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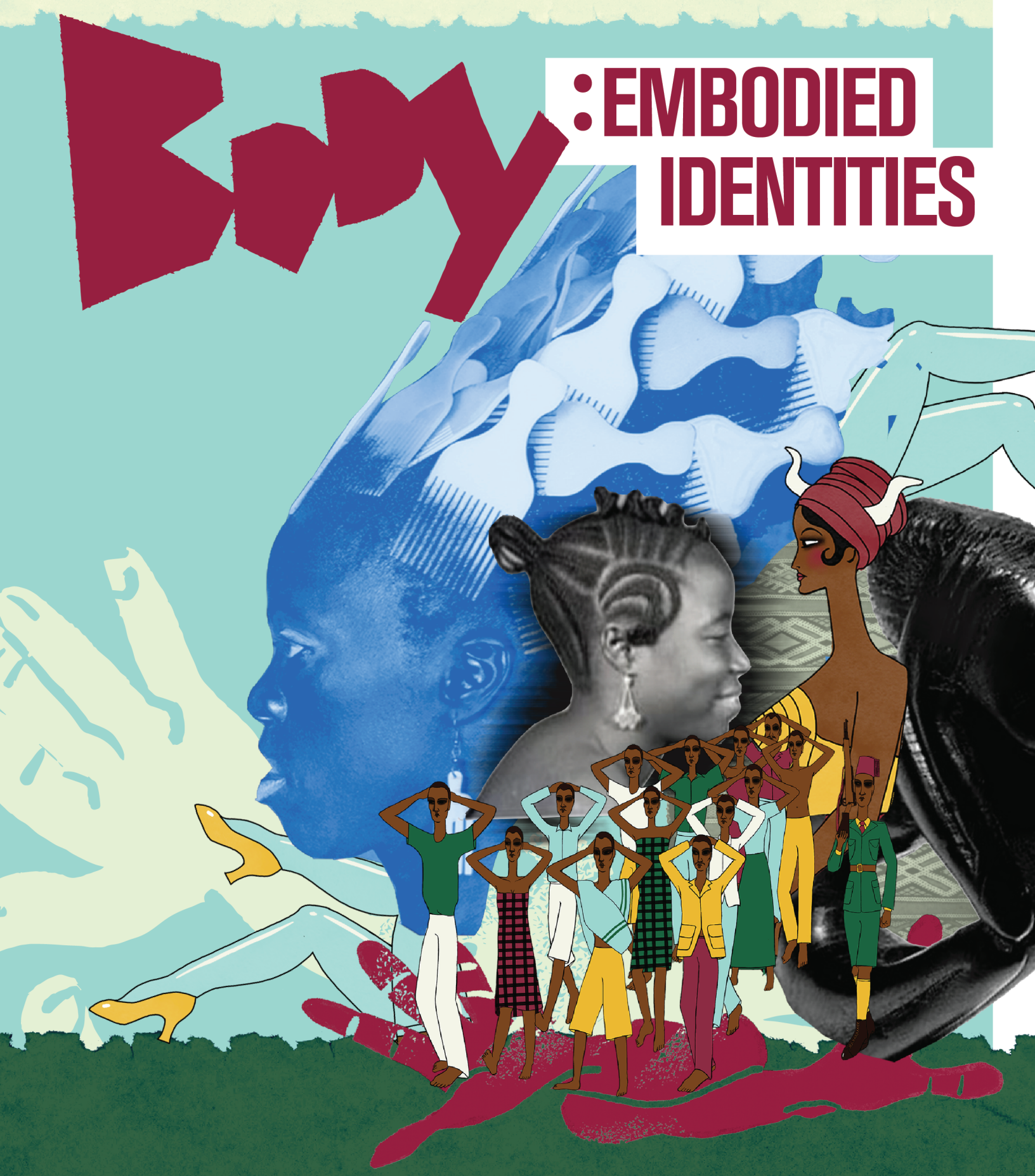
BODY: EMBODIED IDENTITIES



The Art and Politics in Africa journal
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This issue presents the outcome of a dedicated group of students from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, guided by Dr. Polly Savage.

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Editor's introduction

Art has been part of Human life for millennia. At times appreciated for aesthetic aspects, at times contemplated for the impact it has on its audiences, art is experienced in a variety of forms every day. It conveys meaning and tells stories, interactively mirroring and shaping society. Indeed, by being created and shared in specific contexts, artworks transmit worldviews. Academics have often observed art pieces through a Eurocentric lens, disregarding the richness of other cultures, and perpetuating a colonial mindset. Hegemonic art reinforces a deep-rooted power imbalance, muffling narratives from the global south. While it is impossible to provide a complete record of every artistic production around the world, it is crucial to decolonise the gaze and study alternative voices. In this regard, Africa is a continent which deserves attention, notably because of its abundance of multimedia initiatives.

Welcome to this special edition of *Embodied Identities*, a journal that delves into the profound nexus between artistic expression and socio-political dynamics on the African continent. This issue presents the outcome of a dedicated group of students from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Our objective was to embark on a profound journey through the realms of gender, emancipation, and resistance as articulated in African art. Our collection of essays presents a kaleidoscope of perspectives, exploring how art becomes a medium for political expression and identity reclamation. From J.D. Okhai Ojeikere's photographic celebration of African hairstyles as symbols of freedom to the subversive resistance in Zanele Muholi's self-portraits, each piece reveals the power of art in challenging and reshaping societal narratives. We traverse through diverse themes—gender norms in Lawrence Lemaoana and Kawira Mwirichia's Kangas, the political and aesthetic shifts in Malangatana Ngwenya and João Craveirinha's works, and the exploration of African women's multifaceted identity in the art of Houria Niati and Souad Abdelrasoul. Through these essays, the journal illuminates the intricate dance of art and politics, portraying how African artists harness their craft to voice their unique stories, resist oppression, and celebrate their heritage and identity.

This edition finds its focus on the subject of 'The Body', a site which holds a wealth of significance in relation to African histories of gender, race, ecology, political emancipation, resistance and memory. The notion of "embodied identities" denotes both the corporeal poignancy of the body as a physical space whilst emphasising the socio-political matrices through which we move. Through these essays examining 'The Body' in contemporary African and diasporic art emerges a diversity of expression which transcends a static identity or singular form. Readers may come to understand how art can play a healing, regenerative role which can break up staid hegemonic typecasting of African cultures and vivify a pluralised conception of African and diasporic identities. We hope this journal will contribute to celebration of African art in the global critical art-scape, a re-examination of the archive and boost recognition of African political histories and cultures.

Chapter. I

GENDER

The Body as a Canvas

Henna in the Works of Farid Belkahia and Mous Lamrabat as a Tool to Interrogate Gender, Identity, and Globalization in a Modern Morocco

Chloe-Kate Abel

Gendered bodies, Queer bodies

The Kangas of Lawrence Lemaoana and Kawira Mwirichia

Natalie Taylor

Reimagining Identity

The Multifaceted Nature of the African Female Body

Xuan Zhou

The Body as a Canvas

Henna in the Works of Farid Belkahia and Mous Lamrabat as a Tool to Interrogate Gender, Identity, and Globalization in Today's Morocco

Chloe-Kate Abel

Within the expansive history and tradition of henna, Morocco reveals itself as a setting where tradition, spirituality, and identity intertwine. From its ancient origins to its expressions in the works of modern and contemporary Moroccan art, henna has evolved to more than a medicinal and cosmetic agent and into a powerful tool used to understand complex themes. Farid Belkahia and Mous Lamrabat are two formative male Moroccan artists working across the late 20th century and into the present day who use henna in such a way. These artists illuminate the ways in which henna as an artistic tool, can transcend borders, challenge gender norms, and transform the body into a canvas as a site to understand the intricacies of a modern Moroccan identity. Both Belkahia and Lamrabat examine henna's relationship to the body as a means of commenting on substantial social themes of gender, identity, and globalization within Morocco and the fluidity of the human experience more generally. Henna is a method of temporary body painting which has been in practice for thousands of years across civilizations from Babylon to the Mughal Empire, with some of its earliest known uses traced through medicinal scripture and the remains of mummies in Ancient Egypt.[1] The henna paste is manufactured by crushing the stems and flowers of the Lawsonia Inermis shrub, which contains a copper coloured molecule

1 Maman Lesmana, "Wearing Henna: The Tradition of Arab or Islam?," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 8, no.2 (February 2019): 75, https://www.ijhssi.org/papers/vol8(2)/Ser%20-%202/M0802027578.pdf.

Figure 1 Henna for good luck Photograph. Photo by Fred Dunn, May 7, 2015.

Figure 2 This woman in Khemisset, a town in central Morocco, had her ankles tattooed when she was young. The soles of her feet are dyed with henna. She requested that her face not be published.
Photograph. Cynthia Becker, 2002.

that allows for the temporary "tattoo"(Fig.1).[2] While the use of henna is evidenced across continents, it bears particular importance as a socio-cultural agent in the Moroccan context, where its use is both spiritual and largely linked with the feminine.[3] Within Islam, there appear to be two hadiths[4] (prophetic sayings) and some interpretations of fiqh-us-sunnah[5] (Islamic jurisprudence) that allude to the use of henna, specifically on the hands, as a feminine practice not to be replicated by men. Additionally, many social and cultural practices within Morocco and across the region seem to reinfor ce the gendered sphere in which henna, as a decorative substance, exists.

Morocco is an exceptional land where the Mediterranean and Atlantic converge, desert and fertile forests coexist, and a diverse mix of ethnic and religious identities including Amazigh, Arab, Sub-Saharan African, Jewish, and Muslim among others live.[6] In the Moroccan context, henna is a crucial element in the life of a Moroccan woman and is associated with major milestones in her life like puberty, marriage, and childbirth.[7] Henna is not just assigned to celebratory occasions and intricate designs but plays a major role in the social life of women at the public bathhouse, known locally as the hammam, where its practical and communal uses are evoked. Despite the multiplicity of identities within Morocco, the hammam is a "cultural common denominator among women" where many use henna to dye

2 Tammana Begum, "The Henna Plant: Transcending Time, Religion and Culture," Natural History Museum, April 2023, https://shorturl.at/deiE6.
3 Amanda E. Rogers, "Politics, Gender and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa: Moroccan Women's Henna Practice"(PhD Dissertation, Emory University, 2013): 3.
4 Lesmana, "Wearing Henna: The Tradition of Arab or Islam?," 77-78.
5 "Fiqh-Us-Sunnah - 5. 46-C | Volume 5," Alim, n.d., https://www.alim.org/hadith/fiqh-sunnah/5/46/.
6 Rogers, "Politics, Gender and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa: Moroccan Women's Henna Practice," 15.
7 Lalla A. Essaydi, "Disrupting the Odalisque," *World Literature Today* 87, no. 2 (March 2013): 62–67, https://doi.org/10.7588/worllitetoda.87.2.0062.

their hair, fingernails, and feet (Fig.2).[8] In addition to its practical and celebratory properties, henna is a source of great spiritual reward and is seen as a form of blessing or baraka as well as a protective agent against jinn[9] (spirits). Nonetheless, henna as an artistic practice has come to transcend the binaries within which it once existed. Artists, of all genders, have begun to explore the relationship of henna to the body, as henna design can only exist with the body as a canvas. This transformation of the body through intricate design serves as a metaphor for the idea that bodies are unique spaces to express identity, emotion, and story. Henna's temporary nature also alludes to other symbolic meanings. The ephemeral quality of the tattoo prompts reflections on the impermanence of the body and life itself, the way the body is an ever-changing vessel imprinted by the surrounding environment and a reflection of lives lived.

Figure 3 *Woven pillow from the Middle Atlas region of Morocco*. Photograph. Addi Ouadderrou, 2002.

Farid Belkahia was a pioneering Moroccan Modernist of the last half-century, having helped found the Casablanca Group - "a group of artists referred to as 'the school of signs' that sought to cultivate a new visual language in line with Morocco's burgeoning nationalist sentiments."[10] Originally from Marrakesh, a city revered internationally and locally for its vibrant and distinct culture, Belkahia lived and trained abroad in France and returned to Morocco as it was gaining independence. Upon his return, he strived both to find a unique artistic language to distance himself from the French, and to prove that indigenous art was as meritorious as globally regarded modern European styles. For Belkahia, this language was found in returning to Amazigh patterns, symbols, and writings featured in local traditions such as ceramics, tattooing (Fig.2), textiles (Fig.3), and henna.[11] In particular, he used "henna in relation to issues of commodification, globalization, gender, perceptions of the body, and the culture of sex and desire."[12]

Through his 1980s series of works all titled some iteration of La Main (Fig.4,5), Belkahia used the cultural symbol of the Hand of Fatima and henna design to investigate the convergence of identities and gendered experience within the Moroccan social fabric. The series consists of a few large hands configured by stretching animal skin dyed with natural henna pigment on wooden blocks. The henna design formulates different linear geometric patterns that, from a distance, give the works aesthetic merit, but upon closer inspection reveal a much deeper meaning. The

8 Valerie Staats, "Ritual, Strategy, or Convention: Social Meanings in the Traditional Women's Baths in Morocco," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 14, no. 3 (January 1994): 10, https://doi.org/10.2307/3346678.

9 Cynthia Becker, *Amazigh Arts in Morocco: Women Shaping Berber Identity*, 1st ed. (University of Texas Press, 2006):

10 Christa Paula, "Farid Belkahia (Morocco, Born 1934)," Bonhams, October 12, 2009, https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/17716/lot/54/.

11 Fatima-Zahra Lakrissa, "Lives of the Artists Farid Belkahia," Tate, March 15, 2018, https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-42-spring-2018/lives-of-the-artists-farid-belkahia-fatima-zahra-lakrissa.

12 Enid Schildkrout, "Inscribing the Body," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33 (2004): 333, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25064856.

Figure 4 *Main*, 1980. Dye and henna on skin laid down on board, 158 x 138.5cm. © Bonhams.

Figure 5 *La Main*, 1983. Serigraph, 120 x 80 cm. © Mutual Art.

symbols reference magic, medicine, and protective emblems - symbols drawn from the Tifinagh script (Amazigh alphabet) that relate the indigenous populations of Morocco with those of Libya, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso.[13]

The Hand of Fatima or khamsa is also a transnational and feminine symbol that is meant to evoke protection. The talisman has, over time, embodied many different cultural identities. The symbol is originally traced to Carthage in the 2nd millennium BCE where it was named after Phoenician goddess Tanit before being incorporated into Jewish iconography, and finally reimagined in Islam as the Hand of Fatima.[14] Belkahia's depiction of local themes and designs that are both hyperlocal and transnational within a very gendered symbol and artistic practice, make this particular series an interesting example of henna and the body as a canvas to interrogate identity and gender.

Mous Lamrabat is a contemporary Moroccan-Belgian self-taught photographer who has been called by some a "master of hybridity" for his combination of North African and Islamic symbols with pop culture references.[15] Born in an Amazigh village in northern Morocco, Lamrabat moved to the Flemish city of Sint-Niklaas in Belgium in his youth. Lamrabat recalls never feeling fully Moroccan nor fully Belgian and today draws upon both identities to inform his work.16 In order to encapsulate the multiplicity of identities which he embodies - Moroccan,

13 Paula, "Farid Belkahia (Morocco, Born 1934)."
14 Map Academy. "Hand of Fatima," April 21, 2022. https://shorturl.at/imyCU.
15 Miriam Bouteba, "Provocative Photographer Mous Lamrabat Subverts North African Stereotypes," *CNN*, April 29, 2020, https://shorturl.at/bLNTZ.
16 Tamar Gerrits, "Mous Lamrabat: Coexisting Cultures," *Metal Magazine*, n.d., https://metalmagazine.eu/en/post/interview/mous-lamrabat-coexisting-cultures.

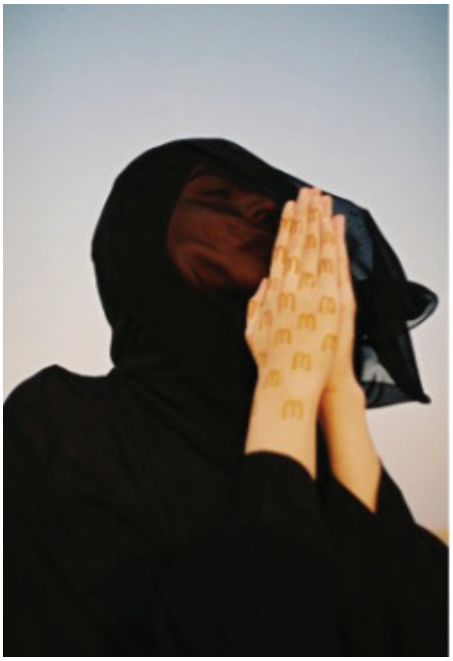

Figure 6 *You want fries with that*, 2019. Photograph. © Mous Lamrabat.

Figure 7 *Do you want fries with tha*t, 2019. Photograph. © Mous Lamrabat.

Figure 8 *Mous Lamrabat for WhatsApp: There's No One Like Us*, 2023. Photograph. © Mous Lamrabat.

Amazigh, African, European, Muslim - Lamrabat created his own universe called Mousganistan, where "the North African diaspora [could] finally feel at home."[17] Lamrabat's works are subsequently characterized by his playful use of brand symbols like the Nike swoosh or the Louis Vuitton logo placed on traditional Moroccan clothes like belgha slippers or djellabas.

By combining local and international symbols using henna and the manipulation of traditional dress, Mous Lamrabat highlights the body as a "tabula rasa" shaped, moulded, and influenced by lived experience across geographies. In particular, his series from Mousganistan, which turned the McDonald's M into henna design (Fig.6,7), and his collaborative ad campaign with WhatsApp, which also used henna to draw out the WhatsApp logo (Fig.8), exemplify the artist's interrogation of the power of henna and its relationship to the body as an emblem of transnational identity, gender, commodification, and globalization.

Lamrabat grew up working at McDonald's in Belgium and was drawn to the M logo because his name started with an M, and he wanted to adopt it for himself. Not only do the hennaed "Ms" become representative of Lamrabat as an individual but also reflect the ways globalization blurs the lines between what is local and what is not, underscoring Lamrabat's transnational identities. Moreover, Lamrabat dissects the idea of diasporic identities through his collaboration with WhatsApp, the communication tool of choice for those in diaspora to connect with their loved

17 Bouteba, "Provocative Photographer Mous Lamrabat Subverts North African Stereotypes."

ones and relatives back home.[18]

While Lamrabat's interrogation of gender through henna is not explicit, his photography raises questions about the gendered practice of henna in that we know it as a female art form done by women for women. So who is the henna artist making the designs for/in Lamrabat's photographs? If he is the artist, he is commenting on the binary experience of who may be a practitioner and if he is not, he reinforces and respects the gendered nature of the craft. Mous Lamrabat's creative fusion of local and international symbols using the feminine art form of henna, highlights Moroccan heritage while simultaneously dissecting the impact of globalization on Moroccan identity and what it means to be a Moroccan in diaspora.

The works of Belkahia and Lamrabat showcase henna's ability to transcend borders, challenge gender norms, and transform the body into a canvas to express the intricacies of a modern, Moroccan identity. Belkahia delves into indigenous symbols, particularly those from Amazigh culture, Islam, and henna design, to challenge prevailing Western artistic norms and explore the convergence of identities and gendered experiences in Moroccan society. Mous Lamrabat, Belkahia's contemporary, takes a playful yet impactful approach with henna by merging North African and Islamic symbols with global pop culture references to reflect the complexities of his own identity and his experience in diaspora. Both artists demonstrate that henna, as a temporary and transformative art form, serves as a metaphor for the ever-changing nature of identity and life itself. Through their works, these artists contribute to a broader conversation about the intersection of tradition and modernity, the impact of globalization on cultural practices, and the nuanced exploration of gender within the realm of henna art in Morocco.

18 Aimee Mclaughlin, "Mous Lamrabat and WhatsApp Celebrate Cross-Cultural Identity in New Show," Creative Review, May 10, 2023, https://shorturl.at/dgns4.

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Gendered bodies, Queer bodies

The Kangas of Lawrence Lemaoana and Kawira Mwirichia

Natalie Taylor

A *kanga* or *khanga* is a cloth composed of two rectangles with a border design called the pindo and a central motif called the *mji*. Usually colourful in design they contain a message called the jina, mostly in Swahili, and have spread throughout East, Central and Southern Africa.[1] Since its advent in the 19th century on the Swahili coast when newly freed slaves wore *kangas* to assert their freedom through sartorial modesty,[2] the kanga has largely been a gendered garment and has developed through a process of cultural and commercial exchange between the Swahili coast and numerous global actors.[3] It is typically wrapped around the body as a skirt, headdress, or baby sling, however, it is also used for ritual ceremonies, subversive political expression, and silent interpersonal communication.[4]

Adopted as national identity markers in Kenya and Tanzania, the *kanga* has frequently been appropriated by contemporary visual artists, the late Kenyan artist Kawira Mwirichia and South African artist Lawrence Lemaoana here being the two examples explored. Both have used the *kanga* to explore violence in relation to gender and sexuality utilising the communicative potential of cloth, however, while Mwirichi's art was celebratory, embracing themes of queer utopias, Lemaoana's work is self-admittedly more cynical in its exploration of South African masculinity.

Just as gender and race were hierarchised according to colonial values, so was textile artistic production as modern art hierarchies of modes

1 Moon Ryan, "Kanga Textile Design, Education, and Production in contemporary Dar es Salaam, Tanzania," 424

2 Fair, "Dressing up: Clothing, Class and Gender in Post-Abolition Zanzibar," 79; [1] Machado, "Cloth's Many Waterways: Indian Ocean Textiles and the Deep Histories of Exchange," 283

3 Moon Ryan, "Kanga Textile Design, Education, and Production in contemporary Dar es Salaam," 127

4 Yahya-Othman, "Dressing Up: Clothing, Class and Gender in Post-Abolition Zanzibar," 135; Hamid, "Kanga: It is More Than What Meets the Eye—A Medium of Communication," 103-109; Beck, "Texts on textiles: proverbiality as characteristic of equivocal communication at the East African coast (Swahili)*," 155-156

of production in Kenya and South Africa were shaped by colonial British education and patronage meaning the decision to produce textile art is not neutral.[5] Textile art took a subordinated position in this hierarchy and was feminised corresponding with its devalued status as women's work in the West.[6] The artificial dichotomy of 'fine art' and 'craft' has been blurred through 'craft' such as textile art appearing in galleries for decades now, however, these deeply entrenched hierarchies still influence textile art's feminisation and devaluation.

Lemaoana, conscious of the double-gendered element of his *kanga* textile art, uses 'the feminine act of sewing' on the kanga to deconstruct South African masculinity.[7] ***Fortune tellers*** 3 (2008) is a complex critique of 'hegemonic masculinity that pervades not only Black males, but also white males' and the role that the media plays in upholding it. 'Hegemonic masculinity' is described as 'the currently most honored way of being a man'.[8] Lemaoana uses the motif of the *sangoma* cloth, a variant of the kanga, which is used by traditional healers who when going through the healing process are in between male and female.[9] The piece features a striped *pindo* with paisley and the mji features a kneeling rugby player, a dancing Jacob Zuma, a coronal burst, and text that reads in capitals 'MANLY SUN SIGN UP TO BE A MAN!'. Zuma on this specific medium was especially pertinent at the time the piece was made, which was still in the aftermath of his acquittal of his rape charges in 2006. The alleged victim wore a *kanga*; Zuma, president of the ANC at the time, testified that he 'interpreted her dress as an invitation'.[10] This is ironic considering the history of the *kanga* as a modesty garment amongst freed slaves. This did not discourage his loyal defenders who showed their support by wearing and waving kangas with his face nor did it impede his ascendancy to presidency while his alleged victim had to seek asylum in the Netherlands.[11] The Daily Sun is South Africa's most popular tabloid and is controversial for its salaciousness, sensationalism, and xenophobia is parodied in the *jina*, as it was a key player in the media circus trial and Zuma's subsequent election victory.[12]

South Africa has been described as a "patchwork-quilt' of patriarchies' in which the three most prominent are white, rural traditional African, and urban African masculinity.[13] The rugby player, a recurring icon in Lemaonana's work, represents this white masculinity as rugby has been a white-dominated sport in which the player is regarded as a masculine ideal, the bursting sun motif by his head reminiscent of a halo.[14] Lemaoana subverts this faceless masculine hero through the pink skin and shirt with floral shorts and socks he wears as stereotypes of femininity, the devalued and subordinate in-

5 Arnold, "Visual Culture in Context: The Implications of Union and Liberation", 12; Okeke, "The quest: from Zaria to Nsukka," 31
6 Von Veh, "Textual Textiles: Gender and Political Parodies in the Work of Lawrence Lemaoana," 445
7 Lemaonana, "My Own Sanity Within That Madness"
8 Connell, Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 832
9 Lemaonana, "My Own Sanity Within That Madness"
10 Von Veh, "Textual Textiles: Gender and Political Parodies in the Work of Lawrence Lemaoana," 451
11 Von Veh, "Textual Textiles: Gender and Political Parodies in the Work of Lawrence Lemaoana," 451; Thamm, "'Khwezi', the woman who accused Jacob Zuma of rape, dies"
12 Wasserman, Tabloid Journalism in South Africa: True Story!, 21-23, 104; Chuma, "'Border jumpers' and 'spreaders of disease' - how South African media incites racial hatred"
13 Bozzoli, ," Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies," 149; Morrel, Jewkes, and Lindegger, "Hegemonic Masculinity/ Masculinities in South Africa: Culture, Power, and Gender Politics," 12
14 Corrigall, "Displacing and Deflecting Otherness: The Subversion of the Dichotomised Framework of Self and Other in Lawrence Lemaoana's Last

verse of masculinity. The player kneels below Zuma who mounts the sun, reflecting the displacement of white hegemonic masculinity at the end of the apartheid. Zuma, represented in the colours of the ANC party with a shield on his face and chest, is characterised as the epitome of a backwards-looking pseudo-traditional masculinity that is 'heterosexist, patriarchal, implicitly violent and... glorifie[s] ideas of male sexual entitlement, notably polygamy, and conspicuous sexual success with women'.[15] The shield, a symbol in the ANC's logo, and the party colours show this ideology transcends the individual and is politically entrenched, the effects of which are felt acutely by women in South Africa where there are high rates of female homicide and rape.[16] The language of optionality in the jina suggests the artificiality of hegemonic masculinity, a uniform to put on, but also the societal pressure to embody these ideals from the media. The transparency of the appliquéd male figures revealing the sangoma cloth underneath could also hint at the precarity of these performed identities as ritual and something to be healed. Lemaoana's use of a ritualised traditional cloth to critique pseudo-traditional gendered rituals is powerful.

The ritualisation of the ***kanga*** ignited Mwirichia's Kanga Pride series. It is a common ritual in Kenya for ***kangas*** of celebration and nuptial guidance to be laid down for brides on their wedding days to walk over, seeing this at a friend's wedding Mwirichia realised 'that may not happen for many queer people in Kenyan society, that open gesture of welcome... I wanted to use the medium of the khanga to celebrate our love'.[17] Homosexuality is illegal in Kenya and is punishable with up to fourteen years in prison; LGBTQ Kenyans face severe discrimination in employment, healthcare, and education as well as increased risk of verbal, physical, and sexual violence.[18] The ***jina*** in Kenya (2017) by Mwirichia responds to the homophobic rhetoric of the then President Uhuru Kenyatta and translates to English as 'My love is valid' which paraphrases Kenyan actress Lupita Nyong'o proclamation that 'Your dreams are valid' when accepting her Oscar.[19] The ***pindo*** features hands encircling each other and chains and the mji depicts two enclosed raised fists against a simple patterned background. The encircling hands could be a reference to the Jubilee party logo, the party of Kenyatta, which includes hands clasping

Line of Defence," 350

15 Morrel, Jewkes, and Lindegger, "Hegemonic Masculinity/ Masculinities in South Africa: Culture, Power, and Gender Politics," 17

16 Morrel, Jewkes, and Lindegger, "Hegemonic Masculinity/ Masculinities in South Africa: Culture, Power, and Gender Politics," 14

17 WePresent, "Kawira Mwirichia — The Nairobi artist on creating a dialog between creative scenes"

18 Nthemba Mutua-Mambo, "Living in a Liminal Space: Feminist and LGBT Alliances in Kenya," 125-126

19 Mukunyadzi, "Q&A with LGBTQ artist and activist Kawira Mwirichia"

in comradeship; Although the Jubilee Party state their values include 'protection of minorities and the marginalised, and non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, ethnicity or any other bias' they upheld colonial legislation that criminalises homosexuality.[20] The chains can be read as representative of the imprisonment and suppression of queer Kenyans as well as the connection and unity of LGBTQ people through their shared struggle. The raised fist is a popular symbol of resistance and revolution but is also a salute to the old logo of the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission which took the Kenyan government to court in 2013 and won after they were denied from registering as an NGO because their name was deemed 'unacceptable'.[21] Despite the starkly queerphobic backdrop of Kenyan society, Mwirichia's image is defiantly optimistic.

Mwirichia's queer *kangas* evoke the same unequal power relations that historically prompted women to use the shield of silent *kanga* communication through proverbs to express themselves.[22] However, while traditionally the women who used this *kanga* communication relied on ambiguity; Mwirichia's aimed to proudly celebrate queer people and their love through her *kangas* evidenced by their presentation in galleries. Returning to the bridal *kanga* ritual, Mwirichia's exhibited her *kangas* on the floor with protective plastic coverings inviting visitors to walk upon them, honouring queer love in an act otherwise not possible in Kenya's queerphobic society. Mwirichia's *kangas* also follow the tradition of political kangas which are worn to signify support for political causes and politicians. George Paul Meiu places Mwirichia in the context of queer utopianism; In a society where queer people are presented as a threat to the future of the nation and future salvation, Meiu posits that Mwirichia's queer utopianism does not aim to 'materialize as imagined but to produce collectivities sustained by the pursuit of their utopias'.[23]

Lemaoana and Mwirichia's use of the kanga, a textile steeped in tradition and nationalistic pride, to subvert the hegemonic pseudo-traditionalism that is used to justify violence enacted on female and queer bodies and attack feminism and queerness as 'un-African' is meaningful. This nebulous 'African' identity as static, insular, and regressive has material consequences and to present misogyny and queerphobia as essential to 'African' iden-

20 Mukunyadzi, "Q&A with LGBTQ artist and activist Kawira Mwirichia"
21 Lichtenstein, "A Kenyan artist designs revolutionary 'kanga' celebrating queer love around the world"; Kelleher, "Kenya's Supreme Court rules in favour of LGBTQ+ rights group in 'triumph of justice"
22 Cowie, "Designing kangas that celebrate queer love"
23 Meiu, "Queer Futures, National Utopias: Notes on Objects, Intimacy Time, and the State,"324)

tity is corrosive and ahistorical. In 2020 Kawira Mwirichia was found dead in her apartment under suspicious circumstances at only thirty-four years old and years later no cause of death, motive, or suspect has ever been revealed, following a brutal trend in Kenya.[24] The kanga which evolved from global influences from India to Indonesia to Portugal to name a few, has been endlessly adapted in custom and function showing that identity and tradition are constructed in a fluid process.[25] Lemaoana and Mwirichia harness(ed) the social and political dialogic power of this complex cloth that lay bare the violence of societies that look back to a fabricated past to uphold an unjust present and suppress feminist and queer futures.

24 Kimuyu, "LGBT activist Kawira Mwirichia found dead in Nairobi"; Schipani, "Kenyan killing exposes prejudices faced by LGBT+ Africans"
25 Moon Ryan, "A Decade of Design: The Global Invention of the Kanga, 1876-1886," 128

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Reimagining Identity

The Multifaceted Nature of the African Female Body

Xuan Zhou

African women's bodies have long been a canvas upon which narratives and ideologies have been inscribed, often without the consent of the women to whom these bodies belong. Depictions of African women in art and literature often take on the exotic overtones of colonial fantasy, believing that the East belongs to another world.[1] After centuries of patriarchy and hierarchy, African women are also constrained by negative images of themselves.[2] This essay will delve into the complex role of African women in art, using the female body as a medium, while challenging historical oppression and colonial, orientalist, and patriarchal narratives. This essay uses the work of Houria Niati and Souad Abdelrasoul to focus on the multifaceted nature of women's bodies under orientalism and to discuss women's diverse roles in patriarchal societies, and provides an analysis to examine the underlying reasons for the diversity of female representation.

Houria Niati's female image within colonialism and orientalism.

Houria Niati's work challenges stereotypes of North African women in the context of colonialism and orientalism. Algeria was colonized by France in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Western painters and writers portrayed the Eastern world as exotic, backward, and mysterious, frequently reducing its people to fantasy and stereotype.

Delacroix's painting "The Women of Algiers" (Fig.1) is a classic example of orientalist art. It was painted during a brief stay in Algiers where he had access to the interior of a harem. It exoticizes and objectifies Algerian women, presenting them as passive figures within the secluded spaces of a harem. Although such images catered to Western tastes and represented Muslim and

1 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003).
2 Leslie Omolara Ogundipe, 'African Women, Culture and Another Development', *Présence Africaine* 141, no. 1 (1987): 123, https://doi.org/10.3917/presa.141.0123.

North African women in great colour and detail, they did not reflect the true lives or agency of the women depicted.3 We can see that the painting has added standard orientalist elements like the narghile pipe, the charcoal burner, and the odalisques pose. European viewers in the 1800s associated the "narghile pipe" with smoking opium or hashish, and they also linked the loose, unbound clothes to sexual immorality.4 These ideas made the Western fantasy even more real.

Houria Niati was born in French Algeria in 1948 where she lived through the war of independence (1954–1962). Her work serves as a form of rebellion against the simplistic and exotic depictions of Algerian women. In her paintings, the clothing, jewels, and carpets that Delacroix and others used to objectify women are removed to reveal feminine reality and authentic dignity. Her women emerge from dark purple, blue, and viridian backgrounds (Fig.2), showing her unhappiness, fear, and anger about the pain of Algerians as well as the exploitation of women. Her use of these colours also demonstrates her admiration for Delacroix's use of pigment.5

Having considered the context, it is now possible to attend to women's role in Niati's artwork. Niati's paintings are stark, with bright colours and big, expressive lines that focus on the female body (Fig.2). In doing so, she not only shows how strong and tough North African women are, but also how complicated their feelings are because

Figure 1 Eugene Delacroix, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement*, 1834, Oil on Canvas; 1.80m x 2.29m
Musee du Louvre, France

Figure 2 Houria Niati, *No To Torture* (After Delacroix Women of Algiers, 1834), 1982, Oil on canvas; 188 x 270 cm

3 Salah M. Hassan and Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art., Gendered visions: the art of contemporary Africana women artists (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1997).

4 Rebecca Blake, 'Changing Perceptions Over Time: The Influence of the European Fantasy of the Orient on Eugene Delacroix's Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement', Burgmann Journal, no. V (5 December 2016), https://studentjournals.anu.edu.au/index.php/burgmann/article/view/64.

5 Houria Niati, 'Houria Niati | Felix & Spear', felixandspear, accessed 8 November 2023, https://www.felixandspear.com/houria-niati.

Figure 3 Souad Abdelrasoul
Nile Crocodiles, 2021
Acrylics on canvas; 187 x 187 cm

of their political and historical battles.[6] Niati's women do not keep quiet; they seem to come out of the painting and challenge the viewer with their eyes, showing a depth of character and experience that imperialist stories often did not show.

Her art does more than just show a different side of North African women; it also interacts with history, questioning and turning over the colonial and orientalist stories that have long hidden the truth about these women's lives. Niati's work is a strong voice for rethinking what it means to be an African woman, showing how complex they are and standing up for their independence and humanity. With her brush, she takes back the body of the African woman as a place for personal and political expression,[7] quite different from how it was portrayed in the past, when it was seen as something to be owned.

Souad Abdelrasoul's female image under patriarchy.

Abdelrasoul is an Egyptian visual artist who works in a society where gender roles have been set by patriarchy for a long time. She claims that female artists have not been fairly treated and a man's masculinity is linked to his work.[8] She explores the themes of female identity, women's roles, and the human condition within the context of African culture and within a patriarchal society. Abdelrasoul's paintings often feature women prominently, frequently surrounded by or merged with elements of nature, such as flora and fauna (Fig.3). This symbiosis can be inter-

6 Salah M. Hassan, 'The Installations of Houria Niati', Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art 1995, no. 3 (1 November 1995): 50–55, https://doi.org/10.1215/10757163-3-1-50.

7 Houria Niati, No to Torture, Yes to Life: An Interview with Houria Niati, n.d., https://www.brainscanmag.com/houria-niati.

8 Souad Abdelrasoul, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-9G9UfuDOAA.

preted as a commentary on the resilience and multifaceted identity of women who, like nature, bear life and nurture yet remain untamed and free-spirited.

Through her link to the Nile and the use of water as a symbol in her art, Abdelrasoul creates images of women that show how different women's problems and experiences are. She uses water as a metaphor for things that happen in life, like birth, rebirth, violence, and death. This is meant to show that women, like rivers, are complicated and have many layers. Abdelrasoul's link to the Nile, which has always been a part of her life, may also represent the strength and resilience of women who overcome changing social constraints.[9] The river seems calm on the surface, but it hides possibilities below. Her work may suggest that women often have skills and potential that are not immediately obvious. Abdelrasoul's link to the Nile and her use of water as a symbol in her art can be seen as a reflection of how deep and complicated women's lives are, how strong they are when things go wrong, and how many secret strengths they have.

The inevitable oppression: a catalyst for artistic expression.

An analysis of the intersection between African women's art and politics requires discussions on the inevitability of oppression and its catalytic impact on women's art. Throughout history, the phenomenon of oppression has consistently played a pivotal role in stimulating artistic manifestation, specifically within the contexts of colonialism, orientalism, and patriarchy in the African continent. These oppressive systems have not only shaped the experiences of individuals and communities across the continent but have also provided a fertile ground for artists to respond, resist, and challenge these structures through their creative works.

The inevitability of oppression stems partly from the power dynamics inherent in human societies. The oppression emerges from the economic structures of capitalism, which are designed to benefit the ruling class at the expense of the proletariat.[10] It is therefore evident that capitalism coexists with and necessitates the presence of oppression. Colonial oppression, on the other hand, has often been rationalized through orientalist discourses.[11] Due to the long-term dominance of men in the historical social structure, women will naturally be regarded as "the Other" and the "second sex". Culture, traditions, and social systems are all constructed with men at the centre. These factors also jointly shape the marginalization of women.[12]

It is within this context of struggle that art emerges as a poignant voice of resilience and defiance. African women, historically subjected to a double bind of oppression through colonial hierarchies and entrenched patriarchal norms, have found in art a canvas for resistance and a means of articulating their own narratives. Through diverse expressions of the body, women artists channel the weight of their collective experiences into powerful expressions of identity, often challenging and reshaping the discourse around gender

9 'Like A Single Pomegranate Edited by SAHAR BEHAIRY', accessed 8 November 2023, https://www.almasartfoundation.org/usr/documents/press/download_url/6/souad-abdelrasoul-digital-book_compressed-1-.pdf.
10 Karl Marx Engels Friedrich, 'The Communist Manifesto', in Ideals and Ideologies, 11th ed. (Routledge, 2019).
11 Said, Orientalism.
12 Simone De Beauvoir and Roswitha Böhm, Le Deuxième Sexe (Gallimard Paris, 1969), https://www.lavoixduson.fr/airiq/le-2-sexe.pdf.

and justice. Their art not only reflects personal stories, but also advocates for multiple visions of African women in the world. In short, oppression in its various forms does not merely suppress, it paradoxically empowers and emboldens artistic expression, turning pain into a palette from which resistance and rebirth are painted.

In summary, this paper investigates the multifaceted nature of African women's roles in contrast to Western stereotypes and dependence on patriarchal societies. The works of artists like Houria Niati and Souad Abdelrasoul redefines the narrative, offering a nuanced portrayal of African women that transcends victimhood and exudes strength, resilience, complexity, and vitality. These artists are doing more than reflecting reality when they reclaim the female body; they are actively shaping it, demanding their rightful place, and speaking up against a historical backdrop that has frequently tried to stifle their voices. In a way, this artistic reinvention shows how strong African women are and challenges the systems that keep throwing them off. It demonstrates that, although being a horrific part of history, oppression can indeed serve as a stimulus for deep artistic expression and invention, creating possibilities for liberation and empowerment.

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Souad Abdelrasoul, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9G9UfuDOAA.

Chapter. II

EMANCIPATION

J.D. Okhai Ojeikere's art invitation

Exploring hairstyle as a political material in Africa and its diaspora

Sahar El Faijah

From Black Power to institutional marketing

the effect of changing contexts on the political significance of an image

Luciann Flynn

Somnyama Ngonyama

Hail the Roar of Resistance

Janet Delves

The Rise of the Cultural Couture in Postcolonial Africa

The Case of Loza Maleombho

Mercy Ijeoma Oguama

Self-Portraiture, the Outsider's New Token of Difference

How does the historical imposition of Western perceptions on self-representation in African art shape the dynamics of African self-portraiture within the global art canon?

Fiona Quadri

Interpretation of African Mask by Romuald Hazoumè & the Connection to the Body

Hae Su Shin

How are expressions of Negritude portrayed through the two oil paintings of Negritude artist Ben Enwonwu?

Iman Lynch-Eghill

J.D. Okhai Ojeikere's art invitation

Exploring hairstyle as a political material in Africa and its diaspora

Sahar El Faijah

While hairstyling could be examined as an artistic practice on its own, it is the significance of its representation which interests us here. At the starting point of this conversation: the magnificent art of JD Okhai Ojeikere. The Nigerian photographer is renowned for capturing a multitude of hairstyles encountered in his country, from the Independence period around the 1960s until his death in 2014. Beyond their aesthetic aspect, his pieces act as an identity expression, exposing the viewer to an African tradition[1]. Ojeikere's case study is particularly relevant because it is situated in a period of substantial decolonisation waves[2]. Combining an archival and a documenting function, his work on hairstyle challenges the colonial gaze. Extensively, it revisits the sense of otherness from an Indigenous perspective, which revokes White Euro-American fixed/unfixed and imagined/real dichotomies[3]. Articulated around the body, the focus on hair as a subject is far from innocuous and translates African narratives, as a dialogue to be opened on memory and liberation. Accordingly, the aim of this article is to explore hairstyle as a political material in Africa and its diaspora from the analysis of Ojeikere's art.

> "All these hairstyles are ephemeral. I want my photographs to be noteworthy traces of them. I always wanted to record moments of beauty, moments of knowledge. Art is life. Without art, life would be frozen." – Ojeikere[4].

Through his words, Ojeikere highlights the crucial role culture can play in our society and places hairstyle farther than a decorative element, with-

1 Nicome, Alexandra. "Who is Neotraditional?: Visualizing Postcolonial Identities in JD'Okhai Ojeikere's Hairstyles Photographs." (2017).
2 Nugent, Paul. *Africa since independence.* Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012.
3 Gaafar, Rania. "Migrating Forms: Contemporary African Photography at The Walther Collection." *Third Text* 25, no. 2 (2011): 241-247.
4 Paoletti, Giulia. 2018. "J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere" The Met. Updated October 31, 2023. https://ipevolunteers.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/J.D.-Okhai-Ojeikere-Supporting-Docs.pdf









out denying an appreciation for beauty. In the same vein, it is pertinent to acknowledge Du-bois' popular argument that art should not only integrate both components of beau-ty and truth, but always be propaganda. By satisfying these criteria, artists use their creativity as a voice and there-fore as a self-affirmation statement. Even though the African-American intellectual lived a few de-cades before Ojeikere, a connection between them is construc-tive, as it helps to bridge Afri-ca and its di-aspora, in an attempt to value a com-mon heritage[5]. Négritude is a concept which brings even more substance to this rea-soning, no-tably because it emerged ap-proximately at the same epoch. It has been replaced by Pan-Africanism now-adays but it remains a key movement of African history. Seeking universality in the values and experiences of Black communities around the world, it encouraged anti-hegemonic expres-sions in a (post)colo-nial and slavery con-text[6]. These notions are encapsulated in Ojeikere's photo-graphs as they bring forward a specific part of the body, the hair, and ways of ap-prehending it. Despite the well-made structure of his portraits, a sense of authen-ticity is reported, as the art-ist selected hairstyles in everyday life sit-uations. Captured on the streets, offices, par-ties, models personify an endemic relationship between themselves and the photographer as opposed to an im-ported dynamic. A precise structure is followed, with subjects mostly re-corded either from the rear, head on, or in profile. The simplicity of the backdrop puts in evidence the sophistication of the hair-styles[4]. This is reinforced by the close-ups and headshots, making the spectator zoom in and move through the architecture by the hair, which nearly become abstract lines and position the

5 Williams, Robert W. 2018. ""Criteria of Negro Art" by W.E.B. Du Bois" WEBDuBois.org. Updated October 25, 2023. http://www.webdubois.org/dbCriteriaNArt.html

6 Diagne, Souleymane Bachir. 2021. "Négritude" The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Updated October 22, 2023. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/negritude/#GenCon

models as sub-texts. It is difficult to ignore Ojeikere's style, who printed his hairstyle series in black and white. Resounding with the racially discriminatory paradigm from colonisation and slavery opposing Black and White people, the portraits could be interpreted concurrently in two ways. Firstly, they could disclose an unconscious form of mental colonisation inherited from European visual ethnographic documentations which exoticised indigenous people. An emphasis on the hair, and therefore a lesser attention on the model, would amount to a metaphoric fetishism as the postcolonial individual is symbolised by a socio-cultural object. On the other hand, the portraits could convey a response to visual ethnographic documentations which took place under imperial control. As such, the stereotypes on African hairstyles are subverted and re-assessed in the light of a decolonising gaze. What is certain is that the viewer is compelled to visualise difference and navigate be-

tween the tension of political histories[3].
Wearing African hairstyles rejects Euro-American standards as it can be traced back to a pre-colonial tradition. Ojeikere's contemporary pieces use an ancient custom and, for that matter, may be observed as neo-traditional art. In this regard, hairstyling is actualised but protected from forgetfulness and reasserted as an archival material[1]. Prior to colonisation, the boundaries between African countries as we know them today did not exist. Rwandan journalist Nsabimana argues that there is a persisting discourse which depicts European imperial powers as the bringers of history and knowledge in Africa. Reminding the ethos of civilising missions, this account completely overlooks the diversity and richness of autochthonous cultures. Tribal communities were, and in fact still are, an important political aspect across multiple African countries[7]. As neighbouring tribes lived on the same territory, hairstyle came up as an indicator to distinguish one's ethnicity, age, religion, or social status. When Trans-Atlantic slavery occurred, Africans were shaved against their will, in a dehumanising and alienating process performed by colonists. The control of deported peoples through the politics of the body was threatened by the re-adoption of some traditional hairstyles within American cotton plantations, echoing with Négritude introduced earlier. In her video "The History of Braids & Bands on Black Hair", American media host Peterson stresses that in spite of a practical side to ease exhausting workdays, embracing traditional hairstyles was a reconnection to stripped away origins[8]. It is explained in the work

7 AJ+ français. 2020. "Afrique: Un Continent Sans Histoire ?" 8 November, 2020. Educational video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ONlia22750&list=PLKy1xeX08_1FYnmp5pP3fqj7eHkNAx-uQ-&index=56

8 NowThis News. 2018. "The History of Braids & Bans on Black Hair" 9 April, 2018. Educational video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_l0rEJq1_s&t=79s

of Colombian historian Garcia that the geometric patterns sculpted in hair illustrated escape routes from the plantations and enabled discrete storage of food, manifesting as a combat for dignity and freedom[9].

Exceeding the kidnapping stages in Africa, hair was the site of punishment. Slave masters would use shaving as a retribution, reinforcing their supreme position. Moreover, it materialised jealousy sentiments amongst the White wives of enslavers. Indeed, they used the depiction of the African Temptress with abundant hair or noticeable styles to justify a fear of (generally not consensual) interracial sex between their husbands and their slaves, thence ordering hair mutilation. This was especially true for mixed women who had a closer texture to these White wives and with whom they felt in competition. Stepping out of the Black vs White taxonomy, it set the ground for a new form of violence: the lighter the skin and the more Euro-centric the features, the more power[10]. According to USA "One Drop Rule" enforced during the 20th century, an individual with one African ancestor was considered Black. This assigned the children of slaves and slave masters to the slave status. A hierarchy was also induced, with "Blackest" slaves to the hardest physical labour and "Whitest" slaves to less intense chores. Maintaining White Supremacy, this colourist political model was outlawed in 1967, but has unfortunately reproduced until today. By establishing an implicit ideal of Whiteness, darker-skinned individuals are often more the target of racism[11]. Through globalisation, the colourist scheme travelled overseas and imposed the White beauty standard[12]. As a consequence, the fantasy of straight hair was implemented in minds, to assimilate and virtually detach from the attributes of the persecuted. It testifies a heavy internalised racism, which hinders the capacity of self-love and self-affirmation[13]. DuBois' stance on the necessity to provide propagandistic art would be supported considering the scarcity of positive African hair representations. Ojeikere does fill in this gap with his portraits, as an encouragement to embrace the African and diasporic Self, in line with the core of Négritude. Although the unconscious pressure of meeting Euro-centric characteristics is persistent, hair has been at the front of resistance and empowerment scenes. For instance, in 1960s USA, the Black Power movement used Afro hair as a symbol of freedom from domination and to bring forward a racial identity[14]. It could be imagined that there were differences between Africa and America as they had different political concerns. The reference to tribal sub-cultures might have been significant in some nationalist strategies to emancipate from colonial authority, by returning to pre-existing African customs. Notwithstanding, in America, the tribal fabric was residual in that enslaved populations had various origins and instead recognised themselves in their Blackness. As a result, the multi-dimensionality of African identity is re-

9 HomeTeam History. 2020. "A History of African Hairstyles Used as Maps To Escape Slavery" 27 February, 2020. Educational video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8agJ_6LVxyk

10 White, Shane, and Graham White. "Slave hair and African American culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." *The Journal of Southern History* 61, no. 1 (1995): 45-76.

11 Hollinger, David A. "The one drop rule & the one hate rule." *Daedalus* 134, no. 1 (2005): 18-28.

12 Marginson, Simon. "Globalisation: The good, the bad and the ugly." *Keynote for centre for global HE 2021* (2021).

13 Tate, Shirley. "Black beauty: Shade, hair and anti-racist aesthetics." *Ethnic and racial studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 300-319.

14 Vargas, Mary. "Fashion statement or political statement: The use of fashion to express black pride during the civil rights and black power movements of the 1960 's." *Undergraduate Review* 5, no. 1 (2009): 95-99.

vealed and disconnected from Négritude which implied too standardising categories in nature[15]. Nevertheless, the resilience and supportive space it invokes is not to be abandoned.
Hairstyling, be it at a salon or by relatives, are an integrate part of African and diasporic culture. More than a beauty care moment, it stimulates creative answers to violence and dispossession, as part of a common experience which can be brainstormed together[16]. The whole procedure is a constantly evolving yet familiar material. The wide-range of choices renders its autonomy to the African and diasporic Body, as a coded language inspired by ancestors. Ties between individuals have been described as a feature of hairstyling environments[17]. Building upon the meaning of sisterhood, which overcomes self-hate and abuse, a political solidarity preserved from racism is advanced. Of course, this theory could be revisited to transcend womanhood. Above all, it constructs intersectionality and recognises the importance of safe places[18]. Essentially, African and diasporic hairstyles typify stories of survival in oppressive political circumstances. It is not just hair, it is a transnational history, which continues to be written.

15 Jenkins, Nicole Dezrea. "Contested identities: African diaspora and identity making in a hair braiding salon." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 48, no. 6 (2019): 806-835.
16 Mercer, Kobena. "Black hair/style politics." *Black British culture and society: A text reade*r 34 (2000).
17 Tarlo, Emma. *Entanglement: The secret lives of hair*. Simon and Schuster, 2016.
18 Hooks, Bell. "Sisterhood: Political solidarity between women." In *Feminist Social Thought*, pp. 484-500. Routledge, 2014.

Appendix

Poem Our hair is *political* by Sahar El Faijah

El Faijah, S. (2023), Our hair is political (Online) Dune Magazine. Available from https://www.dunemagazine.net/articles/our-hair-is-political (1 November 2023).

Film *Hair Love* by Matthew Cherry

HD TRAILERS (2020) Hair Love/Oscar Winning Short Film. 30 June. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VV2wroJE5v4 (Accessed: 2 November 2023).

Documentary *Black Power in Hair* by Juliana Kasumu

The New Yorker (2022) Black Power in Hair. 3 August. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtaV6dhVrUg (Accessed: 2 November 2023).

Instagram *community Hrach is Beautiful*

Hrach is Beautiful (2023), Hrach is Beautiful (Online) Instagram. Available from https://www.instagram.com/hrachisbeautiful/ (2 November 2023).

Painting series *The Redemption* by Tawny Chatmon

Barnes, S. (2020), Glittering Gold Portraits Celebrate the Beauty of Black Hair in the Style of Gustav Klimt Paintings (Online) My Modern Met. Available from https://mymodernmet.com/tawny-chatmon-the-redemption-portraits/ (2 November 2023).

Sculpture *Maari* by Murjoni Merriweather

Merriweather, M. (2020), Maari (Online) Instagram. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/CHa1ZKXJgOF/?img_index=1 (2 November 2023).

Photographs *Braids in North Africa* by Africcan

Africcan (2022), Braids in North Africa (Online) Instagram. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/ClBElEaIXnb/?img_index=1 (2 November 2023).

Book *JD Okhai Ojeikere* by Bisi Silva

Silva, B. (2014). JD Okhai Ojeikere. Lagos: Centre for Contemporary Art.

Podcast *Texture Talks* by Piage Lewin

Lewin, P. (2023) Texture Talks, Apple Podcasts (Podcast). Available at: https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/texture-talks/id1669983295 (Accessed: 2 November 2023).

Workshop *The Power of Your Natural Hair!* by Nancy Falaise

Real Stories (2021) The Power of Your Natural Hair! Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfAfK42hBq8 (Accessed: 2 November 2023).

Song *Don't Touch my Hair* by Solange

Solangeknowlesmusic (2016) Solange – Don't Touch my Hair (Video) ft. Sampha. 3 October. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTtrnDbOQAU (Accessed: 2 November 2023).

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Hooks, Bell. "Sisterhood: Political solidarity between women." In *Feminist Social Thought*, pp. 484-500. Routledge, 2014.

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Vargas, Mary. "Fashion statement or political statement: The use of fashion to express black pride during the civil rights and black power movements of the 1960's." *Undergraduate Review* 5, no. 1 (2009): 95-99.

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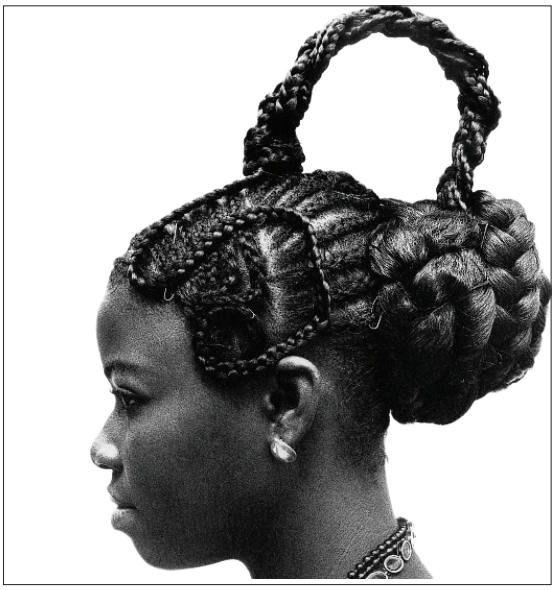
Cover image source (with permission)

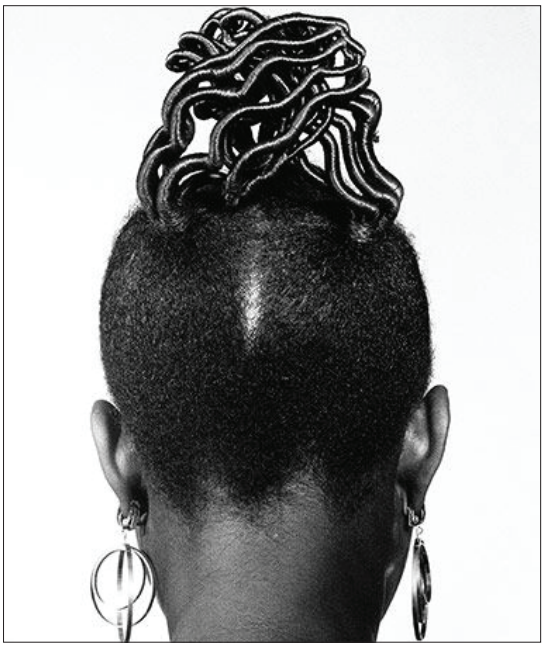
Westafricancommunity. 2021. "Nigerian hairstyles by J.D. Okhai Ojeikere, 1970-1975" Instagram. Updated November 2, 2023. https://www.instagram.com/p/CV22x2fLzLa/

Nigerian Hairstyles



J.D 'Okhai Ojeikere | Abebe Hairstyle, 1975

Afro Photos JD-Okhai-Ojeikere



JD-Ohkai-Ojeikere vintage hairstyle

J.D 'Okhai Ojeikere's Portrait of Nigerian Hairstyle

From Black Power to Institutional Marketing

The Effect of Changing Contexts on The Political Significance of an Image

Luciann Flynn

The transcultural, transcontinental, and transmaterial journey of the image shown in Figure 1 has taken it from studio portrait in 1970s Khartoum to institutional tweet in 21st Century London. By tracking the changing environmental and contextual circumstances it has encountered across its six-stage journey, I will investigate their effect on its impact. The shifting power balance between subject, photographer, viewer, and image have fluctuated over nearly five decades since its creation as well as its format, ownership, intent and viewing context. The essay proposes that, notwithstanding these changes, the image has retained its political impact and examines the key reason behind this.

Portrait *au Soleil or Sun Lady* was taken in 1975 by Fouad Hamza Tibin (1952-2020) in his Studio Mwahib, El Obeid, Sudan. Scholarly or biographical information on Tibin's career is scarce, but anecdotally he exhibited in Mali and France from 2005 onwards.[1]

Stage 1: Studio portra

Figure 1 shows the digital reproduction of a black and white analogue photograph of a young woman in three quarters pose. Her head and hair almost fill the bright sunburst behind, set against a dark background to evoke a striking effect. The use of contrast is enhanced by her lit-up face and the white stripes on her short-sleeved top.

The subject's afro visually connects the photograph explicitly to the media image, and therefore implicitly to the political ideology, of key protagonists of the American Black Power and Civil Rights movement during the late 1960s/ early 1970s, specifically Angela Davis (b1944). Symbolic not only of the fight against oppression

1 "Fouad HAMZA TIBIN | ELNOUR." Accessed November 8, 2023. https://www.elnour.org/fouad-hanza-tibin/.

Figure 1 *Portrait au Soleil/Sun Lady*, black and white analogue photograph. Fouad Hamza Tibin, circa 1975, Studio Mwahib, El Obeid, Sudan. 10.24cm x 10.27cm. Source: Wikicommons

through the overt rejection of the hegemony of White standards of beauty in the West,[2] plus discriminatory practices related to a Black woman's hair,[3] the afro also defies the dehumanising of Africans by head shaving during slavery.[4] In the period of geo-political change in which the photograph was taken, the afro may be understood as signifier of political resistance. In the commercial studio environment, which this is assumed to be, the photographer's role was to interpret the wishes of the sitter, with whom the ultimate purchasing power also lay. In this case, while comparison with the better-documented but equally longstanding tradition of private studio photography in Mali suggests the sitter's intent was to be represented as modern, it is unclear whether the politico-aesthetic choices were hers or those of the photographer.[5]

The shared iconography of the afro also visually connects to affiliated contemporary political movements on the African continent, including that of South African anti-apartheid activist Miriam Makeba (1932-2008), whose 'Natural' hairstyle inspired early afro adopters in the United States.[6] Malick Sidibé (1935-2016) also accelerated post-colonial progress through image making by photographing Mali's youth expressing their solidarity with the American Civil Rights movement through hairstyles, clothing, and

2 Patton, Tracey Owens. "Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair?: African American Women and Their Struggles with Beauty, Body Image, and Hair." NWSA Journal 18, no. 2 (2006): 25.

3 Caldwell, Paulette M. "A Hair Piece: Perspectives on the Intersection of Race and Gender." Duke Law Journal 1991, no. 2 (April 1991): 370.

4 Ellis-Hervey, Nina, Ashley Doss, DeShae Davis, Robert Nicks, and Perla Araiza. "African American Personal Presentation: Psychology of Hair and Self-Perception." Journal of Black Studies 47, no. 8 (2016): 871.

5 Bajorek, Jennifer. Unfixed: Photography and Decolonial Imagination in West Africa. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.5.

6 Walker, Susannah. "Black Is Profitable: The Commodification of the Afro, 1960—1975." *Enterprise & Society* 1, no. 3 (2000): 541.

dance.[7] A relationship is also forged with Cameroonian-Nigerian photographer Samuel Fosso (b.1962) in his 2008 self-portrait as Angela Davis (Figure 2).

Angela Davis's work with Black women's rights is referenced by Fosso's badge (Figure 2). In the *Sun Lady* context, this points to an intention beyond simple iconographical affiliation with Civil Rights or the prevailing zeitgeist. Analysing her pose and expression provides insight into the political and religious context in which the photograph was taken, potentially confirming the above intention, but not whether its main agent was sitter or photographer.

The sitter 'performs,' posing with head tilted interrogatively to the right, turned to look over the left shoulder.[8] Her calm, direct gaze lacks an activist's zeal and the choice of three quarters pose with chin dipped is less challenging than face on, chin raised. While her half-smile and arms at rest convey tranquillity over revolution, her afro, direct gaze, and nimbus suggest the photograph is marking a 'new dawn.'

The effect recalls Barthes' statement "photography is the advent of myself as other" – the sitter herself is not a revolutionary but her pose and the composition are representative of change wrought by women for women, nineteen years after Sudan's independence.[9] The decade-long pause in the Sudan Civil War following the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement allowed women's pressure groups to effect change in the imple-

Figure 2 Angela Davis, from the series *"African Spirits"* 2008, Samuel Fosso. © Samuel Fosso, courtesy of Jean Marc Patras, Paris. Source: The Walther Collection

7 Diawara, Manthia. *"The 1960s in Bamako: Malick Side and James Brown" in Elam, Harry Justin, and Jackson, Kennell, Eds. Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005:243.

8 Shusterman, Richard. "Photography as Performative Process." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70, no. 1 (2012): 68.

9 Shusterman, "Performance," 70.

mentation of Sharia law relative to consent to marriage.[10] With Islamic fundamentalism and economic collapse eight years away,[11] the photographer and his subject have encapsulated a moment of positive change for the Muslim women of north Sudan.[12]

Using the sunburst motif both elevates the status of the sitter and her representative role as well as strengthens its connection to contemporary politics. Figure 3 demonstrates the use of the fiery halo in Islamic art to indicate a high-status female figure, in this case 16th century Maryam and Issa, while Figure 4 creates a similar effect around Angela Davis's head using the Black Power logo. A reference to the Black Madonna iconography of the mid/late mediaeval period[13] could also be argued, given its widespread presence in the eastern Mediterranean and southern Sudan's Christian minority.[14]

Stage 2 and 3: Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE (United Arab Emirates)

Figure 5 shows the online announcement for The Khartoum School exhibition in 2016/17, featuring Sun Lady. The exhibition was co-curated by Cornell University professor Salah Hassan (b.1964), expert on the Khartoum School. Founded in 2009 with the mission of showcasing works with 'Arab and internatio nal artists,' the Sharjah Art Foundation[15] Post-9/11, its exhibitions have played a role in addressing the 'racialism of the category Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim'.[16]

Figure 3 *Nativité dans le desert from Neyshâburi, Qesas al-anbiyá (Stories of the prophets),* Qazvîn, Iran, circa 1595. Gold and coloured ink on paper. 29.5 × 20.5cm. Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France, manuscripts, supplément persan 1313, f. 174

10 Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn. "Shari'a Law in the Sudan: History and Trends since Independence." *Africa Today* 28, no. 2 (1981): 74.
11 Warburg, Gabriel R. "The Sharia in Sudan: Implementation and Repercussions, 1983-1989." *Middle East Journal* 44, no. 4 (1990): 630.
12 Roden, David. "Regional Inequality and Rebellion in the Sudan." *Geographical Review* 64, no. 4 (October 1974): 501.
13 Scheer, Monique. "From Majesty to Mystery: Change in the Meanings of Black Madonnas from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries." *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 5 (December 2002): 1413.
14 Roden, "Regional," 507
15 "Exhibitions - Sharjah Art Foundation." Accessed November 8, 2023. https://sharjahart.org/sharjah-art-foundation/exhibitions/the-khartoum-school-the-making-of-the-modern-art-movement-in-sudan-1945-pre
16 Zarur, Kathy. "Self-Portraiture and the Rise of 'Arab' Art: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Hassan Musa and Walid Raad." *University of Michigan, Department of*

Paradoxically, the digital image of Sun Lady promoted the show, but the archive images do not record its exhibition context.[17] Its selection confirms that decades later, its transcultural visual aesthetics and historical political resonance (easily accessed through the afro iconography) were still valued and deemed relevant. Described variously as producing "imagery expressive of Africa"[18] as well as "an exotic image of Africa,"[19] for many artists the Khartoum School's purpose lay in progressing a post-colonial Sudanese identity during a finite period.[20] Although from 2005 onwards image copyright and therefore distribution control of Sun Lady was shared between Tibin and Elnour, a French-owned organisation whose stated aim is to preserve little-known Sudanese photography, it may be assumed that Tibin consented to the image's inclusion within the Khartoum School ethos.[21]

As an analogue exhibit, *Sun Lady* shifted to the public domain, controlled by the curators and the institution 'as taste makers,' and thereby subject to their specific agenda. By Sharjah, the photograph and photographer are re-coded as historical components of the Khartoum School. As a digital promotional image, *Sun Lady*'s subject was a tool of the institution with no further agency.

Phase 4: Hassan Musa's Mail Art

Figure 6 (a,b) show verso and recto of five postcards from The *Khartoum School* exhibition

Figure 4 *Free Angela,* poster, Herb Bruce 1971. Ink on paper. Source: Lisbet Tellefsen Archive, Zimmerli Art Museum.

Figure 5 T*he Khartoum School: The making of the modern art movement in Sudan (1945-present)* website exhibition announcement.
Source: https://sharjahart.org/sharjah-art-foundation/

Art History, Doctoral Dissertation, January 1, 2014:53.

17 "Sharjah."

18 Elsbeth Court cited by Zarur, Self-Portraiture, 86.

19 Salah Hassan cited by Zarur, Self-Portraiture, 88.

20 Hassan, Salah M, Sarah Adams, Ibrahim El Salahi, Tate Modern (Gallery, and Art New. Ibrahim El-Salahi: A Visionary Modernist. London: Tate, 2012:10

21 "Elnour."

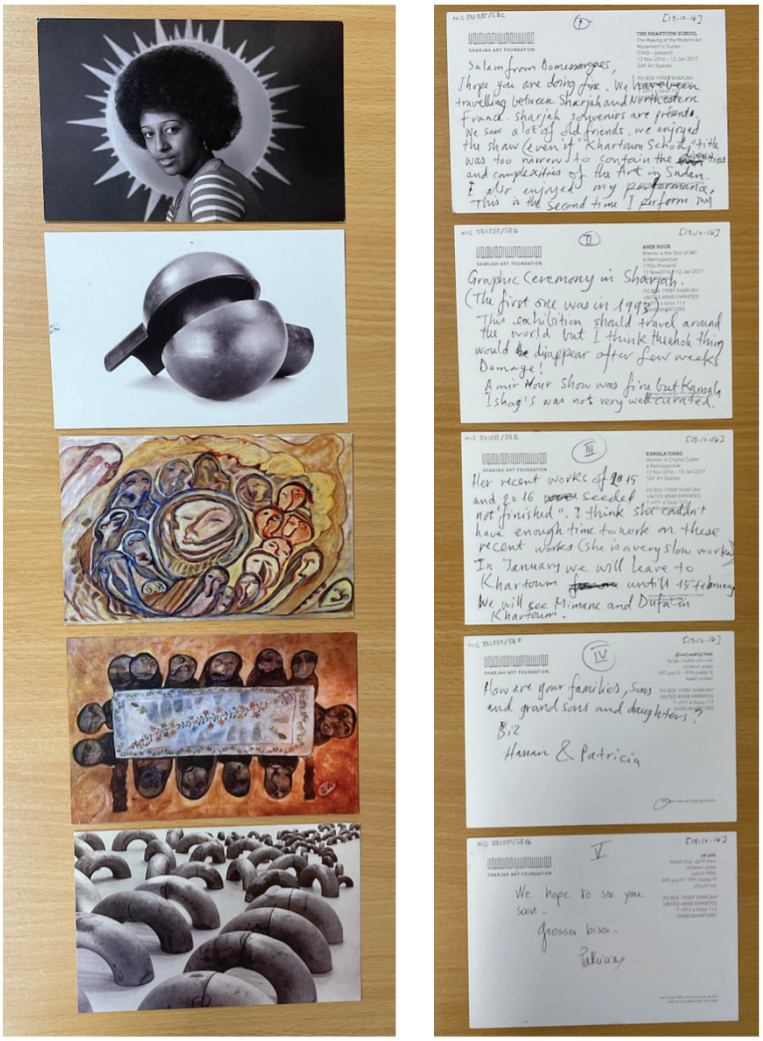


Figure 6 a.b Verso and recto of physical postcards sent by Hassan Musa to Elsbeth Court, 2016 from Sharjah Art Foundation and digital record of *Sun Lady*. Coloured ink on card.
Source: SOAS Special Collections Ref 381333/58C.

sent by Hassan Musa (b.1951) in 2016 to Elsbeth Court, art historian and academic at SOAS. Musa is a left leaning, politically engaged Sudanese artist and art critic, who performed at the 2016/17 Sharjah exhibition. Described by Salah Hassan as among the key disruptors of the Khartoum School hegemony, Musa critiqued the movement for making art to fit Western demand, and, like criticism levelled at Senghorian Negritude in 1969,[22] for its dependence upon colonial structures.[23]

Musa's view of "All world art as a common heritage"[24] is reflected in the satirical musings through collage and drawings which comprised his Mail Art series. These works on paper, sent to Court among others, were affiliated with the eponymous 1960s pop art movement may be understood as critiques on global inequality and inherent corruption of specific governments and elites.[25]

In postcard format, the *Sun Lady* image made its transcontinental journey separately from the Mail Art project. It returned to the private domain, arguably re-coded as performance art, studied by one individual at a time. As a postcard, *Sun Lady* became integrated into the globalised network of increased connectivity envisaged by Victorian England when the format was invented. Stripped of its Sudanese political context, the sitter's non-confrontational attitude contradicts the political signifier of her afro, commodifying it to

22 Franz Fanon cited by Anderson, Samuel. ""Négritude Is Dead': Performing the African Revolution at the First Pan-African Cultural Festival (Algiers, 1969)." In *D. Murphy (Ed.), the First World Festival of Negro Arts*, Dakar 1966: Contexts and Legacies, 143–60. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016:140

23 Hassan, "Ibrahim El-Salahi," 9.

24 Zarur, Self-Portraiture, 89.

25 Cantone, Helena. "Hassan Musa: The Artist's Stamp, Exhibition Review." *African Arts* 51, no. 1 (2020):84.

the point of "Fashion revolutionary".[26] Conversely, by association with Musa and the intentional critiques of his Mail-Art series, it becomes part of a wider political movement.

Stage 5: SOAS Special Collections

In a transmaterial shift, the SOAS tweet captured in Figure 7 changed the image from a private physical object (postcard) to a public digital image. Subject again to the aspirations of an institution and its curators, Sun Lady was donated to SOAS by Elsbeth Court in postcard format and was included in Hassan Musa: *The Artist's Stamp* exhibition of his Mail Art, Textiles, and Court's private collection in 2019. Musa's *ArtAfricanism*[27] challenged the perceived 'reification' of African artists, but nevertheless supported SOAS as an engaged institution specialising in African studies.[28] *Sun Lady* may be viewed as an indirect contributor to this. Effectively a physical museum object, viewable privately on request, its viewing status has come full circle.

Figure 7 Tweet from SOAS Special Collections, 22/09/2020. Source: SOAS Twitter

Stage 6: SOAS School of Arts

Sun Lady's medium and aesthetic complement the image selection shown in Figure 8 to promote the SOAS Asian Art Diploma, thereby supporting its aim to engender understanding of art history beyond a Eurocentric perspective.

In this politically aware institutional context, Warburg's understanding of the image as figural memory with the ability to traverse cultures through iconisation is appropriate.[29] The shared iconography of the afro examined in Stage 1 of the *Sun Lady*'s journey resonates in a multicultural milieu where the curriculum prioritises understanding of the struggle for global civil rights, gender parity, and the fight against oppression through education. The afro provides a visual connection with globally recognised political activists, allowing the Sun Lady to continue to 'achieve meaning,' facilitating the intersection of the university population and institutional principles.[30]

26 Davis, Angela Y. "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia." Critical Inquiry 21, no. 1 (1994): 39.
27 Zarur, Self-Portraiture, 72.
28 Chika Okeke-Agulu cited by Zarur, Self-Portraiture, 72
29 Pollock, Griselda. "Whither Art History?" *The Art Bulletin* 96, no. 1 (2014):11
30 Peffer, John, and Elisabeth Lynn Cameron. *Portraiture & Photography in Africa.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013:8.

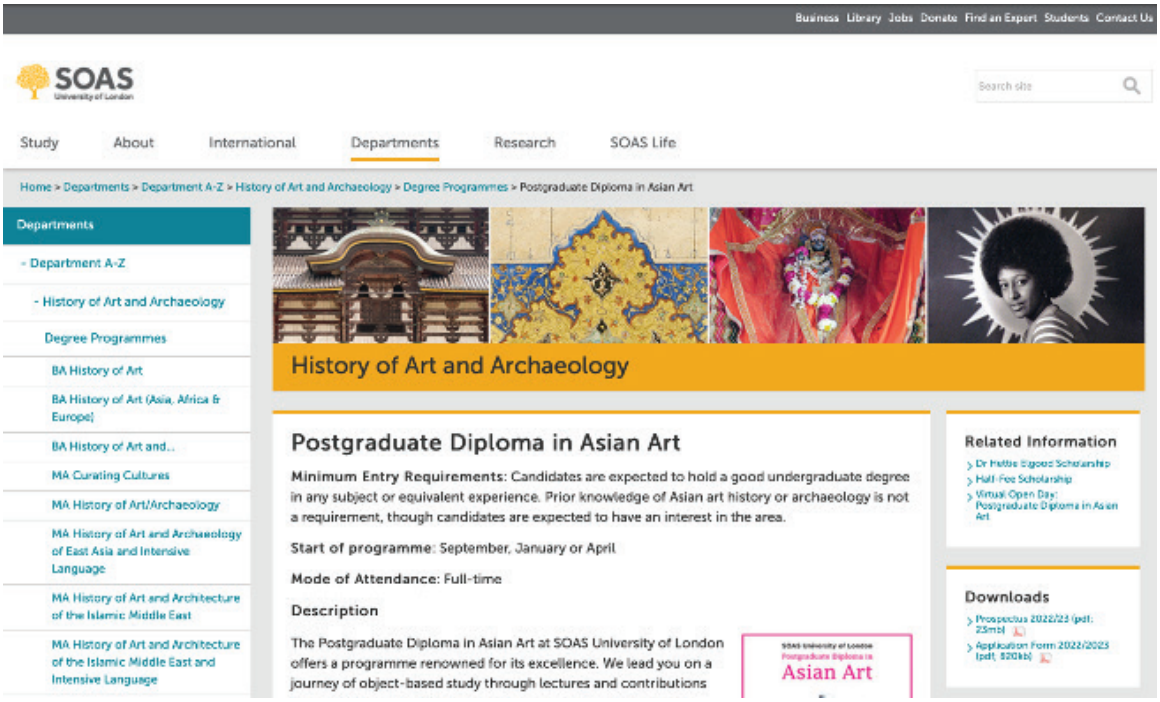


Figure 8 SOAS website banner for History of Art and Archaeology department, 02/07/2022 with Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Art.
Source: Wayback Machine internet archive
https://web.archive.org/web/20220702091226/https://www.soas.ac.uk/art/programmes/dipasart/

Conclusion

This essay has tracked the journey of an image and its central political component from analogue photograph marking a window of peace in 1970s Khartoum through to contemporary institutional website. It has shown that despite multiple changes in context, format and viewing platforms, *Sun Lady*'s political resonance endures. The essay has identified the afro worn by the subject as the key component of the iconographical relationship between the image and African and American female political rights activists. When combined with the striking composition of the original portrait, the continued deployment of the image across time, space, and changing environments reiterates the authority of the afro as a signifier of enduring political resistance and by association, female empowerment.

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Somnyama Ngonyama

Hail the Roar of Resistance

Janette Delves

South African photographer, Zanele Muholi, self identifies as a visual activist and seeks to use their[1] work to challenge the conventional representation of Black, female and queer bodies. Establishing their art practice through photographs documenting the lives of Black lesbians and trans men in South Africa, Muholi captures individuals who are underrepresented in the country's visual history. They have stressed the need for alternative histories, and alternative historians, to recognise, respect and validate the existence of those who have been overlooked or misrepresented.[2] This determination to counter dominant meanings or stereotypes in their photography has been termed 'subversive resistance'.[3] Here the focus is on the series Somnyama Ngonyama, which means 'Hail the Dark Lioness' in isiZulu, with an examination of Muholi's use of the body as a site of subversive resistance to dominant paradigms. This series is distinct within Muholi's oeuvre as they turn the lens on themself in a series of high-contrast black and white self-portraits, with a clear focus on the subject's racial identity.[4]

The use of photography as an instrument of representation of the body, and specifically its racial identity, is controversial in an African context and particularly loaded in connection to South Africa.[5] Photography has a long history in Africa, dating at least from the earliest developments of daguerreotypes in the 1830s. Records of African-born photographers date from the 1840s, calling into question an entrenched assumption that the history of photography in Africa is en-

1 Muholi's preferred pronouns are they/them.
2 Deborah Willis. "Zanele Muholi Faces and Phases in conversation with Deborah Willis." In *Aperture Magazine* April 21, 2015.
3 Deborah Willis. "The Sociologist's Eye: WEB Dubois and the Paris Exposition." In *A Small Nation of People: WEB Dubois and African American Portraits of Progress*, pp52-60. Washington DC: Amistad Books and the Library of Congress, 2003.
4 Zanele Muholi. "Zanele Muholi in conversation with Renée Mussai. Archive of the self." In *Zanele Muholi. Somnyama Ngonyama: Hail the Dark Lioness. Ed Renée Mussai*. New York: Aperture. 2018
5 Henriette Gunkel. "Through the Postcolonial Eyes: Images of Gender and Female Sexuality in Contemporary South Africa." In *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 131:1, pp77-87. 2009.

Figure 1 *Ntozabantu VI, Parktown.* 2016. Digital Photograph ©Zanele Muholi. (Reproduced with permission from the artist.)

tirely a history of the colonial gaze.[6] Nevertheless, despite the belated recognition of African photographers, the visual history of Africa, as viewed from the West, has developed through the hegemonic lens of colonialism. Early photography was used extensively in the fields of ethnography and anthropology to categorise people, constructing racial differences based on colour, which positioned whiteness as superior. Later 20th Century Western photography frequently depicted disease, poverty and corruption, but rarely represented contemporary Africans in ordinary situations or depicted their dignity.[7] This partial view has created a vast archive of African visual clichés, constructing Africa as a site between survival and adversity.[8]

In South Africa, constructions of White superiority were embedded into legal, political, and social structures through the system of apartheid. Derived from earlier British colonial policies, this was an ideology of separatism promoted by the Afrikaner National Party which came to power in 1948. Under apartheid, being Black meant being subject to laws set by Whites who presumed the right to decide on the lives of Blacks. This system, with its laws of segregation and racial marking, based on the visuality of the body, is the system that Muholi was born into in 1972. It remained in place throughout their early life, ending in 1994.

Stepping in front of the camera for Somnyama Ngonyama is an act of subversion. Doing this, Muholi disrupts both the apartheid gaze and Sontag's pessimistic argument

6 Jennifer Bajorek. "At Least Two Histories of Liberation." In *Unfixed: Photography and Decolonial Imagination in West Africa.* Duke University Press p9. 2020

7 Okwui Enwezor, *Snap Judgements: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* New York: International Center of Photography. 2006.13

8 Ibid

Figure 2 Zanele Muholi *Qinis, The Sails, Durban.* 2019. Digital Photograph ©Zanele Muholi.
(Reproduced with permission from the artist.)

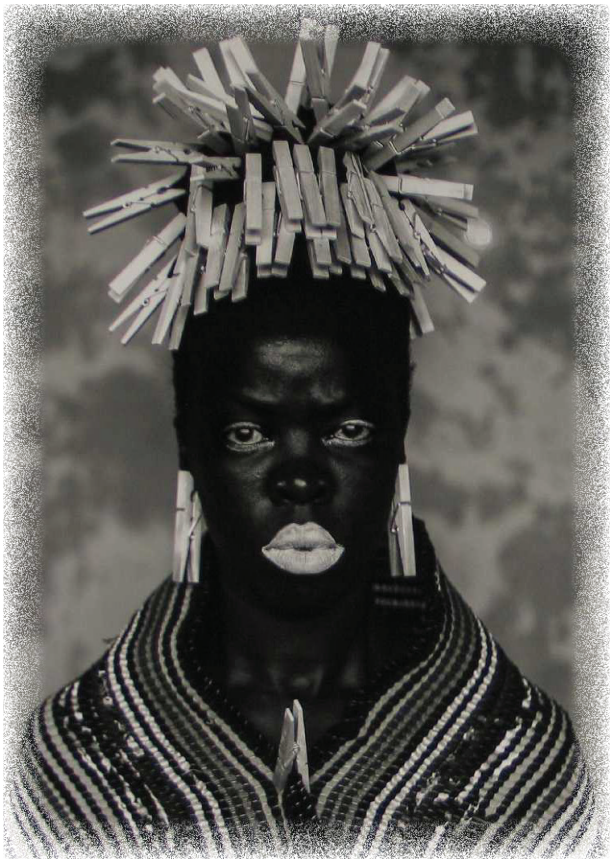

Figure 3 Zanele Muholi. *Bester I, Mayotte.* 2015. Digital Photograph ©Zanele Muholi.
(Reproduced with permission from the artist.)

of photography as violation.[9] Instead, Muholi confronts the viewer with an oppositional gaze: the Black, female, queer body is reclaiming a sense of autonomy and turning the gaze back on their oppressors. Using their body as a site of subversive resistance, Muholi exposes their vulnerabilities through a highly personal exploration of their experience of race, sexuality, presence, and existence. They have explained their use of self-portraiture in this series:

> I wanted to use my own face so that people will always remember just how important our black faces are when confronted by them [...] And as much as I would like a person to see themselves in Somnyama, I needed it to be my own portraiture. I didn't want to expose another person to this pain.[10]

Muholi experiments with different characters and, through these, inhabits spaces that histor-

9 Susan Sontag. "In Plato's Cave" in *On Photography*, Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. 1977.
10 Zanele Muholi. "*In Zanele Muholi. Somnyama Ngonyama*" Ibid. 8

ically have been difficult to negotiate or denied to Black bodies. In Ntozabantu VI, Parktown, (Figure 1.), Muholi subverts oppressive standards of beauty and reimagines Black identity. Here the props used allude to beauty contests and the exclusion of Black contestants, who did not meet these oppressive standards. Muholi's gaze is directed straight at the viewer, challenging the negative representations of Black beauty that have been created and circulated by White people, and presenting an alternative paradigm.

A distinctive characteristic of the portraits in *Somnyama Ngonyama* is the darkened skin of the subject, sharply contrasted by lightened sclera and lips. The notion of Blackness and the affirmation of Black identity is central to this series of works, but the blackening of the skin tone is evocative of minstrelsy which discomfits the viewer. Minstrel shows originated in the US in the mid-1800s, with White performers blackening their faces with cork and whitening their lips to offer a grotesque caricature of Black people as entertainment. These were still shown on mainstream UK television until 1978.[11]

Muholi disrupts these anti-Black tropes by using them to draw attention to how skin is a primary medium through which the body is racialized and raising questions about the politics of representation. In their artist's statement Muholi explains:

> By exaggerating the darkness of my skin tone, I'm reclaiming my blackness, which I feel is continuously performed by the privileged other. My reality is that I do not mimic being Black; it is my skin, and the experience of being Black is deeply entrenched in me. Just like our ancestors, we live as Black people 365 days a year, and we should speak without fear.[12]

Using the afro comb and a bathmat as props in *Qinis, The Sails, Durban,* (Figure 2), Muholi creates a highly stylised and beautiful image, which is both reminiscent of modern fashion photography and of the traditional images of African women created by the colonial gaze. The afro combs positioned in their hair evoke a specific form of surveillance and categorisation: the 'pencil test.' Under apartheid rules in South Africa, authorities would insert a pencil through a person's hair and whether it stayed in or not would confirm their race. Positioning the afro combs in this way, Muholi lays claim to their own racial identity and defines new standards of beauty, whilst alluding to the continued fetishization of the Black body by the Western fashion industry.

The subservience and subjugation that apartheid subjected Black people to is symbolised in Muholi's recurrent use of items of domestic labour as props. These include clothes pegs, scouring pads and cleaning sponges, which are dramatically transformed and loaded with historical meanings. Domestic labour in South Africa remains the domain of the Black worker and several works, including *Bester I, Mayotte* (Figure 3), draw attention to this. Simultaneously drawing the viewer's attention to this subjugation and resisting the narrative of subservience, Muholi intertwines it with their own family history and creates profound and elevated images. Here Muholi honours

11 *BBC History of the BBC* https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/100-voices/people-nation-empire/make-yourself-at-home/the-black-and-white-minstrel-show (accessed 05/11/2023).

12 Zanele Muholi's Artist's Statement, Autograph Gallery, https://autograph.org.uk/exhibitions/somnyama-ngonyama-hail-the-dark-lioness-harvard (accessed 31//10/2023).

their mother, Bester, who was a domestic worker.

Muholi's work on the *Somnyama Ngonyama* series started in 2012 and spans a period that coincided with more recent global anti-racism and decolonial uprisings, including the Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter movements. These uprisings re-emphasise the imperative to continue to expose the legacies of racial segregation and to resist notions of race put forward by the privileged other. Muholi's use of their own body to resist these notions is a bold and highly personal approach to documenting an alternative history. Through a nuanced presentation of themself and their community, Muholi's aesthetically provocative images expose political meanings which confront and subvert the politics of race in the photographic archive.

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The Rise of the Cultural Couture in Postcolonial Africa

The Case of Loza Maleombho

Mercy Ijeoma Oguama

Introduction

While hairstyling could be examined as an artistic practice on its own, it is the significance of its representation which interests us here. At the starting point of this conversation: the magnificent art of JD Okhai Ojeikere. The Nigerian photographer is renowned for capturing a multitude of hairstyles encountered in his country, from the Independence period around the 1960s until his death in 2014. Beyond their aesthetic aspect, his pieces act as an identity expression, exposing the viewer to an African tradition[1]. Ojeikere's case study is particularly relevant because it is situated in a period of substantial decolonisation waves[2]. Combining an archival and a documenting function, his work on hairstyle challenges the colonial gaze. Extensively, it revisits the sense of otherness from an Indigenous perspective, which revokes White Euro-American fixed/unfixed and imagined/real dichotomies[3]. Articulated around the body, the focus on hair as a subject is far from innocuous and translates African narratives, as a dialogue to be opened on memory and liberation. Accordingly, the aim of this article is to explore hairstyle as a political material in Africa and its diaspora from the analysis of Ojeikere's art.

> "All these hairstyles are ephemeral. I want my photographs to be noteworthy traces of them. I always wanted to record moments of beauty, moments of knowledge. Art is life. Without art, life would be frozen." – Ojeikere[4].

1 Nicome, Alexandra. "Who is Neotraditional?: Visualizing Postcolonial Identities in JD'Okhai Ojeikere's Hairstyles Photographs." (2017).
2 Nugent, Paul. *Africa since independence.* Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012.
3 Gaafar, Rania. "Migrating Forms: Contemporary African Photography at The Walther Collection." *Third Text* 25, no. 2 (2011): 241-247.
4 Paoletti, Giulia. 2018. "J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere" The Met. Updated October 31, 2023. https://ipevolunteers.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/J.D.-Okhai-Ojeikere-Supporting-Docs.pdf

Through his words, Ojeikere highlights the crucial role culture can play in our society and Nigerian scholar Okwui Enwezor, for example, pioneered contemporary art and provided a framework for postcolonial portraiture. In addition to challenging Western conceptions of African identity, his innovative exhibitions gave rise to a new generation of African artists fighting for visual sovereignty in the postcolonial world. Emphasising photography and portraiture, Okwui's argument brought attention to humanist traditions in African art and the function of aesthetics in creating subjectivity . His art provided a framework for understanding the "poetics of postcolonial portraiture as a decolonising act that disrupts colonial influence" . Kasfir believes that these "deft cultural heritage modifications made it possible for African art to be recognised globally on its terms by facilitating the psychological process of decolonisation" . Modern African artists today employ a strategic assertion of identity that draws from cultural traditions to refute colonial narratives of primitivism. African art has benefited from cultural nationalism by being internationally recognised through the adaptation of fusing "old and new, traditional and modern".

The Ivory Coast's rich cultural heritage and traditions are fundamental to the country's fashion sector. The Ivory Coast's traditional attire shows the many ethnic groups who call this nation home. Every group has a unique aesthetic, selection of fabrics and designs handed down through the years. The Baoul', renowned for their proficiency with dyeing methods, are one such example. They produce beautiful fabrics with rich blue hues using plant-based natural dyes like indigo and kola nuts. The hand-painted designs and symbols on the clothes of the Baoul people communicate stories about their cultural identity and

history. The fusion of contemporary and traditional elements characterises the fashion industry of Ivory Coast. Many country designers incorporate traditional textiles and apparel into their modern ready-to-wear collections. This combination produces a distinctive look that embraces the current while paying respect to the past.

Ivory Coast's fashion business contributes significantly to the Gross Domestic Product "GDP" and creates jobs, making it a vital sector of the nation's economy. The textile and garment business employs thousands of people, one of the country's biggest employers. Women make up the majority of this industry's workforce. The Abidjan-based business Uniwax is one of the prominent participants in the fashion industry on the Ivory Coast. Known for its colourful wax designs, which have come to represent African fashion, Uniwax was founded in 1968.The enterprise impacts the local economy and employs more than 200 people. Numerous homes and local companies are supported by Uniwax's operations, which range from textile manufacture to distribution.

Beyond its influence on the economy, the Ivory Coast's fashion sector has become well-known worldwide thanks to the efforts of designers and businesses that have shown their creations in esteemed fashion magazines and worldwide runways. The Ivory Coast's remarkable fusion of traditional craftsmanship and modern design has captured the attention of fashion fans worldwide, highlighting the continent's abundance of skill and talent. The yearly fashion show in Abidjan, known as the 'Afik Fashion Show', is a prime

illustration of its international renown. Worldwide fashion enthusiasts, industry executives, and designers attend the stage for established and up-and-coming designers to present their collections. It strengthens the Ivory Coast's reputation as a centre of fashion. Ivory Coast's fashion sector is expected to continue growing in both local and international markets thanks to increasing support and recognition on a global scale.

Loza Maleombho

A fusion of tribal prints, forgotten stories, and cultural references. Through her business, Loza highlights the importance of sustainability and social impact, highlighting the elegance of African design. Ivorian fashion designer Loza Maleombho is a rising star changing the African fashion business with her distinctive and avant-garde creations. The contradiction of the old and modern, the cultural and the futuristic, is celebrated by her brand. Loza Maleombho has become well-known and successful worldwide. Her influence in fashion has been further cemented by stars such as Beyonce, who have adorned her designs. Loza works with African artisans who have perfected their trade for centuries. Loza has become well-known and successful worldwide. Through a small manufacturing workshop, Loza Malombho also helps young African women from underprivileged backgrounds and supports the

local economy by creating shoes, jewellery and accessories in the Ivory Coast. Inspired by Ivorian tribal aesthetics and New York's urban fashion, Loza's creations honour African traditions with contemporary silhouettes derived from Her strategic marketing technique is a significant reason for her success. Loza Maleombho has collaborated with influencers and used social media to generate excitement about her brand. She engages her fans and displays her designs on social media sites like Instagram. Social media has dramatically increased the influence of designers. African designers now utilise social media platforms to exhibit their collaborative efforts, expanding their worldwide reach and contesting African fashion and craftsmanship stereotypes. Using lookbooks, still-life photography, and visual diaries brings attention to the African continent's cultural diversity and sometimes overlooked stories. Loza's business concept is based on her dedication to sustainability and social impact. She works to produce designs that reduce her adverse effects on the environment and support ethical labour practises since she thinks fashion can be beautiful and virtuous. She uses environmentally friendly materials and production techniques to be sustainable. She purchases textiles from local artisans, promoting their artistry and upholding traditional weaving and dyeing traditions. Furthermore, Loza reduces waste and revitalises

discarded textiles by incorporating recycled and repurposed materials into her designs.

From the viewpoint of social impact, Loza actively works with local communities and craftspeople, giving them fair compensation and fostering their economic independence. Loza works with these communities to develop chances for sustainable livelihoods while also preserving their cultural legacy. A project that Loza has undertaken that demonstrates her dedication to social impact is her partnership with an Ivory Coast cooperative. Collectively, they apply traditional methods to produce handwoven fabrics, giving the cooperative's members a sense of empowerment and employment. Through this partnership, Loza guarantees the authenticity and quality of her designs while bolstering the economic growth of the local community.

The creations of Loza Maleombho provide witness to the abundance of talent, artistry, and ingenuity present throughout the diverse African continent. The Black is King album, which Beyonce collaborated with Loza Maleombho and other African designers. The album is a prime example of Africa's wealth of creativity, inventiveness and talent. Beyoncehighlights African culture and its global significance by showcasing one of Maleombho's designs and incorporating it into her visual storytelling. During the " Already" music video from the Black is King album, Beyonce features a dazzling ensemble designed by Loza Maleombho. Bright, handwoven fabric with striking patterns and delicate details is used in the design. Beyonce honours the rich cultural legacy of African textiles while showcasing Maleombho's talent and craft-

manship by wearing this piece. Furthermore, Beyonce and Maleombho's collaboration delivers a strong message about representation and empowerment. By displaying Maleombho's design, Beyonce dismantles boundaries and gives marginalised voices in the fashion industry a platform while showcasing the ingenuity and talent of African designers. In addition to enhancing Maleombho's output, this partnership inspires upcoming African designers to embrace their cultural heritage and cherish their artistic visions. Through her designs, she is redefining the narrative around luxury by presenting a novel and distinctive take on African aesthetics. Her designs are a prime example of how African luxury businesses revolutionised the market and raised the global bar for luxury and sophistication. The rise and development of luxury African brands, such as Loza Maleombho, indicate the continent's innovations, cultural development, and economic expansion. This trend has grown over the last few decades, highlighting Africa's potential beyond traditional commodities such as cocoa, gold, and oil. These companies dispel myths, showcase African ingenuity and ability, and globally place African individuality and artistry.

Sidney Littlefield Kasfir provides insightful analysis in The Idea of a National Culture Decolonising African Art about African artists' troubles in redefining their cultural identities following decades of colonialism. Kasir investigates the complex interplay between art, politics and culture in postcolonial Africa. She contends that a national culture must develop through decolonisation to reconcile the effect of colonial aesthetics with Indigenous artistic practices. Kasfir's theories are essential to Loza Maleombho's work since they illuminate the designer's approach to fashion. Maleombho's designs show her am-

bition to forge a distinctive African fashion identity by fusing traditional African patterns with modern aesthetics.

Negritude, Pan-Africanism and Postcolonial African Identity, African Portrait Photography, by Okwui Enwezor and Octavia Zaya shows how African photographers have regained control of their visual representation by using photography to depict the complex and varied aspects of African identity. The ideas Zaya and Enwezor emphasise are reflected in Loza Maleombho's artistry. Maleombho challenges conventional ideas of beauty and celebrates the diversity of African cultures in her collections. Indeed, she adds to the continuous process of rethinking and claiming postcolonial African identities by embodying her identity through fashion. Octavia Zaya and Okwui Enzewor are examples of a more significant artistic movement that challenges and reshapes popular narratives about Africa. Enzewor and Zaya highlight the value of varied creative voices in challenging Eurocentric viewpoints and advancing a more inclusive understanding of African identity by presenting Maleombho's designs. Her art defies conventional notions of beauty and acts as a cultural activism, encouraging people to take ownership of their stories and embrace their ancestry.Loza Maleombho critically examines socio-political concepts such as African socialism, international solidarity, and Negritude in her work, which goes beyond aesthetics. In her collections, Maleombho uses traditional techniques and African textiles to represent Negrtude, a political and cultural movement based on Black pride and the declaration of African cultural heritage. Her support of fair-trade standards

and ethical sourcing also reflects her involvement with African socialism, which fosters economic empowerment and social justice. Moreover, by fusing global inspirations with African authenticity, Maleombho's clothing displays a spirit of global unity. Her creations have become well-known abroad and nationally, allowing her to promote intercultural understanding and elevate African fashion worldwide.

Loza Maleombho's practice expands on the decolonisation rhetoric by showing that it is a continuous process of critical examination and action rather than just a political upheaval. Her efforts to revive and reinterpret traditional African fabrics and techniques address historical inequalities brought about by colonialism and give local craftspeople more authority. Collaborating with traditional artisans and incorporating traditional artistry into her collections, as demonstrated by Maleombho, highlights the significance of actively decolonising African art forms. Visual practices of Loza Maleombho also address the historical legacy of state brutality in Africa. Her goal in addressing current world struggles is to raise awareness and promote conversation. By bringing attention to topics such as immigration, prejudice, and gender inequality through her designs, Maleombho highlights the value of fashion as a medium for social and political change.

Conclusion

Loza Maleombho's work demonstrates her engagement with sociopolitical concepts such as Negritude, African socialism, global solidarity, and its aesthetic qualities. Her designs promote economic justice and community empowerment through ethical sourcing and fair trade practices and showcase African cultural heritage through traditional textiles and techniques. While Kasfir argues for recognising cultural nationalism, evidentially[5], Loza's use of cross-cultural understanding across nations has raised the profile of her fashion globally by fusing global influences with authentic African design. Loza Maleombho's creations redefine the luxury narrative and establish new benchmarks for opulence and elegance. They are a testament to the abundance of skill and resourcefulness throughout Africa. Through her work, she actively decolonises African art forms and addresses contemporary global struggles through fashion commentary.

5 Kasfir, Sidney Littlefield. Contemporary African Art (World of Art). Thames and Hudson, 2020. https://thamesandhudson.com/contemporary-african-art-world-of-art-9780500293591.

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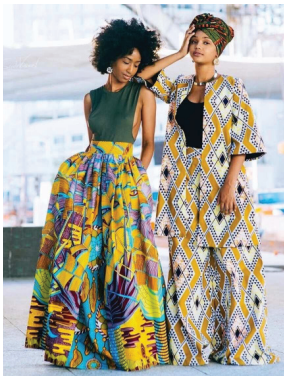

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Portraiture, the Outsider's new Token of Difference

Fiona Quadri

> One can say that African artists are not so much fighting for the freedom to be 'African' (whatever that may mean), but to be fully accepted as artists, through this can only be articulated through their 'Africanness', since that is the site of their categorical exclusion from a global art discourse in the first place.'
>
> -Sidney L. Kasfir, African Art and Authenticity[1]

Throughout history, Western perceptions of African art have been steeped in stereotypes and the pejorative label of 'primitive,' particularly during the period from the 17th to the 19th centuries.[2] This characterisation has had profound consequences, leading to the systemic marginalization of African artists within the global art canon, a phenomenon aptly termed as being the 'Outsider' by Oguibe.[3] The art canon functions as a curated selection acknowledged for its representation of excellence within a specific genre.[4]

In response to the distorted image of the African identity, numerous artists have strategically employed art as a means of challenging and reshaping the fetishised interpretation of the Black body. Especially portraiture, defined as a visual representation of a specific individual through painting, drawing, or photography,[5] emerges as a powerful tool for reappropriating a new African

1 Kasfir, Sidney Littlefield. "African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow." *African Arts*, 25(2): 40-53+96-97. UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center Stable. 1992

2 Arnaut, Karel. 1991. "Art in Transit: A Postcolonial Ethnography of the Commodification of African Art." In *Art in Theory*, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Oxford: Blackwell: 151.
Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 1991. "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" *Critical Inquiry* 17 (2): 338.

3 Oguibe, Olu. 2001. *The Culture Game*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1

4 Iskin, Ruth E., ed. 2016. *Re-envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon: Perspectives in a Global World.* (2016):1

5 Collins. "Portrait." Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Copyright HarperCollins, 2023.

identity. From pioneers like Aina Onabolu (1882-1963) to contemporary figures like Omar Victor Diop (1980 – now) and Zanele Muholi (1972-now), the tradition of intertwining identity and heritage through figuration and portraiture persists. However, amid the global success of African portraiture,[6] questions arise regarding the potential risk of exoticisation in the quest for acceptance on the global art scene, as articulated by Oguibe.[7] Does portraiture inadvertently become a new token of difference, perpetuating stereotypes, and contributing to the complex dynamics of representation in contemporary African art?

This paper will look at four examples of portraiture, exploring how different artists throughout African art history have developed strategies around these questions. The exploration contends that African portraiture serves as a transformative tool, challenging historical stereotypes and countering the fetishised interpretation of the Black body within the global art scene. Through critical analysis of the integration of African portraiture on the global art scene, from pioneers like Seydou Keïta (1921-2001) to contemporary figures like Zanele Muholi (1972-now), this study explores the nuanced dynamics between celebrating a unique African portraiture genre and navigating the increasing expectations dictated by the global art scene. The analysis raises important questions about the inadvertent risks of self-exoticisation and the perpetuation of stereotypes, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in the representation of the African identity in contemporary art.

To prompt a re-evaluation of the global art

6 Borgatti, Jean M. 1990. "African Portraiture: A Commentary." *African Arts*, October 1990, 23(4): 38

7 Oguibe, Olu. 2001, *The Culture Game.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (2001): 1

scene's impact on the representation of African identity through portraiture, it is imperative to recognize that the resulting artworks initially emerge as a reconstruction of national pride and a celebration of identity.[8] A noteworthy illustration is found in Seydou Keïta's (1921–2001) work. Keïta represents a crucial position, as his work coincides with Mali's initial steps towards independence from French colonial domination. Between approximately 1948 and 1964, Keïta manages a portrait studio in Bamako, Mali. The artist shoots his photographs in Black and White, produced in collaboration with the 'subjects' desire for an ideal self-image'.[9] The aesthetic imagery vividly captures the vibrant energy and cultural metamorphosis of Mali in the 1960s. Despite the original intent for a local audience, Keïta's work seamlessly integrates into the global art canon, contributing not only to national narratives but also to the broader global artistic discourse.[10]

Conversely, as these photographs venture onto the global stage, they are detached from their original context shifting the authorship and resulting in the loss of the artist's intent. Through Keïta's imagery, we observe an anonymisation of the subjects depicted in the photographs as they are exhibited in *Africa Explores* (1991) exhibition in New York.[11] As Keïta's photographs are taken out of their original context into an exhibition context, the individual pieces as well as the artist names are described as 'Untitled' and 'unknown artist', signifying that the photographs are 'no longer bound to their subjects'.[12] The anonymisation of subjectivity consequently results in a shift of authorship, highlighting the external curatorial decision. The shift of authorship in Seydou Keïta's work, marked by the infusion of a new 'cultural meaning'[13] undergoes a metamorphosis, losing the authentic voice of the artist and contributing to a new, market-driven identity. The carefully composed portraits are reduced to commodities, extracting capital from Keïta's aesthetic.[14] Taking the artworks out of their context into a new sphere allows them to align with international tastes and trends.[15] This process of adhering to the global art scene shows that a new identity is constructed under the influence of colonial authority, thereby overshadowing the artist's voice and purpose.

Beyond the shift of authorship, to understand the extent of the global art scene's impact on the representation of the African identity more profoundly, a critical examination questioning the construction of the art canon is necessary. Steiner[16] contends that the art canon reflects a hierarchical power structure entrenched in a Euro-American-centric discourse, perpetuating a reductive Eurocentric lens through which all non-Western art is perceived. This Eurocentric framework, rooted in the history of colonialism, marginalises non-Western art, pushing it towards market validation by conforming to 'pure' and 'traditional' forms divorced from Western

8 Riep, David M. 2017. *Postcolonialism and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?* Albany: State University of New York Press.
9 Bigham, Andrea. 1999. "Seydou Keïta: Photographs from Bamako." African Arts 32 (4): 56
10 Bigham, 57
11 Caldwell, Kia. 2016. "The 'Uncurated' Photography of Seydou Keïta." *African Arts* 49 (2): 72
12 Bigham, Andrea. 1999. "Seydou Keïta: Photographs from Bamako." *African Arts* 32 (4): 57
13 Arnaut, Karel. 1991. "Art in Transit: A Postcolonial Ethnography of the Commodification of African Art." In *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 162.
14 Ogbechie, Sylvester O. "The Pathfinder Paradox: Historicizing African Art within Global Modernity." Review of *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in 20th Century Nigeria by Chika Okeke-Agulu*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2020.
15 Bourdieu, Pierre. Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London. 1984: 159
16 Steiner, Christopher B. 1996. *African Art in Transit.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

artistic traditions.[17] Hereby it becomes clear that the categorization is more influenced by international reception than by the genuine self-representations of formerly colonized peoples. The intricate interplay among the art canon, global market forces, and international reception gives rise to a multifaceted narrative in which the authenticity of African portraiture is continually negotiated and, at times, compromised.

An essential aspect of comprehending the underlying paradigm of the global art market, to understand the impact on African self-representation through portraiture, involves a close examination of curatorial authority and the inherent political agendas that may shape the reception of artworks.[18] Consequently, the focal point for a comprehensive analysis should not be solely fixed on African artists' portraiture but rather on the trajectory of global recognition. In this context, *The New African Portraiture, Shariat Collection* held between 19th November 2022 until 10th April of this year (2023), curated by Ghanaian-British curator Ekow Eshun at the Kunsthalle Krems, emerges as a poignant example of the nuanced efforts to maintain an authentic voice. With a specific aim to reinterpret and interrogate prior depictions of the Black figure,[19] the exhibition features portraiture from artists such as Tesfaye Urgessa (1983 - now) and Amoako Boafo (1984 - now), marking a departure from Western portraiture conventions and representational likeness.[20]

However, despite the commendable endeavour to break away from Western conventions and redefine the portrayal of Black figures, the selected portraiture in *The New African Portraiture* is not exempt from the overarching challenges posed by the global art market. Eshun's curation, while well-intentioned, unintentionally risks falling into the trap of commodifying African identity for the sake of international reception, as observed through an analysis of media coverage following the exhibition's opening. This aspect is notably highlighted in a statement from *Kurier* (2022)[21] : 'Afrika! Afrika! - Die Kunsthalle Krems zeigt trendige Porträts'. (Africa! Africa! The Kunsthalle Krems shows trending portraits.) While this positive framing actively counters the historical 'primitive' associations with African art[22] it also raises questions about the extent to which the exhibition may contribute to a marketable and idealized idea of the Black identity.[23] Thereby, it becomes clear that the exhibition does

17 Mitter, Partha. 2008. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850–1922: Occidental Orientations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 533
18 Hylton, Richard D. 2017. *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating.* London: Thames & Hudson.
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19 Kunsthalle Krems. 2022. *The New African Portraiture, Shariat Collection*. Exhibition catalog.
20 Borgatti, Jean M. 1990. "African Portraiture: A Commentary." *African Arts*, October 1990, 23(4): 38
21 Huber, Michael. Afrika! Afrika! - Die Kunsthalle Krems zeigt trendige Porträts. Kurier. 19.11.2022.
22 Svasek, Marjetica. 1997. "Missionaries, Ethnographers, and African Business People: Challenging the Canon in Western Museums." *Visual Anthropology Review* 13 (2): 44
23 Hylton, Richard D. 2017. *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating.* London: Thames & Hudson.

little more than feed a celebratory tone. Similar to Keïta's work, *The New African Portraiture* exhibition constrains the artist's voices. Portraiture, as evidenced in both cases, becomes a powerful medium that not only skews the narrative of representation but also presents an uncritical and marketable perspective of the African identity.

Examining the limitations and potential consequences of portraiture, galleries and curators actively embrace the artworks as direct reflections of the 'African Identity'[24]. This creates a nuanced ambivalence, navigating the delicate balance between celebrating a distinctive African portraiture genre and succumbing to the expectations and narratives dictated by the global art scene. Within this paradigm, it becomes evident that underlying frameworks remain Eurocentric, often stripped of African narrations and intentions. Portraits gain attention and recognition by capitalising on the commodified Black body,[25] a process leading to the creation of a product identity[26], sometimes deemed 'pornographic'.[27] While African artists who utilise portraiture as a means of communication negotiate their identities intending to challenge historical stereotypes about Africans and their art,[28] the narrative is constrained by the global art market. Thereby, the anti-Western narrative inadvertently aligns with the multicultural European agenda, deviating from its original purpose.[29] As expressed by Odiboh Freeborn,[30] the pursuit of identity is seen as a Western tactic to marginalise African art creatively, 'keep it on the shelf of cheap commodity'. The discussion shifts to the multifaceted challenges faced by African artists striving for recognition within the global art scene.

In turn, African artists fall prey to European standards to ensure recognition from a glob-

24 Oguibe, Olu. 2001. *The Culture Game*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

25 Jackson, Kennell. "The Shadows of Text, Will Black Music and Singers Sell Everything on Television?" *In Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*. University of Michigan Press. 2005: 90

26 Oguibe, Olu. "Double Dutch and the Culture Game." Catalogue essay for the exhibition, *Yinka Shonibare: Be-Muse, Rome*, 2001: 11

27 Freeborn, Odiboh. "The Crisis of Appropriating Identity for African Art and Artists: The Abayomi Barber School Responsorial Paradigm." 2005.

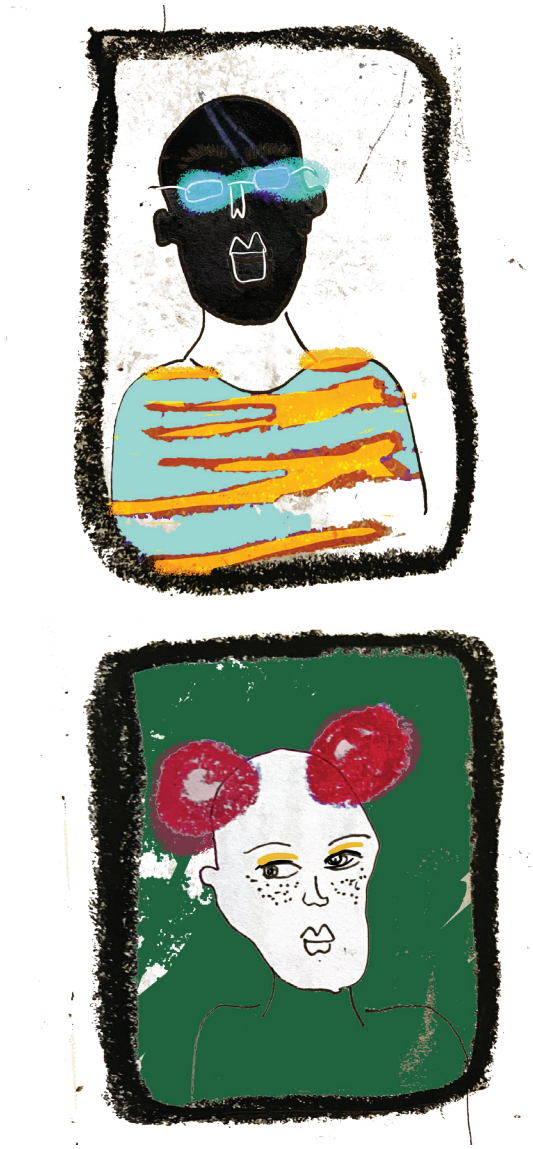
28 Hassan, Salah M. "The Modernist Experience in African Art: Visual Expressions of the Self and Cross-Cultural Aesthetics." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 1995: 2: 30-74.

29 Mitter, Partha. A*rt and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008: 533

30 Freeborn, Odiboh. "The Crisis of Appropriating Identity for African Art and Artists: The Abayomi Barber School Responsorial Paradigm." 2005.

al audience. An example is Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu (1917-1994). His 'Self-Portrait' (1967) seeks to reflect the complexity of African identity, yet critics like Okeke[31] argue that it lacks a deep exploration of the conceptual and formal nuances of indigenous cultural manifestations. Enwonwu, following a negritude agenda, stays true to African traditions and art while incorporating modernist techniques, but the resulting values are confined to a specific formalist agenda, emphasising the metaphysical dimension associated with African identity.[32] Thereby, the hyper-focus on identity and belonging in the global world risks propagating self-exoticisation, ultimately limiting artistic performance. Ultimately, the African artist's quest for validation, leads to conforming to Western expectations, by exaggerating heritage and culture in self-portraits.[33] This comes to show that the global art scene inevitably impacts the representation of African identity through portraiture.

In the last part of this paper, considering the historical context of Western stereotypes and the art canon's influence on the systemic marginalisation of African artists, light is shed on the possibilities within the field of constraint. Although artists such as Keïta did not have the means to defend their original intentions, and artists such as Enwonwu fell prey to self-exoticisation around the global art scene, other artists have found ways to conform to the 'rules of the game' without losing their purpose.[34] This 'rules of the game' refers to understanding and deconstructing the art canon, which becomes crucial for navigating the limited chances of



31 Okeke, Chika. *The Quest from Zaria to Nsukka*. Flammarion. 1995. pp. 38-75.
32 Ebong, Ima. 1991. *Contemporary Nigerian Art in the United States*. Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles.
33 Oguibe, Olu. *The Culture Game.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2001:1
34 Ibid.

success within this framework. Zanele Muholi's work serves as a powerful example in this regard. Photographing primarily Black Lesbian Women in South Africa and taking self-portraits,[35] the reception of Muholi's work is inevitably subject to the Western gaze.[36] Nevertheless, instead of being held back by the commercialised backdrop and the potential change of narrative, Muholi purposefully uses a mainstream-appealing body of work to address violent homophobia in Africa.[37] Muholi's goal is to 'ensure there is Black queer visibility [because] it is important to mark, map and preserve our mo(ve)ments through visual histories for reference and posterity so that future generations will note that we were here'.[38] Muholi intends to assert the presence of Black lesbian communities in Africa. Therefore, whether the message of the work is interpreted as 'celebratory' by the global scene is secondary, as Muholi's primary goal is the simple global exposure of the photographs.[39] Ultimately, the global success can be used to preserve African queer moments through visual histories for reference and posterity. The global art scene's impact on the work contributes to an active change in the perception of African subjects within their localised context.

Muholi's example demonstrates that whilst the global art scene always impacts the representation of African identity through portraiture, the result does not inherently have negative impacts. Portraiture is one means that facilitates easier access to the recognition of a wider global art scene. This is underlined by the Western gaze, which focuses on 'othering' non-Western art, as the art canon continues to be based on the ideas of 'belonging and exclusion'.[40] Thereby, African portraiture is received by the global art scene as a token of difference operating in an economy of difference.[41] African portraiture is inevitably condemned to exoticisation. Ultimately, one can only conform to the rules of the game when aiming to represent African identity through portraiture.

In conclusion, the global art scene profoundly shapes the representation of African identity through portraiture, entangled in historical stereotypes that marginalized African artists. From the derogatory label of 'primitive' to present challenges, the journey reflects a complex interplay of struggle, resilience, and transformation. Case studies, like Seydou Keïta's, underscore artists' challenges in navigating the global art market, necessitating comprehensive analysis of both African portraiture and global recognition trajectories. The New African Portraiture exhibition exemplifies nuanced efforts but also highlights the risk of commodifying African identity for international reception. While some, like Ben Enwonwu, risk self-exoticisation for Western validation, artists like Zanele Muholi strategically uses portraiture for global exposure and societal impact. The global success of Muholi's work reveals the inescapable negotiation of a re-

35 Enwezor, Okwui. 2006. "The Uses of Afro-Pessimism."In Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography, New York: International Center of Photography: 18
Garb, Tamar. 2011 Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography Göttingen, Germany: Steidl.
36 Salley, Raél Jero. 2012. "Zanele Muholi's Elements of Survival." *African Arts* 45 (4): 58.
37 Salley, 60
38 Muholi, Zanele, 2012. 'Faces and Phases.' Transition 107: 113
Suvillan, Nikki, 2003. A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
39 Bernstein, Jay M. 2011. "Atheism, Sexuality, and Tradition in Zanele Muholi's Visual Activism." *Journal of Contemporary African Art* 30: 85
40 Mitter, Partha. 2008. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 540
41 Freeborn, Odiboh. "The Crisis of Appropriating Identity for African Art and Artists: The Abayomi Barber School Responsorial Paradigm." 2005.
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formulated gaze on the global art stage. African portraiture, at the crossroads of reclaiming identity and challenging stereotypes within a global context, demands sustained critical discourse in the realm of global art.

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Interpretation of African Mask by Romuald Hazoumé

the Connection to The Body

Hae Su Shin

The Body as a Direct Expression

The body represents more than its physicality, which can become very powerful and impactful as a tool of expression across all cultures and ages. The understanding of "the body" cannot be limited to either the physical or non-physical, and neither can it be confined to just a certain school of thought, culture, or identity. In the context of African culture, it is not only limited to the physical body itself but also applied to extended representation, typically mask figure.

For instance, in the film Black Girl (1966)[1] directed by Ousmane Sembène, a particular mask plays a significant role as the motif (fig. 1). Throughout the film, the mask serves as a journey of exploitation of protagonist Diounana and Africa through colonization. This represents the inherent African identity and unity of the spirits invoked by the mask. Today, several artists are creating mask objects with different materials claiming the authenticity of African heritage and decolonising the general hegemony. Especially, Romuald Hazoumé creates new forms of masks using the most common symbol of everyday life in Africa, the plastic jerrycan.[2] Through this representation, he questions the body and identity of Benin and the African continent. In this article, I will analyse the specific objects and compare the role and display of the artist's modern mask and 'traditional African mask' at galleries and museums in the West. Through Hazoumè's on-going practice, we can assume the power of the body as a medium to drag socio-political accusations on materialism and to emphasize evolving African identity.

1 *The Black Girl*, directed by Ousmane Sembène, (1966; Les Films Domirev (Dakar), Les Actualités Françaises (Paris)1966)
2 Emanuele Fantini, "Connections #4 – Jerrycans," Billet, *FLOWs* (blog), August 31, 2023.

Figure 1 Sembène, Ousmane, director. *The Black Girl*, 1966, *Les Films Domirev (Dakar), Les Actualités Françaises (Paris)*

Stretched and Molten Jerrycan: Faces of Africa Today

> It is important to know that the mask remains the true face of an individual. The subject becomes people's lives—that is what interests me. I go through their garbage, and I tell their story.[3]

"Sénégauloise" is one of his "Mask" sculptures, made with a plastic container, wire and dyed cloth (fig. 1). Direct message of the label, meaning Senegalese, simply allows us to realize that this object represents a female figure covering her head with bandana cloth. Hazoumé plays with simple but metaphoric elements so that the entire figure creates a new meaning based on the object and label, which can transcend to the audience with certain notions of sympathy and understanding. The plastic jerrycan, which is the main component of his continuous practices, plays an important role in delivering environmental issues across the globe. It not only resembles the simplified face of a mask individually but also

3 Katy Donoghue, "Romuald Hazoumè's Masks Reveal the True Face of an Individual," Whitewall, April 19, 2019.

Figure 2 Romuald Hazoumè, *Sénégauloise, 2009*, plastic container, wire and dyed cloth, 24.5 x 22 x 27cm., October Gallery, London. © Romuald Hazoume

Figure 3 Romuald Hazoumè, *Bidon Armé, from the series 'Kpayoland'*, 2004.
Edition of 6 plus 2 artist's proofs, C-type print, 120 x 80 cm. (RH266)

forms a monumental installation as an achieved memory. Hazoumé collects discarded jerrycans and other trash found on the streets of Benin to create masks. Jerrycan is used for carrying cheap gasoline by informal traders in the black market between the border of Nigeria and Benin (fig. 2).[4] Therefore, the jerrycan clearly portrays obstacles which Benin is facing in today's world regarding illegal global exploitation and adverse external socio-political development policies. Canister masks become mirrors reflecting the daily lives of the Benin people and carry their voices. Although the works are not specifically named after individuals, they allow us to identify with politicians, activists, and ourselves, and to see Africa's current state in the mirror.[5]

Furthermore, his work adopts symbols from all over the world beyond the appearance of Africa. One of Hazoumé's mask series "Liberté" (fig. 3), reminds us of the Statue of Liberty located in New York. His masks extend the physical boundaries and give us a chance to think about the global system of exploitation of materialism, and environmental impact we produce on Earth. By reflecting the human figure and a part of facial expressions, it directly talks to us about the relationship between the West and Africa, and the responsibility for materialism and waste emission in a global epoch.

Modern mask for the West

Masks are a significant part of African cultural heritages playing an important role in ritual and ceremonial performances across many regions. For centuries, they

4 Fantini, Emanuele. "Connections #4 – Jerrycans." Billet. *FLOWs* (blog), August 31, 2023.
5 October Gallery, dir. "Romuald Hazoumè, Carnaval, Artist's Talk," November 23, 2022.

Figure 4 Romuald Hazoumè, *Liberté 2009*, 2010, Plastic, porcupine quills and fabric, 50 x 43 x 25cm., Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art © Romuald Hazoume

have been used to form relationships between individuals, communities, the environment, and the cosmos. By putting on a mask, performers enter a sacred realm between the living and ancestral worlds.[6]

In African cosmology, the body is viewed as an organic entity connected to nature and spiritual realms. Masks play a significant role in this context, allowing individuals to connect with ancestral spirits and transcend their physical selves to become spiritual mediums within their communities.[7] However, masks and sculptures, which hold great importance within communities in Africa, remain spread across museums and exhibition spaces around the world leaving behind a disconnected legacy of African traditions. The masks are unjustly disconnected from their source communities and continue to greet visitors with their sculptural beauty, not knowing when they will be repatriated. These African masks exhibited worldwide serve as historical evidence, testifying to the brutal history of dispossession and coercion experienced by Africa. Looking at the case of Baule masks from Côte d'Ivoire, it can be understood that the notion of local African culture and art is just an invented understanding of African culture. After several inter-

6 Tate. "A World in Common." Tate. Accessed December 9, 2023.
7 Esekong H. Andrew, "Configurations of the African Mask: Forms, Functions and the Transcendental." *Cross-Cultural Communication* 10, no. 4 (June 25, 2014): 211–16.

views and investigations, Vogel notes[8] that the mask was strictly limited and concealed; pointing out that it is inherited as a cultural practice, rather than recognized as an object that corresponds to and can be categorized as "art". On the contrary, museums and galleries, they devise categorizing of masks by serving as aesthetic representations and sources of inspiration.

In this context, Hazoumé's practice plays a critical role in subverting the regime of collecting and exhibiting African masks in a satirical manner. Through his iconography, Hazoumé subverts the process by which Africa is seen and consumed within the social and political context. Running the projects since 1989, his work is acquired by various collectors in the West and major Western galleries and biennials. Paradoxically, the act of exhibiting his work is reminiscent of the process of collecting African art during the colonial era, raising numerous questions about "being authorized as an African contemporary artist with unauthorized traditional African material". Given his interview with Queensland Art Gallery, he states[9] "I made a new mask with rubbish and send it back to them (the West)." Through the mask series, he critiques the authority of Western-centered artistic powers. It is a critique of the West and a question of identity for Africa.

"In"Authentic Mask: Claiming Against the Perception of Africans

Apart from that Hazoumé's cultural background in Babalawo, from the Yoruba village of Igbonan, it seems like he does not directly draw inspiration from traditional practice. He would rather invent new forms of African identity with discarded materials. In this way, his masks no longer function as mediums for the prosperity and solidarity dedicated to a community but rather as satirical representations and indictments of contemporary conditions in Africa today.

What does "Africaness" stand for and traditional African art? It can be assumed through Senegal's ideology movement combining African art. Soon after the independence of Senegal, President Léopold Sédar Senghor, led the cultural ideology of Negritude and a new form of African modernism in Senegal, which aimed at establishing national discourse rooted in African visual motifs as an integral element of the nation's identity.[10] This movement led to the development of a massive artistic education system and the recognition of the symbolic and inner significance of traditional African identity.[11]

There is a certain correlation and contrast between the Negritude movement led by Senghor and the jerrycan masks made by Hazoumé. Both reinterpret the symbol of traditional African visuality and link the key concept to the modern and contemporary practice of art. While Senghor accommodates the way Western cultural values and how Picasso approached and exploited traditional African art and encourages the process of developing from traditional to modern,[12] Hazoumé focuses on metamorphose function of the masks in the contexts of social and political

8 Susan Mullin Vogel, "Baule: African Art Western Eyes." *African Arts* 30, no. 4 (1997) : 64–95.
9 Queensland Art Gallery. "Romuald Hazoumè Introduces His Recycled Masks," October 7, 2022.
10 Sédar Senghor, *Liberté 3: Négritude et civilisation de l'universel.* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).
Ebong Ima, "Negritude: Between Mask and Flag-Senegalese Cultural Ideology and the Ecole de Dakar," in *Reading the Contemporary : African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, ed. Oguibe, Olu, Okwui Enwezor (London: InIVA, 1999), 132.
11 Ima, "Negritude: Between Mask and Flag-Senegalese Cultural Ideology and the Ecole de Dakar," 135.
12 Ibid., 130.

phenomena. For him, tradition and modernity are not situated as an opposite side.[13] It is always to enable, to transcend the time, and to invent the new material as a medium. Following Levi Straus' argument, the semantic function of art tends to disappear in the transition from "primitive" to "modern",[14] and Hazoumé stretches the boundaries of this very ideology.

The Evolution of African Identity, Eliciting Conversations, And the Power of Contemporary Art

By examining his artistic practice, we can conclude that Hazoumé emphasises the power of the body as a medium for commentary on global phenomena and the evolving African identity. Firstly, his artistic interventions for modern masks serve as powerful symbols that reflect the social and political phenomena in Africa today, addressing issues such as environmental impact, materialism, and global exploitation. Secondly, through his satirical representations, Hazoumé critiques the complex and multi-layered meanings embedded in African masks, both within their original cultural contexts and as objects exhibited in Western galleries and museums. Lastly, it also implicates questions about authority, authenticity, and the relationship between the West and Africa. While he brings the masks and its invented authenticity from museum to contemporary gallery, he creates a new individual character and blows a vital force on it. All things considered, the viewer can engage by questioning the substantial meaning between its materialistic and human figure and interconnects the dots which Hazoumé creates.

13 Bartholomäus Grill, "Encounters with Romuald Hazoumè in His Native Country of Benin," in *Romuald Hazoumé : My Paradise - Made in Porto-Novo*, ed. Martin Henatsch Herbert-Gerisch-Stiftung Neumünster (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 27.
14 Sidney Kasfir, "African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow," in *Reading the Contemporary : African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, ed. Oguibe, Olu, Okwui Enwezor (London: InIVA, 1999), 105.

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How are Expressions of Negritude Portrayed through the Two Oil Paintings of Negritude Artist Ben Enwonwu?

Iman Lynch-Eghill

Negritude refers to the African literary and artistic movement of the 1930s, which was centered around the concept of black consciousness (Jacques, 2011). Created as the brainchild of Senegalese president and politician Leopold Senghor, Martinican poet and politician Aime Cesaire, and Leon Damas, a poet and politician from French Guiana. This movement was created in opposition to the pernicious and pervasive effect of colonialism, which had led to the subjugation and subordinate position of people of African descent within global society. In this essay, I will explore how Nigerian Negritude artist Ben Enwonwu portrayed and expressed the ideas of Negritude through two of his oil paintings from the 1960s to the 1970s.

In the figure 1, by Ben Enwonwu, the concept of Negritude can be seen to be embodied through the depiction of a woman with a distorted physique and a bowed head. Diagne (2010) suggests that the primary role of Negritude was to regain control of African narratives and to center African voices, along with their history and indigenous culture, to empower Africans with a strong identity, which had been stripped away from Africans through the colonial process. In this painting, this distortion appears to be representative of the indelible mark left by colonialism and slavery, which caused an irrevocable fracture to African people on an internal and external level. Internally this not only meant the displacement of African people physically, but in a more pernicious manner, this also meant stripping African people of many identities cultures, and norms, and were now living in a society that had reduced their humanity to an inferior status, that they were expected to assimilate into (Kanu, 2013). On an external level, it symbolized the lingering and persisting effects of colonialism that had ravaged the African continent, in the form of the pillaging of natural resources and the destabilization of social, governmental, and political structures (Nwanosike, Onyije and Eboh, 2011).

In contrast, figure 2, depicted in color; is symbolic of the vibrancy, dynamism, and diversity among African populations and their cultural traditions. This is exemplified through the colorful cultural clothing of the men and women in this painting, symbolic of their traditional African attire and religious backgrounds. As a movement, Negritude strived to restore and revive a sense of a united black consciousness and identity among African people, throughout the African continent and the African diaspora. It aimed to do this through the main avenue of literary and artistic works from an Afrocentric perspective, to reconnect Africans with their indigenous traditions and customs which were demonized by the Western world (Popeau, 1992).

Negritude is also expressed in figure 1, through the imagery of African women and men in the background, illustrated in vivid, pastel colors. This illustration is both retrospective and futuristic as the iconography; this refers to the placement and construction of visual imagery, objects, or symbols within an image. The construction of the image with African men and women in the background, illustrated with intricate details such as elongated and ornamented heads symbolic of tribal affiliations, indigenous hairstyles, and African instruments; occupying a smaller frame is reminiscent of a distant African past and history, where there were a plethora of civilizations, arts, sciences and flourishing economic, governmental and trade networks (Zaid, 2020); a world free of the colonial system and imperialism where Africa did not seek dependence on western nations and were an independent thriving continent, with indigenous cultures and identities that were omnipresent. The painting also has a futuristic

Figure 1 *Negritude African Art* (1977)

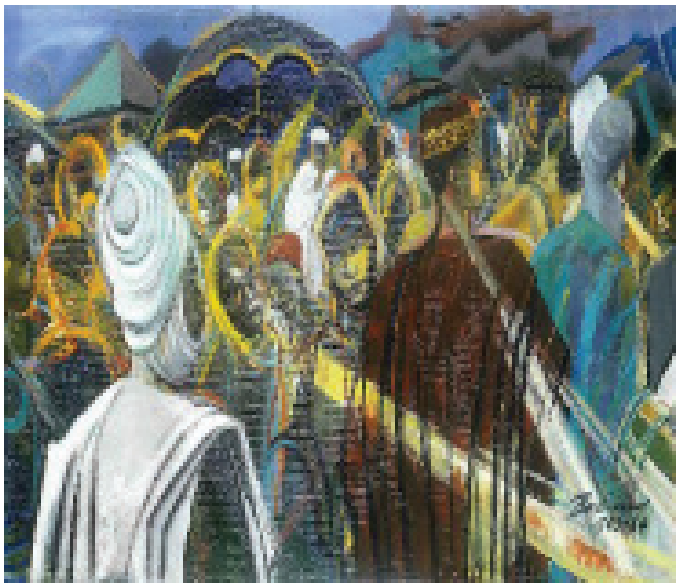

Figure 2 *'Nigerian Symphony'*, Bonhams. (1963-64)

element, as the Negritude movement is based on the premise of a revival and return to this African heritage of African-centered artistic works, literary expressions, and creative outlets; where this heritage was celebrated and showcased (Le Baron, 1966). This futuristic element is also reinforced by the central image of the woman with her eyes closed, which is suggestive of her reimagining a world free of the constraints on their literary expressions or outside views of what constitutes global and mainstream art that centers a European perspective and narrative, as well as a world free of the influence of colonialism and imperialism and dependence on European aid. Instead, this image can also be interpreted as a new beginning and blank canvas that which African people can use freely and without constraints to construct their ideals of African art, as they are now the driving force behind these stories.

In figure 2, Ben Enwonwu, meticulously centers two women, at the forefront of this painting, and their visibility, to the consumer of the image, sheds light on their invisibility and subordinate position within society and the Negritude movement at large. In this image, the two women, although centered at the forefront, are visibly ignored, and overlooked by the men who walk across their path. Women's position within society and the Negritude movement can be contrasted with the first image, as this image depicts these women as being marginalized and unacknowledged. The Nardal sisters speak of the eradication and dismissal of women's voices and contributions to the Negritude movement. They assert that black women played an instrumental role in the genesis of this movement, which stemmed from conversations between them and Harlem Renaissance writers, who discussed important artistic forms of black expression, in their salons in France (Diagne, 2010). The Harlem Renaissance can be seen as a large contributor to the later movement of Negritude, as the Harlem Renaissance was created as a result of African Americans during the early 20th century traveling in large numbers to the Northern states of America, like Chicago, Manhattan, New York, Philadelphia, and Detroit, in search for better-paid jobs, that were difficult to find in the Southern states of America due to the presence of Jim Crow laws, which meant that African Americans faced segregation, in many forms from the workplace to neighbourhoods and housing. Therefore, leading to a lack of opportunities in the realm of education. This exodus led to the creation and hub of African American literary forms, important musical genres, like jazz and blues music, and renowned literary figures such as W. E. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston (Baker, 2013).

In the painting, one woman almost has a direct gaze on the consumer of the image, whilst the other woman's eyes are locked on the men who ignore her mere presence. This imagery of half of the woman's body being cut off by the man's shoulder is also suggestive of the poor treatment of women within society and the Negritude movement, because of colonial factors that reversed the roles of women, from being revered members of the community and many African societies being matriarchal to now patriarchal African societies ascribing a lower status to women (Parpart, 2019).

In conclusion, the two oil paintings by Ben Enwonwu convey similar themes regarding an innately African-centered expression of a common consciousness and goal of unifying African people globally, through African ideals and portrayals of Africa and its people from an African viewpoint, which was a unique and rare perspective to be showcased to mainstream society. However, these oil paintings also differed in relation to their depiction of gender and in particular the experiences of black women throughout the colonial process and Negritude movement. In one image, women are the focus, and her many facets are illustrated in terms of her lack of and therefore quest for a strong identity and connection to her heritage, which is contrasted with women in the background who have an undisrupted and strong cultural attachments and ethnic affiliations and are seen as revered women with high status. Whereas, in the second painting, the visibility of the woman draws attention to her often-oppressive position within society. Overall, the positive and negative aspects of Negritude are effectively portrayed in a way that centers the African perspective.

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Chapter. III

VIOLENCE

The Hands of Power

Nia Jones

A Study of Eco-Womanism in the Poetry of Lucille Clifton and Lorna Simpson's Photography

Sabahat Asif

The Annihilation of Body Parts in the Rwandan Genocide

Mugisha Perezi

Performance Art in Africa: Kuduro and the Body (Politic)

Angelica Vieira

Unpinned

Rupture and Healing in the Embroidered Photo-collages of Joana Choumali

Anežka Edginton

The Hands of Power

Nia Jones

Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique was a horrifically brutal and exploitative regime that has permeated through all aspects of life from the early 16th Century until independence in 1975. The focus on Mozambique as a source of labour and production for the Metropole has been significant in formulating the colonial identity in the twentieth century. The *Chibalo* system of forced labour of Africans went hand in hand with the ideology of Antonio Salazar using the colony as "a supplier of raw materials and agricultural products"[1], for the modernisation and economic of the Metropole. This regime was overseen by a police force who were "extremely brutal, usually beating the 'malingerers'" and "beating their families and raping their wives and daughters"[2] illuminating the targeted individual punishments on the individuals. The extraction of labour from the African body gives us a sense of an unstable identity, a dichotomy between the Africans and the Settlers. As the assimilation process allowed "Europeans the opportunity to lower themselves to the level of Africans, but the converse was not possible"[3], how is one to define oneself in a time of power and restriction from an external force that prioritised the exploitation of physical labour. There was a struggle to find unity and a national identity within this unequal power dynamic.

Considering the arts, Makonde blackwood sculptures were made for settlers and European tourists, carved "as a means of subsistence"[4] rather than artistic expression. The colonial experience had taken the products of the nation and its individuals and capitalised on it and placed it with-

1 Huffman, Robert, 'Colonialism, Socialism, and Destabilisation in Mozambique', in *Africa Today*, vol. 29, 1992, 12
2 Huffman, 11
3 Sahlstrom, Berit, *Political Posters in Ethiopia and Mozambique: Visual Imagery in a Revolutionary Context*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990, 8
4 Bortolot, Alexander, 'Artesãos da Nossa Pàtria: Makonde Blackwood Sculptors, Cooperatives, and the Art of Socialist Revolution in Postcolonial Mozambique,' in Sidney Kasfir and Till Forster (eds) *African Art and Agency in the Workshop*, 2013, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 256

in new spheres. Those who produced received few benefits, there was a level of alienation from the labour of the worker and his yield, evident in the ideology that "the metropole took everything and gave nothing"[5]. Within this context of constriction and violence it is hard to see a consistent Mozambican national identity, from the extracted physicality of labour and the submissive position this placed Mozambicans in. This helped to pave the way for a radical socialist revolution to redefine what it meant to be Mozambican. It is within these contexts that this essay aims to analyse two works of art from both colonial Mozambique (Fig 1) and the independent nation (Fig 2) and show the ways in which they represent ideas of national identity through the use of the body and the hands. It will analyse how they reflect ideologies and relationships of colonialism and independence and their relationship to the labour of the individual, assisting defining terms of Mozambican national identity. Hands are a significant aspect in representing human connection and physicality. They are part of the direct connection that our minds have with the outside world, they are the instruments of our thoughts but can also act as tools of external manipulation of power and control.

The first work is a Malangatana Ngwenya oil painting titled *The Small Dentist* from 1961 (Fig 1). The scene depicts a dentist extracting a tooth from a patient in a dark and dubiously clinical environment. It shows an interesting mix of realism and symbolism, whilst the skin tones help to identify both subjects as non-white yet presumably Mozambican, we know that the Portuguese did not 'produce' any African doctors. The dentist can be seen as a symbolic representation of

Figure 1 Malangatana Ngwenya, *The Small Dentist*, 1961. Oil on Hardboard

5 Huffman, 13

colonial power, in his dominant position over the Mozambican as part of "a decoding of assimilation as a form of colonial violence."[6] We should consider how Malangatana shows a preoccupation of bearing teeth in his many of his works, relating to symbols of savagery and this disparity between African and Settler. The dentist uses his hand to simultaneously hold down his patient and to brutally extract a tooth. The blood dripping down the patient's face informs us of the violent nature of this procedure, reminiscent of the Mozambican experience under colonialism. By depicting the removal of a body part, Malangatana alludes to the direct extraction of labour from the African body for produce and profit. The hand that controls this is paler in comparison and is detached form the body using the instrument, almost hesitant to touch the patient's body, this avoidance to connect with the 'Savage' African. The detached power of the Metropole and its methods of extraction illuminated in this clinical setting. The work further conforms to the reality of one-on-one physical punishment of colonial rule in a new imagined context.

The hand holding the patient down is disproportionally large; perhaps a fault of his self-taught practice, but also is a sign of the overpowering force of the Portuguese in mind as well as body. This covering of colonialism under the guise of modernisation for the nation. It follows a restriction kept under *Chibalo* rule, halting the development of the individual by the hand of the coloniser, a control of labour, of education, and of assimilating relationships within the colonial context. On the contrast the patient's hands are not portrayed, there is a lack of agency, he is a vessel for labour. His body is not his body anymore, it has been overcome by the hands of violent domination. Thus, we see a relation to the reiteration of a national identity defined by the mentally and physically oppressed individual.

This explicit exploitation can refer to a theory of liberation scripts that convey narratives that refer to a "promise of victory, not only against colonialism...but against the exploitation of man by man"[7]. By reading *The Small Dentist* in a post-colonial context it is important to see the presence of the two figures in this intimate scene of extraction and exploitation as a visual precursor to brutal revolution. The overthrowing of this oppressed national identity into something altogether new and victorious.

It is worth considering that Malangatana joined FRELIMO (Liberation Front of Mozambique) in 1962 an as active guerilla member. During this time, he was even imprisoned. Subsequently, his work holds not only a political, but a personal relationship to these ideologies of national identity. Malangatana's involvement with the revolution to the very violence displayed here can question whether the painting is a reflection or representation for a motive of such revolt. The desire for the freed body, the liberated identity from this dominating colonial presence is present on a much deeper level when we consider Malangatana's place in FRELIMO.
It may be worth considering

6 Mário Pissarra, "Deep Ambivalences: Malangatana's Anti/Colonial Aesthetic," in *Malangatana: Mozambique Modern—The Modern Series at the Art Institute of Chicago* (Art Institute of Chicago, 2021), para 2
7 Israel, Paolo, 'A Loosening Grip: The Liberation Script in Mozambican History', Kronos, vol 39, 2013, 11

here the direct gaze of the patient to the viewer, or even the artist himself as this such desire to define a new Mozambican identity.

A FRELIMO poster from 1988 accredited to Joao Craveirinha advertises the 1st of May Workers Day and depicts an idyllic scene of agricultural work (Fig 2). We know that posters are significant in propagating information to the masses on a visual level, especially in colonial nations like Mozambique whose literacy rate before independence was 7%.[8] The medium is important in understanding the creation of a national identity, as one of the collective, prioritising the whole over the individual and his production for the Metropole. Considering the significance of the producibility and reach of the medium across urban and rural Mozambique considering a radical socialist revolution.

The hammer in the hand of the worker in front is the focal point of the poster, yet it is placed outside the border, in white 'empty' space. The fist and hammer play a significant role in the international image of socialism, this introduction to the blank space as a reference to the influence of international Socialist icons throughout the twentieth century. The image, message, and identity here is not limited to FRELIMO but references, in the white space, to global struggles. The man's hand is disproportionately large to the rest of his body; in opposition to that of Malangatana's subject it is reminiscent of the socialist realist style, emphasising the importance of the laborious work yet optimistic image of the people of the new nation. Considering this alongside independence from the Portuguese, the hand serves as a

Figure 2 Joao Craveirinha, *1o Maio/Dia Do Trabalhador*, 1988 Accessed via SOAS and Exhibition, *Our Sophisticated Weapon: Posters of the Mozambican Revolution*, 2021, Brunei Gallery

8 Data from Harvard Business School, Literacy Rates Spreadsheet, accessed via https://www.hbs.edu/businesshistory/Documents/historical-data/literacy.xls

shining light for new identity. It serves as one not determined by external forces but by the work and determination of the Mozambican and how they are united as workers and as human beings. Whilst the dentist's hands produced ideas of direct colonial violence, domination, and oppression on the individual here we see the hand as a notion of liberation for the masses.

A personalisation of these figures is not present, they are simply vessels for the FRELIMO message, represented by the hand grasping the hammer. The colourfully depicted agricultural labour depicted behind is of secondary importance, a representation of what can be achieved when Mozambican's collectively unite where there is no individualisation. The individual exploitation of labour and product is not present in revolution. As first independent President Samora Machel is quoted in *Kuxa Kanema*, "in Mozambique, Maconde doesn't exist, Macua doesn't exist...what there is in Mozambique, is the Mozambican"[9] we see the move from the oppressed colonial individual into the revolutionized collective both in life and in art. There is a reinvention of what Mozambique identity is, not the local community or local religion or even across genders but a uniting identity for a singular cause. This ideology comes into play considering the artists themselves as the poster medium plays a significant role in "decommercializing the artists activities and making them into publicly employed artists"[10]. The worker, the artist, the Mozambican is part of a bigger national identity, the socialist. We can consider the differing placements of the artists here, of Malangatana as an individual artist making work for expression, praise, and profit with a limited artistic relationship to FRELIMO, and of Craveirinha actively producing art for the political revolution of the country under the name of FRELIMO. Even the people who create these works can be categorised into these defining aspects of changing national identities, of the individual and the collective.

Additionally, this poster can be seen to comply with ideologies of the liberation script in reference to FRELIMO's ideals of revolution. For Joao Paulo Borges Coelho these scripts refer to the narratives of nation forming that "relies on a set of binary opposition and on specific notions of experience and subjectivity"[11]. Binaries are included subtly here in the use of the collective triad of figures to refer to the individual exploitation of colonialism. The agricultural labour in contrast to the colonialist devotion to the industrialisation of the nation and Mozambican body. In comparison to Malangatana's work it creates direct references to the colonial versus the revolutionary. With the understanding that Craveirinha also had an active relationship with FRELIMO, which also included a prison sentence, it is useful to view this work as fraught with political ideas of both national identity and in relation to theories of liberation itself. It begins to question the very substance of FRELIMO and what the involvement of the visual arts was especially in representing the body and identity within revolution.

From closely reading two works of Mozambican artists from the context of both colonialism and revolution it has become known that they use the body in similar ways to depict themes of chang-

9 *Kuxa Kanema: The Birth of Cinema* (dir: Margarida Cordoso, 2003), timestamp: 7.50-7.55
10 Sahlstrom, *Political Posters*, 29
11 Libertation p 13

ing national identity. Throughout the nation's tumultuous history or borders and domination, these artists use representations of hands, and the body more broadly, to depict a shift from the identity of the oppressed individual into one of the collective socialists. These works consider art as significant historical and political texts to visualise changing attitudes nationwide and across time. Though represented through different mediums, the message of the artists are stark, addressing political issues in a creative and engaging way for the present and the future. We see a new hope arise in these works, a future filled with light and connection with the global world rather than one of punishment and forced labour.

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Kuxa Kanema: The Birth of Cinema (dir. Margarida Cordoso, 2003)

A Study of Ecowomanism in the Poetry of Lucille Clifton and Lorna Simpson's Photography

Sabahat Asif

The impact and trauma of slavery on African-American citizens have permeated through many literary, political and artistic works by African-American authors and artists. The emotion and transparency of the feelings attached to certain events in history that mainstream media avoids is the central and focal point that such authors and artists bring to light. Melanie Harris's work on *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (2017), is based on the "critical deconstructive analytical approach to systems of colonial ecology"[1]. The foundations of Ecowomanism are built on the central idea of Ecofeminism, that a "man's domination over nature is related to man's domination over women" and that a "non-exploitative relationship to nature cannot be established without a change in human relationships"[2]. In essence, Ecofeminism focuses on the singularity of ecological anxieties surrounding women. In contrast to Ecofeminism, Ecowomanism is a paradigm that weaves the ecological strands of Ecofeminism into the histories and experiences of black women to set down the notion that violence, racism, slavery, and classicism are dependent on environmental justice.

The relationship between the violence and oppression against black communities, particularly women, is a significant idea surrounding the study of Ecowomanism, Harris states that the "violent part of racial history in the United States has a deep impact on the environmental history"[3]. This key difference between Ecofeminism and Ecowomanism closes the marginality that African-American women experience and opens a new discussion into the

1 Harris, Ecowomanism: *African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*, 14
2 Shiva, Vandana and Mies, Maria, *Ecofeminism*, 319.
3 Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*, 12.

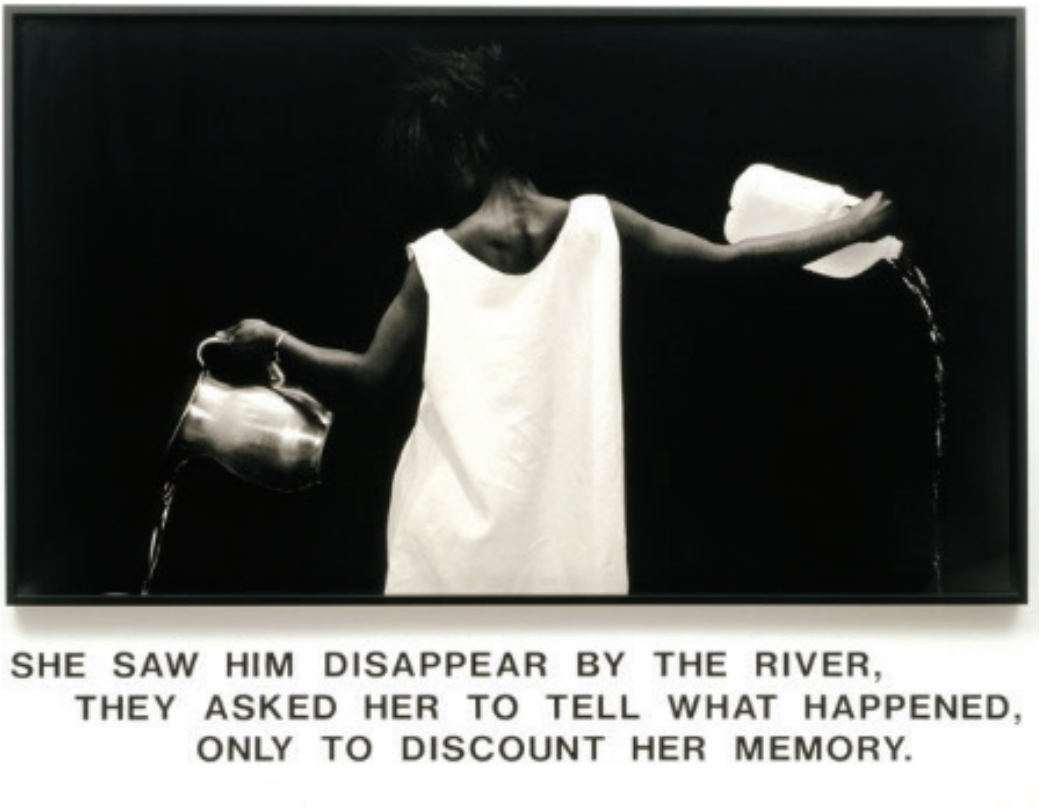

Figure 1 Lorna Simpson's *Waterbearer* (1986)

dismantling of historical oppression regarding race, gender, and sexuality which directly references the enslavement and colonial period. This celebration of African-American black female identity is depicted in my selected works from Lucille Clifton and Lorna Simpson who use their African roots and experiences to illustrate the movement from objectification and marginality to self-definition with a direct intersection of race and gender. The use of memory and serving as a mouthpiece for those who were previously silenced in my selected works is a reflection of a facet of *Ecowomanism* called 'Ecomemory'.

The term 'Ecomemory' was coined by Harris to deconstruct the binaries of racial power, which "illustrates themes of loss of community and displacement from lands as well as stories of hope"[4]. The unique works of Lorna Simpson illustrate "stories of hope" as they depict memory, power and violence with inseparable roots to black female identities. Much of her artwork plays a responsive and advocative role as it restricts the viewer's gaze to the female face and body.

4 Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*, no page number.

The attempt to remove the fetishised male gaze places African-American women in a unique paradoxical system of control and vulnerability. Using photography as a medium to represent identity politics places the lens of the camera as a witness to the creation of events, which partially divorces differing perspectives on how to view the image. Simpson utilises her photography as a way of documenting images to assert objectivity and in doing so, uses it as a strategic tool for repositioning political and societal views on black female identities.

As one of Simpson's most famous and discussed works her photograph entitled Waterbearer (1986)[5], reveals the paradigm of female memory and power. The photograph shows a young black woman with her back to the camera as she pours water out using a plastic container and a metal jug in her right hand. Beneath the photograph, Simpson writes:

> "She saw him disappear by the river,
> They asked her to tell what happened,
> Only to discount her memory."

The photograph itself measures almost six and a half feet wide and uses visual forms to represent the quote underneath. The black and white toned image and the use of both a metal and plastic jug represent the black female vulnerability and defiance with a direct reference to the memory of the woman and the power of the white authorities who "discount her memory". The duplicitous nature of the art both at once refuses her memory and voice and interrogates this silencing of her voice. The visual representation of memory and power relates to Ecomemory as it is an "agency [of] producing and empowering acts of justice".[6] The blessings and life form attached to the water symbolise sustained nature and redemption for a black woman to reclaim her place in history and to reconnect with her ancestral heritage and the future. The intensity of the woman's defiant stance with her back to the camera creates a new gaze. This alternative space redefines and determines her knowledge and power. In addition to her stance, the water containers serve as reminders of the way history has shaped the intersection of gender and race, yet the flow of water is constant and uninterrupted, as a sign of transforming the identity to reclaim history with truth and ownership.

Moving to the poetry of Lucille Clifton whose work depicts a beautiful and complete celebration of her black feminity and the female body. As a tool of connection with her mother and female ancestral heritage, Clifton's poetry creates a valued and empowered space where the female body, particularly black bodies, are celebrated for who they are, rather than what society makes them to be. Recalling a time with Lucille Clifton, Toi Derricotte narrates a time when Lucille Clifton, at elementary school, had asked the librarian if they had "any of Everett Anderson's book". The librarian replied that as the school has no black children, they didn't have such books, to which Clifton replied, "well you don't have any bunnies in this school either, but you have books about bunnies"[7]. Illustrating an inseparable part of her identity, Clifton, from a young age held her black skin as a triumph to

5 Simpson, Lorna, *Waterbearer,* 1986.
6 Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths,* no page number.
7 Derricotte, Toi. "Won't You Celebrate With Me": Remembering Lucille Clifton, 375.

be celebrated through her poems.

The unique structure of Clifton's poems offers a strong and thought-provoking reflection while addressing and advocating for the victims of racial dehumanisation and injustices. Throughout her poems that specifically illustrate the violence and brutality against African Americans, the anger and resentment are disguised by her sense of humour depicting her hostility. Alongside her hostile humoured tone, is the repeated use of enjambment with no capital letters or punctuation, which addresses her anger and resentment surrounding the historical events of her poems. This economical style of writing adopted by Clifton reflects the monotonous and bleak historical context that Clifton often depicts in her poems. Furthermore, Clifton's complete disregard for traditional poetic styles of grammar and capitalisation can be read as a metaphor for the brutal and inhumane treatment of African Americans due to the laws and legislations in place that also had a complete disregard for African-American citizens.

As elucidated by Clifton, the telling of an individual's history, in particular within the historical context of America, calls for a reinterpretation of recorded history. The dual "responsibility" of Clifton's poetry as an African American woman carries the weight of narrating and re-narrating her matriarchal ancestry and a past that would solely focus on her race. Published as an untitled poem in her book, *Good News about the Earth* (1972)[8], Clifton illustrates and bridges her racial identity and feminism together. This particular unnamed

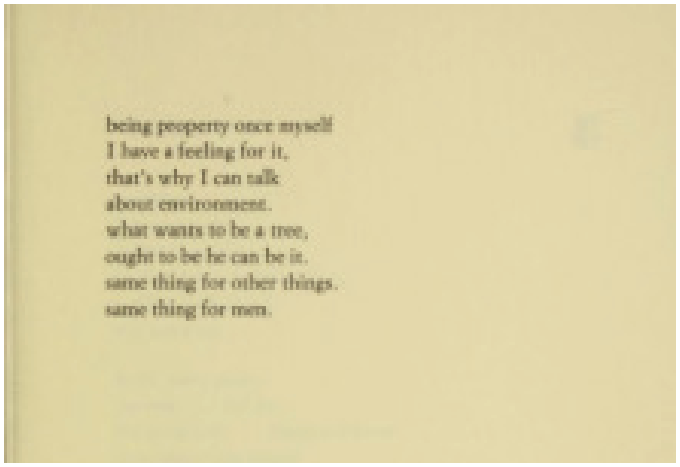
being property once myself
I have a feeling for it,
that's why I can talk
about environment.
what wants to be a tree,
ought to be he can be it.
same thing for other things.
same thing for men.

Figure 2 Untitled Poem from Clifton's book: *Good News about the Earth* (1972)

poem was written and published during the time of 'The Gary Convention' (1972)[9]. This National Black Political Convention was held in Indiana to advocate for African-Americans to either "choose…to slip back into the decadent white politics of American life, or we may press forward to the… creation of our own Black life".[10] Gathering around ten thousand African Americans, the Gary Convention urged and empowered black communities to advocate for the humane treatment of African-American citizens, in particular slavery. This convention was held in Gary, Indiana, and was a three-day conference with Civil Rights Leaders, politicians, and delegates to represent the urgency of building a Black Coalition to establish new political strategies. It is agreed to be a significant event in Black politics following the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. Embodying the 'Legacy of the Gary Convention', Clifton's poem reads as follows:

8 Clifton, Lucille. *Good News about the Earth;* New Poems. New York, Random House, 1972.
9 II, Robert Greene. *"The Legacy of the Gary Convention."* AAIHS, African American Intellectual History Society, no page number.
10 II, Robert Greene. *"The Legacy of the Gary Convention."* AAIHS, African American Intellectual History Society, no page number.

being property once myself
i have a feeling for it,
that's why i can talk
about environment.
what wants to be a tree,
ought to be he can be it.
same thing for other things.
same thing for men

Clifton as 'being property…myself' (1) mirrors Clifton's descendant of slaves in America who endured racial dehumanisation and oppression, as well as being a woman who has experienced patriarchal rulings. By referring herself to as 'property', Clifton exposes the legally enforced rights that slave owners had, and in doing so advocates for the slaves who endured the sufferings at the hands of their owners. As stated by Harris, "the legacy of white supremacy woven through the law of racial discrimination… Ecomemories are infused with individual and collective memories of racial hatred and brutality".[11] The connection between the "legacy of white supremacy" and the "environment", Clifton creates a bond between the enslavement of African-Americans and the environment which carries civilisation burdens. As Clifton was 'property once', she is able to 'talk about the environment' (2) and establishes a sense of ownership of her consciousness. With this shared experience of being assigned a 'less-than-human' status in society, Clifton has the authority to 'talk' and express social and ecological reformation and equality. '

The use of ecology with relation to Ecomemory to depict black female oppression ties the scars of colonial, white and patriarchal supremacy with the exploitation of nature. The works of both Simpson and Clifton contain emancipatory messages which echo the work of Harris's Ecomemory dictum to which the "loss of community and displacement from lands" integrate "stories of hope".[12]

11 Clifton, Lucille. *Good News about the Earth; New Poems*, 2.
12 Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*, no page number.

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The Annihilation of Body Parts in the Rwandan Genocide

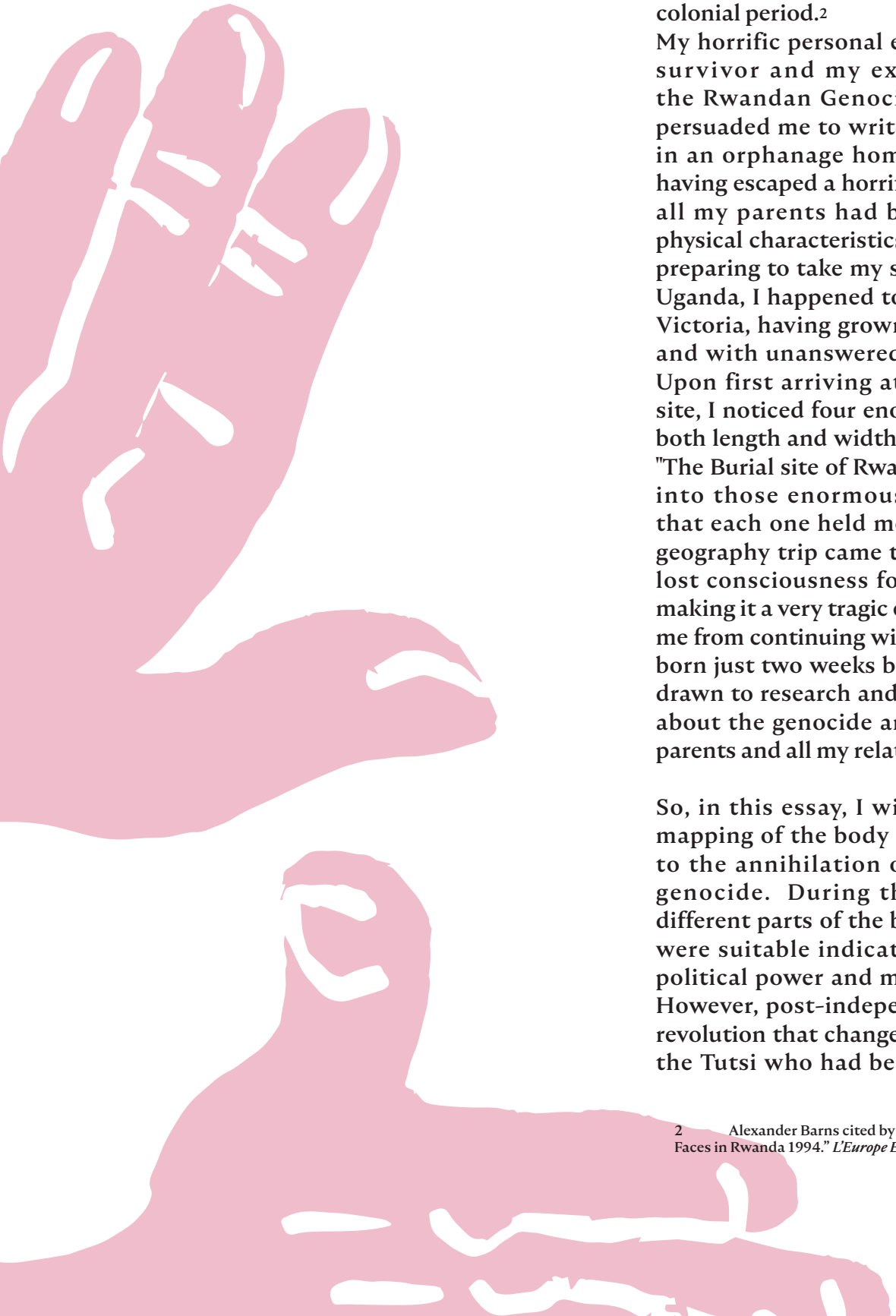
How the Tutsi people's physical traits contributed to the obliteration and devastation of their bodies during their extermination.

Mugisha Perezi

In the period of one to two years after the Rwandan genocide, different places especially of worship, and suburbs of Kigali were stagnant with timber posturing people's different parts of bodies like skulls, skeletons, dithering clothes, and bones. These places of worship would have several properties in their vicinities that belonged to the people who were massacred while looking for shelter in those places. These belongings would exhibit the kind of ruthless or extreme brutality that was used while slaughtering them since the bones and then entire skeletons could be still trapped in the carriage in which they had been killed[1]. So, in my discussion, I will explore how the destruction of the body while using the 'artifacts methods' of killing in the Rwandan genocide, is a consequence of politicization and racialization of the body by the colonialists.

The Rwandan genocide against Tutsi, explicitly the disastrous interface stuck between two groups, the killers and victims, illuminated the ethnic aspect of violence that became evident in the manner people's bodies were incapacitated or crushed. However, the great violence of the Rwandan genocide was neither the manifestation of an incongruity nor a deficit hyperactivity disorder of the Rwandan population. The genocide was well-ordered and curtailed from an ethnicized conception of the antagonist relationship, which the public had been thoroughly inspired by the politicians for many years and it was inherited from the

1 Mamdani, Mahmood. *When Victims become killers:Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda.* Princeton University Press, 2019:3.



colonial period.[2]

My horrific personal experience as a genocide survivor and my extensive research into the Rwandan Genocide against Tutsis have persuaded me to write this essay. I was raised in an orphanage home in Uganda as a child, having escaped a horrific kind of death in which all my parents had been killed due to their physical characteristics. As a geography student preparing to take my senior four final exams in Uganda, I happened to visit the shores of Lake Victoria, having grown up in excruciating pain and with unanswered questions in my heart. Upon first arriving at the Kasensero landing site, I noticed four enormous graves measuring both length and width, adorned with the words "The Burial site of Rwandan Genocide". Looking into those enormous graves, one could see that each one held more than 500 bodies. My geography trip came to an end when I fell and lost consciousness for more than four hours, making it a very tragic experience that prevented me from continuing with my studies. Since I was born just two weeks before the genocide, I was drawn to research and learn as much as I could about the genocide and the kind of death my parents and all my relatives suffered.

So, in this essay, I will first discuss how the mapping of the body parts by colonialists led to the annihilation of the body in the 1994 genocide. During the colonial period, the different parts of the body, especially the nose, were suitable indicators of association with political power and marginalization of power. However, post-independence Rwanda led to a revolution that changed the status quo because the Tutsi who had been privileged during the

2 Alexander Barns cited by Krüger, Karen. "The Destruction of Faces in Rwanda 1994." *L'Europe En Formation 357*, no. 3 (2010):96.

colonial era, were overpowered by the political revolution of 1959-62 that changed the political and social landscape in the country. The physical body structures that were initially surety for political power and eminence turned to be a disgrace that necessitated physical and organizational oppression, leading to a ruthless kind of death in the 1994 genocide.[3]

The Hutu and Tutsi were not two distinct cultural communities in pre-colonial times, nor were they referred to by these terms to denote two distinct ethnic groups. Hutu and Tutsi shared the same language, the same religion, and the same landmass back then as they do today. The term "Tutsi" was originally used to denote a person's status as a cattle-owning individual. Hutu was the term used to describe cultivators. A Hutu could convert to Tutsi culture through intermarriage or cattle ownership, and vice versa. The term "Tutsi" became increasingly popular in the late 19th century to denote a superior group because Tutsi kings ruled Rwanda during that time. "Therefore, to be a Tutsi was to be powerful, to be close to power, or simply to be associated with power – just as being a Hutu was increasingly to be a subject." At the beginning of the 20th century, when Europeans first arrived in Rwanda, the identification of Hutu cultivators as subjects and Tutsi pastoralists as those in power was becoming a general issue in public discussions.[4]

It was noted by the colonialists that the word "Tutsi" was associated with power. However,

3 Hinton, Alexander Laban *Annihilating Difference : The Anthropology of Genocide.* Berkeley: University of California Press, [20]07, 2002:137-174.

4 Newbury, Catharine. *The Cohesion of Oppression : Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda*, 1860-1960. New York:Columbia University Press, 1994.

they were ignorant of the rationale underlying the nation's social structure. Conversely, their arguments were grounded in racial theories. The Tutsi were perceived as an alien race that had invaded Rwanda after the so-called Hamitic hypothesis. Because they believed that members of the Tutsi "race" were more intelligent and power-hungry than other "negroes," they took it for granted that they held positions of authority. European onlookers concluded that the Tutsi were a distinct race based on physical characteristics. It was said of the Hamitic Tutsi that "he is a European who happens to have black skin" or that "he resembles the Negro only in the color of his skin." The colonialists acquainted themselves that the Tutsi were a powerful group because their 'race' was alleged to be enthusiastic for power and gifted with more advanced shrewdness than the Hutu group whom they grouped as origin Rwandese.[5] Colonialists illustrated distinct characteristics that facilitated the physical transformation-based differentiation between Hutu and Tutsi.[6] It was imagined that the Hutu were the short, robust, simple, peasant people with large noses, and the Tutsi were the tall, magnificent, tiny people with small noses. The collection of presumptive physical attributes was enhanced by assessments of the charisma or character of the Tutsi people.

The body's physical distinctiveness that was set in place was accompanied by organizational arrangements that were also established by colonialists in Rwanda that deepened the practices of separating Hutu and Tutsi. The Catholic Church's arrangements favored Tutsi as they assumed that they were natural leaders.

5 Mamdani, *When Victims*, 1-100.
6 Newbury, *Cohesion of Oppression*

Consequently, Tutsi were favored by the education system where Tutsi children would be admitted to schools then distributed across state administration positions.[7] This kind of institutional arrangement which gave Tutsi special privileges was accompanied by teachings of racial beliefs that had the assumption of the Hamitic hypothesis that Tutsi were not the original ethnicity of Rwanda. This was put in missionary schoolbooks and was comprehensively taught in schools. This ideology was consumed by the Hutus and was a doctrine that was absorbed by Hutus for many years, and they believed it. Around 1993, ethnic and racial separations were finally established through an institution that distributed an obligatory national identity card that distinctly mentioned the ethnic origin of the individual.[8]

All these institutional arrangements set in place during the colonial era were accompanied by assumptions of Hutu being indigenous and Tutsi being aliens. They created a deep hatred for Tutsi by Hutus due to political reasons and socio-economic inequalities that shaped the politics of the country. They were used as a weapon by the Hutu regimes after independence to start persecuting the Tutsi because now the Hutu elites were fighting structural arrangements that had been set in place by colonialists. This was the focal point of poisoning Rwanda's population by colonialists and politicians who prioritized ethnicities and race instead of all Rwandese. This is the reasoning behind this common statement by Professor Mamdani: "The origin of the violence is connected to how Hutu and Tutsi were constructed as political identities by the colonial state, Hutu as indigenous and Tutsi as alien."[9]

In this essay, I address how the physical characteristics of the Tutsi people contributed to their body destruction during their extermination. The artifacts mean the horrifying torture of various body parts during the killing process—a process I have dubbed the "annihilation of the body parts." After my horrifying geography class experience on Lake Victoria, I talked myself into going to Rwanda for the first time to see if I could learn anything about my parents' and relatives' deaths. I had psychological and physical scars on my body and heart, and the things I learned there were incomprehensible. Thus, the literature that is currently available about this tragedy, along with my own experiences and exposure as a scholar and survivor, serve as the guidelines for my discussion here.

The evidence after the genocide showed that genocide was characterized by the highest levels of agony because of indescribable brutality to the human body.[10] The categories of killing include burying people in massive graves who were not yet dead, killing pregnant mothers by cutting their wombs and extracting babies, cutting off the nose, and cutting other different parts of the body into pieces

7 Mamdani, *When Victims*, 87.
8 Kruger, *Destruction of faces*, 102–104.
9 Mamdani, *When Victims*, 34.
10 Christopher C Taylor cited by Karen Kruger, *Destruction of faces*, 92.

and others were pierced, or burnt to death.[11] Two years after the Lake Victoria incident, I traveled to Rwanda to learn how my parents and other family members had died. Although it was a horrible experience, I felt compelled to learn everything I could about the type of death they had endured. Locals and other villagers told me a lot about the type of death they had experienced during my search. They told me that many of my people died a cruel and drawn-out death after being drained dry for the entire week. Every day, various body parts were purged, beginning with their long noses and cutting legs, and organs like the liver, heart, and intestines were removed before the victims were killed. Additionally, my other family members were forced to give the executioners enormous sums of money in exchange for a quick death. I've never recovered.

The Rwandan genocide was unparalleled in its wickedness, savagery, and inhumanity. Dead bodies with signs of horrifying torture were dumped into the Kagera River in northern Rwanda and floated up to Uganda, where they were retrieved by people and buried in massive graves with over 500 bodies buried in each.[12] The Tutsi ethnic group was the target of this politically motivated act of violence, which was motivated by the dehumanization of the group at the time of the killings, which gave the killers the confidence to kill without showing any remorse.

Rwanda saw widespread acts of violence during this time, including the widespread rape of women, mutilation of noses, spear and machete killings, and deliberate dismemberments that did not occur accidentally. Logically it seems to have operated as a kind of social exercise, as if it were a matter of guaranteed standards. To illustrate specific beliefs in a nation's body culture, various body parts were severely dismembered (mutilated).[13] The goal of this kind of violence was to achieve political supremacy by exterminating the Tutsi group of people who were thought to be a race.

Large-scale murders motivated by physical traits, such as long or small noses and thin or tall people, took place in public places like schools where Tutsi children could be identified from other students by using nose appearance selection techniques. In addition, road blockades were established nationwide and heavily guarded by Hutu soldiers and militia; media outlets would continuously alert specific road blockades about any Tutsi groups or individuals approaching them, readying them for the massacre; and finally, in churches where Tutsis sought refuge, the priests turned them over to the killers. A person's physical appearance could be taken into consideration if they lacked a National Identity card, and in other places, the decision to kill was made if the victim's card bore the letter T, a symbol of the Tutsi.[14]

Local perpetrators killed people in numerous cases after receiving information from politicians that the Tutsi were the Hutus' enemy due to their physical appearance. In certain instances, they had to take a finger measurement of the nose before they could determine if the

11 Mamdani, *When Victims*, 6.
12 Mamdani, *When Victims*, 1
13 Kruger, *Destruction of faces*, 102-104.
14 Kruger, *Destruction of faces*, 102-104

person was Tutsi if the finger did not enter or appropriate the nose. The most desirable feature of the body for the perpetrators to deform was the size of the nose. The connotation of the dismemberment of noses went far from the vehement statement that the only intention was to kill. But by gaining confident acquaintance around the ethnic identity of the victim, the perpetrators thought that making the victims suffer in anguish would not only terminate bodily uprightness but also ethnic and group validity. [15]

Conclusion

In my discussion, I have expounded that dismemberment was conveyed through the Rwandan community's assessment of the body's appearance which was centered on ethnic connotation. The parts of the body like the nose, fingers, and legs turned out to be key factors in representing the individual's race. The governments in Rwanda made decisions on an individual's choice of political participation based on his or her racial connotation.
The ethnic aspect of violent acts revealed much about the history of the conflict and the accusations that made the Tutsi appear to be a potential threat. How the Hutu people understood this violence and what it meant to them by this time was deeply rooted in historical circumstances in the country from the time of colonialization followed by post-independent governments. In Rwanda, the victims' ethnic identity was the motivation behind their obliteration. So the act of obliteration to eliminate was clearly linked to "ethnic" distinctions and traits, which the media and political actors depicted as dangers to the Hutu populace.

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Performance Art in Africa: Kuduro and the Body (politic)

Angelica Vieira

In Angola, *kuduro* meaning 'hard-ass' or more figuratively, 'in a hard place', is both a powerful energetic dance and a genre of music which has become a site of politics. This essay hopes to trace an analysis of as a kind of (symbolic) body politic and the political and racial spaces in which it operates, against the movement and play of history in Angola. Considering how the body has been defined within the field of cultural analysis beyond social space into a performative one [e.g., Lefebvre, Plessner, Benjamin], a performative notion of the body denotes that the body can be analysed as a natural, cultural formation through the process of becoming visible as 'corporeal topographies'[1]. For others, the body is not a given spatial unit but a configuration of 'images and myths which postulate it as a symbolic force'[2]. Although no universal definition of 'the body' exists, here, it transcends the social and political sphere as a performative notion of imagined space which has material effects on culture. Thus, the object (the body) is also a subject (of performance) and in this manner, the intersection between the body and politics is inherent. For this essay, 'the body' is conceptualised as a discursive formation, in line with the methods used for discussion e.g., "cultural discursive methods: body spaces as performative rituals in historical, gender, postcolonial and transcultural contexts".[3]

According to Foucault, the body is a site of power relations directly involved in a political field and subject to systemic regimes of truth. Synthesising a link between the body and the nexus of power and discourse, Foucault denotes "[discourses] have an immediate hold [upon the

1 Markus Hallensleben. Performative Body Spaces: Corporeal Topographies In Literature, Theatre, Dance, And The Visual Arts. (Vancouver, Rodopi 2010) Ser. Critical Studies, Vol. 33,16.
2 Gabriele Brandstetter, & Hortensia Völckers, ReMembering the Body: Body and Movement in the Twentieth Century. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz 2000)
3 Hallensleben, Performative Body Spaces, 10.

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body] they invest it, mark it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs." [4] Through identifying a unity between the body and space and between the body and politics, the possibility of a collective body politically acting *(body politic)* materialises. The notion of a ***body politic*** denotes a collective social practise in which the entire body, subject to the powers of society, struggle for its dominance and regulation. Rejecting existing institutional and disciplinary powers in society, the ***body politic*** is comprised of individuals negotiating their own personal power through intimate relations which form the ultimate political expression of the subject–– out of the physiological body emerges the intentional body[5].

Tracing the genealogies of ***kuduro***, the concept of art in Angola is coterminous with and indissociable from the War of Independence 1961-1974 and its subsequent Civil War 1975-2002. For the ruling party, Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), art has always been a political project seeking to interrupt Portuguese anthropology. Many MPLA slogans such as, ***'Um só povo, uma só nação'*** (One people, one nation) encouraged the negation of ethnic differences in favour of a national aesthetic. For example,

4 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage 1995), 25.
5 David Dudrick, *Foucault, Butler, and the Body. European Journal of Philosophy*. (2005),13, 239.

Figure 1 Manuel Teixiera 'Viteix' Untitled Estudo II, mixed media. 1992.

Figure 2 Cowke 'O Pensador

those involved in cultivating Angolan nationalism through art have used traditional Cokwe symbols i.e. derived from *sona* – a form of performance art and storytelling through the drawing of geometric shapes originally used for demonstrating social status and reappropriated from its traditional cultural space and 'native environment of usage for a completely new ontological context'.[6] For example, Teixiera's 1992 '*Viteix*'[7] in its intimacy with traditional imagery and native Angolan practices, represents "an effort to [evoke] a shared culture and to erase regional differences as a way to support the MPLA's construction of one nation".[8] Furthermore, arguably the most well-known sculpture exhibited at the Museu Nacional de Antropologia (Anthropological Museum of Luanda) founded less than a year after Angola's proclamation of Independence, is the statuette known as '*O Pensador*'[9]. Found in 1937, it has become the cultural symbol of Angola–– the apologue of a mythical ethnic past. The statue depicts a somewhat pensive gesture, leading many to compare it to Rodin's 'The Thinker'. This comparison is unsettling as in many ways, Rodin's sculpture is the aesthetic embodiment of the European enlightenment project. Efforts to synthesise the Cowke statue into prevailing western-centric ideas about 'modernity' remind us of Fanon's analysis of the colonial aesthetics as a 'world of statues: the statue of the general who carried out the conquest, who built the bridge'[10], a reminder that the colonial context privileged only European subjectivity and ways of being.

6 Torin Spangler, *Review of Repainting the Walls of Lunda: Information Colonialism and Angolan Art, by D. Collier.* (Análise Social 2017). [I, 52(223), 477–480.

7 See Appendix (Figure 1)

8 Suzana Sousa, *Fighting over the Archive: Politics and Practice of the Art World in Angola.* (Kronos 2019). 45, 68.

9 See Appendix (Figure 2)

10 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched Of The Earth. (Grove Weidenfeld 1963)*,50-51.

For Collier, "[Angolan] art was at the time of independence in 1975 produced in a state of emergency, shaped by a response to epistemological and physical violence". In this sense, art in Angola is also inextricably linked to the practise of memory. Bourdieu denotes that the body is a mnemonic medium made up of texts and signs inscribed in culture,[11] and if we view culture as a temporality of micro-practises, there exists a dialectic relationship between the body and space whereby the body embodies the 'mythico-ritual'[12] structure of the world, "through the movements and displacements which make the space within which they are enacted–as much as they are made by it".[13] Memory, then, is reproduced in the micro-practises animated by the body in a given space-time, forming part of the socio-cultural fabric of life. Thomas Csordas surmises, "memory and the domain of time break through at just the right moment into the domain of material circumstances to effect spatial transformations".[14]

Whilst its origins are contested, ***kuduro*** is has said to have emerged sometime within the 1980s to the mid 1990s.[15] Kuduro is characterised by moves from hip-hop and break-dancing such as 'popping and locking', traditional Angolan dances, carnival culture and theatrical movements. For Moorman, kuduro behaves like, "a coordinated body in music: muscles pump its dance; technology (video clips; mobile phones; candongueiros) is its blood and its tongue (slang and bifes), while *grife* (sartorial style) or *swague* (swag) seal it within a semiotically thick epiderm".[16] In the

Figure 3 Local kuduro event in Sambizanga, Luanda, 2015 photographed by Anita Baumann

11 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP,1977) , 281.
12 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory*, 89.
13 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory*, 90.
14 Thomas Csordas. *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1994).
15 Marisa J Moorman. *Anatomy of Kuduro: Articulating the Angolan Body Politic after the War.* (African Studies Review 2014) 57 (3), 40.
16 Moorman. *Anatomy of Kuduro*, 24.

street gatherings where this dance is often performed, the body is 'broken down' in-front of the audience as a way of reconnecting with the collective. In many ways kuduro, is no more about anatomy than the physiological effects of the 'hard' conditions of life in Angola.

Thriving in the informal economy of *musseque*-based studios and candongueiros (taxis), ***kuduro*** is a phenomenon emerging organically from Luanda as form of expression (discontent) with the conditions of life. Through the body, ***kuduro*** articulates the failures of infrastructure and the dwindling enthusiasm for socialism. In Jorge António's film, *Fogo no Museke* [2007],[17] observers describe ***kuduro*** dancers as looking like "they have no bones". The aesthetics of the dance articulate, "a way of being, a disposition in the face of difficulty and constraint".[18]

Today, the artists of kuduro claim to provide what the state does not––it has become a body politic in itself. Against the contemporary economic challenges in Angola, namely, the scarcity of late capitalist society, ***kuduro*** dancers turn their "dire material conditions into cultural raw materials",[19] reifying their bodies on their own terms by taking capital into the corporeal realm for transfiguration.

Dancers use the movements of ***kuduro*** to embody the epistemic violence of Portuguese colonialism–– a reflection of the corporeal violence on Angolan bodies, particularly those of young people during the decades of conflict. Throughout the civil war, 'the body' was a site of extraordinary violence. According to the Human Rights Watch, 'the MPLA raided Luanda's ***musseques*** at night to collect youths to send to the front lines and UNITA rebels forcibly recruited youths into their military operations in the provinces'[20]. In this manner, many ***kuduro*** dancers at the turn of the century used their own bodies to perform the violence they have seen and lived through as well as the missing bones of many of their peers used

17 Jorge António' (dir.). *Fogo no Museke.* (Lisbon: LX Film 2007).
18 Moorman. *Anatomy of Kuduro*, 29.
19 Moorman. *Anatomy of Kuduro*, 31.
20 "Forgotten Fighters," *Human Rights Watch*, 2003. https//www.hrw.org.

Figure 4 All Copyrights to Afri-pedia Stocktown Films. Photos by Teddy Goitom, Benjamin Taft & Senay Ber

as cannon fodder for the achievement of political ends. While the resistance movements were dissolving their own *body politic* through the erosion of social contracts once built on shared ideologies and visions for a better future, *kuduro* was being propelled through communities as a kind of (symbolic) body politic based on shared values and discontents. Moorman surmises, "in Luanda, the body is ground zero of economic and physical survival and the locus of material and psychic investments." [21]

For MPLA, the creation of a national aesthetic has been a priority as early as 1977.[22] The context of art and art production in Angola is one marked by the colonial encounter and haunted by the ideas of national identity and reconstruction. Until the late twentieth century, official art production was designated by the *União Nacional de Artistas Plásticos* (UNAP), a political artists association of the MPLA under a legal statue to support the Angolan revolutionary process. The association promoted Angolan artists on the world stage, sending official national delegations to take part in events such as Festac 77, CICIBA Biennial (the itinerant international biennial of bantu art), the Havana Biennial and also to several Eastern European and African countries.

21 Moorman, *Anatomy of Kuduro*, 30.
22 Sousa, *Fighting over the Archive*, 65

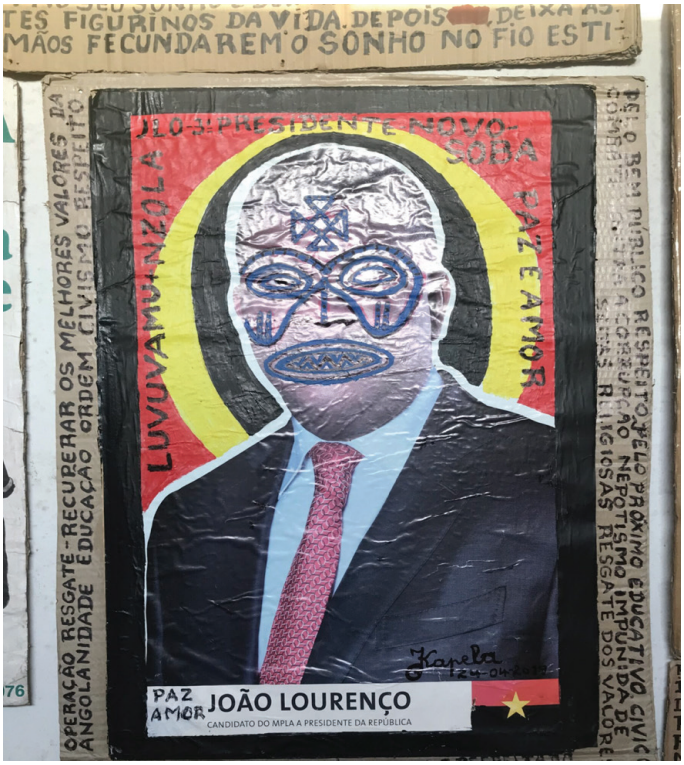

Figure 5 Kapela, Installation view at Fuckin'Globo 2020

When MPLA adopted the international slogan 'os Kuduristas' loosely meaning 'the artists and afficionados of kuduro' in its 2012 election campaign, ***kuduro*** had reached global popularity since its rise at the turn of the new millennium. Up until this point, ***kuduro*** was an embodiment of political goals, hopes and dreams that personified its collective body. In this context, it became a political tool with affiliations to the new leaders of MPLA. President José dos Santos, a man with troubling personal investments in state and foreign media, weaponised the ***body politic*** for electoral success by 'curating' ***kuduro*** in the language of late capitalist spin.[23] The ruling MPLA previously shed Workers Party from its acronym at the culmination of the civil war. Largely substituting revolutionary Marxist-Leninism from its ideology, MPLA's failure to uphold its once coherent and exalting message of liberation left most of the individuals that made up its body politic throughout the resistance movement, disillusioned.

Today, the backdrop for ***kuduro*** as performance art includes the 'Fuckin'Globo' exhibition project Est 2015 and the National Union of Visual Artists that represent a new generation of Angolan art and artists seeking to escape the political narrative haunted by the ideals of the nation-state inscribed into the cultural sphere.

Overall, ***kuduro*** can be conceived as a manifestation of a body politic or at least, denote its existence. In many ways kuduro is a collective body of resistance, used today to perform powerful revisionary effects against the institutional

23 António Tomás, *Becoming Famous: Kuduro, Politics and the Performance of Social Visibility*' (Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art and Visual Culture 2014). 8, 2, 2014, 261–275.

legacies of colonial rule and the poverty of daily life, " use[ing] the body to push back against the forces of history and contemporary life. [24] Though primarily a genre of music and dance, ***kuduro*** is a symbolic corporeal transformation in which "contemporary history is performed in, on and through the body".[25] In line with Bourdieu's thinking, the body acknowledges multiple ways of knowing in the moment in which it performs. Therefore, ***kuduro*** as a set of micro-practises, "in the space of time as continuity and identity", [26] can be conceived as a ***body politic***. Here, the individual body (the expression of the subject) is part of a collective social practise struggling for the dominance and regulation of societal powers in the realms of economic production, governance and law, "carrying [preforming] memory into the spaces in which an I finds subject-positions for living its everyday life".[27] As such, ***kuduro*** as a material embodiment of the ***body politic*** could even be viewed as a challenge to the western subjectivities that privilege the cartesian dictum, "I think therefore I am'"or "[the] moment in which solitary man attains to himself a position which is impossible to regain solidarity with other men who exist outside of the self",[28] that underpinned the Enlightenment project coterminous with and indissociable from colonial expansion and by transforming it into a collective political declaration, 'I perform, therefore I am'.

24 Moorman, *Anatomy of Kuduro*, 29.
25 Moorman. *Anatomy of Kuduro,* 31.
26 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory*, 285.
27 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory*, 285.
28 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism [from] Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre.* (Meridian 1989), 1.

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Unpinned

Rupture and Healing in the Embroidered Photo-collages of Joana Choumali

Anežka Edginton

Working in a mixed media of embroidery, photography and collage, Joana Choumali explores notions of femininity, social trauma, and reunification in her home country of Ivory Coast. This essay seeks to explore the discourses of contemporary life in Ivory Coast in Choumali's *Translation* (2011-2017) and *Ça Va Aller* (2011-2018) series, investigating how the artist weaves creative form with social commentary to advocate for a shift in the dialogue of mental health, gender roles and migration in the society of Ivory Coast as attached to notions of spatio-temporal identities and embodiments.

In her series entitled *Translation*, Choumali highlights the displacement of people and identities through cutting figures out of photographs and transposing them into a different scene, leaving a void space where a person once walked. To begin to analyse these works, it is important to frame the context from which Choumali's multimedia works were first conceived. Due to the volatile socio-political crisis in Ivory Coast of 2010-2011, during which the country found itself on the brink of civil wars, Choumali exiled herself to Europe and began to reflect on the emotional and socio-cultural effects of displacement, dislocation, and intercontinental dynamics. With a heightened sensitivity to the creation of absence in families and wider communities because of international economic migration, Choumali's series *Translation* presents parallel images of African cities and cities in wealthy former-colonising states. In each of these dual-image works, a figure from the African street is cut out and pasted into the Western scene, a piece of white fabric stitched into the resulting void, threads left unravelled and tumbling down from the image from both the cut-and-pasted figure and the stitched details of surrounding figures. The duality of the images side-by-side encourages the viewer to contemplate notions of integration amidst the stark differences of the environments.

In *Translation*, loose threads symbolise the prolonged wait and disunification experienced by families and communities with a loved one working abroad. Commenting on the decision to leave threads loose and unbound, Choumali states "embroidery symbolises the weight of the wife or the mother or the child who is left

Figure 1 "Abdijan – Paris", T*ranslation 2017.*

behind like Penelope".[1] identifying her work with Homer's Penelope from *The Odyssey*. Penelope awaits Odysseus' return and for twenty years engages herself in the weaving of a funeral shroud, allaying suitors who fill her house and hope to replace the absent king by telling them she will decide once she has finished her weaving, each night unravelling the day's work to buy herself more time. The trailing thread therefore signifies an emotional longing, an incompletion because of familial absence. Additionally, the works can be read as a dialogue on the historical corporeal relation between ex-colonial states and post-colonial African nations, with Western wealth built off the labour of Africans. In "Abidjan - Paris", (Fig. 1) the red thread running from the heart of the "I [heart] Paris" souvenir shop suggests the running of blood and indicates that the viewer may read the red stitching on the Parisian street as droplets of blood, pointing to the brutal colonial history which funded the metropoles and paving of streets in Western countries.

Reading the loose threads as bloodlines or

1 Choumali, Joana. 2018. "Joana Choumali Embroiders Empathy." Fresh Art International Podcast. https://freshartinternational.com/2018/04/30/joana-choumali-embroiders-empathy/.

corporeal ties that are left dangling in negative space outside the frame of the photograph serves to intensify the pathos built around signs of displacement in the series. Furthermore, the trailing of the threads past the frame of the photograph, claims the negative space of a gallery wall which is likely to be positioned in the Western-dominated art scene. This can be read as a reclamation of space, a positing that these figures and their cultural, social, economic ties trail beyond the delineation of what is the realm of "Africa" and "the West", stating that no matter where the work is exhibited there is a crossover, and the delineations are not so neatly trimmed. A reminder that the privilege of the Western art world is tied to the former subjugation of African people.

In exploring the economic ties which continue to link Africans to Western societies within an unbalanced dynamic of power, we return to the concept of Penelope to explore the relationship between gender roles and economic power and the ties to colonial states. Choumali mentions in an interview with gestalten.com that she grew up watching her grandmother sew together scraps of wax cloths into an amalgamated multi-purpose fabric – a technique familiar across West Africa, it is known in the Agni language in Ivory Coast as ***n'zassa*** and "represents the unity of the numerous cultures that you can find in my country, coming as one. Different yet complementary".[2] Despite the popularity of ***n'zassa*** cloths, embroidery and patchwork are skills associated with women's domestic roles and thus carry little prestige as an art form. Discussing Ivorian conceptions of gendered art forms, Choumali remarks that she enjoys the contrast between "photography which is seen so much as a male activity, male work, and embroidery which is so feminine and seen as a "little" work",[3] the act of embroidery therefore becomes an embodied act of reclaiming a feminine identity within her work as an artist. However, not only does the practice of embroidery assert itself against patriarchal notions of gender roles, but it also simultaneously tests colonial assertions of economic value as coterminous with wage labour. Indeed, skills such as embroidery, quilting and sewing, thought of as "subsistence" skills "are considered neither work nor an integral part of those economies (...) colonial ideologies, which have always been deeply patriarchal, have either excluded women from or made them and their activities invisible in indigenous economies".[4] Reclaiming the ***n'zassa*** and embroidery thus become advocations for the economic value of women's domestic labour.

Beyond the material paradigm and visual semiotics of the ***Translation*** series, the embodied enactment of stitching can be understood as an act of resistance, protest, and healing to communal and individual traumas respectively. Choumali has stated that the idea to embroider began when she was sick and did not have the physical strength to be out and photographing. She turned to the embroidery of her works "in a very instinctive way, always using the same

2 Author unknown. 2021. "The Therapy of Joana Choumali's Threading." *Gestalten*. https://uk.gestalten.com/blogs/journal/the-therapy-of-joana-choumali-s-threading.

3 Ibid., "Joana Choumali Embroiders Empathy" 2018

4 Kuokkanen, Rauna. 2011. "Indigenous Economies, Theories of Subsistence, and Women: Exploring the Social Economy Model for Indigenous Governance." *American Indian Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (Spring): 215–240. 10.5250.

Figure 2 Untitled, *Ça Va Aller*, 2011–2018. Joana CHOUMALI - Ca va aller.

Figure 3 Untitled, *Ça Va Aller*, 2011–2018. Joana CHOUMALI - Ca va aller.

stitch as if it was to repair a wound".[5] The slow, painstaking, repetitive nature of embroidery as a practice gave Choumali ample time for reflection and contemplation when embroidering photos taken in Grand Bassam following the terror attack of 2016.[6]

In her series *Ça Va Aller*, Choumali uses the combination of embroidery and photography to bring awareness to the dismissive attitude towards mental illness which pervades Ivorian society and is veiled under the ostensibly optimistic phrase "ca va aller" (loosely translated to "everything will be alright"). Highlighting

5 Ibid., "The Therapy of Joana Choumali's Threading." 2021.

6 Essa, Azad. 2011. "Ivory Coast: The brink of civil war | News." *Al Jazeera*, December 27, 2011. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2011/12/27/ivory-coast-the-brink-of-civil-war.

Figure 4 Untitled, *Ça Va Aller*, 2011-2018. Joana CHOUMALI - Ca va aller.

the unspoken trauma in the community, *Ça Va Aller* features street shots with spaces devoid of people, a sense of anonymity as people's faces are turned from the camera and lighting which leaves figures underexposed and conceals their idiosyncrasies. (Figs. 2,3,4.)

The anonymity in these pictures presents a sense of community identity which has been ruptured and is adrift. Densely clustered stitches emanating from the point of an underexposed figure's head and expanding out into a fog in the large empty spaces of the frames highlights the presence of overwhelming thoughts which become a cloud in their environment and isolate individuals even when they exist within the same space. The act of stitching thus serves simultaneously as an act of healing and campaign, as the artist processes the emotional pain and physically heals her weakened physical body whilst demonstrating the isolating effects of the dismissal of trauma in society.

This reparative act of sewing compliments and enhances the medium of photography as a format for social commentary. Whilst Choumali chose to photograph with her iPhone camera to remain as unobtrusive as possible, "just as a camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a subliminal murder -

a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time".[7] The act of photography can therefore be seen as a further act of separation, further isolating the subjects of her photographs. Moreover, photographs create a temporal rupture, enforcing a kind of stasis. "Spectators in real life do not view reality like a camera, as the eyes constantly shift and move, cutting through spectacles quickly and in rapid successions, even before the mind can fully develop the pictures into actual images. Life is therefore a chaotic clutter of collages that are never quite collectively resolved".[8] Within Choumali's use of n'zassa and her reparative act of stitching, I believe she can go some way to mend the sublimating act of photographing a subject, highlighting the inner world of her photographed subjects through the incorporation of stitches and collage.

In conclusion, the patchwork and embroidered photographic collages of Choumali's *Ça Va Aller* and *Translation* series prompt contemplation on the social body of her country through an embodied artistic practice which prompts discourses of economic migration, gender roles and stigma around mental health. Choumali's act of stitching and sewing is one intertwined with acts of mending and repair. Choumali's works question the boundaries and interstices of temporality, of imaginative space and reality, of emotional presence and dislocation, of unpinnable cultural heritage and hegemony across continents and fractured international power dynamics whilst reclaiming and reinstating femininity. Choumali's stitches are a reparative act for identity and self-autonomy.

7 Sontag, Susan. 2001. *On Photography*. New York: Picador.
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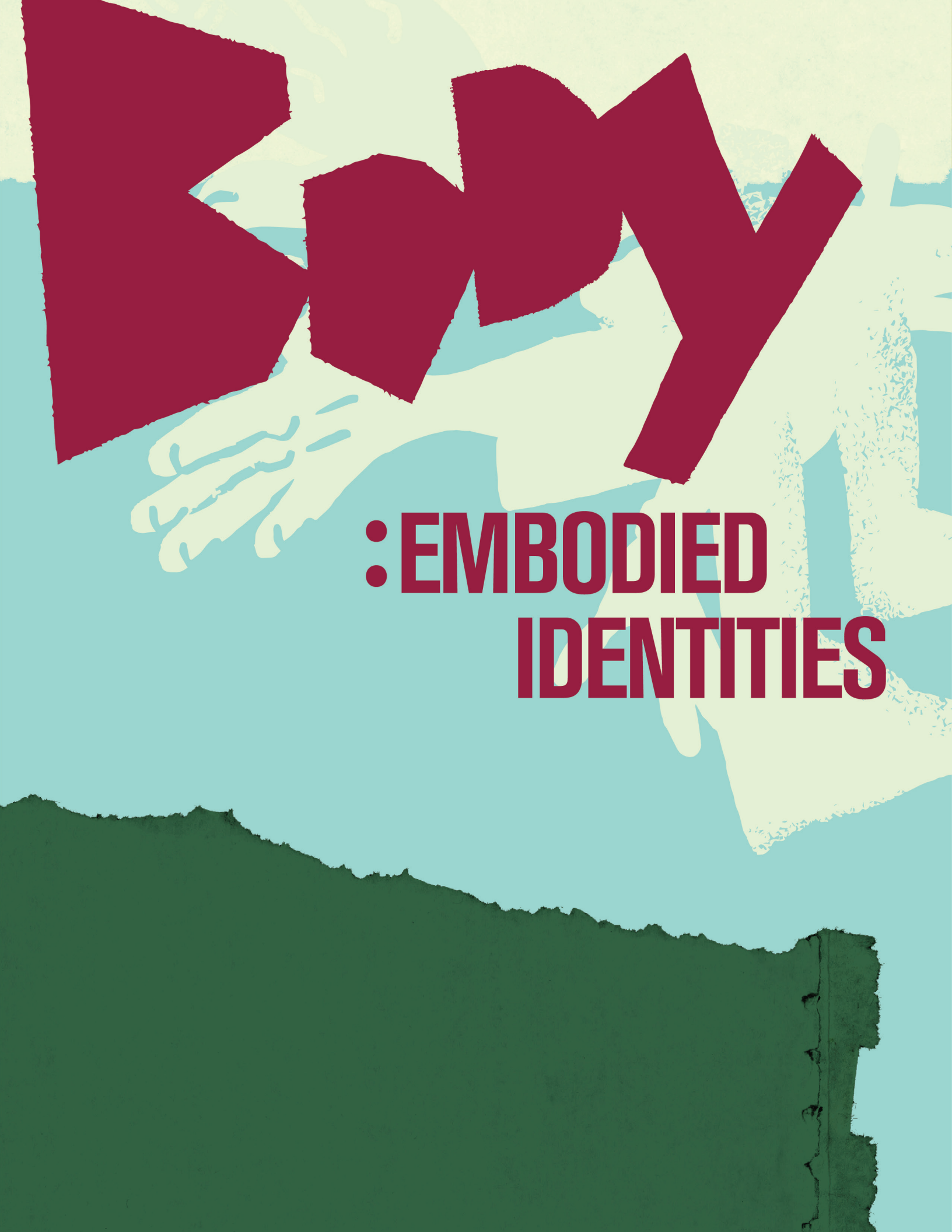
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:EMBODIED
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