

**Personhood, Selfcraft and Kinaesthetic Regimes: Colonial Witchcraft & The
Timeworn Death Wish¹**

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Cosmologies form the palimpsestic bedrock of embodied Africana lifeworlds and have continued to flourish within their own modernities despite the ongoing, echoing impacts of (neo-)colonialism and global anti-blackness. As such, one might understand “being African” to necessarily consist—at least in part—of ongoing acts of resistance. Acts of continual, fluid, and intentional processes of self-restoration, re-membering, and speculative refiguration that advances black Afrikan personhood and lifeworlds, values, and aspirations. Colonialism and slavery were, at the level of implementation, kinaesthetic regimes. Sociopolitical choreographies achieved through violence, manipulation, coercion, exploitation, and destruction of bodies—an aesthetics of violence, if you will. Various ideological and physical apparatuses, aided by a cornucopia of maleficent infrastructure, and technologies ensured that an internally consistent terror formation was upheld.

Here, the term kinaesthetic (Bastian, 1887 and Proske, 2009) is appropriated and subtended in its use to index processes occurring at the intersection of enfleshment (Musser: 2014), *kinesis* (motion), *aesthesis* (sensory perception), and *aesthetics* (concerned with beauty). Kinaesthetic regimes have served to perpetuate Eurocolonial perceptual inertia.¹ Frantz Fanon summarizes well how colonization was, at its core, about the Hellenization of the native. (1963: 8) Fanon’s notion of body-schema, the implicit knowledge that allows the “construction of myself as a body in a spatial temporal world.” (2008: 91) Fanon argues that the black person cannot articulate their body schema in the white world as it is linked to a historical-racial schema. (90-91) One’s capacity to self-identify and self articulate is

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hindered. The psychic and spiritual reengineering of the native Afrikan, as described by Zimbabwean historian Mhoze Chikowero, (2015) was characterized by binding, quarantine, forced migration, corporal punishment, murder, starvation, silencing, invisibilization, dehumanization, feminization, and infantilization along the lines of what Fanon (2008: 130) calls negro-phobogenesis. (2008: 130) The epidermal logic of settler colonialism's kinaesthetic regimes endeavoured to produce via the black Afrikan body a submissive phobogenic object² in the severely limited psychic geographies of the white colonial settler imaginary. The legacies and iterations of these kinaesthetic regimes still haunt the wake of settler colonialism in the form of Eurocolonial perceptual inertia (Rothfield and DeFrantz).³

Sarah Nuttall's *Beautiful Ugly: African and diaspora aesthetics* (2006) on contemporary Afrikan art practices elucidates the idea of the aesthetic (re-)turn in scholarship on the African continent. It acknowledges "beauty" as an implicitly moral and abstract notion that has been insidiously deployed in the historically Eurocentric conceptions of modernity and in econo-political discourse that sustains the ideologeme of Afrikan global inferiority (9-13; 293) and sees things black and Afrikan as infection or as contagion. Karin Barber (1997) also notes in pointing out the significant role art history has played in the construction of "Africa" from within the dialectical primitivist frameworks of the tradition-modernity binary. Nuttall (2006) argues that aesthetics affects and mobilize human senses transversely and can be useful in producing new information about people and their relation to the world. In this sense, the aesthetic turn deployed by concepts such as Afropolitanism (Skinner 2015, 2017, and Mbembe 2020), stereomodernism (Jaji, 2014), Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993), Black Performance Theory (Rothfield and DeFrantz, 2018) interrupt how "the hermeneutic narrative

² Fanon's notion of phobogenesis suggests that "the Black body becomes the target for emotions categorized as socially unacceptable within a particular social order, often referred to as Whiteness or White Supremacy as it is based on a racialized hierarchy with Whites as the most civilized and Blacks as primitive. Thus, phobogenesis emphasizes how the shame and guilt that fuels projection is constructed out of a fear of emotions experienced in a White body that are socially categorized as characteristic of a "primitive" other." (Knobluach 2022: 156-157)

Thomas DeFrantz, scholar of Black Performance Theory, defines perceptual inertia as seen in Eurocolonial artistic production as "totalizing forms of vision [that] can...be discerned within colonial landscape painting and naturalist theatre. These represent a certain way of thinking light, in transcendental, panoramic terms" ("Relay" 5). My use of perceptual inertia similarly indexes the inspiration for Euro-American productions of blackness in the natural sciences and the museumizing impulse that rendered Europeanist epistemology into visual representation, political philosophy, and moral justification for imperialist projects.

of the West has long relied on Africa's otherness to stage its grandest and most exclusive theatres of self." (Nuttall 2006: 8) These new ways of thinking intervene in what Toni Morrison labels "the hegemonic act of looking which objectified the black subject before it adjudicates what is beautiful and what is not." (Nuttall, 9) Kamari Maxine Clarke even argues that the production of racial difference is an "aesthetics of racial signification." (Nuttall 2006: 293) Thus, in the context of performance, kinesthetics become a relevant heuristic modality. Said from within a Afrikan conceptual system, one might use the *seselelāme* from the from the Ewe peoples of the Volta region of Ghana. Loosely translated it means knowing the world through the body or to "feel-feel in/through the flesh". (Jude, 2016a)

Zimbabwean historian Mhoze Chikowero (2015) argues that the musical archive of the colonized *madzimbabwe* peoples reflects acts of *selfcrafting* that nourish, sustain, and enrich black African self-conception within and beyond colonial oppression. Selfcraft is forwarded as an antidote to the colonial settler "witchcrafting" (*uroyi*) seen in social, political, psychic, and spiritual reengineering of black Afrikan society, space, and personhood. Chikowero's concept of selfcrafting is a specifically black Afrikan liberatory aesthetic modality guided by moral imperatives of self-determination and imbued with neo-ancestral⁴ registers specific to, while not limited by, their originary indigenous conceptual systems and the embodied knowledge of life within the global formation of the Afrikan (post-)colony. Under these specific conditions, selfcraft can be applied to creatives who, while living in the wake of colonialism, recognize the necessity and urgency of participating in *hondo yerusununguko* (war of self-liberation).

Through interviews with Harold George (Sierra Lerone/Belgium), Bawren Tavaziva (Zimbabwe/UK), Masimba Hwati (Zimbabwe/Austria), Olivier Tarpaga (Burkina Faso/USA), and a closer reading of the documentary film *Movement (R)evolution Africa: A Story Of An Art Form in Four Acts*, (Frosch, 2008), this article addresses contemporary Afrikan theatrical dance and performance art by deploying analyses rooted in indigenous worldsenses.⁵ In order to mobilize

⁴ Artist-scholar Ike Newsum (2016) referred to the neo-ancestral impulse as the "impulse", rooted in deeper spiritual genealogies, to thematically and or aesthetically re-present Africana cosmological principles in the face of oppressive global Euro-Western visual regimes.

⁵ I deploy terms "worldview" and "worldsense" interchangeably borrowing from Oyèwùmí's essay, "Visualizing the Body" in which the author contemplates the deployment of Western theories on African subjects (3-4). In my own understanding "World-view" connotes perception beyond sight and optics though I agree with Oyèwùmí that its use indexes the primacy of the visual in Europeanist frameworks.

Global South Cosmologies and Epistemologies⁶ as methodology, the essay centres the *chivanhu* cosmologies of the *madzimbabwe* peoples of southern Africa who were colonially renamed the “Shona” by the British.

By embracing the non-translatable, Africanizing *ruzivo* (the body of knowledge), and re-indigenizing the terminology used in Black Performance Theory, scholarship can destabilize the Eurocolonial worldsense via theory, methods, and narrative (re-)turns to Africa that affirm the ongoing vitality of Afrikan lifeworlds. Masimba Hwati (2024), a Zimbabwean-born sculptor, sonic artist, and performance architect, whose work continues to be presented internationally, describes this as the capacity to “make something that you want, instead of accepting something that has been designed for you...the agency to recreate things—to create what we want,” and herein lies the efficacy of concept of practice of selfcrafting. In this manner, this essay lays ontological and epistemological groundwork for an Afrikan orientation to contemporary dance performance by Afrikan-born transnational artists as they navigate the Global South. In part, the means mobilizing indigenous lexicon where appropriate to “re-visioning” of certain artists’ praxes and their imperatives, to suggest that they consistently and expansively demonstrate their commitment to black Afrikan futurity, self-liberation, and conscientization in the face of ongoing necropolitical and epistemicidal kinaesthetic regimes.

Once the omnipresence of kinaesthetic regimes is appreciated, the matter of the ongoing *chimurenga* (liberation struggle) in the face of global epistemicidal warfare and anti-blackness sustained by specific kinaesthetic regimes becomes self-evident. Reading Afrikan-born artists’ practices of “ethnographic refusal”⁷

“World-sense” on the other hand, brings our attention to the fact that perception requires sensual engagement the entirety of bodily experience; the very engagement that is the vocation of the choreographic artist. Dance is an embodied act of consciousness that pays attention to a person’s body and how they imagine, inhabit and produce their worlds.

⁶ Global South is understood here as an experiential/epistemological space—on one hand labyrinthian terror formation fabricated by the epidermalizing gaze of Eurocolonial perceptual inertia, on the other, a fertile generative space of speculation, resistance, and innovation.

⁷ Ortnor describes ethnographic refusal as the rejection of “thickness” and attempts at holism in the ethnographic process, particularly when considering resistance to dismantle easy typologies of everyday resistance. I treat this as a discursive strategy deployed by Afrikan artists engaged in selfcrafting to disarm any assumptions of a unanimous “Africa” that can be easily understood.

(Ortner, 1995) and “dialogical offense”⁸ (Woodson 2020) from within *chimurenga*-based and *chivanhu* indigenous conceptual system makes room for deeper curiosity about decolonial and African Diasporic analytical methodologies that disrupt “[colonial] settler moves to innocence”, (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 1) and short-circuit the technologies of coloniality. Coloniality (Quijano, 2000) is used here in reference to technologies controlling variables that ensure the continuance of docility, obedience, and subservience at the levels of culture, knowledge, industry, aesthetics, education and individual aspiration. Afrikan-born transnational artists working with/in experimental, self-reflexive creative and performative modalities are participating, to a significant extent, in the political legacy of Afrikan self-liberation through confrontation, sabotage, and disarmament of sonic, visual, and gestural hegemonies that perpetuate the colonizers’ perceptual inertia. One can observe powerful resonances with the philosophies of Afrikan liberation struggle figures such as Steve Biko, Amílcar Cabral, Julius Nyerere, and Thomas Sankara concerning self-sufficiency, critical thinking about oppressive systems, and innovation from within indigenous conceptual systems to solve problems relevant to the Afrikan lived experiences in contemporary life. This essay centres on the concept of *unhu* (personhood) alongside Chikowero’s (2015) *chimurenga*-based notion of “selfcrafting” to interpret anew the heterogeneous creative imperatives, exigencies, and innovations of Afrikan-born transnational contemporary dance artists.

Such a discourse is only possible, and must begin, as suggested by Kevin Quashie (2021), in a world where black personhood is presumed. It must also be initiated, as was powerfully articulated by Michelle Wright (2015) from within conceptual geographies that transcend a Middle Passage Epistemology and honour precolonial histories of Black migration, and itinerancy. We must accept that while blackness may be “*in the wake*” (Sharpe, 2016)⁹ of *hudzviti* (material and epistemological terrorism, physical violence, and subjugation)—the world-ending terror formations of slavery, colonialism, and the ongoing traumas they spawn—it need not be *of the wake*. For certain African-born performers, herein lies the

⁸ “This decolonial act of naming “the thing” decentres Eurocentric academic hegemony and allows colonized subjects to dialogue anew- on “the colonized” terms and in “their” language. The creation of this new nomenclature is central to the project’s uniqueness. The creation of the nomenclature “Dialogical Offense” is itself a “Dialogical Offense.” (Woodson 2020: iii)

⁹ Christina Sharpe’s text, *In the wake: On blackness and Being* (2016) uses the wake as a multivalent metaphor to engage with contours of the aftereffects of the Middle Passage on Black lived ontologies in the Americas and beyond.

efficacy of epistemological disarmament of coloniality's matrices of power via *chimurenga*. For this disbarment to function, one must tear themselves away from the withering teat of the "master narrative of the Enlightenment" (Appadurai 1996: 36) and confront without fear "the hegemony of Eurochronology". (30)

(R)evolving Kinaesthetic Regimes

Movement (R)evolution Africa: A Story of an Art Form in Four Acts is a documentary film directed by Joan Frosch (2007) that undercuts the Eurocolonial perceptual inertia that often envelopes the black dancing body. The film was catalysed by the Special Topics Conference by the Congress on Research in Dance and hosted by the University of Florida's Gwendolen M. Carter Conference in African Studies in 2004. (Gee, 2004) It was filmed between 2004 and 2006, engaging Afrikan dance companies and choreographers touring the United States. The companies and artists worked in Florida, Maine, Chicago, Oregon, and Massachusetts. The film features a host of creatives, including *Company Kongo Ba Téria* (Burkina Faso), Faustine Linyekula and *Les Studios Kabako* (Democratic Republic of Congo/France), *Company Rary* (Madagascar), Sello Pesa (South Africa), Nora Chipaumire (Zimbabwe/USA), *Company TchéTché* (Côte d'Ivoire), *Company Raiz di Polon* (Cape Verde), and *Company Jant-Bi* (Senegal). It features choreographers in the studios and on stage working with companies and international collaborators, teaching college and university, working amongst themselves, and excerpts from performances.

The footage includes interviews where choreographers, dancers, technicians, journalists, and scholars voice their perspectives. Summarily, the themes at hand include the innovations, revolutions, and evolutions in choreographic practices and productions by Afrikan-born contemporary dance theatre artists. They discuss creative process and content, race and gender, working with and performing for non-African persons, expatriatism, economic institutions and more. The concern in this essay is with reading the film and interviews I have conducted from within a *chivanhu* indigenous worldsense and bolstered by other indigenous Afrikan knowledge systems to address personhood, selfcraft, embodied acts of resistance, and the liberatory imperatives that demonstrate how the artists are deeply conscious of the role they play in the ongoing *chimurenga chepfungwa* (liberations struggle of the mind/epistemological freedom struggle).

The artists in question achieve this via tactful confrontation, sabotage, subterfuge, dismantling, and disarmament of sonic, visual, and kinaesthetic hegemonies by interrupting one of coloniality's key technologies: self-replication (Nandy, 1988

and Mbembe, 2001). Strategies of resistance against colonialism and its pfukwa (hauntologies)¹⁰ mobilized by the artists in *Movement (R)evolution* include “onomastic sovereignty” (Hwati, 2024) (naming, self-naming, and renaming), aesthetic dissidence, “ethnographic refusals” (Ortner, 1995), “dialogical offenses” (Woodson, 2020), “re-membering” (wa Thiong’o, 2009), “neo-ancestral impulse”¹¹ (Newsum, 2016), and an “ethic of incommensurability”¹² (Tuck and Yang, 2021). These praxes acquire novel legibility when *chimurenga*-based and *chivanhu* knowledge systems are mobilized. They illustrate decoloniality as kinaesthetic discursive practice. They revolt against technologies of coloniality—including but not limited to misnaming, classification of knowledge, relativism, empiricism, the myth of reason, fear, apartheid, and epistemicidal violence—that sustain its ethos of ceaseless cultural cannibalism (Tawengwa, 2020) and of self-replication.

Rooted Nomads & Fluid Constellations

In *Movement (R)evolution*, the artists mobilize several imbricated and interwoven identities that undergo constant and detailed revision to effect maximal liberatory instrumentality. These fluid constellations of identitarian instrumentality become heuristic tools for understanding transnational African-born artists. Hwati (2024) forward an ethic of “humble custodianship” when describing his intermedia work. “So, having grown up repairing and caring for things gave me the understanding of materials,” he says, speaking on the experiences that shaped his

¹⁰ Diana Taylor’s dance scholarship text, *The Archive and the Repertoire* defines “hauntology as the particular ways in which embodied performance persists. It is also through hauntology that culturally specific collective consciousness is sustained through “vital acts of transfer;” that the author calls repertoire (2003, 2).

¹¹ Newsum’s *Soul Stirrers: Black Art and the Neo Ancestral Impulse* (2016) argues that neo-Ancestral artists “perform acts of memory” as creative moments of (re)creation; a conjuring of the past (xvi). In contemporary transnational Afrika dance performance neo-Ancestralism is reflected in the creative process and material thinking that sustains, affirms, and reframes Africana cosmologies. It embodies a counterpoetics that revisibilizes Africana ontologies and practices that have been systematically suppressed and made invisible through the epistemic violence that accompanied the birth of the New World. This clash between the old and the new, the sacred and the profane, inscribes a neo-Ancestral impulse in this performance.

¹² “an ethic of incommensurability...recognizes what is distinct, what is sovereign for project(s) of decolonization in relation to human and civil rights based social justice projects. There are portions of these projects that simply cannot speak to one another, cannot be aligned or allied... We make these notations to highlight opportunities for what can only ever be strategic and contingent collaborations, and to indicate the reasons that lasting solidarities may be elusive, even undesirable.” (Tuck & Yang, 28)

creative practice. He goes on to add, "The way I relate to materials [and the world], I would say it's a little deeper than just material... when we talk about personhood...we need to take the conversation outside of just humanhood." I propose that, as rooted nomads, transnational African-born artists working in these self-reflexive modalities embody liberatory conscientization via invocative and evocative refiguration of kinesthetic regimes. These processes demonstrate wor(l)ding, (Brodnicka, 2007 and Hillard, 1998) diunital logic, (Dixon, 1976) and material thinking (Carter, 2004).¹³ These artists are co-architects of abundant, robust, sustainable, and humane Afrikan futures.

I Am The Sun

The opening scene of *Movement (R)evolution* foregrounds a kneeling man. Back arched in a concave contraction, white pants of a loose fabric fastened at the waist in a bundle on his right hip. A layer of perspiration glistens under a midnight-blue light. His arms, snake-like, writhing in a polycentric lament. His meditative, if not prayerful, gaze with eyes almost closed, follows his tender, fluid, signifying limbs. Ever so slightly out of focus and in the rear of this frame and slightly obscured by the cation in the foreground, is a man seated with his back to the viewer. He sits cross-legged, his strong spine rising to meet his bowed head. His arms grow downward to meet the ground. Perhaps it is intentional, perhaps it is not, that the film begins here. The title of the choreography briefly fades in and then out: *Fagaala (Genocide)*, and, beneath it, the company name, *Jant Bi (Senegal)*. The interview excerpts that follow stand in defiance of the epistemicidal imperatives of *vapambi* (plunderers/ thieves).

The first words spoken in the film are by Germaine Acogny¹⁴, the founder and artistic director of *Jant-Bi (The Sun)*. "What is contemporary dance in Africa?" she

¹³ What I call "wor(l)ding" comes from the Brodnicka's esoteric concept of the "sacred wor(l)d" which is inspired by Tidjani Sufism and indigenous Malian cosmology alongside the Wisdom Tradition of ancient Egypt. In these cosmologies, all being-in-the-world, emanates from the Sacred Word or Divine Speech (Mdw Ntr in Kemetic cosmology) and therefore are a part of it; a part or manifestation of the Wor(l)d. I syncretize this idea with AbouMaliq Simone's concept about the "worlding" of African cities (2001).

¹⁴ Acogny is a key figure in the documentary and in story of modern African dance with a career spanning more than forty years "Acogny did not want to limit African dance to 'authentic,' non-evolving black dance. Instead, she constructed an ongoing inquiry into African dance, treating tradition as perpetually self-renewing, and in turn she began to codify a pan-African aesthetic She addressed the importance of the contextualizing the socio-cultural present with a traditional dance form. Therefore, even though her work was deeply rooted in popular traditions, it was not a return to

asks using the colonizer's tongue (French), "If it has to do with time, then we are contemporary. And if it is a concept like in France, well, we are not like them. They can say we are not contemporary. But we *are* contemporary." The direct simplicity of this statement reterritorializes all following discourse to the Afrikan Global South as the centre. Acogny's unperturbed dismissal of Eurochronology eradicates all possibility of colonial perceptual oversight. Her words powerfully perform epistemological disarmament of Eurocentricity. Without any suggestion of Afrikan epistemological unanimity, Acogny's declaration instigates further collapse of *muzungu's* long-held infatuations with black primitivism. She assertively interrupts the momentum and trajectories of imperialist discursive missiles of coloniality and teleports all pursuant discourse to Afrikan lifeworld and the analytical paradigms therein. This self-affirming discursive tactic is resonant with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (2009) revolutionary call to decolonize the African mind—*chimurenga chepfungwa*—through a (re)turn to Afrikan languages. This sovereignty, I suggest, can also be applied to the dancing body. I refer to this analogous connection between language and embodied articulation as "bodyvoice".

Later in the documentary, we see Acogny speaking with a group of students. She describes her experiences in a ballet class where she is instructed to perform a *grande plié*. She demonstrates how she performed it as instructed, but immediately after this, she performs her own version: palms at shoulder height, facing forward; spine undulating, pelvis and arms pulsing rhythmically as she lowers herself in her own version of the movement. Her head is tilted slightly, and she smiles the entire way down. The students cheer and applaud. "I take [it] and mix with what I am," she says. In 2012, I conducted an interview with Sierra Leone-born choreographer Harold George in Zimbabwe, in which a similar sentiment was shared. He was describing his learning of traditional Krio dances, and popular dance growing up, and his grown and evolution when he moved to the united states in 1996 and train. "I realized that I was explain Afrikan consciousness to them, as I perceived it. Inas much as what they produced aesthetically was exciting, technically...[but] there was a thing missing. I don't know if it's spiritual or something." He goes on to describe a manner of embodiment that he has experiences working with Afrikan and Diasporic dancers, a how they were able to somehow embody a bricolage of movement techniques in ways that were, to him, uniquely Afrikan. Regardless of where they came from, there was something in their bodyvoice that was shared and understood.

The interviewees in *Movement (R)evolution* affirm how recent scholarship of the late twentieth century and the twenty-first century is re-conceptualizing the global

formation of the African diaspora and rewriting outmoded dialectical paradigms that overdetermine discourse in Africana identities via kinaesthetic regimes, and imaginary geopolitical boundaries. This seen in scholarship such as of Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu's anthology *The New African Diaspora* (2009) and Ryan Skinner's work on Afropolitanism (2017, 2015) and Afropean (2022) lifeworlds among others. Dialectics such as essentialist-pluralist, local-global, tradition-modernity, autochthonous-foreign, sacred-profane, black-white, and insider-outsider are now being met with diunital logic instead. Transnational artists are reimagining and overwriting previously impermeable, bounded constructions of race, ethnicity, nation, national identity, and the kinaesthetic regimes therein —such as “technique” that was implicitly derived from a Europeanist worldsense.

Through their itinerancy/mobility (often under the aegis of Western institutions) and dissemination of unique aesthetic modalities, the transnational Afrikan dance artist undercuts the totalizing character of the nation-state formation. It is also a powerful reminder that “the cultural history of the continent can hardly be understood outside the paradigm of itinerancy, mobility and displacement.” (Mbembe 2006: 27) It is this very mobility that colonialism tried to stop and erase through the production of geo-political borders. Congolese choreographer decimates this paradigm during an interview in *Movement (R)evolution* by stating, “perhaps my only true country is my body.” Contemporary Afrikan dance performance is thus a declaration that significantly demystifies the structure of the nation-state formation. It lauds the value of cultural variability and undercuts the assumptions that come with terms such as “citizen” or “African”, thus inscribing a different relationship to race, ethnicity and difference. It dethrones the false dichotomy of autochthonous-native. “Citizen” becomes a verb. “Citizenizing” (Thurston, 2024) becomes fluid, embodied process guided by conscientized autonomies, ever-changing combinations from available creative choices not anchored by colonial assumptions of what personhood is. The artists in the film understand that culture and cosmology are characterized by three things: permeability, malleability, and plurality.

In *Movement (R)evolution*, the late Béatrice Kombé of Côte d'Ivoire, launches an assault on all attempts at analytical conclusivity and genre definition. She casts aside the colonially birthed category of “Africa”: “Don't say, ‘Ah! This is African dance.’” The artists reject all terminological inexactitudes¹⁵ and renounce all

¹⁵ A reference to the title of Caroline Muraldo's 2003 article which she reveals a network of hegemonies (racial, economic, political, ethnic, colonialism, corporeal, historical) that are part of a biased and exotic construction of “Africa.” Throughout the article, Muraldo superficially references the tools of deconstruction to address

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registers that seek to render Afrika and Afrikans legible within the colonizer's ontology. Choreographer Faustin Linyekula (Congo-Kinshasa/France) performs the *coup de gras* by taking hold of the final thread that stands between the false emperor and nakedness. With tender a finality in his tone, he tugs: "Even though I can explain these things, there is always a point when all explanations are powerless. And, maybe, that's where something can begin to happen." This is the realm of *seselelame*, of things that can only be known through the body.

Movement (R)evolution begins by indexing genocide as a function of the colonial settler's apparatus that haunts the wake of the colonial encounter, and by claiming onomastic sovereignty through self-naming, and through an ethic of humble custodianship concerning the "materials" available to be used in selfcrafting. This executes epistemological disarmament and discursive subterfuge that eviscerates the global North's interpellative and subjectifying capacities, which rely heavily on the weaponization of linguistic categorization to the exclusion of indigenous languages and embodied knowledge systems. Genocide is the unspoken, enduring legacy of colonial imperialism. Black bodies are caught in a necropolitical maze of ongoing apartheid in which the only possible terminuses are death and disposability. *Fagaala* translates literally as "to eliminate" in the Wolof dialect of Senegal. Acogny's choreography contemplates how these deathworlds continue to emerge in the wake of colonialism in the form of civil wars, coups, and assassinations that continue to be a part of the neocolonialism's strategies of destabilization and extraction through interference in Afrikan politics. The documentary's introduction, in no uncertain terms, confounds the operative matrices of *vadzviti* by uprooting all parasitic and invasive conceptual weeds sustained by extractive (neo-)colonial philosophies that cannibalize the physical and conceptual geographies of Black performing bodies.

The iconoclast performance artist, Linyekula sets the terms of the conversation. The film fades into an excerpt of a performance by his company, *Les Studios Kabako*, titled "*Triptyque Sans Titre*" (Triptych Untitled). Linyekula stands before the camera and speaks:

*"Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen.
My name is Kabako.
I am Kabako,
Again, Kabako.
Once Kabako, Forever Kabako.*

inaccurate terminology in the naming of African and African-diasporic dance forms and relates the lack of naming to the institutional inequality and marginalization of the dance practice and practitioners in Britain.

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*Kabako is my name,
And, tonight, I have a story to tell..."*

What Is In a Name?

The matter of self-definition seems central at first, but the viewer quickly realizes that the matter at hand concerns autonomy—self-determination, hence *chimurenga*. Brenda Dixon-Gottschild reminds us that “the act of naming is an assertion of power. That which is unnamed or misnamed remains mute, inconsequential and insignificant” (Gottschild, 1995, p. 95) In the face of what Aimé Césaire (2020) calls thingification—the colonizer’s act of naming that he equates with colonization itself, self-naming and renaming is a vital practice of decolonial onomastics that decentres a Eurocolonial perceptual hegemony that revolves around the right to name and to create categories. Among the *chivanhu* and *isiNdebele* cultures of the *madzimbahwe* people, naming is part of the practices of oral literature (Pongweni, 1983 and Ndlovhu, 2023) that sustains solidarity and indexes the values and moral imperatives that ensure the continuity of a community. (Lantern, Ndlovu and Sibanda, 2012) More importantly, naming sustains and reinforces *unhu* (personhood). Furthermore, in an antiblack global economy of kinaesthetic regimes, to name oneself through one’s bodyvoice while being Afrikan is a dialogical offense and a powerful emancipatory strategy.

Hwati (2024) describes the “onomastic and psychological agency to name, rename, and un-name [as] an everyday resistance [modality].” The use of indigenous *chivanhu* terminology in this essay serves as a generative and reterritorializing contrariety that represents the limits of epistemological negotiation—the point beyond which all becomes incommensurable and must therefore find ways to coexist. It represents an epistemological *frontera* of sorts, to borrow the term from Gloria Anzaldúa (2021)—of resistance and of the frottage of non-translatability that must be confronted when one is committed to self-determination, mobility, and the decolonial protocol’s immersive requirements. This naming transcends the oral/aural, for movement itself is speech. It is a refusal of erasure that can only be resolved via literal and metaphoric “translanguaging” (Makalela, 2016)—to borrow a term from educators working in multilingual contexts.

The utility of the *chidzimbahwe* language in this essay lies in its varied conveyances of registers of heterogeneous *chivanhu* peoples’ sensorial and anatomical proximity to our world as a central means by which meaning is produced. Thus, the *chivanhu* taxonomy indexes a world that stands in stark contrast to Eurocolonial universalizing and oppressive alchemies of relativism and empiricism that would categorize and transform worldsenses into conceptual wor(l)ds in which black lives and lifeworlds hold no currency. The interviewees in *Movement (R)evolution Africa* confront this charade and its convenient

“terminological inexactitudes”¹⁶ and presuppositions that confine audiences’ and critics’ reception to a conveniently Europeanist worldsense—thus sustaining intellectual apartheid will be addressed later.

In the film, dance historian Funmi Adewole (Nigeria/UK) describes the relationship between Afrika and the West as “argumentative”. This is what Gottschild rightly observes concerning late 20th-century Africanist aesthetic presences in popular and theatrical performances in the United States: “Africanisms are appearing as an exotic commodity of the mainstream beauty market”. (2018: 27) Black bodies are simultaneously condescended to and cannibalized to nourish the impoverished cultural imaginary of the ever-derivative and self-replicating capitalist-imperialist—and nowadays technocratic—aesthetic dynamo. Self-naming via embodied praxis thus embodies a tactical dialogical offense that ensues from *chimurenga* protocols by actuating the urgencies of decolonial renaming. As Zimbabwean author No-Violet Bulawayo titled her novel, *We Need New Names* (2013) because “there are those who ruled by naming and those who are ruled by being named” (Ragussi, 1986).

Mute Gods Dream in Forgotten Tongues

In another section of the documentary, Chipaumire says, “I believe that it is time Afrikans speak about themselves—tell us who they are. I want to tell you who I am. I am an Afrikan,” The theme of muteness in the face of the colonizing gaze recurs frequently in the film, as do inferences about invisibility. All aspects of reality generated by the body are speech acts. (Myers, 1993 and Brodnicka, 2007); acts of wor(l)ding. The body itself is divine speech. (Brodnicka, 2007) In an interview scene less than five minutes into the film, *Jant-Bi* dancer, Pape Ibrahim N’Diaye - aka. “Kaolack” - emits a roaring cry. He eyes wide, his mouth open wide enough for the viewer to see gold-plated upper incisors. This is followed by a few heaving, grunting breaths that subside, giving way to a gentle and clear voice, “That is me...yeah. It’s *my* sound.” In another interview scene, Ousmane N’Diaye, also of *Jant-Bi*, improvises a brief, flavourful measure on his *tama*¹⁷ or ‘talking drum’. Visually, the scene is similar to Kaolack’s except N’Diaye says

¹⁶ A reference to the title of Caroline Muraldo’s 2003 article which she reveals a network of hegemonies (racial, economic, political, ethnic, colonialism, corporeal, historical) that are part of a biased and exotic construction of “Africa.” Throughout the article, Muraldo superficially references the tools of deconstruction to address inaccurate terminology in the naming of African and African-diasporic dance forms and relates the lack of naming to the institutional inequality and marginalization of the dance practice and practitioners in Britain.

¹⁷ This instrument is known by multiple names, I choose the Wolof, Madinka and Serer name from Senegal where *Jant-Bi* is based.

nothing after he plays. Only a glint in his eye and a mischievous smile of contentment. His drum has spoken. His voice is displaced onto his talking drum. Chipaumire, while teaching a class on stage, speaks of her movement as coming from her “mother tongue, [her] memory, [her] signature.” Yet she is referring to *rurimi rwaamai*—mother tongue, memory, and signature of her *body*. Again, we are reminded of Fanon advocating for a *lived* ontology. “[Eurocolonial] Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of a black man since it ignores the lived experience.” (2008, p. 90) This idea makes ontology itself into a space that one occupies.

Throughout the film, we (re-)turn to the choreographers’ and dancers’ lived space as they reference their lifeworlds. They speak from a *bodied* consciousness—*seselelame*. (Jude) “We are speaking a language,” Chipaumire says, egging her pupils on, “your feet have to be *articulate*.” [emphasis mine] ‘Language’ in the film becomes multisensory, “anti-discursive and extra-linguistic”. (Mbembe, 1992)¹⁸ It is lived and felt. As she demonstrates a few balletic *tendus*, Chipaumire says, “This cannot be your mother tongue.” There is an insistence on discovering and articulating your personal movement signature from within and beyond the proscribed gestural regimes. The extra-linguistic mode of dance ruptures the muteness inflicted by rapacious kinaesthetic regimes. Acogny feels deep resonance with the horrors of global genocides, her own nation included. Through dance, she is able “as a woman, to raise [her] voice, to scream without screaming, to speak without speaking.” Transnational Afrikan artists use the “mute” form of dance to manifest and articulate liberatory epistemologies while navigating global antiblackness.

Silence/silencing is a historical operation and lies among the tools in colonizer’s technological arsenal. Performance dance praxes become discourse through their representational potentiality and their material and spiritual productive capacities. This is a radical reclamation of the reality of the “notion of encounter”. Rothfield and DeFrantz elucidate the importance of the notion of encounter as follows: “the notion of encounter offers a certain conceptual thickness to the idea of writing about dance. It fleshes out that which is implicit and makes possible dance scholarship. The encounter is a corporeal event, one that occurs between bodies. Writing about dance ensues from the encounter, whether on stage, in the studio or between audience and performer” (2016, p.7). as a corporeal event, even when this intimacy is “monstrous” (Sharpe, 2010). Randy Martin, (2011) sociologist and theorist in art and public policy, argues that “dance offers a

¹⁸ In this article Mbembe is describing the experience of the postcolony. Like Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, he argues for an ontology that is not incarcerated in a Western philosophical linguistic rubric.

different intimacy of attention, an alternative somatization of risk, a sustainability of difference, a mutuality of debt that can be shared, leveraged and embraced" (42) Unlike literary art forms and visual art, ACD stakes an actual body situated simultaneously in silence and voice through dance. Where verbal language ends is where movement begins, and in this "silence", a whole new voice is discovered for bodyvoice is never "silent". And this is where the work of dance begins; toward a social that exceeds itself.¹⁹

This essay reaches across timelines and cultures to answer the calls of voices that the *muzungu* listens to but cannot hear because *vadzviti* have the habit of confusing one's blackness for the darkness within themselves. It joins the war cries of other scholarly voices that have survived *mudzviti's* teargas anthems. Voices that have and recognized the ongoing epistemicidal warfare that has continues to threaten, violate, and incinerate Afrikan spiritual genealogies and bonds of black consanguinity. *Chimurenga chepfungwa* is an embodiment of a liberatory imperative that cannot be extinguished for it is fought on the frontlines of multiple battlefields in concert. Contemporary transnational Afrikan performance artists catalyse intellectual and epistemological insurrection. Within this realm, a scant and treacherous bridge conjoins the unmanifest, and the creative ritual-artistic imperatives activated through embodied-intellectual praxes. In this sense, the artists considered here offer new, complex configurations and theorizations of 21st century Afrikan personhood through the power of selfcrafting. The courage and ingenuities demonstrated by these trans-dimensional, rooted nomads demands new vocabularies and methodologies capable of transmitting the neo ancestral aesthetics, cultural chimerism, and transnational sociopolitical registers they mobilize in their creative practices because:

"Blackness is born and reborn as something uniquely itself, in stark difference against that which it is not, and in comforting familiarity with those things that are itself. To say something different and new about blackness, about it having a nature or decipherable core, is serious work because it is head spinning in its contradictions and contingencies." (DeFrantz and Gonzales, 2014: vii)

The Afrikan-born transnational performance artists—unruly inhabitants of the Global South—are implicated here in creative actions that "culminate within temporalities of struggle and renewal" (ibid) D. Soyoni Madison's foreword to the *Black Performance Theory* (BPT) anthology offers some clear definitions to aid this understanding. "Performance constitute forms of cultural staging—conscious, heightened, reflexive, frames, contained—within a limited time span..." whereas "performativity marks identity through habitus of repetitive enactments,

¹⁹ A reference in part to notions of 'utopia' and ideas from Muñoz on 'queer horizons'(2010)

reiterations of stylized norms and inherited gestural conventions.” As such, BPT understands the *performative* as “the culmination of both in that [performance] *does* something.” ((DeFrantz and Gonzales, 2014: viii)

Biomythography and Beloved Hauntology

“I am a child of struggle, I’m a child of violence, I’m a child of trauma, I’m a child of *chimurenga*, I’m a child of resistance, I’m a child of revolution, of convoys, curfews, roadblocks, martial law in Zengeza, Dangamvura, Mbare, Highfields, Mutambara, Nehanda, Chaminuka, Kaguvi, Mhondoooooro!...” These words are spoken by Zimbabwean-born artist Nora Chipaumire from a dance work titled *Pungwe*²⁰—a “re-written” excerpt from her 2007 work titled *Chimurenga*—in *Movement (R)evolution*. There is power in the re-writing of self—another aspect of selfcraft—of one’s history, and of narratives of the social imaginary of one’s culture. This is, of course, is only possible in the cyclic time of the *chivanhu* cosmology. In this biomythographic retelling of lived experience in the context of the proscenium theatre, Chipaumire simultaneously activates an overwriting of personal and national histories—she re-members. Speaking on the concept of remembering, wa Thiong’o says, colonialism

“tried to subject the colonized to its memory, to make the colonized see themselves through the hegemonic memory of the colonizing center. Put another way, the colonizing presence sought to induce a historical amnesia on the colonized by mutilating the memory of the colonized; and where that failed, it dismembered it, and then tried to re-member it to the colonizer’s memory—to his way of defining the world, including his take on the nature of the relations between colonizer and colonized.” (2009: 67)

In this fantastic demonstration of *rondedzero* (Mboti, 2023)²¹ methodology, Chipaumire invokes images of colonial terror formations that inflicted death and torture upon the *madzimbabwe* peoples until 1980. I intentionally use the term invoke rather than evoke because of the specific ways in which time and personhood play out in the *chivanhu* contexts. To speak or name an event is to

²⁰ *Pungwe* (Shona language) is the term for an all-night gathering/wake done during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, in which the freedom fighter gathered villagers to propaganda, raise moral and inform people about the struggle.

²¹ Nyasha Mboti’s *Apartheid Studies: A Manifesto*, details the *rondedzero* methodology by which critical forensic analysis of narrative is conducted a way to destabilize “self-normalizing colonial reminiscences”²¹, procedures, and conclusions that delimit black lifeworlds.

bring it into the present, rather than a mere reminiscence. There is power in the sacred wor(l)d. There is power in a name. “Zita rangu ndiNora Chipaumire”, (my name is Nora Chipaumire) she says in performance excerpt during the documentary the film. She struts forward as she speaks, her shoulders lithe with contralateral, deep intentionality. There is something deeper than confidence in her words and body. There is a challenge. There is a promise. There is a claim to selfhood—an autonomous kinaesthetic. There is a transtemporal echo that ricochets across time. She pre-emptively lays claim to her place in the annals of ancestry.

Chipaumire *invokes*, and in doing so incarnates histories of apartheid’s forced labour migrations, theft of land, high-density neighbourhoods designed to feed labour into the *muzungu*’s²² (settler colonizer) voracious extractive industrial apparatus. She does so on her own terms thus transmuting and, in many ways cleansing and appeasing *zvipfukwa*. She names the militaristic tactics deployed by *vadzviti* against the unarmed inhabitants to control the indigenous black Afrikans—how fear, pain, hunger, and death were inflicted to remain in control of the bountiful resources of the stolen land. She invokes names of powerful *vadzimu* (pl. ancestral spirit mediums) arrested and/or killed by Rhodesian authorities for their role in the struggle for independence, whose heads, taken as trophies, were sent to England and remain there today. Such was the case with Mbuya Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana, the spiritual leader killed in 1898 for leading *chimurenga*. Kinaesthetic re-writing and self-writing facilitate this selfcrafting. There is a simultaneity of the re-vision, and neo-vision in the sense that re-memembering a fragmented and/or suboptimal past requires the artist as sacred interlocutor to act decisively and with inspiration. Ananya Chatterjee (2020) suggests:

Chipaumire also often revisits her own choreography to reimagine it, an approach that insists on populating the space of a text with multiple rewritings, refusing to stabilize any one version as authoritative. Her choreographic mode of repetition-with-difference positions dance as a methodology of decolonial world-making, acknowledging our implications in shared histories of racial and cultural hierarchies, and re-narrativizing them through movement. Each rewriting disturbs the surface of the previous narratives, and the friction of crossing embodiments generates heat, inevitably energizing these encounters in multiple directions (187)

I read the artists discussed here as functionaries in emancipatory labour who insist on Afrikan self-conception. They express cultural and temporal transversality while navigating generative misunderstandings globally and

²² Literal translation—from *kudzungaira*—to be lost and confused.

insisting upon creative self-determination. As image-makers and embodied philosophers, they are irrefutably agents of *chimurenga chepfungwa* and in so being ensure survival and longevity of black personhood, creative sovereignty, and the infinite possibilities of self-determined *pan*-Afrikan²³ futurism.

Conclusion

They understood that Afrika has always had its own knowledge systems and indigenous technologies therein designed to solve problems specific to their own existence. The colonizer was/is one such problem. Mhoze Chikowero explains in detail Christian colonizer missionaries' violent epistemological insemination campaigns and strategies accompanying the sociocultural decimation campaigns inflicted upon the *madzimbabwe* peoples and the creative resistance modalities of artists under *vadzviti's* (pl. colonizers) terrorist regime. At the centre of Chikowero's narrative, however, stand black Afrikan bodies generating and mobilizing a consistent flow of rebellious acts of resistance, subterfuge, and revolutionary ingenuity in the fight for self-governance and autonomy of self-conception.

Settler colonial kinaesthetic regimes functioned by deployment of sociopolitical and economic choreographies designed to reengineer embodied experiences of indigenous peoples primarily through violence—physical, psychic, spiritual. In the case of the *madzimbabwe* history kinaesthetic regimes utilized forced migration, starvation, corporal, punishment, outlawing of indigenous embodied practices (dance, ritual, prayer, communing/gathering, *chivanhu* socialized gesture), implanting forced assimilation into foreign gestural regimes (bowing, tipping the hat to colonizers, Christianity, “proper” movement etc.). In effect, the *chivanhu* people's existence was irreparably ruptured by through sudden brutal insemination of foreign kinaesthetic regiments that knew little to nothing of *unhu*.

²³ Tsitsi Jaji's concept of “stereomodernism” draws instead from George Shepperson's lower-cased “*pan*-Africanism” which can also be seen as informing or relating to both Gilroy's black Atlantic and Mbembe's Afropolitanism. (2014) Jaji summarizes *pan*-Africanism as an eclectic constellation of “ephemeral cultural texts throughout the twentieth century ranging from popular to elite forms in contradistinction to the more formal organizations comprising capital “P” *Pan*-Africanism.” (3), Jaji argues that Shepperson's “*pan*-Africanism” is far from outmoded considering how the structures and technologies of raciological and imperial oppression have evolved to an extent that warrants renewed liberatory/liberating action and sentiment. (8) *pan*-Africanism is more about informal, transient cultural productions that circulate transnationally to produce this global African sense of solidarity which expresses itself differently in various diasporic locations.

Personhood, Selfcraft and Kinaesthetic Regimes

Contemporary Afrikan dance performance, especially where selfcrafting is involved, is an embodied resistance practice against marginalization under contemporary globalization. The artist engaged in selfcrafting, engages bodily agency, and demonstrates representative sentience that directly points to her personhood. That act of performance is also performative of corporeal consciousness; an instantiation of her corpo-reality. As the imagemakers in the indigenous imaginary, the artist also embodies the generative role of wor(l)ding that ensures survival and futurity that is nourished and sustained by, within, and through—while not being confined to—indigenous *chivanhu* or other Afrikan cosmologies, knowledges, and ways of being. Contemporary transnational Afrikan-born dance artists—those for whom colonialism is a part of their epistemological inheritance—are, in this warfare, at the frontier of rebellion and reconstruction. As performance artists, they fight their battle simultaneously against sonic, visual, and kinaesthetic regimes that seek to endlessly propagate reiterations of racial and cultural hierarchies that erase, diminish, or destroy Black personhood. In subtending Chikowero's scholarly labour, this essay excavates and elevates the embodied narratives of a few Afrikan-born contemporary performance artists whose transnational praxes resist discursive incarceration.

These artists' agential narratives extend to the Global South as an epistemological and material formation because of the ways in which they are non-consensually chained to the racialized artworlds. Selfcraft is self-conception, the act of giving birth to oneself; of re-membling yourself in a world that has robbed you and your *madzitateguru* (past generations/progenitors) and seeks to devour you whole. They perform unperturbed by kinaesthetic regimes. In fact, they sometimes use them to get their point across. They are not fooled by applause because the bones of their *madziteteguru* are still stored in museums in the West or lost to unspoken genocides. They feel the rumbling of *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits) in their chest. They perform love letters to their extended selves. In a simultaneity of acts of memory and of futuring, they manifest material and speculative liberatory imperatives. Any misunderstandings from beyond the global South typically arise from the audacious and tenacious belief that there is a periphery to which black and brown bodies can be relegated. An obsessive delusion insulated by refusal to accept that Afrika have always been a part of the world moving in it, shaping it, and co-creating it alongside the rest of the world. As such, the artists do not seek permission to be in any spaces because they know that they belong.

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