**Abstracts**

**Hymns of Home: Vernacular Categories and the Intersections between the Local and the Global, Home and Away**

*Khumisho Moguerane*

In February of 1913, the Wesleyan Missionary Society issued an invitation for original contributions to enlarge the Sechuana hymn book. This is how the hymn book gained a supplementary section of compositions 'for the *morafe*.' Both the people of colonial Bechuanaland, including Silas Molema (c. 1850-1927) who contributed no less than ten original hymns, and the colonial administration translated the *morafe* variably as 'tribe', 'nation', 'people' and 'race' but almost always in a context of contestations about virtue and pedigrees of civility. As a vernacular category, the *morafe* is local, intricately related to Bechuanaland's own natural and cultural geographies. Yet, not least in how native speakers of Sechuana themselves translated it into English, the category seems to create possibilities of identification beyond its particular locality and history. Silas Molemas and others were utilising it also to include themselves in experiences of belonging that they understood others elsewhere to share. They were ethnographers of their own worlds, at once observing the practical repetoires that fashion their particular identity and translating them into a language of universal experience. As such, they were involved in the exercise of theorising. I pay attention to this practice by exploring these hymns of the *morafe*. I argue that as a genre of 'reverent songs', hymns uniquely offer a way of reading that reveals the *morafe* as a 'way of being' in the world. They illuminate the *morafe* as a moral category that speaks intimately to people's unique historical experience but that is, at the same time, concerned with the deeply existential dilemmas of what makes a human being across time and space. This makes this colonial archive invaluable as a resource for grappling with the methodologies and procedures of making theory, especially in our current historical moment where we are debating the enterprise of making 'theory from the South'.

**Convening Differently**

*Carolyn Hamilton*

The colonial construction and ordering of knowledge saw the accumulation of large bodies of material relating to the southern African past and its categorization, arrangement and institutional organization in particular ways. Colonial choices about what to collect, and how to categorize, arrange and organize have given definitional shape to the accumulated materials, constituting them as certain kinds of things rather than as other kinds of things. Over the last decade, the Five Hundred Year Archive has pursued a series of experimental strategies designed to unsettle, and refigure, this inheritance. The paper discusses one of these experimental strategies, made possible through digital affordances, that of convening the accumulated material differently. One form this takes is the instantiation in one place of a searchable, datable and provenanceable historical African language archive drawn from multiple places, in which language itself, *qua* language, in addition to the matter which the language gives expression to, is the archive. The contribution discusses experiments which convene other kinds of materials in a variety of new ways but always in association with the convened language archive, paying attention to how this combination affects the definitional shape and constitution of the materials. The paper thus both theorizes ‘convening’ and discusses its effects in action.

**There’s a bug in my media: insects, colonial archives and book history**

*Isabel Hofmeyr*

Traditionally a ‘dry’ discipline little concerned with ecocritical themes, book history has started to engage with environmental humanities in a more sustained way. This paper joins this trend by considering insects in colonial archives.  Starting with the insects themselves, the paper considers state responses of fumigation, and what this means for definitions of books and literary genres. Situated at the intersection of insect, paper and chemicals, the article raises larger questions of entomopolitics, chemical legacies in museums and archives, and the intertwined histories of empire, war, insecticide and genocide.

**On Legibility: What the Archive Wants from Us**

*Stefan Helgesson*

Constructivist critiques of the archive – such as those formulated by Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Edward Said, or Ann Laura Stoler – have taught us that archives are made rather than found, and that their making will coincide with vested interests. The “colonial library”, as a case in point, indicates an archive shaped not just in but *by* the era of colonialism to serve the interests of domination. Without denying the fundamental validity of such critiques, I wish to ask whether they themselves might not also be an expression of a will to power – a power, in this instance, over the past. Adopting instead from cultural memory studies the distinction between canon and archive (see Aleida Assmann), I will from a hermeneutic rather than constructivist standpoint emphasise the capacity of the archive (also, one would hope, in its digital incarnations) to surprise and confound us. In that way “it” – which is never a stable entity – can draw the researcher into new linguistic worlds and unanticipated domains of legibility.

**Digitising differently: The world of difference in spaces of the visually impaired**

**Rubric**

*Innocentia Mhlambi*

Of recent, I have been challenged in one of my classes, I encountered for the first time in my teaching career at university, a visually impaired student in my film class. This experience opened my mind to a number of life aspects that we normatively take for granted but which in themselves are unjust and non-inclusive. Then, a chance opportunity to work with BlindSA threw me into the world of the visually impaired, which allowed me an opportunity to engage with interventions allowed by the technological advancements and so challenged me to think critically about the visual world’s access technologies. Arguably dominant groups often engage minority groups as an after-thought, often times as a gesture for being political correct instead of using such encounters as moments to pause, reflect and change the cause of development for true democratisation of intellectual spaces we inhabit, and enable alternative forms of generating knowledge. My collaboration with BlindSA wherein the request to have a Speech To Text application, with a software constructed by a visually impaired developer turned my world upside down. Together with my team, we had to engaged on numerous levels of knowledge production, using as it were, spaces that shuttle between two worlds; that of what we have normalised as spaces of the written code, the seeing, the literate, and those we have dubbed as blind/visually impaired, excluded, constricted access to literate spaces and so on. This project made me to ask bigger questions about how to intervene in the digitilisation project, which almost emphasise the world of the seeing, perpetuating the very limitations of the written world as opposed to the aural world with its infinite possibilities for innovation, problem solving and social justice.

**African Literary Metadata and the Semantic Web**

*Ashleigh Harris*

In an era of big data studies, the politics and limitations of data, their architecture and their historical antecedents require thorough analysis if we are to take seriously calls to decolonize the archive.

This presentation outlines how the African Literary Metadata project approaches this matter. The project aims to investigate the legacies of colonial bibliographic metadata (from libraries, archives and the book trade) on the field of African Literature. It then aims to rethink the inherited metadata architectures that have tethered the idea of the literary object to the monographic book as opposed to other literary forms, such as oral and performed literatures. The project aims to make a contribution to the future African literary archive by using semantic web technology to repeal the colonial legacies of the book in the metadata we attach to literary objects.

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**Dambudzo Marechera's digital afterlives**

*Tinashe Mushakavanhu*  
  
This reading of Dambudzo Marechera aims to present a multifaceted overview of his legacy and contributions as they have been digitally constructed, despite his material archive being physically deposited in Berlin, Germany. The aim is to provide speculative pathways that suggest how we might potentially enlarge ways of reading not only Marechera but African literatures in the internet age in the context of debates about repatriation and reparations. From this exercise, several questions emerge, especially how digital technologies and medias have reformulated the form, function, and audience of African literature.