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The Artist as Archaeologist of the Colonial Archive: 
Towards a New Political Imaginary

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Department of French & Francophone Studies from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Accepted for __________ Highest Honors __________
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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May 4, 2020
Introduction
An Archaeology of the Colonial Archive

“Hence, an enormous job lies ahead. An archaeology of the archive, of the colonial discourse and its orders will exhume the murmur of voices, the texture of the lives of the anonymous from the dust of the colonial archive.”

- Françoise Vergès, Carpanin Marimoutou, A Project for a Museum of the Present

I. Origins of the ‘Orient’: Knowledge as Power

In 1798, Napoleon engaged in what Edward Said describes as “the first really modern imperial expedition” to Egypt. His invasion was atypical; he arrived with a significant army of soldiers, as well as scientists, botanists, architects, painters, astronomers, engineers, philologists, musicians, and historians, whose task was to examine Egypt in every recordable

Maurice Orange. Vintage lithograph of Napoleon Bonaparte and his savants in Egypt viewing an Egyptian mummy.

1 Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 58.
way. Among the savants were inventor of the graphite pencil, Nicolas Jacques Conte, zoologist Etienne-Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, and artist and the Louvre’s later director Dominique Vivant Denon. The product of their records was a scientific survey – designed not for Egypt, but for Europe. Napoleon recruited these savants to “build a sort of living archive for the expedition, in the form of studies conducted on topics by the members of the Institut d’Egypte, which he founded.”

During his expedition, Napoleon and his troops deployed, indexed, recorded, schematized, tabulated, and archived. The product, Description de l’Égypte, was published in twenty-three expansive volumes from 1809 to 1828.

Various records remain of Napoleon’s expedition, each a demonstration of Western knowledge of the Egyptians. The expansive volumes served to “aggrandize the project of glorious knowledge acquired in the process of political domination of the Orient” and “to feel oneself as a European in command, almost at will, of Oriental history, time, and geography.”

The savants built a detailed repository of records, including comprehensive art, maps, engravings, and descriptions of Egypt, like the above image, that served to categorize, catalogue, and define Egypt for the Western regard. This process of dissection fulfilled a European desire outlined by Said, one of command and control. The savants made efforts to record every discernible feature of Egypt; naturalist Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire crafted images of Egyptian turtles, mongooses, and bats; Jules-César Savigny produced renderings of worms; André Dutertre etched ruined temples and heads of mummies. These records, which comprise a material archive of colonialism, were made by, and for, the European.

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4 Said, 84.
In Napoleon’s project, the French employed knowledge as power to “formulate the Orient.” In so doing, the French collected an archive to better facilitate their domination, classification, categorization, and otherization of the Egyptians. In recording knowable facts about Egypt, the French gained an authority:

“to make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type; and, above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because nothing in the Orient seems to resist one’s powers.”

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5 Said, 86.
6 Said, 86.
As Said details, the French expedition transformed observation to generalization; and it was recording these generalizations into text that actualized the West’s possession of the “Orient.” In their classification, the French were able not simply to produce knowledge, but to showcase knowledge that the Europeans had over the Egyptians. Given that no comparable Egyptian study exists of the French, Napoleon’s volumes exhibit that the Egyptians are knowable, and in turn, dominatable. His volumes expose the power of the West to “be there, and to see in expert ways things that the natives themselves can’t see.” Indeed, Description de L’Égypte codifies perceived European superiority over the “Orient,” notably through the colonial archive.

This colonial archive, a representation of Western power to record and create a colonial epistemology, underpins the discussion in the proceeding text. For years, prior scholarship has begun addressing the question of the colonial archive. Scholars such as Ann Stoler have considered the colonial archive’s political role, looking “to colonial archives as both transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves.” In 2014, Marie Houllemare evaluated the French colonial archive for its historiographical role, emphasizing the colonial archive is not simply sources, but an “objet d’histoire” collected to advance the imperial “cœur d’un empire de papier.” In the last two decades, some contemporary postcolonial scholars have exposed the problems with the archives of specific regions; Cheryl McEwan’s study of how South Africa’s colonial archive diminishes women’s agency, Ellen Namhila’s exploration of Namibia’s colonial archive

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7 Jhally, Edward Said On Orientalism.
and its effect on contemporary citizenship issues, and Anjali Arondekar’s analysis of South Asia’s archives through the lens of sexuality are just a few of these studies. In 2006, Carpanin Marimoutou and Françoise Vergès took the analysis of the colonial archive one step further, attempting to create a museum space in Reunion Island accounting for the distortion and erasure of Reunionese identity in the existing, colonial archive. In *A Project for a Museum of the Present*, a document outlining the conceptual and methodological choices behind a Reunion Island museum project, *la Maison des civilisations et de l’unité réunionnaise*, Marimoutou and Vergès propose a political solution to address the colonial archive’s negative effects: a *travail archéologique*. These postcolonial scholars call for an investigation to retrieve the lost and distorted stories that animate a new imagining of not simply the past, but also the future. My work will consider the varied means of postcolonial artists to engage in the *travail archéologique*, often employing the colonial archive, to subvert the colonial gaze and create anew. In this chapter, I will outline the three goals of the colonial archive: to know, to distort, and to erase. Further, I will explore the field of postcolonial studies, the role of the postcolonial archive, and the position of the artist in its construction. The text in its entirety examines the project for the postcolonial archive, addressing questions about how to showcase stories without objectifying, how to recall the past without systematically re-inscribing the people minorisé into a landscape of violence, and how to revisit history while acknowledging its fluidity. This exploration uncovers the

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13 “Archaeological work” In *Project for a Museum of the Present*, Vergès and Marimoutou outline the archeology of the past that must occur to retrieve traces of the colonized individual.
14 This term translates to people “placed into a minority position.” The English word, “minorities,” fails to achieve the same goal as this adjective, as it rids the individual of their humanity and doesn’t acknowledge the agency of others having placed people minorisé in their minority position.
essential role of the postcolonial artist: not simply as an archaeologist of the past, but as a creator of a new political imaginary that celebrates the agency of the subaltern.¹⁵

II. Orientalism, Discourse, and “the Rest”: Distortion in the Colonial Archive

Orientalism is a notion created by Edward Said, which focuses on the relationality between the Western world and the ‘Other.’ In his work, Said engages predominately with the concept of the Middle East as the ‘Orient,’ highlighting examples, such as Napoleon and his savants. He exposes that while defining the ‘Orient,’ the West formulates its own conception of itself. According to Said, Orientalism is a product of various institutions and discourses, borrowing from Foucault’s notion of discourse.¹⁶ Orientalism is the product of interests, power relations, and knowledge that define themselves in their relationality to the ‘Orient.’ At its core, Orientalism reveals that “the way we acquire knowledge is not innocent or objective, but the end result of a process that reflects certain interests – it is highly motivated.”¹⁷ Said’s work exposes the deeply intentional ways in which the acquisition of knowledge obtains, encodes, and distorts the image of the ‘Other.’ Indeed, Orientalism is “a creation of an ideal other.”¹⁸

In his article, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” cultural theorist Stuart Hall examines Said’s concept of Orientalism and Foucault’s notion of discourse to explain

In Can the Subaltern Speak, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes the subaltern as placed into a position of inferiority and voicelessness by colonizers or those in positions of power. She highlights the importance of representing the subaltern despite the avoidance of speaking for them, stating, “For the ‘true’ subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation.”
¹⁶ Said’s theories borrow from those of Foucault, particularly as he positions orientalism in the category of discourse. Foucault describes discourse as a “discursive formation,” revolving around the production of knowledge through language. A discourse is produced by a variety of individuals in an institutional setting. It is a network – drawing on the essential characteristics and elements of other discourses to draw meaning. The relationships and differences between statements of a discourse are regular and systematic. Finally, discourse gives considerable weight to the issue of power, as truth, power, and knowledge exist in relation to each other.
¹⁷ Jhally, Edward Said On Orientalism.
¹⁸ Jhally.
his own binary construction of power relations between “the West,” created as uniquely powerful, and “the Rest,” positioned as inferior. Hall’s work concentrates on a dynamic process of categorization resulting from economic, political, and social systems that place the West at the center of development, civilization, and history. Comparable to Said’s concept of Orientalism, Hall characterizes the West as a concept that constitutes itself in its relationality to something ‘Other.’ According to Hall, to know “the Rest” is to define “the West.” For that reason, “the West” relies on the construction, knowledge, and domination of people minorisé.

Hall highlights how the creation of “the Rest” draws upon an archive and library of commonly held information. He credits four primary archives with the construction of such epistemology: classical knowledge, religious and biblical sources, mythology, and travelers’ tales. These various texts comprise an “inventory…not only to understand one’s self but to understand one’s self in relation to others.” Out of this inventory, or this archive, a definition of “the West” emerges. “The Rest” is accordingly a result of the West’s production of scientific knowledge, but also a product of stereotype and mythology fabricated within this inventory. The materials Hall identifies contribute to a mythic construction of “the

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20 Hall.
21 In The West and the Rest, Stuart Hall describes “classical knowledge” as one of the archival underpinnings for the construction of the discourse he examines. Plato’s descriptions of legendary islands became the quest of many early explorers. Aristotle and Eratosthenes’s approximate circumferences of the globe were employed by Columbus. Explorers sought to find the places of “perfect happiness” imagined by classical poets such as Horace and Ovid. Herodotus and Pliny, Hall describes, depicted “barbarous peoples who bordered Greece,” leaving “grotesque images of ‘other’ races which served as self-fulfilling prophecies for later explorers” (207). These classical works were foundational for the explorers who would come to define the West as it relates to their constructed inferior ‘Rest.’
22 The Bible was foundational for the interpretation of geography by thinkers in the Middle Ages. Hall remarks that “Jerusalem was the center of the earth because it was the Holy City” (207).
23 Mythology created images of the world with “misshapen peoples and monstrous oddities,” as well as “enchanted gardens” (207). This mystic view of the unknown animated the development of the “West and the Rest” discourse.
24 Hall focuses primarily on a German collection of over a thousand years of traveler’s tales which depict “the land of the Indian” as containing “men with dogs’ heads who talk by barking” (207). Another traveler recounts, “In Libya many are born without heads and have a mouth and eyes” (207). These imaginings became mythologized and deified – reinforcing the perception of the ‘Other’ that endures today.
Rest” that evolves out of a vision of what “the West” isn’t – or doesn’t seek to become. The colonial archive is more than the knowledge, collection, and display of scientific facts about the colonized; it is also a distortion, misrepresentation, and conceived mythology of those the West seeks to define itself in opposition to.

The Western scholar, missionary, and soldier created “the West” by categorizing, distorting, and recording, “the Rest.” These texts, foundational for the classification of “the Rest,” compose the colonial archive. Indeed, the colonial archive exists to exhibit the power of the West’s knowledge, to justify domination, and to reinforce political, economic, and social superiority.

Napoleon’s expedition and Hall’s discussion of the documents foundational to “the West and the Rest” approach reveal two predominant ways of understanding how the West forms the colonial archive; Napoleon’s meticulous records of the Egyptians fabricated a “complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe.”

Napoleon’s recording of Egypt represents how knowledge functions in the colonial archive. Hall’s descriptions of the role of mythology reveal how distortion plays an important role in the colonial archive’s construction. Even so, an examination of the role of erasure, a key element of the colonial archive’s deficiency, is essential in comprehending the colonial archive’s effects and the challenges posed by revisiting the colonial past.

III. The Colonial Archive: The Role of Erasure

When examining the composition and creation of the colonial archive, various questions emerge related not just to what is recorded and fabricated, but also to the absence of the voices of people minorisé:

26 Said, Orientalism, 15.
Who chooses what is archived and what is remembered? Why?

What is worth remembering, and what is better left forgotten?

Where might one retrieve the perspective of the people minorisé?

While the collection of objects and the fabrication of mythology are critical features of the colonial archive, so too is the process of erasure constitutive of its construction. A strategic forgetting and silencing of the voices of the subaltern play an important role in colonial discourse. The creation of the colonial archive, and of History, depends on both remembering as well as selective, strategic, and intentional forgetting.

The colonial archive has taken on multiple forms in a variety of international spaces. The archives are institutional spaces with collections of documents gathered to advance imperialism, such as those physical spaces analyzed by Houllemare in France; Houllemare examines the development of the *Bureau des archives de la Marine et des colonies* in the 18th century and evaluates archiving as a public policy tool. The archive is also a symbolic space, a discourse, and a system that advance a distinctly colonial epistemology. In all of its forms, the colonial archive is unified in its erasure of the voices of the colonized. As Marimoutou and Vergès conceptualized their museum space, they grappled with the challenge posed by the existing colonial archive in Reunion Island: the challenge of erasure.

The island’s material traces, largely crafted by slave-masters and colonizers, fossilized an oversimplified version of the past – one that neglected the perspective of people minorisé and projected dichotomies between slave and master, colony and metropole, and tradition and modernity. Marimoutou and Vergès’s museum, which was to be sponsored by the Reunion region, was a product of observations about the enduring legacy of colonialism and the limits

27 History with a capital ‘H’ is often distinguished from history because of its strategic selectivity. While history is the past – anything that’s occurred, recorded and unrecorded – History with a capital ‘H’ is the study of the past, which is socially and culturally constructed, featuring intentional inclusion and exclusion by historians.

28 Office of the Navy and Colonial Archives

29 Houllemare, “La Fabrique Des Archives Coloniales et La Naissance d’une Conscience Impériale (France, XVIII e Siècle).”
of the colonial archive. Notably, Marimoutou and Vergès responded to a central question: “What is the status of the immaterial archive in a world of colonial archive?”\textsuperscript{30} To respond to this question about the immaterial archive, Marimoutou and Vergès first deconstruct the colonial archive’s key elements.

The colonial archive, they observe, is characterized by a fragmentation of the past that aggrandizes the French Republic and reinforces its “mission civilisatrice.”\textsuperscript{31} First, Marimoutou and Vergès emphasize that the colonial archive is characterized by a recording, encoding, and displaying of that which the West perceived as different. They insist the colonial archive represents “how knowledge was packaged and objectified.”\textsuperscript{32} They also acknowledge the archive’s distorting effects, contending it “built stereotypes.”\textsuperscript{33} Above all, however, Marimoutou and Vergès highlight erasure and silence as dominant elements in the colonial archive’s generation. In their reflection on the colonial archive’s role, Marimoutou and Vergès write,

\begin{quote}
“The colonial archive played a role in the construction of the national archive, that of representing the greatness of the Republic in its self-proclaimed ‘civilizing mission.’ In this it made a discriminatory selection and eliminated the voices and views of the colonized population.”\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

The selection of documents for inclusion in the colonial archive was and is intentional and discriminatory; the voices of the colonized population are strategically erased. Unmistakably, among the many reasons these voices are excluded is their inconsistency with the goals of the colonizer – ones that are predicated on the dehumanization of the colonized people. On the subject of silence and systematic erasure, the postcolonial theorists add that,

\textsuperscript{30} Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 36.
\textsuperscript{31} “Civilizing mission” of the French Republic is a political and social rationale or justification for colonization that focuses on a perceived superiority of Western civilization that must be shared with the seemingly savage cultures in the rest of the world.
\textsuperscript{32} Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 45.
\textsuperscript{33} Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 58.
\textsuperscript{34} Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 58.
“No vernacular object before 1848 has survived and we wish to underline: there was no collection of testimonies of slaves after the abolition of slavery. No one (emancipated, abolitionists, writers….) thought of collecting oral testimonies of the freed slaves. The desire to forget and a policy of silence prevailed. The voices of 60 000 women, children and men were lost for the written archives.”

The colonial archive, while contributing to what Marimoutou and Vergès term “the desire to forget and a policy of silence,” fossilizes people minorisé as dehumanized and otherized colonial subjects; it cements them into a position of immobility. In its categorization, the archive “built stereotypes, the category of the anonymous, the voiceless, the cultureless, the knowledgeless,” banning “an entire humanity.” In the collection and organization of some knowledge, and in the intentional and systematic erasure of information that reveals the voice and humanity of the people minorisé, the West forms its colonial archive. Indeed, the colonial archive exists to exhibit, to distort, and to erase as a means of reinforcing political, economic, and social superiority. In this regard, the colonial archive is not merely a collection of objects, but a system that functions to actualize and fossilize the Western view of the world.

IV. The Colonial Archive as a System

Importantly, the colonial archive that builds these stereotypes is not, by definition, material. While objects comprise an important component of the colonial archive – and the presence of traces, itself, represents a superiority over the traceless ‘Other’ – the archive is more than a collection of materials. According to Ann Laura Stoler,

“It may serve as a strong metaphor for any corpus of selective forgettings and collections - and, as importantly, for the seductions and longings that such quests for, and accumulations of, the primary, originary, and untouched entail.”

35 Vergès and Marimoutou, 56.
36 Vergès and Marimoutou, 58.
37 Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” 94.
The archive is not only a collection of objects, but a system of erasure. Foucault further animates this discussion about the materiality of archives, contending that the archive is not a sum of texts, nor is it the institutions erected to legitimize those texts. Rather, he denotes, the archive is a “system of statements” with “the interplay of material determinations, rules of practice, unconscious systems, rigorous but unreflected relation.” More than a catalogue, the archive is a system and a network of materials, customs, cultural and political practices that defines “the West” in relation to all that Westerners perceive and construct as inferior. Because the archive is a system, not solely a collection of objects, absence and erasure play crucial roles in the composition of the colonial archive.

Even as the colonial archive is not merely a collection of objects, material traces do take part in its construction. The museum has long served as a central space for the colonial archive, enabling Western powers to place knowledge and power on display, or to fossilize a fixed notion of the identity of people minorisé. The European museum arranged the colonial archive in “one institutionalized version of the past as a common memory was shown.” The museum of the colonial archive would erase, or even disrobe people minorisé, institutionalizing violence and vulnerability; it would homogenize an ‘Other,’ refusing the complexity and humanity of colonized people; it would exclude ‘the Other,’ erasing any traces of the colonized person’s voice.

Out of this understanding of the colonial archive – as a collection of material objects, but also a system of selective knowing, distorting, and forgetting – important reflections emerge. Given the stagnancy of the colonial archive, postcolonial theorists focus on the need to animate memories of the past, give them life, and reject their fixity.

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39 Vergès and Marimoutou, 41.
Because the existing archive documenting Reunion Island’s past was constituted by violence, trauma, stereotypes, dehumanization, and absence, Marimoutou and Vergès emphasize that the symbolic relationship between a community and its archive fails to function. In the archive, people are intended to find an echo of community and collective identity; instead, people minorisé find a colonial archive of violence and silence – leading to a sort of “archive sickness.” To emerge from this state of malady, Marimoutou and Vergès pose the following question:

“How can we represent, how can we perform, how can we imagine practices in a situation where available documents, archives, are for the most part those of ‘the Other’ (visitor, colonizer) or the master?”

Indeed, how does one build an imaginary in the face of a system that perpetuates the catalogued discourse of “the Orient,” a distorted vision of “the Rest,” and a colonial epistemology anchored by erasure? How can an immaterial culture be represented in a way that manifests a sense of collective identity? The answer to these questions has not yet been fully addressed by postcolonial scholars. Marimoutou and Vergès reflect on possibilities for addressing the challenge of representation and alternarration in the face of the colonial archive, advocating for a reclaimed self-image, preference for orality, and political development of an authentic archive policy. Their project, however, was never fulfilled. Because of political constraints in the island, the project’s development never came to fruition; a space that investigated how artists could fill voids, expose absence, and condemn the colonial archive was never fully realized in Réunion Island. Still, while theorists such as Marimoutou and Vergès have speculated about the concepts that anchor a project for the

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40 Vergès and Marimoutou, 58.
41 Vergès and Marimoutou, 57.
42 Vergès and Marimoutou, 59.
postcolonial archive, a comprehensive analysis that answers their initial question has not yet been explored. My work will attempt to address this lack, examining contemporary cultural examples of the construction of the postcolonial archive; this text will address how the postcolonial artist can render presence from absence and bring volume to the voices of people minorisé, performing an archaeology of the colonial archive. To outline how the conception of a postcolonial archive is possible, it is first essential to understand the theoretical basis that underpins the deconstruction of the colonial discourse, system, and archive: postcolonial studies.

V. Postcolonialism: Dismantling Colonial Discourse

Postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe defines postcolonialism as a collection of evolving beliefs that “derives both from anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles on the one hand, and from the heritage of Western philosophy and of the disciplines that constitute the European humanities on the other.”43 Postcolonial thought, he describes, “has decisively contributed to the unmasking of Western hegemony in the field of the humanities and in other disciplines,” deconstructing problematic notions of Western superiority.44 Postcolonialism, in his vision, is a dissection and interrogation of colonialism’s assumptions and effects.

Postcolonialism appeared as an intellectual movement drawing upon the ideas of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, emerging from much of the work conducted by diasporic scholars of the Middle East and South Asia evaluating the relationship between Europe and the West, mostly since the 18th and 19th centuries.45 According to Bhabha, postcolonial theory is meant to disrupt; it is “an attempt to interrupt the Western discourses of modernity through...displacing, interrogative subaltern or postslavery narratives and the

critical-theoretical perspectives they engender."\textsuperscript{46} Importantly, Bhabha emphasizes how subaltern narratives and perspectives serve as a tool to undermine the assumptions of colonial discourse. Bhabha’s work, however, does not detail how to find these perspectives and, if found, how they should be represented.

Marimoutou and Vergès advance their own definition of postcolonial theory, with the express goal of opening up new theoretical and political possibilities in postcolonial states. They insist,

"Postcolonial theory seeks to be trans-disciplinary, heedful of fringe expressions, ‘minorities’, and new places of resistance (music, visual arts, urban cultures...), attentive to the new forms of power and exploitation, to new cartographies (emergence of new regions, of new exchange routes, of new cosmopolitan cities...)."\textsuperscript{47}

Importantly, postcolonial studies explore new possibilities – by expanding artistic spaces of resistance and imagining new ways of visualizing cultural and political connection, postcolonialism empowers those affected by a legacy of colonialism. As Marimoutou and Vergès describe, the postcoloniality of Reunion Island is not anchored in the end of a colonial status, it is founded on questions of citizenship, inclusion, and national identity that have hitherto been undermined by France’s self-image. Reunionese postcolonialism questions prior representations, stereotypes, and History.

In his work on postcolonialism, Mbembe emphasizes the necessity to revisit the past – to reject the Western superiority inscribed in the existing discourse of colonialism and its legacy. To do so, he explains, “we have to confront in the same breath the terror visited upon us by racial imperialism as well as our own self-inflicted brutalities” and “widen the scope of cultural and political critique and renew the archives of our past and of our present.”\textsuperscript{48} In this way, postcolonialism is an evolutive project to confront – and remember – the violence and

\textsuperscript{46} Homi K. Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture} (Routledge, 1994), 199.
\textsuperscript{47} Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 98.
\textsuperscript{48} Mbembe, Africa in Motion: An interview with the post-colonialism theoretician Achille Mbembe | Mute.
trauma of the colonial past, without rendering a perpetual association between violence and postcolonial states. This project may begin with, but does not depend on, the colonial archive. As Mbembe outlines,

“[The Western archive] contains within itself the resources of its own refutation. It is neither monolithic, nor the exclusive property of the West. Africa and its diaspora decisively contributed to its making and should legitimately make foundational claims on it. Decolonizing knowledge is therefore not simply about de-Westernization.”

Indeed, Mbembe’s outline of how to deconstruct the Western archive, by refuting its assumptions and proposing a new epistemology, is foundational to postcolonialism. The pursuit of this postcolonial epistemology, as Mbembe indicates, is grounded in a refutation of the Western – or colonial – archive. Decolonizing knowledge and deconstructing colonial discourse requires revisiting the colonial archive and exposing the silence, condemning the violence, and filling absence with a redefined postcolonial identity. This is the archaeology of the postcolonial archive, a project to revisit the colonial past toward a redefined political future.

VI. The Postcolonial Archive: Creating Anew

As Vergès and Marimoutou contend, the postcolonial archive is “an archive of traces, of ghosts, of missing and anonymous persons.” It is a project that “insists on the need to visualize new maps of the past and the present where Europe does not speak in the name of others, does not shape their lives and territories.” It is a space that rejects and inverts the aforementioned elements of the colonial archive: its display, distortion, and erasure. As Cheryl McEwan emphasizes in her project of creating a postcolonial archive inclusive of South African women, the essential imperative of the postcolonial archive is to “create an

49 Achille Mbembe, “Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive” (Public Lecture Series at Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, 2015), 29.
50 Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 59.
51 Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 52.
archive for the future and an alternative form of historical documentation.”

McEwan highlights the necessity to revisit the past documented in the colonial archive and retrieve traces. She writes,

“The documentation of these pasts, conceived as ‘hidden history’, seeks to democratise the historical record, create an archive for the future and an alternative form of historical documentation.”

McEwan’s emphasis on the re-documentation of the ghosts and missing persons furthers the notion that the archive relies on the hidden narratives of the subaltern. Her invocation of the future presents the postcolonial archive as a system that is shaped by the past, grounded in the present, and motivated by the future. Its creation offers the subaltern an agency and identity that does more than reconstruct History, but create a redefined, future-oriented political identity. As McEwan maintains, creating a postcolonial archive can be critically important for subaltern communities; the project “resist[s] various kinds of amnesia…essential to the creation of a shared past and a shared sense of national and communal belonging” and ensures “voices can be incorporated into national projects of remembering and notions of belonging.” The postcolonial project is thus a political one; it attempts to reininsert more voices into the Historical record and contemporary political communities, rendering them more polyphonic and democratic.

How to retrieve these voices, though, remains an unresolved question in postcolonial theory. The project of creating the postcolonial archive is subject to numerous challenges. Capturing the postcolonial archive without risking fossilization, dwelling on violence, and reinforcing notions of voicelessness and powerlessness is a task that must be reconciled. How to represent the postcolonial archive – how to render objects that respect orality, how to retrieve perspectives when those voices have been erased, and how to create displays that

53 McEwan, 747.
54 McEwan, 755.
don’t expose – has been little explored in postcolonial literature. It is this examination that I conduct in the proceeding text, exploring how the postcolonial artist possesses a unique power to construct a postcolonial archive and political future.

VII. History, Memory, and the Role of the Artist

In the ongoing discussion surrounding the representation of France’s colonial past, the postcolonial artist must reconcile critical questions: How can we represent the trauma of the past, without dwelling on passivity, on victimhood, and on violence? How can we represent the History of people or of an event when there are no physical traces? How can we archive something in motion, without risking its fossilization?

In the absence of objects, individual and collective memory become increasingly important. In *Esclavage colonial : quelles mémoires ? Quels héritages ?*, Françoise Vergès refers to memory as “un espace de résistance contre un récit historique qui s’écrivait en niant l’existence de [la traite et de l’esclavage].”²⁵⁵ In the absence of material traces, Vergès stresses, memory becomes a tool through which individuals can construct a new archive and a transformed political imaginary.

Importantly, memory exists separately from History; it is a reconstruction of past events, either by an individual or a collective – a group of individuals, a community, or a nation. History is a selection of those memories which prevail, and an erasure of those memories which are left forgotten, erased, or silenced. History relies on material traces, which are archived, inscribed, and dominant. In the face of a History dominated by the knowledge gathered by the West, the postcolonial artist must engage in what Vergès and Marimoutou describe as “historical research.”²⁵⁶ The research, they outline, involves “reexamining the past to reinterpret it, to transform memory into history, to mourn the past

²⁵⁵ Vergès, “Traite des noirs, esclavage colonial et abolitions,” 156. “...a space of resistance against a historical account that creates itself while negating the existence of the slave trade and slavery.”
²⁵⁶ Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 87.
and build a shared narrative.”\textsuperscript{57} Due to the absence of materiality and the predominance of orality in subaltern communities, Vergès and Marimoutou argue “the preservation of the non-material heritage is bound to creation and not to ‘showcasing.’”\textsuperscript{58} The project of the postcolonial artist – the archaeologist of the colonial archive – is to render History out of memory while respecting silence, avoiding re-traumatization, and remaining oriented in the present and future.

Postcolonial theorists have described the artist as uniquely capable of liberating people\textit{ minorisé} from the confines of History. Guadeloupean philosopher and writer Alain Foix emphasizes that the artist is liberated of the objects, events, and influences that precede them and must instead be perceived as active creators.

He writes,

\begin{quote}
\textquote{L’artiste quel qu’il soit, ne peut plus être considéré comme le facteur d’expression d’un commanditaire qui en serait le maître, maître d’un sujet à dépeindre et exprimer, maître d’une histoire et d’une cosmogorie, maître d’une éthique et d’une esthétique, maître d’une vision et d’une conception du monde léguée par une histoire dont nous serions prisonniers, mais comme sujet agissant, autonome et libre de sa propre expression, de sa propre vision du monde, de sa propre histoire.} \textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

The liberty of the artist is retrieved in the artist’s own expression, identity, and interpretation. Creation permits artists to rid themselves with the limits of a past that does not include, represent, or imagine an entire humanity and future for the colonized population. It is thus this artist, the postcolonial artist, who brings to life the postcolonial archive.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{57} Vergès and Marimoutou, 87.
\textsuperscript{58} Vergès and Marimoutou, 68. \textit{Italics added.}
\end{footnotesize}
The process of refiguring postcolonial identity, describes anthropologist Natacha Gagné, requires creation. She explains, “giving yourself an identity means translating into a homogeneous discourse a heterogeneous group of languages. So the discourse in which we pronounce our identity is a creative act.” In the absence of material traces, of historical representation, of humanization, the artist must create to construct a new imagined future for postcolonial identity. The artist must clothe, animate, and render human the characters of the past that have been long disregarded and systematically silenced.

The travail archéologique demanded to rewrite, rearrange, and reject the prevailing History is no simple task. Various questions emerge regarding how to construct this postcolonial archive:

- How can colonialism, its banality and brutality be made visible, represented?
- How does one revisit memories of violence without re-traumitizing?
- How does one amplify voices without harkening on voicelessness?

Out of these questions, a postcolonial archive emerges. The answer of how to revisit the colonial archive lies not only in rejection, but in creation. My work examines how artists are employing the colonial texts toward a postcolonial archive and political identity. The artists draw from the archives of violence. They fill silence. They start from the same reality and tell a new story. They denounce and expose the colonial enterprise and its associated violence, distortion, and silence. They utilize the colonial archive as a canvas, on which they create a reformed vision of the past that explores new political possibilities.

In recent years, postcolonial artists in Francophone countries have employed photography, film, literature, and museum exhibitions to participate in the elaboration of a postcolonial archive. An examination of their work constitutes a study of the first records of

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the postcolonial archive; analysis of their texts reveals the unique role of the postcolonial artist, how the aforementioned challenges of the postcolonial archive might be addressed, and where challenges remain. To examine how the postcolonial artist has begun to address the difficulty of creating the postcolonial archive – and how art has served as a tool not simply for re-appropriating the past, but also for reimagining a future – I analyze four artists and mediums of art.

Chapter One focuses on the portraits of Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, an Algerian artist who manipulates the colonial archive of the Algerian War of Independence. In reinventing the women denied a voice, she simultaneously reimagines the postcolonial identity of Muslim women. Examination of her work, which restores dignity to women unveiled and photographed for an Algerian War registry, demonstrates how the postcolonial artist can employ art as a tool for remembrance and resistance.

In Chapter Two, I explore Abdellatif Kechiche’s film, Vénus Noire, which questions and manipulates the colonial archive of Saartjie Baartman. Baartman was a Khoikhoi woman whose body was exhibited in freak shows in 19th-century Europe under the name “Hottentot Venus” and whose dissected corps was exposed in museums after her death as an example of how Western science legitimates European imperialist expansion and subjugation of the ‘Other.’ I investigate the film’s capacity to give flesh and complexity to Baartman, while avoiding speaking for the subaltern. I also emphasize the advantages and limits to exposing violence in the postcolonial archive.

Chapter Three considers the art of Emmanuel Kamboo, the curator of a museum exhibit in Reunion Island that scrutinizes the colonial archive to invert History’s conceptualization of Western hegemony. His employment and reappropriation of colonial stamps illustrate how art can reinscribe the identity and dominance of people minorisé into a reimagined, postcolonial archive. Kamboo’s work addresses the role of art in exploring a potential
political future for a territory facing the enduring economic, social, and cultural effects of Western colonialism.

In Chapter Four, I analyze Maryse Condé’s novel, *Moi, Tituba, sorcière...Noire de Salem*, that confronts the colonial archive of Tituba, an enslaved woman of color represented as a traitorous witch in the Salem Witch Trial records. Conde’s novel exposes and condemns the erasure of Tituba’s voice from colonial texts; her work illustrates the unique role of francophone literature in constructing a political future that challenges fossilized depictions of the past.

Indeed, these texts examine how the postcolonial artist employs their liberty to signify, re-appropriate, critique, and create. Such an examination serves not only to comprehend how postcolonial artists reformulate the past, but also to embrace the new, proposed epistemology advanced by the creators of the postcolonial archive. This analysis exposes more than the violence and silence of certain colonial records, but also the collective identity and community the subaltern seeks to construct. The generation of a postcolonial archive plays a critical political role; in creating a shared past, the postcolonial archive enables national belonging, possibilities for healing, and a more democratic method of both remembrance and political imagining. In the *travail archéologique* demanded of the postcolonial artist, it is art that becomes a tool in retrieving and devising those stories that animate a new, *created* conception of the political past and future.
Chapter I

The Algerian War of Independence and the War of Memory: Re-appropriation of the Images of Marc Garanger

“Sex and violence still sell in Paris,” writes New York Times critic Michael Kimmelman of a 2009 exposition at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Entitled Controverses, the exhibition was devised to display photos that have provoked extensive public debate from 1839 to the present. The exhibit was curated by Daniel Girardin, art historian and curator at Musée de l’Élysée à Lausanne and Christian Pirker, lawyer and contemporary art collector. The exposition gained extensive popularity. In Paris, the show attracted “Louvre-length, two-hour lines” that “snaked out the door of the Bibliothèque Nationale.” The attractiveness of this forum demonstrates the sensational voyeurism associated with viewership of the forbidden and the West’s perceived ‘Other.’ The power lied with the spectator, as they took pleasure in the violent, the strange, and the forbidden. The exhibit was an intimate quest for the visitor to examine their relationship with the photographs and to identify that which speaks to their sense of morality and identity.

Each image included in the collection encapsulated a precise historical controversy. The photo, “Buzz Aldrin on the Moon,” credited to NASA represented the debate about the falsification of the moon landing and notions of American propaganda.

Girardin and Pirker denote that the controversy...

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62 Kimmelman.
provokes a conversation about “l’importance de l’image – ou de l’absence de l’image” and trust in the reality of photography.63

The image entitled “Kissing Nun” by fashion photographer Oliviero Toscani raised questions about the legitimacy of religious barriers around sexuality. Originally created as an ad for Benetton Group, the photo was quickly condemned by Catholic authorities. Toscani’s efforts to add a social dimension to instruments of publicity, “en brisant les tabous par le choc de l’image”64 rendered his work worthy of exhibition in Controverses.

The photo, “Abu Ghraib,” picturing naked inmates piled on top of each other with two American soldiers holding thumbs-up signs addressed an ongoing debate about the normalization of the abject violence tied to American power and the dehumanization of

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64 Pirker. “…by breaking taboos with the shock of image”
others. Among the 180 images selected by Pirker and Girardin, there was one portrait that depicted events of the Algerian War of Independence: the portrait of Cherid Barkaoun.

Christian Pirker, one of the exposition’s curators, described Controverses as “l’expression des sensibilités et des points de tension d’une société à un moment précis.” In an interview, Pirker revealed that the objective of his work was to present his images in a manner deemed “la plus neutre possible, afin que chacun se fasse sa propre opinion sur les images.” The image displayed of Cherid Barkaoun alludes to French occupation of North African territories, but the controversy invoked remains unknown. The reference to the war in Algeria remains blurred. Perhaps Pirker and Girardin sought to illuminate the controversy over the conditions under which the photo was taken – and the power of the photographer. Perhaps it was the capture of Barkaoun’s hijab adorning her shoulders rather than her head, or the objectification of the colonized that the curators were capturing with their selection. The ambiguity of the controversy conveyed in the image of Cherid Barkaoun demonstrates how the erasure of context reinforces the voyeurism constitutive of colonial representation of an ‘Other.’ Indeed, the image of Cherid Barkaoun, when placed in context, is revelatory of a contemporary French struggle over colonial memory and the power dynamics at play in archiving the imperial past.

I. Marc Garanger and the Historicity of the Colonial Enterprise

In 1960, a young French man, Marc Garanger, served in French military service during the colonization of Algeria by France. Six years into the Algerian War of Independence, the French were systematically capturing Muslim and Berber people for

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65 Pirker. “The expression of sensitivities and points of tension at a precise moment.”
66 Pirker. “…the most neutral possible, so each person can create their own opinion of the image.”
67 Algeria was France’s first and last colony. In 1830, the French invaded Algeria with a particularly violent conquest, constituted by a “scorched earth” policy of massacre and mass rape. In 1834, Algeria became a French military colony and was divided into departments Alger, Oran, and Constantine in the 1848 constitution. On November 1, 1954, in what became known as the Toussaint Rouge, the National Liberation Front (FLN) launched an attack on military and civilian targets. After eight years of violent conflict, a United Nations resolution recognizing Algeria’s right to self-governance, France recognized Algeria’s independence in 1962.
their suspected connection to the National Liberation Front (FLN). Official photographer of his regiment, Garanger was a soldier obeying the orders of his commander; in order to identify the villagers accused of supporting the FLN, the French army tasked him with taking 2000 photos of Algerians, especially women. The photos were to be taken of individuals living in internment camps under military supervision. Over the course of 10 days, Garanger traveled to multiple camps, compelling his subjects to sit for his camera against bare walls as their photos were taken. Garanger forced the women to remove their hijabs, against their will. As Garanger later described in his autobiography of the events, “Elles n’avaient pas le choix. Elles étaient dans l’obligation de se dévoiler et de se laisser photographier.”

Nearly 60 years after this conflict, there remains an enduring political and social trauma, as well as what Françoise Dosse terms a “commémorite aiguë,” in which France must reconcile a recognition of its past violence with the preservation of a national identity. See also Dosse, “Entre histoire et mémoire.”

Marc Garanger, “Femmes algériennes, 1960,” Les cahiers de médiologie 15, no. 1 (2003): 43, https://doi.org/10.3917/cdm.015.0043. “They didn’t have a choice. They were under the obligation to unveil themselves and leave themselves to be photographed.”
The images of the women are varied, but generally feature the women’s faces and upper bodies. The photograph’s subjects, who range from children to elderly women, are looking at the camera with strong and stern expressions. Many of the images expose the tattoos and makeup on the faces of the women. Often, they are wearing large beads around their necks or rings around their fingers. Many wear veils around their shoulders, presumably the veils that French authorities forcibly removed from their faces. On multiple photographs, Marc Garanger noted the date and wrote “femme algérienne”\(^{69}\) in the photo’s corner, along with his own signature. None of the photos appear to include the name of the woman pictured on the copy.

\[\text{Marc Garanger. Photograph in the collection, “Femmes algériennes.”}\]

\(a. \) The Role of Women and Unveiling in the Algerian War

The strategic choice of the French military to capture the images of women, in particular, was no coincidence. The veil is a loaded, polysemic sign – a sign of submission, a sign of

\(^{69}\) “Algerian woman”
erotism, and a sign of resistance as a mask. The West saw the veil as a symbol of Muslim women’s submissiveness in a patriarchal system. At first, the French army didn’t fully acknowledge the role of women in the Algerian War, making appeals to Muslim women promising to emancipate them from what the French assumed were traditional roles. In reality, women played a crucial role in the war of independence; female combatants formed an integral part of on-the-ground guerilla tactics for the FLN. Women and men in Algeria were, in many cases, equally participating in the fight for the independence of their country. The veil became a political tool during the Algerian War, through which women were able to subvert Western expectations and attack the French army. Veiled women would transport weapons, including guns, grenades, and bombs under the veil, particularly in the Battle of Algiers, memorialized by Gillo Pontecorvo’s 1966 film. This practice subverted and exploited the French stereotype of the traditional Muslim woman as “a passive and submissive woman who should under no circumstances be touched.” After influential battles revealing the threat of veiled Algerian women, the French began to recognize the veil as a sign of resistance. Indeed, “women who did not conform to gendered ethnoreligious and cultural stereotypes became a serious problem for the French army.” For women fighters, the veil enabled them to mask their true identity, to protect themselves, and resist the possession of the colonial gaze. The veil, in this sense, “protects, reassures, isolates.” As the French witnessed these acts, a new need to remove the veil emerged – to deconstruct the mask and the potential for women’s resistance.

In *Algeria Unveiled*, member of the Algerian National Front Frantz Fanon describes,
“We shall see that this veil, one of the elements of the traditional Algerian garb, was to become the bone of contention in a grandiose battle, on account of which the occupation forces were to mobilize their most powerful and most varied resources, and in the course of which the colonized were to display a surprising force of inertia…the officials of the French administration in Algeria, committed to destroying the people’s originality, and under instructions to bring about the disintegration, at whatever cost, of forms of existence likely to evoke a national reality directly or indirectly, were to concentrate their efforts on the wearing of the veil, which was looked upon at this juncture as a symbol of the status of the Algerian women.”

As Fanon outlines, the veil was an acknowledgement of the originality, dignity, and status of the subaltern; the French deployed considerable force toward its removal to expose and possess the Algerian woman.

Unveiling was not simply related to deconstructing the Algerian woman’s mask, however, but also dismantling the woman’s status and appeasing the sexual curiosity of the Western man. The European sexual fantasy of unveiling Muslim women dates back to the 19th century, during which Europeans traveling to the Middle East depicted eroticized representations of women removing their veils and exposing their naked bodies. Made into postcards, images of unveiled women proliferated depicting the unlocked eroticism of those Muslim women who exposed themselves. During the Algerian War, the French military further launched a campaign to ‘liberate’ Algerian Muslim women, forcing them to unveil for photos that reinforced a myth of poor gender relations in the country.

The unveiling of Algerian women served as a tool of political domination, as well as social subordination. To unveil the colonized woman was to unleash her sexuality and reveal her beauty. The practice symbolized “breaking her resistance, making her available for

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76 Fanon, 36-37.
79 Fanon, 43.
adventure.” By removing the veil, colonizers gained access to the forbidden and the Algerian woman became a potential object of possession. Unveiling has thus occupied the position of a French colonial myth – a myth that embodies control over the exoticized, dehumanized, and sexualized colonized woman. Efforts by colonizers to strip the women of their veil were an attempt to strip them of their dignity and humanity and impose the voyeuristic colonial gaze upon them.

b. The Colonial Enterprise and the Rejection of Opacity

The act of violence – of unveiling – that ensued between French authorities and these Algerian women is inextricably tied to the project of producing knowledge associated with the colonial archive. This practice of record-keeping to possess, manipulate, scrutinize, and reduce an individual minorisé is the same weapon wielded by Napoleon in his 1798 Egyptian expedition. Marc Garanger’s photographs reduce what is unknown, using simplification to illustrate that “different cultures are united by one thing: the fact that they are all different from the Rest.” This process of reduction has the effect of rejecting the subaltern’s “right to opacity,” a concept created by Édouard Glissant in his 1990 text, Poétique de la Relation. Glissant presents the concept of opacity as an antonym to transparency, acknowledging that the recognition of difference is not the understanding of otherness; rather, it is accepting opacity – the impenetrability and unintelligibility of communication across cultures. As Glissant asserts,

“How can one reconcile the hard line inherent in any politics and the questioning essential to any relation? Only by understanding that it is impossible to reduce anyone, no matter who, to a truth he would not have generated on his own...This same opacity is also the force that drives every community: the thing that would bring us together forever and make us permanently distinctive. Widespread consent to

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80 Fanon, 43.
82 Glissant, Édouard. Poétique de la Relation (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 194. Translated by Betsy Wing.
specific opacities is the most straightforward equivalent of nonbarbarism. We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone. “

In this passage, Glissant characterizes opacity as the antidote to reduction, recognizing opacity as the impossibility to simplify and distort difference. The “truth he would not have generated on his own” to which the subaltern is so often reduced is the truth at the core of the colonial archive. Marc Garanger’s photographs were an attempt to render transparent and knowable the West’s vision of ‘Other,’ creating an exoticized image of the Algerian woman that simplified the subaltern condition to barbarism. The photographs demonstrate the colonial archive’s role in controlling and rejecting opacity.

The veils of the Algerian women are thus literal and symbolic. In the literal sense, the veil’s removal enables the West’s physical possession of and voyeurism with respect to the woman minorisé. Symbolically, the veil denies the colonizer access to control and possession of the unknown. A metaphor for the colonial enterprise, the veil’s removal enables the colonizer to dissect, scrutinize, and expose the subaltern, rejecting the opacity to which she is entitled.

c. On Barbarism: History of Viewers as Voyeurs

The Western obsession with exhibiting the exotic and the forbidden has deep psychological and political roots, dating back beyond the Algerian War to the human zoos of the 19th century. To justify the economic exploitation and political subjugation in the colonies, the French employed postcards, photographs, advertisements, and various artifacts that fed the culture of the colonial gaze, where this dehumanization was at play. They also often displayed black actors as animals or sauvages84 in exhibits and performances. A highly lucrative industry, these expositions demonstrate how the colonial gaze can be employed as a

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84 *Sauvages*
tool of imperialism. The inferiorization of the West’s conceived ‘Other’ was intensified by scientific investigation that reinforced notions of cognitive and civilizational hierarchies between races. These practices perpetuate a “culture du regard,”\textsuperscript{85} constituted by the exhibition and manipulation of minority bodies through visual objects that reinforce subordination. These objects, be they the 	extit{sauvages} of human zoos or the sexualized images of women in tourist advertisements, demonstrate the Western “gout pour l’exotisme.”\textsuperscript{86} The popularity of these expositions, and the simultaneous Western condemnation of and obsession with difference, can be explained in part by the sexual limitations of Christian Victorian values, the “Negromania” of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century tied to triumph over anatomy, and a deviancy from the Enlightenment era rationality and morality.\textsuperscript{87} Human zoos served as an outlet for the French to express their desires – to touch and to see that which challenged the boundaries of sexual behavior. In 	extit{Zoos humains : entre mythe et réalité}, Bancel et. al detail the French attraction to the exposition of the ‘Other.’

\textit{“Dans ce cadre, l’exhibition de l’autre l’inscrit dans un ordre (celui de la raison), l’objectif dans une hiérarchie (le déviant, le taré, le fou, puis le représentant des ‘races inférieures’). C’est donc d’un processus de réassurance, de la nécessité d’affirmer sa propre maîtrise qu’il s’agit et, comme presque toutes les volontés de puissance, elle puise dans l’angoisse son extraordinaire énergie.”}\textsuperscript{88}

The energy referenced in this passage is derived from the Western fear of difference. Domination over alterity remains the means to assure the West of its racial and political superiority. This otherization of difference and dehumanization of people \textit{minorisé} through


\textsuperscript{86} Philippe Dewitte et al., “Zoos humains. De la Vénus hottentote aux reality shows,” \textit{La Découverte} 1239, no. 1 (2002), 4. “…taste for exoticism.”

\textsuperscript{87} Dewitte et al.

\textsuperscript{88} Dewitte et al. \textit{In this framework, the exhibition of the Other inscribes it in an order (one of reason), the objective in a hierarchy (the deviant, the foolish, the mad, then the representative of the’ inferior races ’). It’s therefore a process of reassurance, or the necessity of asserting one’s own mastery, and, like almost all the wills of power, it draws its extraordinary energy from anxiety.”}
exhibitions and performances – the “culture du regard” – has contributed to an intellectual, political, and economic racism that endures today.

While human zoos diminished in popularity in the 20th century after World War I due to the advent of cinema, the practice of field work by anthropologists, and the legitimization of institutionalized racism, the legacy of the practice endures. Photography brought with it “une autre dimension de l’altérité” that imbeds itself in contemporary social constructions of race. In this way, image has become reality, whether in Western fear of immigrant communities, the exoticization of local people for Western tourism, or the continued economic exploitation of postcolonial states. “Cette mise en cage virtuelle des Autres fonctionne toujours,” explain Dewitte et al.

It is this construction of dominator and dominated, of seer and seen, that colors the power dynamics of exhibiting the colonial archive. From human zoos to exoticized portrayals of African bodies, there lingers a question of who possesses control over the gaze – the colonizer or the colonized, the viewer or the viewed. Such is a question of passivity and activity; the viewers, in their activity and their voyeurism, carry with them a historical tradition of gazing upon the passive colonial subject, objectifying and creating an ‘Other.’

Garanger’s tale of fame associated with his photographs raises important questions about the notions of power, representation, and silence in French national memory. What’s more, it reflects the enduring legacy of the culture du regard that colors French history. The images of the Algerian women began as an animalized, objectified expression of ‘Other’ for the French army’s political oppression and social amusement. Eventually, these women took on an evolving role. Garanger, throughout his career, chose to ignore how his art was born out of

89 Dewitte et al. “…another dimension to otherness”
90 Dewitte et al. “This virtual placing in a cage of Others still operates.”
a colonial epistemology and how his contemporary success reinforced the problematic voicelessness of the subaltern.

As lines of French spectators visited the exposition *Controverses* and stopped to witness the image of Algerian woman Cherid Barkaoun, they carried with them a colonial legacy of exoticizing difference for the reinforcement of political, economic, and intellectual racism. While this exhibit reminds the spectator of the epistemological violence committed by the colonizers, the spectator’s gaze, and the spectator’s position of empowerment, the exhibit also accompanied a complicity and a power that cannot be divorced from the Western history of putting the colonized on display. In their spectatorship of the photography, visitors legitimized the violence inscribed into the colonial archive, all the while distancing themselves from it.

d. Marc Garanger’s Exposition of the Photos: Photography and Memory

Later in his career, Garanger claimed taking these photographs exposed him to the humanity of Algerian women and the moral inadequacy of the French army’s actions.

He describes that the first exposition of the *Femmes algériennes* was before the captain of his unit. The captain gathered his officers around the photos, remarking, “Venez voir, venez voir comme elles sont laides! Venez voir ces macaques, on dirait des singes!”

Subject to the oppressive imperial gaze, these women were further animalized and otherized.

In 1965, Pierre Gassmann, director a large photographic library, discovered his images and proposed that Garanger apply for the Niepce Prize. Garanger redrew the images of the women in a vertical format, blurring the background to “aller progressivement au blanc pur, ce qui renforçait le côté esthétique de ces photographies.” It was this interpretation of the women, surrounded by whiteness, that warranted Garanger’s selection for the Niepce

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91 Garanger, “Femmes algériennes, 1960.” “Come see, come see how ugly they are! Come see these macaques, they look like monkeys!”
92 Garanger. “to gradually go to pure white, which reinforced the aesthetic aspect of these photographs.”
Prize. In 1969-1970, the images circulated as an exposition in the Maisons de la Culture de France.

Garanger admits that as the photos gained notoriety, he neglected to recall the brutality of their origins. He states, “pendant toute cette période, les échos dans la presse insistaient surtout sur la beauté de ces photographies, bien que je n’ai cessé de rappeler leur origine de photos d’identité faites sur ordre du pouvoir militaire français.”

In 1981, the photos were exposed at Théâtre Antique in Arles before 2000 spectators. Reading a passage describing his military service and condemnation of the Algerian War, Garanger was surprised to find the audience broke into applause. It was then that he decided to publish a photograph book of the images. Since this period, the images of the Algerian women have become the subject of multiple expositions, including Controverses.

Susan Sontag addresses this issue of the power of photographs and the voyeurism of spectators in Regarding the Pain of Others. Referencing the photo project of Sebastião Salgado, “Migrations: Humanity in Transition,” Sontag maintains that “the problem is in the pictures themselves…in their focus on the powerless, reduced to their powerlessness.” She references that Salgado fails to name the ‘powerless’ in the captions. With the exception of the image in Controverses, the photos of Marc Garanger are similarly displayed as “Femmes algériennes,” stripped of names and identities. Ultimately, as Sontag clarifies, artists employ photographs, exploiting pity and compassion, to invoke feeling. The sympathy of the spectators “proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence.” The spectator is awarded a place of power and privilege in viewing the image of the sufferer, and in doing so, a distance is constructed between the viewer and the viewed.

Garanger. “During all this period, the echoes in the press insisted especially on the beauty of these photographs, although I never stopped to recall their origin as identity photographs made on the order of the French military power.”

Garanger.

Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 78.

Sontag, 102.
Photographs do more than expose society’s voyeuristic tendencies; they reinforce power dynamics and encode violence into memory of the past. In Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag contends that “photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed.”97 When memorialized, photos have the power to create “archives of horror” that can serve as “reminders of death, of failure, of victimization.”98 According to Sontag, memories “haunt,” and “remembering through photographs eclipses other forms of understanding, and remembering.”99 Archiving photos of the past legitimate the violence contained within those images by inscribing such violence into History. What’s more, perceiving the powerless renders the spectator more powerful. Viewers are reminded that the suffering is happening to another, not to them.

While Marc Garanger’s photographs allow the spectator to remember the violence and subjugation of the colonial enterprise, they also capture and archive the abject suffering of Algerian women during the war. Repeated exhibition of these photos in expositions like Controverses represents the Western inclination to revel in the pain of the colonial subject while establishing a distanced sympathy. Further, the identity and context of the viewer adds complexity to the reading of this colonial archive; in different spaces, these images take on diverse meanings – whether feeding the Western obsession with exoticism and possession under the eyes of French soldiers in the 20th century, instructing the Western viewer of the faults of colonialism in Garanger’s later exhibitions, or satisfying a voyeuristic need of the Western spectators of Controverses. Undetachable from the Western legacy of colonialism and exposing of the ‘Other,’ it is this appetite for the power over representation that expositions like Controverses exploit. It is the distance between the viewer and the viewed

97 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 81.
98 Sontag, 86-87.
99 Sontag, 89.
that images such as those of Garanger codify. It is thus the permanence of the violence captured by Garanger that characterizes the colonial archive.

According to Michael Kimmelman of the *New York Times*, *Controverses* “violated the civil contract” implied by photographs – one that recognizes the potential barbarism of photographers and the complicity of viewers.  

In a debate over whether a photo should meet the public eye, exhibiting such a photo is, in effect, taking a side in the debate. “It’s not just the perpetrators’ barbarism,” Kimmelman insists, “but ours that photographs like these expose.”

The process of etching violence into and exposing the exotic in the archives of the colonial past is one that the postcolonial archive seeks to reject. It is when the archive is re-appropriated and recontextualized that images such as those of Marc Garanger serve an opposing political function – one of resistance to the enduring effects of colonialism and of a reconstitution of postcolonial political identity.

**II. Princesses: Creating a New Identity**

In 2015, an exhibition entitled *Princesses* by Algerian artist Dalila Dalléas Bouzar was displayed at la Dak’art in Senegal, revealing how postcolonial archives can be wielded to uplift perspectives erased from the colonial archive. At this exhibition, paintings inspired by Marc Garanger’s images could be found surrounded by a collection of displays that place the women into a context of the Algerian War and collective memory.

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Princesses consists of 12 portraits of Algerian women, positioned side by side to form a collection. The portraits feature the faces of women of diverse colors surrounded by blackness. The black background gives the appearance that the women are bodiless, floating in space. Most of the depicted women possess golden adornments, including necklaces, crowns, or earrings. Many of the portraits feature tattoos on the faces of the women. In each image, the painting’s subject looks straight at the spectator with expressions of solemnity or condemnation.

Bouzar was born in 1974 in Oran, Algeria. Her artistic works are unified in their effect of extracting images from Algerian history and reinterpreting the archives. Educated in Paris, she has exhibited her work in various European and African countries, including South Africa, Senegal, Algeria, and France. Her art explores individual and collective memory in expositions such as Algérie Année 0 (2012) and Princesses (2015). Her work has also emphasized the fantasy role of Orient in Femmes d’Alger d’après Delacroix (2012-2018).
Her series of six illustrations, *Femmes d’Alger*, demonstrates her propensity to draw upon the colonial archive to manipulate and question the assumptions of colonial epistemology.

In these images, she draws upon the 1834 painting of Eugène Delacroix, *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement*, which depicts an enticing and exotic scene associated with the Algerian woman. Delacroix painted this scene after being invited to accompany Count Charles de Mornay on a French diplomatic trip to Morocco shortly after the French conquest of Algeria began.\(^{101}\) During his trip, he repeatedly sought out opportunities to depict Muslim women, and after various denials, he was granted access to a harem through a series of personal connections.\(^{102}\) Finally, he was able to view the “unlawful, protected, forbidden” – the Algerian woman without her veil in the private apartment space.\(^{103}\) While Delacroix’s painting motivated other artists to take an interest in the representation of the Algerian woman and gives identity to women in a space where men are absent, Delacroix’s painting


\(^{102}\) Bacholle, 18.

exemplifies the extent of the Western desire to know and possess the subaltern by violating their opacity.

Bouzar condemns and reimagines this colonial archive in her own work, removing any geographical, racial, and cultural specificity. In blurring the detail of the clothing and background décor that exoticize Algerian culture in Delacroix’s painting, what remains in Bouzar’s work is a sense of community, friendship, and motherhood. The women are transformed, in many cases, to reveal more of their bodies, exposing that which was hidden upfront, removing its secrecy, and placing the power in the hands of the woman whose gaze meets the viewer with a certain gravity. Bouzar also removes Delacroix’s depiction of the woman of the darkest complexion – an enslaved woman in the household – replacing her with two representations: a transparent figure, in the left painting, and a faceless child, on the right. The outlined figure in the leftmost image is ghost-like, representing how the construction of contemporary postcolonial identities are shaped and marked by the haunting colonial past. Gothic representations of haunting are quite common in postcolonial texts; the haunted is “to be called upon, for the phantom presence returns to collect an unpaid debt,” which often refers back to “the imperial dominance and territorial appropriation that forces
the voice of the colonized into the unconscious of the imperial subject.” By transforming the enslaved woman into a ghost, Bouzar recognizes that the cultural and historical legacy of colonization cannot be done away with. She further accentuates an impossibility to articulate the full presence of the enslaved woman and her testimony; by rendering her a ghost, Bouzar denounces the colonial enterprise and exposes the haunting legacy of colonial violence. Furthermore, both illustrations are opaque, indecipherable – the viewer does not have access to know, possess, or decipher their faces or forms. In this sense, Bouzar restores opacity to the subjects of her reimagined archive, rejecting the simplification of Algerian identity.

Bouzar’s work consistently challenges the notions of the dominant representations of the past, destabilizing as well as redirecting the viewer’s understanding of colonial epistemology. In *Princesses*, Bouzar engaged in a similar inversion, destabilization, and reimagining that she conducted in *Femmes d’Alger* just three years before, employing the colonial archive to create a new identity for Algerian women.

Paintings from Bouzar’s 2015 exhibition in Senegal subvert the colonial gaze by reimagining the identity of the Algerian women in the colonial archive; she creates a future for postcolonial identity that assigns agency and dignity to the subaltern. Rather than depicting twelve entirely fabricated Algerian women with the power assigned to royalty, Bouzar chooses to manipulate the colonial archive, Marc Garanger’s photographs, while recognizing the ghostly legacy of colonialism in contemporary identity. She revisits the past – and the accompanying distortion and erasure – to engage in artistic, and deeply political, reimagining. Importantly, Bouzar displays the women together, in a unit of 12 side-by-side images. Given that Garanger’s colonial archive was often displayed in a disjointed and fragmented manner, exhibiting a singular image in expositions such as *Controverses*, this choice by Bouzar is a strategic one. Together, these women represent more than one single

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testimony of the colonial past, but a collective memory and identity. Her contribution to the postcolonial archive builds a community based on the united testimony of subaltern women who experienced a common trauma. In restoring their power as a group, Bouzar rejects the colonial archive’s fragmentation and claims a redefinition of identity that draws from a political community.

Bouzar also could have chosen to employ the physical images taken by Marc Garanger, themselves, appropriating and manipulating the archive with the original text in hand. Her strategy of painting oil on canvas, from scratch, reveals a desire to create anew; Bouzar employs the colonial archive and distorts it, but also recognizes her independence from the text. This choice illustrates Bouzar’s regard for the need to address the colonial past, but also the power of the artist to create a postcolonial identity that isn’t anchored in or defined by colonial roots. Bouzar also reclaims the identity of the women in Marc Garanger’s photos by depicting them adorned with crowns of gold. “La couronne,” describes Bouzar, “c'est aussi une référence à l’art de la coiffé et de la parure dans les tribus.”

The crown represents Bouzar’s project of dressing and empowering the women in her images. Bouzar expresses her intention is to both “pay tribute” to the Algerian women and to “get them out of their role as victim.” The crowns signify strength and control – the new identity Bouzar fabricates is one in which these women have the power to reign.

Bouzar’s work also addresses the issue of unveiling. She insists,

“Le dévoilement réalisé par le photographe pour cette série révèle le manque de respect de l’agentivité de ces femmes concernant leur port du voile, faisant alors partie intégrante de leur corps, le

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To reject the violence and trauma of the unveiling of Algerian women, Bouzar restores intimacy as she creates the identity of the subjects of her portraits. The blackness of the background replaces the hijab, reinstating agency and strength. It also focuses the viewer’s attention on the expressions of the women: ones of denunciation. In surrounding the paintings in a background of blackness, Bouzar re-clothes the women, creating density and complexity to reject the erasure constitutive of the colonial archive.

Bouzar also seeks to resist the archiving of violence constitutive of war photography. As she was investigating the Algerian War archive, she remarks that the images were characterized by gruesome and explicit violence. “Même si je traite de la violence dans mon travail,” she expresses, “je tends toujours à maintenir une certaine distance entre la violence et ce que je veux représenter, qui sera quelque chose d'assez doux.” As Bouzar creates a new archive of the colonial past, she avoids re-humiliating the women and reinforcing the imaginary of postcolonial states characterized by brutality and violence.

The focus on the eyes and faces of the painted women dismantles the vision of exoticism that surrounded the original photos. Bouzar also creates each woman’s skin-tone color palette from scratch, achieving a diversity of tone that refuses the homogenization of their identities by the French. With these tools, Bouzar fulfills the role of the artist in the postcolonial archive, creating life, story, and identity attached to women whose perspectives were erased from the colonial archive.

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107 Guily, “2016. ‘Princesse’ - entretien avec Dalila Dalléas Bouzar.” “The unveiling done by the photographer for this series reveals the lack of respect for the agency of these women regarding their wearing of the veil, thus forming an integral part of their body, the voyeuristic unveiling of the photographic eye is therefore an exhibition, a mischief, violence against these women.”

108 Guily.

109 Guily. “Although I deal with violence in my work, I always tend to maintain a certain distance between the violence and what I want to represent, which will be something quite sweet.”
Bouzár’s work is one of inversion: rather than the Western gaze befalling the dominated women, “ce sont les femmes qui nous regardant.”110 She seeks to obliterate the presence of the photographer and in doing so, transform the spectator’s reading of the text. As Bouzar describes, her portraits “échappent aux représentations des grands récits de l’Histoire” et “les detourn[ent],” subverting the gaze established by History and emerging from the colonial oppression through which the photos were captured.111

Bouzár’s portraits, resistant and powerful, recognize the humiliation and trauma experienced by the Algerian women, while preserving their dignity. Her work evokes a reinterpretation of the gaze of the women and reclaims the power to archive the past; once considered victims, these women become “icônes intemporelles ayant marquées l’histoire collective de leur communauté, de leur pays.”112 In the conflict, otherwise described as the war of French colonial memory,113 Bouzar employs the weapon of art to break silence.

Bouzar also positions her art in its context, offering an explanation of Marc Garanger’s position and role in 1960 and the oppressive effects of his work. In Senegal, she presented her exhibition with a series of drawings that develop a narrative of the violence of Algerian history, as well as with archives of the Algerian War of Independence and the Algerian Civil War. Her work’s placement in the contemporary conflict of memory is best embodied through the quote of philosopher Hannah Arendt that Bouzar displayed alongside her exhibition,

“I should like to quote words by Hannah Arendt taken from the book Responsibility and Judgement. 'Thinking and remembering is the human way of establishing roots, taking one’s place in the world where we all arrive as strangers.' When I think I cannot stop myself remembering. Remembering what I have inherited. History. A history

111 Bouzar. “…escape the representations of the great stories of History and divert them.”
112 Bouzar. “…timeless icons that have marked the collective history of their community, of their country.”
113 Vergès, “Traite des noirs, esclavage colonial et abolitons.”
that I have not experienced but which nevertheless makes me think.”

The recognition of the History from which Bouzar attempts to liberate her work acknowledges the oppressive role of Marc Garanger’s colonial vestige. In this reference, Bouzar reclaims the power to define the past, employing art as a tool of remembrance. In so doing, Bouzar constructs what Françoise Vergès describes as “un espace de résistance” where a reconstitution of the colonial archive – a fight against being forgotten – functions as nonviolent political action.

While she does layer her work with contemporary questions around memory and History, Bouzar doesn’t offer extensive context on the practice of unveiling and the culture du regard that undoubtedly inform the original work of Marc Garanger. Her portraits of twelve of the original photographed women recreate a narrative of power and restored intimacy; however, names or efforts to catalogue the identity of the women captured remain absent. However, Bouzar’s efforts to dress the women, to give them dynamism and life, are an important step in crafting the postcolonial archive; importantly, and Bouzar makes no effort to insert a voice for the subaltern or to reinforce their voicelessness. Bouzar’s representation of the princesses she creates conveys how the constitution of the post-colonial archive can work both to retrieve the traces of erased stories and create anew.

In Princesses, Bouzar utilizes the colonial archive to create a new identity and add density to the memory and traces of Algerian women in the war of independence. Her exposition reveals that the conflict of postcolonial memory remains active; however, the tools of resistance – and the ways in which postcolonial archives are dynamically constructed – have multiplied.

114 Goudal, “Warding off Disappearance, Getting Beyond Icons.”
115 Vergès, “Traite des noirs, esclavage colonial et abolitions.” “...a space of resistance”
Chapter II

Abdellatif Kechiche’s *Vénus Noire*:
Adding Life to the Colonial Archive without Inserting Words

« Dans l’ombre, essayer de survivre. Cultiver les souvenirs de sa vie d’avant, rameuter les petites joies, les tendresses, le visage de ceux que l’on aime, un enfant, une épouse, une mère, un ami...l’ombre favorise la pénétration en soi, elle se fait enveloppe. »

- Patrick Chamoiseau, *Guyane, traces-mémoires du bagne*\(^{116}\)

In 2010, film director and screenwriter Abdellatif Kechiche created a nearly three-hour-long film, based on the life of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman exhibited in European freak shows from 1810-1815 under the name “Hottentot Venus.”

Deborah Young of *The Hollywood Reporter* characterizes the challenge of viewing the violent film: “it elicits strong feelings of moral revulsion and disgust, which are not indicators of great commercial success outside hard-core art houses.”\(^{117}\) Further criticizing the film’s troubling content, Young states, “more than leisurely paced, the film is needlessly repetitious and could be much shorter without losing meaning or suffering.”\(^{118}\)

Other critics share Young’s concern for the mental drain of the drawn-out scenes of sexual, physical, and emotional exploitation. Jay Weissberg of *Variety* determines “the overlong pic can be distressingly strident, making it painful to watch.”\(^{119}\) Allociné customer reviewers are steadfast in their condemnation of the film’s length and destabilizing content:

“Film décevant scènes horribles, perverses et répétitives ! interdit aux moins de 12 ans !!!!???”

“Trop long et lent!!!”

\(^{116}\) Patrick Chamoiseau and Rodolphe Hammadi, *Guyane, traces-mémoires du bagne* (Paris: Caisse nationale des monuments historiques et des sites, 1994). “*In the shadows, try to survive. To cultivate the memories of his life before, to rally the small joys, the tenderness, the faces of those we love, a child, a wife, a mother, a friend... the shadow favors the penetration in itself, it gets wrapped.*”


\(^{118}\) Young.

“Film trop long, héroïne trop impavide. Trop de pathos, trop d’humiliations.”¹²₀

For viewers, the film was monstrous in its length and its deeply discomforting effect. Film critic Thomas Sotinet describes the troubling questions brought to light by the film in *Le Monde*, “A chaque station, les questions s'accumulent : suffit-il de voir et de s'indigner pour acquitter sa dette à l'égard de la victime que l'on montre ? Cette pornographie à alibi scientifique née autour des attributs physiques de la jeune femme peut-elle être montrée sans troubler ?”¹²¹ Is bearing witness to the violence of colonization sufficient to reconcile the past?

Why create this monstrous three-hour film in 2010, subjecting modern viewers to bear witness to this horrible past? Why expose in such graphic detail Saartjie Baartman’s humiliations, her passivity, and her victimization? What compelled Kechiche to tell this story? How did Kechiche manipulate the archive?

Abdellatif Kechiche created *Vénus Noire* to clothe Saartjie Baartman, whose exposed body was the subject of the colonial archive. By showing her victimization, humiliation, and passivity in excruciating length and detail, Kechiche simultaneously builds a postcolonial archive that restores her opacity and agency. He embodies the creative and distinctive role of the artist in restoring identity to a person *minorisé* and reveals the legacy of the political, economic, and scientific dimensions of colonialism.


¹²¹ Thomas Sotinel, “‘Vénus noire’ : la Vénus dérangeante et bouleversante de Kechiche,” *Le Monde.fr*, October 26, 2010, https://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2010/10/26/venus-noire-la-venus-derangeante-et-bouleversante-de-kechiche_1431368_3476.html. “At each station, the questions accumulate: is it enough to see and be indignant to pay off the victim’s debt? Can this pornography with scientific alibi born around the physical attributes of the young woman be shown without disturbing?”
I. The Colonial Archive: The Body of Saartjie Baartman

From the Musée de l’Homme’s 1937 founding until 1976, a skeleton, a body cast, and jars of a woman’s genitalia were on display. The woman whose body was central to this exposition is now called Saartjie, or Sara Baartman, though no official record of her original name exists.\(^\text{122}\) She is best known by an epithet, ‘Hottentot Venus,’ and for her performances in freak show attractions in 19\(^{th}\) century Europe.

The colonial archive concerns itself little with the origins of Baartman. Minimal documentation exists of her life, except for sparse colonial records that indicate she was brought to Liverpool in 1810 by a surgeon of an African ship and museum specimen exporter Alexander Dunlop, representing an “imperial success and a prized specimen of the ‘Hottentot.’”\(^\text{123}\) Her arrival, advertised in the following announcement, represented an assertion of British imperial knowledge of and power to display colonial subjects. As described, the public is invited to assume the role of “judging how far she exceeds any description given by historians.”\(^\text{124}\) Even in her lifetime, Baartman’s body was a colonial

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\(^{122}\) Qureshi, “Displaying Sara Baartman, the ‘Hottentot Venus,’” 233.

\(^{123}\) Qureshi, 235.

archive: an object for study, exhibition, and exploration; her body entered the colonial discourse as a construction of the bearer of proof – the justification – for scientific racism.

After her arrival in Europe, very little is known of Baartman’s life. Limited evidence reveals she performed in various 19th century freak shows under the title of ‘Hottentot Venus.’ 125 ‘Hottentot’ is a historically racialized term the Dutch employed to describe the Khoikhoi people of South Africa. Her “race” of “Hottentot” was characterized as “the missing link in the ‘great chain of being’…considered as hovering on the border of human and animal classifications.” 126 Sir Joseph Banks commented on his 1771 trip to the Cape of Good Hope that Hottentots were “a race whose intellectual faculties are so little superior to those of beasts.” 127 The term later became a European insult meaning uncivilized or ill-mannered. 128 As Nicholas Hudson writes, the term demonstrates the extent to which “an intellectually respectable and systematic racism became possible only through a process of approximating the foreign Other to the European self.” 129 ‘Venus’ invokes the Roman goddess of love. The combination of these terms juxtaposes the racialized stereotypes of ‘Hottentot’ with praise; ‘Hottentot Venus’ illustrates the European sexualization of and obsession with the deviancy of the West’s ‘Other.’ Her classification of ‘Hottentot’ is exactly what made her alluring – a ‘Venus;’ her otherness was inviting, her suffering was abject, and the viewer’s voyeurism seemingly justified by her animality.

129 Hudson, 310.
The freak shows, a profitable European enterprise during the 19th century, embodied the Western “goût pour l’exotisme”\textsuperscript{130} that can be explained in part by the norms of European Victorian society. Advertisements, such as that photographed above, attracted spectators by exoticizing Baartman’s alterity, stressing her origins from the “interior of Africa.” Simultaneously repulsive and attractive to audiences, she represented the abject – a sight so abhorrent it became enticing. Exhibitions of Baartman participated in an economy of desire that permitted Western society to feed its taste for the exotic, exercise voyeurism, and vindicate its civilizing mission in the colonies.

\textsuperscript{130} Dewitte et al., “Zoos humains. De la Vénus hottentote aux reality shows.” “…taste for exoticism”
Court record archives reveal that during performances, Baartman was characterized by the “kind of shape which is most admired among countrymen,” wearing a dress so tight that her “shapes above and the enormous size of her posterior parts are as visible as if the said female were naked ... the dress is evidently intended to give the appearance of being undressed.” Descriptions and images of Baartman from the period focus overwhelmingly on her body, enlivening the curiosity of the spectator to view the forbidden – a forbidden at once abject, appealing, and justifiable, given that Baartman was depicted as something other than human. Represented below in an 1811 British depiction by Christopher Crupper Rumford, Baartman is illustrated as nude with dramatized features. On her buttocks sits a

Christopher Crupper. A caricature drawn in October 1811.

cupid figure, cautioning the spectator: “Take care of your hearts!” Beneath, “Love and Beauty” are utilized to describe her, acknowledging the attraction grounded in her body.

Baartman granted one interview in her life, in London, which was translated from Dutch “under the watchful eyes of officers of a court.” Two other interviews were likely fictional, revealing that “Baartman left, then, mere fragments of history . . . [thus f]ixing . . . Baartman within the conventional genre of biography rais[ing] fundamental questions about how we know what we know and how we write about people whose lives traversed so many geographies and different cultural worlds.” Beyond these interviews, the remaining archives of Saartjie Baartman are drawn predominately from a court proceeding questioning the autonomy of her involvement in freak shows and from scientific studies documenting, cataloguing, categorizing, and mutilating her body.

In 1810, abolitionists made humanitarian objections to Baartman’s performance, prompting a trial proceeding. Baartman received self-appointed prosecutors who contended the indecency of the exhibition was consistent with Baartman being held against her will. Hendrik Cesars and William Dunlop presented an employment contract in the trial as evidence of her liberty – a document that is likely to have been falsified – and the charges were thus dismissed. Newspaper reports of the case and limited court records catalogue questions about Baartman’s agency as an artist. Absent from the archive, however, is the unadulterated and uninhibited perspective of Saartjie Baartman.

Perhaps the most enduring archive of Baartman is that of her body. During Baartman’s lifetime, founder of paleontology Georges Cuvier examined, manipulated, and measured her body in pursuit of proof of the closeness of man to animal. He categorized her

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134 Strother, “Court Records: Display of the Body Hottentot.”
135 Qureshi, “Displaying Sara Baartman, the ‘Hottentot Venus.’”
with numerous species of monkeys, noting the size of her ears, the position of her lips, and her unique vivacity.\textsuperscript{136}

In March 1815, Cuvier, as well as French naturalist Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, inspected Baartman’s body and documented various observations. Saint-Hilaire wrote of his examination of Saartjie Baartman that he observed “un commencement de museau encore plus considérable que celui de l’orang-outang rouge qui habite les plus grandes îles de l’océan Indien.”\textsuperscript{137} Even during her lifetime, Western scientists employed Baartman’s body to catalogue, record, scrutinize, dissect, dominate, and know. Their assertions comprise a colonial archive that leaves no room for the voice of the subaltern.

Cuvier and Saint-Hilaire also emphasized Baartman’s genitalia, begging her for access to examine her more intimately. Despite their curiosity, scientists did not gain a lens into her genitalia until her post-mortem examination. When Baartman died in Paris in December of 1815 from an undetermined inflammatory disease, Cuvier accessed her remains and performed a dissection. Unconcerned with Baartman’s humanity, Cuvier and his scientists spared no time investigating her cause of death, but focused instead on the object of their curiosity: her body – specifically, her genitalia.

In \textit{Extrait d’observations Faites Sur Le Cadavre d’une Femme Connue à Paris et à Londres Sous Le Nom de Vénus Hottentotte}, Cuvier’s catalogue of his findings after Baartman’s death, he reinforces his perceived parallels between the body of Saartjie Baartman and that of a monkey:

\begin{quote} “Ses mouvements avoient quelque chose de brusque et de capricieux qui rappelloit ceux du singe. Elle avoit surtout une manière...”\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{136} Cuvier, “Extrait d’observations Faite Sur Le Cadavre d’une Femme Connue à Paris et à Londres Sous Le Nom de Vénus Hottentotte,” 263.

Cuvier produced multiple body casts of Baartman, a wax mold of her tablier, and preserved her brain, skeleton, and dissected genitalia. Her cast and skeleton were exhibited at the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle alongside two other human skeletons belonging to a similar collection until 1827, when Baartman’s skull was stolen. Months later, the skull was returned anonymously. Baartman’s remains were thereafter untouched until their transfer in 1937 to the Musée de l’Homme, a museum that displayed the accumulation of considerable anthropological collections by the French.

The Western museum institution, while offering an appearance of objectivity and neutrality, has deeply troubling racialized and political origins. Throughout history, the Western museum has served as a demonstration of European knowledge and classification of that which the West constructs as inferior, whether through depictions of other cultures that lack humanity, education, or Western civilization. The Western museum is also noted for “recording the cultural difference in terms of fixed, rigid distinctions, in an interpretation marking contrasts and oppositions and neglecting unity.” Sahart Maharaj titles the phenomenon *multicultural managerialism*, in which difference is transformed into none other than “a consumer item,” and the otherization of an item’s display feeds the Western appetite for exoticism.

Indeed, the Western exhibition of objects of European curiosity reinforces the knowability of a purportedly inferior race and objectivity of the hierarchy. In *Zoos humains : entre mythe et réalité*, Bancel et. al writes,

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138 Cuvier, 263. “Her movements had something abrupt and capricious about them, recalling those of a monkey. Above all, she had a way of making her lips stand out just like what we observed in the orang-utang.”

139 A word for an enlarged labia minora characteristic of certain African women.

140 Qureshi, “Displaying Sara Baartman, the ‘Hottentot Venus,’” 245.

141 Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 51.

142 Vergès and Marimoutou, 51.
“Dans ce cadre, l’exhibition de l’Autre l’inscrit dans un ordre (celui de raison), l’objective dans une hiérarchie (le déviant, le taré, le fou, puis le représentant des ‘races inférieurs’). C’est donc d’un processus de réassurance, de la nécessité d’affirmer sa propre maîtrise…C’est pourquoi montrer l’Autre est fondamental. Exhiber l’Autre, c’est lui reconnaître un statut et un intérêt particuliers, c’est aussi légitimer, prouver et fixer une connaissance.”

The Western display of the ‘Other’ is more than an exercise of voyeurism; it is a systemic reinforcement of racial hierarchy. Baartman’s display in the Musée de l’Homme reflected this institutionalization of Western knowledge and superiority in the museum. Baartman’s skeleton and body cast were positioned side by side. Above her head, images of black people highlighted Baartman’s perceived value to the scientists. The cast presented a nearly naked, bare body, excluding a small piece of fabric between her legs – positioning her sexual organs as the focal point for the viewer. It is here that Baartman’s remains were exhibited until 1976.

Bancel et al., Introduction, 9. “In this context, the exhibition of the Other inscribes itself in an order (that of reason), the objective in a hierarchy (the deviant, the crazy, the insane, then the representative of the ‘inferior races’). It is therefore a process of reassurance, the need to assert one’s own mastery … This is why showing the Other is fundamental. To exhibit the Other is to recognize a particular status and interest, it is also to legitimize, prove and fix an understanding.”
This archive, built by Cuvier and other Western scientists of the 18th century, participates in the construction of the colonial archive. The dehumanizing accounts of Baartman’s body demonstrate the role of the scientist in the political and scientific justification for European imperialism. During the 18th century, especially, science played an essential role in the development of a racialized discourse, justifying colonization through a rationalization of perceived Western superiority.

As Bancel et al describe of the context for the scientific investigations of the 18th century,

“La rationalisation scientifique d’une hiérarchie raciale comme sa vulgarisation à travers les exhibitions anthropozoologiques est inséparable de la quête d’identité qui affecte les sociétés du vieux continent. L’eurocentrisme se construit sur de multiples angoisses, produites par l’association des fulgurantes avancées de la science et de brusques mutations sociétales...Le positivisme scientifique, la foi dans le progrès ne peuvent être compris qu’en replaçant sur la toile de fond des profondes inquiétudes anthropologiques qui traversent le corps social, déstructurant les psychismes collectifs, opacifiant l’avenir.”

Scientific investigation and ethnological explanations for racism cannot be analyzed without referencing the European quest for identity. Here, Bancel et al recall Stuart Hall’s paradigm of understanding colonial discourse as the West’s mode of defining its own identity in opposition to what Europeans craft as inferior and ‘Other.’ The colonial archive generated by the scientist emerged out of a social anxiety that demanded the scientific hierarchization of difference. Comprehension, manipulation, and display of Baartman’s body represent the political and racialized role of science in generating the colonial archive.

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Bancel et al, 8-9. “...the scientific rationalization of a racial hierarchy as its popularization through anthropo-zoological exhibitions is inseparable from the quest for identity that affects the societies of the old continent. Eurocentrism is built on multiple anxieties, produced by the combination of dazzling advances in science and abrupt societal mutations ... Scientific positivism, faith in progress can only be understood by placing on the backdrop deep anthropological anxieties that cross the social body, destructuring collective psyches, clouding the future.”
Confronted with the distorted colonial archive of Saartjie Baartman, artists in pursuit of the postcolonial archive, such as Kechiche, are left with various questions to consider:

*Out of this colonial archive, how can the voices of the voiceless be retrieved?*

*How can community be created when the only remaining traces are that of pain, shame, and dehumanization?*

*How might one create a new archive that gives volume to absence and invisibility?*

*How does one give density to invisibility without betraying the subaltern and their opacity – without betraying Saartjie Baartman?*

**II. Vénus Noire: The Ambiguity of the Gaze**

To answer these questions, this text considers the work of Abdellatif Kechiche, as he employs film as a medium to expose the scientific, political, and social dimensions of colonialism. To reconcile the challenges of subalternity and voicelessness, Kechiche engages in two tasks: first, he *clothes and creates*, giving flesh and volume to Baartman by restoring her humanity; second, he *respects her opacity*, guarding her status of subalternity and respecting her silence whilst creating a new postcolonial identity.

*a. The Artist who Clothes*

*Opening scene of Saartjie Baartman’s body cast in Vénus Noire.*
Describing the position of people *minorisé*, Patrick Chamoiseau states, “la trajectoire de ces peuples-là s’est faite silencieuse.” 145 This silence, however, demands an archaeology of existing traces and their preservation – a preservation, Chamoiseau suggests, which is most appropriately practiced by the artist. He writes, “De toutes manières, il faut stopper l’usure et entrer dans un processus de conservation de ce qui est acquis…Ici, le conservateur sera de l’engeance des poètes. Et la conservation sera une poétique.” 146

In *Vénus Noire*, Kechiche acts as the conserver of those few traces of Baartman’s humanity. As François Paré describes in *Théories de la fragilité*, he possesses “les mains cérémoniales. Celles qui précèdent. Celles qui procèdent. Elles produisent le visible à partir de l’invisible.” 147 In his creation, he gives flesh, density, and complexity to the voiceless and the invisible – to Saartjie Baartman.

In the first scene of the film, Cuvier and a group of scientists display the cast and remains of Saartjie Baartman, as if she were a prize to be exhibited. Cuvier describes Baartman’s body in zoological terms, banalizing and dehumanizing an entire race through the regard of one woman’s corpse. As Cuvier discusses his scientific findings before a crowd of viewers, the camera scans the body cast of Baartman, revealing the longtime subject of the scientists’ and society’s curiosity.

Kechiche’s selection of this scene as a point of origin is a strategic one. First, he reveals the sole documentation that remains of Saartjie Baartman: her body, which has been manipulated and examined for scientific investigation. He demonstrates the important

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145 Chamoiseau and Hammadi, *Guyane, traces-mémoires du bagne*. “The trajectory of these peoples has been silent.”
146 Chamoiseau and Hammadi, 45. “In any case, we must stop usury and enter a process of preservation of what is acquired...Here, the curator will be the brainchild of poets. And conservation will be poetry.”
147 Paré, *Théories de la fragilité*, 9. “…ceremonial hands. Those which precede. Those which proceed. They produce the visible from the invisible.”
scientific dimension of colonialism that Baartman embodies, as a justification for perceived racial superiority and a reinforcement of the colonial civilizing mission.

Moreover, this scene leaves nothing to be desired of Baartman’s body by the viewer, eliminating suspense and intrigue from the presentation of her sexual organs and physicality. Kechiche does not reward anticipatory curiosity. What’s left is a demand that viewers engage in critical reflection, rather than await the resolution of a mystery. By exposing Baartman, Kechiche forces viewers examine themselves, as opposed to her body, acknowledging their complicity in the circumstances that befell Saartjie Baartman.

Importantly, in this scene, in which Baartman is understood to be dead, voiceless, and silenced, Kechiche manages to add flesh. In a final shot of the scene, a closeup of the body cast centers on Baartman’s face. In this shot, the cast strikes the viewers differently; the unusual clarity of the facial features offers the appearance that Baartman has come to life. In opposition to the lifelessness of the cast depicted in the scene, the last shot appears to be of a human, rather than of a cast. Kechiche commences his story with a scene that assigns humanity to the lifeless and dehumanized cast of the colonial archive. Further, Kechiche’s focus on Baartman’s closed eyes captures the impossibility of possessing the colonized
‘Other,’ further underscoring the opacity of the subaltern. As Glissant emphasizes, opacity is a tool of resistance that “displace[s] all reduction.”[148] With closed eyes, Baartman resists, refusing to witness the violence to which she is exposed, refusing to engage the colonizer’s reduction, and refusing to recognize the rejection of her opacity.

Closeups of Baartman’s face are a primary aesthetic feature of the film that restore her intimacy and add density to an otherwise voiceless figure. Mara Mattoscio claims the subversive prominence of Baartman’s face constitutes “a haunting presence potentially exceeding violence.”[149] She adds that Kechiche’s focus on Baartman’s face “leaves the spectator with no right to access the character’s unrecorded and thus mysterious inner life,” advancing what is at once a “successful historical critique” and a reflection on “possible alternative selves for this hyper-constrained and hyper-constructed woman.”[150] In beckoning this reflection from the viewer, Kechiche “clothes” Baartman, offering possibilities and complexity to a woman who is over-simplified, fixed, and violated by the colonial archive.

Kechiche’s act of “clothing” Baartman restores her decency and preserves a pudeur[151] that was denied by the colonizers. Clothes are traces of belonging in a community, a sharing of norms, and participating in a social environment. Baartman was stripped of clothing, both literally and symbolically, in the colonial archive. By clothing Baartman, Kechiche constructs her participation in a community and reinforces her humanity.

b. An Artist’s Respect for Opacity

In Kechiche’s difficult exercise of rendering visible the invisible, he must battle the tension of denouncing alienation and invisibility while preserving silence. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak emphasizes the essence of subalternity as

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[151] Modesty, as in physical reserve
voicelessness. She writes, “In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.” Thus, the subaltern presents a paradox: in revealing its voice, this unrepresented class loses its status of subalternity. As Spivak implores, however, it is the job of the postcolonial intellectual to grapple with this question of representation:

“For the ‘true’ subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject’s itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual. In the slightly dated language of the Indian group, the question becomes, How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?”

Spivak suggests that representation must be attempted, but beckons a voice-consciousness. How, then, can the artist respect the identity of the subaltern whilst bringing light to their voice, their existence, and their suffering? Paré asks a similar question in his description of the person minorisé in perpetual combat with the dichotomy of apparaître/disparaître and invisibilité/visibilité. Visibility, he states, is the spectacle of invisibility:

“À l’excès, le visible devenait pour le sujet minoritaire, de part et d’autre de la représentation, le spectacle de l’invisibilité même. Et disparaître était donc pour lui le mode virtuel de son apparaître, son mode spécifique (douloureusement spécifique) d’appartenir à l’Être.”

The interaction between these statuses – that of possessing a voice versus subalternity, invisibility versus visibility, appearance versus disappearance – requires that the artist respect

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152 Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”
153 Spivak, 287.
154 Spivak, 58.
155 Paré, Théories de la fragilité, 21. “Apparaître/disparaître” and “invisibilité/visibilité”
156 Paré, 21. “To excess, the visible became for the minority subject, on both sides of the representation, the spectacle of invisibility itself. And disappearing was therefore for him the virtual mode of his appearance, his specific mode (painfully specific) to belong to the Being.”
duality and coexistence in their representation of the person minorisé. According to Paré, the “minoritaire” or person minorisé lacks an origin and is characterized by this lack. They are “humilié, bafoué, vidé de son appartenance au sens, marginalisé, réduit au silence. Mais, voilà le miracle, ce comble de l’humiliation est son identité, le lieu désintégré de sa participation, sinon originelle, du moins originale, à la parole.”

The artist who clothes must, in turn, respect the place of silence and voicelessness in the identity of the person minorisé.

Vénus Noire features very little dialogue by the character, Saartjie Baartman, played by Yahima Torres. During scenes of utmost violence, Torres’s face is often blank, empty. The viewer is left wondering what Baartman’s emotions, thoughts, and feelings might have been as the events transpire. Despite the fact that the film recounts a considerable period of Baartman’s life, the viewer is left without access to the thoughts that characterize her humanity. For the viewer, it’s as if Baartman, even in her lifetime, were always a cast.

Saartjie Baartman testifies in court in Vénus Noire.

157 Paré, 27-28. “...humiliated, ridiculed, emptied of his sense of belonging, marginalized, silenced. But, here's the miracle, this height of humiliation is their identity, the disintegrated place of their participation, if not original, at least eccentric, in speaking.”
One scene features Baartman in the courtroom, alleging her autonomy as a performer following accusations that she is enslaved and forced to perform human zoo spectacles. In this scene, as with many others, Baartman’s few words reveal little of her thoughts. Despite Baartman’s statements asserting her freedom and choice to expose herself against the condemnations of Europeans – notably, those of European women shouting “She’s not an actress, I’m an actress” – Baartman’s actual autonomy is left unknown. In this representation of the colonial archive, that of the real trial of Saartjie Baartman’s employers, the impermeability of her thoughts is respected. Even in the presence of words, Baartman’s position of voicelessness is made both evident and preserved.

In representing Baartman with few words, Kechiche avoids speaking for the subaltern. Rather than placing a voice in Baartman’s mouth, he respects her opacity and her silence, acknowledging the impermeability of her perspective and the traceless reality of the colonial archive. In this way, Kechiche avoids betraying Baartman’s status as subaltern. He focuses, instead, on clothing her – inventing her identity, complexity, and humanity to give her the very thing the colonizers took away: her flesh.

Kechiche’s project of clothing and respecting the opacity of Saartjie Baartman demonstrates how postcolonial artists employ the past to expose and question Western epistemology rooted in colonialism. While two centuries have transpired since the Baartman’s freak show expositions and four decades have passed since her body’s museum display, Kechiche revisits this colonial archive to condemn colonialism’s enduring legacy. In representing Saartjie Baartman’s story, Kechiche questions contemporary manifestations of colonialism that position the black female body as the object of the gaze.

Artists, including Kim Kardashian, have since invoked imagery of Baartman’s body to call out public fascination with the female body. While Kardashian was able to profit socially and financially from the voyeuristic tendencies she exposes, contemporary fascination with
Kardashian’s physique is anchored in the same perverse curiosity that enabled the colonizer to put Baartman’s body on display. Kechiche engages the colonial archive to bring a colonial construction into a postcolonial context, condemning its enduring political effects.

Kechiche’s contribution to the postcolonial archive also reveals how the artist attempts to reconcile the challenges in re-documenting what has been exposed, distorted, and erased. Rather than concerning himself with the re-inscription of violence into the testimony of the postcolonial archives, Kechiche embraces the silence, passivity, and abject suffering at the core of Baartman’s story and employs its contents to question the voyeurism of the viewer and the acts of the colonial enterprise. Even so, questions linger about whether excessive display of violence reinforces Western constructions of savagery associated with people minorisé – or, if Kechiche has constructed an unbreakable tie between suffering and the subaltern. Moreover, Kechiche’s work also leaves unanswered whether the full intersectionality of Baartman’s subalternity can be represented and the uniquely gendered

Kim Kardashian 2014 Paper Magazine cover shoot compared to Saartjie Baartman representation.
nature of her suffering exposed, when the creator of her story and the voice behind her fabricated words is a man of color. Despite these challenges left unresolved in *Venus Noire*, Kechiche’s film illustrates how the artist has used acts of *creation* and *creativity* to fill voids, reveal distortion, and create new political imaginaries in the postcolonial archive.
Chapter III

INcyclopédie: Inversion and Invention of Reunion Island’s Past

“It is an island whose traces, signs are misread by the Other, the French, who yesterday sought exoticism, and today seek a pacified multiculturalism, a new form of exoticism.”

“This is where the challenge lies: to take charge of the place and the history through its languages and history. Where is the fiction in trying to come to terms with the history and the place, unless it is through traces, through ghosts?”

- Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Shirley Anne Tate

“C’était donc ça, un vaste territoire, La Réunion d’avant 1946 ?”159 inquire journalist David Chassagne in an interview with museum exhibit curator Emmanuel Kamboo.160 Kamboo, whose interview centered around his recent museum exposition on the French overseas department of Reunion Island – a small 970 square mile territory – answered decisively: “C’était ça oui. Un continent.”161

From April 24 to December 29, 2017, local museum-goers in Reunion Island might have stumbled upon Kamboo’s exhibit: “INCyclopédie du continent réunionnais” at the Archives départementales, Sudel Fuma.

“J’invite les visiteurs à découvrir cet atlas déboussolé qu'est l'INcyclopédie, la vérité sur La Réunion avant 1946,” beckoned Emmanuel Kamboo, artist behind the exhibition, on Reunion Island’s official tourism website.162 Kamboo advertised the exhibit as an opportunity for spectators to uncover a hidden history – a true history.

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158 Rodríguez and Tate, Creolizing Europe, 50-51.
159 “So that was Reunion Island, a vast territory, before 1946?”
161 Chassagne. “It was that, yes. A continent.”
“Plongez dans une encyclopédie inversée de notre territoire à la découverte du continent réunionnais, de ses royaumes, de ses sultanats, de ses forteresses, de ses ruines antiques ou encore de ses lions sauvages. Les héros de cette histoire portent des noms qui sonnent familièrement à l’oreille : Ombline, Chane-Maillot, Moutoucadet, Haoreaupoulé, Bin Grondin Al Turpin, Mallet et Patel, Caroupayet…” outlines Johanne Chung in her advertisement for Clicanoo, a Reunionese news site. The article, entitled, “C’est le moment ou jamais de découvrir les secrets de La Réunion avant 1946,” described the exposition as a revelation of a forbidden, even forgotten past. Journalists advertised the exhibit to Reunion’s inhabitants as conveying something at once familiar and in need of discovery. The names to which Chung attributes familiarity are real names of cultural significance to Reunion Island: Ombline, referencing notorious Reunion Island slaveowner Ombline Desbassayns, Chane-Maillot, translating loosely to chain-bathing suit, or familiar Reunionese places and surnames. Already, Chung indicates Kamboo’s exhibition invokes and employs a sense of Reunionese collective identity.

incyclopedie-du-continent-reunionnais-la-verite-sur-la-reunion-avant-1946-1246956. “I invite visitors to discover this disoriented atlas that is InCyclopédie, the truth about Reunion before 1946.”

163 Chung, Johanne, “C’est le moment ou jamais de découvrir les secrets de La Réunion avant 1946 !,” Clicanoo.re, March 19, 2018, https://www.clicanoo.re/Culture-Loisirs/Article/2018/03/19/Cest-le-moment-ou-jamais-de-decouvrir-les-secrets-de-La-Reunion. “Immerse yourself in an inverted encyclopedia of our territory to discover the mainland of Reunion, its kingdoms, its sultanates, its fortresses, its ancient ruins or its wild lions. The heroes of this story bear names that ring colloquially: Ombline, Chane-Maillot, Moutoucadet, Haoreaupoulé, Bin Grondin Al Turpin, Mallet and Patel, Caroupayet …”

164 Chung, Johanne. “It’s now or never to discover the secrets of Reunion before 1946!”

“Pour redessiner une carte oubliée, des chemins perdus menant à un passé disparu,” writes Jérôme Talpin in _Journal de l’île_. The exhibit, as advertised, positions visitors as archaeologists of a lost past. Where and how this past escaped from Reunionese collective consciousness is not evident in the exhibit’s publicity. Instead, the exposition is shrouded in mystery, enticing the visitor to play a part in retelling the story of Reunion’s cosmology.

In these newspaper reviews, descriptions of an essential element of the museum exhibit are not explicitly revealed: it is entirely made up. Kamboo’s museum exhibit is a fabricated, imagined history. While his work embraces locations, names, and ethnic groups that are present in Reunion’s contemporary cultural landscape, the history he writes with these real terms is entirely created. In his exhibition, Kamboo constructs what philosopher

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Charles Renouvier terms an “uchronie,” or “utopie dans l’histoire.” As Renouvier insists, this form of alternative history enables a writer to “écrit l’histoire, non telle qu’elle fut, mais telle qu’elle aurait pu être, à ce qu’il croit.” Kamboo creates the history conveyed in *INcyclopédie*, constructing a completely new archive and reimagining a postcolonial future for Reunion Island.

The exhibition’s catalogue ends with a passage by Damien Vaisse, Director of the Archives départementales in Reunion Island. Entitled “Une ‘histoire vraie,’” the piece outlines the goals of the exhibition.

Vaisse writes,

“Qu’on ne s’y trompe pas cependant: c’est ‘l’histoire vraie’ qui est en creux dans la fiction. Au-delà du plaisir esthétique et du jeu, le visiteur pourra mettre à l’épreuve son érudition pour identifier les modèles, mesurer les décalages, repérer les allusions.”

Vaisse reveals that this lost and recovered history is an imagined one. With this knowledge, he asks viewers to transcend mere acknowledgement of the game and the aesthetic enjoyment – he asks that they engage in reflection. In examining the myth’s sources and detecting discrepancies, the exhibit demands spectators engage more critically with the origin of their territory and their relationship with the land. Out of Kamboo’s artistic imagining, and with the careful contemplation demanded of viewers, a potential political future is explored.

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167 Charles Renouvier, *Uchronie (l’utopie dans l’histoire): Esquisse historique apocryphe du développement de la civilisation européenne tel qu’il n’a pas été, tel qu’il aurait pu être.* (Bureau de la critique philosophique, 1876). “Uchronia...utopia in history.”

168 Renouvier, 11. “…writes history, not as it was, but as it could have been, as he believes.”

169 Kamboo, 96. “Let there be no mistake about it, however: it is ‘true history’ that is hollow in fiction. Beyond the aesthetic pleasure and the game, the visitor will be able to test his erudition to identify the models, measure the discrepancies, identify allusions.”
How might a visitor at INcyclopédie – a viewer of this uchronie – make sense of this exhibition? What is its creation destined to achieve? How does the exposition connect the artist to the departmental archive’s goal of preserving Reunion Island’s heritage?

Emmanuel Kamboo’s exhibition highlights the artist’s integral role in actualizing an imagined political future for a people in a territory affected by an enduring legacy of colonialism. Through his artistic contributions to the postcolonial archive, Kamboo scrutinizes, manipulates, and ultimately overwrites the dominant colonial discourse and creates a new political imaginary for Reunion Island.

I. **Reunion Island: History, Art, and the State of the Archive**

Reunion Island, a culturally and geographically diverse, insular space off the coast of Madagascar, has origins bound to colonization. Uninhabited until the 17th century, the island was first known by Arab and Chinese navigators. In 1638, French explorers bound for the Indies found the island uninhabited, took possession of the territory, and named it “l’île Bourbon.” Its original settlers included French colonizers who brought enslaved individuals primarily from Madagascar – tying the territory’s cosmogony to one of violence and bondage. The colony’s social organization was rapidly shaped by a coffee and sugar plantation-based economy.

In 1848, when the French abolished slavery, 60,000 of the island’s 100,000 inhabitants were freed. Sixty percent of the island’s population, now citizens, experienced a form of *paradoxical citizenship*, given their continued status as colonized. Even after slavery was abolished, the island’s raw material-based economy encouraged plantation owners to turn to indentured servants from China, Madagascar, India, and Mozambique for

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170 Marimoutou and Vergès reference this relationship as a structure for the anti-colonial struggle for equality and democracy.
main d’oeuvre. Immigrants from Gujarat and southern China arrived in the latter half of the 19th century, occupying economic niches in grocery and fabrics.

In 1946, Reunion Island was no longer considered a French colony and was declared a French département. The following decades featured anti-colonial movements by Reunionese who resisted economic dependency and sought political autonomy. Facing multiple struggles for independence in African colonies, France responded to Reunionese demands for sovereignty with forms of political and cultural restraint aimed at homogenizing the territory. The 1950s to the 1970s “were [years] marked by political and cultural repression (fraud, censorship, denial of the Creole language and culture, policy of assimilation) and a modernization of infrastructures.” Laurent Médéa regards these policies as forms of “symbolic violence” manifested in the construction of a “desirable identity,” the prevention of the teaching of Creole in schools, and the permeation of French culture in various facets of Reunionese social, economic, and political spaces.

The result of these policies has been decades of economic challenges, including high unemployment rates and deep inequality. As the global economy transformed, so too did the economy of Reunion Island. According to Marimoutou and Vergès, “the end of this world and its social organization, its network of assistance and solidarity, the decline of industry, the growth of the unemployment rate caused a profound social breakdown that further added to a long-lasting denial of history and culture.” Médéa examines the economic effects of departmentalization on the Reunionese economy, stating,

“Departmentalisation imposed an economic system that was ill suited to Réunion’s particular geographic and socio-cultural

\[\text{171 “manpower”}\]
\[\text{172 Départements d’outre-mer are French department overseas territories featured by some political autonomy guaranteed by French constitutional provisions; however, they are not independent, sovereign states.}\]
\[\text{173 Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 16.}\]
\[\text{174 Medea, “Creolisation and Globalisation in a Neo-Colonial Context,” 129.}\]
\[\text{175 The unemployment rate in Reunion Island was 55% for those aged 15-25 in the year 2017. This is three times the unemployment rate in the French metropole (INSEE, 2017).}\]
\[\text{176 Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 20.}\]
features. It has been economically disastrous because the changeover to a tertiary economy, the advent of a civil service, and strong dependence on public funds have together destroyed Réunion’s productive capacity."\textsuperscript{177}

The economic system imposed on Reunion during departmentalization inscribed the island into a narrative Marimoutou and Vergès title “catching-up.”\textsuperscript{178} This narrative intimates Reunion Island’s economic, social, and cultural backwardness with respect to the developed West, suggesting a need to work towards meeting Western standards of development. Economic conditions cast the island into a state of conceptual infancy based on a Eurocentric imagining of infrastructure – an imagining that positioned the French metropole as a model to emulate.

In spite of – or perhaps, even because of – this history, the island has evolved into a distinctly heterogeneous, pluralistic, and postcolonial society with a unique Creole culture. Culturally, efforts to preserve and celebrate the territory’s heterogeneity and creolization gave birth to rich forms of cultural and artistic expression. In Project for a Museum of the Present, Marimoutou and Vergès lay out the connection between Reunion’s colonial past and contemporary distinctiveness clearly:

“Réunion’s history has been filled with violence, denials, negations, contempt... The main expression of this common culture is orality which by definition is always dynamic and pregnant with changes. Our island’s contribution to the world is founded on our immaterial productions, a treasure that warrants an ethics of human relations that refuses to comply with the economic logic of merchandise.”\textsuperscript{179}

In this statement, Marimoutou and Vergès address a unique challenge of the postcolonial Reunionese artist: representing the immaterial. As outlined, rapid urbanization, economic transformation, and population growth\textsuperscript{180} in Reunion Island paralleled the rise of

\textsuperscript{177} Medea, “Creolisation and Globalisation in a Neo-Colonial Context,” 129.
\textsuperscript{178} Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 45.
\textsuperscript{179} Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” Preface.
\textsuperscript{180} Since 1960, the population of Reunion Island has risen dramatically, growing from 342,700 in 1960 to 843,000 in 2015.
new artistic expressions. The growth and transformation of the Reunionese social and economic bases bred strong social solidarity and a vibrant cultural life. In recent years, Reunion Island has developed into a “place for the expression of cultural and collective memory in the form of music, theatre, folk tales, poetry, painting, sculpture, and photography.”¹⁸¹ Artists in the region are confronted with a need to contribute to the postcolonial project and reinvent themselves historically, geographically, and ontologically.

Artists also face the challenge of representing the complexity of Reunion’s past and present condition, in the face of the island’s tradition of orality and immaterial collections. As Marimoutou and Vergès outline, “We have few examples of visual representation of Reunion’s culture and history to examine, analyze, counter or challenge.”¹⁸² Little archive exists of Reunion’s rich past, and those material remnants that endure are not fully representative of the island’s deeply heterogeneous identity. As Marimoutou and Vergès emphasize, “our material heritage mainly shows the lives of a very small part of the population: mansions, churches, temples, industrial relics of the sugar mills.”¹⁸³

Reunion Island is characterized by a distinct lack of accessible archives and traces; what little written histories exist are created predominantly by slave owners. As a result, the narrative of the territory’s past is oversimplified, rejecting the complexity of the space’s cultural diversity. The material remnants of the past that prevail include stylistically-creole properties, the dwellings of colonial *grands-blancs*,¹⁸⁴ and aging sugarcane factories.

Marimoutou and Vergès emphasize the unique challenge posed by the state of the archive in Reunion island,

> “The voices of 60 000 women, children and men were lost for the written archives. They survived in oral literature, songs, poetry, in police and trials reports, but no direct testimonies remained. While

¹⁸¹ Médéa, *Reunion*, 158.
¹⁸² Vergès and Marimoutou, 39.
¹⁸³ Vergès and Marimoutou, 58.
¹⁸⁴ A term to describe the wealthy, white upper class of Reunion Island. In the French colony, this class owned plantations and slaves.
some have been transformed into museums, others have evolved into abandoned spaces."

Archaeological developments have failed to ameliorate this shortage. The result of this absence of traces, Marimoutou and Vergès write, is a risk of trivializing, erasing, and even misrepresenting Reunion Island’s complex past.

“‘No matter their current state, these traces project and perpetuate a political image of the colonial past that erases, ignores, and excludes the perspectives of people minorisé in Reunion’s past and present.’”

The traces in Reunion Island are not only difficult to discern and retrieve; Marimoutou and Vergès outline that many systematically perpetuate the goals of departmentalization and colonisation: to exclude, ignore, and erase. The state of the archive in Reunion Island has resulted in museum exhibitions constituted by “recording the cultural difference in terms of fixed, rigid distinctions, in an interpretation marking contrasts and oppositions and neglecting unity,” denying a past colored by rich dynamism, creolization, and difference. The museums that display Reunion’s fragmented material traces fossilize the territory’s culture into dichotomies of colony/metropole, traditional/modern, and moving forward/catching-up.

As challenging as it might be to curate a historical exhibition without archival traces or artifacts, equally challenging is the task of reconstituting the connection between people and territory. When the land has been closely linked to the island’s longstanding history of violence and exploitation, how might one re-inscribe a people into that land? How might one retrieve a relationship with an earth that both recognizes and transcends past relationships that were deeply painful and violent? Even if the land, itself, provides traces of the colonial past, how can that relationship be repaired?

Above all, what traces exist in Reunion Island, and what story do they tell?

185 Vergès and Marimoutou, 56.
186 Vergès and Marimoutou, 56.
187 Vergès and Marimoutou, 51.
II. Emmanuel Kamboo’s INcylopédie: When Inventing a Past Creates a Future

For multiple months in 2017 and 2018, Emmanuel Kamboo’s exposition was displayed at the departmental archives Sudel Fuma,\(^{188}\) an institution that defines its mission around “le contrôle, la collecte, le classement, la conservation et la communication des archives.”\(^{189}\) At the exhibition, Kamboo fabricated Reunion’s history, pursuing his role as an artist who invents, explores, and envisions an alternative past for the territory – and in so doing, constructs new possibilities for the island’s political and cultural future.

![Image of exhibition](image-url)  
Charles Panon de Cimendef, secrétaire perpétuel de l’Institut INcylopédique universel, a character played by Reunionese actor Sergio Grondin.

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\(^{188}\) The colonial archives in Reunion Island were created on August 17, 1793, predating archives of the Compagnie des Indes and the royal administration. It wasn’t until 1952 that the first departmental archivist, Yves Pérotin, took office. Now housed in Champ-Fleuri in a building of architects Pierre Noailly and Alain Bocqué, the departmental archives are now under the watch of the General Council, now the Department Council.

\(^{189}\) “Histoire et Missions | Présentation Archives | Archives,” accessed November 13, 2019, http://www.cg974.fr/culture/index.php/Archives/pr%C3%A9sentation-archives/histoire-et-missions.html. “...the control, the collection, the classifying, the conservation, and the communication of the archives”
The exhibition was entitled, “INcyclopédie du continent Réunionnais.” Employing various maps, images, objects, cards, video recordings, audio recordings, and posters accompanied by legends, Emmanuel Kamboo wages a fight against “l’oubli d’un passé Glorieux.” Upon arrival, visitors of the exhibit discover Reunion’s invented past with a guided visit by Charles Panon de Cimendef, secrétaire perpétuel de l’Institut INcyclopédique universel, a character played by Reunionese actor Sergio Grondin. Grondin’s acting participates in the designed hoax; his role as secretary of a fabricated project legitimizes and institutionalizes Kamboo’s work, even as it contributes to an imaginary performance. Grondin, with dramatic gestures and unfettered enthusiasm for his role as guide, stands before maps, invoking stories of ancient territories, and before images of faces, recounting legends of emperors. Grondin eagerly leads guests on what would be described as a “fascinant voyage” of the diverse components of Reunionese history.

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190 Kamboo, Incyclopédie, 3. “…the forgetting of a Glorious past.”
191 perpetual secretary of the Universal INcyclopedic Institute
The exhibit commences with a map that turns the conventional atlas upside down and places Reunion Island’s *continent* at the center of the earth. Kamboo thus contradicts the dominant colonial understanding of Europe at the center of the world, and all other territories on the periphery. Kamboo’s work demands that the visitor question the arbitrariness of a conventional map’s orientation. This inversion displaces Europe’s centrality and recognizes the prominence of Reunion Island, represented as Australia. Finding the regions with which one identifies on a conventionally inverted map – what might be considered disorienting for the visitor – produces an effect that invites reflection on the difficulty of deconstructing Western epistemology.

![Map of Réunion Island’s "continent" in Kamboo's exhibition.](image)

At the start of the exhibit, Kamboo also displays a map of Reunion Island that reverses the conventional display of cardinal points with North on top and South on the bottom, labeling invented kingdoms and territories. The accompanying introduction in the exhibit’s catalogue sets the stage for what is unveiled in the exhibition. Kamboo writes,
“Cet atlas vise à faire le point sur l’état des connaissances, d’après des sources fiables et contradictoires, quant aux réalités géopolitiques, économiques et touristiques de La Réunion avant le ‘grand dérangement’ de la départementalisation de 1946. En effet, si l’inclusion de La Réunion dans l’ensemble national a pu apporter certains bienfaits, cette intégration a été payée par l’oubli d’un passé glorieux, chargés de batailles et de grandes découvertes scientifiques qui ont fait de La Réunion un sujet d’admiration pour le reste du monde civilisé.”

According to Kamboo, it’s the erasure of this glorious past – which he attributes to France’s departmentalization in 1946 – that the exhibit is designed to invert. The atlas exposes the weakness of the sources and the assumptions upon which colonial epistemology rests. The visitor, viewing the inversion of the conventional atlas, questions the basis for positioning North and South in their present placements, thus scrutinizing the same institutions that place Europe at the center of the world. The atlas, being the first image visitors witness in the exhibition, prefigures the theme of inversion that anchors Kamboo’s work.

To that same end, ubiquitous use and capitalization of “IN” proliferate in Kamboo’s exhibition, reinforcing the theme of inversion and negation of a prevailing colonial epistemology. Despite the erasure of the colonial archive, Kamboo’s introduction presents the exhibit as a reconstruction of lost fragments; the exhibit reads, “suite à des recherches approfondies dans des archives restées jusqu’alors secrètes, l’Institut INcyclopédie Universel a pu recueillir les premiers fragments d’une histoire du continent réunionnais avant le ‘grand

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193 Kamboo, Incyclopédie. 3. “This atlas aims to provide an overview of the state of knowledge, according to unreliable and contradictory sources, as to the geopolitical, economic and tourist realities of Reunion before the ‘great disturbance’ of the departmentalization in 1946. Indeed, if the inclusion of Reunion in the national assembly could bring certain benefits, this integration was paid for by the forgetting of a glorious past, laden with battles and great scientific discoveries which made Reunion a subject of admiration for the rest of the civilized world.”
After viewing the introduction, visitors then follow their guide through the discovered history of these territories, separated into five geographic categories: Réunion Septentrionale, Réunion Occidentale, Réunion Australe, Réunion Orientale, and Réunion Centrale. Each geographic region accompanied detailed posters and legends of a variety of kingdoms. The guide describes these kingdoms in detail at each geographic station, standing before images of dark faces, boats, planes, and animals. Kamboo presents each kingdom in the context of a grandeur and a glory of the past, often associated with one depicted figure representing themes of imperial power: a king, queen, emperor, or intellectual. The details of each image feature limited coloration and faded lines that covered the faces. A plain background

194 Kamboo, 4. “...following in-depth research in previously secret archives, the Institut INcyclopédie Universel was able to collect the first fragments of a history of the Réunion continent before the ’great shrinking’ of 1946.”
surrounds most individuals or landscapes, some giving the appearance that the portraits levitate from the poster.

These images are, in fact, colonial stamps. The bibliography on the last page of Kamboo’s catalogue features a small statement on the illustrations: “toutes les illustrations sont issues de timbres postaux de collection.”195 His selection of postal stamps from the era of French colonization constitutes an appropriation of the colonial archive to create anew. He employs the texts central to constructing colonial discourse to criticize the Eurocentric norms that position his territory into perceived economic and cultural inferiority. This appropriation

195 Kamboo, 99. “all illustrations are from a collection of postage stamps”
of the colonial archive enables Kamboo to ameliorate the archive sickness\textsuperscript{196} experienced by Reunion Island, a lack of self-image and community built by the territory’s present archival documents. By employing the documents that project colonial epistemology’s assumptions about Western superiority, Kamboo questions those assumptions and reimagines the relationship between the Reunionese people and their own archive.

III. The Colonial Stamp as a Colonial Archive

The elaborate French history tied to the use of stamps reveals the dynamics of exoticization, simplification, and dehumanization at play in the displacement of the colonial archive’s nameless subjects. The French colonizers who designed these stamps told a story about colonized individuals without offering the possibility of self-representation.

Six commemorative postal stamps were issued in the Exposition Coloniale Internationale of 1931 in Paris, France, a gathering to simplify knowledge of and signify control over the colonies, animating a discourse of an exotic ‘Other’ that could easily reach the French population. On the stamps were images manufactured by the French government “to give themselves an illusion of control over the colony.”\textsuperscript{197} While the content of the images varied, they were all tied to a political, social, and economic justification for colonization. Further, “metaphors of liberty, equality, and brotherhood were subtly subverted and distorted to

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{stamp.png}
\caption{Stamp from the Exposition Coloniale of 1931.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{196} Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 59.
\textsuperscript{197} Adedze, “Re-Presenting Africa,” 58.
justify the subjugation, colonization, and exploitation of Africa.” The goal of the stamp’s creation closely mirrored that of the human expositions, also features of the Exposition Coloniale. The images classified, scrutinized, and exoticized the colonized population to satisfy the Western gaze.

What began as representations of imperial power and the allegory of empire evolved to showcase the French imaginary of Africa, perpetuating stereotypes of exoticism and savagery associated with the colonies. They were derived from “the imagination of French artists and engravers advised by their colonial agents,” often representing African women, nature, and alternative cultural spaces (such as markets, villages, and architecture different from those of the West). The following image clearly illustrates the French strategic projection of an exotic colonized individual.

"Les Races," the second stamp at the exposition designed to reinforce pseudoscientific hierarchies.

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198 Adedze, 58.
199 Adedze, 58.
The first stamps generated by the French government projected an image of French power, history, and empire. In 1859, the French postal service produced and shipped 6000 stamps to Africa with the text “Colonies de l’Empire Français” and “La Gorée” overprinted. This representation of empire, liberty, and power was succeeded by stamps produced by the French government during this time, honouring military figures such as General Louis Léon César Faidherbe, the conqueror and colonial administrator of Senegal from 1854 to 1865. 200 Adedze, 58.
The stamp, entitled *Les Races* and designed by J. de la Nézière, was created to reinforce the pseudoscientific ethnic and linguistic hierarchy of the human race. In Carl Linné’s classification of *Homo sapiens* in his 1735 volume *Systema Naturae*, humans were separated into a system of categorization with Europeans on top, Native Americans and Asians in the center, and Africans at the bottom, who were described as “biologically and psychologically closer to animals.” The stamp, above, retrieves this system of classification in representing various “races” in “ethnic attire,” surrounding the eternal flame of the French Republic. The stamp perpetuates the French perception of Western superiority over the populations in their colonies, justifying their violence, subjugation, and civilizing mission.

The next commemorative stamp, designed by Géo François for the Exposition Coloniale of 1931, reveals similar exotic themes, but adds an important economic dimension. At the exposition, this stamp was accompanied by statistics about agricultural production, reinforcing the economic rationale for French colonization and the value of Africa’s raw materials – not for Africa, but for France. The women with fruit, a boy with lambs, and the barrels (likely for palm oil) symbolize the goods and resources that the French empire exploited for economic aggrandizement.

201 Adedze, 59.
202 Adedze, 60.
Indeed, the colonial stamp served a critical political, social, and economic role in French history, projecting the power of the French empire, the otherization and exoticization of the colonized individual, and the economic reasoning for colonization. Importantly, the stamps recount a story about France and tell little about the African countries and individuals they depict. Absent from the stamps are the voices of those represented. Without these perspectives, how can the voices of the people minorisé be retrieved? How does one create a postcolonial archive – and a new political identity – out of this systematic misrepresentation and erasure? Kamboo confronts these questions in his exhibition *INcyclopédie*, manipulating the colonial archive to write a new history for Reunion Island.

Even so, Kamboo is engaging in a practice similar to that which the colonizers engaged in; he gives the subjects of the stamps a story, but it’s a story that has been imposed on them. He re-inscribes them into history, but they are still recorded in their voicelessness. He recounts a narrative of their existence; however, the narrative he constructs still denies them the agency to represent themselves.

While Kamboo continues to display these images in a way that undermines self-representation, his practice is distinct from that of the colonizer. Kamboo removes the visual indications that these images belong on stamps – on his posters, there are no prices, no borders, and no locations tied to the stamps’ production. He reworks the images of the colonial archive to give them a revised significance and to incorporate them into a new epistemology. Kamboo is manipulating the colonial archive, taking the subjects of the exoticized and dehumanized colonial stamps and restoring an identity, dignity, and power. In the absence of names to retrieve, Kamboo names the nameless, reinscribing their identity and dominance into a reimagined, postcolonial archive. He inverts the narrative of colonized/colonizer, employing their faces to represent the legacy of black power, agency, and leadership in Reunion Island. He places the faces in a context – even if fabricated – of a
period of glory before departmentalization. In so doing, Kamboo imagines political possibilities after departmentalization, one in which the glory of the past can epitomize a more powerful future. In Kamboo’s imagining, the homogeneity of the exotic becomes a celebration of heterogeneous rulers and kingdoms – a celebration of the modern resistance to departmentalization.

IV. Towards a New Political Imaginary for Reunion Island

Emmanuel Kamboo’s exhibit, *In*çyclopédie, reveals how the artist is uniquely positioned to manipulate and scrutinize the colonial archive to reimagine a postcolonial future. Kamboo’s inversions and negations disorient and destabilize the visitor, forcing them to ask questions and engage in reflection over their territory. The title, *In*çyclopédie, recalls the desire to archive, document, edify, inscribe, know, and educate about the past. The exhibit presents itself as a collection of knowledge, an encyclopedia; however, the negation of the term demonstrates how Kamboo affirms Reunionese identity by contesting colonial understandings and institutions of knowledge. Indeed, Kamboo’s exhibit accepts imagined legends as history, as a knowable past that inverts the existing dualities of Reunion’s history: those of colony/metropole, traditional/modern, and moving forward/catching-up. Without the existing material traces to construct a postcolonial archive of Reunion Island, Kamboo employs the tool of art to create a history representative of the territory and people’s power.

The exhibit’s location in Saint Denis at the Departmental Archives serves a strategically critical role, allowing Kamboo to both utilize and criticize the archival institution.

In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida emphasizes the imperative function of the archive as both recording and producing imaginings of the past. He writes,

“[T]he technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very
As Derrida claims, the archive produces, actualizing an event or description; what is recorded in the archive is rendered into being, just as what is strategically withheld from the archive is denied existence. In this way, what is archived from the past can also determine the future.

According to Derrida, this power attributed to the archive also produces a “mal d’archive,” an unrelenting desire and need, among people, to archive themselves. He describes,

“It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.”

The inevitable longing to revisit and record elements of the archival past derives from a desire to exist, to create a future out of what is inscribed in the past. Derrida’s analysis of the archive frames postcolonial artists’ need to manipulate, re-appropriate, and above all, place themselves in an archive that has long forgotten them. In so doing, they create more than an existence, but a potential future that reimagines the subjugated and minority position to which they were cast.

An archive’s mission, to selectively conserve official documents per government directions, makes archives into spaces of authority in defining History. The government possesses the ability to legitimize or delegitimize certain tellings of past events, and accordingly erase every document or voice that threatens its power. In exhibiting a new past for Reunion Island in the departmental archives, Kamboo lends hope to a future that transcends the narrative of underdevelopment, exploitation, and Western dominance that

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204 Derrida and Prenowitz, 57. “archive fever”
205 Derrida and Prenowitz, 57.
once prevailed. Kamboo employs the archive to give legitimacy to his own work, while questioning how the West builds and legitimizes knowledge. The archive’s existing authority enables Kamboo to rebuild the community’s relationship with its archive, inscribing documentation that reflects the collective identity of Reunion Island. Indeed, Kamboo both uses and questions the authority of the archives and the archival institution, and in so doing, creates a new postcolonial identity for the people of Reunion Island.

Kamboo places a prominent emphasis on nature in his work, recalling the environmental features of each kingdom and its territory. In Réunion Orientale, Kamboo describes a “territoire encore peu exploré et largement couvert par une forêt,” as well as “montagnes centrales.” Réunion Occidentale is characterized by a lack of preservation by the French, and a “territoire désolé, brûlé par le soleil et le sel, manquant d’eau et de toute forme de développement.” Kamboo’s invocation of nature’s role redefines a complicated relationship between Reunionese people and their land. What was before a territory marked by the stain of enslavement, Kamboo transforms into a land that witnessed the glory of black leaders. He invites the tourist to experience this land at the invitation of the Reunionese, inverting the exploitation of the tourist industry dominant in the modern economy of the region.

Finally, the legend that accompanies the colonial stamps demonstrates how Kamboo reimagines postcolonial identity for those distorted by the colonial archive. By characterizing the subjects of these stamps as the heads of civilizations, imperial leaders, and the founders of a culture, Kamboo constructs an *uchronie* that empowers people *minorisé*, both in the past and future. For example, Kamboo portrays “Grand Duché de Cilaos of Réunion Centrale” as “l’une des plus brillantes civilisations réunionnaises, fertilisée par l’apport de la civilisation

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206 Kamboo, 42. “a little-explored territory, and largely covered by a forest” “central mountains”
207 Kamboo, 26. “desolate territory, burnt by the sun and salt, lacking water and all forms of development”
malgache, au faîte de sa puissance,”208 emphasizing its remarkable power. In Réunion Septentrionale, “République Populaire du Grand Hazier” is displayed as a space with “prestigieuses universités, célèbre pour ses trois prix Nobel de littérature”209 and described as the “centre de la vie intellectuelle du continent réunionnais.”210 The associated image is one of “Poéte-Président Aristide Moutoucadet,” a black man presented in formal Western attire, eyeglasses, and a mustache, inverting the otherization associated with the colonial archive’s representation of colonized individuals. Kamboo reworks these stamps to propose a new, postcolonial epistemology that rejects the assumptions and institutions that enable the colonial archive’s construction.

In INcyclopédie, the creation of the past and the manipulation of the colonial archive serves to render a future that inverts present dynamics of power and development in Reunion Island. Displaying his exhibition in the departmental archive, Kamboo questions the authority of a system that erases and misrepresents the territory’s past, subverting that authority and proposing an altered epistemology. In reimagining a cosmogony, he creates a new relationship with a land that was once a representation of violence. Restoring dignified identities to the subjects of colonial stamps, Kamboo reclaims the power denied to the people minorisé during and after French colonization. His exhibit of inversion, manipulation, and rediscovery of the colonial archive demonstrates the essential role of the artist in constructing a postcolonial archive – one that deconstructs the past toward a reimagined future.

208 Kamboo, 56. “one of the most brilliant civilizations of Reunion, fertilized by the contribution of the Malagasy civilization, at the peak of its power” (emphasis added)
209 Kamboo, 19. “prestigious universities, known for three Nobel prizes in literature”
210 Kamboo, 19. “center of intellectual life in the Reunionese continent”
Chapter IV

Tituba: Giving Flesh to the Characters of the Colonial Text

“How can the struggle against a colonial system backed by brutality, force and contempt, be told?”
- Carpanin Marimoutou and Françoise Vergès

The colonial archive is more than a document or a text. According to Carpanin Marimoutou and Françoise Vergès, it is a system and a force that, in its distortion and exclusion, has an enduring effect on the politics of postcolonial communities. The colonial archive encompasses “policies of silence and amnesia set up by the authorities who seek to impose one story, one tradition.” That prevailing, dominant story has the effect of projecting a memory of trauma, violence, and pain. Vergès, writing about the memory and archive of colonial slavery, remarks that what remains is “une mémoire de la souffrance qui trouve des échos auprès de personnes qui subissent humiliations et discriminations et qui veulent comprendre qui est responsable de leurs souffrances.”

In recalling the documents and artifacts left in Réunion Island, Marimoutou and Vergès emphasize how the colonial system has built an archive of pain, outlining,

“The colonial archive told about the life of the notables, and by its rhetorical devices built stereotypes, the category of the anonymous, the voiceless, the cultureless, the knowledgeless. An entire humanity was banned from the colonial archive.”

For those whose traces are absent or misrepresented in the colonial archive, the process of deconstructing this system requires confronting a memory defined by the trauma, humiliation, and suffering that Marimoutou and Vergès describe. People minorisé are left to question what is worth remembering. They are left to confront an impossible duality between

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212 Vergès and Marimoutou, 52.
213 Vergès, “Traite des noirs, esclavage colonial et abolitions.” “A memory of suffering that resonates with people who suffer humiliation and discrimination and who want to understand who is responsible for their suffering.”
214 Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 58.
the pain of remembrance and the need to reinscribe themselves in a past where their voices were hitherto absent.

Tituba is one such individual, whose quasi-erasure in the colonial archive raises questions about postcolonial representation in the face of omission, stereotypes, and suffering. In the colonial archive, Tituba appears as one of the women who testified and was convicted in transcripts of the Salem Witch Trials. This archive projects an image of a woman confounded by stereotypes, caricatures, and impossibility of self-representation. In this chapter, I will outline how postcolonial artist Maryse Condé employs the colonial archive of Tituba and the art of literature to expose the colonial archive’s erasure and imagine new possibilities for postcolonial identity.

I. The Colonial Archive of Tituba

Tituba’s presence in the archive is limited primarily to Salem Witch Trial records collected by the Essex Institute. The warrant for Tituba’s apprehension and indictment describe her as “an Indian Woman servant.”215 She is understood to have been an enslaved woman; in the 1663 indictment, the court refers to her as “Indian servant to m’r sam’l Parris.”216 Samuel Parris, to which the document refers, was the Puritan minister in Salem Village at the time of the trials. Tituba’s origins are not outlined in the trial records and thus “little is known about Tituba’s background.”217

Recent efforts by historians to unearth traces of her origins have provided a somewhat clearer picture. Archives detailing Samuel Parris’s sugar plantations in Barbados reveal that he returned from Barbados to Massachusetts in 1680 with two slaves – Tituba and John

216 “Salem Witchcraft Papers from the Essex County Court Archives.”
Indian, who became Tituba’s husband. Tituba and John Indian’s birthplaces remain unclear; however, historians such as Elaine Breslaw have identified Barbadian sources, including 17th century depositions from the kidnapping of Native Americans in Guyana, which denote the northeastern coast of South America as a probable origin for Indian slaves in Barbados. Historians also point to a Barbados deed from 1676 referencing the named “Tattuba” to support her connection to Barbados. While many writers have assigned Tituba to either African or mixed African and Native American descent, the colonial archive offers only evidence of her Native American roots. Breslaw even notes that Tituba would likely have been identified as “Negro” in the colonial records had she possessed any African descent, as were two African-Americans involved in the Salem Witch Trials. The “Tattuba” referred to in the Barbados deed documents was described as a child, thus placing the age of Tituba as less than thirty years old at the time of the Salem Witch Trials.

Even the name of Tituba remains fluid, unknown, and distorted in the colonial archive. The deed refers to her as “Tattuba,” while the court records spell her name as both “Titiba” and “Tituba.” The Deposition of Ann Putnam, Jr. v. Tituba, image below, refers to a “Tituba,” whereas Tituba’s own confession lists her name as “Titiba.” Such inconsistency speaks to the inaccessibility of Tituba’s true identity in the colonial archive. Colonial documents, in their failure to capture her name, project a disregard for Tituba’s identity and humanity.

221 Breslaw.
222 Breslaw.
The most elaborate record of Tituba is her examination, often referred to as her “confession,” recorded by schoolmaster Ezekiel Cheever. It is this archive that Maryse Condé draws upon for her book *Moi, Tituba sorcière...* in its own chapter entitled, “Interrogatoire de Tituba Indien.” The following is the excerpt presented by Condé, in the original English translation from the Salem trial records, and a subsequent image of the original archive.

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223 Breslaw.
Examination of Titiba Indian.

(H) Titibe whan evil spirit have you familiarity with.

(T) none.

(H) why do you hurt these children.

(T) I do not hurt them.

(H) who is it then.

(T) the devil for ought I know.

(H) Did you never see the devil.

(T) The devil came to me and bid me serve him.

(H) Who have you seen.

(T) Four women sometimes hurt the children.

(H) Who were they.

(T) Goode Osburn and Sarah Good and I doe not know who the other were. Sarah Good and Osburne would have me hurt the children but I would not she further saith there was a tale man of Boston that she did see.

(H) when did you see them.

(T) Last night at Boston.

(H) what did they say to you.

(T) they said hurt the children.

(H) and did you hurt them

(T) no there is 4 women and one man they hurt the children and they lay all upon me and they tell me if I will not hurt the children they will hurt me.

(H) but did you not hurt them

(T) yes, but I will hurt them no more.

(H) are you not sorry you did hurt them.

(T) yes.

(H) and why then doe you hurt them.

(T) they say hurt children or wee will doe worse to you.

(H) what have you seen.

(T) an man come to me and say serve me.

(H) what service.

(T) hurt the children and last night there was an appearance that said kill the children and if I would no go on hurting the children they would do worse to me.

(H) what is this appearance you see.

(T) Sometimes it is like a hog and sometimes like a great dog, this appearance shee saith shee did see 4 times.

(H) what did it say to you

(T) it S the black dog said serve me but I said I am afraid he said if I did not he would doe worse to me.

(H) what did you say to it.

(T) I will serve you no longer. then he said he would hurt me and then he looked like a man and threatens to hurt me, shee said that this man had a yellow bird that kept with him and he told me he had more pretty things that he would give me if I would serve him.

(H) what were these pretty things.

(T) he did not show me them.

(H) what also have you seen

(T) two rats, a red rat and a black rat.

(H) what did they say to you.

(T) they said serve me.

(H) when did you see them.
(T) last night and they said serve me, but I said I would not
(H) what service.
(T) shee said hurt the children.
(H) did you not pinch Elizabeth Hubbard this morning
(T) the man brought her to me and made me pinch her
(H) why did you goe to Thomas Putnams last night and hurt his child.
(T) they pull and hale me and make me goe
(H) and what would have you doe. Kill her with a knif.
(T) Left. Fuller and others said at this time when the child saw these persons and was
tormented by them that she did complain of a knife, that they would have her cut her head off
with a knife.
(H) how did you go
(T) we ride upon stickes and are there presently.
(H) doe you goe through the trees or over them.
(T) we see nothing but are there presently.
(H) ...
(T) ...
[H] did you not see Sarah Good upon Elizabeth Hubbard, last Saterday.
[T] I did see her set a wolfe upon her to afflict her, the persons with this maid did say that
she did complain of a wolfe.
[H] What cloathes doth the man go in
[T] he goes in black clouthes a tal man with white hair I thinke
[H] How doth the woman go
[T] in a white whood and a black whood with a top knot
[H] doe you see who it is that torments these children now.
[T] yes it is Goode Good, shee hurts them in her own shape
[H] and who is it that hurts them now.
[T] I am blind now. I cannot see.225

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225 “Salem Witchcraft Papers from the Essex County Court Archives.”
Tituba, as imagined in the colonial text, is a woman who does the Devil’s bidding. She is different and threatening—a witch who endangers the lives of the community’s children. She is inconsistent without explanation, first testifying that she did not come to know an evil spirit and did not hurt the children, and subsequently confessing to having inflicted harm on the children. Above all, she betrays the women in her community, explicitly
naming four women who committed witchcraft along her side. The 1692 Summary of Examinations of Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba, recorded by merchant and magistrate John Hathorne, suggests, “Tituba againe acknowledged the fact & also accused the other two.”

The colonial archive documents Tituba not simply as a victim, but an accuser. The indictment against her, written on May 9, 1963, characterizes Tituba as a “detestable Witch Against the peace of o'r Sov'r lord & lady the King & Queen their Crowne & dignity & the laws in that Case made & provided.” She is depicted as the very ‘Other’ whom Vergès references in her description of the colonial archive’s distortion; her actions render her character “detestable” and threaten the norms of Christian religion upon which the society of Salem is founded. The indictment also states Tituba “wickedly mallitiously & felloniously A Covenant with the Devill did make,” associating her with the commission of villainous acts.

The colonial archive of Tituba is an archive of pain. It ties her to a story of suffering resulting in 20 individuals’ deaths. The archive places Tituba in a position of wicked alterity – she is represented as ‘Other,’ marginal, and subjugated. Despite the perceived presence of Tituba’s voice in this text, these words – written down by someone other than herself – are not properly contextualized by the woman who uttered them. Absent from the record are the origins, motivations, and thoughts of Tituba, who was never allowed self-representation. Without context, the colonial archive’s reader cannot be left to conclude anything other than betrayal and denunciation.

In reclaiming a postcolonial identity, what is to be done when the colonial archive tells such a story of suffering? How does one make the violence of colonialism visible

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226 “Salem Witchcraft Papers from the Essex County Court Archives.”
227 Institute, Essex Institute Historical Collections.
228 “Salem Witchcraft Papers from the Essex County Court Archives.”
without dwelling on this violence? How does one give flesh to an individual whose identity is
shrouded in the distortion, erasure, and pain of the colonial archive?

The answer to these questions lies, in part, with the postcolonial artist. In their
reflection on how to create a museum space that addresses and condemns the colonial
archive’s misrepresentation, Marimoutou and Vergès call upon the artist. They extend “an
invitation to join in the discussion” to “artists” to fill a space of “exhibitions, discussions,
confrontations, interpretations and a place of proposals, actions, reparations, re-
appropriations and restitutions.”

The postcolonial artist is enabled to explore new possibilities in the form of a creative act – re-appropriating, scrutinizing, and filling in absence from the distorted representations of the colonial archive. In the novel, *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem*, Maryse Condé does exactly this, creating a dynamic, powerful, and intersectional Tituba and imagining postcolonial identities for those erased from the colonial archive.

Even with the postcolonial artist’s role defined, the question remains: why revisit *this* past, and why *now*?

Condé chooses to approach the subject of the Salem Witch Trials and the erased record of Tituba at the turn of the 20th century, nearly three centuries after the trials concluded. Her selection of Tituba’s story serves a critical role in deconstructing the dynamics of colonialism’s power that have transgressed centuries. She explores the absences in Tituba’s past to understand the legacy of colonialism in contemporary politics. Above all, Condé employs a reimagining and manipulation of History to create new possibilities for the postcolonial identity of the present – one that embraces difference, recognizes prior suffering and silence, acknowledges intersectionality, and demands political accountability for colonialism’s contemporary effects.

229 Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present,” 15, 27.
II. Power of Literature in Rendering New Imaginings of Postcolonial Identity

To perform this act of creation, Condé employs literature, generating a narrative history that exposes the shortcomings of the colonial archive. In particular, she creates what might be perceived as a historical document, an invented autobiography of Tituba. Condé contributes to the redefinition of History in a variety of manners; she includes and manipulates the colonial archive; she creates a title that draws inspiration from the style of a slave journal; and as early as the preface, she vests in herself a particular authority to tell the story of Tituba. Despite this interaction with History, Condé is not acting as a historian, as is evident from her rejection of History’s erasure and inclusion of deeply contemporary themes.

In *Letting Go of Narrative History: The Linearity of Time and the Art of Recounting the Past*, Ari Helo clarifies the role of the historian. He posits,

> “historians do not simply offer us more or less true representations of the past, but rather create history out of the past…one would do better to view history as historians’ ongoing discourse about the best explanation of any given past phenomenon.”230

Indeed, Helo describes history as an ongoing discourse; necessarily, the historian constructs, erases, and manipulates what is included or excluded from the conversation. History is evolutive, an ever-transforming process of offering what he terms “the best explanation.” It is also selective, necessitating that some voices remain excluded and altogether concealed or forgotten. It is this process – the fossilization of a single view of the past – that Condé criticizes in her work. Rather than contributing to a system of selection and simplification, Condé’s art questions that very system. In so doing, Condé places her work not in the past, but in the present.

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Achille Mbembe’s conception of the past in *Politiques de l’intimité* provides a point of reference for what Condé’s work achieves. He imagines the past “…non pas comme trace de ce qui a déjà eu lieu, mais [comme] le passé en train d’advenir, tel qu’on peut le saisir là, au moment de l’effraction, dans l’acte même par lequel il advient, à l’instant même où, surgissant comme par la fente, il s’efforce de naitre à l’événement, de devenir événement.”

In this passage, Mbembe frames the past as mobile, *en train de* [in the middle of] occurring, rather than having occurred, fossilized and static. He also highlights the pivotal role of context in defining a past act or event, emphasizing the importance of time [à l’instant] and place [à l’événement]. It’s within this active, mobile, and contextualized view of the past that many postcolonial thinkers and artists operate. By reimagining the past as evolutive, postcolonial thinkers redefine History as lived experience,

“…caractérisé par la présence de témoins, donc d’une mémoire vivante, ’l’histoire du temps présent.’”

Condé, like the postcolonial thinkers who preceded her, operates within this evolving and progressive view of the past. Her work includes anachronisms, such as the 20th-century-tinted feminist declarations of character Esther Prine, positioning the text’s import in the present. Rather than pretending to be a historian, Condé employs creative elements to allow readers to question the authority of History, to rethink the existing Historical narrative, and reimagine a future for those absent from or distorted by the colonial archive. To provoke this reflection, Condé writes an alternative history and employs literature – an artistic tool uniquely suited for scrutinizing the past and reconceptualizing the future.

231 Achille Mbembe, “Conclusion. L’éthique du passant.,” in *Politiques de l’inimité* (Paris: La Découverte, 2018), 197–204. “…not as a trace of what has already happened, but [as] the past happening, as we can grasp it there, at the time of the break-in, in the very act by which it occurs, at the very moment when, arising as if through the slit, it strives to be born at the event, to become an event.”

Francophone literature has long served as an artistic tool to construct narrative history, addressing History’s omissions and erasure. Postcolonial theorists, such as Yolaine Parisot and Charline Pluvinet, consider the joint domains of literature and history as working together to “contourn[e] l’écueil de l’archive manquante pour s’attacher aux traces ou aux ‘mémoires possible.’” As these writers outline, literature has the unique powers of both calling attention to voids within the archive and filling them with an interpretation of the past that is active, evolving, and altogether redefined. Parisot and Pluvinet characterize the role of literature as an archaeology of traces and possible memories, an intersection that postcolonial theorist Patrick Chamoiseau explores as *traces-mémoires.* Faced with static objects that tell fossilized and often unrepresentative stories of the past, Chamoiseau invites an embrace of traces that acknowledge the testimonies of oral tradition, the mobility and evolution of memory, and the silence in the Historical record. By linking this notion of traces and memory with literature, Parisot and Pluvinet highlight how literature can insert more voices into the past and deconstruct the authority of History, rendering a more polyphonic political future for postcolonial identity.

Emmanuel Bouju contributes to the ongoing discussion of literature’s possibilities by contrasting literature and historiography. He writes of the difference between contemporary literature and history,

“…c’est dans l’exposition et la critique du processus d’enquête et de son compte rendu, aux deux sens originels de l’historia, que la différence se marque essentiellement, selon moi, entre roman contemporain et historiographie. Cet écart fait du roman l’exercice des mémoires possibles de l’histoire – l’exercice alter-historiographique.”

233 Parisot and Pluvinet. “…bypass the pitfall of the missing archive to attach to traces or ‘possible memories’”  
234 Chamoiseau and Hammadi, *Guyane, traces-mémoires du bagne.* “Memory-traces”  
235 Emmanuel Bouju, “Exercice Des Mémoires Possibles et Littérature « à-Présent » : La Transcription de l’histoire Dans Le Roman Contemporain,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 65, no. 2 (2010): 417–38. “...it is in the exposure and the criticism of the process of investigation and its report, in the two original senses of historia, that the difference is marked essentially, in my opinion, between contemporary novel and historiography. This gap makes the novel the exercise of possible memories of history - the alter-historiographic exercise.”
In this passage, Bouju highlights that literature exposes and critiques the conventional exercises of History. This criticism expands access to possible memories of the past that fill absences and reinsert lost voices into both the past and the future. Bouju acknowledges the two original roles of History or historia: investigation and report. Questioning these roles provokes reconsideration of Historical authority and a criticism of how information is gathered, disseminated, and remembered. Literature thus beckons a re-remembering and a challenge to the dominating influence of History’s singular, fixed projection of the past. Because of this, Condé positions herself not as a historian, but as something more powerful – the postcolonial author and the postcolonial artist.

III. Moi, Tituba sorcière... Creating Tituba and a New Political Imaginary

*Tituba et moi, avons vécu en étroite intimité pendant un an. C’est au cours de nos interminables conversations qu’elle m’a dit ces choses qu’elle n’avait confiées à personne.*

- Maryse Condé

With these words, Guadeloupean writer and academic Maryse Condé commences her award-winning text, *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem*, prefiguring a theme of blurred borders between narrator and author, past and present, and life and death. She addresses archival omissions, stressing that her conversations – nods to a tradition of orality – were never before heard, and, necessarily, never before recorded. The subject of her conversation, and her text, is Tituba, a character from Barbados, enslaved under Puritan clergyman Samuel Parris. Condé derives her character from the woman first accused of witchcraft in the 1692 Salem Witch Trials, Tituba, whose life origins and story remain largely unknown. In her text, Condé appropriates that which lingers of Tituba’s existence – transcripts from her trial – and adds dimension, complexity, and agency to the woman in the colonial records.

236 “Tituba and me, have lived in narrow intimacy over a year. It’s over the course of our interminable conversations that she told me things that she has never confided in anyone.”
To reclaim Tituba’s identity, Condé manipulates the colonial text that has disfigured, homogenized, otherized, and stereotyped Tituba. Condé inserts the colonial archive – the documentation of Tituba’s examination – in the center of a text that affords Tituba reflective capacity, intelligence, density, and agency. She places the colonial archive into a context, thus undermining the document’s goal of fossilizing a singular, distorted representation of its subject. She gives the colonial archive a chapter of its own, but breaks the boundaries of the novel’s existing structure, capitalizing the chapter’s title and composing the section almost exclusively of dialogue. She removes the typical (H) and (T) inscribed in the colonial archive’s text, eliminating references to speakers. She also inserts several paragraphs of Tituba’s internal monologue and omits a number of statements, replacing them with ellipses, “…”\textsuperscript{237}

In re-appropriating Tituba’s examination, otherwise referred to as her confession, Condé practices recognition of and respect for silence in the postcolonial archive. First, Condé translates what is listed in the archive as an “examination” for “interrogatoire,”\textsuperscript{238} suggesting a more adversarial process than was initially indicated. What’s more, she replaces the initialed marks of the speaker with “—.”\textsuperscript{239} This manipulation of the colonial archive challenges the authority of the document. Excluding indications of speakers, Condé removes attributions of statements to Tituba, leaving readers to question who exactly offers each statement and to what extent the written words can be connected to the thoughts of Tituba. Indeed, Condé disorients readers of the colonial archive while acknowledging the impossibility of placing these statements in Tituba’s voice. What’s more, Condé’s representation of the examination includes several ellipses, marking passages of time during the interrogation. These ellipses are separated by the narrator’s thoughts. Through the

\textsuperscript{237} Condé, \textit{Moi, Tituba sorcière... noire de Salem}, 166.
\textsuperscript{238} Condé, 163. “interrogation”
\textsuperscript{239} Condé, 163-67.
ellipses, Condé recalls silence and acknowledges omissions from the colonial archive.

Including Tituba’s thoughts between those ellipses permits Tituba to silently comment on, contextualize, and scrutinize the colonial archive. At once, Condé respects Tituba’s absence from History, while empowering her with the ability to criticize an archive that excludes, ignores, and erases her voice.

Condé further emphasizes the colonial archive’s shortcomings and levels of archival privilege in conversations she constructs between Tituba and her later master, Benjamin Cohen of Azevedo. In the book, the narrator describes Benjamin as a Jew who faced “des persécutions religieuses,” but whose family was “indifférente à tout ce qui n’était pas son propre malheur.” During one scene in the text, Benjamin recounts the history of his people and their suffering,
In this interaction, Condé highlights the privilege related to being accounted for in official historical documents. In emphasizing the suffering experienced by the Jews, Benjamin also demonstrates the presence of the Jewish community in the colonial archive and his ability to retrieve an understanding of his people’s past in the official historical record. Moreover, Benjamin wields references of specific dates and precise events, demonstrating his presence in the colonial archive, even if the record is marked by violence. Tituba, in her short response questioning whether similar estimates might be made regarding her own people, acknowledges the impossibility of relating the positions of her and Benjamin’s communities, because of the distinctive absence of enslaved individuals from the colonial archive. Her response to his recitation of historical presence is simple: “Il me battait à tous les coups.”

In this line, Condé invokes a gendered, intersectional violence in the selection of the term, “beat,” calling attention to her imbedded status of subalternity, as outlined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She also emphasizes archival erasure, clarifying that her people – enslaved Africans – are left disadvantaged because of their absence from the historical record. In so doing, Condé highlights the challenge she undoubtedly faced in constructing Tituba’s story – rendering presence where there is absence and offering flesh to a character when so few traces exist.

Condé’s re-appropriation also begins with the novel’s title, Moi, Tituba sorcière…Noire de Salem. Her title evokes those of American slave narratives. Frederick Douglass’ autobiography, for example, is called Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. The cover of Douglass’s text suggests that his work is an autobiographical account; his title signals that the story relates to his life; and the inclusion of the author’s name, Frederick Douglass, projects autobiographical content. Douglass positions his name

243 Condé, 198. “He beats me every time.”
244 Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”
first, then subsequently ties his story to the condition of enslavement in America that played an important role in his narrative. Condé’s title is parallel, tying Tituba to her heterogenous identity as a black woman whose story is defined, in part, by her experiences in Salem. Her title, differently from that of Frederick Douglass’s narrative, invites expectations that are incongruent with the text’s reality. Beneath what appears to be a first-person account of Tituba’s life is an author’s name that misaligns with the subject of the narrative.

Playing with the reader’s assumptions about autobiographical accounts, Condé makes efforts to reconcile the distance between herself, as author, and Tituba, as narrator. The word, “Moi,” invokes a personal reference, foreshadowing an association between the narrator and the author brought about by their shared identity as mixed women affected by an enduring legacy of colonialism. This frames the deeply personal, reflective, first-person narrative that follows. The story Condé writes for Tituba, indeed, speaks to a broad postcolonial, heterogenous identity that the author shares with her imagined protagonist.

In the title, the comma and name following “Moi” clarify that the “Moi” invoked in the first word refers directly to “Tituba.” This name could be loosely derived from the French verb tituber, which translates to stumble or stagger in English. Already, the emphasis on the narrator’s meaningful name implies a difficult story, marked by challenges and acts of defiance. “Sorcière” and “Noire,” which come up later in the work’s title, are two words deeply tied to Tituba’s identity: the former an appropriation of a once-pejorative term, and the latter a reference to her intersectionality in the capacity of gender and race. The invocation of “Salem” associates the construction of her identity with the witch trial conflict. Already, Condé identifies an erasure from the archive with her choice of an ellipses at the title’s end, implying a space, a lack that cannot be retrieved.
What proceeds in Condé’s telling is a story that restores agency to Tituba, while acknowledging the violence of the past. The first lines of her book are “Abena, ma mère,” a reversal of the structure of the title with the opposite effect of distancing the narrator from the woman described. Abena, the reader learns, is the mother of Tituba who was enslaved and raped on a boat named “Christ the King,” as it progressed toward Barbados.

The narrator describes the event as the aggression that ultimately led to Tituba’s birth. To begin with this passage is to recognize the impossibility to speak for Abena; indeed, it emphasizes the impossibility to translate the experience of an enslaved woman, by reinscribing her as the passive subject of the phrase and inverting the narrator-author relationship invoked in the title. To begin with this passage is to acknowledge more than a silence, but also a suffering inherent to the recounting of Tituba’s story. Condé restores intimacy to the hidden and forgotten experience of enslaved people while condemning the violence that accompanied that experience. It is this balance of condemnation, respect for silence, and empowerment that distinguishes Condé’s art.

Condé reinforces Tituba’s agency throughout the novel, particularly as she describes Tituba’s enslavement. In the first half of the book, Tituba, upon meeting and falling in love with John Indian, makes a choice to give up her freedom and be enslaved to be with him. As she wrestles with her complicated decision, Tituba stresses,


245 Condé, Moi, Tituba sorcière... noire de Salem, 13. “Abena, my mother”
246 Condé, 13.
247 Condé, 37. “My mother had been raped by a white man. She had been hanged because of a white man. I saw his tongue sticking out of his mouth, turgid and purplish penis. My adoptive father committed suicide because of a white man. Despite all of this, I planned to start living among them again, in their womb, under their thumb. All because of the frantic taste of a mortal.”
In this passage, Tituba grapples with a history of suffering driven by white people, one that resulted in the death of her parents. She also wrestles with her existence, which is inextricably tied to this suffering. Condé highlights the nuanced liberty of Tituba’s sexuality, one that provides enslaved individuals a source of expression and freedom, but now risks to re-imprison her. Indeed, Condé frames the enslavement of Tituba less as an event that befalls a passive sufferer; instead, Tituba is an agent of her fate, and restores her enslaved status as an expression of her love for her future husband.

Condé’s restoration of intimacy and respect for silence is pervasive throughout the text. Structurally, Condé includes frequent page breaks – particularly when referencing traumatic or violent events, such as Tituba’s mother’s death.

She writes,

“J’obéis aussi vite que je pus, tenant la lame énorme dans mes mains frêles. Ma mère frappa à deux reprises. Lentement, la chemise de lin blanc vira à l’écarlate.

On pendit ma mère.”

In this passage, Condé creates temporal and visual space between descriptions; she jumps from a scene of violence – her mother’s act of violence – to a simple statement that describes the result: a mortal act of violence inflicted against her mother. The space between paragraphs on the page reflects the passage of time, but also creates a void where the intervening, indescribable violence is left unaccounted for. The reader is left to imagine what might have transpired in the time between this act and her mother’s death. She allows the reader to notice the failure to record Abena’s story, which could be explained by anything from archival erasure to the impossibility of revisiting the memories. Leaving empty gaps

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248 Condé. “I obeyed as fast as I could, holding the huge blade in my frail hands. My mother knocked twice. Slowly, the white linen shirt turned scarlet.

We hung my mother.”
both on her pages and in her narration, Condé highlights the lack of traces, the unbreakable silence, and the literally unspeakable suffering characterizing and constraining her story.

Working with the absence and erasure of Tituba’s voice from the colonial archive, Condé creates a new identity for the woman whose past was marked by Western fear of non-Christian spirituality and enslavement. Condé also faces the challenges of condemning the violence of the colonial past Tituba’s story represents, whilst liberating her from an impenetrable association with violence and subjugation. With so few traces left of Tituba’s story, Condé was left to construct an identity that respects that absence yet renders presence in a postcolonial archive. Condé addresses these concerns by restoring dignity and agency to Tituba, without betraying the sparseness of available information about her and the impossibility of articulating the violence of colonization. By scrutinizing the colonial archive of Tituba and inserting a voice without dwelling on voicelessness, Condé reimagines a postcolonial identity for those whom History places in a position of enslavement and alterity.
Conclusion
Towards a Postcolonial Political Identity

In 1925, Arthur Schomburg – African American historian whose archival documents became one of the world’s largest repositories of collections focused on black history – wrote an essay entitled *The Negro Digs Up His Past*, where he insists, “The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future.” He goes on: “a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice. History must restore what slavery took away.” In the early 20th century, Schomburg perceived investigation of the past – revisiting the archive – as the key toward constructing a new political future for black individuals. Even though Schomburg’s work focused primarily on the past of and political possibilities for African Americans, the persecution, enslavement, and problematic racial discourse that characterize their archive closely mirrors that of the people *minorisé* in French history. As Schomburg’s text acknowledges, the archive has the power not just to document one version of the past, but to create reality out of it. To recreate this reality – and open up political possibilities for postcolonial communities – a postcolonial archive must be constructed and the past *reconstructed*. In manipulating, scrutinizing, and exposing the assumptions embedded in the colonial archive – and in *creating* – the postcolonial artist is capable of constructing a new epistemology and political identity for the those left out of the colonial archive.

In *Le Pli*, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze introduces the concept of *plier-déplier*, a process of folding and unfolding space, movement, time, and history that “ne signifie plus simplement tendre-détendre, contracter-dilater, mais envelopper-développer, involuer-

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249 During his lifetime, Schomburg collected literature, art, slave narratives and other materials that were purchased to become the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at New York Public Library.
251 Schomburg, 231.
évoluer.252 People minorisé are hidden in the creases and folds of history, enveloped by the dominant Historical narrative and colonial epistemology. Retrieving the traces and conceiving of a new epistemology demands the unfold: “certainly not the opposite of the fold, nor its effacement, but the continuation or the extension of its act, the condition of its manifestation.”253 The postcolonial artist is the unfolder, particularly qualified to bring the creased traces into appearance and the retrieved perspectives into existence.

The task demanded of the colonial archive’s archaeologists is complicated by various challenges. For one, the colonial archive possesses, distorts, and erases the subaltern. The perspective of the person minorisé often cannot be retrieved from the colonial record; and even if the postcolonial tradition of orality or collective memory has kept certain fragments of the past alive, questions remain about what is worth remembering, and what is better left forgotten. Indeed, a past colored by violence and suffering, when exposed, poses the risk of reinscribing a people into a landscape of violence and suffering. Uplifting the voices of the subaltern also removes their status of subalternity, risks rejecting opacity, and neglects a respect for silence. What possibilities remain, then, for representing postcolonial identity?

While postcolonial scholars have begun to examine how a postcolonial archive should be constructed, most notably Marimoutou and Vergès,254 a thorough analysis of its contemporary development has not yet been attempted. In this text, I evaluated examples of the genesis of the postcolonial archive, exploring how postcolonial artists, through a variety of artistic expressions, have begun addressing the challenges posed in the archive’s generation. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar employs portraiture to restore dignity and agency to Algerian women exposed and unveiled in the colonial archive. Abdellatif Kechiche’s film,


254 Vergès and Marimoutou, “Pour un musée du temps présent - Project for a museum of the present.”
Vénus Noire, exposes violence while respecting silence to clothe Saartjie Baartman, whose naked body was exhibited in the colonial archive. To repair a flawed relationship between an archive and its people in Reunion Island, Emmanuel Kamboo creates a museum exhibit, INcyclopédie, which both utilizes and scrutinizes archival authority and inverts colonial epistemology. Maryse Condé wields the power of Francophone literature to reveal past distortion and create the story of Tituba, a woman implicated in the Salem Witch Trials. Through examination of these texts that comprise the postcolonial archive, it becomes clear that the artist is uniquely capable of addressing the challenges in the postcolonial archive’s development. As Marimoutou and Vergès question, “why cannot we also turn our attention on artistic creation and on culture—the result of social life and relations and the individual’s permanent attempt to conceive and express the reasons of its existence, origin and destiny?”

To construct an archive that reflects a community’s collective identity, it is essential to turn to the artist; the artist possesses a special capacity to represent culture, assert or fabricate a cosmogony, and create new modes of capturing a people’s pride and power. The artist creates the past in order to conceive of future political possibilities for postcolonial identity.

What the postcolonial artist creates tells an important story about the future political imaginary sought by people minorisé. Achille Mbembe insists there is an essential political dimension to the archive: “it is supposed to belong to everyone.” He maintains, “the community of time, the feeling according to which we would all be heirs to a time over which we might exercise the rights of collective ownership: this is the imaginary that the archive seeks to disseminate.” The texts of Bouzar, Kechiche, Kamboo, and Condé tell

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257 Mbembe, 21.
stories of reclaimed agency, pride, and power of the subaltern. At the same time, they all acknowledge and condemn the colonial past. Drawing on colonial archives that exclude, they construct an inclusive postcolonial archive that enhances possibilities for social and political belonging.

Still, the postcolonial archive must be further investigated. While this text has examined how the postcolonial archive has taken shape in various political communities, limits of the postcolonial archive remain that must be explored. If one problem with the colonial archive is its propensity to include some versions of events while excluding others, how can the postcolonial archive overcome that same obstacle? Because the postcolonial archive is still a repository of texts, objects, and materials – however selected and recorded – some accounts may always remain untold. Some voices may still be erased. As Achille Mbembe emphasizes,

“No archive can be the depository of the entire history of a society, of all that has happened in that society. Through archived documents, we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order, one after the other, in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end.”

Even the postcolonial archive cannot insert every lost voice, correct every distortion, and liberate itself from the fragmented recording of the past. Though this reality should not inhibit experimentation with forms of broadened representation by the postcolonial artist, scholars must further consider how to create a truly inclusive postcolonial epistemology out of the archive.

Despite challenges inherent to archiving and documenting the past, it’s through these uchronies, these alternative histories, that a new, postcolonial political future emerges. What do postcolonial artists’ works demonstrate about what this future should look like? This

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future will contest notions of Western supremacy and Eurocentrism, it will empower people minorisé, it will accept and grapple with the impossibility of simplifying difference, and it will connect members of marginalized communities to collective identities they can perceive within the archive. The postcolonial archive is not simply a revised History. It is a political text where demands for the future can be made. Indeed, it is to the postcolonial archive that the world must draw its attention to build a more polyphonic and democratic political future.
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