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# Centring silences: the elusive photographic archive of Mabel Cetu

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# CENTRING SILENCES:

## THE ELUSIVE PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE OF MABEL CETU

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**A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree**

Johannesburg, 2020

## DECLARATION

I, Stefanie Jason, a student registered for a Master of Arts degree at Wits University, declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

## ABSTRACT

Mabel Cetu had a dynamic life, with a career as a photojournalist, journalist, nurse and councillor, however details surrounding her history – including her photojournalistic practice during the middle of the twentieth century – are widely absent from historical records in South Africa. This research, presented as both a written paper and creative component, with a reader titled *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu*, grapples with the nebulous depiction of Cetu's narrative in mainstream history and within the archives of two of the many publications she worked for: *Drum Magazine* and *Golden City Post*. In examining institutional archives, this report questions how, in the face of archival absences relating to Cetu, can her practice be centred. By engaging "official" and "unofficial" archives and experimental processes, this research aims to provoke the silences encasing Cetu's memory, and invokes nuanced, alternative narratives to explore the fragments of Cetu's history.



**KEYWORDS**

Archives, memory, gender, photojournalism, histories of photography, media

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

"*History is Storytelling*." — Yaa Gyasi, 2016

"*Every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actors*." – Saidiya Hartman, 2018

### 1.1 Introduction

In an essay titled 'The Early Years: Notes on South African Photographers Before the Eighties' (Warne, 2006: 22), Pam Warne points to marginalised narratives of black women photographers in South Africa's histories circa the middle of the twentieth century and prior. Warne articulates, "In the silence surrounding black women photographers before the 1970s and 1980s, the name Mabel Cetu (1910-1990) resounds like a bell" (2006: 22). In this argument, Warne elucidates gaps relating to black women photographers in the histories of photography in South Africa, while emphasising the omission of photojournalist Mabel Cetu from mainstream histories.

Utilising Warne's observation as a point of departure, this report examines the depiction of Cetu in public archives to not only provoke the elusiveness of Cetu's work and everyday experiences from "official" accounts but query ways to centre the experiences and photography of Cetu when so little information relating to her practice and biography is present in historical records. This examination prompts a critical study of mainstream historiography and the socio-economic, cultural and political climate of South Africa during Cetu's practice, to investigate the implications of dominant archival practices and ideologies on Cetu's work and how she is remembered today. Moreover, Warne's argument sets into motion research that grapples with the structure of the "official" archive – its foundations, influences and claims to represent the past – to ruminate on

fragmented histories and explore ways to draw from these shards to centre marginalised historical narratives.

Despite a nebulous depiction in archival records, Cetu – who lived for many years of her life in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth[1] – had a dynamic life and illustrious career. Warne illustrates Cetu's multifaceted career as a nurse, photojournalist and councillor, and argues that Cetu was a "prominent figure in Port Elizabeth's White Location[2]" (2006: 22). Warne's scholarship surfaces that Cetu worked for publications *Golden City Post* – which Cetu joined in 1958 (Warne, 2006: 22) – *Zonk*, *Drum Magazine*, and the *Herald*'s weekly title, *Umsobomvu*, where, Warne argues, "she later became a contributor" (2006: 23). Warne also claims that Cetu worked for state-run South African Broadcasting Corporation radio station, *Radio Bantu*[3].

In a conversation with Cetu's niece Zingiwe Cetu, which features in the creative component of this research report, a reader titled *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu*, Zingiwe Cetu details that Cetu was a nurse early in her career, and later worked in media as a journalist and photojournalist (Cetu, 2020: 17), and was also involved in women's rugby and organising beauty pageants.

The reader *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* also elucidates Cetu's political activism against a repressive apartheid government. Zingiwe Cetu signals Cetu's clandestine political activity and shares that Cetu's son Churchill was an anti-apartheid activist who was brutally arrested by the state and imprisoned on Robben Island. Zingiwe Cetu argues that Cetu was politically active but, in a "low, not that out-there [kind of way]. Because it was very strict with government. And she was something like a mother of a Robben Islander, because her son was arrested in 1963"

[1] In *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu*, Zingiwe Cetu, Mabel Cetu's niece articulates that Cetu lived in New Brighton but later moved to KwaDwesi, where she passed away (2020).
[2] White Location is one of the areas within New Brighton. "New Brighton Township grew around the railway station built in 1877. It includes Red Location, White Location, McNamee, Boastville, Elundini and KwaFord" (South African History Online).
[3] Sekibakiba Lekgoathi claims that *Radio Bantu* was launched in 1960 "as a fully-fledged station for African listeners in their different languages" (Lekgoathi, 2009: 566). Lekgoathi articulates the complexities of *Radio Bantu* as a propaganda machine for apartheid regime but also a platform: 1) in which some broadcasters "quite wilfully subverted white control by slipping in unseen messages to their listeners through the thicket of language"; 2) which created opportunities for the "upward mobility for black announcers, despite the racism they endured at the workplace"; 3) upon which writers and producers could express their "intellectual skills that could not easily be employed elsewhere" (Lekgoathi, 2009: 566).

(2020: 19). Neo Ntsoma in the reader *Centring Silences* argues, "Mabel Cetu, who was also an activist in her own right and used multiple platforms to advance her cause" (2020: 57). Meanwhile Dudu Madonsela, in a conversation with me in *Centring Silences*, states that Cetu was a part of the African National Congress Women's League, an organisation that was instrumental in pushing back against the repressive policies of white-minority rule, and points to a photograph she found of Cetu wearing the league's uniform (2020: 34).

Zingiwe Cetu announces that in the early 1980s, Cetu was appointed a community councillor[4] (Cetu, 2020: 18), a structure introduced by the apartheid government "to concede some measure of power to local African communities in governing their own urban areas," according to Patricia Zweig (2005: 2). Zweig, underscoring the tensions of these structures, also elucidates that community councillor constructs – "in the climate of anti-government sentiment" – had been "vigorously rejected by township residents who saw them merely as new government control mechanisms" (2005: 2). As Zingiwe Cetu, Ntsoma and Madonsela's arguments illustrate Cetu's political work and infer ways in which individuals such as Mabel Cetu and her son agitated against the state, with brutal consequences – Cetu's role in challenging the apartheid system is pronounced but also complicated by her appointment as a councillor.

In the essay *Mabel Cetu: Between Politics & Photography* in *Centring Silence*, Candice Jansen (2020) critiques the absence of Mabel Cetu's work in dominant histories and does so through surveying an archival document. The document – a "partial transcript of the Ciskei Commission" (Jansen, 2020: 27) – features on memory website South African History Online and enmeshes "Mrs Cetu" to community councils and Bantustan-related politics. Jansen's reading of the archival material provokes the fragments of the past and how its manifestation in memory spaces has the potential to heighten or perpetuate silences. Jansen also underlines tensions around this particular moment in South Africa's history, which the transcript points to, and the implications of such tensions on the memory of Cetu today.

[4] Zingiwe Cetu argues that Mabel Cetu "was a local [councillor] in the early eighties. You know, when the government tried to make black influential people in townships in charge of their communities" (2020: 18).

In the essay, Jansen questions if the "Mrs Cetu" in the transcript is indeed Mabel Cetu and if so, wonders: "Did Mrs Cetu stand on the wrong side of apartheid? If she was Mabel Cetu, the photographer, is this part of why she struggles to appear in photographic history?" (2020: 29). Through this provocation, Jansen surfaces the politics of history; its entwinement with power structures, and implicates hegemonic constructs pre- and post-1994 South Africa in sustaining dominant narratives and pushing to the fringes of mainstream memory accounts that do not fit into these configurations.

Despite the absence or nebulous depiction of Cetu's photography and experiences in public archives, Zingiwe Cetu notes that Mabel Cetu was an influential member of society (Cetu, 2020: 18). In a *Drum Magazine* article, Cetu's stature is also inferred by the description "prominent journalist" (1968: 20). Warne, as argued above, also refers to Cetu as prominent, and further states that "Cetu's social and political commitment to her community earned her the title 'Mother of the White Location'" (2006: 23). An essay titled 'On Both Sides Now: Fifty Years of South African Women Behind and in Front of the Lens' by Penny Siopis (2006) includes a photograph featuring a group of individuals standing alongside each other. The caption of the photograph, credited "EP Herald", reads:

> Mabel Cetu established a reputation as a fearless photojournalist and community builder. In this image from newspaper archives, Cetu, centre, is inducted as president of the New Brighton branch of the National Council of Women at a ceremony held in the eighties at the War Memorial Hall, New Brighton, Port Elizabeth. (2006: 10).

This caption elucidates Cetu's media and civic engagements, notably her reputation – "fearless photojournalist" – and her position as president of the National Council of Women's[5] New Brighton branch in the 1980s. Moreover, Siopis's essay briefly mentions Cetu as a pioneering photojournalist (2006: 10), and describes Cetu as the "first black South African woman photojournalist" (2006: 10).

[5] Academic Shahana Rasool observes that The National Council of Women in South Africa (NWCSA) was "committed to promoting equal rights and responsibilities for all races" (2016: 10). The NWCSA, "established in 1909, was largely White and focused on issues that would enhance the lives of this group of women, like pensions and family law, and excluded Black women because of segregatory laws" (Rasool, 2016: 5). Unlike organisations such as Federation of South African Women and National Council of African Women, whom, Rasool argues, "aimed at a radical transformation of the system of discrimination" (2016: 9) in apartheid South Africa, the NWCSA "argued that while they were opposed to Apartheid and fought against it through the legislature, they asserted that 'they were obliged to obey the laws of the land'" (2016: 9).

Siopis is not the only one to refer to Cetu as the first black woman photojournalist in South Africa. Journalist Jimmy Matyu, whom I reference later in this report and who has written about working with Cetu (Matyu, 2009: 6) – Warne also invokes his writing on Cetu in her research – also refers to Cetu as "South Africa's first black woman photo-journalist" (2007: 8), thus emphasising Cetu as a pioneering photojournalist.

Commenting on labels such as "first black woman", Nontobeko Ntombela, who calls out dominant history-making practices in marginalising individuals in "official" histories, asserts this naming convention as exclusionary and invoking western imperialist sentiments. Ntombela argues that claims relating to "firsts" reinforce "Western desires of 'discovering', 'defining' and 'viewing" (2013: 40), as well as "perpetuates a colonialist view". Ntombela problematises this titling convention by theorising it as a process which implicates historians for being selective about recording history and the potential for such a titling to further silence subaltern narratives (Ntombela, 2013: 40). Despite Cetu's position as a pioneering photojournalist, Ntombela's theory points to how naming Cetu as the "first black South African woman photojournalist" evokes notions of discovery and dominant historiographic practices that "other" and exceptionalise (Ntombela, 2013: 40); thus potentially continuing to silence black women photojournalists who may have practiced alongside or even before Cetu.

Having held such positions both culturally and civically – as a prominent photojournalist and journalist, and later the apartheid-appointed councillor and president of the New Brighton branch of the National Council of Women – this research paper interrogates: if Cetu was such a visible figure in society, why is her story and photography so concealed in mainstream records today? With an illustrious and layered history such as Cetu's, as pointed to above, this research therefore aims to tackle the formation of "official" history, and critically examine why Cetu's story, with all its depth and complexities, is not as readily available in historical accounts as the sonorous silence that shadows her photographic archive in institutional memory spaces.

### 1.2 Research scope

This paper surveys the representation of Cetu in the archives of the *Drum* and *Golden City Post*, between the period 1958-1970. Drawing from Warne's research, one of the few published records noting the early years of Cetu's photographic career, and which locates Cetu's practice to 1958 – the year Cetu "joined the *Golden City Post*" (2006: 23) – this paper therefore uses 1958 and *Golden City Post* as a locus to begin examining public archives.

In cross-referencing Warne's claims relating to Cetu's work for one of the *Herald* newspapers, *Umsobomvu*, I contacted the *Herald* archive and was sent two columns by Jimmy Matyu, who had worked[6] with Cetu. In one column, Matyu recalls working with Cetu on a story in New Brighton in 1960 (Matyu, 2009: 6). "Both of us were at the *Golden City Post* and *Drum Magazine,*" Matyu writes (2007: 8). While, in another column, the second date Matyu invokes in relation to Cetu is "the '70s" (Matyu, 2007: 8). In this column, Matyu does not write about covering a story with Cetu, he instead emphasises the perils of navigating a racist, patriarchal apartheid South Africa as a black person, and uses an example of an instance with Cetu to demonstrate his point. Therefore drawing from Matyu's columns, the scope of this research is widened beyond the 1960s to 1970 – despite there being no concrete evidence that Cetu was practicing photography during this time.

Moreover, in drawing from Matyu's and Warne's writing, and issues relating to time limitations of my Master's programme and the scope of my thesis, I chose to focus on the archives of the *Drum* and *Golden City Post*, which were initially published by Jim Bailey in the 1950s. My decision to examine these publication was not only due to the accessibility of these archives in Gauteng, where I lived during this research period, but due to an interest in what an exploration of these archives might yield in regards to the landscape of media and photojournalism in South Africa's histories but also how a reading of these archives might give insight into the framing of Cetu's narrative today. However, it should be emphasised that, as these two publications are only a few of the many media titles Cetu worked for and contributed to, much more research is needed to develop an even more

[6] In the column titled ''Prophet' arrested on New Brighton beach and never heard of again', Jimmy Matyu (2009: 6) references working with Cetu; recalling an instance in which Cetu documented a scene in New Brighton, which Matyu aimed to report.

complex and in-depth survey of the archive of Mabel Cetu. As this report looks into *Drum* and *Golden City Post*, research of various other publications and titles might give an even broader insight into Cetu's work, the media machine and her legacy within and beyond these spaces.

Through examining these publications' archives during the periods 1958-1970, I happened upon fragmented and sometimes inconsistent histories. I found absences relating to photographic credits, only a handful of depictions of Cetu and no images credited to Cetu. If her photographs were in these archives, they were either hidden, erased or not attributed with her name. Therefore, in a research report aimed at centring Cetu's memory, the key questions of this paper are provoked further: In which ways can such research focus on the work of Cetu where gaps and omissions are widely present, and arguably intentional? And in which ways can this research draw from "official" archives to radically contemplate Cetu's photographic practice in a way that does not further negate or silence Mabel Cetu in histories?

Lastly, despite my research centring the photographic works of Mabel Cetu, this paper is focused just as much on Cetu's lived experiences. "In marginalised communities, what is personal for us is political. Inherently political," argues Aisha Gani (2018: 140). Therefore, in examining the photographic practice of Mabel Cetu – a black woman in a racist, sexist, classist apartheid South Africa – this research is interested in the quotidian; Cetu's everyday, and how the political, the economic, the social and cultural overlap in relation to her lived experiences. This scrutiny is therefore aimed to get a sense of how the society around Cetu shaped her day to day, including her work, and moreover, to ruminate on how her existence pushed back against dominant structures or impacted the world around her.

This contemplation of agency and the ways in which dominant systems affect the lives of black women – more specifically, "the nexi of power relations at play", to reference Pumla Dineo Gqola (2001: 12) – draws from Black and African feminisms which give special attention to agency, social context and narratives relating to black women's lives. In addition, a theory to these frames, intersectionality – a seminal concept of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989: 40) – carefully identifies interlinking structures of power in

relation to black women's lived experiences. Expounding on intersectionality, Crenshaw argues that the concept denotes:

> … the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences. My objective there was to illustrate that many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately. (1991: 1244)

Furthermore, in invoking African and Black feminisms, which I elaborate on below, these frames advocate for research that is conscious about and interested in the lived of black women (Gqola, 2001: 17), as a way to not only subvert dominant histography and violent knowledge production practices (Gqola, 2010: 11) but also to invigorate original narratives, practices and knowledge (Gqola, 2001: 20).

### 1.3 Terminology

This paper makes use of the words "archive" and "archives". In referencing definitions of the two terms by the organisation Archival Platform, which articulates "the archive" as a "conceptual term to refer to the circumscribed body of knowledge of the past that is historically determined as that which is available for drawing on when we think about or reckon with the past" (2014: 14). While Archival Platform defines "archives" as: "the collections of storehouses of preserved historical resources, whether documentary, oral, visual, material, virtual or physical" (2014: 14). With these distinctions in mind, this paper also pays attention to the configurations of dominant historiographic practice in framing the document as the archive's "medium par excellence" (Enwezor & Okeke-Agula, 2009: 36). Therefore in an attempt to draw focus to Mabel Cetu's photography, an examination of the dominant memory practices and a sensitivity to Cetu's everyday and agency become critical in positioning this work as a distinct, alternative space of memory.

Michelle T King claims that nuanced, divergent spaces of memory evoke feminist practices, which is explored in the methodology section. King argues, "Feminist historians have argued for the need to broaden the concept of the 'archive' to include alternative

sites of historical memory, such as the domestic space of the home or the pages of female-authored historical novels" (2011: 27). Furthermore, Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris and Graeme Reid suggest that there are multiple alternatives to written, public documentation. These include oral records, "[l]iterature, landscape, dance, art and a host of other forms offer archival possibilities", which they argue as "capable of releasing different kinds of information about the past, shaped by different record-keeping processes" (2002: 10). Therefore, as King, Hamilton, Harris and Reid foreground memory practices that are subversive, unique and which go beyond the restrictions of the institutional archive, it is critical then to draw distinctions between the various memory spaces: the institutional archive and alternative sites of memory.

This paper also utilises the term "absence" to engage the dearth of representation of Cetu's photographic works in public archives. Absence in this context is used to draw attention to widespread silences around Cetu's photographs in historical records, and illustrating the lacuna of her archive as well as her works being hidden or unaccredited. Absences in this sense also evokes Matt Richardson's theory on "strategic absences" (2013: 6), a term used to address exclusionary historiographic tactics that have deliberately muzzled the voices of marginalised identities to maintain dominant political agendas. Thus, in eliciting Richardson's argument, I also make use of the word "erasure" to infer how strategic absences have shaped and/or negated Mabel Cetu's memory in mainstream histories today.

### 1.4 Research question

This research paper poses the following questions:

1. As Mabel Cetu's photographic works are widely absent from institutional memory spaces, in what ways can the "official" archive be engaged to produce new, nuanced and alternative narratives on the history of Mabel Cetu?
2. As public records are fraught with omissions and silences relating to Mabel Cetu, in which ways can the fragments of the past – within and beyond the "official" archive – be drawn upon to centre her practice?

## 1.5 Aim

"There is no easy remedy, no obvious redress to past exclusion from mainstream archives. What was left out cannot simply be put back in," argue Hamilton, Harris and Reid (2002: 12). Hamilton, Harris and Reid's observation points to the challenges of researchers of marginalised histories and unsettle ideas of historians neatly replacing what has been extracted and excluded through dominant archival practices (2002: 10). Instead Hamilton, Harris and Reid elucidate the complexities of working with silences in dominant histories, and call forth a delicate approach to engaging fragments of marginalised historical accounts. Hamilton, Harris and Reid's assertion propel the aim of this research paper, which is to centre Cetu's work however to do so with an awareness of the intricacies involved in engaging such a layered, nuanced and delicate history. Without attempting to present fragments of Cetu's history in ways which replicates mainstream memory practices and further marginalises her narrative, Hamilton, Harris and Reid's provocation therefore encourage this report to hold to the tensions and challenges of investigating silences in mainstream memory, as well as to write on Cetu's history in a nuanced and distinct manner; that invariably goes against dominant archival grain.

## 1.6 Chapter outline

This research paper comprises four chapters. Chapter one introduces this work by giving an overview of the research and the main themes of the paper. Chapter two explores the various theoretical frameworks applied to the research, and expands on how these frames have shaped the contours of this work. This chapter also lays out the methods used to carry out this research, and argues why certain practices were fitting for this type of study.

Chapter three analyses relevant literature, and mobilises numerous arguments in areas that this research engages – such as archives, media, photography and gender – to ground this report in various discourse and highlight any gaps in research that this paper might contribute to. The next chapter, chapter four, is a survey of the archive. This section interrogates the institutional archival structure, its foundation, histories and present

standings, and questions the implications of such configurations on society, particularly in relation to Cetu's history in mainstream memory. By critiquing the "official" archive and examining materials within institutional memory spaces, this chapter also aims to lay bare the archive[7] as a way to not only grapple with its condition, but to also elicit new and experimental approaches to the history of Mabel Cetu.

Meanwhile, chapter five, unpacks the creative project for this report, titled *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu*, and explores alternative, divergent practices of memory. In discussing the process for creating the printed reader, and the key concepts that forms this creative gesture, chapter five draws on discussions relating to counter-archives and interventions that seek to reframe and reimagine historical absences. Lastly, the final chapter also comments on this project in relation to curatorial practice, which this research is rooted in, and highlights creative gestures which also engages silences in histories, and which *Centring Silences* aims to stand in conversation with.

### 1.7 Conclusion

By providing an overview of the research paper, this introductory chapter outlines the scope of this research and the questions this paper puts forward. This section surfaces the main areas which this paper will engage. Further, through mapping the contours of the research, this chapter stands as a prelude to the arguments that this paper will delve into and expansively unpack; querying the ways in which disjointed and difficult histories in "official" archives can be engaged to ruminate on the experiences of marginalised voices, and subvert dominant history practices to generate new and nuanced research.

[7] By using the term "lay bare the archive". I am invoking provocation by Justin Davy from artist collective Burning Museum who speaks on the process of the collective in mining the archive to engage contested histories: "We are looking into archives, but it's more than that. We are also laying bare archives and creating them. I guess we are reading against the grain of a certain archive, to use a more academic description". (Dantas & Davy, 2016)

# CHAPTER 2

## METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research approach

This research contemplates the representation of Mabel Cetu in the archives of *Drum* and *Golden City Post*. Through examining these repositories, this paper aims to interrogate the formation of history, centre Cetu's photographs – despite absences in institutional archival records – and foreground alternative narratives to the fragments of Cetu's history as represented in "official" sites of memory today. To execute this research, I inspected the archives of *Drum* and *Golden City Post* and its materials; surveyed scholarship on Cetu; interviewed people who knew Cetu and/or who have researched Cetu, and; examined exhibitions or creative interventions whose themes correlate to those of this report.

The research components of this report are all grounded in qualitative inquiry. "Qualitative researchers work with language-based data and visual representations in order to understand the quality or nature of social phenomena, not their quantity," argue Eric Mykhalovskiy, Joan Eakin, Brenda Beagan, Natalie Beausoleil, Barbara E. Gibson, Mary Ellen Macdonald and Melanie J. Rock (2018: 614). These seven scholars emphasise that qualitative research inquiry draws from numerous "theoretical approaches and concepts and is used to explore a wide range of questions and research topics" (2018: 614), and add that one of the characteristics of qualitative research inquiry is the role of the researcher in interpreting the research, and attending to its complexities and context (2018: 614).

The above descriptions of qualitative methods underline an inquiry practice that is acutely aware of context, nuances and the intricacies of the research, as opposed to quantitative methods, which prizes numerical interpretations of data collection and, according to Hazel Smith and Roger Dean, is "normally set up that a numerical entity can be measured, whereas the qualitative researcher gathers verbal, and occasionally visual

or sonic, evidence" (2009: 4). Therefore, as this paper carefully examines archival materials, writing on Cetu, creative interventions and collates interviews, inquiry such as qualitative methods that encourages a sensitive unpacking of the research material to explore Cetu's experiences and the wider structures that have shaped her memory in the public today, has been integral to this work.

### 2.2 Document analysis

One of the aspects of this research was surveying material from the *Drum* and *Golden City Posts* archives between 1958-1970. In examining the publications' archives, I made use of the archival repositories at Wits University Library, National Library of South Africa: Pretoria Campus and Bailey's African History Archive. As reported above, when analysing archival documents, I used a qualitative data research approach. Document analysis of archival material became one of the crucial aspects of this research, not only as a way to engage depictions of Mabel Cetu's experience and work, but to examine the institutional archive, and critically unpack these materials in relation to the configurations of the "official" archive and South Africa's socio-political, cultural and economic context.

Furthermore, the documents were analysed through a process of triangulation, which Glenn Bowen describes as a means in which document analysis is "used in combination with other qualitative research methods" (2009: 28). These other research methods include drawing upon various ranges of sources, such as interviews, as a way "to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods", as argued by Bowen (2009: 28). Thus, the document analysis for this paper are inspected and corroborated against other forms of qualitative methods such as interviews, and cross referencing materials in the *Drum* and *Golden City Post* repositories against documentations such as blogs, books or newspaper articles that exist outside of these two publication archives.

### 2.3 Interview practices

Another research approach for this report were interviews. Interviews were employed to not only corroborate archival material but also challenge mainstream historiographic

practices, which have fixated on "written archives as the sole source of historical legitimacy" (King, 2011: 31). In utilising interviews with people who knew Cetu – through research or personally – research participants shared personal accounts and insights into Cetu's life or related to her photographic practice. Such textural recollections and/or reports would fail to yield through quantitative methods aimed at exploring objective and numerical outputs[8]. In addition, interviews also agitate dominant knowledge production that have excluded voices "from state archives and histories by dint of their race, sexuality or oral traditions" (King, 2011: 31). Therefore in including interviews, this research aims to not only provoke the exclusionary practices of dominant archives, but also contribute divergent and nuanced narratives of Cetu that wrestle with the nebulous representation of her photography in institutional memory sites.

Feminist theories, which have invigorated this mode of research, encourage interviews as one of the research components that invite complex and careful readings about individuals within patriarchal environments. Gwendolyn Beetham and Justina Demetriades explore types of interview processes that are vital to qualitative methods and researchers striving to capture the nuances of subjects within a gendered society (2007: 203). In so doing, Beetham and Demetriades argue that qualitative methods like open-ended interviews, "which often involves the use of topic guidelines rather than questions that are strictly defined like those used in quantitative surveys" (2007: 203), are important to examine research in which gender dynamics are at play. Further, Beetham and Demetriades claim that research such as this – in which the intricacies of gender politics impacts society – "cannot easily be quantified by numerical statistics or values" (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007: 203).

Thus, when speaking to participants for this type of research, which critiques the politics of memory, race and gender in relation to the representation or absence of Cetu in the "official" archive, I sought interview approaches that call for prompts to encourage open-ended conversations. In utilising qualitative research methods that resist the constraints of dominant research inquiry, interviews conducted for this thesis therefore encouraged alternative, nuanced and unhackneyed narratives of Cetu's history, as opposed to the nebulous depictions in the "official" archive today.

[8] University of Southern California

## 2.4 Archival encounters

*Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* is an A5-sized book, which comprises archival material and text- and visual-based works. The book features interviews with people who knew Cetu and/or researched her work, and contributions from scholars, artists, curators and writers whose works directly or broadly engage topics of this research, such as archival absences, feminisms, histories of photography and memory.

In creating the reader and this paper, I invoked research methods that encourage divergent approaches to drawing from institutional archives in a way that is sensitive to fragile histories, challenge the archival grain and prompt original, nuanced narratives relating to the experiences of those who appear obscurely – or not at all – in mainstream histories. In this writing against the grain, concepts of history as linear and official archives as exclusionary spaces, configured through practices which reinforce power structure, are provoked.

Giovanna Zapperi (2013) argues that feminist temporalities unsettle chronological and linear histories, promulgated by mainstream historiographic and archive practices. Zapperi claims, a feminist temporality as uniquely anachronical (2013: 26) and therefore able to "open new perspectives" (2013: 26). Zapperi argues that through feminist practices, "Fractures and discontinuities (often erased by historiography, but constitutive of historical temporality) come to the fore, and new meanings become visible". (2013: 26). As Zapperi explores ways in which feminist temporalities mine gaps in history to (re)centre the lives of women on the peripheries of mainstream memory, the academic illustrates the potential for this approach to invigorate new possibilities for archival research. Thus, for a report such as this, which is interested in ways of engaging institutional archives to ponder Cetu's practice, feminist approaches therefore propel a research intervention that challenges linear forms, embraces histories as fragmented, random and anachronical, and through this, prompts distinct and divergent narratives.

Furthermore in creating the reader, Saidiya Hartman's seminal theory of critical fabulation (2008), which proposes "a history written with and against the archive" (2008: 12). Hartman describes critical fabulation as a method to centre the lives of subaltern subjects presented nebulously in institutional archives with violent histories. Hartman proposes critical fabulation as a theory that pushes back against the totality of the archive, and suggests it as an approach to reimagine lives in the margins of dominant, violent histories (2008). Irvin Hunt explores Hartman's theory, and argues that it "takes the impossibility of recovery as a beginning, not an end, a call to speculate about what could have been, or as Michel-Rolph Trouillot famously said, a call 'to make the silences speak for themselves'". (2019)

Hunt observes Hartman's theory of critical fabulation as a modality in which to rethink dominant spaces of memory, and further prompts the archive as a site in which to reimagine lives that are ill-defined in it and through this theory, heighten silences that exist in popular memory today. Drawing from the above arguments, this research therefore vigilantly examines the *Drum* and *Golden City Post* archives, and contemplates the "official" archive as a locus to explore the possibilities of lives written out of history; and a site upon which to engage the silences relating to Mabel Cetu's memory today.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This chapter argues that a qualitative inquiry is suitable for research that carefully mines institutional archives and questions ways to generate new, nuanced narratives around fragmented histories. As opposed to a quantitative approach, concerned with numerical data collections, a qualitative research method is therefore argued as fitting for this research as it encourages a practice that is aware of the fragile nature and complexities of Cetu's history and the context in which it is presented in institutional memory spaces today. In closing this chapter, a feminist praxis and Hartman's theory of critical fabulation has also been argued as approaches that heighten silences and centre marginalised voices in mainstream sites of histories, therefore crucial to research that is concerned with carefully examining silences relating to Cetu's representation in dominant histories.

# CHAPTER 3

## LITERATURE ANALYSIS

### 3.1 Introduction

By reviewing scholarship and examining arguments in areas that this research deliberates on – such as archival debates, photojournalism and media, gender and approaches to generating subversive, alternative narratives – this chapter aims to ground this report in various discourses and highlight gaps in knowledge, which this paper hopes to add to.

### 3.2 Mapping the archive

In a critical analysis of institutional archives, Michel-Rolph Trouillot articulates that "official" archives are actively, not passively, constructed (1995: 50). Trouillot advances his argument by foregrounding that histories that exist in archives today do not just happen they are, instead, carefully hand-picked and arranged by those in power (1995: 48). Trouillot implicates inherent biases of dominant historiographers as contributing to what is sorted and selected for inclusion in historical records (1995: 50), and details that such procedures reinforce uneven power structures (1995:47).

Trouillot's examination of dominant historical accounts brings attention to western imperialist regimes' centring western narratives through a process, which Trouillot refers to as the "myth-making process that gives history its more definite shapes" (Trouillot, 1995: 116). In so doing, Trouillot calls out the implications of an archive that not only prioritises narratives of those in power, but one that orders and shapes histories along power lines. Additionally, in claiming that "silences are inherent to the chronicler" (1995: 50), Trouillot's assessment provokes the role of the historian – or the chronicler – and implicates them in the omission of marginalised identities from history.

While examining the representation of Mabel Cetu in the *Golden City Post* and *Drum*, Trouillot's argument beckons an interrogation of historiography, the chroniclers responsible for the historical matter that fill these archives and, how prevailing ideologies might have informed the depictions and/or absence of Cetu in these histories.

Meanwhile, Jacques Derrida theorises that archives are not free from bias nor association with institutions of power which, according to Derrida, shapes dominant archives and the accounts selected to be included in mainstream histories. Derrida elucidates, "The concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name *arkhē*. But it also shelters itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets" (Derrida, 1995: 10). Derrida's statement therefore brings light to the tensions of an archive system predicated on memory however built to push to the peripheries histories that do not fit into dominant narratives. Furthermore, Derrida highlights a network of institutions and practices that create and sustain the archive (1995: 10). Derrida brings to the fore state systems that influence the configurations of the institutional archive, and point to how state policies and what he terms the *archons* – "the guardians" of the archive and archival documents (1995: 10) – decide the inclusion of documents and the movement of the public in these spaces of memory, therefore shaping not only what is included in dominant histories but how it is accessed by people.

In mobilising both Trouillot's argument that dominant history is constructed and done so in favour of a hegemonic narrative, and Derrida's, which emphasises the institutional archive's structure as influenced by systems of power, "official" archives are thus exposed as convoluted bodies of history, interlinked with those who oversee its structure and order its materials. Thus, in contemplating Cetu's depiction in the mainstream memory spaces today, Trouillot and Derrida's arguments therefore invites this research to carefully deliberate on the relationship between corridors of power and institutional archives, and investigate how these connections have contributed to the silences or sketchy representation of Cetu in dominant histories today.

Carolyn Hamilton argues that South Africa's institutional archives have been "shaped by apartheid, colonialism and even by configurations of power and structures of knowledge that existed before then" (Hamilton, 2017: 347). As Hamilton surfaces the various sites

of knowledge production and power that have influenced the contours of "official" archives in the country, Bhekizizwe Peterson (2002) elucidates how state powers co-opted such diverse sites of memory in support of its colonial and apartheid agenda. Peterson argues that "colonial authorities sought to reshape and appropriate such 'archives' into the service of colonialism" (Peterson, 2002: 29). In so doing, Peterson brings to the surface that colonial and apartheid regimes justified such appropriation through "an attitude borne out in their insistence that Africans had no history" (2002: 29), and in turn created an institutional archive shaped through racist, classist and gendered lines (2002: 29). Peterson's theory thus provokes the ways in which the colonial and apartheid institutional archive entangled and marginalised the histories of black South Africans.

The above arguments bring forward the histories of archives in South Africa, and the position of state archives in projecting and furthering the colonial and apartheid regime's project. Hamilton and Peterson's assertions encourage a critical engagement of institutional archives, including the sites of memory in which I researched – Wits University Library, the National Library of South Africa: Pretoria Campus and the Bailey's African History Archive. Their arguments also evoke the questions: How have these archives been constructed? And how has the relationship between these dominant sites of histories and structures of power contributed to the depiction of Cetu in today's institutional archives?

In the reader *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu*, Candice Jansen examines the history of Cetu through surveying a "partial transcript of the Ciskei Commission" (Jansen, 2020: 24) for a commission convened to discuss independence of the Ciskei Bantustan[9]. Jansen, in the essay, questions whether the "Mrs Cetu" in the transcript is indeed Mabel Cetu. Jansen engages the transcript entangling "Mrs Cetu" to Bantustan politics and community council structures interlinked with the apartheid regime (2020: 25). Through her writing, Jansen provides a reading of "Mrs Cetu's" views on Bantustans that is not only complex but also elucidates tensions too. Jansen also provokes "Mrs Cetu's" links to community councils, and questions these ties in relation

[9] "On 4 December 1982, Ciskei became an independent republic, recognised only by the South African government and other 'independent' homeland states in South Africa" (South Africa History Online).

to her elusive photographic archive in mainstream histories today, asking: "Did Mrs Cetu stand on the wrong side of apartheid?" (2020: 27).

More so, Jansen's scholarship not only foregrounds silences relating to Cetu's photography in the context of marginalised histories of black women in South Africa – as a result of a racist, patriarchal, capitalist colonial apartheid society – but also infers post-apartheid agendas as further marginalising Cetu's history today (Jansen, 2020). Jansen suggests the consequences of chronicles and histories that do not align to dominant narratives, and elicits questions as to what happens to the stories of those that might have stood on the "wrong side of apartheid"?

In the lead up to the 1990s, dominant memory work in South Africa shifted and adjusted in relation to the transition into the country's democracy in South Africa presented. Influenced by "rainbow-nation" sentiments and post-apartheid agendas focused on reconciliation and nation-building (Harris, 2011: 116), dominant history making practices often prioritised histories that aligned to mainstream narratives (Worden, 2009: 29). In examining memory work in South Africa during the 1990s, Verne Harris argues, "Public discourse in and about South Africa was emblazoned by the concepts of noble struggle against apartheid, of post-apartheid reconciliation, and of nation-building" (2011: 16). Therefore, despite Cetu's preeminent photo/journalistic contributions and political activism, Jansen's writing not only complicates Cetu's history but also provokes the configurations of the archive by heightening the implications of dominant historiography on voices that do not neatly fit into mainstream historical narratives of South Africa.

Cheryl McEwan, in her survey of memory spaces in post-1994 South Africa, argues, black women "have often been most marginalised by colonialism and apartheid and excluded from dominant accounts of history" (2003: 740). McEwan's theories elucidate: "The construction and interpretation of archives is gendered in specific ways, with the result that the agency of marginalized or subaltern women is erased from the historical record" (2003: 743). McEwan advocates for a close reading of gender dynamics and agency in the country's institutional sites of memory, and urges an interrogation of the

archive's constitution to identify how this might prevent women's voices from coming through. (2003: 744).

In the context of Cetu's memory today, McEwan's assertions therefore stand as an urgent call for a research that registers agency, as well as research that critically examines how colonialism and apartheid as well as contemporary power systems shape the histories of black women, and the ways in which these systems can be challenged.

### 3.3 Photojournalism

The implementation of apartheid in 1948 has been argued as a critical point for documentary photography in South Africa (Grantham, 2009: 2). Okwui Enwezor defines this period as an important moment in black South African photographers imaging their environs, claiming that "after 1948 African photographers became visible protagonists in shaping the image of their world" (2013: 29).

Provoking histories of photography in Africa – particularly western colonial photographic practices, which used photography to further an imperial mission and create a racialised "Other" (Lewis, 2005: 13) – Andries Walter Oliphant examines the role of documentary photography in South Africa in the middle of the twentieth century. In his survey, Oliphant argues that photojournalism at the time "marked a shift in the representation of Africans from passive ahistorical subjects to active agents involved in modernist practices of self-refashioning based on cosmopolitan, pan-African, and transatlantic African American identities" (2013: 348). Oliphant's theories therefore surfaces photojournalism not only as a tool used by black photographers to subvert hackneyed, racist images and forge new, alternative representations of black experiences in South Africa, but also a practice in the country that stood in conversation with wider continental and African diasporic developments.

The above claims – which contextualises photojournalism during apartheid as a subversive tool used to push back against a white hegemonic state and generate alternative and distinct images of black life, while also being a male-dominated space – invoke Cetu's career as a photojournalist at the time. In so doing, this raises questions as

to how Cetu's practice might have contributed to the visual narratives created by black photojournalists in South Africa's mid-twentieth century.

Despite Oliphant and Enwezor's arguments surfacing photojournalism as an instrument used by black South Africans to document the world around them and push back against a repressive and violent state, the practice during the middle of the twentieth century has also been argued as exclusionary to women photographers (Siopis: 2006). Penny Siopis alludes to the mid-twentieth century's male-dominance in photography, claiming, "In the late seventies, women photographers became more visible, but remained a very small minority" (2006: 10), and points specifically to the dearth of black women in photojournalism (2006: 10) at the time. Siopis argues further:

> Historically, news photography as a profession was traditionally out of bounds for women, ostensibly because it was a physically dangerous field. But the pervasive patriarchal perception that women's place was in the domestic domain – that danger was ' masculine' – was a more likely explanation (2006: 10).

Siopis claims prevailing patriarchal agendas during the middle of the twentieth century as stifling the participation of women in photojournalism, and in paying closer attention to black women photojournalists within the photojournalism field during apartheid, states:

> Black and white women might have been economically dependent on their menfolk, but black men, like black women did not see photography as a viable profession... White women, by contrast, were privileged. Most did not need a profession – at least not economically. All these factors contributed to the dearth of women photographers in the past (2006: 10).

In the above passage, Siopis's research brings forth a myriad of issues. Siopis alludes to a racist and gendered society, hierarchised with white men as the most privileged, followed by white women, and then black people, and how this hierarchy within a patriarchal apartheid South African society created structures, which have marginalised black women the most (McEwan, 2003: 740). In this claim, Siopis illustrates how these hierarchies in a gendered, capitalist and racist society shaped an exclusionary field of photography.

Siopis claims that "black men, like black women did not see photography as a viable profession" offers a limited perspectives of black photographers and is challenged by documentary photographers such as Cetu, who was black and a woman *and* did take up photojournalism as a career. Additionally, this assertion is provoked by a political, cultural, economic and social milieu which placed discriminatory restrictions on black photojournalists, including black women photojournalists (Ntsoma, 2020: 55), and which might have, therefore, contributed to the dearth of black women photojournalists at the time and possibly influenced their perspectives on photography profession that was not "viable". Moreover, Siopis claims:

> Those few chances to build a photographic career seemed limited to men, as witnessed in the photojournalism of *Drum* magazine of the fifties. I know of only one black woman photographer, Mabel Cetu, from that time. She was said to be the first black South African woman photojournalist and worked for *Drum* and *Zonk* magazines, as well as the *Golden City Post* (2006: 10).

As Siopis illustrates a male-dominated photojournalism industry, the argument above also invokes Ntombela's theories, explored earlier, around "firsts" as a naming convention that has marginalised black women in history and implicates dominant historiographic practices that have denied black women's voices in mainstream memory (Ntombela, 2013: 40). Furthermore, Warne, calling up Marilyn Martin's analysis, foregrounds history practices and scholarship that have neglected the research on women in histories of photography, and highlights the implications of this on the memory of black women photojournalists in the mainstream. Warne argues:

> The paucity of research on both black and white South African women photographers suggests that the lives of many female professionals and amateurs have thus far remained unrecorded, their work hidden in archives or lost. But 'the most telling absences' in our photographic histories, as Marilyn Martin has observed, are black women. (Warne: 2006: 15)

The arguments above contextualise an apartheid South Africa in which black women were not only marginalised in society but in mainstream histories. These theories highlight the implications of apartheid policies on black women photojournalists and on

their memory in institutional archives today. Therefore, in a male-dominated field of photojournalism, Cetu's agency; her everyday experiences, are brought to the fore and propel consideration for what role her photography played at a time of racial, gender and economic injustice, and how her vision added to visual documentations of South Africa in the middle of the twentieth century. The above arguments also provoke Cetu's position as photojournalist, and how her career might be contemplated as disruptive of not only racial suppression but male-dominance too.

### 3.4 South Africa's media landscape

In examining the South African media machinery's relationship with prevailing ideologies and practices in the country's history, and questioning the consequences of this on Cetu's work and representation in institutional archives today, I will use *Golden City Post* in 1958 – the year Warne (2006: 23) points to as Cetu's commencement at the newspaper – as a locus to begin to discuss these points.

The *Golden City Post* was founded in 1955 by Jim Bailey just four years after he launched *Drum* magazine – originally titled *African Drum* (Sampson, 2005). In her scholarship, photojournalist and academic Deseni Soobben argues that *Golden City Post* "set off at a time when the apartheid ideology was just beginning to tighten its grip on society" (2010: 27) and was "fearless" (2010) in its reportage. During the 1950s, publications such as *Drum*, *Zonk* and Bantu Press, a media stable formed in the 1930s and published newspapers *World*, "*Imvo*, *Ilanga* and *Evening Post*" (Tomaselli & Muller: 1897: 47), were part of a number of white-owned media titles that were targeted toward a black readership (Tomaselli & Muller: 1897: 47).

Illustrating the effects of a racist and capitalist South African state on black-owned media establishments at the time, Keyan and Ruth Tomaselli claim that despite the presence of "African-owned publications voicing black aspirations" during the early twentieth century, many of them "fell prey to economic restraints and/or political suppression" (Tomaselli & Muller: 1897: 47). Moreover, Tomaselli and Muller argue that mainstream media excluded black media practitioners through mechanisms in which black journalists were not given job security through salaries or permanent employment, and

claim that apartheid government used violent repression tactics to further the state's agenda and silence voices of black media practitioners (1987: 56).

Tomaselli and Muller complicate "white-owned, black-oriented press" (1987: 106) in the middle of the twentieth century by surfacing tensions, such as "white-owned, black-oriented press" representing anti-apartheid sentiments while simultaneously bolstering the "hegemonic bloc in different ways" (1987: 106). The latter mainly evidenced through these publications aligning with pro-capitalist ideologies, including class structures[10] (1987: 106).

Illustrating Tomaselli and Muller's assertions, former editor of *Drum* magazine between 1951 to 1955, Anthony Sampson, in his memoir – replete with racial and sexist pejoratives – illustrates how capitalist *and* racist[11] ideologies gave shape to the publication, which later became a platform for anti-apartheid rhetoric. Sampson argues that the early a-political *Drum* was welcomed by Europeans and the state (1956: 3) but due to a low readership circulation, *Drum* publisher Jim Bailey and his team of mainly white English men in the early 1950s, devised changing the editorial plan from being a publication, which Sampson describes as fashioned on "what white men want Africans to be, not what they are", to a publication that was modern and relevant to a black audience in urban parts of the country (1956: 8).

Following the change to the publication's editorial direction and hiring a predominantly black-male editorial board, the circulation of *Drum* grew during the 1950s (Sampson, 1956: 17). Sampson's argument therefore reveals the paradox of the publication: While *Drum* was entwined in a patriarchal, white supremacist and capitalist[12] ideological structure it also stood as a politically conscious editorial that centred everyday stories of South Africans of colour and featured news of liberation and civil rights movements across Africa and the diaspora.

[10] Tomaselli and Muller claim that black journalists for "white-owned, black-oriented press" were often "part of the relatively advantaged petty bourgeoisie" (1987: 55)
[11] These include both white-supremacist and anti-racist sentiments.
[12] hooks, 2004: 79.

The above arguments propel questions around Cetu's practice and experience as a photojournalist – as black woman photojournalist – in a media landscape: shaped by racist, patriarchal, capitalist ideologies; influenced by anti-apartheid narratives, and; invigorated by nuanced, everyday stories of black experiences in South Africa, which stood radically in contrast to colonial and apartheid epistemes.

### 3.5 Gender and media in South Africa

Nicolette Ferreira elucidates black women's contribution in media during the middle of the twentieth century, the male-dominance in media at the time and the shortage of documentation on black women journalists. Ferreira argues, "… [L]ittle research has been done on black female journalists who were making contributions to the South African media during a male-dominated era of the black press under apartheid" (2011: 59).

Evoking the role of black women in media and their contributions to media and gender discourse (Jaji, 2014: 146), Tsitsi Ella Jaji's scholarship points to intellectual contributions of black women in the early twentieth century in South Africa impacting debates around women's issues and influencing black media in the middle of the century (Jaji, 2014: 125). Jaji articulates that black newspapers after the 1930s became a site in which the "interest in women's accomplishments outside the home was regularly featured" (2014: 125). In addition to intellectual contributions by black women in the media, Jaji highlights that black women were often represented on magazine covers and "the target audience for advertising" (2014: 111). The latter representations, Jaji claims, "fostered a degree of skepticism in the face of the rise of advertising" (2014: 112). Therefore, the involvement of black women in media can be read not only in the context of a capitalist society but, in foregrounding agency, Jaji argues that the participation of black women in media also "gave rise to important debates over shifting attitudes towards gender roles at a moment in rapid urbanization" (2014: 112).

Additionally, Jaji explains that black-oriented publications featured imagery and narratives which "appealed to constructions of femininity and women's experiences that placed women's aspirations and everyday routines at the core of negotiating the changing dynamics of the domestic sphere under apartheid and the (de)colonising process" (2014:

116). Jaji's survey, which examines the media in relation to representations and conversations around gender during the middle of the twentieth century – when apartheid was newly enforced in South Africa and other parts of the African continent were beginning to decolonise[13] – prompts contemplation for Cetu's work and experience in media at a time of shifting gender roles and robust debates on gender identity. Jaji's arguments therefore provokes contemplation for how Cetu's practice might have contributed to discourse at the time, and how her vision might have not only pushed back against racist, patriarchal systems and dominant epistemes, but also engaged in subversive and alternative narratives about socio-political issues and everyday life in South Africa.

Meanwhile, photojournalist and academic Deseni Soobben's scholarship on *Golden City Post* interrogates the media as complicit in reinforcing patriarchal ideologies and racial-gendered hierarchies (2010: 24). Soobben argues how gatekeeping – which "refers to the power to grant or deny access to different voices in society" (2010: 24) – has played a key role in fortifying power dynamics that have silenced women's voices in South Africa's media. Soobben adds that such practices have contributed "to the public approval of male cultural hegemony" (2010, 24). Soobben here points to ways in which media practices contributed to the marginalising of women in the newsroom, and the implications this had in excluding or limiting the representation of women in media.

Thus, as Soobben's claims illustrate the ways in which media during the middle of the twentieth century have included and excluded the voices of black women, Jaji's argument highlights how black women have impacted media while living in a repressive apartheid state. Therefore, these arguments contextualise a media landscape of South Africa, and the wider socio-political, economic and culture milieu, and bring forth the possibilities of the experiences of black women media practitioners, especially within an institutional archive which has flattened such representations and produced widespread silences relating to the practice of black women photojournalists in mainstream histories.

[13] As "the wave of decolonisation swept across Africa" (Munemo, 2016: 138), Douglas Munemo argues, "In the 1950s and 1960s, colonialism came to an end in most African countries, mainly through armed struggle or nationalist protest" (2016:142)

### 3.6 Feminist discourse

This report has applied feminist theory to sensitively engage the gaps and fragmented history of Mabel Cetu as presented both "official" memory sites. In scrutinising the representation of Cetu in the "official" archive and engaging distinct ways of drawing from sites of memory to centre Cetu's experiences, feminist theory – particularly Black and African feminisms – has been a central framework for this research. "Black feminism calls for us to examine erasure and re-centre those who've been side lined," argues Evette Dionne (2018: 62). As a frame that is conscious of agency (Gqola, 2001), grapples with silences and is concerned with centring voices on the margins, Black feminist theory is therefore a suitable frame for research that ruminates on the lacuna relating to Cetu's experiences and photographic practice in mainstream histories today. Further, in considering the specificity of Cetu's experience within the context of South Africa, African feminisms have moved this work to think about how systems and policies in South Africa might have affected her everyday life and her representation in public archives today. Josephine Ahikire argues:

> Feminism in Africa has been a boiling pot of diverse discourses and courses of action. Far from being constructed in simple opposition to Western feminism, feminism on the African continent constitutes a myriad of heterogeneous experiences and points of departure (2014: 8).

Ahikire points to the complexities that African feminisms hold, and its prioritising of the varied experiences of women within the context of multifarious African settings. Moreover, Black and African feminisms, in their registering of agency, urge an examination of intersecting oppressions in society and the implications on black women's lives (Kiguwa, 2019: 227). Peace Kiguwa argues that crucial to Black and African feminisms is intersectionality, a theory of Kimberlé Crenshaw, as argued above, and "a guiding methodological and ethical framework [that] attests to the diversity of women's lived realities and feminist approaches more broadly" (2019: 227). Kiguwa also elucidates the aim of intersectionality as engaging and making "visible the voices and experiences of women of colour" (2019: 227).

### 3.7 Radical re-imagining

Puleng Segalo, Einat Manoff and Michelle Fine (2015) argue the importance of researching and engaging silences relating to black women's narratives in ways that do not (re)suppress their voices. Segalo, Manoff and Fine advocate for a sensitivity when engaging fragmented, marginalised narratives of black women in South Africa, in which "the legacies of colonialism and apartheid have effectively silenced Black women's voices" (Segalo, Manoff & Fine, 2015: 345), Segalo, Manoff and Fine announce that a critical process to "amplify" (2015: 343) and provoke the silences relating to black women's voices, is through the framework of decoloniality[14]:

> As people around the world continue to have their voices, desires, and movements restricted, and their pasts and futures told on their behalf, we are interested in the critical project of decolonizing, which involves contesting dominant narratives and hegemonic representations (2015: 342).

Through this provocation, Segalo, Manoff and Fine propose interventions that push back against hegemonic master narratives, to listen to voices "smothered, censored, or buried" (2015: 343). Segalo, Manoff and Fine also complicate such an approach, and argue that it has the potential to regurgitate violent systems that have marginalised subaltern subjects. They argue, "… many postcolonial researchers have critiqued, augmenting the voices of others is where research often falls into the murky terrain of colonialism" (2015: 343). Thus, as a way to avoid "the process of speaking for others" (Segalo, Manoff & Fine 2015: 343), Segalo, Manoff and Fine preface decoloniality and "methods that seek to document and release memories and imagination from within their colonial settings" (2015: 343).

[14] Academic Joseph Drexler-Dreis expands on notions of coloniality and decoloniality by arguing: "Coloniality refers to the cultural and epistemological frameworks—including the ontological (for example, gender and racial), theological, and social imaginaries—generated during the political process of colonialism, which have yet to disappear after political decolonization. Coloniality includes the colonialism that took place on the political and economic levels between nation-states, but its reference is broader than this, as it also extends to the frameworks that legitimize processes of domination. Analogously, decoloniality differs from decolonization because it remains a vision even after the political process of decolonization on the level of nation-states has taken place. While this political process is necessary within decoloniality, decoloniality indicates a more comprehensive response. Postcolonial thinkers have developed this sort of broader response in their own way. While not opposed to postcolonial thought, decolonial thought takes a different approach. Taking on a decolonial perspective means attempting to understand and expand intellectual and artistic expressions that emerge within the underside of Western modernity rather than attempting to put problems in the postcolonial world in relationship to theoretical concepts originating in dominant intellectual trajectories in Europe and North America". (2015: 253)

Thus, in engaging the gaps and silences around Cetu's photography in the institutional archive, Segalo, Manoff and Fine's argument encourage this research to push against the notion of speaking for, giving or providing a voice to the archival absences of Cetu's work[15]. In addition, Segalo, Manoff and Fine's argument puts into motion work that critically engages the configurations of the archive, and carefully draws from these archival moments to ruminate on Cetu's work in a process that does not silence her voice.

Earlier in this paper, I argue that Hartman's theory of critical fabulation (2008) has been crucial in me researching the history of Mabel Cetu in institutional archives, sensitively engaging the fragments of this history and pushing against dominant archival practices to generate new, alternative narratives.

Alongside critical fabulation, this report invokes the concept of radical imagination as another divergent approach to "official" archives that urges intellectual and creative processes that extend radically beyond the exclusionary confines of dominant knowledge systems and institutional memory spaces. Invoking the notion of Black Radical Imagination[16], researcher Rashieda Witter argues that Black Radical Imagination "… is thought of as an essentially intrinsic force that acts as an instrument of liberation, allowing one to create without limitations, reclaim their artistry, and construct narratives that are reflective of their own African or diasporic experiences" (2017: 4).

Further expounding on the concept, Witter claims:

> The Black Radical Imagination proposes ideas of creating spaces that are not restricting or limiting. It requires reclaiming and restructuring narratives so that they are not victimizing, but empowering. Above all, the Black Radical Imagination requires one to generate new narratives (2017: 8).

[15] I am invoking poet Toni Stuart's assertion: "I don't like the phrase 'giving voice'. It's a very paternalistic idea that we give voice to people. For me, everyone has a voice – it's about listening for that voice" (2020: 57).
[16] Witter's research draws from the Black Radical Imagination – a concept which Witter argues as originating from a series of dialogues curated by Erin Christovale and Amir George – to provoke the relationship between black artists and museum structures, and advocates ways in which Africa and African diasporic art museums can become fertile space for the Black Radical Imagination via their artist residency programs (2017: 5)

Exploring the concept of Black Radical Imagination as advocating for a space free from the constraints of institutionalism, Witter elucidates the ways in which this notion proposes a rethink of narrative structures that are not reliant on hackneyed ideas, but instead shaped by radically alternative and unique narratives (2017: 8).

Witter's provocations therefore present Black Radical Imagination as a critical site for rethinking institutional spaces and reimagining narratives in experimental and unconstrained processes. In addition, radical imaginations therefore become important sites for this report to engage in a research and creative practice that radically disrupts institutional confinements to explore new and nuanced narrative relating to the fragmented history of Cetu in the "official" archive.

### 3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has mobilised arguments relating to media, photojournalism and gender discourse to contextualise the complex social-political, cultural and economic landscape in South Africa during the middle of the twentieth century. By doing so, this chapter has not only illustrated how the landscape of the country might have affected Cetu's experiences and the ways in which she is remembered today, but has also attempted to surface gaps in knowledge and how this paper might contribute new knowledge to the various fields.

In addition, discourse on gender has been invoked in this chapter to engage debates relating to the experiences of black women in South Africa to further contextualise the country's socio-political milieu in relation to Cetu's everyday and institutional memory today. Moreover, discourses on feminist theory have been brought to the fore and argued as applicable frameworks for this research.

Black and African feminisms have specifically stood out as frames that promote research to pay special attention to agency and silences. While Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, as argued above, prompts an interrogation of how power structures overlap in the lives of black women, to critically examine sensitive histories. Thus, Black and African feminisms, and intersectionality, have guided this work to recognise Cetu's

agency and complex experiences, and carefully unfurl the fragments of history as presented in the institutional archive to centre her voice.

Lastly, this chapter has also brought forth methods such as radical imagination and Hartman's concept of critical fabulation, as a way to anchor this research in practices that encourage a subversive and radical engagement of official memory spaces. In doing so, these concepts prompt this work to give rise to new, distinct narratives around such a fragmented history.

# CHAPTER 4

## UNPACKING THE ARCHIVE

### 4.1 Introduction

Before examining the archive and its material, I will foreground this chapter by sharing that I did not find any photographic works attributed to Mabel Cetu in the archives of the *Drum* and *Golden City Post*, which I accessed at Wits University Library, National Library of South Africa: Pretoria Campus, and Bailey's African History Archive. I will use the introduction of this chapter to expand on my experiences within the archive to contextualise how these visits to various repositories shaped the contours of the research. Due to the hourly access fee of the Bailey's African History Archive, I therefore made use of mainly the library archives but visited Bailey's African History Archive when I was able to. It is crucial to note that the National Library and Wits Library did not have every edition of the publications, sometimes pages or issues of these publications were missing from the microfilm or physical copy, and there was not an exact logic or order to the different editions that featured in these repositories. Moreover, some publication pages were poorly scanned or preserved, therefore hard to read or illegible on the scanning machine or physical publication.

As some repositories I visited held issues which others did not, and some repositories were at times out of reach of my student budget or location (such as navigating to Pretoria from Johannesburg and back, or visiting Bailey's African History Archive), in trying to read each page of every edition of the two publications was therefore challenging and resulted in my movement between these three space becoming haphazard and circuitous. Being that these three archives are in city centres, Braamfontein and Pretoria's central business district

Furthermore, traveling between these holdings – which in urban centres: Braamfontein, Maboneng and Pretoria's central business district – and being within the archive, raises questions about physical encounters with these archive: how does one's physical ability

affect research in these spaces? And in a country scourged by gender-based violence, what does movement in and between these cities where these archives exist, feel like for researchers? And what does being within often-times quiet repositories mean for those researching? All of these considerations provoke debates around accessibility and ways in which archives invite or limit interaction, and brings forth literature by Michelle T King, which evinces that the circumstances of research are crucial in its effect on the research process:

> Research agendas are shaped by random events and external constraints, as much as or in spite of our own devising: trips to distant archives require difficult to obtain financial support, archives may be temporarily or permanently closed, working hours may be brief and conditions may be difficult (2011: 32).

King's arguments emphasise how conditions of research are a factor in sculpting the research process, and therefore are crucial in provoking how my personal experiences within the archive contributed to the creation of this report. Therefore in briefly prefacing my personal experiences visiting and researching within various archives, this chapter's introduction aims to surface how the conditions of the archive's and encounters with these spaces might have contributed to the research presented.

Lastly, while researching the *Drum Magazine* and *Golden City Post*, articles and photographs without credits are prevalent in these publications during 1958-1970. When names do appear in bylines and photography credits, they are often a recurring selected few names, and are predominated by men, with the exception of a few names of women media practitioners. Former *Drum* editor Sampson does however note that during his tenure, one of the magazine column's credited with a woman's name was in fact written by male journalists (1956: 99). In addition, bylines seen in these two publications sometimes denote locations, such as "Cape Town Reporter" or "Port Elizabeth Reporter", and in one instance gender, "POST's Woman Reporter". Despite Cetu's career as both a photojournalist and journalist, the absence of her work – whether buried, uncredited, or omitted – is evident.

There are a handful of times in which Cetu is mentioned in the archives of these two publications, but not in relation to her photojournalistic practices, such as: in the August

1968 issue of *Drum*, discussed below, she is referred to as a "prominent journalist", the *Golden City Post* in 1959 refers to Cetu as the Port Elizabeth representative of the publication, and in the *Golden City Post* in July 1965, also discussed later, Cetu is referred to as the secretary of Eddie 'Mr Showbiz' Nomkonwana.

Furthermore, in the documents representing Cetu, in which she is physically depicted in photographs and referred to in a limited way – outside of the expression of her complex experiences, and illustrious career, including her photojournalistic practice – I am conscious that *re*presenting these depictions have the potential to reinforce exclusionary historiographic practices, rehash violent depictions on black female subjectivity, and further erase her work from histories. Therefore, to avoid doing so, I carefully analyse and critically interrogate these representations to encourage unique, alternative approaches of these archival documents. In so doing, this approach aims to draw forth not only the silences around Cetu's work but also new and distinct narratives to these historical fragments.

### 4.2 Examining the archival material

Due to the word count and scope limitations of this report, this section will only include examinations of three of the handful of archival materials specifically relating to Cetu found while surveying the archives of the *Drum* and *Golden City Post*. The three materials include one photograph and two newspaper clippings. However, it is imperative to note: I believe more space can and should be given to assessing these materials, as a way to further critically examine the archive's structure and Cetu's experience, and in so doing, hopefully give rise to more research relating to Mabel Cetu.

#### 4.2.1 The photograph

Before going to Bailey's African History Archive, I informed the archive that I would be visiting to do research on Mabel Cetu. When I arrived at the archive, I was presented materials that related to Cetu and a set of white gloves, which I was instructed to wear while I perused the materials. One of the materials presented was a black and white photograph (Figure 1) recorded on the archive's system with Cetu's name. In the image,

in which three people stand before a structure, Cetu appears to be in the centre. The archive's system does not have recorded details about the date the photograph was taken on, if it was published in a publication, nor the name of the photographer and the people standing beside Cetu.



**Figure 1:** Archival photograph. Date and photographer unknown. (Bailey's African History Archive)

In examining the photograph, questions around who took the image, when was it taken, and who are the people with Cetu, come to the fore. Thus, in seeking more information about the context of the photograph, I have inspected visual codes[17] in the image that might reveal more about it. One such code is Cetu's cat-eye spectacles or sunglasses, a style popular in the mid-twentieth century[18], which might, therefore, point this photograph to the 1950s or early 1960s – but it could also have been later however, it is

[17] Renée Mussai theorises photographs as containing stored codes and explores the notion of deciphering these codes to translate or organise images. "That is not to say that images aren't capable of telling a story on their own. I believe in photographs having a "voice," albeit one that constantly shifts and mutates upon reception, and often the images themselves benefit from "interpretation," mediation, advocacy. I'm interested in new image configurations and their concomitant reverberations that emerge through archival acts of resurrection, and at times bricolage". (2016)
[18] Donald-Brian Johnson argues cat-eye eyewear shapes were "popular in the 1950s" (2005: 23).

likely to not be before the 1950s. Secondly, as Cetu and the two people stands before a structure with a corrugated tin roof and minimalist design, I therefore explored architectural visual cues that might point to the location of this photograph.

Surveying imagery of New Brighton during the middle of the twentieth century, artist George Pemba's works (Figure 1 & Figure 2) depicting the township are invoked. Mainly his watercolour *McNamee Village* (1944), which shows a vista of New Brighton neighbourhood McNamee Village [19] (Baines, 2005) with a row of houses and a street on which three people can be seen. Like the photograph, the houses on the street have iron roofs and similar windows and window pane designs. While Pemba's painting *New Brighton* (1977), features a bustling street scene and shows people on a road lined with modest houses with what looks like corrugated silvery roofs. Both paintings show homes in New Brighton (Baines, 2005) with similar structures, windows and roofs to the one in the photograph of Cetu.



**Figure 2:** *McNamee Village* (1944) by George Pemba. (Source: Baines, 2005)



**Figure 3:** *New Brighton* (1977) by George Pemba. (Source: Standardbank.co.za)

These paintings therefore incite speculation as to whether the structure in the photograph is a home in New Brighton. And if so, whose home is this, could it be Cetu's? Despite Gary Baines arguing that Pemba's works "having a reputation for realism" (2005: 252), it is difficult to ascertain if the location that the photograph was taken in was indeed

[19] McNee Village was a former name for one of the neighbourhood's in New Brighton (Baines, 1995: 105) where houses, Gary Baines argues, "were basic two-, three- and four-roomed brick dwellings with iron or asbestos roof" (1995: 105).

New Brighton, or if it was in another area in South Africa, as the apartheid government had constructed homes in townships across South Africa in similar designs, as a manifestation of control and economic, racial and "social-spatial order" (Coetzer, 2009: 1).

The omission relating to the details of this image surfaces the institutional archive as a site of silences, fragmented histories and unknowns, as opposed to a site that holds chronological accounts of histories, "whole" narratives and "truths" (D'Souza, 2019), as "official" memory spaces often claim to (Coetzee, 2007: 25). Despite Cetu's name attached to this image in Bailey's African History Archive, the archive's taxonomic function is exposed as an illogical, subjective system, in which certain identities and information are retained and others erased. This photograph also raises questions about why the photograph is in the archive, and what was the impetus behind the "chronicler" – to invoke Trouillot's scholarship – storing these specific details? Moreover, in an instance such as this, in which the photograph contains no recorded information besides Cetu's name, colonial and apartheid archival practices are evoked, in which black identities were often denied a nuanced, textured record in history (Peterson, 2009: 29).

The processes within the archives, in which white gloves are to be worn and researchers charged almost R100 an hour to access this repository, evokes two arguments: 1) issues around performativity, and; 2) how institutional archives regulate public accessibility. Firstly, the act of wearing gloves invokes the archive's "performativity of preservational acts" (Ackermans, 2015: 9). Hannah Ackermans argues:

> Wearing white gloves is nowadays a naturalized ritual or performance, that indicates the value of the documents as objects that should not be touched with bare hands. Gloves can create the 'illusion that the hands, once encased, are somehow transformed into 'safe' instruments' (Baker 2005, 5). (2015: 14)

Ackermans theory illustrates the ways in which the practice of wearing white gloves places value on the archive document and gives an impression of the archival document as sacred. This practice, specifically the act of being handed gloves by archivists, also brings forward Derrida's theory around the *archons* guarding the archive and creating a barrier between publics and archival documents (Azoulay, 2015: 215).

Secondly, in grappling with notions of accessibility, Julie McGee's scholarship (2006) points to ways in which cultural institutions in South Africa can exclude publics through systems such as language, locationality and financial costs to enter these spaces (2006, 187), among other factors. As McGee's claims point to museums, one could draw parallels to institutional archives, that are presented as public spaces of knowledge and history, however might not always be accessible to the wider public of South Africa as a result of the legacies of colonial and apartheid policies.

In calling out the position of the Bailey's African History Archive in society today, Candice Jansen provokes this institution's "claims to be 'a people's archive'" (2017) by pointing to its hourly rate. In a country such as South Africa, which is one of the most unequal countries in the world (Bhorat, 2015), an hourly fee of R95 makes this archive inaccessible[20] to a large number of South Africans. Moreover, in surveying the repository, Jansen reports on the ubiquity of absences that lie in it.

> The *Drum* photo collection is largely populated by anonymously authored photographs. Most of the photographers whose images are in the collection have not been identified, which means that their images circulate in books, films and exhibitions like stock photographs. They serve to ensure the visibility of this historic brand, but simultaneously reinforce the invisibility of its lesser-known photographers, who are mostly black (Jansen, 2017).

Jansen's provocations problematise Bailey's African History Archive's position in society and the continuing implication of negating archival practices on already marginalised photographers, whom Jansen argues, as being mostly lesser-known and black. Through this point, Jansen articulates how such practices bring continuing attention to Bailey's African History Archive's name at the cost of black photographers' identities.

[20] Based on the international poverty line of $1.90 per day, (2011 Purchasing Power Parity, exchange rates), 18.8% of South Africans were poor in 2015, following a decline from 33.8% in 1996. Factors driving this progress include, among others, real income growth, expansion of social safety nets, access to basic services including subsidized housing credit. Yet progress towards poverty reduction has slowed in recent years, with the $1.90 per day poverty rate increasing from 16.8% to 18.8% between 2011 and 2015. This is partly due to structural challenges and weak growth since the global financial crisis of 2008, but increasingly too by labor market developments that demand skills that the country's poor currently lack. Unemployment remains a key challenge, standing at 27.6% in the first quarter of 2019. The unemployment rate is even higher among youths, at around 55.2%. (The World Bank)

### 4.2.2 Mabel Cetu and Eddie 'Mr Showbiz' Nomkonwana

On a page of entertainment news in the *Golden City Post* newspaper in July 15, 1965, under the headline "MAD! MAD! MAD!" and sub header, "FRENZIED, GAY WEEK IN P.E", which is credited "POST Reporter – Port Elizabeth", a small, thumbnail-sized image (Figure 4) on the bottom of the page shows a photograph with the caption:

> Eddie 'Mr Showbiz' Nomkonwana at P.E. station, sees off his secretary, Mrs. Mabel Cetu, who visited Bloemfontein for a week to make final arrangements for the 'Miss S.A. Teenage' beauty contest to be staged there in December (1965: 8).

On the page, there is no photographer credited for this image nor is there more text about this image beyond its caption below. Therefore, like the photograph above, I use a similar close-reading approach to inspect the newspaper clipping. In the photograph, Cetu and Nomkonwana's posture become salient; they are standing next to each other with Nomkonwana in the foreground. Cetu's torso is partially framed by Nomkonwana's torso. They both appear engaged by what they are looking at. It is hard to determine if they are posing or if the cameraperson caught them in action.

Reading the caption brings forward several points of issue. Firstly, In the first part of the caption, "Eddie 'Mr Showbiz' Nomkonwana at P.E. station, sees off his secretary, Mrs. Mabel Cetu", the introduction of Nomkonwana first is not of issue however, the reference of Cetu as "his secretary" evokes issues around ownership or possession, hierarchy and proximity; Cetu's proximity to Nomkonwana. Secondly, in 1965, when this image was published, Cetu by then had already been a been working as a photojournalist (Warne, 2006: 23) and was a "representative of POST in Port Elizabeth" (Golden City, 1959: 20).

As Cetu was involved in beauty pageants (Cetu, 2020: 20), and had a dynamic career, I have no issue with Cetu's reference as secretary. However, the caption's reference of Cetu as only a secretary and not, for instance, a secretary, journalist and photojournalist, therefore reduces the scope and magnitude of her career, and exposes a patriarchal society: which commonly positions women in proximity to men, with men dominating

women, and women "subordinated by men" (Bird & Epsey, 2010 :361). Further, in deciphering this image, the role of media in apartheid as maintaining a male hegemony, as argued earlier by Soobben, is highlighted; which, in this instance, flattens Cetu's agency, experiences and career, as well as fails to position her – through visual and textual framing – outside of the context of a male figure.




**Figure 4:** Newspaper clipping. Photographer unknown.
(*Golden City Post*, 1965)

Secondly, the second half of the caption describes Cetu and Nomkonwana as being at "P.E. station" and mentions Cetu visiting Bloemfontein; illustrating national travel. Therefore, "P.E. station" probably refers to the Port Elizabeth Railway Station, established in 1875 (Huisman, 2016), and where a network of trains travel both locally and nationally. This text referencing Cetu's travels to Bloemfontein from Port Elizabeth, prompts Cetu's translocality – not only her mobility and agency, but also provokes the complexities around travel for black people, especially black women, in apartheid South Africa.

Apartheid policies severely restricted the mobility of black South Africans through legislature such as The Pass Laws Act of 1952, which forced black South Africans to carry a pass book detailing which areas they were allowed to access (Cortland). Examining

segregation on railway travel at the start of apartheid in 1948 and shortly thereafter, academic Gordon H Pirie illustrates that racial segregation on commuter trains dates back to "before the turn of the century" (1992: 671). Pirie asserts that from the late 1940s, railway stations also became the site of resistance against the newly entrenched apartheid society (1992: 679), and argues that "resistance to railway apartheid" (1992: 683) mounted in 1952 "as part of the nationwide Defiance Campaign launched by the ANC, the South African Indian Congress and the South African Coloured Peoples' Organization" (1992: 683). Pirie emphasises further, "Apartheid on trains and at railway stations in South Africa was at its most extreme in the 1960s and early 1970s" (1992: 671), and surfaces "enforced racial segregation between black and white passengers" (1992: 671).

Pirie's proclamation provokes contemplation for Cetu's travels in a country in which racial segregation had severe ramifications on the everyday lives of black people. Further, the above argument, which evokes railway stations as resistance sites, brings forward a complex reading of this newspaper clipping that advocates for ruminating on Cetu's agency and experience within a repressive state but also contemplation for how her railway travel might be read as an act of defiance; an act that pushes against apartheid policies and patriarchal ideologies.

### 4.2.3 'Can secret lovers lick the divorce problem?'

Mabel Cetu features in an article (Figure 5) in the August 1968 issue of *Drum* magazine titled, 'Can secret lovers lick the divorce problem?'. This article deserves a painstaking and extensive examination but due to the scope and word limitations of this paper, I will engage a few areas that a close reading yields.

Presented over a double-page spread, 'Can secret lovers lick the divorce problem?' claims to highlight high divorce rates in the Eastern Cape at the time by engaging various individuals – including "a prominent, freelance journalist, a church minister, a teacher, a musician and actor, a librarian and two beauty queens" (*Drum*, 1968: 20) – on the topic of marriage, "secret lovers" and divorce.



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YOU'VE got to be with it. Otherwise you're lost. But it seems that to be with-it these days you must have a quiet little affair with the man (or woman) down the road while your husband (or wife) isn't looking. After all, it's a fashionable pastime.

It's all the rage in Port Elizabeth's New Brighton. People in Kwazakhele are doing it. And in Kingwilliamstown, East London, Umtata and Butterworth people are doing it.

Not passionate, violent, smouldering exchanges mind you. No. Just a few hours, even minutes, of blissful forgetfulness with someone other than your wife or husband. Some call it living in sin and to others it is a very necessary exercise — and the nice thing about it all is that the whole exhilarating excursion could save your marriage.

That was one of the candid opinions exposed by people interviewed by DRUM during a probe into the alarmingly high East Cape divorce rate.

Chances are that 1,609 East Cape couples will apply for divorces this year. One thousand of them will eventually be divorced. And the figures are growing every year. Compare them with the 1961 figure — 825 couples were divorced that year. 95 were divorced last year.

A breakdown of divorce applications reveals the following alarming facts: In Kingwilliamstown 258, Port Elizabeth 750, Queenstown 165, Butterworth 112, Umtata 136, Kokstad 166, Port St. Johns 11. That's 1,639 divorce applications in one year, July 1966 to June 1967.

A closer examination reveals that in 1966-67, the East Cape Southern Divorce court made 645 restitution orders. But only 18 of the couples were reunited.

And in the previous year, 997 restitution orders were granted. This time, only 11 couples returned to one another.

Today, DRUM brings you the story behind the cold, hard facts.

It is a tragic story. A story involving thousands of people caught up in a social revolution that has mercilessly tossed aside custom and tradition.

We interviewed a prominent freelance journalist, a church minister, a teacher, a musician and actor, a librarian and two beauty queens, one of whom has survived two stormy marriages.

Most of them agreed that the "infamous" secret lover was an answer to the divorce problem.

They argued that not outside marriage was an ideal way of relieving the tensions and hurdles that exist in so many marriages today.

But, they warned: The relationship between the married person and his (or her) lover must now get "serious." They said that any close, emotional attachment would destroy the object of the exercise which was merely to "get away from it all and return to the husband or wife exhilarated."

Freelance journalist Mrs. Mabel Cetu told DRUM, I think having a secret lover is ideal. It deserves more credit than we give him. And in the long run he might go far in saving many marriages." Mrs. Cetu was widowed just over 15 years ago. And if anyone knows about life, the late

SWEETNESS SONAYI: "Just give me the basic material..."

RET LOVERS LICK
ORCE PROBLEM?

There are few people these days who don't have among their friends at least one who is, or has been, divorced. More marriages are breaking up all the time. One of the places where divorce is commonplace is the Eastern Cape. DRUM tried to find out the causes of the alarmingly high disaster rate for marriages and, if possible, seek out a solution. Some of the suggestions we got were startling . . .

MABEL CETU: "The ingesi idea is excellent."

**Figure 5:** Can secret lovers lick the divorce problem? (*Drum Magazine*, 1968: 21)

Like the two archival materials analysed above, this article and its photographs, in which Cetu appears on the top right-hand corner of the right page (Figure 5), is void of any photographic and journalist credits. Cetu is described in the article as "freelance journalist Mabel Cetu" (1968: 20). As Cetu is the only "journalist" featured in the article, it can be deduced that the "prominent, freelance journalist" description points to her. While examining the *Golden City Post* and *Drum* archives between 1958-1970, this article provides one of the only first-person accounts of Cetu, showing some of Cetu's personal thoughts on topics related to relationships, romance and pleasure.

This article also reveals details of Cetu's private life, such as the death of her husband 15 years prior to the publishing of the article in 1968, therefore around the early 1950s. Therefore, igniting a series of queries around Cetu's experiences not only as a photojournalist *and* journalist but also as a mother – a single mother – and the implications of this on her work and personal life. In the article, Cetu expresses her approval of a "secret lover", claiming it as "ideal" (1968: 21). Cetu argues: 'These days … everyone seems to have a secret lover. It's fine. To begin with it's a thrilling experience for the married person and for the lover" (1968: 21). Expounding on the topic, Cetu claims:

> The Basuto people have got the right idea. They call the secret lover an 'inyatsi'. They approach the inyatsi from the angle that no man was created for one woman and that no woman was created for one man. Especially when the wife has got an inyatsi, it helps her to relieve the boredom of her marriage… But the inyatsi is a remnant of tribal days. The basic idea is excellent. But it must just be adapted to modern life. (1968: 21)

Cetu's quote points to various themes, such as marriage constructs, traditional marriage customs and ways in which they might be adapted and negotiated within a modern, urban society. As Cetu invokes Basuto culture, which she argues as advocating for both men and women to have secret lovers while married, Cetu foregrounds married women's experiences and the role of the "inyatsi" in relieving boredom within marriage. In reading this quote within the context of a patriarchal – particularly a heteropatriarchal[21] – apartheid society, in which government policies and sometimes marriage[22] practices marginalised black women, this paper therefore asks how Cetu's claims might push back against racist-patriarchal ideologies by centring black women's needs, desires and sexuality.

Later in the text, Cetu responds to the interviewer's question: "When should a girl start having sex" (1968: 21). She argues:

> I think a girl must go into marriage with a sound knowledge of sex. There are two aspects to this. First of all a girl must know what sex is about. Otherwise, she might enter marriage a virgin without knowing whether she's sexually suited to her husband. If she's not, it can lead to a break up of the marriage. The second thing is that if she is going to have sex before marriage, her mother must know about it. I strongly feel that girls must start sex early. At about the age of 15 or 16 with men just a bit older than they are, or perhaps the same age … (1968: 21).

By advocating for girls to have sex "early", at the ages of "15 or 16 with men just a bit older than they are, or perhaps the same age" (Cetu, 1968:21), Cetu's assertions invoke

[21] Heteropatriarchy, Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck and Angie Morrill describe as "the social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent" (2013: 13).

[22] Scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola argues, "Nothing about apartheid made Black women feel valued or taken seriously. Apartheid law treater women as minors who could not make any significant decisions in their own names, not even enter a contract for themselves. It punished those women who entered professional life for getting married, such as the fact that Black women teachers would lose their access to permanent employment as soon as they were married, exposing them to increasing vulnerability if the marriage did not work" (2015: 13)

numerous arguments, mainly around ways in which patriarchy is maintained and how sexual violence is normalised in society; this comes forward in several ways in reading this quote, including by young girls – under the age of consent[23] – being encouraged to have sex with older men. Scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola argues that "seemingly benign behaviour enables" (2015: 5) sexual violence, which in itself is, Gqola emphasises, "an exercise of patriarchal violent power against those who are safe to violate: mostly women, girls and boys" (2015: 14). As Gqola urges us to "think unrelentingly about what we are taught in patriarchal society" (2015: 6), Cetu's claims therefore cannot be read outside a racist-patriarchal setting, and point to ways in which practices that might appear as being considerate of young women, are in fact normalising of patriarchal systems and violence against black women and girls.

Lastly, the magazine article's lack of photo/journalist credits makes it challenging to analyse exactly whose perspective this article was written from, how it was framed and the subjectivities that might have been involved in creating this story. The fragments of history are thus exposed, and invoke one of the paper's main questions: How do you ruminate on the experiences of Mabel Cetu by drawing from the shards of a violent history, fraught with silences and gap? As this article surfaces Cetu's voice, without the full details of the writer, their position and perspective, this archival material is thus encouraged to be read carefully and sensitively.

### 4.3 Conclusion

Surveying the archives of the *Drum* and *Golden City Post*, as argued above, only a few depictions of Mabel Cetu are present in these repositories, and within these materials, Cetu's life experiences are briefly highlighted and her photographic contributions are absent. By scrutinising these archival materials above, this chapter therefore interrogates the configurations of the institutional archive and exposes the ways in which dominant historiography has silenced voices within the margins of society, as well as surfaces how the enmeshment of dominant ideologies and history-making practices, including media practices, can shape a narrative in favour of those in powerful positions.

[23] During apartheid, the Sexual Offences Act 23 of 1957 "set the age of consent to sexual intercourse at 16 years for both males and females in a heterosexual context" (Denness: 2).

In unpacking the *Drum* and *Golden City Post* archives, this chapter has aimed to put forward a sensitive, distinct and nuanced reading of these materials as a way to not only provoke dominant historiography but also centre Cetu's life experiences and bring forward new possibilities to reading institutional archival materials that have negated or flattened Cetu's dynamic history.

Beyond attempting to engage new narratives around Cetu's history, this section has also aimed to question the position of memory institutions in South Africa today not only in relation to publics accessing them but in the ways in which the silences of marginalised voices within these repositories manifest as silences today, and the risk of this in continuing exclusionary archival modalities.

# CHAPTER 5

## CREATIVE COMPONENT: 'CENTRING SILENCES'

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the creative component of my research report, titled *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* (Figure 5). This creative project manifests as a printed A5 reader, comprising images and text. Edited and compiled by me, *Centring Silences* features interviews, and text- and visual-based contributions by artists, curators, academics and writers. The reader also features an essay, which I have written, and a conceptual creative component, that utilises archival documents and other materials gathered during my research. *Centring Silences* also features conversations and creative interventions that are not specifically related to Mabel Cetu but engage with topics that this research broadly ruminates on, such as visibility, memory, archival absences, re-imagining and photographic practices.

Drawing from concepts and frameworks such as Black and African feminisms, and decoloniality, Black radical imagination and critical fabulation, the aim of this reader is to provoke structures which have produced silences in mainstream histories, and conceptually generate alternative, radical engagements of Cetu's nebulous public memory today.

As my research report is undertaken as part of a Master of Arts degree in Contemporary Curatorial Practice, this work is therefore grounded within curatorial practice. In research relating to notions of decoloniality in curatorial practice, Ali Rosa-Salas traces of the origin of the word "curate" to point to the "museum's historical role as a site of value of which curators are expected to protect and build" (2018: 23). Rosa-Salas argues that expectations of curators of colonial exhibitions of the late 1800s were predicated on the condition of maintaining "colonial governmentality" (2018: 23). While cognisant of these histories, Rosa-Salas points to divergent and unique curatorial practices that disrupt the role of the curator as maintaining the colonial exhibition and wider colonial

project. Rosa-Salas argues the "possibilities of curator as political dissident" (2018: 23), and puts forward "the shifting role of the curator from caretaker of objects to that of an author, political agent, and creative practitioner" (2018: 29). While articulating the role of the curator over time, Rosa-Salas defines "curatorial practice as an accumulation of performative acts that expresses one's subjectivity" (2018: 23). Rosa-Salas argues further "that curators must implicate their subjectivity and be critically reflective of their cultural biases" (2018: 23).

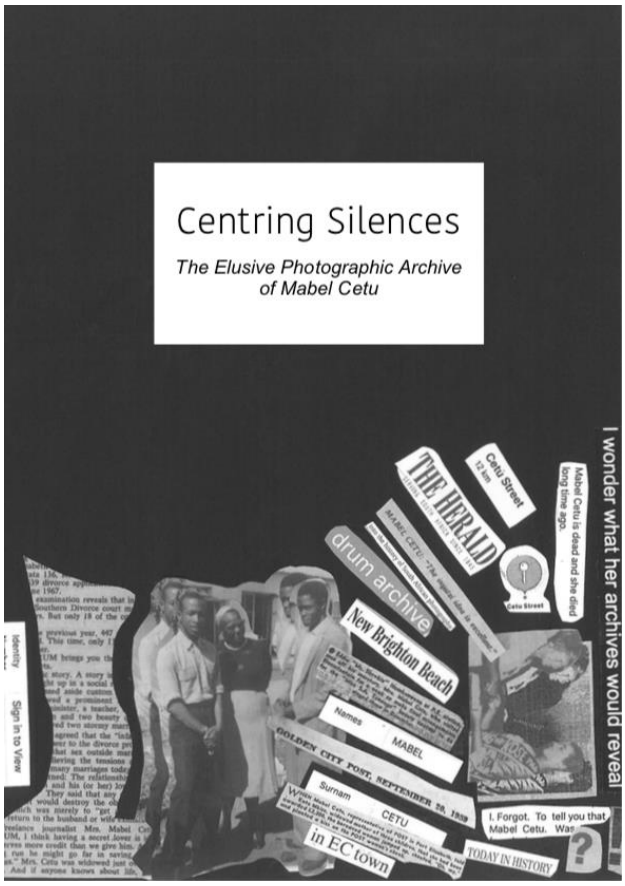



**Figure 5:** Cover page of *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu*.

Therefore Rosa-Salas's emphasis on the role of subjectivity in relation to the curator has been important in positioning the process for creating and presenting *Centring Silences* within curatorial practice. Through compiling material for this reader, selecting and inviting contributors to engage Cetu's memory or topics that this research report navigates, and presenting encounters with the archive, this intervention can therefore be read as performative and subject; thus, a curatorial act.

In creating a research report that grapples with the structures of archives, engages sketchy descriptions of Cetu in the archive to ruminate on her practice and query ways to centre her work in the face of absences, *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* strives to not only subvert power structures that have marginalised the voices of black women in history, but also proposes nuanced and experimental contemplations relating to Cetu's fragmented history. Furthermore, by opening space for contributions and interviews in *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu*, the aim has been to create a site for conversation around Cetu's history, that goes beyond my own perspective to include different voices and visions.

As the title for the reader, *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu*, makes reference to the archive – specifically Cetu's photographic archive – it is essential to clarify that this work is rooted in curating as opposed to archiving. In a paper on ways in which curatorial practice might amplify silences, Carol Preston argues that unlike archivists who "keep objects and documents, including the attached narrative, for posterity" (2014:8), the "curator carefully creates a narrative that is fleeting and ephemeral" (2014:8). Preston's argument points to an intervention that might not be permanent or reliant on lasting forever; an intervention that is potentially transitory and diaphanous.

Moreover, Preston claims, "The curator may draw from the archive, and in doing so create a new and personal narrative that is again bounded in time, but the archival endeavour is to preserve memory over time" (2014:8). Therefore, drawing from Preston's claims, *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* does not stand as a practice of archiving, instead can be read as a curatorial intervention that draws from the archive to provoke the institutional memory of Mabel Cetu, incite the limitations and arbitrariness of official archives, and engage divergent narratives to such a fragmented history.

### 5.2 Thematic divisions

*Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* is divided into three parts: 'Counter-memory', 'Divergent Archive' and 'On un/Seeing'. The first section

features an interview with Zingiwe Cetu, Mabel Cetu's niece, an essay by scholar and curator Candice Jansen and an interview with curator Dudu Madonsela. 'Divergent Archive' features a conversation between art critic Jessica Lynne and curator and scholar Oluremi C. Onabanjo, a photography essay by visual-based storyteller Manyatsa Monyamane and a screenshot of photographer Lerato Maduna's blogpost about Cetu. The last section, 'On un/Seeing', features text by writer and artist Julie Nxadi and interviews with photojournalist Neo Ntsoma and poet Toni Stuart,.

The intention of these chapters are not to create distinctions in these materials nor separate the ideas which are presented in the reader. Instead, these sections can be thought of as discursive themes, in which the contributions loosely explore. These thematic partitions draw from exhibition making practices, and invokes *Afro-Atlantic Histories*, an exhibition which was presented at Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) and Instituto Tomie Ohtake in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2018. The exhibition – which evokes Paul Gilroy's seminal text *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* to engage "the 'ebb and flows' among Africa, Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe throughout five centuries", as argued by Heitor Martins and Adriano Pedrosa (2018: 29) – is thematically divided into sections 'Everyday Lives', 'Maps and Margins', 'Rites and Rhythms', 'Portraits', 'Afro-Atlantic Modernisms and Routes' and 'Trances: Africa, Jamaica and Bahia'.

Through such thematic divisions, *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* thus provokes neatly chaptered narratives and institutional spaces of memory that claim to present tidy, linear histories. *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* therefore stands as a site that acknowledges the complexities in representing accounts of histories; a site of alternative and distinct narratives, presented through layered and interconnected segments that agitate the inconsistencies, gaps and silences around Cetu's history in "official" archives today.

### 5.3 Annotating fragments of histories

*Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* invokes Santu Mofokeng's book *Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950* (2013), from the eponymous

exhibition. *Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950* features a collection of photographs of "black working- and middle-class families commissioned during the period 1890 to 1950 and the stories about the subjects of the photographs" (Mofokeng, 2013), which Mofokeng collected from family archives.

Disengaging the colonial archives as a complete and chronological history, *Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950* invites a rethinking of the archive, as Mofokeng roughly sketches the details relating to the lives of those photographed, which he presents in the book (Figure 6). The anachronistic diagram in the book, shows text, question marks, arrows and asterisks, dates, and lines that connect individuals or moments in histories. The sketch, which does not attempt to provide full stories of those photographed, instead, provokes nebulous outlines of black lives in the intuitional memory spaces of South Africa, to centre the lives of those in the photographs, and highlight the histories denied through dominant archival practices.

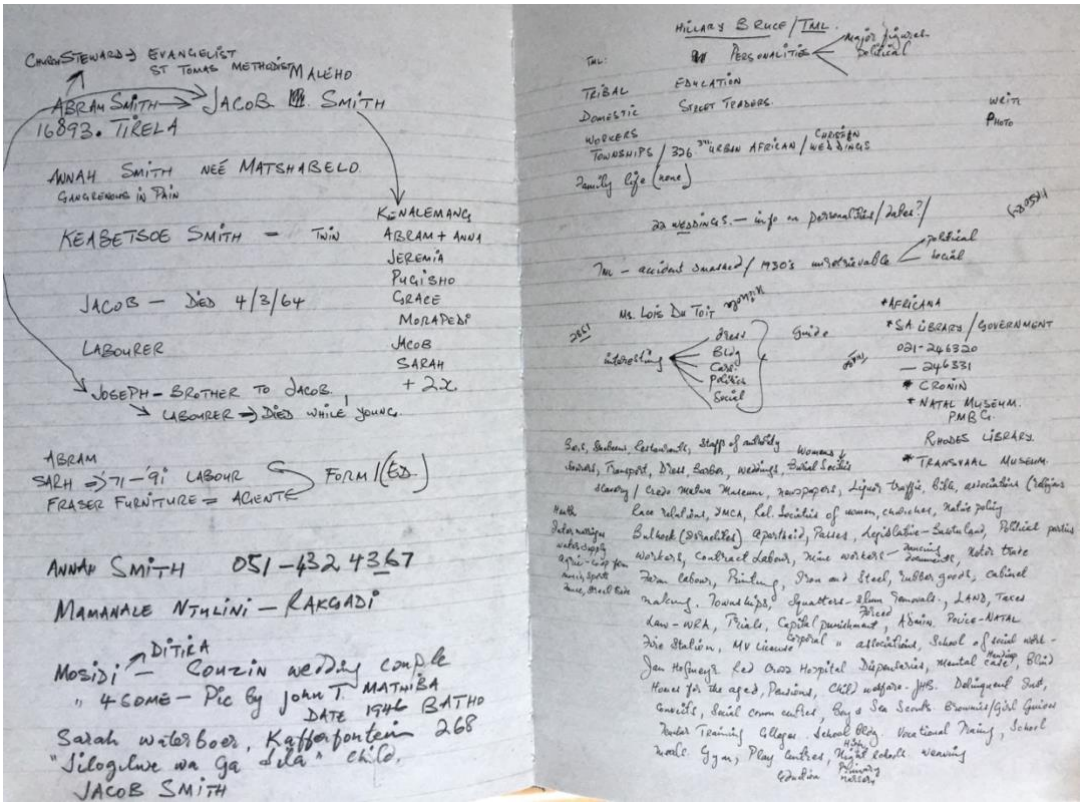



**Figure 6:** Details, *Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950* (Mofokeng, 2013)

*Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* thus evokes Mofokeng's intervention into dominant histories to engage a process that centres voices on the

margins. Therefore, in this case, I draw from fragmented histories in the "official" archive, books, interviews and Zingiwe Cetu's family archive, to conceptually engage in the memory of Mabel Cetu. In so doing, *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* aims to unnerve sites of erasure and agitate silences around Cetu's photographic archive in official historical records. Furthermore, Renée Mussai theorises utilising annotative practices to grapple with difficult histories and in so doing, present new narratives (2016). In a conversation about curating marginalised histories relating to black and African diasporic experiences in the United Kingdom, Mussai, curatorial head of photographic agency Autograph ABP, theorises ways to engage the institutional archive to louden absences through annotative acts:

> … we are increasingly turning our attention to mining image archives, contributing new knowledge to the ongoing writing and re-writing of photographic histories. While our work is often directed at filling gaps of a particular focus, the aim is to annotate and affect wider cultural narratives, and address what we refer to as a series of "missing chapters" above and beyond specific black or diasporic histories. (2016)

*Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* therefore draws from Mussai's provocation for mining "official" archives as, she argues, an intervention that has the potential to catalyse, annotate and widen narratives relating to the gaps, absences and fragments of histories of those marginalised in dominant memory spaces.

### 5.4 An inclusive intervention

Further, *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* draws from intersectional Black feminist curatorial practice as a guiding tool to attentively engage tenuous histories and mindfully ruminate on the experience of Mabel Cetu. "Within the framework of intersectional Black feminism, critical curating involves careful consideration of the overlapping and differing forms of social oppression and their relationship with institutional power" (2018: 35), argues Joana Joachim. As intersectionality, as argued above, aims to identify the interlocking systems of oppression, Joachim draws from Crenshaw's seminal theory to put into motion a curatorial practice that "can initiate powerful conversations" (2018: 42) and be useful in

"opening discussions between communities about topics that are difficult to unpack, yet necessary for our collective well-being" (2018: 44).

Illustrating how Black feminist curatorial practice provokes exclusionary institutional exhibition making processes and centre the experiences of marginalised identities, Joachim observes:

> Black feminism is particularly useful in these conversations, because, as bell hooks famously stated, it is focused on continuously 'bringing the margins to the centre' and consistently reflecting on what more can be done for the liberation of those most vulnerable to systems of oppression (2018: 44).

As Joachim argues ways in which Black feminism can inform the creation of inclusive cultural spaces, intersectional Black feminist curatorial practice therefore prompts *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* as a site that not only aims to centre Cetu's narrative but also a site that is interested in holding space with practitioners from various fields to unsettle exclusionary historiographic practices and generate alternatives narratives relating to voices on the margins.

# CONCLUSION

This report has aimed to engage my research of the history of Mabel Cetu, and approaches to centring her photographic archive in the face of vast absences. An interrogation of the archives of *Drum Magazine* and *Golden City Post* during 1958-1970 has highlighted the lacuna in relation to Cetu's photographic practice and life in mainstream memory. By grounding this work in various debates and foregrounding gaps in research relating to Cetu's history, this paper has attempted to engage the central questions of this report, which makes inquiry into the institutional archive as a site to ruminate on Cetu's photographic practice, and ways in which her practice can be centred when so much of her narrative has been marginalised in dominant histories.

As illustrated earlier in the report, Cetu's life and career were dynamic. Through examining the *Drum* and *Golden City Post*, the omission of Cetu's photographic contributions to the field of photojournalism is revealed, while depictions of Cetu in established memory spaces are argued as flattening her experiences. Through the above examinations of Cetu's opaque history, a patriarchal, capitalist and racist society is exposed; bringing into the open ways in which such ideologies have been fortified through media practice and historiography, and surfacing the implications of this on Cetu's memory in mainstream history today.

Aiming to sensitively engage the hazy, fragmented accounts of Cetu's life in institutional memory spaces today, this paper urges for an idiosyncratic research and creative application to Cetu's history; an approach that pushes against dominant historiography to avoid further silencing her voice and practice. In so doing, this paper also advocates for tactful strategies that are aware of agency and incite new ways of seeing and researching to ponder Cetu's history.

In pushing against the archival grain to engage unique, experimental narratives – as opposed to dim renderings of Cetu in the *Drum Magazine* and *Golden City Post* archive – and applications that challenge dominant history practices, have been crucial for this research. Such a perspective relating to unique frameworks and methods to centre Cetu's

narrative evokes Audre Lorde's theory that "… the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (1984: 111). So, as Lorde urges against utilising practices that have suppressed as a way to emancipate, this paper has therefore sought distinct processes that challenge the "official" archive and call for nuanced readings of silences in histories. Therefore, idiosyncratic and careful strategies to explore such complex histories have energised this research to centre Cetu's practice and experiences.

This paper has also been motivated to rethink the institutional archive (Trouillot, 1995) by invoking approaches such as Hartman's theory of critical fabulation (2008) and Oluremi C. Onabanjo's provocation for "reconsidering archives not as a bureaucratic structure but one of experimentation" (2018). Such theories champion unique narrative strategies and a radical engagement of the "official" archive beyond its intention of "othering" and empowering dominant narratives (Trouillot, 1995). Through rethinking "official" sites of memory, the archive is surfaced as a "starting point, not an end point", to reference the scholarship of Anna Harding (Nimis, 2016: 351).

Furthermore, concepts such as Black Radical Imagination which, Witter argues, is an "intrinsic force that acts as an instrument of liberation" (2107: 3), have invited this work to go beyond dominant structures to explore vast possibilities relating to silences that do not prescribe to colonial and apartheid narratives, and broach new and expansive territories for the fragments of Cetu's history. Such unique approaches of engaging such a sensitive history have heightened silences (Segalo, Manoff & Fine, 2015: 343) and brought forward complex engagements of Cetu's story. In addition, frameworks that are acutely aware of agency, advocate for a critical, yet careful examinations of difficult histories, and encourage unhackneyed narratives, are crucial to carefully think about this research.

Frames that have been applied to this research include African and Black feminisms – including its tenet (Dionne, 2018: 71) Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality (1989) – as well as decoloniality, which have propelled this report to examine the context in which this research takes places, centre erased and marginalised histories, and generate

alternative and unique narratives. As this work is grounded in curatorial practice, by looking to disruptive and inclusive creative and curatorial processes, this report has evinced how particular approaches to the shards of violent histories can be utilised in creating inclusive spaces and narratives.

By examining the *Drum* and *Golden City Post* archives, the absence of Cetu's practice in these repositories have been highlighted within the context of critical dialogue on the marginalisation of black women's histories in South Africa, including in areas such as media and histories of photography in South Africa, which have been male-dominated (Siopis, 2006: 10). In analysing the photojournalism and media landscape in South Africa during apartheid – circa the middle of the twentieth century – this research has foregrounded how structures of power have come together to marginalise women's voices within these fields. Moreover, this paper has simultaneously surfaced the critical contribution of black women in the media and ways in which dominant historiography have pushed narratives of black women journalists and photojournalists to the peripheries of mainstream histories. Therefore, this paper aims to provoke the silence of black women photojournalists in mid-twentieth century and spark questions as to what Cetu's practice might have been, and how it might have contributed to the media and photography landscape

In addition, by highlighting gaps relating to Cetu's photographic works, this research seeks to query how these silences around her photographic archive are not only evidence of a violently racist, sexist, classist and capitalist society, but also illustrate the potential for new narratives relating not only to Cetu's memory today but other black women photojournalists in South Africa whose historical accounts have been erased.

In closing, by observing history as splintered, tangled and porous, this research has resisted against attempts at presenting Cetu's full, linear story. Instead, *Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* – the paper and creative component – hopes to be a site upon which to contemplate and radically imagine the possibilities of Cetu's practice in the presence of widespread omissions. In doing so, this report encourages an approach to Cetu's history that challenges the grain of the "official" archive

and – to invoke Renée Mussai's argument – aims "to annotate and affect wider cultural narratives" (Mussai, 2016) relating to "missing chapters" (Mussai, 2016) in history.

As this research grapples with the erasure of Cetu's narrative in mainstream memory, particularly her photography, this work hopes to be in conversation with continuing studies on the history of Mabel Cetu. In addition, this work also aims to add to critical, ongoing discourse around the role of institutional memory spaces in society today; dialogues that provoke questions about ways of centring historical omissions and queries relating to how power-infused institutional memory spaces can be employed in navigating silences.

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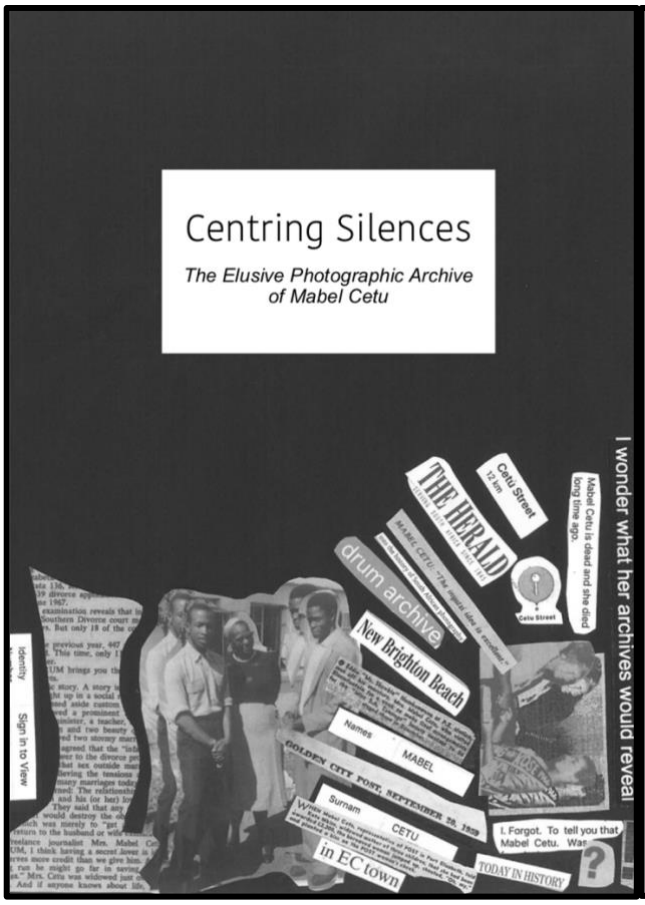
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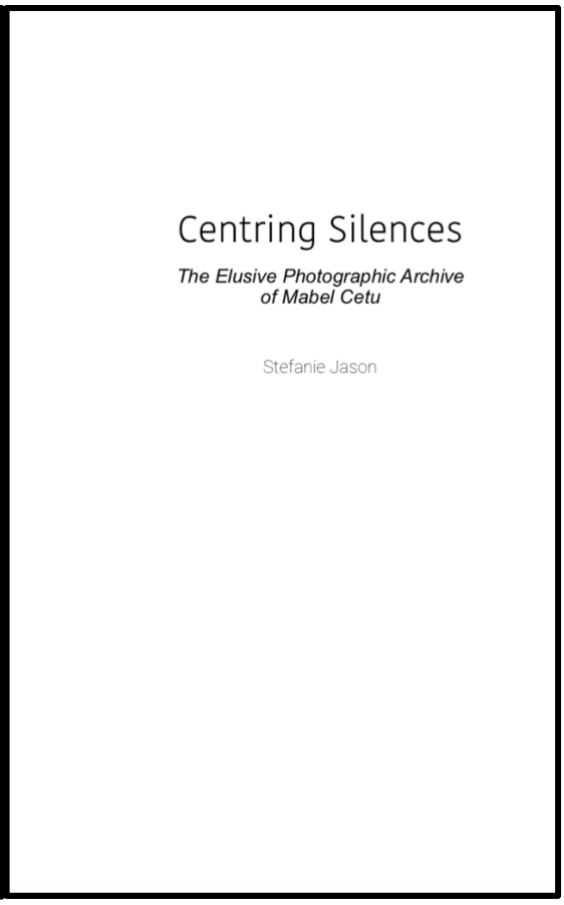

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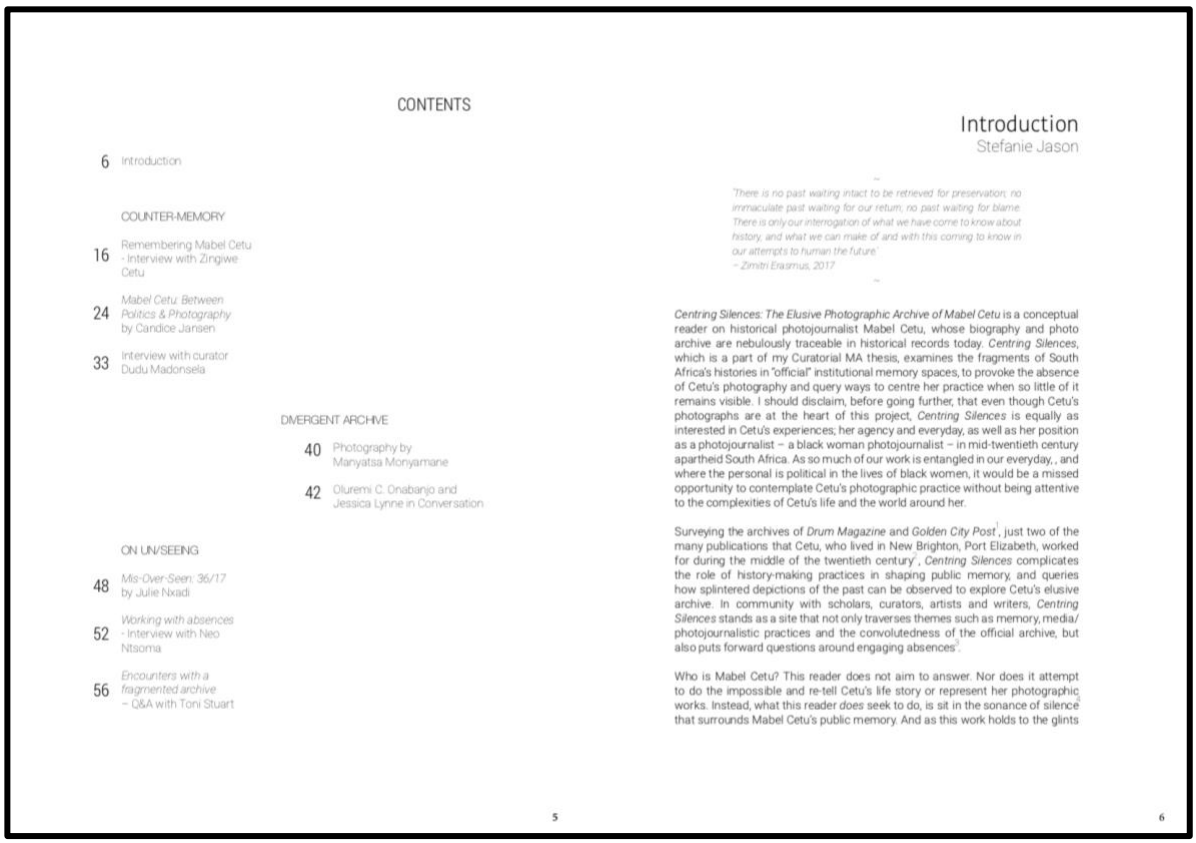
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## Introduction

Stefanie Jason

*'There is no past waiting intact to be retrieved for preservation; no immaculate past waiting for our return, no past waiting for blame. There is only our interrogation of what we have come to know about history, and what we can make of and with this coming to know in our attempts to human the future.'*
*– Zimitri Erasmus, 2017*

*Centring Silences: The Elusive Photographic Archive of Mabel Cetu* is a conceptual reader on historical photojournalist Mabel Cetu, whose biography and photo archive are nebulously traceable in historical records today. *Centring Silences*, which is a part of my Curatorial MA thesis, examines the fragments of South Africa's histories in "official" institutional memory spaces, to provoke the absence of Cetu's photography and query ways to centre her practice when so little of it remains visible. I should disclaim, before going further, that even though Cetu's photographs are at the heart of this project, *Centring Silences* is equally as interested in Cetu's experiences; her agency and everyday, as well as her position as a photojournalist – a black woman photojournalist – in mid-twentieth century apartheid South Africa. As so much of our work is entangled in our everyday, , and where the personal is political in the lives of black women, it would be a missed opportunity to contemplate Cetu's photographic practice without being attentive to the complexities of Cetu's life and the world around her.

Surveying the archives of *Drum Magazine* and *Golden City Post*[1], just two of the many publications that Cetu, who lived in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, worked for during the middle of the twentieth century[2], *Centring Silences* complicates the role of history-making practices in shaping public memory, and queries how splintered depictions of the past can be observed to explore Cetu's elusive archive. In community with scholars, curators, artists and writers, *Centring Silences* stands as a site that not only traverses themes such as memory, media/photojournalistic practices and the convolutedness of the official archive, but also puts forward questions around engaging absences[3].

Who is Mabel Cetu? This reader does not aim to answer. Nor does it attempt to do the impossible and re-tell Cetu's life story or represent her photographic works. Instead, what this reader *does* seek to do, is sit in the sonance of silence[4] that surrounds Mabel Cetu's public memory. And as this work holds to the glints



Manyatsa Monyamane
*Tswelopele, Mamelodi* 2019

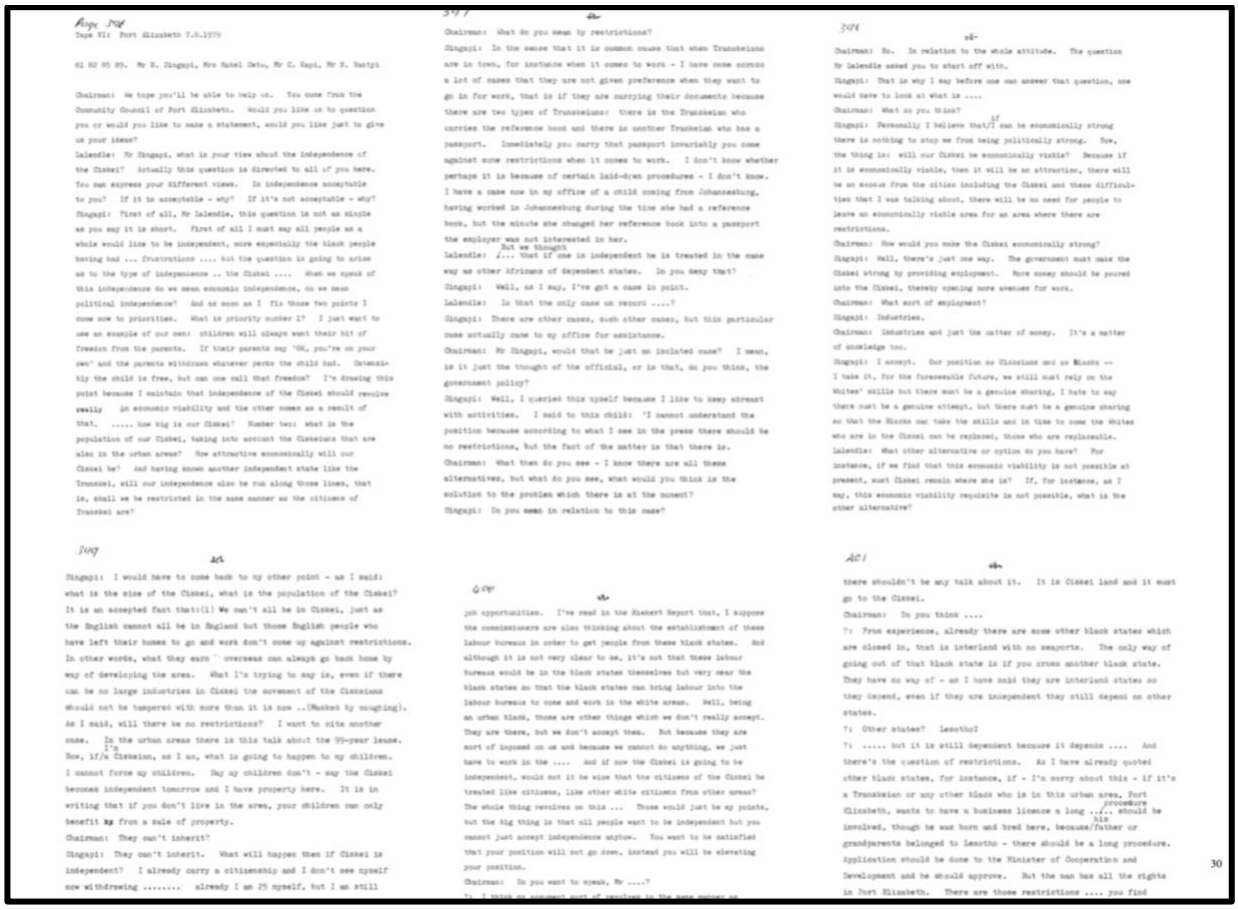
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Manyatsa Monyamane
*Ba tšweletše, Mamelodi* 2019

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OLUREMI C. ONABANJO
AND
JESSICA LYNNE
In Conversation



Tape VI: Port Elizabeth T.O.1979

81 82 85 89. Mr N. Dingezi, Mrs Mabel Cetu, Mr C. Kapi, Mr R. Tantyi

Chairman: We hope you'll be able to help us. You come from the Community Council of Port Elizabeth. Would you like us to question you or would you like to make a statement, would you like just to give us your ideas?

Lalendle: Mr Dingezi, what is your view about the independence of the Ciskei? Actually this question is directed to all of you here. You can express your different views. Is independence acceptable to you? If it is acceptable - why? If it's not acceptable - why?

Dingezi: First of all, Mr Lalendle, this question is not as simple as you say it is short. First of all I must say all people as a whole would like to be independent, more especially the black people having had ... frustrations .... but the question is going to arise as to the type of independence .. the Ciskei .... When we speak of this independence do we mean economic independence, do we mean political independence? And as soon as I fix those two points I come now to priorities. What is priority number 1? I just want to use an example of our own: children will always want their bit of freedom from the parents. If their parents say 'OK, you're on your own' and the parents withdraws whatever perks the child had. Ostensibly the child is free, but can one call that freedom? I'm drawing this point because I maintain that independence of the Ciskei should revolve **really** in economic viability and the other comes as a result of that. ..... how big is our Ciskei? Number two: what is the population of our Ciskei, taking into account the Ciskeians that are also in the urban areas? How attractive economically will our Ciskei be? And having known another independent state like the Transkei, will our independence also be run along those lines, that is, shall we be restricted in the same manner as the citizens of Transkei are?

Chairman: What do you mean by restrictions?

Dingezi: In the sense that it is common cause that when Transkeians are in town, for instance when it comes to work - I have come across a lot of cases that they are not given preference when they want to go in for work, that is if they are carrying their documents because there are two types of Transkeians: there is the Transkeian who carries the reference book and there is another Transkeian who has a passport. Immediately you carry that passport invariably you come against some restrictions when it comes to work. I don't know whether perhaps it is because of certain laid-down procedures - I don't know. I have a case now in my office of a child coming from Johannesburg, having worked in Johannesburg during the time she had a reference book, but the minute she changed her reference book into a passport the employer was not interested in her.

But we thought

Lalendle: ... that if one is independent he is treated in the same way as other Africans of dependent states. Do you deny that?

Dingezi: Well, as I say, I've got a case in point.

Lalendle: Is that the only case on record ....?

Dingezi: There are other cases, such other cases, but this particular case actually came to my office for assistance.

Chairman: Mr Dingezi, would that be just an isolated case? I mean, is it just the thought of the official, or is that, do you think, the government policy?

Dingezi: Well, I queried this myself because I like to keep abreast with activities. I said to this child: 'I cannot understand the position because according to what I see in the press there should be no restrictions, but the fact of the matter is that there is.

Chairman: What then do you see - I know there are all these alternatives, but what do you see, what would you think is the solution to the problem which there is at the moment?

Dingezi: Do you mean in relation to this case?

Chairman: No. In relation to the whole attitude. The question Mr Lalendle asked you to start off with.

Dingezi: That is why I say before one can answer that question, one would have to look at what is ....

Chairman: What do you think?

Dingezi: Personally I believe that if can be economically strong there is nothing to stop me from being politically strong. Now, the thing is: will our Ciskei be economically viable? Because if it is economically viable, then it will be an attraction, there will be an exodus from the cities including the Ciskei and these difficulties that I was talking about, there will be no need for people to leave an economically viable area for an area where there are restrictions.

Chairman: How would you make the Ciskei economically strong?

Dingezi: Well, there's just one way. The government must make the Ciskei strong by providing employment. More money should be poured into the Ciskei, thereby opening more avenues for work.

Chairman: What sort of employment?

Dingezi: Industries.

Chairman: Industries and just the matter of money. It's a matter of knowledge too.

Dingezi: I accept. Our position as Ciskeians and as Blacks -- I take it, for the foreseeable future, we still must rely on the Whites' skills but there must be a genuine sharing, I hate to say there must be a genuine attempt, but there must be a genuine sharing so that the Blacks can take the skills and in time to come the Whites who are in the Ciskei can be replaced, those who are replaceable.

Lalendle: What other alternative or option do you have? For instance, if we find that this economic viability is not possible at present, must Ciskei remain where she is? If, for instance, as I say, this economic viability requisite is not possible, what is the other alternative?

Dingezi: I would have to come back to my other point - as I said: what is the size of the Ciskei, what is the population of the Ciskei? It is an accepted fact that:(1) We can't all be in Ciskei, just as the English cannot all be in England but those English people who have left their homes to go and work don't come up against restrictions. In other words, what they earn overseas can always go back home by way of developing the area. What I'm trying to say is, even if there can be no large industries in Ciskei the movement of the Ciskeians should not be tampered with more than it is now ..(Masked by coughing). As I said, will there be no restrictions? I want to cite another case. In the urban areas there is this talk about the 99-year lease. Now, if/a Ciskeian, as I am, what is going to happen to my children. I cannot force my children. Say my children don't - say the Ciskei becomes independent tomorrow and I have property here. It is in writing that if you don't live in the area, your children can only benefit by from a sale of property.

Chairman: They can't inherit?

Dingezi: They can't inherit. What will happen then if Ciskei is independent? I already carry a citizenship and I don't see myself now withdrawing ..... already I am 25 myself, but I am still

Job opportunities. I've read in the Riekert Report that, I suppose the commissioners are also thinking about the establishment of these labour bureaus in order to get people from these black states. And although it is not very clear to me, it's not that these labour bureaus would be in the black states themselves but very near the black states so that the black states can bring labour into the labour bureaus to come and work in the white areas. Well, being an urban black, those are other things which we don't really accept. They are there, but we don't accept them. But because they are sort of imposed on us and because we cannot do anything, we just have to work in the .... And if now the Ciskei is going to be independent, would not it be wise that the citizens of the Ciskei be treated like citizens, like other white citizens from other areas? The whole thing revolves on this ... Those would just be my points, but the big thing is that all people want to be independent but you cannot just accept independence anyhow. You want to be satisfied that your position will not go down, instead you will be elevating your position.

Chairman: Do you want to speak, Mr ....?

there shouldn't be any talk about it. It is Ciskei land and it must go to the Ciskei.

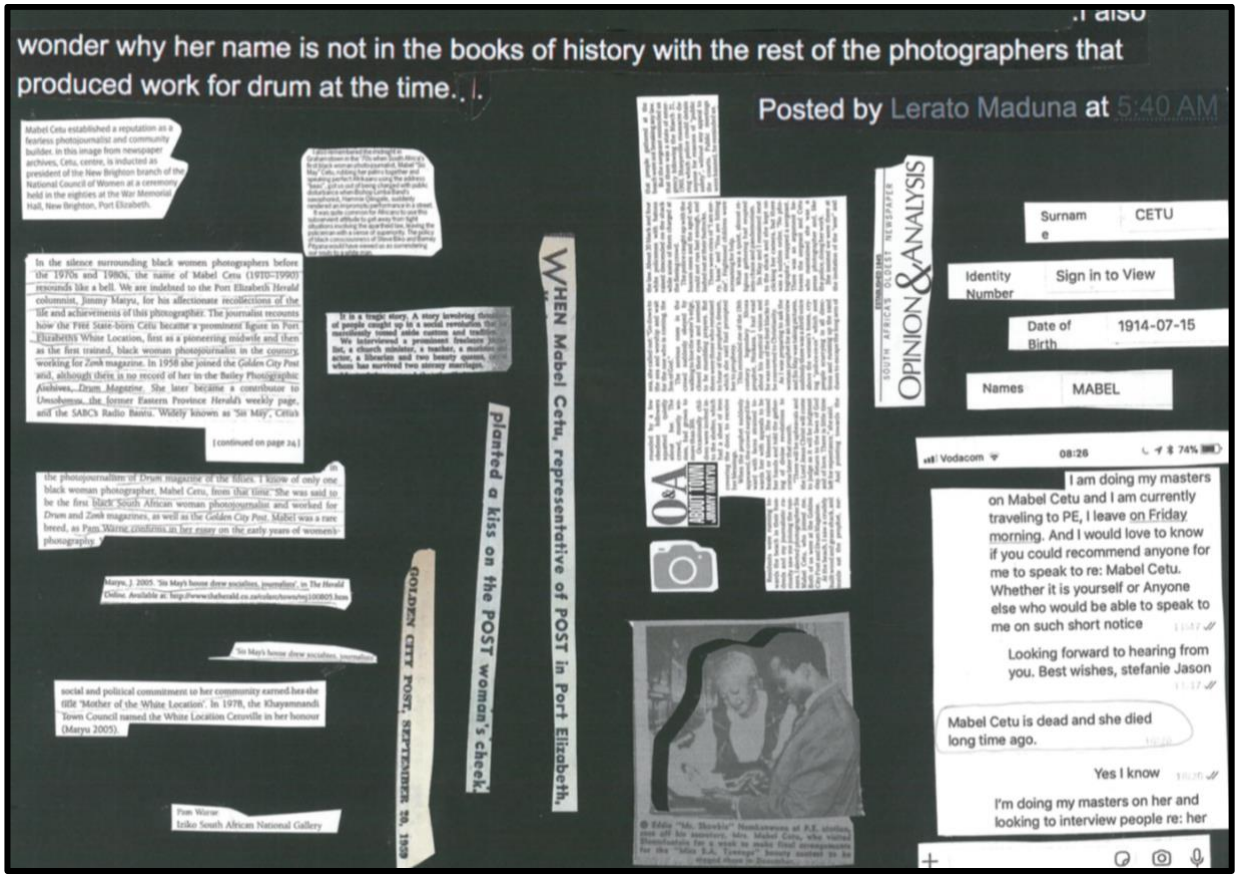
Chairman: Do you think ....

?: From experience, already there are none other black states which are closed in, that is interland with no seaports. The only way of going out of that black state is if you cross another black state. They have no way of - as I have said they are interland states so they depend, even if they are independent they still depend on other states.

?: Other states? Lesotho?

?: ..... but it is still dependent because it depends .... And there's the question of restrictions. As I have already quoted other black states, for instance, if - I'm sorry about this - if it's a Transkeian or any other black who is in this urban area, Port Elizabeth, wants to have a business licence a long ..... should be procedure his involved, though he was born and bred here, because/father or grandparents belonged to Lesotho - there should be a long procedure. Application should be done to the Minister of Cooperation and Development and he should approve. But the man has all the rights in Port Elizabeth. There are those restrictions .... you find

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INTERVIEW

WITH

DUDU MADONSELA

Curator at the Bensusan Museum and Library of Photography at Museum Africa



**Stefanie Jason: In 2018 I shared some of my research with you, and you had told me about the work you have done around photographers in African histories, including Mabel Cetu. Do you mind sharing more about this, and what that journey was like?**

Dudu Madonsela: I came to know about Mabel Cetu through BAHA [Bailey's African History Archives], *Drum Magazine* archives. I went there because I was curious to know more about histories of African photographers. The reason I was interested in taking that direction was prompted by the exhibition I was doing for the 2010 Fifa World Cup in South Africa. For the exhibition I wanted to include photographers from the six African countries that were going to participate in World Cup event. As you know, *Drum* was started in the 1950s and later expanded into the rest of Africa. So at the time, I was hoping to get work of women photographers from the continent. It was then when I coincidentally came across the name Mabel Cetu. Around August 2010 I also met Khwezi Gule, then Chief Curator of Hector Peterson Museum, who resuscitated the name and brought a lot of support. It was around that time that I began to consider looking at our archives, the Bensusan Museum. However, I realised that we were not covering the scope of black photographers, including women photographers.

I then began to think about people that would be of assistance. I got the late [photographer] Alfred Khumalo, as well as journalist from the Eastern Cape, pap' Jimmy [Matyu] – who passed on in 2012. Those were the people that actually gave me confidence to dig more on her. Because they said, "Yes, we were working with her and she was ... [a] photojournalist." My interest developed from there. When I wrote something about Mabel Cetu, beyond Alf Khumalo and Jimmy Matyu, my other references were Mike Mzileni and Nkosikhona Ngcobo. I also contacted the *Herald* newspaper and started to research *Zonk* magazine archives. I tried the Western Cape Archives, where I was told there was nothing under her name. The only thing that I can say was substantial from my research, was the fact that all of them confirmed that indeed she was there, and was in the industry. I spent almost 18 months researching and was so looking forward to exhibiting her work. The Western Cape government wrote me a letter to say that they couldn't find her work. I think I was irritating them because I wanted to know how they could have not had her work in *Zonk* archive, and why her work cannot be found. They wrote me a letter on letterhead to say, "We've done our job. There's nothing we can do".

**SJ: At the time you were interested in curating an exhibition on Mabel Cetu. May I ask why you chose not to go ahead with it, and what other interventions did you ultimately decide were fitting in relation to the history of Cetu?**

DM: A blow was to not find her work. I was excited thinking about curating her energy. I wanted to showcase her work. But after realising that it was impossible, that's when I resorted to starting a women's photography seminar to keep her name going. That's not to say that she does not have work, it's just that we cannot connect to it because of the system. Bailey's knew what they were doing. For me, Jim Bailey gave another perspective different from the currencies of



Western Cape Government
Cultural Affairs and Sport

Western Cape Archives and Records Service

e-mail: [redacted]
tel: [redacted]
fax: +27 21 483-0444
Our reference: WCA12/4/5/1/2/2
Enquiries: [redacted]

Dear Ms Madonsela

I respond to your enquiry of 2 April 2014, regarding photographs and information on Mabel Cetu.

Despite an intensive search by means of the National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS), I could not trace any photographs/information on the above-mentioned person in this repository.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]
**WESTERN CAPE ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE**
Date: 7 April 2014

72 Roeland Street,
Cape Town, 8001

Private Bag X9025, Cape Town, 8000
webaddresses: www.westerncape.gov.za
www.national.archives.gov.za

Cultural Affairs and Sport : IminCimbiyeNkcubekonezembiDiala : Kultuursake en Sport



Divergent
*archive*

# INVITATION TO CONTRIBUTE TO CREATIVE COMPONENT

Dear _____,

My name is Stefanie Jason, an MA student in the Contemporary Curatorial Practice programme at Wits University. My dissertation is on the representation of Mabel Cetu in the *Drum* and *Golden City Post* between 1958-1970. In case you are unfamiliar, Mabel Cetu was a photojournalist (also a freelance journalist, and later a councillor) who lived in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, and practiced photography during the mid-twentieth century, but whose photographs and biography are widely absent from South Africa's archival records.

I am also putting together a conceptual publication, with the hope for the book to be a space in which Cetu's life can be centred but also for topics such as gender, race, memory, black creative expression/lens-based-practices and archival erasure to be explored (transnationally), as well as notions on radical reimagination, artistic and/or research interventions and the curatorial as a restorative, divergent and decolonial gesture.

With that said, I would love to request your contribution to this publication – obviously dependent on your availability. There is no specific request around what to submit. It could be an essay, images, notes, poetry, prose, or a conversation etc. And the format can be text- or image-based. The submission does not have to necessarily be new, but if it engages or speaks to some of the themes that this publication grapples, then that would be amazing.

*More about the publication and submission: It is A5 sized and comprises text and images, interviews and conversations, and will be about 50 pages in length – so not too long, and therefore I am requesting text with a maximum of about 1 500 words, or text-based/visual work that is a maximum of 3 (rectangular) pages long. Due to the limited funding, from Wits School of Arts, I will only print a limited run, but will also create an online version to share more widely.*

Thank you so much for time. Looking forward to continuing the conversation.

Warm wishes,

Stefanie Jason

# ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

## CERTIFICATE OF COMPETENCE IN RESEARCH ETHICS

**Full Name:** Stefanie Jason

**Student No:** 682133 **Date of Certification:** 24 July 2019 – 23 July 2022

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

***TRAINED BY:***
*Professor Jasper Knight (Research Ethics)*

*Signed:*

***ACKNOWLEDGED BY:***
*Dr Robin Drennan*
*(Director: Research Development)*

*Signed:*

This certificate is confirmation of successful completion of a training course in Research Ethics for Non-Medical Human Research, based upon achieving a minimum level of competence in different assessment tasks. This certificate is valid for a period of three years from the date given above.