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# The Un/chrono/Logical timeline method as a curatorial approach for critical fabulation imbued in personal histories and multimodality (upcycling the master's tools)

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# The Un/chrono/Logical timeline method as a curatorial approach for critical fabulation imbued in personal histories and multimodality

# (upcycling the master's tools)

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This dissertation is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Art in the field of Contemporary Curatorial Practice degree by dissertation in the Department of Curatorial, Visual and Public Cultures of Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg.

Supervised by Dr Kitso Lelliott and Prof. David Andrew

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____  ___ Date: __14 August 2025_____

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ARAC | - | Another Roadmap Africa Cluster |
| ARS | - | Another Roadmap School |
| LEC-SA | - | Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa |
| MMA | - | Morija Museum and Archives |
| MLAB | - | MuseumsLab |
| VAM | - | Van Abbe Museum |
| PEMS | - | Paris Evangelical Mission Society |
| UNESCO | - | United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| DAAD | - | The German Academic Exchange Service |

## Keywords

Coloniality, multimodality, reparation, personal stories, time, pluriversality, co-curation, DEI, decolonial, epistemic-disobedience, critical fabulation.

# INTRODUCTION

> *For difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways to actively 'be' in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters*. (Lorde, 1983, p. 99)

The Un/Chrono/Logical Timeline is multifaceted; it is a material object, a durational process centred on different voices, a pedagogical presence, and an artistic research method created collaboratively within the context of arts education. It operates as an invitation for participants to engage their own personal experiences, memories, and desires for arts education in conversation with recorded histories of art, as informed by their individual perspectives and experiences. This gesture of embracing and counting on difference builds upon Lorde's assertion that appropriating the master's tools may allow us to beat him at his own game, even temporarily. However, enabling long-term genuine change relies on embracing other sources of support outside the master's house. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline does not seek to rewrite history, undo the past or erase. Rather, its function is to disrupt and upcycle to produce repair and explore new imaginative possibilities on the premise of plurality and mutual purpose.

The vibrancy of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a generative pedagogical activity resonates in multiple ways because of the broad range of contexts it may be applied to. On one hand, it latches on to the notion presented by Vietnamese filmmaker, Trinh. T. Min-ha that "Living is neither oral nor written", and asks the question: "how can the living and the lived be contained in the merely oral?" (Minh-ha, 1989, p.126) in conjunction with the idea of voice. Furthermore, bodily interaction is fundamental to the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline in igniting emotion and creativity. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, therefore, simultaneously illustrates and

embodies an entirely different conception of how histories might be generated and recuperated. The depth of its iterative performance is as significant as the surface of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline itself (Andrew, 2022). This is to say, the performativity of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is essentially a way of thinking and learning with one's body, physical movements and presence.




**Figure 1.** Some of the entries from the earlier iterations of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline in 2017. Image courtesy of the Johannesburg Working Group, ARAC.

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline leverages dialogue and storytelling as modes for inhabiting histories; it approaches history as a resource in the contemporary moment to disturb hegemony and animate counter-hegemonic narratives. The deliberate conflation of the linear timeline does several things: it deconstructs the idea of progress, disrupts the concept of time measurement, articulates questions of social justice, and visualises historical events differently from the norm. In this regard, language plays the important function of being embodied resistance.

The very first iteration of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline consisted of a loosely chronological arrangement of excerpts from the publication *Visual Century: South African Art in Context 1907–2007* fixed on a 30-metre-long clear plastic vinyl laid on the pavement at the Wits School of Education (Andrew, 2022). It was conceived

and introduced by the Johannesburg working group of the research collective Another Roadmap Africa Cluster (ARAC) of the Another Roadmap School (ARS) as an experiment that would be elaborated further with continuous engagement.

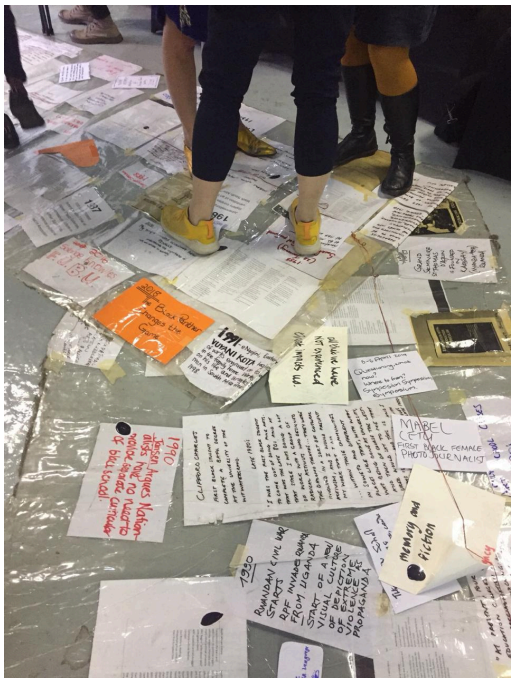


**Figure 2.** Participants reading through and adding new stories to the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline in 2017. Image courtesy of the Johannesburg Working Group.

The Another Roadmap School (ARS)[1] is a research network composed of art educators and practitioners organised into three clusters: The Popular Arts Cluster, the Intertwining Histories Cluster, and the Africa Cluster. The Another Roadmap School began as a critical response and supplement to the 2006 UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education (URAE) outlined within the framework of the first World Conference on Arts Education: Building Creative Capacities for the twenty-first century held in 2006 (UNESCO, 2006[2]).

[1] The preparatory project phase of ARS began October 2011 to the end of 2012 and was primarily used for networking, exchange and the formation of new research groups, as well as for discussing research perspectives and design, methodologies and research agreements. In parallel, new working groups started to form. From October 2015 to August 2018 the individual working groups developed research projects, exchanged experiences and information, identified trans-regional questions and discussed common problem areas.

[2] The Another Roadmap School argues that some aspects of UNESCO's policy documents reflect a lack of substantial, nuanced research on art education practices in varying socio-political contexts. The documents lack sufficient critical engagement with the history and the persistent hegemony of the western conceptions of arts and education within the field.

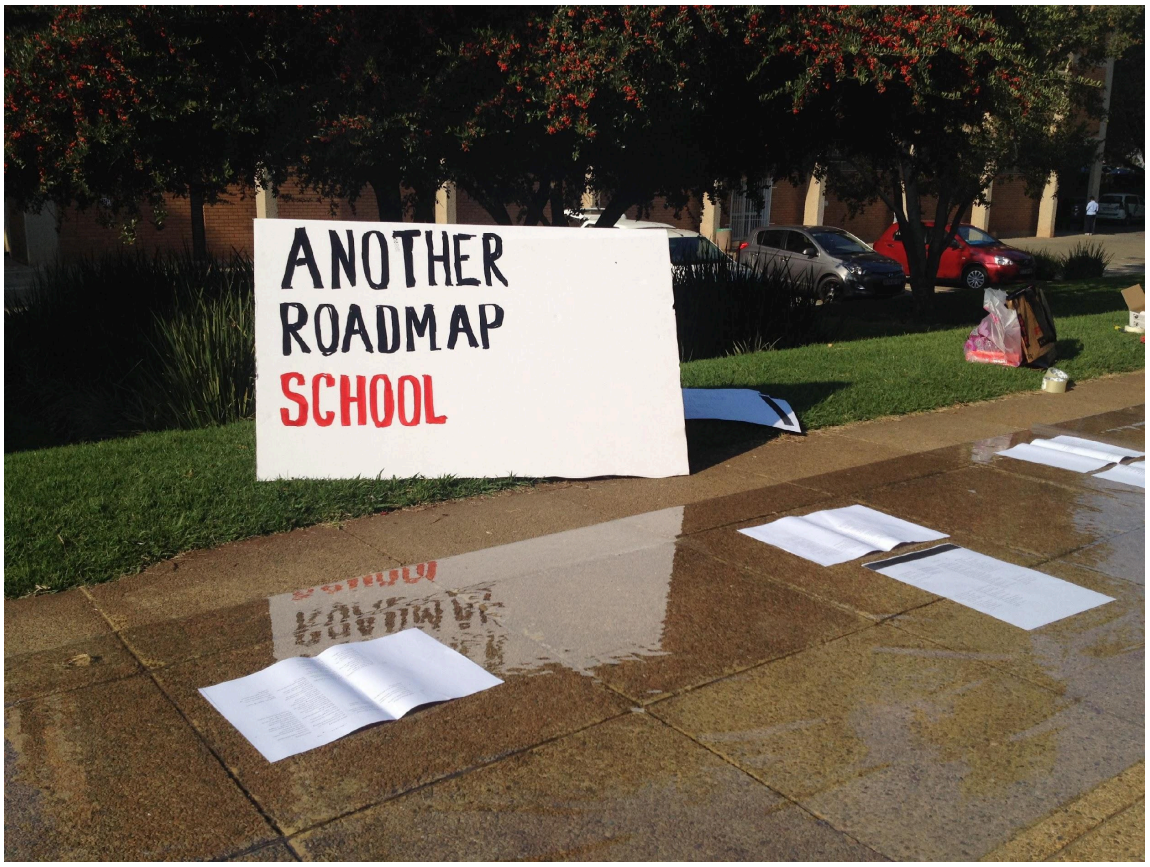



**Figure 3.** The very first Un/chrono/Logical Timeline activation in April, 2017 outside the Wits School of Education. Image courtesy of the Johannesburg Working Group.

## Origins of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline draws inspiration from the anti-apartheid artist collective: Medu Art Ensemble[3], and operates on the tenet to not impose the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline creators' vision of the future on people but instead to fashion revolution with the people (Allara, 2010). The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, as a research framework, leans on intergenerational collaboration, dialogue, decentralisation, and a focus on language and decolonial ideology (Andrew, 2022) to inspire agency within participants. Recounting the events of the first activation, Associate Professor in the Wits School of Arts and member of the Johannesburg Working Group, David Andrew, reported that:

[3] The Medu art ensemble was a group of cultural workers that formed in Gaborone, Botswana in 1978. The collective included many influential artists and scholars from South Africa and played an influential role not only in shaping the ANC struggle, but in stimulating the growth of arts in Botswana (Makin, 2021). They created many posters, songs, literature and other artistic works to draw attention to the plight of apartheid in South Africa and disseminated their messages all over the world. Their operations were brought to an abrupt end when the South African Defence Force raided them in 1985.

> During the day, the timeline accrued many entries, some pre-planned, some spontaneous, some in response to others, and some intensely personal. Some stayed within the broader chronologies introduced by the Visual Century outline. At the same time, it became clear that, in the spirit and urgency of the injunction to think un/chrono/logically, the timeline would be driven by instincts that were unruly, disobedient, and filled with large doses of healthy scepticism. (Andrew, 2022, p. 67)



**Figure 4**. ARAC members (L-R): Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, Rangoato Hlasane, Christian Nyampeta, Lineo Segoete and Patrick Mudekereza assembled for discussion with colleagues from Wits after the first Un/chrono/Logical Timeline activation in April, 2017. Image courtesy of the researcher.

When it comes to reasons for employing alternative practices to counter ongoing epistemic violence enshrined in Western hegemony within arts education on the continent, Nomusa Makhubu posits in Ka Canham's Riotous deathscapes that:

> Whiteness is an ensnaring social category, trapping people into suffocating relations. The notion of an exit is not just about leaving confinement but also about regeneration. It is a way to transcend institutional spaces and knowledge to which one assimilates by performing outside of local knowledges, finding oneself simultaneously alienated from Europe-centred knowledge and the local knowledge. (Ka Canham, 2023, p.45)

The statement frames coloniality as something that must be exited in exchange for local knowledge systems in order to regenerate the self. ARAC, therefore, draws heavily from pioneers such as Bisi Silva through the itinerant Àsìkò Art School programme. Àsìkò responds to the continent's lack of arts education infrastructure by using a format of “part art workshop, part residency and part arts academy, over a thirty day period” (Silva, 2017, p. 245).

The Àsìkò school consists of an arts education that covers critical theory, art history, research methodologies, and conceptual strategies that underpin contemporary artistic and curatorial practice (Ka Canham, 2023). The dialogical, non-curricular structure the programme’s facilitators use is based on praxis and a commitment to engaging in experimental exercises of knowledge sharing, learning, and practising (Ka Canham, 2023).

The archival research I undertook as the research lead of the Maseru working group of ARS from 2015, along with the narrative devices that have emerged from it, positioned me to experience the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline in multiple contexts since the first iteration in April 2017[4]. The geographic and research proximities of the Maseru and Johannesburg working groups deepened my involvement. Simultaneously, the idea of unchronological timelines spread to other members of the Intertwining Histories cluster[5] of Another Roadmap School.

In October 2017, the Intertwining Histories Cluster, at the initiation of the Moscow Working Group, developed the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline game in Vienna, Austria, during the Shaking Arts Festival. The game is a set of stories related to the histories of art and their embedded coloniality. The stories are added on cards featuring

[4] The Another Roadmap Africa Cluster has had three independent meetings: Entebbe 2015, Maseru 2018, Johannesburg 2020, three meetings during the Another Roadmap international meetings: in Madrid 2015, São Paulo 2016 during the 32nd São Paulo Biennale, Huye 2018, and meetings as part of the larger Intertwining Histories Cluster: in Vienna 2017, Zurich 2018, and lastly three meetings in Kassel 2022, as part of documenta fifteen.

[5] The Intertwining histories cluster comprises working groups from previously colonised (Africa, South America and Asia) and imperialist nations (Europe) based on the consensus that historiography in arts education means referring to a plurality of hi/stories as perceived from different geopolitical perspectives. The cluster asks; how are these hi/stories, their relations and intertwinings relevant for the development of current practice in arts education.

images or visualisers, questions, keywords, and the dates referenced.

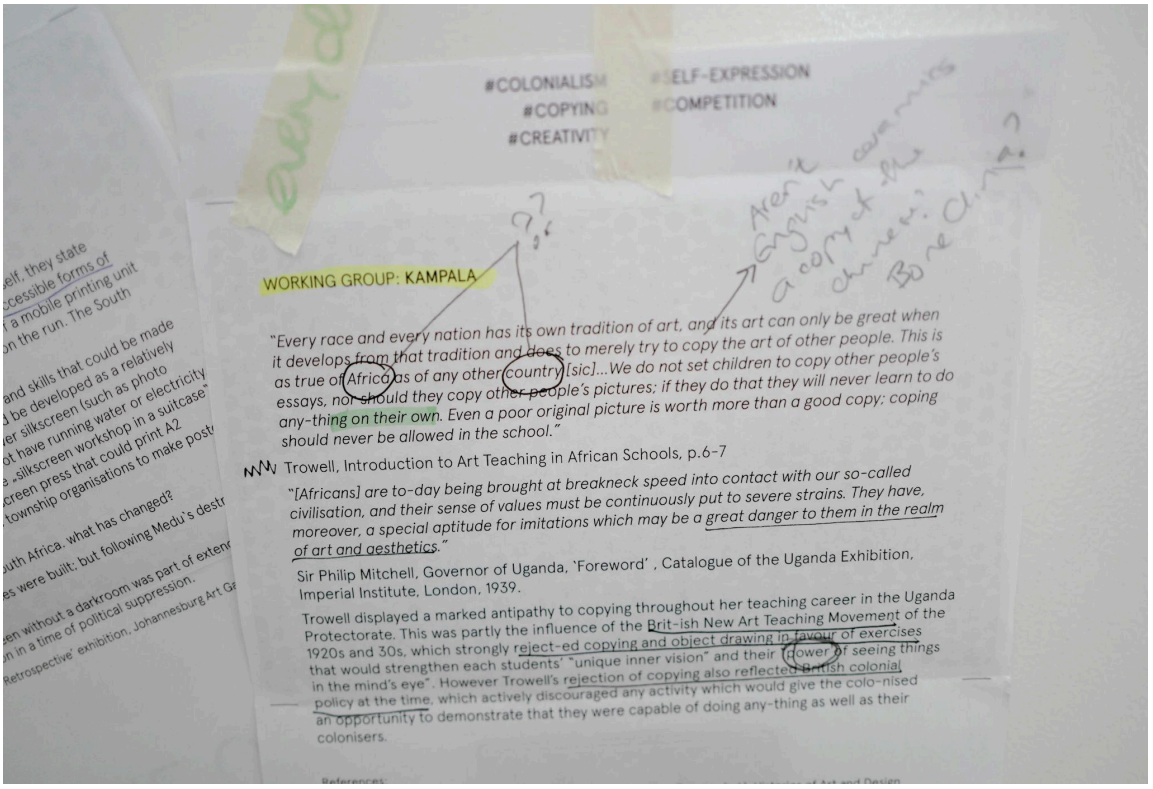



**Figure 5**. One of the Kampala working Group Un/chrono/Logical Timeline game cards with notes from one of the participants after the game's activation in Zurich, 2018. Image courtesy of ARS.

During the game, participants are asked to select a card from a stack, read it to the group, and then attend to the questions asked by either responding with their answers or directing the questions to the group. I have activated my adapted version of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline in various contexts to prompt discussions on politics, identity, coloniality, and heritage narratives.

## My interpretation of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline

My adaptation of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline foregrounds storytelling anchored on associations prompted by the questions listed on the cards. It is my way of offering or stimulating more context by connecting the story on a card to the present moment and current events. Doing this makes participants relax and speak more freely because they feel included in the history. This approach with the

Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is grounded in Sesotho folklore, or *Ba re e ne re,* and it follows the protocol below:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Call** | | Ba re e ne e re | *They say it was said* |
| **Response** | - | Qoi | *Go on* |
| **Storyline** | - | E le… | *There once was…* |
| **Ending** | - | Ke tšomo ka mathetho! | *That is all there is to the story.* |
| **Discussion and banter** | - | Moqoqo | *People discuss questions, lessons and favourite moments from the story.* |

In 2018, I developed a workshop, which I termed *Skima Sesotho* (befriend Sesotho), that was introduced as part of an ongoing communal critical fabulation project to produce words in the Sesotho language that articulate contemporary experiences as an attempt to imagine more equitable futures (Hartman, 2008) from the perspective of peers. The project bore the the name *Ba re dictionary*[6]. The project started in 2015 as one of the Ba re e ne re[7] programmes. I observed through the Skima Sesotho series that workshops complement the concept of co-creating within artistic research because they galvanise a full spectrum of emotions. The resulting tensions, joys, laughter, music playlists, playful interactions, humour, and complaining ripen the learning experience and reveal hidden narrative gems.

The Ba re dictionary, like the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, speaks to the complexity of Basotho life concerning the Sesotho language and coloniality. It was created through multimodality (the use of multiple modes of communication to convey meaning, such as combining text, images, sounds, and gestures), to trigger

[6] The BA RE Sesotho Dictionary was a weekly series that ran in 2015 to showcase the innovation and growth of the Sesotho language. In 2018, the project was expanded by hosting a series of workshops where participants played Sesotho word games, generated their own words and created artistic dictionary pages for the newly generated words. The project also involved an open call in 2017 where the public made contributions via email and social media. It also included a series of workshops where we brainstormed existing words or feelings we wanted to express in Sesotho, creating and mindmapping together through visual and sonic aids, and then arriving at the final new word by consensus. In 2021 some of the words were illustrated and compiled into a book along with the entirety of the words collected between 2015 and 2020.

[7] Ba re e ne re was the Brainchild of Liepollo Rantekoa in 2011. After her untimely death in 2012, Zachary Rosen and myself collaborated to host a series of 4 Literature Festivals in her honour between 2014-2018 while we were compelled to create more activities to meet public demand until we closed the project. Since then Ba re e ne re kept active through publications on its website, and the last public event was at the *How to make a country* book launch on 11 March (Moshoeshoe's Day), 2023. The book was compiled as part of an exhibition under the same name curated by Lerato Bereng at FRAC Poitou-Charentes, Angoulême, France, 19 June 2021 to 18 December 2021.

multisensory experiences in an act of disrupting the Western hegemony upon which 19th-century European missionaries coded Sesotho grammar. The reason being that the Sesotho language was coded according to an "alien" epistemic lens and canon which subsequently circumscribed the language to logics that do not cohere to its own animating logics. We deepened the process of creating new words by including critical questions to prompt collective reflection on our journeys with the language as entwined with identity and historical narratives. This act of writing about what stories could have contained by recreating lost or silenced stories, or critical fabulation (Hartman, 2008), is a way to open up history to fictionality as a pathway to unpack it (Höjer, 2020).

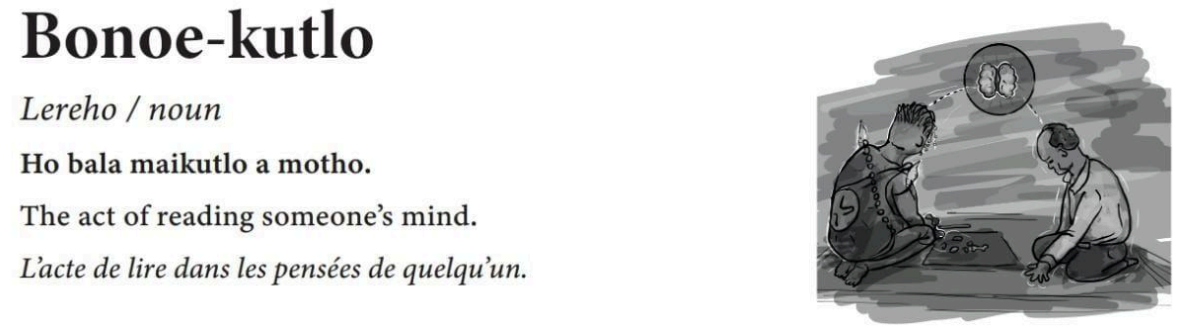



**Figure 6.** An illustration of the Ba re Dictionary word for telepathy included in the publication; How to Make a County, edited by Lerato Bereng. The word was created through Skima Sesotho workshops in 2018. Image courtesy of the Researcher.

The connections between my approaches with the Ba re dictionary and the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline merged into the conception of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop, also known as *Contending with Friends*[8]. The workshop leaned on the idea of a transcultural gifting that complicates the direction ideas flow in and influence follows, as well as who has agency to develop modes of doing things in the imperial encounter. For this iteration, which I cover in depth in chapter four, I requested participants to bring personal items to the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline

[8] The title alludes to the quality of dealing with complexity with friends. It speaks to having difficult conversations and disagreement from a place of love and appreciation.

activation. The goal was to add more dimension to the process and broaden the scope of imagination and relatability. Personal items represented an archive of the participants' different lived experiences, intelligences and emotionalities. They were material supplements to the individual stories shared by participants.

# Context of research

## The ubiquity of decolonial discourse related to curatorial practice in Africa and Europe.

The UNESCO Roadmap for Arts Education states that Arts Education is structured through three complementary pedagogical streams. The stream most concerned with this research refers to direct contact between audiences and artistic works through concerts, exhibitions, books, films, etc. The three streams are further broken into three dimensions that speak directly to curatorial practice. However, I will isolate the two most relevant to this research: Firstly, to gain knowledge through interacting with an artistic object, performance, or the artist. Secondly, it is to gain knowledge about the relationship of the arts to history alongside researching and studying the arts (UNESCO, 2006). The critical underpinnings of ARS compelled me to pay attention to how the two dimensions are executed in Lesotho, and Africa more broadly, in contrast to the global North.

For this research, I activated the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline in a novel context by workshopping a tailor-designed version to nine staff members at the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, Netherlands[9]. The workshop *Contending with Friends* was part of the museum's research phase ahead of the "*That time when we were not*

[9] ARAC was invited to participate in the research phase conducted by the Van Abbe Museum staff towards the conceptualising of a major exhibition of work from their collection. The exhibition is scheduled to open in 2026. Three other artists/cultural organisations also informed this research phase towards the exhibition. The Van Abbe Museum was interested in using the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a tool to kick off the process of collectively imagining an alternative way to organise the collection display, centering relationality and storytelling. For the Van Abbe, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline was a strategy to catch up their organisational structures and ways of classifying history to better reflect the world people (want to) live in. The process involved several meetings over the course of 5 months, to introduce the concept and people to each other, agree on the workshop format, as well as finalise a rubric once the workshop was completed.

*there*" exhibition in 2026[10]. The sample size was indeed small. Nonetheless, the different roles occupied by the museum participants helped to illustrate that with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, anyone within a cultural space has the power and capacity to play some aspect of the curatorial function.

The irony of experimenting with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a curatorial tool in a European museum instead of an African museum is not lost to me. It underscores my problem statement. One of my motivations for this research was recognising that the prevalence of decolonial discourses related to curatorial practice in Africa and Europe constantly risks co-option because the West reacts faster and more aggressively. Instead of subverting coloniality, they may inadvertently veil its violences under narratives, policies and hierarchies masked under aesthetically pleasing visualisations or differences in financial endowment. This research presents evidence of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as an essential tool and practice for decolonial practitioners, substantiated by the success that it has had among ARAC members and in global North institutions[11].

To offer a form of counter balance, I have included a hypothetical interaction through archival sources at the Morija Museum and Archives (MMA), in Chapter three. The purpose was to connect history to the present and the self, and to highlight the value of dialogue in decolonial work. The interaction animates how epistemic disobedience could be evoked through productive discomfort and conversation among people of varying backgrounds brought together within a mutual artistic context marred by coloniality.

Thirdly, I reference my time as a Fellow in the German-funded Museumslab

[10] The group consisted of 9 individuals holding roles connected to the exhibition: 1 Senior curator exhibitions, 1 Head of Collections, 1 Curator in training, 1 Education mediators, 1 Assistant curator, 1 Marketing, communication & press, 1 Constituent Organiser, and 1 Senior Coordinator Public Mediation & Education, as well as 1 Fundraising. Prof. David Andrew was also present and played the dual role of supervisor and representative of the ARAC JWG in the spirit of staying true to the collaborative premise of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline.

[11] In all of my iterations of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, every context was related to radical pedagogical methods for arts education and formed part of rigorous academic training. Reports on the impact of the interactions have been positive with more people downloading the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline cards online, requesting workshops and activations, writing about the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline and speaking about it among themselves.

(Hereafter, MLab) programme in 2024[12] to add more dimension to the ways coloniality prevails within cultural frameworks that purport to be doing/engaging in decolonial work. MLab[13] is a casserole of policy, knowledge production, historic cultural institutions, and optics. It is supplemented by a compelling narrative, aesthetically appealing milestones, and political power. MLab is a case study to unpack how the historically intertwined continents perpetuate outdated colonial tendencies and how a resource such as the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline may be used to address biases and injustices, or set the scene for difficult conversations that lead to transformation.

To illustrate this I cite some programmatic activities that took place on-site in Berlin, Accra, and during the weeklong residency at a partner museum in France, that raised concerns. In Berlin, fellows took a tour of the site where a massive bust of Hitler was on display (Hernández-Morales, 2023) along with other controversial monuments, clearly to align with Germany's mandate to confront its dark past. Without trigger warnings or psychosocial support afterwards, to help process the experience, Fellows were encouraged to wander around before engaging in group exercises to conceive creative responses on how to generate conversation around the collection.



**Figure 7**. Bust of Hitler's head at the Spandau Citadel Museum of retired Monuments in Berlin. Image courtesy of the researcher.

[12] The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) describes TheMuseumsLab as "a platform for joint learning, perspective exchange, networking and career building among African and European professionals. Bringing them together to build bridges between individuals, institutions, nations and two continents for an engaged discussion on how museums can confront their past, meet the present needs of society and work towards an equitable future" (DAAD, 2024).

[13] I am 1 of 50 Fellows in the 2024 cohort.

As an intervention, Fellows were then conscientised on what to expect ahead of a tour to the slave forts in Ghana two months later. Trauma counsellors were also on call at the site in case people needed support. However, people were hustled along to keep time instead of being afforded the same liberty to wander around that they had had in Berlin. The pressure to stay on schedule stunted the experience. When the moment came for dialogue about the experience, it became clear that concrete answers depended on people who were not in the room. The staff present were simply operating within the limits of their job.

Furthermore, the prevailing discourses in the context of MLab give the impression that change is imminent. In practice, however, the institution privileges the funders' terms, seemingly elite audiences and the status quo. Regardless, there are institutions within the same sphere of influence which break the mould through short-term or symbolic interventions in the face of intense resistance. For example, in 2023, the Exhibition *O Quilombismo* was shown at HKW (Haus der Kulturen der Welt/House of the Cultures of the World)[14] in Berlin, under the institution's new director, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung from Cameroon.

The exhibition was pluriversal, meaning that it supported appreciation of multiple ways of knowing and being in the world (Paulson, 2018, p.87). Furthermore, it was an intergenerational proposition established outside the pedigree of colonial modernity. The proposition was enacted through genealogies of resistance movements and artistic strategies of self-presentation and liberation. Its goal was to constitute new cultural forms, shift aesthetic paradigms of recreation and restitution, and enact queering as emancipation (HKW, 2023). In Ndikung's words, at HKW (Haus der Kulturen der Welt/House of the Cultures of the World), they "practice not only the diversity of peoples, but of epistemologies" (Salfiti, 2023, p.7).

[14] The HKW as a central German government-sponsored art institution, framed a political statement through art by presenting works by three Palestinian artists in the exhibition "Forgive us our trespasses" (14 September to 8 December 2024). The decision was a bold demonstration of institutional critique and decolonial theory during a time when discussions about Palestine were silenced or punished through de-platforming, job termination and budget cuts.

Instead of taking consistent palpable actions, initiatives like MLab which come from Europe and are themed around decolonising, have many flaws. As a sample, senior staff at the well-funded Confluences Museum in Lyon, France, responded that national laws restricted them when my colleagues and I asked about restituting their African assets. The response demonstrated that people who hold positions of power would sooner declare their limits to driving transformative policies than take on the status quo. In parallel, most African art institutions are publicly funded, with subventions rarely meeting their needs. Nevertheless, in both contexts, institutions tend to conform to national narratives and standards set by international policy bodies such as ICOM and UNESCO (Hans, 2018).

On the other hand, privately funded institutions enjoy greater subject matter and methodological freedom. Nevertheless, they do experience friction with gatekeepers whereby they constantly have to contort themselves to receive accreditation, endorsement by the State, or simply to survive, (Hans, 2018). The decolonisation trend fuels the framing of culture and heritage as economic instruments for achieving economic goals and boosting people's quality of life by development agencies. Logically, UNESCO is also referenced in this dissertation for the role it plays in determining policy for cultural institutions and countries worldwide, as one such agency. Unsurprisingly, the development narrative pervades national cultural policies, NGO missions and donor organisations' funding requirements, thus nurturing corrosive power relations (Manton, 2023).

As it is, The Art Newspaper reported that as of 2025, there was a major shift in the number of shows and investment museums compared to 2020 when the COVID-19 Pandemic hit. Many museums cite budget deficits and volatile audience interest as living costs become more precarious. Museums in the United States, such as the Brooklyn Museum and the Solomon R. Guggenheim, are laying off staff and reducing shows and running times to mitigate rising costs and falling footfall (Shaw, 2025). The article further added that some museums were exploring strategies to make their programmes more dynamic while increasing their free offerings and pacing exhibitions differently to garner better and recurring engagement.

Lastly, and related to the materiality and educative quality of an art institution such as a museum, Africa demands to be perceived, narrated and represented in a fluid space open to the future (Manton, 2023). This exerts pressure upon museums to employ different epistemological perspectives to inform their responses. Gibson (2019) offers an example of shifting perspectives at the Iziko Museum, where the cataloguing of assets was limited to the number, name of the object, and the tribe it came from. The shift encompassed adding the names of the makers of assets in catalogue cards, as well as the assets' local names.

The Iziko Museum example demonstrates that an epistemic shift that favours decolonising demands a narration of history that encompasses deciphering messages carried in assets across time. After all, every culture defines what assets mean to them and what the best ethics of care and representation might be (Tangwa et al., 2024). Cultural assets adopt meanings far beyond the intention of their origins (Vivan, 2014). Therefore, as meaning evolves, so should the narrative.

The policy, engagement and sustainability gaps highlighted in this research project validate the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline's capability for co-creation and pluralising voices (Ose, 2023) in museums. This assessment finds grounding in the fact that museums and cultural institutions consist of human beings despite their dubious bureaucratic structures. Therefore, they are not entirely unpliable. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is a temporal object containing written testimonies of people's memories and experiences. It hones into the fact that invisible human phenomena such as stereotypes, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are influenced and shaped by stories:

> Exposure to narratives can affect the message recipients' beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours such that they move into closer alignment with viewpoints espoused in those narratives. (Braddock & Dillard, 2016, p. 18)

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline therefore enters as a radical object in both its purpose and what it symbolises, which may be used as a tool for setting decolonial curatorial conditions.

# Research Methodology

For this research, I have used combinations of four research methods embedded in my artistic practice. My logic for this approach is best articulated in the following words:

> Artistic research can make space for non-linear, material and sensory logics that emphasise emergent, subjective and intersubjective knowledge". Such knowledge arises through practical knowing wherein no consistent rule guides decision-making. Rather, a guiding logic is informed by specific aesthetic and kinaesthetic concepts that emerge in the logics of relationship, place, and space. (Longley & Castro, 2002, p. 85)

Firstly, this research project endeavours to connect archival research to practical reflection by experimenting with artistic narrative to examine an aspect of history. The archive I have referenced is located at the Morija Museum and Archives[15], which I then contrast to and link with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop at the Van Abbe Museum. Both Activations individually and together denote the value of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a decolonial tool for generating questions and presenting opportunities for alternative narratives.

To begin with, archives, by their ever-changing nature, are limited and complex. Some researchers inclined to decolonisation aim to experiment with the archive's ambiguities so that multiple readings can challenge how their function was previously understood. To understand the archive it must be engaged in its granularity (Ntombela, 2013) to problematise the notion that it is universal. In chapter three, the textual material extracted from the archive was used first to produce a critical fabulation that connotes the weight of language and epistemic disobedience. Secondly, the critical fabulation as a process, was referenced for setting the

[15] The museum is the oldest museum in Lesotho (opened in 1956), and is home to many cultural assets including traditional Basotho artifacts, war memorabilia, natural history objects, and dinosaur fossils. The archives of the museum include documents and publications rich in 19th century Lesotho history.

experimentation of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop in motion on a conceptual level in chapter four.

According to Rheinberger (as cited in Schwab, 2014), experiments require a coherent and finely calibrated context to produce results. In the case of this research: the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop. A successful experimental system becomes increasingly independent of the researcher's wishes, thus revealing its epistemic thing. The term 'epistemic thing' indicates the unknown as it arrives in a knowledge domain (Schwab, 2014). In the case of this research, a convergence between theory and practice is located at opposite ends both geographically and by subject, yet kneaded together by colonial history and encapsulated in the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline Toolkit.

The archival work is in and about Lesotho (with global implications), at a heritage and cultural museum. Alternatively, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop takes place at a contemporary art museum in Europe, none of which exist in Lesotho yet. An experiment that conjoins experiences of both places involves a conscious awareness of time, story and culture to spark connections, wonder and questions. This conjoinment is expressed in the creative component of this research; the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline Toolkit.

Owing to its dialogical quality, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline method is concurrently a workshop model for critically piecing together narratives and confronting conceptions of knowledge about time (Fadel, 2023). The workshop is described by Ahmed & Asraf (2018) as a means of establishing the credibility of results produced by a qualitative study through a prolonged engagement. *Contending with Friends* fits this description as it was an exercise of inhabiting arts histories and considering history as a resource in real-time. The workshop's experimentation with form, fragmentation, and structural uncertainty effected this inhibiting of histories by inviting the group to imagine themselves through the eyes and experiences of VAM's audience as they planned for 2026.

Additionally, I apply the questionnaire[16] method to include the supplementary voices of the staff at the Van Abbe Museum in the experiment. At the end of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop, *Contending with Friends*, I requested participants to respond to open-ended questions. The aim was to unpack the meaning of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline for them and to situate it more intimately (Qu & Dumay, 2011) as the 'epistemic thing'. The questionnaire was a written form of enacting Ba re e ne re, where the questions constituted the post activation discussion, '*moqoqo'*. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline focuses on specific nuances to categorise and create a web of interrelationships that allow questions to be open-ended.

Chapter three leverages on open-endedness to further interrogate the discrepancies of Sesotho orthography despite its foreclosure through standardisation, while unravelling demonstrations of agency through epistemic disobedience. The impossibility of holding a hypothetical conversation with a dead person, about a problematic something that is essentially set in stone, is a metaphor for navigating inflexible colonial structures while staying true to epistemic disobedience. Chapter four then demonstrates how engaging Van Abbe Museum's internal stakeholders with that attitude and mentality during *Contending with Friends* allowed me to create conditions for participants to call onto one another and then respond through collaboration, connecting, being playful, and speaking freely, within the constraints of their institutional responsibilities.

*Contending with Friends* is subjective: Participants must have a common agenda, and the context must highlight a decolonial attitude and epistemic disobedience. I apply the Standpoint methodology to account for limitations in my approach, to acknowledge rather than negate my subjectivity and bias (Draper, 2008). This is born of my awareness that the research at hand is influenced by previous experiences (Farber and Mäkelä, 2010), consciously and otherwise. In addition, the narrative

[16] I used questionnaires to launch the first research phase of the Maseru Working Group, in the ARS. As the Ba re dictionary project picked up through the Skima Sesotho workshops, I used the questionnaire to get a picture of people's perception on and relationship with Sesotho literature and language.

style of this dissertation aims to illustrate the generativity and connections that unchronologicality allows, to complement the hypothesis.

# Research output

This Master's project consists of a dissertation and a practical component in the form of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop activation at the Van Abbe Museum: *Contending with Friends*. I demonstrate the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline's strengths and potential in conversation with the voices of the participants and concentrate on the chief outcomes of the engagement. The video presentation of the workshop operates in the framework of a Toolkit for practitioners interested in applying the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline to catalyse their decolonial curatorial processes. It is composed of images of scenes from VAM; the audiences, collections in the current De*linking / Relinking* exhibition (2022-2026), the warehouse and moments from the workshop.

The images include slow motion video to symbolise a slow deliberate pace when interacting with artworks. Finally, the narrative component consists of an introduction to the Toolkit accompanied by soundbites from the workshop to instantiate the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline process of arriving at clear actionable steps within the curatorial setting. The video constitutes the technical object of this research project. Schwab (2014) describes a technical object as a scientific instrument that embodies the knowledge of a given research field at a given time and binds the assessment of the epistemic thing.

## Dissertation chapter outline

This dissertation is structured into four chapters, excluding the practical component.

### The introduction

This chapter is a detailed account of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, its history, and its linkages to my practice and role in its development. It outlines the

Un/chrono/Logical Timeline's premise and curatorial positioning, the research context, the research methodology, and the research output.

## Chapter one

This section provides a background to the research project, its aim, context, limitations, ethics, rationale, and affiliation to divergent curatorial practices. It outlines the connections between my independent artistic research and curatorial practice in Lesotho, my activities within the ARS, and critically studying coloniality and power read through UNESCO and MLab. Lastly, it links my interactions with the MMA and VAM museums as wildly different museums inevitably connected by history and contemporary practices. This chapter intends to establish the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a methodological tool for both theory and practice in curatorial practice.

## Chapter two

This chapter outlines the literature review to establish the research's theoretical framing. It references curatorial practitioners and academics using temporality, multimodality, and alternative pedagogies to disrupt canonised perspectives and present alternate tactics of narrativity and repair.

## Chapter three

The third chapter delves into the power dynamics that underlie coloniality, how they accumulate to points of tension, and the subsequent outcomes of those encounters. It explores how epistemic disobedience is enacted in the face of stringent policies and power structures through critical fabulation in an encounter with the historiography of Sesotho orthography resting against the backdrop of biography. The subject permits insight into the collective psyche, silenced ideologies, and inevitable political consequences instigated by coloniality in the late 19th century. In other words, the enactment is a textual embodiment of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline to generate questions and strategies for a clear decolonial course of action through plural perspectives, while digesting new knowledge in the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop..

This chapter aims to activate the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline by incorporating references to my personal (hi)story alongside select archival source materials. It simultaneously challenges universalising narrativity and indubitably provokes reparative intervention. The critical fabulation is thus a conversation between the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline and archives structured to arrive at appropriate questions for the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop covered in chapter four.

## Chapter four

The fourth chapter deals with decolonial practices in cultural institutions according to the people working in their various roles at VAM. It elaborates on the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop activation, *Contending with Friends,* and the feedback and lessons learned during that encounter. The interpretation and analysis of the questionnaire conducted with the Van Abbe Museum team conclude with a list of hypothetical questions and considerations to be made.

## Conclusion

This research project does not necessarily have a conclusion, given that the work is ongoing. Nevertheless, this section accounts for the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline's agency and potential next steps for the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a research apparatus.

## The practical component

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline Toolbox visually and sonically demonstrates *Contending with Friends* by capturing how the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline operates in a contemporary cultural space through a visual tour of the current exhibition; De*linking / Relinking* and moments from the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop and previous Un/chrono/Logical Timeline iterations. It visualises how the theoretical underpinnings of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline may aggregate into decolonised exhibition narratives in the storytelling, artwork selections and spatial design. Importantly, it alludes to new public engagement strategies to broaden the spectrum of audiences.

# CHAPTER 1
# The Genealogies of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline

## Introduction

I met the late Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, the initiator of the Africa Cluster of the Another Roadmap School (ARAC), at the first NEPAD Regional Conference on Arts Education in Africa in Johannesburg[17] in 2015. Wolukau-Wanambwa was invited as a keynote speaker alongside Prof. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, another one of the founding members of Another Roadmap School (ARS)[18]. ARAC was formalised in July of the same year. The cluster focuses on research critically informed and grounded in historical analysis, particularly concerning Africa's colonial heritage and arts education. It aims to build a shared knowledge base and structured mutual learning that will benefit African practitioners and contribute to advances in thinking and practice on the continent and globally.

Since its inception, ARAC's model was for working groups to meet in person as often as possible[19]. The meetings were made possible through funding secured from Pro Helvetia and Arts Research Africa to supplement the Mercator Foundation and Allianz Foundation grants that ARS was operating on (2015-2018). During meetings, working groups would catch up on each other's research, conceive methodologies together, share and provide feedback on methods developed by the individual groups, and host public programmes. And it is through this process that

[17] I was there in my capacity as Co-director of Ba re e ne re Literary Arts. The organisation, a non-profit, was set up as a passion project that would be a resource to Lesotho's education sector and literature enthusiasts at large. We set off with the intention to promote a love for reading and creative writing, but as we grew in our engagement with audiences, schools and peers from the continent and elsewhere, our objectives deepened to critical literacy and creativity as cultural production.

[18] Following my presentation, Emma invited me for further conversation with her, Rubén and Rangoato Hlasane of what became the Johannesburg Working Group, based on the mutual connections they had identified between our respective projects and the mission of ARS.

[19] From 2015 to 2020, the cluster met collectively on 8 separate occasions.

the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline came about.




**Figure 8**. Group picture of ARAC members at the inaugural ARAC meeting with Zimbabwean academic and scholar, George Shire, who attended as a critical friend. L-R: Lineo Segoete, Andrea Thal, Patrick Mudekereza, Christian Nyampeta, Rangoato Hlasane, Rana Elnmr, George Shire and Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa. Image courtesy of Jesse Mukwaya. 2015.

The Maseru Working Group gravitated towards arts education curriculum and pedagogy[20]. My research interest within Another Roadmap School was to interrogate the effects of colonialism on Lesotho as a post-independence state. I am particularly interested in how coloniality shapes public perceptions and perspectives on arts education with a focus on language. I became drawn towards historical records concerning the development of Sesotho orthography housed at MMA[21].

A distinction is drawn between what is considered proper or poor Sesotho[22] (Segoete, 2022). At the oral level people are judged on their cadence and when it comes to written Sesotho, many people have a tendency to make disjointed words

[20] The curatorial programming of Ba re e ne re included spelling bees, a short story anthology (Likheleke tsa Puo), writing competitions, workshops, and modifying our flagship project; the Ba re e ne re Literature Festival. We deliberately classified the event as a Literature festival because our focus extended beyond books and writing. It was our position that literature, and by extension, texts, exist in many other forms including personal knowledge, cultural practices such as music, fine art and oral storytelling. As such, between 2014 and 2023 when the Ba re Dictionary was also published into a book, we incorporated the varied practices to create space for imaginative thinking and innovative approaches for creative expression and engagement in the public sphere through language.

[21] MMA is the oldest archival institution in the country. It is an institution of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS) inherited from the colonial period. The PEMS also oversaw the standardisation of the Sesotho Language after having reduced it to written form since the 1830s after they arrived in Lesotho.

[22] Furthermore, I learned through interviews and surveys with a set of student and teacher focus groups that many people perceive Sesotho to be policed under rules enforced by the school system.

into whole words, for example, they write /*e le* / *(which is* or *it is)* as */ ele /.*

I traced the reasons for this distinction back to Missionary education in my study of the historical records. Mutebi argued in his Master's dissertation in Education Policy studies that:

> Western education, taught by the Missionaries using Christian philosophy, was a valuable instrument used by the colonialists to push their agendas. Since education and religion were intertwined in missionary education, they used schools to teach about God, claiming that Africans had little or no knowledge of God. (Mutebi, 2019, p. 28)

A more comprehensive breakdown of the development of Sesotho orthography from 1841[23] until 1906, when it was standardised, falls beyond the scope of this research. Regardless, language development also denigrated local knowledge systems and cultural practices according to what the missionaries considered relevant. It shows the psychological power of narratives upon the public. The reality, however, is that to this day, Basotho articulate and celebrate their humanness through language, craft, and movement. Basotho create music, poetry, visual creations, oral performances and dance, among the many activities woven into their everyday lives (Mohale, 2016).

Respected Mosotho thespian and theatre educator, Liatile Mohale, continues that by following the imposed religion, the people of Lesotho effectively took on the colonisers' perception of them and their culture (Mohale, 2016). This quality is not exclusive to Lesotho, it is shared by many African and global South countries. Furthermore, missionary education did not holistically empower Basotho to be self-reliant, which led to them neglecting other development areas such as dedicated artistic production and the infrastructure to develop it (Mutebi, 2019). As a result, the artistic production in Lesotho has relied mostly on apprenticeships and self-teaching by the majority who cannot afford the cost of studying the arts outside

[23] The first grammar book titled Etudes sur la Langue Sechuana, was published by one of the first three missionaries to arrive and work in Lesotho, Eugene Casalis, in 1841, 8 years after he first arrived in Lesotho.

the country.

The work of the Maseru Working Group responded to the epistemic, infrastructural, and pedagogical gaps left behind by colonialism by drawing from the lived experiences of the public in the curatorial programming of *Ba re e ne re* projects from 2015-2023. My view was that the key to decolonising and unlocking arts education in Lesotho lay in how everyday people interpret their realities, navigate their everyday lives, and process learning and knowledge. I was interested in the way storytelling could engage history and the present in cultural production.

# Aim

The purpose of this research project was to demonstrate the qualitative value of the Unchronological Timeline Method in curatorial practice. The methodology is an interactive process for engaging personal stories, artistic practice, and rereading the term “history” in ways favouring plurality, intergenerational dialogue and unlocking practical decolonial possibilities. It is rooted in dissecting institutionalised narrative models and defying the Eurocentric tendency to arrange history chronologically. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline stimulates a multidimensional experience in its multimodal design, which makes room for different expressions of critical fabulation. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is applied to urge critical questions and interventions for unpacking time, knowledge, and materiality as gestures of epistemic freedom.

## Curatorial practice

This research project considers the curator’s role in educating about and through art. Traditionally, the curator's role is to preserve and display artworks, alongside their organisational and administrative duties within cultural institutions. Curators further assume the role of a mediator who situates artworks within space (Morgan, 2013). They educate viewers on the curated histories represented by and through artworks and how to see and behave inside the museum space (Mabaso, 2018). International

Curator, Maria Lind, described curatorial practice as a viral presence that strives to create friction and push new ideas from agents within the arts. She continues that curatorial practice is:

> A stirring of smooth surfaces, a specific, multilayered way of agitating environments both inside and outside the white cube. The curatorial involves not just representing, but presenting and testing; it performs something here and now instead of merely mapping something from there and then. It is serious about addressing the query; what do we want to add to the world and why? (Lind, 2009, p. 103)

## The Curatorial question

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline invites participants and practitioners to pay close attention to the subtle ways in which coloniality continues to dominate ways of thinking and doing within cultural and knowledge institutions like museums. It asks participants to introspect collectively on how to complicate the entanglements of precolonial, colonial, postcolonial, and decolonial moments to arrive at new possibilities of repair. On a global level, the socio-politico-economic realities that manifest in policy, financial power, and knowledge economies, make the invitation all the more urgent.

Therefore, rather than succumbing to resentments and negative criticism, people can collectivise intelligences and intertwined histories into an eclectic model for repair. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is one such model in that it is a tool for confronting hierarchies and power dynamics by acknowledging the invisible violences projected by mutual histories between the global North and South. Put another way, though the severity and experience of the harm is necessarily understood as disproportionate, colonialism was detrimental to both the colonised in the global South as well as those who inherited its imperial legacy in the global North. Regardless, the ongoing psychological, economic and cultural harm continues to benefit the North at the

expense of the South. Therefore, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline may be activated to design mutually desired futures on mutual terms within the museum space.

This research project shows how subtle epistemic violences perpetuate through policy, restricted knowledge economies and historical narratives, thereby delaying processes towards significant repair. I propose the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline method to tackle Walter Mignolo's metaphorical colonial wound. Mignolo's definition stipulates that there is a psychic dimension to the damage inflicted by colonialism. This dimension demands responses geared towards reparation and justice, which address the intangible ways in which traces of colonial violence are reflected in the present (Pillay, 2020).

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline method in its layered juxtapositions, its spilling over and into, its unruliness, and its refusal to adhere to linearity (Andrew, 2022), invites an expanded vision of symbolic creativity (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2014). With the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, vision is charged by a decolonial attitude that enables certain critical questions and the search for answers to be generated (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop shows how the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline may set curatorial conditions in a museum in its insistence on flexibility. It set circumstances for calibration as we engaged the extended premises of relational, collective, and still-to-be-imagined practices (Andrew, 2022). Put simply, when one dances or sways to the rhythm, rather than fixating on sequence, the focus is on flow, intuitive movement and surrender to arriving at the unknown through experimentation. This is the way of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline.

# Limitations of the study

The value of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is subjective because it is known essentially by people intimately connected to it. Any record of other users' experiences with it is fragmented and primarily unknown because quantitative mechanisms to evaluate its impact outside the contexts of ARS or ARAC do not yet

exist. This means that while leaving it as an open-ended invitation may be intentional, it does make it vulnerable. It could leave new users and participants stranded or sceptical about reaching the expected outcome, even if the context is clearly defined.

Furthermore, if every perspective is valid, I wondered to myself:
Does the democratic nature of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline dilute or alienate the weight of more abstract perspectives? What if it were co-opted for nefarious reasons to suppress its radicality? How could conflict be resolved when there is disharmony? The method could be used against itself when viewed strictly through conservative eyes and in the absence of any of the co-creators to signpost it.

It is still unknown how the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a curatorial strategy would fare for an African museum such as the MMA, which is faced with limited resources and dubious policy structures. Conversely, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline functions differently where the audience's access to arts education is thriving. This means that a definitive measure of success is ambiguous and constantly shifting.

I am keen to explore what else the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline does when it does not concern itself with defying narrative hegemony and the chronological arrangement of history in a dynamic world where history is impermanent. I would like to fortify the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline so that it does not reproduce notions of victimhood and the narrative of impoverishment associated with Africa, the so-called pity porn, especially with its lack of traction on the continent outside Southern Africa. I hope to think with others how the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline can better enable those whose histories are directly implicated to articulate their priorities and make change happen (Lynch, 2019).

Finally, activations of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline have been durational for any group of participants. This means that outside informal interactions, there are no standard follow-up mechanisms to document progress after the fact. Such a study is teased a bit through the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline questionnaire. However, a more elaborate follow-up extends beyond the scope and conditions of this research.

The effects of narratives accumulate with repetition, cumulatively leading to substantial change (Braddock & Dillard, 2016). Repetition also speaks to the cyclical nature of time. Similar, recurring events imbue evidence of this.

Although events may vary at the level of individual being (Zachhuber, 2022), the daily and annual cycles of the sun, life cycles, and the changing seasons, exist independently of human perception and measurement. Notwithstanding, these cycles provide lessons for preparation and altering circumstances. The task now at hand is to explore the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a serial exercise, versus iterative. Doing so will facilitate broader opportunities to unpack its potential and resolve its blind spots. A comparative analysis could then be done between a serial and periodical activation to establish how it may need to be adjusted to respond to different sets of circumstances.

# Ethical considerations

I am exploring a dimension of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline that has never been engaged before, particularly by members of the Another Roadmap or the originators of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline; the Johannesburg working group. In this iteration, I am activating the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline within the context of curatorial practice in contrast with strictly arts education[24] settings such as universities or schools where it was situated in previous iterations.

Dealing with the ethics of collaborative work means that obligations rest on team negotiation of their respective professional roles, commitments, and attendant responsibilities. Consideration must always be made for institutional policies and procedures as well as standards of practice (Ewashen, McInnis-Perry & Murphy, 2013). Therefore, informing the Johannesburg working group about this research and engaging Professor Andrew to join me for the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop kept me accountable and deepened my application of the method in a

[24] When the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline was activated at documenta fifteen, The New School, and Javett-UP, it was in the context of alternative curriculum and pedagogical practice.

unique setting. I invited Prof. Andrew to join as both my co-supervisor and as a member of the ARAC Johannesburg working group[25]. Throughout the project, Dr. Lelliott served as a neutral part of the process thus ensuring that potential biases between Professor Andrew and myself were challenged. Besides the trip to Van Abbe where she was absent, she gave significant outsider guidance by countering, questioning or highlighting gaps and 'incomplete' arguments. Another way of maintaining distance was that Professor Andrew insisted that I focus on my logic, interpretation and understanding of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline method as I was designing, facilitating and analysing the *Contending with Friends* workshop.

# Rationale: the logic behind the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is a continuously unfolding methodological approach. This project seeks to prove its capacity as a synergistic presence for repair and processing discomfort that is embodied in the questions generated through it, intertwined histories, and the tensions and contradictions to be dealt with. The method's unruliness and refusal to stick to conventions as a performative and durational process make it so that it garners curiosities and participation in positively surprising ways, as seen through *Contending with Friends*.

The original Un/chrono/Logical Timeline object was danced on, and taken to the streets, classrooms, universities, and galleries. It was added onto until the ink faded and pages started tearing. It has tape on it, marker stains, drink stains, countless invisible footprints and other remnants of its travels and those who interacted with it along the way (Andrew, 2022). The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a decolonial tool operates from and beyond the margins of modernity. It pays attention to the origins of concepts and recognises the locations implicated, their commonalities, and

[25] The rule within ARAC is to have the collective represented by a minimum of two people at any public engagement.

tensions (Mignolo & Vázquez, 2013). It does the work of enunciating personal stories as relevant history not isolated from global events.

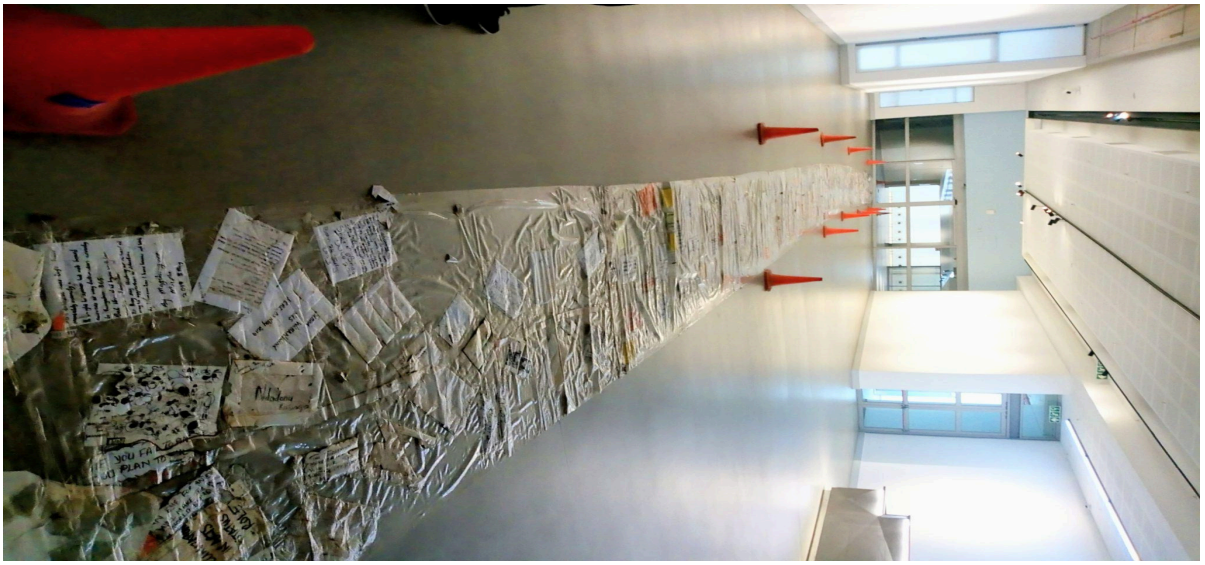


**Figure 9.** The original Un/chrono/Logical Timeline laid out at the Javett-UP Art Centre in Pretoria after it was restored and before it was cut up into sections for hanging in the first floor gallery in 2023. Image courtesy of Puleng Plessie.

This research project further illustrates the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline's aptitude for unpacking histories to arrive at critical questions. I worked backwards using the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline to read through archival missionary literature in Lesotho, and then use that approach to arrive at answers for the VAM in the Netherlands.

There were three narrative objectives behind this research. Firstly, it was to apply the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline to the archive to storify instances of epistemic disobedience during the formative years of Sesotho literary production, along with the cultural shifts that supplemented it. Secondly, it was to workshop the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as an experimental research method within a museum setting. The task was to explore the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a narrative and exhibition design strategy. Lastly, it was to produce a comprehensive video presentation of the *Contending with Friends* activation and rubric, which would function as the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline Toolkit.

# Past experiences with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline

The Johannesburg working group introduced the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as an invitation since its inception in 2017. As an object in its first iteration, it was occupied only by printed excerpts from the *Visual Century* publication that were preplanned and placed in loose chronological order by the working group. The excerpts provided entry points for the rest of the cluster on how to engage with the object. As the day went along, the number of entries grew more sporadic. Some were spontaneous based on people's initial understanding of the exercise, while others responded to entries already on the timeline. For example, one person's entry about a musical event that occurred in a particular year prompted a connection for another person from a different location and context. What the two had in common were the artist and political moment referenced. Some entries were intensely personal and offered glimpses into people's private selves. Interestingly, some entries stayed within broader chronologies introduced by the Visual Century outline. People did this by introducing dates without context or simply adding undated stories.

Co-creation and expansion were always present in the conception of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline. The idea of using it as an agent to engage uncomfortable realities of coloniality in North-South cultural activities, independently and co-dependently of each other, resonated strongly. Hence, the Intertwining Histories Cluster's decision to create the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline into a game as the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline card game.

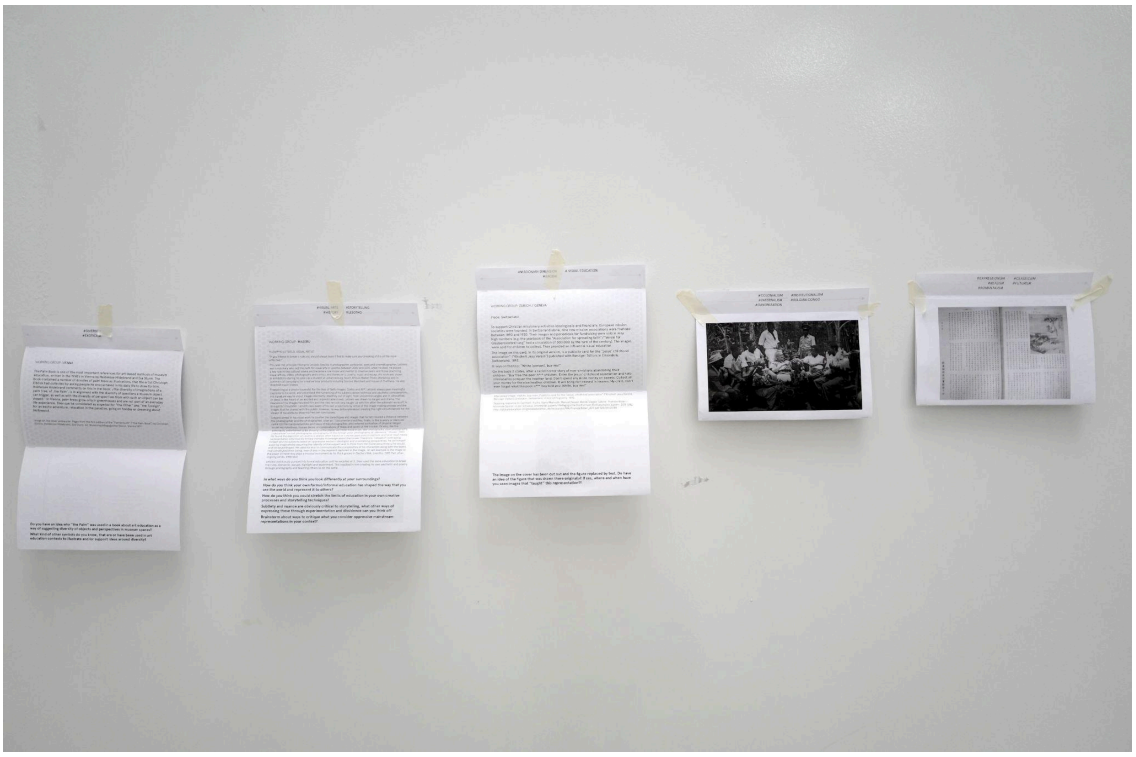


**Figure 10.** Five different Un/chrono/Logical Timeline game cards taped to a wall during its activation in Zurich in 2018. Three of the images show the story and question sections next to two cards folded up to show the image section. Image courtesy of ARS.

Over the years, I have activated the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline in its two forms at various sites. Every iteration was unique to the audience, setting and context, while the exercise of epistemic disobedience never shifted. I will summarise each iteration briefly below:

- Activated in June 2018 at the Another Roadmap Intertwining hi/stories of arts education public symposium for MA students, arts educators, and cultural producers in Zurich. The most significant insights were: How to learn from and exchange similar or related stories by drawing parallels between the locations covered in the game.



**Figure 11.** The researcher activating the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline card game for a group of MA students and arts educators in Zurich 2018. Image courtesy of ARS.

- In Nov 2018, at Casco Art Institute[26] and Piet Zwart Institute, in Utrecht and Rotterdam, respectively. During those sessions, we discussed the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline's capabilities as a research tool, as participants imagined it would be customised to their respective art contexts.

- In June 2023, at the *diskrit-kubi_transfer* (Discrete-cubic_transfer) Symposium in Dortmund[27], and at the close of The *Historicisation of the Creative Child in Education* (CREAT_ED) seminar series at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto (Martins, 2023). In both instances, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline unpacked colonial blindspots and biases and raised restless/unsettling questions among the participants who were all academics in arts education from Europe, the US and Brazil.

- In October 2023, at the Vera List Centre, New York, I hosted an experimental version of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline based on the original

[26] Casco operates on the idea that art and the commons are basic structures for change, co-exploration, and study. They produce collective art projects as well as organisational experiments out of critical questions and radical imagination. Their initiatives are process-based and place-specific, and created in the interest of forming community and generating art and knowledge as common resources (Casco.art, 2025).

[27] The Symposium was a component of the Discrimination-critical perspectives at the interface of education and art project by Carmen Mörsch (2021). It was attended by arts scholars, artists, students and practitioners

Johannesburg model, which I called the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline 2.0. The only prompt participants received was to base their contributions to the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline on their personal histories of arts education and politics. The activation sparked tensions based on conflicting readings of history and specific literature. The timing of the activation also raised severe political differences over the Israeli-Palestinian war. The tension gave way to an intimate moment of learning and solidarity.

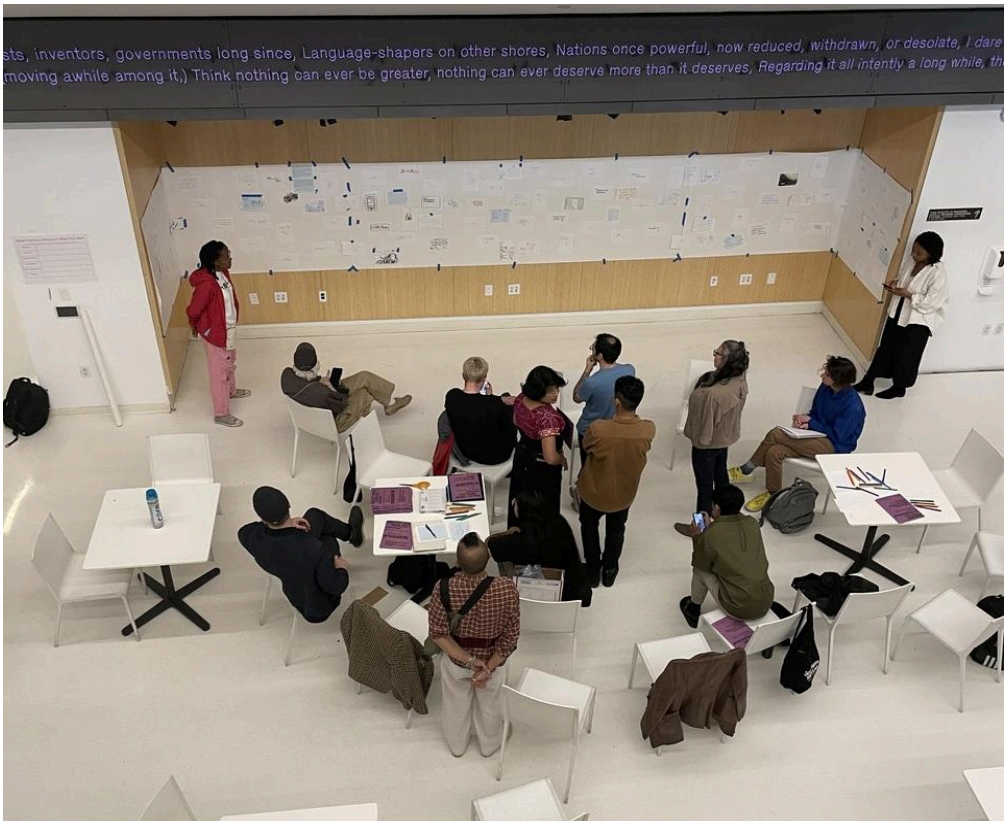



**Figure 12.** Activation of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline 2.0 by the researcher at the New School University, New York City, during the Jane Lombard Fellowship in 2023. Image courtesy of the Vera List Centre.

Due to my limited involvement, I cannot elaborate on a version of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline that involved reading and writing exercises. It relates to the ARAC residency at Javett-UP Art Centre in Pretoria between August 2023 and March 2024. During the residency, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline was cut up into sections and displayed on a series of walls of the first-floor gallery. The exhibition included reading tables full of literature ranging from textbooks to the ARAC Zines. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline was activated as a reading and writing exercises

initiated by Prof. Andrew and the Johannesburg working group[28]. A total of thirteen iterations of the original Un/chrono/Logical Timeline took place between 2017 and 2021.[29]






**Figures 13&14.** The original Un/chrono/Logical Timeline hung at the Javett-UP Art Centre in Pretoria as part of the ARAC Residency there from 2023-2024. On the table in figure 13 are textbooks and publications on arts education in South Africa borrowed from Prof. Andrew. In figure 14 is a reading table with chairs and ARAC publication on the table. Image courtesy of Javett-UP.

[28] The activations were accompanied by public engagements involving different stakeholders including students, members of the public, representatives from national and provincial departments of education, and arts education lecturers from higher education institutions.

[29]

1. Wits School of Education: Engagement from the Another Roadmap Africa Cluster (ARAC) and students from Witwatersrand School of Education (WSoE) (April 2017).
2. The Point of Order: ARAC with 3rd year Fine art students from Witwatersrand School of Arts (WSOA). This included a Zine making workshop (April 2017).
3. Wits School of Arts: Learners from New Model Private College place adhesive tape on the timeline as means to preserve text.
4. Arts and Culture Trust – University of Johannesburg Conference: David Andrew activated the timeline in the forecourt area adjacent to the conference venue. Delegates and participants observed and contributed to the timeline, learning from its content (July 2017).
5. Witwatersrand School of Arts - Amic Dec: We added sound and music records to the timeline. Students from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and Metropolitan College gathered, interacted, studied and listened to the music. (September 2017)
6. Koni Benson and JWG at the WSOA: Possible extension and looking at similar timeline research.
7. Alone time: Rangoato Hlasane has one-on-one time with the timeline. Puleng Plessie also has alone time with the timeline. Both moments happen on separate occasions but have a similar function of preserving the timeline by cleaning and adding adhesive.
8. Intertwining hi/stories Festival, Vienna: This iteration included performative engagement with the timeline. Rangoato Hlasane reading letters from Fees must Fall activists and poetic intervention from an audience member (2018).
9. Ba e e ne re Literature Festival, Maseru: Included ARAC and Intertwining Histories members, artists, poets and audiences of the festival.
10. Lephephe Gatherings Festival: Included writing workshop with Lineo Segoete and Puleng Plessie. (!Keleketla Library, Johannesburg).
11. Rorke's Drift, Histories and Pedagogies – Stories told and yet not told Symposium at the Bag Factory in Johannesburg, South Africa (5-6 April 2019). David Andrew convened this symposium with participants interacting and contributing to the timeline.
12. Documenta 15, Fridskul, Kassel, Germany – second version of the un/chronological timeline (June-September 2023).
13. Javett Art Centre, University of Pretoria, Pretoria (2023).

# Situating the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline where policy meets curatorial practice

In 2025, the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture (MTEC) in Lesotho, through the Department of Arts and Culture, submitted a proposal to UNESCO that advocates for the constitution of a revised national policy draft on culture and heritage. The last edition of the policy was published in 2006. The revised draft seeks to incorporate contemporary contexts that have emerged since then, such as Lesotho's ratification of the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2010 (Segoete, 2020). The policy stresses the need for advances in arts education so as to cultivate a robust creative industry. It moreover proposes the development of an independent Language Policy that will play a more substantial role in Lesotho’s development and economic growth through culture and heritage.

A natural consequence of curatorial work is that it entails engaging as an educator (O’Donoghue, 2017). Linking this to a moment in history, King (2019) states that in the 1960s, UNESCO’s ‘diversity of cultures’ emerged as a structuring concept to guide the development of artistic production in member states. Towards the late 1970s, the focus shifted to endogenous development, where culture became linked to development (Westheimer, 2019). This shift supported arguments for financial and administrative support for developing countries like Lesotho. The claim was that developing countries demanded the right to define their development paths (King, 2019). In other words, culture became commodified/instrumentalised and could not escape the wave of structural adjustments that came with neoliberal paternalism (Singh, 2007), and curators became obliged to adapt.

# The case of Morija Museum and Archives and Van Abbe Museum

In many postcolonial states, museums are challenged to reinvent themselves. The impetus is to escape the trap of pandering to state patronage and being instrumentalised to fashion nationalism. The other reason is that the perception of elitism surrounding the museum renders it both an imposed and hurtful heritage that has the potential to contribute to local communities (Mataga, 2021).

MMA was established in 1956 (Makwindi, 2016) and subsequently opened to the public in 1989 (Gill, 1995). It is the oldest museum in the country and showcases natural history and Sesotho[30] cultural heritage. Its collections include geological and fossil collections, cultural artefacts, and archives (Makwindi, 2016). It is owned exclusively by the Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa (LEC-SA), previously the PEMS until 1964, and is run under the watchful eye of a board appointed by the church.

Dlali-Lekhanya (2022) explained in her Master's dissertation that PEMS missionaries began developing ideas around a national museum in Lesotho in 1947. The Basutoland Museum, as it was called, organised exhibitions curated by missionaries at mission stations across the country (Dlali-Lekhanya, 2022). Gill posits that the current Morija Museum and Archives reflected the vision and expectations of museum enthusiasts of the time (Gill, 2015, p. 32).

From 1999, MMA ran multiple exhibitions and public events under the leadership of its previous curator, Stephen Gill.[31] Noteworthy among them are the once popular Morija Arts and Cultural Festival; visual art exhibitions featuring sculpture, photography, painting, and collage; the *Conversations at Morija* series curated by

[30] Sesotho refers to both the language and the culture of Basotho people.

[31] During his tenure, the museum established the Maeder House Gallery, the linotšing art studio, later Morija Art Centre, and the semi-autonomous The Hub, a creative technology lab that provides affordable access to computers, the internet, a library, and digital media training in Morija.

Lerato Bereng; and multidisciplinary events organised by myself during my time there as a public mediator.

On the other hand, the Van Abbe Museum is one of the oldest contemporary art museums in the world. It is named after Henri van Abbe, who was a private art collector[32] and local cigar manufacturer who benefited from tobacco plantations in Deli (in Sumatra), formerly called the Dutch East Indies, during colonialism (Van Abbe Museum, 2023). The museum has an exhibition titled *Hidden Connections* in its basement dedicated to expounding on the oppression and resistance on those plantations. The exhibition is the museum's way of opening up the conversation with its dark past. Interviews with Deli scholars, Van Abbe's grandson, and archival photographs have been incorporated into the narrative to deepen engagements with the exhibition.

The museum's positionality is made clear on its website, where it cites its awareness of colonial thinking and its link with modernity. VAM has taken the stance to embrace a decolonial perspective as a response moving forward. It actively questions how colonialism continues to present itself explicitly or implicitly in colonial empires like the Netherlands. VAM strives to explore how art can benefit looking at the world in a more rooted, and holistically 'life-friendly' way (Van Abbe Museum, 2023).

[32] The museum's original collection was bought by the Eindhoven city council in 1934 in an agreement with Henri van Abbe. In return for the city council buying some of his art collection, van Abbe paid for and donated the museum building, which opened in 1936.




**Figure 15.** A frame of Cis van Abbe, grandson of Henri van Abbe speaking on Van Abbe Museum's colonial legacy in a video installation that forms part of the Hidden Connections exhibition. Image courtesy of the researcher. 2024

VAM goes beyond talking about decolonising by actively pursuing it in their creative direction and curatorial practices. Many museums in Europe operate well within the vestiges of the colonial systems[33]. Regardless, a rising few are invested in producing and sustaining decolonial projects in their institutions. As national policies become more restrictive regarding governance and political positioning, radically minded cultural workers test their limits. These practitioners resist confinement through dissenting narratives and public engagement configurations which challenge convention. They constantly adapt strategies to frame their practices to ensure that change is enduring.

In contrast, MMA has so far remained steadfast in its positioning as a traditional custodian of culture. The doors are open for researchers and artists to engage with the collection and archive independently. However, the museum gave little to no effort towards engaging critically with its collections or narratives. When it came to discourse, MMA typically assumed a morality stance. Programming at the museum and its subsidiaries is still expected to abide by the church's tenets.  It could not be

[33]Art historian, Carol Duncan puts it best in her essay; Art Museums and the ritual of citizenship by pointing out that by the middle of the 19th century, at the height of the colonial enterprise, almost every Western nation came to boast a national museum or art gallery as a fixture of a so-called 'well-furnished state' (Duncan, 2012).

seen to stir controversy regarding either history, or current social issues, let alone stories that spotlighted its own colonial past. The museum stuck to the script, a script that, although localised, retained principles that colonisers installed via missionaries.

Under its first Lesotho-born curator since 2023, ‘Mamokuena Makhema, efforts are now to refine MMA’s image to boost its public profile locally and abroad. Infrastructure improvements have been made with the addition of Mantsopa gallery, Ramatšeatsana archives building, and the digitisation of its archive. Nevertheless, general public engagement is frail. Steep pricing[34], poor programming, and dated exhibition aesthetics reinforce notions of elitism. The sentiment is shared among constituents of Morija, where the museum is located, as well as many cultural enthusiasts elsewhere around the country. In 2024 when the museum attempted to revive the popular Morija Arts and Cultural festival[35], the main event which used to be attended by patrons in their thousands, was attended by a modest crowd including local volunteers from Morija.

Digital interaction via social media is consistent. However, the information offered is superficial and generic, leaving the reader yearning for more. Granted, the gesture may have been a deliberate marketing strategy to lure people to the museum at some stage. The value of MMA’s archive and publications cannot be understated. The museum holds essential texts and a small collection of rare and unique images connected to Lesotho. Some of this archive is fragile and vulnerable to theft. Therefore, the museum has taken steps to be more vigilant with its care. Nevertheless, the archive is comprehensive, accessible, and extensive despite its modest location. MMa is therefore a prime location to unravel decoloniality given its unique history and the revolutionary spirit of its current Curator, which favours criticality reflection and reimagined futures.

## Entanglements of coloniality

[34] Museum fees which have been significantly increased (by 50 percent) in the interest of ensuring better preservation and security for the archives and facilities.

[35] The festival ran from 1999 to 2013 and consisted of cultural competitions for schools, music concerts, food and clothing stalls, etc. Activities were spread out over 4 days; Thursday to Sunday, around Independence day each year.

I cannot help but trace links between UNESCO's policies, museum positionalities, cultural exchange initiatives like the MLab programme, and the missionary activities in 19th century Lesotho. What they have in common are their colonial undertones and benevolent underpinnings, ostensibly to uplift the public. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline comes into play as a way to grapple with the workings and value of the institution to locals as necessary. Acknowledging these institutions' coloniality would remove gestures of 'enclosure' similar to those imposed on Sesotho orthography as illustrated in Chapter three.

The missionaries who mapped out MMA, the decision-makers who drive UNESCO policies, and the powers behind MLab unfortunately are prone to attribute selective listening to grassroots voices and share power unequally in decision-making. They silence voices by rejecting recommendations made towards better transparency and processes. The biased distribution of resources and power is emblematic of enduring colonial attitudes. Earnest aims towards decolonisation, therefore, depend on intentional actions that ensure historically silenced perspectives contribute to reshaping narratives (Barbudo Carrasco, 2024). The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is thus a mode to create conditions for necessary discomfort whereby disobedience is generative even if only to plant a seed towards agency.

Regarding the programming of MLab, the speakers are accomplished, passionate, and committed to their practices. However, the model of feedback, digestion and balancing practice with theory inherently sticks to Western hegemony. The academic programme is saturated with content spread over consecutive days and is staged as a rigorous learning experience based on input from predominantly African partners. Nevertheless, the programme is European-funded and therefore serves European interests. The power dynamics loom like a menacing presence.

The Advisors, one of the four founding partners, joined MLab on the premise that the partnership required an African and Afro-Diasporic presence, participation, and agency at every level of the process. MLab was framed as a co-curated project. They wrote a report that addressed numerous aspects of mainstreaming African agency within the MLab. They acknowledged in the report that other elements of the

future direction of MLab would continue to be decided in the broader administrative, strategic, and political environment outside of the immediate reach of The Advisors and some of the other partners involved at the time (The Advisors, 2023).

Because good results are not always the result of good performance, the Advisors made a straightforward recommendation to MLab. They advocated for adopting a diverse and symmetrical spread of knowledge and competencies. These would be accompanied by experiential, social, financial and administrative resources, applied within an environment of constructive communication and transparent decision-making. The Advisors asserted that such actions would contribute towards efficient, practical outcomes, good political standing, and the overall success of MLab and its programmes (The Advisors, 2023). Two and a half years into the project, the collective left MLab after publishing the report. They felt that their voices fell on deaf ears.

From a Fellow's perspective, some moments during the programming felt like we were going through a checklist that superficially glossed over or repeated old tropes. My subjective conclusion was that the individual must make the most of the experience. MLab is undoubtedly packed with potential; the knowledge exchange and unforgettable encounters compensate for the weaknesses. However, the violence seems only to shift position with each year because the concerns raised by the Advisors have been shared by many of the African Alumni over the years. If institutions such as MLab or UNESCO adopted an Un/chrono/Logical Timeline approach in their programming for example, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline would cater for all the contributing voices to be on equal footing. Given the wealth of knowledge they all bring to the table the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline would relieve voices from former colonies from feeling like they are oscillated between two extremes; being taken for granted and being othered.

# Divergent curatorial practices

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline leans on experimentation as the core of co-creating dynamic experiences. It upholds the premise that museums, with their colonial underpinnings, must think critically and show care. It supports the notion that museums are appended by community collaboration, critical dialogue and pluriversal voices (Chipangura & Mataga, 2021). Writing on care aesthetics, Thompson (2020) proposes that exhibitions should think hard about creating affective, sensory and dynamic experiences that suit their different capacities and diverse backgrounds.

Crucially, an aesthetics of care views public events as an invitation for audiences to participate in a discussion. Since artworks themselves are not ascribed a preordained meaning, exhibitions thus represent the opportunity for dialogue and reciprocity (Thompson, 2020). The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline creates an environment where the voices of the curator and audiences engaged in dialogue set the tone for a symbiotic interaction. To effectively combat power imbalances, voice must be encouraged using ordinary or normalised language.

Intentionality behind the choice of language used is a way of ‘taking voice’. *Taking* here represents embracing diverse narratives, practices and projects otherwise rendered invisible (Ní Mhurchú, 2024). It is a way to give agency to decolonial dialogues that favour alternative subjectivities. With the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, voice is not limited to words but involves gestures, tone, sounds, and that which escapes words/cannot be put into words. The different configurations of ‘voice’ depend on the language used in the given contexts to represent pluriversal realities and perspectives. Pluriversality promises a way to work across different cosmologies while recognising their entanglements, it views the world as a pluriverse instead of a universe. It is a way of inhabiting the border regions of knowledge production (Mignolo, 2013). It also recognises that knowledge production is always embodied and situated and, therefore, partial and limited. Knowledge can never be thought of outside its historical, cultural, and environmental context (Mignolo, 2013).

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline thrives on using ordinary language to unravel what and how something can be said. It demands that understandings of what constitutes everyday ‘ordinary’ types of language be expanded. A single word has the potential to bear different meanings to different people. To comprehensively explore the complexities of the aesthetic dimensions at play and move beyond dominant Western hegemony, one must be cognizant of cultural differences. Artist Kemang Wa Lehulere tackles the idea of language in his 2023 work *Vowels.* While the raised fist is somewhat synonymous with black empowerment, Wa Lehulere interprets the raised fist as an expression of rebellion and raising one’s own voice. The artwork reflects that language can make knowledge and experience accessible while also being an instrument for spreading misinformation and propaganda (Galerie Tschudi, 2023).



**Figure 16.** An image of Vowels, artwork created by Kemang Wa Lehulere at the Tschudi Gallery in Switzerland, as part of the for every birth there is blood exhibition in 2023. Image courtesy of the Tschudi Gallery.

For the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, the curatorial engenders a sensibility for connecting works, contexts, places and the public at all times, using ordinary

language. Bereng states that her process for developing accessible language is equated to communicating art and its concepts to her non-art-inclined parents in a way that they understand. The appeal of ordinary language is that it is accessible to a broad range of demographics, regardless of their backgrounds. In the Lesotho context, cultural workers are uniquely positioned because they can define things for the first time and shape new ways of doing things (Hall, 2013).

My interpretation of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline embraces the idea of a Sesotho way of doing things. In addition, it is a way of acknowledging the different sources, interactions, participants, and national contexts I have operated with. It is my mode of togethering using the call-and-response technique borrowed from Sesotho storytelling. Morgan (2013) attributes the emergence of divergent curatorial practices such as the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, which do not situate themselves within institutional gatekeeper classifications, or traditional parameters, to their stated subjectivity. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline operates within the space of resistance and social justice and is enacted as a form of epistemic disobedience. Such practices depend on the proximity that the curators who implement them have to social justice issues and the artistic movements emerging or operating simultaneously around them. Their joint circumstances constitute production shifts, which are inevitably tied to contextual issues, politics, economics, and considerations for display and public presentation (Morgan, 2013).

# CHAPTER 2
# Literature review and theoretical framework

## Introduction

The Un/Chrono/Logical Timeline method explores connections between international art and history, local art and history, and personal stories of arts education. Ergo, it centralises the position of narratives in the ongoing deconstruction of colonial impressions upon the contemporary. For example, issues of identity, cultural practice, and language in Lesotho, and Africa as a whole are markedly shaped by the colonial enterprise and its side effects. Nonetheless, previously silenced voices and practices are emerging as societies and practitioners reclaim their voices. The impulse is for more holistic narratives that respond to enduring colonial violences, however subtle, to be generated.

The way histories are told in museums often reflects a Eurocentric perspective, which can distort or erase the experiences and contributions of colonised peoples (Macdonald & Snepvangers, 2009). Furthermore, exhibits and archives can unwittingly exoticise or decontextualise non-Western cultures. They may unintentionally represent non-Western cultures as a primitive ‘other’ or hollow voids lacking in complexity and evolution (Phillips, 2005) simply by their choice of words and phrasing. Such an operational framework therefore privileges certain narratives, perspectives, and artefacts while marginalising others.

The museum is expected to operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of its communities (ICOM, 2022). It is meant to offer a spectrum of experiences for education, celebration, reflection and knowledge exchange. A revised definition of the museum was proposed at the ICOM General Conference in Kyoto, Japan, in September 2019 (Fraser, 2019). It characterised museums as:

> Democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understanding of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing. (ICOM Singapore, 2019, p. 4).

The definition was never adopted due to a lack of consensus. Those delegates who objected critiqued the definition as a prescriptive ideological manifesto with political undertones. They said the definition strayed from the museum's traditional function (Fraser, 2019) as though the traditional function was in itself not ideological or political. Although the new definition was indeed convoluted, the premise of centering people’s diverse perspectives on history and the present as a necessary museum priority cannot be ignored.

Despite tensions in arriving at a complex definition holistically in tune with contemporary realities and questions, a growing number of African museums are deploying innovative forms of engagement. These museums seek to attract new audiences whilst dealing with social issues in their immediate locations (Mataga, 2021). This shift intends to acknowledge the communities’ needs and versions of history as African museums evolve beyond their colonial origins.

The museum thus becomes an interactive space, while the institution itself reckons with its colonial history. This approach is instrumental in changing the narrative about museums being elitist urban institutions (Chipangura & Mataga, 2021). Such a change rests on a comprehensive overhaul of institutional practices, policies, and power dynamics (Barbudo Carrasco, 2024), even if slowly. The agency within the African museum is driven by much more than definitions and politics. These museums are tasked with defining their own identities out of colonial ashes.

The shift is not the burden of African museums alone. For example, the Confluences museum where I was assigned for my MLab residency, aims to be sensitive to misrepresentations among other markers of colonial residue. However, their *Origins* exhibition, one of four permanent exhibitions in the museum, aroused concerns between myself and two other MLab fellows. We were concerned about how African objects/assets were framed differently compared to Western ones. Scientific advancements were used to highlight the natural progression of Western societies, while global societies were framed according to their ethnographic qualities.

When we shared feedback with the museum staff, they responded gracefully. They acknowledged that more work had to be done to identify and address unconscious biases. Our comments were noted as part of their considerations for the upcoming redesign of that particular exhibition. Be that as it may, addressing such imbalances requires going beyond the collection. It reiterates the need for a comprehensive restructuring of institutional practices, policies, and power dynamics.

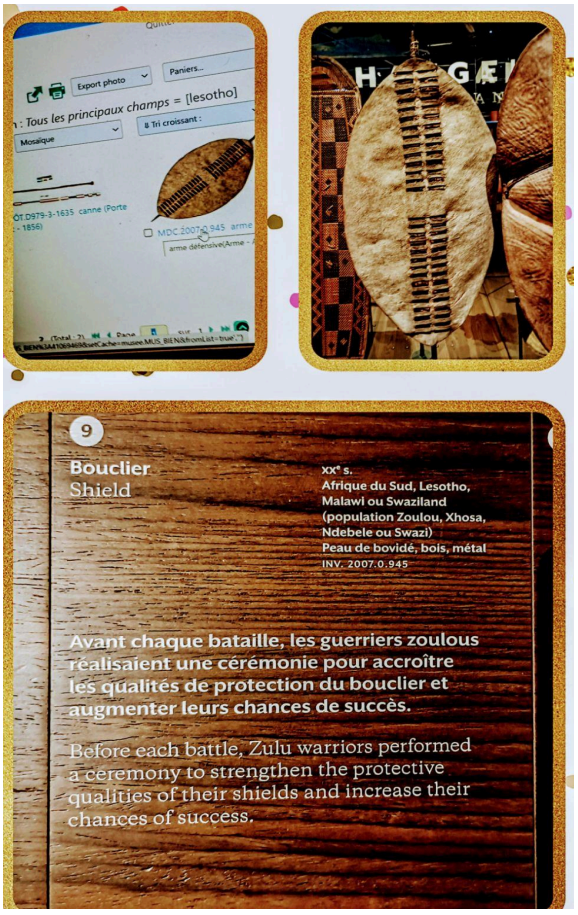



**Figure 17.** A collage of a shield the researcher found at the Confluences Museum as well as how it is catalogued, described and displayed within the permanent collection display. Image courtesy of the researcher

Revising narratives involves updating exhibits to reflect multiple perspectives, particularly those of previously marginalised people (Kreps, 2003). Such an exercise champions Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and calls for democratising decision-making at the highest levels. It acknowledges that museums are not neutral, more so in their role in misrepresenting African cultures (Wajid and Minott, 2019). In practice, a thoroughly people-centred approach such as the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline inevitably aligns with DEI ideals. DEI is a paradigm born in the social justice corpus. It is concerned with creating a world where historical and structural inequalities are justly remedied (Vangeli, 2022). DEI has become all the more critical as many Western powers pivot right with their politics. As of January 2024, The USA announced an overhaul of all DEI programmes and affiliated language (Salajan and jules, 2025) based on criticism that DEI is divisive, unpatriotic (Conyers & Wright Fields, 2025) and goes against traditional values.

The mere act of advocating for social justice renders DEI radical and a necessary break away from the convention. DEI seeks to rectify historical imbalances by challenging systemic biases. It is about creating spaces that authentically represent multiple societal voices and experiences. Within the museum, DEI has the dual function of addressing both programming and mediation. It underscores the transformative potential of strategic communication in reshaping museum narratives (Barbudo Carrasco, 2024) by nurturing and promoting collaborative practices. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, therefore, fits as a rigorous tool for revising narratives within museum practice. It underscores diversity, criticality, and personal stories as the grounds for collaborating toward inclusive, varied, and plural outcomes.

# The different strands of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline

To understand the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline’s positioning as a methodology, it is essential to unthread it into its theoretical strands: decolonisation and decoloniality, personal story, critical fabulation, multimodality, memory, and time. This is an

exercise to recognise the master's tools that warrant upcycling. Audre Lorde's admonishment of the Second Sex Conference in 1979 for treating the voices of minority women as an afterthought and homogenous. The essay's illustration of patriarchy and western hegemony (the master's tools) in terms of representation and social transformation, articulates the set up for the arguments advanced by the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline. Upcycling the master's tools therefore refers to recentering marginalised voices, activating indigenous knowledge systems and confronting coloniality with an unapologetic criticality that does not seek to negate nor erase the colonial legacy, but rather to dismember it into individual parts that can be crafted anew.

## Decolonisation

In the words of a prominent scholar of coloniality and decolonising in Africa, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, decolonisation is a vast multi-dimensional enterprise. As a result:

> The decolonisation of the twenty-first century questions the very rules of the game and has escalated the issue to the level of rethinking, and even unthinking thinking itself. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p. 884)

Ndlovu-Gatsheni's scholarship on African epistemologies, history, politics, post-colonialism and decolonial theory complements the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline's vision of confronting continuities of coloniality in favour of imagined decolonial futures. Furthermore, he speaks about the cognitive implications of colonialism, its subtle presentations, endurance, and dangers. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's work builds on theories introduced by Walter Mignolo's generation in Latin America and locates decolonial theory within the (Southern) African context. How we view ourselves, our past, present, and our environment tends to be heavily dependent on our position about imperialism and its colonial and neo-colonial manifestations. To move from this means shuffling our worldviews to decenter colonialism. Therefore, the cognitive empire's crimes justify the pursuit of epistemic freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

This pursuit calls for what Mignolo (2009) calls decolonial options. Zembylas (2018) states that decolonial options favour analyses, art forms, and actions that practise epistemic disobedience. According to Zembylas (2018), decolonial options oppose Eurocentric categories of thought and instead lean towards those previously discredited as uncivilised and barbarian under the banner of colonialism. Zembylas' work around critical discursive practices and emotions, in conjunction with pedagogical reforms aimed at healing, empathy and love, also resonates deeply with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline.

Mignolo writes:

> Rather than assuming that thinking comes before being, one assumes instead that it is a racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space that feels the urge or gets the call to speak, to articulate their humanness, in whatever semiotic system. (Mignolo, 2009, p. 160).

Pedagogical reforms such as the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline thus inevitably respond to epistemic violence as a remnant of coloniality. For example, Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa's artistic research and practice around the British missionary Margaret Trowell assessed the liminal hegemony of Trowell as an arts educator. Decades after independence, Trowell is still a rarely examined blueprint for Kampala's contemporary art school and museum (Gassmann de Sousa, 2023). Part of Wolukau-Wanambwa's responses to Trowell and the idiosyncrasies she represented was to counter normative museum practice. She intentionally shifted meaning first by returning to Uganda to reconnect her body through touch, re-ordering materials in the museum, and imagining them afresh. In doing this she aimed to disrupt the staticity of museum collections and policies.

Wolukau-Wanambwa's process observed the archive as selective memories and paid attention to what they obscured or effaced. She turned chance discoveries into narrative experiences and creatively re-imagined the unseen (Gassmann de Sousa, 2024). Furthermore, she resorted to fiction to compensate for gaps and fact failures. Her storytelling technique paid homage to her cultural storytelling traditions and used critical fabulation to communicate agency.

## The decolonial turn

The enactment of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is a decisive gesture of epistemic disobedience in that it also encourages somatic involvement as it challenges linear temporality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022) and canonised knowledge. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that time is also a colonial construct that needs to be decolonised. Puerto Rican philosopher, Maldonado-Torres (2017), asserts that Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* portrays an understanding of the devastating effects of colonialism on the development of identity, personality, culture, and knowledge.

Maldonado-Torres, therefore makes a proposition for a decolonial attitude of love and understanding that involves reclaiming being othered. He argues that doing so can turn the tide of epistemic violences and the coloniality of knowledge and being. In other words, such an attitude would lead to a decolonial turn. Therefore, a decolonial attitude is embodied through radical actions that may appear as forms of epistemic disobedience in the modern/colonial world but are reparative (Maldonado-Torres, 2017).

Coloniality may be interpreted as continued colonial assimilation in the post-colonial era. The project of refashioning 'the other' in the image of European consciousness, comportment, conduct, and aesthetics did not end with the end of legislative colonisation. It is reinforced through power hierarchies, education, and cultural and political differences. Decolonisation, therefore faces the predicament of decolonising difference without giving up on the importance of diversity in refashioning narratives about self and culture (Pillay, 2020).

The ways assimilation and difference evince themselves in creative cultural expressions primed me to engage the archive as a flawed, precious, memory-triggering, time-travelling resource. Similarly, I engaged it as a colonial repository committed to colonial interests (Wild-Wood, 2020). The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, as a tool that operates despite and alongside the constraints of coloniality in its articulations (Andrew, 2022), cradles its approach to

collaboratively mining personal archives to reverberate narrativity as a manifestation of culture to be decolonised.

## Co-curation and pluriversality as decolonial options

Audre Lorde makes a provocation in the final paragraph of *The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house:*

> I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices. (Lorde, 1983, p. 101)

Walter Mignolo (2011) was one of the earliest thinkers to suggest that curatorial practice within museums should acknowledge and challenge the institution's positionality. He challenged museums to use their collections, however controversial, to spotlight marginalised histories. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is a way to heed this call in its expression as a co-curated practice and object. Co-curation can be described as a horizontal and arts-based method of collaborative knowledge production (Horvath, 2024). Co-curation attends to DEI representation and decolonial thought in that it insists on co-ownership.

Anthropologists and proponents of horizontality Blaser and de la Cadena (2018) propose what they refer to as uncommoning as a co-curation strategy. According to them, uncommoning is the process of unpacking seemingly oppositional matters that also constitute the larger whole so that negotiations toward common progress can take place. They claim that the point of uncommoning is not to preclude the possibility of commoning. Instead, the point is to seek ways to base uncommoning on the solid grounds of recognised productive divergences (Blaser & de la Cadena, 2017). This research further views co-creation from the vantage point of uncommoning archives through critical fabulation to arrive at questions. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a co-curation modality, is an endeavour to make coloniality more tangible, to bring to the fore what is often in plain sight but manages to camouflage itself as part of the mainstream.

Horvath (2024) purports that creating collaboratively involves active participation from various contributors: artists, academics, stakeholders, institutional counterparts, and local community members. These contributors, in turn, embark on collective creative processes that produce tangible and intangible outcomes. The act of creating together is about building trust-based relations with historically excluded communities from knowledge production (Horvath, 2024). The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline emphasises amplifying voices so that divergent points of view are expressed and bolstered in personal contexts.

Mörsch (2009) cautions that taking voice must fit differentiation criteria that gauge criticality and encourage continuous improvement. The curator must ask: Is the gesture emancipatory or paternalism veiled under the notion of participation? What are the politics and public spheres being articulated? Are the participants being instrumentalised, or having their self-expression regulated? These questions also help the museum's reflexive strategy when crafting its co-curation approach.

Despite its criticality, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is not fashioned to be antagonistic. Instead, it is a moment for embracing tension and sitting with it so that it becomes a teachable moment, not a reactive one (Horvath, 2024). When the encounter inspires anger or other negative emotions, it becomes an opportunity to introspect according to our pluriversal lenses collectively. This thinking was embedded in structuring the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop, *Contending with friends* at the Van Abbe Museum.

Pluriversality refers to a decolonial vision created by the Zapatista movement[36] in contrast to the universality of the modern Western world. It is not a synonym for inclusivity or diversity. Instead, it embraces people's capacity to shape their worlds based on their different assumptions, beliefs, worldviews, and epistemologies. It is an invitation to deconstruct narratives that invisibilise possibilities of worlding already available within the modernised world (Leitão, 2023).

[36] Zapatista is a far-left political and militant group that has roots in liberation theology. Although they have rejected political classification, they aligned themselves with the wider alter-globalisation, anti-neoliberal social movement, which seeks indigenous control over local resources, especially land.

Pluriversal thinking in co-curative practice relies on uncommoning (Stengers, 2011). Pluriversalising promotes the autonomy of being because it is closely linked to territory and acknowledges different cultural identities. It stimulates people's creative capacities and frees them from applying imposing or predatory models in dealing with other earthly beings (Montuori & Nicoletti, 2021).

Zullo (2024) cites that there are three dimensions of pluriversality identified thus:

Pluriversal participation: In this dimension, the curator acknowledges that in order to reach heterogeneous dynamics, participants need time to adjust their rhythms to everyone else's'. My method in this regard was to meet participants on their terms based on common traits we identified. It could be through a question like, "Do you also struggle with your native language?" or "Do you like art?"

Pluriversal presence: In this scenario, the curator must be cognisant of participants' different societal positions. The position one holds professionally can be different to the one occupied personally. Positions are also liable to change due to a variety of reasons. My approach with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is to present my default personality. That is, to be neither too professional nor artistic, but to narrow it down to being a living entity that occupies different positions in life. Doing this makes participants feel a sense of familiarity, allowing their other positions to be represented during the encounter.

Pluriversal directionality: This dimension allows flexibility and malleability in the direction the curatorial design processes take over a given period. It speaks to the willingness to adapt designs as conversations and the specific circumstances that impact the curatorial direction evolve (Torretta, 2023). My method is to offer an overview of how the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline can be engaged without being pedantic about the steps. I leave the flow to the participants. The connections they make guide the direction we take in the workshop, which leads to satisfactory outcomes for them.

## Time

The most fitting description of time in the context of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is provided by the English philosopher, Simon Critchley. He writes:

> Time is reversible, intermittent, episodic, various and variable, pluriform, relative, relational, and, importantly, finite. Rather than thinking of time as a line or an arrow, we can think of it as a loop or a series of loops, as a spiral or series of spirals. This is a time which is various, multiple. (Critchley, 2016, p. 2)

The choice to disrupt linearity, as suggested by the “Unchronological" in the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, is a decolonial gesture. Africans tend to deem time as elastic. The precise dating of events and their chronological sequencing is less important than what took place and the lessons thereof (Huch, 2007). For example, when Basotho tell stories using *ba re e ne e re,* they refer to what was said and not so much to who said it or when, let alone where or to whom. As the story unfolds, the message outweighs the minor details. This approach also makes the tale collectively owned instead of crediting a single source. It is in keeping with oral traditions passed down across generations.

The observation of time as a linear scale of measurement is relevant when examining Western ideas about history. Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) posits that the Enlightenment era was a crucial time when history came to be viewed as a reasoned or scientific understanding of the past. It was linked to notions of progress, as evinced in the following quote: “The connection between time and productivity became more important after the arrival of missionaries and the development of more systematic colonisation” (Smith, 2012, p. 57).

Regardless, civilisations around the world have different approaches to measuring time and marking significant dates based on their geographical locations and epistemologies. For example, when the new year begins varies depending on the specific culture’s interpretation of cosmic and environmental events. In some

instances, the consideration extends to religion, as in the Gregorian and Lunar calendars.

The Raqs Media Collective  poses the question below as part of a poem opening to an essay they wrote on time:

> To ask a human being to account for time is not very different
> From asking a floating fragment of plankton to account for the ocean.
> How does the plankton bank the ocean? (e-flux journal, 2011, p. 1)

The essay is a comprehensive study of time as an experiential dynamic that forms part of different ways of being human. It speaks about time as cognitive, social, emotional, relational, and so on[37]. Curatorial perspectives on time, in which artistic research intercepts history to generate questions for dialogue, are therefore not new. Furthermore, I was drawn to the Collective's[38] approach to time during their residency at the Isabella Gardner Stewart Museum in 2010.

Raqs Media Collective activated their process by wandering around the museum grounds, cultivating and growing plants, and engaged storytelling through a series of children's fairy tales. Within the museum, they gravitated towards artworks that resonated with communal spaces where discussions, philosophical debates, or games could occur. The Collective's activities also included exploring the effects of expanded sensory dimensions to elevate the museum experience through light stimulation. Their actions were strategic explorations of narrating questions of identity, location, myths, and histories in relation to time.

The process unfolded into a multimodal exhibition featuring tapestry, animation, aluminium etchings on acrylic, and a talk series (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2013). The residency also encompassed a talk series curated by the collective and

[37] The text features what they refer to as 'parapractice', which consists of writings and conversations that they enter into, alongside, for example a processual duration with many different people, or a Studio with students to reimagine the power of margins or thresholds.

[38] Raqs Media Collective is based in Delhi and comprises independent media-practitioners Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta. The group has been described as artists, curators, researchers, editors, and catalysts.

new artworks they generated in conversation with the museum's collection. The residency and exhibition successfully activated a conversation between time, space, and materiality in ways that resonate with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline.

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline proposes that the notion of time be understood as an incomplete aspect of the physical world. Time is an inseparable phenomenon from the conscious mind, meaning that it is experiential. It is part of how we think and speak about our existence (Zachhuber, 2022). The experiential element is, therefore, a portal for memories retrieved from the past, present, and future to converge. As inscribed in personal stories, memories are a way of carving out a face against the logics of time and space—a vernacular archive of sorts. Through the narrator's voice, they offer a trace, a place of origin, or at least a point of departure.

In the words of Chicana Feminist and Scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa who is popularly known for her borderlands theory (which speaks to the plurality of self), personal stories function as a model of upcycling the masters tools, in that they afford one:

> The freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture…. with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar, and my own feminist architecture. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 22)

Additionally, the nature of memories as abstract records makes them personal, dynamic, complex, and temporal. Turkle (2007) cites that memories are evocative objects that function as the companions of our emotional lives. Memories are filled with movement, emotions, meta-cognitive states, and multisensory information about the people, places, and events we encounter throughout our lifetimes. This means, in straightforward terms, that memories animate time. They are traces (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2006) that keep past events visible.

In honour of commemorating memories, Ora Loapi in Botswana are sustaining the

legacy of Medu Arts Ensemble by leading the establishment of the Aga Motse Centre: A Sanctuary for Art, History and Cultural Memory[39] in 2023. The space was formed in conversation with previous members of Medu and houses literature, photographic archives, and musical records, among others, collected from those members and other veteran artists. The collection is displayed as part of the space's ambience for artistic and cultural programming and as an agent of meaning-making through conversation and engagement.

For this research, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is engaged to formulate narratives engrossed in unconventional meaning-making within curatorial practice. With the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, meaning is derived or extracted through the ‘difference' among the participants. The ‘other’, alluded to by Maldonado-Torres, is essential to shaping meaning and shattering stereotypes (Hall, 1997). In other words, when the voices of those who have historically been othered tell their story themselves, they add more dimension, nuance and context to their stories. These voices and the stories they tell may then be engaged to challenge previous conceptions about the cultures of those voices to reveal what has been overlooked, simplified or understated.

Furthermore, meaning must be made together to be nuanced and represent as many voices as possible. Min-ha sums it up best:

> The story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being… When history separated itself from story, it started indulging in accumulation and facts. Or it thought it could. (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 119).

A decolonial curatorial narrative style therefore gives room to ignore separations between disciplines, honour history while breaking traditions, and stoke cerebral experiences alongside the visceral (Zara, 2025). It is a way to be poetic without

[39] Aga Motse was conceived as a space to commemorate and preserve cultural memory related to Botswana’s rich history.

seeming capricious, or to be scholarly without boring audiences through endearing, complementary, and innovative exhibition designs. Rarely seen or accessed archives and personal items such as letters, poems, drawings, and posters, may be gathered to introduce new knowledge and respond to current social concerns.

## Material culture

This section continues with the notion of memories as intangible subjective archives. To remember or recall is not something that happens by chance, it is impelled by sensory stimuli and the symbolic meaning attached to particular objects. Therefore, material markers indicate what should be remembered and how it should be remembered (Crooke, 2019). Unfortunately, the study of material culture has tended to exoticise its subject. Decolonialists have, therefore, had to rely on ethnographic accounts with the danger of understating modern caveats (Ross, Hinfelaar and Peša, 2013).

These practitioners risk finding themselves unwillingly participating in the exoticising of ‘the other’ via the embedded biases of their source materials or themselves. Understanding the activities within which objects became essential and worthwhile is helpful in mapping ‘biographies of practice’ that extend beyond singular narratives (Wynne-Jones, 2016). It is, therefore, prudent to embrace material markers such as biographical objects, the body, places, buildings, photographs, folders, and albums to widen the pool of representation and context. Incorporating sensory markers as well further broadens decolonial possibilities. The material and sensory markers set the tone for multimodal memory retrieval, storification and organic personal responses. Hence my request to VAM staff to bring along personal items.

Speaking specifically about the body as a memory bank, Minh-ha (1989) encourages storytelling that allows each body part to be infused with consciousness. According to her, doing so brings a new awareness of life into previously forgotten, silenced, or deadened areas of the body. Consciousness in this context is not about accumulated cerebral knowledge and experience but is a

term for the ongoing unsettling process of being alive and present (Minh-ha, 1989).

## Multimodality

Multimodality is all about meaning-making through language and what people do with that language (Kulju et al., 2018). It is a way to ensure that a holistic sensory experience happens through multiple modes of expression. The central proposition of multimodality is that meaning is made and interpreted through regularised and organised representational semiotic resources (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). These resources include images, gaze, gestures, movements, music, speech, tone and sound effects (Kress, 2003).

Multimodality encourages playfulness in taking risks and entertaining sometimes peculiar, ambiguous and contradictory moments. The environment is supportive; there is no insistence on right or wrong, only a multiplicity of possibilities (Andrew, 2007). The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline has demonstrated this quality and its merits throughout its various iterations since 2017 and continued to insist on it with *Contending with Friends*. A playful environment allows for the rules to be bent, experimentation to thrive, and things to be added or removed, and reframed. It does not insist on any formal conclusion except for the experience to have taken place.

To the advantage of critical fabulation, multimodality considers communication as something that happens beyond the linguistic, but does not exclude it. Language is mobilised with other modes in the making of meaning. Modes are then materialised through textured matter, such as paper, sound, and the body. The different communication modes are accorded equal status and serious attention. They extend beyond the normative, whereby the body is still, and a person's energy is concentrated in the eyes and hands (Newfield, 2011). More importantly, multimodality broadens the representation base (Archer, 2014).

To set up the spatial considerations for the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop covered in chapter four, I channelled ARAC member Christian Nyampeta's inquiry into *how to live together* in the exhibition Words after the World, 2017-2018 (Camden, 2017). The process incorporated different modes of interaction, including

silences, translation, and confusion. It was complemented by a space designed for thinking, playing, resting, and dancing. On the back end, my archival encounter had steered me toward specific questions.

# Theoretical Framework

## Decoloniality

I operate from Ndlovu-Gatsheni's framing of a decoloniality that seeks to ask new and appropriate questions about the historical and present human condition: A decoloniality that goes beyond Euro-American-centric epistemology. It involves the retelling of history and knowledge from the vantage point of epistemic sites that were classified as primitive in Western modernity. It calls to democratise and de-hegemonise knowledge. This decoloniality is an agenda to bring identity into epistemology; that is, it brings the ones who generate knowledge and where they are from into view (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline method, as a temporal, personal, and multimodal methodology, furnishes conducive conditions for storytelling that reference history critically. It is a space where the verbal, graphic, written, experimental, figurative, symbolic, metaphoric, kinaesthetic, or gestural intersect (Murcia, 2014). Furthermore, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline lends itself to transcultural relations and entanglements where the concepts of cultural demarcation and representation no longer make sense. The 'self ' and 'other' are not separated (Bhagwati, 2020). The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is part of a movement away from traditionally Western object-oriented approaches in museums. It speaks in unison with museums motivated to become spaces of interactive engagement between various cultures (Ariese & Wróblewska, 2022).

## Critical fabulations

The pioneer of critical fabulation theory, Saidiya Hartman asks in the text *Venus in two acts*:

> Is it possible to exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive? By advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities) in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that, I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history, I intended both to tell an implausible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling. (Hartman, 2008, p. 11)

Critical fabulation manifests as decolonial historical speculation that simulates realities by deconstructing the relationship between history and the present. Central to enacting decolonial options is the concept of decolonial love. Figueroa (2015) posits that hope for a stronger, loving world impels human beings to imagine other ways of living and being. I am further interested in the way that official archives, as remnants of coloniality, fabricate. Although this research anchors on textual archives and memory, Garb and Mokeona's (2019) assessment that a substantial number of images of colonial Africans were staged rings true. Those images, like colonial newspaper entries, generally portrayed the fantasies of the coloniser.

“Critical fabulation means approaching the violent inertia of the archive from the radical possibility of our present” (Huggins, 2023, p. 30). In the next chapter, I borrow this observation to reflect on the historiography of Sesotho orthography. I do this through the character of ‘Matsa Cranmer Sebeta[40] in a non-sequential fabulation juxtaposed with moments extracted from the archive. Certain colonial subtleties identified in these excerpts are interpreted against my memories and practice with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline. I do this to strategically map *Contending with Friends* at the Van Abbe Museum to demonstrate the

[40] Sebeta was a Christian convert who rose to great fame in the late 19th Century, despite this, little is known about him and his work beyond his service to Christianity. Part of his erasure is due to the fact that he fell out of the good graces of the Christian missionaries who had trained and propped him up when he radicalised to elevate Basotho voices in areas of governance, culture and education.

Un/chrono/Logical Timeline’s suitability in curatorial practice.

Like Hartman, I am seeking to alleviate the absence of narrative, an absence which sets the scene for the history of the present. In other words, this project is a reading of temporality that is also cognizant of time's intricate and dynamic nature. Regarding materiality, it makes room to read and arrange objects in a manner that allows stories to be told from different perspectives. By divorcing narratives from Western hegemony, the desire for something better than the predictable norm thus shapes the contours of one’s storytelling (Hartman, 2018). Critical fabulation strives to convey the aspirations, longing, tumult and upheaval incited by those collective voices yearning to be heard and remembered. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline answers this yearning by facilitating the conditions for all the participating voices to be heard. In a sense, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline highlights time and memory as keystones upon which the present and future can be built (Dlali-Lekhanya, 2021).

# CHAPTER 3

# Reviving so-called old technologies: engaging the historical entanglements of policy and culture through critical fabulation

## Introduction

Ndebele Historian Patisa Nyathi said in a public presentation titled *'Ngangas (doctors/healers) as Resistance Through Artistic Practice'*, which was part of the Voicing Out Silences exhibition held at Livingstone Office for Contemporary Art (LoCA) in Zambia in May 2024: "In Africa we do not do art for art's sake; it encompasses functionality, utility and value, presented in specialised aesthetics that epitomise elements of African beauty: circularity, movement and rhythm" (Nyathi, 2024). Cultural heritage, art and history are, therefore, continuously entwined. This means that as we globalise, exporting our cultures to the rest of the world, African perspectives will tend to align with this understanding of the arts.

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline aligns with Gaztambide-Fernández's (2013) proposition that cultural heritage accounts for patterns of interaction evolving out of different contexts in addition to values, artefacts, customs and norms. Cultural heritage also covers the material and symbolic conditions that impress upon a specific culture. From this perspective, culture is not only viewed as what people are, their heritage, or even what they value; culture is instead considered as what people do every day (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

In the 1980s and 1990s, UNESCO introduced a link between culture and democracy to build upon the relationship established between culture and development (Graber,

2006). Around the same time in the 1980s, “cultural mediation” was introduced within European museum practice (Mörsch et.al, 2014). The government of Lesotho responded to UNESCO[41] by writing a project proposal to the Participation Programme[42] in 1991. The project would host conscientisation seminars and an aggressive cultural awareness campaign. It aimed to combat the lingering influences of colonialism and new foreign commerce (King, 2019). The two elements were framed as instrumental to eroding Basotho’s cultural values and desensitising people to socio-cultural issues. The project proposal insisted that rejuvenating an interest in Sesotho culture and history would galvanise the public to engage more actively with contemporary issues (King, 2019).

Simultaneously, calls to re-standardise Sesotho orthography were in motion. In addition to some moderate yet significant revisions, the grammar rules remained more or less the same. Moreover, although a series of Sesotho terminologies was compiled from 1954 to 1992 to expand the lexicon, translators in fields as diverse as education, health, and media still faced challenges (Moleleki, 1999) developing new words to keep up with the times. This is ironic when one considers that Sesotho is a fluid language by nature. Since its earliest days, it has never waited for either policy, colonial experts, or even language practitioners to deliberate over its fate.

In 2001, UNESCO then introduced its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. It was followed by the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The UNESCO Roadmap for Arts Education (URAE) policy document followed in 2006. In 2010, the Seoul Agenda further elaborated on the Roadmap. As of 2024, a consolidated UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education was created (UNESCO, 2024).

UNESCO is a compelling voice in shaping policies and their implementation (Singh, 2007) in so-called developing countries like Lesotho. However, the broad strokes

[41] UNESCO was founded months after the end of the Second World War on 16 November 1945. While this was an important political moment, it was nevertheless in the midst of the colonial era.

[42] The programme was aimed to provide emergency assistance to member states and non-governmental organisations.

that underlie objectives assigned to culture and arts education can inadvertently widen the gap between theory and what is done in practice in terms of the ideas they lay claim to. This relationship dynamic is remnant of the European missionary's diplomatic role in colonial Lesotho. Likewise, MLab directly reflects how policy inconsistencies play out between European and African actors during encounters. These three institutions provide rich, time-sensitive, valuable learning and networking opportunities for their beneficiaries. Yet, it is often coupled with biased and tone-deaf practices in the administration and programming of the institutions.

The issues cited earlier in Lesotho's proposal to UNESCO in 1991 echoed those expressed at the turn of the century by Basotho intellectuals. What UNESCO (the present) and the missionaries (history) have in common is that despite their benevolent disposition, they set governing policies skewed towards Eurocentric logic (Western hegemony). Whether one calls it modernisation or development, coloniality cannot be masked or explained away (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2018).

This realisation was my departure point in crafting the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop covered in Chapter Four. The questions about voice and its place within collective consciousness have deep-seated roots (Mörsch, 2009). The critical fabulation in the next section signals the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline's ability to speak to historical records to arrive at agency and the appropriate questions. It unpacks epistemic violences reflected in the missionary literature through letter-writing as a technique. The letter is a reading of resistance and civil epistemic disobedience, as embodied in the person of Cranmer 'Matsa Sebeta.

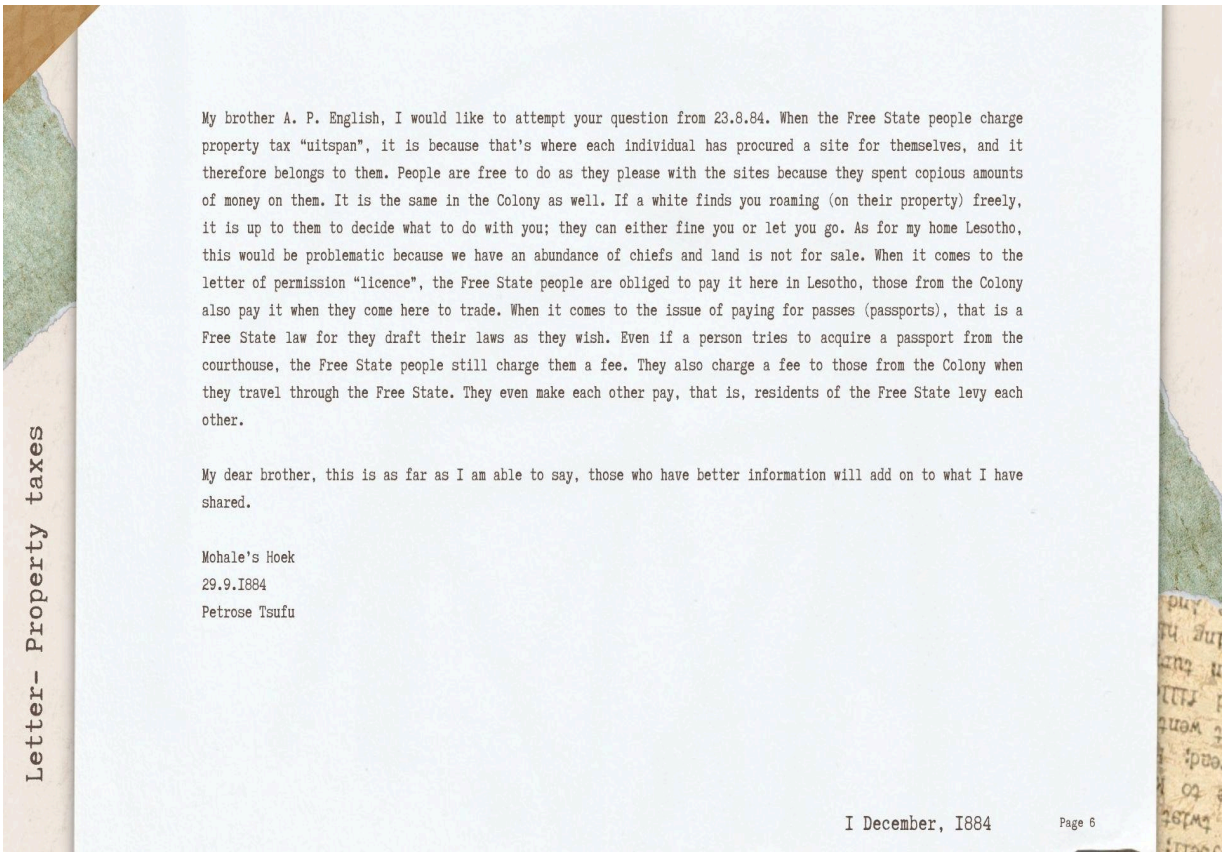



**Figure 18**. A letter about property taxes from contributor, Petrose Tšufu in the Leselinyana Newspaper. The letter was translated from Sesotho to English by the researcher to benefit the reader. Image courtesy of the researcher.

The intimacies embodied by letters have the possibility to launch movements, in the way that letters allow private details to enter into public space. The process thus catalyses political possibilities that taunt dominant narratives (Fernández et al, 2022). Letter writing offers an outlet to say what is difficult to say without the strain and rigidity of Academic writing. It is a tool of disobedience that subverts the evidence-based; no immediate audience, no life, pre-determined form designed to provide proof of what is. The letter comes in as a gesture and provocation of what else is possible (Fernández et al, 2022).

I further drew inspiration from a project by Keleketla! Library in the context of Another Roadmap School called "Letters to/from Cairo, Delhi, Gwangju/Cologne, Johannesburg & Richmond: Letter writing as a technology of the past present and futures". The engagement was a collective contemplation on fantasy, thought, feeling and speculation as action". It explored the theory of a letter as something stunted in time, despite the situations and conditions that render the letter relevant

at the particular time of writing changing between the time of departure, during transit and at the time of reception (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2020).

# Qalong: genesis-historical context-departure

This research project and others like it build upon assertions made by predecessors. The idea of plural identities was foundational for people who resorted to nationalise as Basotho[43]. King Moshoeshoe's resolution to treat Europeans as friends, not masters or enemies, was entrenched in a philosophy of unity in diversity (Dlali-Lekhanya, 2021). Basotho culture is an amalgamation of practices, ideals and codes of conduct incorporated from the founding clans and supplemented by their unique customs and traditions (Eldredge, 1991). The first missionaries' arrival nine years after the nation was founded in 1824 means that aspects of their Western cultures are deeply embedded in what is identified as Sesotho culture today[44].

The missionary endeavour in Lesotho was successful and set a precedent for missions across Southern Africa[45]. Despite their progress, the missionaries were frequently confronted by competing critical and dissenting voices. If not for the converts who deserted congregations and Christianity, it was the departure of beloved proteges from the mission. Another challenge they faced was the emergence of new churches. Sebeta was twice problematic in this sense; he left the

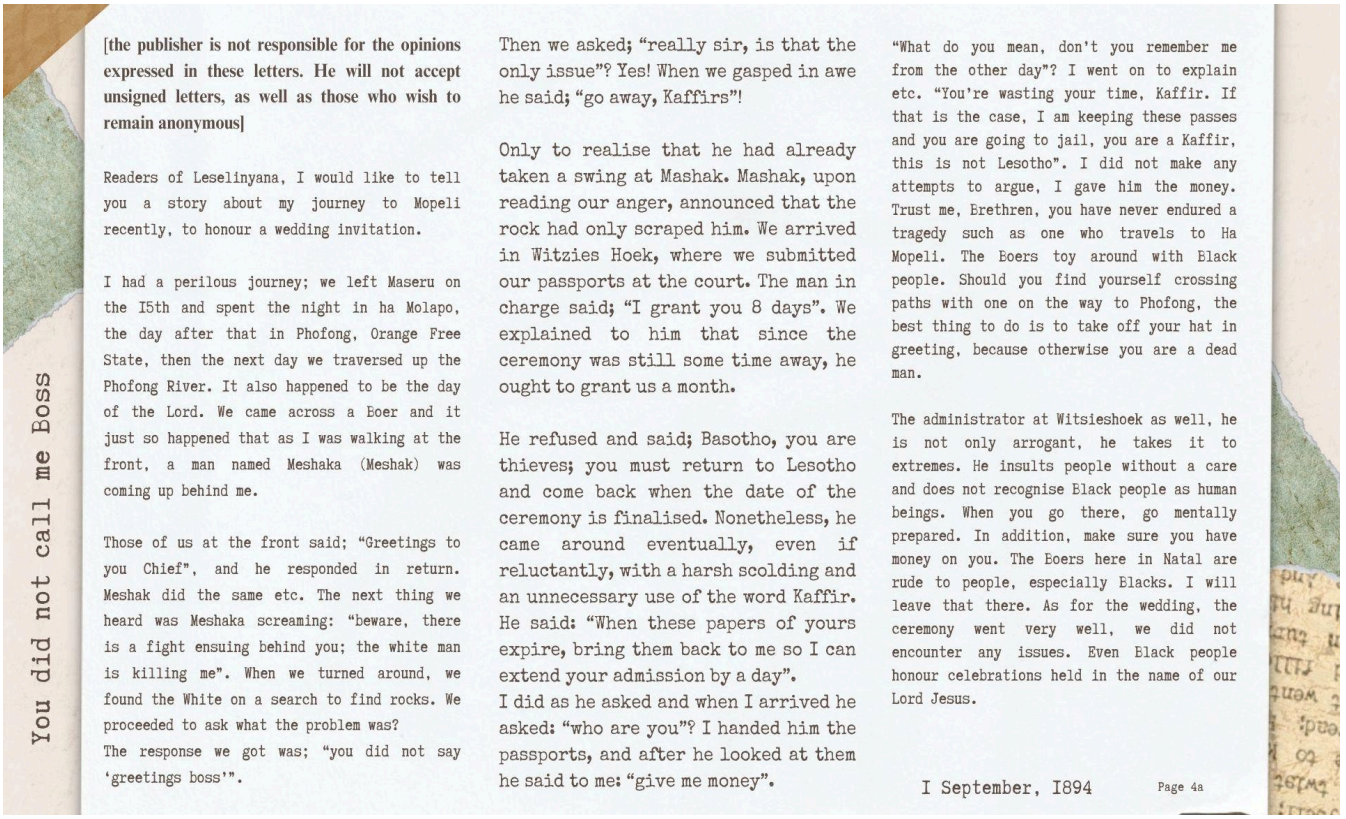
[43] The history of Lesotho is that the country comprises refugee clans that consolidated under the leadership of King Moshoeshoe at the height of the Lifaqane war and the Great Trek in the 1820s. Small tribes faced dangers from both local and foreign aggressors at a time when the Enlightenment era was taking off in Europe and The United States. The raging conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism had inspired a wave of proselytising on the African continent and Asia, continents which were said to be inhabited by primitive and savage heathens. In 1833, luck met opportunity for both King Moshoeshoe who invited Christian missionaries to Lesotho as a strategy to secure peace for his people, and the PEMS (Paris Evangelical Mission Society) Missionaries who were eager to pioneer their mission work.

[44] According to King, Lesotho was forged in a melting pot of adversity and diversity, Lesotho-as-amalgam had boundaries, but they have never alienated Lesotho from a wider, changing world. This is evident in Lesotho's long history of transnationalism, represented by both migrant labour and pan-Africanist thought (King, 2019). Nonetheless, attitudes born as direct expressions of coloniality; the individual versus the collective, elitism, rank, competition and so on, became ingrained in Basotho as they became increasingly Westernised.

[45] The PEMS missionaries embraced adventure. They would liaise with peers to organise excursions in the form of diplomatic missions connected to the British colonial government, and their search for heathens to civilise and expand their religious Kingdom. Their efforts got them to places as far away as Zambia where they ultimately set up a satellite mission in 1885 (Arone, 1886). An analysis of the Missionary journals also reveals that the Morija mission was the most successful in the region by virtue of the high number of schools, converts and trained catechists and priests who went on to open and lead mission stations.

PEMS and started a black church. He took his defiance further and co-founded the first political movement in Lesotho (Machobane, 1990). More about Sebeta will be revealed in the next section.

The voices who spoke up to missionaries were not inherently against Western technologies or education. They opposed the rejection and infantilisation of indigenous epistemologies and values. For example, how Basotho measured time (X, 1885), as well as their social and spiritual practices. It was hard for them to buy into the idea that Europeans were superior simply because they had different intelligences. These Basotho knew that the tendency was for Europeans to either hate or exploit them and that friendship tended to be conditional (Moloantoa, 1894).



You did not call me Boss

[the publisher is not responsible for the opinions expressed in these letters. He will not accept unsigned letters, as well as those who wish to remain anonymous]

Readers of Leselinyana, I would like to tell you a story about my journey to Mopeli recently, to honour a wedding invitation.

I had a perilous journey; we left Maseru on the I5th and spent the night in ha Molapo, the day after that in Phofong, Orange Free State, then the next day we traversed up the Phofong River. It also happened to be the day of the Lord. We came across a Boer and it just so happened that as I was walking at the front, a man named Meshaka (Meshak) was coming up behind me.

Those of us at the front said; "Greetings to you Chief", and he responded in return. Meshak did the same etc. The next thing we heard was Meshaka screaming: "beware, there is a fight ensuing behind you; the white man is killing me". When we turned around, we found the White on a search to find rocks. We proceeded to ask what the problem was?
The response we got was; "you did not say 'greetings boss'".

Then we asked; "really sir, is that the only issue"? Yes! When we gasped in awe he said; "go away, Kaffirs"!

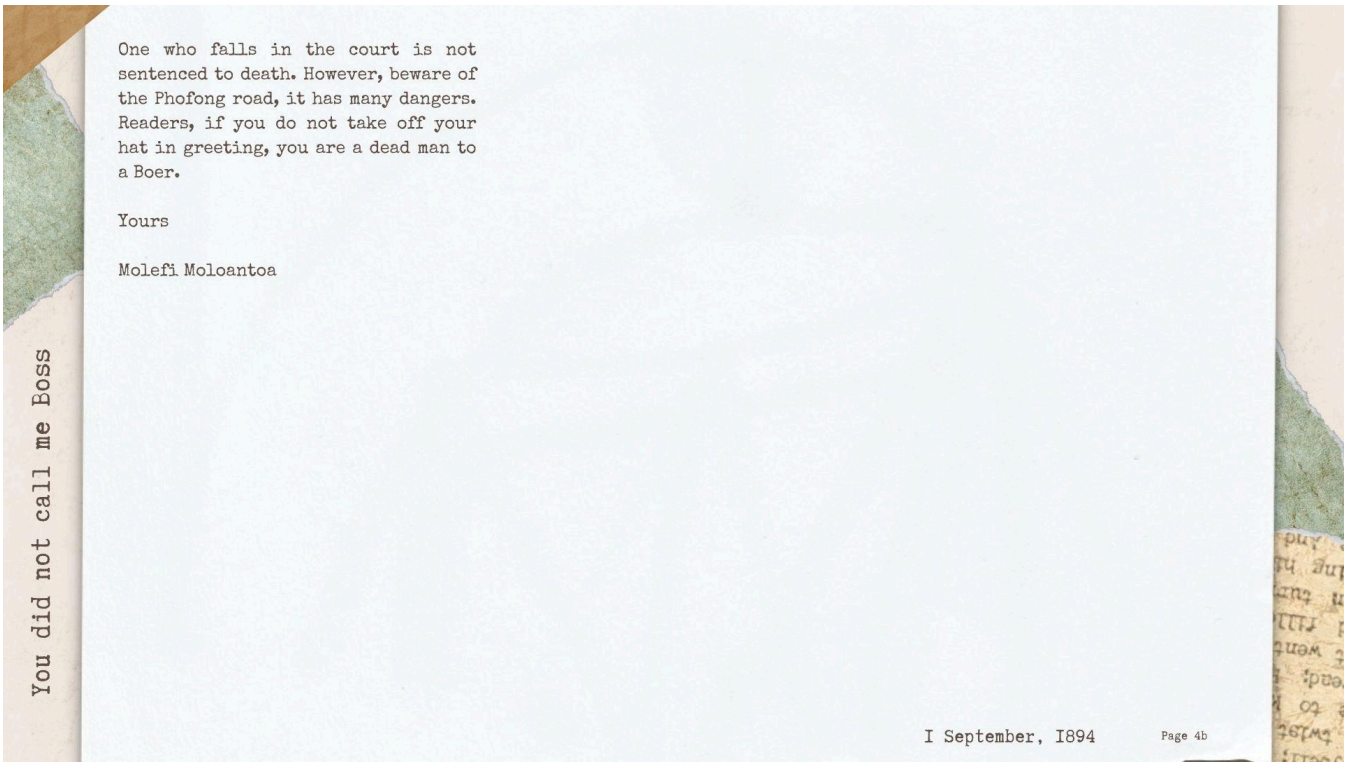
Only to realise that he had already taken a swing at Mashak. Mashak, upon reading our anger, announced that the rock had only scraped him. We arrived in Witzies Hoek, where we submitted our passports at the court. The man in charge said; "I grant you 8 days". We explained to him that since the ceremony was still some time away, he ought to grant us a month.

He refused and said; Basotho, you are thieves; you must return to Lesotho and come back when the date of the ceremony is finalised. Nonetheless, he came around eventually, even if reluctantly, with a harsh scolding and an unnecessary use of the word Kaffir. He said: "When these papers of yours expire, bring them back to me so I can extend your admission by a day".
I did as he asked and when I arrived he asked: "who are you"? I handed him the passports, and after he looked at them he said to me: "give me money".

"What do you mean, don't you remember me from the other day"? I went on to explain etc. "You're wasting your time, Kaffir. If that is the case, I am keeping these passes and you are going to jail, you are a Kaffir, this is not Lesotho". I did not make any attempts to argue, I gave him the money. Trust me, Brethren, you have never endured a tragedy such as one who travels to Ha Mopeli. The Boers toy around with Black people. Should you find yourself crossing paths with one on the way to Phofong, the best thing to do is to take off your hat in greeting, because otherwise you are a dead man.

The administrator at Witsieshoek as well, he is not only arrogant, he takes it to extremes. He insults people without a care and does not recognise Black people as human beings. When you go there, go mentally prepared. In addition, make sure you have money on you. The Boers here in Natal are rude to people, especially Blacks. I will leave that there. As for the wedding, the ceremony went very well, we did not encounter any issues. Even Black people honour celebrations held in the name of our Lord Jesus.

I September, I894 Page 4a




**Figures 19&20.** A letter from a man named Molefi Moloantoa published in the Leselinyana Newspaper. He recounts the story of racist encounters he and his travel companions faced in the Orange Free State in neighbouring South Africa. Image courtesy of the researcher.

For the interaction with Sebeta, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is activated in conversation with the Leselinyana newspaper and The PEMS *Journal des missions évangéliques* (The Journal of Evangelical Missions, hereafter; *the Journal*) archives[46] as primary sources. The Leselinyana[47] was founded by a Swiss missionary to the Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS) in 1863 until it ceased publication in 2006[48]. *The Journal,* on the other hand, was a missionary magazine published from 1826 to 1989. It consisted of articles written in French by missionaries who narrated experiences and observations in their respective stations across the world.

The proselytising agenda behind missionary literature necessitates viewing it as both assault and exchange, much like the struggle for fairness between UNESCO and

[46] I also referenced the Correspondence Missionnaire (missionary correspondence), Naledi ea Lesotho (Basutoland Star) archives to supplement and contend (if at all) with Leselinyana and the Journal, in order to build a more compelling story.

[47] In its early days, Leselinyana operated as a tool to evangelise and transmit messages from the church and colonial administration. It also included letters and opinions from locals which offer contemporary readers a glimpse into the economic, social, and political realities of the time.

[48] Locals were published on condition that they wrote within parameters set by the publisher. Sometimes the publisher publicly rejected letters, showed condemnation or cut them in short if they were deemed unsuitable for the paper. In its own right, this was a form of censorship more than regulation.

developing countries or MLab and its modus operandi. To further complicate this tension, Porter (2004) continues that the missionary and convert shared a mutual vision of belonging to an international, trans-temporal community. It is, therefore, helpful to apply the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline to analyse the European missionaries according to their modes of representation and gatekeeping and then juxtapose them with resisting voices among the converts.

The Leselinyana serves as a chronological record of the evolution of Sesotho orthography architectured by Europeans throughout the last half of the nineteenth century until it was first standardised in 1906 and beyond (Semethe, 2019). The early days reflect when orthography was coded to privilege European pronunciation. For example, */yualeka/* became */joalo ka/*, the latter of which sounds more aligned with the accent of a native Sesotho speaker. In the same vein, the Leselinyana newspaper is referenced as an almanac of African letters (Mokoena, 2020), which capacitates the production of a biography of a prominent Indigenous Christian, ‘Matsa Cranmer Sebeta.

## Sebeta: gone astray

This section covers the enactment of a critical fabulation. I wrote a letter to ‘Matsa Sebeta to ask about his experiences, scholarship and writings. Sebeta recognised early on that timing and tactical diplomacy were important (Machobane, 1990). The Missionaries and colonial administration, much like UNESCO or MLab, were too powerful to confront head-on; so he operated on the fringes as a friendly adversary. His legacy offers some ways to think about how to navigate the bureaucracy of official structures in the present. Although Sebeta ultimately radicalised and distanced himself from the PEMS church, he was comfortably part of an elite. He was part of a generation of Basotho who appropriated their westernisation on their terms. His communal objective was to challenge colonialism by elevating Basotho and raising consciousness and criticality, while tackling national identity through language. In addition, Sebeta opened an independent school and co-founded the first political party in Lesotho.

Very little is known about Sebeta through a complete biography. However, the fragments from the archive still bear questions and relationalities worthy of engaging. The storyteller (film and writing) Minh-ha puts it this way:

> In the process of storytelling, speaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. It destroys, brings to life, and nurtures. (Minh-ha, 1989, p121).

I wrote a letter for its potential for intimacy, where speech takes priority over formality to make way for a meditative conversation. I ask questions so that speculation about Sebeta's response invites the readers to imagine themselves in the scenario.

Archival research guides my processes for strategically arriving at questions for the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop at VAM. I focused mainly on the unanswered questions, the humanising aspects that likely influenced certain topics of discussion and how they were handled by Sebeta in the Leselinyana. I lean on Minh-ha's (1989) notion that each story is a fragment and a whole within a whole. The little bits of personality revealed about Sebeta as an individual allow enough room for conjecture to arrive at certain conclusions about the trajectory of Sesotho orthography and parallel cultural shifts of the time. The interaction with Sebeta orientates my navigation of the intersections of curatorial practice, policy, institutional positionality, narrative and history in *Contending with Friends*.

Sebeta's biography is found here in keeping with the original Un/chrono/Logical Timeline activation, which uses dry chronological facts to elicit a personal response about art history and social justice. It is a reparative exercise anchored on speculation and radical intervention, as I reckon with history. This speculative encounter is further illustrated in the biography's description of a moment after he died.

## Biography

- ‘Matsa Cranmer Sebeta, birthday unknown.
- When it opened in 1868, he became one of the first students to enrol at the Normal school.
- After completing his studies in the early 1870s, he became a teacher in the PEMS schools.
- In 1882, he enrolled as a student at the Theological school when it was opened, thus beginning his journey towards becoming a Reverend.
- The seminary was temporarily closed from 1883, and when it reopened in 1887, Sebeta never returned.
- In 1886, he established an independent, non-denominational black-owned school at Matelile, with strong support from the area chief, Seeiso Letsie.
- In 1895, he left PEMS and subsequently joined the A.M.E church.
- In 1898, he established the first A.M.E church mission in Lesotho.
- He presented *Naledi ea Basutoland newspaper* at the government-sponsored missionary conference on Sesotho orthography in 1906. He led the paper as editor in chief since its founding in 1904 and was a frequent contributor in its early years.
- In 1907, he became one of the founding members of the Basutoland Progressive Association (BPA), the first group in Lesotho to organise a political arm.
- In 1912, he passed away.

In 1921, Dr W. M. T. Sebeta, his son, completed his medical studies in Edinburgh

## Letter to Sebeta

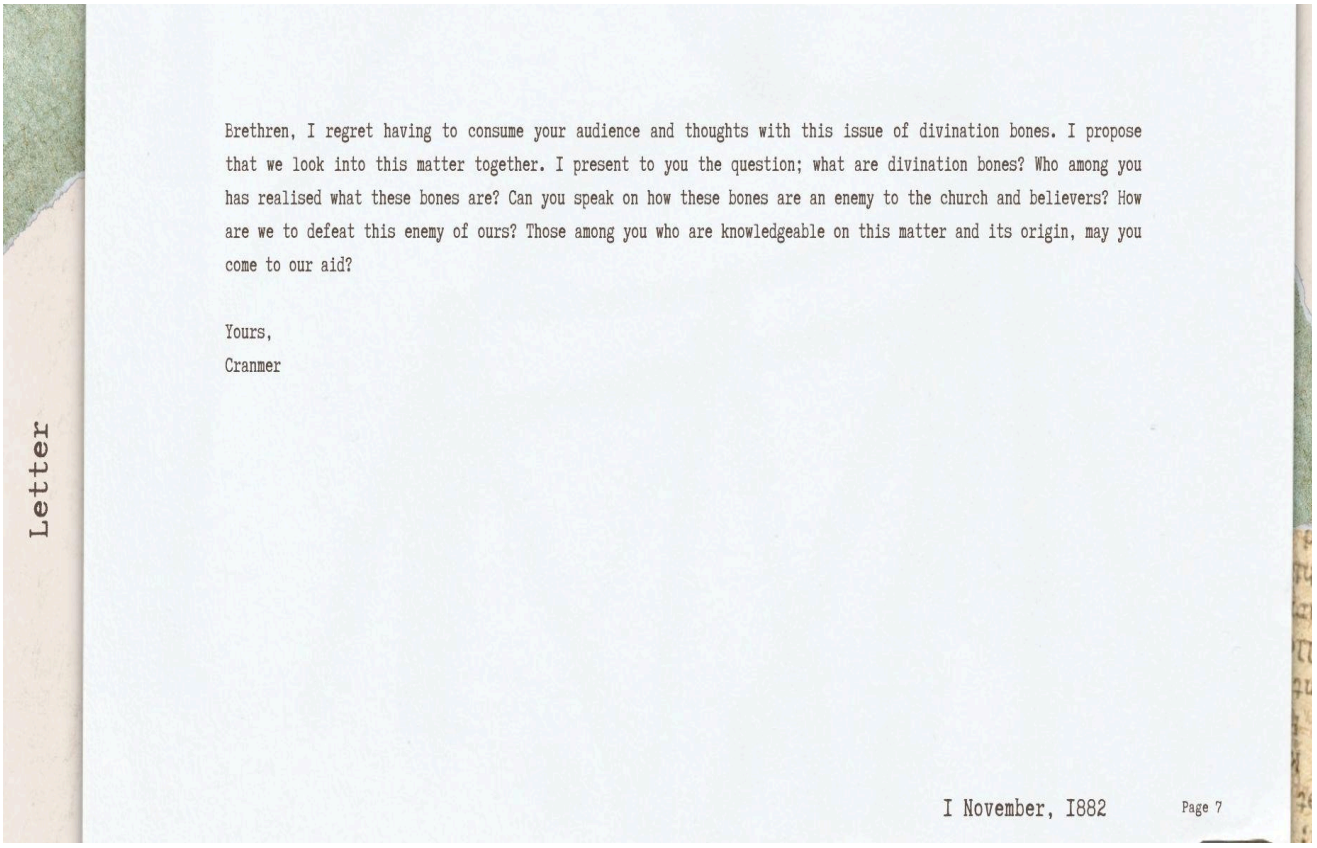
*Lumela ntate ‘Matsa.*

*Let me start by saying, ntate Sebeta, forgive me for being direct; it is just that I feel comfortable to speak freely. I identify with what I have learned about you, though limited.*

*Were you a student of Rapetloane before he died of Typhoid in 1874? You know he is one of my earliest recorded ancestors! So recorded because he loved Fora[49] so much that he almost broke his spine during the church's construction between 1847 and 1857 (Smith, 1996).*

*You must have made quite the impression on Rapetloane and Reverend Mabille because you were among the first Basotho to be featured in Leselinyana after him, and you lived in Mabille's house.*

*When I first read you in a letter in 1882, you were questioning the practice of bone-throwing. I thought it funny that you responded to yourself in a subsequent issue a few months later. I assume this was because you did not receive responses from readers? You were critical about the physical presentation of the Healers. Charlatans in the business of exploiting people's naivete, in your view. Your tone was a dead giveaway of your thoughts on the matter. Were they entirely your thoughts?*


Letter

Brethren, I regret having to consume your audience and thoughts with this issue of divination bones. I propose that we look into this matter together. I present to you the question; what are divination bones? Who among you has realised what these bones are? Can you speak on how these bones are an enemy to the church and believers? How are we to defeat this enemy of ours? Those among you who are knowledgeable on this matter and its origin, may you come to our aid?

Yours,
Cranmer

I November, I882 Page 7

[49] Basotho refer to PEMS/LEC-SA as Fora because it was introduced by French speakers. The word Fora is Sesotho for France, while French would be referred to as Sefora.

**Figure 21.** Sebeta's first entry to the Leselinyana Newspaper. It is a letter to readers asking about divination bones. Image courtesy of the researcher.

*You happened to be a student during the rise of the prophetess 'Mantsopa[50]. As early as the 1860s, her philosophy was to blend Christianity and Basotho spiritual traditions in her spiritual practice and teachings. She called for Basotho to return to the traditions and customs they had before the arrival of the Priests.*

*Nkhono 'Mantsopa's ethos was that the pathway to God was broad enough not to renounce Basotho spirituality for Christianity. Were you thinking about her when you wrote the short letter?*

*Another possibility, which is more likely, is that someone asked you to write the letter. The ground was laid very early on by the pioneer missionary of the PEMS to Lesotho, Casalis when he wrote that:*

> *There exists among these people a crowd of clever and cunning men, who under the generic name of engakas, or learned men, perform the functions of priest, prophets, diviners, and doctors and enrich themselves at the public expense. The chiefs favour them and find in them powerful auxiliaries. (Casalis, 1861, p. 283)*

*The level of detail you give in your response to yourself gives me the impression that your curiosity was rooted. Perhaps you were grappling with a dilemma privately? You had given the topic a lot of thought.*

*Your story is fractured; how come? Is it because you were only considered good depending on how you represented the mission? Does it make it ok for all your other achievements to be ignored? What kind of man did this shape you into as a Mosotho and your understanding of your culture?*

[50] The missionaries certainly did not approve of 'Mantsopa nor her relationship with King moshoeshoe. Her popularity made it difficult to turn Basotho against her, so the PEMS missionaries embarked on a campaign to convert her. The current narrative about her revolves more around her conversion to Christianity than other equally important areas of her life and practice as an indigenous Spiritual leader.

*During your earlier days at the mission, did you feel like you were there in your wholeness? Or did you already feel that you were only allowed to be there as long as you stayed in line?*

*Would you and your peers have decided to form a political party if you had not interacted with the African Americans of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) Church[51]? How did your transition to the church happen after you left the PEMS in 1895? Did it have anything to do with Mabille's death in 1894?*

*As a reader, I am sure you were exposed to the writings of W.E.B Du Bois[52] as you got better acquainted with your new church. I read that you led its first congregation in Lesotho in 1898. History says the A.M.E grew from a spirit to fight for freedom among Black people and not to depend on others to mediate it[53]. Your mindset was clear and unapologetic. I respect that.*

*Did the spirit of resistance and national identity directly respond to your Missionaries' political contexts, too? After all, The 1830 Revolution in France happened three years before Casalis and company arrived in Lesotho. Similarly, Switzerland had come out of the Sonderbund Civil War twelve years before Mabille arrived in 1860.*

*Perhaps during moments of nostalgia, loneliness, or shooting the breeze, the missionaries would share anecdotes that imprinted on your mind. What shape did 'mindless conversation' that did not involve religion take between your*

---

[51] Power disputes resembling earlier conflicts with the white missionaries between natives and their American counterparts came to be marked by bitterness and disappointment. Visiting bishops expressed dissatisfaction with the standards of the clergy they found and the practice of 'poaching' members from other congregations and churches. On the other hand, the rank and file did not appreciate the condescension of the American bishops (Kennedy, 1992).

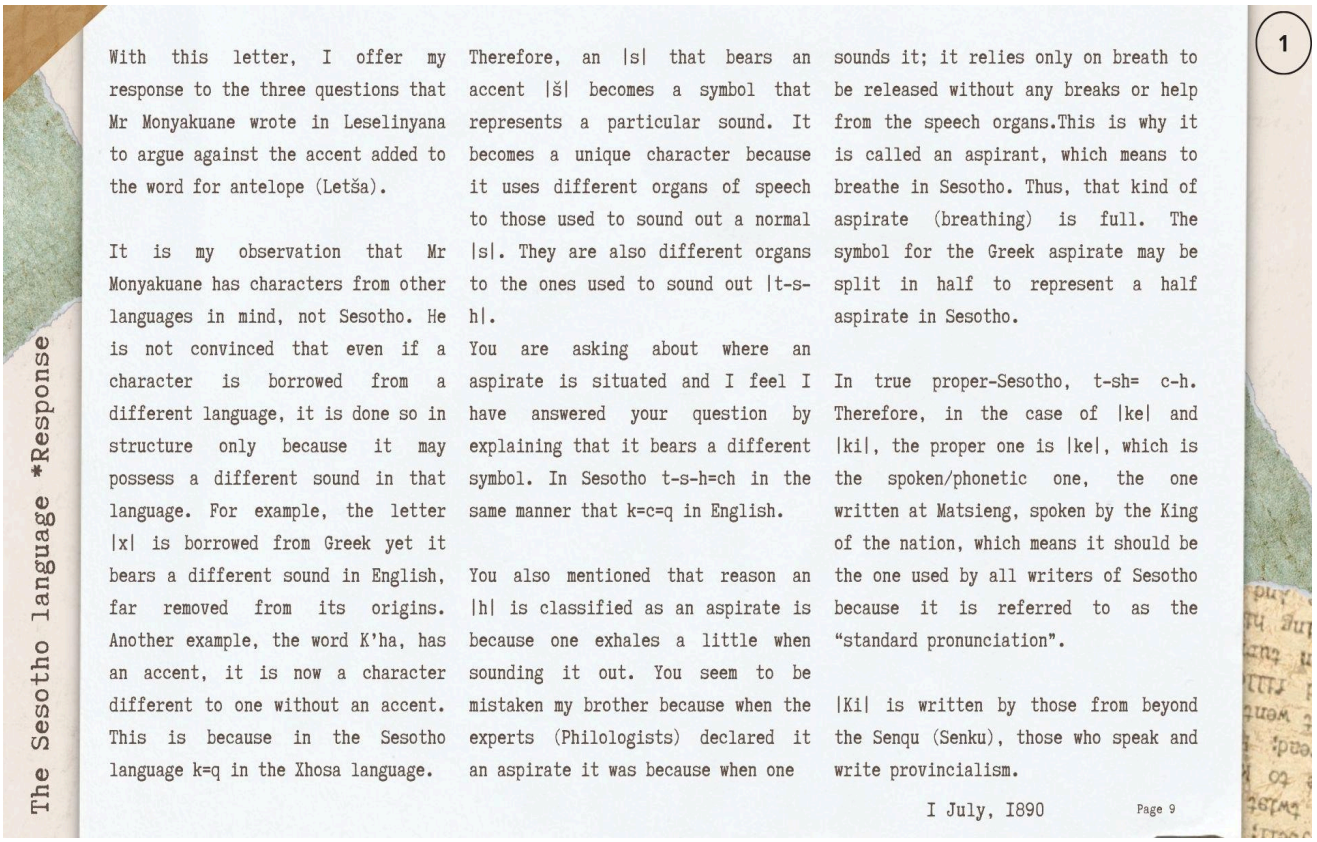
[52] Du Bois advocated for a religious rebirth for black people-one that would move away from emotional fervor toward the most powerful agency in moral development and social reform (Savage, 2000).

[53] The sovereignty of the African districts of the african methodist episcopal church: a historical assessment offers a comprehensive picture of the AME and its establishment and internal struggles throughout the 20th century (Booyse, 2010).

*colleagues and the missionaries? Especially if you and a white counterpart happened to be agemates?*

*From 1890, your entries in the Leselinyana shifted from spiritual practices to language. Is this how you reclaimed being Mosotho amid Westernisation? Was it your way of speaking for your inner child?*

*Was it a compromise that allowed you to make the missionaries happy by giving them something to publish? In contrast, they gave you the freedom to write about something you were sincerely passionate about until you found other outlets more in tune with your vision. Is this part of what influenced you to opening a school? Talk about upcycling the master's tools!*



The Sesotho language *Response

1

With this letter, I offer my response to the three questions that Mr Monyakuane wrote in Leselinyana to argue against the accent added to the word for antelope (Letša).

It is my observation that Mr Monyakuane has characters from other languages in mind, not Sesotho. He is not convinced that even if a character is borrowed from a different language, it is done so in structure only because it may possess a different sound in that language. For example, the letter |x| is borrowed from Greek yet it bears a different sound in English, far removed from its origins. Another example, the word K'ha, has an accent, it is now a character different to one without an accent. This is because in the Sesotho language k=q in the Xhosa language.

Therefore, an |s| that bears an accent |š| becomes a symbol that represents a particular sound. It becomes a unique character because it uses different organs of speech to those used to sound out a normal |s|. They are also different organs to the ones used to sound out |t-s-h|.

You are asking about where an aspirate is situated and I feel I have answered your question by explaining that it bears a different symbol. In Sesotho t-s-h=ch in the same manner that k=c=q in English.

You also mentioned that reason an |h| is classified as an aspirate is because one exhales a little when sounding it out. You seem to be mistaken my brother because when the experts (Philologists) declared it an aspirate it was because when one sounds it; it relies only on breath to be released without any breaks or help from the speech organs.This is why it is called an aspirant, which means to breathe in Sesotho. Thus, that kind of aspirate (breathing) is full. The symbol for the Greek aspirate may be split in half to represent a half aspirate in Sesotho.

In true proper-Sesotho, t-sh= c-h. Therefore, in the case of |ke| and |ki|, the proper one is |ke|, which is the spoken/phonetic one, the one written at Matsieng, spoken by the King of the nation, which means it should be the one used by all writers of Sesotho because it is referred to as the "standard pronunciation".

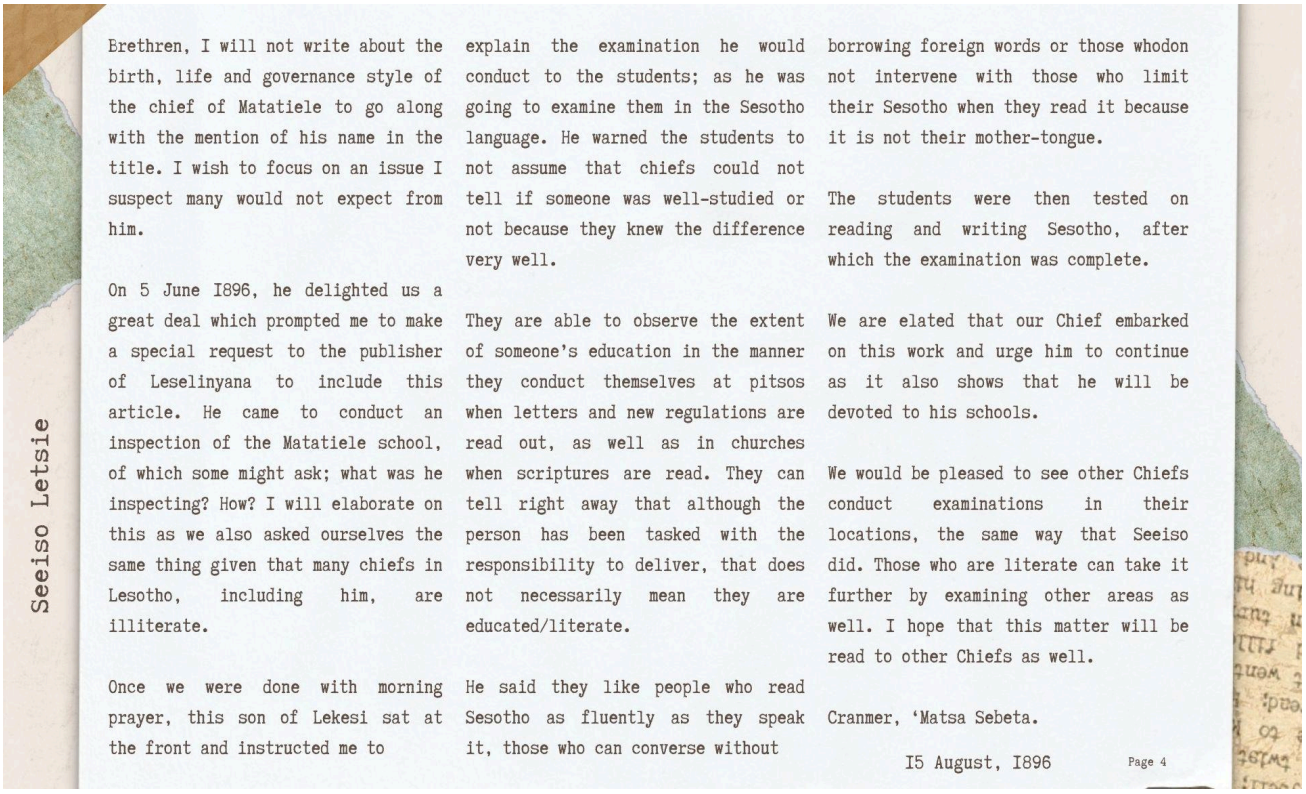
|Ki| is written by those from beyond the Senqu (Senku), those who speak and write provincialism.

I July, I890 Page 9

**Figure 22**. A letter from Sebeta to a Mr. Monyakuane relating to Sesotho orthography from the Leselinyana Newspaper. The letter is a glimpse into Sebeta's logic and interpretation of Sesotho orthography and pronunciation. Image courtesy of the researcher.

*You argued through your writings about Sesotho that the orthography was far more advanced than peer languages in the region. What struck me was that the queries you attended still challenge native Sesotho learners today. I*

*wonder if you operated on the understanding that some progress was better than none.*



Seeiso Letsie

Brethren, I will not write about the birth, life and governance style of the chief of Matatiele to go along with the mention of his name in the title. I wish to focus on an issue I suspect many would not expect from him.

On 5 June I896, he delighted us a great deal which prompted me to make a special request to the publisher of Leselinyana to include this article. He came to conduct an inspection of the Matatiele school, of which some might ask; what was he inspecting? How? I will elaborate on this as we also asked ourselves the same thing given that many chiefs in Lesotho, including him, are illiterate.

Once we were done with morning prayer, this son of Lekesi sat at the front and instructed me to explain the examination he would conduct to the students; as he was going to examine them in the Sesotho language. He warned the students to not assume that chiefs could not tell if someone was well-studied or not because they knew the difference very well.

They are able to observe the extent of someone's education in the manner they conduct themselves at pitsos when letters and new regulations are read out, as well as in churches when scriptures are read. They can tell right away that although the person has been tasked with the responsibility to deliver, that does not necessarily mean they are educated/literate.

He said they like people who read Sesotho as fluently as they speak it, those who can converse without borrowing foreign words or those whodon not intervene with those who limit their Sesotho when they read it because it is not their mother-tongue.

The students were then tested on reading and writing Sesotho, after which the examination was complete.

We are elated that our Chief embarked on this work and urge him to continue as it also shows that he will be devoted to his schools.

We would be pleased to see other Chiefs conduct examinations in their locations, the same way that Seeiso did. Those who are literate can take it further by examining other areas as well. I hope that this matter will be read to other Chiefs as well.

Cranmer, 'Matsa Sebeta.

I5 August, I896 Page 4

**Figure 23.** A letter from Sebeta about Seeiso Letsie, the chief of Matelile inside the Leselinyana Newspaper. The letter narrates a school visit and examination conducted by the chief, at Sebeta's school. Image courtesy of the researcher.

*I ask because you and your colleagues also started a newspaper using old equipment bought from the Morija mission[54]. In the Basutoland Star, you made the editorial decision to use an orthography you felt was more suitable.*

*How come you mostly stuck to the grammar rules formalised by Jacottet and Mabille? Were you frustrated when they rejected the most obvious of your recommendations during your presentation of Basutoland Star at the Orthography conference in 1906?*

*The issue of orthography and who had power over it was discussed at great length within the highest ranks of the PEMS. Relentless as the church was against accommodating objectively logical recommendations, you and your*

[54] The missionaries had updated their equipment and were actually impressed at the idea of a local press. However, they assumed a different tone once the newspaper began criticising them (Ambrose, 2007).

*comrades gave the missionaries one big headache. Still, in the end they proved to you just who had more power.*

*It is ridiculous that /D/ remained /Li/ in Sesotho when a fair amount of the orthography was revised with input from various stakeholders. I get the uniqueness argument around the orthography debate, but it does not legitimately hold weight. It highlights that we are using a Latin alphabet to communicate a Bantu language, and translation can be messy.*

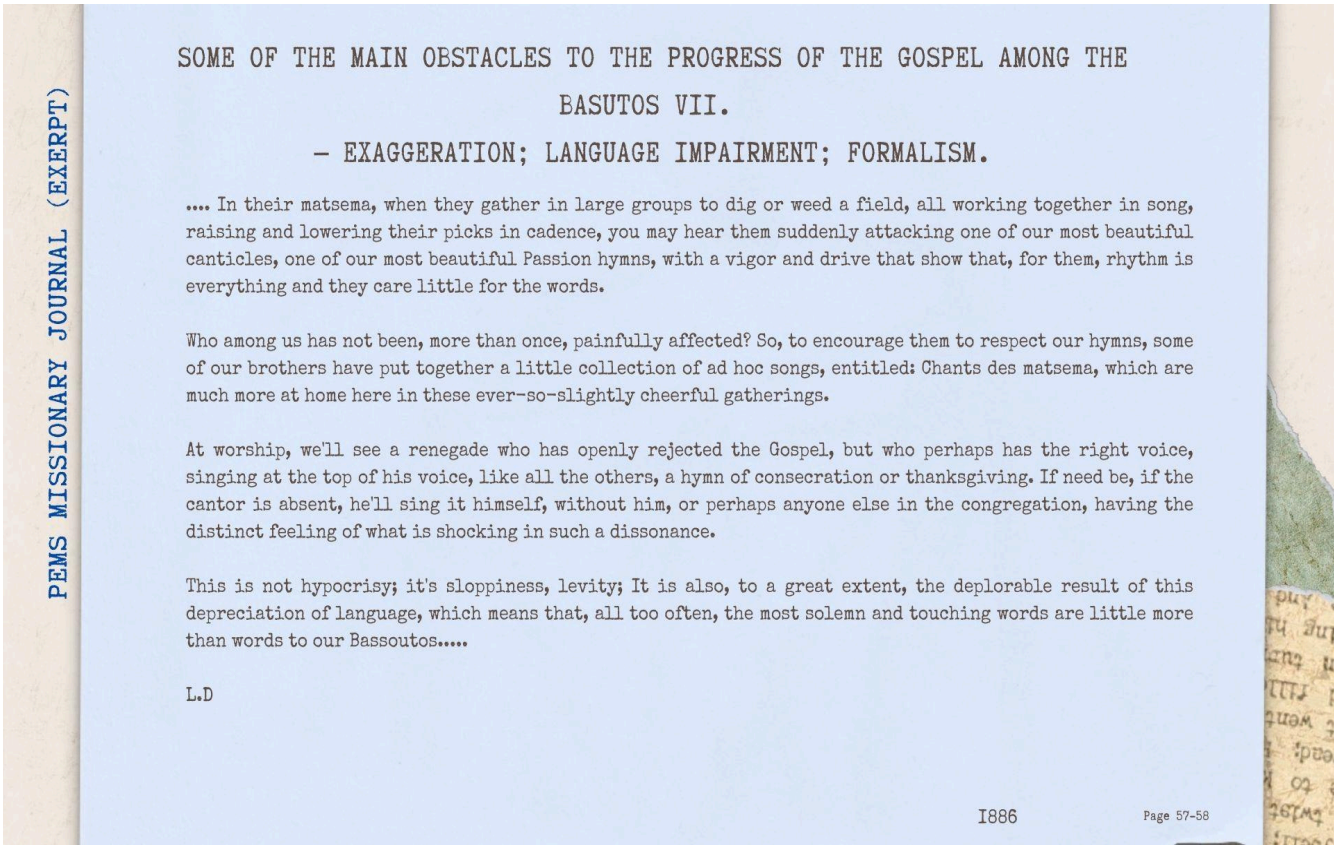
*Generations of Basotho struggle to read and write Sesotho; similarly, they struggle to read and appreciate art and its narrative value. The Sesotho language is phonetic; why can we not write it as we hear and speak it? Why not do as we think, think with our hands, so to speak? Language makes sense to those who experience it.*

*In African aesthetics, chevrons and rings were marked with ash to decorate calabashes dedicated to libations to the ancestors. Back in your days, function and beauty went hand in hand. Language is the same; its function is to communicate meaning through sound. Narratives around a language, its offshoots and reproductions, make it what it is. Therefore, language politics are not unique to Sesotho; I am simply drawing a parallel.*

*Swiss missionary to Lesotho Louis Duvoisin wrote that:*

> *Basutos, as we have seen, are very prone to exaggeration. They resemble children who have little sense of measure or shade. Like children, they like to generalise. Many of these exaggerations have passed into the language and become common phrases. For example: "Ke shuéle", "Ke bolailoe" (I died, I was killed) will say someone who is still very well, but who, either literally or figuratively, wants to imply that he/she has been a little mistreated. (Duvoisin, 1886, p. 54)*

*He goes on to say that Basotho did not know where to draw the line between time and place when it came to singing hymns composed by the church.*



PEMS MISSIONARY JOURNAL (EXERPT)

SOME OF THE MAIN OBSTACLES TO THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL AMONG THE BASUTOS VII.

– EXAGGERATION; LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT; FORMALISM.

.... In their matsema, when they gather in large groups to dig or weed a field, all working together in song, raising and lowering their picks in cadence, you may hear them suddenly attacking one of our most beautiful canticles, one of our most beautiful Passion hymns, with a vigor and drive that show that, for them, rhythm is everything and they care little for the words.

Who among us has not been, more than once, painfully affected? So, to encourage them to respect our hymns, some of our brothers have put together a little collection of ad hoc songs, entitled: Chants des matsema, which are much more at home here in these ever-so-slightly cheerful gatherings.

At worship, we'll see a renegade who has openly rejected the Gospel, but who perhaps has the right voice, singing at the top of his voice, like all the others, a hymn of consecration or thanksgiving. If need be, if the cantor is absent, he'll sing it himself, without him, or perhaps anyone else in the congregation, having the distinct feeling of what is shocking in such a dissonance.

This is not hypocrisy; it's sloppiness, levity; It is also, to a great extent, the deplorable result of this depreciation of language, which means that, all too often, the most solemn and touching words are little more than words to our Bassoutos.....

L.D

I886 Page 57-58

**Figure 24**. A letter from Duvoisin inside the Journal. It is covered as part of a series of reports analysing the obstacles missionaries faced in the efforts to convert Basotho to Christianity. Image courtesy of the researcher.

*I imagine you would have responded, as I would; that Basotho are poetic people who speak in pictures. Sesotho words are pretty simple on their own, but their true magic is how they can transmit emotion and meaning. This is what makes Basotho formidable storytellers. It has to do with ensuring that the story or its message stays with a person.*

*During the missionary conference 1906, Reverend Duby[55] of the PEMS said: "without religious teaching, the natives would be top heavy and would be overwhelmed in the storms of life" (Duby, 1906, p.77). Which validated what you meant when you said education is curated differently for Basotho.*

[55] Duby expressed his sentiments during a discussion on *Literature in the Vernacular*. Only one native priest from the Morija mission formed part of the delegation to the conference: J. P. Mohapeloa.

*How come you never wrote any books? The power of your words, tone, mood, and manner in which you wrote told me that you were intentional with your voice. If it meant speaking through an orthography that did not all the way make sense to you, you would be articulate nonetheless. Your writing is austere, thoughtful, well informed and cordial. It carries in its rhythmic chants repetition—a quirk of Basotho's speech.*

*Language is more than noise or words; it is movement. Voice is, therefore, a person's rhythm as they navigate life. I see this in how you invite your readers to join you in thought.*

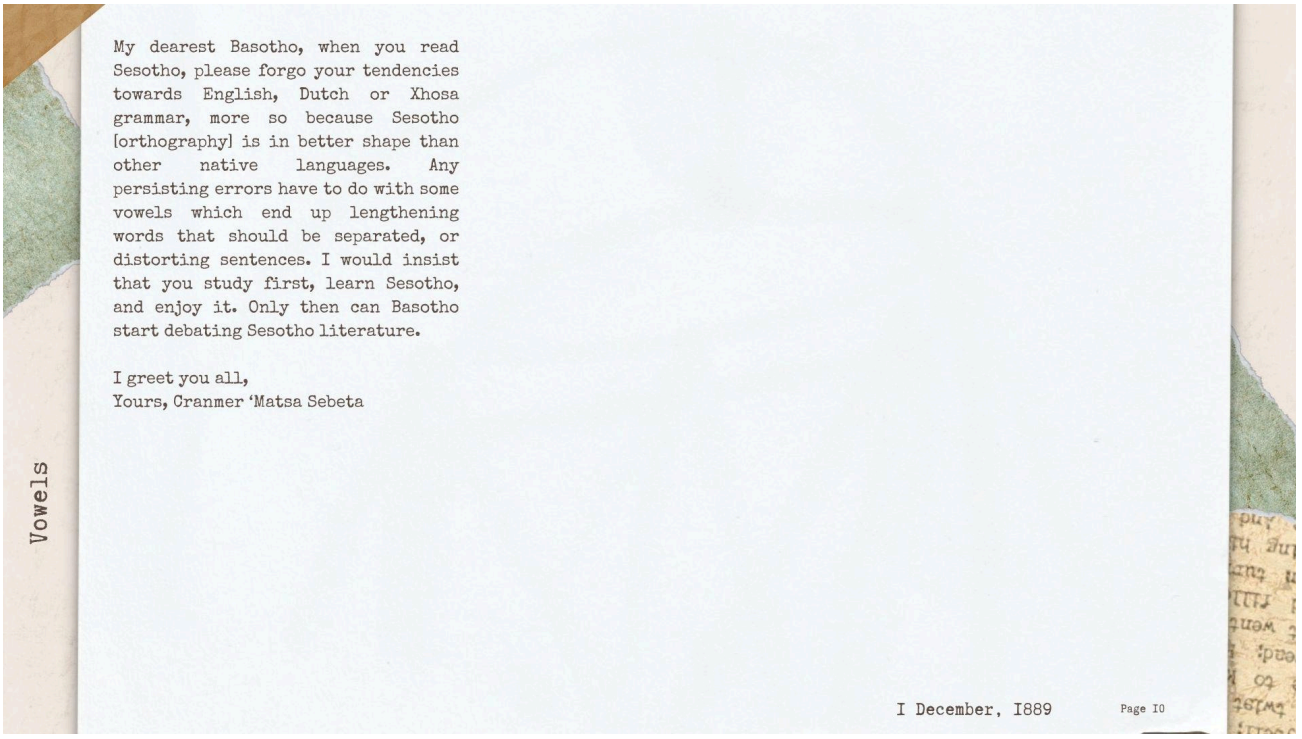



**Figure 25.** A letter from Sebeta to readers of the Leselinyana Newspaper. In the letter, Sebeta admonishes readers for conflating Sesotho orthography with other orthographies and encourages them to study Sesotho more. Image courtesy of the researcher.

*Duvoisin also wrote:*

> *Most people in Lesotho viewed the church as somewhat a state within the state. It could be compared to small fortresses, surrounded by walls and bristling with cannons from which to keep a respectful distance. (Duvoisin, 1886, p. 387)*

*He added that language could demilitarise the resistance to capture sceptics because it introduces new thought, speech and expression rituals.*

*I ask myself, what about the spiritual embodiment of language? Censoring particular vocabulary and language discouraged aspects of the spiritual world. The languages of nature and communion, which bore their energy regarding Basotho's way of life, were diluted with industrialist, Enlightenment language (Warmelo, 1927).*

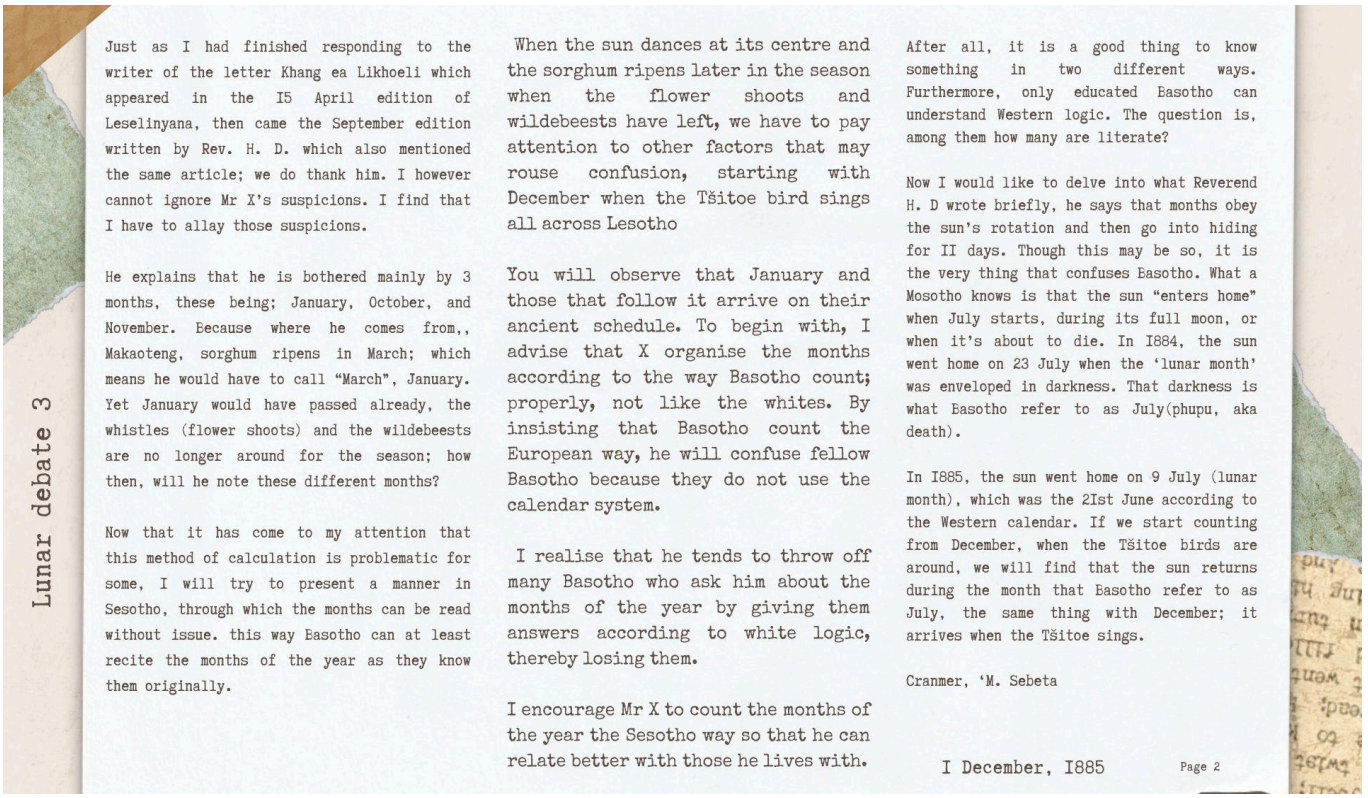
*Before then, activities were governed by principles and little was improvised. For example, trade was more of a pragmatic practice for Basotho based on needs and communities, as in the case of matsema[56]. It had less to do with capitalist endeavours focused on the individual.*

*This brings me to your conception of time. In 1885, you responded to a series of letters debating the Lunar cycle. You may be interested in learning that this topic is still on people's lips. Climatic conditions have shifted seasonal cycles to the point where predictability has become volatile.*

*How is it that Hermann Dieterlen[57] was willing to publish your controversial thoughts? Was it for freedom of speech and debate? As long as it supported the claim that proselytising was more effective when communicated through local perspectives, I suppose.*

[56] Letsema (singular) is the practice of people collectively working together to complete a set task such as ploughing the fields. Reference Eldredge's A South African Kingdom (2002) to learn more about the trade systems of Lesotho.

[57] Dieterlen emigrated to Lesotho in 1875 to run the Hermon Mission station in Mafeteng Lesotho. He was fluent in Sesotho and revised and expanded several editions of Adophe Mabille's original Sesotho-English Dictionary.



Lunar debate 3

Just as I had finished responding to the writer of the letter Khang ea Likhoeli which appeared in the I5 April edition of Leselinyana, then came the September edition written by Rev. H. D. which also mentioned the same article; we do thank him. I however cannot ignore Mr X's suspicions. I find that I have to allay those suspicions.

He explains that he is bothered mainly by 3 months, these being; January, October, and November. Because where he comes from,, Makaoteng, sorghum ripens in March; which means he would have to call "March", January. Yet January would have passed already, the whistles (flower shoots) and the wildebeests are no longer around for the season; how then, will he note these different months?

Now that it has come to my attention that this method of calculation is problematic for some, I will try to present a manner in Sesotho, through which the months can be read without issue. this way Basotho can at least recite the months of the year as they know them originally.

When the sun dances at its centre and the sorghum ripens later in the season when the flower shoots and wildebeests have left, we have to pay attention to other factors that may rouse confusion, starting with December when the Tšitoe bird sings all across Lesotho

You will observe that January and those that follow it arrive on their ancient schedule. To begin with, I advise that X organise the months according to the way Basotho count; properly, not like the whites. By insisting that Basotho count the European way, he will confuse fellow Basotho because they do not use the calendar system.

I realise that he tends to throw off many Basotho who ask him about the months of the year by giving them answers according to white logic, thereby losing them.

I encourage Mr X to count the months of the year the Sesotho way so that he can relate better with those he lives with.

After all, it is a good thing to know something in two different ways. Furthermore, only educated Basotho can understand Western logic. The question is, among them how many are literate?

Now I would like to delve into what Reverend H. D wrote briefly, he says that months obey the sun's rotation and then go into hiding for II days. Though this may be so, it is the very thing that confuses Basotho. What a Mosotho knows is that the sun "enters home" when July starts, during its full moon, or when it's about to die. In I884, the sun went home on 23 July when the 'lunar month' was enveloped in darkness. That darkness is what Basotho refer to as July(phupu, aka death).

In I885, the sun went home on 9 July (lunar month), which was the 2Ist June according to the Western calendar. If we start counting from December, when the Tšitoe birds are around, we will find that the sun returns during the month that Basotho refer to as July, the same thing with December; it arrives when the Tšitoe sings.

Cranmer, 'M. Sebeta

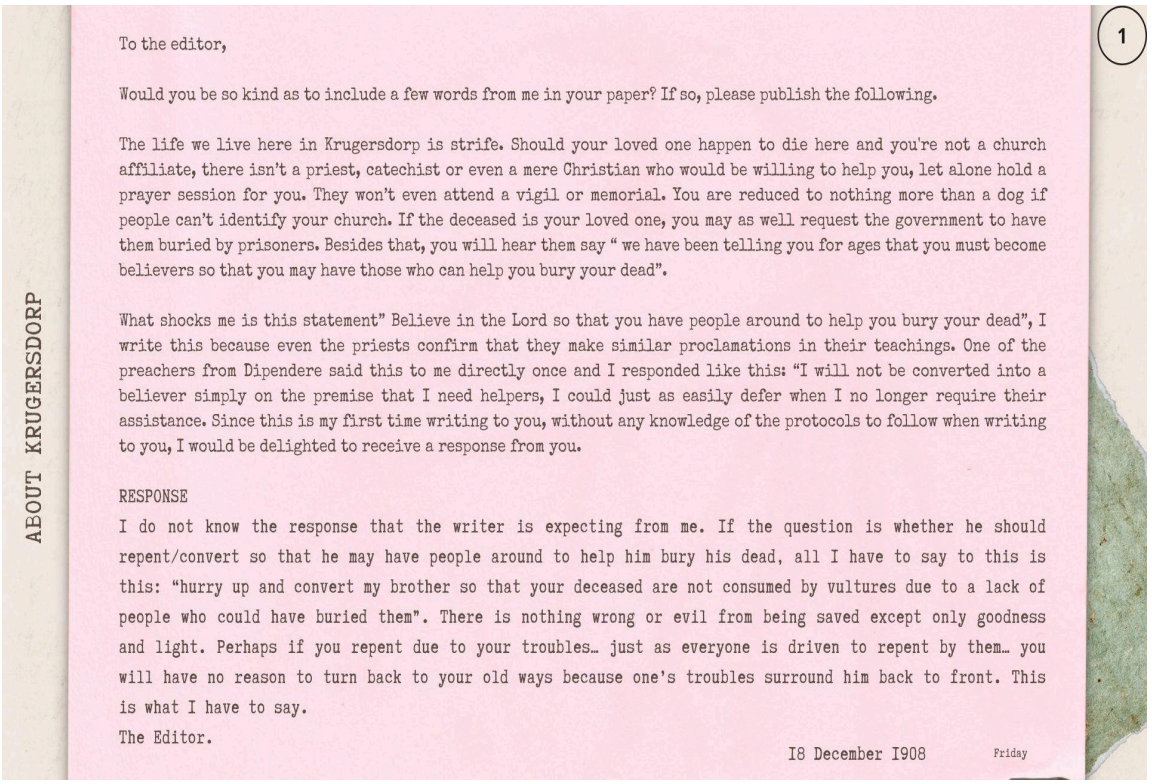
I December, I885 Page 2

**Figure 26.** A letter from Sebeta in response to a Lunar debate that took place in the Leselinyana Newspaper. In the letter, Sebeta advises Basotho to stick to their way of counting time. Image courtesy of the researcher.

*Naledi ea Lesotho also featured paternalistic commentary on what was considered proper for a modern Mosotho. Could it have been a case of your unconscious bias, or were you setting up a new culture of modern, educated, refined Basotho? I worry that the terms of that 'refinement' were deeply nuanced because, at face value, it felt like you were replicating the ideals of the missionaries.*

*Your efforts toward decolonisation were clear. Your generation knew what they did not want: to be reflected as inferior to the Europeans or go back to the days-of-old before "civilisation." The vision was unclear and convoluted. In a sense, the civilising project had achieved its goal of creating a people with a lost sense of identity.*

*How did you identify yourself once you took away your books, European dress, and Sesotho speaking? I ask myself this question a lot.*



ABOUT KRUGERSDORP

1

To the editor,

Would you be so kind as to include a few words from me in your paper? If so, please publish the following.

The life we live here in Krugersdorp is strife. Should your loved one happen to die here and you're not a church affiliate, there isn't a priest, catechist or even a mere Christian who would be willing to help you, let alone hold a prayer session for you. They won't even attend a vigil or memorial. You are reduced to nothing more than a dog if people can't identify your church. If the deceased is your loved one, you may as well request the government to have them buried by prisoners. Besides that, you will hear them say " we have been telling you for ages that you must become believers so that you may have those who can help you bury your dead".

What shocks me is this statement" Believe in the Lord so that you have people around to help you bury your dead", I write this because even the priests confirm that they make similar proclamations in their teachings. One of the preachers from Dipendere said this to me directly once and I responded like this: "I will not be converted into a believer simply on the premise that I need helpers, I could just as easily defer when I no longer require their assistance. Since this is my first time writing to you, without any knowledge of the protocols to follow when writing to you, I would be delighted to receive a response from you.

RESPONSE

I do not know the response that the writer is expecting from me. If the question is whether he should repent/convert so that he may have people around to help him bury his dead, all I have to say to this is this: "hurry up and convert my brother so that your deceased are not consumed by vultures due to a lack of people who could have buried them". There is nothing wrong or evil from being saved except only goodness and light. Perhaps if you repent due to your troubles… just as everyone is driven to repent by them… you will have no reason to turn back to your old ways because one's troubles surround him back to front. This is what I have to say.

The Editor.

I8 December I908 Friday

**Figure 27.** A letter from an unknown author in the Naledi ea Lesotho Newspaper. The letter is placed with a response from the editor next to it. The editor's tone is authoritative and final. Image courtesy of the researcher.

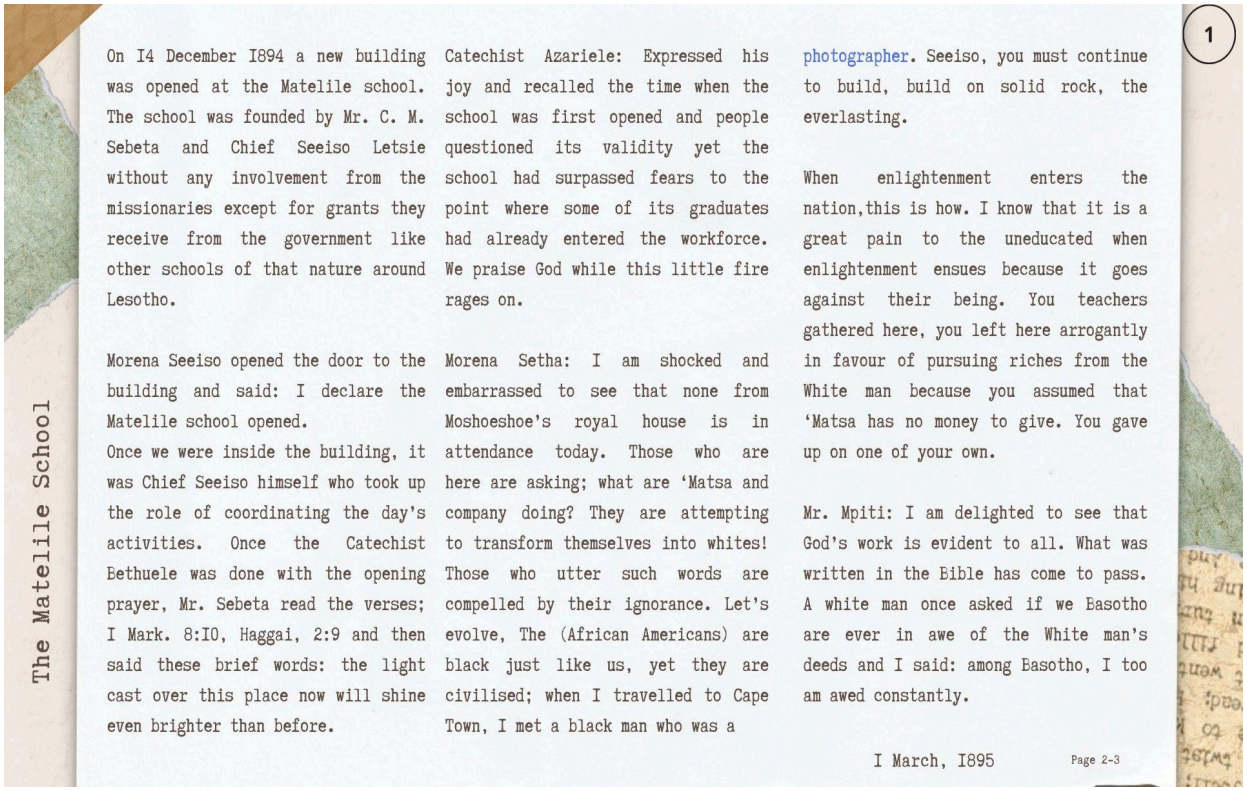
*After trying for many years, I realise that I do not have the capacity to continue the fight on orthography. Fruitful change can only happen through a full-time commitment and it is a thankless job. I have to eat and pay bills. I will, however, continue to think around and through it.*

*Orthography is coded language activated through voice. I look at curation similarly: as a coded language activated through voice. The main difference is that in the case of the curatorial, it can evolve and defy the static justifications of gatekeepers.*

*Asking questions about Sesotho orthography exposed me to similar realities elsewhere and how those cultures address their language peculiarities. I find that, like time, language is mutable, elastic, generative and creative, even amid regulation and manipulation.*

*Counter-practices always find their way to the surface. You created as much room as possible for an alternative outlook on education and knowledge production through your various projects. You were planting the seeds for localised perspectives to be explored intentionally. What would have become of your school if it continued after you transcended?*

*You faced scepticism from locals and your peers at the beginning because they assumed the quality you offered would not be on par with that of the missionary schools. Although yours was an alternative school (Mohapeloane, 1889), it still conformed to the standards and curriculum set by the British administrators. You also had to stay on good terms with the missionaries to avoid being ostracised.*



The Matelile School

1

On I4 December I894 a new building was opened at the Matelile school. The school was founded by Mr. C. M. Sebeta and Chief Seeiso Letsie without any involvement from the missionaries except for grants they receive from the government like other schools of that nature around Lesotho.

Morena Seeiso opened the door to the building and said: I declare the Matelile school opened.
Once we were inside the building, it was Chief Seeiso himself who took up the role of coordinating the day's activities. Once the Catechist Bethuele was done with the opening prayer, Mr. Sebeta read the verses; I Mark. 8:I0, Haggai, 2:9 and then said these brief words: the light cast over this place now will shine even brighter than before.

Catechist Azariele: Expressed his joy and recalled the time when the school was first opened and people questioned its validity yet the school had surpassed fears to the point where some of its graduates had already entered the workforce. We praise God while this little fire rages on.

Morena Setha: I am shocked and embarrassed to see that none from Moshoeshoe's royal house is in attendance today. Those who are here are asking; what are 'Matsa and company doing? They are attempting to transform themselves into whites! Those who utter such words are compelled by their ignorance. Let's evolve, The (African Americans) are black just like us, yet they are civilised; when I travelled to Cape Town, I met a black man who was a photographer. Seeiso, you must continue to build, build on solid rock, the everlasting.

When enlightenment enters the nation,this is how. I know that it is a great pain to the uneducated when enlightenment ensues because it goes against their being. You teachers gathered here, you left here arrogantly in favour of pursuing riches from the White man because you assumed that 'Matsa has no money to give. You gave up on one of your own.

Mr. Mpiti: I am delighted to see that God's work is evident to all. What was written in the Bible has come to pass. A white man once asked if we Basotho are ever in awe of the White man's deeds and I said: among Basotho, I too am awed constantly.

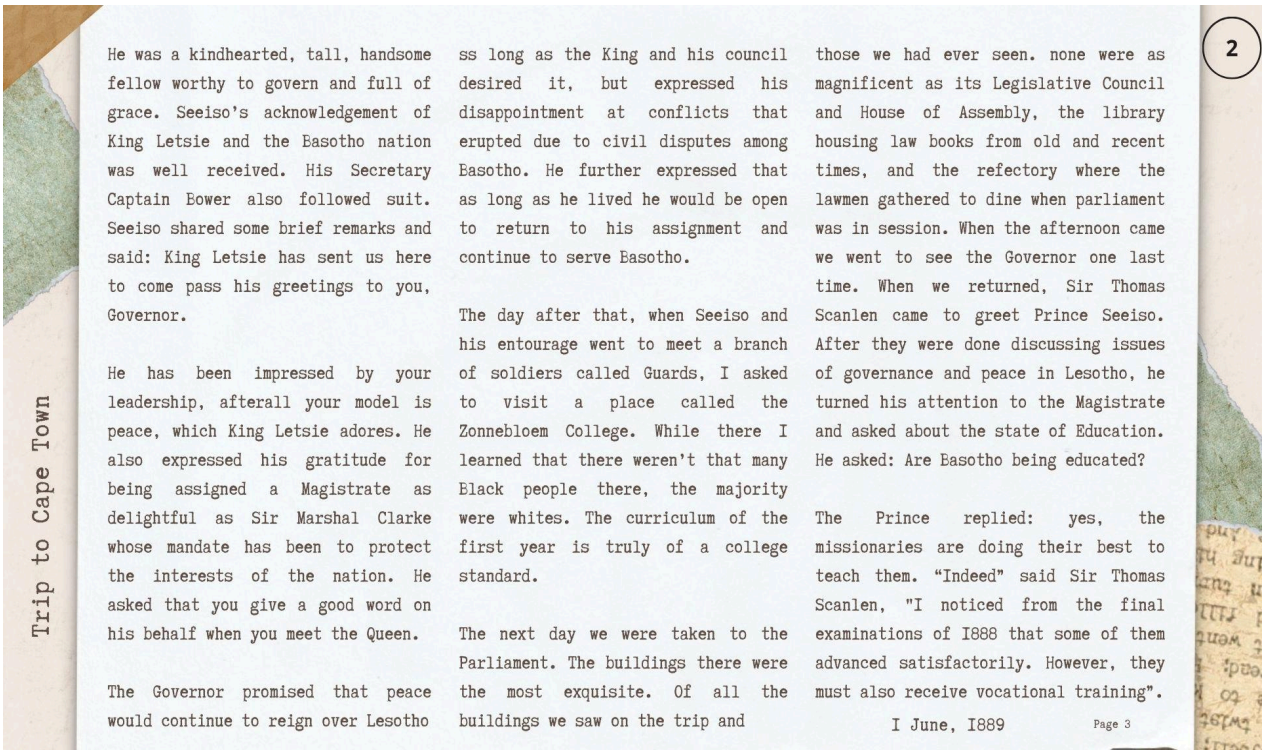
I March, I895 Page 2-3

**Figure 28.** Page 1 of 2 of a report by Akime Sello to readers of the Leselinyana Newspaper about a ceremony that took place at Sebeta's school. The language mentions African Americans and new technology, which alludes to new awareness about former American slaves stolen and sold from Africa. Image courtesy of the researcher.

*How did you navigate teaching those subjects and topics you felt were being kept from Basotho and Black people in general? How could you teach what you did not know as a product of the missionary schools? How did you acquire*

*the kind of literature that would improve your knowledge base and teaching? Did your colleagues in the A.M.E. play a hand in helping you gather resources?*

*What did your wife have to say behind the scenes? I am sure she was most certainly educated to have been married to you. The only record I could find of your marriage is that you had a son who became a prominent doctor. Did your becoming a father influence the questions and contributions you were making in education and language?*



Trip to Cape Town

2

He was a kindhearted, tall, handsome fellow worthy to govern and full of grace. Seeiso's acknowledgement of King Letsie and the Basotho nation was well received. His Secretary Captain Bower also followed suit. Seeiso shared some brief remarks and said: King Letsie has sent us here to come pass his greetings to you, Governor.

He has been impressed by your leadership, afterall your model is peace, which King Letsie adores. He also expressed his gratitude for being assigned a Magistrate as delightful as Sir Marshal Clarke whose mandate has been to protect the interests of the nation. He asked that you give a good word on his behalf when you meet the Queen.

The Governor promised that peace would continue to reign over Lesotho ss long as the King and his council desired it, but expressed his disappointment at conflicts that erupted due to civil disputes among Basotho. He further expressed that as long as he lived he would be open to return to his assignment and continue to serve Basotho.

The day after that, when Seeiso and his entourage went to meet a branch of soldiers called Guards, I asked to visit a place called the Zonnebloem College. While there I learned that there weren't that many Black people there, the majority were whites. The curriculum of the first year is truly of a college standard.

The next day we were taken to the Parliament. The buildings there were the most exquisite. Of all the buildings we saw on the trip and those we had ever seen. none were as magnificent as its Legislative Council and House of Assembly, the library housing law books from old and recent times, and the refectory where the lawmen gathered to dine when parliament was in session. When the afternoon came we went to see the Governor one last time. When we returned, Sir Thomas Scanlen came to greet Prince Seeiso. After they were done discussing issues of governance and peace in Lesotho, he turned his attention to the Magistrate and asked about the state of Education. He asked: Are Basotho being educated?

The Prince replied: yes, the missionaries are doing their best to teach them. "Indeed" said Sir Thomas Scanlen, "I noticed from the final examinations of I888 that some of them advanced satisfactorily. However, they must also receive vocational training".

I June, I889 Page 3

**Figure 29.** A letter from Sebeta to readers of the Leselinyana Newspaper about a trip he took to Cape Town as part of a royal delegation. This excerpt details his tour of the Zonnebloem college for boys. The school was framed as a multi-racial school for elites yet had a mostly white population. Image courtesy of the researcher.

*I am more familiar with my Westernisation than my Sesotho heritage. I assume you were, too, given that you were raised at the PEMS Morija mission. My sense of displacement and my questions are possibilities. I think about how you negotiated space between your Mosotho way of thinking and the vast world your Western education exposed you to.*

*How did it impact you as a reader and writer, and how did it manifest in your work? I am confronted with this whenever I workshop with people in Europe and outside Lesotho.*

*Your conditions resonate so well with my lived experience as a cultural producer. Fundamentally, coloniality was as present in your time as it is now.*

*Your story is proof that the tools to challenge it were present then as they are now. The difference is that the current generation has more options and broader means of amplifying dissenting voices despite what has been normalised.*

*I will end here before I start going around in circles. I hope to hear back from you soon.*

*Yours sincerely,*
*Lineo*

# Naming the experience - grounding

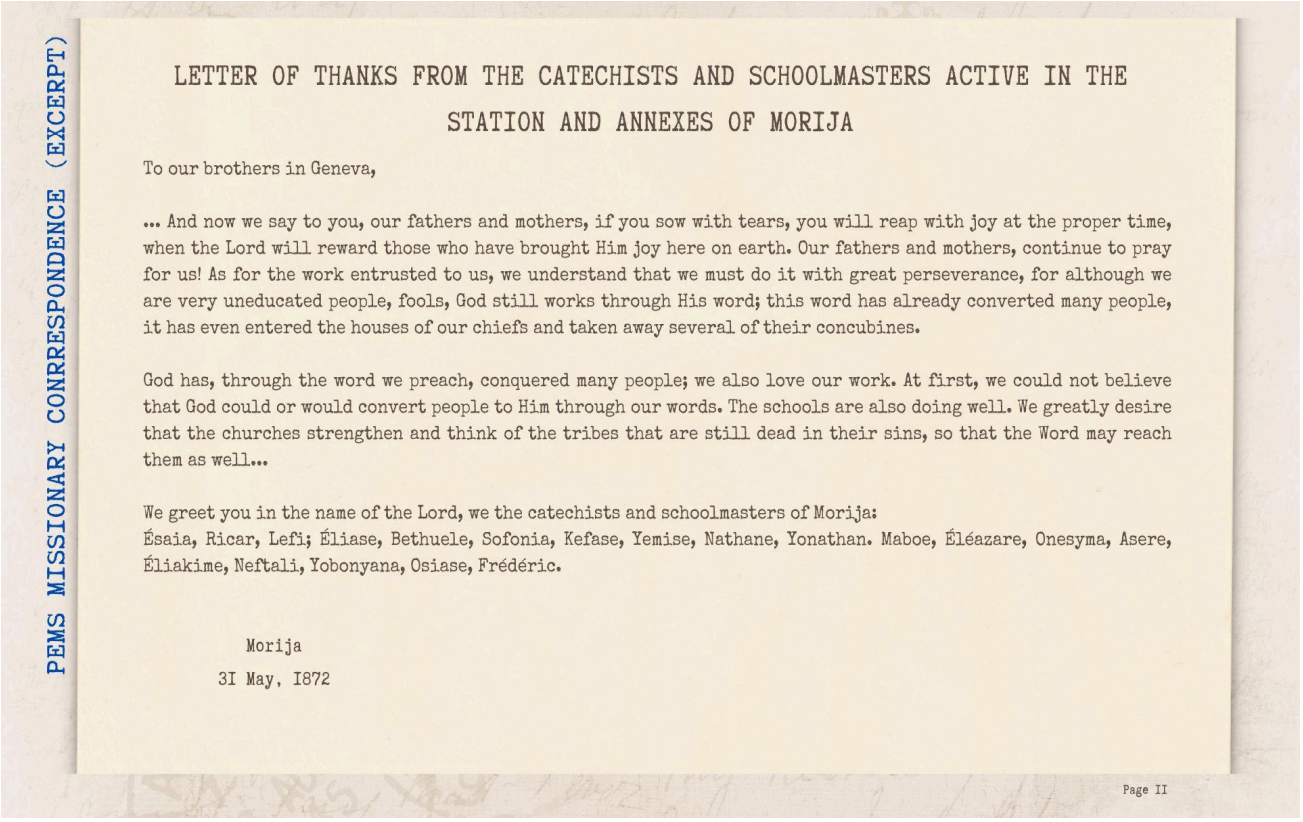
Sebeta's story animates several of Sesotho's qualities as a language. First, Sesotho is a hybrid language, a creole of sorts. Its vocabulary includes words derived from San, Nguni, Bantu, French, Swiss, German, Dutch, and English origins (Semethe, 2019). Many Basotho are often surprised when they learn the backstories of certain places, tools, rituals, etc. It extends to particular attitudes towards the story of cultural production and its development. Many people are happy to keep things as they are or evolve within the familiar system, but what if they did not (Nhlapo, 2021)?

Secondly, Sesotho is tonal, meaning pitch is used to distinguish lexical or grammatical meaning. During interpersonal communication tone subtly reflects a person's energy and mood. It is latent in sarcasm, metaphor, and epigrams (Eldredge, 2007). To a reader unfamiliar with this context, such as Europeans, a lot of subtext can be missed. For example, when Basotho natives were hand-picked to write letters of gratitude to donors in Geneva (Mabille, 1887), one might read their voices as a parody of self-indulgence[58].

Thirdly, the fluidity of Sesotho means that it does not conform to any one thing. In the earliest stages, King Moshoeshoe and his people spoke the same language as Setswana and Sepedi, differing only in dialect (Nhlapho, 2021). When the time came for Basotho to take full ownership of their orthography, their indoctrination into the Western rationale[59] was well advanced, and modernity was in full swing.

[58] The letters were condensed into a single letter and translated from Sesotho to French. I translated them to English, aware that some nuance has been lost with each interpretation.

[59] The grammar books were not necessarily written for Basotho, as evident in the prefaces of the early editions, (Jacottet, 1906, p. v): "The wish has been often expressed that a practical Sesuto Grammar should be written for the benefit of the numerous Europeans who desire to learn the language".



PEMS MISSIONARY CONRRESPONDENCE (EXCERPT)

LETTER OF THANKS FROM THE CATECHISTS AND SCHOOLMASTERS ACTIVE IN THE STATION AND ANNEXES OF MORIJA

To our brothers in Geneva,

... And now we say to you, our fathers and mothers, if you sow with tears, you will reap with joy at the proper time, when the Lord will reward those who have brought Him joy here on earth. Our fathers and mothers, continue to pray for us! As for the work entrusted to us, we understand that we must do it with great perseverance, for although we are very uneducated people, fools, God still works through His word; this word has already converted many people, it has even entered the houses of our chiefs and taken away several of their concubines.

God has, through the word we preach, conquered many people; we also love our work. At first, we could not believe that God could or would convert people to Him through our words. The schools are also doing well. We greatly desire that the churches strengthen and think of the tribes that are still dead in their sins, so that the Word may reach them as well...

We greet you in the name of the Lord, we the catechists and schoolmasters of Morija:
Ésaia, Ricar, Lefi; Éliase, Bethuele, Sofonia, Kefase, Yemise, Nathane, Yonathan. Maboe, Éléazare, Onesyma, Asere, Éliakime, Neftali, Yobonyana, Osiase, Frédéric.

Morija
3I May, I872

Page II

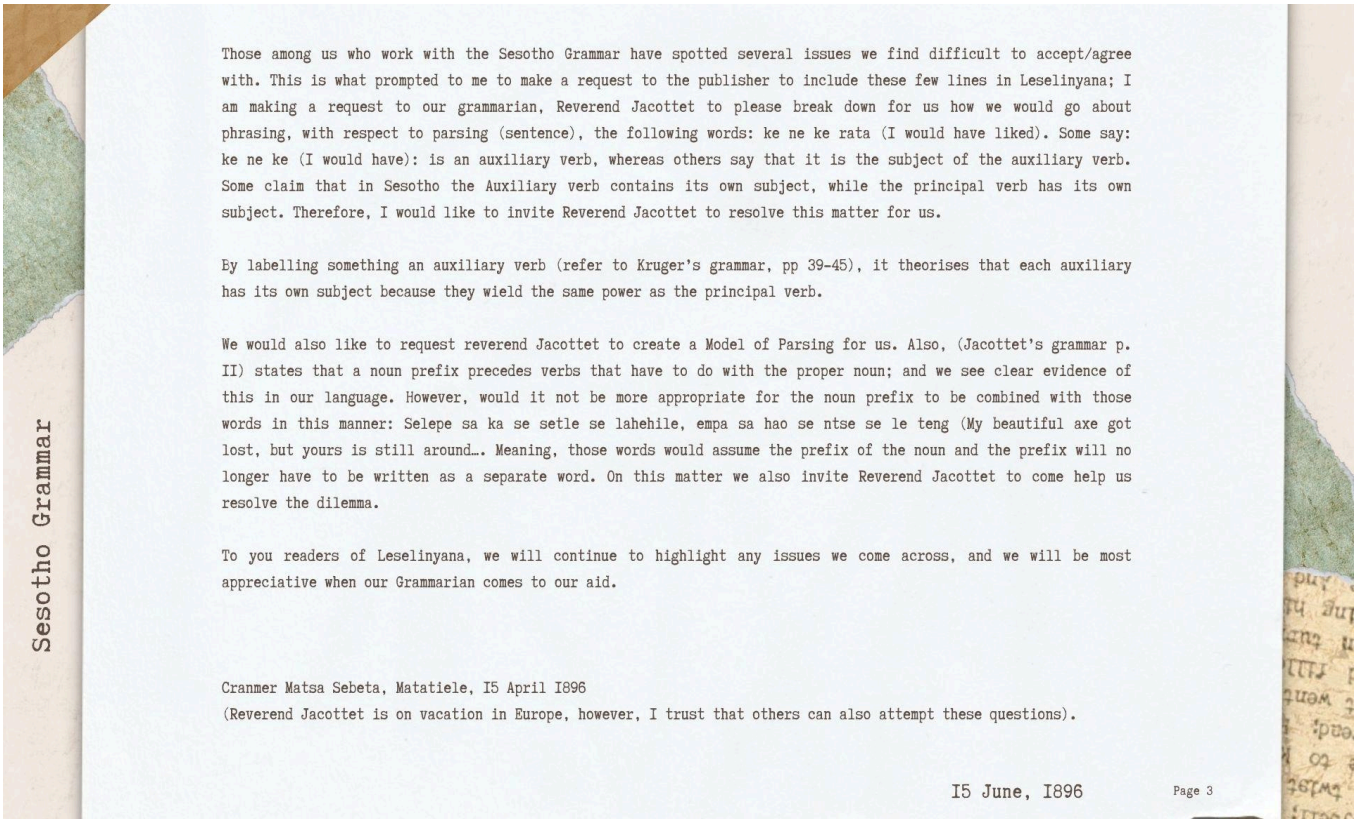
**Figure 30.** A letter excerpt from Mabille to donors in Geneva published in the Missionary Correspondence. In the letter, Mabille has translated his students' gratitude and offers a language disclaimer. Image courtesy of the researcher.

I also deduced that written Sesotho developed according to the voices inside Leselinyana and how they worked around the discrepancies within Sesotho grammar as orchestrated by the Missionaries. Sebeta managed to mask his defiance through tone while meeting the publisher's expectations. For example, the way he advises the writer X to focus on the Sesotho way of reading time to avoid confusing himself with Western logic.

Qui (2014) posits that language is innate for humans. It constantly changes as humanity evolves, making it inherently creative and productive (Sebotsa & Mahula, 2022). The missionaries may have shared Sesotho through literacy. However, they lacked the Sesotho cultural subjectivity that would have allowed them to pick up on certain things Sebeta said between the lines. Another example: on the subject of Sesotho orthography, he publicly challenged Jacottet[60] about the rules of parsing and

[60] Edouard Jacottet was a Swiss missionary who picked up in Adolphe Mabille's footsteps with regard to developing Sesotho grammar and dictionary. Mabille published a little Sesotho grammar called Helps to Learn

how those rules could be adjusted to the Lesotho context given syntactic differences between English/French and Sesotho.



Sesotho Grammar

Those among us who work with the Sesotho Grammar have spotted several issues we find difficult to accept/agree with. This is what prompted to me to make a request to the publisher to include these few lines in Leselinyana; I am making a request to our grammarian, Reverend Jacottet to please break down for us how we would go about phrasing, with respect to parsing (sentence), the following words: ke ne ke rata (I would have liked). Some say: ke ne ke (I would have): is an auxiliary verb, whereas others say that it is the subject of the auxiliary verb. Some claim that in Sesotho the Auxiliary verb contains its own subject, while the principal verb has its own subject. Therefore, I would like to invite Reverend Jacottet to resolve this matter for us.

By labelling something an auxiliary verb (refer to Kruger's grammar, pp 39-45), it theorises that each auxiliary has its own subject because they wield the same power as the principal verb.

We would also like to request reverend Jacottet to create a Model of Parsing for us. Also, (Jacottet's grammar p. II) states that a noun prefix precedes verbs that have to do with the proper noun; and we see clear evidence of this in our language. However, would it not be more appropriate for the noun prefix to be combined with those words in this manner: Selepe sa ka se setle se lahehile, empa sa hao se ntse se le teng (My beautiful axe got lost, but yours is still around…. Meaning, those words would assume the prefix of the noun and the prefix will no longer have to be written as a separate word. On this matter we also invite Reverend Jacottet to come help us resolve the dilemma.

To you readers of Leselinyana, we will continue to highlight any issues we come across, and we will be most appreciative when our Grammarian comes to our aid.

Cranmer Matsa Sebeta, Matatiele, I5 April I896
(Reverend Jacottet is on vacation in Europe, however, I trust that others can also attempt these questions).

I5 June, I896 Page 3

**Figure 31.** A letter Sebeta wrote to Jacottet regarding sentence structuring in Sesotho. Sebeta speaks to Jacottet as an equal while affording him seniority, an attribute of Basotho's expression of acknowledgement. Image courtesy of the researcher.

Bantu languages, like the art, carry elements of functionality. Things are so named based on what they do and, for people, what they become. Furthermore, pockets of exclusive language systems emerge that are unique to those who use them, as in the case of jargon within different professional fields. I say language is coded sound energy transmission. Things are hidden within language, be it the language of speaking (figure of speech) or the language of doing (symbolic gestures), as sound is energy in motion.

Oral communication, therefore, carries aspects that stray from the status quo in that the message fundamentally overrides formalised grammar conventions (Rapeane, 1997). A people's way of life can be depicted literally or metaphorically through language. Oral tradition invariably involves language and living (Minh-ha, 1989). In

Sesotho in 1876; in 1879 Kruger published Steps to Learn the Sesotho Language. Jacottet then published Elementary Sketch of Sesotho Grammar in 1893 (Nhlapho, 2021).

the context of this research, oral tradition also refers to recollections of history inherited from earlier generations and transmitted through testimonies delivered in structured or unstructured contexts (Emeagwali, 2003).

New grammars emerge when minds unite for a mutual cause of social justice. The character of Sebeta, while complicated and imperfect, is familiar to contemporary alternative schools of thought that thrive on civil epistemic disobedience as he did. In the next chapter, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline continues the communal introspective process of confronting coloniality in art history and language by entering one of the epicentres of contemporary art in the world. The workshop at VAM stems from the realisations, discoveries, questions and reflections I had while engaging the archive to develop Sebeta's biography and demonstrate the agency of one's voice in addressing power and mastering one's language.

# CHAPTER 4
# The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline Workshop, insights and possibilities

## Introduction

The Western public school system subsequently exported to the colonies was developed roughly around the same period as the exhibition complex in the West. This fact underscores the curator's role as an educator and the colonial entanglements inherent in both systems. Both education and curatorial practices deal with policies, procedures, the public, infrastructure, aesthetics and boards of authority that oversee operations. Both of them demand an intricate balance of power across all levels. Meaning: both the schooling system and the exhibition complex exemplify prevailing modes of codifying social organisation that emerged out of and adjacent to the colonial enterprise.

When the educational system was rolled out in 1814, education became the space for reconciling scientific progress, the capitalist economy, and the anti-capitalist citizen (Tröhler, 2013). Schools became modes of social control to sustain capitalism and mould the nation-state[61]. Working-class children were shaped into natural resources to be fed into the industrial machine (Illich, 1972). Furthermore, in the colonies, subjects taught in schools were based on structures that were not holistically in tune with the local context, even in the case of Sebeta's independent school covered in the previous chapter. The measure of one's intelligence was based on the ability to reason, memorise and recite educational facts centred around

[61] When the education system began school enrolment was mostly compulsory and free for learners. Teachers were, in turn, trained and certified for their professional duties. Current international education policy and has reinstated this as the standard.

Western canons of knowledge. This feature endured throughout the days of political decolonisation to the present.

The first President of an independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, advanced the argument that:

> The colonised African student, whose roots in his own society are systematically starved of sustenance, is introduced to Greek and Roman history, the cradle history of modern Europe, and he is encouraged to treat his portion of the story of man together with the subsequent history of Europe, as the only worthwhile portion. (Nkrumah, 1964, p.153)

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline articulates that there are other canons to learn from and that people are libraries by virtue of their experiences and perspectives. Similarly, there is more to language than what is formally accepted. If all these considerations are brought into curatorial practice, it broadens the possibilities within the museum and allows other knowledge systems to emerge and be engaged. Nkrumah's assertion drives home what Mignolo wrote in *Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought, and Decolonial Freedom*, that instead of riding on the assumption that thinking comes before being, we must instead assume that the racially marked body occupying a geo-historical marked space is perturbed to articulate its humanness, in whatever semiotic system. (Mignolo, 2009).

Lerato Bereng tackled the connections between alternative canons of knowledge and curating in the 2021 exhibition, *How to Make a Country* [62] (FRAC Poitou Charentes, 2021). The *Ba re Dictionary* was included in the exhibition for its playful interrogation of language rules maintained through the education system. The showing featured various expressions of cultural identity conversing with the notion of the nation-state and its limitations. It wrapped up in a fifth edition of the *Conversations* series (paired with a book launch of *How to Make a Country*), which Bereng held with me on Moshoeshoe's day, 11 March 2023. The series had started at MMA ten years earlier in 2013.

[62] Conversations#4




**Figure 32**. A poster bearing the Ba re Dictionary word for displaced heritage created in honour of the How to make a country exhibition in 2021. Image courtesy of the researcher.

Museums are implicated as instruments of public education. Therefore, they must be critiqued using similar language to what Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich (1972) said about public schools. He called them bureaucratic, self-justifying, and manipulative. Comparably, I observed similar traits within the MLab programme. Although the programme's merits could not be overstated, its policies and structure helplessly succumb to old colonial tropes despite their good intentions.

The BlaxTARLINES[63] ethos of emancipation, as adopted from President Nkrumah and his generation of liberators, underlines the fact that emancipation is an ongoing radical process (seid'ou et al., 2021). The principle of 'forward ever, backwards never' popularised by Nkrumah, dictates an attitude of possible freedom where tactical indifference is applied in the name of subverting binaries. The ethos further

[63] The institution is an experimental incubator of contemporary art and a sharing community. It has a lineage of radical art and community projects dating back to the 1990s. Since 2015 when it was formalised, it has taken on the responsibility of demystifying art from classical and pre-1960s European modernist predeterminations at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana.

reveres historical reference in the spirit of *Sankofa*[64]*.* It gives people room to forge their subjectivity out of systems designed for their failure instead of submitting to pre-colonial nostalgia.

The formerly colonised are, therefore, compelled to apply curatorial approaches such as the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline that challenge erasures and highlight what is suppressed. History is evidence of the power of narrative. Consequently, voices must be heard on the speakers' terms. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline acknowledges that time does not happen to people; it exists because nature exists, and humans rationalise it with all its paradoxes. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop was centred on fun; it relied on laughter, sarcasm, quirks, vulnerability, anecdotes of my perspective to build rapport, attentiveness, authenticity and a little cheekiness. Qualities which I identify with my Bosothoness.

# Formulation of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop

Rather than building an argument that focuses on the outcomes of schooling, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline focuses on rethinking the terms of engagement around which education happens. It challenges the schooling model mentioned earlier in the previous chapter by focusing on the conditions that shape experience rather than their outcomes (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). The workshop, *Contending with Friends,* similarly seeks to draw from lives people already lived. It taps into the intrinsic things that inform the staff's decisions towards their cultural work and contemporary art. They reference these dynamics alongside their training, experiential knowledge and expertise.

This Un/chrono/Logical Timeline activation extends to putting the theories discussed in this dissertation into practice. Chapter three set the foundation for arriving at guiding questions for a critical fabulation that could draw from the participants'

[64] Sankofa is an Akan (Ghana) word which means to retrieve or to go back and get something. It is a concept that encourages learning from the past to build a better future,

personal stories, perspectives, attitudes, and cultural diversity in *Contending with Friends*. The staff were furthermore representative of the museum's constituencies and the demographics they themselves are part of. A workshop setting has the inevitable appeal of a classroom, albeit with more flexibility regarding pedagogical breadth. The participants and I entered the space free of hierarchies; my role was to facilitate and mediate the process while relying on the participants as teachers (Ka Canham, 2023). The workshop was cradled in care (Langevang et al., 2022) and ease to create favourable conditions that cultivated co-creation, pluriversality and DEI.

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is a continuously evolving tool. It is context-based and cannot be universalised (Higgins, 2020). One of ARAC's provocations states that we should be aware that our ideas may be used against us. It is a call to embrace being at the receiving end of critique, having our minds changed, and engaging in debates. Tensions reveal the beauty of fragility, which can be reparative or transformative at the least.

# Policy overhangs

MMA was the brainchild of the PEMS missionaries. It was a handmaiden to colonialism that joined other bastions of racial science, which facilitated the misappropriation and misrepresentation of African societies, people and cultures. Museums during that time eroticised and primitivised the different colonies (Dubow, 2006). However, by the end of the 19th century, they were rebranded as institutions of power and instruments of education, enlightenment and social salvation (Dlali-Lekhanya, 2021).

The potential of museums to create meaningful experiences for diverse people is central to their social value (Dlali-Lekhanya, 2021). A pluriversal approach, therefore, lays the ground for overcoming biases of display and narrativity. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline seeks to shift away from the notion of museums as spaces that satisfy the curiosity of the elites while excluding the local people who

produce the materials (Dlali-Lekhanya, 2021). *Contending with Friends* is, therefore, an intervention of necessity, a call. Credit is due to the museum's determined efforts to face blind spots through speculative and unconventional research practices. Not many share VAM's rebellious stance against traditional museum narrative practices, even in the face of opposition.

## People first

The story begins and ends with audiences. Museums must incorporate business models into their institutional frameworks and administrative operations that facilitate or supplement programming. On this premise, I am in consensus with the majority of the MLab 2024 cohort that audience engagement ought to be a fore-thought for curators and cultural workers (TheMuseumslab, 2025). Audiences are not passive receptacles but instead are core to the existence of the institution.

Museums need people like cows need grass; it is essential to their survival. If people do not feel a claim to what the museum represents, holds, exhibits, and how it speaks, then they become indifferent towards it. So far, the trend has been that museums attract significantly higher percentages of middle-class and wealthy people who are better educated (Nightingale & Mahal, 2012). Socioeconomic status must, therefore, always be factored in when trying to break norms.

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline presents as one of many attempts to fill equity gaps by inviting the public to be co-curators irrespective of class or background. The gesture does not diminish the role of the curator; rather, it expands their ability to diversify narratives when dealing with history. Furthermore, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is a tool of symbolic resistance, creativity, and functionality in that it challenges the 'do not touch' museum norm by taking over the museum as a hang out spot.

# Contending with Friends; the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop at Van Abbe Museum.

Once the Van Abbe Museum had communicated its aims for engaging the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as part of its research phase, I began the workshop design process. *Contending with Friends* was informed by the *Ba re e ne re* tradition and structured through the archival engagement in the previous chapter. It was tailored to achieve VAM's research objectives around preparing for their 2026 exhibition: *That time when we were not there.* The workshop outline was circulated among the participants ahead of time to paint a picture of what to expect. However, I was always cognizant that some aspects would change once we met in person. Each Un/chrono/Logical Timeline iteration is unique in that sense.

VAM was interested in the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a divergent practice for storytelling activated through inhabiting history. The workshop was therefore intended to demonstrate the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, activate it, and guide the staff at VAM on how to fit it into their unique context. *Contending with Friends* was facilitated over two days and divided into three-hour sessions each. We included various elements in the space where we convened that served as memory triggers or linkages to people's stories. The elements included plants, perfume, craft work and differently textured objects to stimulate the sense of touch. The objects were added to facilitate the multimodal multisensory dimensions of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline.

Nine museum staff from the curatorial, communication (marketing), and mediation departments and management participated.




**Figure 33.** Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop introduction by Prof. Andrew with members of the VAM staff who participated in Contending with Friends in the Museum as Parliament at VAM. 2024. Image courtesy of the researcher.

Below is a breakdown of the activities and insights that transpired during the two days:

## Day 1

We kicked off by recapping the origins, histories, and present of the Another Roadmap School, as well as its key principles. The participants learned about the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline's background, forms, and different iterations. I contextualised the notion of *Contending with Friends* through a casual introduction to schools of thought that inform the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline. I gave examples of epistemic violence I uncovered through critical fabulation. At that moment, I decided that I would ask everyone if they liked art and what their relationship with it, if any, was. I answered the question first and spoke as candidly as I would with my inner circle of friends, and the group followed suit.

**African time is the right time; things happen when they should, not according to plans.**

I then linked the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a subversive narrative device by having everyone introduce their item to the group and explain why they had chosen the particular object. The modes of display were different: some people held up their objects for the group to see, while others passed them around. In the end, all the objects were put at the centre of the Museum as Parliament (e-flux, 2018)[65] in VAM's basement[66]. The activity was supplemented by ambient music playing in the background as people spoke.



**Figure 34.** A photograph of one of the plantation images exhibited in the Hidden Connections exhibition at VAM. 2024. Image courtesy of the researcher.

The group juxtaposed their personal stories with VAM's collection of artworks, relevant texts, and/or artists. The participants spoke about the emotions the objects

[65] Museum as Parliament is a reconstruction of the People's Parliament of Rojava developed by Studio Jonas Staal in collaboration with the Democratic Federation of North-Syria and the Kurdish Cultural Foundation Eindhoven. It is inspired by the political model of "stateless democracy," which is based on local self-governance, gender equality and communal economy. Its circularity embodies the ideals of collective, decentralised democratic representation, while its pillars represent key values such as gender equity and social ecology, lastly, Its rooftop consists of a confederation of fragments of flags. The space therefore served as an additional voice during the workshop, based on the mutual value systems it has with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline.

[66] Just outside the doors to The Museum as parliament is the exhibition Hidden Connections about Henri Van Abbe's tobacco plantations in Sumatra during the colonial period.

triggered and the memories attached to them. The moment illuminated the group's humanness and made way for collective analyses of their various arts educations and modes of resistance that fuelled their agencies. We intentionally avoided calling ideas "decolonial" as we spoke. As stated in previous chapters, we did not want to join the convolution of decolonisation apparent in Western museums, we wanted to embody decoloniality. The group wrote little notes with insights, realisations, questions and collection references on multicoloured paper and put them at the centre of the Museum as Parliament.

### Checking in

I then invited the group to share their immediate observations, reflections and feedback about the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline. This exercise aimed to engage in the collective reflection process. As this was the first time the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline was being activated as a prolonged activity, it was important to pause halfway along and evaluate progress in case there were blind spots or shortcomings to address. The group was instigated to compare and contrast narrative conventions with what they had learned about the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline. I summarised the day's main insights and then sent the group home with thoughts to consider for the next day. We wrapped up with a writing assignment for the next session where the group was to answer the following three questions for further discussion:

- Are you happy/satisfied with the range of audiences you get?
- Do you like the art in the collection?
- How would you like to experience it if it were up to you?

## Day 2

The day started with some casual banter, snacking, organising a playlist, and people laying their responses on the floor with the other objects from the previous day. Everyone was invited to walk around and read each other's responses and notes. We sat in a semicircle with music playing in the background. The playlist included recommendations from each participant, including myself. We recapped on day one

and shared additional reflections. Some people revised their answers, while others added further context. The rest of the group shared how the different perspectives exchanged had transformed their worldviews, feelings, experiences, and expected outcomes for the exhibition.



**Figure 35.** Members of VAM staff relaxing in a circle and enjoying snacks during discussion on day two of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop. 2024. Image courtesy of the researcher.

Most importantly to me, the mediation/public constituency staff shared their joy at being part of the early planning stages. They expressed the dangers they had observed from attending to audience engagement after the fact. The staff were excited by the change and eager to brainstorm ways to enhance and diversify the museum's attendance. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline helped them to think back to previous practices and feedback, ideas they had that never took off, and other possibilities they had been reluctantly thinking about.

Finally, we agreed that the next step in the research process was to begin the leg work towards the exhibition. This workshop phase scrutinised what was already in the museum and working. It decentered the self-censorship that comes with controversial artworks/artists and topics to think about the installation, rhythm, storytelling and exhibition design of *That time when we were not there*. We were cognisant that consensus did not mean agreement. The rest of the voices in the

museum still had to be consulted before the public could be engaged to ensure structures were in place.

## After the workshop

Participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire to collate their workshop experience and make recommendations if necessary. Seven of the nine participants responded, which was enough to represent the various perspectives of the teams involved. The final step of this research involved creating a rubric for the museum to engage with after the workshop. The rubric is a guide for which questions to ask during the preliminary stage and who to ask them. The team settled on a pool of ninety constituents to co-curate the exhibition: *That time when we were not there*, using the experience of *Contending with Friends* as a model.

## Reflections on the questionnaire responses

My approach with the questionnaire was to allow the responses to speak for themselves without being burdened with my interpretation and analysis. I wished to retain the experiential information as testimony to the “personal”. While indeed my voice matters as the author, the entire premise of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is to honour plural voices and the weight that each voice carries. Each individual in the group had their respective context in mind during the workshop, therefore, reaching and meeting both expressed and unknown needs registered to me as a marker of success in terms of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline’s function within the curatorial.

# (NOT A) CONCLUSION

## Analysis

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is fluid enough for people primed to expect the unexpected but perhaps sufficiently abstract for those who like structure. Its experimental quality renders it unpredictable. I did not follow the steps in the workshop outline I had shared with the group point-for-point. I anticipated that the room's energy would set the tone for the day. People were not looking for an academic lecture but a learning experience. What I did not do was verbalise my intentions because I deliberately wanted to use the suspense to the advantage of the group.

Nevertheless, I took for granted that as intuitive as I find the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, it may not be the case for people unfamiliar with its context and histories. The lack of clarity could have a negative bearing on the level of engagement. Critical fabulation was featured frequently during the workshop; however, I did not engage the group with my undertaking in chapter three more directly. Perhaps if I had opened up the conversation around language more explicitly related to this research project, it might have led to unexpected yet welcomed discoveries for the team.

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline's non-sequential nature makes it seem random. However, it carries layers of nuance, which are revealed in the superimpositions, remixing, juxtapositions, stretching, and veiling done during interaction within a space (Andrew, 2022). For this reason, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline must accommodate all of its participants by outlining its clearly defined aspects into predictable steps to follow. Even if we do not yet know what we do not know, this gesture widens the space for interaction through care.

Case in point:  People were even more relaxed on the second day of the workshop because they had a better sense of direction. The discomfort of not knowing is essential to the process because it evens the scales of vulnerability. Regardless, I

cannot ignore that it runs the risk of confusing participants inclined to order, which is a consideration that should be made ahead of any activation. Personality differences and preferred modes of doing should be considered even if most of the group is happy to go with the flow.

Like most other artistic practices, if the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline becomes too mainstream, it will likely dilute. Therefore, it is explicitly an invitation to those committed to or comfortable with forms of epistemic disobediences. It is a supplementary approach that should be grounded in something, not reduced to a formulaic recipe. There is room to reinterpret it for other contexts, as with the various articulations of critical fabulation most artist-researchers are creating, such as the film *Dahomey* (2024). This film is fascinating because of the way it leaves audiences asking questions. An invitation for critique is imbued in the film's production (Mallen, 2024), as it is in the activation of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline.

## Friendship over power

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline workshop, *Contending with Friends,* was in keeping with the *Ba re e ne e re* tradition of storytelling in Sesotho culture. The workshop was intergenerational and presented friendship as a way of doing. The approach allowed us to extract unexpected gems and anticipate limitations/weaknesses/potential trouble. More generally, it helped us to create meaning out of chaos through spatial and scenic considerations inspired by personal items. Since the exhibition is yet to take place, the critical fabulation in chapter three demonstrated how ideas and questions could be generated through an imaginary dialogue with the archive.

There is nothing wrong with having magnanimous intentions; friendship is based on love and mutual well-being. Coloniality is violent and divisive, which is motivation enough to embrace a counter-love approach presented by such tools as the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline. The underlying values and missions of UNESCO, MLab, and the PEMS missionaries are based on this principle of friendship. Nevertheless, it is the very thing that attracts scrutiny. True friendship is based on equity, mutual reflection, open communication and consistent behaviour change. All three of these

institutions deal in the business of exporting and maintaining modernity despite their best intentions. However, it is positive that UNESCO and MLab have learned from a legacy of racist hierarchies, as in the case of the PEMS, by nurturing critical feedback to improve their ways of doing things.

That said, a process of decolonisation initiated by the coloniser and beneficiaries of colonialism may not be aimed at consolidating privilege (Adjei & LeGall, 2024). Instead, it is a form of soft power where critique is invited years after the discourse peaks. Like in the colonial days, policies targeted at the 'other' are often developed in fragments, not wholly. It prevents them from becoming a nuisance that is tricky to regulate by those in power (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2018). Contemporary policies propagated by the likes of UNESCO and MLab promise experiences that cater for more decolonial options and how to get them done. However, there remains a massive elephant in the room. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is primed to create conditions for such elephants to be acknowledged and dealt with.

This research has also demonstrated how UNESCO's power is exercised on a national policy level, MLab on an institutional level (Museumslab, 2024), and PEMS on historical and religious levels with a bearing on education and cultural production. These institutions tout collective decision-making, equal representation, and room for democratic views. However, in practice, it is a three-legged-tango struggle for balance because people cannot strip themselves of their colonial biases. Coloniality has a way of shapeshifting, taking advantage of perceptions and biases embedded into people's psyches. It fuels the agency of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as an introspective and reflective tool.

Through this research, the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline has effectively shown itself as a mode of employing critical fabulation in curatorial practice to stimulate critical conversations with history. Its activations have consistently produced infinite possibilities by emphasising collaboration and co-curation. This is thanks to its layering of pluriversality, introspection and the spirit of friendship. The current global political climate of rising injustices calls for compassionate and loving responses from those involved in cultural and curatorial work. As we look to the future, the

Un/chrono/Logical Timeline could be activated to highlight mining practices and their ethics and impact on the environment (Firstpost, 2025), it could stimulate more generative conversations about war and settler colonialism (Kirsch, 2025), and it could also hold powers accountable for their policies and ideologies (Langrand, 2025).

# Next steps

This research project effectively revealed contradictions ingrained in coloniality and how they play out in the museum and interpersonal relationships. Centring personal stories in juxtaposition with art history helped expose and work through the following: convenient excuses, unavoidable truths, implicit biases, and potential room for compromise through the collective harnessing of differences, even if controversial. It allowed the VAM staff to be reflective about the policy challenges they face and their agency as actors within the space.

The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline has evinced itself to be specific and direct, and for this reason, it has to be activated for a particular agency. It is no coincidence that with each of its iterations, there were notable threats to voice and cultural production: for example  in 2022 at documenta fifteen an exhibition which was plagued with antisemetic accusations (Burack, 2023), in New York, days after the genocide began in Palestine, or at VAM in 2024 in the midst of growing right-wing governments anchored on nationalist rhetoric in the West (Boztas, 2024).

Furthermore, restitution[67] was a hot topic during MLab 2024, which led me to think about Lesotho's place in the conversation within Southern Africa, besides Namibia[68]. In addition to applying the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as a research method for the

[67] There is clearly a gap in the number of Southern African voices contributing to the discourse. The narratives around most museum collections tend to mask the urgency to engage reparations and restitution productively.Theory begs to be turned into action and many collections are dying to be heard anew or for the first time.

[68] Restitution efforts for Namibia include returning objects, land reform, and reparations for genocide from Germany. In 2023 the Namibian and German governments agreed to renegotiate their joint declaration on Restitution to allow for a bigger pledge from Germany and shortened payment period. Although there are still efforts by activists to amplify the voices of the affected communities (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

curatorial in other types of museum settings, especially in Africa, I want to use it to advance provenance research from an African perspective. I am curious about the potential of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline in attempting to restore the dignity of cultural objects and the knowledge they carry. I would like to activate it to embrace and explore the spiritual aspects of ownership that comes with the stories attached to the material assets (Phillipe, 2022). Applying the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline to restitution efforts can spark public awareness of the assets and the politics surrounding them. The lack of conversation[69] may be explained by long-term historical inequalities of access and representation amplified by the minimal effort made to emphasise or include the voices and positions of Africans in their long battle for the restitution of their heritage (Moiloa, 2022). The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline is created especially for such contexts. The knowledge can thus seep into local arts education in formal and informal contexts and begin to raise questions that compel politicians to do more than “wait until…”

[69] It can join the likes of artists-scholar-practitioner Molemo Moiloa in South Africa, co-founder of Women’s Museum Zambia Samba Yonga in Zambia, and Dr. Rudo Sithole in Zimbabwe, who are championing conservation south of the Congo (Open Restitution Africa, 2025).

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# Appendix

## Workshop outline

ANOTHER
ROADMAP
SCHOOL

**Contending with friends in Eindhoven:**
**VAM 2024**

ARAC's Unchrono/logical Timeline (Un/chrono/Logical Timeline) emerged from the Johannesburg Working Group (JWG) and is indebted to the radical models of arts education in the service of social justice and liberation. The content of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline focuses on the concepts and histories of coloniality, critical narrativity and ideations of times and marking of activating key events connected to the arts, education and their broader contexts. Since its inception in 2017, the JWG along with the greater Another Roadmap Africa Cluster (ARAC) collective, has facilitated more than twelve iterations, allowing participants to engage with the text already on the existing timeline through sonic interventions, poetry, imagery and personal narratives. For Documenta 15 in Kassel, Germany, we re-imagined a new chapter that activates counter-maps and suggests a more inclusive discussion of historical influences of arts education and artistic practice from an even wider pool of references and participants. For the Jane Lombard Fellowship in New York, United States (2023), we envisioned a continuation of the conversation from the Kassel iteration.

**Schedule for workshopping of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline:**

**Note that the outline below includes thoughts for both the tentative Design Academy workshop (90 minutes) taking place on 20 or 21 September and the two-day workshop for colleagues at the Van Abbe Museum. For the purposes of this document the first four points below are envisaged as the basis for the Design Academy workshop. Points 1 to 6 are the basis for the Van Abbe Museum two-day workshop. The workshop will be facilitated in English.**

1. Introduction to the Another Roadmap School: origins, histories and presents; key principles.
2. Introduction to the ARAC group and its work: origins, histories and presents; key principles.

3. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, its forms and its different iterations: from the Wits School of Education (Johannesburg, 2017) to the Javett Art Centre (Pretoria, 2024); theorising with and through the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline.

4. Exploring the notion of “Contending with Friends”: An introduction to some of the conceptual material informing our work (e.g. examples from Lesotho and South African contexts; epistemic violence, vis-a-vis epistemic disobedience, epistemic ignorance, epistemic indifference(?), a short literature review from the global South).

5. Evolving a site specific version of a Un/chrono/Logical Timeline in the Van Abbe Museum context:
    - Select relevant texts and artists/friends (from the collection) that will form the starting point (these might exist as copies of images and objects or drawings/sketches thereof).
    - Add decolonial concepts (these might be written on sheets of paper or as copies of texts).
    - Put said texts on vinyl or paper placed on the floor.
    - Have a speaker present for music selection.
    - Allow for participants to browse through the existing content of the timeline - as selected at VAM and suggest things to add.
    - Participants select a card and write/doodle/storify a memory or experience which relates to arts education from their locality and practice.
    - Draw/write their interpretations of what they see on the floor.
    - Include other elements that serve as memory triggers or linkages to other people's stories in the group.
    - Generate questions and observations.
    - Share reflections and notes aligned with the exhibition/collection.

6. Discussion: What does the notion of an Un/chrono/Logical Timeline process mean for the Van Abbe Museum collection and the practices that inform the collection?

**Methodology (2 day 3 hr sessions)**

**Day 1**

1. Introduction of objects

2. Analysis for epistemic violence relating to notions of time mapping in and through cultural production under the auspice; Contending with friends… “*African time is the right time*”.

   a. compare and contrast narrative conventions with what we now know
   b. evidence of subversion if any
   c. possibilities and missed opportunities

3. Identify contradictions (read the room and materials)
   a. convenient excuses
   b. unavoidable truths
   c. Is there room for compromise?

4. Extract unexpected gems (a writing exercise)
   a. every rose has thorns; anticipate limitations/weaknesses/potential trouble
   b. find and create order in chaos
   c. paradox allows for multimodal dimension through juxtaposition and symbiosis, the more absurd, the better

**Day 2**

5. *In a semi- circle:* discuss observations, feelings, experiences, expected outcomes for the exhibition.

6. Map the next steps as agreed (agreement does not mean consensus)
   - decentering the contentious friends

   Installation, rhythm and spatial design (back to front, down to look up, circularity, etc).

Please spare a few minutes to respond to this questionnaire, to collate your experience of the workshop.

**Materials required**

1. Projector
2. Speaker
3. Spotify/YouTube
4. Scented Markers, pencils, paper, pens, cloth, different textures, charcoal and other doodling/craft materials
5. Snacks (potluck style?)
6. Childhood reference e.g toys, animation, trips

**Literature review**

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# Un/chrono/Logical Timeline Questionnaire

| What was your experience of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline? | How has it or has it not impacted your approach to the exhibition you are working on in relation to the idea of "contending with friends"? | What is the relevance of a "decolonial attitude" in your work? | What would you like to add/remove? |
|---|---|---|---|
| I had a good experience working with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline. It forced me to think beyond the chronological timeline which opened up more space for new ideas. There was more freedom without the limits of a chronological timeline. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline encouraged me, and I think the whole group, to create and be open for new narratives. | It has impacted working on the new exhibition, because we started with a new perspective. A perspective where we can break rules and open up the conversation together about how we want to reimagine the new collection display. | As a fundraiser, a decolonial attitude would mean being mindful of where funding comes from and how it aligns with our values. It is also important to be transparent about how funds will be used to support decolonial curatorial practices. | I would like to add an overall introduction which sums up what is on the planning for the day and question the group what today's goals can be. This could be helpful at the start of each workshop day to align our focus. |
| Great! Nice concept/theory to work from for our new collection presentation. It fits the idea of this exhibition quite well. | I think the idea of bringing a personal object really helped our way of thinking from a more personal perspective. This will impact the exhibition a lot if we decide to move forward with this idea! | I think it's very very relevant to have a 'decolonial/demodern attitude' within our museum & exhibitions that we organise. It's one of our major themes for a reason and can be found in everything we do. But: we are all still learning. And as we talked about Dwarsverbanden | I would love to see some examples of previous timelines that you have created! To see what's on them! That makes it a bit more clear what to expect! |

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| | | yesterday, I think we all learned a lot. Also about using certain words like Glenda said (empowering versus 'giving space') etc. So it's a work in progress but very important to keep learning. | |
| I really enjoyed the workshop and believe it will be an invaluable tool for the development of the new collection display. What is especially important is that it transforms an analysis into an action, via a method. This allowed the discussion to be practice oriented, which for us is very important and a good place to meet between different teams (curatorial, mediation, marketing). | It has resulted in the outlines of a vision on how to do this in practice. I hope that each professional can in the next phase work on translating the ideas of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline in their own practice, whereby I hope it will not be something added on their current practice, but something that will transform their current way of working. | Being born in an old imperial nation with much colonial action, colonialism is ingrained in many aspects of life in the Netherlands, including myself. To untangle this and gain awareness requires profound self-reflection on the level of my own personal behaviour, yet also on the cultural, social, economic and political structures in which I operate. I feel that this enormous project has in the last year been undertaken with a focus on 'correction'. This is still important, but my experience is that we now also want to start to experiment with new ways of being that propose not only a critique of the existing, but also a new form of practice/ethics, that could help us to make positive choices in the now and future. The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline helps to realise this shift in the domain of how we relate and live our embeddedness in history. | I don't know exactly where the removing or adding should happen. But I would like to add or keep or be aware of, that we should strive for clarity, which appear as simplicity, yet which in the end is something else. Clarity translates a complex reflection in an appropriate and relatable form. When it is clear it can be lived. Clarity will never be 100%, but we need to find the appropriate stem-form that allows for as many people as possible to inhabit the idea of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline. |

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| I am overwhelmed with gratitude and feel lucky to have been able to engage and contribute to developing a new edition of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline | The Un/chrono/Logical Timeline will play a central role in the renewed collection display and will inform the exhibition hang in 2026. Informed by the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline method, the collection artworks will be spatialized and hung according to dates drawn from the personal narratives of participants. | Very, I am always trying to contend with the modernist colonial project | I would love to meet the original Un/chrono/Logical Timeline and would be curious to play the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline card game. |
| I liked the setting, feeling comfortable, open up , connecting, sharing thoughts with respect, space to be yourself. | I don't understand the question. But working in relation is working with a deep connection and respect with yourself and each other. I hope to work like that in the future | everything, starting with approach, waking up, setting the mood, everything. Sometimes i truely believe when working on something where the startingpoint was not clear or pure or without connection something in a project can just effect harm. and i find that really fucked up. Decoloniality is not a buzzzzzz | Keep it 100 |
| Fantastic! An opportunity to understand/experience time differently | Absolutely, especially in the sense that Un/chrono/Logical Timeline revealed artworks to be as elastic as time itself. They became incredibly porous, each one offering an entry point—something that could evoke responses in tension with the message they “contain.” Or rather, it became clear that this sense of containment was itself an illusion... | Oof. I think I took too long to respond to this questionnaire because I was grappling with this question. For one, I struggle to separate work from life—I think of Maria Lugones' maxim, "I won’t think what I won’t practice." This thought sometimes leaves me feeling that what I do for a living is so far removed from the kernel of "real" struggle (think for instance policymaking). But other times, that same thought reminds me that | I just wanted to take a moment to recognize the absolute brilliance of your project and to share that I witnessed firsthand the effect it had on all participants (including myself). It helped us understand other departments more deeply and, of course, led to a true breakthrough in the exhibition content. The Un/chrono/Logical |

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| | | art and cultural production are right there, latent and powerful, and I shouldn't give up recognizing what they do. So yeah, I'm caught in this double bind but somehow still propelled forward by it. | Timeline workshop was a gift. :) |

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| I experienced the sessions and the discussion surrounding the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline as very insightful. I thoroughly enjoyed the way personal histories became connected to a more chronological and art historical, possibly traditional, timeline. Especially as this gave way to creatively revise the relationship between constituents and the artistic development of exhibition concepts, a relationship which in my opinion is all too often defined by separation. It reminded me of Saidiya Hartman's critical fabulation, in which I experience (forgotten) histories as becoming more lively and relational. | Although I am not deeply involved, I can talk about something else which I encountered recently and, together with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline sessions, greatly influenced my thinking about merging constituent working and conceptual artistic development. During my attendance of my reading group, we read two texts, one by Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò and the other one by the Zapatistas, after which we discussed in length about identity politics and its effects on representation within different domains. To keep it relatively short, the combination of the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline sessions and this discussion provided me a more in-depth insight into the separation of constituent organizing and the artistic and conceptual work happening within and outside of museums. A process which to me is still developing and which I'm still interested in engaging with and a relationality which I personally also consider to be a very ideological one. No matter what organization, when an organization decides to actively engage with constituent-working, this | I think the above is also very relevant to this question. And, to put it short, I personally believe that working with artists who often concern themselves with history, be it how it's continuing into the present and future or otherwise, cannot be seen without recognizing and working against historical structures. Especially as the VAM is an institution also rooted in this principal. In my view, curating or cultural work (something I align myself more with compared to curating) is a social practice and demands recognizing and understanding where artists are coming from. And how I see constituent organizing and curating as connected, I also cannot possibly forego a decolonial approach, as this work offers a way to support different communities with different experiences. | N/A |

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| | is often not fully implemented within the organizational structure itself or for that matter in their public image. In my opinion something which acts as a separator and does the exact opposite, namely a performative measure which doesn't recognize the structural problem of making art something for the elite.<br><br>What I found really inspiring is that, with the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline, this separation becomes less. Instead of constituent organizing as a separate function and program, it integrates it into the artistic and conceptual. The constituents the museum organizes with are in my opinion very important, and I hope these sessions provided myself and my colleagues with the foundation to also bring these groups together. Especially as most of these groups have a reason for collaborating with the museum. I've worked with activist groups and grassroots initiatives whose collaboration, in my view, are also grounded in different crises - be it the genocide happening in different places at this moment, or the extreme gentrification making organisations | | |

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| | slowly disappear within the city of Eindhoven. Through something like the Un/chrono/Logical Timeline but hopefully in the future also other tools which integrate artistic and constituent organizing, we can gather more tools to connect these different groups, so that we can be more instrumental in not offering space and facilities for these constituent groups in the museum, but also offer (not push) a network in which they can find support and a shared struggle. Something which is often missing within municipal or governmental organisations. | | |

# Un/chrono/Logical Timeline Rubric

**“That time when we were not there”: *Contending with friends***
**Van Abbemuseum edition of the un/chrono/logical timeline tool Rubric**

**How to do it**

- Find 90 people who fall within constituencies that vary as widely as possible to reflect the cosmopolitan nature of VAM’s audiences and the Netherlands more broadly, and ask them to contribute a personal object they would be comfortable parting with for an extended period for public display. The object should somehow be connected to their relationship to modern and contemporary art in the collection. Contributions can be sought from the following groups:

    - ➔ Citizens assembly
    - ➔ Immediate neighbours; cultural institutions, schools, churches, local shops
    - ➔ Strategic individuals; parliament, the monarchy, local council, artist union or parallel
    - ➔ Colleagues
    - ➔ Participants from outside the Netherlands (to create a more global reach)

- Ask the contributor to share a personal anecdote related to the object they chose.
- Ask the contributors to express how they would want their contribution to be experienced in the gallery.
- Ask these four questions, or their variation, and record them:

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| **1** | Why do you like art, what was your first encounter? |
| **2** | What is the link between history, your life, and art? |
| **3** | Do you think about art in relation to where you are and somewhere else, past or present? |
| **4** | Do you think new conversations can emerge from old art works? |

**Framing of the object in relation to an artwork**

- Include geographies associated with the object, visible and invisible.
- Highlight a historical socio-political moment that coincided with the object, be it the origin or when the owner took it into their possession
- Include the personal link in the narration
- Include a critical question or reflection related to the artwork, especially what they feel is missing.

**Title card information**

- What is your (preferred) name?
- What is your personal item called?
- Which artwork from the list we’ve provided does your work correspond to?

- Please share the story (100 words max) of how you've matched your personal item to the art work. And abbreviated version of your story will be provided in the exhibition via audio and written form
  - Which date is significant to your personal story (not necessarily a "grand history" event…maybe even "history from the ground up") somewhere else in the world which can allow for different dates to be "extrapolated" or unpacked from one year..

  - What else happened in the world on that day? (ask contributors to situate themselves in history to a moment where art, personal life, and current affairs intersected).
  - Do you have any notes of how the collection team needs to care for your personal item? You will be provided with a loan form for your personal item, this form outlines the terms and contentions of the loan.
- Date: The object must be related to an historic event

**Collection of stories**

- Audio to be transcribed. May include anecdotes on:

  ➔ Song (accompanied by a brief description for context)
  ➔ Food in the form of recipes, images or caricature
  ➔ Smell?

**Notes or suggestions for interviewees**

- Dynamic, haptic and welcoming; make it feel like visiting someone's living room.
- Open to change by introducing new stories or questions along the way.
- Give and take; audiences have the room to add their own personal anecdotes, their different perspectives or even a challenge to the presented artworks. They may take it apart by its components based on their own subjectivities or they can have new takeaways from the encounter that they had not anticipated coming into the exhibition.
- The audience should leave feeling mostly reflective, with the beginnings of a transformed worldview. One that is more critical of art history and its place in world history, beyond aesthetics. Encourage them to leave something behind.

**Evaluation of success**

- There should be room for flexibility, if something in the design is not working there should be room to change it.
- The exhibition should be modular to the best extent that it can be. How people interact in and with the space will be indicative of success or failure. The more people enjoy the space, the more they will be inclined to return and recommend others to visit.
- Experiment with a ticketing model and activities structured around the different constituencies represented by the 90 objects to strike a spike in visits and spread out to cater to the range of demographics the museum wishes to attract.

- Mediation becomes a two way process, where visitors are engaged in a call and response, an exchange, versus being mostly one-directional.
- Ask the question; do the kids get it and enjoy it?

**For the team**

There should be a feedback protocol in place throughout the development and exhibition phases. Below are some questions to ask yourselves as you move along.

1. Given the subjectivity of art, think about what you might consider success besides audience statistics.
2. What else can you do during the exhibition so that the method continues to be generative vs performative?
3. How far are you willing to push the narrative, what if your narrative clashes with some of the 90?
4. Will you have other smaller activities with the 90 to make the process continuous?
5. How will you respond to negative feedback and controversy?

# Letter of intent from VAM

6 May. 24, Eindhoven, The Netherlands

To whom it may concern,

Subject: Letter of Intent for collaboration from Van Abbemuseum

On behalf of Van Abbemuseum, I hereby confirm our intent to collaborate with Lineo Segoete (Another Roadmap for Arts Education) in the context of *How late is it?*, the new collection presentation at the Van Abbemuseum opening spring / summer 2026.

We have specifically invited Segoete as an expert for the research phase of the exhibition, to develop new ways of presenting the museum collection in relation to the Another Roadmap's Unchronological timeline tool. Segoete will give a talk and with colleagues guide a series of workshops over the course of the year. For this we will provide travel and accommodation during her stay in Eindhoven from 19-25 September, 2024.

***How late is it?*** is the new collection presentation at the Van Abbemuseum opening spring / summer 2026 when the museum turns 90. The exhibition replaces the popular multivocal and multisensory exhibition *Dwarsverbanden: Delinking / Relinking* (2022-2026) and will be installed over five floors of the new building with an area of 1500 m2 and will launch an expanded free zone in the museum. The exhibition title takes after the Dutch way of asking for the time, "Hoe laat is het?," and carries the double meaning in English of wanting to stay up, wondering if it's already "too late." The action of telling the time involves grounding yourself in relation to others and the environment, it's a way of measuring the past and the present. Taken together across languages, the title also marks a shift away from linear ways of "telling the time". Epochal classifications of history insist on linear progression and only recognize dominant moments in history and disregards peripheral and emergent events. *How late is it?* instead recognizes that various temporal rhythms exist together in a present moment. The methods for the exhibition are developed with (artist) interlocutors to engage in collective thinking to garner agency and transform out of systems of domination and oppression. As such (artist) interlocutors G, Africa Cluster of Another Roadmap to Arts Education, Ima-Abasi Okon and Nolan Oswald Dennis have been invited into the exhibition (research) phase to develop a set of methods through respective workshops and discussions with colleagues from the museum curatorial, collections, mediation, and education teams to contribute methods for organizing and thinking through the collection and archives away from chronology and normativity.

The **Van Abbemuseum** is the art museum of the city of Eindhoven. Ever since its foundation in 1936, we have been raising questions in the field of art and society in an experimental way, applying art as a tool. Openness, hospitality and exchange of knowledge are important to the Van Abbemuseum and we encourage ourselves and our visitors to think about subjects such as, for example, the role of the collection as a cultural 'memory' or the museum as a public space**.** Thanks to international collaborations and exchange, the Van Abbemuseum has also become a place for creative cross-pollination. A source of wonderment, inspiration, and imagination, the Van Abbemuseum is one of the foremost museums of contemporary art in Europe. It has an extensive international collection of more than 3400 works of art, from both well-known

contemporary artists such as Tania Bruguera, Marlene Dumas and Iris Kensmil and modern masters such as Oskar Kokoschka, Piet Mondriaan and Pablo Picasso.

I hope to have informed you well, please don’t hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Van Abbemuseum
+31 40 238 1090