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(Re)composing: A study of the musical documentary in reimagining the historical archive through song

Daniel R. N. Roberts

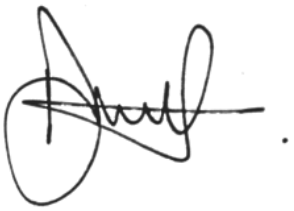
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Film and Television, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts, Film and Television

Johannesburg, 2023

Declaration

I, Daniel Roberts, declare that this thesis is my own work. It is being submitted for a Masters degree in Film Art at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.



Daniel R.N. Roberts

Acknowledgements

To all my dear (and patient) family who have witnessed this process of a mind, well known for having the attention span of a gnat, attempting late in a career a process better performed at its beginning. Thank you.

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Chapter 1. Introduction to the music documentary

1.1 Background

The seeds of this research were sown in 2019 when I was approached to contribute to a script for a proposed music documentary titled *My moederf**ken taal: Die rebelle van die Afrikaansspreekendes*. *A music documentary series about the men and women who refused to bite their tongue* (Roberts & Kemp, 2022).[1]

The synopsis for *Rebelle* ran:

> *Die Rebelle* is a music documentary series that tells the stories of those Afrikaners – the originals, the dissenters, the pioneers, and the off-cuts.
>
> Guided through the lives of these Afrikaner iconoclasts by two contemporary Afrikaans rappers and poets and relying on song, performance, expert testimony, story-telling and personal reflection, the series will remind us of Afrikaans's neglected and deeply African heritage, and at the same time give us insight into the history and humanity to which the language itself has borne witness.
>
> (Roberts & Kemp, 2022)

The documentary script spans the era from Afrikaans's origin as a slave creole of Dutch during the Dutch East India Company's (VOC) establishment of its colony in the Western Cape in 1652 through the rise of South Africa as a state until the present democratic era.

The history of Afrikaans and Afrikaans music is inextricably intertwined with South Africa's narrative, from its colonial origins to the present day. The language emerged as a Dutch creole spoken by the enslaved people of the Dutch colonisers, but over time, it was appropriated by whites, formalised, and weaponised during the apartheid period. Debate about the status of Afrikaans persists. Importantly, it was repositioned as an indigenous language for all in the democratic era post-1994, though this aspiration has become somewhat frayed in recent years.

1.2 Aims and objectives: Framing the main argument.

My research emerges from the context of the debate about the history and identity of Afrikaans.

[1] Although I am not of Afrikaans heritage, I speak it as a second language, utilise it for composing songs, and have collaborated on various recording and film projects with Afrikaans musicians. I have been particularly involved with the Afrikaans satirical group *Radio Kalahari Orkes*. I produced and authored material alongside actor, writer, and musician Ian Roberts and long-form journalist Rian Malan.

It aims to explore purpose-composed music as a form of reenactment within historical documentaries. This aesthetic approach raises essential questions regarding the effectiveness of a documentary film of music and verse as conduits for the complexities of language, music and the colonial subject. As a stylistic technique, incorporating music and verse in the documentary form can serve as a cinematic means of bridging the gaps within the incomplete colonial archive, where the voices of colonial subjects have been – and to some extent still are – silenced or omitted.

I must clarify my intention in using purpose-composed verse and explain how it diverges from the conventional historical archive. The distinction can be exemplified by the insights of documentarian and musician Ricu Lätti, whose film is discussed in this research. He characterises the unique qualities of the poet Churchil Naude, a mixed-race musician from the Western Cape renowned for his *kletsrym* (chat rhyme) style, by saying: "You have to listen to Churchil with four ears" (R. Latti, e-mail communication January 1, 2022). Unlike historians' and journalists' factual presentation of available data, musicians interpret and convey their truth in a poetic and emotive manner. The subtext or underlying meaning of what a song might be conveying requires reading 'between the lines.' I extend the analogy of reading 'between the lines' to what happens between the camera and the subject in dealing with the creative collaboration between the documentarian and musician in performing the purpose- composed song.

It is equally important to explain my use of the term, 'reenactment.' Commonly used in documentary studies to refer to recreations of past occurrences in historical drama using the tools of Hollywood dramatic film production such as screenwriting, costume design and acting. I propose using the term to include a broader spectrum of cinematic devices that could contribute to the documentary's narrative and emotional impact. For instance, soundtracks combined with a specific lighting choice, camera angle, or close-up, without acting and cinematic staging, also evoke specific emotions, leading viewers towards interpretations that may diverge from conventional notions of documentary authenticity. In doing so, directors wield these tools deliberately to shape the audience's perspective, reinforcing their viewpoint within the narrative. I contend that the common use of a soundtrack in the documentary may move towards reenacting the mood of a past alluded to in the documentary.

My approach in using song does not intend to supplant historical data but instead strives to reveal a pathway to enable the evocation of the emotions and behaviours of distant subjects, bringing them into clearer focus as human beings. By tapping into the power of music and

verse, filmmakers and musicians may breathe life into historical narratives, helping the audience to understand past experiences, perspectives, and all the complexities of human interaction. My intuition is that, through the artistic interpretation of these distant subjects, a more nuanced and empathetic portrayal emerges, enhancing our comprehension of and connection to the historical moment instead of striving to recreate a precise (albeit often biased) historical record, musicians blend realism and fantasy, even when using a current genre, to craft an immersive experience for their audience. The approach aims to engage contemporary audiences with subjects from the past in a way that resonates with their recent experience, in much the same way that we can vicariously be transported by film, theatre, and musical performance.

The artistic aspect of this research takes the form of an essay film that employs elements of the *cinéma vérité* approach but also steps outside that observational mode to include participatory and poetic modes to examine the mechanisms of the collaboration between filmmaker and musician within music documentaries. This artistic inquiry seeks to probe the tensions that arise from using narrative song as a medium for historical scrutiny, a topic analysed in the present written research component. The essay film adopts a more personal and reflective stance, which also questions my positionality as a white male South African filmmaker exploring subjects that some may consider remote from that experience.

Chapter Two, "Blurred Lines: Modes & case studies," delves into the efforts made in documentary studies to keep pace with the ever-evolving landscape of non-fiction filmmaking. The chapter examines theorists' attempts to understand the merging of the documentary genre with entertainment to form the music documentary genre. Recent documentary films have increasingly challenged the traditional borders between fictional and non-fictional, falling under the umbrella of "modernist realism" (Porton, 2011, p. 1). However, it is essential to acknowledge that the music documentary genre has demonstrated a remarkable consistency in its utilisation of the *cinéma vérité* style since its emergence in the 1960s.

I shall also analyse the use of reenactment in music documentaries, focusing on incorporating purpose-composed songs as a means of reenactment. 'Reenactment' in documentary filmmaking typically describes actors in period costumes pretending to be historical subjects. I use the term differently to describe how certain songs may be deployed as sites of historical reenactment in the context of the music documentary. I investigate how this technique has been employed in music documentaries and evaluate its effectiveness in conveying meaning and evoking emotion. By scrutinising specific artistic strategies, I aim to shed light on the impact and significance of purpose-composed music as a tool for reenactment in the context of music

documentaries dealing with historical subjects.

The key theoretician in this endeavour is Bill Nichols, renowned for his significant contributions to documentary studies, particularly his formulation of the various modes of documentary and his writings on reenactments. While there are numerous estimable scholars in the field of documentary studies, and contributions continue to shape the discourse, few have had the enduring impact of Nichols. Despite being developed over three decades ago, Nichols's modes continue to act as a far-reaching foundation for discourse of the genre, providing a shared language and practical analytical tools. Nichols's work is essential as a point of reference for other scholars and for situating one's research in the broader reach of documentary film studies. Furthermore, Nichols' modes are helpful for this research in defining the music documentary's most resilient forms, direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*.

Emerging in the early 1960s, both direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* were products of advances in portable sound and camera technology that enabled a level of direct and objective documentary filming previously unattainable. These filmmaking approaches were further influenced by the American counterculture and the French *nouvelle vague* (new wave) movement in the direction of a more genuine and immediate representation of events. While the terms are sometimes used interchangeably and share core values, subtle differences distinguish them. The term *cinéma vérité*, originating from the French *nouvelle vague*, was coined in the writings of Jean Rouch (Bruni, 2002) In contrast, according to Nichols in this *Introduction to documentary* (2010) 'direct cinema' was popularised by figures such as Richard Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker, and the Maysles brothers, Albert and David. Bill Nichols (2010) describes direct cinema as strictly observational, with the camera functioning as an invisible observer. *Cinéma vérité*, on the other hand, melded observational and participatory elements, acknowledging the camera's presence. Because of their shared truth-telling intention, I will use *vérité* (truth) to encompass both movements.

Before these movements, documentary cinema had conventionally relied on dramatic recreations in the performative mode to illustrate historical events. The 'direct cinema' group of young American documentarians, motivated by the counter-culture movement, championed the observational style and fundamentally altered the landscape of documentary filmmaking. Eschewing historical reenactments, they argued for their method's superior authenticity and veracity in representing subjects (Nichols, 2010, p. 14).

There has subsequently been a resurgence of reenactment in documentary filmmaking, mainly when dealing with historical subjects and seemingly for entertainment reasons. These reenactments can be seen as moments of fantasy disguised as reality, which Nichols (2008, p. 72) terms the "fantasmatic subject." The reintroduction of reenactment represents a shift in the genre's approach to storytelling, challenging the notion of strict adherence to observational purity.

While my earlier comments on broadening the definition of reenactment may suggest I use a different term altogether, such as 'restaging' or 'reframing,' I have instead opted for Nichols' term 'fantasmatic' to describe better the place where a poet/musician may be transported to. This choice is informed by a desire to capture poetic and musical expression's imaginative and evocative nature, aligning with Nichols' conceptualization of documentary modes encompassing subjective and emotional elements alongside factual representation. Instead of the director imposing sets, wardrobe and acting, the poet/musician selects a place of historical

significance (the theatre) and then attempts to ‘conjure up the spirits’ of their ancestors through poetry and music (performance/acting). My argument is that there may be something more authentic and heartfelt in this approach than the acted-out version, a distinction which I hope to make in the case studies.

In his paper, “Documentary reenactment and the fantasmatic subject” (2008), Nichols’s extensive use of the term ‘fantasmatic’ refers to the utilisation of theatrical or fictional production techniques to recreate historical events or scenes within the context of documentary filmmaking. It emphasises the constructed and mediated nature of the reenactment, acknowledging that, rather than a direct representation of reality, it was a stylised interpretation (Nichols, 2008, pp. 72-89). Fantasmatic is usually associated with French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who explored how unconscious fantasies and desires manifest in language, symbols, and cultural artefacts (Johnston, 2023, p. 11). Nichols draws on Lacan’s ideas to highlight the constructed nature of these recreations and their ability to evoke fantasies and imaginative interpretations of historical events. Despite this trend, as I shall demonstrate, the observational and participatory modes of the *vérité* movements have remained the preferred choice for music documentaries. In apparent contradiction to the promotional aspect of popular music, musicians have been drawn to the *feeling* of authenticity, and truthfulness conveyed through the observational and participatory modes.

In concluding Chapter Two, I explore the intersection of purpose-composed songs, Nichols’s observational and participatory modes, and the music documentary genre founded in *cinema vérité*. Through a series of case studies, including *Dont look back* (1967), *Prison songs* (2001, *Afrikaaps* (2010), *The far side of the wall* (2023), and the music video *Witbooi* (2020), I examine how these elements intertwine and contribute to the authenticity and impact of music documentaries. The case studies shed light on the enduring relevance of the observational mode, capturing raw moments and providing viewers with an authentic glimpse into the lives of musicians and historical subjects. Including purpose-composed songs by descendants of historical figures adds depth and resonance to the storytelling, bridging the gap between past and present.

By exploring these case studies, the research aims to deepen our understanding of the dynamic relationships among *vérité* aesthetics, purpose-composed songs, historical subjects, and performances in appropriate locations within the music documentary genre. The exploration will demonstrate how the several elements converge to create meaningful and impactful narratives.

In Chapter Three, "Remodelling history," I consider how a form of reenactment in the music documentary might reframe or foreground historical subjects side-lined in the historical texts authored by their colonial masters. I turn to documentarians and writers like Karel Schoeman (2009) and Joyti Mistry (2017), who help us understand how the silenced historical subject might be approached in the archive and revivified.

A vital case study here is Claude Lanzmann's *Shoa* (1985). Lanzmann's refusal to rely on the numerous recordings and archival footage created by the perpetrators of the Holocaust reflected his moral choice not to use anything they had created. His approach served to amplify the voices of survivors, disrupt the prevailing narrative, and offer a platform for those who endured unimaginable suffering to share their stories. The intentional exclusion of the oppressors' perspectives becomes a strength, enabling a more authentic and empowering representation of historical events. I intend to argue that this device of Lanzmann's works similarly as reenactment. In avoiding direct restaging of events or the existing historical record of the Nazis, he uses footage in a way that I will argue has a fantasmatic quality, a poetic and compelling emotional restaging of those vivid events of the Holocaust.

Drawing on these examples, I argue for music as a form of reenactment within the music documentary that can make visible those obscured by the South African colonial record. Used in specific ways, music that 'crosses the timeline' may offer a more profound impression of authenticity than the use of restaged scenes in historical documentaries involving dressing up in costume and pretending. I will examine how music can bring those distant historical subjects into focus. Noting the bias in the VOC's otherwise detailed recordings of their enslaved subjects, I will explore the evidence available of what they may have sounded like. In *The Musical Human: A History of life on earth* (2021), the musicologist Michael Spitzer describes how, through the layered accounts of different cultures by archaeologists and anthropologists, we can, in effect, time travel and hear what earlier cultures sounded like in song.

In Chapter Four, "Reflexive analysis and discussion of artistic research and process: Theory and praxis," I delve into the intersection of artistic research, reflexive analysis, and the intricate relationship between theory and praxis. At its core, this chapter seeks to illuminate the connections between written research and visual representation, focusing principally on the bond between musician/poet and documentary cinematographer.

This interplay is explored in the written component through the lens of music documentaries that seek to reveal elements of colonial history obscured by the official record. The concept is expanded upon in the artistic component, where the bond between composer/poet and

documentarian comes alive, especially in unearthing personal histories and performances set in specific locations.

The chapter concludes by positioning the essay film as a dynamic and evolving genre, drawing on Hans Richter's seminal definition and exploring its transformations over time, especially in the age of digital media and platforms like YouTube. In sum, Chapter Four explores the artistic process, the role of reflexivity in documentary filmmaking, and the power of music and poetry to reclaim and reshape historical narratives.

In the final chapter, I conclude the study and reflect on what has been discovered through the research process.

Chapter 2. Blurred lines: Modes & case studies

2.1 Introduction

Standard notions of reenactment in documentary filmmaking allow for fictionalised reconstructions of past events and subjective perspectives. However, this also seems to sit uncomfortably with the intended 'feeling of authenticity' of documentary cinema propagated by some. Drawing upon selected case studies and the writings of Bill Nichols, I aim to contest the notion that fictionalised reenactments are an adequate method of dealing with historically marginalised communities. Instead, I propose an alternative approach that lends a voice to these silenced subjects. By considering the defining features of the *vérité* approach and their implications for reenactment, I seek to explore a more authentic and nuanced representation of history within the music documentary genre.

2.2 Nichols's modes of documentary

Bill Nichols's groundbreaking book, *Representing Reality* (1991), was a milestone in the theoretical exploration of documentary film. Nichols positioned documentary as one of the "discourses of sobriety" (Nichols, 1983, p. 11) alongside those of science, economics, and politics, emphasising the genre's potential to effect change and have real-world consequences. The emphasis on documentary as a serious form of discourse has led to an extensive scholarly focus on cognition, knowledge, and ideology within the genre. Nichols's description of the various modes of documentary has become widely influential, to the extent that critics such as Stella Bruzzi have raised concerns about their perceived dominance in documentary studies, writing that "Nichols' modes are attributed as if they are not one way of looking at documentary history and production, but *the* way" (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 3) (emphasis in original). Examining how these modes have evolved and adapted to new challenges is crucial to my argument.

Treating documentaries primarily as educational tools has fostered the perception of a gap between the documentary form and entertainment values. This perception, alongside the influence of technological advances and evolving audience expectations, has spurred scholars to re-evaluate the boundaries and potentialities of the genre. Through a critical assessment of Nichols's modes and the current challenges and developments in documentary filmmaking, I explore the multifaceted nature of the documentary, underscoring its dual potential as a medium

that is informative and engaging, with the ability to enlighten while simultaneously captivating the audience (Lipson & Baqué, 2019).

Then again, Nichols has always accepted the idea of change in the documentary. In his 1983 essay "The Voice of documentary," he writes:

> It is worth insisting that the strategies and styles deployed in documentary, like those of narrative film, change; they have a history. And they have changed for much the same reasons: the dominant modes of expository discourse change; the arena of ideological contestation shifts. The comfortably accepted realism of one generation seems like artifice to the next.
>
> (Nichols, 1983, p. 17)

Nichols's modes and his writings on reenactment are integral to my investigation of the purpose-composed song in the documentary genre. The song form, commonly associated with popular culture and entertainment, has the potential to authentically convey the experiences of historically marginalised groups, serving as a reenactment that amplifies their voices. The evocative power of poetic language and music offers a more organic and resonant approach to reenactment than the conventional method of scripted impersonation. I aim to highlight the heightened impact when performers of purpose-composed songs have a personal connection to historical subjects, such as being descendants of the same communities.

I position the purpose-composed song as a compelling and potentially superior vehicle for reenacting historical narratives within the musical documentary, in line with the pursuit of authenticity and representation. Nichols's modes serve as a valuable toolkit for analysing the selected case histories while also providing a framework for the artistic component of my research, allowing for the exploration of various facets of the thesis through the camera lens.

In due course, the connections among the chosen case studies, my video essay, music documentary, Nichols's modes, the colonial archive, music transcending timelines, and the purpose-composed protest song will become more evident.

Nichols initially defined the modes to develop a framework for documentary legitimation, in terms of which each of the six modes he proposes highlights specific legitimating strategies a documentary maker may choose to adopt (Yu & Yan, 2021, n. p.). The modes explored below are expository, participatory, observational, performative, reflexive, and poetic (Nichols, 2017). Following one or more of these strategies allows the filmmaker to create a

recognisable form that appears authentic to the viewer. For example, the expository mode relies on voice-of-God commentary, expert opinions, and expository intertitles to legitimise its content. The participatory mode achieves legitimacy through witness testimony. The observational mode depends on audience observation to achieve similar outcomes, and so on.

To provide some historical perspective, the term "documentary" was coined in 1926 by John Grierson, a British film writer and producer, to refer to a specific type of pedagogical nonfiction film (Druick, 2017, p. 1). As a counter-discourse to Hollywood's entertainment-focused narratives, the genre allowed countries other than the United States to make their mark in a Hollywood-dominated film marketplace. The documentary aimed to present reality as it was, exposing the connections between invisible structural causes, such as colonialism, industrial capitalism, geopolitical conflicts, and their effects. It served as a corrective to the consumerism-focused fantasies propagated by Hollywood (Druick, 2017, p. 1).

Nichols acknowledges the persistence of John Grierson's succinct definition of documentary as the "creative treatment of actuality" (Nichols, 2010, p. 6). He notes that Grierson's view acknowledges the creative nature of documentaries and emphasises that although the brevity of the formulation masks complexity, it remains a helpful perspective (Nichols, 2010, p. 6). According to Nichols, striving for a definitive, overarching definition is not fundamentally crucial as it can obscure and reveal aspects of the genre. What is essential, instead, is to recognise how each film contributes to an ongoing dialogue that enables the documentary to assume new and distinct forms like an ever-changing chameleon (Nichols, 2010, p. 6).

An academic or theoretical foundation was initially considered important in defining documentary film as a distinct genre separate from the highly commercialised world of fictional cinema. However, the question of what truly defines documentary remains open. Nichols suggests embracing and celebrating the fluidity of the form, as it allows for a dynamic and evolving medium (2010, p. 143). In his seminal work, *Representing Reality* (1991), Nichols responded to the expanding range of documentary forms by establishing the six modes as a foundational framework. He acknowledges that these modes may overlap within individual documentary features, observing that while a mode can serve as a dominant characteristic, it does not dictate every aspect of a film's organisation (Nichols, 2001, p. 154).

Unlike other documentary modes, music documentaries, including 'rockumentaries,' have primarily adhered to the *vérité* or observational mode. According to Nichols, this mode has been commonly employed to explore the careers and lives of artists or music movements. The *vérité* approach satisfies the audience's yearning for an "impression of authenticity" (2010, p.

xiii) and aligns with musicians' aspirations to convey their artistic credibility. While other modes, such as the participatory and expository, may also appear in music documentaries, they generally exist as elements within the overarching observational style.

2.3 Six modes of documentary

Not all documentaries are the same, and cinematographers' choice of cinematic style will vary depending on the type of documentary being made. Ken Burns' discussion of documentary modes in, *What are documentary modes? The masterclass series* (2021) highlights the enduring relevance of Nichols's modes in the discourse of documentary film. Nichols identifies six main documentary genres or modes:

1. **Poetic mode**: Deviates from sequential continuity and explores mood, leaning towards emotional visual and audio content. The craft of cinematographer and sound designer comes to the fore, concentrating on carefully composed scores and visually impactful images that convey a story without relying too heavily on text and intertitles. An example is *Koyaanisqatsi: Life out of balance* (1982), where Phillip Glass's music, Ron Fricke's cinematography and Godfrey Reggio's production combine to create an immersive experience of life on earth.
2. **Expository mode**: This mode deals with an argument that the director deliberately intends to make. In doing so, interviews, stock footage, archival materials, b-roll footage, or reenactments of historical events are all employed to make the argument. An example is *The Dust Bowl* (2012), a film by filmmaker Ken Burns where he examines the causes of the depression in the United States and its consequences using photographs and gathered information.
3. **Participatory mode**: This mode actively acknowledges the filmmaker, recording both the author and the subject in their interactions. Highly interactive, these documentaries have a personal approach that expresses the filmmaker's opinions and feelings, placing them at the centre of the story as the filmmaker seeks to prove his intended message. An example is Michael Moore, a filmmaker closely associated with the mode and his film *Bowling for Columbine* (2001). While the mode is strongly exhibited, he also uses observational and expository modes, blending them to drive his argument.
4. **Observational mode**: The adherents of the *cinema vérité* and direct cinema movements advocated that exploring reality and giving authenticity to their films was necessary to adhere to a rule system governing their hands-off, fly-on-the-wall approach, capturing sound and vision simultaneously. They rejected Hollywood

modes such as the reenactments of historical events. *Dont look back* (Pennebaker, 1967) is a notable example of a music documentary influenced by these movements and filmed in the observational mode.

5. **Reflexive mode**: This form of documentary embraces the filmmaker and audience relationship. Knowingly breaking the fourth wall, examining the process of documentary filmmaking itself, with filmmakers exploring all aspects of the production process, including editing, interviewing, and post-production. An example of a reflexive documentary is the seminal, *Man with a movie camera* (1929) by Dziga Vertov—a portrayal of urban Soviet life in the 1920s.
6. **Performative mode**: These documentaries place the filmmaker and their experiences at the film's centre. The filmmaker has a personal connection with the subject to explore a subjective truth. An example is *Supersize me* (2004), directed by Morgan Spurlock. Using his body as a test case, he subjects himself to MacDonalds food for 30 days and explores the resultant health issues raised through medical examinations and scientific tests.

2.4 The music documentary, rockumentary, the documusical and the fantasmatic subject

I intend to examine the music documentary's origins in the *vérité* movements. I examine the distinction between music documentaries and rockumentaries and delve into both the emergence of the documusical as a new documentary genre and the concept of reenactment, which Bill Nichols aptly labels the "fantasmatic subject" (Nichols, 2008, p. 72). This concept offers valuable insights into the intersection of reality and fiction in documentary storytelling.

Once hailed as an authentic element of documentary representation, the use of reenactment to recreate past events was eventually cast aside by the pioneers of the *vérité* movement, whom Bill Nichols refers to as the "*vérité* boys" (Nichols, 2017, p. 2). Documentarians such as Robert Drew, Ricky Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker, David and Albert Maysles, and Fred Wiseman spearheaded this movement in the early 1960s, driven by a belief that documentaries separated from other forms of filmmaking by their idea of holding up a mirror to reality and making use of the technological advances that made it possible (Monaco, 2009, p. 206). At about the same time, building on Dziga Vertov's concept of *Kino-Pravda* (truth cinema), Jean Rouch developed *cinéma vérité* in France. It is interesting to note that Vertov's major work, *Man with a movie camera* (1929), initially shot mainly in the observational mode, takes on a life of its own during production with substantial effects and deliberate in-camera techniques invented by Vertov. For this reason, it is cited by Nichols as closer to the reflexive mode

favoured by the essay film. Nichols categorises *vérité* as falling primarily in the category of the observational mode, although it occasionally exhibits elements of the participatory mode. Adherents of this style assert that unrehearsed and unmanipulated footage captured on camera represents a better version of authenticity. Anything else is deemed fabricated and inauthentic, including reenactments. *Vérité* takes this further by utilising the camera to provoke and reveal hidden truths through the active participation of the cinematographer (Nichols, 2008, p. 72).

While reenactment has regained popularity in subsequent years, the observational mode remains resilient in music documentaries. It is essential to understand that the various movements associated with the observational mode were not solely a result of the availability of portable equipment. They were also supported by solid theoretical principles embraced by documentarians of the time. Musicians, who were part of the counterculture movement alongside these filmmakers, were sympathetic to the mode's principles of authenticity and truth-telling evident in the *Cinema du réel* 1980 festival catalogue, where Edgar Morin described *cinéma vérité* as differing from direct cinema:

> The type of cinema that poses the most profound and complex problems concerning illusion, irreality, and fiction is indeed the cinema of the real, its same task being to face the most difficult problem asked by philosophy for two thousand years, that of the nature of reality.
>
> (Coover, 2009)

The rockumentary and the music documentary differ in subtle ways. The rockumentary strongly emphasises showing over telling, rigidly privileging the documentary's visual capabilities over patterns of exposition in the observational mode. It relentlessly foregrounds the musicians' performance, with the camera following the musicians on stage. The music documentary may share some of this but is more provocative and concerned with exposition, involving itself with off-stage issues, engaging in interviews, etc. Rouch himself, who coined the term *cinéma vérité*, rejected that documentary could be purely observational believing once there was the presence of the camera, behaviour inevitably changed. For Rouch, the goal of *vérité* was not just to document reality but to find a deeper truth within it. He believed that the filmmaker's interaction with the subject could reveal aspects of reality that were not immediately apparent, offering insights into the human condition. (Coover, 2009)

When Film theorist Brian Winston states, "[d]irect cinema made the rock performance/tour movie into the most popular and commercially viable documentary form thus far" (1995, p. 205), He feels that the opposite may be true: "[t]he rockumentary (music documentary) turned

direct cinema into a commercially and widely available form" (Beattie, 2005, p. 106).

It is important to pause at this point and consider the attraction of *Cinema Vérité* for the musician. This may partly be that *vérité* documentary *appears* more authentic, for this, we need to consider the 'Zapruder effect'.

As described by documentary theoretician Stella Bruzzi (2006, p. 18), this highlights the remarkable transformation of a grainy, jumpy, and accidental home movie filmed by Abraham Zapruder during the Kennedy assassination into one of the most significant films of its era. Despite its low technical quality, the content of the Zapruder film became immensely important, eventually leading it to be recognized as shorthand in American film schools for footage of extreme significance despite its technical limitations. Following the assassination, students and filmmakers sought to emulate the style of the Zapruder footage, viewing it as a model for capturing raw, unfiltered moments. Bruzzi records how Patricia Zimmerman notes this phenomenon, particularly in reference to home movies, observing how the American avant-garde embraced the home-movie style as a formal manifestation of spontaneous and untampered filmmaking. This appropriation of the Zapruder style underscores its enduring impact on the broader cinematic language and its influence on the perception of authenticity and immediacy in filmmaking.

As we will see in the DA Pennebaker film *Dont look back* (1967), a film considered a seminal example of the music documentary genre, new equipment, financial practicality and a filmmaker's desire to capture a new kind of intimate connection with his subjects led to the film being similarly influential to filmmakers and musicians in the music documentary genre.

The distinctive look of the film, black and white 16mm, observational and participatory with a feeling that the subjects were aware of the presence of the camera, has been emulated by subsequent music documentaries into the present in a similar way to how the 'Zapruder Effect' was used to convey a feeling of authenticity. A notable example was Madonna's *Truth or Dare* (1991), which, until *Fahrenheit 9/11* in 2004, was the highest-grossing documentary in history. Director Alek Keshishian made much of the *cinéma vérité* influence, alluding to *Dont look back*. (Jacobs, 2021)

2.5 Case study 1: *Dont*[2] *look back* (1967) – The observational mode & the music documentary



Figure 1. Dylan performs as the teacher in "Subterranean homesick blues" while his accomplices, the poet Alan Ginsberg and the folksinger Bob Neuwirth, perform as extras in the background. A scene from *Dont look back*, London, 1965. D. A. Pennebaker, courtesy Morrison Hotel Gallery

To examine the evolution and characteristics of the music documentary, I have selected D. A. Pennebaker's groundbreaking film, *Dont look back* (1967), as a primary case study. Widely regarded as the first music documentary, this film continues to resonate and retain its appeal. Pennebaker, a prominent figure in the direct cinema and *vérité* movement, embodied the counterculture movement of the time by capturing legendary musicians and behind-the-scenes political drama (Bradshaw, 2019).

Dont look back[2] is a suitable launching point for exploring how the music documentary came to be and analysing the form through Nichols's modes. I will also investigate how the film establishes a deep connection with its subject, highlighting the affinity between the

[2] [2] The missing apostrophe was intentional on Pennebaker's part.

documentarian and the musician. This approach necessitates a collaborative partnership at its core, with the musician and documentarian simultaneously engaging in the artistic processes of filmmaking and songwriting, utilising purpose-composed verses as a form of reenactment.

The film, however, opens with a sequence that immediately contradicts the idea of *vérité* filmmaking. It's a performance to camera and a statement by the young Dylan. It exemplifies the collaborative act between the director and songwriter, showcasing a purpose-composed song as the sort of reenactment I envisage as Nichol's fantasmatic act. At the time, this was something different in a documentary, and there seemed to be little precedent. (Some consider the film segment to be the first music video.) It should, in some ways, be considered a reenactment, as I intend to argue.

Pennebaker's filmmaking process was not bound by rigid dogma. Instead, he seemed to have arrived at the film's structure serendipitously, guided by artistic ideas and embracing flexibility and openness, illustrating how the documentarian and musician must approach the reenactment with adaptability and creativity to achieve the desired impact.

At the time of Pennebaker's passing in 2019 at the age of 95, Peter Bradshaw wrote in *The Guardian* about the legacy of the film in glowing terms:

> *Dont Look Back* is […] a movie showing Bob Dylan's 1965 British concert tour with all its thrilling immediacy, intimacy, and fluidity – and its sense of a wittily contrived set-piece; it was a 60s classic which nonetheless looked forward, setting the scene (paradoxically) for the Brit rock invasion of the United States, for pop videos, concert movies (with a behind-the-scenes language that helped underpin mockumentary comedy), our ideas of celebrity and its pressures, even reality TV.
>
> (Bradshaw, 2019 p. 2)

Shot with a 16mm handheld camera in black-and-white, *Dont look back* challenged contemporary cinematic norms. Its reputation and influence have continued to grow since its release in 1967, and the film was recognised as one of the top ten documentaries of all time in the British Film Institute's authoritative poll of movie industry experts in 2014 (*Time Magazine*, 2016, n. p.).

As Peter Bradshaw (2019, n.p) notes, "[a]gain and again, Pennebaker captured lightning in a bottle of his invention." Reflecting on the technological advances of the time, Pennebaker highlighted the sigificance of the

portable camera with synchronised audio and film recording: "You've got to remember that this was the time when there was no portable camera that was sync. So, it looks like we were doing something nobody else had done because the technology had changed" (*Time Magazine*, 2016, n. p.).

While technological determinism alone cannot be credited with the emergence of the documentary movement of direct cinema and *vérité*, there is a connection between filmmakers' artistic concerns and their desire to utilise more portable film equipment. The interaction between artists and technology also has a playful aspect as they explore the possibilities that arise when new equipment is placed in their hands. As Pennebaker has commented, he aimed to capture his subjects in an intimate and unguarded way that was previously impossible (*Time Magazine*, 2016, n. p.). This ability of cinematographers to immerse themselves within the scene means that the audience has to discover what is happening and form their own opinions as the film unfolds. The result is a different and immersive experience for viewers.

It seems, according to Pennebaker, that the *vérité* inspired music documentary movement emerged as much from artistic intention and financial realities of the time rather than as a result of any theoretical commitment. Although this was during the counterculture movement of the 1960s, when societal norms were challenged and radical ideas were the order of the day, Pennebaker cited other concerns. In an interview with Clayton Dillard published in *Slant Magazine* (Dillard, 2015, n. p.), Pennebaker commented that he never classified his work as 'documentary' because, at that time, "the minute you said documentary to a theatre buyer or distributor, they went somewhere else. It wasn't an audience attractor" (Dillard, 2015, n. p.). Instead, he likened his films to home movies: "[b]ecause one person makes them and [they are] not made with the expectancy of a large return. They're made the way music is written or books. It's just one person's take on what's happening around them" (Dillard, 2015, n. p.). Pennebaker's commentary reflects a maverick operation driven by artistic exploration and not yet informed by theoretical thinking. That came later when Pennebaker aligned himself with filmmakers with similar concerns, such as the Maysels brothers.

He describes the appeal of this style, which would eventually become the dominant mode for music documentarians: "You shouldn't be the adversary with a lot of equipment to protect you. You should be vulnerable just as the people you film are vulnerable" (Dillard, 2015, n. p.). This mutually complementary collaboration between musician and filmmaker

contributes to the enduring appeal of the music documentary and is at the heart of my motivation for the reenactments presented in the essay film submitted as the creative component of this research. Inspired by Dylan and Pennebaker deliberately creating the ideal playground for two kinds of artists to interact, thereby giving birth to a new form, this collaborative relationship underpins my proposal for the fantasmatic reenactment. The musician is invited to compose a narrative song, visualised with the filmmaker's artistic input during the music documentary reenactment. At that moment, the musician and documentarian need to act in concert: the musician is the means through which the filmmaker must create, and the filmmaker is the agent who must record the act and provide the musician with the context for the song. The roles of filmmaker and musician are not separate here.

Further analysis of this scene is important in understanding the argument that reenactment in the music documentary need not be limited to Hollywood-style notions of the term which are frequently associate with the historical recreation of scenes in documentaries such as the dressing of actors in period costume. Bradshaw expands the reading of the scene as follows:

> When *Saturday Night Live* did a sketch with Hillary Clinton at the door of a state "elector", mutely begging her to vote for anyone but Donald Trump with a series of flashcards, of course, everyone saw the reference to *Love Actually*. But the great meme-ancestor of that moment was Bob Dylan standing in an alley behind the Savoy Hotel in London in Pennebaker's classic 1967 film *Dont Look Back* and with deadpan aplomb unveiling a succession of flashcards to *Subterranean Homesick Blues* with key lyrics punningly misspelt – and he did the whole thing in one continuous take – not easy.
>
> (Bradshaw, 2019, n. p.)

Bradshaw hypothesises that Dylan was staging a simulation (reenactment) of a classroom environment, performing the role of an educator. Dylan would undoubtedly have been acquainted with flashcards, a cornerstone of American primary education, which is strongly echoed in this scene. Was his intent to take these journalists and academics back to the schoolroom metaphorically? As Bradshaw alludes, 'Splaining,' or ironically clarifying, to these 'uncool oldsters' who are hard-of-hearing, mockingly belittling their struggle to decipher the meaning of his lyrics and the counterculture.

The sequence takes on a performative and poetic quality distinct from the remainder of the film, which adheres closer to the *vérité*-influenced observational and participatory style while

preserving the same 'feel' or tone as the rest of the documentary. There is no 'dressing up and acting' here. Dylan remains Dylan, with the flashcards merely used as props. It is possible to interpret this sequence as what Nichols identifies as the "fantasmatic act" despite its being an integral part of the film. According to Nichols, "Reenactments, the more or less authentic re-creation of prior events, provided a staple element of documentary representation until they were slain by the 'vérité boys' of the 1960s" (2008, p. 73), suggesting that D. A. Pennebaker, one Nichols' "vérité boys" was inherently against the notion of reenactment. While this might hold some truth, it is apparent that from the blending of styles in *Don't look back*, Pennebaker harmoniously accommodates both perspectives.

Supporting this blended approach within his use of *vérité,* Pennebaker alludes to a methodology that leans more towards artistic invention than merely the observational approach of direct cinema. He is profoundly embedded in the scenes, right down to his quirky 'Merry Prankster' top hat, hardly the 'fly on the wall' stance championed by direct cinema. This more provocative approach nevertheless sits more comfortably in the *vérité* movement than the direct movement.



Figure 2. D. A. Pennebaker (top hat) filming Dylan in *Don't look back.*

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The following case is that of a documusical, and the focus shifts to the role of the purpose-composed song in the documusical.

2.6 Case study 2: *Prison songs* (2015) – The purpose-composed song as the reenactment

The Australian documentary *Prison songs* (2015) features purpose-composed song performances as a form of reenactment within the documusical subgenre. Unlike the music documentary, the documusical occupies a distinct space, exhibiting similarities to fictional film musicals by incorporating music and dance.

Originating in the United Kingdom, the documusical represents a convergence of non-fictional and fictional television. According to Derek Paget and Jane Roscoe (2006), it is characterised by the use of "*purpose-composed* verse, music, and song within a documentary setting" (Paget & Roscoe, 2006, n. p.). Filmmaker Brian Hill and writer Simon Armitage are credited with inventing this subgenre with their work *Drinking for England* (Watts, 2002).

Paget and Roscoe (2006) distinguish the documusical from mockumentaries by emphasising its more provocative nature in combining non-fictional content with performance. They argue that the documusical expands the possibilities of the post-documentary era as described by John Corner (2000) and reflects the increasing interplay between factual and imaginative ways of seeing in contemporary media (Paget & Roscoe, 2006, p. 2). This interaction between fact-based approaches and artistic technique can be observed across various performing and expressive arts disciplines. Paget and Roscoe (2006) describe the documusical as a "seriously playful" form, and *Prison songs* (2015) exemplifies the use of participatory and performative modes with elements of the observational, intertwining purpose-composed songs in line with the themes explored in this thesis.

Lesley Speed characterises *Prison songs* (2015) as a performative documentary where poetic expression supplants conventional screen discourses of sobriety (Speed, 2019, p. 2). The film opens with typical observational and participatory documentary shots, showcasing a day in Berrimah prison. During an interview in the participatory mode, Max Lee, a mixed-race indigenous Australian prisoner, shares his story. Suddenly, a reggae beat emerges, and the film cuts to an observational prison scene before returning to Max as he breaks into song directly to the camera. This genre shift is surprising and playful, marking a clear departure from the observational and participatory modes. The incorporation of reggae music in the film resonates with indigenous Australians, who view it as their music, a means of self-expression.



Figure 3. Max Lee, an inmate of Berrimah Prison from Prison Songs

According to Paget and Roscoe (2006), Hill's films, including *Prison Songs*, involve a collaborative process in which professional writers develop songs based on participant interviews. The participants then record and mime the songs, similar to the practice in promotional music videos. This approach creates a feeling akin to that of a fictional musical. For *Prison Songs*, the press kit reports that Kelrick Martin's team worked with prison support staff and management to develop the music (Speed, 2019, pp. 6, 9-10). Professional songwriters Shellie Morris and Casey Bennetto incorporated interviewees' words into the music, but the inmates had the final say on the lyrics (Speed, 2019, p. 3). In the press kit, Bennetto explains that the song "In the middle" was primarily rewritten by the two inmates, Max and Dale, in their rap performance dealing with their mixed-race origins (Speed, 2019). The film's emotional peak is reached with Bernadine's gospel number, "God has a reason," which delves into spirituality and redemption. The song presents a personal interpretation of religion in prison, drawing on their hopes and dreams of a life beyond confinement (Speed, 2019).

This technique, which allows performers to use their voices, can also be seen in the subsequent case study, *Afrikaaps* (2010). One criticism of *Prison songs* is the perceived overproduced quality of the songs due to the lip-sync method, which may create a sense of distance between the performers and the audience. However, this is a minor complaint and not applicable to *Afrikaaps*, which adopts a different approach. Performing songs directly to the

camera, with the sound being performed in real-time, is certainly in the spirit of *vérité* filmmaking. This combining of diegetic performances, where the sound we hear is being performed simultaneously, is cognate to the site-specific performance of purpose-composed songs by descendants of historically dispossessed individuals, as envisioned in this research. The chapter will explore the significance of historical sites and their ability to evoke emotion, even when events have left no visible traces. In situ, live performances may have a more emotionally complex effect than the post-synch versions used in *Prison songs*.

In exploring the documusical as a form for giving marginalised individuals a voice, it is essential to consider the second part of the research question, which involves allowing those no longer present to speak. This aspect raises the challenge of finding suitable performers effectively to portray these individuals in reenactments. To address this, I have examined two South African documentaries and a music video that provide different approaches to localising and tackling the issue. These case studies, originating from the Western Cape region, shed light on different facets of the same question. Additionally, they allow me to reflect on my role as an outsider, offering my perspective on these narratives.

2.7 Case studies 3 and 4: *Afrikaaps* (2010) and *The voice behind the wall – die ongetemde stem* (2022). Finding historical voices - Two sides to the coin

Afrikaaps (2010) and *The voice behind the wall* (2022) share common ground in exploring historically contested aspects of the Afrikaans language, albeit from different perspectives and employing different documentary modes. They both critique the historical archive, focusing on language as a control tool and the resultant historical marginalisation of certain voices. Both films also recognise the entertainment potential of the music documentary form to reach a broad audience interested in the subject matter. They utilise purpose-composed songs and enlist experts to communicate the content effectively.

2.7.1 *Afrikaaps* (Valley, 2010)

Afrikaaps is primarily concerned with language and race in South Africa, specifically, the Western Cape. The film uses purpose-composed songs from descendants of the early Cape Colony's historically marginalised and enslaved communities. Presented as a play within a film, *Afrikaaps* has an unusual structure. The cameras capture the action and subjects in a fly-on-the-wall manner. At the same time, director Dylan Valley employs an expository voice-over with a reflective tone, resembling a voice-of-God approach.

The film also incorporates archival footage, often used ironically to challenge the authority of colonial powers. Expert testimony from recognised scholars and academics further contributes to the expository mode. While the purpose-composed songs in *Afrikaaps* are not used as reenactments in the film, they function as reenactments within the play presented in the film. The overall style of *Afrikaaps* is *vérité*, encompassing the observational and participatory modes described by Nichols.

The film's strength lies in its deployment of purpose-composed songs performed by descendants of previously colonised subjects. These function as reenactments that affirmatively reframe their ancestors' experiences, bringing them from the margins to the forefront. With the support of expert commentators, the film effectively establishes an empowering connection between the authors of the songs and their ancestors, giving the ancestors a voice and the opportunity to express themselves through the performers. Furthermore, the film delves into the world of the performers, who use their contemporary sounds to communicate playfully serious entertainment to a younger audience. Through their artistic expression, community members rightfully claim their place as the authors of a language historically weaponised against them. They thereby reclaim Afrikaans as their language and assert their cultural identity.

The importance of language in the South African context is emphasised by academic and linguist Christopher Stroud, who declares that language *is* race:

> Practices and representations of language comprise a particular category of racialisation discourse. It is against this that the documentary *Afrikaaps* is of interest for understanding the idea of Linguistic Citizenship. The documentary presents a richly alternative representation and celebration of Afrikaans that shifts the significance of racial categories. Afrikaaps is fundamentally about reclaiming ownership and authority over Afrikaans – a powerful tool of White racial hegemony throughout South Africa's history – and, in so doing, rethinking race.
>
> (Stroud, 2018: P. 21)

Through *Afrikaaps,* Valley attempts an "act of reclamation" (Williams, 2016; see footnote 3) of the indigenous language, Afrikaans, or Afrikaaps, from which the film gets its name. It claims that this is no mere *gamtaal,*[33] 'kitchen' dialect or 'gangster' language spoken by poor,

[3] [3] *Gam*, referring to one of the sons of Noah, carries a sense of deep shame and being cursed (Quintin Williams, *Mail and Guardian* 15 Dec. 2016, accessed 9 Jan 2023).

uneducated people, but a language originating as a slave creole, emerging through the contact between Dutch, French, English, Portuguese, English, Tamil, Arabic, and Malay speakers, including the Khoi and San languages of the local population. Featuring prominently in this story are the Khoi – also referred to as Khoekhoe(n) Khoisan. Originally called Hottentots (now derogatory), the term refers to the region's inhabitants. The early adventurers, mainly from Europe, came across the Cape region and its interior. They are generally absorbed into the 'Coloured' community and live on official reserves in South Africa or Namibia. As academic and activist Neville Alexander explains at the 8:55 mark in the film's timeline:

> As die Kho, die San, en die Slawe veral nie gedwing was om Hollands of Nederlands te leer nie of te praat nie, dan sou die taal Afrikaans eintlik nie onstaan het nie.
>
> [If the Khoi, the San and especially the enslaved people had not been forced to learn Dutch, then Afrikaans would not have existed.]
>
> (*Afrikaaps*, 2010)

The film maintains that this proto-Afrikaans was appropriated by the Dutch colonial masters and modified (Europeanised) into what it is today. In the film's description on the 2010 Encounters Film Festival website, there is this passage:

> On the surface, *Afrikaaps* appears to be a theatre piece within a film based on the creative processes and performances of the critically acclaimed stage production of the same name. But rather than depending on the drama on stage and the production's prominent characters to carry the narrative, Valley finds revealing moments from the cast's and production crew's narratives that transcend what happens on stage. *Afrikaaps*, the film and the stage play breaks ground by boldly attempting to reclaim Afrikaans – so long considered a language of the oppressor – as a language of liberation.
>
> (Mowbray, 2010, n. p.)

Stroud (2018) emphasises how the film goes beyond simply documenting the production of a play about Afrikaaps to become an act of reclaiming a language and challenging the narratives surrounding it. The film offers an alternative narrative that resonates with language and race issues by recuperating lost meanings. It calls for active participation in matters of historical importance by having the ancestors speak through the performers and potentially reshape the present world. The use of music and performance in this act of reclamation adds a robust layer of commentary about the medium itself.

The reference above to "revealing moments from the cast's and production crew's narratives that transcend what happens on stage" testifies to the strength of the observational mode in the music documentary. It resonates with Pennebaker's experience of capturing behind-the-scenes moments and finding significant insights between the live performances. Valley, like Pennebaker, has a knack for capturing those "lightning in a bottle" moments (Bradshaw, 2019), which add depth and richness to the storytelling. He appears to have discovered that at least part of the film's story resided in the off-stage moments rather than the performances. These moments, captured in the editing room, reveal the growth of the performers and a sense of something significant happening that transcends language. From the perspective of this research, the absorption of historical stories by the performers (even though the historical texts from which they are derived may be distorted) is essential in shaping their understanding and portrayal.

Overall, the film *Afrikaaps* exemplifies the potential of the music documentary and the observational mode to delve into the deeper layers of cultural identity, reclaiming lost narratives and capturing transformative moments beyond the stage.

One of the players, Jitsvinger, explains their growing sense of the importance of their mission as extending beyond language, "I think this documentary teaches kids to think more about themselves and the rest of society. Language is just one aspect of this thing" (Stroud, 2018, p. 28). This suggests that while the *Afrikaaps* performers had an idea of their history, the light shed by the perspectives of the experts enabled them to see it more clearly through the murk of the past. Valley handles this by projecting the expert testimony of Patrick Mellet and Neville Alexander onto the rehearsal space wall, indicating that we are seeing this information at the same time as the cast in a *vérité* mode. The resulting songs within the play are often incompletely shown in the documentary (with some exceptions) but still retain much of their power, as seen in intercuts to audience reactions, the commentary of the audience post-performance, and the behaviour of performers during rehearsal.

Examining the songs, we can see how the authors used artful wordplay and rhyme to entertain through humour and evoke pathos. In the following excerpt, Moenier, one of the performers in the play within the film, tells an origin tale of the creolisation of the language and current inhabitants of the Western Cape and the idea of consolidation of Afrikaans. Moenier performs in the *kletsrym* (chat rhyme) style in Afrikaaps:

> 1. Ek is 'n *number*[4] met 'n storie ou pel / *I'm a number with a story old pal*
> 2. Van hoe my mense hulle *feelings* en geheime vertel /*About how people talk about their feelings and secrets*

3. Ek was gebore daar in *Europe* met 'n ander taal /*I was born in Europe with a different language.*
4. Maar innie Kaap was ek gekap met 'n *creole style* / *But in the Cape, I was produced in the creole style*
5. Ek is ook baie gesing met 'n ghoema sang / *I've been sung a lot with a ghoema song*
6. Ek vat jou hand Zanzibar en Dar Es Salaam / *I take your hand Zanzibar and Dar Es Salaam*
7. *Dutch Sailor Boy*
8. Wat sing jy daar? / *What are you singing?*
9. Sal jy *mind* as ek vir jou 'n klein vragie vra / *Do you mind if I ask you a question*
10. Sing jou *song* gou weer, en dan 'n nogger keer / *Sing your song again, and then again.*
11. Nou kan ek mos al my broese dai *song* leer / *Now I can teach all my brothers that song*
12. Oor 'n uur of twee sal ons dai *number* ken / *Over an hour or two, we'll know that song*
13. Met 'n *smile* sing ons hom *now and then*
14. *We'll sing that song*

(quoted in Stroud, 2018)

In the song's first verse, Moenier explores the creolisation of his people, tracing their heritage from Europe, Zanzibar and Dar Es Salaam, along the early slave trade routes to the Cape. The second verse goes beyond language learning and likely alludes to an original Dutch folk song such as Rosa, still performed by Cape Malay choirs during their *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* and other celebrations, with its origins dating back to slavery times. This song is notable for its strong Malay influence, showcasing the Cape Malay community's contribution to Western Cape music. Like Afrikaaps, Rosa is a Creole version of a Dutch song, illustrating how the language and the music were adapted to suit the community's purposes. Today, we can easily perceive Rosa as a Malay song performed in Afrikaaps, highlighting music's ability to transcend time and convey messages from the past. The historical information shared with the theatre company performers significantly enriches the power and impact of the song.

2.7.2. *The voice behind the wall – die ongetemde stem*[4] (Gideon Breytenbach, Ricu Lätti 2022)

The voice behind the wall (*Die ongetemde stem*) (2022) stunned the local film community when, in May 2023, it was awarded the Cannes International Film Festival's award for Best African Film after the NFVF (National Film and Video Foundation) had decided that no South African film was worthy of representing the country for the Oscars: "No South African film was good enough to enter for the 2023 Oscars. The reason, the NFVF noted, is that the offerings failed to

4

[5] While playing no part in its conceptualisation, edit or the final product I do appear in it as an interviewee.

depict marginalised groups well enough" (Bronwyn McKay, *News 24*, 26 May 2023). The fact that this was precisely the subject matter of *The voice behind the wall* made the circumstances even odder. The film, incidentally, has had no significant screenings outside of film festivals. *News 24* goes on to describe it:

> The controversial 2022 documentary film, in Afrikaans, known as *Die ongetemde stem*, is an unflinching examination of the Afrikaans music industry and the racial imbalances that have persisted within the industry for nearly 30 years since the end of Apartheid.
>
> (*News 24*, 26 May 2023)

Although exploring subjects similar to *Afrikaaps*, this music documentary assumes a different approach, particularly when viewed through the lens of Nichols's modes. While it may not explicitly employ purpose-composed songs as reenactments, *The voice behind the wall* is a cognate film because it explores the archive in dealing with complex subject matter. Its significance lies in its ability to raise questions about my positionality as a white, English-speaking filmmaker tackling issues to which I may be perceived to be an outsider. Like *Afrikaaps*, *The voice behind the wall* examines language as a tool of oppression. It incorporates diverse perspectives from individuals representing a wide range of South African cultures, including descendants of the original colonisers who identify as white, contrasting with the casting of *Afrikaaps*, which focuses on the descendants of subjects oppressed under colonial control. Notably, the film features the voice of *kletsrymer* poet Churchil Naude in the opening and end titles. Naude expresses the frustrations of being excluded from Afrikaans, a language he loves. This exclusion may be attributed to his status as a first-generation mixed-race individual in South Africa who does not fit into the prevailing racial categories. These performances by Naude, including a Cape Malay choir, can be seen as comparable to purpose-composed songs in that they address and encapsulate the issues the documentary addresses, evoking emotional and reflective responses. Naude's songs resonate powerfully within the film, conveying a sense of being the voice behind the wall, kept apart and not allowed in. *The voice behind the wall* mounts a visceral attack on the use of language as a weapon of racial exclusion. It provides crucial details and valuable context on the appropriation of Afrikaans from its founders, emphasising how this history reverberates today. Unlike *Afrikaaps*, which employs humour and pathos to convey its message, *The voice behind the wall* adopts a more direct approach through interviews and testimonies, openly confronting the gatekeepers who manipulate Afrikaans as a subtle tool of racial control. The film evokes genuine anger in its pursuit of dismantling such practices.

Looking through the lens of Nichols's modes, *The voice behind the wall* departs from the *vérité* or observational mode of *Afrikaaps*. It employs a paced editing style, alternating interviews with experts, musicians, journalists, and authors with illustrative intercuts of related objects that convey a focused perspective on an essential cultural topic. By utilising edited images alongside interview audio, the film is predominantly aligned with the expository mode (Nichols) commonly seen in mainstream documentaries on platforms like Netflix and HBO.

Although the film does not include divergent opinions and counterarguments in interview form, it encourages critical discourse by using archival imagery deliberately distorted in post-production – a technique it shares with *Afrikaaps*. In both cases, there is an attempt to playfully diffuse the power of the original archive. I will investigate this aspect further in the following chapter using Joyti Mistry's writing. The most significant difference from *Afrikaaps* is that most (but not all) of the opinions delivered in *The voice* come from the descendants of the colonisers responsible for colonial oppression. If the "voice behind the wall" figure of the title is effectively embodied by *kletsrymer* Churchil Naude, whose mixed-race status grants him a unique position to view this complex world, I wish to reflect briefly on my status as an English-speaking descendant of erstwhile colonisers.

Although I played no role in the conception, production, or outcome of *The voice behind the wall*, I was interviewed for the film because of my involvement in creating the Afrikaans satirical group *Die Radio Kalahari Orkes*, alongside author Rian Malan and actor Ian Roberts. Our musical group emerged in response to white Afrikaner claims that *Boeremusiek* had European origins. Instead, we rejected the Eurocentric narrative and sought to reconnect *Boeremusiek* with its Creole origins and Khoi, Cape Malay and New Orleans roots. While my involvement in the project did not initially entail academic ambitions, I researched the origins and creolisation of South African music in the Cape. My reading included works such as Herman Giliomee's *The Afrikaner*s (2010), Denis-Constand Martin's *Sounding the Cape* (2013), Louise Meintjies's *This is Africa!: Making music Zulu in a South African studio* (2003), David Coplan's *In township tonight! South Africa's black city music and the*atre (1987) and authors like Karel Schoeman and Patric Mellet. Yet the most significant source of information on the Creole origins and later Europeanisation of *Boeremusiek* came from musical archivist Robert Allingham. Allingham's vast collection of 30,000 shellac recordings alone attests to his extensive archival knowledge of the origins of South African music.

Co-author Ricu Lätti noted that my inclusion in the film was based on my ability to offer a brief overview of South African music's roots, presenting it in the concise and accessible manner

favoured by filmmakers. In this regard, I must acknowledge Rob Allingham, whose significant contributions have greatly enhanced my understanding of all forms of South African music, including the origins, history and contemporary era of Afrikaans music. I willingly accepted the opportunity to participate, knowing that information serves as the currency and context of documentary filmmaking. I was nevertheless mindful that my representation in the film was limited to my perspective, acknowledging that others in the room had greater authority within the broader social and political discourse.

The voice behind the wall shares with *Afrikaaps* the purpose of reclaiming Afrikaans and its music for people of colour. However, it approaches this objective from the perspective of the white Afrikaans music industry, which has historically used language as a tool of oppression. The film identifies three distinct waves that have shaped the trajectory of Afrikaans.

The first wave involved the forced imposition of the Dutch language on colonial subjects, resulting in the emergence of Dutch Creole (or *Afrikaaps*, as depicted in Valley's film). The second wave entails the appropriation of Dutch Creole and the subsequent co-optation of Afrikaans as a language of exclusive origin by the National Party during the Apartheid era. This period consolidated the role of Afrikaans as a means of oppression.

Interestingly, the film highlights that even some 30 years since apartheid's decline, and in the complete absence of legislated racial segregation, the legacy of Afrikaans as a language of oppression persists. In the film, Ricu Lätti poignantly describes this ongoing phenomenon as a "[n]ew refined, subtle, unintentional racism – that is still happening" within the realm of white Afrikaans music.

By including the voices of the descendants of the colonists, *The voice behind the wall* offers powerful testimony decrying the way Afrikaans music and language continue to oppress in subtle and intentional ways; as Stroud (2018, p. 1) has it, "language is race."

Chapter 3. Rebalancing the tainted archive in a place of historical significance

In this chapter, I engage with the complex challenges that writers, musicians, historians, and filmmakers face when grappling with archives created by colonial masters and oppressors. I explore their strategies and approaches to navigate and rebalance these tainted archives. By examining their methodologies, I hope to shed light on the power of the purpose-composed song as a form of reenactment. Specifically, I focus on the transformative potential of performances by descendants of those portrayed in specific locations with historical significance within the music documentary.

In the previous chapter, I discussed a variety of music documentaries, including *Dont look back* (1967), *Afrikaaps* (2010), *The voice behind the wall* (2022), and the documusical *Prison songs* (2015). Each film employs unique techniques to challenge and reinterpret the historical record.

Both *Afrikaaps* and *Dont look back* use *vérité* techniques (incorporating observational and participatory modes). *The voice behind the wall* uses the expository mode to depict and interrogate the historical record. The films leverage various means, including archival photographs, newsreel footage, animation and postproduction techniques like digital glitching, resampling, colourisation and speed ramps. These strategies are exploited to challenge and neutralise the power of the colonial authority.

In *Afrikaaps*, Valley incorporates the expert testimony of two academics, Patrick Mellet and Neville Alexander, who appear in projected images during rehearsals. Researcher Aryan Kaganof describes this technique as a way of challenging the traditional barriers enclosing the "territory of academics," making this knowledge accessible to the performers and granting them insight into "what actually happened" (*Afrikaaps*, 2010). Crucially, academics Mellet and Alexander, renowned in their fields, are mobilised to reinterpret the original colonial VOC records for the performers and highlight the humanity of the enslaved individuals historically silenced. This process involves a careful reading of the texts, a shift in perspective centred on the recorded actions of these subjects, and a reinterpretation of their actions in the light of current knowledge, thus enabling them to emerge as more fully realised individuals with hopes, dreams and desires.

This process of re-interpretation through the virtual reenactment of historical figures is crucial to my objective, as it requires accurate information about the figures who have survived only as notional subjects embedded in texts. The following section explores the role of historians in re-interpreting history, especially when dealing with records authored by the perpetrators of violence and oppression. The work of historian Karel Schoeman (2009) is instrumental in recovering voices distorted by the official record. The documentary filmmaker and the musician face similar challenges when interpreting archival history for an audience.

As a repository of historical narratives, the archive has often been dominated by the perspectives and agendas of the oppressors. Given its history of colonialism and apartheid, South Africa is no exception. However, writers, historians, musicians, and filmmakers have begun actively challenging the partial erasure or marginalisation of certain voices, seeking alternative narratives, reclaiming suppressed histories, and attempting to bring the textually sidelined more into the foreground.

Drawing inspiration from these endeavours, I examine how the purpose-composed song, when performed by the descendants of the historically silenced, can function as a meaningful reenactment. By engaging with specific locations that hold deep historical significance, these performances offer a unique opportunity to connect with the past, breathe life into forgotten narratives, and reclaim agency over collective memory. As discussed previously, they emerge from a close collaboration between the music documentarian and the musician. Two artists, with their different approaches to media creation, combine forces. Through this exploration, I aim to contribute to the broader discourse on reclaiming agency and reshaping narratives within historical research and representation.

Claude Lanzmann confronted the dilemma that Imre Kertész succinctly summarises: “It is impossible to film the Shoah” (qtd. in Baron, 2007). His epic nine-hour film documentary on the Holocaust, *Shoah* (1985), has such power that Roger Ebert felt obliged to confess: “There is no proper response to this film. It is an enormous fact, a 550-minute howl of pain and anger in the face of genocide. It is one of the noblest films ever made” (Roger Ebert, 1985, n. p.). Ebert writes that when Lanzmann undertook his mammoth eleven-year odyssey to capture the sweep of the Holocaust, he wanted to foreground the survivors’ testimony and give no agency to the Nazis despite the meticulous recordings and significant archive assembled by the Germans. He spoke forcibly about how he refused to use existing archives, instead choosing to focus on the survivors through their testimonies, intercut with roaming footage of the geographical place where the crimes had occurred sometime before. In so doing, he creates an

"incarnation of history in the present tense [as] a first-hand, first-person act of political engagement" (Brody, 2018, n. p.). The eloquent and disturbing use of historically significant geographic spaces in Lanzmann's film – eerily empty and often desolate – somehow enables the sorrow attendant on events to be experienced in all its weight. The rusted train tracks and the incessant sound of trains become a repeated device evoking pain and sadness. Lanzmann thus memorably exploits the emotive power of the place of historical importance (Brody, 2018, n. p.).

Professor David Olusoga, a scholar of public history at Manchester University and documentary presenter, eloquently captures the sensation of being in a place of historical significance as one of those "[s]hiver up the spine moments" (Laverne, 2021, n. p.). On the radio programme *Desert island discs,* he describes how merging context and physical location can evoke a profound sense of ghostly presence. Olusoga maintains that although we cannot communicate directly with the deceased, we can listen to their stories and empathise with their emotions: "We can't talk to the dead, but we can listen to them, and we can try to feel something of what they felt" (2021, 00:02:29 into the programme). This notion underscores the power of historical places and their ability to evoke a visceral connection to the past, enabling us to gain insight and deepen our understanding of historical events. Olusoga continues:

> There are places on the Western Front where if you can't feel the presence of a generation of doomed youth, then I think there's something wrong with you. There are fields where you can see fragments of metal. And if you think for a second (about) what that metal did or might have done and you can't connect with the horror of what happened in Flanders a century ago, then maybe history is not for you.
>
> (Laverne, 2021, 00:03:03 into the programme)

The experience of strong emotions in historically significant places is expected, as in the case of the awe-inspiring Parthenon, the mysterious lost cities of South America, or the haunting grass fields of Isandlwana. I had such a moment during my visit to Eksteenfontein in the Richterveld, where I had the opportunity to be with the local *Bö-Sluis Basters*, descendants of runaway enslaved people and drifters. Standing amidst the vast, imposing, yet barren landscape, I could visualise their escape route in the late seventeenth century and felt connected to their struggles and resilience.

Thus, Site-specific filming is used by documentary filmmakers such as Lanzmann and Valley to resist the record of the oppressors and privilege the narratives of the survivors and the

historically silenced. Lanzmann's use of geographical space in *Shoah* is particularly significant, as it immerses the audience in locations associated with the Holocaust, using visual and auditory elements to evoke the weight and poignancy of the historical events. The insights derived from Lanzmann, Valley, Olusoga and my own experience contribute to the layered research questions explored in this thesis and highlight the urgency and transformative potential of purpose-composed songs performed by descendants of the historically silenced in specific, historically significant locations.

3.1 Remodelling history: Ethical concerns when interpreting colonial records

I now delve further into the challenges of accessing the colonial archive. As an example, I examine the biased and sensationalist depiction of the people at the Cape by a member of the De Houtman expedition of 1595, which reflects a distinctly European perspective devoid of genuine understanding of or appreciation for the diverse cultures and peoples encountered: "They always stank greatly since they besmeared themselves with fat and grease When we killed any oxen, they begged for the entrails, which they ate raw after shaking out most of the dung" (Herbert, qtd. in Raven-Hart, 1967, 18).



Figure 4. A Khoi family (from Herbert, 1634)

The illustration accompanying Herbert's written description amplified this viewpoint, indirectly pursuing a political agenda. We must also bear in mind that the published illustrations

of Khoikhoi in European publications were ‘filtered’ through the experience of a wood-block cutter or engraver who had never been to the Cape or seen the Khoikhoi. The approach produced some strange interpretations, often coloured by racial preconceptions and other agendas such as the need for propaganda or the desire to entertain. This ‘othering’ of the original inhabitants by these early travellers shaped their narratives and had a lasting impact. So resilient are these attitudes, indeed, that they continue to inform the racism of the present era. As we observed in *Afrikaaps* and *The voice behind the wall,* the echoes of this deep-rooted othering can still be heard and felt in contemporary society.

The creolisation observed in the evolution of language in the Western Cape originates with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company (known as VOC in Dutch). This event catalysed a significant increase in slavery, leading to a considerable influx of enslaved people. Historian Robert Shell estimates that between 1652 and 1808 – the year the slave trade was abolished – approximately 63,000 enslaved people were brought to the Cape from various regions, including the African continent, the Indian sub-continent, Madagascar and Indonesia. This culturally diverse group interacted with people of various nationalities passing through the Cape from Europe, resulting in a unique cultural fusion. The dominance of male settlers, especially in frontier regions, often led to intercultural marriages. This cross-cultural blending was prominent among enslaved people (Guelke, 1985, p. 453). The information available to scholars today stems from the carefully maintained records of the VOC. In every trade made, the quantity of goods imported and produced was noted, and as enslaved people were regarded as possessions, they were not excluded.

The complexities of colonial relationships, racial dynamics and the partiality of preserved records present significant challenges to understanding the early colonial era of the Western Cape. The meticulous accounts of VOC officials are inherently biased, often downplaying or misrepresenting the indigenous inhabitants of the Cape, the enslaved people and the indentured labourers. Instead, these texts emphasise the company’s personnel and the burghers on their farms – the enslavers. With careful interpretation by experts equipped with a comprehensive understanding of the era, partial histories of individuals begin to emerge. The documents also offer an invaluable record of the descendants of those individuals.

3.2 Changing the point of view: The reenactment as performed on the page

In his book *Seven Khoi lives* (2009), historian Karel Schoeman delves into the original VOC records, intent on uncovering the lives of significant Khoi figures during the early colonial era. Schoeman, sharing the concerns of Mistry (2017) and the creators of *Afrikaaps* (2010) and *The voice behind the wall* (2022), notes the largely shadowy depiction of these figures within the archive, reflecting the perspective of the VOC officials who were focused instead on advancing their commercial prospects in the Cape of Good Hope.

The records, while diligent, often cast the Khoi as an 'uncivilised,' heathen group lacking European manners or grace. Schoeman endeavours to shift this perspective, remaining within the bounds of the archival record but reimagining the scenes from a Khoi point of view. In doing so, he sheds light on the richness of Khoi culture, bestowing on his Khoi protagonists an authenticity and humanity overlooked in the colonial account.

The conspicuous lack of Khoi historiography before the 1990s in South Africa and a burgeoning interest in their nearly forgotten past propelled the quest to unearth Southern Africa's early colonial history. As Carine Zaayman (2010) aptly points out in her review of Schoeman's book, the exploration reveals "[a] complex landscape, yet one inherently bound to the debates of colonialism, its knowledge paradigms, and record biases."

Schoeman attempts to navigate this challenge by focusing on specific individuals while remaining within the confines of the written texts and drawing on corroborative evidence. Through this unromanticised lens, his subjects – Krotoa, Doman, Sousoa, Oudasoa, Ngonnemoa, Sara, and Dorha – are presented not as caricatures but as fully rounded individuals with their own beliefs and opinions, actively participating in and influencing their time.

In *Afrikaaps* (2010), Mellet depicts these people as vibrant characters with their mythologies, as interpreters and rebel heroes. The inclusion in the film of historians like Mellet and Alexander serves a specific purpose, as suggested by Kaganov: "These histories remain within the realm of academia ... when, in fact, everyone should be privy to this knowledge to comprehend what transpired" (*Afrikaaps*, 2010, 00:04:59). The aim is to reach beyond the academic sphere, engaging not just historians but also the general public.

One such example is Schoeman's analysis of journal references in 1654 to a Khoi girl, Krotoa, who was renamed Eva by Jan van Riebeeck, the Governor of the VOC's initial encampment at the Cape (Schoeman, 2009, p. 12). As a gift from Autshomao (also known as Herri die

Strandloper), presumably Krotoa's uncle, was brought in to assist Maria, van Riebeeck's wife (Schoeman, 2009, pp. 12-14). Schoeman notes that she was educated in Christianity and Dutch and wore European clothes, as is evident from a casual reference to a "certain girl called Eva who lived clothed in the Commander's house" (Schoeman, 2009, p. 14). Schoeman also ascertains that by 1657, Eva was "now living here permanently and speaking Dutch well and Portuguese reasonably" (Schoeman, 2009, p. 15). At this juncture, Krotoa (Eva) emerges as the most dependable Khoi interpreter and garners more substantial coverage in the records.

Quoting from Van Riebeeck's journals, Schoeman writes that Eva/Krotoa asked to visit her family across the mountain, asking for "a supply of copper, iron, beads, tobacco, bread and brandy as a reward for her services as interpreter, to serve as presents for her mother and everyone she might visit" (2009, p. 17). This excerpt from Van Riebeek's journal offers an intriguing snapshot of Krotoa as a distinct individual.

> After which she departed towards evening, with fair Dutch words and courteous gestures as expressions of gratitude for the gifts she had received, etc., and when she reached the mat hut of the interpreter Doman outside [the Fort], she immediately resumed the skins and sent her clothes back home, with the promise that she would, however not forget the Lord God.
>
> (qtd. in Schoeman, 2009, p. 17)

Here, she ceases to be seen merely as a beneficiary of Van Riebeeck's kindness or a useful interpreter in dealings with the Khoikhoi, a young woman at home in the environs of the fort. Quite the opposite: with this visit, she asserts herself as part of a distinct culture and tradition, where her role is defined not only by her age and gender but equally by familial ties, other relationships, friendships and obligations. By this time, she had reached marriageable age and was returning to her people to participate in the customary initiation ceremony (Schoeman, 2009, p. 18). Such information was undoubtedly of no interest to Van Riebeeck and his wife.

Schoeman devotes considerable attention to Van Riebeeck's dismissive reference to Krotoa's "skins," arguing that such a comment glosses over the cultural significance of her wardrobe shift. Schoeman suggests that her 'skins' would have been more intricate than Van Riebeeck's record suggests, focusing instead on the frequent mentions of her declared obedience to "the Lord God," which he equates to her European wardrobe and conversion to Christianity. In a segment that reads like a historical reenactment, Schoeman devotes an entire page, referencing various sources, to give us a clearer picture of what she would likely have worn. He includes writings by Peter Kolb (also known as Kolbe), a German teacher, ethnologist, astronomer and

traveller. Kolb's seminal work, *Caput bonae spei hodiernum* (1719), provides an in-depth



Figure 5. These two sketches are among the 27 drawings discovered in the National Library of South Africa 1986. The sketch on the left depicts an older woman with a walking stick and poorly kept leggings; the sketch on the right depicts an elegantly dressed younger woman.

account of Khoikhoi life, offering a substantially different perspective from earlier travellers, particularly concerning their culture and beliefs. Unlike his predecessors, Kolb compared the Khoikhoi beliefs and culture favourably to that of Europeans (Schoeman, 2009, p. 20).

Schoeman also comes across some visual evidence – twenty-seven drawings on fifteen sketchbook sheets unearthed by the National Library of South Africa in 1986. The drawings were significant for being the earliest and only known drawn-from-life, realistic depictions of the Khoikhoi. The artist is unknown but presumed by experts to be from the Rembrandt School. The writing added later is dated 1730, but the drawings are considered to date much earlier, like Kolb's writings, within fifty years of the scene Van Riebeeck describes in his journal (Schoeman, 2009, p. 20).

Using these sources, Schoeman describes Khoi women's attire in great detail. They would typically don single or double-skin cloaks, primarily made of sheepskin, referred to as "skins" by Van Riebeeck or, less delicately, "stinking old cattle skins" by his successor, Zacharias

Wagenaer. Beneath these cloaks, they wore skin aprons or skirts and adorned their heads with small, pointed skin caps of various shapes. When travelling, they carried leather bags on their backs and fastened leather shoes or sandals to their feet with straps (Schoeman, 2009, pp. 20-21).

Schoeman observes that these women were often elaborately adorned with multiple strands of beads around their necks and arms, with a preference for copper or multicoloured glass beads. They wore bead rings on their fingers and large rings in their ears. Adult women sported rings cut from dried cattle hide layered around their calves. Their faces were marked with red patterns created from a mixture of ochre and fat, and their bodies were coated with powdered *buchu*, which they sprinkled on their heads. The unfamiliar scent was initially offensive to whites, but as the traveller De Greenbrock comments, "after a while, they begin to find it delicate, fragrant and pleasing" (Schoeman, 2009, pp. 20-21).

Among the anonymous sketches, one can see vibrant depictions of "dancing Hottentot women" and dances featuring women playing the so-called pot drum, a clay pot covered with a single skin, and men on the *gorah*, a stringed-wind instrument. As noted by the artist, "Their eyes are always downcast to watch how they place their feet," which could not deviate "one hair's breadth from one step to the next. At each skipping motion, the rings on their legs rattle. They also dance in the company of the men but never touch each other's hands" (Schoeman, 2009, p. 21).

To conclude this literary reenactment, Schoeman imagines Krotoa's departure thus:

> Early the following morning, she left, a young Khoi woman in a skin cloak and her leather bag full of presents, on her way through the spring landscape to visit her friends and relatives somewhere in the interior of the peninsula or the South Western Cape, which was still largely unexplored by the whites. Within this framework and against this background, Krotoa must be seen and acknowledged in the first place, whatever devious paths she may have followed in later years.
>
> (Schoeman, 2009, p. 18)

In his depiction, Schoeman provides valuable insights into the character's unique capacity to navigate between two personae: Eva, the servant and translator in the Van Riebeeck household, and Krotoa, deeply rooted in her indigenous community. Schoeman furnishes rich material for documentarians and musicians alike, offering a tangible sense of the individual into whom this young person was evolving and effectively transporting a historical figure into the immediacy

of the present. We see a clear example of this in *Afrikaaps* (2010), where experts, researchers and performers (the latter, descendants of the colonial subjects) collaborate in composing songs and performances which re-enact the world in much the same way Schoeman attempts in his text.

Through his interpretive method, Schoeman preserves the integrity of the historical text while unveiling layers beneath the surface, thus challenging the notion that colonial subjects are irremediably obscured or rendered invisible within archival records. His nuanced reading breathes life into their stories and allows them to take their rightful place in a historical tradition in which they have hitherto been portrayed as peripheral figures.

Schoeman's meticulous approach to interpreting archival records is not the only method of pursuing his objective. A more whimsical approach is seen in filmmaker and theorist Jyoti Mistry's reflections during her tenure as Artist in Residence at the Netherlands Film Academy (2016–2017). In her work, *Places to play: Practice, research, pedagogy* (2017, p. 5), Mistry discusses her involvement in the Master's programme renowned for its artistic research approach, "[i]n and through cinema, an essentially open-ended trajectory favouring questions over answers, and the process over product."

Mistry proposed re-visiting historical images from the Dutch colonies: "Rather than viewing the film archive merely as proof of colonial exploitation, as documents of oppression and the colonial gaze on the Other, my focus is on uncovering and probing narratives that expose the filmmaker's subjectivity and that of the Other" (Mistry, 2017, p. 19). She poses the question:

> Can the archive, created by colonial hegemonies, be subverted to expose and highlight the experiences of the Other? Can the narratives of those not centre-frame be brought into focus to make their histories, experiences, and subjectivities in the colonial past visible? Can figures previously relegated to the margins (for instance, the voiceless black subjects) assume a more central position in the narrative? (Mistry, 2017, p. 19)

In pondering the possible narratives embedded in the archive rather than those assigned by colonial authors, Mistry's concerns parallel my research interests. She asks: "The victors may have built the archive, but what were the experiences of the victims?" (2017, p. 19). This method allows for a more accessible, critical, and even impertinent engagement with the historical archive, as suggested by the irreverence of *Afrikaaps* (2010) and *The voice behind the wall* (2022).

Another embodiment of the documentary form is found in the expository mode, typically used to scrutinise the historical record. As outlined previously, expository documentaries advocate

a particular viewpoint or thesis, often employing authoritative voice-of-God narration. In this genre, the cinematographer's task is to curate visuals that reinforce and intensify the film's verbal argument, often through a mix of resources like stock footage, archival materials, auxiliary b-roll footage, or historical event reenactments. There is a stark contrast between this approach and an entertainment-centric expository documentary employing reenactments in the dramatic Hollywood style.

3.3 Case study: *Slave ship mutiny* (2010) – reenacting the archive

The Cape Archives in Cape Town are impressive for their extensive volume (kilometres of shelving), exceptional preservation, and public accessibility. At about the same time as the release of *Afrikaaps* in 2010, historian Nigel Worden, aided by activist Lucy Campbell, participated in an American-produced TV documentary about an uprising on the ship *Meermin*, transporting enslaved people from Madagascar to the Cape Colony in 1766. Upon viewing the completed film *Slave ship mutiny*, Worden voiced his discomfort with the director's dramatic portrayal of him as a committed historian engrossed in the Cape Archives' storeroom. In the scene, he methodically sifts through numerous original manuscripts as if they were forgotten relics until he uncovers the documents detailing the slave uprising and its leaders' fate. Worden considers this representation problematic:

> Historians of Cape slavery have certainly not remained locked in archive storerooms, detached from the emotional and contemporary implications of their subject of study. Much of the impetus behind the burgeoning of Cape slave historiography since the 1980s and 1990s came from the desire of engaged academics to make the wider public aware of a hitherto neglected past. Similarly, slave descendants have researched in the archives and made important contributions to our understanding of their history. (Worden, 2014, p. 23)

Warden believes the documentary misrepresents the VOC archive's true accessibility and transparency, underlining its carelessness regarding authenticity. In one scene, according to Warden, the makers orchestrate a scene where Warden "reveals" to Lucy Campbell a mark made by one of the rebel slaves. The director apparently manipulated the revelation and Lucy's emotional response. Further evidence exists in the rest of the film, as its Hollywood-influenced reenactment style strains credibility. The depiction of well-nourished enslaved people glistening with oil and a sailor in pristine attire (Figure 6) seem more suited to a pageant or an official event than a sailing expedition and vitiate any sense of historical accuracy. Nonetheless, the high-budget Hollywood aesthetics appeared to have charmed viewers, who gave the film a 75% positive rating on Rotten Tomatoes, a leading online review site. The contrast between *Afrikaaps* – with the performers (actual descendants of the

enslaved and colonised subjects) singing in Afrikaaps, the 'root' of Afrikaans – and the self-conscious reenactments in *Slave ship mutiny*, could not be more stark. Despite using the same



Figure 66. *Slave ship mutiny* (2010). Reenactment of a slave sale.

archives and released in the same year as *Afrikaaps*, this film fails to portray the period authentically. It also ignores the descendants of the original enslaved subjects living at the Cape, while *Afrikaaps* excels by presenting their true likeness and sounds. Irrespective of the Hollywood reenactments and Warden's discontent with his scene's dramatisation, prioritising entertainment over authenticity, it remains within the versatility of the documentary form as Nichols characterises it.



Figure 7. *Slave ship mutiny* (2010). Reenactment of VOC official with boat stranded on modern road leading to a beach.

3.4 The descendant

HemelBesem, AKA Simon Witbooi, is a poet, rapper, and Khoi activist who feels he is here to save his language, his *volkstaal* (people's language). He says, "Afrikaans is God" (the phrase reads in both English and Afrikaans), a mission he ascribes to his discovery that he is descended from the Nama revolutionary, Hendrik Witbooi. In 2020, HemelBesem released the song *Witbooi*.

He tells interviewer Annie Klopper (2020) of the Afrikaans academic website *Litnet* about his fascination with revolutionary characters in the past:

> On my arm is [a tattoo of] William Wallace, the portrayal of Mel Gibson; that movie is a core part of who I am (laughs). But seriously, I didn't quite understand that history – I['m] talking about '95, '96 – but I was watching *Braveheart* and that stuff at that time, and it shaped my life; it's who I am.
>
> (Klopper, 2020. Translated from the original Afrikaans using Google Translate)

But while the story of the Scottish hero Wallace struck a chord with him in his youth, he did not yet know about a similar storyline embedded in his genes, as it were. Then he discovered

that he could trace his direct lineage to Hendrick Witbooi, the Namibian rebel hero:

> I didn't know that. That same thing! And now suddenly that thing ... why I resonate so much with it ... is not about who, [or] what it is not ... a Scot or whatever (by the way, I have Scottish blood too) ... but it's because it's embedded in my DNA, that revolutionary thing.
>
> (Klopper, 2020)

This 'born revolutionary' realised that he needed to spread the word about his people's heritage and have pride in that heritage. Like Churchil Naude and the cast of *Afrikaaps,* Witbooi identifies as a *kletsrymer* (chat rhymer). While often set against a hip-hop beat, the idiom of his work is closer to poetry than American rap. The language of Afrikaans could not have found a better exponent of its resources. The naturally phonetic language explodes with phonetic clicks, creating percussive, polyrhythmic effects.

Recently, I was involved in filming Witbooi for my artistic component, and he has now transitioned to a Khoi identity. Part of this was expressed in his *Witbooi* video.

In writing about Simon Witbooi, I am interested in how such a figure, a self-identified rebel and a descendent not of enslaved people but of a tribe that went into battle against the colonial masters, might represent the past. While not necessarily in a place of geographic significance (though this is implied in his music video), he sings a purpose-composed song to his ancestor, Hendrik Witbooi. There is another layer revealed in his response to Klopper's question about whether he is explicitly addressing Nama's history:

> Look, I think the song doesn't necessarily [just] address Nama history. It doesn't necessarily [just] address Witbooi history either. It's the Khoi... the undertone is the Khoi consciousness, if I can put it that way.
>
> (Klopper, 2020)

According to Witbooi, identity consciousness prevails among modern descendants of indigenous 'brown' tribes, such as the Nama, Khoi, San, and Griekwa (Klopper, 2020). Their focus is on the present and addressing the essential concerns of their community. Witbooi, the composer of this purpose-composed song, embraces this idea, singing for his forefathers and his people in the present moment.

In addition to his musical endeavours, Witbooi is also an actor and TV presenter. This dual role may be a little uncomfortable for him because he is confined to presenting exclusively Afrikaans shows tailored for a coloured audience, which parallels the experience of Churchil

Naude, who faces cultural barriers and is not perceived as a typical Afrikaner but as a distinct type within that community. Both individuals navigate a complex consciousness that challenges societal classifications and encourages a deeper connection with their heritage. Witbooi's identification as Khoi reflects a rejection of the apartheid-era designations that labelled people of mixed race as "coloured." Instead, he looks further back in history to establish connections with the First Nation people of the region. Many in the Western and Eastern Cape share Witbooi's journey as they embark on a similar path of reclaiming and embracing their ancestral roots.

The *Witbooi* song represents a form of verse closest to the conceptual centre of my research question. Written as a statement of his quest, the song is a fully formed account of his transitional journey to find his identity, an experience I investigate more fully in my accompanying film.

Both films selected for the case study, *Afrikaaps* and *The voice behind the wall,* include songs performed by descendants of those previously muted in the historical record. In the case of *Witbooi*, the composer reveals a new history, recently discovered and not heard at school, that he wants others to hear about. It is akin to an awakening. Once the people have an idea of the richness of this heritage (Afrikaaps, rebels, heroes, fighters, historical people of rich customs and identities), they are filled with a fresh sense of purpose. They use the song form to propagate this awareness and invest in a new narrative. By taking ownership of their story, they reclaim their history and are inspired to spread the news to their community through narrative song forms. These ideas add a new stratum to the layered research questions already examined in my thesis. These purpose-composed songs reveal more urgent intentions than I had first supposed. The selection of the music documentary format is pivotal to this study, as it employs performers who are descendants of those whose voices were once suppressed, not only in the skewed accounts of seventeenth-century Dutch settlers but also through the apartheid state's distorted historical narratives taught in schools pre-1994.

3.4 The historical archive and its ethical dimension in music documentaries

Before concluding this chapter, I would like to scrutinise two additional pieces of evidence to understand better how documentarians and musicians might navigate the ethical difficulties associated with interpreting historical data.

In recounting South African music history in *Sounding the Cape* (2013), Denis-Constant Martin delves into the concept of *métissage*. This French term loosely – and imperfectly –

translates to creolisation. He describes the events in the Cape Colony and their subsequent impact on all South African music. He writes:

> Because the colonisation of South Africa began at the Cape, because slavery developed at the Cape, because all kinds of people, coming from a great many places within and without the borders of contemporary South Africa, met and mingled there, Cape Town was the first outpost of creolisation in what was to become South Africa. From there, creolisation processes eventually embraced every part of the country. Musics that were invented at the Cape, because of the particular mix of people who found themselves in the Mother City from the middle of the 17th century to the beginning of the 20th, decisively influenced the creation of all 20th-century South African musics. This implies that any history of modern South African music necessarily begins at the Cape.
>
> (2013, p. 382)

The concept of music transcending time also deserves attention. A rock painting in Tassili n'Ajjir, part of the Sahara Desert, dating from 6000 BC, shows five women and three men dancing together. Anthropologist Gerhard Kubik suggests their dance may be a precursor to the Zulu stamping dance, *indlamu* (uncountable), commenting: "It is as if time has stood still for 8,000 years" (Spitzer, 2022, p. 21).

Moreover, songs can preserve histories. The San fire dance has been documented with large groups clapping and shuffling around a fire, kicking up sand. In Wuppertal in the Western Cape, Nama *rieldansers* (line dancers), also known as *stofdansers* (dust dancers), perform a similar ritual. The Dutch folk song, *Rosa*, believed to have originated in the seventeenth century, continues to be performed by the descendants of enslaved people in the Malay choirs of the Western Cape, exhibiting the distinctive microtonal scales of the early Dutch colony of Batavia. This song, a time capsule in Afrikaans (not Dutch), remarkably sounds musically almost entirely Malay.

The core of my inquiry addresses the aptness of music documentaries for handling historical content. Music documentaries often wrestle with a moral conundrum when interpreting historical data from their makers' interaction with historical archives. As highlighted earlier, music documentaries are inherently paradoxical, reflecting various counteracting dynamics. Drawing upon Nichols's comprehensive writings in *Representing reality: Issues and concepts in documentary* (1991), I have focussed on the following dichotomies in the construction of music documentaries: art versus commerce, reality versus performance, and historical veracity versus narrative involvement.

While music documentaries serve as a vehicle to explore creative expression, societal impacts,

and the nuances of the human condition through music, they also operate within a commercial realm. They are often designed to promote a musician, an album, or a tour, creating an intriguing tension between artistic exploration and commercial motive. Such documentaries also exist at the crossroads between performance and reality. The tension between the authentic narrative of the subject and the staged artifice of the performances they capture brings a unique dynamic to this genre that D. A. Pennebaker encountered in one of the first examples of the genre. It led him to concentrate more on the off-stage elements. Historical accuracy versus narrative engagement is another potential paradox faced by these documentaries. They aim to portray historical events accurately, but they also need to craft a compelling narrative that captivates audiences. This challenge often leads to a balancing act between truth and storytelling (Nichols, 1991, n .p.).

Since the 1960s, music documentaries have not received the attention they deserve in documentary studies, which is puzzling considering the immense influence of music on popular culture (Chanan, 2010, p. 1). Then again, as I have suggested in my case studies, music documentaries can leverage their counter-culture heritage to challenge and comment on the historical archive, notably when playful alterations of the archive are used to subvert the narratives of former colonial powers. Using the song form to challenge perceived wrongs in a culture or society goes back a long way.

The music of the Western Cape is known for its use of the *moppie*,[6] a song form characterised by its humour and satire, frequently employed for social commentary, and this tradition dates to the earliest days of the Colony. In *Sounding the Cape*, Martin cites the first instance of a Creole *moppie*[5] in 1707 in a timeline drawn from the VOC archive. A man named Biron was condemned for singing "questionable ditties, half Malay, half in Dutch" in the streets of Cape Town (2013, p. 17).

This form of social commentary continues to be prevalent in the Western Cape today, embodied in the clown-like performers of the *Klopse*[7] Carnival (a tradition referenced by the performers of *Afrikaaps* during a school visit), where there is a strong tradition of humour, used in part for social commentary. Members of the *Klopse* draw a line from Biron's audacious performance in 1707 to the present day.

Emerging from this discussion is the potential for a symbiotic relationship between the

[5] [6] A Cape Malay Street song sung to challenge, deride or irritate the listener, or merely as foolery (*Dictionary of South African English*. https://dsae.co.za/entry/moppie/e04895).
[7] *Klopse* is the Afrikaaps word for clubs or troupes.

documentarian and the musician or composer. The musician, inherently driven by self-expression, may gravitate towards addressing social issues and the historical events impacting their community. The documentarian mirrors these interests, as demonstrated in the case studies. This shared motivation fosters a powerful collaboration between two creative roles, enhancing their collective impact on societal discourse and historical understanding. Creators such as Lanzmann, Mistry and Schoeman provide particular insights into how historical events can traverse time and resonate with contemporary audiences. Meanwhile, musicians, armed with historical evidence and operating within their contemporary music style, can find innovative ways to bring these subjects to life in the present, creating a vivid and engaging representation.

Chapter 4. Reflexive analysis and discussion of artistic research and process: Theory and praxis

I approached this component of the thesis with some trepidation. My experience in filmmaking spans some forty years, primarily working in commission-based film production, where I held roles as a director across various genres. My career began with documentaries before transitioning to television commercials and encompassing music promotional videos, culminating in several years as a music producer. My traditional directorial approach was shaped by the large crews I worked with, requiring a hands-off approach where I focused on instruction rather than technical tasks. Despite not directly handling the camera, lights, or editing, I created shot lists, collaborated with production designers, interacted with camera and lighting technicians, guided performers, and supervised post-production, relying on the hands of craftspeople skilled in these tasks. At the time, I would have described directing as largely reacting and adjusting to on-set challenges while ensuring adequate coverage for the editor to craft a cohesive film aligned with the script's requirements—a description I still find apt. By contrast, the film project for this research had no discernable budget, no real crew, a camera that could fit in one pocket and a sound recorder that could easily fit into the other. I had engaged a cast of eight artists, which shrunk to four and expanded to five at the last moment.

With a minimal budget and crew, I deliberately embraced the ethos of the early music documentaries, employing a single camera and synchronous sound recording. I aimed to pay homage to *cinéma vérité* pioneers, adopting stylistic choices like black-and-white filming and unscripted conversations. However, I departed from *vérité* by prioritizing collaboration with the artists, treating the process as a partnership between filmmaker and poet/musician to simulate the purpose-composed performance collaboration exemplifying the proposed

‘fantasmatic act’.

I established a rule system for filming, engaging with artists only before shooting and allowing their free expression during filming. While time and budget did not allow for the purpose-composed song, artists selected existing compositions related to significant locations of their choosing. They were then free to discuss their choices before performing in a single take without prompting. I intervened minimally during filming, including my three recorded interjections in the final cut.

I followed this approach throughout, aiming to organically incorporate all productions into the film. For example, when Churchil Naude stumbled over his song's lyrics, we followed the one-take rule by including the interaction in the final cut. His chosen location of a prison cell was disallowed by the untimely visit of a police colonel, so we performed on the street outside the station. Similarly, Vusi Mahlasela's health constraints necessitated flexibility, resulting in a spontaneous change in song choice that I believed enriched the thematic narrative. My original intention was that he would perform one of his Afrikaans songs, which would draw comparison to three of the artists who had chosen an Afrikaans poem or song (Herman Schilder had performed an instrumental). When we arrived, Mahlasela decided to perform another song of his in Zulu and Xhosa on forgiveness, given his chosen location, a recording studio built into the cells of the old jail on Constitutional Hill in Johannesburg. I honoured his choice per our prior agreement and found that it bookended Jaco Van der Merwe’s discussion on forgiveness (*ontsoening)* in the opening scene. In post-production, some feedback suggested Mahlasela's segment diverged from the others. While acknowledging this perspective, I remained faithful to the project's original intentions, allowing the film's coherence to emerge organically through collaboration between myself, as the filmmaker, and the musician/poets .

My written research investigates the capacity of the fantasmatic device in music documentaries to interrogate colonial histories. The challenge of the historical text emerges from the selective and biased data preserved by the archival record-keepers. As demonstrated through the case studies of *Afrikaaps* (2010), *The voice behind the wall* (2022), and illuminated by Carine Zaayman in her review of Karel Schoeman’s *Seven Khoi lives* (2009) on Litnet[8] (2010), this marginalisation in the company records was exacerbated by apartheid-era education:

> Today, we recognise […] their profoundly skewed nature in those accounts. Of course, the comprehensive changes in the political landscape of the 1990s, which were precipitated, in part at least, by work done on cultural and intellectual fronts, made it clear that a new kind

> of text is required, and what is more, one for the general reader who has received only accounts severely distorted by apartheid agendas.
>
> (Zaayman, 2010, n.p.)

Although we are aware of their existence, how much do we genuinely understand about the oppressed subjects as unique human beings? The previous chapter investigates whether the bespoke song utilised as a form of reenactment (the fantasmatic act) within the music documentary could offer a platform for the descendants of colonial subjects to illuminate these obscured figures, rendering them more palpable and more relatable.

In my film component, I explore this by considering the bond the composer/poet and documentarian share when investigating personal histories and performances in site-specific locations.

Regarding the choice of black and white, there were further ideas I wished to explore. With its vibrancy and life, colour often offers a realistic or 'objective' representation of the world. It can bring the viewer closer to the experience, bridging the gap between the screen and reality. Black and white, on the other hand, offers a departure from reality, introducing a level of abstraction that lends itself to a more 'subjective' interpretation. Filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard suggests that black and white serves as a valuable abstraction of reality, contending that "[c]olour can be more real than real[ity] itself" (Smith, 1996, p. 31) and stand in the way of interpretation. He elaborates on this by saying, "People often ask, 'What do you mean exactly?' To which I would respond, 'I mean, but not exactly.'" His argument turns on the idea that the abstractive strategy involved sometimes demands more from the viewer and is, therefore, more effective (Smith, 1996, p. 31). The choice to embrace black and white in my film thus reflects an intentional abstraction that invites deeper reflection and a more nuanced understanding of the themes I am examining. By opting for black and white, I intended to emphasise my endeavour's artistic, reflective, and interpretative aspects rather than providing a mere objective recounting.

Combining black-and-white presentation with the simultaneous capture of sound and vision serves as a nod to the past and a vital instrument in my present artistic inquiry. It forms a bridge between the objective and the subjective, the historical and the contemporary, the visual and the auditory, encapsulating the complexity and richness of the subjects I seek to explore.

I chose a group of musicians representing a cross-section of South Africans with strong and

diverse connections to the past. I invited them to select a song from their repertoire that echoed their experience, either recent or historical, yet resonated with their current experience. Additionally, they were asked to choose a site-specific location for their performance of the piece. Participants were asked to contribute a brief narrative explaining or contextualising their choice of song or poem. My role was not to choose the performed piece or location but to document the unfolding event. In homage to the seminal films that birthed the music documentary genre, I allowed the camera and sound recorder to 'roll', capturing events as they naturally occurred without asking the artist questions.

In choosing the performers, it was necessary to identify artists of some reputation and credibility in their communities to set the film apart from the documusical, which uses subjects who work with songwriters and composers in the background and who, in the film mime to material recorded in the studio.

The musicians and poets I chose were Hilton Schilder, Jaco van der Merwe, Simon Witbooi, Churchil Naude and Vusi Mahlasela.

Composer and multi-instrumentalist Hilton Schilder describes in the film how he is descended from Sinti Gypsies from the Netherlands, who, according to Schilder, are believed to descend from the peoples of sub-continental India. The Schilders immigrated to the Cape in the late 1800s and married into the Afrika family of Nama origin. Both families featured musicians and Schilder relates how he joined the Klopse carnival troops at age four. He co-founded the musical group *The Genuines* in the 1980s, specialising in *Goema* music, a distinct Cape Jazz style. Schilder led bands like *African Dream* with Victor Ntoni and Vusi Khumalo and *Sons of Table Mountain* with Robbie Jansen. He has produced numerous albums, including SAMA nominee *No turning back* (2003).

Poet, educationalist, and rapper Jaco van der Merwe is a descendant of the Dutch Van der Merwe family. The first recorded Van der Merwe, Willem Schalksz, an employee of the VOC, arrived in 1661. Van der Merwe describes himself as the sixth in line to have the name Bernardus Jacobus van der Merwe.

Simon Witbooi traces a direct line of descent from Hendrik Witbooi (c.1830–1905), Nama revolutionary hero of Namibia. As an activist, he has used rap and poetry to fulfil his mission to uplift his community. He has recently fully embraced a Khoi identity.

In South Africa, Churchil Naude would be identified as a first-generation 'Coloured,' having both a white and a black parent. Well known in rap circles of the Western Cape, he identifies

as an Afrikaans poet who lives in Mitchells Plain.

I first met Vusi Mahlasela in 2007 in my sound studio when he was recording his album *Naledi ya tsela* (Guiding star), produced by Lloyd Ross of *Shifty Records*[6]. Mahlasela is known for his African folk style, stance against apartheid and, post-1990, his message of reconciliation. He remains one of the most lauded South African musicians, having performed at Nelson Mandela's inauguration, the opening of the FIFA World Cup in 2010 and Mandela's 90th birthday concert in Hyde Park, London.

My engagement with these artists is as a white English-speaking South African. There is no active direction on my part; it is just an invitation followed by observation. Whatever is said is also done without my direct bidding. I deliberately chose the sound man, Warrick Sony, music producer and recordist better known for his alter ego, *The Kalahari surfers*, because he had been involved with all the participants for some time. (He is currently currently completing a PhD on the topic.)

I initially discussed with them via email the notion of a purpose-composed song response to landscape, experience, or environment. They would choose the moment and place; I would be there to witness with a camera and sound recorder. The form is not prescriptive. While there will be some similarities to the music documentary, such as the cinematography being in the *vérité* mode, the final nature of the film is discovered in the editing room.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

This thesis has journeyed through the intersection of music, language, history, and documentary filmmaking, seeking to uncover the potential of purpose-composed songs as a form of reenactment. Rooted initially in consideration given to a music documentary series, the thesis has navigated the complex terrain of colonial legacies, the suppression of marginalised voices, and the power of narrative reinvention. I have relied on film theorist Bill Nichols's seminal distinction of the modes of documentary to guide me in untangling the complex nature of the documentary genre.

5.1 Rejection and refinement

In challenging the conventions of historical recreations, I have identified the filmmaker's dilemma in dealing with competing forces: the ethical treatment of the archive, on the one hand, and the demands of entertainment and commerce, on the other. The use of

[6] Lloyd Ross is co-founder of *Shifty Records* (1983), a company that promoted anti-apartheid artists and issues. He appears in the documentary *The voice behind the wall*.

reenactments, typically resembling Hollywood-style dramatizations, can be at odds with the authenticity and immediacy of the music documentary format and place a significant financial burden on the production. My contribution is, through critical engagement with theory and case studies, to have pointed to a possible path forward. Namely, in place of Hollywood modes of reenactment production, I have looked at using elements found in the music documentary and documentary musical. These fantasmatic acts, as Nichols describes them, are traced to the opening scene of the first recognisable music documentary, Pennebaker's *Dont look back (*1967). I further propose in my film essay that these reenactments when performed by descendants of the subjects depicted in the historical music documentary in site-specific locations, shift the point of view of the historical text and foreground the subject's voice rendered barely visible in the original writings.

I reject the idea that traditional recreations are the only way to bind historical narratives. Instead, I advocate a more dynamic and evocative approach that combines purpose-composed music with site-specific performance. The aim is to overcome the limitations of conventional reenactment while seizing opportunities for entertainment and playful interaction with the archive and creating profound and emotionally resonant connections with the past.

5.2 Key takeaways

The key takeaways from this journey are clear: the integration of purpose-composed music performed in site-specific locations by descendants of historical subjects represents a potentially powerful tool for historical music documentaries. Such an approach enriches narratives, encouraging audiences to empathise with the subtleties of historical events and the lives of individuals obscured by biased historical texts and archives. By using descendants of the historically dispossessed in site-specific locales, I look to enhance the potency of their performance while remaining within the observational mode of the *vérité* movement. Among the key discoveries of this research were the collaborative possibilities of the relationship between the musician/poet and documentarian in the music documentary. The attraction of the

musician to the feeling of authenticity provided by the observational mode, with its roots in the seminal works of the *vérité* movement, has allowed this mode to survive into the present as one of the most popular forms of documentary.

5.3 Lessons learned

Through practical experimentation and theoretical exploration, I have learned valuable lessons. I have discovered that music, as a form of social commentary, can bridge past and present, making historical stories accessible and relatable. When leveraged effectively, the alliance between documentarians and musicians can breathe life into bygone events and their enduring impact. Thanks to music historians such as Michael Spitzer, I have uncovered how music can traverse time through instruments and surviving communities, allowing us to witness and even recreate, through historical instruments, the sounds that historical subjects may have heard.

5.4 Looking forward

Reflecting on this work, I see a path forward for future endeavours. While I may not delve into the specifics of my film, I recognise the need for refinement and adaptation. What was successful in this project can be further honed, while areas that require improvement can be addressed. It is also essential to consider what elements, if any, should be discarded in future endeavours.

This research is a foundation for future projects exploring the rich interplay between music and history. It offers a renewed perspective on the stories we narrate, challenging conventional boundaries and inviting a more profound engagement with our shared past.

Looking toward the horizon, I am excited about the potential to revisit the more extended series that inspired this journey. By integrating the lessons learned here, I hope to contribute to a broader understanding of how purpose-composed music and site-specific performances by descendants of historical subjects can reshape historical narratives and breathe new life into the voices of the historically silenced.

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