

nato
molwisch

WHITE PRIVILEGE



Documented Artistic Research Project
(Practice Thesis)
Pasipoti le ilamapeji angu 56.
This Passport contains 56 pages.

This Untethered Buffoon or
the Trickster in Everything

SQUIRM
the book

ZIMBABWE

FRAGMENT
No 05

PASIPOTI
PASIPOTI
PASSPORT

Nhamba yePasipoti
Inhombolo yePasipoti
No. of Passport

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Zira romuridzi
Igama lomnikazi
Name of Bearer

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Ugari hwako munyika/Inhlalo yakho elizweni
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CITIZEN OF ZIMBABWE



Stacey// Shmuel

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Stacey Sacks

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Stacey Sacks
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Cover Images
Front - Zimbabwe Passport
Back - Notebook, June 2015

**‘Remembering
is an ethical act,
has ethical value
in and of itself’**

SUSAN SONTAG
(2003, p.115)



Photo taken by Dad on a Whites Only beach in Durban, South Africa (circa 1977).



Bathtime with Jessy in Harare, Zimbabwe (circa 1975).

Notebook. Stockholm midsummer June 2019, Valhallavägen

When people hear my accent in Stockholm, they ask me where I'm from, on buses trains trams at bus stops in bars; anywhere actually, just not supermarkets coz no one gets cosy and curious in those. And then they guess England Australia New Zealand, not generally America nor Canada but Spain and maybe Italy or rarely Israel as if there's nowhere else in the world.

What about South I suggest. South? Where South? Long pause, slow think, insufferably wide-eyed impossible look, you can't be from Africa. Yes, I attempt a feeble smile. But how? You're white. It happens, there are white Africans – not that many comparatively, but we exist (a dying diasporic breed, invisible foreigners, mostly privilege-drenched); and then they guess Morocco or Kenya, Namibia or South Africa but never Zimbabwe. And when finally, one of us is leaving the bus train bar and I feel coercively forced to label myself from THERE, so their exotic curiosity can be appeased, ZIMBABWE I say. Oooooohhhh Rhodesia, the 's' pronounced Svenska hard. NO. Zimbabwe.

Yes, but it was Rhodesia before that terrible dictator came ... what was his name? Oh you're from Rhodesia! Knowing look. Long quizzing pause.

But where are you really from? Where did your parents come from? My mother was born in Zimbabwe.

Oh, so she's also from Rhodesia.

No, ZIMBABWE.

Ok how interesting. This is my stop, goodbye.

A focus on ancestry is not socially innocent. It reflects deeply rooted cultural understandings, suspended in space and time. When I must declare my ancestry, where and when should I stop and what implications would this have? As Achille Mbembe says, I need 'to untangle the relations between collective memory and individual memory' (2017, p.103), and this, in my case, includes investigating my family's historical experience of exile and displacement due to ethnic hatred, but also their complicity in systems of domination and abuse. In Africa, being so-called 'white', they occupy both the periphery, being in the minority, as well as the centre, through economic, material, social and historical privilege.

If I'm to believe recent research on the intergenerational transmission of memory and trauma these experiences could be embedded in my DNA. Marianne Hirsch, researcher on the intergenerational transmission of Holocaust trauma, writes that 'memories of traumatic events live on to mark the lives of those who were not there to experience them'.¹

Part of what I'm trying to do from this place of privilege is to learn to listen better; through multi-modal positionalities I'm excavating ancestry, performing history and collective and personal memory while simultaneously staking a claim for the potentiality of inter-cultural and animaterial penetrations, for softness and porosity. Have I slipped into the aboutness again? ~~Sorry~~

I believe this particular genealogy of inherited and experiential trauma (part of a dialectic of ancestral trauma originating in Lithuania's anti-semitism in the early 20th century and Hitler's Europe – with the added layers of colonialism and apartheid) is worth investigating.

Allowing the penetration philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy talks of (as mentioned in the Introfucktion), this means listening closely to my personal stories and histories and entering what I have received critically. Critical reflection is crucial to decolonising minds.

During a seminar on decoloniality in May 2019 at The Royal Academy of Art in Stockholm, Argentine semiotician and professor at Duke University, Walter D. Mignolo, says, 'Coloniality (*and I would add Whiteness*) is a machine to produce wounds – not just material, but ones deeply imbedded in one's experience of dignity and belonging. Decolonial healing then is the task of decoloniality.' He argues that epistemic reconstitution can occur only when we delink and disobey.

¹ <https://www.postmemory.net/> (accessed 1 January 2020).

Can my activism and epistemic disobedience be located in the radical subjectivity I reveal, expose and display? In this performing essay, can the historical critique be discerned in the chronicles? As I deepen ways of listening closely to and speaking nearby my own ancestries and experience, am I honing deeper into the project's *schmerzpunkt*?

Embedded in my personal history is a deep paradox of being both in the centre and on the margins simultaneously. As a so-called white person and self-proclaimed queer, I cannot sentimentalise the position of being on the border; mostly it's a place with severe material and physical disadvantage, something I have only rarely experienced. As a result of my political and sensual convictions, I have courted estrangement from my inherited tribe on a number of occasions, however, and tend to exist on the fringes, often feeling an outsider looking in. There are many conversations that can't be entered, I'm often biting and holding my tongue at family gatherings for the sake of keeping the peace. Being marginal and sensually fluid is firmly imprinted in my own mythology of self – a queer dragging clown activist, failing at it all.

When I start living in Stockholm, I acutely feel my body as racist in a way my mind and soul abhor. Walking alone in the forest, a man on the path ahead, we're walking towards each other, my heart pounding heavily and all of me wants to run another direction.

I stay on the path. Breathe deeper.

Nothing happens, of course.

I remember one sun-drenched steaming day in Harare, early 1990s, sitting in a boiling car, radio blaring, window wide open in a car park at a shopping centre. A man attacks me from behind, grabbing my head in a strangle-hold uttering, 'You're so easy to attack!' Immediately I recognise his voice. It's just Dad. We laugh together, it's true, I should be more conscious of my surroundings. 'Be more aware of who's around, you must be vigilant!' My Dad Frank was always a prankster, an irrepressible yet unacknowledged clown.

And he was always deeply concerned about my physical safety, teaching me self-defense techniques, ways of whacking big men on their necks and then running like hell.

In 2004 I'm visiting my folks in Harare. I've borrowed an old camera from a friend ostensibly to document both the ever-diminishing Jewish community of Harare (predominantly people whose families originate from the Island of Rhodes in Greece and other parts of the Mediterranean, *Sephardim*, or alternatively, from Poland and Lithuania, *Ashkenazim*) and to do further research on the Zimbabwean Lemba² community, a documentary I've never finished and hardly begun.

One rainy Sunday during that trip, in the mood of kissing the moment, I suggest to Dad that we make a short film, based on memories I have of him from childhood. There are things I want to document and archive, particularly his penchant for bursting into spontaneous song, as well as his Hitler impersonation. I write a simple action script based on an elderly man waking up in a room, before tv. He looks at photos, remembers, plays with artefacts, sings, remembers, plays Hitler, and finally puts on a *yarmulke*³ and eats chocolate. While preparing to shoot, I find a photograph of his father, Jack Michael Sacks, doing an impression of Napoléon Bonaparte, and I incorporate the image into the film. Only years later I piece together this genealogy of dictatorial impersonations. With hindsight, things are always obvious.

² Watch this clip for some interesting information about the Zimbabwean Lemba community <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8buThpIVDc> (accessed 12 January 2019).

³ A skullcap worn by Jewish men when praying, studying Torah or saying a blessing, or entering a synagogue. See https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/607780/jewish/What-Is-a-Kippah-Yarmulke.htm (accessed 20 January 2020).

Daddy had a thing for weapons. After a few robberies and a couple of experiences with a gun to my head I also like to sleep with a weapon near the bed, a bat or walking stick in the corner, knife in the drawer, keys at arms-length ready to poke some intruder in the eye. During especially panicky times, dreams are shallow and alert, listening for alarms, crashes, bangs or barks. Every loud night sound sparks an anxious heart, hair stands on end adrenaline-ready to bend some metal on a stranger's head. Post-traumatic stress survives continents, hops generations, contexts, and remains a blot of unintentional or even uncontrollable bias on the psyche.

On Dad's side, our ancestors escaped anti-Semitic persecution in Lithuania around 1920. There are no records left from that time, everything has been destroyed. On Mom's side, early 1930s, her parents escaped Nazi oppression in Warsaw, when a distant cousin left Poland for Southern Rhodesia and sent word that he needed help with a tobacco shop. They escaped murderous persecution as victims of ethnic hatred and, upon arrival in southern Africa, were catapulted into being masters based on the colour of their skin. Being Jewish, however, meant they were not always regarded as highly as those with British and Afrikaner backgrounds. But they clearly still enjoyed massive privilege based on their lightness. Histories of oppression and abuse, forced submission and acquiescence are deeply entangled with my ancestral trajectories; we are both complicit in and suffering from collective generational and personal experiences of victimhood and domination.



Still images from the short film *before tv* (10'12''), directed by Stacey Sacks, 2004.

My family’s names betray stories of genealogical erasure and denial. I come from a family of Nuts and Shushleppers (‘shoe shleppers’) on Mom’s side, and Factors and Goldbergs (‘gold mountains’) on Dad’s. The Schuschleppers and Nuts became the Kings. The Factors transformed to Sacks who married the Goldbergs.

You could say I come from a family of Nut-Sacks; it’s no wonder I went into comedy.

I wonder how it felt to make landfall on the tropical African coast, after a confusing and haphazard journey to the so-called ‘free’ world, to arrive at the threshold where my ancestors disembarked their ships at the port in Beira, Mozambique. I often wonder if they felt their agency being stripped away by those indifferent, bureaucratic officials making arbitrary decisions at the border-posts; nonchalantly altering the course of my ancestors’ identities.

Their aloof pens erased our history, deeming it acceptable to begin an entirely new genealogy, without consultation. Did my ancestors experience anger, shame, frustration or resentment due to this gross rewriting of our historical roots? Unlikely. They were probably too ecstatic to be the lucky ones escaping murder, disease, degradation and certain death. ‘What’s in a name!?’ they probably shrugged, ‘I’m alive! And what great weather!’ and then proceeded to dance the *horah*⁴ while singing ‘*Aveinu Shalom Aleichem!*’⁵ And when they found out they would have servants, they danced twice as hard and sang louder than ever.

4 The *horah* is a circle dance originating in the Balkans.

5 *Aveinu Shalom Aleichem* (Peace Be Upon You) is a traditional Jewish song.



I discovered after my father’s death (2014) that he’d been an avid yet quite secretive postage stamp collector.



My parents named me after the first initial of my maternal grandfather's Hebrew first name, Shmuel. On my mother's side, the Nuts and Shushleppers from Poland had their name transformed at the border to King and finally arrived in what was then Southern Rhodesia. On my father's side the Factors from Lithuania were altered to Sacks when they arrived in southern Africa, eventually settling in Kimberley where the diamond rush had been in full swing since around 1871.

In Bulawayo decades later, Frank Sacks found Doreen King and they became the Sacks.

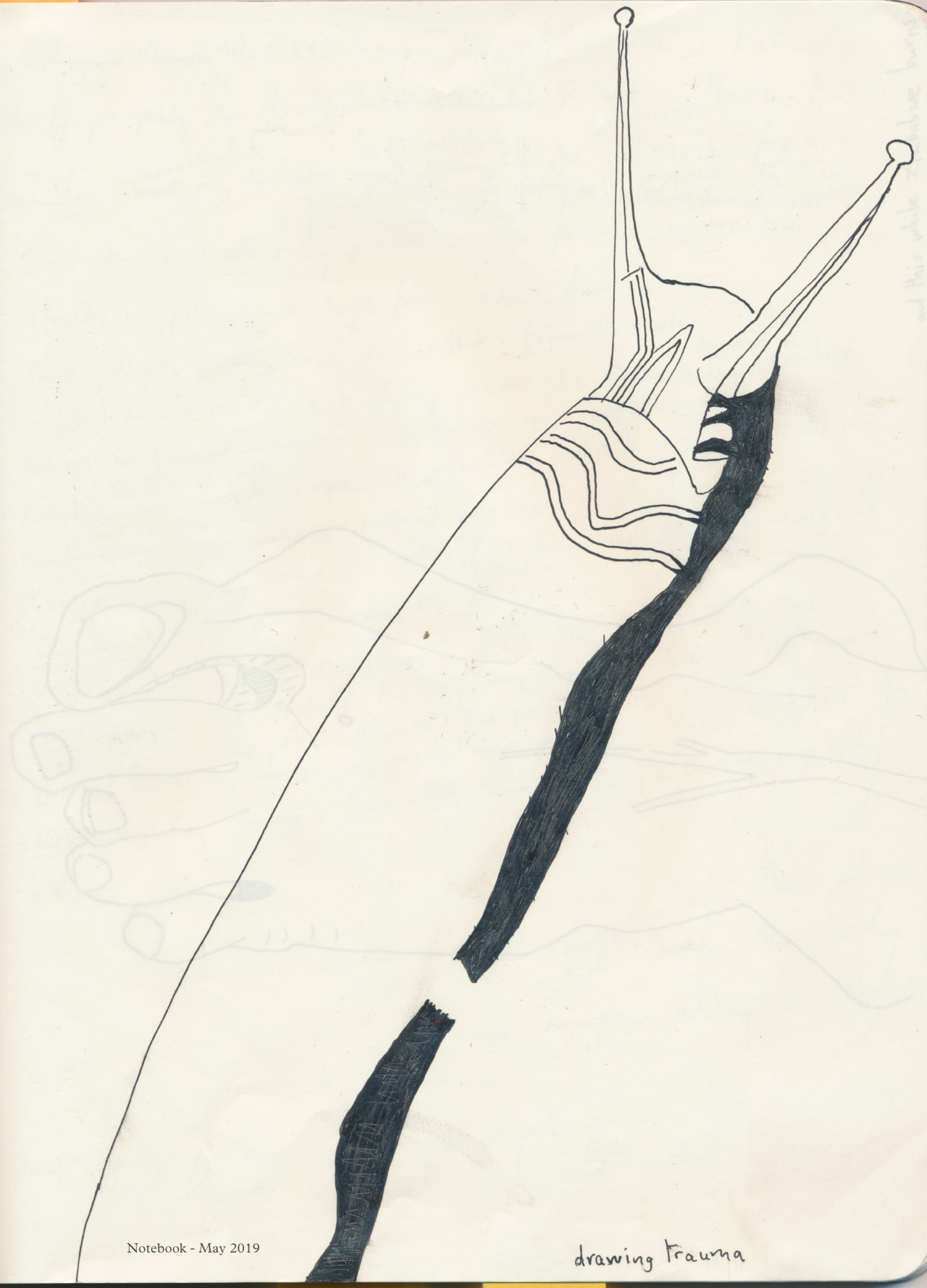
About 25 years after that, their eldest daughter wanted to marry a man with the surname Bagg, and Mom said no because she couldn't bear to print those wedding invitations.



In Harare around the same time, on cricket-blaring summer nights, Mom leaves Dad and I watching TV in the lounge and goes outside; armed with salt and a torch, she's singeing those slugs munching on her Alstroemerias. She pulls off snails and squashes them underfoot on wet green grass. A few times I accompany her but can't bear the sounds of the crunching shells and the slugs sizzling their long slow painful deaths.

But we did have a seriously beautiful garden, unintentionally fulfilling every stereotype of the colonial white's fetish for landscape and scenery. Everyone who came over couldn't believe its lushness and colour and I always felt proud and took it all for granted and walked barefoot most days and fell into bed safe and happy except for when I imagined people with machine guns outside shooting through my window; so I pull the duvet up high over my head; I'm safe that way; bullets won't penetrate the blankets.

When my brothers got army onesies, I was jealous. When the boys grew too big, I inherited their gear and loved parading around feeling important and potent though I was never allowed to wear the camo to Synagogue. It's no wonder that later in life I create a clown show *I Shit Diamonds* where playing a dictator in full military gear fulfils all my fantasies of performing totalitarian drag.





Still frame from stop-motion animation *white panic is real but not a rabbit*.

I'm about eight years old when our family is invited one night to a friend's farm so my brothers and father could shoot the vermin, an infestation of those pesky hares eating the farmer's maize (corn) crops. Dad was a sharpshooter, was even invited in 1980 to represent Zimbabwe in the Olympics rifle team going to Los Angeles that year (he declined due to a pre-planned family holiday). He was that kind of man, my Dad.

That humid night at the farm we had two motorbikes on the back of which my brothers hovered, laughing and excited with their rifles. And there was a *bakkie* – a truck – in the back of which I went along for the fun of the ride, unknowingly standing close to where they threw the shot bunnies. Those dying and dead rabbits, a growing pile of injured and lifeless bleeding bodies getting higher and higher. They shoot in the dark at the hares' green glowing eyes, blind-struck and momentarily bewildered by powerful torches. Afterwards they're collected and flung in the back of the truck, at my feet. If the bunnies are twitching, not quite dead, they grab them by their two back feet and swing crash their heads against the side of the car, a blow or two takes care of that, and throw them on the heap. That night I sleep in a loft and am scared by the strangeness of it all, by the spider-infested thatched roof and deep smells of the rotting exploding wild.

My brother shot my best friend Ruth, once. Well not intentionally, or so he says. She was always hyperactive and ran in front of the target just as he pulled the trigger, though he'd clearly told us to stay away. The bullet entered the inner side of her upper right arm and exited the outer. It wouldn't have been so bad except just a few weeks before, Ruth had joined us on another farm excursion and that time a pet baboon had gone crazy and the farmer asked Dad to put it down and just as we arrived the baboon started to chase us kids – we were easier targets – and we ran like crazy – but I ran faster because she was a bit heavier and the baboon bit her deep in the bum. We had to take her to hospital for rabies and tetanus shots and everything.

With hindsight I'm amazed her parents ever sent her back to play at the Sacks. But events like that weren't completely not normal when I was growing up. These things could happen; children could get shot at their best friend's house and a baboon bite the bum on Sunday excursions to the farm.

Being the grandchild of unintentional settler colonialists, I'm aware they didn't start the trauma of colonialism but happily benefitted from it, eating away at the profits afforded by privilege – a 5-bedroom home, domestic workers, swimming pool, massive vegetable garden, giant grassy patches to play cricket or rugby on, mulberry, mango, avocado, pecan-nut, papaya, plum, macadamia trees, monkey spiders, daddy-long-legs, barefoot on the green grass of a tropical, balmy home. The kind of environment ancestors from the old countries could never have imagined. Despite the obvious privilege, settler colonialism locked my family in and erased their history. Mom says her parents never spoke of Warsaw, and Dad had no stories of life in Šiauliai, the small town in Lithuania his family originated from.

518

AFRICA

Jews in Zimbabwe

Saul Issroff with the assistance of Dave Bloom

General Population: 13,000,000 (July 2005 estimate)

Jewish Population: 200 (estimate)

Percent of Population: less than 0.0001 percent

Jewish Population by City: mainly in Harare and Bulawayo

Migration Routes and Ethnic Backgrounds: Jews migrated from Lithuania, Latvia, and England, and a small Sephardi group migrated from the island of Rhodes.

Languages Spoken: Shona, Ndebele, English

Information from *Encyclopedia of the Jewish diaspora: origins, experiences, and culture* (Vol. 2), 2009.



Mom's side. Photo of the Nuts in the Okopowa graveyard, before they became Kings (circa 1915).



Top: Nuss grave; bottom: Shushlepper grave. From *Stanley's Ghetto Tour*, short film, 2018.

That's my grandfather Morris (Shmuel), the one smiling and crouching in the front, to the left of the tombstone, a seemingly impertinent and slightly naughty look on his face. Mom says he always smiled at funerals, couldn't help himself. This picture was taken at the Okopowa Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw, Poland, at the 'unveiling' of the tombstone of my great-grandfather, David Ya'akov Nuss (Nut), in about 1915. The woman and child to the immediate right of the stone are my great-grandmother and great-aunt, both of whom perished from disease in the Warsaw Ghetto, after returning to Poland from Southern Rhodesia because they disapproved of the ways in which Jewish Law seemed to be dissolving in the diaspora.

Following are some stills of a film sequence from the film *Stanley's Ghetto Tour*, showing Stanley G. at the exact same site in 2018. The woman on the extreme left of the 1915 image is Chaia Tzluva Shushlepper, my great-great-great-grandmother, whose grave Stanley G. also encounters.

Acknowledging that I'm treading on dangerous territory in relation to the ethicality of playing *clown alone* in the graveyard, I contemplate what features of this experiment could generate offence, and for whom. And what harm this kind of offence might in reality invoke? Sitting for hours with the graves, I ask for forgiveness and receive answers from cawing crows and wind howling through bare trees.

During the five days I spend in Warsaw I visit the cemetery over two days and stay for about five hours each time. Mostly, I'm alone. I could have stayed much longer had I not started to shiver uncontrollably, consumed by hunger and the gnawing promise of pierogi and chicken soup, a delicious treat hard to find in Stockholm.

I'm the worst vegetarian in the world.

How do I connect this private excavation to the tragedies of current times, and must my artistic probings as part of this vivisection be instrumentalised in this way? Recently I've been thinking about the fact that terrorist shooters in the US are almost entirely white boys or men. Yet every time there is a shooting at a school or church or mall or wherever in that country, why do Whites not come out with the hashtag #notinmyname? What neuropathology does this betray? I want to say **NOTINMYNAME** too. I am unequivocally opposed to the Zionist expansionist ideology of settler colonialism perpetrated by Benjamin Netanyahu's government and some communities inside Israel. As a Jewish citizen of the world I feel it is my duty to speak out against these atrocious crimes. I wonder, why don't Jewish people get called out the way Muslim people do to renounce the 'terrorist' elements of their communities?

Does the radical subjectivity of my research point towards geo-political concerns including rising fascism, white supremacy, gross inequalities and the climate crisis? Does it do that regardless of any trying on my behalf? In general, I realise I could benefit from not trying so hard. By the time I make the film *Stanley's Ghetto Tour*, three years into the research, I have let go of any illusion that my art making will change the world. If anything, the hope is that my personal ancestry's entanglement in ongoing processes of victimhood and abuse offers a myriad of turns and entry points for contemplating issues of wider ecological, social, material and historical significance. I'm hoping the cast of clowters emerging from these experiments have broader resonance as a direct result of their specificities.

In Krakow, I experience the horribly uncanny commercialisation of trauma as Holocaust tour pamphlets line every hotel, restaurant and public space. Genocide provides a theme park to be consumed as spectacle – Holocaust tourism, the tourism of horror and evil. Hang out at Birkenau and Auschwitz then grab your favourite pork dish at the nearest Kosher restaurant!

The construct of cultural authenticity is rooted in heritage tourism. I stay in the Jewish Quarter in Krakow and witness a menu at a local Kosher restaurant offering pork ribs in one dish and chicken cooked with cream in another – violations of the foundational dietary rules of Judaism. Local history is shaped for the benefit of tourism, authenticity a sham. But that's nothing new.

I'm there for four days and most of the tour groups I see are school groups visiting from Israel. It's interesting that within a context of rising anti-Semitism across Sweden, Germany, France, the US, UK and other parts of the world, that on the days I am in Krakow, I witness predominantly Israeli youth deeply immersed in the grotesque evil of concentration camps. The question of Holocaust education in schools and addressing anti-Semitism is a complex issue not limited to Israel and ignites discussion at civic and state levels worldwide. See Larissa Allwork's (2019) research on this topic.⁶

⁶ <https://books.apple.com/us/book/holocaust-education-and-contemporary-anti-semitism/id1489720493?ls=1> (accessed 15 December 2019).



There's a rat on the sofa. Unconscious blackfacing in the lounge, Harare (1985).

Notebook. Södermalm, March 2019

A grey-haired Swedish woman on the tunnelbana asks if, since I was from Zimbabwe, whether I was the daughter of missionary parents. In her head I could clearly not be African. I say my mother was born in Bulawayo in the south of Zimbabwe. She nods her head in agreement, but her eyes widen with surprise. Luckily, it's my stop. Escape.

Now before you jump to all kinds of conclusions and smug accusations, this was after the opening night of the very first play I was ever in, 'Wind in the Willows', at Sharon School, my junior school in Harare. I'm playing Rattie. At the time, not for a second did I, nor any of my multiracial friends and teachers at the time, ever contemplate I was doing blackface.

No-one questioned that a Jewish girl was cast in the role of a rat either. Now that I think of it, I believe I remember Dad singing Al Jolson's 'Mammy' at me a few times. But at that time, we all found it funny and not in the least bit offensive.



Rattie exits the auditorium after the applause (Harare 1985).

Since I don't want to whitewash the past, how do I live with the history I am from? Racism exists in the very core of the private and is often dwelling in subjective notions of love and of kinship and of family. Can I put intimacy to work here, going deeper to reveal the political implications inherent in the most private?

Objects are receptacles of memory and history. This bell was used in my grandmother's home in Durban, South Africa, to call servants to the dining room table. We had a bell in Harare too. Once summoned, the domestic worker would enter with best wear, usually a perfectly ironed shirt with collar in some rendition of white, cream or beige, bearing trays with starters, or collecting dishes, or bringing more mustard or whatever. Standing in the kitchen ready and awaiting the summoning bell. These positions were an accepted part of everydayness; not a moment was spared contemplating the extreme power dynamics at play on every conceivable level. Inconceivable from this Stockholm vantage point, decades later, where people tend to clean their own toilets and raise children without help from anyone else.



My grandmother's bell.

im constantly told in sthlm that i can't be from Africa what
white people born in Africa? yes butt where were your
parents from



noone in sthlm believes im African
yes butt where are you really from



Frame from animation sequence, *Melancholic G*wog or The Road is Long*.

I did not question it intellectually at the time but, as a sensitive child sensing the unspoken yet gross hierarchies at play, I felt an awkward shame and empathy towards *our* servants, a rational compassion offering friendly smiles and warm thank-yous and humble half-curtsies, and good-night hugs for *my* beloved *nanny* Jessy and a few small *bonsellas* (bonuses) palmed out, mostly coins at a time when coins actually had a measure of value. Being raised in an explicitly apolitical family and cultural milieu, we unthinkingly played the parts assigned to us in that time of Zimbabwe in the mid-1980s. With hindsight, it feels entirely wrong, warped and bizarre, but it was normal at that time. Older whites were always ‘*Baas/Boss*’ or ‘*Madam*’, black domestic workers or ‘the servants’ always the ‘boy’ or ‘girl’, or *our* boy, *our* girl, a good portion of conversation at dinner parties was devoted to the disobedience of the servants; to this one who stole but ‘rather the thief you know than the thief you don’t know’; or to that one who had an extra cousin living in his room for months ‘without letting us know’!

Looking back now I can see what an entitled little shit I could be, screaming out orders and demanding immediate answers, ‘JESSY! Have you seen my other takkie? I can’t find my *takkie*. WHERE IS MY TAKKIE JESSY!?’

A takkie is a sports shoe.

Jessy was my second mother, I loved her dearly and certainly took her for granted. In my baby-head she existed for me and it was only when I reach my mid-teens that I contemplate the sacrifices she’s made, and how these affected her own family. She left her home to live in ours, to look after our family. To iron our socks⁷ and wash our underwear and make our beds and look after and bath the children and clean sometimes, though we had a *cook*, Agrippa (his friends call him George), whose job covered cleaning along with cooking. All our domestic workers live in the ‘servants’ quarters’ or the *kaya*, a denigrating word describing the separate and slightly disheveled building on our plot of land.

Many Saturdays Jessy babysits when Mom and Dad go out and we love watching TV shows together, like *Sounds on Saturday*, or even the *Hammer House of Horrors* late at night. The episode ‘The House That Bled to Death’ was not the best for a six-year-old with a wild imagination and, though I love it, the visceral image of the oozing bleeding line where wall and ceiling meet stays with me for years after. We’d watch films like *Bugsy Malone* (1976) modelled on gangsters in New York during prohibition, but the entire cast are children who fight with guns that shoot cream and bombs of custard pie. Most of the girl-womxn are scantily clad and singing sultry-like in the clubs; one of them is a young, gorgeous Jodie Foster. Every day after bathing, I sit at the dressing table – those old-fashioned ones with three mirrors – Jessy stands behind, combing my hair into Foster’s character – Talula’s – style, ringlets on the top and sides.

‘My name is Talula, I live till I die ...’ We sing together, the eight of us, beaming widely at each other. I’m wearing the PJs mom and dad brought me back from Singapore. Jessy is wearing a traditional nanny uniform and is missing one of her big front teeth; she whistles through the hole to make me laugh. Works every time.

⁷ Very important to iron carefully all clothes hung outside in Harare during the rainy season or run the risk of having the eggs of a Putzi fly hatch into your body and have tiny white maggot parasites living in there for up to two weeks, ones that will eventually have to be extracted by the doctor once you’ve brought them to a head by covering their breathing hole with Vaseline. From this you will have a relatively large oblong scar and a wonderfully disgusting story to share with people for the rest of your life.

Jessica Munemo

What does it mean to place her name here, in this way? Is it a futile and somehow slightly embarrassing and shame-inducing gesture? I don't know. But words have power, and she provides an anchor for why I've arrived at this research and helps me think through the complexities of embodied interpersonal race relations.

Gumdon, *our gardener*, lived with our family for 29 years. His wife Anna and all their children Jason, Frank and Beulah, live with us, the entire family in one room, the middle son named after my father. I don't know their surname. My mother can't remember it either these days. We can't remember Agrippa's surname though she employed him for more than 16 years. 'Daddy would have remembered it,' she says sadly. Jessy was with the family 28 years and leaves the day I leave Harare at 18 for a Rotary Youth Exchange trip to Loveland, Colorado.

We meet one more time before her death.

To communicate with domestic workers my parents and their friends often spoke what is called *Chilapalapa*, a colonial language designed to oppress and humiliate black Africans, though they'd never agree with that statement. 'It wasn't racist! I was taught it from my *nanny!*' Mom exclaims. It's a strange mash-up mocking mix of Shona, English and to a lesser extent Ndebele, the three official languages in Zimbabwe. Its equivalent in South Africa is *Fanagalo*, also called *pidgin*. They are nonsense languages, deeply racist. I remember a well-known white Rhodesian comedian and newsreader called Wrex Tarr whose *Chilapalapa* records were a regular source of entertainment in our home. Born in 1934 at the height of land discrimination in Southern Rhodesia, Tarr became famous among white Rhodesians for his ability to use *Chilapalapa* to stereotype and humiliate African people through the use of jokes. There was never a sense in our community that using this language or listening to and laughing at those records was racist or problematic.

My parents do not, however, speak *Chilapalapa* with other people of colour in our lives; neither to our dentist Dr. Chiroto, nor to our neighbours and bankers Basil and Chipu, nor to parents of friends from school. It is definitely the prerogative of the higher paler classes, enacting an explicit statement, 'I am superior.'

Growing up encapsulated in this tiny minority of a minority, a so-called white Jewish Zimbabwean enclave, meant a world circumscribed by distinct cultural and religious codes. Later add the layer of queer and another kind of outsidership and marginality can be added to the identity politics I'm slowly tightening around my already taut neck. Like professor Mignolo (2009, p.14) I like to imagine '[a] politics of identity is different from identity politics – the former is open to whoever wants to join, while the latter tends to be bounded by the definition of a given identity'. While there was certainly an historical lineage dating from Cecil John Rhodes' imperial project, whites in Zimbabwe are far from an homogenous group.

The range of differences in the spectrum of 'white Zimbabwean' must not be discounted or underestimated.

Professor of African Studies at the University of Copenhagen, Amanda Hammar (2012, p.217), questions ‘who and what stands in for the category of “white” and the condition of “whiteness”, and who and what is excluded’. Hammar also refers to

one of the most awkward and as yet unresolved questions thrown up by Zimbabwe’s ongoing crisis: that of white belonging ... when do (or can) ‘settlers’, or migrants for that matter, become real citizens, not only in the statutory sense but in terms of their own and others’ sense of their belonging; and equally importantly, who decides? The struggle over belonging is always complex, always situational and often violent, and inevitably invokes dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at different scales.

Post-1999, shortly after the start of the fast-track land reform process that ultimately leads to hyper-inflation and economic disaster, my lived experience is that whites in my close community start lathering themselves with a sense of vulnerability and victimhood. Since my family lived in the city, we never feared the dispossession faced by white farmers in Zimbabwe, yet my parents were deeply invested in expressing and claiming their status as victims. Wherever we went, they’d somehow be proud of their victimhood as sad, dispossessed Zimbabweans. Overseas, people were all too happy to shower them with pity, especially since we had ‘that monster’ dictator in charge, the man who ‘single-handedly destroyed the entire breadbasket of Africa’.

Mom and Dad seem eager to share the levels of lack and difficulty in their lives. They tell the same stories over and over: how they lost their entire life’s savings due to rampant inflation, how in supermarkets the prices of produce would go up as you shopped – rubbed out and rewritten on black boards, the endless power cuts, the water shortages, the petrol queues, the night they were almost killed in their beds, how Dad shot and possibly killed one of the intruders, and how Mom’s purple face was swollen for weeks after.

That attack is what finally pushed them out of the country in 2011, when, at 80 years old, they are welcomed with open arms into Israel, where the state pays for their flights over and grants them monthly pensions for the rest of their lives (for the first time in their lives). Despite ongoing atrocities of illegal occupation and human rights abuses, the Israeli government remains able to generously enfold new *Olim*, Jewish people with the right to return.



White Zimbabweans or children of immigrants or *Emigrées* or Mom and Dad, Zimbabwe, 1984.

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