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Us in Relation to the Universe—Collaborative North-South Photographic Practice Research

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Abstract

In 1986 Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argued that '[t]he choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves' (Ngũgĩ 1986:4). This article re-applies Ngũgĩ's analysis to contemporary African photographic practice, since images are similarly central to people's self-definition.

Collaborating with the Zambian National Visual Arts Council, the practice-research project *Stories of Kalingalinga* developed a photographic workshop (2019) and exhibition (2020) to counteract Zambia's lack of institutional engagement with photography. Focused on Kalingalinga, a high-density neighbourhood undergoing gentrification in Zambia's capital Lusaka, the workshop provided space to experiment in decolonising creative practice through slow action research. As a photographer, animator and curator from the global north, I present work by Zambian project participants Scotty Jongolo, Danny Chiyesu, Zenzele Chulu, Edith Chiliboy, Natalia Gonzalez Acosta, Margaret Malawo Mumba, Dennis Mubanga Kabwe, David Daut Makala, Muchemwa Sichone and Yande Yombwe. The article discusses the decolonisation of Zambian photography and the workshop's deepening of my own decolonial photographic practice. I highlight the importance of empowering Zambian photographers through encouraging critically informed image-making in contemporary African photographic practice. African visual self-governance requires building supportive communities that embrace alternative and creative ways of knowledge creation.

Keywords: Collaborative practice, African photography, decolonisation, Zambia, Zambian National Visual Arts Council, practice research

Kalingalinga is, like many other compounds, unique. It is seen like a slum, where the poor people live, where everybody who is forgotten and shunned by society lives, but what we forget in

Zambia, is, that from these places is where the stories and the background of the country is emerging. (Scotty Jongolo 2019)

In 1986 Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o made an impassioned plea for a more critical engagement of the African literary community with the politics of culture in African literature, as this engagement, he argued, would lead to the decolonising of the mind.

Language, Ngũgĩ suggested, was 'central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe' (Ngũgĩ 1986:4). What is true of language is also true of photographic images. They also contribute to the definition of people's understanding of themselves and how they are seen by others. I therefore argue that much of Ngũgĩ's writing about literature is still relevant in a photographic context, as his demands for the decolonisation of literature echo in the discussions about current photographic practices and the demand for visual self-governance by photographers on the African continent. By deliberately drawing on writers and photographers from the continent, this article aims to highlight an African perspective on Zambia's historic relationship with photography. It further considers the urgent need to document the unstoppable modernisation and gentrification of cities like Lusaka and how the story of Kalingalinga, a high-density neighbourhood that is about to be transformed, inspired a photographic workshop and exhibition in 2019. The project develops collaborative and creative practice methods with Zambian photographers and explores how artistic practice research can create a community, an *us*, in which we can discuss decolonial methodologies. The paper investigates my positionality as a white documentary photographer, curator, educator and researcher and emphasises my dual role as a learner and amateur during the knowledge sharing sessions of the workshop. The discussion highlights the ongoing need to advance the dialogue about decolonisation of current photographic practice by recognising and valuing local functions and contexts of photography.

Historic background

Soon after its invention in Europe, photography was recognised as a propaganda tool to aid the expansion of the British Empire. In the introduction to *Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent* Brantlinger observed that: 'Africa grew "dark" as Victorian explorers, missionaries and scientists flooded it with light, because the light was refracted through an imperialist ideology that urged the abolition of "savage customs" in the name of civilisation' (1985:166). Scottish missionary, David Livingstone, brought a camera on his second exploration of the interior of the African continent in 1858–1863. This ushered the simultaneous arrival of colonialism, missionary practices and photography in central Africa, the region of the continent that is now the Republic of Zambia. In the decades that followed, the photographic apparatus and the resulting images became signifiers of power and dominance.

By 1902 the first organised use of photographs as a colonial propaganda tool was deployed by the Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee (COVIC). COVIC produced lantern-slide lectures for the British Empire. The official aim of these slides was to 'instruct, first, the children of Britain about their Empire and, second, the children of the Empire about the 'Mother Country'' (Ryan 1997:186). Funded by British and US missionaries and governments, their narrative reinforced the superiority of the colonial state and assigned clear roles to the photographed: governed and governing, primitive and educated, poor and wealthy, black and white. 'By April 1907, over sixty-four lantern-slide sets (some 23,000 individual slides) had been sent around the Empire' (Ryan 1997:188). By targeting children in schools, the colonial narrative became a doctrine that made the dominance of the Empire unquestionable, while the 'African self-images grounded in centuries of civilisation would be condemned by the European scientific and intellectual communities as heathen, unclean, primitive and savage' (Enwezor and Zaya 1996:19).

In 1935 missionary societies, the British colonial administrations of Central and Eastern Africa, the British Film Institute, and the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures developed the Bantu Educational Kinema [Cinema] Experiment (BEKE). It established a systematic, regional approach in producing films for the indigenous spectators and would support the colonial mission to introduce a Christian and colonial value system in the region. Administrators in Northern Rhodesia, which became the Republic of Zambia in 1964, were particularly keen and chose their territory as a test bed for colonial propaganda (Smyth 2001:150). They aimed not only to teach a European understanding of the world but also deliberately to undermine the recognition and understanding of the *self* in African society through these films. Similar programmes ran until Zambia gained its independence.

By 1969, after a brief respite, Zambia was again the target of propaganda. Regional neighbour South Africa had become 'a media giant surrounded by media dwarfs' (Gerdes 1983:n.p). South Africa had historically been the centre of media and propaganda production for the empire and was determined to assert its dominance and apartheid philosophy after some of its neighbours gained independence. To counteract South African influence the Zambian government established the Zambian News Agency (ZANA) in 1969. However, only ZANA photographers and high street portrait photographers in the cities were allowed to use cameras. Vemacular camera use remained restricted during President Kenneth Kaunda's nearly thirty-year leadership. If ordinary Zambians were 'found with a camera' it was 'taken away from you in the name of security', recalls Zambian photographer Danny Chiyesu (2020).

While photography continued to be seen as suspicious and external, African literature had found its intellectual home in universities throughout the continent during the early post-colonial years in the 1960s and 1970s. The new writers were often pan-African activists, who used their words to detangle colonial narratives interwoven in African society by

a century of colonial propaganda and manipulation, which had denied people the right of self-expression. As we have seen, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasised the central role of language in defining a new African self in relation to its immediate, newly independent surroundings. The African continent would use language to break the colonial ties and reinvent itself. I argue, however, that early pan-African writers like Ngũgĩ overlooked visual colonial propaganda in their quest to change the narrative. By denigrating photographers to mere camera operators, the new African intelligentsia left visual communication unchallenged.

Multi-party democracy in Zambia was established in 1991. According to Zambian photographer Chanda Mwenya, by the early 1990s 'freedom of expression was seen to come to the fore especially through mass media, through independent newspapers which carried radical editorial comments, political satires, caricatures and more liberal photography' (Mwenya 2021). However, there was little awareness of visual self-governance amongst the general population. 'Cameras, still or video, were owned by foreigners' (Chiyesu 2020).

Foreign photojournalists turned their focus to the human cost of HIV/AIDS pandemic in the 1990s and 2000s. 'AIDS was and is a highly stigmatised matter' says Mwenya (2021). He recalls that no Zambian photographers covered the pandemic and that 'the images of the AIDS pandemic [were] institutionalized images taken by humanitarian agencies' (Mwenya 2021). These agencies worked with international photojournalists like me, rather than local photographers, compounding the fractured relationship between the Zambian population and the photographic medium, further fostering mistrust in photography.

More recently, countries like Nigeria and South Africa have developed a new visual narrative and embraced photography as part of their art practices, and now South Africa has a rich and diverse history in photography. The medium became a tool of resistance and weapon to fight Apartheid during the 1980s and 1990s. Out of these fertile foundations, a

photographic culture is blossoming today. However, many other African countries, including Zambia, are still discovering their visual history and a more critical dialogue with the medium. Writers and photographic historians like Okwui Enzwo, Darren Newbury and Tamar Garb have worked tirelessly over the last two decades to enrich photographic archives with photographic collections from the continent, which until very recently had often been ignored and forgotten. In their various books and essays they point out the unpredictability of recovering the photographic history of the continent, as photographs '[m]ore often, and not at least in Africa, [...] remain outside of official collections, subject to deterioration and loss' (Morton and Newbury 2015:1).

African photographers are now recognised for their creativity and distinct language as they start to take control of the visual narrative of the continent with 'an insistence that Africa be seen in all its paradox and promise and everyday wonder' (Eshun 2020:7). By interviewing Zambian and African photographers and thinkers, I was able to catch glimpses into the history of Zambian photography and the potential for further research. Young photographers like Sana Ginwalla, who created the *Zambia Belonging* project in which she collects and archives private photographic collections and family albums and artist duo Edith Chiliboy and Patrick Chilaisha, who integrate pre-colonial visual culture in their photographic practice, are now paving the way for a new visual dialogue with Zambia's fraught relationship with photography. Importantly, though, these practitioners have not been nurtured in Zambian academic centres but studied abroad or found informal training arrangements like the *Stories of Kalingalinga* workshop, which this article uses as a case study.

Decolonising photographic collaborations

During colonial rule researchers from British universities followed missionaries and explorers into Central Africa and established research bases. The focus of knowledge production was clearly aimed at

establishing a cultural hegemony, with the roles of researcher and researched clearly defined. In this framework, interdisciplinary Africanist research methodologies were first established at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Northern Rhodesia in 1938. However, a lack of local higher education institutions during the early years of independence meant the same research frameworks continued to dominate knowledge production in the 1960s and 1970s. British outsider researchers affiliated with the then renamed Livingstone Museum contributing 'to the advancement of knowledge in the fields of history, archaeology, ethnography and natural history in Zambia' (Mubitana 1974:n.p.). These researchers continued to use Zambia as a subject of their research, while the museum building was constructed by the museum's African permanent staff. This meant outsiders were still controlling Zambian knowledge production. 'The whole museum staff was for several years fully engaged in a successful completion of this huge and highly demanding task' (Holy 1974:n.p.) while their country's knowledge was in the hands of European and American researchers.

While higher education has established itself within the country since that time, many courses today focus on what is considered vital knowledge production to improve Zambia's health, economy and education sectors. The arts have so far been neglected. Last year the University of Zambia acknowledged the shortcomings in the creative sector when they began the curricular development for art and design courses as part of the Mass Communication department restructure. To counteract these institutional hesitations, research methodologies need to be re-examined to make Zambia's understanding of itself central to decolonised course and research design. The fostering of creativity and imagination should be at the core of establishing new research methods and methodologies to decolonise research and facilitate the telling of Zambia's own (hi)stories in the words and images of its own people. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's research with the Maori in New Zealand observes that

during colonialist oppression the opportunities to freely express Maori creativity were denied:

The capacity of colonized peoples to continue to engage, against all odds, in this imaginative, creative activity was the focus of quite systematic imperial and colonial practices that are encapsulated in the concept of dehumanization. The dehumanizing tendencies within imperial and colonial practices are deeply encoded. These practices serve constantly to deny that colonized people actually have ideas of our own, can create new ideas, and have a rich knowledge base from which to draw. (Smith 2012:170)

Smith's celebration of the endurance of communities to foster their creative activities, which they had recognised as an essential weapon in the fight against colonialism brings into perspective the importance of amplifying the creative voices of collaborators, and carefully evaluating outsider input and actions at each step of the decolonisation project.

Placing photographic collaborations in Zambia therefore within the framework of collaborative arts action research rather than that of ethnographic research or journalism might be, for now, a more successful strategy, as the arts allow photographers to challenge some of the outdated imperialist Africanist research frameworks. 'Decolonisation allows us to open up communication in heartfelt and meaningful ways, to focus on our current political and societal contexts, and engage in critical reflexive practice of and between ourselves' (Fredericks and Adams 2011:8). By introducing a dialogue about the act of photographing and its historical significance in the oppression of the African population of Zambia, *Stories of Kalingalinga* was able to open a discussion on why photography is still not trusted by African societies.

The gentrification of a neighbourhood

Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, is named after the Chief Lusaaka who resided near Manda Hill, close to

where Zambia's current parliament building is located. During the construction of the railway in 1905, Europeans settled nearby, and the settlement started to grow into a town. In the twenty-first century Lusaka is still a fast-growing city with a nearly five percent growth rate. Since this creates enormous pressure on housing stock availability, '[i]n the City of Lusaka over 70 percent of residents live in informal settlements' (Lupale and Hampwaye 2019:53). Kalingalinga, near the centre of Lusaka, is one of many informal high-density neighbourhoods under immense pressure from surrounding wealthier neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood's earlier history is not clear, but by the mid 1970s it had become one of Lusaka's early squatter areas, formed as more and more of the rural population moved into the urban centres in search of work and opportunities.

The pressure of urbanisation and gentrification on Kalingalinga is mounting as most people in the area rent informally without any tenant rights or they own small inherited patches of land. For Kalingalinga, pressure is exerted by the white-collar workers and students from the University of Zambia and the media district of Lusaka and the renters and property developers who exploit the proximity to the Kabulonga neighbourhood with its large houses and leafy gardens. The overspill of people from these more affluent areas encroaches on Kalingalinga's living spaces and the wealthier newcomers bring with them the demand for gentrified commercial and entertainment venues and better housing stock.

While the World Bank supported an upgrade to the neighbourhood in the 1980s, where parts of Kalingalinga now have community water closets and electricity, it is still considered one of Lusaka's poorer neighbourhoods. The extreme inequality in living standards within Lusaka forces low-paid workers to move out of these newly developed commercial activity centres. 'When looking at the cost of living in Zambia, according to Mercers (2010), living in Lusaka costs more than living in Washington, D.C. when comparing purchasing power parity' (Habitat

for Humanity 2021:n.p.). Therefore, many residents move to the less desirable areas away from central Lusaka, often with less access to sanitation and electricity and away from areas designated for imminent development. While there are similarities with gentrification of cities in the Global North, 'the class transformation of the urban space in the cities of the Global South involves systematic, large-scale reconstruction of large chunks of urban fabric—backed by the financial support of transnational investors and the political support of state-led efforts to define indigenous populations as an undeserving poor' (Lees et al. 2008:166). This influx of foreign money is visible at the edges of Kalingalinga along newly built city highways, where Chinese supermarket chains and real estate development are transforming the area. Developers are acquiring land along the main arteries for ribbon development, often supported by local or national planning committees and their interests, which neglect and disrupt the views for local residents as the '[...] planning process and related land investments often take place without meaningful community participation' (Lupale and Hampwaye 2019:68). Much hope to improve living standards is now resting on the new Zambian government, which won the 2021 presidential election with a landslide.

The workshop

Because of this imminent change, and in discussions with lecturer Gerald Mwale from the University of Zambia and painter Geoffrey Phiri from the Zambian National Visual Arts Council (VAC), we identified the Kalingalinga area as a prime neighbourhood to develop a photographic response to Zambia's rapid gentrification. We needed to take particular note of the inherent mistrust of photography in the workshop design, which was discussed at length to ensure that research outputs were beneficial to both Zambian institutions and that all collaborators benefitted from participation.

The *Stories of Kalingalinga* workshop aimed to use the rapidly changing neighbourhood of Kalingalinga as a background for discussions on the

current situation of photographic practice in Zambia. The workshop allowed a space for the participants to experience strategies for mutual creative growth and supported establishing a sustainable community of photographic practitioners. Our collaborative action research methods developed organically throughout the creative practice and allowed for more democratic collaborations and shared artistic making and learning processes to evolve in the project. The participatory approach also provided a framework for my research by actively deconstructing often inequitable academic research environments in the UK and Zambia. The adoption of collaborative working methods among the subjects, the participants, the undergraduate research assistant and myself allowed for a workshop format in which we could create a learning community. 'These collaborative methods are among the most important in visual sociology and anthropology. They often broach subject matter that could be studied in no other way, and when empowerment is the result of research [...] it signals a very big step for social sciences in general' (Harper 2012:155). The collaborative making enhanced our understanding of the area. While most scholarly work focuses on analysing existing historic and contemporary photographic depictions of Africa, this workshop created knowledge through the making of new photographic work. As an artist, amateur and curator I was able to collaborate fully in all aspects of the workshop and was able to position myself side-by-side with the other participants as a maker of new knowledge. By reducing the distance between workshop leader and participants, and by opening my own work up for group critiques, we were able to establish a more democratic environment throughout the workshop.

This democratisation of the workshop environment helped us overcome what Marazzi calls 'the classical oppositions between theory and practice, the empirical and the abstract, and the pragmatic and the ideological' (Marazzi 2017:375). By re-evaluating the area through visual means, through the joint making of artwork, we consistently engaged in

a shared learning process. We responded to our artistic practice and academic research through this organic making process by organising, facilitating, contributing to, and analysing our daily progress. Recognising that photographers' personal experiences were valid starting points for accessing the stories within Kalingalinga was an important recognition for all of us.

In April and May 2019, we brought together established artists Zenzele Chulu and Danny Chiyesu and myself and early-career photographers Edith Chiliboy, Natalia Gonzalez Acosta, Margaret Malawo, David Daut Makala, Dennis Mubanga, Scotty Jongolo, Muchemwa Sichone and Yande Yombwe for a two-week photographic workshop hosted at the Henry Tayali Gallery. These photographers and visual artists were selected as they had expressed an interest in enhancing their contextual, critical and narrative skills and in developing their individual voice in their photographic practice.

Renters of Kalingalinga

My own contribution to the *Stories of Kalingalinga* project was 'Renters of Kalingalinga'. I wanted to photograph a group of women I met while looking for a project. The women were all traders within Kalingalinga and supported each other. Some of the women were related and there was a wide variety of ages represented in the group.

The permission process for 'Renters of Kalingalinga' was a complex negotiation. I had to draw on my experience of negotiating access gained through previous projects as a documentary photographer. I connected with Beatrice Lungu while walking along the main market street, as I wanted to photograph her, and we became friendly. She was active in the local ministry, and as a community leader she offered to introduce me to the other women in her community. We had two meetings, where sixteen women and their children came to the living room of one of the ladies and interviewed me about my intentions. They wanted to clarify the benefits they would get by being part of the project and how the images would be used. I discussed the planned exhibition in the UK and Zambia and how their voice would allow

people who had never visited Kalingalinga to better understand the place and find similarities with their own lives. I assured them that they would be in control of how they were to be depicted. After the initial meeting they asked me to come back two days later for a second meeting, which gave them the time to discuss my proposal amongst themselves, weigh up my answers and to decide who wanted to be part of the project. This was important to create equity between me and the women within the project. In the second meeting they welcomed me back and after several bible readings and prayers they agreed for the project to go ahead. After I received the women's blessing, I was able to conduct brief interviews with them about their current living circumstances in Kalingalinga and their future plans.

Members of the group translated for me as I don't speak Nyanja, the lingua franca in Lusaka, and the resulting information about them is displayed below the images.

The project drew on the relatively new research strategy described as 'public ethnography' by Vannini and Abbott, which is:

[...] characterised by creativity, critique, innovation, participation, and activism on part of the researchers in order to reduce social injustice, promote social awareness and cultural understanding, and ensure that social scientific knowledge reaches audiences beyond academic circles. (Vannini and Abbott 2018:691)

The images allowed women to take control of their own narrative. As a photographer I had to surrender some control over the research process in order to be able to collaborate meaningfully with the women. For example, they did not want to be photographed doing their daily work and instead wanted more formal portraits and time to prepare and look their best and think about how, where and with whom they wanted to be photographed. In addition, I was able to mirror some of the complexities of people's lives through the photographs that I took by including relevant props or backgrounds. For example, in Beatrice Lungu's image she



Beatrice Lungu. Beatrice is 50 years old, widowed and recently engaged. Beatrice is renting a two room house and shares it with her grown-up children and their families. She sells offal, does odd jobs and volunteers in church. She would like to run a catering service for functions. Beatrice hopes to move away from Kalingalinga to escape the high rents.

positioned herself in front of her house with her fiancé and one of the kids living in her rented house.

I visited the women four times to achieve sixteen portraits that make the final series. Each of the images contained visual clues about the sitter's occupation or personal circumstances. On my fourth visit, I brought 5 × 7 inch printouts from a local photo lab for each of the women plus a group photograph of all of them together for each of them. They were happy to see themselves in the photographs but did not comment on the quality of the composition or lighting. For them, it was more important to see themselves as confident and well presented. The collaboration had given them agency throughout the

process. For these women, the prints were one of only a few printed photographs they had of themselves.

As the project developed, I shared the work with the other workshop participants. We discussed my methods of accessing the group of women and how my previous experience as an internationally practicing photo-documentarist had given me a specific toolset that I could use for these negotiations. I had developed working methods that allow people to accept my presence and invite me into their communities. This is often achieved by non-verbal body language and negotiation skills. We also identified that I had privileges that the local participants did not have, as I was seen as an outsider. This outsider role paradoxically identified me as less suspicious. The



Mary Ngandwe. Mary makes a living by selling empty bottles. She gets one Kwacha for two bottles. She would like to have a little business selling live chickens. She is single, has one girl and two boys and lives with her mother. Mary finds rent and electricity payments very expensive. She would like to move away to a plot near Great East Road where rent is cheaper.

Zambian photographers were sometimes accused of working as government agents or spies. As a western photographer, I also did not feel targeted by thieves, as most petty criminals would have received harsher punishment if they targeted a white foreigner. I could therefore walk more freely with expensive camera equipment through the area. While I had always been aware that my role as a western photographer was different from my Zambian colleagues, the workshop conversations allowed me to clearly identify the privileges I experienced.

The participants

The workshop's structure was designed to give maximum flexibility to participants, who were all working photographers and needed to continue their professional work alongside the two-week programme. Every morning we brought participants together for three-hour sessions at the Henry Tayali Gallery. The daily meetings allowed us to discuss key concepts in photography and their resonance within the Zambian context. We discussed the work of a broad range of African photographic

artists and how their practice could inform our visual interpretation of Kalingalinga.

The Kalingalinga inhabitants' first reaction was to mistrust the camera. We therefore also explored concepts in ethics and trust amongst each other and with the people we photographed through Red Pedagogy (Grande 2008) and Slow (Adams, Burke, and Whitmarsh 2014) methodologies. The photographers' daily discussions empowered them to find ways to engage with Kalingalinga and strengthened subaltern voices in the workshop. The participating photographers discussed their unfamiliarity with the area, and how they had only used the main traffic arteries that cut through Kalingalinga. While some of the photographers had grown up in similar high-density neighbourhoods, none of them was familiar with the interior or had family in Kalingalinga. They initially experienced some resistance from the community, whose main concerns were that the photographers would enrich themselves with the photographs and would not share the profits. People were also concerned that the photographs would be used somehow against them or that the photographers might collaborate with state officials.



Esnat Chansa. Esnat Chansa is 48 years old, she has five kids and is a single mum. Esnat wants her market stall business to grow. She lives in a house with her aunt, who owns the house. She says Kalingalinga is changing and everything is expensive for her.

Over the duration of the workshop the photographers were able to make connections within the compound and gained insights on how their projects could unfold. They sought ways to express themselves beyond typical representations of impoverished neighbourhoods and responded creatively to the Kalingalinga residents and the community's lived experiences. For example, Scotty Jongolo, one of the workshop participants, said, '[m]y main focus was to show that people from Kalingalinga are not only as human as everyone else but are happy and are giving back to their community' (Jongolo 2019). In the morning sessions we often returned to the discussion of how to photograph somebody ethically and with consent.

The photographers have given permission to showcase the following examples of their work—

images and accompanying text—in this journal article.

All the *Stories of Kalingalinga* photographers related their contribution to either previous ways of working or developed innovative personal responses by finding connections with the space or the people they photographed. Most participants commented with their work on the entrepreneurial spirit of Kalingalinga. The photographer and painter Danny Chiyesu used his digital overpainting technique to abstract the everyday, while artist Zenzele Chulu developed his 'Schematic Tantrums' through close-up details of a wheelbarrow used for the coal trade, a concept he also uses in his paintings. Scotty Jongolo produces documentaries for NGOs and large organisations, but throughout the workshop he drew on his childhood memories growing up in a



Rhoda Kunda. Rhoda is 42 years old and married. Her husband does not have a permanent job. They have three boys and one girl, but not all are living with them as they can't afford to feed them. The family lives in one room. Rhoda went to school until Grade 7. She would like to start a small business selling dried Kapenta fish. Rhoda does not like her life in Kalingalinga, but does not know where else to go.

similar neighbourhood. He also produced a video of a successful businesswoman who narrated her entrepreneurial journey. Edith Chiliboy is a portrait and fine art photographer who portrayed workers through 'hand portraits'. Natalia Gonzalez Acosta, the undergraduate research assistant for the project, documented Sikwazi Road, one of the main traffic arteries cutting through Kalingalinga. Margaret Malawo introduced fashion models in the street scenes as indicators of the changes happening in Kalingalinga, while commercial photographer Dennis Mubanga went on a search for entrepreneurs, who mirrored his own ambition for success. Fine artist and sculpture David Daut Makala critiqued through his work the lack of public art by building an

impromptu sculpture in front of the coal merchants' place of business. Muchemwa Sichone enhanced the colours of his images to highlight the encroaching modernity, while Yande Yombwe, an early career photographer, photographed the adverts of local businesses.

The emergence of these visual narratives led to daily discussions in which the group explored the role of photographers in shaping communal and individual identities to challenge static and outdated visual representations of Kalingalinga as a place of destitution. Muchemwa Sichone suggested that he 'learnt the way photography is not only about great images, but rather the way it influences the way people look at the world' (Sichone 2019).



Mevis Chimbo. Mevis is 55 years old, is married and has eight children and six grandchildren. Mevis used to sell charcole and mielie meal. Her husband does not have a job and her children do odd jobs. Mevis has lived in Kalingalinga for 37 years, many of her friends have moved away and she wants to move as well.

The discussions and creative implementation of the resulting ideas therefore empowered the photographers to question and counter stereotypical representations of their country by recognising the power of their own voice.

Throughout our collaboration we established open communication between workshop participants, ensuring that each participant could express their views freely and that everybody was listened to. This built trust between all the workshop participants to contribute to discussions and critiques of one another's work. Through these debates, the participants felt encouraged and recognised the important role indigenous photography can play in developing broader and more diverse visual narratives.

Throughout the workshop we also published daily posts including work in progress photographs

and think pieces from all participants and guest speakers on the *ZPhotoNet* blog. Within two weeks the blog reached 1100 visits. 642 visits were from Zambia, indicating that there is significant interest in the photographic work produced and that there is a broad interest in developing a platform which shows less stereotypical and more diverse visual narratives of Zambia. The blog demystifies the research progress and makes work in progress available without the constraints of academic publishing.

Over the two weeks we captured the zeitgeist of transformation. As a group, we had critical debates around our work, and created an important artistic and historic document, *Stories of Kalingalinga*. Zenzele Chulu, who not only contributed visually to the workshop through his project, but also wrote an essay for the



I always felt that people from this particular part of the capital, where I live, have been miscategorised and labelled poor and futureless by other parts of Zambian society. My main focus was to show that people from Kalingalinga are not only as human as everyone else but are happy and are giving back to their community. To be able to capture the children playing and having lots of fun was fulfilling and reminded me of my own childhood. (Image and text by Scotty Jongolo)

publication, expressed it this way, '[a]t this breath-taking pace, Kalingalinga will become history in a few years to come, and the memory will linger on in the photographic narrative taken in this workshop' (Chulu 2019). Together with VAC we recognised the potential to develop this project further and are planning to record the visual transformation through future workshops. The outcome of this workshop and others will serve as a long-term visual critique of the gentrification of Kalingalinga. By developing these alternative images, we will question post-colonial and neo-colonial representations of Zambia and engage in a deep and prolonged dialogue about Zambia's photographic historic and current practices.

As most of the Zambian photographers participating in the workshop are self-taught visual

artists and photographers, their practices are often intuitive. Therefore, critical writing and contextual analysis of their work within a Zambian context are still in its infancy, but the dialogue during the workshop could inform future contextual writings about Zambian photography. *Stories of Kalingalinga* also fits within a wider context of the burgeoning African photographic movement. As Ghanaian academic Prosper Tsikata suggests, a discussion about visual self-governance is occurring not only in Zambia but also in many African countries that had historical restrictions on self-expression through photography. In Tsikata's words,

African countries are framing and representing their own stories and experiences, challenging the 'one-size-fits-all'



The first thing which hit me when I visited Kalingalinga was the 'life must go on' attitude among the residents. Despite the place being a poor area many went on with their lives hoping for the best in the near future. Kids, in general, were a marvel to watch as they freely danced, played football, netball or other games. Another subject I chose was the saloons, traders and craftspeople along the main road and streets. The colourful plastic buckets were turned into 'geysers' or heating elements. Others were converted into washing basins. High-quality metal gates, doors, window frames and wood furniture, all were made and sold. Innovation was all over the place. Kalingalinga is full of entrepreneurs. People are hard at work. There is no 'work without play' in Kalingalinga. After helping their parents with daily chores, sweeping and washing plates and pots, the girls set out to play netball in the sports field. (Image and text by Danny Chiyesu)

assumptions by participating in the creation of media themes by themselves, about themselves and for themselves, with the possibility of influencing how others frame and represent them. (Tsikata 2014:40)

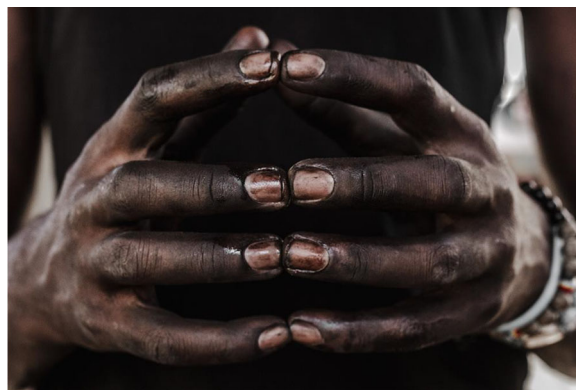
Exhibitions and dissemination

The exhibition in the Ruskin Gallery at Anglia Ruskin University, was the first ever group exhibition of Zambian photographers in the UK and shows the

potential for a more dynamic dialogue between Zambian photographers and international photographic institutions. As support for photography in the Zambian art sector is still weak, Zambian photographers rely on international institutional connections and external funding to showcase their work. The Zambian government's funding for the visual arts is still not matching their long-term economic plan to grow the creative economy, and photography competes with the broader visual arts for the limited monies available.



Schematic Tantrums. At this breath-taking pace, Kalingalinga will become history in the few years to come, and the memory will linger on in the photographic narrative created in this workshop. It is history in the making through images. My focus was drawn to the wheelbarrow found at the Charcoal market, near the main school ground. There are two wheelbarrows for the market, belonging to the collective of charcoal sellers used strictly for delivering charcoal around Kalingalinga. The wheelbarrows are mostly used early in the morning to do deliveries, but beyond deliveries, my interest was to get close-ups of wheelbarrows; to magnify details of its engineering and mechanism. This revealed another dimension and allowed new interpretations, which relates to my painting practice of 'schematic tantrums'. The close-ups are a by-product of a new body of work expressing the same lines and dots found in my paintings, creating abstract expressions out of the realistic images. (Image and text by Zenzele Chulu)



Kalingalinga is a place in which people craft their hopes and dreams through manual labour. For me, the hands became a symbol of this hard-working community and an homage to the individuals and their hard work. (Image and text by Edith Chilliboy)



Sikwazi Road. Kalingalinga's market runs along Sikwazi Road. The vibrant atmosphere of the street, where commerce and life coexist at the edge of the tarmac, invited me in. People negotiated their photographs, day by day, more sitters came forward and for a brief moment, I was part of it. The roughness of the road balanced the gentleness but also the determination of the people working and living in Sikwazi Road. I was invited behind the scenes, made friends and will come back. (Image and text by Natalia Gonzalez Acosta)



Fashion. Kalingalinga is considered to be among the poorest neighbourhoods of Lusaka. However even in the poorer areas, where fashion is a luxury, beauty always stands out. The radiant beauty of self-confidence shines through and cannot be ignored. (Image and text by Margaret Malawo Mumba)

The *Stories of Kalingalinga* exhibition was therefore a unique opportunity for the participating photographers. Their photographs were shown in the Ruskin Gallery at Anglia Ruskin University in January 2020 and at the Centre for African Studies Library at Cambridge University in the UK in February 2020 and during Festival Fotografischer Bilder in Regensburg, Germany in October 2021. The two UK exhibitions were accompanied by a framework programme of networking activities, all designed to bring international researchers, artists, participants and audiences together. However, funding restrictions did not allow us to bring any of the Zambian photographers to the UK. We, therefore, connected the photographers to various events via Skype, which gave them the chance to see their work in the gallery during the opening night and

speak to some of the guests. Several of the exchanges were emotional celebrations of the work, and others were long exchanges that went well beyond the images themselves.

The exhibition in the Ruskin Gallery contained 75 photographic and moving image works by eleven photographers and eleven separate videos of varying length (6–15 min) with interviews of contributing photographers rotating on nine screens. In preparation for the exhibition, I had created a 'shoebox' maquette as a curatorial tool to develop the layout of the walls within the gallery space and planned the flow of the audience. The video screens in the Ruskin Gallery were fixed to the outer walls surrounding the exhibition. The freestanding walls in the middle of the gallery were arranged so that at least one photographer's video was visible from



The Entrepreneurs. The *Stories of Kalingalinga* project was a time of introspection for me. My project was inspired by people who 'hustle' to make their lives better despite being at a disadvantage in society, and in a place where the cost of living and doing business is high. They are still able to manage and survive amidst the many hardships the community is facing. I admired the power within the people to overcome; to be able to pull up a genuine smile and have hope for a brighter future. This project has taught me that there's hope for humanity generally, and that it takes one person to bring change in a community and that person can be me. (Image and text by Dennis Mubanga Kabwe)



Angel of the Morning. (Image by David Daut Makala)

every point within the gallery, as to make the photographers omni-present in the space. The exhibition's layout was planned to emulate the labyrinthine architecture of the Kalingalinga neighbourhood through angled walls, none of them parallel and all different shapes and sizes to fit the varied work of the individual artists.

I had produced video interviews with each photographer throughout the workshop in Zambia, which allowed them to introduce themselves, their intentions, their professional background, their ambitions and how they addressed the *Stories of Kalingalinga* project. The videos were intended to lift the veil of anonymity during the exhibition, especially as the photographers had no funding to travel to the UK for the opening, and to transfer some agency to the photographers within the planned exhibitions. For many UK exhibition visitors, it was the first time to hear from African photographers as authors in a non-hierarchical setting; that is, as image producers who were not 'othered' and were

speaking with the same authority as did undergraduate research assistant Natalia Gonzalez Acosta and I, who had travelled from the UK to join them.

A smaller exhibition was staged at the Centre for African Studies at Cambridge University in February 2020, shortly before lockdown restrictions closed the building. It contained 27 photographic works by 11 photographers and one 90 min video with eleven interviews of contributing photographers presented on one screen. Jenni Skinner, the manager of the Centre for African Studies Library and representative on the Cambridge University Libraries Decolonisation Working Group, has been collaborating with me to bring the exhibition to the centre. She observed that my previous *Generation Z* exhibition showcasing my work on modernity in Zambia had initiated a wide-ranging debate on the representation of Africa through photography amongst MPhil and PhD students and staff visiting the centre, and it served as a blueprint for other subject libraries to decolonise their study



In this project, I am attempting to tell a story about the people of Kalingalinga and their lifestyle. I have encountered locals in the compound who shared their sensitive and touching stories with me. Photography can create a visual story about a certain type of life. Photography can affect society in small and large scales. At first, I had different reasons for wanting to be part of this project but days after attending the workshop and being in the meetings and conversations, I realised my reasons for wanting to be a part of it had changed, I then wanted to learn, to help and to gather detailed information and history about Kalingalinga. My perspectives on how I look at photography changed. But more importantly, I learnt the way photography is not only about great images, but rather the way it influences the way people look at the world. (Image and text by Muchemwa Sichone)

environments. The *Stories of Kalingalinga* created a similar debate in the time before and after the lockdown.

Feedback from visitors established the impact of the exhibitions in the Ruskin Gallery and the Centre for African Studies. 'I particularly was struck by the way the images—although they were beautiful and striking—they didn't exoticise or romanticise' read one of the feedback cards. 'It has given me an appreciation for the people living there and the photographers who engaged with them' read another. While another simply

responded 'Yes definitely' to the question if the exhibition had made them think differently about photography in Zambia.

The question about what the audience had learned about Kalingalinga generated a broad spectrum of responses: From an empathetic 'we share the same basic values and virtues' to observations that focused on the narrative of gentrification 'Nomadic, overcrowded, pushed and pulled by modernity' could also describe the transient state of gentrified Manchester, New York or Beijing. The exhibition questionnaire feedback highlights that the



The Adverts. I took pictures of the various adverts of shops and businesses, random wall writings and print-outs of services being offered in Kalingalinga. The texts represent the advertisers' personalities, hopes of what they wish to achieve and also how creative they can be. Through my interaction in Kalingalinga, I have learnt that there is always more than what meets the eye anywhere you go. We can learn a lot through interaction as we people have different needs, lifestyles and experiences. There are so many untold stories and photography is one way I can share them. (Image and text by Yande Yombwe)

UK audience reappraised their understanding of Zambian urban gentrification and connected with both the depicted inhabitants of Kalingalinga and the photographers that narrated the stories. One visitor wrote: 'Before this exhibition I held stereotypical views on Zambia and the photographic practice there, this is impactful!' Overall, the exhibitions had very positive feedback and were visited by many visitors, including school and student groups, artists and academics.

To create a permanent record of the exhibition and make it accessible beyond the gallery, I created a catalogue containing sample images from all the participating photographers, artist statements, essays, and links to their interviews. The tabloid newspaper stock reflected the transient nature

of Kalingalinga and allowed us to print 1500 copies to be given out during the exhibitions in the UK and future exhibitions in Zambia.

On 31st January 2020 I organised a one-day symposium at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, in collaboration with the Centre for African Studies at Cambridge University, under the title *Telling our tales through ambiguous photography: Decolonizing the visual library of the African continent*. The symposium created a platform for practitioners, practice researchers and theorists who are working towards renewed and diverse visual understandings of the African continent. The speakers highlighted the importance of collective making and collaboration with partners from the north and south.



Exhibition maquette



Exhibition opening at the Ruskin Gallery 16/01/2020



Cambridge · Lusaka · Livingstone

Stories of Kalingalinga Catalogue. Texts by Dr. Aletta Norval, Chanda Mwenya, Zenzele Chulu and Kerstin Hacker. With QR codes linking to YouTube videos. 20-page document—Edition of 1500, printed on 55gsm improved newsprint with full colour throughout. ISBN: 978-1-912319-01-5. Published by Ruskin Arts Publications, Anglia Ruskin University, www.ruskin-arts.co.uk. Concept and editorial by Kerstin Hacker. Catalogue design by Anne-Marie Miller, www.carbonorange.com. Printed by Shaman & Co, Peterborough, shamanandco.co.uk.

Throughout the day we returned to the question of what it means to 'decolonise the visual library'. Andrea Stultiens, one of the speakers, summed it up as 'a redistribution of power, which was further translated into the slightly more tangible gestures of re-interpreting, deconstructing, reconstructing gazes, voices, traditions and conventions through scholarship and (artistic) intervention' (Stultiens 2020:n.p.). Msingi Sasis, a photojournalist and creative, who joined the debate from Kenya, emphasised that the concept of decolonisation cannot be given or developed by institutions and passively accepted by African photographers. He suggested instead that African photographers need to demand recognition, take their place in the global creative industry and 'actively challenge existing institutional power structures in the pursuit of decolonisation' (M. Sasis 2020). The symposium re-emphasised that the main task to achieve decolonisation of the visual library is to actively occupy the creative space and make artworks which counter the existing

oppressive narratives and support a new and empowered photographic practice.

Conclusion

The *Stories of Kalingalinga* workshop and exhibition was a purposeful collaborative learning space that challenged all participants, including myself, to rethink their practice. By developing this space for discussion and creative practice, new forms of photographic expression developed. All photographers recognised the deep and continuous dialogue needed to explore localised social and photographic history and produce critically informed and current practice, while I was given the unique opportunity to discuss and examine my working practices with the help of the workshop participants. As a photographer, amateur and curator from the global north, I felt the impact the workshop had on my understanding of my own decolonial photographic practice strongly, but the workshop also highlighted

my privileged position as a European educator and photographer. It brought into stark relief the lack of artistic centres to nurture critical debate about photography in Zambia and the need for workshops like *Stories of Kalingalinga* to facilitate that mutual learning. As the popularity of African photography is now growing exponentially, we need to be aware that these artists often come from just a handful of countries and are extracted into an international art market, which does not feed grassroots cultural production on the continent.

The *Stories of Kalingalinga* programme aimed to be inclusive and work with artists, practice researchers and academic researchers at all levels of their career to significantly build creative research capacity in Zambia and embrace the diversity of creative responses. On the influential blog *Africa is a Country* Jesutofunmi Odugbemi, Orapeleng Rammala and Wangūi wa Kamonji argue in their post 'There is no Africa in African studies' that too often only knowledge found in academic journals and books is accepted as valid, while alternative practices of critical engagement with knowledge-making and creating are ignored. They argue that '[a] diversity of voices means to include voices of those who—out of circumstances or choice—may not have the privilege of theorising and knowing through academic publishing' (J. Odugbemi et al., 2019:n.p.). The results of the *Stories of Kalingalinga* workshop confirm what is possible when support is given to activities that encourage local knowledge creation. The images will be added to an emerging contemporary visual library of Zambia and will celebrate Kalingalinga, which currently sits right at the fault line—where its history and its future are simultaneously visible.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Note

Kerstin Hacker is a Senior Lecturer at Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University and leads the BA

(Hons) Photography course. Hacker is an award-winning documentary photographer, and her work is exhibited internationally. In her research she is concerned with the decolonisation of photography and her long-term research interests explore collaborative practices that embrace alternative and creative ways of knowledge creation. Her current practice research interrogates influences of historic photography on everyday practices of the medium in Zambia. Hacker holds research fellowships with the Affect and Colonialism Web Lab in 2021/22 at the Freie Universität Berlin and the Honorary Fellowship of Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity since 2018.

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