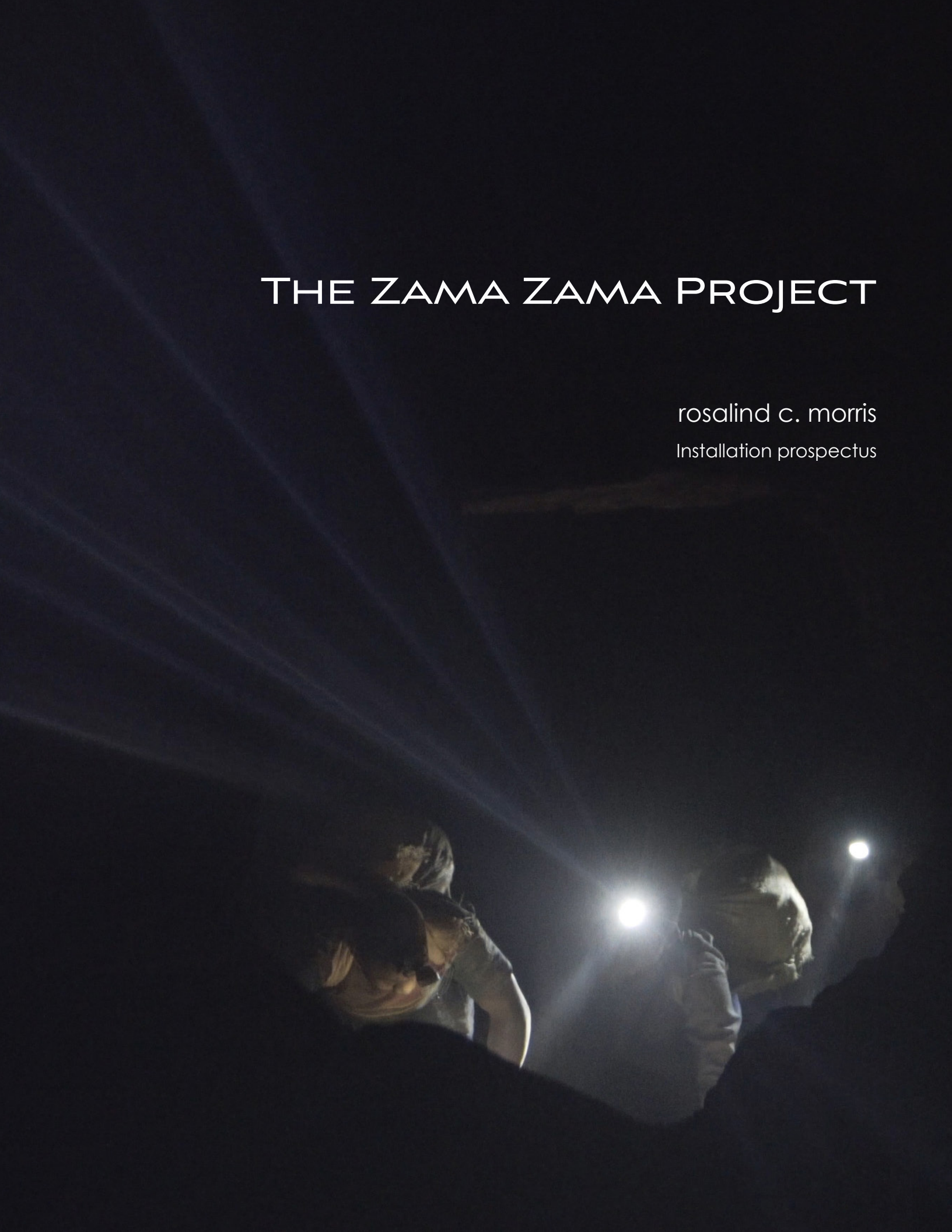


# THE ZAMA ZAMA PROJECT

rosalind c. morris

Installation prospectus



# THE ZAMA ZAMA PROJECT

The Zama Zama Project is a flexible multi-media installation program grounded in long-term research about the works and lives of informal migrant miners in South Africa's abandoned gold mines. It includes videographic works in both UHD (4K) & HD (1080) formats, including for multi screen/channel projection, and on large-format monitors.

## 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. 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.

**Rosalind Morris**, the producer and director of 'The Zama Zama Project,' is an award-winning professor anthropology at Columbia University, as well as a cultural critic, writer and media artists who has conducted research on the social lives of gold mining in South Africa for more than two decades. In 2016, Morris commissioned Ebrahim Hajee as Director of Photography on her documentary feature, 'We are Zama Zama,' which was then shot over more than two years. 'The Zama Zama Project,' grows out of this collaboration, and explores a variety of narrative and non-narrative forms for representing the lives, histories and affective dimensions of the zama zama phenomenon.

**LIST OF AVAILABLE WORKS** (\* indicates selection by Berlinale Forum Expanded)

**Ambient Projections and Multi-channel works**

Below Ground Above  
Stop/Limit

**Short Films and Narrative Fragments**

Thresholds of the Visible World\*  
No Accident\*  
Women Undocumented\*  
An Education\*  
Dreaming Democracy\*  
A Film is Being Made\*

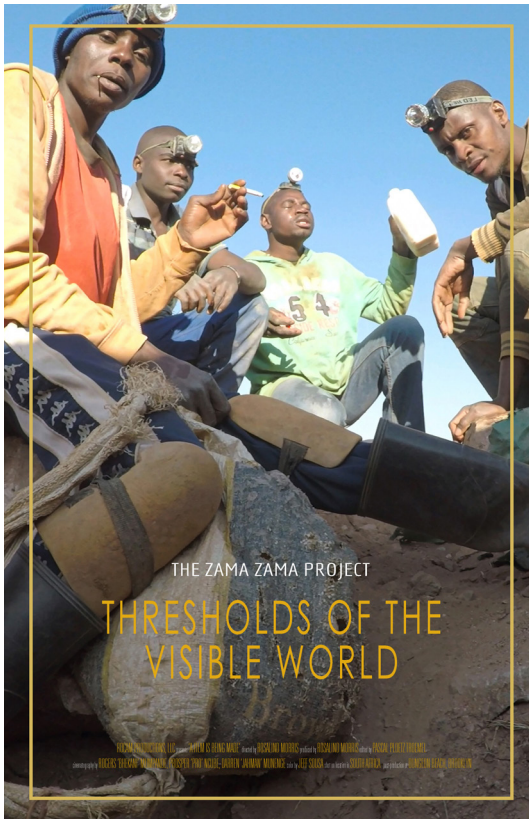
**Still Images: C-prints and Inkjet Prints**

Specters/Torsion (12)  
Still Life with Motion (24)

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Installation View of 'The Gamblers,' at 'Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Berlin January, 2019.  
'The Gamblers' has been recut and remixed, and now goes under the title 'Below Ground Above'. 3



**THRESHOLDS OF THE VISIBLE WORLD**

2020, UHD/UHD or HD

No subtitles. Separate translation available for ritual sequence only (English).

Director and Producer: Rosalind Morris

Cinematography" Ebrahim Hajee

Underground Cameras: Rogers 'Bhekani' Mumpande, Prosper Ncube, Darren 'Jahman' Munenge

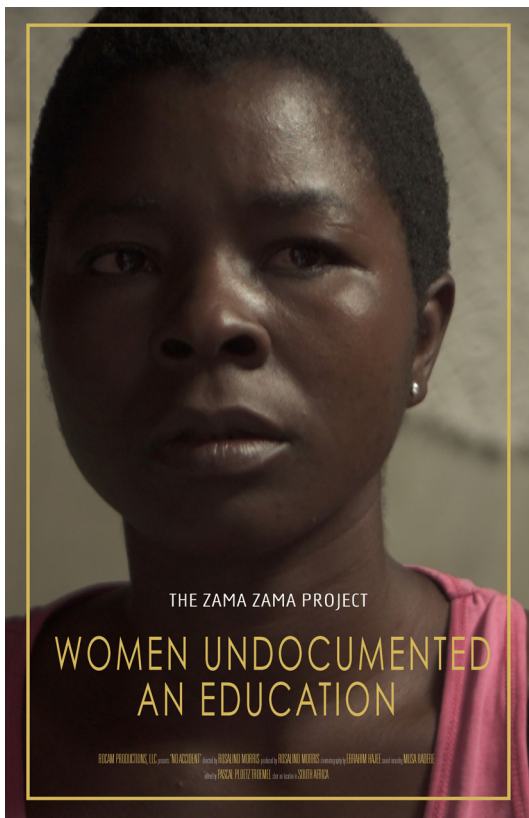
Aboveground Sound Recording: Musa Radebe

Sound Design: Pascal Troemel

Editing: Rosalind Morris and Pascal Troemel

Run time: 8:39

**Zama Zama means to gamble**, but this does not mean that these informal miners abandon themselves to mere chance. They call on the ancestors and pray to God for assistance beneath the earth. Exploring this split and doubled relation between the dream of heaven and the threat of hell, 'Thresholds of the Visible World' is a montage that sutures together two parallel tracks, tracks that are both real material spaces and metaphors for a predicament of radical vulnerability.



**WOMEN UNDOCUMENTED and AN EDUCATION**

2020, 4K/UHD or HD

Chitonga, with English subtitles

Producer/director: Rosalind Morris

Director of Cinematography: Ebrahim Hajee

Editing: Pascal Troemel and Rosalind Morris

Sound recording: Musa Radebe

Run time: approx 6:36 and 11:43 respectively

Translation for titling, Noel Musokotwane

In Women Undocumented, we hear an account of the lives of women who survive in or around the abandoned gold mines--the least known and most vulnerable of all the workers in this precarious universe.

What do informal miners want for their children? In 'An Education,' a zama zama miner and the mother of his child dream aloud about what the future might hold for a child whose dreams they cannot fathom but whose choics they nonetheless avow.



**NO ACCIDENT**

2020, 4HD/4K, 5:46mins  
 SeSotho/isiZulu/ with English subtitles  
 Director and Producer, Rosalind Morris  
 Cinematography, Ebrahim Hajee  
 Sound Recording, Musa Radebe  
 Editing, Pascal Troemel  
 Translations for titling, Mofana Morojele

Death is constant company underground, but accidents are the stuff of story.

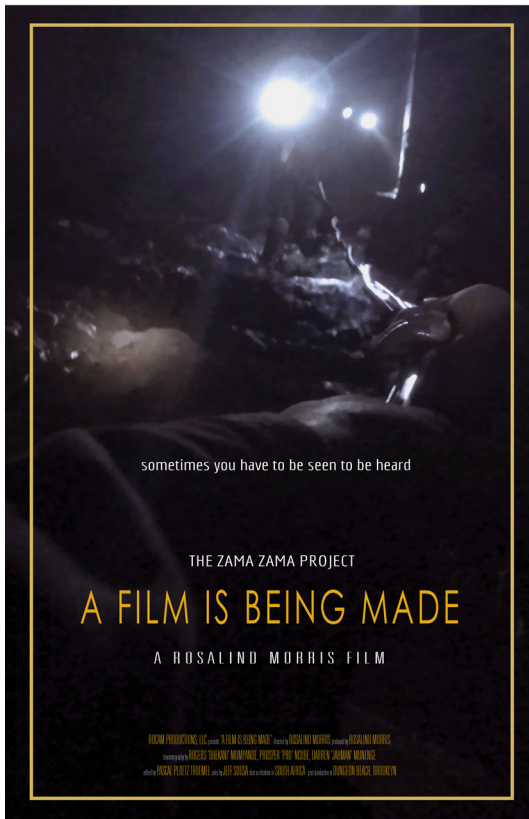


**DREAMING DEMOCRACY**

2021, UHD/UHD or HD, IsiZulu/IsiNdebele, Chitonga, with English Subtitles.

Director and Producer, Rosalind Morris  
 Cinematography, Ebrahim Hajee  
 Sound Recording, Musa Radebe  
 Editing, Pascal Troemel  
 Translations for titling, Noel Musokotwane and Tanya Nyathi  
 2020. Run time: 11:55

A 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.

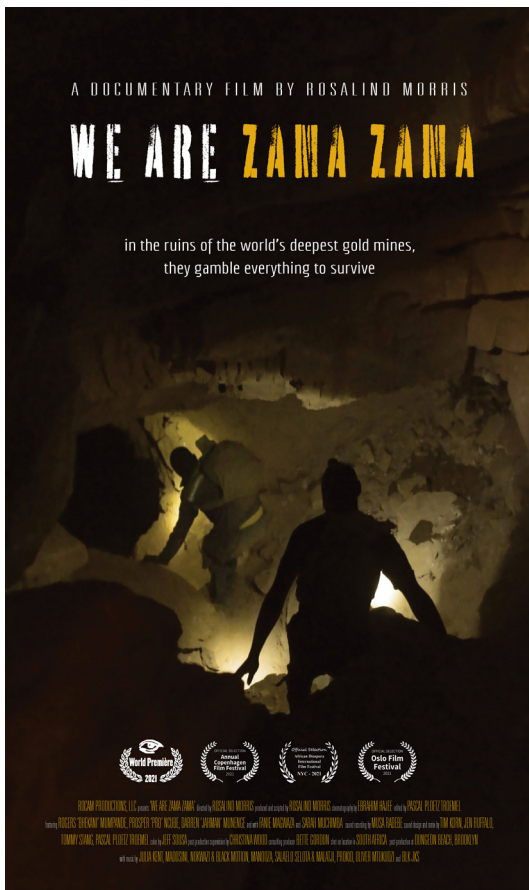


## A FILM IS BEING MADE

UHD (4K) video for projection.

Producer/director: Rosalind Morris  
 Director of Cinematography: Ebrahim Hajee  
 Underground Cameras: Rogers 'Bhekani Mumpande,  
 Prosper Ncube, Darren 'Jahman' Munenge  
 Sound recording: Musa Radebe; Editing: Rosalind Morris  
 Colorist: Jeff Soussa  
 2020. Run time: 18:00.

In the course of making the feature documentary, **'We are Zama Zama'** (2021), Director Rosalind Morris and Cinematographer, Ebrahim Hajee taught three young miners to use cameras underground. For days, they filmed themselves in the process of extracting gold, as well as meeting other men underground, sharing meals, telling stories, and imagining the future life of their image-making. They also learned the language of cinema. This is the film about their journey and their aspirations



Information on the Feature documentary is available at:  
<https://www.wearezamazama.com>

**'BELOW GROUND ABOVE'** (2019-2020) is a two-part video sequence, conceived as an immersive installation designed for three-channel projection on three wall-size or large adjoining screens (16:9 ratio). The installation is also amenable to large-format single screen projection in a closed environment). Projection requirements for digital installation: minimum 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. 19mins, 30.

Producer/director: Rosalind Morris; Director of Cinematography: Ebrahim Hajee  
Underground Cameras: Rogers 'Bhekani' Mumpande, Prosper Ncube, Darren 'Jahman' Munenge  
Sound recording: Musa Radebe; Editing: Pascal Troemel, Philippe Leonard and Rosalind Morris;  
Sound Design: Paul Brody and Pascal Troemel

### **Part One. BELOW**

An immersive POV-experience of the underground world, 'BELOW,' 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 headlamps 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 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. ABOVE**

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, bodies are composed and decomposed into minute gestures, and the line between rock and air, dissolves, so that audiences come understand what it might mean to be buried alive, from the inside.



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

**'STOP-LIMIT: THE BORDER'** (2020) — two possible formats: 1) single video mounted on a motorized track-mounted projector, running the length of a single room; 2) fixed projector, ideally to be shown on a large screen in an enclosed space. (4K or 1910x1080 formats). Can also be played in spaces with natural light.

Producer/director: Rosalind Morris

Director of Cinematography: Ebrahim Hajee

Sound recording: Musa Radebe; Editing: Rosalind Morris; Colorist: Jeff Soussa, 2020.

Run time: approx 9 mins.



**Many 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, and follows that journey to the sparkling dawn of Johannesburg and then on to the ruined mines. The moving projection on motorized tracks asks the viewer to walk with him.

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## **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: Lightdance



Specters: Cyclops



## CREATIVE TEAM

### **Rosalind C. Morris, Producer, Director**

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. Her debut feature documentary, 'We are Zama Zama,' premiered as an official selection at the Encounters International Documentary Film Festival (South Africa); and was also an official selection for the South African Film Festival, Canada; the Oslo Film Festival, and the Copenhagen Annual Film Festival, where it was a finalist for Best Feature Documentary. It played at the African Diaspora International Film Festival in New York, in 2021, and was selected to play in the festival's 'Best of' mini-festival in January 2022. Morris's poetry has been published in 'Carapace,' 'Literary Imagination,' 'Ideas and Futures,' and in South Africa's national newspaper, 'Daily Maverick,' among other venues. With Yvette Christiansë, she is the co-librettist on two operas with the composer Zaid Jabri. 'Southern Crossings,' their new chamber opera will premiere in New York City in June 2022.

### **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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