



Modjadji, Of Myth and Fantasy.

*For Bodwekhe,
a conversation over a lifetime*

Modjadi

Of Myth and Fantasy

Modjadji, Of Myth and Fantasy

the imaginings of a phantom,
what remains of a story whose master
have long ascended

Book 1

Dithugula tša Malefokana

A curatorial project by

George Mahashe

MA[FA] submission, Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town

ARC: the visual university and its collumbarium and

The Centre for Curating the Archive.

Cape Town, South Africa

Copyright © George Mahashe 2012

Notes on Orthography

Some words referring to names in Khelobedu will be inconsistent as there was no standard orthography for Khelobedu during the early period. I have kept the author's original spelling while correcting them to the now dominant Northern Sotho spelling for my use. For example, the incorrect spelling is Modjadjie, the correct spelling Modjadji; similarly Lovedu for Lobedu; Balobedu refers to the people of Bolobedu; Khelobedu refers to the culture, language and religion of Balobedu (all things Lobedu); while Lobedu refers to/of a people, and Bolobedu refers to the place of the Balobedu.

Modjadji, Of Myth and Fantasy

the imaginings of a phantom,
what remains of a story whose master
have long ascended

The text explore the imagination – my imagination as well as a scholarly imagination – of Khelobedu and, in particular, the ways in which the Rain Queen has been imagined, interpreted, appropriated and immortalised. I chart and explore ideas and look for ways of seeing or imagining new connections between contemporary fact and myth. I examine the different threads that have contributed to the imaginings of the myth of Balobedu’s rain queen. I start with some hearsay and move on to the canon of the myth in the form of *The Realm of a Rain Queen: A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society* (Krige & Krige, 1943), which is the classic Lobedu ethnographic monograph. I

¹ Dr. Mathole Kherofo (hereditary name of a famous Lobedu magician) Motshekga is a Lobedu-born academic and politician who served as legal council and advisor to the deceased rain queen Modjadji VI. An ANC heavyweight (current Chief Whip for the ANC in Parliament) and author of numerous essays and books on Lobedu cosmology, his honours include a Fulbright scholarship.

also look at new ideas as found in the insider perspective found in *The Modjadji Dynasty : Principles of Female Leadership in African Cosmology* (Motshekga,¹ 2010), as well as the modern appropriation of the figure of the rain queen, foregrounding gender issues and heritage economies as found in the essay, “Who Killed the Rain Queen” (McGregor, 2007). I look at some of the primary sources that form the basis of the myth as expressed in the form of scientific authority “ Modjadje: A Native Queen” (Reuter,² 1907) report submitted to the *South African Association for the Advancement of Science* in 1905/1906. As well as the historical novel *The Bush Speaks: Border Life in the Old Transvaal* (Dicke,³ 1937), which becomes the key source of the myth as it sets both a wider historical account, context and dishes out some gossip on the actors that are part of the original formation of the myth. I close with a brief look at the opening scene of the North Sotho play *Modjadji* (Franz,⁴ 1972) that gives a visually rich account of Modjadji’s rise, contextualised by the journal article “G.H. Franz’s *Modjadji*: archetypes of time and the transcendence of history” (Boshego & Lloyd, 2009) which tracks the formation of Modjadji as a myth as presented in Franz’s *Modjadji* (1972).

Over and above this, I grasp at straws as my imagination makes connections between the story and the facts and try to link some of them to current debates.

² Rev. Friedrich (Fritz) Ludwig (1848-1940) was the first successful missionary in Bolobedu. He arrived in Bolobedu in 1888 under the umbrella of the Berlin Mission Society, which had been in the area since 1963 (Mashale 2009) and had been active in South Africa since 1824.

³ Bernhard H. Dicke was a prolific writer who has written several books and accounts of the northern Transvaal. His subjects range from military history to social science.

⁴ Gottfreid. H. Franz (1896-1956) was the son of a Berlin missionary who worked in the northern Transvaal as an educationist specialising in Northern Sotho.

Background

I work on an archive of photographic objects, left in the custody⁵ of Iziko South African Museum's Social History department. This comprises 700 plus black and white negatives and photographs made 1930 to 1939 during the fieldwork of anthropologists, E.J. and J.D. Krige, in Bolobedu during the rule of Queen Modjadji III. The Rev. and Mrs. Krause facilitated the Kriges' initial introductions in Bolobedu. Rev. Krause was the successor (1940) to the pioneering missionary Rev. Reuter (1881-1940), and Mrs. Krause was the daughter of Rev. Reuter. It is my working assumption that the Lobedu were active collaborators in the making of the ethnography *The Realm of a Rain Queen: A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society* (Krige & Krige 1943). I regard the archive as the sacred objects of the Kriges and Balobedu, and I approach it as a mediator rather than a historian. By this I mean that although I might historicise and anthropologise the archive, my main aim is to understand it as the body of an ancestor or as remnant of an ancestor in need of praise and libation, as opposed to a library/archival source to be read and studied.⁶ In essence, I concern myself with imagining how one could go about mediating the libation of this archive.

⁵ The images are not accessioned as a photographic archive: they are seen as complementary to the material culture that Eileen officially donated to the South African Museum.

⁶ My resistance to study (criticise) the archive takes cognisance of the fact that to only study an archive without accepting/realising its wider context closes the potential of the archive down, thus shutting down most of the threads that lead to new knowledge.

⁷ Where most neighbouring countries/districts had their rainmakers, the Lobedu queen was resorted to when they failed. Unlike the circular rainmakers who could make and attract rain to their country, Modjadji could withhold or send rain to a particular place outside her domain. Because of this ability she is feared by many chiefs (Krige & Krige, 1943). She herself is noted to have confessed that her ancestors can hold her hand, disabling her ability to control the rain, thereby admitting that the limit of her power lay with the ancestors (cited in the documentary video accompanying the book

The Myth of Modjadji

– the darkroom of seclusion

Balobedu are a very popular people, not popular for being Lobedu, but popular for their queen, a great rain maker and transformer of the clouds.⁷ She has been credited as the inspiration behind the book *She: A History of Adventure* (Haggard 1888).⁸ The female protagonist is portrayed as “she-who-must-be-obeyed”. In a movie adaptation, *She* (2001),⁹ a dialogue between the queen (Ayesha) and her chamberlain elaborates the essence of the queen’s power – the attendant moves to pressure the queen into enacting a decree that would see the newly arrived strangers sacrificed. The chamberlain is referring to a male stranger (whom the queen has taken on as a lover) and his companions. She retaliates by reminding the attendant that “She” is the one that is to be obeyed and things will happen at her command and convenience, emphasising that her kingdom is built on perception rather than brute force and that although she herself must bow down to the law, she still is the only one that decides the time and manner that it is to be carried out. She declares, “I rule my people not by force

The Power of Performance: Linking Past and Present in Hananwa and Lobedu Oral Literature, (Joubert, 2004).

⁸ A British-born writer who spent seven years (1875-82) in South Africa. He worked in the Lieutenant- Governor of the Colony of Natal’s office and also in Sir Theophilus Shepstone’s office in the Transvaal. He was a prolific writer of adventure novels, with the lost world genre attributed to him (Etherington, 1991).

⁹ There have been several cinematic adaptations of the novel, the first in 1935, then 1966 and 1982, before the 2001 adaptation.

¹⁰ **Chamberlain:** I come to hear your command your majesty.

She: My command.

Chamberlain: The law of stranger your majesty, decreed by She that-must-be-obeyed many ages ago.

She: The law is that strangers must die.

Chamberlain: Yes, your majesty.

or terror, my empire is of the imagination, my moods change, and may turn and sway like clouds, but behind them plays the great will of my purpose” (*She*, 2001).¹⁰

This likeness of the Lobedu queen to a fictional immortal, Alexandrian-Egyptian style goddess is further animated by the quote/statement often recited by journalists quoting Mandela’s description of Modjadji V as being like the British queen, in which he commented on the fact that she does not answer questions,¹¹ thereby implying her ability to command as well as the role of absence/silence in the power of fostering a myth, firmly entrenching the “she who must be obeyed” idea.¹²

Modjadji III was also spoken fondly of by Prime Minister General Jan Smuts¹³ who, in the foreword to the 1943 publication of *The Realm of a Rain Queen* (Krige & Krige 1943: *vii-xi*) recounted his fascination with the queen for two reasons. The first was as a mythical subject emanating from the legends surrounding her pale skin. This related to the story of the queen of Balobedu being one of the two spared daughters of some Boers who were massacred by the Lobedu in some distant past, and thus offering a new myth in place of an older claim that suggests her fairness was the result of being kept in the seclusion of a dark hut as decreed by her accession to the throne. The second was one in which he painted a picture

She: I rule my people not by force or terror, my empire is of the imagination, my moods change, and may turn and sway like clouds but behind them plays the great will of my purpose.

Chamberlain: But, your majesty.

She: And remember, Chamberlain, death is also penalty for treason.

Chamberlain: Yes your majesty.

¹¹ Cited in many sources including [Obituary] “Queen Modjadji “in, *The Economist*, 5 July 2001.

¹² Queen Modjadji IV is recorded as being the only person that has ever refused Mandela an audience several times, and when he did finally secure an audience (after buying her a Japanese sedan), she made him wait for four hours before she let him see her.

¹³ Born 24 May 1870; he entered school late (12), completing his Matric five years after entering Victoria College in Stellenbosch. He read law at Christ College

of a real woman by recounting a personal story about one of his daughters (Cato Smuts). She was shown kindness by the queen after she and her college friends set out on a quest to see the mystical rain queen in the Lobedu forest. The party (which included Eileen Jensen Krige) was caught in a violent thunderstorm, then rescued by members of the queen's court. Upon learning that one of the group members was the daughter of General Smuts, the queen gave her a personal audience revealing herself as tangible, and fixing the shifting figure of a myth. Smuts also told the story of how his nephew and his wife (the anthropologists J.D.& E.J. Krige) related to him tales of their Lobedu experience as they encountered Bolobedu's reality in their fieldwork. Smuts himself eventually visited Bolobedu between 1936 and 1939, and was allowed a personal exchange with the queen whom he described as a queen fit to rule. He also revealed his agony about the fate that awaited the queen at the end of her reign.

Other stories that circulated placed the Lobedu queen Modjadji (who is immortal) as a harem madam who harboured young women as a way of attracting to her court great men and warriors whom she manipulates with beer and other vices, frustrating their designs before they become a threat to her 'realm'. One account that tried to explain the queens'

in Cambridge with an Ebdon Scholarship, graduating with top honours. He was a renowned statesman (holding the prime minister ship twice), who distinguished himself both locally and internationally. He was also a well-decorated high-ranking war strategist. He is seen as having a special interest in science, holding the headship of the British Association of for the Advancement of Science in 1913.

‘whiteness’ suggested that, in some distant past, a prestigious Portuguese general who had come to conquer the region was tricked into getting drunk. The queen then had her way with him, and conceived and bore a daughter. The child later became the fair-skinned queen everyone is fascinated by.¹⁴

Some of these stories are discussed briefly in the Kriges’ monograph (1943: 1-15), but their genesis is in *The Bush Speaks* (Dicke, 1937), which Krige describes as a gossip piece. The book offers anecdotes about events surrounding an old trickster. Dicke uses humour and vernacular words with a salon tone to conjure up a tall tale in his efforts to make the complex myth and entanglement of the Lowveld’s bushveld palatable. In the first section of the book, in which he introduces Modjadji, he spends most of his time setting the scene with elaborate descriptions of the excessive red tape, protocol and rituals involved in living the frontier life against the adventurous spirits of some Boers, a Portuguese and a few German characters with their Magwamba accomplice. This sets the stage for the crimes that canonised and, at the same time, damned “*She-who-must-be-obeyed*” (Haggard 1888) and emphasised the fact that the ‘Bantu’ of the northern Transvaal were indeed very well informed of all the developments in the wider country including the movements of the Europeans.

¹⁴ This circulated as a way of diluting the authority of the ‘Bantu’ as a powerful agent without the benefit of a more ‘civilised’ blood.

¹⁵ Joao Albasini (1813-1888) was a notorious trader that exploited the Lowveld’s area that had an abundance of wild life (Balobedu refer to this area as *Bophwaa nama* meaning abundant meat). He traded mainly in skins and ivory becoming very rich, his route stretched from Lourenço Marques (Maputo Mozambique) to Magashula’s Kraal (now known as Albasini Ruins in what is now the Kruger National Park). He is often referred to as the first European in the area.

Dicke charts the positions of Bavenda, and the chiefs in the region, but concentrates on Magwamba (*makwapa*, a derogatory term for Tsonga or Shangaan people or immigrants) as they rally around Joao Albasini,¹⁵ a Portuguese trader of Italian extraction. Albasini is at the same time a Portuguese counsel, a Union of South Africa's native commissioner and a Makwapa chief. An *Uitlander* (outsider) to the Boers, who at great cost to himself sustained the dealings (expansion in to the area) of the Boer republic within the northern Transvaal at his stronghold, *Die Skaans*. He is described as one of Matatje (Modjadji)'s two 'thorns'. Modjadji's other thorn, Rev. Reuter, a *moruti* (priest), was rumoured to have been an army man who had survived an Impi confrontation, only to be resurrected as a healer and a man of the cloth.¹⁶

In the same breath Dicke mocks General Petrus Jacobus Joubert¹⁷ as a vain man who was conned into playing the father figure to Modjadji by her counsellor's flattery. She conned him into stopping a 6000-strong 'Bantu' and Boer army of native commissioner Adolf Schiel¹⁸ that would have ended Modjadji's domination of the region. Schiel, who was Albasini's replacement as native commissioner and chief of Makwapa, was nicknamed Mafikizolo¹⁹ by Makwapa. He was referred to as *Mojeremane* (the German) by the Balobedu and had a

¹⁶ Rev. Reuter was indeed in the army, but many sources (for example Mashale 2009: 48) indicate that he fought in the army in Germany against the French. He arrived in South Africa already a missionary.

¹⁷ General Petrus Jacobus Joubert (1834-1900) was commandant-general of the South African Republic's Boer forces, a passive strategist who is often criticised for never attacking (he always acted in defence) or learning from European soldiers because he was too busy attending to his beautiful wife. He came from a legal background and was side-lined because of his sympathy to the *Uitlanders* (foreign Europeans).

¹⁸ Adolf Schiel was a Prussian hussar who came to the region in 1878 (Gomm, 1971). He was a founding member of the German Commando which was under the jurisdiction of Gen. Joubert.

¹⁹ Directly translated as a latecomer, but generally refers to a child or inexperienced person.

reputation for trickery and womanising. Earlier in his entry into the northern Transvaal he tried to assume Cetshwayo (the brave Zulu king) as his character name. Apparently the locals mocked him, because for them it is another man's prerogative to give a man a character name.

Dicke paints the queen as a cunning and calculating temptress who lives in a mist-covered haven with her seductive wives/girls as her weapons, and attributes her fall from grace to being so good at her trickery that even she could not protect herself from the success of her magic, redeem the Modjadji [Queen] as a phoenix²⁰ arising from her ashes after death. Ever invincible in her seclusion, Dicke's queen effortlessly moves in and out of the confines of the classification of a 'noble savage'²¹ and 'the great strategist'. Her aides (counsellors) flatter her enemies with their sweet tongues while her enemies eat their own stomachs. They eat their own stomachs because their victory over her, which is also their defeat, is at their own cost, and not hers.

Most importantly, however, Dicke's piece is a story about a girl(s),²² not a woman, nor an old huckster, but a girl in her most liquid form, one who is referred to in Sotho as *sego sa meetsi* (a pail of water – a watertight vessel that can harbour (contain) life). In this imagining of Modjadji we find

²⁰ Mythological bird found in almost all cultures, the bird lives for centuries. Towards the end of its life it builds a nest made of twigs, which bursts in flames with the bird inside, burning to ashes. A new bird rises out of the ashes and it is said that it is a reincarnation of the old bird, signalling its immortality.

²¹ The concept first appeared in John Dryden's heroic play, *The Conquest of Granada* of 1672 (see Dryden 1926) and commonly refers to an idealised other who has eternal goodness in opposition to a civilised self who is marred/tainted by comforts of civilisation. The noble savage is seen as living in harmony with nature and not dependent on technology.

²² The story tells of an oracle of Arabian descent, referred to as the Priestess of Fecundity, as she gives her last five sacred beads chains to her last two granddaughters before they are married off to some kings in the region where they will act as the king's rainmakers. The rest of the story spends a great deal of time describing a British trader's encounters with a few young girls of light complexion who are later

an intricacy that is attempted in the Kriges' study (1943), and only partly realised in *The Mudjadji Dynasty* (Motshekga 2010) in charting the diversity of relations that contextualise Modjadji's 'realm'.

Another aspect of the imagining of Lobedu, which I encounter time and time again, is premised in Dicke's elaboration of the terrain of what he calls Wolowedu (Bolobedu). He charts the instrumentality of the tsetse fly belt as a deciding factor in Balobedu's success, elaborating at length about how the fly belt divided the successive 'Bantu' movements into the area in relation to their livestock's suitability to the tsetse fly. He argues that the settlement of people around the region was affected by the way they negotiated the belt. Cattle herders avoided it while goat and shepherders tolerated it.

The story I am trying to get at revolve around Balobedu's fame as great magicians and cunning strategists. According to a man I encountered during the *Gae Lebowa* exhibition (Mahashe 2010),²³ Balobedu were wanderers who exchanged rain for land. His account stressed the idea that Balobedu, because of their knowledge of the ways of nature, could cause a place to be undesirable by infesting it with locusts or other life-sapping pests, or make it barren with drought, only to sell their magic to the people to make the place habitable again. Hence

established as the daughters of the Priestess of Fecundity. The general theme is that the oracle was a queen bee or the source of the fair-skinned girls who become the principle wives of the region's kings, thereby implying that all principal wives that could make rain, including Modjadji, are of the oracle's blood. He explains the sacred beads by citing that the oracle and her kind were what remained of the Arabian trade post (possibly referring to the Swahili kingdoms that flourished in the region east of Mapungubwe in the 1400s) whose inhabitants of which were massacred by the 'Bantu' who despised them. The 'Bantu' saved the women because the 'Bantu' chiefs liked fair-skinned woman. They also admired the skills and knowledge the woman possessed (and only passed to their daughters). The beads were a sign that protected them from death by symbolising that they were of the oracle's blood (they were sacred priests).

²³ "Unnamed man"[uncatalogued recorded interview], Johannesburg Art Gallery, 19 February 2010, recording available in Khelobedu (recording no. 35-36).

Modjadji was referred to as the “white faced Huckster in her hut” (Krige & Krige, 1943), the white woman that peddled her magic cures from the seclusion of her hut.

Among the Zulu-speakers Modjadji is known as Mabelemané, the four-breasted one, who is seen and represented as a powerful rainmaker whose four breasts symbolise her fertility or the fertility of the land. This symbolism has been appropriated in “Driving the devil into the ground: settler myth in Andre Brink’s Devil’s Valley” (Highfeld 2010).²⁴ The chapter deals with the subject of rape, in that it is the story of a woman named Moon-jaan (sounds reminiscent of Modjadji) who is raped by about 20 British soldiers as payment for her father’s freedom. Her father then kills her as a way of preventing the birth of a hybrid child.²⁵ The death of Moon-jaan, which leads to the land being barren gets likened to the death of Modjadji and the arrival of the Boers, leading to the great drought. Bryant in *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (1929) gives an account of Mjanji (Modjadji) as the daughter of Tobela (Thobela),²⁶ Siyoka (Seoka),²⁷ and Mgodo (Mokoto).²⁸ She is mentioned in a chapter that deals with the defeat of the Ndwandwe leader, Zwede. Bryant notes that to fall into disfavour with queen Modjadji was a matter of grave concern, as she was the magician *par excellence* in the Limpopo region.

²⁴ The name Devil’s Valley is the English translation of Duiwelskloof, which has been, renamed Modjadjiskloof.

²⁵ The hybrid child is a key feature of the myth of Modjadji’s whiteness. In another parallel, Modjadji’s daughter who becomes Modjadji II is seen as the offspring of Modjadji I and Mokoto (Modjadji I’s father) invoking an idea of Mokoto as taking responsibility (custody) for Modjadji (Moon-jaan)’s hybrid child.

²⁶ According to Motshekga, Thobela is the name of the kingdoms from which the Lobedu and Venda originate. It comes from the name of their ancestor, Tovera, who initiated the move from the Sudan to Mbire, near Lake Tanganyika in the Great Lakes region (Motshekga, 2010).

²⁷ Seoka is the name given to the denizens that had occupied the area where the Lobedu made their first kingdom as Balobedu. They are portrayed in most accounts as not knowing about the use of fire and are credited as showing the Lobedu the secrets of the Dadja forest (Krige & Krige 1943, Motshekga 2010, Dicke 1937. Several praise

He added that the penalty would be decided by the seasons – it could be drought or a plague visited on one’s crops.²⁹ As Mabelemané, she is portrayed in a positive light, with her breast famed to be so long that she could easily slap them on her back to feed a suckling child. This led to a variation in the name to Mabelemade, the long-breasted queen, highlighting that her fame came from her breasts as a life giving force – fertility.

Another interesting story about Modjadji circulated in 1905 in a report to the *South African Association for the Advancement of Science* (Reuter 1907),³⁰ in which Rev. F. Reuter of the Berlin Mission Station, Medinyeni,³¹ painted Modjadji as a powerful and murderous ruler who used trickery to gain wealth, someone who would accuse an innocent man of witchcraft in order to steal his cattle. The report noted that when rain did not come, she would blame anyone she did not desire and use the opportunity to murder and dispose of them, confiscating their wealth. On the subject of seclusion, Reuter recounts the story of a bastard with a rifle claiming to be the son of the God Ralivimbo who demanded daughters as tribute. Ralivimbo wanted to take Modjadji as tribute and this frightened Modjadji so much that she went into seclusion. From then on Modjadji sent her sister to impersonate her in

poems have stated similar accounts).

²⁸ Mokoto is the last king of Balobedu, who it is said have fathered a daughter by one of his daughters in order to effect the change from male to female chiefs, he also warned of the Mfecane and the coming of the missionaries (Europeans).

²⁹ The penalty emphasises Modjadji’s command of nature.

³⁰ ‘Modjadji- a native queen in northern Transvaal: an ethnological study.’

³¹ Reuter founded the mission station in Queen Modjadji’s domain in Medinyeni, an area belonging to one of Modjadji’s induna. Its original name is Medingen, named after the German benefactor that made the mission to Bolobedu possible. The Induna who granted Reuter a place is a descendant of the first Lobedu convert who, during a mission ordered by Modjadji to buy guns, became evangelised and returned to Bolobedu with the guns and a translated bible.

public to avoid anyone knowing what she looked like, a practice that she continued with the Boers. In the same breath Reuter muses about Modjadji's beauty by referring to the sister's beauty, who in his words "resembled her (Modjadji) in a most striking manner", writing of her as being "tall and slender with a pointed nose, dark blue eyes and a light colour".

In 1879, just two years before Reuter arrived in Bolobedu, another missionary from the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society by the name of François Colliard³² visited Modjadji's court to request permission to set up shop in her realm. Colliard describes Mochache (Modjadji) in his diaries, which were published in his *The Threshold of Central Africa: A Record of Twenty years' Pioneering among the Barotsi of Upper Zambezi* (1897), as a high priest whose sanctuary is in a wooded gorge where she performs her rites and sacrifices. He adds that no stranger is allowed in the sacred grove except for a few privileged "ancients" (those with long local historic lineages),³³ adding that if one's herd of cattle was to trespass her boundary they would be confiscated without any appeal. He describes her as a gifted magician whose power and intelligence sets her above the rest. He noted that on their visit they were made to wait for her for two days and even then she would not see them. The reason for this was that she

³² François Colliard (1834-1904).

³³ This part is reminiscent of Haggard (1881)'s description of Ayesha's domain [realm].

had her GOD, of which she was the high priest, and for them to come would result in their being jailed or her authority being undermined. She also said that their calendar had only seven days and hers had eight,³⁴ so there was no way it would work. He describes the experience as hitting against a rock, which no arguments could shake. Further, he noted that they were ordered to leave, all without even a glimpse of the queen. Later in his accounts he likens another woman chief of the Lozi (on the other side of the Zambezi, Chief Lewanika's domain) to Modjadji, stressing that, like Modjadji, their warfare was that of Pandora's box.³⁵ They unleashed plagues, calamities, pests and drought. He refrains from speculating on Modjadji's identity, except to say that with magic the secret to perpetual youth could be found.³⁶

Perhaps the most famous account of the myth of Balobedu is the one in the first chapter, "The Pageants of the Past" in *The Realm of a Rain Queen* (Krige & Krige 1943). It tells the story of the collapse of Great Zimbabwe's Munwamutapa dynasty that led to the split of Bokhalaka³⁷ into the Rhozwi and Lozwi dynasties/factions³⁸ headed by a new office dominated by a sacred ruler known as Mambo.³⁹ The Mambo legitimises his rule, not by armed force, but by virtue of sacred accession. The Mambo is appointed by the spirit of the deceased Mambo (this

³⁴ The calendar aspect is quite important as both Motshekga (2010) and Boshego & Lloyd (2009) speak to its significance to Modjadji's rule.

³⁵ A Greek mythological figure, Pandora – the first mortal woman – was created by Zeus, ruler of Olympus, the home of the Greek gods. She is said to have been blessed with many virtues by the rest of the Greek gods, but she was also given a box of calamities, which she brings to earth as Zeus's revenge against Prometheus who stole fire from the gods and bestowed it on humans. The box is considered to be a receptacle or a repository, which is both a house of the deceased as well as a prison. The idea of Pandora is also explained as a process that generates many complicated problems as the result of an unwise interference in something.

³⁶ In his book he titles the section that talks about Modjadji as 'she that must be obeyed'. I am unsure as to whether he coined this term or if Haggard came up with it. His book was published in the translated form in 1897, but the diaries were written around 1879, while *She* (1888) was published a decade later.

was the case after the death of the first Mambo) who dies in the sacred hut (Balobedu call their hut *Mmalekhalo*⁴⁰), where he holds the door shut to anyone but a true heir.

The story is about Dzugudini, the daughter of the Mambo Chingamira who fell pregnant by her uterine⁴¹ brother⁴². In fear of the Mambo's wrath, her mother steals and teaches Dzugudini the virtue of the rain charms and sacred beads. She sends Dzugudini and her child, Makhaphimo, over the Limpopo River with the stolen charms where they settle, eventually to be ruled by Makhaphimo, the illegitimate son born out of the incestuous relationship.

Kings rule Bolobedu for 200 years, with a complex formulation that established Balobedu as great rulers in the region. There is, however, a disaster that is caused by an illegal/unusual variation in the succession process. Kheale, who is pictured by the Kriges as ruling from the great stone tower [hill], secretly teaches his favourite son, Mugodu (Mokoto), the ways of the rain charms, while publicly humiliating him by banishing him from his court. Upon Kheale's death Mokoto becomes king, but his public integrity is wounded by the humiliation imposed on him by his father, leading to some public unrest and disrespect from Mokoto's own sons. To save Bolobedu, Mokoto approaches his daughters and proposes a

³⁷ Pre-16th century kingdom that dominated southern Africa.

³⁸ See Motshekga (2010) for more detailed distinctions.

³⁹ A title denoting the highest office of the independent polities that formed after the collapse of the Munwamutapa office.

⁴⁰ The hut in which the chief (Modjadji) of Balobedu commits ritual suicide in, the next Chief must emerge from this hut to be proclaimed the ruler. The hut has two doors, the door in which the eligible candidates (for the position of the chief) enter is said to be held shut by the spirit of the dead chief who keeps it closed to all except the true heir. Upon successfully entering the candidate must take the chief's articles of power and exit through the other door. (Krige and Krige 1943:1-15).

⁴¹ Her brother from the same mother as opposed to a brother from the father's other wife.

⁴² Sometimes the illegitimate child of a high ranking princess is explained by suggesting that a princess's uterine brother is to blame for the sister's illegitimate

marriage with the aim of bearing a daughter that will become the next ruler of Balobedu.⁴³

The first daughter rejects it and the second agrees and by their union a daughter is born and the mother takes the throne as regent for the child that is to be Modjadji, the ruler of the day (the sun).⁴⁴ Mokoto, in his final death dance, presents a prophesy that announces the rule of a woman and the invasion of the land by black ants (the Mfecane),⁴⁵ whom the people will overcome, as well as the arrival and invasion of the red ants (Whites/Europeans/missionaries/Boers) whom they shall fight, but not overcome. The king also advises Modjadji to live in seclusion.

The beginning of Modjadji's reign is described with images of diplomatic supplication and tributes brought to her from far and near. The same is not true for Modjadji II, whose reign is plagued with disorder, mainly coming from the new forces (the red ants). Modjadji II retaliates, and her seclusion is broken, opening up her land to Western exploitation.

The accounts published by the Krige spawned many variations,⁴⁶ most of which omit the reign of the kings and the political complexity of the Lobedu accession and its significance to the might of Balobedu, to focus mostly on the incest before offering an account of Modjadji's mystical realm.

child, as a way to protect the honour of the sister who is un married, and possibly destined to marry into a crucial political alliance. This act can also be used to block an undesired alliance.

⁴³ This act basically consolidated the office of the wife (keeper of the rain charms) and the husband (rain maker) into one office under the rule of the queen.

⁴⁴ The name Modjadji literally means the sun.

⁴⁵ A highly contested term whose origins are founded in the concepts surrounding the "upheaval" that lead to the rise of the Zulu kingdom in the early 19th century. This concept has been challenged on two fronts first by Cobbing (1988), who suggests the term/concept was an alibi for slave trading (see John Wright (1995) for wider context around the debate), the other concept is based on an archaeological hypothesis that puts the blame on environmental factors (the great drought *circa* 1800).

This said, it is not surprising that the Kriges are still quoted by Balobedu, scholars and gossipers alike, as the authority on Khelobedu. The authority of their anthropology is appealing, and its weight lies in the fact that it offers an account gleaned from Lobedu narrators. Ann Jones, in the book *Looking for the Lovedu* (2001), expresses relief at the discovery of the Krige texts, as she was beginning to lose hope with all the other accounts she had seen so far, accounts that could not correctly map the Lobedu because all were by people who had heard the story from third parties. She notes, further, that Henry Rider Haggard had heard the story about the rain queen from the Zulus, implying that his story was just a fragment. With that move she canonises *The Realm of a Rain Queen* (1943) as the only first-hand authority on the Lovedu (Lobedu). She nonetheless expresses dissatisfaction with anthropology because even though the Kriges had seen Modjadji III, whom they describe as a black woman, and have photographs that prove to that effect, they still perpetuate and give credibility to the myth of a Portuguese Don Juan's visit to the queen's chambers by constantly referring to the queen's light skin. Jones ends her survey of the imaginings of Modjadji with an anecdote from a curator at the British Museum who insisted that the "Lobedu Queens were actually men in drag" (Jones

⁴⁶ The more popular one can be found on the website for Gallery Ezakwantu, URL:<http://www.ezakwantu.com/Tribes%20-%20Ba%20Lobedu%20-%20Lobedu%20-%20Northern%20Basotho%20-%20Balobedu%20-%20Lovedu.htm>

2001), which then compelled her to come and see this for herself.

Perhaps the most arresting and vivid account of Bolobedu today is Liz McGregor's account of Khelobedu, in the essay, "Who Killed the Rain Queen" (2007). McGregor brings into play the depth and breadth of Khelobedu. Her essay is centred on a quest that dominated all the other stories about Balobedu, the search for a familiar face, that South African woman who is empowered in her position but disempowered through neglect from the people that are supposed to look out for her. McGregor finds this familiar face in the Lobedu queen, a woman who transcends gender, but suffers an unnecessary death because she would not comply with the office's demands. The motif of the queen is summoned to represent the modern South African woman in a democratic South Africa, suggesting issues of right to one's body and questions of HIV and access to treatment, but mostly it highlights the separation of woman, man, and family in the new democratic South African state. She relates the case of the queen by contrasting her death to the survival of a sacred *Thugula*⁴⁷ cattle "*she*".⁴⁸ She relates how the queen is left to die of a preventable death, while the cow lives to be used again, reiterating the object hood of the queen/woman, as a commodity in an economy for men. McGregor describes the

⁴⁷ A sacred object or thing, which a family keeps as a shield from misfortune. See Krige and Krige (1943: 3-49).

⁴⁸ The cattle's gender is seen as female (Thugula animals are usually male), see Krige's description of the sacred cow 1943: 31-49).

⁴⁹ The queen (Modjadji VI), like the impostor presented to the Afrikaner General Joubert, is rumoured to have died an unnatural death.

⁵⁰ Malatji succeeded Simion Modjadji (Molokwane) as Eileen Krige's fieldwork assistant in the 1960s. John Malatji's interaction with the Krige family starts when he was a teenager assigned to look after the Krige boys during the Kriges' fieldwork (circa 1962). He was later given a Berlin Mission scholarship for his high school. His university fees were facilitated by the Malefokana scholarship to study at Turfloop University. Malatji had impressed Eileen as an assistant, especially after discovering that he was the son of Dora Makobo (a daughter in the inner circle of Modjadji III), who was one of Eileen's fieldwork assistants in the 1930s, facilitating Eileen's access to

queen's independent spirit and her turbulent short life with an induced⁴⁹ end that was brought about by her unwillingness to comply with the wishes of the family (the men).

McGregor's account of the fate of the child (Queen Modjadji VI's illegitimate daughter) that is to become the next queen, tracks the child's existence first as a phantom that is a well-guarded secret, to a child handed over to the care of a white missionary family, to one in the custody of her father who is ready to relinquish his custody to a stranger who happens to be a white academic from a liberal university. McGregor (2007: 45) recounts how Malatji⁵⁰ (the primary protagonist in this story) sums up the fate of the child, citing that the father, Mohale⁵¹ (who is not a noble), might have custody, but we⁵² have guardianship (over the office), if the child does not comply we will dethrone her.

If the story of Bolobedu is bound up in the complexities of custody and guardianship,⁵³ then McGregor's account is by far the most vivid in uncovering the depth of this complexity as well as its actors. She portrays a blind local historian, whose up-to-date status is exemplified by his possession of the latest newspaper in Braille, navigating through it as if it were an Ipad.⁵⁴ Also described is the hopeful Josephine, a woman from the royal family who works at the local bed-and-breakfast

women in the royal inner circle. Malatji has served as Deputy Vice-Chancellor to Prof. Ndebele at the University of Limpopo (former Turfloop University), Director-General of the Limpopo region as well as the chief counsellor to the Lobedu tribal authority. He is currently the Motshwara Marapo (conducts all the ceremonials as history orator) to the royal family. He is the most referred to man in Bolobedu at the moment, succeeding Mathole Motshekga as historical reference, dealing with all enquiries about Balobedu. (He is also very knowledgeable about settler history).

⁵¹ A supposed ANC member who had just returned to Bolobedu after studying in the United States.

⁵² Referring to family, men or the Balobedu in general.

⁵³ The basic definitions of custody and guardianship place the custody as a condition, which is sought and awarded temporarily while guardianship is a position that is conferred and not bound by time.

⁵⁴ A blind historian also features in Eileen(krige)' notes on their 1930s fieldwork.

establishment (a white-owned luxury B&B bordering on the Modjadji nature reserve) and has hopes of converting her prime Lobedu real estate (the views from the mountain are breath taking) into a heritage industry gem; the courtiers with their lust for power (power found in the control of the queen) who want more than the money that comes with the heritage industry (cultural village style); the returned exile, a modern man who wants democracy and a better life of choice for his daughter; and the outsider researcher who, although seduced and drawn by the mysticism of being told “it’s a secret”, has found herself lodged in the middle of a world she barely comprehends. These portrayals of the different constituencies that place their claim on the economy produced by the myth of the Lobedu queen highlight the claim these groups lodge on the head of the queen, which they do by taking her into their custody.

If Bolobedu were founded on the practice of giving young wives (who can make rain) to old men as the different myths tells us,⁵⁵ then the rain queens are their daughters who remain in the custody of the people of Bolobedu. The question that needs to be asked is who is responsible (or rather who has the right to decide what they do) for the education and guardianship of this generation’s future? Is it the South African states sitting

⁵⁵ The Kriges talk about people supplicating for rain, giving their sisters as tribute who then are married to the queen or passed on to important headmen. Others talk of the alliance between two uncles and a nephew where Modika and Mahasha give their daughters to Mohale to establish the house of Balobedu.

in Pretoria and Cape Town, the parents who are out working in the cities, the academics, tribal council and their heritage projects or the new religious leaders? Furthermore, what will these children learn and how? Will they learn from the historian, the heritage industry, the academic researchers, the old men at court, or the modern father? Is these people's guardianship different from that housed in the office of the queen? McGregor does well to make the people vying for Bolobedu's custody visible, but in exposing the people she makes them open to criticism that hinders their ability to do their job. The seclusion of the queen means that one cannot judge these people based on their gender, political ambitions, personal quirks, race or any other prejudice that comes as a result of having lived their lives, leaving them to perform the task with which they are charged.

This exposure of the queen and her office has opened up space for speculation on the future of Bolobedu to the wider public. I once heard a person say the woman have had their time, now its time for the men, the cycle of men lasted for two hundred years, the woman lasted for two hundred years, it's time for a change. If the historians tell us that the reign of the men ended when Mokoto fell out of favour with his sons as McGregor and the Kriges relate, then the current queen has

fallen out of favour with her subjects.

McGregor's essay asks the key question of why has nobody been able to follow up with a research project on the scale of the Kriges in Bolobedu? She does not directly answer this question, but perhaps suggests an answer to the question. I have a feeling it has something to do with the fact that even today, the office of the rain queen still does not respond to questions and only those who are patient and persistent enough to wait, crawl, beg and serve, may see the door open and be given a glimpse of Khelobedu. To go for a visit is only to imagine the façade, while to stay is to be invited to a funeral where the truth of how the different custodies and guardianships relate are told/seen (most information circulates at funerals and other events on the same scale, particularly those of people with long lineages).

In his defence, Malatji highlights this idea of persistence, coming from an Africanist (or is it communist?) University of the North.⁵⁶ Malatji set out to impress on the "self-important liberal academic" (McGregor) that Bolobedu is a sovereign place with its own concept of time and protocol. Malatji and the tribal council (of which he was the head) deliberately made her wait to assess if she was really interested in understanding the dynamics surrounding Khelobedu. Her persistence

⁵⁶ Interview with Malatji at Ga-kgapane on 5 July 2012.

(although miniscule in relation to that of the Kriges) earned her an invitation to a Thugula ritual where the Thugula cow she so beautifully deploys as metaphor is placated. During this ritual Malatji, who is seated next to her, provides her with the basis for this metaphor, but the real formulations required to understand these metaphors are hidden in the metaphoric language that Motshekga (2010) often mentions when he dismisses the authority of the western academy in matters of Khelobedu. Malatji, during the interview I conducted with him, sang the opening verse of a song which invokes Makwala's illuminating poem (1996) whose line *Bana ba Kwale ba bitšana ka melodi* enlightens us about the nature of language among kin, that is a language accessible only by having spoken it. Malatji's song is a call to the royal kin, when answered by advancing the verse, it enacts the rain. McGregor was correct to see the cow as a metaphor, but she failed to realise that just like the queen, the cow was a symbol that brought together a constituency, which had the power to facilitate the rain.

In Bolobedu it is not enough to recognise the actors, one must see them over time. Most importantly, one must see the compromise made by the actors to keep their world intact.

Emphasising the idea of Balobedu and their secrecy as highlighted in McGregor's essay, the recent television

programme, *A Country Imagined* (SABC 2010), devotes less than two minutes to Bolobedu in a documentary showcasing Limpopo's art, echoing Eiselen's dismissal of Balobedu as an inconsequential group (language group) that would be absorbed into the Pedi (Duggan-Cronin, 1928-35). *A Country Imagined* writes Balobedu out of the region by stating that the region is home only to the Venda and Tsonga. The programme focuses on how people represent themselves and the efforts made to put the region, which is described as having a great deal to offer in terms of heritage and arts. When it came to Bolobedu, the programme only paused to say that the Lobedu story is fraught with many variations of the same story and the generic answer of "I don't know, it's a secret".

The story is simple: there is a queen, but the queen is not visible. In reality the deeper story of Balobedu fell out of the programme because the series depended on a superficial approach that could not do justice to the complexity of Khelobedu. The question here becomes, why are Balobedu in this modern age of independence still determined to retain their unity by placing their entire future into the hands of the weakened tribal council (men) and the symbol of the now vacant rain queen/sacred high office (women)?

More recently, Mathole Motshekga in his book *The Mudjadji Dynasty: Principles of Female Leadership in African*

Cosmology (Motshekga, 2010) sets some of the wider myth in context by elaborating that the stolen rain charms were, in fact, not stolen but were passed on in the way they had always been passed on for generations before, and that Dzugudini inherited the charms from her mother, as her mother inherited them from hers, putting the spotlight of rain-making firmly in the hands of women.

In his explanation of the incest, described earlier, Motshekga charts the history of Balobedu to the land of the Sun (Bokhara) where both the Lobedu and the Egyptians find their origin, and explains through the Egyptian link, the institutions of endogamous marriages, designating them as political rather than lascivious, as implied by the offshoots of the Kriges' account. He also brings to light the political or ideological dimension of Balobedu as priests and sacred scientists who carried with them the knowledge and religion of Mwari to the southern parts, designating the divinity as the mother of Mohale in a complex move that charts a version of the history of Balobedu with great detail. Motshekga sets straight some of the theoretical miscalculation that has befallen Balobedu's history.⁵⁷ The addition of the facts does nothing to dispel the myth but fuels it as it presents an even more legendary account. The main offering is the story of the

⁵⁷ See Motshekga 2010 for more

insider, and the fact that the Khelobedu spoken by the people and the Khelobedu reserved for the intimate royals that have been initiated, is the key to the heart of the story of Balobedu and the truth surrounding the myth. The offering highlights the fact that, even though the author was himself a full member of Balobedu, he did not have complete access to the story because he was not a noble of the Lobedu house.

Another relatively recent feature of Balobedu and their Queen presents itself in the 1998 publication, *Die Lobedu Sudafrikas. Mytho sund Realitat der Regenkonigin Modjadji* (Höckner, 1998), by the German scholar, Elfriede Hockner.⁵⁸ The book's main contribution is that it translates the early accounts of Reuter's diaries from a difficult German script that is barely practiced, that is, from Zutelin to modern German script, while comparing this with the Kriges' writing as a way of surfacing the overlapping ideas that make up the myth of Modjadji. The book offers no interpretation but rather gives a direct translation of the diaries.

Of all these accounts my most favourite is told by G.H. Franz, a Northern Sotho language scholar, in his 1972 play *Modjadji* (published in both Northern Sotho and Afrikaans), about the motif of the rain queen. My favourite is the opening scene where, in a simple but elaborate story, he tells of the

⁵⁸ Although I have not been able to read the book myself since I do not read German, I have relied on English reviews of the book and the English summary provided in the book and the invaluable help of German anthropologist, Katharina Schramm, who went through the book with me and translated the key points.

relationship between the sun and the moon, darkness and light, knowledge and mortality and how these pairs are interlinked in a delicate natural balance that harmoniously give each other time to rule, much like the way Modjadji would rule only when it is her time- and fade away when her time ends.

He recounts the story of the “half man” a character whose body is split into two parts from top to bottom, having only one of each feature, that is, one arm, leg, eye, nose and so on. These “half man” are famous for their work as guardians of Venda’s sacred lake, Funduzi. He elaborates on the difference between a person that is only an elderly person or a person who is a “white head”, one whose wisdom occupies the human body for a short time before disappearing and abandoning the body, leaving it to become like a child again and signalling that person’s mortality⁵⁹ and death. This emphasises the temporary state of knowledge and contrasts it with the nature of the living ancestors who never die. In discussing life, he writes about a person coming from another world into the current world, being here for a while before retiring to another, that is, death. For the living ancestors, it is quite different. They come from the one world into this world but at the end they do not die like the rest, that is to say the white head does not abandon or leak out of them and demote them into childishness, but

⁵⁹ He refers to leaking as the signal to mortality, talking about the white head leaking from the vessel that is the body. This works well with the concept of Modjadji as a water-tight vessel - *sego sa meetsi*.

instead they are split into two: one part, the right hand side which is called *letona* (male, commander) goes back to the previous world to teach (*bokelela*) them what he has learned, while the other part, the left hand side which is called *letshadi* (female), stays behind to watch over her children in this world. Once a month on a full moon the two unite into a complete person and listen to the tributes and pleas⁶⁰ of their children. Through Modjadji's curiosity about the half-man, Franz asks a question that highlights gravity and light and their role in the life of the split body, asking if the half-man will not fall as he only has one side and therefore no balance, and the diviner replies by saying 'only things that have a shadow are subject to fall' (Franz 1972:3), emphasising that night is their time. This scene unfolds at a sacred grove by Modjadji's ancestral burial grounds, where the diviner has made three holes in the ground for Modjadji's ancestors to drink the beer Modjadji has prepared as tribute for them. The diviner had already invited Modjadji's ancestors to the grove on that particular night which also coincides with the meeting of the two halves facilitated by the making of an offering of food they liked.⁶¹

The diviner is instructing Modjadji in the passage to the throne, relating to her that what she is about to witness will transform her from the cycle of the white head, and the child

⁶⁰ The term gets its basis in the word *Loba* which the name *Balobedu* (receivers of tribute) comes from and it takes the form of presents when you are asking for something, but it also denote prayer as in the case of Modjadji her wishes to be chief are heard by her ancestors. She does not speak at the gathering but they deduce from her beer (the word *loba* also refers to putting water in a pot to make beer) that she desires the throne. The word is also found as a root for flower (*leloba*), which is used as a tribute at graves. It also means to lose as well as to suppress.

⁶¹ This can also be likened to a family gathering where all the family branches come together.

to the realm of the eternal white head. By nature Modjadji is not allowed to witness the meeting of the halves, but the diviner tells Modjadji that she will render her invisible to the ancestors by anointing her with medicine, which will mask her smell and form, telling her that the only thing that might betray her presence to the ancestors is her voice. As the diviner exits she relates to Modjadji that the deepest loneliness is that felt by a chief.

The scene moves on to the entry of the ancestors, namely, her mother, uncle and grandfather. They drink the beer and from the beer they decide Modjadji has desires for the throne, and resort to a saying, namely, *Ngwana allele naka ya mokhura sehlang le mo neye* (Rakoma 1995: 221)– “when a child wants (cries) for something (trouble), you give it to the child and see what they make of it”.⁶² They move to debate the technicalities of power, constantly referring to the role of queen as a lonely one (secluded). The ancestors warn Modjadji’s mother (Makoma), who is now an ancestor not to assist Modjadji in the work.⁶³ She must walk the road alone and look to her people for help. If she needs their help she should brew beer and bring her tribute to them collectively. Modjadji exits and, philosophising about times past, present and future, declares that she is not just a God or a man but a living god, “I

⁶² When a person wants for something troublesome and he or she is advised against it, but still persist; it is better to give it to them, for when they have fallen into trouble because of it they cannot blame anyone else.

⁶³ The end of the male line is sometimes attributed to the interference of the king, Kheale, in the succession. It is related that he helps his favourite son by teaching him the ways of the rain charms.

am ruler of the day” (Franz 1972:9).⁶⁴

This story is complex and simple at the same time – simple because it is clearly told, complex because it requires volumes to explain its consequences. The main idea is that you have two types of people – those who die and those who live forever, but even for those who live forever, their time in this world is limited and they pay for their immortality with infinite labour after they leave the throne. The separation between the mortal and the immortal is found in the chief’s grave.

An essay that enlightens this play is found in “G.H. Franz’s *Modjadji*: Archetypes of Time and the transcendence of History”(Boshego & Lloyd 2009). Their formulation looks at time – more particularly historical time versus mythic time – using some very illuminating theoretical formulations. Their story illuminates the fact that from the beginning the play is set against the backdrop of an historical time, a time that does not confine itself to a linear order so as to free itself from the inconsistencies inherent in linear history. They draw our attention to the constant relationship between the sun and the moon, which is the basis of all calendars. Starting with the opening scene, which has already been described above, they formulate the concept of the calendar as the very basis of the Modjadji myth and her power. The biggest

⁶⁴ Modjadji means ruler of the day, she presides over the day.

dilemma and obstacle that faces Modjadji is immortality, which her ancestors have already told her is impossible, because the fate of human beings is to age and to age is to be open to death. They take us through the strategies Modjadji employs to remedy this situation, including relating the story of how Modjadji chooses Nwetšana, her daughter from her first wife who, in real life, is also her sister. Realising that she cannot defy ageing she resorts to manipulating perception by presenting her daughter as herself. She chooses the daughter, not only because she looks similar to herself, but because she is in character like herself. Her deception of the public was easy for Modjadji, for its members only ever see her from a distance, and the distant view can always betray the signs of aging or mask the presentation of someone else in her stead. Her biggest challenge would be to deceive the ones close to her (the close generals and headmen), and with the successful presentation of Nwetšana to her General Rakoma, Modjadji secures for herself a chance at immortality. This deception raises questions from Nwetšana about the moral implication of deception. These questions are met by a riddle that explains to Nwetšana that to please someone by giving them hope and knowledge of security for the future is not to lie, because lying implies taking something away from someone forcefully.

Boshego and Lloyd's main offering is that they illuminate the immortality of Modjadji by explaining the genius employed in rescuing the office of Modjadji from historic time and the terrors it presented. They highlight that, through the restraint of the deceased queen (the ancestor) and the seclusion of the reigning queen in favour of the incoming queen, the office of Modjadji allows more than one generation to rule at the same time, relying on the strength of each generation (the knowledge of the ancestor queen, the wisdom of the old queen and the health and innocence of the incoming queen).

Seclusion, power, and imagination

The story of presenting an icon to stand in for Modjadji recurs often, as already mentioned by Reuter (1907), Modjadji was afraid of Ralivimbo (Ralivumbu in Dicke's case), the person requesting daughters as a tribute, and the very same one Dicke (1937) credits with the end of the oracle of fecundity life. So, in defence, Modjadji presents someone else. What this trickery tells us, and is illuminated by Boshego and Lloyd's essay, is that for chiefs to secure the perpetual future of their people, it is necessary for the chief to live forever in order to maintain the rhythm that makes them their people (that is, maintain Khelobedu). Something that I have always

known about Modjadji, but have not yet explored, is that the name “Modjadji” literally means the Sun, the heavenly body that controls/illuminates all the other heavenly bodies in our solar system. Thus, if Modjadji is the sun then the moon is time, and Modjadji’s act of sacrificing her body for the survival of her knowledge thus outsmarts time (she mentors Nwetšana for 40 years, just as she herself was mentored before she came to the grove).

Perhaps the myth of Modjadji, fuelled by her seclusion, might have ended in 1894 with the presentation of the false Modjadji to General Joubert and his men. According to Dicke (1937)⁶⁵ an old woman was brought out after five days of waiting, only to a disappointing realisation that “she who must be obeyed” was not, as expected, a white woman or at best of Arab descent, but was in fact, a very black woman. No one can know for certainty what actually happened, for it is said that the real Modjadji, rather than submit herself to, and be seen by, the Boers, committed ritual suicide, thus completing her cycle. She disappeared into the sacred hut, passing on her immortality to her chosen one.

In reference to the renewal of the source/Modjadji, the Queen Bee – the oracle of the native tribes of the north and the source of the rain-making girls – is described by Dicke

⁶⁵ Krige and Krige (1943:1-15) also mention it.

as the high priestess of fecundity, and in her dying ritual she is captured in a spectacular ritual by Ralivumbu, god of lightning (symbolised as a lightning bird). Her capture occurs after she distributes her last five sacred beads that symbolise the immunity and power of “she who brings the rain” to her two granddaughters. Of course, her capture did not mean an end for the office of the oracle, for her successor had already been decided, and she appeared under the tree of fecundity the very next day wearing the exact outfit the previous oracle had worn.

Modjadji II's last move, her appearance and simultaneous disappearance, not only added fire to the myth but opened up room for the new dispensation still to come a hundred years later where the story of the ‘Bantu’ as the builders of the great towers of Zimbabwe became relevant. It is convenient for the African renaissance that descendants of the ruler of the great southern empire are black – in contrast to the previously prevailing theories that asserted that Phoenician, Arabs or ancients were the builders of these ruins, ruins that have become the symbol of the new Africanist South African nation.

Conclusion

Through her seclusion Modjadji was able to leave room for people to imagine her in any way they required, in ways that were natural to their own cultural mores. For Haggard she was the perfect antidote to a theoretical paradox in a story that would otherwise be impossible to tell without the duality and complexity inherent in the idea of the Lobedu queen – in essence a woman but at the same time a man. For the trekboer she was a survivor of genocide, a symbol that ensured their claim to land ownership in a foreign country. By manipulating General Joubert in appealing to the myth of the Boer child, Modjadji invokes his parentage and, in so doing, avoids Schiel's army. To the modern statesmen she epitomised unchallenged sovereignty in a sea of colonial domination. In anthropology she was the perfect metaphor, a concept that could contain the challenges of reducing a multifaceted culture to paper, a parallel that appealed to their rootedness in the traditions of Greek mythologies, a tradition that lends itself easily to the Lobedu myth. To the pioneering missionary she was a worthy adversary, a pagan god that would be triumphed to establish the Christian Son as the victor as they established their

domain on her foundations. To the Zulu, she was the symbol of fertility, a reservoir of life giving source. To the popular historians she could contain the history and stories of diverse cultures and interest for a wide audience, an audience bound together by their dependence on the wilderness fed by the rain she masters. Finally, in the present, she has become a symbol of resistance and progress, a link to the past and a beacon for the future: she makes sense to the Africanist and the feminist, the liberal and the conservative.

Her absence was her presence, her portability was her power, she *was sego sa meetsi*, a watertight container that could hold the diversity and fertility of this land and gently deposit it where it is needed the most.⁶⁶ In this way, she is the queen of the people that converge under the imagination of her myth.

The myth and fame of Modjadji is bound up with her seclusion, but most importantly its source is the un/broken line of knowledge, knowledge of things found at the intersection of life and death. Knowledge reserved only for one insider (the one who ascends the Lobedu high office), an insider whose mortality breeds immortality – all this fuelled by men’s constant speculation as they try to fix a phantom just beyond their comprehension.

⁶⁶ The fame of Modjadji comes not just because she could make rain (rain making was widely practiced in South Africa and around the world, but because she could constrain the clouds, taking them from one place and gently depositing them where they were needed. Taking this idea in the inverse direction, the South African Navy has three submarines named after famous South African heroines; the last of the three was named Modjadji I. It is ironic that the watertight vessel that contains water within is now a watertight vessel that keeps water out!

Reference List

Boshego, L.P. & Lloyd, D.W. "G.H. Franz's *Modjadji*: Archetypes of Time and the Transcendence of History." *Literator*, 30, no 3.2009, 157-178.

Bryant, A. T. *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal: Containing Earlier Political History of the Eastern-Nguni Clans*. London: Longmans, Green, 1929.

Cobbing, Julian. "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo" *Journal of African History*, 1988.

Coillard, François. *On the Threshold of Central Africa: A Record of Twenty Years' Pioneering among the Barotsi of the Upper Zambesi*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897.

A Country Imagined. Auckland Park [South Africa]: SABC, 2010.

Dicke, B. H. *The Bush Speaks: Border Life in Old Transvaal*, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1937(first published 1936).

Dryden, John, *Essays of John Dryden*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926.

Duggan-Cronin, A. M. *The Bantu Tribes of South Africa: Reproductions of Photographic Studies* Vol. 2, sect. 2. "The Suto-Chuana tribes: the Bapedi" with an essay by Werner Eiselen. Cambridge: Deighton Bell & Co. Kimberley, South Africa: A. McGregor Memorial Museum, 1928-1935.

Etherington, N. Foreword to *The Annotated She: A Critical Edition of H. Rider Haggard's Victorian Romance with Introduction and Notes*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Franz, G. H. *Modjadji*. Johannesburg: APB Bona Press, 1972.

Gomm, Neville. "The German Commando in the South African War of 1899-1902" *Military History Journal* 2, no 2, 1971.

Haggard, H. Rider. *She: A History of Adventure*. London: Longman's Green, 1888.

Highfeld, J. "Driving the Devil into the Ground: Settler Myth in Andre Brink's Devil's Valley." In *Trauma, Resistance, Reconstruction in Post-1994 South African Writing*, edited by Jaspal K. Singh & Rajendra Chetty. New York: Peter Lang, 2010.

Höckner, Elfriede. *Die Lobedu Süd Afrikas: Mythos und Realität der Regenkönigin Modjadji*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998.

Jones. Ann, *Looking for Lovedu: A Journey through Africa in Search of a Legendary Rainmaking Queen*. London: Robinson, 2001.

Joubert, Annetjie. *The Power of Performance: Linking Past and Present in Hananwa and Lobedu Oral Literature*. Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004 [accompanied by a DVD].

Krige J.D. & Krige E.J. *The Realm of the Rain Queen: A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society*. 1980 ed. London: Oxford University Press 1943.

Mahashe, T.G. *Gae Lebowa*. Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2010. [Exhibition].

Mashale F.K. "The Provision of Education at Medingen

Mission Station since 1881." MEd.diss., Pretoria: University of South Africa. 2009.

McGregor, L. "Who Killed the Rain Queen" In *At risk: Writing on and over the Edge of South Africa*, edited by Sarah Nuttall & McGregor. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2007.

Motshekga M. K. *The Mudjadji Dynasty: Principles of Female Leadership in African Cosmology*. Pretoria: Kara, 2010.

[Obituary] "Queen Modjadji Mokope Modjadji V, Known as the Rain Queen, Died on June 28th, Aged 64" *The Economist*, 5 July 2001, accessed 11 October 2012 <http://www.economist.com/node/682992>.

Rakoma, J.D.R. *Marema-ka-dika, Tša Sesotho sa Lebowa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1995.

Reuter, F. "Modjadji: Native Queen in Northern Transvaal: An Ethnological Study." *Report of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science* 1906/7.

She, directed by Timothy Bond. 2001, Prophecy Entertainment.

Unnamed Man [uncatalogued informal interview]. Johannesburg Art Gallery, 19 Feb 2010, (Recording available Khelobedu)

Wright, John, *Mfecane Debate* Double Issue, 39 & 40, September/October & November/December 1995. UR:http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/sarb/X0033_Wright.html accessed 2012/10/01.

