

# Visualizing the Realm of a Rain-Queen: The Production and Circulation of Eileen and Jack Krige's Lobedu Fieldwork Photographs from the 1930s

PATRICIA DAVISON

*Research Associate, University of Cape Town & Iziko Museums*

GEORGE MAHASHE

*Master of Arts candidate, Centre for Curating the Archive*

*& Archive and Public Culture initiative, University of Cape Town*

*In the 1930s social anthropologists Eileen Jensen Krige and Jacob Daniell (Jack Krige) undertook intensive fieldwork among the Lobedu people of the north-eastern Transvaal of South Africa (now in the province of Limpopo), whose ruler, Modjadji, was widely known as a rain-maker. In 1943 their ethnographic monograph, 'The Realm of a Rain-Queen. A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society', was published and has remained in circulation ever since. The photographs in this work comprise a small fraction of some 700 photographs taken in the field by the Kriges and kept for private use until 1990 when Eileen Krige donated them to the South African Museum. This article considers the photographs produced during two phases of fieldwork, the first comprising short visits in 1930 and 1932, followed by an extended period of research between 1936 and 1938, and the circulation of the photographs thereafter. We argue that the early photographs are less formally structured than the later images which reveal a change in fieldwork practice and the influence of functionalism. Once in the curatorial domain, the photographs accrued new meanings. We present two projects, one undertaken in 1996 by Davison and the other in 2011-12 by Mahashe, both of which sought to extend the circulation of the photographs in public spheres, invite new readings and show their generative potential. As a visual archive, the Krige photographs provide insight into the practice of social anthropology in the 1930s in South Africa but their significance is not limited to that context.*

## Introduction

Over the past two decades it has become axiomatic to acknowledge the complex, ambiguous nature of photographic images.<sup>1</sup> The seeming realism of photographs,

---

1 Interest in visual anthropology and history was given impetus in the 1980s by the work, among others, of Paul Jenkins and Christraud Geary on the 'Photographs in the Basel Mission Archive', *African Arts*, 18 (1985), 56-63, and in the early 1990s by the essays in the volume edited by Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992). More recent writing on the topic includes Christopher Morton and Elizabeth Edwards, eds., *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009). In southern Africa *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*, edited by Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester and Patricia Hayes, was published in 1998, and the Encounters with Photography Conference in 1999 at the South African Museum in Cape Town, convened by Michael Godby and Patricia Davison, brought together some of the key theorists and practitioners in the field, including Elizabeth Edwards, Christraud Geary and Christopher Pinney. In 2001 a special issue of *Kronos*, edited by Patricia Hayes and Andrew Bank, was devoted to Visual History affirming the growing scholarship in this field. The authors would like to thank Andrew Bank for his interest, insight and encouragement. We also thank Michael Godby for discussion on an early draft of the article. George Mahashe acknowledges the support of the Centre for Curating the Archive and the Archive and Public Culture initiative at the University of Cape Town and both authors acknowledge Iziko Museums, copyright holder of the Krige Photographic Collection, for access and permission to publish photographs from the Collection.

with its expectation that photographic images constitute objective visual documents, has been questioned and replaced by the recognition that photographs are never unmediated but composed and made meaningful at different times and in different contexts through multiple acts of interpretation. As Elizabeth Edwards points out, 'meanings are not necessarily in the photographs themselves, but in their suggestive appearances within different contexts, as people and things decontextualized within them are transposed within the culture of viewing'.<sup>2</sup> Photographs, like other artefacts, have life histories and change in significance as they move through time and space, as well as changing conceptual contexts. In the case of photographs taken in the course of ethnographic fieldwork, they are grounded, literally and metaphorically, by the experience of the photographer-ethnographer in the field. At one level, ethnographic field photographs can be seen as constituting a visual record of the subjects of study framed by the lens of the photographer and an implicit assertion of the presence of the ethnographer in the field; at another, they represent personal inter-subjective encounters that reside in the realm of experience, evocation or memory. In addition, as time passes, the images may take on historical and cultural significance for the people who were photographed in the past, as well as for others looking back at the images as representing a visual contact zone with the places and people depicted in the photographs.

The theoretical, interpretive and political dimensions of photographic representations were not major concerns for social anthropologists Eileen Jensen Krige and her husband Jack Krige who, in the 1930s, produced a photographic record during extended periods of fieldwork in the northern Transvaal Lowveld (now part of the South African province of Limpopo) among the Lobedu people,<sup>3</sup> subjects of chief Modjadji, renowned for her rain-making powers. Their ethnographic monograph *The Realm of a Rain-Queen. A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society*, published in 1943, includes thirty-one photographs to illustrate the text. These, however, comprise a small fraction of the photographs taken by the Kriges during their fieldwork. The collection consists of over 700 original celluloid nitrate-based film negatives in medium and large format, loose prints of the negatives, two albums (one of fieldwork photographs taken in the region of Modjadji's Capital in 1930, 1932 and 1936-37, and the other of photographs taken on a trip to neighbouring chiefdoms in June and July 1937), sixteen groups of prints mounted on boards for teaching purposes,<sup>4</sup> and miscellaneous photographs and transparencies from later years. A small number of photographs in the collection relate to Eileen Krige's research in the early 1930s in the Eerste Rus location near Pretoria. Most of the fieldwork photographs were kept for private use until 1990 when Eileen Krige donated them to the South African Museum in Cape Town, to complement the material culture collection that she had presented twenty years previously.

In this article we consider the production of the photographs taken by Eileen and Jack Krige as a visual record of their Lobedu fieldwork, initially for short periods in 1930 and 1932 and thereafter for an extended period between 1936 and 1938, and

---

2 Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 8.

3 The spelling of 'Lobedu' is inconsistent in the ethnographic literature. The bi-labial *v* is rendered as either *b* or *v*. There is no standard orthography for the local dialect which has elements of both Venda and North-Sotho. We use 'Lobedu' which is the standard spelling in North-Sotho unless citing other authors.

4 In the 1960s and 1970s Eileen Krige used the mounted photographs in teaching undergraduate anthropology at the University of Natal; they cover conventional ethnographic themes, such as village life, preparation of food and beer, childhood, wedding scenes, initiation, medicine and religion, recreation and material culture.

discuss the contours of the collection in relation to the practice of ethnography in the 1930s. We give attention to a personal album containing some 360 photographs from both the early and later periods of fieldwork and then narrow our focus to the photographs that were published as illustrations in the 1943 monograph. We argue that, in comparison with the published plates, the earlier unpublished photographs are less structured and more personal, evoking a sense of immediacy in their focus on everyday activities. In counterpoint to this informality, the photographs circulated in the monograph were selected and framed by academic standards of the time and reveal the disciplinary influence of functionalist theory.

The change of context from private ownership to a public museum opened the collection to other fields of circulation and engagement. We outline two curatorial projects – *Looking Back: Images from the 1930s*, undertaken in 1996 by Patricia Davison, which took to a selection of Krige photographs back to the area in which they had been produced sixty years earlier and elicited responses from the community, and the other, *Dithugula tša Malefokane* [envisioning the images as ancestral objects of the Kriges and the people they photographed], a contemporary engagement with the collection by George Mahashe, an artist/photographer, whose intervention tricks the audience into taking responsibility for the photographic objects as a way of drawing attention to their materiality. Both projects show the creative possibilities of the Krige fieldwork photographs and affirm their openness to forms of reinterpretation that link the ethnographic past with the present.

## Young Anthropologists in the Field

In July 1930 Eileen and Jack Krige set up a field camp among the Lobedu people, to the north of the royal Capital of Modjadji III. With the chief's permission, they pitched their tent in a reaped field high above the Molototse Valley with a splendid view across the Lowveld (Figure 1).

This was their first fieldwork experience undertaken as a husband and wife team; neither of them knew the Lobedu language and they had to depend on local guides and interpreters to translate for them and mediate their social interaction with the community. Andreas Matatanya, principal of the junior school at the Capital, became their trusted field assistant. He had been introduced to Eileen in 1928 by Marie Krause, wife of the Berlin missionary, Rev. Wilhelm Krause, when, as a student of social anthropology, she had spent her July vacation at Medingen Mission and Andreas had been her interpreter and guide.

During this first foray into the field, Jack Krige was given the Lobedu name, *Mašhohla lefoka*, literally meaning an intrepid or brave intruder, or a trespasser in the wilderness or bush.<sup>5</sup> Eileen was named *Malefokane*, the wife of *Mašhohla lefoka*. That Eileen's Lobedu name was secondary to Jack's suggests a perceived gender hierarchy in the minds of the name-givers but in practice being a husband and wife team worked in the Kriges' favour. They accepted that they would have different degrees of access to gender-specific cultural knowledge, a fact which they later explicitly highlighted in the preface to their joint monograph. In addition, within Lobedu social relations, women have high status both as sisters and wives and this would have been to Eileen's advantage. Naming was a significant form of representation, a way of knowing and

---

5 The verb *-šohla* literally means to trespass while *lefoka* refers to the bush or wilderness.

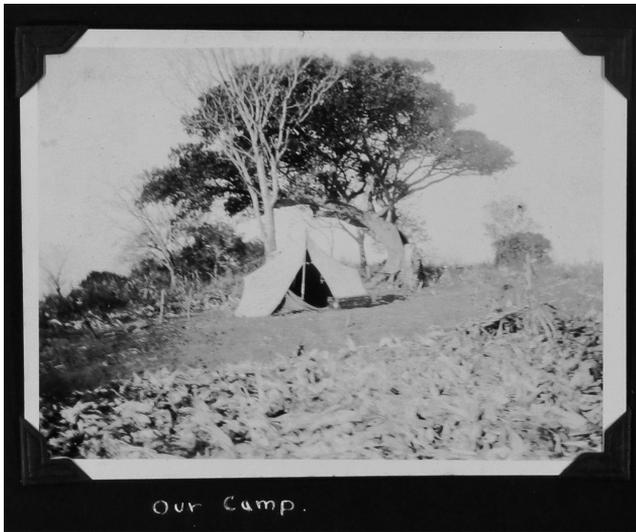


Figure 1: 'Our Camp', 1930, unnumbered photograph in the album of fieldwork photographs, annotated by Eileen Krige. Since the publication of Malinowski's field photographs, the anthropologist's tent pitched in remote locations has become an iconic assertion of presence in the field, of 'being there'.<sup>6</sup>

of drawing the outsiders into the local vernacular, as well as into a network of social relations that arose from their being accepted by their Lobedu hosts but, at the same time, cast in roles with reciprocal obligations. They were guests among the Lobedu people who were known for their distrust of outsiders and for their ability to deflect attention from matters they did not want to disclose.<sup>7</sup> It would take time for mutual trust to develop. Naming marked the event of the Kriges' arrival in the field and assigned them a local identity and character – they were outsiders but were known to be brave and resilient.

Looking back many years later, Eileen Krige described this, her first fieldtrip with Jack, as a 'second honeymoon'.<sup>8</sup> They had, in fact, married in November 1928 two years after both had attended Winifred Hoernlé's lectures on social anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand. Eileen Jensen Krige (1904 -1995) and Jacob Daniell (Jack) Krige (1896 -1959) both came to social anthropology after initially training for different professions.<sup>9</sup> In 1919 Jack, a zoology graduate from Stellenbosch University, was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford where he read for Honours in Jurisprudence. In 1923-4 he served on the staff of the International

6 See Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), 'Plate I The Ethnographer's Tent on the Beach of Nu'agasi'.

7 The Lobedu tendency to safeguard their secrets was mentioned by General J.C. Smuts in his Foreword to Eileen Jensen Krige and Jacob D. Krige, *The Realm of a Rain-Queen. A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society* (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1943), viii, and is mentioned frequently in Eileen's recollections of fieldwork, see KCM, file 418, Eileen Jensen Krige papers, Campbell Collections, Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal. By not disclosing cultural knowledge Lobedu people were actively exercising their power when engaging with outsiders.

8 Interview with Eileen Krige by Patricia Davison, Durban, 4 December 1990; uncatalogued tape-recording in the Iziko Social History Collections Department, Cape Town.

9 Our published sources of biographical information on Eileen and Jack Krige are Max G. Marwick, 'Obituary: Professor J.D.Krige', *African Studies*, 18, 3 (1959), 146-148; John Argyle and Eleanor Preston-Whyte, 'Eileen Jensen Krige: Her career and Achievements, together with a Bibliography' in Argyle and Preston-Whyte, eds., *Social System and Tradition in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1978), ix-xxii; John Argyle, 'Obituary of Eileen Krige', *Natalia*, 25 (1995), 92-95. Unpublished Krige Papers in the Killie Campbell Africana Library provided additional detail, in particular the biographical notes drafted by Eileen Krige in 1978 (KCM, file 417, Krige Papers, Killie Campbell Africana Library).

Labour Organisation in Geneva and, on his return to South Africa, he practised as an advocate at the Johannesburg Bar from 1925 to 1930. During this period he experienced the impact of cultural misunderstanding among Africans faced with a European legal system and became interested in understanding African perspectives on law. The embryonic discipline of social anthropology led by Winifred Hoernlé at the University of the Witwatersrand provided an opportunity to gain such knowledge. Also drawn to social anthropology was Eileen Jensen who had already completed her training as a teacher and was taking a Masters degree in economics, while working as a teacher in Johannesburg. In 1924, as a third-year undergraduate, Eileen had taken an initial course in social anthropology which led to her taking further courses, part-time, after completing her Masters degree in 1926. In her studies as an economist her focus was on the urban poor in Johannesburg and her entry into anthropology was a direct response to her work on poor relief. Her interest in social anthropology and African languages arose from the realization that these subjects were crucial to an understanding of the socio-economic conditions under which Africans lived. In 1928 she registered for Honours in social anthropology which consolidated an important change in the direction of her career. Later that year she and Jack married and together they embarked on what was to become a long-term field research project among the Lobedu people of the northern Transvaal lowveld. Through their work as social anthropologists, both were committed to furthering an understanding of African social systems in the uneasy context of race relations in an increasingly segregated South Africa.

Two years before Eileen and Jack Krige went into the field together, Eileen had undertaken a short field trip to the Lobedu area in her July vacation and, prior to that, in 1926, she had visited the area on holiday. In 1928, her mentor at the University of the Witwatersrand, Winifred Hoernlé, arranged for Eileen to stay at the Medingen Mission, founded in 1881 by Friedrich (Fritz) Reuter of the Berlin Missionary Society.<sup>10</sup> Despite a number of setbacks, Reuter had persevered in establishing a church and a school, promoting literacy, providing technical training in carpentry and building for young men, and advocating the adoption of western dress as an outward sign of conversion and modesty.<sup>11</sup> In 1927 the Berlin Mission established a visible presence at the royal Capital by building a European-style house as a gift to Modjadji III, for her to use when receiving guests. This thatched house with deep verandah became a conspicuous landmark within the royal precinct (Figure 2). The number of Lobedu converts, however, remained low. In the 1930s, Christians made up less than 5% of a population numbering about 33000, and even converts believed in the power of Modjadji to make rain, albeit by the will of God.<sup>12</sup>

Marie Krause, one of the daughters of Friedrich Reuter, had grown up at the mission station, was fluent in the Lobedu language and was well-placed to orientate the young anthropologist to local practices. She arranged for Eileen to have an

---

10 Fritz Reuter, 'Modjadji, A Native Queen in the Northern Transvaal: An Ethnological Study', *Report of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1905-06, 242-250. See also unpublished typescript 'Medingen 100 yrs, 1881-1981', [1981], 1-6, uncatalogued papers, Iziko Social History Collections.

11 Elfriede Höckner, *Die Lobedu Südafrikas. Mythos und Realität der Regenkönigin Modjadji* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), plates 128-129. Eileen Krige notes that Christians needed money to buy cloths and soap to wash them to 'live up to the standards of bodily cleanliness inculcated by the missionary' in 'Economics of Exchange in a Primitive Society', *The South African Journal of Economics*, 9 (March 1941), 19.

12 Höckner, *Die Lobedu Südafrikas*, 119-134; Jacob D. Krige and Eileen J. Krige, 'The Lovedu of the Transvaal' in Daryll Forde, ed., *African Worlds. Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples* (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1954), 81. The population estimate is given in Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, 13.



Figure 2: View of the Capital, *mosata*, showing clusters of courtyards with thatched sleeping- and cooking-huts after the wet season, and the colonial-style house with wide verandah built in 1927 by the Berlin Missionary Society as a reception house for the Queen, 1936 (K187).

audience with Modjadji and, as noted above, introduced her to Andreas Matatanya, son of a mission-educated family at Medingen. Having been trained as a teacher at Botshabelo, he spoke and wrote fluent English. Described in later years by Eileen as ‘tactful, wise and sympathetic’, he became her indispensable field assistant, guide and translator, and would remain pivotal to her later field work in 1930 and 1932.<sup>13</sup> Together they travelled on horse-back to remote villages to give Eileen a sense of domestic life beyond the mission; she sketched the layout of homesteads and items of material culture, while observing local people going about their daily routine. Marie Krause, herself, assisted Eileen in arranging interviews with elders at the mission and translated for her, especially on matters relating to women. A number of other local people, referred to in the field notes only by their first names,<sup>14</sup> were interviewed and provided information on kinship terms and various cultural practices of particular anthropological interest, such as rituals associated with the agricultural cycle, girls’ puberty rites and initiation ceremonies. Although this information was obtained from converts at the mission, Eileen noted that her informants were elderly and had

13 Eileen J. Krige, ‘Notes on Fieldwork Experiences among the Lovedu’, unpublished typescript, KCM 01/4/370/03, Krige Papers, Killie Campbell Africana Library.

14 Andreas was also only referred to by his first name in the field notes but his surname was recently found in a letter, written to Eileen Krige in 1931, among the Krige documents on material culture in the South African Museum. In 1936 Andreas Matatanya was not available to assist the Kriges as he had been appointed as an interpreter at the Native Commissioner’s Office in Duiwelskloof, an affirmation of his competence as a translator.

been converted to Christianity only late in life, and were therefore still knowledgeable about traditional matters.<sup>15</sup>

Fifty years later, reflecting on the advantages of participant-observation and the limitations of the interview method of collecting field data, Eileen commented, 'A drawback of the interview technique is the manner in which you yourself so often unconsciously frame your question with your own European background in mind.... It is only by living with people that you learn to understand them.'<sup>16</sup> Despite the acknowledged limitations of these early fieldwork methods, they gave rise to papers by Eileen Krige on agricultural practices (1931) and the social significance of beer among the Lobedu (1932) while Jack Krige wrote on bride-wealth in Lobedu marriage ceremonies (1934).<sup>17</sup> Although the fieldwork could not have been accomplished without the assistance of Andreas Matatanya, he is not explicitly acknowledged in these or later publications. Within the emerging profession of anthropology, it was not unusual for the contributions of untrained assistants to be overlooked in the published outcomes of research.<sup>18</sup> Only relatively recently has the role of field assistants in the co-production of anthropological knowledge become a specific focus of scholarly attention.<sup>19</sup>

These early papers reflect the respective academic backgrounds of Eileen and Jack Krige in economics and law, foreshadowing their later division of work in researching and writing their co-authored monograph. No photographs were taken in 1928 but over a hundred were taken during the fieldtrips in 1930 and 1932. Eileen undertook the latter on her own so that she could attend a *vyale* and *vuhwera* initiation ceremony<sup>20</sup> that was taking place at the time. Andreas had informed her of the event and he met her at Duiwelskloof with a donkey-wagon and helped her set up camp at Lekhwareni in the Molototse valley. Photographs from these fieldtrips were placed in an album to which we now turn.

### Pictures in an Album: The early 1930s and 1936 to 1937

The first part of the album holds the fieldwork photographs taken in 1930 and 1932, with captions by Eileen Krige; the second part of the album holds some 230 uncaptioned prints mainly from 1936 and 1937. Photographs taken during fieldwork in 1938 are not found in the album, probably for the simple reason that there was no more space in it. The later photographs in the album differ from the earlier images technically, in that they are sharper and more uniform in size, but also in being less spontaneous, as if the ethnographer's attention had become more focused on

---

15 Eileen J. Krige, 'Notes on Fieldwork Experiences among the Lovedu', unpublished typescript, KCM 01/4/370/03 Krige Papers, Killie Campbell Africana Library.

16 Krige's notes on early field experiences (1936-8), KCM, file 418, Krige papers, Killie Campbell Africana Library.

17 Eileen Krige, 'Agricultural Ceremonies and Practices of the baLobedu', *Bantu Studies*, 5, 3 (1931), 207-239; Eileen Krige, 'The Social Significance of Beer among the baLobedu', *Bantu Studies*, 6, 4 (1932), 343-357; Jack D. Krige, 'Bride-wealth in baLobedu Marriage Ceremonies', *Bantu Studies*, 8, 2 (1934), 135-149.

18 See Andrew Bank, 'The "Intimate Politics" of Fieldwork: Monica Hunter and her African Assistants, Pondoland and the Eastern Cape, 1931-32', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34, 3 (2008), 557-74. Overlooking the role of field assistants as cultural intermediaries is interpreted by Bank as a deliberate exclusion to bolster the ethnographic authority of the professional anthropologist but, in the case of the Kriges, naming the people who mediated and interpreted local knowledge may have put those people at risk of being accused of disclosing secrets and angering the ancestors. In *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, xv, the Kriges thank numerous Lobedu friends 'who must remain anonymous' suggesting that it could have been indiscreet to name their assistants.

19 See Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology. Fieldwork, Networks, and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

20 The women's *vyali* and men's *vuhwera* ceremonies which are linked to ensuring rain and fertility take place in addition to puberty rites and circumcision schools; see Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, 126-140.

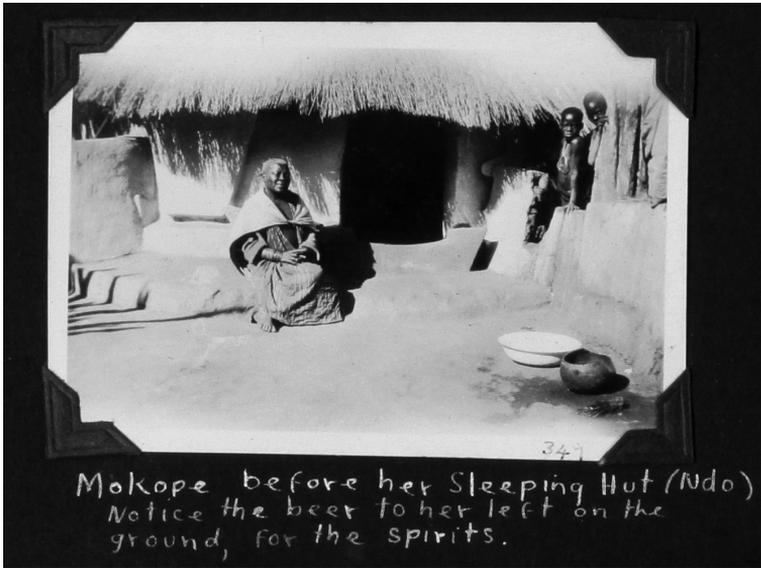


Figure 3: As a former *motononi* of Modjadji, Mokope was part of a social network linked to the royal house by ties of affinity and obligation. Note the enamel basin alongside a calabash vessel for beer (K347).

pre-defined categories of activity. To anticipate our conclusion, we associate this shift with the influence of functionalism on the Kriges' fieldwork methodology.

The earliest photographs were taken in July 1930 when Eileen and Jack camped north of the Capital in the Bagone area under 'headman' Mokope, a woman of high status who had been sent in tribute to serve the Queen as a *motononi* or 'wife'<sup>21</sup> and was later allowed to establish her own *mosha* or household. She was the Kriges' host during their stay in her area (Figure 3).

At first glance, it is perhaps not surprising to note a tendency in the photographs towards wide views and seasonal activities, seen in part through the eyes of Andreas Matatanya who is present in a number of the photographs. Eileen was becoming familiar with the local routine of domestic life and the agricultural tasks undertaken in winter after the harvest, which provided the subject matter of both her earliest publications and many of the photographs from this period. In accord with John Berger's enduring insight that the relationship between knowing and seeing is never settled,<sup>22</sup> this assonance between writing and photographing affirms that acts of looking, seeing and knowing were interlinked in recursive ways such that the photographs both shaped and were shaped by the knowledge gained during fieldwork.

The formats of the prints in the twenty-four page 'Cambrian' album suggest that they were taken on different cameras using a film that produced a larger 83 x 140 mm negative, commonly known as 122 format, as well as the smaller 117 and 120 format films.<sup>23</sup> In a recent interview, Thor Krige recalled that his parents had used a

21 Sending a young woman as a 'wife' to Modjadji was a way of building a lasting relationship with the royal house and cementing social and political ties between wife-giver and wife-receiver. Royal wives were expected to remain chaste while in the royal household and were eventually allocated as a real wife to a senior headman or given her own household.

22 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

23 The larger format film, technically referred to as 122 roll film, was common from 1903 to 1971 and was compatible with the Zeiss Ikon Nixe. The 120 format film produced 55 x 83 mm format negatives; the 117 format film, which produced 55 x 55 mm square negatives, was the main film used on the 1936-38 field trips. The fact that roll film was available and used instead of plates had the technical advantage of allowing large numbers of exposures to be made with minimum preparation and setting-up time.



Figure 4: Jack Krige spending time informally with local men, including Andreas Matatanya on the left, 1930 (K338).

Zeiss camera.<sup>24</sup> Some of the photographs were taken by Eileen and others by Jack, but which of the two ethnographers took particular images is not recorded. The annotations are in Eileen's handwriting and it seems likely that she compiled the album fairly soon after leaving the field and having the films developed commercially in Duiwelskloof or Pretoria.

Only three of the photographs taken in 1930 and 1932 were included in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* affirming the impression that the early photographs were not intended primarily for publication or circulation. Instead, they seem to have been produced for the Kriges' own recollection and reference, as visual records of their early fieldwork. At this time they were still dependent on local guides and interpreters; they were becoming familiar with the place and getting to know the people and using the camera to document their experiences. The photographs from these preliminary trips have a more informal, subjective register than those taken during the later fieldwork; they suggest the absence of a set plan in favour of photographing people with whom they were building relationships and taking pictures of what happened to be going on (Figure 4).

Far from being a stereotyping or distancing device, the camera seemed to facilitate personal interaction. Being a husband and wife team no doubt allowed Jack and Eileen to be accepted more easily but they had still to win the confidence of the local people. The currency of good relationships in the field was essential to the success of their project. In the case of Eileen these relationships laid the foundation for a life-long connection with the families of her field assistants.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> George Mahashe interview with Thor Krige, Durban, 22 May 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Eileen Krige maintained contact with her field and research assistant, Simeon Modjadji, for over fifty years until his death in 1993. She sponsored the education of a number of Lobedu students and her family still sustains these ties. After Eileen's death in 1995, the Krige family scattered her ashes in the forest of cycads.

One of the pages in the album is compelling in a number of ways (Figure 5). The central photograph, captioned 'Daniel and his godmother' is of Eileen holding Andreas's baby boy. The shadow in the foreground is probably that of Jack but, if so, the date at the top of the page is incorrect because Jack was not present on the 1932 trip. Also baby Daniel would have been two years old in 1932, so 1930 is the more likely date. The name Daniel is significant in being Jack Krige's middle name but, as Andreas explained to Eileen Krige in a letter, the baby's full name, Joseph Jacobus Daniel, also honoured his own father.<sup>26</sup> The fact that Eileen was Daniel's godmother points to the closeness of the relationship that she had with Andreas's family and to the degree of her personal involvement and commitment to them. Her own Lobedu name *malefokane* had also been given to the new-born baby pictured in the photograph below that of Eileen.

The photograph captioned 'Andreas and his family' on the lower left of the page also includes the shadow of the photographer but in this case it is almost certainly Eileen's shadow. The two photographs above this are captioned 'My tent' and 'View from the tent door, looking towards Daja'. Here again there is uncertainty about the date as in 1932 Eileen camped on her own in a low-lying area of the Molotse valley some distance from the Daja forest. Nonetheless, these photographs show that the ethnographers were living among the Lobedu people, they were *in situ*, so to speak, unlike on Eileen's previous visit when she stayed in the comfort of the mission station. Although not intended for publication, the caption 'View from the tent door ...' brings to mind the quintessential fieldwork image of Malinowski's tent on a Trobriand beach, and the more recent discourse on fieldwork and 'writing culture'.<sup>27</sup>

The lower central photograph shows a ten-day-old baby being smeared with red ochre by his grandmother. The mix of traditional and modern utensils and clothing is notable. An enamel basin and tin container are quite at home in the company of a gourd bowl and calabash of fat. The clothing of the grandmother includes a goat-skin wrap, possibly a baby carrier or *thari* to protect the baby and a striped cotton salampore wrap; she is wearing a large number of *masega* anklets made by rolling wire around a circlet of the tail hair of a cow. The young boys, wearing purchased clothes and watching this courtyard scene, do not seem out of place and, as we note below, the photographer made no attempt to compose a view that excluded modern material culture. The result is a visual document of an intimate moment in which the photographed subjects seem almost unaware of the camera.

The three photographs on the right show a storage enclosure, beer being brewed, and beer being carried to thank a doctor. Being July the harvest had been reaped and it was the season for brewing beer and fulfilling social obligations. None of these photographs was intended for publication. The camera was restricted to the role of visual notebook and the images would have served as useful references for Eileen when writing her paper on the social significance of beer among the Lobedu.<sup>28</sup>

A photograph taken in 1930, almost certainly by Jack, is of a court-case in progress at the *khôrô* of the Capital (Figure 6). In general, the court was the domain of

---

26 Andreas Matatanya to Eileen Krige, 20 September 1931, uncatalogued correspondence, Iziko Social History Collections.

27 James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986). The cover image of this volume shows the ethnographer, Stephen Tylor, taking notes in the field.

28 Except for *The Realm of a Rain Queen*, none of the academic publications of the Kriges includes photographs. Eileen returned to the Lobedu area in the 1960s but did not take photographs for research purposes.

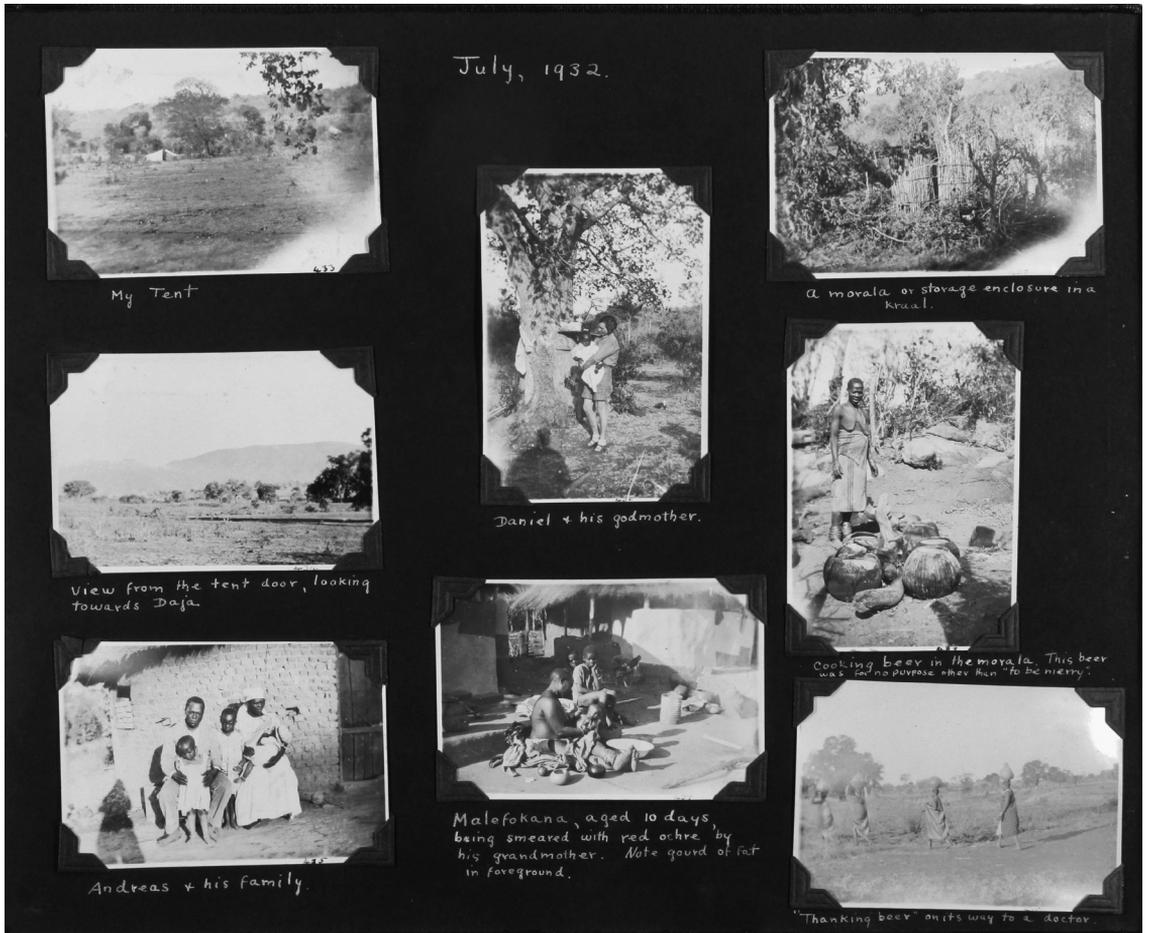


Figure 5: Page from an album of fieldwork 'snaps' with captions in Eileen's handwriting. Although headed July 1932, at least one of the images, that of 'Daniel and his godmother' dates to 1930 and the other images may also do so (vertical rows, upper to lower, K433, 434, 425, 436, 437, 438, 439, and 440).

men and in this scene the proceedings seem to have paused so that the photograph could be taken. All the men have bare-feet, having removed their shoes as a sign of respect before entering the *khôro*. Their clothing is mainly of western origin and ranges in style from overalls to neat trousers and jackets and thread-bare overcoats. The man at the back with his hands in his pockets suggests a 1930s urban style, possibly acquired when working as a migrant on the Reef.

Jack Krige's experience in European law and jurisprudence made him particularly attentive to Lobedu court cases. At first he found the inconsistencies and lack of apparent rules difficult to understand or align with his knowledge of the law. However, after conducting comparative research in 1937 among neighbouring groups, he came to the conclusion that the overriding objective of achieving reconciliation between litigants was the primary principle underpinning law as applied in the Lobedu court system. He based this insight on an anthropological understanding of legal processes made possible by an extended period of time in the field and by comparative research. The photographs taken on the trip to gather data in the surrounding

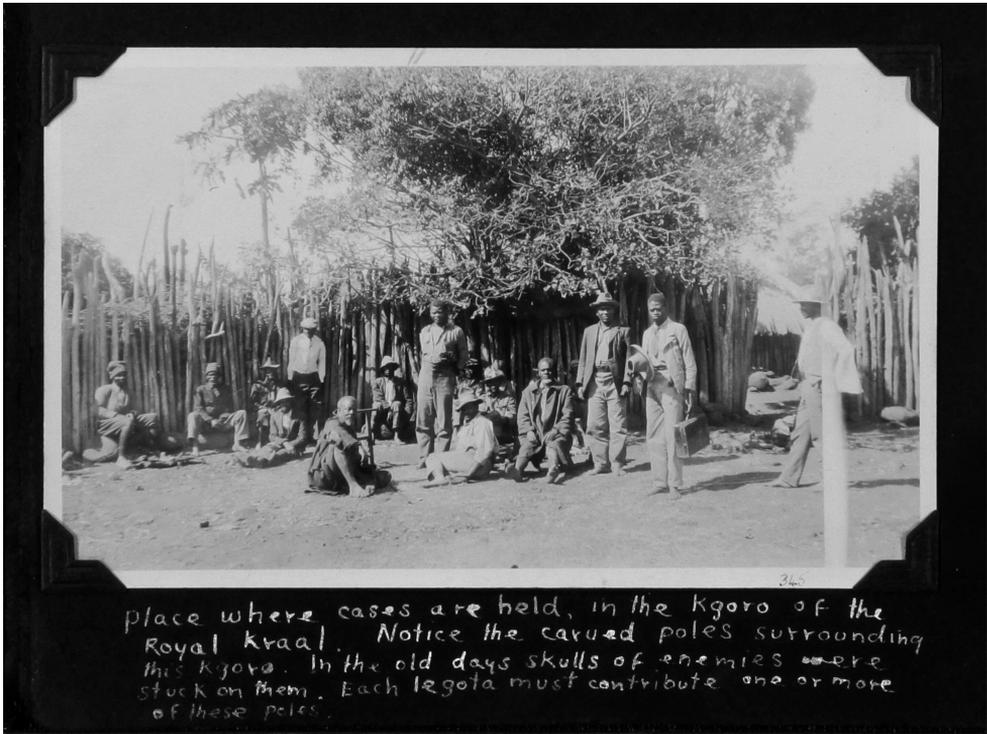


Figure 6: Court-scene in the *khôro* of the Capital, 1930. The statement that in the old days the skulls of enemies were stuck on the poles was later said by Eileen Krige to be untrue, revealing the revising of information during the research process. In 1996 this photograph formed part of an exhibition at the Lobedu capital and the central man in overalls was identified as the chief councilor Moneri Modjadji. The man on the left with the suitcase is the Kriges' guide and interpreter Andreas Matatanya (K345).

areas were placed in a separate 'tour album', annotated by Jack, which is not discussed in this paper.

In contrast to the earlier photographs, carefully placed in the album with photo-corners, and annotated by Eileen Krige, the second part of the album, with photographs dating mainly to 1936-37, holds uncaptioned prints pasted directly onto the album pages, grouped roughly into general functional categories which parallel the themes of the monograph. Eighteen of these photographs are among the thirty-one, widely circulated illustrations in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen*. Almost all were taken on 117 format film which produced 55 x 55 mm negatives, and compared with the earlier photographs they seem to follow a more detached, formal approach to visual documentation. The absence of captions or names of people in the photographs de-personalizes images and leaves them unanchored by contextual information. On the other hand, the presence of hand-written annotations in the first part of the album affirms a greater degree of personal investment in its making, not only as a visual notebook of field experiences but also as a souvenir or residue of memories.

In the 1936-37 period of fieldwork, adherence to Malinowski's approach to photography and research is striking in that photography takes place but is subordinate to participant-observation and experiencing first-hand the complexities of doing fieldwork. As social scientists the Kriges set out to understand the social system of



Figure 7: Page from the second part of the album, portraits and studies of feet. This composite page format is typical of the 1936-37 part of the album - prints without captions, pasted directly onto the page (horizontal rows from top, left to right K216, 61, 183, 37, 215, 182, 12A, 159, 176, 27, 2A, and 168).

the Lobedu people and the relationship of the parts to the whole. Thus their fieldwork programme and the related photographs sought to cover all aspects of social and cultural life. The primary outcome was the published monograph. It is interesting, however, to consider briefly some of the photographs which were not included in the monograph and remained unpublished and uncirculated while held as part of the Kriges' private research collection.

This page from the album (Figure 7) is telling in a number of ways. Firstly, the presence of portraits contrasts with the absence of portraits in the monograph, as will be discussed below. They are relatively informal portraits of people whom the Kriges knew, but in the absence of captions they are anonymous images of Lobedu men and women. From the information with the negatives, we know the first names of the men in the top row, for example the man wearing a hat is 'Moneri'. From other sources we can identify him as Moneri Modjadji, chief councillor of the Queen and her mother's brother.<sup>29</sup> In the middle row, the traditional hair-styles of the young women

<sup>29</sup> Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, 189.

are noted in the list of negatives but the older women are listed simply as 'women'. Perhaps the most incongruous images, considering the Kriges' focus on social relations, are the studies of feet in the lower row of prints. Fortunately, there is correspondence to explain these photographs.<sup>30</sup> Eileen had observed that some Lobedu people had bunions despite never having worn shoes. This proved to be of interest to Clark's shoe manufacturers in England who were aware of the Kriges' work, as the Clark and Krige families are related by marriage. So it was in relation to this question that Eileen provided 'evidence' in the form of photographs of feet and footprints on paper. These are exceptional images within the collection in their primary focus on physical form. Looking at the album as a whole, we have already noted that there is a qualitative difference between the earlier and later field photographs. In some places the subject matter overlaps, as in the case of food preparation or material culture, but the grouping and placing of the images in the album is more systematic in the later phase. We infer that this is consistent with a more structured or disciplined methodology in the later phase of fieldwork which was separated from the earlier fieldwork by the exposure of the Kriges to a field of a different kind – that of anthropological theory and scholarship at the London School of Economics.

### **Functionalism and Fieldwork, 1935 to 1938**

In 1935, before undertaking their longer period of fieldwork in the Lobedu area, Eileen and Jack Krige travelled to England where they had the formative experience of attending the seminars and lectures of Malinowski and Firth at the London School of Economics (LSE), and of associating with fellow social anthropologists. Eileen participated in seminars at the LSE and Jack gave lectures at the Royal Institute of International Affairs. Having already shown their potential as researchers, they were successful in obtaining a joint Research Fellowship for three years (1936-1938) from the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures to enable them to do more extensive field research. Significantly, at the LSE they were introduced first-hand to Malinowski's charismatic advocacy of the fieldwork method of participant-observation that his own research in the Trobriand Islands had so convincingly demonstrated. Christopher Pinney and other writers on the histories of anthropology and photography have shown that the role of photography in generating anthropological knowledge changed radically when the ethnographer as participant-observer 'took onto his own body and his own presence the functions that photography had previously mediated'.<sup>31</sup> No longer were photographs taken by a 'man-on-the-spot' in remote areas and sent to metropolitan centres for analysis and synthesis by professional anthropologists. Instead, the previous separation of functions was collapsed into the person of the observing, participating and photographing ethnographer in the field. Although Malinowski continued to take photographs in the field, these were secondary to his being a participant-observer among the people he was studying – his ethnographic authority was based on first-hand experience and his own insight, rather than on visual representation. But as Anne Grimshaw has noted, vision remained central to Malinowski's anthropological

---

30 Extract from a letter, Eileen Krige to Bancroft Clark, 30 September 1936, and Bancroft Clark to Eileen Krige, 5 October 1936, uncatalogued papers, Iziko Social History Collections.

31 Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 52. See also Christopher Pinney, 'The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography' in Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 74-95.

practice and his ethnographic writing is intensely visual.<sup>32</sup> A similar point will be suggested later in relation to the Kriges' pictorial style of writing in their monograph, *The Realm of a Rain-Queen*.

According to Malinowski, being able to communicate in the vernacular language was essential to immersing oneself in another culture and to understanding how a society functioned from an insider's perspective. He used an organic model of society as a functioning 'whole' to explain how the various institutions within a social system all played a part in sustaining and perpetuating the social structure. Before attending the LSE seminars Eileen Krige had become aware of Malinowski's theories through the teaching of Winifred Hoernlé. Her 1930 Honours thesis in Social Anthropology, which was reworked for publication in 1936 as *The Social System of the Zulus*, shows the influence of functionalism but the study was not based on fieldwork.<sup>33</sup> While at the University of the Witwatersrand, the Kriges were also exposed to the ideas of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown which drew strongly on the work of the French sociologist Durkheim who advocated that social life should be investigated empirically through the objective observation of 'social facts', following the methods of the natural sciences, in order to discern the underlying principles and laws which would explain social phenomena and relationships.<sup>34</sup> Although there were striking differences between the functionalism of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's conception of social anthropology as the natural science of human society, their positions were not entirely incompatible – both were committed to professionalizing the discipline of anthropology and to replacing conjectural explanations with a theoretically-informed understanding of social systems. By the mid-1930s there was an emerging international consensus that valid anthropological abstractions should be based on intensive research conducted by qualified scholars.<sup>35</sup> This involved social anthropologists, trained in the theoretical concepts of the discipline, spending extended periods of time in the field, usually in a remote area, and gathering empirical data that was based on first-hand observation. The critiques of the 1980s on the rhetoric of ethnographic writing lay half a century into the future<sup>36</sup> and a new professional orthodoxy was in place.

In 1936 when Eileen and Jack Krige embarked on their extended period of fieldwork among Modjadji's subjects, they were armed with an understanding that their success as social anthropologists depended on their learning the local language and applying the method of participant-observation to gather objective data that would eventually be written up as an ethnographic monograph, ordering and transforming the 'unruly' experiences of fieldwork into 'an authoritative written account'.<sup>37</sup> Intensive fieldwork was, indeed, a rite of passage into the profession. On arrival in the field, they camped in the valley in the Lekhwareni area but, after Jack contracted malaria, requested permission from Modjadji to build a rondavel on the high ground near the Capital (Figures 8a and 8b). This became their field base for the duration of their research.

---

32 Anne Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye. Ways of Seeing in Modern Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 45.

33 Eileen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus* (London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936). This work is a compilation of material drawn from historical accounts, published writing and unpublished records. In the preface the author states that she avoided theory as far as possible but acknowledges her training by Winifred Hoernlé.

34 Anthony Giddens, *Durkheim* (London: Fontana Press, 1978), 35. Radcliffe-Brown is credited with bringing Durkheim's social science perspective to British anthropology. Writing an appreciation of the life of Winifred Hoernlé, Eileen Krige affirmed that Durkheim's work had been a strong intellectual influence on her. See Eileen Krige, 'Winifred Hoernlé: An Appreciation', *African Studies*, 19 (1960), 138-144.

35 See James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority', *Representations*, 2 (1983), 118-146.

36 See Clifford and Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture*.

37 See Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority', 120.



Figure 8a: 'Our hut', Eileen and Jack Krige's field base, 1936-8 (K51).

There is little doubt that the Kriges' research inquiry and their interpretation of Lovedu social structure were underpinned by functionalist theory. This is made clear in the statement of intent in the preface to their monograph *The Realm of a Rain-Queen. A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society*:

Our main task has been to describe the culture of the Lovedu. We have set ourselves the task of showing the nature of its parts and their relation to one another. ... Considered as a whole, the culture emerges as a structure supporting and in turn supported by the Rain-Queen.<sup>38</sup>

Together with the sociological principles emphasized by Winifred Hoernlé, Malinowski's theory of functionalism and his fieldwork methodology were vital in shaping the Kriges' theoretical and practical approach to fieldwork, including the making of a photographic record of their observations. Mainly due to Winifred Hoernlé's wide interests and the encouragement of Dr N.J. van Warmelo, they also paid attention to material culture.<sup>39</sup> The primary result of their field research was a major ethnographic monograph on Lovedu social and cultural practices which appeared in 1943, publication having been delayed by World War II. It was reprinted four times in the following two decades.<sup>40</sup> In 1980 a paperback edition was published with a new preface by Eileen Krige in which she draws attention to social, political, economic and environmental changes that impacted on the social system described in the monograph but she suggests that most of the structural and institutional features of the society were still in evidence in the 1970s, although often in modified

---

38 Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, xii.

39 In 1970, on her retirement from the University of Natal, Eileen Krige presented her collection of Lovedu material culture to the South African Museum. See Patricia Davison, 'Lovedu Material Culture: A Comparative Study of the 1930s and 1970s', *Annals of the South African Museum*, 94, 3 (1984), 41-201.

40 *The Realm of a Rain-Queen. A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society* was first published in London by Oxford University Press in 1943, and reprinted in November 1943, 1947, 1956 and 1965. The 1980 paperback edition with a new preface by Eileen Krige was published in Cape Town by Juta & Co.



Figure 8b: General J.C. Smuts and family members visit the Kriges in the field. Left to right: Cato Clark (daughter of General Smuts), Jack Krige, Eileen Krige, Bancroft Clark, General Smuts, two local men and three children (unidentified). Jack Krige was a nephew of General Smuts who wrote the foreword to *The Realm of a Rain-Queen*. The name of the photographer is not on record.

form. The original preface by General Smuts is omitted from the 1980 edition and the new preface refers to published articles by both Eileen and Jack Krige that serve to amplify and supplement the material in the monograph. However, with minor alterations in cropping, the photographs in the 1980 edition remain the same as those first published in 1943 despite the changes in social and cultural practices since that time. Interestingly, the book became a work of reference for literate residents at the Capital who, in the 1990s, cited the publication as a source of historical and cultural knowledge that they themselves did not remember clearly.<sup>41</sup> In a different, more popular context, the romantic notion of Modjadji, as the mysterious Rain-Queen, keeper of esoteric knowledge and ancestral rain charms, has been widely perpetuated in literature, film and journalism.<sup>42</sup> The Kriges themselves combine myth and historical narrative in writing about the ‘pageants of the past’ and the mystery

41 In 1994 when Patricia Davison interviewed elders at the Capital regarding a proposed exhibition of the Krige photographs, they spoke of *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* as the authorized version of Lobedu cultural traditions. A recent alternative account by Mathole Kherofu Motshekga, *The Mudjadji Dynasty. The Principles of Female Leadership in African Cosmology* (Pretoria: Kara Books, 2010) draws selectively on *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* but the author suggests that the work of anthropologists was limited by their reliance on interpreters who were educated by missionaries.

42 The adventure novel *She* by H. Rider Haggard (serialized in *The Graphic* magazine, 1886 to 1887; published in London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1887) is said to have been inspired by Modjadji II; it has been translated into 44 languages, sold over 83 million copies and has never been out of print. About ten film versions of *She* have been made, the most recent in 2001. Bernhard H. Dickey's novel *The Bush Speaks: Border Life in Old Transvaal* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1936) became a popular source of Modjadji mythology; Liz McGregor's essay 'Who Killed the Rain-Queen?' in Liz McGregor and Sarah Nuttall, eds., *At Risk. Writing on and over the Edge of South Africa* (Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2007), 15-47, gave the myth a literary spin, and the Rain-Queen legend set against a backdrop of the cycad forest featured in the television series, *A Country Imagined* (SABC, 2010).

surrounding Modjadji, the legendary ‘transformer of clouds.’<sup>43</sup> In addition the name of Modjadji is symbolically linked to the unique forest of cycads on a hill north-east of the Capital,<sup>44</sup> lending an aura of antiquity to the mix of associations evoked by the legendary Rain-Queen. As a tourism destination the cycad forest is invariably linked with stories of the Rain-Queen; both are promoted and ‘packaged’ for visitors as being unique and having roots in the remote past.

In the preface to the monograph, the authors make their method of work clear. Firstly, they based their account on personal experience and observation of everyday life among the people they were studying and, secondly, on a comparative investigation of neighbouring chiefdoms. The greatest emphasis was placed on personal observation and being first-hand witnesses of all cultural practices, including seemingly impenetrable ceremonies and performances. They divided the work roughly along gender lines with Eileen concentrating on women’s activities, family life, magic and religion while Jack focused on men’s activities, politics, law and history. This division was complementary rather than rigid. They discussed their respective interpretations and, quite literally, compared notes, bringing their own specialized knowledge in economics and law to bear on the final outcome. Eileen is the first author of the monograph and she was the more highly qualified anthropologist of the two but in the field they worked as a team. They set out to draw the main outlines of Lobedu society for students of anthropology, as well as general readers. In his overview of South African anthropology, David Hammond-Tooke described the published account as ‘an elegant evocation of Lovedu society as it was in the 1930s,’<sup>45</sup> admired for its literary style and narrative flow but notable also for its absence of theoretical exposition and referencing, and minimal footnotes.<sup>46</sup> Although photographs played only a supporting role in relation to the written ethnography, they were integral to the experience of doing fieldwork, to ‘being there’ and witnessing the social and cultural lives of Lobedu people at a particular time in their history, as well as at a particular moment in the discipline of anthropology. Although the role of photography as ethnographic evidence had diminished in importance, it remained a tool of visual documentation, an addition to written field-notes. The style of writing in the monograph explicitly appeals to the visual imagination – an early chapter, for example, presents ‘A Picture of Everyday Things’ opening with the lines:

As you drive along the winding road on a visit to Mujaji’s reserve, you find yourself in a narrow valley between two ranges of uLovedu mountains, where flows the Mulodozi River, fed by countless streams from the bush-covered slopes above.<sup>47</sup>

The word pictures of the text are supplemented by photographs taken in the field.

---

43 Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, 1-15.

44 The hill of cycads, north-east of the royal Capital, was proclaimed a national monument in 1936 and is now a Provincial Heritage Site in Limpopo. These rare ‘Modjadji cycads’ (*Encephalartos transvenosus*) are protected by the Rain-Queen, as well as by law.

45 W. David Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters. South Africa’s Anthropologists 1920-1990* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1997), 87.

46 In the preface to the 1980 edition of *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, viii, Eileen Krige cites Malinowski’s description of the Trobriand *kula* ring as the model for Jack Krige’s interpretation and diagram of Lobedu bridewealth exchanges in which wives and cattle circulate in opposite directions.

47 Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, 17.

## Plates in a Monograph (1943)

Most of the thirty-one photographs used as illustrations in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* were taken between 1936 and 1938 during which time the Kriges had spent some sixteen months in the field.<sup>48</sup> It is not clear which photographs were taken by Eileen and which by Jack and they themselves did not think it necessary to note who took the photographs published in the monograph.<sup>49</sup> They gave the publisher, Oxford University Press, explicit instructions on the selection of photographs and the layout of plates and initially suggested some fifty-four photographs for inclusion but these were reduced in the final edit.<sup>50</sup> In addition to artistic merit or the general appeal of certain images, the authors intended that ‘as many as possible of the types of activities or aspects of culture should be illustrated’.<sup>51</sup> We assume that the authors agreed on the final plates in discussion with the publisher. Comparing their long-list with the final-list of illustrations suggests that they reduced the number of photographs of similar subjects, or of variation within a topic, rather than eliminating substantively different images.

Interestingly, the photograph of Modjadji III in the Krige collection is not present on either list, suggesting that the authors did not consider it relevant to their purpose to show a portrait of the Queen.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps, including a photograph of a particular ruler would have been at odds with their intention to describe general principles and institutional arrangements rather than to give a time-specific account of the reign of the current Queen. Another explanation could be that a portrait may have served to reduce the mystery of the Rain-Queen, whose source of power lay partly in her seclusion, while the absence of an illustration allowed for a pervasive imagined presence. A further point of interest is that the status of the Queen is not overtly indicated by royal attire or regalia, except at her public installation. In the existing photographs of Modjadji III her dress differs little from that of other Lobedu women.<sup>53</sup> What distinguishes Modjadji from other women is not her attire or outward signs of royalty but the belief in her divine knowledge of rain-making and the sanction of her power to make, or withhold, rain by the spirits of her royal ancestors. Although not represented visually in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen*, Modjadji and the constellation of cultural practices that radiate from her are invoked throughout the monograph. It is telling that Modjadji was described as the central pivot of the Lobedu social system but that her outward appearance was not considered essential to the narrative. This calls into question the role played by the images that were included in the monograph.

By listing the photographs as ‘illustrations’, their role in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* is accurately presented as secondary and complementary to the ethnographic account.<sup>54</sup> The images were intended to illustrate the text rather than being presented as visual texts to be read in their own right. The chapters of the book follow a set of functionalist themes found in the major southern African ethnographic

---

48 April to June in 1936, January to July and September to October in 1937, and May to August in 1938.

49 Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, xiv.

50 KCM, file 17, Krige papers, Killie Campbell Africana Library.

51 KCM, file 17, Krige papers, Killie Campbell Africana Library.

52 There was no cultural restriction on photographs of Modjadji being taken.

53 In the Krige photograph of Modjadji III taken in 1937, she is seated on a mat wearing a cotton wrap draped over one shoulder; in the 1946 portrait of Modjadji III by professional photographer Constance Stuart-Larrabee, she is wearing a German-print dress with a cotton wrap over one shoulder. In both photographs she is wearing many rolled wire *masega* bangles which are distinctively Lobedu but not reserved for the Queen or royal women.

54 See ‘List of Illustrations’ in Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, vi.

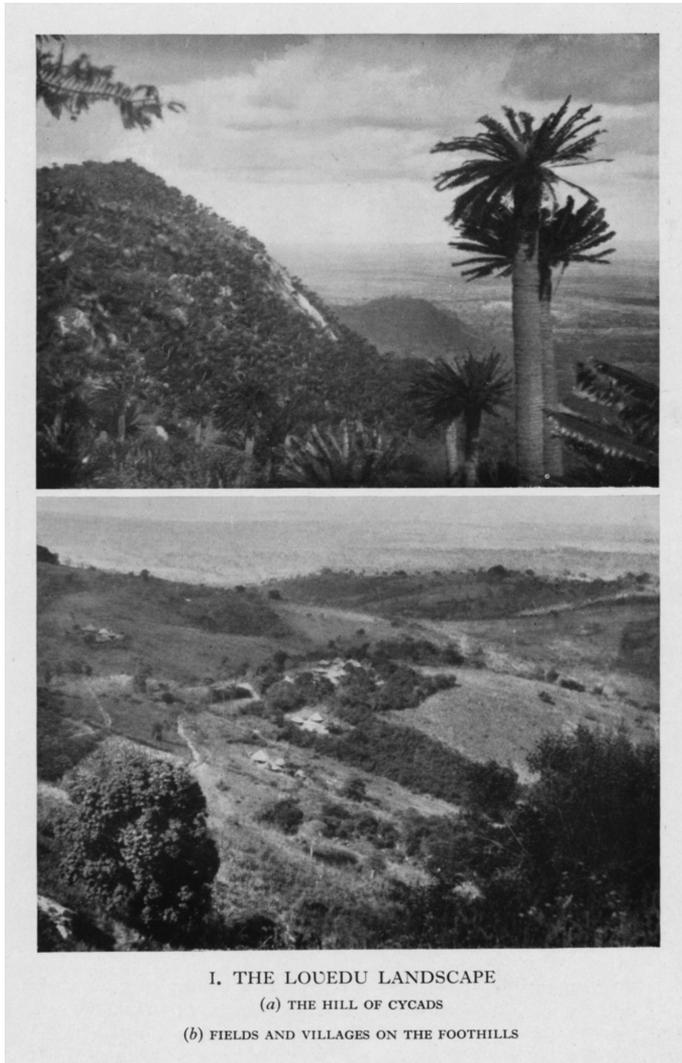


Figure 9: *The Realm of a Rain-Queen*, Plate 1, ‘The Lovedu Landscape, (a) The Hill of Cycads, (b) Fields and Villages on the Foothills.’

monographs of the 1930s and 1940s, most notably Monica Hunter’s *Reaction to Conquest* and Hilda Kuper’s *An African Aristocracy*, but one cannot generalize about the way photographs are presented in these works to illustrate the conventional themes.<sup>55</sup> In *The Realm of a Rain-Queen*, on all but one plate, images are paired to complement each other, as if in a single conceptual frame. The authors noted that the photographs had been cropped to show the essential features and advised the publisher that it was ‘undesirable to group together on one plate photos from different categories of activities or aspects of culture.’<sup>56</sup> The placing of the plates in the volume

55 See Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936); also Hilda Kuper, *An African Aristocracy: Rank Among the Swazi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947).

56 KCM, file 17, Krige papers, Killie Campbell Africana Library.

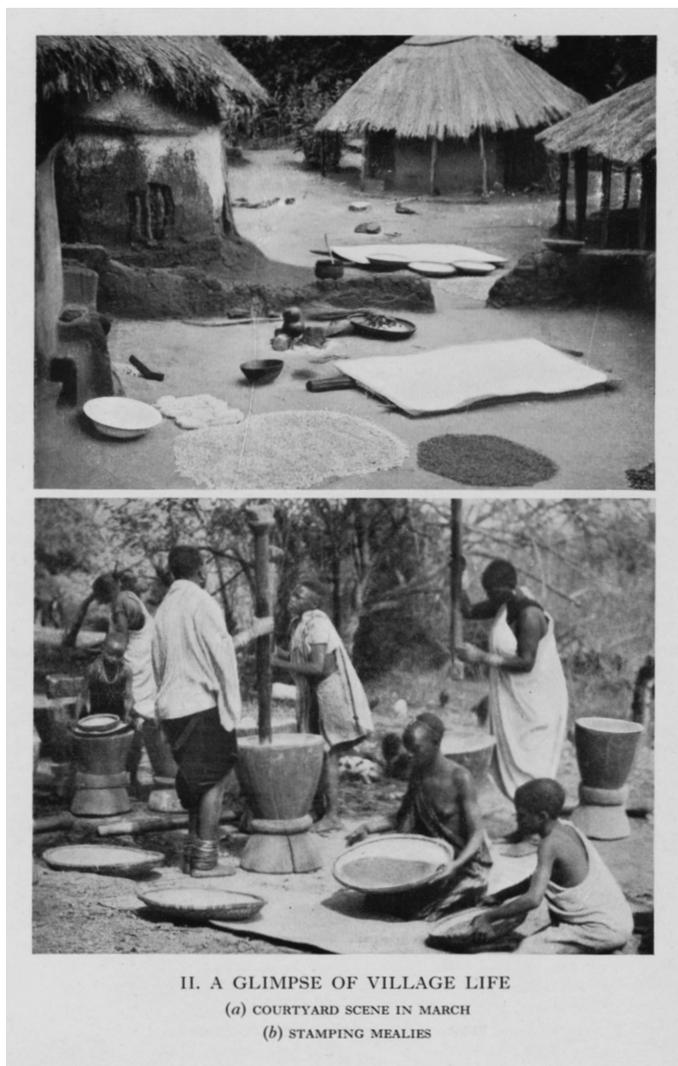


Figure 10: *The Realm of a Rain-Queen*, Plate 2, 'A Glimpse of Village Life, (a) Courtyard Scene in March, (b) Stamping Mealies.' These images take the reader into the courtyard of an extended family showing domestic utensils and grain spread out to dry, followed by a more active scene of women stamping and winnowing maize on the periphery of the Capital.

follows the narrative sequence of the written chapters – the scene is set with photographs of the landscape, opening with the hill of cycads, the iconic 'sacred' forest that has become synonymous with Modjadji, leading on to a view of the foothills showing the settlement pattern of dispersed homesteads and fields (Figure 9).

Plates 1 and 2 in the second chapter provide 'A Picture of Everyday Things', an explicitly visual narrative of seasonal subsistence activities and social relations of production (Figure 10).

These are followed by plates on craftwork and agricultural co-operation leading into the subsequent chapters on the 'Bases of Subsistence' and 'Co-operation and Exchange'. The narrative continues through chapters on family life, some social groupings, early training and coming of age. The chapter on 'Fertility and the Drum Cult' is

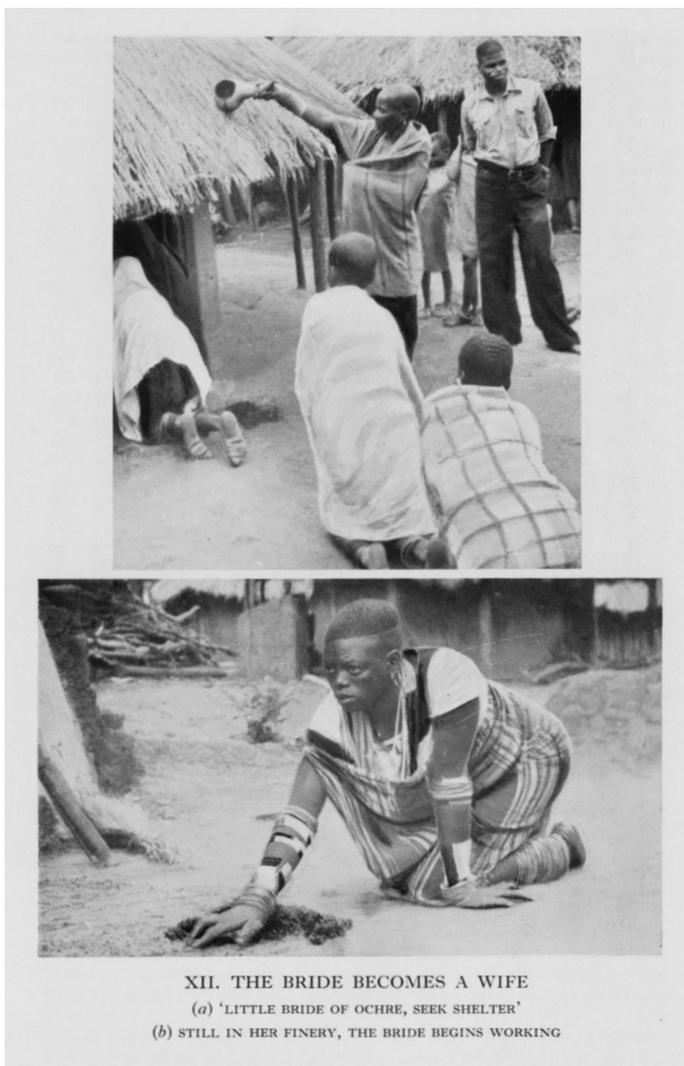


Figure 11a: *The Realm of a Rain-Queen*, Plate 12, 'The Bride becomes a Wife, a) Little bride of ochre, seek shelter, b) Still in her finery, the bride begins working.'

illustrated with the most widely circulated images from the monograph – the masked dancers of *Ravothata* and the masquerade of the *vahwera* initiates (Plates 9 and 10). Important chapters on the rain cult and on witchcraft and sorcery do not include plates, suggesting a recognition that certain topics were too complex or abstract to be illustrated visually. The closing images in the monograph are of *thugula* shrines where offerings are made to appease the ancestral spirits. Later in this article George Mahashe engages with the *thugula* concept in relation to his own creative practice as a photographer.

In the chapter on 'Marriage and the Social Structure', Plate 12 shows two images from a series of fifteen photographs taken at a wedding at the Capital. The series covers the journey of the bride as she is escorted to her marital home and welcomed by her husband's family. A calabash of water simulates rain as the bride takes shelter in the groom's house. This is the culmination of months of negotiations between the



Figure 11b: Page from the album showing full-frame images from the wedding series. The two published images focus only on the culmination of the ceremony rather than the narrative sequence of events. They also show how the images were cropped for publication.

families and, at times, the seeming reluctance on the part of the bride-to-be to leave her family (Figures 11a and 11b).

In the lower photograph the new bride, still wearing her wedding finery, smears the courtyard with mud and dung in symbolic acceptance of the domestic duties of a wife. Without knowing the context, the woman's dress and adornment would seem entirely inappropriate to the task at hand and could be misread as having been staged to show the particularity of hairstyle and dress. This is, in fact, one of the few images in the collection that shows the detail of traditional beadwork and clothing although this was not the primary intention of the photographer. Significantly, the man wearing non-traditional shirt and trousers in the upper image was not cut out of the photograph as could easily have been done.

In 1996 when the photograph of the bride was exhibited at the Capital, she was recognized by her daughter as being Khiwela Modjadji, first wife of Simeon Modjadji, a member of the royal family and long-standing field assistant of Eileen Krige. The meaning of the photograph took on added significance through this personal association and related memories. In 2011 the same image was seen in the home of Khiwela's family, displayed as a framed portrait among other pictures of family



Figure 12: Framed photographs at the home of Khiwela Modjadji's family in 2011, shown with a copy of the 1980 edition of *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* which reproduced Plate 12 in landscape format rather than the original portrait format used in 1943. Photograph: George Mahashe.

members and a photograph of Simeon Modjadji's gravestone. In this context the image had been reclaimed by the family as part of their own history. The authority of the image as an illustration in an academic publication may have added lustre to its provenance, but the photograph no longer functioned as a generalized ethnographic image from a marriage ceremony but as a visual document of a particular historical event imbued with personal associations and memories for the descendants of the bride (Figure 12).

Most of the illustrations in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* show people engaged in activities or events; all have short captions but none of the people in the photographs are named, nor are precise localities or dates given. In this lack of specificity, the photographs conform to the generalizing tendency of ethnographic discourse at the time – they add a visual dimension to the narrative without representing historically-situated events. There are no cross-references to the photographs in the text of the monograph, affirming that they were intended to be generic illustrations rather than visual references to specific events. It is also noteworthy that, unlike the recent claim that some of the field photographs in *Reaction to Conquest* by Monica Hunter were staged,<sup>57</sup> none of the photographs in the monograph suggests that the photographer intervened in posing the subjects or setting up scenes for the camera and, although cropped for publication, the illustrations do not exclude non-indigenous commodities in the form of western dress or purchased utensils. In this they differ markedly from the photographs of Alfred Duggan-Cronin who controlled the camera and

57 Rui Carlos de Noronha Assubuji, 'Anthropology and Fieldwork Photography: Monica Hunter Wilson's Photographs in Pondoland and BuNyakyusa, 1931-1938' (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2010), 17, 30-32.

framed his subjects to construct idealized images of picturesque Africans untouched by modernization.<sup>58</sup> Significantly, there is not a single portrait among the illustrations in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* and no trace of an earlier school of essentialising ethnography in which photography was used to document physical types and racial difference.<sup>59</sup> The Kriges' project was about describing and illustrating culture not typifying people. The photographs suggest a particular way of looking and seeing that differs from the objectifying gaze that distances people as Other. The focus on ordinary activities serves to deflect attention from visual markers of ethnic identity or cultural difference. At the same time, unlike the expressive images produced in modernist style by photographer, Constance Stuart Larrabee, the Krige photographs were not framed primarily as aesthetic compositions destined for circulation and exhibition as works of art.<sup>60</sup> With the exception of the images of initiation ceremonies which owe their aesthetic nature to the drama of the event itself, the photographs present a prosaic picture of everyday life, a visual record of the ethnographers' observations and their interaction with local people. Having said this, however, many of the images in the collection have strong aesthetic qualities. The closest parallels are found in the field photographs of Isaac Schapera who used the camera as a fieldwork tool, a visual notebook and a witness of everyday events.<sup>61</sup> Contra to the trope of the colonizing camera, the Krige field photographs reveal a more empathetic ethnography of the everyday.

Both illustrations and text were intended to evoke a way of life in which there was social coherence while facing 'the onslaught of Western civilization'.<sup>62</sup> The monograph refers very briefly to the history of the turbulent closing decades of the nineteenth century when Modjadji's people had come into increasing conflict with the Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek over taxes and encroachment of land.<sup>63</sup> In 1892 the imposed boundaries of the 'Modjadji Location' reduced Lobedu land to less than 10% of their previous territory. Modjadji's hostile reaction to this dispossession led to armed confrontation in 1894 when General Joubert finally crushed her resistance and confiscated about 10 000 head of cattle in retribution.<sup>64</sup>

Although the published text and illustrations give an overall impression of a relatively secluded chiefdom isolated by local dialect, topography, climate, endemic malaria and minimal transport, evidence of modernity in the form of consumer goods is not excluded. Almost without exception, the men depicted in the Plates in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* are wearing factory-produced, western shirts and trousers, unlike the women who are shown mainly in cotton wraps and cloaks which,

58 Michael Godby, 'Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's Photographs for *The Bantu Tribes of South Africa (1928-1954)*: The Construction of an Ambiguous Idyll', *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 36 (Nov. 2010), 54-83.

59 Eileen and Jack Krige would have been fully aware of the genre of anthropometric photography, and it can be assumed that they were familiar with the guidelines for field photography in *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, fifth edition (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1929).

60 Constance Stuart Larrabee worked as a professional photographer in South Africa from 1936 to 1949 with a break in 1944 when she was a war correspondent in Europe; see Michael Godby, 'African Contrasts', in *Lines of Sight: Perspectives on South African Photography* (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 1999), 18-33.

61 John L. Comaroff, Jean Comaroff and Deborah James, eds., *Picturing a Colonial Past. The African Photographs of Isaac Schapera* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

62 Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, xii.

63 In 1876 taxes on individuals, as well as a hut tax, were imposed by the Volksraad of the Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek and at the same time it was decreed that 'locations' would be assigned to more important chiefs who would be paid a salary in return for keeping law and order and supervising the collection of taxes. Modjadji refused to co-operate and in 1890 a commando force was sent to exact taxes and confiscate arms from her people.

64 H.W. Grimsehl, 'Onluste in Modjadjiland, 1890-1894', *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid Afrikaanse Geskiedenis*, 11, 1955, 193-252. In 1894, the missionary Reuter interceded on behalf of the Lobedu people in negotiations with the Volksraad over territorial boundaries but their land remained much reduced. This dispossession of land coincided with the death of Modjadji II in 1895, the devastating rinderpest of 1896 and a drought in the following years.

although made from traded cloth, was the traditional dress worn by Lobedu women who were not among the small community of Christian converts. The adoption of western dress by Lobedu men is not surprising considering that as early as the 1860s small numbers of Lobedu men had left their rural villages to seek work as far afield as the Cape Colony<sup>65</sup> and the demand for migrant labour increased greatly after the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and gold on the Reef. Taxes payable in cash forced men to enter the labour market and the material culture of migrants reflected emerging consumer patterns in both urban and rural areas. With her background in economics, Eileen Krige took a particular interest in the impact of cash on the local economy. In the late 1930s, money or the equivalent in grain (a basket or large enamel basin of grain was valued at one shilling) could be traded at stores on the periphery of the Lobedu Reserve for salampore cloth or German prints, men's clothes, blankets, candles, soap, pocket knives, enamelware, iron hoes and copper wire among a range of other commodities.<sup>66</sup>

We have noted that modern commodities were not excluded from the photographs published in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* but there was an exclusion of another kind that sheds light on the ethnographers' selectivity. Even though the text often refers to Tsonga or Shangaan people living in the Lobedu area and they are represented in the unpublished photographs, they are not included in the published illustrations. From about 1840 onwards successive waves of Tsonga-speaking people had moved into the Lowveld from what is now southern Mozambique. The increasing numbers of immigrants to Modjadji's area were regarded as outsiders and were not fully assimilated into the Lobedu polity even though they were required to pay tribute to the Queen as her subjects. This changed gradually over time but the exclusion was sustained with regard to certain items of Shangaan material culture being excluded from the Capital. The absence of illustrations of Tsonga or Shangaan people in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* seems to echo this wider cultural exclusion.

Our focus has been on the photographs circulated in the monograph but, as noted earlier, these represent a small fraction of the collection as a whole. A contour graph of the subjects covered in the field photographs from the period 1930 to 1938, excluding those taken on the 1937 tour of surrounding areas, would show peaks in the areas of agricultural and domestic work (about 150 images) and views of people (about 103) followed by technical activities (about 60), homesteads and courtyards (about 47), initiation (about 46), landscapes (about 33), ceremonies (about 23), shrines (about 10) with the rest spread over smaller categories. The large number of fieldwork photographs taken by the Kriges suggests that their ethnographic practice represents a transitional stage in the development of social anthropology when the earlier value attached to photography as primary evidence had declined but the camera remained a useful tool of documentation, and photographs functioned as visual notes from the field. In Eileen's research from the 1960s onwards, photography did not play an important role, reflecting her increased theoretical interest in understanding social structure, kinship patterns and marriage. We turn now to a much later chapter in the life history of the collection.

---

65 Peter Delius, 'Migrant Labour and the Pedi, 1840-80' in Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, eds., *Economy and Society in Pre-industrial South Africa* (London: Longman Group, 1980), 296.

66 Eileen Krige, 'Economics of Exchange in a Primitive Society', 18.

## Becoming an Archive - From Private to Public Collection

In the early decades of the twentieth century, 'as depth rather than surface became the perceived goal of the anthropologist', Elizabeth Edwards notes, 'the realist insistence of photography appeared increasingly irrelevant to the concerns of modern, functionalist anthropology'.<sup>67</sup> As a consequence of this change, photographs taken in remote places were no longer widely circulated through networks of exchange between field and academy but were kept largely for private use by individual fieldworkers. This was so in the case of the Krige fieldwork photographs which remained within the domain of their own research, teaching and publication until they were donated to the South African Museum over half a century after they had been taken. Unfortunately, the Kriges' field notes from the 1930s were accidentally destroyed in the 1960s so there is a significant gap in the written record of this time. Eileen Krige's later correspondence, field notes and research documents were eventually placed in the Killie Campbell Africana Library where her granddaughter, Emily Krige, has catalogued these papers.<sup>68</sup>

In the early 1970s after Eileen Krige had donated her collection of Lobedu material culture from the 1930s to the South African Museum, she indicated that, in due course, the fieldwork photographs from this period would be presented to the South African Museum to complement the material culture collection.<sup>69</sup> However, only in 1990 was she ready to part with the photographs which held personal memories for her of the time when she and Jack, who had died in 1959, had done their pioneering work among Modjadji's people. Over time, the photographs had come to mean more than visual research documents – they were distillations of past experiences.<sup>70</sup> While held by Eileen, personal associations imbued the photographs with meaning and memory. Once transferred to a museum they entered the public domain where meaning was no longer anchored by memory but generated externally in a range of other contexts that constitute the curatorial field.<sup>71</sup>

Curatorial responsibility for the photographic collection fell to the museum anthropologists as there was no archivist or specialist in managing photographic collections on the staff. In 1993 a project funded by the Social Science Research Council in New York was undertaken to catalogue and conserve the collection.<sup>72</sup> This was the first step towards the collection becoming an archive.<sup>73</sup> Conservation was

---

67 Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 46-47.

68 Emily Krige, 'Inventory of the Eileen Jensen Krige Papers, 1927-1991', Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of Natal, Durban, 2002.

69 From 1974 onwards Eileen Krige gave Patricia Davison access to the field photographs for research purposes and told her that in due course she would donate the collection to the Museum. In 1984 some of the Krige photographs were published in Davison's comparative study of Lobedu material culture in the *Annals of the South African Museum*. In 1990 Davison worked through the collection with Eileen Krige at her home in Durban and received it on behalf of the South African Museum.

70 For Eileen, the field photographs were encoded with memories of Jack and their work together, which gave them significance beyond their research value. Similarly, for Monica Wilson, the writing up of her late husband's Nyakyusa notebooks for publication was invested with emotional attachment; see Rebecca Marsland, 'Pondo Pins and Nyakyusa Hammers: Monica and Godfrey Wilson in Bunyakusa' in Andrew Bank and Leslie Bank, eds., *Inside African Anthropology: Monica Wilson and Her Interpreters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, The International African Library Series, 2013, forthcoming).

71 Because of Davison's association with Eileen Krige, the collection was not entirely devoid of memory once in the Museum but these later memories formed a secondary layer of recollections.

72 Reports and correspondence on this project are housed in the Social History Collections Department of Iziko. The negatives were copied onto safety film because celluloid nitrate film is known to be highly flammable and the original negatives were kept under controlled environmental conditions. June Hosford was responsible for the conservation of the collection.

73 Definitions of what constitutes an archive vary. Some authors define a photographic archive as any set or collection of historical photographs brought together for some purpose - see Marcus Banks and Richard Vokes, 'Introduction: Anthropology, Photography and the Archive', *History and Anthropology*, 2 (Dec. 2010), 337-349. We make a distinction between a 'collection' that has not been accessioned into a formal archive and an 'archive' that is official or institutional and is subject to set archival procedures.

given priority and both prints and negatives were re-stored in acid-free materials and treated within a regime of care that was considered best practice at the time. Contact sheets were made, as well as working-copies of the negatives on safety film. No changes were made in the numbering of the photographs which have retained Eileen Krige's numbers and captions. The original sleeves and packets were kept as ephemeral artefacts associated with the collection. However, while the collection remains housed within a curatorial department rather than a formal archive, access to the collection is mediated through museum curators and anthropologists who approach the materiality of the collection in a slightly different way from strictly archival practice.<sup>74</sup> The status of the collection could be described as liminal in that it has not yet been initiated into the formal procedures of an official archive but it has been incorporated into a public collection and it is accessible as a cultural resource.

### ***Looking Back: Images from the 1930s (1996)***

In early May 1996 an exhibition, *Looking Back: Images from the 1930s*, was shown in the foyer of the court-house at Modjadji's Capital and at local schools with the dual purpose of bringing the photographs from the 1930s to Lobedu audiences of the 1990s and of talking to local people about the content of the photographs. There was no official opening but Councilor Victor Mathega had given the exhibition his approval and public awareness of the event was spread by word of mouth, resulting in about sixty people viewing the photographs at the court-house. In eliciting responses from viewers Patricia Davison asked about how the area had changed since the 1930s and if the people and places in the photographs were remembered. This tended to become an informal conversation with groups of people so that it was difficult to reduce the interaction to a coherent contemporary commentary. Responses, interpreted by Olga Modjadji, were mostly about people in the photographs and changes in cultural practices. Here the photographs could be regarded as performing, within a modernist methodology of visual anthropology, as generative images or texts able to shed new light on the conditions and relationships of the fieldwork event.

In 1994 when planning the exhibition, Davison had taken about seventy photographs to the Capital to discuss the proposed idea of bringing a selection of prints back to the area in which they had been taken in the 1930s. A number of the images were familiar to the Lobedu elders from illustrations in *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* and their responses were informed by their having known *Malefokane* (Eileen Krige) personally. They also associated the photographs with the late Simeon Modjadji, a respected member of the Molokwane branch of the royal family at the Capital, who had worked closely with *Malefokane* as her research assistant. At Eileen's request, Simeon had written down children's stories, kept a diary of interesting events, taken notes at court-cases, and had corresponded with her in the Lobedu over many years.<sup>75</sup>

In 1973 Eileen Krige had introduced Patricia Davison to Simeon Modjadji, who became her guide, and facilitated her access to the royal Capital and surrounding

---

74 The Krige photographic collection falls under the Iziko Social History Collections Department which houses mainly material culture collections. In 2010 this Department moved to the Iziko Social History Centre on Church Square in Cape Town. The temporary location of the Krige photographs at the South African Museum is due to the fact that the collection had not yet moved when research by the authors started. It will be relocated to the Iziko Social History Centre at the end of the current project.

75 The research notes of Simeon Modjadji and his correspondence with Eileen Krige are housed in the Killie Campbell African Library in Durban.

areas. He smoothed her way through the protocols of paying respects to the Queen and asking for permission to document material culture and take photographs in the royal village and beyond. Camera equipment and the museum's Landrover with a 'CA' number-plate became familiar objects of curiosity to local villagers during her fieldwork.<sup>76</sup> In 1994, when discussing the proposed exhibition of the Krige photographs from the 1930s with Lobedu elders, they associated it with *Malefokane* and regarded it as an extension of Davison's earlier work. Simeon had died in 1993 but his daughter, Olga Modjadji, agreed to be the local project assistant in organizing the exhibition.

A curatorial selection of forty-six prints was made on historical, cultural and aesthetic criteria and enlarged prints were produced and laminated for exhibition at gaModjadji. The selection was made with the assistance of photographers Paul Grendon and Chris Ledochowski who were contracted to work on the project. They brought their own sensibility and considerable technical skill to the task of selecting the images best suited to enlargement and exhibition. Working in the museum dark-room, they did careful test-printing and enlarged about seventy images from which the final selection was made. This process transformed the photographs from field documents into museum objects. Although derived from original field negatives, the enlarged images for exhibition were, strictly speaking, not field records but artefacts of curatorial practice. In this context, the aesthetic, expressive qualities of the images competed for attention with their ethnographic content. The process underlined the ambiguity of the photographic images and their potential for many interpretations in different contexts. In showing the images at gaModjadji yet another process of making meaning took place, located in history, imagination and memory (Figure 13).

During the *Looking Back* exhibition the images from the 1930s accrued further layers of meaning through the recollections and comments of viewers.<sup>77</sup> A communication process took place in which meanings and understandings of the photographs were negotiated by a range of local viewers – women and men of differing ages, some of whom had known Eileen Krige in person and others who knew her only by reputation, or not at all. The knowledge and expectations of viewers inevitably influenced the way they saw the exhibition. In some cases individuals in the photographs were recognized by name, giving the image a personal association, an identity in place of former anonymity. This recoding of the image restored it to the field of human relationships from which it originated and so affirmed the exhibition as a form of visual homecoming.<sup>78</sup> Young viewers were often surprised to see pictures of their grandparents in their youth. In general, photographs of people attracted the greatest response, drawing attention to the potential of fieldwork photographs from the past to be re-animated by subjective engagement in the present.

The process also brought the collection to a younger generation of viewers who, more familiar with colour photography and film, found the images somewhat outdated and amusing. Changes in dress and lifestyle were noted – one young woman declared that she was a woman of the '90s and would not prepare food on an open fire,

---

76 The photographs taken during Patricia Davison's fieldwork are housed in the Iziko Social History Collections Department, Cape Town.

77 The project was informed in part by the work of Corinne Kratz which was later published in *The Ones that are Wanted. Communication and the Politics of Representation in a Photographic Exhibition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

78 See Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, eds., *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 4. They describe the naming of formerly anonymous images as a process of recuperation.



Figure 13: The *Looking Back* exhibition viewed in the court-house at the Capital, May 1996.  
Photograph: Patricia Davison.

preferring a four-plate stove.<sup>79</sup> During the course of the exhibition disposable cameras were given to a number of young people who showed an interest in photography. Perhaps not surprisingly, with a very open brief to take pictures of what interested them, the results were mostly ‘snaps’ of friends and family. These images were given to the young photographers. With the approval of the South African Museum, it was agreed that the exhibition should remain in the care of Olga Modjadji so that it could be used as a cultural and historical resource as and when the opportunity might arise.<sup>80</sup>

In July 1999 a small exhibition of the Krige photographs, *The Ethnographic Lens: Images from the Realm of a Rain-Queen*, was held at the South African Museum in Cape Town during the Encounters with Photography Conference.<sup>81</sup> The photographs were mounted with dual labels, drawing on the Kriges’ annotations from the 1930s, as well as responses from the 1996 exhibition. The intention was to present the Krige photographs to wider audiences in the Museum and in the digital domain, and to show their openness to new readings. By the end of the 1990s reflexivity in museum discourse was such that no exhibition could be mounted without taking into account the burden of representation and the responsibilities of curatorial authority. *The Ethnographic Lens* implicitly addressed the politics of representation by drawing attention to the ethnographic nature of the images and the museum context but, at the same time, it suggested that relations of power, inherent in producing and exhibiting the photographs, did not necessarily limit their creative potential. The project below makes this point in a different context.

79 Electricity had been introduced to the precinct of the Capital in the early 1980s. An uncatalogued tape recording of some responses to the photographs is housed in Iziko Social History Collections Department.

80 The prints were carefully kept and shown to selected visitors, including members of the Krige family, but were not exhibited again. Olga Modjadji passed away in 2006 and the photographs are currently in the possession of John Malatji who had assisted Eileen Krige in the later years of her field research.

81 The exhibition ran for the duration of the conference and also appeared as an online resource on the South African Museum website which has since been replaced by the Iziko website.

## *'Dithugula tša Malefokane': Seeing Other People's Stories, Telling Tall Tales*

In 2011 and 2012 the Krige fieldwork photographs became a source of creative inspiration for photographer, George Mahashe. The title of his project *Dithugula tša Malefokane*, conceptualizes the Krige photographs as being ancestral both to the anthropologist and the people who were photographed (Figure 14). Imbuing the photographs with the significance of *dithugula* (ancestral objects) gives them relevance as active mediators of the past in the present.<sup>82</sup>

Mahashe's dissatisfaction with dominant narratives dealing with photographs deemed to be 'ethnographic' framed his engagement with the Krige photographs. He defined his research site as the curatorial field<sup>83</sup> and set out to investigate, by participant-observation, the discourse that had informed criticism of his 2010 exhibition, *Gae Lebowa*, suggesting that he had perpetuated an 'ethnographic gaze' in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>84</sup> This view, he argued, revealed a limited understanding of the term 'ethnography'. Discourse dominated by the trope of the camera as the gun, and the false assumption that anthropology was a homogenous discipline<sup>85</sup> tended to equate almost any representation of cultural 'others' with an act of objectification.<sup>86</sup>

The Krige collection was selected not only because the photographs are of Lobedu origin but because they conform to a particular genre. They constitute documentary images imbued with an aesthetic quality that appeals to a particular photographic taste and sensibility.<sup>87</sup> As a professional photographer, Mahashe sought to privilege the material aspects of photographic images over their content.<sup>88</sup> As a curator-researcher, he took two factors into consideration: firstly, that the curatorial field can generate new insights by applying appropriate methodologies and by taking the biography of the archive into account,<sup>89</sup> and secondly, that the engagement would be conducted on the primary source, namely full-frame, original negatives. Access to an analogue photographic darkroom at the South African Museum meant that he could work with the photographic negatives as chemically-based material objects, drawing on an appreciation of the aesthetic quality of the medium-format camera's unique compositional frame, as well as the novelty of black and white film and its rendition

---

82 The concept of *thugula* is essentially Lobedu, although it occurs in other Limpopo and North Sotho groups which adopted it from Balobedu. *Thugula* objects are activated through the process of *hophasa* by which the ancestors are acknowledged and placated; see Chapter 13 of Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, as well as the unpublished seminar paper by George Mahashe 'Dithugula tša Malefokane: Framing the Ethnographic Photographic Archive at Iziko South African Museum made by E.J. and J.D. Krige in Bolobedu' (Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative Workshop at the University of Cape Town, 27-29 July 2011).

83 For the purpose of this project Mahashe focused on the curatorial field and academic disciplines engaged with historic photographs, including museum practice, social anthropology that renders things visible by description instead of images, African studies that produces exhibitions from historical material, art history that theorizes and informs the parameters of reading art/photography, visual studies that interrogate photographs on their merits, as well as history departments that draw photographs into the realm of evidence.

84 For critical comment on the ethnographic gaze, see Hartmann, Silvester and Hayes, *The Colonizing Camera*; see also Okwi Enwezor, *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006), and ideas of 'poverty pornography', the genre of NGO/Aid organization-commissioned documentary photography that uses images of poverty to portray black subjects as helpless at expense of their dignity.

85 See Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters*, on the different branches of anthropology; see also Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology*, on the changing role of photography in the history of anthropology.

86 Earlier uses of anthropometric photography in the service of scientific racism tainted later forms of photography by anthropologists.

87 See William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) where documentary value is based not on the photograph as a source of verifiable information but on its ability to elicit an emotional response beyond the fact.

88 Mahashe took his cue from the curatorial interventions described by Elizabeth Edwards in *Raw Histories*.

89 See Christraud Geary, 'Photographs as Materials for African History: Some Methodological Considerations', *History in Africa*, 13, 1986, 89-116; see also Carolyn Hamilton, 'The Life of the Archive' (Seminar paper presented at the symposium 'Framing the Archive: new directions in photographic traditions and modernities', Leiden, 2011).



Figure 14: Viewers at the exhibition staged at the Michaelis Gallery, Hiddingh Hall campus, University of Cape Town, 12 March 2012. Photograph: Raymond du Toit, courtesy Centre for Curating the Archive.

of tone, the way the image translates onto photographic paper and the reaction of the paper to the chemistry.<sup>90</sup>

Mahashe is of Lobedu descent and a researcher of images representing Lobedu culture, which brings ‘halfie’<sup>91</sup> methodologies into the curatorial process and allows different ideas about agency and power inherent in photographed subjects to be indulged. He also took cognizance of feminist theories that raise issues of audience and locality in relation to exhibition practice.<sup>92</sup> Where the installation took place would influence the responses of audiences, as well as the type of data the curator-researcher would gather about the viewers of the exhibition. As noted earlier, the meaning given to photographs is strongly influenced by the physical spaces and localities in which they are viewed. If the project had taken place in Bolobedu, as the *Looking Back* exhibition had done in 1996, contemporary Lobedu people would have been involved both as audience and research subjects. However, by staging it within the curatorial field, the viewers and research subjects would be curators and academics who themselves were involved in processes of making and circulating images. The result was an installation, located in different curatorial spaces, which invoked the materiality of chemically unstable photographic documents (Figures 15a-d).

90 Film format, colour of the medium, paper used in printing and how these materials age all create aesthetically specific effects that are outside of the photographer’s control.

91 ‘Halfie’ anthropology generally refers to research on a culture to which the researcher partially belongs, collapsing the distinction between self and other. See Lila Abu-Lughod on ‘Writing Against Culture’ in Richard Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), 137-62.

92 See Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, eds., *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008) which explores feminist, non-colonial, methodologies aimed at giving different readings of research data, outside the dominant academic methodologies.



Figures 15 a-d: Exploring the materiality of photographs and the mystery of the darkroom, 12 March 2012. Photograph: Raymond du Toit, courtesy Centre for Curating the Archive.

The intention was to encourage imagination and awareness of photographs as ‘sensible objects’<sup>93</sup> and to remove them from analytical or scientific frames of reference.<sup>94</sup> A darkroom was created within the exhibition space and members of the audience were invited to develop randomly-selected images from the Krige collection which the curator had previously exposed onto expired photographic paper without a stop bath and fixative. This meant that the image was clearly visible for less than thirty seconds before it started to fade into blackness. Participants were then asked to take the images to the next room where they were hung up to dry, and could be viewed by other members of the audience. Random captions to the photographs were printed and mounted on translucent blocks incorporated into the darkroom wall and were visible only from inside the darkroom. The presence of the translucent captions, however, compromised the light-proof nature of the darkroom and hastened the blackening of the photographs, further reducing the amount of time that the images were visible. Mahashe, who was present in the darkroom, answered questions and told stories to the audience as they viewed the emerging photographs. These stories bridged the gap in their knowledge about the content of the images and focused particularly on tales that were not based on facts and which did not lend themselves to academic writing. Interaction with the transient chemical process of photographic

93 See Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth Phillips, eds., *Sensible Objects, Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), 1.

94 See Geoffrey Batchen, ‘Snapshots: Art History and the Ethnographic Turn’, *Photographies*, 1, 2 (Sept. 2008), 121-142. He cites the absence of a picture of Roland Barthes’s mother in *Camera Lucida* as a revolutionary moment because it allowed him to see/imagine her rather than being presented with a generic image.



Figure 16: A photographic metaphor for ethnographic knowledge.  
Photograph: George Mahashe.

images emerging and fading generated awareness and curiosity in the audience both about the materiality of photographs and the untold stories that lie below the surface of the image (Figure 16).

## Conclusion

In the introduction we acknowledged the multivalent nature of photographs and the shifts in meaning that occur when photographic images move through different spatial and temporal contexts. At one level, the Krige fieldwork photographs are embedded in the practice of social anthropology in South Africa in the 1930s but at another they are sediments of personal memory both for the descendants of the ethnographers and for the people who were photographed. Since 1990, the meaning of the photographs has been inflected by the context of a public museum and by curatorial practices that have re-animated them in different ways.

Viewed as a visual archive, in the broad use of the term, the Krige collection provides insight into the role of photographic practice in social anthropology during a critical period in the development of the discipline. The collection is of particular interest in that it spans the short periods of fieldwork undertaken in the early 1930s before the Kriges attended Malinowski's seminars at the London School of Economics and their later field research between 1936 and 1938. In comparing the photographs from these periods there is a discernible shift in register in the later

photographs that were shaped, in part, by the functionalist categories that would provide the conceptual framework for *The Realm of a Rain-Queen*. Although the role of photography as primary evidence had diminished in favour of first-hand observation by the fieldworker, the camera was important as an aide memoire, a visual tool alongside the written field notes. The published photographs were used to illustrate a general ethnographic account rather than being presented in their own right as visual documents of cultural practices at a particular time and place. Selected images were circulated within the academic community and beyond through the *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* but the larger collection of fieldwork photographs remained in private ownership for fifty years after being produced.

The move of the Krige collection to a public institution in 1990 marked a significant moment in its life history and, as has been noted by Marcus Banks and Richard Vokes,<sup>95</sup> the transit of photographic images from one set of material conditions and relations to another allows us to see them as labile and fluid objects 'at home' in different contexts. The ability of a photograph to transcend its original context, while at the same time retaining traces or echoes of that context, becomes part of the process of accruing new layers of meaning and adds to the 'performance history' of the image. The two curatorial projects described in the article demonstrate this point in different settings. Photographs always retain an excess of meaning that invites further exploration and interpretation. The darkroom without fixing tray, in Mahashe's installation, is a fitting metaphor for fleeting vision and the quest for greater clarity of understanding.

---

95 Marcus Banks and Richard Vokes, 'Introduction: Anthropology, Photography and the Archive', *History and Anthropology*, 21 (Dec. 2010), 339.