Chapter **01**

Threads Between Photographs as Image Objects in Collections and Photographic Images of Collecting

Lize Kriel

This publication and accompanying exhibition are key outcomes of Laura de Harde's project, *Inherited Obsessions* (2022). De Harde developed the project in response to what the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (hereafter NIHSS) identified as shortcomings in post-colonial forms of thinking about heritage and scholarship. She conceptualised the project as a collaboration with the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History (hereafter DNMCH), working with Motsane Gertrude Seabela, Anthropology Collections Curator, to revisit the museum's collections in ways that address and challenge what can sometimes be presumptive and lasting cultural stereotypes. The chapters in this publication are the result of research and creative work conducted as part of, or in conversation with, the *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) project, which centres on the following themes: objects of culture, collection, conservation, memory, and commemoration. Hosted by the DNMCH in Pretoria and opening on Saturday, 24 September 2022, the curators want the exhibition to invite contemplation about the nation's heritage and the collective consciousness of South African communities and society at large. However, the politics of the personal and the multiple collectives we associate with as individuals are also at play: the ties that bind us by birth, profession, age, conviction, obligation, association, and discrimination.

Photographs as *Objects with Stories* (2022)

De Harde's art exhibition, co-curated by museologist Seabela, coincides with a cultural-historical exhibition on the same floor of the DNMCH museum, titled *Objects with Stories* (2022). In this exhibition, adjacent to a display of cameras from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, visitors are offered a view of a selection of photographs from the museum's collections. As the medium demanded subjects to 'hold still' in the early days of analogue photographic technology, the people in the older photographs were captured while 'posing' whilst going about their daily activities. Obviously, this selection of photographs in the exhibition represents the more interesting photographic images from the museum's extensive collection. Although the people depicted are not identified by name, their actions and interactions are considered informative and educational for a present-day audience in revealing something about the diversity of South African society.

As viewers, we know what the power relations and the racial hierarchies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were. Especially in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century images, we can guess that persons of colour would most probably have been 'curated' by a white photographer. Regarding the selected photographs, one gets the impression that the actors, albeit colonial subjects, were not taking on their parts altogether unwillingly. A striking example is a photograph taken in Pretoria in the 1890s, apparently to advertise the signwriting and interior decorating business of Van Bommel and Schürmann (Figure 1.1). The tools, equipment, and some examples of their products (a painting of a Dutch windmill prominently displayed on an easel) are arranged around a vast billboard on which line-drawn, chubby, naked angels with palettes are at work. In the foreground of the photograph, amongst the ladder, easel, tins, and brushes arranged around the billboard, a seated African man leans in on his right forearm and looks straight into the camera. There is a mysterious confidence in him. From the early twentieth century, another image presents street vendors posing with their basketsful of wares, two balancing these baskets on their heads. From the same period there are several images of African women posing whilst doing domestic work: washing clothes, carrying water, fetching wood, and grinding maize (Figure 1.2). The latter photographs may have been labelled as 'ethnographic' in a different context. Still, it seems as if the curators were deliberately scrambling such categorisations to focus on the diversity of activities these early photographs depicted.

The photographs selected for *Objects with Stories* (2022) could be and probably are arranged in such a manner as to elicit all kinds of questions, such as the gendered and racialised properties of work, and about who and what had been left out in the quest to represent as wide a range of activities as possible. A national museum's inheritances and acquisitions are meant to be taken as the nation's collective memory. Young democratic South Africa inherited her institutions after more than a century of white supremacist collecting. Inevitably, many past obsessions continue to loom over the collections and memories of previous displays, demanding intervention and mediation in the collective consciousness. The DNMCH collections entail, so to speak, an incomplete heritage, fragments of remainders from a much more extensive human experience. But as the photographs in the *Objects with Stories* (2022) exhibition suggest, remainders have connotations that extend much further than the objects' image or material presence. A nation's memory is locked into objects that relate to past individuals' being human: their joys, their agony, their pride, their envy, their triumph, their resignation, their deprivation, and their resilience.

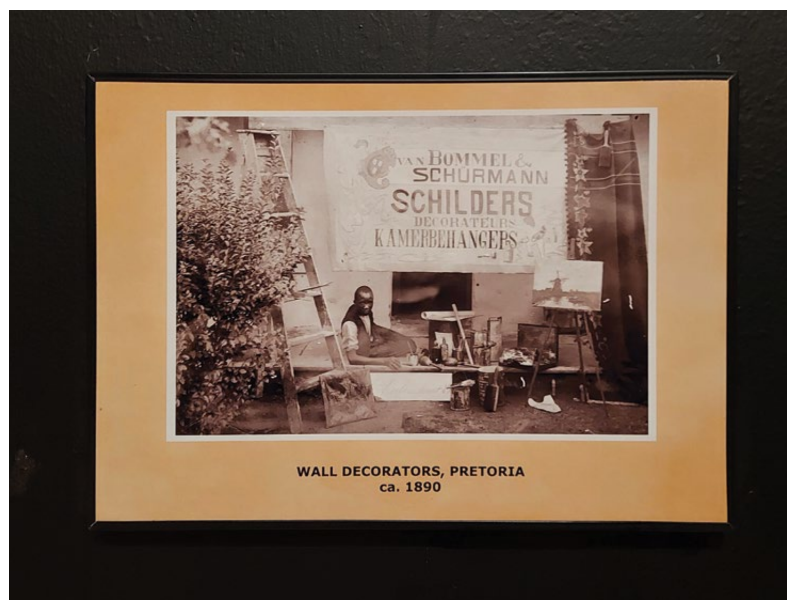


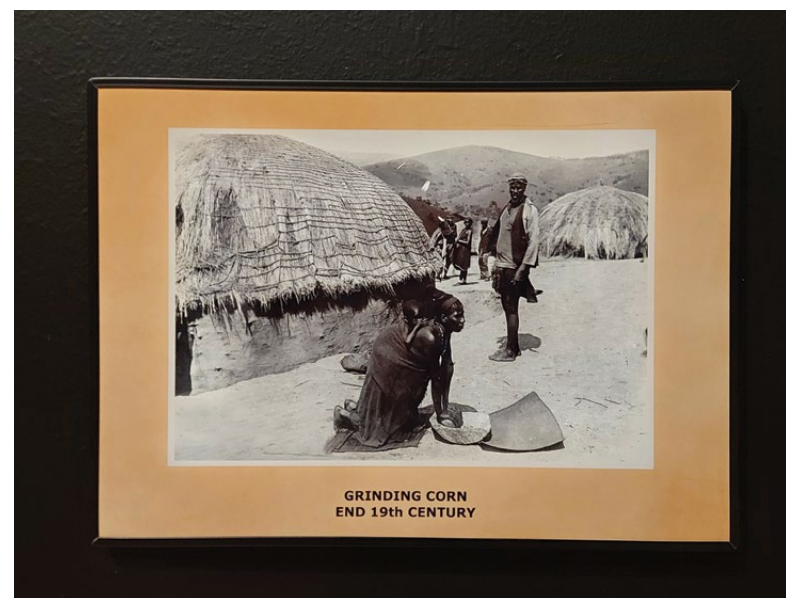
Figure 1.1.
A photograph from the DNMCH collection as reproduced for the *Objects with Stories* exhibition. It features the services of the Van Bommel and Schürmann decorating business and was taken in Pretoria in the 1890s. Photograph by Laura de Harde, 2022.

***Inherited Obsessions* (2022)**

Adjacent to the cultural-historical *Objects with Stories* (2022) exhibition, the art exhibition, *Inherited Obsessions* (2022), features De Harde's works in ink and thread on various surfaces. These artworks resemble portraits of individuals, but unlike photographs that capture a single instant in time, the artist had made the markings on the paper surfaces run and fade in layers. In many works, it seems as if repeated attempts were made to wash away and rework the sitters' faces, over and over—obsessively, as if this ritual might have helped to rekindle the essence, the substance, of those human beings irrevocably no longer there. Ornately embroidered veils of stitching pierce the remainders of the ink layers that had repeatedly been applied and washed away. In some of the works, the paintings appear like disintegrating photographs, held together merely by the threads going through the unravelling surface. Most of the artworks seem to be translations of old photographs. The sitters resemble the diversity of South African colonial society, somewhat like the photographs selected for *Objects with Stories* (2022). However, De Harde does not attempt to represent the sitters through their *actions*; she focuses primarily on their faces, seeking in their gaze some reassurance about their agency; trying to

recover their personhood in their eyes and their features, drawing the viewer into wrestling with questions such as who the sitter may have been and under what circumstances a photographer must have tried to capture their likeness. Hence the artist's obsessive attempts to reach the sitters' elusive humanity through washing and reconfiguring, as if the repeated action might implore their spirits to resurface. As such, the artwork is the remainder of the labour of sense-making, the residue of a ritual. (See Chapter 4, in which Teboho Lebakeng will contemplate his art and allude to the possibility that De Harde's work might be interpreted this way.)

In the works described above, De Harde engages the DNMCH's exhibition strategies and the challenges of living with its colonial legacies—aspects which Matthew McClure and Motsane Gertrude Seabela will elaborate on in Chapters 2 and 3. However, when moving to the objects in *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) that are more personally related to the artist, there is a change in approach and feeling, even though the media she works in remain the same. The portrait of the artist's mother (Figure 1.3) is presented in the same disintegrating state as some of De Harde's renderings of colonial photographs. This tricks the viewer's notion of time passing—the inexorable certainty that the future will bring the fraying of her own mother's legacy is painful in a different way than the historical truth of the museum's inability to do justice to the memory of all the persons represented in the photographic image objects preserved in its cold storerooms, not to mention the many others of whom the museum has no record whatsoever. No amount of collecting can adequately account for a nation, and even less so for the whole of humanity's experience of being human. Neither can collecting atone for a single human being's sense of inevitable loss. (Jessica Webster in Chapter 5 will address this aspect.) However, within the moment of experiencing the exhibition, the artist's mother is present through the aura of her artwork. Amongst De Harde's ghost and spirit portraits, her mother's quilt work (referred to in Chapter 9) enchants the viewer as objects of exquisite beauty. Tilly de Harde's quilts compel the viewer to utter: 'these belong in a museum' because as much as it tells of a mother's labour of love gifted to her children, the beauty, the exceptionality, and the exquisiteness are almost too much for the realm of the personal. Museums have a connotation with safekeeping, preserving, prolonging an object's life and enduring its legacy. Justine Wintjes



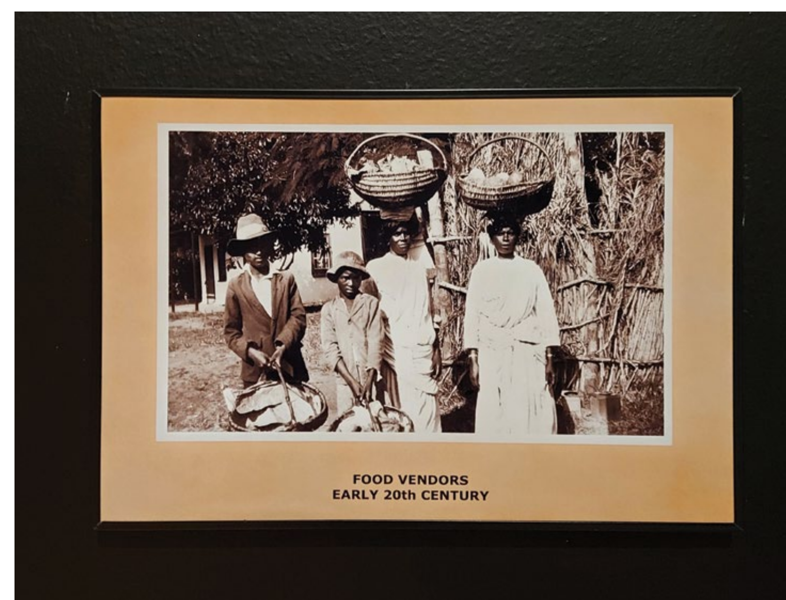


Figure 1.2.
Reproductions of photographs from the early twentieth century featured in the *Objects with Stories* exhibition at DNMCH. Photographs by Laura de Harde, 2022.

Figure 1.3.
A study of the artist's mother by Laura de Harde, 2022. Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

will eloquently argue this point in Chapter 8 with her discussion of the gourd Magema Fuze donated to the Natal Government Museum (today KwaZulu-Natal Museum) in 1904.

De Harde's work invites one to think about inheritances, whether embraced, denied, or contested. It wants us to face the world of objects, collectively and individually: what to keep and what to discard (a question that will be contemplated in Chapter 7 by Olivia Loots): what to value, how to cherish, how to preserve, and whom to entrust with conservation (see Jill Weintraub's contribution in Chapter 6 in this regard). It challenges us to consider how one generation's pride, or obligation, can become an embarrassment, or a burden, to the next—and yet: how we are inclined to lament what has been lost. 'Obsessions' in the exhibition title relates as much to the practice of collecting as to finding meaning in the collected. The tension between individuals' challenges to store and curate their possessions and the delegation of that responsibility to institutions such as museums and archives runs through De Harde's exhibition and the chapters in this publication. Somehow considerations about the 'whether', the 'why', and the 'how' of 'getting', 'having' and 'keeping' cannot be boxed neatly into either the affective or the rational.

In the introduction to his study on German ethnographic museums, historian Glenn Penny (2002:1) states that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, German ethnologists were at the forefront of a scientific approach to the acquisition, ordering, studying, and displaying of objects from all around the world in their quest for a cosmopolitan, Humboldtian understanding of humanity. At the apex of their rational approach came their resignation—they 'found that they had reached the limits of their empiricism, and they encouraged a younger generation to abandon the project'. Penny (2002:13) also describes museum visitors' often counter-scientific expectations when entering the exhibition space as a penchant for the spectacular and the amazing. All the empiricism in the world cannot supersede this human inclination to be enchanted. Is it not because affect is the spark that begins the urge to collect? Art critic Mari Shaw explains that she—and others inflicted by what they acknowledge as the 'ignoble' practice of collecting—buy what they love 'which is often work we do not understand' (Shaw 2017:4). Objects have a propensity to invoke fascination, curiosity, and a sense of wonderment.[1]

This is what objects do. They engage us. They entice us. They make us obsessive. And this appeal of the object precedes, sustains, and will transcend museum science. We rely on museums to be the responsible custodians of the labour that objects impose on humans, namely that of collecting. As collecting surpasses the lifetime of a single human being, objects of value are bequeathed, passed on, and handed down. Art collectors Mari and Peter Shaw earmark their art acquisitions as bequests to museums (Shaw 2017:2–3)—forward-dating, so-to-speak, their private obsessions as future public inheritances. As problematic as some inheritances are to the museum institutions of the post-apartheid South African nation, the museum still has the responsibility to broaden understanding and the capacity to facilitate the public admiration of objects of value. Penny (2002:51) quotes Georg Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* (1900) to explain: 'We call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them.'

Collections of photographs

Worldwide, including on the African continent, the scholarly engagement with historical collections of photographs of Africans is receiving increasing interest as objects of value. Summarising the situation in 2012 and referring to, amongst other trends, the role of indigenous agency in shaping ethnographic photography, Richard Vokes (2012:23–24) predicted: 'our current narratives about the emergence and spread of photography in Africa—and about the ongoing place of historical photographic images in various types of "memory work"—will doubtless become significantly more refined'. Kiyara Ananmalay's (2017:10–14) study on the 'field practices of writing and photography' by the Frobenius expedition to Natal (today KwaZulu-Natal Province) in 1929 is an excellent example of such research. She refers to the 'traces of social histories contained within, or tangential to' the photographs taken during the exhibition. We should keep in mind, Ananmalay (2017:14) argues, that 'the Frobenius team recorded a range of expressions of a particular way of living which included both oral histories and material culture, resulting that the team interacted with various people they met along the way'. Most photographs end up in collections with far less contextualising information than the ones in the Frobenius Archive, but Ananmalay's foregrounding of this particular situatedness will be helpful to inform and sensitise our imagination when engaging with 'ethnographic' photographic objects where the backstories are less forthcoming.

[1] Even if the conqueror loots an object from the vanquished, which he finds repulsive rather than fascinating, there is still a thrill, however perverse, in the taking of the spoils. (Edward Said referred to these pleasures of imperialism in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993:111, 123, 132–61)).

The possibility of digitising images and making them available online is a far-reaching dimension of research projects involving photographic collections, especially as it enables new ways of studying a series of resources and undertaking broader comparative work. One such example is the International Mission Photography Archive (IMPA), a digital hub from where the photographic collections of dozens of missionary societies stationed in Africa (and other parts of the world) during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be accessed. The possibility to pair similar and juxtapose contrasting images from different missionary societies working in different parts of the African continent, of course, also comes with the responsibility not to detach these images from the archival documents that might explain the conditions under which these photographs were taken, reproduced, and circulated. Such detachments might, sadly, perpetuate the act of alienating the memory of the people and objects from the situation in which the camera had captured them.

Strangely, the possibility of digitising photographs refocused the attention of historians and artists alike on the presence of analogue photography in museums as image objects (Vokes 2012:23). Similarly, the labour of digitising historical records foregrounded the life of the text, or document, as an *object* in archival repositories. Maureen de Jager's creative work *History [TBC]: refocusing the South African War* (2019), in which she inventively photographed aspects of historical documents (such as the holes made in papers to bind together the reports written on them), draws attention to what she refers to as 'the blind spots in history' and thus she grapples with her own 'ambivalent "inheritance" as an "anglicised Afrikaner"'. De Harde undertakes the artistic work for collections of South African photographic image objects that De Jager is doing for archived documents as objects. To contextualise this notion, this chapter proposes some possible contributions which artistic unsettling (of the kind De Harde's work elicits) can make to cultural and historical interpretations of photographic collections and the image and text they display.

Carolyn Hamilton and Nessa Leibhammer's edited volumes *Tribing and Untribing the Archive* (2016) did a lot of work to bring museum collections into the ambit of the South African archival heritage and to emphasise the backstories of objects and the collections they find themselves in, as well as the 'public lives' they have led as part of exhibitions and publications. This should be considered when tracing their changing meaning and significance over time. The potency and elusiveness of historical photographic image objects in museum collections, as on display in the *Objects with Stories* (2022) exhibition coinciding with *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) at the DNMCH, receive attention in several of the contributions in *Tribing and Untribing* (2016). Hlonipha Mokoena (2016:526–45) discusses late nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs depicting the peculiar colonial practice of collecting photographs of African policemen in the service of the British colonial administration. She found such photographs in studio archives and family albums, with reproductions featuring in ethnographic monographs and on postcards. Her essay also addresses the colonial practice of collecting Zulu knobkieries, such as the ones displayed in the photographs she discusses. Elaborating on this point, Mokoena discusses how linguist and anthropologist Nicolaas van Warmelo, appointed Government Ethnologist in 1930, not only took photographs of African policemen carrying knobkieries but also collected the artefacts themselves (Mokoena 2016:540).

In their contribution to *Tribing and Untribing* (2016), Sara Byala and Ann Wanless discuss the Clem Webb collection of Zulu regalia. They also feature a photograph from the 1880s depicting the collector dressed up in his acquisitions. Byala and Wanless (2016:549–50) use Major Webb's collection to illustrate that '[a]s a way of both gathering and categorising knowledge, collecting was as much about colonial control as it was about colonial curiosity. As such, collecting and colonialism compelled each other.' The authors use a quote from Tom Griffith's (1996:17) book to add a dimension that was not at play for the collectors who returned to Europe but which lay at the heart of the hierarchical diversity of colonial society itself: 'Collecting was … a "respectable" form of hunting for late nineteenth-century gentlemen, a pursuit that was guided by a colonial need to become local.' In contrast to Major Webb's authoritative affirmation of his local 'belonging' through the comprehensiveness of his collection, the photographs Mokoena selected for discussion depict two 'native policemen' in varying, 'incomplete' stages of appropriating objects of European apparel and on both occasions their weapon, the knobkierie, continues to signify their 'Zuluness'.

Sartorial collecting

Mokoena's discussion focuses on the role and meaning of knobkieries in photographs. The argument centres on the other sartorial markers

of the African policemen's inferiority through the colonial gaze. In the first photograph, taken in a studio, a standing African policeman poses next to a seated white policeman. Their uniforms are neatly arranged for the picture, but the shoes on the black policeman's feet are conspicuously absent. In the second photograph of a Zulu policeman scrutinised by Mokoena in her investigation into knobkieries, the description of the man's dress reveals even more elements of 'incompleteness' than a lack of shoes (Figure 1.4). Mokoena (2016:541) describes it as follows:

> Although he is wearing thongs on his feet—unlike the barefoot constable—his uniform is an unexpected combination of formality and informality, as well as Western and indigenous items. Thus, he is wearing both his shirt and jacket unbuttoned, which suggests that he did not 'prepare' for this photo to be taken and was caught in a spontaneous moment. The top half of his body stands in sharp contrast to the bottom; his thongs and *isinene* (the tassled front piece) are 'traditional' dress. The fact that his hands and arms are also carrying items further adds to this confusion. [...] His gaze seems to be fixed on the horizon rather than on the photographer who is taking the picture, and this belies his slightly dishevelled comportment; it is as if his stiff and upright pose with all his weapons and personal effects neatly arranged is to compensate for the fact that he is not 'properly' dressed.

The photograph described here is part of the collection of the long-serving twentieth century state ethnologist Nicolaas van Warmelo. Observations such as 'unexpected combinations', 'confusion', and 'dishevelled comportment' indicate some resemblance to the following description from a missionary's diary dating from 1895, in which Christoph Sonntag describes Hananwa women having escaped from indentured labour on Boer farms in what was then the Transvaal.[2] Another correlation, besides the fact that the observers concur that the performers were not wearing their costumes 'correctly', is their agreement that the Africans were finding the objects of Western apparel desirable: the Zulu policeman used them to affirm his authority among fellow Zulu people, and the Hananwa women proudly showed off their trophies to their families and friends. Missionary Sonntag did not take a photograph or leave any other graphic image of what he had observed. Still, the following is the verbal image[3] he conjured up in writing—as translated into English by his grandson:

> A number of the women and the older girls who had returned, already carried signs of their attempts to emulate the representatives of the new civilisation. Some of them had been overjoyed by their mistress with the remains of a modern jacket. Others had acquired a huge discarded bonnet, others again had been put by their mistress into a most-respectable blue-print [isiShweshwe] dress. If the good women who had bestowed these gifts on them had hoped thereby to shackle their servants to their kitchens, they were very much disappointed.
>
> On the Sunday that the escapees came to church, the owners of these articles of clothing paid us a visit and flaunted their latest acquisitions. The twists and turns, the waltzing motions and the revolutions these ladies performed in the costumes to which they were by no means accustomed yet, defied description (Sonntag 1983:149).

Perhaps, for a moment, we should consider the danger of conflating scholarly observations about an African sartorial 'incompleteness' in colonial images with the colonial gaze itself. The colonial gaze entails a way of looking that persists in the expectation that the complete and comprehensive mimicry of the Western master is the norm and that anything less merely amounts to 'playing' at being civilised, an affirmation that there is something 'lacking' in being African. Through the colonial gaze, Zulu men wearing police uniforms without shoes, for example, are infantilised (Mokoena's word choice (2016:528)). This might have been the intention of colonial authorities, who refused to issue black policemen with shoes. However, infantilisation is not a satisfactory explanation for the bare feet of numerous African Christians photographed in Western attire in the late 19th century (Vosseler 2022:306) or of the Hananwa ruler in a photograph taken at his royal abode as late as 1939 (Figure 1.5). The researcher should make provision for other possible ways of interpreting African appropriation of apparel objects besides a colonial way of seeing the African as not (yet) completely 'civilised' owing to unconvincing copying of European dress.

When we remind ourselves of two central themes in the *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) project—objects and collecting—it may be

[2] Now-retired DNMCH curator Johnny van Schalkwyk (1995:100–101) referred to this quotation from the Sonntag diary in his doctoral thesis. [3] With reference to WJT Mitchell's genealogy of images as graphic, optical, perceptual, mental, or verbal (2006:196–99).

worthwhile to consider the following alternative: Two decades ago, Antoinette Burton's book *Dwelling in the Archive* (2003:141) appealed to researchers to look differently at those persons who are the most likely to be considered the historical subjects of colonial archives. She encouraged us to see them as possible creators of historical collections in their own right.[4] All the images discussed in the previous paragraphs carry evidence of this notion. In clear view of these photographic objects collected by colonial agents and acquired by colonial museums are images depicting indigenous Africans as the collectors of European objects: jackets, coats, and hats. And in accumulating such new and curious things, the African collectors we see in these photographs did not necessarily abandon local items which were convenient and familiar to them. We must also consider that, although they were colonial subjects, there may have been circumstances under which Africans could exercise a right to choose what appealed to them, or to adjust the expected appearance as a means of subverting authority.

Figure 1.4.
Image of 'Zulu Policeman on patrol, Nocombotshe, Msinga'. Photograph taken by Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo, date unknown. Courtesy of Van Warmelo Collection, University of Johannesburg. https://hdl.handle.net/10210/2051 (accessed 1 September 2022).

What might be deplored through the colonial gaze as the incompleteness of the colonial subject may be reconsidered through a decolonial lens as an altogether different configuration in which incompleteness 'is the normal order of things [...] Things, words, deeds, and beings are always incomplete, not because of absences, but because of their possibilities,' anthropologist Francis Nyamjoh (2017:253–56) argues. Compositeness, he continues, is a far more reasonable and practicable condition of being human than the myth of completeness. Throughout their lives, in encounters with other human beings, people continue to make and remake themselves by combining, discarding, and taking over different technologies, practices and appearances from others. Said introduced what may have been an allusion to compositeness when he stated that 'the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings' (Said 1993:7). There is more to Nyamjoh's notion of compositeness than *bricolage. Bricolage* implies 'making do' with remainders; compositeness implies making up with what one likes. In Chapter 4, Teboho Lebakeng reflects on his artistic practice as a means of doing just that. As in De Harde's work, Lebakeng's art involves fabric, and ritualistic repetition, working with the personal inheritance of collective obsessions.

Why was De Harde drawn to stitching and Lebakeng to fabric in their artistic practice? Could it be because fabric and dress enable such an embodied, personal form of collecting, of composing the

[4] Stephan Miescher (2007:131–45) applied Burton's work, which focused on Indian women, to an African context in an article on Ghanaian *akrakyefoo* indigenisation of collecting, archiving, exhibiting, and memorialising in domestic settings.

self—as we have seen in the images of black policemen and Hananwa women who had liberated themselves from Boer farms? For museum curators, fabric is a challenging medium. At the DNMCH, curator Annemarie Carelsen and her team preserve historical apparel with gentle precision. They discourage the prolonged exhibition of objects containing fabric to counter the deterioration process. In personal possession, however, clothing is frequently displayed, and wear and tear is inevitable. Ironically, the photographic images of colonial subjects displaying their collections of dress items withstood the test of time far better than the material objects themselves. Photographs seem the best evidence today that African colonial subjects were collectors of Western attire.

Robert Ross (2008:7) concurs and argues that dress is a language, which says: 'This is who I am, and this is what I am doing'. He adds that it is also a language that can easily be misunderstood. What colonial overseers laughed and sneered at and what they saw as their colonial subjects' odd sartorial combinations of random parts into incomplete appearances may be reconsidered from the opposite perspective. Africans in colonial societies were also interested in collecting strange new objects (dare one say, Western curiosities) for the curation of their personal appearance. This was not necessarily always performed as an obligation to conform to what was perceived as the Western norm. Africans were more than capable of mimicking European dress codes to the button and the shoe buckle, but every photograph in which this is not the case need not be read as an example of sartorial failure. Steeve Buckridge (2004:78) explains it well:

> The significance of dress in colonial society provided possibilities for resistance, because the semiotic process was never fully controlled by the ruling elite. As a result, dress and the body, as signifiers of contrasting and complex meanings, enabled oppressed people (including slaves) to symbolically and covertly resist, to make satirical and politically subversive statements about their identities in relation to the dominant power. Dress and the body could thus be deliberately manipulated in an effort to alter social representation and relations of power. As such, they became persuasive agents of movement towards a moral ethic that would guarantee freedom, if not completely, at least temporarily.

Figure 1.5.
Kgaluši Sekete Mmalebôhô, the ruler of the Hananwa people of Blouberg from c.1880–1939, was photographed by a visitor to the royal household shortly before his death. Transvaal Archives Repository 26079. Courtesy of the National Archives of South Africa Photographic Collection.

This explanation by Buckridge helps one understand De Harde's intuitive reach for stitching and the use of fabric in her artistic endeavour to *will* a sense of being, of mattering, but also an acknowledgement of vulnerability, into the faces of colonial subjects captured and preserved in photographic objects in museum collections. This chapter focused on the possibilities of finding African agency within colonial photographs by probing into practices and objects of culture visible in these selected photographs. In her artistic pursuit, De Harde keeps engaging with people's faces, reworking them as she continues to seek what those eyes could have seen, contemplate what they might have looked at, and ask if those past lives might be acknowledged through memory.

***

The creative work and research presented in this project are interwoven in a fabric of connections and collaborations, which can be described in different textures of patronage, collegiality, and friendship. I would like to think of it as a collective (Mühling 2022) within a broader field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993). From within the collective, I would like to extend my appreciation and recognition to all who contributed to this production, in which art, history, literature, anthropology, and archaeology converged. But there was also the patient indulgence of colleagues, parents, and partners. Babies were born, a girl child became a teenager, some loved ones had joined the realm of the ancestors, and a dog and a few kittens were adopted.

For me, it all started with the artwork produced by Sikho Siyotula for her final year exhibition at the University of Pretoria, which sparked conversations about remainders from the precolonial in our world today. This became a leading motive in Siyotula's doctoral project that took her to Potsdam, and Anja Schwarz and Lars Eckstein with their Minor Cosmopolitanisms Research Training Group. Siyotula's work does not form part of this publication. Still, I am indebted to her for the notion of 'remainders', which added some spring to my wanderings (with cultural-historical trainers on my feet) within the maze of missionary archives. What I was hoping to learn from the image-text-objects in these archives regarding African-European interaction unfurled into the oxymoron of Christian missionary fascination with the African cosmology they had come to (try and) overturn. I also endearingly think of what I have learnt in this regard from Adam Jones, who opened my eyes to photographs as historical sources, and Annekie Joubert, who was a pioneer in linking African oral art and visual culture studies.

Annekie and I (and a few missionary history cronies from previous collaborations) are indebted to Laura de Harde and Sikho Siyotula for the further funding which followed from a proposal into which their work on remainders and attempts to copy and translate them culturally could be incorporated. De Harde had sharpened her tools in Justine Wintjes's research team at the University of the Witwatersrand and carried them with her when she came to Pretoria as a postdoctoral fellow sponsored by the NIHSS. She was taking the NIHSS up on their call for 'the necessary work of creating post-apartheid forms of thinking, of heritage and scholarship' by researching and disseminating the findings that can counter enduring, reductive cultural stereotypes (NIHSS homepage: about us).

We came up with the idea to work not only with WJT Mitchell's genealogy of images (2006) but also with his delectable concept of the image-text and image/text (Mitchell 1994). However, the subject matter we were spending so much time on in archive and museum vaults, at heritage sites, and (the artists) in studios, made us decide to twist the concept further: The notion of 'image-text-objects' would serve our focus on the materiality of remainders that could be studied in pursuit of African traditions of knowledge—on Francis Nyamjoh's (2017:255) recommendation, *not* 'traditional knowledge', as that implies fixity and forecloses possibilities for innovation and adjustment. At the DNMCH, De Harde found a like-minded partner in Seabela for just that: innovation and adjustment. It is gratifying that the DNMCH's long-standing openness towards the education of the students at the University of Pretoria School of the Arts can be acknowledged through the collaboration of an artist and a museum curator in *Inherited Obsessions* (2022).

I cannot help but think of Johnny van Schalkwyk, Isabel Hofmeyr and Carolyn Hamilton as 'living-intellectual-future-ancestors' of much with which we are busying ourselves. Our publication is also breathing in the inspiration generated over the past few years in the making (and now utilising) of the book *Archives from Times Past* (2022), edited by Cynthia Kros, John Wright, Mbongiseni Buthelezi and Helen Ludlow. The NIHSS also generously sponsored that project. I remind myself of what Penny (2012:282) had taught me many years ago, that 'form follows funding', and I realise how lucky we have been.

References

Ananmalay, K. 2017. *Ethnography and the Personal. The Field Practices of Writing and Photography on the Natal Leg of the Ninth Frobenius Expedition*. MA Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.

Bourdieu, P. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Buckridge, S.O. 2004. *The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica, 1760–1890*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.

Burton, A. 2003. *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home and History in Late Colonial India.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Byala, S. and Wanless, A. 2016. Using Zulu and losing Zulu: How the Clem Webb Collection was undone. In: Hamilton, C. and Leibhammer, N. (eds). *Tribing and Untribing the Archive. Identity and Material Record in Southern KwaZulu-Natal in the Late Independent and Colonial Periods.* Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

De Jager, M. 2019. *History [TBC]: Refocusing the South African War Through Praxis*. PhD (Fine Art) (Exhibitions, video works and 12 hand-bound books), Kingston University.

Griffiths, T. 1996. *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kros, C., Wright, J., Buthelezi, M. and Ludlow, H. (eds). 2022. *Archives of Times Past: Conversations about South Africa's Deep History.* Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Miescher, S. 2007. From pato to parlor. Domesticity, masculinity, religious space, and alternative archives in 20th-century Ghana. *Comparativ* 17(5/6): 131–45.

Mitchell, W.J.T. 1994. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mitchell, W.J.T. 2006. The family of images. In: Manghani, S., Piper, A. and Simons, J. (eds). *Images: A Reader.* Twin Oaks: Sage.

Mokoena, H. 2016, 'Knobkierie': Some preliminary notes of the transformation of a weapon into a swagger stick, or sometimes a stick is not just a stick. In: Hamilton, C. and Leibhammer, N. (eds). *Tribing and Untribing the Archive. Identity and Material Record in Southern KwaZulu-Natal in the Late Independent and Colonial Periods.* Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Mühling, M. (ed). 2022. *Group Dynamics. Collectives of the Modernist Period.* Munich: Hatje Cantz.

National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences. n.d. *About us.* [Online]. Available at: http://www.nihss.ac.za/about-us [accessed 10 July 2022].

Nyamjoh, F. 2017. Incompleteness: Frontier Africa and the currency of conviviality. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52(3): 253–70.

Penny, H.G. 2002. *Objects of Culture. Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

— — —. 2012. German polycentrism and the writing of history. *German History* 30(2): 265-82.

Ross, R. 2008. *Clothing, a Global History: Or, the Imperialists' New Clothes*. Cambridge: Polity.

Said, E. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism.* New York: Vintage Books.

Shaw, M. 2017. *The Noble Art of Collecting. Book One. Words, Books, and the Spaces They Inhabit.* Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Siyotula, S.Y. 2011. *Remainders of the Ephemeral.* Catalogue for the Artistic Body of Work, BA (Hons) Fine Art, The University of Pretoria.

Sonntag, C. 1983. *My Friend Malaboch, Chief of the Blue Mountains*. Pretoria: K Sonntag.

University of Southern California. 2022. *USC Libraries, International Mission Photography Archive, ca. 1860–ca. 1960*. [Online]. Available at: https://digitallibrary.usc.edu/Archive/International-Mission-Photography-Archive--ca-1860-ca-1960-2A3BF1OL0UB?Flat=1 [accessed 7 July 2022].

Van Schalkwyk, J.A. 1995. *Ideologie en die Konstruksie van 'n Landelike Samelewing: Die Hananwa van Blouberg.* PhD Thesis, University of South Africa.

Vokes, R. (ed). 2012. *Photography in Afrika: Ethnographic Perspectives.* Woodbridge: James Currey.

Vosseler, A. 2022. *The Visual Representation of South Africa in European Missionary Periodicals*, *1836–1910.* PhD Thesis, Leipzig University.