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The Making of *All That Is Buried*: Dialog, Chronotope and Decoloniality

This article argues for the utility of Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theories in developing dialogic and decolonial filmmaking practices. Using the example of our research-led documentary film, *All That Is Buried*, we challenge traditionally hierarchical structures of film production in which primary authorship lies with the Director/Producer, by implementing dialogic methods of co-creation between filmmakers, researchers and participants. We explain how Bakhtin's work on dialogism, chronotope, transgredience, polyphony and participative thinking provides the production and filmic tools and methods to host the distinct and equal voices of the South African creatives featured in the film - Zizipho Bam, Sindiswa Busuku, Haroon Gunn-Salie, and Dizu Plaatjies - maintaining throughout a sense of shared and equal investment in the project, and ethical responsibility to the collective. *All That Is Buried* shows the four participants discussing their work, ideas and experiences as they move between their homes, places of work, sites of inspiration, and artistic installation in and around Cape Town over the course of a day. In both process and product, we demonstrate how our co-creative methods support, and are supported by, practices of decolonial filmmaking, and provide a model useful and replicable for capturing Arts and Humanities research on film.

Keywords: documentary filmmaking; Bakhtin; chronotope; decoloniality; South Africa; literature

This article explores dialogic and decolonial processes and practices of co-creation between filmmakers, researchers and participants in the design, development and production of a short, research-led documentary film entitled *All That Is Buried* (2023). The film emerged out of an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded research project that examines the development of South African literary modernism from the nineteenth century to the present day, and follows South African artist Haroon Gunn-Salie, poets Sindiswa Busuku and Zizipho Bam, and musician Dizu Plaatjies, as they move in and around their home city of Cape Town over the course of a day. Through

speech, readings, performance, and site-specific installations, the four contributors show how their art, writing and music engage and convey anti-colonial, anti-apartheid, anti-racist, feminist, community-based and traditional knowledges and ideas, provoke emotion and action, express resistance and challenge and strive towards social cohesion, equality and justice.

Here we explain how our small team, comprising filmmakers and English Literature researchers, created a research-led documentary film about South African art, writing and music that was informed in both theory and practice by the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin. We see five concepts from Bakhtin's writings as particularly useful for our work: dialogism, transgredience, participative thinking, the chronotope, and polyphony. Using the example of our film, *All That Is Buried*, we argue that Bakhtinian dialogism – which, in its simplest form, involves the interactions of multiple views within a single work – can be productively mobilised to support the processes and practices of decolonial filmmaking. Transgredience (the transgression of boundaries through interaction) and participative thinking (the renunciation of individualised positions and perspectives to form a unitary consciousness in which act and product are inseparable) helped us to establish production methods committed to egalitarian and non-hierarchical participation and exchange. The inextricable connection between temporal and spatial relations that Bakhtin conceptualises as chronotope, and the plurality of independent but equally valid voices that he terms polyphony, provided the specific tools that shaped the form and content of the film. In this way, we were able to use Bakhtin's work to disrupt traditional filmmaking processes, resulting in the production of a film aligned to the decolonial politics of both filmmakers and contributors.

Our deployment of Bakhtinian theory as decolonising methodology for both production and product has the potential to provide a model and method useful and replicable for and by others looking to capture Arts and Humanities research on film. This claim requires careful negotiation, of course, because although Bakhtin occupies a formative role in the development of literary criticism, and is increasingly important for analyses of film (Flanagan 2009), he is rarely considered in the contexts of Production Studies or as a meaningful contributor to decolonial thought and praxes. It may appear jarring, even inappropriate, to return to the work of a long-departed Russian Formalist to explicate decolonial filmmaking processes in the UK and South Africa in the present day. Indeed, not insignificant intellectual leaps are required to understand why Bakhtin's analysis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary fiction might be relevant to real-world documentary making in the twenty-first century, or why a theoretical work that makes no explicit address to issues of empire, colonisation and race might have something to offer to discussion of those topics. Objections to the continued prioritisation of canonical white male voices in pursuit of decolonisation might also be justifiably levied. In negotiating these potential pitfalls then, we try to retain a sense of Bakhtin's voice as one among many, so that (in true Bakhtinian spirit) his writing is brought into *dialog* with our own, as well as the voices and ideas expressed by the participants in the film. Importantly too, the mobilisation of this critical theoretical model emerged as a direct consequence of our multi-disciplinary and collaborative creative process. So, although Bakhtin's work does not explicitly address issues of racial equity and justice, we found that in the making of *All That Is Buried* his writing on dialogism, participative thinking, transgredience, the chronotope and polyphony provided us with the tools and methods to host distinct and equal voices, ideas and experiences, maintain a sense of shared and equal investment in the project,

and ensure ethical responsibility to the collective. We interpret all of these processes and outcomes as supportive of, and supported by, decolonial filmmaking practice.

Dialog

In the making of *All That Is Buried*, our team sought to work outside of established film production practices, which typically affirm and instate the alienation of labour (to borrow from Marx) by maintaining distinct roles within fixed hierarchies so that primary authorship remains only with a privileged few (e.g. the Director / Producer). We aimed instead to bring together Bakhtin's literary theories and lessons from Production Studies to establish a dialogic, non-hierarchical, decolonial and participative production culture. Participative thinking, in Bakhtin's words, is the thinking of 'those who know how not to detach their performed act from its product, but rather how to relate both of them to the unitary and unique context of life and seek to determine them in that context as an indivisible unity' (1993, 19). This resonates with Miranda Banks's point that Production Studies is 'predicated on the assumption that knowledge of the cultural and industrial modes of production will not just inform, but alter one's reading not only of the media text, but of the media' (2009, 87). Combining these insights to understand process and product as two sides of the same coin, we also set out to challenge conventional 'approaches to film criticism' as described by David Hesmondhalgh, which typically tend to

> focus on the idea that there is an especially talented artist at the heart of the work and often ignores the means by which the films have reached an audience, how it was supported or suppressed or the means by which it was produced […] downplay[ing] its dependence on colonialism, patriarchy and exploitation and in doing so – marginalis[ing] other approaches to art. (2019, 10)

Understanding the work as a product and representation of working practice requires direct acknowledgement of the manifold ways that it is imbued and shaped by the structural inequalities of gender, race, class etc. that constitute the economic conditions of production, dissemination, and reception. Hesmondhalgh's point is important therefore, because although we, as makers of a small-scale documentary film, are unable to meaningfully alter the commodification and hierarchisation of the cultural industries at large, we are able to actively listen to, and stage, voices and experiences wholly distinct and different from our own in ways that enact a participative, dialogic and egalitarian production culture. This impetus in our work has broader implications too, because as Sarah Wiebe notes, 'collaborative filmmaking provides a forum for resistance to dominant colonial discourses whilst creating a space for radical difference in pursuit of decolonization' (2015, 244); and as Chi-Hui Yang further explains, '[i]f we mess around with Documentary Power, if we hold it accountable, we can destabilize, reimagine and build more equitable social, cultural and political power on a much broader level' (2019, n.p.).

In process and end-product, we also took steers from an essay on acts of learning in education by Alexander Sidorkin, in which he brings Karl Marx's theory of alienation into conversation with Bakhtin's work on participative thinking to argue 'that alienation is not only a function of such social conditions as the mode of production; it is also a matter of ethical consideration for the person who is doing the producing', and 'at its core, alienation is not about relationships between the producer and the products and the systems of production, alienation is grounded in a corrosion of the human ability to act, to partake in the eventness of Being' (2004, 259). Bakhtin's theory of eventness of Being, or 'Being-as-event' (1993, 2) interprets life as a continuous series of acts or events experienced by the individual as unique occurrences, which might also

at the same time be shared with others in ways understood as dialogic. For Bakhtin, 'a theory needs to be brought into communion not with theoretical constructions and conceived life, but with the actually occurring event of moral being' (1993, 12). Interpreting this statement in the context of our work, we understood this to mean that an act does not take precedence over product, nor production over film, rather there is an ethical imperative created by the holistic connection between them, as per Sidorkin's elucidation of Bakhtin's arguments (2004, 258). In the making our film then, we sought to deploy models of production that reflect not just 'the theoretical truth', in Bakhtin's words, but also the truth of Being-as-event (1993, 71).

From our earliest meetings as a team (Sept 2021-Jul 2022), we established horizontal ways of working grounded in dialogic modes of communication and participative thinking. This ensured that we were able to respect and trust one another's skills and contributions, and learn and adapt to changing and multiple roles, whilst staying in the eventness of the accidental, spontaneous, and contributor-led direction that facilitates dialog. The openness, flexibility, and opportunities for connectedness facilitated by sharing in Being-as-event offered a workable alternative to the structural inequalities engendered by the enforcement of fixed and discrete roles within production hierarchies. It also presented a solution to the (potential) alienation of individual contributors from the film, processes, each other, and even themselves.

Inevitably of course, experience, knowledge, and existing skill sets did inform our initial and primary roles: two of the team were experienced producer/directors who took responsibility for establishing relationships and conducting interviews with the contributors as well as overseeing the technical and aesthetic approaches to the film, where the academic research team offered theoretical perspectives on aesthetics and content that informed the editorial process. Each of us therefore joined the team with

our own irreducibly specific knowledge and skills, and yet there was flexibility built into our working practices that still allowed for a joining of consciousnesses and the embracing of individual ideas and points of view. For example, logistical reasons made it impossible for everyone to be present for all of the interviews that took place as part of the shoot, but the whole team were involved in logging rushes, and team members worked in pairs to transcribe the many hours of footage. All of us were therefore able to develop shared and intimate understanding of the content and form of the recorded material so that informed opinions and ideas (or, *meaning*) could emerge through dialog. The editorial process then, sought always to fend off a monologic authorial voice and the primacy of a single Director/Producer through collective and sustained attentiveness to our own temporally- and spatially-specific and shifting eventness of Being ([1981] 2002, 255).

As filmmakers we had only tangential links to the individual experiences of the film's four subjects, their art, and the contexts of their work. For this reason, it was important to engage the participants in ways that did not simply utilise their lived experiences and aesthetic expressions to support an already-designed and pre-approved narrative structure. Our interest was in the unique social, historical, and political conditions that informed their artistic outputs, and so it would have been untruthful to design a treatment that pursued a driving thesis (at any stage) that over-emphasised any specific point of view. Thus, when we initially proposed to Plaatjies, Bam, Busuku and Gunn-Salie that we intended to create a film that explored contemporary engagements with, and (re-)interpretations of, existing works of South African modernist literature, we were quickly confronted with the limitations of this format as one that did not necessarily speak to their artistic interests. This instigated a key moment of reflection, as our original idea now seemed incompatible with our stated commitment to decolonial

filmmaking – that is, we risked imposing a monologic narrative through a prescriptive and rigid approach to the creation of story, script, and schedule.

Bakhtin's 'surplus of seeing' (2010, 15) as synthesised by Michael Holquist helped us to rethink our approach. Bakhtin illustrates this concept with the example of 'when you and I face each other, I can see things behind your head you do not see, and you can see things behind my head that I cannot see' (Holquist 2010, 15). Whilst the things I cannot see are not outside of experience, they are outside the boundaries of my sight at that moment. If we switch places, Bakhtin explains, what was previously unseen comes into sight, and both subjects recognise the other's 'surplus of seeing'. He uses this example to explicate his theory of transgredience - the transgression of boundaries through interaction (Holquist 2010, 15). Though complete transgredience remains impossible as one can never fully inhabit the perception or experience of the other, the continual striving for transgredience in experience is an ethical and necessary endeavour, one compatible with both decolonial praxes and participative thinking. To be clear, the other in Bakhtin's description is not established in postcolonial terms as an Orientalised or primitivised other, but as Liisa Steinby and Tintti Klapuri indicate, a

> co-subject: one to whom we listen when he speaks, whom we speak to, whose words we include in our own speech. Thus we do not recognize other's human dignity and our moral obligation to him or her in an abstract way; we are involved in a real encounter with the other person in terms of his own self-understanding and his understanding of the world, as expressed in his or her own words and acts. (2013, xxi)

This real interaction of self and other provides the context and conditions for dialog, and, as Sung Uk Lim points out, this idea can then be connected to a decolonial ethics because it acknowledges 'multiple centers with diverse perspectives' so that all discourse 'has a limited perspective, which is also relative to other perspectives', just as

'colonial discourse is subject to relative truths rather than absolute truth' because 'all colonial subjects, regardless of whether they are the colonizers or colonized, are all centers in terms of "seeing"' (2011, 120). Following this decolonial line, we wanted to make our activities 'answerable' (Bakhtin 1993, 29) through the unity of thinking and action, and in our responsibility to, and respect for, others.

Chronotope

Duly and newly inspired and motivated to jettison our original plan, we committed to a filmmaking process without pre-determined diegesis, themes, and unifying foci prior to commencing the shoot. This choice to break some of the most basic operational rules of filmmaking was made possible by the high levels of trust and confidence in and between filmmakers, researchers, and participants established through our early interactions. We felt it essential that the four artists were co-creators, and had ownership of their contributions and representations within the film. This required us to determine and form ways to hear, understand, and represent what Bakhtin calls '[a] plurality of independent and un-merged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices' ([1984] 1999, 6). Bakhtin elucidates his concept of polyphony in literature through analysis of Dostoevsky's novels, in which he proposes that their dialogic nature gives equal voice to different characters. Bakhtin's theory of polyphony has also previously been productively adopted and adapted by others, for example by Aston and Odorico, who argue that it has purchase as a 'tool and method to define and frame the field' of interactive documentaries (i-docs) (2018, 68).[i] This insight gives important pointers to our argument here, though we suggest the further application of the concept as a tool for decolonising documentary filmmaking by ensuring shared ownership of the process when creating a documentary narrative.

There is no monologic or unifying voiceover in *All That Is Buried*, so that the

only voices that can be clearly heard are those of the four contributors, the co-authors of

the film. In this way, the narrative is driven by only their 'speaking consciousness[es]'

(Bakhtin [1984] 1999, 434), delivered as a series of responses to the (unheard) primary

guiding question: 'Why do you create?'. The artists were thus able to curate and self-

direct their own responses, articulating their own individual personal, political, social

and other drivers for the production of original music, poetry, prose and art. Influenced

by Bakhtin's writings on polyphony, this approach meant that Bam, Busuku, Gunn-

Salie and Plaatjies were not 'objects of authorial discourse' but instead 'subjects of their

own directly signifying discourse' ([1984] 1999, 7). The structure of the film then

emerged through their creative impetus rather than through external direction based on a

preconceived film treatment or thesis-led exposition. Again with reference to

Dostoevsky's novel characters, Bakhtin alerts us to how a polyphonic approach

safeguards '*free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not

agreeing with him and even rebelling against him' ([1984] 1999, 6). Of course in

transposing Bakhtin's argument from fictional characters to documentary film we

recognise that the contributors are not the creations of the filmmaker, but the point

remains that in their representation in the documentary film, their utterances stand

independently from, even in opposition to, the perspectives of the filmmakers, as well

as to any notion of the monologic authorial voice. In line with Enrica Colusso's

approach to ethical documentary filmmaking, this means that we allowed for 'a mode of

relating and communicating between the filmmaker and her subject, a qualitative

"listening" and a mutual awareness capable of profound transformation in both' (2017,

155). Another way of thinking about this is as heteroglossia, which Bakhtin describes

'as close a conceptualization as is possible of that locus where centripetal and

centrifugal forces collide' ([1984] 1999, 428). Although centripetal force is required in the editing process to create a coherent film narrative, the centrifugal force exerted by the speech of our contributors resists too-easy generalisations of voice and story. Through the concept of heteroglossia, Bakhtin alerts us to the ways in which meaning is shaped through interaction, speech by context, and how there will always exist a variety of different manners of speech even within a single character or novel, or as in our example, the film or individual contributor.

In order to pursue dialogic and decolonial thought and action in the making and content of *All That Is Buried*, we needed to establish a shaping dynamic that could host polyphonic contributions, connections, and meanings. Taking our cue from Bakhtin once more, we turned to his work on the '*chronotope* (literally, "time space")', which he uses to describe 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed' ([1981] 2002, 84). For Bakhtin, 'every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope' ([1981] 2002, 258), and so we chose to incorporate a car into the shoot [Figure 1, Figure 2]. This had practical motivations, serving as a means to transport our participants around the city, whilst also functioning as both a recognisable signifier of modernity and modernist cultures (along with the city and cinema), and as a filmic vehicle that would permit the calibrations of time and space necessary for dialogic communication. The car thus provides the chronotope through which individualised experiences can be communicated, but it also becomes a part of the narrative construction of the film, generating meanings that, in Martin Flanagan's words, '[complete] the dialogical circuit' (2009, 55) by merging the 'actual chronotopes of our world' (Bakhtin [1981] 2002, 253) with the 'reflected and created chronotopes' (253) of the film. As Flanagan explains, 'meaning does not reside inside the film can, Blu-ray disc case or memory

card but in the multiple consciousness of audiences' (2009, 188). 'The represented world […] can never be chronotopically identical with the real world' (Bakhtin [1981] 2002, 256), it is the unique contexts and minds of the viewers in dialog with others within and outside of the film, where meaning is created.

In *All That Is Buried*, the car functions as signifier of both forms of chronotopic classification and understanding: the 'folkloric chronotope' (Bakhtin [1981] 2002, 146) recognisable across forms and genres over time, and the chronotopic 'motif' specific to the individual diegesis (97). So although the car as folkloric chronotope in *All That Is Buried* recalls the mainstream Hollywood trope of the automobile as vehicle for liberation and rebellion (as in, for example, *They Live By Night* (1948), *The Wrong Man* (1956), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *Thelma and Louise* (1991)), it also invites other meanings unique as a chronotopic motif to the time-space of the locations and individuals behind and in front of the camera, the production process, and the viewing audience. Moreover, given the devastating impacts of the fossil-fuelled climate and ecological crises, public perceptions of cars are changing, so that they are now just as likely to evoke reflections 'that automobility [is] no longer an historically progressive force for change' (Flink 1972, 451-452). In South Africa, two-thirds of households do not own a car, and so it remains a clear and distinctive marker of the gross economic inequalities still in place. Importantly too, the absence of a secure, reliable and extensive public transport infrastructure means that for many South Africans, the car represents the safest mode of travel. But of course – this is only available to those who can afford it, and is still paradoxically limited and dangerous with over 23,000 car jackings annually (*BusinessTech*, February, 2023).

Although the four subjects of *All That Is Buried* had never previously met, and did not meet until after the shoot, the chronotope of the car creates the context for their

dialogic interactions with one another, and with the makers, subjects, and viewers across specific contexts of production, dissemination, and reception. Bam, Busuku, Gunn-Salie, and Plaatjies were filmed separately, and each is accorded distinct, equal and sequential time and space within the film. Each artist's voice therefore has 'equal rights' and comes 'each with its own world' (Bakhtin [1984] 1999, 6). Plaatjies talks about art as the only constant in the world, and of the role of music and traditional instruments in connecting to ancestors and to history. Bam and Gunn-Salie speak about using their art as political tools in pursuit of equality and social justice, with Bam homing in on how art can reflect on women's position in the current socio-political landscape, and Gunn-Salie focusing on how art addresses the reverberances of past injustices in the present. Finally, Busuku discusses the power of art to articulate the unspeakable and create intimacy between people. In the film, each person occupies a different position in the car as it travels from morning to night around the streets, suburbs, and surrounds of Cape Town. The 'dialogizing influence they have on each other' (Bakhtin [1984] 1999, 346) however, is facilitated by their respective positions in the car, and confluent and corresponding moments and ideas in their speech. As such, the car becomes the space in which their utterances are brought into dialog so that they can be read in relation to, and as responses to, each other. This mode of representation is influenced by Steinby and Klapuri's note on the ethical dimensions of Bakhtin's work, as exemplified by their contention 'that the chronotope is not, as traditionally conceived, primarily an epistemological but an ethical category, i.e. it is not about different ways of perceiving temporality and spatiality but rather about different possibilities of human action in a concrete situation' (2013, xx). In *All That Is Buried*, each contributors' utterances exist within their own world at the same time as the

responses intermix, but do not merge in the unity of the event of being an artist in contemporary Cape Town.

To further counteract the monologic authority of the director and limit interference in the contributors' stories, we drew inspiration from Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's innovative representation of the inner lives or inner speech of his characters. Now considered a hallmark of modernist writing, streams of consciousness provide insights into the interior worlds of novel characters, also often combining shifting narrative focalisations from character to character as a way of providing differing perspectives on the action of the novel. We gesture towards this in *All That Is Buried* by introducing each contributor out of vision. Thus we see a shot out of the front window of the moving car as we hear Plaatjies deliver the opening lines: '[w]hen we look at things happening in this country now, we want to smell a revolution' (00:47-00:52). The film then cuts to a close-up shot of Plaatjies's face as he starts to explain the role of music in providing comfort to people. Just as Bakhtin describes 'the literature of private life' as one that allows readers to '*eavesdrop*', so too did we seek to introduce our contributors in the same way, affording the audience the opportunity to hear their voice before the audience meets the contributors in vision (Bakhtin [1981] 2002, 123). Plaatjies, Bam, Gunn-Salie and Busuku are all introduced with the same visual and auditory cue: first an off-camera utterance signifying their internal monologue followed by their entrance (either on foot, or in the moving vehicle). Their opening lines create dialogic meaning through the expression of recurring and confluent ideas. So, Plaatjie's comment about potential and fomenting political unrest is linked to the opening point made by Bam that 'our state of mind has been under attack for such a long time and it's only now that we are conscious of certain things that have been happening in our country' (03:07-03:15). Indeed, all of the contributors make connections between the

end of apartheid and the parturition of the Rainbow Nation in the 1990s and the failure of successive ANC governments to bring this ideal to fruition. In this way, the 'stream of consciousness' effect allows the contributors' voices to negotiate meaning through dialog as they each respond to the utterances of others.

Decoloniality

The title of our film, *All That Is Buried*, comes from the first South African novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, by feminist and anti-colonial writer Olive Schreiner (1855-1920). By introducing one of the earliest examples of mainstream creative production into the dialog of the film, we suggest that South African art, music, and writing connects past, present, and future as part of an ongoing conversation. The quote in full is as follows, and appears as an epigraph at the start of the film:

> The troubles of the young are soon over; they leave no external mark. If you wound the tree in its youth the bark will quickly cover the gash; but when the tree is very old, peeling the bark off, and looking carefully, you will see the scar there still. All that is buried is not dead. (Schreiner [1883] 1992, 97)

Schreiner's tree metaphor expresses how violence, trauma, and evidence of suffering may be hidden or obscured, but the lasting and irreparable damage remains, and can be uncovered. The resonance of this idea reaches beyond Schreiner's colonial context of writing in the late nineteenth century to the contemporary post-apartheid moment, chiming with the community-orientated, decolonising, and anti-racist drives of the art produced by the subjects of the film. This is perhaps best exemplified by the epigraph's dialogic connections to Gunn-Salie's site-specific intervention, 'Zonnebloem Renamed', which features in the film. This artwork directly addresses the consequences of the apartheid-era Group Areas Act, which was used to forcibly evict over 60,000 residents from the multi-racial working-class area, District Six, in the 1970s. District

Six was razed, redesignated a whites-only area, and renamed Zonnebloem. As Gunn-Salie explains in *All That Is Buried*, 'I had someone under the promise of anonymity make signage for me – same font, same vinyl, and then I changed the road signs back to District Six' (06:20-06:29). Interspersing footage from Gunn-Salie's own filmed documentation of the installation (which took place at night to avoid police detection), he clarifies that 'it's not just a name, it's a piece of justice' (06:34-06:37), setting right the attempt by the apartheid government to 'permanently erase the history of that area' (06:52-06:55; Gunn-Salie 2013). Gunn-Salie goes on to argue that 'changing it back to District Six was an act of restoration and an act of like vigilante justice. The fact that you can walk through the city and you can actually interact with the works – that's what's special' (06:56-07:09). The wounds of Zonnebloem still remain of course, just as the word still lies beneath the covering, peeling, District Six stickers, even a decade later.

Sustained dialogic interactions of past, present, and future reverberate across the contributions of the four artists. All make reference to the ongoing trauma of South Africa's colonial and apartheid past, showing how their art engages with the many economic, social, political, and infrastructure failures of the Rainbow Nation. Racial segregation, no longer enforced through apartheid laws, can still be easily mapped on to the spaces inhabited by, and gross economic disparities between, Black, 'coloured', and white people in South Africa.[ii] Plaatjies describes an effect of this as follows: 'we come from oppression, now we see the freedom. But the freedom that we think that is freedom is not the real freedom that we fought for. Free education, free houses and so on – if those things didn't happen, the only thing that will comfort you is the music' (00:55-01:17). The film then cuts to a shot of Plaatjies performing on the uhadi, itself an example of contemporary engagement with the past, as Plaatjies makes and restores

traditional instruments to create new music (Plaatjies 2021; Plaatjies, Plaatjies and Dinga 2020) [Figure 3]. We hear a similar message from Gunn-Salie too, who states: 'I just don't believe that until we've actually achieved freedom on all accounts, including economic freedom, that we can celebrate a victory yet' (05:44-05:53). Indeed, he outlines a charge that has been levied against him: 'I get told by some that I'm obsessed with history. That I – why won't I move on? Why can't we move on like the rest of us move on? And I, I just simply won't' (05:32-05:42).

All That Is Buried picks up on other tropes also represented in Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, including the chronotope. Itala Vivan suggests that the farm in Schreiner's novel 'becomes an iconic conglomerate of temporal and spatial dimensions' (2021, 360); and one of the co-authors of this article, Jade Munslow Ong, argues that the semi-desert Karoo setting of the novel together with 'the deteriorating homestead comprise a chronotope of time as space, where the emptiness or bareness of things that should have been symbols of colonial control and authority, forms an allegory of the effects of colonisation on history' (2017, 72). So too in *All That Is Buried*, markers of South Africa's colonial past appear within the urban geographies of Cape Town. By way of only three examples: the film repeatedly returns to a forward view from within the car, showing a Christian cross dangling from the rear-view mirror; there is a frame showing the plinth that once supported a statue of arch-imperialist Cecil Rhodes; and in the closing shot, the car drives past a Union Jack (the flag of the United Kingdom) hanging from a post [Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6]. These symbols and legacies of colonial intervention carry a narrative responsibility, loaded as they are with historical meaning. The cross alludes to South Africa's colonial history, because Christian missionaries played a central role in the expansion of European empires and associated spread of global capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986, 1). The empty

plinth invites historically-extended dialogic and decolonial connections because Schreiner was one of the first major public figures to turn against her former friend Rhodes, denouncing his rabid imperialist expansionism in Mashonaland and Matabeleland in her allegorical novella, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897); and 118 years later, the Rhodes statue on the University of Cape Town campus was pulled down as part of the 2015 student-led decolonising movement, #RhodesMustFall. The flag, finally, serves as a reminder of the British Empire and British colonisation of South Africa.

Despite the loaded potential of the colonial symbols of the cross, statue and flag, their presence in the film cannot be attributed to directorial design. The cross was already hanging from the mirror of the taxi we used to shoot the film, and belonged to the driver, Chris Jangano Sithole; the covered plinth is mere steps away from the A.C. Jordan Building on the University of Cape Town campus, where Busuku's office is based, and which she passes on her way to work; and we admit that we only noticed the flag in the final shot when we began to write this article! This last is offered as evidence that we did not seek to overplay the importance of these symbols within the frames of the film – they are small, peripheral and fleeting, yet serve as constant reminders of a past interwoven in the present, illustrating in a quiet way the point made by Busuku that 'there is never any time that I don't feel the weight of history bearing down' (08:02-08:08).

Throughout *All That Is Buried*, shots of Bam, Busuku, Gunn-Salie and Plaatjies are interspersed with 'interstitials' of Cape Town life and traffic. In these in-between moments, we tried to avoid recreating the objectifying European colonial gaze so long directed at African people, and historically used to create and sustain racist ideologies across various cultural, scientific and anthropological forms. As such, we chose not to

include close-ups of people's faces, which Mary-Ann Doane describes as '*the* most recognizable units of cinematic discourse' and 'privileged receptacle of affect [and] passion' (2003, 91). Instead, the interstitials capture fleeting glimpses of inhabitants of Cape Town from a distance, in wide shots, and out of focus. Many of the people are hooded, and face away from the camera. There are hooded figures too in Gunn-Salie's footage of 'Zonnebloem Renamed' – though in this case head coverings were used to deliberately disguise and conceal those involved in replacing the road signs in case of legal repercussions. The interstitials in *All That Is Buried* do not, therefore, strive to impose meaning, nor attempt to speak over or for others. Rather, they hint at the many South African stories that are not directly accessed by the film - the polyphony of voices that exist beyond the dialog of the four main subjects.

In *All That Is Buried,* both Busuku and Bam read their poetry aloud, including in Bam's case, at a poetry event hosted by *Off The Wall*. Though, as already discussed, we sought to avoid any close-up, lingering or easily-recognisable shots of faces other than those of the four main subjects of the film, we made an exception for shots of the crowd at the poetry event, after seeking permission from audience members to do so. These reaction shots capture a diverse audience, spanning old and young, men and women, and Black, white, 'coloured' and mixed-race Capetonians engaged and sharing in a creative, supportive space. Interestingly, the social cohesion suggested by the optics of the film does not resonate with the content of Bam's poetry, nor with much of the content of the film itself. The vision of diversity and unity represented in *All That Is Buried* is not necessarily therefore a representation of the real experience of living and working in Cape Town, and yet was entirely truthful in the given context. Warning of the importance of recognising the boundary between what is real and what is portrayed, Bakhtin writes that 'we must never confuse[…] the *represented* world with the world

outside the text', as this would constitute 'naïve realism' (1981, 253). Relatedly, Sidorkin argues that for Bakhtin, general consciousness and universal truth do not exist (2002, 89). As documentary filmmakers then, we aimed to observe events 'as they happened' with little intervention, to 'include moments representative of lived time itself rather than what we may call "story time"' (Nicholls, 40). Neither looking to determine a set interpretation nor assume a contrary one, *All That Is Buried* thus represents a real situation as it appeared in front of us, though it may appear, and indeed function, as a form of untruth.

Two of the politically radical keynotes of *The Story of an African Farm* are its intersecting anti-colonialism and feminism. And though Schreiner's views on these issues did not fully coalesce with a clear anti-racist stance until much later in life, for Bam, writing today, the three are inseparable. Clearly positioning herself on her website 'as a young black womxn' (Bam n.d), Bam conveys in *All That Is Buried* her sense that 'women are under attack, black girls are under attack, our state of mind has been under attack for such a long time' (03:01-03:09). This is captured too in her poetry, including in 'Where I'm From', which she reads aloud in the film:

> To be a woman from this country is to wear your tough skin on the outside
> Is to show up with your guard up
> With your gild in place. […]
> To belong to this country is to be bruised every day […]
> Or to bleed, quietly. […]
> Where I'm from, women do not belong' (02:20-02:31; 02:41-02:56; 05:00-05:04)

Bam's poem about the crisis of gender-based violence in South Africa is grounded in harsh reality. In June 2020, President Cyril Ramphosa acknowledged that intimate partner violence in South Africa was amongst the highest levels in the world, affecting around 51% of South African women (*Human Rights Watch*, 2020). All too few options

exist for escape, resistance, restitution and justice, so that as Bam has it: women can try to 'heal inside the fire and turmoil', 'look for a place that does not burn', or, more likely, 'play dead instead' (2022, 61). The question Bam poses both directly in the film, and indirectly in her art then, is: 'How do we merge poetry into social justice? And how do we find ways in which poetry can be innovative, to start a movement, to […] change the way people think?' (03:41-03:52).

Busuku's work is similarly guided by anti-racist, anti-colonial and feminist principles and praxes, though in *All That Is Buried* she widens her frames of reference beyond national boundaries, stating that '[t]here is just this overwhelming sense of threat that I feel and I don't think that's unique to me or unique to South Africa. I think that many people will resonate with that' (08:09-08:23). Busuku reads lines from her forthcoming book: 'after the burning years the trees cracked and bled for months and began thinning along with all the dying wildfires' (07:39-07:48). In a world all-but-destroyed by human cruelty, even the plants are compelled to move away: 'the trees grew quiet, too quiet, and then they grew hard. They didn't remember me anymore. Then, they disappeared, without turning to wave goodbye' (10:40-10:55). Though both Busuku and Bam convey in their art a shared, all-encompassing and unceasing sense of peril, they also offer insights into the roles played by intimacy, friendship and succour that reveal their deep ethical and political commitment, and future promise. Thus Bam says that 'the role of poets is to comfort and to disturb sometimes […] for people to wake up, the call to action, but sometimes to comfort and to calm down and to heal' (04:00-04:13), and Busuku states that 'I think that it's in the intimacy between people that hope exists' (10:15-10:21). In this way, both Bam and Busuku infer that writing, reading and listening to poetry, and connecting people through art, friendship and

dialog, can provide refuge, hope and paths towards restoration, just as Schreiner's tree heals without ignoring or eliding the traumas of the past and present.

Conclusion

The literary and cinematic journey of the film comes to an abrupt end in the final shot, when we reach – both metaphorically and physically – the end of the road. A forward view from within the car shows a traffic light turning red. As the car comes to a stop, we see a road sign with two options: Table Mountain to the left (which recalls the first shot of the film in which the mountain comes into view as the car turns), and the ocean to the right, which opens up new and unknown destinations [Figure 7]. For Bakhtin, progressive movement along the chronotope of the road represents progressive movement through life, so that '[o]ne can even go as far to say that in folklore a road is almost never really a road, but always suggests the whole, or a portion of, "the path of life"' (1981, 120). The ending of *All That Is Buried* subverts this folkloric chronotope, however. There is no clear destination, no clear 'path of life' in the film. This is because each contributor had ownership of their own chapters and so chose their own locations for filming, including their homes (in Plaatjies's case) and places of work (in Busuku's case), at a poetry event and at the beach (in Bam's case), and at the sites of various art installations (in Gunn-Salie's case). These self-directed shots situate the contributors in spaces that they consider important for their own lives and artistic practice.

The interstitials on the other hand, capture the various roads travelled to move between these and other destinations – in itself a decolonising endeavour, because as Molly Anderson and Shari Daya explain: '[t]he apartheid project in South Africa was as much a spatial project as it was a social one' (2022). The long history of racialised segregation in South Africa was imposed by various legislations, including the colonial

Glen Grey Act of 1894, the Natives Land Act of 1913, and the apartheid-era Group Areas Act of 1950 that used race classifications to determined neighbourhood inhabitancy. As we have already mentioned, this last Act facilitated the displacement and forced removals of Black, 'coloured' and Indian citizens from various urban areas, and as Gunn-Salie points out: 'people from District Six mainly still live out in the dusty wastes of the Cape Flats in poverty and gang-infested ghettos - and that's unfair. So at what point to we accept this and at what point do we actually continue a fight?' (07:16-07:31). Indeed, despite the end of apartheid, neighbourhoods, suburbs and townships around the city are mostly still divided along racial lines. But as 'space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' (Bakhtin 2008, 84), the chronotope of the road in *All That Is Buried* moves far beyond folkloric instantiations to take on nuanced and additional temporal and spatialised politics. The car and the artists move freely in and around a city formed and still shaped by a colonial past, newly occupying and investing those sites with creative meanings unique to their eventness of Being. Indeed, Bakhtin helps us to see the power in Bam, Busuku, Gunn-Salie and Plaatjies' address to the role of art in representing and responding to South African social and cultural contexts, politics, and history when he describes how 'a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event' ([1984] 1999, 6).

Our final act in the making of *All That Is Buried* was to screen the film for the participants and a public audience as a way of acknowledging, and being held accountable for, the dialogic mechanisms of the production process, the product created, and its afterlife in the hands of the participants and audiences. The screening was hosted by Gunn-Salie at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town in June 2023. The Castle, a bastion fort dating back to the mid-seventeenth century, is the oldest existing colonial

building in South Africa. It was therefore a somewhat surprising and striking setting for a film concerned with decolonial thought and action. Yet as we discovered through an invigorating and emotional audience-led Q&A (spanning tears, laughter and everything between), and through feedback collected from attendees, 'the fact that even Black Women can occupy spaces like the Castle' (anonymous participant feedback, 21 June, 2023) became an important part of the art, activism and dialog taking place within and beyond the film. We were also gratified to read other positive responses from attendees, which commented on how the film 'showed the richness and diversity of the [South African] art community', that 'art is revolution', and, finally, that 'the struggle continues' (anonymous participant feedback, 21 June, 2023).

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Figures

Figure 1 Haroon Gunn-Salie

Figure 2 Zizipho Bam

Figure 3 Dizu Plaatjies

Figure 4 Cross in car

Figure 5 Plinth and former site of the Cecil Rhodes statue, University of Cape Town

Figure 6 Union Jack

Figure 7 Final shot of *All That Is Buried*

Ethics

Ethics Approval granted by the University of Salford: 7539.

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[i] An interactive documentary, or i-doc, is 'any project that starts with the intention to engage with the real, and that uses digital interactive technology to realize this intention' (Judith Aston, Sandra Gaudenzi, and Mary Rose quoted in Aston and Odorico 2018, 64).

[ii] The term 'coloured' has a specific history and contested meaning in contemporary South Africa and is thus placed in scare quotes to mark this. It was originally used to refer to people of mixed-race descent predominantly based in the Cape, was deployed as legally-

defined racial classification during the apartheid era, and forms one of a number of racial

categories with a presence and power over South African lives that still persists (See

Erasmus 2017).