

rosalind c. morris

The Zama Zama Project

Installation prospectus

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by Rosalind C. Morris

The Zama Zama Project is a flexible multi-media installation program grounded in long-term research and audiovisual exploration about the works and lives of informal migrant miners in South Africa's abandoned gold mines. A partner project of the feature documentary, *We are Zama Zama*, it includes the following elements, which may be variously combined, and with more or less elements, according to the site space and projection capacities of the venue:

OPTIONAL ELEMENTS

- **BELOW GROUND ABOVE** is comprised of a two-part (2K) video sequence, conceived as an immersive installation designed for three-channel projection on three wall-size or large adjoining screens (6:9 ratio; the installation is also amenable to large-format single screen projection in a closed environment). Part One of the sequence is underground; Part Two is above ground. Run time: approximately 15 mins. Projection requirements for digital installation: 2K capacity, with mac mini as playback device for each set of three digital projectors along with a Matrox Triplehead2go to sync the signal. (Projectors should have bulbs of comparable age, to ensure continuity of color and luminosity). Quadrophonic surround sound.
- **STOP-LIMIT: THE BORDER**, 2K video with two possible formats. The first is a single video mounted on a motorized track-mounted projector, running the length of a single room (preferably longer than wide). The second is a split-screen projection for fixed projector, ideally to be shown on a large screen in an enclosed space. (Approximately 10 mins).
- **THRESHOLDS OF THE VISIBLE WORLD** is a series of 5 looping videos, featuring narratives (in isiZulu/isiNdebele, Sesotho, and Chitonga, with subtitles in English) by inhabitants of the ruined minescape, including "No Accident," "The Threshold of the Visible World," "Women Undocumented," "Dreaming Democracy" and "A Film is Being Made." These are intended to be played on flat screen Super HD or 2K monitors (32" – 50") with headphones and accompanying seating. (Run time varies, from 5 – 12 mins).
- **SPECTERS/TORSION** is a series of 24 ink-jet prints (framed or unframed), including modified stills from film shot underground and digitally manipulated images derived from turn of the (nineteenth) century stereographs.

BACKGROUND

For more than a century, the gold mines of South Africa were the sparkling center of a nation: for some a dream destination, for others a nightmare of accident and lost life underground. Today, what were once the deepest mines in the world are beginning to close. In their decaying spaces, itinerant migrants now scavenge for gold, risking their lives for a rock they call imali (money).

These informal miners are called “zama zama.” The word “zama” means to try in isiZulu. Zama zama means “to keep on trying,” but also “to gamble.” Zama Zamas are informal miners who stay for days and weeks at a time in the darkened caverns where electric trains and massive engines once pumped air in and water out. Without helmets or safety equipment, with neither oxygen nor dewatering, lighting the way with only bicycle headlamps, zama zamas are indeed gamblers, those who stake everything for survival.

Most of these migrants are from the neighboring countries: Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho and Malawi. They follow the same routes as did formal miners during the era when the Chamber of Mines and its labor recruiting organizations sought African workers for the most arduous labor underground. Today, however, they are mainly undocumented migrants, who cross the borders without permits and whose illegalized status excludes them from obtaining access to education, health care, security and the rights that citizens can expect. The objects of fear and xenophobic violence, they are doubly displaced, at once hyper-visible and invisible. The extremity of the poverty that they have left behind exceeds even that of the territories in which they now seek left-over gold.

At once an experimental document of southern Africa, and a testimony to the plight of undocumented migrants whose poverty and destitution compels them to leave their homes—in grief and hope—*The Zama Zama Project* offers audiences the opportunity to grasp the costs of history at the point when heritage gives way to ruin. It is also an act of witnessing to the creative resilience of those whose stories have not solicited the sympathetic attention of the international communities that have, for so long, benefited from extractive economies and the legacies of the mineral industries in Africa. These are not the migrants whose images adorn the front-pages of newspapers, or whose pressure on the coastlines and borders of Europe has generated so much discourse about the ‘Crisis of Europe.’ Nor are they the caravaneers of the US southern border. The men and women of *The Zama Zama Project* are the forgotten, the ghosts in the machine of modern, speculative capital which, despite the lure of virtual, digital or immaterial labor, continues to rely upon natural resource extraction.



BELOW GROUND ABOVE, 3 screen installation

BELOW GROUND ABOVE: TWO-PART PROJECTION. UHD or 2K Video

Part One. The Hole

An immersive POV-experience of the underground world, 'The Hole,' take viewers on a journey down the shafts of the abandoned mines, which the miners have filmed using body-mounted cameras. We slide down the cement tunnels, with broken cables as guides and only the slender beams of bicycle hand-lamps to light the way. Falling rocks, rotting support beams, the drip and trickle of underground rivers, and nearly bottomless pits that the miners traverse on slender planks, this milieu is one of darkness: an echo chamber of threat and the promise of gold. We join the miners in their arduous labor and their rituals of obeisance to the ancestors, share their hunger (described as the 'mouths' dreaming'), their exhaustion and their release in musical interludes, as they spend the days below ground in hope and fear.



Stills from **BELOW GROUND ABOVE**, Part One

Part Two. The Elements

Rock is ground by hand, with other stones as hammers, by women who wait for the men as they return in the dawn hours. These scenes of heat and dust, of bleached light and insuperable effort, give audiences a sense of the relentlessness of the task that is involved in extracting gold from rock. In this segment, of bodies composed and decomposed into minute gestures, audiences observe a process whose elements are those of earth, water and fire: of grinding and sweeping, sluicing and smelting.



Stills from **BELOW GROUND ABOVE**, Part Two

Total run time: 18 minutes.

STOP-LIMIT: THE BORDER. UHD or 2K Video

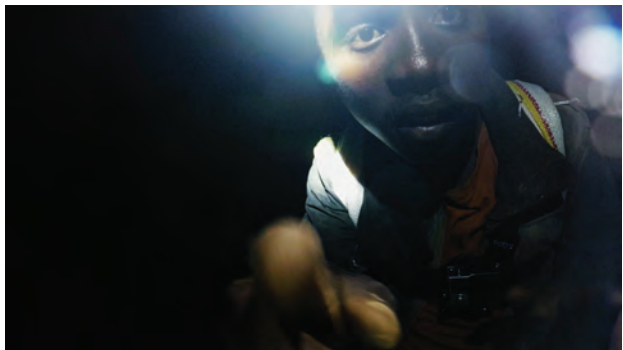
Most informal miners are undocumented migrants who must cross the border either by “jumping” the official entry points, or by walking across the great Limpopo River, and then through the desert bush. They are preyed upon by both human smugglers and police. This video follows an extended walk along the Zimbabwe/South African border, with a young zama zama who has made the illegal crossing several times. The moving projection on motorized tracks asks the viewer to walk with him. Approx. 10 minutes.



Stills from **Stop-Limit: The Border**

SPECTERS/TORSION: INKJET PRINTS

From the body-camera footage, I have selected and edited frames for the project that I call ‘Specters/Torsion.’ These images capture moments in which the fleeting emergence of a figure, or the retreating remnant of a passing body are registered without necessarily being focused. They are the function of a non-identity between head-lamp and what Nadar would have called the camera’s line-of-sight. In this sequence of stills, I have attempted to explore this non-identity both because it expresses, without representing, something of a carnal practice in which the tactical understanding of space—as the space of movement—is separated from that which can be represented.



Torsion: Check



Specters: Cyclops

THRESHOLDS OF THE VISIBLE WORLD: Video Loops for Small Screen (2K or HD)



No Accident. Sequence of narratives of accidents underground, violence and the threat of vengeance amid the ruins.



Thresholds of the Visible World. Montage of threshold moments, where desire for escape and transcendence are concentrated: rites of obeisance to the ancestors, walking township church services, gambling, the market of commodity desire.



Women Undocumented. Narratives by and about women who live and make their living in or around the abandoned gold mines.



Dreaming Democracy. Conversation between zama zamas about the prospects for democracy in Zimbabwe after the fall of Mugabe, and for foreigners in an increasingly xenophobic post-apartheid South Africa. Their conclusion: without employment and economic justice, there can be no democracy.



A Film is Being Made. During a 3-day journey underground with cameras as part of the making of *We are Zama Zama*, the miners learn to construct their own film language. As they do so, they long for recognition while also speaking at length about the process of giving themselves to be seen by others, especially white viewers and the anthropologist.

CREATIVE TEAM

Rosalind C. Morris, Producer, Director, Editor

Rosalind Morris is an award-winning anthropologist, cultural critic and media theorist, who has taught at Columbia University, where she is Professor of Anthropology, for 25 years. She has worked for more than two decades to document the transforming life-worlds around the gold mines of the Witwatersrand. She is the author of 7 books and more than 70 essays, and has been recognized with numerous awards, including the Berlin Prize and the inaugural Andrew W. Mellon fellowship of the American Academy in Berlin, the Lenfest Prize, the Lichstein Lectures of the University of Chicago, and residential fellowships at the Institute for Cultural Technology and Media Philosophy in Weimar, the Institutes for Advanced Study in Princeton and Stellenbosh, and the Rockefeller Center at Bellagio. In addition to her scholarly writings, Morris has collaborated extensively with South African artists, including William Kentridge, with whom she has written three books, Clive van den Berg (whose work is the subject of her monograph, *Unlearning the Grounds of Art*), Ebrahim Hajee and Songezile Madikida.

As a filmmaker, Rosalind Morris has directed and produced works in documentary, narrative and expanded cinematic forms. *The Gamblers* premiered in Berlin at the ICI in January 2019. With Yvette Christiansë, she is the co-librettist on two operas with the composer Zaid Jabri.

Ebrahim Hajee, Director of Cinematography

Ebrahim Hajee grew up in Athlone, a poor suburb of Cape Town, South Africa. He started doing graffiti and community empowerment work through art while still a youth, but turned to film shortly thereafter. His first documentary, 'Overspray' (2001) grew out of his work as a street artist, and became an iconic film about the genre in South Africa, winning the gold award for best documentary at the Stone Awards. Since then, Hajee has established himself as one of the most desired and creative cinematographers in the business in South Africa, working for both local and international companies on projects that range from feature narratives to guerilla documentaries, music videos to television commercials. Hajee is also a still photographer, who works in a variety of analog and digital formats.

Pascal Troemel, Editor

Pascal Ploetz Troemel is a New York-based editor. He works mainly in documentary film, but has edited everything from commercials and music videos to award-winning narrative shorts. He has worked with acclaimed director Gianfranco Rosi, as well as a host of other boundary-pushing directors during the span of his 10-year career. Troemel's documentary credits include *Borderline* (2016), directed by Debbie Ratner and *Borderline Notes*, a youtube channel of 350 short films to accompany the feature film; *Volta*, directed by Stella Kyriakopoulos (2014), and selected for the 2015 Sundance Film Festival; and *Drinking from the Well* (2011), directed by Skinner Myers.

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