturing

an ethnographic essence. By putting photographs not conventionally understood as ethnographic in conversation with those that are, we can gain an understanding of how photographs can create certain places as racialized in particular ways, certain people as placed in particulars ways, and these people and places as those which are properly understood through the lens of the ethnographic. Crucially, we can come to grasp the elisions and absences that are necessary for this ethnographic framing of race and place. Moreover, by focusing specifically on photographic *postcards*, we can think the ethnographic more capaciously, as extending beyond the narrow confines of those who sought to document humanity for science, instead becoming an ordinary mode through which certain subjects came to be seen and depicted, as well as a site of fascination and enjoyment. The movement of the postcard, here—whether actual or anticipated—speaks to the extent to which the ethnographic framing of the postcard is legible to popular European audiences from across the East Coast of Africa to Europe and North America[44].

I focus on four postcards that would not typically be imagined as ethnographic, that nevertheless share the same epistemic and aesthetic terrain as typological and other ethnographic postcards, and make comparable claims about the cultures, races and territories of the colonized. However, with these photographs there is a crucial difference—while in images traditionally conceived as ethnographic, the colonized subject comes to the fore, as an articulation of (often abject)

[44] All places to which some ethnographic postcards in the Winterton collection had been sent.

difference, in these images, the colonized subject is elided and absented, even as they are visible in the frame or their presence is noted in the caption. When Africanity is noted, it is as an ethnographic elision of something else—the colonial, slaving and capitalist modes of exploitation the photographs otherwise capture. These representational practices reduce racialized subjects to mechanicity, and absent them from the social. This takes place in ways that mirror the assumptions of structural functionalist anthropology: the subject becomes a body fulfilling a task which is at once its role and the defining condition for social systemic possibility. The neatness with which the anthropological tropes of role and system overlay onto the roles—slave, indenture—and systems—slavery, free capitalism, empire—that are in place in Zanzibar, ensures that everyday political-economic violence comes to be erased, and perversely legitimated by the echoes of the ethnographic and the anthropological authority they imply.

This anthropological legitimation performs a metonymic shift, in which images depicting the enslavement and indenture of Black subjects come to stand in for images of Indigenes living self-managed lives. Enslaved and indentured subjects—with ancestral ties to the mainland continent—become Natives, in a process that at once reveals the primacy of racialization in Anglophone conceptions of African colonialism and makes the Black the abject of the modern African colony. Importantly, these postcards do this work in a vernacular context distinct from that of anthropology as discipline, revealing the ordinariness of the ethnographic as a mode of colonial discourse and sight. Further, these postcards—published by men

of Portuguese descent and sharing a mode of absenting capturing different colonized subjects—speak to the common colonial underpinnings of the "Native" and the "Arab" under British colonialism. In this chapter, I explore how these forms of colonial subjectivation reveal the *colonial* utility of the ethnographic, and whether, through an insistent attention to the elided subjects of ethnographic framing, a different kind of idea of the ethnographic might emerge.

Typical ethnographic type postcards create ethnic and racial maps of imperial possessions, capturing subjects as representations of ethnic groups bound to certain localities. You will see a person posed as if to look unposed, though in a way that no longer reads as such to the viewer. If they do not look directly at the camera, they are invariably in profile, the better to note their inescapably racially and ethnically particularized features. If there is anything of note in the background, it denotes their particularity. If the person is wearing clothes, they denote indigeneity (as, often, does their nudity). If they are photographed in context of social life, what is of concern is the social event, and the person is elided. That these postcards are usually labeled ethnically and geographically signals that they form a kind of ethnographic cartography; given that they then travel, at the least through many hands to an archive, but also through postage, this form of visual mapping appears at least as significant as the traditional cartographic form in situating African bodies as African, as bodies. Even in the postcards where some elements of this ethnographic map are absent—the ethnic group, the posed subject, even the recognition that there is a subject in shot (even when there is not a person in shot)—the map remains, guiding

our relationship to the materials, indicating the terms through which these people, places, practices should be understood.

Thus, type postcards present us with a neutral relationship between a particular subject, one form of racialization, another form of ethnicization, and a place. There should be no personalities here, else there would be the implication that what is represented is anything other than the way everything is and has been. Instead, through salvage anthropology's photographic counterpart, we see the Natives in all their glory—as sites for fascination, intrigue, curiosity, but also for high knowledge. Thus, a subject who happens to have been interesting to the photographer or receptive to him becomes a subject who is evidence of the cultural practices of a racialized people who are confined to this territory of that continent—and whom we would be forgiven for mistaking for another member of that group of placed people, for that subject captures something of an essence of all of those people.

Not all ethnographic postcards look like type postcards, or their related genres in other imperialist anthropologies. The postcards I am concerned with in this paper are, on the surface, distinctly unlike type postcards. They may even appear only spuriously ethnographic. These are not postcards that render the other hyper-visible, and fetishize the difference of an anthropologized subject. Beyond failing to replicate the visual tropes that are found in type postcards, these postcards do not even necessarily depict the Other. Instead, these postcards become ethnographic through their attention and their framing—how they look at their subjects, and what they expect buyers to see. In these postcards, functionalist framing serves to absent

their subjects from social recognition, to mechanize them into roles and into objects, to undermine non-imperial relationships to place, and to silence complex histories of slavery and dispossession, while the ethnographic gaze grants these photo postcards their value as souvenirs. In many cases, the image and the caption exist in tension, with the image exceeding that which the caption conveys, but remaining foreign enough to be subsumed into the logic of the text. In this section, I discuss how the representation of subjects, the interplay between the caption and the photograph and the various components of the shot allow us to understand these postcards as ethnographic, and begin to consider the authorizing and naturalizing role the ethnographic came to have.

The first of these is a borderless postcard. Its grayscale photograph centers on a small boat, crafted from bundled cane or wood, on the water, with its large-scale check-patterned sail fully unfurled against two long mast-poles and blown up by the wind. One of the masts extends beyond the top edge of the photograph. The other is tied to the hull of the boat, where it is attached to a steering rod in the hand of a black Zanzibari man with greying close-cropped hair, torso bare in the sun, wearing a light-colored bottom garment pulled up, exposing his legs. He sits, legs stretched out and crossed in front of him, on the rear end of the boat, leaning forwards, with his face directed somewhere between the boat and the camera, perhaps towards the sea ahead. The sun is high, and the calm water is dappled in white, grey and black tones, lightening into the distance. In the background, another boat, visible between the boat and the sail. Further behind, there is land, visible foliage, and hints of buildings.

The postcard is labelled "Zanzibar, Fishing Boat" on the top left corner, in faded print.

The postcard's label does more than refer to the boat as the object of interest: it defines it as the only object of concern. But there is a person on the boat—working the boat—who is in no way hidden or otherwise invisible to the eye. Perhaps the label was guided by the boat—an object of ethnographic fascination—being simply a more interesting subject than the man—who in context lacks the same, being merely a man working a boat, however dark his skin. Yet still, the man is absented—in being unworthy of mention, he becomes unworthy of sight. Like stage hands in black whom we are trained not to notice, the man becomes scenery, part of the machinery of this particular photographic capture. He is subsumed into the boat, becoming part of its mechanics: a component of its steering, or the robotic arms through which the boat may come to catch fish and sails. Indeed, the postcard's label is very specific in how it mechanizes this man—he ceases to be a man, who is capable of sailing a boat, who is sitting on a boat in the shallows of the Indian ocean. He becomes a fisher-man—because this is a fishing boat, but he is also not even that. He is not even -man, reduced through inattention to the mere depersoned role.

Moreover, subjects in these postcards are not only stripped of their subjectivities, but absented from the photograph in ways that strip their relationships to place. This second postcard, labelled "Zanzibar" and "Native Quarters" along its bottom edge, depicts a pedestrian street, between two rows of thatch-roofed

buildings with covered porches, in which printed cloths hang. In the background, palm trees and a sky that contrasts with the light clouds—a beautiful day in the tropics. Several people walk along the street. Three of them are the most visible—two men who are walking towards the camera, and one person who is walking away from it. The latter is carrying things on their head, and keeping them stable with their left arm. Another person, further in the background, does the same. A fifth person stands near the men walking to the camera, visible in the right side of the photograph. His body is turned away from the camera - further to the right - and his head is turned sharply to face the camera.

The palm trees in the distance signal not only tropical paradise—and the fiction of a life of leisure and relaxation, in which any toil is rendered tolerable if not pleasant (Cf. Thompson 2006, 2011)—but the life-worlds built from them, visible in the craft of the houses in the core of the shot. Hanging pieces of cloth—likely left to dry—appear to be *kanga* wax prints, patterned in ways that, if not already then, have since become overdetermined signs of Africanity. But most notably, it is the people in the shot that grant this location its nativeness. Like with the previous postcard, even as they escape mention—and in doing so, escape concern—they are inescapably present, and their presence is what grants the label its authority. You cannot, after all, have an inhabited world absent inhabitants. But you also don't need to really see them; or see if they are looking at you, or read their expressions, or even look closely enough to agree whether you would class these people as "Native". In fact, it is probably better if you cannot—they may prove themselves inauthentic in

the process. Instead, the bodies do the work. While this is subverted by the man staring at the camera—whose gaze refuses the photograph's posturing as ordinary, as documentary—it is confirmed by the two people transporting items on their heads. We should understand from their presence that this is Real Native Life. Reading their absent presences with the sandy ground, the table-frames made from rough pieces of wood, the predominance of thatch, the image of indigenized life and territory becomes clear.

Of course, this—British Zanzibar—is not truly indigenous territory at all. As with the "Fishing Boat", this postcard's label makes a series of claims that shift the language through which the photograph must be understood, and that absent its captured subjects. Unlike "Fishing Boat", this label makes a political claim simply as a phrase, prior to any reference to the photograph. First, the caption asserts that a "Native"—a figure presumably defined by their relationship to the territory upon which they had been encountered—can be "quartered"—confined to an assigned territory, while still somehow remaining "Native". An extraordinary and banal thing is done to the word "Native" in this process—it loses any sense of meaning autochthony or indigeneity, and thus is stripped of the ensuing ideas of territorial belonging and sovereignty. Moreover, the subjects in this photograph, the descendants of people captured in raids along the East African coast by Swahili and Arab slavers, are *made* "Native" by its caption. As a result, the Native is no longer a person who is native to a land, but a person who truly belongs in a specific portion of an annexed territory, consequent of a specific racial character—the Native, in this

postcard, is black, and nothing else. At the same time, the portion of Zanzibar to which they are "rightly" confined becomes, by virtue of the word "Native", the land in which they always were, perhaps even the land to which they would confine themselves. The historical elisions here are manifold—of the people indigenous to Zanzibar Island, of the extensive slave trade that brought most of Zanzibar's "natives" to its shores, and of the changing colonial character of the archipelago. This political claim is elided by the fact that it is made through the modality of a label—which we expect to hold a tidy referential relationship to the visuals provided—and by the fact that the photograph confirms the claims the label makes, at least on some level. Here, we see the natives living as we expect that they might—amongst the palms, and the houses built from them, amongst the sands. We see no others.

Returning to the "Fishing Boat", we find that this postcard does not offer a simple story of absence. Even as the man is absented, his presence is necessary for the photograph to make sense. His presence—as a subject who would be noticed at least peripherally, and imagined through his Blackness as a Native even in the absence of such captioning—is both what enables the sail to be unfurled for visual weight and what gives the boat its ethnographic currency,. His blackness (as a signifier of alterity) both establishes the authenticity of this scene and makes sensible his elision from its description, from the orientation of the viewer's sight. He becomes a Native, sitting on a (thus) Native fishing boat, looking out upon the water as if he were relaxing or about to fish as the Natives do. That his absent presence

grants the boat its aura of fascination only underscores his mechanicity—he is not a person, or a subject; he is part of the boat.

Another postcard shows this process of absenting the Native from place and subjectivity in very different ways. While the previous postcard made explicit (though subtle) ideological claims to the rightful place of the Native, and visually situated this figure within those, this postcard makes no explicit claims. Like the other postcards, it frames itself as capturing a natural scene in social life. But this postcard, labelled "Clove picking, Zanzibar" on the bottom edge, claims to capture a process, an event, an action, a verb. In the process, it hides that it too is making claims about place, subject and belonging. Moreover, as it is expressing these claims in terms that appear to simply indicate an actual going-on—as it is making claims through what it does not say as much as through what it does—there is nothing immediately troubling about the captioning, no evident conflict between image and annotation.

The grayscale photograph shows a working scene. It is midday. Multiple black Zanzibari people are gathered on and around a seemingly pyramidal scaffolding made from wood, which rests against a large and leafy tree whose foliage takes up the majority of the shot. Four people stand facing the camera—a child on the ground, two adults on the top of the ladder, one of whom holds cloves, and, at the very top of the photograph, a man seemingly standing on a branch of the clove tree. A woman sits on the middle of the scaffolding, facing away from the camera. At the bottom of the scaffolding, a man sits on a protruding end of its lowest rung, supporting it, facing away from the camera. On the other side, a young child sits

against the lowest rung, also supporting it, chin downturned and eyes cast down, seemingly sullen, quite likely avoiding the sun. Next to this child, in the bottom right corner of the photograph, stand three women, one of whom faces the ladder, the others with backs turned to the camera.

The label is not misleading us, then, in claiming that these people are picking cloves—this photograph does capture some portion of the event of clove picking. But here we see a repetition of the forms of mechanicity articulated in the Fishing Boat postcard, and to a lesser extent in the Native Quarters postcard. Even though these subjects are implicitly necessarily acknowledged by the fact that at least someone in shot must be doing the verb of picking cloves for "Clove Picking" to be sensible as a label—in a way different to a fishing boat, which can at least logically exist unpersoned—they are still elided. Who, exactly, is picking cloves, and under what terms? The label does not tell us— it tells us that Clove Picking is happening—and in Zanzibar—and we are expected to understand this as simply what happens, in Zanzibar. That is to say, the label introduces a naturalized relationship between an activity and a place (and, implicitly, the people who participate in the activity) that tells us—as functionalism would—this is what these people do here; this is what they always have.

Indeed, the phrase is in want of two subjects—who are the clove pickers, and for whom do they pick? The likeliest answers can be found in the region's history. The clove pickers are almost definitely slaves, either juridically or *de facto*. Both positions are possible because of the dating of these photographs. The postcards in

this collection seem to roughly date to the turn of the 20th century, with the photographs possibly being significantly older. This photograph appears in Abdul Sheriff's *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar* (Sheriff 1987:58). Sheriff's caption indicates this as a photograph of Pemba, the island in the Zanzibar archipelago in which clove plantations were developed following a cyclone in 1872, which devastated the main plantations on Zanzibar Island. Moreover, his caption notes that the tripod scaffolding used to access the clove tree was a standard feature of slave-era plantations in Zanzibar, suggesting this photograph may have been taken prior to 1897, when slave-holding was legally abolished in Zanzibar. But as abolition did not meaningfully change the lives of Zanzibari slaves, forcing them into conditions of indenture to pay their former masters the financial compensation for their freedom (Cooper 1980), even a later photograph may well have included the same forms. In any case, the transition from slave to worker was not a meaningfully transformative one for subjects caught within the plantation economy. In its framing, the postcard repeats the history of this enslavement—by mechanizing these people outside of any subjectivity beyond their contribution to the world of their masters—whilst imagining the forced (or, at best, poorly waged) labor of slaves undergirding transoceanic capitalism as ethnographic habitus.

The question of "for whom" is slightly more complicated. There is, of course, the obvious answer that they are picking cloves for the Omani plantation owner (the slave master, or nominal employer of recently "liberated" slaves). But in this process, they are picking cloves to be sold as part of an international trade in spices whose

capitalist grounding in Zanzibar was exacerbated by the abolition of the slave trade (Cf. Bhacker, 1994), where Zanzibari clove and mace, along with other spices (and their exploitative cultivation) came to replace Zanzibar-trafficked persons as primary trade on the archipelago. They are picking cloves to be bought by spice traders sailing upon primarily European trading boats[45], primarily to Europe and its colonies, fulfilling the capitalist promise of the legitimate trade as a vehicle for post-abolition wealth (Williams 1944; Cf. Ricardo 1819), and sating colonial appetites for spices in an abundance that only wide-spread exploitation could engender (Cf. Sheriff 1987). The irony, then, is that as the slave *trade* was abolished prior to the abolition of slavery in Zanzibar, the enslaved Zanzibari "Natives" come to fulfill this anti-slavery promise even as they are yet enslaved; indeed, their subjugation and exploitation is deepened in the midst of a liberatory fiction about their salvation. That this period between the end of Zanzibari slave trafficking and the end of formal slaveholding is one characterized by increasing British imperial control suggests the need for Zanzibar to be legible as a place in need of saving and to a growing need for it to be legible as already saved—in both cases, by the British, from the horrors of Arab slavery—so that it could represent at once the need for and success of British colonial action. It is then striking that this political-economic moment coincides with a iconographic and discursive terrain in which the African who has become (Black) Slave, then becomes a Native (and thus, not-Slave) who is at once deterritorialized

[45] But also American—see Brady 1950.

(and so perhaps still-Slave but, more likely, Indigenized), and territory-bound (and so the classically ethnographic Indigenous).

Like in this iconographic realm, in the plantation economy, it is the body of the "Native" that does the work—of climbing clove trees to find flowering clusters, of picking the buds, of transporting them, of laying them to dry, of transporting them again, for sale. Here, to maximize profit—as was the obligation at Pemba, in the aftermath of soaring clove prices after the 1872 cyclone—is to reach the limit of bodily capacity. Returning to the working figures depicted in the postcards, we can understand only their bodies. Even as they are rendered ethnographiable, they are paradoxically bound to and stripped of place, bound to and stripped of culture. The ethnographic vision at play has profound functionalist echoes. We find the assumption that there are subjects who need not be named or acknowledged as subjects, existing instead simply for the purpose of a task—who are subsumed into an object or an event—who are not people. In this functionalist reductionism, like "the organic structure of a living body" (Radcliffe-Brown 1940:4), subjects are reduced to a social role where "the combined actions of mutually dependent parts constitute life of the whole" (Spencer 1898:453). Race is absent in this story. But in the postcards, Blackness comes to impose upon the color of skin, and—through the subject's ethnographic reduction to social role and the subject's actual enslavement, in which they form the mechanism for the function of the plantation—the subject is uncannily reduced to mechanical animacy, to a bestial condition perhaps not unlike

that depicted on the stem of the Carved Stick for Sale to Europeans[46].

Moreover, while the terms of Zanzibari ethnographiability reveal some of the looseness of colonial meanings of Nativeness, the Zanzibari subject also represents a limit to ethnographiability against which broadly illuminating characteristics can be read. The first, already identified, is that the ethnographic subject is somehow in and of a place, but is not sovereign. The second comes into closer view upon re-examination of the Native Quarters and Clove Picking postcards. In both photographs, the men wear light-toned robes that are either *kanzu*s or *thawb*s (the former a Swahili garment influenced by the latter Arab garment) with light-toned *kofia* hats that are clearly identifiable against dark skin even in the blurry middle distance of the photographs. These hats—which are Swahili developments of the Islamic *taqiyah*—and these robes together mark the men as proto-Islamic subjects. In the Clove Picking postcard, the women who are photographed all appear to be wearing wax-printed *kanga* cloth wrapped around their torsos, baring their shoulders, and another piece wrapping their hair; this cloth appears, hanging, in the Native Quarters image. While this may correspond to a gendered difference in Islamization—and, perhaps, a gendered difference in ethnographiability—it most

[46] This animality can be read too in the very idea of indigeneity. The word "aboriginal", for example, describes a subject in place from the beginning—*ab origine* (OED Online 2016). There is a violent duality here. The Aboriginal is *in place* from the beginning—an acknowledgement of autochthony, of territorial sovereignty, though one that will be bounded and minimized by anthropology and colonial power respectively. But the Aboriginal is also in place *from the beginning*—this subject is not only the first, but the origin, the barely human.

evidently shows a set of colonial subjects who are, by virtue of an apparent affiliation with Islam, and the apparent adoption of what could be read as Swahili custom, not rational and civilized Europeanizing subjects. They are, at most, potential converts, yet to be spiritually liberated by the power that intends to liberate their bodies.

As such, the subjects of these postcards are cast not (only) as mechanistic *bodies*, but as *flesh*. Unlike the Europeanized subjects who photographed, printed and bought most of these postcards (and, to an extent marked by Orientalist difference, unlike the Omani elites in Zanzibar) who are possessed of symbolic life—spirit—the native was possessed only of symbolic death—the flesh, which, existing outside of divine favor, is in need of salvation (Wynter 2003:278-9). But the flesh is also the body reduced further, to its substance: here, sinews, muscles, fat; but neither bones nor viscera. This is the substance that must be used to attain—that can be harmed without sacrificing—the profits of the Omani plantation owner. This substance, and its formation through the captive body of the African subject who has been abducted and sold into slavery, offers a critical way to interrogate the functionalist structures that the Zanzibari subject is forced to embed himself in. That which remains, with neither organs nor organization (Cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1988),—the flesh—is very different to the functionalist social system—the body whose organized organs conspire towards its perpetual maintenance. The flesh is abject, not so much what holds the social body together as what comes, traumatically, to reveal the fissures in social life. Hortense Spillers articulates this key distinction in *Mama's Baby,*

*Papa's Maybe*[47]:

> But I would make a distinction in this case between "body" and "flesh" and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the "body" there is the "flesh," *that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography*. (Spillers 1987:67, emphasis added)

The flesh—like the postcard (Alloula 1986:27)—is a zero-degree (but not transparent) mode of representation that is indicative of the social terrain from which it emerges, even as this social terrain nevertheless comes to conceal it. And crucially, as Spillers elaborates, the social terrain is legible through the wounding—which is also the inscribing—of the flesh:

> Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies—some of them female—out of West African communities in concert with the African "middleman," we regard this human and social irreparability as high crimes against the flesh, as the person of African females and African males registered the wounding. If we think of the "flesh" as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or "escaped" overboard. (Spillers 1987:67)

The "lacerations, woundings, fissures, tears, scars, openings, ruptures, lesions, rendings, punctures" of social violence—of a slaving social system—together form a "hieroglyphics of the flesh" that is hidden from view by the meanings already

[47] In thinking with Spillers, I am not making the case that the subjects trafficked across the Atlantic became "Native" subjects, nor am I equating precisely the trans-Atlantic conditions of seizure and social transformation with those on the Swahili coast. Rather, I am making the case that enslaved people in Zanzibar were brought into a form of subjectivity that was structured by their enslavement and then only incidentally overlain with the convenient image of their indigeneity.

ascribed to the skin of the enslaved (Spillers 1987:67). But, as Fatimah Tobing Rony (1996) reminds us, this moment—where the racial appearance of an enslaved subject overdetermines them out of the social—is often an ethnographic one. Indeed, the above postcards have thus far revealed an ethnographic mode of attention and vision which transforms the intelligibility of race, colonization, and slavery. As the ethnographic comes to cast the violences against flesh as at once nature, way of life, and ordinary colonial alterity, the postcards become suggestive of how indirect rule (here, present as an implicit fiction) also comes to authorize colonial violence by pretending it away, and how the "anti-conquest" humanitarianism of anthropologists (Cf. Pratt 1992:7)—the modes through which they would assert their innocence with respect to the colonial project, whilst nevertheless casting a European look—does not translate to the disentanglement of the anthropological from colonial violence.

But it is not only the Black whose flesh and subjectivity needs ethnographic resolution. There is a fourth postcard of interest, which differs from the others in three ways. Firstly, it does not depict a colonized subject in the photograph; secondly, it was used for correspondence, sent by A. P. Bryant[48] (of Bala, North Wales) to a

[48] This letter writer reappears in the Herskovits Library of African Studies postcard archive, in another collection. That postcard, labelled "The Hippo's Siesta, Victoria Falls" depicts a hippo in the Zambezi River, at the water's edge, with pale blue water behind and brush and foliage surrounding. In this case, the postcard is sent to a girl at AP Bryant's return address, her niece who is affectionately addressed as Gwenith Gwyn. In the correspondence, the hippo in the photograph is directly acknowledged, being cutely rendered for the child reader as "Mrs Hippo", who lives in the river along with "Mr. Crocodile". The human charm of this correspondence is striking in light of what appears as the absence of any in the Arab Graves postcard, not least because wild animals are rendered human subjects in ways that dead Arab persons

Reverend and his wife in London; thirdly, and most importantly, the absented subjects in question are Arab. The postcard is labelled "Arab Graves, Zanzibar" on the bottom, in faded handwritten print. This label is handwritten in blue-black fountain pen ink on the printed postcard—it is intended as a factual/informative label—and may have been applied after collection or purchase, but probably not by the sender. The photograph depicts a field, with several trees in silhouette in the distant background, the sky a stark white. In the left of the field, a low white building with a pyramidal white roof, possibly a tent. On the right edge of the frame, walking next to and along a white line drawn across the field, is a (probably European) woman, wearing a hat covered in flowers, a white top, and a voluminous black skirt. Her visual presence itself seems enough to discourage an ethnographic reading of this image, when considered against the pains taken in typological photographs to retain 'first contact' as a possible interpretation of the image. Her body is partially obscured by a circular bundle of vertical sticks protruding from the ground, tapering slightly towards the top. Other such bundles are visible in several other parts of the foreground of the photograph.

These bundles, the label signals to us, are grave markers; this field is a cemetery. The people buried here were ostensibly the politically dominant race group in Zanzibar. Not only were they the former imperial powers, prior to the establishment of the Zanzibar Protectorate by the British, but they were also

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are denied.

privileged subjects under the version of Native Rule[49] that the British maintained and then imposed in Zanzibar. The act of taking this photograph, and rendering it a curio for tourists, signals a fascination that is ethnographic in character with Islamic burial, which—in spite of the pervasiveness of Islam in Zanzibar, a place in which almost every free person would have had an Islamic burial—transmutes into a racial fascination with Arabness. While persons are absent from the photograph itself, a certain vision of their subjectivity is brought into presence by the caption. This Arab is a complex figure, signifying freedom in some ways (the domination of the plantation-holding Omani elite, the ordinary Arab migrant's possibility of life outside of the flesh), but also a position of colonial subjugation to the British that is perhaps more similar to that of the Native than it is different. Upon flipping to the postcard's verso, this partial subjectification is ignored altogether. The cursive on the verso reads:

> This is to wish you both / a very pleasant Xmas, and / a happy New Year. / We came to this country in / Aug. traveling up the East / Coast of Africa and had a / glorious trip - Mr Bryant / returns to Port Elizabeth Jan. 4th / and I hope to return in July. / Trusting you are both quite / well. Kindest regards / Yours very sincerely / A.P. Bryant

[49] This concept is turned on its head in light of the difficulties of thinking indigeneity and indigenous authority in a territory populated almost entirely by the descendents of slavers and slave owners with often distant ethnic origin and the descendents of people trafficked from the interior of the continent. But its internal motivations are also brought to the fore - "native rule" does not mean rule by those termed "natives"; it means the preservation of structures of power that are convenient, and their transformation and reification into a seemingly ever-fixed colonial apparatus.

Even where the Arab subjects are brought into some kind of presence by the postcard's label, they are refused recognition as subjects—they are absented—by the postcard's buyer/sender, who sees a photograph of their graves as mere curiosity, a perfect site for a Christmas note to a Christian missionary minister whilst on holiday on an island off of Africa's Islamic coast. This transformation—from burial site to holiday greeting—is a reminder that even as British rule ensured the political and social dominance of Zanzibari Arabs within Zanzibar, they were still trapped within the same racializing frame as the Native—brought into vision by the ethnographic, whilst simultaneously being absented from concern. In both cases, though for slightly different ideological reasons, the white Briton[50] can write themself into the top of the social hierarchy—for being non-Native, for being non-Arab, for being Christian and thus non-heathen, for having pushed to end the slave trade (and in the process, pushed to erase their complicity and involvement in slaving).

What is crucial about the ethnographic here is not that it is revealing another wounded anthropologized subject group (the Arab), whose agency and political virtue might then be recovered through the harms of the ethnographic. However, despite the fact that the harms the ethnographic is in conspiracy to conceal remind us of the structural antagonism between this and the other key anthropologized subject group, the Native[51], the common mode through which these two

[50] Or, in the case of the photographers, the Portuguese-speaking man.

[51] An antagonism which would remain unresolved until the violent revolution of 1964 erased its terms of possibility.

subjectivities were seen and cast by their latest European colonial dominators—the British—is a reminder of the foreclosed political potentiality of the past. How might *solidarity* have restructured the Zanzibari political terrain, had commonalities of colonial perception been recognized and taken as grounds for radical anti-capitalist change not only by the anthropologized, racialized Native but also the anthropologized, orientalized Arab? What might Zanzibar look like had the ethnographic led to the recognition of the contingency of—and the violences underwriting—the position of "Arab"? I ask this question here less out of an interest in thinking a Zanzibari counterfactual than in thinking its contemporary echoes, across the African continent, in the relationships between the subjects once cast as Native and the descendants of the many willful and coerced arrivals of the Indian Ocean and Arab world.

For while it is clear that there can be no *standpoint* of the anthropologized—there are too many mutually antagonistic anthropologized subjectivities—there is nonetheless a specificity to colonial uses of the ethnographic. These mobilizations—unlike the African instantiations offered in the preceding two chapters—work to resolve the abject bursts of the real that emerge in the aftermath of European colonial violence. The colonial ethnographic offers the means through which European colonial subjects may disavow the hidden violences for which they share complicity. To some extent, this process of resolution appears anthropological. Not only does it mirror the *work* of the discipline, its ethnographic reframing of the world is graspable as truth in light of the work of early anthropologists and

sociologists to authorize a set of terms as those which described their objects of study. But it is also something else: it reflects a valence of ethnographic attention, existing outside of the disciplinary domain, within a broader, ordinary, imperial discourse. But as the previous chapter showed, there are other ethnographics—including willful, African, ethnographic abjects, capable of working with the flesh instead of concealing it. The question that would remain is whether the ethnographic can do so without reproducing the anti-social violences of sovereignty. Recalling Spillers, the hieroglyphics of the flesh—the social text inscribed by the core social violence to which some are subject—offer more than an account of violation. They offer an "insurgent ground" (Spillers 1987:80) through which to find a new text for what it might mean to be Zanzibari—what it might mean to be African:

> In this play of paradox, only the female stands in the flesh, both mother and mother-dispossessed. This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the insurgent ground as female social subject. *Actually claiming the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name"), which her culture imposes in blindness, "Sapphire" might rewrite after all a radically different text for a female empowerment.* (Spillers 1987:80; emphasis added).

Here, the black woman's grounding in the flesh disallows her being gendered within the female, whilst becoming the one who—as this social text casts the fictive absence of the black man as Man, who—names. Spillers proposes here that claiming the figure of the woman-in-the-flesh offers, instead of a mode through which black women may rightfully become women, a new condition of possibility for thinking

gender in America. Analogizing from Spillers' intervention to the African context, by insisting on *encountering* and *claiming* the flesh (and the other abjects of colonial violence), we may find a way to think Africanity both on the actual terms in which it is lived (terms which are, following Mafeje, nevertheless wrought with ethnological and anthropological fiction), and on other terms still. Crucially, as the ethnographic concealment of the flesh creates the inability to *see* it, the subjects whose flesh allows them to be ethnographied away from subjectivity must be returned to willing view—and we must be willing to see from their eyes. Some of these eyes look back. In "Native Quarters", we see a man, head turned, glaring—we might imagine, in knowing recognition of his entanglement in the flesh, of the photographer's abjecting of the same—in response to the camera's look. In "Clove Picking", the camera is not as legibly unwelcome, but it is recognized—it is looked at. Even "Fishing Boat", who's fisher-'s face is cast in shadow, contains the ambiguity of a face directed half at the boat, half at the camera. This ambiguity is suggestive. Whether the boat or the camera—the ethnographic creation of Africa-as-body or the ethnographic abjection of Africa-as-flesh—is what is the focus of the eye, the other must remain within the frame. In a context overdetermined by the former, this means a renewed engagement with the latter—with the abjecting away of the flesh, and with how this abjecting is seen and recognized by those subjected to this move. Flesh indicates the ways in which the anthropologized are refused presence in a social life that their absence brings into being. But, as the returned gaze suggests, it may also indicate the forms of sociality that may remain, and that may yet come into

being.

## Between Two Africas: Nubia in the Ethnographic Imagination

> There are those who maintain that Africa cannot unite because we lack the three necessary ingredients for unity, a common race, culture and language. It is true that we have for centuries been divided. The territorial boundaries dividing us were fixed long ago, often quite arbitrarily, by the colonial powers. Some of us are Moslems, some Christians; many believe in traditional, tribal gods. Some of us speak French, some English, some Portuguese, not to mention the millions who speak only one of the hundreds of different African languages. We have acquired cultural differences which affect our outlook and condition our political development.
>
> All this is inevitable, due to our historical background. Yet in spite of this I am convinced that the forces making for unity far outweigh those which divide us. In meeting fellow Africans from all parts of the continent I am constantly impressed by how much we have in common. It is not just our colonial past, or the fact that we have aims in common, it is something which goes far deeper. I can best describe it as a sense of one-ness in that we are Africans.
>
> Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, p132

Egypt has not been African for over forty years. Despite its foundational role in Pan-Africanist struggles for collective liberation and towards radically anti-colonial forms of sovereignty over the 1950s-60s under the aegis of then-President Gamal Abdel Nasser[52], Egypt is no longer really even *North* African. We are often asked to

[52] An extended discussion of this history can be found in Tawfik, 2016. Tawfik's account narrates Egypt's development from a state with a founding role in Pan-Africanism under Nasser, to one with increasingly US-aligned foreign policy under Anwar Sadat, and finally to one marked by conservatism under Hosni Mubarak - crystallized in his support for Arabist north Sudan instead of the Africanist South, and then solidified after an assassination attempt when he was to attend an Organization for African Unity summit. Tawfik also medidates on the failure to revive Egyptian Pan-Africanism following the 2011 revolution.

In this text, I follow the conventional (Egyptian Arabic) transliteration of Nasser's name. But I do so with some hesitation, recognizing the gesture made by Fatin

understand its geographic location on the African continent as something at once incidental and irrelevant to its reality. Really, we are told, Egypt belongs to elsewhere. To Pan-Arabists and the global intelligence and security apparatus, it is Middle Eastern; to those grasping towards classical antiquity or colonial splendor it is Mediterranean. To others still it is none of these, and rather stands as a region unto itself, belonging to no-one but the Egyptians.

Who counts as Egyptian, and who does not always, or sometimes cannot? The answers to these questions seem transparent in light of the histories of enslavement of the populations who lived in what are now the South of Egypt and Sudan, of the 19th century Egyptian colonization of Sudan and later reconquest and co-administration of the region through the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium—a project which ended as late as 1955—, and the displacement of Nubians and Upper Egyptians through the construction of the Aswan High Dam in 1964. It is not unimportant here that the Nubian-displacing High Dam was built, and Pan-Africanist foreign policy was prioritized, by Nasser in the same period; this incongruity is suggestive of the tension between Egypt's status as ex-colony and ex-colonizer, and suggestive too of those who do not fit within the project of a new

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Abbas (2014) in her critical essay on *Dongola*, in which she appears to transliterate this name as it would be pronounced in Sudanese Arabic, as "Jamal abd al-Nasir", while also (and thus emphasizing the prior decision) referring throughout the text to "Nasserism". This dual transliteration suggests the wilful assertion of a Sudanese counter-narrative akin to the Nubian counter-narrative Abbas identifies in *Dongola*, and one that is kin too to the African continent, and possibly also to the broader Arabic-speaking world.

Egypt: The kin of the enslaved, of the Sudanese, of the Nubians - and those who share their blackness. But the project of Egyptian national identity is not only a (repressed) racial one. It is, of course, also a religious one. Alongside these is a temporal aspect: to be Egyptian is to claim an unbroken tie to the ancient, while remaining a modern. It is on this last note that the figure of the Nubian becomes an urgent question for this chapter: the Nubian, while also a subject with ancestral claims to antiquity, is ultimately an *ethnographic* subject, one denied coevality (Fabian, 1983) and instead made legible through the idiom of custom, its danger and its disappearance.

This chapter examines two Egyptian literary texts differently animated by ethnographic concerns with representing Nubian people. These two books—a novel, *Dongola*, and a book of short stories, *Nights of Musk*—are both set in and concerned with "Nubia"—a term which indicates the ancestral homeland of the displaced ethnic Nubians of Egypt. *Dongola* is centered around Awad Shalali, a would-be Nubian nationalist who ultimately abandons his revolutionary aspirations and leaves his hometown behind. The novel, which alternates between his, his mothers', and his wife's narration, wrestles throughout with Nubian relations to gender, custom, nationhood, as well as with questions of historical justice. *Nights of Musk* comprises five stories set in Nubia or sites of Nubian resettlement, which together offer meditations on Nubian sociality, custom and kinship, the inhabitation of difficult terrains, and the efforts to maintain an existence in the wake of the High Dam. I read these texts through and against their attachments to culture, politics, and history,

paying attention too to how they are framed by reviewers and readers as conveying a sense of Nubian reality and possibility. I explore how the disavowal of the ethnographic (in all of its racial and cultural senses) in Sudan and Egypt is an attempt to narrate a project of capitalist modernity in terms of ancient lineages, in terms that prioritize an imperial regional affiliation with the Arab world and that seek to elide any relation to the rest of the African continent. Moreover, I argue that by resurfacing the ethnographic—by re-centering the Nubian and the Sudanese—in considerations of Egyptian political identity, we might think Africanity north of the Sahara in ways that allow us to reflect upon, and begin to think past, the complex coloniality of Egypt.

Perhaps the most widely encountered Egyptian presentation of the ethnographic is one found in the Nubian Museum, in Aswan. Upon walking down its stairs into the cavernous exhibit area, the lighting of the museum shifts, from broadly lit overhead to a dark room in which antiquities are spot-lit from the front, and some lit from below. The exhibit area is organized chronologically; different areas contain artefacts from different periods in Nubian history, and the organization of the exhibit suggests a path through the artefacts that takes you through an ancient past typified by the grand and the monumental. But even as there is a sequential logic to one's walking, these objects first present themselves to the viewer as a mass of dramatically staged materials. Their gridded layout and visible abundance immediately invoke the idea of a "collection" of artefacts, and one burdened by the majestic weight of the "ancient". As one proceeds through this floor of the

museum, the hall of the spectacular ancient gives way to a series of small recessed exhibit areas with much lower ceilings and bright lighting, through which the visitor learns about the region's maritime trade, the archaeology of the everyday, and is brought into sudden encounter with Nubian people in the ethnographic present, through a full scale diorama depicting two seated women, both wearing dark blue headscarves and robes, in an outdoor area, with fake palms and a red belt fence between them and the visitor. Behind this diorama—and after walls that offer a more conventional ethnographic museological experience, though one where objects are on the floor instead of in display cases—there is another diorama capturing a full scene from daily life, stretching for maybe 20 meters from one side of the room to the other, and in the process traversing an entire day and an entire river.

On the extreme left, we see a man in a cobalt *gelabiya*, with a donkey in front of him, positioned so as to work the *saqiya* and gather water from suggestion of a well beneath, or perhaps from the river to the right. Moving rightwards, we find a mural depicting the Nile, and the sandy floor of the diorama bends into one-point perspective at its center, suggesting that as we have walked from one scene to another, we have also (and very quickly!) crossed the river. Having crossed it, we find six children—three boys in the front, three girls behind them—wearing light and bright colors, sitting on a carpet on the sand as they attend madrassa. Their dark-skinned and old teacher sits in front of them on a wide squat stool, wearing a white *gelabiya* and turban. Three building faces follow, staggered so as to move us through more space in less museum. They are followed by a street scene. Two dark skinned

men hold instruments—one opens his mouth as if to sing, and holds a *tar*, while another holds a *kisir*. A lighter-skinned woman wearing a patterned abaya, embroidered headscarf, and a large gold-toned and turquoise-embedded necklace stands in the center of the scene, arms pulled away from the body, one hand holding the outer layer of her skirt, as if dancing. Behind her, two dark-skinned women wearing blue-embellished black appear to speak to each other, while two dark-skinned men in white sit to the right, appearing to watch the dance. The building-face behind this scene is illuminated in yellow from behind, suggesting a night-time event. Just to the right of this, another building face, with a window and door through which to see the event illuminated within: three women in sparkly black dresses helping a fourth—equally sparkly, and wearing gold-toned jewelry as well—put on a translucent and embroidered veil, perhaps for her wedding.

Returning upstairs, there is less to see. On the right, there is a small museum gift shop, primarily selling books published by the American University in Cairo Press. To the left of the entrance, there is large room devoted to the history of the UNESCO salvage efforts, and to the international partnerships that brought them about. This history is presented in a fair amount of detail over immense cloth banners hung from the ceiling of the room. These banners are laid out in rows little over a meter apart from one another; with much of their text high up, they are hard to be at once far enough from and close enough to read, indicating that the museum does not expect visitors to spend much time in this room, nor to care particularly about the details of the historical relocation of ancient artefacts and buildings, nor

the drowning of what remained with the establishment of the high dam. In the downstairs exhibit area, where this information is presented with the salvaged materials or their replicas in plain sight, the idea of a salvage effort is astounding. But upstairs, this interest is transformed by the tedium and discomfort of actually poring through these awkwardly placed materials. They are not, ultimately, what visitors come to this museum to see.

Nevertheless, the histories they contain are critical to understanding contemporary Nubian experiences, and contemporary Nubian narrations of the region prior to and since the construction of the High Dam. Perhaps for this reason, the dispossession and displacement produced by the High Dam is a recurring theme in the framing text—the blurb, the reviews, the translator's note - to Haggag Hassan Oddoul's collection, *Nights of Musk*: *Stories from Old Nubia*. The book is a lightweight paperback, with a Margo Veillon watercolor, "Sebouah Feast Day", as its cover image. A street scene in front of what may be a mosque, it depicts figures dressed in suggestions of white, with red slings and fabric accentuating the scene, and carry baskets on their heads. Their skin is an inky black, deeper than the outlines around the buildings and figures; these outlines are doubled and sketchy in ways conveying movement. With the title, *Nights of Musk: Stories from Old Nubia*, we are promised life in motion. The reviews on the back seem to promise the same:

> "A very moving book." - Arab News
>
> "In his stories, Oddoul captures—in astounding detail—the ways of the Nubian people and the tragedy of their demise through the course of

history." - Egypt Today

These reviews invite the reader to expect in this set of stories a dirge, a haunting, in which history asserts itself, not least through the form of a lost culture—a lost *black* culture, lest we forget the cover—on parade. The Nubian here—and the Nubia suggested by the cover—is an anthropologized subject the reader may hope to encounter in rich ethnographic detail. But this encounter is also characterized as a form of historical memory; this text salvages the Nubian who has supposedly disappeared from Egyptian life "through the course of" a "history" that appears empty of political meaning. On the front foldout, we find the book's blurb:

> THIS COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES, both poignant and skillfully crafted, brings to life the tragic demise of traditional Nubian life and culture. If the earlier dams that were built across the Nile during the first half of the twentieth century caused increasing numbers of the men-folk to migrate north to Cairo and Alexandria to work as servants, waiters, and doormen, the completion of the High Dam in 1964 sounded the death knell. While the temples of Abu Simbel were meticulously relocated at great expense, the drowning of the ancient heartland of the Nubian people along the banks of the Nile went largely unnoticed.
>
> Haggag Oddoul's work, as well as documenting the personal tragedy of individuals caught up in massive social transformation, also casts a nostalgic light on the heritage and way of life of the Nubians: their rhythmic dancing, their beautiful women, the lively humor of their elders, and the enormous centrality of their traditions and the spirits with which they shared their environment.

The blurb is written to situate the book within Oddoul's broader oeuvre and within a geopolitical context. In some ways it overstates the reach of the stories within by providing this context, as in the first paragraph. But it also vastly understates it, by

failing to note the racial and sociocultural dimensions of the figure of the Nubian outside of fragmentary tropes. The brief suggestion of political-economic commentary—the migration of "men-folk" and their later work—is followed by the implication that the problem with forced relocation was the loss of an "ancient heartland". This gesture is fascinating: in positioning the Nubian as a figure with a similar claim to antiquity as the Egyptian, the Nubian is nevertheless instantly produced as out of time. To be drowned out of being out of time, then, is to be forced into modernity—something sad, but perhaps something right. Oddoul's work is cast as nostalgic, but impossibly so. For it is nostalgic for a version of Nubia and Nubianness that is either hopelessly out of time—with tradition and spirit-rich cosmologies at the center of life, and so the Nubian as the quaintly ethnographic fool—or otherwise, with the dancing, beautiful women, and funny elders, as inconsequential outside of some orientalist fantasy. More sharply still, in this framing the book is given the task of "documenting" a historical experience. In the process, the reader is invited to imagine this text as something beyond the literary—as something perhaps no longer literary. Instead of being allowed to be a set of short stories—allusive and internal and imaginative and fabular—there is a desire for it to do, at once, the work of people's history and that of salvage anthropology. While these projects seem to be at odds, their combination reflects a relationship between historical modernity and the ethnographic that recurs in writing about Nubia, and further underscores the tension between these modes of thinking the near past and present and the weight of the civilization-scale accounts of the distant, ancient, past.

This book is especially fascinating not because of the ethnographic character of the stories within - though many valences thereof are present - but because there is an investment in understanding this book as doing the work of the ethnographic as a form of history, and in ways that disable the potential for political critique.

The four stories in *Nights of Musk* make no effort to write history or ethnography. Nor do they attempt to speak to national politics. The stories do not even share a time period, mood or realism. But they are all shaped by an affection for Nubian life, which is not *documented by* the writing as much as it *animates* the writing. Put differently, Oddoul has not written something akin to an ethnographic monograph—as the blurb might invite us to imagine—but instead something intimately informed by the ethnographic. This becomes clear in the first story, "Adila, Grandmother". The text and its glossary tell us that the word *adila* means farewell, or return safely, in Nubian. The story is narrated in the first person by Mohamed as the remembrance of his grandmother upon her passing. The story captures Mohamed's journey towards caring for and understanding a grandmother who at first seems hostile towards him—the child of her Nubian son and his Northern Egyptian wife—because of his mother's outsiderhood. Importantly, the task of understanding his grandmother is also that of understanding her village—"the outsider's village" (Oddoul 2005:1)—and Nubian values more broadly.

Throughout this story, the grandmother is produced as an ethnographic subject par excellence. Her dialogue is a mixture of Nubian and broken Arabic[53]. She

[53] The translator does not, however, reproduce in the English the gender-swapping

is perfectly at home in her village that she almost never leaves, in which all members are extended relations, all children are cousins, and which is described as a community of one "tribe", one "family" (Oddoul 2005:4). Her face is described in ecological terms, as "shriveled" (Oddoul 2005:2); when she cries, "A stream of tears [moistens] the cracks on her withered face" (Oddoul, 2005:13), and it is no accident that what she is crying is the loss of life-worlds, plenty, and *water* with relocation from the Nile to a new desolate landscape. That is to say, her ties to the land are so profound that they literally shape her body. Grandmother is also someone who—despite the relocations—still lives according to custom; her "temples [are] marked with lines from a bleeding blade" (Oddoul 2005:7). Such a blade reappears later as Grandmother tends to her sick daughter-in-law by letting blood from her calves and back—being stopped before reaching her temples—amidst protestations from her North-facing light-skinned granddaughter that Mohamed reads as implying she sees a "barbarity" to this act of care (Oddoul 2005:19). This sense of the customary as barbaric reflects how, while capturing a tension between the ethnographic and the modern, Grandmother's conflict with her daughter-in-law and granddaughter is also racial.

This racial conflict is captured in the recurring use of the term *gorbatiya* or *gorbati*. This term, described in the book as "a pejorative term for anything non-Nubian" (Oddoul 2005:122), is most frequently used to describe Mohamed's mother,

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that he notes in the Arabic as marking Grandmother as a poor speaker of Arabic.

but is also exclaimed by Grandmother while she cares for her daughter-in-law, in response to her granddaughter's protests. This granddaughter essentially only features in this story as a foil to the blackness and custom which envelops her grandmother—she relishes in her light skin, doesn't visit the village, will marry another *gorbati*. Early in the story, Mohamed's aunt explicitly distinguishes color from the status of being a *gorbati*; she tells him that there are Nubians of "every color—black, tan, bronze, and white too" in the village, and that he can marry one of any of these, just not a *gorbatiya* like his mother (Oddoul 2005:8). But even as it is possible for Nubians to have light skin and remain insiders, it is only those who possess light skin that risk becoming *gorbati* themselves. In the village children's teasing of Mohamed with the term throughout the story, and often when it is used by Grandmother to Mohamed and his mother, it operates as a contingent invitation to kinship. This invitation operates in terms that acknowledge the racial violence of Egyptian nation-building, and so breathes life into the depiction of a community marked by sorrow and a struggle to survive—through ritual and the ordinary alike—the extinction that cascades towards it.

While in "Adila, Grandmother", the ethnographic is just one feature in a story that is about family, conflict and remembrance, the last two stories in *Nights of Musk* are overwhelmingly saturated by the ethnographic. The first of these, "Zeinab Uburty", is a morality tale grounded in an account of a Nubian cosmology which is rich with agential beings outside of the human and animal, which - like the Nubian people who encounter, live beside, avoid them—exist in necessary relationship with

the Nile. The story begins:

> Here we divide all living things into three. First there are the adamir, the descendants of Adam, that is us. Half of us are evil like Cain, and half of us are good like Abel. Then there are the inhabitants of the river bottom, and they too are good and evil. The kind ones we call amon nutto, the River People, and the evil ones amon dugur, the River Trolls. We pronounce the word dugur quickly and violently to get it out of the way, as if it is a plague. But evil as amon dugur are, they only ever harm one or two adamir every so many years. . . However the evil ones among the third kind of conscious beings, the People of the Current, are totally the opposite. I take refuge in God, the Almighty Protector, for they are godless infidels and truly evil. (Oddoul, 2005:41)

The story is told as a recounted oral history from the narrator's youth. It follows Zeinab, a woman ugly in "looks and nature" who comes to be nicknamed Uburty—"the word for the ashes that gather at the bottom of the household oven", that women would smear over their faces in the event of catastrophe, before proceeding to mourn (Oddoul 2005:50). Zeinab, the narrator tells us, was "envious and spiteful", "[cursing] everything that moved" (Ibid.), and thus keeping any men from wanting to marry her. After two failed marriages, Zeinab grew so envious as to look for an old book of magic that had belonged to her third great-grandfather, an evil wizard who had been killed and dismembered in retribution, and his body eaten by wild animals. She used the book to summon a demon to "[bind] the males" from having sex with their wives (Oddoul 2005:53), in exchange for her soul. The demon, Kakoky, later promised her any wealth she desired. With every wish Zeinab made, her own will was bound more and more to the demon's. Her wishes were not without consequence: her ill-gotten wealth and plenty had blocked the sky with grey, frozen the Nile and

withered it's fruit. As the village realizes Zeinab is responsible for their tremendous misery, they and Kakoky too turn on her. The villagers began to organize a revolt, while Kakoky sapped Zeinab's strength and sight, mocking her for her foolishness. Zeinab eventually attempted to escape, but could not find her way, and was recognized by villagers who try to throw her to hyenas that were uninterested in eating her feeble body. Kakoky eventually unbound Zeinab, who fled the village, leaving the villagers to look on at narrow Nile, with the River People emerging from it in wait, as the sun reappears in a blaze. With the world restored, the villagers went out in pursuit of Zeinab, who they killed and threw to wild animals. The narrator concludes:

> "That's what happened to Zeinab Uburty in the end. The same thing that happened to her wicked grandfather Hamreen. But we never did find the evil book and burn it. It remains hidden somewhere, waiting for a certain day. . . .
>
> "I wonder if any of you young men will think someday about looking for it, in order to cross over to the other side and enter into a pact with the demon Kakoky." (Oddoul 2005:88)

On one level, this is a morality tale in which witchcraft takes on the role of radically antisocial evil, and in which the forces of bad must be overcome by collective (and violent) action in order to restore the order of society. This is, at its heart, a classically structural functionalist reading of social conflict—as an organizing tension that returns society to a stable equilibrium. And it is narrated so as to reproduce a genre that is the literary and historical response to the ethnographic—that of orature. But Zeinab's witchcraft—which transforms the Nile from a reliably flooding

measure of time to the barest stream, which dries up the fruit and the soil and leaves all but the malevolent starving—is not just any witchcraft, but that of the High Dam. And this witchcraft does not only destabilize the comforts of the past, it alters the world *irrevocably*. There is no revolutionary violence to any Upper Egyptian Zeinab that will return the Upper Nile to its former abundance, nor that will restore a now-forgotten relation to its banks. But the protagonists in this story are so perfectly the idealized subjects of classical anthropological concern that there is no idiom outside of the cyclical, unchanging fabular through which to imagine any response to Nubian dispossession that might allow for new kinds of political action in Egypt.

The last story in *Nights of Musk* is "The River People". The story is largely written in first person from the perspective of Asha Ashry, a young woman who is overwhelmed by the transformations of her village, as various dams are built upon the Nile, men are taken to the North to work, and their "land is swallowed up" (Oddoul 2005:112). The man Asha hoped to marry is also swallowed up, drowning on a mail boat. In her grief, Asha puts on her grandmother's jewelry, and takes the family sword, and goes to Lake Nasser to be taken by the River People. She is swallowed up too. This text's interweaving of historical detail, magical cosmology, and the ordinary tragedy of loss and grief is tremendously moving—not least because the details of Asha Ashry's family's grief are narrated through tropes that are introduced in the previous three stories—the processual wailing, the dirt-blackened faces, the barrenness of the soil. But as Anthony Calderbank writes in his translator's note:

> The dilemma is that these delightful stories are born of a tragedy that can never be undone, and though there is humor, even a sense of hope in them, and though we may well enjoy them, we are left somehow confused and dismayed at the end (Calderbank in Oddoul 2005:ix).

Calderbank finds some solace in the idea that thanks to Oddoul:

> Nubians will not go uncelebrated, for he has documented his people's demise and given us a taste of how things used to be deep in the south of Upper Egypt. (Ibid).

But I do not find here a cause for celebration. In fact, it is the very quasi-anthropological project that this note ascribes to the book—of documenting a demise, like the salvage anthropologists who followed the UNESCO mission, of showing things how they used to be—that keeps these stories from truly responding to the context—of Nubian *dispossession, displacement, disposability*—from which they emerge, and to which the stories are so angrily directed. This is a problem that is only heightened by how the book is framed, where its ethnographic pulse is reimagined as ethnographic texture, as though Nubia could be reducible to dancing and music along the banks of the Nile, as though the inhabitation of custom could be reducible to its representation. The desire to read into this book a charming museumified anthropological form fails to reckon with the anthropologization and racism that undergirds it, and too with the violent imperial and slaving history of Egypt in relation to the region. The High Dam becomes the foundational violence, before which the bounded community out of time was *real* and should have been preserved, instead of a capstone to centuries of social marginalization and

repression. And even as "Zeinab Uburty" and "The River People" offer us a taste of magical realism, it is thoroughly unhaunted—even the harms suffered by Zeinab were those she ultimately brought upon herself. The closest *Nights of Musk* comes to being haunted is in "Adila, Grandmother", whose old and cantankerous title character refuses to make peace with the new world she has to live in. But even this history is short, and with Grandmother's care for her daughter-in-law, we end up with a story of survival through reconciliation.

Idris Ali's novel, *Dongola: A Novel of Nubia*, offers no such relief. A text punctuated by the near and distant past; it begins in historical conversation. He quotes two historical texts that capture moments of Nubian "Illumination" and "Disgrace" (Ali 1998:1-2):

> **ILLUMINATION:**
>
> [Caliph] Umar wanted to secure the southern borders of Egypt, as he had secured the Western borders. And so he sent 'Uqbah ibn-Nafi' al-Fihri to Nubia, but the people there fought the Muslims fiercely. 'Uqbah quickly withdrew without having concluded a peace or a truce, as the Nubians shot their arrows, never missing. They aimed only with their eyes when they shot, so the Arabs called them "the bowmen of the glance." Umar's battalions remained skirmishing on the borders after 'Uqbah's retreat. In the caliphate of 'Uthman ibn-' Affan, Abdallah ibn-Sa'd ibn-Abi-Sarh made a truce with them, though one side fought the other, and they made an exchange. The Nubians gave the Muslims slaves, and the Muslims gave the Nubians food equal to the value of the slaves. The Nubians did not even think of crossing the borders into Egypt to engage the Muslim forces, but were content to repel their enemy from their own land, and to stay on guard against them.
>
> Dr. Muhammad Husayn Haykal,
> *Al-Faruq Umar*

**DISGRACE:**

> The Arab tribes which established themselves in the region of Murais in the early centuries of Islam trafficked in slaves from Nubia, and they kidnapped some Nubians and sold them to merchants in Egypt. Also, the raids Egypt mounted against Christian Nubia yielded Nubians as captives, and the Arab tribes trafficked in them.
>
> Al-Maqrizi recounts that when 'Abd-al-Rahman al-'Umari had conquered the Nubians in the place known as Bashanqir, between Barbar and Abi Hamad, "slaves were so plentiful with their owners, that when one of them had his hair cut, he gave the barber a slave."
>
> Dr. Mahmud Muhammad al-Hariri
> *Aswan in the Middle Ages*

This device situates the text—and, particularly, the insurgent Nubian nationalism of its chief protagonist, Awad Shalali—within a consciousness of the "Nubian" an ethnic form fundamentally structured by enslavement and its legacies. But more broadly, this text is also situated in nostalgia for a moment of past imperial glory, in which Nubians were able to sustain and defend their position of comparative freedom in part through the capture of slaves for sale to those in the North who were yet to enslave them. In this light, the Nubian nationalism that Shalali will never fully motivate, however he may implore his kin to subscribe to it, is grounded both in a sense of historical violation—a stolen *dignity*—and that of a nostalgia for a lost *majesty*. This device also situates the book in conversation with the writing of (political) history—and its protagonists as (putative) political actors—, which allows us to read *Dongola* as counterpoint to *Nights of Musk*. In *Nights of Musk*, we are promised stories that will do the most intimate form of the representational work

otherwise assigned to salvage ethnography—and the book broadly is framed as though it could be a quasi-anthropological text—, and thus presented with the protagonist as anthropological informant, seamlessly operating within the realm of the cultural. *Dongola*, from its very first pages, insists on being a different kind of text. Instead of being concerned with the Nubian *way of life*, it is concerned with the Nubian *historical experience*, and in the longest of views, beginning at latest with the reign of the caliph Umar I in the 6th-7th centuries CE. In *Nights of Musk*, the relevant history of Nubia begins much later, in 1901, with the disruptions produced by the building of the earliest Aswan Dam that begin to transform tribesmen into townsmen (Cf. Mayer 1961; Magubane 1973). These transformations, as historical events only one or two generations removed from living memory, allow *Nights of Musk* a contemporaneity—an ethnographic presence—that makes its nostalgia for the past legible as an expression of grief for a very real kind of ethnographic possibility. *Dongola's* nostalgia is very different, and seemingly more phantasmatic—it is for a distant moment accessible only through historical texts, and (as Shalali will find throughout the novel) thoroughly unremembered by those whom it might interest. But where *Nights of Musk*—in its attachment to a kind of decontextualized ethnographic against all other memories—appears romantic in its portrayal of the past, *Dongola*'s relationship to the past is grounded in an assertion of the past's relevance, rather than difference, to the present. This sense of historical continuity produces the revolutionary Shalali of the first third of the text as rightful in his revanchist anger at the conquest, degradation, and ensuing disposability of Nubia

and its people.

It is tempting to read this early Shalali as illuminated. He is certainly delightful to encounter, as he reads histories of Nubia and Nubian-Egyptian conflict into the landscape and architecture of Egypt, turns Egyptian nationalist iconography against itself by subverting the meaning of the ancient (Abbas 2014:156-7), and narrates himself to his many interrogators as located in and identifiable by historical moments, subjects, and conflicts, and always as a Nubian contra Egypt. But as Fatin Abbas (2014) notes, this early Shalali spends his time aimlessly wandering, almost overwhelmed by the intrusions of his phantasmatic memory of the ancient into the present. Indeed, when the communist Shalali had attempted to organize, he found his ostensible comrades were disabled by his blackness. Shalali's newfound Nubian nationalist zeal is thus as much the product of alienation from Egyptian nationalism and that from the revolutionary fissures that had opened against it. When Shalali returns to Aswan after this wandering, he is resolute in his pursuit of Nubian nationalism, and he soon escapes its questions and demands to try to foment revolt south of the border, beginning in Dongola, the capital of the medieval Nubian kingdom of Makuria. Over the second section of the book—largely narrated by Hushia, Shalali's mother, in his pained absence—we find that this revolutionary project fails: "Nubian" is an identity operating on an absurd scale to those he speaks to—too broad to speak to important forms of ethnic particularity, and not as relevant as (and too dangerously in competition with) burgeoning projects of postcolonial national identity. He eventually finds work as a cruise ship captain,

where he falls in love with a French professor of oriental history who is "tolerant", "an opponent of fanaticism", and who convinces Shalali that:

> history was just the dusty past and that to be obsessed with it just meant illness and death. What he had been was gone, and his dreams of a Nubian state were naive, and just an injury of history. (Ali 1998:75)

These adventures are narrated after Shalali has ended his self-imposed exile, and has returned to the resettlement village. Shortly thereafter, he realizes his ailing mother, Hushia, had been left to fend for herself for years without income or support, and had only survived through the care of the community. He cannot bring his new life to Aswan, nor can he move on from his past by staying, but he must make a plan to care for his mother, and the men of the village are horrified at the thought of one of their daughters becoming a paid carer. Instead, knowing it will amount to her enslavement, Shalali marries a woman from the village so that his mother will have a societally-sanctioned carer, and soon abandons her forever. In the third section of the novel, we begin to see the living echoes of the disgrace with which the novel begins. The perspective shifts entirely: we follow Halima, Shalali's wife, as she lives as Hushia's slave, is denied a divorce by her violent father - who chases her down the street threatening her and cursing when she complains about Shalali—and ultimately seducing an Upper Egyptian carpenter working on a house nearby. When the blind Hushia wakes up in the night, she hears them and screams out—"Disgrace!" (Ali 1998: 113). The Upper Egyptian runs, while Halima panics and strangles Hushia. In the novel's desperate climax—and it's final moment of Disgrace—Halima cries out

"Help! Help! Help me! The Upper Egyptian has killed Hushia al-Nur!". In this last moment, the remaining possibility of a radical consciousness—of Hushia's death signaling a form of revolutionary violence, an eruption from a newly transformed oppressed subject—is collapsed; in its place, we find black Egyptian survival predicated on destroying another black Egyptian.

After all of this tragedy, we are left with the question of the radical political promise that, while nebulous, nevertheless pulsates through Shalali's encounters with Cairo, Aswan and Northern Sudan. The early Shalali is compelling[54], demanding that the reader think Egypt anew by centering the Egyptian Nubian—and, by extension, the Sudanese (Nubian or otherwise)—in our accounts of Egypt's history and in our sense of political imagination. And he is also compelled—for two decades of his life—to treat this reimagined Egypt as the necessary force that would correct a centuries-long history of injustice. But his identity politics does not gain traction.

If we follow David DiMeo's (2015) reading of the text, the lack of traction reflects the fatal political impossibility of any re-imagination of Egypt from the perspective of its South. This is due both to the necessity of Nubian exclusion to produce any Egyptian nationalism, and to the Nubian subject's position as part of a "voiceless population lacking the grammar to understand its own liminal existence in the refashioned imagination of postcolonial Egypt" (DiMeo, 2015:73). In this process, DiMeo misreads not only the historically contingent and extensive nature of

[54] It is not only the reader who is compelled - the town madman is taken in, too [cite page], eventually helping Shalali escape imprisonment in

the Nubian exclusions from the construction of Egyptian identity as necessary and yet historically arbitrary (while failing to acknowledge the seeming possibilities opened within this, at the time in which the novel is set, by having the Pan-Africanist Upper Egyptian Nasser as president), and the extent to which most of *Dongola's* Nubian characters refuse to align with Shalali precisely because they are *aware* of their own marginality and disposability (and the very narrowness of the possibility that that position might change, especially if it means acting against an established Egyptian identity). Moreover, DiMeo strikingly misreads Gayatri Spivak's argument in "Can The Subaltern Speak?" as indicating that the subaltern subject - beyond being unable to be legible to the colonizer, or even beyond (the usual misreading of) an absolute absence of agency—cannot even see that they have been colonized (or in his reading of *Dongola*, made "liminal")![55]

This latter crisis of revolutionary consciousness imagines *Dongola* as a morality story of what happens when the colonized subject is either insufficiently colonized—and so insufficiently brought out of subalterity—or fails to be converted—into a black nationalism that is also a red atheism—by its savior, Shalali. But to read the novel in this way is to mistake Shalali's self-ascriptions and affective encounters with his home town and its lifeworlds as adequately representing them. This reading is difficult to reckon with how abruptly the novel presents Shalali as having lost his revolutionary fervor, the fact that it is replaced for love of a white

[55] The idea that the Nubian could ever be truly *subaltern* in Egypt (following millenia of contact) is also worth questioning.

woman with a rejection of political positionality, and the miserable way in which Shalali treats his mother, and—perhaps truly proteanly, as DiMeo tells it—takes mastery over the customary he so vividly resents in order to trap his new wife into slavery so that *he* might then be free to live *as a modern*. Importantly, this mastery is different to the inhabitation of the customary in *Nights of Musk* in that it is cunning and manipulative, and distinct too from the ethnographic appropriation of the Carved Stick for Sale to Europeans in that it reflects Shalali as a figure no longer interested in the well-being of a Nubian community (whether politically, racially, historically conceived) or even of Nubian independence, and instead one who has come to value his own independence from Nubia.

For DiMeo, rather than corresponding to a disillusionment contingent upon Shalali's circumstances and built around his prior dispositions to his Nubian kin, these moments reflect Shalali's loss of a connection to his Nubian relatives while attempting to find "a comprehensible grammar to voice [their] sufferings]. In this version of the novel, Shalali travels north to learn how to speak (Arabic?) to Northerners on behalf of his kin, and in the process of learning that Northern grammar, loses his ability to connect with his kin. But the Shalali we see in the novel never truly has a connection to his kin—his revolutionary fervor is not somehow representative of Nubian perspectives, and in every encounter with particularistically Nubian ways of thinking or living the reader is faced with Shalali's absolute disdain for the ethnographic, and for any version of Nubia that contains it. Put differently, Shalali holds the actual people "for whom" he agitates in great contempt. They live

their lives in ways that are their own—retaining some semblance of sovereignty, but one unrelated to the sovereignty he imagines that they deserve, and perhaps even prioritized against that sovereignty. To read him otherwise would be to vastly understate the tragedy of his fall from grace—his transformation is neither the natural response to Nubian ingratitude to the message of salvation, nor the necessary consequence of the relationship between Nubian periphery and Cairene core, but the complex product of his social experience, historical memory and, importantly, his own antipathy to any Nubia that actually exists. And in light of this, there is also nothing intrinsic to the makeup of nation states or to the position of Nubians within them about the failure of Shalali's project. Where DiMeo (2015:85-7) reads Shalali as possessed of an inadequate revolutionary project, it strikes me that Shalali is rather (an inadequate revolutionary operating) in an inadequate revolutionary *moment*.

In this inadequate moment, when revolution fails to happen, business does and does not go on as usual. On the one hand, the norms of life are not disrupted - our would-have-been revolutionary Shalali finds instead that the Nubian Way Of Life he has resented has only sedimented further, and further tied him to kin he would rather leave behind. But when Shalali goes North, never to return again, we see a devastating recapitulation of Nubian disgrace: his mother becomes a slave master and his new wife the enslaved, making Shalali—once incensed by a history of Nubian enslavement—himself a slaver. For Abbas (2014), this recapitulation is a crucial component of Ali's account of the gender politics of Nubian society. Abbas

reads the narrative swap between Shalali's perspective and his mothers, back to Shalali's and then eventually to his wife, Halima's, as placing masculine and feminine Nubian perspectives into relief, with the latter coming to take the role of critic. Read thusly, there is a further tragedy. When he first returns home, while speaking to a Mayor who is interrogating him about his absence, Shalali is struck by his own failure to care for his mother, asking:

> How had he given so much thought to his motherland and so little to his mother? (Ali 1998:82)

But this realization does not transform Shalali's sense of responsibility; it merely forces him to find someone else to care for his mother, so that he might seek refuge away from the Egypt in which he feels at once alienated and on guard. And when Shalali ultimately does escape, having failed to care for his mother or his wife, Abbas reads that he—like, and as a representative of, other Nubian men—has instead reproduced the violence of the Egyptian state and Egyptian history onto Nubian women. What Abbas does not develop in this analysis, however, is the extent to which Nubian women (like the Zulu woman in chapter one) operate in this story as the stand-ins for, and the fulcrums of, the disavowed Nubian ethnographic[56]; and the extent to which white women—Egyptian and European alike—represent the

[56] This is also true of *Nights of Musk*. Grandmother, Awada, and the sister; Zeinab Uburty; Asha Ashry and Anna Korty - all are women characters through whom the reader comes to understand the ethnographic valences of Nubian life. Moreover, like in *Dongola*, it appears to only be the women characters who must have some kind of absolute relation to the customary - either completely living through it, or completely disavowing it.

seductive outsiders—perhaps, the *gorbatiyas*—who come to disable it. Custom emerges sharply when Shalali tells his mother about his lover Simone—"This is a disgrace, Awad. A foreign woman, with a clitoris?" (Ali 1998:75)—and is reflected back by Shalali in a meditation on Simone's freedom from taboo.

*Dongola* is shadowed by the ethnographic. Heritage, custom, lineage, tradition, history, culture—all of these ideas are operative throughout the novel, but they are almost exclusively narrated through appeals to antiquity[57], or, at the most recent, to medieval history. In the process, Ali indicates the danger of modernity as a terrain for political subjectivity. odernity is desirable for now obvious reasons: the ethnographic subject is represented as at worst a timeless subject, one who cannot be agential in producing history but is rather *subject to* it. This is the subject in *Nights of Musk*—one suffering through a genocidal storm while clinging to some semblance of—some possibility of—an absolute discourse. But even as its political stasis is desolate, the stories in *Nights of Musk* are given life by this struggle; in the midst of their high apolitics lies a low politics of care for those subjects who are not only disposable in their blackness, but incomprehensible and unbearable in their custom.

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[57] This is, interestingly, a trope that Abbas reproduces in her analysis of Dongola (2014:150-1, emphasis mine):

"As a result, most Nubians inhabiting the area had to be relocated in what was an event of great collective trauma. The dam not only constituted an act of economic oppression—leading to mass displacement and the consequent migration to the north of a large number of Nubians who could no longer self-subsist by farming—it also constituted *an act of cultural oppression: priceless monuments and artifacts of ancient Nubian civilization were drowned in Lake Nasser*, the body of water that formed as a consequence of the building of the dam."

In Dongola, even in the moments in which Shalali articulates racial-historical solidarity—the moments which may reflect some promise of *continental* solidarity—he only professes it for subjects who have been alienated from the customary by enslavement and religion. As a result, the high political idealism that first animates Shalali's wanderings and later motivates his attempt to stir revolt in Sudan is hollowed of real impact. Learning from both of these texts, we can ask: what possibilities emerge from recuperating the ethnographic as the grounding point for political claims and projects? I suspect that one would be that the early Shalali's project—of a recognized Nubia; of an Egypt that sees itself in Nubia, in Sudan, and below; of continental racial solidarity—becomes less fanciful. The abandoned Nasserist Pan-Africanism that Shalali's journey reproduces would also be given new imaginative form. In the place of a fiction of African solidarity expressed in commitments between quasi-sovereigns (Grovogui 1996) and at the cost of those citizens who are understood to most belong to the African continent, of the romantic nostalgia for the ethnographic past offered by Oddoul, and of the not-quite-revolutionary dystopia Ali warns us against, we might imagine a new form of continental solidarity, forged upon common histories of cultural, racial, gendered, economic violence that have been suppressed, left unaddressed, or otherwise incorporated into projects of compradorial nationalism.

Such a practice—perhaps, habit—of solidarity would offer a way to bridge the sedimented divide, where the continent's geographic span includes a Southern Mediterranean against Africa, an Arab North Africa against a sub-Saharan Africa

proper, which is then that of Egypt against Nubia, Egypt against Sudan, Sudan against South Sudan, White Africa against Black Africa, (Ancient) Modern Africa against (Ancient) Ethnographic Africa. In all of these formulations, the Native —the figure who carries the racial and indigenous valences of the ethnographic, who comes to stand in for Africa—is at the heart of the trouble. Indeed, this much can be read from the fact that even when Nasserist Egypt was willing to claim *Africanity*, it was never willing to care for its legibly African *Natives*. As a result, and in ways not unlike witchcraft in Zambia or Zulu subjectivity in South Africa, the ethnographic (under the sign of the Nubian, the African, the Indigene, the Black) has been what Egypt has sought, with nation-building zeal, to disavow. But, in a similar way to how the ethnographic came to offer a means to disavow an ever-present plantation slavery in Zanzibar—in the process leaving a structural crisis to fester—, the ethnographic has also established the terms for crisis in these dyadic North African domains, as reflected by British anthropological museum culture. Standing in the entryway of the Khartoum Ethnographic Museum, the visitor is flanked by two maps—one in English on the left, with a companion in Arabic on the right—titled "Ethnic Groups in Sudan". Such depictions of the idea of the spatialization of the ethnographic subject form a genre which opens many anthropological texts, and which are easily maligned now for how they (implicitly or actually) delimit the borders of social life for anthropologized people, fixing them into place as singularly and inescapably localized and ethnicized. In this map, one ethnic marker does radically different work.

The map is in a wooden frame painted a yellowed off-white seemingly after the map was placed within it, with no glass in front of it. The shape of what is likely pre—WWI-era Sudan[58] is painted in a dark green onto a large sheet of now-deeply-yellowed off-white paper, with white ethnic, settlement and region labels and settlement markers, and thin sky-blue detailing of the Nile and its various tributaries. At the very bottom of the map, again in dark green, a note that the scale of the map is one to two million; the scaling of this label text invites one to wonder what population densities underlie each of the ethnic markers, each of which is written in varying magnifications of print script, to better enclose the areas to which they are relevant. Ethnic labels proliferate in the lower parts of the green, first singularly and steadily more repeated, eventually giving way to more and more place names as we look northwards to "ARAB", written in enormous print that stretches across the map. Further still we find "NUBIAN", printed in an arched line rotated 90 degrees, with one and a half letters painted green instead of white, extending as they do into the unnamed, undepicted North. To the east of "NUBIAN" we see, in similarly large print, and rotated the other way, "BEJ" (now typically Beja). For these latter two, there are scarcely any competing ethnic groups in view. Under the "ARAB" we are invited to consider the Arabization of the few ethnic groups listed underneath and in close proximity to its four floating letters; so, one needn't cease to be other things to be Arab—put differently one might still be, in one's particularity, an

[58] This periodization is suggested by the full inclusion of the Ilemi triangle on the south east portion of the map.

ethnographic subject. But ARAB does not *coexist* with Fur, Nuba, Berti, Hamar, Mesiriya, Kawala, Gaalin, Kenana, Magalin, Beideriya, Kawahla, Bergid, Gawamma, Shukriyah. It superimposes, becoming the point of reference. There are (the many kinds of) Arabs, and there are others.

Imagining into position the line which now divides Sudan and South Sudan, one notices too that the declarative "ARAB" falls almost immediately above it. This is not incidental. Over the fifty-some years in which Sudan was "jointly" ruled by Egypt and the British, its southern regions were those targeted by missionaries as places for education and conversion. Put differently, only those who had been anthropologized, but not Arabized, were suitable for the transformative "corrections" offered by missionary education. And thus, instead of becoming—as those protesting British rule from Egypt may have envisaged—increasingly Arabized and Islamized subjects, or subjects otherwise bound together in a resistant national unity, those southernmost Sudanese were invited to become Anglicized and Anglican (and Roman Catholic) ones. And so "ARAB" becomes distinguishable as the category of unsuitability for the individualized projects of salvation and education that characterized British colonial intervention elsewhere on the continent[59]. But they were also, with the notable exception of the racial research conducted by Charles and Brenda Seligman, not subjects of *anthropological* attention. This must to some extent reflect the difficulty colonial structural functionalist anthropologists faced in taking

[59] Notably, this project is absent too in Zanzibar, the other territory the British originally governed in quasi-partnership with an Arab empire.

*identity* change seriously—even as, as early as Evans-Pritchard's writing, they recognized they were working within the midst of immensely disruptive social change. But beyond this, it reflects the entanglement of ethnographiability and colonizability with both race and religion, in ways that produce both South Sudan and Nubia (despite the latter's Islamization) as the culture-bound foil to an assumed Arab modernity. In order to take this history of British anthropologization seriously, and to do justice to the ex-colonized subjects of these regions, we must unsettle the project of racial and ancient Arabism. To do so would mean to take the ethnographic seriously as a form of black inhabitation, to recognize its dissembling and reifying and violent and generative valences and operations as they emerge across the African continent, and to treat the survival of those who inhabit them as the foundational terrain for African thought, memory, and political practice.

## Conclusion: After Anthropology, the Ethnographic

The Museum of Black Civilizations opened its doors in December of 2018. Located in Dakar, Senegal, the fact of the museum's establishment was itself a declarative call for the repatriation of stolen African worked objects still held in European and American museums. Funded in part by the Chinese government, this museum casts itself as equally concerned with the history and culture of Africa and its diaspora. But the culture on display here is not ethnographic but aesthetic in character, and the desired aesthetics is that of a continent—of a people—with exalted beginnings matched by an inevitable contemporary rise. This blackness is not the origin of culture, but the master of cultural production. At the same time, a perhaps more striking articulation of black unity was underway, on the other side of the continent. Though intermittent, and rarely central, expressions of blackness and Africanity had become ordinary features of the burgeoning protests in Khartoum, which would eventually depose the government of Omar al-Bashir. The most widely circulated image from the protests would come to be a photograph of a Sudanese woman, dressed in white, wearing gold moon earrings, addressing a crowd. The various captions that accompanied it narrated this as a gesture to an ancient Nubian queenhood, and as the promise of a politics to come, marked by peaceful mass organization, a new position for Sudanese women, and (often implicitly) a new way of imagining Sudan's relationship to blackness—possibly even a way of rethinking the partition of South Sudan, of rethinking South Sudanese as racial and continental kin. These two moments mark two modalities in which continental claims to

blackness seem more potent than they have been—the contemporary artistic-museological, and the political-historical. But both moments are marked too by the fact that the indigenous—the Black-as-Native, the ever-ethnographic-African—remains unthought, or at best a site of tension.

As the "Carved Stick for Sale to Europeans" showed in the first chapter of the dissertation, Africanity cannot be considered seriously without understanding it as a nexus of blackness and indigeneity. This nexus, marked by a European fear of its own animality, by the necessity of producing proper colonial subjectivity, is abject. The Stick seems not-quite-ethnographic; it is brought to the museum (perhaps as a consequence of Gluckman's attention to the colonial encounter that would be reflected in the Bridge Paper), as an outlier at the edges of anthropological possibility, with even its naming expressing its exceptionality to rule. And this not-quite-ethnographic character is emphasized by the fact that the stick is declarative in a way that items in ethnographic collections—collected for their particularized mundanity—usually aren't. The Stick contains an account of proto-Apartheid society that, while being in some ways thinner than Gluckman's (which explicates to scientific perfection the allegiances and frustrations of position that animated the Bridge ceremony), is more incisive. The Stick articulates something that Gluckman does not (perhaps, and perhaps because of the conventions of positivistic anthropology, cannot), which is that the relationship between whites and blacks in South Africa was characterized not only by allegiances and protocols and differences of access (and, should one be attached to functionalism, not only by the

commonality of a colonial social system), but by *violent dispossession* predicated upon the production of what I read as race-as-abjection. But precisely because the stick offers a winking, perhaps even mocking account of this—and one willfully and carefully articulated through the iconography of custom, even as it is an iconography whose gender attachments cannot be wanted—it offers a reading of life in excess of the abject, life outside of the abject, and life here is lived on terms legible (however partially) through the ethnographic.

Here we can see the starting points of threads that weave in and out of the following chapters. The first, and most foundational, is that Africanity must be understood in relationship to both blackness and indigeneity. The second is that Africanity exists as an abject site of seeming excess that also exceeds European fantasy, retaining an (ethnographic) grounding in lived difference that offers a reminder that there remain ways to inhabit the social world that do not cede to European impressions of it. Strikingly, even in not ceding to the European, the Stick is articulating itself on ethnographic terms. Moreover, this articulation is always also in relationship to white rule, to the confinement to what will become Bantustans, to forced (free) labor. As a result, the ethnographic is not strictly about "culture" (even as it never is not about "culture"); it is about a broader political economy in which the conditions of possibility and response come to hinge upon some idea of "culture".

These threads are taken up in the second chapter, where the witchcraft objects in the Reynolds Collection appear to offer the absolute case of the

ethnographic, the abject, the entanglement of both with the African (and Black, and Indigenous), and the legibility of the political-economic in ethnographic materials. But taking these materials seriously means insisting against romantic readings of witchcraft in which it represents a neat criticism of an illusively expansive capitalist modernity. I find that witchcraft is more productively thought as a form of sovereign power (with the excessive and antisocial violences that inhere to such power). The stark arbitrariness and antisociality of its violence brings into relief the problems with the persistence of "sovereignty" as the privileged discourse of African (sociocultural, political) liberation, and of witchcraft as a symbol of degree-zero African political futurity. In some senses carrying from Gluckman's analysis in the Bridge paper, and in others following from contemporary anthropological writing within the "Occult Turn", this chapter insists that witchcraft is not comprehensible outside of the colonial encounter. Moreover, it is within this encounter that the witchcraft objects come to produce the abject. Here abjection is a practice of self-fashioning, in which the African (and Black and Indigenous) is again the abject, but instead of the production of abjection reflecting a purely external opinion of Africanity, the witchcraft objects cast themselves and their creators as abjects, both through their materiality and the violence that surrounds them.

Here, the ethnographic begins to be the abject too, even to anthropologists. We see that witchcraft should be understood as "modern"—escaping the denial of coevality—to correct the nexus of associations that is tangled with the ethnographic, to the point that this declaration comes to act as though it were a great intervention

instead of a banal feature of a contemporary practice. This moment offers a reminder that the ethnographic is myth and real entwined. The animating fiction that anthropologists writing romances about the modernity of witchcraft are somehow accessing "truth" and abandoning the mythology, by means of pulling the ethnographic out of the past, is a recuperative gesture that fails, because it cannot even fully reckon with the (primitive-coded) violences of the present. This point is of particular importance because it speaks to how Africanity appears to ground both a politics of liberation and a romance of agency and possibility, which must be thought separately; any attachment to degree-zero African liberation must rely not on the political forms that seem immediately forceful enough to make it tangible, but rather must ask what African liberation is actually desirable, what forms of politics and political violence are tenable. The Reynolds Collection signals that the "modern", and the sovereign, are inadequate sites of aspiration, which do not resolve the trouble witchcraft and Africanity poses—their problem does not lie in their primitiveness, and there is no easy resolution in a truer sovereignty.

The third chapter shifts in perspective. Here, the materials are not worked objects that reside in museums, studied or collected by anthropologists of colonial Africa. Instead, a series of commercial photo postcards carry various iconographic and textual tropes which cast black Zanzibari subjects as ethnographic subjects. This visual force means that depictions of enslavement and indenture come to be naturalized as reflecting ordinary social life. This chapter extends the discussions of blackness and indigeneity from the first chapter into an analysis of the specific

character of the Native per British imaginations, and how the idea of indigeneity offers grounds for ethnographic myth-making designed to abject Blackness from Africanity. This chapter also offers a shift in beginning to consider continental subjects who are not Black—specifically, elite Arabs of Omani descent (and, more obliquely, other ethnically Arab and South Asian subjects who would come to be mistaken for them as the Zanzibar Revolution took a distinctly racialist turn), who are absented from subjectivity in similar ways to the Black subjects in other postcards, and in ways mirroring their political subordination to the British under the Protectorate. From this point, this chapter examines Arab-Black solidarity as a missed political opportunity in the period following the establishment of the Protectorate.

In this chapter, the ethnographic appears as an imperial practice of naturalization, that resolves the abjection of (slavery-marked) blackness. Throughout, the production of the "native" here (a territory in which nearly no resident could have claim to autochthony or to a cultural community of origin) appears to be the production of a post-slavery subjectivity, which perhaps could be generalized more broadly to think of the Black as underlying the ethnographic, and the account of African indigeneity as the resolution of the abjecthood of enslaved blackness. Importantly, this imperial practice is not evidently the product of anthropological scientificity, instead signaling the common ground between anthropological habits of understanding difference and run-of-the-mill imperial culture. As a result, this complicates the task of neatly distinguishing a "scientific" approach to difference

from the project of imagining away histories of racial violence. Moreover, this may offer some grounding for the seeming impossibility of reading blackness into the African continent; it may be the product of how the ethnographic (as an epistemic category) is meant to overcome the racial. In response, it appears necessary to *reracialize* the ethnographic, in order also to underscore the relationship between the production of the ethnographic, the production of broader forms of racial difference, and their entanglement in stratified forms of political-economic subjugation. Further, in examining solidarity as a political option for (neo)colonial Africans in (neo)imperial positions, this chapter considers how such solidarity may offer an alternative to the romance of sovereignty.

In the fourth chapter, I develop these threads through an analysis of the production of ideas of Nubianness in two literary texts and the Nubian Museum in Aswan. In the Egyptian nation-building mythos, the ethnographic is again the abjected form (with blackness abjected alongside it). Egypt gains its position as the proper subject of history, with the according trappings of modernity, industrial capitalism, and (in a move which maps Egyptian modernity onto that of Europe) roots in classical antiquity. But even these resistant articulations of Nubian identity are fraught. They are unable to reconcile the political imagination offered by a historical articulation of blackness and the ethnographic cast through which Nubian lived experience need be understood. As a result, they lose the ability to position Nubian and other indigenized life within the Sahara in relation with African life below it. Following both texts, I argue that in order to do justice to the histories of

colonial dispossession that have produced Nubia, Sudan and South Sudan as distinct and distinctly racialized territories against Egypt's fictive Arabness, we need to find a way to commensurate the inhabited ethnographic offered by Oddoul with the historical memory that grounds Ali's text. Because of the specific racial and cultural character that marks the Native, depictions of Nubia that rely upon a simply racial account of blackness or an incidentally black ethnographic subject both offer political dead ends, either gaining political legibility at the cost of the subjectivity worth fighting against assimilation for, or remaining trapped in a quasi-functionalist project of survival. But this reflects a broader problem of commensurating the visions of historical subjectivity and post-anthropological subjectivity.

Succeeding in such a task would mean resolving the problem of the continued abjecthood of the ethnographic. Here more than elsewhere in the dissertation, the ethnographic abject is the product of what Fabian describes as the denial of coevality; the ethnographic is (no matter its declared relationship to the temporal) outside of time. But more broadly, this is also the terrain in which the ethnographic abject is least distinguishable from the abjects that are Black, Indigenous, African—from the abject that is the African continent itself—and in ways that seem impossible to escape even in the attempt to reclaim within Egypt a space for Nubia. Broader still, this chapter demonstrates the untenability of existing patterns of (ex)imperial, (ex)colonial racial and political subjugation across the continent, and the ways in which they have come to produce violent dispossession in Nubia, Sudan and South Sudan. In the place of this, and against the revival of the

old sovereigntist Pan-Africanism that rendered black Egyptians disposable in the name of a thriving state, continental Africanist solidarity needs to be considered from new, re-racialized and re-ethnographied, grounds.

What might it mean to take Africa seriously? As—yes—a continent haunted by ethnographic phantasm, but also as one inhabited by people living ethnographied forms of difference (and who are not merely worth valuing, but offer the only possible ground for struggle)? What might it mean to rethink scholarly engagement with the ethnographic in light of this, and to reorient it towards a project of expanding African cultural, political and economic possibility? What might such a materialist project of radical African imagination look like today? Rather than the ambition of resolving conceptual impasses of European making—rather than seeking fixes that would make Africa modern, sovereign, "secular", post-racial, post-ethnic, and to treat these projects as the grounds for liberatory possibility—the analysis offered in the preceding chapters points to a project of messy inhabitation, of making habit of the ethnographic—retaining its ordinary intimacy—while never exactly surrendering to it. A renewed ethnographic, claimed with caution and humor from below, as a generative basis for an absolute African discourse, for African social and political vitality—this appears to be continental Africanity's offering and demand.

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