

Revolutionary Foundations in Cultural Production and Nonabyssal Praxis

By:

Yaazhin Pillay

BFA, Emily Carr University of Art + Design, 2020

A THESIS SUPPORT PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

2022



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Acknowledgement

To start, I would like to thank my supervisor Daniel Drennan ElAwar, without whom I would not have been able to finish this project. Your guidance and support have led me to this point and equipped me with the tools necessary to do this work. I had the space to explore and make mistakes, knowing you would always have me back. I am eternally thankful for your friendship and mentorship.

I want to thank the staff, faculty, and technicians at Emily Carr for facilitating my work. Your assistance and presence throughout my time at Emily Carr has allowed me to grow as an artist and student. I would like to thank Mimi Gellman and Trish Kelly for making this opportunity available to me. I would also like to express my gratitude to Jamie Hilder and Maymanah Farhat for their thoughtful contributions during the examination process. It would, of course, be impossible to thank my mother Sarasvathi, my father Pathmnathan, and my brother Kumaresan enough for all they have done for me. Beyond the support and care they have provided during this project, I thank them for giving me the love and support that has made me who I am and made possible all that I have in life. I must thank my partner Charisma Christal Thomas, for her unyielding support throughout this experience. You have been there day and night, assisting me at every stage and being my soundboard; I could not have completed this without you.

I want to thank my grandparents, without whom none of this is possible. Their sacrifices

and love have given me everything and more. To my Thatha Maganathan Pillay, thank you for making me an artist; you were my first teacher. To my beautiful Aiyah Visvakanthe Pillay, I thank you for always surrounding me with your infinite love. To my wonderful Aiyah Lillavathi Pillay, thank you so much for the love, care, and drive that you gave me. Finally, to my Thatha Gopal Pillay, your presence and influence are felt always.

My loving Aunts and Uncles, Mayesveri and Anand Pillay, Shamla Govender and Nugalen Pillay, Pooventhuran Pillay, Sugendran and Karen Pillay, and my godparents Michael Singh and Veena Naidoo, your influence has shaped and guided me in ways you cannot know. I am blessed with a life of happiness and to be on this path because of you. To my cousins, Neryvia, Vedarsharn, Sarteyan, Yashodani, Kineshta, Sobithan, Nalin, and Dinita, thank you for your support, no matter the distance between us. I want to thank Sarteyan and Kineshta, especially for always being there to listen to my stories and for your support when I was in the thick of it. I must also give thanks to my family in all but blood, Jurie, Sitara, and Sloven Thaver, for always being there no matter the hour, no matter the circumstance.

This project has shown me that I am who I am and fortunate enough to do what I do because of the wealth of love and support I am blessed to be surrounded by. I cannot adequately express my adoration for you all; this paper is dedicated to you.

Preface

The writing presented in this paper attempts to break down the broad structures within which I exist. I would like to preface the document by stating that I see the writing and art presented in this paper as steps in a broader effort to gain agency and dignity for my community in South Africa and comrades around the world. I hope to examine the complexities of oppression experienced by and perpetuated within subaltern communities. It is imperative that we orient such discussions away from symptomatic issues such as race relations and reductive identity politics, focusing instead on deeper systemic problems such as class disparity and the lasting effects of our colonial past.

I wish to first establish a foundational understanding of the violence experienced by colonised peoples and explore the means by which the global South has resisted coloniality and subjugation. It is my duty to honour my heritage and culture in my work and to refocus the discourse of art and culture born under these oppressive structures to reflect value systems that lead to a culture of protest and resistance. To evidence my work with cultures and cultural products without first recognising their rejection from these oppressive institutions would not allow for an honest understanding of their context and value and would only further their consumption as *inferior entities*.

I aim to celebrate my culture outside the purview of the western institution and to utilise cultural resistance to said systems as the underpinnings of my own production. As Paulo

Freire models, the fight for freedom as pursued by the oppressed is in part to save the oppressor who can no longer save themselves (Freire 18). Such efforts, though limited by their context, may present a starting point for honest discourse and potential internal shifts both systemically and individually. I thank you for giving me your time and recognise our interaction here as praxis, latent with the potential for change.

Identity Through Abyssal Exclusion

"I am the product of the masses of my country and the product of my enemy."

– Winnie Mandela

I am a South African Indian and a descendant of indentured labourers and revolutionaries.

I am a man of colour and an immigrant living in the crown colony of Canada. As the product of imperial expansion and oppression regimes, I inherited a proud culture and legacy of resistance that can be traced, via my family's lived experience, to my Indian acculturation and African roots. With the ultimate pursuit of one's life being the attainment of freedom, simplicity, and enlightenment, as defined by the Vedic scriptures, I consider my position in strict opposition to empire. Western imperialism's perpetuation of suffering and inhumane social practices is in direct opposition to these values and ways of life as I understand them and as they have been communicated to me by immediate and extended family and community. As an artist, it is my duty to my community and my comrades, both internationally and locally, to continue the celebration, learning, and mending of history, tradition, and culture that I was initiated into.

What I produce is in honour of and in reference to my ancestors, as well as all who have experienced, survived, and resisted colonial subjugation, for they have made possible my personal context. To represent them is to know a history that is not recorded and to observe culture as an aspect of myself that has been stolen from me. My artistic and research endeavours invoke the limitations of the institution of Western academia as they

must simultaneously engage with and diverge from this Western academic discipline. The values placed on knowledge, cultures, and peoples, as established in the earliest Western anthropologic traditions, remain the ultimate hurdles to overcome. The purposes of such thought were, after all, to prove the subhuman nature of bodies such as my own and, in turn, dismiss knowledge born *the Other*¹ as barbaric and heathen (Rodney 64). This tradition of evaluation and extradition can only be circumvented through the seeking and embracing of current and historical precedent that demonstrates alternative ways of being.

As Post-Orientalist writer Hamid Dabashi poses, “Why should we, the rest of the world corroborate that terrorizing abstraction (the West as a principal interlocutor of the world) even by revoking it?” (Dabashi 272). To revolutionise Western knowledge production, we must begin then with that which exists outside of its purview. This is the role of liberation discourses sourced primarily from global Southern epistemologies, as their base function is to exist despite Western dominance. This is clarified by Freire, who states, “Dialogical cultural action² aims... at surmounting the antagonistic contradictions of the social structure³, thereby achieving the liberation of human beings.

1 See Edward Said's book *Orientalism* defines the *Other* as: everything that lies outside of the self (144). The Self is the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the Other is strange (the Orient, the east, “them”) (Said, 43)

2 *Epistemologies of the South*.

3 *Western hegemonic rule*.

Antidialogical cultural action⁴, on the other hand, on the other hand, aims at mythicising such contradictions, thereby hoping to avoid (or hinder insofar as possible) the radical transformation of reality” (Freire 152).

Such research, therefore, supersedes the capacity of the institution, becoming entangled with the lived reality of the scholar, necessarily occupying the grey areas of approved academic diligence and operating beyond the abyssal line of established humanist assumptions. “The abyssal line... marks the radical divisions between forms of metropolitan sociability and forms of colonial sociability that has characterised the modern Western world since the fifteenth century” (Santos 20) and, in doing so, distinctly marks the epistemic approaches of the Global North and Global South. The labour of the post-abyssal scholar (Santos 137) is, therefore, to undo the effects of colonisation itself, internally and externally, while navigating the unknowns of the reconciliation process.

The notions of thesis, finding, and conclusion flatten Global Southern epistemic thought, leaving little room for *lived* knowledge⁵ or the subsequent wisdom of experience that forms the basis of so many global Southern epistemologies. Nonabyssal praxis and intersensorial knowledge production is the historical precedent set by the Global South. Yet our diminishment as subaltern researchers continually forces us to engage institutional thought in a manner that is foreign to our state of being, making us lesser beings within

4 For the purposes of this discussion we can define this as *Western institutional methodology*.

5 See Santos' chapter **The Deep Experience of the Senses** for elaboration on abyssal Western control of sensorial knowledge.

academic spheres that emphasize dominant liberal and neo-liberal concepts and ways of being. “Feeling in a subaltern way means being compelled to transcribe what one feels in the language and terms of the oppressor. It amounts to transcribing what is active in a passive mode,” as such, to acknowledge this approach to academia is to acknowledge the system of thought that proves coloniality and whose reasoning is aimed at pacifying the colonised world through its utilisation of colonised bodies (Santos 168). To prosper within this climate of bourgeois thought, one must submit themselves to be colonised both in body and mind.

Therefore, by merely existing within Western academia, I am compromised as Said was (Dabashi 272) and forced to adopt a discourse that assumes an “entirely Eurocentric provenance.” The work of resisting and rebuilding can and should be conducted via nonabyssal praxis that is sensitive to geographical or communal contexts (Santos 22). By choosing to do so within the confines of the Western institution, one risks engaging a discourse around that which has been stolen, perpetuating the consumption of ‘excluded’ (Santos 21) cultures as potential wares. To debate one’s freedoms is to entertain that they are debatable to begin with. To prove the value of one’s humanity within the colonial institution is to receive the *benevolent gift* of acknowledgement from the coloniser. These are the fundamental rules of engagement that I am expected to abide by as I attempt to conduct my research. Acknowledging my born exclusion from the Western tradition and the necessary embrace of that exclusion is the foundation upon which a progressive alternative praxis is built.

Theory and Practice

The bizarre nature of engaging in decolonial or activist work within the confines of a Western institution should be recognised. Such work aims to dismantle the very institutions it occupies, a cancer within the body that is Western rationale. And so, such efforts, so long as they are not co-opted (as is the case with most post-modern expansions of *third-world* thought), are extirpated through demonisation, dismissal, and most insidiously, isolation. Yet the work of creating change must continue beyond these expulsions. Communities of resistance within the Global South, as well as diasporic communities and internal colonized communities within the Global North, fuelled by the rhetoric of resistant post-abyssal researchers (Santos 136), see to the implementation and pursuit of change via action. Walter Rodney reminds us of a popular saying in socialist circles during his *Crisis in the Periphery: Africa and the Caribbean* speech, “One ought to engage in praxis to unite theory and practice” (Rodney, 5:49).

Epistemologies of the North place supreme importance on methodology, seeing method as an inevitable path to an outcome. Alternatively, Epistemologies of the South place importance on the context and subjectivity of the executor, resisting methodological fetishism (Santos 136). The utilisation of knowledge in both cases serves a greater nature; the abyssal methodology of the Global North operates to segregate, categorise, and control. The Global South utilises knowledge and tradition to survive. The subaltern cannot afford discussion or theorisation in perpetuity; it must concern itself with that which

gives it power, agency, and longevity (Gramsci 440). I hope to make clear at every stage of my work that the Global South will continue to act in its best interests regardless of the West's attitude towards progressive thought at any given moment. It is the inevitability of change that characterises non-colonial ways of being and that makes possible the Western world's potential for progress.

If we are to take the Western academy's word on its desire to decolonise itself, then it could serve as a site for greater change. However, the treatment of Global Southern epistemologies must be given space and importance in such a future, and Western academia must recognise that its theories are founded in the lived realities of the subaltern. To this end, I suggest three concepts be made permanent fixtures in the Western academic psyche.

- The need to decolonise oneself and the pedagogy that informs Western criticality must be understood to be a first step in creating lasting change (Freire 47).
- Intersensorial knowledge must be given its value back and removed from the fetishizing eye of Western cultural consumption. Our knowledge can no longer afford to be seen through an orientalist lens that diminishes it as 'lesser' thought enacted by 'lesser' peoples. Such hierarchy will only continue to serve the agenda of imperialism and apartheid segregation, to keep the 'civilised' world distinct from that of the 'savage.'

- Finally, praxis must become a primary consideration and outcome of Western thought. Western academic theory cannot afford to continue being evaluated through the sanitary confines of peer review and institutional publication, far away from the lived realities of its principal demographics.

This Humanist obsession with theorisation and the mythologising of artist, scholar, and writer is only made possible when supported by the exploitation of lesser classes. Thought without action is contingent on an economic and social system that provides in excess for an educated class. The action required to support such a class of people is left to the proletariat, whose resources are gained from the many colonies that rely solely on their designated export. As this has always been the foundation upon which cultural institutions in the Global North, reflecting a dominant mode of thought, have functioned, their knowledge production assumes a degree of removal from the subject.

Those exposed to Western culture must not fall prey to academic trend setting⁶. The weight of words has come to rest light on the shoulders of academics. Concepts such as freedom, dignity, and equality have become boring tropes that fill the pages of grant applications and bourgeois book clubs. Hegemonic thought does not feel the strain of loved ones held captive by poverty, war, political buffoonery, or the same racialised violence that has come to exemplify the nature of life for all colonised people over the

⁶ This can be observed in the Canadian governments commitments to reconciliatory efforts with the First Nations, which is informed by decolonial theory and implemented via modes of post-modern discourse.

past two centuries (Fanon 1). Santos uses a Chinese proverb to highlight this approach to methodology, saying, “if the wrong man uses the right means, the right means will act the wrong way” (Santos 136). I, therefore, declare that such efforts are not decolonial; they may be concerned with the topic of decolonial theory but without an appreciation for the humanity behind such work, said theories cannot operate. I want you to look past my writing and production to the people I speak of, to hear their stories and to feel **their** need for freedom, dignity, and equality. It is not I, the speaker, who should be the subject of your concern but my people and comrades, and any attempt to shift that focal point must be met with resistance. To appreciate these stakes and the weight of those whom you represent is to begin decolonising the self (Gramsci 202) and seeing oneself not as an individual but as a constituent part of a greater community.

To establish one’s connection to communities outside of the colonial empire broadens the horizon of knowledge and culture that one can draw upon and is responsible for. Yet experiential knowledge and sensorial knowledge, that which is so integral to epistemologies of the South, are not accepted by the Western academic tradition. “Modern science has conceived of the senses as necessary evils, indispensable but treacherous evils to be sorted out or unmasked by reason” (Santos 166), and so that which is intangible is untrue until revealed. In Western academic’s othering of the colonised world, it is seldom made known the strangeness that such notions hold in global Southern epistemologies. To view the natural world as separate from oneself, proven only through one’s observation of the world, is foreign to many indigenous knowledge bases. To not trust one’s senses,

favouring only logic, is often treated by indigenous knowledge as a contradiction, as logic and reason do not exist in isolation but rather in relation to stimulus (Santos 167).

This unyielding trust of 'senseless' reason is the foundation upon which the colonial era operated; it was the basis of superiority that the humanities were founded upon⁷. I, therefore, pose that the hypocrisy of toting decolonial theory within the same institutions that have yet to recognise the reasoning and thoughtfulness of those whose stolen belongings continue to gild the walls of their vaults and cabinet displays as equal, albeit different, is irreconcilable at the current moment. Knowledge of the 'savage' is only given heed when the consumptive nature of the colony has damaged itself irreparably. It is only then that our ways of being are accepted as sacred, as revolutionary, as intelligent. I highlight these transgressions against the colonised world to make clear the limitations of viewing that which is outside of the colonial consciousness, that which is nonabyssal, and to state my refusal to serve up culture as something to violently consume. This, I believe, creates a space for post-colonial discourse, a space of responsibility, confrontation, and growth.

If growth and change are, in fact, the goal of institutional knowledge, they cannot be achieved without action. What good is the theorisation of revolutionary thought without

⁷ "...it was in the slave system on the slave plantation that the fantastic gap between master and slave was translated into a feeling on the part of the white slave master that he had inherently to be superior to that black man who was slaving out in the fields. It was the white plantation owner who produced a number of pseudoscientific and theological theories attesting to the inferiority of the black man." (Rodney, 64)

application? Such mental and verbal acrobatics only have a place in a society of privilege and decadent self-indulgence. Praxis is, therefore, the *modus operandi* employed in global Southern strategies of decolonization and liberation within communities that cannot afford to speak for the sake of speaking. The value of a theory must always be tested against its potential for change, its inclusivity, and its honesty to the accepted ideology of the community. To supersede these benchmarks is to co-opt the community's ability to advocate for itself and seize its sovereignty. I see the example⁸ set by subaltern communities as integral

The NIC (Natal Indian Congress) was the first of the Indian Congresses to be formed. It was established in 1894 by Mahatma Gandhi to fight discrimination against Indian traders in Natal. From the 1920s, the organization functioned under the umbrella organization, the SAIC (South African Indian Congress). However, in the 1930s-1940s, the NIC experienced more radical leadership when Dr. G.M. Naicker emerged on the scene. Dr. Naicker was elected to the organisation's leadership in 1945. Due to more militant protests, by the 1950s and 1960s, several of the NIC's leaders were in jail. Although the NIC itself was not banned, this harassment of its leaders and the repressive conditions at that time led to a halt in its activities. It was only in 1971 that the NIC was revived with a focus on civic work. The organisation was prominent in the establishment of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the mid-1980s.

to what decolonial or resistant praxis could be without needing to control or adopt the identity and belonging of another entity. The community leaders, parents, teachers, and labourers, proletarians of every social context the world over have demonstrated that the work of decolonisation and revolution is not found at the picket line or at the walkout but in the toil of their everyday resilience. If one's theories are not in reference to these

⁸ See column for a brief history of the NIC (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/natal-indian-congress-nic>)

demographic's realities or concerned with changing their circumstances, then it is of no value to the subaltern, the working class, the subjugated, and the vulnerable. This is the value of praxis, the "process by which theory is embodied and enacted." (igi-global.com)

Chris Hani⁹ is credited as saying,

"Socialism is not about big concepts and heavy theory. Socialism is about decent shelter for those who are homeless. It is about water for those who have no safe drinking water. It is about health care; it is about a life of dignity for the old. It is about overcoming the huge divide between urban and rural areas. It is about a decent education for all our people. Socialism is about rolling back the tyranny of the market. As long as the economy is dominated by an unelected, privileged few, the case for socialism will exist."

I believe this precisely conveys the role and importance of praxis because it describes the continual, progressive action that is always occurring in the community and places theory in relation to this continued effort. Theory's role in my own life and in my work only provides the tools to communicate the realities of my community and my experience to a stratum that has dominion over me. I believe that my cultural production should, in part, serve as a conduit for greater communication between these two worlds, if not at the very least through the potential for addressing trauma as opposing entities.

⁹ Leader of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and chief of staff of uMkhonto we Sizwe.

The Reconceptualization of Influence

The notion of artistic influence neatly establishes the abyssal line that divides global Southern and Northern epistemologies (Santos 22). To discuss artistic influence requires that we tap into one of the prevailing institutions established during the era of colonial expansion, that of the European Canon. Such an apparatus demarks a clear distinction between the European and the conquered world. It is the purpose of such systems to define canonically accepted and, more importantly, unaccepted cultural production. If we are aware that the European Canon is tied directly to European expansionism, then we must assume too that all culture born out of pre-contact traditions and values exists within the category of the conquered and, as such, are not on equal standing with that of the European tradition.

To exist or succeed within this climate of European superiority is a challenge that causes deep internal rifts within those emerging out of marginality, as it requires the adoption of the very system that perpetrates such violence to succeed. To master these Eurocentric methods, histories, materials, and mediums is to gain agency against the dominant cultural tradition and in turn, the ruling class. This has been the attitude of many generations living under oppressive subjugation, and it has proven successful as Global Southern communities work to compete under colonial dominion. What little agency can be gained through this form of cultural resistance is minuscule, however, when compared to the resulting loss of indigeneity.

A discussion of visual language and influence cannot, therefore, be had without it mirroring discussions of ancestral language or loss of indigeneity. My production within the Western canon reflects my usage of the English language; a language forced upon me in place of my mother tongue. To discuss my ability and influences as a visual artist existing within a capitalist art economy, working via western traditions, and learning via the western canon, would only serve to further ignore my lack of access to production within the rich traditions of my ancestral heritage. Inversely, it is my proficiency within the Western tradition that best demonstrates the social and economic embodiment that I possess relative to my brothers and sisters of similar historical or social contexts. For me to occupy an improved class status validates the proactive actions and labour of the many generations who have fought for a better future under the colonial regime. The subsequent internalised guilt, anger, belittlement, pride, and lack of identity that become part and parcel of social, economic, and political improvement also becomes the condition of the non-European artist as they become minorities of success and representatives of their communities.

With this status in mind, my options as a cultural producer born of global southern epistemologies are as follows: to continue producing as a proletarian, to satisfy the sensibilities of the dominant class, hoping to surpass and subvert their power, or, to reconnect to my lost cultural heritage and produce art that does not recognise the authority of the empire and its markets. In his speech *The Ballot or the Bullet*, Malcolm X declares, “You don’t have a revolution in which you love your enemy, and you don’t have a revolution in which you are begging the system of exploitation to integrate you into it.

Revolutions overturn systems. Revolutions destroy systems.” (X) As I have established previously, progress lies outside the purview of Western institutions. It is for this reason that I feel cultural production must move to function outside of dominant institutions and must be justified outside of established institutional narratives. It would not be proper for the descendant of Indian indenture to prioritise reference to Dutch Renaissance artists, enabled by the exploits of the Dutch East India Company, before asserting the many communal and often nameless influences entrenched in the conquered world.

In place of a Eurocentric canon, I present an alternative perspective on influence, that of one’s Guru, Katavul, Parents, Home, and Community. Katavul refers to God, which for the purposes of this discussion, can be considered as the achievement of enlightenment through lifelong Dharmic praxis. This should be considered as an influence that has allowed me to maintain respect for my culture and value systems throughout my exposure and study of Western visual and aesthetic traditions. Though my immediate visual leanings may change, the enduring concept of Katavul¹⁰ has influenced my making and conceptualisation to remain connected to my heritage. It is my people’s adherence to our culture and pride in our art forms that has allowed us to stay connected to who we are after centuries of colonial subjugation. For those of us born in the diaspora, these points of cultural connection, though sparse, provide invaluable opportunities to assert our belonging to our place of origin.

10 As est. in Vedic scripture and Hindu teachings.

The earliest artistic teachings that I received were from my Thatha, my first Guru (teacher). He instilled a love for art in me at a young age, always reinforcing the importance of craftsmanship and innovation in making¹¹. He passed on my people's ability to make what we do not have, and his teachings, with age, showed me that there was nothing that the oppressor could do that we could not despite our people's economic and social disparities. It is through his stories and teaching I learned the history of my community and the limitations that they were expected to live within. My Thatha was always involved in his community as a photographer, poster maker, illustrator, Tamil scholar, and teacher. He highly valued our indigenous culture and language, spending most of his life teaching or contributing to community via cultural enrichment or other acts of seva¹². His creative output reflected his values in both medium and community involvement, both aspects of his practice that I hope to carry forward in my own creative output.

¹¹ "Artisanal knowledges of one's own to be mobilized in concrete struggles" (Santos, 132).

¹² Seva is the Sanskrit word for 'service' and "means to do something for someone else without expecting anything in return. It means to do without the desire of any reward in return" (Shankar).



Fig. 1: This is one of many photographs taken by my Thatha, Maganathan 'Mac' Pillay throughout his life. C-print, 4 x 6 in.



Fig. 2: This photograph is of my [L to R] great-grandfather and grand-uncle working. C-print, 4 x 6 in.

My parents gave me music and artistic rigour. Their influence pushed me to know the value of discipline, practice, and the importance of intuition in one's art form. It was their determination and effort that have given me the opportunities that I have today. They set an example by continuing to build on the opportunities given to them and, in doing so, pass on a tradition based in communality and resistance. They gave me what I needed to love what I do and grow within the bounds of my practice while remaining true and proud of who I am and where I come from.

My home of South Africa blessed me with its beautiful land and instilled in me an appreciation of history and story. Growing up in such an enriching environment taught me at a young age that there was immense value in the stories and histories of all people. After introducing *Red on Black* (Judy Seidman)¹³ to my mother, she proceeded to rifle through, filling in the blanks with the unwritten history of community leaders, activists, and friends that are often not recognised. It is our duty as creative producers and scholars to record and honour that history to the best of our ability.

My community showed me the power of collective action and unity in the face of bigotry. It was our comrades from diasporic communities around the world who demonstrated the value of empathy and standing up for one another through resistant action. This global community of activists and militants showed me how to be unyielding in one's fight against oppression. These are the influences that I carry with me with every step that I take and

¹³ Former member of MEDU Art Ensemble.

in everything that I make. They guide both my praxis and approach to life at large. The prominence of any one artist or entity within this network of culture and shared experience only promotes the value of the rest.

As such, it becomes problematic and contradictory to laboriously single out or give face to individual visual influences. As an artistic community, we must move beyond capitalist economies, which force what is an innately fluid process of learning and collaboration into the controlled domains of market and industry. To do so would be to hypocritically catalogue these influences within a system that rejects and demeans them. The value and applicability of a singular source of influence born from this network of marginality is not its influence upon me but rather the world that it has created for me. I, therefore, present and speak to my influences from this perspective of belonging and respect. To view my work is to view the product of collective action and shared influence. To draw upon such influence is to belong beyond capitalist art economy and contribute to the body of work produced within traditions of decolonization and liberation in Global Southern communities, an archive of cultural production that is not limited by market structure or historical narrative but rather defined by communality and comradery.

Cultural Production in the Global South

Let us move on to examine how cultural production, born of nonabyssal praxis, functions within a Global Northern setting and explore some of the required assumptions attached to cultural cultivation and maintenance.

Vedic Resistance (2020) is a sculptural piece that remains incomplete to exemplify the pressures of assimilation placed on those within a hegemonic culture. By assembling and re-contextualising Hindu and Buddhist imagery via the use of contemporary symbols of resistance, I am making known the viewer's access to the subject matter. The context or cultural competency required to view the piece is not one of the Western canon or global Northern epistemologies¹⁴, which are driven by market and imperial values, but rather communal, spiritual, and regional knowledge.

The piece uses the image of Shiva and integrates contemporary symbols of resistance pertaining to my own history and upbringing as a South African Indian. The body is replaced with that of the Starving Buddha¹⁵, instead of the river Ganges, we find the beret of uMkhonto we Sizwe¹⁶ atop his head, and a Zulu spear stands at his side in place of Lord Shiva's trident. His skin is smeared with soot¹⁷, and his features are gaunt.

14 Epistemologies defined by the social and historical context of colonialism and hegemonic rulership.

See Boaventura de Sousa Santos' book *End of the Cognitive Empire* for details.

15 Symbol of supreme discipline, mindfulness, and the pursuit of enlightenment.

16 The military wing of the ANC (African National Congress).

17 Mirroring the use of ashes in Hinduism and in reference to the discoloration of Lord Shivas skin.

As expected of unfired clay, huge cracks run across his body and clothes, and his skin glistens with many coats of lacquer. My vision for this piece was for it to be a vessel of considerable size. It is customary that such imagery be crafted out of more permanent materials to allow for the craftsman to be paced and meditate upon the wisdom of what they are creating. A piece that holds physical presence such that it can be gifted to a community creates an opportunity for both the cultural producer and their viewers to exchange thought and pass on knowledge. Yet this piece remains a model. This is due to the number of difficulties inherent in its making. We can look to the precedent set by Indian and African craftsmen for methods of production rooted in Global Southern epistemologies. Dependence on traditionally made kilns or firing techniques made finishing this work impossible in my Canadian context. Therefore, the piece likewise embodies the reason for its unfulfilled nature. Laws limiting the freedoms of domestic space or land-based praxis restrict cultural production that is not based in Western canonical practice. To work in a nonabyssal manner is to work illegally or in violation of empire, as exemplified by Indigenous basket weavers in British Columbia, who practiced their traditional craft outside of the law.



Fig. 3: Yaazhin Pillay, *Vedic Resistance*, 2020. Unfired clay, lacquer and wood, 12 x 12 x 7 in.

The value of the image is inherent, and the lessons are embedded in age-old symbology. This makes the construction and rendering of the imagery of little importance and purely a reflection of my own technical capability. My role, then, is not to innovate upon these symbols but to honour, celebrate and present them. This places the piece and the artist within the context of a community, a history, and a knowledge base with its own value system and traditions, within the epistemologies of the South¹⁸. The work, therefore, requires no monetary evaluation, no colonial institution to aid in its existence, no Capitalist market to appreciate in to have value. The piece's value lies in the lived experience and collective knowledge of those who precede me, rendering the vessel of no significance. It is the act of making it, however, that passes on this knowledge, strengthening communities and allowing for the exchange of culture and resistant methodology.

This facilitates a community's access to embody culture and fosters a society that is capable of self-preservation and advocacy. Freire examines this relationship through his termed "dialogical theory of action," born from the oppressed desire to cooperate and strengthen itself against the dominating "antidialogical" methods of the oppressor. Instead of individuals whose goal is to dominate a dialogical space via their interaction, the oppressed are exemplified by those who congregate "to *name* the world in order to transform it," even by simply "posing... their very oppression as a problem" (Freire 140). Were this sculpture to be completed, it could be utilised in nonabyssal spaces that operate

18 "The epistemologies of the South concern the production and validation of knowledges anchored in the experiences of resistance of all those social groups that have systemically suffered injustice, oppression, and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy" (Santos, 1)

dialogically to bolster cultural and historical education in a manner that is sensitive to the values of its audience. An object that can be utilised to emphasise the importance of communal sites of resistance provides opportunities to recognise that space and the nature of its occupation. This communal engagement or collective discourse is modelled by global Southern creative production whose chief subject is not the 'I' but the 'we.' ¹⁹

Within a society that rejects the formation of community, there is little possibility of creating anything without monetary value. Cultural products become defined by an economy of individualism, industrialisation, cultural fabrication, and resource exploitation. Objects created within this social context become the sum of their material contents and the perceived class status of their creator in that given moment. The lack of community further pushes the creator to turn to the colony's market for materials and resources, a system that was founded upon and requires the continued exploitation of subjugated peoples and countries. After all, how many artists can say that the oils, fabrics, woods, metals, or electronics that make up the foundation of their practice have not passed through the hands of the derelict youth of some forgotten third-world village? Art markets ruled by capital investment define appropriate techniques, materials, and subjects. The western narrative of the artist defines the value of the art's content, and so the performance of class status and economic status becomes the true work of the Fine Artist.

¹⁹ See Santos', *End of the Cognitive Empire*, pg. 3, for elaboration on collective action and resistant praxis being inherent to global Southern epistemologies.

It is at this point that the concept of producing culture within colonial society merges with what we have established as systems of colonial dominance and oppression. “Concepts such as unity, organization and struggle... [become] dangerous to the oppressor,” as “it must divide [the majority] and keep it divided in order to remain in power” (Freire 114).

Suppression, therefore, becomes both the means and the goal of maintaining order and dominance through hegemonic cultural practice. Laws defining residential freedoms are quickly utilised to invade our domestic space, defining what one can and cannot do in the home, selectively limiting gatherings, and making contact with land impossible. This divides what could be community while simultaneously destroying the culture and knowledge of colonised people (Freire 114). Cultural producers caught within the web of colonial assimilation tactics are at this point rendered without a means to honestly make a living, without an audience, without access to their traditional mediums, without access to the necessary space required to perform their craft, and without voice, as one by one their options and numbers dwindle.

I have come to embrace and advocate for the incompleteness of one’s cultural production as a valid method of working. ‘Art that cannot be made²⁰’ provides valuable contextual insight into the social, political, cultural, and economic realities within which that cultural product and producer reside, often being a better indicator of what defines successful or acceptable than that which prospers. I believe that this act of being unable to make

20 As phrased by my Thesis Review Committee.

mirrors the Global Southern tradition of martyrdom, a symbol of what could not be. To present this sculpture in this unfinished state recognises what it would require to make art outside of a dominant Eurocentric culture while paying homage to craftsmen who continue to work through tradition. The hypothetical completion of this piece relies on important assumptions: The expectation that one's community will see the value in the work, the assumption that those around will assist in its creation, that the making of the final work will be a reflection of the artist's discipline and effort, that the imagery used will be received not consumed, and that the work would be received with dignity and respect regardless of whether or not it is placed in the street, in a gallery, or a temple.²¹

These assumptions are realised by many global Southern cultures and societies today that operate exclusively outside of any notion of empire. They recognise the responsibility of the artist as a guardian and promoter of culture and knowledge while relying on the presence of nationhood. To operate around established colonial institutions via modes of cultural embodiment and production will require the collective refusal to participate in a capitalist art economy and a rejection of individualistic values in one's consideration of production, product, and subject.

²¹ See *Theory and Practice*.

Decolonisation through Indigeneity

“It is a rare peasant who, once “promoted” to overseer, does not become more of a tyrant towards his former comrades than the owner himself”

– Paulo Freire

It is for us to recognise that we are moving into a new period of revolution. One that requires a redefining of empire and oppressive methodology. We face faceless enemies and a surveillance state as never before seen in human history. In turn, revolutionary action must be reconsidered within the contemporary landscape that it aims to affect. The victories of the previous anti-imperial revolutionary movements have laid bare the effects of our colonial history, and so we must continue to equip our peoples with the tools necessary to deal with such traumas. I propose as Freire did that this process begins with the decolonisation of the self and the embrace of one’s indigeneity.

I would emphasise three points of this process, the first being the internalisation of one’s indigenous culture and the embodiment of its value system. This would include adherence to spiritual beliefs and uptake of traditional practice. Next, it is important that we establish nonabyssal practices of archiving, storytelling, and recording. It is the exposure to Global Southern histories, recorded and taught via modes appropriate to the context of the society or culture it is based in, that will best teach both the virtues and shortcomings of our actions to date. To see the efforts of our predecessors as something to carry forward is a vital step in promoting a continuation of revolutionary action and instilling pride in the

individual. Lastly, it is imperative that we do not come to replace our oppressors in our bids for emancipation.

Freire explains, “In order for [the] struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both” (Freire 44). This is perhaps the most important of the three points, as it is the internalisation of coloniality that has distorted so many revolutionary movements, as in the case of the ANC. “Many of the oppressed who directly or indirectly participate in revolution intend—conditioned by the myths of the old order—to make it their private revolution. The shadow of their former oppressor is still cast over them,” and so we can observe a trend of personal enrichment and power-grabbing that does not reflect the ideological underpinnings of the movement. This once more leads to the creation of a ruling class, an aristocracy born of and empowered by emancipatory revolution. This has come to be an observable cycle created by the inevitability of oppressive regime. I put to you, must this be the destiny of all revolutions?

I created a poster series based on the tenets of the freedom charter to make visible once more the ideological foundation upon which the South African resistance and subsequent Constitution was based. This was not aimed at highlighting the failings of the movement but rather to ask people to consider the state of our nation today relative to these formalised aspirations.

The Freedom Charter 1955

We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:

- that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the People;
- that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;
- that our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;
- that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;

Therefore we, the People of South Africa, black and white together - equals, countrymen and brothers - adopt this Freedom Charter. And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.

THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN!

Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws;
All people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country;
The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex;
All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities, shall be replaced by democratic organs of self-government.

ALL NATIONAL GROUPS SHALL HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS!

There shall be equal status in the bodies of the state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races;
All people shall have equal right to use their own languages and to develop their own folk culture and customs;
All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride;
The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime;
All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside.

THE PEOPLE SHALL SHARE IN THE COUNTRY'S WEALTH!

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people;
The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and the monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole;
All other industry and trade shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people; All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions.

THE LAND SHALL BE SHARED AMONG THOSE WHO WORK IT!

Restriction of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided amongst those who work it, to banish famine and land hunger;
The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams to save the soil and assist the tillers;
Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land; All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose;
People shall not be robbed of their cattle, and forced labour and farm prisons shall be abolished.

ALL SHALL BE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW!

No one shall be imprisoned, deported or restricted without a fair trial;
No one shall be condemned by the order of any government official;
The courts shall be representative of all the people;
Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance;
The police force and army shall be open to all on an equal basis and shall be the helpers and protectors of the people;
All laws which discriminate on grounds of race, colour or belief shall be repealed.

ALL SHALL ENJOY EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS!

The law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, to organise, to meet together, to publish, to preach, to worship, and to educate their children;
The privacy of the house from police raids shall be protected by law;
All shall be free to travel without restriction from countryside to towns, from province to province, and from South Africa abroad;
Pass laws, permits and all other laws restricting these freedoms shall be abolished.

THERE SHALL BE WORK AND SECURITY!

All who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers;
The state shall recognise the right and duty of all to work, and to draw full unemployment benefits;
Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work;
There shall be a forty-hour working-week, a national minimum wage, paid annual leave, and sick leave for all workers, and maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers; Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights as all others who work;
Child labour, compound labour, the tot system and contract labour shall be abolished.

THE DOORS OF LEARNING AND OF CULTURE SHALL BE OPENED!

The government shall discover, develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life;
All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands;
The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace;
Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children;
Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit;
Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state educational plan;
Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens;
The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished.

THERE SHALL BE HOUSES, SECURITY AND COMFORT!

All people shall have the right to live where they choose, to be decently housed and to bring up their families in comfort and security;
Unused housing space shall be made available to the people;
Rent and prices shall be lowered, food plentiful and no one shall go hungry;
A preventive health scheme shall be run by the state;
Free medical care and hospitalisation shall be provided for all, with special care for mothers and young children;
Slums shall be demolished, and new suburbs built where all have transport, roads, lighting, playing fields, creches and social centres;
The aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state;
Rest, leisure and recreation shall be the right of all;
Fenced locations and ghettos shall be abolished and laws which break up families shall be repealed.

THERE SHALL BE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP!

South Africa shall be a fully independent state, which respects the rights and sovereignty of all nations;
South Africa shall strive to maintain world peace and the settlement of all international disputes by negotiation - not war;
Peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding equal rights, opportunities and status for all;
The people of the protectorates- Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland shall be free to decide for themselves their own future;
The right of the peoples of Africa to independence and self-government shall be recognised and shall be the basis of close co-operation.

Let all who love their people and their country now say, as we say here:

'THESE FREEDOMS WE WILL FIGHT FOR, SIDE BY SIDE, THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES, UNTIL WE HAVE WON OUR LIBERTY.'

**Adopted at the Congress of the People
at Kliptown, Johannesburg, on 25th and 26th June , 1955.**

Fig. 4: Yaazhin Pillay, Reproduction of the Freedom Charter, 2022. Digital print, 17 x 23 in.

It would be appropriate to say that this was a document born of the people as it was created with robust input from many grassroots organisations operating in relation to the ANC (which was itself in exile at the time). This, therefore, makes the Freedom Charter a document which accurately and wholistically reflects the needs of its people. It would not be dramatic, however, to say that our current government no longer meets any of the needs outlined in the charter. Without job security, stable electricity, water, housing, and safety, craft and media-based praxis become instrumental in giving agency and voice to creative producers. The value of this can be seen in the prolific output of media produced during the anti-apartheid era, most of which was produced in hand-built print shops around the country.

I chose to produce these posters as prints because they are indicative of the effectiveness of techniques that reflect communal roots and that are aimed at the wide dissemination of ideas, not limited by market or abyssal sensibilities. It was my intention to make these poster designs available for distribution. A pamphlet containing the elaboration of each point as cited in the Freedom Charter could serve as an accessible means of disseminating this information to a new generation or simply as recognition that these are the values of our people. Having recently taken copies of the completed posters home to South Africa, I was pleased to witness their enthusiastic uptake and the discourse that organically formed around them. Creative products such as these open dialogical space for all people to engage each other and the subject matter in a manner that promotes and prioritises deeper and lasting engagement.



Fig 5

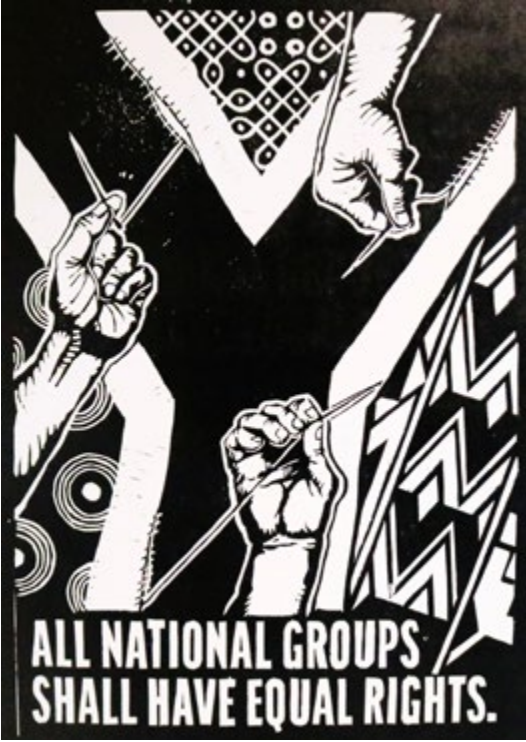


Fig 6



Fig 7

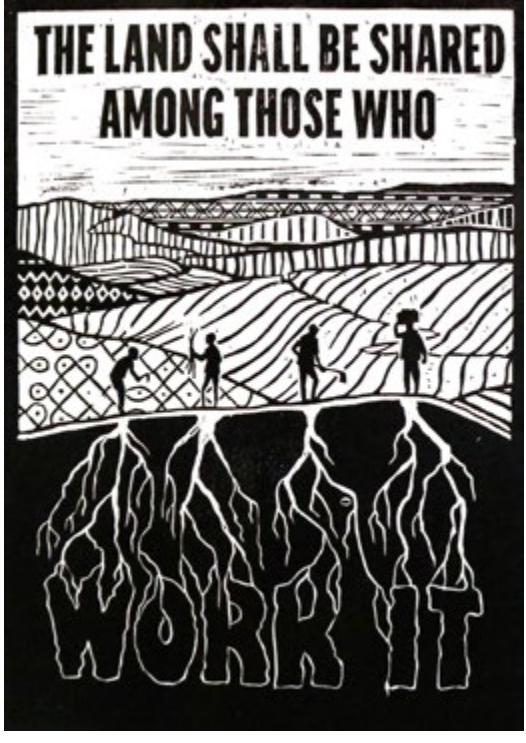


Fig 8



Fig 9



Fig 10



Fig 11



Fig 12

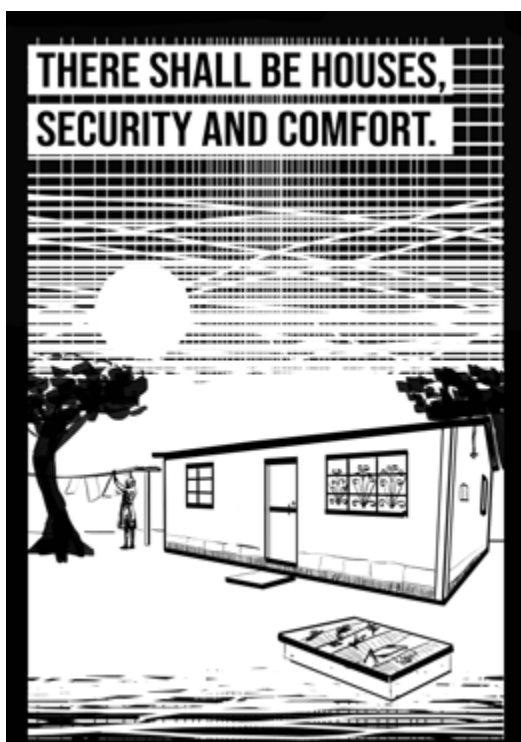


Fig 13



Fig 14

Fig. 5: Yaazhin Pillay, *The People Shall Govern*, 2022. Woodblock relief print on cotton rag paper, 17 x 23 in.

Fig. 6: Yaazhin Pillay, *All National Groups Shall Have Equal Rights*, 2022. Woodblock relief print on cotton rag paper, 17 x 23 in.

Fig. 7: Yaazhin Pillay, *The People Shall Share in The Country's Wealth*, 2022. Woodblock relief print on cotton rag paper, 17 x 23 in.

Fig. 8: Yaazhin Pillay, *The Land Shall Be Shared Among Those Who Work It*, 2022. Woodblock relief print on cotton rag paper, 17 x 23 in.

Fig. 9: Yaazhin Pillay, *All Shall be Equal Before The Law*, 2022. Woodblock relief print on cotton rag paper, 17 x 23 in.

Fig. 10 - 14 are proofs of concept that will be made into woodblock prints at a later date.

Fig. 10: Yaazhin Pillay, *All Shall Enjoy Equal Human Rights*, 2022. Digital Print, 17 x 23 in.

Fig. 11: Yaazhin Pillay, *There Shall be Work and Security*, 2022. Digital Print, 17 x 23 in.

Fig. 12: Yaazhin Pillay, *The Doors of Learning and of Culture Shall be Opened*, 2022. Digital Print, 17 x 23 in.

Fig. 13: Yaazhin Pillay, *There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort*, 2022. Digital Print, 17 x 23 in.

Fig. 14: Yaazhin Pillay, *There Shall be Peace and Friendship*, 2022. Digital Print, 17 x 23 in.

Another aspect of collective memory that I have attempted to bring forward into a communal discussion can be seen in my *Faces of Indenture* series. I aim to demonstrate an alternative approach to embodying this history. As opposed to a medium aimed at collective action and contributing to national identity, this series focuses primarily on honouring my indentured ancestors. This taps into a Global Southern practice of valorising the martyrdom and sacrifice of those who came before. In places of war, for example, the tradition of the martyr poster gives face and familial recognition of what the community has lost. In this case, numbers replace names. In doing so, I recognise that my social and economic status is relative to their proactive collective effort.

The incentive to create these portraits is born of my community's lack of access to our ancestry, whose status as "beasts of burden" was reflected in their callous documentation. The process of finding my ancestors through our assigned colonial numbers²² made my relationship and responsibility to my history clear.



Fig. 15: Yaazhin Pillay, *Faces of Indenture*, 2022. Pastels on paper, 100 x 52 in.

²² Colonial numbers that I was able to access through my grandmother's marriage certificate, printed 1955.

By correlating each portrait to an appropriate colonial number, I want to emphasise the lived reality of these individuals. It is my hope that these portraits will motivate other South African Indians to pursue their ancestry and participate in this collective effort to unravel our history. I see this work operating in relation to a broader discourse occurring in South Africa and more expansively in diasporic communities around the world.

G.P.S. 7844—1952-3—20.200. 4/5/1975. UNION VAN SUID-AFRIKA—UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA. 77497. Saloonette/Revenue 197 (D.L. 95).

KOPIE VAN HUWELIKSREGISTER VAN INDIËR- COPY OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS' MARRIAGE REGISTER.
IMMIGRANTE, Artikel 70, Wet No. 25 van 1891. Section 70, Law No. 25 of 1891.

Nº 16048

Offisiële nommers van kontraherende partye. Official Numbers of Contracting Parties.	Indies koloniale getrouwe, offisiële nommers van ouers. If Colonial- born, Official Numbers of Parents.	Name, Namen.	Gedog- ten. Age.	Ouder- doer. Age.	Verblyfsplek. Abode.	Ras. Race.	Gedooft Religion.	Datum van huweliks- verklaring. Date of Declaration of Marriage.	Datum van registrasie van huwelik. Date of Registration of Marriage.	Handtekening van Registrar. Signature of Registrar.
18004/40005 18006/60006		GOPAL	19.25.		INDIAN	INDIAN	HINDU.	27-11-1908	27-11-1908	(Sd) P.C. J. J. J.
18020/10020 18006/40006		LILLAVATHI NAR	F. 21.		DO.	DO.	DO.	DO.	DO.	(Sd) P.C. J. J. J.

DURBAN.

WARE KOPIE/TRUE COPY.

1-7-1955
DURBAN

Handtekening van Indistrituysman/Signature of Indian Immigrant.

Fig. 16: My paternal grandparents' marriage certificate, 1955. Used by permission of owner.

To recognise the lived reality of this history is to reveal the divisive agenda of those to challenge its importance and validity, strengthening our societies. I, therefore, created these portraits with the intention of showcasing them in sites of communal engagement. The aesthetic rendering of the portraits is secondary to the act of giving face to these

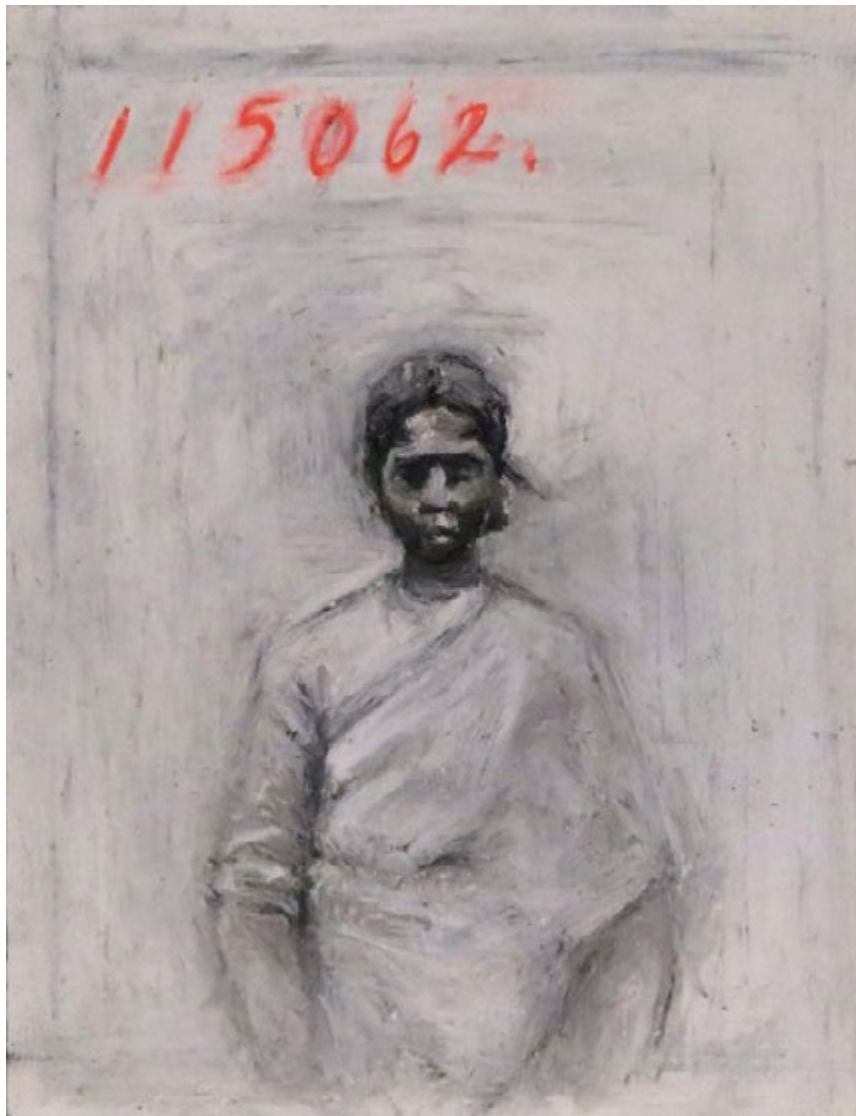


Fig. 17: Yaazhin Pillay, *Faces of Indenture* (one of 30), 2022. Pastels on paper, 10 x 14 in.

individuals. I believe that making this visualisation of that which is not documented available to the public will best communicate these concepts of indigenising oneself, pride in one's national identity, and the embrace of our history. Be it via a formalised exhibition space at a community center, a dedicated wall at the local temple, or a moving exhibit in diasporic communities; the work will function as intended so long as it operates in relation to its people. This being an example of nonabyssal methods of depiction, promotes both in myself and in the viewer a telling of history that is grounded in the indigenous values of my community, once again opting to focus on the collective rather than the individual.

MEDU Art Ensemble and Collective Action

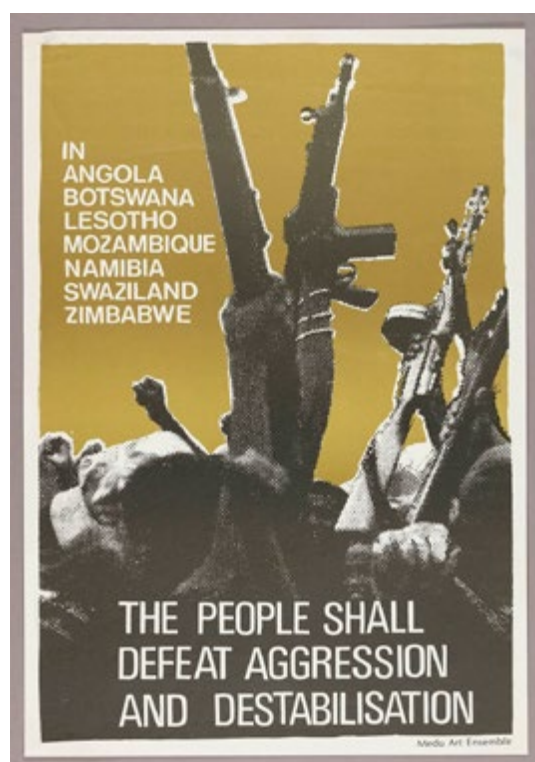
To work in a collective manner is to give voice to community. I look to art collectives such as MEDU Art Ensemble as a model for resistant “cultural workers.”²³ It is the purpose of contemporary cultural producers situated in communities of resistance to enrich communal and national culture and identity. Working via these modes, we can begin the work of reorienting our societies to valorise resistant efforts once more. Let us examine two foundational aspects pertinent to the functionality and longevity of resistant art collectives. Firstly, cultural production rooted within community begins a cycle of cultural growth that feeds back into society in the forms of skills training, economic betterment, and value-oriented education. The second significant aspect of collective cultural production can be observed through the initiation of youth into organised struggle. Having been provided with the tools necessary to combat their state of oppression, informed by the successes and failings of previous iterations of revolution, young voices are crucial in the

In 1977, a group of “cultural workers” from the townships fled into exile in Gaborone, Botswana; including Molefe Pheto, from Mhloti Theatre. Thami Mnyele followed in 1978. In Gaborone they established the cultural organisation Medu Art Ensemble (Medu is a SePedi word meaning roots). Medu ran units specialising in music, theatre, graphics and visual arts, photography; and “research and production” (writing). Over the eight years of its existence, Medu varied from 15 to as many as 50 members. Most were South Africa exiles.

prosperity and longevity of resistant movements. If art collectives are cable of successfully

23 MEDU members referred to themselves only as *cultural* workers to push back against elitist terminology such as art which are born of acceptable Western canonical practice.

ingraining these aspects of resistant action into community, then they will have laid the foundation for broader social change. If we examine MEDU from its inception²⁴, we can observe a grassroots organisation formed as a response to the pervasive exclusion and persecution enacted by the South African apartheid government. While in this state of exclusion and exile, the collective was able to overcome geographic limitations by working along lines of liberatory rhetoric and praxis. It is this vocalising of lived reality that, when made available to the youth of Global Southern communities, ensures that the struggle is made contemporary in its attitudes and approaches to revolutionary action.



“For me as craftsman, the act of creating art should complement the act of creating shelter for my family or liberating the country for my people. This is culture.”

- Thami Mnyele

Fig. 18: J.A. Seidman with Medu Art Ensemble, *The People Shall Defeat Aggression*, 1983. Lithograph, 21 11/16 × 15 in. Used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported.

²⁴ Refer to column on page 39 for a brief history of MEDU Art Ensemble (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/medu-art-ensemble>)

Conclusion

It is my hope that through the concepts and perspectives that we have explored here, I have made clear the limitations present in dominant cultural values locally speaking and, more broadly, in Global Northern epistemologies. The Global North's need and potential to evolve past the traumas it has inflicted through colonisation and subsequent inhumane practices hold significance to all communities and societies. Tangentially, I hope that I have emphasised the resilience of the resistance movements and traditions within the Global South. A post-colonial future, free of bloodshed, environmental disaster, and human suffering, can only be achieved through the consistent, collaborative effort of all peoples. Until that day arrives, let us consider the lived reality of our most vulnerable and the quality of life experienced by our brothers and sisters existing within oppressive regime today. I hope to have made them a focal point in your consideration of the world at large. Our ancestors laid the foundations for growth through resistant praxis and their adherence to indigenous knowledge and culture. Let us carry this tradition forward through our own communal advocacy and collective action. I thank the comrades whose words and teachings I rely on in this text and my lecturers for their guidance. Finally, I hope that I articulated my pride as a South African Indian, as well as my undying love for my community at home and around the world.

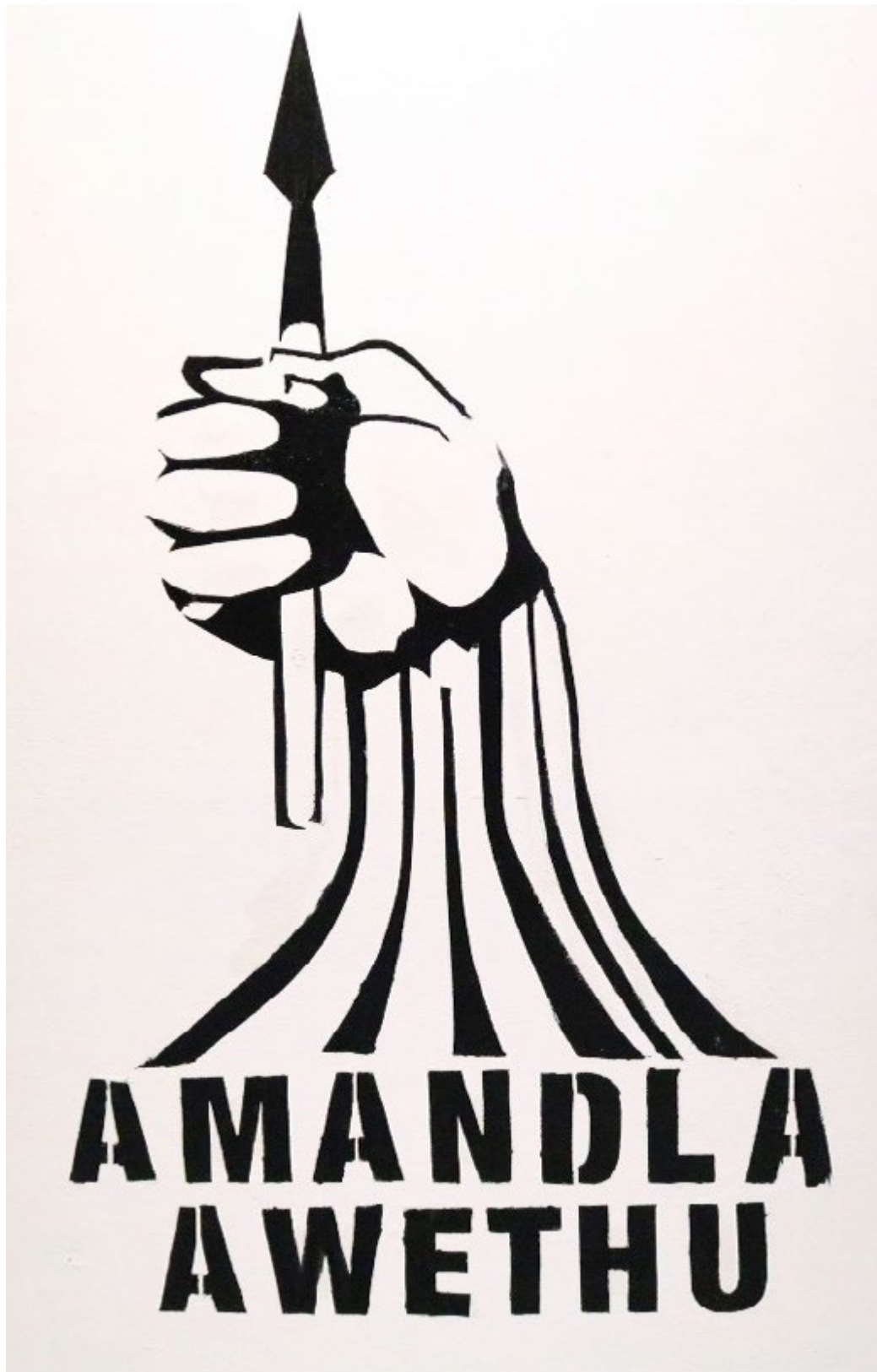


Fig. 19: Yaazhin Pillay, *Amandla Awethu*, 2022. Stencil and spray paint on wall, 18 x 24 in.

Appendix A

Thesis Defense Presentation

Good day friends and comrades. I thank you for sharing your time with me today. I would like to reflect on some of the challenges that this degree has posed. From the beginning, this project seemed a daunting task, as I was forced to consider how my practice belonged to a broader world and a broader context. Though I was proud of what I was accomplishing, the achievement of each step forward was continuously marred by the institutional space within which I was working and within which we find ourselves speaking today.

I am grateful that I was presented with an opportunity to put into words my experiences of being a diasporic Indian and African and to represent my communities in a formalised manner. The hidden labour of my thesis, however, was learning to withstand the endless barrage of racism, neglect, humiliation, exploitation, and dehumanisation directed at my peoples and myself. Labour that continually holds no validity in Western Academia. I believe there comes a point, a page, or an article, wherein, through reading and listening, those who came before become unexpectedly close to you. This is in part due to so much of colonial history having ended not even one hundred years ago, if at all. To learn what my family and ancestors went through and see the continuation of that same violence today is what drove me to finish this work. I created this series of portraits to try and honour their lives and all that they have given me. Each person is represented with their colonial number, numbers

passed on to one's children, numbers that I found on my grandmother's marriage certificate printed in 1955. Each individual and number corresponds to a description recorded in the ship manifests that brought them to South Africa, among which you will see my family.

It is because of this closeness that I often struggle to reconcile the ease with which we, as a community of creatives and thinkers, speak to such dire and violent realities. The research of this project made me acutely aware of academia's ability to co-opt progressive action. I realised that this risk arose not necessarily from ill will but through the economic incentives and founding principles that constitute life in the "First World." It is the distance from the lived reality of violence that has made our industries so callous in our treatment of those we represent or record. So, I had to question, could the work of change truly begin within the walls of Western Academics? The answer I came to was a resounding, maybe... When I read those laws, whose words professed my inhuman status or looked at all that I am missing because of my people's indenture, I was not experiencing that as a scholar but as a human. If all our critical and decolonial theory is to amount to something, I believe that it must find its way to the people with whom it aims to emancipate. It is imperative that we find ways to treat those that we represent as people and communities with histories and agency of their own, not subjects of anthropologic observation.

With this in mind, I look to my home of South Africa as both a beacon of anti-imperial action and as a warning of the challenges that we face as we begin to deal with our colonial pasts. The document that perhaps best exemplifies our struggle for emancipation is the

Freedom Charter, whose tenets can be seen and applied to movements the world over. In this document, we see the hope of a better future for our youth and a burning reminder of where we have strayed from the path. I mention it today to further recognise that the South African apartheid system was based on that of Canada's apartheid system and to point out the hypocrisy of discussing decolonial theory within a surviving crown colony. Observing these connections and systemic overlaps is to observe the commonality of struggle. We are not simply united ideologically but historically and systemically. I produced a poster series based on the Freedom Charter because it serves as an example of a document born of the people that, in 1994, guided us to an equitable and free society. Today, it serves as a reminder of what our parents fought for and what we must strive towards, as well as a reminder of the networks of commonality that we belong to and which bind our continued efforts for equity and equality.

It was my goal to understand how I could utilise academic theory to inform cultural revolution and bridge these worlds. How could I use this new economic and social status gifted to me by my parents and ancestors to focus on cultural production that could potentially be nation-building? How could nation-building as a praxis, informed by indigenous knowledge and practice, create networks of revolutionary thought? I found these to be fascinating and exciting questions, but they all require a first step, and I see my work here as my first step. I hope that this paper serves to better my community and country and that it honours the resilience of my comrades around the world. Thank you for listening, and I invite your questions.

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