Master's Thesis

By

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Title: *Care as Dissent in the Art of Georgina Maxim, Gladys Kalichini, Kresiah Mukwazhi, Masimba Hwati and Léonard Pongo*

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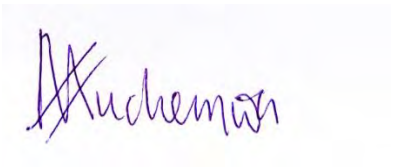
ABSTRACT

The concept of care is proposed as an ethical and practical framework for the reading of the artistic and writing practices of Georgina Maxim, Kresiah Mukwazhi, Gladys Kalichini, Léonard Pongo and Masimba Hwati. In their practices, dissent is both an existential crisis and a constitutive practice. Through small actions, they offer up new narratives. The notion of seeing care as a form of dissent is to simply reflect on the artistic practices that are integrated with or responsive to forms of political protest and dissent based on ethical care practices and what it means to align with those things that matter to us and distancing ourselves from those things that do not. The thesis explores the ethic of care, its possibilities as a dissenting approach, and provides a narrative description of five case studies that exhibit different expressions of care in contemporary art. By prioritising care, there is an educational interest in creating resources and themes for a politically engaged approach to artistic practice and the creation of art. This study also aims to shed light on the power of art as a tool for social and political commentary, and the role of artists as agents of change in society. The study focuses on how these artists use their art to challenge societal norms and political structures, embodying the concept of care as a form of resistance. It underscores the importance of understanding the context in which art is created and the messages it conveys, particularly in societies where freedom of expression may be constrained. The study further investigates how these elements are presented in different ways to show the different manifestations of care and dissent. Through semi-structured interviews, analysis of relevant texts, and a detailed visual analysis of selected works from the five artists, the situational approach was used to explore how meanings are negotiated. The outcome is an expanded proposal for care as dissent and a listening guide as a tool or approach in helping us to listen to marginalised voices, validate experiences, identify barriers and building empathy.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for a Master of Arts at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university. All translations unless otherwise stated are my own.



Signature

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INTRODUCTION: A WORLD UNDONE

I began this study out of the need for kinship and an understanding what it meant to navigate the political terrain where it is possible for any action to be misunderstood. I had an idea of what I needed to research but the right terminology eluded me. The ethic of care became the closest I could explore this phenomenon. Back home I have seen and partaken in small acts of care and 'small epiphanies'(Jenness, 2019) that make my position as a contributing member of my community one that constantly needs to be negotiated with care. Instances of small acts of care are seen in how women and now men band together to form societies like *mukando*[1] and hiking groups, especially at the start of the Covid pandemic, which made relationality a matter of survival. During my study, in my curatorial practice at a state institution, I was accused of encouraging homosexuality in the content and titling of exhibitions; I struggled with purpose and self-care and caring for others and began to view care in a different light. I also began to understand more clearly the complex and dangerous world artists like Masimba Hwati had to navigate.

This introduction presents the thesis, outlines its fundamental epistemological assumptions, describes the societal backdrop of the research, and poses the research questions. The thesis explores the ethic of care, its possibilities as a dissenting approach, and provides a narrative description of five case studies that exhibit different expressions of care in contemporary art. By prioritising care, there is an educational interest in creating resources and themes for a politically engaged approach to artistic practice and the creation of art. I posit that the study of care in art practice helps to understand how individual artists are both governed by and, more importantly for a decolonial study, resist the different forms of power that structure social and political relations.

Three of the artists in this study, Georgina Maxim, Kresiah Mukwazhi and Masimba Hwati are from Zimbabwe, a context that I partially understand and I am familiar with. Sometimes speaking out openly about injustice, violation of basic human rights or corruption in this context is a dangerous thing as demonstrated by what happened with Adam Madebe and

[1] Mukando is a Shona word to describe the pooling of resources mostly by women as a kind of savings society. The word loosely translates to 'throw into a pot'.

Owen Maseko.[2,3] Since then cultural workers and artists are careful about what they show. Zimbabweans have mastered the skill of reducing serious issues to humorous anecdotes (an indication that everyone is seized with an issue is how it is humorously treated in public discourse) hiding behind jokes and gallows humour to deal with what concerns them and living in a country that defies categorisation.[4] One cannot afford to be impervious to what is going on around them and how to negotiate a terrain made murky and perilous by constantly changing legislature. Care began to mean survival for me; not to care means to die. I decided to expand my study a bit further than Zimbabwe to see if the peculiarities of the manifestations of care could be different. I therefore included two other artists: one from Zambia, Gladys Kalichini, and another from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Léonard Pongo.

The Ethic of Care

Reflecting on the portrayal of care in art for the past half-century, I acknowledge its limited application. Despite its extensive development in caregiving professions, a well-defined model of care in the history of art is still absent, and the discipline has seen minimal research on the subject of care. There has not been much written on care in the art history canon and none specifically in African art history. It is easy to talk about the delusions of care, care, and performance that 'the institution' believes are correct (Ndikung, 2021). This 'performance of care' is especially so in an extractive economy whereby an institution gets you to fulfil its

[2] Adam Madebe's sculpture *Looking into the future* in 1985, featuring a nude man looking into the distant future, was taken down from a Bulawayo town house at the behest of Minister Enos Chikowore on morality grounds. The sculpture was moved to the courtyard of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo. Further complaints saw the sculpture moved into storage.

[3] Owen Maseko's March 2010 exhibition *Sibathontisele* (which translates to 'Let's drip on them') on the events of Gukurahundi (the massacres of Ndebele civilians during skirmishes in the 1980s, between rebel forces and the 5th Brigade Infantry led by Perence Shiri and Constantine Chiwenga and loyal to Robert Mugabe) led to the shutting down of an entire gallery floor for over five years at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo. Maseko was arrested less than 24 hours after his new exhibition opened. He was charged, under the Public Order and Security Act, for 'undermining the authority' (Section 33 (2) (a) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act) of President Robert Mugabe and 'causing offence to persons of a particular race or religion' Section 42 (a) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act). The charges carried a possible twenty-year prison sentence. He was granted bail and in September of the same year, his trial was postponed pending consideration by the Supreme Court as to 'whether criminalising creative arts infringes on the freedom of expression and freedom of conscience'(Legal Monitor, Issue 63, September 18, 2010), as guaranteed by the Constitution. A magistrate granted an application to the Supreme Court on constitutional grounds, and on the grounds that Maseko's art depicted events which had unquestionably happened. The gallery was only reopened in 2015 and Maseko never got his work back.

[4] By Western definition Zimbabwe has all the characteristics of a failed state and should not exist.

purpose. How can we grant more space for fiction and fabulation? ‘Care is not just a picture of language, not just a metaphor or analogy, but a task’ (Cavarero, 2000, 2 – 3).

There has been a rise in interest on the ethic of care in the past few years, with most of the research focusing on the archival aspect of art practice. This archival concern explores the ethical dimensions of dealing with problematic archives. Much of the research is concerned with the state of the researcher, especially how in the process of re-enacting and performing archives, particularly the colonial archives, the researcher can become embroiled in the trauma (Odumosu, 2021). Thus, the ethic of care is concerned with cartographies of research, the role of storytelling as a practice of care, the ethic of care as a literary trope, and the ethic of care as a research paradigm.

In an attempt to define it, care is frequently socially framed as a feminine ethic, leading to a common conflation of feminist and care ethics. When examined from the perspective of feminist discussions on gendered labour division, care, as a practice embodied in action, is often confined to the realm of family obligations, particularly within the framework of the traditional nuclear family. This definition of care implies a burden on the carers and exploits labour, particularly for women.

Care is also defined as a set of principles, practices, and laws that enable community assembly and political governance (Held, 1993; Tronto, 2007). This study’s proposed politics of care primarily focuses on self-determination, community determination, and the allocation and distribution of responsibilities essential for human life. As such, the analysis of artworks by chosen artists is based on and contributes to non-ideal care theories. These theories view historical and contemporary liberation struggles as not just a pathway, but also a preparation for a distinct type of politics that offers new ways of cohabitation. The ethics of care have recently evolved to provide ethical reasoning from a relational and contextual viewpoint. This approach inductively derives its insights from care practices, where a combination of qualitative empirical research and comprehensive conceptual analysis forms the basis for a grounded normative position.

The politics of care outlined here is not entirely unprecedented (Ruddick, 1980; Gordon, 1990). Care theorists join a disciplinary dialogue, carrying insights from aspects of political theory that have always existed but have frequently been side-lined. This tradition has

portrayed care as an ethic, a relationship, a type of work, a component of cultural reproduction, and a stepping stone towards non-capitalist and non-dominative social interactions. However, I acknowledge that care concepts have often been paternalistic, dominating, and at times, violent.

Care as a field of study came to prominence as an interdisciplinary endeavour in the eighties when the social scientist, Carol Gilligan, challenged the concealed (pseudo) Kantian method in morality studies and contended that individuals model their values on their relationships and contexts (Gilligan, 1982). The field progressed significantly through the substantial contributions of Virginia Held and Joan Tronto[5]. Their influence, often indirect and disseminated through other scholars, activists, and policymakers, helped elucidate the political and ethical nature of the ethics of care. In this context, care is the central focus and primary activity in investigating the potential for harmonious coexistence and collaboration. Drawing inspiration from feminist theory, the ethics of care underwent a swift transformation. Initially, it was primarily concerned with gender-related issues. However, it soon broadened its scope to include considerations of race and power dynamics. As an ethical framework, care goes beyond simply demanding a mutual attitude of respect, responsibility, and obligation among individuals. It advocates for a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships, emphasising empathy, compassion, and the recognition of the inherent dignity of all individuals. It encourages us to consider the complexities of human interactions and the diverse contexts in which they occur. This expanded perspective allows for a more comprehensive approach to ethical decision-making, one that takes into account the intricate web of relationships that constitute our social fabric. Tronto (2013) suggests how a transformative politics of care is present in today's world – whether in black market communities, or migrants organising against borders globally, 'the only horizon of an ethics of care is a world undone' – that is, 'extracting ourselves and each other from the ideas, values, and institutions of Western modernity'(Tronto, 2013, 9).

Tronto's research brings to light the disparities present in the realm of care, with a specific emphasis on racial and gender-based differences. Tronto underscores the systemic biases that often permeate care practices, disproportionately affecting individuals based on their race and

[5] Virginia Held and Joan Tronto are prominent scholars who have made significant contributions to the field of ethics specifically in relation to the ethic of care.

gender. She argues that these inequalities are often overlooked or normalised, leading to a skewed distribution of care. Furthermore, Tronto expresses concern over the increasing influence of neoliberal market principles in shaping societal values, which she believes undermines the foundational tenets of democracy. She warns that this shift towards market-driven values could further exacerbate the existing inequalities in care, as it tends to prioritize efficiency and profit over empathy and compassion. Held (1993) views care as a political issue that extends beyond personal relationships, while Gould (2004) identifies it as a global concern. Duffy (2005) argues that the concept of care, when seen as 'nurturance', favours white women and excludes women of colour. Collins (1990) advocates for an 'ethic of caring' to challenge 'Eurocentric masculinist' perspectives by focusing on the experiences, emotions, and knowledge of Black women.

Feminist political theorists emphasise the need to consider the specific, embodied experiences of women as caregivers and labourers, rather than a universal, abstract notion of citizenship. They argue against a simplistic public/private distinction. Numerous academics have delved into the study of care politics and how the evolution of 'common sense logic' that governs societal norms and behaviors undergoes transformation within social movements and democratic setups. Such transformations can have profound implications on the politics of care and advocate for a broader, more inclusive interpretation and implementation of care. They argue that care should not be confined to individual relationships or specific sectors like healthcare or social work. Instead, they propose that care should be recognised as a fundamental social value that informs all aspects of societal interaction and policy-making to pave the way for a more equitable society where care is distributed more fairly and everyone's care needs are acknowledged and addressed.

Care as Collective Organising

How is care manifest in contemporary art? In what ways do artists depict concepts of kinship and solidarity? How are care and dissent entangled? These are some of the questions guiding this thesis. What would be required for care to be an ethic and political practice that orients people to a new way of living, relating, and governing? Care ethicist Frans Vosman (2014) proposed the development of care ethics into a contemporary political ethics, as within the traditional caring professions, phenomena, and new issues are insufficiently reflected upon and recognised. In this regard, I also argue for a politics of care that seeks to elaborate an

orientation capable of diagnosing, undoing, and building ways of governing and living. My starting point in this effort invokes Joan Tronto's (2013) first phase of care 'the only horizon of an ethics of care is a world undone'(Threadcraft, 2016). Undoing the world requires a new register to confront and dismantle institutions of suppression and oppression.

Essentially, dismantling an 'otherwise world[6]' involves rejecting our aggressive and all-encompassing knowledge system. This system is rooted in and perpetuated by colonial capitalism, marginalization, and patriarchy - systems that continuously foster violence, inequality, and exclusion. James Baldwin (1992, 325) argues 'We made the world we're living in and we have to make it over.' I am reminded of the definition of Aissatou Ba in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* whose desire for freedom and agency within her marriage had her described as wanting her prison gilded. For this reason, 'it's not a matter of "doing politics differently,"' but care demands we '[do] something different from politics' altogether (The Invisible Committee, 2018). Care calls for transformational practices. An ethic of care must acknowledge the non-relational pain of those who are misrecognised (Karerea, 2019; Harris, 2019). This pain forms the foundation that positions and structures all types of class and gender-based alienations: the entity to be regulated, the deviant to be repressed, and the item to be discarded or rejected. These are defined in opposition to the state, which necessitates this rejection for its stability and preservation (Wilderson, 2020). Therefore, care and care ethics must directly address misrecognition and marginalisation, forming the basis for dismantling these principles and moving towards an unexplored and unknown future.

Care is not always neat and tidy; it is often messy and complicated and involves a willingness to envision alternatives, and the capacity to handle disorder and impurity. The acts of caring and killing can be entangled: for instance, humans set forests and prairies ablaze for their preservation. Caring sometimes necessitates acknowledging and managing various forms of violence, rather than attempting to remove or eradicate it. An often-neglected definition of care involves feeling unsettled (Murphy, 2015). In this context, to care in ways that unsettle, implies operating without a definitive, standard vision, but being responsive to relationships

[6] An otherwise world is my description of an alternative world, one that diverges from the existing norms, structures, and systems.

and locations, and continually adapting. Indeed, the term ‘unsettling’ suggests that it possesses a significant capacity for radical transformation.

This thesis explores care organised around a commitment to universal provision for human needs, countervailing power for the vulnerable and ignored, and a rejection of lip service to social problems. The politics of care transcends the liberal view of care as a limited resource or a feminine trait. It leverages dissent traditions and social movements to conceptualise and implement care as a survival tactic, a basis for political organisation, and a proactive strategy for creating a world where everyone can prosper.

This thesis explores the role of care in today’s visual arts and its implications for the future. It examines who provides care in our societies, how and why they do it, and the necessity of care for preserving human life and culture. It discusses when the state ceased to care for its citizens and the repercussions of our own neglect of care. The study uses care as a tool for systematic analysis of artworks, aiming to reshape our engagement with the world. My observations of the artists’ work presents care as a commitment to address historical and ongoing misrecognition. They provoke questions about the distribution of care versus violence, the role of collective care in place-making, and how marginalised and gendered spaces define care.

This thesis advocates for a broader understanding of care, extending its application to contemporary art and beyond familial obligations. It explores the potential for dissent in diverse care expressions. Artworks embody the idea of care as a mindful commitment to what is important, implying both alignment with valued aspects and disassociation from the unvalued. This thesis draws upon decolonial studies and reflects on writing from the perspective of the Global South (Amadiume, 2002). It is crucial to explore Africa’s knowledge and look at artworks through the Southern lens (Nnaemeka, 2004; Simbao, 2017; Folaranmi, 2019; Baasch et al., 2020).

This research highlights the complex and unsettling implications of the aesthetic and psychological construct of a positive frame that can become a ‘tyranny of positivity’ (David, 2023) and how care ethics might navigate beyond such a framework. It emphasises the significance of interpreting our perceptions, which are invariably influenced by our subjectivity. Vosman (2020) encourages a political and ethical contemplation of the use of

arts, aiming to generate enjoyable experiences for those who are ill or suffering through co-creation. The study also considers how the arts can genuinely provide solace to those in pain, with ‘comforting until the bitter end’ being a crucial aspect of care (Heijst, 2008).

Our ‘hegemonic epistemic framework’ limits our ability to empathise with those we can’t identify with, leading to ignorance about others’ suffering and hindering recognition of their need for care (Saull, 2010). Care ethics must challenge these unjust structures by understanding the specific experiences of the marginalised (Sontag, 2003). The inability to grasp the unique suffering of the most vulnerable highlights the critical need for care. Care ethics assessment, driven by the identification of specific harms, advocates a non-ideal theory that focuses on everyday injustices (Casalini, 2020). Recognising epistemic violence is key to an inclusive care theory that redefines our understanding of justice.

Artworks transcend being mere objects for intellectual consumption or contemplation, transforming into symbols of protest and extensions of gatherings, both public and concealed. They serve as catalysts for change, enabling us to envision futures that free individuals from ‘teetering on the edge of invisibility, dis-ease and insanity’ and we are yet to comprehend or desire (Smith, 2016). This form of care counters the prevailing liberal forms of political care, such as welfare or humanitarianism, which are enacted at the national or human level and rely on exclusionary political structures. Welfare excludes non-citizens, and not everyone is considered equally human in humanitarianism. These liberal care forms are driven by limited moral sentiments like sympathy, pity, or compassion, which create hierarchies by distinguishing between deserving and undeserving individuals. They often rescue those deemed ‘innocent’, thereby criminalising ‘perpetrators’ (Woodly et al, 2021, Ticktin, 2011). In this way, care practices have inadvertently supported marginalising policies, determining whose lives warrant attention and whose do not.

In the modern context, care is simultaneously seen as an effective state, a practice, and an ethical-political duty (Tronto, 1993; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, 2012; Martin, Myers, and Viseu, 2015). Scholars, anti-racist activists, and Black and transnational feminists are increasingly recognizing the power of care as an ordinary yet potentially revolutionary and transformative force. The resurgence of interest in care, redefined with the conviction that it can be reshaped to tackle enduring forms of exclusion and domination, has been fuelled by various factors. These include emerging needs due to austerity and anti-immigration policies,

instances of abandonment and neglect, and most recently, the global upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the stark social disparities and violence it has exposed (Roy, 2020).

A form of care lies at the core of collectivity, which is fundamentally about drastically redistributing resources and dismantling systems of domination and enclosure to foster relationships of equality, reciprocity, and responsibility. Care serves as a tool to conceptualize, anticipate, and implement alternative ways of communal living that are inherently inclusive and devoid of sentimentality. By implementing what Woodly (2020) terms as 'structural care'—a process of addressing societal issues through collective action rooted in the understanding of universal interdependence—new political structures emerge. Care thus plays a pivotal role in the creation of a new collective entity.

This thesis further considers looking at the ethic of care as the not easily perceptible form of dissent. The examination of creative work draws attention to the role of caring as an epistemological phenomenon and a relational practice of restoring the world (Alacovska, 2020). Socially engaged art practices (Bishop, 2006, Berman, 2018) turn creative work into a practice of care and mode of resistance. There is an exploration of self-determined identities, resurgences, and insurgencies of African decolonial thought in challenging systems that construct and maintain ignorance (Gatsheni, 2018). The concept of care is the tool to explore the artists' lived experiences and provide an insight into their work. It is also a medium to explore the political and ethical dimensions of socially engaged processes (Kester, 2011) that are subtle and quiet ways (Quashie, 2012) one can enact dissent. 'Care' here signifies respect for everyone's emotions, humility towards the unknown, openness to new possibilities, a call for shared responsibility, and an inherent drive towards justice (McLeod 2019, 267).

Thus, functioning in conversation with dissent and conceptualism, this thesis's interrogation of care contributes to the kind of enquiries being made on the theoretical level by the politics of recognition, decolonial studies and feminist theory. Each section considers how select artworks by Maxim, Mukwazhi, Kalichini, Hwati and Pongo contributes to broader discourses on care and dissent, and I contextualise how their art geographically and historically, through comparisons with other artworks that relate formally or thematically, articulates the vocabulary of care. I propose exploring grief, refusal, celebration, survival, writing and performance as sites and practices of care.

The thesis is organised around a series of strategies used by the selected artists to comprehend, examine, broaden, and enhance conceptualisations of care. One of these strategies is a new politics of recognition (Spencer 2020) which illuminates how artists contest the erasure of identities and epistemologies. The politics of recognition theorises that recognition or absence shapes identity (Nwoye, 2017). Recognition has several meanings, but the one used here is acknowledging or respecting another human being. Lack of recognition can be a tool of discrimination, trapping someone in a distorted identity and compromised mode of being. Thus, recognition is an integral component to understanding how these five artists' practices navigate care ethics.

When viewed from the perspective of self-determination and independence, autonomy is seen as an ideal state of financial and social self-sufficiency, coupled with optimal physical capability. In this interpretation, disability is not considered part of autonomy. This assumed autonomy negates the necessity for care or social connections, thereby isolating an individual or entity from its environment. This isolation reinforces the institutional norms that encourage and create standard models of self-dependence. The institutional structure relies on this concept of isolation and self-dependence embodied by autonomy. In simpler terms, autonomy, in this context, is about being financially and socially independent and physically capable. However, this view doesn't include disability. When people assume this kind of autonomy, they don't need care or social networks, which can lead to isolation. This isolation can strengthen the societal norms that promote self-reliance. These norms are part of an institutional framework that values isolation and self-reliance.

Dissent in art practice focuses on taking care as a lens through which the enactment of dissent is realised. I explore the strategies I propose to employ to expand the concept of care into a form of dissent. The focus is on the less obtrusive forms of dissent, where marginalised groups often hide their defiance in the dominant presence and suggest that resistance can remain below the radar. These disguised forms, 'low profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name' (Scott, 1990, 19), are subordinate discourses that strategically lie between the power that is openly declared and the actions that occur outside the dominator's field of perception (Marche, 2012). Hwati and the language of taking care is the overarching theme of this chapter.

Dissent studies focus on individual cases, broader campaigns or conflicts, or the universe of all aggressive actions in each society (McGarry et al., 2020). There is diversity in the expressions of defiance, and multiple forms of protest and resistance are often entangled in complex ways (Simbao 2019). Protest is nuanced. According to some studies, there is a distinction between violent and nonviolent protest with nonviolent strategies involving acts of persuasion, disruption, or non-cooperation that do not entail physical force (Workman, 2015; Zlobina and Gonzalez, 2017). Some, however, lump together different forms of dissent into one measure of protest (Scott, 1990; Stimmer & Wisken, 2019). Systems designed to strip people of their humanity see activities that aim to reclaim that humanity, questioning the extractive or dehumanising actions of governments and systems as potentially terrorist and dissenting action. According to the American Government's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), for example, in the StopCopCity Movement August 29 2023 indictment in Atlanta Georgia could be considered as seeing mutual aid, solidarity and collectively fulfilling one another's needs as a form of dissent:

> Rather the notion of anarchy, being grounded in an anti-authority mindset, primarily targets government because it views government as unnecessarily oppressive. Instead of relying on a modicum of government structure, anarchy relies on human association instead of government to fulfil all human needs. Some of the major ideas anarchist promote include collectivism, mutualism/mutual aid and social solidarity.[7]

The term can be interpreted either in the context of subtlety—what remains politically invisible—or in terms of importance—what doesn't fully meet the criteria of being political. These secondary narratives that tactically exist between the openly acknowledged power and what happens outside the dominator's perceptual range (Marche, 2012), actions, gestures, and thoughts that are not explicitly political but reside in the gaps of power, have now been criminalised.

[7] From image text of the StopCopCity 106-page indictment shared by user Forsaken-Hearing8629 on Reddit https://www.reddit.com/r/TheDeprogram/comments/16axo92/from_the_rico_indictment_of_the_stopcopcity/

Context

Zimbabwe and Zambia share a fascinating political and social history. They were both part of Rhodesia and Nyasaland: Zambia was Northern Rhodesia, a British colony, and Zimbabwe was Southern Rhodesia, a self-governing protectorate. Zambia attained independence in 1966 and Zimbabwe in 1980. Whilst Zimbabwe's road to liberation involved a civil war, Zambia (along with Mozambique and Tanzania) provided sanctuary to the Zimbabwean freedom fighters. The current discourse in both countries does not address issues of dispossession, marginalisation, spatial policies of inequality, resource allocation and how the nation state is complicit in the systematic invalidation of people's lived experiences (Tendi, 2011, 2022; Yingwana, 2018). The lived experience has been marked by heightened forms of precarity reinforced by strategies of erasure of life forms of the marginalised. Nontsikelelo Mutiti (2019) speaks of coming from a place (Zimbabwe) where people spent decades whispering what they felt till they forgot how to speak.

There are efforts being made to establish levels of erasure within minority groups as they strive to reform their specific histories - who is accountable for this erasure? In the contestation to reimagine history and identities who commands attention? What possibilities are there for the subaltern to speak? Are the subaltern a monolithic group? Silencing is a complex practice reflected in the sociopolitical hierarchy. Artists based in Zambia and Zimbabwe have presented their expressions of the systems that continue to negate their experiences through artworks and performances. Their work has become a form of restructuring of the present art world, its institutions and authorities, to explore possibilities for new relationships and engagement.

The work by the majority of artists in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) focus on the history of violence that continues to plague the country. The DRC is the site of very complex dynamics with the country's conflicts influenced and impacting internal, regional and international relations. The history of the DRC is marred by unimaginable violence that started with the setting up of the Congo Free State under the Belgian King, Leopold II. The exploitation of the DRC is fuelled by conflict minerals. Resource driven conflicts continue to derail eradication of exploitation of the DRC and sustainable development.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I use is premised on the undoing of inequalities. Drawing on postcolonial thinking and extending on what Laura Stoler (2013) describes as 'imperial debris', decoloniality becomes critical for the rethinking of the global politics of aesthetics and epistemology. My study began with the erasure of knowledge that led to the formation of institutions and power structures that uphold systems of exploitation, domination, and suppression (Chikowero, 2015) to analyse the conceptualisation and experimental articulations of these ideas in creative spaces. My exploration examines the significance of theory and praxis as it relates to intersections between decolonial aesthetics or aesthesis, critical race theory and articulations of self-determined identities as well as resurgencies and insurgencies of radical African decolonial thought in the exploration of systems that construct and maintain ignorance (Gatsheni, 2018).

Methodology

I was guided generally by the interpretive perspective, and specifically by Alvesson's (1996) situational approach. The interpretive perspective places the focus on interpreting the meanings and perspectives of cultural members, and how these meanings are negotiated (Trujillo, 1992). The situational approach directed the choice of specific interactions to explore in depth. Thus, an appropriate means of investigating the topic from this perspective was the observation of conversation and the artist interview to understand the meanings they have for their creative processes as well as their positionality.

Semi-structured interviews, considered by Bernard (1988) to be productive research instruments and constitutive elements in knowledge production that provide a clear set of instructions and can provide reliable and comparable qualitative data, were conducted with the selected artists. The inclusion of open-ended questions that stray from the interview guide provide new ways of seeing and understanding the topic at hand and allows the informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms (Briggs, 1986).

I interviewed the following artists to clarify and provide insight into practice and positionality: Gladys Kalichini (in person as she was based in Grahamstown at the time); Kresiah Mukwazhi and Georgina Maxim (in person as they are based in Zimbabwe),

Masimba Hwati electronically as he was in Austria, and Leonard Pongo (electronically as he was at one time in Brussels and then in Kinshasa). These interviews engaged with specific artworks being analysed as well as the artists' broader opinions about the topic of care as a form of dissent and creative forms of coding within their specific working environments.

I also sourced information from Rhodes University, the National Gallery School of Visual Arts and Design, Bayreuth University, the Copperbelt University, Harare Polytechnic and Chinhoyi University of Technology where the artists went to school. I carried out a visual analysis of the selected artworks. I also conducted a brief textual analysis of the broader DRC, Zambia and Zimbabwe's histories of systemic violence discourse. Additionally, I conducted a comparative study of the works of other artists who engage with this topic in the three countries, and then narrowed down my study to focus on an in-depth visual analysis of the works of the core artists, sourced from exhibitions, artists and galleries.

This thesis is structured organically and contains four parts, each of which relates to the overarching theme of care in contemporary art practice and how acts of care can manifest both physically, through actions such as grief, refusal, celebration, survival, writing and performance, as sites and practices of care and how this can be a form of dissent.

Chapter 1, 'Threads of Care and Resistance: Exploring Georgina Maxim and Kresiah Mukwazhi's Practices' focuses on artworks by these two artists and the creative framework to explore the methodologies of care through which individual welfare is tied to the welfare of the community. This chapter captures the intertwining themes of care and resistance within the textile practices of the two artists, highlighting the nurturing and empowering qualities of textiles as a means of expression, support and defiance. The chapter is divided into two distinct parts: Georgina Maxim, Subversive Stitching and Memory making, and Mukwazhi and the Diarist Approach.

Chapter 2, 'Gladys Kalichini and the Nationalist Imaginary', focuses on the Kalichini's work and considers reciprocity and the politics of recognition. The chapter expands the consideration of care through the exploration of archival practices.

Chapter 3, 'Masimba Hwati: Resistance, Negotiation and Guerilla Tactics as a Practice of Care' focuses on Hwati's work and takes care as a way to rethink and resituate artistic

practice. Shifting beyond the private manifestation of care, the chapter explores Hwati's engagement with public spaces through his artworks.

Chapter 4, 'The Entanglement of Celebration, Refusal and Care in Leonard Pongo's Photography' focuses on Pongo's work, and refusal as a form of care.

My thesis concludes with a postscript entitled 'An expanded proposal for care as dissent' This section highlights ongoing issues in need of further research and explores how contemporary art can be understood through the lenses of care and dissent. This section poses the five artists as a care collective case study and an experiment in investigating the myriad problems within the institution of care for disempowered and marginalised people. It also provides a listening guide as a tool or approach in helping us to listen to marginalised voices, validate experiences, identify barriers and building empathy.

CHAPTER 1: THREADS OF CARE AND RESISTANCE: EXPLORING GEORGINA MAXIM AND KRESIAH MUKWAZHI'S PRACTICES

Art Historians, Social Scientists, and Care Ethicists are drawing on the work of Audre Lorde (1988), who asserted that for marginalised individuals, care is a form of political resistance: to participate in care is to affirm the right to exist. In a similar vein, Saidiya Hartmann (2016) contends that the care labour, which was birthed from the harsh structures of slavery and later exploited by racial capitalism, is not entirely consumed by these violent systems: this care allows those who were never intended to survive to do so, even in the harshest circumstances. It's about survival in the face of adversity and maintaining dignity and humanity in the process. This form of care goes beyond the personal and becomes a political act of defiance and resilience.

In this chapter, I delve into the concept of care, analysing the work of Georgina Maxim and Kresiah Mukwazhi, viewing care as a theoretical and philosophical idea with significant practical impacts that are central to our existence and crucial in our relationships and endeavors. These two artists examine the ethics of care, which values and honours femininity within a 'sex difference' gender framework, and how this can be interpreted as a form of protest. The chapter captures the intertwining themes of care and resistance within the textile practices of the two artists, highlighting the nurturing and empowering qualities of textiles as a means of expression, support and defiance.

The textile practices of the two artists are disparate and similar at the same time. Maxim hand stitches her work, which is a long and laborious process, whilst Mukwazhi machine stitches her work and adds other elements to it. Maxim works against oblivion brought on by death and Mukwazhi works against oblivion brought on by marginalisation. Regardless, the two artists harness forgotten or uncomfortable stories to make their work. Care for the forgotten or those consigned to oblivion is the focus of the work of these two artists and can be seen as a subversive act.

Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch* (1984) highlighted the cultural and socio-economic aspects of embroidery, exposing the gender politics that undervalued 'feminine' arts. Stitching, a blend of decoration and politics, became a public statement from a private act, relevant both domestically and globally. It gained prominence during the pandemic as people

sought solace in homesteading. It’s a powerful mix of power, pleasure, and protest, uniting voices to weave stories of struggle, hope, and resistance. People were trying to find comforting ways to cope with an unfamiliar world and reclaimed it through close attention to the affective, collective healing properties of engaging in handicraft. It is, perhaps above all, a transformative amalgamation of power, pleasure and protest, a way of knitting together many voices to create new narratives of struggle, hope, and defiance.

Subversion implies a quiet effort aimed at toppling established power structures and hierarchies. The term refers to something or someone that aims to undermine or overthrow a system, government or authority through covert or disruptive means. It can also refer to something that is intended to challenge or undermine the established norms, values or beliefs of a society or group. In general, the term implies a threat to the status quo or to established order.

There are many examples of subversive art throughout history. One well-known example is the work of the Dada movement, which emerged in Europe during World War I and aimed to challenge traditional artistic and cultural values. Dada artists produced works that were intentionally nonsensical, provocative and sometimes offensive, in order to undermine the conventions of art and society. Another example is the work of the feminist artists group the Guerrilla Girls, who use humour and satire to expose sexism, racism, and other forms of inequality in the art world. Their work often takes the form of posters, billboards and public interventions, and is intended to provoke discussion and raise awareness about social issues. A more recent example is the work of Banksy, a British street artist known for his politically charged and often controversial street art. Banksy's art regularly challenges capitalism, consumerism, and governmental policies, frequently employing wit and sarcasm to convey his message. His work is created anonymously and often illegally, and is intended to challenge the status quo and provoke a response from the public.

Stitching and embroidery have traditionally been associated with domesticity and femininity, and have often been dismissed as ‘craft’ rather than ‘art’. By using these techniques in unexpected ways or to address controversial subjects, textile artists can challenge these gendered and hierarchical distinctions and subvert traditional notions of what constitutes ‘serious‘ art. For example, Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña’s work often incorporates found or recycled materials, and she uses stitching and other textile techniques to create intricate and

often politically charged installations and sculptures and challenge conventional notions of artistic materials and processes and to address issues such as environmental degradation and social justice. The work of the feminist collective subRosa uses embroidery and other textile techniques to create works that explore the intersections of gender, technology, and power. Their work often includes subversive messages or imagery that challenge dominant ideologies and stereotypes.

So, while textile art and stitching are not inherently subversive in the same way as graffiti art, they can certainly be used in ways that challenge established norms and provoke critical thinking. The silent action inherent in embroidery and stitching practices is largely due to the idea that 'because of its history and associations embroidery evokes and inculcates femininity in the embroiderer' (Parker, 1984, 3). As such, according to Parker (1984, 3) embroidery represents both 'a source of pleasure and power… while being indissolubly linked to… powerlessness'. Those who stitch wield a double-edged needle, poking holes into society's fabric but also risking reinforcing stereotypes surrounding domesticity, femininity and craft. Maxim's story is one of such pleasure, power, and powerlessness.

Georgina Maxim, Subversive Stitching and Memory Making

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence; it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare. – Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, 1988.

Georgina Maxim, [Fig. 1] born in 1980, Harare, Zimbabwe is a textile artist and curator who works with pre-owned or second-hand clothes to turn them into tapestries, monuments and gestural sculptures. Her middle name, Maindida (you used to love me), is a fitting description of her artworks, which can be described as memorial pieces or the memory of. Her tapestry work signifies multiple stories of stitching, memory and healing. Her works are also items of vulnerability, translating perceptions of femininity. The objects, a result of 'granny manners' (Kazungu, 2019) of stitching, knitting, weaving and applique are a study in patience and endurance speaking about reliving memories through appliqué. These are the skills for the domestication of the female and generally not viewed as 'art'; skills which she harnesses to create monuments. She coalesces memory with new narratives from an experiential footing to talk about how we can say things without saying them. Her work reminds one of the murky

and difficult character Tambu in Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *This Mournable Body* and why if we mourn and grieve circumstances of certain living bodies we might create a better world (Dangarembga, 2019). Maxim invites the viewer to take the journey from the first owner of the garment through the transformations that develop out of the thousands of stitches and dozens of hours that accompany each piece to create a monument. Every artwork is a hand-stitched memorial showing the revolutionary potential in small acts of care.

Maxim was raised by her grandmother. When her grandmother fell ill and subsequently passed away on 21 November 1995, it opened up in Maxim a space for contemplation and helplessness. During her grandmother's illness she would spend nights awake and at the same time had to go to school in the morning and still study and pretend as if she had had a good night's sleep. Her grandmother's illness so disturbed her she was demoted from the A Class to a B1 class[8]. Her aunts sat her down and gave her a strong talk regarding the unacceptable fate of failure. As a result, she knuckled down and studied so she could be promoted again. She was rewarded with a promotion back to the A class. Soon after the promotion her beloved grandmother passed away. She could not afford to wallow in grief and could not let up studying for fear of failing. She never mourned her grandmother the way she wanted. The first clothes that she worked on for her art practice belonged to her late grandmother.

Maxim's chosen medium is especially fraught with the domesticity that is frequently associated with women's work and care work: 'embroidery, sewing, tapestry, knitting, lace-making, crochet. The various types of needlework, activities traditionally allotted to women, subjugated them to a model to follow, a framework, a so aptly named pattern. Pledged to these domestic tasks, they sacrificed their independence of spirit and their creative freedom'(Collection de l'Art Brut, 2007 – 2008). Georgina Maxim's artworks continue needlework's powerful yet ambivalent role in society and explore the 'place of in the refashioning of cultural, racial and gendered identities'(Checinska, 2014, 130) and

[8] Promotion and demotion exams are written in some group A and Trust schools in Zimbabwe to determine which study path a student should take. In Zimbabwe, schools are divided into several categories, including Group A, Group B, Group C, and many others. Group A schools are generally considered to be the most prestigious and well-resourced schools in the country, and they typically offer a wide range of academic and extracurricular programs. Specifically, Group A schools in Zimbabwe are a group of high-performing government-funded schools that are considered to be the most elite in the country. These schools are often located in urban areas and are known for their highly selective admission processes, rigorous academic programs, and outstanding sports teams. These schools are highly competitive and often require students to pass entrance exams or meet other rigorous admission criteria. They are known for producing many of the country's top scholars, athletes, and leaders. Georgina went to Hatfield Girls High school.

reframes cloth as a way of challenging existing power structures. Her making is an inherently subversive practice that centres her silence as a choice. Yet, the message of her work and its impact is undeniable. Her practice offers a 'communal' sewing space and archive of making. The work brings protest into the public sphere through the use of simple sewing techniques.

The Art of Transformation

The art of transformation refers to the use of artistic expression as a means of personal or collective transformation. It is a process of using creative expression to explore, understand, and transform oneself or one's environment. In this context, art is not simply a means of aesthetic pleasure or entertainment, but a tool for personal growth, healing and social change. Artists who work within the art of transformation seek to create work that inspires and empowers their audience and that encourages them to see the world in new and transformative ways. Sometimes they also transform ordinary everyday objects into new narratives and objects. It can be used to explore themes such as identity, spirituality, social justice and environmentalism, and can be both personal and political in nature.

The first time Maxim really felt at home with her practice, which had become a way of care-taking for herself, was when she was on residency in Geneva in 2017 and visited the Collection de l'Art Brut art museum in Lausanne. She viewed parts of the exhibition *Jean Dubuffet's Art Brut, the Origins of the Collection* and it ultimately changed how she viewed her work. Some of the work was created by people who had suffered different forms of psychotic breaks, or had been institutionalised. One patient stitched closed letters from her family members who never visited. The exhibition text resonated with Maxim:

> Jeanne Tripier, Madge Gill, Agnès Richter and Rosa Zharkikh, which explore the ancestral subservience principles of needlework and indeed seem to contest this subservience through their bold, prodigious creations. Judith Scott, Juliette Bataille, Yumiko Kawai and Jules Leclercq devised stitches, knots, lacings or weavings, sometimes in a sense of refinement, sometimes in a rage. Astonishing finery, embroidered life stories, magical fetishes, poetic tangles: embroidery, sewing and knitting were used to represent so many ritual actions – favouring roving thoughts –

> thanks to which they move away from reality and allow their fantasies to unfold.(Collection de l'Art Brut, 2007 -2008)

These Art Brut creators gave substance to the daydreams that they evoked between transparency and opaqueness and by extension gave Maxim the confidence to embody her practice. In particular she spoke at length of Marguerite Sirvins' wedding dress, created using threads from her bedsheets and indicative of her state of mind and her long period of institutionalisation. Sirvin's work particularly resonated with Maxim who saw the protest in textile arts.

The exhibition took Maxim on a sort of adventure, the cementing of her journey in a world where textile art glorified mean and their feats in battle. For her part, Georgina Maxim reaches for the weave of cloth and web to attain the vertiginous, dreamlike territories of the mind and glorify the feats of women who have impacted her life. She defines her stitches as *dhungemutunge*[9] which is a haphazard and temporary stitching that is contrary to what Maxim does. Maxim (2022) said,

> I think that's my definition of the untidy and uneven stitching which I use. If you look at it more closely that's how the doctors stitch up a scar; it's a macabre way of just putting all together and you are hoping your body will fix it, will sort it out. It's all deliberate but it's a horrible deliberate way of doing things. '*iyoyo stitching yema doctors yekuti ngazvingobatana*'[that stitching by doctors to just close a wound] and that's exactly what I am doing. And the reason why '*ndichizoisa*'[I then put] that piece is I am trying to say the base, remember it's the base which is the dress most of the time or a blouse, a skirt which is the base, which I call my canvas.

That canvas is very much a part of the finished work. In her stitching she puts layers on top. Then there is the small cloth that she cuts up and adds to the canvas with her *dhungemutunge* in a way saying, 'It will pass, one day all will be well.'

[9] *Dhungemutunge* is a Shona word that describes a basting stitch.

Maxim's work is rarely done in private, her children and artists who stay in her home usually witness or are part of the process:

> What private moment? Look at my house, does it give me private moments? I am surrounded by artists who can walk into my fridge. I noticed it when we were staying on Silwood that I no longer have a private space. My private space is only going to end up being my bedroom where I go to sleep. The bedroom is not even a private space; the kids just open the door and get in. I have told Misheck [Maxim's husband Misheck Masamvu] that there is no need to even lock the door or close it, because the kids are going to knock and walk in. (Maxim, 2022)

She usually sits with her children, who witness the small fragments being stitched, but the final assembly of the finished art work is solitary work. When Maxim starts working everything is deliberate and she starts by getting a manicure. The first thing she sees when she wakes up and stretches is colour and tells herself, '*nhasi'*[today], you know what it's a pretty day' and she starts sewing.

She has named her stitches; stitches of laughter, stitches of sewing together and stitches of scars, to differentiate what each piece means to her. Stitches of laughter are an allusion implicit in the phrase like that of a sharp pain – like being pricked with a needle. Sometimes when she is sewing Georgina makes a mistake that brings her back to reality, when she pricks herself with the needle. It tells her that she was probably getting dreamy and forgetting where she is and she grounds herself. There are beautiful moments tinged with pain. Laughter, rather the stitches of laughter, remind Maxim of making a better way and grounds her and reminds her she is alive, 'We hardly ever laugh to the point that its coming from the guts but once we find someone who can make us laugh from there, do you know that there is pain after that?' (Maxim, 2022)

With the stitches of sewing together one is reminded of women coming together as a community to help each other. For example, to sew a quilt for a fellow woman. While Maxim does not sew with other women, she sews in the presence of her children and they sometimes help her with the threading of the needles or just sit with her whilst she makes countless stitches.

The last group of stitches, the stitches of scars, are really about the stitching act. Scars are not created by stitches, but rather stitches are used to close wounds and facilitate the healing process, which can result in a scar. When a wound is deep or large, stitches may be used to bring the edges of the wound together and reduce the likelihood of scarring. The type of stitch used will depend on the size and location of the wound, as well as the desired outcome. These stitches are simple stitches, running stitches (what is generally called *dhungemutunge* in Shona), horizontal mattress stitches, and subcuticular stitches that are used to bring together what is falling apart. It is important to note that scars are a normal part of the healing process and may form even with the use of stitches. The appearance of a scar can be influenced by factors such as the size and location of the wound, the age and health of the individual, and the care taken during the healing process. Older people are likely to scar more than young people. Much like tattoos, stitches of scars are socially constructed ethnographic determiners.

When Maxim speaks of stitches of scars her reference point is always the stories of the people who have had an impact on her life. Her work also weaves together the global and the personal, exploring the ethics of making at a time of environmental crisis caused by fast fashion as indicated in *Lifestyle Labels 1* [Fig. 2]. Her work demonstrates the myriad ways that, in this dark moment, handiwork 'is shaping our cultural moment', opening up avenues not only of protest and dissent but also of healing and connection. Her work labels similarly evoke the connections embedded in fabrics, as body, nature and dress become one. Sewists are archivists, with their threads cataloguing the passing of time, what Elkins (2017) calls 'craft's enduring capacity to express complexity'.

Maxim reminds us of this complexity in the 'long tradition of sewing as commemoration of the dead, and as testament of survival and resistance in the face of political persecution and racial oppression'(Parker, 1984). She explores this in detail with the work *Petite,* [Fig. 3] and *Worth,* [Fig. 4] a homage to Ros Rogers, whose blouses were used as the canvas for the work. Ros Rogers' story is the story of many Zimbabwean white farmers who woke up one day and found their lives forever altered. [10] The Rogers family met Georgina Maxim when she still

[10] The Rogers family were affected by the land reform program in Zimbabwe and their story recounted by son Douglas Rogers. *The Last Resort: A Memoir of Zimbabwe* is testament to the brutality of the reform exercise, sparing no one. Drifters, their vacation home which the Rogers turned into budget accommodation, was bequeathed to Maxim and her husband Misheck at the death of Ros.

worked with Helen Lieros and Derek Huggins at Gallery Delta. This was to be a lifelong relationship. When Ros died, her daughter Fran asked for one of Ros's blouses to be turned into an artwork. When Fran's sister Helen saw the work, she also asked for one of her own which became *Worth.*

The two art works more than commemorate Ros and her husband Lyn, they stand as archival evidence of what happened at Drifter's, the Rogers' home, and how lives were transformed. And in turn how Maxim's life was transformed from knowing this family.

Whilst the previously discussed works are part of Maxim's mourning process, care taking when death occurs and that of the Rogers family, some of her work also creates monuments for unacknowledged labour (*Mhingo/When you come back, carry me* [Fig. 5]), forgotten histories (*Mai Mugari and Ma Mere II* [Fig. 6 and Fig. 7]) and violence against women (*Sex in the Bushes* [Fig.8]).

In *Mhingo/When You Come Back, Carry Me* [Fig. 5], unacknowledged labour takes centre stage and in this work care as a burden and care as solicitude are tangled. *Mhingo* is akin to a blood oath, an unshakeable duty. The object resembles a baby carrier, popularly called *Mbereko* a Shona word that connotes domesticity, childminding and fertility and is derivative of '*kubereka*' which mean to bear or to carry on your back, much like the act of caring. The ethic of care here is based on valuing and celebrating the feminine within the construction of gender and gendered labour. The burden of societal expectations and the joy of motherhood are entangled, as well as domestic protest seen in the role of unpaid, domestic labour. She coalesces memory with new narratives from an experiential footing to talk about how we can say things without saying them.

Critiquing the privilege often inherent in the 'make and mend' trends of recent years, Maxim unpicks the 'New Domesticity' and centres her work as 'a decisive actor in society's mess of roots'(Maxim, 2022) and highlights how stitching can bring together a global community in a healing, restorative act. Her work is also a powerful demonstration of sewing's ability to draw out the dark, damaging histories and ongoing traumas that mar our society. The garments carry the history of their former owners, a mute memory and an absence that the artist tries to remedy. She gathers scattered pieces, sews, embroiders and draws the scars to fight against oblivion. Maxim reactivates these cumulative stories into new narratives. Her

practice suggests sometimes the personal, private connections of craft resonate long after their initial impact.

Georgina Maxim reminds us that we must constantly push at the boundaries of what needlework can do and achieve. What's more, we must continue to interrogate the structures of power and capital that have not only divided needlework from fine art, but have also separated it as a quaint hobby from the labour of stitching.

Breaching the Core

No matter how small the rebellion, the point is to sow anxiety into the minds of the oppressors. Rebellion is the only hope for change. –Fatima Kara, *The Train House on Lobengula Street*, 2023

Art which comes from trauma is an antidote to the annihilation of the other and to the resulting absence, which constitutes the core of the trauma and precludes its representation. Art dealing with trauma may circumscribe a double locus, one of witnessing as well as one of emptiness or execution. When Georgina Maxim and I met for our first interview for this study, she immediately launched into a monologue about a recent loss of a close friend, Uchi Gappah, before we got into the interview. She then spoke at length about her grandmother. These two people, their loss and the impact of their deaths on Maxim shifted the focus of the interview. Through her speech, she realised that her work is concerned with the trauma brought on by death and the process of making is her way of self-care.

Mukwazhi on the other hand did not speak about her trauma, instead choosing to speak about solidarity and how her work is a form of solidarity with sex workers, assault victims and the marginalised. She was particularly interested in these questions: when you encounter my work why are you feeling uncomfortable? What is it about the work that makes you uncomfortable? Is it just because of the mystery, or there is something about women's undergarments? Or there is something else within you that is being provoked? That introspection is what entangles the work in the concept of care and dissent. As a viewer, you now have to confront something that is uncomfortable within yourself, and it continues to wrap itself around you. You are forced to care because Mukwazhi cares and presents a compelling case.

Kresiah Mukwazhi's celebration of everyday people and her intentionality about how issues of trust, mattering and community offer up series of gestures of care for the quiet dignity of lives that inspire her work without fetishising or denigration (Muvhuti, 2018; Spry, 2011). This has a threefold impact: pointing to the already central role of women, upholding figures of black culture who receive insufficient recognition, and pushing back against institutionalised narratives that singularise struggle to make it clear that historical change will frequently be made by those who are likely to remain anonymous.

Mukwazhi and the Diarist Approach

There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.' –Arundhati Roy, *My Seditious Heart,* 2018

Kresiah Mukwazhi [Fig. 9] was born in 1992 in Harare, Zimbabwe, where she lives and works. Her work advocates for the visibility and rights of women who are discriminated against in patriarchal societies. Through visual activism, she explores the power dynamics within the female body through installations, performances, videos and vibrant textile collages. By challenging cultural norms and taboos, Mukwazhi highlights the importance of addressing latent forms of patriarchy and systemic violence. Her work expresses a commitment to solidarity and empowerment.

An examination of Kresiah Mukwazhi's work starts with *Hesi Keresiya*. *Hesi Keresiya* (Hello Kresiah) is Mukwazhi's ongoing inquiry of the self that references an old Zimbabwean playtime rhyme to retell where her point of focus began. Kresiah is named after her grandmother Keresiya Bayisai Mukwazhi who taught her the art of ceramics and is an inspiration in her practice.

Mukwazhi sometimes focuses on the use of language to silence particular groups of people as indicated in the work *Hesi Keresiya*, which uses the playground rhyme to address issues of intergenerational trauma, religion, erased narratives and death. *Hesi Keresiya,* like all play time rhymes was a place where children learned to play and played to learn. Much has been written about the potential of games for important skill development and children's ability to distinguish between reality and make believe. In that time of innocence, full of the joy and purity of spirit, they internalise how society expected them to behave, shaping children's social education, making the games the learning tool and subsequently shaped their reality. In

Hesi Keresiya Mukwazhi remembers her grandmother whilst having a go at the exclusion of divergent bodies in the social imaginary.

Moving from *Hesi Keresiya*, [Fig. 10] Mukwazhi addresses the lives of sex workers and raises these questions: How do individuals and nations respond to violence and trauma? What are the possibilities of rebuilding what has been shattered? Her textile collages train attention on the violence of modernity via both moral impositions and social constraints placed upon womanhood and the social cleansing of cityscapes by the nation state. In *Rakazvirova rikazhamba, it (the cock) hit itself and cried* [Fig. 11] Mukwazhi responds to the ZANU–PF-led government's 2005 'Operation Murambatsvina' in which sought to clear the rubbish blighting the country's otherwise pristine urban façades resulted in overcrowding of places like Cold Comfort Farm and Hopley Farm. [11] The brutality and casual cruelty is set against moments of aching tenderness and lyrical imagery of soft colours, and music. The work explores intimate terrorism which 'rests on a broader spectrum of violence meant to preserve the traditional dominance of heterosexual men, and coerce those who are perceived as threatening that order.'(Samudzi, 2017)

Mukwazhi's work frequently serves as a kind of protest against sexual assault in Zimbabwe and throughout southern Africa, as well as other types of social injustices impacting women and children. Mukwazhi, herself a victim of sexual violence[12], feels compelled in her crusade to shine light on patriarchal injustices. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, cultural theorist and activist scholar respectively, said, 'the preservation of black social life is articulated in and with the violence of innovation' (2013)– a persistent existence despite the suppressive and repressive conditions that surround it. The context of this statement lies within a broader exploration of violence, particularly how it intersects with black social life. By asserting that the preservation of black social life is articulated through the "violence of innovation", Moten and Harney invite critical reflection on the ways in which innovation and resistance intersect

[11] In May 2005, at the beginning of winter, the government launched Operation Murambatsvina [Operation Drive Out the Filth], in which soldiers, police and government militias used extreme violence to destroy the homes of hundreds of thousands of poor people on the outer edges of the country's towns and cities on the pretext of illegal construction and unsanctioned property extensions. The government presented Murambatsvina as a regeneration and renewal scheme to 'clean up' urban areas but an estimated 700 000 to a million people watched their houses being bulldozed, sledgehammered and set ablaze, becoming homeless overnight.
[12] In an interview with the *Sunday News* in 2016 Mukwazhi said, 'In 2011 I was raped. I opened a case against the perpetrator. For two years I went back and forth to court hoping the case would finally be resolved. Every time I was summoned to court I felt as though I was being stripped naked in a room full of people. It was humiliating. All I could do was put up a brave face and this made me start this documentary.'

within marginalised communities. Violence, while always particular, nonetheless keys into larger social patterns and patriarchal norms which Mukwazhi explores: how patriarchal privilege intersects with other forms of power to keep particular groups in the margins. Her aesthetic offerings attempt to problematise hegemony and social orderings enforced through the visual. She calls attention to the structuring of urban spaces which make starkly visible the precarities and vulnerabilities of the gendered citizen, particularly within erotic labour in addition to and alongside other workers in other parts of informal economies.

Sacred Resistance

Kresiah Mukwazhi has several bodies of work which explore the world of sex work and deal with questions of safety, sense of community and collective support. The possibilities of artworks that are unafraid to tackle questions of gender and sexualities outside the framework of traditional rites are not new: questions of who is having sex and with whom, questions of pleasure, questions on the impact of militarism on sexualities, questions about masculinities and questions about sexual commodification, which are prevalent in her work, have been explored before. Mukwazhi raises the same questions and battles with a sense of the colonial and occasionally current gazes that configure black women's embodiment as simultaneously exotic and bestial. Mukwazhi moves 'beyond the tired polemics of violence, disease and reproduction and exploring their layered complexities beyond heterosexual normativity and moral boundaries [which] will lead to fresh conceptual insights and paradigm shifts' (Tamale, 2010, 21). She protests societal attitudes, behaviours and marginalisation of communities involved in sex work.

It was by pure happenstance that, almost by accident, Mukwazhi was asked at a workshop to photograph sex workers at Hopley Farm who were coming together in a society to encourage and empower each other. She felt from then on as if she had been chosen to tell the story of erotic work and the ugliness that accompanies it in Zimbabwe. It was also a moment of awakening – when she realised why she had been fascinated with undergarments as a medium. She found a story where she could use this medium to express herself as well as telling the stories of sex workers. Understanding how society already viewed these women, she wanted the medium itself to carry and portray or tell their story in a way that did not shame them or embarrass them. She took stories people would look down upon and would rather not talk about and presented them in an interesting way with dignity.

These works have been presented in exhibitions as *Mukando* and *Ndakamira Pamukaha*[13] and several of her art works also support the concept of protest. They serve as a testament of her determination to address latent forms of patriarchy and systemic violence by interrogating the mechanisms that force some women into precarious labour and working conditions often led by brutality and coercion. Mukwazhi took her own professional experience of working in nightclubs as well as her conversations with sex workers in Hopley Farm in Harare, Zimbabwe, as the premise for these works. Hopley Farm is home to victims of Operation Murambatsvina, which left almost one million internally displaced people. This community, which has experienced grinding poverty, medieval diseases born out of poor sanitation and lack of adequate care, as well as an increase in the number of sex workers, presents a perfect example of the marginal communities Mukwazhi is interested in working with. This is a community that faces a lot of violent language and marginalisation. The violence of language is based on mis-framing or excluding experiences (Chigudu, 2019). Katherine Marcoccio (1995) speaks of a notion of the language manifesting and perpetuating oppression and suppression. The possibilities of perpetrating violence and its many permutations, the subtle and sometimes unconscious non-verbal put-downs and brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities, communicate hostile derogatory or negative slights to marginalised individuals or groups. They make it possible to treat these communities as less than human.

Mukwazhi feels that the stories of people existing in the cracks – marginalised stories of women – were not given enough space or being celebrated in society. This, then, became the impetus for the majority of her work. And yet she could see that there were other women in the margins, such as sex workers, who she felt needed space as well. In response, Mukwazhi created objects of resistance that also deal with issues of consent and violation, pointing to the emancipatory effect of the art object. Where Yesomi Umolu (2020) talks of the fiction of the emancipatory power of the cultural or art object and in defiance of the framework re-entrenches a logic that criminalises efforts against systems that perpetrate violence and constructs subjects as docile, Mukwazhi points to the importance of expressing anger and how anger can be viewed as ‘interpretation(s) on predicament’(Scarpa and Raine, 2017).

[13] *Mukando* and *Ndakamira Pamukaha* were presented at Jan Kaps gallery in Cologne in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

She started with selecting and using seductive, inviting, soft and tender media as opposed to the rigidity of canvas. She felt that petticoats and satin and lingerie and other delicate fabrics gave the suggestion of the woman's body and intimacy (Mukwazhi, 2022). Over time, as the issues started to become heavier, the medium moved from just being a piece of fabric to being something akin to a blanket. The issues broadened to include the practice of black magic and displayed solidarity with the stories of the women who were assaulted women.

One group of sex workers started a savings society, popularly known as *Mukando* in Zimbabwe, to support one another when no one else would. In this instance, *Mukando* becomes much more than a pool of financial resources; it is a rare place of radical acceptance and assistance in which each member of the group is offered some economic security to enable personal realisation. It is a theatre of women who are more than physical barometers of the toxicity of a system: women who are fierce protectors of all they hold dear, breaking down walls and surviving at all costs. These are women who stand for and take care of each other. The work in the exhibition *Mukando* is a tribute to this radical form of care and resilience.

For her textile pieces, Mukwazhi uses second-hand clothing, especially feminine apparel and lingerie, some of which was formerly owned and donated by sex workers as well as other objects like the decommissioned Zimbabwean currency or sparkling tinsel. The works are undeniably seductive, with the sparkle that lures some men under the cover of darkness. The bright colours of some of the symbols included and the attractive texture of these pieces, which can resemble traditional quilts or tapestries, lure the viewer into an act of voyeurism. In the work, *Untitled*, 2021 [Fig.12], Mukwazhi selected a historical symbol (the Mukwati royal sceptre[14] in this instance, as a symbol of power) seen in the bottom left corner, and the nightclub with its metonyms (as a signifier of the type of space that is generally deemed unsafe to women), and pink and blue-washed it and festooned it with glitter. The phrase ‘Power or Poverty’ is spray painted in pink to imitate a neon sign. The work is to call out in our imaginations and is full of exuberance. Because the attacks on black womanhood are extreme, they demand an extreme response. The subject matters raised here are certainly

[14] Mukwati, one of the rulers of precolonial Zimbabwe, was said to posses a mystical sceptre which has been the subject of many power disputes in Zimbabwe. It is famed to be the repository of mythical power that gives whoever possess it authority over Zimbabwe.

uncomfortable, making the work appear 'tasteless'.[15] The women in seemingly vulgar and obscene poses defy the gaze of the viewer. Mukwazhi refuses to qualify and convert her grammar of experience into terms with which we are comfortable because in a compelled translation we lose an opportunity to better know and understand our fellow human beings on their terms instead of ours. By doing so, Mukwazhi forces us to acknowledge and recognise a group of people who remain marginalised and are even sometimes 'ghettoised' to better support and protect them and one another.

Some of the visuals in Mukando's textile series [Fig. 13, Fig. 14, Fig. 15 and Fig. 17] also call women to recognise and accept their own sexuality. The artist wishes to signify the importance of discussing and thinking about women as erotic selves rather than concentrating on the abuse and violence that is only one aspect of a broad topic. Simultaneously, these works can be perceived as 'blankets' or 'covers', a symbol of protection that Mukwazhi would like to wrap around the individuals she references in her work.

Ndakamira Pamukaha imitates Mukwazhi's video and performance work, particularly the video work *Please Tip Your Dancers*, which expands on an idea of pole dancing and escort work that the artist had already explored in 2017 for the project *That, Around Which The Universe Revolves*, initiated by the German art centre, SAVVY Contemporary. Some of the work focuses on pole dancing and stripping [Fig. 16 and Fig. 17] and intends to challenge the negative perceptions placed upon the female body as well as how the state of the economy forces some women to take up sometimes undesired work to make ends meet. *Pamukaha* is a Shona word for a crack and speaks to margins and liminality. *Ndakamira Pamukaha* presents the meeting points of the body as a public/private space and public space as an archive, as a place of history and memory. In this intervention, Mukwazhi is looking at the female body and how it occupies or is occupied by public space. She requires us to respectfully shed light and raise awareness on certain aspects of this community, at the same time caring for each other.

Ndakamira Pamukaha is a statement on nature, sensual pleasure, memory, friendship, reading, painting, fortitude and struggle shared with a friend. The potency of the work flows

[15] An unrecorded comment by a member of the Acquisition committee of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in July 2023 regarding why he was against acquiring the work by Mukwazhi into the National Gallery of Zimbabwe's permanent collection. His full comment was, 'I find it a bit tasteless to be honest'.

from Mukwazhi's acute sensitivity to patriarchal systems of power and dominance over nature, women, other cultures, and non-human worlds. Even if not directly a matter of biopolitics, Mukwazhi's thinking certainly carries with it the invisible hand that interferes or intervenes to equalise and level the playing field.

In contemporary Zimbabwean culture there exists only one area where men assume a subordinate position to women and that is at a shrine or ritual site. Mukwazhi presents the rest of the social, political and economic life of Zimbabwean women and girls as a battlefield from which they need protection. The idea of blankets, cover and protection is echoed in the work, *Chembere Dzagumhana* [Fig. 18]. In this work, Mukwazhi displays an installation made from discarded bras as obsolete objects. Positioned as contrary to autonomy, this work talks of the lack of agency experienced by the women she talks about.

Mukwazhi's *Chembere Dzagumhana* is a polysemic title. *Chembere Dzagumhana* is a wild vegetable variously known as *mowa, mbowa, mbhuya, bononGwe* and *umbowa*, a pigweed (*Amaranthus Thunbergii)* that provides sustenance for vulnerable communities. It is viewed as a 'struggle'[16] vegetable. The artwork presents the feminine form, with the brassiere serving as a metaphor for support and protection. The sculptural work confronts the intricacies of assembly. The work is a careful and intimate consideration of the body in collaged, filmic, and painted and sculptural form – these trans-medium explorations allude to the multiple planes of human existence. The use of intimate apparel in the artwork establishes the feminine through the symbolic object most associated with the breast that provides nourishment for babies.

The insistent theme of the artist's body of work is *Shemurenga;* derived from *Chimurenga* and *Chembere*[17], the denotation being of a female struggle, a struggle that presents the *Chembere* half of the dichotomy as something metaphysical, a spirit of nationalism, moreover feminism and protection in the ether of those who still exist on the physical plane. The significance of these sculptures comes from the companion pieces – automatic rifles

[16] Struggle meals are created from desperation and are a product of not having enough of something — sometimes energy, but more often, resources or money. Because it is wild and grows pretty much anywhere without need for human assistance, the pigweed is mainly popular with foragers and doomsday preppers.
[17] Chimurenga is a Shona word for rebellion or revolution. Traditionally, it signifies a fight in which everyone at hand participates. In a modern context, it extends beyond physical conflict to encompass broader societal challenges and aspirations. Chembere is a Shona word for an older woman past child bearing age but it is also used to describe female spirits.

festooned with the bands of undergarments, a true manifestation of sex as a weapon or the weapon as sex, suggestive of the comfort of the feminine being possessive of an unbridled threat. An ode to female freedom fighters of Zimbabwe's revolutionary war of liberation, *Chembere Dzagumhana* converges sentiments of the experiences of these unrecognised freedom fighters (which Gladys Kalichini delves into more critically), the mental strain of battle suggested through the inscribed bra straps, and the physical torment generally associated with war. In essence, sex and war and their conflicted natures are complicated in this installation.

The support band of the bra (here inscribed with the words: *Vangani vachafa? Aramba warambirei? Achachema ndiani? Achabvuma ndiani? Zvinotinyadzisa. Unotisvibisa*)[18] metaphorically alludes to the female collaborators to the cause, the *chimbwido*.[19] The placement of the rifle beside the brassiere sculpture is perfectly descriptive of the human condition. It details peace and war, comfort and grief or – in simplicity – life and death. *Chembere Dzagumhana* reaches the metaphysical in a sense where those that have passed are spiritual guardians. In consideration of the women who fought the war for independence; what was robbed of them was their girlhood. [20] For those who lost their lives, something more arises. They become virginal beings who delivered through their valour, a new nation born of blood. In real time they are the grandmothers of the revolution even when they were young women and girls in death. Semblances of the giving tree known as *Muti Usina Zita*[21] can be derived from these works as the icon of the bosom as a largely nurturing station where any sojourner would show obeisance to and receive anything they desired.

A lot of care is needed when you are creating from a conservative environment and often for that same environment. Kresiah's work (previously called tasteless by a compatriot) sheds light on a subject that often involves nudity, objectification, crudity and cruelty in an environment characterised by Judeo-Christian tendencies. Mukwazhi handles the subject itself with care because she wants a conservative society to understand how possibly the way

[18] Vangani vachafa? Translates to How many will die? Aramba warambirei? Translates to If you have refused why have you refused? Achachema ndiani? Translates to Who will cry? Achabvuma ndiani? Translates to who will agree? Zvinotinyadzisa. It's a communal embarrassment. Unotisvibisa. You sully all of us.
[19] Chimbwido was a female war collaborator who was often the subject of sexual abuse.
[20] Ref Gladys Kalichini's exploration of the same subjects but in more detail and specificity.
[21] Muti Usina Zita which translates to Tree Without a Name is known as the giving tree. The tree *Cleistanthus schlechteri* of Buhera is rare and isolated and is regarded as a mystical tree that will provide for wayfarers with sustenance.

it perceives these women is a problem in itself. The chaos in the work is reflective of the very disturbed and chaotic state of being between the subject and society that involves lack of recognition or acknowledgement of others.

Conclusion

The challenge in managing politics, gender, sexualities, care and dissent together lies in applying care ethics in artistic research and production. The epistemological commitment to 'undoing'(Tronto, 1993) patriarchal and colonial versions of gender with politics of recognition in the face of unacknowledged displacement and genocide, comprises a critical terrain for theory and activism. The artists named here do not share focuses or approaches, but what a survey of their work will show is a passionate engagement with the artivism[22] in artmaking, with the urgency of writing that tackles the politics of gender and sexualities within African contexts and with an eye attuned to the fact that researching these politics has often been done in the name of 'culture', the exotic and the sub-human. These artist challenge recurring stereotypes of black bodies and sexuality: the image of the lewd black man, the pure white female body, and the portrayal of the black/African body as grotesque, uncivilised and crudely sexual, even when formally dressed. It is not only the image of the black woman, abused and abandoned, whose hegemony over the meaning of gendered-sexuality-in-Africa deserves deconstruction; it is also the case that a long legacy of anthropological, epidemiological, and development-oriented research exists, rehearsing notions of gender as static, traditionally brutal, irrational and superstitious in matters of sexualities, and identically deployed across African contexts. Maxim and Mukwazhi deal with absences and erasure of individuals in individual and collective lives.

The next chapter, on the work by Gladys Kalichini, deals with oblivion in the nationalist imaginary.

[22] Artivism is a fusion of art and activism. It involves using artistic expression as a means to directly challenge harmful norms, stimulate dialogue, and advocate for social change.

CHAPTER 2: GLADYS KALICHINI AND THE NATIONALIST IMAGINARY

This chapter focuses on Gladys Kalichini, whose work at once adds to that of the artists in the previous chapters as well as giving a different dimension to the concept of care and dissent. Kalichini works with the performance and photographic mediums in interesting ways, and cultivates modes of seeing that question conventions behind the photographic representation in an archive as well as a mode of storytelling to address issues of dispossession, marginalisation, spatial policies of inequality, lack of access to resources and how the nation state is complicit in the systematic invalidation of people's lived experiences (Tendi, 2011; Yingwana, 2018).

In her account of grief, the power of ritual and a quest for justice, Kalichini explores what the intersection of art and archival research can tell us about the lives of the dead. Throughout her treatise, she makes it clear that state and national imaginaries colluded to erase the stories of women freedom fighters for the war of liberation in Zimbabwe and the fight for liberation in Zambia. Whilst it might be important to explain the distinction between the respective freedom struggles of the two countries, it is more important to point out that the two movements erased the contribution of women freedom fighters with similar impunity in each. In the wake of this erasure, Gladys Kalichini has been searching for the truth of the hidden and forgotten stories. She dares to care, and in the tenderness of unearthing these stories, archival excavation offers proof of systematic erasure but also tells the story of each life lost and artistic expression creates monuments of these stories and lives. Kalichini also makes us see how artistic expression can act as ritual – a way of caring for the dead with symbolic force that can repair societies torn apart by violence. She reproduces aspects of the photographs she employs as source material while simultaneously keeping aspects out of reach, respecting the fragility and vulnerability of subjects.

Daring to Care

Exhumation can divide brothers and restore fathers, open old wounds and open the possibility of regeneration—of building something new with the 'pile of broken mirrors' that is memory, loss, and

mourning.[23] – Alexa Hagerty, *Still Life with Bones: Genocide, Forensics and What Remains*, 2023

Born in 1989, in Chingola, Zambia, Gladys Melina Kalichini's [Fig. 19] artistic practice is centred on the complexities in connection to visibility and representations of women within larger dominant and nationalist histories. These fuel conversations about abundance and absence, convergences and missed connections and the possibilities dreamed of amid the complex terrain of feminist debates. Her work is vested in engaging with the kinds of seeking to restore and make visible suppressed, destroyed, or under-represented histories relating to absences and blind spots, as well as performative acts of remembering or recalling of female historic figures, such as women freedom fighters, which her work draws on.

Kalichini draws from concepts of memory and representations of history, highlighting silences, and absences of women's stories in representations of historic and national events. On the other hand, her work focuses on acts of remembrance and stems from a nostalgic place to recover lost, repressed and forgotten histories about women. Remembering is not passive. Often, caring is seen as an innate quality of women. However, caring is a complex gesture and a form of protest. Art historian Annett Busch (2021) argues that caring, caring to remember, is a gesture of resistance and that to care or daring to care is much more. It describes an intellectual practice or an artistic activity, which is no less time consuming, a thought process interconnected by paying attention to details sideways and to bifurcations. It aims to construct a more populated and complex picture of history; caring is a model of resistance, a counter concept to erasure, because if no one cares, as long as historic narratives are not called into question, not to care is as violent as erasure.

Kalichini's practice draws on archives and from funerary practices to explore memory-making and how loss is processed collectively and individually. In *Burial, erasing erasure* [Fig. 20] she has made fictive kin with Julia Chikamoneka[24], whose story started Kalichini's

[23] From Alexa Hagerty's book *Still Life with Bones: Genocide, Forensics and What Remains* where she recounts her training in the science of forensic exhumation at mass grave sites in Guatemala and Argentina and what such work means for the families of victims. (Hagerty, 2023.)

[24] Julia Chikamoneka, also known as Mama Chikamoneka, was a fierce activist and freedom fighter in colonial Zambia. Born as Julia Mulenga Nsofwa between 1904 and 1910 in Kasama, Northern Zambia, she was the daughter of Mulenga Lombe, who served as an African sergeant during the First World War. Chikamoneka adopted her moniker to hide her identity while mobilizing citizens, thus avoiding frequent imprisonment. She made significant contributions to the struggle for independence in Zambia. Julia Chikamoneka was the first freedom fighter Kalichini resonated with and led to the ever expanding body of work.

journey with into the archives of Zambia and Zimbabwe to look for the accounts of women freedom fighters whose stories were missing from the national imaginary. This fuelled her project at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, Germany, titled *... these gestures of memory* [Fig. 21], an extension of her practice, drawing from histories and stories about women freedom fighters.

During her stay in Berlin, Kalichini visited monuments and places that embody specific memory, such as the Berlin Wall Memorial, the GDR Jail, Karl Marx Allee and the Sowjetisches Ehrenmal im Treptower Park. These places became the starting point for the ideas of performances and gestures of memory, things done and monuments created in an attempt to remember. Intrigued by practices of mourning as gestures of commemorating life, these gestures of memory became a commemoration for stories about women freedom fighters in Zambia and Zimbabwe that are invisible in monumental structures of independence.

Gladys started her exploration with *ChaMoneka: UnCasting Shadows* (2017) and *Fyamoneka: Exploring the Erasure of Women Within Zambian History* (2017). In these, she explored the narratives about specific women and the archives as complex spaces of burials, storage and observation as well as protest. She used death as a metaphor for the process of erasure of a person and their body to reference stories or memories of women. In the specific video and voile cloth installation that formed part of these works, she staged a practice from some Zambian cultures in which, when a deceased one is being buried, particular mourners are covered in a white powder. According to the practice, after the body is buried, a tombstone is placed above the grave and at a later time unveiled and a memorial service is had. For Kalichini this performance relates to the hiding of the body by burying it, and consequently ensuring that the deceased is not forgotten through the gestures that are performed afterwards, like the memorial service.

The project at Bethanien incorporated more than just the memory but expanded outside of the archives to consider the notion of a monument as a space of memory and to consider the gestures performed around loss and commemoration by viewers and mourners. With *...these gestures of memory*, Kalichini was particularly seized with Pierre Nora's (1989) concept of memorial place, that particular places are retainers of memory, and that memory in itself is complex. Nora argues that memory is constantly evolving – and is open to the dialectics of

remembering and forgetting. This is an issue Kalichini struggles with in the excavation of national archives.

In my reading of Kalichini's artworks, which also focuses on the duality of memory and history, remembering, forgetting and mourning, the concentration is always on national and collective ways of forgetting. I refer to 'forgetting' here as a type, or types, of (active) refusal to remember, rather than an absence of remembering or ignorance (Vergès, 2023). But forgetfulness is not just a psychological mechanism; it is the result of economic and political choices. In its logic, there is no need to do away with inequalities and precariousness. They are, in fact, structural to neoliberal logic. What is important in this system is to negotiate and renegotiate the threshold of 'bearable' precariousness, to avoid revolts and insurrections by shifting the blame onto individuals (if their lives are precarious, it's because they are lazy[25]), by systematic displacement and dispossession (Vergès, 2017) and consign image and stories which are inconvenient to image oblivion.

So, in terms of remembering, which is what Kalichini's work is doing, or trying to conceptualise, this idea of remembering particular stories takes two forms: remembering as a form of protest and remembering as a form of care. On a theoretical foundation, bodies are mortal and memory fades and is distorted. Kalichini looks at memory and mourning, as a metaphor for remembering. She explores mourning practices where solidarity and kinship become very important because the mourning happens at an intimate and individual level, but also, at the communal level. The practice of collective mourning provides kinship and solidarity. Kalichini (2022) in an interview says:

> Care is an act of solidarity in itself because it takes time to do something to be in agreement with somebody else, or to help mourn something else or to help acknowledge something we know whether it's in terms of like a loss or something with the other person or something like this.

In her unpublished doctoral thesis, she goes on to write about experiencing absence and going into the archives, and not finding certain kinds of archival materials, for example images of

[25] Reference to an interview by Kim Kardashian with Variety in March 2022 where she told women to get off their assess and work harder. The interview and Kardashian's views received a backlash for calling poor people poor because they did not want to work.

particular people, and noticing that there is little or nothing written about certain women. This is the starting point of the exhibitions *Chikamoneka: uncasting shadows*, and *these gestures of memory*: the invisibility and the oblivion. Just as memory is just really a continuation and process, the excavation of the archives became about experiencing some kinds of upsets, then trying to find a lot of information; if these women did not exist in the nationalist imaginary, where could they be found? Kalichini's next step became trying to understand how to communicate the feelings and stories through the artwork, or trying to listen to how perhaps the story would want to be communicated, because listening to absence is a difficult thing. The process itself of navigating the archive, translating the absence, encountering upsetting images and language in the archives, and trying to find the language to communicate was in itself a form of radical care. She still has not processed some of the information emotionally and in her work.

Kalichini knew that she wanted to talk about missing stories, because in her research she had heard stories that she had not encountered before, or she knew bits and pieces that she was curious about and wanted to explore further. She came to experience what absence felt like, and then started to view this absence as dying; for to not be remembered, as if you had never done anything and were consigned to the oblivion was the real death. One of the things in parsing the information she encountered was to think of caring for the stories by carefully trying to find some of them, with the understanding that she could never find them all, but it could be a start for other people or communities to find where these stories resided and become story keepers. Another was acknowledging that she was not trying to recreate their stories in some way, by careful navigation of the space of the story, of even the agencies of the stories of the women she was researching. The other parts that she was interested in such as women's groups from, for example, the Catholic church, and related also to the women who were part of the women's brigade. Those stories were of no interest to her because of the role that the women were given by the official political parties, that of nurturing, and the widely held belief that women were meant to care for these kinds of parties, or politicians or activists. In the independence struggle they had that role foisted on them. It assumed a kind of mothering that took away agency, and their bodies become the site for political struggle. Kalichini takes a different approach to the stories of women's groups which culminated in the body of work *...these practices are done in the sharing of her stories* [Fig. 22]. It started off her Instagram page, with her posting some videos and she started participating in the

communal activities of mourning, because, in doing the research and participating in some instances, sometimes not directly, sometimes maybe a little bit directly she learned to become part of that community she lived in but had been away from, and to belong becoming entangled in the communities and the lives of the women in her community in Lusaka. In an interview, Kalichini (2023) in an interview expressed a desire to belong:

> And because you belong, they care for you, like you care for the person too. And then when making some of the works, and when translating the information there is care too. So, this is where I'm drawing from, and trying to trying to find maybe some activities that could symbolise some of these actions, like, taking time to cleanse in the videos. It's the language of care. But then, maybe it's a visual language of care, maybe when I'm translating it, looking at the actions and gestures of what the paintings that are not paintings, and the videos are doing, you know, because they are talking about erasing erasure.

Reciprocity and the Politics of Recognition.

Whose suffering is recognised? This is a complex process that involves the perpetrator and the recipient of the violence. Rita Felski in 'Context Stinks' (2011) argues that historicising artworks downplays or actively denies their agency. Context is an endlessly contested concept with the traditional models of context and its correlates – society, ideology and power – criticised for not accounting for the ability of artworks to transcend geographical boundaries (Felski, 2011). I would argue that art is historically rooted and is always seeking relevance by addressing particular issues of a specific historical context. Ignoring context by a critic and a historian becomes a deliberate act of erasure. Erasure refers to the practice of collective indifference that renders certain people and groups invisible (Sehgal, 2016). The word refers to the tendency of ideologies to dismiss inconvenient facts and is increasingly used to describe how inconvenient people are dismissed, their history, pain and achievements blotted out. Compared with words like diversity and representation, erasure goes beyond simplistic discussions of quotas to ask whose stories are taught and told.

A new politics of recognition (Spencer, 2020) underpinned by a number of theoretical frameworks is mobilised here to illuminate ways in which Gladys Kalichini contests the

erasure of identities and epistemologies. Her work has pushed against the episodic tendencies in certain specific revolutionary movements to both elide issues of intersections of gender and also give insufficient recognition to the always present participation of women. Through her work, *these gestures of memory* [Fig. 21] and *Burial erasing erasure* [Fig. 20] one is able to gain insight into Zambian and Zimbabwean national narratives. The National Archives of Zimbabwe and Zambia are the repositories of national memories in their dusty confines. If memories and narratives do not exist in these places, does it mean those stories do not exist? Are you documentable? What can you document about your life? (Muponde, 2021). Grand narratives continue to value particular lives over others. Even where there are no racial hierarchies (where though?), we have value hierarchies that continue to invisibilise certain groups of people. Kalichini's unearthing of forgotten as well as remembered stories of women, and her examination of monuments, demonstrates how art turns to care as a site for interrogating its own suspended agency in the affirmative culture of a market society, where art is tolerated as inherently unthreatening. The way she focuses on the redoing and redress in terms of the place of women also oriented me towards paying attention to the forms of revolution embedded in the small acts of care and solidarity among the marginalised.

The formulation and propagation of a historical narrative, the destruction of physical remains, and the production of a new symbolic geography with new places and street names are all examined in this study as strategies for erasing specific events from memory. Kalichini examines the regime of forgetting's stubborn ambiguity since it does not totally remove all traces of the past. She addresses the rise of subversive memory and counter-memory, which suggests that forgetting may be revised in the future. Kalichini looks at erasure and hypervisibility as a form of erasure of women freedom fighters in the nationalist archives of Zimbabwe and Zambia. Her research examines historical revisions, different narratives, 'scopic regimes,' and 'ways of seeing'.

Whilst Kalichini's views on monuments as sites that reinforce dominant memories, she also sees them as spaces where memory is constantly in flux. She creates monuments and memorial spaces for women that subvert dominant narratives. Her experiences of loss and death like Georgina Maxim's serve as the impetus for her practice. She creates spaces for community mourning to explore the mobility of sociality and coming together. She presents what it means to be in relation and speak in concert, to think beyond the need to address

matters of concern and to pay attention to failure; she points to the forgotten or invisible ones whilst acknowledging she does not know all of them and can never do the work alone.

Art history may be positioned as a discipline and a practice that frames cultures and identities and which can build on (and conversely, contest) knowledge(s) concerning power relations, inequalities, silencings and invisibilities that continue to shape the world today.

By conflating art with histories, it can turn a spotlight on assumptions and expose fault lines so as to generate a more complex, responsible, inclusive and comprehensive landscape of stories towards a future led by social justice and equality. Of course, art history is itself part of discursive formations that have also served to reinforce and/or contributed to existent power relations; nonetheless, it also harbours the potential to think across disciplines such as literary studies, postcolonial theory, indigenous histories, and anthropology, addressing the past by paying attention to the ways in which power relations shape culture, relaying dominant values through material, performative and visual means.

While Kalichini argues for undoings, to build constructs around invented characters, to pay homage to historical figures, to fuel discussion and to interrogate the state of the world, to make historical information, often lost or displaced incorrectly physically present and presenting it in new, thought provoking ways, for her, to care becomes an archival impulse [26] (Forster, 2004). Kalichini, by spotlighting the women freedom fighters in Zambia and Zimbabwe makes us rethink the meaning of identity, history, memory and loss. She uses manipulation as a subject of enquiry – to carve her own clarifying archives from what exists in and outside the national liberation struggle archive. She infuses her artworks with the voice of the unpresented. Whilst her body of work tells a limited story and preserves select histories, much like the nationalist archives she critiques, Kalichini shows us how positions of power in our histories have shaped our present. Certain sites and people have certain types of power. The moment of fact creation (the making of sources), the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives), the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives), the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance) are all points at which privilege is exercised and the people whose stories are being archived have no control.

[26] An archival impulse – drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects – in history and art alike – that might offer points of departure again is a term coined by art historian Hal Foster to explain the compulsion to delve in archives like Kalichini does.

People in privileged positions, the ones with the social power and education to write and record in the first place, are the ones who create the source material we have today. What people compile and the compiler's perspective affects how history is recorded and remembered. Kalichini's foray into archival practices and her subsequent translation of these archival practices into art makes for an understanding of our own time.

With Kalichini's creative use of the archival form, evidence is offered as if for forensic scrutiny. It becomes a story of how materials interact, theorising fugitivity and how archival documents imagined as permanent, static objects actually change over time and make new marks. Much like the way in which Kalichini views archives as burial grounds to be excavated, we begin to see archives not only as storehouses of the past but as living breathing generative matter, infused with anarchic energy and with disorder. We begin to see the archive not as perfection of ordering and preservation but as an ongoing mediated realm. Using photographic material that is historically tied to archives, Kalichini transfers materials from one shape and form to another.

Which brings the questions: What does the excess of the archive – what is generated out of the original document by non-human powers – show us about the role of the materiality as an ongoing matter of inquiry? How can we give the force of materials more due? This is the basis to construct alternate approaches to emphasise both the material and discursive manifestations of culture (Bennett, Savage, Silva, Warde, Gayo, and Wright 2010). Kalichini takes the everyday and mundane to juxtapose the material, personal and social to make work that is autographic, teetering in a fragile equilibrium between holding together and unravelling.

Waking the Dead

The story of Gladys Kalichini's art practice starts with Julia Chikamoneka. She made fictive kin with Julia and has been carrying her along since. Her encounter with the absence of Julia Chikamoneka in the national imaginary prompted a search for stories and places where she could find her. What does it mean to participate in a practice of care that is transformative in the here and now? The kind of care which dismantles so it can create and let live, honouring the dead while tending to the living? (Sharpe, 2016) The subjects of Kalichini's practice are either missing from the famous and nationalist imaginary or framed in a particular way,

hence excluded and unacknowledged, which resonates across archival materialities, contexts and time and explores what small actions can offer up new narratives (Han et al., 2010). Through this ethics of care, the practice of undoing creates the opportunity to build what does not yet exist, a new horizon. Such a process can powerfully change how we relate to each other and ourselves, what some scholars and activists call ‘abolitionist care’.

The work Kalichini has done as a researcher, labouring as process, has shown the intersections of bodies, objects and material and how care is central to her practice and other researchers like her. Caring for themselves in various personal ways to build and maintain the physical and emotional reserves that enable them to care for other people’s well-being is an act of care and dissent. They need tools that settle the nervous system and allow them to do care work, such as, for example, sound tactics deployed in experimental media, audio and visual elements that interact and produce meaning. Performance work that is repetitive and meditative calms and engages. The analysis of Gladys Kalichini’s work is linked to discussions on silence, voice, noise, listening, the soundscape and other key ideas to suggest transformative approaches for safety and justice.

Gladys Kalichini’s focus in her artwork on redress for the place of women in nationalist narratives, insists on care where historically there has been none (*...these practices are done in sharing her stories*, 2020[Fig. 22]) (Kalichini, 2020) through repetitive movement and meditative silence. The ongoing, reparative work of waking the dead, walking with ancestors, fighting to feel more than hunted, more than humiliated, dispossessed, and abject, becoming more than possessive individualism could ever hope to contain, prophetic praxes of Black, liberation, are carried from generation to generation, and reflected in the series of restorative gestures.

Caring for the Dead

What makes it possible for certain people’s stories to live on while others fade into obscurity? What are the complexities of erasure, whether institutional or structural? And how does the reintroduction of such hitherto unheard stories help towards collective thinking? What methods might we employ to document and recount such women’s lives and work in order to give their efforts and accomplishments a more lasting legacy? What has happened to women’s activism in the struggle for independence from colonial rule? These are the major

questions that the reading of Gladys Kalichini's work raises. Her work explores how nationalist narratives make women invisible and hyper visible in nuanced ways.

Erasure in Kalichini's case sometime starts with the mourning and funeral rites. *...these gestures of memory*, created at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, is perhaps best suited to the exploration of an intensified thanatopolitics, where the state sought to take over full control of corpses and the death world (Canham, 2021). The pandemic has had major implications for how we order and relate to the African death world. Mourning and funeral rites are important sites of sociality for the processing of loss, ritual cleansing and renewal. The dramatic rise in deaths associated with the pandemic mean that mourning rites, sociality and potential renewal have been fundamentally disrupted. This disruption occurs because rituals and customs associated with how we honour and bury the dead have had to change as a result of health protocols and government regulations that are promulgated against contagion. The meaning of what we lose when ritual and relation are threatened is perhaps something that needs further exploration. It presents politics of mourning and fugitive mourning as forms of resistance that the black underclasses are always insurgently engaged in.

Thanatopolitics, a term that refers to the politics of death, a concept that has been discussed at length by philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, is the best way to describe how powerful people and nation states have the power to decide who lives and dies. Much like whose stories are public and who remains nameless. Achille Mbembe's (1992) critique of the postcolony is worth noting in order to understand how spectacle develops and obscures meaning (Muchemwa, 2010) and what Kalichini refers to as hypervisibility. In the case of Zimbabwe, the state sought the revisionist narrative through galas, *biras*[27], funerals, commemorations and other state rituals (Muchemwa, 2010). Because this is where heroes are made and recognised, Kalichini wields the same tools for monument-making to tell the women's stories. She points to the implications this has had in the production of materialism, violence and insecurities of citizenship and nationality.

As referenced in Kalichini's art works and writing, the National Archives are sites of absent bodies and dismembered lives. Gerz (1993) has described invisibility as an intellectual

[27] Bira is a. Shona word for an all night vigil to celebrate and welcome back home a deceased's spirit

challenge and a protective measure; the unseen cannot be defaced. The spectacle of the archive serves to perpetuate stereotypes, despite attempts to frame them differently, or outdated as a relic of their time. The spectacle of the archive serves to reinscribe and reify the power dynamics of time. Any work that engages with and challenges this terrain becomes a disobedient object. There is a lack of agreement on both the social and political spectrum. Kalichini's research takes her to where for example, Julia Chikamoneka is 'living' and encounters her family.

Kalichini's exhibition *...these gestures of memory* (2020) is in service of bodies in archives and how grief is a practice of care and a gesture of defiance. Drifting into a different world, she returns to the archive and transforms it into an art medium. Her work is visually stark and builds on a theoretical framework on the multilayered relationship between the image or performance and the viewer – the meaning can change all of the time in the mind of the viewer.

At Künstlerhaus Bethanien *... these gestures of memory* (2020), was made up of three installations. The first was the multi-channel video work *...these practices are done in sharing her stories* [Fig. 22] looking at the rituals of cleansing and caring. The work explores the power of sharing memories as a way of subverting erasure, forgetfulness and amnesia. This iteration was the beginning of an ongoing and broader project on the topic. It involves Gladys Kalichini's participation in and documentation of women taking part in various cultural and religious activities. The earlier videos are recordings of women washing their hands and feet while a gospel hymn plays in the background. In one video, three women in white tops and patterned wraps kneel on a white cloth in front of a grey water receptacle, take turns to soap, and wash and dry their hands. In another, one woman picks a cue from the first video and repeats the gestures in reverse. In the third one, a woman picks a cue from the second video and then washes her hands and feet. The fourth video has a pair of women washing each other's hands. The hymn is by Catholic women in Zambia and is titled '*Ulemu Kumwamba*' which translates as 'to pay respect to the heavens'.

The second installation consisted of black flags of barkcloth hung at half-mast, titled *…these moments are spent listening to her silences and seeing her invisibility* (2020) [Fig. 23]. The materiality of this artwork is the basis for understanding the care and attention Kalichini gives the silenced by semiotically creating meaning and value. The spiritual connection of

barkcloth is used to mediate the stories. Barkcloth is traditionally used in funeral rites in some communities for a dignified burial so is usually associated with death and the afterlife. The process of harvesting the bark and pounding it laboriously into cloth is carefully thought out. The harvesting is sustainable to ensure the availability of more bark in the future. That Kalichini uses barkcloth to actively 'listen' to and 'see' the bodies missing from the famous nationalist imaginary, excluded and hence unacknowledged across archival materialities, contexts and time, is defiance and care entangled. This work speaks of seeing and listening and what small actions can offer up new narratives.

Also part of the exhibition, …*these wreaths are laid in honour of her memories,* 2020 [Fig. 24], is an installation of black and white paper flowers in honour of female freedom fighters involved in Zambia and Zimbabwe's struggle for independence. The choice of material, paper flowers, and the mainly black aesthetic is fascinating, as these choices symbolise mourning (people lay flowers at the graves of their dead loved ones) and the women referenced in this work are not all dead. The process of intentionally making each individual rose reflects how we mourn or cope with loss (Kalichini, 2020). This work is a manifesto in which love and crisis imbue each other with the spirit of care.

The works are organised into several restorative gestures, and in each of the works, the lens of care works to understand, interrogate, expand and extend conceptualisations of care and dissent. Care becomes a reframing gesture and a marker of defiance. What Kalichini calls for, the different modalities of 'rehearsal, reversal, rewinding, repairing, renewing, reacquiring, redistributing, readjusting, reallocating' (Azoulay, 2019), is a form of return. The practice of re-doing, with reparation at its inner core, frames the notion of return, but also of re-thinking and re-writing and by extension the ideas of care and resistance. As a space that supposedly cares for everyone and their histories, to whom do art institutions cater? Kalichini goes beyond the symbolic realm to talk about the living who might as well be dead. Interestingly, the creation of temporary monuments for these women for whom monuments might never be built is a way of institutionalising their stories ensuring that their contributions are recognised and remembered. These ephemeral tributes serve as a powerful reminder of the often-overlooked roles women have played in shaping our history and culture.

Caring for the Living, the Self and the Future

As cultural workers, artists play an important role in addressing issues of social justice and supporting social transformation. Recognition, seeing and being seen, lends the quality of durability to our fragile human experience. This invites us to extend how we see, think and make sense of the world. Dissent can function as the manifestation of commitment within a conceptualisation of enacted professionalism and how caring action as an activist stance of principled dissent can lead to aligning ideologies.

Caring for the living is just as important as caring for the dead. Issues of trust, community, affect, afterlives, and mattering argue for the usefulness of enlivening stories of resistance and survival. Kalichini's …*these practices are done in sharing her stories* (2020) the multi-channel video work that has previously been discussed, focuses on how women tell stories about women. The work is organised into several rituals and in each of the rituals, acts of care work to understand, interrogate, expand, and extend conceptualisations of care. Everything is intentional; the pace, the sound and the gestures. Acts of care are seen here in the use of metaphor, analogy, archived documentation of performance and body language and the use of cloth. The movements are repetitive and meditative. The silence can be seen as a choice of meditation and can also be viewed as passive aggression. Care here is directed by consideration and attentiveness.

There is trauma and liberation brought on by excavating these past histories and present ones. This entanglement is the life of the autonomous agent. An autonomous agent may decide to become another-regarding caregiver and give up a considerable amount of their independence (Bhandary, 2019). The distinction between the idea of autonomy itself and the background context in which the agent is situated is crucial in understanding the dynamics of self-governance. While autonomy represents the capacity of an agent to act independently, the background context can significantly influence the extent and manner in which this autonomy is exercised. The interplay between these two aspects can shape the agent's decisions, actions, and overall behaviour. One might exercise autonomy competencies even in circumstances in which one's freedom of action is relatively constrained. Although there is no consensus in the broader literature on how the term autonomy should be used, keeping this distinction in place is helpful for understanding (and not obscuring) how people exercise agency under conditions of oppression.

Kalichini in presenting Julia as her fictive kin to describe relations outside of blood relationships whom we care for, presents a perpetually unfinished object that demonstrates multiple points of contingency. Documenting her dependency both in installation, text, audio and video, Kalichini also utilises objects as evidence, such as in *... these practices are done in sharing her stories*, demonstrating the physical effects of care and dependency. Traces of dependency mark the afterlife of those relationships and, thus, imbue everyday objects with affect. Not being there accounts for why Kalichini thinks of these works as more than simply artworks. In their staging of absence and presence, they move beyond the particular to offer a 'symbol of the female body and how it is always a site for exploitation' (Tamale, 2011). Kalichini creates fractured narratives, past memories as a way to reenact forgotten lives. Re-enactment mediates the space between personal narratives and collective memory, between processes of amnesia and the archive, all the while showing us how the body, like the archive, gives up or offers new information and how it also refuses. The nature of indexical records makes us constantly interrogate our positionality.

Where Kalichini's practice concentrates on caring about absences in nationalist imaginaries of women freedom fighters in Zambia and Zimbabwe, the next chapter on the artworks and writing by Masimba Hwati deals with a different type of erased people who exist in the liminal space between chaos and order.

Chapter 3: Masimba Hwati: Resistance, Negotiation and Guerilla Tactics as a Practice of Care

This chapter builds on the forms of dissent described in the previous chapter. It explores the strategies I proposed in the introduction to expand the concept of care into a form of dissent. The focus of the chapter is on the less obtrusive forms of dissent, where marginalised groups often hide their defiance in the dominant presence and suggest that resistance can remain below the radar. These disguised forms, 'low profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name' (Scott, 1990), are 'subordinate discourses that lie strategically between the openly avowed to those in power and that which takes place beyond the perceptual field of the dominator' (Marche, 2012).

Where the previous chapters have provided definitions of dissent that are latent, this chapter explores the artworks of an artist whose work is an investigation into the political and economic violence that requires a different form of care. The discussion of Masimba Hwati's work will alternate between the works because, although they were created at different times, they are entangled and interwoven in their representation of an occluded world. Masimba Hwati takes us on a journey to show us being human requires a lot of negotiation.

Care as a lens for reading Hwati's work and the traumatic legacies of settler colonialism upon contemporary sensibilities is an interesting endeavour. Hwati conceptualises colonial dispossession as a transnational political and economic structure and engages with the politics of post-independence extraction in Zimbabwe. He makes gestures towards the deterritorialisation, forced movement, ecological catastrophe, political corruption and the paradoxical modes of sovereignty. Close analysis reveals three communities of memory, each defined through a distinct relationship to dispossession that has persisted for centuries: the revolutionary potential of sound; hiding as survival; and imagining the future.

Scoring Survival: Hwati and the Language of Taking Care

Imagining yourself in the future is not revolutionary, it's survival. –Lindokuhle Nkosi[28]

Masimba Hwati [Fig 25], born in 1982 in Harare, Zimbabwe, is an interdisciplinary artist, working with an emphasis on sculptural work, collecting historical, culturally imbued items ranging from cars and shoes to scrap metal and found objects, altering and repositioning them in a contemporary urban setting. He works at the intersections of sculpture, performance and sound, and is known for unconventional three-dimensional mixed media sculptures. Hwati explores the transformation and evolution of knowledge systems that are indigenous to his own background whilst experimenting with the symbolism and perceptions attached to cultural objects, expressed as an art movement known as 'The Energy of Objects' and examines postcolonial themes by re-appropriating archives and objects and presenting them in new contexts. Hwati attempts to work from basics, creating his own pigments, and creating objects from basic materials. His works use contemporary and historical themes. He also works extensively with found objects, transforming existing artefacts into elements of works of art. Hwati says that he should be able to find at least 35 variations in any given object, but says that often he cannot realise more than ten. The horns in his recent work give a nod to Keston Beaton, whose work continued and solidified the found material sculpture movement, and show work that is steeped in the tradition of black fugitivity, which sees the devising of ways to survive at all costs. Through repetition and obsessive accumulation, Hwati requires us to pay attention. The work is personally conflicted, stealthy and sometimes openly political.

There are attempts to create hierarchies of erasure among minority groups as they try to reshape their particular histories – who has silenced whom? In the contestation to reimagine history and identities it becomes interesting to point out the groups who receive and command attention. The possibilities for the subaltern to speak are reinterpreted and recomplicated by the new generations. We see the palimpsest quality of language as a vengeance of the silenced. Silencing is a complex practice reflected in the sociopolitical hierarchy.

[28] https://thisisafrica.me/arts-and-culture/%e2%80%a8the-promise-futurism-part-3-content-digital-age-conversation-lindokuhle-nkosi/

In this regard, the artist's registers require dissimulation and persistence to safely express defiance against systems that deny recognition for some people (Butler, 2004). Through micro instances of activism, the artist converts the world into a transgressive world, making space for the entanglement of care and dissent. The staging of dissent is often performative (Butler, 2004; Jones, 2015), always in the now and essential in situating art practices without fixing them. It is possible to refuse historical terms of negation by avoiding too much of the ugly language (Kärki, 2018; Campt, 2017; Odumosu, 2020) to show that it is possible to develop new approaches that confront yet do not repeat the epistemic and material violence of coloniality. When you focus on trauma, there is always the risk of pathologising pain (Tuck and Yang, 2014a), and this is a sustainability question of how to speak of the violence without feeding that singular narrative (Adichie, 2009).

This consideration and attentiveness and language of resistance manifested in some of Hwati's earlier work but much is clearer in the work *Mbende/Jerusarema Tehkno,* 2018 [Figs. 26, 27, 27, 29] and *Sokunge,* 2019 [Figs. 30, 31, 32]. *Mbende/Jerusarema Tehkno* is a performance and listening experience with sonic disruptions that resist 'terms of disruption and dispossession' (Campt, 2017: 96). *Mbende/Jerusarema Tehkno* is collaborative work (presented as by Masimba Hwati and friends) with performance, sound, dance, sculpture. It was presented at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor's Duderstadt Video studio in September 2018.

Hwati describes the premise of *Mbende/Jerusarema Tehkno* as a living example of fugitivity. He created a hybrid dance from Detroit Jit and Mbende/Jerusarema, two dance forms from different parts of the world that used subtle dissent tactics. Techno's roots are steeped in protest and Mbende Jerusarema is based on hiding in plain sight. Mbende Jerusarema functions on two levels as a way to mobilise people and as a way '*yekurasisa vavengi'* (decoy) to hide. It provides for sound as a condition of listening, the substance before the music, under the music or after the music. This ongoing project investigates the politics of listening, drawing on the notion of the sound archive as location in which to examine this. The political dimensions of listening are conceptualised as the ambivalent ways listening is invoked for explicitly political ends such as consciousness raising or surveillance; the power dynamics of listening practices within interpersonal relationships including learning, witnessing or therapy; and the politics bound up in making and using archived sounds. Who

and what is listened to, recorded and heard, how when and by whom can these be used and to what ends? Drawing on archival as well as new recordings, work produced as part of this project includes audio broadcasts, installations and texts.

Mbende Jerusarema Tehkno is historically grounded, like all Hwati's works. A Mbende is a mole that runs really fast. It is also the name of an ancient war dance. Mbende the dance began as a war dance, fertility dance, hunting dance and death dance specifically for ritual purposes. The Mbende as a war dance was developed as a diversionary tactic when Shona warriors wanted to outwit their enemies. The repetitive movements could often become intoxicatingly hypnotic, giving the warriors enough time to marshal resources and mount a defence. When the Mbende dance was outlawed for being provocative (the dance does involve sensual movements) and unchristian by the settler government, the Zezuru sacrificed the name for Mbende Jerusarema so that they could still perform and participate in the dance. 'Mbende' thus evolved into a dance that negotiated with power characterised by distraction, diversion and disguise.

Taking *Mbende Jerusarema* as a tactic, Hwati's work offers a grammar of experience and new registers to operate in the shadows (Hwati, 2021) which the *Black Market Score* [Fig. 34] elaborates on. His polysemic titles offer a grammar of taking care to probe for weaknesses and sonic disruptions that resist dispossession to exploit small advantages (Jaji, 2018; Hwati, 2019). Whilst Hwati's work negotiates with power, it is extended in Hwati's writing practice to see writing as care (Khan et al., 2020).

The fugitivity called for in *Mbende/Jerusarema Tehkno* is carefully articulated in the body of work *Sokunge.* The sculptural work, such as *Sokunge 2* [Fig. 32], is included in the body of work, *Sokunge*. 'Sokunge' is a Shona word that describes a phenomenon where something presents itself as other than its true nature (Hwati, 2019). When directly translated to English, the word means 'as if' or 'like' and is a form of refusal to be boxed into any form of definition. Refusal is a productive stance here, rooted in a critical awareness of settler colonialism and its representational regimes (Campt, 2019). Refusals are required in order to tell narratives other than the dominant one and to fight images that devalue personhood or sovereignty. Refusal also refers to an attitude or strategy in *Sokunge* that historicises and analyses material through a network of commitments, histories, allegiances and resonances

that determine what may be understood within research frames and what should be kept out of reach.

Sokunge is more than a collection of artworks and performances. It is also an activist scholarship and an example of writing as a form of care. In his fine arts master's thesis *Sokunge: Shadows of Resistance*, Hwati harnesses infrapolitics and trickster spatialisation to present a possible course for action. Hwati explores the 'black market' that fuels an ailing economy and explores the roots of its existence and links its nebulous form to the origins of the war dance Mbende and specifically to the origins of the city of Harare to the War Chief Neharawa, nicknamed Haarari for being ever ready and never 'sleeping'. [29] *Sokunge* is also about taking care and hiding in plain sight; taking care here is a way to rethink and resituate, and may be the site for survival. The defiance of the underdog; offstage discourse of the powerless is neither empty posturing nor worse, a substitute for 'real' resistance. Material and symbolic resistance is part of the same set of mutually sustaining practices, particularly for those whose low profile is better adapted to resisting an opponent who could probably win any open confrontation. The Zimbabwean government has been creative in 'allowing' some form of dissent and allowing the visual arts to remain largely unchecked. As what happened with the Gukurahundi exhibit[30] in 2010 taught artists, it is perhaps prudent for survival for the living to operate at places of transformative possibility and deep relationality.

Seeing, Tasting and Scoring Liminality*:* The Revolutionary Potential of Sound and the Sound of a City

The frontier is an elusive line, visible and invisible, physical and metaphorical, amoral and moral. –Salman Rushdie, *Step Across this Line*, 2002.

In November 2022 at a workshop for curators run by the National Contemporary Arts Institute of Nairobi, I met archivists from the Sounds of Nairobi. We were then taken on a sound tour of downtown Nairobi. It was quite interesting to note that some of sonic elements reminded me of home, particularly the area around Kaguvi Street in downtown Harare. Through the sonic textures I could relate to the market places that sounded almost similar to Mbare Musika sounds. These sonic textures made me become more vigilant as I walked the

[29] Chief Neharawa was the chief who, with his people, occupied the kopje area in present day Harare (the hill at the foot of which the commercial area grew) at the time the Pioneer Column arrived and seized the land.
[30] Reference to the exhibition *Sibathontisele* explained in foot note 3

streets of Nairobi. I realised one particular thing; you have to activate yourself to listen and become a defensive listener in some areas in order to survive.

When people listen to each other they avoid a lot of misunderstanding. Learning to listen requires learning to slow down. In 2021, Masimba Hwati explored with *Black Market Score*, *Deep Struggle* and *Breadscores*, the military aspect of sound and challenged the colonial curation of sound that still lingers long after independence. Defensive listening in the case of Harare, requires a good listener and a 'good listener' is not necessarily someone who can hear well but one who can use their spatial hearing sense to locate and track the source of a sound (Ouzounian, n.d). A good listener needs to listen to the presence of municipal police and state agents. The act of listening requires the body to physically listen and remember too. What do you do after hearing threatening sound?

To chart Masimba Hwati's interest in sound and how he incorporates it in his practice it is important to ask: What is sound? What does it mean to listen? A sound is a specific type of wave that takes the form of vibrations travelling through air, water, or any other material (Tronchin et al, 2006). In Shona the word for sound is '*ihwi*' which has the same meaning as voice and for hearing is '*kuhwa*'. One process of something making a ringing sound for example is called '*kurira*' which interesting has been used in connection with the black-market sounds and aesthetics. The black market in Zimbabwe primarily focuses on the illegal trade in foreign currencies. Forex traders called money chngers are divided into two types; the small note changers and the ones who move large ammounts. This black market is driven by money 'ndarama ne ndarira' Ndarira a derivative of '*kurira'* which is a word for brass also loosely translates to 'I rang'. In street parlance '*ndiye ari kurira*' then means top dog or the talk of town. It this world that relies on sound that Hwati explores.

Auditory space perception, once considered subordinate to visual space perception, was newly understood as a vital skill, with 'powers of hearing' suddenly mapped onto the powers of nation states. In this regard perhaps British physiologist A. V. Hill's definition of sound as 'a vibratory motion of matter of the type to which the organ of hearing responds' is more appropriate. While this certainly corresponds to well-established ideas about sound, technologies of acoustic defense made it possible to experience sound as 'a vibratory motion of matter' in a tangible way (Hwati, 2021)). The black-market sounds require spatial listening for one to survive.

Other ways of communicating such as gossip and the black market, sneak tactics and finding gaps, empowered the people. These ways of communicating are explored by Masimba Hwati to understand how people resist and negotiate using their bodies and their culture. Hiding as survival is used in the work Hwati's *Breadscores* [Fig. 35] to show a way of caring that shies away from confrontation. He uses historical anecdotes to score the work: at the time when the leaders of the anticolonial movements were imprisoned, their relatives would take them small transistor radios, newspaper cuttings and messages hidden in loaves of bread, the only way they could get news. The musical score in the loaves of bread in *Breadscores* is a tribute of this tactic of survival. It is also quite interesting that today the Zimbabwe Prison Services, because they know of this tactic, search prisoners' food thoroughly for contraband.

Why is the black market such an integral part of Hwati's exploration of the margins in Harare? The world of the *Black Market Score, Deep Struggle* and *Breadscores* is aptly summed up in the words of Stanley Crouch (1991), an American writer, critic and cultural commentator when he says, 'But we must understand that the money lenders of the marketplace have never ever known the difference between an office or an auction block.'. [31] The answer is always space and liminal space to negotiate terms. There is probably no financial alternative, the alternative is the ability to navigate (listen), to navigate physically and not just play the game or concede to it. So how do you negotiate the auction block? The answer according to the *Black Market Score* is that you don't, you don't get off it, climb over it or walk around it. You destroy the auction block.

In Zimbabwe, the system is designed not to fail and will cannibalise its own children for survival. This is resonated in the lyrics of Winky D and Holy Ten's song *Ibotso*. '*Vanotora zvevapfupi nekureba. Ini ndiri muimbi chete. Handina pfumo Handina bakatwa. Musandikande pasi kunge hakata*'.[32] This system of governance was inherited from the settler government. The electoral geography in Zimbabwe, indeed political geography in general, has been largely concerned with mapping distributions which are then 'explained' by non-spatial factors. To the extent that spatial context itself where it has counted, it has been

[31] Crouch also argues that jazz is a form of resistance and rebellion against dominant cultural norms and power structures, and that it has often been associated with marginalized and oppressed communities. He points to the ways in which jazz has been used to challenge racial and social hierarchies, as well as to the ways in which it has been embraced by people from diverse backgrounds and cultures.
[32] Loose translation of the lyrics 'they take from the short because they are tall. I am just a singer. I don't have a spear. I don't have a dagger. Don't throw me down like divination sticks.'

largely in terms of locality or neighbourhood effects, which are presumed to work against 'larger' or 'wider' social processes. *Black Market Score* takes issue with conventional mapping and locality-effect accounts of context on the ground that each involves a radical ontological separation of space and society that cannot be sustained. A concept of context-as-place is elaborated that abandons the identification of context with a single (local) geographical scale and provides a way of bridging the gap between abstract sociological and concrete geographical analysis.

Fugitivity understood in terms of what Moten and Harney (2013) delineates as a category of the irregular that escapes easy representations and predictions, can undiscipline Hwati's practice in productive ways. The subject of the *Black Market Score*, the youth, the most political and neglected age group, has to have an acute awareness of what the safest shape they need to take on to survive particular contexts. The *Black Market Score* is not only the sound of marginalised or neglected youth negotiating existing power relations of life, love, rights, concerns and duties, but it can also be an expression of the challenges, concerns, attitudes and dominant semiotics faced by today's youth. The youth are sometimes called mischievous '*karingido*'[33] and at other times are considered the most political group that needs careful handling. This fluid presentation of self and the ability to be malleable are tactics used to access acceptance and camouflage. Through this exploration of diverse modes of existence, within this particular setup, we witness the evolving, dynamic, and emotional complexities tied to the understanding, interpretation, and expression of individuality and roots. This journey not only broadens our perspective but also deepens our appreciation for the intricate tapestry of life. Attention to sonic reminders and remainders of haunted pasts can decentre understandings of the aesthetics of the black market and can lead to a more nuanced thinking about the imbrication of music in life that refuses ever to fully sound in harmony, residing instead in a disordered space of restlessness.

The black market is not as bad to economies as governments profess them to be, but is a barometer to the over-regulation of official markets and those the government continue to ignore. The case of the black market in Zimbabwe is a reflection of the government, despite over-regulation, losing control and failing to resolve government created economic problems.

[33] A made up word from street slang which is a mashup of *Kuringa* (looking) and *do* (do) which is used to describe juvenile agitators and tricksters.

For example the introduction of punitive IMT tax[34] to widen the government revenue base has since resulted in pushing economic players to informalise business. The tax did little to hinder the black market, instead pushing citizens to start operating on a cash and barter basis. This points to the nature of black markets. They thrive based upon fulfilling an existing need, not upon government control. They therefore replace whatever services the official market fails to provide. Some businesses have had their accounts frozen for suspicions of fuelling the black market but as history attests, human beings continue to be inventive whenever banks or governments put on a monetary squeeze. The more arrogant the banks and political leaders are of their omniscience over the populace, the less likely they are to credit the populace for finding ways to worm out of this one-sided deal. At first, it's always those who already live on the wrong side of the law's 'unilateral coercive measures' (Samudzi, 2023) who create black markets. But when we reach that point mentioned above – the point at which food for the family and fuel for mobility are at stake – the average man will join the black market. Soon after that point, it becomes ubiquitous and, in some cases, becomes the primary market, as it has in Zimbabwe.

The *Blackmarket score* and *Breadscores* are Hwati's re-enactment of possible action. A brief exploration of the score might suffice here. The musical score has been under study for millennia. The score has provided a blueprint for what can be possible and what the artist hopes to be the outcome with the expectation that it will not always come out the way they expect in the live enactment. Such radical experiments with music notation and the possibilities therein for collectivity can be found in the work of Greek composer Jani Christou, who died in 1970.

The script for *Breadscores, Deep Struggle* [Fig. 33] and *Black Market Score* [Fig. 34], which consist of written instructions accompanied by miniature drawings, invokes this space as a stage that is literally inscribed with the actions of the artist: lie down, wake up, walk around, sit, lie down, etc. Hwati is both the subject that performs and the object that is observed by himself and other people well aware that in all public spaces every action is a performance. The scripts for the scores are an important interlocutor between the subjectivity and

[34] IMT tax is a tax chargeable on all financial transactions which happen through transfers such as direct debits, online transfers, mobile money transfers, supplier payments and interbank transfers subject to specified exemptions.

objectivity that is enacted in the studio and subsequently in public. The score highlights Hwati's role in the enactment of the notation.

The two works and the accompanying texts which by Hwati focus on questions about power and how people respond to power. He proposes that sound is closely linked to politics and politics of oppression. Much as the black market is fluid and of no fixed abode the resistance lies in daring to survive state legislature and circumstances make it seem that you are meant to die. Decoloniality means distribution of this power and different ways of looking, and if you cannot resist openly there is a way to negotiate for space.

Remembering Land, Remembering Bodies, Remembering Violence

'In contrast to downbeat marches, the offbeat rhythms do not obey but resist. Moreover, they leave behind the phantasm of atomized egos, but instead become alive through the communal interlocking of various players. Instead of the phantasm of mechanized identical repetition they unfold their power through permanent variations and improvisations in the repetition which seems to stretch the bend of time.' Ariel Flórez and Heidi Salaverría, *Syncopated Resistance: Rhythms of Postcolonial Thinking,* 2018

The Shona words for seeing and hearing, the key components in listening and taking care in Masimba's practice, are '*kuona'* and '*kuhwa'*. Hwati harnesses these two elements to position the participating agent and provide the tools they need to survive. *Kuona* is more than just seeing, it is also recognition. *Kuhwa* is more than just listening, it also means to taste and to feel, making way for experiential learning. The two multifaceted elements point to Hwati's exploration of the horizontal politics of listening which redefine the mutual 'us' that listening creates and the fluidity of street lingo in the ingenious and flexible informal economy the black market is (Hwati & Simbao, 2017). Listening is positioned as a whole-body exercise.

Masimba Hwati's work on the *Black Market Score*, 2022 is accompanied by critical writing *The Black Market Sound: Sampling a Micropolitical Terrain of Listening, Resistance and Refusal* (2021) to explain and obscure at the same time and further the agenda of hiding in plain sight. Perhaps to be understood in the scope of the work he did with the *Mbende/Jerusarema Tehkno*, he writes extensively about shapeshifting for survival in reference to Achille Mbembe's political improvisation. He presents the black market as both a metaphysical and physical space whose fluidity keeps defying definition. He also presents it as an alternative but also a cultural space capable of producing and sustaining its own street

language and etiquette that would eventually end up in ubiquitous urban circles. Here, you encounter the language of syncopation in the postcolonial thinking of Mazhet, Maghepu, Kungwavha-ngwavha, Chibaba baba, and Kurira.

Hwati writes in a form of patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages: the language of rebellion, a secret language and an intermixture. He has developed an oeuvre around subversive sound 'Guerrilla Radio' and developed scores to articulate these experiences. He has dealt with the failure of language to translate the experiences he presents by using the vernacular, slang and ambiguity, how these initiatives emerged and articulating their questions around and imagination of sustainability. The power, relevance, subtlety and shade of writing as a political dissenting act is an enduring matter of culture, an enduring matter of the poetics project. His writing style attempts to displace the linguistic sign in multiple aesthetic possibilities concerning time, context and history. It talks of the ephemeral nature of language and the poetic politic nature of the act of writing. Traces of past collaboration from which new collaboration can be built can be seen when he writes about other lives.

Hwati centres sound as the language and re-enactment of resistance and to create a rough sketch of a calming and stabilising, calm and stable, centre in the heart of chaos. To move from chaos to the beginnings of order is a 'fragile centre' in which to find ourselves feeling safe once again (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari articulate that rhythm serves as the milieu's response to chaos, binding crucial instances or connecting in transition from one environment to another.

In this regard, Masimba Hwati's *Pahasha: Pirate Taxi and Guerilla Radio* [Fig. 36 and Fig. 37] can be divided into three carefully curated parts, the sonic, the spoken word and the visual. The performance of *Pahasha: Pirate Taxi and Guerilla Radio* starts with the song *Maruza Imi* by Dickson Chinx Chingaira.[35] The popular revolutionary song '*Maruza imi*'[36] is a favourite for independence celebrations and a true reflection of the hope that the people of Zimbabwe and the freedom fighters had of overcoming the settlers. The most important

[35] Dickson Chinx Chingaira, known as Comrade Chinx, was well known for his talent of articulating the causes, purpose and benefits of the liberation struggle through songs.
[36] *Maruza imi* is a song that is synonymous with the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. In the song, Comrade Chinx provides a history of the coming of the settlers to Zimbabwe. He narrates their coming under the guise of wanting to hunt and spread the word of God, among other purposes. The refrain '*Maruza imi*' translates to 'you have been defeated'

element in this song is the rhetorical emphasis that 'they' had been defeated as suggested in the chorus '*maruza imi*'. The bottom line is that the indigenous people felt that they had been robbed by the settlers, became determined to remove them from their land and were pre celebrating an eminent victory. This chorus then meant hope that the war was going to be won by the Black majority and the language used expresses hope. In this instance, Hwati uses the song to set the tone for the disappointments of what were to be the gains of the revolution. The cycle of monstrosity that the more you fight something the more you become that thing is reiterated here and echoes Amilcar Cabral's (1966) 'our struggle is against ourselves and the enemy' reinforcing that the problem with postcolonial Africa is not just with the west.

The song is punctuated by the sound of the fly whisk (a reference to the Ndebele Isishobo (royal septre) currently housed in the Albany Museum in Makhanda and how return is more complex than we might want to admit), and the sound of a spear dragged across the floor.[37] The sound is alternately a restless shuffling and busy bass of the horn, and sounds a lot like what Ariel Florez and Heidi Salaverria call 'Syncopated Resistance'.[38] Syncopated resistance is described as a powerful and creative force that can challenge and transform dominant cultural narratives and power structures, and can help to create new forms of social and political engagement (Florez and Salaverria, 2018). Hwati then uses this tool to segue into the spoken word.

The visual in the performance video of *Pahasha: Pirate Taxi and Guerilla Radio* is Hwati wearing a black robe that looks like a kurta[39] with sides split more than the norm – possibly for ease of movement – with a brown chest-belt holding two transistor radios. He wears a leather armband with an attached spur. The visual is arresting and deliberate. It points to an exploration of more than just precolonial Zimbabwe. In Hwati's case, his wearing the kurta,

[37] Reference in casual conversations talks of a time before the settler incursion as the time '*pasi pasati parohwa ne nyundo*' referenced here by the dragging of the spear (*nyundo*).
[38] Ariel Florez and Heidi Salaverria, scholars, researchers, have written about the notionof 'syncopated resistance' with regards cultural and social movements in Latin America. According to their research, syncopated resistance refers to a form of cultural resistance that is characterised by a rhythmic and improvisational quality, akin to the syncopated rhythms of music such as jazz and hip hop. Florez and Salaverria argue that syncopated resistance is a way for marginalised groups to resist dominant cultural norms and power structures, and to assert their own identities and values. They suggest that syncopated resistance can take many forms, from street art and graffiti to dance and music, and that it often involves a combination of improvisation and deliberate subversion of dominant cultural codes and symbols.
[39] A kurta is a type of loose-fitting, collarless shirt that is commonly worn in as everyday clothing in many parts of South Asia, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. It is typically made of cotton or silk, and can be long or short, with a straight or asymmetrical hemline. Kurtas are also often worn for formal occasions such as weddings or religious ceremonies.

the south-east Asian tunic often worn on formal occasions and at religious ceremonies, is symbolic of how like a religion he treats his performance.

The transistor radio, on the other hand, is a symbol of various facets related to freedom. Radio was a ground-breaking technology when it was first developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and it has continued to evolve and adapt over time. The medium became a powerful communication tool that is synonymous with innovation, progress, and the human desire to explore and create new things. It became a tool of the power and importance of communication in society, as well as the desire to connect with others and share information. The medium has long been a source of entertainment, from music and talk shows to sports broadcasts and news updates. It has also been used historically as a tool of governments and other institutions to exert control over the flow of information and shape public opinion. In this context, radio can symbolise authority, censorship and the potential for propaganda and manipulation.

The spur, whilst seemingly minute, is reference to the pioneer column and the settlers on horseback who came to explore and conquer. The pioneer column was a military expedition which was organised by British Businessman Cecil John Rhodes in 1890 and led by Major Frank Johnson. It entered Zimbabwe from the territory now known as Botswana, meeting resistance along the way, to finally settle in the territory that is present day Harare.

The elements of the performance of *Pahasha: Pirate Taxi and Guerilla Radio* include spoken word and alternate between singing and wailing. Throughout the performance Hwati makes reference to some of his previous works and the history of Zimbabwe from 1894. The spoken word is characterised by plaintive drawn out wailing and untranslated Shona utterances. Hwati has in the past deliberately been opaque[40] by choosing to evoke Glissant.[41] According to Glissant, opacity refers to the idea that there are certain aspects of ourselves and our cultures that cannot be fully understood or translated into other languages or cultural contexts. This can be seen as a resistance to homogenisation or assimilation, and a

[40] Reference to a Harare Conversation he had with the author in December 2019 titled On Cultural Resistance and Contentious Objects https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BXko3Lz9xA

[41] Édouard Glissant was a French-Caribbean writer and philosopher who wrote extensively on issues of identity, culture, and globalisation. He used the concept of opacity to describe a particular kind of relation between people and cultures that is characterised by a certain level of mystery or unknowability. Glissant's concept of opacity is a key part of his broader philosophy of creolisation, which emphasises the importance of cultural diversity and exchange in shaping our identities and our world.

recognition of the unique value and importance of different cultures and ways of being in the world. In Glissant's view, opacity is not a barrier to communication or understanding, but rather a starting point for dialogue and exchange between different cultures. By recognising and respecting the opacity of others, we can create new forms of communication and connection that are based on mutual recognition and appreciation, rather than on the imposition of dominant cultural norms. Hwati goes further, positioning opacity as a tool for survival. Hiding is survival, 'when we're invaded/colonized/occupied and stripped of all dignity, we turn to guile and opportunism' (Roy, 2006, 118).

In the song *Maruza Imi*, Hwati makes several historical references of dispossession, such as the Grobler Treaty, the Moffat Treaty, the Rudd Concession, the Tati Concession and the Pioneer Column. These treaties pertain to negotiations, transactions and payments aimed at obtaining the right to settle on land, and even to become its legitimate owner. It is conceivable that Lobengula, to whom these documents were read, signed them with a cross without really understanding their meaning or realising their portent. There are allegations of mendaciousness by the men who presented these agreements. Hwati sets up these treaties as the first formal dispossession and alienation of the people from their land. The oddity of these written records and their language, in an era dominated by spoken word, coupled with the disregard for verbal agreements, prompts scrutiny of the land annexation. Hwati sets up the treaties as the first catastrophe, characterised by land grabbing, curtailed land use and exclusion. He takes a dig at the church (ironically, a missionary was present at the signing of the Rudd concession, to ensure that no trickery happened and in the interests of the Matabele) with references to St Luke, St Peter, St John, St Mark. He also wonders where the churches for Chaminuka, Kaguvi, Nehanda, Takawira and Chitepo (the venerated ancestors of the land) are and sets the people up for complicity in ensuring the nation remains beholden to '*vapambi vepfumi*'[those who forcefully seize wealth].

He jumps to '*Hondo yechindunduma*'[42]and brings to the fore the liberation struggle, which started in March 1896 with the first Ndebele Uprising, and ended seemingly with the second Chimurenga's resolution of independence in 1980. The word '*chimurenga*' comes from

[42] *Hondo yeChindunduma* is also known as *Hondo yeChimurenga*, which means rebellion.

Murenga Soro Renzou a revered ancestral figure among the Shona people. [43] Here Hwati paints a genealogy of resistance and a history that is littered with figures who can provide inspiration.

Hwati moves seamlessly to current affairs and expresses his dissatisfaction and, by extension, that of the marginalised, with the current rule which has been in existence since independence. He begins his litany with '*ZANU chiwororo*[44] *yogwa yoga hondo*'. He laments the lack of reprieve with the repetition of '*Mvura ngainaye*'[45] which references the seminal novel by Charles Mungoshi, *Waiting for the Rain*', and deploys the common characteristics of suspense and expectation, which are reiterated in '*Tichapona Rini*?' characteristic of the slow sociopolitical disintegration born of the decay of authority and the relations with the land that pervade Mungoshi's novel. The phrase also embodies the spirit of the novel's main character, Lucifer, through the words '*mwana wevhu*' and 'geographical mistake'. Here he also makes reference to the maps of Sebastian Münster [46] and Gerardus Mercator[47] as paving way for the colonisation of the known world, echoing Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine: 'Give me a map; then let me see how much is left for me to conquer the world.' [48] Hwati uses this to show a correlation between cartography and territorial imperatives of political power; cartography imperatives that still exist today. It may be argued that Hwati is here making a commentary on colonial unknowing.

Colonial unknowing takes many forms. Colonial unknowing suggests that colonialism, while pervasive, is not fully grasped by those involved in its domination. This 'unknowing' is a norm in colonial contexts, creating a disconnect where colonialism is both omnipresent and absent, shaping places still impacted by colonial violence. The preservation of this ignorance, particularly by beneficiaries, reflects the arrogance of empire and results in collective

[43] Murenga was a fearsome character as described in Zimbabwean history and lore. His legacies are an inspiration to Shona revolutionary and protest groups when fighting for independence. Some Zimbabweans see him as the God of War. He is frequently invoked to spark rebellion.
[44] *ZANU chiwororo* in local parlance translates to 'ZANU–PF is the ultimate power in ending people'. It has become popular especially on Twitter, where it is used to describe how the party devours its own children and is vindictive. This has given the impression of a Lamia-like entity.
[45] *Mvura ngainaye* loosely translates to 'rain should fall'.
[46] Sebastian Münster (1489–1552) was German and the first cartographer to map the world.
[47] Cartographer Gerardus Mercator (1512–1594) produced *Nova et Aucta Orbis Terrae Descriptio ad usum Navigantium Emendate Accommodata*, the first map of the world to show a projection of the spherical earth on the plane.
[48] Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine* Part II, V.iii 123 -39

amnesia. Colonialism might be 'gone' but the structures are still there – we cannot theorise our way out because this is on the ground.

This train of thought is reflected in '*Putugadzike (tea)*' (2016) [Fig. 39], where Hwati references the residue of trappings of settlerism specifically in terms of food and beverages. Tea stands as a symbol of Englishness, which is reflected in other 'trinkets that make a mockery of our lives' (Muchemwa, 1976) and like everything left by British is often regarded as a sign of exclusivity. Hwati explores the histories of objects and how they possess and consume life standing as domination. The work *Putugadzike (tea)* consists of enamel teapots that are in almost all Zimbabwean homes and Hwati uses the teapots to provoke the narrative of how the British brought tea to Zimbabwe but also the longer history of tea bought from Chinese traders and Portuguese missionaries. Zimbabwe has become a nation of tea drinkers. This residue has also permeated other aspects of Zimbabwean life. Adenrele Sonariwo a Nigerian Gallerist and curator on her visit to Zimbabwe in 2022 was astounded as to how almost like the British Zimbabweans were, pointing out how unsettling Africa Unity Square[49] was – an indication of how subliminal messaging remains stamped on land and that mapping is a technical way of keeping the violence and exploitation. Residents are not just observed and mapped, they have no legal power to stop extractive or conservation projects.

Hwati continues along these lines and questions how a voice that liberated the people now silences the same people. There is a tongue-in-cheek reference to campaign taglines 'The voice of revolution. The voice of Zimbabwe.' that alludes to the power of the radio as well as the godlike reverence ZANU–PF has given itself. The ruling party and in turn Hwati, borrow the tagline from Jane Ngwenya, a top DJ during the anticolonial resistance, who presented a programme on Voice of Revolution in Lusaka Zambia. This reference reiterates the role of sound in warfare and resistance. Radio played a significant role in the liberation war. Guerilla radio was used to recruit people to join the struggle. The existence of guerrilla radio is about finding another way to negotiate and resist sources of oppression.

Hwati makes reference to more of his previous work which is positioned in the performance at different points. Included in the visuals of the performance is the artwork *Rückspiegel* [Fig.

[49] Africa Unity Square in the middle of the Central Business District is a manicured walk through park that is designed to represent the Union Jack.

38]. *Rückspiegel* is German for a car's rear-view mirror; the mirror that enables you to see the traffic behind when you are driving. The inclusion of *Rückspiegel* in the performance is a reminder that historical injustices are still a danger and closer than one might think. The statement 'objects in (the) mirror are closer than they appear' is a safety caution that is mandated to be inscribed on the passenger side mirrors of automobiles in numerous places.[50] *Rückspiegel* refers to 'colonial aphasia', a term by Ann Laura Stoler (2008), which is an active forgetting making colonial history unspeakable. It's a deep communication breakdown, where past atrocities remain unspoken and incomprehensible, yet their impacts are felt in the present (Hopkins, 2017). There is another implication, a warning that the results of some colonial atrocities are deceptively closer than they are perceived to be. You look back and the past is not too far away. The refrain, '*Seiko? Nhai Baba hwe!*' and repetition of '*zviuru zvina sere neshanu* 485',[51] is also reference to the concentration camps, called 'keeps', which existed at the peak of the war and are the basis of how villages in rural Zimbabwe are now structured. It refers to how long it has been since this type of open-air carceral oppression and is supported by the assertion that he needs rest and is tired '*Ndaneta. Zororo. Tichapona rini*.' The structure of the concentration camps referred to as 'keeps' still exists today and is used to corral rural populations during elections and ensure compliance, in effect keeping people in open-air prisons.

Towards the end of the performance, Hwati intones:

> Why do you allow others to define you? Why do you allow others to draw lines around you? Let me rearrange you. Let me make you fearless. Let me make you formless. Let me start you over again.

It is in the face of existing in a space where 'people who refuse death by an extractive colonial/postcolonial legislature, a posture of improvisation against the spectre of an inherited

[50] The warning 'objects in (the) mirror are closer than they appear' is mandated on vehicle mirrors in many countries. It's due to the mirror's convexity, which makes objects seem smaller and further away, potentially misleading drivers about the actual distance of vehicles behind. This warning reminds drivers of this issue.
[51] This is a reference to *485 Days at Majdanek* a memoir by Jerzy Kwiatkowski, a Polish political prisoner who survived the Nazi concentration camp at Majdanek during World War II. The book chronicles Kwiatkowski's experiences as a prisoner at Majdanek, where he was held for 485 days between 1943 and 1944. The memoir sheds light on the complex social and political dynamics that existed within the camp, including the relationships between different groups of prisoners and the ways in which they resisted and coped with their circumstances. The essence of *485 Days at Majdanek* is a powerful and moving testament to the resilience and endurance of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable suffering.

Rhodesian system'(Hwati, 2021) that Hwati is persuaded to think 'that reviving ancestral cultures of sounding and deep listening might be the best way to understand the socio-economic, colonial trauma of postcolonial state crafting' (Hwati, 2021). He makes reference to Shona philosophy, which is deeply rooted in sound and listening. Such listening was a survival skill and still is today on the black market in Harare.

Supporting a liberal agenda makes it hard to safely navigate post-independent Zimbabwe's politics of continual extraction. Colonial histories, often chaotic, can be side-lined in national narratives or disrupt historical norms. They can highlight past tensions or fade into irrelevance, becoming remnants of a violent, extractive past. These histories can be disconnected from current human relations and lose their ability to form connections. They pose questions about simultaneous knowledge and ignorance, and the unsaid implications.

Is caring resistance? Creating art is a form of expression, but in Zimbabwe, it's seen as an act of defiance against the state. In this scenario, producing art outside the commercial sphere and beyond the confines of established institutions can be viewed as a form of protest. It could be argued that by choosing to think differently and react to situations where societal vision is lacking, one is fostering a unique economy of attention. By focusing on aspects deemed less important by societal norms, artists can concentrate on their strengths. They demonstrate their capacity to embrace and make the most of a scattered, fading, and limited influence, but one that is historically adaptable to changing situations and believes that art contributes to our identity and evolution, both individually and collectively.

In that regard, how do people survive? Masimba's work oscillating between dark pessimism and almost myopic optimism is dedicated in its entirety to constituting a combative collective conscience in sync with insurrection. Perhaps the answer lies in '*magepu*', in the cracks, in how we re-engineer our context to get what we want; in questioning who owns and controls the tools we rely on. Léonard Pongo, whose work is the focus of the next chapter, gives another context to refusal as care and I look at the productive possibilities of disappearance not as being absent but claiming illegibility, or better undetectability when settler colonial frames are used.

CHAPTER 4: THE ENTANGLEMENT OF CELEBRATION, REFUSAL AND CARE IN PONGO'S PHOTOGRAPHY

This chapter focuses on a different manifestation of care based on the photography of Congolese Belgian photographer Léonard Pongo. A study of Pongo's work is to look not at the margins nor at the centre but at places of transformative possibility and deep relationality (Ahmed, 2004, Collins, 1990), at refusal[52] as performative, rhetorical and undisciplined (Campt, 2012) and following the lineage of decolonial methodologies on narratives as political tools. Whilst Pongo has done assignment work in the region extensively, the focus of this chapter is on his two projects, *The Uncanny* and *Primordial Earth.* The first of these addresses estrangement and navigating that estrangement and notions of indigeneity and nationalism and the second, belonging in the landscape and relational ecologies that can support the emergence of environmental and social science frameworks to contribute to the decolonial project.

The Congo We Know

The context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is too big to be reduced to the singular. Leopold II called the Congo, '*un magnifique gâteau Africain'* (a magnificent African cake), because it is a beautiful country with riches that continue to be exploited by the world. It has a flourishing community of musicians, writers and artists. It is also easy to speak of the capital city, Kinshasa, against the backdrop of art. Art is everywhere, and the streets' chaos provides stimulation and the objects needed for creation. It is also most famous as the site of history's greatest if lesser-known crimes against humanity and the worst cases of extractivism in history. The usual narratives of the Congo use language that is violent and perpetuates what Sianne Ngai calls 'ugly feelings'. [53] The nightmarish practices carried out in the name of Leopold II terrorised the populace into subservience and left the country marred. It is also the country where the post-independence president, Mobutu Sese Seko, prized arts through the Zaireanization programme to eradicate all traces of Western influence. He took

[52] Tina Campt (2012) has defined refusal as 'a rejection of the status quo as liveable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise.'
[53] Sianne Ngai defines the following emotions as 'ugly feelings': envy, irritation, anger, boredom, anxiety and paranoia

care of artists through the Cultural Promotion Fund and the Mobutu Sese Seko Fund while he pillaged the economy and left the country destitute. Before Mobutu, history speaks of how all the archival records of Leopold's Congo Free State, which were deliberately destroyed before the Belgian state became the colonial power in 1908, 'exists' as a cover-up that worsens the crime (Muchemwa, 2021). So how do you imagine a future from a past that was in effect destroyed?

The rubber industry contributed to collections of images so horrific that Reverend John Harris, an English Baptist missionary, called them inhuman and atrocious, publishing them in 1903 under the title *The Congo Slavery State: A Protest Against the New African Slavery.* Raoul Peck's exploration of this dark era in the history of the Congo in his thesis film *Exterminate All the Brutes* brought these same sentiments back, triggering ontology anxiety. This is the story in popular media that I grew up with. It is one where Belgian cartoonist Hergé's famous book *Tin Tin in the Congo*, whose problematic depiction of black people is grotesque and absurd, was normal. The Tervuren human zoo of King Leopold II's time and is another chilling reminder of how exoticisation can be violent and how black bodies are still exploited.

In Alain Mabanckou's fictional world,[54] the region has often been profoundly misunderstood and exoticised by Europeans and Americans. Colonial legal frameworks, established over a hundred years ago, persistently influence the lives of individuals, facilitating access to land and resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for foreign corporations and Congolese elites, often at the expense of the general populace. The sterilised rhetoric employed by politicians and non-governmental organisations fails to adequately articulate the extreme hardship experienced in the DRC. The realm of fiction presents a more effective medium for such portrayals. 'Fucked' is how the character of a British mercenary in John le Carré's 2006 novel, *The Mission Song*, puts it:

> Fucked by the Arab slavers, fucked by their fellow Africans, fucked by the United Nations, the CIA, the Christians, the Belgians, the French, the Brits, the Rwandans, the diamond companies, the gold companies, the mineral

[54] Reference to Congolese – French writer Alain Mabanckou's 2018 novel The death of Comrade President

> companies, half the world's carpetbaggers, their own government in Kinshasa, and any minute now they're going to be fucked by the oil companies.

For five centuries, the area now recognised as the DRC has been plundered by outsiders, becoming a symbolic representation of all forms of human distress: slavery, Ebola, starvation, autocracy, AIDS, malaria, corruption, sexual assault, and civil war. Despite this, it has consistently captivated the Western world for centuries, embodying an extreme, imagined version of Africa. Elements such as crocodiles, gold, dense forests, castle-sized trees, mythical beings, fertile black soil, and vibrant fruits contribute to a vivid image of a wild, uncontrolled, and fantastical environment, brimming with life and enigma. The metaphors it evokes are often extravagant and indulgent. The 19th-century explorer Henry Morton Stanley likened his experiences in its jungle to a 'feast' of sensual delights.

My relationship with the Congo is distant but shameful; it comes from my country's involvement in another case of extractivism through the Third Congo Civil war from 1998 to 2003. An understanding of 'other' environments is typically initiated at the national level, aligned with countries, possibly regions, or even cities, but never with ordinary people. The Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), sent to help prop up Laurent-Desire Kabila's government against the rebels from the Congolese Rally for Democracy and the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo, did more harm than good. The ZNA thus became complicit in stripping the country of its diamonds for the ruling elite, the 5.4 million war-related civilian deaths and the displacement of more than twice that number (McGreal, 2008). Never had it been so shameful to celebrate the death of a human being as it had when Laurent Kabila died in 2001. Zimbabwean citizens who thought the war was over and the men who had been sent to fight would now come home threw street parties. Unfortunately, there are still some Zimbabwean soldiers guarding the mines today. The Third Congo War remains a dark stain on the history of Zimbabwe's assistance in civil wars on the continent.

This is not the Congo I encountered when I started talking to Léonard Pongo.

Enter The Uncanny

I don't want to define myself as alternative because it's always alternative to what. And I don't want things I don't like to define me. I want the things that I love to define me. –Léonard Pongo[55]

Léonard Pongo [Fig. 40], born in 1988 and operating between Brussels and Kinshasa, has achieved international recognition and won numerous awards for his long-term project, *The Uncanny*. *The Uncanny* started in 2011 when he went on assignment to the DRC to cover the elections. It started in Kinshasa (or Kin in local parlance), 'the country city or city that is a country'[56](Pongo, 2021a), and migrated to other parts of the DRC. Pongo divides his time between his projects, teaching and assignment work. The assignment work is influenced by his project work and portrays the quiet dignity of the people he photographs. Through Pongo's work, we glimpse self-determined identities and resurgences and insurgencies of radical thought and practice in exploring systems that construct and maintain ignorance. It is encountering reality through biography. It becomes the realm of possibility and a personal experience unafraid to assert its subjectivity. Léonard Pongo's photographic projects offer a glimpse into the challenges of transdisciplinary engagements with violent pasts and the difficulties of working through multiple knowledge registers. They show the possibilities of more collaborative and generative forms of knowledge production and refusal as care and resistance.

I first got to know of Léonard Pongo's work from his participation at the 2019 12th Bamako Encounters – African Biennale of Photography. His work was included in a chapter titled *For the Mouth Must Not Tell Everything: On Politics and /or Poetics of Ecosystems.* I found the work, *The Uncanny,* included in this section to be appropriately placed. This edition of the biennale claimed 'to listen(s) carefully to remoteness and invisible matters, hitherto erased voices and images, and celebrates politics and poetics of (in)animate ecosystems'. [57] The following year I was asked by Billie McTernan, an editor with art magazine *The Sole Adventurer*, if I would be interested in writing text on Léonard Pongo for their collector's edition. This interaction began a series of interviews for the article and then spilled on into

[55] All quotes from Pongo himself in this chapter are taken from his interviews and personal communication with me from 9 June 2021 to 30 March 2022.
[56] Leonard Pongo described Kinshasa thus to explain how vast and diverse the city is
[57] From the concept note by Bonaventure Soh Bejeh Ndikung, the artistic director of the 12th Edition of Bamako Encounters

my research as I became fascinated by Pongo's work ethic, the 'ghosts'[58] in photography and the archival turn.

The Medium of Photography

In my perception, photography is an imperfect tool for explaining the world. The photograph is a fraught metric, particularly in this post-truth world in which a wholly undistorted image maybe less common. It is a dense visualisation of visible and invisible trajectories in which a central commentary sometimes remains obscured. The medium of photography is not about what one sees but what it can conjure and its power lies in its will to dominate the viewer. The gaze of the audience and photographers alike is a negotiation of marginality and one that tells us who belongs on the outside of the human family, waiting to get in.

Photography is a tool of witnessing which does what was previously done by reflection and memory (Berger, 2008) and photographs in this data age 'have an unstable and vagrant life' (O'Toole, 2005). They take on different life forms and all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions (Sontag, 2004). Photography has a long history of violence and abuse in Africa and its environs, painting a singular narrative of the continent as a continent in pain. I refer to pain here in all its manifestations that rob people of their dignity and urgency; what Opallo (2011) calls 'poverty porn', or its derivatives 'famine porn', war photography, 'disaster photography' and the violence that comes from miscaptioning and lack of captioning.

Whilst images of black pain have aided in subjugating the pictured subject and the awakening of viewers to the injustices depicted, they still remain evidence of the violence that continues to plague black bodies. The role of beauty and joy in photos of black life is less widely seen and distributed as a valid and powerful method of resistance; photographers who choose to focus on joy have been accused of aestheticising tragedy or pain on occasion. Of course, this is a bigoted view about othering and shoehorning analyses when images of African people do not show the devastation. Pongo adopts a generative stance by not repeating the violence by repeatedly talking about it (Tuck, 2009, Tuck and Yang, 2014b). This decision to show only

[58] A loose reference to *The dilemma of a Ghost* by Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo which was the inspiration for the 12th Edition of Bamako Encounters.

what is necessary, 'what you need to know and what I refuse to write in' (Simpson, 2007, 72) is seen throughout Pongo's work and influences what makes up his bodies of work.

Pongo goes to great lengths to circumvent the limitations of language and the camera to shine new light on some hidden aspects of the Congo life experiences. Photography becomes the tool for rethinking the complexity of human emotions and experiences. At its most effective, the photograph is a signifier that we subconsciously identify as assuming an authoritative voice. It serves a clear purpose and delivers an inscrutable message. In the work of this artist, similar strategies are used to subversive,[59] absurd and philosophical ends. He communicates the arbitrariness of inherited conventions and renders anew the vernacular visual environment that so engulfs us that we may be unaware of it. He uses the medium to create photographs 'which visualise recalcitrant normalcy in places and settings where it should not be' (Campt, 2012) and participates in community and identity formation in an environment that negates some groups

Pongo's photographs, captured at precisely the right moment and resonating with a profound meaning beyond the action shown in the image, evoke a sense of place and glimpse into relationships, experiential activities and unique experiences. They are raw and guttural and imbued with tremendous power. They radiate with the sort of care and taking care that comes with discovering a long-sought place that is not quite what you expected. The visual errors, blurs, flashes and repeated failures translate the Congolese experience and serve as constant reminders that the mundane is far more critical than the disaster photography associated with the Congo. The act is both confrontational and an affirmation practice of visibility that Campt in *Listening to Images* (2017), says reveals their multisensory and embodied nature and:

> You cannot discern what is being performed just by looking at the photograph but you apprehend when you look away from the image and you attune yourself to the impression that is left upon you by the person who decided to take this image.

Pongo's vision transcends established and politicised clichés. He does not judge or question, he wonders and wanders. He is clear about why he does what he does. His projects are long

[59] It must be noted that this is my reading of Pongo's work in the grand scheme of things. He does not claim to be subversive in any way preferring rather to be defined by the things that he loves.

and rightly so. *The Uncanny* is thus a story of contact and encounters, which I think ultimately influenced the way Pongo photographed.

A Case for Refusal

I am not trying to deliver the truth—I am merely striving to understand a peoples' reality and to reconstruct my own. To use photography to create an impression, to have an emotional impact rather than to use images as proofs of a fact-based analysis or opinions. It convinced me that photography could be a tool to create a completely new world based on one's search for experience and obsessions. –Léonard Pongo, 2022

There still is the demand for black artists to exoticise themselves. The same struggle that Ernest Mancoba had is still around and often one does not have to be told to self-exoticise; the mechanisms in which people are shaped into that direction is very sophisticated, but that is the nature of power itself. I am very conscious of it. It is also about refusing the spectacle. - Kemang wa Lehulere, *History will break your Heart,* 2015

Léonard Pongo takes a unique approach to imagery, creating an archive that captures his present and his world. The concept of The Uncanny is rooted in the theories of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who referred to the uncanny as 'unheimlich', which roughly translates to 'unhomely' in English. According to Freud, the uncanny symbolizes the resurgence of the repressed and represents a stark contrast between the safe, homely interior and the terrifying intrusion of an external entity. This sense of 'unhomeliness' is frequently depicted in fairy tales, with Freud's primary example being *The Sandman*, a somewhat eerie tale written by ETA Hoffman in 1816, which was once considered suitable bedtime reading for children. The themes of home, the loss of it, and 'unhomeliness' are recurrent in postcolonial culture. This sensation of being homeless, of being trapped between two conflicting cultures, has also been termed 'unhomeliness' by critic Homi Bhabha. The return of the repressed is a crucial, but not the only, condition for the uncanny.

The sheer effort of thinking the aesthetic and political together is seemingly at the core of *The Uncanny*. Léonard Pongo's work is motivated by frustration that came from knowing about his father's country of birth via 'proxy' and feeling as if he did not belong in Belgium, where he grew up with family nearby. He knew of the DRC only through others sharing their stories and experiences and the Western media. When he came to see the Congo of the stories, he

found that there was a disconnect between what he had read and been given access to through others and what he encountered. The feeling of being connected to a location and having individuals who have shared their experiences of DRC but not having access to it may not be enough for the uncanny to occur. He relied on family members, some of whom he had never met, to introduce him to spaces that generally do not interest photojournalists documenting life in the Congo.

Pongo was invited to experience and be part of the experiences of Kinshasa. In some ways, *The Uncanny* is collaborative work. t elaborates on the significance of African photographic methods and the potential for us to narrate our own narratives through images, advocating that photography in the region is a communal endeavour. *The Uncanny* transcends the boundaries of photography as a visual medium, interacting with its physicality, its performative nature, and most importantly, its resonance. The sonic properties of photography intimates what Campt (2012) calls for us to do, to listen to images for images have a 'phonic substance'[60] and speak to us on a frequency that allows us to listen to them. The images captured by Pongo in the process of engaged witnessing, 'still moving images'[61], offer visuals of contemporary life in DRC to discuss the supposed threshold between the somatic and the supernatural. It addresses the challenges posed by history, commercial imperatives and sensory boundaries between how matter and space are experienced and also tells us about how he feels about his home country.

Pongo saw a need to try and create a natural connection, especially when it came to Congo. And so, instead of trying to come to a narrative, he was interested in simply how powerful it could be to try and create a narrative that meshes into the environment he was working with. His process is slow, artisanal, deliberate and reflective, allowing him to be fully present when he photographed the people who invited him to witness. He developed this approach the longer he spent time in the Congo. It is easy to see that what we see in *The Uncanny* is what Pongo feels about Congo and his identity; this collection of work provides a crucial exploration of image production, the significance of images in visual literacy and

[60] Tina Campt (2012) has defined phonic substance as 'the sound inherent to an image; one that defines or creates it, that is neither contingent upon nor necessarily preceding it; not simply a sound played over, behind or in relation to an image; one that emanates from the image itself.'
[61] Tina Campt (2012) has defined still-moving-images as 'images that hover between still and moving images; animated still images, slowed or stilled images in motion or visual renderings that blur the distinctions between these multiple genres; images that require the labour of feeling with or through them.'

preservation, and the contextualization of history. Pongo (2022) in a personal interview spoke about a profound connection to his subjects and the land as affecting how he photographs:

> The idea to some extent, at least sharing an interconnected experience of life but also related to showing properly related cultures and sharing a sense of togetherness, is something that's always deeply affected the way that I create images. And for me, that solidarity means that there's a sense of connection or maybe a need to connect, or at least a feeling of belonging to a whole entity.

His distinct visual language encompasses blurriness, movement and the apparent gestural nature of gazes to extend a welcoming hand, while at the same time not allowing us to forget that we are entering a visual territory that is impervious to our perceptions. Intentionality is often defined in terms of results and for Pongo intentionality is an initiative of how he wants to connect and start a process. Pongo (2022) has emphasised that it is not about controlling the process:

> I think it translates into a need to say, "this is how I feel in this place and how some other people feel" rather than to say, "this is how these people live, I have been here, and I know it because I photographed them.

In *Necessary Evil* [Fig. 44 and 45], the video work and the most evocative sections of *The Uncanny*, Pongo illustrates the emergence of unconventional religious groups that rely more on influential leadership than on rigid doctrines. *The Uncanny* invites us to accompany him on this indefinite, winding voyage, where the powerful scrutiny of his subjects forces us to reconsider our role as observers – a role that is invariably impartial.

The idea of shared agency and creating a set of images that do not provide a clear formalised narrative resulted in moving images and it is the core of the project. He chose the subjective element, and it was a choice not to tell a single story. He could not grasp anything on his own and because people came on board to help him navigate the city, it changed how the project came out. 'The condition of the work existing at all is people' (Muchemwa, 2021). What comes through is Léonard's willingness to move away from using photography as a tool to observe; his way of creating a visual universe that was worthy of sharing was to try and collect those moments of witnessing and let that be the content of the project. He has seen the

world he participates in as a very mirroring environment as if he was working in some sort of very extended family scene, ‘in the sense that I see myself and the people that I work with, and I see my close relationships, and I see my family and the people that I work with. And it means that’s the way I feel’ (Pongo, 2021b). He acknowledges the privilege he has because he grew up in a Western environment and worked with Western elements and built connections in that environment, which gives and provides him with a lot of access. That access allows him to become a storyteller to illustrate other people’s lives, which comes with a lot of responsibility. Where one might view this privilege as a handicap, that privilege is very empowering because it means that he has a chance to represent his community in ways that can extend the conversation, or at least display people in a way that shows that they are dignified. Whilst Pongo does what he does out of passion, love, obsession, curiosity and respect, he wields his power carefully, knowing the observer and the observed cannot be separated (Mudede, 2023).

The final photos of *The Uncanny* photo series are from 2017, but it took until 2018 for the project to be finished editing. The project also existed as a part of his process; he came ‘with a strong need to recover, to capture, and the photographs are part of that process.’

Returning to the Source

Léonard Pongo has spent the better part of his life working in urban areas and his first encounter of the DRC was with cities. The awakening that came with *The Uncanny* prompted him to explore even further the sources of the symbols and crafts that he grew up with but did not fully comprehend. For this he decided to explore the Congo’s depths and find comfort in nature. *Primordial Earth*, is his search for his rebirth. It was presented as *Primordial Earth: Inhabiting the Landscape* at Bozar, Brussels from 20 January 2020 to 21 March 21, 2021; shown at Foreign Agent Gallery along with *The Uncanny* from 8 July until 21 August, 2021 in Lausanne, Switzerland, and at the Yango Biennale in Kinshasa from January to February 2022.

What insights can we glean from observing the manifestations of nurturing and mutual exchange evident in flora, fauna, and mineral formations? In the project titled *Primordial Earth*, which can be perceived as a journey back to the rudimentary elements or the genesis, Pongo endeavors to shift the focus away from anthropocentric perspectives, to attentively

perceive and reinterpret the natural world. If *The Uncanny* encapsulates narratives of human interaction and experiential realities, then perhaps *Primordial Earth* serves as Pongo's foundational narrative delineating his bond with the terrestrial environment. It signifies a process of his self-reconstruction. This endeavour remains a work in progress, with visual compositions spanning from 2017 to the present, originating from diverse locations such as Lubumbashi, Kinshasa, Bas-Congo, Virunga National Park (North Kivu), the Equatorial forest, and various natural sites in Kasaï.

Curator Sorana Munsya, who worked with Pongo on the Bozar presentation, said, in an interview with Bruzz:

> In the Congo, he (Pongo) realised that it is important to respect your own experience and those of the places and people you are attempting to portray. Surrounded by nature, he realised that he was dealing with something bigger than himself and that he could not communicate that environment in its totality.

The grainy, blurry energy and kinetic-charged black-and-white imagery that is *The Uncanny* morphs into poetry and softness of colour to explore boundaries with space. Traditional Congolese narratives and symbols inspired the project. This exploration has brought Pongo to places where these narratives are valid for a philosophy of life and the environment. Much of *Primordial Earth* is concerned with the ideas of ancestry, land and belonging. And it is the ultimate respect and love for these things that Pongo feels he wants to follow and discover how people can see themselves as complete. He explores how the land can be perceived and how the relationship with that land can be the source of the whole vocabulary, validating Souleymane Bachir Diagne's philosophy on African artists which states that to understand artists one must understand the intuition and impetus that feeds their work. Diagne's text, which has been an inspiration for Pongo, provides for a lens of care through his approach to art making on the continent as a valid philosophical undertaking. Pongo mimics this approach when he photographs images for his projects, when he is on assignment and when he is teaching in both Brussels and Kinshasa. This idea of transmission is something that he grew up with, and does it without making an effort.

Primordial Earth The project probes into the intricate relationship that humanity shares with location and territory, both on a symbolic and sensory dimension, while simultaneously providing an interpretation of life and our planetary existence. It delves into the exploration of personal and communal perceptions of physical existence and processes of metamorphosis. These transformations span a wide spectrum, from geopolitical disputes to the underlying frictions between human beings and the natural environment they inhabit. In essence, it seeks to understand how we, as humans, connect with the spaces we occupy - whether these connections are tangible and sensory, or more abstract and symbolic. It presents an interpretation of life as we know it, and our place within the broader context of the planet.

The project further scrutinizes the concepts of physical existence from both an individual and collective perspective. It explores the processes of change and transformation that we undergo, which can be influenced by a variety of factors. These range from geopolitical conflicts that shape our societies and our identities, to the more subtle yet profound tensions that exist between humanity and the natural world. This exploration prompts us to reflect on our role within the natural world and how our actions impact the environment we live in. Flora and fauna show colonial incursion into every aspect of life and colonialism as bio-invasion. They are what remains of the forced relocations and underdevelopment. The environment Pongo presents is the environment after life of an empire and raises questions about who has what stake and what is indigenous where and what is useful and what is invasive.

I think there is something else, a certain way of looking, a different way of gazing, in the way Pongo uses the camera when the camera has a strong very contentious history of being used to create, to produce portraits or subjects. In *Primordial Earth*, Pongo uses the camera as a tool to interact with the environment, with the landscape as an entity, changing the way that he perceives the world and the way that he has decided to create, which has allowed him to repurpose the tool. On a very technical level he has done this by changing the tool and altering it so that it is these cameras that see outside of the human eye. Pongo has repurposed the camera to function in a completely different way where it’s unreliable and very random, in what it produces. For Pongo, that adds to the relationship with the landscape where he is fully not in control of what is produced, which gives him distance and the space to create different types of objects; to look more at shapes and signs as compared to the rules of

photography and to therefore move to repurpose that space differently to remake the language. Thus, his work looks less conditioned by habits and tropes.

For Pongo, there was a need to be in the natural environment and this came from a need to bridge and recover things he grew up with; crafts, traditional tales, music and the less contemporary culture. In a way, the *Primordial Earth* is a continuation of the work he did with *The Uncanny.* It explores a world that is strangely familiar and asks ultimate existential questions about life and purpose. Pongo delves into humanity's symbiotic relationship with nature and puts humankind back in the hierarchy with nature. He wants to clarify that although humanity is a small part of nature and is just one species, it is the most destructive in its impact. He creates worlds within worlds, mirroring and yet upsetting what is outside, playing with the concept of erasure and haunting histories and yet making space for the balm nature can be for souls tired from the frenetic rush of cities.

Pongo does not see his work as trying to address the issue of care, and it is not a defining factor for producing it (Pongo, 2022). He does not see himself as 'that central or that essential,' but because his work is already so biographical and connected to his sense of self and relationships, it inevitably reflects his personal journey and experiences. His modesty belies the profound impact his work has on those who engage with it. So whilst he does not make his work the centre of a caring mission, he is careful in the way that he creates and develops it but honest enough to say that the spark of care is not really present in his work and the only reason is that his way of functioning of working and creating is not that intellectual. Care is the impetus of his work although this is not his intention whilst creating the work. His refusal to centre his work 'against something' echoes Hank Willis Thomas, who said in an interview with *The Guardian* in 2019:

> It's not the responsibility of black folks to use their work as a teaching tool. That sense of didactic of using or employing your kind of cultural production as a way to engage a white audience is not particularly effective because at that point what you are doing is centralizing whiteness. Like everything lives outside of this centre subject. We should be making work as if we are in the centre of our own conversations

And Pongo's final words on the matter perhaps reiterate his refusal stance:

> So maybe that answers it for care and dissent. That it's not about keeping dissent, it's more about, what do I care about talking about? And I'm going to be defined by what I love, rather than what I dislike or what makes me feel angry or what I feel of this filtered injustice.

The idea is that the arts must not allow themselves to be used in connection with interventionism in care and that they should remain faithful to what the arts can do, that is, create shape and form and be visually pleasing – but does this imply that art is independent of socio-political trappings that make it function like a social worker? (Vosman, 2016). Pongo is interested for people to have a connection to Congo or to the Central African region, even though they don't have the keys to all the concepts that he discusses his work, but they should still find his work valuable to them. It may perhaps make the work function less in a vacuum or less in a bubble and demonstrate that it is not merely conditioned by a certain debate that belongs to a certain environment, but rather that it can also bridge different debates and different discussions that happen in very different, seemingly disconnected, environments. The issue isn't lack of knowledge but systemic design. No amount of alternative discourses or awareness can dismantle oppressive structures without complete overhaul. Using existing concepts only perpetuates current systems of subjugation, failing to guide us towards new possibilities.

The story of brutality and untold suffering is the single story of the continent and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in particular. But that is not the story here. Pongo invites us to think of how the photograph and subsequently the framing can be a way to combine different angles, experiences and layers of understanding. It may be a way for us to experience the spirit of community, collaboration, collaborative care and ask the question: how can we develop new approaches that confront yet do not repeat the epistemic and material violence of coloniality?

Much as Campt does in *Image Matters*, Pongo complicates the narratives of the Congo and links to larger questions about the nature of historical evidence and the historical process. Pongo makes us question the way we see and understand the Congo by gracefully unfolding unexpectedly private moments, moving public provocations and refuses the chilling accounts of perpetually returning historical legacies.

CONCLUSION: AN EXPANDED PROPOSAL FOR CARE AS DISSENT

This section highlights ongoing issues in need of further research and provides some tentative notes on how contemporary art can be understood through the lenses of care and dissent. The five artists in this thesis had different ways of looking at the ethic of care. They have been part of a care case study and an experiment investigating the myriad problems within the institution of care for disempowered and marginalised people and how or if this can be construed as a form of dissent. The creative framework I used to develop my argument and how I approached the imagined neutrality or independence of artists – posed by a capitalist, liberal society as the ideal state of being – provided some challenges and insights.

I am concluding my thesis with a postscript entitled 'An expanded proposal for care as dissent' for a simple reason. During the fieldwork and writing of this thesis, I came to know care in different ways. Care manifests in different ways: in the relationship between bodies, community care, the natural environment and across time to consider our ancestors and generations to come. Care becomes an act of resistance in a world that does not care.

One of the key challenges of this research project was the struggle of positioning. The metatextual moments that make one aware of the prejudices we have already passively absorbed and which are meant to encourage us to collectively sonify the study of culture and to suggest transformative approaches for safety and justice, were hard to digest. While there is a push to engage indigenous knowledge systems to guard against the failure of indigenous futures, it is challenging to work within a capitalist system that was built against this form of knowledge. Looking at the universe as a way of looking back in time, is a creative process and participatory and you become entangled in indeterminable acts of care.

Another challenge was realising that the decolonial project is not a metaphor but is being treated as such and in treating it this way academia and policy makers are losing sight of what needs to be done and are being careless. The pressure to theorise from the South, for example, to fit into the academy and to fit into the proper way of doing research, derails the real work that artists are doing. We need to take notes from the calm and meditation that comes with art practice. I make a call to move a more slowly because there is no happy ever after – this is a continuous process and we have to find a way to integrate that into daily practice.

I also became conflicted in the process of writing other people's lives because I felt that I was also writing my own. For example, when I started writing on Pongo, I kept hearing Tuck on harmful research that perpetuates the damage that it seeks to address (Tuck, 2009). I kept thinking: when our texts are read, how do we stand in relation to the objects and subjects we are studying? The process of construction, the data we are looking at in order to understand, to deconstruct, to understand the meaning and how it is constituted (performing the process of reconstruction), can become entangled because all subjects exist in context; the subject has relations and objects have lives. What sort of care should we exercise to ensure we do not undo the work the artists are doing because, contrary to what disciplinary debates assume, there are people involved and there are stakes beyond the argument?

Outside the realm of political theory, care, as a field of knowledge shaped by institutions and politics, has been widely conceptualised as a tool for mutual aid, a decolonial strategy, a method of non-capitalist world-building, a non-biological kinship arrangement, a collective survival tactic, a liberation politics and a non-exploitative amendment driven relation to land. What is it to care? What is it to touch? The five iterations of artistic practices described in this thesis explore methods for engaging different communities to imagine, feel, consider and care. And that is dissent.

The Listening Guide

This research mainly involves an auditory aspect that requires us to decelerate and listen intensively. However, how do you orient yourself to listen to, alongside, within, and around such a multifaceted, clamorous, yet opaque setting? A sustainability question on care; we cannot do anything well (teach, heal, research, activism, make work) without settling the nervous system, as it is the foundation of our mental and physical well-being, and thus, crucial for our overall performance and productivity. When we attend to trauma, we need to tend to how we live. Some tools to settle the nervous system; *For all I care* by Nwando Ebizie a podcast that focuses on healing through art, health and science and *Concepts of Love* by Dana Whabira part of Njelele Radio's exploration of loving provide a premise of what this can look like: sonic – sound healing sessions and body care all of which are aimed at nurturing the mind and body, promoting relaxation, and fostering a sense of inner peace. What you are called to do maybe difficult and how you metastasise the pain and trauma is very important.

This research shows that the act of dismantling the world is already underway, guided by a care ethic that recognizes that a dismantled world is the only solution to end the cycle of knowledge-based violence and instability that positions and structures class and gender differences. In the end, the feasibility of care and its ethics will depend on our capacity to not just contemplate, but also strive to live in and think from a perspective beyond the current state 'cultural space of ethics, relationality and the sacred' (Bellacasa, 2017, 8).

We also need to be careful about subjecting the dead to violence and how we subject ourselves to the same trauma. When we speak about the trauma without feeding into the discourse of how Africa a continent in pain in a world that relishes the sensation of Black bodies suffering, we care. We risk pathologising the pain communicated by images when we do not take care. Susan Sontag (2003, 103) wrote:

> To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more–and more. Images transfix. Images anesthetize. …Information about what is happening elsewhere, called "news," features conflict and violence—"If it bleeds, it leads" runs the venerable guideline of tabloids and twenty-four-hour headline news shows—to which the response is compassion, or indignation, or titillation, or approval, as each misery heaves into view.

We all build the world from a compromised position but dissent can function as the manifestation of commitment within a conceptualisation of enacted professionalism and how caring action as an activist stance of principled resistance can lead to the aligning of goals for care. We should look for fellow travellers. In the process of this research I also came to realise that on top of deeply entrenched phobias is the insistence of secularity in leftist movements there was a refusal to engage the religious and cultural grammars of African life and death that speaks to renegotiating terms of engagement. We should mind the past and listen carefully to what it is telling us. For quite some time, a branch of sociology focusing on everyday life has been grappling with the concept of late modernity, also referred to as hypermodernity. This is seen as a new and highly fraught stage of modernity. One of the defining characteristics of late modernity is the cultural emphasis on, and the experiential

economic utilization of, individual life experiences. The focus is on the self-generation of 'positive' experiences, the ‘tyranny of positivity’ while 'negative' experiences, hardships, and suffering are often overlooked.

Artists, in their role as cultural contributors, have a significant part in addressing issues of social and ecological fairness, promoting societal change. Their work often stimulates thought, sparks dialogue, and can lead to social change. Through their creative expressions, they can highlight injustices, propose alternative perspectives, and contribute to the transformation of society. They serve as catalysts for change, using their art to inspire, challenge, and engage audiences, thereby playing a crucial role in fostering social transformation. Katherine Ann Porter (n.d), in a *Paris Review* interview on the question of what the artist’s role is in civilisation, once said, in a meditation of the power and purpose of art:

> Nothing is pointless and nothing is meaningless if the artist will face it. And its his business to face it. He hasn’t got the right to side step it like that. Human life maybe itself almost pure chaos, but the work of the artist – the only thing he is good for – is to take these handfuls of confusion and disparate things, things that seem to be irreconcilable, and put them together in a frame to give them some kind of shape and meaning … we understand very little of what is happening to us at any given moment. But by remembering, comparing, waiting to know the consequences, we can sometimes see what an event really meant, what it was trying to teach us.

The act of recognition is resistance in a world that constantly values certain lives and particular narratives over others. What care means for human futures and more than human worlds is not forcing our way into producing some idyllic past or going to some colonial past, fossilising it and bringing it to produce some idyllic present. We cannot run to a place of purity; we are forever tainted by history and contact. What care means is going forward with an acknowledged practice. It’s about being mindful and intentional in our actions, acknowledging the impact we have on others and the world around us. Care gives humans purpose and can extend ways in which we see, think and relate to the world. It’s what drives us to nurture relationships, contribute to our communities, and strive for better outcomes. It’s the motivation behind our desire to improve, to grow, and to make a positive difference.

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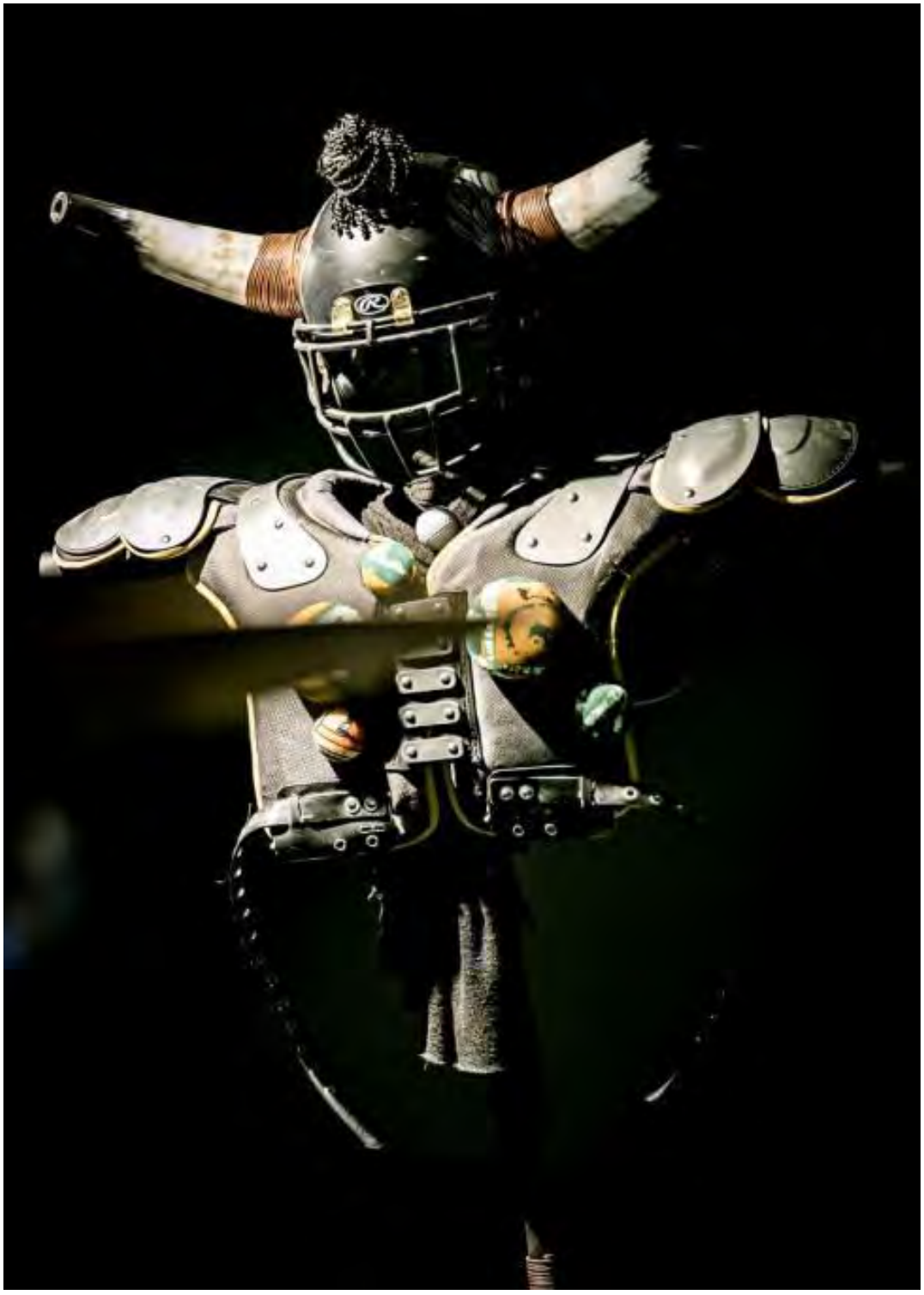

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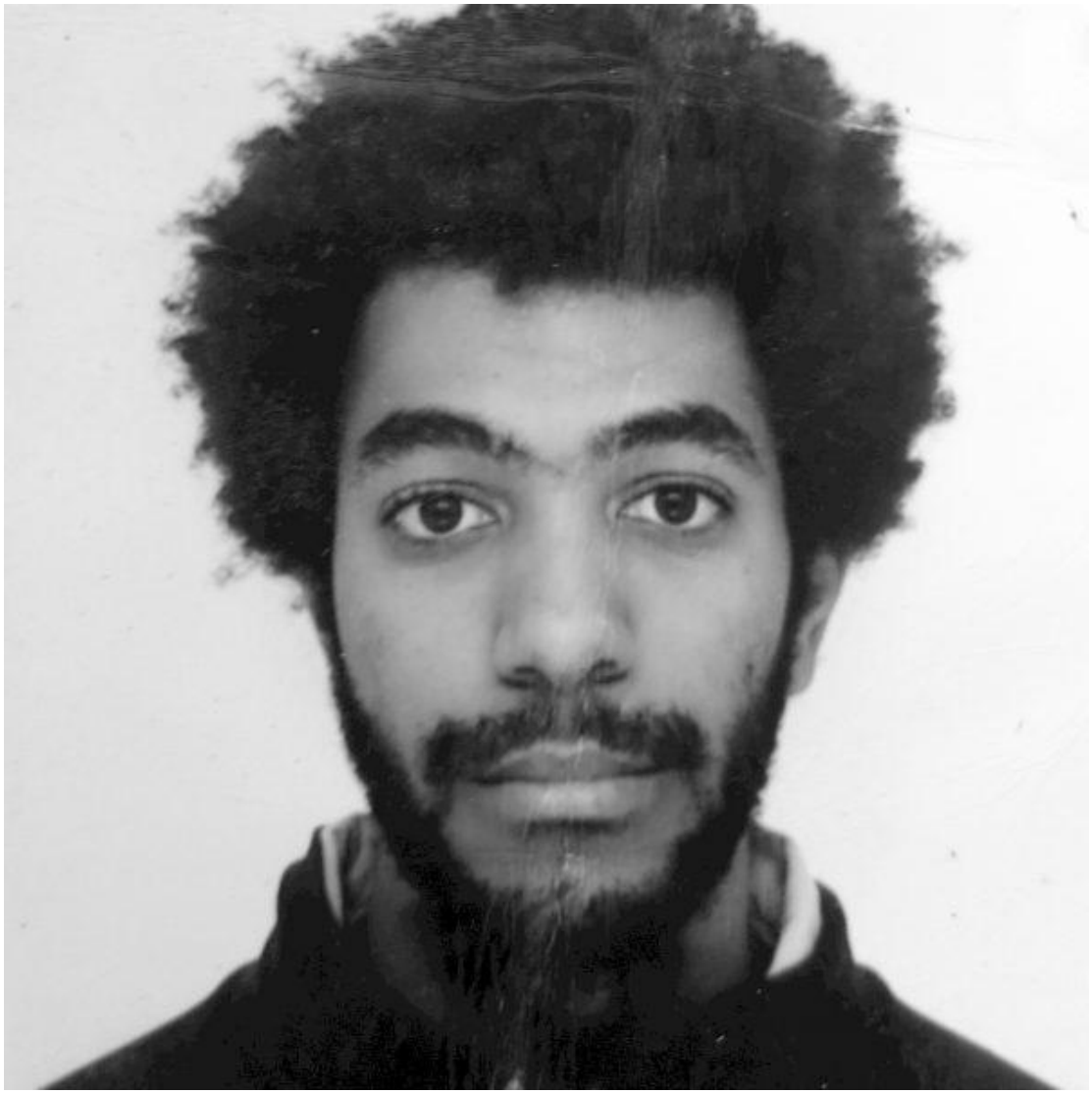

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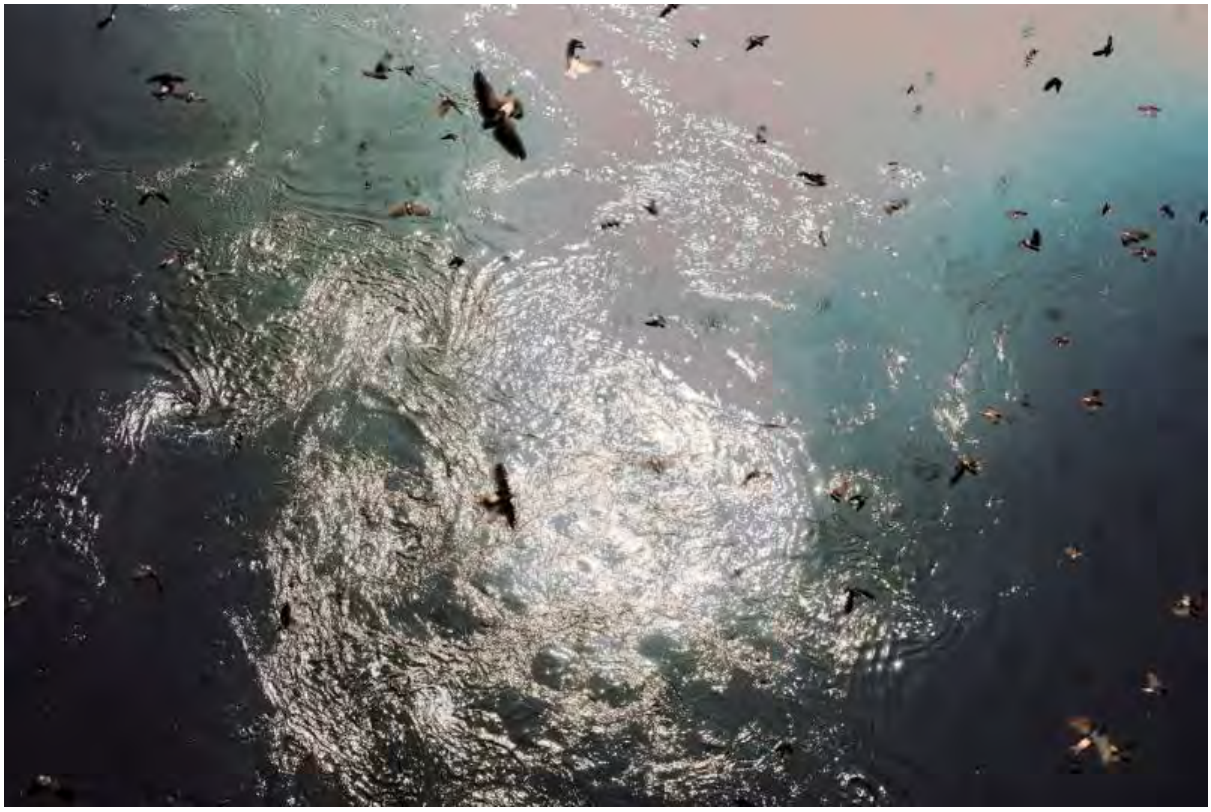

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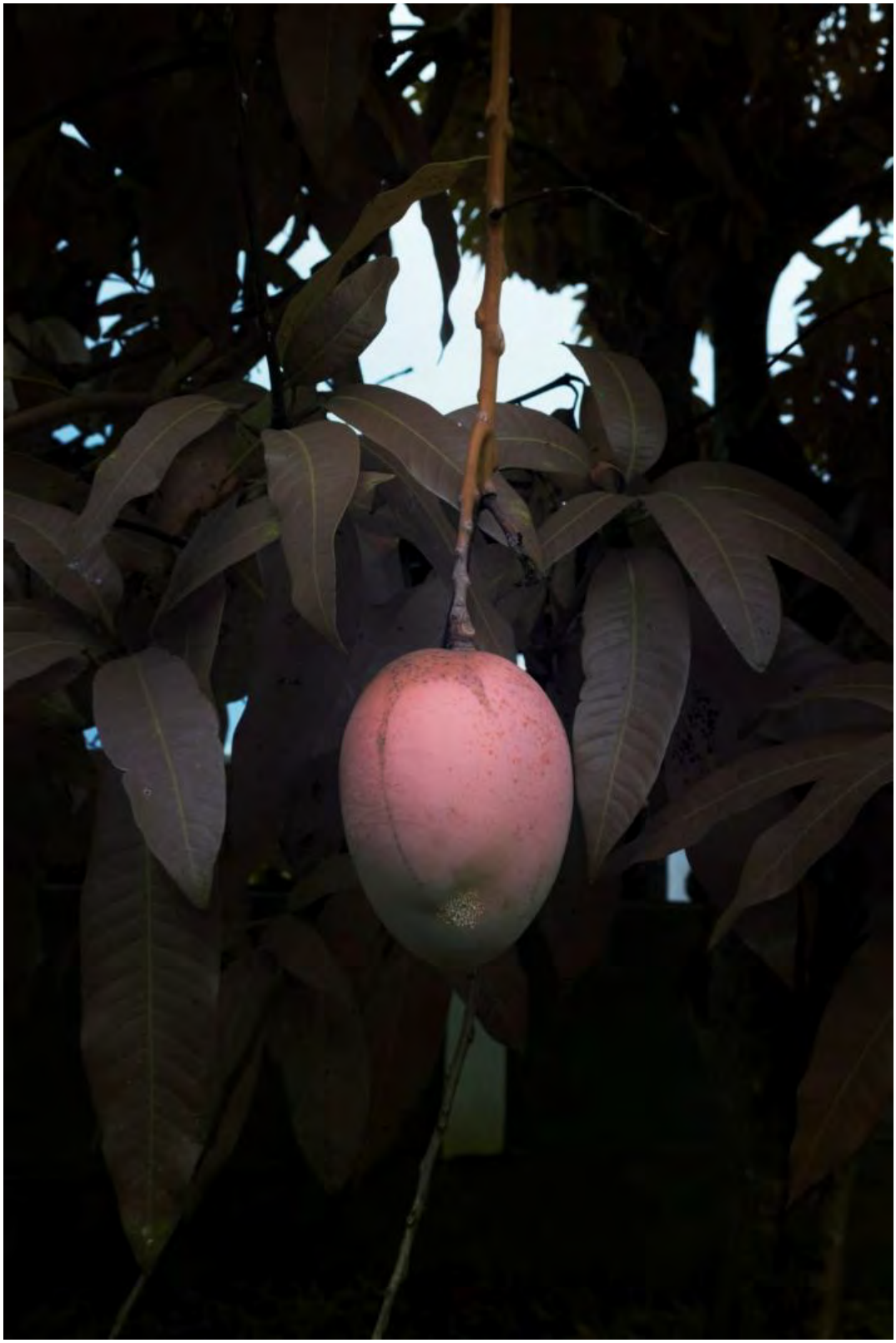

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