POSTS & COSMOLOGIES OF BLACK STUDIES

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The following pages contain contributions developed in response to a seminar series, *Posts & Cosmologies of Black Studies*.

Course Overview:

The world continues to wrestle with the afterlife of Slavery and colonialism, as well as their social, political, economic and cultural residue. The persistence of the world-making violence of Slavery warrants a rigorous reading and critique, which has come to be known as Black Studies. We therefore seek to introduce students to marginalised historical narratives pertaining to the Black Radical Tradition, the invention of Blackness read as a positionality and not only as an identity. We will adopt a nonlinear approach to studying this history and theory. Throughout this module students will be introduced to various visual representations whose main vocation is the exploration of the neocolonial and decolonial paradigm.

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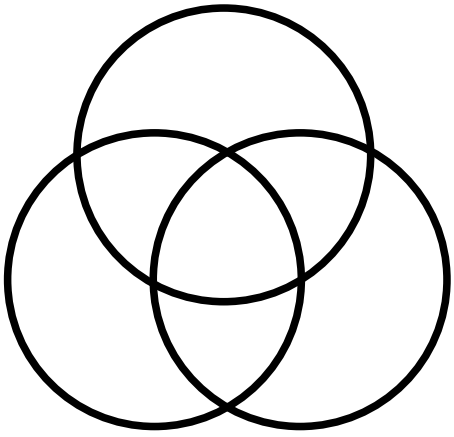
SEEING TRIPLE

Black optics seen through three films by Med Hondo



Ben Albertyn

Before I discuss the films themselves, I should first speak about how I got to see them. Soon after Med Hondo's passing in 2019, most of his films appeared on YouTube for a limited period of time. Prior to that, Soleil Ô (1967) was the only one you could easily track down online and about the extent of most people's exposure to his work. In 2019, West Indies (1979) appeared on Awa Konaté's (2021) invaluable CAS archive Excel sheet. The link delivered me to a brand new YouTube page, with English subtitles too, but it could not accommodate the scale, resonance and colour of Hondo's film. Its subsequent removal felt almost appropriate, though it is still available on This Light's digital library (Wilson 2021). Illusive deep cuts like his Les Bicots-Nègres, vos Voisins (1974) also briefly surfaced and disappeared again. As did Sarraounia (1986), before user Kilombavita (2021) generously put it on Archive.org for public viewing earlier this year. The opacity of the deep web made it possible for me to see Soleil Ô, West Indies and Sarraounia.

This information is worth foregrounding for a number of reasons. No analysis of Hondo's work, especially not one that concerns itself with image culture, would be complete without considering the present conditions of their exhibition and consumption. To ignore how blackness is trafficked and accumulated on the internet would be to misunderstand the cultural life of Hondo's filmography. Setting aside the value of public access these movies, their bootlegged distribution hews close to the exploitative circulation of black visual culture that has an established historical precedent. On the open-source bedlam of the internet, the unchecked seizure of black images from those who produce them continues along the same axes of appropriation (Dean 2016). My own consumption of Hondo's films mirrors the tipping scale between the hypervisibility and erasure of blackness in contemporary popular culture (Dean 2016). These conditions are of course also themes within the films themselves.

And I'd be remiss to lose sight of the films themselves in and amongst the cultural industry that surrounds them. The establishment does not necessarily contain or constrain the work and Hondo's cinema has always occupied a variety of subcultures and counterpublics (Sanogo 2015: 552). This study therefore aims to discern the multiple planes of vision reflected in the films of Med Hondo. Soleil Ô, West Indies and Sarraounia respond to three distinct environments within the Third French Empire, namely Paris, the Caribbean and Lougou respectively. Each context offers a unique visual problematic and the formal gambits deployed in response will be foregrounded. I am indebted as always to Fred Moten (2003)(2013) and Édouard Glissant (1989)(1990), who guide me through this reflection deeper into the infinity mirror. What I call black optics is an extension of the thesis put forward in Arthur Jafa's Love is the Message, the Message is Death (2016).

FIGURE 1: STILL FROM WEST INDIES (1979). MED HONDO.

In this cogent video work, Jafa lays the groundwork for the theorisation of image culture through Black Studies. I take up this line of inquiry, with Black Studies as first philosophy, to unpack what is seen and unseen in the films of Med Hondo.

What is shown in Hondo's work is always as important as what is not shown. Sarraounia, in particular, is animated by the tension between what Glissant (1990) calls transparency and opacity. Opacity is a theory of difference that promotes "subsistence within an irreducible singularity," (Glissant 1990: 190). It cuts against the notion that transparency, or the need to "measure your solidity with the ideal scale," is a requirement for the recognition of another (Glissant 1990: 190). Opacity is what is kept from the totalising view of Western thought. True to this form, Sarraounia is as much about the capture of the Chad Basin as it is about what cannot be captured by the colonial gaze. Of the three films in question, it is perhaps the most faithful to historical realism and thereby offers a stark vision of the Voulet-Chanoine Mission (VCM) of 1898. The military expedition led by Paul Voulet and Julien Chanoine was a project of unearthing all that needed to be consolidated W"under French protection." The film therefore charts the splaying open of a landscape to reveal everything that is at least physically there for the colonial purview to capture. Jean-Roger Milo plays Captain Voulet with remorseless transparency. His portrayal of French imperial delirium is awful and undeniable. Just when you think the character is entirely spent, Milo reaches deeper into a seemingly endless well of depravity. Voulet is in search of his own personal Eldorado. The archetypal colonial fetish object, which he refers to as "the witch's treasure."

FIGURE 2: STILL FROM SARRANOUNIA (1986)

Guided by his own spiritual disquiet, Voulet leads the VCM troops into the domain of the Azna matriarchy and their high priestess Sarraounia. Faced with the imminent threat, Sarraounia (played by a resolute Aï Keïta) mobilises an effective counterinsurgency culminating

MED HONDO

in the historic Battle of Lougou. Across a number of sprawling set pieces, Hondo makes full use of his geographical canvas to stage the strategic movements of the Azna resistance. Once in the orbit of Sarraounia, the VCM is assailed by noxious sorcery and guerrilla strikes that ultimately compel their retreat. The Battle of Lougou was the death knell of the VCM and Voulet died soon after at the hands of his own troops. However, Hondo does not frame the events as a drama of military triumph, but instead as a testament to opacity in the face of imperial transparency. In her closing verse, addressed to the survivors of the VCM from various nations, Sarraounia declares that whoever wishes to enter the fold of the Azna is guaranteed the right to opacity (See Figure 2). She suggests a fugitive political structure in opposition to the panoptic capture of social life. “Your soul is your own responsibility,” she stresses, as an assurance that difference and anomaly may thrive in its singularity. The animist social fabric of the Azna nation was woven into the landscape across the imposed borders of colonial cartography. Their established relational ties could facilitate lines of flight and resistance that evaded Voulet’s vision.

Soleil Ô, in turn, recedes into the murky interior world of a man named The Visitor (Robert Liensol), but his experience as a black immigrant in 1960s Paris also blurs the distinction between inside and out. The film moves like a psychological thriller, but concerns anxiety at a political scale. It diagnoses a societal condition in relation to the psyche of its protagonist, but also aligns with what Denise Ferreira da Silva and Valentina Desideri have called the practice of Political Therapy (Ferreira da Silva & Desideri 2015: 3). The film refutes the frictionless separation of political and psychic, in order to contend with the deeper pathology of anti-blackness. As Hondo turns his gaze

inward, we encounter yet another dimension to the prism of black optics. One that relates across the Mediterranean to Kamala Ibrahim Ishaq and her fellow Crystalists in Khartoum, who embarked on "a project of a transparent crystal with no veils but an eternal depth," (Ishaq et al 1978: 1).

Glissant sees a similar interior depth reflected in the Atlantic ocean, but also in the work of Charles Baudelaire and his refusal of poetic self-mastery (Glissant 1990: 6, 24). Where his contemporaries collapsed the internal and external landscape into one continuous conquest ("inner space is as infinitely explorable as spaces of the earth"), Baudelaire saw a fathomless depth unveiled: the untold depth of Relation (Glissant 1990: 24). In all three films, Hondo is addressing a relational psyche, wherein individual wellbeing is bound up within the whole. In the words of Sarraounia, "Deserting the tyrants does you honour, and does honour to all black men." Hondo's gaze is at all times both inward and outward facing, drawing from a depth of experience that is uncontainable.

Then the inexorable scream. The climactic moment that is represented on the most widely circulated poster for Soleil Ô (See Figure 3). The "irreducible materiality" of Robert Liensol's scream heralds the famed Glissantian assertion that "din is discourse," (Glissant 1989: 123) (Moten 2003: 10). It is the same discourse of Willie Dixon's rock 'n roll music, which prefigured the fame of Led Zeppelin during the 1970s (Moten & Harney 2013). Dixon, for his part, "never got paid the way he was supposed to get paid," (Moten & Harney 2013: 152). He and Liensol bespeak the conditions of slaveness that even Marxism cannot contend with, in Moten's view (Moten 2003: 11-13). The scream is a "phonic propulsion, the ontological and historical priority of resistance to power and objection to subjection, the old-new thing, the freedom drive that animates black performances," (Moten 2003: 12). It is an utterance that cannot be unseen, but only suppressed. For what persists throughout the economic relations forged in the afterimage of slavery is the natal alienation and censure that Liensol's character is confronted with (Wilderson 2017: 8). His spiritual exhaustion by the end of the film is inarticulable. In Caribbean Discourse (1989: 124), Glissant concludes that "since speech was forbidden, slaves camouflaged the word under the provocative intensity of the scream." Soleil Ô depicts the inevitable rupture of discourse that claims equality of voice, but conceals that voice itself is conditional. The same lie that

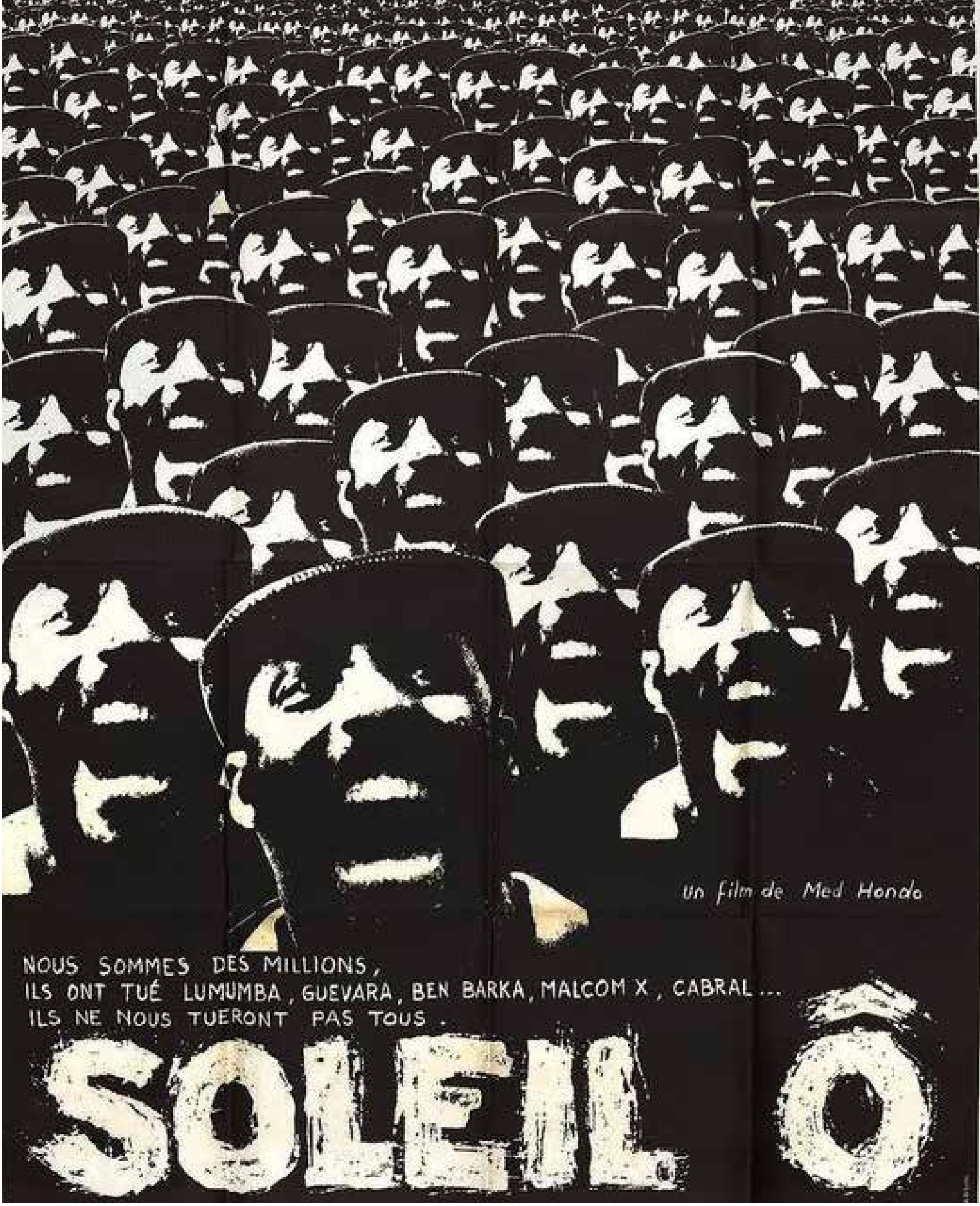


FIGURE 3: POSTER FOR SOLEIL O (1976). MED HONDO

paradesunder the banner of Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, as inscribed on the palatial set of West Indies.

The third film departs from Hondo's preceding work and the no-nonsense aesthetics commonly associated with so-called Third Cinema. Instead, West Indies takes the shape of a dazzling musical film. The influence of the theatre and black performance is already evident in Soleil Ô, but West Indies is decidedly brighter and confined to a single theatrical location. The stage design sets up an encounter between the hold of the slave ship and the public arena of colonial power, thus collapsing geo-and biopolitical terrains within the realm of spectacle. Hondo enacts what Otobong Nkanga (2014) has called "Shine," or the blinding "glitter image of colonial violence." In her installation titled In Pursuit of Bling (2014), Nkanga deploys the brilliance of Mica and other fluorescent minerals to activate alternative lines of sight. Her work makes it "impossible not to see the hole in the Green Hill (the site of a German mining operation in Namibia)," (Ferreira da Silva 2017). West Indies is engaged in a similar visual provocation. The opening credits roll over a remarkable tracking shot across a spacious factory floor, before settling on Hondo's monumental ark set (See Figure 4). In this introductory manoeuvre, the filmmaker situates his discourse within the relations of labour and capital that undergird the spectacle of Empire.

West Indies illuminates a seismic history. The plantation acts as the nexus from which numerous paths of violence and resistance emanate. The film also lampoons the idealisation of Europe, for which Soleil Ô can be seen as an effective quilting point. In the latter film, the illusory image of Paris is shown to be grounded in the same racial logic as the plantation system. The slave ship in West Indies represents the transatlantic route that also connects the Caribbean to Lougou. Hondo draws out the historical trajectories of black life during the time of colonialism and ties them into a unified relational critique. The radical clarity of his vision is paired with and bolstered by a consistently unruly imagination. Throughout his life, Hondo remained an enigmatic artist whose critical inquiry operated at a diversity of scales. (In later years, for instance, he receded from view to voice the French dub of Donkey in the Shrek series). Above all, his images represent a decisive cut. The radicality of his work lies in its ability to not only expand but also disrupt our view of the world. By theorising the world through black performance, he is able to embolden the backbreaking myth it

is founded upon. Seen through the lens of black optics, the myth of Empire can be traced back to the film sheet that captures its negative image.

I am left with these images in mind, but also easily distracted by others. Midst the outflow of an image economy that is almost inevitably framed by what Ngwarsungu Chiwengo (2007: 24) calls the Western screen that renders subjectivity.

FIGURE 4: PRODUCTION IMAGE ON THE SET OF WEST INDIES (1979). MED HONDO.

Hondo's films are not exempt from this reality, but they work against the grain of the image, perhaps in search of Arthur Jafa's "black visual intonation," (Jafa in Omotosho 2018). The idea, for Jafa, is to visualise the cadence of black music in a hybrid form that is free from scale of cinema. The fault is in medium, or rather the category, to his mind. The cinema is implicated in rendering the world as we know it, but perhaps in another world, our images could move otherwise. Similarly, in a letter written to a secret society of utopian architects following WWI, Bruno Taut (1985) inquired, "If architecture had to rise from the ashes, could it not do so as a crystal?" His musings at the time were unsullied by the formal strictures of reality and seem far removed from Hondo's reckoning with the material violence of anti-blackness, but what is shared is an outright refusal of this world. Only then might we be able to imagine what could come into being after its end. In the dizzying final image of West Indies (one of the great movie wonders in my opinion), the image is spun out beyond recognition. As if the silver halide in the celluloid film stock is tossed back into suspension and the history of images turns to liquid crystal. You know, "the old-new thing."

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WATER-BREA

K-TREADMILL

Nobukho Nqaba and Rory Emmett

Location: The Breakwater Treadmill (site) housed on UCT's Graduate School of Business (GSB) campus

Dress code: Formal, black suit and black dress, wearing face masks

Props: Time-keeping device, 2 x 500ml water bottles, 2 x skipping ropes, ball of wool, easel, watercolour paints and brushes, watercolour board, crates, needle and thread, container for water.

Performers: Nobukho Nqaba and Rory Emmett

Photographer: Jean Claude Nsabimana

Action: Repeating the same action over and over again as a meditation on the loaded history of the Breakwater Treadmill. Keeping to 55-minute intervals of labour, this performance was initially conceptualized as an endurance piece. The 'labour' was initially to take the form of preparing and painting/repainting the wooden beams of the treadmill in its existing colour whilst remaining silent as a form of mediation and mourning. After encountering some red tape (due to the fact that the treadmill now exists as a heritage site), the action was subsequently tweaked to speak to our individual artistic processes/media. Warm up exercises to be done first, 5 sets of 5 repetitions for each of the exercises as a warm up for the work ahead.

History of the Breakwater Treadmill as written on the board next to it:

“Convicts who caused trouble could be put in solitary confinement or sentenced to hours of labour on the treadmill. For 55 minutes in every hour, a convict would hang on to an overheard bar while his feet kept the treadmill going at a steady pace. If he slacked off, the treads would crack him on the shins till the blood ran....
Today the treadmill sits next to solitary confinement cells.”


021-551 0085

Rationale/ Idea(s) behind this performance piece:

This work comes as a response to theoretical inquiries made in this course which speak to the world-making violence of slavery. The intervention is a direct reference to spaces/sites in Cape Town that hold fraught reminders of colonial legacies. Our investigation is based on past and present ideas of power relations and commodified labour as a form of lived experience and symbolic violence. We envisaged this particular kind of collaboration as it lends itself to influential ideas for us... namely Édouard Glissant's thinking in his text Poetics of Relation (Glissant & Wing, 2010), embracing interconnectedness and a sense of shared historical traumas, especially the writer's conceptions of a right to opacity in how we maintain a sense of individual identity whilst remaining 'masked' simultaneously. A sense of mystery and illegibility is therefore sustained in relation to each other as well as the viewer's gaze. Recognizing the real and painful history of slavery and punishment inflicted on slaves at the Cape, the performance explores ideas of:

Access - as we have direct access to this space as UCT students ourselves.

Resistance - as we are questioning the current status quo by assessing how far we've come since 'emancipation'.

Privilege - as a form of imaginative escapism and commemoration of those who have come before us.

Human Capital - as we attempt to keep our bodies mechanically 'fit' for labour.

(In)visibility - what is seen versus what is unseen and what remains after the fact.

It has been many years since slavery ended, and only a few years after apartheid.

Although it may seem easy for some to simply 'move on', slavery's residue is still prevalent in today's society and supposedly 'free' world. The exploitation and violence inflicted on the black body, whether visible or psychological, continues to plague how we navigate spaces that have problematic histories. Modern day slavery is often times silent, and opaque with sirens of race, class and social status. These are shown in how the social stratum is designed, where people work, what they wear to work etc. Their everyday life is a repetitive and performative occurrence that benefits a system that is designed to keep them invisible.

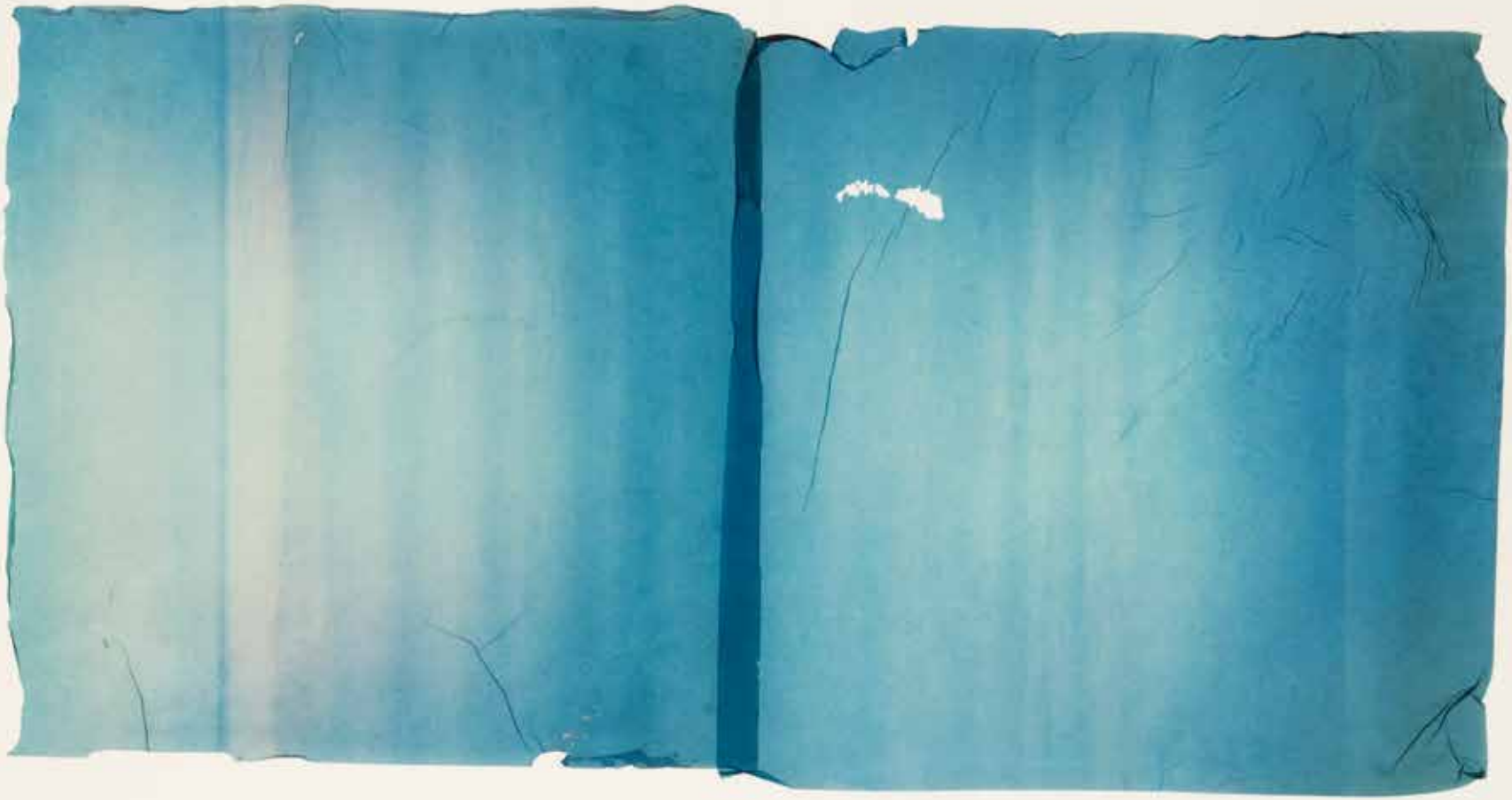
In the performance, perceptions of status and class are demarcated through fashioned bodies whereby the garment becomes a signifier of presence and utility. Our visual response to these themes and idioms will hopefully rupture these normalized power relations and perceptions of tenuous forms of pride amongst the working class whilst remaining self-reflexive of our positionality and privilege in being able to 'perform' or 're-produce' images of these lived realities – however familiar they are to us. Therefore, through this poetic and symbolic intervention we will create a new set of visual encryptions which could be read through multiple experiential or theoretical lenses as we contribute to these ongoing contemporary realities via this dormant and derelict torture devise - The Breakwater Treadmill.

Reference: Glissant, É and Wing, B (2010). Poetics of Relation. University of Michigan Press.

SOUTH ATLANTIC, 2 VIEWS.

Vanessa Cowling

South Atlantic, 2 views.
Polaroid Emulsion Lifts onto cotton paper.
20x32cm and 20x18cm



UNCERTAIN EVIDENCE

Thinking with the Unresolvable Questions in Santu Mofokeng's The Black Photo Album / Look at Me: 1890-1950

Dale Washkansky

Santu Mofokeng, a renowned South African photographer, self-initiated the task of searching townships and remote locations across the country for the historical family portraits compiled in the publication The Black Photo Album / Look at Me: 1890-1950 (2013). Some families treasured these photographs of their deceased relatives and prominently displayed them. “Most often,” Mofokeng recounts, “they lie hidden to rot through neglect in kists, cupboards, carboard boxes, and plastic bags” (2013:n.p.). Undeniably, many such photographs have been lost over time. These photographs present a moment in South Africa, which historian James T. Campbell describes as “a specific historical catastrophe” (2013:n.p.). Prior to the racial policies of apartheid, a minority of black South Africans gained short-lived economic upward mobility.

Mofokeng explains:

> These are images that urban black working- and middle-class families had commissioned, requested or tacitly sanctioned … Painterly in style, most of them may be fiction, a creation of the artist insofar as the setting, the props, the clothing, or the pose are concerned. Nonetheless there is no evidence of coercion. When we look at these images we believe them, for they tell us a little about how these people imagined themselves. We see these images in the terms determined by the subjects themselves, for they have made them their own (2013:n.p.).

Tamar Garb elucidates the significance of this historic moment when studio portraiture was primarily accessible to white patrons. She states that, "by the late nineteenth century urban back elite has appropriated the pose and posture of Victorian respectability for themselves and the studio became a powerful site for the refusal of ethnic essentialism that circumscribed images of Africans" (2011:64). These portraits oppose the dominant Western image repertoire of black people during this time, a time when, Mofokeng states:

> black people were frequently depicted in the same visual language as flora and fauna, represented as if in their natural habit for the collectors of natural history. Invariably they were relegated to the lower orders of the species, especially on those occasions when they were depicted as belonging to the 'great family of man.' Designated Natives: a discrete group who were considered in a sense citizen, but not altogether citizens. The images so made have formed a part in the schemes of authoritative knowledge on the Natives, serving no small part in the subjection of those populations to imperial power (2013:n.p.).

From the mid nineteenth century, shortly after its invention in Europe, the camera accompanied colonial expeditions to Africa. As such, "The history of photography in Africa", Campbell writes, "is inextricably entangled with the history of colonialism" (2013:n.p.). The camera did not merely document the colonisation of Africa, but participated in the colonisation of Africa. What we think photography is and does, is still entangled in how it participated in colonialization, which means

that it continues to collaborate in the afterlife of colonialism. “Africa”, Okwui Enwezor states, “has made for a fascinating and elusive subject, at once strange, intoxicating, carnal, primitive, wild, luminous”, which has, “yielded a huge archive of visual tropes about Africa that have persisted in the popular imagination” (2006:13). The results of which, Enwezor continues; “has acquired a quality of myth impossible to dislodge from the real” (2006:13). Photography was able to wield this power on account of the camera having been promulgated as a mechanical image-making device that supposedly produced objective records. Granted the certitude of facticity, the colonising camera assisted in the production of Africa as an object of knowledge. Colonial exploitation and violence were sanctioned by the emergence of new scientific disciplines. Photography was utilised to provide visual ‘evidence’ to validate their claims; complicit in granting credibility to the theorization of race – the hierarchical categorization and ontological essentialization of differences between people. Campbell elaborates, stating, “Like the photographs themselves, this language was black and white, with Africans and Europeans appearing as starkly different, incommensurable ‘races’– one benighted, backwards, and black, the other enlightened, progressive and white” (2013.n.p.).

The evidentiary is therefore by no means an innate characteristic of photography, but a claim that is embroiled in the violent dehumanisation of colonialism and racial discrimination. By debunking the postulation of mechanical neutrality, objectivity or transparency, photography emerges as ontologically indeterminate. There is no answer to the question: what is a photograph? On account of it never existing on its own, in order to understand what photography is, one has to question the relations within which it is situated that influence, and indeed constrain, what one sees and what one does not see. In light of this, we must look into the opaque shadows of the portraits in The Black Photo Album / Look at Me: 1890-1950 in order to interrogate what we think we see.

In compiling this book (and exhibitions of these images) Mofokeng scanned the original photographs, creating a digital archive of the found, domestic, familial, the named and the un-named. Mofokeng’s retrieval and conservation has enabled these photographs and the history they attest to, to enter the awareness of the broader public. However, this is also an archive of loss. Mofokeng palpably renders the poignancy of the irretrievable and the irreparable. He visualises

this loss with black empty pages that appear intermittently throughout the publication. Due to the repeated appearance of these black pages, the viewer is called upon to contemplate this emptiness; an archive interminably incomplete.

Mofokeng also employs pointed textual provocations that engender disruptive uncertainty. The text, printed white against the void of the black page, declares the photograph's failure to identify the sitter: Bishop Jacobus G. Xaba and his family? Who is this man? Extended family? This couple is unidentified. Perhaps most disconcertingly, the text occasionally directs this uncertainty towards the viewer and how one might interpret these photographs: Who is gazing? Are these images evidence of mental colonization or did they serve to challenge prevailing images of 'The African' in the western world? This question is repeated several times with slight variations: Did these images serve to challenge prevailing western perceptions of the African? Are these images evidence of mental colonialism? Do these images serve as testimony of mental colonialism?

By attaining upward economic mobility and the means for creating self-fashioning images, these families had to mimic the colonialists, adopting not only their garb, but their language and religion; renouncing their inherited traditions and ways of life. As a result, they experienced alienation from their black compatriots. Campbell claims that "educated Africans became objects of ridicule and contempt, pretenders to a status they could never own, like children preening in their parents'clothes" (2013:n.p.). Were these ill-fated failed performances a relinquishment of self, which rather than defy colonial representations of Africans, are re-appropriated by Western visual tropes, or, do they resist subjugation and subvert the scheme of the evidentiary? Alexandra Dodd proposes that "ultimately there is no answer. The pictures represent neither and both – capturing instead a sense of the irreducibly contradictory life worlds knotted together in conditions of estrangement" (2015:55). Likewise, Tina M. Campt states that Mofokeng

> insists that we see them 'in the terms determined by the subjects themselves.' Rather than dismissing them as evidence of mental colonisation, he presents them as expressions of both aspiration and capitulation to a regime in which their history positioned them in conflicted and contradictory ways (2017:63).

Viewing these images in the present, how are we to position ourselves in relation to the irreducible contradictions of history?

Martiniquan essayist, novelist and poet Édouard Glissant observes and explores how life is lived within this complex paradoxical space of neither-and-both. He discusses how Creole emerged from this space and became a means of covert communication by African slaves who worked on the sugar plantations of French colonialists. Creole developed from what Glissant terms counterpoetics or forced poetics, a strategy that, "exists where a need for expression confronts an inability to achieve expression", "created from the awareness of the opposition between a language that one uses and a form of expression that one needs" (1989:120 & 121). Creole was born from a necessary concession. "The alienated body of the slave," Glissant writes, "in the time of slavery, is in fact deprived, in an attempt at complete dispossession, of speech. Self-expression is not only forbidden, but impossible to envisage" (1989:122). The dispossession and severance from their former world was total. They were therefore compelled to resort to the master's language even though it was, Glissant states, "an unsuspected source of anguish" (1989:120).

The African slaves tactically dismantled the linguistic structures of French so that, Glissant states, "No one could translate the meaning of what seemed to be nothing but a shout ... So the meaning of a sentence is sometimes hidden in the accelerated nonsense created by scrambled sounds. But this nonsense does convey real meaning to which the master's ear cannot have access" (1989:124). However, despite the subversiveness of Ceola, Glissant claims that it

> falls short of its potential... to become a form of self-expression. Creole
> is also a concession made by the Other for his own purposes in his dealings with our world. We have seized this concession to use it for our own purposes... but having seized it does not make it into a means of self-expression, nor has our only advantage become a nation (1989:166-167).

The linguistic counterpoetics of Creole elucidates the ambivalences and necessary concessions that the families in these portraits had to negotiate. There was no visual language for Africans to create images by and for themselves. As viewers, the challenge is to sit within

the ambiguity to allow the nuances, complexities and paradoxical imaginings to emerge. However, concession is not submission. Campbell claims that whether or not these photographs are evidence of 'mental colonization, "they are evidence of assertion, of struggle. In commissioning portraits, these men and women were not merely creating mementos. They were staking claims to forms of identity and culture, to ways of being in the world, that the keepers of South Africa's racial order sought to reserve for whites" (2013:n.p.).

The ambivalences of counterpoetics do break down, or at the least disrupt, semiotic certitude, therefore calling into question the photographic evidentiary. The people we see in these photographs resist becoming objects of knowledge. They resist transparent inscription, vying for opacity: an aesthetic for self-determination. Opacity is, Glissant states, "Through which our anxiety to have full existence becomes part of the universal drama of cultural transformation: the creativity of marginalized peoples who today confront the ideal of transparent universality, imposed by the West, with secretive and multiple manifestations of Diversity" (1989:2). Mofokeng draws out the photographs' counterpoetics and in doing so, their socio-political significance, not only within their historical context, but how they might act today. He asks us to interrogate and critique present-day forms of self-imaging. To what extent do these historical images reflect the present? How are we responding and interpreting the transparent and opaque dimensions of the photographs? Has the opacity needed to achieve Diversity deconstructed the West's authorship of images of Africans? Who is gazing? This question that Mofokeng poses is as pertinent today as it was then. Campbell also asks us to reconsider these photographs in light of the socio-political and economic developments in democratic South Africa. "Whether the coming of majority rule has delivered a substantially better life to the majority of the nation's people is of considerable debate in South Africa today," he writes –

> but there is no question that it has greatly enhanced the prospects of some – primarily the urban, educated, middle-class Africans who stand as the modern counterparts of the 'school people' depicted in this book… Perhaps we should see them not as relics but as harbingers, forerunners of a modern black elite that is finally reaping the rewards promised long ago (2013:n.p.).

Campt proposes that family photographs are performative practices; "records of intentions", which reflect "who these individuals aspired to be; how they wanted to be seen; what they sought to represent and articulate through them; and what they attempted or intended to project and portray." (2012:6). Instead of apprehending these photographs as accurate records of the past, Campt suggests that viewers should "engage these images as sites of articulation and aspiration" (2012:7). Historical family photographs can provide insight into how the past imagined the future, or rather, what kind of future the past sought to actualize. Challenging the evidentiary, which prioritises and privileges the ocular as the mode of engagement, Campt suggests listening to images, which can, "give us access to the affective registers through which these images enunciate alternative accounts of their subjects." (2017:5) By listening we can position ourselves within a more intimate, personal, haptic and vulnerable relation with photographs. Instead of seeking knowledge, we can circumvent representational conventions and paradigms that precondition perception and tune in to the realm of possibility where we can encounter other ways of being.

It is common practice to regard history as that which explains the present; a stable reference point from which one can project a likely course for the future. But these photographs provide us with evidence that the past is still to come. Whatfutures can we imagine when we look for the imagined futures of the past?

The past continues to call out: Look at me.

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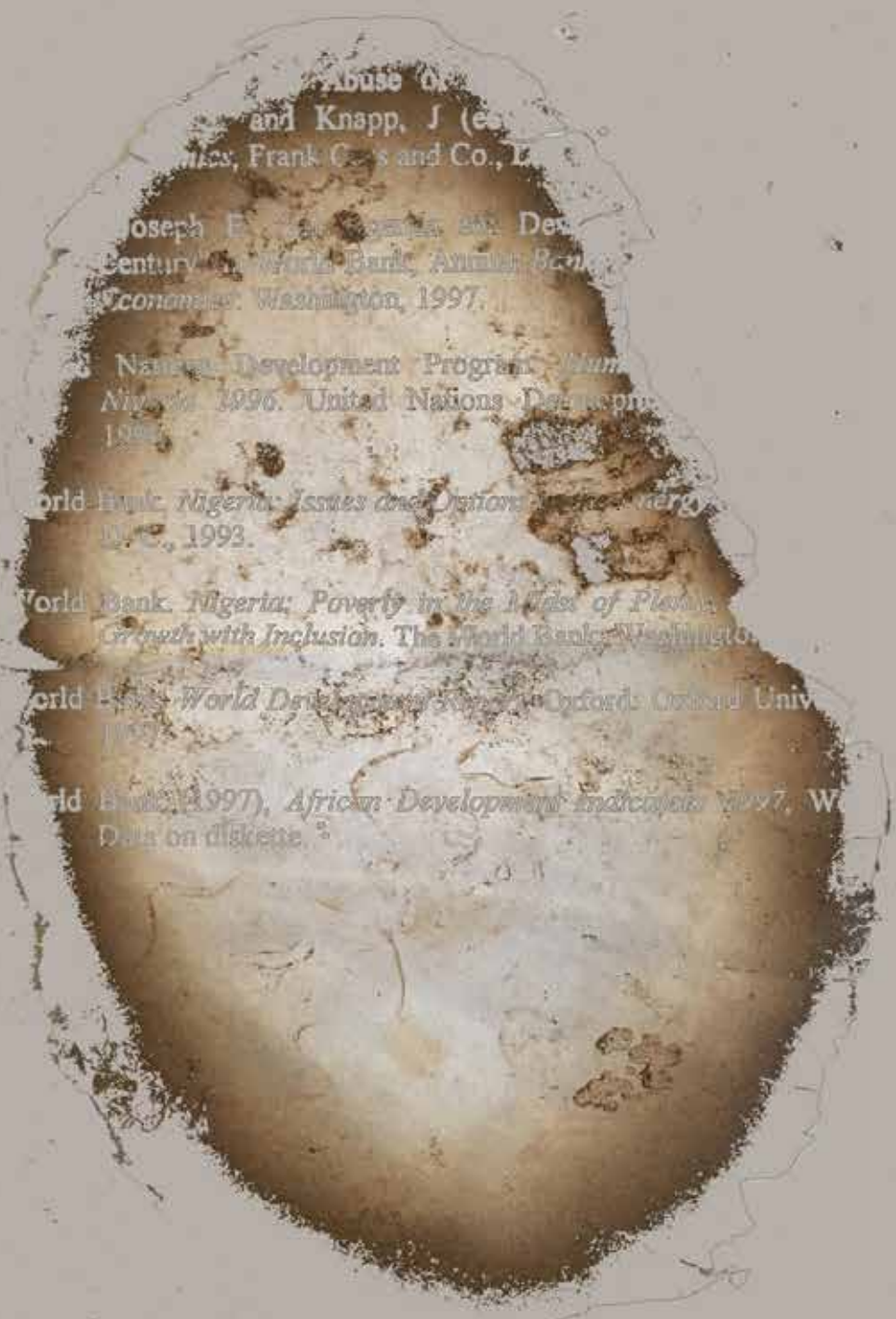
LESSONS OF HISTORY

Maia Lehr-Sacks



On Friday 25 June 2021, just over 2 months after the 2021 Table Mountain fire, I found several burnt pages blown into the bushes on UCT Upper campus near the Jagger Library.

The material that was lost in the fire that gutted the Jagger reading room that housed parts of the immense African studies collection and the African film collection has been a devastating loss for many reasons.

The historian and political analyst Somadoda Fikeni spoke about the importance of these archives because the "African continent, which has suffered several series of conquests, has been struggling to reconstruct its own history" and that "therefore, any special collection that is frail, no longer available, or no longer printed very often tends to be priceless in terms of its heritage value and in terms of the knowledge project."

UCT academic Shannon Morreira says that the burning of any part of a library is a tragedy because one loses voices from the past that may provide alternative histories. Morreira points out how this is particularly pertinent to countries like South Africa with "fraught and contested histories" that "have, for centuries, been told from a particular vantage point."

According to Ujala Satgoor, executive director of the University of Cape Town's Libraries, the Jagger library was the centre point of UCT's special collections. Satgoor also said that only some material had been stored digitally and that because these archives are incredibly vast, despite what may be salvaged there will still be a lot of invaluable material that is lost.

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AT THE INTERSECTION OF JUSTICE AND CONSTITUTION

Andrew Juries

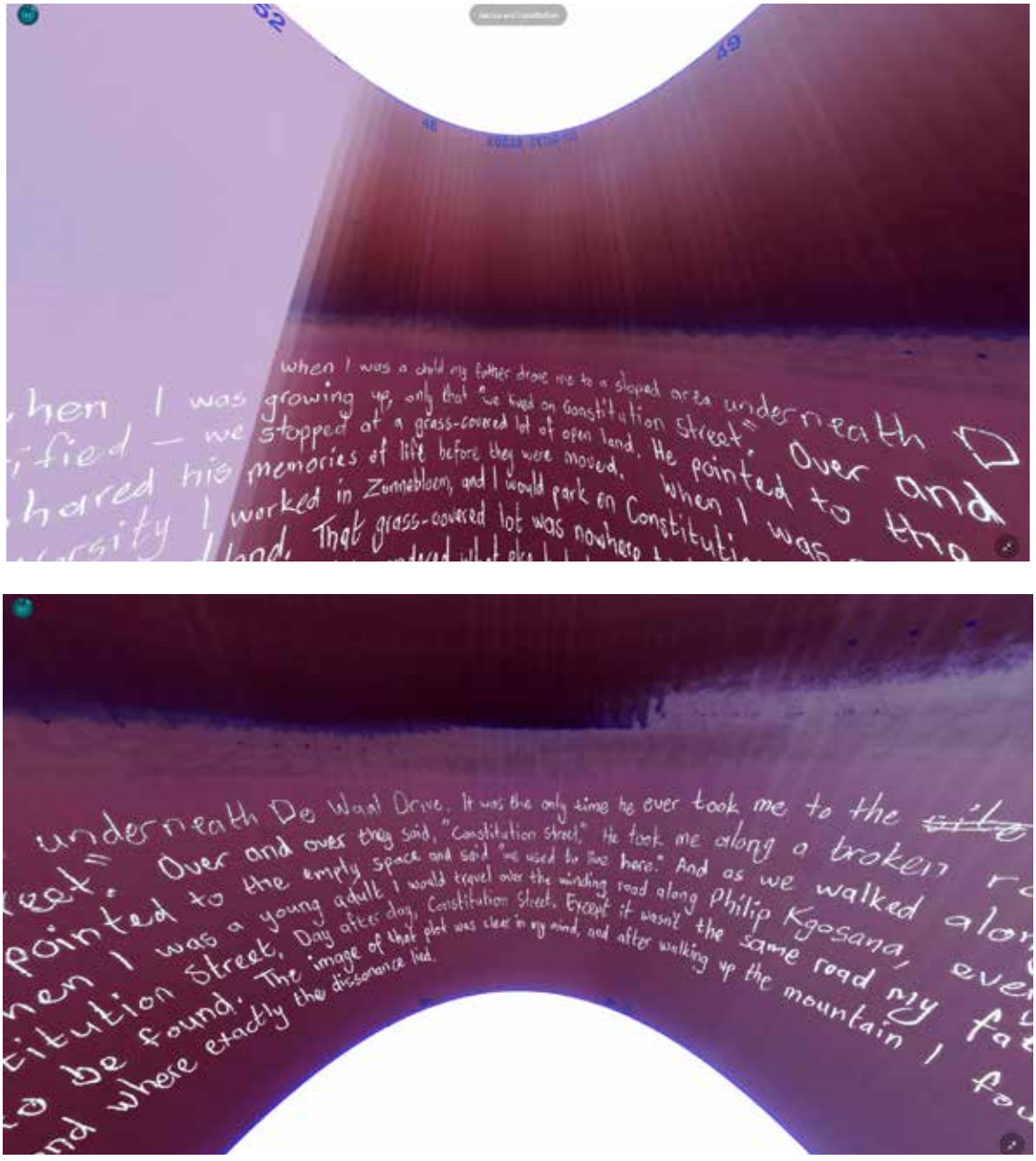
At the Intersection of Justice and Constitution (2021) is an interdisciplinary work that incorporates photography, writing and time-based endurance. It is presented here in two forms. First and foremost it is a 360° digital panorama that can be accessed using the link below. Second, it is presented as a flat image spanning the following two page-spreads.

The exposed image is a 360° view of District Six as seen from the now empty plot of land on which my paternal grandparents once lived. The image was recorded on photographic film using a mechanical slit-scan pinhole camera of my own design.

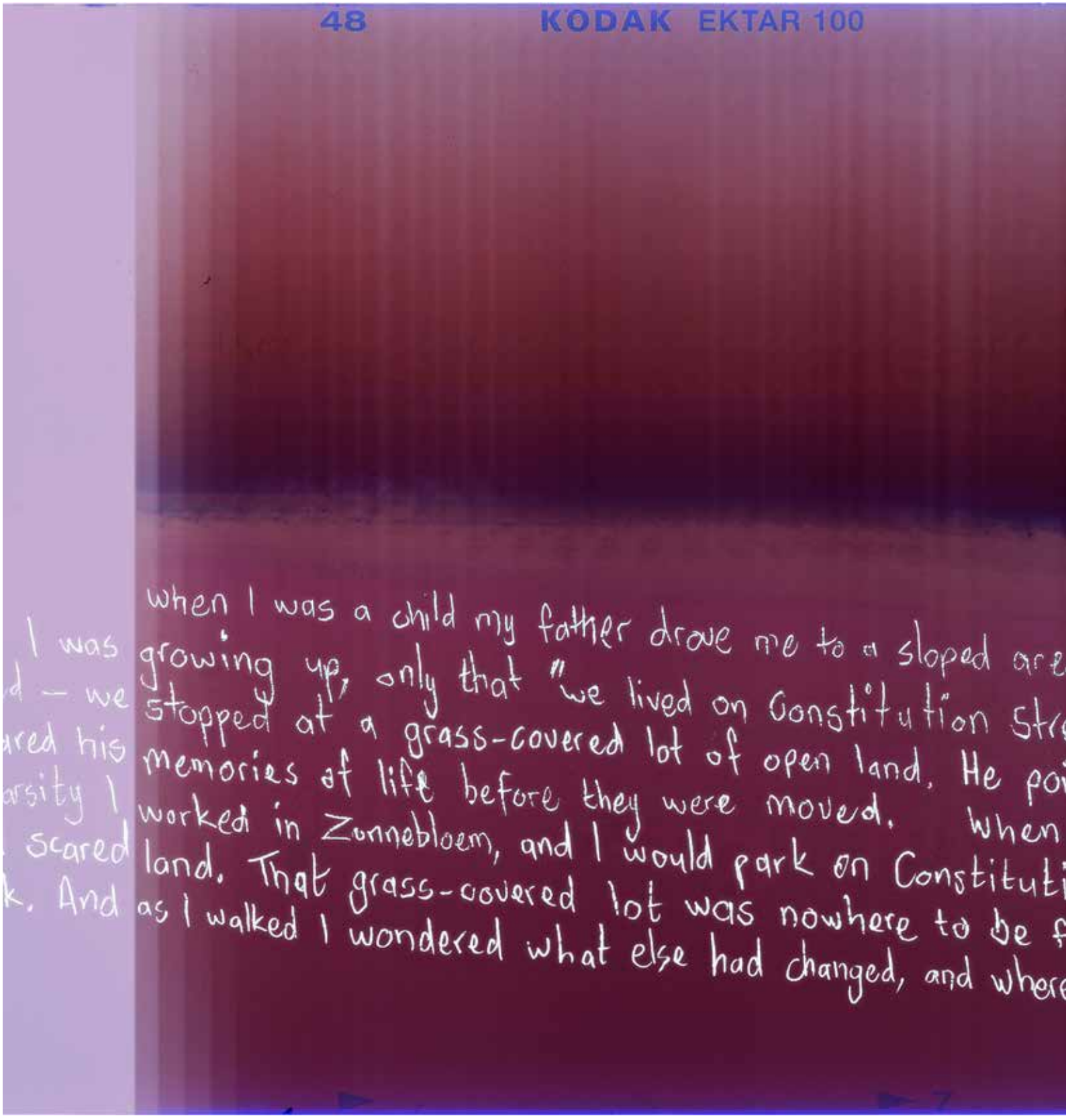
In order to expose the image I slowly rotated the camera through a 360-degree field of view in 2 degree increments at a rate of 12-36 seconds per 2 degrees. This resulted in a total exposure time of approximately one and a half hours. For me, this process of laboriously rotating both the camera and my own body around the full view of the area was an act of intentional presence and contemplative looking.

My thoughts on my own conception of this loaded place and how it has changed over my life-time is explored through writing, carefully structured in both visual and literary form. This involved carving tiny words into the film's surface with intense focus and care, and it too was an act of endurance and intentional crafting.

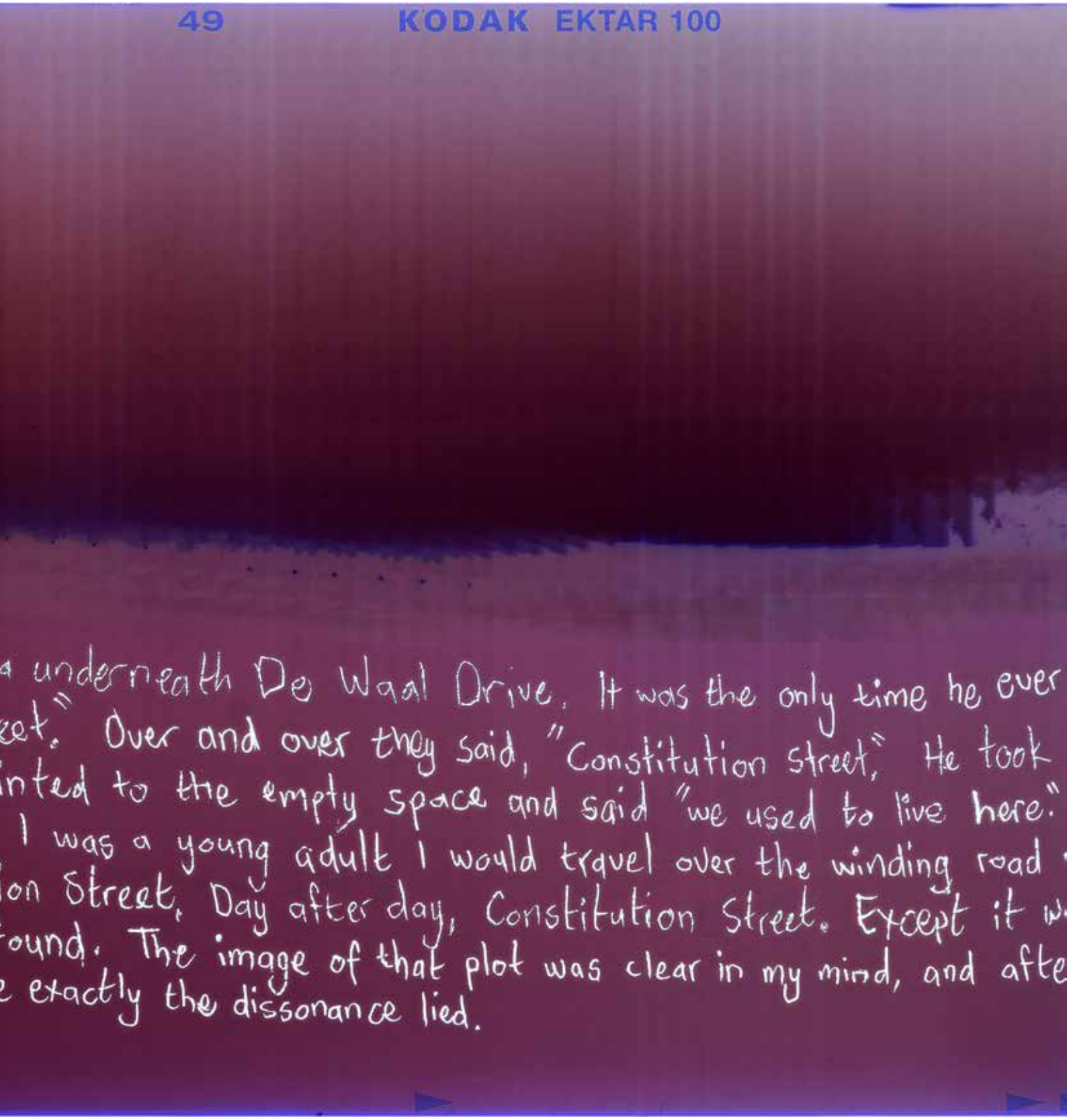
Link to 360° digital panorama:
https://panoraven.com/en/slider/ZuC8Uu8fly
Please view the panorama in full screen mode.

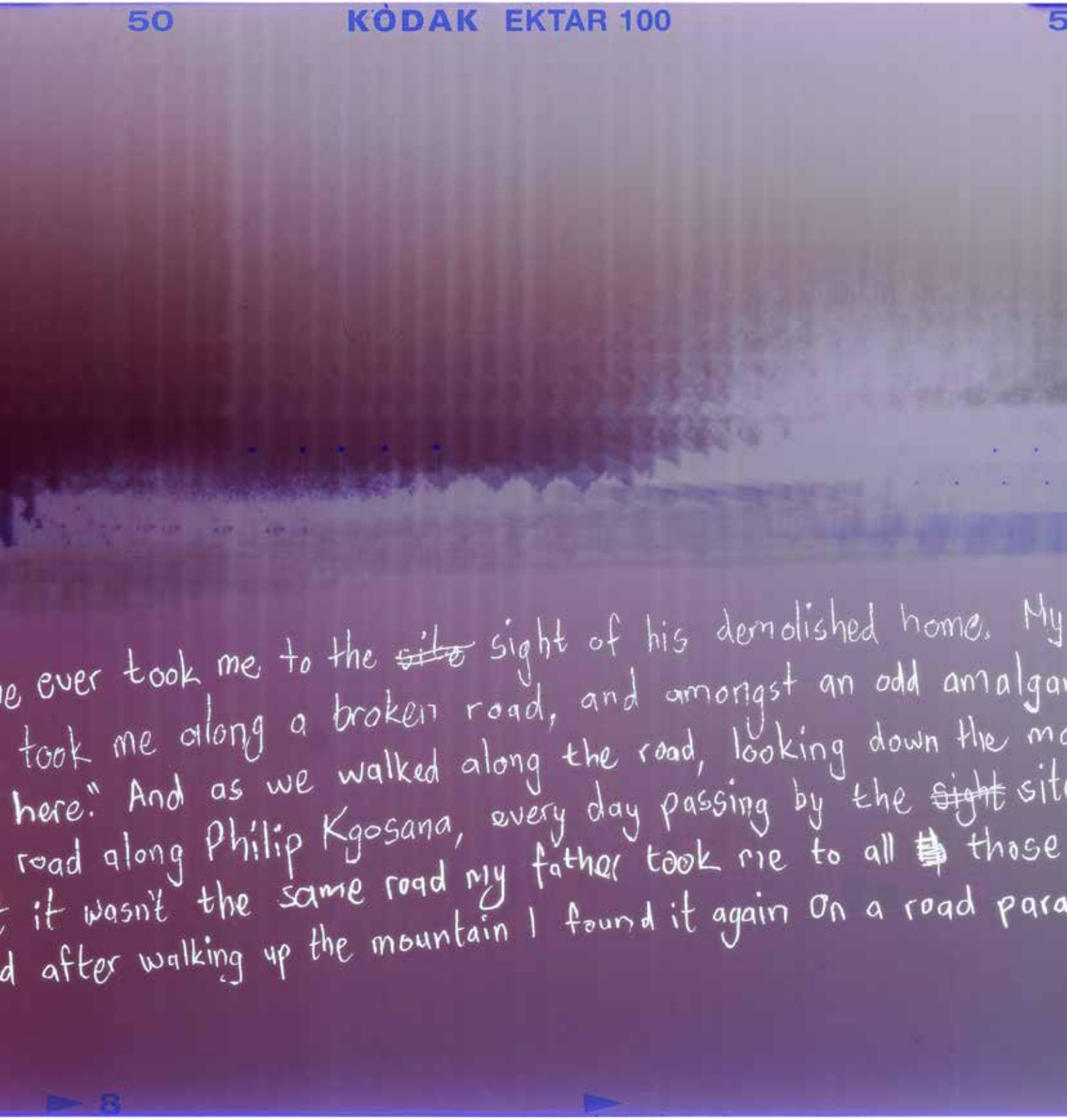


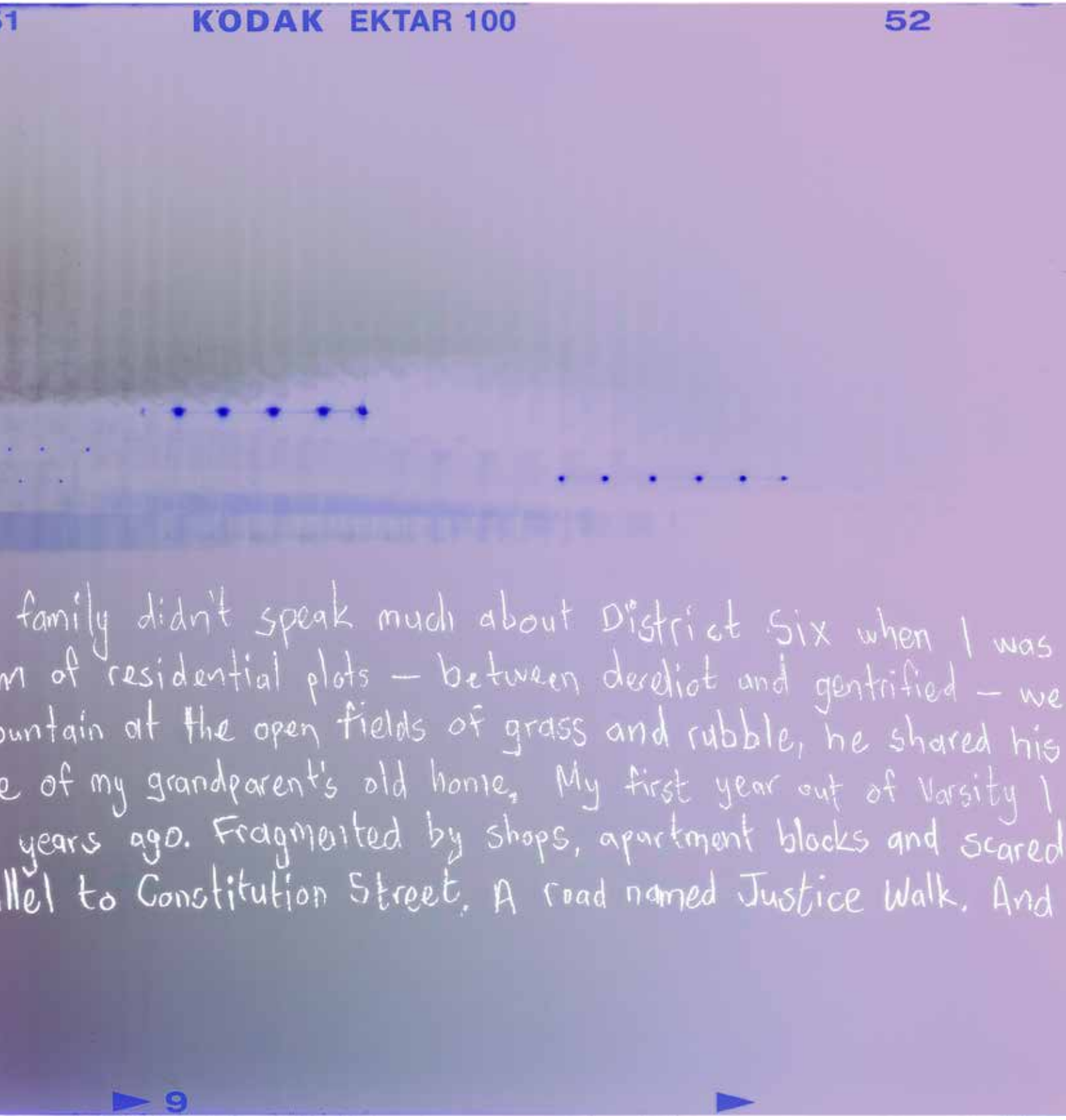
Views of **At the Intersection of Justice and Constitution**
2021
360° Digital panorama



when I was a child my father drove me to a sloped are
growing up, only that "we lived on Constitution Str
stopped at a grass-covered lot of open land. He poi
memories of life before they were moved. When
worked in Zonnebloem, and I would park on Constituti
land. That grass-covered lot was nowhere to be f
as I walked I wondered what else had changed, and where


49 KODAK EKTAR 100
underneath De Waal Drive. It was the only time he ever
eet." Over and over they said, "Constitution Street." He took
inted to the empty space and said "we used to live here."
I was a young adult I would travel over the winding road
ion Street. Day after day, Constitution Street. Except it w
round. The image of that plot was clear in my mind, and afte
e exactly the dissonance lied.


50 KODAK EKTAR 100
e ever took me to the ~~site~~ sight of his demolished home. My
took me along a broken road, and amongst an odd amalga
here." And as we walked along the road, looking down the ma
road along Philip Kgosana, every day passing by the ~~sight~~ site
it wasn't the same road my father took me to all those
d after walking up the mountain I found it again On a road para


51
KODAK EKTAR 100
52
family didn't speak much about District Six when I was
n of residential plots – between derelict and gentrified – we
ountain at the open fields of grass and rubble, he shared his
e of my grandparent's old home. My first year out of Varsity I
years ago. Fragmented by shops, apartment blocks and scared
llel to Constitution Street. A road named Justice Walk. And
9

A LUTA CONTINUA

The Struggle Continues

Jean Claude Nsabimana

A luta continua (which means the struggles continues in Portuguese) is a series of 5 images I created as a contribution towards the final publication of the Posts & Cosmologies of Black Studies seminars. These images named: 1619 (the captive), 1831(the revolt), 1863 (emancipation proclamation), 1877 (rebirth of white supremacy), and the present, were created in response to Afro-pessimism readings, Afro-pessimism: An introduction (2017). These images reflect mainly on slavery as a relation of property, slave as an object, a commodity to be bought, used, sold, and exchanged. The slave as a being for the captor and socially dead, and the white as a master and human. In this series I incorporated the continuing systematic oppression/ exploitation, what I call modern slavery.

FIGURE 1. 1619 (THE CAPTIVE). A LUTA CONTINUA. CAPE TOWN. 2021

FIGURE 2. 1831 (THE REVOLT), A LUTA CONTINUA, CAPE TOWN, 2021

FIGURE 3. 1863 (EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION), A LUTA CONTINUA, CAPE TOWN, 2021

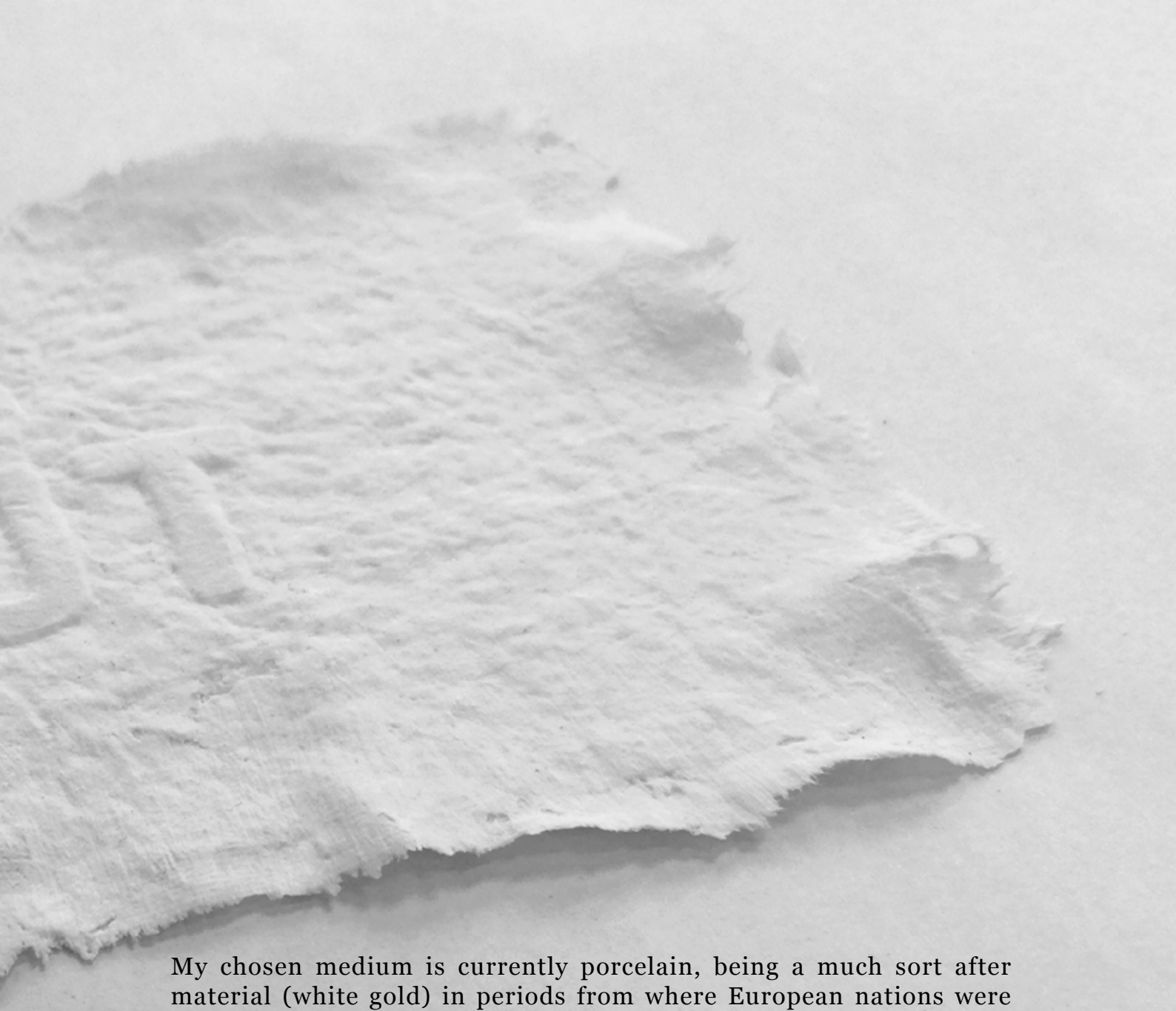
FIGURE 4. 1877 (REBIRTH OF WHITE SUPREMACY), A LUTA CONTINUA, CAPE TOWN, 2021

FIGURE 5. THE PRESENT, A LUTA CONTINUA, CAPE TOWN, 2021

BUT

Laurel Holmes

In trying to discuss the issue of white supremacy and whiteness within certain of my own social circles, the ‘wall’ that the discussion of dismantling white supremacy constantly refers to is becoming more apparent. “Decolonisation in a colonial country... is that even possible?” Vusumzi Nkomo. The complexity of the issues we are faced with are denied and mostly simplified by many whites.



My chosen medium is currently porcelain, being a much sort after material (white gold) in periods from where European nations were ‘exploring/colonising’ the world and bringing back their finds, often stolen, seems relevant in this case. Only the wealthy could afford porcelain, thus excluding ownership by the majority.

Porcelain paper clay in this piece, despite being extremely thin and fragile, exhibits a remarkable strength to it. The highly defensive word ‘but’ is embedded in the clay and speaks to the insidiousness of a colonial ‘DNA’ and how deeply it is entrenched in our South African white culture. The fragility of the material belies how weighty the issue of decolonisation is for black cultures, and the refusal to acknowledge this weight, is then glossed over by the majority of the white community.The enormity of a transition becomes so complex and from this angle, seems impossible.

ARRIVING AT THE END OF THE WORLD

A Risky Business

Oskar Keogh

Something I am only beginning to understand is that language fails. English in particular, which now exists as an immaculate conception of Western epistemology, tends towards collusion. It can become increasingly contrary, and bash its head against all kinds of seminal knowledge that predates its formation (it's doing it already, can you feel it?). Certainly, this knowledge can be grasped with these words, but I think arriving at it requires reverential stillness. The arrival I am imagining here is not at a physical or even psychic destination. I see it as an embodied hum ringing out from time immemorial to the much-talked-about end of the world.

What this body of text seeks to engage with, is my relation to a broader "Poetics of Relation" as outlined by Édouard Glissant. My engagement operates on a knifeedge balance, because my whiteness wields an inherent potential for harm. What I intend to outline is how to proceed with this fatal flaw, in a living state of hamartia. In doing so, it must be said that I am not seeking out a state of transcendence or absolution, quite the opposite. If I had to constrain this chimerical endeavour to one principle, it might be that the process might lead to greater permeability.

Now I will begin poking and prodding at what I mean with greater specificity and daring. The intellectual endeavour of unpacking these beating hearts will always feel like an operation, a dissection.

In the "Poetics of Relation", Édouard Glissant speaks of "opacity" as a quality that saves one from being defined, so that the limits of one's personhood are not so easily reduced to the "transparent" by another (2010:189). The quality of 'opaqueness' signifies a metaphysical or spiritual boundary against a Western ontology, which is a doctrine that proudly proclaims, "I admit you into existence, within my system. I create you afresh" (Glissant, 2010:190). It is through this process of transmutation that the boundaries of the soul are transgressed and desecrated, so that the subject is finally rendered 'transparent'. This transparent vision does not refer to seeing someone for who they are, it is a kind of liquidation and modelling of their perceived character into a prejudiced placeholder.

I imagine opacity enshrining the transparent in a cloudy sanctuary. A protective spell of secrecy.
When I first encountered Glissant's text, I caught myself wanting to

become opaque. To stake my claim in what I understood as a boundless, mythopoeic realm of irreducibility. However, I soon realized this was not my path forward, as Glissant challenged my intuition. He revealed my understanding to be a conflation of "opacity" with "obscurity". Wherein that which is seen as obscure is inextricably "accompanied by exclusion and whose transparency is aimed at 'grasping'" (2010:191). This inclination to grasp is animated by my whiteness, and my understanding of these terms is inevitably filtered through what George Yancy calls "the white gaze" (2012:165). This gaze, therefore, limits my cognition, but moreover locates itself in an entirely different realm, that of the "opaque white racist" (Yancy, 2012:168). These dual embodiments of opacity I think are a key to uncovering the limits to which the "Poetics of Relation" might illuminate, with its inherent brightness, an imagined path to a collective, embodied arrival.

I feel myself tripping over my feet as I try to run down the path. I'm seriously getting ahead of myself.

Yancy challenges whites to tarry with "the unfinished present" (2012:158). As I understand it, this references an inclination of whites to reach into the intangible future as a means to avoid inhabiting their whiteness in its violent totality. This is not only a tactic of alleviating responsibility, but it deprives whites of "risking fundamental transformation through a radical act of exposure" (Yancy, 2012:157). Without risking honest exposure to the 'Other', there is only a retreat into the opaqueness of the white racist 'Self'. In this configuration, exposure requires embodiment, while opacity heralds the alignment of whiteness to abstract Spectrality (Yancy, 2012:161). Whites have become bodiless spectres so as to move through the world unmarked, and enshrine our collective delusion of innocence.

"Whites who give the impression that they were born from the head of a god, as Athena was born from the head of Zeus." - George Yancy (2012)

Glissant thoroughly examines the nature and radical possibilities of existing in the Self/Other dichotomy through the Deleuzian rhizomatic structure (2010:11). I have come to understand the whites should, however, reconsider surreptitiously locating ourselves in this enmeshed root matrix. Tiffany Lethabo King says it best in "Otherwise Worlds", where she exposes whiteness's " 'new' way of encountering the human

and nonhuman material world as fundamentally interconnected is only possible through the murder of Indigenous and Black people" (2020:58). This speaks to a whiteness that does not know its own limits. It obfuscates where its boundaries lie, precisely because they have been untethered from physicality. This is where a white's faux self-discovery comes at the cost of black and indigenous people's emotional and intellectual labour.

This is where texts like the "Capitalism and Schizophrenia" project become a hindrance to progress. Because they have an irrefutable obscurity about them. They exist in the volatile realm of white opacity where excitable critical engagement can all-too-easily slip into the appropriation and consumption black theory and struggles. As Frank Wilderson cautions, "there's a lot of interest in Afropessimism, and that is not always a good thing" (2020:62). What is born out of a purely intellectual commitment to the lives of others will always be parasitic. Heeding this warning then, requires the firm containment of whiteness, and disavowal of its trespasses. This should exist as a prerequisite before relational progress can be made in good faith.

"We're on a road to nowhere
Come on inside
Takin' that ride to nowhere
We'll take that ride"
- Talking Heads

We are progressing along a road, and the destination is not simply unknown, but nowhere. As I understand it, in this historical moment upon moments, the destination can only be understood and located in where and what it is not. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney herald this as "the path to the wild beyond", one that is "paved with refusal" (2013:8). Whiteness is however still in the process of reckoning how to embody this "refusal". We are still not effectively undermining our self-imposed Manichean divide that favours virtue signalling above honesty. Embodying refusal allows whiteness not to exist as "sites of complete self-possession but, rather, sites of dispossession" (Yancy, 2012:165). True resistance and insurgency on the part of whiteness hinges on the recognition that the path of the "Self" and the "Other" are not just concurrent but fatally interconnected.

"The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's fucked up for us. I don't need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know" (Moten, 2013:140).

The coalition, and the terms by which it must exist, that Harvey and Moten are referencing could not be put more plainly. It cannot be galvanised by vacant ascriptions of 'allyship' or what Frank B. Wilderson calls, "The Ruse of Analogy" (2010:35). Because to adhere to the ruse, is to enter into an agreement that the world and all its people can only exist through being analogous to whiteness. Whites are at home, in the bed of a state-sanctioned domesticity, and the "ruse" is one of the stories we tell ourselves in order sleep soundly at night. The coalition challenges this reality, it roots itself in radical alternatives, one of which being the potential of "hapticality". Hapticality, a term coined by Moten and Harvey, is described as "the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you, this feel of the shipped is not regulated" (2013:98). The term is impossible to pin down in its entirety, precisely because it is a kind of love. It is love that does not fall prey to platitudes of togetherness and notions of compromise. A love that whiteness cannot find any purchase on, because feeling at such depths evades regulation.

This notion of the "shipped", as I understand it, relates to those who were enslaved and forced to endure the Middle Passage. How in the moment of enslavement, the idea of blackness was born in what Glissant cites as "a womb abyss" (2010:5). Where the birth of race was

conceived in an abyss of suffering. This image of a birth into death articulates much of the continued vibration of Afropessimism. I now know that the birth/death of blackness was only achievable through the simultaneous creation of whiteness in that terrible womb, this marks their fatal connection. The "relation" that was conceived, through absolute violence. Only in locating and embodying the identity of whiteness in this ceaseless moment of horror, can its echoing iterations be honestly resisted.

Glissant reaffirms the nature of relation as being one of this embodiment in saying that "one does not first enter Relation, as one might enter a religion. One does not first conceive of it the way we have expected to conceive of Being" (2010:172). In this way, Relation and its poetics refuse to exist, as religion sometimes does, as a self-flagellatory thought experiment in the hive mind of whiteness. "Relation" cannot be ideologically constructed, it must be lived. Whiteness will remain yearning to render itself intangible, as long as it avoids reckoning with the very tangible effects its existence has on others. From where I'm standing, the route to the end seems like a generative paradox hurtling toward a nexus event. Full of impossible love, inescapable death, and useless words (this text is full of them). But bringing about the end of this world infinitely exceeds any 'risk' involved. I would not want to live a life through the panopticon projection I was raised on. I hope to rather enter state of becoming where the world passes through me, as I through it, in equal measure.

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QUESTIONING ANTHROPOCENE

A Letter to my Fellow White Environmentalists

Emme Pretorius

Dear Fellow White Environmentalist

I hope you are well in these unprecedented times? Of course, a continual worry about the state of the environment will always be present within our minds, but you're doing well aren't you? Sure, we have problems, especially in this pandemic, but we live in the age of the Anthropocene after all, we're in the age of human, aren't we? No species is thriving more than we are, sadly, I know. So you're well?

Ah, the age of human, interesting concept, is it not? It is quite easy for us, in our privileged white positions, to get swept away by this concept when it comes to our environmentalism. The Anthropocene rhetoric claims that we, the Anthropos, are the driving force behind environmental degradation and steady destruction. In this rhetoric then, we find ourselves as the culprits of this situation and accordingly it can be taken upon ourselves to create a solution. The serious among us as white environmentalists, more often than not, do act upon this conclusion. Every little contribution to the state of the planet will help, right?

An introspection comes with this action. Where in my life can I make a change to be more environmentally conscious? The answers naturally seem to lie within our consumerist tendencies. We begin to question the products we consume: food wrapped in plastic packaging, fruits and vegetables cultivated with pesticides and GMO seeds, overconsumption of animal products, chemicals in our cleaning products, toothpaste, shampoos and conditioners, the list is never ending. Accordingly we turn to alternatives: we start shopping at certain plastic free grocery shops, exclusively buy organic produce, become vegan and only buy natural, organic and biodegradable cleaning and beauty products (don't forget about the bamboo toothbrush!), as though this will change the state of the environment. Of course, we do know that these are merely minor efforts in the greater cause, but we follow this lifestyle so we know, at a minimum, we're doing everything we can do in our own lives. That is all we can do, right? Oh yes, and the climate march in front of parliament every so often.

What if I told you that it's not all we can do, that what we are doing actually falls into a trap of sorts? Strange, I know, so let me explain.

The Anthropocene theory, and its infiltration into environmental ideologies, setsout that the collective of humankind is at fault, but do we really believe that? We can definitely see how our daily actions and consumptions can contribute to the causes of climate change and environmental degradation, but that can't possibly be all there is to it? Should we really have to take out our wallets to live more sustainable lives? Not everyone can do that. It lies very comfortably within our historical privilege as white environmentalists to be able to afford these lifestyle changes. Have you heard of the term Green Capitalism before? This term explains the hidden agenda behind so much of what we as white environmentalists give in to. It is the making of sustainability and environmental consciousness an elite and trendy industry that can be capitalised on, and so it inevitably becomes a main purpose. Why else do we have to pay almost double for products that logically contain 'less'? Yes, there might be an entire economic reasoning behind the expensive nature of these products that goes beyond my understanding. This, however, does not take away from the fact that it is quite laughable that one must pay for sustainability. Additionally, what happens when an environmentalist cannot afford these 'green' products? Does that disqualify a person from being a serious environmentalist? Is it perhaps then, privileged to take part in the movement of environmental consciousness? According

to the system of green capitalism, perhaps. Can we then agree with the Anthropocene theory that collective humankind is at fault? Most certainly not.

This brings me to another thought I've been meaning to bring into our discussion about the Anthropocene rhetoric and our environmentalism: origins of these issues. By now, I believe it is clear to us that collective humanity cannot be blamed for the state of the planet. Those of us being able to comfortably invest in 'sustainable' 'green' lifestyles, the white and privileged amongst humanity's environmentally minded, fear a near future that might entail climate change and environmental destruction in our immediate settings, whilst the people that make no contribution to these crises are already facing devastating consequences.

Who is to blame then? Some theorists will find the answer to this question hidden in the issue of green capitalism, as the very system of capitalism itself. In the book Decolonizing Nature, T.J. Demos argues against the Anthropocene rhetoric with the theory that we are living in the geological epoch of the Capitalocene. I don't know how you feel about this theory, but it sits a little better with me than that of the Anthropocene. The Capitalocene then suggests that the entire economic system the majority of the world finds themselves in, the drive for capital, the centring of capital, of unending growth, is what has created (and continues to create) the state of the environment currently. If capital accumulation is at the centre of one's intentions, a care for the environment almost inevitably comes last.

While this makes a lot of sense, how did this system, this culprit, find its origin? Ah, this is where it becomes interesting. I would argue that this system was born in colonial ideation, don't you think? Or, at the very least, the system of colonialism is another culprit. How else can we explain the extensive environmental damage and negative impacts on communities in colonized nations? These issues most definitely have their roots, both subtly and explicitly, in colonialism and colonial thinking (think Niger Delta conflict and Marikana). Oh dear, here I go again. You know once I start on this topic I'm unable to stop. But you see the link, right? We really are living in the age of only SOME human. I might even go as far as saying the age of the white human in the environmental crisis' ties with the afterlife of colonization, capitalism and racism. Let me explain. There's this brilliant article that I read a while ago that I've been meaning to tell you about. It's called Racism

is Killing the Planet, by Hop Hopkins. In this article Hopkins states:

> "You can't have climate change without sacrifice zones, and you can't have sacrifice zones without disposable people, and you can't have disposable people without racism... We'll never stop climate change without ending white supremacy. "

Hopkins is arguing that there is a strong underlying tone of racism in actions of environmental destruction. Again, the case of Niger Delta can serve as an example. Shell had little issue with the state of pipelines, and frequently followed victim blaming for broken and exploded pipes, that has caused loss of lives and mass destruction of environments and livelihoods in the area. Consider this against the background of a Shell advertisement, as noted by Nnamdi, Gomba & Ugiomoh (2013) in the UK captioned: 'Would you protest if Shell ran a pipe through this countryside? They already have!' While people in the Niger Delta region were deemed 'disposable' and lives are frequently lost at the hands of Shell, those in the UK aren't even aware that a Shell oil pipeline is present. This is just one example of how closely related racism and environmental exploitation is (and the ties to colonialism). The fact for us as white environmentalists then comes to light:

We can't be environmentalists without being actively anti-racist as well.

We really are living in the age of SOME human, where we as white environmentalists are all too comfortable in our blissfull states filled with bamboo toothbrushes and organic avocados.

Anyway, I'm looking forward to hearing back from you.

I hope you're well.

Actually, I know we're well.

Best wishes,
Emme

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SITTING UPON TO MONUMENTS

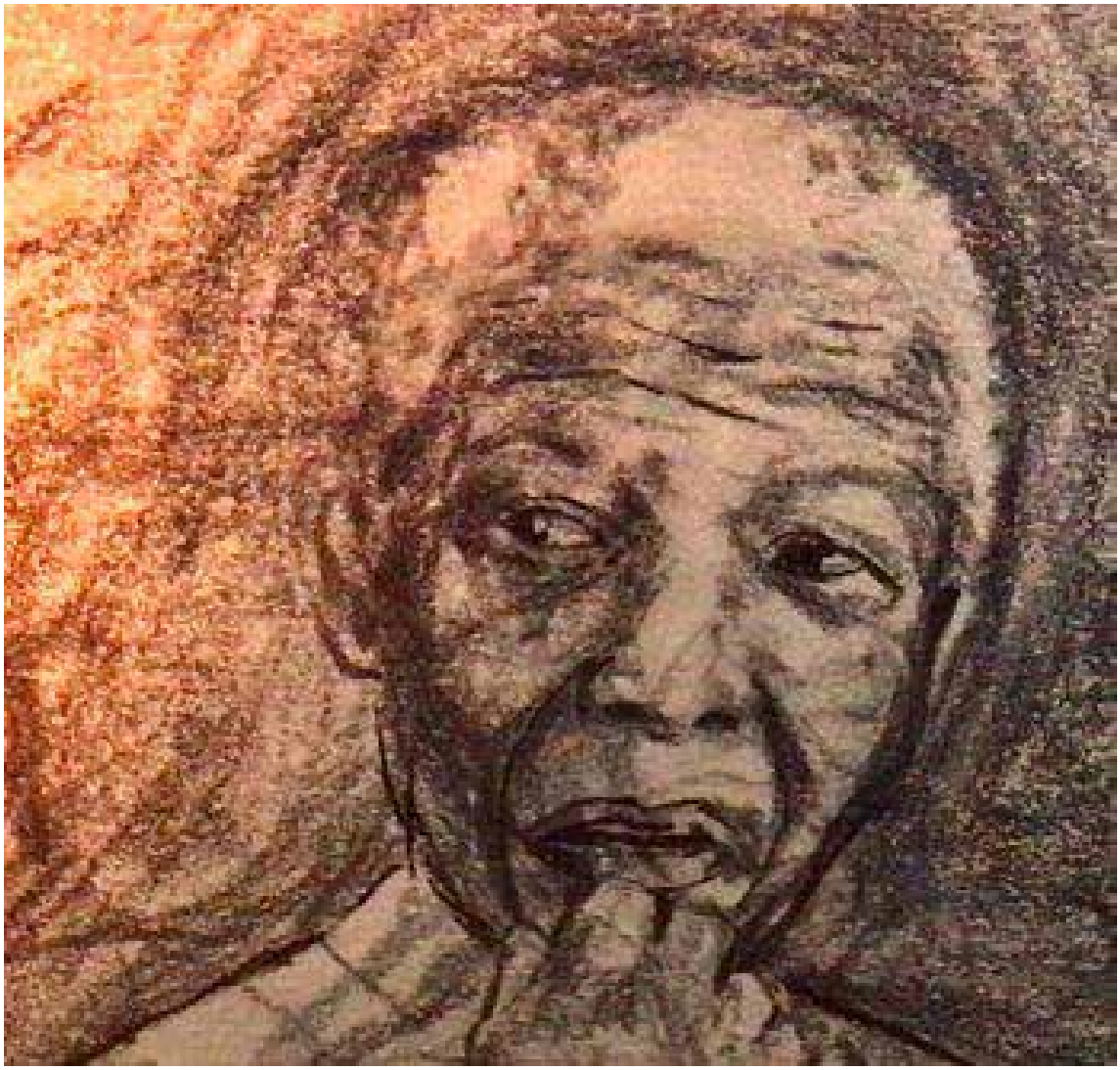
Sam Fortuin

In the photograph above, I am seen sitting on the lap of former president Nelson Mandela on the eve of his farewell dinner in 1999. My father worked for Mandela as his body guard before and during his presidential years. The photograph acts as a point of departure for a creative meditation on how this moment implicates myself in the master narrative of the post-colony.

For as long as I can remember, the photograph of Mandela and I has followed me, haunting my consciousness. To be seen next to a figure that is known the world over, is to be visually overpowered and perhaps to not be seen at all. That is why I started my sketch in my visual journal with my own portrait in an attempt to visibilise my presence within this particular moment.

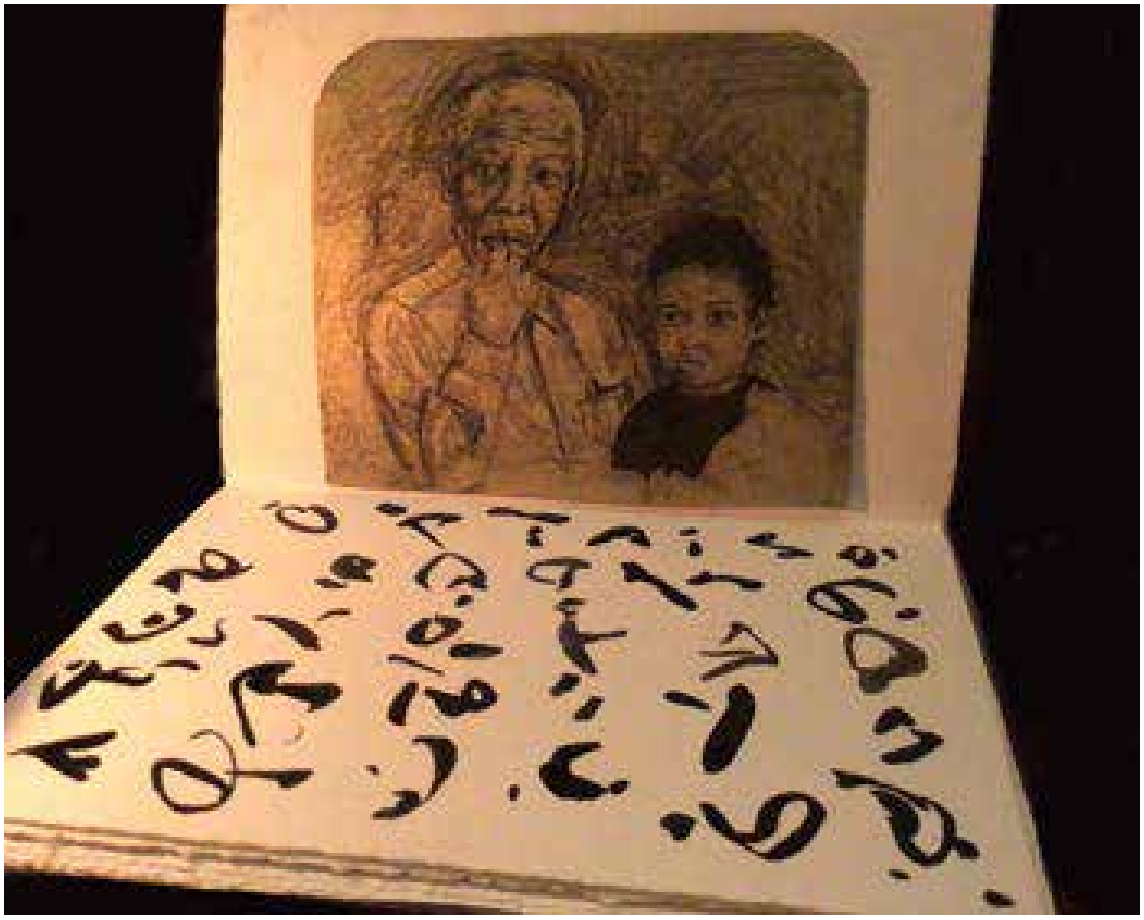
Looking at myself as a 2 year old baby, I am intrigued by my expression . What could have been going through my mind as I sat there? I cannot say for sure. But what I do know now is that the image forces me to confront the role I play in post-coloniality with it's inherent power imbalance when it comes to issues of gender, race and class. It calls for me to adress the residue of violence and forge a path of healing through creative modalities.

Nelson Mandela is a figure in South Africa and the world whose image has become a kind of monument. A monument representing a capitalist, masculine dominated democracy within the post-colonial African state. Mandela's image can thus be seen as a language that alludes to the norms and conventions of contemporary democracy in South Africa.



I am concerned with how the monument of Mandela's image has forged society and my own identity in contemporary South Africa. I believe that the purpose of my presence in the image itself is to unravel what it might mean for us to create a alternative imaginary that does not let monuments go unquestioned.

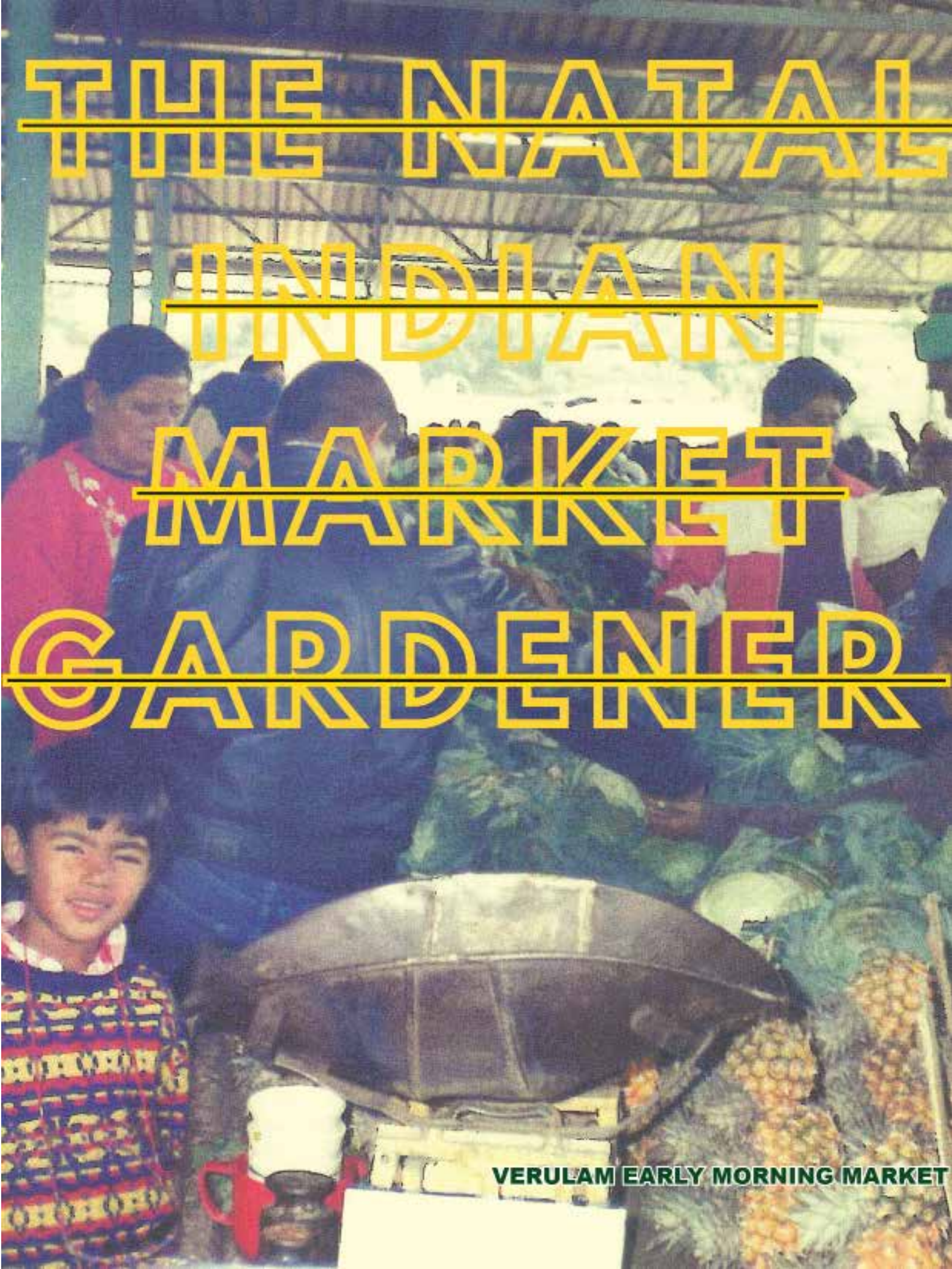
The final image produced from this visual meditation of a fleeting moment, combines the completed sketch with ideograms that expand the conversation beyond the image of Mandela and myself. Ideograms are symbols that suggest meaning without necessarily indicating what sound accompanies it. I produce them from an intuitive space. To me, the ideograms manifest as expressional messaging that connects to my ancestral consciousness. They depart from any expectations of what 'should be' visualised and assert their own ambiguity. In doing so, offering the image of Mandela and I, a solution to the problem of the master narrative inherent within the post-colonial.



UNTITLED

Shamil Balram

THE NATAL INDIAN MARKET GARDENER



VERULAM EARLY MORNING MARKET

According to Edouard Glissant's "One World in Relation" under his chapter titled DNA, he states," You cannot use investigative police methods to search for your roots, that is not possible. You can only search for your roots through poetry and knowledge, Right?'. Glissant further states, "All we have left were traces – that's Why I Believe that our literature is a literature of traces".

Towards my Critical Knowledge contribution, I will be drawing on ideas from Edouard Glissant with a focus on his film titled "One World in Relation" in order to disrupt a traditional academic way of writing and furthermore to understand my position as a writer within Academic institutions through forms of poetry and narration. The West is 'anxiously determined to cling to their conception of a world in which they dominate and control rather than 'a world in which one is, quite simply, one agrees to be, with and among others' (Glissant, 2010: 128).

I am interested in a certain kind of my awareness and positionality as a contribution. I have been going back and forth, trying to find my words and trying to find my narrative. I am interested in mediating myself through a kind of violence and questioning how the Academic Institution functions as a form of domination, border, and control of history and knowledge and how, at the same time, it offers a theoretical and methodological framework to look at new epistemologies.

Like Aimé Césaire, Glissant insists on poetics as a means of building new imaginaries, because of a disillusionment with political processes as a means of change. Poetics, he argues, may be, on the one hand, totally ineffective against oppression, but that also makes them powerful – they are at once outside of the system and within reach of those outside it.

I am looking at contentious identity politics that are not reflected within the academic institution and contemporary practice. Being a first-generation in my lineage to attend University, I am very aware of my privileged position navigating myself through unfamiliar spaces of power, making my trajectory through these elite Universities, having learnt a particular history and forms of knowledge practices throughout my academic career.

Using innovative methodologies, my practice explores the politics, experimental forms of narration, and the colonial grammar embedded within academic Institutions. Inserting myself through forms of

informal knowledge practices such as oral narratives and trauma. As a response, my work aims to disrupt or create a rapture within the Eurocentric knowledge system, allowing for new epistemologies to function within the Academic institutions.

My research engages with difficult and violent histories that shape our contemporary landscape, reflecting on the past as embodied trauma; the intersections of archive; living archive; language; institutional critique; critical race theory, telling the incomplete history of who we are; the question of theorization, how do we theorize from the everyday. The manner in which I pursue these difficult areas is at once imbued with a principled and ethically accountable perspective but without being sanctimonious or vainglorious. To rethink research and creating as a form of practice and the important contribution to the interdisciplinary fields of work.

Writing from the position of a South African writer looking at contentious identity politics and living in a period of what I would refer to as a Post "Post-Apartheid" Global South moment, after we have sold our critique of the Academic Institution to the institution, after they have graduated us into a new system of knowledge, after the Academic institution has commodified our existence, after being consumed by the institution and realising our existence is dependent on the institution after the death of identity politics, after we have defined ourselves as Post-colonial thinkers.

I aim to use my positionality and agency to disrupt the conventional academic institutional ways of writing and knowledge production. To be able to alternatively write and speak with a register of prose. Some places in my writing I want to leave standing, whether they are thoughts or gaps such as a dialogue with the self. To critique the colonial grammar of how I should write to be accepted by the Academic institution because really now let's look into the mirror, understand our battles and approach these battles with ethics to the self. Historically within my family and culture knowledge has been produced and passed down through forms of physicality, farming, community, and orality as forms of education. What does it mean to open up these spaces within the academic institution? We should take the responsibility to weave our own histories.

My study aims to change a particular narrative of the single-story thought in this field of writing and practicing art-making. Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche writes the danger of the single-story, the problem with the single story is that it robs people of their dignity and creates stereotypes, it's not because they are untrue but they are incomplete – they make one story become the only story, "To create a single story, show a people as only one thing over and over again and that is what they become" (Adichie, 2021). It is impossible to speak of the single-story without talking about power, I use these multiple disciplines of knowledge practices that have been rejected from academic institutions to disrupt these power structures which have been fed to us. Stories are defined by how they are told and who tells them. Power is the ability not just to tell another story of a person but to make it the definitive story of that person.

Pursuing this study within the academic institution will allow me to bring new sets of knowledges within the field and with the power of agency I can tell my own stories as a scholar from the global south, writing for the self from the position of my Indian heritage. It has been written about in a certain narrative that I don't think is relative and speaks to me. Because we are multiple bodies, moving into different spaces in time. Time cannot be measured on a linear scale I think this is what it means to be a scholar, claiming your space within an institution. To acknowledge a sort of agency and to be aware of these shifting narratives that start to happen and to understand your position within these complicated spaces. As I have every right to refuse to take it on, even though I am of Indian Heritage it does not mean this is the sort of systematic approach I need to take on because the gaze hasn't allowed us to be more. I am interested in taking on a much more conceptual undertaking. My project is about a position of questioning which guides my theorisation.

HOW TO TELL A STORY

How does one begin telling a story? A personal story, one that is not linear. A story of my kind, am I even a kind?

A story that does not reproduce violence or trauma.

A story heavily laden with questions that's never easy to ask.

Answers you can't find in academia.

A question of how do we heal.

Is that not what we all do, tell stories? Please! ... Not just another story of an artist crying out to be a victim of Apartheid, colonialism, colonial structures, structures of segregation, violence and rejection. This research paper deals with my relationship to the academic world of knowledge surrounding my art practice. Returning to a point of my origin to find my purpose, a search for self-understanding and self-retrieval from the obscurities of language and knowledge not created for my benefit. How do I exhibit my human need to understand, to come to terms with, and to move on and not resurrect or reproduce violence and trauma? The nature of my practice is to infiltrate history and culture obliquely.

My multiple knowledge practices, lived experiences and ability to speak multiple tongues follow me into my academic work. This writing is about my inability to be a disembodied academic. The assumption coming out of an Indian home was that I had to be constantly selling, if not my body – subjected to a form of labour – then my credibility, to bring home a salary at the end of a month which one could barely put food on the table with nor fill the fridge. I still remember my art school teacher Mr. Maistry telling me, "Indian people don't appreciate art, they'd rather buy a pocket of potatoes and a bag of rice than invest in a piece of art".

It is only later that I started to understand the dynamics and the power structures of art. It was not the lack of appreciation but rather the inability of access to appreciate. The system has robbed my entire culture. When I write, I write for all the those who came before me who

could not read or write. Those who did not have this level of privilege to be in a University. My purpose is to produce knowledge and to open up these spaces for all those who will come after me.

INTRODUCTION AND NARRATION

So, I decided to write to me, to my people. Why do we write? I am writing to return to my point of origin, to find my purpose.

I am writing to all those who were not able to see a reflection of themselves in the world. To those whose imaginations and dreams where limited to the expectations which communities imposed onto them, to those who had been chained to a system they could not escape, and could not see a future outside their communities.

I am writing to my aunties, uncles, and parents who do not have a tertiary education, who sacrificed their pride, screaming at the top of their voices in order to sell their vegetable produce in the market, freshly cut from the farm. To my father's sister who took over my grandparent's table in the Verulam market, who was always filled with anger when I would spend my vacations selling in the market. She would always find some sort of reason about me to complain to the market committee. "He is standing too much in front of his table", "His extension table is too long", "The customers are complaining that he's screaming too loud". The most common complaint was that I was stealing her customers. Every holiday turned out to be the same experience. Before my return back to university, she purchased fresh mango atchar and chili pickles which she carefully wrapped in newspaper, and packaged for me. Beneath all those animosities there was always love embedded in the soil.

My grandparents were fourth generation South African Indian Indentured labourers, settled in Verulam, KwaZulu-Natal who worked until their death. My grandfather, Balram Mahabeer, drove a Mercedes-Benz and carried a suitcase with him. He ventured off into many working titles while practicing farming but wasn't successful. Farming was practiced on leased land from the state. During apartheid in South Africa, Indians who practiced planting were not called farmers but rather 'Market Gardeners' even though they sold their vegetables and fruits in the market (Govindsamy 1987: 9). I find this classification of the 'Indian Market gardener' to be a disturbing one

and a form of ‘othered experience’, which belittles their experience. These people were seen not to be worthy enough to be called farmers. Michel Foucault describes this process of othering as the creation and maintenance of imaginary “knowledge of the Other”, a form of cultural representation in service to socio-political power and the establishment of hierarchies of domination. My grandparents are deceased. The land which they farmed on is still currently on a lease agreement. After the death of my grandfather, the farm has been run by my grandmother and has now been passed to my father. This practice of knowledge has been part of the family legacy and has been intergenerational but dies after my father. Writing this research paper allowed me to understand that I carry these practices into an academic world and into my art practice, these practices do not die but rather take on another format.

To my grandmother who could not read or write but could speak in multiple languages including ancestral languages, my grandfather would teach her how to sign her signature in the back of a cigarette box. My grandmother worked with the labourers on the farm and considered herself as one of them - everyone in the community knows of my grandmother’s work ethic. She worked seven days a week, arrived on the farm before the sun rose, and only left after the sun had set. She drove a white Toyota Hilux and gained her driver’s licence through an oral test.

I still remember when I use to spend my time on the farm with her, and she would tell the laborers (with a smile on her face), “Umzukulu wami lona”. She shared her knowledge with me as a form of orality through narration. How one should cultivate the soil: first you harrow and then you plough the field and the lines should be perfect - if they’re not, then the process should be repeated. She would tell me how in the past the government hired out prisoners to labour on their farms.

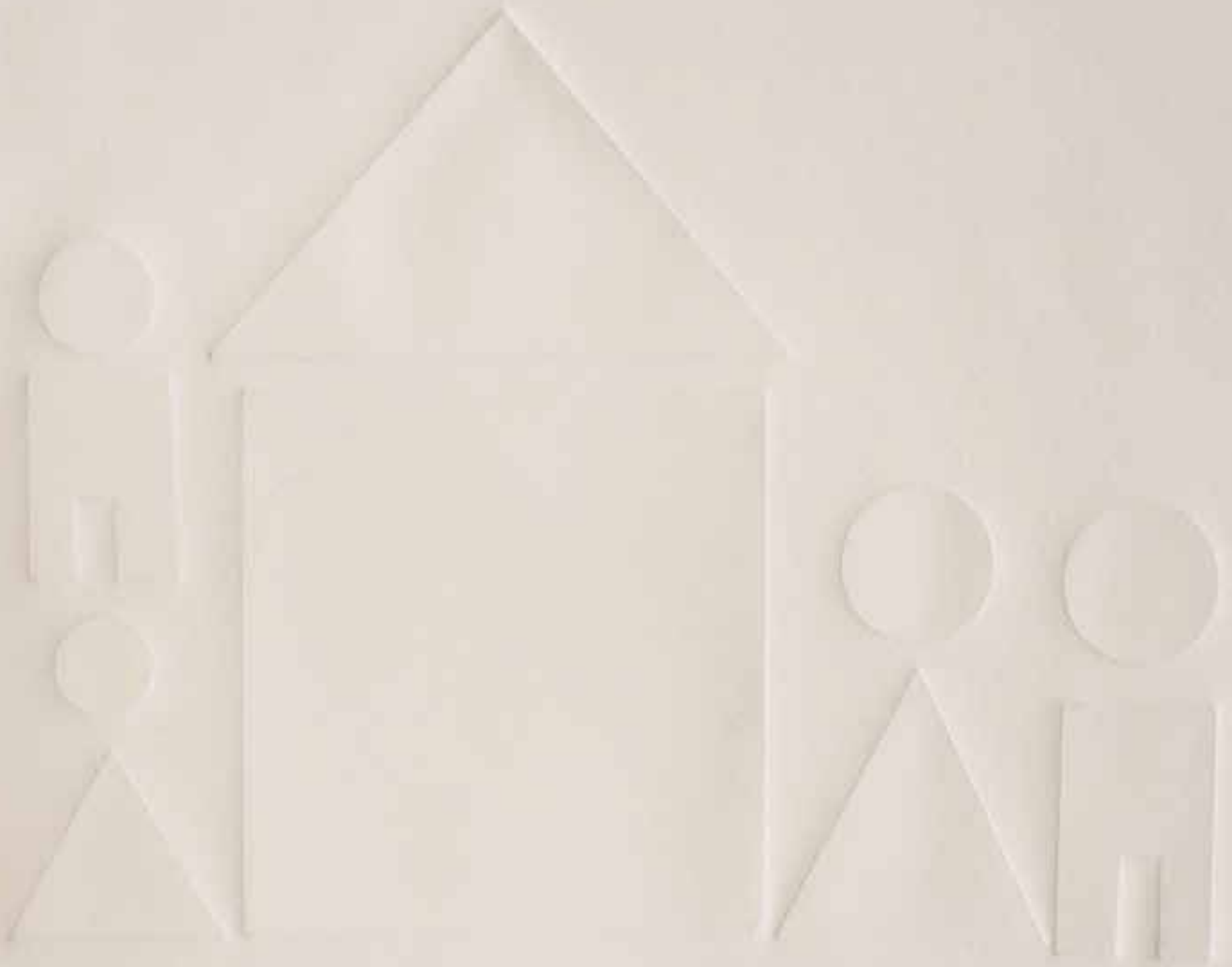
But most importantly I am writing to my cuzzi-bru Suvan. The year I repeated Grade Eleven he told me, “Lytie, you’re wasting your time going back to school, school is not for you. You will take over the Bali’s business”. Suvan had been a major influence on my life and had shaped my thinking - schooling was not his interest and he rather turned towards a form of physical labour production and worked amongst the family. He drove a Red Volkswagen Polo Player with a set of 17-inch rims and a sound system which contained a 12-inch Pioneer subwoofer. Apologies for my lack of description, he would have done a much

better job than I could ever. He did not want much out of life, yet he was everything I ever wanted to be. Working for my father as a driver, transiting vegetables through Swaziland – Suvan passes away as a result of an accident at the age of twenty-six.

THE INVISIBILITY OF WHITENESS

Gill Allderman

The Invisibility of Whiteness, 2021
Embossed on Hahnemuhle 300gram art paper
Mono Print



UNTITLED

Ulriche Jantjes

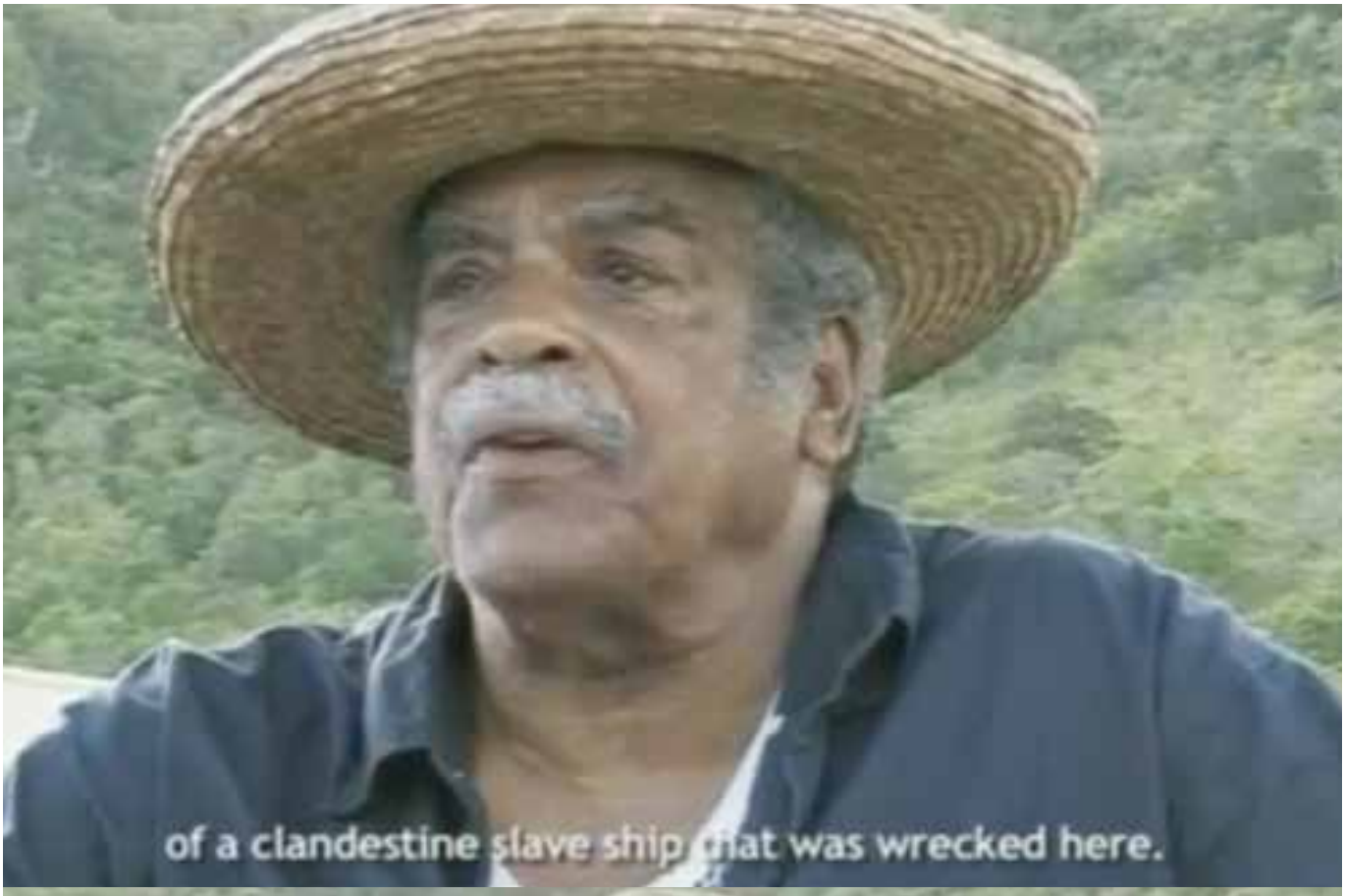
Stills from “Edouard Glissant: one world in relation”, by K’a Yéléma Productions

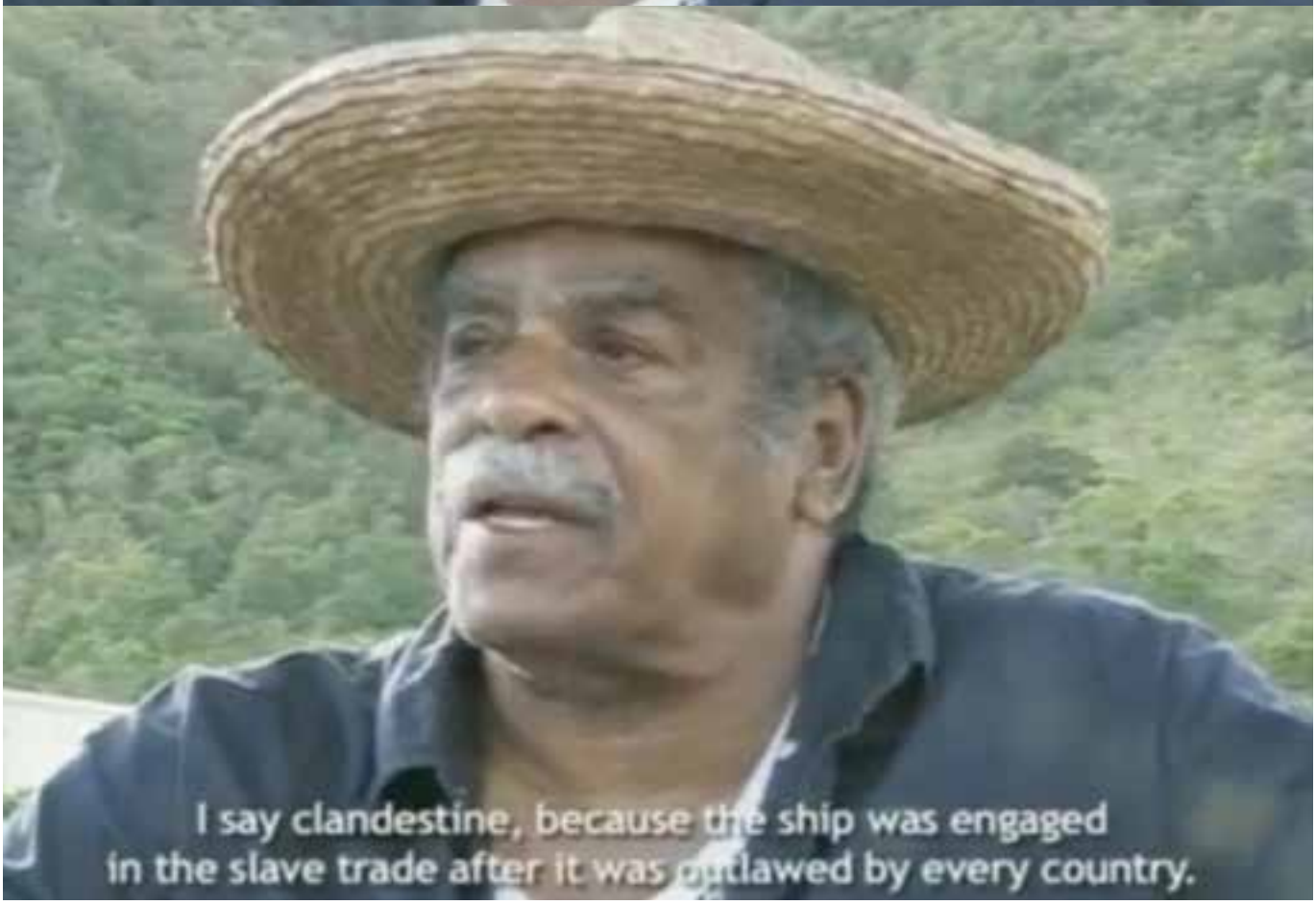

It's a place which has been solemnized
and consecrated by Laurent Valere,


a young martinican artist who made this Memorial,


where Jacques Coursil is playing the trumpet.


The Memorial was made to honor the victims


of a clandestine slave ship that was wrecked here.


I say clandestine, because the ship was engaged
in the slave trade after it was outlawed by every country.


The ship was caught in a storm here,


We don't know the name of the captain;
we don't even know the name of the ship.


on these rocks, on this coast;
and all the crew members disappeared.


GEDENKING

Nestled in the Overberg region of the Western Cape, Elim stands as a mission station teeming with history dating back to 1824. Established by German missionaries in the 17th century, Elim is home to descendants of emancipated slaves and indigenous people of South Africa. The history of Elim as a place of refuge after the emancipation of slaves in 1838 was memorialised a century later, by establishing a monument in their name.

This monument acknowledges the variety of historical narratives around the arrival of emancipated slaves in Elim. A number of slaves relocated to Elim from the neighbouring towns such as Swellendam, and others found their way here after a ship capsized in the stormy waters along the coast. Elim's slave monument is the first slave monument in South Africa.

Today, the monument stands as a lone signifier of Elim's history as a refuge for emancipated slaves. Although discreet in nature, this monument stands as a firm reminder that our history as Elimmers is intertwined with the mass uprooting and displacement which accompanied slave trade.

GRANDM
MOTHERS A
"POST-AP
DAUGH

Lerato M

OTHERS,
AND THEIR
ARTHEID"
HTERS

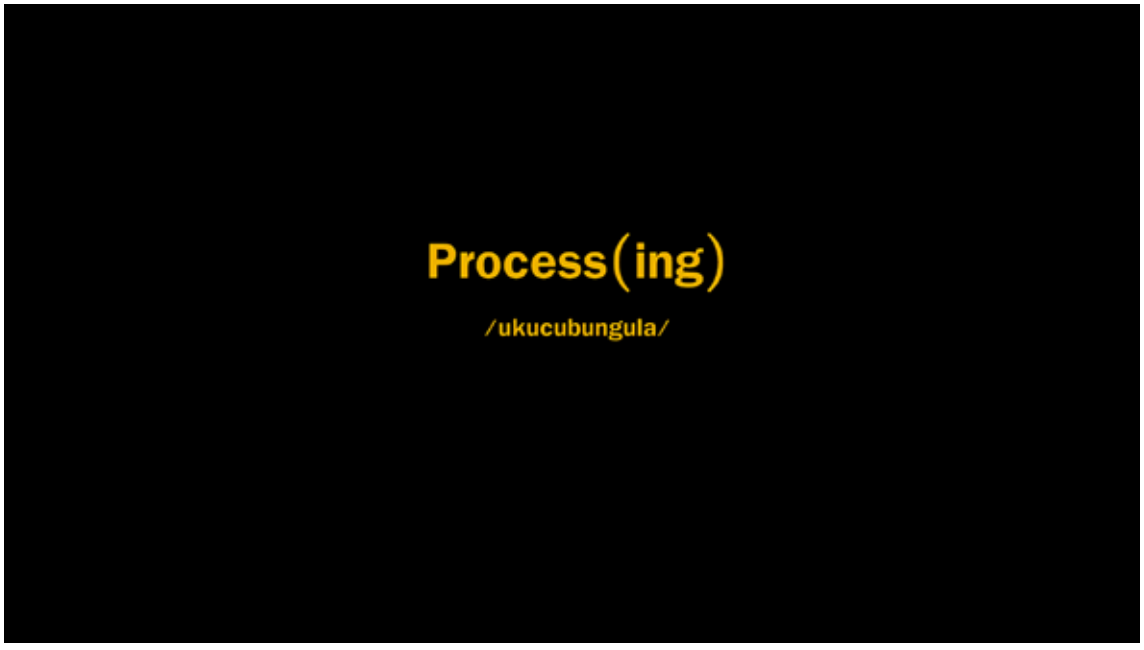
Maduna

My mother, grandmother, great aunt and many women within my maternal family have for a long time used art and photography to subvert systems of oppression. Using the grammar of black feminist futurity to navigate their lives, they continuously insisted on performing freedom while living in racist apartheid south Africa. (Campt, 2017)

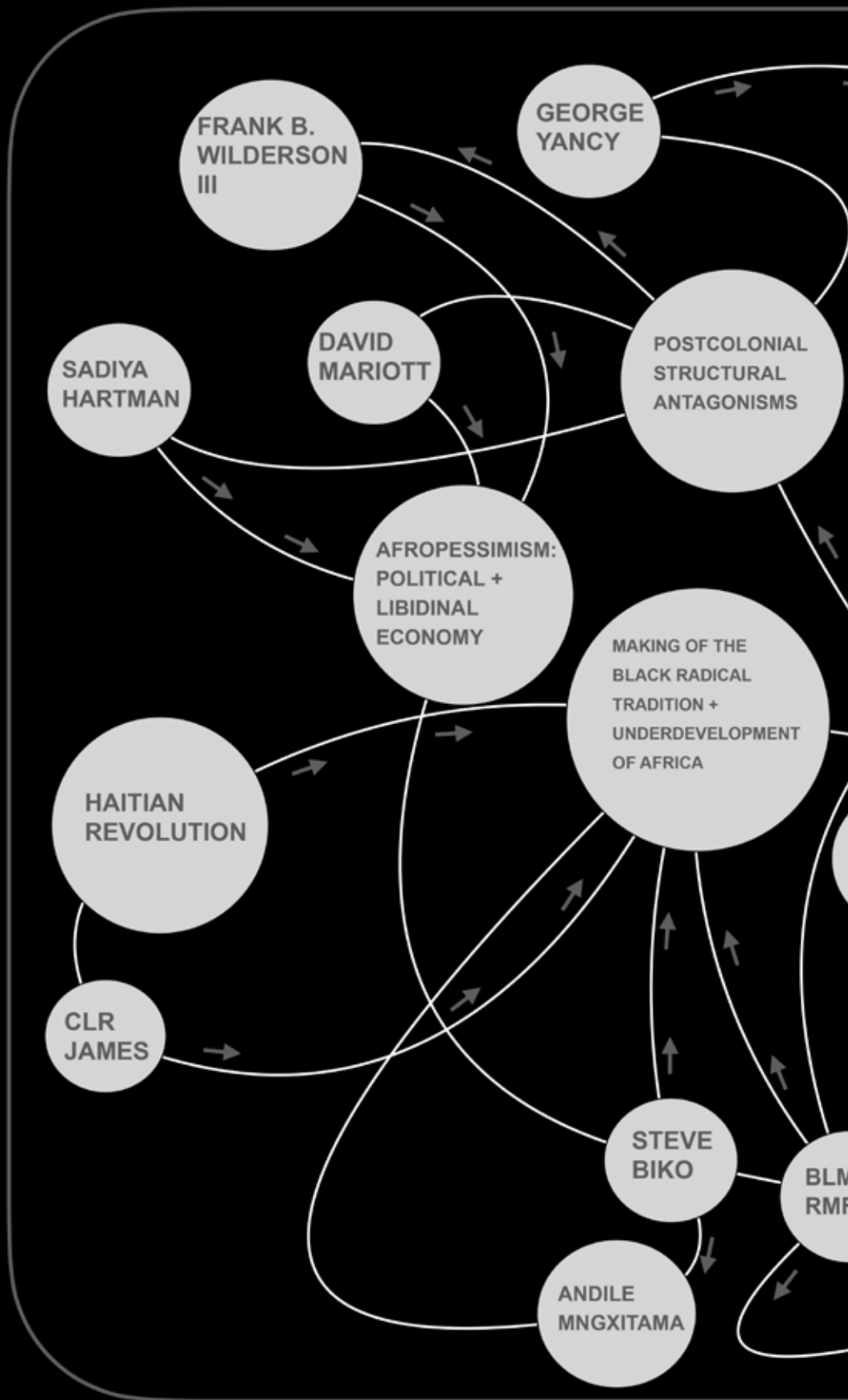
Tensions between African spirituality and Christianity are an inherited intergenerational trauma passed on genetically within my family. I read this as a symptom of the lingering effects of colonial-apartheid.

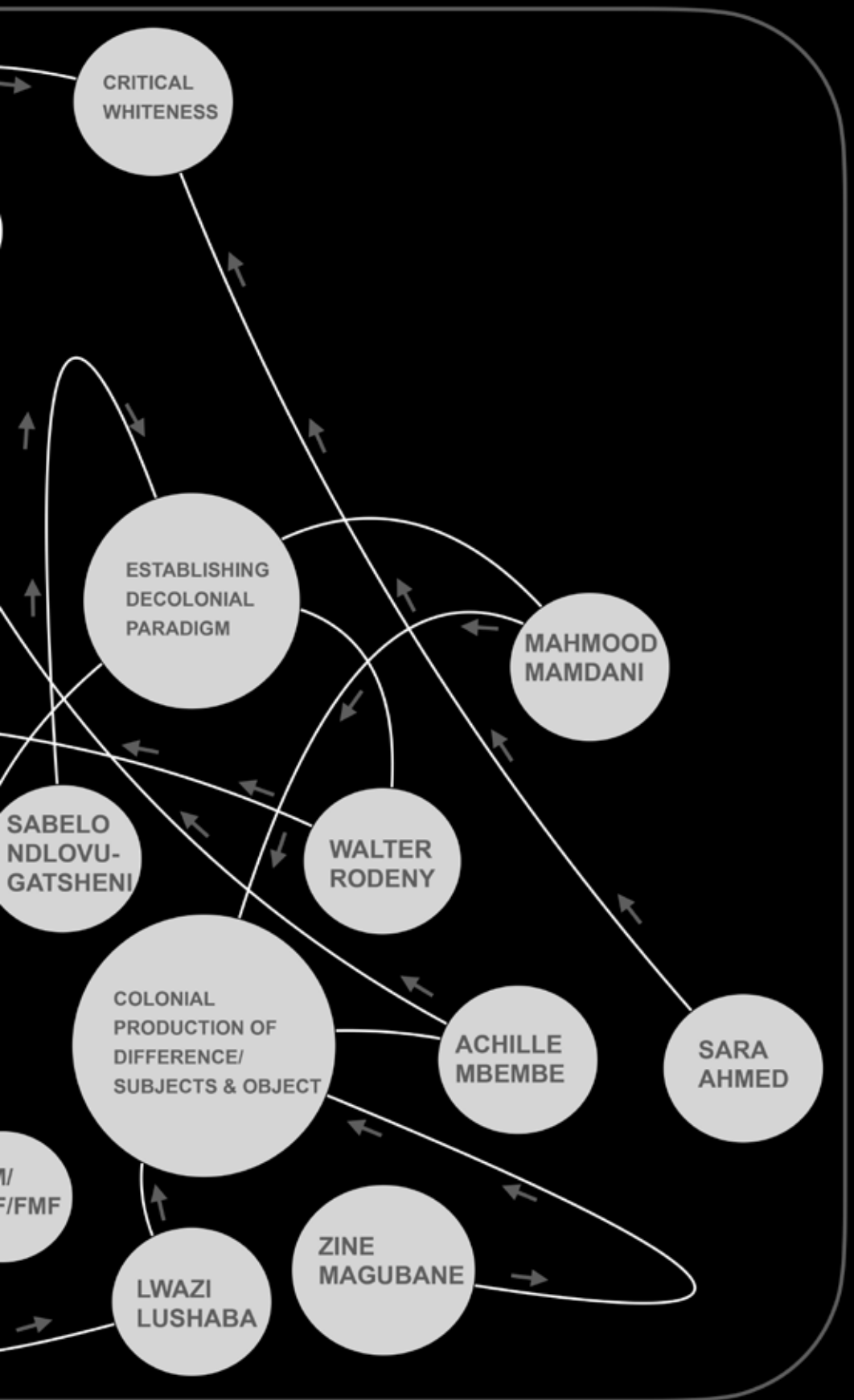
Process(ing)/ukucubungula is part of an ongoing, reconciliatory conversation between myself and relatives/ancestors, a process of a collaborative effort between my mother, aunts, daughter, sisters and nieces, and our maternal ancestors, not an outcome of my own doing.

Link to Process(ing)/ Ukucubungula:
https://vimeo.com/601853277



Following stills from: Lerato Maduna, Process(ing)/ Ukucubungula, 2021, 03:36 min


FRANK B. WILDERSON III
GEORGE YANCY
SADIYA HARTMAN
DAVID MARIOTT
POSTCOLONIAL STRUCTURAL ANTAGONISMS
AFROPESSIMISM: POLITICAL + LIBIDINAL ECONOMY
MAKING OF THE BLACK RADICAL TRADITION + UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA
HAITIAN REVOLUTION
CLR JAMES
STEVE BIKO
ANDILE MNGXITAMA


CRITICAL WHITENESS
ESTABLISHING DECOLONIAL PARADIGM
MAHMOOD MAMDANI
SABELO NDLOVU-GATSHENI
WALTER RODENY
COLONIAL PRODUCTION OF DIFFERENCE/ SUBJECTS & OBJECT
ACHILLE MBEMBE
SARA AHMED
ZINE MAGUBANE
LWAZI LUSHABA